

# KASHMIR



## *The Places of Worship*



*Khir Bhawani Temple*

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# *Kashmir: The Places of Worship*

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## **1 Introduction**

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**The** happy valley of Kashmir is well known throughout the world for its Natural beauty. Here nature has been prodigal enough in crowning this ancient land with all its splendour and glory. Gulmarg, Pahalgam and Mughal gardens attract visitors from all over the world. Its lakes, green meadows, dancing and foaming streams, majestic forests full of fir and pine, snow-capped peaks are common attractions to the outsider as well as to the native.

Besides this, the valley being sacred and called Rishi wari till now, abounds in sacred places, Tirthas and Asthans. Long ago at the dawn of civilisation when the sons of Rishi Kashyapa from plains came to settle here they brought with them their traditions, religion, mythology etc. etc. These early settlers named the confluence of river Sindh and river Jhelum as Prayag, equal to holy Prayag at the confluence of the Ganga and the Jamna in India. They named the tallest mountain peaks here after their Gods and deities such as Brahma, Vishnoo and Mahadev. These settlers must have felt surprised to see the hide and seek of water in the Spring of Trisandya; melting of snow around the spring of Bedaba Devi and other marvellous places. With the passage of time, these places became Tirthas or places of worship and has continued so upto the present time. The tradition being like this R. L. Stein who has translated Rajatarangini into English writes, "Kashmir is a country where there is not a place as large as a grain of seasam without a Tirtha. Time and conversion to Islam of greater portion of population has changed but little in this respect. " Pandit Kalhana while writing introduction to Rajatarangini names the miraculous springs of Trisandya Saraswati lake on the Bheda hillock, Self created fire at Soyambhu etc. etc. "

## **2 Some Marvels of Kashmir**

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**Prof. C. L. Sadhu**

The happy valley of Kashmir is well known throughout the world for its Natural beauty. Here nature has been prodigal enough in crowning this ancient land with all its splendour and glory. Gulmarg, Pahalgam and Mughal gardens attract visitors from all over the world. Its lakes, green meadows, dancing and foaming streams, majestic forests full of fir and pine, snow-capped peaks are common attractions to the outsider as well as to the native.

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In this small article I have made a humble effort to sift and choose certain marvels and wonders shrouded by myth and mystery, hidden and lying in oblivion from the eyes of the outsider. I have made an effort as to what is myth, heresay and what is real. These wondrous, now as Tirthas ( places of pilgrimage ) have been verified by me personally. These wonders consist in the shape of springs, temples, caves, boulders, and other things which lie scattered throughout the length and breadth of the valley.

I have not included such things which lack corroboration and verification. For example in the vale of Sonamarg people refer to a cow carved out of a rock and from whose uddersmilk-white water issues forth. The locals also claim a couple, of waters lying transformed into stone far up in the Jungle. I have also excluded such objects where people seem to have exaggerated things such as Nakwaribal in the village of Seer Kanligund on way to Pahalgam. They claim that a stone-head lying on an allevation gives out water by right Nostril during the bright fortnight and by left Nostril during the dark lunar fort- night. Nakwar in Kashmir means Nostrils and therefore the name Nakwaribal. On verification I found it simply false, though the stone head, with Nostrils exists near the villages.

### **2.1 The Holy Spring At Tullamulla ( Kheir Bhawani )**

#### ***Its water changes colour***

One marvel of Kashmir is the mysterious holy spring of Kheir Bhawani which is widely known to change its colour from time to time. It is towards the north of Srinagar at a distance of about 14 km. and can be reached within an hour by bus.

Before we enter the main islet to have Darshana of the holy spring of Bhawani we come across two important sites - one is Ziarat of Mir Baba Haider (a Muslim saint) and the other is the Samadhi of Shri Labhu Shah, a saint who lived some 150 years ago in Kashmir.

The main spring dedicated to Goddess Kheir Bhawani has an irregular septagonal shape with its apex called Pad ( feet ) to the East. The northern and the southern sides are longer than the western side which is called Shir (Head). In the centre of the holy spring where once stood a mulberry tree, there is one marble temple which enshrines some idols found at the time of cleansing the spring. In January 1970 an electric pump was installed to conduct the cleansing operation of the spring. Besides removal of mud and mire which had accumulated since long at the bottom of the spring a number of gold ornaments and silver

pieces offered to the Goddess were recovered. As a result of the silt clearance a huge volume of milky white water bubbled out. During recent times regular clearance is being made after each festival when huge quantities of flowers, lotuses, mentha sylvestries (Vena) offered by devotees collect at the surface of the holy spring.

The water of the Spring changes its colour from time to time. It takes on various hues like red, pink, orange, green, blue and has often light green, red rosy and milky white shades. Abul Fazal in 16th century and Swami Vivekananda in the year 1894 have testified this fact. Any shade of black colour is supposed to be inauspicious for the inhabitants of the valley. This colour was prominent in the year 1947 when the Pakistani raiders attacked the peaceful valley. Many times rising of bubbles has been observed which form the mystic Chakra on the surface of the water. In my infancy I had a strange experience here. An outstretched hand from the holy spring offered me a beautiful pen in a dream. In the morning when I woke up I found the same pen under my pillow which I retained for many years with me as a sacred relic of the Divine Mother. Such a sacred and mysterious spring is found nowhere else in India. The people living round the holy spring have great veneration for the holy shrine. A Hindu or a Muslim will not enter the premises of the holy spring if he happens to have taken meat on the day. In 1947 when the Pakistani marauders attacked the valley the local Muslims led them astray to save the shrine from their unholy hands.

Various legends and stories are current among the people regarding the holy spring. One such legend is that when Ravana was killed at the hands of Bagwan Rama the Goddess Bhawani ordered Hanuman to carry her to Satisar-Kashmir along with 360 Nagas. Hanuman selected the site and installed the Goddess in the Northern part of the valley. She came to be known as Kheir Bhawani or Ragyna Bhagwati as her favourite offerings consist of rice cooked in milk and sugar, and all other vegetarian forms of diet.

How did the existence of the holy spring come to light among the people ? It is related that one pious Brahmin named Krishna Pandit of Habba Kadal in Srinagar had a vision wherein he was informed by a Deva to offer Puja to Kheir Bhawani in the swamps of Tullamulla. How shall I locate the Goddess and her holy abode was the query on behalf of the saintly Brahmin. Thereupon he was asked to hire a boat at Shadipora wherefrom a snake would guide him to the destination. Krishna Pandit did the same and was extremely happy when the snake guided him through the swampy and marshy land, until he reached the hollow trunk of a mulberry tree. The snake made a dip and disappeared from sight. The saint took the clue and after performing Pujā poured milk which he had brought for this purpose. It is thus that the holy spring was discovered and was known to Kashmiris. It is believed that the discovery of the holy spring has been made on Ashadha Saptami, the 7th day of the bright fortnight of the month of June-July. Kashmiri Hindus come here on every Ashtami - 8th day of the bright fortnight of each lunar month and majority of Kashmiri Hindus consider Kheir Bhawani as their guardian Goddess.

Such is the brief history of the holy spring, the abode of Goddess Kheir Bhawani which has been eulogized by a poet in the following words:

"I make obeisance to that one Goddess, who having taken the position of the supreme God is the Queen in reality, whose form is made of light and is adorned by the lustre of 12 suns who cannot be observed through senses, who is seated on a throne and is wrapped with serpents ."

## ***2.2 The Cave At Beerwa***

To the south of Gulmarg there is a village known as Beerwa which is the tehsil headquarters of the surrounding area. The village is flanked by a mountain range on its southern side. At the eastern super of this mountain is located the celebrated cave connected with life of Acharya Abinav Gupta, the greatest Shiva philoopher of Kashmir. The Acharya was called Bairwa meaning the fairless one. The village comes to be known after this title of Bairwa and has now become Beerwa.

The celebrated cave is located at the height of nearly 300 meter on the super of the ridge overlooking the crescent shaped narrow valley of evergreen Jungles with a Sukh Nag Nalla flowing through it.

One Haji Mohd. Sultan Dar ( 75 years ) who guided me up to the cave said " Hindus used to assemble here upto year 1947 on the 12th day of the bright fortnight of the month corresponding to the month of June. In 1947 the valley was attacked by Pakistani raiders and so the tirtha was given up for security reasons. Since then a Government employee or some research scholar is seen occasionally visiting the cave."

The entrance of the cave is like a rectangular room where some 8 or 10 persons can accommodate themselves. Going further, the cave begins to narrow and opens to another smaller room where a stone Shiva lingam is visible. One can go further sideways but nobody proceeds further because of darkness and narrowness of the passage. On right and left vermilion covered rocks-adds can be seen.

Nearly one thousand years ago Acharya Abhinav Gupta who flourished at the beginning of the 11th century A. D. and is the exponent of Kashmir Shivaism known as Trika, entered this cave. The locals and the Hindus in the valley hold the legend that the Acharya entered the cave with 1200 disciples following him. None of them returned. Even at present while offering prayers, the Kashmiri Hindus recite the same prayers which the Acharya and his followers recited while entering the cave. It is believed that they entered Shivaloka in their earthly bodies through the cave. It is since then that the cave is held in great veneration by the Hindus of the valley and till recently it was the place of annual pilgrimage.

### ***2.3 Shankerun Pal or Boulder of Lord Shiva***

On the way to Mahadeva the pilgrims leaving Harwan behind, come across a huge boulder which they shower with flowers as token of reverence. This huge boulder is known as Shankerun Pal meaning the boulder of Lord Shiva.

In Shivsutra Vimershima, it is recorded that sage Vasugupta - the founder of Shiva philosophy of Kashmir - lived in Harvan in a hermitage. One night he saw lord Shiva in a dream who seemed moved with compassion at Vasuguptas helplessness in arguing before Buddhistic scholars. To enlighten him the Lord disclosed to the sage, the existence of a rock on which some sacred Shiv Sutras were inscribed. Vasugupta was further directed to proceed on spot early before sun rise, when by his mere touch, the rock would overturn by itself and expose four Shiv Sutras to him which he should learn and teach to worthy pupils. The huge boulder with almost smooth surface is still pointed out as one on which the sage Vasugupta found the inscription.

At present there is no trace of any inscription on it, and it is believed that the boulder over turned after the inscriptions were copied by Vasugupta. According to Kshemendra the very sutras became the foundation of Advaita Shaivism of Kashmir known as Trika.

### ***2.4 Budbrari Or Bada Devi Spring***

*Where snow does not fall within a radius of 350 ft.*

Towards the south of village Kellar, high up in the small valley of Birnai Nallah which connects Drubgam by a direct route with the Pir Panchal pass of the old Moghul Road, there is a stone lined spring bubbling with milky water. It is situated on a hillock with low-lying area on all sides and so is free from mountain torrents. It is 7800 ft. above thesea level in the Romeshi Forest Range. Snow does not fall within 125 Hastas a radius of 350 ft. from the spring. The holy spring is square shaped and in measurement is 50 ft square. The water is milky white and is shallow near the banks. The source of the water is in the centre and is very deep, so much so that once a buffalo got swallowed there leaving no trace behind. Because of this incident shepherds do not let their cattle stray near the holy spring which accounts for the clean and tidy premises of the fount. The spring is full of water through out the year. It has a beautiful forest full of fir and pine for its background. While going up to reach the holy spring from Keller one comes across a small hamlet known as Shukroo. From the hamlet upto the sacred spring a number of mounds can be seen under which bricks lie buried which show that long ago thereexisted some human habitation near the holy spring. Some three chains away from the sacred spring there is a small waterfall which emits a sulphuric smell. The local gojars told me that patients suffering from rheumatism and skin diseases get relieved by having a bath in this water. Lime is also found buried here and there. There are no idols nor any ruins of

any temple here except a boulder on which Shiva Lingas are carved. The sacred spring must have been a very popular Tirtha in the Kashmir Valley. Kalhana in his Rajatarangini writes: "There the Goddess Saraswati was believed to have shown herself as a swan in a lake situated on the summit of the hill ". Though in the present era it is forgotten by people, the old Mahatmya of the sacred lake has survived and Shri.M. A. Stein who visited the Valley in 1890-95 and has translated Rajatarangini into English has identified the site known at present as Budbrari. At the end of 16th century when Hindus still made pilgrimage to the Tirtha, Abu Fazal has recorded; "Near Shukroo is a low hill on the summit of which is a fountain, which flows throughout the year, is a place of pilgrimage for the devout. The snow does not fall on this spur."

It is related that in ancient times Rishi Pulastya performed long penance here and made the holy Ganga push forth near Ashram. He further craved for a boon that it may rest forever by his side which was granted. It is thus that Ganga Behda Tirtha got created. The Goddess Saraswati (Goddess of speech ) appeared to him in the shape of a swan which the Rishi worshipped on the 8th and 9th of the bright fortnight of Chitra of each year. Ever since the Goddess Saraswati has been receiving worship at the Ganga Behda Tirtha. Nilmat Purana recounts the Tirtha as Ganga Behda and is included in the list of Tirthas mentioned in the epic of Mahabharat. This establishes the antiquity of the Tirtha.

I visited this holy Fount in Oct. 1976. From Srinagar via Pulwama regular bus service is available upto village Keller wherefrom one is to cover a distance of 9 km. either on horseback or on foot. The enchanting scenery, the green meadows with Nallah Birnai flowing at the foot of the hillock, the spring bubbling with milky white water is a thing to be ever remembered. The site if connected to a pucca road from Keller Masapora will prove the greatest attraction for tourists and will provide means of livelihood for poor Gujjars who inhabit the neighbourhood of the sacred spot popularly known as Bujbrari.

## *2.5 The Chinar of Prayag*

### *Which Neither Grows Nor Decays With Time*

Early settlers in Kashmir named their new places of settlement after the names which they cherished most in India. Such a place is Prayag at Shadipur, situated at a distance of 18 km. in the north west of Srinagar city. It is situated at the confluence of the river Sindhu and the river Vitasta, similarly as Prayag in India stands at the confluence of the river Yamuna and the river Ganga. The place has enjoyed exceptional sanctity as a Tirtha since times immemorial. Here, as a Prayag in India, Hindus immerse the sacred ashes of their deceased relatives. Opposite to Shadipur village once there stood a temple dedicated to Lord Vishnu.

At the confluence of the river Sindhu and the river Vitasta there is a small island built of solid masonry on which an old chinar stands, which shelters a few idols and statues. The chinar neither grows in size nor decays with time. It has taken the place of the famous Ficus Indica. There is a popular legend among people here that the island rises when the rivers get swollen with flood waters so as rising tides cannot touch the Chinar. The Chinar has found its place in the vocabulary of Kashmiri dialect and is referred to when the size of a boy or a girl is found stunted !

## *2.6 Kah-Kah-Pal*

### *The stone which rises up when persons numbering 11 touch it with their index fingers*

At a distance of 32 km. towards the south of Srinagar city on the National Highway there is a town-Bijbehra on the left bank of the River Jhelum. At the southern tip of the town there is a massive stone temple dedicated to Lord Shiva. In the compound of the same temple there is a conch shaped stone tapering at one end which is popularly known as Kah-Kah-Pal. The stone does not weigh more than 60 kilos or more and one adult person can move it from side to side.

The marvel of the stone gets apparent when 11 persons encircle it, and apply their 11 index fingers to the base of the stone. While repeating Kah-Kah ( eleven-eleven ) the stone gets lifted above the ground. The stone is popularly know as Kah-Kah-Pal which in Kashmiri means the digit eleven. The stone is in the

custody of the pujari of the temple. Many stories and legends about the stone are attributable to it. For example it is related that once it was thrown into the river and next day it reappeared on the bank of the river. I have dismissed such legends as mere heresay.

### **2.7 Takshak Nag**

At a distance of 10 km, towards the east of Srinagar city there is a village known at present as Zewan. The spring known Takshak Nag is situated in this village. It is said that saffron has originated from the spring and that its cultivation has spread in its neighbourhood. It is related that the Lord of the Spring offered Hakim Waga Bhat, the saffron bulbs as a token of reward for curing his eye ailment.

Bilhan the great Sanskrit poet who flourished in 11th century and was born at Khunmoh ( a village at a distance of 5 km. towards the east of Zewan ). He described the spring as "A pool filled with pure water sacred to Takshak the Lord of snakes ", Abdul Fazal records the facts that this spring is held to be the place wherefrom saffron originated and flourished in the neighbourhood.

In the time of Akbar, the cultivators worshipped at the spring at the beginning of each spring season. To get successful crops it was customary to pour cow's milk in it. As a local divinity Takshak Naga retained sanctity and importance for long with cultivators. Pilgrims when on their way to Harishwar cave offer Puja at the spring on the twelfth of the dark fortnight of Jeth corresponding to the month of June.

Where relating the story of Chander lekha-the beautiful Naga damsel-the great poet Historian, Kalhana mentions the name of the spring in the Rajatarangini as a place of pilgrimage. The inclusion of the spring as a Tirtha in the list of Tirthas recorded in Mahabharata signifies its antiquity.

At present the spring stands intact with embankments of chiselled stones full of pure and sweet water. The spring measures 50' x 50' and has depth of 3'. The water source is in the North east corner of the spring.

### **2.8 Lal Trag at Pampore**

In the South of Srinagar at a short distance there is a small town as Pampore, at present famous for saffron cultivation. In the centre of this town there is a pond measuring 50' x 250' with varying depths of 2' to 5'. It is known as Lal Trag. The pond is held in great reverence by Hindus as well as Muslims of the locality, since the tank happens to be connected with an important event in the life of Laleshwari popularly known as Lal Ded in the valley.

Laleshwari flourished in the 14th century. She sang of divine love, tolerance, secularism and universal brotherhood when Persia lay prostrate under conquering feet of Timrlane and Black Death hovered over the British islands. The great mystic poetess chose the common man's language for expression of her subtle spiritual ideas. She was the harbinger of new patriotic awakening and laid the foundation of Kashmiri song and poetry. Her couplets are so popular even at present times that a Kashmiri gets spell-bound when he hears some village minstrel singing them for some audience.

Lal Ded was born at village Sempore in the year 1317 A. D. and was married at Pampore. Her married life was most unhappy. She had initiation from her spiritual Guru known as Sedu Mole as the practice in vogue at that time. Her mother-in-law at the time of serving meals would keep a round stone in the dish and cover it with a little of boiled rice for Laleshwari. She was subjected to this mal-treatment of near starvation for not less than 12 years, untill her father-in-law came to know about it. Her husband under the provocation of his mother would always find fault with his saintly wife. One day when Lal Ded returned from the river with one earthen pitcher full of water on her shoulder, her husband hurled a stone on the pitcher which broke into pieces and fell on the ground. To the amazement and horror of mother and son, the water remained intact like a frozen piece on the shoulder of Lal Ded. Instantly all the empty pots got filled with water and the rest of the water was thrown away from the window on to the ground where it assumed the form of a pond and is existing there till today. The tank became known as Lal Trag. The fame of the miracle spread like wild fire in the valley and Lal Ded began to shine like a pole star over the spiritual firmament of the Kashmir Valley.

Among Hindus of Pampore, on a marriage ceremony the bridegroom offers Puja at the tank before he enters the house of the bride. Muslims pour cow's milk into it as a token of respect. Some locals bathe

their children in order to cure them of scabbies and other skin diseases. The elders in the locality saw that the tank never get dried even when the valley happened to be in the grip of severe drought. This holy pond is in dire need of repairs and renovations because of its national importance in the valley. Such is the legend of Lal Trag at Pampore.

## **2.9 Harmukh**

Towards North-East of Srinagar city there stands one conspicuous hoary headed mountain overlooking the Gangabal Lake. It is known as Harmukh meaning thereby that the peak appears same from all sides. It is situated at an elevation of 16890ft. The reverence which ancient Greeks had for Olympus, the Kashmiris have for Harmukh since they believe that on its top is the abode of Lord Shiva. Shamus-Faqir a well known Kashmiri poet in one of the songs says, "Thou knower of truth if you want to see Him face to face you can see Him at Harmukh."

Sir Walter Lawrence, the Settlement Commissioner of J & K State, has recorded about 100 years ago in his book "Valley of Kashmir" that Kashmiris in general believe that there is a mine of jewels and rubies in Harmukh. The inhabitants of the valley believe that wherever the Harmukh peak is visible in the Valley, the serpents of the place happen to be quite harmless, and on the other hand, the peak is not visible the serpents of the locality are poisonous and their bites are fatal. In Illaqa Pulwama where the peak is visible the snakes are quite harmless and at village Lar where it is invisible the serpents are poisonous.

At the foot of Harmukh there is one beautiful lake known as Gangabal Lake. In the month of September corresponding to the bright fortnight of Bahadun, Kashmiri Pandits immerse the urns (ashes) of their dead relatives in this lake after performing their Shraddha. No sooner are the ashes cast in the crystal clear water of the lake, than swarms of small red worms appear on the surface and render the water unfit for drinking purposes. The pilgrims know it, and therefore, cook their meals before casting ashes in the lake.

Long ago some pilgrims gave me to understand that they saw a small channel with mercury flowing down the mountain side into the lake. Having no container with them they collected a little quantity of the same in a dried piece of cowdung. On reaching their destination they found the mercury slipped down somewhere on their way back.

Once a hermit tried to reach the summit of the Harmukh to see Lord Shiva face to face. For twelve years long he tried to scale the summit, but failed until one day he saw a gojar descending the summit. When the gojar approached him, the hermit enquired as to what he saw there. The gojar whose goat had strayed and for whom he had been searching, said that he saw a couple milking a cow and drinking the same in a human skull. They had offered some milk to him, which he refused to drink and when they departed they rubbed a little of the milk on his forehead. As the gojar indicated the spot on his forehead where the milk was rubbed, the hermit was extremely joyful and rushed to lick his forehead. It is said that the hermit got Nirvana and disappeared from the place, to the entire surprise of the gojar. The legend is known as Hurmukhuk Gosoni.



### 3 Pilgrim Spots of Kashmir

#### Prof. Chaman Lal Sapru

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**Sanskrit** Shloka says that almost all the pilgrimages of the World are also found in Kashmir, such as the holy Ganga and the Prayaga.

Every Hindu considers it his duty to immerse the ashes of his deceased ancestors in the Ganga. In Kashmir we give the same preference to Gangabal as is given to the Ganga in holy scriptures. The same is true about the prayaga at Allahabad where the Ganga, the Yamuna and the invisible Saraswati meet and our Prayaga at Shadipur which is the 'Sangam' of Kashmir's two important rivers the Vitasta, and the Sindhu. Every Hindu who offers prayers according to Sanatana traditions, worships God in the form of PANCHAYATAN. The Panchayatan comprises the following deities-Ganesha, Shiva, Vishnu, Devi and Surya. We have temples and Teerthas attributed to the above mentioned gods and also dedicated to Avatar like Shri Rama.

#### 3.1 GANESHA

Ganesha is worshipped as the Aadi Deva (The First Deity). Ganesha is the son of Sankara or Shiva. Every Hindu starts his worship with obeisance to Lord Ganesha. Ganesha is considered as the Siddhidata (the, boon-giver) and Vighnaharta (destroyer of obstacles). In Srinagar we have a prominent temple of Ganesha in the heart of the city. The temple previously under the management of the Dharmarth Trust, is now managed by a local managing committee. An annual festival on Vaisakha Shukla Chaturdashi is held in the premises of the temple and a Mahayajna by the Brahman Maha Mandal is performed on the Brahma Jayanti day. There is a legend that during the atrocities committed by Pathan rulers, several hundred years back, the original idol of Lord Ganesha was submerged in the Vitasta by the Pandits to save it from desecration. During the Dogra rule the idol was reclaimed by the devotees and installed on the Vaisaka Shukla Chaturdashi in the temple.

This particular idol is placed in the outer temple by the side of the Siva Lingam and two bigger and more attractive idols, most probably donated by Dogra rulers, are also installed in the main temple.

There is another important temple of Lord Ganesha at the foot of the hillock of Hari Parbat which every Hindu considers it his sacred duty to go round every day. Lord Ganesha's temple is the first amongst the shrines strewn on this hillock.

Even the holy pilgrimage to Sri Amarnathji starts with the worship of Sri Ganesha at Ganeshabal near Pahalgam.

#### 3.2 SANKARA OR SIVA

There is hardly any place of Worship in Kashmir, where you will not find a Siva Lingam. In the world-famous cave of SWAMI AMARNATHJI an ice Lingam is formed to full size on the fifteenth of the bright half of every month, (Poornima), hence is of reverential attraction to the devotees of all faiths. This holy place is visited on the Shravana Poornima every year by thousands of pilgrims from far off places. The Pilgrimage starts from the Dashnami Akhara of Srinagar in the form of a procession. The Mahant carries the holy silver mace of Lord Siva and is followed by hundreds of Sadhus reaching the cave on the Shravana Poornima, which coincides with Raksha-Bandhan.

People like Aadi Shankaracharya, Swami Vivekananda and Swami Ramtirtha have visited this place. Swami Ramtirtha has composed beautiful verses in praise of the mysteries of the Lord. Swami Vivekananda says to his European disciples, "The image was the Lord Himself. It was all worship there. I never have been to anything so beautiful, so inspiring.

### **3.3 SANKARACHARYA TEMPLE**

A beautiful stone-temple of Lord Shiva is situated on a hill in the Srinagar city commanding a magnificent view. The temple is managed by the Dharmartha Trust. It is believed that the first Sankaracharya on his visit to Srinagar, meditated on this spot. Swami Vivekananda has given the following description of the temple:- "Look ! what genius the Hindu shows in placing his temples ! He always chooses a grand scenic effect. See ! the temple commands the whole of Kashmir."

The snow-clad peaks round the valley bear one or the other name of Lord Shiva You have "Mahadeva", "Harmukha", etc. Under the Mahadeva peak in the picturesque range of Harwan, the famous Siva-Sutras (the base of Shaiva Philosophy) were composed. Devotees visit this place particularly on the same day on which the pilgrimage to Amarnathji is undertaken. They also visit the following places of worship connected with Shiva on the same day. Dhyaneswar in Bandipur, Thajwor in Bijbehara and Harishwar in Khonmoh.

There are numerous temples of Shiva in the whole valley. Sadashiva temple in Purushyar and Someshwar temple in Habba- Kadal find the description in the famous histories and Puranas of Kashmir.

### **3.4 THE VISHNU PADA**

The only holy place connected with Lord Vishnu in Kashmir is Vishnu-Pads or Kaunsar Naga. This is a big lake situated at a height of more than 14,000 feet in Anantnag district. The lake is shaped as a foot and it is believed that Lord Vishnu had placed his holy foot in the place where the present big lake was formed.

### **3.5 THE DEVI (DIVINE MOTHER)**

We have numerous places of pilgrimages attributed to the Goddess in Kashmir of which the Kheer Bhawani, Shri Sharika Mandir, Mahakali Mandir ( Srinagar and Vadora ), Jwala Mukhi ( Khrew ), Shailaputri (Nagabal, Baramulla), Baladevi, Sri Vaishnodevi and Sarthal Devi (last two in Jammu region) are well known.

### **3.6 KSHEER BHAWANI**

The temple of Goddess Maharajni, known as Ksheer-Bhawani, is situated about 14 miles away from Srinagar at village Tulamula in the famous Sindh valley. The road leading to Ksheer Bhawani has also spiritual significance. J. Krishna Murti in his booklet "At the feet of the Master" writes about the following four "Sadhanas" to achieve realization. They are Viveka (Discrimination), Vairagya (renunciation), Sadachar (righteousness) and Prema or Mumukshaa (the eternal love). While going to Ksheer Bhawani one comes across the places bearing the same name. First we reach 'Vicharnaga.' Vichar is synonym of 'Viveka'. Then we reach 'Tyangal-bal' (the hill of burning charcoals) and Kavaj-var (the fire of cremation ground) and Amarher (the immortal staircase). These two names also denote the feeling of renunciation. The third place is Aanchar Lake, which derives its origin from Aachar (the righteousness). After going through these places we reach the cherished destination, the holy place of the Divine Mother and one is all love pure and divine with the Divine Mother.

An old Sanskrit text called the 'Bringesha Samhita' carries a chapter known as 'Rajny-Pradurbhava' and the Pauranic description of the said Teertha is given in the said book. The demon-king of Lanka (Ravana) in order to attain unlimited power worshipped Mother Maharajni. The Divine Mother, after being moved by the immense 'tapas' (penance) performed by Ravana, bestowed upon him many boons.

Soon after, Ravana began to lead a life of luxury and after forcibly taking away Sita, prepared himself for a battle with Lord Rama. After watching the misbehaviour of Ravana, the Devi asked Hanumana to take Her to Satisar (Kashmir) along with 360 Nagas.

Hanumanji installed the Devi at Tulamula village in Kashmir Valley. Here the Devi is being remembered as 'Ksheer-Bhawani' or Goddess Rajna. The Devi began to be worshiped with flowers and offerings of milk and sweets only.

The Brahmins of Tulamula have been described in Rajatarangini as full with spiritual powers.

For quite some time in the past this important Teertha remained under flood waters and it was only after a pious Brahmin Shri Krishna Pandit had a vision that the place was rediscovered. He was a great devotee of the Devi and composed the famous Rajna Stotra.

A beautiful marble temple has been erected in the centre of the 'Kunda' (spring) by Dogra rulers. This spring changes colours and is shaped as "OM" in Sharada script. Every year an annual festival is held on Jyeshtha Shukla Ashtami at this holy place. Swami Vivekananda and many others have performed Tapas at this holy place and had visions.

### **3.7 SUN TEMPLE AT MARTAND**

Only five miles away from the town of Anantnag is a village known as Mattan or Bhawan. In ancient scriptures the name of this place is given as Martand (the sun). Here is a beautiful spring and a small rivulet flowing nearby known as the Chaka. On the banks of the Chaka thousands of devotees; from northern India perform Shradhas to their deceased ancestors on Adhikmasa months on Vijaya Saptami. About 2.5 km. from the spring are ruins of a magnificent temple known as Martand. The temple in Indo-Greek architectural style was built by the great emperor Lalitaditya.

### **3.8 OTHER SHRINES**

The two prominent places of pilgrimages of Muslims and Sikhs are Hazratbal and Chhatipadshahi. The Hazratbal shrine on the Dal lake facing east is known as the second Mecca. The holy relic of Prophet Muhammad is preserved here. The Chhati Padshahi is a Gurdwara near Hari Parbat which had been visited by the sixth Guru of the Sikhs.

Besides the above mentioned places of pilgrimages there are hundreds of holy places found in Kashmir. A brief description of these places is given below:

### **3.9 DISTRICT ANANTNAG**

#### **AMARNATH**

This is the holy cave in which the ice-lingam of Lord Siva is formed changing its size with the waning and waxing of the moon.

#### **VETHA – VATUR**

(Vitasta-tatra) : Here is the source of river Vitasta. Annual pilgrimage to this place is performed on the thirteenth day of the dark half of the Bhadra month.

#### **KHANA BARNI**

Dedicated to Divine mother, it is near Qazigund.

#### **KAPAL MOCHAN**

Annual festival on Sravana Shukla Dwadashi is held here and devotees perform shradha of teenagers. It is situated near Shopian.

#### **MANZGAM**

A temple in the forests is dedicated to Mother Rajna. Annual festival is held on Jyeshtha Ashtami.

### **3.10 PROPER ANANTNAG**

A holy spring after which the town as well as the district is named is famous for its crystal clear water. Annual festival of Ananta Devata is held on the fourteenth day of the dark half of Bhadra month.

#### **THAJIWORE**

It is situated near Bijbihara. An old Shiva temple is found here and the annual festival is held on Sravana Poornima.

#### **GAUTAMA NAGA**

It is situated about 4.5 kms. away from Anantnag.

#### **LOKABHAWAN**

Annual festival is held here and a Mahayajna performed. It is 11 miles from Anantnag.

### **UMA NAGARI**

A temple and a spring of Goddess Uma is found here. Annual Mahayajna is performed here.

### **NAGADANDI**

Sri Ramakrishna Maha sammelan managed by Vivekananda Rock Memorial Committee Kanyakumari, is situated here. An ancient spring and a few idols of some ancient temple are found here. Annual festival is held here on the day Chhari (Amarnath Yatra) starts. It is 3 km. away from Achhabal.

### **GOSAYEEN GOND**

An attractive neat and clean Ashram is found here. During Amarnath Yatra a number of devotees visit this Ashrama and stay and mediate for a few days.

### **VISHNU PAD**

Known also as Kaunsarnaga. It is about 14 miles away from Aharbal fall. It is a hazardous journey.

### **JWALA MUKHI**

This Teertha attributed to Goddess Jwala is situated about 20 kms. from Srinagar in Anantnag district. A temple of Jawalaji is situated on a hillock there. Annual festival is held on "Jwala Chaturdasi" (fourteen day of the dark second half of Asharh).

### **KURUKSHETRA**

It is near Pampore (famous for saffron, where famous mystic Poetess Lalleshwari or Lal ded lived). Festivals are held here on the occasions of solar and lunar eclipses.

### **BALADEVI**

This famous Teertha is attributed to Bala Bhagwati. She is considered to be the 'Istadevi' (presiding deity) of the Dogra rulers, hence the Teertha is managed by the Dharmarth Trust. This place of pilgrimage is situated in Balahama near Pampur.

## **3.11 DISTRICT BARAMULLA**

### **KOTI TEERTHA**

It is situated on the right bank of the Vitasta at Baramulla. It is believed that the holy water of one crore of teerthas reaches here through Vitasta and therefore is very sacred.

### **SHAILAPUTRI (Devibal)**

This Teertha is situated on the left bank of the Vitasta at Baramulla. This is a miniature Ksheer-Bhawani.

### **NANDKESHWAR (Seer-Jagir)**

A famous place of Nandakeshwar Bhairava situated on the left bank of the Vitasta at Sopore. The annual festival is held on Jyeshtha Amavasya here.

### **NANDKESAWAR (Sumbal)**

A place for worship of Nandakeshwar Bhairava situated in Sumbal village. **GOPHABAL:** Situated near Langet, Handwara.

### **BHADRAKALI**

The Teertha attributed to Goddess Kali is situated in a thick pine forest near Vadipora (Handwara).

### **TAKAR (Gushi)**

Situated near Kupwara this teertha attributed to the Divine Mother (Maharajna) is found here.

### **CHANDIGAM**

Situated in the picturesque valley of Lolab in Sogam, a Niranjani Akhara is established here.

### **GOSAYEEN TENG**

Situated on a hillock at Baramulla. Some springs attributed to Bhagwan Ramchandra are found here.

### **SHARADA JI**

It (now in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir) is situated on the bank of Kishanganga famous throughout the country before partition. This is considered as a "Siddha Peetha" like Sharika Chakreshwar temple at Hari Parbat. It was a place of learning also and students as well as scholars from far off places used to come here. Some monuments still exist there.

Sharda can be approached via Hoaihama (Kupwara) through the Safawali Gali which leads to Lashadut and from Laderwan (also in Kupwara) via Patukha Gali which leads to Shalabhothu. Both Lashadut and Shalabhothu are on the LOC. The Safawali route is comparatively easier.

Across the LOC, Pakistan has constructed a pucca, metalled vehicular road on the right bank of the Kishenganga. A regular passenger bus service plies thereon. The bus plying on the road belongs to the Abbotabad Kashmir Bus Service.

One can go to Sharda by either these routes or from Muzaffarabad or Teetwal which have bridges strong enough for carrying vehicles across the river. The journey by bus would obviously be comfortable. But then the bridges and the whole of the vehicular road are in Pakistan. So undertaking the journey is dependent upon a request being made to Pakistan by India and upon Pakistan granting the necessary permission.

Source: **SaffronValley.com**

### **3.12 DISTRICT SRINAGAR**

#### **SHANKARACHARYA**

A beautiful Shiva temple exists on the hillock called Shankaracharya hill. Annual festival on the day of Amarnath Darshan is held here.

#### **HARI PARBAT**

A hillock in Srinagar city, it has many temples around it. The main temple is of Goddess Sharika, the presiding deity of Kashmir. Annual festival on the first Navratra & Ashadh Navami is held here. This is considered as a 'Siddha Peetha'.

#### **KSHEERABHAWANI**

Twenty kilometres away from Srinagar a spring in which a temple is constructed dedicated to Mother Rajna. Annual festival held on Jyeshtha Ashtami.

#### **GANGABAL**

A lake situated near Harmakh peak is the most beautiful lake of Kashmir. Annual Yatra is held on the Ganga Ashtami in Bhadra month. People immerse the ashes of their deceased there and also perform Shradha. The journey is most hazardous but much rewarding.

#### **GUPTAGANGA (Nishat)**

Just adjacent to Nishat garden is situated the GuptaGanga. On the Baishakhi festival devotees from all over Kashmir have a dip in the spring here. A Shaiva Mathika is also attached to it where Sunday classes on Shaivism were conducted by Shaivacharya Swami Lakshman Joo.

#### **JYESHTESHWARA**

A temple attributed to Jyeshtha Devi is located in between Shankaracharya and Chasma Shahi. A pilgrimage to this place on Thursdays of Jyeshtha is considered auspicious.

#### **GANGAJATAN**

Situated in tehsil Badgam; on Ganga Ashtami day people go there and have a dip there. It is almost a dry spring but on this particular day at a particular hour water gushes out and devotees have their holy bath.

#### **BADIPUR**

Situated in tehsil Chadura near Nagam, it is a miniature Ksheer Bhawani. Annual Mahayajna on Vaishakha Shukla Ashtami is held here.

### **MAHAKALI ASTHAPAN**

Situated by the side of famous Khanaqah of Shah Hamdan; it is believed that a magnificent temple of Mahakali existed here. The annual festival is held here on Pausa Krishan Paksha Ashtami.

### **VASKUR**

Dedicated to a mystic poetess Roopa Bhawani, considered to be an incarnation of Goddess Sharika; Annual festival is held here on Sahib-Saptami.

### **VICHAR NAG**

Situated on Srinagar-Leh Highway at a distance of about 10 kms from Srinagar, the annual festival is held on the last day of the Kashmiri calender i. e. Chaitra Amavasya. The famous Kashmiri Pandit-Shirya Bhat-responsible for the change of heart of Sultan Zainulabidin, later known as Budshah (the Great Monarch), also lived here.

### **3.13 JAMMU**

#### **VAISHNO DEVI**

It is as famous as Amarnathji or Ktheer-Bhawani in Kashmir. Thousands of Pilgrims mostly from northern India visit this place. Divine Mother in Vaishnavee form is being worshipped here. The main temple is 11 kms. above Katra, a town on Jammu-Srinagar National Highway. Devotees prefer to visit the shrine on Nava-Ratra Days.

#### **SARTHAL DEVI**

It is situated in Doda district of Kishtwar. There is a popular belief that mother Sharika (Hari Parbat) shifts during winter to this place. There are other places of pilgrimages in Jammu region also such as Burha Amarnath, Sudh Mahdev, etc.

## **4 The Forgotten Tirtha of Bheda Devi**

### **Arjan Dev Majboor**

As Dr. Raghu Nath Singh of Benaras, who has translated Jonraja's RajTarangini into English, maintains, there were originally about three hundred Hindu tirthas in Kashmir, which were considered important and had each a special significance of its own for the devotees. Kalhana makes a specific mention of tirthas like Kapteshwara, Jwala Mukhi, Chakreshwara, Martanda, Sarda and some others. M. Arel Stein, who visited the religious shrines mentioned in Kalhana's Raj Tarangini, says that the tirtha of 'Gangod Bheda' was not visited by the Brahmanas of the valley of Kashmir because by that time it had gone into oblivion, having fallen into a state of neglect over a period of time. He observes:

High up in the valley of the Birnai Stream which debouches at Darbagam from the south west, is the site of an ancient tirtha, which though not completely forgotten, must have ranked once among the most popular in Kashmir. In Kalhana's introduction there is named along with 'Trisandheya' Suyambhoo. Sarda and other famous sites, the Hill of Bheda (Bheda Giti) sanctified by the 'Gangod-bheda' spring. There the Goddess Saraswati was believed to have shown herself as a swan in a lake situated on the summit of the hill. (See Rajtarangini by Kalhana, p. 472)

In November 1890, M. A. Stein came to Zaillapura from Anantnag, whence he moved (along with his camp) to Chitragam. A Brahmin of Hawal, Pulwama, met Stein enroute. The latter asked him if he knew anything about the tirtha of Bheda Devi. The Brahmin showed his willingness to guide Stein and his party to the spot. As they reached Hawal, Stein set up his camp there and was then led by the Brahmin to the nearby small temple called Beeda-bal. He consulted his maps and also studied carefully the statement of Kalhana about the forgotten tirtha; he was not satisfied that he had got to the exact place he was in search of. However, he paid some money to the Brahmin and rested for the night at the camp in Hawal. On the following day, a gujjar named Khaira, who visited the camp, informed Stein (on being questioned by him) that the place he wanted to explore was about twenty kilometers away from Hawal, within a forest. Led by Khaira, Stein reached the spot, which the gujjars called Bujbrore. He was fully satisfied, in fact convinced that the site he had been guided to was the abode of Saraswati (though now in a disguised form).

As I read about the tirtha in Kalhana's Rajtarangini my curiosity was aroused and I made up my mind to visit the place myself. It was about three years before the outbreak of insurgency in the valley that accompanied by two friends, Shri M. L. Goja (an artiste of repute) and Shri P.N. Bhat (a lecturer/writer) I undertook a yatra to the tirtha.

We started from Shopian (district Pulwama), reached Pulwama and then boarded a bus that took us to the famous village of Kelara, a big village surrounded by lofty hills and forests. From this place we had to trek through the forest along a road that was very rough. We could not hire horses as they were reported to be grazing in the fields nearby. Luckily we got into a truck proceeding to Bujbrore, where the site of Bheda Devi tirtha was to be discovered by us.

The driver was very friendly (luckily known to Shri Goja) and so we were offered comfortable seats. After the truck had gone a few kilometers, it started raining heavily with the result that the wheels of the vehicle we sat in were driven with difficulty rattling through the mud. However, it stopped raining and soon it was sunny. That facilitated our journey to the tirtha.

It is worth mentioning here that the road to Bheda Devi runs through the Pargana (Administrative Division) named Shakoora in the old records. The stream called Vaitarini-nad (now called Birnai) flows through Shakoora. According to our Sastras Vaitarni is the stream that the pitras (souls of the dead) have to cross as a hurdle before they can move any further in the world unseen. It is relevant to point out here that many names given by our ancestors to the tirthas in Kashmir are identical with those of the corresponding tirthas in the rest of the country. Why this is so is to be attributed to the isolated character of the valley of Kashmir: because of geographical barriers it would remain cut off from the plains in the past, especially during winter when the mountains remain snow-capped. The present means of transport

were not available to the Kashmiris then. The Kashmiri Hindus showed imaginative resourcefulness and practical wisdom in founding and naming their own tirthas, which they visited conveniently ; this gave them the same satisfaction that they would have got by undertaking long journeys to the tirthas with identical names that exist in the rest of the country : like Pushkar, the Ganges etc. It is said that there were dharamsalas on the banks of the Vitasta (Jhelum) right from Sangam to Vijeshwara (the present Bijbehara). These dharamsalas were used by the pilgrims who came on foot to the Martand Khetra. Their journey began actually from Sangama - which is the confluence of the Vitasta and the beautiful river called Ranbiara.

The Bheda Devi tirtha is situated in an open vale surrounded by large mountains having devdar and fur trees on their tops, From a place nearby the road leads to Rajouri and Poonch. We found a tank-like spring in the middle of the vale. The snow around this spring melts very soon as Kalhana has rightly mentioned. We found the spring lined with chiselled stones and noticed an image at the centre. We also found some plinths, made of stone or brick, in the vicinity. It was obvious to us that in the past some buildings must have been there with these plinths as their supporting base ; these structures must have collapsed and gradually disappeared, leaving behind the evidence of their previous existence in the shape of the plinths. We could infer that the buildings must have been used to host the pilgrims; also some of them must have been used for conducting classes of the students who came to receive education, here in the remote past.

The place is picturesque and as such worth seeing. It is a cool and calm piece of land : an ideal place for reading and writing, and for practising meditation. It is also mentioned in Nilmat Purana. Sloka No. 1359 of the Purana is reproduced below (followed by its English translation)

**<verses>**

***The man who takes a bath at a place close to Bheda Devi (where Ganga is in disguise) attains the 'phala' (virtue) of bathing in the Ganges and goes to Swarga Loka.***

I went round and searched particularly for what I expected to be a statue, or an image carved in a stone, of the Goddess Saraswati. Just away from the spring I found a big stone. Since it was covered with mud, we washed off the mud and were delighted to see a beautiful image of Saraswati, riding a swan, carved in it. We also noticed a carving of Shiva Lingam above that of Saraswati. My friend, the artist, sat down and drew a pen-sketch of the whole carving. On close examination, the stone was seen to consist of two pieces. I gathered from a local gujjar that the pieces were originally a single piece; it had probably been struck by lightning that had broken it into two. From him I learnt further that the local gujjars held the shrine in great esteem. He also revealed that once someone pissed on the spot; during the ensuing night he lost his ox, that was stoutly built. Thereafter the locals showed greater reverence to the place whenever they passed by driving their cattle to the fields nearby. One of the gujjars offered us hospitality, desiring us to stop there for the night. We thanked him for the invitation and declined it politely.

Stein states in his account of the Tirtha (in a note in the Raja-Tarangini, that having once fallen into oblivion its significance was lost to the Kashmiri Pandits. He adds:

Fortunately the old 'Mahatmeya' of the sacred lake has survived in a single copy. With the help of some indications furnished by it and an opportune notice of Abulfazal, I was able to make a search for this Tirtha, which ultimately led to its discovery at the present Bud-bar in the valley. The 'Mahat Meyya' describes the lake as sacred to Goddess Saraswati, as situated on the summit of a hill and Gangodbheda as a spring flowing from it.

As, far as the lake is concerned, we could not see it. May be it has disappeared or it might be far away from the spring in high mountains. Very little water actually flows down from the spring and it is used by patients to cure rheumatic diseases. When we visited the site, we came across a gujjar having come from Tangmarag area to use the water of this spring for bathing in order to be cured of chronic diseases.



The village Kelar, whence we took the road leading to Bheda Devi tirtha, is the Kalyanpura grama which was founded by Kalyani Devi, a queen of Tayapeeda. Drabhagom is mentioned by the historian Sheevara as Drabhgrama. It is a big village that is still famous.

The Goddess Saraswati or Sarda Devi has been one of the chief divinities held in esteem and worshipped in Kashmir since the land was inhabited by learned scholars, who dedicated their lives to the creative arts and to spiritual pursuits. The tirthas associated with the Goddess Saraswati are generally found on foothills, often surrounded by delightful forests.

As a student of the history of Kashmir, I was fascinated by what I had read about the Tirtha and my visit to the actual site, and the scenic background, made me ponder over how this place of worship, learning and meditation must have looked during the good old days when it was frequented by pilgrims and scholars. After I pondered over and fantasized about the place for some valuable moments, I looked at the setting sun and noticed to my delight how its last rays lingered on the lush green Kale trees and the vale around. I was pleased to learn that a party of young men of Shopian had been visiting the Tirtha in the month of Chaitra for the past two years.

Refreshed by the visit, our curiosity having been amply rewarded by what we saw, we came back to Kelar on foot, avoiding to board the loaded truck that was otherwise available as a means of transport. Thence we went to Tenggura, a village near Pulwama, where we stayed in the house of Shri M. L. Bhat. As a student of Kashmir history, full of ideas about the tirtha we had visited, I thought of Plust Rishi, who is, believed to have founded Pulwama. I should also like to mention that in Tenggura there is a statue of the eight-armed goddess, Durga. It is carved out of black marble and is a fine piece of sculpture. It took me and my companions several hours to note the fine details and decorations of the image. It was actually found at Romooh in Pulwama Tehsil (mentioned as Romush in the Rajtarangini) and is installed on the bank of Romshi river.

*[Shri Arjan Dev 'Majboor' is one of our leading poets in Kashmiri besides being an accomplished writer in Hindi. He stays at Udhampur.]*

*Source: Patrika*

## 5 Kaptasvara Tirtha

### History and Legend

**Dr. Ramesh Kumar**

Many pilgrimages lose their importance over time. Presently pilgrimages to the holy cave of Lord Amarnath and the shrine of Tulmulla have the greatest sanctity for Kashmiri Hindus. Visits to Sarada shrine, Harmukta ganga, Bheda tirtha and Papsudana-Kaptasvara spring were highly revered in ancient Kashmir. Papsudana (sin-removing) spring enjoyed great reputation for its sanctity for many centuries. This Tirtha is located a short distance above the village of Kother, situated two miles above Achabal. The name of the village is a contraction of KAPATESVARA, an appellation of Siva to whom the spring here is sacred. Siva is worshipped here under the name of KAPATESVARA, having shown himself there according to the legend under the disguise (Kapata) of pieces of wood floating on the water. Large number of ancient glass fragments are strewn on the road that leads from the village Kother to the Papsudana spring. This indicates the existence of a flourishing glass industry in the bygone times.

### 5.1 ARCHEOLOGICAL REMAINS

The sacred spring now rises in a circular tank, at least sixty yards in diameter. It is enclosed by a massive stone wall, still extant partially. Steps flanked by side walls, which are surrounded by cornices lead down to the water. From the formation of the ground, it is evident that this tank has been formed by closing artificially the gully in which the spring rises on the hillside. The dam, which effected this forms the western side of the tank. Depth of the spring is quite considerable. There are two small temples, which seem to be contemporaneous with the stonewall of the spring. Internally the larger temple measures 8' 4" and faces south-west. The smaller temple faces west and measures 6' 4" internally. Its lower part is buried underground. There is a long stretch of wall 246ft long and 12ft wide on the north side. It originally formed part of the enclosure wall round the temples and the tank. The fragment that is above ground on the east side shows that this surrounding wall is in reality a cellular peristyle. The top stones of the cells are visible. State Archeology department carried out excavation work in this area in 1932-33. It revealed a cellular quadrangle and a number of shrines belonging to the tenth to eleventh centuries. It also showed that there was an older stratum of buildings, upon which these structures were superimposed.

### 5.2 LEGEND OF KING MUTUSKUND

Like the Sarada shrine, the construction of the Kaptasvara tank and its stone enclosure are credited to the legendary King Mutuskund. This king cursed by nature with a pair of buffalo's ears, was anxious to rid himself of this disfigurement. He had in vain sought relief by visits to numerous sacred sites. At last he learnt about the miraculous powers of Kaptasvara spring. When near Kaptasvara he noticed that a wounded dog was healed by entering the water of the sacred spring. The King followed his example and got rid of his cursed ears. In gratitude, the King expended his treasures upon the foundation and upkeep of the temples and the spring.

The legend of King Mutuskund is quite popular in this area. It says:

***Mutsakand razas manshihandikan***

***Tim kati tsalanas' Kuther van***

***King Mutuskund has buffalo's ears;***

***where will he get rid of these in the forests of Kother.***

A curious legend reports that a treasure lies buried somewhere in or near the spring and that there was a stone slab embedded in the wall of the spring on which were inscribed directions for its discovery. This was meant as compensation for the person who would undertake the repairs and upkeep of the spring and its dependent shrines. Sir Aurel Stein corroborates the traditional reference to treasure. He says that an inscription in various characters' had existed until Sikh times near a door in the stone enclosure on the northern side of the tank. It is believed that this inscription was thrown into the tank by a local Muslim

Jagirdar during the times of King Ranjit Singh. Sultan Shahabuddin is also reported to have carried out repairs of the tank and an inscription relating to it was found by the State archeology department during one of its surveys.

The identity of King Mutuskund is shrouded in mystery. Close examination of the legend in relation to Sarada legend indicates that this King was a gauda warrior from Bengal. In the case of Kapatesvara tirtha, Raja-tarangini identifies King Mutuskund with King Bhoj of Malwa. He was contemporary of King Ananta (1028-1063 A.D.) of Kashmir. King Bhoja of Dhara, who ruled over Malwa for four decades was a great patron of literature. He was a prince of uncommon ability and laid out Bhojpur Lake near Bhopal. This lake, once covering 250 sq miles was formed by massive embankments and testifies to the skills of his engineers. King Bhoja, who had heard about the sanctity of Kapatesvara spring, had vowed that he would always wash his face in the water from the Papesudana tirtha. He engaged the services of merchant Padmaraja for the construction of tank and the stone basin at Kapatesvara. King sent heaps of gold for this. Padmaraja used to despatch water from this spring in big glass jars on a regular basis to King Bhoja.

### **5.3 TIRTH YATRA**

Pilgrims visited Kapatesvara tirtha every year in the month of Baisakh. Now the pilgrimage has lost much of its importance and only Kashmiri Pandits of the neighbouring villages visit it regularly.

### **5.4 SOCIO-HISTORICITY**

The importance and the socio-historicity of Kapatesvara tirtha has been recorded in Nilmatpurana, Srikanthcharita of Mankha, Kitab-ul-Hind of Alberuni, Rajatarangini of Kalhan, Haracaritacintamani of Jayadratha, Ain-i-Akbari of Abul Fazal and in our own times by RC Kak, an outstanding archeologist. Alberuni mentions that pieces of wood sent by Mahadeva appear annually 'in a pond called KUDAISHAHR to the left of the source of the vitasta, in the middle of the month of vaisakha'. Kudaishahr is a corrupt derivative of Kavadevsar, a prakritised form of Kapatesvara. The date mentioned for the yatra by Alberuni coincides with that given in Kapatesvara Mahatmya. About Kapatesvara, Kalhana writes in the first taranga of Rajatarangini. Where, within the sanctuary of Papesudana, those who touch the husband of Uma in wooden form secure for reward the pleasures of life and liberation.

The great Kashmirian poet Mankha was a contemporary of Kalhana. In his celebrated Kavya Srikanthacarita, he gives description of important temples of Kashmir. About Kapatesvara tirtha, he says the temple is situated in water and in it are present the wooden images of Lord Shiva. He also mentions about its great importance. Jayadratha, the author of Haracaritacintamani (32 cantos), devotes the entire fourteenth canto to the story of Kapatesvara. This has now become the official Mahatmya of the tirtha. The author was a great poet and belonged to the Kashmiri family of Rajanakas. He lived at the end of 12th or the beginning of the thirteenth century. In Ain-i-Akbari, Abul Fazl writes 'in the village of Kotiyar is a deep spring surrounded by stone temples. When its water decreases an image of Mahadeva in sandalwood appears'. RC Kak in his 'Ancient Monuments of Kashmir', has recorded the legend of King Mutuskund and has given detailed description about the architectural aspect of Kapatesvara spring and temples.

### **5.5 NILMAT STORY**

By far the most detailed description about the origin of Kapatesva area is given in Nilmat Purana. It describes the sanctity associated with taking a bath in Kapatesvara spring. Nilmat records: One attains the world of Rudra by taking bath in Kapatesvara. In the famous dialogue on the sacred tirthas of Kashmir, which takes place between King Gonanda and Sage Brhadhasva, two names Bhutesvara and Kapatesvara arouse Gonanda's curiosity. This leads Brhadhasva to narrate Bhutesvara mahatmya and Kapatesvara mahatmya explaining the story of Siva who appears before the sages in the guise of logs of wood. Gonanda asks the sage Brhadhasva as to why the venerable Sambhu is called Kapatesvara. Brhadhasva then narrates the story in detail.

Once many sages stood in great penance on the sacred bank of Drsadvati in Kuruksetra to have a sight of Rudra-the lord of the gods. Impressed by their devotion, Lord Mahadeva told them in a dream to go soon

to Kasmira where there is a spacious and immaculate abode of the naga. He told them that there he would be visible in disguise. Having heard him in a dream they all reached that abode of the naga. They could not see even a little water, for the water was all over covered with pieces of wood. Moving the wooden logs with their hands, the best sages obtained Rudrahood with their bodies by merely taking bath.

However, one Vasistha Brahman, named Gauraparasar neither took the bath nor touched the wooden logs. He went on prolonged fasting and made his body decay. Hara then spoke to him in a dream and advised him to obtain Rudrahood quickly by taking bath and touching the wooden logs. Gauraparasara persisted, 'that you can be visible after the attainment of Rudrahood is a fact, 'O father of the world! But my mind is not satisfied without the sight of the lord of the gods. You have said that you would be visible in disguise in the abode (of the Naga)'.

The Brahman refuses to leave and continues fasting, Sankara replies:

I have already provided to them, my manifestation in the form of wooden log. Merely by seeing me, they attained Rudrahood, O twice-born! Now, due to your penance which is greater, I give you the desired boon. Ask for what you desire and obtain Rudrahood. Gauraparasara demands that Mahesvara should manifest itself in the form of a wooden log, to all the human beings, as it did to the sages. Mahesvara agrees and remarks. O best among the twice-born, all those people who will see (the god) standing in the form of wood, (will see the gods) not always but only occasionally. With a desire to do favour to them, my gana--this Nandi in the form of wooden log shall always be visible to the human beings. And having seen (him) they would attain Rudrahood with their bodies. As I shall appear in disguise before men, so I shall obtain the name, Kapatesvara.

*Source:* Kashmir Sentinel

## **6 Sarada Temple in Kashmir**

**P.N.K. Bamzai**

**That** Kashmir has been a part and parcel of Bharatvarsha from time immemorial has been testified to by Pandit Kalhana by recording in his Ragatarangani that pilgrims from Kashmir used to visit holy places from Rameshwaram to Badrinath and Dwarka to Puri and that devotees of Durga and Shiva from all over the country would flock to the holy shrine of Sarada and the sacred cave of Amarnath in Kashmir. The author, the renowned historian of Kashmir, describes the importance of the Sarada Temple which now lies in Pak-occupied Kashmir: Editor

From time immemorial Kashmir has been known all over India as Saradapeeth or the abode of Sarada the goddess of learning and fine arts. Every orthodox Brahmin in South India, for instance, on rising from his bed in the morning faces north and with folded hands offers salutations to goddess Sarada:

***Namaste Sarada Devi, Kashmira mandala vasini  
(Salutations to Goddess Sarada who resides in Kashmir).***

The place of pride which the Valley acquired in Sanskrit language and literature as well as in humanities like medicine, astronomy, astrology, philosophy, religion, law and jurisprudence, music, art and architecture is attributed to the grace and benediction of the goddess who revealed herself in all her divine grandeur to Muni Sandalya at Saradavana in the Upper Kishenganga Valley in the north of Kashmir.

No wonder the holy spot became a sacred shrine to which thousands of devotees not only from the Kashmir Valley but from distant parts of India were attracted to seek blessings from Sarada Devi, the goddess in her three aspects of Sarada, Narada or Saraswati and Vaghdevi.

The exact location of the shrine where, in course of time, a huge temple complex came up, is indicated by Kalhana himself. He has occasion to speak of the siege of Sirahsila castle (Raj. viii- 2556-2706) which took place in his own time. His references show clearly that the shrine was in close proximity to this hill stronghold. Various indications gathered from the general description of the locality pointed to the Upper Kishenganga Valley.

An earlier source, the Sarada Mahatmya, narrating the origin of the tirtha mentions the various stages of the pilgrim route. The Muni Sandalya, son of Matanga, was practising austerities in order to obtain the sight of the goddess Sarada, who is a Sakti embodying three separate manifestations. Divine advice prompts him to proceed to Syamala (the present Kupwara district).

There at Ghusa, Mahadevi appears before him and promises to show herself in her true form as Sakti in the 'Sarada Forest'. The goddess vanishes from his sight at Hayasrama, the present village of Hayahoma situated about four miles to the N.E- E of Ghusa.

The Muni next proceeds to a spring now known as Krishna Nag in which he bathes. Thereupon half his body becomes golden, emblematic of the approach to complete liberation from darkness. The spring situated above the village of Drang is shown on the larger Survey Map as quite close to Hayahom and is undoubtedly the Drang mentioned by Kalhana (Raj . 2607-2702). The place is nowadays usually designated by the local Brahmins as Sona-Drang.

From thence Sandalya ascends the mountain range to the north on which he sees a dance of goddesses in a mountain meadow known as Rangavatika which lies below the pass by which the route leading from Drang towards the Kishenganga crosses the watershed.

He then arrives at Tejavana, the residence of Sage Gautama on the bank of the Kishenganga. The Mahatmya then relates how the sage after crossing a hill sees on the east the god Ganesa and arrives in the Saradavana. After reciting a hymn in praise of her triple form of Sarada, Narada or Saraswati and Vaghdevi, an account is given how the goddess revealed herself to the Muni at the sacred spot and rewarded his long austerities by inviting him to her residence at Sirahsila.

Pitras now approach Sandalya and ask him to perform their shradas. On his taking water from the Mahasindhu for the purpose of the tarpana rite, half its water turns into honey and forms the stream now

known as Madhumati. Ever since baths and shradas at the samgama of the Sindhu and Madhumati assure to the pious complete remission of sins.

The Brahmins from the neighbouring districts who till recently performed the pilgrimage to Sarada, avoided the difficult gorges through which the route above described, debouches into the Kishenganga Valley.

Starting on the pilgrimage on the Sudi 4th Bhadrapada, the day when, as the Mahatmya says, special holiness accumulates at the tirtha, they satisfied themselves by bathing in the rivulet which comes from Drang, instead of visiting its source at the Krishna Nag. They then proceeded to Ghusa where they visited a little grove of walnut trees and chinars situated by the side of the Kamil river known by the name of Rangavaar as a substitute for Rangavatika. From there they marched by the ordinary route to Dudinial on the Kishenganga over the Sitalvan pass. Ascending the river on its left bank they reached Tejavana and finally Sarada on the 4th day.

The sacred spot where the goddess appeared in her divine form is marked by a stone slab seven feet long, six feet wide and half a foot thick. The stone is supposed to cover a Kunda or spring cavity from where the goddess rose and finally vanished in.

Through the course of centuries it has been the object of worship and devotion of a large number of pilgrims who annually visited the spot. The slab has ipso-facto become the sanctum sanctorum of the temple which came up here on the model of the Aryan order of Kashmir architecture. Though in ruins now the entire complex inspires a sense of grandeur and awe.

The cella of the main temple is 22 feet square. The entrance is from the west. The other three walls have blank refoiled archway standing to a height of about 20 feet from the base to the apex of the arches. The entrance is approached by a flight of a few steps. On each side of the porchway are two square pillars about 16 feet high and two feet six inches apart. The capital of both the pillars seem to have been hewn from a single stone.

The interior of the temple is square and perfectly plane. There are scarcely any traces of the usual pyramidal stone roof. Bates (1873) noticed the temple covered by a low shingle roof having been "recently erected by Col. Gundu, Maharaja Gulab Singh's Ziladar of Muzaffarabad".

The temple occupies the centre of a quadrangular court 142 feet long and 94'6" broad. The quadrangle is enclosed by a massive wall six feet thick and eleven feet high from the level of the court to the projecting rim at the foot of the coping. The latter rises in pyramidal form to a height of eight feet above the top of the wall, giving it a massive look.

Seen from outside, the walls of the enclosure appear still massive and imposing, as they are raised on basement walls built to equalize the different elevations of the ground.

The entire complex stands at the foot of a spur which rises above the right bank of the Madhumati stream and slopes up gradually for some distance until it culminates in the precipitous pine-clad mountain which is traversed by the direct path leading towards the Kashmir Valley.

The temple with its enclosed quadrangle is approached by a staircase about nine feet wide of stone steps sixty-three in number, having on either side a massive balustrade fallen into ruins. The stair-case leads to the entrance of the quadrangular court. This gateway occupies exactly the middle of the west face directly in line with the porchway leading to the sanctum sanctorum of the main temple.

Judging from the fame which the shrine of Sarada enjoyed not only in Kashmir but far beyond it, the number of pilgrims must have been considerable. Kalhana himself in his account of Lalitaditya's reign (8th century AD) refers to certain followers of a king of Gauda or Bengal, who had come to Kashmir. under the pretence of visiting the shrine of Sarada, but in reality to avenge the murder of their king by Lalitaditya. This particular reference to Sarada shows that its fame had spread to far off regions.

A witness to the fame of Sarada is Alberuni (10th century AD) who describes its position in "inner Kashmir about two to three days journey towards the mountains of Bolor" (upper Indus between Gilgit and Ladakh). He speaks of the shrine as much venerated and frequented by pilgrims and mentions it along

with the most famous ones like those of Surya at Multan, the Visnu Chakraswamin of Thaneswar and the Linga of Somnath.

Bilhana whose literary career falls into the second half of the eleventh century also mentions the tirtha of Sarada, in his panegyric description of Pravarapura or Srinagar. Written when he was in Deccan far away from his home, he ascribes the patronage of learning, claimed for that city, to the favour of Sarada. The goddess is said to resemble a swan, carrying as her diadem the glittering gold washed from the sand of river Madhumati".

In a more legendary light the temple of Sarada figures in a story related of the great jaina scholar Hemacandra (1088-1172 AD), in the Prabhavakacarita. Commissioned by king Jayasimha of Gujarat to compose a new grammar, he requested to be supplied with necessary material in the shape of the older grammars which could be found complete only in the library of Sarada in Kashmir. Jayasimha sent at once high officials to Pravarapura to obtain the manuscripts. Arrived there they proceeded to the temple of the goddess and offered prayers. The manuscripts were delivered to the king's-envoys and brought by them to Hemacandra, who, after perusing them, composed his own grammatical work, the Siddhahemacandra.

The Sarada shrine was known in distant parts of India, long before the composition of Prabhavakacarita (middle of the 13th century) and hence the author must have known that at the temple of Sarada was a massive library housing learned works of authors who had been blessed by goddess Sarada.

Another curious reference to Saradapeeth is found in Jonaraja's chronicle wherein he mentions that Sultan Zain-ul-abidin visited the shrine perhaps in 1422 AD to witness the miraculous manifestations of the goddess. From Jonaraja's account it appears these were the appearance of sweat on the face of the image of the goddess, the shaking of the arm, and a sensation of heat on touching the feet.

We see from this account that a miracle-working image of Sarada, probably the same of which Alberuni had heard was yet in existence in the early part of the 15th century.

In the 16th century the temple of Sarada must have enjoyed yet considerable reputation in Kashmir itself. Abul Fazl's notice of the site (Ain.ii-p. 365): "At two day's distance from Hayahom is the river named Madhumati, which flows from the Darda country. Gold is also found in this river. On its banks is a stone temple called Sarada, dedicated to Durga and regarded with great veneration. On every eighth tithi of the bright half of the month, it begins to shake and produces the most extraordinary effect".

The notice of gold being found in the river clearly applies to the Kishenganga, which drains a mountain region known as auriferous to the present day.

The number of pilgrims was ever increasing while Kashmir was under the rule of Hindu kings. They maintained the temple complex in a spick- and-span condition. With the advent of Islam (First quarter of the 14th century) it lost the royal patronage. But the flow of pilgrims was quite sizeable even during the Sultan, Chak and Mughal rule. Fortunately the destructive hands of Simandar Butshikan did not reach the shrine and its temple, because of its location at an isolated spot where perhaps his writ did not run.

But it was the politically disturbed condition of the Upper Kishenganga Valley during the later Mughal and Pathan rule that has had much to do with the neglect into which the shrine of Sarada has fallen.

Karnah and Drava were then in the hands of the government of the Kashmir Valley. Unable themselves to maintain order among the warlike and turbulent hillmen of their territory, they allowed them to make frequent raids into the Kashmir Valley.

Conditions improved but little during the Sikh rule, and even as late as 1846 Kashmir was raided as far as Srinagar by bands of restless Bombas. It is evident that during this long period of anarchy the pilgrimage to the distant shrine on the Kishenganga could have no attractions for peaceful Brahmins of Kashmir.

Under one of the Karnah chiefs the temple is said to have been used for the storage of gunpowder, the explosion of which blew off the original roof.

The temple was subsequently repaired by Maharaja Gulab Singh under whose orders Col. Gundu, the Ziladar of Muzaffarabad erected a shingle roof over the temple for its protection. The Maharaja also

settled a small bounty of seven rupees 'chilki" per mensem on the family of Gotheng Brahmins who claim the hereditary guardianship of the temple.

According to the traditions of the Gotheng Brahmins it was only since the establishment of the Dogra rule and the peaceful settlement of the Upper Kishenganga Valley that the temple of Sarada became once more open for regular pilgrim visits.

*Source:* Koshur Samachar



## **7 Sharadha Tirtha**

### **Subhash Kak**

**Here** are some facts about Sharada, the most famous and sacred of all the Kashmiri pilgrimage centers:

1. The ancient temple of Sharada is located in Neelam (Kishanganga) valley just beyond the line of control in Pakistan occupied Kashmir. The temple is located in a small village called Shardi near the confluence of Kishanganga and Madhumati rivers. As far as I can gather from my maps, its location seems to be 74.2 E and 34.8 N. It is located northwest of the Wular lake about 40 miles as the crow flies. Another way of getting an idea of its location note that Kishanganga and Vitasta (Jhelum) meet in Muzaffarabad. Shardi and Sopore are about the same distance from Muzaffarabad along two different rivers.
2. It was important not only as a temple to Sharada in her triple form as Sharada, Sarasvati, and Vagdevi, it was also a centre of Kashmirian learning. The main pilgrimage used to be conducted on the 4th shudi of Bhadrapada. Shradha used to be performed by the Madhumati.
3. The famous chronicler Al-Biruni (1130 AD) names Sharada, together with Somnath, Multan, and Thaneshvar, as one of the most important temples of Hindus in north India. In the 16th century, Abul Fazl, the author of Ain- Akbari, similarly describes this as a temple dedicated to Durga which is regarded with great veneration. He adds, "On every eighth tithi of the bright half of the month it begins to shake and produces the most extraordinary effect."
4. If you would like to read details about the temple see pages 279-290 in the second volume of RAJATARANGINI translated by M.A. Stein, who visited the temple in 1892. Stein has extensive notes regarding the temple and his own description of it.
5. It is curious that during the fighting of 1948, the Indian army made no attempt to control this region. I presume this was because the memory of the Sharada temple was not very strong in the minds of the main actors in the drama.

Remember the fame of Sharada was so great that the word became synonymous with learning. Also remember that the native script for Kashmiri is a script called Sharada. Some of you would remember the zataks written in it. Sharada is somewhat similar to Devanagari but not identical.

### **7.1 THE SHARADHA SCRIPT**

Here I summarize current knowledge on the Sharada script:

Sharada, like other Indian and southeast Asian scripts, is derived from Brahmi which was in use in India at least as early as 500 BC if not earlier. New theories suggest that Brahmi, in turn, evolved from the ancient Indus (or Sarasvati) script that was in use in India in 2500 BC.

The earliest records in Sharada have been dated to about 800 AD. You find them all over northwest India. Incidentally, Gurumukhi, the script that was designed by one of the Sikh gurus for Punjabi, used Sharada as its model. The widespread usage of Sharada has been interpreted by scholars to mean that Kashmiri Pandits in ancient times, as now, were fond of travelling outside the valley. The script of the Dogras, called Takari, is also derived from Sharada.

### **7.2 MORE ON THE SHARADA TEMPLE**

This information is abridged from Stein's account:

The temple is approached from the lower slope of the hill in the west by an imposing stone staircase, now half decayed, which leads up in 63 steps to the main entrance of the quadrangular court enclosing the temple. The staircase is about 10 feet wide and rises rather steeply in six flights between two flanking walls of massive construction. The entrance to the court is through a gateway with a double porch of Kashmiri design.

The court of the temple forms an oblong accurately oriented and enclosed by a massive wall 6 feet thick. The north side of the enclosure measures 142 feet whereas the east side measures 94 feet and 6 inches.

Thus the quadrangle has proportion of 3:2. In the centre of the northern wall is a small recess 3 feet 3 inches square inside which opens by a trefoil arched door towards the interior of the court. This recess contained two ancient lingas.

In the centre of the quadrangle is the temple raised on a basement of 24 feet square and 5 feet 3 inches high. The entrance to this inner temple is from the west side and is approached by stairs five and a half feet wide with flanking side walls. The interior of the inner temple is a square of 12 feet and 3 inches and it has no decoration of any kind. The only conspicuous object inside is a large slab which measures about 6 by 7 feet with a thickness of about half a foot. This slab is believed to cover a kunda, or spring, in which goddess Sharada appeared to the sage Shandilya. This kund is the object of the special veneration of the pilgrims.

The main Sharada temple rises in a prominent and commanding position above the right bank of the Madhumati on the terrace-like foot of a spur which descends from a high pine-clad peak to the east. Immediately below this terrace to the northwest is the spot where the waters of the Madhumati and Kishanganga mingle. The view from the staircase to the outer temple is magnificent. Not only can you see the valleys of Madhumati and the gorge of Kishanganga but also a stream now called Sargan that falls into Kishanganga.

The location of the Sharada temple in the village of Shardi is beyond the mountains, immediately surrounding the valley north northwest of Bandipur. It is beyond Lolab valley and beyond Drang so reaching it must take a few days. Although it is only about 35 miles or so from the northern reaches of the Wular, the journey in ancient times must have been carried out entirely on foot. I suppose now it should be possible to complete it rather quickly starting from Bandipur.

I am assured by the account that it has a beauty more dramatic than that of Yosemite!

## 8 Shree Sharika Peetham of Kashmir

### Moti Lal Pushkar

The valley of Kashmir is known as Deva Bhoomi i.e. the abode of gods. It is situated in the lap of the Himalayan mountains. The seat of Sharika Devi, the 'Cosmic mother', is one of such divine centres. It is the abode of three crore gods; hence in Sanskrit it is called Vaas Bhoomi of Trikoti devtas of the Hindu pantheon. The devout have always found great spiritual solace and bliss here. It is also known as "Pradyuman - peetham" - the wish-fulfilling seat of the cosmic Mother.

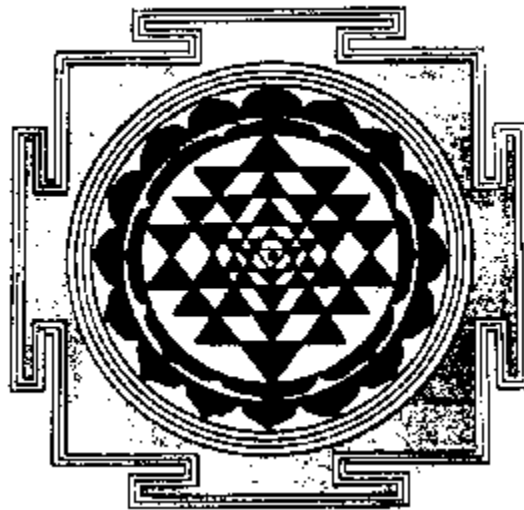
Kashmir's deshny is settled here at the lotus feet of Jagad Amba. This spiritual seat is situated on the western top of the mount Hariparbat. It was at this very spot that the Divine Mother destroyed the demon "Jaloudbhava" that existed in the deep waters of the Sati-Sar. This terrible demon used to give trouble to the inhabitants that lived then on the hill tops surrounding that pretty sea Satisar now called 'Kashmir'.

Kashmir has seen many natural calamities from time to time during its history in the shape of floods and rains. The cosmic Mother here represents the solar energy, having seven components. The number 'seven' represents seven colours of light, seven Rishis of the Veda vidya, the seven worlds. It is for this digit seven that the divine Mother's seed letters are seven in number, corresponding to the seven basic 'Swaras' of the Sangeet Shastra. She is the protector of her Bhagtas from all the opposite aspects of existence. The energy here is personified as heat or the 'Solar Energy'.

The old city of Srinagar is situated at its foot hill in the west. The Divine Mother Sharika has all along been the 'Ishta Devi' i.e. personal goddess of the royal dynasties that ruled over Kashmir from time to time. One of the most famous among these kings was Pravar Sen, the son of the great Buddhist King 'Megha- Vaahana' who ruled the land at the end of the 6th century A.D. The city of Srinagar is known as Pravarpura i.e. the city laid out by king Pravara Sena. "Shri Chakra" is worshipped here as the cosmic form of Divine Mother. It is engraved on a green, circular shaped stone of Sapphire. The Bhawani Sahasranama says thus.

### 8.1 The Meaning of Shri Chakra

The Mother exists here in the form of a diagram. She is within its orbit. Even the triangles that shape the corners of the Shri Chakra are the forms of Devi. All these 43 triangles and lotuses vibrate from the very basic central point that represents the core of the whole cosmos. It has 3 circles around it and 4 gates to enter into it. It originates from one central point.



This diagram is also known as 'Matra-chakra' established here by king Pravar Sena. Historian Kalhana writes: <sanskrit sloka>

There was a Murti of Sharika Devi made of glazed black stone. The same was taken away to Sarthal Kishtwar by king Ugra Deva in 1170. A.D. Kashmir was in a state of turmoil then. The following shloka throws light on this Sharika Murti <sanskrit>

Sharika Devi's Murti is beautiful. Her, image is made of black stone. She is Mother Durga having 18 arms. The Cosmic Energy is beyond any name and form and She is Eternal force of God. She is matter (Sat), soul (chit) and bliss (ananda). I offer Pranams to Her to protect me, the seeker of asylum under her pious feet.

### **8.2 The Surroundings of Hari Parbat**

The famous Dal Lake is in the East of the Parbat and Rainawari, a township established by king Rana Ditya (hence its original name was Ranapuri, situated close to the southern edge of this hillock). An ancient Durga temple is at the top of this very mount. Hari Parbat is a big ancient fort site with all the required facilities, like availability of drinking water, a space for armoury, residential huts and a storage for provisions etc. etc.

Its eastern foot-hill area was used as a cantonment for the army. This area is protected by an allround wall covering its adjacent land strip from the southern end to the northern end inclusive of the western strip with a magnificent gate "Kashtadwar".

Its western strip is known as Devi Aangan where Kashmiri Pandits would collect in thousands to offer prayers to Devi on the Hora Ashtami night.

It was at this very seat and shrine of the cosmic Mother that MaharajaJai Sinha (1128 - 55) gave a start to his Vedic renaissance programme with the intention of inspiring confidence among his masses. He dug deep foundations for preservation and promotion of the Vedic Dharma. This renaissance programme was launched in the form of "Shakti- Upasana" The Maharaja gave a new direction to his masses. It was the Shakta cult that he stressed upon for his subjects.

Before Jaya Sinha's advent to the throne of Kashmir, the country had faced the first foreign invasion by Mohd. of Gaznavi. The Kashmiris had faced great trouble due to this invasion and multi dimensional devastation had taken place as a result of it. Later also the Kashmiris had seen bad days during the rule of king Harsha (1089-1101 A.D.) whom Kalhana calls a 'Rakshasa'. He had indulged in plunder and destruction of the Hindu shrines. In his reign Deva Murtis were desecrated. He had recruited the Turks as his army generals and soldiers. He worked under the influence of some non-Hindu mendicants and took such steps to save his kingdom. This was all based on his wrong notions. The happenings compelled Jayasinha to follow the Shakta Marga. This back ground has been hinted at in the Bhawani Sahasranama thus.

Here the word 'dushta' has been used for kings like 'Harsha' and the word 'Malecha' indicates the invader 'Gazanavi' who had surfaced during the rule of Sangrama Raja (1003 - 28 A.D.) . One more factor that had contributed towards this "Renaissance Movement" was the Historian Kalhana who had compiled his great work 'The Raj Tarangini' during the rule of Maha RajaJaya Sinha from 1148 to 50 A.D . MaharajaJaya Sinha's greatness also has been acknowledged in the Bhawani Sahasranama: Jagad Amba Sharika is Herself Jaya's Administration, Guide to his victory, the Bestower of victory and Sustainer and Supporter of this visionary king Jaya Sinha. Under the influence of the unmanly concept of non-violence, escapism and falsehood that were practised in the name of devotion and salvation with the advent of non-Vedic paths. This had compelled the Kashmiris to feel concerned about their social existence and preservation.

### **8.3 The Bhawani Sahasra Nama**

This grantha, composed in praise of Devi Bhawani's one thousand pious names, throws enough light on the Shakta cult. All these names enable us to grasp the main features of the Vedic Dharma i.e. social consciousness, service to mankind, compassion, sympathy, moral values, etc. Shlokas from the granth use to be recited by the devotees regularly as they performed Parikrama (when there was normalcy in Kashmir). The text consists of three parts. The first part throws light on the creation of this universe, the

eminence of the Bhawani Devi, the source of the elements that make up the existence or the Prakriti. This grantha tells us that even Lord Maha Deva is born out of the cosmic energy. Maha Deva is thus a devotee of the Mother. "Maha Deva" also happens to be the name of the Rishi who has given an account of his mystic experience, that he had got through the constant recitation of this grantha.

#### **8.4 Other Works on this Subject**

Bhavani Sahasranama is a Samvada, comprising of questions put forth by Nandiji and the answers given by Maha Deva, the Lord. The word 'Rishi' used in the text suggests that it is a revealed book. The Vedas say in the "Vag - Ambhrani" sookta that it is the Mother's grace that makes a person into a Rishi, who reveals the truths to the world. It is the Mother again that carves a heroic personality out of a simpleton besides giving birth to a great scientist.

It was prior to the period in which Bhavani Sahasranama appeared that the "Panchastavi" was composed by Dharma Acharya. This work consists of hymns on the Devi and it lays stress on the Mother's worship. Even the Adi Shankara had composed his great work "Soundarya - Lahari" with the same objective in view, to make the Indian society aware of the Mother's eminence, four centuries before the Bhavani Sahasranama was revealed.

A few names from the 2nd chapter of the work signify: That the mother is enlightenment, Mother of the whole cosmos, She is Mother of the Vedas; She is Courage, Love, Tradition, the Earth; She is the real ruler, Truth, Omkara herself. She is the mother of Buddha and Mahavira She is diplomacy and penal code, besides She is Ganga, Yamuna and all other rivers that flow through the Indian subcontinent, She is an Army herself and victory as well, She inspires the devotees to attain the four-fold aim of the human life.

Other names convey that she loves dancing and singing. She is the composition of poets and the wise. She has great liking for the saffron flowers. She is the land known as Kurukshetra where the Maha Bharata was fought. She is both Shri Ram's and Shri Krishna's birth place. She is the social code, the digestive system, the system that is responsible for the creation of human body. She is beauty and the reverential feeling for the mother. It is she that shapes future generations. She is all forms of Expression. She is science and spirituality both. She is the service to mankind to sustain this world. She is armoury. She loves horse riding. She is the sheath and the sword. She is the heroic mother that gives birth to brave sons and daughters. She is herself the battle field. She is benevolent to all.

The Third chapter deals with fal shruti. It mentions the set of benefits one derives from its recitation. These benefits are Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha.

In the end, it is emphasised that we should make it our daily practice to recite the text with devotion and dedication. The set of one thousand names includes one hundred names from the "Lalita Sahasranama", the pious names of Mother Lalita's eminence. Cultural and territorial identity of India is the Divine Mother herself.

May the Mother bless us all. Victory to Jagad Amba Sharika.

## **9 Bujbror - An Ancient Religious Place**

**P. N. Bhat**

**Kashmir** is the Treasure House for archeologists, historians and researchers. It abounds in places of religious importance too. Kashmir is known as Rishiwari or Rishivatika, where Rishis of yore meditated and attained God- realization. Surrounded by snow-clad mountains and ever green forests on all sides, it offered them seclusion and peace, necessary for the pursuit of knowledge. It is because of that Kashmir came to be known as Shardapeeth - the Seat of learning. It produced great scholars of Sanskrit, Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam.

Kalhana, the great historian of Kashmir while enumerating sources of Kashmir history, made a mention of Gangodbheda in Sloka 35, Vol. I of his world famous Rajtarangini as under:

<verses>

A mention of this place is made in Nilmatpurana also as under:

<verses>

Gangodbheda, according to Kalhana and Nilmatpurankara was a very sacred place under the foot of the Bheda mountain of the Peer Panjal Range in western Kashmir. Gangodbheda Mahatmya gives a vivid description of this sacred place and the days of its pilgrimage. It also gives an account of its origin. Rishi Palustya, doing a long penance in the land of Sati, had made the divine Ganga gust forth near him from Mount Himvat for the purpose of his sacrifice. After completing his worship, the sage wished to discharge the river. He was stopped by a divine voice of Goddess Saraswati from the sky. She told the Saint that the stream has its source in the mountain in the forest called Bheda and at place would arise the holy Gangodbheda on the top of hill where the ground level extended to 10 Dhanusha (both in width and length), a great pond full of pure water would be formed without a dam and removed from the water of torrents.

At its eastern foot, a stream called Abhaya, a purifier from all sins is to issue which neither fails to flow nor leaps down over the steep slope. The divine voice then informed the Rishi that the holy Ganga would manifest itself in this shape only for 10 days each month, flowing for the remainder period both in the heaven and the hell. At the same time, he is granted a boon. Palustya, there upon, praised the spiritual powers of the river and prayed that it might rest for ever by his side. His boon was granted and the Gangodbheda Tirtha was created.

To obtain the slight of the Goddess whose voice he had heard, the Rishi undertook a hard penance. After a thousand years Saraswati - Goddess of knowledge, appeared to him from the sky in the form of a flamingo (Rajhans). Having been worshipped by him on the 8th and 9th day of the bright half of Chaitra the Goddess explained her sixfold nature. With reference to this, the sage gave her the name of Bheda and proceeded to worship her as Hanswageshwari- Bheda. On the 14th and 15th of bright fortnight of Chaitra. Ever since the Goddess has been worshipped at the Gangodbheda Tirtha on the 8th, 9th, 14th and 15th of the bright fortnight of Chaitra.

The Gangodbheda Mahatmya also mentions about a neighbouring shrine of Govardhana Vishnu near which no snow ever falls for a distance of 125 hastas (one hasta-4 inches). A miraculous image of Yama, called Aujas set up for the Rishi at the same place, is also referred to. It is to be worshipped on the Amavasya of Ashvauja (Asay) (Aashvin) or on the 14th dark day of Magha. The Mahatmya also refers to Ramasharm, Ramausa and hermitage of Saptarshis and to the Vaitarni river. Those sacred places were visited at the time of pilgrimage of Gangodbheda Tirtha.

Nilmatpurana gives a brief description of Gangodbheda Katha stream which is none other than Abhaya. Aujas, though mentioned as an image of Yama in Mahatmya, is described as a stream near here. Narayansthana is none other than Goverdhandhara Vishnu of the same Mahatmya, Ramtirtha is the Romshi (Ramusha) river, Aparastirtha, Rishi-tirtha and Vaitarni are also mentioned in Nilmatpurana from

1359 to 1366 slokas. All these tirthas are enroute to Gangodbheda and are ordained to be visited without fail. There is mention of other tirthas also near Gangodbheda in Nilmatpurana.

A mention of Gangodbheda tirtha is also made in Abdul Fazals' Ain-e-Akbari. He says, "near Shukroh in a low hill on the summit of which is a fountain which flows throughout the year and is a pilgrimage for the devout. The snow does not fall in this spur.". The Shukroh mentioned here is the pargana of Shukru which is near Romush immediately on the south. Abdul Fazal here refers to the Bheda hill. Shrivar also makes a mention of this place in his Rajtarangini in 494 verse as under:

**<verses>**

The forces of Mohmmad Shah under the command of Jehangir the Margesha of Mohmmad Shah, met the forces of Maqsood Khan at Drabgam- headquarters of Shakoor Pargana. Maqsood Khan was defeated. He and his defeated army left the Valley by the Bhedavan route. So Gangodbheda was still known to the populace, though Kashmir had come under Muslim rule those days. But the Hindus must have been going on pilgrimage to this place. Shukrut or Shukroo is now known as Shohwur to the people there.

Gangodbheda has undergone change in its nomenclature with the passage of time. It became known as Budbrar and later as Bujbror. It was a part of Shukoor Pargana and later of Haripura district. Up to 1978, it was in the Anantnag district and its tehsil was Pulwama. With the re-organisation of districts in the Valley, it came under Pulwama district. It is in the Kellar block of Pulwama tehsil.

Budbror is located at a height of 7,800 feet above sea level under the foot of the western Pirpanjal mountain range. It is on the famous Rajouri- Kalampora (Kalyanppur of Rajtarangini) road. A mention of this route is made very often in Rajtarangini of Kalhana, Jaunraja, Srivara and Prajyabhata. Rajouri (Rajpuri of olden days) was a part of the Kashmir kingdom. Very often invasions on Kashmir have been made through this route in the past. Even Mohmood Gaznavi had assembled his forces at Rajouri to attack Kashmir but later he gave up the idea after he got a lot of gifts from the King of Kashmir.

Budbror has lost its glory and has gone into oblivion. No pilgrimage is made of that Tirtha now. It was M.A. Stein who brought this place to light again on September 16, 1895, when he reached there. He arrived in Hawal village on September 15, 1895 and was shown a temple there known as Beedaibal, situated on the outskirts of the west of the village just near Nala Laar. But the description as made in Rajtarangini did not satisfy him-Suraj Bayu, a purohit of Hawal took him to Kellar near Drabgam and thence to Budabrор where the location was the same as described in Nilmatpurana and Rajtarangini.

Budbror is at a distance of six miles to the south- west of Kellar. The route is uneven and it passes through paddy fields and then on the right of Bidnai stream under the foot of the hills. There are orchards of apples, almonds, walnuts, etc., on both sides of the route. Upon the hills are pine trees and still up on the mountains is snow that makes the place most charming. The Bidnai stream is formed of the water of Batsar, which is on the top of the mountain. Even today, the Gujjar there will tell you that there are images of Raja and Rani in Batsar Lake whom village folk pay obeisance even now.

At the foot of Bhedagiri is a small ridge about 30 yards from the north-east to the south-west and a little less from the north-west to the south-east. There is a square shaped tank of pure water enclosed on all sides by old, decayed stone-steps. Each side of the tank is about 55 feet. It is in fact a spring and its water oozes from its north. There are some decayed stones on which disfigured images of gods and goddesses still are noticed. The water of the tank flows out from the southern end down the spur to join the Bidnai down below.

At a distance of about six feet, all around the edge of the tank, are the remains of the rough stone wall which once enclosed the sacred tank. There are remains of the foundation of a Dharamshala on the south of the tank. About 15 feet to the south-west of the tank is a big boulder about 5 feet long and about 3 feet high. On its smooth surface towards west are carved two lingas with bhadraveethas (bases). Each linga is about one foot high. In between the two lingas and on either side of them are carved the images of Goddesses with Kalshas (pots) of water in their both hands. The Goddesses are seated on Swans. The

swans on the right and left of the linga on the right side face each other while the third on the extreme left is broken and only its legs are visible. The boulder has been broken on the right in the ratio of 1:3.

There are parts of broken earthen-ware, red bricks boulders and foundations to the south-west of the tank. The tank ends its adjoining place never freezes in winter even after a heavy snowfall and the tank water always retains the same level. The Gujjars live just near the tank. They regard it very sacred and keep its sanctity intact. They pour milk into it and tie threads to the shrubs around the tank for the fulfilment of their desires. They confide that their desires are mostly fructified.

I visited Bujbror last on July 22, 1994 alongwith Shri Arjun Dev Majboor and Shri Makhan Lal Goja. We found the place in a very bad shape as the tank was filled with broken branches of nearby pine trees, filth and stones that had been washed away in it by the rains. The stone-steps had broken. The water was lukewarm and shore in sunshine. I also drank it.

That very year Swami Moti Lal Brahmachari and some Hindus of Battapora Shopian visited the place and cleansed the tank and smeared sindoor on the lingas of the boulders. They had planned to visit that tirtha every year to revive its past glory. But that was not to be. Pilgrimage to Budbror continued up to 1893 as is stated by Stein. I also enquired from the Gujjars and local Muslims of Kellar about the time when Kashmiri Pandits had stopped visiting the place. They said it must have been long ago. But the Hindus who worked in government offices at Kellar visited Bujbror, bathed in the Bidnai and worshipped there.

Shakroo is now known as Shohwur. A hamlet near Kellar, old red bricks earthenpots and idols are found there even now. There I saw a big stone known as Shukurpal. It is of quadrilateral shape. The locals say that there was cremation ground there and it is even now called Shokur Awarain. Pal in Kashmiri means a big stone and Awarain a cremation ground. The locals say that there was a bonfire and historians of its past. The Moghuls, the Pathans and that continued burning for many years. The locals, though now Muslims, placed chopped wood on it to burn. They too considered it sacred and called it gosaindooni. On a threat from someone, they stopped placing wood on it and the fire extinguished.

Just above Bujbror is Bidar, Yarikhal and still above is Radhikhal, Sirchkor and on the mountain top is the Sukhsar. There are many margs or meadows round about Bujbror They are Jrakjikkhal, panzikhal, Razikkhal, Katarikkhal and Hassankhal. The people of the area send their cattle to these grazing fields during summer. Khal in Kashmiri means a place where paddy or other grain is stored after harvesting it.

Budbror or Bujbror has lost its past glory but its historical and religious importance will continue for all times to come. The spring and the stone on which are carved the lingas and images of Goddess Wageshwari will always remind the visitors the Sikhs passed through Bujbror. There caravans must have halted there for rest before going ahead. The route down to Srinagar passes through Kellar, Dralgam (Brabhagram of Rajtarangini), Romooh (Ramosh), Newa and Wathora. I wonder if the boulder that had Shiv Linga and Goddess Saraswati carved on it exists now. The bigots and anti-Hindu terrorists who rule the roost in the happy Valley now might have broken it to pieces but the tank will be there for us to remind of the golden period of the Hindus who are the real inheritors of Kashmir.

*Source: Koshur Samachar*



## **10 Creating Symbols of Hope**

### ***Hari Parbat at Faridabad***

**Anangpur** is a small suburban village on the outskirts of Faridabad. In fact alongwith Mehrauli and Tugluqabad it constitutes the triangle of historical importance in the National Capital Region of Delhi. Tugluqabad was the Centre of Delhi during the reign of Mohd Bin Tagluq and Mehrauli is believed to be the place where the first Delhi was created. Anangpur was founded by Raja Anangpal and the famous King of Delhi Prithvi Raj Chauhan lived here. Anangpur also has the distinction of having the first school of SOS chain in India for orphan children. The creation of the school in this village has transformed the life of people living there by bringing modern education and latest health care to the doorsteps of villagers.

It is this village which is now witnessing another transformation these days. The people of the village are helping in creating a replica of Hariparbat on one of the hillocks on the boundary of the village with a temple of goddess Sharika on the top, as a token of solidarity with the displaced Kashmiri Pandits.

The entire idea of developing 'Hari Parbat' at Faridabad germinated in the mind of Sh J.N. Koul the founder chief of the SOS schools who is a household name in Anangpur. Sh J.N. Koul, after the forced displacement of Kashmiri Pandits from the Valley, had to plunge into one more arduous field of helping his fellow communitymen in exile.

He, as the President of Kashmiri Sevak Samaj of Faridabad and All India Kashmiri Samaj, started many vocational, educational and self help schemes for displaced Pandits. Few years back he and his wife were struck with the urge of creating a temple for goddess 'Sharka' on one of the hillocks adjoining the Anangpur village. They visualised transforming the hillock into a replica of Hariparbat so that the entire area is transformed into a meditational centre. He broached the idea with the village elders but a responsive cord was struck only after some villagers had strange spiritual experiences during their sleep. As per the common talk in the village some villagers saw goddess in their dreams extolling them to construct a temple on the top of the built. These experiences inspired the villagers, who to the last person have been staunch Arya Samajists, to donate the hillock for creation of a temple for the goddess Sharika. They appealed to 'Papa Ji' (Sh. J.N. Koul) to immediately start the construction of the temple. Sh Koul immediately entrusted the job to the experienced project consultant for SOS village Sh C.K. Dass.

With the voluntary help pouring from all sides of the village and elsewhere

Sh C.K. Dass started the work of constructing steps to the hill top. Initially 60 steps were built from west to the east. And with the construction of these steps the entire concept of transforming the hillock into the abode of Sharika started concretising.

After a year of work now, a total of 211 steps have been built to reach the main temple at the top. The temple constructed at the top has a height of 33 feet from the top of the hill. As the construction of the 'Sanctum Sanctoram' neared its completion it was felt that the initial Marble deity 'Sheran Wali Maa' brought from Rajasthan was relatively smaller for the size the temple had assumed. So the project team decided to instal a bigger deity. One nationally reknowned sculptor from Orissa Mr Maharana was assigned the task of sculpting the deity. Mr Maharana happens to belong to the family of sculptors who built Konark Temple and is recipient of the President's Award for sculpture. He sculpted the statue of goddess in the sand stone of Orissa. And the diety was subsequently placed in the sanctum sanctrum.

The diety has remarkable feature which are not traditionally seen in the north Indian statues. The flavour of the sculpture is a mainly of East and South India.

With the completion of the temple the other main work of 'Land Scaping' Of the hillock has begun and it is just a matter of time when the entire are would be transformed into a beautiful meditation centre.

For last few years 'Hari Parbat' Anangpur has become a place where 'Kashmiri Pandits' in and around Delhi observe their 'Nav Reh' festivals. Thousands of villagers of Anangpur, as a true mark of national intergeration, join them on the day and together they rise up to hillock to pay obeisance to the deity. The

creation of 'Hari Parbat' is one more example of the effort of the displaced community to build symbols in exile to protect their identity.

However, significantly this effort has helped transform a village into tourist spot. 'Aap Ne Is Gaaon Mein Raunak Layee'...you have brought new light to the village-say the villagers with pride. Women folk of the village are happy in particular for two reasons. One that their 'Maan Sheran Wali' has come to their door step and second that it has helped to introduce an element of religiosity amongst the village youth many of whom unfortunately are alcohol addicts. 'The religious atmosphere will certainly help in improving the habits of our youth', said the village elders. Experiencing happiness after the creation of the temple the villagers have come forward to donate one more hillock to be transformed into temples of Shiva. 'You have created Hari Parbat. Why don't you create a Shankara Charya Temple here'

J&K is neither Aaland Islands nor South Tyrol War like situation exists in Siachen. Pakistan is desperately trying to dislodge India from the vital positions there. During the last seven months Pakistan has made 15 attempts to capture Siachen and after Lahore declaration Pakistan again reactivated Siachen by launching two major last one being on March 29-30.

Engagement over Siachen glacier has remained a dilemma for both India and Pakistan. Are the two fighting only for military prestige' Since 1984, the snow-warriors of India and Pakistan have been locked in supremacy for the control of Siachen glacier. Its inhospitable terrain has taken heavy toll of men and resources on both sides. Fiction and folklore have become mingled with Siachen warfare.

*Source:* Kashmir Sentinel

## 11 Sodaratiratha

### *Myth, Legend and History*

Dr. Ramesh Kumar

#### **Background**

For Kashmiri Hindus all the images erected by the sages and all the great lakes in Kashmir are holy. Regular pilgrimages to these places have formed an integral part of their socio-religious history.

Naran Nag, located at the foot of steep Butsher mountain leading to Gangabal pilgrimage, has from times immemorial remained a site of pilgrimage, enjoying a very high degree of popular esteem. It is ten miles away from Kangan, the last major town on Srinagar-Sonamarg highway. In ancient times, it was called Sodaratiratha.

The sanctity of Naran Nag is derived from the existence of a large spring, Sodara Nag. Around it have been built two, actually three groups of temples in east and west directions. In terms of antiquity, these temples have been erected around the same time as Sankaracharya temple and Bumuzuv temple, near Mattan on Pahalgam road. Only the temple remains of Payech seem more ancient.

The importance of the pilgrimage to Sadaratiratha continues to the present times, but more as an extension of Gangabal pilgrimage. Pilgrims after consigning the ashes of their dead relatives to the Gangabal (Uttaramanasa) lake, make it a point to offer worship here, by staying overnight. The myth, legend and the history of Sodaratiratha indicates that it had an importance of its own, rivalled by few pilgrimages.

The Sodarana has been lost in the tradition of Purohitas as well as in the religious lore of Kashmiri Pandits. Pandit Sahibram, that careful scholar on Kashmir's socio-religious history, in his monumental work Tirtha Samgraha, refers to the antiquity of Naran Nag. In his notes on Harmukttaganga pilgrimage, he writes.

***Tatah (the Harmuktganga Lake) Pratyavrtya Vangatakhyapradese (Vangath) Prathamam Bhutesvara Pujam Vidhya Sodarnage Yastim (viz. the long stick used on the mountain pilgrimage) Ksiptra Visrjya Pratyayat.***

Nilmatpurana mentions Sodarana in connection with the shrine of Bhutesvara (Butsher) and Kankavahini river. Ablutions in the Sodara spring are recommended to the pilgrim visiting the tirathas of Bhutesvara, Jyesthesa and Nandin.

The particular region around the spring of Sodarana was also known as Bhuteshvara or Shiva Bhutesha-the lord of beings. This entire area is clad by dense pine and fir forests. Roaring stream of Kanakvahini (present Kanaknai/Kankinaz or Karanknadi of Harmuktganga Mahatmya), flows to the south of Sodaratiratha. It is formed from the tributaries, which flow out from the sacred Nundkol (Kalodoka) and Gangabal lakes. Temple ruins are seen on the right bank of Kanak Vahini.

Wangat (Vangat), the nearest village with human habitation is five kms. away and gives the name to the temple ruins as "Wangat Temples". Wangat is ancient Vashisthasrama, named after sage Vashistha. He, as per tradition, stayed here while consecrating Linga called Jyesthesa at Naran Nag.

#### **11.1 Sodarana**

Sodara Nag spring lies to the north of the temple complex and is a oblong-rectangular structure. Its northern side is a rocky area and the original spring has been camouflaged with a drain chamber. The other three walls are built in dressed and polished masonry in a stepped fashion. In the rocky surface a few lingas are also carved in the rock face. RC Agarwal believes that these lingas date to fifth-sixth century AD. About the spring, he remarks that in the early historical period it was properly channelled and a tank was scooped out for storing the spring water. The tank is lined with ancient slabs.

The sanctity of the tank-spring has also aroused much interest among the archaeologists. RC Agarwal comments, "the sanctity of the tank or Pushkarni was so overwhelming that in the later period it was used

for performing rituals and became a tirtha, which in subsequent historical writing came to be known as Sodaratiratha." In the opinion of Pandit RC Kak, the pioneer archeologist of Kashmir, "its cool, delicious water, perhaps contributed to some extent to its sanctity".

The spiritual merits of taking bath in Sodaranag have been enumerated at length in Nilmat, our principal source for studying significance of Sodaranag. It says that one may obtain prominence among the ganas by seeing Hara Bhutesvara, Jyesthesvara and Nandi after taking bath in the holy Sodara. The merits of taking bath in the Sodaranag and Uttarananasa (Gangbal) lake are same i.e. one thousand cows. In fact, Uttaramanasa is believed to be the abode of Sodaranaga and the linga Jyethesa at Naran Nag is washed with water from Uttaramanasa lake. One can also attain the merit of performing Rajasuya and Asvamedha by taking a dip in the Sodaranag.

Sodara (Kashmiri) is derived from Sanskrit Samudra, meaning ocean. What expanse and depth of this spring impressed the ancient Kashmiris so much that they mistook it for Samudra' Kashmir being far away from the sea, the expanse and the depth of blue-coloured Gangabal lake reminded Kashmiris of sea. And possibly for those who could not withstand the hazardous mountain journey, mini-Gangabal was created as Sodaranag at Naran Nag.

### ***11.2 Siva Bhutesha Worship***

Nandiksetra or Nandisaksetra refers to the whole sacred territory from the lakes on the Harmukta down to Bhutesvara. Sodaratiratha lies at the outermost limit of Nandiksetra. Nandisa is the designation of the Shiva worshipped in the Nund-Kol lake (Kalodaka lake). The inner portion of the lake showing blue colour is supposed to mark the residence of Kala or Siva. The outer portion having light green colour is the place where Nandin lives. There is a legendary description of how Siva came to take up his residence in this area in the form of Bhutesa, in Nilmatpurana. The mountain spur, which stretches south-east from Harmukh peaks marks the residence of Bhutesa. It bears to the present day the name of Buthsher i.e. Bhutesvara.

Both Kalhana and Sir Aurel Stein have commented eloquently about the religious significance of this region. Kalhana says, "there even to this day drops of Sandal ointment offered by the gods are to be seen at Nandiksetra, the permanent residence of Siva". Stein writes, "the worship of Siva Bhutesa, 'the lord of the beings' localised near the sacred sites of Mount Harmukh has played an important part in ancient religion of Kashmir". In the Nilmat, Siva says to Nandi, "you shall live in my company in a place at a distance of one Yojana from here towards the east. O best of the ganas, I in the form of Hara Bhutesvara, shall dwell in your company. O Nandi, the gifted sage Vasistha on the earth shall erect your image and also mine at that place."

At Naran Nag, there are temples erected in honour of Siva Bhutesa and Siva Ugresa. Bhairava together with a 'circle of mothers' (Matrachakra) is worshipped close to Bhutesa temple. As Bhairva is connected with bloody sacrifices, his shrines are kept some distance away from those of other deities. Matrachakra refers to the Saivite goddesses, the Sapta Matrka or seven mothers, representing Life and Death, radiant loveliness and hideous ugliness.

### ***11.3 Jyestharudra Cult***

However, Sodaratiratha's fame rests on its being the original sanctuary of Siva Jyethesa or Jyestharudra. As per legend, Siva liberated Parvati (Jyestha) from Daityas here and on marrying her took the name of Jyethesa. In the Jyethesa temple at Naran Nag, Siva is worshipped as linga. Nilmat says that the consecration and first worship of the Jyestharudra linga is distinctly attributed to Rishivasistha. When Bishop Cowie visited Naran Nag in late nineteenth century, he found the base of a colossal linga at the South-West corner of the enclosure of Jyestharudra temple complex. Stein comments that this remnant of linga which Cowie found, "belonged perhaps to the very emblem of Jyethesa." Linga was worshipped here under the name Svayambhuh i.e. natural stone and not sculptured symbol of god.

The similar lingas are worshipped at Sarikaparvat and Suresvari. There are basically three sites in Kashmir, where Siva Jyethesa was worshipped under this name or its equivalents, Jyesthesvara and

Jyestharudra. These are Mt. Harmukta in the sacred territory of Nandiksetra; near Tripuresvara (Modern Triphar) i.e. between Mahadev and Suresvar; and in the close neighbourhood of Srinagar.

Shrines at Sodaranag have enjoyed liberal patronage from successive Kashmirian Kings. For their abiding faith, they often retired to this place for offering penance. Since royal citizenry frequently visited this place, the locality has also been called 'Rajdainabal'. Families of Asoka, and Kalhana had great reverence for the shrines of Nandiksetra. During Asoka's time, Kashmir was overrun by Mlecchas (Greeks). He offered austerities to Siva Bhutesa and obtained from him a son, later named as Jaluka, in order to exterminate mlecchas.

According to Rajatarangini, Jaluka (137 BC) erected a stone temple at Nandiksetra for Siva Bhutesa and offered to the god a sacrifice of precious stones with other treasures. The offering of flowers made of precious metals and stones is mentioned in various Saiva Paddhatis still in use in Kashmir. This temple has been identified with Siva Bhutesa temple at Naran Nag.

Jaluka vanquished the Mlecchas, by defeating them at Ujjhatadimba. Having done this, the King through his queen Isanadevi founded Matracakras all over the Valley, particularly in the frontier region. He began regular worship at Sodara and other places as vying with Nandisa. It is said Jaluka would attend every day to worship of tirathas so distant from each other as Vijayesvara and Sodaratiratha. The journey from Vijayesvara to Jyethesa in Nandiksetra is nearly 100 kms. To rationalise this, Kalhana writes, "A Naga out of kindness would not allow him to ride in stages (four marches) with horses kept ready from village to village, but carried him always himself".

Distance to Sodara made him uneasy. He created a shrine in Srinagar near Dal Lake, which rivalled Sodaratiratha. The shrine is located at Jyether village, adjoining the Sankaracharya hill. Fragments of a massive linga as big as ten feet in diameter have been found here.

While engaged in erecting Jyestharudra shrine at Jyether, Jaluka felt that without the Sodara spring, it could not rival Nandisa. There is a legendary account mentioned by Kalhana regarding the emergence and sanctity of Jyesthanaga (at Jyether), rivalling Sodaranag.

Once in his preoccupation with state affairs, he felt dismayed at not being able to take his bath in the waters of the far-off Sodara spring. He observed in a waterless spot water suddenly welling up which in colour, taste and other respects was indistinguishable from that of Sodara. After having a dip in this sacred bring, the King felt satisfied in his desire to vie Nandirudra (Nandisa). To test the identity of the new spring, he threw into the Sodara spring an empty golden cup, closed at its mouth with a lid. His doubts were removed, when the cup appeared two and a half days later in this new spring at Jyether. Kalhana magnifies importance of this miracle by saying, "It seems that the King was Nandisa himself, who had descended in an Avtara to enjoy the pleasures of the earth. Not otherwise could such a miraculous event take place before men's very eyes."

### **11.4 Patronage**

Sodaratirtha's sanctity invited the attention of Kings and nobility of Kashmir. They raised temples and gifted wealth to the shrine. Temples were endowed with extensive estates and the priests incharge seem to have been a particularly influential body. The earliest evidence about the royal contribution to the shrine goes back to 253 BC, when King Narendraditya I alias Khimkhila was ruling Kashmir. He consecrated shrines of Siva Bhutesvara and founded a permanent endowment for feeding of Brahmans. His guru Ugra constructed shrines of Siva Ugresa and a 'circle of mothers'.

In Jayendra's time (61 BC), the three most famous shrines of Siva worship were Bhutesa, Vardhamanasa (Ganpatyar) and Vijayeya (Bijbehara). King Sandhimati (24 BC) alias Aryaraja (Vikramaditya dynasty) also used to worship at Sodaratirtha. About his devotion, Kalhana writes, "when he went about to beg his food, he was welcomed with much respect as a follower of the observances ordained by Siva. The wives of the ascetics vied eagerly in every hermitage to give him alms. But as his alms-bowl was filled with choice fruits and blossoms by the trees he, who deserved respect, had not to suffer the humiliation of mendicancy even when he lived the life of renunciation".

The King had stood in front of the shrine of Siva Bhutesa at Sodaratirtha. In true fashion of ascetics he had covered himself with white ash, with his neatly arranged hair tied in a knot. He carried a rosary, marked with Rudraksa.

Lalituditya (713-755) on return from his victorious expeditions presented huge sums (' eleven crores) of his war booty as an expiatory offering to the shrine. He erected a lofty stone temple of Siva Jyestharudra in close proximity to the shrine and also made a grant of land and villages.

Avantivarman (855-883), a man of wisdom and culture, made a pedestal with silver conduit for bathing of sacred image (snanadroni). He had similar conduits installed at Tripuresvara and Vijaysevara.

Jayasimha also consecrated a linga of Siva called Bhutesvara here. His Prime Minister Srngara, son of Sajjaka would spend great sums to make available at shrine ample provisions for celebration of full moon day of Asadha. This festival (Devas Vapana), mentioned in Nilmat, would be celebrated over ten days. Writing about Srngara's arrangements, Kalhana says, "in recent times even Kings could not have imitated. He had been directed there by Canpaka (Kalhana's Minister-father) and others. Thereby he obtained subsequently prosperity for five-six years".

Sumanas, brother of Rilhana, another minister of Jayasimha built a matha or congregation hall here. RC Kak says, "It is possible that the pillared hall is the same matha. Further excavations may throw light upon this question."

Nobility and Kings often desired to retire to Sodara tiratha. Queen Ratnadevi, after erecting matha at Ratnapora, retired to Nandiksetra. King Kalasa (1063-1089) is quoted by Kalhana as having said, "After completing the foundation of my town, I shall throw upon you the burden of the crown and go as an ascetic to Varnasi or Nandiksetra".

Kalhana's family was equally devoted to Sodaratirtha shrine. His father Canpaka paid frequent visits to the shrines of Nandiksetra i.e. Buthser and made rich endowments there. Every year he would spend seven days at this tiratha and utilise his entire sayings. Ultimately he retired to Nandiksetra. Kalhana's uncle Kanaka also used to frequent this shrine. In fact, the nearest town of Kangan (old name Kankanpora) is named after him.

The lavish gifts and treasures bestowed upon the shrine led to its plunder from time to time. A powerful Damara from Lahara (modern Lar), Dhanova in the time of Avantivarman plundered the villages attached to the shrine. Once Avantivarman had come to worship at Siva Bhutesvara. After having presented on his own behalf sacrificial apparatus, which was in keeping with his royal dignity, he noticed that the temple priests had placed on the base of the god's image as an offering a wild growing vegetable with a bitter estate, Utpalasaka (Wopal hakh). When King asked the priests the reason for such an offering, they threw themselves on the ground, and spoke with hands folded. The Purohitas of the shrine wanted to demonstrate to King the poverty to which they were reduced by placing before the image, instead of proper offerings, leaves of Utpalasaka i.e. a present of no value. The King left the worship, feigning colic, making it appear as if he had not heard what he had heard. His minister Sura understood and went to Bhairava temple near Bhutesa. He tactfully ordered off the assembled crowd. Having done this, when only few attendants remained, Sura asked Dhanova to present himself. He appeared after repeated calls from Sura. Minister's armed men were ordered to decapitate Dhanova near the image of Bhairava temple, located higher up to Sodarana. The body of the Dhanova was thrown into the basin of Naran Nag, the pond close by. Kalhana writes, "the wise Sura, who had thus removed the King's displeasure, went outside after having the body, from which the blood was pouring forth, thrown into the tank close by".

Bhadreshvara, Minister of King Sangramraja (1003-28) also committed a similar hateful deed in plundering the treasury of Bhutesvara.

The shrine was burnt during the reign of Uccala (1101-11) by a sudden conflagration. The King rebuilt it a fresh, finer than before. During the rebellions under Jayasimha (1128-55), the temples were sacked by the marauding hillmen (Khasas) at the instigation of rebel baron Haya Vadana. Shrine of Bhutesvara seems to have escaped the sacrilegious confiscations of King Harsa. There are no records available which

speak about vandalism or consecration of new temples at Naran Nag during the Sultanate rule or later Muslim period.

### *11.5 Post Script*

As pilgrims failed to reach distant Sodaratirtha, they created its replicas close to their homes. Near Hazratbal on the deep inlet of Dal (Sudrkhun) lies the village Sudrabal. Stein believes that both Sudrkhun and Sudrabal are linked to Sodara spring. There are also two pools fed by perennial springs near the lake shore and close to the mosque of Sudrabal. There is a definite tradition which says that these springs were visited by numerous pilgrims. Infact, a portion of Sudrabal village is called Battapor. This points to a former settlement of Pandits.

In North Kashmir, there is a village, Sudrkoth (Srivara mentions it as Samudrakota) near northeast shore of volur. Sudr'mar is the quarter in which lies Somatirtha of Rajatarangini, built by queen Samudra of King Ramadeva in 13th century. It was also called Samudramatha.

*Source:* Kashmir Sentinel

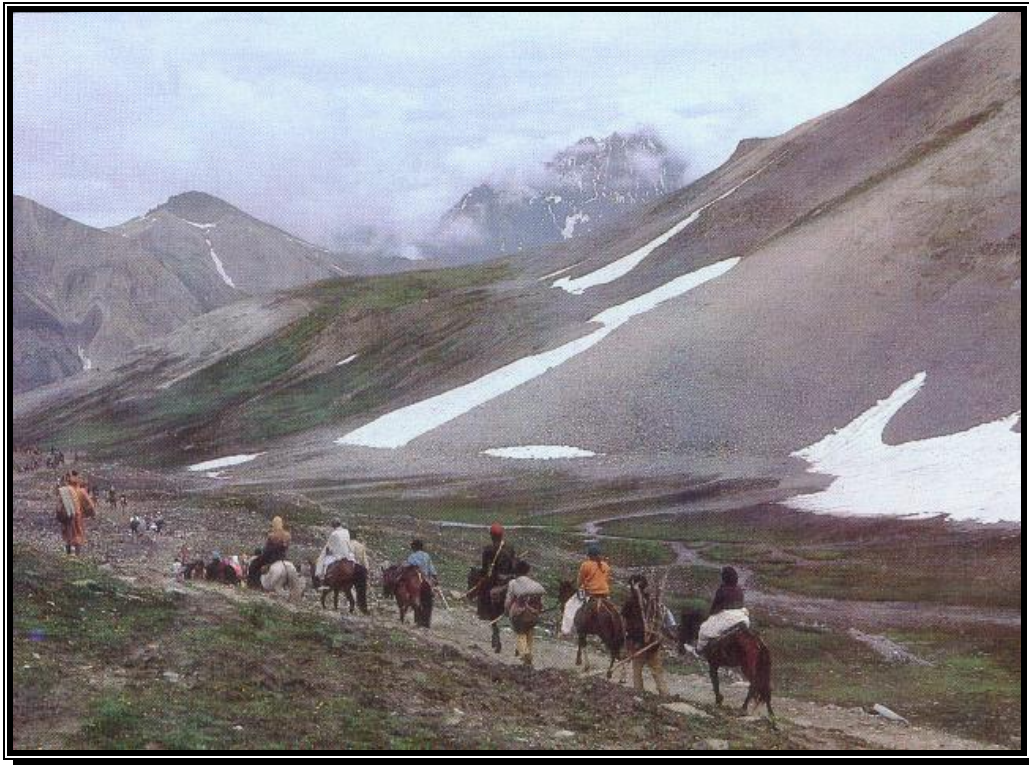
## **12 Amarnath Cave**

### **12.1 Pilgrimage to Amarnath Cave**

**One** of the holy trinity, **Shiva** is a living god. The most sacred and most ancient book of India, the Rig Veda evokes his presence in its hymns. Vedic myths, ritual and even astronomy testify to his existence from the dawn of time. But Shiva, the destroyer, the mendicant, is undefinable: he is the great yogi, the guardian of the absolute. His actions are the themes of the myths in which his nature unfolds.

Shiva, he of the opposites and the absolute, is known to have made his home in the Himalayas. He built no house nor shelter, not for himself nor for his bride. He was an ascetic, and yet married; he could be both for "he was the wild god sporting in the forest or taking his ease on a cloud."

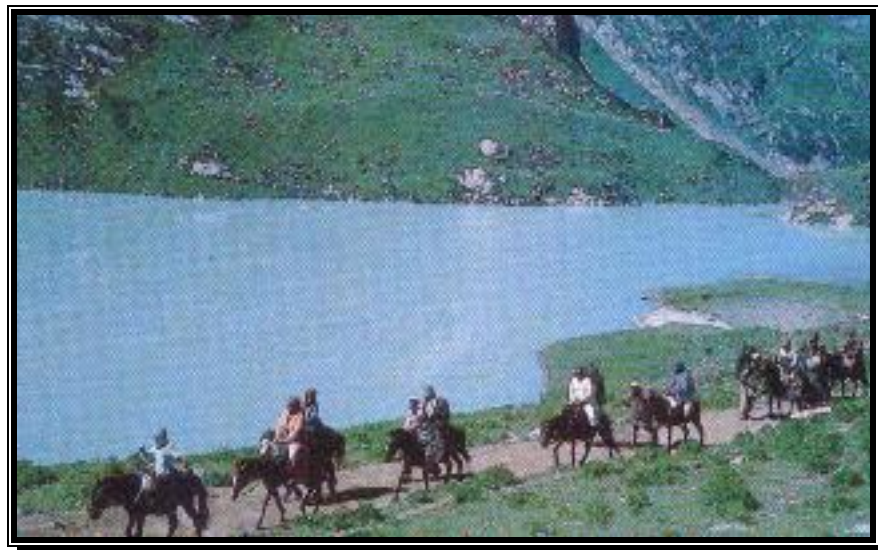
Legend has it that Shiva recounted to **Parvati** the secret of creation in a cave in Amarnath. Unknown to them, a pair of mating doves eavesdropped on this conversation and having learned the secret, are reborn again and again, and have made the cave their eternal abode. Many pilgrims report seeing the doves-pair when they trek the arduous route to pay obeisance before the ice-lingam (the phallic symbol of Shiva).



**Making their way across Mahagunas pass.**

*Picture Courtesy: J&K Tourism*





**Along the spectacular Sheshnag Lake.**

*Picture Courtesy: J&K Tourism*

The trek to **Amarnath**, in the month of Shraavan (July-August) has the devout flock to this incredible shrine, where the image of Shiva, in the form of a **lingam**, is formed naturally of an ice-stalagmite, and which waxes and wanes with the moon. By its side are, fascinatingly, two more ice-lingams, that of Parvati, and of their son, **Ganesha**.

According to an ancient tale, there was once a Muslim shepherd named Buta Malik who was given a sack of coal by a sadhu. Upon reaching home he discovered that the sack, in fact, contained gold. Overjoyed and overcome, Buta Malik rushed back to look for the sadhu and thank him, but on the spot of their meeting discovered a cave, and eventually this became a place of pilgrimage for all believers. To date, a percentage of the donations made by pilgrims are given to the descendants of Malik. and the remaining to the trust which manages the shrine.

Yet another legend has it that when **Kashyap Reshi** drained the Kashmir valley of water (it was believed to have been a vast lake), the cave and the lingam were discovered by **Bregish Reshi** who was travelling the Himalayas. When people heard of the lingam, Amarnath for them became Shiva's abode and a center of pilgrimage.

Whatever the legends and the history of Amarnath's discovery, it is today an extremely crucial centre of pilgrimage, and though the route is as difficult to trespass as it is exciting, every annum, millions of devotees from the subcontinent come to pay homage before Shiva in one of his Himalayan abodes.

Situated in a narrow gorge at the farther end of **Lidder** valley, Amarnath stands at 3,888 m and is 44.8 km from **Pahalgam** and 141 km from Srinagar. Though the original pilgrimage subscribes that the yatra be undertaken from Srinagar, the more common practise is to begin journey at Pahalgam, and cover the distance to Amarnath and back in five days. Pahalgam is 96 km from Srinagar.

The trek from Pahalgam to Amarnath cave is on an ancient peregrine route. The 45-km distance is covered in four days, with night halts at **Chandanwari**, **Sheshnag (Wawjan)** and **Panchtarni**. The distance from Pahalgam to Chandanwari (12.8 km) is covered in about five to six hours, and the trail runs along the Lidder river. Pilgrims camp here on the first night out. A major attraction here is a bridge covered, year round, with ice even though the surroundings are free from it.

The next day's trek, of 13 km, is through spectacular, primeval countryside, and the main centre of attraction is Sheshnag, a mountain which derives its name from its seven peaks, resembling the heads of a mythical snake. The journey to Sheshnag follows steep inclines up the right bank of a cascading stream

and wild scenery untouched by civilization. The second night's camp at Wawjan overlooks the deep blue waters of Sheshnag lake, and glaciers beyond it.

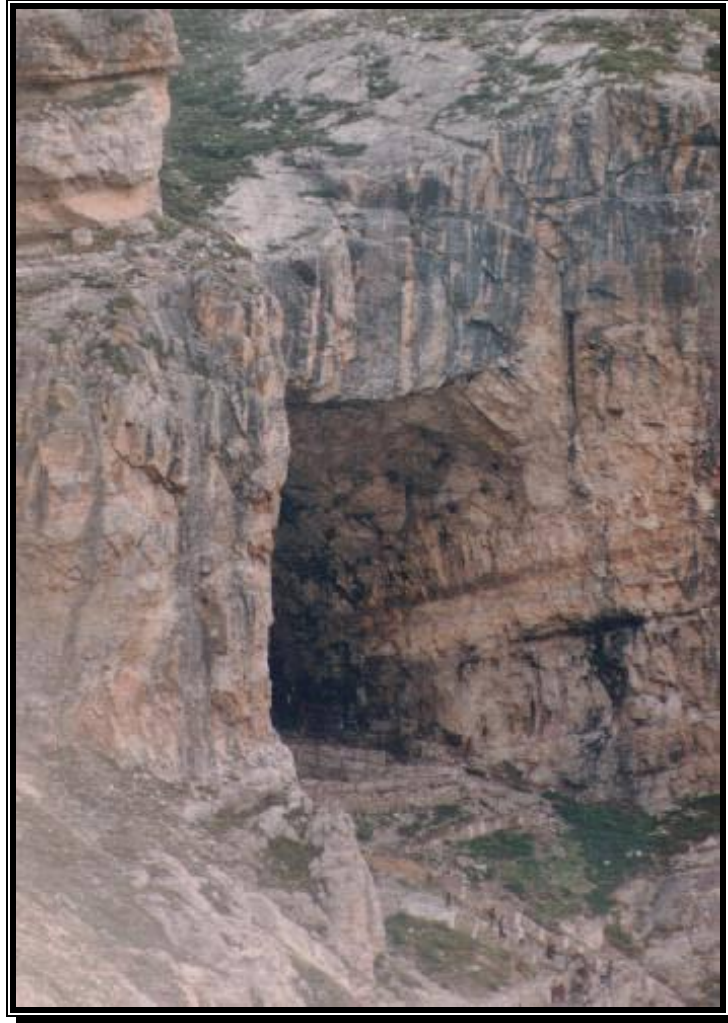


**Shiva and Parvati with Ganesh.**

There are legends of love and revenge too associated with Sheshnag, and at the camp these are recounted by campfires, to the stillness of a pine-scented, Himalayan night.

The third day's 13 km trek steadily gains height, winding up across Mahagunas Pass at 4,600 m and then descending to the meadow-lands of Panchtarni, the last camp enroute to the holy cave.

From Panchtarni to Amarnath is only 6 km, but an early morning's start is recommended for there is a long queue awaiting entrance to the cave. The same day, following darshan, devotees can return to Panchtarni in time for lunch, and continue to Wawjan to spend the fourth night out; or continue further to Zojibal, returning to Pahalgam on the fifth day.



**Entrance to the Amarnath Cave.**

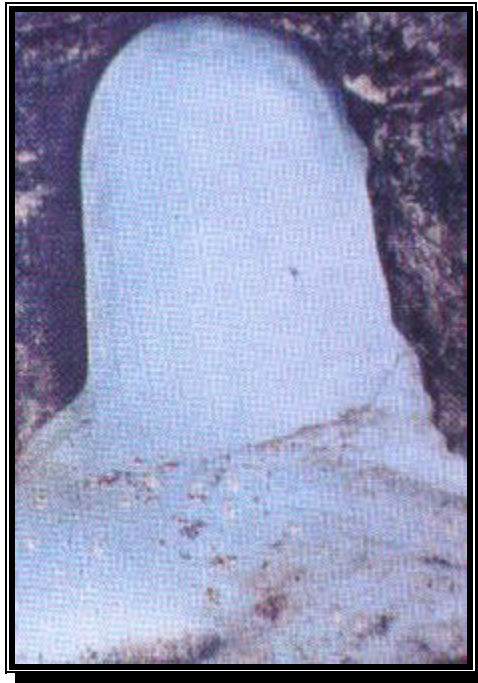
Entrance to the cave is regulated, and darshan a hasty affair for there are many others waiting outside to pay homage before the awesome Shivalinga. The devotees sing bhajans, chant incantations, and priests perform aarti and puja, invoking the blessings of Shiva, the divine, the pure, the absolute. For those who journey with faith, it is a rewarding experience, this simple visitation to a cave-shrine, the home of the Himalayan mendicant who is both destroyer and healer, the greatest of the Hindu deities.

### *12.2 The Mysterious Cave of Amarnath*

**Man's** search after God began with the dawn of creation. This search has assumed various forms, some seekers have concentrated on the teachings of the great prophets of religions, and others have gone on pilgrimages to the birth places of saints and prophets and visited localities where the different gospels were preached. Thereby they seek inspiration to help them in their quest.

The grandeur of Northern India lies in its glorious mountain ranges . . . the Himalayas. It is on these ramparts of Nature that the prosperity of India depends. Shri Krishna says in the Bhagwat Gita, 'I am the Himalayas among mountains'. The Indians look upon them as the abode of celestial beings. It is said that in the caves of Himalayas live sages who have been in meditation for hundreds of years. They occasionally reveal themselves in disguise to pilgrims. Among the many holy places in the side-valleys of these mountains, two . . . Kidar Nath towards the south and Amar Nath in the interior of Kashmir Himdlaya's . . . stand out prominently. There are also a number of mountain peaks which are dedicated to

certain gods or goddesses. The most sacred spots in Tibet on the further side of the Indian border are Mount Kailas and the Manasarwar lake where adepts in spiritual lore are supposed to be living in their subtle bodies. These Masters are ever ready to guide the travellers on the spiritual path. I think one of the reasons why men go to these places is to see the Hand of the Creation in scenes of Nature's impressive grandeur. As these places are not easy of access, and as they are thousands of feet above the sea-level, beyond the dust and din of the world, man's soul gets elevated at the sight of their sublime beauty and thus he is brought closer to the object of his quest.



**The Shivalinga.**

*Picture Courtesy: J&K Tourism*

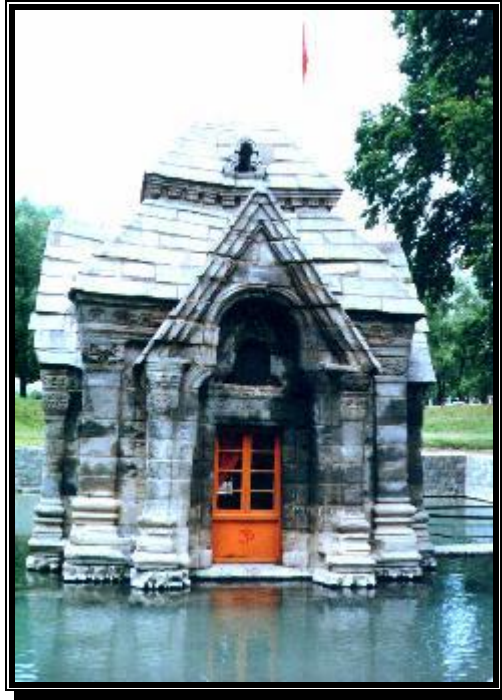
There are special days fixed according to the lunar calendar to visit these sacred places. The pilgrims assemble on a certain date in a certain place and start together. Such a rule is applicable only to those places which lie in mountains and the going is difficult. The Government provide facilities as far as possible everywhere for pilgrims.

The most famous of these pilgrimages is the Cave of Amar Nath which is an All-India Holy Place. People visit it from every corner of India. Mention of it occurs twice in the Raiatarangini (the history of Kashmir), first where the King Ram Deva is stated to have imprisoned the debauch King Sukh Deva and to have drowned him in the Lidder (Lambodheri) among the mountains of Amar Nath about 1,000 B.C., and a second time where King Sandimati (34 B.C. to 17 A.D.) is described as visiting the ice-lingam.

This shows that this sacred spot was known to the people in very early times. One can only guess as to how this cave was discovered. The villagers of the Kashmir Valley generally send their flocks under a shepherd's care to the pastures in summer. Each shepherd has his own pasture which he inherits from his father. The word Pahalgam means 'a village of shepherds'. While grazing his flock round the pastures of Pansatarni, some shepherd may have lost some members of his flock. In search of these he may have climbed the mountain and found this cave with the Shiva-lingam in it and communicated the news to his brothers who in turn must have made it known to others. The maliks as the guides to the cave are now called, have a share in the offerings to the deity. Formerly, in absence of tangas and lorries the whole journey from Srinagar was done on foot. There were a large number of springs, places and streams in the

way where the pilgrims had to bathe, and drink water. Since the introduction of wheeled conveyances many of these places have been abandoned being out of the way, and much time is thus saved. For the information of the reader I give a detailed list of places which a pilgrim is expected to visit for a bath and other ceremonial purposes.

**Old Route.** According to the Amar Nath Mahatmya a pilgrim is expected to bathe or drink water at the following places before he enters the Holy Cave. As some of the places are not accessible to wheeled conveyance, they are not now visited by pilgrims.



**Pandrethan**

*Picture Courtesy: J&K Tourism*

**Srinagar.** Shudashi Khetor, the modern Shurahyar about 2.5 miles from Srinagar. It is said that in ancient times there was a stone staircase leading from this place to the top of the Shankarachar. Lately a temple has been built here.

**Shivpor.** There must have been a temple here, but there is no trace of it now.

**Pandrethan.** The old Panthdreshti about 1.5 miles from Shurahyar. There is a temple in the middle of the spring built by Meru the Prime Minister of King Paratha (921-31 A.C.). Kak is of opinion that this is the temple of Shiv-Rilhanesvara erected by Rilhana, the Prime Minister of Jayasimha, about the year A.D. 1135.

**Padampur.** This was the favourite haunt of Rajank Acharyas the present Razdan family. It is 5.5 miles from Pandrethan. It was here that Shri Lalishwari lived. There is a spot here which is called Lalatrag.

**Javati.** The modern Zewan. It is 7 miles from Srinagar. The road is metalled. There is a spring here dedicated to Vasak Nag. There are regular buses running now.

**Meshitoud.** It means sweet water, the modern Petwan.

**Avantiporika.** It is known as Seda Khetor, the modern Avantipor. There are at this place old temples built by King Avantivarman (855-883 A.C.).

**Barsu.** There is a stream flowing through the village called Rudara Ganga.

**Jaubror.** There must have been a temple here in olden times.

**Mahawarishwarn.** The old Mahawaras.

**Haridrak Ganapati.** Known as Hari Ganish.

**Belihar.** Known as Belyar. This was known as Lakhmi Khetor.

**Wagahama.** The place is known as Hastikaran.

**Tsakrish.** The modern Tsakodar. This is a plateau on the right bank of the Vetasta near Bijbihara. It is 28 miles from Srinagar.

**Dewak Tirth.** The modern Dewakivar.

Hari Tsander. It is the southern ghat of the Bijbihara stone temple. It contains a huge stone lingam.

**Sthalwat.** The modern Thajwor. It is 2.75 Miles from Bijbehara and here water drips from the southern side of the plateau through maiden-hair on the Shivlingam.

**Suryi-Gohawati.** The modern Sriguphvara. It is 4.75 miles from Thajwor.

Lambodari. A stream in which the pilgrims have to bathe.

**Sirhom.** Here is a spring called Surya Ganga where worship takes place.

**Bodrus.** The place is sacred to Ganpat whose worship removes all obstacles.

**Tsatrus Bodrus.** The place is now called Hayi.

**Shirshi Ashram.** The Woter Nag Ganga flows by this Spot. It is 2 miles from Sriguphvara.

**Sallar.** Here the people bathe in the stream. The place is 3.5 miles from Tsatrus Bodrus and is reached by a pony track.

**Bala Khelyan.** Known as Vishna Khetor, the modern Bala Khellan.

**Ganish Bal.** 10.5 miles from Sallar. Here Ganish is worshipped. It is on the right bank of the Lidder below Pahalgam.

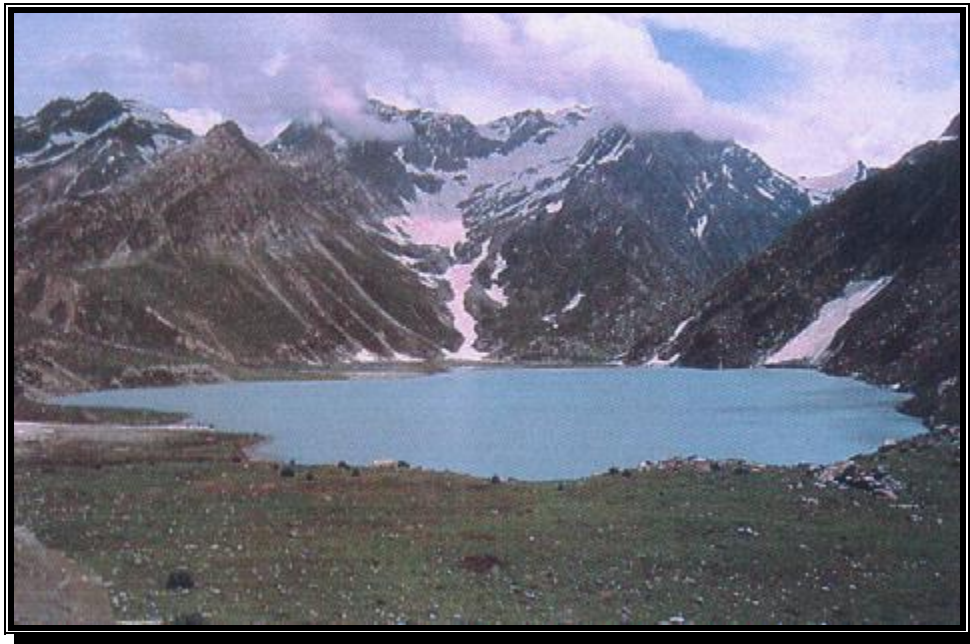
### **Mamalishwar (Shiva Lingam)**

On the right bank of the Lidder is a spring and an old temple containing a Shiva Lingam at this place which is about a mile from Pahalgam. It is said that when Shiva removed His seat from Thojwara to Mamalishwar Ganish who was his door-keeper did not allow devas to visit Him. Hence the name of the village Mamal - don't go.



**Mamalishwar**

On one occasion Indra sought permission to visit Shiva. Ganish did not allow him. So there followed a quarrel, Ganish became furious and thirsty. He drank the river which became dry. Shiva while playing at his tabor poked the stomach of Ganish with it and out flowed the stream again, hence Lambodari.



**Sheshnag Lake**

*Picture Courtesy: J&K Tourism*

In my opinion the source of the Lidder is the Kolahoi glacier. A stream joins it at Lidderwat which is the corrupt form of Lambodar wat-a rock dedicated to Ganish who is also named Lambodar and it is from here that the river was named Lambodari the modern Lidder. This must have been a place of pilgrimage in the olden times. An affluent from Tarsar enters the river at this place.

**Bragapati Khetra.** It is a spring in Pahalgam. It is said that Vishnu was pleased with the worship of Brago whom He embraced. Brago perspired, which gave rise to a spring. This spring is behind the village.

**Nila Ganga.** It is about 3 miles from Pahalgam. Close by the foot of Pisu Hill was the tirth of Sthanishwar where pilgrims had to bathe. One day Shiva kissed the eyes of Parvati to which antimony had been applied. He washed her eyes in water which turned dark-blue, hence Nila Ganga. There was a great fight between the Devas and the Daityas. The Devas did not allow the Daityas to see Shiva. The Daityas were defeated and ground down to tiny bits. Hence Pisu Hill.

**Sheshiram Nag.** A certain Daitya's body was entirely made of wind. He became very powerful. He troubled the Devas every way. They all entreated Shiva to rid them of the monster. Shiva told them that he was his disciple, and that they should approach Vishnu, which they did. Vishnu sent his Wahan, Sheshi Nag who sucked all the wind from the Daitya's body and the Daitya was killed. Pilgrims bathe in the lake.

**Vaovajen.** Some of the Daityas still concealed themselves in the lakes around the place. These lakes, were dried and the Daityas were killed. Hence Hoka Sar (dried lake). The Deva's were told to build small houses of stones as a shelter against the wind. Hence pilgrims also make toy sheds of stones.

**Pantsatarni.** This is believed to represent plaited hair (jata) of Shiva from which the Ganga flows. It is said that Shiva told one of his Rudhragans to beat the drum every evening. He forgot to do so one evening. Thereupon he was cursed and turned into a mountain which is now known as Bairau Bal.

**Garbagar.** On the other side of the Bairau Bal is Garbagar popularly known as Garba Yatra. Nandi complained to Shiva that he could not stop the rush of Devas coming to visit him. He ordered Nandi to

get a huge rock and make a hole through it, so that every one desirous of visiting him would have to pass through that hole while Nandi would be standing near the hole.

**Amaravati.** All living beings besought Shiva to disclose a method which would render them immortal. Thereupon Shiva rinsed His plaited hair (jata) and out flowed the Amaravati-the stream of immortality. Some of the drops fell here and there giving birth to some of the gods, while himself he turned into Sudhaling (immortal emblem) in a corner of the cave. Every one being satisfied praised Shiva.

**Sangam.** The confluence of the Amaravati with the Pansatarni is the place where a pilgrim has to perform Shrada (a ceremony for the dead). He is required to make a pedestal of barley flour with four golden nails struck in the four corners and a pure pearl set in the middle which should be given in charity to a Brahman who is supposed to be Shiva's form. When returning from Pahalgam the pilgrims revisit Mamalishwar and bathe in the nine springs of Naudal.

Patal Ganga. This is the last place where a pilgrim has to bathe. This is a spring near Nishat Bagh.

### **Chhari Saheb**

IN the Bragish Sahita it is said that after Reshi Kashap Ji reclaimed the Kashmir Valley from the waters it became populated through the agency of Nag Raja Takhek. It so happened once that Bragish Reshi roaming through the Himalayas arrived here. It was he who gave a clue of the cave of Amar Nath Ji to the people. He gave them a detailed account of the Tirthas and the places on the route to the cave.

After some decades the Daityas had the upper hand here and this place fell into oblivion, and the people forgot all about the route. Thereupon Bragish ji reappeared. He told the people that he had propitiated Bhagwan Mahadiv from whom he had obtained a sceptre which he had entrusted to Nag Raj Takhek. They should go and get this sceptre from Nag Raj, and while ruler of the country shall make arrangements for the Pilgrims who should start in a body from Srinagar with the holy sceptre in front. There would be no hindrance nor any trouble on the way. The sceptre called the Chhari Sahib wielded at present by the Mahant under the supervision of the Dharmartha Department has led the procession of pilgrims ever since.

In 1819 A.C. Pandit Har Dass Tiku founded the Chhawani Amar Nath at Rambagh where the Sadhus from the plains assembled and where he gave them free rations for the journey, both ways from his own private resources. This cost him about two lakhs.

The Mahants who wield the divine command of holy plac have always been the carriers of two holy sceptres which symbolise that command. Wherever a Mahant visits a place and takes his seat with ceremony a man holding one of the sceptres stands on his right and the other on his left.

The whole Amar Nath pilgrimage procession is conducted under the auspices of the Chhari Sahib. No pilgrim is allowed to go ahead of the Chhari, which is guarded by the Dharmartha Department, Kashmir. I am told that the Chhari in Srinagar was first wielded by Mahant Atwargir near the present Shital Nath buildings. After some time Mahant Sarswatigir visited Kashmir and stayed at the spot Dashnami Akhara. He erected a platform and some buildings and began to entertain Sadhus who came from the plains to Amar Nath. He took the Chhari from Atwargir.

In the meantime Shivratananand Saraswati improved the Durga Nag Ashram to such an extent that most of the Sadhus bound for the pilgrimage stayed in his ashram and were much cared for and warmly entertained. He put forth the plea that the Chhari must belong to his ashram as he was the Shankarcharia of the place. Thereupon started a dispute over the Chhari. Shivratananand Saraswati marched to the Amar Nath pilgrimage. A compromise was made between the two claimants and Mahant Saraswatigir considered Shivratananand a Sadak chela. The latter then naturally became the wielder of Chhari Sahib. Under his command the arrangements for the sadhus were excellent. There were enough tents and pilgrims were much cared for. But a section of the Sadhus of the place was not satisfied with the agreement. They protested to the Government and made demonstrations. After the demise of Shivratananand, the Chharipassed into the hands of a Chela of Saraswatigir who now wields it under the control of Dharmartha.



The Chhari generally leaves on the 4th day of the bright fortnight of Sawan. A state official is always present to perform puja at Dashnami Akhara on the eve of its departure. The carrier of this holy sceptre must walk on foot. They visit Hari Parbat and Shankarachar before departure. They go by stages as pilgrims did of old but by a different route by-passing the places of interest mentioned in Amar Nath Mahatmya. The first halt is, at Pampor. At Bijbehara all sadhus accompanying the Chhari are given a dinner by the pujari of the temple. Villagers call it 'Gosain Mela', the fair of hermits. Bijbehara to Anantnag-5 miles.

Anantnag. A great festival is celebrated for the townspeople who come to see the sadhus.

Anantnag-Bawan 4.5 miles. Here is the famous spring of Martand where in the intercalary month or on vijaya saftami shraddhas are performed.

Bawan to Aishimuqam 9.5 miles.

Aishimuqam to Pahalgam 11.5 miles.

Near Pahalgam village there are sheds for pilgrims. All pilgrims coming from various parts of India assemble here and wait for the Chhari Sahib. They arrange with contractors for ponies or coolies for their luggage. It is necessary to have a tent and some warm clothes. Religious-minded people abhor putting on leather shoes. If leather shoes are used they must be nailed. Formerly pilgrims, generally used grass shoes. They are most useful in going over glaciers. In this journey however, there is only a small bit in the Cave Glen. A water-proof coat is very useful. A staff with an iron spike would prove useful. It is also advisable to keep handy some ready-made food. Cinnamon should be used along with tea.

Poorly clad people from the plains having no conception of the severe cold of the place, suffer a lot. The Government makes excellent arrangements for the convenience of pilgrims. A civil officer regulates the whole affair. Medical aid is provided and security measures are enforced. Some schools and colleges despatch batches of scouts to look after the weak. There is a regular bazaar held at the stage. The shopkeepers, confectioners, grain-dealers, vegetable-sellers sell their commodities at a high price. The contractors arrange for fuel. As the fuel is not available beyond Pisu Hill (11,081 ft.) it is advisable that the coolies or pony-men be instructed to carry one or two bundles of wood. No wood except juniper is procurable for the next two stages.

The Government allots about ten thousand rupees for the maintenance of the weak Sadhus and children and makes every possible effort to give them comfort and ease.

The Public' Works Department looks after the upkeep of the road and the bridges over the torrents. Lately an excellent arrangement for the baths of men and women has been made near the cave. Also an iron railing has been erected round the Shivaling in the cave.

On the night of the 11th day of the bright fortnight of Sawan (July-August) all pilgrims assemble at Pahalgam. They all are now in full equipment including picturesque awnings of all sorts and forming an artificial village march like the Aryan of old, in a deeply devotional spirit, reciting the praises of various gods and of goddesses, introspecting and meditating the inward vibrations of their minds and this is the purpose of their journey. The procession is best described by Swami Vivekananda in the following words: 'The procession of several thousands of pilgrims in the far-away Cave of Amar Nath, nestled in a glacial gorge of the Western Himalayas, through some of the most charming scenery in the world, is fascinating in the extreme. It strikes one with wonderment to observe the quiet and orderly way in which a canvas town springs up in some valley with incredible rapidity at each halting place with its bazaars and broad streets running through the middle and vanishing as quickly at the break of dawn, when the whole army of gay pilgrims are on their march once more for the day. Then again the glow of the countless cooking-fires, the ashes covered Sadhus under the canopy of their large geru (orange) umbrellas pitched in the ground, sitting and discussing or meditating before their dhunies (fire), the Sanyasis of all orders in their various garbs, the men and women with children from all parts of the country in their characteristic costumes, and their devout faces, the torches shimmering at nightfall, the blowing of conch-shells and horns, the singing of hymns and prayers in chorus, all these and many other romantic sights and experiences of a pilgrimage, which can be met with nowhere outside India, are the most impressive and

convey to some extent an idea of the overmastering passion of the race for religion. Of the psychological aspect and significance of such pilgrimage, done on foot for days and days, much could be written. Suffice it to say, that it is one of those ancient institutions which have above all, kept the fire of spirituality burning in the hearts of the people. One sees here the very soul of the Hindu nation laid bare in all its innate beauty and sweetness of faith and devotion.

Pahalgam to Tsandanwari (9,200 ft.) 8.5 miles. The pilgrims rise early and in a long string walk one after another. Some old ladies are carried in palanquin. The palanquin-bearers sing in chorus to avoid fatigue. Some rich people ride on ponies, while most of the people walk. It is a good pony-track which runs along the right bank of the torrent. The mountain slopes are densely forested. The flow of the blue waters rushing against the rocks, making delightful pools and dashing cataracts infuse new life into the onlookers. Occasionally they hear the sweet music of the whistling thrush or see the gorgeous plumage of the white-capped redstart or a dipper diving in the swift torrent to get its food. The shady path under the pines which emit delicious fragrance lessens the fatigue of the traveller. Some pilgrims take a little rest, against a huge fir and with closed eyes meditate on the beauties of the skilful works of the Author of the Universe. Others open their thermos flasks and while enjoying the beauties of Nature which abound in these lovely spots take a cup of tea to exhilarate themselves; while others again hold the hand of an old man to help him to go ahead. In the way they have to bathe at the Nila Ganga. Some pilgrims walk straight on and halt at Tsandarwari and pitch their tents there. It is a wise plan to be early at the stage, to pitch the tent, make a drain round it and get coolies to collect wood in good time. A small hatchet is of much use. Ponies carrying luggage should not be allowed to move away from oneself and coolies should not lag behind.

There are sheds at all these stages, but except during pilgrim traffic they are not well cared for. It would be desirable that the sheds at Pahalgam and Tsandanwari be placed direct under the Public Works Department and the sheds at Vaovajen and Pansatarni entrusted to shepherds living there for summer months. They should be paid for that. In that case the sheds will be kept clean, tidy and in good repair. I wish more sheds were built for the comfort of the pilgrims.

This stage presents a moderately difficult ascent. From Tsandanwari to the foot of the Pisu Hill (11081 ft.) is about 1.5 miles. There is a snow bed to pass over. The ascent up the hill is somewhat steep. It is better to make an early start, as with slow and steady steps, the ascent can be easily negotiated. When taking rest it is advisable to look below at the same time not missing the glorious panorama of densely forest-covered mountains and snowy peaks about which eagles and vultures hover in circles to find their food. Close at your feet, right and left, are nature's gems of various colours-flowers peeping from underneath trees and bushes till you reach the top. You are now above the tree-belt (in the alpine region). Take a little rest and have something to eat. The going from here to Sheshiram Nag is easy. In between about two miles from the top of the Pisu Hill is Zoj pal a nice camping ground. The path goes along the shore of Sheshiram Nag (11,730). The Nag lies in a depression surrounded on one side by mountains about 16,000 ft. high. There are two small glaciers on the flanks of these mountains and the water from these glaciers feeds the lake. The silvery streaks of water flowing over the worn rocky precipitous slopes move like the Shesh snake and disappear into the lake. The pilgrims bathe here and some of them prepare tea. The colour of the water is lovely to look at. The lake on one side is silted up. The stream from the lake has carved out a deep ravine covered with birch trees. One finds beautiful flowers peeping out of juniper bushes. Rhododendrons are not scarce. The account of the lake given in the first book of Raiatarangani and that occurring in the Amar Nath Mahatmya do not agree. At sun down the snow on mountains turns pink and its reflection in the lake makes the beholder mute.

It is said that once upon a time there was a man named Sodwani running a shop at Drugajen. To him children of the village would come for a pinch of sugar everyday. One day a boy asked him for a second pinch because he said that there was another boy riding on a bull coming to play with them. This statement excited the curiosity of the shopkeeper who told him to show him the boy. When the shopkeeper was taken there, the children did show him the boy but he could not see him. He entreated them to put in his hand the tail of the bull. So at evening when the boy went back, the shop-keeper caught hold of

the tail and over bush, rock and rough path he was dragged. In the way, the boy told the shop-keeper that was not the proper way for him to go. He should come to Sheshiram Nag on Shivratri day and then he would take him along with himself. It was not easy for the shop-keeper to go such a distance and to a place at such a height in mid-winter when the snow lies very deep on the ground. However, he managed to sell all his belongings, went to Pahalgam and collected a large party of peasants. He paid them lavishly and told them to guide him to Sheshi Nag. In those days the path was very rough and snow fairly deep. The winters in those days were very severe. Somehow the peasants were able to guide him and they reached Sheshiram Nag. There he saw Shiva and Parvati waiting for him in a well furnished shikara on the shore of the lake. They beckoned to Sodwani to get into the boat. No sooner he went in, than the boat disappeared.

An ascent Of 500 ft. will take you to the camping site of Vavojen (12,730 ft.). Due to its height above the sea-level and the exposed nature of the place the wind here is very strong. Hence the ropes of the tents should be tightened firmly and the body wrapt in warm clothes. The only available wood is juniper.

The Mahant of Chhari does not permit any pilgrim to go ahead of him. I remember that once we started at early dawn for the next stage. The Mahant shouted, 'Who are you? Where are you going?' 'We are confectioners and are making for the next stage', said we. 'All right'.

So a lie, sorry to say, saved us from a papal bull. My friends and I went straight to the cave. There we saw some Public Works Department coolies and some cowboys. The pilgrims build here toy huts of stone, as a propitiation to the forces of Nature to save them from the wind.

#### Vavojen (12230 Ft.) to Pantsatarni - 8.25 Miles

On the 14th day of the bright fortnight of Sawan (July-August), the procession starts under the leadership of Chhari Sahib. They ascend Ashad Daki then Mahagunas which is a plateau where the herb of the same name once used to grow. Physically exhausted and tired, making halts at short intervals, the pilgrims walk slowly when the gradual descent of the path takes place from Hokasar and Kalinar where the route from Pahalgam via Astanmarg which is four miles shorter meets the main route. From here two miles onward is Nagara Pal, a huge boulder, up which the pilgrims scramble with two pebbles in hand beating the rock as if beating a drum to proclaim their arrival. Walking one mile and a half they stand on the bank of the Pantsatarni stream. They take off their clothes and bathe in all its six or seven tributaries, the last being the main and the largest one. The water of some streamlets is pure because they rise from springs, while others come from glacial sources and hence contain minute sandy particles. When all these streams unite they form a mighty river which it is impossible to ford. If one had the time, it would be worth while to explore the main stream. I remember once camping here and suggesting to my friends to explore the source of the main Pantsatarni stream, but they were very anxious to see their friends at Pahalgam and so did not agree.

The whole region is rich in herbs. It is a pity that the sheep and cattle graze everywhere in it, hence the flowers cannot be much observed. The herbs can only be recognized by their leaves. Here and there one might find a flower which has escaped being nipped by an animal. Even then some people conversant with eastern medicines, get a lot.

On their arrival the pilgrims hasten to pitch their tents. Cooking fires are lighted; the smoke from the green juniper bushes rises higher and higher in streaks. There is hustle and bustle everywhere. The ponymen are shouting for their ponies, the masters are yelling at their coolies, the mothers are looking for their children, the clients are enquiring about their priests. Some people after having tea, have a look at the landscape round the valley. The sunset on the snowy peaks is marvellous.

#### Pantsatarni to Cave (12,729 Ft.) 4 Miles

On Purnamasi Sawan (July-August) the visit to the cave takes place. The old route has been condemned by the Government. The pilgrims used to climb the Bairau Bal and going round the summit reached the cave after descending the precipitous slope through Garba Yatra. The cave is at a distance of two miles from Pantsatarni.

The Present Route being easier, known as Sant Singh's route has been adopted for years past by the pilgrims. It is plain going for 2 miles and then there are 2 miles of very gradual ascent, part of it over a small glacier. Turning round the corner and looking up the glen one discerns a large hole in the mountains. That is the cave.

A narrow defile leads up to this cave which is nestled among mountains between 16,000 ft. and 17,000 ft. above sea-level. This small valley must have been scooped by glaciers which now have receded. A small torrent drains the valley, while a streamlet shimmers down from the top of the cave and joins the torrent below. This spot where Nature's basic material, rock and water are abundant, gives bliss to millions of Hindus. Their eyes marvel at the skilful hand of Nature, and this handiwork of hers the mysterious cave, the destination of their long, long journey. Their souls find peace. Every particle of sand, every drop of water, every thing hereabouts to them the emblem of Shiva a sign of peace. They direct their thoughts to things spiritual in this frame of mind they undress themselves. First they wash themselves in this torrent; then they bathe in the Amaravati and besmearing themselves with the chalky sediment of the stream, become all white. They put on new loin cloths and thus, so to say draped in white from head to foot enter the cave, in a way become for a moment one with the Supreme and having no consciousness of the physical world.

<verses>

***Immersed with eyes closed in the bliss springing from inner love ' would that I attained to Shiva-consciousness so that while I bowed to my own self as Shiva, I would also worship a blade of grass as a manifestation of the same Supreme Reality.***

Returning to physical consciousness they look around the interior of the cave. Towards the north-eastern corner they see Sudha\* Lingam (immortal emblem) of pure greenish-white ice in a recumbent position on a natural pedestal (peth). The water drops from the top of the cave fall on the pilgrims and in some places the images of Ganesh Ji, Kumar Ji, and Parvati are formed by these drops. The Mahant of the Chhari Sahib sits close to the Pedestal with two silver staves placed on either side of the Amar Nath Lingam (immortal emblem). The pilgrims offer to the deity, camphor, candles of clarified butter, raisins, candy sugar, black pepper, clothes, silver and gold ornaments. The recitations from the Vedas and Tantras echo through the spacious cave and snow pigeons which nest in the mountains make their appearance at this juncture and fly froth their perches. Seeing these birds the pilgrims clap their hands and shout: 'Ishwara Darshan Pa'ya re (we have seen the manifestation of the Lord)'. A part of the offering of raisins, crystalized sugar and black pepper they bring along with themselves in order to distribute the same among their relatives and friends. They also take silt from the Amaravati or limy pebbles from the cave as Babuti for their relatives and friends.

From this highly spiritual atmosphere steps are now retraced towards the material world. The descent to the lower altitudes now begins. The pilgrims do not go to Sangam where in olden times Shradhas were performed in memory of dead ancestors. The pilgrims return to their camps for breakfast (they eat only one meal on this day) and precipitately begin the downward march. It is a pity that people do not stay here for some time. There is a sea of glaciers on the north and east of the Amar Nath Range. Some of the peaks are much higher than Kolahoi. Hence this area is worth exploration. It is true that weather conditions are uncertain in these altitudes. A cloud passing from one mountain peak to another may bring a shower of rain, may discharge a hail-storm or envelop the valley in a snowy shroud. But such conditions do not last long and when we are well-equipped, a short stay at the place is well worth the hardship of weather.

The return journey via Astamnarg is prohibited by the Government. The Sasokot is not safe in bad weather: it is all sand and shale. So the pilgrims hasten their downward journey to Tsandanwari and the next day make for Pahalgam. It is said that the pilgrimage to Amar Nath Ji is not complete until the pilgrim washes himself in the nine springs of Naudal (nine leaves), which is 22 miles from Pahalgam via Bugmor pass.

(\*It is believed to wax and wane according to the phases of the moon.) - *Source: Srinagar & its Environs* by Samsar Chand

### **13 Khir Bhawani Spring**

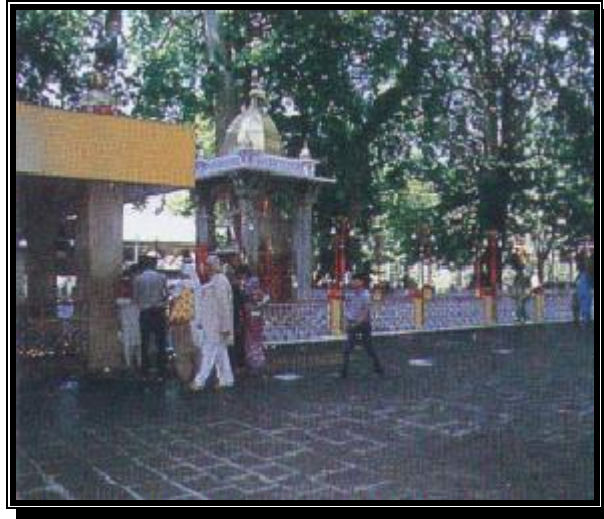
**Kashmir** in the olden times was known as Reshi Bhumi or the land of saints. Cut off as it was from the outside world by its mountain ramparts, its means of communication were difficult. The people had developed their own script called 'sharda' and their own literature and philosophy. They cultivated various branches of knowledge, and worked for humanity preferring action to theory.



**Khir Bhawani Temple**

Surrounded as the country is by the snow-clad high mountains, water absorbed in the soil gives birth to numerous springs scattered all over the country. Those springs are known as Nags (serpents). They are dedicated to different gods or goddesses, hence some of the towns are named after them, such as Anant Nag, Vetsar Nag, Tsandi Gam (after Tsandi Nag in the Lolab Valley) and Ver Nag in Anantnag district. Special days are set apart in the calendar to commemorate the story of those springs and fairs are held and public worship takes place on such occasions.

One of these mysterious springs is situated near village of Tulamulla. The whole place round Tulamulla is swampy and for miles around there are rice fields. By the side of aqueducts grow a large variety of wild flowers, the most common being *Mentha sylvestris* (Vena) which is used in worship and the sale of which brings money to the peasant population.



**Khir Bhawani Temple**

It appears that Tulamulla is a sort of floating garden, as the natives say that if they dig a whole in the ground, they find fish coming from the tributary of the Sindh which drains the place. The village is girt round by the tributaries of the Sindh which carry water from the Amar Nath and Gangabal glaciers. There is also a stream of pyre water which rises from the springs round the eastern side of the village and passing under a bridge enters into the Sindh canal (also called Gangkhai).

The numerous islets are covered with willows and poplars while the main island on which the spring stands is shaded with chinars, mulberry and elm trees. Lately, the place paved with dressed sandstones, but there is much scope for the improvement and tidiness of the spot. Water and vegetation being very abundant, mosquitoes are ubiquitous in July and August. In summer, the birds nestling on trees produce melodious music at dawn. The golden oriole, the thrush, the ringdove, the paradise flycatcher, the bulbul are conspicuous by their song and plumage. In winter the wild fowl, the shoveller, the mallard, the gadwall, the widgeon, the teal, the paddy bird, the coot and such other birds are found in the Anchar Lake and round about the swamps.

### ***13.1 The Anchar Lake***

The Anchar (Atsar - means good conduct) Lake must have once touched the skirts of the Lar and Ganderbal mountain ranges and the alluvial soil wrested from the lake is the outcome of the silt which the Sindh and rain have deposited here for hundreds of years. This process is still going on and extensive tongues of land in the form of deltas between several distributaries are being formed continually. About seventy years ago the Sindh changed its course, flowed over Gadura village and thence entered the lake. A tributary from here joins the Vetasta (Jhelum) at Shadipor. Two canals drain the water of the Dal Lake into the Anchar Lake. The Nala Bal flows past the north of Hari Parbat via Amda Kadal, and the other canal used to flow through Bohri Kadal during summer months. The later canal has been filled up under the master plan and does not exist now. The best lotus blossom is found towards the southern side of the lake called Khushal Sar during the months of July and August. It is fascinating to watch the pheasant-tailed Jacana in gorgeous plumage and the paddy bird in sombre colour. The lake yields large quantities of lotus seeds and lotus roots which are eaten as a vegetable. Fishing is also carried on in it. It supplies fodder for animals to the city.

There are two important springs on the eastern side of the lake. Amrishwar spring in Amburher which was a great place of pilgrimage in olden times and a spring in Biyhama which is highly prized for digestive water.

The lake is about 3.5 miles long and 2.25 miles broad and covers an area of about 7.5 sq. miles. There are better floating gardens here than in Dal Lake.

Before wheeled traffic came into being the pilgrims to the spring went on foot or by boat. The religious-minded preferred the journey on foot. From Srinagar they either went to Sowura Ghat or to the Gron Kadal where they engaged boat and crossing the Anchar Lake landed at Gadur. From here they walked through rice fields in about 4 or 5 hours arrived at Tulamulla.

Others engaging a doonga or a house-boat in Srinagar in the Vetasta (Jhelum) reach Shadipor, where the confluence of the Sind and Vetasta takes place. This place is also called Prayag and is sacred to the Hindus. From here boat is towed up the canal along the delightful turfed banks and finally anchored at the island. The journey covers about 8 or 9 hours.

Now lorries and cars run to the place and cover a distance of 14 miles in about 40 minutes. The pilgrim, no doubt saves much of his time in this way but he actually wraps his vacation in a wet blanket and has, to his credit merely the satisfaction that he has visited the place.

### **13.2 Vetsar Nag**

On the way to Ganderbal there is a spring called Vetsar Nag which is 8 kms. from Srinagar. It is said, that in the olden days the new calendar used to be discussed here before it came into circulation. Vetsar means discussion. The pilgrimage to this place takes place on the Amavasa (last day of dark fortnight) of Chet. This spring is also, called Ailapator after the high-altitude lake of Gulmarg. The spring was once cleansed. In the centre of the spring there is a stone cylinder about 3 ft. high on which rests a stone Shivlingam. The water gushes out from the north-eastern and north-western corners and fills the spring.

### **13.3 Ganderbal**

Ganderbal is the terminus of the boat journey. Its lovely turfed banks, shady chinars, the graceful flow of the Sindh, the delightful mountain slopes in the distance and the refreshing breeze which blows from the pine-clad mountain slopes of the upper Sindh Valley are very soothing to the wearied body and mind. It lies at the base of the Sindh Valley and was originally called Doderhom. It is the official headquarters of the Sindh Valley and has a regular bazaar, a post office, a veterinary hospital and a hospital for men and a Government Higher Secondary Schools for Boys and Girls. Some visitors engage houseboats and spend some time under shady chinars. There are some interesting spots round about the place which can be easily visited from here. A morning walk of about 3 miles will take a person to the Khir Bhawani spring. About 6 miles from here lies the famous Manasbal lake. From Vayil bridge about 2.5 miles from here a glorious view of the Sindh Valley flanked by verdant mountain slopes can be had.

At Ganderbal there is an electric power-house which supplies light to Srinagar city and adds to the present electric supply of the valley.

### **13.4 Historical Reference**

Mention of this place is made in the last chapter of the Ragyna Pradurbhava which is a section of the Bringish Samhita. It is stated there that during the early period of the Epic Age, King Ravana ruled Lanka, an island to the south of India. It was then a flourishing country having sixteen hundred towns. This island is beautifully described in the Ramayana.

King Ravana in order to gain temporal power and glory worshipped goddess Parvati (Shama) who manifested herself to him in all her nine aspects. For sometime he remained sober-minded and worshipped the goddess with all devotion.

When Shri Rama King of Ajoydiya invaded Lanka and the generals of his army Sugrev and Hunuman killed King Rhvana's brother Kumbakaruna and his son Megnad, his wife Mandudhari entreated him to make peace with Shri Rama. He was kindled with rage and tried to invoke the blessing of the goddess by offering her various kinds of sacrifices. Thereupon the goddess, wrathful at Ravana's misdeeds, cursed in and ordered Hunumhn to take her to Sati Sar (Kashmir) on her vehicle along with 360 Nags. Hunuman selected a spot in the northern side of the valley within the space surrounded by the villages of Borus

(Bhawanish), Ahatung (Tungish), Ladwun (Labdawan), Wokur (Bhageh). Here he installed the goddess with all her satellites. She was called Khirbhawani or Raji Ragyni, exclusively preferring milk, sugar, rice and all vegetarian forms of offerings. To quote from Stein's translation of Kalhana's Rajatarangini: "When he (Jayapida) was appropriating (the land of) Tulamulya, he heard, while on the bank of the Candrabhaga, that a hundred Brahmans less one had sought death in the water of that (stream)." .....

Tulamulya is undoubtedly the present village, of Tulamul, situated 74 deg 48' long. 34 deg 13' lat. among the marshes through which the Sind River passes before joining the Vitasta. The large spring of Tulmul is sacred as the habitation of Maharajni, a form of Durga extensively worshipped among the Brahman population of Kashmir, and is accordingly to this day the object of frequent and popular pilgrimages. The name is written as Tulamulaka in Fourth Chron. 527, 531 and in Rajnipradurbhavamah.

In the midst of the wide water-logged tract of the Sind Delta we find the ancient Tirtha of Tu-lamu-lya at the village now know as Tulmul, situated 74 deg 48' long- 34 deg 13' lat. The Purohita corporation of Tulamulya is represented as a well-to-do and influential body already under King Jaydpida. (A.D. 85 and 88) The large spring of Tulamulya is sacred to Maharajni, a form of Durga, and is still held in great veneration the Brahman population of Srinagar. It is supposed to exhibit from time to time miraculous changes in the colour of its water, which are ascribed to the manifestation of the goddess. Owing to its convenient position the Tirtha attracts large numbers of pilgrims from the capital. Abu-I-Fazal notices the place and its marshy surroundings. About two and a half miles to the east of Tulamul lies the village of Dudrhom on the main branch of the Sind which have become first navigable. It is repeatedly referred to by Srivara under its old name of Dugdhasrama.

"The worship of the 'Mothers', which is identical with that of the Saktis, plays a great part in the Tantra ritual flourishing in Kashmir from ancient times.

It is said that Ravana's father Pulasti Reshi lived in Kashmir.

The land was all swampy, made as it were of floating gardens, it was light and bumpy, hence it was called Toola Mulla, from two Sanskrit words. 'Tool' meaning 'cotton' and 'Mulla' eaning 'value', 'worth'.

A person aged about 90 (in 1948) told me that he knew the time when reeds were placed along the swampy foot-path from Hur Mengin Wor to enable the pilgrims to walk to the island.

(Hur Mengan was a Spirit who sometimes possessed the bodies of the persons travelling during the night and he was a dread to the inhabitants of the neighbourhood.)

After some time a road was constructed by Mahant Dharm Dass. Shah Radha Krishen, a merchant, paved the edge of the spring with Baramulla stones and Dewan Narsingh Dayal built the big dharmshala on the north of the spring during the reign of Maharaja Ranbir Singh. Later on, during recent times the road was metalled (macadamised) and made fit for wheeled traffic. The old dharmshala has been dismantled, new ones erected and the place made more beautiful.

There is a legend that a long time ago the goddess appeared to Pandit Govind Joo Gadru who arranged to go in a boat from Sowura Ghat to the swampy side of the Anchar Lake. He took with him a number of earthen vessels full of milk and when he found the spring, he poured milk into it.

The following is another version of the process which is said to have brought the spring to light.

A pious Brahman Krishna Pandit saw a vision in which he was informed by a Deva (an angel) that the spring of Khir Bhawani lay among the swamps of Tulamulla.

'How shall I be able to find out the spring?' He asked.

'Engage a boat as far as Shadipor, and from there a serpent will guide you. When you will reach near the spring, the serpent will jump into it. That is the spring', was the reply.

He did as he was told, engaged a boat and came as far as Shadipor.

### ***13.5 Khirbhawani***

A snake was seen swimming over the water of the swamps. The boat followed the snake, which halted at a particular place where Shri Krishna Pandit fixed a long stick to indicate the position of the holy spot.



After the snake moved in an oddly rectangular direction, the space thus covered by it was demarcated with the fixation of sticks over the marshy area. Thus was the divine spring discovered.

The swampy area around the spring was led up with dry earth carried in boats for this purpose. Shri Krishna Pandit along with other persons and devotees from Srinagar the worship of the goddess. At the conclusion of the puja, it is said that a piece of birch bark was seen floating over the water of the spring. Shri Krishna Pandit took it up and found the sloka written on it. The verse described the divine form of the goddess Ragni.

**<verses>**

***I make obeisance to that one goddess who, having taken the position of the Supreme God is the Queen in reality, whose form is made of light and is adorned by (the lustre of) twelve suns, who cannot be observed through senses, who is seated on a throne and is wrapped with serpents.***

He composed a poem of as many stanzas as there were letters in the sloka and this poem is still extant. He would pay a visit to the spring on every 8th day of the bright fortnight as long as he lived.

Gradually, this place became known all over Kashmir and people began to gather there to worship, while the people round the place sold milk, flowers and fuel to the pilgrims which gives them a good business.

Before we enter on the main island, we see two important places, one is the Ziarat of Mir Baba Haider, a Muslim saint and the other is the Samad of Lobu Shah who had miraculous powers and lived some 150 years ago.

Mention has been made in the Rajatarangani of Raja Jiyapida (A.D. 850-88) confiscating the lands of the Brahmans of Tulamulla. The Brahmins troubled by the misdeeds of the Raja went in a body to see him. They were detained by the courtiers. Thereupon, they raised a hue and cry and were called by the Raja. They attacked him vehemently and one of them cursed him with the result that there and then a golden rod from the royal canopy fell on the Raja, causing him a wound which proved incurable and brought about his death.

### **13.6 Spring**

The spring is situated in the centre of the island round which the Gangkhai a canal from Sind makes a circuit. It is said that this spring is surrounded by 360 springs. Most of these have fallen into oblivion and are covered with rushes and silted up.

Before the main spring came to be known the goddess was worshipped at Solur where under a chinar tree a spring still exists. This spot is called Devot Wol boin. One mile north-east of this island near Lodwan village is Ganesh Bal or Vodjen where Ganesh is worshipped. The other springs which are still known are: Ashta Rudhar to the south, Tsandar Nag to the south-east. Machi Nag, Naga Rad, Gokhin Nag are to the east.

The main spring dedicated to Goddess Khir Bhawani or Ragyni has an irregular septagonal shape with apex called PAD (feet) to the east. The northern and southern sides are longer than western side which is called SHER (head).

In the centre is an islet on which a temple have existed once. There also grew a mulberry tree here. Now there is a small marble temple which was built by His late Highness the Maharaja Partap Singh. The small flags and miniature silver umbrellas presented to the goddess by the votaries are placed in the temple.

Here is reproduced an extract from "Talks with Swami Vivekananda" about the Holy Spring.

"Then Swamiji said, on the way back, he returned to Srinagar by the common route by which the pilgrims return. A few days after returning to Srinagar he went to visit Kshir Bhavani Devi and staying there for seven days worshipped the Devi and made Homa to Her with offerings of Kshir (condensed milk). Every day he used to worship the Devi with a maund of Khir as offering. One day, while worshipping the thought arose in Swamiji's mind: "Mother Bhavani has been manifesting Her Presence here for untold years. The Mohammedans came and destroyed Her temple, yet the people of the place did nothing to

protect Her. Alas, if were then living, I could never have borne it silently. " When, thinking in this strain, his mind was much oppressed with sorrow an anguish, he distinctly heard the voice of the Mother saying: " It was according to desire that the Mohammedans destroyed the temple. It is My desire that I should live in dilapidated temple, otherwise, can I not immediately erect a seven-storied temple of gold here if I like ? What can you do? Shall I protect you or shall you protect me! " Swamiji said: "Since hearing that Divine Voice, I cherish no more plans. The idea of building Maths etc. I have given up; as Mother wills, so it will be." disciple speechless with wonder began to think " Did he not one day tell me that whatever saw and heard was but the echo of the Atma within me, that there was nothing outside? " and fearlessly spoke it out also -" Sir, you used to say that Divine Voices are the echo of our inward thoughts and feelings ". Swamiji gravely said: " Whether it be internal or external, if you actually hear with your ears such a disembodied voice, as I have done, can you deny it and call it false? Divine Voices are actually heard, just as you and I are talking."

The disciple without controverting accepted Swamiji's words, for his words always carried conviction.

### **13.7 Natural Phenomenon**

Such a mysterious spring is found nowhere in India. The water of the spring changes its colour from time to time. I have observed and found it rosy red, faint rosy, light green, lemon yellow, milky white and grey white on various occasions. There is no special time or definite period for this change of colour. Any shade of black colour is supposed to be inauspicious.

I have seen bubbles rising out of the water of the spring and, forming three lines round the islet not regularly complete, but a part here and a part there though in perfect order. These lines are said to be the Dwara of the Chakra.

### **13.8 Chakra or Yantra of Rajni Devi (Tulamulla)**

What is a Chakra? It is a mystic symbol. Every goddess has her own Chakra. The Chakra of Kshir Bhavani consists of seven parts enclosed one within the other. The Chakra popularly known as Yantra embodies Mother Goddess with Her Shakties.

The people well-versed in various forms Tantric cult take this mystic symbol to represent the inward psychic centres of the body and concentrating on it under proper guidance a supposed to acquire various superphysical powers.

Tantrikism is the content of the Vedas a Agams and differs from one place to another challenging many syntheses. This is found amply in Agams in different system as invocations female deities identical with Shakties. A speci Power of goddess representing it is the time-honoured-form of worship. The worship offers a mystic blend of Brahmanical and Buddhi practices.

The Tantrikism has much influenced countries, all ages, all places and all systems philosophic thoughts and all ritualistic practic Innumerable are the systems of Tantric worsh called by different names, forms and systems. It has its own mine of literature with its celebrated authors. A few of them are enumerated below:

**Agama Tantrikism**  
**Yamala Tantrikism**  
**Samyachara Tantrikism**  
**Vajrayana Tantrikism**  
**Kapalika Tantrikism**  
**Saiva Tantrikism**  
**Siddha Tantrikism**

Like all other metaphysical reorientations Tantrikism is a way of worship. Tantrik symbolism and rituals elevate a man to a state of bliss leading to salvation. The Tantrik psycho-physical discipline formulates the diagram known Chakra, Yantra and Yoga.

**Rajni Devi (Kshir Bhavani Devi) has Her prescribed diagram for worship in Tantra Shastra which is reproduced here. It embodies the system as right-handed Tantrikism. The following is the system**

of Rajni Devi's diagram (Chakra) with her Shaktis as borne by the descriptions in the relative manuscripts and available literature on the subject.

### *13.9 Puja of the Devi or Worship of Goddess Rajnidevi*

*Dwara (Gate) (Outer line) (Siddhis)*

1. Animah Siddhi Namah
2. Mahima Siddhi Namah
3. Lagima Siddhi Namah
4. Eshata Siddhi Namah

*Middle Line (Mudra)*

1. Sarva Sankhobini Mudrayay Namah,
2. Sarva Vidrawani Mudrayay Namah
3. Sarva Karshani Mudrayay Namah Mudra
4. Sarva Vashankari Mudrayay Namah

*Innermost line (Shaktis)*

1. Brahmi Shakty Namah
2. Maheshwari Shakty Namah
3. Kumari Shakty Namah
4. Vaishnavi Shakty Namah

*Ashta Dal (Adhishtratri Devis)*

1. Brahmey Namah
2. Maheshwaryay Namah
3. Kumarey Namah
4. Vaishnavey Namah
5. Varahey Namah
6. Narsimhey Namah
7. Indriyay Namah
8. Chamundey Namah

*Shath Kon*

1. Saraswatyay Namah
2. Lakshmeyay Namah
3. Ashta Dash-Bojayay Namah
4. Ashta Bojayay Namah
5. Dashannayay Namah
6. Gowriyay Namah

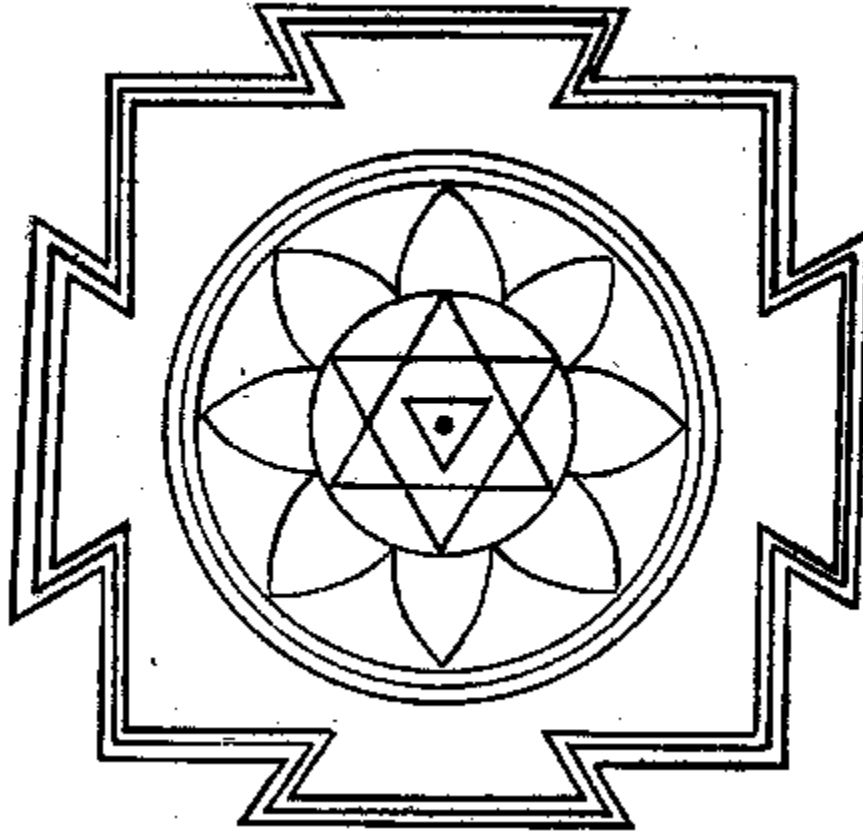
*Trikon*

1. Maha Kaliyay Namah
2. Maha Saraswatyay Namah
3. Maha Lakshmeyay Namah

*Bindu (The Point)*

Shree Mah Rajniyay Namah  
We meditate upon Shri Maha Rajni  
"The Great Empress"  
Who is the embodiment of peace and  
Who is the giver of wealth that is sought

The people living round the island whether Hindus or Mohammedans have a great veneration for the goddess. They never eat meat when they have to go over there. They go there with their bodies and clothes washed.



1. Bindhu                      A point.
2. Trikon (3 angled)      A triangle with its apex downwards.
3. Shatkona (6 angled)    Two triangles inverted. The vertices of the one resting on the side of the other.
4. Valai                        A circle.
5. Ashta Dal                 Eight lotus leaves resting on the circle.
6. Tri Valai                 Three circles.
7. Dwar (gate)             Three lines with half triangles in the middle, enclosing all other parts and completing the Chakra.

According to a Sanskrit stanza by an unknown author, the discovery of the spring was made on Ashara Saptami\*, seventh day of bright fortnight in June-July, but pilgrims from all parts of Kashmir come here on every eighth day (Ashtami) of the bright fortnight of every lunar month, while the chief festival is held on Zetha Ashtami (about May). They light candles made from ghee (clarified butter), and burn dhup (incense), to the accompaniment of the music of ringing of bells played by the priest. The offering is Khir (preparation of rice in milk and sugar), with sometimes admixture of ghee, raisins, dates, coconuts, and pieces of sugar candy in odd numbers. The recitation of Sanskrit hymns from scriptures along with

offerings of flowers and rice in spring completes a form of worship. A portion of these offerings is distributed among relatives and friends.

At dusk, hundreds of people assemble round the spring with candles waving. The head priest also waves a candle, while the other priests blow conch shells and horns, beat timbrels, ring bells, and wave morechells (peacock's tail feathers). All pilgrims recite hymns, producing a singular mixture of sounds, and creating a religious atmosphere diffusing spiritual vibrations everywhere. The whole congregation standing in a devotional mood concentrates on the image of the goddess and seeks to merge itself in the Primordial Energy pervading the universe. I think, this united form of worship more impressive if some set verses were selected and recited together than individual for sometime. After this had been done every person could follow his own way according to his-own peculiar bent of mind.

Every Kashmiri Hindu has his own guardian goddess. When a child is born to him or when his son is married, he has to take him to his guardian goddess for thankoffering. Khir Bhawani is, the guardian goddess of the majority of the Kashmiri Brahmins.

(\* On this day the Brahmins of the Valley draw figures of the sun in all seven colours on the floors, kitchens, compounds of their houses. This is probably done to show that the sun occupies its highest position in the heavens on this day.)

### *13.10 The Cleansing of Khirbhawani Spring*

The spring has been cleansed twice within living memory and some of the idols (murties) taken out of it, have been placed in the temple.

Once again the Khirbhawani Spring was cleansed. The operation which began on the 30th of January 1970 lasted till July 10, 1970. An electric pump conducted these operations round the clock. The mire and sediment which lay at the bottom were removed. A large quantity of water flowed out making the spring fresh and sparkling. As a result of this operation, the spring bubbled out in several directions. In the middle of the spring, milky water flowed out. While the mud and mire were being removed several golden ornaments and silver pieces offered by the devotees from time to time were collected, from the bottom of the spring. The spring was thus cleansed for the fourth time.

### *13.11 Improvement of the Shrine*

The holy Khir Bhawani Shrine at Tulamulla (Ganderbal) besides invested with sacred associations since very ancient times is also a place of great tourist interest. Situated as it is, in the peaceful surroundings of bountiful nature, caters to the requirements of devotees seeking spiritual peace and calm as also those fond of sight seeing. In the recent years the Dharmarth Trust of the State has done a good job in improving the surroundings of the shrine and also has provided comfortable accommodation for devotees and yatris-cum-tourists who come every year in millions to worship at the shrine of all India fame.

Formerly the shrine was confined to about 50 kanals of land and the influx of people on festival days was so huge that they could not be accommodated within this limited space. The Dharmarth Trust, under whose care the shrine is, felt the need for acquiring more land for the shrine in view of the difficulty faced by the devotees on the festival days. Therefore, more land was acquired and the area extended. Dharamshalas have been constructed for conveniently performing Puja during rains and in the scorching heat of the sun. A Puja Mandap of 34' x 17' size in front of the sacred Kund has been constructed at a cost of Rs. 52,000. Hawan Sheds have been constructed to cater to the needs of the public for performing Yagna. A 3 H.P. Motor has been purchased for bailing out water from the sacred Kund which is generally cleaned after 2-3 years, and a pump shed constructed for the purpose.

For beautification of the shrine, marble walling has been raised on all the all sides of the Kund which has been enclosed by an iron railing. Stone platforms around the chinar trees have been built up. Electric arrangements have been very much improved and street lights provided.

With the addition of 18 kanals of land outside the shrine premises a main gate of good design has been constructed at a cost of Rs 73,000. On the whole the Trust has been doing very good constructive work in

respect of providing facilities to devotees-cum-tourists who come to worship the shrine from all over the country though there is much room for improvement still.

*Source: Srinagar & its Environs* by Samsar Chand Koul

## **14 Three Shrines of Khir Bhawani**

**Tula-Mul, Mani Gam, Raithan**

**from Kosher Encyclopaedia-Vol. 1 & 2 Cultural Academy**

*Original--Moti Lal Saqi*

*Translation--Dr. R.L. Bhat*

**Tula-Mul** is also known as Ragniya Asthapan and Kshir-Bhawani both in and outside Kashmir. The tirtha, lies 22 km to the South of Srinagar. Kshir-Bhawani asthapan is among the tirthas of Kashmir, well-known outside Kashmir too. Non Kashmir yatris flock there for Darshanas.

The historical antecedents of Kshir-Bhawani, go back to very ancient times, as per the traditions. It is said that Ragniya Devi came to Kashmir from (Sri) Lanka in the era of Ramayana. Though Ragniya is a rupa of Durga, this one is a Vaishnav rupa in Kashmir Ragniya is also known as Tripura, while in (Sri) Lanka, the Mother Goddess was called Shayama. Sita too, is believed to have been an incarnation of Ragniya. Ragniya Mahatmya has it that those who meditate on Panch Dashi Mantra during Nav-reh, Mother Ragniya grants their wish.

It is said that the night during which Mother Goddess came from (Sri) Lanka to Kashmir was Christened Ragniya Ratri In Kashmir a number of shrines are deciated to Mother Goddess at Tiker, Bhuvaneshvar, Manzgam (Noor-abad) Bheda, Lo-qaer-pur, Mani-gam, Rai-than and Baed-pur, but the Shrine at Tula-Mul is the most famous one and hence the focus of yatris. 360 springs (nagas) are said to have gathered there. Ragniya is a Sattavie form of Mother Goddess, i.e. the form of tranquility and bliss.

The first mention of Tula-Mula in Raj-Tarangni comes in Jaya Peda's reign when the Brahmins of Tula-Mula agitated against him. The protest of Brahmin fraternity indicates that Tula-Mula commanded much importance in Jaya Peda's time, because of which many Brahmins congregated there. The river on whose bank, Tula-Mul stands, has been called Chandra-Bhaga in Nilamat Purana. This Chandra-Bhaga is the branch of Indus which flows by Tula-Mula and finally merges in Veth (Jehlum).

Another tradition says that in the year 4041 Sapta Rishi over a thousand years ago, when the location of Tula-Mul Tirth had been lost to the people as the whole area of Tula-Mula had been inundated by water. Krishna Pandit, a devotee of the Devi, located it again, in that year. The reason for (Jesht) Ashtami being the day of fasting for Devi, is said to be the fact that its was in the night of (Jesht) Ashtami, that Devi came to Krishna Pandit in a dream and told him that she would lead him through water to the location of her asthapan, the next day. This is said to have happened exactly so and Krishna Pandit drone pegs around the place to demarcate it. Later when the flood ebbed the shrine was established a new.

Abul Fazl writes that Tula-Mula is an area of fifty kharwars which gets flooded in summer. About the marsh, he says, that when the waters recede, people catch ½ to 1 kg fish from under the mud.

Dara Shikoh's advisor, Maharishi Shyam Sunder Koul who was a Shakta-Margi, had a strange experience at Tula-Mula when his meat-dishes turned into vegetable ones. Devis' devotees have a firm belief that the waters of spring, in which Devi's shrine is located, changes colour.

Krishna Kar, attained spiritual height at this spring, during Aurangzeb's reign (1659 AD).

Today the shrine is spread over an approximate area of 20 miles, which contains Dharam-salas etc. The area around the spring is floored in marble.

Though there is a festival at Tula-Mula on every Ashtami of full-moon fortnight, the grand festival of the year is held on the Jesht Ashtami, in which people from Kashmir and outs-side take part.

The Devi temple of Tula-Mula is said to have been damaged in 14th or (and?) 15th centuries. The temple that was damaged (destroyed?), was also situated in the middle of the spring like the present temple. This came to light when the foundation for the new (today's) temple was being laid. The (ancient) temple had been built of beautifully carved flat stones, that were 9 feet in length and 3 feet in breadth. Besides a number of murtis were recovered which had great splendour and beauty. Maharaja Pratap Singh built a

small marble temple in 1912 AD, on the foundation of that ancient temple. The small stone icon, adorning this temple is believed by experts to be more than 600 years old.

The original name of Main Gam is MaYA Gram. The village is situated above Lar on the right-bank of Indus, a little to the interior, between 540-12(E) longitude and 340-17' (N) latitude, at a distance of 20 kilometres from Srinagar.

In the village proper, no ancient remains are found (now) but above the village on the foot of hill there is a heap of tiles, about which (M.Aurel) Stein writes that a temple existed there. On this path, enroute to Mahind Marg, there was a pond enclosed in stone-work with an inlet in the north.

This spot is now called vata-shun. Haider Malik Chadoora calls this spring "Votur-Gang", and relates that its defiling, brought a fear of a snow-fall in Summer Hassan supported Haider Malik and has called it 'votur-nag'. Now this spring is used by the water-works department (PHE) as a water-source.

A mela is held at this spring, on the 12th of the bright-half of Shravana. It has been called Achha-ra-na Nag in Harmukh Mahatamya.

Raithan is to the North-West of Srinagar 32 km away. Near the village, between the Son-moi river and the road, there a very large stone which the Hindus have been worshipping since time immemorial as a form of Goddess Ragniya.

Till 1975, we were not aware of any historical significance of this place. In that year the people of the area decided to build a Dharamshala and a wall around the shrine and started digging near the Ragniya aakar. During this (digging) stone murti were found in two layers. The murtis in the upper layer related to the Hindu period and those below to the Buddhism. A specimen of wood-carving and a foundation of an ancient temple were also unearthed. Besides, charcoal mixed in earth was also found which indicated the destruction of the shrine by fire in some early time. The foundation of the small edifice is in front of the stone towards north. Its lay-out points to a stupa having existed there. This is not surprising since the remains of a Boddh-Vihara existed, till only a short while ago in Arigam, just a little below Raithan. This indicates that Buddhist activities continued in the area for a long time. A little below Raithan, to the left of the road, there is a udara, which is even today called Raza-Geer (Raj Gadi-Capital). People say that coins of different period were found during ploughing.

Gh Ahmad Mahjoor, had collected many of these coins from the people. Mahjoor had been the patwari of Raithan, Ari-gam and Gra-veth, for a long time (before independence).

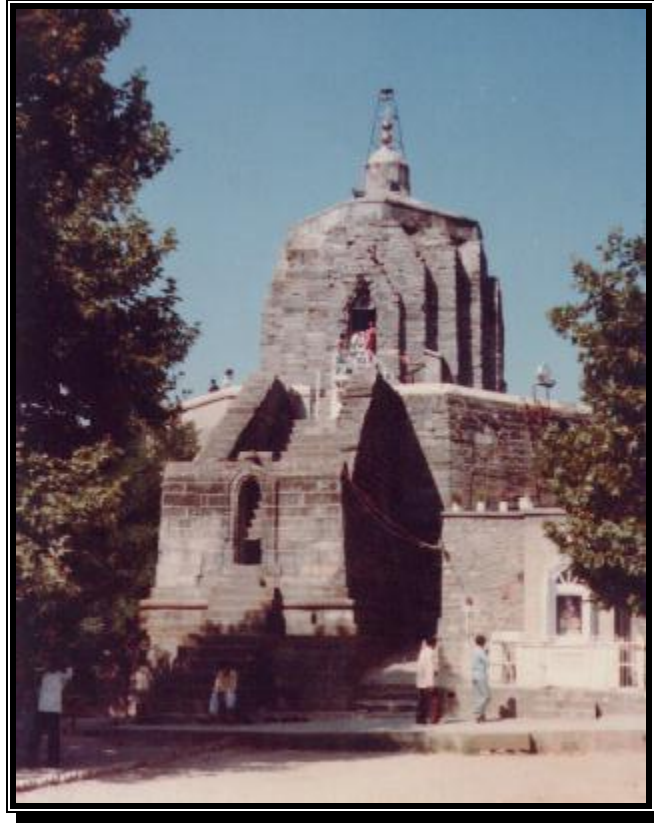
The murtis, that were excavated during digging, have got broken for the lack of caution. Most of the murtis are of soft-stone (lime-stone) which is not found in the vicinity. The murtis of Buddhist period are from the view point of craftsmanship and art much graceful, (but) those of the Hindu era do not possess that finesse and instead give the impression of crudity. It appears that these are related to the 11th and 12th centuries when the sculpture in Kashmir had decayed. However, the three-faced, green stone Vishnu, that has been found there is much graceful. Probably, it has been brought to the place from somewhere else. A similar three-faced Vishnu has been found earlier at vont-i-pur (Avantipura).

Thus the Raithan shrine has have passed through three stages. First there had been a Buddhist shrine, then its became a Vishnu shrine and now it is a place for worship of Devi.

*Source: Kashmir Sentinel*



## *15 Shankracharya*



**Shankracharya Temple, Srinagar**

*Picture Courtesy: J&K Tourism*

**Shankarachar** is a detached ridge of igneous rock to the south-east of Srinagar, separated from the Shilamar Range by the Aita Gaj Gap. The summit of the hill is crowned with a picturesque edifice. This

hill was called Jetha Larak and afterwards it was named Gopadari Hill. Some are of opinion that the temple at the top was originally built by King Sandiman (2629-2564 B.c.). There were 300 golden and silver images in it. About 1368 B.C. King Gopaditya founder of Gopkar repaired it and bestowed to the Brahmans of Arya Varta, agrahars which he built on its top. King Sandimati (34 B.C.-A.D. 13) improved and added to the temple. Zain-Ul-Abdin (1421-1472 A.D.) repaired its roof which had tumbled down by an earthquake. Sheikh Ghulam Mohi-Din, a Sikh Governor (1841-46) also repaired its dome. Recently, the dome was repaired by Swami Shivratanand saraswati at the request of a Nepali Sadhu who gave him financial aid.

The temple is under the control of the Dharmartha Department. They have built two small buildings for the sadhus who live there. There is at the place an old stone shed which is called 'Parvatihund bana koth' (the store-house of goddess Parvati).

The present name owes its origin to the great philosopher Shankaracharya who visited the valley about ten centuries ago, and lodged at the top of this hill, where it appears there were small sheds of Brahmans who looked after the temple. There is a small tank built of slabs of stone just behind the temple. In those days the Acharya or the Chief Preceptor or, in modern parlance, the Chancellor of the University of Srinagar was Swami Abinaugupth. A discussion took place between the two sages and according to the local tradition Abinaugupth initiated Shankaracharya into the Shakti cult.

On the 20th April 1961 Shri Shankaracharia of Dwarika Pet installed the white marble statue of Adi Shankaria just near the temple arranged by the Dharmartha Department.

A climb to the hill from the Mission Hospital (now Government Hospital for chest diseases) will take about 40 min. The path is a pony-track. The descent towards the Gagribal spur is gentle. En route is the tomb of Mian Dullo who is said to have squandered away all the money which his father had given him to trade with. He was enamoured of the charms of the Dal Lake which he selected as his favourite haunt for the gratification of his epicurean appetites.

The panoramic view of the valley in early April when the snow is deep on the mountains, or after rains on a summer day from the summit of the hill is one of the best that could ever be witnessed. The mountain ranges on the south, west and north rise one above the other and the peaks, varying in height from 13,000-15,500 ft., jut out like the teeth of a saw cutting through the sky. On the south lies the Banahal Pass (9,250 ft.) the chief highway to Jammu, and a number of other passes and depressions. The Brahma Shakri peaks, a group of grand cones viewed even from Lahore, the Aliabad Pass (11,440 ft.) leading to Gujrat, the Romesh Thong (Sunset) Peak, Tata Koti (15,540 ft.) guard the Chhoti Gali Pass (14,450 ft.) the highest in the range, come one after another. We now turn our eyes to the west where lies the vast plateau of Tosa Maidan, the paradise of sheep, and where the eye meets the depression of Ferozpor leading into Punch (Prunts) and Apharwat (13,542 ft.) giving shelter to Gulmarg and affording thrilling sport for the votaries of ski-ing in India.

Beyond the Baramula Pass, towards the north-west, the range is continued in Kaj Nag and Khagan mountain. In between the Tragbal (9,500 ft.) and Zoji La (10,500 ft.) appears the beautiful candy cone of Harmoukh (16,842 ft.) in the north, while the eastern range culminating in Mahadiv (13,013 ft.) and Western peaks completes the enchanting circle. At the foot of these mountains lie the alluvial plateaus with rich yellow soil yielding maize and rice where water is available. The swamps, marshes and lakes of the valleys stretch as far as the Wular Lake in the extreme north of the valley. The Baramula road bordered with poplars, the sinuous course of the Vetasta (Jhelum), cutting a clean almond called Shivapor Phur, the green house-tops now disappearing with the introduction of galvanised iron sheets for roofs, the minarets of churches and mosques and the shining surface of the temples present a picturesque sight.

Turning now to the Dal lake we see the Moghul gardens of Nasim, Shalamar and Nishat densely shaded by the deep green foliage of Boin (Chinar) trees, the floating gardens and the houses situated on the islands in the lake encompassed by poplars, willows and quince trees. The two expanses of deep blue water are separated by the causeway like two great eyes, each with its pupil of an island. The eastern

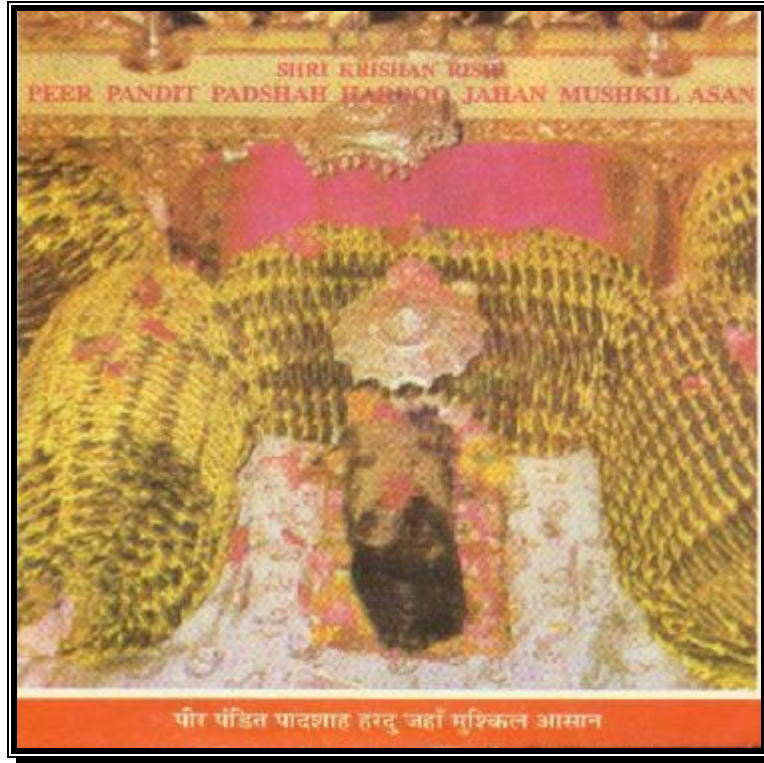
shore is embellished by the magnificent Royal Palace with their crystal sheen, by newly-laid gardens and the boulevard skirting it. A part of the palace has been converted into a hotel with a superb view.

The Government has made the hill a resort and it is hoped that it will one day be clothed with dense herbage and trees Providing charming bowers for lovers. A number of paths has been marked out and platforms with suitable seats have been made for visitors. In fact, every effort is made to attract people to the hill.

In olden days a great festival used to be held by the Hindus on the ioth day of the lunar fortnight of Baisak which corresponds to March. Just above the Dal Gate they would come in doonga's to bathe. This was called Monda daham, probably in memory of the killing of the demon Mond by the goddess Sharika. But this festival has now been entirely forgotten as if nothing like it ever existed.

*Source: Srinagar & its Environs* by Samsar Chand Koul

## 16 Rishipeer



Rishipeer at Alikadal, Srinagar

### Pir Pandit Padshah

#### *The Puff That Kindled The Divine Spark In Him*

**Reshi** Pir Pandit was one of the greatest saints of Kashmir of the 17th Century A.D. He was a Karmyogin type of a Saint who helped people both in spiritual and temporal pursuits and he became famous as "PIR PANDIT PADSHAH HARDU JAHAN MUSHKIL ASAN" i.e. Emperor of two worlds and answer to difficulties of all kinds.

His father was Pandit Gobind Kaul resident of Batayar Mohallah Ali Kadal Srinagar (Kashmir). He was a well-to-do man but could not get a girl to marry. What worried him was that he was advancing in age. However, he ultimately succeeded in marrying a girl in Gushi Village of Handwara Tehsil. When the bride-groom came for the marriage ceremony to Ghoshi Village, his mother-in-law noticing some grey hair on her son-in-law's head fell into a swoon. After the wedding, the mother prayed at a nearby "Sacred spring" for her daughter. One day while praying earnestly at the spring, she heard a voice telling her "Oh old lady-go to your house and get your daughter to this spring. A bunch of flowers will come out of the spring let your daughter smell this bunch of flowers and your ambition would be fulfilled and your daughter will get a holy son". This was done by the lady and Pir Sahib's mother smelt the coloured bunch of flowers. When the time of delivery was approaching she left her parents house to go back to her husband. While travelling in a boat to Srinagar, she delivered a male child in the boat itself at Sopore in the year 1637 A.D. This boy was given Reshi as his name. A temple has been constructed at this spot and is known as "Resh Sund Mandar". Pandit Gobind Koul was extremely happy when his wife and child reached his home in Srinagar. When Reshi was 7 years old he was married and his father died soon after. By the time he attained the age of 12 years he became indifferent to worldly affairs and devoted his entire time to Sadhana in temples, visiting saints and searching for a Guru. With this predominant idea in his mind, he started circumambulation of Shri Sharika Bhagwati Shrine situated on a hillock in the city of Srinagar during nights for 40 days crawling all the way on his knees (a distance of about 3 miles). On the

40th day when he was in Deviangan (an open space below the hill) Goddess Sharika Bhagwati gave him Her Darshana and enquired of him as to what he wanted. He prostrated himself before Her and implored Her for being granted the boon of a Guru. The Devi ordained that the first man he would come across henceforth would be his Guru. After he left Deviangan and reached the place known as Hari on the northern side of the Hillock, he encountered a "MASTANA" saint sitting on a big stone and bowed to him, but he - the saint bolted away without saying a word leaving Reshi Pir far behind. The Mastana saint reached Reshi Pir's house before he himself reached there, asked Reshi's mother to give him Reshi's Hokka and smoking a puff or two told her to give the Chellum to Reshi for smoking after he returns home, and left the house. As soon as Reshi reached his home, his mother told him that a Mastana had come, who asked for his Hokka, smoked a puff and said the "Chellem" should be given to him (Reshi) for smoking. Reshi had a puff. The second puff kindled the Divine spark in him, his Jana Nitra opened and he became a God-intoxicated Trikaladarsh. This "Mastana" saint who initiated him was Pandit Krishna Kar. After his initiation he continued his intense Sadhana for 14 1/2 years. It is said that for a bath he would throw live red hot charcoal on his shoulders and body daily, for a number of years. After this period he became famous as "Pir PANDIT PADSHAH" as he helped many people out of their worldly difficulties. This news reached Aurangzeb who disliked his being called king "PADSHAH" and sent his messenger to Srinagar to arrest him and get him to Delhi. As the messenger met Pir Sahib, he made arrangements for his food. etc. and told him that he would accompany him the next morning to meet the king. By his miraculous powers he went to Delhi during night and enquired of Aurangzeb what he wanted of him. On seeing Reshi Pir, Aurangzeb trembled, became convinced of his spiritual prowess and greatness and wrote to Saif Khan Governor of Kashmir not only to cancel the orders of his arrest but also to keep a Jagir in his name in Devsar Village. Pir Pandit had fixed 14 pies as Niaz or offering to him. This practice is continuing even to this day among Kashmiri Hindus.

A contemporary of Pir Sahib, Mulla Ahmad Badkshani used to have discussions with him on spiritual topics. Dara Shikoh was his (Mulla Sahib's) pupil. It is believed that he "Reshi Pir" influenced Mulla Sahib greatly with Vedantic thought and he induced his pupil Dara Shikoh to translate it in Persian and named the book "SAIR-I-AKBAR".

*Source: Koshur Samachar*

**17 Chakrishwar**



**ChakriShwar Temple at Hari Parbhat, Srinagar**

## ***18 Ganpatyar Temple***

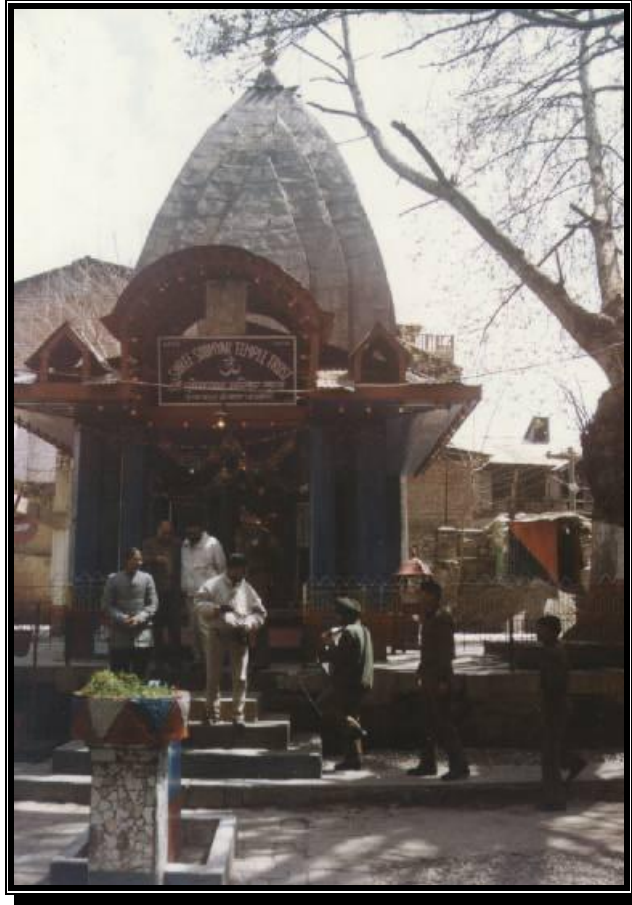
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**Ganpatyar Temple, Srinagar**

***19 Somyar Temple***

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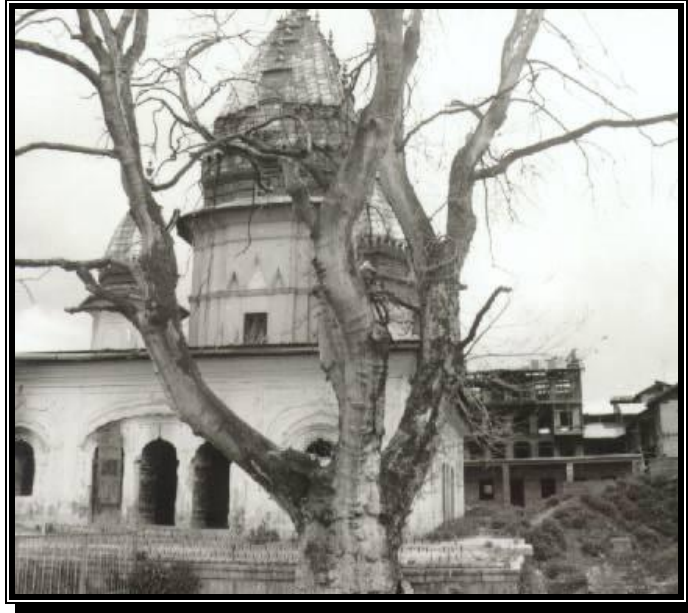
**Somyar Temple**

*Photo Courtesy: Panun Kashmir*



## *20 Raghunath Temple*

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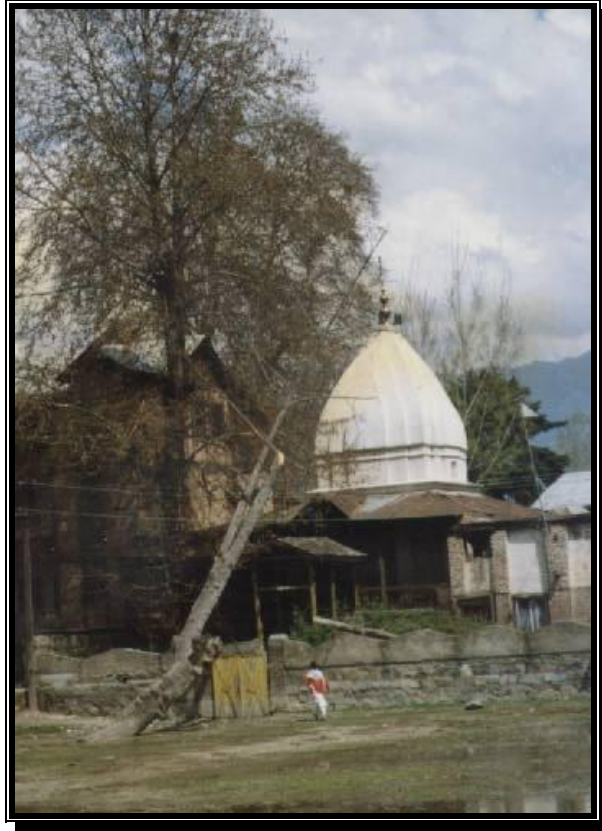


**Raghunath Temple**

*Photo Courtesy: Panun Kashmir*

## *21 Sheetalnath Temple*

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**Sheetalnath Temple**

*Photo Courtesy: Panun Kashmir*

## *22 Temple inside Hari Parbat Fort*



**Temple inside Hari Parbat Fort**

*Photo Courtesy: Panun Kashmir*

## *23 Avantipora Temple*



**Avantipora Temple**



**Kah, Kah, Kah,.... (11,11,11, ...) stone at Avantipora Temple**

The stone which rises up when persons numbering 11 touch it with their index fingers

At a distance of 32 km. towards the south of Srinagar city on the National Highway there is a town-Bijbehra on the left bank of the River Jhelum. At the southern tip of the town there is a massive stone temple dedicated to Lord Shiva. In the compound of the same temple there is a conch shaped stone tapering at one end which is popularly known as Kah-Kah-Pal. The stone does not weigh more than 60 kilos or more and one adult person can move it from side to side.



**Row of cells of Avantiswami temple at Avantipur.**

The marvel of the stone gets apparent when 11 persons encircle it, and apply their 11 index fingers to the base of the stone. While repeating Kah-Kah ( eleven-eleven ) the stone gets lifted above the ground. The stone is popularly know as Kah-Kah-Pal which in Kashmiri means the digit eleven. The stone is in the custody of the pujari of the temple. Many stories and legends about the stone are attributable to it. For example it is related that once it was thrown into the river and next day it reappeared on the bank of the river. I have dismissed such legends as mere heresay.

## ***24 Mamleshwar Temple at Pahalgam***

### ***24.1 Mamal***

**This** spot is also about a mile from Pahalgam. It stands across the Kolahoi stream up towards the mountain side. There is an old temple here the pinnacle of which was adorned with gold during the reign of one of the early kings. There is also a spring beautifully banked with long dressed stones of about 8th century. This was dedicated to Shiva and was called Mamalishwara. It is said that Ganesh was placed as doorkeeper not to allow any one to enter the temple without his permission. So it was called Mam Mal - Don't go. There is a priest to look after the temple. In summer the place is regularly visited by the populace of Pahalgam.



**Mamleshwar Temple, Pahalgam**

*Source: Srinagar & its Environs* by Samsar Chand Koul

**25 Bhairav**

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**Bhairav at Balgarden, Srinagar**

## *26 Martand (Sun Temple)*

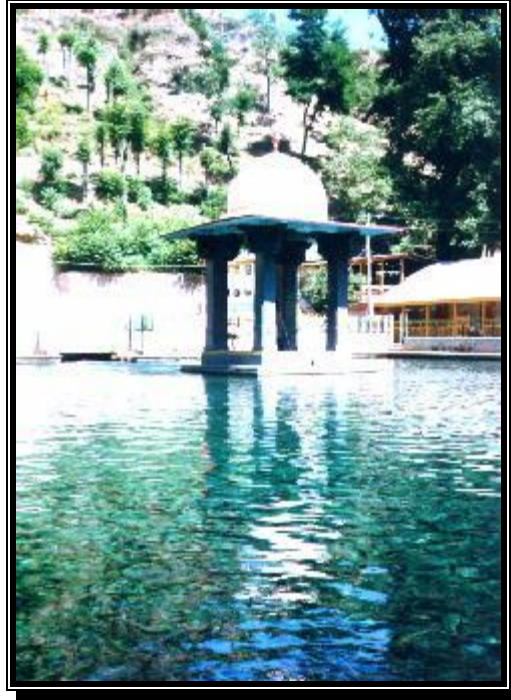
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*Pictures Courtesy of: Mr. Kamlesh Moza, Baytown, Texas*



## **27 Mattan Temple**



**Temple at Mattan - 2 miles from Martand  
with numerous fish in its pond.**

### **Matan, Anantnag**

**The** lofty plateau, on which the remains of the ancient temple of Martanda stand, overlooks the modern village of Matan, located at its foot. The name of the village is derived from the name of the presiding deity of the temple on the plateau, which is also known as "Matan" or "Martand". The plateau itself is connected with the slope of a mountain.

The site selected for the temple is indeed superb and fascinating not only in its setting vibrating with beauty but also in its atmosphere of reposeful serenity. Immediately behind the temple, which stands on the highest part of the plateau overlooking the lovely plains below, rises up a mountain.

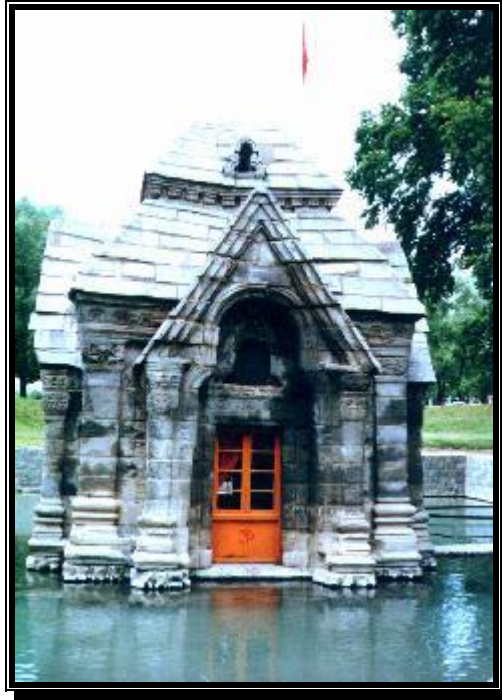
The slope of this mountain at the rear of the temple commands a picturesque panoramic view of the splendid valley, with its soothingly green corn fields in a large part of the year and groves of deep green trees, encircled by high snow topped reposeful mountains with their lower part covered by majestic trees. A more fitting and nobler site could hardly be chosen for the mansion of the Sun God, the spanner of the obscured by trees, the temple shines in its solitary grandeur.

*Source:* SaffronValley.com

## ***28 Pandrethan***

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**This** place is about 4 miles from Srinagar. Here was the old capital of Kashmir, which was founded by king Ashoka of Buddhist fame. The word is a corrupt form of Purana-old, adhishtan-capital. There is now a cantonment at this pace. Not very far from the road there is a very low spring in the middle of which stands a beautiful stone temple. The roof of the temple consists of one stone artistically carved. This was erected by Meru, the minister of kinz Partha who ruled ashmir from 921-931 A.C. It was dedicated to Vishnu and was called Meru Vardhana Swami. It must have been a place of pilgrimage in the olden times. Mention of it has been made in the Amar Nath Mahatmva, but the place has now lost its sacred associations.



**Pandrethan (near Srinagar). One of the few temples of Kashmir with roof intact.  
Although miniature in size, it is ornate with structural symmetry.  
10th century era.**

*Source: Srinagar & its Environs* by Samsar Chand Koul

## ***29 Rani Mandir, Gulmarg***

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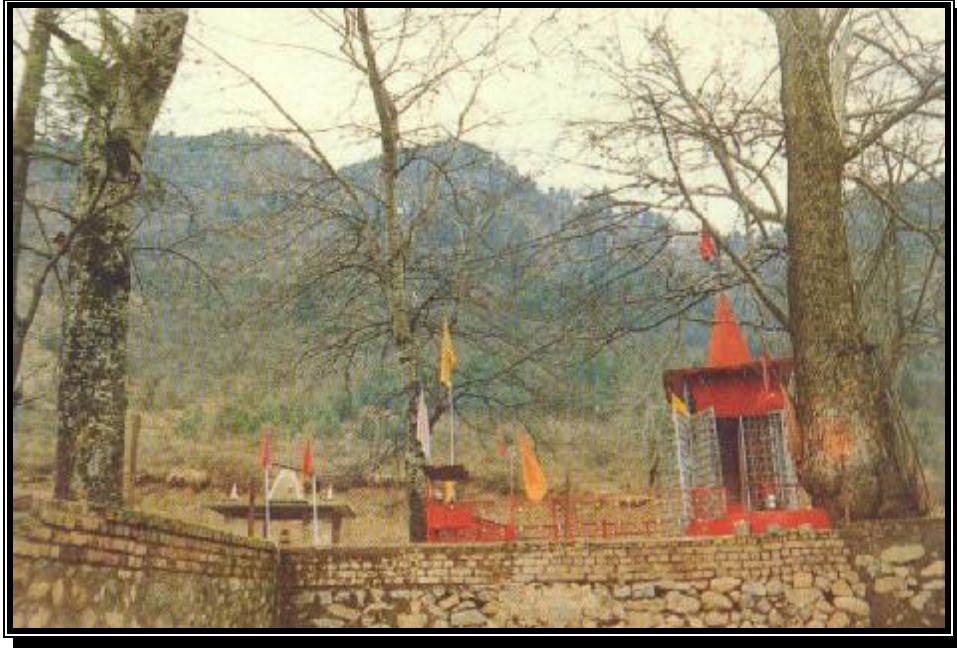


**Rani Mandir, Gulmarg**

*Picture Courtesy: Koshur Samachar*

### *30 Zeeth Ya'r*

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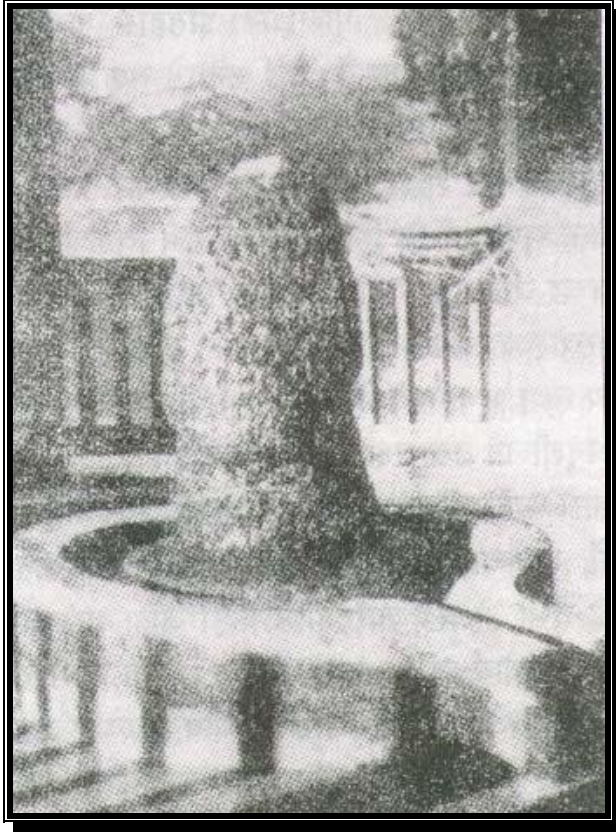


**Zeeth Ya'r**

*Picture Courtesy: Koshur Samachar*

***31 Shiv Ling at Kapal Mochan (Shopian)***

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**Shiv Ling at Kapal Mochan (Shopian)**

*Source:* Ancient Monuments of Kashmir by Ram Chandra Kak

### *32 Sharda Mata Temple at Gushi (Kupwara)*

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**Sharda Mata Temple at Gushi (Kupwara)**

*Source: SaffronValley.com*

### ***33 Maha Kali Temple***

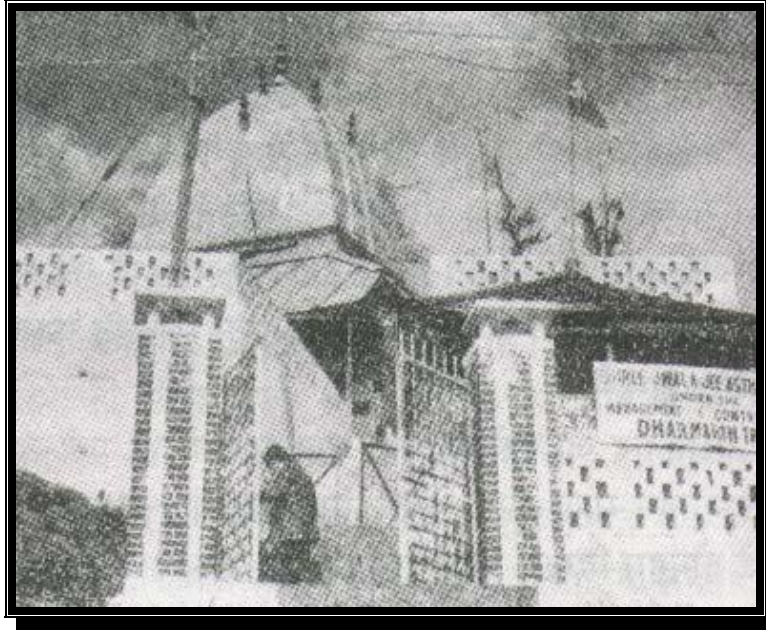
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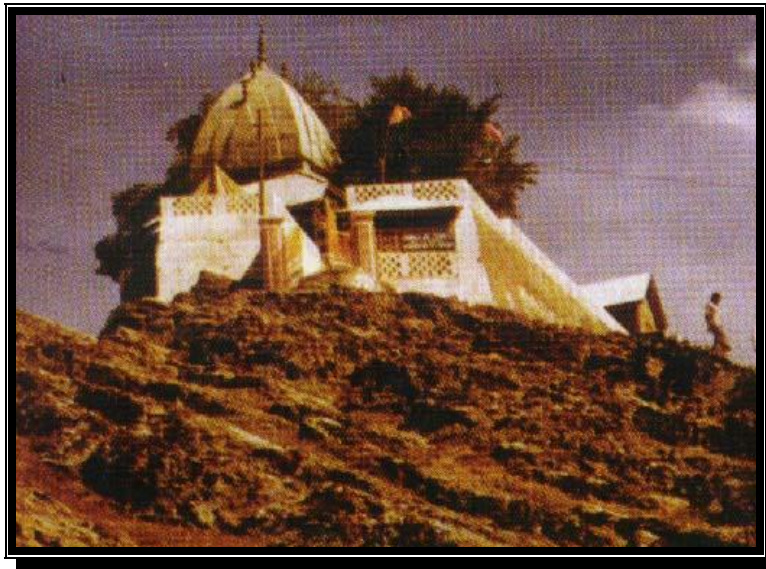
**Maha Kali Temple**

*Source: Ancient Monuments of Kashmir by Ram Chandra Kak*

### *34 Jwala Bhagwati Temple (Khrew)*



**Jwala Bhagwati Temple (Khrew)**



**Jwalaji Khrew**



*35 Vasuki Nag*

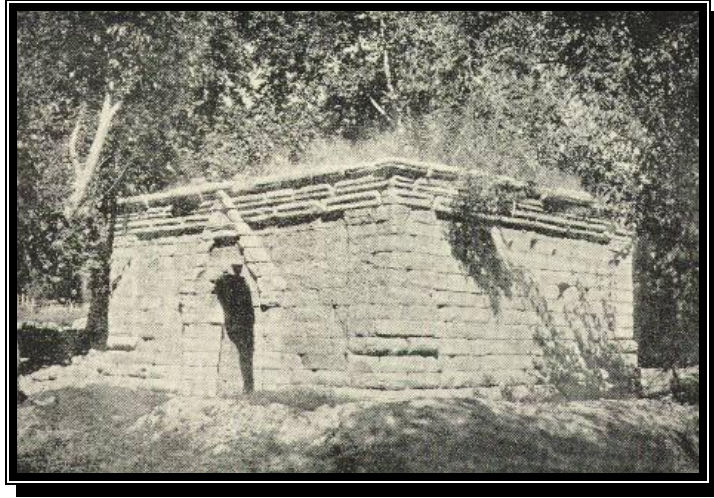
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**Vasuki Nag**

### *36 Temple at Loduv*

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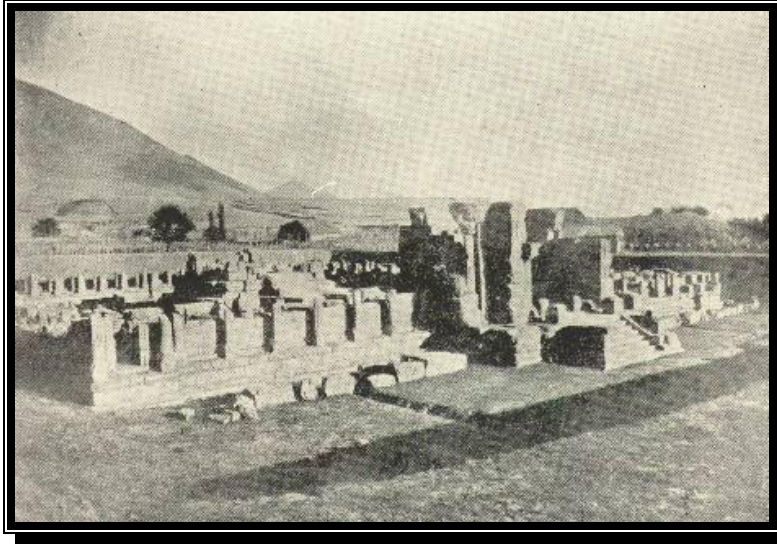


**Temple at Loduv**

*Source: Ancient Monuments of Kashmir by Ram Chandra Kak*

### ***37 Avantivami Temple: General View From The Front***

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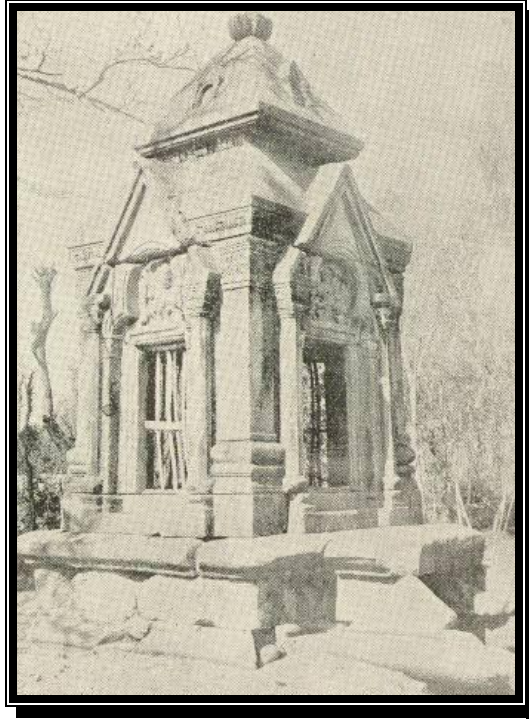


**Avantivami Temple: General View From The Front**

*Source: Ancient Monuments of Kashmir by Ram Chandra Kak*

### *38 Payar Temple*

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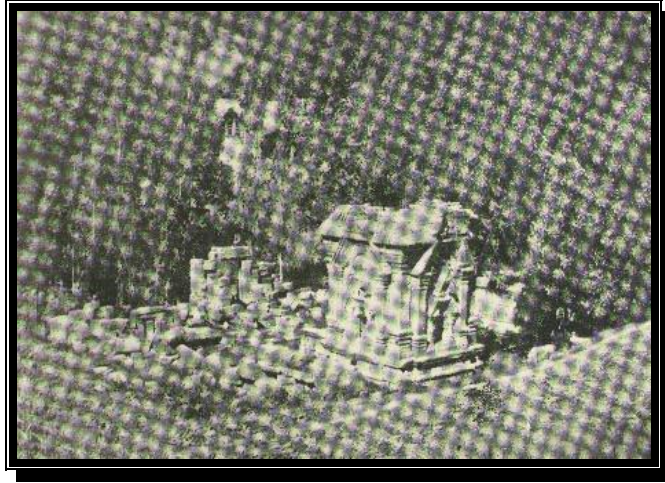


**Payar Temple**

*Source: Ancient Monuments of Kashmir by Ram Chandra Kak*

### ***39 Temple at Narastan***

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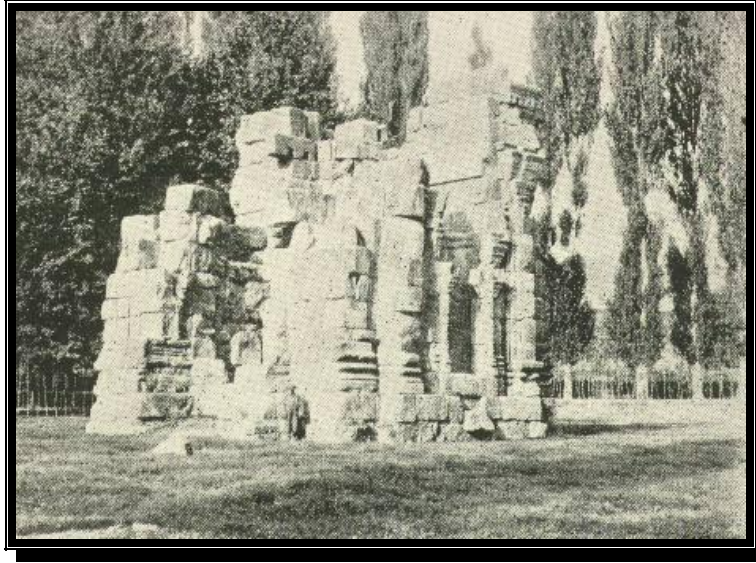


**Temple at Narastan**

*Source: Ancient Monuments of Kashmir by Ram Chandra Kak*

## ***40 Sanraragaurisvara Temple at Patan***

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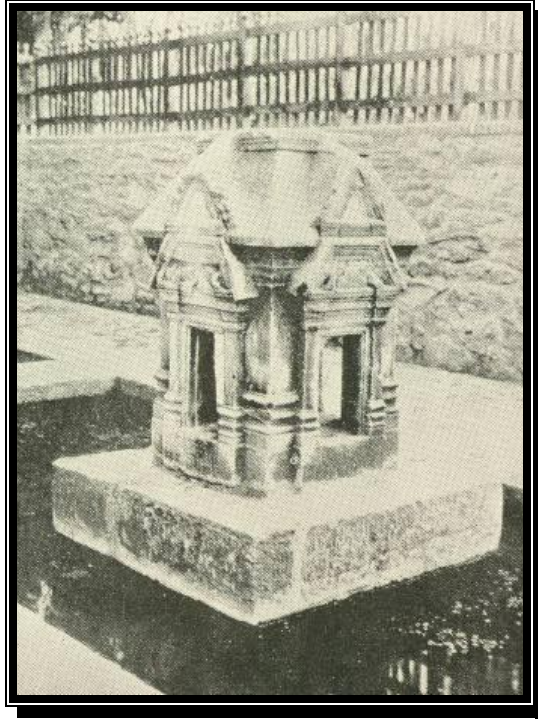


**Sanraragaurisvara Temple at Patan**

*Source: Ancient Monuments of Kashmir by Ram Chandra Kak*

## ***41 Miniature Temple at Patan***

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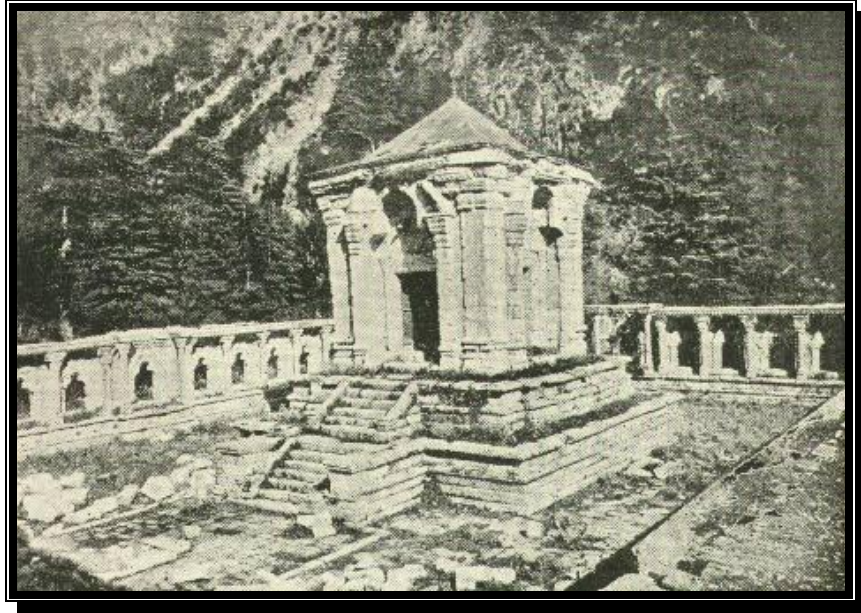


**Miniature Temple at Patan**

*Source:* Ancient Monuments of Kashmir by Ram Chandra Kak

## *42 Buniar Temple*

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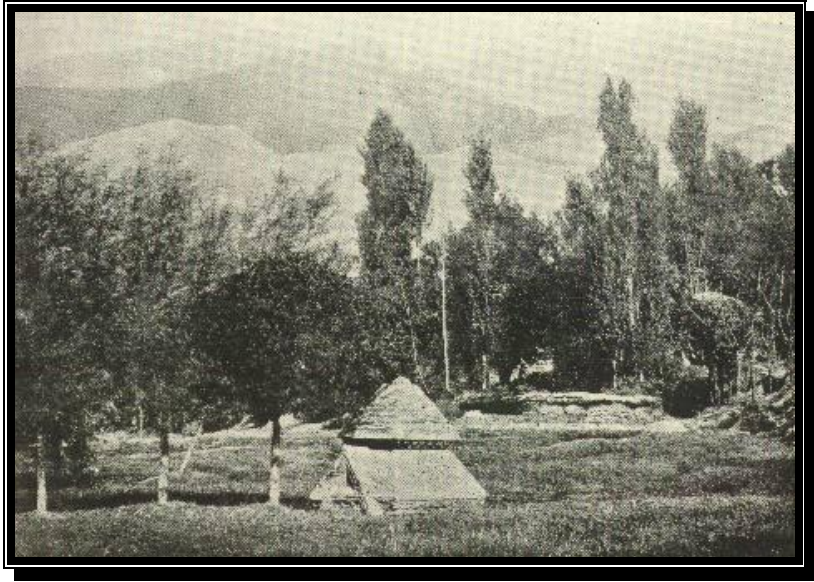
**Buniar Temple**

*Source: Ancient Monuments of Kashmir by Ram Chandra Kak*



### *43 Submerged Temple in Manasbal Lake*

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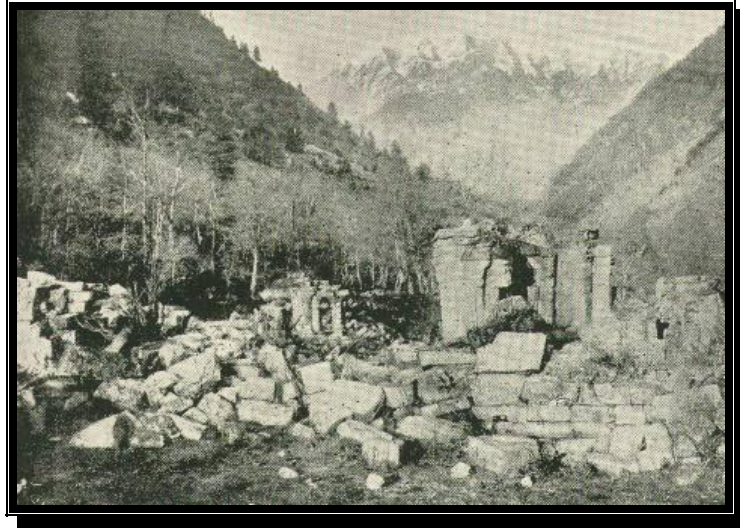


**Submerged Temple in Manasbal Lake**

*Source: Ancient Monuments of Kashmir by Ram Chandra Kak*

## ***44 Wangath Temples***

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**Wangath Temples**

*Source: Ancient Monuments of Kashmir by Ram Chandra Kak*

## ***45 Shailaputri Asthapan (Devibal), Baramulla***

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**Shailaputri Asthapan (Devibal), Baramulla**

**This** Teertha is situated on the left bank of the Vitasta at Baramulla. This is a miniature Kheer-Bhawani. A havan used to be performed on Ram Navami. People from nearby towns like sopore, kupwara, handwara etc. used to come and join in puran auhute. Prasad used to be distributed at the end of the Havan.

*Source:* SaffronValley.com

## ***46 Shri. Nandakeshwar Maharaj***

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**Shri. Nandakeshwar Maharaj**

A famous place of Nandakeshwar Bhairava situated on the left bank of the Vitasta at village Seer Jagir (Sopore), 3.05 kms from Sopore of District Baramulla was completely destroyed (burned) in the year 1947 by pakistanees (Kabalies).

Has a religious importance. Jesht Amavasi is celebrated every year. It is a custom that the girl (of the village) who are married. Her inlaws have to perform a Havan to save them from evils.

After exodus the community is performing Havan at Shiv Temple Gole Gujral on Jesht Amavasi.

*Source: SaffronValley.com*

*47 Tikkar, Kupwara*

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**Tikkar, Kupwara**

*Source: SaffronValley.com*