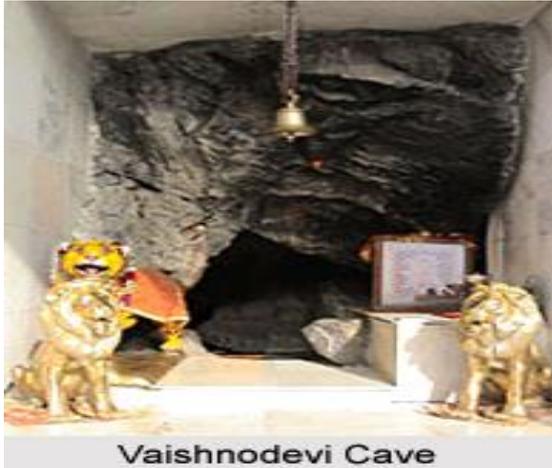


TIRTHAS----JAMMU & KASHMIR



Vaishnodevi Cave
JAMMU



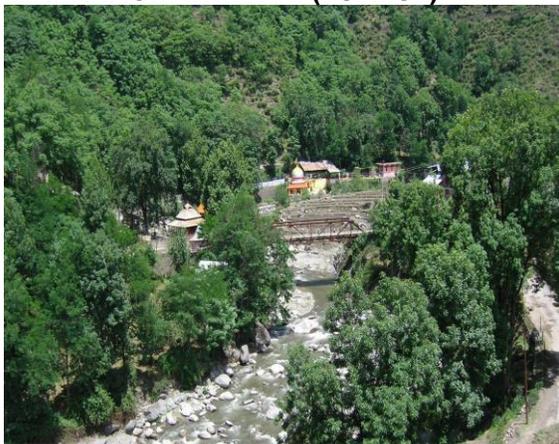
AMRESHWARA (AMARNATH) TIRTHA, KASHMIR



NATURAL SPRING TEMPLE TIRTHA
MAHARAGNI BHAVANI (TULMUL)



NATURAL Sri CHAKRAM, SHRIKA DEVI TIRTHA
HARI PARBAT, KASHMIR



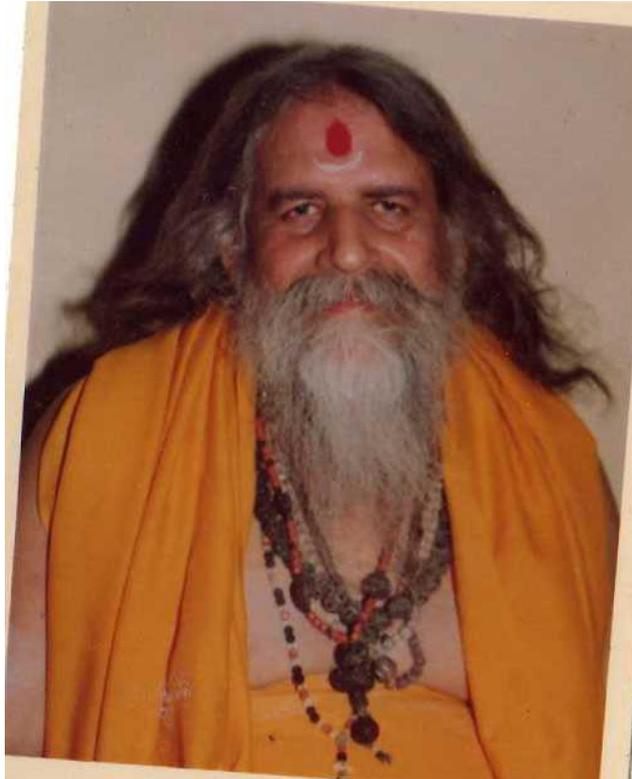
GUPT GANGA TIRTHA, BHADARWAH,



KAILASH KUND TIRTHA, JAMMU

BY
CHAMAN LAL GADOO
VIDYA GAURI PRAKASHAN
DELHI

DEDICATION



**IN THE MEMORY OF MY SPIRITUAL GURU
Dr. SWAMI OMANAND SARASWATI MAHARAJ**



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TIRTHAS OF JAMMU AND KASHMIR

A place of pilgrimage is a *tirtha* or *tirtha-sthana*. A pilgrimage is a *tirtha-yatra* and a pilgrim is a *tirtha-yatri*. The purpose of pilgrimages is to remember the Lord constantly, and therefore the Lord is known as *tirtha-kirti*. Another purpose of going to a place of pilgrimage is to get the chance to glorify the Lord. *Tirtha*, with its many associations, is a word of passage. It refers not to the goal, but to the way, the path one travels. *Tirtha* is a holy place of pilgrimage, especially on or near the bank of a sacred river, or a spring, or a lake, or near the sea. Usually, holy shrines of Hindus are situated, on spots full of natural beauty---on the top of mountains, in forests, in caves, near the sources of rivers, and at secluded places.

In Hindu tradition, any place can become sacred place or abode of God, if proper rites are performed, like Hindu temples and *tirthas*. Those 'certain parts' of earth that give ready access to the heavens are *tirthas*, and those are also, thresholds or doorways, where one's prayers are quickly heard, one's desires readily fulfilled, one's rituals bound to bring abundant blessings. It is precisely because of these doorways which were opened by some *Avatars*, or by some *Rishis* or by some Saints, that they are *tirthas* for Hindus.

A *tirtha* is a spiritual goal. Pilgrimage or *Tirtha-Yatra* is a sacred journey, or going towards what is holy and most sacred. *Tirtha-Yatra* (pilgrimage) is much more than religious sightseeing. It is undertaken as part of the devotional discipline (*Vaidha Bhakti*). It kindles in the heart the flame of *Bhakti*, which then turns into the higher devotion called *Bhava Bhakti* or *Prema Bhakti*.

The Hindu places of pilgrimage are divided into two broad categories; first, the places of pilgrimage, where pilgrimages are held for worship of the various Hindu deities on specific occasions and secondly, the pilgrimages which are dedicated to the rites and rituals performed for the salvation of the ancestors of the pilgrims including, performance of *Shradha*, and the immersion of ashes of the dead. In the Hindu religious culture of India, there is a greater emphasis on the rites and rituals performed for the salvation of their dead ancestors, at different *tirthas*.

Jammu and Kashmir being full of *tirthas*, is also known as *Rishi Bhoomi*. Vaishno Devi Tirtha and Amreshvara (Amarnath)Tirtha are known to Hindus all over the world. A detailed background of these world famous *tirthas* along with a few more is given in the booklet.

VAISHNO DEVI TIRTHA---JAMMU

The cult of the Mother Goddess is as old as humanity. The worship of the Mother Goddess is an integral part of the Sanskrit civilization of India and the broad structure of temple worship which evolved through the Indian history. A striking uniformity exists between the forms of worship in the temples of Jammu and Kashmir and temples in India. It appears that the historical sequence which marked the evolution of temple worship in Jammu and Kashmir is identical to the historical sequence of the temple worship in India. The worship of the Mother, in the form of *Bhavani*, is the basic ground-work of the Hindu temple worship in India. It is definitely the most ancient form of worship in Jammu and Kashmir as well.

The Vaishno Devi shrine is one among the most popular religious shrines of India. Vaishno Devi in Jammu has been designated as the Elder Sister among the six other Devi shrines in a fairly narrow belt of the Siwailiks between the Yamuna and Chenab rivers. Vaishno Devi has become much more popular than the other Six Sisters---Mansa Devi, Chintipurni Devi, Naini Devi, Jvala ji (Jvalamukhi), Kangra (Kangrevali Devi or Vajreshvari) and Chamunda Devi.

Historicity of the Shrine

There is lack of exact chronological evidences in history as to when the Vaishno Devi shrine came into existence. It is an ancient shrine whose reference is found in the Vedas and ancient scriptures. Like other highly venerated shrines of India, Vaishno Devi shrine is an ancient one whose antiquity is pre-Mahabharata. Lord Krishna is believed to have advised Arjuna to go up in the hills of 'Jambu' and seek the blessings of Vaishno Devi before taking up arms in the battle field. 'Jambu' is identified with present day Jammu. Arjuna, while worshipping Vaishno Devi, calls her the highest *Yogi n* who is free from decrepitude and decay, who is the Mother of the 'Vedas and the science of Vedanta' and who is giver of 'victory and personification of victory' itself. The shrine of Vaishno Devi has a long traditional, spiritual and religious history as a long surviving institution of nearly 1,000 years.

The shrine of Vaishno Devi is a manifestation of the Mother Goddess and it lies nestled in a natural cave located in the Trikuta Mountains towering above Katra, about 50 km. from Jammu, at an altitude of 5,200 feet and a distance of approximately 12 kilometers (7.45 miles) from Katra, the base camp of the shrine. The connection with the Vaishno Devi shrine is often indicated by its setting among snow capped mountains, particularly among the three peaks of Trikuta mountain. Enroute the pilgrims cross Ban Ganga, Charan Paduka, Adhkwari and Sanji Chhat before one reaches the holy cave temple. There had been only one tunnel, which had been created by nature, which led into the shrine. This tunnel was used for both entering the holy shrine and for coming out of it. Second tunnel was opened for devotees in the year 1977 and the third tunnel in the year 1998.

The mythological journey that the pilgrims take up the mountain follows the footsteps of Vaishno Devi as she fled up the mountain from the home of the Vaishnavite Brahmin, Sridhar, in Katra. Using her special powers, she had helped provide the food for a *Bhandara*, or feast for mendicants, which she had advised Sridhar would bring him the boon of a son. However, also coming to the feast was Bhairava Nath, the chief disciple of Guru Gorakha Nath, adept of the Shakta sect, who had to be included in the broad invitation. He decided to test the power of Vaishnavi by asking her to serve meat and wine to him, but Vaishnavi told him it was not allowed in a Vaishnava vegetarian household. When she sensed that Bhairava had "evil intentions" towards her, she fled up the mountain. But Bhairava, as he now is called, followed her. The first spot that marks her route is the Bal Ganga, where she struck a rock to bring forth a stream for the monkeys who were now accompanying her, to drink. Further up the mountain she entered a first cave where she remained for "a full nine months, as a child in the womb of her mother." Through his occult powers, Bhairava could see her going up the Trikuta Mountain and he followed her. When Bhairava entered the cave, she struck an opening at the other end of the cave with her trident and went on up the mountain to another cave.

When Bhairava began to enter this next cave, Langur Vir (Hanuman) attempted to restrain him but was unsuccessful. Therefore, Vaishno Devi assumed the form of Maha Kali and cut off the head of Bhairava. She did this with such force that his head was flung up the mountain side. As the head of Bhairava flew up the mountain, its voice recognized her and said, "Oh mother, I was not familiar with this form of your holiness. I have met my fate at your sacred hands But if you don't pardon me, coming generations will hate my name." On listening to the prayers of Bhairav, the mother took pity on him. She gave him a boon and said, "After my worship, people will be worshipping you also. Your soul will be liberated. The devotees will visit your shrine after pilgrimage to my abode. The devotees, who pay obeisance to you, will also get their desires fulfilled."

It is believed that after killing Bhairava Nath, Vaishnavi took the form of a rock and went into eternal meditation. She appeared in Sridhar's dream and showed him the route of the Holy Cave. Sridhar accordingly reached the holy cave temple and started regular *Puja* of Vaishno Devi at the cave. Later, he was blessed with a son.

Topography of the Cave Temple

The entrance to the cave is called Bhavan. At the mouth of the original tunnel to the holy cave is the symbol of Ganesha, on the left hand side of the rock face. Adjacent to it is the symbols of Surya Dev and Chandra Dev. While crawling into the holy cave through the natural tunnel one crosses over the *Dhadh* of Bhairava Nath who was beheaded by the Goddess at the entry point to the holy cave. The *Dhadh* is 14 feet long. After this is the symbol of Hanuman called Langur Vir. The pilgrims have to wade through water beyond the Langur Vir point. 23 feet beyond Langur Vir, on the left upper hand side, on the roof of the cave are the innumerable heads of Shesh Nag. Immediately, below Shesh Nag is the *Havan Kund* of Devi. Adjacent to it are the symbols of *Shankh*, *Chakra*, *Gada* and *Padam*. Higher up, almost touching the ceiling of the cave are the symbols of the five Pandavas, the Sapt Rishi, the thein of the divine cow, Kamdhenu, Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva and Parvati. 3 feet further ahead, on an elevation is *Khamba* that was gripped by the devotee Prahlad. Diagonally below this, at the water level is the *Yantra* with innumerable mystical signs and symbols inscribed on it. 22 feet beyond this point is located the *Sher Ka Panja* symbolizing the lion, which is the mount of Vaishno Devi. The distance from the entry point to the *Sher Ka Panja* is 59 feet, 13 feet beyond this, immediately above, is located the symbol of the primary hood of Shesh Nag which appears to be bearing the weight of the roof of the cave at that point. The length of the cave up to the primary hood of Shesh Nag is 70 feet. Six feet further ahead, on the left hand side, are the symbols of Shankar and Gouri. 13 feet beyond the symbols of Shankar and Gouri are located the holiest of the holy *Pindies* of Maha Kali, Maha Lakshmi, and Maha Saraswati. Within the temple is the deity in the form of a five and half feet tall rock with three *Pindies* or heads. The three manifestations of the Goddesses are represented in '*Pindi*' (Rock) form and are located at the end of a 98 feet long cave. To the right of the holy *Pindies* on the upper side again are the symbols of Ganesh, Surya Dev, Chandra Dev and Goddess Annapurna. Slightly behind the holy *Pindies*, on the right hand side is the

symbol of the seated Sinh Raj. A little ahead of it is seen the full hand of the Goddess in the *Vard Hast* mode granting boons to the world.

Invariably the Goddess is riding on her *vahana* (vehicle), dressed in red wedding attire, with all her jewellery. The image illustrates a benign Goddess virgin, auspiciously dressed as a bride. She wears the victory *Mangala* garland and in her eight arms she holds several weapons symbolic of Vishnu and Shiva . Also included are the accompanying attendants of Hanuman, the Langur Vir carrying a red flag with Garuda on it, and Bal Bhairava (a child Bhairava), carrying a severed head . Immediately opposite the holy *Pindies* is the natural symbol of Lord Pashupati Nath.

Water gushes out of the base of the holy *Pindies* and flows out of the holy Cave. It is known as Charan Ganga and this holy water is collected in small containers by the devotees and taken home. The same water flows to the bathing *ghat* and the devotees take a bath before they have *Darshan* of the holy *Pindies*. Pilgrims from all over the world come to the cave temple to seek the blessings of the Goddess, and crawl through the narrow cave to have *Darshan* of the holy *Pindis*. Vaishno Devi shrine is frequented every year by hundreds and thousands of pilgrims. The worship of the Goddess is formalized through *Aarti* and chanting of various *Mantras* by the *Pujaris*. *Aarti* is performed twice a day, once at sunrise and again at sunset. The Prasad offered by the devotees to Vaishno Devi is called BHAINTE. A typical Bhaint comprises *prasad, fuliyan, chunri, mouli, coconut, pooja samagri* including *itra, bangles and sindoor*.

Vaishno Devi is a unique shrine as it is said to have manifested Herself in all her three forms of Maha Kali, Maha Lakshmi and Maha Saraswati. It is believed that the Goddess in her manifestation of Maha Kali blesses her devotees by giving them strength, as Maha Lakshmi, she blesses her devotees with wealth and prosperity. As Maha Saraswati she blesses her devotees with knowledge and high intellect. To lead a full and meaningful life, a balance has to be struck amongst the three. This balance is extremely difficult to achieve. It needs divine blessing and the belief is that it is only at Vaishno Devi cave temple that such blessings are possible simultaneously from a single source of *Shakti*. This is what makes the holy shrine of Vaishno Devi unique in the world.

The original myth of Vaishno Devi is, of course, a local variant on the story of the Devi Mahatmaya, wherein all the Gods call upon Devi to kill Mahisha, who is destroying all the sacrifices given to them; and they each give her a weapon with which to do that. They cannot use these weapons themselves because the demon has been given the boon, through austerities, of being killed only by a woman. Destroying many others in the Mahisha army, ultimately cutting off his head, is done for all the Gods, by the Devi herself.

There are numerous other myths associated with Vaishno Devi. One of the myths is that of Vaishno Devi meeting Sri Ram as a child. The popular belief is that Devi was born to a childless couple in South India after several years of penance. The couple while praying to Mother Goddess had promised that they would fulfill all the wishes of the child. A baby girl child was born to the childless couple and she was named Trikuta. From a very young age, Trikuta showed high spiritual inclination and was an ardent devotee of Sri Hari Vishnu. When she reached

adulthood, she asked her parents' permission to meditate by the sea. During this period, Sri Ram was searching for Sita and he reached the seashore where Trikuta was meditating. Trikuta told Sri Ram that she had already chosen him as her husband. Sri Ram told her that he was already married and therefore could not marry. Sri Ram could not ignore the austerities undertaken by Trikuta and instructs her to go and dwell in a cave in the Trikuta Mountains and meditate; she will retain the powers she has gained from remaining a virgin, and she will be honoured there. This explains her title, Adikumari, Virgin Forever.

Different myths relate to the Devi's protection of poor peasants who were exploited by kings and landlords. One version of this type is found in "The Story of Baba Jittoo" (Kaul 1980). In this long and complex myth, a poor peasant devotee of Vaishno Devi, Jitmal (Jittoo) had a bountiful crop of grain, due to Vaishno Devi, who had been incarnated as his daughter. The King Vir Singh, upon seeing this abundant crop, demanded half of the harvest instead of the one-fourth as agreed upon, and sent his men to get it. In despair, Jittoo prayed to the Devi, who tells him to leave the world, and dwell with her, and she will deal with the king. Jittoo takes his own life and lied while bleeding on the grain which polluted it. In the conclusion of the myth, King Vir Singh becomes a leper, his property burns, and he and associates go insane. The association with Jittoo is collaborated by another myth which describes the Jhiri Fair (held west of Jammu city). This fair is held at the height of the pilgrimage season to Vaishno Devi in honour of the "memory of Baba Jittoo, who died 500 years ago fighting feudal tyranny." At the fair, descendants of the thieves who robbed Jittoo of his grain are compelled to furnish free food for a feast. Another story has Vaishno Devi protecting a king of Jammu, Maharaja Ranjit Dev, who is her devotee at the time of the reign of Aurangzeb in Delhi. The kingdom of Jammu was a very small hill state at the time; hence the Maharaja was frightened when he was called to Lahore by the regional Mughal governor. According to the story, Maharaja Dev pretended to go hunting, but instead went to seek out Vaishno Devi. He found her "sitting on the top of Trikuta Mount." (Shri Mala Vaishno Devi: 83) He asked for her help. When he went to Lahore, and with the help of Vaishno Devi, the Maharaja was able to survive by cutting a deal with the Mughal governor, Mir Mannu, to keep Jammu from being swallowed up. It is said that, in his gratitude, Ranjit Dev cleaned and established huts and water along the path to Vaishno Devi. Every year he went barefoot to Her cave Temple.

Associated with Vaishno Devi is vegetarianism, an attribute that sets her apart from the other Devis in this region. Even though the shrine to Vaishno Devi relates to a local Goddess, the name carries the advantage of representing the gentle side of Mahadevi, especially the vegetarian aspect of the Goddess. The name Vaishno refers to Vishnu, which in India commonly means vegetarianism and hence greater ritual purity. Although the other Devi temples no longer practice animal sacrifice, but their ritualistic histories are not as "pure" as that of Vaishno Devi. Consequently, this Goddess shrine developed a reputation for maintaining a high degree of ritual purity and for a high level of efficaciousness. In addition, the shrine is regarded as unique because it contains "the holiest of holy *Pindis*, manifesting Devi in her three forms of Maha Kali, Maha Lakshmi, and Maha Saraswati". Again, this is not to deny that other shrines may have certain

distinctive characteristics, but the unsurpassed distinction of combining all three manifestations of the Goddess furnishes a strong incentive for pilgrimage to this particular shrine.

Pilgrimage or *tirth-yatra*, is an important part of the Hindu tradition. Pilgrimage, in its true tradition, is undertaken to meet the Gods, have face-to-face communication with them to attain a deeper state of spirituality and experience a higher vision of truth. Hindus believe *tirthas* to be spiritual fords, the meeting place of heaven and earth, the locations where one crosses the endless cycle of birth, death and rebirth to reach the shore of liberation.

The development of the shrine began in the year 1846 when Maharaja Gulab Singh took Jammu and Kashmir from the British. He established, Dharmarth Trust, and took over several temples and shrines, including Vaishno Devi. The Trust continued under the descendants of Gulab Singh, who, along with their kingship, retained the position of sole hereditary trustees. At the time of independence, Karan Singh became responsible for the operation and administration of the shrine. During this time, several physical changes were made to facilitate the arrival and movement of pilgrims. These included improving and changing the approaching road, installing water and food stations along the road, and cutting a new exit into the side of the mountain to allow pilgrims to leave immediately rather than returning through the tunnel. Traditional Dogra Maharajas' of Jammu and Kashmir provided royal patronage to Dharmarth Trust since its inception. Dogra Maharajas were in control of the trust for performing routine administrative functions by their nominated family priests. This system of the management of the shrine was popularly known as "Baradari System". In reality the groups of Baradaris, collectively, and privately controlled the major administrative and managerial functions of the trust with the blessings of Maharajas.

On 30th August 1986, the governor of Jammu and Kashmir, Shri Jagmohan initiated the Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Act, which was later confirmed by the state legislature. The need to make these changes was cited by Governor Jagmohan because he was appalled at the "material and moral corruption" at the shrine. This act, which changed control of the shrine from the Dharmarth Trust and the hereditary priests to a governing statutory board, resulted into "what appears to be one of the most efficiently run temples in India"

The major indication of growing importance of this sacred shrine is the increased number of pilgrims especially during *Navratras* who visit the cave temple of Vaishno Devi. The annual number of pilgrims has more than tripled and has crossed one crore mark, during the last couple of decades. Certainly this growth far exceeds that to the shrines of her Sisters in the same region.

GUPT GANGA TIRTHA---BHADARWAH (JAMMU)

Bhadarwah is known as 'Chotta Kashmir'. God has bestowed on Bhadarwah unparalleled charm and fragrance. Ancient Bhadarwah was a sovereign and prosperous state. It had its own colorful and flourishing civilization. Its famous cities were Durga Nagar and Udho Nagar which perished under the red hot material of the volcano that erupted on the nearby Kailash Mountain. A new city of Bhadravart

came up, which is presently known as Bhadrot. It is said that a university with capacity of lodging and boarding for about one thousand students existed exactly where present Bhadarwah university campus has been set up. Raja Lakshmi Dev's, dynasty ruled Bhadarwah up to sixteenth generations and then Nagas took over. Historically, Nagas as a race are not serpents, but a totem, a title or a sub-caste named after many animals in Jammu and Kashmir and elsewhere in India. In the epic literature they have been described as the posterity of Rishi Kashyapa and Kadru, one of his wives, and in mythology they have been sketched both as humans as well as snakes. According to Harivamsa Purana, Nagraj Vasuki is the Naga sovereign and immortal Naga, having the largest number of worshippers in India. Nagas were strong worshippers of Shiva and ruled many parts of India. The origin of their ruling dynasty is attributed to Navnagas and there were other prominent ruling Nagas also. Naga dynasty rulers shifted their capital to Bhadarwah proper called Nagar. Bhadarwah became part of Jammu and Kashmir State, under Dogra rule, in 1821AD.

To the east of the town, on the bank of river Neru is an ancient Shiva temple, situated at the mouth of a huge cave. According to Vasuki Puran, when Pandavas performed the *Ashumegh Yajna*, the 'Sham Karan' horse that would graze upon the meadows in the surroundings of holy 'Sonabain' was taken from Sawan the then king of Bhadarwah. It is generally said, that Pandavas during their exile took shelter in Bhadarkashi, presently known as Bhadarwah. One day they disappeared suddenly. It is believed, that they disappeared through this long cave to some unknown place because that was the day their *Agyatvas*, living in hidden position, started.

The temple has a tomb like construction and long stone slabs have been used in it. Here Ganga abruptly falls on the Lingam and then disappears. It is a natural phenomenon. The Shiva-Ling of this temple is of huge size and made of black marble. The dome of the temple is made of stones in a circular shape. A stream of pure water flows from inside of the temple and drops on the Shiva-Ling day and night. Then this water flows to a "*Bawali*" (Pond) where *Sadhus* and devotees take bath. The water of the *Bawali* is cold in summer and warm in winter. Since the stream of water comes into the temple in a mysterious way, the water of this stream is considered as sacred as the water of the Ganga, so it is called Gupt Ganga. Inside the temple, there is a footprint of Bhim, one of Pandav brothers, on a rock. This ancient Shiva temple is greatly revered by Hindus of the state and is a famous historical pilgrimage centre.

KAILASH KUND TIRTH YATRA----BHADARWAH (JAMMU)

A Journey to Eternal Faith - Abode of the mythological serpent God, Lord Vasuki Nag, the sacred natural Kailash Kund, located at 16000ft above sea level, having a circumference of 1.5 miles in Bhadarwah, Jammu, is an enchanted crater lake which remains frozen for a greater part of the year. During late August or early September every year the scenic environs of this hallowed lake come alive to the chants of thousands of devotees who undertake an arduous trek to take a Holy dip in the lake during the annual Kailash Yatra. It is believed to be as holy as the

sacred Mansarover Lake. A dip in the ice-cold waters of Kailash Kund is believed to wash away the sins of the *Yatries* (pilgrims) and make their wishes come true. Legend has it that the lake is also visited by Lord Shiva who described it to Parvati as one of the most important pilgrimages of Northern India in the 'Vasuki Puran'. The *Yatries*, while taking the Holy dip, also worship the Lake, Lord Shiva and Vasuki Nag. Kailash Kund also known as Vasuki Kund is abode of Nagraj.

Every year thousands of pilgrims participate in Kailash *Yatra* which commences on the 14th day after Shraavan Purnima. Main *yatra* starts from Gatha, Bhadarwah. There is a famous temple of Lord Vasuki Nag at village Gatha, believed to be centuries old, about 2064 years back. It is believed to be the home of Lord Vasuki. Every year Kailash *Yatra* in Bhadarwah start from this temple and the Holy Mace of Lord Vasuki Nag along with Chelas and devotees start their journey to this sacred *Yatra* in the month of August or beginning of September. The track from Seoj passes through the spot called as Shank Padar and Ramtund which is known for its religious legends called 'SHAGARAN' (Two stones which exactly resembles the face of Hanuman). Another huge stone contains etch mark and an etched line which are believed to be the spot where the fleeing Vaski Nag' wept while taking rest on the stone. Total distance of pilgrimage is 12 miles. Enroute join a number of *Yatras*, besides *Yatras* from Chamba and Duggan Vasuki temple, which join main *Yatra* at Kailash. Pilgrims keep awake all nights singing *Bhajans*, *Kirtans*, shouting *Jai Ghosh* and dancing to the melodious tune of Dhakku. The pilgrims believe that Lord Vasuki Nag emerges in the shape of snake from middle of the sacred Lake and devotees shower flowers of different kinds in the sacred Lake thus the pilgrims having the sacred *Darshan* of the Vasuki Nag. Thereafter *Yatra* returns back from Kailash Kund. The *Yatra* lasts for 15 days.

AMRESHVARA (AMARNATH) TIRTHA ---KASHMIR

"Listen O Devi, I tell of the Maha-Tirtha Amreshvara, by listening to which alone, one is freed of millions of grave sins." Amreshvara Mahatmaya

Pandit Kalhan, the greatest and earliest historian-poet completed in 1150 AD, his immortal work of 7,844 verses, Rajtarangini-"River of kings", the history of ancient Kashmir, in a detailed manner. According to Rajatarangini the most famous pilgrimage in Kashmir is the cave temple of Amarnath and mentions that King Ram Deva is stated to have imprisoned the debauch King Sukh Deva and to have drowned him in the Lambodheri (Lidder) among the mountains of Amarnath about 1000 BC. It also mentions in Tarang II, Samdimat (Arya Raja) 34BC-17AD, a great devotee of Shiva who rose from the position of a minister to be the king of Kashmir, "used to worship a *Linga* of snow above the forests, during the delightful summers of Kashmir, which is not to be found elsewhere in the world, ," it further states in verse 267 that Shushram Naga (Sheeshnag) is seen to this day (i.e.1148-49AD) by pilgrims proceeding to Amreshvara."

The original name of the *tirtha*, as given in the ancient texts, is Amareshwara, Amarnath being a name given later to it. The earliest reference to Amarnath can be seen in the Nilamata Purana (v.1324), a 6th century Sanskrit text which depicts the religious and cultural life of early Kashmiris and gives Kashmir's own creation myth.

The pilgrimage to the holy cave has been described with full topographical details in the Bhringish Samhita and the Amarnatha Mahatmya, both ancient texts said to have been composed even earlier. As per ancient literature cave temple of Amarnath was worshipped by devotees of Lord Shiva from time immemorial. It is recorded that Himalayan caves have been abode of celestial beings and great Sages used to meditate for hundreds of years in these caves. It is also recorded that the Himalayan mountain range especially the northern range is indeed the first and the sublimes symbol of divinity. "Of the mountains, I am the Himalaya" says Lord Krishna in the Bhagwat Gita. Someone asked Swami Vivekananda, "Why have we so many Gods and Goddesses?" He promptly replied, "Because we have Himalaya." The music of the Himalayan streams brought divine feelings to the Seers. The rushing streams fall like thunder with the sound of *Vyom, Vyom* on the rocks and the flow out in frightening speed with the sound *Hara, Hara*.

Probably Adi Shankara, inspired by snow clad Himalayan peaks and ice Lingam of Shiva at cave temple of Amarnath wrote of Shiva ;

*" Oh, Shiva, Thy body is white, white is Thy smile,
the human skull in Thy hand is white.
Thy axe, Thy bull, Thy earrings, all are white
The Ganga flowing out in foams from your matted locks is white.
The crescent moon on Thy brow is white.
O, all-white Shiva, give us the boon of complete sinless-ness in our lives."*

Swami Vivekananda wrote about Shiva of Amarnath;

*For whom all gloom and darkness have dispersed ,
That radiant light, white beautiful,
As bloom of lotus white is beautiful,
Whose laughter loud sheds Knowledge luminous.*

The worship of the *Linga* according to Vivekananda was originated from the famous hymn in the Atharva-Veda Samhita sung in praise of the Yupa-Stambha which represented the 'Eternal Brahman'. *The fire, the smoke, the ashed, flames, the black-wood and the ox connected with this Vedic sacrifice gave place to the conceptions of brightness of Shiva's body. His tawny matted- hair, His blue throat and the riding on the bull of Shiva and so on---just so. The Yupa-Stambha gave place to the Shiva-Linga and was deified as the high Devahood of Sri Shankara.....In the Linga-Purana the same hymn is expanded in the stories meant to establish the glory of the great Stambha and the superiority of Mahadeva.!"*

On August 2, 1898 Swami Vivekananda had *Darshan* of Amarnath. When he entered the shrine, a profound mystical experience came to him and latter he said, 'Shiva Himself had appeared before him'. He further said; "the ice Lingam was Shiva Himself. It was all worship there. I never enjoyed any religious place so much, so beautiful, so inspiring."

Swami Rama Tirtha, on having a glimpse of the 'Amareshwara Linga' uttered in ecstasy an Urdu couplet, which means;

*"Where ice is bedecked in formless movement,
there stands supreme-consciousness as Amar Linga"*

In ancient scriptures, it is recorded that Maharishi Bhrigu was the first person to sight and identify the cave temple of Sri Amarnath where Lord Shiva had

narrated the secret of *Amartav* to his consort Parvati and got himself transformed into ice Lingam on *Sharavan Purnimashi*. This sacred day falls every year on the night of the full moon in the month of *Sawan* (July – August) on *Shrawan - Purnemashi*, when sun is in Leo, *Simha Rashi* and *Chandrama*, moon in Aquarius *Kumb Rashi*, this yoga makes the Shiva-Lingam *Darshan* very auspicious. A pair of snow pigeons over heard Shiva's discourse and became immortal. Thus Amarnath, the Lord of Immortality and Deathlessness became *Amreshvara*.

As per Amarnath Mahatmya, Parvati, the consort of Shiva, was keen to know in full details the mysteries of life and immortality. Entreating the lord to reveal the mysteries to her, Shiva traversing the tops and ridges of the Himalayas took rest in a cave and disclosed to her all the secrets about life and immortality. Finally Lord transmuted Himself into an icy-lingam.

The cave temple is located in South Kashmir (34.12':75.07') at an altitude 12,720ft about 140 kms from Srinagar. The huge natural cave is about 25 meters high and enough to hold hundreds of devotees where a self-forming '*Ice Lingam*' waxes and wanes with moon. The holy cave is 50' long 25' wide and 15' high approximately. The cave is nature's temple where '*Ice Lingam*' is completely filling the right corner of the cave, the top of the *Lingam* touches the base of the cave. The base of the cave is also covered with ice, like a carpet. Here Shiva is worshipped by nature in the purest way. Shiva is snow-white and pure. *Lingam* is formed by drops of water falling from the top of the cave and two other small '*Ice Lingams*,' are also formed, believed to be the symbols of Goddess Parvati and Lord Ganesha. The dripping that followed from the feet of '*Ice Lingam*' or '*Shiva Lingam*' took form of a stream known as Amuravati.

According to Bhrngish Samhita a person who bathes in the waters of Amuravati and rubs himself with the ashes gets *Moksha*.

Pandit Kalhana describes in verse 267 of Rajatarangni; 'The lake of dazzling witness (resembling) a sea of Milk, which he created (for himself as residence) on a far off mountain, is to present day seen by the people on the pilgrimage to *Amreshvara*. In his Chronicle of Kashmir, a sequel to Kalhana's Rajatarangini, Jonaraja relates that that Sultan Zainu'l-abidin (1420-1470) paid a visit to the sacred tirtha of Amarnath while constructing a canal on the left bank of the river Lidder (vv.1232-1234). The canal is now known as Shah Kol.

In the Fourth Chronicle named Rajavalipataka, which was begun by Prjayabhatta and completed by Shuka, there is a clear and detailed reference to the pilgrimage to the sacred site (v.841, vv. 847-849). According to it, in a reply to Akbar's query about Kashmir Yusuf Khan, the Mughal governor of Kashmir at that time, described among other things the Amarnath Yatra in full detail. His description shows that the not only was the pilgrimage in vogue in Akbar's time – Akbar annexed Kashmir in 1586 – but the phenomenon of waxing and waning of the ice linga was also well known. Amareshwar (Amarnath) was a famous pilgrimage place in the time of the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan also. In his eulogy of Shah Jahan's father-in-law Asif Khan, titled "Asaf Vilas", the famous Sanskrit scholar and aesthete Panditraj Jagannath makes clear mention of Amareshwara (Amarnath) while describing the Mughal garden Nishat laid out by Asif Khan. "The King of gods Indra himself, he says, comes here to pay obeisance to Lord Shiva".

François Bernier was the French physician who accompanied Emperor Aurangzeb to Kashmir in 1663 AD. He has mentioned about cave temple, “a magnificent cave full of wonderful congregations”. Vigne in his book 'Travels in Kashmir, Ladakh and Iskardu' (1842) says; “The ceremony at the cave of Amarnath takes place on the 15th of the month of *Sawan* (28th July)...not only Hindoos of Kashmir but those from Hindoostan of every rank and caste can be seen, collecting together and traveling up the valley of Lider towards the celebrated cave.”

At the behest of Aurangzeb his governor in Kashmir, Iftikhar Khan, subjected the Kashmiri Pandits to the worst ever persecution and torture for their conversion to Islam. Kashmiri Pandits, five hundred in number, under the astute leadership of Kirpa Ram, a known Shaivite Scholar, met at the Holy cave of Amarnath to devise a workable strategy to meet the challenge. One of the Pandits at the Holy cave saw Lord Shiva in a dream directing him to call on Guru Tegh Bahadur (1621-75A.D) at the village of Anandpur Sahib in Punjab. It was from the Holy cave of Amaranth that Kirpa Ram in obedience to the direction of Lord Shiva led the delegation of five hundred Pundits to Guru Tegh Bahadur and rest is history.

“On the night of the 11th day of the bright fortnight of *Sawan* (July-August) all pilgrims assemble at Pahalgam”. Swami Vivekananda describes the on-going pilgrimage as; “The procession of several thousands of pilgrims in far-away cave of Amarnath, nestled in a glacial gorge of the Western Himalayas, through some of the most charming scenery in the world, is fascinating in the extreme. It strikes one with wonderment to observe the quiet and orderly way in which a canvas town springs up in some valley with incredible rapidity at each halting place with its bazaars and broad streets running through the middle and vanishing as quickly at the break of dawn, when the whole army of gay pilgrims are on their march once more for the day. Then again the glow of the countless cooking –fires, the ashes covered *Sadhus* under the canopy of their large *geru* (orange) umbrellas pitched in the ground, sitting and discussing or meditating before their *dhunies* (fire) , the *Sanyasis* of all order in their various garbs, the men and women with children from all parts of the country in their characteristic costumes, and their devout faces, the torches shimmering at night fall, the blowing of conch-shells and horns, the singing of hymns and prayers in chorus, all these and many other romantic sights and experiences of a pilgrimage, which can be met with nowhere outside India, are most impressive and convey to some extent an idea of the overmastering passion of the race for religion. Of the psychological aspect and significance of such pilgrimage, done on foot for days and days, much could be written. Suffice it to say, that it is one of those ancient institutions which have above all, kept the fire of spirituality burning in the hearts of the people. One sees here the very soul of the Hindu nation laid bare in all its innate beauty and sweetness of faith and devotion.”

Pandit Anand Koul, the pioneer of archaeological research in Kashmir, who carried research regarding the *ice-linga* inside the cave of Amarnath, made the following observations; “This *lingam* is not impregnated with any matter, but is composed of simply pure water turned into ice. Nor is it an ice-spring, as some say, for on *Amavas* days the ground in which it stands is found dry. There is, off-course, gypsum in the cave, but it does not form the ingredient of the *ice-lingam*. This *ice-lingam* waxes and wanes with the moon, which has been observed by several

reliable persons who have stayed at Panchtarni, for a full month and visited the cave temple daily. The phenomenon is considered wonderful by not only Indian scientists, but also by some European scientists who must have been aware of the formation of rock-matters.”

According to Amreshvara Mahatmaya some of the important places where pilgrims had to perform ablutions while on pilgrimage were Anantnaga, Mach Bhawan (Mattan) , Ganeshbal (Ganeshpora,6800ft) Mamleshwara (name of Lord Shiva), (Mamal, 7300ft), Nilganga, Chandanwari, Shusshram Naga (Sheshnag),the pilgrims have to cross at Vayujana (Vowjan), from Lidar to Sind valley, then to Panjtarni, and finally to Amuravati.

Nowadays the journey starts from Pahalgam (7500ft). The next halt which is at Chandanwari (8500ft) is 10kms.away. The old name of the place is ‘Sthanuashrama’. ‘Sthanu’ is an epithet of Shiva and literally it means ‘a pollard’. Lord Shiva sat in *samadhi* like a pollard in the lap of Himalaya where *Deodar* grew. From Chandanwari to Pisu Gathi (12200ft) is steep hill of 2kms. and after 7kms is Seshnag (13148ft), the next halting point. The Seshnag Lake is 25 sq.kms.in areas, and is fed by the Kohenhar glacier which looks like hood of a cobra. The milky-water of the lake is seen just 200mts. down in a trough-shaped basin. The mountain around Seshnag is covered with snow and it has seven peaks which resemble the seven heads of mythical Seshnag. From Seshnag to Panchatarni (12230 ft) is about 7kms. In between is 5kms climb, to Maha-Gunas, the highest peak in the whole track. This is the last halting place for pilgrims. From Panchatarni (12729ft) to holy cave is 6kms. Panchatarni is a wide plain among the mountain ranges, where five streams flow side by side. Going across these streams there is the sixth stream in which pilgrims perform *Shradha* of ancestors. Pilgrims start early in morning for the *Darshan* of holy lingam, at the cave temple and return back to Panchtarni, after performing *Puja*. Usually, devotees take bath in Amuravati which flows near the cave temple. Recitation from the Vedas and hymns pertaining to the deities and *Mantra* chanting is made individually and collectively by devotees inside the cave temple. Kashmiri Hindus usually recite during the *yatra* and at cave temple;

*Om Namah Sambhavaya cha, mayo bhavaya cha,
Namah Sankarya cha, mayas karaya cha,
Namah Shivaya cha, Shivtaraya cha. (YAJURVEDA)*

(We offer our salutations to Thee---the giver of Happiness,
We offer our salutations to Thee---the Auspiciousness, and
We offer our salutations to Thee---the bestower of Bliss and still greater Bless!)

The whole Amarnath pilgrimage procession is conducted under the auspices of *Chari Maharaj*. Bringesha Samhita records, that Bringesha Rishi was once approached by the people praying to show them the path to salvation. The Sage advised them to take pilgrimage to cave temple of Amarnath and pray to Shiva Lingam. To ensure safe journey to cave temple, Bringesha Rishi prayed to Lord Shiva, he was graced with Holy mace pair. Ever since this became symbol of protection for the *yatries* and has now taken the form of *Chari- Maharaj*---the holy mace, and leads the annual *yatra*. The *Chari* generally used to leave after performing the *Puja* at Dashnami Akhara (Srinagar) on the 4th day of the bright fortnight of *Sawan*. During Sikh rule in Kashmir ‘*Chhaari Maharaj*’ used to start from

Amritsar, during Dogra rule from Srinagar and now after the exile of Kashmiri Hindus from valley it is from Jammu. The *Mahants* who wield the divine command of holy place carry the two holy maces and when the *Mahant* after the prayers at the cave temple takes his seat a *Sadhu* holding one of the maces stands on his right and other on his left.

The shorter northern route is just about 16 km long, but has a very steep gradient and is quite difficult to climb. It starts from Baltal and passes through Domial, Barari, and Sangam to reach the cave temple. The northern route is along the Amarnath valley and all along the route one can see the river Amuravati, which originates from Amarnath Glacier.

Despite the terrorist activities in Kashmir and their targeting *Yatra*, large number of pilgrims, throng to Holy Cave Temple of Sri Amarnath, year after year.

SHARIKA DEVI TIRTHA (SRINAGAR, KASHMIR)

The Sharika shrine is the abode of Mahashakti--- Divine Mother Goddess Durga. The eighteen-armed Goddess Sharika, *Ashtadushbuja*, is regarded one of the Isht Devi of Kashmiri Hindus. In Tantra Shastra, Para-Shakti is known as Tripurusundri. The sacred shrine of Sharika Devi is situated on Hari Parbat hill, in the heart of Srinagar city. It is one of the oldest *Shakhta* shrines of Kashmir.

A legend is associated with the Hari Parbat shrine. A powerful demon, Jalodabhava lived in the waters over the place where the hill is. The demon harassed and troubled the Rishis. The Rishis prayed to Goddess Parvati to free them from the demon. The Goddess assumed the form of a bird *Myna* called *Haar* in Kashmiri, and dropped a celestial pebble which she was carrying in her beak, at the spot where Jalodabhava the water demon was laying. The pebble grew into a hillock, pinning the demon down forever. The Goddess in grateful memory of deliverance took up her abode at the hill-top and is worshiped as Sharika Bhagwati. The hill is called Hari Parbat --- the hill of Sharika. The legend goes that, the miracle happened on the day of *Ashad Shukla Paksh Navami*, known in Kashmiri language as Har Navam. The Hindus of Kashmir celebrate this day as birthday of Sharika Bhagwati with great reverence and devotion.

In Chakreshwari shrine, at Hari Parbat, Sharika is manifest in the form of Chakreshwari, symbolized by Sri Chakram, which is naturally engraved upon the vertical holy rock, known as *Shilla*, located in the middle of the western face of the Chakreshwari shrine. The *Shilla* is smeared with *Sindhoor*. The Sri Chakram is a symbolic representation of the cosmic union of Lord Shiva and Shakti. It is a famous Yantra. Yantras are represented in two ways either as evolution or dissolution. The Chakras looking downward are the Shakti Chakras. The Shakti Chakras are Five. The Chakras looking upwards are called Shiv Chakras. The Shiva Chakras are Four. A verse from 'Rudra Yamala Tantra' describes Sri Chakram as; "The point, the group of 8 triangles, two groups 10 triangles, the group of 14 triangles, 8 petalled lotus, the 16 petalled lotus, the three circles and the quadrangular ramparts all round constitute the Sri Chakram of the Supreme Mother." In the Yantra (i) the inner group forming the central dimensionless point (Bindu), the primary triangle (Trikona) with its apex downwards and the figure of

eight corners (Astakona) symbolize bliss, Laya or absorption,(ii) the middle group forming the figure of ten angles (Antradasara), another figure of ten angles (Bahirdasara) and the figure of fourteen angles (Catur-dasara) symbolizes mastery over the worlds, preservation or Sthiti and (iii) the outer group consisting of the eight petalled lotus (Asta-dala-padma), the sixteen petalled lotus (Sodasa-dala-padma) and the square field (Bhupura) symbolize extension or Srsti.

The shrine of Chakreshwari is also known as Pradyuman Peeth, Sidh Peeth, Shakti Peeth and Sharika Peeth. Devi Mantra is of seven '*Bijakhsharas*' symbolic of Sharika, seven Sages and seven Lokas. In Tantra Shastra, Udharkosa is a unique Grantha. The first half includes 25 Patalas (paragraphs) and has been composed in the form of Adhyayas (chapters) dealing mainly with Bhija-mantras of Gods and Goddess. Similarly, the other half contains 35 Adhyayas (chapters) which also deals in detail the *Bhija-mantras*. The Mantra is a verbal expression, and Yantra or Sri Chakram is visual expression, of Divine Mother.

On Navreh, the New Year Day of Kashmiri Hindus, which falls in the month of Magh and during the days Navratra, devotees regularly visit the Hari Parbat for special prayers and worship of Sharika Devi. Our tradition make us believe that on the day of Navreh, the Sri Chakra emits the maximum energy and lot of people have actually witnessed the emerging Chakra's (Triangles) on the holy rock. Some selected verses of 'Sundaryalahari,' 'Panchastavi' and 'Durga Saptshati' dedicated to Divine Mother are recited by devotees at the shrine.

Kalhan's 'Rajatarangani' mentions Sharika Parbat, Hari Parbat, as the epicenter of spiritualism in Kashmir. A number of holy spots and temples are located on all sides of the Hari Parbat hill. The devotees undertake *Parikrama* of the whole of hillock. The *Parikrama* would start from the Maha Ganesha's shrine (Ganishon), which is located on the south-western spur of the hillock. Ganesha is represented by a huge rock, '*Shila*' smeared with '*Sindoor*'. He is worshipped both in the form of image and Yantra inside the temple. The '*Swastika*' is known as graphic symbol of Lord Ganesha.

After prayers at Maha Ganesha, devotees move towards the rock, known as 'Sapat Rishi', with which the earliest scientific calendar devised by Kashmiri Hindus, now 5091 years old is associated, and is worshipped. Further onto the cluster of four Chinars known as 'Lal Ded's Boni' and from there, devotees move to a small temple of Mahakali. In front of the Kali temple is a large chunk of land known as *Sidh Peeth*. It is believed that great modern saints of Kashmir, Rishi Peer, Krishna Kar, Sahib Koul, Madhav Dhar and others meditated here and attained divinity. After *Sidh- Peeth*, next is *Devi Angan* at the foot of the hill with Chakreshwari temple at the hilltop. A flight of steps one hundred and eight in number lead to the Chakreshwari temple, the steps are wide, and made of dressed stone slabs. Besides other shrines, the resting place of Shivacharya Abhinavagupta is also associated with Hari Parbat. A long trail ahead is Pokhri-Bal. *Pokhri* means spring and *BAL* as place, --- the place of springs. The holiest of springs at Pokhribal is known the Amrit Kund. This is a square shaped clear water spring, surrounded by Chinar trees and is the place where the holy feet of Goddess Sharika are supposed to rest.

MAHARAJNI BHAVANI TIRTHA (TULMUL, KASHMIR)

The shrine of Raginya Bhavani, also known as the shrine of Khir Bhavani at Tulmul, is one of the most revered Hindu natural spring temple of Kashmir. The colour of the spring waters change, which gives the indication of coming events.

Tulmul is situated at a distance of twenty four kilometers from Srinagar, towards the north of the city. The shrine is dedicated to the worship of Bhavani, the Divine Mother. During the Hindu era, Tulmul was a place of great learning. The holy spring in the middle of which the temple of Maharajni is placed, is situated on the bank of a branch of the river Sindh. In Nilmat Purana, the river is mentioned as 'Tsandara Baga'. There are many references of Tulmul in the Rajatarangni. The Ragina Kavach---a psalm in praise of the Divine Mother included in Sanskrit work of Rudrya Mala Tantra substantiates that Tulmul is an ancient and popular place of pilgrimage among Kashmiri Hindus. Dr. Bhullar traced some sixteen manuscripts from Brngisha Samhita, related to the holy places of Kashmir. One of them is about Tulmul. The Samhita mentions in detail about the sacred shrine of *Bhavani*.

Shri Parmananda Research Institute Srinagar, in their publication Shri Shri Maha Rajni Pradurbhavah, 'A leaf from Brngisha Samhita' has given detailed description of the shrine. The origin of this temple has been described in the last chapter of Brngisha Samhita. It is noted that Pulastya the father of Ravana, the demon king of Lanka, was originally from Kashmir. Ravana worshiped the Maharajni but in the form of Shyama. The Divine Mother bestowed Ravana, many boons. At the time of the war with Sri Ram, Ravana tried to invoke the blessing of Goddess by offering her various kinds of sacrifices. There-upon the Goddess cursed him and ordered Hanuman to take her on the back along with Anant serpent to Satisar, Kashmir. Thus the Goddess came to Kashmir with 360 serpents, *Nagas*. The night when the Divine Mother came to Kashmir, came to be called Rajni-Ratri. The goddess is worshipped as Maharajni.

For long time the *Tirtha* at Tulmul remained under flood-waters. There is a legend that, the Divine Mother appeared in a dream to Pandit Govind Joo Gadoo and he was ordered to visit Tulmul. He arranged a boat from Sowura Ghat and went to the abode of Divine Mother with a number of earthen vessels filled with milk. When he found the spring, he poured milk into it. Perhaps for this reason this shrine is known as Khir Bhavani. Another version is that a pious Brahman, Krishna Pandit, found mention of the holy spring in a book called 'Brihad Katha'. Latter he had a vision in which he was informed by an angel that the holy spring of Maharajni lay among the swamps of Tulmul village. He was further advised to move towards the north east direction following a serpent from Shadipor and this actually happened. Shri Krishna Pandit marked the place where the snake stopped. Then he moved in an oddly rectangular direction. The space thus covered, was also demarcated. The swamp around the holy spring was filled up. Thereafter, a stone temple was constructed. One day Krishna Pandit was performing *Puja*, a *Boj-Patra*, birch-bark leaf appeared floating in the spring. A *Shaloka* was written on the leaf. The *Shaloka* read; "I, prostrate to Supreme Goddess Maharajni who is lustrous having around twelve suns and seated on lion's throne, wrapped by the serpents, not visible to the material eyes but realized by spiritualist". Shri Krishna Pandit composed a poem of as many stanzas as there were letters in the '*Shaloka*' and

this poem 'Rajani Sotra' is still existent. Although it is recorded that the discovery of the holy spring was made on Ashara Saptami, 7th day of bright fortnight in June-July, but devotees throng this place on every 8th day, *Ashtami*, and an annual festival is held on every *Jyestha Sukla Ashtami*. Maharajni is the Isht Devi of Kashmiri Hindus.

The holy spring has an irregular septagonal shape with the apex called *Paad* situated to the east. The northern and southern sides are longer than the western side, which is called *Sher* or head. It is shaped like *AUM* in the Sharada script. In the centre of the spring is the Maharajni temple. The spring is said to be surrounded by 360 springs. Most of these are covered with bushes and silted up. In 1902, Pandit Ved Lal Dhar cleared the sedimentation of the main stands.

The spring is situated in the centre of an island round which the Gang Khai, a canal from Sindh makes a circuit. The digging unearthed an ancient temple in the center built of large sculptured white stone with superb artistic features and marvelous images of deities. The whole shrine was repaired by Maharaja Partap Singh, the Dogra ruler in 1907AD.

During 1888AD, British Land Settlement Commissioner to Kashmir, Walter Lawrence wrote about Khir Bhavani:

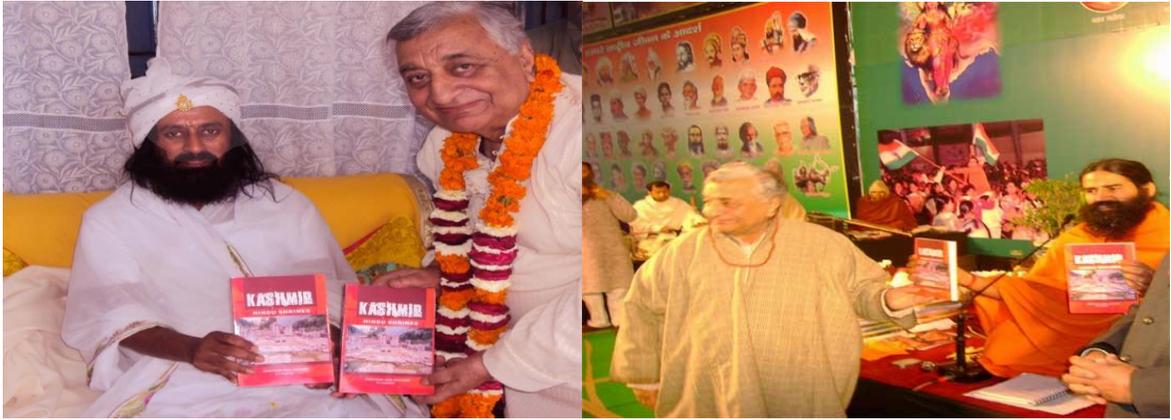
"Khir Bhavani is their favourite goddess, and perhaps the most sacred place in Kashmir is the Khir Bhavani; spring of Khir Bhavani at the mouth of the Sind valley. There are other springs sacred to this goddess, whose cult is said to have been introduced from Ceylon. At each there is the same curious superstition that the water of the springs changes colour. When I saw the great spring of Khir Bhavani at Tula Mula, the water had a violet tinge, but when famine or cholera is imminent the water assumes a black hue. The peculiarity of Khir Bhavani, the milk goddess, is that the Hindus must abstain from meat on the days when they visit her and their offerings are sugar, milk-rice, and flowers."

According to Hindu scriptures, Hindu deities are expressed in three manifestations; (1) Ionic form, wooden, stone or metal (2) Mantra, sound form, (3) Yantra, a mystic symbol. The deities are usually worshiped in ionic forms. In Tantric culture, the devotees concentrate on mystic symbol or Yantra, geometrical abode of the deity and are supposed to acquire super-physical powers. The Yantra is drawn by using the dot, Bindu, the straight lines, the triangle and the circle. Tantrikism is a way of worship. In Tantra Shastra, Maharajni has a prescribed diagram, Chakram with her *Shaktis*. Mantra is a sound form of the deity. It is chanted to invoke the deity in the mind, generally known as *Dyanam*.

According to Maharajni Pradurbhava the Mantra of Maharajni is a 15-worded Mantra. An appropriate ritual has to be followed while reciting the Mantra.

Swami Vivekananda visited Tulmul 30th September 1898 during his stay in Kashmir. There he lived a life of intense austerities and devotion to the Mother for a week. Nivedita writes after his return from Tulmul Swami ji said, "No more Hari Om. It is all Mother, Mother now."

***Om sarvamangala Mangalaye Shivaay Sarvartha Sadhikay |
Sharanyai Traimbhakey Gouri Narayani Namastutay ||***



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