

ART AND ARCHITECTURE OF THE TOMB OF LUWANG NINGTHOU

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Abstract

Manipur is well known for its archaeological sites and remains. Historical sites, monuments, cave, inscriptions, coins rock-shelters etc. are found in different parts of Manipur. This evidence has thrown some light on the history and culture of Manipur. Among the remains, temples and tombs are considered as the most important monuments of religious architecture. The most important example of religious architecture is the temple of Shri Shri Govindaji, Imphal West, Temple of Lord Hanuman, Imphal east, etc. Staunch and devout Hindu rulers with their patronages helped to build a large number of temples and tombs in each and every parts of the state. However, architecture differs greatly from culture to culture. Generally, a temple or tomb was built on a raised platform with flight of steps in front. Its plan is square, sometimes rectangular. There is an inner sanctum. Round the sanctum is the covered path for circumambulation for the devotee. The sanctum is preceded by a porch and mandapa or hall for the congregation of worshipper and devotees. Among the Hindu temples and tombs of Manipur built in the early period was hut type such as Temple of Shri Krishna, Imphal East, Tomb of Maharaj Khaba, Tomb of Luwang Ningthou, Imphal West, Manipur etc.

Key words: *Art, Architecture, Arch, Curvilinear, Cornice, Curve, Hut type, Pedestal, Porch, Pilaster, Roof, Sikhara, Sanctum, Temple, Tomb, Tower.*

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1. Introduction

Manipur is situated in the North-Eastern part of India. The state is very rich in archaeological sites and remains such as monuments, caves, inscriptions, coins, rock shelters etc. Among the monuments, temples and tombs are in good condition. These archaeological remains throw significant light on the development of the art and architecture and religious life of the people of Manipur. The Manipuris had developed an independence type of architecture since time immemorial. However, the process of Sanskritization and their contact with the South-East Asian Countries, reflected in the art and architecture of Manipur particularly in the construction of palace, temple and tomb. Most of the kings were great devout of Hinduism and with their patronage helped to built number of temples in the state. These temples became the most important seats of Vaishnava culture. Besides this, they also constructed tombs in the cremation sites of the kings and nobles who played an important role in the state administration.

The kingdom was ruled by the 'Ningthouja' dynasty from the first century A.D. Most of the kings were devout and staunch Hindu. They erected Hindu temples, tombs and other artistic monuments. Most of these remains are lying scattered in different parts of Manipur which testify the excellence of the art and architecture of the time. Some of the temples are still worshipped. Most of the remains belong to the 'Nagara' or Indo-Aryan and Indo-Islamic style which is found in Northern India. The 'Nagara' type has four sided square or oblong pyramidal curvilinear tower or 'Sikhara' surmounted by a single or double 'Amalaka'(Indian gooseberry fruit) followed by a 'Kalasa'(vase-shaped finial) and 'Stupi'(finial).^[1] The 'Nagara' temple plan is always a square or a rectangular. The temples and tombs built in the early parts of the 18th century were hut type style. Amongst the hut type temples and tombs of Manipur which have survived, mentioned may be made of

Krishna Temple, Temple of Hanuman, Temple of Madan Mohonji, Tomb of Maharaj Gambhir Singh, Tomb of Maharaj Khaba , Tomb of Luwang Ningthou etc. These temples and tombs are well designed and the architecture is an improved version of the hut type temple of Bengal.

2. Objective and Methodology

The objective of the paper is to find out new facts and reconstruction with the help of scientific methods. The paper is based on the report of field work and original sources. The Tomb of Luwang Ningthou has feasibly been selected to be study sites. Measuring tabs, high-tech compass, camera and other simple engineering measurement tools are the tools of the field survey. These technical works have been incorporated with appropriate Engineers and field experts. Emphasis has been laid on the study of the general lay-out, ground plan and vertical features of the temple. Attempt has also been made here to interpret literary sources in the light of the information gathered from field work and to compare and bring them together. A comparative study of the architectural remains of the tomb with those of some other parts of the country has also been attempted to know the stylistic affiliation.

3. Discussion

The Tomb of Luwang Ningthou was constructed at the cremation ground of Luwang Ningthou also known as Maisnam Gaurashyam Singh who died in 1848 A.D.^[2] He was the father of Queen Maisnam Kumudini Devi, wife of Maharaj Gambhir Singh. The tomb is located at Singjamei Chinga Makha, about 4 Kms south of Imphal west, Manipur.

The structure of the tomb can be divided into (i) *Adhishthana*, the pedestal on which the tomb stands, (ii) *Garbhagriha*, sanctum cube or shrine, (iii) *Antarala*, porch hall, (iv) dome shape roof, and (v) *Kalasa*, the crowning cape. The tomb was

built on a rectangular ground plan. The tomb is built of well-burnt bricks and mortar. The ground plan of the tomb is rectangular which is 3.55m length and 2.95m breadth. The tomb is erected on a low pedestal and facing south. The walls of the sanctum hall raised vertically from the basement and meet the projected straight cornices. The cornice is 0.23m. thick. This exterior wall up to the straight cornice is 1.93m. height with no decoration except projected pilasters in four corners. Above these cornices the wall again raised straight up to the semicircular eaves of the roof that is 1.06m height. There are two semicircular cornices projected in the four sides of the upper part of the sanctum wall just below the eaves of the roof. Floral designs are provided in these external walls. The external and internal brick walls are plastered. The wall is 0.73m thick. Two half round Pillars are projected in each sides of the southern wall that supported the straight cornice. The sanctum or *Garbhagriha* is rectangular and prepared without any stone and brick. On the eastern, northern and western walls of the sanctum hall provided arch ventilations measuring 0.35m. height and 0.25m. breadth. The upper part of the sanctum hall looks like a lancet arch.

The roof of the sanctum hall is dome shape. The four sides eave of the roof are designed as semicircular arch. The eaves are 0.13m thick. The topmost part is decorated with floral motifs and a circular crown is place above it. The circular crowning cape has two vase shape (*Kalastas*) placed one upon another and fixed a wheel (*Nilachakra*) on the top vase. The finial is about 1.50m height.

The sanctum hall is interconnected with the porch. The ground plan of the porch is rectangular that is 0.80m breadth and 2.23m length. The porch is 2.50m height from the ground level. The wall of the porch hall is 1.80m height. The wall is raised street without any decoration and meets the curved cornice. Straight cornice

is also projected on the wall of the porch hall as decoration just above the segmental arch entrance door. The arch opening is supported by two pillars as doorframe to the south and forming main entrance of the tomb. The arch doorway is 1.62m height, 1.65m length and 0.67m breadth. Two half round Pillars are projected in each sides of the façade of the porch as doorframe. The pillars are not free standing which are shown as relief on wall-surface. The pillars are 1.33m and 1.24m height. The pillars are decorated with zig zag pattern just below the capital. The thickness of the eaves is same as that of the sanctum eaves. The roof of the porch is an exact replica of the sanctum roof. There is no decoration of floral motifs and crowning cape on the roof of the porch. Stylistically the tomb is affiliated to ‘Char-Chala’ hut type temple of late medieval Bengal.

4. Conclusion

The kings of the Ningthouja dynasty who ruled in the 18th and 19th century were great builders. The buildings they had left behind reflected the mighty building tradition which are lying scattered at different sites of this state.

The royal chronicle ‘Cheitharol Kumbaba’ refers numbers of temple, tomb and other structure built of perishable and non-perishable materials in different period. The popularity of the icon of gods and goddesses and introduction of brick in Manipur caused erection of temples and tombs with other permanent materials in different designs on a large scale. Migration of different races from South-East-Asia and North India in Manipur also led to the growth of a synthesis in art and architecture. The royal chronicle recorded the visits of many architects and masons from Bengal and Burma during the 17th and 18th century.^[3] These artisan and architects were employed in the construction of temple, tomb and other structure. They contributed for the growth of art and architecture particularly different styles of temple, tomb and other monumental structure in Manipur. Probably those who

visited from eastern India and Bengal might have introduced the hut type architecture in Manipur.

Archaeological finding reveals that the tomb of Luwang Ningthou is affiliated to hut type temple of late medieval Bengal and the tomb belongs to the 19th century A.D. The external features of the tomb are highlighted by the pedestal or platform on which the sanctums cube stands, hut type roof, the porch hall, and the crowning cape or 'Kalasa'. The hut style is based on imitations of the common village house of mud or bamboo with thatch roof built in Bengal. The basic form of hut type temple may go back to time immemorial. But the earliest dated hut type temple in Bengal is the temple of Simhavahini at Ghatal (Midnapore) built in Jaishtha 1412, Sakabda(1490).^[4] The hut style architecture began to appeared in Manipur in the early parts of the 18th century A.D. such as Krishna Temple, Temple of Hanuman, Temple of Madan Mohonji, Imphal East, Manipur etc. The hut type architecture was not only applied in the construction of temple but also in the construction of tomb. The Tomb of Luwang Ningthou is the finest example of hut type architecture in Manipur. The hut type architecture was dominated in Manipur till the beginning of the 19th century in the construction of temple and tomb.



Fig. 1 Front view

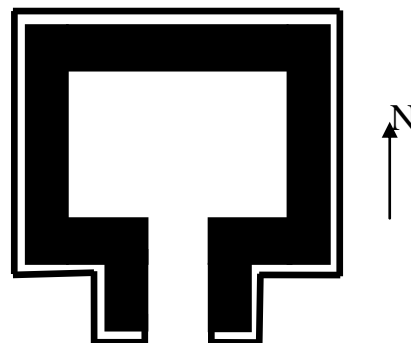
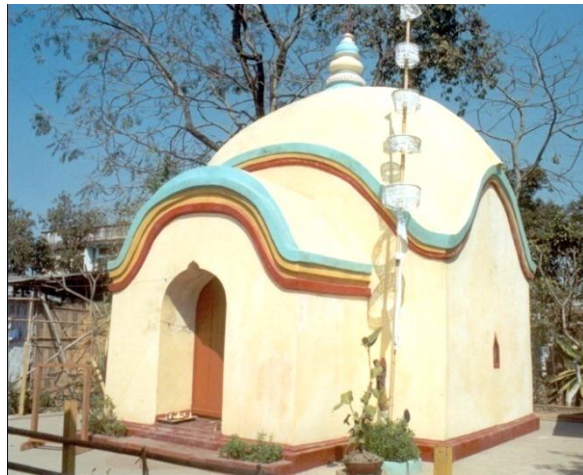


Fig. 2 Plan-Over-Plinth



Fig. 3 Floral Designs

Tomb of Luwang Ningthou



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