

Abode of Goddess Sharda At Shardi

I – Mother’s Grace {Mahima}, Sharda Mahatmaya And Grandeur

- Brigadier Rattan Kaul

{I dedicate this effort to Grace {Mahima} of Goddess Sharda for the benefit of my and Gen-X, who may not know much about Goddess Sharda and her implied benevolence to our Sharda Desh. This article is also a gift to Gen-X, like Naveen, who know more of our religion, culture and heritage than men of their age. Along with era scholars and personalities associated with Sharda Temple during various century’s, I have given brief details about them to make it more informative. Each part is self explanatory with notes to avoid reference to previous part....Rattan}

Mahima {Grace} Of Mother Sharda. As a young boy I got used to hear folk tales of *Sone Kisli* and other tales from Granny Zapur Ded, but what interested me was her narration of travelogue of Pandit Bhawani Kaul of 18th Century {Descendant of Pandit Narain Kaul; who wrote History of Kashmir during Akbar’s time}. His travels through dense forests in quest of spiritual and literary enlightenment kept me, an eight-year-old, gazing at her next lip movement, however, it was Bhawani Kaul’s challenging pilgrimage to Gangabal and Sharda Temple which impressed me most. At *Matamal* uncle would hold court at his *Rehbab Sahib* residence and amongst various discourses, Pandit Harjoo Fehrist’s {Mid 19th Century; social reformer and staunch *Vedhist*} visits to Sharda Temple, till he lost his life at the temple, held us spell bound. Those days Goddess Sharda meant a lot to me, in my quest to do well in studies. The *Mahima* of Goddess Sharda also came from our Guruji *Lala Sab*, maternal Guruji’s *Nityanand*, *Vassa* and *Jagga Boui*’s, when on *Gor trai* hand painted image of Goddess Sharda *Gor trai*’s were handed over to me and my siblings. Having been specifically dedicated to *Bhadrakali*, family devoted to *Chakreshwari*, this did not damper my mental affiliation to Goddess Sharda. But alas, unlike other places, which I could visit, I had to satisfy myself with imaginative details of Sharda Temple. Time flew; in 1976, I was literally crawling on my fours to reach a mountain top in Kupwara District called as *Raja Ram Di Lari* {See Map}. As I stood on top of over 14000 feet high mountain; Nanga Parbat and K2 peaks formed the magnificent backdrop on the Northern skyline of Kishanganga Valley {Neelam Valley} across Line Of Control {LOC}; now under Pakistan. In the process of admiration of this scenic beauty, my local guide, nudged and in halting Kashmiri asked me to view two other peaks in the middle distance. Sharda and Narda Peak to the East of *Raja Ram Di Lari* formed two twin peaks overlooking Kishanganga River and dense forests on Northern slopes. Along forward slopes of these twin-peaks I could see, through binoculars, two major structures with a narrow walled passage leading to it. Kishanganga River flowed few hundred feet below with many more rivulets, small and big, racing to merge with the river. He was pointing out Sharda temple to me and to its immediate west was a fort like structure, now in ruins, called the Sirhasila Castle. As I bowed in obeisance, the accounts ingrained in childhood kaleidoscopically came back. Months later I was over the area in a helicopter and my pilot colleagues made it point to remain hovering over the area to enable me to have more look of the Temple. As we did so, hymn to Sharda; “*Sharda Varda Devi Mookshidata Saraswati, Sharneyetrambike Gauri Narayani...Namostute, Namastasyey, Namastaseyey, Namastaseyey, Nammo Namahah*” came out loudly from my lips, much to the amazement of my pilot colleagues. During next two years stint in the valley, as a foot soldier, I trudged almost all the area notably those associated with Sharda Pilgrimage. Wangat Temples {Sodaritirath; Narannag}, Mohanmarg {Gangabal}; Bandipur, Wullar, Gurez, Machel, Putta Khan {North of Wullar Lake}, Saadamalyun, Gushi, Rangwar, Kralpura, Kupwara, Keran {All near to Sharda Temple} and finally Handwara, Bhadrakali, Kazinag, Nastachun Pass and Karnah {Titwal; Northwest of Kupwara}. The dye had been cast; narration’s of Bhawani and Harjoo’s travelogue got translated into real landmarks and did not remain fiction. Study of our history, religious places, translated scriptures, over the decades and inclination brought me to a stage that I could understand these accounts better. With maze of accounts, folklore and myths; Sharda Temple had become epicenter of religious philosophy, *Avtar*’s, Sage’s, King’s, Visitor’s, River’s, Chronicler’s accounts; yet the antiquity and *Mahima* of the temple, deity, pilgrimage account and changes, over the centuries, remained obscure, mostly hazy, or attributed to different sage’s, scholar’s etc. Possibly truth and facts were casualty while draped fiction held sway.

Temple Of Goddess Sharda. Kashmir has been known as Sharda Desh {Abode of Goddess Sharda - though many chroniclers like Kalhan refer to it by ‘The land of Aryans’ {Kalhan’s *Rajtarangini* Verse 341 Book I}; named after presiding deity of learning and fine arts. Sharda not only is important as a temple, but in her triple form of Sharda, Narda or Saraswati and Vaghdevi; giving impetus and excellence to Kashmiri learning. Temple of Sharda is located in Neelam Valley {Upper Kishanganga}, few Kilometers from Line Of Control {LOC}, in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir {POK} in a small village called Shardi; near the confluence of Kishanganga {Referred, wrongly though, as Maha Sindhu, Sindhu Ganga, Parvati Ganga}, Saraswati {Referred also as Kalnotri} and Madhumati Rivers. Its location can be fixed Northwest of Gangabal and North of Lolab Valley/ Wular Lake. Shardi, a small village gets its name from Sharda and is connected by road running along North bank of Kishanganga to Muzafarabad {where Kishanganga River meets Vitasta {Jhelum}} called Neelam Valley Road. One has to cross Kishanganga to reach Shardi or Sharda Temple if travelling along this road. From the valley one has to cross Shamsabari Range and descend nearly to the level of Kishanganga River and then move East along a foot/pony track. The main temple rises prominently on the lower slopes of Sharda Peak {Point 3287 Metres also called Domel Baihik}; Narda Peak {Point 3805 Metres also called Katsil} is just East of it, higher in height but on the same ridge line. The twin-peaks are magnificent and prominent, even though to the South of the temple. The view from the Temple towards North would be splendid with Nanga Parbat and K2 Range paying obeisance to the Goddess from their towering heights. There are pine clad mountain slope between the temple and twinpeaks {Forest cover in the area, more so in the vicinity of the temple, has diminished and is sparse above the line of temple}. Madhumati and Saraswati Rivers, flowing on either side of Sharda Temple, join Kishanganga closer to the temple and pilgrims refer the confluence as Sharda

Sangam. Kalhan; author of *Rajatarangini*, in his introductory part on the vale of Kashmir {Verses 28 to 38 Book I} says thus ‘Where by visiting the Goddess of Sharda one gets in moment to the river Madhumati and the Saraswati adored by the poets’ {Verse 37 Book I}. The reference is to the *mahima* of Sharda but has not used River prefix with Saraswati and apparently refers to Goddess Saraswati; other form of Sharda. Auriel Stein, who translated *Rajatarangini* in English, however, prefixes Saraswati with River in brackets; connoting his ‘own’ interpretation of River and NOT Goddess Saraswati. Apparently he has missed nuances of Saraswati as Goddess. *Rajatarangini* means ‘River of Kings’; 8000 verses, in eight parts, of high poetic merit in Sanskrit; written between 1148-1150 AD, covers a period of 3050 years with dated accounts from AD 813 onwards with eighth part being exhaustive. Kalhan was born in the beginning of 12th Century, his father was a Kashmiri nobleman during the reign of King Harsha {1089-1101 AD. *Rajatarangini* has been updated from time to time, even under Muslim rule; by Jonaraja up to 1459 AD; Shrivara 1487AD; Prajya Bhatta {under Akbar’s orders} 1514 AD; Shuka upto 1586 AD. Various other historians under Mughals {including Narain Kaul and Anand Kaul} brought it up to ending 1785; Abul Fazal’s *Aine-a- Akbari* is also notable amongst them. Kalhan gives the location of the shrine with reference to the siege of Sirhasila Castle {*Rajatarangini*}, which took place in his own time {12th Century} and ‘**where a huge temple complex came up**’. His reference indicates location of the shrine in proximity to Sirhasila Castle/Fort {also called Sirhala} West of Sharda {Sirhasila Fort encircled by Kishanganga, Madhumati and Muktasri – *Rajatarangini* Verse 2492 Book VIII. Sirhasila is literally next to the temple, now in ruins, overlooking Kishanganga and, as per Kalhan, encircled by Kishanganga, Madhumati and Muktasri {Verse 2492 Book VIII}. While Kishanganga and Madhumati River referred to is next to Sharda { not to be mistaken with Madhumati of Bandipore}; Muktasri River would be further West and only guess can be made of its location closer to Tejjan. This interpretation is because he specifically refers to encirclement / isolation of Sirhasila Castle , which is possible only if these rivers are in a ring around it. He also refers to the flight of Bhoja, the defiant Dard Warlord of the area, from the battle scene, towards the shrine, which he refers as ‘Sanctuary of Goddess Sharda’ {Verse 2706 Book VIII}’; which also indicates proximity of the two landmarks. Kalhan, in his account of King Lalitaditya's reign, refers to visit by certain followers of a King of Bengal under the pretense of visit to Sharda to avenge the murder of their king by Lalitaditya but enter Parihaskeshwa temple and get killed {Verse 325/326 Book IV *Rajatarangini*} { Lalitaditya had conquered Bengal {Gauda} during his reign}. This indicates that *mahima* of the shrine had spread to far off regions and that the shrine existed prior to the reign of King Lalitaditya of Kashmir {Lalitaditya Muktapida (697 AD to 733 AD) - Karkota Dynasty; A successful military expeditionary. Lalitaditya was equally a great builder; he built very fine and massive temples including world famous sun temple at Martand, his capital near the sacred shrine of Khir-Bhawani naming it Parihaspur {City of Pleasure}. He was also known as Mukhtapida; even 'Sharda' Mukhtapida in later chronicles. Though himself a Vaishnavite Hindu, he erected a massive Buddhist Vihara at Parihasapur, though Buddhism had started to wane in the valley by then}. Famous chronicler Al-Biruni describes shrine’s position in ‘Inner Kashmir’ about two to three days journey towards the mountains of Bolor {Bolor referred by him in his chronicle has been interpreted towards Upper Indus between Gilgit and Ladakh, however, reference to Bolor to mean ‘Wulor’ or ‘Wular Lake’ is most likely, as Gilgit and Ladakh are far away from Sharda and the area was never known as Bolor. Also the phoentics of ‘Wulor’ in Arabic is somewhat closer to ‘Bolor’}. He speaks of the shrine; ‘much venerated and frequented by pilgrims as those of *Surya* at Multan {Pakistan}, *Vishnu Chakraswamin* {Thaneswar -Kuruksheetra} and the *Linga* of Somnath {Gujarat}{Al-Biruni (996-1031 AD) visited Kashmir in 1030 AD and this description is not that of his visit as there is no evidence of his having visited the shrine. Al-Biruni , an Arab scholar who came to India with Mahmud of Gazni, in the beginning of 11th Century AD stayed in India for a number of years. He wrote a book, which gives account of social, political and economic conditions of then India. He was killed in a battle in 1031 AD; just a year after visiting Kashmir}. Another Kashmiri scholar, Bilhana, in his description of Pravarapura {Srinagar}, while in Deccan, mentions Sharda *tirath* shrine {Not temple} and ascribes excellence of learning of the people to Sharda {Bilhana ; Born 1041 AD at Khonmukh {Khonmoh}; fellow-poet of Kalhan. Bilhana left Kashmir in 1066 AD during the reign of King Kalsa {1063 to 1089 AD} to become Chief Pandit of Karnata {Present Day Mysore}. Unheard of after 1088 AD, wrote *VikramankaDevaCaritam*, a historical compendium of poems narrating the expedition of King Vikramaditya VI of Kalyan {1076 A.D. to 1127 AD}{Verse 937 Book VII *Rajatarangini*}. In 1877 AD an old palm-leaf edition of *VikramankaDevaCaritam* was found in Jaisalmer {Rajasthan}. Other known compositions to his credit are; *CaurPanchasika*- a lyric of fifty stanzas and *Karna Sundari* a drama of four acts}. Another reference to Sharda’s form is found in Jonaraja’s chronicle wherein he mentions Zain-ul-Abidin {Badshah} visited shrine, in 1422 AD to witness the miraculous manifestations of the Goddess {Jonaraja; A writer of 14th and 15th Century 1389 -1459 A D, updated *Rajatarangini*. He candidly owns that he was commissioned to write this by Zain-ul-abdin, through the good offices of Shirya Bhatta, Head of Judiciary. His account covers twenty three rulers of Kashmir upto 1459 AD}. The Valley acquired place of pride in Sanskrit, Sharda language, literature, medicine, astronomy, astrology, religion, art and architecture; all attributed to the benediction of Sharda. The temple became a sacred shrine to which thousands of devotee’s from distant parts of India were attracted to seek blessings. In 16th Century, Abul Fazl {He wrote account of Akbar’s reign named *Aine-e-Akbari*} writes; ‘At two day's distance from Hayahom is the river named Madhumati, which flows from the Darda Country{Dardesa} {Apparently referring to Dardistan area which was controlled by defiant Dards}. On its banks is a stone temple called Sharda, dedicated to *Durga* and regarded with great veneration. On every eighth *tithi* {*Ashtami*} of the bright moon, it begins to shake and produces the most extraordinary effect’. The reference to Madhumati is specific to a stream North of Hayahom.

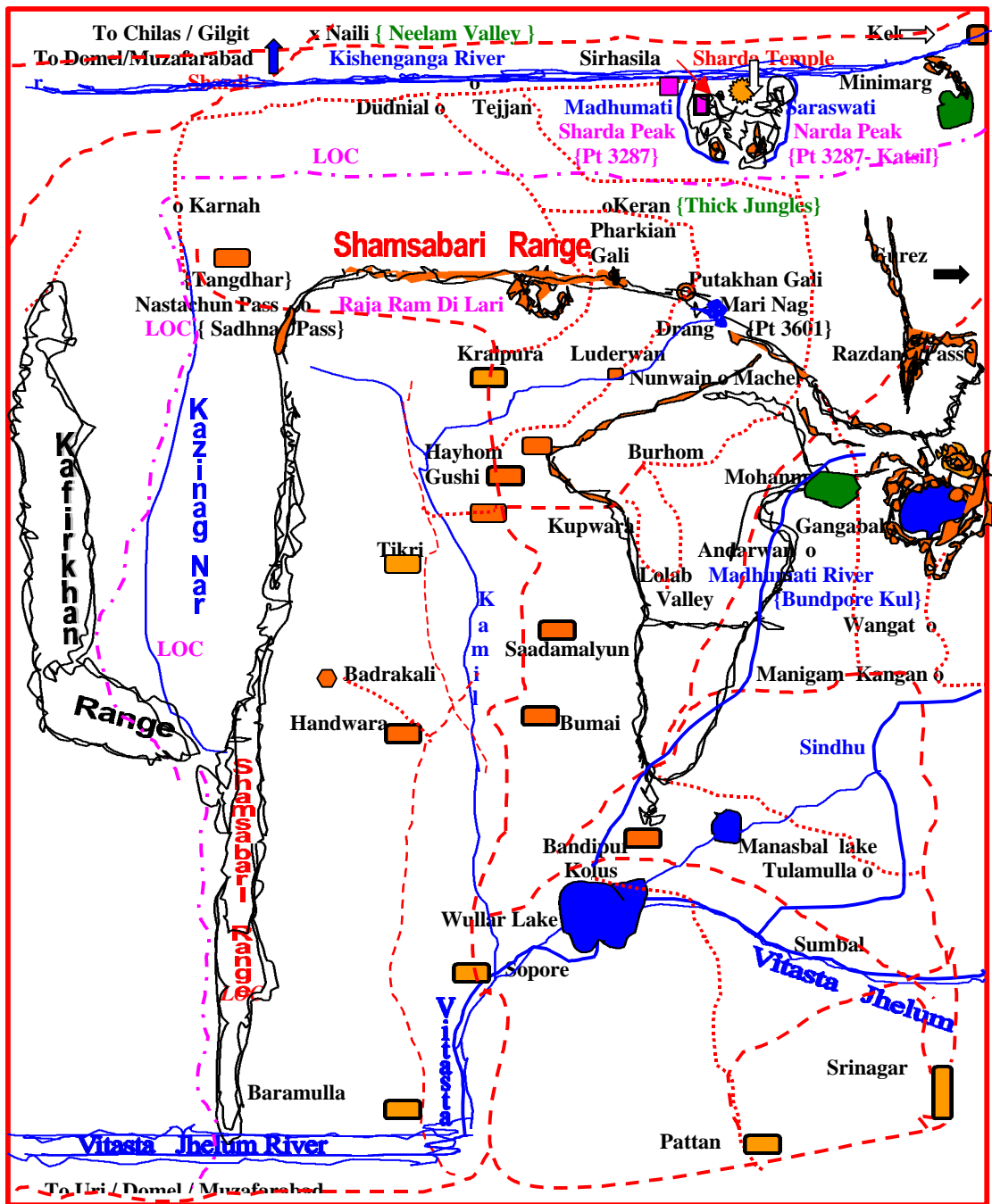
The goddess is said to resemble a swan, carrying glittering gold washed from the sand of river Madhumati as her diadem {Madhumati River is considered sacred stream and gets mentioned in *Nilmat Purana* 1261sqg. However this stream is no other than Bandpore Nala {Marked Bodh Kul on the maps and falls into Wulor {Wular} lake near village of Kulus. This river gets mentioned in *Rajatarangini* Verse 1171 Book VII. However, River Madhumati of Sharda is different which is

a small stream getting this name in later centuries. More on this aspect later}. Description of Goddess in our *Sharda Vandana* reads like this {Not in full}; *Kashmir Purvasini, Vidhya Dieyinam Shawetambuj Viharinam, Chaturbuj Dharini... Shattanriveena Vadini... Mokshadayini, Papanashneemam ... Vitasta Rupenam ... Himachidit Girishshobinam ... Kalashamrit Dharayae*. Translated this means; *Residing in Kashmir from ancient times..giver of knowledge.. seated on a white bird {Swan}..having four arms, carries hundred stringed veena.. giver of moksha and forgiver of sins.. just like with grace of Vitasta {Jhelum River}.. gracing a snow clad mountain..carrying a pot with holy nectar*. In South India, where worship of Sharda is equally high, Goddess Sharda represents matrix of the universe displaying in her hands; jar full of nectar, book signifying learning, rosary signifying subtle nuances of universe, source of Upanishadic knowledge and three *Shakti's* {*Trimurtis*} known as Saraswati, Lakshmi and Iswari. The number of pilgrims to Sharda was ever increasing during the rule of Hindu Kings, who maintained temple in a spick-and-span condition. With advent of Islam {1320 AD}, it lost royal patronage but flow of pilgrims was reasonable even during Sultan and Chak rule {15th and 16th Century}. Fortunately destructive hands of Sikandar *Butshikan* did not reach the shrine, because of its location, where perhaps his writ did not run. It was politically disturbed conditions during Mughal and Pathan rule in Upper Kishanganga Valley that had much to do with the neglect into which the shrine had fallen. Things marginally improved during Dogra rule, however, with 1947 War and subsequent ceasefire, Shardi remained on the other side of LOC, in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir. Even today orthodox Brahmin's in South India, on rising from his bed in the morning, faces north and with folded hands offers salutations to Goddess Sharda; '*Namaste Sarada Devi, Kashmiri Mandala Vasini* {*Salutations to Goddess Sarada who resides in Kashmir*'. In Kashmir the hymn to Sharda is; '*Sharda Varda Devi Mookshidata Saraswati, Sharneyetrambika Gauri Narayani...Namostute, Namastasyey, Namastaseyey, Namastaseyey, Nammo Namaha*'.

Sharda Mahatmaya. *Mahatmaya's* are scriptures pertaining to various pilgrimages. 51 *Mahatmaya's* existed or have been traced in Kashmir. Most of these have been extracted from *Purana's* but many are of medieval period more so pertaining to those shrines which came up during middle of first millennium BC and later. *Sharda Mahatmaya*, a similar scripture, narrates *tirtha* as seen by Muni Shandalya {Gotra of Kashmiri's ie Bhatt, Bakhshi, Nari is named after Sage Shandalya}. In order to see Goddess Sharda, Muni Shandalya is advised to proceed to jungles of Syamala {Possibly Kupwara District}. There at Ghusa {Ghushi} *Mahadevi* {Sharda} appears and promises to show herself in her true form as *Shakti* in the *Sharda Van* {*Mahadevi* - Consort of Shiva; Parvati or Uma, also called Kali, Durga. Religious scholars, historians {not all} refer *Mahadevi* as one form of Parvati, Lakshmi and Saraswati. This form of address, *Mahadevi*, is more common in Shavitic variant and that too in South}. The Goddess vanishes from this sight at Hayasrama {The present village of Hayahom; Northeast of Ghushi}. The Muni then proceeds to a spring known as Krishna Nag {Marked as Mari Nag {Point 3601 Metres} on the maps, in which he bathes and his body becomes golden; representing symbolic liberation from darkness. This spring situated above the village of Dranga, close to Hayahom {Many chronicles claim that Dranga mentioned is situated at the foot of a hill and still bears that name and its location is in the foothills of mountain-ridge known as Kakudar (Kashmiri); a corrupt form of *KaraKuta Dhara* above *Tosa Maidan* of present day {*Tausi* the plain of *Tohi* as known in Poonch and Persian *Maidan*; thus *Tosa Maidan*}, which was a watch station also called Surapura where Utpala meets death {Verses 140, 1352 Book VII *Rajtarangin*} along the Pir Panchal Range in those days. Authors who refer it to Dranga of *Sharda Mahatmaya* may be because of similarity of names; both are widely separated. Actually it is called Sona-Drang after word '*Swararnardhanguka*'; *Swarn* meaning gold and *anguka* body; apparent reference to Shandalya's body becoming golden}. Muni Shandalya then ascends the mountain range to the North and sees dance of Goddess in a mountain meadow, known as *Rangavatika* {Rangwar Forest, which lies below the pass; Rangwar Gali. Exact location of *Rangvatika* remains unknown} through which route leads across Shamsabari Range towards Kishanganga. He then arrives at *Tejavana* {Possibly present day Tejjan a small jungle close to Dudnial, the residence of Sage Gautama {Kashmiri Gotras are also named after Gautama; notably Parimu, Kak, Razdan, Fehrist} on the banks of Kishanganga. The sage {Muni Shandalya} after crossing hill sees God Ganesh on the East {The mountain behind the temple and Sirhasila has resemblance to Lord Ganesha's head and trunk. Sirhasila means the rock of the head; *Sirah* – head; *sila*{shila}- rock. Sirhasila Fort/Castle seems to have got name from Sharda Peak in the *Mahatmaya* } and arrives in the *Sharda Van* {The pine clad forest North of the temple}. After reciting a hymn in praise of her triple form of *Sharda, Narda or Saraswati and Vaghdevi*, goddess revealed herself to the Muni at the 'sacred spot' {Reference is to the place where shrine existed and temple was constructed later. Legend says that SHE disappears inside a spring {*Kund*}, now inside the Sanctum Sanctorum now covered by a stone slab and invites him to her residence at Sirhasila. It is said that *Pitras* then approached Muni Shandalya and requested him to perform their *Shrada's*. On his taking water from the 'Maha Sindhu' for the purpose of the *Tarpana* {Giving water to the dead}, half of its water turns into honey and forms the stream now known as Madhumati. It is said that bath and *Shrada's* {Rites associated with dead} at *Sharda Sangam* {What is meant here is confluence of Madhumati and Kishanganga Rivers of Sharda} assures remission of sins. Actually Sindhu Ganga or Maha Sindhu emanates from Dras and is mentioned in Nilmat Purana {vv297sqq}. This river is called lower Sindhu and finally joins Vitasta {Jhelum. Geographically Sindhu {Indus}, Maha Sindhu and Sharda are far apart. In *Mahatmaya* the reference is to Kishanganga River and Madhumati, a stream next to the temple. More on this aspect later in the article. This custom of *shrada* adopted for this temple pilgrimage is not religiously connected with the Goddess of learning and fine arts; Sharda. Specific places for such rites for the dead have been designated in different parts of the valley; Shopian, Mattan, Shadipur, Jawalajee {Khrew}, Khonmukh, Gangabal etc. Most probable reason for this could be that *Pitra Paksh* {Annual fortnight for *Shradha's* for dead ancestors starts just seven days after the designated day of pilgrimage and by that time they may not have returned to their homes. *Sharda Vandana* {Hymn} also attributes *Mokshadayini* and *Papnashneemam* {Giving freedom to soul and forgive sins} which may have also been reason for including *tarpan* rites as part of the pilgrimage..

Aryan Saraswats are reported to have settled nearly 5058 years back in the valley {In Kashmir three era's were dated; Sapatrishti the oldest and current year is 5058; Vikrimi Savant is 56 years older than Christian era i.e 2058 this year {2002 AD}. Sakka Samvat was also in vogue but is younger than Christian era and not in use now {For details read articles by Shri C L Nagri, which appeared in *Koshur Samachar* last year}. Goddesses they worshipped initially were the *trinity* of Laxmi, Parvati and Saraswati. Manifestation of Goddess in the shape of Sharda, as goddess of learning would have been subsequent {*Mahadevi* in the form as *Shakti*, as given in *Mahatmaya*}. A broad spectrum would thus indicate *Sharda Mahatmaya* account refers to 'already manifested form of Goddess Sharda'; between 2500 BC and 1000 BC, the period when *Gotra's* and *Vaishnavite* Brahmanism took strong roots after absorbing local rituals and worship of Goddess's in other forms, other than the *trinity*, started. *Sharda Mahatmaya* infers Sharda Goddess had already manifested in the valley before existence of Sage Gautama and Muni Shandalya {Founders of their respective *gotra's*. Originally only six *gotras* existed including Dattatreya and Bharadwaja. Sage Gautama is in the next enlarged *Gotra's* and finds mention in post Mahabarata era. Muni Shandalya is supposed to be post Gautama, but closer to the era of Gautama. Apparently Sage Gautama would have had Goddess's *darshan* earlier and established his *ashram*, close to the place of worship of the Goddess}. There are certain indications from *Sharda Mahatmaya*; it confirms that temple had not been constructed by then. Peculiar names of places like Hayasrama, Syamala have been used {Few place names, features given in the account can be identified today} but others like *Tejavana* etc are more scholarly names. Hymn recited by the *muni* generally indicates

PILGRIMAGE ROUTES TO SHARDA TEMPLE IN KISHENGANGA VALLEY



{Not To Scale}

composition era of *Sharda Mahatmaya* between 9th and 13th Century AD, when most of religious accounts, philosophies, scriptures started taking shape in the valley and many scholars from outside, with fresh strong Shaivite inclination of the South, visited the valley. A further confirmation of the era is visualisation of Sharda in the form of *Mahadevi* {Form of *Shakti*}; this manifestation is associated with 12th and 13th Century AD, when Kashmir had come under the influence of *Shakatmata*. Kalhan's reference to sacred river Madhumati {Near Bandipore} and not Madhumati of Sharda Shrine also gives indication of the vintage of Sharda Mahatmaya to the later era. Scriptures and chronicles indicate *Shakatmata* influence started during King Harsha's rule {1089-1101 AD} {Not to be mistaken with King Harshavardhan}. Is it that the author, a Shaivite to the core, wanted to project Sharda in the role of *Mahadevi* {*Shakti*} as per his own beliefs? Or was it another step to give impetus to 'Dualistic' Shaivism in the valley or bring it at par with similar belief of the Goddess Sharda in South? The needle of authorship of *Sharda Mahatmaya* points towards Madhvacharya {Madhavacharya {1199-1276 AD}; Vidyaranya after becoming an ascetic. Disciple of Sri Vidyateertha (1247 - 1297 A.D), 51st Acharya of Kamakothi Peeth. If he is the author then it could have well been composed in the later half of 12th Century; possibly when he had become ascetic and wanted account to remain anonymous. There are, however, certain other points which need to be noted; account of the places traversed by Muni Shandalya are generalised and not specific, Shandalya is post Gautama and could not have met him at *Tejavana*; is *Sharda Mahatmaya* just referring to his residence; *Tejavana* after Gautama. These sanskritised names, with a tinge of Southern bias, are somewhat new to Kashmiri vocabulary. However, Kalhan's account in *Rajtarangini* just says; '**where a huge temple complex came up**' but does not give detailed account of the shrine/ temple like Sirhasila { This account is pre Madhavacharya by about fifty years plus}. This becomes all the more interesting that had *Sharda Mahatmaya* been available during Kalhan's time, he may possibly have dwelled on it in more detail, including the temple. Or is there any other reason for him to refrain from such mention?. It is also apparent that description of various landmarks is that of the ones closer to the valley like Madhumati {Bandapur Nala}, Maha Sindhu {Lower Sindh} and its equivalent names have been created for this *Mahatmaya*. Kalhan also refers to Sindhu Ganga and Madhumati but these are different from Kishanganga and Madhumati of Sharda.

Grandeur of The Temple. The temple is approached from West by an imposing stone staircase from the direction of Sirhasila Castle/Fort, now nearly decayed, which leads up in 63 steps to the main entrance of the quadrangular court enclosing the temple. The stairs are about 9/10 feet wide and rise rather steeply in six flights between two flanking walls of massive row of parapet coping {Balustrade}, now in ruins. The view from the staircase is magnificent; you can see the valleys of Madhumati, Kishanganga gorge and also their *Sangam*. The quadrangular court, enclosing the temple, is an accurately oriented oblong. 142 feet long and 94 feet 6 inches wide, having proportion of 3:2 and is enclosed by a massive wall, six feet thick and eleven feet high from the level of the court to the projecting rim at the foot of the coping. The later rises in pyramidal form to a height of eight feet above the top of the wall, giving it a look like a fortress wall. >From outside, the walls appear massive and imposing, as they are raised on basement walls to equalise different elevations of the ground. The entrance to the central court is through a gate with a double porch of *Kashmiri* design {When referred as *Kashmiri* design, it connotes design as found in other temple structures of mediaeval period}. This gate occupies middle of the west face, in line with the porch, leading to the sanctum sanctorum. The other three walls have blank archway, standing to height of about 20 feet from the base to the apex. In the centre of the Northern wall is a small recess 3 feet 3 inches square, containing two ancient *lingas*, which opens by a terrafoil arched door towards the interior of the court {In earlier accounts there is no mention of existence of these *lingas*}.

Sanctum Sanctorum. In the centre of the quadrangle is the temple raised on a basement of 24 feet square and 5 feet 3 inches high and is perfectly plane. The entrance to inner temple is from the west side and is approached by a flight of a few stairs, five and a half feet wide with flanking side walls. The cell of the main temple is 22 feet square. On each side of the porch way are two square pillars about 16 feet high and two feet six inches apart. The capital of both the pillars seem to have been hewn from a single stone {This aspect is very important, as similar evidence can be found in temples constructed between 9th and 13th Centuries AD}. The interior of the inner temple is a square of 12 feet and 3 inches and it has no decoration of any kind; perfectly plane and scarcely any traces of the usual pyramidal stone roof. The only conspicuous object inside is a large slab, which measures about 6 by 7 feet with a thickness of about half a foot. This slab is believed to cover a *kund* or spring, from which Goddess Sharda appeared to the Sage Shandalya. This *kund* is the object of special veneration of the pilgrims. In our Kashmiri religious philosophy *Kund's* hold special reverence; like Kheer Bhawani, Devi Bal, Bhairav Temple Maisuma, Nandkeshwar Temple Seer {Sopore} and many more. As a young boy I slipped in Shah-e-Hamdan Mosque and saw, from a distance, enclosure covering the *kund* in the centre of the mosque. I believe this *kund* was venerated before Shah-e-Hamdan mosque came up. As the conditions deteriorated during medieval era and thereafter around Sharda, a *kund* in the village of *Tsatsa*, 6-7 kilometres from the North edge of Dal Lake West of Burzhom Village} was named *Shardakund* and venerated at par with *Sharda kund*. Some chronicles mention presence of an idol of Sharda made of wood inside the temple. From Jonaraja's account of Zain-ul-Abidin's visit, it appears that the idol was there; "appearance of sweat on the face of the image of the goddess, shaking of the arm, and sensation of heat on touching the feet". Bilhana, Al- Biruni {Both 11th Century AD}, Kalhan { 12th Century AD} do not mention about this idol or two *lingas* but accounts of Jonaraja {15th Century AD} and Abul Fazl {16th Century} do mention this. This indicates that the idol and *lingas* had been installed somewhere after 12th Century {Kalhan} but before 15th Century AD {Jonaraja}; possibly before Muslim rule in 14th Century firmed in. Such installation of idols or *lingas* takes place at the time of *Kumbhabhishekam* {Consecration} of a newly constructed or extensively renovated temple. The other factor is that representation of Gods and Goddess's in those days used to be of stone, not in man made form, which stood vagaries of weather and time; which is not so for wooden idols. The stone slab was venerated as the form of the Goddess and no need was felt for an idol. In any case, during the medieval age, no firm shape was given to Gods and Goddess's and generally they were formless and if an idol was installed it would have been a temporary measure. It may be that custom of a wooden

idol being installed, from year to year, by craftsmen, may have been adopted; Goddess Sharda being the deity for learning and fine crafts. Similar installation of *Vishwa Karma*, *Durga* or *Ganesh* idols on *Vishwa Karma*, *Puja* or *Ganesh Chaturthi* festivals respectively, has been followed throughout India. It, however, may not be an old custom but possibly imported in later centuries. A brief and latest account of the Temple comes from Justice S N Katju, who visited Sharda Temple in the summer of 1935. He narrates; ‘The shrine is located on a hilltop like the shrine of *Jwalaji*. The steps leading to the top of the hill appeared to be twisted as if an earthquake had battered them. The question as to when did the University township cease to exist requires investigation’. The question remains, if when and where!

Sri Chakra Inscription at Sharda Temple Sanctum Sanctorum. We are told of *Sri Chakra* inscriptions on the stone slab covering the *kund* at Sharda and Shankaracharya {Called hereafter Adi-Shankara} having taken it from Sharda to other places in India for installation. In *Sri Chakra* form the Goddess, as *Shakti* {Power}, is depicted in the form of a diagram representing a *Chakra* {Circular wheel of life; as understood philosophically}. It originates from one central basic point that represents the core of the whole cosmos; 3 circles around it and 4 gates to enter, with 43 triangles shaping the corners of the *Sri Chakra* depicting the form of *Mahadevi*. *Sharika*, the ‘Cosmic Mother - *Sri Chakra*’ is worshipped at *Hari Parbat* in the cosmic form of Divine Mother. It is engraved on a green, circular shaped stone of Sapphire. This diagram is also known as *Matra Chakra*, established here by King Pravar Sena at the end of the 6th century AD. *Bhawani Sahasranama* lucidly explains this cosmic form of divine mother. Descriptions in *Sharda Mahatmaya*; by Al-Biruni, Kalhan, Jonaraja describing Zain-ul-Abidin’s visit, accounts of Abul Fazl’s and MA Stein {1892} do not mention inscription of *Sri Chakra* on the slab covering *kund*. Admittedly Vermilion and *Ghee* used to be pasted on this venerated slab, but these could not have fully covered engravings, if they existed. Chronicles only mention presence of an idol of Sharda {of wood?}; confirmed by Jonaraja’s account {Zain-ul-Abidin’s visit in 1422 AD}. He talks of ; “*appearance of sweat on the face of the image of the goddess, shaking of the arm, and sensation of heat on touching the feet*”. Similarly Abul Fazl {16th Century} writes; “*On every eighth tithi [Ashtami] of the bright moon, it begins to shake and produces the most extraordinary effect*”. There is similarity in both accounts as far as extraordinary effects were observed, a phenomenon, which takes place when a worshipper, with full faith, goes to a shrine.

Sri Chakra form of Mother Goddess, in her form of *Shakti*, is associated with *Chakrashwari* and newly constructed Sharda Temple at Gushi. There is no mention of her being seated on the core of a *Chakra*. As per our religious scriptures this form is cosmic *yoga* of the Goddess, tantric in nature, which is adopted while fighting evil. In another *dhyan* of *Sharika*, she is shown as having eighteen arms; do they also symbolise the aspects of Kali with 10 arms and Lakshmi and Saraswati having 4 arms each, of unity in Her? The principal *Kuladevis* of the Kashmiri Brahmins are *Ragnya*, *Sharika*, *Jwala*, and *Tripursundari* {All forms of *Mahadevi*}, if Sharda was also to be *Mahadevi*, definitely she would have also been a *Kuldevi*. The Shrines of both *Sharika* and *Jwala* do not contain any *murtis* but are cosmic *Shilas* {Rocks}, which are not man made. That is the difference with Sharda or Vaghdevi or Saraswati. The name of Saraswati {Vagheswari, Vaghdevi} consort of Brahma is not much talked about in other manifestations of the *trinty*. In Shaivism the manifestations of Shiva and Shiva’s consort {Parvati or Uma also called Kali, Durga, Mahadevi} are the prime objects of worship. There is no reason for Sharda to *dharan* this form; for in her image she represents Goddess of Learning and Fine Arts; also amplified by Sharda Vandana, elaborated earlier in this article. A careful study and understanding of *Tripursundari*, *Raghnya*, *Sharika* and *Jwala Satotram*’s {*Sholaks* in praise of these Goddesses} adequately define their role’s as *Shakti*, unlike in the case of Sharda. Every aspect of *Shakti* {*Mahadevi*} form of Goddess has Her corresponding *Bhairava* and both are worshipped together. *Ragnya’s Bhairava* is *Bhuteshwar*, *Sharika’s Bhairava* is *Vemdeva*, *Jwala’s Bhairava* is *Mahadeva* and *Tripurasundari’s Bhairava* is *Karneshwar*. Similarly *Shaiva’s* cannot ignore the consort of Shiva, the *Devi* and *Shaiva* and *Shakta Upasana* cannot be separated. This is not so in the case of Sharda; only one idol has been noted inside the Sanctum Sanctorum. Two *lingas* in the recess in the Northern wall do not indicate presence of *Bhairava*, as rightful place for Her *Bhairava* would have been alongside; no *Bhairava* is known for Sharda. The ritual of marking a *Sri Chakra*, by priests, with lime or white powder or Vermilion is not new and this is what would have been happening in recent centuries and may have been introduced by Kashmiri Pandits, who were back to the valley, carrying certain rituals from plains of India; possibly after 15th Century {Badshah’s visit} or during Moghul rule {16th and 17th Century}. Abul Fazl’s account, by reading between the lines, when he describes ‘stone temple called Sharda, dedicated to *Durga*’ is not indicator of any such markings; possibly due to misidentification.

Narda Linkage To Temple Construction. There are few facts, which remain to be unraveled as far as Sharda is concerned. First; reasons for another name of Narda, which is used apart from Sharda. Hymn to Sharda refers as ‘*Sharda Varda Devi*’ and *Sharda Vandana* does not include Narda address but this is mentioned when Muni Shandalya recites hymn in praise of her triple form; ‘*Sharda, Narda or Saraswati and Vaghdevi*’ {*Sharda Mahatmaya*}. Second, all places of worship of Kashmiri’s are within the valley; enclosed within mountain ranges of Pir Panchal, Shamsabari and lower ranges of Great Himalayan Range. At best we have Gangabal, Amarnath {Amarnath} and Bhedagiri on the inward periphery of these ranges, but none across. This must be viewed in the context of majority, nearly 98 percent, of then Kashmiri’s living within the valley. Thirdly, construction era and person {King, Feudal Chief, Religious Head, Group etc} who may have been instrumental in construction of the temple remains unknown. It is all the more intriguing when Sharda lends her name to this *Desh*, proudly talked of from centuries. Kalhan talks of siege of Sirhasila {Sirhala} Castle {*Rajtarangini*}, which took place in his own time {12th Century} but is silent on details of Sharda. His statement is loaded with some indications by using words ‘where a huge temple complex came up’, not exists; using this expression with siege without giving reasons or any more details of the shrine. This siege took place in 12th Century, when Jaisimha (1128-55 AD) was the King; who repaired, restored many temples and shrines and laid numerous other pious foundations including at Narannag {Wangat}. If it was constructed during his time, why his name is not mentioned, though he does figures closely in other facet of Sharda; the language/ *lipi* {More of it later}? Did it remain un-linked to him, as his other temples? Jaisimha’s early days were

critical, because of the preceding civil wars and political unrest. Sirhasila Castle siege indicates the area around Sharda Shrine to be part of then Kingdom, under the fiefdom of a local revolting feudal chief, who had to be reigned-in. From 958 AD {First Lohara Dynasty} till 1150 AD and even beyond, Hindu Shahi's reigned in Kabul, while Hindu Kings including Didda ruled in Kashmir. Both these Kingdoms were contiguous with good relations; exchange of expertise, culture, religion, matrimonial relations and same language {*Upbrahmbasha*} and also shared Sharda *lipi* {In fact first artifacts in under-development Sharda *lipi* were found in the areas of Hindu Shahi's of Kabul}. Let us go back to history of one group of Saraswat Aryans having strayed North of the valley, who had identical beliefs, rituals as that of the group who came directly to valley {The lost tribe of Jews is not being referred here}. A variant of *Upbrambasha*, slightly influenced by the Northwestern *Upbrambasha*, was common in this area as well and the country{s} was called Darda or Drava. The spill over of changes in religion and beliefs from the valley covered this area as well. *Dards* have a long history; Ptolemy in his book '*Almagast*' has used the word *Daradrai* for *Dards* of the Western Himalayas. Before embracing Islam, they were the followers of Buddhism and Hinduism. At present their major concentration lies in Dardistan (Dardesa); the area to the North of Kashmir Valley, especially Neelam Valley; Shardi {Chilas, Naili, Neelam}, Upper Kishanganga {Kel, Seri} and Gurez and Tilel Valley. The valley of Kishanganga, part of a feudatory state, was also known as *Drava* derived from *Duranda* {Corrupted name of a local feudal lord} as per Kalhana and mentions that title of 'Shahi' was that of Dard and Kabul rulers. The tract of land known as Keran and Karnaha {Karnah} bordering Kishanganga Valley, though under local rule, was known to have paid tribute to Kashmir Kings. Even Lohara Dynasty who are believed to be from the areas of Poonch, could have had influence in this area, as Poonch was easily connected to areas West of Pir Panchal and Shamsabari Range. All these factors may indicate Narda as another name for Sharda in that part of the country {in Darda}. *Sharda Narda* form of combined address being used in *Sharda Mahatmaya* reinforces this point; as the shrine lay beyond geographical and controlled territory limits of Kashmir valley and Narda being local form of address of the Goddess. Close similarity of phonetics of Sharda-Narda, in the respective variants of *Upbrahmbasha*, could be another reason of association. It is also certain that the people and material {Stones etc} for the construction came from close by area; rock examination points clearly to quarries of Ganesh Ghati along the mountain spur called Sharda Peak. In our history only works of Kings and Scholars have been chronicled and many works/constructions undertaken by local warlords/feudal lords or chieftain's remain obscure; this has also been so with our great Chronicler Kalhan. It may be that King Jaisimha had to undertake reining in of this feudal lord of the area as its control was necessary since visitors from outside to the shrine first reached his court and the shrine was out of his jurisdiction. The architecture of *Kapteshwar* temple, located above the village of *Kother* {3 Kilometres from Achabal} resembles that of Sharda temple; simple architecture and absence of any decoration; giving impression of King Mutskund {1040-1060 AD- also called Mucukund} being the builder of Sharda temple as well. He being an outsider could not have done so and that too so far away from *Kapteshwar* Temple. *Rajatarangini* identifies Mutskund, a *Gauda* warrior from Bengal, during reign of King Ananta (1028-1063 AD) who built *Kapteshwar* Temple. This king cursed with a pair of buffalo's ears, anxious to rid himself of this deformity, learnt about powers of *Kapteshwar* Spring. The King took a dip in the spring and got rid of his cursed ears. In gratitude, Mutskund built the temple. *Kapteshwar* is also mentioned in *Nilmat Purana*, when sage Bhadravasa narrates its *Mahatmaya* {Grace} to King Gonanda I {Pre Mahabharata}; associating it with form of Shiva as a wooden log. Someway Mutskund has found way in Kashmiri way of taunt; *Mushtand* word commonly used for hefty/ugly specimen, in disdain. It may be that the design of this temple could have been taken back home by one of the pilgrims. In all probability, nearing certainty, the temple of Sharda in the form described, was constructed in 12th Century {Somewhere after mid Century} during the reign of Jaisimha; by a warlord of the Kishanganga Valley, a strong devotee of Sharda, whose ancestors too were Saraswat Brahmins and in fact de-facto Kashmiri Pandit. Though Sharda temple like Shankaracharya Temple {Gopadiri}, *Chakreshwari*, *Jwala* temples is on a hill, its stairs, flanking walls, massive row of parapet coping indicates enormous effort to cater for vagaries of adverse weather and snow conditions and not really of great architecture design. This will also answer the question as to the simple but massive architecture of the temple, unlike temples, which had royal patronage; like Sun Temple at Martand, Shankar Varman's temples at Pattan and many others.

Authorship of *Sharda Mahatmaya* remains unknown, but we find some indication of Madhavacharya, a staunch devotee of Adi-Shankara, being the author. Madhavacharya is attributed with many scholarly works, longer stay in the valley and his life period {1199-1276} coinciding with the period of probable temple construction {not manifestation of Goddess}. He is known to have moved around the valley, North of the valley as well and such works of poetic imagination, evident from various landmarks used, can safely be attributed to him. There is, however, no record of his visiting Sharda Shrine. It also looks certain that Madhavacharya wrote *Sharda Mahatmaya* after becoming an ascetic, taking the name of Vidhyaranya, kept the work anonymous, as per unwritten customs of ascetics. The hymn used in the *Mahatmaya* {Sharda, Narda or Saraswati, Vaghdevi} is in accordance with the hymn in praise of Sharda in the South except that the local variant name Narda has been added; another strong pointing needle to his authorship; who found it necessary to include local form of address as well.

II- Historical Evaluation, Shakti Roop, Lore And Pilgrimage Routes

Historical Evaluation of Sharda Temple. It is from various accounts, chronicles, events, and historical data that dating of the temple, its construction, changes and other major inferences can be made. There are four different periods, pertaining to religion variant eras, which are important for purpose of this evaluation. First, when Aryan Saraswats settled in Kashmir and *Vaishnavite* Brahmanism took shape; Second, advent of Buddhism; Third, Shaivism taking firm routes and finally changes that took place during the subsequent centuries. Approximately 3000 BC a Kashmiri clan is named in Mahabharata and *Nilamat Purana*, a *Vaishnavite* work, declares Kashmir as the seat of *Cakradhara* (Vishnu) dating around

this time{ *Nilamat Purana* 189sq}. Saptarishi Era or the year 3076-75 BC {5078 years {2002 AD} is our current *Samvat* seems to be the time when the Saraswat Aryans entered and settled in the Valley. This era nearly coincides with Mahabharata war and Kalhan too begins his accounts in *Rajatarangini* around this era and writes about installation of Queen Yasomati on the throne of Kashmir, as the guardian of her son King Gonanda II, by Lord Krishna. There is an interesting twist to the group of Aryans, who entered Kashmir; one group is reported to have entered the valley directly and another bifurcated while moving in the adjacent plains and moved Northeastwards and settled beyond the geographical limits of the valley. Another theory is that one group; albeit a smaller one, settled in areas North of the Shamsabari Range, as there was another valley, albeit smaller one {Now called Neelam Valley in Dardistan}. This group is of interest to us, when we tried to answer the question as to reasons of the shrine coming up outside the geographical limits of the valley {Read Part I}.

Vaishnavite Hinduism. *Vaishnavite* Brahmanism, mixed with rituals of Nagas and not so strong Shaivite faith, formed the religion of Kashmiri Pandits in the Valley till appearance of Emperor Ashoka along with 5000 Bikshus {300 BC} to propagate Buddhism. In later centuries *Vaishnavite* faith, Buddhist and Shaivite thoughts co-existed with Brahmin's worshipping Triad; Shiva, Vishnu and Brahma and their Consorts; Parvati or Uma also called Kali, Durga, Mahadevi (Consort of Shiva); Sri or Lakshmi (Consort of Vishnu) and Vaghswari or Saraswati (Consort of Brahma). Each manifestation of these Goddesses has a benedictory role; not mixed with roles of other Goddess Consorts.

Buddhism. As per Kalhan's *Rajatarangni*, Kashmir had many *Bauddh Vihars* {Buddhist Places of Worship or Monasteries} even before Ashoka {Ashoka extended control over Kashmir in 273-232 BC and encouraged Buddhism}. Accounts of Chinese travelers/scholars to this region claim Buddhism had spread in Kashmir just fifty years after Gautam Buddha {May 623 – 547 BC} i.e. around 500 BC. Famous Chinese traveler Huan Tsang {7th Century; 631 A D} records that Kanishka {King Kanishka (25-60 A.D), Kushan dynasty; for the first time Kashmir was linked with a vast empire during his reign} organised fourth and last Buddhist council attended by about five hundred Buddhist scholars at *Kundal Vanvihara* {Jallandhar; some say at *Harwan* in Kashmir. However, archeological finds positively indicate Jallandhar} and donated entire Kashmir to *Sangha* {Collective Buddhist Organisation}, build many *Vihars* and raised *Stupas* {Buddhist Monuments}. By 6th Century A D Buddhism was almost on the wane in Kashmir, however, during 7th / 8th Century AD Buddhism had official protection during Lalitaditya Muktapida {697 AD to 733 AD} reign. During reign of Lohara dynasty in Kashmir {1003 – 1273 AD} there was a brief attempt to revive Buddhism but by the time of King Harsha {1089-1101 AD} it was breathing its last.

Shaivism. Shri Vasugupta {Around last part of 8th Century}, founder of *Shaiva* philosophy and of *Shivmat* in Kashmir} found seventy-seven terse *sutras* etched on stone near Mahadev Peak, as revealed to him in a dream, which he named the *Shiv Sutras*. On this scriptural foundation arose the school known as Kashmir Shaivism, Northern Shaivism *Trikashasana* {Trika System}. Kashmir Shaivism, reached its peak in 10th to 11th Century AD and continued to be so till advent of Muslim rule; when it could just maintain its philosophy, could not proliferate and conversions took away big chunk of its followers in the valley. It may be of interest to our readers that ancestors of many of the scholars who gained prominence in Kashmir between 8th to 12th Century's came from plains with then ruling kings; like Vasugupta, Abhinav Gupta.

Buddhist Monuments. There are well-chronicled descriptions of Buddhists monuments established in the valley from 300 BC onwards. Neither Sharda Shrine nor any area closer to Sharda/Shardi figures in these. Some of these Buddhist monuments, which are generally talked about are; Kanishka's city Kanishkapur known as Kanispur {Baramulla}; 3rd Century Hushkapura {Harwan – Srinagar}; Pandrethan near Srinagar. *Vihars*; Jalora Vihara {Zainageer Sopore}; Stupa's in Budgam; *Parihaspora*, *Anderkut*, *Ahen* {Sumbal} and *Raithan*.

Historical Evaluation. Analysis of above periods leads to certain inferences with regard to Goddess Sharda and spot of her abode. First, around Sapatrishi Samvat 500 {2500 BC} crystallisation in the faith would have taken place for Goddess Sharda to manifest in Kashmir; 500 years {3000 to 2500 BC} were adequate for firming in of faith and manifestations of other forms. This period also generally tally's with similar phenomenon in India; notably South. Some estimates are of 3000 BC, coinciding with entry of early settlers into the valley, is too early for manifestation of other forms {*Roops*} of Goddess's. Next two thousand years must have seen settlement, development, deep rooting and spread of religious faith with evolutionary refinements during next few centuries; say up to 250 BC. At this time Buddhism started taking roots and attention would have been suddenly diverted to this new religion. Unlike Islam, Buddhists did not forcibly convert existing places of *Brahmanical* worship into *Vihar's* or *Mutt's*, but their interest in existing shrines was insignificant. The shrine where Sharda manifested in Kashmir {assuming that it was the first spot} would have remained in that form, with certain neglect, up to around 700 AD; end of Buddhist period. Unlike Hindu rulers who maintained Buddhist *Vihar's*, there is no account of any of Buddhist Kings building temple's for Hindu's, also Sharda or close by locations do not figure in Buddhists scriptures and accounts. During this period Sharda shrine must have remained isolated, except that *Bauddh's* may have continued to pass through this area being on the gateway to Dardistan, Central Asia, Afghanistan, Ladakh and China {via Karakoram Pass} and was not under presence or influence of Buddhists. It is no longer possible to trace with certainty, dating of structures, temples based on ancient Hindu architecture in the valley which owed their existence to Lalitaditya Muktapida {697 AD to 733 AD}. In any case if it had been constructed during his time it would have found specific mention in *Sharda Mahatamaya* or in chronicles of Kalhan, Al-Biruni, Bilhan, Jonaraja and Abul Fazl. The important phase of Kashmir *Brahminism* came during the period 880 AD and 1320 AD, when prominent Hindu Kings {Avantivarman 855-883 AD, founder of the Utpala dynasty; Shankara Varman 883-902 A D; Kalsa 1063-1089 AD; Harsha 1089-1101 AD; Jaisimha -1128-55AD} and many more ruled the valley. It is during this period that *Brahminism* got impetus; construction of temples on new architectural designs and styles, modifications, improvements and renovations to existing ones took place; historians and chroniclers like Kalhan, Al-Biruni, Bilhan and Jonaraja recorded events for posterity and foundation of religious philosophy laid including composition of scores of scriptures by various

scholars {Vasugupta, Kayyatacharya, Somananda contemporary of Vasugupta (850-900 AD), Mukta Natha Swamin, Shiva Swamin, Ananda Vardhana and Kallata; great Shaiva philosophers. Bhatta Kallata, Bhatta Pradyumna and Abhinava Gupta, staunch worshippers of *Sakhti*; Pradyumana Bhatta, Utpalacharya, Rama Kantha, Prajnarjuna Lachaman Gupta and Mahadeva Bhatta and many others who made colossal contributions to Shaivite thought during 9th and 10th Century's}. This is also the period when Sharda, as language, had started taking definite regional shape and many religious scriptures, poems, *bhajans*, hymns were composed in praise of God and Goddess's. Two identical pillars, possibly hewn from one stone, gate of Kashmiri design definitely points to an era, when other temples were constructed with similar or close resemblance to the pillars. Generally this period gets identified with 12th Century {After Kalhan}, or 13th Century {Before Jonaraja}; possibly during 12th {King Jaisimha's (1128-55) during his rule of 27 years repaired, restored many temples and shrines and laid numerous other foundations. Unfortunately they have not got prominence in various chronicles, even Kalhan concentrates on past than on the ones of Jaisimha's period. Surprisingly he {Kalhan} talks of Sirhasila Castle siege but not in detail of Sharda Temple. Subsequent period from Rinchen /Muslim rule {1318/1338 to 1810 AD} would not have seen much changes or improvements of the shrine, except that during Zain-ul-Abidin {1420-1474 AD} and later Moghul rule {1586- 1753 AD}. These two date blocks are important, in that many Pandits who had left the valley returned during these periods and certain amount of revival did take place. These Pandits, influenced by rituals and Vishnu theology, during their settlement outside Kashmir, brought vigour, imagination and refinement to the rituals and religion in their ancestral home. Their efforts were significant during the reign of Badshah and Akbar, but survival, preservation of culture and religion took priority during hostile environment in later period. During Afghan rule {1753-1819} things were no better, in spite of *Madhurmilans* {Prime Minister's} being Pandits; like Kailash Dhar, who had survival, hostility, intrigue and nepotism to cope with.

Thus Goddess Sharda must have manifested in the valley around Sapatrishi Samvat 500 {2500 BC} and it is around this time that her shrine was established, where various sages including Gautama, Shandalya were privileged to have her *darshan*. Somewhere in 12th Century the temple was constructed over the shrine, when idol of the Goddess and two *lingas* must have also been installed. The two *lingas*, in all probability, are in the form of *pindi's* {Natural small rock formations depicting some *aakar* {Shape}, depicting Goddess with her consort}. *Lingas* would have been installed at the time of *Kumbhabishekam* {Consecration}, as recess in the Northern wall of the temple would have been made, most probably, during temple construction.

Ram And Krishna Lore. There are scores of accounts and lore's associated with Lord Ram and Lord Krishna, with specific reference to Sharda Temple. However, we must carefully assess visits of various *Avtars* to this *tirathsthan* with authentic details and try not to attribute existence of this *tirath* to anyone other than original preceptor. Any deviation is likely to contradict past history of Kashmiri civilisation and Pandits. It also overshadows the truth and over a period of time originality of a fact is lost. It is a common feature to name places after God's, Goddess's and *Avatars* and then these places invariably get closely associated with them with lore's. There is no scriptural, historical or archeological indication of Lord Rama having been to our valley. Saraswat Aryans settled in Kashmir just post *Mahabarta*. Lord Ram's {Ramayana is pre Mahabharata by about a millenium} birthplace and life was around Ajodhya {Ayodhya} in UP and areas in MP. For this reason and peculiar transition of our religious theology in earlier centuries, Lord Ram does not figure much in our worship, temples, *stotras* and *bhajans*. This is evident from the fact that there is hardly any temple of that period exclusively dedicated to Lord Ram in the valley. Some of the ones constructed in his or his other name *Raghnath*, are during the last few centuries. Irrespective of this, many places, men or women get associated with name of Ram or Sita like Ram Kund, Sita Kund or Ram Van {Ramban}, Ram Ganga; even though not remotely connected with Lord Ram. Some places at Lidderwan {Ludderwan, See map }, have similarly got names like Ram Takht, Ram and Sita Kund and Sita *Choka* {Chula}. Lidderwan falls close to the route of pilgrimage to Sharda from the valley. Many pilgrims taking this route were learned Brahmin's from plains, who had influence of Lord Ram and *Ramayana* and these names would have been given by these pilgrims. Similarly there is place called *Raja Ram Di Lari*, a rugged mountain top and close by few mountain outcrops called *Raja Ramun Lariyan*, all East of Kralpura, just on route to Sharda. *Raja Ram Di Lari* is not in Kashmiri or Sharda but is Takari {Dogri} origin. If one had interacted with local old people, as I did few decades back, it would have been clear that the rugged mountaintop was named after a local chieftain of this name. One is not sure if the same Chieftain is associated with Sharda temple construction or was he the chieftain who had to be reined-in at Sirhasila.

Lord Krishna's association with Sharda temple is also talked about; *Krishna Nag* {Mari Nag near Drang}, his stay in the area of *Raja Ramun Lariyan*; Kishanganga being renamed after him or wandering *Pandava's* having cut a big stone for bridging Kazinag Nallah called *Pandav Pull*; these stones are reported to be lying in a close by forest. Or *Pandava's* living in Tad, Prad villages and finally Krishna having visited *Pandava's* at Village Helmat {All in Karnah of Tangdhar Tehsil}. Geographically areas other than *Krishna Nag* and *Raja Ramun Lariyan* lie on the route from Muzzafarabad and same reasoning of attribution as in the case of Lord Ram holds good. Krishna's and lives of *Pandava's* revolves around *Brijbhumi* {Vrindavan, Mathura, Western UP and present day Haryana}. Even for them, bestowed with super powers that be, they had neither the time nor cause to visit these parts of the valley. I recall old temples near Pattan called as *Pandav Lari* {Buildings of Pandav's} but constructed by Shankara Varman {Uptala Dynasty; during 883-902 AD} and had nothing to do with *Pandavas*. The only specific mention of Krishna in our chronicles is when Kalhana describes installation of Queen Yasomati on the throne of Kashmir {Not dated} as the guardian of her son King Gonanda II by Lord Krishna. This should not be construed with physical visit of Lord Krishna to Sharda or areas close by. Absence of any significant temple of Krishna during medieval age is also a pointer.

Sindhu Ganga, Kishanganga,, Madhumati and Saraswati. Sharda *tirtha* sounds incomplete without the mention of three rivers deeply connected with it. They are Kishanganga, Madhumati and Saraswati. Present day Kishanganga is referred as *Maha Sindhu* in *Mahatmaya*. Actual *Sindhu* or Indus emanates from Tibet, crosses Ladakh Range, flows

through Sakardu and Chilas {South of Gilgit} and any mention of Indus or Sindhu from the valley had to be with reference to any important landmarks close by in the valley and these were Gangabal {Harmukh} and Wullar Lake. *Nilamat Purana*, however, mentions Sindhu Ganga {Verse vv 297sq} thus ; ‘*Ganga Sindhu tu vijneya Vitasta Yamuna tatha*’. *Harmukhganga* and *Nandishetra Mahatmaya*’s, scriptures pertaining to Gangabal and *Nandishetra* { *Nandishetra* is generally area snow clad mountains of Dras, Amarkanth, Baltal; basically associated as abode of Shiva in these mountains} respectively. Kalhan pays tribute *Nandishetra* in Verse 36 Book I *Rajtarangini* as thus; ‘ There even to this day drops of sandal ointment offered by the Gods are to be seen at *Nandishetra* , the residence of Shiva’. In *Harmukhganga Mahatmaya* , the stream flowing towards Narannag {Called Nund Kol}is referred as Sindhu Ganga, which joins Lower Sindh near Kangan. In *Nandishetra Mahatmaya* lower Sindh, emanating from Baltal area, is referred as Sindhu Ganga. **Since Sindhu was referred North of these landmarks, the first such river in the region in that direction got referred to as Sindhu. The prefix of Maha has come to it because of the gorges** and steep banks, which gives look of a big and swift {*Maha*} river. The snow-capped mountain peaks around the Valley and the river always-evoked image of Shiva with Ganga coming out of His locks. Many of the rivers / rivulets all over India are named with prefix or suffix of Ganga like Dudh Ganga etc. Early chroniclers noticed traces of gold like particles being found in the river, which applies to Kishanganga too; coming through mountain region known as auriferous {Such rivers have shining particles like Gold of sand or clay. This is more so in case of upper reaches of Indus {Sindh}, Lower Sindh and other similar rivulets and streams in the region}. Surprisingly this is also the case in the case of upper reaches of actual Ganga and another reason for Ganga suffix. This period of naming can be dated back to around 800s, when Acharya Vasugupta {Founder of *Shivmat* in the valley} was living on *Mahadeva* {*Mahadev Peak*} near Srinagar. Tradition states that one night Lord Shiva appeared in a dream and told him of the whereabouts of a great scripture carved on a rock. Upon awakening, Vasugupta rushed to the spot and found seventy-seven terse *sutras* etched in stone, which he named the *Shiva Sutras*. Secondly, Kishanganga starts from area between Dras and Gurez, just immediate North of Gangabal. Northern tributaries of Harmukh watershed {Gangabal} form Kishanganga. Archeological finds on the Southern side of Gangabal {Wangat, Narannag {*Sodaratirath*}} date back to first millennium and hence confirms this naming around 800 AD. Kalhan mentions the name of Kishanganga River at many places and it can be assumed that the naming of this river is pre 11th Century. Sharda Temple, when seen from Shamsabari Range, has Sharda and Narda Peaks immediately behind while temple is on the lower slopes of these twin-peaks. Two prominent and significant mountain streams flow in this area, on either flank. The one to the West of the temple ridge, generally emanates from Sharda Peak. This stream fits in with the description given as Madhumati in *Sharda Mahatmaya*. Al-Biruni, Jonaraja’s accounts do not mention Madhumati by this name; it is Abul Fazl, the author of *Ain-e-Akbari*, who refers to Madhumati by name apart from *Sharda Mahatmaya*. Naming of the stream as Madhumati would have thus been somewhere between later part of 15th and 16th Century; adequate for Al- Biruni and Jonaraja not to mention it, but finding mention in Abul Fazl’s account. The reason for other chroniclers not referring or associating this Madhumati stream with Sharda pilgrimage is due to the reason that actual Madhumati River, a sacred river in the valley {Bandpore Nala: Bod Kol} was nowhere close to Sharda. It is also apparent that this name has been created to have a similar sacred stream next to Sharda pilgrim centre. The other rivulet, East of the temple, emanates from Narda Peak and finally all three join at a place referred as *Sharda Sangam*. In many chronicles this rivulet is referred as Kalnotri; along with Saraswati. There is no mention of *Kalnotri* in *Sharda Mahatmaya*; name alien to the valley but not in Central Himalayan area {Uttanchal}; like Gangotri, Yamnotri. This name is linked with someone who must have been adherent of Shaivism, conversant with Central Himalayan region *tiraths* {Badrinath, Kedarnath } and then Sharda. All indicators thus generally refer to era between that of Adi- Shankara’s followers {11th Century} and *Pravachandara* compositions {13th Century} which finds mention of these names. Around 13th Century seems to be more appropriate as Al-Biruni does not mention of any of these rivers. Kalnotri name also did not remain for long; Zain-ul-Abidin and Abul Fazal visit accounts also does not mention Saraswati River, though Madhumati is talked about. In both cases of visits, eminent Kashmiri Saraswat Brahmin Scholars, would have accompanied them. There may have been some of those, whose or whose ancestor’s settlements in plains may have had been in areas closer to legendary mythical Saraswati River, bringing Saraswati name to the River closer to their new place; somewhere between 15th and 16th Century {*Sharda Mahatmaya* also does not mention this name}. Appropriately the name fitted well with Sharda; Saraswati being other form of the Goddess.

Single account of association of Lord Krishna with the valley is well chronicled, but no significant Radha Krishna temple existed anywhere in Kashmir in early days, even though *Nilamat Purana* describes the *Janam Ashtami* festival in Verses 716 to 722. Similar to renaming of Saraswati, prefix of Kishna can be traced to around Vasugupta’s time, by then religious scholars would have found the flow actual route of Sindhu {Indus} and that these rivers were not connected with actual Sindhu {Indus}. Ganga remained common suffix, Sindhu Ganga the sacred river mentioned in *Nimat Purana* existed , actual Sindhu far away and thus to have Kishanganga; albeit Ganga next to Sharda. Reason of Kishan prefix may be that since *Nilmat Purana* quotes Sindhu Ganga as the sacred river, once this river was found, Kishan was one of the Avatars quoted therein and lend its name. One might get surprised on the nuances and phonetics of Kishanganga and Krishanganga {If it was to be named after Lord Krishna}. With the development of Sharda Language and Script, subtle changes in intonations and phonetics peculiar to Kashmiri’s pronunciation of ‘Krishen’ would have become ‘Kishan’. Remember as to how Lord Krishna was pronounced, in Kashmiri; *Kishna Bagwan* or Krishan’s being called as Kishan and Krishna as Kishni}. Thus three rivers associated with Sharda got named to Kishanganga, Madhumati and Saraswati. We find all these names familiar; Madhumati River existed {Near Bandapore}, Saraswati other name of the Goddess and Ganga now in the form of Kishanganga; all making a *Sangam* next to a pilgrimage centre. This also indicates, with other events , that Sharda pilgrimage took deeper roots around end of first millennium and effort was to concentrate all the ingredients of a *tirath* at

one place. From the trail of events, religious developments and peculiarities it is between 13th and 16th Century when Madhumati and Saraswati names came about; may not be in one go but generally during this period.

Pilgrimage Later Centuries. Older and our generation do not know much about the places and pilgrimage routes to Sharda, as mentioned in many chronicles. Basically it is because of circumstances, lack of detailed, connected and accurate description of the places. Many accounts route it via or combine it with Gangabal. Pilgrims avoided difficult gorge route described in *Sharda Mahatmaya* and while selecting routes our ancestors kept some basics in view. These were; beaten tracks allowing use of ponies/horses, halts so planned that movement in a day was from one to another villages having Pandit community for night halts and finally took routes which led to existing crossings over River Kishanganga. Karnah and Drava, though in the domain of rulers of Kashmir Valley were avoided, being away from the main routes and as Bomba's, inhabitants of these places, were inimical to the people of the valley. These hillmen, in connivance with Dards made frequent raids, robbed pilgrims and even as late as 1846 AD raided Srinagar. Conditions improved just a bit during Sikh rule. It is evident that during long period of anarchy, in last few centuries, pilgrimage to the shrine was less attractive for peaceful Brahmins of Kashmir. **{I have the privilege of being amongst very few of my generation, to have walked every foot of the area; Gangabal area, Shamsabari Range, Kazinag to Kishanganga, just opposite Sharda. It was constraints of LOC, which precluded foray across}**. Herewith routes and *modus operandi* of the *yatra*, used during last few centuries, with Srinagar as focal point, have been described for posterity. Graphic account of these routes and *yatra* by two noted Pandit's of our community, who undertook frequent pilgrimages to Sharda in mid nineteenth century {Somewhere between 1820 – 1850 AD}, has trickled down through few generations. The first one was Kashmir's Philosopher, Historian, Writer, Artist and Intellectual Pandit Bhawani Koul {Approximately 1780 –1850 AD} of Gulshan {Hariparbat/Rainawari/Ram Kaul Mandir}. Second, Pandit Harjoo Fehrist {Approximately 1800- 1850 AD} of *Budhgair* {Near *Kawdore*}; a staunch believer in *vedic* rituals, who got drowned in Kishanganga while returning from Sharda pilgrimage. It is interesting to note that both these personalities were *Banumassis*, whose ancestors had returned during the reign of Badshah and again during Moghul period from areas closer to the mythical Saraswati River Banks and thus their spiritual connection to Sharda and Saraswati.

- Few months before the *Sharda Ashtami*, word went round about the basic planning of the *yatra*; dates and places for assembling were tentatively fixed and passed on. Places for assembling were; *Devi Angan* {Srinagar} for areas around and South of Srinagar; Sumbal and then Bandapur {Bandipur} for those in Northeast of Srinagar; Sopore/Bumai for those closer to Wullar/Sopore; Handwara for those from Baramulla /Handwara side. Bumai /Saadamalyun for those South of Kupwara. Tikar {Tikri}, Kupwara, Sogam{Lolab Valley} were also selected for assembling points. Approximate dates of arrival of *yatra jatha* at these places were also given and generally became places for night halts. Most of these places had important places of worship, small *tirths* close to them, which were also briefly visited as part of *yatra*.
- Preparation would start immediately after *Janam Ashtami* and *yatris* would assemble at *Devi Angan* two or three days prior to *Bhadrapada Amavasa* {*Amavasa*{Full dark night} was considered inauspicious to start the *yatra*. Also journey to Sharda would take eight to nine days, on foot}. On the designated day the caravan would move after early obeisance at *Chakrishwar*. The column used to be self contained in all respects with hired people for protection, guards of noblemen, younger ones carrying *lathis* and volunteers for cooking {I refrain to specifically to call them anything other than volunteers}. Generally at each halt the villagers looked after them. As the caravan moved towards the destination, strength swelled as *yatris* joined from different areas enroute.
- Columns taking different routes ultimately concentrated at Gushi {Gusha} on 3rd *tithi* of Shudi Bhadrapada. On 4th Shudi of Bhadrapada they bathed in the rivulet which comes from Drang, instead of its source, when special holiness accumulates at the *tirtha*. They then visited walnut tree grove, on the banks of *Kamil* River, named Rangawar {Substitute for *Rangavatika*}. Next day they moved towards Kishanganga River over Pharkian Gali {See Map}.
- A parallel route, used by those from Lolab Valley, crosses over Burhom, Machel {Both North of Lolab Valley} and meets main route East of *Tejavana*{Tejjan}; the route thereafter is common. This route was not taken by many as they would miss bathing at Gushi and visit to Rangwar {*Rangavatika*}; considered part of the pilgrimage.
- People from plains, outside the valley, similarly moved via Muzzafarabad over Kafir Khan Range at Reshian Gali, cross Kazinag Nar at Karnah and cross over to other side of Kishanganaga near Karnah over the existing crossing place or move along the southern banks of Kishanganga river and join main route at Dudnial. The distance from Karnah to Shadi is over 50 kilometres.
- By the end of the day {6th Shudi} they reach general area of *Tejavana* {On the northern slopes of the hill range, presumed to be the ashram of Gautama during Muni Shandalya's pilgrimage to Sharda}. A night halt, recitation of various *satotras* in praise of God and Goddesses in their various manifestations would end the day. On the 7th Shudi they cross Kishanganga, move eastwards along the beaten track along Northern banks of Kishanganga and reach Sharda *tirth* by end of the day. Next day 8th Shudi of Bhadrapada also called *Sharda Ashtami* as well as *Ganga Ashtami* {In plains of Northern India this day is called *Radha Ashtmi*}, *darshan* after bath, prayers, various rituals, etc followed by *Shradha* performed on the banks of Madhumati. An evening in the meditation around the temple rounded up the day.
- Early next day, obeisance at the temple, return journey along same route would start and caravan strength would decrease at each night halt, when pilgrims detached enroute to return to their village's.
- During the reign of Hindu kings, such caravans used to be patronised by noblemen, visitors, scholars and protected by armed soldiers of that time. Even food and comforts were provided under the Kings decree. Chroniclers record such an arrangement during the reign of Zain-ul-Abidin {Who too had visited the shrine} and Akbar {His chronicler Abul Fazl also visited the shrine}. During Muslim rule and later Afghan rule, number of pilgrims reduced and not many known

organised caravans except few during the tenure of Pandit *Madhurmilans* of Afghan rule. Not much happened or improved during Sikh rule and it is only after establishment of Dogra rule and the peaceful settlement of the Upper Kishanganga Valley that pilgrimage became once more open for regular visits. This is the time Pandit's Harjoo Fehrist and Bhawani Kaul made many visits to the shrine. In case of Bhawani Kaul, he is reported to have accompanied Dogra King Gulab Singh for the pilgrimage, being a scholar of his regime.

- Narration's say that the pilgrimage ended at *Devi Angan* again after obeisance to *Chakrashwari*.

Gangabal and Sharda Tirath Together. Many of Sharda pilgrimage accounts talk of starting pilgrimage from Wangat {Narannag}, then to Gangabal and culminate at Sharda on 8th {*Ashtami*} *Shudi of Bhadra*. Narannag, an important place of pilgrimage of ancient *Sodaratirth*, is the location of temples, which are commonly known as the Wangat temples. In ancient times, it was called *Sodaratirth* and the sanctity is derived from the existence of a large spring, *Sodaranag*. King Jayasimha {12th Century} consecrated a *linga* of Shiva called *Bhutesvara* here. His Prime Minister Srngara, would spend great sums to make available ample provisions for celebration on *Asadha Purnamashi* and *Ganga Ashtami* at the shrine. Gangabal {also referred as Harmukh} has lake surrounded by mountains all around and is a holy place for immersion of ashes of the dead; on *Ganga Ashtami* {8th *Shudi Bhadra*}. After consigning ashes of their dead relatives in the Gangabal Lake, pilgrims made it a point to offer worship on return journey at Wangat {Narannag} and for religious beliefs *Ruch Kaam*; auspicious work cannot be part or combined with pilgrimage to temple like Sharda. A look at the map and terrain will also indicate that Gangabal Lake trek itself is tortuous and would take many days and it is humanly impossible to combine it with pilgrimage to Sharda, more so day of pilgrimage being same. Few centuries back there was a catastrophe for Gangabal Pilgrims when hundreds of Pandits perished due to bad weather and difficult terrain. Pilgrimage via *Bhadrakal* {Near Handwara} has similar terrain and time constraints {See Map}; only pilgrims coming from Baramulla, Handwara would visit *Bhadrakal* and then proceed to Sharda. Moreover, temple of *Bhadrakal* is of recent origin; few century old.

Rangwar Forest, Tejawan, Gushi and Shardi Village. *Sharda Mahatmaya* account mentions certain places, though these places may even exist today, an effort is made to co-relate them with present landmarks. There is no place with the name of Syamala; Lolab Valley itself has a religious history, may be that Syamala is some *tirtha sthal* in the area, not much known now. Gushi and Hayahom villages, near Kupwara, are close to each other and are on the route to Sharda. In recent centuries Gushi became a halting place for the pilgrims due to inaccessibility of *Rangvatika* and instead walnut grove on the banks of *Kamil* River near Gushi was named as Rangwar {Substitute for *Rangavatika*}. Incidentally Gushi seems to have got name from a buddhist scholar Avgosh who lived in Ghushi {Kanishka's time} and wrote "*Buddhacarita*" {A verse compendium of Buddha's teachings and first of buddhist scriptures written in the valley} *Rangvatika* is presumably deep inside Rangwar Forest; accessible through Rangwar Gali and on the beaten route {Rangwar Forest is a vast and deep forest with beautiful meadows; wild flowers grow and cover these like a carpet, *Kanagachh - Guchhi* {Black Mushrooms} grow in abundance. Inside the forest is a beautiful meadow with a carpet of daffodils most of the year called, appropriately, *Yambarzalwar*. Unfortunately this area is den of militant hideouts now and much in news}. No Sharda temple existed in Gushi, but place got importance because of Rangwar Grove and bathing in the close by rivulet. With discontinuation of the pilgrimage to Sharda, a temple has been constructed with image of Sharda. It is said that few decades earlier Goddess Sharda revealed to a young boy that she was moving to Gushi. Temple construction started soon thereafter and a known *panchang* editor authenticated the presence of Goddess at Gushi. A close study of the image shows Sharda sitting on a lotus, having ten arms with Ganesh and Shiva sitting below. The date of the pilgrimage is termed prominently as *Sharda Ashtami* {*Gushi*} and not *Sharda Ashtami*; but Goddess, omnipresent as she is, would still be at Shardi.

A beautiful meadow cum dense pine jungle behind the main temple at Shardi is called *Sharda Van*, where she is supposed to be moving around. Over the period forest cover has diminished around this area. *Sharda Mahatmaya* also mentions *Krishna Nag* above village of Drang, which has many springs and this *Nag* is probably Mari Nag {See Map} just close to the ridge line of Shamasabari. There are no traces of any ruins of an *ashram* {*Tejavana*}, residence of Sage Gautama, on the bank of the Kishanganga; though generally area Tejjan {See Map} is referred to as *Tejavana*, giving general identification of the area. You get magnificent view of Sharda Temple, Sharda and Narda Peaks, Nanga Parbat and K2 from this area and pilgrims halt for the night at this place. *Sirahsila* Castle, next to the temple, finds mention in Kalhan's chronicle and siege of the castle was mounted during his time. This place is now in ruins. There is another fort near Keran, also in ruin but of later vintage. This was a strong hold of Dards against whom the expeditions were mounted from time to time. The main mention is of the expedition against Dard warlord Bhoja during the Jaisimha's time and finds detailed account in *Rajtarangini*. Kalhan is also quoted referring to *Bhedagiri* in the context of Sharda pilgrimage which is not true. Verse 35 Book I *Rajtarangini* says thus; "Where the Goddess herself may be seen in the form of a swan in a lake on the peak of Bheda mountain which is hallowed by the rise of Ganga". He actually uses 11 verses in Book I {28 to 38} to define the sanctity of the Valley and this one [Verse 35] refers to *Bheda* (*Bhedagiri*) *tirath* {Southwest of Pulwama in *Pir Panjal* Range} as 'sanctified by the *'Gangod Bheda'* spring'. Goddess Saraswati is believed to have shown herself as a swan in a lake situated on the summit of the hill; the lake does not seem to exist now. In Kalhan's this introduction to *Bheda* is named alongwith '*Trisandheya Suyambhoo*' {Another *tirath* of Kashmir}, Sharda and other famous sites and not Sharda in isolation. Apparently in curiosity to add more weightage to suffix Ganga to Sindhu or Kishan {Ganga}, this well clarified description of a separate *tirath* has been incorrectly used. Kalhan also would not have meant this reference to Sharda *tirath*; being absolutely far away and in different direction from *Bhedagiri*; 180 degrees and in South. As far as description of a lake closer to Sharda temple is concerned there are small lakes which are sources of many rivulets but are far away from Sharda.

Goddess Sharda's temple is located next to village Sharda, quite close to Sirhasila Castle and just across the rivulet next to the temple. The village seems to have come up for those who did not find place in the castle but were closely associated with it; workers, guards etc. Once the temple was constructed it must have been appropriately named after the Goddess. However the nuances of 'Shardi' can be traced to minor variation in the *basha* of the area as prevalent at that time and spoken by the people of the area. This is more towards the *basha* spoken in Dardesa {Dards} and further indication of the facts of the temple construction, as enumerated above.

Sharda Temple Connection to Buddhism and Karnah Artifacts. Traces of civilisation and settlements have been excavated at a small hamlet Dildar {Karnah - Tanghdhar}, which consists of Lance, Maze, Swords, stone pickaxe dating 3000 years. A Buddha statue is reported to have been found in the area. These artifacts, local name of Mai Sharda, ruins of a fort have been associated with Sharda temple, Sharda Peeth {Taken as University} and inadvertently associated with Buddhism also. These relics, crude as they are, are connected with Naga's civilisation but cannot be associated with Aryan settlers who had by that time moved beyond these primitive artifacts. These are also too earlier than Buddhists era, given their equal progress and abhorring weapons. Given the topography of the area, inhospitable terrain and weather conditions, it is more prudent to limit that Saraswat Aryan had mostly settled in the valley portion, Naga settlements and a stray group of Aryans continued in Kishanganga Valley. It may be that Buddha statue or relics found at Karnah, in all probability, being that of Buddhists staging camp while moving to Afghanistan and Dardistan. These relics cannot be exclusively connected to Sharda temple of that period. Attributing location of Sharda Peeth at this location, during Buddhist era in Kashmir, is out of question, as earliest records in under development Sharda script have been dated to about 800 AD over Northwest India {including Kashmir}. The language during Buddhism in Kashmir was Brahmi; only around 9th Century AD *Upbramasha* took shape, changed during 10th to gave rise to *Siddha-Matrika* and subsequently to Sharda. Karnah relics, Sharda Temple or Sharda Peeth do not find any mention in Buddhist scriptures, well chronicled travelogues of Buddhist scholars or visitors and Buddhist monuments of that period. The architectural design and construction of the temple, as discussed, precludes any Buddhist influence or hand in it. Even if they had, definitely it may have been named of Sharda *Vihara*.

III - Sharda Script, Myths, Adi - Shankara And Sharda Peeth

Sharda Language and Sharda Script. Sharda Script has been closely associated with Kashmir, Goddess Sharda and bringing *Sharda Desh* designation to Kashmir. In the evolution and assessment of history of a particular geographical area, spoken language and its script are important factors. While language evolves naturally, scripts adjust to spoken words of the speakers and get constantly modified to come up to appropriate medium, during which scripts get slowly altered till they get a distinct designation. Even in a uniform language, like *Kashmiri*, subtle variations in life-style, group behaviour, culture, geographic situation lead to changes in intonation from region to region. After passing through these stages, it is given a distinct name; like Sharda and the Goddess connected with literary achievements of Kashmir lend her name to the language script of the valley. Unfortunately in our assessment and analysis of the Goddess, we allowed history of one of the best and expressive language scripts of the area to be diffused with attribution ranging from *vedic* times to Buddhists and then to rulers of Kashmir; measures which corrupt history. In this part aspects of language, scriptures and impact of personalities, having direct or indirect connection, have been discussed in sequential progression. The spoken language of ancient India {Brahmi} is generally attributed to era of 2500 Years BC; coinciding with *Sapatrishi* era. By about 7th and succeeding centuries gave way to new regional denominations. By around 9th Century AD Northwestern *Brahmi* language called *Upbramasha* spoken language, a variant of Brahmi, began to evolve in different parts of this area including Kashmir, Punjab, Himachal and the Northern parts of present day Pakistan. Brahmi was the script in which this *Upbramasha* (and the earlier Sanskrit, Palli etc) was written {Earliest Brahmi scripts are dated to 5 - 6th Century AD, but references to it in *Rigveda* takes it to around 1500-2000 BC}. During 10th century AD, *Upbramasha* changed shape and gave rise to a slightly different and advanced form called *Siddha-Matrika*. Used in Kashmir during Lalitaditya (697-735 AD) time, *Siddha-Matrika* was the *lipi* and called as such because alphabet starts with the benediction *Om Swasti Siddham*. Shankara Varman (883-902 AD) who conquered neighbouring principalities including Gujrat, refused to talk in Sanskrit and used the language used by the people; *Upbramasha*. Al-Biruni (1130 AD) also refers to *Siddha-Matrika* as such. Sharda was this denomination of *Siddha-Matrika* and covered a vast region extending from Afghanistan to Delhi and its characters showed remarkable resemblance with earlier Brahmi characters and exhibited several positive developments to justify a new appellation by 1000 AD; including Gurumukhi. The earliest records in 'under development' Sharda script have been dated to about 800 AD in Northwestern India. Its characters appeared for the first time on the coins with inscriptions of the name of Avanti Varman (855-883 AD), the founder of the *Avantiswami* temple at Awantipur. Coins, copper plate, charter of Hindu Shahi's of Kabul and Gilgit {9th-10th Centuries}; the fountain stone temple inscriptions {11th -13th Century's} of this dynasty and other extant epigraphic and literary records of 14th Century represented the three stages of development of Sharda script. A birch bark manuscript of *Munimata Manimala*, which is 'earliest known Sharda manuscript' discovered in Kashmir belongs to this third stage i.e 14th Century. Kalhana wrote Rajtarngini in Sanskrit writing in Sharda script. Sharda remained par excellence language and script of Kashmir till the present century and lend its name to the valley, which bore the alternative name of *Sharda Desh* and *Sharda Mandala*, owing it to deity Sharda. Some people wrongly believe that Sharda is a script of Sanskrit. Sharda was evolved when the language of Kashmir was passing into *Kashmiri*, with its peculiar intonations, variations and sounds, as a result Sharda language, imprinted with vocal peculiarities, became unfit for Sanskrit but continued to be used for writing Sanskrit in Kashmir. Sanskrit language lays emphasis on the sound of each alphabet; while Sanskrit writings in Sharda script could be

understood but in speech it could not be deciphered. Kashmiri's had difficulty in pronouncing Sanskrit correctly, because of lack of knowledge of Devnagri script and Sharda is so different from Devnagri.

Sharda script formed a vital link in the chain of communication of ideas, knowledge, and culture among the states comprised in the Northwestern Himalayan region; similar to the role of Brahmi and *Kharoshti* during that period. *Kharoshti* belongs to the same period as Brahmi. It had 37 letters of which 24 resembled Brahmi. Of the rest, a few (supposedly 3) seemed to resemble the Semitic script. In Kashmir people irrespective of religion spoke Kashmiri and signed their names in Sharda; like 15th Century will of *Makhdoom Sahib*. Till 14th – 15th Century AD, even Tombstones in Kashmir were inscribed in Sharda. By end of 16th Century, beginning of Moghul rule, *Kofi* and *Nasak* {Variants of Arabic script} were used for tombstone inscriptions, though Sharda still existed side-by-side. Sharda was thus pushed under, however, older generation of priests continued with Sharda till sixties / early seventies. I was sweetly surprised to see my horoscope, written in early sixties, in Sharda Script forcing me to learn Sharda alphabets. AR Stein, who has chronicled his visit in 19th Century; unmistakably proves this fact, when he says, 'The continued popular use of Sanskrit {Read Sharda} even among Mohammadans is strikingly proved by the Sanskrit {Sharda} inscription on a tomb in the Cemetery of Bahau- Din -Sahib at Srinagar (A. D. 1484)'.

Adi Shankara's Visit To Kashmir and Sharda Temple and Authorship of Scriptures. Nothing has created ambiguity in attribution of our religious and scholarly works, worship places etc than the visit of Shankaracharya and his being associated with Sharda, apart from other shrines and spread of Shaivism in Kashmir. It is not only with us, the very institutions connected with Shankaracharya are mired in differing dates, origin, attribution of works and scriptures and life time events of Shankaracharya. A brief explanation of institution of Shankaracharya is, therefore, necessary. As per various accounts Great Adi Shankaracharya {Also called Jagatguru, Great Adi Shankara}, named Sankara {*San* means prosperity and *Kara* means the giver} was born 2500 years back at *Kaladi* {Kerala}; son of Sivaguru and Aryambal. After him started the legend cum pontiff's seat called *Acharaya's*. His descendant lineage has the *Acharya's* of four established *mutts* that exist even today; Puri {Est 484 BC}, Srinegri { Est 483 B.C}, Jyotirmath {Badrinath} { Est 485 BC} and Dwarka { Est 490 BC}.The fifth one at Kamakothi {Kanchi}is considered as the original seat of Great Adi Shankaracharya. *Guhya-Sahasranama* (Sanskrit) refers to these five Shankaracharya Peeth's (*Mutts*); Kamakoti Peeth as presided over by Shankaracharya himself, others by his four disciples; Suresvara, Padmapada, Totaka and Hastamalaka. In fact lineage charts of these *mutts* start from these disciples; dated BC. However, researchers refer to Shankaracharya being of later vintage {AD}, though none of the *mutts* accept this, in-spite of strong and irrefutable evidence to prove it. There was and is only one Shankaracharya for record; either Great Adi Shankaracharya of BC or Shankaracharya of AD era. Other heads of the *mutts* are actually *Acharaya's* but have been commonly referred to as Shankaracharya's in many scriptures, chronicles, visits etc. Thus discrepancies arose out of visits, scholarly works of these *Acharaya's*, mistakenly referred as Shankaracharya.

As per records of *Acharya's* of the medieval age of Kamakothi {Kanchi} *mutt*, the name of Abhinava Sankara; a disciple of Sri Vidyaghana {37th *Acharya*}, who became 38th *Acharaya* of Kamakothi {Kanchi} stands preeminent and his deeds are compared to that of Great Adi Shankaracharya; hereafter he is called Adi-Shankara. Some refer to him as Adi Shankaracharya; though none of the *mutts* call / called their *Acharaya's* with prefix of the 'founder's prefix Adi'. As per succession records of the *mutt*, he is believed to have attained *samadhi* in Himalaya's in 840 AD after 30 years of *acharyaship*. Notwithstanding various records of all the *mutts*, extensive research indicates Adi-Shankara was born in May/June 805 AD {Lunar month of *Vaishakha*, 26th year of the sixty year cycle} and attained *samadhi* in the month of Dec/Jan 837 AD {*Vaishaakha* or *Pausha* of 58th year of the sixty year cycle}. Surprisingly the name of his father and mother, place of birth and various events in his life are same as in the case of Great Adi Shankaracharya. In all probability this era, religious works of Adi-Shankara, who became a monk at the age of eight {Commentary on *Brahmasutra*, *Bhagvad Gita*, *Upanishads* etc } fit into the personality of Abhinava Sankara, who as per records, as 38th *Acharaya* took name of Dhir-Shankarendra Saraswati. Many scholars and researchers are of the view that Adi- Shankara of 8th/9th Century is actual Great Adi Shankaracharya. ***Government of India celebrated 120th anniversary of Adi- Shankara's birth in 1988 indicating his birth in 788 AD. This in a way confirms AD status of Adi Shankaracharya.*** However, all the *mutts* have lineage and succession charts from 5th Century BC, even Kamakothi {Kanchi} *Mutt* to which Abhinava Sankara belonged, dates lineage chart to 5th Century BC. If one ponders; both are *Acharaya's*, their name Sankara, therefore in both cases they are *Sankara – Acharaya*. None of the other *Acharaya's* of any of these *peeth's* had Shankaracharya name, which remained restricted to these two only. Strange, though all the *mutts* talk of Great Adi Shankaracharya, none of them other than Kamakothi {Kanchi} *mutt* talk much of Adi Shankara. Even in their case the references are guarded; all this to maintain antiquity of Shankaracharya to BC era. Scholars have valid reasons for their dissent and most important of all that Gautam Budha {May 623 – 547 BC} and Great Adi Shankaracharya {509/514 – 516 BC} were around in the same era and operative in common areas. Gautam Buddha preceded and spread Buddhism, its spread would have been checked when Great Adi Shankaracharya was operative and Hinduism revived. Facts, however, indicate Buddhism flourished till as late as 6/7th Century and it is after the revival efforts of Adi-Shankara {8th/9th Century} Hinduism bounced back. None of the five *mutts* accept existence of Abhinava Sankara as Adi-Shankara or as Shankaracharya of 8th/9th Century. One can even notice this ambiguity in our Kashmir chronicles also; *Rajataragini* says that the Kashmiri King Gopaditya founded *agraharas* {jagirs}and built temples of Jyesthswara and Shankaracharya; ' Having founded Jyesthswara on the Gopa Hill, the Brahmins born in the land of 'Aryans' were induced to accept Gopa *Agraharas* {jagirs}by that pious King{Verse 341 Book I *Rajataragini*}. This King is given date of 417-357 BC. Another account says; 'Gopadri {*Gopadiri Tirath*} became known as Shankaracharya after the visit in the 8th Century AD of 'Adi Shankaracharya' to Kashmir, when both Gopadri Hill and the Jyestheshwar temple {Present day Shankaracharya Temple and *Zethyer* shrine} on it were given the

new name in his honour'. Surely Kalhan would have mentioned this in his *Rajataragini* instead of referring it to King Gopaditya .

Shankaracharya word is not new to Kashmir, which seems to have been used for defining even *Acharaya's* of the *mutts*; it may also be of interest for us to know that two *Acharaya's* of Kamakothi {Kanchi} are credited to be from Kashmir; Sureswaracharya 2nd *Acharaya* {*Samadhi* in 407 B.C.}; Sadasiva 17th Acharya {*Samadhi* in 375 AD}. Also Ujvala Tapati 16th *Acharaya* is credited to have attained *samadhi* in Kashmir in 367 AD. Another famous *Acharya* of the Kamakothi {Kanchi} Peeth was the 47th Sri Chandracuda Sarasvati (1098 -1166 AD). This *Acharaya* was held in great esteem by our scholars such as Mankha {*Srikanthacharita* composed between 1135 to 1145 A. D}, Jayadeva {*Prasanna Raghava, Chandraloka and Bhakti Kalpa-Latika*}, Jaisimha, then ruler of Kashmir, was a staunch devotee of this *Acharya*, who too {47th *Acharaya*} is referred as Shankaracharya. He traveled widely all over the country, possibly including Kashmir. Kalhan was also around at this time and wrote *Rajtarangini* but there is no mention. This period of 47th *Acharaya* fits in well, when Madhavacharya {1199-1276}, who came to Kashmir nearly a century later, would have known of his visit, in detail.

Adi-Shankara's Visit: Facts and Fiction. As per one account of his visit; 'after he sat on the holy stone slab at the temple {Sharda}, it gave him vision to compose *Saundriya Lahiri* in praise of Goddess Divine Mother {*Shakti*}; considered excellent piece of poetic devotion after *Panchastavi*'. Further, 'he adopted *Sri Chakra* as reverence to Goddess Sharda and was conferred honour of Sharda Peeth'. Some accounts give to understand that he ascended Temporal or Pontifical Seat at Sharda Temple and / or Sharda Peeth {Referred by some as university} during his visit to Sharda Mai {Little known area near Karnah is referred as 'Sharda Mai' and being stated as the location of the Sharda Peeth}. Account of his visit has been composed by Madavacharya {1199-1276}, an erudite scholar, who after becoming ascetic is referred by the name of Vidhyaranya. His account was subsequently, apparently, suitably versioned by followers of Shankaracharya, who had returned back to Kashmir in the later part of the 15th Century during Zain-ul-Abidin reign. While in plains they had become Shankaracharya devotee's and generally followed *Shankaradivijya*; extensive poetic work on Adi-Shankara, composed by Madavacharya in 13th Century, five Centuries after Adi-Shankara. It may be of interest that during this Century {13th} Islam had taken roots, in pockets, in South and Khilji Armies were active for conversion to Islam. Many of then Hindu scholars of South could not continue their religious inclinations and found Kashmir an ideal place and was one of the reasons of extra ordinary number of scholars of Shaivistic order, visiting Kashmir during this period; even staying back for longer duration or till they attained *samadhi*. He {Madavacharya} did not adhere to his religious activities as given in *Sankaravi Jaya-Kavya* {Composed by Anantanandagiri; 10th Century AD} but adopted tradition of writing flourishing accounts based on *Puranic* mythology authors, poetic imagination, personal devotion containing stories and events, which in most of cases had no reality. His description of Sharda temple is also believed to be similar, interspersed with ground landmarks, duly assisted by our own little known scholars of that period. These scholars, who gave this touch to his imaginative and expressive works, were also devoted to Abhinav Gupta {933-1015 AD}, a shaivistic scholar of highest degree. His ancestor Atri Gupta, a scholarly Brahmin, was brought by Laltaditya {697 AD to 733 AD} to Kashmir with him. One of the best authorities on Shaiva philosophy and various branches of Sanskrit literature e.g. rhetoric and poetic; he wrote some forty works, including *Tantraloka* {Light on Tantra} a comprehensive text on *Agamic Shaiva* philosophy and ritual. Abhinav Gupta's literary period extended from 990-1015 AD. Some of his other works are; *Para - Trimshika Vivarna, Pratyabhijna Vimarshini* {expurgated}, *Pratyabhijna Vivriti Vimarshini* {full}, *Tantrasara, Parmarthasara* and Commentary on *Bhagvadgita* called *Gitartha-Sangraha*. It was Abhinav Gupta whose brilliant and encyclopedic works established Kashmir Shaivism as an important philosophical school and after completing his last work on the *Pratyabhijna* system, entered the *Bhairava* cave near Mangam with 1200 disciples never to be seen again. The legend of his entering the cave, never to return has been immortalised in a folk verse in Kashmiri; "**Bahshat Chaat Heth Su Bal Bramchhari... Sari Heth Khot Shivlokas... Yete Khot Deh Heth... Kus Deh Dari... Abhinav Gupta Acharaya Zan**". Translated; 'With his 1200 disciples this *Brahmchhari* went to *Shivlok* with all of them in mortal form, who dares such a miracle. Remember only *Acharaya* Abhinav Gupta could do it'.

Sharda Peeth Honours. Sharda or Sharda Peeth word or institutions are not new to Hinduism in India; followers of Great Adi Shankaracharya {Adi-Shankara} started these institutions, which exist even today and are flourishing. Called Sharda Peetham's or *Mutts* or Peetham's of respective order etc, but Sharda is supreme in these institutions. In their religious philosophy; 'Sarada is Guru Rupini; she is of the form of the guru. Through the person of the Jagadguru {Shankaracharya who occupies *Sarvajna Pitha* or the Pontifical seat} she dispenses her grace'. The legends says; 'Great Adi Shankaracharya {Adi-Shankara?} reached Sringeri in Karnataka, on the banks of Tungabhadra River. While Sri Sankara and Mandala Mishra {Another scholar} were walking, Sarasawani {wife of Mishra} did not move and stood fixed in the sands of Tungabhadra River. Great Adi Shankaracharya {Adi-Shankara?} turned back and realised by his divine powers that Sarasawani did not want to proceed any further and created a seat for her for spreading *Advaita*. This seat is today called the Sharada Peetham or the Seat of Sharada {*Saradamba*}'. This was the first *Mutt* installed by Great Adi Shankaracharya {Adi-Shankara?}, with the direction that all the heads of the *Mutts* will be called *Acharaya's* and they will have a lineage of *Shishyas* {Disciples}. Without going into many more details of the incident, similar event is recorded for Adi- Shankara; in which a variant tradition places the *Sarvajna Pitha* {the throne of transcendental wisdom} in Kamakothi {Kanchi}. Adi-Shankara is the one credited with having made extensive tours in North India, even to Kashmir {Sharda is not specifically referred} and between 788-810 AD; 'He defeated (in debate) the famous Vakpati Bhatta, a reputed scholar of the court of the King of Kashmir. He ascended the *Sarvajna Pitha*, in Kashmir (Srinagar) after winning over many great scholars'. 'History of Sanskrit Literature' refers to *Shankarendra Vilasa* by Vakpati Bhatta, a Kashmiri Pandit; a biography of 38th *Acharya* Dhir-Shankarendra Saraswati {Abhinava Shankara}, of Kamakothi {Kanchi} Peeth. Not much is known except that this biography pertains to same Adi-Shankara and is the only scholarly work mentioned in

the name of Vakpati Bhatta; who has not been fully identified as per the *mutt* records. Kalhan in verse 144 Book IV *Rajtarangini* refers him as Vakhpatiraja who was around during Laltaditya's time. Again there is no mention of him being defeated in a debate by Great Adi Shankaracharya {Adi-Shankara?}. In Kashmir too we have taken Bhatta name in a generalised form and not specifically pinpointing any scholar of that period. This is important as most of the scholars find place of honour in our records like; Vasugupta, Kayyatacharya and Somananda {Contemporary of Vasugupta}, Muktakantha Swamin, Shiva Swamin, Ananda Vardhana and Kallata {Great Shaiva philosophers and authors} flourished during this period. Surely Kashmiri religious intelligentsia would have fielded their best scholar, more so as the debate would have been on the shades of *Shaivism* and differing perception of the two debaters. The only Kashmiri Scholar somewhat closer to this name during the period referred is Bhatta Kallata {850-900 AD; Vasugupta's disciple}, but he does not fit in the time period of Adi-Shankara. Biography writing of scholars cum religious heads on the move is not easy and may be that a Kashmiri Scholar, named as such, was with Adi-Shankara and got into a debate and finally Adi-Shankara won in this debate at *Sarvajna Pitha* {Srinegri} and as is the custom ascended the place of honour after the debate. The visit and outcome should, if true, have also found place in the chronicles of King Jayapira {764-795 AD; a great conquerer and lover of learning. *Katayana's* commentary on *Panini* was re-compiled during his period} or his successors or that of Vasugupta. Vasugupta's *Shivsutra's* or any other scholars thinking would have also been influenced by the *advaita* or 'dualistic' shaivite philosophy if Adi-Sankara had visited Kashmir and defeated one of our representative scholars. A defeat would naturally mean that we accepted his philosophy, which was not so.

No account/chronicle has used any word other than *Sarvajna Pitha* {**Not Sharda Peeth**}, which has been commonly used in Shankaracharya *Mutt*, taken as 'Pontifical Seat' and does not refer to a specific place. Another significant event in the history of Adi-Shankara's, noted in his accounts, is his occupying the *Sarvajna Pitha* {Note the usage of *Sarvajna* which had been established at Kanchi; not Kashmir}. According to V. Raj Gopal Sharma, author of '*Acharya Sri Sankara's Advent*'; 'There have been several references to the visit of Shankara {Adi-Shankara} to Kashmir. He did not establish a new Peeth there but ascended an existing Peeth'. As far as ascending an existing Peeth is concerned, it is unlike of Adi-Shankara, as wherever he went he 'established' a Peeth. Sharda Temple or Sharda Peeth is not specifically mentioned in this event and there was no 'pontifical seat' at Sharda Temple. Chronicles refer to debate in Kashmir and when associated with dates, it may be one of the Buddhist *Vihara* turned into a *mutt* or peeth, as at this time Buddhism in Kashmir had started waning, not requiring his presence. Indicators of account being imaginative can also be gathered when Madhavacharya mentions that Abhinav Gupta, living in Assam (Kamarup) was a *Tantric* sorcerer who applied sorcery to Adi-Shankara with the result that the latter developed a dangerous disease {Same Madhvacharya who in his '*Shankra Digvijaya*' makes this single reference to Abhinav Gupta being alleged sorcerer, wrote a *Shanker Bashya*, presumably on Badrayan's *Vedanta Sutr*s}. There is no evidence that can establish name Abhinav Gupta other than the great author of Kashmir. The story is thus purely imaginary and also confirmed as there was a gap of two hundred years between the times of these two great teachers {788-810 AD - Adi-Shankara's visit and Abhinav Gupta 950-1000 AD}. All the traditional tales about their meeting and associated accounts are mere fiction and do not establish any historical fact. Chroniclers confirm Adi-Shankara visited many places in South, Madhya Bharat and Himalayas, during his short life span, before he is supposed to have visited Kashmir. His visits have been extensively chronicled in detail with dates/duration; but visit details to Kashmir do not exist, uncorroborated, events devoid of facts and in many cases termed 'may have'. I respect religious sages and scholars like Adi-Shankara, but even he would not have liked to be part of an imaginative account, which would otherwise cover facts, more so of a civilisation that of Kashmiri Pandits.

Adoption of Sri Chakra. Adi-Shankara traveled around the land, refuting all objectionable practices in Hinduism, which had cropped up. There is no denial of his contribution and renaissance efforts, when Buddhism had started collapsing. Adi-Shankara founded the *Dasanami* order; namely *Aranya*, *Ashrama*, *Bharati*, *Giri*, *Parvata*, *Puri*, *Sarasvati*, *Sagara*, *Tirtha* and *Vana* {We have a wing of one of these in Srinagar- *Dasnami Akhara*}. To spread his teaching evenly around the country, he established *mutts* in four places; *Vimala Peeth* at Puri, *Kalika Peeth* in Dwaraka, Sarada {Sharda} Peeth in Sringeri {Tamil Nadu}, and the *Jyoti Mutt* in Badrinath. During these visits he installed *Sri Chakra's* in many temples like Kamakshi temple of Kanchi, Nara Narayana temple of Badri and Guhyeshwari temple in Nepal. His visits and establishment of these *mutts* were all in the early parts of his life and pontification; before his purported visit to Kashmir.. It must be understood that Adi-Shankara and his predecessors were the back bone of revival of Hinduism, where *Shakti* and Shiva were given place of pride in their dualistic shaivite theology and *Sri Chakra* was not new at the time of but had taken roots along with preaching of Hinduism. The theory of Adi-Shankara having adopted *Sri Chakra* during his purported visit, that too to Sharda, therefore, is not correct. In Kashmir King Pravar Sena had established *Sri Chakra* at *Chakrashwar* in 6th Century AD {See above}.

Sharda Desh and Sharda Peeth. As far as university {Peeth} is concerned if it existed it would have been ideally next or closer to Sharda Temple or any other place closer to seats of power of then reigning Kings. The word 'Peeth' is a Sanskrit word used mostly with religious institutions in the South, meaning 'pontiff's or exalted seat'. There are two major and many smaller Sharada Peetham {Peeth} in South associated with Sankaracharya institutions and they claim to be of BC era, in most cases. Sharda Goddess had manifested in other parts of India also, as presiding deity of learning and fine arts. We must not take it that Goddess Sharda in *Matri Rupen* {In the form of Mother Goddess} manifested in Kashmir due to efforts of 'others' and not our own belief and divinity. Kashmir got the name of Sharda Desh because the degree of worship to various deities in Kashmir was always high, nearly complete, which included Sharda. The people being of Saraswat Aryan origin, traveled far and wide and were recognised as *Acharya's* {Scholars}; all benediction of Sharda. The next reason is the naming of various smaller places in Kashmir by Buddhists during the spread of their religion, for nearly a millenium {300 BC – 600 AD} Kashmir did not get a single appropriate designation though geographical limits had got extended beyond Kashmir valley. *Kashyapsar* connotation had got limited to restricted geographical limits of the valley but

extended limits now met prerequisites of a *Desh*; developed religion {*Dharam*}, language and Script {*Bhasha* and *Lipi*}, reign {*Raja*}, people {*Praja*} and intellectuality {*Budhivita*}. This appellation allowed people from outside to refer it by a single designation, *Desh* and not by small place name like Pravarapura {Srinagar}. These smaller places could not represent Kashmir as a whole. People from South had found another nomenclature for Kashmir; *Kashmir Mandala*; meaning Kashmir State. It may well be argued that why such a peculiar name or dispensation did not come up in South or any other place in India. The reason is demographical, as these places were not purely composed of *Brahmins* but were conglomerates of various other castes, religions; segmented on different religious beliefs and caste line's were stronger to allow a single state to be named after any God or Goddess. Nepal is a predominantly Hindu *Desh* {Presiding deity being *Durga* and her various forms}, Buddhists flourish here but country is not named after the Goddess {Most popular derivation of the name is from *Ne* after an ascetic and *pala* meaning cherished or looked after. The word thus means country looked after by *Ne*}. It was not so in Kashmir as the valley was purely of *Brahmanical* order, after Buddhism waned and before Islam took roots. However, there are places known after *Avtars* like *Brijbhoomi* encompassing areas of Krishna lore, but this was due to a person and not the people. This appellation could have come about when visiting scholars, devotee's of Goddess Sharda, finding high degree of scholarly inclination; attributed it to benevolence of Goddess Sharda in her *Desh*. On their return they started referring to Goddess as Kashmir *Vasini*, area as *Mandala* and even composed a hymn for their morning prayer on getting out of bed. Subsequently *Mandala* shifted to *Desh*; a more Sanskritised word. It is not difficult to guess to the origin, as many scriptures of 12th and 13th Century refer to it as such and most of these were from those who were associated with the institutions of Shankaracharya. The word Sharda Peeth has also been wrongly called as university and till today we just refer to it without having applied its actual meaning or found any historical proof of its location and if a *peeth*; a 'particular single specific seat or institution of learning', ever existed. Some scholars suggest Karnah as its erstwhile location, based on the findings of relics, artifacts and Buddhist statues. This area most of the time, in both the AD millenniums {1st and 2nd} was hardly under effective control of rulers of Kashmir, always taken as at a limb, away from the seat of governance and populace and had no religious or locational advantage for a university. One must also remember that religious or scholarly institutions in Kashmir were established next to temples or *tirath sthans*, as it was a must to pay obeisance to the ruling deity first and then enter the institution. Karnah, therefore, does not hold same position for Sharda temple; being 35 miles away from the temple over a difficult terrain. Kashmir had hundreds of renowned scholars on different facets of our religion, whose works have been well chronicled, institutions under their patronage well chronicled and mostly decentralised. These scholars had selected places closer to their place of worship and their operational field mostly their place of residence or worship; wisely they did not allow such places to proliferate. Scholars and pilgrims from all over India used to visit Kashmir for discussions on religious topics and *Darshana Shastras* (Philosophy), especially during the regime of King Lalitaditya Muktapeeda, Varman's and Jaisimha, but not at a fixed place or venue. With tongue in cheek, I may add; Sages and Scholars had their own domain, intrusions from colleagues were rare, but works discussed, shared or disseminated during their visits to a centralised place or *yatras*, *sangamas* {Seminars}, congregations and festivals.

In a more legendary light the temple of Sharda {Not Sharda Peeth} figures in a story related to scholar Hemachandra (1088-1172 AD) in *Prabhavakacarita*; a scholarly work on the influence of Kashmir's progress in the sphere of religion and literature at that time. Commissioned by King Jayasimha of Gujarat {Now in West Pakistan} to compose a new grammar, he requested to be supplied with necessary material in the shape of older grammar. High officials were reportedly sent to *Pravarapura* to obtain the manuscripts {In Kashmir the King was also Jayasimha (A.D. 1128-1155)}. After arriving there, they proceeded to the temple of Sharda and offered prayers. The manuscripts were delivered to envoys and brought by them to Hemachandra, who, after perusing them, composed his own grammatical work the *Siddhahemachandra*. Let us collate other historical facts pertaining to this account. Shankara Varman (883-902 AD) had conquered neighbouring principalities including Gujrat which was then under the rule of one Alakhan. The language used at that time by the people was *Upbramasha*, which further developed into *Siddha Matrika* {Sharda} and covered a vast region extending from Afghanistan to Delhi, which included Gujrat. During this period three Jaisimha's are being talked about; King Jaisimha (AD 1128-1155) of Kashmir, King Jai Simh connected with both {Kashmir as well as Gujrat} and King Jaisimha of Gujrat. If the extent or limits of the reign of Jaisimha are fixed, it will be found that his domain did extend up to Northeastern portion of then Gujrat Principality. The picture becomes more clear; Hemachandra's work *Siddhahemachandra* is his version of *Upbramasha Lipi* {*Siddha Matrika*}, duly adapted to the requirements of that area and instead of it being called *Siddha Matrika* was named after 'Hemachandra' and thus the name of *Siddhahemachandra*; a local variant. King Jaisimha may have tasked him for this assignment; there seems to be only one at that time and Gujrat had no King being a principality only. He himself being a man of letters, must have pointed out mistakes and referred it to scholars of his kingdom for correction. Obeisance to Goddess of learning, Sharda, for such missions is normal way of life in our religion; when assigned a scholarly mission you start with a place of worship and on return obeisance again at a place of worship, as thanksgiving. Kalhan in *Rajtarangini* refers to Kashmir as the land of 'Aryans' and not *Sharda Desh*. This is in line with the progress of *Sidhamatrika* to Sharda, which took deeper roots after Kalhan.

Panchastavi and Saundarya Lahiri. Stories have created many grey areas about inspiration, authorship and dates of composition of *Panchastavi* and *Saundarya Lahiri* {In this Adi-Shankara addresses *devi* {Sharda} as *Chidananda Lahiri* {Wave of consciousness and bliss} and this has been used as expression in *Saundarya Lahiri*}. Some chronicles and accounts credit Adi-Shankara with the authorship of both, some talk of South Indian origin of both and some of our own Kashmiri Scholars. However, researchers who have analysed Adi-Shankara's works, while acknowledging commentary on *Brahmasutra*, *Bhagavad Gita* and *Upanishads* etc as his major works, term composition attribution of *Saundarya Lahiri* to him as 'doubtful'. The resemblance between *Panchastavi* and *Saundarya Lahiri* is remarkable and is mainly responsible for creating such a dilemma. *Panchastavi*, however, does not resemble *Tattuagrabha-Stotra*, a hymn to Mother Goddess by

Bhatta Pradyamna, a Kashmiri, chief disciple of Bhatta Kallata {During the reign of Shankar Varman 883-902 AD}. An oral tradition prevalent in Kashmir is that *Panchastavi* was composed by Abhinav Gupta {11th Century} on the occasion of his discussions on *Shaktism* with Adi-Shankara. *Vedantist* teacher Sivopadhyaya, an 18th Century author and renowned teacher of Shaivism, refers to the meeting of the two in his *Srividya*, a small work aiming at reconciliation between *Tantric Shaivism* and *Upanishadic Vedanta*. He says that a boy disciple of Abhinav Gupta getting a nod from him, stood up and uttered *Laghustava* as a spontaneous flow of poetry. The account of *Laghustava*, as having been uttered by a boy disciple and composed by some Lagvacharya is imaginary. Nityanada, an ancient commentator of some tantric works, says that *Laghustava* was composed by a poet named *Dharma Acharya* {*Dharma* means Religious, Scholar meaning *Acharya* and could be a 'Religious Scholar' without giving his name}. Vidyaranya {Madhavacharya} in one of his works, *Srividya Vatantra* referring to '*Maya Kundalini*' verse says that this theological doctrine had been indicated by *Dharma Acharya* in *Laghustava*. The author of *Maya Kundalini* was about one hundred years from the time of Adi-Shankara and there is no evidence to prove correctness of any such attribution and further adds to imaginative accounts. Similarly, more imaginative accounts were heard from old Pandit's of Kashmir, few decades ago.

Panchastavi, a collection of five hymns sung in the praise of Mother Goddess; personified absolute Godhead of the Lord and lays stress on the Mother's worship. *Panchastavi* appears to have been composed four centuries before *Bhavani Sahasranama* was revealed. *Panchastavi* and *Saundarya Lahiri* resemble in technique, with similar objective in view; to bring awareness of Mother's eminence. The composer has maintained silence about his name, time or lineage throughout his versified composition. Ganapati Shastri, a noted *vedic* scholar of last century brought out an edition of the first chapter of *Panchastavi* in 1917, naming it as *Laghustuti* with Sanskrit commentary by one Raghvananda, who attributed composition to a poet named as Laghu Bhattaraka. Bhattaraka or Bhatta was used as addendum to the names of learned Brahmins or Kings, while its diminutive *Bhattah* is a generic name for Kashmiri Pandits; thus it means a small {*Laghu*} Bhatta, apparently referring to a boy scholar, which is not borne by facts. It is very well known that Shaivism of the South is predominantly 'Dualistic' in content while Kashmiri Shaivism is 'Monistic' system, which thrived only in Kashmir and both are fundamentally at variance {Readers keen to know more about Monistic and Dualistic systems are advised to read books or articles on the subject}. Even if it is taken that *Panchastavi* is post *Saundarya Lahiri*, it could not have been composed after 1030-1040 AD as *Saraswati Kanthabharana* of King Bhoja, which has references to its verses, was composed between 1030-1040 AD. By this time *Panchastavi* must have attained sufficient fame and credence for being included in *Saraswati Kanthabharana*. Thus composition date band can be narrowed down between 800 and 1050 AD; may be latter half of 9th Century. Culturally Kashmir witnessed great advancement during this century; Kayyatacharya, Somananda, Muktakantha Swamin, Shiva Swamin, Ananda Vardhana and Kallata; great Shiva philosophers and author's, flourished during this period. During 10th Century, which includes reign of Chakravarman (922-933 AD), though conditions were disturbed by political vicissitudes, Pradyumana Bhatta, Utpalacharya, Rama Kantha, Prajn Arjuna, Lachaman Gupta and Mahadeva Bhatta had made enormous contribution to Shaivite thought. Any of these could be composer of this scripture, but then the work must have been completed very early, attained fame in a very short period but why maintain anonymity! The limited time to be accepted for inclusion in *Saraswati Kanthabharana* if composed in 10th Century throws the dice in favour of first option; 9th Century {Ajitpada 813-850 AD, Avanti Varman (855-883 AD, his son Shankara Varman (883-902 AD)}, which gave adequate time for it to pick up accolades. This is not only possible but probable. Its verses have been quoted as examples by Mammata- Acharya in his *Kavyaprakasa* in 12th Century.

Point requiring analysis; is *Panchastavi* work of one or a group of religious scholars {*Dharma Acharya*{s}. Contents of the scripture, which is found in Kashmir alone and recited even today, is based on monistic Shaivism founded and propagated in Kashmir. Thus author of *Panchastavi* could be Kashmiri by birth, who was also well versed with *Sabari* and *Kundalini Yoga* and had been long enough in the valley to be literally one of them. Purely Kashmiri herb like *trupsi* is mentioned in *Panchastavi*; small but possible indication of being a Kashmiri or the one who knew Kashmir like palm of his hand. But there are other indicators pointing towards Southern 'influence':-

- *Panchastavi* resembles *Saundarya Lahiri* in technique, theology and philosophic contents. It, however, conveys importance of *Sabari*, favourite form of the Divine Mother; a Namboodhari {Keralite} tradition of *Tantric Sadhana* and not Kashmiri.
- *Panchastavi* does even mention *Kali*, popularly worshipped in Kashmir especially by Somananda, Abhinav Gupta and Jayaratha, which rules out their authorship.
- *Yoga* system praised in *Panchastavi* is different from systems popular in Kashmir {*Trika Yoga* and *Kaula Yoga*}. The hymns also convey importance of *Kundalini Yoga*, again not popular in Kashmiri tradition but highly popular in Tamilian and Canara {Kannad}{ *Saundarya Lahiri* describes *Kundalini Yoga* as the main mean of unity with the 'Absolute' }.
- Abhinav Gupta and Siddha Natha (alias Sambbhu Natha) have eulogised deities of *Kramanya*, but such deities do not find any place either in *Panchastavi* or in other *stotras* like *Saundarya Lahiri*.
- The only important common element between the *Sadhana* of the *Trika* system and *Panchastavi* is the worship of *Tripura*; common factor of nearly all *Shaiva/Sakta* theology systems and traditions and cannot lead to any specific conclusion.

It is thus clear that *Panchastavi* does not follow Kashmiri tradition of *Sakta* theology but follows the one in South. Imagination has always been a strong element in the character of poetic brain, Madhavacharya alias Vidhyaranya is typical example of such poets. There is no unanimity about the authorship of *Panchastavi*, leading to that the author wanted to remain anonymous. To highlight his intentions to remain anonymous, the last verse of the first canto of *Panchastavi* gives his intentions. There is, however, no doubt in the fact that this *Dharma Acharya* {Religious Scholar} who composed *Panchastavi*, was a master of *Shiva/Sakta* monism, an Hindu/Brahmin to the core hailing from area within four corners of

Kashmir- Dwaraka- Kanyakumari- Kamarup and whole of *Panchastavi* was composed by him alone; but he knew Kashmir very well. May be a Kashmiri who had also imbibed Southern nuances also.

Acknowledgements. This researched article would not have taken shape without reading, consulting and analysis of plethora of books, accounts, scriptures, articles; not only on Kashmir but connected with our religion in India, institutions of Shankaracharya, scholars apart from myths, lores and specifically accounts of Bhawani Kaul and Harjoo Fehrist. Amongst the accounts of chroniclers; *Rajtarangini* {Kalhan, Jonaraja and translation of *Rajtarangini* by Stein; Biographical accounts of Kalhan, Abhinav Gupta {Prof KN Dhar}; Bundles of material on Kashmiri Shaivism {Prof Kokiloo, Dr Kaw, Dr Subash Kak, JN Kaul 'Kamal', KOAUSA Website, Justice Katju, Dinanath Shastri, Prof KN Dhar}; History of Kashmir and Aspects connected with Kashmir {JL Kilam, Prof L N Dhar, PNK Bamzai, His father Pt Anand Kaul Bamzai, Dr Aima, Dr Kaushalya Wali, A D Majboor, Ram Krishna Kaul, Ramesh Kaul, J N Ganahar and M L Pushkar, JL K Jalali, Prof C L Sapru} ; Histories of Shankaracharya's, Mutts and Acharayas {Analysis, History, Sharda Peeth, List of Acharayas and works of Acharaya's , Commentary on various scriptures by Adi-Shankara, Scholarly known or attributed works of Madhavacharya; in fact lot of other connected papers} have been studied. A sitting with Pandit PNK Bamzai and the ICHR Library were equally rewarding to clear some thoughts. **Last but not the least, it is the efforts of our ancestral scholars and their magnanimity to remain anonymous, being givers than seekers, which made me to write, boldly though, on the inferences which got obliterated with our giving credit to every one from outside.**

Epilogue. Our immortal Sanskrit poet Kalidas writes about the valley; 'The place is more beautiful than the heaven and is the benefactor of supreme bliss and happiness. It seems to me that I am taking a bath in the lake of nectar here.' {Incidentally some historians and researchers are of the opinion of his Kashmir heritage}. Reading about Goddess Sharda and understanding is easy but what is not easy are the diverse accounts, attributions and aspects associated with her great name, which have come about in her manifestation at Shardi. Typically many of our ancestor scholars and elders in their keenness allowed other accounts, lores, myths to combine with the factual accounts and thus we find that many such attributions have diluted facts and *Mahima* of Sharda Mata.

- In all probability Sharda temple was constructed somewhere in mid 12th Century, during the reign of Jaisimha by an Aryan Saraswat Brahmin warlord of Kishanganga Valley. Installations of idols and *lingas* seem to have taken place at the time of *Kumbhabhishekam* {Consecration}.
- *Sharda Mahatmaya* was possibly composed between 9th and 13th Century AD, when religious accounts, philosophies, scriptures started taking shape in the valley and outside scholars visited the valley. It looks Madhavacharya composed it in later part of his life {after 1250 AD} after becoming ascetic, referred by the name of Vidhyaranya and not giving his name. Sharda being addressed as *Mahadevi* is an effort of the author to show her in *Shakti* form, to convert Sharda too as Cosmic Divine Mother. This is a later addition and not as per the philosophy of *Shakti* worship.
- Adi-Shankara had already installed *Sri Chakra* in different *tiratha's* before his purported visit to Sharda. *Sri Chakra* being taken from Sharda is not a fact.
- Lord Ram and Lord Krishna's name is associated with many places and landmarks, as devotion and to keep veneration of these *Avtars* alive, while on pilgrimage to Sharda.
- Transition of names of three rivers of Sharda pilgrimage was in stages; to Kishanganga. Madhumati and Saraswati names also came about; not in one go and our own ancestors had a hand in their naming.
- Adi-Shankara's visit to Kashmir and Sharda Temple remains unresolved. 8th and 9th Century's were blessed by Adi – Shankara, by his religious philosophy, *advaita*, and revival of Hinduism. In spite of lack of evidence of his visit we have woven stories out of devotion to his religious philosophy and his stature. Attribution of his authorship of *Panchastavi* is depriving the honours to that anonymous *Dharma Acharaya* {Religious Scholar}, who had imbibed *Tantric Sadhana* of South, but definitely belonged to Kashmir and India. Though there is similarity in technique, theology and philosophic contents of *Panchastavi* and *Saundarya Lahiri*, yet even attribution of the latter to Adi Shankaracharya is contested by researchers.
- Gangabal and Sharda Tirath could never be combined and some of the places mentioned in *Sharda Mahatmaya* were replaced with the ones falling on the route and that is how Gushi came up.
- Goddess Sharda, identified to be Kashmir *Vasini*, gave a well deserved designation for the identification of the valley; *Sharda Desh*. We did not have to go to far off places to trumpet our beliefs; the believers came to learn it from us.
- While we know names of many of our great scholars, many remained unknown, but there are many who came from outside and merged in the flow of intellectuality.
- It is wondered as to why Kalhan has remained silent on one of the important facets of Kashmir; Sharda. There are two reasons for it; first he basically concentrated on the valley portion and the Kings. Secondly his father Champaka was a Kashmiri nobleman, who held the office of *Dwarpal* or commander of the frontier defences during the reign of the ill-fated King Harsha (1089-1101 AD) and he had developed cold feet towards then King and his successor Jaisimha.

{ I have written this article with a view to bring back the facts concerning our Goddess Sharda and her abode at Shardi. All efforts have been made to corroborate the views with authentic data, excerpts from ancient accounts, scriptures and translated versions of chroniclers. I would welcome additional facts duly supported with data, excerpts and any other document or scripture which can give more details. Email your views to kaul_rattan@yahoo.com or kaul_rattan@hotmail.com. May Goddess Sharda's benevolence be with you always and every time ... Brigadier Rattan Kaul }

Brigadier Rattan Kaul



Brigadier Rattan Kaul was born in Srinagar and had his initial schooling there. After Military Training he was commissioned in 5th Royal Gorkha Rifles [Frontier Force] in 1963. Soon, barely twenty, he was deployed on J&K Border. He participated in 65 War and during 1971 War was seriously injured in first ever helicopter borne operations behind enemy lines. In 1974 he was amongst top ten to be selected for Staff College, a year long professional course at Wellington. Apart from foreign assignment with his battalion, he has served in all corners of the country and held prestigious assignments. He commanded his brigade during militancy in Punjab. An HRD, Management, Defence Analyst, he has been Instructor in Army's prestigious teaching institutes and IMS Indore. A renowned Defence Analyst, writer with four books to his credit and plethora of articles on Military History, Defence, Politics, Lighter Anecdotes, Poetry and Astrology. He left Army in 1996 to side step into Industry and served as Vice President Birla's. Soldier to the boot he has been awarded 14 medals for distinguished service and bravery. Also, he was decorated with COAS award for exceptional work in Punjab, where he is also remembered for his pioneer civic action projects in Khem Karan Sector. **For the last few years his articles on way of life in the valley and post migration have a spark of his memoirs and deep concern of our values and heritage. This article is his efforts of last few years to bring home the facts of the most sacred and venerated shrine of Goddess Sharda at Shardi. It is his effort to make this article as spring board to get this temple on the list of world heritage monument, even though it is now in Pakistan Held Kashmir.**