

## Jagannath temple at Kanpur

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**Abstract:** Jagannath temple is located at Behta village near Kanpur situated at latitude 26°11'36''N and longitude 80°14'49''E. The temple has a unique shape and inherits architectural features of various times rendered over a long span of time. The temple is unique in another sense that idol of Vishnu is standing with feet over Shivling. Another striking feature of the temple is the fact that one can predict rain after entering the temple. Through this paper it has been tried to analyse various aspects of this unique temple.

**Keywords:** Jagannath temple, Monsoon temple, Mauryan architecture, Gupta architecture, Indus Valley Civilisation, Pashupati of Indus valley civilization, Shivpuran

There is an ancient temple at Behta village, Bhitargaon block 32 Km from Kanpur. This temple is a protected monument under Archaeological Survey of India(ASI). The temple evokes surprise due to multiple attributes. The temple structure from outside seems to be stupa. The idol of Vishnu is standing with its feet over Shivling. A more striking aspect is that one can predict rain after entering the temple.

I could chance upon two studies conducted on the temple. Dr. L M Behl, retired Senior Archaeologist<sup>1</sup> published his paper in 2015. Dr. Behl placed the antiquity of temple to CE 1100-1200. Another paper was published by Dr. Suchita Upadhyay<sup>2</sup>. Dr. Upadhyay indicated that the temple bears antiquity to Gupta period i.e. 4<sup>th</sup> century CE and she found that the temple was last renovated in 12<sup>th</sup> century CE.

I have based my study on various aspects of temple structure comparing with similar features in other temples to trace the antiquity.

1. **Outer structure:**

2.



Photo-1:Front elevation



Photo-2:Left Elevation



Photo-3:Left Elevation

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The outer structure has the shape of a typical stupa with double dome(photo-2 &3). The builder has tried to give the appearance that the structure is made of layers of petals of lotus so that the temple looks like a lotus(photo-4,5 & 6). That is the reason, why the structure looks like a stupa or in other words, stupas got the typical shape since the builders wanted to give the structure shape of lotus. This is worthwhile to mention that lotus has a significant and special status in Buddhism as well as in Sanatan dharm.

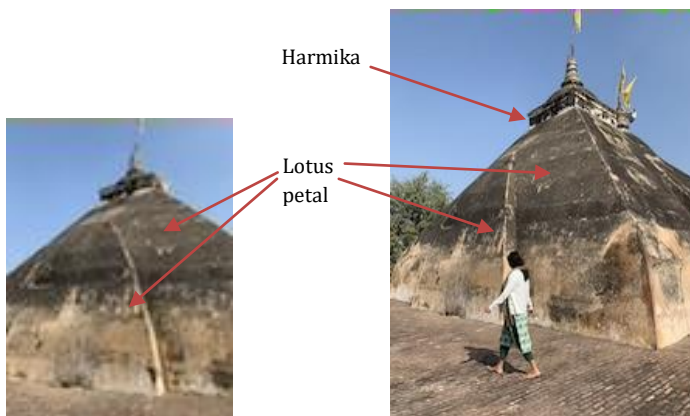


Photo 4: Rear elevation

Photo 5: Rear elevation



Photo 6: Left elevation



Photo 6: Right elevation

Rear dome has a Harmika type structure typically found in stupas(photo-5). Front dome has a typical Kalash of a temple with flag, while rear dome has Harmika with Chakra on shaft. If seen together, it resembles a Rath (Photo-2, 3 & 6). Double dome with Harmika was a feature to give appearance of Rath. **Later on, while building stupa only one dome was provided but lotus shape without petals with Harmika was retained.**



Photo 7: Peacock pair on left elevation



Photo 8: Peacock triplet on right elevation

On the left elevation wall, there is a pair of peacock facing each other(photo:7). On the right elevation there are three peacocks (photo-8). The peacock at the centre seems to look at the observer while the others are looking at the central peacock. The central peacock is in its pristine dancing pose.

Peacock finds distinctive place both in Sanatan dharma as well as in Buddhism. Mauryan dynasty owes its link to Mayur or peacock. Sanchi stupa has several peacock motifs in highly evolved sculptural form (photo-9).



Photo 9: Peacock motif on stupa no.2 of Sanchi<sup>3</sup>

There is another significant feature. There are 4 lotus symbols depicted on front, left and right elevations (photo 10). The lotus symbol is similar to ones found at Sanchi Stupa (photo 11 & 12).



Photo 10: Lotus on wall



Photo 11: Lotus on Sanchi stupa<sup>4</sup>



Photo 12: Lotus on stupa at Sanchi<sup>5</sup>

The walls of Jagannath temple are made of brick. In order to provide stability to the structure with curved shape, wall has been thickened at base by 5m so that the centre of gravity of wall



remains within the base. This thickness of the wall has ensured that the structure has withstood the vagaries of time including earthquakes.

The outer walls of Mauryan stupas are also brick structure.

**The resemblance of the basic features, construction technique, motifs and the level of perfection of typical Mauryan architecture indicate that the outer structure is an early Mauryan structure. Stupas built by Maurya kings were inspired by this temple structure.**

### 3. Inner structure:

Once we step inside the temple and look around, we can see that the temple structure consists style of different periods. The flooring is of sandstone slab.



Photo 13: step of door no.1



Photo 14: Script on doorstep



Photo 15: Entrance gate no.1

The doorstep at the entrance has some sculpture. On the leftmost portion, a curved spiral object has been depicted. To me it appears a “Vamavarti Shankh” (Anticlockwise spiralling conch). Vamavarti Shankh is associated with lord Vishnu. On the right side of Shankh, a man is shown sitting with a lady on his left side. A young child is sitting on his lap. The headwear of the male figure is different from the Pashupati sculpture. From the headwear it is evident that the person is a king or leader of a clan. At the centre of the doorstep, there is convex sculpture with some symbols in two lines(photo: 14). At the top centre, a jar symbol common in Indus Valley Civilisation is shown. At the extreme right two persons are shown standing bowing down. It seems that the king is a great devotee who intends that his entire family receives the dust from the feet of devotees who visit the temple.

The kind of finish and crudeness of sculpture on the step indicates that sharp iron tools may not have been used. It will be clearer if we compare the perfection with which the upper members of structure have been rendered (photo-15, 16 & 17).

The jambs of entrance gate no. 1 are asymmetrical both in size, type, and finish.



Photo 16: Left jamb of door-1



Photo 17: Right jamb of door-1

**It is clear that the left jamb of entrance and lintel belong to one period and the right one belongs to an older period whereas the step belongs to much antiquated period.**



Photo 18: Left jamb of door no. 2



Photo 19: Right jamb of door no.2



Photo 20: Lintel over door no.2

Door no.2 has also the same asymmetry as reflected in door no.1(photo 18 & 19). Here I want to highlight the shabby restoration work done by ASI. The restoration has been done without preserving the basic feature and without maintaining the structural integrity. Even the lintel has been placed upside down(photo 20).

All the structural elements inside the Garbh griha have identical detailed artistic sculpture. The motifs on left Jambs are repeated in more perfect rendering on all the pillars and lintels.



Photo 21: Column and beam



Photo 22: Carving on pillars



Photo 23: Carving on pillars

arrangement of Garbh Griha

Carving marked in photo:22 is displayed on several structures. This is most likely the depiction of “Lord Narsimha”.

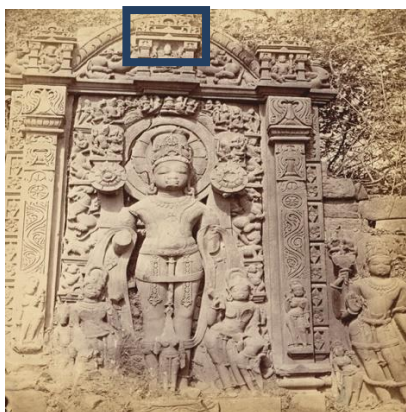


Photo 24: Aditya temple at Garhwa, Prayagraj <sup>6</sup>

The style of carving of pillars and beams inside the Garbhagriha has striking resemblance with the carvings in Aditya temple at Garhwa, Prayagraj built by Gupta Kings which is dated to 5<sup>th</sup> century CE. The column head, flower vase and floral design in the middle are similar to the carving shown in photos 18, 21 and 23.

**It can be concluded that steps belong to pre-Mauryan period. Right jamb pillars belong to pre-Gupta period while all other structures belong to Gupta period.**

#### 4. Deity:

The principal deity in the temple is unique in many aspects. **This is the only temple where lord Vishnu has been shown standing over Shivaling.**



As per Shiv Puran, Lord Vishweshwar(Shiva) wanted to retire to Kashi with Goddess Ambika and hand over the responsibility of functioning of universe to someone else. Ambika smeared nectar on the left ankle of Shiva. Vishnu originated from the body of Shiva. Vishnu was assigned the role of upholder of universe and this form was called “Jagadeeshwar”. The temple is themed after the story mentioned in Shiv Puran.

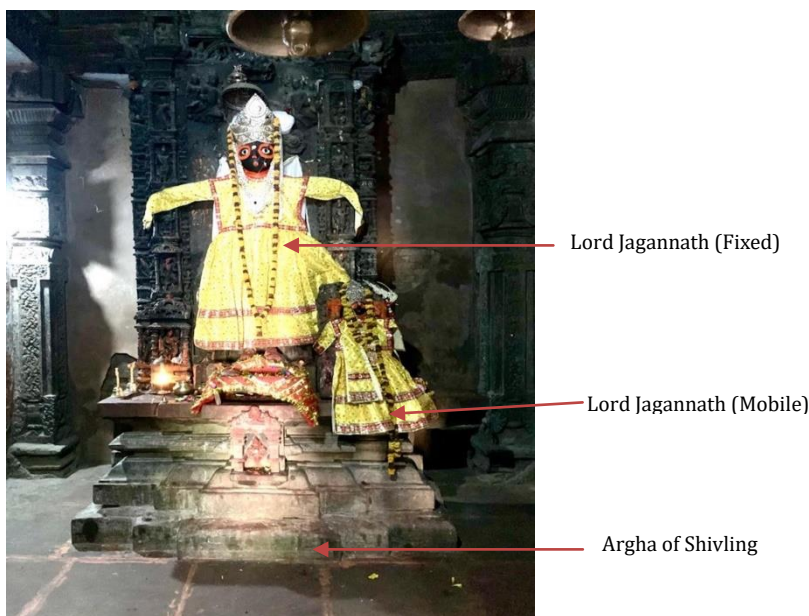


Photo 25: Idol of lord Jagannath over Shivling

Dr. Behl<sup>1</sup> does not recognize argha as part of Shivling but as a platform for the statue of Lord Vishnu. But why the platform has narrow water channel exactly as in all the typical shivling argha has not been explained. Even a casual look will show that it is a typical argha of Shivling in rectangular shape. Dr Upadhyay<sup>2</sup> in her paper has correctly identified Shivling and Argha.

Argha is made up of huge rectangular blocks of sandstone in layers (photo 25). On the top of Argha, some figures are carved on a curved convex rock with a small Shivling in front (Photo 26, 27 & 28). The central figure is of a male in Padmasana surrounded by animals. Coiled snake is shown on both sides. The animals are either looking at the face of the central figure or respectfully bowing down.



Photo 26: Pashupati Shiv (front view)



Photo 27: Pashupati (left side view)

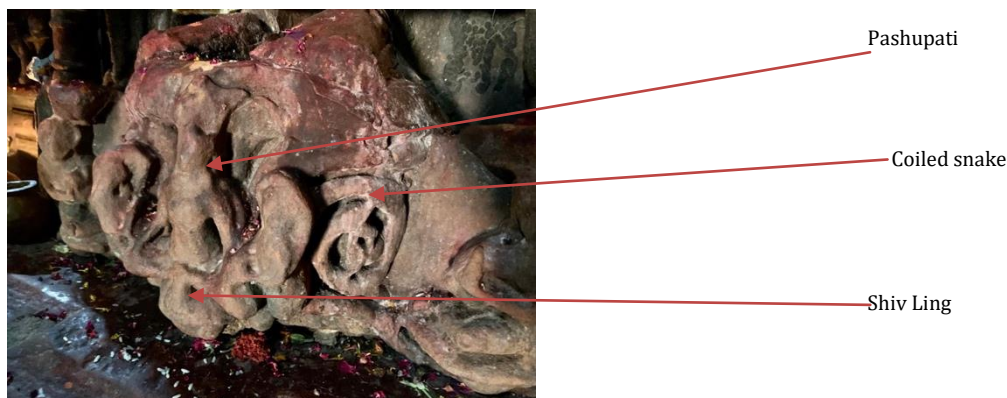


Photo 28: Pashupati (right side view)

Seals of Pashupati found at Harappa and Mohanjodaro are presented below (photo 29):



Photo 29: Pashupati seals of Indus valley civilization <sup>7</sup>

Dr. Behl, in his paper, is of the opinion that these figures are of Gada Devi with Conch and flowers<sup>1</sup>. I disagree with his findings.

**The yogic posture, headgear of the central figure over Argha in Jagannath temple and the surrounding animals convey irrefutable resemblance to the Pashupati seals of Indus valley civilization. It can be concluded without doubt that the figure is of Pashupati. It also settles debate whether the Pashupati seal of Indus Valley Civilisation refers to lord Shiv since at Jagannath temple it corresponds exactly to lord Shiv of Shivpuran placed over argha of shivling.**



**Idol of Lord Jagannath:**



Photo 30: Lord Jagannath

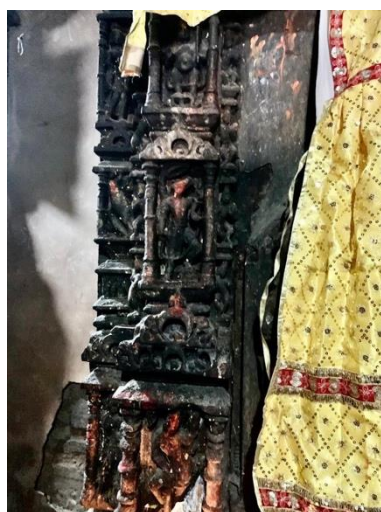


Photo 31: Ornamental work

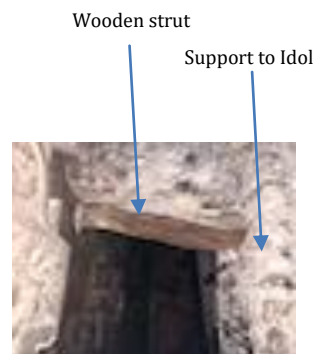


Photo 32: Idol struted to wall

There are two idols of Lord Jagannath. Taller one is 5 feet high and is fixed(photo 30). Shorter one is not fixed and is used for Yatra(photo 30). The statue is standing over the head of Pashupati and is fixed to a brick wall which is further fixed to the main wall of temple with the help of wooden strut(photo 32). Initially two wooden struts were used but one was removed by ASI for study.

The structure supporting the back of the idol is in three parts. The central part which holds the idol is in brick. The ornamental work on black granite is placed on either side of the brick column (photo 30).

Ornamental work on granite depicts ten avatars of lord Vishnu and Brahma on top. The ornamental work(photo 31) resembles the work in Aditya temple, Garhwa(Photo 24).

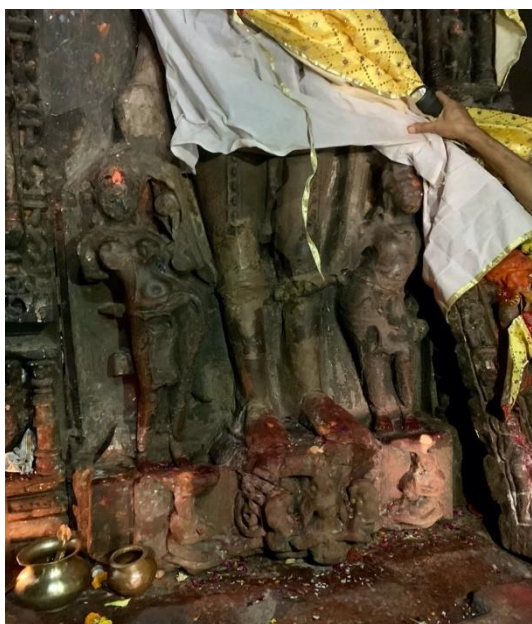


Photo 33: Jagannath idol with Subhadra & Balram



Photo 34: feet of Jagannath idol with Subhadra & Balram

Jagnath idol is flanked by Subhadra and Balram(photo 33). Comparison with Aditya temple, Garhwa(Photo 24) leaves no doubt that these idols are of the same antiquity as Aditya temple, Garhwa. However, the face of Lord Jagannath and those of Balram and Subhadra do not have same level of perfection. Body of lord Jagannath and face may belong to different periods.

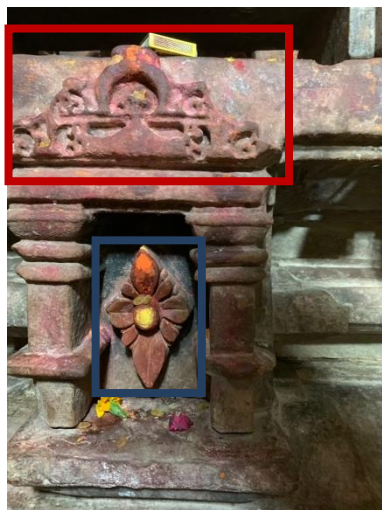


Photo 35: Symbol on argha



Photo 36: Base of pillar



Photo 37: Broken pillar

There is a symbol like a blooming flower in the front of Argha (Marked with blue box in photo 35). This symbol is enclosed in a temple type structure which shows that it is a highly revered symbol. This symbol has been replicated as a decoration item at several places (photo 15, 36 & 37).

These symbols are repeated on either sides of pillar of Aditya temple at Garhwa (Photo 24). Also, the symbol marked in red box in photo 35 and photo 24 shows that these belong to one kingdom. **This proves that this symbol was added by Gupta empire over the Argha of Shivaling at Jagannath temple.**



Photo 38: (a) Narmada Udgam Mandir, Amarkantak<sup>8</sup> (b) 8<sup>th</sup> CE Vijay Mandir, Vidisha (c) 6<sup>th</sup> CE Nagakkal, Chennai Museum (d) Aparajita flower



This symbol is available in Pataleshwar mandir and Keshavnarayan mandir at Amarkantaka (Photo 38) built by Kalchuri kings (11<sup>th</sup> century CE)<sup>8</sup>. This symbol has been used in Vijay Mandir at Vidisha(8<sup>th</sup> century CE). Also, this symbol has found place on Nagakkal statue which is available in Chennai Museum which is of 6<sup>th</sup> century CE. The symbol seems to be a representation of Aparjita flower(*Clitorea Termatia*) also known as Gokarn or Shakhpushpi (Photo-38(d)). This flower is a flower of choice for goddess Durga and has been named after Devi Durga's one of many names.

In Jagannath temple, the symbol has been provided over Argha of Shivling. Argha symbolizes goddess. **It shows that this symbol is dedicated to goddess which has found place in all the seals of Indus Valley Civilization dedicated to goddess (photo 34).**

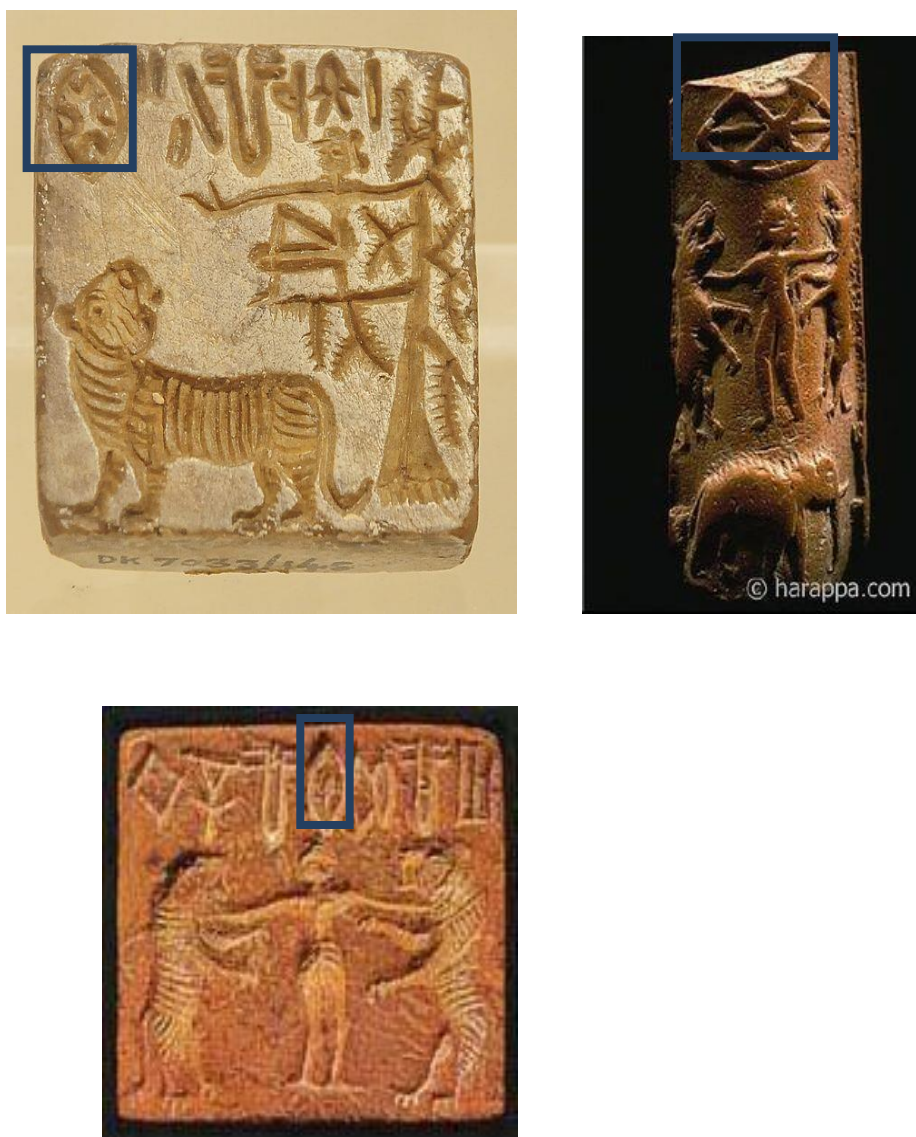


Photo 34: Seals of Indus Valley Civilisation<sup>9</sup> depicting Mother Goddess

**This proves that this symbol continued to symbolise mother goddess since Indus Valley Civilisation till at least 11<sup>th</sup> century CE.**

##### 5. Antiquity of the temple:



As analysed above, the temple structure does not pertain to one time. As per the local tale, the deity exists since time immemorial. The original structure suffered damage at various times. But since the deity had a special significance, the structure was renovated by various kingdoms over centuries. **Therefore, it seems to be a mash up of various styles of architecture and sculpture.**

The step of temple doors (photo 13, 14, 15) and Pashupati figure (photo 26, 27 & 28) are the oldest. **Since Pashupati image has only been found in Indus Valley Civilisation, these structures belong to Indus Valley Civilisation period.**

Assuming that the original structure enclosing the deity was a rectangular one over which Mauryan kings erected the wall structure, the ratio of length and width of the rectangle corresponds to 1.25:1. The ratio of 1.25:1 is the commonest ratio of building architecture found at Dholavira, Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro. The age of wooden strut (photo 32) shows that these structures were first built no later than 2200 BCE. These corroborate the fact that the oldest portion of the temple belongs to the period of Indus Valley Civilisation.

Visible portion of Argha, body of Lord Jagannath, Balram, Subhadra, the jail work and beam columns are of Gupta period (5<sup>th</sup> century CE). If we see closely (photo 34), it is clear that the feet of Subhadra and Balram are of similar style and made with sophistication. Also, feet are not monolithic with Pashupati. On the other hand, feet of Lord Jagannath are monolithic with Pashupati upto ankle and of much inferior sophistication.

**It seems that Pashupati, feet and face of lord Jagannath are of one period i.e. Indus Valley Civilisation. Balram, Subhadra and mobile Jagannath idol were added by Gupta kings to draw parallel with Jagannath temple of Puri.**

The outer structure pre-dates the famous structures of Mauryan empire. These were built during initial Mauryan period i.e. 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE.

#### **6. Rain prediction:**

The temple is better known as monsoon mandir. If we look directly over the idol of lord Jagannath, we see beautiful stone sculpture with hallmark of Gupta period. If there is condensation of water over the stone, rain is likely within 5 to 7 days. Once the rain starts, the stone turns dry. Condensation of water takes place even before pre-monsoon rain and by seeing intensity of condensation, one can predict intensity of monsoon.

I visited temple on 6 Feb 2022 and 04 June 2022. The photographs with weather record are placed below:

No Condensation

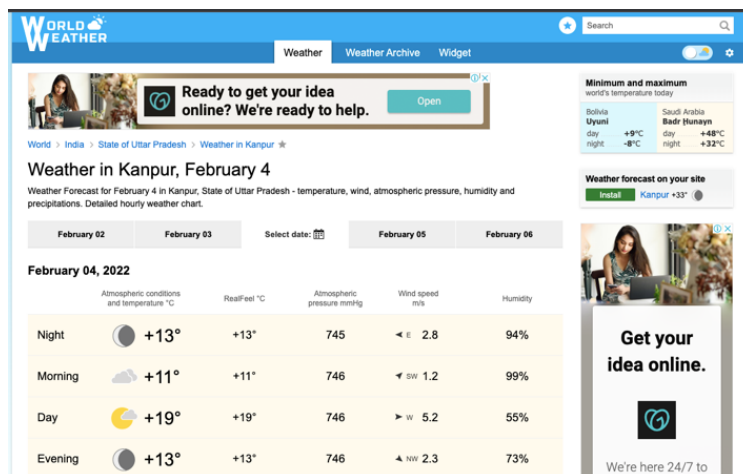


Photo 35: on 06-02-2022

Photo 36: Weather of Kanpur on 06-02-2022 <sup>10</sup>

Condensation

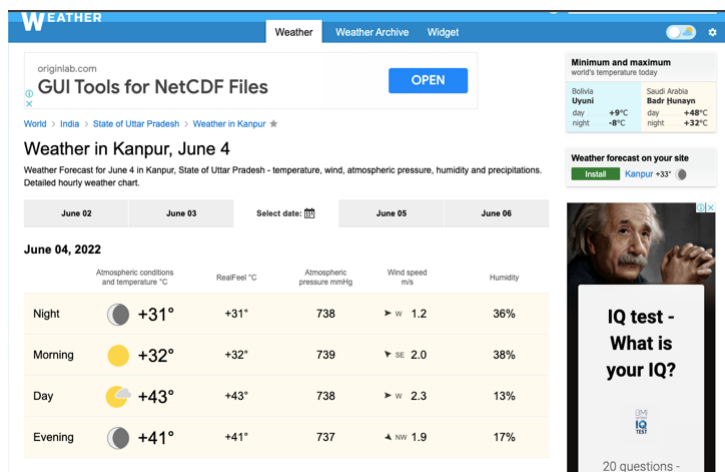


Photo 37: on 04-06-2022

Photo 38: Weather of Kanpur on 04-06-2022 <sup>11</sup>

No Condensation

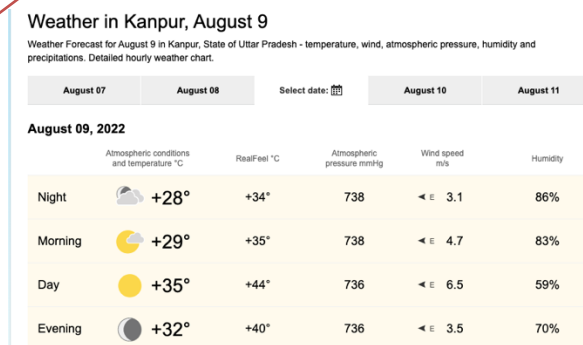


Photo 39: on 09-08-2022

Photo 40: Weather of Kanpur on 09-08-2022

On 04-06-2022, with temperature above 41°C and relative humidity less than 17%, condensation was observed. The priest predicted normal monsoon. Next day IMD has issued forecast with 103% rainfall prediction. In June, first rain was witnessed on 19-06-2022. Again I visited the temple on 09-08-2022 when monsoon was in full spate. There was no condensation observed. This aspect needs serious scientific research.

**Conclusion:**

1. Presence of Pashupati image and symbol associated with mother goddess shows that Indus Valley Civilisation extended upto the banks of Ganga. Famous Nadi sukta of Rig veda includes rivers from Ganga in east to Sindhu in west.
2. The temple structure was first constructed during Indus Valley Civilisation based on Puranic theme. It means, Shiv Puran was composed during this period.
3. The unique features of Stupas built by Mauryan empire is inspired by the shape acquired by Jagannath temple giving it shape of a lotus flower. The outer structure corresponds to the early Mauryan period.
4. There is continuity in sculpture, architecture and religious practices since Indus valley civilization to modern times through Mauryan and Gupta period. Thus, this temple fills the gap between the history of Indus Valley Civilisation and Mauryan period.
5. Village Behta is situated over mound of ancient civilizations as learnt from residents. There are numerous such ancient structures around Kanpur. If studied properly, it will lead us to a new history.

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