



An age old Shakta Shrine: Jayanti Devi

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Evident history in structural temple architecture in India dates back to the Gupta period.ⁱ One of the oldest temple structures to be mentioned is the temple made of bricks in Bhitargaon around 550 A.D.ⁱⁱ Central and South India is full with the relics and intact temple structures having being built from ancient times to the modern. But due to the foreign invasions in the North India religious structures could not survive here, the Mughal emperors practiced mass destruction of temples in this area and discouraged the temple construction, if any temple was constructed it was demolished by Mughals.ⁱⁱⁱ Due to such reasons Punjab does not have much ancient or medieval monuments or religious buildings.^{iv}

Still a few examples can be seen around. One amongst them is Jayanti Devi temple dedicated to Shakti located in Jayanti Majri village of Punjab. It is believed to be the oldest Hindu religious structure found on the outskirts of the city Chandigarh. Remained untouched by the invaders this temple is witness to a rich historical past. According to one article published in The Tribune news paper it is believed to be built about 550 year back^v and according to an another article in the same news paper it was built about 525 years back during the times of Emperor Babar.^{vi}



Jayanti Devi temple is located in the Jayanti Majri village of Punjab. Earlier the name of the village was Majrian, now it is also known by the name Jyanti Majri which comes from the name of the temple. The village lies at a distance of 15 km from Chandigarh and is connected with an approach road from Mullanpur Garib Dass a suburb of Chandigarh.^{vii} The temple is built on a hillock and is dedicated to goddess Jayanti^{viii}. It is said that the surrounding area of the temple was a part of Hathnor state ruled by a Rajput King during first half of the 18th century. The legend of the temple is associated with the daughter of the Kangara ruler who was married

into the ruling family of Hathnor. She was a strong devotee of Goddess Durga. Her in-laws had no faith in the Goddess, so prohibited her from worship. The goddess could not tolerate the ill treatment towards her devotee and appeared in a dream to the dacoit of the area 'Garib Dass', who was also a

staunch devotee of the goddess. Inspired by the dream Garib Dass killed all the Rajputs of the Hathnor State and began construction of the temple of goddess Jayanti Devi on the hillock, which was later on completed by his grandson, Bhagwan Dass.^{ix} According to the priest of the temple the pindis (anaconic form) of the Goddess was brought from the Kangra and were accompanied by the forefathers of the priest. Since then it is their hereditary tradition to perform the duties of the priest in the temple.^x The temple management is run by two committees. One comprises the Priest family and villagers of Jayanti Majri. The other committee consists of residents of Mullanpur village. Eleventh generation of the purohit is performing worship here these days.^{xi} The shrine faces the West. The temple complex comprises of shrine of Goddess Jayanti, rooms for the residence of the pandit, two langar halls, tank to take a holy dip and two inns.



Built on a hillock the temple structure looks like a fort. An archway leads to stairs, which are approximately 380 in number, and lead up to the temple building. While going up to the temple there are two langar halls located on the way. These langars are managed by the above said managing committees. Closer to the temple there are shops on both the sides of the stairs for prasad (consecrated food) and small gifts. The shrine of Goddess Jayanti is made in the centre of the platform on the top with the main entrance facing southwest. On the right side of the shrine are rooms for the purohit's residence.

The temple of Jayanti Devi is built on a 6.10 m high platform supported by four hefty octagonal bastions at the corners measuring 3 m across. There is one oval shaped bastion each on the southwest and southeast side of the platform. In the centre of the platform is the shrine which measures approximately 9 X 9 feet, and is a small cubical chamber with two cusped arch doors one on the northwest side and the second on the southwest sides. The northeast and the southeast walls inside have similar blind doors. The door on the southwest side is used as the main entrance to the shrine. In front of the entrance door against the back wall of the shrine is a niche which enshrines the iconic and aniconic forms of the Goddess. In front of the idol of the Goddess three pindees^{xii} (aniconic forms) are placed. The idol of the Goddess is carved out of white marble and is beautifully draped in red cloth and decorated with gold ornaments and mukut. The three pindees are also decorated with necklaces and tall mukuts. Above the idols are suspended silver and gold chhatras. The niche is faced with white marble with the jamb of niche clad in ceramic tiles with different images printed on them depicting Saibaba, Ganpati, Shiva and Parvati, Hanuman, Kali and Durga. The floor of the shrine is clad in white marble whereas the walls and the ceiling are faced with off-white ceramic tiles. There is ample space around the shrine for pradakshina.

The outside walls of the shrine have blind cusped arched doors, three each on the southeast and northeast sides, apart from the central blind doors on the southeast and the northeast walls all the other eight have niches in them containing idols of different deities; Bhairon^{xiii} and Hanuman on the southwest side, Shiva Parivar and Sundri Bala on the northwest side, Lakshmi and Lokda on the northeast side and Kali and Ganesha on the southeast side. All the idols in the niches are in cement and are painted. The entire facade of the shrine is covered with tiles making a chequered pattern. On all the four sides of the cubical shrine is a projecting eave with a low parapet. The temple has a domical superstructure which is crowned by an inverted lotus, kalash and finial. On all the four corners of the

roof there are four burjis (pillars) with a small domical superstructure shaped like a Kalash surmounted by a finial.



In this shrine around the garbhagriha we come across some local deities of the areas enshrines in the niches such as Lokda and Sundri Bala.

The superstructure of the shrine is not in the Indian temple architecture style but is influenced by Mughal architecture (dome). This must be the architectural style popular at the time when the temple was built and more over it would have been difficult for the Mughals to recognise a Hindu religious structure from outside and hence these types of Hindu religious structures were safe. The

other such examples of historic Hindu religious structures with the outlook of Mughal architecture in this area are the Mansa Devi Temple^{xiv} near Manimajra town of Chandigarh and the Chandi Mandir^{xv} from which the Chandigarh city took its name Chandigarh.

In the absence of proper restoration the original flooring of the shrine has been replaced by marble and the walls have been faced with different ceramic tiles. Printed ceramic tiles with the images of different deities have been added to the facade of the garbhagriha and the facade of the shrine has been faced with tiles arranged in chequered pattern. The niches in the outer wall of the shrine also are faced with floral pattern ceramic tiles. With an early intervention of the authorities the original face of the shrine could have been saved in a better way.

ⁱ Tomory, Edith, A History of Fine Arts in India and West, Orient Longman limited, Chennai, 1997 (reprint), pg 85.

ⁱⁱ Rajan, K.S. Soundara, Indian Temple Styles (The personality of Hindu architecture), Munshiram Manoharlal, New Delhi, 1972, pg 9.

ⁱⁱⁱ Rawlinson, H.G., A Short cultural history of India, pg 330. Aryan, K.C. Punjab Murals, Rekha Prakashan, New Delhi, 1977, pg 12.

^{iv} Aryan, K.C. Punjab Murals, Rekha Prakashan, New Delhi, 1977, pg 13.

^v Roy, Jayanti, "The Divine Dowry", The Tribune, Saturday Plus, October 31, 1998.

^{vi} Thind, Amarjit, "Jayanti Mata Temple portion collapses", The Tribune Chandigarh October, 9, 1998.

^{vii} Punjab District Gazetteers Rupnagar, Revenue Department, Punjab, Chandigarh, 1987, p. 450.

^{viii} A text in the Devi-Purana states that Devi is worshiped as Jayanti in the coastal areas between Vindhya and Kurukshetra and as Nanda between Kurukshetra and Himalayas. Klostermaier, Klaus K. Hinduism: A Short History. England: one world oxford, 2006, p. 207.

^{ix} Punjab District Gazetteers Rupnagar, Revenue Department, Punjab, Chandigarh, 1987, p. 451.

^x Interview with Pandit Chander Muni, priest Jayanti Devi Mandir, on October 1, 2007.

Roy, Jayanti, "The Divine Dowry", The Tribune, Saturday Plus, October 31, 1998.

^{xi} Interview with Pandit Chander Muni, priest Jayanti Devi Mandir, on October 1, 2007.

^{xii} Pindees; an aniconic form through which a god is symbolized.

^{xiii} Bhairon is a village godling personification of a field-spirit. Began as a peasant godling he elevated to Hindu theogony, became an attendant of Shiva and then regarded as a form of god (Siva) by particular peasant communities, mainly in North India. Margaret and James Stutley. A Dictionary of Hinduism: its mythology, Folklore and Development 1500 B.C.- A.D. 1500. Bombay: Allied Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1977, p. 41.

^{xiv} An inscription made in the arch of the Singh Dwara of the temple says that the temple of Mansa Devi is said to have been begun by Maharaja Gopal Singh in Samvat 1868 (1811 A.D.) and was completed in Samvat 1872 (1815 A.D.)

^{xv} According to a board placed in front of the temple gate, this place has a 5000 years history and there is a legend associated with place that an ascetic noticed that it is the place of goddess Durga and made a small temple dedicated to her, with mud and stones and worshipped her. It is also said that during the exile of twelve years Pandavas had come to this temple and worshiped Chandi and the goddess Chandi blessed them with a sword for victory. After the fifty seven generations of ascetics this area came under the King of Manimajra. The eighteenth King Raja Bhagwan Singh made a fort on the hillock which was called garh (garhi) and a village settled here which was known as Chandi. From this became Chandigarh. As the time passed the first president Dr. Rajendra Prasad and defence minister Shri Ram Karju and Shri C. P. N. Singh who was governor of Punjab at the time came here and after knowing the history of the place, announced that they will make a city in the name of Chandi goddess. Then they named the cantonment area as 'Chandi Mandir' and named the modern city as Chandigarh. From an information board put up near the main gate of the temple. This board has the signature of Pujaris Ramesh Giri, Rajesh Giri, Toni Giri and Kamal Giri.