

Aranyapur Pancharatna Temple: A Study of its Archaeological and Historical Significance in Cumilla, Bangladesh



Md. Sadequzzaman¹, Sabikunnahar², Md. Ali Hossain³, Abdur Rakib⁴, Marzia Akhter⁵

¹Assistant Professor Department of Archaeology Comilla University, Cumilla-3506

^{2,3,4,5} Post Graduate in Archaeology Department of Archaeology Comilla University, Cumilla -3506.

ABSTRACT: Ratna style temple architecture flourished in the Bengal Delta from the mid-17th century to the 19th century. Although there is a clear distinction between the Ratna style temples and the ancient Bengal temples built in the North Indian Nagara and South Indian Dravidian styles, a careful analysis of the architectural structure of the Ratna temples reveals influences from both North and South Indian temple architecture. The incorporation of Indo-Islamic architectural features into Ratna temples, as seen in other contemporary structures like mosques, palaces, and forts, has given this style its uniqueness. This style of temple construction is not found elsewhere in the Indian subcontinent, except in the Bengal region. Among the various Ratna styles, the Pancharatna temple architecture is the most prevalent. The aim of this study is to review the origin and development of the Ratna style temple in Bengal and to provide a brief insight into the amalgamation of various architectural styles in the Pancharatna temples across Bengal by examining the architectural features of the Aranyapur Pancharatna temple in Cumilla. Through field surveys and photographic data analysis, the researcher has identified the architectural characteristics of the Ratna style, including Indo-Islamic and European influences, as well as the indigenous Chala style of Bengal. Additionally, other features of the aforementioned temple, such as its octagonal shape, sanctum sanctorum, arched circumambulatory path, three entrances on three sides, and the curved cornice of the central Ratna, have been compared with those of other Pancharatna temples in Bengal.

KEYWORDS: Pancharatna, Temple architecture, Bengal Delta, Ratna style, Chala style.

1. INTRODUCTION

Temple architecture has held a prominent place in the history of Bengal since ancient times. Influenced by royal patronage and cultural diversity, Bengal showcases various styles of temple architecture, including the Sarvatabhadra style of the Early Medieval period and the Chala style of the Late Medieval period. While the Chala style was known in the Bengal region since the pre-Muslim era, its application in temple architecture became more prevalent during the Late Medieval period. The emergence of the Ratna style during this time marked a significant turning point in the temple architecture of Bengal. From the Late Medieval period to the colonial period, the Ratna style gained popularity for constructing temples in the Bengal region. Temples were built with one or more Ratnas placed atop a thatched or plain roof, with evidence of temples featuring up to twenty-five Ratnas. Among these, one and five Ratna temples are most commonly found, with the five Ratna temples known as Pancharatna temple architecture. There is substantial evidence of Pancharatna temples in Bangladesh. These temples typically feature a central Ratna surrounded by four Ratnas at the corners of the main structure.

In the Cumilla region, one Pancharatna temple has been discovered, which is the focus of this research. The architectural design and decoration of this temple are notable, as it is adorned with motifs of animals, flowers, arabesques, and abstract patterns reflecting Muslim architecture. Despite its current state of abandonment, this brick temple highlights the spread and prosperity of Hinduism in the study area. Additionally, the temple serves as a reminder of the changing political and cultural context of its time, as evidenced by its neglect. The religious beliefs of the local population and the evolving socio-cultural conditions have contributed to the temple's ongoing deterioration. Despite being abandoned for a long time, no research report has been published on this uniquely beautiful temple. The temple was not listed among the archaeological remains of Cumilla until its identification during an extensive field survey in Cumilla Adarsha Sadar Upazila in January 2022. Given its uniqueness, the archaeological significance of the temple has been highlighted in this research.

2. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Cumilla district has been culturally significant and rich since ancient times. The region's diverse political culture and dynamic economic prosperity were complemented by an advanced religious culture. Additionally, Cumilla was notable for its artistic skill and taste, evident in the architecture developed in the region. Analyzing and reviewing the history of the region through various

Aranyapur Pancharatna Temple: A Study of Its Archaeological and Historical Significance in Cumilla, Bangladesh

architectural styles and types provide insights into the area's prosperity and architectural uniqueness. The Aranyapur Pancharatna temple in Cumilla district is a unique temple in the region. It is located on the banks of the old course of the Gomti River, near the Jagannathpur Seventeen Ratna temple, and in close proximity to the Lalmai Hills, a historical center of Buddhism. It is also near the ancient capital city of Basantpur. The Aranyapur Pancharatna temple is significant as the only Pancharatna temple found in the region, warranting research into its architectural structure and ornamentation. In addition to its style and decoration, it is important to study the temple to understand the history of the people associated with it, considering the social, political, religious, and economic conditions of the time. Given these factors, the Aranyapur Pancharatna temple in Cumilla district has been selected for this research.

3. GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION

Present-day Cumilla is the center of the ancient region known as Samatata. The archaeological findings from various periods in this region are considered significant sources of ancient Bengal's history. One notable archaeological site is the Aranyapur Pancharatna temple. This temple is located in the village of Aranyapur, within the Jagannathpur Union of Cumilla Adarsha Sadar Upazila. Locally, it is known as Bairagi's Stupa. The temple is situated approximately 250 meters south of the main road in Aranyapur, at coordinates 23°27'39" N latitude and 91°14'0" E longitude. It is located on the banks of the old course of the Gomti River. To the east lies the Indian state of Tripura, while the Jagannathpur Seventeen Ratna temple is located about 1 km west of the Aranyapur temple. Additionally, there is various archaeological evidence from the colonial period within a 3-4 km radius of the temple.

4. RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

Temple architecture holds a significant place in the architectural history of Bangladesh, developed to facilitate the religious beliefs and rituals of the people. The origins of temple architecture in the Indian subcontinent date back approximately 2000 years (Akhter, 2015). In Bengal, temple architecture flourished from the ancient period, particularly during the Gupta and post-Gupta periods, and under the patronage of rulers from the 9th to 11th centuries. Local zamindars, financiers, and influential figures also played a leading role in the construction of temples during the Muslim and colonial periods. This architecture not only reflects the social structure of a particular group but also represents a unique aspect of Bengali cultural heritage.

In the early medieval period, temples in Bengal were built following the Shikhara and Deul styles. However, from the 16th to the 19th century, indigenous styles became more prominent, and temple decoration became more elaborate. Decorations included figures of gods and goddesses, flowers, arabesques, leaves, animal figures, vegetal designs, geometric patterns, and scenes from the Ramayana and Mahabharata. During this period, a new style known as the Ratna style emerged in Bengal. Ratna style temples feature curving cornices on the lower roofs and miniature pointed eaves on the roofs, with Ratnas or kiosks at the apex. The diversity in the number of Ratnas led to a variety of temple names, such as Navaratna and Pancharatna temples. The Aranyapur Pancharatna temple in Adarsha Sadar Upazila of Comilla District is an example of this style. The number of Ratnas often reflects the economic prosperity of the temple's patrons. Temples are constructed based on the societal needs of the time, embodying the religious rituals, demographics, economy, and culture of the local people. Pancharatna temples, in particular, offer insights into the social hierarchy, attitudes of the ruling class, religious influences, the expansion of religious practices, the philanthropy of builders, and construction and decorative styles.

The abandonment of temples often occurs due to changes in social or cultural contexts, which is an important aspect in archaeology. The Aranyapur Pancharatna temple is currently abandoned and has fallen into a dilapidated condition due to both natural and man-made factors. The decorations, walls, roof, cornice, spire, and each Ratna are gradually decaying, along with the interior infrastructure. Examining the architectural features and decorative styles of the Aranyapur Pancharatna temple provides valuable insights into the structure and style of Pancharatna temples in Bengal, which combine various architectural influences. Highlighting the archaeological significance of this temple in the current research contributes to a broader understanding of the history of Pancharatna temples throughout Bengal, including Cumilla.

5. LITERATURE REVIEW

Temple architecture serves as crucial archaeological evidence that helps reconstruct the history of the Cumilla district. Although extensive research has been conducted on the temple architecture of Bangladesh, there has been no published book or report specifically focused on the temples of Cumilla district. Consequently, a literature review covering the temple architecture of both West Bengal and Bangladesh was undertaken to gain a comprehensive understanding of the characteristics of temple architecture in Bengal. In 2003, Tapan Kumar Dey published a book titled 'Math-Mandirer Katha' (in Bengali), which describes the identity, origin, development, and various forms of monasteries, temples, hermitages, and akharas, considering their historical significance. Pranab Roy's 1999 book 'Banglar Mandir Sthapatya o Bhaskarja' (in Bengali) provides information on the history of ruined temples in East India and Bangladesh, including their diverse decorative elements. In 1957, Ratan Lal Chakraborty, in his book 'Bangladesher Mandir,' highlighted the locations, architectural descriptions, spatial divisions, and uses of temple architecture in Bangladesh. The following year, Niharanjan Roy, in 'Bangalir Itihas' (in Bengali), described the architectural history of ancient Bengal and detailed the identities of temple and monastery architecture. David J. McCutcheon's 1972 book 'Late Medieval Temples of Bengal' focused

Aranyapur Pancharatna Temple: A Study of Its Archaeological and Historical Significance in Cumilla, Bangladesh

on the context, style, and decoration of temple architecture during the late medieval period. In 1983, George Michell edited a compilation titled 'Temples of Bengal from the Architecture of David McCutcheon,' which highlighted the identities, architectural descriptions, various forms, and features of temple architecture. Additionally, George Michell's 1977 report, 'The Hindu Temple,' discussed the origin, development, and distinct identities of various temples. These works collectively provide a rich source of information on the temple architecture of Bengal, helping to understand its development, diversity, and historical context.

6. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH

The present research has been conducted to achieve the following objectives:

1. To present the architectural style of Aranyapur Pancharatna temple in accordance with the origin and development of Pancharatna temple.
2. To understand the historical and archaeological importance of the Pancharatna temple of Bengal through the architectural analysis of Aranyapur Pancharatna temple.

7. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study was conducted using a specific research design, completed in three phases. The first phase involved pre-field research, during which the history and historical significance of Pancharatna temples in Bengal were explored through a literature review of published and unpublished reports. This phase also included a study of the context of the Pancharatna temple in Cumilla and an investigation into the historical aspects of the Aranyapur Pancharatna temple. Based on the information obtained in the pre-survey study, a detailed survey plan was developed, including the types of data to be collected, methods of data collection, and post-data collection analysis techniques. During the fieldwork phase, the surrounding topography and geographical settings of the temple were observed. In-depth observations helped identify the causes of the temple's abandonment, current damage, and contributing factors. In the post-fieldwork phase, the collected data were categorized. Several photographs of various parts of the temple structure were taken, and necessary drawings were made based on direct inspection and photographic evidence, all of which are presented in this paper. The potential for obtaining meaningful results was assessed based on the research problem and questions. In the data analysis phase, the pre-field survey data were combined with the data collected during the fieldwork. The validity of the research hypothesis was evaluated through comprehensive analysis. Finally, a detailed report was prepared based on the research problem and findings.

8. THE TERMINOLOGY AND NAMING CONVENTIONS OF THE TEMPLE

This abandoned temple was not recorded in any sources before its discovery by the current researcher. The temple, now in a very fragile condition, contains no idols, mounts, weapons, or emblems that could identify it with any particular deity. Therefore, it is unclear to which deity this temple was originally dedicated. However, a serpent pattern is observed on the chhatra or pyramid-shaped surface of the central Ratna. In Hinduism, snakes are often associated with Lord Shiva and the serpent goddess Manasa. To date, no evidence of the Manasa cult has been identified in the Cumilla region. On the other hand, various forms of Shiva, such as Uma-Maheshwara, Kal-Bhairava, Nataraja, and Nateshwara, are depicted with snakes as an emblem, and the Chandrashekhara form of Shiva is often shown with a snake on his shoulders (Hosen, 2006, pp. 99-131). The existence of Shaiva worship in the region during the contemporary period is supported by the presence of a Shiva temple in the Panchthubi Union of Cumilla Adarsha Sadar Upazila. Therefore, due to the presence of serpent motifs in the central Ratna, the aforementioned temple has been identified as a Shiva temple.

9. ORIGIN OF THE PANCHARATNA TEMPLE

The term "temple" derives from the Latin word *templum*, meaning "sacred precinct." A temple is a structure where worship, sacrifices, or other related rituals are conducted (Vardia, 2008, p.2). Religious and philosophical thinking has influenced the construction of temples from ancient times to the present. The oldest known temple, built approximately 11,600 years ago, is located at Göbekli Tepe in Turkey. Although the history of temple construction in the Indian subcontinent is not as ancient, the origin of Hindu temples can be traced back to the fire altars used in Vedic rituals to please the deities. The architectural development of Hindu temples began during the Gupta period. By the 5th century, under the Chalukya dynasty, temple architecture had fully developed, distinguishing between the Nagara, Dravidian, and Vesara styles in North and South India (Bilimoria, p. 107, 112).

In Bengal, temple architecture followed these styles until the early medieval period. However, the region's climate, materials, cultural, and economic conditions influenced the architectural aspects of the temples. By the end of the medieval period, a distinct style of temple architecture emerged in Bengal, characterized by the local Chala and Ratna styles. The precise origin of the Ratna style is unclear, but it likely began in the 16th century, following the Neo-Vaishnava movement led by Sri Chaitanya. No evidence of such temples has been found from the independent Sultanate period or the pre-Muslim era. A Ratna temple features one or more "Ratna" or Deula Ratna on a chala or flat-roofed building. In Bengal, temples with varying numbers of Ratnas (one, five, nine, eleven, thirteen, fourteen, twenty-one, and twenty-five) were constructed (Roy, 1999, p.34-58). The Ratna style is not a distinct

Aranyapur Pancharatna Temple: A Study of Its Archaeological and Historical Significance in Cumilla, Bangladesh

style but rather a combination of different ancient architectural styles. The lower part of a Ratna temple often follows the Gupta period's building style or the Chala style, an addition to ancient temple architecture or indigenous styles.

During the Muslim rule, local and Muslim architectural styles merged, influencing both Hindu and Muslim architecture. This fusion is evident in the application of the Ratna style, particularly in Pancharatna temples, within Indo-Islamic architecture. The dome used in the central Ratna reflects Muslim architectural influence. The structural style of Ekaratna (one Ratna) temples is similar to that of single-domed mosques, while the four-cornered Ratnas of Pancharatna temples resemble umbrellas used in mosque and tomb architecture. Additionally, Pancharatna temples are influenced by the Shikhara or Deul style of ancient temples, with the central Ratna positioned over the sanctum sanctorum, similar to the Shikhara in North Indian Nagara style. These Ratnas also resemble miniature Deul temples. The construction of Ratna temples, incorporating Indo-Islamic styles, local climate considerations, and the artistry of earlier generations, gained popularity in Bengal from the 17th to the 19th century. The number of ornaments, materials, and Ratnas in a temple often reflected the social and economic status of the temple's patrons.

In the Bengal region, Ratna temples with artistic excellence are fewer compared to those with simpler features. Several Pancharatna temples exist in both East and West Bengal. The Pancharatna temples in West Bengal were generally built earlier than those in East Bengal. The oldest example in West Bengal is the Pancharatna temple at Shyamaray in Bishnupur, Bankura district, constructed in 1643. Another notable Pancharatna temple is the Madangopal temple in Bishnupur, built in 1665. The Rameshwar temple at Chandrakona, constructed in 1655-56, is another example. The Lakshminarayan temple at Khatnagar in Burdwan district, built around 1754, is also significant.

In East Bengal, the Pancharatna temple at Naldanga in Jessore district is the earliest example. The Pancharatna temple in Jhapsa, Vikrampur, built by Ramprasad Roy, is a notable example from the first half of the 17th century. King Sitaram Roy established a Pancharatna temple in Muhammadpur (Magura) in 1703, known as 'Harekrishna Mandir.' Another Pancharatna temple was established in Jhenaidah by Mahadev in 1733. The Prangopal Mandir, built by Raja Ramnath Roy in 1945 in Gopalganj, Dinajpur, also belongs to this category. While the internal layout of these temples is generally identical, the Puthiya temple in Rajshahi, although not exactly similar inside, resembles the Pancharatna style in its exterior design. The Shiva Pancharatna temple at Puthia in Rajshahi is considered the last example of Pancharatna temple architecture according to current research.

10. ARCHITECTURAL FEATURES OF ARANYAPUR PANCHARATNA SHIVA TEMPLE

The Aranyapur Pancharatna temple is built on an octagonal plan. The entrance to this two-storied temple is located on the north, south, and east walls, featuring double-tiered semi-circular archways set in rectangular panels of 2.7 feet each, with multi-foil arches at the top. Each side of the octagon measures 10 feet, making the diameter of the temple structure 80 feet. Similar to the main elements of ancient Hindu temple construction (6th-13th centuries), several notable architectural features are observed in this temple. At the center of the temple is the sanctum sanctorum, surrounded by a circular path, stairs to the second floor in the west wing, a central Ratna above the sanctum, and four relatively smaller Ratnas at the four corners of the octagon.

The sanctum sanctorum itself is octagonal, with a diameter of 27.2 feet. It has three double-tiered angular archways along the main temple entrance. Aside from the entrance, the octagon features rectangular designs on the upper sides and one niche on the west wall. The sanctum sanctorum is encircled by a 4.6-foot-wide circular path, which narrows to 2.5 feet on the western side. This circular path rests on eight angular arches. A 2-foot-wide staircase is located on the west wall. Above the two-storied sanctum sanctorum is the central Ratna.

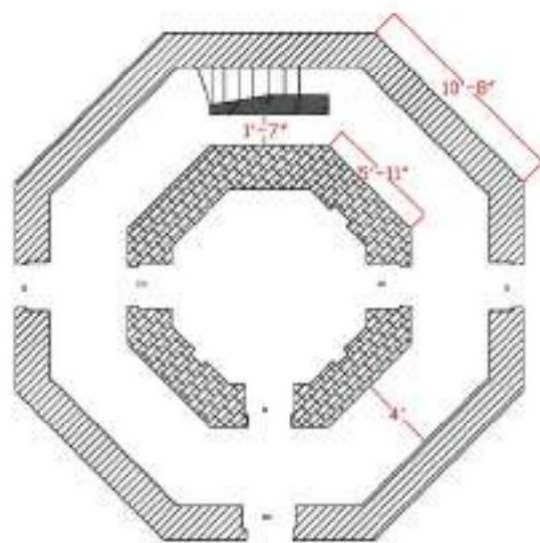


Fig 01: Ground Plan of Aranyapur Pancharatna Temple

Aranyapur Pancharatna Temple: A Study of Its Archaeological and Historical Significance in Cumilla, Bangladesh

The central Ratna's construction plan is octagonal, similar to the main temple and the sanctum sanctorum. The central Ratna, with a diameter of 32.8 feet, also features a two-tiered angular arch at its entrance. It is placed on a 3.7-foot-high plinth and is topped by a pendentive dome with an 8.3-foot diameter. Each side of the octagon has a carved rectangular design at the top, with one niche on the two walls between the three entrances. Among the five Ratnas of the temple, the central Ratna is the largest. The four corner Ratnas are square in shape and are open on all sides, except for the western corner Ratna, where one side is closed due to the location of the staircase. Each of the corner Ratnas measures 5.3 feet in length, with roofs built in the style of chauchala vaults, characteristic of the Bengal region.

11. DECORATIVE STYLE

The decorative style of the Aranyapur Pancharatna temple is remarkable for its intricate and uniform design elements. The temple's exterior walls, excluding the western wall, are adorned with pilasters, angular and rounded arches, and rectangular paneled arch designs. Each entrance is enhanced with multi-foil arch designs, and pillars flank the entrances to add to the temple's beauty. The sanctum sanctorum, while relatively plain, features rectangular panels and multi-foil arch designs at the entrance. Inside the sanctum sanctorum, the walls are somewhat enlivened by rectangular designs carved into their surfaces.

The central Ratna showcases a splendid combination of decorative styles, with each side of the octagon more elaborately adorned. Notable elements include the use of panels, arches, and various animal, floral, and geometric designs, as well as carved rectangular patterns. Each entrance to the central Ratna features multi-grooved designs and fluted arches, with floral motifs, snake patterns, blooming lotus flowers with buds and leaves, and cross-set peacock designs carved along them. The walls are further embellished with multi-slotted arch designs, separated by pillars, with floral decorations on the arches. Externally, the lower part of the chala on each arm of the dome features carvings of swans, peacocks, possibly Hanuman, indistinct lion portraits, plants with stems, and triangular geometric designs, all enhancing the structure's ornate appearance. The chala's border is similarly decorated with various geometric ornaments. The interior of the central Ratna is decorated with carved rectangular designs and geometric patterns. Each arm of the central Ratna has a carved oblong design, with faint floral motifs present on most of these carvings. The lower part of the dome is encircled by similar creeping floral designs, while the top is adorned with a circular floral design surrounded by creeping flowers, adding to the Ratna's aesthetic appeal.

The decoration of the other Ratnas mirrors that of the central Ratna. The use of chauchala vaulted roofs in the Ratnas, arched entrances, and the intricate combination of pillars supporting the Ratnas highlight the artistic identity of the craftsman responsible for the temple's decoration. Another significant aspect of the temple's ornamentation is the serpent pattern decoration on the outer dome.

12. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Religious architecture holds a significant place among the ancient architectural monuments of the Indian subcontinent. The religious beliefs of ancient people and the various rituals associated with them led to structural changes in religious architecture. Fire altars from the Vedic period, Stupas, Chaityagrihas, and Viharas associated with Buddhist beliefs in the Mauryan Empire, later Hindu temples from the Gupta period to the present, and mosques and madrasa architecture from the Muslim period in the Indian subcontinent and Bengal region during the Middle Ages are all outstanding contributions to ancient architecture and art. These various religious architectural structures each have their uniqueness, and there is often a combination of different religious styles. Among the religious architecture of ancient Bengal, temple architecture, in particular, requires research. The initial form of temple

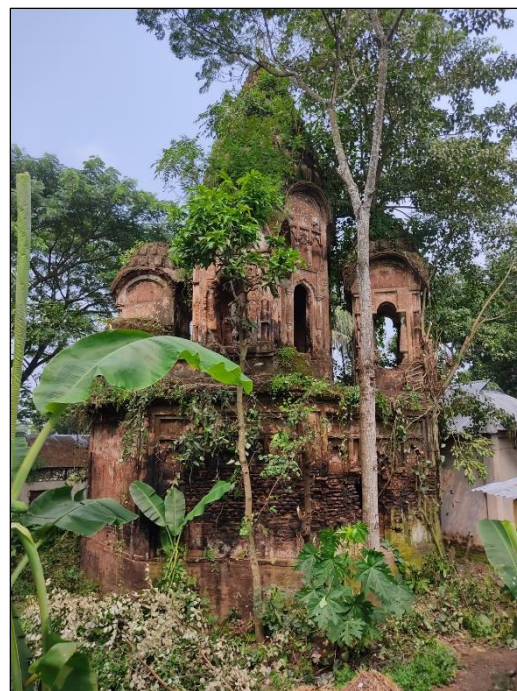


Fig 02: Aranyapur Pancharatna Temple



Fig 03: Aranyapur Pancharatna Temple

Aranyapur Pancharatna Temple: A Study of Its Archaeological and Historical Significance in Cumilla, Bangladesh

architecture has changed, expanded, and evolved over time, emerging as new structures periodically. Evidence of temple structures dates back to the Gupta period in the Indian subcontinent, but the oldest temple evidence in the Bengal region dates back to the 8th century, with the Siddheshwar stone temple at Barakar in Burdwan (Basu, 2015, p. 4). Ancient temples likely did not survive due to the scarcity of stone in Bengal. Until the twelfth century, temple construction in the Bengal region followed the North and South Indian styles of Shikhara and Rekha or Pidha Deul styles.

During the medieval period of Muslim rule, notable traces of temple architecture are found in early Bengal. Conversely, there is evidence of mosque construction using the ruins of ancient temple structures, such as the Zafar Khan Ghazi Mosque and Adina Mosque in Tribeni. Evidence of the first temple construction in Bengal during Muslim rule is the Charchala Singha Vahini Temple at Ghatal in West Midnapur (1490 AD) (Basu, 2015, p.12-25). In the medieval period, instead of the Shikhara and Rekha Deul temple structures, temples were built using Bengal's indigenous house-building method. From 1490-1643, Chala style temples became very popular in Bengal. In the 17th century, a new style of temple construction began, featuring both Chala and Ratna styles. Depending on the number of Ratnas, temples were built with as few as one Ratna and as many as twenty-five. The first Ratna style temple in Bengal was probably built in 1643, known as the Shyamray Pancharatna temple in Bishnupur. However, the Vrindavanchandra temple of Birsingh (1638) in Bankura is considered a Pancharatna temple. This indicates that from 1638/1643 to the 19th century, temples of this style were built. The Pancharatna temple predates the Ekaratna (One Ratna) temple (Roy, 1999, p.35).

There is no evidence of this style of temple architecture outside Bengal, suggesting it is unique to the region. However, a review of existing Ratna temples shows that builders did not follow a completely new structure. Instead, they created a new style by combining ancient temple architecture (Shikhara or Deul), Bengal's own architectural style (Chala), and Islamic influences (domes, arches, floral decoration). This blend resulted in a distinctive addition to the history of temple architecture in Bengal. Given that this style developed in the Bengal region, it can be considered unique to Bengal.

Ratna style temples occupy an important place in Bengal's temple architecture because they incorporate ancient temple architectural styles, the Chala style of indigenous Bengal, and Indo-Islamic influences. The Pancharatna temple typically features a central Ratna above the sanctum sanctorum, resembling ancient Shikhara style temples. The central Ratna, along with four smaller Ratnas at the corners of the temple, may have been influenced by the square minar or chhatri structure of medieval mosque architecture. The lower part or the first floor of these temples often resembles the flat or Chandni Dalan of the Gupta period or the Chala style of Bengal (Roy, 1999, p.34-36). Additionally, the architects incorporated features of Islamic architecture, such as domes in the central Ratna, conical pillars, arches, multiple entrances, lime-suki, and Muslim decorative styles.

The Aranyapur Pancharatna temple in the Cumilla region is an excellent example of the Ratna style. Although several vestiges of Pancharatna temples survive in West Bengal, few are found in Bangladesh. No previous books or research articles have focused on the Aranyapur Pancharatna temple before the current research. This temple is a classic example of the Pancharatna style, combining the previously discussed temple architecture with Islamic architectural styles. The temple is two-storied, with the first floor resembling a flat-roofed temple and the second floor containing the Ratnas. The central Ratna is located above the sanctum sanctorum on the first floor, featuring pendentive domes in an Islamic style, though its dome is not visible from the exterior. The central Ratna, along with the sanctum sanctorum, appears to be built in the Shikhara or Pidha Deul style on the outside and in the Islamic dome style on the inside, demonstrating the artist's skill. The cornices at the top of the Pidha Deul are plain, but the central Ratna of the Aranyapur Pancharatna temple features a curved cornice in the Chala style.

The temple's exterior incorporates architectural elements from ancient Shikhara or Pidha Deul and Chala styles of Bengal. The curved cornice and angular arched entrance surround the temple, reflecting the Chauchala and Islamic architectural styles of Bengal. Besides the central Ratna, the main temple, the sanctum sanctorum, and each arched entrance, along with the pillared arches of the circumambulatory path around the sanctum sanctorum, reflect Islamic architectural features. The temple also features various animal figures, lotus motifs, serpent motifs, and geometric designs reminiscent of Islamic architecture, particularly in the interior and exterior of the central Ratna.

This temple has some structural differences from other Pancharatna temples built in ancient Bengal, making it unique. Unlike other Pancharatna temples, typically square, this temple is built on an octagonal plan, possibly reflecting European influence. During colonial rule, temple construction in an octagonal plan began, though octagonal architectural plans were seen earlier in medieval Islamic tomb architecture (e.g., Sher Shah Suri's tomb at Sasaram). The proximity of the Seventeen Ratna Temple of Jagannathdeva (1761 AD), built in an octagonal plan with European influences, to this temple suggests European influence. Another unique feature of this temple is its octagonal sanctum sanctorum, in contrast to the square sanctum sanctorum of other temples. This consistency in the octagonal plan is evident in both the main temple and the sanctum sanctorum.

The arrangement of the Ratnas around the second floor of the temple shows a lack of coordination, with a Ratna in the southeast corner and asymmetry in the arrangement of the remaining four Ratnas. This may be due to the location of the stairs in the western wing, disrupting the coordination. Despite the sense of beauty in the construction and decoration of the temple's Ratnas, the lower part of the temple is built simply. Unlike other Pancharatna temples, such as the Shyamrai Pancharatna temple, which are richly decorated in Hindu style, the lower part of this temple features Islamic-style angular and semi-circular false arches, rectangular

Aranyapur Pancharatna Temple: A Study of Its Archaeological and Historical Significance in Cumilla, Bangladesh

panels, and pillar designs, possibly reflecting the economic status of the builder. This remarkable Pancharatna temple in Bangladesh is currently in a very dilapidated state. Much of the temple shows signs of damage, particularly the plaster on the lower part of the walls, which has fallen off. The growth of large and medium-sized plants has weakened the internal structure, and the enclosing wall of the second floor has almost completely collapsed. The decorative design at the peak of the central Ratna, both interior and exterior, is obscured.

13. CONCLUSION

The Aranyapur Pancharatna temple is one of the few surviving Pancharatna temples in Bangladesh. Due to the lack of proper conservation management and research, the temple is constantly at risk of destruction. The entire outer structure of the temple still stands, albeit with various signs of damage. Therefore, the temple should be brought under permanent conservation through appropriate measures. All stakeholders must play a supportive role in preserving the temple. It is essential for the temple to be declared a protected monument through effective management by the Department of Archaeology and the local administration. Proper preservation and presentation of the temple will significantly contribute to reconstructing the history of the Cumilla district and realizing its potential for tourism development. This, in turn, will open up new avenues for research into Pancharatna temples and archaeological studies in Bangladesh. Given its remote location, neither the Department of Archaeology nor researchers have extensive information about the Pancharatna temple in Aranyapur. Therefore, a comprehensive publication on the temple is necessary.

REFERENCES

- 1) Roy, A. (1999). *Banglar Mondir: Sthapatya o Bhaskarja* (1st ed.). Indrobhason Adhikari.
- 2) Basu, S. (2015). *Banglar Teracotta: Akhayan o Alankaran* (1st ed.). Ananda Publishers private Limited.
- 3) Hosen, M. (2006). *Hindhu Jain Buddhist Iconographic Description*. Dibby Prokash.
- 4) Dey, T.K. (2003). *Moth-Mondirer Kotha* (1st ed.). Faysal Arefin Dipon.
- 5) Sanyal, A. *The Evolution of Temple Architecture in Bengal* (Puralokbarta-ISSN 2319-7641).
- 6) Acharjee, A. (2017). Comparative Study of Nagara and Vesara/Chalukyan style of Temple Architecture. *Journal of People's History and Culture*, 2(1-2), p.1-2.
- 7) Guha, S.& Bandhayopadhyay, A. (2017). Teracotta Temples of Bengal: A Culmination of Pre-existing Architectural Styles. *The Chitrolekha Journal on Art and Design*, 1(1), p.46-48, 56-57. www.chitrolekha.com/ns/v1n1/v1n105.
- 8) Sarmin, F.& Tabassum, S. (2012). Archetypal Analysis of Regional-Religious styles for Temple of Dhaka City: Influenced by Indo-Islamic style. *International Journal of Engineering Research & Technology*, 1(9), p.1-5.
- 9) Manganonkar, P. (2012). Temples of Bengal: Material Style and Technological Evolution. *Chitrolekha International Magazine on Art and Design*, 2(1), p.5-8. www.chitrolekha.com/v2n1
- 10) Bilimoria, p. *Temple Architecture a Brief Overview and Its Symbolism*. <https://www.indian.heritage.org/temple/symbolism-purushottama>
- 11) Vardia, s. (2008). *Building Science of Indian Temple Architecture*. Master's Thesis, Universidade do Minho.
- 12) Akter, N.(2015, March 3). *Mondir Sthapatya*. *Banglapedia*. https://bn.banglapedia.org/index.php/%E0%A6%AE%E0%A6%A8%E0%A7%8D%E0%A6%A6%E0%A6%BF%E0%A6%B0_%E0%A6%B8%E0%A7%8D%E0%A6%A5%E0%A6%BE%E0%A6%AA%E0%A6%A4%E0%A7%8D%E0%A6%AF.



There is an Open Access article, distributed under the term of the Creative Commons Attribution – Non Commercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0) (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits remixing, adapting and building upon the work for non-commercial use, provided the original work is properly cited.