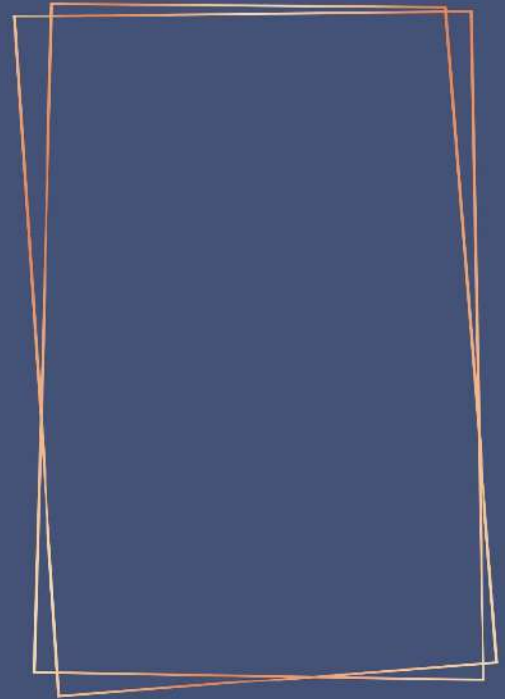


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Bharat Singh (JKAS)

Editor
Dr Abid Ahmad



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Mailing address

Editor English
J&K Academy of Art, Culture and Languages,
Lalmandi 8, Srinagar

Typesetting & Designing:

Shah Anwar

CONTENTS

EDITORIAL	IV
1 COMMUNITY-CONSERVED SACRED TREES AND TREE GROVES AS NATURAL HERITAGE IN J&K Om Prakash Sharma Vidyarthi	6
2 <i>MARAK</i> OR <i>AZA KHAN'E</i> IN KASHMIR: A study in art and architecture Dr Rizvi Syed Iliyas	67
2 KASHMIRI MYSTIC POETRY: A study of Shamas Faqir and Wahab Khar Dr Saltanat Farooq	76

Editorial

Kashmir has a rich and vibrant spiritual and cultural tradition popularly known as Kashmiryat, recognised for its syncretic cultural ethos, inclusivist social vision and a worldview based on peace, social harmony and the celebration of varieties of religious and cultural experiences.

This vibrant legacy of Kashmiryat is based on multiple religious and cultural sources. All religious, spiritual and cultural traditions found in Kashmir's past and present have had a profound influence on the development of the tradition of Kashmiriyat.

Kashmir is an ancient culture. The *Nilamata Purana* is the earliest source of information about Kashmir and its creation myths. Besides Sanskrit, other earliest references to the valley of Kashmir are found in the Greek and Chinese classics, followed by some sources in Arabic language.

Excavations at Burzhoma indicate that the earliest inhabitants of Kashmir were cave

dwellers or pit dwellers. The earliest residents of Kashmir are said to have been the Nagas, Pishachas, the Sakas, the Yavanas, etc. It is said about them that they were the sun and the serpent worshippers. During the reigns of Kushana kings, the people of Kashmir adopted Buddhism as their religion. It was during their rule that the fourth Buddhist Council took place here whose decisions were engraved on copper plates and buried at an unknown location in Kashmir. The location of that cultural

treasure trove is still to be identified. The valley became the centre of Mahayana Buddhism.

In the seventh century AD, Buddhism was superseded by Hinduism as the dominant religion of the people of Kashmir. It was during this period that Kashmir developed a humanistic philosophy of its own known as Kashmir Saivism. This philosophy affirmed the spirit of physical existence, though transitory in nature. It believed in saying yes to life in totality.

Besides literature, art, aesthetics and other aspects of culture, this period was characterized by excellence in architecture represented by the remains at Awantipura, Martand, Tapar, Mattan, and Parihaspora. Huge temples of majesty and beauty carved out of stones stand testimony to the artistic excellence of that epoch. Kashmiris also made a huge contribution to the Sanskrit scholarship in this period. Be it grammar, aesthetics, poetics, philosophy and spiritualism, Kashmiri scholars made substantial contribution to these fields of learning.

Such a long historical journey and philosophical legacy had given birth to a unique tradition of mysticism in Kashmir that was based on Buddhist and Hindu religious conventions. This mystic tradition was indigenous and was inspired by local spiritual and cultural sources.

(Dr Abid Ahmad)

COMMUNITY-CONSERVED SACRED TREES AND TREE GROVES AS NATURAL HERITAGE IN J&K

Om Prakash Sharma Vidyarthi

The tree is a symbol of life, religious sanctity and biological diversity. It nurtures cultural traditions in addition to binding the soil and retaining water in its roots. It hosts feasts and nesting activities of colourful birds and insects in the web of its branches, crevices and twigs. The oldest tree living on the planet is the Ginkgo biloba of China. It is the oldest living tree species, with an antiquity of more than 270 million years, thus rightly called a 'living fossil'. Buddhists contributed to its conservation by way of religiously planting it around their monasteries. As many as six Ginkgo trees – survivors of the atomic holocaust of Hiroshima – still flourish in good health as 'heritage trees' in Japan. In our own Valley, the Heritage Ginkgo biloba tree was planted centuries ago at Lal Mandi, Srinagar, much before its introduction at the Emporium Garden and the Shalimar Garden in Srinagar. Vedic culture nurtured tree reverence. Night Jasmine, known in Sanskrit as 'Parijat', (Harshingar in common parlance), is said to be one of the boons that emerged from the Samudra Manthan. Its fragrance and beauty so allured Indra, the lord of the Devtas, that he took it with him to the Swarga-loka. Narad Muni, the ever-travelling sage, brought a single flower of the plant to the Earth and presented it to Krishna in His palace at

Dwarka. Krishna offered the heavenly blossom to Rukmini, His chief queen. This act of her lord angered Queen Subadhra, who felt belittled before Rukmini, her rival. To sort out the domestic squabble, Krishna sojourned to the Swarga-loka and brought back the Parijat bush to the Earth, where it remains till date. There is also that charming reference in folklore about how the Parijat tree came to shed its fragrant orange white blossoms at early dawn. Having exiled Sita, a heart-broken Rama took shelter under a Parijat tree for a moment's respite. Now a tree being a tree, it did not pay any attention to the One who had come to bless it with His presence. When Rama was gone, the animals and other creatures of the plant kingdom, who stood nearby, upbraided the Parijat for its wooden mind to have failed to pay obeisance to the Lord of the Universe. Poor Harshingar felt so remorseful for its lapse that it continues to offer its redolent flowers even to this day, awaiting another visit by Rama. Harshingar finds a place in our contemporary literature as well. Usha Vyas, known for her poetic talent, has adored it in verses reflecting its rich folklore. We in Jammu and Kashmir have a rich tradition of venerating trees. Elms have a sacred association with places of worship in Kashmir, where this tree is called Bren. The most common elm tree preserved around shrines is the cherry bark elm, *Ulmus villosa*. The Dogra communities in Jammu worship sacred trees like peepal, bargad, bael, amla devdar and ash tree. Many sacred spaces have a tradition of sacred groves and sacred trees planted there. The community-conserved water bodies at Mansar, Bhaid Devta and the presence of trees of ber, tun, phurlai, peepal, barna, jungli kadamb, devdar, sinnu, cheer, koha, shahtoot inside temples, gurdwaras, shrines and mosques evince the reverence the locals have for trees and tree groves.

The Pohu Hatab grove at Chandigarh, the old mulberry tree at Zati Wali Shah mosque courtyard, the sacred bren elm tree at Tikkar, Kupwara, the sacred tree grove at Bhaderkali, the sacred chinars at Tullamulla or Zeyshta temple, as also at Panderethan stand testimony to the faith of Kashmiris in greenery. Sacred water bodies at locations like Mattan and Kupwara nourish all the living trees around. The Dara Shikoh Garden with its majestic chinars and the Mughal-style architecture testify to the royal patronage for chinar trees in the valley. Bijbihara is known as a town of chinars and the largest chinar can be seen at Padshahi Bagh at Bijbihara, Kashmir. A living tree is the storehouse of phytochemicals. Trees like amla, hard, baheda, - shyonak and patla have found use in chyawanprash and constitute a healing traditions under the Ayurveda and Unani medicine. Junipers, called shukpa in Ladakhi and hapusha in Sanskrit, are held sacred by Buddhists. Juniper groves are preserved at locations such as Shukpachin, Foker and Skarbuchin. The incense of the juniper has religious sanctity in Ladakh. Juniper oil, extracted from aerial parts, is traded in the international market and finds mention in folklore. The juniper tree - *juniperus semiglobosa* - was declared as the state tree of Ladakh union territory in October 2023, which reflects its cultural and ecological significance in the cold desert of Ladakh. The Megalithic site at Burzahauma near Dachigam in Srinaga has an age-old link with the birch tree, locally called burza tree of Himalayas. Bhojpattra's papery bark remained a popular writing material to write old religious textbooks and Kashmiri scriptures, till Emperor Akbar introduced man-made paper. The archeological site at Burzahauma has provided proof of birch use for roofing of mud-houses and antiseptic bandages to heal wounds and injuries in prehistoric Kashmir. Birch and juniper trees have provided efficient fuel to the nomadic Gujjars and Bakkarwals since ages.

As it is, the overexploitation of the fragile mountain habitats has led to uncontrolled glacial erosion and avalanches in Kashmir. The Dards of Gurez depend on natural healthcare. Many of their asthans have sacred trees planted inside the sacred spaces. Hamilton's spindle tree, locally called chhlchhatr or elm tree, also called bren, is seen conserved inside the places of worship. Sacred groves dedicated to Habba Khatoon, the 16th century poet, at Chorvan Dawar have preserved treelets of Seabuckthorn, locally called Lehberry, Himalayan lilac called Haputkumaansh in Shina, Oriental Currant Ribes orientale, in addition to plants like Zoon or Shmazoon, named after Habba Khatoon. Habba Khatoon loved nature and composed lyrics of romance under the cool shade of chinars. Avian melodies and chirps are closely interlinked to tree canopies, boughs, barks, flowers and fruits. Many folk songs find mention of such ecological links, reflecting the association of the bird koel to mango, green pigeon to fig, the Himalayan cuckoo to raspberry or Box myrtle tree called kafal, kala fakhta to monkey face tree, basanta to anjeer and papeeha to the monsoon, and so on. The flowering semal tree is a kind of an avian zoo during springtime. Birds like sunbirds, rosy pastors, starlings, drongos, treepies, mynas, crows, flower peckers, orioles, minivets, cuckoos, shrikes, white eyes, green pigeons and barbets love to partake of the feast of pollen and nectar there. This tree finds mention in folklore as the tree which was cursed by Draupadi when Bheem played a trick on her. She was led to caress semal logs mistaking them for Bheem. Losing her poise at being tricked, Draupdi cursed the semal tree with thorns so that nobody would willingly touch its armed (prickly?) trunk or log. Even so, semal continues to be valued for its therapeutic qualities. Its roots and flowers find use in folk healing. Semal plants are used also as Holika totems in parts of Rajasthan during Holika-dehan. A Dogri folk song - 'Gori nikli andre da, hoth

suhaa phull simbley da' - reflects the beauty and popularity of the flower among locals who visualize the enchanting intense red colour of the fleshy petals as the lips of a woman. In religious iconography, the semal symbolises Ma Lakshmi with lit diyas burning in its bough-like arms. Palash dhak, known to the world as the flame of forest, is a tree native to the hotter subtropical belt of India. Its three leaflets, thought to symbolize the Sanatana Trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh, are used in rituals and pitra pooja among Hindus. Due to the semblance of its blossom to a parrot's beak, Palash has aptly been named as kinshuka in Sanskrit (parrot tree in English). Indian literature right from Kalidasa to Rabindra Nath Tagore has eulogized its beauty in verses as well as prose. Dogri poets and authors like Kehri Singh Madhukar, Mansa Ram Chanchal and Om Vidyarthi too have praised its beauty in their compositions. In the temperate mountains, the red rhododendron, locally called cheu, haddhull, madhaal or burans, has a bloom, splendour and exquisite beauty, which has been adored in prose and poetry by writers and poets. Folk songs too reflect its beauty as in the Pahadi song – Raunslo burans, pahad thando thando. Tesugul finds use in Braj, Mathura and Vrindavan Holi celebrations and at Shantiniketan as part of Vasantotsav. Its beauty has been eulogized by Amir Khusro as well as Rabindera Nath Tagore. Jungli kadamb, called kaim in Dogri, is a tree of great reverence at places like Baba Kailakhnath, Jatwal Virpanath, where old tree trunks are seen encircled with sacred threads of faith. The tree is associated with Lord Krishna. Legend has it that sitting on a bough of a kadamb on the banks of the Yamuna, Krishna used to play the flute and tease gopis bathing in the river. The famous poem 'Ek Ped Kadamb' by Subhadra Kumari Chauhan describes the playfulness of Krishna. The descendants of the Kadamba dynasty that ruled in the presentday Karnataka still follow the

tradition to celebrate the Kadamba festival. In fact, the kadamb tree is adored by Krishna's devotees all over India. The month of Sawan (corresponding to July-August) is known as Lord Shiva's month among Hindus. The monsoon at its best drenches the summer-scorched Shivaliks and devotees throng the Shivalyas to worship Bholenath with sacred foliage and fruit of Bael tree seen growing wild in the Shivaliks of Jammu Dograland. Its trifoliate leaves are akin to the Trishool of Lord Shiva and its fruits are considered dear to goddess Lakshmi. Bael trees, along with fragrant Champa, Hari Champa called Kandhaar, Shady Maulsari and Krishan Kadamb were planted by Dogra rulers at places like Zanana Park, Mubarik Mandi and painted by contemporary Pahadi painters. Trees have been painted with magnificent pheasants, peafowls, partridges, cuckoos, brainfever birds, barbets sitting on boughs and monsoon clouds hovering over the sky. Pahadi art, craft and paintings employed colours derived from foliage and flowers of trees like Dhak, Parijat, Jamun, Mehandi, Dhrenk, Daruhaldi, etc. The Bargad Tree, also called (*Ficus*) *benghalensis*, was revered by our ancestors and adored in religious and medicinal texts. It has been found helpful in fighting air pollution. Planting of the following trees can prove beneficial in the urban environment of cities like Jammu: *Ficus* religious, called 'Peepal', *Ficus* *racemose*, called 'Goolar', *Anthocephalus* 'Kadamb', *Polyalthia longifolia* called 'Ram Ashok' or 'Devdaru', *Mangifera indica* called, 'Aam', *Cassia fistula*, called 'Amaltas', *Putranjiva roxburghii*, called 'Putrjeevak' or 'Jiyopota', *Psidium guyjava*, called 'Amrood', *Terminalia arjuna*, called 'Arjun', *Millingtonia hortensis*, called 'Neem chameli'. All these trees enjoyed royal patronage of our erstwhile Dogra rulers. The Bargad can still be seen at many locations in Jammu and Kashmir parks and gardens. Here is a brief introduction of some prominent sacred trees and sacred groves

1. Sacred Battle of Plassey tree, Palash, Dhak

The Sacred Flame of the Forest tree, associated with the Battle of Plassey and named as Battle of Plassey tree, is locally called 'Palaah', which is a term derived from the Hindi word 'Palash'. It can be seen at the shrine dedicated to the Kuldevi (clan deity) of the ethnic Charak community at village Sunjwaan in the outskirts of Jammu. Known for its orange red fire flame blossoms, the tree is botanically named 'Butea monosperma' in the honour of John Stuart, the 3rd Earl of Buta. Sanskrit scholars identify the tree as 'Kinshuka', by which name it is mentioned in the Vedas, especially Yajurveda. The word 'Kinshuka' means parrot-like. That being so, another name of the tree is Parrot Tree. In Hindu rituals, it is used in Agnihotri fire sacrificial rituals. Its wood is used as Samidha to pour ghee in the sacred fire rituals. In Kerala, its name 'Chhamita' is derived from Samidha. Nambudari Brahmins plant the tree in their houses to seek blessings of the gods. The three leaflets of the tree symbolize the Trinity of Brahma-Vishnu-Mahesh. The leaves are used in performing religious rituals. A twig of Butea is supposed to have been used to drive away calves from mothers whose milk was to be used in religious ceremonies by gods. The leathery leaflets find use in making plates and donas. Before the arrival of plastic cups and plates in Uttar Pradesh, the people there used plates and donas made from palaash leaves for serving meals. Presently it is the state flower of Uttar Pradesh and Jharkhand. The soft white Palaash wood is resistant to insect fungus - a trait that it shares with Jamun - and is used in wells. Traditionally, the Palaash roots were a rich source of fibre for rope making in the villages of Bihar and UP. Once found in abundance in the Do-aab area between Ganga and Yamuna, large tracts were cleared for expanding agriculture during the colonial British Era.

The beauty of blossoms was adored by Sanskrit and Hindi poets as well as thinkers like Kalidasa, Rabindranath Tagore. Jaidev in Geet Govind has mentioned Dhak Palash flowers as the nails of Kamadeva, the god of love. Indeed, dhak flowers are often associated with passionate love. Plassey, historical locale of the Battle of Plassey is said to have been named after this tree (it is called 'Palassi' in Bengali language). The tree is called 'Kesudo' in Gujarat, 'Kanker' in Chhattisgarh, 'Modugu' in Telugu, 'Parasu Parasam' in Tamil, 'Dhak' as well as 'Palash' in Hindi, 'Kesu' in Punjabi and 'Palaah' in Dogri. The names in English that it carries are 'Flame of the Forest', 'Parrot Tree' and 'Bastard Teak'. Talking of taxonomy, Roxburgh classified it as 'Butea monosperma' though it was once named as 'Erythrina monosperma' by French Biologist Lamarck and 'Plaso' by German Botanist Kuntze. Under the Genus 'Butea', botanists have identified three species, namely, 'Butea monosperma' (tree with orange red blossoms), 'B parviflora' (white flowers) and 'B superba' (Liana with red flowers). Butea monosperma is known for its resinous gum called Kamarakas or Bengal kino. It is known to have aphrodisiac applications. The flowers are a source of dye and Holi gual. The Holy festivities in Mathura, Vrindavan, Shanti Niketan revolve around its blossoms. Even the pods are used for making Abeer. In Theravada Buddhism, Palaash is considered as the Tree of Enlightenment. The lac insect, Kerria lacca, uses its foliage as food and thus the tree is linked to lac production. It is also used as a source of shellac with many cosmetic and medicinal usages since early days. Butea monosperma, after shedding its leaves in early spring, gets festooned with bright red flowers in late spring, setting wilderness ablaze and be named as the 'Flame of the Forest'. In Telangana, on the occasion of Shivratri, Palash flowers under the name Modugu are offered to Lord Shiva. It is said that

Kamadeva climbed this tree to take an aim at Lord Shiva to disturb His meditation. Shiva opened His third eye and set the tree on fire. The Palaash blossoms are offered by the devotees to Shiva to seek blessings. A viscid secretion inside the parrot-like blossoms possesses anti-insect qualities. Mosquitoes laying eggs on the blossoms fail to develop since the larvae get killed in the secretion. Powdered flowers can be taken as herbal decoction, applied on the face for skin glow and removal of face acne blemishes. Its use as a Holi colour is a healthy practice.

Butea monosperma, known variously in different Indian languages, is a sacred tree of India. Associated not only with Indian religion and culture, it also has reputed medicinal uses. Besides, it serves as the host tree of lac insect, as well as the larval host tree for several Indian butterflies. The tree, when laden with blossoms during scorching summer, is a treat to eyes. It adds charm to the forest where it grows in wilderness. Civic authorities would do well to include it in the city landscape as a roadside avenue tree. It attracts a wide variety of birds such as parakeets, mynas, tits, sunbirds and also rosy starlings, *Sturnus roseus*, which gets its common name 'Tesuari' from the Tesu flower.

2. Jiyopota Trees and the Sacred Grove of Jammu

The heritage *Putranjiva roxburghii* from the Amla family, called 'Jiyopota' in Dogri, is a revered heritage tree in Jammu. 'Jiyopota' or 'Putrajeevak' may be roughly translated into English as 'May the son live!' It is also called Lucky Bean Tree. Associated with the naming of Jiyopota Ghat at Akhnoor on the banks of the river Chenab, it is located opposite the Forest Guard Training School, Doomi, about 30 km from Jammu. Historically, it was under the canopy of this tree that Maharaja Gulab Singh was crowned as the king of Jammu on 17th June 1822. The original

coronation tree got washed away in a flood but its historical context remains etched in the memories. The fruit of the Putranjeev Tree is borne as an amulet to ward off evil spirits. The seeds are used for wellbeing of unborn child. The powdered seeds help in maintaining hormonal balance in expecting mothers. Another sacred Jiyopota tree grove, an oasis amidst agricultural land, is located near Gajansoo town in Marh tehsil of Jammu district. It has been under community preservation since ages. It has more than 60 trees of Putanjiva roxburghii aged some 200-250 years. One sacred tree of Jiyopota, standing in front of the Kailakh Devta temple, is revered by the community. A similar tree of Barna Garlic pear tree, *Crateva religiosa*, is inside the sanctum and worshipped by devotees in the name of Kailakh Serpent God. The sacred grove hosts a variety of trees in addition to Jiyopota: old trees of Cluster fig tree, *Ficus racemosa* (Rumbal, Goolar), Toon tree, *Toona ciliata* (Tun, Tuni), Peepal *Ficus religiosa* (Peepal), Shisham *Dalbergia sissoo* (Tahli), Puniya *Ehretia acuminata* (Pauna), Datranga *Ehretia laevis* (Chamrore), Garlic pear, *Crateva religiosa* (Barna), Monkey face tree *Mallotus philippensis*, Java plum, *Syzygium cuminii* (Jamun), Paper mulberry *Brousonettia papyrifera*, Monkey Jack *Artocarpus lakucha* (Dhehoo), Punjab fig, *Ficus palmata* (Phagwara). Nowhere else in J&K is seen such a grove blessed with over sixty Jiyopota and forty other trees of different species.

3. Himalayan Cedar Tree, Devdar

Cedrus deodara is a revered tree. The term 'deodara' is derived from Sanskrit word 'Devadaru' - 'God's tree' - 'Deva' means god, 'daru' means wood. Its wood is highly aromatic and the prized timber is used in the construction of temples, mosques and houses. Several Nag temples dedicated to serpent deity exist under Cedar trees in Doda district. A 500 years old *Cedrus*

deodara, stands overlooking Chanderbhaga in Co.10/P Gulabgarh, Padder in Kishtwar district. With a girth of about 26 ft and height of more than 150 feet, it finds a place in history for the scary purpose to which it was put. During the reign of Maharaja Gulab Singh, it was from the branches of this age-old tree that criminals and offenders were hanged during the mid-19th century.

Deodar tree Latha Devta at Dewal Kotaal, Doda: At a height of over 2337 metres inside forest compartment 33 in the block Kotaal, Thakarai forest range in Doda forest Division stands a *Cedrus deodara*, one of the largest and oldest of its kind. It has a girth exceeding 34 feet at breast height and a trunk more than 150 feet tall. Built inside the grove are temples dedicated to Nag Devta and Latha Devta. Congregations of devotees are held annually three days after the festival of Rakshabandhan when the people from the surrounding villages take out a procession for the deity garlanded with the aromatic leaves of Shingly Dhoof – *Skimmia laureola*. The head priest performs puja to seek divine blessings. Sacred Himalayan cherry tree, *Prunus cerasoides*, locally called 'Pajja' and Horse chestnut tree, *Aesculus indica* can be planted in the available vacant space around the sacred shrine to add to the charm and beauty of the surroundings.

Yassernag sacred Cedars, Keshwan, Doda: Located near village Ohli at a height of over 6000 ft in Kotal, Thakrai forest range Doda, there is the sacred Grove of cedars, blue pines and firs surrounding the Yassernag Nag Devta temple. Devotees from nearby villages namely Hadar, Hidool, Batkoot and Ohli offer regular prayers to seek the deity's blessings.

Deyari Devta Cedars, Khaurgali, Damnot, Udhampur: Encircled by cedars and pines is the revered shrine dedicated to Deyari Devta. A stone idol of the deity adorns a raised platform before which devotees offer prayers. The sculpture resembles

the one seen at Sandrani Bhim di Bani, Chadhei. The sacred grove has in it *Cedrus deodara* (Deyaar), *Pinus roxburghii* (Cheer) and *Quercus oblongata* (Banj).

Multi-stemmed heritage Cedar of Bhaderwah: A large sized multi-stemmed deodar tree stands in the Forest Compartment Co.31/Neeru range, Bhardwaj Forest Division, The tree has girth 20'-9" at breast height and is about 180 years old. Tourists are fascinated by its sight and love to take selfies with this magnificent Devdar.

Tatani Cedar Grove and Bimalnag temple: About 37 km from Drabshalla at Tatani village in Kishtwar district, there are several 100-120 feet tall, 120 to 180 years old *Cedrus deodara* trees, each having girth 20 to 25 feet. Encircled by the sacred cedars is the village Nag deity, named as Bimalnag. The serpent god is worshipped by the residents of the nearby villages.

Largest Devdar tree at Chanti, Bhalessa: As per a recent field survey undertaken by DFO Bhaderwah, a massive *Cedrus deodara* tree aged over 500 years, having a girth of 10.5 metres stands in compartment 57, Neeli block in Bhalessa Forest Range in Bhardwaj Forest Division. It is recorded as biggest landmark Cedar of Jammu and Kashmir. In comparison, the giant Cedar tree of Kanasar measures only 6.35 metres in girth. The local communities maintain a religious link with this landmark tree. They ensure that no tree twig is ever lopped or damaged. At a distance of about 150 metres there is Devasthan abounding in vegetation.

4. Sacred Tree Grove, Baba Shibo Devasthan, Samba

A historical religious shrine, dedicated to visionary saint Baba Shibo, it is located at Goran near Sumb in Samba. It is a rich

repository of biodiversity. Surrounding the temple is a sacred grove comprising trees like Indian Laburnum *Cassia fistula*, Kampillak *Mallotus philippensis*, medicinal *Adusa Justicia adhatoda*, extensive liana Maljhan, Maloo creeper *Bauhinia vahlii*, locally called Maloongar. A whole lot of bird species, such as treepies, fantails, warblers, drongos, minivets, flycatchers, bush chats, Flycatchers, in addition to diverse diurnal nocturnal insects, bees, beetles, butterflies, find refuge in the grove. It is a classical example of community conservation. It nurtures ecological as well as cultural traditions.

At Baba Goran's ancestral home, village Samotha, thirty km from the Samba town, is another sacred grove well preserved by the local community in the memory of the saint. Huge Liana of Maloongar, Maloo creeper *Bauhinia vahlii*, aged 100 years, is preserved along with several trees of *Mallotus philippensis* and other vegetation. Many medicinal herbs and climbers like *Spermadictyon suaveolens*, *Ichnocarpus frutescens*, *Cissampelo spariera*, *Dioscorea belophylla*, *Pueraria tuberosa*, *Justicia adhatoda*, *Achyranthes aspera* sustain rich entomoavian fauna in the protected habitat.

Tree Grove of Sumah Devta, Akhnoor: Growing extensively by the side of a hill stream, on the rocky outcrops, Maloo creeper *Bauhinia vahlii* syn *Phanera vahlii*, locally called Maloongar, holds not only an aesthetic appeal, but it also caters to the local need of leafy cups and plates for serving marriage meals and community feasts. The eco-friendly ethnic usage has led to clean surroundings, as no plastic garbage is generated in the place. Apart from Maloo creeper, other trees preserved in the Sumah sacred Grove are Peepal, Semal, Bael, Tuni, Karkatshringi, Mango and Bargad.

5. Sacred Krishan Kadamb tree groves of Jammu

Sacred grove Jatwal, Samba: Birfanath temple at Jatwal in Samba district in Kandi belt has preserved tree growth of sacred Kaim Kadamb *Mitragyna parvifolia*, sacred threads of faith are seen tied around tree trunks. It is a true Krishan Kadamb, associated with pranks of Gopala. In addition, old Banyan tree, sacred Parijat tree, medicinal Amla and Cheela trees stand conserved in the sacred grove. The temple attracts pilgrims, tourists and conservationists. Earlier, it was located on the holy route to Maa Vaishno Devi and devotees used to stay here before proceeding further. The grove has a sacred Saranda pond where devotees take holy water for worship in the temple.

Baba Kailakh Nath, Thatthar near Kot Bhalwal: The Temple is dedicated to Baba Kailakhnath. It has preserved sacred Peepal tree *Ficus religiosa* and true Krishan Kadamb trees *Mitragyna parvifolia* in the name of serpent God Vasuki Nag's son, Kailakh Nath. The Seth baradari, in honour of their Kul Devta, organise annual congregation here, in which community feast is held. Food then is served here in eco-friendly cups and plates made of leaves and the use of non-biodegradable plastic, styrofoam is discouraged. A Kadamb tree, oldest of its kind exist around temple with sacred threads around trunk bears testimony to the sacred way of tree preservation since ages. Parijat trees identified in Botany as *Nyctanthes arbor tristis* stand planted in the sacred space.

Mitragynaparvifolia, sacred trees at Mera Mandriyan, Akhnoor: Around the village pond at Mera Mandriyan, huge old trees of Kaim, Vanya kadamb are seen conserved along with sacred fig Peepal *Ficus religiosa*, Banyan fig Bargad *Ficus benghalensis*, Madagascar Governor's plum *Kakoha Flacourtia indica*, Indian Ash tree, *KaimbaljhinginiLanneacoromandelica*and

Conker berry Garna Karaunda. The devotees worship Krishna's Kadamb, Peepal and Bargad on special days.

Sacred Kadamb tree, Digiana, Jammu city: One Kaim Kadamb, *Mitragyna parvifolia* tree, growing at Digiana Park within Jammu Municipal Corporation, is an object of worship. During the monsoon month of Sawan, local women visit the preserved Krishna's Kadamb to pay obeisance. *Mitragyna parvifolia* occurs in the Shivaliks as a wild deciduous tree. In comparison to the evergreen *Neolamarckia kadamba*, its leaves are much smaller. The tree is worshipped by followers of Lord Krishna. It is said that in Mathura, Vrindavan, Lord stood in its shade playing melodious tunes of flute. He is also said to have dived from a Kadamba tree to kill Kaliya Nag in the river Yamuna.

Dyalachak sacred Kaim tree: Located on the Jammu Kathua National Highway by the side of the village pond at Dyalachak, there is a mighty *Mitragyna parvifolia* tree, locally called 'Kaim'. It too is Lord Krishna's Kadamb. Sacred threads entwined around the tree trunk testify to its sanctity. Local women perform special puja under the tree during the month of Sawan. The available space around the pond needs to be planted with more Kadamb and fig trees to create more greenery.

6. Sacred Banyan Fig trees around temples in Jammu

Baba Mei Mall temple Akhnoor: At Duggi Dugehrnear Akhnoor town in the Kalidhar Forest Range, there is a famous temple dedicated to Mei Mall. It is located under a huge Banyan tree, *Ficus benghalensis*. Banyan is the national tree of India. It is locally called Bauhd. The water reservoir and Banyan tree at the site have a moderating effect on climate and hot temperature during summer. Figs are keystone species. These trees nurture bird life of several frugivores, especially green pigeons (Preu),

hornbills (Doaah) and barbets (Kuddru). Many frugivorous birds like Barbets, Green Pigeons, Grey Hornbills visit Banyan fig tree for relishing fig fruits. The tree is sacred to Krishna. The image of an inverted Banyan tree has been used in Srimad Bhagwadgita to describe Creation. The Banyan tree is sacred to Lord Vishnu as well. At the time Pralaya – the Deluge – Vishnu rides the surging waves on this leaf and in His stomach lies the entire universe. Thus, the Banyan leaf acts as a saviour of Creation.

Banyan Fig Tree, Chuhadi Bua Dati temple: Situated in Sunjawan area of Jammu, a huge Banyan tree is worshipped by the Mangotra clan. The Mangotras congregate here annually to pay obeisance to their kuldevi.

Sacred Banyan Tree Grove Rehani, Mera Mandriyan: A huge Banyan, protected in the Village Rehani, in fact a sacred, is a grove in which not only Banyan fig tree but other trees also stand preserved in honour of a Sufi saint. Indian Ash tree *Lannea coromandelica*, Monkey face tree *Mallotus philippensis*, Conker berry bush *Carissa opaca* and *Justicia adhatoda* have equal protection in the habitat. Many birds such as parakeets, owls, Hornbills and Green pigeons visit the Banyan tree to feed on fig fruits.

7. Bhim di Bani and Ghagga sacred Groves of Chadei in Udhampur: Charei Muttal, about 24 km from Katra in Udhampur district, is known for its artistically designed water bowlies and ancient Raghunath temple nestled under trees. Near to Charsi, the Bhim di Bani Sacred Grove is dedicated to the memory of Baba Bhim who migrated from Rajasthan during famine. It was he who sculpted stones during his stay at the location. Around Bhim di Bani, many trees, shrubs, and climbers are preserved by the community. The conserved flora, unique in

their nature, include Goolar *Ficus religiosa* (Rumbal), Madhavi lata (*Hiptage benghalensis*), Indian Pellet shrub (*Pavetta indica*) locally called 'Guldhar', thorny climber (*Caesalpinia decapetala*), locally called 'Dudreda' or 'Dadoohr', Mockbuckthorn (*Sageretia filiformis*) locally called 'Kanainoo', Spike thorn (*Gymnosporon aroyleana*) locally called 'Lehi' or 'Pataki', Maloo creeper *Bauhinia vahlii* locally called 'Maloongar', Baibiding *Embelia tsjeriamcottam*, Kanta karanj (*Bianca eadecapetala*) locally called 'Dadoohr' or 'Dudraihda', *Pyrus pashia* (Kainth), and *Ficus hispida* (Garumbal, Laana), *Asparagus adscendens*. During the monsoon, seasonal medicinal plants like *Desmodium gangeticum*, *Gloriosa superba* (Agnishikha, Vishalya, Galohtmama) are also recorded. A good diversity of Birds and butterflies is encountered inside the sacred grove. Religious congregations take place at the site twice a year at the time new crop harvest in summer and other during autumn.

Ghagga sacred Grove Chadei: Picturesque tourist spot with plenty of perennial fresh water flow, network of bowlies reflect the ancient wisdom of conserving waterbodies near temples. The area has preserved tree growth around the Raghunath temple that was built 200 years ago. Hill mulberry Karoon Kauin, identified as *Morus serrata*, Musla, Neelan identified as *Olea paniculata*, Batta Kataar Kaudkainthal identified as *Xylosma longifolium*, mountain ebony Bistendu Rajaini identified as *Diospyros montana* can be seen here.

The presence of trees and freshwater perennial flow maintain a cool atmosphere even during the scorching summers. As per a local legend, Tantya Tope once visited the spot during revolutionary conflict to gain independence from colonial rule and remained here in exile for almost two years to evade arrest at the hands of the British army. Ghagga is named after a local

inhabitant who provided shelter to famine-stricken groups of artisans centuries ago.

8. Shivkhori Sacred Grove Ransoo, Reasi

The vegetation around the holy Shiv khori shrine stands preserved as a sacred grove. Some of the trees, shrubs and lianas that find a place there are Rock fig - *Ficus arnottiana* locally called 'Paras Peepal', Royle's spurge - *Euphorbia royleana* (a C4 plant which catalyzes shilajit secretion on rocks), Kampillak Kamilla Kumkum tree *Mallotus philippensis* (in earlier days, kumkum was used by ladies as sindoor, even Sita Ma used fruit powder as sindoor kumkum during her exile), Woolly Litsea *Neolitsea cuipala* named as Kaulo (often mistaken for Tejpatta) and Semi-cordate fig *Khinna Ficus semicordata*. The route to the holy Shivkhodi cave is a habitat to diverse plants such as the Unique liana, Sulaang *Millettia pinnata*, green climber *Mudheyaan Helinus lanceolatus*, Naabbhre *Vitis adnata* and Hegdi *Strobilanthes mentosa* (syn *Aechmanthera gossypina*), and Maddareyaan *Arachne cordifolia*. The area is rich in avian diversity as well. Several kinds of warblers, rock chats, thrushes, treepies, woodpeckers, fly catchers, minivets, wagtails, cuckoos are encountered at dawn and evening time.

9. Heritage Toon trees of Jammu

The Largest Toon Tree: *Toona ciliate*, locally called Tuni or Tunu, which is a kind of Indian Mahogany, is valued for its superior timber, but as per faith, the tree is highly secure and prayers are offered under it regularly. India's largest Toon tree can be found at village Raang in Tehsil Ramnagar near the Govt High school. The more than 200 years old tree is worshipped by both Hindus and Muslims as a standing testimony of social harmony. Sacred green flags flutter in the name of village Peer

along with the saffron flags of Goddess Chauntra during the annual religious yatra held under the Toon tree. The tree is preserved as heritage by the community.

Sacred Toon tree at Peerbaba Fatehpur, Rajouri: Despite its location by the side of a busy highway and lack of space for further expansion, the sacred tree is well protected in the historic Muslim shrine dedicated to the memory of the great saint.

10. Baba Dhansar sacred Grove, Reasi

Located about 17 km from Reasi on the Katra road is a sacred shrine devoted to Baba Dhansar. Baba Dhansar was the son of Vasudev, a manifestation of the serpent deity, Sheshnag, sacred to Lord Shiva's devotees. At the shrine is a sacred pond along with a preserved tree grove. The preserved plant species seen around there are: *Toona ciliata* (Tunu), *Terminalia bellirica* (Bahera) at the entrance, trees of *Amaltas* *Cassia fistula*, *Chopdu* *Cocculus laurifolius*, climbing fig *Ficus sarmentosa* and three trees of Himalayan Sweetspire. *Itea nutans*, extensive climber *Heptapleurum venulosum* (Saud simbli) are also seen conserved and preserved. In addition, a mighty Liana Maloo creeper, *Bauhinia vahlii* Maloongar is not only preserved but is revered by devotees. Sacred threads tied on the coiled bough bear testimony to the unwavering faith in the 'Devourer' aspect of Lord Shiva. The preserved forest has a rich biodiversity and perennial water source to sustain avian life. The shrine is visited by thousands of devotees hailing from within as well as outside J&K. Plenty of fresh water and enchanting water melodies rejuvenate the mind of visitors during scorching summer.

11. Heritage Ber trees of Jammu

The Bala Sundri Sacred Ber is preserved on the sacred hillock bordering Billawarand Kathua Forest Division, about 9 km from Phinter. The sacred Ber stands beside a holy Bargad tree on the bank of a sacred pond in the temple complex. It is wrapped in holy cloth of faith by devotees as a mark of reverence to Goddess Bala Sundari. In addition to the Banyan and Ber trees, the surrounding vegetation has preserved lesser-known plants of *Incarvillea emodi* Trumpet bush, Royle's spurge *Euphorbia royleana* (Danda-thor, Sul) and aromatic Himalayan Golden fragrance *Gadseelu Pittosporum floribundum*.

Panjbakhtar temple Ber tree: Located in the heart of Jammu city is the ancient Mahadev temple. In the courtyard, embedded with silver coins, stands a historic Ber *Ziziphus mauritiana* tree. It was under this venerable tree that Guru Nanak Dev ji delivered a sermon in 1514 in presence of the king Raja Khokar Dev. It is said that Guru Nanak Dev stayed here for 3 days. The tree is worshipped by Shiva devotees as well as a mark of respect and reverence to the saintly sermon that was delivered underneath it more than 500 years ago. In addition to the sacred Ber tree, the sacred Grove of *Prosopis juliflora* is also a centre of attraction for the visitors.

However, the true Shami Jand tree revered in scriptures is a different species named as *Prosopis cineraria* which need to be planted in the temple courtyard.

Sacred Ber, Baba Banda Bahadur shrine: Preserved and protected *Ziziphus mauritiana* Ber tree over the holy shrine in Reasi district is dedicated in the memory of supreme sacrifice of Baba Banda Bahadur. The sacred Ber tree is worshipped by the devotees in the Sikh shrine. Here nobody is permitted to cut any branch of the tree.

12. Pohu Groves of Kashmir

Pohu is the familiar False Witch hazel tree of Kashmir. Its twigs are used by artisans for making heating pot, Kangri. During the autumn season, Pohu foliage turns fascinating golden yellow, adding to charm and glory to the Kashmir landscape. Other local names of Pohu are Hattab and Passed, Killar.

Pohu Sacred Grove, Chandigam: There is that dense False Witch Hazel Grove, popularly called Pohu Asthan at Chandigam of the Lolab Valley. It is venerated by the ethnic community of Sufi cult. More than 108 *Parrotiopsis jacquemontiana* clumps (no exact count available) bear testimony to the man-nature association strengthened over many generations by way of reverence towards Mother Nature and the community's commitment to conserve biodiversity.

Pohu Sacred Grove, Batpora, Kupwara: On the way to Kumkadi in Kupwara, there is a centuries old Pohu Grove. Comprising a dense growth of the trees, it is dedicated to a woman saint. Large Pohutrees display threads and rags of faith fastened to their branches.

Pohu Sacred Grove, Kangan: On way to Gagangir, just beyond the Kangan town on left side, is a huge Elm tree, *Ulmus villosa*, Pohu Hattab tree *Parrotiopsis jacquemontiana* (False witch hazel) and Hamilton's spindle *Euonymus hamiltonianus* tree (Chhalchhattar, Sakki), *Berberis lycium* (Kaodachh, Simblu) stand preserved there. Harvesting of any twig, bush, grass is strictly prohibited by the community. Rags of faith hung on branches bear testimony to age old reverence and tree preservation.

13. Habba Khatoon Sacred Grove, Gurez

Habba Khatoon, a well-known Kashmiri queen of Mohd Yusuf Shah Chak, was born at village Chandahara in Pampore, Pulwama district. Her songs are sung even to this day during Kashmiri weddings. The herb *Artemisia maritima* is named as 'Zoon' in her honour. A mountain at Chorvan Achhura in Dawar, Gurez, Kashmir, beside the river Kishanganga also carries the queen's name. Sustained by the famous Habba Khatoon spring, the sacred grove is home to fragrant lilac bushes *Syringa emodi*, *Abelia triflora*, Oriental Currant *Ribes orientale*, Sea-buckthorn *Hippophae rhamnoides*, Oleaster *Elaeagnus*, several important medicinal plants like Black cumin *Kala zeera* *Bunium persicum*, Monk's hood *Aconitum heterophyllum*, wild flowers like Geraniums, Primroses, Campions, Columbines, Buttercups, Windflowers and Goldenrods. Preservation of seabuck thorn and black cumin in the Habba Khatoon Sacred Grove reflects the local community's reverence towards Habba Khatoon as also its firm commitment towards the conservation of biodiversity conservation. As the language spoken here is Shina, the plants and animals seen in sacred grove have unique Shina names such as 'Zoon', 'Shamadi', 'Burjeed', 'Sampheru', 'Hashnushposh', 'Haputkumaansh' and so forth.

14. Majestic Heritage Chinar Trees of Kashmir

The term 'Chinar' is derived from a Persian word which means "What a fire!", alluding to the fiery red glow of tree's autumnal foliage. Commonly known as Oriental Plane tree, it is also called 'Booni' or 'Bouin' in Kashmiri. The name honours Goddess Bhawani, as Kashmiri Pandits associate the tree with Ma Bhawani. The mystic poetess Lall Daed too adored Chinar in her religious *vaakhs*. Kashmir Valley is known for the majestic shade of Chinar trees. It is a common sight in places of worship in Kashmir, be it a mosque, a temple or a Gurudwara. Chinar is

often confused with Maple, but while Plane tree has alternate leaves, Maple has opposite leaves. Besides, the fruit in Chinar is in round spiny cluster of achenes, whereas fruits in Maples are winged samaras. Even so, both Chinars and Maples have brilliant fall foliage.

Heritage Chinar tree, Chhatrgam, Budgam: The largest Chinar protected and preserved by locals can be seen inside the holy mosque premises in the shrine dedicated to Hazrat Syed Qasim Sahib at Chhatrgam in Chadoora, Budgam District of Kashmir. This tree was measured by the veteran forest officer, Mohmmad Shafi Wadoo, as having a girth of 31.85 metres at the ground level and 14.78 metres at the breast height. Bijbihara, popularly known as the 'Town of Chinars', holds the distinction of having the oldest Chinar in the Padshahi Park. It has a girth of 40 feet at breast level and at ground level it measures a huge 70 feet. Legend has it that in the 16th century, Guru Nanak Dev ji visited this place during his pilgrimage to the Mattan pilgrimage centre during the 16th century and delivered a sermon under the shade of this Chinar. By that reckoning, the tree should not be less than 700 years old. The tree trunk has hollowed out due to old age but its crown bears lush green branches.

Dara Shikoh Garden Chinars: Just across the river Jhelum there is the historic Dara Shikoh garden. It has mighty Chinar trees aged more than 500 years. Dara Shikoh, elder brother of Aurangzeb, is known for his Sufi outlook and thinking. He translated many Sanskrit books into Persian language. A connoisseur of art and himself a talented poet and painter, he visited Basohli to have a look at the Basohli paintings.

Chinars in the Mughal Gardens, Kashmir: The Mughal Gardens under the management of Floriculture department have

age-old Chinar trees which turn fiery red during autumn to add colour and charm in the season of leaf-fall. The Shalimar, the Nishat and Harwan Gardens have multiple tall Chinar trees aged more than 400 years and having a girth measuring more than 30 feet. Majestic Chinars at Achhabal and Kokernag with cool shade beside crystal clear water channels and streams attract tourists during summer season. Families sit under Chinars and relish home made meals, noon-chai and bakery items. The Floriculture department celebrates 15th March as Chinar day in Kashmir. Chinar leaf is used as motif in weaving, painting, paper mache, craft, embroidery, carpentry, art and craft work throughout Kashmir.

Tullamulla Kheer Bhawani Chinars: The Chinar has an age-old association with the Ganderbal temple dedicated to Kheer Bhawani. In fact, the Kashmiri name for Chinar-Booni or Bouin– itself establishes the deep connection of the tree with Goddess Kheer Bhawani in Kashmir.

Zithyar Temple Chinar Grove, Srinagar: Under the canopy of majestic Chinar trees is located the ancient Zithiyar temple located next to Rajbhawan in Zabarwan hills of Srinagar. Devotees visit the deity to seek blessings and spiritual solace. Fiery red autumnal foliage adds colour to the surroundings and the fallen leaves are used as fuel for Kangri during the severe ‘chill e kallaan’, the forty-day spell of winter in Kashmir.

Maa Roop Bhawani Sacred Grove, Srinagar: Close to the Chashma Shahi spring at Zabarwan mountain range is the location of temple dedicated to the saint named, Maa Roop Bhawani. The temple has preserved the Chinar tree grove which bears testimony to the faith of Kashmiri Pandits. Their name for Chinar - Bouin or Booni- has historical connection to Goddess

Durga. Roop Bhawani has Durga-like courage and wisdom. Her scholarly pursuits have made her famous among devotees. The word 'Bhawani' as 'Booni' finds mention in the Vaakhs of Lal Daed and Shrukhs of Sheikh ul Alam.

Prayag Booni at Shadipur, Ganderbal: At the holy confluence of the rivers Sind and Jhelum in Ganderbal near Sumbal, a preserved Chinar is revered as Prayag Booni (Prayag Chinar). Under the tree, a Shivlangam is worshipped by Kashmiri Pandits. Tarpan ritual is also held in the memory of departed souls. As the tree is growing at the confluence of two rivers, it can be accessed only by boat. It is believed that this Chinar has divine significance and even at the time of worst floods it remains intact.

Panderethan Temple Chinar: Located in front of the 8th century Shiva Temple at Panderethan in Badami Bagh Cantonment Srinagar, the sacred Chinar tree is revered by Shiva devotees. The tree trunk is hollow and in that hollow there is an altar dedicated to Goddess Bhawani to which the devotees visiting Shiva temple pay obeisance. The Chinar Corps of the Indian Army has preserved an excavated idol as 'Dharohar', meaning a heritage. The monolithic Shivlangam is unique to the temple in that it is surrounded by water from all sides. Panderethan was the old capital city of Kashmir founded by King Ashoka. Later, it got devastated in a massive fire, as recorded in the history of Kashmir.

15. Phulahi Trees at the Peer Baba Shrines of Jammu

Phulai Peer Baba, Jandrah: Located at a roadside hillock short of Jindrah town is a Peer Baba shrine under the canopy of *Senegalia modesta*, with a small water pond in front. Muslim devotees visit the shrine on each Thursday and offer prayers. *Senegalia modesta* - Phulaitrees - are useful in apiaries as bee

forage, Phulai twigs are used by the locals as toothbrushes and leaves are fed to goats as fodder. Phulai firewood has high calorific value. Thus, even though such trees are heavily exploited, they are religiously protected inside sacred shrines like Peer Baba at Jandrah, Jammu.

Largest Phulai tree, Kot Bhalwal, Jammu: A huge Phulai tree, I think the largest specimen in India, lately identified as *Senegalia modesta* (though it was earlier known as *Acacia modesta*) is preserved by a Muslim family out of ancestral faith, since a peer once meditated under the tree. The girth of the tree is over 3 metres at the base and it has multiple trunks at breast height. Such preserved trees with detailed information on girth, height, canopy spread and age estimation need to be documented in the Heritage Tree Register by the JK Biodiversity Council.

16. Bhaid Devta Sacred Grove, Nagrota, Jammu

In Jammu, near Kattal Battaal, Nagrota, there is a sacred Bhaid Devta temple situated beside the river Tawi. Here, an endangered fish species, Golden Mahseer is found. The fish is revered as a manifestation of Baba Bhaid, son of the serpent god, Vasuki Naag. The surrounding vegetation is a kind of sacred grove where deforestation is prohibited. We come across Christmas time flowering of the climber *Poranopsis paniculata*, a snow-white flowering that enchants devotees during the early winter season. As spring arrives, the landscape gets an altogether golden look due to profuse flowering of Winter flax, *Reinwardtia indica*, a wild crop relative of the cultivated Flax, *Linum usitatissimum*.

17. Shahdra Shrief Sacred Grove

The Muslim shrine at Shahdra Shrief, near Thanna mandi in Rajouri district, is visited by devotees of all faiths to seek divine blessings. Childless mothers pray there for motherhood. The

sacred space has preserved evergreen fruit bearing Citrus plant which bears fruits all the year round. Childless mothers are offered citrus fruit as divine blessing as per the tradition. In addition, several trees of Banj oak, *Quercus oblongata* syn *Q leucotrichophora*, barberry bushes *Berberis lycium* and *Pteracanthus glutinosus* stand well preserved near the shrine. Shahdra Shrief is famous for carpentry wood items like combs, ladles, spoons made from Boxwood tree, *Buxus wallichiana*, locally called Chikhri. Due to over-exploitation of mature trees in the forests, poor or insignificant sapling recruitment and no large-scale planting of important tomer tree, the livelihood of the locals associated with woodwork of Chikhri is on the decline. The Forest Department needs to establish a Chikhri nursery at Thannamandi or Darhal for large scale Chikhri planting in the field.

18. Preserved old Cherry bark Elm trees

Kheer Bhawani Tikkar, Kupwara: At the holy shrine dedicated to Goddess Bhawani at Tikkar in Kupwara district of Kashmir, there are sacred Elm trees of *Ulmus villosa*, sacred to the goddess stand preserved. It is a replica of the Tulla Mulla Kheer Bhawani temple in Ganderbal district, where mighty Chinar trees are preserved.

Largest Elm at Pakharpora, Kashmir: One of the largest old Elm trees, *Ulmus villosa*, stands preserved at Pakharpora in Budgam district of Kashmir. The tree, nearly 600 years old, has a girth of 26 feet at the breast height, even though its trunk has turned hollow with age. It is held sacred and is protected in reverence to the great Sufi saint, Hazrat Syed Ali Aali Balkhi (RA), whose holy shrine is just 100 meters away. The soil beneath the tree and sapling of Elm Brenn is thought to have been

transported from Balkh, Afghanistan, by the holy saint himself. A story told by the elders goes as follows: 'Hazrat Sultan Sayyed Muhammad 'Ali' Ala Balkhi was the ruler of the town of Millah in Balkh, in present-day Afghanistan. He is said to have ascended the throne of this principality in 1417 C.E. at the age of nineteen consequent upon his father's death, and went on to rule for thirteen years. Then he appointed his elder son as the ruler of Millah in his place. To his younger son he gave his prayer-mat (jai namaz) and entrusted him with the responsibility of 'delivering sermons and propagating religion' (va'az-o-tabligh). That done, he left for Kashmir the same day. After an arduous journey through ice-clad mountains for more than seven months, he arrived at the borders of Kashmir. Passing through Thana Bhavan (Thanna Mandi ? – please ask the author) in Rajouri, he arrived at the village of Pakharpora (in the present-day district of Budgam). Just then, it is said, Hazrat Nuruddin Nurani, who was then at Chrar-e-Sharif, received a premonition about Hazrat Sultan Sayyed Muhammad's arrival. He, along with his khalifa, Hazrat Baba Nasruddin Rishi, then (delete) set off to Pakharpora to receive him. That is said to have taken place in the winter of 1430 C.E. It is believed that this ulmus tree was planted by the Hazrat Sultan Sayyed Muhammad 'Ali' Ala Balkhi in the year 1430 C.E'.

Oldest Elm tree at Patnazi, Bunjwah, Kishtwar: A very old Cherry bark Elm tree is seen beside road in Patnazi panchayat, tehsil Bunjwah of Kishtwar district. The tree trunk circumference measures over 32 feet, its height is over 75 feet, approximate age of tree is 250-300 years. The tree is called 'Bren' in Kashmiri, 'Maraadu' in Dogri and 'Mannu' in Pahadi languages.

Elm trees at Janbaz Wali Ziyarat, Baramula: About 2 km from Baramulla town on the Uri Road, there is the famous Jaan

Baz Wali Ziyarat shrine with preserved Cherry bark elm trees, *Ulmus villosa*, locally named as 'Bren'.

Heritage Elm at Bagsu Nag Temple Sadrota, Billawar: An old sacred heritage grove of Mrandoo (Maraal) trees, identified botanically as *Ulmus villosa* (Cherry Bark Elm), growing in the sacred space of Bagsu Nath/Charg Nag temple, is the centre of religious faith. Devotees offer prayers to seek blessings of the serpent god under the Elm trees.

Baba Saain Ganji Ziyarat Elm, Rajouri: On the way to Darhal from Rajouri, at the Baba Saain Ganji shrine is located a famous Muslim shrine, dedicated to the memory of Fateh Mohammad, popularly called Saain Ganji Shrine. It has two preserved old Mannu trees, in addition to a Premna tree and a Hackberry Khirak tree.

Hathar Nag Devta Elm, Hanzal, Kishtwar: In the mountainous terrain of the Marwah Valley at village Hanzal, there is a sacred Cherry Bark Elm, under which is a shrine of the village deity. Here an annual animal sacrifice is made. A religious procession, called 'Yatra', is taken out on the auspicious occasion of Shrawan (Mid July) Sankranti. The Nagpanchmi day is also dedicated to the deity Hathar Nag Devta. As per the locals, Jhanki Yatra is also displayed on the occasion of Krishna Janamashtmi.

19. Preserved Mulberry Trees of J&K

One of the oldest mulberry trees, Tulkul *Morus nigra* stands preserved beside a fresh water spring inside the holy Shrine of Baba Hazrat Zati Shah Wali (RA) in the outskirts of Kupwara. The Mulberry Tree is held sacred by the locals of the Sufi cult. A dense mossy growth on the venerable tree indicates its antiquity.

The locals fetch drinking water from the spring located under the sacred mulberry tree. A Mulberry tree (of which the main trunk is partially rotten), more than 350 years old, which was planted during Mughal period in the Shalimar Garden, Srinagar, Kashmir, is preserved as a heritage tree. Its flowers and fruits attract many birds.

Bumhama Peer baba, Kupwara: The oldest preserved Mulberry tree is seen at Bumhama Peer Baba Shrine, Kupwara in north Kashmir. A preserved Hill mulberry tree, *Morus serrata*, is seen at Raghunath temple, Charei Ghagga, Trikuta hills in Udhampur district.

20. Sacred Cotoneaster Tree at Jyodian Temple Bani in Basohli

Located at a height of 9000 ft is a sacred tree of *Cotoneaster affinis* syn *C. bacillaris*, popularly called 'Reu' or 'Reunsar' or 'Leeon'. It is associated with Goddess Jyodiyana Mata. Iron chains, sacred threads of faith and devotion are placed on the holy tree to seek blessings of the goddess. The significance of *Cotoneaster* is unique to Jyodiyana temple. No other temple in J&K has association with *Cotoneaster affinis* tree and faith of the devotees has preserved the species at alpine meadow grassland. Each year, during the month of October, a pilgrimage to the shrine is organized and devotees in thousands pay obeisance to the sacred grove.

21. Nag Devta Sacred Grove Sujan Dhar, Reasi

In the Bhamag block of Reasi district, the Nag temple has a dense sacred grove comprising of old *Quercus oblongata* syn *Q. leucotrichophora* (Banj oak), *Toona chinensis* syn *T. serrata* (Doriya, Darilli), Himalayan bird cherry *Prunus cerasoides*

(Battaran, Pajja), Dogwood tree *Cornus macrophylla* (Adehoo, Kandar), Punjab fig tree, *Ficus palmata* (Phagwara). The wellpreserved sacred grove has a perennial fresh water spring which the community associates with the serpent god. Annual congregations attract devotees from far and wide locations (delete).

22. Community Conserved Olive trees

Sacred olive, Kahu at Salalkot: Near to the temple beside a community kuldevi samadhi at the village Salakot on way to Kanthan Arnas, one comes across preserved wild olive trees identified botanically as *Olea ferruginea* syn *Olea cuspidate*. It is known to the locals as Kauha or Kau. In addition to the four olive trees, one can notice a preserved medicinal East Indian Mastiche tree, named *Pistacia chinensis* var *interigema*, which is known to the locals as Kakkadsingi. The local name evokes a curious looking horn-like insect gall, used as a drug under Ayurveda and Unani systems of medicine.

Sacred Olive, Kahu Devta at Khaurgali, Damnot: An old heritage tree of *Olea ferruginea* (Wild olive), locally named as 'Kauha' or 'Kaahu', having an alter to the village deity established beneath it, stands preserved at Khaurgali in village Panchayat Damnot of Udhampur district. Devotees present offerings and worship the village deity. The tree girth measures over 15 feet.

23. Mango Grove, Baba Ballo Mathwar, Jammu

The sacred mango trees, preserved by the community at Baba Ballo shrine, have an interesting legend about Baba Ballo's spiritual prowess. The holy man used to graze cattle at this location. Once, when a quarrel erupted between the Rajputs and the Karkiyal community over mango trees, a close friend entrusted the job of looking after the mangoes to him. One

morning, when Baba had gone for a bath, the Karkiyals plucked the mangoes from the disputed trees. Baba Ballo felt angry. He told Karkiyals to put the plucked mangoes back on the trees. Baba's instruction was obviously impossible to follow. Taunting him, the Karkiyals asked him to attach the mangoes on the twigs if he had that power. Baba Ballo went into medication, and to the surprise of everybody standing around, the plucked mangoes got hung all over again on branches of the trees. Before attaining salvation, the Baba advised the people not to sell these mangoes and use them only for religious purposes. The community has faithfully preserved mango trees. An annual religious celebration is organized at the location of the festival of Basant Panchami.

24. Vasuki Nag Cedar Grove, Basant Garh, Udhampur

At a picturesque spot under the dense canopy of Himalayan Cedar *Cedrus deodara*, locally called Deyaar, is a temple dedicated to the serpent god, Vasuki Nag, where devotees pay respects and offer new maize cobs, semolina porridge, to the deity. The prasad is also offered to jungle crows, *Corvus macrorhynchos*, on a specified rock. Twigs of several plants like *Parthenocissus himalayana*, along with threads of faith are seen hanging on the ceiling of the temple. One Cedar tree has on its trunk even an impression of Vasuki Nag depicted as snake. Nobody ever dares to lop or damage any twig of the holy cedars here. In addition, a few Sumac trees of *Rhus punjabensis*, one Arkhol tree identified as *Toxicodendron succedanea*, and *Wikstroemia canescens* bushes are preserved in the sacred Grove.

25. Ghoda Gali Blue Pine Grove, Gool

Under the Blue Pine trees of *Pinus wallichiana*, adjacent to Gool town, lies a historical spot known for its ancient equine stone

sculptures (plural or singular? Ask the author) of warrior horsemen. The sculpture can prove a treasure trove for historians and heritage conservationists, but it is in a poor condition due to the neglect it faced during the disturbed days of terrorism. It needs better upkeep and promotion under ecotourism. In addition to pine trees, Oleaster silver berry bushes growing in the location provide forest fruit rich in antioxidants, minerals and vitamins. Rhea bushes, *Dabregeasia hypolecua*, known for their fibre and fruit, too find shelter in the sacred grove. Other prominent edible herbs found in the grove are Watercress *Nasturtium officinale* growing along water channels and *Pilea umbrosa*, locally called 'Phander'. Most of the water bowlies unfortunately have dried up, and some have silted. Only a few bowlies still provide drinking water to the locals and visitors.

26. Vasuki Nag Sacred Grove Dudu

The space around famous the Vasuki Nag temple at Dudu serves as a kind of sacred grove, with over 30 trees of Moru *Quercus floribunda* syn *Q. dialata*, 5 trees of Sinnu *Fraxinus hookeri*, few trees of Banj *Quercus oblongata* and Cherry bark elm *Mannu* trees of *Ulmus villosa*. None of these trees is allowed to be cut down for any purpose, though dry twigs can be used for temple activities. Many of the Moru oak trees are, however, heavily infested with two epiphytes: one is *Taxillus vestitus* epiphytic mistletoe known to locals as 'Rinn' and the other is the leafless epiphytic mistletoe, *Viscum articulatum* known as 'Jinji' in Dogri.

27. Tahli Mata Mandir and Sacred Shisham Tree

The Shisham tree is known as Tahli in Dogri language and Northern Rosewood tree in English. In Sanskrit, the tree is called *Shinshpa*. Shisham is a reputed timber tree, but as per research findings of the Central Drug Research Institute

Lucknow, it has medicinal value as well. Shisham extract has been developed as a medicine called 'DalZbone', derived from the scientific name of the tree, 'Dalbergia alata'. The botanical name of the tree is in the honour of a German personality, Dalberg.

Near the International Border adjoining Gajansoo in Jammu district, there is a historic Tahli Mata mandir under a sacred Shisham, Dalbergia sissoo. The huge tree trunk and the idol of goddess Kali are revered by devotees. The management of the temple is looked after by Chinore Agricultural authorities. In addition to 250 year old Shisham, other trees growing in the vicinity are Terminalia bellirica (Bahera), Terminalia chebula (Harad), Aegle marmelos (Bael), Phyllanthus emblica (Amla), Psidium guajava (Amrood), Millettia pinnata (Sukhchain), Hibiscus rosa-sinensis, Lagerstroemia indica (Panjtara), Cassia glauca, Tecoma stans (Yellow bells) and Ocimum tenuiflorum (Holy basil). Outside the gate and in front of the temple is a 250-year-old sacred fig tree Ficus religiosa. During the nine-day Navratra festival of Maa Durga, devotees in thousands visit the Tahli Mata Mandir.

28. Panjbakhtar Mesquite Tree, Jammu

Old sacred trees growing in the premises of Panjbakhtar temple are a symbol of religious faith. The temple is located in the heart of old city adjoining the Residency Road. Sacred mesquite trees planted there belong to the plant genus Prosopis. The trees are reverentially preserved by devotees who use its wood for religious ceremonies. However, it is not a true Shami Prosopis cineraria. The Jand tree seen in the Panjbakhtar temple complex is identified as Prosopis juliflora which is not native to India. It is declared as the State Tree by Rajasthan in the name of 'Khejdi' and in Telangana in the name of 'Jammi'. The witnessed supreme

sacrifice of villagers of village Khejdli near Jodhpur in Rajasthan who laid down their lives to protect it in the year 1730.

29. Mata Katao Temple Sacred Forest, Sunderbani

The religious spot, with amazing foot impressions of Goddess Kataao on the rock and formation of two never drying water tanks at top of a hill forest, is a location with rich diversity of plants like Elephant rope tree *Sterculia villosa*, Velvety melon counterfoil tree *Phyllanthus velutinus*, Ceylon tea tree *Cassine glauca*, Ujjain *Desmodium Ougeinia oojenensis*, Khinna tree *Ficus semicordata*, Roxburgh's fig *Ficus auriculata*, Dhamman *Grewia tiliifolia*, Pansar *Wendlandia heynei*. A lesser known Sanjeevni herb, *Polygala arvensis*, growing near the old temple is amazing. Its hairy seeds make miraculous movements on uttering the sounds of 'Govind go' or 'Go binjo'. The seeds move like the cows of Lord Krishna. Another unique legume seen in the area is *Rhynchosia pseudocajan* (Dapakkhru), which looks like Arhar, but has a climbing habit. Its flowers are dark yellow. Devotees visit the temple during the auspicious occasion of Navratri - nine nights dedicated to seek blessings of the goddess for health, security and prosperity. Ma Katao is considered a form of Goddess Maa Vaishno Devi, who helped the exhausted soldiers during the 1965 war to quench their thirst and feel motivated.

30. Saruisar wetland sacred Grove, Jammu

Within the Saruisar Ramsar site, an island in the middle of lake waters is a secure and secluded sacred grove dominated by wild date palm trees which provide shelter and roosting location for cormorants, egrets, herons and other waterfowl. Medicinal marsh herb *Acorus calamus* grows here in abundance, along the peripheral waters. Trees of Jamun -*Syzygium cumini*, Wild date

Palm Phoenix *sylvestris*, Indian Mahogany *Toona ciliata*, Mango *Mangifera indica*, Soapnut tree *Sapindus mukorosii*, Kumkum tree *Mallotus philippensis* are encountered in the grove. Butterflies seen visiting the surrounding vegetation include several whites, yellows, nymphalids, pansies and swallow tails.

31. Kapil Muni Ashram, Thubb Area, Gajansoo, Jammu

An old historic location, Kapil Muni Ashram has a rich diversity of trees, namely *Mitragyna parvifolia* (Krishan Kadamb, Kaim), *Millettia pinnata* (Sukhchain, Karanj), *Aegle marmelos* (Bilva, Bael), *Ficus elastica* (Rubber fig), *Roystonea regia* (Royal Palm), *Bauhinia purpurea* (Gulabi Kariyal, Kachnar), *Grevillea robusta* (Silver oak), *Platanus orientalis* (Oriental plane), *Cestrum nocturnum* (Raat ki raani), *Tectona grandis* (Sagwaan), *Achras zapota* (Chiku), *Malus domestica* (Seb) etc.

32. Terminalia Arjuna Sacred Trees at Nardibala in Mera Mandriyan

Nine exceptionally large and old trees of *Terminalia arjuna* with trunk girth of over 15- 20 feet stand preserved as heritage trees. The trees are supposed to have antiquity related to Mahabharata times as per local faith. It seems that they are at least 300 years old and largest among all the Arjun trees seen growing in Jammu province. In addition to Arjun trees, one finds trees of *Mallotus philippensis* (Kampillak), *Aegle marmelos* (Bael) and huge older Liana of *Phanera vahlii* syn *Bauhinia vahlii* (Maloo creeper, Maloongar, Maljhan) with treelike growth climbing on one of *Terminalia arjuna* tree beside the legendary water channel connected to the Pandava's stay at the site.

33. Sacred Grove Faqirpura Dawar in Gurez

Sacred traditions nurture tree growth around the Sufi shrines across the Valley of Kashmir. One such shrine at Faqirpura village Dawar in the Kishanganga Valley has preserved Hamilton's spindle *Euonymus hamiltonianus* tree growth, in addition to walnut trees. When autumn approaches, both Hamilton's spindle and walnut trees lose foliage, but the trees of *Euonymus hamiltonianus* family get decorated with pink red capsular fruits which is the favourite food feast for many passerine birds at the location. The bark of Hamilton's spindle tree is fissured and presents a crocodilian decorative look.

34. Panjpeer sacred Grove, Pargwal

The land of Sohni Mahiwal, an island of Pargwal, is known for Sufi traditions, community preservation and tree worship. At Rajpura Pargwal, the sacred grove of a Peer Baba Panjpeer shrine has preserved the growth of trees like Sacred Fig tree Peepal, sacred Java Plum Jamun, Sacred Madagascar Governor's plum, *Flacourtia indica*, Monk's pepper Chaste tree, *Vitex negundo*, sacred Tilki Pansar, *Wendlandia heyneii* and Shisham, *Dalbergia sissoo*. Both Hindus and Muslims offer prayers to seek blessings of the Peer Naba, especially on Thursdays and other pious occasions.

35. Bhaderkali Temple Sacred Grove, Handwara, Kashmir

Despite disturbed conditions and mass exodus of Kashmiri Pandits, religious places maintained their sanctity even during the turmoil. Bhaderkali temple idol of Goddess Kali, though stolen in 1983, was recovered in 1996 and reinstalled in the temple with the help of the army. The temple, which has a burnt tree trunk of *Cedrus deodara* Himalayan cedar Devdar, attracts devotees from far and wide, especially during Navratri on Ram Navami

and Dussehra days. The sacred space around the temple has a rich diversity of cedar, pine and Chinar trees. It is connected by road from Handwara town, followed by stair steps leading to the temple. A few 'Tree Talk' sessions were organized here to spread Biodiversity awareness during the UN-declared International Year of Forests, 2011.

36. Babliana Sacred Grove, Satwari, Jammu

In the village Rohi Babliana adjoining Satwari, Jammu, is a sacred grove around a Peer Baba shrine, with three *Ziziphus jujuba* trees, one *Murraya koenigii*, one *Bombax ceiba*, a reputed medicinal climber, *Tinospora cordifolia*, bushes of *Justicia adhatoda* and *Capparis sepiaria*. It serves as a sort of green lung in the vast expanse of city concrete. The day temperature of the sacred grove during summers is a few degrees less than outside. Devotees visit the shrine on Sundays and Thursdays and light mustard-oil lamps to seek divine blessings.

37. Sacred Banyan, Baba Pargo ji Maharaj, Pargwal, Akhnoor

Near to the historic Mahiwal village of Hamirpur, a sacred Devasthan dedicated to the memory of Pargo ji Maharaj has preserved a huge Banyan *Bargad* tree over the temple. Devotees tie threads of faith on the bough of Banyan and seek divine blessings.

38. Heritage Red Wood tree, Yarika, Tangmarg

Among three long lived global Redwood taxa, namely *Sequoiadendron giganteum* (Giant Redwood), *Sequoia sempervirens* (Coastal Redwood) and *Metasequoia glyptostroboides* (Dawn Redwood), only Redwood tree taxa

growing at Yarika, Tangmarg in Kashmir is a rare tree of Jammu and Kashmir. No wonder that students and conservationists adore the antiquity of the Giant Sequiodendron arboreum which grows wild in its natural habitat, Sierra Nevada mountain range, Californian, United State of America. Named variously as Giant Redwood, Sierra Redwood, Wellington tree or simply Big tree, its specimens in the natural habitat are world's massive tree specimens on the earth known to mankind. Several attempts to propagate its seedlings in Kashmir have not yielded success so far. A strategy is needed to be developed to bring the rare tree taxa to the notice of tourists by including it in the tourism map. The location is under the supervision of the Indian Institute of Integrative Medicine J&K. Scientists under the supervision of Prof. A.K. Kaul, working at Baba Ghulam Shah Badshah University, Rajouri, initiated research work on its seed germination and multiplication of seedlings but success has eluded them so far.

39. Sacred Grove, Bawa Bhoto, Gajansoo, Jammu

Another sacred grove dedicated to a clan deity, Bawa Bhoto, has unique tree diversity. It contains one of the oldest *Dalbergia sissoo* (Shisham, Tahli), Tiger claw tree *Erythrina variegata* (Thubb), Oriental Plane *Platanus orientalis* (Chinar), Banyan fig *Ficus benghalensis* (Bargad), Panjtara *Lagerstroemia indica*, Ber *Ziziphus jujuba* (Ber), Stone apple *Aegle marmelos* (Bel), Indian Gooseberry *Phyllanthus embelica* (Amla), Shami *Prosopis cineraria* (Jand), Kamini *Murraya paniculata*, Flame of the Forest *Butea monosperma*, *Magnolia champaca* (Champa), Pilkhan *Ficus virens* (Palakhi) stand protected. The grove is home to several birds like Eurasian Hoopoe - *Upupa epops*, scaly breasted Munia – *Lonchura punctulata*, Baya - *Ploceus manyar*, Bulbul -

Pycnonotus cafer, Golden oriole- *Oriolus kundoo*, and Indian Grey Hornbill -*Ocyrceros birostris*.

40. Sacred Trees at Narsingh Devji Temple, Ghagwal, Jammu

In almost all the places of worship, heritage trees are conserved as a mark of devotion to Mother Nature. The Narsingh Dev temple at Ghagwal, visited by many devotees, is an example. In front of this temple, old protected trees of Peepal *Ficus religiosa*, Mulberry *Morus indica* and Margosa *Azadirachta indica* are worshipped by visitors for their significance in mythology and folklore, Neem wood is used for making the idols of Jagannath, Balabhadrand Subhadra at Puri, Peepal trees are worshipped as the manifestation of Lord Vishnu and Mulberry has its religious sanctity. The nearby pond, developed by shepherds and grazers in the hoary past, is named 'Gwaale da Talab' in their memory. Old fig trees of Peepaland Bargad are preserved around the periphery of the grove. A well designed 'Nakshatra Garden' exists in the vicinity of Narsingh Dev ji temple, Ghagwal.

41. Ma Dati Sacred Grove Dbujj Kaka, Vijaypur

A sacred water body under the temple and the presence of old trees such as a mighty Banyan with a prop trunk, three old Peepal trees, Bael trees, Jamun, in addition to a rich growth of medicinal shrubs like Rehaad *Capparis sepiaria*, Adusa *Justicia adhatoda*, Kundru *Coccinia grandis* make it a sacred grove-cum-germplasm conservatory. Many parakeets, hornbills, green pigeons, barbets, bees, butterflies enjoy secluded shelter in the grove.

42. Kapla Peer Siddh Nath Sacred Grove, Sawankha

Near to Swankha in Ramgarh sector, a sacred abode of saints abounds in tree diversity. Trees of Jamun (*Syzygium cumini*), Bael Bilva (*Aegle marmelos*), Peepal (*Ficus religiosa*), Krishan's Kadamb (*Mitragyna parvifolia*), Parijat (*Nyctanthes arbor tristis*), Rudraksh (*Elaeocarpus ganitrus*), Lamarck's Kadamb (*Neolamarckia cadamba*), Amla *Phyllanthus emblica*, Reehad *Capparis sepiaria*, Giloe *Tinospora cordifolia*, Milkweed *Calotropis procera*, Kala Dhatura *Datura metel*, Kamini *Murraya paniculata*, Sacred basil *Ocimum tenuiflorum* are seen preserved in the surrounding space. Kapla Peer used to put Sidh Nath's to rigorous tests.

43. Mata Bholi Devi Pond and sacred tree grove, Gho Brahmna, Jammu

On the way to Swankha, the Mata Bholi Devi temple, housing the idols of Shanidev and Hanuman, is located under the shade of a mighty Banyan *Ficus benghalensis*. The tree is the abode of mynas, parakeets and barbets. A pond also exists there. Among the religiously significant trees planted in the sacred space are Flame of the Forest *Dhak*, *Butea monosperma*, White Fig tree *Ficus virens*, Night flowering Jasmine *Nyctanthes arbor tristis*, Sorrowless tree *Saraca asoca*, Indian Gooseberry *Phyllanthus emblica*, Fearless Belleric Myrobalan *Terminalia bellerica*, Arjunic Myrobalan *Terminalia arjuna*, Kachnar *Bauhinia variegata* etc.

44. Diospyros sacred Grove, Gho Rakwala, Ramgarh, Jammu

Beside a pond - an abode of several water birds, mallard, teal, white breasted hen, kingfishers - is a dense sacred Grove dominated by old trees of Bombay Ebony, Rajain *Diospyros cordifolia*. In front of the Shaheed Samadhi of the Baba, an old *Diospyros cordifolia* tree is preserved since centuries. In addition

to Diospyros trees, one finds medicinal plants like *Justicia adhatoda* (Adusa), *Capparis sepiaria* (Kanthari). Introduction of Eucalyptus trees is however recent and not native to the sacred grove.

45. Sui Simbli Old Jiyopota and Pilkhan Tree, Kanhachak, Jammu

The historic Jiyopota tree, *Putranjiva roxburghii*, supposed to be planted by Maharaja Gulab Singh, after his coronation as the King of Jammu in 1822, is in front of the historic Shri Raghunath Temple at Sui Simbli. The Maharaja used to visit Mahant Guru Prem Das who had prophesied that he would be crowned as the raja of Jammu. When the holy man's prophecy came true, a temple was constructed on the spot and a Jiyopota tree planted there. Inside the temple space stands an old Cypress tree, while outside the sacred premises exist old Peepal tree and a few trees of *Bael Aegle marmelos* tree sacred to Lord Shiva. Adjacent to the temple is a historic Peer Baba ziyarat, where exceptionally large and one of the oldest Pilkhan tree stands preserved by the locals belonging to both Hindu and Muslim communities. Rags and threads of faith are seen tied on the side branches of *Ficus virens*, locally called Plakhi. The locals claim that Plakhi's springtime tender foliage can be made into nutritious cuisines.

46. Peer Jalali Sacred Fig Peepal and Bargad, Jammu

Just short of Bachial, beside a water channel, are preserved twin figs. An elderly lady, Pasho Devi, who visits the shrine every Thursday, revealed that earlier an old mulberry tree existed at the site. It was later replaced by the mighty Bargad Banyan tree. At present, a sacred Peepal has also established itself on the spot: thus twin figs, *Ficus benghalensis* (Baud) and *F religiosa* (Peepal) are growing together as one. Several birds, such as green pigeons

(Preu, Preva), barbets (Kudroo, Basanta), grey hornbills (Doaa) et cetera visit the tree for fig forage. Blue rock pigeons, *Columba livia*, have also taken refuge in the matted prop root growth.

47. Bawe Da Jaad and Bawe Da Talah Jhiri, Jammu

The sacred grove of Baba Jitto at Jhidi has many aged old trees of *Butea monosperma* (Dhak), *Ficus virens* (Palakshi), *Ficus benghalensis* (Bargad), *F. hispida* (Udumber), *F. religiosa* (Peepal), *Flacourtia indica* (Vikankat), *Senegalia catechu* (Khair), *Ficus racemosa* (Goolar), *Diospyros cordifolia* (Rajain), *Mitragyna parvifolia* (Kaim Kadamb) as well as mango trees. These trees need to be protected and managed as Baba Jitto Sacred Grove at village Panchayat level by the designated Biodiversity Management Committee Jhidi. In addition, there is a preserved pond at Baba da Talah, surrounded by sacred Peepal trees where devotees visit to collect holy clay as medicine to cure skin ailments. An annual fair is held at Jhiri during the month of November and devotees take a dip in holy pond to collect the clay.

48. Sacred Fir Grove, Bootapatthri, Gulmarg, Kashmir

Under the mighty Himalayan Fir trees, *Abies pindrow*, a sacred Sufi shrine is located at Bootapatthri in Gulmarg Biosphere reserve, Kashmir. Sacred rags of faith, green sheets with quotes from Holy Quran and bangles are seen fastened to tree trunks to express gratitude after wishes of devotees are fulfilled by the Almighty.

49. Deva Mai Sacred Figs and Mangoes, Katra

Deva Mai, supposed to be the second incarnation of Goddess Vaishno Devi, is visited by devotees in search of mental solace

and divine blessings. In the sacred space around the temple, one finds protected trees of Ashvattha-Ficus religiosa, Aam - Mangifera indica, in addition to the preserved growth of Parijat - Nyctanthes arbor tristis, Palakshi - Ficus virens, Banyan - Fig tree Ficus benghalensis, Tallow - tree Charbi Triadacasebifera, Kumkum tree Mallotus philippensis, Hackberry tree - Celtis tetrandra, White pearl bush – Securinega virosa, Conker berry - Carissa opaca and Squirrel tail bush -Colebrookia oppositifolia.

50. Baba Chamliyal Sacred Grove, Jammu

Near to the Line of Control in Ramgarh sector, a famous shrine known for miraculous soil, called 'shakkar', which is effective against various skin disorders, has 7 trees of Varuna Barna, sacred garlic pear tree Crateva religiosa, in addition to four or five Shisham trees Dalbergia sissoo, a few Jamun trees Syzygium cumini, Curry leaf tree Murraya koenigii, Bael tree Aegle marmelos and two large sized Peepal Ficus religiosa trees. These trees are revered by the locals as well as devotees from outside. In June, an annual congregation of devotees not only from the Indian side but also from Pakistan takes place and 'shakkar' is collected for seeking divine blessings. Baba Chamliyal Grove is really a symbol of cultural harmony among Hindus and Muslims.

51. Heritage Kainth tree at Sankri Devta, Pancheri

Kainth tree, also called 'Batangi', is a wild pear of Jammu hills. The edible fruit turns black on ripening. Aged more than 100 years, the Kainth is preserved out of piety and faith toward the village deity, Baba Sankri Devta ji Maharaj. Multi-coloured rags of faith are seen fastened to the twigs of this tree. Due to age, some mushrooms have taken a foothold near the ground and call for immediate silvicultural care and treatment. Holy iron chains on the trunk show reverence to the tree. The side of the tree

canopy, facing the metallic galvanized iron roofing, has dried up of late. Removal of the metallic roofing sheets may be one option to lessen solar glare and heat effect on the otherwise healthy sacred tree. Beside the old Kainth tree, one Oriental Plane tree *Platanus orientalis* stands planted by the devotees. Little away on the side front, a very old Himalayan Butterfly bush, *Buddleja crispa*, adds floral charm to the premises during the springtime and summer season. Cedar planting in the vicinity is the hope for adding more trees to the treeless expanse. Near the Sankri Devta mandir, a large evergreen Moru oak tree, *Quercus floribunda* syn *Q dilatata*, stands preserved by locals, under which Kalka Mata is worshipped by devotees to seek divine blessings. It is a heritage tree standing close to the newly constructed forest inspection hut. *Rhododendron arboreum* trees can be introduced in the available blank spaces.

52. Maulsari Sacred Grove, Raghunathji Temple, Jammu

In the Raghunath ji temple in the heart of Jammu city, a well preserved Maulsari Grove has over 20 trees, Botanically identified as *Mimusops elengi*, 'Vakula' in Sanskrit, the evergreen trees bear orange red edible cherry like fruits, called 'Spanish cherry'. The wood is quite strong, fit for cabinet work. Another name given to Malusari is Bullet wood tree. In addition to Maulsari trees, there are two old trees of Krishan Kadamb *Mitragyna parvifolia* (not to be confused with *Neolamarckia cadamba*), one old tree of Arjun *Terminalia arjuna*, four trees of sacred peepal *Ficus religiosa*, one tree of Banyan fig *Ficus benghalensis*, five trees of Wood apple *Bilva Bael pattar* *Aegle marmelos*, two treelets each of Kamini *Murraya koenigii*, and Litchi *chinensis*, a few shrubs of pomegranate and Chandni *Tabernmontana divaricata*. These trees to add charm and give an aesthetic look to surroundings.

53. Shiv Mandir Chhapanu Sacred Grove, Bamiyal, Nagrota

Located beside the rivulet Oli in the vicinity of village Bamiyal is a historic Shiv temple having ruins of an old sara imeant for the pilgrims of Goddess Vaishno Devi. There is also a stepped well for supply of potable water for the devotees. An old Peepal tree with vegetation comprising of medicinal plants like *Mallotus philippensis* (Kamilla), *Litsea glutinosa* (Raihn, Meddasakk), *Casearia tomentosa* (Cheela), *Ficus racemosa* (Rumbal, Goolar), *Pyrus pashia* (Kainth), *Woodfordia fruticosa* (Dhaai, Dhatri) stand preserved. It is desirable to add religious trees inside the sacred space available. Planting of Sita Ashok, *Saraca asoca*, *Bael*, *Aegle marmelos*, *Palash*, *Butea monosperma*, *Kachnar*, *Bauhinia variegata*, *Thubb*, *Erythrina variegata*, *Barna*, *Crateva religiosa* is recommended during the ongoing celebrations of Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav.

54. Panjpeer Sacred Grove in Ramnagar Wildlife Sanctuary, Jammu

On the old Jammu-Nagrota road, just one kilometer from Amar Mahal, is a historic Panjpeer shrine with preserved tree growth comprising of two Banyan trees, one sacred Ber tree, one Kaim tree -*Mitragyna parvifolia*, two *Eucalyptus* trees, one mango and a few *Vachelia nilotica* trees. Adjoining to the main shrine is a very old revered tree of Rajain *Diospyros cordifolia* (Bombay Ebony) which is protected and preserved as mark of respect to the noble soul of saint named Panjpeer. In addition, a few exotic garden plants have been introduced to beautify the surroundings.

55. Baba Abdunath Sacred Grove, Samba

At a distance of 7 km from Samba near village Mananu, perched on a hillock is the sacred shrine of Baba Abdunath. Traditionally, milch cattle milk is first offered to the deity before consumption. The shrine has a unique tree diversity. Its uniqueness lies in having preserved half a dozen trees of Kakoha *Flacourtia indica* Madagascar Governor's plum, Vikankat, four mighty Banyan trees - *Ficus benghalensis*, a mighty Maloongar Maloo creeper, a liana *Bauhinia vahlii*, old bushes of Conker berry *Carissa opaca* Garna, solitary sacred Raathal Rathei *Securinega virosa*, three trees of True Krishan Kadamb *Mitragyna parvifolia*, two trees of Bael *Aegle marmelos*, one tree of White siris *Albizia procera*, a tall tree of Garlic pear tree *Varuna Baarna Crateva adansonii* var *odora* (syn *C religiosa*) and an Arjun tree -*Terminalia arjuna*, in addition to bushes of Malabar nut *Justicia adhatoda*, curry leaf bushes *Murraya koenigii*, Karangal tree *Cassia fistula* and Flame of the forest *Butea monosperma*. Newly planted trees of *Alstonia scholaris* Saptarni Satpattiya are also grown in the shrine. On Sundays, Kheer is prepared and distributed as Baba's prasad among the visitors. Birds visiting the sacred grove include Hornbills, Drongos, Rufous Treepie, Long tailed Minivet, Paradise fly catcher, Golden Oriole, Magpie Robin, Tailor bird and Crows.

56. Baba Barkhandi Sacred Grove, Kheri, Bhalwal, Jammu

Situated at the outskirts of Jammu is a lesser-known Baba Barkhandi Peerbaba shrine under the shade of old Banyan and Peepal trees. In addition to these fig trees, the nearby trees are Madagascar Governor's plum *Flacourtia indica*, Indian Ash tree *Lannea coromandelica*, Kumkum tree *Mallotus philippensis*, Dudhi tree *Wrightia arborea*, besides shrubs like *Adusa* *Justicia zeylanica*, Raathal *Securinega virosa*. The shrine is perched on a

hillock beside a village road connecting Kheri village to Kangar rural hamlet in Bhalwal block. The nearby pond needs planting of medicinal trees like Gamhari *Gmelina arborea*, Padal *Stereospermum chelonoides*, Harad *Terminalia chebula*, Amla *Phyllanthus emblica*, Baheda *Terminalia bellirica*, Kutaj *Holarhena pubescens*, Parijat *Nyctanthes arbor tristis*, Dhak *Butea monosperma*, Sahjan *Moringa oleifera*, Kachnar *Bauhinia variegata*.

57. Saharan Sacred Grove, Gajansoo, Jammu

A few kilometers ahead of Gajansoo township one comes across a dense stretch of preserved old tree growth with predominance of Jamun (*Syzygium cuminii*), Jiyopota (*Putranjiva roxburghii*) and Rumbal (*Ficus racemosa*). Saharan Vansthali has preserved growth of trees namely *Putranjiva roxburghii*, *Syzygium cuminii*, *Diospyros montana*, *Mangifera indica*, *Ficus racemosa*, *Mallotus philippensis*, *Neolamarckia cadamba*, *Brussonetia papyrifera* and shrubbery comprising of *Murraya koenigii*, *Justicia adhatoda*, *Ficus palmata*, *Achyranthes aspera*, *Dioscorea belophylla*, *Anisomeles indica*. There is a Nag temple, in addition to Devsthans of different clans like Bajpuri, Soddhiand Rajput biradri. Numerous birds such as *Eudynamus scolopaceus* (Koel), *Oriolus kundoo* (Peelkad), *Drongo macrocercus* (Kali laant), *Pericrocotus ethologus* (Surkholi), *Copsychus saularis* (Guaalpiddi), *Ploceus benghalensis* (Bregdu), *Ocyerosbirostris* (Doaa), *Rhipidura albicollis* (Surmyichidi), *Zosterops palpebrosus* (Chitti akkh), *Spilopelia senegalensis* (Todrughuggi), *Treron phoenicopterus* (Preu) are encountered in the sacred grove. The most fascinating sight is that of a serpent deity impression on the Mango tree trunk close to Nag Devta mandir, where devotees offer prayers for longevity and getting rid of the fear of serpents. The nearby termatarium is worshipped especially on the

Nagpanchmi day. Two community congregations are held here in a year, one in the month of June and other in October, coinciding with full moon of Ashad and Kartik months. Devotees from faraway places of Punjab and Hariyana come to seek blessings of deities established in the dense sacred grove of Saharan Vansthali.

58. Budda Kedarnath Temple Grove, Chenani, Udhampur

The historic cave temple dedicated to Lord Shiva is popularly known as Budda Kedarnath. It is located beside a rivulet inside a dense forest adjoining Village Dhanas. An old heritage tree, *Ulmus villosa*, locally called Maradu, is inside the riverine tract. The old rotten trunk has been swept away, leaving the younger trunk intact. *Alangium chinense* (Chinese Alangium) treelet, locally named as 'Mandari' is growing in the shrubbery comprising of plants like *Cornus macrophylla* (Aduaa), *Rubus paniculatus* (Ainsloo), *Rhus chinensis* (Titri), *Viburnum mullaha* (Malechaa), *Quercus glauca* (Banji), *Drepanostachyum falcatum* (Narkali, Ringaal), *Pilea scripta*, *Pilea umbrosa*, *Wikstroemia canescens* (Tartaang, Chamlaakh), *Indigofera heterantha* (Katthi), *Leptodermis lanceolata* (Guhaada) etc. Birds seen in the vicinity include Monal Pheasant, Himalayan Whistling thrush, Lineated laughing thrush, Rufous Sibia, Nut cracker, White capped redstart, Plumbeous water redstart. An annual mela is organized here on the occasion of Ashadh Purnima.

59. Heritage Crateva Trees of Jammu

Known to the locals as 'Barna' or 'Varuna' (Sanskrit name of the god of seas), the *Crateva* tree is a sacred tree of Jammu. It is preserved at multiple places of worship like Paar Baba shrines, village temples and ponds. The Varuna tree, more than 250 years old, is preserved with the holy flag or Jhanda fluttering at the

summit of the canopy. The tree is located at village Jhanda in Bhupnargarh hill in Samba district. It is revered by devotees of Baba Siddh Gouria. In addition to this huge tree, an old Banyan fig tree (*Ficus benghalensis*), Ber tree (*Ziziphus jujuba*) and Saprtparni tree also stand preserved at the Gajansoo, Jammu, temple complex. Located opposite the Govt.High School, Baliyal Rajpura, Pargwal, another sacred *Crateva religiosa* tree exists at the Peerbaba shrine. Varuna tree reputedly has medicinal properties. Its bark, fruit, leaves are used by the Ayurvedic practitioners in the treatment of urinary and kidney troubles. The Department of Posts, Government of India has issued a commemorative postal stamp to highlight its cultural, medicinal and religious significance. Varuna tree is the larval host plant for Orange tip butterfly, *Hebomoia glaucippe*. As flowers have long spidery stamens, the tree is fondly named as Spider tree of India. It grows in shivaliks as a wild medicinal & decorative sacred tree.

At Baba Bankhandi, Badori near Jammu we find old Varuna tree preserved inside a sacred place of worship dedicated to the memory of Baba Bankhandi. Another location where sacred Varuna trees are seen preserved is Baba Abdunath shrine near Samba in Jammu.

60. Trees of Jhingni at sacred places of worship

Jhingni is Sanskrit name of *Lannea coromandelica* which in Dogri is named as Kaimbel or Gadambal, identified as *Lannea coromandelica* under the Mango family *Anacardiaceae*. One of the known medicinal trees, Jhingini is also named as Promodini, Shemti, Mohin or Moi. Its gum is used to cure urinary tract infections and its bark employed in the treatment of bone fractures. Its tender leaves are cooked as a vegetable by tribals. It attracts several insects, birds, squirrels as their food tree.

Roadside solitary *Lannea coromandelica* tree beside village clan deity kuldevi is seen protected by locals at village Nud on way to Mansar in Samba. It is supposed to keep away evil spirits and is preserved as a heritage tree.

Jhingni tree is deciduous tree with alternate pinnate leaves, leaflets ovate acuminate, flowers greenish yellow, fruits oblong. It belongs to Mango family Anacardiaceae.

During autumn, foliage turns golden yellow, stem cuts exudate transparent gum which finds use in calico printing and is also used in white wash. Tender leaves are cooked as vegetable. Fruits are eaten by birds. Blaze is pink red, heartwood useful as household timber used in oil pressers. It is the commonest tree of dry deciduous forests throughout India. This tree is seen under community conservation in Shivalik.

Another *Lannea coromandelica* tree is seen protected at Peerbaba shrine at Chowki Chaura in Kalidhar forests of Jammu. Fruits are eaten by many birds like parakeets. Gum is used in calico printing and tender leaves are cooked as vegetable in Bihar.

Among several trees protected at Taida, Rajwalta in Ramkot forest range, medium-sized tree of Jhingini *Lannea coromandelica* beside water bodies is centre of religious faith & devotion. Devotees worship the tree and red cloth is rolled on the trunk to exhibit religious significance.

61. Mango orchards of Hutt, Basohli

Mango tree also named as Cuckoo joy tree due to its association with cuckoo koel songs during summer is adored in Indian literature. National tree of Bangladesh and national fruit of India, Pakistan & Phillipines had special royal patronage during Mughal era.

At Hutt village, Basohli in Kathua district, Raja Bhupat Pal brought over sixty varieties of mango during seventeenth century

and established royal orchard of great fame & name. Till 1966, the orchard was under the control of J&K Revenue Department and later it was handed over to the Department of Horticulture. Presently not more than 300 mango trees are left out of earlier count of over 700 mango trees. Many trees got dried up due to ageing & pest infestation over the years of neglect and poor upkeep.

Many trees seen at Hutt are relict trees of earlier established fifteen orchards having names like Jandralli, Ambika, Gullaban, Godhra, Parnai, Chhibbu, Garh, Khajuran, Kainthu, Naru, Nalani, Kothi, Sukhchain baghs which need to be rejuvenated as heritage mango orchards of Hutt, Basohli.

62. Preserved Oleander leaf fig at Zamslan Mahore

Fig has shaped our culture & religious ethos. Indians have special connection with figs used as it is as a motif in sculpture, paintings, embroidery and architecture. Among many known species, *Ficus neriifolia* is a lesser known Fig tree of Jammu hills. The tree is seen growing at Chormotu, Ramkot, Darhal, Rajouri forests. Its spring foliage is fascinating pink and its tender leaves are cooked as a vegetable by locals, popularly named as Dudhilo, Dodhla, Dudhlo.

One solitary *Ficus neriifolia* is seen protected in Mahore forest Division. The tree with multiple stems arising at ground level has interesting story. It came in the alignment of road and was to be removed. Wailing cries were heard by the engineers. A mother who had lost her son namely Shafi, wanted to preserve that tree as she connected fig tree to the childhood memories of her lost son. The story changed the heart of surveyers and changed the road alignment to save the tree in the rural hamlet Baaggaan Jamsalaan. So it is a kind of tree kept preserved in memory of a departed soul.

Fig is suitable even for bonsai making and tender leaves make a delicious cuisine.

63. Chilla tree at Daate da Talaah, Jammu

Jammu kandi belt known for scarcity of water during summer months has a good network of village ponds with Peepal, bargad, Jamun & Krishan Kadamb trees planted for shade around the embankment.

Alongwith these trees, many ponds have preserved even Chilla trees beside waterbodies. Daate da Talaah at Birpur has preserved solitary Chilla tree growing amid concrete stairs. The name Chilla is derived from Sanskrit word Chillhak and is botanically identified as *Casearia tomentosa* under the family Flacourtiaceae or Salicaceae as per new systematics. Fruits on maturity get dehisced to expose seeds wrapped in bright red pulp which is sometimes employed as fish poison.

64. Sacred Bael & Jamun trees

Bael, *Aegle marmelos* is known as wood apple or stone apple due to its hard fruit shell and fruit & leaves are offered to Lord Shiva especially on Shivratri day. Likewise Jamun, *Syzygium cumini* is seen planted in various temples inside Jammu city.

On way to Oli mata in the centre of macadmized road is holy Peerbaba shrine with preserved old Bael tree now dried up and a green Jamun tree *Syzygium cuminii*. The shrine is located on a raised platform with iron fencing & a gate. Bael tree *Aegle marmelos* is sacred to Lord Shiva and is often seen preserved around holy Shiva temples. Jamun tree is planted around temples & as roadside avenue tree as well. Once a row of Jamun trees existed along both sides of Talab Tillo Road.

Oli Mata temple located on traditional route to Mata Vaishnodevi has preserved groves of Mangoes, water reservoir and sacred Fig tree for the comfort of devotees.

Bael, Jamun & Maulsiri trees are seen preserved inside Raghunath Ji temple, Panjbakhtar temple, Peerkho garden and historic Gauri Shankar Shiva temple Akhnoor.

Bael fruits & leaves are recommended in the treatment of ailments like diarrhoea, dysentery, diabetes, jaundice and liver disorders.

64. Horse chestnut trees at Peerbaba, Mela ground Bani, Kathua

In the mela ground of Bani, there are three preserved Horse chestnut trees botanically named as *Aesculus indica* associated with religious shrine dedicated to Peer Shah Muraad Lakhdata sahib. Trees are characterized by palmately divided compound leaves borne in opposite fashion, looking elegant when laden with erect flowering branches. Locally named as Gugg or Guggu or Goon or Bankhodi, trees look majestic during flowering time in mid-summer. No damage to preserved heritage trees is tolerated out of religious sanctity but elsewhere trees are lopped for fodder and wood is used for making utensils. Fruits are processed to remove bitter saponins before making porridge by the locals.

65. Sacred Grove at Baba Bankhandi, Bhadori, Bari Brahmna, Jammu

Located beside the road linking Smailpur village to Bhadori, opposite to old village pond, there is a famous Baba Bankhandi

Peerbaba shrine with old preserved growth of trees & shrubs. 250 years old Garlic pear tree locally called Barna (Varuna in Sanskrit), botanically named as *Crateva adansonii* var *odora* syn *Crateva religiosa* is preserved inside the shrine. Four or five trees of Krishan Kadamb, *Mitragyna parvifolia* locally called Kaim stand preserved nearby but huge *Mitragyna parvifolia* tree is preserved little farther from the Peerbaba where ladies come to take bath during the month of sawan and worship the tree as a part of cultural tradition and religious ceremony. In addition to *Crateva religiosa* and *Mitragyna parvifolia* trees, sacred grove has rich growth of Shisham, *Dalbergia sissoo*, *Jiyopota Putranjiva roxburghii* (Childlife tree, Indian amulet tree, Lucky bean tree) trees beside bushes of *Justicia adhatoda* (Brhainkad-Dogri, Adusa-Hindi), *Murraya koenigii* (Draunkal-Dogri, Meethi neem- Hindi), *Capparis sepiaria* (Rihaar-Dogri, Kanthari-Hindi) & *Gymnosporia royleana* (Pataki-Dogri). Many bird species take refuge in the sacred grove where *Alstonia scholaris* (Indian scholar, Sattpattra-Dogri), *Senna glauca* & *Leucaena leucocephala* trees are also present.

66. Peer Baba Chatala, Bari Brahmana, Jammu

Located inside congested Industrial estate, Bari Brahmana in outskirts of Jammu is famous Peerbaba shrine known for one preserved Italian Cypress (Saru), one Mango tree (Amb), one Cuban palm (*Roystonea regia*), two Devdaru *Polyalthia* (Ram Ashok) and two Sukhchain *Millettia pinnata* trees (Karanj). In addition, ornamental Panjtara, *Lagerstroemia indica* shrub are also there. Many decorative garden plants stand introduced for positive ambience around the sanctum sanctorum of shrine.

Each year in the month of June, community congregation takes place when devotees are served holy prasad on the occasion and message of brotherhood disseminated far & wide.

67. Semal trees of Jammu hills

Semal tree *Bombax ceiba* was previously known in Botany as *Salmalia malabaricum* after its Sanskrit name *Shalmali* and Malabar region where it grows as a prominent tree of wilderness. The tree is revered by ethnic tribal communities and used during Holika Dahan celebrations especially in Rajasthan & Madhya Pradesh. Urban as well as rural landscape across Shivalik provide breathtaking view when leafless Semal trees get laden with red flowers.

One of the largest *Bombax ceiba* tree about 200 yr old is growing at Meenka Mahadev temple, Meenka village of Beri Pattan Tehsil district Rajouri in Jammu region.

Trunk circumference at breast height is over 28 feet, height of bole is more than 100 feet. As the tree is growing beside religious place of worship, the tree is considered sacred. It looks elegant when laden with blood red blossoms. Diverse kinds of birds visit flowers in the search of nectar, pollen & juicy petals.

68. Bird cherry tree, Kamachnag temple, Watsar, Kishtwar

Located at a distance of 3 km from national highway at Watsar in Chingam, Kishtwar, magnificent Nag devta shrine named Kamachnag is located under a multistemmed Bird cherry tree. *Prunus cornuta* locally named as Zumm or Zumb in Pahadi Gojri, Hindi name Jamnoi stands derived after Jamun fruit as its small sized fruits contrary to true cherry fruit turn purplish black on maturity and relished by locals. Many fruit eating birds eat Bird cherry fruits so named Bird cherry in contrast to sour Himalayan cherry *Prunus cerasoides* having scarlet pink fruits.

69. Ginkgo trees in the landscape of Kashmir

Ginkgo biloba with 270 million old evolutionary antiquity is National tree of China. It is revered by Buddhists and it is due to its religious sanctity, the tree has survived to present times despite long evolutionary origin on this earth. The tree is therefore levelled as Living fossil tree. The tree is medicinal whose leaf extract and decoction is recommended as anti-aging herbal remedy. As the tree is Gymnosperm, no fruit formation takes place, instead naked seeds with fleshy sarcotesta give a false silvery look of apricots.

More than 200 years old Maiden hair Ginkgo biloba tree which existed at Lal Mandi, Srinagar got perished during devastating deluge of September 2014, its trunk got toppled and the tree of antiquity vanished.

More than 120 years old Ginkgo biloba tree is seen growing in the Emporium garden of Floriculture department in Srinagar city. The tree is quite healthy with magnificent multistemmed branching from the base, fan-shaped broad leaves that turn fabulously brilliant yellow during autumn season to provide a festive look to the onlookers in the season of leaf fall.

Over 60 year old tree of Ginkgo biloba is seen growing in Shalimar Garden whereas twin trees, one male & the other female, are under cultivation in JNM Botanical garden Srinagar which attract tourists during autumn for their elegant fall foliage.

Two newly planted Ginkgo trees, one male and the other female, stand planted at the front lawn of Srinagar Airport. Though still young, but once mature they will add to the beauty of the autumn for the tourists & travellers.

70. Buaa Kaudi sacred Grove, Kathua

At a distance of 15 km from Kathua in the Chann village there is a historical temple dedicated to Buaa Kaudi, the daughter of revolutionary valiant farmer Bawa Jitto. As the area was visited by both while returning from Haridwar and the non-availability of water at the location prompted Buaa Kaudi to get divine power invoked for the appearance of water bodies. So the bowlies got named after Buaa Kaudi as Buaa di Baain. Devotees visit the temple, take bath in the holy water bodies for the blessings.

In the area surrounding temple, there are preserved old trees like Pilkhan *Ficus virens*, Khajur Phoenix *sylvestris*, Baheda *Terminalia bellirica*, Mango *Mangifera indica* & tree like herbaceous banana *Musa paradisiaca*.

71. Sita Ashok trees in Jammu

Located near Ghagga Chadei tourist spot, on the side cliff is located a Gyankot temple where once Guru of Maharaja Pratap Singh meditated. On the way one comes across sacred Sita Ashok tree, *Saraca indica* popularly named as Sorowless tree in contrast to Tree of sadness or sorrow *Nyctanthes arbor tristis* (Parijat of scriptures, grows wild in shivaliks & is seen planted in temples & gardens). *Saraca indica* belongs to Amaltas family but in contrast to Amaltas, Sita ashok bears scarlet to orange red petal-less flowers directly from woody boughs & branches whereas *Cassia fistula* (Amaltas) bears golden yellow flowers with 5 free petals hanging in elegant racemes during summer.

Sita Ashok tree, seen planted at Gyankot, is oldest *Saraca indica* in J&K and is heritage tree associated with worship & religious festivity. Bark, flowers, seeds are medicinal, used in the treatment of various gynecological ailments in Ayurved system of Indian medicine. Sita Ashok trees planted in Bagh- Bahu are

hardly 60 years of age but tree seen at Gyankot is more than 100 years old with 4 feet girth at breast height.

Floriculture Dept has introduced Sita Ashok trees in city spaces like Bagh-Bahu, Sohan Singh Park Gandhi Nagar, Zanana Park Dogra Hall, Jammu.

72. Revered Kanakchampa tree

Indian tree popularly named as Kanakchampa is mentioned as Karnikara in religious books. In Dogri named as Lalaar Chamba, its binomial name is *Pterospermum acerifolium*. It bears fragrant fleshy flowers with snow white petals surrounded by finger-like fleshy sepals having golden brown pubescence so named as Kanakchampa. Kanak means golden brown and champa is due to highly fragrant blossoms. Leaves are quite large leathery and used as leafy dinner plates so another name for the tree is Dinner plate tree.

100 years old Kanakchampa tree is seen growing at Peerbaba shrine dedicated to the memory of Hazrat Sain Lal Din sahib at Rakkh Bandhu on Kunjwani Bishnah road near Sahib Bandagi Ashram in Jammu outskirts. In addition to Kanakchampa, one sacred fig tree Peepal and 9 Amrood trees are seen preserved around the main peerbaba shrine.

73. Preserved Celtis trees in shrines & graveyards

Hackberry tree, *Celtis australis* locally called Brimij in Kashmir & Kharak or Khidak in Dogri is seen preserved in Sufi saint shrines and graveyards.

Baba Shungli Ziyarat near Parihaspora, Baramulla has 3 *Celtis australis* trees and nobody is permitted to damage even a branch.

Another heritage tree of faith, Brimij Hackberry *Celtis australis* alongwith Bren Indian Elm *Ulmus villosa* & Booni Oriental Plane *Platanus orientalis* is seen preserved at holy shrine

of Baba Ghulam ud Din, a disciple of Sheikh-ul Alam, Nund Rishi at Brein near Nishat Srinagar Kashmir.

Large-sized 100 year old *Celtis australis*, Brimij tree is seen protected at Baba Nagri, Wangat, Naranag in Ganderbal district. Girth at breast height is more than 1.5 meters (6 feet). Near the shrine, there is sacred Cedar tree which has many threads, cloth pieces & bangles tied to twigs out of sufi faith. Devotees visiting the shrine also pay their respects to the holy cedar Devdar tree.

74. Sacred Himalayan Yew trees around shrines

Taxus wallichiana tree aged 300 years is under worship of Subarnag serpent deity temple at Subardhar forest meadow located at 8000 ft elevation. Locally named as Birami, Barmi, Thuner, Postul in different languages, the tree is dioecious conifer tree with separate male & female trees. The tree bark traditionally is used as tea substitute by mountain communities. Extract of *Taxus* is a source of anti-cancer drug Taxol, Pacilitexel which is a synthetic drug used in cancer treatment.

One Birmi tree has several tridents offered by devotees and placed beside preserved sacred *Taxus wallichiana* tree. Other tree trunk has dried up over the years and presently not seen under worship but in earlier times when yew was green, definitely 2nd tree was also worshipped by devotees.

Many sacred groves in Kashmir like Choontvalivar, Ganderbal, has the presence of old *Taxus contorta* trees inside preserved tree vegetation as a matter of Sufi faith, led by Sheikh ul Alam, Nund Rishi about 600 years ago.

75. Suchar devta & sacred oak trees at Billawar in Kathua

After uphill trekking through oak *Rhododendron* forest, one comes across the trees of *Allan Lyonia ovalifolia* with

reddish brown twisted & fissured bark. Lodhra *Symplocos paniculata*, large woody lianas of *Rubus brunonii* (Musk rose) and *Parthenocissus Himalayana* (Himalayan wild Grape) attract attention of visitors. Unique attribute of sacred preserved growth is presence of several epiphytic ferns growing on *Quercus* & *Lyonia* trees, rich growth of several lichens & mosses growing on tree trunks.

At Suchar Baba forest, preserved growth of trees like Sangla *Neolitsea pallens* and Banj *Quercus leucotrichophora* beside bushes of Kimblu *Berberis lycium* is noticed. Horizontal oak tree trunk with several upright trunks, trunks encircled by pliable green twigs of Lodhra *Symplocos paniculata*, Talanju, Teond *Viburnum grandiflorum* and Sangla *Neolitsea pallens*, fastened by devotees to seek blessings of Suchar devta as a mark of mannat for fulfillment of wishes is a notable ritual.

(The author, a former Principal Chief Conservator of Forests, is a Sahitya Akademi awardee and also the founder of Tree Talk campaign in J&K with more than 50 books to his credit.)

MARAK OR AZA KHAN'E IN KASHMIR
A STUDY IN ART AND ARCHITECTURE

Dr Rizvi Syed Ilyas

Introduction

Unlike other forms of Islamic Spaces, such as the Mosques (*Masajid*), Shrines (*Aastaan*) and Hospices (*Khanqah*), unique building form locally known as *Imam Bargah* or *Marak* provide space for communal worship, social service and above all a space for mourning period especially during Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar to commemorate Martyrdom of Imam Hussain (AS) and his companions in the Battle of Karbala. The student of craft and oral history has an opportunity to study such structures. *Hussainiy'e* or *Aza Khana* or *Imam Bargah* or simply *Marak* in Kashmiri language is a feature of special occurrence throughout Shia Islamic civilization. It has been an opportunity to write about different dimensions of the society which have an impact on the overall history of the place and people. The present paper is an attempt to know historically about one dimension of Shia community through studying these *Marak* or *Aza Khan'e* (mourning spaces) in Kashmir. The purpose of writing it is to give a bird's eye-view of the influences that these spaces have, in many ways. The study gives a glimpse of these unique architectural spaces, their history and contributions in the overall influence on the people at large.

While visiting the places under study one comes across many challenges which one overcomes by knowing from the people living there or through experiences of the people who have lived there. The paper views Kashmir through multiple lenses of history, rituals, knowledge, society and culture and it is hoped the paper will provide a lay reader in general and researchers in particular insights into various aspects of the subject.

The regions like Kashmir are culturally and socially varied with diverse regions and communities reflecting their own identity, art forms, architecture and the way of life. The remote, almost inaccessible valleys, with their own distinctive languages, further separate these ethnicities from mainstream culture. Similarly, their socio-cultural and religious rituals, their arts and crafts and architecture emerge as much from local needs and raw materials as they do from their outer influences. Pumpkin gourds as containers, for instance or apricot paste as a mould rather than clay are few unique examples. These are self – sufficient communities and their lifestyles, crafts and architecture have unmistakable affinity to the place they are. As Kashmir came under social and cultural influence of the Central Asia, people in Kashmir absorbed many customs and new traditions which are now deeply rooted in our generations. Among them is its architecture.

In Kashmir, the use of wood in building may have originated from Iran, but the local decorative carved and crafted elements owe their inspiration from local creativity. Architecture in the Kashmir was influenced by three different factors – the tradition of building in stone from earlier Hindu and Buddhist times. There was also an existing indigenous style of wooden architecture, as there was no shortage of wood in Kashmir. Not surprisingly, however, it was wood that became the preferred

material of Muslim Kashmir. The most important building to be rebuilt in new style was the shrine locally known as *Aasar Shrief Dargah*, Hazratbal, which saw the introduction of a dome and a minaret probably for the first time in Kashmir. Another example is of the traditional mourning sites, among the Shias of Kashmir, locally known as *Marak* or *Imam Bargah* or *Imambada*. A monumental hall for mourning, known as *Azadari*, this architectural tradition which is the marriage of ideology and faith with craftsmanship, has evolved in Kashmir from 16th century. They can be seen as first such buildings to be constructed on the pattern of the Indian sub-continent and have stood the transition of history with changes in time and influences from other parts of the Islamic world.



Imam Bargah Zadibal

The 500 year old Imam Bargah, constructed by Qazi Chak in 1527 AD, is the first and the only surviving building in Shias. Being even one of the first in the Indian sub-continent, the building houses the Holy Relic of third Shia Imam – Imam Hussain (AS). During the holy months of Ramadhan and Muharram, special congregations are held every year. Inside, one would locate *Qandeel*, unique pot, in one of the corners. The

special annual traditional majlis known as *'Majlis e Asad'* is held here during the zodiac month *Asad (Leo, Lion) – July – August*. This is the largest gatherings among all Imam Bargah of Kashmir in which traditional Marsiya Khwani is read and the tradition is continuing for centuries. The Imam Bargah was gutted a number of times with the last one in 1872 AD. The Imam Bargah used to have traditional architecture with spire, known as *Brang*, which had very unique design.

Among the old structures, only the Imam Bargah, Zadibal, has been rebuilt. While the others have been redesigned in different times, Imam Bargah Zadibal has seen altogether a new architectural remake. The most prominent being the addition of a Dome and the Minaters. Another feature, *'Zariya'* – that houses the Holy Relic, has gone through latest redesign in Persian style which was shipped and installed by Persian craftsmen in 2018. Presently, the work is going on the massive scale including 'papier machie on khatamband' work done by a team of highly skilled craftsmen of papier machie. Once completed, the Imam Bargah is said to become the masterpiece of art and architecture of such style.



Imam Bargah, Hassanabad Srinagar

The Imam Bargah situated in the old city area of Hassanabad is probably the only one among the series that has retained the originality of the traditional architecture to a large extent.

The building, originally constructed in 19th Century by Mirza Mohammad Ali, a wealthy businessman, has the courtyard plan with the traditional features of a Kashmiri Imam Bargah. The two-storey building is externally dominated by arched windows. Inside, Imam Bargah gives a beautiful view with the decorative Papier Machie work done on the ceilings with central space dotted with huge wooden pillars, separating the specially-marked sub spaces known as "*Masjid*". Each masjid is decorated by series of hand-made and crafted textiles named "*Shamiyana*", hanging from the ceiling with different Quranic and other sacred texts hand-written and designed on them. During the month of mourning, these are replaced by all black ones, in addition to banners. Unlike other traditional ones, the space *Ghulam Ghardish* is not open. The Imam Bargah has two medium gates known as "*Dheedh*" which open towards the historical ruins of Khanqah-I Baba Ali Najar and the graveyard respectively on east and other three directions. The graveyard contains the cenotaphs of many leading Muslim ulema, nobles and poets.

Imam Bargah, Hassanabad, is famous for hosting the Annual Special Majlis on 28th Safar every year. It also hosts one of the oldest processions from Balti community of old city Srinagar on 7th Muharram. In addition, regular events are hosted especially during the Hijri months of Rajab and Ramadhan when special Quranic Recitation sessions are organized for general masses.



Imam Bargah, Budgam

This Imam Bargah was originally founded in 1857 AD under Agha Syed Mohammad Al Mousavi and renovated by Agha Syed Yousuf Al Mousavi in 1955.

The two storey-building has the traditional courtyard plan with unique look. It has the central space "*Poukbur*" which is raised in height than the outer ring like pathway known as "*Ghulam Ghardish*". The Imam Bargah gives a beautiful view with the decorative Papier Machie and Calligraphic work done on the ceilings.

The Papier Machie work visible from three sides has been added from the first Imam Bargah while the masterpieces of the poetry of Muhtasham Kashani can be felt alive through the calligraphic art of Mir Ahmad. As per the oral history, Mir Ahmad, also known by few as Mir Syed Ahmad, was one of the rare calligraphers from Srinagar who was invited by the Aga Family of Budgam to write these art pieces. Some suggest that he was from Mirgund, Budgam. Unfortunately we do not find any written

archive about him. The space, used as a pathway, is open without a ceiling. The main purpose of it being the space for free air movement. The *Ghulam Ghardish* is surrounded by the outer most space named as “*Dhalaan*” and used as a pavilion. Above it is the space used specially by women during the congregations. The Imam Bargah usually has large gates known as “*Dheedh*” which open towards the lawn. The Space has seen a series of changes including recent restoration of old art work and the adding of the papier machie and calligraphy panels on the north by a team of experts. The Najjar family is one among many which has contributed their masonry and carpentry skills.

Imam Bargah, Budgam becomes vibrant with the Majlis on few special calendar months like Hijri months of Rajab, Ramadhan beyond the regular ones held in Muharram and Safar.



Imam Bargah Ahmadpore

The Imam Bargah has been built in Ahmadpore, Magam, which is considered as one of the historically important areas in the Shia history of Kashmir. Like others, the building follows the

traditional architecture with the decorative Papier Machier and Khatamband work. It has the slim wooden pillars with two large gates on the east and south directions which open towards the very large open grounds on all directions. Recently a small fountain has been created on the eastern end.

Imam Bargah is famous for the *Aashura Day* when traditionally more than a dozen of Taziya and Zuljjanah processions starting from various villages culminate here. This is a must visit occasion for researchers of the subject.

Imam Bargah is situated near the historical graveyards that contain the cenotaphs of many leading Muslim nobles, poets and some very prominent historical and religious families including the Rizvi family and the descendants of Syed Hussain Rizvi Al Qumi (RA).

The paper deals with the historical and traditional aspects of these *Marak or Aza Khan'e* through practices of creating architectural masterpieces. The research has confined itself to the neighbourhoods of the old city in Srinagar and its peripheries.

Unique observations have been found during the journey of writing this piece. It includes one among many that beyond *Marsiya Khwani*, all the Imam Bargah are also used during many special occasions. During the natural calamities like 2014 floods or Covid-19 pandemic, Imam Bargahs have been used as temporary shelter for the affected segmented of the population, besides the community schools or special health awareness and vaccination camps. In 2022 Imam Bargah also saw participants lined-up in long queues to take part in largest ever World Blood Donation Campaign by London-based Humanitarian Organization WHO IS HUSSAIN. Around 1800 pints of donations were reported from Kashmir itself making it a record

one in a day. These are also used for other events of socio-cultural significance.

The study of crafts in the Imam Bargah takes one to the past decades of highly skilled men and women, who have toiled hard to create such spaces where one feels solace, calm and at times healing as well. Many such Imam Bargahs have been constructed in last few decades in many neighbourhoods. Largest among them is under construction at Yousufabad, Bemina, Srinagar.

(The author, a student of Design and Innovation Center (DIC), Central University of Kashmir, is the founder of 'Edraak' (Educational Revival through Arts and Aesthetics in Kashmir).)

KASHMIR MYSTIC POETRY:

A study of Shamas Faqir and Wahab Khar

Dr Saltanat Farooq

Kashmir has a vast literature of its own that is thousands of years old. Most of it is available in Sanskrit, Persian and Arabic. As far as literature written in Kashmiri is concerned, it is almost seven hundred and fifty years old. It parallels more or less many modern literatures of the world including English. It is available in *One thousand languages: living, endangered, and lost* that “Kashmiri/*Kosbur* is the most prominent Dardic language, with an established literary tradition and official recognition as one of the official languages of India”. (Austin)

Kashmiri literature begins with the work of three poets — Shiti Kanth, Lal Ded and Shaikh Nur-ud-Din (Nund Rishi). Shiti Kanth’s *Mahayana Prakash* (Illumination of the highest order), written in the twelfth century, is a work of poetry and scholarly criticism. It consists of ninety four *vakhs* each of which is followed by translation and an explanatory comment in Sanskrit. Shiti Kanth’s philosophy is *Trika Shavism*. Kashmir being an abode of saints and rishis has from the times immemorial been a hot-bed for the development of various mystical strains. And hence Kashmiri literature too finds its roots struck in the mystic aura of the valley. Mysticism is quite evident in Kashmiri poetry and it truly started to grow in the fourteenth century with the

famous woman poet and saint, Lal Ded. In this regard Chitkara states:

Lal Ded also known as Laleshwari (1320–1392) was a mystic of the Kashmiri Shaivite sect. Her mystic verses are called *Vakhs*, literally "speech". Known as Lal Vakhs, her verses are the earliest compositions in the Kashmiri language and are an important part in history of Kashmiri literature. (14)

A mystic in the *Trika Shaivite* tradition, she was spiritually engaged in the communion of the lower self with the ultimate reality. At the same time, she was gifted with the capability of articulating that communion in language as far as it was possible.

She gave expression to her personal experiences in *Vakhs* and used a language which, though more personalized, yet was better understood by the people as the metaphors and images she coined were more or less familiar to her audience. With the result, her poetry offers deep insight and poignant intensity. (Inayatullah 12-17)

The first English renderings of Lal *Vakhs* were made in the twentieth century by G A Grierson and L D Barnett (*Lalla Vakyani*) and R C Temple (*The Word of Lalla*). Hafiz Mohammad Inayatullah says "She (Lalla) thought and expressed the oneness of reality in order to propagate brotherhood and fraternity among the masses" (13).

She was constrained by the practices, rituals and false beliefs popular among her people that contradicted the true beliefs of Shaivism. She warned the people against idol worship and tried to

lead them to God (Shiva) who is *Nirguna*--without any particular attributes. (Khan 36)

She was of the opinion that one needs to free himself from duality to find God. The following stanza illustrates her deep mystic thought:

*So my lamp of knowledge afar,
Fanned by slow breath from the throat of me.
Then, my bright soul to myself revealed.
Winnowed I abroad my inner light.
And with darkness around me sealed,
Did I garner truth and hold Him tight.*

(Translated by Sir Richard Temple)

According to her, there is no difference between 'God' and 'self'. And when a human being realises his self, he becomes a part of the Absolute:

*My guru gave me one single precept:
Withdraw from without to the inner self.
That precept became my being, my song
And I took to roaming and dancing naked.*

She says he who considers his own self and others alike, can only know God in his own self. R C Temple was so charmed by Lala's powerful poetry that in '*The Word of Lalla*', he was led to say: '*Thine is a song that enslaveth me, son of an alien kin and clime.*' G L Tikku says of Lalla that "Religion to her was an experience which raised the status of man. She preached purity of heart and the unity of being as a means to achieve higher goals in life and shunned the thoughts of disunity" (226).

The second mystic poet in line is the younger contemporary of Lal Ded, Nund Rishi, also known by the names of Alamdar-i Kashmir, Shaikh ul Aalam and Sahajanand. There is a lot of debate on the exact date of Shaikh-ul Aalam's birth. In this regard, Trilokinath Raina in his book *A History of Kashmiri Literature* states:

It is difficult to determine his exact date of birth, but he died in 1438, and there is a strong belief that he was 63 years old when he shuffled off his mortal coil. Thus it is generally believed that he was born circa 1375-77. (24)

Shaikh-ul Aalam was a great upholder of Kashmiri Sufi tradition. He set out to search for God in the light of Islam. Shaikh's time was a period when Sufis from Central Asia had come to Kashmir with missionary purpose. Shaikh-ul Aalam carried forward the legacy of these Sufis:

Shaikh-ul Aalam propagates which he calls true Islam.... He explains evil as a force which makes darkness to prevail, superstitions to grow and egos to get blown up. Evil for him is not any external agent but a divisive force, which grows out of one's own self deception. (Gowhar 53)

Shaikh practised a form of poetry which is known as *Sbruk* in order to reach to his people with better effects. His verses give a wonderful feeling of spiritual experience and mystic meaning of God:

*There is one God, But with a hundred names,
There is not a single blade of grass, which
does not worship Him.*

J L Koul says about Shaikh-ul Aalam that “His poetry confirms that he is a great soul, saint- philosopher and mystic of a very high order. His mystic verses speak of catholicity of vision, righteousness and purity of mind and heart.” (88) All his mystic verses are in the common man's language. He was a vociferous preacher of simple living, a living free from desire and want. The following lines attest to what he preached:

*Desire is like the knotted wood of the forest,
It cannot be made into planks, beams or into
cradles.
He who cut and fell it
Will burn it into ashes.*

Shaikh-ul Aalam had the same spiritual temperament as Lal Ded. Both convey the same spiritual message; emphasize the importance of understanding truth and knowing God above all mundane affairs. Both emphasize attaining cleansed minds to become fit for attaining the true knowledge about the existence of Self, Universe, and God. After Lal Ded and Shaikh-ul Aalam, the mystic trend in Kashmiri poetry diminished. A wide gap of almost two centuries in which the production of literature was meagre was witnessed owing to many socio-political reasons. However a fresh start of poetry was made with the lyrical verses of Habba Khatoon in the sixteenth century but the theme of mysticism was gradually replaced by that of human love in her poetry. During the second half of the sixteenth and the early seventeenth century, Kashmir witnessed poets like Khwaja Habibullah Nowshehri (1555-1617) and Sahab Koul (1629) who wrote mystical verses. Both were influenced by Lal *Vakhs*. In this regard Trilokinath Raina states:

Khwaja Habib Ullah Nowshehri wrote in the *vakh* tradition, only his *vakh* had longer lines than Lal Ded's and has a refrain added on, as in *vatsun*. The beloved in his poem was not a human being, as in Habba Khaatoon, but God. (50)

Further about Sahab Koul, Trilokinath states, "Sahab Koul was profoundly influenced by Lal vakh, and from early days evinced a yogic and philosophical bent of mind and made a serious study of the Upanishads and Shaivism." (51) He has written three books in Kashmiri: *Janam Charit*, *Kalpa Vraksb* and *Krishnavataara Charit*. Of these, *Janam Charit* delineates the evolution of philosophical thought in Kashmir. His *Krishnavataara Charit* (translated by Grierson in 1928) is regarded as the first Kashmiri poem to be written in the *leela* style.

Rupa Bhavani (1625-1721), another great mystic poet of Kashmir, was born to a spiritual scholar Pandit Madhav Joo Dhar of Mohalla Khanaqahi Sokhta (Safakadal), Srinagar. He was also her spiritual guru. She also enriched Kashmiri literature with her mystic poetry. Though well-versed in the Sanskrit and the Persian languages, Rupa Bhawani chose Kashmiri for expressing her spiritual thoughts and experiences in the form of *vakhs*. According to her, dissolution of 'self/ ego is essential for self as well as absolute realization. Her *vakhs* exhibit a great influence of Kashmiri Shaivism on her:

*Selflessness is the sign of selfless,
Bow down at the door of the selfless,
The selfless are of the highest authority,
The kings of the time and the wearers of the crest and the
crown.*

Pandit Mirzakak of the eighteenth century was also a great mystic poet of Kashmir. He contributed a lot to the *vakh* tradition in Kashmiri poetry. He regards the ultimate truth as synonymous with *Ram*, *Shyam* and *Brahma*:

*"Tas nav Shyam Sunder, Gbara chus Zagi under, ...
Bhajan kar Ram Ramay."*

His name is Sham—the handsome one, I have
left in His pursuit,...
Repeat His name Ram Ramay.

Apart from him, Master Zinda Koul, popularly known as Master ji has an important place in the mystic poetry of Kashmir. He was a firm believer in Karma theory and his poetry propounds the same.

Parmanand (1791-1885) born in a village *Seer* near *Mattan*, presents a refreshing contrast in Kashmiri poetry with his devotional songs and hymns. Being a highly gifted poet, his poetry consists of *bhajans* and *leelas*. His *Radha Soyamver*, *Shiv-Lagan* and *Sudhama Charitra* are regarded as masterpieces in Kashmiri poetry. *Radha Soyamver* is a valuable contribution to the devotional literature of Kashmir. One of the famous devotional poems of Parmanand entitled *Amarnath Yatra* symbolises the various stages through which a devotee has to pass during the attainment of his spiritual goal.

Sufi Poets of Kashmir

Towards the end of the eighteenth century and beginning of the nineteenth century, Kashmir witnessed an upsurge of Sufi poets who carried forward the legacy left by Nund Rishi in the fourteenth century. Completely engrossed in the Islamic doctrines, these Sufi poets wrote at length about God, unity of

God, love and devotion and the measures of purifying one's soul so that one can enter into communion with God. To begin with, the trend was set by Rahim Sahab (c 1775-c 1850). He belonged to the *Qadri silsila*. He says:

*Rahim silsila qadri chhui dar haq
Valla ta billa chhu na kaanh Shaq*

Rahim, "you belong to Qadariya Sufi order"
By God, there is no doubt in it.

Mahmood Gami (1765-1855) has written both in Persian and Kashmiri. His lyrics include various themes from love to mysticism. J L Koul says:

The Sufi poets of Kashmir followed the Persian *masnavi* tradition; in their romantic narratives they adopted Persian mystical devices, and the stories were especially allegorical, which is an attempt to underplay the ritualistic part of religion and emphasize the oneness of God and his manifestation in everything. It's from the poetry of Mahmood Gami that the concept of higher reality gets more personalized and translated into personal emotions. His innovations in poetry introduced Kashmiri literature to newer fields where it is reflected through the effects of Kashmiri mystic poets. (223)

Nyaem Sahab was yet another Sufi poet of this age who wrote his mystical verses praising God's magnificent and exalted position and the relation between the lower self (mortal self of man) and the higher self (immortal absolute self of God). Rahman Dar was also a well-known Sufi poet known for his poem *Shash Rang*, one of the best in Kashmiri poetry. A woman's

yearning for love in this poem equals to that of mystic's longing for God's realization. *Maachb Tulur* is an allegory presenting a poetic dialogue between honey-comb (soul), honey bee (thought or intelligence) and fly (desire). The basic conviction of the poet is that all creation is in essence the manifestation of a single and supreme reality. Momin Sahab lived in the time frame when the eighteenth century switched over to the nineteenth. He was a renowned Sufi saint and a preceptor of Mahmood Gami, Socha Kral and Karam Buland. His verses contain religious fervour and mystic sensitivity:

Panunui kboon gatsbi treshi kani chyonuye
Sui gatsbi tchaangi zaalunaye lo
Tami ke gaashi gatsbi praan prazalunaye
Ratsbi ratsbi matsbi maaz khyonaye lo.

You ought to quench your thirst by the very
blood of yours

And feed the same to the oil lamp
The light produced should enlighten you
Bit by bit you ought to eat your own flesh.

Shah Gafoor also belonged to the era in which the 18th century was winding up for welcoming the fresh springs of the nineteenth century. At the turn of the century, Shah Gafoor emerged as a poet of the highest order who demonstrated profound knowledge of both Islamic Sufism and the Shastras. Some verses from his most famous poem, *Soo hum Soo*, would clear our perception regarding the mystical intensity of Gafoor's poetry belonging to the elite cadre:

Yot yith zanmas kenb chbuna laarun
Daarnaayi daarun soo hum soo
Brahma, Vishnu, Mabeeshwar gaarun

Shaf byoo chhuy tibundui zoo

This mortal life does not guarantee anything
The truth lies in just “Soo hum Soo”
We need to search for Brahma, Vishnu and
Maheshwar
As we breathe in their soul and spirit.

During the nineteenth century, Kashmiri Sufi poetry touched new heights with the contribution of two new poets; *Shamas Faqir* and *Wahab Khar*. Both of them were well-versed in Sufi doctrines and produced a corpus of Sufi poetry rich in mysticism that stood high on the parameters of content and form. Shamas Faqir (1849-1904) rightly called as the prince of the mystic poets of the 19th century by Trilokinath Raina, has about some ninety-six poems published so far that are included in *The Anthology of Sufi poems in Kashmiri* brought out by the J&K Academy of Art, Culture and Languages, Srinagar which prove undoubtedly his superb proficiency over the Kashmiri language and his effortless experimentation with metre, form and rhyme. But above all, his poems reveal a mystic of deep spiritual insight. In all his mystic poetry, especially in “*Shunyaa Gatsbithuy*”, “*Wanae Bo Seer- i-Asrar*” the quality of divine passion and insight of true mystical experience and realization can be seen:

Shunyaa gatsbithuy oos myon ooluy
Amy ashka naaran zolaye
Kuniras trovnam rwon i manzoluy
Shroyn sobroyn bozaan tchaas

Beyond Nothingness lies my eternal abode
This fire of love burned it all

I traversed to his kingdom of Oneness in a
beaded cradle
Hearing its melodious sounds, I entered the room

For Wahab Khar, there is an old Kashmiri adage, '*Ath kathe chhu Wahab Khar te lajamabe*' which is a fitting tribute to the wisdom of this 19th century poet. Though being illiterate, Wahab Khar rose to become one of the celebrated Sufi poets of Kashmir. He had an incredible command over the mystical language in his poetic works to explain the mystic aura of the aspirant (seeker) reaching the highest state of his communion with God-- the Beloved, where he loses all the conventions of the religion. His *Tota*, *Tchandan Kul* and *Mebraj Naama* are full of mystical allusions. These poems point to his continuous pursuit of God, and asking for His divine favours. The following lines would act as a proof:

*Mei leyi luusum wutchaan watye,
su kas patye goom
Tem gharki daryaaw kernas be tye,
su kas patye goom.*

The tireless wait of the beloved has shattered my
being
May I know whom did he follow?
I have left in pursuit of my beloved
May I know whom did he follow?

Time and again it becomes evident to the readers that Wahab Sahab's poetry is an amalgam of religious and his mystical desires which come out in a blended form in his poetic works.

After these two stalwarts of Sufi poetry, the 20th century Kashmir witnessed no doubt some great mystic poets who carried on the legacy of their predecessors, i.e. Lassa Baba, Samad Mir, Soch Kral and Mirza Akmal-ud-Din but the climate of the new era

was changing and hence its effect on literature was quite evident. Onwards mystic temperament somehow receded as it was replaced by new modern trends.

Shamas Faqir: Sufi Doctrine and Poetry

Of all the renowned mystic poets that Kashmir has produced, Shamas Faqir holds an important position in the club of Sufi poets. A 19th Century Kashmiri Sufi Poet, he was born in 1839. His real name was Sidique Bhat. Early in his childhood, he was placed as an apprentice in a shawl- making factory. At this factory Shamas Faqir in the association with other workers, especially Nyaem Sahab got exposed to such a spiritual environment that in turn shaped his personality. Throughout his life he adopted the spiritual path and lived in the true spirit of a Sufi saint. As a Sufi of high order, his poetry adheres to the Sufi doctrines. The concept of Allah (God), obedience and submission before Him, faith in the principles of Islam and adherence to its pillars are among the main features of his poetry. Further, his poetry is a testimony to the various Sufi concepts emerging from the Quran and its knowledge. For example, the relation between man and Allah, the true union of the seeker's self and the absolute self of Allah, self- annihilation leading to self- realization and purity of heart as a necessary requirement for visualizing Allah's exalted nature. Trilokinath Raina says:

His poems reveal a mystic of deep spiritual insight. He was a saint poet and in him is the quality that makes mystic poetry, the quality of intense sincerity, of passion and abandon and, what is more, the authentic insight of the true mystical experience and realization. (95)

Mystics in general and Sufis in particular spend their quality time remembering God, yearning for His glimpse and loving His essence. They know that the material world has no permanence and is bound to vanish. So they keep themselves abreast with the remembrance of God.

Shamas says:

*Where does the Sun come from, where does it go?
Seeing the Sun, the Moon shies away.
The Heavens and the Earth received the divine order,
Submit thy soul and body's cage to God.
All bow before the holy Kaba
Seeing the Sun, the Moon shies away.
Do search for the secrets of the Sun and the Moon,
Plunge into the passage to locate the Stars
In quest of truth lie the planets and galaxies
Seeing the Sun, the Moon shies away.*

Shamas requires of a seeker that sharp sight and a sound mind that can lead him to God through His creation. Likewise in the above lines, Shamas raises a query about the origin of the Sun, the Moon and the Earth. And then answers the query in the succeeding verse. He says that everything that exists moves (lives) only according to the wish of God. It is only He on whose command the entire universe along with us live and sustain. And as a mark of respect, all bow before his exalted self, and bowing before *Kaaba* (the house of Allah) has the same connotation as bowing before Allah. He says that all the secrets of the universe would be revealed if a seeker looks for truth. He says:

*Water, fire, earth and wind, all constitute the world
Their master is the same, who runs the whole universe.*

These verses show Shamas Faqir's true understanding of the nature of God as the creator and sustainer of all the creation. Further, he adds:

*The water gushes out from aqua
Head to toe, he is a pure being.
There the universe lies under his feet
O Crazy! I will search for thou at Hazratbal (149)*

Shamas Faqir's concept of God is clear, he understands God to be supreme, pure of all malice, holding an exalted position and mightiest of all, who is in control of the whole universe. The moment a Sufi realizes this, he tries to get closer to God's reality and absolute truth. He wants to enter the premises of eternal truth. In one of his most famous poems, "Shuniya gatsith oos meyon oolui" Shamas says:

*The crow left with a message for the owl
The trap is meant to entrap someone.
If at all you face me and hear me with caution
I tell you, the way leading there is no cake-walk
Listening to the crow, the owl bowed down his head
To understand this truth one needs to have a pure soul.*

In these lines the poet, through the symbols of crow and owl, brings forward one of the most striking truths of this mortal life. The poet claims that this life is nothing but a trap that is set for the one who runs after material pursuits of life. Hence a man becomes a slave of his own self. Further Shamas says that entering the realm of God and to attain a blissful state is not easy for everyone. For such bliss, a Sufi is required to undergo tough training wherein he has to shun his interests in the material world. Shamas Faqir too holds this view of Sufis and talks about the futile exercises of getting comfort through material pursuits.

He says this material approach casts a veil on the sharp vision of man and the blurred vision never catches the sight of God. He says:

*Explore thyself, if you are a visionary,
I wish blurredness disappears from his naive eyes,
How should I blame the gardener for the error?
The planted flower seedling turned into nettle,
I watered the nettle, it damaged my skin,
I wish blurredness disappears from his naive eyes.*

In the above verses, the poet wishes a clear sight for man, a vision free of worldly pursuits. Nurturing the materialistic approach in this mortal world would yield one nothing.

Carrying forward the same sentiment, Shamas Faqir states the futility of fulfilling worldly desires and wants that at the end would yield nothing positive to man. He says:

*The body's boat swings amid nothingness
From the bodily requirements, I adorned it full
What shall I evaluate after the soul departs from the
body?
Tell me what did you see at last?*

Running continuously after the world and its attractions may prove fruitful in this mortal world but at the end the pursuit turns out to be a business of failure. Shamas holds a proper opinion in pointing towards the hollow pockets of a man when heading towards the eternal destination. These material gains are required only by the self and feeding this mortal self leaves nothing in store for the soul, hence leaving it in a state of extinction.

He is of the view that until and unless man shuns his love for worldly attractions, he cannot perceive the reality of God. He cannot view God's exalted stature, and he cannot feel one with his creator. Hence, for a seeker to be in close contact with God, the first and the foremost requirement is to clear the self of all material love.

Once the seeker comes in terms with the temporary nature of worldly things, he moves ahead of this world to satisfy his urges—to love and to be loved. The love for worldly things recedes within man; he looks for the real love and tries to search it in all possible directions. This love for God turns into a foundation on which a permanent relation of man and God starts to develop. But, for such love that is pure and free from the dirt of selfishness, one's heart needs to be pure. In this regard M M Zahurudin Ahmad says:

According to Sufis---the human heart (Qalb) is the seat of the Idea of God. In the mystic terminology it has no association with the physical part of the human organisation bearing the same name. It is a spiritual faculty in us, a sort of spiritual sense, something akin to the moral sense as understood by Shaftesbury and others. Sufis consider it a kind of mirror that reflects the reality of God. It is through this faculty that human beings come in touch with their creator, and it is through this faculty that human beings can progress spiritually, and can draw closer to the fountain of all spiritualism. (124)

Shamas Faqir too takes heart as a mirror that shows the truth---the truth of God. He says:

*Have acquaintance with that divine light
Where from the darkness and light both sprout
Cleanse the mirror of your heart
O crazy! I will search for you at Hazratbal.*

So a seeker can recognise God's self only when his heart is clean. His heart should be without any impurity. When his heart ultimately turns pure, it distances itself from all but God. Pure love for God starts to pour out from a mystic's heart. This love is intense and does not allow a seeker to rest even for a blink. It turns him mad for God as the poet upholds:

*Where did fierce love embers befall over me?
This fire engulfed me head to toe,
I am guilty, which water should I wash myself with?
O Crazy beloved! I yearn for thy glimpse.
Majnun bore the countless confinements
In search of Laila, put thine self to risk.
My destiny guided me as a true friend,
O Crazy beloved! I yearn for thy glimpse.*

The poet does not know how this love captures one's heart so firmly. He speaks about the grip of love being so strong that it takes a complete hold of a seeker. From head to toe, his entire being immerses in love. Being an ardent lover of God, a seeker yearns for His glimpse and continuously tries to rid his self of any of material impurity associated with him. He feels guilty about his past attitude but believes in the grace of God. Shamas says that like *Majnun* (crazy lover), a seeker also knows about the hardships that he has to encounter in getting closer to his

beloved. He adds that it is the love for the final destiny---a union with God, which keeps a Sufi alive in the way to God. He says:

*Pay some attention to Shamas Faqir, O beloved!
The hot love embers set me ablaze.*

Here Shamas asks for God's attention. He begs Him to pay attention to him as the fire of love has set him ablaze. As a seeker he calls upon His mercy alone for his entire self is in pain caused by the burns of intense love. For Sufis this kind of love leads to the union between a seeker and God.

When love envelops the very soul of a Sufi, he wants to merge in the self of God. In love, his self is annihilated so that he can achieve self- realization. He wants to turn into a state of *fanna* (annihilation of self) to achieve the state of *baqa* (self-realization). Shamas says:

*If you are a lover, without panic die once for all
Tear off the bony garment and glide in the world of vision
You will come to know your name along with your lineage
The secret I will unfold to you, the one who dies in love
remains alive forever
O Shamas! Try and understand this secret
Your stature as a petitioner demands it.*

A Sufi is required to tear off his mortal self, to reduce its existence. This will lead him to the world wherein he comes to know about the secret of his being. The one, who nullifies his individual existence, can live eternally. The one who understands the temporary nature of mortal life comes to taste the everlasting spiritual life. This is the law of nature. The poet is transformed.

A *Rinda*—unfettered lover, who dies in the love of God and gets burnt to ashes by the heat of His love leads to a merger with the Absolute. Shamas says:

*From the day, you have burnt me in the fire of love
Henceforth my soul merged in your spirit*

Shamas Faqir's concept of true love is clear. By true love he means the love for God, love that is everlasting and selfless. He feels God in his heart, and His divine light illuminating through his self.

*God and his essence lie deep in my heart
That is what I call as manifestation of God
This stage is unknown to the devotee and the ascetic
The only one to touch that is the blessed Sheikh Mansur
Far away from that exalted stage, he said that the Divine light
resides in him
That is what I call as manifestation of God.*

The poet claims that when the human body and soul emit God's light, the seeker at this stage is nothing but a mirror that reflects only God's essence. When a seeker reaches such a stage, God starts to reside in his self in the same way as he did in Mansur Hallaj. In this regard A N Dhar says:

There is a significant mention in this poem of the unorthodox Persian mystic Mansur Hallaj who, asserting his innate divinity, declared "I am Truth" for which he paid the penalty of his life. In the eyes of the poet (Shamas Faqir), Mansur was an extraordinary mystic, a *rinda* not tied to any dogma, a true and bold lover of Truth. (139)

A Sufi's selfless love and devotion earns him God's love and care in reciprocation. And when such pure love flows from both the sides, a supreme union occurs. This is the final goal of a Sufi that he wants to achieve in this mortal world.

Shamas Faqir's Sufi poetry highlights the quest of a Sufi, his love and yearning for his beloved that ultimately leads to their union.

Wahab Khar: Sufi Doctrine and Poetry

Wahab Khar is considered as one of the most prominent Sufi poets of the nineteenth century in Kashmir. Partly his success as a poet depends on his being a spiritual guru (saint) of a high order. Born at village Shaar situated at the foot-hills of Wastooriwan, Wahab Khar lived a long life of about a hundred years. Prof Shad Ramzan in his monograph "*Hindustaan Adbek Memaar--Wahab Khar*" has documented the time period of 1810-1812 wherein the date of birth of this Sufi poet falls and the year 1912 as the year of his death. Wahab Khar's father, a blacksmith by profession, was himself a poet. Moreover it has also been said that Wahab Khar's grandfather was also a poet and both Wahab's father and grandfather had been great Sufi saints of their times. In addition to this, *Haet Khar*, Wahab's father was also well-versed in Persian. All this implies that Wahab got poetic temperament in inheritance. From his childhood he had been witnessing and adoring his father's saintly and poetic persona that in turn significantly influenced his thinking, attitude and behaviour. His initial training in spirituality was given to him by his father and later for seeking higher spiritual knowledge he went to Rahman Sahab of Pingal-gom, Pulwama. During this time Wahab almost remained in a world of ecstasy. At last, Wahab approached Ahmed Sahab Machaam, a great Sufi saint and guru of his times. Remaining attached to him and his

spiritual teachings, Wahab understood the niceties of Sufism and became capable of documenting and recording his spiritual experiences in words, thereby bringing to the fore a Sufi poet of high pedigree. Wahab Khar's association with the Sufi doctrines was intense and capturing the same essence in words made him a Sufi poet of elite order.

According to Wahab, man is powerless before the supreme power of God. It is God who has created man along with all other creatures. He has produced life from non-existent material. He is crazy about such a God who is the master of the whole universe:

*God has created every being (thing)
How could I achieve the end of the Universe?
The All Pervading God knows no boundaries
There doesn't exist the day or the night.*

The universe for Wahab is infinite. It cannot be held in the palm of one's hand. The chain of creation has to be located with a unifying thread of the various elements. As such, Wahab finds no limits that could de-limit the vastness of the universe. Further, his inward eye encapsulates God in all His creation. He envisions and breathes God everywhere. For him, God is all-pervading.

In one of his famous poems "Tchandani Kul" Wahab has earnestly worked on the various parameters governing various facets of human life, its evolution, the lineage of various Prophets, the purpose behind their arrival, the place of Prophet Mohammad, the exalted stature of God and much more. The following verses of "Tchandani Kul" would help us understand Wahab's Sufi poetry better correlating his poetic craft with the

theory of creation. It reinforces the Quranic message that mentions *Hazrat Adam* to be the first human being whom God created and both Hazrat Adam and his wife *Hazrat Hawa* (Eve) to be the source of the whole human race:

*He chose him (Adam) to be the king of all clans
Adam being the messenger of God
In the Heaven, Hazrat Hawa accompanied him
The whole world populace is born out of them.*

Hazrat Adam, being the first human, Wahab addresses him as the king of all clans and God's messenger. He says both Hazrat Adam and his wife Hazrat Hawa are the parents of the whole human race. In his poetry he documents and narrates the episodes about man's birth and further evolution.

Wahab while portraying God's picture paints Him in colors of miracles which show Him being powerful enough to enable a woman to conceive and give birth to a child without any male intervention. Taking a cue from the lives of various prophets, Wahab again describes God as the final decision- maker. It is only according to the wish of God that things occur on any particular plane. To the one whom God blesses with the gift of life, no one in the world can change his destiny.

It is this God, the master of the earth and the skies whom Wahab Khar yearns for. He continuously requests God to provide him with His holy glimpse. Adoring God, Wahab says:

*I would sing a sweet lullaby to you
Stay at our home today, O beloved!
Why don't you come to our home, what does it imply?
Stay at our home today, O beloved!*

The poet refers to God as an innocent infant to whom he would like to enchant with a melodious lullaby. He wants to caress and love God. God's pure being appears to Wahab as the innocence of an infant and waits His glimpse:

*The tireless wait of the beloved has shattered my being
May I know whom did he follow?
I have left in pursuit of my beloved
May I know whom did he follow?*

In the above verses, Wahab Khar says that he has left everything behind in pursuit of God. And his tireless wait for beloved has almost shattered his self. Still God evades him and that has turned his thirst for spiritual salvage more intense. It is here at this point that a seeker realizes that to visualize God's pure self, one needs to be pure himself. No man can capture a sight of God's essence without being pure at heart. An impure self can never conceptualise God. He says:

*In past, with grandeur I was a Deodar of dense forest
What would I do being speechless?
I have been reduced to pieces by woodcutter
Tell me my love, Oh Beloved just say!*

In the above lines Wahab says that earlier he misunderstood the world as a permanent abode and took himself as being strong and secure according to his worldly position. But when he started to understand God, he was reduced to being a non-entity. He feels himself to be nothing but a part of a bigger scheme. He says that he needed to change into a seeker in order to taste God's reality. And to be a seeker, one has to shun all materialistic attractions and love God. This pure love sprouts out from the bosom of a Sufi only when he turns pure in heart and mind.

Only then does God batter a seeker's self and remoulds and casts it in a frame fit to be God's abode. Wahab says:

*He rolled me--a grand Deodar down to hills & brooks
Life is like a moment of sleep
This swift axe cut me into slices
Tell me my love, Oh Beloved just say!
He hammered me into small pieces
Then crafted them into delicate Items
The craftsman brushed all over me his wisdom and was all praise
for me
Tell me my love, Oh Beloved just say!*

Accordingly Wahab feels being sliced into a million parts by the sharp stroke of love without an identity of his own. God comes forth to reshape and recast him in a new form, as an ardent seeker. Wahab says, God broke down his material self and then remolded him in a new self--a self that was well acquainted with its origin and its end. After being redressed in the apparels of being an ardent seeker, God was all praise for him. It is a stage where a bruised traveler reaches his destination positively. But a seeker does not easily get to taste the victory of achieving the final destination; he has to pass through various stages leading to God:

*My mystical Instincts led me to the way of nine and seven Sufi
stages
I had to bear the brunt of those fiery stages
I am holding fast that hot spark of ember inside
Whom did my beloved follow?*

Wahab says that his mystical quest turns him restless and makes him move on the path to God. He says, in order to enter the

premises of God, a Sufi is required to pass through various stages. He narrates his ordeals in passing those stages. He draws our attention to his continuous pursuit of God and of the spiritual development of his soul. For him, it is not easy to be a Sufi in real sense. For that one needs to burn himself tirelessly in the fire of love. An ardent seeker has to be patient enough to bear the brunt of all the hurdles that come between him and God. True lovers always run after the true essence of God. They every now and then want to feel God in their own way. He says that for being one with God, a lover should pass through all the stages required for attaining that union:

*Keep chasing the stage of eternal divination
Mansur gave his blood for that cause
This quest boggles the lovers
I am left wonderstruck after experiencing the divine
miracle.
Do explore the highest stage of divinity
That divine message is a blessing pure
Knowing God requires negating all duality
I am left wonderstruck after experiencing the divine
miracle.*

Chasing eternal divination, the quest for truth of God and his own existence does not allow a seeker to rest and hence he keeps chasing the stage wherefrom he can enter the realms of God and be one with him. This quest of seeker is fuelled by love that springs only from the bosoms of true lovers. Giving the reference of *Mansur*, a renowned Sufi saint of all times, Wahab argues that one could achieve a true union with God only if he fearlessly and purely loves Him. He says:

*I lit a candle by feeding it my blood
That glow illuminated my inner darkness*

*Oh! This darkness carries in bosom priceless diamonds
Whom did my beloved follow?*

These verses show that a seeker's self illuminates only by his tireless efforts in making a communion with God. It is then the light of his illuminated being that removes doubt and ignorance and opens his inner eye to see God.

Wahab Khar's Sufi poetry puts forward his concept of the doctrine of Sufism. His understanding of the true nature of God is quite evident in his poetry. Accordingly he has deliberated on a number of methods that are to be brought into operation during the making of a Sufi. The yearning for God and passing through various stages of soul's purification can turn one into a Sufi who can visualize God through his inward eye.

(The author is a Post-doctoral Fellow, ICSSR –New Delhi.)

