



Hindu Art of Kangra Fort

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Kangra (32° 54N and 76° 15E), the glorious kingdom of history and the present district of the state Himachal Pradesh has a rich heritage of art and culture developed and flourished particularly in its vicinity. It was ruled over by the Katoch rajput dynasty from the ancient times as the great epic Mahabharata carries the reference of its founder king Susharma Chandra who had fought against the Pandavas in Mahabharata. The Pandavas named it after Bhima as Bhim Kot (fort of Bhima). However its rule remained dominated by Katoch dynasty. In 326 BC when Alexander the Great invaded Punjab a Katoch prince was ruling this region. Kangra once was a part of the ancient kingdom Trigarta which was formerly also known as Jalandhara. During Gupta period, in the time of Harsha, the known Buddhist pilgrim Huien Tsiang visited to Jalandhar (Jalandharayana - She-Lan-To-Lo) in 643 A.D. that time Trigarta had two main provinces, major one in the plains with headquarter at Jalandhar and next in the hills with headquarter at Nagrkot or Kot Kangra (The present Kangra). He talked about its social stature and life at its bests.

Mahmood Ghaznavi after defeating Hindu kings at Lahore advanced towards Kangra. Mahmood looted loads of gold and silver wealth from the Kangra fort and temple. In 1337 Raja Rup Chand lost the fort to Mohd. Tuglak an Afghan king of Delhi but later it was recaptured by Raja Purab Chand in 1351. One of his ambitious successors Raja Roop Chand annoyed the Sultan of Delhi Firoz Shah Tuglak who invaded Kangra in 1366. During the invasion of Timur Kangra was again under the reign of Roop Chand's son Singara Chand. It was also captured by the Afghan king Sher Shah Suri in 1540. Mughal Emperor Akbar had subjugated the entire hill kings as they were retained within their territories. But Jahangir opted to annex the region in his state. First attempt was made in 1615 and was not successful. In 1616 second attempt was made but finally success came in 1620 with annexure of the state into the Mughal Kingdom and the fort was left in charge of a strong garrison.

After a long time span when Mughal Empire was seeing a decline again a great Katoch rajput king Sansar Chand was on rising. He called Sardar Jai Singh of Kanhaya Misal for helping him in

recapturing the state. They restored from it Mughal officer in 1783 and by giving some territory won in the plains as substitute to Sardar Jai Singh Sansar Chand became its ruler. Sansar Chand rejuvenated the hill culture and tradition. In his twenty years reign he erected new buildings, beautified many places and patronized Kangra Paintings. His ambition drove him into an eventual destruction. He came into conflict with his neighbouring hill chiefs, Gurkhas and in 1806 he was defeated by their allied forces. In 1809 Sansar Chand met Maharaja Ranjit Singh at Jawalamukhi temple and made an agreement with him according to which Kangra fort with close at hand 66 villages will be handed over to Maharaja Ranjit Singh after expelling Gurkhas out of Kangra fort and region. It remained under the tributary of the Sikhs and after first Anglo Sikh war in 1846 along with the entire hill state it fell into the hands of British.

The Kangra fort had been a prestige attraction for the kings and rulers. It was a sign of supremacy in Punjab hills the earliest capital of Katoch kingdom. As mentioned in Mahabhatra during the ancient Trigarta Kingdom the royal family of katoch rajput dynasty has built this fort. The steep rock of Purana Kangra provides it a governing location over the surrounding valley. It has a very strongly secure situation as it is surrounded with river beds of Ban Ganga and Manjhi rivers. Protected through numerous gates and a single narrow path were quit suitable for a strong fortification. At the top of the fort, there is a large compound having temples (presently in depleted condition) and ruined palace of the Chandervanshi kashtriya lineage Katoch rulers.

Conquerors of the fort had erected gates in their name such as the *Jehangiri Darwaza* is attributed to Mughal Emperor Jehangir, *Ahani* and *Amiri Darwaza* ascribed to the first Mughal Govenner Nawab Saif Ali (Alif) khan, *Ranjit Singh Darwaza* attributed to Maharaja Ranjit Singh. The disfigured statues of River Goddess Ganga and Yamuna stood on both sides of the oldest structure in front of the fort the *Darsani darwaza*. The shrines Lakshami-Narayana, Sitala and Ambika Devi (Mata) are located in the south side of the courtyard and a narrow passage in between these shrines goes up to the palace.

As soon as we enter into the complex of Kangra fort, we can enjoy the artistic atmosphere created with sculpture (detached and broken part of temple architecture) garden along with the Archeological Museum (Kangra). These artistic pieces are rich source of study of Kangra art and its temple architecture. These artistic pieces are full of aesthetically rich expression, though these are mutilated and detached from the main formation. Apart from the museum site when we cross the main entrance and Ranjit gate (after renovation) of Kangra fort. We mount toward the upper part of fort; initially have two small observation towers, on the left side of outer wall having sculptural forms of Lord Ganesha, Hanuman and Durga. These artistic forms have well defined arrangement. As per their treatment, these images are of later period compare to temple art of Kangra fort palace complex. The image of Lord Ganesha is decorated with four arms, two of them are broken. Ganesha image have pot belly bodied form seated on the lotus pedestal in maharajlila asana with his vahana- munch (rat). At next observation tower the forms of Ganesha, flying Hanuman, Durga Maheshasurmardani and a unique form of a royal stag has been carved. All the forms are of different size but rendered stylistically in oneness. Here image of Ganesha is exceptional, having four hands with upper hands holding ankush and axe while the lower hands shown with rosary and ladoos. He is seated in maharajlila asana over a lotus pedestal.

Crown is decorated with lotus like flower. His trunk is heavy and placed over his pot belly. Beside the Ganesha image we have well decorated form of Durga Maheshasurmardani, standing over an inert image of mahesha along with her vahana lion. She is decorated with eight arms and each attributed to her concept of energy. Her long trident like lancer is hitting at the neck of asura mahesha. Durga is looking calm and dressed in a designed ghagra like dress. The form is simple in formation but decorated in contemporary designed jewelry. Above these two images upper part of the conical arch is decorated with flying image of Hanuman, who is holding mace and carrying mountain in his hands. Face of Hanuman is decorated with grin smile. An image of seated black buck well decorated with flowing scarf at the neck, exactly below the image of Hanuman and in-between the space of Ganesha and Durga. The concept of black buck might have been travelled from northwest region of India towards Kangra along with nature loving Rajput (Katoch) clan. As it has usually found place in the Raga Ragani paintings of Rajasthani and Pahari style. At the next place images of Ganesha and flying Hanuman are well placed in the niches of outer wall of the fort. Posture of Lord Ganesha is like his previous image, who is seated in the maharajlila asana, having broken trunk but eating ladoo. Here his vahana is in playful mood. Headgear of Lord is simple but total form is well decorated with jewelry. The flying image of Hanuman is unique in its expression. He is holding mountain in his upright arm. His heavy bodied form is very much near to wrestler's expression, though form is simple in rendering but expressive in flowing quality. These two images are well placed above the narrow path near to observation holes through the outer wall of fort.

After that there is another arched gateway and above that another narrow door is well restored after renovation (documented 1907 after Kangra earthquake 1905), leads toward the main palace compound of the fort. Here one can enjoy vast landscape view along the flowing river exactly beside the precipitous cliff of Kangra fort. Now first architectural fortification is over and after crossing the open area one marches toward another fortified compound of the fort. Here one need to enter the fort through a narrow courtyard, which is enclosed between two phataks(gates), evidently constructed during Maharaja Ranjit Singh's reign. From here a long narrow passage leads upto the iron gate (Ahani Darwaja) and Gate of nobles (Amiri Darwaja), both attributed to Nawab Saif Ali (Alif) Khan, the first governor of Kangra under the rule of Jahangir, after his victory over fort. After this the upper darwaja (gate) of the Kangra fort is called Handeli or Andheri Darwaja .After crossing all these, the temple gate is called Darsani darwaja (gate of worshipping), which is flanked with the images of river Goddesses Ganga and Yamuna .These images are true expression of female form dedicated to nature and conceptual art of Pratihara style art of northern India (8th to 12th century). These standing images are presently reduced to simple forms with the passage of time but clear enough to justify their concepts. Both images are well ascribed along with their iconographical signs, such as Makra for Ganga and Kalsha and Kurma for Yamuna image. There are canopies over their heads to grace their divinity. Above the lintel part of gate there are five mutilated protruding flying images supporting the roof above the Darsani Darwaja. Exactly inside the renovated Darsani Darwaja there are the old holes of date back era which are still holding the present Iron Gate.

The decorated stone gateway provides way to a courtyard and cells (rooms) on right side and a Jaina temple complex exactly towards left side. Further along the south side of these architectural

formations, ruined but remarkable shrines of Laxmi Narayan, Sheetla and Ambika Mata, which are facing north side Darsani Darwaja, are still appreciable. These temples remain are beautiful architectural example of Nagara style. Right side of the Darsani Darwaja there are certain rooms (cells) in shabby condition and these certain rooms are decked with different broken pieces of Laxmi Narayan temple. There are base parts of pillars, broken pillars and lintel parts of temple might be broken after famous Kangra earthquake 1905. Amalaka part of temple shikhara and decorated (broken) freezes proved its glory and aesthetically rich formation at its best. Exactly in the palace temple compound the foundations of Nagara style temple are still intact along with the backside wall of the temples. These temple walls are intricately carved out of local stone material and still are well preserved to show the sheen of that time. There is a narrow gap between these two Nagara style temples. Sheetla Mata temple is exactly west of Laxmi Narayan temple of Kangra fort palace courtyard. The single roomed temple, which is facing north also decked with four round moldings of pillars at equidistance and a balcony opening towards east, west and north. It is exactly well carved Nagara style temple of the same period. Again here one can see shikhara part of the temple. There are pillar tops decorated with overflowing purna kalsha designs. Besides purna kalsha stambha base we can enjoy the top bracket part of pillars intricately designed with meticulous details. Here we can see niches for the lamps in the back side wall of Laxmi Narayan temple.

Besides these two Nagara style temples, here is Ambika Devi (Mata) temple complex with Jaina temple architectural forms. These temples are simple and small compare to Nagara style temples, but well preserved as image of Adinath is well intact and still worshiped by Jaina devotees. Mandapa of these temples are square with door opening towards north, south and west. Along the Adinath temple, two small temples are decorated with Image of Ganesha (Lintel part of temple) and other decorated images, having the same fervor and style of early Kangra art. One of the temples having no image for worship but its entrance is decorated with seated image of Jaina Tirthankar exactly in between the lintel part of its door. Here is another small temple decked with seated image of Goddess (six armed) in maharajlila asana. It might be the form of Shaktiki, because it is carrying trident in one of her hand. But she is seated on a swan like bird suggested it as Saraswati Goddess. Besides this standing images of Shiva Parvati (Uma Maheshwara) is carved with Nandi bull (broken head). Lord Shiva is shown with four arms and decorated with crown like lofty headgear rather than matted hairs. The fearlessness posture (Abhaya mudra) of Shiva and Parvati is more prevalent and expressive because forms are still (Abhanga) and addressing to the beholder. Images are away from atmosphere effects and well preserved till today. On the upper part of the Shiva Parvati images we can see the small forms of Brahma and Vishnu ascribed besides the lotus form as Shivas' halo. Images of Lord Hanuman, Vishnu as Narasimha, Lord Indra riding Aravata (Elephant - his vahana) and mutilated forms of male divinities in the corner of small temple. All images are iconographical and well proportioned although small in size.

The outer part of the Jaina temple and there corners are further decorated with designs and seated forms of Jaina deities. One of the images of seated Jaina deity is shown in a temple (triratha) with lofty shikhara. Its kapuri part of amalaka is decorated with two seated peacock like birds. It is one of the interesting decorated corner part attributed to Jaina temple at Kangra fort.

Exactly besides the Jaina temple complex, here we have chance to see mutilated architectural plan compound with two standing pillars. The upper parts of these twelve sided pillars are decorated with purana kalsha forms. The architectural compound is decked with broken artistic pieces of temple and architectural remains, which are one way to another concerned with religious concepts of Hindu philosophy. Further it is justified with huge size amalaka parts also, which are placed here. The concept of construction is quite visual with the help of those sockets marked over the carved stone parts of pillar capital. The constructional concept by placing one carved stone besides another well intact with metal hooks prevalent in Nagara style architecture. We have seen such socket marks formation in the ruined temple architectural complex at Dholwaha, Hoshiarpur (Punjab). Trimurti (Bairava, Shiva and Shakti) form is ascribed over certain broken architectural remains available here.

Between the Jaina temple compound and Laxmi Narayan temple structure, a staircase leads to the palace, which is full of small and large living rooms along with a broken structure of a temple (the debris is still piled here) , exactly behind the temple. Here is a watch tower seen through a gate (now renovated) called palace gate (mahalon ka darwaja). Another expressive view of vast landscape of Kangra hills is seen as we go upstairs. Here is ample space to observe the Kangra fort from each corner.

The artistic part of Nagara style temples are remarkable, which is beautifully intact and having the same galore from the rear side. Each part is intricately carved out of local available stone with all possible expressions of design and Nagara style. Bada part of these temples are carved at tala and upar jangha over a low pista. Rear wall have three protruding projections. Temple style is belonged to either triratha or panchratha pattern of Northern India. The uncertainty about the ratha concept is because we have no sign of gandi (trunk) and shikhara of these temples, which might have been lost during the earthquake. Rest the design quality and carving is very much near to the nearest centre Dholwaha temple architecture of plain area of Trigarta. Although these temples are badly mutilated from the front side but certain parts of carved protruding projections have figures of Gods and Goddesses to project its serenity and might of the Laxmi Narayan temple. These forms are of Lord Shiva, Goddess Durga, Shiva Trimurti, Shakti with cursive designs of aesthetically rich high caliber art and expression. There are niches exactly in the centre of rear walls of both temples. There is moonstone like broken stone form, designed with lotus petals, placed under the central niche of rear wall of Laxmi Narayan temple. Moreover there is no sign of erotic figures usually inscribed over the rear wall of temples in Himachal.

After crossing the retreat gate, here is a pathway leading down towards south which is ended up at Kapoor sagar complex. Here is a tank, which is square 40x40x6 meters in its formation. It has two pillar gates along with a carved slab of seated figure of Vishnu with chouri bearer attendants. A water tank and a narrow well are also situated in the southeast part of this complex. Instead of the above historical and conceptual artistic formation of architectural art, there is an archaeological museum located at the entrance of main gate of the fort complex. Museum houses Stone Age tools, sculptural and architectural pieces of art, coins of Kangra kingdom collected from the Kangra fort and the nearby vicinity.

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