

THE TEMPLE OF MAHAVIRA AT AHAR

Ahar (Āhaḍ), Āghāṭa of the Mediaeval times, was the capital of the Guhilas of Mewar (Mevāḍa i. e. Medapāṭa) since the middle of tenth century when Allāṭa is said to have transferred his seat from Nagada (Nagahrda)¹. Ahar acted as the hub of architectural activities in Mewar for a full quarter of a century. It seems to have lost its importance soon after A. D. 980 around which date Guhi's Śaktikūmāra suffered reverses at the hands of Paramāra Muñja of Dhārā.

The three decades in question must have been very brilliant for Ahar as attested by the ruins and fragments of some of the splendid temples of the Medapāṭa school of Mahā-Gurajara style of Western Indian temple architecture. The Viṣṇu Temple (the so called Meerā's Temple) has been dwelt upon by R. C. Agrawal (*Arts Asiatique, Tome XI 1965, F2*): the remaining Brahmanical and four Jaina temples are being studied by Prakash Bapna of Government Museum, Udaipur. I have, for the purpose of this felicitation volume dedicated to Muni Jinavijaya, selected for discussion the Temple of Mahāvira (now going by the name of Kesariyāji) as a tribute on my part to the services rendered to the fields of Indology and Indian Archaeology by the great Muni.

The Temple under reference is one of the two northerly oriented Jaina temples situated to the south of Viṣṇu Temple across the causeway leading to the main bazar of the town.

The Temple stands on a high Jagatī (terrace) now thoroughly renovated except at the main, southern entrance. The two Devakulikās (chapels) flanking the storied Valīnaka (portal), though old, do not belong to the complex of the Jaina temple. They were transferred, possibly in late 15th century (during the time of Mahārānā Rājamalla) from their original location near the Brahmanical kuṇḍa and re-erected here. The doorframe of the portal is of the same later period, being a substitution for the original one; the engaged pillars flanking the doorframe are, however, as old as, and formed the integral part of the original temple located up inside.

The Temple comprises the Mūlaprāsāda (Shrine proper, Gūḍhamandapa (closed Hall), Mukhamandapa (vestibule), the Raṅgamandapa (Dancing Hall) and two Bhadra-prāsādas attached to the either transept of the Rangamandapa.

1. This tradition, however, needs confirmation.

The Mūlaprāsāda is *tri-aṅga* on plan and thus possesses *bhadra* (central offset), *karna* (principal corner) and *atiratha* (juxta-buttress) as the proliferations (Fig. 1).

In its elevational part, it consists of Kāmada class of pīṭha possessing a *bhūta* (plainth), *jadyakumbha* (inverted cyma recta), *karṇikā* (knife edged moulding) and *grāsāpattika* (band of *kīrttimukhās*).

The *kumbha* (pitcher) of the *vedibandha* of the *maṇḍovara* (wall proper) shows the figure of cakresvari (south), Vairōtyā (west) and (?) Sarasvatī (North). On each of the remaining *kumbha* faces is carved a bold *ardharatna* (half diamond) on the *jaṅghā* (frieze) of the *maṇḍovara* are carved fine figures of *apsarases* (heavenly damsels), *vyālas* and *Dikpālas* (Fig. 2 and 3)². Some of the *Dikpāla* figures, particularly yama and Nirṛti are masterpieces of Mahā-Gurjara style known in Western India. The fine lotus-bearing *apsaras* on the south *bhadra* (Fig. 2) has been labelled as Padmāvati. The deep niches on the *bhadra* which once sheltered Jina images, are vacant; two are even pierced through.

Above the *udgama* pediment of the *jaṅghā* comes a wide *śīrsapattikā* (top-most band) harbouring figures of seated and standing Jinas and *vidyādevīs* in the recesses (Fig 2 and 3). Above this band, at each *bhadra* comes *vidyādhara-māla* (band bearing daemons) while corresponding part at *karṇa* as well as *pratiratha* shows a plain, square complex *bharanī* (capital). Above this comes the crowning, double course of *kanṭha*-and *varaṇḍika* (eve-cornice). In the *jaṅghā*-of the *kapilī* (which connects the Gūdhamaṇḍapa is found, besides *vyālas*, the figure of *Dikpāla Varuṇa* on the West and *Isīna* on the corresponding position on the east-face.

The Gūdhamaṇḍapa has, on the *kumbha* faces the figures of *Vidyādevīs* and *yaksis* such *Ambikā*, *Sarasvatī* etc. on the west and *çakreśvari*, *Prajñapti* an unidentified goddess on the east. The *bhadra* niches of the *jaṅghā* show *Sarasvatī* on the west (Fig. 4) and *Cakreśvari* on the east, (Fig. 5); on the front *karāja*, flanked by *apsarases* and *vyāla* is the figure of *Jivantasvāmī Mahāvīra* on the west (Fig. 6) and standing *kāyotsarga* Jina on the east (Fig. 7.)

The figures on the Gūdhamaṇḍapa carry a look of lateness when compared with those on the Mūlaprāsāda. The top-mouldings of the Gūdhamaṇḍapa are likewise in confusion. It seems that the latter structure was renovated in 1050, the

2. The *Dikpāla* *Indra* and *Agni* were replaced during recent renovations when the carving on the Mūlaprāsāda was subjected to ungainly abrasion.

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date of the image of Cakreśvari. The presence of Jivantasvāmī indicates that the temple was dedicated to Jina Mahāvira.

The pillars of the Mukhamāṇḍapa are simple. The pilasters inside the Gūḍhamāṇḍapa, the doorframe, as well as the image call for no special remarks. The large magnificent *parikara* (frame) with two bold lions flanking the edge-wise *dharmacakra* is certainly old.

The *śikhara* over the Mūlaprāsāda is new. The Gūḍhamāṇḍapa has likewise lost its original superstructure. The Raṅgamaṇḍapa and the two Bhadrāprāsādās are of later age, possibly of late fifteenth century.

The Temple has an *entourage* of Devakulikās around the Raṅgamaṇḍapa. Except one illustrated in Fig. 8, none are contemporary with the Mūlaprāsāda. Its decorative details closely agree with those on the Mūlaprāsāda. Dikpālas, *apsaras* and *Vyāls* feature here also. A seated Jina figure graces the *bhadra* niche.

As for the date of the Mūlaprāsāda and the last-noted Devakulikā late tenth century seems a most plausible guess. The Dikpālas with two-arms, the *vyālas* in *salilāntras* (recessed corners), the ture *śiṣṭapattikā*, the square, complex, *bharṇi* and the absence of *kutacchādyā* (ribbed aning) a top the *mṇḍovara* are features characteristical of that age. The presence of *karṇikā* in the *pītha*, *ardharatna* on the *kumbha*-faces, and the general suavity of the figure sculptures indicate that the dawn of eleventh century is not far, and the temple is younger only by a few years than the Viṣṇu Temple. Belonging thus with the group of temples of the transition age, few and far between in existence as far as known, it holds a significant position in the history of temple architecture in Western India.

