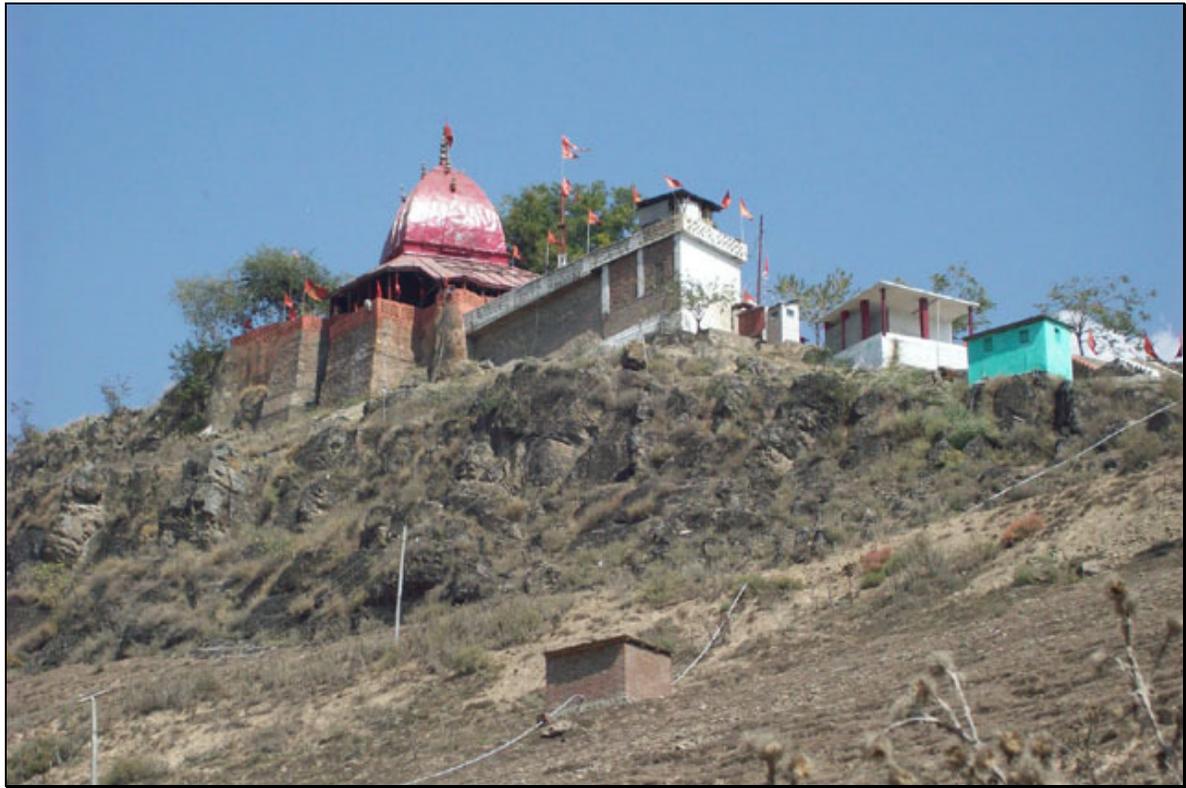


# PLACES OF WORSHIP IN KASHMIR

**Chander M. Bhat**



*Jwala ji, Khrew*

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# **Places of Worship in Kashmir**

**Chander M. Bhat**

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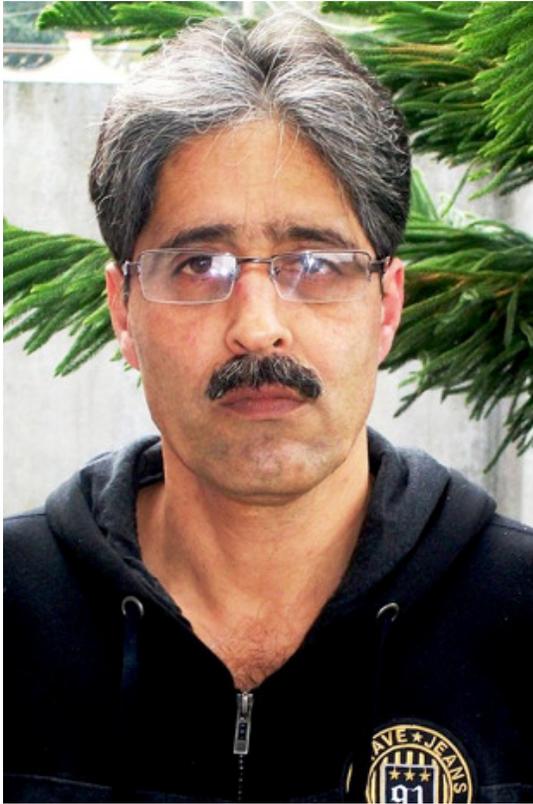
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## About The Author



Born on 20<sup>th</sup> March, 1960 in Murran a village in North Kashmir, Chander M. Bhat is presently working as an Assistant Director Postal Services, Jammu & Kashmir Circle in Department of Posts, Govt. of India. His articles regarding Posts and of non-political nature stand widely published in various papers and magazines of the country. A booklet “How to Collect Stamps” published by the Deptt. of Posts, has earned him genuine accolades. He worked on the project of tracing the roots of his co-villagers and of the village Murran, resulting into the culmination of a widely acclaimed book “Murran ...My Village”. Man with depth, Chander M. Bhat has also another book, “Ocean by Drops” (collection of poems) in his vase having colorful poems. His book “Ancient History of Jammu and Kashmir”, confirms his researching capability. Various research papers like “The Splendor that is

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## Bhadrakali, Wadipora, Handwara

**Bhadrakali as per Bhavanisahasarnama (The Thousand Name of Bhavani) is the power that wields time of bringing forth the facility of impressions and dissolving the resplendence thereof.**



As testimony to destruction the theological eulogy of Kali, in contrast to the creative power in nature, represents the ever active power of disintegrating forms and structures of the universe. Her make-up and sport are factual and graphical. It is the force that drives heavenly bodies back into their nebulous state. It is the state where the trichotomy of authority, testimony and object melt into universal oneness.

Devi Sati was the youngest daughter of Daksha, the king of all men. When she grew up she set her heart on Shiva, worshipping him. Daksha invited all the gods in the swayamvara of Sati except Shiva. Sati cast her garland into air, calling upon Shiva to receive the garland; and behold, he stood in midst of the court with the garland around his neck. Daksha had no choice but to get Sati

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married with Shiva. As the legend goes on, on day Daksha made arrangements for a great sacrifice, and invited all the gods except Shiva. Sati's urge to go to her home due to the affection towards her parents overpowered the social etiquette for not going to an uninvited ceremony. Daksha insulted her in front of others. Unable to bear further trauma she ran into the sacrificial fire. Shiva came to know about the incident and with deep sorrow and anger, plucked a lock of hair and thrashed the same on the ground. Vir Bhadreshwar and Devi Bhadrakali were born. Vir Bhadreshwar was dark as the clouds, three burning eyes, and fiery hair; he wore a garland of skulls and carried terrible weapons. To provide him power arrived Bhadrakali, a wrathful incarnation of Devi. Another legend describes that the Goddess Bhadrakali came from Bengal; in the pursuit of demons, whom the Goddess destroyed at the place where the present temple is constructed.

Bhadrakali is one of the fierce forms of the Great Goddess mentioned in the Devi Mahatmyam. She is represented with three eyes, and four, twelve or eighteen hands. She carries a number of weapons, with flames flowing from her head, and a small tusk protruding from her mouth. Her worship is also associated with the Tantric tradition of the Matrikas as well as the tradition of the ten Mahavidyas and falls under the broader umbrella of Shaktism.

Bhadrakali Temple is significant Devi temple located at the extreme end of village Wadipora some 8 km from Handwara town in Kupwara District of Kashmir. The temple is situated on a small hillock and is covered with thick forest. One has to climb about 350 stairs to reach the temple complex. At the bottom on the hillock there is a small Shiv temple, a pujari niwas, a havan kund and a small pond surrounded with wooden planks. A yatri niwas has also been constructed at the bottom of this hillock by Rashtriya Rifles who is presently maintaining the temple. This Temple is held in high esteem by devotees of Goddess Bhadrakali popularly called the 'Grant Mother Goddess'. Goddess Bhadrakali is *Isht Devi* of Pandits of village Wadipora, in particular and some Pandits of Kashmir in general. Remarkable feature of the temple is the black stone image of the Goddess placed near the trunk of a Deodar tree and a Deodar tree forming main sanctum sanatorium. This Deodar tree protrudes out of the root of the temple. It is said that this Deodar tree is about 1000 years old. In the image goddess is seen in a sitting posture with fierce looking eyes and face. The Goddess can also be seen wearing a crown and having eight hands holding various weapons. At present some branches of the said Deodar tree have dried up and it said that the tree dried up in the year 1990 when militancy erupted in Kashmir Valley.

There is an artificial pond on the left side of the temple and thick forest in the surroundings which adds to the spiritual charm of the temple. Number of Deodar trees en-route this temple from the base of the hillock are said to carry immense spiritual powers and people apply Sindoor to these Deodar trees as a

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mark of devotion. Housing about two to three small temple surrounding the main temple exude a sacred aura when large number of devotees gather to offer prayers on the day of Ram Navmi and Maha Navmi which was a routine till the mass exodus of Kashmiri Pandits from this area.

## Bala Devi, Village Balhama

**‘Bala’ is a Sanskrit word meaning ‘the girl child.’ Worship of Sakti or the Mother Goddess is a very ancient practice in India.** Of the several aspects of the Divine Mother Parvati, Lalita or Lalita-Tripurasundari is very important and popular. Bala (also called Bala-Tripurasundari) is an aspect of this Lalita. Sometimes she is described as the daughter of Lalita who helped her to destroy the army of the demon Bhandasura.



As her very name suggests, Bala is pictured as an eternal girl of nine years. Iconographical works describe her as red in colour like hibiscus flower. She has four arms carrying sash, noose, goad and book. Bala is specially worshipped, by those desiring psychic powers.” [A Concise Encyclopedia of Hinduism by Swami Harshananda]

The abode of Bala Devi in Kashmir valley is at Village Balhama which is about thirteen kilometers from Srinagar. This village is surrounded by village Wuyan in the east, Khunmoh in the north and Pampore town in the west. This village

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is about 3 km on the right side near Pantha Chowk, a link road near Pampore Joinery Mill.

According to the local folk lore the original abode of Bala Devi is in South India. It is said that the saint of the temple had a dream in which she told him to visit Kashmir where he could have her darshana. The saint along with his devotees as per the divine blessings visited the village of Balahama which was a dense forest at that time. The goddess gave darshana to the saint in a spring. In order to keep the sanctity of the shrine she directed him to plant five saplings of Devdar trees around the spring which in the course of time grew to full size Devdars. The five Devdar trees are believed to be more than five thousand years old and is the principle object of veneration. The spring in later years faded away under the trunk/girth of Deodars.

The temple around these five Devdar trees was built by the Dogra rulers in the year 1942. I was told by a Pandit who still resides in the village that once the temple was renovated by the locals with a roof and after the work was completed suddenly the roof of the temple fell down and from that day the temple is without a roof.

Thirty Kanals of land is attached to Bala Devi temple and the temple has been built in the right side of the plot/land facing towards east. There is a small hut having only one room which is believed to be the residence of the Chowkidar. The temple has been built by constructing a circular brick pillars covering the five Devdar trees and thereby joining the pillars by steel fencing.

Presently there are five Hindu families who are looking after the temple. A local namely Gh. Qadir has been engaged as the Chowkidar by the local Pandits on Rs. 600/- as monthly remuneration.

At present the temple is having a deserted look due to lack of maintenance and proper care due to forced migration of Pandit families from this village.

## **Brari Aangan**

### *The abode of Uma Devi*

**A place is a liter away from the well known tourist resort of Achhabal in Anantnag.** The explanation for the name Brari Aangan could be scoffed at but it has solid foundation on historical facts.



Haji Karimdad Khan, who is mentioned in history as one of the harshest and most tyrannical Afghan Subehdars of Kashmir, deputed in 1772 A.D. a junior executive, Shri Ram Kaul Jalali, to collect land revenue and other taxes from the Utarasu pargana in the Anantnag tehsil. Shiv Ram had already been initiated by a ranking preceptor in spiritual discipline and on reaching Uttarasu he intensified his meditative practice. In the course of a few months he attracted the attention of the people around who frequently came to see him to seek initiation at his hands. Soon he resigned his job and devoted himself to meditation on Goddess Uma in the form of 'Aumn'.

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These facts were reported to the subehdar who summoned Shiv Ram to Srinagar. The latter did not go but put his heart and soul in meditation under a shady tree. The subehdar was annoyed and sent some troopers to 'bring Shiv Ram to his senses' and to drag him to the capital. On reaching Shiv Ram's place of meditation they were dismayed to find him guarded by two leopards, one to his right and the other to his left. The mounted soldiers wanted to swoop upon Shiv Ram in the manner they were directed by the subehdar who considered Shiv Ram's recalcitrance to grave offence, but their mounts shied and backed, ran helter-skelter, and sustained injuries along with the riders. Crest-fallen, the soldiers reported the whole matter to the subehdar at Srinagar.



**Main Temple**

Haji Karimdad Dhan was the hero of many a battle in Afghanistan and India, including Kashmir. He went to Brari Aangan to check personally all that was reported to him. Catching a glimpse of Shiv Ram from a distance he found him flanked by two cats, but when he approached closer he was astounded to find two leopards instead. Nothing daunted he spurred his mount to charge but it

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fled in the reverse direction. The truth dawned on the Haji and Shiv Ram was no longer an average mortal but had attained stature under the protection of Divinity. He gave up his arrogance and approached the saint in all humility. The leopards instantly changed into docile cats. Shiv Ram who was all along in his *samadhi* gradually returned to normalcy.

The subehdar expressed his appreciation of Shiv Ram by granting him land for a shrine and 1600 kanals of rent-free agricultural land for its upkeep and for a free kitchen for visiting pilgrims. Soon thereafter many people, Hindus and Muslims, settled on the land around. It came to be known as Uma Nagri but the common man called it Brari Angan, the courtyard of cats, on account of the role of the feline species in the evolution of the village. Shiv Ram was also called as Shivananda. He used to lit Dhooni (sacrificial fire) every morning and the place of Dhooni was called Dhooni Sahib. After the nirvana of Sh. Shiv Ram (Shivananda) the local saints from Pandit family and Koul family took the reigns of Uma Shrine. The last saint of the shrine was Swami Satyananda who was a teacher by profession and belonged to the local Koul family. He was a bramchari and attained nirvana after the mass exodus of pandits from the valley. Two bandararas (yagna's) are celebrated every year, one on the occasion of birthday of Goddess Uma during navratras and another on nirvana divas of Sh. Shiv Ram in the month of January-February. The two celebrations are now offered at Jammu by the ancestors of Koul family of whom Swami Satyananda belonged. One of the saints namely Swami Soimaanda of Ganpatyar, Srinagar who was blessed by the Goddess had also contributed a lot for the construction of the shrine at Uma Nagri and then at Jammu after the exodus. The yegna is also offered at Uma Devi Temple, Muthi, a replica of Uma Devi Shrine of Brari Aangan. Hawans are also offered at Sharadapeth, Bantlab, Jammu every year by the ancestors of Swami Satyananda.



A tom-cat is referred to as bror (pl. 'brare') in Kashmiri and its female counterpart is braer (pl. brari). Braer is derived from Sanskrit word Bhataraka meaning 'worshipful' as in Bhattaraka Nadvala which is the present Brarinambal according to Stein. The name Brari Angan is therefore fully appropriate for the village.<sup>1</sup>

The 1600 kanals donated by Haji Karimdad Khan continued to be utilized for the shrine from April 13 (Basakhi), 1781 A.D. for nearly a century and half. It was reduced to 964 kanals in the reign of Maharaja Pratap Singh who sanctioned a grant in cash for the Dharmarth Trust for the area resumed. In the last 1950s the estate was reduced to just 182 kanals under the agrarian

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reforms of the state. A separate forest area was also offered by the Dogra rulers to the shrine.

Haji Karimdad Khan's land grant thus provides a historical explanation for the 'why' and 'how' of the name Brari Aagan.

The common noun *braer* is occasionally invested with divinity as the expression Braer Maji (Mother Goddess) or in such *lila* songs as

*Raji Reni rani Braeri Laga yai paeri paeri* (All praise to her who, known as Rani (queen) Braer, is the consort of the Almighty.

It adds a new dimension to the place name which bridges historical facts with diving grace, reminding one of Goethe's adulation:

Wouldst thou the earth and heaven  
In order sole name combine

*Tehrik* Kashmir mentions another spot on the crest of the Zojila pass which also was known as Brari Angan. It states that from time to time many people felt carried away by the sound of music and minstrelsy, they imagined, they heard there. Their companions applied the rough and ready therapy of flogging to bring such an individual back to normalcy so that he did not lag behind the caravan and get frozen to death.<sup>2</sup>

There were seventy KP families residing in this village prior to mass exodus which includes Kauls, Bhats, Ganjoos, Pandits, Khars, Bhans and Marhattas. At present there is no KP family in this village. The Uma Shrine in Brari Aangan is now in ruins. The icon of the goddess was destroyed and the same is resting at the bottom of one of the spring. The surrounding of the shrine was raised to the ground in a fire during 1990. Two dharamshalas surrounding the shrine were capable to sustain one thousand devotees. But the *moorat* and *soorat* (*aakar and sorup*) of Goddess Uma is awake in every devotee. There were three springs of diameter 12 mts/8 mts and 11 mts. The springs were having crystal clear water and were located like a triangle in the shape of Omkara.

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*Image Gallery:* [http://koausa.org/gallery/categories.php?cat\\_id=235](http://koausa.org/gallery/categories.php?cat_id=235)

## Chakrishor, Srinagar

**Hari Parbat (Sharika Peeth) is situated at the periphery of Srinagar city is an ancient and one of the holiest places of Kashmir and is associated with the Kashmir Culture since time immemorial.** It is the abode of Maha Shakti. The Divine Mother of Shri Jagat Amaba Sharika Bhagawati also known as Maha Tripursundhari or Rajeshwari locally called as *Harie*. The Eighteen armed Goddess Sharika is regarded as the presiding deity of Srinagar city.



The Goddess Sharika is represented by a Sayambhu 'Sri Chakra' also called 'Maha Sriyantara' which consists of circular Mystic impressions and triangular patterns with as dot (*Bindu*) at the centre. The mystic Sri Chakra self engraved on a vertical rock (*Shilla*) is located at the middle of western face of Hariparbat (Hillock).

There is a legend, which talks of how the hill got its name. It is said that after *Kashyapa Rishi* drained off the water of the *Satisar*, a remnant lake was still there in the vicinity of Hari Parvat. A demon by the name *tsand*, who took

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shelter in this lake, troubled the inhabitants in and around the area. Desperate, the inhabitants prayed to goddess Durga and sought her protection. In order to protect them, she took the form of a bird, called *heuur* in Kashmiri, who picked up a pebble in her beak and dropped it over the lake trapping the demon inside. The pebble grew in size to that of the Parvat (hill) and thereafter to crush the demon, she is said to have taken her abode on the hill. The hill thus got the name Hari Parvat or Sharika Parvat and the holy place, where Sharika took her abode, *Chakrishor* or *Chakreshwari*. The day when goddess Sharika took her abode on Hari Parvat happened to be *tsithiur zuuniu pachh okdoh*, the day celebrated by the community as *navreh*. Besides this auspicious day, devotees also visit the shrine on *zangiu tray*, *haar euut'ham*,

*haar navan* and *huer euut'ham*. The importance of this shrine is described in *Sharikapariccheda*. Hari Parvat is linked not only with the ethos of the people but also serves to nurture the religious and spiritual quest of all the inhabitants of the Valley, the Muslims, the Sikhs and the Pandit. For the community Hari Parvat is the *Sedd Peeth* because a devotee in a single Parikrama (circumambulation) is able to pay obeisance to many deities. Devotees, from Srinagar and the nearby places visit, everyday early in the morning, and circumambulate the *Sedd Peeth* and offer prayers various holy places. Starting from, *Sangeen Darwaza*, the *Parikrama* cover, *Maha Ganesh*, *Sapt Rishi*, *Mahakali*, *Deviaangan* temples, *Chakrishor*, *Hari Asthapana*, *Mahalakshmi Temple*, *Amar Kaul Temple*, *Sita Ram Ashram* and *Hanuman temple*. A brief account of each of these places of worship is as under:

**Maha Ganesh Temple**, also known as *Ganeshbal*, located on the Eastern side at the foothill of Hari Parvat, is one of the ancient temples. Historian Jonaraja writes in his *Rajatarangini* that when *Pravarasena II* established the new city of *Pravarapura*, present Srinagar, Ganesh was looking at his new city but later on it turned its face. CE Tyndale Biscoe also makes a mention of it in his book. He writes, "It is said that when *Pravarasena* laid the foundation of his new capital Srinagar, the god, from regard for the pious king, turned his face from the West to East so as to behold and bless the new city. The rock is now covered with so thick a layer of red paint that it is not possible to trace any resemblance to the

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head or face of the elephant god, still less to see whether it turned west or east. The later Hindu chroniclers relate that the god, from disgust at iconoclasm of Sikandar Butshikan, has finally turned his back on the city and hence his face cannot be seen". Maha Ganesh is the first shrine, where from the devotees start their circumambulation. They sit in front of the *Shila* of Lord Ganesh pasted with *Sindhur* (vermillion) and meditate, offer prayers, place flowers and garlands at his feet, apply *Sindhur*, burn *agarbati*, *koophuur* (camphor) and sandalwood and use rattan deep (earthen lamps) to invoke the blessings.

**Sapt Rishi** is a shrine with an Icon of the form of a tree. Devotees pay obeisance to the *Sapt Rishis*, to whom Kashmiri Pandits trace their genealogy and also sit in meditation at this place.

**Mahakali Asthapana** is the third shrine worshipped en route. It is dedicated to Mata Kali. Devotees sit in meditation at this shrine. Many saints performed their *Sadhana* here.

**Deviaangan Temples**, as the name suggests, is the *Aangan* (compound) The Goddesses...an *Aangan* in which a number of shrines were dedicated to various goddesses. Of late, a number of residential complexes have come up in the area.

**Chakrishor Temple** or Chakreshwari, located at an elevation on Hari Parvat, is the *Mata Sharika's* abode. The holy place, about 200 feet above the ground level, has a *Shila* pasted with *Sindhur* (vermillion) and has been worshipped ever since *Mata Sharika* made it her abode. The shrine is known for the divine *Sri Chakra*, the mystic symbol, on the *Shila*, over which is the dome of the temple. Starting from a place close to *Devi Aangan*, devotees reach the temple after climbing more than 100 steps laid with stone. The ascent to the temple is through the main gate, also made of stones built at the base where from the stairs start. Devotees celebrate *Sharika Jayanti*, in honour of *Mata Sharika* on *haar navam*, when hundreds and thousands of devotees visit the shrine. Devotees usually visit the shrine on the suspicious days on the previous evening and participate in the night-long programme of *Bhajan*. A fair is also held during these celebrations. Just above *Chakishor* temple further up on the top of Hari Parvat is the temple of Kali, inside the fort, which houses a *Pratima*, black in colour, of Mata Kali. Till not so long ago, the temple used to be thrown open to the public on *Ram Navami*.

**Hari Asthapana** is located on the western side of Hari Parvat just opposite to the Amar Koul's temple. After paying obeisance to Mother Sharika, a devotee soon after coming down from the hillock comes across the *Hari Asthapana* at a short distance. The *Asthapana*, also dedicated to Mother Sharika, has since time immemorial been the place where saints and seers have performed *Sadhana* and attained bliss. This is also the place where *Rishi Pir* found the

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Guru. The shrine is at an elevation and can be reached from the base after climbing a number of steps of the staircase, laid with stones through the efforts of Pandit Triloki Nath Saraf.

**Mahalakshmi Temple** is just opposite to the shrine of *Hari Asthapana*. The three shrines, namely Mahalakshmi Temple, Amar Koul Temple and Sita Ram Ashram are co-located within the same complex. The complex has gardens and some landed property with a common entrance. Inside the shrine, devotees pay obeisance to Mahalakshmi, Hanumanji and Lord Ram.

**Hanuman Temple** is the last Asthapana, where devotees pay their obeisance to Hanumanji. It is located on the route to Kathi Darwaza.

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*Image Gallery:* [http://koausa.org/gallery/categories.php?cat\\_id=276](http://koausa.org/gallery/categories.php?cat_id=276)

## Jagan Nath Bhairav Temple, Village Achan

*Achyan Cham Chyani maay mato  
Har jaaye tsaran chus chyani tsay mato  
Tatya lolike qunya zan dwar wathi  
Katya rozi krardil mea by woy mato  
Mai gachi ACHAN wuni achanachi joy mato*

**The worship of the village gods “Raza Sahib” is most ancient form of the Indian religion.** Before the Aryan invasion, which probably took place in the second millennium B.C., the old inhabitants of India, who are sometimes called Dravidians, were a dark-skinned race with religious beliefs and customs that probably did not greatly differ from those of other primitive race. They believed the world to be propelled by a magnitude of spirits, good and bad, which were the cause of all unusual events, and especially of diseases and disasters.



This worship of the village Deity, or Raza Sahib, as it is called in Kashmiri, forms an important part of the conglomerate of religious beliefs, customs, and ceremonies which are generally classed together under the term Hinduism. In almost every village the Raza Sahib is periodically worshipped and propitiated. Shiva and Vishnu may be more dignified beings, but the village deity is

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regarded as a more present help in trouble, and is more intimately concerned with the happiness and prosperity of the villagers.



**Front view of Shri Jagan Nath Bairav Temple, Achan, Pulwama**

The origin of this form of Hinduism is lost in antiquity but it is certain that it represents a pre Aryan cult of the Dravidian people, more or less modified in various parts of North India by Brahmanical influence; and some details of the ceremonies seem to point back to a tokenistic stage of religion. The normal function of the Raza Sahib is the guardianship of the village, but many of them are believed to have other powers, especially in relation to disease and calamity. The village deities and their worship are widely different from the popular Hindu deities, Siva and Vishnu, and the worship that centres in the great Hindu temples.

Shiva and Vishnu represent forces of nature: Shiva symbolizes the power of destruction and the idea of life through death, Vishnu the power of preservation and the idea of salvation. Both these Gods and the system of religion connected with them are the outcome of philosophic reflection on the universe as a whole. But the village deities, on the other hand, have no

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relation to the Universe. They are related, not to great world forces, but to such simple facts as choleras, cattle disease etc.



**Shiv Lingam inside the burnt temple**

The village deities are almost universally worshipped with annual sacrifices and in Kashmir the same practice continued. The sacrifice of lamb, in Kashmiri “*Raza Kath*” was offered to the village deity or Raza Sahib when the wish made by a villager especially the Pandits was fulfilled. The lamb so sacrificed was then cooked without any spices and distributed amongst the villagers. When the lamb is sacrificed the blood of the lamb is collected in an earthen pot called “*Tok*” in Kashmiri and the blood is added to flour to make a paste and this paste is applied to the lid of the pot in which the dish is prepared. All the parts of the lamb are prepared including the legs etc. The member who has performed the sacrifice retains big chunk of the dish.

There is a temple of Jagan Nath Bhairav at Village Achan, one of the brothers of Aasth Bhairav. The detail of the eight Bhairav with place of residence is as follows:

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a) Shri Jagan Nath	Village Achan
b) Shri Nandkisher	Village Sumbal
c) Shri Ganganand	Village Mattan
d) Shri Kakvishal	Village Pargachu
e) Shri Jeevan Nath	Village Ladhoo
f) Shri Moonglesher	Village Sirnoo
g) Shri Omkar Nath	Village Drussu
h) Shri Neilkanth	Village Murran

Bhairav of village Achan, Shri Jagan Nath is the eldest one and that of village Murran Shri Neilkanth is the youngest one. Shri Keshev Nath was the grandfather of the Ashth Bhairav. Raza Sahib of Achan and Sirnoo were vegetarian and rest were non-vegetarian.

Village Achan is in Pulwama and is 12 km away from the district headquarter. Achan village has probably derived its name from Sanskrit work *Akhan* meaning immortal. It may have been that village contained unending capability or harvest and unending *Santosh* to the people living there in. This Akhan must have stood to what it is currently known by the name Achan. Village has its own history to explain. Its topographical situation give it the distinction of getting maximum period of sunshine during the day and thereby larger amount of solar energy to ignite life in this village or magical coincidence with other adjoining villages.

There is a temple dedicated to Shri Jagan Nath Bhairav situated in this village. Shri Jagannath is a village deity. This temple was looked after by Swani Jagannath Sewa Dal. The families staying back at Achan worked tirelessly and constructed a boundary wall around 5 kanal area of temple land. The families were assisted by State Government. The shrine place is famous for offerings of sacrifice of health sheep to the presiding deity of village and sacrificial ceremony was called RAZA KATH in local language. Even Shri Jagan Nath Bhairav is said to be a vegetarian yet the offering made by the people to express gratitude towards his divine help was heartily being accepted by him. People from adjoining villages would also make offering this way to show faith in the solidarity provided by the village deity.

There was a temple and two dharamshalas in the walled area of the shrine besides a fresh water spring near the temple. The construction of temple dates back to year 1946-47. It is said that an idol of the period of King Richen Shah was excavated from the sight while construction work was carried out in respect of the temple and the idol was handed over by the local Kashmiri Pandits to State Govt. authorities and the same is now pleasant treasure of Srinagar museum.

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The Bhairav *Asthanpan* attracted many people to seek path of meditation and one Swami Kak practiced *saadhana* over here and after finding the path of celibacy he opted to shift to Kokernag.

*Image Gallery:* [http://koausa.org/gallery/categories.php?cat\\_id=213](http://koausa.org/gallery/categories.php?cat_id=213)

## **Abode of Jeewan Sahib, Village Loduv**

**Amidst of the beautiful Vastur Van is village Loduv in total silence some 20 km from Srinagar near famous saffron fields of Pampore.** Village Loduv is located within the jurisdiction of Pampore Police Station in the district of Pulwama and was comparatively prosperous in relation to other neighbouring villages. It stands about three km to the southeast of Pampore town. The chief place of the then Vihi Pargana is now the town of Pampore, the ancient



**Samadhi of Jeewan Sahib, recently renovated by State Government**

Padampur. Padma, the powerful uncle of the puppet-king Cippate-Jayapida, founded it in the beginning of the ninth century. Padma is said by the Chronicle to have also built a temple of Visnu-Padmasvamin. Close to the temple is the Ziarat of Mir Muhammad Hamadani with some fine ancient columns and ornamented slabs. Padampura owing to its central position in a fertile tract seems to have always been a place of importance and is often mentioned by Kalhana and the later Chroniclers. To the south of the village one passes first Balhom, a large village, which in the Likaprasada and

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Tirthasamgraha figures as Balasrama? Under a large *Deodar* near it Baladevi is worshipped in the form of an ole stone. At the foot of rocky spur, which descends from the mountain range to the north, lies the picturesque village of Vuyan, one mentioned by Kalhana under the name of Ovana. It has a large sulphurous spring visited by the sick. The first factory in Jammu and Kashmir for the manufacture of cement was installed at Vuyan because of the availability of raw material for the purpose. Vuyan was burnt during the civil war between the Kashmiris and the immigrant Syeds in 1484 A.D. The name of the village changed from Ovana (Uvana) to Vuyan and then to Wuyan.



**Close view of an Ancient Temple**

About two miles further east one reaches the village Khruv, the ancient Khaduvi that, as we have seen, gave to the district its former name. There is abundance of fine springs in and about Khruv: Abul-i-Fazl mentioned them as objects of worship and estimates their number as 360. Above the village a so-called 'Svayambhu-Chakra' or mystical diagram is shown on a rock. It is held sacred to Jwalamukhi-Durga and largely visited by pilgrims especially the Pandits. The temple is situated on the top of a small hillock. The Jwalaji festival falls on or about 16<sup>th</sup> July every year. This shrine forms the *Isht Devi* of

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maximum Pandits of the valley. Only a mile to the north of village Loduv is the village of Saar, until recently the seat of a flourishing iron-industry. Kalhana mentioned it by the name of Sanara as an Agrahara founded by King Sacinara. The Ziarat of Khwavu Khizar, which stands here near several small springs. Wahab Khar was born in 19<sup>th</sup> century at Saar. A blacksmith by profession he was also a Sufi saint. Wahab Khar has projected “mysticism” in his poetry. *His “Sheikh Sana”, “Mash Tular” and “Mehraj Name”* are considered his best poetic creations. Wahab Khar Passed away in 1912.

To the south of village Loduv, on the bank of the Vitasta lies the village of Latpor. An old gloss of the Rajtarangini identifies it with Lalitapura, a place founded in honour of King Lalitaditya by his architect. The king, according to the Chronicle, was not pleased with the attention; in any case no importance seems to have attached to the place. There are no old remains above ground, but the local tradition still knows of King ‘Laltadit’ as the founder of a large town on the neighbouring *Udar*.

Some 1 km to the west of village Loduv is village Sempor. Some sources place this village as the birth place of great woman saint of Kashmir, Lal Ded in the year 1335 A.D.

According to *Guldastai Kashmir* by Harpogal Koul, Loduv Pandit, a minister of Raja Saka during 2409-72 KE founded Loduv village. Loduv Pandit also built a temple there. Total area of the village is 904.87 hectares and as per 1981 Census total population of this village was 2820 souls comprising of 369 households. Kashmiri Pandit community comprises 24 percent of total population of the village and was having about 57 households. Eight households have held back after the mass exodus of Kashmiri Pandits from the valley in the year 1990. I visited the village on 7<sup>th</sup> March 2010; one Shri Ravi Ji Bhat son of Shri Nath Ji Bhat aged 43 of the same village accompanied me.

M.A. Stein writes in Kalhana’s *Rajtarangini*, “The Pargana, which adjoins Srinagar from the southeast, in olden days, was known as Vihi. It extends from near Puranadhithana to the Vastur Van spur near Vountpur (Awantipora) and comprises a wide semicircular tract of fertile karewa lands. In ancient times the district took its name from the village of Khaduvi, the present Khrew”.

Loduv is known for two ancient temples...a bigger one and a smaller one. The bigger temple is in the middle of a shallow tank, which receives water from a spring in its North-East corner. The temple simple in design, 24 feet square externally, supports a domical ceiling. According to Pandit Ram Chand Kak “Externally the walls are without decoration, their bareness being only partially relieved by a cornice which consists of three courses of stone adorned with projecting fillets. The corner pilasters are quite plain, and headed by a semicircular, almost horseshoe-shaped, arch surmounted by a single storied

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pediment of very slight projection. Internally the temple is circular with a diameter of 17 feet and 6 inches. The smaller temple is similar to the bigger one. Internally the temple is 6 feet square and the ceiling consists of three courses of over lapping stones. Inside the spring is a Shiva Linga made of lime stone". According to Pandit Kak, "A few yards behind this temple, higher up the hill and immediately at the back of the mosque, a smaller temple which externally presents the same appearance as the large temple, the only difference being that the projecting pediment which enclosed the round-headed doorway has here developed into a well-defined portico with a trefoil niche". According to "*Soon Adab*" published by Jammu and Kashmir Academy, 1977, the material of the smaller temple has been used to build a Ziarat. At present there is no Shiva Linga in the spring. This temple has been taken over by the Archeological Survey of India and is being looked after by an employee of the same department.

There are two more Shiva Temples in the village built by the Pandits of the village in recent past. These temples have been built on the shades of mighty Chinars. Village deity *Raza Sahib* called *Tcharas Raza* also lives near one of the temples.

Gousein Naar forms the part of village Loduv, situated some half km from the main village. Ten Kashmiri Pandit families [nicknamed Gousein] were residing in this mohalla of the village. All the ten families migrated out of Kashmir in the year 1990.

Jeewan Sahib passed his last days of his life in a house at Gousein Naar. Jeewan Sahib, an outstanding saint of the 18<sup>th</sup> century was born in Motiyar Mohalla of Rainawari. He was a highly evolved saint with tremendous spiritual powers. It is said that this great saint shifted from Rainawari to Gousein Naar in the 1779 and practiced *sadhana* in this village. All time *Dooni* was on during his life time and it continued for some years after he attained *Mahasamadhi*. The then Maharaja of Kashmir allotted him a *jaggir* of 80 *kanals* of land at Gousein Naar. Ten Kashmiri Pandit families were residing in this mohalla of the village, who were brought there from Srinagar by the then Maharaja of Kashmir to look after the land gifted to Jeewan Sahib.

All these things are there but the people whose presence once thrived on the face of Loduv are now few and far between.

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## **Jwalaji, Khrew**

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**Village Khrew, in Vihi Pargana is in the South-East of Srinagar at a distance of 20 km.** This village is located at 34.02°N and 74.98°E. It has an average elevation of 1,067 metres (5,272 feet).



Village Loduv is in the East of village Khrew. This village is famous for the abode of Jeevan Sahib and for two ancient temples. According to Guldastai Kashmir by Harpogal Koul, Loduv Pandit, a minister of Raja Saka during 2409-72 KE founded this village. Loduv Pandit also built a temple there which is presently under the control of Archaeological Survey of India. Total area of the village is 904.87 hectares and as per 1981 Census total population of this village was 2820 souls comprising of 369 households. Kashmiri Pandit community comprises 24 percent of total population of the village comprising of 57 households. Eight households have held back after the mass exodus of Kashmiri Pandits from the valley in the year 1990.

Village Wuyan is about 2 km to the West of Village Khrew. It was known as Ovana formerly. The first factory in Jammu and Kashmir for the manufacture of cement was installed at Wuyan. Ovana (Wuyan) was burnt during the civil war between the Kashmiris and the immigrant Syeds in 1484 A.D. The name of

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the village changed from Ovana (Uvana) to Vuyan and then to Wuyan. There were 15 Kashmiri Pandit living in this village before mass exodus. All the families have migrated to other parts of India in 1990. There are few sulphur springs in this village besides a big and deep spring locally known as Kaiz Nag. It is said that a fish in this spring was having golden ear rings and the said fish was visible on the day of Ashtami only.



Balhom or Balhama village is in the South of village Khrew. This village is famous for Baladevi Shrine. Baladevi was the Isht Devi of Dogra Rulers. At present the temple is having a deserted look due to lack of maintenance and proper care due to forced migration of Pandit families from this village. Two pandit families are still residing in this village.

Village Shar lies in North East of village Khrew. This village is the birthplace of famous mystic poet Wahib Sahab (Khar). Kalhana mentions it by the name of Sanara as an Agrahara founded by King Sacinara.

Other small villages like Androssa, Bathen, Nagandar and Satpokhran are also to its surroundings.

Village Khrew has a population of 18,820 souls as per 2011 census. About 50 Kashmiri Pandit families were forming the part of population in this village before 1990. Khrew had a history of having 360 natural springs but currently only 7 springs flow through this town. Once known for their crystal clear waters, these water bodies have lost their traditional stature to one reason or the other. Village Khrew is also the best producer of saffron and has been graded as the fourth cultivator of saffron in India. Amanullah Khah Sahab, Baba Qasim Sahab, Sabir Shah and Syed Mantaqi are the holy places of Muslims in village Khrew.

Popularly known as Zaala Bhagwati, the Shrine of Mata Jwalaji at Khrew is one of the ancient shrines of Kashmir. Jwalaji is the Isht Devi of many Kashmir Pandit families. Kalhana refers to the village in Rajtarangini as 'Khaduvi' where according to him; there were three hundred and sixty fresh water springs. Kalhana further mentions that on the hill side to the east of the village, was a standing rock on which a mystical diagram was drawn. The shrine has a holy spring locally called Bod Nag or Aneek Nag at the base of the hillock. It is also known as Nagabal. Pilgrims used to take a dip in this spring before making the

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ascent. This spring is 40 feet wide and 60 feet in length and 3 feet deep. Fresh and cold water is oozing at the South West corner of this spring. Some idols believed to be some six hundred years old are standing at this oozing point. This spring abounds in fish. Recently a small island has been constructed in the centre of this spring. This spring under the shade of three Chinar Trees presents a magnificent look. There is also a walnut tree on the bank of this spring. The water of this spring flows out into a stream, passes through the compounds of some Kashmiri Pandit houses and thereby is used for irrigation purpose. In my childhood days I alongwith my respected parents used to go to Khrew to one of our relatives and would stay there for four to five days. I still remember that this stream was flowing underneath the house of my relative namely Pandit Sarwanand Bhat.

The octagonal shaped temple is reached by a flight of 320 dressed devri stone steps. It is believed that Raja Daya Krishan Koul has built this temple during Dogra Rule. Pilgrim pays obeisance at the Ganesh temple on the left side of the stair before reaching main sanctum sanatorium. The shrine of Jwalaji is situated on top of the hillock overlooking village Khrew. The main sanctum sanctorum is 12 feet by 12 feet square shaped structure. The ceiling of the dome is decorated with Khatamband (Vaastalav/Wood Carving) design. The structure of the shrine resembles of the aspect and architecture of the pagodas of China, but the slope of the roof is straight instead of being concave. Its basement, six to eight yards square, is of stone, raised a few feet from the ground. On the front side of the shrine wooden plates have been placed (called Voorusi in Kashmiri) and these plates can be placed on the top of the front wall and opens the front portion completely. There is a Shilla inside the sanctum sanctorum, in the form of a natural stone measuring 4 feet height, 4 feet length and 3 feet width, smeared with Sindhur. It is said that Jwalaji manifested herself all the time as a jyoti sometime in the past. There is no firm base over which this sacred shilla has been placed and it is believed that the Shilla is stationary and is floating in air. This sacred Shilla has naturally carved mystical lines forming triangles and hexagons in the shape of Sri Chakra. It is further believed that the Shilla turned black due to the occasional flames which sparked here from time to time. One has to flight some 6 stairs for making parikrama of the shrine. Above the main shrine, there is a small temple dedicated to Bhariava. Tahar (yellow rice) and Shooshnoor (lamb's lung) is being offered to the Bhariava. A revered



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hill 'Vishnu Pad' is on the left side of this shrine. There is a foot mark at the top of Vishnu Pad. As per the legend this foot mark is believed to be of Lord Vishnu. In olden days pilgrims used to visit this hill also and but with the passage of time this practice was stopped.

After having darshan pilgrims can decent through a different route (leading to Daibdather, Dobi Ghat) which is rough. After descending a few yards, the pilgrim can slide on the slippery slope of the hillock (Rikinei Wosun) to reach Daibdather. It is believed that this slide on this slippery slope is the final stage of the pilgrimage. I remember during my childhood, we used to go to this village every year by hiring a horse driven cart especially Khaliq Tangeh from my native village Murran, carrying all the essential commodities and used to stay in open at Daibdather (Dobi Ghat) on the foot of the Zabarwan Mountain for three to four during Mela Jwalaji i.e. on 14th bright fortnight of Ashada (June-July).

The birthday of Goddess Jwalaji is being celebrated on Ashad Shukla Chaturdashi, fourteen bright fortnight of June-July also called Jwala Chaturdashi, every year and a grand festival is being held at village Khrew. It was a routine that the relatives of the Kashmiri Pandits residing at Village Khrew used to come to this village for three to four days.

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*Image Gallery:* [http://koausa.org/gallery/categories.php?cat\\_id=217](http://koausa.org/gallery/categories.php?cat_id=217)

## Kotitirtha

### Holiest of Holy Shrine

Kashmir valley is traditionally divided into two parts Maraz and Kamraz. Maraz was southern part of Kashmir while as Kamraz comprised northern part of Kashmir. Srinagar was central point of both the divisions. Anantnag was the Headquarter of Maraz division while as Baramulla was the seat of attraction for Kamraz division.



Baramulla has its origin to the era of Kashyapa Rishi. The water of Satisar was drained from a place through a deep valley between two hills at Sheeri Narvaw resembling the mouth of Varah, The Boar. This *Varah Moh* changed its identity as Varmul and started to be called as Varamulla.

Varamulla is the entrance point to the valley through Muzzafarabad Uri Road and is 55 km away from Srinagar. There is another story as to how Baramulla came to be known as Varahmul. There was a shrine of Lord Vishnu and was

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called Adi Varaha. The shrine was located on Eastern bank of Vitasta near Kotitirth. The name Varamulla is also probably related to the shrine place of Adi Varah, the Boar. It is held in great esteem since ancient times and has repeatedly mentioned by Kalhan Pandit in Rajtarangni. The temple was vandalized by Afghan ruler Sikander Butshikan. The ancient Shiv Linga and some stone images in Kotitirth is said to be belonging to the shrine of Adi Varah at the same bank of Vitasta.

The town of Baramulla faced the ire of tribal invaders in 1947 and a large scale damage was done to Hindu and Sikh fraternity falling into their hands. Sh. Jawahar Lal Nehru wanted to rename Baramulla as Maqboolabad to commemorate the martyrdom of the nationalist Sherwani. However Baramulla retained its identity.



**Shiv Lingam inside small Shiv Mandir near Kotitirth**

On the left bank, close to Baramulla, is the ancient site of *Hushkapur* (present Ushkur). Hushka had built a vihara, a stupa and a Vishnu Temple. As per local tradition, Heun Tsang, on arrival in the Valley, stayed here for the first night. Later, he said that some copper plates, on which the proceedings of Kanishka's council were engraved, lay buried here.

The importance of this shrine is described in *Kotitirthamahatmya* [part of *Bhringisha Samhita*]. Presently, the shrine is known for the Shiva temple, inside the sanctum sanctorum of which stands a unique five feet Shivlinga with a face. The shrine has a *dharamshala* and a holy spring. The water of the holy

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spring is cold in summer and hot in winter. At present *dharamshala* is occupied by CRPF and its maintenance is being done by them.

Right above this temple there is another temple which is called *Ganganor*. *Ganganor* is a holy spring at Mohalla Rajghat. A small temple has been built on this sacred spring. It is said that the spring receives water from seven springs existing above at an elevation on the small hillock called *Gousain Teng*. There are seven springs on Gousain Teng with a temple. Each spring has its name viz. Ram Kund, Sita Kund, Laxhman Kund etc. Simultaneously, water from all the springs with independent outlets combine to form a brook and passing into a phase of journey. It is believed that it belongs to the Lord Rama's period.

There was a number of Kashmiri Pandits living in Baramulla. After invasion of tribal invaders, many Kashmiri Pandits of Baramulla choose to migrate to other parts of the country and many more were killed by tribal invaders. Before migration some 536 Kashmiri Pandit families were living in Baramulla and had their households scattered in Rajghat, Dewan Bagh, Khowja Bagh, Kanlibagh, Jetty Road and Ramghat. After mass exodus only one Kashmiri Pandit namely Sh. Mohan Lal stayed back braving all odds. Some Kashmiri Pandits families from Jammu have returned back and are staying in a temple. They are doing small trades in Baramulla now. Two families staying at Khowja Bagh did not migrate and are still residing there.

The shrine topography described above remains incomplete without getting mention of Ram Mandir of Ramghat. A *Janki* was always taken from this temple on occasions of Ram Navmi and Dussehra. Another temple near Kotitirth is the temple of Bhairav known as Bhairav sund [Bharav Bagh]. *Shushnoor* was offered on dates of festivals specializing the occasions in the honour of the deity.

Near Kotitirth there was a ghat on river Vitasta called Kotighat. This place was used for the purpose of 10<sup>th</sup> day Kriya of the departed souls. The ashes of the dead were immersed in Vitasta at Kotighat. Adjacent to Kotighat is cremation ground comprising of five kanals of land.

All these things are there but the people whose presence once thrived on the face of Varamul are now few and far between.

*Image Gallery:* [http://koausa.org/gallery/categories.php?cat\\_id=234](http://koausa.org/gallery/categories.php?cat_id=234)

## Martand Mandir

**Martand Mandir, also known as Martandeshwar Mandir, now in ruins, is located on the top of Mattan wudar in the East of Anantnag, just 2 km from Mattan, 4 km from Anantnag and 63 km from Srinagar.** The temple dedicated to *Surya* (the Sun-god), is the only Sun temple in the north. Two other Sun temples are at Konarak in Orrisa and at Modhera in Gujarat. The temple is considered not only as an engineering marvel but also a magnificent architectural creation. The ruins of this grand ancient temple are seen in a locality ahead of the present Martand Tirtha, popularly known as Bhawan, which is in use since ancient times. The shrine of Martand was a famous *Tirthasthan* in ancient times, which finds a mention in Rajatarangini as well as in *Tuzki Jahangiri*.



The importance of this shrine is described in *Martandamahatmya*. According to Aurel Stein, “The ancient remains at the sacred spring itself are very scanty. All the more imposing are the ruins of the great temple, which King Lalitaditya erected at a short distance in honour of the presiding deity of the tirtha. They

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are situated a little over a mile to the south-east of 'Bhavan', near the northern edge of the great Udar which stretches towards Anantnag". The historians have not been able to establish the exact date of the erection of the temple and there are variations, believed to be due to the presence of another temple at the site, were the ruins of Martand temple stand today. Kashmiri Pandits call it the house of Pandavas and Kauravas, thereby indicating that the temple has a pre-historic origin and pertains to the period of Pandavas and Kauravas. It is believed that Raja Ram Dev in 95 Kaliyug laid the foundation of the temple and



**Author in the temple complex, viewing the past glory.**

Raja Lalitaditya completed temple construction, though Rajatarangini records only the colonnades of the temple as his work. Says Lawrence "The true dates of erection of this temple...the wonder of Kashmir...is a disputed point of chronology; but the period of its foundation can be determined within the limits of one century, or between AD 370 and 500". The imposing nature of the temple can be judged from the accounts given by various travelers and historians and testified to some extent by the ruins and the remains of the temple. Talking to the grandeur of the, temple Lawrence further says, "the temple itself is not more than 40 feet in height, but its solid walls and bold outlines, towering over the fluted pillars of the surrounding colonnade, give it a

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most imposing appearance. Talking about the ruins, Aurel Stein writes, “Its ruins, though much injured by the ravages of time and earthquakes, form still the most impressive specimen of ancient Kashmiri architecture. Further, he says, “The destruction of the sacred image is ascribed to Sikandar Butshikan”. According to Soon Adab, it took Sikandar Butshikan quite sometime to demolish it. Martand consists of a courtyard with the principal shrine in the middle and a colonnaded peristyle. The grandeur of the temple can be judged from the facts, as under:

- The main temple is 63 feet in length, 36 feet in width. It is in the centre of the courtyard. The temple was raised on a plateau and was visible from all sides around Martand.
- The courtyard is 220 feet long by 142 feet broad and contains eighty-four fluted columns facing the courtyard. The whole structure is built on grey stones carved beautifully in those days by the stone masons. Each stone is a big boulder and carved in such a way to give shape of squares and circles.
- The peristyle is externally plain, except on the West side, which originally had a row of columns similar to that of the Avantipur temples. It gives an indication that engineering art adopted at Avantipur temple is similar to the one available at Martand.



**Main entrance to the temple - a path which leads to darshan of Lord Martand.**

- The temple is divided into *Ardhamandapa* (the outer portion) measuring 18 feet 10 inches square, *Autarala* (the middle portion)

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measuring 18 feet by 4 ½ feet and *Garbhagriha* (the inner portion) measuring 18 feet and 5 inches by 13 feet 10 inches. It is believed that an idol of Sun-god was installed in *Garbhagriha*. It was a perfect engineering marvel giving an indication that three gates were to be crossed to reach the main temple. Thus the Hindu mythology of *Aehlok*, *Parlok* and *Pataallok* are to be seen over here.

- The entrance, or gateway, stands in the middle of the Western side of the quadrangle and is the same width as the temple itself. The walls of the gateway are profusely decorated and indicate a welcome sign for the pilgrims who believe in the heavenly powers of Lord Martand.
- The outer periphery of the temple is 270 feet by 180 feet and has three main gates. This indicates that builders of the temple wanted to show that Lord Martand has two eyes and the sixth sense to watch the world.<sup>1</sup>

**NOTES AND REFERENCES**

1. Encyclopedia: Kashmiri Pandit: Culture & Heritage by C.L.Kaul, published by Ansh Publications, 2009.

*Image Gallery:* [http://koausa.org/gallery/categories.php?cat\\_id=157](http://koausa.org/gallery/categories.php?cat_id=157)

## **Mata Bhuvaneshwari, Chandpora, Harwan**

**Harwan is located about 3 km beyond the famous Shalimar garden where a Bhuddhist monastery existed and a scholar, the glorious Nagarjuna, lived one hundred and fifty years after the Buddha.** The place was called Sadarhadvana which stands for forest of six saints.



**The Temple**

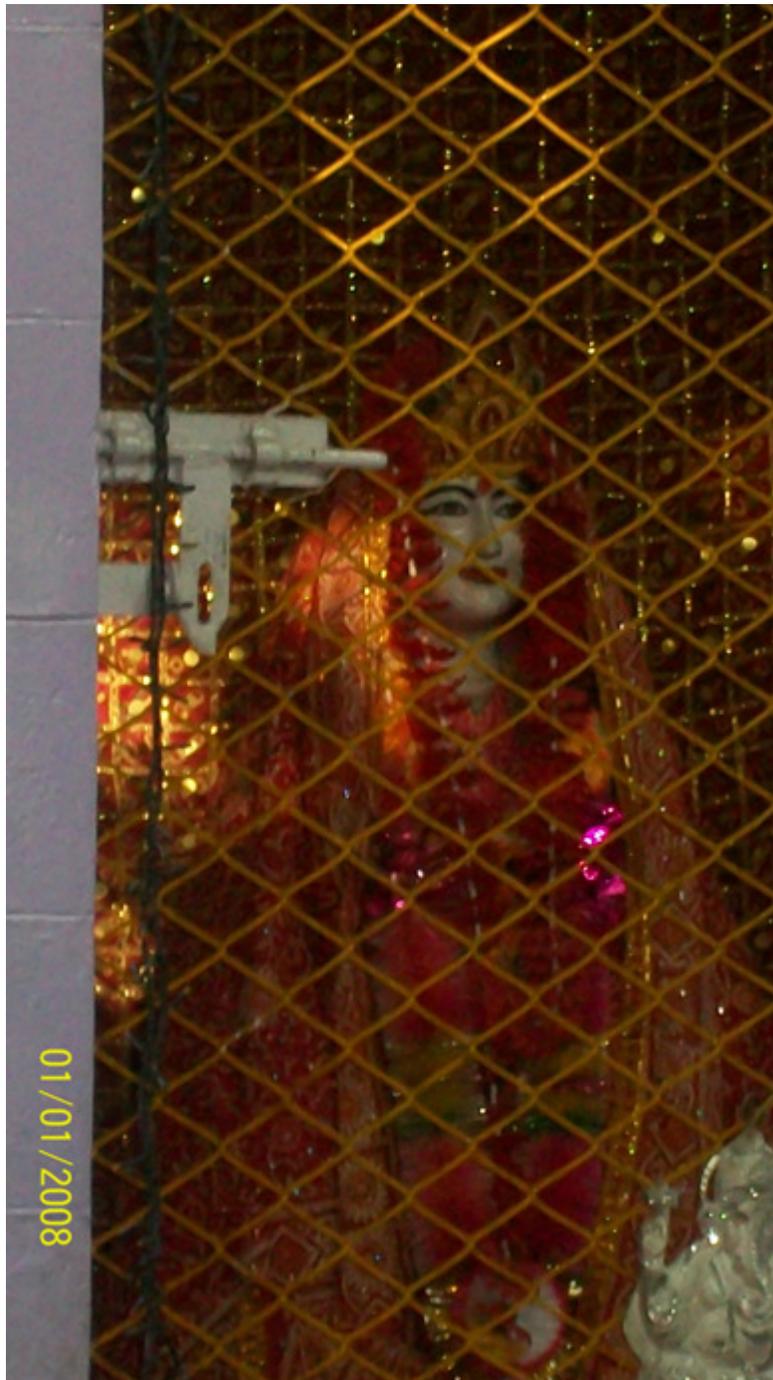
Harwan is a huge garden lined with flower beds and massive Chinar Trees with a beautiful canal flowing right through the middle. The canal is fed from a beautiful lake which lies behind the garden. There is not much clutter of fountains and other fancy things but vast big green carpeted green lawns which form an ideal spot for picnics.

Kalhana maintains in his Raj Tarangini that "there is not a piece of land, equal to a mustard seed that is not a tirtha in Kashmir". It is on this account that the Aryans visited Kashmir frequently; they stayed mostly at Buzahama and

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Harwan. On a hillock, linked with the name of Raja Harish Chandra (known for his honesty), there still exist some ancient ruins considered sacred. At



**The Deity**

Harwan, in Chandpora, there is a small sacred spring associated with Mata Bhuvaneshwari. Kalhana has mentioned this spring in the Raj Tarangni; at two of its corners, we find the idols of Mata Bhuvaneshwari installed. It is said that

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it was Maharaja Gulab Singh who changed the original name of the place from 'Chachaa Pora' to Chand Pora. The Maharaja's grandson Maharaja Partap Singh often visited the sacred spot and paid his obeisance to the Holy Mother; as a religious ritual, he would feed young virgins and adore them as divinities.

The hillock of Mahadev, believed to be the abode of Lord Shiva is about 20 kilometers away from the holy spring located in Chandpora. It is believed that Lord Shiva keeps a vigil on it from the Mahadev Peak.

It was during Maharaja Partap Singh's reign that a Sadhu Alakh Ram took up his abode in a hut near the spring mentioned above. The hut got destroyed in a fire. Thereafter two Dharmshallas were constructed to provide shelter to pilgrims, these structures did not stand the fury of nature for long and no trace was left of them. With the expansion in the population of the village around, the inhabitants got together and constituted a committee to look after the shrine, which they named as Bhuvaneshwari Sathapana Committee. The members of the committee in question spared no efforts in raising a pucca structure that served as a Dharmshalla accommodating at least 200 pilgrims. The committee in question not only renovated the spring but also got a concrete temple built up in which the image of the Mata was firmly installed. In the adjoining area of the temple, measuring 3 kanals of land, there exist six Chinar trees and a brook having pure water flows through the complex. It is said that a spring has sprouted from within the hollow of each of these Chinars. The water of the main spring at the shrine can cure diseases. The legend is there that once the only son of a woman, who had gone blind, reposing his trust in the kind heartedness of the Mother Goddess Bhuvaneshwari, washed his eyes with the water of the holy spring for seven consecutive days; he regained his vision through the grace of virgin Goddess Mata Bhuvaneshwari, whose devotees make only vegetarian offerings to her in the shape of the fruits and other edible things. Non vegetarian offerings to the Goddess are strictly forbidden.

Mata Bhuvaneshwari, is one of the seven sister-divinities and the youngest of them, the other six being Ragyna, Sharika, Jawala, Zeshta, Uma and Shardha. According to Kashmir, Shivism, Shiva, who is the male counterpart of the Shakti, is the Supreme Being. He remains introvert and dormant, while Shakti is active and dynamic. The Shaivite philosophy is, in principle, non dualistic. In her diverse manifestations, Shakti performs manifold functions. As Saraswati, she propagates knowledge and wisdom. As Lakshmi, she distributes wealth and as Kali she destroys the demons. In Kashmir, Shakti worship is very popular and every clan of Kashmiri Pandits adores its chosen female deity as Ragyana, Sharika, Jawala, Zeshta, Uma, Sharda or Bhuvaneshwari. Being the youngest, Bhuvaneshwari, is adored as eternal Shakti.

The devotees in great bulk, including all the inhabitants of Chandpora, have

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deep-rooted faith in Bhuvaneshwari. It is said that when a hawan was performed propitiate the Goddess Bhuvaneshwari on the seventh day of it a beautiful snake, bearing white patches, emerged all at once from the spring at Chandpora, it made seven circumambulation around the temple to the joy of devotees present there. It accepted the milk that was offered to it by the devotees, and then vanished. The devotees took it as a good augury, believing firmly that Bhuvaneshwari had blessed them.

Thus enthused and encouraged, a beautiful Murti (idol) of the Goddess carved out of the marble from Jaipur was installed in the temple on Mata's Birthday in the year 1974, falling on Vetha Truvah which is also celebrated as the birthday of the river Vitasta (Jhelum) annually. It was the late Swami Laxman Joo, renowned saint and Shavite Scholar, who took care of the installation ritual.



**Close View of the Holy Spring**

After the displacement of the Pandits from the Valley, the devotees of the Mata being away could no longer ensure the preservation and maintenance of the shrine. With the passage of time, due to climatic ravages the Dhramshala collapsed, though, the other pacca structures still exist. Now the Mata's hawan is being performed at the Kheer Bhawani Peeth at Janipur, Jammu to mark the birthday of Bhuvaneshwari.

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*Image Gallery:* [http://koausa.org/gallery/categories.php?cat\\_id=244](http://koausa.org/gallery/categories.php?cat_id=244)

## Logripora

### *A Shrine of Magnificiency*

**Hey! Devotees of Mata Shakti, hold the torch of magnificent faith. Let ye float high, the unique banner of immortal peace.** Wear the unending cover of dispassion towards *Kam, Krodh, Loubh, Moh, and Ahankar* and recite the glory of Shiva and Shakti to bring nectar to the soul besides bliss of *santosh* to the Atman. These are the feelings when one descends on the seat of devotion in the hearts of lands groomed by the Knight of Canals, the *Shah Kol*. It is pertaining to the abode of Mata Ragnya at Logripora. Logripora is an ancient village in Pahalgam Assembly segment enroute Anantnag Pahalgam via Martand. This village also known as Lokitpur is one km away from shrine place Aishimuqam.



**Close view of the Temple**

Perished high up on a mountain spur in the shrine of Zain Shah Sahib known among Hindus as Zanak Rishi, he is the guardian saint of the Lidder Valley and is reputed to be one of the followers of Shiekh Noor-Ud-Din the chief saint

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of Kashmir Valley” writes Parmanand Parashar in his book Kashmir: The Paradise of Asia. Shri Shiri Ram Bakshi in his book Kashmir through Ages [Volume 3] writes, “There is a spring and a small hill near Baisaran, passing through the glade. There is a big rock in the centre of the glade. It is that saint Zain Shah meditated 12 years on that stone. There was then living a *Gujar* with his family. He had a cow from which he gave milk continuously to Zain Shah for 12 years. Once the wife of the *Gujar* murmured that during 12 years they would have obtained 12 calves from the cow. The saint heard this and called for the *Gujar* and told him to go to the cowshed and call calves by their names from the door. Thereby 12 calves came out from the shed when the *Gujar* was busy with calling the saint left the place. The *Gujar* searched all sides and found him on the bank of Lidder at Aishimuqam where his Ziarat is existing.



**Scattered idols in the lawns of temple.**

Logripora has the distinction of being the seat of an ancient shrine of Mata Ragnya dating its history to the era of *Satisar*. The surrounding area of village Logripora consists of *Sapt Rishi* Springs at a distance of half km on East side, Sweet water spring of Village Manzgam on West side at a distance of half km. *Roza Mubarak* of Saint Zain Shah [Zanak Rishi for Hindus] at Aishimuqam at a distance of one km on North side and *Bodh Rishi*, the seat of Bhodhistva, at a

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distance of half km on South side. Logripora is at foothills of *Shael Dar* forest range abounding in *Devdar* trees.

Logripora village was home to 42 house holds of Kashmiri Pandits before mass exodus and now only four house holds have held back. I visited the village on 11<sup>th</sup> September 2009; one Shri Jagan Nath Bhat son of Late Shri Mahadev Bhat aged 54 of the same village accompanied me. We reached this village at about 1100 hours after starting our journey from Srinagar at about 800 hours.



**Shiv Lingam in open**

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Logripora village holds in its lap the famed Shrine of Ragnya Mata, the incarnation of Shakti. The shrine is held even today as gospel of peace and pleasure for all ethos that have unquestionable faith in the magical prowess of Shiva and Shakti.

Spread over an area of forty *kanals* of land, the shrine has five springs representing *Panchtatva*. As *Panchtatva* combine and form a life. Simultaneously water from all the springs with independent outlets combine to form a brook and passing into a phase of journey. The philosophy of life as per Sanatan belief applies to the presence of these springs. Shiva and Shakti being the creators of the Universe seem to overlook the Panch Nags [five springs] to form a brook of life for its onward journey.

Five springs exist and date its origin to the era of Kashyap. Each spring is with length and breadth of 10 to 12 feet each apart from the bigger one which has dimension of about 12 to 15 feet. This spring has earned its name as *Kali Nag* due to its blackish crest. Two temples stand at this place. One temple is devoted to Lord Shiva, having a Shiva Lingam in it and the other one is built magnificently to house a spring inside the temple. The temple is made of bricks while as the spring is having its walls made of *Devri* stones. There is no image or presence of any visible figure of any god or goddess, which can be directly approached on the side of morning sun is a window shaped place carved in the wall of spring where in a monolithic black stone image of Mata Ragnya was placed. This portion of window type place specially carved for keeping the image of Mata is not approachable any way except spring water in from of it. The monolithic black stone image of Mata is said to be some 1000 years old. It is that when Lord Hanuman brought this image from desecrated Sri Lanka and on his voyage to Ksher Bhawani, he had a brief stint at this place and thereafter the place was also known as Ragnya Pora.

The monolithic black stone image of Mata is not now available there. The image may have either fallen in the hands of vandals or may have been taken in the hands of antique smugglers taking the advantage of the turmoil conditions in the valley. No FIR has ever been lodged and neither has district administration provided any security cover to this magnificent place of meditation. There were other pieces of images of variety of stones and these also missing now. The fencing of the shrine has also been dismantled in the year 1993. There are many walnut, apricot and Chinar trees in the forty *kanal* land of the shrine and these are very much there.

Another temple in premises of the shrine on a hillock was devoted to Lord Shiva and a big *Shiva lingam* is installed in it. The *Shiva lingam* is made of hard rock stone on monolithic base. The temple has remained apparently untouched by hooligans due to the heavy mass of the *lingam*.

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The shrine place is an ecstatic mutational place and philosophy of origin of world applies to it as the combination of Shiva and Shakti as creators of this universe comes to the fore; from the fact that presence of Shiva and Shakti and representatives of Panchtatva is what we now call the universe with mother earth and other celestial bodies making it a body for research and imagination. Swami Nand Bab and Swami Kashi Bab were perhaps feeling this magnetic gravitation towards this shrine that they adopted to meditate here for earning *moksha* from creators of the universe. The sanctity of this shrine is revered even by Muslims as they offer first cow milk to the temple spring at the feet of Ragnya before using it for themselves.

It is held in high esteem by local devotees particularly and they often quote examples like one dates back to period not far away from the date of exodus. Smt. Meenawati wife of Late Sh. Shamboo Nath Bhat age 86 who is still residing in this village disclosed that the marriage of the daughter of Sh. Mahadev Bhat was fixed and she suddenly fell ill. She was admitted in a hospital at Anantnag. As the day of nuptial knot was closing in she was brought back to the village in ill condition to attend *Saat Mainz* at Ragnya Pora/Logripora. All of a sudden a saint namely Kashi Bab appeared there and offered her the sacred water of temple spring, she took the water and was all right within half an hour.

Shri Sudershan Koul age 70 who is still residing in the village also quote the example of how all people (devotees) fell ill when a dispute took place between them on construction of the roof of the temple. It was only on the advice of a saint that the dispute was settled and roof of the temple was constructed. Ultimately all were free of illness.

Shiva and Shakti here created all alike. Be it *Satoguni* or *Rajoguni* or be it occupied with *Tamoguni* habit, but pitfalls of attachment and faith must remain when Shiva is with Shakti and Shakti is incomplete tale without Shiva, who the *Tamoguni* was, who has separated Shiva with Shakti and took away the image of Shakti, the other part of *Ardhnareshwar*. Attribute intellect to *antakarna* to bring back Shakti for Shiva at magnificent spring abode of Shiva and Shakti in this Ragnya Pora. Should we wait Shiva to come out of meditation and what then?

*Image Gallery:* [http://koausa.org/gallery/categories.php?cat\\_id=224](http://koausa.org/gallery/categories.php?cat_id=224)

## **Nagbal, Anantnag**

**Anantnag is one of the 11 districts that make up Kashmir Valley. The city finds a pride place in Bhagavad Gita that says, “I am Anant Naga”.** Anantnag is home to highly honoured shrines from any faith, practicing it with utmost belief. Anantnag is an ancient city which came into existence as a market town around 5000 BC making it one of the oldest urban settlements in the whole world. Famous Lal Chowk of Anantnag is a big trade centre of the town and it was the seat of one of the oldest degree colleges in Jammu and Kashmir State.



According to ancient mythological stories, the name Anant Nag is given to the place because Lord Shiva during his journey to Amarnath cave left all his valuables on the way and Anant Nag was the place where he is supposed to have left countless number of serpents residing on him. Anant nag is also well mentioned in ancient Naga and Pichash chronicles of ancient aboriginals of the

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valley. It was also known as Kashyapteshwara in ancient times linking it to the mythology of Kashyap Reshi. In ancient times, it was called the Inder Nag.

Anant also means numerous in the Sanskrit language and Naga means springs in the Kashmiri language. Thus Anantnag is believed to mean numerous springs because here are many springs including Nagbal, Salak Nag and Malik Nag in the town. Thus every part of Anantnag town resides on a crest of water. Few feet depth brings water to the surface. Anantnag is a perfect Vastu Shastra location by nature. On one side is a hillock releasing endless water from its feet. Localities are thus blessed with this perfect Vastu creation of nature.



**Author inside Temple Complex**

The name of Anantnag District according to a well known archaeologist, Sir A. Stein, comes from the great spring Anant Naga issuing at the centre of the city. This is also corroborated by almost all local historians including Kalhana according to whom the city has taken the name of this great spring of Cesa or Anant Naga land of countless springs. The spring is mentioned in Neelmat Puran as a sacred place for the Hindus and Koshur Encyclopaedia testifies it. Mendi Kadal, one of the localities of Anantnag town was famous for magic waters that cured leprosy patients. Anantnag town was a transit camp for Amarnath Pilgrims in olden days.

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The town of Anantnag is constituted by three main boroughs or towns viz. Anantnag, Khanabal and Mattan. The old city of Anantnag comprises Nagbal, Maliknag, Kadipora, Cheeni Chowk, Doni Pawa, Sarnal Bala, Janglatmandi, Old Port Khanabal, Downtown Martand and Dangarpura areas and few villages like Haji Danter, Mir Danter etc.

About 1200 households of Kashmiri Pandits were living in Anantnag town and almost entire community joined in mass exodus during 1990. Most of the Kashmiri Pandit community were either in Government Service or had their own business establishments in the town. Noted Kashmiri Pandits from Anantnag who made their name on national scene were Sh. Piarey Lal Handoo, Sh Prem Nath Bhat, Dr. A.N.Safaya etc. Chirvi's, Zutshi's, Goja's, Jad's and Guzerwan's were noted business families in the town.

Anantnag is centre seat of Maraz segment of Kashmir and its language culture is unique in comparison to other segments of Kashmir Valley. It was a land locked place from Verinag...Kokernag belt and from Qazigund...Shopian belt. This advantageous position left lesser impact on its culture by Huns, Kushans and Afghans.

Near Anantnag three streams namely Arapath, [the glacier waters from Mrigin Mountain and streamlets from springs of Chahaer and Brahmasar form Aripat] Bringi [Bringi freshet is formed by the glacier waters from the Hokhsar Mountain and various other streams from Springs of Navbhug and Kokernag] and Sandran [the glacier waters from Brari Mountain and streams from Verinag and other springs of Shahabad from Sandran] confluence together and mingles with Veyth. Another stream Liddar [Lamboodri] also joins the flow with them at a little distance downstream further ahead.

The Nagbal temple is in the eastern corner of the Anantnag town, placed adjacent to a spring. There are long shady Chinar trees that stand sentinel round the tank. The presiding deity of the Nagbal temple is Lord Ananta Bhawan set up at the outlet of the spring. The temple was built by Maharaja Ranbir Singh, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Dogra ruler of Kashmir. There are also other smaller temples in the temple complex. Shiva temple, the oldest temple, was built during the reign of Maharaja Partap Singh. A sulphur spring, which is believed to possess spiritual power, is also located in the temple complex. Nagbal is bounded by incredible beauty.

The holy spring which originates from here and the formation of which is attributed to Vishno or Narayana is said to be a Vedic pilgrimage centre. The spring rises beautifully from the foot of a small hill-lock and is dedicated to the worship of Ananta or Vishno. Annual festival is held on *beuuderpeth gat'iu pachh tsodah*.<sup>1</sup>

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The shrine of Reshi Mol Sahib is situated in the centre of the Anantnag town and is at a stone's throw distance from Nagbal and famous Devibal Shrine is also located nearby.

Devibal, a small stone temple is located near Nagbal Temple complex and is dedicated to the Mata Ragnya. Inside the temple is the sanctum sanctorum, which is about 12 square feet in size, in the middle of which is 6 square feet holy spring. The Ragnya is said to have blessed the spring. According to a legend, Wazir Pannu, who was a minister during Dogra rule, had a dream in which the goddess revealed to him the secret of her presence in the holy spring and left it to the care of Pandit Balkak, a priest. Maharaja Pratap Singh used to visit the shrine during his travel from Jammu to Srinagar or back, pray and make offerings. He is also believed to have donated land to the shrine.

You may come down from land of shepherds or from the land of modernity, the smooth transition from one site to this site; creates a unique experience of soul purification as clay of Anantnag has touched the feet of Lord Shiva and graced by Mata Ragnya. A stay at Anantnag is a saga of memory for anyone who descends on it.

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1. Encyclopedia: Kashmiri Pandit: Culture & Heritage by C.L.Kaul, published by Ansh Publications, 2009.

*Image Gallery:* [http://koausa.org/gallery/categories.php?cat\\_id=221](http://koausa.org/gallery/categories.php?cat_id=221)

## Temples Associated with Mata Ropa Bhawani

**Mata Ropa Bhawani's life starts with a legend.** It is said that one Pandit Madhav Joo Dhar, who lived in Srinagar in early 17<sup>th</sup> century, regularly used to visit Sharika temple at Hari Parvat and pray for hours together with great devotion. During one such visit, on the first day of Navratra in the year 1620 AD, when he got engrossed in his prayers, Mata Sharika pleased with his devotion appeared before him as a girl child. Madhav Joo, being religious and spiritual man, realized that the girl child was none other than Mata Sharika herself, who had blessed him. To show his gratitude, he worshipped the child and showered on her all the love and affection of a father. Mata Sharika was so happy with her devotion that she asked him about his wish. Madhav Joo is said to have asked for a daughter to be born in his house. Mata Sharika granted this wish and thus Ropa Bhawani was born to Madhav Joo's wife on Poorna Amavasya in the month of zeeth (Jyeshta) in the year 1621 AD. The place happened to be near Safa Kadal. Her parents named her Alakheshwar . She was also called Sharika Ansha Roopa, hence the name Ropa Bhawani. Since Madhav Joo himself was a deeply religious and spiritual man, he initiated her onto the same path and guided her like a Guru in her pursuit for realization of God. She was the contemporary of Rishi Pir. Her ancestor Jadmeru Pandit had come back to the Valley during the reign of Emperor Jahangir. At an early age, Alakheshwari was married to a boy, Hiranand Sapru. Soon her married life turned into a hell, as both her mother-in-law and husband would ill-treat her. Like her father, she would visit Hari Parvat to perform her Sadhana and at times she would even go at midnight. This would raise the suspicion of her mother-in-law as well as her husband, who would doubt her integrity. Ultimately, one day she left in-laws house to pursue her inner voice. Ropa Bhawani wanted to perform her Sadhana in solitude and did so at Cheshma Shahi, Manigam and Vaskura. These places, including her birth place at Safa Kadal, ultimately became Ropa Bhawani Asthanas. Her soul left for heavenly abode on maag gat'tu pachh satam in the year 1721 AD at the age of 96.<sup>1</sup> All the shrines associated with Mata Rupa Bhawani were captured by me except that at Manigam.

### NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Encyclopedia: Kashmiri Pandit: Culture & Heritage by C.L.Kaul, published by Ansh Publications, 2009.

*Image Gallery:* [http://koausa.org/gallery/categories.php?cat\\_id=279](http://koausa.org/gallery/categories.php?cat_id=279)

## Shailputri, Baramulla

*Vande Vanchhitalabhay Chandrardhakritshekharam !  
Vrisharudham Schooldharam Shailputreem Yashasvineem !!*

[Shailputri is one of many names of goddess Parvati. She is called Shail-Bala or Shail-Putri because she was born as Himalaya's Daughter. Himalaya, being a mountain (Parvat or Shail), She is called Parvati or Shail-Putri. Navratra's first day is devoted to Mata Shailputri. She rides on *Vrash* (Bull), she has *Shool* (Trident) in one of her hands, there is half-moon on her crown, and she is beneficial for whatever one wishes.]

**Shaktatism (Mother Worship) represents advancement in the Shaivism.** It accepts Shakti as Mother, Who is the Absolute Power behind every act of manifestation. She is worshipped as Mother. The worship of the Mother, in the



form of Uma is the most ancient form of worship in Kashmir. There are many shrines associated with Mother Goddess. The shrine of Ragyna Devi is located

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at Tullamulla; in North Kashmir some 18 km from Srinagar. The shrine dedicated to the worship of Uma Devi is located at Uma Nagri (Brari Aangan) some 18 km from Anantnag. The shrine dedicated to Zyestha Devi is located atop the eastern spur of Shankaracharya hill, on the left bank of Dal Lake. The ruins of the shrine dedicated to Bhima Devi are lying in village Theid near Mughal garden Nishat. The shrine dedicated to Bhaderkali lies deep in forest among tall pine trees on a slope of a hillock, 4 km away from village Wadipora north of Handwara. The shrine dedicated to the worship of Sharika Devi is located at Chakrishor on the western slope of Hari Parvat hill in Srinagar. The shrine dedicated to the worship of Sharda Devi is located in village Shardi in Muzaffarabad now in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir. The shrine dedicated to the worship of Brari Maej is located in village Murran some 4 km to the west of Pulwama town. Bhuvaneshwari (Mata Bhuvaneshwari, is one of the seven sister-divinities and the youngest of them, the other six being Ragyna, Sharika, Jwala, Zyestha, Uma and Sharda) is another shrine in Kashmir at village Chandpora near Harwan. The shrine of Jwala Devi is situated on top of a hillock overlooking village Khrew. The shrine dedicated to the worship of Shiva Bhagwati is in village Akingam near famous Mughal garden Achabal. The shrine dedicated to the worship of Bala Devi is in village Balhama (Bala Devi is the Isht Devi of Dogra rulers). The shrine dedicated to Bedi Devi is near village Keller in Pulwama District. The shrine dedicated to Shailputri is in Baramulla town.

There are many more shrines dedicated to Mother Goddess in Kashmir as Kulwagishori Shrine at village Kulgam, Ragyna Shrine at village Zainapora, Barga Shakha on a hillock at village Mattan, Ksheer Bhawani at village Manzgam, The shrine of Chandika Devi at village Sagam, the shrine of Jaya Bhagwati on a Karewa in village Bijbehara, Katyayani Devi at village Kakran, the shrine of Tripurasundri at Khanbarnen, Mangla Devi at village Wuchi near Zainapora, Gauri Shrine in village Baugam (Anantnag), Ragyna Shrine in village Logripora (Loketpur) near Ashmuqam, Devibal at village Raithan, Devibal at Badipora near Chadura, Sharda Shrine in village Yachhkot, Bhimashori Devi at village Zoonipora, Bumai, Sopore, the shrine of Ganga Mata in village Handwara, Ragyna shrine at village Tikker (Kupwara), Gaurishori Bhagwati at village Geeru, Tral, the shrine of Pingla Devi at village Pinglana near Pulwama, Ragyna Devi shrine at village Trisal (Pulwama), Chandika Devi at village Tengpuna near Pulwama, Devibal at village Ratnipora, the shrine of Tutla Devi at village Wahibugh, Lokeshwari Devi at Maharaj Gunj, Srinagar, Durga Mandir, Kharyar, Maha Kali Asthapan at Fetej Kadal, the shrine of Tripuraganga at village Triphar close to Harwan.

After the self-immolation as Goddess Sati, Goddess Parvati took birth as the daughter of Lord Himalaya. In Sanskrit Shail means the mountain and due to which Goddess was known as Shailputri, the daughter of the mountain. Goddess Shailputri is worshipped on the first day of Navratra's.

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It is believed that the Moon, the provider of all fortunes, is governed by Goddess Shailputri and any bad effect of the Moon can be overcome by worshipping this form of Adi Shakti.

The mount of Goddess Shailputri is bull and because of that she is also known as Vrisharudha. Goddess Shailputri is depicted with two hands. She carries Trident (*Trishul*) in the right hand and the lotus flower in the left hand. The shrine of Shailputri is situated in Baramulla town in Kashmir.

55 km from Srinagar, Baramulla is situated on both the banks of Vitasta. Baramulla is an ancient town sprung around the shrine Vishnu Adi-Varaaha which is located at the lower, i.e. northern, end of the town on the Jhelum near the present Kotitirth. Apart from its strategic importance, being in control of the route leading from the valley to the outside world, especially Hazara, Gilgit, Gandhara, the town enjoyed distinction for being a cultural centre for the Hindus (at Varahakhetra) and the Buddhists at Hushkapora (present Vushkor) where Huien Tsang stayed for two nights. Later he said that some copper plates, on which the proceedings of Kanishka's council were engraved, lay buried here. The name Varahamula is obviously derived from the Tirtha of the Adi-Varaha, the Boar incarnation. It has been generally referred to as Varahakshetra which includes the shrine and its neighbourhood. Varahamula contracted into Varamul which non-Kashmiri scribes turned into Baramulla.

There were about 1200 Kashmiri Pandit families in Baramulla prior to mass exodus and was considered second town in Kashmir Valley having such a big population of Kashmir Pandits after Anantnag town. Pandits were mainly residing at Kanli Bagh, Ushkura, Rangwar, Dewan Bagh, Rajghat, Ramghat, Khawja Bagh and Jatti. All the families migrated to other parts of the country on outbreak of militancy in the valley in the year 1990.

Devibal, popularly known as Shailputri or Shaila Devi, is located on the left bank of Vitasta on the National Highway, just 1 km from Baramulla on Baramulla-Uri road at *Anapur* (present day Khanpur). The shrine is nearly 1000 years old which can be testified from the remains found at the site, placed on the left side under a big Chinar inside main entrance of the shrine. These are six in number and include a unique Shiv Lingam. The main entrance of the shrine is close to the road. One has to step down eight stairs by using staircase to reach the temple premises laid with dressed stones. This beautiful temple is surrounded by four mighty Chinar trees. There are two walnut and 15 popular trees in the premises of this temple comprising about seven kanals of land. One has to turn right after walking eight yards to reach the main entrance of the sanctum sanctorum and then there is ascend of seven steps to enter. Within the premises is a holy spring, inside which stands a marble temple like the one at Ksheer Bhawani, with a marble icon of Mother Shailputri facing towards south. The premise is 105 feet long and 47 feet wide and has

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space for circumbulating (*Parikrama*), with the floor laid with marbles, around it. Holy spring is sixty feet in length and twenty feet in width having crystal clear waters? Water oozes on the right hand side top corner of the holy spring. Kashmiri Pandits hold this Ashthapan in high esteem and consider it next to Ksheer Bhawani. One has to step down seven steps to reach Vitasta Ghat. There is one *Dharamshala* within the temple premises. Security forces are occupying this *Dharamshala* at present.

On the other side of the road opposite to Shailputri Shrine there is a big mountain called Bhairav Bal. A small temple has been constructed on the opposite to the main entrance of Shailputri shrine on the foot of this hill near a Shilla.

After mass exodus of Pandit from the valley, the shrine remained without any care and started to wither from its pristine glory. The shrine was burnt to ashes in October 1990. I was posted in Baramulla and I saw with my open eyes the flames in the sky. It was about 8 p.m. Other day there was complete curfew in the town and I enquired from a police personal who was guarding the Dak Bungalow, where we the employees of Postal Department were residing that what had happened. He told that Shailputri temple has been burnt by some miscreants and the icon of Mother Goddess has been shifted to Police Lines. It was later confirmed that the main idol of the Shailputri riding on an ox was attacked and its arms and legs axed. I visited this shrine after some days when curfew was relaxed. The temple was having a devastated look. The Chinar trees which had lost their leaves due to fire were themselves reflective of the grief and sorrow of this shrine. History will not spare the generations of Kashmiris who wrought such havoc to this land. The temple was again constructed by Rashtriya Rifles and was re-opened on 28<sup>th</sup> November 1995. I have visited this temple during my school days alongwith my respect father Pandit Dina Nath Bhat who often used to tell me the stories associated with Shailputri.

The biggest congregation of devotees at the shrine takes place on Ram Navami. People from nearby towns like Sopore, Kupwara, Handwara, Seer Jagir etc. used to come and join the congregation. Koti Tirth (Holiest of Holy Shrine), Bhairav Mandir (amidst an almond orchard at the foot of Gosainteng), Gosainteng (abode of seven springs and a temple sacred to the memory of the heroes of Ramayana, including that of Sita) and Chhatipadshahi (Sixth Sikh Guru has visited this place) are located on the right bank of Vitasta, opposite to Shailputri Shrine. Replica of Shailputri has been constructed by the devotees of the Mother at Munshi Chek, Jammu.

In dark nights, under the shade of the Chinar, the sacred place present an atmosphere where one becomes one with God and in moonlit nights, devotees experienced something mystic all over in the shrine of Shailputri.

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## Amrit Kond, Pokhribal

**Pokhribal is a place just below the hillock of Hari Parvat in its North-West corner close to Kathi Darwaza on the one side and close to Nagin Lake on the other.** It is a famous place of pilgrimage since ancient times. *Pokhri* means spring and *Bal* a place....the place of springs. Originally square in plan, the temple is centered on a spring which lies at the centre of the *cella* surrounded by many Chinar trees. The water from the spring flows out beneath the northern wall into a Kund before joining the waters of the Nagin Lake. An



**The Shrine**

ancient Shiva temple stands overlooking the holy Kund. The entry to the temple is from the northern side with a circumambulatory path going around. The internal ceiling of the temple is formed from a shallow dome, which starts at the lintel level spanning from an arched string course. The painted CGI sheet covered *Shikhara* seems to be of later addition. At the back of the temple, along the southern face a portion has been added which opens onto the *cella*. The walls of the temple are constructed in stone and brick masonry covered with cement plaster. In older portion of the temple stone flooring is retained

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while rest of the portion is covered with plain cement flooring. The most prominent decorative features of the temple are the carved eaves board and the carved wooden balustrades. This shrine is presently maintained by Amrit Kond Committee. <sup>(1)</sup>

The ancient shrine, revered by Kashmiri Pandits, is famous for two ancient temples....one dedicated to Shiva and the other to Uma Devi, a representation of Sharika. The Pokhribal complex has *Amrit Kond*, Holy Spring, bathing spring, *Suraj Kond*, building with store, kitchen, hall; big chinar tree, the Shivalinga and the main temple in its premises. The shrine also has *Hawasnshala* and L shaped two storey building with number of rooms, a kitchen and two halls. The Amrit Kond, considered holy, is rectangular in shape and its holy water flows into other spring and then into the Nagin Lake. It is said that the feet of goddess Sharika rest in *Amrit Kond*. Devotees not only visit this shrine on a regular basis but also organize *Bhajan* and *Puja* on various occasions. Many saints and seers, namely, Swami Anand Ji, Swami Nand Bab, Swami Razdan Sahib, Swami Sona Kak and many others, have performed their Sadhana at the Amrit Kond and were blessed. Some devotees have also built an *Asthapana* at Bantalab, Jammu. <sup>(2)</sup>

During the spring of 1944 or 1945, when almond trees were in full bloom, a group of devotees sitting in front of Bhagawaan Gopi Nath Ji requested him to go with them to Hari Parvat, which is surrounded by almond orchards. He asked another person present, Pt Nila Koul Saraf, also to accompany him. But Pt Nila Koul said, 'The Devi is here also. Why should we go there?' However, somehow he was prevailed upon to go and the party of nine including Bhagawaan Ji, left for Hari Parvat at about 12 noon. They entered the Shrine through the exit gate of Kaathi Darwaaza and proceeded to the Pokhribal Temple, inside which is a holy spring. As soon as they opened the small outer wicket gate, they saw a small girl of about five years, alone, playing with the fallen Chinar leaves with a stick. They entered the inner gate and sat on a wooden platform inside the Shrine premises. Bhagawaan Ji asked Pt Nila Koul to get the small girl inside the Shrine. As soon as Pt Nila Koul brought her, Bhagawaan Ji made her sit on his lap and fed to her *nadermunja* (a fried preparation made from lotus roots and rice flour) which he had asked a man (while they had been far away from the Shrine) to fetch from a confectioner's shop at Devi Aangan. After feeding her, Bhagawaan Ji asked Pt Nila Koul to escort her back. She moved fast after coming out of the inner gate and disappeared. Pt Nila Koul came back. The party returned after taking salted tea. En-route, as they came out of Kaathi Darwaaza, Pt Nila Koul said to Bhagawaan Ji banteringly, 'Have you shown me the darshan of the Devi?' Bhagawaan Ji said, 'Did you not see the Devi, Whom you called to sit with us? Was she not fed *nadermunja* by me and did you not escort her back, at my bidding?' Pt Nila Koul understood the position and fell down in a swoon. With difficulty, he was almost dragged home by the party. <sup>(3)</sup>

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At present the shrine is under renovation. The land in front of the shrine adjacent to Nagin Lake has been leveled and some 200 popular trees have been planted. Dharamshalas are still being occupied by Central Reserve Police Forces.



**Shiv Lingam**

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*Image Gallery:* [http://koausa.org/gallery/categories.php?cat\\_id=285](http://koausa.org/gallery/categories.php?cat_id=285)

## **Brari Maej, Village Murran**

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**Murran is located within the jurisdiction of Pulwama District. The village is about two kilometers to the west of Pulwama town.** The original name of Pulwama was Panwangam, which comprised four patties namely Malikpora, Dangeropra, Chatpora and Dulipora. At some stage, Pulwangam became to be called as Pulgam, which with the passage of time changed to the present name Pulwama. Two kilometers to the east, is village Matrigam, the birthplace of renowned patriotic poet Pirzada Ghulam Ahmad '*Mahjoor*'. There is a hamlet of Haarpur.....the last abode of ascetic Nidhan Saab nearby. The Natural Scenery of Murran is very charming. Surrounded on all sides by green pastures, untrimmed meadows, trees and shrubs and paddy fields, the village breathes a typical rural atmosphere.



The temple of Brari Maej is situated in the North West of the village in Mohalla Brarimaejpur. The word Brari has developed from *Bhattarika*, the venerated Mother. *Bhattarika* in Sanskrit means revered or venerated. Brari Maej is synonymous to Divine Mother Uma. This Temple came into existence when the Bhat dynasty migrated from village Sumbal to this village in 1775.

**SUMBAL** ..... A beautiful village in North Kashmir was the birthplace of the great-grand ancestors of the Bhat dynasty. This village used to be often submerged during the rainy season. Pandit Bhawani Bhat (1760-1840), a

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pious and orthodox person, had a celestial dream, on *Magh Ashtami*. A divine effulgence filled his muddy room as the Divine Mother looked affectionately at Pandit Bhawani Bhat, beckoned him to approach and said: “Your great devotion has made me happy. The time has come to shift you from this place, as you are facing a lot of hardships during the rainy season here. Early the next morning, there will appear a cat in your compound. Pack up your belongings and follow here and settle down where she will give you an indication. That will be your next place of settlement but, remember, your seven generations will live at the new place of settlement with dignity and honour and your eighth generation will no longer stay here.” The Divine Mother disappeared after revealing the story to Pandit Bhawani Bhat.



Early next morning, the divine cat appeared in the compound of Pandit Bhawani Bhat. By that time he had already packed up his little belongings and followed the cat till both of them reached a village. The Divine Cat gave an indication to Pt. Bhat by waving the tip of her tail and disappeared. When she was gone, a small spring emerged on the spot. The spring was afterwards expanded by laying a single piece of some (*Pather Kein*) and a temple was built on it. This was later called Brari Maej (Cat Mother) and an icon of the Divine Mother was installed by Shri Loket Bhat (1801-1876) in year 1875.

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This is a beautiful temple surrounded by mighty chinars all around with a big, and beautiful spring having crystal clear water having a diameter of about 15 meters. The temple is facing towards the east of the upper bank of the spring. The spring is attractive at every hour, in every season. Whosoever sits in its side in a devotional prayer gets entranced and spiritually transformed. Some years before 1947, a great saint Swami Ramji spent some two decades at Murran. He was transformed and became an exalted soul. Swami Madhavananda Ji was Swami Ramji's contemporary. He came from Varanasi and spent much time practicing Yoga here. It is said that Adi Shankaracharya also spent some five years in a cave behind this temple while practicing different paths of God realization. The cave still exists in the temple.

Adjacent to the Brari Meaj temple is a *Shivalaya* dedicated to Lord Shiva. Behind the main temple, there is a marshy land locally known as *Saar*. There are two *dharmshalas* on the right side of the main entrance built for the accommodation of the pilgrims, wandering monks, *pujaris* and other wayfarers. There are many walnut and almond trees in the premises of this temple comprising about ten *kanals* of land. On one side of the marshy land, there is a breadmushuk (*salix caprea*) tree, the flowers of which were used to be procured by us a day before *Navrah* or *Soanth* for placing these for the traditional thaal barun ritual and to have its first glimpse on the morning of *Soanth* and the New Year's Day (*Navrah*).

The annual *Yagna*, which also included the cleaning of the spring after autumn, was performed here. The stock items needed for this purpose were collected from amongst the villagers, especially the Pandits. The *Uma Natak Mandli* used to stage a drama on this occasion. Prior to migration, it was a routine for the elderly members of the community to perform the daily *puja* at the temple.

Many people have experienced spiritual experiences here while many had the *darshan* of Goddess Uma. Many have seen the spring in its divine glow at the dead of night.

One day a cow belonging to Pandit Sarwanand Bhat (1901-1977) did not return from the pasture and at dusk all the members, excluding the womenfolk, went for its search. Late in the evening, his wife, Smt. Sampakuj, went herself to search for the cow. As she reached near the Brari Meaj temple from *Devspat* paddy fields (back side of the temple) in her search, to her surprise, she noticed some little girls all in silk playing in the temple and amongst them was a most beautiful girl. The atmosphere was so bright that the light reflected onto her eyes. As she went ahead after giving humble salutations to the Divine Mother, who was playing with the little girls, she found the cow some yards away from the temple. She went home with the cow with a gratitude-filled heart.

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Prior to partition, all the womenfolk of Murran used to get to the temple very early in the morning, before the menfolk would go there. It was the tradition with every woman of the Pandit family to give *brandeh fash* (cleaning of the stairs) to their houses early in the morning. The practice was also applicable to the temples and other sacred places in the Valley and the womenfolk would vie with each other to perform this sacred act first. One day Smt. Haarmal, wife of Pandit Zinda Bhat (1876-1917), woke up in the wee hours of the morning and thought that she was late. Since there were no watches at that time, she rushed towards the Brari Meaj temple, washed her face and went to the spot where the liven dul (cleaning pot) was being kept. She put some fresh water into it and started rubbing the brand. Afterwards she went inside the temple and paid obeisance to the Divine Mother.

Smt. Haarmal was not aware of the fact that she had come too early. After leaving the temple, she noticed a little girl all in silk near the gate of the temple. The girl directed her not to come too early henceforth and disappeared. She rushed towards her home and told the story to her husband. It was later disclosed by the elderly persons of the village that the little girl was no other than the Divine Mother Herself.

In dark nights, under the shade of the chinars, the sacred places present an atmosphere where one becomes one with God. And in moonlit nights, devotees experienced something mystic all over in the temple of *Brari Maej*.

*Image Gallery:* [http://koausa.org/gallery/categories.php?cat\\_id=232](http://koausa.org/gallery/categories.php?cat_id=232)

## Tirth Raj, Lok Bhawan

**Lok Bhawan village is situated in Doru Tehsil erstwhile Brang Pargana some 10 km from District Headquarter Anantnag.** A link road from Larkipora links the village with the rest of the world. This village is situated beneath a small hill. A beautiful spring has its source at the feet of this hill. Seventy households of Kashmiri Pandits were residing in this village before 1990. There was a complete fraternity between Muslims and Pandits. This village is categorized as a backward area by the State Government. This place



**Lok Bhawan**

is famous for the ancient pilgrimage, the *Lok Bhawan* pilgrimage. This pilgrimage, has a the shrine, a small holy spring, at an elevation, and a big spring, the Lok Bhawan Spring, which receives water from the small holy spring above at the foot of the hillock. The Lok Bhawan Spring has plenty of water and abounds in sacred fish. The water from this spring flows in the form of a blanket and exists as a stream from the shrine. Devotees have a bath near this exit.<sup>1</sup> Total land under this shrine is 20 kanals and two springs are spread over an area of 8 Kanal and 10 Marlas. The big spring is 60 feet long and 54 feet in width and the small spring 10 feet in length and 8 km in width. King Aurangzeb had the spring developed through his *subehdar* Saif Khan who also

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laid out a garden name Aurangabad. The name is commemorated in the well known *shrukh* of Sheikh Noor-ul-Din Noorani.

*Lokabhawana 'na' chi kaji  
A kaji karan Siva  
Saati jahnavaran tsaji  
Tin var ditam deva*

[Hail to the mute lade of Lok Bhawan, with dedication one and all she served,  
away she departed with the birds, Grant me, Lord, a boon as that.]

*Tirth Raj* Lok Bhawan is one of the old pilgrimage centres in Kashmir. This ancient shrine was known by the name of *Lok-Punya*, reportedly named after Lalita Daitiya, the famous ruler of 17<sup>th</sup> century A.D. The word *Lok-Punya* signifies the Divine greatness of the shrine. With the passage of time the word *Punya* was replaced by '*Bhawan*'.

In the low laying area of the hill there is a temple in the name of Mata *Saidha Lakshmi*. On the right side of this temple there is a spring called *Waman Ganga*. On the left side of this temple, there is Saraswati Kund and in between these springs there are holy feet (*pad*) of Lord Vaishnu. On the top of the hill there is a shrine of deity *Bhariava*. At a distance of about 500 feet from this place there is a beautiful spring called Naran Nag.

It is said the Lok Bhawan was an affluent town in the days gone by. A local ruler named Lok Nath is said to have laid the foundation of this village. Previously it was known as *Rudhra Bhawan*. Kalhana in his work *Rajtarangni* has also made a mention of this village. Late Shri Anand Koul 'Bamzai' in his book 'History of Kashmir' has also mentioned that a king named *Lok Punya* has laid the foundation of village Lok Bhawan and after him, his son Damras developed it as a centre of education. *Tazak-i-Jahangeri* has also a mention of this fact. This town was extended four km in length and two km in breadth. Village Sidhwara and Shankerpora are also linked with this village. It has a dense population right from Shankerpora and adjoining area. But time proved fatal for the area and only remains of that period are visible now-a-days. Beehama was site of Archaeological excavations and some idols were unearthed and even today, temple of *Gadhadar* is still in its pristine glory. Even today there are ruins of old buildings on the right side of Lok Bhawan temple. There is a waterfall still available in the shape of a pyramid and there is a stream called Ganga going down the ground. There is also a cave available which was forty feet long and four feet high and the opening of this cave is now in debris. The cave has concrete wall and idols of Lord Rama, *Sheshnag*, and Lord *Ganesh* were inside the cave. It is said that royals were coming to this cave shrine after having holy bath at the adjacent spring.

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It is said that a pious lady named *Keij Maej* who was dumb and was a poor lady used to come to this shrine and would offer water brought from Harnag and this water has brought a spring into existence by that time. A festival is observed on the day of *moksha* of this pious lady which falls on *Har Bhah*, the *day of Ashad Shukla Paksha Dwadashi*. This day was being celebrated with gaiety, devotion and enthusiasm ever since a century. It is said that this festival has special significance for the women folk, who would take bath in the twelve springs of the shrine starting from Naran Nag to *Amrit Kund* (spring of nectar), in the vicinity of Lok Bhawan on *Har Bhah* and would get redemption from their sins. The boon to *Keij Maej* from Lord Shiva is also a great boon to women folk of Kashmir Valley. It is said that after the death women are questioned by the Lord of Death, if they have performed *Har Bhah* pilgrimage by having a dip in the twelve springs at Lok Bhawan. This is evident from the following saying which was on the tip of the tongue of everyone in the area.

*Lar Lad Batnai Har Bhah Chaiyah Karmech?*  
(Have you performed the festival of *Har Bhah*?)

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century there was a population only comprising of illiterate people. Under these circumstances a man named Shri Sarwanand Raina started offering prayers at this place which infused interest in other people about the shrine. Shri Sarwanand Raina was working in Jammu & Kashmir Police Department and his efforts proved very beneficial for the shrine. Before 1968 this shrine was being looked after only by elderly people of the village and in later years youth also stepped in. A *Prabandhak* Committee under the name of *Tirthraj Lokbhawan* was started which looked after the construction of the shrine. The effort of this *Prabandhak* Committee took a good leap towards its present position.

In the year February 1986, this shrine and the *dharamshalas* was burnt down by anti-social elements and it was during Governors rule that re-construction of the shrine took place. After mass exodus of Kashmiri Pandits in December 1992, this shrine again fell to the desecration of anti-social elements and everything left behind was either burnt down or broken down. Now work on re-construction of this shrine is under way and may take few more months to restore its pristine glory.

Ever since exodus of Kashmiri Pandits from Kashmir valley, Lok Bhawan Shrine also went in exile like other shrines of the valley. The members of Prabandhak Committee who also migrated to Jammu and other parts of India continued their strenuous efforts to re-establish the institution as Shri Pushkara Swami Sewa Ashrama at Chinor, Jammu. Another branch of the institution has recently been opened at Kashmiri Colony, Vitasta Enclave, Nafagarh, New Delhi.

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*Image Gallery:* [http://koausa.org/gallery/categories.php?cat\\_id=286](http://koausa.org/gallery/categories.php?cat_id=286)

## Moongnag, Village Sirnoo

### *Abode of Moonglesher Bhairav*

**Moonghama Village is situated at a distance of about 1.5 km to the South West of Pulwama town.** En-route Moonghama there is a small village Sirnoo (a KP Village) and in between Moonghama and Sirnoo is a small hamlet known as Kharpur. Moongnag forms part of hamlet Kharpur. These two villages Moonghama and Sirnoo are so close that members of both the villages participate in each others grief and sorrows. As such Kharpur forms the part of both the villages. There were 6 Kashmiri Pandit families in Kharpur hamlet nick named as Sadh.



**Moongnag at village Sirnoo**

Moonghama (*Manglahoma*) and its adjoining villages have been inhabited by the human tribes for the last about 5000 years. The most ancient among the habitations are Murrans (*Mayurana*), Kangan (*Kangana*), Tiken (*Tikayana*), and Sirnoo (*Suriayana*). Some of the remains and “murties” have been found in these villages, while excavation, dates back to hey days of the Naga culture. In the year 1980 when Ghulam Ahmad Wani of village Doodura [nearby village of Murrans] was constructing a house and during excavation for laying the plinth

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some idols belonging to the ancient period were found and the same were installed in a temple at village Tengpuna near Pulwama.

Then there are habitations like Mitrigam (*Maitriyagrama*) [birth place of famous patriotic poet Ghulam Ahmad 'Mahjoor'], Pahaligam (*Putrigama*), Zayagam (*Jayagrama*) and Drabgam (*Drabagrama*), which were founded by the Aryans. Akahala too belonged to the Aryan period. Both Shaivism and Buddhism flourished here from the 1<sup>st</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> century. At village Akahala (*Aikshala*) we see a "Chaka-Pal" (*Chakrautapala*), a huge round boulder with a Shiv Linga engraved on it. Some of the finest idols of Vaishno, Durga and Buddha of the Gandhara Art were also found in village Thokerpora, in the year 1976 and all the statues were installed in the same temple at village Tengpuna.

Moongnag is a big spring of fresh water. There is a big temple with dharmshala on the bank of the spring. This spring abounds with fish. Early in the morning Pandits of village Kharpur, Moonghama and Sirnoo used to come here for pooja and after performing pooja put some grains in the spring as food to the fish.

There are some springs of Surya Dev (Sun God) at village Sirnoo and water of these springs is used by the villagers for cultivation/irrigation. Some water of these springs mingles with famous *Dharkol*. The name of village Sirnoo got modified with the passage of time as it was earlier known as Surya.

Moongnag is the asthapan of Moonglesher Bhairave who is one of the Aasht Bhairav's of the area and elder brother of these eight Bhairav's is residing at village Achan and his name is Jagan Nath. One of these Aasht Bhairav's is also residing at village Murran.

Festivals like Janamashtami, Shiv Ratri, and Navreh was being celebrated around the spring which comprises one kanal and two Marlas of land. Tenth day *kriya* was also being performed on the bank of this spring. The spring is surrounded with five Chinar trees and one Banyan Tree.

Sirnoo village is also called Sadhu Village as the ancestors of the village were nicknamed as Sadhus. Pandit Shanker Sadh, Pandit Ram Sadh, Pandit Kainth Sadh, Pandit Narayan Sadh are few among them.

These Sadhus were the disciples of Bona Kak of village Pinglena.

In Moonghama village there is a Ziarat of Shah Hamdan and Muslim brethren worship there and Pandits also pay humble salutations to the great sofi saint. It is believed that if the soil from the ground of this mosque is rubbed on a person's body that is ill, gets cured within few hours.

There is a verse that is on the tip of the tongue of every member of these villages. It reads as follows:

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*“ATH MOONGA NAGAS GAN SAD LAAGAS  
BAADAM BAGAS CHI FULYA JAAN.”*



**Shiv Lingam in Moongnag at village Sirnoo**

The worship of the village gods “Raza Sahib” is most ancient form of the Indian religion. Before the Aryan invasion, which probably took place in the second millennium B.C., the old inhabitants of India, who are sometimes called Dravidians, were a dark-skinned race with religious beliefs and customs that probably did not greatly differ from those of other primitive race. They believed the world to be propelled by a magnitude of spirits, good and bad, which were the cause of all unusual events, and especially of diseases and disasters.

This worship of the village Deity, or Raza Sahib, as it is called in Kashmiri, forms an important part of the conglomerate of religious beliefs, customs, and ceremonies which are generally classed together under the term Hinduism. In almost every village the Raza Sahib is periodically worshipped and propitiated.

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Shiva and Vishnu may be more dignified beings, but the village deity is regarded as a more present help in trouble, and is more intimately concerned with the happiness and prosperity of the villagers.



**Close up of Moongnag Spring**

The origin of this form of Hinduism is lost in antiquity but it is certain that it represents a pre Aryan cult of the Dravidian people, more or less modified in various parts of North India by Brahmanical influence; and some details of the ceremonies seem to point back to a tokenistic stage of religion. The normal function of the Raza Sahib is the guardianship of the village, but many of them are believed to have other powers, especially in relation to disease and calamity. The village deities and their worship are widely different from the popular Hindu deities, Siva and Vishnu, and the worship that centres in the great Hindu temples.

Shiva and Vishnu represent forces of nature: Shiva symbolizes the power of destruction and the idea of life through death, Vishnu the power of preservation and the idea of salvation. Both these Gods and the system of religion connected with them are the outcome of philosophic reflection on the universe as a whole. But the village deities, on the other hand, have no relation to the Universe. They are related, not to great world forces, but to such simple facts as choleras, cattle disease etc.

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The village deities are almost universally worshipped with annual sacrifices and in Kashmir the same practice continued. The sacrifice of lamb, in Kashmiri “*Raza Kath*” was offered to the village deity or Raza Sahib when the wish made by a villager especially the Pandits was fulfilled. The lamb so sacrificed was then cooked without any spices and distributed amongst the villagers. When the lamb is sacrificed the blood of the lamb is collected in an earthen pot called “*Took*” in Kashmiri and the blood is added to flour to make a paste and this paste is applied to the lid of the pot in which the dish is prepared. All the parts of the lamb are prepared including the legs etc. The member who has performed the sacrifice retains big chunk of the dish.

The details of the eight Bhairaves with place of residence are as follows:

a)	Shri Jagan Nath	Village Achan
b)	Shri Nandkisher	Village Sumbal
c)	Shri Ganganand	Village Mattan
d)	Shri Kakvishal	Village Pargachu
e)	Shri Jeevan Nath	Village Ladhoo
f)	Shri Moonglesher	Village Sirnoo
g)	Shri Omkar Nath	Village Drussu
h)	Shri Neilkanth	Village Murran

Bhairave of village Achan, Shri Jagan Nath is the eldest one and that of village Murran Shri Neilkanth is the youngest one. Shri Keshev Nath was the grandfather of the *Aasht Bhairaves*. Raza Sahib of Achan and Sirnoo were vegetarian and rest was non-vegetarian.

There was a small spring called Raza Nag in the south of this cremation ground at Village Murran. This cremation ground was having a land of about five kanals. Raza Sahib of Murran often used to visit his brother Moonglesher Bhairave at Haarpur, Sirnoo and he has been seen by some of the members of this village. Shri Aziz Chaan (carpenter) was running a water mill at Gratabal and he told me that he has seen Raza Sahib several times. ‘Some unusual sound was heard by me. This sound was heard for years together and I noted the day and date. Once I went to the mill at night, to watch the source of these unusual sounds on that particular day, which was noted by me. To my surprise, I saw an elderly person with white turban riding a black horse going towards village Sirnoo. The sound was coming from the iron bells tied to the horse. I bowed before him from the mill and went away to my home’ said Shri Aziz Chaan (an elderly person of 92 years of village Murran).

## Nidhan Kak, Village Murran

**Kashmir has over the ages produced Saints, Rishis and Saint Poets who have influenced the course of spiritual and cultural history of this ancient land.** Even in the days of political turmoil of the Pathans and the Sikhs they have been born here and have preached the religious tolerance and brotherhood. These saints, rishis and saint poets have appeared in different ages and at different places, but they have left their imprint much beyond the confines of time and place.



**HAARPUR** a small village about 1 km to the South West of village Murran in Pulwama District enroute Deeri village was the last abode of ascetic Nidhan Kak. Nidhan Kak was a resident of Rainawari, Srinagar. Not much is known about the early years of his life. Pandit Anand Koul in his book "The Kashmiri Pandit" writes: 'Nidhan Kak lived at village Murran (Awantipora Tehsil) and died in Sambat 1925'. The exact year of his settlement at village Murran is not known but it is more or less between the years 1836 to 1887. He had come to village Murran to earn his livelihood as the Bhat's of village Murran were well off. He was employed in Pandit Paramanand Bhat's (1836-1888) house for doing

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day-to-day work. During night he used to meditate and held spiritual disciplines (*Sadhna*) in the “*Thakur-Kuth*” (Pooja room). He dedicated himself to spiritual activity not known to anyone in the house though being so close to everone.

Once, Smt. Poshmal, wife of Pandit Paramanand Bhat felt thirsty in the mid night and went to kitchen to quench her thirst. Smt. Poshmal while drawing near to the kitchen where Thokur Kuth fell on the other side got horrified to find the violent fire has engulfed the Pooja room. Immediately she rushed to her room and reported the matter to her husband who in turn got up quickly and rushed towards the Pooja room. He found to his surprise Nidhan Kak in deep meditation and an immense dazzling divine light in his room. Next morning in the early hours, Pandit Paramanand Bhat and his wife fell on the feet of Nidhan Kak and made obeisance. Nidhan Kak to avert the exposure of the truth shifted to Haarpur, where he spent the rest of his life. He selected a place amidst thorns and bushes at Haarpur and practiced ‘*Sadhna*’. He never allowed and publicity and was not a believer of outentatious popularity. He was always calm, serene and throughout a bramachari. Nidhan Kak was always free from anger andd very soft spoken.

It once happened, Maharaja Pratap Singh alongwith his bodyguards riding on horses were coming from Shopyan (the ancient Mughal road), Maharaja’s horse stopped and spurned to go further. Maharaja called the locals to enquire if there was any saint residing in the nearby area. The locals told him about Nidhan Kak and of his greatness and spirituality. He then straightway proceeded to Haarpur for having a darshan of this great saint. On reaching Haarpur, Maharaja alighted from his horse and went to the muddy het of Nidhan Kak. He bowed before him and was much impressed by his spirituality. What transpired between them is not known. Maharaja allotted him a *jaggir* of 96 kanals of land at Haarpur. After reaching Srinagar, Maharaja deputed a few Hindu families from Srinagar to maintain the *jaggir* presented to Nidhan Kak. After 1947 maximum chunk of land went to tillers and it could retain very little and that too in the personal name of Babu Family, one of the families deputed from Srinagar.

Nidhan Kak’s muddy hut was so small that only one person could sit easily inside it. This muddy hut was built on the bank of small spring “*Haarnag*” with crystal clear water. After the passing away of Nidhan Kak, a relic “*Khadao*” (a wooden sleeper) was being worshipped. During the days of turmoil of nineties, the relic was removed by one of the Pandit member of village Murran, Shri Badri Nath who is still residing in village Murran and he continues to venerate and worship them in his Pooja room.

When Nidhan Kak left his mortal body, people of all the religions thronged after hearing the news of His attaining Moksha. The last rites were performed will full

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devotion. When the pyre was lit, single flame (Jyoti) rose high to the sky like a shooting star. A long stick used in his pyre....half burnt was planted upside down on the spot where his pyre was lit. It is now a full grown “*Bran*” (Banyan tree) to everybody’s surprise. The spiritualistic greatness of Nidhan Kak was now omnipresent in the form of the said Banyan tree, grown out of a dead burnt and without life, the pyre stick used to consign mortal remains of this great saint to the *Panch Tatva*.

Nidhan Kak’s death anniversary falls on “*Bhemsen Aikadashi*” in the month of Magha (January-February).

## Vasak Nag

*Sanyaasai Ha Gosaaney, KuneY Kaanay Yekh Na Vaaney,  
Vasak Nag Tchu Yooni Kaanay, KuneY Kaanay Yekh Na Vaaney.*

- Krishan Joo Razdan

**Vasuki is a Sanskrit word for a *naga*, one of the serpents of Hindu mythology.** He is a great king of the *naga* and has a gem on his head. *Manasa*, another *naga*, is his sister. The famous legend in Hinduism in which *Vasuki* took part was the incident of *Samudra Manthan*, the churning of the ocean of milk. In the legend, *Vasuki* allowed *devas* (gods) and the *Asuras* (demons) to bind him to Mount Mandara (name of a mountain located on the highway between Bhagalpur and Dumka which was used as a churning rod to churn the ocean of milk) and use him as their churning rope to extract the ambrosia of immortality from the ocean of milk. In the Bhagvada Gita (Chapter 10, verse 28) Lord Krishana explains his omnipresence by proclaiming, "Of weapons I am the thunderbolt; among cows I am the *Surbhi*. Of causes of procreation I am Kamdeva and of serpents I am *Vasuki*."



**Vasak Nag**

Vasak Nag also known as *Sarsa* is located in the erstwhile *Devsar Pargana* at the base of a mountain near Wagam in Kund area near Qazigund in South Kashmir. The holy spring is the ancient *Vasuki Nag* pilgrimage of Kashmiri Pandits. *Vasak Nag* is a fairly large spring and is dedicated to *Vasak* the

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satellite of Shiva. It flows for six months and runs dry for six months. A week before it begins to flow the wind blows very hard, there are rain and thunder storms, and people of the area say, “*Vasak Nag* is coming”. A large stream flows out of it and irrigates a large area. The water of this stream will run five water mills. This stream flows gracefully between willow orchards and turfy banks covered with yellow buttercups, columbines and forget-me-nots. As soon as the autumn irrigation of the paddy fields is over and the crops are ripe, it runs dry. A story goes that a monk took *Vasak Nag* away in his wallet to irrigate the arid parts somewhere during winter, but the legend is something else. My respected father Pt. Dina Nath Bhat used to tell me the stories about *Vasak Nag* when I was reading in 6<sup>th</sup> standard. He was a regular visitor to this shrine. I can very well recall one of his stories which go like this, “In the month of April, one elderly Kashmiri Pandit namely Pt. Neel Kanth Pandita of village Levdoora heard an un-usual sound during the day in the month of April. He became curious and went out in the fields to see the source of these sounds. To his surprise he saw a big snake crawling through the fields and going towards South. On the next day the news spread like a wild fire that *Vasak Nag* is full of waters. It is a belief that the water of *Vasak Nag* comes back on *trithiur tray*. According to Hassan’s account, though not confirmed, the water continues to ooze till the end of *Bhadrapad*, when paddy ripens, after which the water suddenly disappears and re-appears at a place at Bhaderwah (since the history of Bhaderwah for the pre-historic and pre-epic period is closely linked with the history of Kashmir) and flows there for six months. The phenomenon reverses for the next six months. The shrine is spread over an area of about 8 kanals of land and has a number of Chinar trees.

Now the question arises, where the water does goes for six months. There is a legend and a folk lore too that the waters of this spring goes to Bhaderwah during winter. Bhaderwah also known as “*Nagon Ki Bhoomi*”, the land of snakes, a land of natural beauty, clear streams, green turf, magnificent trees and mighty mountains enveloped with glistening snow peaks is the abode of the *Vasak Nag* for six months. Numerous *Naga* chiefs ruled Kashmir when the valley was a lake. One water borne dragon named *Jalodbhava*, started killing and eating *Nagas* living in the lake relentlessly with the result many *Nagas* and their subjects migrated to different directions for safety. Some went to Kishtwar and Bhaderwah, the nearby areas of the valley. The folk legends and the *Purnic* traditions mention that notable *Naga* chief like *Gamani Nag*, *Kali Nag* and *Pant Nag* whose temples and springs still exist at different places in Kishtwar migrated to Kishtwar and settled there. Right back in Kashmir, after the death of *Kashyap Rishi*, succession dispute started amongst his sons born from two queens *Kadru* and *Vanita*. From *Kadru* were born *Vasuki Nag*, *Shesh Nag* and *Mahel Nag* and their elder sister *Bhadra (Bhaderkali)* while *Garud* and his brothers were born from *Vanita*. *Garud* the eldest son attempted to eliminate *Vasuki* and his brothers. *Bhaderkali* had already shifted to Bhaderwah and settled there as ruling queen. She extended invitation to *Vasuki* and his

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brothers to come to Bhaderwah for safety. *Bhadra* divided her territory amongst the three brothers. The *Maon* Bhaderwah valley on the left bank of Neeru was given to *Vasuki*. The temples of *Vasuki Nag* at Bhaderwah are located at village Galtha, Nalthi, Bheja and Nagar Bhaderwah where many locals worship them as its '*Kul Devi*' but at present it is believed that village Nalthi with more than 100 springs is the abode of *Vasuki* in Bhaderwah. The idol of *Vasuki* at Nalthi is marvellous and a wonder of art and sculpture. Two idols of *Nagraj Vasuki* and Raja Jamute Vahan are made of black stone which stands at an angle of 88° without any support from either side.

After settling her brothers at Bhaderwah, *Bhadarkali* migrated back to Kashmir valley and settled at a village Wadipora situated at a distance of about seven km from Handwara, and at present the temple existed in the midst of pine trees on a hill top. This temple is being maintained by Rashtriya Rifles at present. *Bhadarkali* is the *Isht Devi* (family deity) of some Kashmiri Pandit families. One more temple of *Vasak Nag* is located at Gandh Top, some 30 km from Ram Nagar on the way to Dudu Basantgarh in Udhampur District. The temple is located at an idyllic location on the top of a ridge, providing a magnificent panoramic view on all sides. Another temple of *Vasak Nag* forms the part of village Batyari near village Khagote some 13 km from Udhampur on the way to Ram Nagar.

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## **Bumzu Temple**

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**Anantnag is located between 330-20' to 340-15' north latitude and 740-30' to 750-35' east longitude, bounded in the north and north-west by Srinagar and Pulwama districts respectively and in the north east by Kargil district.** It is the most fertile district in the Kashmir valley and is called as “The granary of Kashmir”. Anantnag is also known as the “Gateway to Kashmir valley”.



**Close up of the main entrance of the cave**

The district is renowned for its rich cultural heritage and hospitality. It is also a symbol of secularism and tolerance. These qualities have bound the people of the district together for centuries. All sects of the society live in harmony without any prejudice. They are credited to have unity in diversity.

Anantnag has for long enjoyed the status of the second largest city of the Valley. The name of Anantnag District according to a well known archaeologist, Sir A. Stein from the great spring Ananta Naga issuing at the southern end of the town. This is also corroborated by almost all local historians including Kalhana according to whom the town has taken the name of this great spring of Cesha or Ananta Naga land of countless springs. The spring is mentioned in the Neelmat Purana as a sacred place for the Hindus and Koshur Encyclopedia testifies it.

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Before the advent of Muslim rule in 1320 A.D., Kashmir was divided into three divisions, viz; Maraz in the south, Yamraj in the centre and Kamraj in the north of the Valley. Old chronicles reveal that the division was the culmination of the rift Marhan and Kaman, the two brothers, over the crown of their father. The part of the valley which lies between Pir Panjal and Srinagar now called the Anantnag was given to Marhan and named after him as Maraj. While Srinagar is no longer known as Yamraj, the area to its north and south are still called Kamraz and Maraz respectively. Lawrence in his book 'The Valley of Kashmir' states that these divisions were later on divided into thirty four sub-divisions which after 1871 were again reduced to five Zilas or districts.



**Shiv Lingam**

Anantnag like the rest of the Kashmir Valley has witnessed many vicissitudes and experienced many upheavals from time to time. Hugel found here some monuments of the Mughal period in ruins when he visited Kashmir in 1835. No significant ancient building or archaeological site is found in the district today

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except the Martand temple. What must have once been magnificent architectural show pieces like the Martand complex of temples situated at a distance of nine kilometers from the district headquarters or the palaces of Laladitya and Avantivarman at Avantipora lying midway between Srinagar and Anantnag town are now in grand ruins. The majestic Martand temple is one of the important archaeological sites of the country. Its impressive architecture reveals the glorious past of the area. Martand temple is the clear expression of Kashmir's pristine glory. The Mughal Emperors especially Jehangir developed many beauty spots of the district, but of their noble and magnificent edifices only faint traces survive. All the same, even in their present ruinous conditions, these monuments do not fail to feast the eye or excite the imagination of admirers at large.

Anantnag district is bestowed with religious wealth in the forms of numerous shrines and places of worship. These worth visiting places include Mattan (Bawan) Temple, Martand Temple, Holy Cave of Amarnath Ji, Ziarat Hazrat Zain-ud-Din Wali, Nagbal, Khir Bhawani Asthapan (Devibal), Uma Devi of Uma Nagri, Bumzu or Bhaumajo Caves, Chapel of John Bishop and Nagdandi.

Ancient monuments of very great archaeological interest which disclose the existence of a lost civilization are, numerous in Kashmir. The devotion of kings, the reserves of the kingdoms and skills of master artists in the past combined, to raise the magnificent and the beautiful temple edifices in Kashmir. They were built to endure for all times. Their solidity of construction and their gigantic size strike one with wonder that man could have built them. Many kings have come and gone and civilizations have bloomed and vanished since they were built. People go and pace around them and gaze on them with amazement and awe - amazement inspired by the stupendous might and skill of their builders and awe excited by the ruins of these edifices which look as if weeping over the departed glory of their founders.<sup>1</sup>

Bumzu is a place at a distance of 1 km from Mattan enroute Anantnag. The place is famous for three cave temples situated on the left bank of Liddar, 60 feet above at a close distance to each other. The entrance to one of the caves is carved architectural doorway, which through a passage leads one to the cave temple. The temple, 10 feet square, is on a raised platform and is reached by a flight of steps. The old square doorway had statues, which were defaced. The second cave temple is close by and is slightly bigger in size but without any architectural designs and is said to be dedicated to Kaladeva. An Icom exists in this cave temple. Nearby is also the third cave temple, which is also without any architectural design.

There is a legend, which gives the origin of these cave temples and links the Bumzu caves and the shrine of Chakradhara with King Nara. Walter R. Lawrence while giving reference to Hugel says that King Nara succeeded his

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father Vibishana in the year Kali 2108 (993 BC). One day, he beheld Chandrasaha, the daughter of Susravas, a serpent-god, whose place was in a lake and decided to carry her away from her husband, a Brahmin. The plan failed, upon which the enraged Brahmin asked Surravas to avenge the insult. A storm was called up and the earth opened and swallowed the king and his whole Court. The sister of the serpent-god assisted him and hurled on the city huge stones from the Martand Mountain. The cavern of Bhumju are said to be on the spot where these rocks were upturned. According to Aurel Stein, "A young Brahman, who had found occasion to assist the Naga and his two daughters when in distress, was allowed to marry in regard one of the latter. He lived in happiness at Narapura until the beauty of the Naga lady excited the passion of the wicked king. When Nara found his advances rejected, he endeavoured to seize the beautiful Candralekha by force. The couple thereupon fled to protection to their father's habitation. The Naga then rose in fury from his pool and "burned the King with his town in a rain of fearful thunderbolts." Thousands of people were burned before the image of Vishnu Chakradhara, to which they had fled for protection. Ramanya, the Naga's sister, came down from the mountains carrying along masses of rocks and boulders. These she dropped, as we have seen, along the bed of the Ramanyatavi or Rambiyar stream, when she found that Susravas had caused, removed to a lake on a far-off mountain." The Nag where the couple took shelter came to be known as Zamtiur Nag. The lake mentioned in the reference is known as Takshak Nag at Zewan, named after Takshak Raza, the Lord of snakes.<sup>2</sup>

According to Sir Walter Roper Lawrence, "Bhumju or Bumzu or Bhaumajo lines at the mouth of the Lidder valley, and easily reached from Islamabad. These caves are situated on the left bank of the Lidder river about a mile north of the village of Bawan, the largest is dedicated to Kaladeva. The cave-temple stands at the far end of a natural but artificially enlarged fissure in the limestone cliff. The entrance to the cavern, which is more than 60 feet above the level of the river, is carved into an architectural doorway, and a gloomy passage, 50 ft in length, leads from it to the door of the temple. It is a simple cella, 10 ft square, exterior dimensions, raised on a badly moulded plinth and approached by a short flight of steps. The square doorway is flanked by two round headed niches despoiled of their status and is surmounted by a high triangular pediment reaching to the apex of the roof, with a trefoiled tympanum. There is no record nor tradition as to the time of erection but from absence of all ornamentation and the simple character of the roof, which appears to be a rudimentary copy in stone of the ordinary slopping timber roof of the country, it may with great probability be inferred that this is the earliest perfect specimen of Kashmir Temple, and dates from the 1st. or 2nd century of the Christian era. Close by is another Cave of still greater extent, but with no architectural accessories and about half a mile further up the valley at the foot of the cliff, are two temples. Both are, to a considerable extent, copies of the Cave Temple but may be of much later date.

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The shrine of Baba Ramdin Reshi and the tomb of his disciple Ruku-din-Reshi are also close by. Hugel states that the Bhumju caves occupy a very conspicuous place in the fables of the timid Kashmiris, and are supposed to have originated from the following causes, In the year Kali 2108 ( 993 B.C) Raja Nara succeeded his father, Vibishana; during his reign certain Brahman espoused Chandrasaha , the daughter of Susravas, a serpent-god, whose place was in a lake near the Vitusta , and near a city built and inhabited by Nara. One day, as Raja Nara beheld the beautiful daughter of the serpent on the shore of the lake, moving gracefully through the calm waters, he was struck with the deepest admiration, and endeavored vainly to inspire the same sentiments he himself felt. At length he resolved to carry her off from husband, but the plan failed, and the enraged Brahman called on her father to avenge the insult. A storm was accordingly called up, and the earth open and swallowed up the King and his whole Court. The sister of the serpent-god assisted him, and hurled on the city huge stone from Bawan Mountain. The caverns of Bhumju are said to be on the spot where these rocks were upturn (Hugel, Growse)".<sup>3</sup>

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Image Gallery: [http://koausa.org/gallery/categories.php?cat\\_id=277](http://koausa.org/gallery/categories.php?cat_id=277)

## Narastan Temple

**Narastan Mandir, now in ruins, lies in the North-East of Avantipora, 16 km from Tral town towards famous Aripal.** The place of Narastan is famous for its ancient temple dedicated to Lord Vishnu, standing against the backdrop of lofty mountains of the Brariaangan Range. The name Narastan is the deviation of the original *Narayan Sthan* (place of Narayan). Architecturally, the temple claims a place of pride among many ancient temples of Kashmir. Minor



excavation work undertaken by Lawrence showed existence of specimens of old sculpture. This stone temple is distinguished for its architectural works; it is dissimilar from all the other temples in the Kashmir Valley. Dating back to more than 1400 years. The interior compound measures about 8.6 feet square. An interesting feature of the Narastan Temple is, it has no ceiling. The courtyard measures 70 feet square. From the outer wall, there is a small side entrance near the southwestern side. This circular shaped temple is wholly constructed with stones in Gandhara style of architecture. The temple is on a

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single base consisting of only four courses of stones. At the top of the pediment, there is a figure that resembles a Garuda, the king of birds, sacred vehicle to Lord Vishnu, who is half man and half eagle with the power to acquire any shape. The main draw of the temple is the trefoil arches on the peripheral of the shrine walls. Another remarkable feature is the absence of any circumambulatory path on top of the base. From the courtyard, a flight of four steps leads to the shrine of Narastan. There is a stream of water that gushes down near the front of the temple<sup>3</sup>. The main temple, except the roof, is very well preserved. The important features of the temple are:



**Front Side of the Narastan temple**

- The temple, built on a single base made of only four courses of stones, is in a courtyard.
- The courtyard measures 70 feet square. It is surrounded by a wall, which is unornamented except for a plain-filleted stringcourse, at about 2 feet

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from the ground, a predamental trefoiled niche in the West wall and a recess 3 feet square.

- The temple cell measures 8 feet 6 inches internally and contained a *Shiv Linga*.
- The temple is at the centre of 5 feet thick and 8 feet high walled enclosure, parts of which are in ruins.
- The temple has an entrance, 4.5 feet wide, inner and middle gateways, designed stone doors, a portico and outer portal supporting columns (8 feet high). It has also a chamber measuring 8.5 feet square, two vestibules (outer one 8 feet by 4 feet and the second one of larger dimensions), the flooring, blank arched recess on the walls and a small cell projecting into the enclosure.
- The portico projects 4 feet from the wall.
- The gateway is a double-chambered structure open on two sides, for entry and exit. A doorway connects the two chambers, each chamber measuring 7 feet by 4 feet.
- To reach the sanctum sanctorum from the courtyard base, there is a flight of four steps.<sup>2</sup>

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*Image Gallery:* [http://koausa.org/gallery/categories.php?cat\\_id=274](http://koausa.org/gallery/categories.php?cat_id=274)

## Pandrethan Temple



**Pandrethan or Puranadisthana (means old capital city) is a place close to Badami Bagh Cantonment, 3 km from Srinagar in its South.** Now a day it is called Paani (water) Temple.

In ancient times, the place was known for Ashoka's capital city and the ancient Srinagari mentioned by Kalhana which is non-extant now. It was also known for the ancient temple, built during the reign of King Partha, by Meruvaradhana, who dedicated this temple to Mahadev under the tile Meruvaradhana Swamin. During the reign of Abhimanyu, the old city was destroyed by fire but the temple survived.

The preserved temple of Pandrethan, which is mandapa type, open on all the four sides and situated on the left side of the National Highway, stands in the middle of a tank of 40 mts. square; with water about 4 feet deep and the temple measures 18 feet square with a projection portico on each side. The plinth of the temple remains submerged almost throughout the year. The water of this tank comes from a spring which is oozing on the north side of this tank. The temple has a pyramidal roof, containing 9 stones arranged in three

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overlapping squares, with carving on it and the floor paved with stones, in the centre of which is supposed to have been a pedestal for the image worshipped. The ceiling of the temple represents a fine example of stone carving found in Kashmir. According to Dr. Ernest Neve, "The ceiling of the domed roof is remarkable as it is covered with sculpture of purely classical design. The date of this temple is early tenth century". The temple is surrounded by a grove of willows and Chinar trees. A number of relics have been found at this site. These include the images of Chamunda, Indrani, Vaishnavi and Buddha, which are not part of SP Museum, Srinagar. William Moorcroft, George Trebeck, G.T.Vigne and A. Cunningham had visited this temple. A Cunningham also noticed ancient remains, which includes carved stones, old pottery extending for a long stretch.

At present this temple is being maintained by Indian Army.

## Takshak Nag, Zevan

**Village Zevan is situated at a short distance beyond Pandrenthan on the Srinagar Jammu highway.** This village was founded by King Kalasha (1089-1011) who, despite his confrontation with his father Ananta and mishandling of his son Harsha, appears to have attained some reputation as a strong ruler. Jayavana, as it was named by the founder, may have commemorated Kalash's victory over his enemies of whom a ruler of his temperament could not have a few. Two persons close to him in his family bore the name Jaya. One was a concubine Jayamati who joined six of kalasha's queens in committing self-immolation a his death. Whether she had persuaded the king to found the village in her name is not known. The second was his son Jayaraja from his favourite concubine Kayya. There is no clue to his association with Jayavan, now Zevan.<sup>1</sup>



**Shiv Temple**

This village is famous for Takshak Nag, which is visited by pilgrims, who undertake a pilgrimage to Harishwar. The spring 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, was born at Khunmoh (a village at a distance of 5 km. towards the east of Zevan).

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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 where from 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.



**Steps leading to Takshak Nag**

This shrine finds a mention in *Rajatarangini* and the works of Bilhana and Abul Fazal. Giving reference to Bilhana, Aurel Stein says that the poet mentions in the "place of high rising monuments" the "pool filled with pure water sacred to *Takshaka*, Lord of Snakes". [*Some Marvels of Kashmir*, Prof. C. L. Sadhu]<sup>2</sup>.

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*Image Gallery:* [http://koausa.org/gallery/categories.php?cat\\_id=257](http://koausa.org/gallery/categories.php?cat_id=257)

## Naran Nag

Wangath is a place near Naran Nag, in the Sindh Valley, and is ahead of Kangan; district Srinagar (now district Ganderbal) is famous for cluster of ancient temples, now in ruins, of *Bhuteshwara*, *Jesthrudra* and others. The temples are located at the foot of the steep *Bhuteshwara*, near Naran Nag, 5 km to the North of Wangat, in a dense forest of pine and fir trees in the lap of *Harmukh* Mountain. Formally known as *Sodaratirth*, it is the location of temples commonly referred to as the Wangath temples. The 12<sup>th</sup> century Bhutesvara temple erected by King Jayasimha is the prime attraction. The ancient name of Wangath was *Vashisht* Ashram.



**Naran Nag**

Neelmata repeatedly makes mention of *Bhuteshwara Teertha* or *Sodar Naag* or *Sodar Teertha*. Kalhana too makes repeated mention of *Sodar Naag* or *Naran Nag* in *Rajtarangini*. To quote *Taranga* I canto 107 and 347, *Taranga* II canto 123 and 139 and *Taranga* IV canto 189, he too calls it *Bhuteshwara* or *Bhutesha* and *Sodar Teertha*. Again the spring inside this temple complex is referred to as *Sodar Naag* by him. Kalhana makes it clear that this temple complex was patronized by various kings of Kashmir. King Jaluka (137 BC)

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erected a stone temple at this site dedicated to Shiva Bhutesha. Kalhana adds that King Jayendra (61 BC) would come to worship Shiva Bhutesha at this temple complex. King Lalitaditya (713-735 AD) donated a good sum of money to this shrine after one of his victory expeditions. King Avantivarman (855-883 AD) built a stone pedestal with silver conduit at this shrine for bathing of sacred images. Kalhan's family was also devoted to this Teertha. His father Canpaka paid frequent visits to this shrine. Kalhana's uncle Kanka also happened to be a frequent visitor to this shrine. The *Teertha* had a large number of *Purohits* who were paid handsome salaries from the endowments created for the shrine. As per Kalhana, the treasury of this shrine was plundered by King Sangramraja of Kashmir (1003-28 AD).



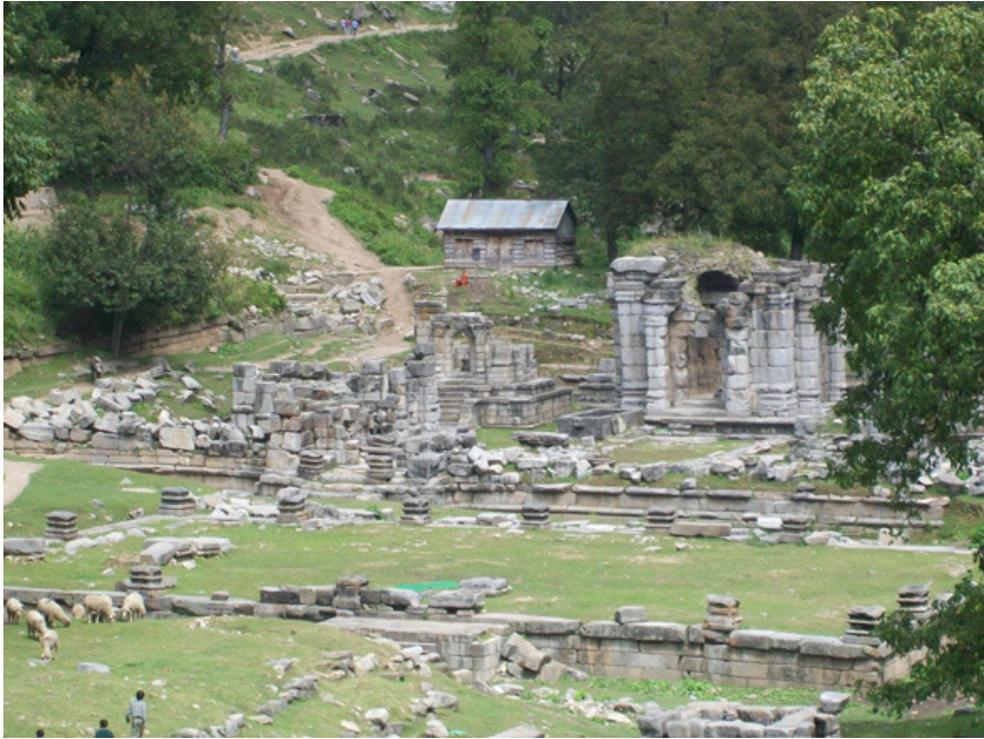
**Naran Nag**

According to Lawrence, "in antiquity these ruins are supposed to rank next after those of Bumzu and Payech". According to the scriptures, Naran Nag, in earlier times, was pilgrimages centre and was famous as *Sodara Tirtha*. With the passage of time the shrine must have lost its importance but it is said that pilgrims to *Gangabal Tirtha* continued to pay obeisance at this pilgrimage centre. This ancient shrine has a holy spring called Naran Nag, which has given the name Naran Nag to the locality. In the vicinity of the holy spring are found ruins of the temples, which have got buried almost completely and on the top of the largest, a pine tree has taken the roots. A footpath by the side of holy springs leads on to the height of *Harmukh* and to the height of *Harmukh*

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and to the mountain-lake *Gangabal*, a celebrated place of pilgrimage, 5,000 feet further up at the foot of Harmukh Mountain. It is said that Raja Narendraditya



**Temple Complex**

built the small temples. According to Lawrence, “It is probable that the Wangath temples were erected at different times by the returning pilgrims as votive offering after successful accomplishment of the hazardous ascent”. The surprising aspect about the temples is the fact that the material with which the stones of the temple have been joined is not known. Major Cole places the time of these temples as 1 AD.

The structure of two clusters with six and eleven temples even though now in ruins are by and large a perfect example of *Vastu Shastra* as the back of these temples is towards the green hills which is treated as the most auspicious on account of *Vastu Shastra* philosophy. Each of the temple was built by perfect grafting of *Devri* Stones and matches to the masonry of Bumzu, Awantipora, Parihaspur, Pattan and Mattan temples. Its sanctity was of the highest level as all Kashmiri Pandits held it in held esteem. The wall behind the clusters measuring 176 feet in length and 130 feet in width probably also dates back to the era of temple. The material used to erect the structures is yet to be established as the structures have felt less effect of time and nature. The largest temple among the cluster of temples was a *grabgrah* holding the site of Lord Shiva or *Bhuteshwara*. The temple had two entrances one facing the rising sun and other the setting sun. This gives an idea that if there is entry

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from rising sun there is exit from the side of setting sun. It is also a philosophical point that every dawn is followed by the dusk.



**Shiva Lingam**

The next philosophy of the doors from sun rise and sun set is that the person entering during the time of sun rise could come out through the door of sun at the time of sun set if he wished to visit all the temples in the cluster. There is also a plinth wall measuring 100 feet by 67 feet and appears that this might have been a base of a magnificent structure.

The visit to this temple was carried out me in the company of Shri Rakesh Sayal, Inspector Post Offices, North Sub Division, Srinagar and Shri Jagan Nath Bhat, Accountant, General Post Office, Srinagar on 10.09.2010 [the day of Eid] when there was mass agitation in the valley in view of reported desecration of Holy Quran by a Christian Zealot in United States. Rocks and stones were being rained by the protestors and security forces were doing their best to keep them at bay. Under these trying circumstances I had to travel all the way from Srinagar to Wangath and back. It was an odyssey and a triumph to keep the next generation aware of our golden culture.

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*Image Gallery:* [http://koausa.org/gallery/categories.php?cat\\_id=246](http://koausa.org/gallery/categories.php?cat_id=246)

## **Avantisvamin Temple, Awantipora**

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**Awantipora (Vuumtopur in Kashmiri) is a place, about 30 km from Srinagar on Srinagar-Jammu National Highway.** The place is famous not only as an ancient capital city of Avantipora founded by Rajaj Avantivarman, but also for its two imposing temples, now in ruins, built by him. The ruins of temples constructed by Lalitaditya, the Brahmin emperor of Kashmir, and King Avantivarman are located in Awantipora. The temples are located at 33°55'24"N 75°00'46"E 33.9232602°N 75.012846°E 33.9232602; 75.012846 and 33°55'41"N 75°00'16"E 33.9279606°N 75.0045311°E 33.9279606; 75.0045311.



**Main Entrance**

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This is an historic temple built by Awanti Warman from whom the place got its name as Awantipora. The place is usually misrecognized by the people saying Pandavas place because the material used in building this place is usually panadava stones. That's why people misrecognize it. But all its history is written inside it. It is said that this temple has gone almost 20 feet deep under the earth and that only its top side is visible.



One of these temples, Avantisvamin, a small one, was dedicated to Lord Vishnu, before Avantivarman's accession to the throne and the second one, Avantesvara, a larger one, to Lord Shiva, after his accession to the throne. The original grandeur of these great temples has been lost and all that remains now are the architectural fragments strewn at their places of origin on the left side of Srinagar-Jammu road. Avantisvamin comes just before Awantipora on the bank of Vitasta and Avantesvara a few hundred metres away at village Jaubror, in Awantipora proper. Another ancient temple built by Avantisvamin was Sheer Mutt, located 6 km from Awantipora. Avantisvamin, one of the better preserved temples of the two, has an edifice, which comprised a colonnaded per style enclosing a paved courtyard 174 feet by 148 feet, in the centre of which is the main shrine, built on a double base with four small shrines at four corners. The centre shrine is built on double bases, the only decoration of which is a torus molding a cyma recta cornice. The base is intact, but the sanctum, 33 feet square externally, has almost disappeared. Avantesvara is situated in

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**Base of the Main Temple**

courtyard columns, but without any recesses behind. The gateway is in the middle of the wall and is divided into two chambers by a cross wall. The base on which the shrine in the centre of the courtyard stands is 57 feet and 10 feet high with stairs, 28 feet wide, on all the four sides, supported on either side by flank wall, 17 feet in length. The remains of these two temples represent finest examples of architecture of the times. One can see the gateways, standing in both the temples, the colonnade of the smaller temple and the semi-attached pillars of the arched recesses with elaborate carvings. Sikander Butshikan destroyed these magnificent temples. According to Lawrence, the complete ruin of Avantipora temples could have been affected by use of gunpowder by bigoted Sikander, whose idol breaking zeal procured him the title of But-Shikan or "Iconoclast".

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*Image Gallery:* [http://koausa.org/gallery/categories.php?cat\\_id=214](http://koausa.org/gallery/categories.php?cat_id=214)

## Manasbal Temple



**Manasbal is situated in the North of Srinagar and is about 30 km from Srinagar on Srinagar Bandipur road.** Manasbal is famous not only for Manasbal Lake but also for a small ancient Shiva Temple situated on the North East side of the lake.

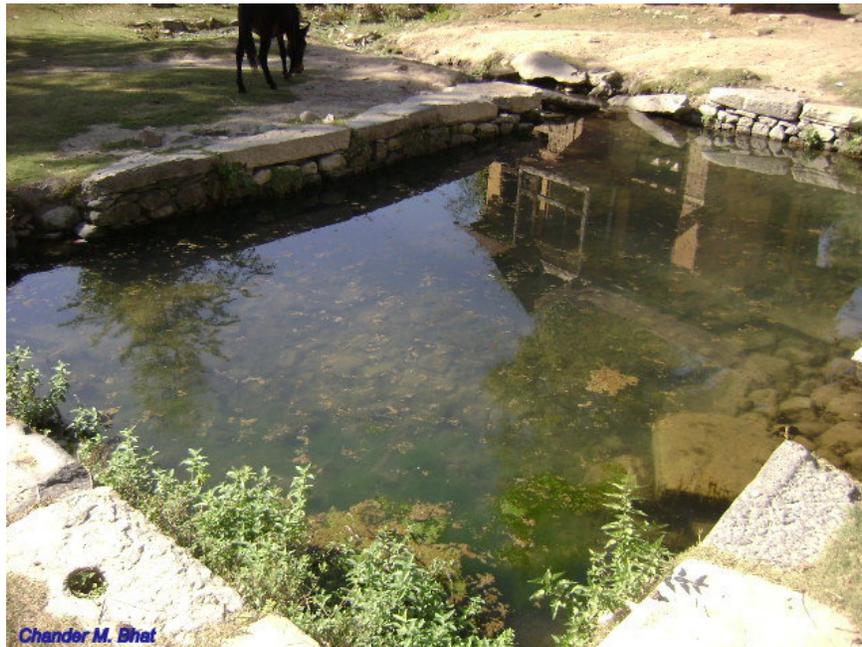
Nilmat Purana records, that there is an old archeological temple, on the banks of Manasbal lake near Kondball. The temple is made of large lime stone slabs. It stands near a spring, but this temple has been looked after well. At present the lower portion of the temple is submerged in water and very small part of the structure of its two pyramidal roofs is visible. The cornice of the lower roof and the horizontal band which divides it from the upper story, are decorated with series of dentils and metopes. Only the upper part of the pediment of the entrance is visible.

The temple is 6 feet square and has a two pyramidal roof and a main door. According to Pandit R.C. Kak, "The cornice of the lower roof, and the horizontal band which divides it from the upper storey, are decorated with series of dentils and metopes. Only the upper part of the pediment of the entrance is visible. It faces west".

## **Paapharan Nag**

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**The Shrine is located in the erstwhile Khowurpur Pargana in Sailia village in Anantnag.** The holy spring is the sacred Pap Haran Shrine of Kashmiri Pandits, located at Salia-Karkoot Nag road, half a km from village Sailia. The Shrine has a temple, a spring about 15 feet by 12 feet in size and some landed property. On the upper side of the sacred spring there is a canal known as 'Shah Kul'. It is said that this canal has been constructed by Zan-Ul-Abdin in 14<sup>th</sup> century.



**Paapharan Nag - place of liberation from all sins**

Village Salia was well dominated by Kashmiri Pandits before the unfortunate exodus, 93 Kashmiri Pandit families were residing over here. Razdans of this village were well off and were owners of vast landed property. At present there is no Pandit family in the said village. This village is surrounded by Seer Kanilgund, Chandrigam, Brar and Khayar villages. Famous shrine Ashmuqam is 2.5 km away from this village and the village has its own history dated back to the period of *Satisar*.

Pap Haran Nag has its origin to the era of *Pandivas*. It is held that an *Ashwameed Yaga* was to be performed by the Maharaja of *Inderpretha* State and learned Brahmins were required to be summoned for reciting of mantras and puja. In this regard they deputed legendary Bhimsen to Kashmir valley for inviting the learned Kashmiri Pandits for the said purpose. On reaching village Sailia, Bhimsen was tired and hungry. He saw a mud hut near the village and entered it. To his surprise, he saw an old woman wailing and weeping inside

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the hut. He enquired about the reason of desperation. The old woman told him that there is a demon living in a cave near the village and he has perpetuated a reign of terror in the area. He would take one person each day as his diet. The day of arrival of Bhimsen was the day when the poor lady's son had to be taken by the demon for his diet. Bhimsen consoled the lady and assured her about the safety of her dear son. He offered himself to be presented to the demon and asked the old lady to prepare food for the demon. He reached the cave on the assigned day where the demon was living. Demon came out to receive the person and the food. Legendary Bhimsen fought with the demon and killed him. Whole village was relieved of the terror unleashed by the demon.



**Present view of Dharamshala at Paapharan Nag -  
place of rest waiting for a doom**

While assigning the task of bringing the learned Kashmiri Pandits for the *Yagna*, Bhimsen was asked not to do any sin during the course of journey. Bhimsen started to repent and in the melee he went into a sleep in the open ground. A divine voice came from the sky directing him to have a bath in a spring which was to emerge at the place he was sleeping. Next day a beautiful spring emerged at the said place and Bhimsen took a bath in the spring and thus was relieved of the sin which was travelling in his mind. Thereafter Bhimsen took the learnt Kashmir Pandit Brahmins to *Inderprastha*.

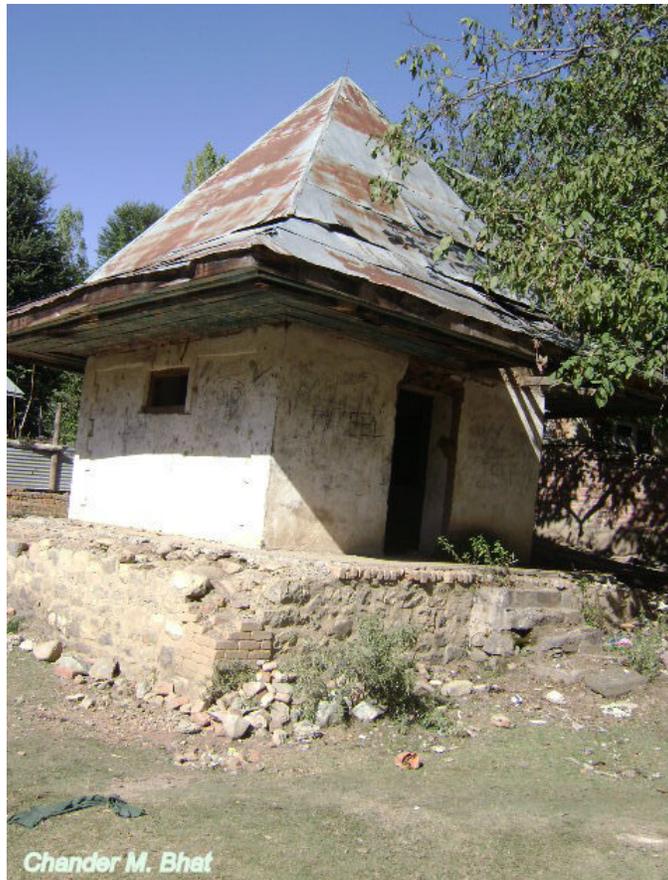
The day of emerging of the holy spring was *Anant Chaturdashi* and the day is celebrated by all the Kashmiri Pandits especially the locals by performing

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*Yagna* and *puja* at this shrine besides having a holy dip in the sacred spring. From that day *Ashud Shakulapakch Chaturdashi* is celebrated by a number of Kashmiri Pandits at Pap Haran Nag shrine. It is said that the King of Kashmir Maharana Pratap Singh also used to visit this shrine once in a year during his regime for a dip in the holy spring.

It has been observed that a shadow of green colour would always appear in this sacred spring which was an indication that another spring is hidden near it as *Gupt Ganga*. It is said that an old lion was visiting this holy spring on every Thursday during the night. There was a white coloured *Shivling* in the middle of this spring which was not visible to the lay man but the same was noticed by the elevated souls only. The spring is attractive at every hour, in every season. Whosoever sits in its side in a devotional prayer gets entranced and spiritually transformed. There was a Chinar tree and some walnut trees in the complex of this shrine but the same are missing at present. A boundary wall of the shrine complex was constructed by the locals in the year 1968. No boundary wall exists at present.



**Shiv Temple at Paapharan Nag.**  
**Time and tide destroy everything in their way.**

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In dark nights, under the shade of the Chinar, the sacred places present an atmosphere where one becomes one with God. And in moonlit nights, devotees experienced something mystic all over in the shrine of Pap Haran Nag.

Washing of clothes, utensils etc was strictly prohibited in the said spring. It is said that once a Muslim lady tried to wash her utensils and clothes in the spring and despite being warned by one Pandit Shivji Koul, she continued with the work. Resultantly she had her house gutted in a fire accident and nothing remained for her survival.

Swami Heam Raj Ji practiced sadhana at this place for 18 long years [13 years at Kaarkut Nag and 5 years at Pap Haran Nag] and thereafter he was directed by Mata Jawalaji [in a dream] to come to Khrew and perform his sadhana over there [after the exodus he shifted to Sudhmahadev near Chenani, Udhampur]. The place earned recognition for being the place of celebration of Deepavali, Janamashtami, Ramnavmi and Shivratri. On Janam Ashtami a big procession was taken out from this Shrine by the Pandits of Seer Kanil Gund, Sligam, Loketpur, Ganeshpur, Khaya, Panzmulla and Chandrigam.

After mass exodus of Pandits from the valley, the shrine has remained without any care and started to wither from its pristine glory. The Pap Haran Nag has its banks broken and water is aimlessly coming out from the spring without any proper outlet. Simultaneously the condition of the Shiva Temple in the near by has also brought into shambles. Even state authorities have turned a blind eye towards its plight. The land of 7 kanals is now reduced to only 2 kanals by illegal encroachment.

Dharamshala of this shrine is also in a pathetic condition as hooligans have desecrated and vandalized it. The land around the Pap Haran Nag has become a grazing ground for the stray cattle.

The shrine which was once a centre of attraction for devoted Kashmiri Pandits has now become a place with a pathetic look.

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2. *Place Names in Kashmir* by B.K. Raina and S.L. Sadhu, published by Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Mumbai and Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, New Delhi
3. Interview dated 18<sup>th</sup> April 2010 with Sh. Kenwal Krishan Razdan, resident of Village Sailia presently residing at Bantlab, Jammu

*Image Gallery:* [http://koausa.org/gallery/categories.php?cat\\_id=222](http://koausa.org/gallery/categories.php?cat_id=222)

## Vichar Nag Temple

### *The Seat of Discussion and Thought*

**“Destroyed is my delusion as I have gained my knowledge through thy grace, “O” Krishana. I am now freed from all doubts. I will act according to my word; promised Arjuna after listening to wonderful recitals from Yogeshwar.”** This thought or Vichar of Kesva transformed a non act into decisive action. The recitals of this sacred thought are now blood in the veins of Sanatan Dharma.



**Shiva watching the remains of the Eternal Spring**

Beating the dreams of thought in the heart of the land of Kashyapa, the blissful Vichar Nag gained popularity due to, it, being the seat of discussion and presentation of thought for learned Kashmiri ethos for settlement of disputes of Panchang, Mahurats and religious reformations.

Vichar Nag is situated on Srinagar-Leh highway at a distance about 9 km from commercial centre of Kashmir, Lal Chowk. On Chaitra Amavasiya, the last day of Kashmiri calendar, a festival is celebrated at this place. Legendary Shri Bhat, the bane of transformation of Sultan Zainulabidin ‘Badshah’ hailed from this area.

Vichar Nag is in the heartland of Naushara locality of outer Srinagar. Famous Anchar Lake is adjacent to this monumental pride of ancient Kashmir. Vichar Nag has also a historical place on its east known as Awanta Bhawan dating its

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origin to king Meghwahana and this place finds its traces in Kalhan Pandits Rajtarangni as built by Meghwahans wife Queen Amrita Prabha. Vichar Nag is famous for its spring and two age old Shiva temples. One temple is made of chisled and dressed devri stones. There is a necklace of springs but the locket is the big spring which is a centre of attraction and sanctity. The spring has a length of 430 feet and breadth of 35 feet. Big sized 'Devri' stones have been used for construction of stairs to the spring on West and South side. There is no access on north and east side probably to face the morning glory of the Sun.



**My heart is bleeding seeing the people ignoring me**

The spring has a boundary walling of stones and the images of some Devi, Devtas are inscribed on them. In the middle of the spring there is a stone cylinder of about 3 feet height and a Shivalingam is resting on it. On one corner, the water gushes out from a small outlet and fills the other springs. From there the water comes out in the shape of a small brook and joins the outlet brook of 'Mukhta Pukhri' spring. After covering a sizeable distance it flows into Lake Anchar.

The spring water contains different varieties of fish. The water turns ice cold in summer and lukewarm in winter. It is held that this spring changes its colour from time to time and images of any blackish colour are held as most inauspicious.

In the vicinity of Vichar Nag, there are many springs and water of some of the springs has clinical value as it is useful in treatment of some skin diseases. Vichar Nag had a number of willow trees in its surrounding and now only few

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of them can be traced. Even Kalhan Pandit had mentioned existence of walnut trees in Vichar Nag and mentioned about the simplicity of Kashmiri Pandits living in and around this temple.

Vichar Nag was seat of thought and Kashmiri Brahmins used to discuss Panchang over here. It is believed that one learned Kashmiri Brahmin Sh. Vasdev's 'almnac' was once held as incorrect by some other Brahmins. After discussion at this place, the work of Sh. Vasdev Pandit was found correct.

On Chaitra Amavasiya, the last day of Kashmiri calendar, a festival is celebrated at this place. On this day devotees take a bath in the holy spring and there after performed puja in the Shiva Temple known as 'Vichar Saheb'. It is believed that 4th Buddhist council, which was held in Kashmir also, was held at Vichar Nag. Vichar Nag was a transit spot for pilgrims of Kshir Bhawani, Tullamulla and Gangabal as scarce transport facilities did not allow continuous journey.

Before the displacement of Kashmiri Pandits from the valley, the management of this holy shrine was in the hands of trust Asthapan Vichar Nag.

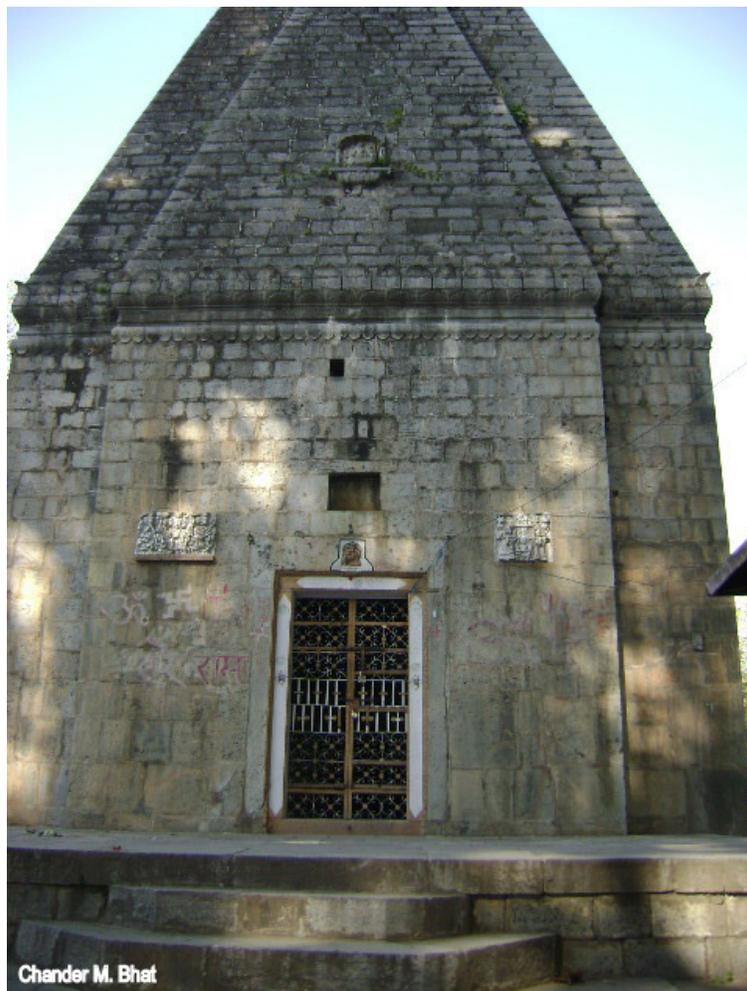
Would now some body come and see from the erstwhile managers that the Vichar Nag spring is now an abode of water plants with a green top rest hiding clear crystal water and Vichar Saheb seeing dogs; resting in his place, where he used to see Dhoop, Agarbatics, Bel leaves and flower petals from devotee Kashmir's, would the trust or Government authorities wake up and see Dharmshalla with hallowed doors and windows? Would any body from authority raise his hand and bring back the glory and legacy of Vichar Nag? Hey if we don't care, we will loose this great inheritance to encroachment and time. Remember Vichar Nag was a place where time was decided and now time should not be allowed to decide it.

*Image Gallery:* [http://koausa.org/gallery/categories.php?cat\\_id=230](http://koausa.org/gallery/categories.php?cat_id=230)

## Vijeshwer Temple, Bijbehara

### *An Ancient Religious Place*

**Bijbehara town is situated on the banks of the Vitasta (Jhelum) with the Srinagar-Jammu highway passing through it, some 8 km from Anantnag enroute Srinagar.** Vitasta passes the ancient *tirthas* of *Vijayesvara* (Bijbehara) and *Cakradhara* (Chakdhar); both these temples were ravaged and destroyed by Sikandar Butshikan. Bijbehara was an ancient seat of learning and in ancient times there was a University where learners flocked to satiate their thirst for learning and scholarship. The dome of the temple at Bijbehara was so high that its shadow was believed to be fall up to Mattan Vodur and Awantipura.



**Front View of the main temple**

It is said to have been founded by King Vijaya (K.E. 2986-94), who was a local nobleman, around the shrine of Vijayeshvara. The shrine however, existed long

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before, as Ashoka, who predated Vijaya, had bould a stone enclosure around it and built two Asokesvara temples within the same. Being on the way to Mattan, the shrine of the Sun-god, Shri Amarnath Cave and to several passes leading across the Pir Panchal to the plains, the town attracted many, including leaders of troops who caused suffering. Kalasa (1063-89 AD.) set fire to the residence of his father Ananta who had retired to Vijayesvara.

The town, says Raj Tarangni, was reduced to ashes. There was considerable military activity in Vijayesvara in Kalhana's own time. The present temple was built by Maharaja Gulab Singh using stones from the ruins of the ancient shrine of Vijayeshwari.

The shrine, dedicated to the god of victory, is known as vijayesvara, and the area around it as Vijaesvarksetra. The Kashmiri name Vejbror is derived from Vijayabhataraka (the suffix bhataraka meaning 'god'). Bhataraka has been contracted to bror, as in Bhatarakanadvala (Kashmiri Brarinambal). Vijibror has become Bijbehara for official records.<sup>1</sup>



**Sanctum Sanctorum**

There is a mention of this place in Nilmatpurana also as under:

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

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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 gush forth near him from Mount Himvat for the purpose of his sacrifice. After completing his worship, the sage wishes 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; 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 Abheya, 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 Gnaga would manifest itself in this shape only for 10 days each month, flowing for the remainder period both 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 every 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. Having been worshipped by him on the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> he 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 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> of bright fortnight of Chaitra. Eversince the Goddess has been worshipped at the Gangodbheda Tirtha on the 8<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> day 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. A miraculous image of Yama, called Aujas set up for the Rishi at the same place, is also referred to.<sup>2</sup>

There are other shrines in Bijbehara town as Zaya Mata and Vezja Mata, both the shrines are on the hillock, on the right side of national highway. The temple of Vezya Devi was damaged in the year 1947 and at present there are no remains of the temple. The Shrine of Mata Zaya Devi was ransacked during the communal riots of 1986 but the then governor of J & K state restored the murties in this temple also along with the other two temples viz old Vijeshwar temple & New Vijeshwer temple which too were looted and ransacked. One Kah Kah Pal used to be in the lawns of new Vijeshwer temple but the same is missing.

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*Image Gallery:* [http://koausa.org/gallery/categories.php?cat\\_id=231](http://koausa.org/gallery/categories.php?cat_id=231)

## **Naranthal**

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**Naranthal temple spread over an area of about 3 kanals of land is located on old Muzzafarabad road at a distance of about 3 km from Baramulla in an isolated place at the foothills of Gosain Teing on the right bank of Vitasta, is an ancient temple, whose reference is found in Nilamata Puran.** This ancient temple stands in a small tank. The temple is about 14 feet square and has 3 feet wide arched entrance on the eastern side. The interior is a square of 7 feet and is 10 feet high. The superstructure of the shrine is above ground and is built of plan blocks of slate stone. Near this temple is a big spring. Only the superstructure is above the ground. The topmost tone of the roof has a circular mortice in the centre, which was originally intended to hold the finial, which crowned the apex of the pyramid. The second layer from the top is formed of single slate slab. This temple is probably of the late medieval era, not later than the twelfth century AD and perhaps much later.



## **Fatehgarh Temple**

**Fatehgarh temple is situated at Village Fatehgarh some 2 km to the South of village Sheeri and 7 km from Baramulla.** This temple stands in the middle of the main village Fatehgarh. This temple is under the management of Archaeological Survey of India. The compound of the temple is 47 feet square. The temple is made of black stones, some of which measure 12 feet in length and 4 feet in height. The interior area of main temple is 29 feet square. Greater part of cella was occupied by a massive platform on which was placed the colossal Shivlingam. Two fragments of a water spout are also lying in the sanctum. A Shivlinga, made of brown stone was found during excavation with carving on two sides. The carving on one side is that of Shiva with three heads and on the other a figure representing Bhairava Roop of Shiva.



## Avantesvara Temple, Jawbrari

**Jawbrari is a small village few hundred meters from Awantipora Temple ruins and about 30 km from Srinagar on Srinagar Jammu national highway.** This place is famous not only being an ancient capital city of Awantipora founded by King Avantivamin, but also for two imposing temples, now in ruins, build by him. Avantesvara temple comes just before Awantipora on the right bank of Vitasta. Avantesvara is situated in a courtyard enclosed by a massive wall, the western face of which is adorned externally with a row of fluted columns. The gateway is in the middle of the wall and is divided into two chambers by a wall. The base on which the temple in the centre of the courtyard stands is 57 feet square and 10 feet high, with six stairs, 29 feet wide on all the four sides and 17 feet in length. The remains of this temple represent finest example of architecture of the times. One can see the gateway, the colonnade and the semi attached pillars of the arched recesses with elaborate carving. This temple is presently maintained by Archaeological Survey of India. This temple stands over a land of about 5 kannals.



## Utpal Temple, Kakapora

**Utpal Temple or Utpal Swamin Temple is located on the left bank of Vitasta at Village Kakapora, some 17 km from Srinagar enroute Pulwama Town.** Rajtarangini mentions that place as Utpalpur. In the time of Jonaraja this place was known as Utpalpur. It is believed that Uptal, the grandfather of King Avantivarman, had built this temple. This temple is dedicated to Lord Vishnu. Uptal had also founded a town on his name and it is believed that Utpalpur is the same town.



The square courtyard of this temple is seventy feet and is surrounded by a wall which is un-ornamented and has a small opening from eastern side of the enclosure. Architecture wise this temple has a cell, porches and a chamber, in which was once an image of Lord Vishnu in black stone. The main temple is without a roof and this temple was destroyed by Sikendar Butshikan. Presently this temple is under the control of Archaeological Survey of India.

## Ladouv Temple

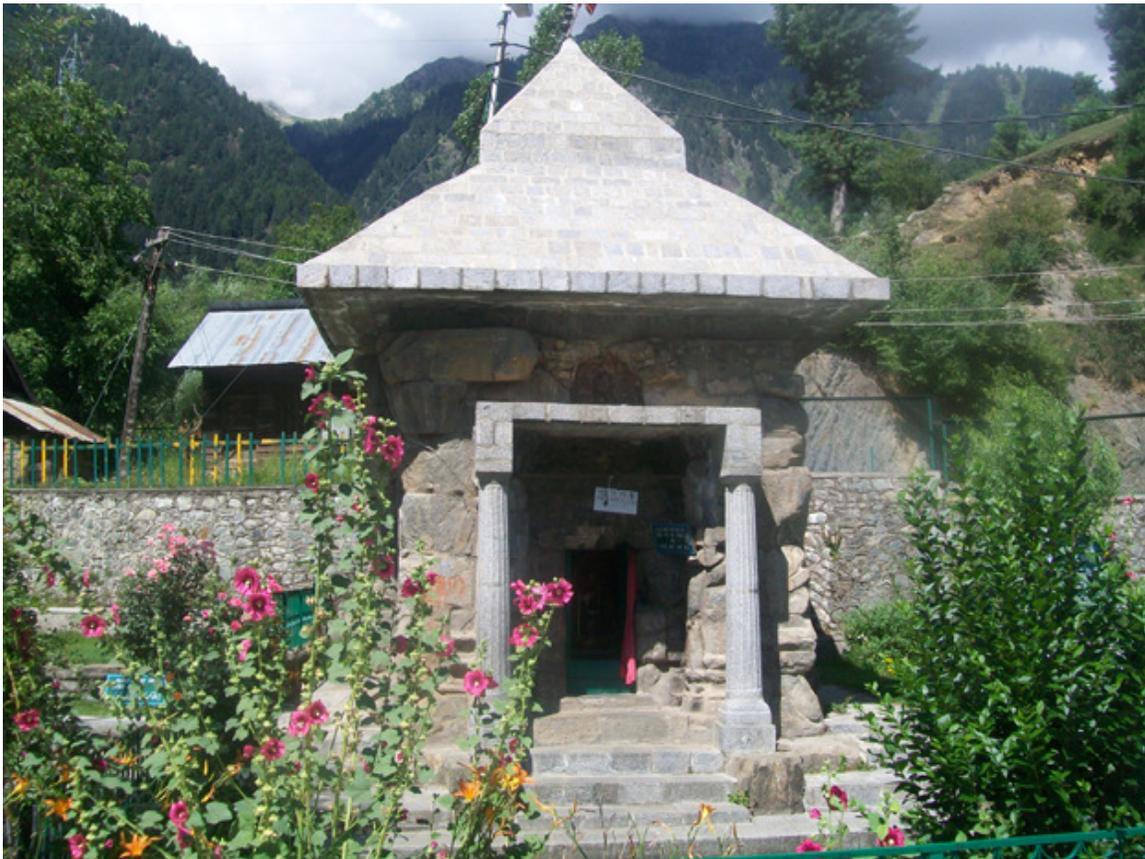
**Village Ladouv is situated at a distance of about 6 km from Pampore town. This place is known for two ancient temples.** The bigger temple is in the middle of a shallow tank, which receives water from a natural spring in its northern corner. The temple is simple in design with a flat roof. The temple is about 24 feet square externally. According to Pandit Ram Chand Kak, “Externally the walls are without decoration, their bareness being only partially relieved by a cornice which consists of three courses of stone adorned with projecting fillets. There is a torus course at the base. The corner pilasters are quite plain, and project only very slightly from the walls. The entrance, which is on the south-west side, is headed by a semicircular, almost horseshoe-shaped, arch surmounted by a single storeyed pediment of very slight projection. Internally the temple is circular of 17 feet and 6 inches”. Inside the spring is a Shivlingam.



The smaller temple is similar to the bigger one. This temple is situated right behind the bigger temple up on the hill. This temple is now part of a house owner in the village. This temple is 6 feet in square and the ceiling consists of three course of overlapping stones.

## Mamleshwar Temple

**Mamaleshwara Temple near Pahalgam is one of the ancient temples of Kashmir that probably dates back to 400 AD.** It is located some 3 km from Pahalgam town. The temple is dedicated to Lord Shiva and stands on the right bank across the Kohaloi stream up towards the mountain in a village called Mam Mal. It is said that when Shiva removed His seat from Thojwara to Mamleshwar, Ganesha who was his doorkeeper did not allow devas to visit Him. Hence the name Mam Mal 'don't go'.



Pahalgam is situated about fifty eight km from Srinagar, at a height of 7500 feet above sea level, at the confluence of Lambodari (Lidder) and Sheshnag streams. Pahalgam “the valley of shepherds” is surrounded by snowy mountains in the lap of dancing streams and deep forests. Pahalgam is also the base camp for famous Amarnath pilgrimage which is being undertaken in the month of July-August every year.

Mam Mal originally Mamlaka village is situated on the south side and is about 3 km from Pahalgam. The road from Pahalgam is metallic and one has to climb a steep to reach the temple. The temple is externally covered with a thick coat

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of lime plaster. The temple is eight square feet internally and has a porch supported on two columns on the front side. The temple is facing towards south west. It may well be that this temple is the name as that of Mamleshwar which the Rajatarangini mentions King Jayasimha (AD 1128-1155) to have adorned with a golden Kalsha. The whole temple is made of sculptured stones. According to Kalhana the Shiva Lingam of the temple is dedicated to Shiva Mamaleshwara. A detail of this temple also forms a part of Amreshvarakalpa. It is said that this temple was adorned with gold during the reign of one of the early kings.

A stone lined tank also forms the part of this temple. The area of the tank is about 12 square feet and is fed by a spring which at times rises under the site of the temple in front of stairs. The water of this spring is crystal clear and is cold during summer and hot in winter.

## **Parihaspur**

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**Parihaspur is situated over an elevation some 2 km from Narbal enroute Baramulla.** Wullar Lake forms the northern portion of these magnificent remains of yester-years.



Lalitadiya Muktapida, a powerful Hindu ruler of Kashmir, built a number of towns with great temples during his regime. Kalhana writes “There is no town or village, no river or lake, no island where the kind did not build a sacred foundation”. It was he who built the famous and elegant temple at Parihaspur. This temple was known as Parihaskesva. Parihaspur was capital city of the great ruler. It is believed that Laltaditya built four Vaisnava temples namely Parihaskesava, Mahavarha, Govardhanadhara and Muktadesva. Besides these four temples he built a Buddhist monastery, a stupa and a grand caitya. There was a common feature for building these huge stone installations i.e. enormous size of the blocks of limestone used, the smoothness of their dressing and above all the firmness of their joints. This was an important centre of Buddhist monastery leaving little of their remains at present. The Caitya that once enshrined a colossal Buddha image and a great stupa is scattered all around.

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There are no traces of these images at present even though the whole area consisting about 50 kanals of land is under the management of Archeological Survey of India. Chinese Buddhist namely Tsiang-Kuin founded a vihara here. He also constructed a lofty stupa and gold images of Buddha. There was a huge statue of Muktakesava made of gold weighing 84,000 tolas (980 tonnes). Tsiang-Kuin also build a statue of Parihasakesava with 3,36,000 tolas (3,919 tonnes) of silver. The great king lalituditya build another colossus of Buddha with 1,01,64,000 tolas (11,855 tonnes) of bronze. Rajtarangani further discloses “that the emperor constructed a separate stone shrine by the side of Shiva at Parihaspura and installed two images of Lord Rama in it which had been unearthed near the village of Suravardhamana”.

## **Pattan Temples**

**Village Pattan is situated on Srinagar Baramulla road at a distance of 28 km from Srinagar.** This place is known for three ancient temples. Two of these ancient temples, presently in ruins are located on the right side of the road and are some 400 meters away from each other. Accordingly to Rajatarangini, King Samkaravarman built one temple known as Shankar Gauresha and his wife Queen Sugandha built other temple known as Sagandhesvara. Both of the temples are dedicated to Lord Shiva.



Each temple has a Cella, porches and a square chamber for lingam. The design of construction reveals a similarity to Mattan Temples. A short distance away from these two temples are some remains of another ancient temple, standing inside a spring, known as Ratnavardhanesa, believed to be built by Ratna Vardhan, King Samkaravarman's minister. According to Pandit R.C. Kak, a

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boali (spring), whose waters are confined in three regular reservoirs, which are connected with each other, were excavated some time back.

## **Payar**

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**Payar village is in the South of Srinagar and is situated at a distance of about 8 km from Pulwama.** This village is famous for an ancient temple, known as Payar Temple.



This temple is dedicated to Lord Vishnu as Surya (the Sun God) and is unique in its beauty and elegance. The temple, situated under the base of a wuder, close to a large stream and surrounded by trees, represents a fine example of architecture. According to Cunningham, this temple was built by King Narendraditya. It is one of the rare architectural designs, of ancient Kashmir and is said to be built during 483 to 490 AD. Some experts also say that this temple has been constructed in 13th century. The temple is 8 feet square, 21 feet high and has opening on all the four sides. The whole temple is composed of only 10 stones only. Four slab stones for four corners, four stones for sculptured tympanums over the doorways and two stones for the pyramid roof.

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The lower stone of the roof is a huge one, about 8 feet by 8 feet by 4 feet in size. A large stone Lingam on an octagonal base occupies the interior. The Sanctum Sanctorum is reached by a single flight of steps on the Eastern side. There are some carvings on the door which have been defaced but apparently represent Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva and Durga. Lawrence further says, "Inside the cupola is radiated so as to represent the sun, and at each corner of the square the space intervening between the angle and the line of the circle is filled up with a gin or attendant, who seems to be sporting at the edge of its rays".

## **Boniyar Temple**

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**Boniyar (Buniar) is located at a distance of 22 km from Baramulla on Baramulla Uri road.** This place is famous for an ancient stone temple, known as Boniyar Temple. This temple was partly damaged by the raiders in the year 1947. Though the exact date of construction of this temple is not known, yet the experts believe to be at least 1400 years old. According to Cunningham, the name Boniyar must have come from Bhawani, name of goddess.



The main temple is quadrangle and measures 145 feet by 120 feet, with a 14 feet square interior and stands on a double base. The outer periphery of the temple is about 27 feet. Around the quadrangle is a wall having 53 cells and the gateway. Each cell measures 7 feet by 4 feet, with space on the inner side, probably kept for images. The roof is hollowed out into a hemispherical dome, of which centre is decorated with an expanded lotus flower. Boniyar temple is the only temple in Kashmir, built in granite stone of whitish colour.

## Dhatta Mandir

**Dhatta Mandir also known as Bandi Temple, now in ruins, is an ancient stone temple, located on the left bank of Vitasta, 3 km from Mohara en-route Uri.** In style it resembles Boniyar Temple. According to Pandit Ram Chand Kak, “The only material difference in style between this temple and the one at Boniyar is that it does not possess any colonnade, and that the cells, which in the former are built of granite as the temple itself, are here built of Kanjur, their plinth only being of limestone”. The temple is 23 feet square in size and is considered an engineering marvel as no material other than the tone had been used for its construction. The exact date of construction of this temple is not known, however it is believed to have been built around 700 A.D. The temple was dedicated to Mother Kali. In the South-East of the temple are remains of two smaller temples, which, like the subsidiary temples in the courtyard, are replica of the main temple.



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Its main shrine faces north-east and is built in green limestone. The jambs of the cells were decorated with half-engaged columns and the remnants of which are seen scattered in the compound of the temple. The main temple has weathered badly and Archaeological Survey of India has made some renovation to the main dome by fixing some iron support to keep it erect. The temple is spread over an area of about 8 kannals of land on the National Highway IA.

## **Wagh Bhat, Village Wagh Hama**

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**Those who believe in austerity of thought and those who believe that specialties are not uncommon, leave an impact to such a personality, for whom there are no scriptures and any written history to make him immortal.** Wagh Bhat belongs to this tiny village some 5 km from Bijbehara. There was no Kashmiri Pandit family in this village at the time mass exodus. Only what remains of his memories is that, oral stories flow from generation to generation.

It is said that Adi Guru Shankaracharya, while on his visit to Kashmir, stayed at Vijeshwara Temple at Bijbehara. He was enquiring about blissful and learned people with whom he could exchange his ideology. Apparently little known Wagh Bhat came to his knowledge by some local resident as being the spiritual personality with magical powers.

He left in search of him and landed at Wag Hama. During his quest he found him ploughing his field and was advised to go to his home at the village. Adi Guru proceeded to his home. What he saw in the corridor [*Voouz* in Kashmiri], felt like a hammer on his pious heart. The wife of the spiritual Wagh Bhat was cleaning small fist locally known as '*Gurran*' in the corridor. Adi Guru was helpless. The house wife asked him to come in and advised him to sit in the room adjacent to the corridor called '*Wuot*' in Kashmiri. She continued cleaning the fist and Adi Guru did not like it because of being a vegetarian.

He waited for Wagh Bhat for an hour or so. As he felt restless, he asked the house wife about the reason of his late coming. On knowing, that Adi Guru was intentional to have a dialogue with Wagh Bhat. She wanted to break the illusion of Adi Guru about Shiva being the supreme with only an unimportant secondary place to Shakti.

She took some water from the pot in which she was cleaning then and threw it on the broom and urn, containing cleaned combine of water and red clay for purification of rooms and corridor [locally known as *Leven Dul*]. Surprising for Adi Guru, was that he experienced flow of *Shalukas* from both these broom and urn kept in a corner of the corridor. He was moved and accepted that Shakti is equally powerful and is part and parcel of Shiva. He had a mission which got completed even before meeting Wagh Bhat.

Hats off to those Kashmiris who have had at their command such spirituality that even Adi Guru Shankaracharya was out smarted.

## Saikh Raza, Village Wanpora (Nahama)



**Wanpora** popularly known as *Thanther Wanpor* is a small village in **Pulwama District**. This village forms the boundary between Pulwama and Badgam District on the West side. Kashmiri Pandits were also residing in the village up to 1990. Saikh Raza was the village diety of the Kashmiri Pandit



families. No Pandit family is presently residing in this village. This village is famous for *Thanther* [blacksmith], a class who were making *loya thaal*, *khias*, *Kanzi Khias*, *dul*, *gada*, *thoor* etc for Kashmiri Pandits. *Wanporek Thanther* was very famous throughout the valley. Before 1990 one could hear the beating of *louy* from the shops situated on the bank of a small stream coming down from Saikh Raza temple.

This temple is situated in the north-

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west of the village at an isolated place surrounded by paddy fields and dense trees. A small stream is also flowing in front of this temple having muddy water [*Gurei Woan in Kashmiri*]. It remains muddy throughout the year.

Sh. Ajay Pandita of village Lajura [Pulwama], who is still residing in his native village along with his family, accompanied me to this temple. It was 8<sup>th</sup> August 2009 at about 3 p.m. After reaching the temple we started cutting the wild shrubs grown inside the burnt temple, collected idols, which were scattered in the premises of the temple, arranged them near the trunk of the Banyan Tree [*Bren in Kashmiri*], applied *sandoor*, fixed three red *jindis* on the bran tree, lighted *doop* etc and went to capture. About 18 village children were watching our actions with rapt attention.



It was learnt that some miscreants set the temple on fire in October 1990. However the land of the temple has not been encroached till date. It has become a barren land now.

*Image Gallery:* [http://koausa.org/gallery/categories.php?cat\\_id=228](http://koausa.org/gallery/categories.php?cat_id=228)

## **Village Sirhama**

### ***The Land of Rising Sun***

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**As the dark paths shed their blindness and Sun sooths to glorify its beauty, the morning dew which enlightens the face of Sun and harmonizes the veils of life.** A first glimpse of such tranquility is felt in shrine place of Suryahama.

Suryahama is what we presently know as Sirhama in the Tehsil of Bijbehara. It is 10 km away from Tehsil headquarter. Morning glory of the rising sun at this place can overwhelm and inspire the poetical insanity. Morning glory of the rising sun at this place can be felt any where in area and can inspire any poetical collection in the hearts of those who value the beauties of nature.

Sirhama earned its name from the area, being the seat of Surya Shrine. This is probably that sun scatters its yeast first time in this area in its morning kiss. An idol resembling the morning sun with a baby smile stands to be the prime attraction of this shrine. The well circled idol of Devri stone was placed at the forehead of a little spring facing the morning Sun. Small drops of water from the resting wall of spring kept the idol wet. This place is also known as Gangbal. Muslims of the area also revere this shrine. However the era of militancy also fomented insanity among those who were otherwise pale at the sight of madness. The shrine is on West side of the village in the raving type little valley. Forced conversions were resorted to in this village in the times of Butshikan and Mughals. People were using to bury big earthen posts in the earth to keep the food grains and valuables away from the heartless agents of the rulers. Even valuable treasures of antique idols etc were buried under earth to save them from being desecrated by agents of Afgan rulers and Mughals. Whenever the chest of mother earth in and around Sirhama is opened for construction or other purpose, the glimpses of helplessness of those meek Kashmiri Pandits come to the fore. What a pathetic life they may have had? God! Help their souls now!

Sirhama an apple rich village of Anantnag district nurtures an affluent population. The village is divided into two segments, *Hergam* and *Bongam* and the principal divider. Sirhama has principal villages like shrine place Khiram on north-east, *Mahind* on South and Shaligam on West. There is a mountainous range (part of *Ashdhara*) which separates Tral from it and has an average height of 3000 to 4000 feet. Sirhama had a thick forest belt in the adjacent hill. Unfortunately same was destroyed by greedy and selfish people. Maharaja Hari Singh was a regular visitor to this hill station for hunting and preying wild fowls for his supper. The fowls usually took refuge in thick forests. The advisors came up with an idea of deforestation to track the fowls easily.

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Unsuspected Raja allowed it and the whole hill were cleared of thick forests and if anything remained untouched, the locals enjoyed that booty.

There is a Shiva Temple in this village close to the mohalla where Pandits resided. The temple is under a Chinar tree. In the background of the temple there is a Razabal and some idols of Vishnu and other deities were kept inside the trunk of an old tree. These idols were in Devri stones carved like mummy type conical images.

24 house holds were in Sirhama belonging to Kashmiri Pandits. All Pandits were affluent in education and economic prosperity. Only four families held back after mass exodus braving the odds of nineties.

Prior to migration, each family had their own lands and orchards and were fully self reliant. The renowned Tab Bhat family of Sirhama had a leading role to play in the affairs of the village. From implementation of justice to the deaths or births, the family had a role to play for both Muslims and Hindus. Be it legendary Sh. Gopinath Bhat who administered justice by holding regular adalats to decide the disputes among the people or the other namely Hakim Shambo Nath Bhat whose nursing touch is fresh in the memories of elderly people even today. None has forgotten benevolence, mark of welfare and sacrifices of great Pandit Sham Lal Bhat. He was a great name in the political circles. One Sh. Sarvanand Bhat was a yogi and adopted a Brahmcharyi life throughout. People proceeding for Haj pilgrimage used to keep their valuables with the womenfolk of this family before proceeding for the pilgrimage. The foundation stone of Khiram Muslim shrine was laid by Pt. Gopi Nath Bhat. Late Pandit Taba Bhat was a great friend of Maharaja Ranbir Singh and Maharaja Hari Singh.

A drive to this village is paradise along a mountainous path with rich natural scenery. There are number of springs in Sirhama and notable among it is sweet and digestive spring water of Koot Lum. People of Sirhama are primarily orchard owners and apple is the main source of earning. Literacy rate is around eighty percent. Dadi canal [Dadi Koul] flows along the basement of hills and provides irrigation facilities to the village.

This village has had its share of misfortunes. It is said that there was a great spring coming out of the hills of Sirhama. This spring was irrigating a large area of the village. The agents of Afgan rulers used to collect a portion of product as tax for the water irrigating the lands. A Moulvi is said to have been so heartless that even in failure of crops he used to terrorize people for payment of taxes. Once he got nothing from the village and thus ordered blocking of the spring. The spring was permanently blocked leaving no trace of it. One can easily hear the sounds of water fall inside the hill even today.

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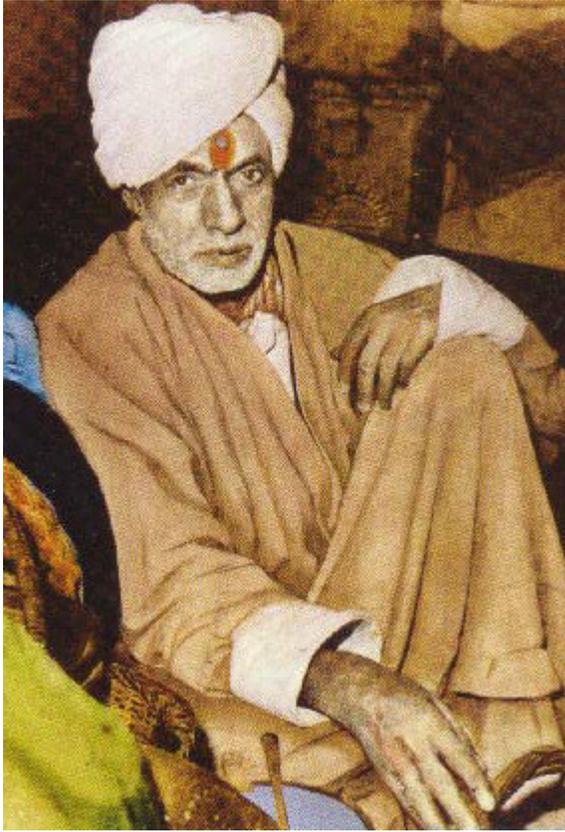
Another incident of misfortune took place in the year 1948 when a stray group of tribal intruders came to this village to unleash terror and loot Kashmiri Pandits. These ambitious marauders tried to unleash terror by lining a group of Kashmiri Pandits and shot them at point blank range on the day prior to Eid. Late Sh. Sat Lal Bhat was first to get martyrdom and two others Sh. Raghav Bhat and Sh. Tara Chand were injured. They took away ornaments and jewellery from womenfolk. Pandit Sham Lal Bhat and other family members took refuge in thick bushes while Pandit Gopi Nath Bhat and Pandit Shambo Nath Bhat took horses and proceeded to Bijbehara and Anantnag to inform Police and then federal minister Mirza Mohd Afzal Beg. The reinforcements of Police reached Sirhama on the other day. During the night the intruders looked up for Kashmiri Pandits as their target. A brave Muslim namely Sh. Gh. Qadir Rather decided to disarm the intruders and save Pandits. He with the help of some local Muslims prepared a dinner for the looters so that they can be disarmed. As he approached with a lantern in his hand near the intruders they shot at him and killed him. Salutes to his martyrdom! On the next day the marauders proceeded to Khiram for further activities. A pal gloom descended on the village on the day of Eid.

An earthquake of magnitude of over 7 rattled the village during gone by days and brought big blocks of stones from adjacent hill. A big block of stone even toady is named as Bunil Pal. Village Sirhama has variety of wild life in hills. The village is rich with farm animals besides horses and donkeys. It was Cinematographer cum Director Sivam who filmed his venture 'Tahaan' in village Sirhama by starring a beautiful donkey in this film. The film was acclaimed for its quality and scenery.

Sirhama in fact looks like a necklace of green diamonds and pearls when greenery is at its helm best.

Generations may come, generations may go but what will ceaselessly make the paths of history would be the glories of morning Sun on the pearl dew at its own place Suryahama.

## Rediscovering Bhagawanji



**Saints and sages all over the world claim to have had a divine experience, which they say is too rich for words.**

Such God-intoxicated persons are called mystics in the technical sense of the word. As William James has rightly pointed out, ineffability is one of the main characteristics of mystic experience. It has been very aptly said, "The history of a country is, to a great extent, the history of its great men and women....." One of the outstanding figures of 20th century in Kashmir is Bhagawaan Gopinath Ji.

Bhagawaan Gopinath Ji, born at Banamohalla in Kashmir, was such a great soul who sang the glory of the divine in the prime of his youth. He was born on 3rd July 1898 AD in one of the most esteemed Bhan families of the Kashmiri Pandit community. Right from his boyhood he showed some extraordinary signs to do something

extraordinary. As per his biographers this great soul left the worldly attachments at the age of 39 and practiced intense saadhanaa. During this period he was so intensely engaged in saadhanaa that at times he would not eat till days together. As per his biographers, this great soul had passed 8th standard and it was often seen that at times he would quote some English sentences. He could also read Hindi and Sanskrit. He was also well versed in Urdu and Persian. Bhagawaan Ji had also visited different shrines in and around Srinagar and had learnt different Sanskrit verses by heart. He would recite these verses while visiting to different shrines. His daily routine started with morning pooja, which was common in every Kashmiri Pandit home. After taking a cup of tea at 9 a.m. he would continue the pooja and at times it lasted for about 12 to 20 hours. During pooja he would fill his chillum and start smoking.

Bhagawaanji was a born celibate and remained a celibate throughout his life. In advanced years of his life, he performed some miracles and people thronged to visit his holy person. By and by he was known in every nook and corner of Kashmir. It was during the last years of his life that Bhagawaanji was fully discovered and many personalities from outside Kashmir also started to visit

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him.

After the Mahasamadhi of this great soul in the year 1968, a group of persons who were daily visitors of Bhagawaanji at Chandpora (Srinagar) and devoted to him started an Ashrama in the premises of Durga Mandir at Kharyar, Srinagar, which in later years expanded its activities. After the mass exodus of Kashmiri Pandits from Kashmir Valley, one such ashram was established each at Jammu and Delhi. Some biographies of this great soul were published and message of Bhagawaanji spread like incense.

Jagadguru Bhagawaan Gopinath Ji was 'discovered' during the middle of the last century. Today, a century later, there is a call to draw up an agenda for rediscovering Bhagawaanji. Why 'rediscovering'? Did we lose sight of Bhagawaanji somewhere along the hundred-year long route that we have now to discover him again?

No, that certainly is not the case. We did not lose Bhagawaanji, but after discovering him we probably did not, or could not, give much time and energy to getting to know him well enough. The persistent, uneasy feeling that colossal significance haunts one and value of Bhagawaanji's place in the unfolding history of the world is yet to be discovered. Bhagawaan Gopinath Ji is known and yet unknown, understood and yet largely misunderstood, adored and yet not followed.

The attempts to rediscover giant personalities like Bhagawaan Gopinath Ji need to be made from time to time. These personalities seem to grow with time, although it is really our own understanding that grows, reveling greater and deeper meaning. Those who lived during Bhagawaanji's time and knew him at close quarters had, of course, every opportunity to rediscover him.

An attempt needs to be made to draft a possible agenda to rediscover Bhagawaanji today. This possible agenda will be only possible by working for the draft most honestly and accurately, which in other sense is called 'true service' at the feet of Bhagawaan Ji.

There were two brothers, one was married, and other was a bachelor. They owned a farm and shared its produce fifty-fifty. The soil was fertile and they reaped a rich harvest every year. All went well for a few years. Then something extraordinary happened.

The married brother began to wake up with a start from his sleep at night and think, 'it is not fair. My brother isn't married. He needs to save much more for the future than me; a married man with a wife and five kids. I have all the security in the world. But what security has my poor brother? Who will look after him in his old age? My kids will care for me when I am old. My brother's

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need is greater than mine.’ With that the married man would leave his bed, steal over to his brother’s granary and pour there a sackful of his own share of grain.

Now the bachelor brother too began to get these nightly attacks. He would wake up from his sleep and think, ‘It’s too bad that I should accept an equal share of the farm’s produce as my brother who has a family to maintain. I am single and my needs are minimal. He has got to support his wife and children. He deserves a larger share.’ So this brother would get up, take a sackful of grain from his stock and empty it stealthily into his brother’s granary.

Once it so happened that they got out of the bed at the same time and ran into each other, each carries a grain-filled sack on his back!

Years later, when the townsfolk wanted to build a temple (the story of the two brothers, who had passed away, had leaked out by then) they chose the spot where the two brothers had met that night. ‘This is the holiest of all places in this town,’ the elders said, and a temple was constructed there.

This story can serve as a good starting point for our discussion. Yes, service is indeed a holy act and the place where service is done is a holy place. Above all, only a holy person can give true service.

Five point programme needs to be drafted for rediscovering Bhagawaanji, which are discussed as under:

The persons who lived during the Bhagawaanji’s times can work as catalyst in doing the research work on the life and teaching of this great soul of Kashmir. Since majority of these people who were closely associated with Bhagawaanji by one way or the other are scattered all over India, they need to be identified by way of advertising in the Ashrama Patrika or through Koshur Samachar. The feedback from these persons will be based on the questionnaire to be published with the advertisement. This feedback from the persons associated with Bhagawaanji at Kashami will be an authentic material and the same could be published in a bookform. This needs an immediate action, as majority of these people will be in old age. Thus by obtaining the information from these people will help us in recording the material which has not been published till date.

Several factors influence the attempts to assess the achievements and significance of World Teachers. Emotion is one of them. Emotions play a major role in the way devotees and admirers assess the Teacher. An emotional assessment may be music to the ears of those who are on the same wavelength, but it usually leaves others cold. Another factor influencing the assessment of World Teachers is social relevance. Pragmatists assess a

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personality on the basis of its relevance to individuals and society. Such assessments naturally need periodic updating, changing with time. Another factor, which also needs to be updated constantly, is the historical perspective. Formation of study circles in respect of life and teachings of Bhagwaanji among the school going children is another factor, which needs attention. These study circles leaves a permanent impact on the undeveloped brains and they in turn can make their personality in coming years. These study circles can highlight the life and teachings of the great masters in the world and will be a boon in shaping the future of our offspring.

A masterplan should be drafted for starting a research journal on different activities of the Ashram and on the life and teachings of Bhagwaanji. One such attempt has been made by the Delhi Ashram by publishing a bi-monthly journal "Prakash". But the standard of this journal does not suffice the goal as the articles on the history and culture of Kashmir are being published in the said journal. This journal should exclusively be printed on different themes of ashram and Bhagawaanji. One column should be kept exclusively for the research articles contributed by the people who lived in Bhagawaanji's times.

Lastly let me quote Swami Vivekananda, "Perfect sincerity, holiness, gigantic intellect and an all conquering will; let only a handful of men work with these, and the whole world will be revolutionized."

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