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## ARCHITECTURE OF KASHMIR



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### Short Profile

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### ABSTRACT

The well-known and much described architecture of mediaeval Kashmir may be said with a fair amount of accuracy to begin at about the sixth to seventh centuries A.D. It ended with the transfer of the kingdom from Hindu to Muslim hands in A.D. 1337, though probably small monolithic shrines, such as those of Patan and Koil, continued to be consecrated even after that time. The buildings which represent this style may conveniently be

divided into two classes - namely, the Buddhist and the Brahmanical. In point of materials, ornament, and technique, there is practically no difference between the two, but the religious needs of the two communities being in certain essentials different, they differ widely in plan and elevation. The Buddhists, who inherited a long artistic tradition, naturally adhered to their old models, though they employed better materials and somewhat elaborated the decoration. The material brought into use was a beautiful grey limestone, which was easy to carve, and presented a very smooth surface when properly dressed. The present article is confined to architecture of some of the Buddhist and Hindu monuments of Kashmir.

### KEYWORDS:

*Architecture, Kashmir, Buddhism, Stupa, Caityas, Temples.*

## INTRODUCTION: -

KASHMIR valley in general is roughly oval shaped, and about 130 km north-south and about 45 km broad. The valley is situated in the Pir Panjal range of Himalayan mountains. The old name of Kashmir appears to be Kasyapapura

For reconstructing the history of Kashmir, there are two main sources. First is the travel accounts of the Chinese pilgrims Hiuen Tsang who visited India between 629-645- C.E. Much of his account related to Buddhism. The second source is the Rajatarangini a Sanskrit poetical work composed by a twelfth century Kashmiri court-poet named Kalhana. His history starts from the sixth century until his times. The close inter-course of the valley with the Gandhara region is reflected in the art and architecture of the period. According to Kalhana, Meghavan, the first king of the resorted Gonandiya dynasty was brought from Gandhara, in the royal court of which his father Gopaditya- the last ruler of Gonandiya dynasty, This dynasty was succeeded by the Karkota dynasty ( c.627-855 C.E.), which marks the golden age of glory and expansion of power under Lalitaditya Muktapida (c.724-60 C.E.). He was the most powerful and renowned ruler of this dynasty. His frequent extensive campaigns brought the imperial power of Kashmir felt not only in a large part of India, but beyond its northern, north-western and eastern frontiers. Karkota dynasty was followed by the Utpala dynasty under its great ruler Avantivarman (C.E.853-83) who brought the peace and prosperity to his kingdom, under this broad political scenario we have to analyse the artistic achievements in the Kashmir valley.

The artistic development of the Kashmir valley can be seen from the time of Asoka (third century B.C.E.) of the early period, however, very few sites can be seen such as at Harwan and Parihaspur. Kashmir was a major centre of Buddhism until eighth century C.E. and its influence was felt throughout in north and eastern Asia. At the confluence of the rivers Sindhu and Vitasta (Jhelum), was the capital town of Parihasapura (modern Paraspur) founded by Lalitaditya built several temples at this site, viz.,

- 1- the temple of Mukta-Keshava with a golden image of Vishnu,
- 2- the temple of Parihasa-Keshava with a silver image of Vishnu,
- 3- the temple of Govardhanadhara with silver image,
- 4- the temple of Mahavaraha, with its image of Vishnu clad in golden armour,
- 5- and the so-called Raja-vihara, a Buddhist Caitya with a large quadrangle, and a colossal image of Buddha in copper. None of these structures, however, survive today, except the foundations of two or three Buddhist Caityas.

One of the structures at Parihasapura is known as Lalitaditya's Caitya which once housed the colossal Buddha. The monastic quadrangle measures 43m by 40m with twenty-six cells enclosed by a running gallery (Fig. -A). Of these only the adhishthana (basement) mouldings have survived. The Caitya comprised a sandhara sanctum in a complex measuring 30 m square. The surviving plinth of the Caitya had a series of eight steps on the east side giving access to the upper platform.(Fig. 1a). The height of the structure probably was thirty to forty metres high. The colossal image of Buddha has been estimated to have been nearly 30 metres high as is seen at Bamiyan valley in Afghanistan

Another structural monument at Parihasapura is known as Cankuna's Stupa (Fig.-B). Cankuna was the Tokharian minister of Lalitaditya. The Stupa is notable for its size and lavishness. From the textual reference in Rajatarangini, it appears that the base of the whole complex was cruciform pancaratha plan as revealed by the surviving foundations. A large number of stone sculptures have been found associated with Cankuna's Stupa, which are now displayed in Sri Pratap Singh Museum in Srinagar.

As said earlier, the Kashmir architecture displays a unique blend of foreign styles and

indigenous/native creativity which resulted in architectural traditions which is entirely different from others in the subcontinent in India. All the surviving temples in the valley are Hindu. They are all constructed in stone. The fundamental elements in Hindu temples most probably derived from the earlier Buddhist Caityas and viharas which filtered through West Asia, and particularly from Gandhara region beginning with Achaemenian Persians. It is certain that Buddhism was introduced in Kashmir since Asoka's time in the third century B.C.E. After the Huna invasions and the Huna rule by the end of the sixth century C.E. Kashmir entered in a new phase, that of political and cultural attainment of the Karkota dynasty (C.600-855 C.E.) which marks the greatest period of temple building. One of the early ancient texts known as Nilamata purana states that Asoka's son Jalauka is said to have erected Saivita temples in the narrow Wangath valley which appears to be an ancient location of Siva worship.

The structure remains of the temples at Bunier, Pandrethan, Nirtand, Payar, and few other places reveal that most of their features are distinctive of the Kashmir valley are linked to Kashmir's remarkable king Lalitaditya Muktapida who ruled during first half of the eight century C.E.

1. One of the earliest stone temples appears to be at Loduv near Avantipura. It has a ground plan of seven meter square on each side (Fig.1b). The pilasters at the corners over which are a overhanging cornice. The entrance doorway has a single arch with a trefoil pattern which is the characteristic of Kashmir temple thereafter. The doorway is surrounded by a triangular pediment resting upon the end pilasters. The noteworthy feature is, although the exterior of the of the temple is square on, the interior of the sanctum is circular. The diameter of the circular plan at the floor level is five meters, while at the top it is four and a half meters at the projecting level. The Loduv temple exhibits some of the typical Kashmiri features, such as the trefoil niche, rounded projecting stone courses along the base and the elevated platform. The corbelled corners suggest that once the temple had a pyramidal roof now lost, and a 'lantern type' ceiling as seen at Pandraethan temple. A simple type of trefoil niche, consisting of a rounded arch inside the trefoil pediment suggests an early date to Loduv temple somewhere around sixth or early seventh century following the end of Huna rule.

2. At Wangath there is a cluster of seventeen ruined temples from which it appears to be a primary site of Siva worship, for its location is along one of Siva pilgrimage routes as noted in Kalhana's Rajatarangini, the better preserved temples is at Bunier which has escaped the destruction on account of its remote situation (Fig. 1c). 3. The temple is a large quadrangule (44m by 36m) which is surrounded by a peristyle colonnade with fluted pillars and intervening recesses with trefoil arches. The entrance to each cell is in the form of a trefoil niche enclosed in a triangular pediment resting upon half-engaged columns. These columns are connected to the niches by transverse beams and on the top of these remains is the first course of the entablature with its frieze of miniature trefoils. The elevated bases in the cells suggest originally it held images. Although presently Buniar temple is a Saiva, the pedestal in the shrine has decorative mouldings on its three sides and was placed on the rear wall of the the shrine that it was originally dedicated to Vishnu. The temple is built in the granite stone which is more durable than the limestone used in nearly all the Kashmiri temples.

4 Another important site of the Karkota period is the Pandrethan (ancient Purandhissthana), which now lies within the municipal limits of Srinagar (Fig. 1d). It is believed to have been founded by Asoka and the patronized by the ruling monarch of Kashmir. This small but elegant built Hindu temple is dedicated to Siva and is dated to circa..eight-ninth century C.E. The temple illustrates a long standing proto-type of wooden architectural tradition. It stands on a plinth built in the center of a tank. The sculptural decoration of the temple is simple. A row of carved elephant (gajathara) are seen at the base of the central shrine. The figure of Lakulisa above the lintel of the doorway indicates that the monument was erected for the Pasupati sect.

The interior of the temple is also simple except for a beautifully carved ceiling panel which is of the 'lantern-roof' type. In the center of the ceiling is a full-blown lotus while at the corners is seen beautifully carved vidyadhara couples. The high-pitched pyramidal roof is made of horizontal courses, while the summit of the triangular roof- the central projection is relieved with a series of brackets capped by projecting bands. The plains face of the upper tier depicts four projecting trefoil niches, one each in the middle of the four sides which resemble the caitya-windows. The trefoil arch is framed within the triangular roof of the central projections. The lintel supports a triangular pediment. Inside the pediment is reproduced the trefoil arch. Within this arch is carved in high relief the figure of Lakulisa, seated cross-legged wearing a dhoti and an upavita (sacred thread). The remaining three trefoil shaped arches are now empty.

In the vicinity of the Pandrethan temple several Buddhist and Hindu sculptures were discovered which are displayed in Sri Pratap Singh Museum in Srinagar. Most of these sculptures are more than life size and display forceful execution. They represent seated and standing Siva, three-headed Siva, Bhairava, Ganesa, five of the Matrikas like Kaimari, Vaishnavi, Indrani, Varahi, and Camunda who display the characteristic of the Karkota period style.

5. Payar; is situated about 30km to the south of Srinagar and is famous for a small and as elegant temple of Siva (Fig2a). The temple stands on a moulded platform and the top of the sikhara is intact, which is crowned by an amalaka. The shrine has four doorways each crowned by trefoils surmounted by pediments. On the eastern doorways is seen Siva Nataraja on the west, a figure of Lakulisa and Mahesamurti on the north doorway, and Bhairava on the south.

The garbha-griha (sanctum) enshrines a Siva Linga, while its domical ceiling is adorned by a lotus and in the corners are vaksa atlants. On stylistic considerations this small temple is later than Pandrethan and is placed in the third quarter of the tenth century C.E.

6. Patan: about 27km lays North West of Srinagar. According to Rajatarangini, Sankaravarman (C.E. 883-902) son and successor of Anantavarman founded a new town at Patan and constructed three Siva temples. Of these only two survive, viz., Sugandhesa and Sankargaurisa.

Of these Sugandhesa was originally enclosed by a cellular peristyle, of which only the eastern arm centrally pierced by a gateway plinth, survives (Fig.2b). The main shrine is triratna structure erected on a two tired platform. The shrine comprises of a sanctum vestibule and a porch. The sanctum has a double pedimented niche enshrining a Siva linga.

The other temple known as Sankargaurisa is a grand version of Sugandhesa temple. The temple consists of a shrine and an antara (vestibule).The subsidiary shrine in the north-west is survived but at a much lower level is buried together with the platform and adhishtana of main shrine. The antarala interior consists of impressive figures of Siva Tripurantaka and Ganesa.

7: Matan: The ancient temple of Martanda overlooks the modern village of Matan.(Fig. C). The name of the village is derived from the name of the presiding deity Martanda which is an epithet of the Surya the Sun-God. The temple stands on the highest part of the plateau overlooking the lovely plains below. The temple commands a picturesque panoramic view of the splendid valley,(Fig.2c) encircled by high snow-topped mountains and part covered by majestic trees. The temple although in ruins was constructed of finely dressed ashlar slabs of limestone, arranged in horizontal courses with fine joints. Iron dowels and cramps were used in binding the stones. The principal of corbelling was adhered to in respect of spanning. The opening of the trefoil shaped arch was covered by an enormous 'T' shaped slab. Although not extant the pyramidal roof was made of horizontal courses of Ashlar slabs. The extant remains of the

Martanda temple probably date from the period of Lalitaditya Muktapida (724-60 C.E.) of the Karkota dynasty, who was a great temple builder of his times in Kashmir. The temple stands in the middle of a large courtyard measuring about 63m by 40m enclosed by cellular peristyle. The main temple is rectangular in plan, which consists of a huge mandapa. The temple is enclosed by a vast courtyard by a peristyle wall having eighty-four subsidiary shrines in it. The columns of the peristyle are fluted. Its bases and capitals closely resemble Syrio-Roman types. It is noteworthy that the Hellenistic elements are predominantly seen in the architectural details of the temple such as the pediment motif and the trefoil shaped vaulted arches. These elements certainly reflect Western Asiatic tastes which were present in Gandhara, Bactria and other regions of the northwest. The main temple rests on a platform of two successive tiers. Both the tiers consist of sculptured niches.

The upper tier niches contain mostly Brahmanical deities such as Surya, Brahma, Vishnu, Siva, Parvati, the river goddesses Ganga, Yamuna and the ashta-dikpalas, while in the lower is seen the mithunas, dancers, musicians etc.

The shrine is entered through an astylar mandapa which further leads to antarala (antechamber). Both these chambers have imposing endurances capped by double pediments which supported on huge pilasters.

The mandapa facades are dominated by pilasters and embellished with three vertical rows of large niches and crowned by pedimented gables. The roofs of all these chambers, however, have been lost. The lower niches are somewhat better preserved which contain the images of ten-armed Visvarupa Vishnu and three headed Siva. In one niche facing east represents defaced Surya riding on a chariot driven by Aruna.

The antarala interior is also provided with niches and the flanking entrance depicts figures of standing Ganga and Yamuna. At present the sanctum interior is bare and featureless. The mandapa flanked by two-chambered structures may possibly have enshrined the images of Surya and his consorts. Near the gateway on the west is a tank sunk in the court yard. The gateway is centered on the west side with peristyle has a imposing two-chambered structure with a wide door frame between. The exterior and interior walls of the gateway are treated like the interior mandapa façade which are adorned with paneled friezes showing geese, ganas, vidyadharas and gandharvas.

The temple of Martanda continued to be in active worship till about the end of the fourteenth century C.E. and it was desecrated and destroyed at the instance of Sultan Sikandar (c.1389-1413 C.E.).

His court-chronicler mentions that one converted, Suhabhatta, was the chief instrument of the Sultan in the work of destruction.

8. Two other temples like Martanda are remarkable of the typical Kashmiri architecture. These are at Avantipur in district Anantanag which is about 28km south-east of Srinagar. The temples are situated at the foot of one of the spurs of the mountain Wastarwan which overlooks the river Jhelum. The site still retains the ancient name Avantipur. According to Kalhana's Rajatarangini, the foundation of the town Avantipura has been ascribed to Avativarman (C.885-83 C.E.), and that it was already a holy center before the town established by the king after his own name. Avativarman, the first king of the Utpalaka dynasty, was the son of Sukhavarman and grandson of Utpalaka who was a maternal uncle of the Karkota king Chippatajayapida. Anantavarman's peaceful rule of twenty-eight years made memorable by a large number of religious monuments. Of the surviving temples, one is that of Avantisvamin, dedicated to Vishnu and the other Avantisvara, to Siva.

Avantisvamin temple, dedicated to Vishnu, was modeled after Martanda-although on a smaller scale (Fig.D). The temple is more elaborate in detailing the iconographic program. Probably each of the sub-shrines in the peristyle contained several manifestations of Vishnu. The layout of the temple

complex consists of a temple erected in the central part of a spacious oblong courtyard (Fig.2d). The central main shrine is not erected in isolation. The four corners of the courtyard show another four smaller shrines. Thus indicating that the whole complex is a pancayatana. An imposing gateway is provided in the central part of the western side. All around the periphery is seen a peristyle with a row of cells arranged along the paved courtyard.

The cellular peristyle seen here suggests that Brahmanical temple-builders of Kashmir borrowed this type of layout from the followers of Buddhism which was a dominant religion in the valley since early times. In front of the flights of steps of the central shrine was a pillared mandapa with open sides. In the center of this on its west side was installed a Garudadhavaja indicating the temples' Vaishnava character.

The main temple is built on a high platform in two tiers. Of the sculptures, the northern pilaster is adorned with a figure of six-armed Kamadeva, flanked by a bejeweled two-armed consorts-probably Rati and Priti. Kamadeva is seated in maharajalila pose, i.e., his left pendant foot resting on a stool. The pilaster on south side depicts a royal figure, probably king Avantivarman himself, flanked by his royal retinue. Another royal figure with the retinue is seen on the northern pilaster facing the stairs (Fig.3a). Another interesting fragment depicts geometric pattern with lotus and female figures in tribhanga pose on either side (Fig.3b).

Perhaps one of the best specimens of the workmanship of the imagery is depicted in that of Vaikuntha Vishnu with four faces. Its front human face represents Sankarshana, the left face that of a boar symbolizes Aniruddha. And the demon-like face on the rear represents Pradyumna. Of his four hands, the upper two hold full-blown lotus and a couch-shell. While the lower hands rest above the heads of Gada-devi (personified mace), the other lower hand rests on Cakra-purusha (personified wheel- an ayudhapurusha). Between the stretched legs of Vishnu is seen the upper portion of Prithvi, the Earth-goddess, with her hands touching the feet of the god. Four-headed such types of Vishnu images are called Vaikuntha, Caturmurti and Caturvyuham which are described in the pancaratra system of Vaishnava doctrine. (This particular image now stands in the verandah of the Gadadhara temple at Srinagar which as shifted from Avantipur).

**9. Avantisvara temple:** is about a km to the north-west of the Avantisvamin temple. Avantivarman was a devout worshipper of Vishnu since his childhood and remained Vaishnava in the core of his heart till his death. However, out of great regard for his minister Sura who was a devotee of Siva, the king constructed the Siva temple to honour his friend.

This temple was conceived on a colossal scale, but for the unknown reason, the decoration was left unfinished. The temple faces west, and rests on a triratna platform. The complex consists of a pancayatana temple. The quadrangular courtyard is embellished with cells (miniature shrines) along the periphery. A double chambered imposing gateway is in the center of the western side row of cells. One of the architectural members depict a standing figure of Lakulia with a trefoil niche between the pilasters. A large oblong stone depicts a relief of a royal couple-perhaps Avantivarman himself.

### Narastan Temple

Narastan Temple is an ancient shrine located at Narastan village in Pulwama District, Jammu and Kashmir. This stone temple is noted for its architectural works (Fig.3c). It is distinct from that of all the temples in the valley. Dating back over about fourteen hundred years, the temple is believed to have been dedicated to Lord Narayana.

The temple faces east and now houses a shivlinga, which must have been installed at a later date. The interior compound measures to about 8.6 ft square. The temple has no ceiling. The courtyard is



about 70 ft square. From the outer wall, there is a small side entrance near the south-western side. This circular shaped temple is fully constructed with stones in Gandhara style. The temple is on a single base consisting of only four courses of stones. At the top of the pediment, there is a figure that resembles a Garuda.

The main attraction here is the trefoil arches on the exterior of the shrine walls. Another remarkable feature is the absence of a circumambulatory path on top of the base. From the courtyard, a flight of four steps leads to the shrine. There is a stream of water that gushes down near the front of the temple. There is another shrine located at the northern part of the chamber which has a sloping roof and ceiling similar to that of the Pandrethan temple.

Finally, the ruthless vandalism of Sultan Sikandar is the prime cause for the destruction of the temples in Kashmir.

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First and foremost I thank my friend Dr. Ajmal Shah (Tagore National Research Scholar) with whom I had long discussions on temple architecture of Kashmir. He was kind enough to share some of his pictures viz. Figs. 1a & 2d.

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Fig.A- Plan of Lalitaditya's caitya

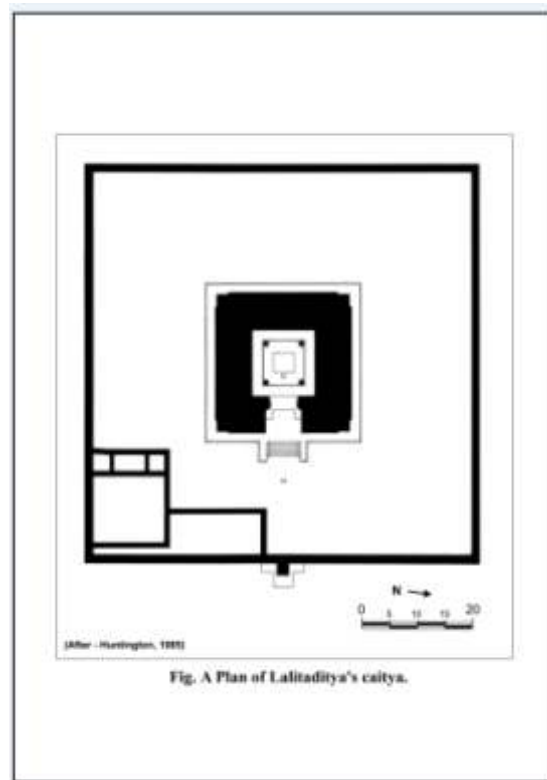


Fig.B- Plan of Cankuna's stupa, Parihasapura.

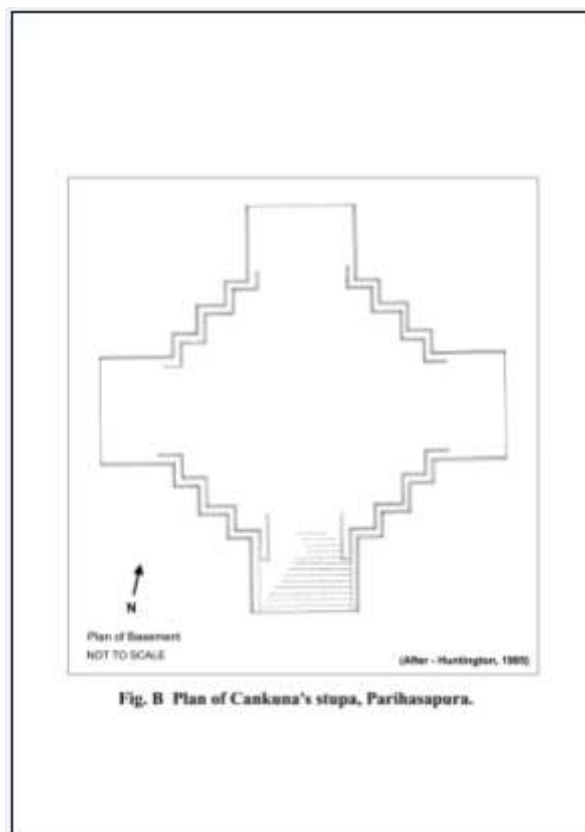


Fig. C. Plan of Martanda temple.

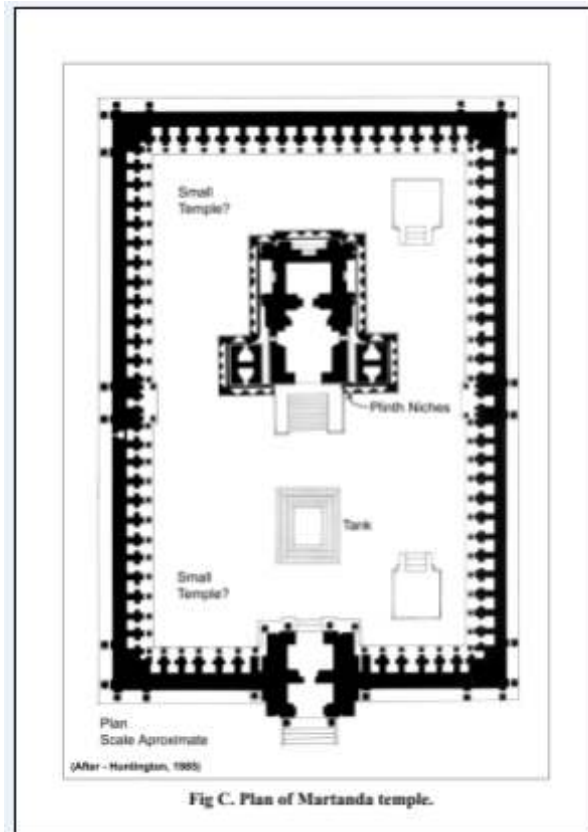


Fig. D. Plan of Avantivamin temple, Avantipura

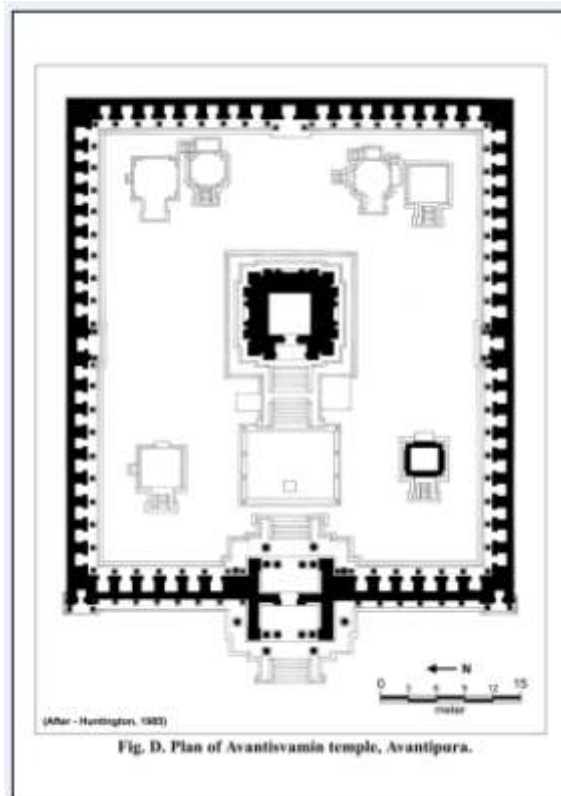


Fig. 1a Stairs of Parihaspura stupa



Fig. 1b. Closer view of the ancient temple- Loduv.



Fig. 1c Bunier Pandava temple, General-View



Fig. 1d. Shiva temple rear view Pandrethan



Fig. 2a Shiva temple view from South Payar



Fig. 2b Sugandhesa temple left side Patan



Fig. 2c Marthanda temple courtyard and scantum



Fig. 2d. Avantivamin Temple at Awantipore.



Fig. 3a Detail of sculputure Avantisvamin temple Avantipur



Fig. 3b Architectural fragment Avantisvamin temple Avantipur





Fig. 3c Narayan temple view of entrance and portico Narastan



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