

# The Glory of Golden Age- Living Bhitargaon Temple

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*History is a cyclic poem written by time upon the memories of man.*

*-Percy Bysshe Shelley*

**Abstract:- Architecture, often known as built legacy, is one of the most significant historical sources. It tracks the development of civilization and of man. In India, both religious and secular structures bear witness to the craftsmanship of laborers and artisans as well as the wealth of the ruling class and other affluent groups. The magnificent Gupta Era, what makes it the Golden Era of India, it was the prosperity that made the time golden. In every dimension they were prosperous, from art to architecture, from the con man to the king, creativity was at its peak, the Ajanta caves were built at that time, and the famous Bodhisattva Padmapani was painted at that time.**

## I. BHITARGAON TEMPLE

The prosperity was judged by the socio-economic condition of any dynasty and one of the prominent features was the tolerance of the king toward the religion, and this era was justified in all dimensions. Early urbanization dates back to 2,600 BCE, according to Indus-Saraswati Civilization city excavations. In the third century BCE, rock-cut buildings started to take shape.

The Ajanta caves are among the first rock-cut temples, however the Mauryan era is responsible for the earliest rock-cut building. Rock-cut temples were replaced by stone temples as man developed new skills and as stone became harder to come by, brick temples, as where stone was not easily available, brick took place as the fundamental elements to build structure temples. In Sanskrit, the word brick known as Ishtika (इष्टिका) further came from the root word ichchha (इच्छा) meaning desire because the roof that is made up of bricks fulfills our desire. Numerous brick buildings have sprang up in the alluvial soil and scarcity of stones and boulders that characterize the Gangetic plains. Brick temples did not fare as well against the whims of time as did rock-cut and stone temples. That is what distinguishes the Bhitargaon brick temple in Uttar Pradesh, which is located 50 km outside of Kanpur. The history of Kanpur is not as old as we think, it was established as Kohna village around 1200 circa. In this article, we are going to talk about the Bhitargaon temple. It is the largest temple of that age to survive for 1570 years or more. This brick building has a terracotta panel at the front. It is the largest and oldest terracotta Hindu shrine still standing with a roof and a

towering Sikhara, having been constructed in the 6th century under the Gupta Empire. The temple faces east and has a square construction with double-recessed corners. Over the garbhagriha, there is a lofty pyramidal spire. Bhitargaon was formerly a part of Phulpur, a historic city. The villagers referred to the temple simply as Dewal, meaning temple. It is one of India's earliest still-standing brick temples.

Cunningham dated it to the seventh century, but it has since been determined that it actually dates to the late Gupta era, or the fifth century. We owe a great obligation to Sir Alexander Cunningham because he discovered and saved a significant portion of India's constructed legacy. Cunningham was appointed by Lord Canning in 1861 as the Archaeological Surveyor to the Government of India. He was in charge of the excavations in Sanchi in 1841 and Sarnath in 1837. He was appointed the first Director General of the Indian Archaeological Survey in 1871. Following then, a series of field surveys that are described in reports started. Cunningham mentions that his friend Raja Ravi Prasada provided him information about a brick temple close to Kanpur that featured excellent terracotta work in the Report of the Gangetic Provinces 1875–76 and 1877–78. He made two trips to Bhitargaon between November 1877 and February 1878. When Cunningham first arrived, the porch and the Ardha mandapa, which eventually fell, were still intact.

When he reached Bhitargaon and saw the temple he was amazed to see the beauty engraved on the bricks. Cunningham claims that the temple is 66 square feet in size, faces east, and has rounded corners. The earliest images of it were captured in 1878 by Cunningham's assistant Beglar, who captured the modest projecting hall in front of the door. The sanctum's entrance is one of the earliest examples of a semi-circular doorway use. However, instead of being built with bricks laid face to face, it is a corbeled or false arch. The 'Hindu arch' is what Cunningham refers to as. The author claims that this is unusual for India. In contrast, a genuine arch has a triangular keystone and a voussoir that are wedge-shaped. A real arch can sustain huge domes, as opposed to the corbeled arch. The inner sanctum (garbha griha) of the temple is also topped by a tall pyramidal spire called a shikhara. The Indian Nagara temple architecture used this shikhara as a defining characteristic. Additionally collapsed is the outer semicircular arch over the entrance stairs. There is only one left that leads into the sanctum. The building as it is today was created from the masonry in 1905, however it was rebuilt in unrelieved straight vertical lines, altering its original design. Since there was no sign of the top's prior shape, it was kept intact. A picture must have

been in the 15 square foot sanctuary, which has no windows. The bricks of this temple wrap up the glorifying history of India. As per Hindu belief, initially, worship was based on rituals including Havana (yagya) which took place in the open. With the passage of time, the rituals changed and temples came up which had flat roofs.

This temple at Bhitargaon is important since it is one of the first few in which we notice a Shikhar. And it is made up of bricks. In 1877, 1878, Cunningham recorded that many piles of bricks were found pointing at the existence of many brick temples. It is interesting to note that every brick is baked in a different mold separately. Every brick has a different size and design. The thickness of the temple walls rises up to 8 ft. This temple is around 50 ft. high. These bricks have braved and survived the vagaries of time to prove that the brick-making skill had been perfected around then. At that time the temple was dilapidated, so the Cunningham requested the British government for some allowance but the government denied. The Gupta Era lasted from 320 A. D. up to 650 A. D., art that flourished in those times is original independent Indian Art and has traveled beyond India.

The Buddha statue in Yungang Cave in China was influenced by Gupta Art. Chandi Bima and Chandi Arjuna temples and other temples in Dieng Plateau in Java have the same layout as this temple at Bhitargaon. These temples were constructed later in time. This was constructed at the end of the 7th century, how the idea and architecture transferred from here to there. Just like presently, various belief systems like Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian, Buddhist, Jain, and many others exist in our Society and we live together as one. Similarly in olden times we had Hindus, Shaiva, Vaishnav, Shaktya, Buddhists, and Jains and all lived together.

Bhitargaon Temple is interesting because Vishnu, Shiv, Parvati, Ganesh, Krishna, Balram, Buddha, Durga, and Gajalaxmi coexist in its terracotta panels. Shaiv, Vaishnav, and Buddhists found representation in a single temple. Gupta Emperors followed Vaishnav belief tradition but treated all alike. All beliefs finding representation in this temple represent the harmony of those times. In 1905 this temple was reconstructed with the bricks lying nearby and those brought from Jhijhi Nag temple. This temple has 28 pillars. The inner sanctum of the temple (garbha griha) is also topped by a tall pyramidal spire called a shikhara. The Indian Nagara temple architecture used this shikhara as a defining characteristic. Some are with design and some are plain. Mohammad Zaheer, in his research, has identified 143 terracotta panels. 128 panels are affixed still on this temple. Some are in museums and the rest are lost to us. This temple was not a pilgrim site but a private temple. And that saved it as legends of the supernatural kept people away from it. Cunningham claimed that the temple was probably a Vishnu temple because of the Varaha incarnation at the back of the building. But when Alexander Cunningham arrived and conducted his survey, residents nearby realized its importance and pilferage began. Still much survived which

can be seen today. The question arises, as to how Bhitargaon Temple is a glimpse of our Golden Age.

## II. APPARENTLY, WHAT DOES THE GOLDEN AGE MEAN?

Golden age or classical age refers to a period of time in the past that is regarded as a time of great prosperity, peace, cultural flourishing, and/or intellectual achievement. It is often characterized by a sense of idealism, optimism, and high cultural and artistic achievements. During this time, the Gupta rulers presided over a period of political stability and economic prosperity, and Indian culture and scholarship reached new heights. The Gupta Empire was known for its advancements in mathematics, astronomy, medicine, literature, and the arts. Scholars and artists flourished under the patronage of the Gupta rulers, and the period is considered a high point in the development of Indian civilization. When there is Prosperity and Peace all over. Art and Culture are flourishing. This was happening between 320 A. D. and 650 A. D. This is the surviving story glorifying our rich golden past.

## III. CONCLUSION

Finally, Bhitargaon Temple is a magnificent example of the region's rich cultural and architectural legacy Gupta era. It stands as the testimony of the first or we can say one of the earliest Nagara Style temples, that motivate the Temple architecture legacy in Northern India and beyond the region of far east asia. This temple structure is singing the Golden age of Gupta and India, when civilizations were developing around the world.

Additionally, Bhitargaon Temple has the potential to increase tourism and support the regional economy. Visitors, both domestic and foreign, who want to discover and appreciate the area's rich past are drawn to it by its architectural magnificence and historical significance.

To ensure that future generations can continue to be in awe of its beauty and explore its historical significance, preservation efforts and measures to maintain Bhitargaon Temple are of the utmost importance. We pay tribute to the past and leave a lasting legacy for the future by appreciating and safeguarding this cultural asset.

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