



**HISTORIC SHITALNATH TEMPLE**

## **BHAIRAVAS**

In Vedantic tradition Bhairavas are attendants of Lord Shiva and are known as *Shivaganas* or *Bhutaganas*. In the Bhairava Tantra, Bhairava represents combination of three aspects of Lord Shiva; 'Bha' from *Bharena*, i.e., maintenance of the universe. 'ra' from *revana* i.e., withdrawal of universe and 'va' from *Vatmana* i.e., letting go of universe. Thus, Bhairava represents three aspects of Shiva; *Srshti*—manifestation, *Stehti*—maintenance and *Samhara*—withdrawal.

**Ashta Bhairavas** (Eight Bhairavas) are eight manifestations of Kaal Bhairava, a ferocious aspect of Lord Shiva, who is considered the supreme ruler of time of the universe and the chief form of Bhairava. They guard and control the eight directions.

The eight Bhairavas represent eight different elements in which five elements represented by Bhairava are sky, air, fire, water and earth and the other three beings are sun, moon and *Atma* (the soul). Each of the eight Bhairavas are different in appearance, have different weapons, have different *vahanas* and they bless their devotees with eight types of wealth representing *Ashta Lakshmis*.

In Kashmir tradition, it is believed that all Shiva Shastras were revealed by Lord Shiva, in the form of *Svachanada Bhairava* through his five faces. *Svachanada* in common parlance means *Svatantra* or the free will which is the keynote of Kashmir Shaivism. Vasugupta founded the school of Trika philosophy. Later Kallata and Sommananda wrote explanatory notes on its aspects and developed a philosophical treatise on the same. The Trika and Shaivism in Kashmir are based on Tantras which have been classified as *Bhairava*, *Rudra* and *Shiva*. There are four schools of Shivaite philosophy; *Pratyabhigna*, *Karma*, *Kulla* and *Spanda*. Shiva's most significant aspect is as a guardian of directions. In his eightfold manifestations of *Asta Bhairavas*, Bhairava presides either alone or paired as consort with eight Mother Goddesses, over the spatio-ritual organization of sacred cities.

In Kashmir Shaivism, Bhairava Tantras are sixty-four in number. The scriptures of Bhairava Shastras are sixty-four in number. The total number of Bhairavas is sixty-four and there are sixty-four Yoginis also.

The Bhairavas and Yoginis are associated with Tantric religious practices.

The Ashta Bhairavas of Kashmir are:

- (1) Anadeshwar Bhairav. The temple is outside the *Akhara*, Maisuma, Srinagar.
- (2) Tushkraza Bhairav. The temple is at Narsingh Grah, Srinagar.
- (3) Bhukatkeshwar Bhairav. The temple at Chattabal, Srinagar, on the confluence of Dood Ganga and Vitasta. His birthday is celebrated in the month of *Chet*.
- (4) Pooranraja Bhairav, Sathu, Barbarshah, Srinagar. His birthday is celebrated in *Baisakh*.
- (5) Vishek Sen Bhairav. The temple lies opposite Mahakali Mandir, beyond Zaina Kadal, Srinagar.
- (6) Nandkeshwar Bhairav, the temple is at Shadipur in village Sumbal.
- (7) Mangaleshwar Bhairav, is located in Brari Nambal area, of Srinagar. The shrine has a stone of an old temple which is believed to have been built around 600 AD. As per Nilmat Purana, the area bears the name of Namchibal.
- (8) Vetaraj Bhairav. The temple is close to Dal Lake, Srinagar. The Vetaraj Bhairav is most powerful Bhairav. His birthday is celebrated twice a year, in the month of *Poh* and *Baisakh*.

The concept of 'Bhairavas' in Kashmir came during the rule of king Praversen II in sixth century, who desired to build a new city of his own and give his name to it. Actually he was residing in the city of his grandfather, i.e., Purandhara, which was prone to floods, fires and epidemics. He worshipped his Isht Dev, Vetar Bhairav. Bhairava means the terrible one, for help and guidance. With His blessings, the king laid the foundation of the new city and divided the city of Srinagar into eight zones, which were presided over by the respective Bhairavas. Temples were constructed in their names. These Bhairavas were regarded as the protectors of their respective areas. The influence of the Bhairavas is still prevailing in religious, cultural and folk tales of Kashmiri Hindus. They frequently visit Bhairava temples to seek their blessings.

All Bhairavas are Shiv-Parvati's attendants. Bhairava worship bestows *Bhairava Siddi* to the devotee and helps him to gain priority with lord Shiva. Bhairavas have usually chosen a tree for its dwelling place in Kashmir and Mulberry or Chinar trees are often seen at Bhairava Temples.

The Bhairav Stotra unfolds the secret of Atam-Janana, the conscious realization of the communion between the man and Paramatma. Abhinavguta gave expression to the Vedic truth, Lord Krishna, revealed to Arjuna in the Mahabharata war. Svetasvatara Upnishad says; "He who at the beginning (of creation) projected Brahma (the Creator, the primal Universal Consciousness), and Who delivered unto Him the Vedas, seeking libration, I go for refuge into that Effulgent One, whose light turns the Understanding towards the (infinite) Atman." Abhinavgupta wrote a commentary on Bhagwat Gita.

Yograj in his commentary on Abhinava's *Paramartha Sara* says, "that Abhinavgupta had attained the stage of oneness with Mahesvara, i.e. the stage of 'Bhairava', which is the same as 'Jivanmukta' in Vedic lore. He left a unique mark on the philosophical religious life in the country." Abhinavgupta, "left his mortal frames along with hundreds of his disciples" when he entered the sacred cave at Bheerwah and disappeared. While entering the cave, he recited verses from the Bhairva Stotra. The Bhairva Stotra of Abhinavguta reveals the Advaitic truth, which forms the foundation of the Shiva Darshan.

The English translation of the verses is given below;

“Having become one with Thee, I adore you in the heart of my heart. You are the first cause, of projection, substance and dissolution of the Universe and the protector of the destitute; everything sentient and insentient stands pervaded by you; you are one with the self, one and only one without beginning and end;

1. By virtue of the power of your grace, I experience whole of this universe as one with Thee, and since you are always everyday of mine, whole of the (Universe) is nothing but me;

2. Despite the fact that the forces of the agents of ‘Karma’ which are extremely terrifying, delusory and very difficult to resist are at work, there is no question of getting over-awed by them in the world, for mine own self, Thine ownself and the world have gained concurrence.

3. O, Ye, God of death! Don’t cast your terrifying glance on me. By serving and remembering Lord Shiva, I have verily become the embodiment of the powers of the Bhairava.

4. All pervading darkness of ignorance is cut as under by the rays of your knowledge which is well-developed and verily one with you. O Ye! the destroyer of death and the God of death, I bow to Thee, I am not at all frightened by the malevolent spirits of Karma.

5. The rays of the truth and awareness have risen and pervaded all the categories and elements of this Universe. I have gained repose of senses by depending on the (divine) nectar of Thine transcendentality.

6. O Lord! When my mind falls a victim to such affliction as cause awful pain to my body, I being one with you, a shower of transcendental nectar in the form of hymns comes into being (which destroys the pangs of pain).

7. O Sankara! It is true by observing fasts, giving charity and practicing austerity, afflictions are destroyed. But by concentrating on the supreme nectar of your philosophy, a soothing stream flows in my mind.

8. After having attained your absolute glorified beauty--- a stage attained with great difficulty---- my awareness joyfully dances, sings and feels blissful.

**English rendering of Bhairava Stotra of Abhinavagupta is by Pandit K.L.Swaroop.**

Further commentary by different scholars:

**Shri Sheetleswar Bhairav Mandir by Dr. T. N. Ganjoo:**

Sheetleswar Sheetalnath is a pre and proto sacred temple of the Kashmir. The existing temple faces west and in its each and south direction the flow is of the “Chandra-Kulya” known now “Pstoot-Kulya”. In fact, in pre-historical period, the entire place was a high lake and was known as “Ahlaadmatt”, now the name is known as “Gunda Ahalmar”. Neelmata-Purana, the two thousand years old historical document mentions in its description the site of the temple- “Sheetleshwaram Sheetalnatha Vandi ahama Bharvam sadaa” – Here I pay my reverence always to Sheetleswar Bhairava Sheetalnath. It is well established fact that Sheetalleswar Bhairava is counted amount the Thirteen Bhairava of Kashmir, whose historical account according to authority of “Aanand-Tantra” – the sacred text of Tantra-literature. Among these thirteen Bhairava, the sacred place of the Sheetleswar is revered most auspicious Bhairava. The “Sheetaleshwara – Mathaatmaya text” the historical account of the place, mentions its sacred annual ceremony as – “Maagh maa se sete Pakshi Panchmyaam Shubhi Dine

Sheetlashvara Bhairvayaagm Sambhavati Mahotsave” – On bright fortnight of Magha-month, the lunar day of fifth, the annual auspicious celebration is performed at locality of Sheetalnath Sathu Srinagar. The royal historian of Sultan Zain-ul-Abiden of Kashmir – Jonaraja mentions the names of Bhairava temples of Hetkeshvra and Sheetleshwara. Thus clearly confirms its importance during fifteenth century of Kashmir when the Kashmir was under the Sultan Rule. The ancient temple was destroyed during the period of Afghan Rule as mentioned by Mr. R. K. Parimoo in his history, after 1990, again the temple and main Hawan Shala, the ceremonial sacred fire place is totally destroyed and its neighbouring people has usurped its eastern position.

**Sh.Sunil Raina Rajanak adds:**

Trika philosophy explains how the quest for the true nature can be achieved through Shakti thus enabling Jiva to again become the Shiva. Since Shiva is the transcendent principle hence the earnest quest in individuals arises to revert to its principal nature. This disclosure to seeker for salvation and to reach their esoteric goal of moksha in terms of realizing his unity with supreme consciousness is possible through Shakti in the upward trend and is thoroughly laid out in Trika of Kashmiri Shaivism. Therefore the sages emphasized these aspects in the Shiva nature of Bhairava, perceiving the ultimate reality in the esoteric worship of “Amriteshwar Bhairava” who is also known as Netranatha a concept unique to Kashmir. Translating in Sanskrit terms we can come very near to imaging the deity as; The Bhairava of the Elixir of Life (Amriteshwar Bhairava)/The Lord of the Eye (Netra Natha). Divine dialogue extended between Shiva and his consort Parvati that unfolds the aptness of the name Amriteshwara / Netranatha.

Devi asks Shiva; Lord your eyes loaded with tears of compassion are so beautiful. Please tell me how these eyes are capable of such a flare that it can reduce Death itself to ashes.

Says Shiva; O my beloved! Be in a state of Yoga and then you will understand the secret of the flare in my eyes. My eyes are brimming with amrita – the elixir of life. The light emanating from my eyes pervades everything. The vision faces every direction and is resident in all states of waking, dreaming, sleeping and deep sleep. My eyes and their light can only be known through the practice of yoga. The light of my eyes is the radiance which shines the world with brilliance. Rather my light infuses matter with life. The stotra of Amriteshwar Bhairava in the Netra tantra which is the detailed manual for performing the worship and rituals of the Lord as Amriteshwar is as follows; Om Jhumsa Amriteshwar Bhairavay Namah.

This esoteric form is worshipped in Kashmir since time immemorial and more so on Shivratri as this is the time when blissful aspect of Lord Amriteshwara Bhairava percolates the heart of the devotees and removes the veil of innate and intellectual ignorance, sets atma free from the perdition of bondage, bestows the divine grace in the form of elixir which is the Consciousness among the seekers for all times to come. The temple dedicated to Lord Amriteshwara Bhairava is situated within Ishwar Ashram premises at Ishber, Nishat in Srinagar. Swami Lakshmanjoo was the ardent devotee of Lord. Therefore, let us pray to Amriteshwar Bhairava on this Shivratri to help us in removing the bondages of illusion and push us to seek the absolute so as to realize our true self. **(Compiled by Chaman Lal Gadoo)**