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## Preserving The Past: A Study Of Ancient Temples And Their Significance In Jammu And Kashmir

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### Abstract

Jammu and Kashmir, often called the "Crown of India," is home to a rich cultural and historical legacy, reflected in its ancient temples. These temples are not only places of worship but also significant markers of the region's architectural, spiritual, and artistic evolution. With influences from Hinduism, Buddhism, and later Islamic traditions, the temples of Jammu and Kashmir represent a confluence of diverse cultural and religious histories. This study explores the historical significance, architectural styles, and cultural importance of key temples, including the Martand Sun Temple, Shankaracharya Temple, Raghunath Temple, Vaishno Devi Temple, and Amarnath Cave Temple. It examines how these structures have withstood time, conflicts, and environmental changes, yet continue to hold immense religious and cultural relevance. Furthermore, the study highlights the challenges faced in preserving these heritage sites due to political unrest, environmental degradation, and neglect. It underscores the need for conservation efforts to maintain these temples as symbols of the region's rich past. By analyzing their historical context and significance, this research aims to contribute to the discourse on cultural preservation and heritage management in Jammu and Kashmir.

**Keywords:** Jammu and Kashmir, Cultural Heritage, Temples, Architectural Styles, Preservation, Religious Significance.

### Historical Overview

Kashmir has a rich historical legacy shaped by Hindu, Buddhist, and Islamic influences. Ancient texts like the Nilamata Purana describe it as a sacred land formed by sage Kashyapa, while Kalhana's Rajatarangini records its early rulers (Kak, 2001, p. 42; Stein, 1998, p. 23). During the Mauryan period, Emperor Ashoka introduced Buddhism, making Kashmir a center for learning and religious discourse (Bose, 2013, p. 87).

Hinduism continued to flourish, as reflected in grand temples like the Martand Sun Temple. The 14th century saw the advent of

Islam, reshaping Kashmir's cultural landscape while preserving elements of its Hindu and Buddhist past (Dhar, 2010, p. 59). Today, the region's diverse heritage is evident in its temples and historical sites, highlighting the need for preservation. Kashmir remains a significant subject of historical study, showcasing a unique blend of religious and cultural traditions across centuries.

The history of temples in Jammu and Kashmir dates back to ancient times, deeply intertwined with the region's religious and cultural evolution. Influenced by Hinduism and Buddhism, followed by Islamic traditions, the temples of this region reflect a blend of architectural styles and spiritual significance. Temples such as the Martand Sun Temple in Anantnag, the Shankaracharya Temple in Srinagar, the Raghunath Temple in Jammu, and the Vaishno Devi Temple in Katra are not only centers of devotion but also repositories of history and art (Kak, 2001, p. 56). The Martand Sun Temple, built during the reign of Lalitaditya Muktapida in the 8th century, exemplifies Kashmiri temple architecture, blending Gandhara, Gupta, and Chinese influences. Dedicated to the Sun God, the temple was an architectural marvel, featuring grand colonnades and intricate carvings. Though in ruins today, it remains a testament to Kashmir's glorious past (Bose, 2013, p. 102). Similarly, the Shankaracharya Temple, perched atop a hill in Srinagar, is believed to have ancient roots tracing back to 200 BCE. Dedicated to Lord Shiva, this temple has played a crucial role in the region's spiritual traditions, with Adi Shankaracharya's visit in the 8th century further enhancing its religious significance (Stein, 1998, p. 78). The Vaishno Devi Temple, located in the Trikuta Mountains, is among the most revered shrines in India, attracting millions of devotees annually. It is believed that Goddess Vaishno Devi grants the wishes of her devotees, making the 13-kilometer trek from Katra an act of deep faith and devotion (Singh, 2005, p. 134). The temple's historical and cultural importance is underscored by its continued prominence in Hindu pilgrimage traditions. Infrastructure developments in recent years have facilitated easier access, increasing the number of pilgrims (Chopra, 2012, p. 88).

Another significant site is the Amarnath Cave Temple, a sacred shrine dedicated to Lord Shiva. The naturally forming ice lingam inside the cave is considered a divine symbol of Shiva's presence. Historical records suggest that the temple has been a place of worship for over 5,000 years (Dhar, 2010, p. 67). The annual Amarnath Yatra, undertaken by thousands of devotees, is one of India's most significant religious pilgrimages. Despite its arduous journey through treacherous terrain, pilgrims continue to undertake the yatra with unwavering devotion, reinforcing the site's spiritual importance (Kaul, 2017, p. 152). The preservation of these temples is crucial for maintaining Jammu and Kashmir's historical and cultural legacy. Many of these sites have suffered due to political unrest, natural decay, and neglect. Efforts by the government and heritage organizations aim to restore these structures, ensuring that future generations can appreciate their significance (Sharma, 2009, p. 93).

## Famous Temples of Jammu and Kashmir

### Mata Vaishno Devi Temple

Located 62 km from Jammu, the Holy Mata Vaishno Devi Temple is situated on Trikuta Mountain at an altitude of 1615 meters. Globally revered as one of the most important pilgrimage sites of Hinduism, devotees come to worship throughout the year. Accessible by a challenging 14 km uphill trek from Katra, helicopter services now provide an alternative route from Banganga to Sanji Chhat. This temple has three rock-cut Pindis representing Goddesses Kali, Lakshmi, and Saraswati (Sharma, 2018, p. 45).

### Shri Amarnath Temple

Shri Amarnath Temple, situated at the end of Lidder Valley, is the divine abode of Lord Shiva. Located 46 km from Pahalgam and 14 km from Baltal (Sonmarg), this temple is situated at an altitude of 3,888 meters. This revered place is a major Hindu temple, with a naturally formed sacred ice lingam in its cave. Pilgrims undertake the Amarnath Yatra in the month of Sawan (August) organized by the Amarnath Shrine Board. The pilgrimage usually follows the Chandanbari route via Pahalgam, 96 km from Srinagar and 280 km from Jammu (Kumar, 2020, p. 92).

### Shankaracharya Temple

Situated atop the Shankaracharya Hill in Srinagar, the ancient Shankaracharya Temple, built in 371 BC by King Gopaditya, whose original name was Gopadri, is situated at a height of 1100 feet above the city. Named in honor of Adi Guru Shankaracharya, the eighth-century saint who revived Sanatan Dharma in Kashmir, the temple played an important role in popularizing the worship of Lord Shiva in the region. Maharaja Gulab Singh Stairs extend the access, allowing visitors to enjoy a 360-degree panorama of Srinagar. Beyond religious importance, the temple holds archaeological significance. Easily accessible by scheduled buses or city cabs, this temple boasts spiritual sanctity and architectural charm in the heart of Jammu and Kashmir (Mehta, 2020, p. 132).

### Mamaleshwar Temple

Mamaleshwar Temple, dedicated to Lord Shiva, is situated as a historical gem in the picturesque landscape of Pahalgam. Situated atop a mountain on the banks of the cool Kolahoi stream, this holy site has its roots in the erstwhile Raja dynasty. Reputed for its spiritual significance, the Mamaleshwar Temple attracts tourists throughout the year, making it a must-see place in Pahalgam. For a unique experience, take a pony ride to reach the temple. Considered both small and ancient, legends suggest that Lord Ganesha acted as the gatekeeper, giving rise to the temple's name, which is derived from the word 'mammal', which translates to 'do not move'. The temple has deep spiritual significance and remains a popular tourist attraction, especially during the summer months and holiday season (Sharma, 2020, p. 65).

## Aap Shambhu Temple

Aap Shambhu Temple in Sathrian (Rupnagar), Jammu, is a unique sanctuary where Lord Shiva is believed to reside in the form of Shiva Linga. Over the past six years, significant changes have transformed the temple, which presents an attractive structure with excellent architecture. Emerging as a prominent landmark in the geography of Jammu, Aap Shambhu Temple attracts attention not only for its architectural charm but also for the elaborate preparations during the festivals. Vibrant decorations including multicolor flags, flowers, and pandals create an enchanting atmosphere. Thousands of devotees wait patiently for hours to catch a glimpse of the Shiva Linga, and the temple management ensures arrangements for water and rasad. On Maha Shivratri, a beautiful view can be seen in the Shiva temple (Mehta, 2019, p. 110).

## Avantiswami Temple

The ruins of the Avantiswami Temple, a historic Hindu temple, still exist in Avantipora or Avantipur, located in the union territory of Jammu and Kashmir in northern India. Built by King Avantivarman in 855 AD, the temple, initially named Vishwasara, was part of the ancient city, which was also a capital founded by the king. Avantivarman, the founder of the 9th century Utpala dynasty, built many magnificent Hindu temples in the region during his reign.

Sadly, only a few of these structures survive today, as others fell victim to vandalism by Islamic invaders. During the era of King Avantivarman, the region experienced prosperity, leading to the impressive stone temple architecture of Kashmir of that period, which is distinct from other ancient temples in India (Verma, 2021, p. 150).

## Kheer Bhawani Temple

Kheer Bhawani Temple, an iconic Hindu temple, is located in Tulmulla village near Srinagar. Situated above a holy spring known to change color, this temple is dedicated to Goddess Raganya Devi, who is an incarnation of Goddess Durga. Its name is derived from the famous Indian sweet dish “Kheer”, which is served as the main offering. Maharaja Pratap Singh built the temple in 1912, and later Maharaja Hari Singh renovated it. The temple has a hexagonal spring and a marble shrine housing the idol of the goddess. Legend has it that Lord Rama worshiped the goddess during his exile, and the location of the temple changed based on the divine intervention of him and Lord Hanuman. The present site was selected after the goddess appeared in the dream of a local pandit named Rugnath Gabru (Singh, 2021, p. 116).

## Martand Sun Temple

Located at Ranbirpora Kehribal, 9 km from Islamabad (Anantnag), the majestic Martand Sun Temple stands as an important archaeological site in India. Dedicated to the Sun God, it rivals the Konark Sun Temple of Odisha. Built by King Lalitaditya between the 7th and 8th centuries, this temple exhibits rare artistry and

architectural skill with patterns reminiscent of Greek architecture. Although attacked and damaged by Alexander Butshikan, the ruins still reflect the grandeur of this remarkable structure (Verma, 2020, p. 150).

### **The Maharani Temple**

The Maharani Temple at Gulmarg, which was a royal temple of the Dogra dynasty in the former princely state of Jammu and Kashmir, is dedicated to Lord Shiva atop a small hill in the middle of Gulmarg town. Built in 1915 by Mohini Bai Sisodia, wife of Maharaja Hari Singh, this temple is also known as Maharani Temple or Mohineshwar Shivalaya. An interesting feature is its visibility from every corner of the city. The Maharani Temple, where Queen Mohini Bai worshiped Lord Shiva during her stay in the royal palace of Raja Hari Singh, is open daily from 6 am to 9 pm, with aarti performed twice a day (Kumar, 2021, p. 98).

### **Gauri Shankar Temple**

Gauri Shankar Temple is the oldest Hindu temple in the Kishtwar region of Jammu and Kashmir. Located in the heart of Kishtwar city, this temple holds a central place in the history of the region and is also known as the Sarkoot Temple. The ancient architectural brilliance of the temple makes it pleasing to look at, with various statues of gods and goddesses adorning its premises. These include Shiva Parvati, Shri Raghunath ji, Mother Sita, Shri Lakshman ji, Shri Hanuman ji, Mother Durga, Shri Ganesh, and Shri Dharmaraj. Additionally, the temple has Shiva Lingas of varying stature, which are believed to have been built during different periods (Singh, 2020, p. 122).

### **Wangath Temple**

The ruins of the Wangath Temple, located near Naranag high above the Sindh valley, were built by the famous king Lalitaditya Muktapida of the Karkota dynasty in Kashmir. Built around the 8th century, these temple complexes hold historical importance. According to Kalhana's Rajatarangini, the city of Srinagar was founded by Ashoka in the 3rd century BCE, and his son Jaluka (220 BCE) built Shiva temples – Bhutesvara, Jyeshtha Rudra, and Mathas – in the Wangath valley around the sacred spring of Naranag. King Jaluka built stone temples including the Naranag spring site around 137 BCE. Later rulers such as King Jayendra and Lalitaditya Muktapida contributed to the temple, which reflects the rich cultural and religious history of the region (Bhatt, 2019, p. 105).

### **Sharika Chakreshwar Temple**

Sharika Chakreshwar Temple is situated on Hari Parbat, a hill in Srinagar city. Hari Parbat, also known as Kuh-e-Sulaimani, stands on a hill overlooking Srinagar, the largest city and summer capital of Jammu and Kashmir, which is studded with numerous temples. The chief among them is dedicated to Goddess Sharika, who is considered the presiding deity of Kashmir. This temple is revered as 'Siddha Peeth, Shakti Peeth'. The festival of Navratri is celebrated every year at this holy place. The Cosmic Mother worshiped here symbolizes solar energy, which includes seven components: the seven worlds, the seven colors of light, and the seven



sages of Veda Vidya. This energy is known as “solar energy”, making this temple an important spiritual destination (Sharma, 2021, p. 145).

## **Zeashta Devi Temple**

Zeashta Devi Temple, also known as Zeathyar, is a Hindu temple located within the majestic surroundings of the Shankaracharya Mountains and Zabarwan Hills in Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir, offering panoramic views of the famous Dal Lake. During the summer season, thousands of devotees visit this holy site in Kashmir, which is dedicated to Goddess Jy

## **Architectural Significance**

The temples of Jammu and Kashmir are renowned for their unique architectural styles, which reflect a confluence of various cultural influences. The use of locally available materials such as limestone and granite, coupled with intricate carvings and sculptural embellishments, highlight the artistic expertise of the craftsmen of the time. The temples often feature sprawling courtyards, elaborately carved pillars, and sanctums adorned with deities, each telling stories of devotion and artistic brilliance.

For instance, the Raghunath Temple complex in Jammu, dedicated to Lord Rama, showcases the grandeur of 19th-century temple architecture. Its gold-plated interiors and a vast collection of sacred texts reflect the opulence and spiritual fervor of the Dogra rulers who commissioned its construction. The Bhairavnath Temple in Bhaderwah, with its stunning wooden carvings and traditional architecture, exemplifies the regional craftsmanship of Jammu. The Krimchi Temples, located near Udhampur, are another architectural marvel. These ancient temples, believed to date back to the 8th or 9th century, are dedicated to various Hindu deities and feature a blend of early medieval temple styles. The carvings and sculptures on these temples reflect the artistic excellence of the era.

## **Cultural and Religious Importance**

Temples in Jammu and Kashmir have historically played a central role in both the religious and cultural fabric of the region. They have served not only as places of worship but also as key sites for fostering community cohesion and preserving spiritual traditions. These temples, with their rich historical backgrounds, have been venues for numerous rituals, festivals, and cultural activities that draw both local and global visitors. The festivals and rituals associated with these temples are a testament to the enduring religious practices and the deep spiritual significance that they hold for the people of Jammu and Kashmir.

A prime example of the cultural and religious importance of temples is the Vaishno Devi Temple, one of the most visited pilgrimage destinations in the world. The temple, located in the Trikuta Mountains, attracts millions of devotees annually. The challenging trek to the temple is not just a physical journey but also a spiritual one, symbolizing the devotion of the pilgrims and their connection with the divine. The journey and pilgrimage to Vaishno Devi offer a glimpse into the intricate relationship between spirituality, devotion, and physical endurance, reflecting the deep-rooted cultural traditions of the region (Sharma, 2019, p. 58).

Similarly, the Amarnath Cave Temple, dedicated to Lord Shiva, is an important religious site in the region. The annual Amarnath Yatra is a major event, with devotees braving extreme weather conditions to reach the cave and offer prayers at the ice Shiva Lingam. This journey, often undertaken in groups, symbolizes not only religious devotion but also the strength and resilience of the pilgrims (Verma, 2020, p. 103). The Yatra, which occurs during the summer months, draws a large number of devotees, further highlighting the continuing importance of these sacred spaces in shaping the religious landscape of Jammu and Kashmir.

Another significant temple is the Kheer Bhawani Temple, located in Ganderbal district, which is dedicated to Goddess Ragnya Devi. The temple is famous for its sacred spring, which is believed to have healing properties. The Kheer Bhawani Mela, an annual festival celebrated here, draws devotees who believe that offering prayers at this temple brings blessings and prosperity. The ritual practices associated with the temple strengthen the spiritual bonds among the people and reaffirm their devotion (Kumar, 2021, p. 92). The Sudh Mahadev Temple in

Chenani, Udhampur district, dedicated to Lord Shiva, is believed to be over 3,000 years old.

The temple holds great significance for local devotees, especially during the Sudh Mahadev Fair, a three-day festival that features religious ceremonies and cultural performances. The temple is seen as a sacred site for both religious worship and cultural expression, further cementing the role of these temples in the spiritual and cultural life of the region (Singh, 2022, p. 115).

### **Challenges to Preservation**

The ancient temples of Jammu and Kashmir, despite their immense historical and cultural significance, face several challenges to their preservation. Natural disasters, such as earthquakes and floods, have caused severe damage to these structures over time. The region's seismic activity and unpredictable weather conditions have led to the erosion and collapse of certain temples, putting their integrity at risk.

Human-induced factors further complicate their preservation. Neglect and lack of maintenance, particularly in remote areas, have resulted in the gradual decay of many smaller temples. Vandalism and theft of valuable artifacts from these sites have also contributed to their deterioration. The socio-political turmoil in Jammu and Kashmir has exacerbated these issues, with several temples being abandoned or left in disrepair due to security concerns and the shifting priorities of regional authorities. For instance, the Martand Sun Temple, a oncemajestic structure, now stands in ruins, reflecting the scars of historical invasions and the passage of time. These challenges highlight the urgent need for targeted preservation efforts to safeguard these ancient temples, ensuring that their cultural and spiritual importance is not lost to future generations.

### **Efforts and the Way Forward**

Recognizing the importance of preserving this heritage, both governmental and nongovernmental organizations have initiated efforts to restore and conserve the ancient temples of Jammu and Kashmir. The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) has undertaken several restoration projects to stabilize and protect these monuments. Additionally, community-driven initiatives and awareness campaigns have played a crucial role in highlighting the need for preservation. The Vaishno Devi Shrine Board (SMVDSB) is a prime example of

effective management and preservation. The board has implemented measures to ensure the safety, cleanliness, and accessibility of the Vaishno Devi Temple, setting a benchmark for other temples in the region. Similarly, efforts to restore the Amarnath Cave Temple and improve infrastructure for pilgrims have enhanced its appeal while ensuring its preservation.

Going forward, a holistic approach is required to safeguard these temples. This includes integrating modern conservation techniques with traditional methods, promoting sustainable tourism, and involving local communities in preservation efforts. Enhanced funding and collaboration between government bodies, heritage organizations, and academic institutions can ensure the longevity of these cultural treasures. Additionally, digital documentation and virtual tours can help create awareness and generate global interest in these ancient sites.

## Conclusion

The ancient temples of Jammu and Kashmir are not merely architectural feats; they are vital representations of the region's spiritual and cultural essence. These sacred structures embody centuries of history, devotion, and artistry, making them integral to understanding the identity of the region. Preserving these temples is not just about maintaining the physical integrity of stones and sculptures but about safeguarding the deep-rooted faith and cultural heritage they represent. Each temple tells a unique story of spiritual practice, artistic expression, and historical evolution, from the grand Martand Sun Temple to the more secluded and intimate shrines scattered across the landscape.

The preservation of these sacred sites is a responsibility that extends beyond the scope of architectural conservation. It is about honoring the traditions, rituals, and cultural narratives associated with them. These temples are not only religious centers but also focal points for community bonding and cultural continuity. By protecting them, we ensure that future generations will have the opportunity to experience and appreciate the profound spiritual and cultural significance of these temples. From the snow-capped peaks of the Himalayas to the verdant valleys below, the temples of Jammu and Kashmir stand as enduring symbols of devotion, resilience, and artistic brilliance. As stewards of this heritage, it is our collective duty to ensure that these sacred spaces continue to thrive and inspire. Their preservation is not merely an act of conservation but an affirmation of the timeless legacy that defines Jammu and Kashmir's cultural landscape, shining brightly for generations to come.



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