MASRUR TEMPLE COMPLEX

A non-descript hamlet named Masrur, in the Kangra District, occupies a unique place in the history of temple architecture for its beautifully carved and the only rock-cut temple complex in Himachal Pradesh. Located in the valley of the Beas, not far from its tributary Banganga, Masrur can be approached by road from Haripur-Guler at a distance of 14 km. via Nagrota Suriyan taking a turn at Pir-Bindali. It lies to the south-west of Kangra town, about 42 kms. by road via Ranital. A sandstone ridge that rises from Pir-Bindali, facing the picturesque Dhauladhar range in the north-east was selected for the rock-cut complex. As one approaches the spot on the road from Pir-Bindli, the backside of the temple-complex becomes visible before one turns towards east (on a pedestrian path) to face the magnificent monument.

Presently protected and preserved by the Archaeological Survey of India, the rock-cut complex does not attract many people even at present and remained little noticed, even by scholars, for a long time. General Alexander Cunningham who surveyed the region and published a thread-bare account of Kangra District in his Archaeological Reports for 1872-73 remained completely oblivious of this place. It was first noticed by Charles Rodgers in his list of the objects of archaeological interest in Punjab in 1891. The first descriptive account of the place
was given by H.L. Shuttleworth in 1913.4 Thereafter Harold Hargreaves surveyed the complex and published it in the annual reports of the Archaeological Survey of India in 1915-16.5 The temple complex has been studied by several scholars like Mian Govardhan Singh,6 Shanti Lal Nagar,7 Subhashini Aryan,8 V.C. Ohri,9 Laxman S. Thakur10 and Krishna Deva11 in recent years and included in their publications.12 We recently studied the entire complex in situ in the company of Prof. Ashvini Agrawal.

The entire rock-cut complex at Masrur located at the crest of the ridge facing east measures approximately 160’ X 105’. There is a huge tank in the front of the temple complex covering its entire length, nearly 50 mt. long and almost half of it in width. Fed by a small catchment area, it is reputed to contain water throughout the year. The tank has also served as natural protection to the complex against unwanted encroachments.

Its remote location and difficult access have perhaps saved the complex from the itching fingers of invading iconoclasts from time to time but the devastating earthquake that shook the entire Kangra region on 4th April 1905 has been responsible for extensive natural damage to the rock-cut shrines. Its northern wing has almost entirely collapsed and so have some of the subsidiary shrines that were separated from the main complex, on both sides in the front.

Carved in the nāgara style of architecture, it has latina śikharas, the central one being the tallest. There is some difference of opinion about its style, as some scholars feel that it had wagon-roofed śikharas of dravidian style.13 The latter view expressed by Hargreaves is no longer acceptable to scholars as the nāgara style śikharas are quite evident.
Like the style of architecture, the number of shrines in the complex is also debatable. Seven, nine, thirteen, fifteen and even nineteen as the number of shrines in the complex has been given by various scholars. Krishna Deva¹⁴ and Laxman Thakur¹⁵ have given the total number as 19 whereas Subhashini Aryan refers to more than fifteen¹⁶. It is difficult to arrive at a consensus on the point because of the highly damaged state of the complex and keeping in mind the fact that some of the so-called shrines may have served only as bhadra-niches. Further, since the complex was left unfinished, its final plan (Pl.5.1) remains uncertain.

The main shrine in the centre, flanked by a number of subsidiary shrines on either side, seven on each side and four in the front¹⁷, is the most elaborate of the entire structure. It has a lofty nine tiered sikha on the top of square garbhagriha measuring 4 mt. on each side and having a massive doorway that measures 2 mt. in width and 4 mt. in height excluding the carving of the doorjambs which cover almost the entire front wall of the sanctum. The sanctum, with a ceiling having a lotus pattern carved in the centre, houses the stone idols of Rāma, Lakshmana and Śītā not of great antiquity. The stone platform in the centre is indicative of its original Śaiva character, in contrast to its present name Thākuradwārā, that indicates its being a Vaishnava shrine. The sanctum is preceded by antarāla, maṇḍapa and mukhamanḍapa with two subsidiary shrines one on either side. The antarāla has two beautifully carved pillars in front. The roof of the maṇḍapa, which rested on four massive pillars, in the same style as seen in some of the rock-cut vihāras at Ajanta, has since completely collapsed and only the lower portions of the pillars survive. The pillars have profusely carved patralatā patterns on their bases. The mukhamanḍapa that also had pillars has completely
collapsed. On either side of the mandapa is a staircase leading to the roof of the temple complex, to be entered through a tri-sākhā doorway. The staircase on the right side has collapsed with only a few lower steps and part of the doorjambs being there. It is beyond use or repair. The one on the left side is intact and still in use with rather tall stairs and the only approach to the top.

The shrines flanking the main temple are either incomplete or have been damaged. All the subsidiary shrines to the south of múlaprasāda have beautifully carved door-frames, four in number and equally beautifully carved nine-tiered latina śikharas in various states of damage. However, it is clear that the śikharas and the door-frames of these shrines were fully completed, before the project was abandoned due to unknown reason. It is to be noted that none of the shrines has been scooped out and the rock beyond the door-frames remains intact. The shrines on the north side of the múlaprasāda, though badly damaged, are as beautiful as the ones on the south. The śikharas of these shrines have almost completely collapsed and the door-frames also are in various stages of damage. They too show that the shrines were not fully excavated, though the frames and the śikharas were completed. The two separate cruciform shrines in the front on either side of the main complex are completely damaged, except for some beautiful sculpture of Kārtikeya, Vishnu-Vaikuṇṭha, Indra, Ardhanārīśvara, etc. in huge niches. It is difficult to say as to in which state of completion they were before the damage. There is little doubt that the rock-cut complex remained incomplete due to some unknown reason. Political upheavals, lack of patronage or stoppage of patronage have been assigned as reasons. Laxman S. Thakur has made a suggestion that it was due to the defective
sandstone ridge and the unevenness of the texture of stone that must have led to the abandonment of the whole project\textsuperscript{18}. However, Ashvini Agrawal does not agree with this suggestion. While studying the temples \textit{in situ}, he pointed out that the work was completed to a fairly advanced stage, as the main temple was fully completed and so were most of the \textit{śikharas}. The sculptures and panels which require the utmost attention of the artists were beautifully carved and completed. Besides the fact that major work of carving was already completed, it must have taken a long time spanning several decades or may be almost a century to finish so much of work. It is hard to believe that no one realized the bad quality of stone for such a long time, whereas the \textit{śilpa śāstras} clearly laydown that the quality of stone and its suitability for carving should be determined before the beginning of the actual work. Are we to believe that the artists who were such master craftsmen to produce this complex, were ignorant of this fact? In his view the reason for the complex remaining incomplete must be looked elsewhere. However, he agrees with Thakur that the work must have been commissioned by some local rulers\textsuperscript{19} of Kangra. It is not surprising considering the fact that the local rulers of Nagarakot (Kangra) were immensely rich as is evident from the amount of wealth that Mahmud of Ghazni got from here during his invasion in 1009 A.D. as described by the Muslim historians like Utbi.

\textbf{DOOR FRAMES:}

The exquisitely carved door-frames of the main temple and the subsidiary shrines that dot the entire length and breadth of the massive rock-cut complex form one of the finest features of the Masrur temples.
They immediately attract the attention of a visitor as the superb specimens of art and can easily be put in the same class at par with the finely sculpted panels of various divinities, be it Kārtikeya, Viṣṇuvaikunṭha, Harihara, Ardhanārīśvara, Indra or any other on the spot. Iconographically and stylistically they can be placed not later than the 8th century A.D. Despite the fact that the complex has attracted the attention of several scholars in recent years, as mentioned above, most of them have ignored a reference to these door-frames with an exception to that of the central shrine. That too is mentioned in a very casual and general manner without details. Laxman S. Thakur is perhaps the only exception who has given some details of the doorway of the central shrine and also that of one of the subsidiary shrines in the south-east. A detailed study of these is not only a desideratum but also very revealing and fruitful from the iconographic point of view.

We have identified eleven door-frames in all at Masrur for our study. Of these one belongs to the garbhagriha of the main central shrine, which is massive by any standard of judgment. Eight frames belong to subsidiary shrines, four on either side of the central shrine. It may, however, be pointed out whether they form door-ways in their proper sense or not. According to dictionaries a doorway is ‘an opening into a building, room, etc.’ or ‘a means or access or escape’ to and from a building. The Sanskrit word dvāra has been explained in the lexicons in the similar way. Since none of these eight frames have any access to an inner chamber because the space remains unexcavated, they may not be called door-ways in that sense. But their architecture, iconography, style and the unfinished character leave no place for doubt that they be placed under doorframes for the purpose of study. The remaining two
are proper doorways that lead to the staircases on either side of the mandapa of the central shrine. The one to the left side is intact and provides access to the roof of the complex but the one on the right side is badly broken and only the lower portion of the jambs survives.

Most of the doorframes have five door-jambs (śākhās) each, though the frames of the staircase doors have only three śākhās each and also of one other on the northern side. The lintels are richly carved corresponding to the door-jambs and depict richly carved divine and semi-divine panels beside the floral designs of various kinds. All the doorways are made both in dimensions and carving according to the rules laid down in the silpa-śāstras such as Mayamatam,22 Mānasāra,23 Aniśumadbheda,24 Tantrasamuchchaya,25 etc. They also correspond to various extant examples of door-frames of the period throughout northern India including Himachal Pradesh, yet some innovations can be noticed in depictions.

Starting from the corner shrine facing south (Pl.5.2), in the south-eastern corner of the complex we propose to move north wards in our study, in the same order as at present one enters the complex and moves from south to north. The first door-frame facing south is unfinished. It measures 10'7" in height and 8'9" in width including the door-jambs and the lintel panels surmounted by a carved latina śikhara, broken nāgara style shrines on its face, it has a carved lintel-band as its base with five chaitya windows, the two side ones being damaged. Of the five bands of the frame, the inner two are absolutely plain and appear to have been left unfinished. The lower halves of the outer three bands are also plain and unfinished and there are no images of dvārapālas or others at their base.
The upper halves of these three out śākhās (Pl.5.3) are beautifully carved with the inner one being a gana-śākhā. It has five standing dwarf figures in various postures holding indistinct objects in their hands. The band on the right side is heavily damaged. Only its top figure and the lower portions of the two below have survived. The next band with corresponding band of the lintel has patralatā design with the ram like face of a mythical animal in the centre of the lintel. The outer most band of the door-jambs has alternate courses of pūrṇaghaṭa with foliage and floral designs in rectangles. Its lintel has patralatā design with two beautifully carved swans in the centre. The lintel corresponding to the middle band i.e. ganaśākhā has five seated figures of gods flanked on either side by standing female figures. Since these figures are quite damaged, it is difficult to say that these two handed figures are attendants or consorts of the seated figures. The former looks more probable from their posture. All these figures are shown standing on lotus pedestals. The figures on the right carry lotus with long stalks in one of their hands, while the objects in the hands of the other three are broken and indistinct. The other hands are either katihasta or simply hanging down by their sides. All the seated male figures are shown seated in ardhaparyatika āsanas on lotus pedestals with another seat (vāhanas?) above these pedestals. All of them are four-handed but badly mutilated. The one on the extreme left has long hair around head but the objects in his hands cannot be definitely identified. He seems to be holding mace and conch in right hand and a lotus in upper left hand. He may doubtfully be identified as Nṛsiṁha. The second figure from the left is wearing a crown. Part of vaijayanti is visible on the left and he carries a sruva like object in upper left hand and a pot like object in the
lower left. The rest is too worn out for identification. The central figure is almost completely damaged and beyond identification. There is a long sakti like object in his right hand. The fourth figure is that of Śiva who wears a jatamukuta. He carries a trident in his upper right hand and the lower right appears to be in abhaya. The upper left hand has a snake while the lower left hand is broken. The last figure is made of stout physique but appears to be only two handed. He wears a jatamukuta that testifies his śaiva character.

The second doorframe, facing east is located on the extreme south on the front side of the complex (Pl.5.4). It also has five bands of door-jambs with corresponding bands of lintel (Pl.5.5). Above the second band, the lintel has another 22" wide panel divided into two parts, the lower being 15" and the upper 7". The doorway is 9'2" wide including the dvāra-sākhās and 11’ in height excluding the top band. The dvāra-sākhās of this frame are very badly damaged and some have completely destroyed. The innermost band comprised of foliated scrolls with corresponding lintel. Its right side hand has completely been destroyed as also the other four on this side, which have been repaired with plain stones by the Archaeological survey of India. On the middle of the lintel of the innermost band a demonic face of mythical figure is shown. The second band comprises of the ganasākhās of which only three fourth on the left side has survived. It contains the figures of five dancing ganas. Its lintel has eight figures of flying vidyādharas carrying lotus flowers and other objects in their hands. The two central figures are shown carrying a triple crown. The fifteen inch high band above this lintel is very interesting. It depicts five standing figures of Mātrikās flanked by six female attendant figures (Pl.5.6). The panel has been discussed by
Laxman S. Thakur who has identified three of the figures as those of Indraṇi, Māheśvarī and Vajra-Varāhī. The divine Mātriṇā on the extreme left is Indraṇi standing in front of her mount elephant. She carries a śakti in her front right hand and vajra in her back left hand. A pot or pātra is held in her front left hand, whereas the object in the back right hand is not clear. The second goddess from the left has been identified as Mahesvari by Laxman Thakur. The identification is doubtful. Her mount looks more like mahiszā than a bull. Her attributes do not correspond with those of Māheśvarī described in texts. Here she is carrying a danda in her back right hand and her front right hand is akimbo. In her back left hand she carries a shield and either a pātra or bijapūraka in the front left hand. With these attributes she may be identified as Yamī. The central figure that has been unidentified by Thakur, is that of Chāmuṇḍā. Her skeleton ribs and drooping breasts are clearly shown. She carries a khdga and danda in her back and front right hands respectively. The front left hand has a kapāla. The back left hand appears to have snake, but it is uncertain. There is a standing dwarfish human figure on her right but the place below her legs is broken. She wears a long garland but it is not shown as made of skulls. The fourth figure is the most interesting. It has three faces. The front human face is damaged except a part of the crown. Her right face is that of a lion and the left is varāha. She carries a mace in her back right hand and khdga in her front right hand. The left hands are broken. She wears a vaijayanti. The portion below her legs is broken but wings of Garuḍa are visible at back on right side. The image has been identified as that of Vajravarāhī by Laxman S. Thakur, but this view cannot be accepted. Vajravarāhī is a Buddhist goddess, whereas there is no trace of
Buddhism at Masrur and such Mātrikā panels are not known. She is clearly the female form of Viṣṇu-Vaikunṭha. As pointed out by Ashvini Agrawal, this depiction is extremely rare, almost unique, as there are no known examples of the female form of Vaikunṭha images, much less in the Mātrikā panels. But considering the fact that there are other Vaikunṭha images at Masrur and this form of Viṣṇu was very popular in Himachal Pradesh and Kashmir, the depiction of its female form is quite possible. The figure on the extreme right is that of Brahmāṇī. She is shown three headed, though her faces are badly mutilated. Her mount swan is shown below on left side. In her right hands she carries a sūla and book (?) and in her left hands she has a sruva and lotus. The folds of her garments are gracefully shown. The attendant figures on the sides of these five images are all two handed, stand in varied postures and carry fly-whisks in one of their hands. The 7" high band above this panel depicts thirteen dancing gaṇas in various postures. They carry various, unidentifiable objects in their hands. Some of them appears to be animal faced. At the bottom left side of the two inner bands is depicted a standing couple, the mithuna figures. They have been very gracefully carved with beautiful body-contours. The male wears a dhoti and the female is wearing a sārī and is in walking posture. They remind of the late Gupta idiom of the late 6th or early 7th century A.D. Below the next śākhā on the same side i.e. the left is a standing male figure of a dvārapāla. He too is carved in the same style as the adjacent images of the couple. The next band and the corresponding lintel has a patralatā design followed by a plain band. The outermost śākhā has pūrṇaghaṭa motif alternated with floral patterns in rectangles. Its lintel has patralatā design on top.
Just adjacent to the second door-frame is the third *pañcha-sākhā* door-frame (Pl.5.7), much wider but less elaborate in the lintel details (Pl.5.8). It measures 10'8" in height and 13'9" in width including the door sākhās. It rests on a plinth with three bands. The lowermost is plain. The middle moulding has a *patralatā* design with a beautifully carved pair of geese in the centre. The *patralatā* design spans the space equivalent of the frame width up to inner jambs. The rest of the moulding is plain round. The uppermost moulding has two bands and is carved with five *chaitya* window designs at equal distance. The *dvāra-sākhās* are damaged on the lower half, but the upper halves are well preserved. The innermost band is *patralatā* with usual scroll foliage design. The second is *gana-sākhā* depicting the gaṇa playing on musical instruments and dancing. Four figures have survived on the left band with the topmost playing on flute and the second from below playing cymbals. Only two figures survive on the right, with the top one playing on flute. The corresponding band of the lintel has twelve figures of flying *vidyādhāras*, six on each side, carrying a triple crown in the centre. There is an additional band on lintel above the *vidyādharā* band that shows twelve carved mythical demonic animal faces, which are usually portrayed, it is believed, to ward off evil-eye. At the bottom of these two bands are shown *mithuna* couples. The one on the left is shown in the embracing posture, kissing with arms entwined around each other, while on the right the couple is shown standing side by side. The third band is again a *patralatā* sākhā with foliated floral design in the centre of the lintel. On either side of this band are depicted standing figures of the door-keepers. They are two handed with their outhands being akimbo and the inner carrying some indistinct object, a *danda* or
It is interesting to note that in the case of the figure on the right side two akimbo hands and arms are shown which is quite unusual. The fourth śākhā is absolutely plain. The outermost bands have pūrṇaghaṭa motif at the bottom on each side with foliage. There are floral cum geometrical designs on the jambs in the left-side upper half and also a pūrṇaghaṭa motif similar to the one at the bottom. Its lintel has patralatā design with a flying vidyādhara couple in the centre facing each other. Above the door-frame, nāga style śikhara is carved with the base depicting chaitya window design above which are carved miniature shrines, etc.

The fourth frame, next to the third makes a corner and is south facing like the first one (Pl.5.9 & 10). It stands on a plinth. The doorframe is 10'8" high and 8'3" wide including the door-jambs. The two innermost bands along with their corresponding lintels have patralatā design without any specific designs or motifs in their centre at lalāṭabimba. At their base on each side are two dvārapālas one below each śākhā. The two on the left side are too worn out for any details. Their right hands are in kaṭihasta posture. Whether they held anything in their left hands is not clear, though the hand of the figure below the inner śākhā is raised. The two on the right side are better preserved but their faces are damaged. Both of them wear crowns and a lower garment, dhoti, and an uttarāyya on the shoulders. The one on the inner band has his right hand to his front and carries some indistinct object. His left hand is raised to shoulder. The second figure on this side has his right hand on chest and with the left he seems to be holding the front folds of his dhotī. The plasticity is fine and supple of the late Gupta idiom. Above these two bands are two bands on the lintel, the base of which has a lotus-petal
design. Above this are shown five seated male gods on lotus pedestals flanked by six standing male attendant figures. All the images in the band are badly worn out almost beyond identification. From the left, the first two are completely damaged. The central figure seated in padmāsana on an indistinct object (Vāhana?) is four handed. He seems to be having jaṭā on his head. There are traces of a long object in right hand that may have been śūla, sakti or danda. His front left hand is resting on his lap with some indistinct object. In his back hand he holds a mace like object. The fourth image from the left is seated on a double-lotus throne in ardhaparyanka āsana. He seems to be carrying a sakti or śūla in his back right hand, the front right hand being broken. His back left hand is completely gone and the object in the front left is unidentifiable, but it rests on his bent leg. The fifth figure is very badly damaged but has a jaṭa-jūta on head and therefore is a Śaiva image. The object in his left hand appears to be a snake, the rest are broken. All the attendant figures are two handed and stand on double lotus pedestal in various postures. Above this panel is another smaller band depicting ten flying vidyādhāras five on each side, five on each side, the central two carrying a triple crown, a favourite theme at Masrur. The next band and lintel is absolutely plain. The outermost is broken. At the top it shows a pūrṇaṅghāṭa motif and floral patterns in a rectangle. The lintel has a patralatā design. Above this is the usual śikhara as in the earlier cases.

The sanctum of the central shrine has the most elegant and majestic doorway, measuring 2 mt. in width and 4 mt. in height (Pl.5.11). The width including the door jambs spans 13’ across and covers almost the entire front of the garbhagriha. Laxman Thakur has rightly described it as the largest temple doorway in Himachal Pradesh32. It has five bands
of dvāra-sākhas with corresponding lintels. More than half of the lower part of dvāra-sākhas has gone and has been restored with plain stone mouldings. Upto 7'7" on the left side and 9'2" on the right side of the door-frame has been restored with plain stone. However, the upper part of the doorway is intact and depicts beautifully carved designs. The innermost sākhā has patralatā design including on its corresponding lintel. The second band has padma and rosettes design throughout.33 The third band has pūrnaghaṭa with foliage motif alternated with ratna34 (rectangles with floral designs in them and bands showing three eighth of an octagonal design. The fourth is a gaṇa or rūpa sākhā that depicts elegant figures of dancing gaṇas. There are ten surviving figures on the left and seven on the right side. The outermost band is again patralatā sākhā throughout (Pl.5.12 & 13). The lintel of the doorway above the third band i.e. pūrnaghaṭa sākhā is the most important. It has nine images of the seated gods flanked by standing female attendant figures on either side. In the centre, on lalātabimba is the image of Śiva seated in ardhaparyanka āsana (Pl.5.14). His right leg rests below and the left is bent, that shows him wearing a thick anklet. He wears a jaṭāmukuta, long ear-rings and a necklace. Of his four hands, he carries trident in the back right hand, the front right, though broken, appears to be in varada. His front left hand, again broken, rests on lap in which he held some indistinct object.35 The back left hand in raised posture also has some indistinct object. He wears thick bangles on his wrists. This figure definitely establishes that the main shrine was dedicated to Śiva. On the extreme left side of this panel is the image of the seated Gaṇapati also in ardhaparyanka āsana. The four handed, elephant faced, pot-bellied god, the remover of obstacles has his trunk towards left rest on lower left.
hand, where probably modaka was shown. He is shown ekadanta with left tooth broken and held in right front hand. The objects in his back hands are not clear but appear to be parśu and lotus. On the extreme right is six-headed Kārtikeya, his heads being shown in two rows. He is also four handed and seated in ardhaparyāṅka āśana. In his right back hand he carries a śakti, but the objects in other hands are not clear. Seated to the right of the central figures of Śiva, is the four handed image on a full lotus throne in svastikāsana. He wears matted hair (jatā). He carries a shaft in the upper left hand and a lotus in the upper right hand. The front right hand is in abhaya mudrā and holds an aksāmālā also. The front left hand rests on his lap with an indistinct object in it. The image is that of Lakulīśa the founder of Pāśupata sect and considered to be an incarnation of Śiva, himself. The figure to be right of Lakulīśa is also four-handed. He is seated in ardhaparyāṅkāsana but wears a plain crown. There appears to be a snake in his back hands indicative of his Śaiva character. The right front hand is broken and an indistinct object is held in his front left hand. The next figure on this side is again similarly seated and four handed. A khadga and śūla are held in his right hands. Front left hand has a pot and the back left probably holds a snake. He is seated on couchant Nandi and beyond doubt is a form of Śiva. To the left of the central figure of Śiva, is again a four handed image in ardhaparyāṅkāsana seated on a lotus. He wears jaṭāmukūṭa, anklets, thick bangles and necklace. He carries a śūla in his back right hand, the stem of which seems to be made of skulls. In front right hand he carries a snake. He has a book in front left hand. The back left hand has an indistinct object (bell?). The next figure on this side is again seated in ardhaparyāṅkāsana on a couchant animal that is
difficult to identify. Its face looks more like that of a dog. The four handed god carries indistinct objects in his hands, has jātā and is Śaiva in character. The second last image on the right side before Kārtikeya is four handed and seated on a lotus seat. The figure is worn out and difficult to identify. But all the figures in this panel are śaiva in character beyond doubt, that also establishes, as already said, the character of the main shrine. Above this panel on the lintel is the one depicting flying vidyādhāras, twenty two in all, eleven on each side the central ones carrying ratnamukutā over the head of the central figure of Śiva in the panel below. Over all the doorframe presents a majestic look and must have been aweinspiring in the complex, when it was complete. It represents a very fine specimen of art of door-frames, though we do not know, what figures adorned the base of the śākhās. It is not impossible that images of Gāṅgā, Yāmunā, dvarapālas and mithuna adorned the base on either side.

As one enters the maṇḍapa of the main shrine, midway on either side there are doorways leading to the staircases for access to the roof of the temple. The one on the left side is intact (Pl.5.15) whereas the one on the right has crumbled down due to the massive collapse of the edifice on this side. The one on the left is 5'5" in width and is 6'10" high (Fig.). It has three well preserved bands of door-jambs and lintel. The innermost is patralatā śākhā, the second is padma and ratna śākhā and the outermost is again patralatā śākhā with corresponding designs on the lintel. On either side of the door-way there is plain space upto 17" at pediya. Obviously the space was meant for the dvarapāla figures but remained uncarved. The doorway on the right side (Pl.5.16) is broken and only the lower portion of the jambs survives. The lintel has
completely disappeared. The design on the door jambs is exactly same as on its counterpart on the left.

The next door-frame when moving towards right from the main-shrine to the wing that has collapsed and badly damaged is our number 8 (Pl.5.17). It measures 8' in width and 10'8" in height. Left unfinished in the centre, the doorway has a huge part of the śikhara collapsed on its top covering a large part of the left upper corners as also a large part of the dvāra śākhās on the right side. The door has five śākhās. The innermost is patra-vallī śākhā with the same design on its corresponding part of the lintel, the centre of which culminates in tri-ratna type design. The second band is padma and ratna pattern throughout. At the base of these two bands is a standing female figure on either side in dvibhaṅga posture. The one on the left, wearing a sari and a girdle has usual jewellery – bangles, big ear rings, necklace, pearl-strings and a round crown. The folds of her uttariya can be seen at the back on each side. She carries a fly-whisk in her right hand which is also katilīasta. The left upraised hand has a mirror like uncertain object. The face of the figure on the right is damaged. She too is sculpted likewise as in the case of the figure on the left but carries a lotus flower with long stem in her down hanging left hand and a fly-whisk in the right hand. These two figures have been identified as those of Gangā and Yamunā by Subhashini Aryan. It is not possible for us to agree with her, as the figures do not have any attributes of the river goddesses that are very often depicted on the doorway from the Gupta period onwards. None of them has their mounts makara and kachchhapa nor any of them is carrying a pot. The figure on the left does not even has a flower in her hand. To our mind they should be identified as female door-keepers (pratihāris). The third
sākhā too is equally beautiful patralatā sākhā but almost completely damaged except for a short portion of the lintel. Between the second and the third band on lintel are two panels. One had five seated deities carved in miniature shrine designs. The two on the left side are completely gone due to the fall of a big śikhara member on it. The central figure on the lalātabimba is also damaged beyond recognition. The two male figures on the right side niches are shown seated in the ardhaparyankāsana wearing crowns and somewhat pot-bellied. But it is not possible to discern any other details of these images or to identify them. Above this is a panel depicting the flying vidyadharas carrying a be jewelled diadem in the centre a motif common on almost all door-frames at Masrur. The outermost band is given the look of pilaster-pillars with half-lotus and pūrnagāta with foliage on each side at the top above which floral designs in rectangle, a variant of ratna design are shown. At the bottom next to the female attendants on each side are figures of standing male dvārapālas. The one on the left is shown standing with his right leg slightly bent, wearing a dhotī and jewellery, right hand placed in his front. The left hand is raised to the chest with some indistinct object held in it. The figure on the right side is carved in exactly similar fashion. One may not that these as well as two female attendant figures discussed above do not have the suppleness of the attendant figures on the door-frames of the left side of the complex. These appear to be somewhat late in time, though not far removed, and work of a different artist.

Mention must be made of another doorframe on this side (Pl.5.18) only the lower portion of which has survived. The three inner bands of the doorway have patralatā, padma and ratna and patrāvalli sākhā. At

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there are figures of female attendants on each side flanked by the figures of male attendants, carved in the similar manner as on the doorframe discussed above. The outermost śākhā has pūrṇaghaṭa with foliage on the base. The upper portion is absolutely damaged. This doorway faces south.

Facing east on the front left side of the complex was another beautiful doorway that has been entirely destroyed but for its exquisitely carved lintel (Pl.5.19). The space below has been repaired by the Archaeological survey of India with plain stones. As clearly visible from the surviving lintel it had padma and ratna śākhā as the innermost jamb followed by rūpaśākhā. Patralatā śākhā and pūrṇaghaṭa and foliage motif śākhā as the outermost band of the frame with patravallī design on the lintel that shows foliage coming out of a cup shaped vase in the centre. There is a lotus petal design above padma – ratna band above which is shown seven images of the seated male gods on high seats (Pl.5.20). On the right side of this panel is a figure of dancing male in graceful manner playing a flute. A beautiful dancing figure in atibhāṅga posture is shown on the right side. Below this a female figure in flying posture has survived of the seven images in the panel, the central figure on the lalāṭabimba is that of Śiva seated on Nandi in ardha-paṇḍya-kāśana. He is shown wearing jaṭā with hair falling on shoulders. He carries a śāla in the back right hand and the front right hand is in abhaya posture. The front left hand has a mātuliṅga or bijapāraka. The back left hand is broken. He wears armllets, probably of snake and a necklace. The image on the extreme left is badly worn out. It is shown seated in ardha-paṇḍya-kāśana with a round flat headdress. As a rare instance a plain halo is shown behind it. The right hands are
complete gone. The left ones too are not clear. The second image from left is shown seated in padmāsana on a double petalled lotus throne. He is shown with jaṭā falling on his shoulders and carries a danda like object in the back right hand, the front right hand being broken. The upper left hand probably has a snake and the front left hand is shown open downwards but it can not be called bhūmisparśa mudrā. The icon is clearly Śaiva in character. A thin snake like uttarīya on both of his arms going to the back of his shoulders. It is slightly different from Dakshiṇamūrti described in the texts.39 The next image again seated in ardha-paryankāsana has jaṭā but the face is broken. He has a flabby belly and is seated on what appears to be a dog. A human body with face down is shown lying in front that may be of apsamārapurūsha. In his right hands he appears to be carrying a śīla and an indistinct object. The upper left hand may be having a sarpa. The front left hand is not clear. The image may be identified as that of Baṭuka Bhairava.40 The fifth figure, the one to the left of the central figure of Śiva, is also shown seated on a lotus in ardha-paryanka wearing a dhotī. He has a jaṭāmukūṭa and carries a śīla and a mace in his right and left back hands respectively. The front right is in abhaya, the front left hand is broken. Tentatively it may be identified as that of Lakulīśa. The sixth figure seated on a half lotus throne, wearing a dhotī in ardha-paryankāsana has a kirīṭamukūṭa. In his back right hand he carries a mace and the front right is in abhaya posture. The back left hand has a chakra and a conch is shown in his front left hand. Its identification as Vishnu is obvious. The last figure on the right is iconographically enigmatic. Seated on a mount that does not look like a bull, but the face down below his left feet is more like that of mahisha. Below his left knee is another face that
looks like that of a lion. The image is ithiphallus but has a necklace and a pendent between breasts, that look like that of a lady. The back right hand carries a triśūla and the front right is in varadāmudrā. A bell in the upper left hand and kapāla or pātra in the front left hand are shown. The face is broken. If we identify it as that of Śiva, his mount and breasts become questionable. If it is Mahishāsuramardini, then it could not be ithiphallus and also would not fit in the scheme with six other male figures in the panel. The image remains enigmatic to us. Above this lintel panel is the usual panel of flying vidyā-dharas twelve in all, the central two carrying an embellished ratnamukūṭa.

Facing north on the extreme right corner of the complex is another doorframe (Pl.5.21). Only the lintel and the left portion of the five band door jambs have survived. In that too the dvārasākhās are badly damaged. It measures 6'9" in width in the surviving portion and 10'8" in height. The innermost is patralatā sākhā with a beautiful pair of swans in the centre of the lintel band, above which is the padma and ratna sākhā, very finely carved. At the bottom of the innermost jamb is the figure of two-handed seated gāṇa with flabby belly, left hand raised and carrying on indistinct object (Pl.5.22). The right hand rests on knee. The padma sākhā has a standing female figure at the bottom. She seems to be carrying a fly whisk in her right hand and a lotus in the left. The third sākhā is gāṇa or rūpa sākhā but except for the faint out lines the entire band is damaged. At its bottom is a dancing gāṇa. Wearing a dhotī and uttariṣya, with both hands raised, flabby belly and what seems to be a headdress of skulls. Above these three bands are two rows of images on the lintel, the māṛṭikā panel with a row of flying vidyādharas above, who carry a ratna mukūṭa in the centre. The panel with the female image
had five main seated deities flanked by standing female attendants on either side. Only four figures have survived. The central figure on the lalātabimba is Gaja-Lakṣmi, seated on a ashṭadala lotus throne on her mount sintha in ardhaparyāṅkāsana (Pl.5.23). She wears a sari, crown, ear-rings, necklace, pear-string, etc. Her hands are broken, but in her upper hands she was carrying lotus flowers. Two elephants are shown standing on lotus flowers. Below the elephants are shown two standing female figures carrying pots in their innerhands. Two more seated figures are shown at the bottom, one on either side. The image of a seated goddess in ardhaparyāṅka posture, four handed wearing a crown, on the extreme left of the panel is badly damaged and beyond identification. The second figure in this panel is also shown seated on a padmāsana on either side of which a devotee with folded hands is shown. This image is also damaged but appears to be śaiva in character. In her back right hand she is carrying either a śīla or sakti. The rest of the hands are broken. The fourth figure on the extreme right is seated in padmāsana on an ashṭadala lotus throne with two devotees with folded hands, one on each side. Her back hands and face is broken. In her front right hand she carries an akṣamālā and is in abhaya mudrā (Pl.5.24). The front left hand that rested on knee is also broken. What remains of the right extreme of the panel shows that the next image was also seated on a lotus throne with right leg hanging down. The outermost band of the doorway has a pūrṇaghaṭa design at the bottom and the top along with other floral designs in rectangles. It is topped by a patralatā lintel beam. Above this beam is śikhara, the base of which has chaitya windows and above that miniature shrines are shown.
On the extreme north-west of the Masrur rock-cut complex, facing north is another five śākhā door-frame which is quite damaged but makes an interesting study (Pl.5.25). The nine feet wide door-frame has patravalli śākhā as the innermost jamb with corresponding pattern on the lintel. The figures of two dvārapālas, one on each side of this śākhā are carved but they are too worn out for any details. The second śākhā has seated female figures, eight on each side. Those on the right hand side are too worn out for any details (Pl.5.26). Those on the left side are all shown seated on their mounts in ardha-paryāṅkāsana (Pl.5.27). The mount of the bottom figure is not clear, but may have been a lion. She carries a long danda in her left hand and a round object in her upraised right hand. The second figure is that of Indrāṇi as an elephant is shown as her mount. She carries what looks like an ankuśa in her left hand and a lotus like object in her right hand. The lotus is not her usual attribute but is described in the Śrītattvanidhi. The mount of the third figure is not clear. She has her left hand resting on the left knee. The object on her right upraised hand, the fingers of which are closed, looks like a bird. If we identify it as kukkūṭa or cock she may be Kaumārī. But in this case she does not carry śakti. The fourth figure, the mount of which is again not clear is also two handed. She seems to be carrying a khadga in the right and a lotus in her left hand. The next figure, seated on a bull, wearing jata holding a śūla in the right hand and the left bent hand touching her hair is Māheśvarī. The sixth figure is badly damaged and seems to be seated on a tortoise and carrying an arrow in her left hand. But it is quite uncertain. The next figure is equally damaged. There may be a lotus in her right hand, the left being on her knee. The top figure is so worn out that nothing can be made of it. The object of the artist
appears to depict mātrikās, but it is quite unusual place for their depiction. Moreover, all of them are shown two handed in place of the usual four-handed figures. The lintel of this band has flying vidyādhāras though badly damaged. The third band shows eight figures of the dancing gānas, the right side being badly worn out. It may be called gāṇa sākhā. On its top is a panel depicting five seated male gods flanked by attendant figures. All of them are completely damaged beyond identification. The panel above that shows fifteen dancing gānas. The fourth is patralātā sākhā with corresponding lintel band. The outermost sākhā with corresponding lintel band. The outermost sākhā has the usual pūrṇa āṭāa with foliage alternated with floral designs within rectangles. The patralatā beam on its top a pair of peacocks in the centre with foliated tails and carrying a garland in their beaks. The door way formed an excellent example of door-frames when it was complete.

There are some other doorframes in the complex as well but they are so badly damaged and collapsed that we have not included them in the chapter for discussion (Pl.5.28, 29 & 30).

In all the rock-cut complex at Masrur provides superb example for the study of the door-frames in Himachal Pradesh. Made in the late-Gupta and early Pratihāra styles they invariably follow the iconographic texts but retain the independence in depicting artistic merit. A close study also indicates that all of them were not made at the same time and there may be a time period of about a century between the earliest and the latest depiction. It is clear from the fact that the style of figures changes in certain cases, so does the plasticity. Even the style of the dvārāsākhās and their arrangement differs from one another. The entire work may be
placed between the late seventh and the end of the eighth century of the Christian era. Though lack of any literary and epigraphic evidence leaves several questions unanswered in connection with this complex. The foremost being, whether it was the work of some local artists under the patronage of some local ruler, or the work of some outsiders. Whatever the case may be, one cannot fail to notice the influence of Kashmir art idiom and some reflection of the Mathura style in various images at Masrur.
Notes & References:

1 The place has been wrongly located to the north-west of Kangra in some books. However, the maps of the area clearly show its location to the south-west of Kangra. Cf. Laxman S. Thakur, *The Architectural Heritage of Himachal Pradesh*, p. 39.


3 Rodgers, C., *Revised List of Objects of Archaeological Interest in Punjab*, Lahore, 1891, p. 41. Laxman S. Thakur has referred to Rodger’s 1875 publication *Objects of antiquarian Interest in the Punjab and Dependencies* as the earliest reference to Masrur. *Op.cit,* p. 39. However, we have not been able to consult this work. It is surprising that the place was known to Rodgers but escaped the notice of Cunningham at the same time.


Sculpture of the Western Himalayas, 1991. He only refers to sculptures from Masrur.


Hargreaves, H., op.cit.


Krishna Deva, op.cit.

Thakur, L.S., op.cit., p. 44.

The contention of Laxman Thakur, ibid., p. 44 that Kangra as part of Jalandhara kingdom was under the Katoch rulers upto the beginning of the 13th century, lacks evidence. Cf. J. Hutchison and J. Ph. Vogel, History of the Punjab Hill States, vol. I, 1933, pp. 99 ff. Further, Thakur’s reference to Rājatarāṅgiṇī, IV, 177 (ibid.) in this connection is of no use, as it barely mentions that
Lalitāditya Muktāpiḍa of Kashmir, a contemporary of Yaśovarman of Kanauj in the first half of the 8th century A.D., made his attendants as rulers of various lands including Jālandhara.


21 See above chapter III on Evolution of Door-Frames.

22 *Mayamatam*, chapter 30.


24 *Amśumadbheda*, chapters 16-17.

25 *Tantra samuchchaya*, II.36-34.

26 *Op.cit.*, p. 42. Plate VI. According to the plan given on p. 41 it should have been shrine No. 6 and not 1 as printed below the plate. In the end-note he has doubtfully, but correctly identified the two other figures as Chāmuṇḍā and Brahmatī.

27 Cf. T.A. Gopinath Rao, *Elements of Hindu Iconography*, vol. I, Part II, p. 385. The back right hand of the deity looks like raised in *varada* pose but that would be highly unusual posture, as it is always the front right hand that is shown in *varada*. Also see Panikkar, Shivaji K., *Saptamātrka – Worship and Sculptures* for various examples and variations.


32 Ibid., p. 41.

33 Some scholars have called it padma and ratna śākhā, but the latter is missing. Cf. Arya, Subhashini, Himadri Temples, p. 48; Thakur, Laxman S., op.cit., p. 41.

34 Ratna should strictly speaking be diamond shaped motifs but sometimes it is loosely used to describe some resembling designs.

35 The posture indicates that it probably held either a pātra or mātulinga.


38 Op.cit., p. 51. Her account is badly confused. It does not tally at all with the numbering given on the plan (p. 45, fig.3) by her. What she refers to as Temple No. 3 is the cruciform shrine on the plan on page 51 she is giving a brief description of what should have been her temple No. 6. But then this doorway has no Kīrtimukhas in a row, which are there in another frame as

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described above. Her account of the temple doorframes of her Nos. 2 and 8 are equally confusing and wrong.


43 The object is uncertain. Her hand actually looks hanging down and the attribute is in the background.