

Dating Problem of the Gorgaṭhri Temples

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Abstract

The temples of Gorgaṭhri (Pl. II), an important archaeological site in the old city of Peshāwar, have been differently dated by two recent authors. Of these Prof. (Dr.) Ibrahim Shah (2013: 39-45) suggested a date between CE 1823 to 1830, whereas Prof. (Dr.) Abdur Rahman (2019: 83-92) believes that the temples could have been, at the earliest, built any time after 1871. As the matter is of some academic interest, we thought to reopen the issue to see if there exists any scope for amelioration.

Keywords: Gorgaṭhri, Gorakh Nāth, Ṣahīr ad Dīn Bābur, Avitabile, Mohan Dās, Raverty, Gopāl Dās.

1. Nomenclature

The name Gorgaṭhri (Pl. I) was variantly interpreted by scholars as ‘Gūr-Khattri’, ‘Kūr-Khattri’, ‘Gor-Khattri’, ‘Gorakh-hatri’, ‘kor khatri’, ‘Gūr Khuttree’. But, as it is obvious, these are merely fanciful and wild guesses which cannot convince any of a person familiar with Hindko, the ancient and present language of Peshāwar. Prof. (Dr.) Abdur Rahman in this context remarks that, etymologically, Gorgaṭhri consists of two words: Gorakh (meaning one who tends cattle, mostly cows) and Kaṭṭri (diminutive form of kaṭṭra meaning ‘enclosure’). Thus Gorgaṭhri would mean ‘Gorakh’s enclosure’. Gorakh appears to have been a popular name among the Jogīs (hermits).

2. Mughal Period

The early history of the Jogīs has gone unrecorded or perhaps perished. But the Jogīs in general believe that the founder of the ‘Tilla Jogiān’ monastery, destined to become the Jogīs’ headquarter, on the top of a hill near Rohtās, was a certain Jogī guru (teacher) known as Gorakh Nāth. Under Gorakh and his disciple Bālnāth, the Jogīs of the Tilla became so popular that they vied even with the Muslim pīrs (mentors) (see Ibbetson: vol. 1, 2007). The monastery regularly turned out a rich crop of trained

young Jogīs who spread far and wide not only in the Salt Range, their home territory, but also in the neighboring Peshāwar valley. At Peshāwar they occupied an ancient site which in the course of time assumed the character of a sub-headquarter. This place came to be known after the name of Gorakh as Gorakh Kaṭri, modern Gorgaṭhri.

In a short while Gorakh became so famous for sanctity and his Kaṭri ‘where the great ones of God lived’ (Abu al-Faḍl) so reputed that it aroused the curiosity of Zāhīr ad-Dīn Bābur in Kābul. Henceforth he made up his mind to see the sacred place of the Jogīs at the earliest possible time. In CE 1505 he was at Jamrūd when he thought he could fulfil his dream. He left the army to stay there for the night and, taking a guide, immediately rode out to Bigrām (Peshāwar) where he saw the reputed pīpal tree, but his guide hesitated to take him to Gorgaṭhri. In CE 1519 he was again in Peshāwar. This time he succeeded in visiting Gorgaṭhri of the Jogīs. Trained in the highly sophisticated cultural traditions of the house of Tīmūr, Bābur was thoroughly disappointed to see the shabby and unhealthy appearance of the Jogī home. “At an earlier visit to Peshāwar” he writes “we regretted at not being able to see this place, but it does not seem a place to regret not seeing” (Bābur 1987: 394). Giving a description of the site, he remarks: “This is a smallish abode after the fashion of a hermitage, rather confined and dark. After entering at the door and getting down a few steps one must lie full length to get beyond. There is no getting in without a lamp. All round near the building, there is let lie an enormous quantity of hair of the head and beard which men have shaved off there.” It is noteworthy that no temple is mentioned by Bābur.

The next important visitor was Bābur’s grandson, Akbar (CE 1556-1605) who is said to have distributed alms amongst the Jogīs. Akbar’s historian, Abu al-Faḍl, relates that “within the Kūrkhattri there is a cave in the midst of which is the way to the secret chamber of the saints of old times”, and that “it was the prayer spot of the great ones of God” (Abu al-Faḍl 1939: 528, 856). Again no temple is mentioned.

Akbar’s son, Jahāngīr (CE 1605-27) likewise visited Gorgaṭhri in 1607 hoping to obtain grace from the faqīrs (hermits) of that place. But just like Bābur, he too was disappointed to see there “a herd (or small fraternity of Jogīs) without any religious knowledge, the sight of whom filled my heart with nothing but regret.” (Jahāngīr 1978: 102). Apparently the Jogīs community of that time had declined to a morbid state of intellectual stagnation which invited Jahāngīr’s sarcastic remarks. For us however it is important to know that even Jahāngīr mentions no temple.

Jahangir's son, Shāh Jahān (1628-58) neither mentions Gorgaṭhri nor Jogīs. During his reign Gorgaṭhri underwent a fundamental transformation which for the next 200 years changed its character. Jahān Ārā Begam, the eldest daughter of Shāh Jahān, converted the place into a caravan sarai (caravanserai) in 1640. The sarai had a series of rooms along the inner face of the perimeter walls, two monumental gateways, a grand mosque and a well (Pl. III). Again no temple is mentioned. Shāh Jahān in fact took fancy of another site named Gorakh Tibbi by Gopāl Dās (1874: 142) and Jaffar (1945: 81-82) and built a basin/pool (?) to collect the water of a natural spring which still exists on the Warsak road. (For abbreviation we shall refer to it as the Spring site). Again no temple is mentioned.

3. Mohan Lal's visit

The date of Mohan Lal's visit to Peshāwar is considered to be the determining point in dating the Gorgaṭhri temples. In the following paragraph we shall try to find out how far this piece of evidence is helpful in resolving the dating problem.

Mohan Lal, in company with A. Burnes and Dr. Gerard reached Peshāwar on March 20, 1832 and quitted on April 19, the same year. During his one month stay at Peshāwar he met with princes, Nāzir, Kotwāl, maulvis, faqīrs and many others who cared to see and talk to him. Riding his horse, he roamed about in the city almost every day visiting places of his interest. He went twice to the garden of 'Ali Mardān Khān, passed by the Shālimār garden, another garden which he does not name, lapidary shops, Asiyā Bazār, the ruins of 'Bālā Hisār' and 'Kote Mausam Khān' both having been demolished by Ranjīt Singh. Twice again he went to visit the Spring site known to him as the temple of Gorakh Nāth. But nowhere does Gorgaṭhri or its temples find a place in his diary. Gorgaṭhri was apparently still functioning as a caravan sarai, like many others in the city, and offered no attraction to him. Neither were the temples there, which could have stimulated his religious feelings for a visit. Thus, any effort to bring the evidence of Mohan Lal's visit to bear on the dating of the Gorgaṭhri temple would be invalid. This is just like making a target of something which does not exist. The place he liked most was the Spring site known to him as the temple of Gorakh Nāth. This is how he described his two visits to the Spring.

April 8

“I went this morning to the Hindu temple called Gorakh Nāth. It is a fine place. All Hindus, both men and women, with their children, assemble here on Sunday and bathe in the basin/pool (?), which has a beautiful fountain in the middle. Its clear and crystalline water which washes the northern side of Peshawar forms a narrow rivulet” (Mohan Lal 1846: 51)

April 11

“A holy day of the Hindus, called Baisākhi, which authorizes that tribe to bathe this morning in rivers, canals and especially at Hardwar a celebrated bathing place in India. I was induced to pay a visit to the temple of Gorakh Nāth. Thousands of men and women were in the basin/pool (?), which is shaded by three pipal trees” (Mohan Lal 1846: 53)

4. Discussion

It is evident from the above citations that the temple called Gorakh Nāth (Spring site) and Gorakh Kaṭri are two different places of which the former is located near the Shāh ‘Ālam branch of the river Kābul, and the latter within the city of Peshāwar. However, the name Gorakh is common to both. Gopal Dās (1874: 142) and also Jaffar (1945: 81-82) tell us that a story had been concocted by the people to account for this dual use of the name. It is believed that the Hindu Jogī, Gorakh Nāth, after whose name Gorakh Kaṭri came to be known as such and who lived in Gorgaṭhri, having been driven to extremities by the Muslims, jumped into the well (which still exists and was built by Jahān Ārā Begam in 1640) and emerged at the Spring site. Thus, both the places came to be known after him.

Mohan Lal’s reference to the Spring site as the site of a temple is of a dubious character. ‘This morning (April 8)’, he writes “I went to the Hindu temple called Gorakh Nāth. It is a fine place”. Now, temple in the traditional sense of the word represents a masonry building devoted to the worship of a god. Did any such structure exist at the Spring site at the time of Mohan Lal’s visit? It is doubtful, for, during our survey (7 Nov. 2020) at the three well known Spring sites, no traces of any ancient structure showing the existence of a temple came to light. Nor has any reminiscence of it survived in the neighborhoods. In our view Mohan Lal used the term temple in the sense of a sacred spot, not in the sense of a ‘building’ exclusively devoted to the worship of a god or gods.

If no temple existed at the Spring site, nor at Gorgaṭhri at the time of Mohan Lal's visit (1832), when were the temples which now stand in Gorgaṭhri built? It is noteworthy that the only building of public interest at Gorgaṭhri was a mosque which was pulled down by Avitabile, Ranjīt Singh's governor of Peshāwar (1838-42), most probably for security reasons. With this the role of Gorgaṭhri as a sarāe came to an end. It now assumed the function of a governor house. It is not likely that Avitabile, for the same reasons, would have allowed the Hindus or Jogīs to build a temple therein. Raverty, who visited Peshāwar in 1850, describes Gorgaṭhri in some detail but mentions merely a 'jogee' or hermit not any temple (1852). Gorakh + haṭhri is next mentioned by Gopal Das whose Tārīkh-i Peshāwar was in the process of completion in 1871. He is more accurate in fixing the spot where the 'jogee' mentioned above built a house. It is the same site, he tells us, where in former days stood a mosque. But just like Raverty he mentions no temple.

5. Conclusions

In view of the above we are driven to the conclusions that:

1. No temple existed at Gorgaṭhri or the Spring site at the time of Mohan Lal's visit in 1832.
2. No temple existed at Gorgaṭhri in 1850 (Raverty's visit) and even 21 years later in 1871 (Gopal Das).
3. The temples of Gorgaṭhri could have been built any time after 1871. Any date anterior to this would be untenable. The Editor's note on this point (Ancient Pakistan, XXX, 2019, p. 91, ft. 6) which recommends the reader to see Shah 2013a for an earlier date may be taken as superfluous.

End Notes

1. One of the three highest points in the old city of Peshāwar. Its height suggests a continuous occupation over centuries.
2. Gopal Das (1874: 142- 44) tells us that there were several Kaṭras in Peshāwar. The old city of Lahore too has many Kaṭras.
3. The survey team (?) consisted of Prof. (Dr.) Abdur Rahman, Dr. Shakrīullah, Mr, Adil Shah and Mr. Mehir Rahaman Khalil (PhD scholars). The one point agenda before the survey party was to determine which of the three natural springs was visited by Mohan Lal. We first went to Sakhi Chahma (Pls. IV-V) on the Pachagai road. It covers an area of about two Kanals between the Wapda House and the Tablīghī Markaz. Much of it has been filled up by the owner, Arbab Khalid of Landae Arbab, while the rest shows marshy land covered with tall grass and trees. A

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small quantity of water oozes out to form a drain. Structural remains show British period bricks fixed in cement. No traces of a masonry basin/pool (?) of the Mughal period came to light. We then moved to Darmangi Kuz Kandha (Pls VI-IX) which is much constricted by modern structures. The spring site which really caught our attention is now known as Khushhāl Bāgh. (Pls.X-XIII) It was turned into a public park by the provincial government in 1992 with a nicely built basin/pool (?) which is said to have replaced an ancient structure apparently marking the site of the basin/pool (?) built by Shāh Jahān in 1640. The spring has enough waterpower to run a small size water – mill for grinding corn. During investigation at the site we were informed by the caretaker of the Bāgh that three old pīpal trees were removed at the time of excavation of the pond in 1992. It is interesting to note that the volume of water, the site of the ancient basin/pool, the number of pīpal trees, all converge (?) on one point, or that this precisely was the site visited by Mohan Lal in 1832.

4. Latin templum, an ‘open or consecrated space’ (Neo Oxford Dictionary).

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Pl. 1 - Gorgaṭhri: A general view (Photo by Authors).



Pl. 2 - Gorgaṭhri: The Temples (Photo by Authors).



Pl. 3 - Gorgathri: The well (Photo by Authors).



Pl. 4 - Sakhi Chashma: trees in the marshy spot (Photo by Authors).

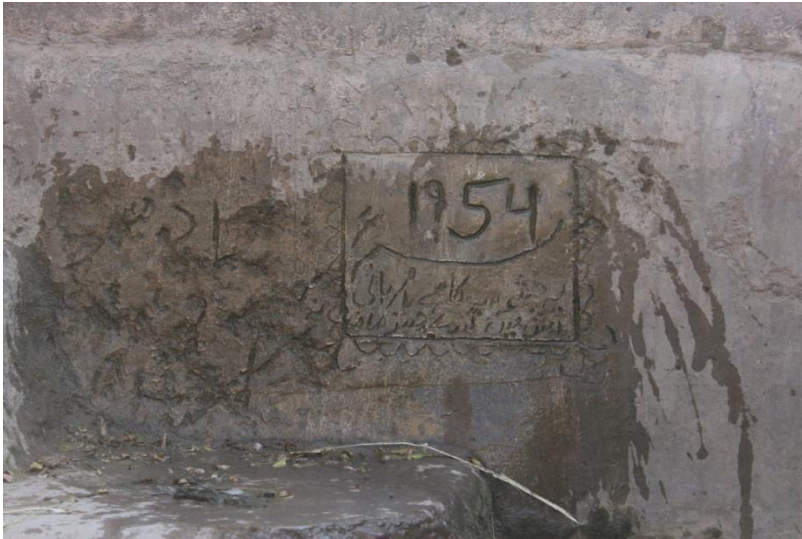
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Pl. 5 - Sakhi Chashma: part of the spring recently filled up by its owner (Photo by Authors).



Pl. 6 - Darmangai kuz Kandha: view of the upper spring (Photo by Authors).



Pl. 7 - Darmangai kuz Kandha: date of renovation displayed at the spring
(Photo by Authors).



Pl. 8 - Darmangai kuz Kandha: another view of the upper Spring (Photo by Authors).

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Pl. 9 - Darmangai kuz Kandha: the lower Spring (Photo by Authors).



Pl. 10 - Khushhāl Bāgh: showing fence. The principal author to right, Prof. Dr. Abur Rahman to left, and the site care taker (in the middle) in front of the enclosure (Photo by Authors).



Pl. 10 - Khushhāl Bāgh: the newly built pond (Photo by Authors).



Pl. 11 - Khushhāl Bāgh: the newly built pond another view (Photo by Authors).



Pl. 12 - Khushhāl Bāgh: another view of the pond (Photo by Authors).