

Religious, Social and Economic Significance of Dargah Hazratbal in Srinagar, Kashmir: A Field Study

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Abstract

We come across in text, a number of terms such as National, World, Cultural, Historical, Food heritage, Heritage studies, Heritage science etc. Heritage buildings of a nation represents its past and culture. In Kashmir, Srinagar city with more than 1200 years of urban history is famous for its rich cultural. In this paper, we discuss famous hazratbal mosque also known as Dargah Sharif which is having intriguing history, its religious, social and economic Significance. It is one of the holiest Shrine of Muslims in Kashmir valley, located around 8 km from the Srinagar city centre, on the bank of famous Dal Lake, Srinagar in Jammu and Kashmir region.

In this paper on the basis of available information and field surveys, we discuss religious, social, economic significance of Dargah Hazratbal and conservation issues.

Keywords: Hazratbal; Srinagar; Kashmir; Heritage; Culture; Survey.

Introduction

The name "Kashmir" means "desiccated land" (from the Sanskrit: ka = water and shimīra = desiccate) as per to folk etymology. In mid-12th century famous history of Kashmir, Rajatarangini, written by

Kalhana, Kashmir valley was in earlier times a lake. In the Rajatarangini, a history of Kashmir written by Kalhana in the mid-12th century, it is stated that the valley of Kashmir widely known as the heaven on earth was formerly a lake (Kashmir information, 2018).

Kashmir from earliest period was a seat of learning and even today it offers a rich field of study for a Botanist and Zoologist, Geologist and Geographer, Archaeologist and a historian and the like. In Kashmir, Nagas around 2000 B.C. were the first known inhabitants, Khasas, Dars, Bhuttas, Damars, Nishadas etc appeared afterwards. Gonanda was the first known King of Kashmir and the more famous rulers of Kashmir were Ashoka (273-232 B.C.), Kushan dynasty (around 100 C.E.), Mihirkula (515-550 C.E.), Karkota dynasty (631 C.E.), Lalitaditya (724-761 C.E.), Avantivarman (855-883 C.E.), Uptala (upto 939 C.E.), Vyasaskaradeva (939-949 C.E.), Parva Gupta (949 C.E.), Ksema Gupta (950-958 C.E.), Didda (958-1003 C.E.), Samgramaraja (1003-1028 C.E.), Ananta (1028-1063), Kalsa (1063-1089 C.E.), Harsa (1089-1101 C.E.), Uccale (1101-

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1111 C.E.), Jaya Simha (1128-1155 C.E.), Bopadeva (1171-1286), Damra dynasty (1286-1320 C.E.), Rinchana (1320-1323 C.E.), Shah Mir (1339-1342 C.E.), Sultan Shihab-ud-Din (1354-1373 C.E.), Sultan Qutub-ud-Din (1373-1389 C.E.), Sultan Sikander (1389-1413 C.E.), Sultan Zain-ul-Abidin (1420-1470 C.E.) popularly known as Budshah, Mirza Haider Daughlat (1541-1551 C.E.), Chak dynasty (1561-1586 C.E.), Mughals rule (1586-1753 C.E.), Afgan's rule (1753-1819 C.E.), Sikhs rule (1819-1846 C.E.), Dogras rule (1846-1947 C.E.). It is a matter of pride that Kashmir has written history thousand years earlier than many modern developed countries. Kashmir also famous for cultural heritage is the treasure house for archaeologists, historians, researchers surrounded by snow-clad mountains and ever green forests on all sides. Kashmir valley as reported was previously a lake worn out by the great Rishi Kashyapa, son of Marichi, son of Brahma in Baramulla by cutting the gap in the hills. The language spoken by People of Kashmir valley is Kashmiri (Koshur). The carpet, shawl weaving, paper machie, music like Wanvun, Rouf and Koshur Sufiaana forms a very important part of Kashmiri identity. The culture of Kashmir valley sprang from Aryans and was influenced during the course of history by Jews, Greeks, Chines, Turks,

Muslims, and what not. The valley of Kashmir possess a wide range of varied architectural monuments that reveal important historical facts about different time periods, religions and rulers spread over different centuries. Srinagar is the largest city of Kashmir valley with population more than 10 lakhs. The name Siri-nagar (or Sri-nagara) is mentioned in earlier records, a local transformation of the Sanskrit name Sūrya nagar, meaning "City of the Sun". In records of Chinese Tang Dynasty name Srinagar is also mentioned which lies on the banks of the Jhelum River, a tributary of the Indus, Dal and Anchar lakes, well known for beauty and urban history more than 1200 years. Heritage Conservation Committee (HCC), Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), State Archaeological Department, Srinagar Development Authority (SDA), Govt. of NCT of Delhi, Trust and Wakf Boards are agencies of conservation of heritages places/buildings. In view of the literature (The Calcutta Review, 1872; Muhibul Hassan, 1959; Koul, 1971; Khan, 1978; Kak, 2002; UNESCO, 2006; Alkazi, 2014 Khan, 2017 etc), we conducted this field study with the main purpose to examine the current status of Dargah Hazratbal in of Srinagar and discuss its social, political, economic and religious significance.



METHODOLOGY

In this study, field survey was conducted during 2021-22, frequent visits were made at the study historical place Hazratbal Srinagar of Kashmir valley. Photographs were taken and were compared to the earlier photographs that were available on different websites and in the literature. Personal interactions were made with the caretakers, employees, elders and people surrounding the area. The people living around the shrine were contacted during the present study to know about the role of this religious heritage place as it plays religious, social and economic role in the lives of

Kashmiri people. The observations were recorded and reported in this study on the basis of literature available¹⁻¹⁴ and field survey.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The field visit revealed that the most of the historical places in Srinagar are in depilated conditions and little care is being taken to save them. It was noticed that few historical places have not been renovated over the years because of political problems. The lack of manpower is witnessed the main issue for maintaining our historical places in Srinagar. The main historical places in Srinagar, their history and

present status are discussed in literature. Here, we discuss significance of Dargah Hazratbal Srinagar.

DARGAH HAZRATBAL

The Hazratbal Mosque in Srinagar is an important religious Islamic shrine of Kashmir, located in Hazratbal locality on the banks of the famous Dal Lake of Srinagar. It is the most peaceful and holy place of Kashmir which holds very high reputation by all Muslims of the valley.

The daughter of Khwaja Nur-ud-Din, a rich Kashmiri businessman, Inayat Begum established Hazratbal mosque, once she became the custodian of the holy relic to be preserved in Hazratbal shrine. It is an exciting story of how the holy relic was handed down to Inayat Begum. The Mughal empire in India was expanding in 1935, a descendant of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), Syed Abdullah Madani, left Medina and moved to India,



on important Islamic days.

Today's location of the Hazratbal Shrine, was initially the site of Ishrat Mahal (Pleasure House) and a garden built in 1623 by a Mughal Subedar, named Sadiq Khan. Mughal ruler Shah Jahan in 1634 visited the place, he ordered to convert it into a prayer hall. There was a case of theft of the relic from Hazratbal Shrine in December 1963, resulting in several protests across J&K and communal riots in West Bengal as well as in East Pakistan. It was reported that around 200,000 refugees entered India. Prime Minister of India, Pt Jawaharlal Nehru, the Prime Minister of India sent a CBI team to Jammu and Kashmir to examine the matter, and in January 1964 the holy relic was recovered. It took a month to restore peace which happened when great spiritual personality of that time Syed Meerak Shah Kashani verified its authenticity again, initially verified by caretakers. The picture of mosque that now comes to mind is of a hard marble dome, a minaret on the banks of Dal, initially it wasn't always like that.

Bijapur. It is said that at that time, he first brought the relic to Kashmir valley and when he left this world, the holy relic came to his son Syed Hameed who felt incapable to preserve the relic due to the Mughal conquests in the region and therefore transferred it to Khwaja Nur-ud-Din Eshai. Mughal emperor Aurangzeb on hearing about holy relic, seized it and shifted it to the holy shrine of Mu'in al-Din Chishti, Ajmer, prisoned Khwaja Nur-ud-Din Eshai. Aurangzeb after 9 days had a dream in which Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) directed him to take the relic to Kashmir valley, he returned relic to Eshai but Eshai had died in prison and by 1700, body of Eshai and the holy relic were brought to Kashmir valley. The Moi-e-Muqaddas was given to Inayat Begum, Eshai's daughter, who as custodian established Hazratbal Shrine. The male successors of Inayat Begum, Banday family from that time are taking care of the holy relic at the Hazratbal Shrine. The holy relic is put up for display to general public



The author recalls stories heard from parents and grandparents about Hazratbal. They were telling that their parents used to say that this place was respected by animals also as they used to sit in circles around the present Hazratbal mosque and people used to visit this place by bare foot as a mark of respect. People in those days would visit Dargah traveling in groups (tooliyan) to have the glimpse of the Moi-e-Muqaddas of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). The desire to take part in Milad celebrations was so strong among children that we hardly miss the religious occasion as revealed by parents and grandparents to author. Here are photographs of the old Hazratbal in around 1917 that authors came across in a wonderful book titled 'Cashmere: three weeks in a houseboat' (1920) by Ambrose Petcock. The present Hazratbal shrine is architecturally matchless and is one of the most visited places in Srinagar which took almost 11 years for its complete construction. The current structure of the Dargah Hazratbal shrine



Hazrat Bal The Mosque

was constructed between 1968 and 1979 under the supervision of J & K Muslim Auqaf Trust's Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah. Besides being the most revered shrine in Kashmir, Hazratbal was used by the National Conference for political gains also. The architectural style of the Hazratbal Masjid can be described as Islamic. It is built in white marble and has a large white dome and tall minarets on the



Hazrat Bal arriving for fete

sides. The site is also used as a mosque to conduct prayers that are attended by thousands of Muslims. Its dome and minaret have an influence of Mughal architecture, while the shrine is influenced by the Kashmiri architecture. It is the only domed mosque in Srinagar. The Hazratbal shrine provides stunning views of the Dal Lake and the surrounding mountains. The beautiful Nishat Mughal is located



at its entrance. This mosque in Srinagar is famed for its architectural beauty and mysterious history. Most importantly the shrine houses an important relic Moi-e-Muqaddas sacred hair of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

Dargah Hazratbal at present besides religious place is also a good business centre as thousands of people offer Friday prayer here throughout the

year. The most Holy Hair is displayed to the public only on special occasions. The shrine receives a trickle of people round the year for religious performance, picnic of students, ritual of Zar Kasai or Mundan (the first hair cut of the new born child, as performing this ritual in this shrine is considered many people sacred), economic activities and social gathering.



In the year 1948, University of Jammu and Kashmir was founded in Hazratbal area and in the year 1969 it was bifurcated into two full-fledged Universities: University of Kashmir at Srinagar and University of Jammu at Jammu. In Kashmir, University of Kashmir is situated at Hazratbal area in Srinagar. Rajagopalachari (the Governor General of India) and Karan Singh (the Yuvraj at the time) are the founder of University of Jammu and Kashmir. The main campus of the Kashmir university is divided into three parts; Hazratbal

Campus, Naseem Bagh Campus, and Mirza Bagh Campus. The University of Kashmir is well known in country for its quality research and teaching. It offers undergraduate, postgraduate and doctoral programs in various fields such as education, law, commerce & management studies, liberal arts, business, commerce & management studies, applied sciences & Technology, biological sciences, physical & material sciences, social sciences, medicine, dentistry, engineering, oriental learning, and music & fine arts





The famous University of Kashmir, Kashmir University which is at present among 100 top universities in NIRF ranking is in Dargah locality. This University was established in the year 1948 which was the first state university located at Srinagar of Jammu and Kashmir. The University of Kashmir is accredited by National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) with grade A and is approved by University Grants Commission (UGC). It provides the students with courses in fields of Social Sciences, Physical and Material Sciences, Biological Sciences, Applied Sciences and Technology, Law, Education, Business and Management Studies and Arts, Music and Fine Arts, Oriental Learning, Engineering, Dentistry and Medicine. The university has basic facilities like classrooms, e-classroom, auditorium, cafeteria, medical, gym, sports, computer labs, hostel, laboratory and library within the campus. The University of Kashmir has a beautiful campus and it provides scholarship opportunities to the students based on research, merit and students aid in order to help them excel in academics. The Companies like ICICI Bank, Airtel, HDFC Bank, Prudential Life etc. are top recruiters.

Leach therapy an old tradition practiced in Dargah

The hirudotherapy or Medicinal leech therapy (MLT) is a type of complementary and integrative

treatment technique applied with blood - sucking leeches. In this method one or more leeches are attached to the skin of problematic area and the idea is to gain potential utilities of leech saliva that is secreted while the leeches are feeding.

Leeches produce an anticoagulant and literally suck blood from the surface of skin, they are frequently used to revive delicate veins and improve blood flow following a tissue reattachment method. In Kashmir Leech therapy is an old tradition that has been practiced and this practice remains widespread in many other parts of the world such as Iran, Ancient Egypt, India, the Arabian Peninsula, and Greece, among others. In Kashmir, it is practiced since long and usually done on the particular day of Nowruz, which marks the beginning of the new year on the Persian calendar. It is observed that apart from treating people on Nowruz, the practitioners gather every Friday in Dargah and practice this age old therapy. Kashmiris believe that the significance of taking leech therapy heals all skin ailments such as skin diseases, dental problems, nervous system issues, inflammation, and chilblains. It has become a routine for every Friday when the Hakeem/practitioners converge at Dargah to practice leech therapy for their livelihood. When placed on certain parts of the body, leeches begin their work by sucking the impure blood from a patient's body. They have three jaws with tiny rows of teeth with which they pierce a person's skin, inserting or injecting anticoagulants through



their saliva. Generally, two to three leeches are placed on a single patient and after placing the leeches on patients, they take out the blood from the leech after use. Generally leeches have a two to three day life span after use, some even die after sucking the impure blood from the patient reported by practitioners. The leeches are imported from different places e.g., Uttar Pradesh and even from Pakistan. A single leech costs Rs. 50, and we charge 60 to 70 rupees from each patient, one practitioner told. The Hajamclan of people mostly practice this form of therapy and there are almost 15 to 16 such families in the Taibal locality, 12 kilometers from Srinagar, Kashmir. Bone

Therapy of Hazratbal Hakeems

The valley's traditional therapists adept at fixing bones are considered alternate healers for the distressed community. It was noticed that the therapist starts rubbing the patients damaged

portion in an effort to fix his dislocated bone and after putting some white tape around his shoulder, he bids adieu to the patient with a big smile. The relieved patient pays some amount to the therapist with gratitude. The therapist told many patients are afraid to visit hospitals so they approach us and we are trying our best to give them right treatment, rest Allah is the real healer. Every Friday these Hakeems/street therapist, called 'Baieng' in Kashmiri, eagerly arrives on Friday to the old Hazratbal market and treat patients. The therapists during discussion told that since generations they are involved in this profession and some of us may not be educated, but our new generation is well-educated who handle every ailment with a great care and caution. Majority of therapists now don't treat the patient without seeing his/her X-ray first and based on X-ray it is decided patients need plaster or not.



CONCLUSION

The historical places are the correct representation of the historical monuments as these places have preserved the art and architecture over the years. The historical buildings of Srinagar exhibits a generous array of amazing constructional wonders. The Heritage places of Srinagar have social, political, religious as well as economic importance to the community for various reasons like historic, aesthetic, spiritual or social qualities, or a mixture of these traits. The religious places of Srinagar indicates Kashmir's ancient history. The conservation cannot be the sole concern of government agencies, but coordinated effort of

local authorities, Archaeological and Heritage Commissioners Officers, ASI, Town Planning agencies, architects, related professionals, NGOs and citizens of area. The encroachments near the Heritage buildings need to be cleared and proper alternative provided to the desired people. The livelihood of thousands depend on Hazratbal Shrine as it is a well known business centre besides religious place in Srinagar. It is concluded that the main purpose of writing this paper was to create interest among masses to preserve our ancient monuments not only for their religious, economic and social importance but also for their historical importance as we can proclaim with the beat of drum that our past was great and illuminating.

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