

Vaishno Devi Mandir: The study on History, Religion and Tourism

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Vaishno Devi Mandir is one of the famous mandir of Jammu and Kashmir which is also known as Mata Rani, Trikuta and Vaishnavi which is also a manifestation of the Hindu Goddess Mata Adi Shakti also known as Chandī/Durga. In India, the words "maa" and "mata" are commonly used as "mother" for calling to her and thus in this way, these words are oftenly used in connection with Vaishno Devi. Among the all Hindu temples of India, Vaishno Devi Mandir is also one of them which is dedicated to the Hindu Goddess. It resides within a Holy Cave located in the folds of the three mountain's peaks of Katra at the Trikuta Mountains within the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir. The distance of the Temple or Bhawan is 13.5 km from Katra and at a distance nearly 12km from the base camp at Katra. Different types of modes of transportation make the place for very easy for reaching to the mandir. Four person offers suitable vehicles for this purpose like from Katra to Bhawan, including Ponies, Electric vehicles and paalkhis. This mandir is also connected with the service of helicopters for covering the distance of 9.5 km from Katra up to Sanjichhat. Vaishno Devi Mandir is visited by millions of devotees every year for adorations and to justify their unflinching faith on the popular temple of Hindu Goddess of Trikuta Mountains in Katra, Jammu and Kashmir, India.

In the foothills of the Himalayas, Vaishno Devi mandirs famed within a cave one of the most visited sacred places among devotees who throng the temple from far and wide. It is dedicated to Mother Goddess Vaishno Devi who is one of the oldest of all the temples in India. The temple is positioned at an altitude of 5200 ft and everybody has requirement for carrying out an peregrination of 13 km on foot to make it to this sacred place. The total travel on foot provides glad to the visitor through the natural beauty. What types of spiritual experiences can be gathered, no one believes without the Darshan of the temple beyond the words: so no should not forget to visit this holy place on any vacation in Jammu. Like with most old Shrines of Jammu, there is no any exact starting time table of pilgrimage to this holy place. According to the geological study of the Holy Cave has indicated its age which is to be nearly a millions of years. The evidence of this female temple's worshiping does not carried by Vedic literature gives no reference to the worship of any female deity, although the mountain Trikuta does find its mention in Rigveda, the oldest of the four Vedas. The practice of worshipping Shakti was started largely in the period of Puranic. The Mother Goddess is firstly mentioned in the epic Mahabharat. The chief warrior of Pandavs, Arjuna was advised by Lord Sri Krishna for meditating upon the Mother Goddess and searched the blessings of the goddess for victory when the armies of Pandavs and Kaurvas were portrayed in the battlefield of Kurukshetra. In the mean time, Arjuna introduced as the Mother Goddess

as '*JambookatakChityaishuNityamSannihitalaye*', which means 'you who always dwell in the temple on the slope of the mountain in Jamboo' (probably referring to the present day Jammu. For this reason, it is also commonly believed that the Pandavs were the first people who decided to build the temples at KolKandoli and Bhawan in veneration and thankfulness for the Mother Goddess. At the adjacent place of the Trikuta Mountain and overlooking distance of the Holy Cave, there are present five stone structures on the mountain, which are relied upon to be the rock symbols of the five Pandavs. According to the oldest reference of the visit of a historical figure, there is also present a probable happen about to the Holy Cave of this place that Guru Gobind Singh who is said to have gone there via Purmandal. This well-known pilgrimage centre covered the passages of the old foot track to the Holy Cave. Some traditional trustful stories are present about this Shrine which is to be the holiest of all *Shaktipeeths* (a place where the Mother Goddess, the Eternal Energy has Her abode) since the skull of Mata Sati fell here. Others believe that this is the place where had fallen the right hand of the Devi, *Shaktipeeths*. Though there is a controversy about this matter that some scriptures do not agree with it. According to them, Gandarbalin Kashmir is the place where the right arm of Sati had fallen. However, one does find stone remains of a human hand in the Holy Cave of Shri Mata VaishnoDeviji which is popularly known as *Varad Hast* (the hand that grants boons and blessings).

There are presence lots of major and sacred Hindu temples of India, the temple of Goddess Vaishno Devi is one of them which are consecrated to Parvati or Goddess Shakti, the Divine Consort of Lord Shiva. This beautiful temple of Vaishno Devi was established safely among the picturesque hills of Vaishno Devi, in the state of Jammu and Kashmir in India. Hindus worship Vaishno Devi, which are also generally introduced this Devi as Mata Rani and Vaishnavi, is the very display of the Mother Goddess Shakti. The Mandir of Vaishno Devi is settled close to the town of Katra, in the Reasi district. The temple is one of the most revered places of worship in India. It is located at an altitude of 5300 feet above sea level and covers at a distance of approximately 12 kilometres from Katra. It has been captured as a record of the temple that near about 8 millionsyattris (pilgrims) comes to visit the temple every year, from each and every part of the world. According to the most visited religious shrine of India, Vaishno Devi temple is the second in position which is coming after the Tirumala Venkateswara Temple. A board of the temple with the name as the Sri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Board maintains the total activities of it. Pilgrims can also enter to the temple by rail via Udhampur to Katra. The pilgrims who want travel by flights of Jammu Airport, is the best way to reach the shrine. Based on the legendry, RatnakarSagar was the actual place of birth of the Mata Vaishno Devi which is present in the Southern part of

India. Her parents were childless for several of years and desired to sire a child. After completing the promise of Ratnakarthat he would never ever interfere with whatever his child chose to do later in life if his child would born in their family. Next day, the moment had come in their family as a divine power, a child was born and was named as Devi Trikuta. As she had taken birth from the lineage of Lord Vishnu, So, She was called as Vaishnavi. At the age of 9 years old, Trikuta sought her father's permission for performing suffering on the seashore. Having sat there, Trikuta started to praying to Lord Rama, an avatar of Lord Vishnu. When Lord Rama was passed over along the seashore, in search of Goddess Sita, who had been abducted by Ravana; at that moment, Devi Vaishnavi was of praying to him. After that Rama was present with his whole VanaraSena (Army of Monkeys) to this particular place. On seeing the beautiful girl with the divine glow, deep in prayer and meditation, he drew near her and offered blessing to her. Trikuta made known to Rama that she had already accepted him as her husband. Rama, Having being EkaPatniVrata (vowed to have only one spouse), Rama had determined that he would wed and be faithful only to Sita. However, after the moving by the girl's devotion towards him, the Lord offered her the name Vaishnavi and promised her that during theKaliyuga, he would take an avatar of Kalki and would then marry her. At that very moment, Rama also ordered Trikuta to meditate in a particular cave found in the Trikuta Range of Manik Mountains which is situated in Northern India. A bow and arrows, a small army of monkeys and also a lion were advanced to offer her protection by the lord Rama. After that the Divine Mother had been settled to observe the 'Navratra' and was prayed by her for the victory of Lord Rama against Ravana. For this reason, even today, devotees of The Devi Vaishnavi read the Ramayana during the 9 days of the Navratri festival. Rama also assured her to being a promise about her that the whole world would sing her praises and venerate her as Mata Vaishno Devi. Mata Vaishno Devi accomplished immortality for the blessing of the lord, Rama and now on this holy shrine is attracted by several hundreds of thousands of pilgrims each year. According to legend, at the time of waging terrible wars against and destroying the Asuras or demons causing chaos in the world, the Mother Goddess was contested Herself for the three main manifestations, namely, Maha Kali, Maha Lakshmi and MahaSaraswati united into one single power for pooling in their collective spiritual strength. A bright tejas or aura was originated by this unification and a beautiful young girl emerged from this tejas. Among the all 51 Shaktipeethas of India, this Vaishno Devi shrine was considered to be the holiest and most powerful temple to many schools of thought. These schools of thought believes that the skull of Mata Sati fell in this area. But the other followers believe that her right hand had fallen there, which holded the Abhaya Hasta (the gesture of succour). Here is present a remained human hand which was founded by one person accidentally. This Abhaya Hasta is also introduced as the Varada Hasta for granting protection, blessings and boons of the true devotees of her.

Now a day's Vaishnavi Devi Mandir or temple is become a desirable place for all the pilgrimages of India as well as world to fulfill whatever her children wishes to her. All devotees of any place now may believe as her mother call them for visiting the temple herself. So, it becomes a unique place of Jammu

and Kashmir of India for all the tourists also. The different types of attractions call or grow interest about this Holy to the visitors or the pilgrimages of different areas. The mythological and legendary history of this place, beauties and charming attraction invites the pilgrimages to visit the place.

Inside characteristic of the Holy Cave makes the place visit able or able to make Darshan are in the form of natural rock formations called Pindies. There are no statues, pictures or idols inside the holy cave. All along the track and at the Bhawan, there are many photographs explaining the nature of Darshans inside the Holy Cave. Human beings contain attributes of the three above mentioned Guna (qualities) and their behavior is determined by the Guna which is predominant in their nature. But, in order to lead a meaningful life, a proper balance among these three is necessary. The Holy Cave is charged with predominant energy that helps in creating the vital but rare balance in the pilgrimages of this place. So, for this reason, it makes the Holy Shrine of Mata Vaishno Devi Ji unique in the entire world.

On the other side, the presence of different types of the Holy Bhawan, is the main centre of reverence for the devotees. It becomes also the key location of the attracted place in the entire Yatra circuit. And the adequate arrangements and facilities of these Bhabans have been created by the Shrine Board for the convenience of the devotees for the visitors. All the features of the Holy Vaishnavi Devi Temple like free & rented accommodation; Toilet Blocks; Bhojanalayas; Post Office; Banks; Communication (STD/PCO); Announcement Centres; Blanket Stores; Cloak Rooms; Medical Dispensary (with a ICU); General Stores; Bhaint Shops; Police Station, etc. make the place unique for its own importance. So, it now becomes desirable place for the person one who wants to visit the Holy Vaishnavi Devi temple of Jammu and Kashmir in India.



Plate:1 The picture of the Holy rock of the Vaishnavi Devi temple which carries the signs of legendary and mythological history of India.



Plate:2 The beautiful image of the Holy Pindi of Mata Maha Kali (the Supreme Energy of Dissolution) in the colour associated with Her i.e. black which provides the devotees the Supreme Energy of dissolution.



Plate:5 The beautiful red cloured picture of different types laces which are tied on the Holy tree of the temple as part of the adoration of the pilgrimage.



Plate:3 The beautiful picture of upstairs shining road of the Holy Shrine of Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Ji which is considered to be one of the holiest pilgrimages of our times and is located in the folds of the three peaked mountain named Trikuta (pronounced as Trikoot).

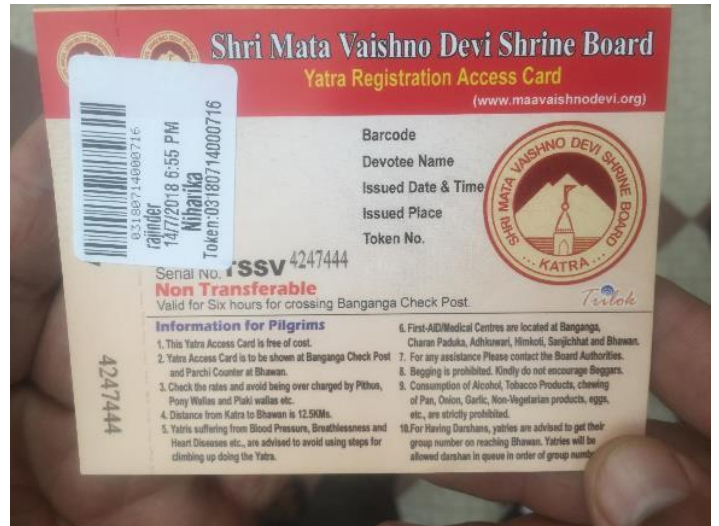


Plate:6 The picture of the permission ticket of the Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Board for visiting the holy place with proper registration.

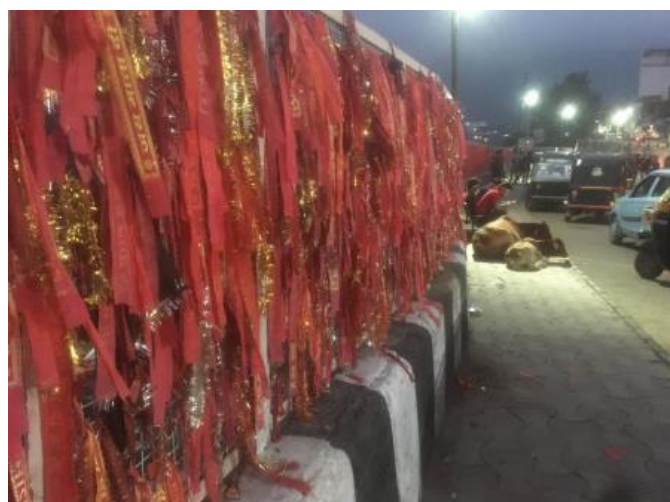


Plate:4 The beautiful red cloured picture of different types laces which are tied on the railings of the Holy temple as part of the adoration of the pilgrimages.



Plate:7 The picture of the street market of the adjacent road of Vaishno Devi Temple with the pictures of some buses.



Plate:8 The picture of a small trader who is dealing the watery juice with the leaves and ices and cold drinks.



Plate:9 The beautiful picture of the street of the road which leads to the Holy temple of Vaishnavo Devi.



Plate:10 The image of a horse rider who is riding on a horse for travelling to the temple of Vaishnavo Devi temple.



Plate:11 The attractive picture of a cart rider who is travelling on it along with the road for reaching to the Holy temple of Vaishnavo Devi.



Plate:12 The circulated passage of the temple Vaishnavo Devi for going and coming along the road which is covered with proper shade and lighted with proper shining of lamps.



Plate:13 The nice picture of the outer part of the temple within a inside of the temple Vaishnavo Devi which is white in colour and different types of attractive designs.

References

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