

A Visit to Burzahom and Martand Sun Temple, Kashmir, the Prominent Archaeological sites of India

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A team of archaeologists led by Dr Manoj Kumar of the Department of Ancient Indian History, Culture and Archaeology, IGNTU, Amarkantak, recently visited the world-famous archaeological sites at Burzahom and Martand Sun Temple in Kashmir Valley. Other members of the team were Mr Manoj K Joshi of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) and Abdul Adil Paray, a Research Scholar of IGNTU and several local officials of ASI.

The site of Burzahom (34°10'11" N;74°52'01" E) is located about three km from the northern limit of Dal Lake and about sixteen km North-East of Srinagar town (via road) and lying on the ancient

lake-bed locally known as *Yendrahom Karewa*. The village Burzahom is surrounded by beautiful hills covered with lush green forests and swampy rice fields. The site has been nominated for recognition as World Heritage Site in 2014 but is yet to be approved by UNESCO. Large-scale excavation at this site was carried out in the early 1960s in seven seasons by ASI, and the excavation revealed evidence from the middle of the fourth millennium BCE as the Aceramic Neolithic stage to the Early historical period. First time in the Indian subcontinent, this site has yielded the evidence of Pit-dwelling in a Neolithic context (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1 – Evidence of Pit-dwellings in Neolithic Context

The entire site retains its physical integrity and is still set in a landscape that is reminiscent of the natural setting of the Neolithic people. The site is famous for its dwelling pits, bone tools, grounded stone tools and its contact with the Harappan civilization and other neighbouring contemporary cultures in Central Asia. This is the alone archaeological site in India that revealed a large no of bone tools, more than two thousand, which were used for agriculture and other purposes.

The team started the visit by examining the landscape and settlement pattern of the site (Fig. 2). The on-site existing Menhirs, dwelling pits, and exposed sections were examined, and material

remains as surface finds were collected in the form of pot shreds and stone tools. He discussed each aspect of the site and raised various issues regarding the subsistence pattern, origin of the Neolithic people, source of Megaliths, and material culture at the site. Besides, the issues related to the encroachment and proper conservation of the site were also discussed, and pertinent suggestions were conveyed to the ASI officer.

Another significant aspect of the visit was an onsite talk by Dr Manoj Kumar in which he delivered an insightful lecture on the characteristic features of the Indian Neolithic culture with special reference to the Burzahom.



Fig. 2: Neolithic Site of Burzahom with Menhir in the Centre of the Site

This lecture was for the blended audience of more than two hundred, available online at various places of the country for a workshop organized by Bihar Museum, Patna and onsite addressees to History students from the Government Junior College of Nadpora, Shopian, J&K. The lecture was followed by a productive discussion on various aspects of the Indian Neolithic Culture and Dr Kumar raised various issues to be answered by the future researchers and showed his concern on the vandalism and sabotage of the site of Burzahom.

The next day, same team visited the famous Sun Temple site of Martand, located in Ranbirpora village on Mattan Karewa, in Anantnag district, about sixty km from Srinagar near the Srinagar-Pahalgam highway. The Sun Temple is one of the earliest and yet largest temple built in the Kashmir Valley. However, there are several views about the construction of this spectacular shrine; the most accepted view is that it was built in the 8th CE by Lalitaditya Muktapida, the third ruler of the Karkota dynasty. Similar to the Burzahom

site, this temple is also a Centrally Protected Monument under the jurisdiction of the Archaeological Survey of India. The temple stands on a plateau-like formation locally known as the *Udra* or *Karewa* formation (a lacustrine deposit).

The Martand Sun temple (33°44'44" N;75°13'13" E), dedicated to lord Surya is now in ruinous condition but still able to demonstrate a splendid glimpse of ancient Kashmiri architecture. Rectangular in plan, the entire temple complex consists of four major components, in which the main temple contains – *Garbhagriha*, *Antarala*, and *Ardhamandapa* lying on a high platform, and all these are surrounded by the fourth component – a roofed colonnade enclosure wall which was built on a platform with fluted pillars. It is believed that the idol of the Sun god was installed in the centre of the *Garbhagriha*, but now any idol is not found. The entire temple is built of square and circular boulders of grey stone in which most of the boulders are beautifully carved with religious panels and relief images.



Fig. 3: Rear View of Sun Temple, Martand, with evidence of true Arch

During the minute examination of the temple complex, it is found that this temple represents a high degree of technical marvel. The following observations are made during the visit:

1. The trefoil arch of the main shrine was attained by following the technique of a true arch in which a T-shaped stone block was fitted in the centre of the upper curve of the trefoil arch with the objective of transmitting the lateral loads on supporting piers or walls (Fig. 3). This fact annihilates the conventional notion that the technique of true arch came to India with Muslim rulers and they introduced it in 1287 CE with the construction of Balban's Tomb.

2. This temple beats the perception that the Indian temples were solely built by post and lintel technique only; now, it can be urged

that in some ancient temples, the principle of corbelling/corbelled arch was also used.

3. Construction of the temple was done with fine-dressed heavy slabs of grey stone, settled in horizontal courses with fine joints that were fixed by iron dowels and clamps; any binding material was not used.

4. It is also observed that Martand Sun Temple's plan closely resembles Kailash Nath Temple, Kanchipuram (Tamil Nadu), which was built almost in the same period (around 700 CE) by the Pallava ruler Narsimha Varman. The main shrine of both temples is enclosed by a colonnade enclosure (Fig. 4).

Such innovative observations and facts will certainly add some new thoughts in the field of Indian archaeology in general and in Kashmir Valley in particular.

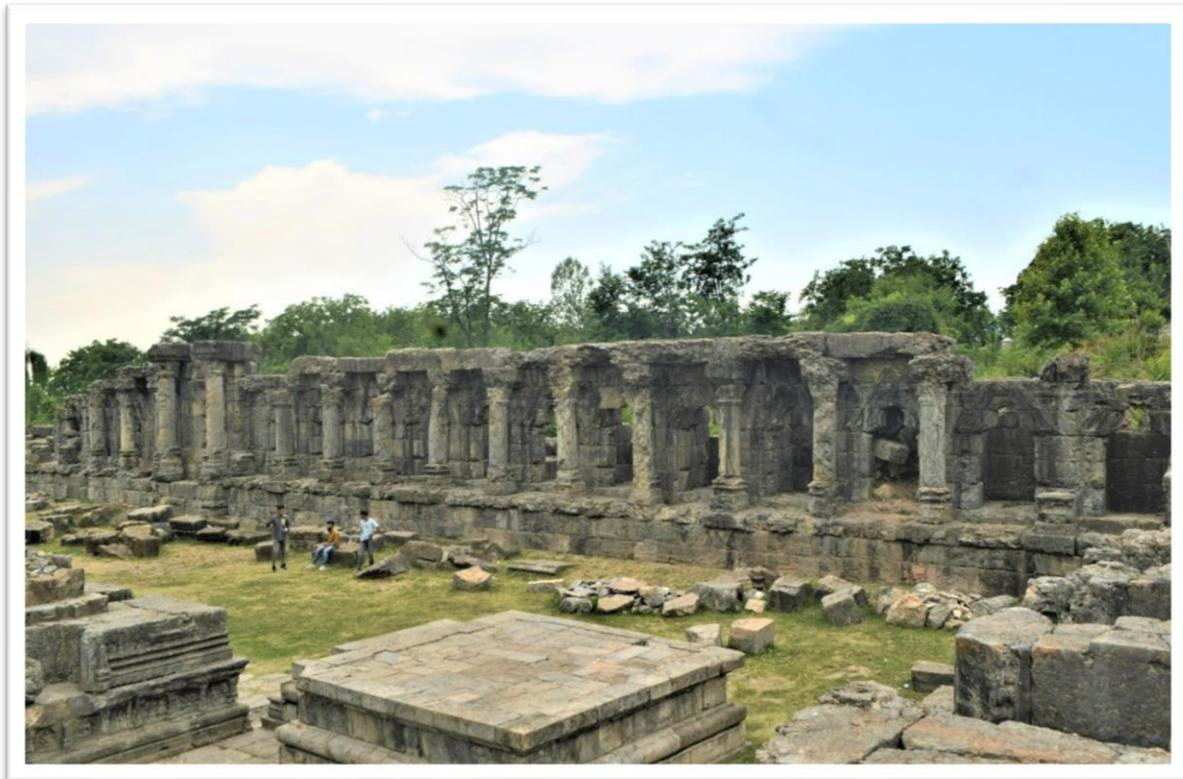


Fig. 4: Evidence of colonnade enclosure at Sun Temple, Martand