

Writers



KASHMIR

Columnists





Piyaray Lal Raina

Religious Practices of Kashmiri Pandits

SELECTED WRITINGS OF PIYARAY LAL RAINA

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1.0 ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Piyaray Lal Raina was born in Srinagar Kashmir in 1936. After receiving his early education in Kashmir he did his masters in Geology from Lucknow University. He served as geologist in the Geology and Mining Dept J&K Govt.



In his childhood he received his spiritual guidance from his maternal uncle which mushroomed during his long stay, in Kashmir through the guidance of various saints / learned scholars. After migration he came in contact with Karunamai Maa, a greheta saint of Kashmiri origin in Delhi / Gurgaon in India and made progress in spirituality under her guidance.

He has been writing extensively on religious matters in various KP journals and internet. He has written a masterly book "Socio- Cultural and Religious Traditions of Kashmiri Pandits" (Published in USA) which has been described as encyclopedia of Kashmiri traditions by learned scholars and readers.

Mr. Raina is life time president of Samarpan Public Charitable Trust (Regd.) which among other things is engaged in spreading awareness of KP Traditions among KP youth.

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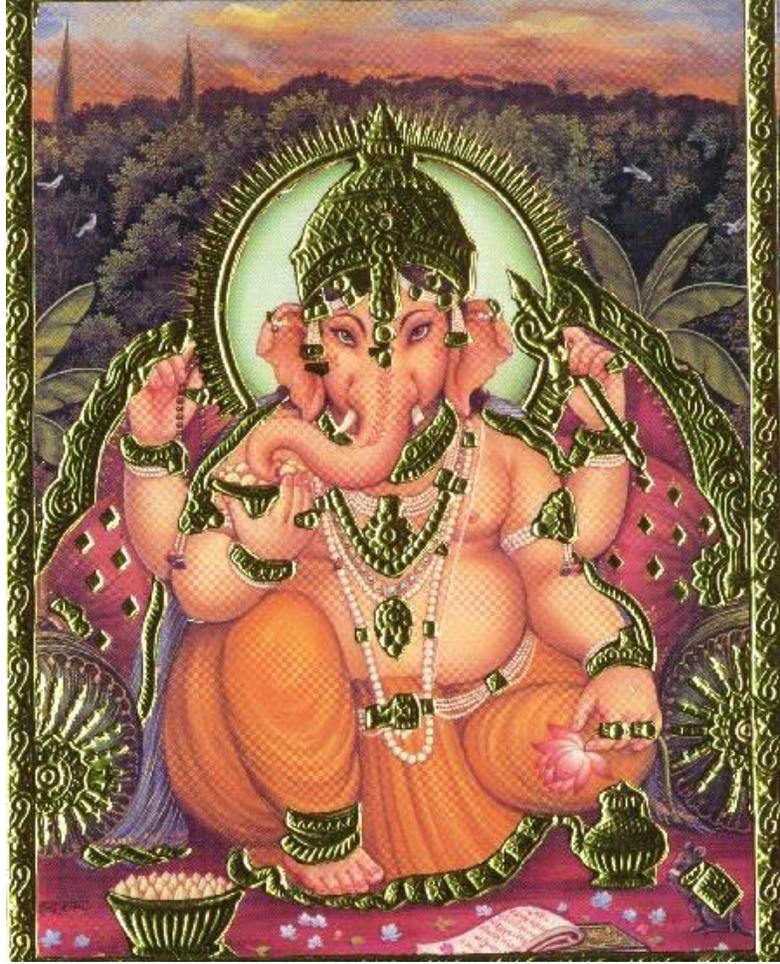
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Attached herewith are some of the writings of Mr. Raina which have appeared in various journals.

2.0 GANESH ASTUTI



Lord Ganesh (Ganpati)

1

HEMJAASUTM BHUJM GNESHM EESH NNDNM
EK DNT VKR TUND NAAG YGN SUUTR KM
RKT GAATR DHUUMR NETR SHUKL VSTR MNDIT
KLPVRKHI BHKTRKHI NMOSTUTE GJAANM
NMOSTUTE GJAANM NMOSTUTE VINAYKM

He who is son of the daughter of the kingdom of mountains
Parvati, He who is leader of the multitude of Gods, He who is
dear to Shiva, He who has one tusk, He who has a curved trunk,
He who has snake around his neck as yagnopavit, He whose
body is red, He whose eyes are reddish brown, He who looks
splendid in white robes, He who takes care of his devotees just

like a KLPVRKHI (a mythical tree which yielded whatever one wanted), and He who has the head of elephant - I bow to that Vinayak (a leader with special qualities).

2

PASH PANE CHKR PANE MUUSHKASH CH ROHNM
AGNEKOTE SUURY JYOTE VJR KOTI PRVTM
CHETR MAL BHKT JAL BHAAL CHNDR SHOBETM
KLP VRKHI BHKTRKHI NMOSTUTE GJAJAANNM
NMOSTUTE GJAJAANNM NMOSTUTE VINAY

He who has snare in one hand and an axe in another, He who is riding a mouse whose fire and light is as powerful as those of millions of suns put together, He who is like a mountain of diamonds, He who is wearing a garland of many colored flowers, He who is always involved in the welfare of his devotees, He who is decorated with crescent moon on his head, He who takes care of his devotees just like a KLPVRKHI, and He who has the head of elephant - I bow to that Vinayak.

3

VISHV VEERY VISHV DEERG VISHV KRM NIRMLM
VISHV HRTAA VISHV KRTAA YTR TTR PUUJITM
CHTUR BHUJM CHTUR MUKHM SEVITM CHTUR YUGM
KLP VRKHI BHKTRKHI NMOSTUTE GJAJAANNM
NMOSTUTE GJAJAANNM NMOSTUTE VINAYKM

He who is most powerful in the world, He who has maximum patience whose karma is without attachment, He who is both a creator and maintainer of our world, He who is worshiped everywhere, He who is four-faced and four-armed and He who is worshiped in all the four yugs, He who takes care of his devotees just like a KLPVRKHI, and He who has the head of elephant - I bow to that Vinayak.

4

BHUUT BHVY HVY KVY BHRG BHAARGV ARCHITM
DIVY VAAHIHN KAAL JAAL LOK PAAL VNDITM
PUURN BRHM SUURY VRN POURSHM PURANTKM
KLP VRKHI BHKTRKHI NMOSTUTE GJAANNM
NMOSTUTE GJAANNM NMOSTUTE VINAYKM

He whose is worshipped by humans, He who is eulogized and worshiped by divine saints like Bhrg and Bhaargv, He who rides a divine vehicle, He who is above time and its entanglements, He who is the caretaker of people and is dear to them, He who is Himself a Supreme Being, He who belongs to Surya class, He who is a original Being, He who takes care of his devotees just like KLPVRKHI and He who has the head of elephant - I bow to that Vinayak.

5

RRDI BUDI ASHT SIDHI NVNIDHAAN DAYKM
YGN KRM SRV DHRM SRV VRN ARCHITM
PUUT DHUUMRH DUSHT MUSHT DAYKM VINAYKM
KLP VRKHI BHKTRKHI NMOSTUTE GJAANNM
NMOSTUTE GJAANNM NMOSTUTE VINAYKM

He who gives prosperity, wisdom, asht sidhi¹ (eight fold boons), and Novnidi² (Nine treasures), He who is worshiped by performing yagnyas and religious ceremonies, He who is worshiped by all classes of people, He who is purified with the smoke of sacred fire, He who punishes evil, He who takes care of his devotes just like a KLPVRKHI and He who has the head of elephant - I bow to that Vinayak.

Notes

1 ASHT SIDHI (eight boons). These are:

- 1 ANIMAA: Power to make one invisible and enter into anything.
- 2 MHIMA: Power by which one can assume the shape of the largest object.
- 3 GRIMA: Power by which one can make oneself very heavy.
- 4 LGIMA: Power by which one can make oneself very light.
- 5 PRAPTI: Power by which one can get anything.
- 6 PRAKAMY: Power by which one can enter Earth or fly in space.
- 7 EESHITV: Power by which one can rule over everything.
- 8 VSHITV: Power by which one can have full control over others.

2 NOV NIDHIYAN (Nine treasures).

These are Pdm, Maha Pdm, Shnkh, Mkr, Kchchap, Mukund, Kund, Neel

3.0 SHIVMAHIMA STOTR (MAHIMNAPAR)

Introduction

Shivmahimna Stotr or Mahimnapar as it is called by Kashmiri Pandits is one of the earliest and one of the most recited Shiva prayer. It is said to have been written by a Gandharva (a demigod or heavenly musician) known as Pushpadanta. He was a great devotee of Lord Shiva. One day he could not get flowers to offer during prayers. He cut flowers from a neighbour's garden without his permission which he realised later on was a sin; though a small one but to wash off that sin he decided to compose his own hymn to Lord Shiva for His forgiveness. Thus he composed thirty-two hymns and at the end of each hymn he offered his tooth as offering instead of flowers. In this way, he composed thirty-two hymns for his thirty-two teeth.

It is a practice in writing of a Stotr (an appreciation) to conclude with writing of a few stanzas stating the rewards for those who conduct that prayer (e.g. a student will succeed in exams, a poor man will be rewarded with prosperity and so on). Thus at the end of thirty-two hymns, we have eleven stanzas offering rewards for those who recite the original thirty-two hymns. However, it is not a common practice to recite stanzas that are written for those seeking rewards.

In Kashmir, we have a tradition of reciting three hymns at the start which may have been composed by some Kashmiri devotee or adopted from some other version. Thus we have 35 hymns instead of thirty-two. Only Kashmiris recite hymn number 23 and 30. They may be from the original rendering but their recitation by Hindus outside Kashmir has been dropped. They have different hymns for these two in their version, which have been given at the end of Kashmiri version.

It may be stated that the hymns of this stotr are unintelligible to a person who does not have the background knowledge about the contents described in the hymn. It is in this context that a commentary at the end of each hymn has been written.

Recitation of this stotr is rather difficult without some guidance. In the Sanskrit written language it is common to write several words together and while reading these words pronunciation changes depending at what place the combination of words is broken by the reader e.g. words ending with R or S change to H. Similarly when word is broken at M the next word starts with A. It is the grammar of the language and in no way changes the meaning of the word. In addition, there are various methods of reciting this Stotr. Therefore, it is suggested that one may seek guidance from some knowledgeable person or by reciting along with the recitations rendered by some person on a recorded audio. There are several recordings available in the market. The hymns in this write up have been rendered as per the recitation of Pandit Jasraj award winner of Padma Vibhushan.

The first three hymns of Kashmiri version are:

1

**AADHINAAM AGDM DIVYM VYAADINAAM MUULKRNTNM
UPDRAVAANAAM DALNM MHADEVAM UPASMHE**

I am worshiping Mahadev –which worship is medicine for mental agonies, destroyer of physical pain, and remover of obstacles.

2

AHM PAAPI PAP KHIPN NIPUNH SHNKR BHVAAN
AHM BHITO BHITA BHY VITRNE TE VYSNITA
AHM DINO DINO DHRN VIDHI SNJS TVM ITRN
N JAANE HM VKTUMZZZ KURU SKL SHAI CHE MYI KRPAM

I am a sinner and O Shanker you are quick in destroying sins. I am one who is afraid and you are always there to remove fears of fearful. I am poor and you are always ready to help the poor. I do not know anything more about you that I would like to describe. Please help me to be exact.

3

JNAAS TVT PAADABJ SHRVN MNN DHYAAN NIPUNH
SVYM TE NISTIRNA N KHLU KRUUNA TESHU KRUUNA.
BHVE LEENE DEENE MYI MNN HEENE N KRUUNH
KTHM NAATH KHAYAATH TVM ASI KRUUNA SAAGAR ITI

If you are graceful to those who are perfect in praying you at your feet with their mind and speech and get them cross over to bhavsagar(Immortal Bliss) that cannot be called as your grace? If you cannot (will not) help me, who is poor and weak, and deprived of praying at your lotus feet, then how can you be known as Karunasagar (Ocean of Compassion).

MAIN STOTM

1

MHIMNH PAARM TE PRMVIDSHU YDH SDRSHI.
STO TIR BRHMAADINAAM API TD VSNNAM TVYI GIRH.
ATH VACHY SRVH SVM TI PRINAAMAA VIDHI GRNN
MMAA PYESH STOTRE HR NIRP VAADH PRIKRH.

If the praise of thee by one who is ignorant of the extent of Thy greatness be unbecoming, then the praise of even Brahma and others are inadequate for Thee, and if all remain unblamable by praising Thee according to their intellectual powers then even an attempt on my part to compose a hymn in praise of your greatness is free from any blemish.

2

ATITH PNTHAANM TV CH MHIMAAH VAN MNSYO
RTD VYAAVRTTYAA YM CHIKTM ABIDHTE SHRUTIR API
S KSYS TO TVYHH KTI VIDH GUNNH KSY VISHYH
PDE TVR VACHEENE PTIT N MNH KSY N VCH

Thy greatness is beyond the reach of mind and speech. Who (no one can) will praise that which even Vedas describe with trepidation by the method of not this, not this, not this? (Because it is impossible to describe what is Absolute) -How many qualities does that possess and can be perceived by whom? Yet to the form taken later* by Thee, whose mind and speech do not turn to Him when He revealed Himself.

* This has reference to the revelation of God in a physical form when He appeared as Sadashiv (Brahamn) for the benefit of His devot

3

MDHUS FEETA VAACH PRMM AMRTM NIRMIT VTH
TV BRMN KIM VAAGPI SURGUROR VISMY PDM
MM TVETAM VAANEEM GUN KTHN PUNYEN BVTH
PUNAAMEE TYR THES MIN PUR MTHN BUDHIR VYVSITAA

O Sadashiv Does the praise of even Brahaspati(the teacher of Gods) cause any wonderment to Thee who art the author of the nectar like sweet Vedas?(Vedas are direct revelation of God) O destroyer of Tripura (a powerful demon), the thought that by praising Thy glories I shall purify my speech has prompted me to undertake this work.

4

TVAI SVRYM YT TT JGT UDY RKSHA PRLY KRT
TRYEE VSTU YSTM TRSRSHU. GUNBINAASU TNUSHU
ABVYA NAM ASMIN VRD RMNEE YAAM RMNEEM
VIHNTUM VYAKROSHIM VID DHT IHAI KE JD DHIYH.

O giver of boons in refutation of Thy divinity which is described by the three Vedas(Rig ved Yujer ved, and Sama ved) who creates, preserves and destroys the world, and who is divided into three bodies (Brahma Vishnu and Mahesh) according to the different qualities(Satvic Rajsic and Tamsic), some thick headed (ignorant) persons offer arguments which are pleasing to the ignorant but (in reality) hateful*

* This has reference to Mimaska system which is one of the six systems of Vedanta which does not recognize God in form and He is not cause of creation preservation and destruction of the world.

5

KIMEEHAH KIM KAYH S KHLU KIM UPAAYS TRIBHUVNM
KIM AADHAARO DHAATAA SRJIT KIM UPAADAANM ITI CH
ATR KYAI SHVRYAI TV YYN VSR DHUSTHO HTIDHYH
KUTR KOYM KANSHCHN MUKHR YTI MOHAY JGTH.

To fulfill what desire, having what body, with what instruments, support and materials does that creator indeed create the three worlds?* This kind of vain argumentation with regard to Thee whose Divine nature is beyond the reach of intellect makes the perverted vociferous to the delusion of mankind**.

* This has reference to a common belief among people that if they do something they have a definite purpose for doing so and that they need a physical body to do so. Not only this, for making any physical object one needs three things ie some instruments, some materials and a support. Ignorant people want to see these conditions fulfilled in Gods act of creation as well. But such expectations are idle for the simple fact that God is God. He can not be judged by human standards

** This has again reference to Mimasa system They cannot perceive the fact that God is above human perception.

6

AJNMAANO LOKAH KIM AVYV VNTUPI JGTAAM
MDHISHTHATARM KIM BV VIDIR ANADRTY BHVTI
ANEESHO VA KURYAAD BHUVAN JNNE KH PRIKRM
YTO MNDAAS TVAAM PRTY MRVR SMSHO RT IME

O Lord of gods can the worlds be without origin though they have parts? Is the creation of the worlds (possible) without a creator? Who else but god can begin the creation of the worlds? Because they are fools, they* raise doubt as regards Thy existence.

* This has again reference to Mimasa System.

7

TRYEE SAANKHYM YOGH PSHUPTI MTM VAISHNVM ITI
PRBHINNE PRSTHAANE PRM IDM ADH PTHYM ITI CH
RUUCHINAAM VAICHITRYAD RJU KUTIL NANA PTH JUSHAAM NRNAAMEKO GMYH
TVM ASI PYSAM ARNV IV

There are different paths (of realization) as enjoined by the three Vedas(Rig veda ,Sama veda, and Yajur veda),such as, Samkhya ,Yoga, Pasupata and Vaishnava* .Persons following different paths- straight or crooked according as they consider that this path is best or that one is proper due to the difference in temperament, reach Thee alone just as rivers enter the Ocean.

* This has reference to six orthodox philosophical schools of thoughts that accepted authority of Vedas. These are regarded as complimentary views of the one truth seen from different angles These are:

- **Samkhya** This is developed by saint Kapila It accepts two eternal realities Purusha (spirit or non matter)and Prakrati(subtle nature of matter)which consists of three gunas(elements) Rajas, Tamas and Sattwa which combine to produce all existence.
- **Yoga.** The author of this school is Patanjali. He defines yoga as means to control fluctuations of mind which can be done in four ways .By knowledge (gyan yoga),meditation (Dhyan yoga),Prayers (Bhakti Yoga)and with the control development unfolding of pertinent laws relating to mind (Raja yoga)
- **Vedanta** The author of this school of thought is Badarayana The main belief is that there is Supreme Consciousness or Infinite Reality called Imperishable Brahman and the main object of life is to identify with this Supreme Consciousness through the Atman, the eternal sprit in every individual. This changeless infinite reality is veiled by its own creative power called Maya which projects the infinite changes brought on this world through names forms and activities.
- **Mimamsa** The author of this school is Jaimini.He does not recognise god in form and that god is responsible for changes brought about in the world. They believe Vedas are eternal and unchanging

- **Vaiesika** The author of this school of thought is Kanada. They believe that every thing in this world is composed of atoms in varying combinations which are un-created, invisible, eternal entities and realise their potentialities when the soul and manas (mind) unite to activate its faculties, whereupon these combine and become visibly manifest as substances.
- **Nyaya** The author of this school of thought is Gautama (Not to be confused with Gautam Budha)It maintains that true knowledge can be attained by an analysis and understanding of the nature of knowledge, its source, the validity of its arguments and its methodologies for distinguishing true from false knowledge.

8

**MHOKHSH KHTVANGM PRSHUR AJINM BSM FNINH
KPAALM CHETI YT TV VRD TNTROP KRNAAM
SURAASTAAM TAAM RDHIM DDHTI TU BVD BRUU PRNIHITAAM
NHI SVATMA RAMM VISHY MRG TRSHNAA BHRM YTIH**

O Giver of boons, a great bull, a wooden club, an axe, a tiger skin, ashes, a human skull and the like - these are Thy sole possessions, though by the mere casting of eye Thou gave to gods great treasures which they enjoy*. Indeed the mirage of sense objects cannot delude one whose delight is in the self.

* Sadashiv is the master of all and giver of boons and all treasures and yet for Himself He enjoys a simple life. To save Gods from asuras He participated in Sagar Manthn(Churning of oceans).For Himself He kept poison which was one of the objects that came out of ocean to save His creation but gave away all the wealth that came out of it to Gods. He held all the poison in His throat which made his throat blue, the colour of poison and hence He is referred to Neelkanth (blue throat)as well.

9

**DHRUVM KSHCHIT SRV SKLM APRS TV DHRVM IDM
PRO DHROUYA DHRDUYE JGTI GDTI VYST VISHYE
SMSTE PYE TASMIN PURMTHN TAIRVIS MIT IVH
STUVN JIRHEMI TVAAM N KHULU NNU DHSTAV MUKHRTAA**

O Destroyer of Pura,* some say that the whole universe is eternal, while others say that all is transitory. Yet others maintain that all these are eternal and non eternal having different characteristics**. Bewildered, as it were by them I do not feel ashamed to praise Thee. Indeed this garrulity indicates my audacity.

* This has reference to the destruction of Tripura sur A demon who was very power full and was destroyed by lord Shiva.

** This refers to various schools of thoughts as stated above (See Hymn 7)

10

TVAI SHRVYM YT NAD YDUPRI VIRMCHIR HRI RDH. PRICHCHETUM YATA VNLMM
ANLSKNDH VPUSHH
TTO BHKTI SRDHA BHR GURUU GRND BYAM GIRISH YT
SVYM TSTHE TABYAM TV KIM ANUVRTIR N FLTI

O Grisha, (One who lives on the mountain Kailash –ie Lord Shiva), Brahma trying above and Vishnu trying below failed to measure Thee who took the form of a pillar of fire. After wards when they praised Thee with great devotion and faith Thou revealed Thyself to them of Thy own accord, indicating Thy worship can not go without bearing result.*

* This has reference to a Puranic story. Brahma and Lord Vishnu had an argument as to who among them is senior. Just then a huge column of fire appeared in the sky. They stopped their arguments and decided to find about this column of fire and the one who came back first to the spot after probing this column would be declared senior. Bhrhma went in the upper region while Vishnu went in the lower region. .After travelling for thousands of years they returned back to original spot without finding the upper or lower end of this column. Right at that time Sadashiv appeared on the scene and told them that He has decided to manifest Himself for the benefit of His devotees and it is in this context that He manifest a part of Himself as Brahma (for creation of universe and as Vishnu (for its preservation) and as Mahesh (for its cyclic destruction). This is called as Trinity of Gods in Hindu belief.

11

AYT NAADAA PADHY TRIBHUVNM AVAIR VYTI KRM
DSHAASYO YD BAHUN ABRT RNKNDU PRVSHAAN
SHRH PDM SHRENE RCHIT CHRNAM BHORUH BLE
SITH RAA YAAHS TVD BHKTE TRIPUR HR VISFUUR JITM IDM

O Destroyer of Tripura, that the ten headed Ravana after ridding the three worlds of any trace of enemies remained with arms eager for (fresh) war is due to the fact of his having great devotion to Thee-, devotion which prompted him to offer his heads as lotuses to Thy feet.*

* This has reference to Ravana who was a great devout of Shiva. He fought a war with Lord Rama.

12

AMUSHY TVT SEVA SM ADHI GT SARM BHUJVNM
BHLAT KAILASE PI TVT ADHI VSTOU VIKRM YTH.
ALBYAA PAATALE PYLS CHLITAN GUSHTH SHIRSI
PRTISHTHA TVYYA SEED HRUVM UPCHITO MUHYTI KHLH.

When Ravana extended the valour of his arms whose strength was obtained by worshipping Thee to Kailasa, Thy abode, Thou moved the tip of Thy Toe and he did not get a resting place even in the nether world. Verily when affluent, the wicked becomes deluded.*

* Ravana got drunk with power and decided to move the abode of Lord Shiv to his own kingdom in Lanka so that he could worship Him there without taking the trouble of going to

Kailash mountain. At this Shiv got very angry and by just moving little finger of His foot Ravana tumbled over and could not get resting place any where, not even in Patal (nether world)He got deluded by his affluence.

13

YDRDHIM SUTRAAMNO VRD PRMO CHAIR API STEEM
ADHSH CHKRE VANH PARIJN VIDHEY TRIBUVNH
N TCHITRM TSMIN VRI VSI TRI TVT CHRNYOH
N KSYAH UNNTYAI BHVTI SHR SSTV YV NTIH.

O giver of boons, that Bana, who had the Three worlds at his Command put to shade the wealth of Indra, is not to be wondered at ,he being the worshipper of Thy feet. What prosperity does not result from bowing down the head to Thee?*

* Banasur was an assur devotee of Shiv.He was son of Bali and grand son of Prahlada.Lord shiva worship had made him very prosperous so much so that even the wealth of Indra, the Lord of heaven was no match to him.

14

AKAAND BHRHMAAND KHIY CHKIT DEVA SUR KRPA
VIDE YSYAA SEED YS TRNYN VISHM SM HRT VTH
S KLMASH KNTHE TV N KURUUTE N SHRIYM AHO
VIKAROPI SHLAAGYO BHUVN BHY BHNG VYSNINH.

O, Three eyed one, (Lord Shiva)* it is not that the dark stain on the Throat of Thee who drank poison as an act of favor to gods and demons at their being panicky at the threatened destruction, does not beautify Thee. Even deformity is admirable in One who is given to freeing the world of fear.**

* Shiva is called Triyambkum i.e. Three-eyed One. The third eye refers to His mental vision with which He reaches everywhere.

** See footnote of Hymn 8 .The blue colour of His throat does not make Him look ugly . It rather enhances His looks.

15

ASIDDHAARTHA NAIV KAUCHID API SDEVA SURNRE
NIVRTNTE NITYM JGTI JYNO YSY VISHIKHAH
S PSHYNNISH TVAM ITR SUR SAADAARNM ABUUT
SMRH SMR TVYAATMAA N HI VSHISHU PTHYH PRIBHVH.

O, Lord, the god of love, Kamdev, whose arrows(advances) do not fail any where in the world of gods, demons and men but are always successful, became simply an object of memory by looking upon Thee as an ordinary god. For an insult to the self-controlled (ie Lord Shiv) does not conduce to good (was not a good act)*

* This has reference to a puranic story .The great Lord Shiva was in deep meditation without any break. But gods wanted that a son should be born to Him to lead them in the battle against the demon Taraka, as it was professed that only Shivas son could kill him.

Gods sought the help of Kamadev the god of love. Kamadev threw an arrow of passion over Shiva .Shiva was distracted in His meditation and as a punishment burnt Kamadev to ashes with the fire of His third eye.

16

MHEE PAADAA GHAATAAD VRJTI SHSA SMSHY PDM
PDM VISHNOHR BRAAMYD BUJ PRI GHUUGN GRH GNM
MUHR DYOUR DOUSTHYM YAT YNI BHRT JTI TDIT TTA
JGT RKHIIIAAYAAI TVM NTSI NNU NAAMAIV VIBHUTA

In order to save the world when Thou danced*, the earth wondered at the striking of Thy feet, whether it would not come to a sudden end; so felt the spatial region along with the planets oppressed by the movement of Thy iron club like arms; and the heaven became then miserable -its side being stuck by Thy waving matted hair. Ah, Thy** very mightiness is the cause of the trouble

* This has a puranic reference. Once a demon prayed for long to Brahma for a boon to destroy the world. .Brahma promised to give the boon at a specific date. This alerted gods who approached Lord Shiva for protection. Shiva at this began to dance so that the time for granting of the boon might pass un noticed. It was such a mighty dance that the three worlds were terror-stricken.

** Shiva danced for the protection of the world but because of His mightiness unknowingly caused trouble to many.

17

VIYD VYAAPEE TARA GN GUNIT FENOD GM RUUCHI
PRVAAHO VARAM YH PRSHT LGU DRSHTH SHIRSI TE
JGT DVEEPAKARM JLDHI VLYM TEN KRTMI
TYNE NAI VONNEYM DHRTI MHIM DIVYM TV VPUH.

The river which pervades the sky and whose foams look all the more beautiful because of the stars and planets, seems no more than a drop of water when on Thy head *.That again has turned the world in to island surrounded by waters .And by this should be inferred how vast is the divine body

* This has reference to a puranic story. King Bhagirath prayed to Brahma for a long time to allow Ganga river flow on Earth to purify ashes of his ancestors. His wish was granted by Brahma and Lord shiva held it in His matted hair to reduce its impact of falling from such height.The volume of water flowing from Ganges filled the oceans and create land masses of continents within it.

18

RTHH KHIONEE YNTA STDHHRTIR AGENDRO DHNURTHO
RTHANGE CHNDRAR KOU RTH CHRNPANIH SHR ITI
DIDHKHIOSTE KOYM TRIPUR TRNM AADMBR VIDHI VIDHEYAIH. KRIDNTYO N
KHULU PRTNTRA PRBHU DHYH

When Thou wanted to burn the three cities* which were but a piece of straw (to Thee) the Earth was Thy chariot, Brahma Thy charioteer, the great mountain Meru Thy bow, the Sun and Moon the wheels of thy chariot, Vishnu thy arrow. Why this paraphernalia** ? The lord is not dependent on others, He was playing with things at his command

* See hymn 9.Tripurasur.He had three sons who had received three cities in boon from Brahma. To show their power they teased devas who prayed to lord Shiva who decided to destroy all the three cities along with their masters.

** Lord Shiva did not need the help of all these but He wanted to test the faithfulness of all of them towards Him.

19

HRISTE SAAHASTRM KML BLIM AADHAAY PD YOH
YD EKANE TSMIN NIJM UDHRN NETR KMLM
GTO BKTY UDREKH PRINTM ASOU CHKR VPUSHAA
TRYANAM RKHIYAI TRIPUR HR JAGRTI JGTAAM.

To worship Destroyer of Tripura(Lord Shiva), Lord Vishnu (Hari) rooted out his lotus eye to make up the deficiency when one flower was missing in his offerings to Shiva of thousand flowers (lotuses)at Thy feet, this great devotion transformed into a discus* which was given as boon to him by Lord Shiva for protecting the three worlds.

* The story goes that Vishnu would worship Shiva daily with a thousand lotuses. One day Shiva in order to test the devotion of Vishnu stole away one lotus from His offering of thousand lotuses. At this Vishnu plucked one of His eyes and offered that for the missing flower. Shiva was moved by this action and as a reward gave Him the discus, Sudarshana with which the latter protected the three worlds.

20

KRTOU SUPTE JAAGRT TYM ASI FLYOGE KRT MTAAM
KV KRM PRDVSTM FLTI PURSHAA DHNM RTE
ATS TVAAM SMPRKHIY KRTSHU FLDAN PRTI BHUVM
SHRTOU SHRDHAAM BDVAA DRDHPRIKRH KRMSU JNH

The sacrifice being destroyed. Thou ever remained the connecting link between the sacrifice and the fruit of the sacrifice. When does the destroyed sacrifice bear fruit if not accompanied by the worship of the Lord? Therefore knowing thee to be the giver of the fruits and putting faith in the Vedas people became resolute about the performance of sacrificial rites*

* This has reference to Mimasa school which believe that the fruits of sacrifice are stored for some future date without any divine intervention. That is being refuted in this hymn.

21

KRIYADKIO DKIOH KRUTUPTIR DHISHS TNUBHRTAAM
RSHINAAM AARTVIJYM SHRND SDSYAH SURGNH
KRTUBRMSHS TVTH KRTUFL VIDHAN VYSNINO
DHRUVM KURTUH SHRDHAA VIDHURM ABHICHAARAAY HI -MKHAAH

Thou, giver of refuge (even) the sacrifice where Daksha the lord of creation, expert in the sacrifice, was the sacrificer, Rishes were priests, gods were supervisors, was destroyed by Thee *, (though Thou art) bent upon giving fruits of the sacrifices. Surely the sacrifices cause injury to the sacrificers in the absence of devotion.**

* There is a puranic story that Daksha Prjapati, Lord Shivs father in law by first wife Sati, organised a big sacrificial yagnya in which all gods participated except Lord Shiva as He was not invited, because He had insulted His father in law by not respecting him on some previous occasion. Lord Shiva destroyed this sacrificial fire through His ganas as a revenge for the insult.

** Though Lord is giver of fruits of sacrifices but in the absence of devotion there is no fruit.
22

PRJANAATHM NATH PRSBHM ABHIKM SVAM DUHITRM
GTM ROHID BHUTAAM RIR MYISHUM RSHYSU VPUSHAAM
DHNUSH PAANER YTIM DIVM API SPTRA KRTMMUM
TRSNTM TEYDYAPI TYJTI N MRGVYAADH RBSH

O Lord, the fury of Thee, Who became a hunter with a bow in hand has not as yet left Brahma though, keenly pierced by Thy arrow and terror stricken, he has fled to the sky.*

* The puranic story goes like this that Brahma had a beautiful daughter (Sandya in human form). Brahma was overcome by lust and wanted to have sex with her. She escaped by taking the form of a deer. Brahma also adopted the same form to chase her into submission. Lord Shiva saved situation by firing an arrow at Brahma, which hurt Him and ever since He became a combination of deer shaped stars in the sky with an arrow of Shiva chasing Him that is visible to naked eye even today.

23

APURVM LAVNM VIVSN TNOSTE VIMRSHTAM
MUNANAM DARANAM SHJNI S KOAPI VYTIKRH.
YTO BHGNE GUHY SKRD API SPRYAM VIDDHTAAM
DHUVM MOKHIOSHLILM KIM API PURUUSAARTH PRSVITE.

Oh !Lord the worship of the most private part of your body when it was cut off due to the curse of Rishis has liberated its worshippers, then how much exalted it would be to worship your body.*

As per puranic story Rishis wives were driven to have sex with Lord Shiva when they saw His naked body. This angered Rishis and they cursed Him that resulted in the detachment of Shivas sex organ that later on became the object of His worship for the mortal

· (This hymn is not included in non-Kashmiri version)

24

SVLAVNYAA SHMSAA DHRT DHNUSHM AHNAAY TRNVT
PURH PLUSHTM DRSHTV A PURMTHN PUSHPA YUDHM API
UDI STRAINM DEVI YM NIRT DEHARDH GTNAD
AIVETI TVAM ADDHA VT VRD MUGDHA YUVTYH.

O Destroyer of Tripura* ,O Giver of booms ,even on seeing in front ,the god of love, bow in hand, burnt like piece of straw in a trice by Thee**. If Parvati proud of her beauty, thinks that Thou art under her fascination because she was allowed to occupy half of Thy body on account of her austerities ,ah, surely the young women are under delusion.***

* See hymn 11

** See hymn 15

*** Parvati performed much austerity to get love of Shiva. Taking pity on her suffering Shiv allowed her to become part of His body. If Parvati or other young women think that Shiv accepted her for her beauty then they are wrong.

25

SHMSHANESHVA KRIDA SMRHR PISHACAH SHCHRAH
CHITA BHSMA LEPH SRGPI NRKROTEE PRIKRH
AMNGLYM SHILM TV BHVTU NAMAI VM AKHILM
TTAAPI SMRTRNAM VRD PRMM MNGLM ASI

O destroyer of god of love, O giver of boons, Thy play is in the cremation ground, Thy companions are ghosts, Thou besmear Thy body with the ashes of burnt bodies and human skulls are Thy garland -all Thy conduct indeed is thus full of evil. But Thou conducts to the great good of those who remember Thee.

26

MNH PRYK CHITE SVIDHM AVIDHAAYAAT MRUUTH.
PRSHY DROMANH PRMD SLILOT SNJT DRSHH.
YDAA LOKYAA HLADM HRD IV NIMJJYAA MRTMYE
DDH TYNTS TTVM KIM API YAMINS TTKIL BHVAAN

Thou art indeed that unspeakable truth which the Yogis realized through meditation on thy self, on controlling the breath according the scriptures directions and realizing which they shed tears of thrilling joy and swimming as it were, in a pool of nectar, enjoying inner bliss.

27

TVM ARKS TVM SOMS TVM ASI PVNS TVM HUTVHH.
TVM AAPS TVM VYOM TVM UDHRNIR AATMA TVM ITI CH
PRICHCHNAAM EVM TVYI PRINTAA VIBHRTU GIRM
N VID MS TT TT TVM VYMHI HU YTTVM N BHVSI

The wise hold this limiting opinion about Thee Thou art the Sun, Thou art the Moon, Thou art the Fire, Thou art the Air, Thou art the Water. Thou art the Space; Thou art the Earth and Thou art the Self. We don not know that thing which Thou art not.

28

TRYEEM TIS TRO VRTIS TRIBHVNM ATHO TRIN API SURAN
AKAARAADYAI VRNAIS TRIBHIR ABHI DDHTTIRN VIKRTI
TUREEYM TE DHAAM DVNIBHIR AVRUUN DHANM ANUBHIH
SMST VYSTM TVAM SHRND GRNA TYOM ITI PDM

O giver of refuge, with the three letters -A, U, M, indicating the three Vedas*, the three states**, the three worlds*** and the three Gods****, the word OM mentions Thee separately. United by the scuttle sound the world OM collectively***** mentions Thee - Thy Absolute Transcendent State.

* Rig, Yajur and Sam Ved

** Namely waking ,dreaming and sleeping states

*** Earth, Patal and Swarg Lok

**** Three gods –Namely, Bhrama Vishnu and Rudra

***** The mantra OM when uttered as one word indicates the absolute Brahman

29

BHVH SHRVO RUDRH PSHUPTI RTHOGRH SH MHAAN
TTHA BHIMESHANOV ITI YD ABHDHAANAASH TKM IDM
AMUSHMIN PRTYEKM PRVICHIRIT DEV SHRTIR API
PRIYAAYAASMAI DHAMNE PRNIHIT NMSYOSMI BHVTE

O Lord, Bhava, Sarva, Rudra, Pasupati, Ugra, Mahadeva, Bhima, and Isana- those eight names* are mentioned even** by the Vedas. To Thee who art beloved and effulgent, I bow down

* Out of thousand names of Lord Shiva the following eight are very common-

1. Bhava- One who is creator
2. Shrva- One who is destroyer
3. Rudra- One who is terrible
4. Pashuoati- One who takes care of all beings
5. Ugr- One who removes ignorance
6. Maha- One who is above all
7. Bhima- One who is very powerful
8. Ishan- One who is a great governor

** even here refers to the fact that these names are referred in Vedas which are the earliest reference books.

30

VPSH PRAADUR BHAAVAAD ANUMITIM IDM JNMNI PURA
PURARE NAIVAHM KVCHD API BHVNTM PRNTVAN
NMN MUKTH SMPR TYTNUR AHM AGRE API PYNTIMAAN
MHESH KHINTVYM TD IDM APRAADH DVYM API

O Lord! I feel my present birth is due to the reason that I did not pray to you in my previous life. Now that I prayed and hope to be liberated but then I cannot pray you any more. I beg to be excused for this double fault of mine.

(This hymn is not included in the non-Kashmiri versions)

31

NMO NEDISTHAAY PRIYDV DVISTHAAY CH NMO
NMH KHIODISTHAAY SMRHR MHISHTHAAY CH NMH.
NMO VRSHISHTHAAY TRINYN YVISHTHAAY CH NMO
NMH SRVSMAI TE TD IDM ITI SHRVAAY CH NMH

O lover of solitude my salutations to Thee who art very near* as also very far & far away**.
O Destroyer of the God of love, my salutation to Thee who art the minutest as also the largest. O three eyed one my salutation to Thee who art the oldest*** as also the youngest.
Thus my salutation to Thee who art all as also transcending all.

* Because He is indwelling Spirit of all

** Because He is beyond mind and speech

*** He was existing even before creation of universe

32

BHUL RJSE VISHVOT PTOU BHVAY NMO NMH
PRBL TMSE TT SMHARE HRAY NMO NMH
JNSUKHKRTE STVO DRIKTOU MRDHAY. NMO NMH.
PRMHSI PDE NISTRAIGUNYE SHIVAAY NMO NMH.

Salutations to Brahma in whom rajas preponderates for the creation of the universe,
Salutations to Rudra in whom tams predominates for the destruction of the same,
Salutations to Vishnu in whom satva predominates for giving happiness to the people,
Salutations to Shiva who is effulgent and beyond the three attributes.

To make up the total to 32 the following two hymn are recited by Hindus outside Kashmir as 31 and 32 hymn:

KRSHPRINTI CHETH KLESH VSHYM KV CHEDM
KVCH TV GUNSEEM ULLNGNEE SHSHVDRDHI H
ITI CHKITM AMNID KRTY MAAM BHKTI RADHAD
VRD CHRNYOSTE VAKY PUSHP UPAHARM

O giver of boons, where is my ill developed mind subject to misery* and where in Thy Divinity - eternal and possessing infinite virtues? Though terror stricken because of this, I am forced by my devotion to offer this hymn at Thy feet.

* According to Patanjali there are five kinds of misery –namely, Ignorance, Egoism, Attachment, Aversion and Clinging to life

ASITGRISMM SYAT KJLM SINDHU PATRE
SUR TRUU VR SHAKHA LEKHNI PTRMURVI

**LIKHTI YDI GRHITVA SHARDAA SRVKALM
TDPI TV GUNANAMISH PARM N YATI**

O Lord, if the blue mountains be ink, the ocean the ink pot, the branch of the heavenly Tree* be pen, the earth the writing leaf, and by making these if the goddess of learning writes for eternity, even then the limit of Thy virtues will not be reached.

* Refers to mythological tree Parijata

References

Swami Pavitrananda of Advaita Ashrama of Calcutta has made the above translation of hymns. The translation of hymns 23 and 30 and those of three hymns recited by Kashmiri's at the start is based on Hindi translation made by Pandit Prem Nath Sadoo in his book Mahimnastotrm. The commentary has been written from references in Shiv puran and other sources.

4.0 KASHMIR SHAIVISM VERSUS VEDANTA – A SYNOPSIS

This presentation was made by the author at the WAVES (World Association of Vedic Studies) symposium in the University of Massachusetts, Dartmouth, RI, USA - July 12-14, 2002

Vedas, which are considered revealed knowledge through the medium of Indian seers (rishis), are revered as mother of all religions in India. They form the matrix of all the theistic philosophies of Indian religions including Kashmir Shaivism. Therefore, the objective here is not to compare Vedas with Kashmir Shaivism but to present their complementary roles in the development of post-vedic India.

I. Background

It is said at the end of the Mahabharata war, which symbolizes the end of the Dvapara Era and the beginning of the Kalyuga Era, through which we are passing now, the influence of Vedas dwindled as the Vedic seers disappeared. New class of seers emerged from time to time who interpreted Vedic knowledge for the benefit of suffering humanity. Thus six systems of Vedic schools called darshanas came into being. These are:

1. Samklya
2. Yoga
3. Nyaya
4. Vaisheshika
5. Purva mimamasa
6. Advaita Vedanta

The last one Advaita Vedanta was propounded by Shankaracharya in the 9th century AD and culminated in the final interpretation of Vedas (Ved –anta – end of Vedas). Although these Vedic darshanas differ in their approach to the interpretation of Vedas but all of them consider Vedas as their base.

The focus of all these systems (darshanas) was to explain or resolve the dichotomy between subject and object; the knower and the known; the Cosmic Self and this self; I (aham) and this self (idam). We may group all these systems as Vedanta for the sake of this discussion.

II. Kashmir Shaivism

Along with this group of seers, another group of seers tried to resolve this dichotomy by investigating their inner nature. They carried experiments on their bodies by employing yogic practices confined to mental processes and came out with their findings in poetic terms using metaphors, symbols, and allegories. This yogic practice came to be known as Tantra. As against the Vedic knowledge, which came mainly through the process of revelation, the tantric knowledge came mainly through various forms of practices (kriyas). Tantric practices were "inward" by nature i.e. they centered around psychophysical makeup of the practitioner as compared to the "outward" nature of Vedic practices, which focus on sacrificial ceremonies along with yoga.

Over a period of time thousands of tantric traditions developed in India and abroad, which came to be classified under three major categories

- a) Shaiva-Shakti Tantrism,
- b) Buddhist Tantrism, and
- c) Vaishnava Tantrism.

Shaiva-Shakti Tantrism which recognizes Lord Shiva as the Supreme and Absolute Consciousness with Shakti as His dynamic energy came to be known as Shaivism and developed in three widely apart regions in India:

- a) Kashmir in the north,

- b) Kerala and Tamil Nadu in the south, and
- c) Gauda (Bengal) in the east.

The tantric practices prevalent in these regions came to be grouped under six traditions:

- a) Shaiva Sidanta,
- b) Pashupati Shaivism,
- c) Kashmir Shaivism,
- d) Vira Shaivism,
- e) Shiva Advanta, and
- f) Siddha Sidhanta.

It is Kashmir Shaivism that provided the philosophy of Trika, which provided relationship between God, nature, and man. It also provided the philosophy of Shiv-Shakti and Nara (man), which forms the main philosophy (Vidya Pada) of all Shaivic philosophies.

Kashmir Shaivism is a theistic philosophy that identifies Lord Shiva as the Absolute, Infinite, and pure Consciousness lying beyond the reach of speech, mind, and intellect. It is transcendental and immanent and can be realized through yoga. It advocates how a human being engrossed in the inferior objective world of Lord Shiva can be taken upwards i.e. towards the Supreme energy of Lord Shiva through his cognate energy (Shakti). It was in Kashmir Shaivism that the concept of dynamic energy (Shakti) playing an important role in the evolution of cosmos was introduced.

The development of Kashmir Shaivic philosophy can be traced back to Aagamas (18) which were written from 3rd century BC to 3rd - 4th century AD. Malinivijayattara is the most important Agama of this period. Vasugupta who lived in Kashmir during the end of the 8th century AD wrote Shiv Sutra and it was his disciple Bhatta Kalatta (mid 9th century AD) who wrote Spanda Karika. Somananda wrote Shiv dreshti in late 9th century AD. He is the father of Pritibijna (recognition) school that forms the basis of Kashmir Shaivism philosophy. However, it was his worthy disciple Utpaldeva who presented the Pritibijna philosophy in a comprehensive way in his book Ishvara-pratiyabijna-karika in late 9th century or beginning of the 10th century AD. Later on, it was Abhinavgupta (between 10th – 11th century AD) who summarized the view points of all previous thinkers and presented the philosophy in a logical way along with his own thoughts in his treatise Tantraloka. Thus one could say just as Shankaracharya was the last exponent of Vedic knowledge, Abhinavgupta was the last exponent of Kashmir Shaivism.

The main philosophy of Kashmir Shaivism rests on the non-dualistic foundation. Abhinavgupta used the word *paradvaita*– the supreme and absolute non-dualism to describe Kashmir Shaivism.

A casual reader may not be able to make out the differences in the final presentation of philosophy of Kashmir Shaivism and Vedanta. However, careful analysis and reading will reveal the differences. But before getting into the differences let us first go over to the commonalities.

III. Common Concepts

The common concepts of Vedanta and Kashmir Shaivism may be summarized as follows:

1. Cyclic nature of eternity

Both believe in the cyclic nature of eternity that consists of vast phases of creation, preservation, and their dissolution.

2. Bound Soul

Both accept the belief that life and death are but two phases of a single cycle to which soul is bound.

3. Dharma

Both accept dharma as the moral law of universe that accounts for these eternal cycles of nature as well as the destiny of human soul in its evolution.

4. Moksha

Both accept that knowledge is the path of freedom and yoga as the method of attaining liberation.

5. Chit (Consciousness)

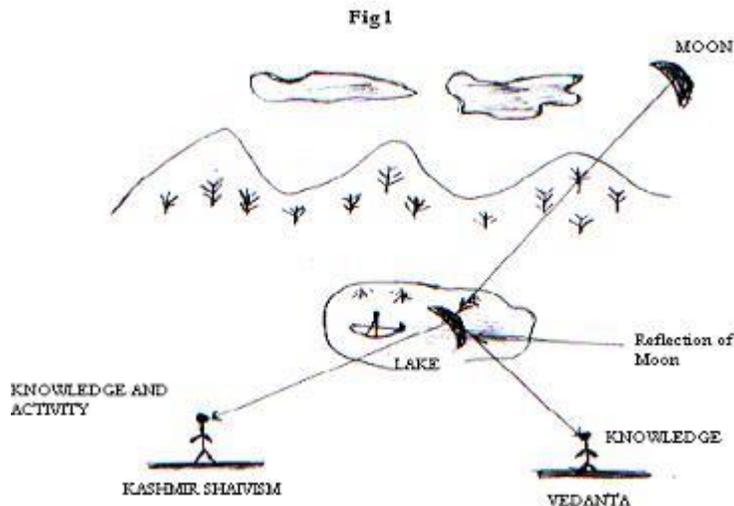
Both recognize consciousness as Supreme Reality. Vedanta calls it Parmatma whereas Shaivites call it Parmshiva.

IV. Points of Disagreement

Some of the points of disagreement are:

1. Ultimate Reality

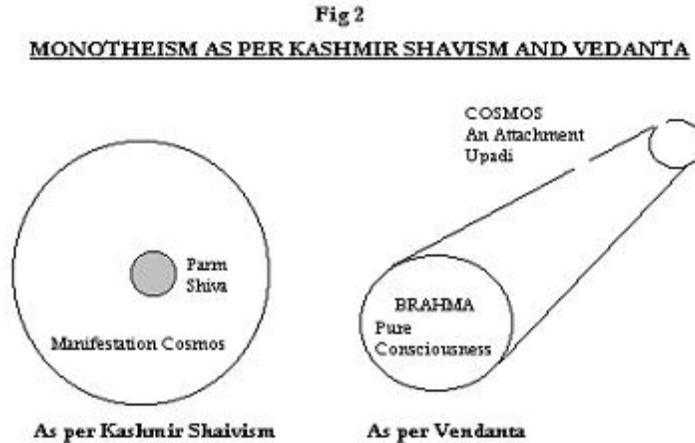
The one creative force out of which everything emerges is known as Ultimate Reality. According to Vedanta, Brahman (chit) is the Ultimate Reality, while Kashmir Shaivism calls this Ultimate Reality as Parmshiva. Brahman is believed to have no activity (kriya.) It is the knowledge (prakash or jnana). As per Kashmir Shaivism, Parmshiva is knowledge (prakash/jnana) plus activity (kriya or vimarsha). Vedanta consider activity (kriya) residing only in the empirical subject (Jiva) and not in Brahman. Shivites on the other hand think that Vedanta takes kriya in a very narrow sense whereas it should be taken in a wider sense.



They argue that even knowledge (jnana) is an activity (kriya) of the Divine, without activity chit or the Divine Being would be inert and incapable of bringing about anything, least of all the whole cosmos. Parmshiva is svatantra (has free will) and therefore is a Karta (doer). Knowledge (jnana) is not a passive state of consciousness but an activity of consciousness, though an effortless one. Knowledge is not really like the reflection of moon in a pond; in knowledge there is an active “grasping” on the part of the knower which is an activity of mind (kriya).

2. Monotheism

While monotheism is one of the central principles of most of the Vedantic philosophies, it is interpreted differently by its various schools. Advaita Vedanta explains the problem of phenomenal existence on the basis of two mutually exclusive and independent entities. The first is known as Brahman (pure consciousness) and the second Avidya (inexplicable ignorance) as an attachment (upadi). Both are said to be beginning less in existence. Kashmir Shaivism does not agree with the concept of Avidya to explain the phenomenal existence. Abhinavgupta in his treatise on Kashmir Shaivism, Tantraloka, refutes this concept. “The principle of absolute existence of ‘Brahman’ along with ‘Avidya’ as an upadi cannot be accepted as a definite principle of pure monotheism” (ibid. 111:404) because it implies the eternal existence of two entities – Brahman and Avidya, which amounts to clear dualism. He further states “there is self-contradiction in saying that Avidya is indescribable as very statement that Avidya is a divine power of God implies that such a power is describable.



3. Manifestation (Abhasvada)

Vedanta states that phenomenal universe we live in is not real. It only appears as an existent reality. It is other than what it seems e.g. like a rope mistaken for a snake. It is like a dream or a mirage – Vivarta. Brahman exists but appears falsely as God, finite soul (Purusha) and insentient matter (prakriti). Abinavgupta contradicts these assumptions by stating “how can it be unreal when it is manifested. This has to be given due consideration. An entity that appears clearly and creates the whole universe must be something real and substantial and should be described as such”. (Ishvarprabijna 111-80)

4. Manifestation Process

Manifestation of cosmos as per Kashmir Shaivism is called “Descent” – which means descent of cosmic self (Parmashiva) to a limited self (Jiva). Vedanta explains this process of manifestation through 25 elements. Kashmir Shaivism explains the cosmic evolution through 36 elements (tattvas) which include 23 elements of Vedanta without modification, 2 with modification, and prescribes 11 more elements (tattvas).

Parmshiva of Kashmir Shaivism is not the same Shiva of Vedanta who is meditating at Mount Kailash with Parvati by His side. Parmshiva is a Being, not necessarily in physical sense, who is Absolute, pure, eternal, infinite, and totally free I-consciousness whose essential nature is vibrant creative energy which Kashmir Shaivism describes as wonderful spiritual stir of blissfulness known as spanda. This spanda causes Absolute Reality to be continuously inclined towards the outward and joyful manifestation of its creative energy – Shakti. This manifestation is brought about by the freewill play (leela) of Parmshiva Himself like a child's play that is without motivation. The outward divine manifestation of this creative energy appears in five activities:

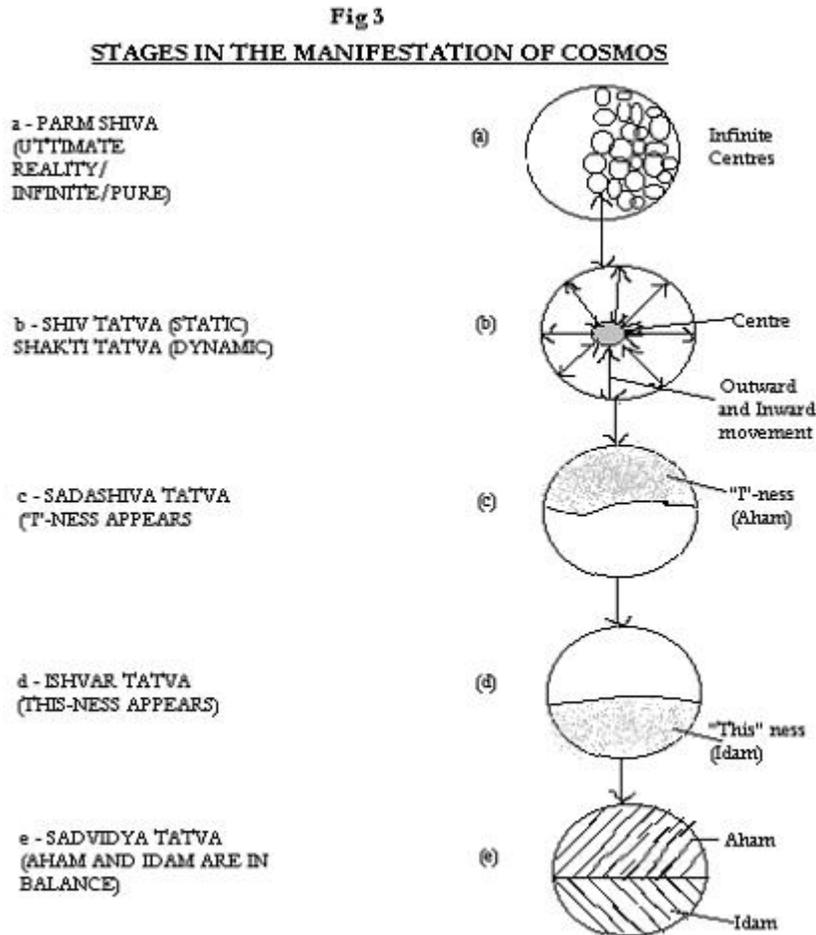
1. The activity of creation.
2. The activity of preservation.
3. The activity of dissolution of all the elements including the beings living in them.
4. The activity of self-oblivion.
5. The activity of self-recognition of these created beings.

Stages 1-3 are common to both Kashmir Shaivism as well as Vedanta. However, Stages 4 and 5 listed above are present in Kashmir Shaivism only.

Kashmir Shaivism includes 36 elements (tattvas) of manifestation process as mentioned earlier. These are categorized into following four major and their sub-categories:

A. Five pure (shudh) elements – These are called 'Pure' because they have been created by Parmshiva Himself as against others which have been created by intermediary and lower beings as per the wishes of Lord Himself.

1. Shiva Tattva
2. Shakti Tattva



These two tattvas are only a linguistic convention and are not actually part of creation. They are in reality one with Parmshiva. They are considered to be two tattvas only for the convenience of philosophical thinking and as a way of clarifying the two aspects of the one Absolute Reality-Parmshiva. Shivatattva is transcendental unity and shakti tattva is universal diversity. The changeless Absolute and pure Consciousness is Shiva while as natural tendency of Shiva towards the outward manifestation of divine activities is Shakti.

3. Sadashiva Tattva (also known as Iccha tattva)

The desire (Iccha) for creation takes place very faintly. While the Absolute is limitless I-Consciousness (aham), small desire for objectivity "this" (idam) takes place. The beings at this stage are known as mantra maheswaras with the presiding deity Sadashiva Bhattaraka who is actually Parmshiva Himself and has descended to this level as the master of creation.

4. Isvara Tattva (also known as jnana Tattva)

The awareness (jnana) of I-Consciousness is not lost but the awareness of "this-ness" begins to

dominate. Awareness shines as "This is myself". Created beings at this stage of manifestation are known as 'mantreshwaras' and the presiding deity is Iswara Bhattaraka.

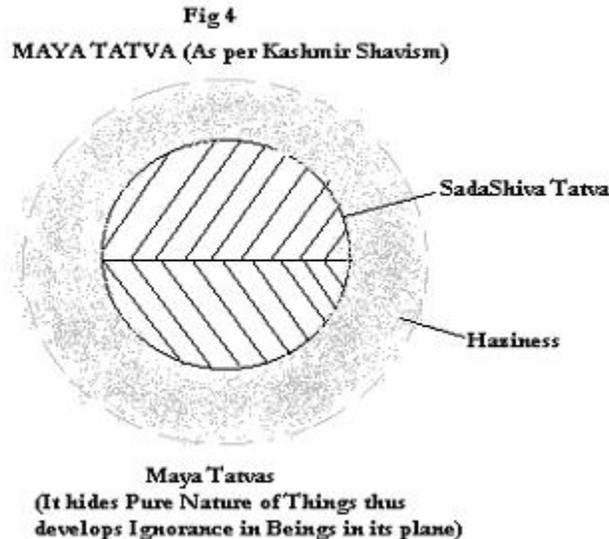
5. Sadvidya (also known as Shuddvidya or kriya) Tattva

The vision of the beings in the 3rd and 4th elements above has been defined as "unity in diversity and diversity in unity" as "I-ness" and "this-ness" is still not balanced. When the vision becomes balanced so that there is equal emphasis on "I-ness" and "this-ness", it is called Sadvidya. At a further stage of diversity, where the awareness of "I-ness" becomes "I am I" and of "this-ness" becomes "this is this", this is called Mahamaya. Beings living in this stage are known as "mantras" and the presiding deity is Anantnatha. He is actually Ishwara Bhattaraka who has descended to this level as the divine administrator of further creation.

6. Maya Tattva

This is the final tattva created by the Lord Himself that is considered to be "impure" i.e. filled with limitations. It has two main effects:

- a) it hides the pure and divine nature of created beings residing in its plane and consequently they forget their purity and infiniteness of their I-consciousness as well as their infinite potency. Hence they are given the name anu (atoms) i.e. finite beings or pashu (animal-like) or simply man Nara.
- b) they see every other activity as different from what they are.

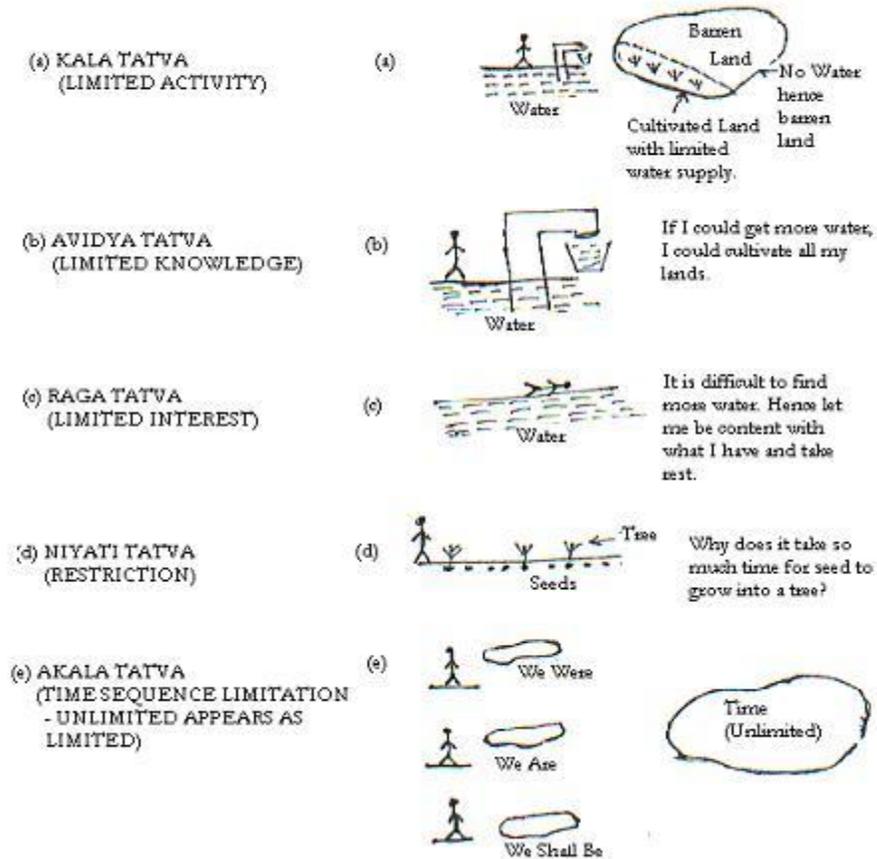


Maya is thus the plane of Absolute self-oblivion and diversity. This is the abode of the finite beings. Under its influence, being loose its state of oneness with the Absolute and also their divine potency. Maya causes feeling of imperfection and emptiness within the beings which they try to fill up with outer objects which leads to development of desire and passions for objects of enjoyment.

B. Five layers of limitations (Kuncukas)

The deity Anantnatha who presides over maya and is the master of mahamaya shakes up maya, so to say, causing it to expand into the next five tattvas – collectively called kuncukas or cloaks which covers the real nature of the knowing objects. Sometimes maya tattva is itself included as the sixth kuncuka.

Fig 5
FIVE LIMITATIONS (KUNCUKAS) DUE TO MAYA TATVA



7. Kala Tattva (limitation of activity, authorship)

To fulfill our desires, maya allows a little power of action to achieve a little amount of success.

8. Avidya (ashudh) Tattva (limitation of knowledge)

Since doing is not possible without knowing, maya gives a little knowledge to know a certain amount.

9. Raga Tattva (limitation of interest)

To further the limit the scope of our doing and knowing, maya appears in us as raga or 'limited interest'.

10. Niyati Tattva (restriction)

Niyati is the law of nature that establishes the order of succession in all phenomenons e.g. the way in which seed develops into a tree. This law of nature appears as the law of restriction and causation.

11. Akala (or Kaala) Tattva (Time sequence limitation)

The above four limitations, limit our capacity of knowing and doing but this tattva limits our very being as well. Our real self is in fact infinite and is in no way conditioned by concept of time imposed on us by maya in the way that we feel "we were", "we are", and "we shall be". Thus imposing on us conditions of time sequence.

12. Parusha Tattva

The I-Consciousness reduced to utter finitude is known as Parusha. It is also known as jiva, pashu , anu nara.

13. Prakriti (or mul prakriti) Tattva

Prakriti is the un-diversified source of all the remaining 23 elements as established by Vedanta system. This represents the complete "this-ness" of the objective manifestation.

C. Thirteen (13) instrumental tattvas

C1. The three (3) interior instrumental elements (antah-karnas):

14. Buddhi (intellect)– Faculty of judgement

15. Manas – Faculty of Imagination

16. Ahamkara – Personal ego

C2. Five (5) exterior elements of perception (jnanendrayas):

17. Sravanendreya (Hearing)

18. Supershanendreya (Feeling by touch)

19. Darshanendreya (Seeing)

20. Resanendreya (Taste)

21. Ghranendreya (Smell)

C3. Five (5) elements of action (karmendreya):

22. Vagendreya (Voice or expression)

23. Hastendreya (Handling)

24. Padendreya (Locomotion)

25. Payvendreya (Rejecting, Discharging)

26. Upasthendreya (Resting or recreating)

D. Ten (10) objective elements:

D1. Five (5) subtle objective elements (tanmatras):

27. Shabdatanmra (sound)

28. Sparshatanmra (Feel)

29. Rupanmra (Color)

30. Rasatanmra (Flavor)

31. Ghandhatanmra (Odour)

D2. Five (5) gross objective elements (bhutas):

32. Akasha (ether)

33. Vayu (Air)

34. Agni (Fire)

35. Apas (Water)

36. Pritvi (Earth)

Kashmir Shaivism does not consider the above analysis of manifestation as final. It is only a tool for contemplative meditation. Through a further analysis the number of elements (tattvas) can be increased to any level and similarly through synthesis they can be decreased to only one tattva. For example, the practitioners of Trika system use only three tattvas in the process of their Yoga meditation viz. - Shiva (Absolute Unity), Shakti (link between unity and duality), and Nara (extreme duality).

Three important observations to highlight the differences in the manifestation philosophies of Vendana and Kashmir Shaivism are:

a) Purusha

While the Purusha of Vedanta is a Universal soul (God-like), He is atmen (pure spirit). In contrast, in Kashmir Shaivism it is bound soul – a jiva, nara, pashu or anu – a limited soul.

b) Prakriti

Prakriti in Vedanta is involved in manifestation as an independent element. It is a cosmic substance that is termed as perennial impulse in nature (like Shakti tattva). But the Prakriti of the Kashmir Shaivism deals with limited jiva only.

c) Maya

Maya in the Vedanta is the means of operation. It is not an element. It is force that creates the illusion of non-perception in nature. It has no reality. It is only the appearance of fleeting forms which are all unreal and like mirage vanishes when the knowledge of reality draws. In contrast, in Kashmir Shaivism maya is a tattva. It is real. It is the power of contraction or limiting the nature of five universal modes of consciousness. It cannot be separated from Absolute Reality – Parmshiva.

5. Three Gunas (attributes)

Vedanta describes Prakriti as a combination of three Gunas – Satvic, Rajas, and Tamas. Further it describes the nature of these gunas. Thus Satva is enlightenment and pleasure; Rajas is turbulence and pain; and Tamas is ignorance and lethargy. It does not explain the source of the nature of these gunas. Kashmir Shaivism has examined this issue. In their view, Paramshiva possesses limitless power to know, to do, and to diversify. These powers are known as jnana, kriya, and maya. By the limitations brought about by maya, the Infinite Consciousness is reduced to finite consciousness – purusha (the limited being, anu or pashu). Here they view these experiences as pleasure, pain, and ignorance.

6. Moksha (liberation from bondage)

In Vedanta we have four fold description for achieving liberation from bondage:

i) Discrimination

ii) Dispassion

iii) Right Conduct

iv) Desire for liberation

To get liberated one must:

i) act with zeal and faith

ii) act for the good of humanity

iii) get immersed in meditation

Kashmir Shaivism has a simple prescription for liberation from bondage. The logic behind this is that just ignorance is inspired by God so is revelation inspired by Him. This inspiration of divine knowledge is known as His Grace (anugraha) or the Descent of His powers (shaktipata). Only those individuals who receive Lords Shaktipata become interested in path of correct knowledge for achieving moksha. Three types of shaktipata have been described:

- i) Tivra (swift) shaktipata
- ii) Madya (moderate) shaktipata
- iii) Manda (slow) shaktipata

Each of the above has further three sub divisions, thus making a total of nine shaktipatas. There is no restriction of caste, color, or creed for achieving moksha. Yoga is the means of liberation.

7. Yoga

Both Vedanta as well as Kashmir Shaivism recommends Yoga for achieving moksha. However, there are differences in practice.

In Vedanta Yoga practices, emphasis is laid on controlling mind by strict discipline in day-to-day life that for its success can be practiced by highly motivated ones or ascetics. A Shiva Yogi is free to live without restrictions - be a householder - and participate in the pleasures of the senses of the mind (bhoga) within the limits of the socially accepted norms. He is advised to pursue some yogic practices known as trika yoga that leads its practitioner to self-bliss and at that stage the lust for worldly enjoyments automatically loose its charm. At that stage, senses develop a spontaneous indifference known as anadaravikrati to former pleasures. The three yogic practices of trika system are:

- i) Shambhavayoga – In this highest form of practice, the minds' tendency is to think of himself as one with Ultimate Reality and nothing else. The practitioner stands still and loses itself in the vibrant glow of I-consciousness. It is the practice of non-ideation (nirvikalpa).
- ii) Shaktiyoga – In this practice, one uses the mind and imagination to constantly contemplate the real nature of Self as taught by Shiva monotheistic philosophy. One is supposed to think that one is everything and yet beyond everything. It is a practice of "pure-ideation" (shuddhikalpa). It is also known as jnanayoga.
- iii) Anavayoga – Its practice is recommended for those who are not capable of adopting the higher yogic practices mentioned above. Anu stands for finite ordinary beings bounded by their limitations and objective meditation is recommended for them where the focus of attention shifts to kriya (action). Kashmir Shaivism encourages practitioners to start from higher yogic practices (shambhavayoga) down to the last by stages if he is not comfortable there. Vedantic yoga recommends a completely different set of yoga practices and one has to go up the ladder from lower practices to upper practices.

V. Conclusion

These are some of the main points of differences of philosophies. But we have to remember that purusha in Kashmir Shaivism is a finite being a man Pashu (animal like) because of his ignorance brought about by maya. He is free from sin and his highest goal is to get out of ignorance and merge his limited self with the Real Self. This is called Ascent. The way to reach there is through trika yoga.

To quote Swami Laxmanjoo, a great Kashmir Shivism scholar of the 20th century, "although Kashmir Shaivism can hardly be grasped unless the Vedanta philosophy is comprehended, yet no system of Vedanta will be complete without it". Kashmir Shaivism gives most detail account of Ultimate Reality, Vedanta has done it in its way.

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5.0 DIWALI CELEBRATIONS BY KASHMIRI PANDITS

ORIGIN

The origin of Diwali is very obscure. However, present day beliefs for this celebration are as under :

SAGAR MANTHAN

Sage Kashyap was married to all the 13 daughters of Sage Daksha Prajapati and from the children born from his first wife ADIT were DEVAS whereas the children from his second wife DITI were DEMONS. DEMONS were physically more powerful and scarred DEVAS who approached Lord VISHNU for help. He suggested away out. That was to churn the ocean for getting nectar, by drinking which the Devas could become immortal and out of reach of Demons harm. Devas agreed to his proposal and got ready for the job. 14 objects emerged from the churning of the ocean. Nectar was 12th which was readily consumed by Devas and they became GODS. 13th object was KAL-KOOT (poison) which no body was prepared to have. In order to save mother Earth from the pollution of poison Lord Shiva came forward to take it. He took it and held it in His throat. By this act His throat turned blue due to the effect of poison and hence He is called by the name of NEELKUNTH as well. Last object to emerge from the churning of the ocean was Goddess LAXMI seated in a lotus, holding precious jewels, wearing garland of imperishable Parijita flowers, looking prettier than anything known till then. She was immediately taken by Lord VISHNU as His consort. Ever since Laxmi came to be associated with not only good fortune and material wealth but also embodiment of loveliness gracefulness and charm.

The churning process started on the 11th day of Kartik Krishan paksh and ended on Amavasya as per our Lunar calender.

LORD RAMAS RETURN

Some believe Lord Ram (who is incarnation of Vishnu) returned home on this day after 14 years of exile along with his wife Sita (who is incarnation of LAXMI)

CELEBRATIONS

Hindus celebrate this day with great festivity. No other deity's worship requires as much massive cleaning except for Shivratri celebrations by our community. People decorate their houses much in advance in preparation of this festival. Some give a new paint to their homes while others clean their homes thoroughly. This is the occasion for buying new things - a new home, a new car, furniture, clothes, utensils etc. In some parts of India celebrations last for one week starting from Ekadashi and ending two days after Amavasya. Since Laxmi is associated with material aspect of life, it is the most auspicious and important celebration for people associated with any business/commercial activity. It is the beginning of the fiscal year for their accounts/books.

On the day of Diwali people get up early in the morning and then put on new clothes, go to temples, and purchase lots of sweets and dry fruit for distribution among friends, relatives and colleagues. They also purchase earthen lamps, candles, electric and electronic devices for illuminating their homes and business establishments. For children it is a day of merry making. They enjoy by playing with crackers especially at night time. They also receive cash as Diwali Gifts. All government and private establishments remain closed on this day. Business houses reward their employees with gifts of cash and kind. In some homes gambling and drinking is considered part of celebration process. Winning is considered a sign of good luck for the coming year.

WORSHIP

The elders of family keep a fast until evening. Goddess LAXMI along with God GANESH is worshipped after sunset. Some people purchase new 'murties' made of clay or silver or even gold. Prayers are offered with or without a family priest. Sweets, dry and fresh fruits, cereals flowers etc. are offered **with** prayers.

CELEBRATIONS BY KASHMIRI PUNDITS

Deepawali is one of the oldest rituals for Kashmiri Pundits. We find a mention of its celebrations in Nilmat Puran. It was then celebrated as SUKHSUPTIKA which literally means sleep with happiness. The celebration would start from Ekadeshi and last on Amavasya. On Amavasya elders of family would keep a fast and worship goddess LAXMI after sunset. Earthen lamps were placed in temples, on the road crossings, cremation grounds, banks of rivers, streams and lakes, hills houses, at the foot of trees, cow sheds, court yards and shops. People would wear new clothes and listen to music.

With the passage of time some of these things have become obsolete but the tradition is still there. Since we were not used to eating Sweets in Kashmir, we substituted sweets with sweet puris and offered the same to Lord NARAYAN (incarnation of Lord Vishnu).

On the whole we do not celebrate Diwali with the same gusto as is done by our Hindu brethren outside Kashmir. This could be due to the fact that we are Lord SHIVA worshipers. Diwali is primarily a worship of Lord VISHNU who is very popular in the plains of India.

6.0 NAVRATRA CELEBRATIONS

Significance to our community

Navratras start from September 28th. Following my earlier notes about appraising the young minds of our community about the significance of various religious customs, below you will find note regarding the significance of NAVRATRAS for our community.

May Goddess Durga (Maharagyna) bless you and your family with abundant happiness!

INTRODUCTION

All over world Hindus celebrate Navratras with great devotion. Navratras literally means "nine nights". These nights are devoted to the worship of Goddess Durga. Navratras, are celebrated twice in a year. Once in the bright two-week period of Shukla Paksha of the lunar month of Ashwani (Asuj in Kashmiri) – corresponding to September/October) from the 1st to the 9th date of the two week period. These days of Navratras are celebrated with great fervor especially in West Bengal where it is known as "Durga Puja". The Gujrati Hindus celebrate it with nine days of Garba dance. The second Navratras are celebrated during the first nine days of the bright two-week period of Shukla Paksha of the lunar month of Chaitra – corresponding to mid-March to mid-April.

The timing of the celebrations correspond to the autumnal and vernal equinox which is also the time when seasons change and we harvest crops which adds to the glory of these celebrations.

RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND

For the devout these days are the most sacred for it is during these days when Goddess Durga takes a stock of her devotees and grants all boons, removes sins and ensures trouble free life for her devotees. During this period most of the Hindus go to Temples for prayers. At some places special pandals (platforms) are raised where clay idols of Goddess Durga are installed decorated with various weapons in Her eight arms, riding a lion, with demon Maheshasur lying dead at Her feet. These idols are worshipped for eight days (nine nights) and then immersed in river, lake or pond on the ninth day with great fanfare. During this period recitation of sacred scriptures such as Durga Sapshudi from Markanday Puran, which narrates how Goddess Durga was blessed and provided with weapons by our Trinity of Gods for vanquishing the demon Maheshasur who had forced Devas to leave heaven and take refuge on earth. Saints and learned ones carry on Pravachans (discourses) and appraise devotees about the importance of these days. In Chaturpur Temple in South Delhi, over a million people visit during these days. Musical recitations by famous musicians are offered for the benefit of the Goddess and devotees. For those who offer Jap (repetition of mantras) as the way of meditation, this is the time for marathon Japas of their chosen mantra at least 125,000 (sava lakh) times. For tantrics, it is the time to enrich their tantric shakti by observing various rituals. The devout ones keep a fast until they spot the moon or by restricting their eating to one time only. Even those who do not fast, do not eat non-vegetarian food during these days. On the ninth day after the immersion of the idol in the water the celebrations come to an end.

The Navratras celebration of March/April period are celebrated on a lessor scale but there is no short cut for devout ones.

KASHMIRI NAVRATRA CELEBRATIONS

There are 22 places all around India from Kashmir to Kanyakumari which are considered most scared to Goddess Durga. In Kashmir, Khirbawani at Tulamulla is among one such places where she is worshipped as Maharagnya. KP's are traditionally Shakti worshippers and worship Durga as Maharagnya, Sharika, Jawala, Kali, Tripura etc.

During Navratras people go to various shrines to offer prayers. We recite Bhawani Sahasranam instead of Durga Saptashudi. Bhawani Sahasranam (1000 names of Goddess Durga) is of Kashmiri Origin and is not known outside Kashmir. Lalita Sahasranam of South India, which has about 100 names common with our Bhawani Shastranam, has the closest resemblance to Bhawani Sahasranam .

Not all KP's observe all nine days as Navratras. Some people observe it from the 5th to the 8th day and some only the 8th day which is Ashtami and traditionally a sacred day for our community. Some KP's take non-vegetarian food for the first four days if they are not keeping a fast.

The ninth day - Nawmi - which is called Ram Nawmi, is a day of traditional celebrations for us. On this day, havans are performed especially at temples dedicated to Lord Rama. It is a day when most of KP's visit the places where havan is being performed. We do not have the tradition of making clay models and worshiping them followed by immersion in rivers. Instead some of us sow barley in a pot on 1st day of Navratra and keep it at a sacred place, they water it daily and offer prayers. The household keeps fast and taking meals one time only. On the ninth day, the barley plants are kept for display of the devotees as a symbolic darshan of Goddess Durga. These plants are later immersed in rivers. A good growth of plants symbolizes the acceptance of prayers by Goddess Durga and her happiness, which is sure to bring happiness and prosperity to those involved.

The Navratras of Chaitra (March-April) is of special importance to KP's as it is on the first day of this Navratras we celebrate our new year (Navreh).

After our last migration from Kashmir, our community has begun celebrating these days according to traditions followed by Hindus in their new neighborhoods. Some people go for Vaishnav Devi yaatra at Jammu which draws huge number of devotees during these periods and receive blessings of Goddess Vaisnav Devi.

DURGA PRAYERS

Seven selected Shlokas of Durga Saptashudi are called Saptashaloki Durga and are recited by devotees daily. These shlokas have been included in Vijeshar Panchang and also in the KOA recent publication Poozai Poshe.

These seven shlokas, along with their translation, are as follows:

- (1) *Gyaninam Api Chetaansi Devi Bhagvati Hi Saa
Balaat Aakrsihya Mohaaya Mahaamaya Prayachhati*

Meaning: Mother Goddess, the greatest pervader of the entire Universe, you are inducing even the mind of knowledgeable to your bondage.

- (2) *Durgay Smritaa Harasi Bheetim Ashaisha Janto
Swasthai Smrita Matm Ateeva Shubhaam Dadaasi
Daaridra Dukh Bhaya Haarni Kaa Twadanya
Sarvopa Kaar Karnaya Sdaarda Chita*

Meaning: Mother Durga you are eradicating fright of all living beings who remember you. People who meditate on you, you bless them with wisdom that brings them relief from all directions. O! Mother Goddess, destroyer of poverty and misery, who is else than you whose mind always remains ready

to help all.

(3) *Sarvamangala Mangalyai Shivaay Sarvartha Sadhikay
Sharanyai Trambikay Gauri Narayani Namastutay*

Meaning: O! Mother Goddess, you are giver of success in everything. O, Mother Goddess of Success, you are giver of all types of protections and peace as Shivi (Consort of Shiva). You are as well Gowri in fruition of endeavors of all those who surrender to you. In your capacity as Narayani (Consort of Narayana), you are remover of all types of troubles. I offer my salutations of you.

(4) *Sharnaagata Deenarta Paritraana Paraayanai
Sarva Syaarta Haray Devi Narayani Namostutay*

Meaning: O, Narayani, who is always engaged in helping her devotees involved in troubles as also remover of miseries of all, I offer my salutations to you.

(5) *Sarvaswaroopay Sarvaishay Sarva-Shakti-Samanvitay
Bhayi-Bhyaa Traadhi No Devi Durgay Devi Namostutay*

Meaning: Your manifestation is in every thing and you exist every where. You are possessed with all power and energy. O! Mother Goddess Durga, kindly protect us from all scare and fright. I offer my salutations to you.

(6) *Rogaan Ashaishaan Apahansi Tushtaa
Rushta Tu Kaamaan Sakalaan Abheeshtaan
Twaam Aashritaanaam Na Vipat Naraanaam
Twaam Aashritaa Hyaa Shrayataam Prayanti*

Meaning: O, Mother Goddess, on becoming happy you cast off all diseases and on being otherwise destroy all ambitions. All those who have already surrendered to you, distress never comes near them. All those devotees, of your whom you bless, become blessors of others.

(7) *Sravaa Baadhaa Prashamanam Trilokya Syaa
Akhilaiswari Ayvam Ayva Twayaa
Karyam Asmay Vyri Vinaashanam*

Meaning: O; Mother Goddess, dweller of Universe, clear out hurdles in my way in all three worlds in the same manner as you suppressed Madukaritab and do keep on destroying my enemies.

*(Translations of above shalokas have been rendered by Shri O.N. Kaul
in the English edition of Vijyashvar Punchang 1998-99 (Janthri))*

7.0 PITR RIN

Remembering the departed souls of your family

Lunar month of Ashwan (Asuj) has started on September 14th. The first two weeks of this month (September 14 - 28 during this year) also known as Krishn Paksh is the period when we Pandits repay our *Pitr rin* to our ancestors who are no longer amongst us. I am writing this note so that you understand our traditions and endeavor to keep our traditions and customs alive for your progeny.

According to Shastras, a Hindu is born with three debts (*rin*) which he/she has to repay during his/her lifetime. These are:

1. *Dev rin*: Debts we owe to Gods for our smooth journey in this and next life.
2. *Pitr rin*: Debts we owe to our ancestors who have departed the earthly abode.
3. *Rishi rin*: Debts we owe to learned ones including our Guru who guides us in our day to day life.

Kashmiri Pandits pays the *Pitr rin* in the following manner:

1. The oldest living male descendant of the deceased soul offers water to his loved ones daily by performing "Tarpan" ritual in the morning before eating.
2. On the death anniversary (as per our lunar calendar) of the departed souls, Shrada Sankalpa is performed at home. The family Guruji (Gor) performs this ritual as per the prescribed text (Vidhi).
3. During *Pitr Paksh* (i.e. the dark two weeks (Krishn Paksh) of the lunar month of Ashwan (known as Asuj in Kashmiri) we perform another Shrada Sankalpa.
4. We also perform Shrada Sankalpa at various tirthas (holy places) such as Mattan in Kashmir, Gaya in Bihar, Hardawar in Uttar Pradesh, Triveni at Allahbad, Pushkar in Ajmer, and other holy places.

During these two weeks, we remember our loved ones on the day (tithi of the two weeks) each departed soul/s passed away. For example, if a loved one had passed away on the 5th day of any lunar month, then we remember him/her on the 5th day of the Krishn Paksh of Ashwan. However, sometimes this can be on the 4th day of the Krishn Paksh if our almanac (Janthri) has marked 5th as Devadev. Devadev means that the day has actually started before the sunrise. As per our customs, the day starts with sunrise. All Devadev days are marked clearly in the almanac.

There are two components of Shrada Sankalpa – one part consists mainly of ritualistic pooja and second part consists of offering of clothes, money, rice, salt, fruit, vegetables etc to Guruji who performs the ritual. In his absence, the offerings are made to the priests at the temple and in some cases to needy ones. Even if it is not possible to perform the Shrada (ritual part), the offerings are still made. We call it Mansawun in Kashmiri. If a Shrada Sankalpa of a loved one has been performed at Gaya, then there is no performance of Shrada (ritual part) at home.

On the day of *Shrada*, the family assemble at the oldest living son's home and all the children of departed soul keep a fast and break the fast together. On this day, choicest dishes are prepared including non-vegetarian dishes if the one who is being remembered was a non-vegetarian. All family members pray and offer flowers for the peace of the departed soul in front of the picture of the departed soul.

Mansawun Vidhi (Offering method)

Our almanac (janthri) describe the offering method. The mantras are simple and short. One has to know the "Gotra" of the family to recite these mantras. Gotra is an identification of all Hindus (similar to social security number in USA assuming there is one for each family instead). Even though outside Kashmir there are total of six Gotras, our community has complex gotra system of 199 gotras.

The process begins with keeping the offering in front of the picture of the departed soul. The males assembled for the ritual transfer the yagnopavit to the left arm. With some water and black sesame seed in the palm of their right hands the following mantra is recited:

OM TAT SAT BRAHM TITHOU ADAY ASHWAN MASASY
KRISHN PAKSHAY <Tithay>1 <Day of Week>2 VASREY
<Relationship of departed soul> 3 <Name of the person> <Gotra>4
SHRADEY ANNAM VASTRAE FALMUL DAKSHINA SAHITAM
SANKALPIYAMI

Notes for the mantra

- 1 Date of the event e.g. Prathmi for 1st day, Dutmi for the 2nd day and so on. Refer to your almanac (janthri) for the Tithay.
- 2 e.g. Somvar for Monday, Mangalvar for Tuesday and so on.
- 3 Pitray for Father, Matray for Mother, Pita Mahay for Grandfather, and Pita Mahey for Grand mother.
- 4 e.g. Datatrey, Kappishtal Manva, Swamin Madugulay

With this recitation sprinkle the water in the right hand on the offerings.

8.0 PUNN CEREMONY

Our Cultural Heritage

This year the "Punn" ceremony falls on Saturday, September 2. It is a very auspicious day for the worship of Lord Ganesha. The following is a detailed account of this ceremony in Kashmir and its link to Hindus in Maharashtra. I hope it is beneficial for our younger generation.

Kashmiri Pandits have a special place for Lord Ganesha being the son of Lord Shiva and Parvati. He has been blessed by no less than Lord Shiva Himself as "Siddhi Daata" (one whose worship guarantees success). Among the deities that we worship He is to be worshipped as the first deity "Ganadipati" (leader of all deities) and "Vigneshaya" (remover of all obstacles). According to Ganesh Purana, the fourth day of the bright half of every lunar month is called 'Siddhi Vinayak Chaturthi'. The fourth day of Bhadrapad Shukla (bright half) chaturthi is known as MahaSiddhi Vinayak Chaturthi (as it is on this day that Parvati, spouse of Lord Shiva, created Ganesha for her protection). When this chaturthi falls on Tuesday or Saturday it is termed as Varad Chaturthi or Shiva Chaturthi and its importance is enhanced.

We observe this great arrival of Lord Ganesha for 10 days from Chaturthi to Chaturdashi by preparing "Roth" (sweet thick pancakes fried in ghee) and "Laddoos" from wheat flour. On this day the ladies of the household get up early in the morning, take a bath and then get to the business of preparing roths at a specially cleaned up space. First of all, roth's made from 1¼ kg of wheat flour mixed with ¼ quantity of sugar are rolled and fried in boiling ghee. These are kept apart as Lord Ganesha's Prasad along with few Ladoo's prepared out of above material. Then additional roths are prepared for all family members, daughters' family, close relatives, and neighbors.

After the roth preparation is completed, a metallic pot (gadda) is placed at a specially cleaned up place as a symbol of Lord Ganesha. A mixture of green grass, barley, and flowers is prepared in a thali. A small quantity of above mixture is put in the pot. Then it is tied with mavli (narivan) round its neck and using sindur tika "Om" in hindi is painted on this pot. Some milk and a coin are also placed in this pot.

The ladies of the house put a small thread made from raw cotton (hence the name Punn) by an unmarried girl by the side of their 'athahore' or 'dejahore'.

All the family members assemble near this place of worship where the pot has been decorated. A sindur tika is applied on the forehead and the senior household lady places the mixture prepared in the thali in the hands of all the members and gives blessings for their welfare.

Everybody takes a seat and then senior lady of the house or somebody she chooses recites a story of Bib Dharam Maej which is as follows:

A long, long time ago there lived a king happily with his family somewhere in India. Once when he was on a hunting trip he happened to see a brahman with a sindur tilak on his forehead and Narivan on his right wrist. The brahman offered some 'prashad' to the king. The king got inquisitive and wanted to go to place of worship where the lady of the house, Bib Dharam Maej, applied some sindur tilak on the king's forehead and tied a narivan on his wrist for his welfare. When king returned home, his wife suspected him of marrying some other woman (Ghandar Vivah) and got angry with him. The king narrated to her what had happened but she wouldn't listen and removed the tika from his forehead and the nirvan from his wrist. Soon after neighboring king invaded their kingdom and the king was taken as a prisoner. His wife and daughter ran away in disguise and lived a life of misery in another kingdom. They worked in a horse stable in the king's palace. One year on the day of Siddhi Vinayak chaturthi, Lord

Ganesha's pooja was being offered in the palace and this lady was also invited for the function. When she saw all this she came to realize that her husband was telling the truth and felt guilty for bringing all the misery to her husband and her family. She decided to perform this pooja for Lord Ganesha and ask for His forgiveness. But she had no resources to buy all the ingredients required for the pooja. She didn't lose heart. She was determined to seek forgiveness from Lord Ganesha. The mother and daughter collected some barley from the stable by washing horse dung and after grinding it prepared some roth's by baking them in the hot desert sand. They offered sincere prayers to Lord Ganesha and soon the roth's turned into gold.

Afraid they might be charged for stealing gold, they presented these gold roth's to the king. The king asked them for their real identity. On hearing their story, the king felt it his duty to help them regain their kingdom and get the king released. He attacked their former kingdom and got back the king and his family together.

Ever since that year, the kings' family observed this Bib Dharam Maej's day and lived happily ever after.
(End of Story)

After this story is narrated and listened to by all the family members with full devotion, some prayers are offered to Lord Ganesha and then everybody puts the mixture of grass, barley, and flowers, that has been in their hands all along the narration, into the decorated pot (symbolizing Lord Ganesha). Roth's are now distributed to all the family members along with a cup of `Kahwa' tea. On the same or next day, roth's are distributed among daughters' family, relatives, and neighbors. This distribution has to take place before Chaturdashi.

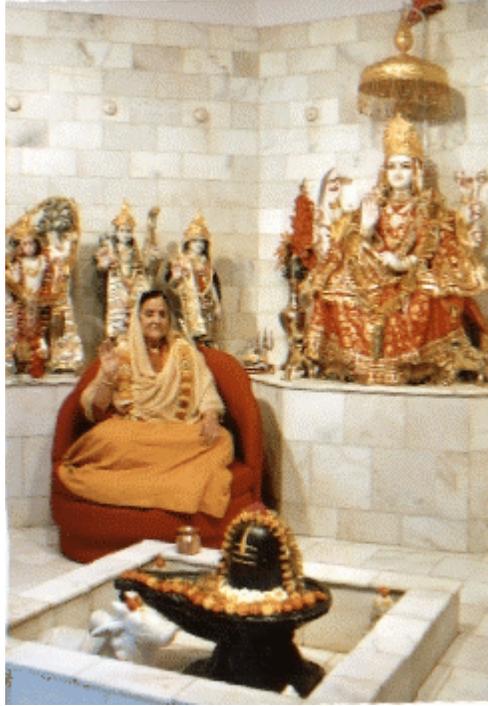
Sometimes it is not possible to perform this pooja during the ten days period as stated earlier. In this case, the function is performed on chaturdashi called as `Annth Chaturdashi' (14th day of the lunar fortnight).

Coinciding with our Punn ceremony, Maharashtrian Hindus perform Ganesh pooja in a big way during these days. Ganesh idols made of clay are purchased by every household. These idols are worshipped for 36 hr up to a maximum of 10 days. The whole community celebrates this festival by erecting special pandals where a big Ganesh idols are installed and pooja is performed three times a day along with fanfare. On chaturdashi i.e. 10th day, processions are taken from all neighborhoods for immersion of the Ganesh idols in the rivers and other water bodies and that brings the ten-day festivities to an end. The state comes to a standstill during these 10 days and schools and establishments close to allow people to participate in this grand function.

The best artists of the state of Maharashtra prepare thousands of beautiful idols of Lord Ganesha. However, the idols prepared by the artisans of the village of 'Pen' near city of Pune are considered to be superior and more religious. This may indicate our strong links with Hindus from Maharashtra (who are also Saraswat Brahmans). The word "Punn" we use for the ceremony may have links with the idols of the village `Pen' that is special in Maharashtra. Another observation regarding this pooja is that Ganesh pooja is common to Kashmiri and Maharashtrian Hindus. It is also to be noted that unlike Maharashtra, Kashmir was never a cotton growing area. It could be that the `Punn' ceremony has come to Kashmir through Saraswat Brahmans of Maharashtra.

9.0 KARUNAMAI MAA

The benevolent mother



Karunamai Maa in Ashram Temple (1999)

On October 28, 2000, Hindu community and particularly Kashmiri Pundits lost one of its modern day saints who had achieved *siddhi* in her lifetime by taking *samadhi* in New Delhi. It was indeed a sad day for the followers of *Karunamai maa*.

Background

Karunamai Maa was born in 1913 in a devout Kashmiri Pandit family of Kichloo's on Nag Panchami and was named Bimla. The family priest Surikant Joshi of Bijbehara in Kashmir who had himself achieved *siddhi* by worshipping *Param Shakti Ragnya Bhagwati* (Khir Bhawani) initiated her into *shakti sadna* at an early age. She wanted to be a *sanyasin* but her guru advised her to live a normal *grehesti* life. She therefore was married in a well to do Kashmiri family of *Channas* in New Delhi.

Although she lived a life of common *grehesti* woman with her three sons, she was always engaged in attending and conducting *satsangs* in New Delhi for about 30 years. Many who attended her *satsangs* became her dedicated disciples and started calling her *Karunamai Maa* - the benevolent mother.

Shree Karunamai Maa Shakti Peeth

Until 1989, she would regularly go to Kashmir (Khir Bhawani) for meditation. In 1989, she decided to establish a *shaktipeeth* at a place known as Sanp ki Nangli near Sohna in Gurgaon District of Haryana State (about 50 kms south of New Delhi). This *shaktipeeth* came to be known as *Shree Karunamai Maa Shakti Peeth*. She procured about 10 acres of land there and with the help of her disciples she constructed a beautiful temple dedicated to *Maa Durga* (Ragnya) with a big hall which can accommodate up to 500 attendees at a time. She also built a small residential cottage for herself where she lived with her chief disciples. Additional construction was done to accommodate pilgrims, a library, a medical clinic, and *sevaks*. The land around the temple was converted into a beautiful garden with flowers and

greenery. Fruit trees such as mango, amrud, papayas, lemons were planted. To meet requirements of eatables for the residents wheat and vegetables were cultivated. A number of cows were added to meet the requirements of milk and milk products. Neem trees have been grown all round the periphery for providing clean and calm environment. The devotees feel enchanted and spirited at the very sight of this Ashram.

Karunamai Maa had achieved siddhi at a young age. She preferred to be left alone to meditate and enjoy the divine bliss of which she was a symbol. This was the primary reason she chose to live in a remote rural place. But her devotees were always looking for her. Everyday the disciple cars were lined up outside the Ashram gate. On auspicious occasions, like Navratras, special arrangements for devotees and car parking had to be made. She never installed a telephone in the Ashram as she thought it would further distract her peace.

Spirituality and Beliefs

Karunamai Maa believed in purity in all phases of life. She taught that cleanliness of mind is as essential for the spiritual growth as physical one. She adored deities in temple with choicest dresses and ornaments and was herself dressed well. She lived by the principle of "sound mind in a sound body". For achieving siddhi, she favored the route of *Japs* rather than ritualistic puja. One would see her always reciting Jap mantras with a Jap Mala concealed in a small pouch in her right hand even when she was talking to her devotees. She insisted on praying daily preferably loudly in her melodious voice to elevate her spirituality before performing Japs. She had adopted Kashmiri prayers for recitation in Ashram. Thus one would hear recitation of prayers like:

Ganesh Prayer

*Hemja Sutam Bujam Ganesham Ish Nandnam
Kalpavraksha Bhaktaraksha Namostutey Gajaananam*

Gauree Prayer

*Om Leela Rabda Sthaapit Lupthakhil Lokaam
Gauree Ambaah Ambur Haakeem Hameeday*

Bhannamsahasrastutih, Bahuroop Garbpath and Mahimnapar (with the beginning of *Aadinam agdam divyam*) were daily recited. The above prayers are purely of Kashmiri origin and are not typically recited outside of the Kashmiri Pundit families. Most of her devotees were non-Kashmiri's and they would recite them verbatim as was done in Kashmir.

During the two annual Navratras, special prayers were held with a daylong *havan'son Durga Ashtami*. Durga Mata was specially propitiated as a fountain of shakti by offering homs (svaha) as established in Bhavani Shestranavali. Karunamai Maa had great faith in Maa Durga. During the nine days of Navratras, she would often remind her disciples that Maa Durga is in a mood to forgive sins and bestowing blessings and therefore they should do as much Japs as possible over 125,000 limit. During Havans, prasad was distributed to devotees where Kashmiri style food such as plain rice, dam aloo, chok vagun, moong ki daal with nadru etc would be served to thousands who would attend. Ashram has raised a permanent platform for distributing prasad to a large gathering.

Benevolent Mother

Karunamai Maa was a benevolent person at heart. Despite her old age and indifferent health, she never refused to attend to the prayers of those who came to seek her blessings. She would always give a patient hearing to them and made it a point to see that they left satisfied. She would give them a small mantra for a jap and then she kept track of the progress of the individuals problem. If no progress was reported she would give a different mantra. She called her devotees by their first name. To give maximum satisfaction to her devotees she made it a point to apply tilak and tie nariwan(mavli) round

their wrists herself in spite of her physical discomfort towards her old age. She had a tradition of going to Haridwar along with her devotees for few days and after having a bath in the river Ganga along with them she would offer extensive pooja and made everyone participate in it. It used to be a great event for her devotees and they eagerly waited for this opportunity. New disciples were initiated with mantras at this time. She felt very sad for Kashmiri Hindus who suffered so much for no fault of theirs and offered prayers for their return to their motherland.

Social Activism

She thought it her duty to do something for the poor. She opened a Homeopathic and Ayurvedic clinic in the ashram where she invited leading doctors to treat the poor. Free medicines were distributed. For the old who suffered from the partial loss of vision she organized camps for their cataract operations. A center was opened providing sewing training to ladies. Weekly coaching classes were held for children to teach them alphabets and also helping in doing their home- work. She had a deep love for children and she laid a park for them in the ashram premises in which swings and seesaws slides were fixed. Annual sports day for village children was held. Winners were presented prizes.

During Navratra celebrations, children were encouraged to recite mantras and were rewarded. On Navratra ashtami, nine small girls were selected among those who came with their parents. They were dressed representing nine goddesses and were carried in a procession to temple, their feet were washed by Maa herself. After performing their pooja, they were sent away with good money as *dakshina*. The excitement on the faces of children and their parents as well was a sight to be seen. On these occasions, she distributed lot of new clothes among the poor. Every year she made special arrangements on a particular day to invite local village people for a pooja for their welfare that was followed by a lunch. This was her way of keeping local people in touch with all the activities in the ashram. They always attended in large numbers.



Kanik Pooja celebration in the Ashram (2000)

Other interests

Maa wrote hindi poetry. A collection of her poems has been published under the *title Maa Prasad*. One finds a touch of Kabir in her poetry. For example:

*Gyan bakti ke bina kahan miley nirman
Goru charan seva bina nahi miley bhagwan*

*Bool per bool kare apne ko dubayey
Neki kar tere kam aayey dubey koun bachy*

Maa had a hypnotizing melodious voice which kept audience spellbound when she recited prayers or her poems. All these have been recorded. She enjoyed music and thus encouraged all those who could sing or play music.

Maa liked travelling. She traveled regularly to US, Canada, Europe, Hong Kong etc. As a matter of fact, she returned from a two-month trip of Germany and France on September 1, 2000.

Future Plans for Ashram

To take care of Ashram after her taking Samadhi Maa had already performed an elaborate abhishek for installing a young sansasi who had renounced his career as a Chartered Accountant as her heir. She gave him the new name Nand Baba who posses all the divine qualities of Nand and with the blessings of Maa he will surely carry forward the mission of Karunamai Maa's dreams.

Those who she touched in her life have been blessed. Let us all pray for her everlasting peace and remember her benevolent presence amongst us.

10.0 KASHMIRI PANDITS TRADITIONS AT CROSS ROADS

Have you ever wondered why we Pandits do not observe our festivals like other Hindus? *Diwali, Holi, Dusshera* etc are celebrated by most Hindus in a lot of enthusiasm and fanfare. But we Kashmiri Pandits hardly celebrate them but instead celebrate *Shivratri* with much more fervor than most other Hindus from other regions. What could be reason for such dichotomy? The answer lies in our religious philosophy.

Religious Philosophies

Superficially, Hinduism looks like one religious philosophy with beliefs in trinity of Gods and performance of rituals to propitiate them. But if one delves deeper there are beliefs so divergent that one can get confused with the very fundamentals of Hinduism.

Broadly, we can divide Hindu belief into two broad philosophies or beliefs – *Shaivism* and *Vishnavism*. Shiava philosophy which one associates with tantra is well developed in Kashmir, Bengal, Assam, Tamil Nadu, and to some extent in Andhra Pradesh. Hindus elsewhere follow Vishnavism predominantly. It has nothing to do with vegetarianism as some may believe.

Vishnavism broadly denotes the philosophy of Vedanta which recognizes that *Brahman* (not to be confused with Brahma) as the Supreme God - the ultimate Reality who is Transcendental and thus beyond any description. The manifestation of Universe that we observe takes through His immanent aspect called *Ishwara*. The manifested Universe that we observe is not like the one we know it. It is in reality, an illusion, caused by divine power called *Mayashakti*. Shankaracharya who is considered the master of this philosophy called this manifestation of cosmos as “*Brahmasatyam, Jagatmithya*” (Brahman is Truth, manifestation is illusion). He explains this further by giving an example of mistaking a rope for a snake in dim-light. Though when seen in full-light, the real rope is recognized and imaginary snake (illusion) disappears. Likewise, when through Karmic and other means when our ignorance (illusion) is removed, we begin to realize the true nature of Brahman. The goal of the human life for a Vaishnavite is therefore to remove this illusion or ignorance which is binding him to endless cycles of life and death (samsara). The goal of liberation of from these cycles of life and death is termed a *Moksha*. *Ishwara* is equated with Vishnu who incarnates from time-to-time to guide people towards liberation.

In comparison, Shivites (Kashmiri Pandits are Shivites) while agreeing that the Brahman is at the substratum of all manifestation, do not reconcile with the assertion that this manifestation of cosmic world is a mere illusion (*mithya*). The philosophy contends that how could a world of such diversity, a world of so many names and forms be unreal? Shivites on the other hand argue that Supreme Consciousness called *Parmshiva* cannot get involved in any manifestation process directly as that would bind Him in the process of 'cause and effect' like humans. The philosophy postulates that manifestation is just a reflection of *Pramshiv* as personality seen by us through His dynamic aspect of energy called '*Shakti*'. While Shiva represents the male aspect, Shakti represents the female aspect of Parmshiva. Parmshiva is formless and static. He is witness of all that His Shakti aspect manifests.

Kashmiri Pandit Aspect of Shaivism

Shakti has been identified as the mother of manifestation and has been given the name of Durga, an incarnation of Parvati (Lord Shivas wife). Although Shivite philosophy does not lay stress on the performance of Karmic rituals as a means of liberation, it stresses observance of mental discipline through *Pranayama* and *Jap*. However, the philosophy recognizes the role of rituals as 'helpful'. Durga

over a period of time was accepted by Vaishnavites as Goddess. Vishnavism associated her with their Goddess Lakshmi (wife of Vishnu) and other Goddesses such as Sarawati etc.

While the *Isht devtas* (family deities) of the Vaishnavites are male Gods such as Vishnu and his incarnations such as Rama, Krishna, Dattatreya etc, among Kashmiri Pandits, Durga in her forms as Ragnya, Sharika, Jwala and Tripursundari came to be recognized as Isht Devis. Thus Kashmir became associated with Shakti worship. Vishnu and His incarnations do get the same reverence among Kashmiri Pandits as they get among Vaishnavites. So much so that all the temples built in Kashmir during Hindu rule (ending 14th century) were totally dedicated to Lord Shiva, notwithstanding the fact that the murals on walls of some of these temples depict Vishnu and His incarnations as well.

Even the mountains of Kashmir are named after Lord Shiva or Mata Parvati. *Neelmatpuran* describes "Kashmir is Parvati, know that its king is portion of Shiva". The peak overlooking Srinagar city is known as *Mahadev* (the great Shiva). *Harmukh* (Shivas face) stands on the east and *Amarnath* in the South. The famous temple on top of Shankaracharya hill in Srinagar with a recorded history of more than 2000 years is also dedicated to Lord Shiva. All the shrines in Hariparbhat are dedicated to Durga and her incarnation.

Festivals and Rituals

Our festivals and rituals are a reflection of our religious philosophy. Shivratri, the night of union of Shiv and Shakti has to be recognized as an outcome of this basic philosophy. Absence of our involvement in festivals such as Diwali, Dusshera, Holi etc which are related to Lord Vishnu or His incarnations, can also be understood in the same way.

The division between these two traditions is not sharp. Centuries of interaction between the followers of these traditions has brought about a mixed tradition. Thus while Kashmiri Pandit observe Janam Ashtami as birthday of Lord Krishna, but Kashmiri Pandits celebrate it as '*Jarm-e-satm*' (Saptami of Lord Krishnas birth). The reason behind this is that while arrival of such a luminary as Lord Krishna is an occasion of great importance and necessary preparations are needed in advance to pray for His arrival and once Lord Krishna has arrived amongst us, it is not a day of fasting but rather a day of celebrations. The same theme applies to Shivratri one day ahead, when it is celebrated in rest of India.

In our ritualistic worship we attach great importance to the worship of deities as our mothers. Hence we not only worship them as our Isht devis, but they also receive extensive worship in their other forms as well.

In our '*Prepun*' –which is ubiquitous in all our pujas as in act of offering *bhog* to deities, Durga is not named only as Parvati, consort of Lord Shiva, but she is named as the source of all alphabets in the words.

A part of the Bhog in Prepun called '*chatu*' is again meant for offering to 14 sky deities. In the performance of pujas on the occasion of various *samskaras* such as *Kahnether* (tonsure), *Mekhhal* (thread ceremony), *Khandhar* (marriage) etc besides the worship of usual female deities such as seven mothers (known as Spt grt matrikas) or sixteen mothers (known as Shodsh Matrikas) or sixty four Yoginis (chtush –shshti yogni), we perform puja of sen mother (which is different from Spt grt matrikas) by offering them *Kheer* (rice pudding) with *moongyr* (cake prepared from moong flour).

In our *stutes* (recitations) as well, the mother aspect is overwhelmingly. *Bhavanishastranama*, which has 1000 names of Durga, is recited regularly on important occasions and used in home as well, is purely the work of Kashmiri Saints. Similarly, *Panchastavi* and *Indrakshi*, *Leela rabda* recitations are not recited by non-Kashmiri Hindus.

On marriage our daughters wear *dejhour* with *athor* on their ears as a symbol of being or getting married which is symbolized by wearing *Mangalsutra* (a necklace) by non-Kashmiri Hindus. The wearing of *Dejhour* by the ear itself represents male and female aspect of Paramshakti the Supreme power, one is called *Shivakona* and other *Shaktikona*.

In the end we may conclude that we Kashmiri Pandits are Shakti worshippers. Shakti is the dynamic power of Lord Shiva, represented by consort Parvati in Her various aspects. Shakti worship is common in West Bengal and South India also. In the plains of India, worship of Vishnu and His incarnations as Rama, Krishna etc is common. The ritual that a group of people observe represents the philosophy of their faith.

How to save our traditions

Our Baradari members keep on lamenting over the unfortunate situation in which we have been caught up due to non availability of our priests for performance of our rituals and *samskaras* which are so dear to us. Yet we do not bother to see how we can save this institution from total collapse. We pride ourselves as Kashmiri Pandits, inheritors of great traditions from our ancestors, yet we are helplessly witnessing the end of these traditions.

During the last five years, I have been trying to study the causes of this indifference. I think the following three are the main causes:

The disrespect that we have had for the priest community at social level and also not paying them due wages for performance of rituals. Our priest community has shrunk in numbers. We do not have young priests. The youngest priest practicing may be above 50 years in age.

Karmkandas are usually regional in character. They are based on *Greha* sutras which is the work of knowledgeable persons. The *Karmkandas* followed by us has been written by Lagukrishi centuries ago and copies of this are non-existent. About 80 years ago, a teacher by the name of Keshav Bhat published relevant portions of this book used in the performance of *samskaras* which have also become prized possessions of few now. The instructions for performance of rituals documented in these books are given in Sanskrit. Present day priests do not understand Sanskrit and hence they are not following proper instructions. Some senior priests have remembered relevant mantras by heart and they have passed it to their juniors. The younger generations of priests are totally ignorant about our *Karmkanda*.

All over India, *Karmkanda* followed by a particular group of people has been revised from time-to-time, keeping pace with the change in times and providing instruction in their vernacular language. However, no such effort has been made by Kashmiri Hindus. Some pamphlets written by our priests, lack of essential details to be followed by a novice.

The cumulative effect of all these factors has led to our younger generation in the loss of faith in our traditions and unless some changes take place we may lose this knowledge base completely.

I recommend few changes for revival of this important institution in our community:

We should get our Karmkanda books translated by learned scholars who may or may not be from Kashmir.

To make up shortage of our priests, we may find out if our priest class is prepared to train their younger ones in this profession. If they are not (as is likely the case), then we should train priests from other communities in our Karmkanda. It may be a part-time or a full-time job for them.

Our baradari seniors have tremendous responsibility in preserving this institution too. They should try to learn at least the basics of our pujas offered on certain occasions such as birthday, shivratri etc rather than using audio cassette. This would ensure that the youngsters in the family can make sense of what is going on these days. Unless we invest time in understanding why we do things the way we do, it is just a matter of time before these rich rituals will die.

We have 24 samskaras among Kashmiri Hindus. In comparison, most other Hindus follow only 16 Samskaras. Most our samaskaras are in dire need of rationalization to keep up with the times. For example, our priests recite about 22 of these samskaras on 'Mekhal' of young boys. These are not only time consuming but quite irrelevant also. Samskara of Garbhadana is to be performed when women gets pregnant. The performance of this samskara during 'Mekhal' makes no sense. Similarly, our Antyeshti samaskara (death ritual) has also a very lengthy ritualistic tradition, which is difficult to follow in the modern times. The learned ones of the community should work out a strategy to make performance of our samskaras brief and meaningful – keeping in touch with modern times.

11.0 WHAT IS KARMKANDA?

Samarpan – 2nd installment

Before going into the details of how the worship is conducted and the logic behind various kriyas (actions) I feel it will be better to let the younger generation know about how the concept of worship developed into its present form.

We humans are strange beings. Our intelligence is far above the normal intelligence of our fellow animal beings into which biological science has classified us together. To put it in empirical terms human brain cavity, which is the measure of intelligence is around 1200 CCs, that is, four times the tiger (300 CCs), the most swift and ferocious animal and three times the elephant (400 CCs) the most intelligent animal next to a human beings.

It is our intelligence which drives our curiosity to know and understand the movements of Universe around us. Our desires, attachment, fears etc. are all due to our responses to our well being which are guided by our intelligence. Think of a lamb being driven towards slaughter house with a pack of green grass in its front. The intelligence of animals is limited to just for survival on the day to day basis. We bother about not only about our well being but for our several generations down the line.

Yet our intelligence is far far limited to understand all that makes things move in such uniformity and regularity at macro and micro level. Look at the structure of the all pervading Universe, as we understand it now, and the structure of the minutest atom –they both have same pattern. The electrons move around the nucleus in the same way as various Planets move around Sun and Sun moves around bigger object in the galaxies.

Our ancients made these observations long back before they learned how to read and write. In India our Vedic seers recognized the cosmic powers behind the various cosmic activities as Devas. These Devas, 33 in number, were described as custodians of cosmic order (rta) which is indicated by the regular alteration of day and night, the waning and waxing of Moon, the flow of river water from upper slopes to lower slopes. There was no concept of god then, nor did they visualize these forces as having any form. They just described them as sentient Beings. Thus Indra Deva was recognized as the most powerful being that controls all cosmic activities which bring timely rain on Earth which in turn made cultivation of crops possible. RudraDeva was describes as the cosmic power which ensures regularity of movements of cosmic bodies such as Sun, Moon, planets etc. AgniDeva, who provides heat for growth of crops. VarunaDeva was recognized as holder of water bodies such as oceans, rivers, and lakes etc which are essential for human survival. Like that VayuDeva for winds and host of other Devas were described as custodians for human survival on planet Earth. The whole cosmic world was divided into three regions called lokas: Dhyo loka, Prithvi loka and Antariksh loka. Devas live in Dhyo loka which is up in the sky, our Earth is Prithvi loka and the region between Earth and Dhyo loka is Anteriksh loka where malicious beings called Asuras live. Females were not given any roles though they were recognized as mothers, sisters, daughters of Devas and Asuras.

A liturgy was later on developed to praise these Devas for their beneficial acts. Offerings of the farm produce called bhoga were made to these Devas through AgniDeva who was recognized as carrier of these bhogas to Devas as he lived simultaneously in all the three lokas: as Sun in the Dhyo loka, as fire in the Prithvi loka and as lightening in the Anteriksh loka. Thus AgniDeva was invoked by lighting fire in a pit at a clean place in the ground and offerings for Devas were made into this fire with the recitations of mantras from Vedas which came to known as yagnya (sacrifice) Yajur Veda describes in detail the methodology for performance of yagnya and other rituals.

Over a period of time, in the post Vedic time around 2500 years back Vedic philosophy was described in detail on the basis of Upanishads. It was at this time that god was recognized as the Supreme Power controlling not only Devas but the whole Universe. God was described as transcendental power which is beyond human description but for manifestation of Universe god adopted an immanent aspect. Two different schools of thought describe manifestation. One school of thought described god as Brahman (in His transcendental aspect) and as Ishwara in His immanent aspect. Ishwara further down the line is projected as Brahma (in His manifestation aspect), Vishnu (for maintenance of Universe) and Mahesh or Shiva (for dissolution of world at the end of certain number of years called epoch). This school of thought came to be known as Vaishnavism. The other school of thought recognized Parmshiva as the Supreme Power in His transcendental aspect and Shiva in the immanent aspect who created Universe through His energy power Shakti. This school of thought came to be known as Shaivism.

While Devas had neither form nor temples for worship, the post Vedic gods were given definite anthropomorphic forms and temples to live in. The attributes of gods came to be depicted by iconography. Thus, these gods were depicted as seated on a lotus (sign of purity), having number of arms (sign of strength), many heads (sign of control over directions and so on). The methodology for worship, while retaining the original Vedic liturgy and yagnya concept, developed into diverse ways which in due course of time adopted regional pattern which came to be known as Karmkanda.

The karmkandas of various regions of India have been upgraded from time to time to suit the needs of living generation. The Karmkanda followed by Kashmiri Pandits has been written by one learned brahman known as Lorareshi, perhaps in 17/18 century. It is almost lost now but our learned priests have retained relevant portions of this book which they use for conducting ritualistic pujas on various occasions. Time has come to upgrade our karmkanda to suit modern needs. We need to work on it.

12.0 THE RELEVANCE OF MUHURAT FOR KP DIASPORAS

For a Kashmiri Pandit observance of *muhurat* (*saath*) is an essential part of his life. Be it time for undertaking a journey, performance of religious duties, observing a fast on auspicious days, *shradda* of an ancestor, celebrations such as birthday, marriage or any other auspicious function such as making or entering a new house. In short, observance of *muhurat* is a *sin qua non* for us. It is for this reason that we always keep an annual almanac (*jantary*) handy in our surroundings and eagerly await for the arrival of its new annual edition.

Keeping up with these traditions is building a wall between seniors and juniors in our *biradari*. Currently, our youth are living in a very different situation than their ancestor. He cannot take the liberty of observing these traditions even if he wants to continue with these traditions. He is a world traveler and has to face many challenges in his career. Life style has changed and is changing rapidly. Twenty-first century is very different from any thing we have seen so far.

Muhurat is linked with *tithi* and *nakshatra*. *Tithi* is a lunar day that is determined by the waxing and waning of the Moon. The path of the Moon in reference to our earth is an elliptic path. Its movement is variable. While the mean duration of its movement in a day is 23 hours 37 minutes and 28 seconds, it varies from less than 16 hours to a maximum of 36 hours at times, depending upon the position of Moon in its journey round the earth. When it is nearest to earth (perigee) it is fastest and travels in less time that at times results in abandonment of a *tithi* and when it is farthest from earth (apogee) Moon has reduced speed thus it may take more than one day to cover a *tithi* (*devadev*). All the *panchangs* register these details.

Nakshatras are a group of small stars in the sky that fall in the path of the lunar motion as observed from earth. In our astrology, these *nanshatras* play an important role as they are considered the resting places of the Moon in its journey around the earth. They are called as lunar mansions. There are 27 *nakshtras* viz: *Ashwini, Bharani, Kritika, Rohini, Mrigashira, Ardra, Punarvasu, Pushya, Ashlesha, Magha, Purva phalguni, Uttara Phalguni, Hasta, Chitra, Swati, Vishakha, Anuradha, Jyeshtha, Mula, Purva Ashadha, Uttara Ashdha, Shrivana, Dhanishtha, Shatabhisha, Purva Bhadrapada, Uttara Bhadrapada, Revati*. In the Vedic astrology the position of the Moon in these *nakshatras* is considered important for determining the characteristics and timing of events.

These *nakshatras* have been divided into three groups of nine planets each for determining their influence on the timing of events. These are *rajsic, tamsic, and sattwic nakshatras*. While *rajsic nakshatras* are considered to influence the individuals with high-energy activities, *tamsic nakshatras* create dullness, and *sattwic nakshatras* influence by inducing one into spirituality, purity and harmony. It is important to understand that all observations regarding *tithi* are made in India and while preparing annual almanac the position on earth from which the observations have been made is recorded. Observation of a *tithi* in our *jantary* is made from Jammu (Lat 32 deg 44 min and Long 74 deg and 54 min). Since there is difference in the timings of day in various parts of the globe the observations made at Jammu will not apply all over the globe. Technically speaking, to find the *muhurat* for all the places where we are now settled there has to be a different *jantary* based on observations made from some central position in that area or we need to make local adjustments based on where we live corresponding to the observation made in Jammu.

The purpose of this writing is not to mislead my *biradari* into non-observance of our traditions but rather to make all aware of the importance of these practices in the changed situations. It was a non-issue while we were all living in Kashmir but now when all of us are scattered all over the globe observance of our traditions with a blind faith is not practicable. It will help us if we know the correct background of our traditions.

13.0 SOME THOUGHTS ON PRESERVING OUR CULTURAL TRADITIONS

There is a lot of discussion going on through all our modes of communications as to how we can preserve our cultural after our migration from Kashmir. It is genuine concern. We have a glorious culture of our traditions guarded and developed by our ancestors over a long period of more than five thousand years nobody would like to dissociate himself with such an inheritance. The culture of a group of people does not evolve overnight. It is not philosophy only. It is collective history; wisdom and thought of a group of people living under similar geographic conditions. Traditions are the manifestation of that culture. It is natural that longer the life of a culture the more complex will be its traditions.

The components of any culture can be categorized as:

- 1) Language of the people through which they write and read
- 2) Religious traditions
- 3) Social customs
- 4) Festivals
- 5) Music, singing and dance
- 6) Food
- 7) Dress
- 8) Art

1) Language

The language we speak is known as Kashmiri. It is spoken by about four million Kashmiris, both Hindus and Muslims. Despite its status as a regional language in the Indian constitution, it has remained as a spoken language only. No doubt we have Arabic as an official script for writing this language but in actual usage it is not used in any official correspondence. It has not developed as a mass medium for conveying our written thoughts. There is hardly any literary material available which people would like to read. How can we then preserve this language even as spoken one? Perhaps the answer is to speak it in the family and familiarize children with its usage. In the mean time we should develop a Devnagri and Roman fonts which is accepted by all for preserving whatever literature we have in Kashmiri. We have few Devnagri fonts but they are not universal in acceptance. As for example Devnagri font in which Koshur Samachar published from Delhi writes Kashmiri section is not followed by other people who write in Kashmiri language.

2) Religious Traditions

We are deeply religious people. Perhaps it is due to our groupings as Brahmins. Although as Brahmins we are supposed to know how to perform their religious rituals but over a time we have established a subclass of priests called *gorus* within our community who guided us in the performance of our religious functions. Due to social stigma *gorus* community had shrunk in numbers while we all lived happily in Kashmir. After our migration, some diasporas of community are left without the services of priests. The problem is more magnified for those who have migrated to foreign countries like we are in USA. Our religious scriptures are all in Sanskrit and we have little or no knowledge of what goes on the performance of these rituals. We do not have translations of the books that describe the methodology for the performance of our rituals. A few suggestions for preserving the religious traditions are as under:

- a) *Institutionalization*. During good old days we had the privilege of having priests calling at our homes for performance of our rituals. In the changed situation we should build establishments at central places where our community members are living, with facilities for the performance of religious and social functions. It should have place for installing deities, living place for a priest and some cooking facilities.

- b) *Recruit new priests.* To man these establishments we need to recruit priests .If we can not find priests among our community then we may have to train priests from other communities who are willing to do the job.
- c) *Separate spiritual from social content.* Almost all our festivities in the social life are linked with our religious activities with the result over the years spiritual content of a religious function has almost disappeared. For example *Yagnopavit*, if performed as per our sacred texts should not take more than three or four hours but as per current practice it takes a full day from morning to late evening for the performance of this *samskara*. It is so partly because priests have developed interest in prolonging the ritual to gain time to receive maximum possible collection of *abid* and also because we keep on serving all sorts of food items while the sacred *vedic* recitations are going on. This reduces the sacredness of the ritual. We could keep both going on if we separate the two. For example if we perform sacred rituals in the morning three or four hours and then serve all the food items in the lunch or dinner (depending upon the *muhurat* time of *yagnopavit*) time that would do justice to all.
- d) *Simplify our rituals.* We have lot of recitations in our rituals. Even priests from outside Kashmir find it difficult to recite as per our texts .All *karmkandas*, (texts used for performance of a ritual) are regional in character and most of the regional bodies keep on modifying these *karmkandas* as per their needs of time. That is the essence of *Sanatana Dharma*. It is time for us to revise our *karmkanda*. We have to simplify it.
- e) *Translate texts.* We are now in the twenty-first century. During the last 16 years, since we left Kashmir, world has changed a lot and it will still keep on changing at a faster rate. Our youth is more pragmatic. They do not stick to blind faith. They look for the meanings of their actions we must provide them an opportunity of knowing the sanctity behind the *Vedic* rituals by translating Sanskrit texts into the language, which they can understand.

3) Social customs

Social customs are the breath of a community. It is through the social customs that we share the joys and sorrows of our loved ones. Despite our dispersion into small-scattered groups we keep up our contacts with our community members and always feel glad to find a new arrival. A few suggestions to preserve our social traditions are:

- a) *Know your social customs* It is important to know the customs of our social functions such as those associated with the marriage in the family, celebrations of festivals and even in the case of a death of a family member or close relation. This is our great inheritance, which binds us together. After all humans have been described as social animals to distinguish them from other animals.
- b) *Make global directory of our community.* Almost all Diasporas of our community have made some sort of directories, which they use for interaction at the time of performance of social events such as *havan* or *shivraatri*. We need to publish them in one volume to serve as our global address book.
- c) *Establish Mrityoo Samgri Bhandars.* It is said that you know your true friend in your adversity. Death of a loved one in the family puts family members in great disarray. In Kashmir, we had a great tradition of having *Mriyyoo Samgri Bhandars* (*death related material warehouse*) in our neighbourhood localities where one could get all the materials needed for the cremation of a body without any botheration of locating the available sources of procurement or immediate payments. The need for establishing these *bhandars* was recognized primarily to provide solace to the bereaved family at a time when they it needed most and was appreciated. Senior community members managed these Bhandars.
- f) *Community pride symbols.* We have a saying in Kashmir which states that for finding a place for a night halt in a village look at the condition of village mosque, meaning thereby that if the community in that village is generous they would have provided good amenities for halt of a pilgrims in their mosque. Post migration, our community largely has done well financially. However, we do not have a tradition or culture of giving for social or community causes. While we may spend lavishly on marriage function of our children, we are poor donors when it comes

to community activities. There are many of our community members still languishing in deplorable conditions in Jammu camps. They have suffered as a result of migration and have not been able to wean themselves out of the situation primarily because of lack of skills and they need help in the education of their children, medical care and marriage of their daughters. We should keep these community members in our minds and take a lesson from the traditions of Sikhs who have a great tradition of community life. We should build small community hospitals, educational centers, community centers, and enhance help in education and job opportunities for our community. Can we take a leaf out of many communities, who donate 10% of their annual income or spending in a marriage function or special event for community causes?

4) Festivals

We have great traditions of celebrating our festivals, which are numerous, reflecting our long historical presence in Kashmir and our faith in *Shaivism*. We must educate our children with the background of our tradition of celebrating our festivals. For example, our children must also know why we celebrate *Shivratri* and *Janam Saptami* (Lord Krishna's birthday vs other Hindus celebrating His birthday) differently than other Hindus.

5) Music, Dance, Food, Art

Our community has had a history of developing great talent in various fields of art and literature. We should encourage these artistes and strive to develop new artistes. We should teach our kids our food preparations and continue to have picnics where we enjoy good food and music. We should also enhance our repository of music, art work, literary work, poetry, phrases, dramas, etc.

14.0 WHY IS THERE NEED TO SAVE OUR RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS?

Religious traditions include all the customs and beliefs that are received from generation to generation through literature, or by word of mouth. Some of these traditions shape their origin in the philosophical thought that has been the endeavor of several generations and yet some may have their roots in the event in the hoary past which has no bearing now. No one, however brilliant, or well informed, can come to such fullness of understanding as to safely judge and dismiss the customs or intuitions of his society, for these are the wisdom of generations after centuries of experiment in the laboratory of history. The sanity of the group lies in the continuity of its traditions. To break sharply with the past is to court madness that may follow the shock of sudden blows or mutation."

- *Will and Ariel Durant (Lessons of History)*

Unlike western societies most of the Hindu traditions are linked with our religious beliefs. Thus, it is important to understand our religious philosophy and how our Kashmiri traditions are different from the rest of the country.

Our Religious Philosophy

Right from *Vedic* times *Sanatana Dharma* developed along two broad traditions known as *Shaivism* and *Vaishnavism*. The main outlines of these traditions are:

1. Both recognize Supreme Being as transcendental. While in *Shaivism* It is known as *Parmshiva*, *Vaishnavites* recognize It as *Brahman* (not to be confused with *Brahma*) Manifestation as per *Shaivism* takes place through the immanent aspect of *Parmshiva* called *Shiv-Shakti* where *Shiv* is passive witness to all that takes place under His orders but *Shakti* is the active principle involved in the manifestation process. *Shakti* has been given the feminine form of *Durga* (with her many other forms). *Vaishnavism* also recognizes that manifestation takes place through the immanent aspect of *Brahman* called *Ishvara* or *Hiranyagarbha* (male form)
2. As per *Shaivism*, *Durga* in Her various forms takes care of the lives of humans (*jivas*) whereas in *Vaishnavism* trio of gods-*Trimurti (Brahma, Vishnu and Mahash)* have been recognized for creation of *jives (Brahma)*, maintenance of life (*Vishnu*) and dissolution of life at the end of life cycles called epochs (*Mahesh is also known as Shiva or Shanker*)

To take care of *jivas* on this planet Lord *Vishnu* takes birth as Avatar from time to time. Lord *Rama*, Lord *Krishna* are the two Avatars among the nine who have taken birth so far.

2. Both traditions agree that *jivas* are held in bondage in this world (*samsara*) due to their ignorance about their true relationship with Supreme Being caused by divine illusion (*Maya*) which is the cause of repeated births in this *samsara*. To get out of this cycle of misery one has to work for salvation (*moksha*). While *Vaishnavites* focus on carrying out rituals and offering prayers to Lord *Vishnu* and His Avatars, *Shivites* offer their ritualistic worship and prayers to *Shiv-Shakti*.

Broadly speaking *Shaivism* is practiced in Kashmir, Bengal and South Indian States. *Vaishnavism* is the dominant faith in rest of India.

Our Unique traditions

As a result of our religious faith, geographical location and long history of about 5000 years our (Kashmiri) traditions have uniqueness. A few examples are given below:

- 1) Our family deities (*Isht devas*) are various forms of *Durga* (*Ragnya*, *Sharika* and *Jwala ji*) The *Isht devtas* of *Vaishnavites* are Lord *Rama*, Lord *Krishna* and other regional deities
- 2) Our recitations which we carry out on most of the occasions are mainly dedicated to our *Isht devi* and Her other forms. Most of these recitations are of local origin and are not recited by non-Kashmiri Hindus. (e.g. *Bhavaninamashasra*, *Indrakshi*, *Panchastavi*, *Leele rbda etc* ; *Ganash Stuti -Hemja stum*). *Shiv Stuti* like *Shivmahimnapar* which is universal has a local touch. We have 35 shlokas whereas out side Kashmir there are only 32 *sholokas*. And even among 32 we have 2 different sholakas. The only prayer for *Vishnu* prevalent among Kashmiris i.e. *Jai Narayan* is also of local origin not recited by non- Kashmiris. *Vaishnavites* carry out recitations from *Ramayana* (e.g. *Sunder kand*, *Hanuman Chalisa*), *Bhagwat* and *Devi stuties* from *Sunder Lahri* of *Adi Shankera*
- 3) We start our *pujas* with *doop dip puja* which forms the *pradhan bhagha* (first step of any *puja*). This is our local tradition. Again *Prepun* which is extensively used by us at the time of offering *bhoga* (*Prasad*) is purely a Kashmiri tradition. Again we celebrate our birthday with a *puja* dedicated to our 8 *rishis*. Non-Kashmiri Hindus do not have any birthday *puja* as a tradition.
- 4) On *Shivratri* we offer extensive prayers to Lord *Shiv -Shakti* along with *Vatuknath Bhairwa* (the highest being next to *Shiva- Shakti*) for days together. The *Vaishnavite* do not follow this tradition. *Vaishnavite Bhairva* is a malicious being who if ignored can create obstacles in their worship.
- 5) We celebrate *Janam Ashtami* as *Zarm Satam*, one day before *Vaishnavites* celebrate it as Lord *Ksishnas* birthday. Same is the case with *Shivratri*.
- 6) Celebrations like *Kawpunim Khicri Amavas*, are our historical links with the past. We enjoy preparations made on these occasions.
- 7) *Yagnopavit Samaskara* though universal among Hindus has developed a local tradition which involves not only extensive ritualistic *puja* carried over several days but also heavy expenditure. It is a small time function among *Vaishnavites* usually carried out for group of boys at teenage or along with marriage of boy.
- 8) Our death rituals (*Antyeshti*) are very elaborate which involves extensive rituals on the day of death and again on 10, 11 and 12 day after death. Even Social customs associated with death are lengthy.
- 9) We do not celebrate *Divali*, or *Holi* with the same enthusiasm as is being done by *Vaishnavites*. It is not a Shivite tradition.
- 10) Even in the recitation of *Bhagwadgita* which is universal we have our way of recitation on occasions like *Yagnopavit* and death rituals

These are some of the differences which mark uniqueness of our traditions.

Post migration dilemma

The loss of interest in our religious traditions started while we all lived happily in Kashmir, which was partly due to lack of real knowledge behind our traditions and partly due to the fact that we had left performance of our religious rituals to our priest class without ever bothering to understand the rationale behind their performance.

Post migration we got scattered into various Diasporas all over India mostly in *Vaishnavite* lands. Our priests had already started getting their children trained into various lucrative professions. After migration the existing ones settled mostly around Jammu. Thus, most of our diasporas who had settled at places like Delhi, Gurgaon, Noida, Faridabad, Pune, Bombay, Bangalore, Chandigarh, Dehradun and other places are left without the services of priests. Since our traditions are unique to us the local priests are not able to perform our rituals to our satisfaction. Hence, when need arises on occasions such as marriage or *yagnopavit* ceremony or the cremation of a dear one, we search all corners to find a Kashmiri priest who, as a matter of supply and demand, raises his fees to unaffordable levels for a common man. The community needs to find out a way to preserve our traditions.

Action Plan

- 2) We have to bring awareness among our community members, especially the younger generation, about our religious philosophy and our traditions. Although we have many scholars in our community yet they have not paid enough attention to writing about our religious traditions. A lot has been written about Kashmir Shaivism but it is not part of our religious traditions. Kashmir *Shaivism* is a philosophic concept of our relationship with god and does not guide us in the performance of these traditions. Our priests have produced a few booklets about performance of rituals but they lack background knowledge.
- 2) *Karmkanda*, which is a guide book for performance of our rituals, needs to be updated from time to time, keeping in view the needs of the group of people who follow it. It is regional in nature. Our *Karmkanda* was written centuries back which is not available now. Our present priests have preserved parts of relevant portions for carrying out our *Samaskaras*. In the present age one does not have time and patience to carry out long and unintelligible rituals, especially when even the priests are not available. We have to rewrite our *karmkanda*, as is being done by other Hindu communities, and make it brief.
- 3) Our seniors have to take out some time off to learn how to carry out our less important rituals. We may avail of the services of trained priests for carrying out major religious functions such as *vivah, yagnopavit, yagnya antyeshti* but *pujas* like birthday, *Shivratri Punn, bhumipujan greh pravesh* are simple and can be performed by seniors ea, or at one house if available, and learn to carry out recitations like *Bhawaninamashasra, Indrakshi, Panchastavi, Shivismahimnapar* and other *stuties*. It could be like a kitty party with the service of *prashad* as eatables.
- 4) We need to train priests preferably from our own community. To attract people we must provide for their training, residence in the locality where they serve and adequate assured income to meet their financial needs. This can be done by regular contributions from the community who avail of their services. We had this tradition in our villages when they were paid a part of the harvested crop along with other service providers like barbers carpenters etc. Our priests were part of family who were consulted not only for carrying out rituals but acted as family astrologers as well.
- 5) We should try to create *Mriyuo Samgri Bhandars* (materials needed for cremation of dead person) in the localities where we live. It was our tradition back home in Kashmir and has been preserved in some localities in Jammu and even outside J&K state. A death in a home brings lot of grief and tension. A little help from community members is a great encouragement. The cost of these materials is meager but inconvenience in finding them, especially in our new surroundings, is great.
- 6) Setting up of community centers. There are reserved places in many new developments for construction of temples which act as community centers. The land offered is at cheap rates. Funding for payment of land and building can be met with donations from residents of locality, especially from those who are well off.

15.0 THE ESSENCE OF YAGNYA

Performance of *yagnya* is essential part for the performance of our rituals. It has been in vogue right from Vedic times. It was vedic people's belief that *devas* who represent various elements like fire, water, air, sky and earth control the fate of human beings by providing abundance of rain essential for cultivation of crops, children, cattle (wealth), long life and after life in the heavenly abode of ancestors. The *devas* (33 in number) could be reached for their favours by offerings of produce from mother Earth like grains, milk and its products, honey etc. While all the major *devas* have their abodes in the heaven called *dyoloka* there are some *devas* who live on Earth as well as in heaven. *Agni deva* (fire element) lives on Earth as fire and in heaven as Sun and serves as a carrier (*havya-vahana*) for carrying oblations offered to it on Earth to heaven for the *deva* to whom they are offered. We find a mention of this belief in Bhagvad gita which states " *having created mankind in the beginning together with yagnya, prajapati (the vedic concept of god who controls even devas) said 'by this shall you propagate, this shall be the milk cow of your desires (3/10) Again 'Cherish the devas with yagnya and may these devas cherish you. Thus cherishing one other you shall reap the supreme good '(3/11).*

Although this Vedic concept developed about 4000 years back and may look obsolete in the present era yet it continues to be an essential mode of our rituals, be it daily worship of five *panch mahabut yagnyass* (worship of five great elements), *samaskaras* like *namakarn*, *yagnopavit* marriage and death rituals. Performance of *yagnya* is also done on other auspicious occasions like *greh pravesh* (entering new house) after recovery from an ailment or just for success in business venture. Performance of *yagnya* is also a social event among Kashmiri Pandits. *Yagnya* called *havan* is performed on religious events such as *Ramnavami* or *Durga ashtami* or any other date to attract maximum community members for a communal event.

English translation of the word nearest to its objective is sacrifice. It is an act of cleaning one's mind of all impurities cause by various types of attachments. By offering one's possessions in sacrifice one gets mentally liberated. A *puranic* story explains this. It is said that King Yudhisthara (of Mahabharata fame) performed a great *yagnya* called *Rajsurya yagnya* when he ascended throne after Mahabharata war was over. All learned and wise acclaimed that *yagnya* was unparalleled till a mongoose with one side of body in golden colour turned up and rolled over the floor, hoping that this *yagnya* would turn him completely golden. It did not happen and he pronounced all performers of *yagnya* as liars. Then mongoose described the reason for his judgment. He said "Years back a terrible famine cause large scale deaths in a village. A poor brahmin, hungry for days got some flour from a nobleman to feed himself and his family. They were preparing bread from the flour when I entered to ask for some food. The brahmin offered all that they had to me. Next day I went again there and found the whole family had died of hunger. I rolled over the floor where a few remnants of flour on ground turned my body golden and since then I have been looking for such a *yagnya* which could turn my other side golden."

We Kashmiri Pandits perform *yagnya* where under we offer oblations to five deities namely Ganesh, *Shiv*, *Narayan*, *Devi* and *Surya* by offering 1000 oblations to each one of all the five deities in one go. Besides this before the start of offerings in the firepit (*yagnyakund*) considerable time is taken in installing *Kalash*, (*Varundeva* as witness to the performance of *yagnya*) installation of *Navgrehs* (nine planets) etc which also adds to the time and effort taken in the performance of such a *yagnya*. Normally the initiation starts late in the evening and is carried to next day upto lunch time or dinner time when all people around are invited to participate in final oblation called *purn ahuti*. After this an *aarti* is performed followed by *shantipath* for the wellbeing of all. The performance of such a long ritual is very tiring and beyond the endurance of present day generation for whom the whole objective of *yagnya* is a means of social get togetherness rather than purification of the soul.

An ideal way out in such situation could be to undertake performance of *yagnya* of each deity individually on different occasions. It would take around 4-5 hours for the complete *yagnya*. And one could avoid overnight stay. It could start around 8 in the morning and finish by noon or start around 3-4 pm and complete by evening. All the participants in the performance of *yagnya* could be associated physically and mentally by presenting to them a copy of 1000 recitation through which offerings are made. It would give satisfaction to all and bring awareness of our traditions among our community. It may be stated here that at some places this practice is already followed. Remember all the gods to whom we make offerings are not different gods. There is only one god with different manifestations. Another quote from Bhagwad gita will make it clear " *Endowed with faith men engage in the worship of my various forms from which they get their desires ,which are being actually ordained by Me*"(7/22).

16.0 REVISITING KASHMIR AFTER 17 YEARS

- the way ahead

The first thought that comes to my mind before writing my impressions of visiting Kashmir after 17 years of exile is to thank my Isht Devi Ragnya Bhagwati for giving me a chance to pray at Her feet after such a long time. I used to go there almost on every Shukla Ashtami come summer or winter and kept on praying to Her every day of my exile with the hope that before my final exit I will get a chance to pray at Khirbhawani Temple once again.

I visited Kashmir in the last week of May 2007 along with my wife, my niece and her son who left Kashmir at the age of 7 years. We stayed at a hotel in Rajbagh, Srinagar near the place which was my home once. My primary desire to visit Kashmir was to go on a pilgrimage, but one cannot ignore the feelings that you get after revisiting the place after 17 years, which was my home for 55 years and before that home of several generations of my ancestors. My object of writing this article is to apprise the readers particularly my community members about my impressions of the place and the people with a view about the possibility of our return to Kashmir.

Temples and Ashrams

Since I was on a pilgrimage, I will first of all write about the state of religious places which we visited:

Khir Bhawani

During good old days I always thought of getting rid ugly structures around the shrine which was occupied by shopkeepers. Well that has been done now. Very nicely planned structures have been raised or are in the progress of construction. Besides about 40 dharmasala rooms, well planned shops, two large *hawan shallas* to accommodate around 200 persons at a time, have been built with excellent ventilation. Within the paved compound several shelters have been made around the shrine for *yatris*.

The structures around the chinar trees that grace the shrine are being redone. On the whole the place looks good It seems *Ragnya Devi* has taken the charge of rebuilding the shrine in Her own hands.

It was Ashtami on the day of our visit. About 100 KPs were there which included some locals and a few who like us had come from outside. The colour of spring water was a pleasing shade of green and blue. Three priests were among outsiders who had come from Jammu. They had come to make some quick bucks from the devotees without performing pooja the way it should be done. They were competing in raising the voices without proper coordination while carrying on recitations. A local old Muslim was selling milk, *ratandeeps* and *vena*. I saw him moving freely within the premises of shrine to collect used *ratandeeps* for reuse

A non Kashmiri Hindu Halwaii was selling *luchas* and serving *kahwa* on request.

A contingent of CRP persons is posted inside the shrine and at the outer gate.

They prepare *khir* everyday from their own money or donations from *yatris* and serve it as *prashad* to all. A telephone booth (without ISD) is run by a Muslim boy within the premises of shrine near the gate entrance. A number of tourist visit the place daily.

Hari Parbhat

Hari Parbhat is no longer a calm and clean place where we used to go for a sacred walk for a *parikrama* (going round about 4 kms) A whole new city with roads has come up inside boundary wall (called *Kalai*).

We had several shrines around this hillock where we used to pray while making a *parikrama*. Now only two sites are visible: Ganesh Temple and Sharika Temple. (Aka Chkreswar)

Ganesh Temple

The old structure at Ganesh Temple has been reconstructed with nice wooden ceiling and a side hall in first floor by few dedicated community members. It was being painted. Lord Ganesh has not received a new coat of *sindur* for years. I was told a *hawan* will be performed here on *Ganesh Chaturdashi* falling in July and a new coat of *sindur* will be applied soon. All the same we could see several *syambhu* (self revealed) *Ganeshas* all over the rock. We applied little paint to one *syambhu* Ganesha and carried out full traditional *pooja* with all recitations for two hours. The temple looks like a chowkidars hut adjacent to the massive stone gate at the stairs leading to Mokdum Sahibs shrine up on the hillock. It is hidden behind the tall 3 storey house in front of temple. The lane in front of temple has been occupied by Muslim neighbour.

Sharika Temple

It is well kept. The *shilla* which is the object of worship has been smeared with fresh *sindur*. A contingent of CRP personal is guarding the shrine. There is no trace of *Devi Aangan*. Muslim houses have come up right upto the stair case leading to the shrine.

Ram Kouln Mandr

The temple still stands there but it been completely vandalized and dharmshallae adjacent to it have been burnt down.

Shankeracharya Temple

It has the same grandeur as it had 17 years back. Security is very tight. We were not allowed to carry cameras or mobile phones. A long queue of visitors was waiting for dharshan of Lord Shiva.

Jeshtadevi Temple

A few dedicated members of community have not only preserved it but made several additions to the structures around it. Security is tight from a Km away No autos are allowed within one Km of temple site.

Durganag Temple

The temple is well kept. As usual it is favourite destination of sadhus and pilgrims. A new four story *dharamsalla* is nearing completion. A number of Hindu *tabas* in the neighbourhood attract tourists for lunch/ dinner.

Ashrams

We could get time to visit *Ishber Ashram* near Nishat and *Ramakrishna Ashram* near Shali store. Both the Ashrams are well kept with CRP personal posted there. Ramakrishna Ashram has added a new guest house for its devotees and a large hall for serving food on special occasions. Pooja of Bhairwa at Ishber and Shiv linga at RK mission gave us great satisfaction .. A few days back Shri Shri Ravi Shanker Ji prayed at Ishber Ashram when he was on a brief visit to Kashmir.

Development works

As a result of huge inflow of funds from govt. and non govt. sources Kashmir looks different now. Right from airport one can see the change. Airport is a modern one which can handle about 20 incoming and outgoing flights with peak traffic flow of about 20000 passengers. Srinagar city has doubled in area with constructions every where. Railway line from Qazigund to Baramulla is nearing completion. Additional bridges have been built on river Jehlum. To get an idea of development works there were just two cement factories in 1990 producing hardly 600 tons of cement per day. At present there are seven large and small cement factories producing about 7000 tons of cement per day and another four large scale factories are under construction which will add about 6000 tons per day. There are hardly any power cuts. All the power from Dulhasti power project of Kistwar which was commissioned recently has been diverted to Kashmir as there are no transmission lines for transfer of power to other parts of India. Many new English medium schools have come up including DPS.

The sad part of story is that Srinagar city is heavily fortified, growth of city is very erratic with no planned development, roads are narrow even in Rajbagh where land prices range plus one crore per kanal of land, Dal Lake has shrunk in size resulting in overcrowding of houseboats, even River Jehlum has been reduced to a stream. The standing walls of burnt down buildings is a reminder of the faded glory of City.

Life in Kashmir

Month of May when we visited Kashmir is usually full of excitement with lot of tourists from India, which involves people of all walks of life to focus on doing good business. Thus everybody seemed to be praying to militants to hold guns for some time. While Muslims and Sikhs are fully enshrined in Kashmir, the few KPs (less than 5000) look like lost in wilderness. The prosperity of people is very visible from the houses they live, the number of cars they own, the dress they wear and the food they eat at restaurants.

Our Prospects of returning to Kashmir

Under international laws, we as aborigines of Kashmir, have a right to settlement there. No solution to Kashmir problem is possible without our right to settlement. Govt of India, State Govt and even the Muslims of Kashmir are aware of it. That is why we are offered several packages which suit our politicians. At this time of history we have to evolve our strategy and stick to it even if it takes another 50 years or more for acceptance.

Our strategy

We have to take following factors into consideration to arrive at our decision:

Living out of Muslim dominance in Kashmir has given us a strength of exploiting our talents to our capacities which is not possible for us in present day Kashmir which is now a virtual Islamic state.

All lands where we lived have been taken over by Muslims/Sikhs. Land prices have gone up considerably.

All businesses, govt. jobs, bank jobs, airport jobs, school and college teaching jobs are manned by Muslims.

The political atmosphere in Kashmir will not change. Kashmiri Muslims have divided the valley into pockets of their influence based on religious sentiments, economic interests, political aspirations etc. To keep their interests alive they have evolved one common strategy to keep India on the defensive by exploiting their nuisance value by raising the slogans of autonomy, independence involvement of KMs in political future of Kashmir and so on. The least they expect is status quo of article 370 of Indian constitution which they have successfully used to create a Muslim State.

From the above it is very obvious that going to Kashmir as the govt. of India /J&K Govt wants us, is out of question. A division of our territory will provide a better environment to both Hindus and Muslims to grow side by side as has been demonstrated by Ambani Brothers after they split the ancestral property. Our long term strategy should be:

Strengthen our roots where we are living now by enriching our selves economically through business, taking up jobs which command influence and respect.

Demand a package of settlement in a designated area in Kashmir which we can call as our homeland. It may be given any name: Panun Kashmir, KP settlement area, KP reserve area. It should be out of administrative control of J&K state. I would suggest an area which starts from Verinag / Qazigund and extends up to Pahalgam as our area of resettlement. Large parts of this area are still open which provide a scope for proper planning of a modern city. Srinagar is only one hour journey from Qazigund railway station.

To achieve our long term goal we should involve all sections of society in it. If we could have a credible Think Tank to guide our movement that would be excellent.