



## Shri Chandrehe Temple of Sidhi, Madhya Pradesh: A Mysterious Archaic Architecture of Kalachuri Era

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**ABSTRACT:** This unique Saiva temple and monastery located beside the bank of the river Son in the Chandrehe village of Rampur Naikin, Sidhi district, Madhya Pradesh. Established back in the year 972 CE, this particular temple is carrying distinctive architectural features full with a deep religio-political history. There is a long debate based on the establishment of this monument and it made this excellent unique Saiva temple a mysterious one. According to some local legends and popular folk tales, this architecture actually representing the vivid practices of one particular Saiva sect commonly known as the Mattamayura Saiva Sect and guru of the Chedi rulers Prabodhasiva was the main person behind the foundation of this magnificent isolated temple.

Sidhi is famous for many reasons but one and foremost is this Temple. This particular district is one of the most populated tribal districts of Madhya Pradesh. So you can find the tribal essence in the architecture and sculptural representation of this temple. This particular monument is the reflection of the North Indian Nagara Style but it also showcasing the blended architectural features which may indicate a new local genre of temple making style. So this paper intends to focus on these detailed matters.

**KEYWORDS:** Sidhi, Rampur Naikin, Chedi, Chandrehe, Mattamayur, Folk Art, River Son, Nagara Style.

### I. Introduction

In ancient and early medieval India, there flourished many royal Dynasties which had various surnames. The dynasty named 'Kalachuri' is one of the most prominent and powerful ruling family was holding their control over the vast part of the central India especially today's Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh for the very long period of time. The dynasty named 'Kalachuri' is one such where meaning had to be evolved and fleet in Bombay Gazetteer Vol. I, part 2, pages 293 and 470 gives the

following variants: 'Kataccuri', 'Katachhuri', 'Katacuri', 'Kalacuri', 'Kalatsuri' (Sanskrit form), 'Kalacurya' and even 'Kalaturya'<sup>1</sup>. Among these various names, 'Kalachuri' seemed to be the basic form. Kalachuris is the only dynasty of Early India which had a minimum of 12 branches and sub branches and they spread out in different parts of the Indian subcontinent<sup>2</sup>. The earlier rules of this dynasty were called the 'Kalachuris of Mahismati'. They ruled in west-central India between the 6th-7th centuries CE. The Later Kalachuri dynasty rulers were known as the 'Kalachuris of Tripuri' that ruled between the 7th-13th centuries CE. The Mahishmati Kalachuri rulers are well known as the 'Haihayas' or the 'Early Kalachuris' (they ruled during the 6th-7th Century CE). The Kalachuri dynasty of Mahismati was controlling the territory comprising parts of present-day Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, and Maharashtra and the 'Mahishmati' was the capital located in the Malwa region. On the other hand, the 'Tripuri Kalachuri' is also called the 'Kalachuri dynasty of Chedi' or 'Later Kalachuris'. They ruled over parts of central India in the 7th-13th centuries CE. This branch was controlling and ruling the region popularly known as the 'Chedi' region (also known as 'Dahala-mandala')<sup>3</sup>, with their capital, at 'Tripuri' (present-day Tewar near Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh). They claimed their origin to of lunar background, and hence this dynasty is also termed as 'Chandravanshi'. They were one of the important dynasties which survived even during the famous 'Tripartite Struggle' of Palas, Rashtrakutas and Pratiharas.

The term 'Kalachuri' itself is very interesting and it has a mythological background. The term has been mentioned in the Epics, Rigveda, Vayu Purana and Vishnu Purana and of course the contemporary Buddhist and Jain Literature. Among archaeological sources, not only inscriptions and coins; but also monuments and different sculptures portray the hidden political, religious and cultural story of that particular dynasty. This particular term



‘Kalachuri’ can well be split up into two components – ‘kala’ and ‘churi’. Here ‘Kala’ or ‘Kali’ means long moustache and ‘Churi’ means sharp knife<sup>4</sup>. During the time of the Kalachuris of Chedi so many magnificent religious and non-religious architectures had been made. Among those monuments, here in this paper I am dealing with the Shri Chandrehe Temple of Sidhi district, Madhya Pradesh. I would like to focus on and discuss the detailed architectural features of this Saiva temple and would like to explain its each and every sculpture. Apart from that, this Paper also intends to focus on the religious aspects as well as the political background and condition of that area during Kalachuri era. This Saiva temple is of historical significance and has been classified as a Monument of National Importance by the ASI.

## II. Aims and Objective of the Paper

One of the main objectives of this paper is to thoroughly study the whole monument and to understand not only just its constructional history (analysing its architectural pattern and sculptural distribution in details) but also to explore the geo-political context of that area. To analyse this particular portion I have to understand how the civilization developed at the bank of the river Son and how the life line of the Vindhya land had been affected and thoroughly changed by the various political and religious incidents from the ancient past. This Sidhi district is a reflection of the proud history of the state of Madhya Pradesh and this region is a repository of natural, historical and cultural history and this ancient place also showcase the spectrum of its floristic socio-cultural diversity and ethnic history of tribal community which is very important to understand the temple making activity of that area. At a very first glance, art historians and art enthusiasts can easily identify this structure as a traditional Nagara Style of temple architecture. But it is actually the mixed style which may be the product of local genre of architectural pattern where you can find couple of tribal elements as well. The special location of this architecture is also very important. As a student of history we know the importance of space and time in historical study. Sidhi district of Madhya Pradesh has almost 11,000-10,000 year’s old ancient shrine with a platform in the centre of which is a stone artefact strikingly similar to present-day shrine of Goddess Shakti. This particular foundation was discovered by Dr. Kenoyer and his team. Not only that this particular village of Rampur Naikin also has some Palaeolithic and Mesolithic sites. As we all know that the Baghor village is located in Sihawal Tehsil of Sidhi

district as well and this village is famous for upper Palaeolithic tools. It easily conveys the importance of that place.

Another major aim of this paper is to explore the little history of the Kalachuri dynasty and to know how the Kalachuris of Chedi became so powerful overtime in that particular region. On the basis of unfolding their history I would like to navigate the path to get the detailed information about the religious history of Chedi district. As we all know about the fact that political and religious history goes hand in hand and it truly reflects through the purpose of the establishment and development of architecture. The main residing deity of this temple is lord Shiva and the building is dedicated to the Matta Mayura (Drunken Peacocks) Saiva Sect. One of the most influential lineages of Saiva Rajagurus was the Mattamayuras popularly known as drunken peacocks<sup>5</sup>. They belonged to the Saiva Siddhanta sect, one of the most influential and widespread Schools of Saivism in medieval India (currently confined only to Tamil Nadu). This lineage of Saiva ascetics, originating in the Malwa region of Madhya Pradesh, initially acted as Rajagurus to the Saiva kings of many central Indian dynasties, especially the Kalachuris<sup>6</sup>. This paper also intends to focus on how Shri Chandrehe Temple of Sidhi became the soul centre of this particular Saiva sect.

## III. Reviewing the Previous Works

To study this theme, I went through various sources. Among first-hand sources, I considered examining different inscriptions of the Kalachuris. Those Epigraphical sources are – ‘The Bilhari stone Inscription’ of Yuvarajadeva, the second; Karitalai records of Lakshmanraja (Kalachuri year 593); Mukundpur records of Kokalla, the second; Copper plate inscription at Varanasi of the later ruler Karna etc<sup>7</sup>. These primary sources provide us with detailed information about the origin of the Kalachuris of Tripuri (Chedi). Like how Kokalla, the first appears to have been the first powerful ruler of the dynasty, as he finds regular mentions in the genealogies of the later Kalachuri rulers. These inscriptions also reveal the power struggle between Kalachuris and other royal dynasty like the Pratihara<sup>8</sup>. Not only were that, on the basis of these inscriptions we came to know that, Kalachuris used to be the subordinate to their southern neighbours – the Rashtrakuta emperors in early times. But after the decline of the Rashtrakutas and Pratihara empires, the Kalachuris assumed independence, probably during the reign of famous Yuvaraja-deva I (915 CE – 945 CE). These epigraphical sources also help us to know that



Trailokyamalla was the last known king of this dynasty and the latter half of the thirteenth century CE, the former Kalachuri territories came under the control of the Paramaras, Chandelas, the Delhi Sultanate and the Yadavas of Devagiri. All these information help us to understand the political appearance of the Kalachuris in the Central India. Shri Chandrehe Temple particularly the monastery has two inscriptions which tell us about the founders of temple and monastery. We are going to talk about this later in details.

Apart from all inscriptions, we also get a bunch of information from numismatic sources as well. A large number of the coins of Gangeyadeva of Tripuri reveal so many important political and religious aspects of that dynasty. Made by gold, silver and copper these coins distributed all over the Chedi<sup>9</sup>. According to the Cunningham, these coins of Gangeyadeva is the only specimens of the money of the powerful Chedi kings of Dahala and these coins are so numerous that the successors of Gangeyadeva did not find it necessary to issue additional coins. On the basis of these coins, we get the information that how strong the economy was that time in Chedi and to built this particular Saiva temple and monastery and to encourage the Mattamayura Saiva Sect the ruler of Kalachuri dynasty paid a good amount of donations as well.

Apart from all these primary sources, I went through couple of secondary sources as well. To understand the power politics of the Kalachuris, I read the book 'the Kalachuris and Their Time' by R. K. Sharma. I also went through book named 'Tripuri: History and Culture' by M. C. Choubey where he talks about the traditional history and antiquities of the Kalachuri dynasty. I also considered the book 'Temples of the Kalacuri Period' by Amarendra Kumar Singh. This particular work is full of information about the temple making pattern that developed under the Kalachuri era and also mentioned Shri Chandrehe temple. But we did not get the detailed features of that temple from this book. I also considered research paper to study this architecture. A paper entitled 'Isolated Sidhi's Detached Shivalaya and Monastery' by Ms. Diksha Singh is focusing on the religious aspect behind the making of this architecture more than the political aspects and detailed artistic features. I also went through the official report of the Archaeological Survey of India (Memoir No.23)<sup>10</sup> where I do get important information about Shri Chandrehe Temple.

#### IV. Methodology

To execute my paper I not only just studied those primary (inscriptions and coins) and secondary sources, but also tried to compare them side by side to unfold the detailed history of the Kalachuri dynasty especially this Tripuri (Chedi) line. I have also tried my best to analyse the main theme that is the detailed architectural features of Shri Chandrehe Temple. I also try to readdress the issues regarding the establishment debate of this popular but isolated temple. Back 2023, October I visited Sidhi, Madhya Pradesh for my filed study and I also went to the Rani Durgavati Fort & Museum located in Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh. Both in the field and in the museum I minutely observed those excellent artefacts. While visiting the *Rampur Naikin* village, I noticed the changing landscape and the free flow of the river Son. Both are important to understand the special importance of that region. Even I went through each and every archaeological detail to understand the making process of that monument. I also noticed all the sculptures of the temple. But what fascinates me is the two storey monastery which is located just beside the main architecture. It is an open pillared structure and has so many chambers. Both the temple and the monastery were located inside of a huge courtyard and there I noticed a well maintained garden as well. I talked to the head priest of Shri Chandrehe temple and his family member to know the importance of this Saiva architecture in the life of the common people at present time and also got the information about the festival. Here I have tried my best to get some crucial information about the Mattamayura Saiva Sect whether it is still popular and active in that region or not. I also collected couple of information from the local inhabitants as well to know the importance of tribal influence of that place.

In Rani Durgavati Fort & Museum, I noticed several photographs of that area taken by ASI, Jabalpur Circle, Madhya Pradesh. I also read official documents and try to find out the information about that particular debate. In that museum especially in the library section I do get various books written in both Hindi and English languages. From that book I gathered some vital information about the political and economic history of the Kalachuri dynasty.

#### V. Discussion

Sidhi is a very well known place of Madhya Pradesh state. This is the birth place of Birbal. Even popular romantic novel 'Kadambari' (composed in Sanskrit) of Banabhatt is written over



here<sup>11</sup>. But this region is famous for that Saiva Architecture known as Shri Chandreh temple and the monastery. There is a controversy about the proper location of this temple. After my visit to a place, I came to know that this monument is located near Shikargang village at the junction of three holy rivers Son, Banas and Banaganga. But in this region river Son played and still playing a crucial role. From the banks of these rivers especially from the bank of river Son this Shri Chandreh temple (24° 17' 27" N and 81° 27' 55" E) and monastery is located at the distance of 1 km. One thing I would like to mention here that this Saivalaya is very old but still it is in better condition but the monastery is in wobbly condition. According to legends, this structure was believed to have been constructed in just one night by Viswakarma, the divine architect of Brahmanical pantheon.

This west facing Saiva temple and the monastery was situated inside a huge courtyard. This architecture consists of Mandapa, Mahamandapa and circular sanctum cella decorated with Shikhara. The temple belonged to the early of the Chedi dynasty (850 CE-1015CE) they were also known as kalchuris. As I have already mentioned that there is a huge debate on the actual date and the person behind the establishment of this temple. On the basis of ASI report, we came to know that the architectural remains at Chandrehe consist of this Siva temple and a monastery. Both of these structures were first noticed by General Alexander Cunningham and Mr. Beglar<sup>12</sup>. But unfortunately neither of them could clearly read the inscription, which is placed into the front wall of the monastery. This particular inscription has two parts and is inscribed on two separate slabs. Firstly, on the basis of this inscription the date of the temple had been wrongly calculated. But then we get the correct information after all the confusion. The inscription is inscribed in classical Devanagari script. The first slab includes 14 lines and other includes 13 lines. The author of this inscription was poet Dhasat<sup>13</sup>. According to this epigraphical evidence, Prabodhasiva, a Saiva ascetic of the Mattamayura clan, had built a monastery in the Kalachri-Chedi year 724. Again the same primary source informs us that the monastery built by Prabodhasiva lay "close to the house of Gods built by his spiritual preceptors". The reference is no doubt pointing to the circular temple of Siva, which situated within 10 yards of the monastery. So now it can easily say that the monastery itself was completed in the Kalachuri-Chedi year 724 = 972 CE<sup>14</sup>. Therefore the temple must have been built about 25 years earlier approximately 947 CE. There is another votive

inscription found from that area mentioning a Yogi named Yamja. Rai Bahadur Hiralal and others are of opinion that this is the same person who has been mentioned in the previous inscription. But here name is different and the Yogi is identified as Magardhaja<sup>15</sup>. But the dates were same. According to my observation and detailed field study, it can assume that, Kalachuri rulers Lakshmana-rajya, the second (945 CE-970 CE) and Shankaragana, the third (970 CE-980CE) donated this land to that 'Yogi' (from another place we get the name Prashantshiva) to built this Saiva temple and this person is also considered to be the preceptor of Prabodhshiva who latter built that monastery. As we all know that Prabodhshiva was the follower of Matmayura Saiva Sect and guru of the Chedi rulers, it can easily say these two structures were dedicated to this special Saiva Cult.

The Saiva temple consists of main three chambers - Garbhagriha, Mandapa and open pillared Ardha-mandapa in front. The carvings on the outer and inner walls of the temple are not very elaborate and at present some of those specimens are totally gone. Shri Chandrehe temple deserves a special notice because of its mysterious peculiar type which is the combined result of the Nagara type of northerner Indian temple style and local architectural style. The whole architecture is placed on a high Adhithana (basement) where you can find 10 stairs to go up to the main structure. The main structure is standing on a broad low platform (known as Jagati) which is rectangular in shape with a narrow projection behind. This platform measures 28' in breadth and 40'6" in length and it has 6 stairs to access the Ardha-mandapa. The Plinth, the body of the Garbhagriha and as well as the Shikhara (elevated part) of this temple are circular in shape which is really unique. Beglar who first discovered this magnificent structure used to believe that the 'Adhithana' is not the original part of the monument, it is the latter addition. I am totally agreed with him as I find the colour of the basement is totally different from the colour of the main structure. The main temple built by the sandstone as the yellow colour easily seen here. On the other hand, the colour of the Adhithana is pinkish. It was built by the pink sandstone. If the platform could be removed, we would find the actual basement mouldings of the temple extend down a considerable distance, and greatly add to the royalness and richness of the temple. The main structure, though elegant, is dwarfed. On the basis of the unique ground plan, the Sanctum Cella of the temple is circular externally as well as internally. The external circle being unbroken into projecting angles and





here we also noticed recessed niches. The peculiarity of this architecture makes this temple mysterious but deserving to study. After observing the monument minutely, one can say that the deepest shadows here are secured by chiselling out the lower portion of the tower above the basement mouldings into pilasters, with deep-sunk narrow intervals crowned by a bold and deep cornice and mouldings, and the upper portion of the tower is also formed into a number of facets separated similarly from each other by deep lines running continuously up to the crowning Amalaka-shila. Here the facets are elaborately sculpted which reminds us the Jain temple at Khajuraho.

This west facing temple is dedicated to lord Shiva. In this architecture we do get the presence of the Antarala. The eternal part of the Sanctum Cella was divided into a number of square pilasters, by chiselling out intermediate spaces between them. Here the main of the architect seems to have been to represent the temple as being supported by a bunch of circular row of pilasters. It may consider being the addition of the local style. Just above the round moulding of the face, there is a circular row of square pedestals on which these pilasters stand. The shafts are plain, except at  $2/3^{\text{rd}}$  of the height from the bottom, where there is a projection, shaped as a cornice, with lotus petals. Over the top one can notice another broad projection, square in section along the edge of which is a row of Kirtimukhas. The square capital is plain and shallow but very appealing. Each of these capitals supports a portion of the circular Sikhara. If anyone observes minutely, they can see that the whole Sikhara is covered with vertical bands of the Chaitya-window-pattern, which terminate in a single triangular Chaitya-window.

The architect had fashioned out the Sikhara in such a way that each of the false pilastered carved out of the body of the Garbhagriha appears to be bearing the weight of the section of the Sikhara, which itself is slightly convex in shape. The stumpy appearance of the Sikhara is due to the low position of the Amalaka which has been placed rather too near the apex of the Chaitya-window-pattern ornamentations. In front of the Sikhara, just over the Antarala, there is a pyramidal structure which is really a peculiar feature of this temple. We can notice a large Chaitya-window on the top with a circular medallion its centre and it contains the bust of a four-headed deity which is very peculiar. The Antarala portion of the temple is plain and simple. The Mandapa itself is open in front, but the sides are covered by parapet walls in the shape of high benches with brackets. The roof of the Mandapa is trabeate and its outer part is shapes as a pyramid. To

the north of the Sanctum Cella is a Gargoyle, shaped like the head of the Makara through which water escapes from the inside of the Garbhagriha. A group of sculptures including Jain and some Brahmanical figures lies in front and inside of the Garbhagriha. There is a Shiva linga placed inside the Sanctum Cella worshiped by the common people. There is another mysterious and weird thing about this structure is that it is not very heavily ornamented and one cannot find so many sculptures from this temple complex.

The monastery is the only other building that has been located inside the temple complex. Beglar first noticed<sup>16</sup> and described about this monument in details. He identified this structure as monastery. The current condition of this structure is not so good. It immediately needs a proper renovation and preservation. After my field work and general observation, it can say that this huge building consists of a central, open, paved courtyard, on all sides of which ran rows of pillars. One can notice several pillared halls inside the monument. Behind the line of pillars on each side are rooms, many of them plain, some small, some large, but some also with elaborately sculptured entrances, and elegant, large, carefully constructed roofs, with the architraves and the overlapping and interesting courses of slabs decorated with sculptures. There is also an external Varandah stretched from east to west. The upper storey, however did not present a plain blank wall externally, for here the outer walls were pierced at frequent intervals by doors and windows, letting in plenty of light and air. At a one glance, you can say that this structure is a perfect example of a civil or domestic architecture. According to me the upper storey was used either as a library or school or to train the novices. The roof portion is totally flat. This building is also made of sandstone.

## VI. Conclusion

This Saiva temple and monastery of Chandreh, Madhya Pradesh is an iconic structure from ancient past. This Kalachuri architecture is basically representing the mixed features of the Nagara style along with local genre of temple making art where one can find the tribal essence. Both of these monuments were used to be the power house of the Mattamayura Saiva Sect. As we already know that the most of the Kalachuri kings were the ardent devotees of lord Siva, it can easily say that in Sidhi this Mattamayura Saiva Sect received royal patronage under the Kalachuri kings of ninth-tenth century CE. According to some local myths that there is a hidden tunnel exists within the main



temple complex connecting it to the nearby Son River. This particular legend adds an aura of mystery and intrigue to this ancient structure. Archaeological Survey of India, Jabalpur Circle takes a great initiative to restore the whole place and preserving its artefacts. I would like to conclude by saying that the Mahadeva temple of Chandrehe not only carries a rich historical legacy but also showcases impressive architectural details and artistic elements. This monument remains a place of worship and cultural significance for devotees and visitors alike. This place is also very important for the art historians and researchers like us to know the

architectural pattern which developed under the control of the Kalachuri dynasty in that region.

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### **Pictures**



Shri Chandrehe  
Temple



Siva Linga, Main residing  
deity of the temple



The Monastery

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