

An Overview on Tirthas of Kashmir in Kalhana Rajatarangini

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Abstract

The valley of Kashmir from ancient times has been considered to be the holiest of the holy lands. The valley of Kashmir came to be known as Reshi-Bhumi or land of the Sages or in Kashmir, "Pir Wari." These are sacred shrines associated with the name of sacred gods or saints. Even before the dawn of the civilisation Rishi Kashyap whose sons when went Kashmir to settle and brought traditions, religious, mythology etc with them. These early settlers named the confluence of Ganga and Yamuna in India. They named the tallest mountain peaks here after the Gods and deities such as Brahma, Vishnu and Mahadeva. These Tirthas are very rich as far as different aspects of religion are concerned. All these are the source of attraction and inspiration for people. In this paper an attempt is made to know about various Tirthas, their location, their sanctity, beliefs and faiths associated with them.

Keywords: Deities, pilgrimage, sacred, devotees, decorated

Article Publication

Published Online: 15-Sep-2021

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doi [10.31305/rrijm.2021.v06.i09.024](https://doi.org/10.31305/rrijm.2021.v06.i09.024)

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Introduction:

The word *Tirtha* means transverse, steps to a river of pilgrimage. All holy sites and items considered holy where there is reference of *Tirtha*. Geography is significant as it helps in identifying a *Tirtha* and it is characteristic of *Tirtha*. Holy sages, Yogis and Rsis spent their time in this Tirthas as deities too will be also associated. *Tirthas* are located on river banks, mountain tops or in remote places, unreachable places.

As far as *Rajatarangini* he emphasizes the fact about *Tirthas* when he speaks in introductory passage that Kashmir as a state where there is not an area as large as a grain of Sesamum without *Tirtha*. There is hardly a village which has not its revered spring.ⁱ

Kalhana frequent reference to sacred springs and other *Tithas* are of Topographical interest. As they enable us to trace with certainty the early history of most of the popular pilgrimage places still visited to the present day.ⁱⁱHere is the overview of *Tirthas* described in Kalhana *Rajatarangini* which are twenty-one in number.

The Tirtha of Sarada: The name Sardi now the name of the small village and fort near which the shrine of Sarda stands. It is derived from the name of the deity to whom place was sacred. It is situated above the right bank of Madhumati. It is the place where the waters of Madhumati and the Kisanganga amalgamate. There is a little beach where the pilgrims carry out their Sraddhas.ⁱⁱⁱ The Sharda pitha was recognised as one of the most prominent seats of learning in our country. Thousands of students from all parts of the world used to throng this great centre of learning^{iv}. Alberuni has heard of it and a story recorded in a Jain life of the great grammarian Hemchandra proves that its popularity had spread to far off Gujarat.^v

The Tirtha of Jyestharudra at Srinagar: The shrine is ascribed to Jalauka. The name of Siva Jyestha is born by the Linga which is found by the side of Jyestha naga. The account related to the sanctity of the site by a legend how Shiva liberated here Jyestha, i.e Parvati from the Daityas and on marrying took the name of Jyestha. The name of the neighbouring village, Jyesther is rendered in the mahatma by Jyestheraka.^{vi}

Naubandhana Tirtha: Towards westward from Banihal there lies three snowy peaks reaching above fifteen thousand feet. The westernmost and these peaks (15,523 feet) form the eminent Naubandhana *tirtha*. According to the legend associated in the Nilmata and other texts Vishnu in his fish Avatara bound to this peak the ship (*nau*) into Durga had transformed herself to save the seeds from being ruined. To the north-west at the foot of this peak, there is a mountain lake over two miles long, known as Kongsr Nag. It is thought to mark a footstep (*karma*) of Vishnu and is the appropriate object of the Naubandhana pilgrimage^{vii}.

Tirthas of Nandiksetra: The Lake which lies at the foot of north-eastern glacier at a level of over thirteen thousand feet is looked upon as the true source of the Ganga or Sind river. It is looked upon as the true source of Kashmir Ganga or Sindh river and is known as Uttraganga or popularly Gangbal. It is final goal of Haramuktaganga pilgrimage which takes place annually in the month of Bhadrapada and is attended by thousands of pilgrims. The bones of those who have died during the year are on that occasion deposited in sacred water.^{viii}

Tirtha of Bhutesvara: In the valley of the Kanknai stream there lays the sacred site of Shiva Bhutesvara, now Buthser. It is closely connected with the mythology of mt. Haramukta. A series of interesting temple ruins marks the importance of this *tirtha* and that of the Jyesthesvara shrine which immediately adjoins it. Bhutesvara is passed by pilgrims on their way back. They reach the latter by a new route passed by a high ridge is known as Bhararagiri and the smaller lake of Brahmasaras.^{ix}

Tirtha of Amaresvara: At its northern end and close to the great snowy peak. Together with the sacred Ganga lake on Mount Haramukta. This *Tirtha* attracts many thousands of pilgrims, not only from Kashmir but from all parts of India in the month of Sravana. The cave is situated at a considerable altitude and is formed by a huge fissure on the South side of a snowy peak seventeen thousand three hundred feet high. In this cave there is a big block of transparent ice created by the freezing of the water. Jonaraja gives information how this site is visited by Sultan Zain-ul- Abidin.^x

The Tirtha at hill of Sarika: It has been worshipped since ancient times on the northwest side of the hill. Certain natural markings on a large perpendicular rock are taken by the pious as representing that kind of mystical diagram which in *tantrasastra* is known as *Sricakra*. This *Svayambhu* is still much frequented pilgrimage place for the people. The Sarika *mahamatya* now in use relates that the hill was carried to its present position by Durga, who had been taken the shape of Sarika bird and who use it to close a gate of hell.^{xi}

Tirtha of Jyesthesvara: It derived its name from Jyesthesvara lies in a small distance from the east shore of Gagri Bal portion of the Dal. Fragments of several lingas are found in the surrounding area of Jyether and show with some other ancient remains now built into the Ziarats of Jyether and Gupkar that the site considered sacred from early time.^{xii}

Tirtha of Suresvari: It lies about two miles further north on the Dal shore and a little beyond the Mughal garden of Nishat. It was sacred to Durga Suresvari who is still worshipped on a high ridge rising from the mountain range to the east of Isbar village. The seat of the goddess is on irregular rock, some three thousand feet above the village.^{xiii}

Tirtha of Tripuresvara: It is about three miles from Dal, the village of Triphar. It is mentioned as a site of a great sanctity by Kalhana. A little stream known as the Tripuraganga near Triphar is however still visited by the devotees of Mahadeva.^{xiv}

Tirtha of Sodara: It lies in the east of Antbhavan, about a mile to the larger village of Sudarbal. It is situated on a deep Inlet of the Dal known as Saudar Khun. Kalhana represented this spring as an Avatara of the Sodara naga worshipped originally near the sacred site of Bhutesvara below mound Haramukta.^{xv}

Tirtha of Vijayesvara: It is situated less than two miles above Cakradhara receive its name from the ancient shrine of Shiva Vijayesvara. According to Kalhana's account Ashoka had replaced the old stuccoed compound of the temple by one of stone. He was also credited with having erected two temples called Ashokesvara. The site has evidently from early times been one of the most important *Tirthas* of Kashmir.^{xvi}

Tirtha of Martanda: The temple of Martand is located at five miles from the town of Anantnag. It is being on the top of high plateau where feet stretch the broad grass enclosed plains of Kashmir criss-cross by a system of rivers, lakes and canals, thickly spotted with worshippers of busy villages nestling like beehive in closely planted orchard of trees, and surrounded by snow- clad mountains embankment.^{xvii} The temple was built by Lalitaditya Muktapida the eighth century A.D. It consists of a courtyard with the main shrine in the middle and colonnaded peristyle around. The peristyle consists of eighty-four columns. The entrance in the middle of western side of the quadrangle faces in the sanctum. The walls are abundantly decorated with pedimented niches. The main shrine has three different chambers and some of its walls are engraved with images. There are also supplementary shrines in the courtyard. A beautiful garden has been developed.^{xviii}

Tirtha of Kopatesvara: The village of Kother is located two miles above Achhabal, a little of the Achhabal-Kishtwar road. The name is derived from Kapatesvara, a designation of Shiva to whom Spring here is sanctified. The place has for many centuries past enjoyed a great status for sanctity. King Bhoja of Malwa who was a contemporary of King Ananta (1028-1063) of a Kashmir. King Bhoja vowed that he would always clean his face in the water from the Papapsudana *tirtha*.^{xix}

Tirtha of Kapalamocana: It is situated above one and a half miles to the west of Shopia. The sacred spring is supposed to mark the spot where Shiva cleaned himself from the sin attaching to him after cutting of Brahma's head (Kapala).^{xx}

Tirtha of Bheda: The hill of Beda consecrate by the Gangodbheda spring. There the goddess Saraswati was believed to have shown herself as a swan in the lake. From the side of hillock issues a spring which is natural out flow of the tank. The water of the spring which fills the tank is said to keep warm in the winter. This accounts evidently for the snow never lies in the ground around the sacred tank.^{xxi}

Tirtha of Svambhu: Kalhana describe it in its introductory notes. It lies on a low ridge about a mile south-west of the village of Nichhom and about one and a half miles north of Tsakvadar. In definite years stream has been recognized to issue from the fissures. The ground then becomes adequately hot to boil the *Sraddha* offerings of the pilgrims.^{xxii}

Tirtha of Tulamulya: The big spring of Tulamulya is revered to maharajni, a form of Durga and is still considered in great reverence by the Brahman inhabitants of Srinagar. It is supposed to evident from time to time miraculous changes in the colour of its water which are attributed to the appearance of the goddess.^{xxiii}

Tirtha of Ciramocana: It lies in four miles above Mangam. This confluence is now visited by the pilgrims proceeding to the Haramukta. King Jalauka, the son of Ashoka who was worshipper of Shiva Bhutesa and of Nandisa ended his life here.^{xxiv}

Tirtha of Bhutesvara: It is place where sacred sites Bhutevara and Jyesthrudra marked by the ruined temples at the present Buthser high up in the Kanknai valley. They are closely connected with the Tirthas of Nandikshetra. The village of Vangath which is the highest permanently inhabited place lies about two miles below Bthser. It is named Vasisthasrama in the *mahamatyas* and is believed to mark the residence of Rsi Vasistha.^{xxv}

In these *Tirthas* the various temples, monasteries stupas built by various kings and their courtiers who believed in different religions. Tribal gods given a chance to flourish along with main religious cults such as Brahmanism, Buddhism, Shaivism and Vaishnavism flourished here along with the major religions such as *naga* cult etc. The concept of figurative gods played an important role. The average believer was given the freedom to select the god.

References

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- ⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.369
- ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p. 282
- ^{iv} S.P Srivasta, *The Survival of the Cultural Heritage of Kashmir* in Daily Excelsior, 2013.
- ^v Stein M.A, *Op.cit*, p.480.
- ^{vi} *Ibid*,p.289
- ^{vii} *Ibid*, p. 393
- ^{viii} *Ibid*, p. 407
- ^{ix} *Ibid*, p. 408.
- ^x *Ibid*, p.409.
- ^{xi} *Ibid*, p.446
- ^{xii} *Ibid*, p.453
- ^{xiii} *Ibid*, p.455
- ^{xiv} *Ibid*.
- ^{xv} *Ibid*, p. 457.
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- ^{xix} *Ibid*, p. 139.
- ^{xx} Stein, M.A, *Op.cit*,p.473
- ^{xxi} *Ibid*, p.473
- ^{xxii} *Ibid*, p. 484.
- ^{xxiii} *Ibid*, p. 469
- ^{xxiv} *Ibid*, p.489
- ^{xxv} *Ibid*.