



Incredible Workmanship of art in Sandhya Gayatri Temple, Jagatsukh, Kullu, Himachal Pradesh

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The Sandhya Gayatri temple at Jagatsukh, a small village of great antiquity on the Nagar Manali road in Kullu district has drawn the attention of several archaeologists and art historians who have expressed widely divergent views about its original form and character. Some scholars hold that the present pent-roofed style was originally in Nagar style stone temple on the basis of various sculptures and architectural members of the seventh – eighth century A.D. scattered on the site or fixed in the rebuilt walls. Goetz thus remarked, “the original Sandhya Devi Temple of Jagatsukh in Kullu belongs to a style group which we have to associate with Kanauj of the Āyudha dynasty”¹.

There has been great controversy about the date of the temple and scholars like Harcourt, Vogel, Hutchison, Handa and others have assigned different dates to the original shrine. A view based on epigraphically evidence that the temple was built in A.D. 1428 by Raja Udhrana Pāla does not go well with the testimony of the art remains on the site that clearly belong to the 8th – 9th century of the Christian era. At its best, Udrana Pāla may have rebuilt or only renovated the temple (Pl.1). Not going deep into the controversy we concentrate on the doorframe of the *maṇḍapa* approached through a flight of steps. The *maṇḍapa* has an outer gallery around the temple that serves as *pradakṣhiṇāpatha*.

The temple at present is a wooden temple with its elaborate wooden door, sloping roof and the walls made of alternate courses of stone and timber (*kāṭha-kūṇi*). The present structure is not of any great antiquity as it clearly appears to have been rebuilt in the recent past. However, a large number of architectural members and sculptures lying in its courtyard and some used in its lower part stand testimony to the antiquity of the shrine.² Hermann Goetz's remark that the original ruins are completely encased in the present day hill shrine may not be entirely true. The modern shrine has no ruins "encased" in it. But there is no doubt about the reuse of some old material.³

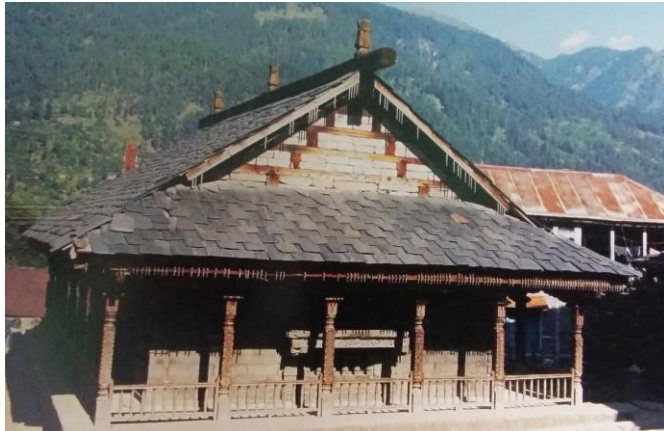
The present temple is built of well chiselled stones but there is no trace of katha kuni arrangements. It is a rectangular structure measuring 650cm X 750cm approached by a flight of steps measures 474cm X 572cm surrounded by an open verandah type pradakṣhiṇāpatha within. The garbhagriha measures 474cm X 572cm and has stone doorway measuring 72cm X 138cm. The tri-sakha doorway has scroll and foliage carvings with an image of Ganesa on the lalata-

bimba. This is perhaps the only pent-roofed temple to have a stone doorway. The latticed windows of this temple are another unusual feature, found only here in the temples of Himachal Pradesh. They have been compared with Bhuvaneshwar and the Ladhkhan Temple, Aihole. The temple houses a black stone image of Vishnu⁴, which does not appear to be the original piece of worship. The second is a white marble image of Sandhya Gayatri of about 15th century as recorded by Hutchison and Vogel.⁵

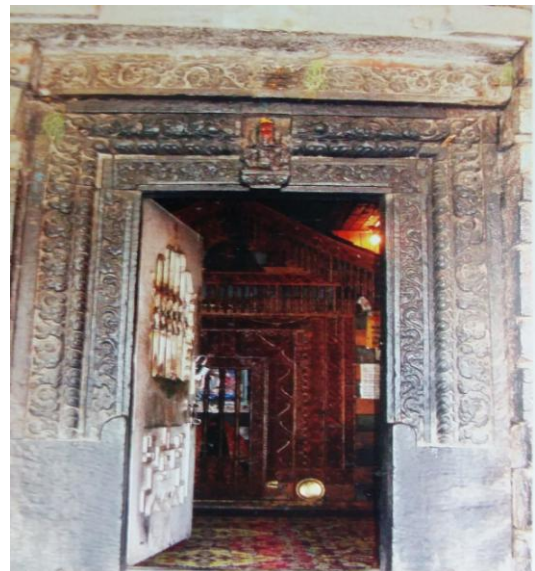
The doorway that measures 28" X 54" has a *tri-śākhā* doorframe. It is 66.5" high and 55" wide. The inner jambs and their corresponding lintel have a *patralatā* design throughout (Pl.2.). The second band which is semi-circular in section has a *padmapatra* design. The outer jambs and lintel have foliated scroll work with a plain border on the outside. On the *lalāṭabimba* is an image of two handed Gaṇeśa sitting in *ardhaparyāṅka āsana* on a lotus pedestal (Pl.3.). He carries *modaka* in his left hand and a *danta* in the right hand. He wears a crown and snake girdle. Big elephant ears are conspicuous. His mount, the mouse is shown on his right back side. There is an additional band of *patralatā* design above the lintel. The doorframe may be assigned to the 9th century A.D. on stylistic grounds. Another ruined doorframe, Gaṇeśa carved on the stone lintel (Pl.4.), and three *śākhās* doorframe, two *śākhās* are decorated with *patra* and the *bāhya śākhā* is plain lying in the complex (Sandhyā-Gayatri, Jagatsukh) (Pl.5.)The old formation was built in the Vallabhi style of architecture. The stone carvings in the lower part that differ from the upper woodcarvings, done in archaic style, stands as a witness to this fact. Evidences from the inscriptions reveal that the original structure including the wooden part was completed in the year 1428 A.D. by Raja Urdhanpal. The structure that stands today contains Mughal pillars and woodcarvings which could be later editions. The temple was later restituted in the 19th century.

Notes and References:

1. H.Goetz's *the early wooden temples of Chamba*.
2. *Early wooden Temples of Chamba*, pp. 68-69.
3. O.C. Handa, *Temple Architecture of Western Himalayas*, pp. 150.
4. *It is a three handed Vishnu-Vaikuntha image* O.C. Handa, *Temple Architecture of western Himalayas : wooden Temples*, New Delhi, 2001.
5. *History of the Punjab Hill State*, Vol.1, page 241.



Pl.1. General view of Sandhya Gayatri Temple.



Pl.2. Door frame of mandapa Sandhya Gayatri , Kullu.



Pl.3. Lintel, Sandhya Gayatri Temple.



Pl.4. Lintel of a ruined Temple in complex.



Pl.5. Doorjamb of ruined Temple in complex.