

Manifestation of Goddess Kheer Bhavani: A Psychological Exploration

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Abstract

The temple of *Kheer Bhavani* is located in the marshy area of Tulmul, about 14 Kilometres away from Srinagar, the state capital of Kashmir. The presiding deity is a goddess known by many names, *Maharagya*, *Rajni* (empress), *Maharajini* (The Great empress) and most famously as *Kheer Bhavani*. The goddess and her famous temple hold a special place in the hearts of the local Hindus who throng to the temple on the days of the festivals in large numbers despite the volatile political situation of the region and the mass exodus of the 1990's. On *Zyeth Atham* (Jyestha Ashtami), the eighth day of the bright half of the month of Jyestha (May- June) a grand festival is held at Tulmul to celebrate the manifestation of the Goddess Ragya. Another is held at the shrine on Ashadh Ashtami, locally known as *Haer Atham* (June- July) which celebrates the discovery of the divine spring of the shrine. In the present paper, mythology related to the Goddess *Ragya* and her festivals have been analyzed to understand their psychological implications on the psyche of Kashmiri Pandits.

Keywords: goddess, kheer bhavani, psyche, archetypal psychology, kashmiri pandits

In 1888, the then British Land Settlement Commissioner to Kashmir, Walter Lawrence wrote the following report about the temple of Mata Kheer Bhawani;

“Kheer Bhawani is their favourite goddess, and perhaps the most sacred place in Kashmir is the Kheer Bhawani; spring of Kheer Bhawani at the mouth of the Sind valley. There are other springs sacred to this goddess, whose cult is said to have been introduced from Ceylon. At each there is the same curious superstition that the water of the spring’s changes colour. When I saw the great spring of Kheer Bhawani at Tula Mula, the water had a violet tinge, but when famine or cholera is imminent the water assumes a black hue. The peculiarity of Kheer Bhawani, the milk goddess, is that the Hindus must abstain from meat on the days when they visit her. and their offerings are sugar, milk-rice, and flowers. At Sharka Devi on Hari Parbat and at Jawala Mukhi in Krihu the livers and hearts of sheep are offered. There is hardly a river, spring, or hill-side in Kashmir that is not holy' to the Hindus, and it would require endless space if I were to attempt to give a list of places famous and dear to all Hindus. Generally speaking, and excluding the Tula Mula spring, which is badly situated in a swamp, it may be said that the Hindu in choosing his holy places had an eye for scenery, since most of the sacred Asthans and Tiraths are surrounded by lovely objects” (Lawrence, 1967).

This quote beautifully shows us a glimpse of the religious life of Kashmiri Pandits in the late nineteenth century and importance of Mata Kheer Bhawani in it. Little has changed from then to now except that presently the majority of the community are living in exile post the rise of insurgency in 1990's. For a community which is all too familiar with exile; in exile their rituals, language, food, culture etc becomes the thread from which they weave their new identity. All cultures are like trees with deep roots unique to their geographical surroundings. When people are uprooted and planted in a strange land with different soil taking root again is not easy. Eventually the culture starts to lose its vitality to continue to survive and in fact thrive, a sort of ritualistic return to the motherland is required. The temple and the worship of Mata Ragyna has become that anchor for the Kashmiri Pandit community. Large numbers of devotees’ flock to attend the two fairs and festivals of the Devi often risking life and limb in the hope of renewal, rejuvenation or in fact just the simple yet extremely emotional act of showing the next generation the land of their forefathers.

My personal memories of the shrine at *Tullamula* are filled with joy. It was the high point of our summer vacations when we used to visit my father who was still stationed in the valley. Since the day of *Zyeth Atham* the main festival which commemorates the return of the Goddess from Sri Lanka falls in the months of May-June a visit to the temple was a must on that blessed day. I remember the days of excitement that preceded the visit. What made it more fun was the fact that

the whole colony where we were staying used to charter one bus so it always turned into a huge picnic for us kids. I very clearly remember one summer when there was flooding in the area and majority of the complex was underwater. We had to wade through ankle deep water at most places. I had never seen such a sight before and clearly remember the exhilaration I felt, the whole temple compound felt so alive. I also remember pestering my father to take me for a boat ride after the prayers and rituals. And like most Indian parents my father was hesitant at first but he finally gave in and we rented a boat and went for a short ride. It was the first time I had ventured into the swamps, which at that time were flooded behind the temple. It had other worldly appeal to it which has stayed with me till this day. The whole of the temple compound had an energy about it, with tall Chinar (Maple) trees around, the sound of the bells, prayers and conch shells being blown. Even at that age it made me feel that there was something special about that place.

The present paper is my attempt to put what I felt all those years as a young girl under the scrutiny using the lens of Archetypal psychology. The mythology related to the Goddess *Ragya* and her festivals have been analysed to understand their psychological implications on the cultural psyche of Kashmiri Pandits. In the present paper, I have taken up for analysis a portion of her Sanskrit scripture (*Mahatmya*) entitled *Shri Maharajni Pradurbhava Vivaranam* (Exposition of the Manifestation of Shri *Maharajni*) which was published for general public in the year 1981. This *Mahatmya* narrates the myths and legends of the Goddess as well as her characteristics, rites and rituals to be observed by the pilgrims while making the pilgrimage. Speaking about *Mahatmya*, Diana L. Eck in her book, *Banaras City of Light* says *Mahatmya*'s are products of "... that particular Hindu structure of Consciousness which is pluralistic and polycentric, but which at any one time, against a vivid and variegated backdrop, brings but one centre, one deity, one sacred city or one temple in sharp focus for adoration and praise" (Eck, 1982). Beside this scripture, I shall also be looking into the hierophanies attached with the shrine which occurred along with the re-emergence of the goddess in the Kashmiri psyche and are commemorated on Ashadh Ashtami, locally known as *Haer Atham* (June- July) which celebrates the discovery of the divine spring of the shrine.

Shri Maharajni Pradurbhava Vivaranam

Exposition of the Manifestation of Shri Maharajni (From the Text Bhringish Samhita)

Canto – I

“Shri Bhairavi said:

She, of whom the second form as the goddess is Tripura named maiden, worshipped by the great souled demon Ravana. In Lanka, she was placed in the corner of *Shiva (Ishan kone)*, in an endless snake. Who is she Designated as *Tamasi* outside? Oh, you knower of all? Is she of *Tamasi*, *Rajasi* or *Sattviki* nature?

I have heard thus *Deva* that in the sacred country of Kashmir, near *Bhuvanesha*, the goddess established herself as *Vaishnavi* in *sattvika* form during the *Kaliyuga* in order to destroy all the troubles, which is even difficult for the gods. By whom was she led? Why there? In what form was she established? Tell me the truth Great Lord for the sake of the people.”

Shri Bhairava (Replied):

Listen oh beautiful, be satisfied, I will describe the great behaviour of the maiden, by mere listening of which people gain all knowledge.

Long ago there lived a descendent of *Pulaste*, a demon by the name of *Ravana*, fully intoxicated with pride and darkness. Ravana decided to do a vigorous penance for a hundred thousand years, without any food, controlling his breath, and standing upon the front toe of his foot. Having controlled his senses by vigorous penance, he was absorbed in the worship of god. Once while he was performing difficult penance, suddenly a hunter having arrows in his hands was chasing a group of wild boars and lions running in different directions, *Maheshwari*. Shaking with fear, trembling for their lives, wounded but not killed by the arrows of the hunter, the animals finally entered into the hermitage of *Ravana*. Although *Ravana* had acquired *Sattvika* qualities, yet seeing his hermitage thrown into confusion, he was full of extreme darkness, and he made a disconsolate prayer. ‘I will destroy all the hunters and all the creatures with one arrow’ he thought, abiding in contemplation.

Invoking the form of God of gods, the Great God having three eyes, he saw him in His Terrible Form. He had the vision of the Terrible Form of the God. Oh Beautiful, having seen the Terrible Form he praised and worshipped in succession. ‘Ask for a boon oh mighty one’, he said having covered the three worlds. ‘Instructed by the Lord, worship *Shakti* from now on, demon.’ Her form is *Rajas* and *Tamas*. The way you were devoted and absorbed in me when you had the destruction of living creatures in your mind, the same way, *Ravana* you be devoted to her. In *Triloka* fulfilling a vow instantly is a law. Right now give devotion to the Great Goddess. She will fulfil all your desires. Thus, addressed by the God of gods, the Lord, the great soul, he prayed to the goddess *Tamasi* having fresh splendour like the sun. After ten thousand years the Great Goddess

appeared to him.

Shyama said, ‘Ask for a boon son which is even difficult for *Skanda* to obtain. I give you the authority to reign over all of the three worlds, without any obstacles which you will enjoy for three eons and will become my devotee. And something else son, whatever is difficult for the gods; I will certainly give you whatever you wish. You just tell me’ Thus said the goddess to the great demon *Ravana*. He replied thus in a gentle sweet tone to the one who dispels the fear, *Bhavani*. If this is your bestowal of divine grace on me, oh Great Goddess, then do me a favour to me, live in my house always be near. Having been addressed thus by the great souled demon, the goddess with satisfied spirit, agreed to live there.

The great endless plower, blazing like a flame, is placed in the earth, endowed with four weapons: noose, hook, bow and arrow. Having three eyes *Tamasi Shakti* who sits on the great lion stayed in the *Ishana* corner of Lanka, having that appearance, called by the name *Shyama*. Demons worshipped by sacrificing buffaloes, alcohols and humans. Thus, *Shyama* as *Paradevi* accepted such offerings from demons as devotion. *Tamasi*, maiden, of Tripura whose skill is greatest, stayed for a long time there. Eventually, she had hatred towards all this because of the actions of the demons. The one who had made her home there was disheartened by the sins of the demons. The immovable one decided to move to the *Satidesha*.

From then on, the one who grants *Ramarajya* was known as *Maharajni* and she made *Satidesha* and lived in *Bhuvanasha*. Guided by *Hanuman*, *Devi* came with countless *nagas*. Surrounded by eighteen thousand *nagash*. Having passed *Panchal* Mountains near *Kapalamula* and reached *Vishnupada*, which has conical stones. She got down at *Madhyagrama* and went to the banks of Vishnu Ganga and crossed mountainous *Divasthala*. Going around the dense forest she reached heart winning *Khilavarini*. Seeing it devoid of water she left towards the north direction.

Then she reached a small village *Svanupaga* on the east of *Martand*, having seen it once she was fatigued at *Anantanaga*. Surrounded by endless snakes, sitting on the head of *Hanuman*, blessed *Devi Rajni* travelled the whole country. Sometimes she went to shaded *Lokutpur*, sometimes to shining *Rayasthal*. Sometimes to the village *Vadipur* and sometimes to the water pilgrimage *Kotipur*. Sometimes to *Chandipur* and sometimes to *Tankarpur* and *Rajni* thus travelling came back to *Satidesha* from *Sharda*. In the end near the confluence, he brought her to a marshy area, suitable for the snakes, its whole edge surrounded by the river *Sindh*.

She observed it being fruitful. Speaking happily to *Hanuman* that the place was good for her, she said ‘The first among worshippers, dear to Rama, the child of the wind, of great might, stay here for a while and help the snakes. Order the snakes to creep in the marsh softly like a tuft of grass; we will also take rest on the ground, under the shadow of big trees. Thus, that *Shyama* who was embellished with several colors stayed there for a long time with peace and happiness. This place

surrounded by *Bhuvanasha*, *Chatumgesha*, *Labdhavana* and *Bhagoha* has been called foremost *mandala* among the *mandalas* of the earth. Let it be measured like a tuft of grass wherever there are other dwellings, oh beautiful one. There are insignificant in price – therefore their value is like a tuft of grass. Establishing her own residence *Maharajni* herself bid goodbye to dear messenger of Rama and she herself lived there in the form (by) which the worshippers of *Shakti* did not measure.

Tranquil the goddess lived there. She consumed milk, sugar and butter had *sattvika* attributes had true form and a fifteen-word mantra. Seers obtain salvation by worshipping her. *Shri Rama* by mediating on her could kill *Ravana* of Lanka. By her blessings, oh *Devi*, the elder brother of *Ravana*, *Vibhishana*, always with peaceful soul, surely obtained the kingdom of Lanka. By mediating upon her all obtain complete attainment of their aim. The one who used to live at Lanka as *Shyama* became famous as *Maharajni* in *Satidesha*. That maiden whose skill is highest bestows *Ramrajya*.

She straight away gives deliverance to whose minds seek refuge, oh consort of *Mahesha*, such as those who wish for sons (she gives sons), those who wish for money, those who desire knowledge she gives knowledge and those who wish for a daughter she gives them a daughter. By the favour of the most excellent Lady, her followers always get treasure, grain, animal, home and field continuously, there is no doubt. Whether one is looking towards the sky or atmosphere, or the earth or is it in deep adversity or is fearful of terrible famine and a devastating fear or is fearful of the king, these are all assuredly eliminated by meditating upon her. One who is afflicted with great distress escapes distress, one who is sick is released from sickness and one afflicted is released from sickness, and one afflicted is able to get through calamities.

The enjoyer who becomes one with god attains release. Whoever recites her mantra which has all of her secrets, and worships her Yantra, he should be satisfied that he will become *Shiva*. Or whoever worships the mother of the world with mantras produced by the voice, his speech will flow like the flow of the river Ganges, about that there is no doubt. Thus, the fifteen worded maiden became famous as *Maharajni* (*Khira Bhavani*) of peaceful form, *Deveshi*, who earlier was goddess *Tripura* (*sundari*). That is why serene peaceful soul worship her. When the beautiful *Tamasi* lived in the house of *Ravana*, she was worshipped with twenty-two words as *Terrible Tamasi*.

She was famous as the great *Shyama*, the greatest of Divinities and was shown the way to the *Satidesha* by *Hanuman* himself. She along with many snakes following the consent of Rama, if she is worshipped, she fulfils all the desires wished by one's heart. Thus, I tell you, *Devi*, as you, inquired from me, *Shyama* with *Ravana*, at his home, she became known as *Maharajni* in Truth. From hearing her of her in Kali yuga one earns merit equivalent to doing sacrifice for ten thousand years. From the study of this, oh great goddess, straight away one will be released from the bindings of this world" (Wangu, 2002).

The Goddess

The mahatmya begins with a conversation between Bhairavi and Bhairava but who are these two entities? Bhairava originates from the word *bhīru*, which means 'fearful'. The name Bhairava then comes to mean 'terribly fearful form'. It is also known as one who destroys fear or one who is beyond fear. Regarding the nature of Bhairava, the great philosopher Abhinavagupta says, “Being in the form of fullness (Bhairava) protects the whole universe, fills up this whole world and sustains it. Besides being full of Jnana and Kriya and by his real nature, he is helpful to those who are being carried away by the ferocious thought currents” (Tantraloka, I.96). He is that form of Lord Shiva which protects his devotees from dreadful enemies, greed, lust and anger. These enemies are as dangerous as any physical enemy as they hinder humans from growing and transforming and achieving divine union with the God within. There is also another way to look at it if we break down the word; *Bha* means creation, *Ra* means sustenance and *Va* means destruction. Therefore, Bhairava is the one who creates, sustains, and dissolves the three stages of life: he becomes the ultimate or the supreme.

Bhairavi, then is the divine consort of Bhairava. As this conversation is between divine couple, divine knowledge here will be revealed in secret and shall be bestowed upon the seeker away from the usual spheres where knowledge is exchanged. Conversation between Shiva and Shakti is a unique feature of most esoteric texts of Tantra School of Indian Philosophy, the highly secret left-handed path of spirituality. Hence it would be safe to deduce right from the outset, the present *Mahatmya* and the Goddess Maharajni has roots in Tantric traditions. Another interesting point worth mentioning is that, Bhairavi is asking questions and asking for clarity for the sake of us mere mortals. As the all-knowing Divine Goddess, she is knowledge herself but being the benevolent mother that she is, she engages Bhairava to repeat the esoteric knowledge, provide clarification to pass on this knowledge to humans who are limited in their abilities to grasp the nuances in one go.

The divine Mother has been referred to by multiple names in the mahatmya, Tripurasundari, Shyama, Maharajni etc. The differences between these various forms are only at the surface level since essentially, they all are different faces of the same Divine Mother. First mentioned is Tripura or Tripurasundari. The name Tripurasundari, literally means 'She who is lovely in the three worlds'. The word 'Tripura' is a combination of two Sanskrit words; '*Tri*' meaning three and '*Pura*' meaning a city or citadel. It can also be understood as referring to three cities or citadels built of gold, silver, and iron, in the sky, air, and earth, by Maya for the Asuras, and burnt by Shiva referring to the legend of the three cities destroyed by Shiva. However, 'Tripura' can also mean 'Śiva Śaktir (Shiva Shakti)' while 'Sundari' means 'a beautiful woman'.

Number three is of importance in the iconography of Goddess. David Kinsley in his book, *Tantric Visions of the Divine Feminine: The Ten Mahāvidyās* (1998) writes that “She is called *Tripura* because she is identical with the triangle (*trikona*) that symbolises the yoni and that forms her chakra. She is also called *Tripura* because her mantra has three clusters of syllables. Here *Tripura* is identified with the alphabet, from which all sounds and words proceed and which is often understood to occupy a primordial place in tantric cosmology. She is three-fold, furthermore, because she expresses herself in Brahma, Visnu, and Siva in her roles as creator, maintainer, and destroyer of the universe. She is threefold also because she represents the subject (*maul*), instrument (*mina*), and object (*meva*) of all things. Here again, she is identified with reality expressed in terms of speech, which involves a speaker, what is said, and objects to which the words refer” (Kinsley, 1998). She is Tripura because she contains in her the three *Gunas* yet she is beyond the three *Gunas*. *Gunas* can be defined as quality, peculiarity, attribute, property. Three *gunas* are *sattva* (goodness, constructive, harmonious), *rajas* (passion, active, confused), and *tamas* (darkness, destructive, chaotic). Tripura Sundari also dwells in the three worlds of *manas*, *buddhi*, and *chitta*. Her devotees identify her with the highest reality, the Ultimate principle.

Tripurasundari is *Para Shakti*, beyond form yet immanent in all forms. The Srividya Mantra is regarded as the Mantra of Tripura Sundari consists of Fifteen syllables same as Kheer Bhavani (Maharajni) which hints towards their oneness. The difference is in the gross or *Sthula* form which is also dependent on the devotee, his psychological temperament and with what emotions he is evoking the divine and for what goal. This is one of the beautiful qualities of Hinduism that it gives space to myriads of divine forms and diversity in different ways to connect to the Ultimate reality.

When Ravana prays to the goddess and invites her to stay at his abode she takes the *Sthula* form of *Shyama*, the dusky one. “the great endless plower, blazing like a flame, is placed in the earth, endowed with four weapons: noose, hook, bow and arrow. Having three eyes Tamasi Shakti who sits on the great lion stayed in the Ishana corner of Lanka, having that appearance, called by the name Shyama” (Wangu, 2002). The name refers to the colour of her skin, she is the not dark or black like the night but is like twilight in her essence. She is *Tamasi*, which refers to her predominant *Guna* that is *tamas* which symbolises darkness and chaos. Anyone who has ever observed the period of twilight knows that wildlife seems to be extra active during these in-between hours. She then is personification of Mother Nature in all her glory, who dwells in between life and creation on one hand and death and destruction on the other. She is that which binds the world in a life/death/life cycle, carrying all potentialities within her.

Goddess is being described as the “great endless plower” (Wangu, 2002). A plow is defined by the dictionary as ‘A farm implement consisting of a strong blade at the end of a beam, usually hitched to a draft team or motor vehicle and used for breaking up soil and cutting furrows in

preparation for sowing' (American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, 2016). Plowing a field refers to preparing land to receive the seed and be cultivated. This requires use of tools that will dig into the soil, as a result of which the top layer mixes with the lower layers and this seemingly chaotic act leads to new cycle of planting of crops and harvest. Goddess *Shyama* is then being described as the 'plower' who is keeping the life/death/life cycle moving; creating chaos and creating new life out of that chaos. She is endowed with four weapons; noose, hook, bow and arrow. While noose symbolises the ability to outgrow dualities, unite opposites, the next three hook, bow and arrow symbolise the ability to focus and the maturity required to hit the mark and get awakened with seemingly little effort.

The Goddess is described as having three eyes. It is widely believed that the right eye of the goddess represents the sun or action and the left eye represents the moon and stands for desire. The third eye on her forehead represents the knowledge of fire. In usual practice the goddess is not seen as 'Triyambake' i.e., one having three eyes. It is only when she is worshipped as Shakti for strength and wisdom is, she shown with three eyes. Ravana wanted to acquire strength and power hence the Goddess appeared to him in her three eyed form. The mount for the Goddess is Lion which is "associated with gold, heroic survival and sun like magnanimity along with compassion of saviour and sovereign" (Ronnberg & Martin, 2010).

This is the form of the Goddess received by Ravana which he worshipped along with his fellow Rakshasas in Lanka.

Goddess and The Devotee

The Goddess interacts with two individuals who reflect different kinds of devotees. On one hand there is Ravan, the great Shaiva bhakt who with his penance and devotion can bring and house the goddess but then also loses her grace at the most crucial of times. Then there is Hanuman, who is a Ram bhakt, whom the goddess requests to help her journey back to her land *Satidesha*. Both are well known examples of learned men and great devotees. Yet there is a clear difference in the psychological approach they have to the divine and their basic temperament.

Ravan is the king of Rakshasas, the most powerful of the lot. With Ten heads he is also known as *Dasanana*. He has ten pairs of eyes and ten pairs of hands. Physically he has the capability far more than a mere human, he is someone destined to be special. Who is a *Rakshasa*? Although this term is often translated as demon, according to ancient Indian understanding these are beings which are in no way, shape, or form inferior to the human race. The difference only lies in the temperament and the behaviour of the two groups. *Manavas* or humans followed *Dharma*, where there are rules in place to ensure that everyone has a chance of survival even the weak ones. The *Rakshasas*, despite having the same intellectual and discriminatory abilities were willing go against *Dharma* and follow what is called as *Matsya Nyaya* or the Law of the Jungle. Here

dominance is the aim and the weak are the prey. So instead of compassion we have a system which is based on fear, and Ravan is the leader of this group of individuals.

Furthermore, he comes from a divine lineage. His father is a Rishi named Vaishrava, whose father was Great Rishi Pulastya who is a mind born son of the world creator Brahma himself while his mother came from a lineage of Rakshasas, she was Kaikesi. She was the daughter of Sumali one of the leaders of a group of Rakshasas, who wanted a strong and powerful heir and hence sent his daughter to Rishi Vaishrava to have a son by him. Describing Ravan, Devdutt Pattanaik in his Book, *Seven Secrets of Shiva* writes, “thus Ravan is a descendent of Brahma, metaphorically speaking Ravan then is a form of Brahma created when imagination is crumpled and knotted by several layers of fear” (Pattanaik, 2011). Brahma once spouted five heads, as is written in the ancient texts, one of which was cut off by Rudra 'The Roarer' the terrifying form of Shiva. Ravan on the other hand in his effort to please the Great Shiva willingly offers his heads as a sacrifice. He uses one of his heads as gourd, one arm as beam and uses his nerves as strings to create the first-string instrument, a lute called the Rudra Veena, which is offered to Shiva. Besides this sacrificial offering, to please the Lord he also offers his creativity and composes a hymn called Rudra Stotam. Shiva is *Bholenath*, easy to please and he offers him many boons but the boons Ravan asks for reveal his temperament. There are many tales of their interaction where he often covets what belongs to Shiva himself be it his spouse (Goddess Parvati), his house or even Mount Kailash itself.

Ravan thinks he is clever and can outwit the Lord himself, partake in his power to dominate the entire creation but as Dr Estés writes in her book, *Women who run with wolves*, “Innocence is different from naivete. There is an old saying in the backwoods where I come from: ignorance is not knowing anything and being attracted to the good. Innocence is knowing everything, and still being attracted to the good” (Estés, 1992). Ravan is a product of a society which functions on the basis of fear; hence his actions are based out of fear and not its antithesis i.e. Love. He is not engaging with the divine because of reasons of love but because he feels that from the divine it is possible to access power. Shiva has the wisdom and realises the futility of chasing power as he knows that actions based on fears will only lead to creating more fear. Devdutt Pattanaik in his retelling of the great epic ramayan titled *Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of Ramayana*, points out that in the indian philosophical thought what a man *is*, is different from what a man *possesses*. He says “we are a set of thoughts and we have a set of things. Ravan has knowledge, he may be learned but he is not wise” (Pattanaik, 2013). Ravan has intellectual understanding yet lacks insight hence his knowledge has failed to bring about a transformation in him. Despite having an understanding about the soul through extensive scholarship of the Vedas and other esoteric texts, and worshipping Shiva who is *Pashupati*, the lord of the beasts, who gives his devotees strength to outgrow base instincts and emotions, he frequently gives in to his passions and surrenders to the ego. A man with far superior

mind and body than any human falls back upon his basest of emotions. He comes from the lineage of divine Brahmins yet he refuses to expand his mind and become a Brahmin in the truest sense of the word.

In this mahatmya too, the inherent personality characteristics of Ravan comes to fore. In the beginning, even when he is immersed in the penance to Lord Shiva, he is unable to control the negative thoughts from entering the mind when he sees his hermitage in disarray. In Hindu traditions, one often is advised to pray to a deity who will help one out grow one's weakness or someone who has the qualities one wants to imbibe. Despite following all the prescribed techniques, worshipping Lord Shiva and intellectually understanding the futility of clutching on to the material world Ravan falls back to his base nature and even the great *Pashupati*, Lord of all animals is unable to help him outgrow this mode of functioning. There is something lacking in the penance which Shiva himself points out.

Ravan prays only to Shiva and ignores the Goddess but there can be no attainment of wisdom without acknowledging the two together. Shiva is also *Ardhanarishwar*, God who is half male and half female and this image shows that they are in their essence one. Devdutt Pattnaik writes "In Shiva temples, Shiva is in the form of Shiva Lingam cannot be worshipped without acknowledging the Goddess. The Lingam stone rises from a leaf shaped trough that points North towards the Pole Star. This is the Yoni, the entrance to the womb of the Goddess. The temple or *garbha griha* is the container of the womb into which Shiva has been drawn. She envelops him only through her can he be realised. Shiva and Shakti thus form a unit" (Pattnaik, 2011).

This begs the question what is Shakti? When written with a small 's' shakti comes to stand for the inherent Power in an individual while with a capital 'S' Shakti is the Goddess of Energy, the Divine immanence that essentially resides in every living being with varying degrees. So as shared by Mahadev himself to Ravan "Ravana you be devoted to her. In *Triloka* fulfilling a vow instantly is a law. Right now, give devotion to the Great Goddess. She will fulfil all your desires" (Wangu, 2002). This is one of the greatest secrets shared by Lord himself with his ardent devotee, that She is the cause and life blood of the world and she also the path that one needs to walk in order to reach Shiva and transcend this world. However, the message that is missed by Ravan in his narrow view of the nature of Shakti is that, this path takes us on a journey which is about claiming the power in the material world but at the same time reclaiming the divine in us and only then a true transformation of the heart would take place and help you reach the Lord, the God consciousness and become divine.

Ravan prays and appeases the Goddess and finally gets her to agree to stay in his house but then loses her grace, "Demons worshipped by sacrificing buffaloes, alcohols, and humans. Thus, *Shyama* as *Paradevi* accepted such offerings from demons as devotion. *Tamasi*, maiden, of Tripura

whose skill is greatest, stayed for a long time there. Eventually, she had hatred towards all this because of the actions of the demons. The one who had made her home there was disheartened by the sins of the demons. The immovable one decided to move to the *Satidesha*” (Wangu, 2002). The name taken by the Goddess in Lanka is *Shyama* (Dusky) which is another name for the Goddess Kali. Kali is the feminine form of "time" or "the fullness of time" with the masculine noun "kāla"—and by extension, time as "changing aspect of nature that bring things to life or death." She is the presiding deity in the Hindu tantric tradition. She is a symbol of Mother Nature in Her creative, nurturing and devouring aspects. In the Hindu rituals, different deities are offered different kinds of offerings, while Shiva is offered uncooked fruits, nuts, unpasteurized milk his divine counterpart the Goddess specially Kali is the only one who is offered blood sacrifice. Pattnaik (2000) writes that the beheading of male animals- buffaloes, goats and cocks please her but killing female animals arouses her wrath. He goes on to explain that blood is offered to the goddess as it satisfies the sexual urge of the goddess. “Blood like semen, is considered creative essence. In Ayurveda, semen is viewed as transformed blood. Thus, offering male blood are in effect, offerings of semen” (Pattnaik, 2000).

The offering of blood is a practice in the Tantric traditions; the world is viewed as shakti or a source of power and all aspects of the goddess are evoked. “The aspirant is asked not to bridle his senses. Instead he is sensually aroused and intimidated by both the alluring and repulsive manifestations of the goddess” (Pattnaik, 2000). The aspirant is expected to face and accept the dual face of the world that is without but more importantly take a similar approach to the world within. It is hoped that he is able to rise above the duality of thought and realise sacred and profane, ugliness and beauty, creation and destruction etc are merely points of view. When the aspirant realises this then he truly becomes enlightened and regains the real shakti in him. But this is easier said than done. K.C. Pandey in his book, *Abhinavgupta: A Historical and Philosophical Study*, (1963) writes, “Kularnava Tantra asserts that following Tantric rituals is as difficult as walking on the edge of a sword and as risky as holding a lion by the ear. The ritual ingredients (grain, fish, meat, wine and sexual partner) are to be used not for the satisfaction of sensuous desires but for the realisation of the highest spiritual value. When the ingredients are producing their highest effect on the physical organism the initiate is to draw his mind completely from the senses and to concentrate on the spiritual joy as completely dissociated from the sensuous element” (Pandey, 1963). The pleasure of the senses become the gateway to the highest spiritual bliss and transformation but when reaching the zenith of pleasure, one is required to turn attention away from the senses and go inwards implying the difficult task of centring your mind and awareness of your thoughts.

The anger of the goddess with the blood sacrifice and the actions of Demons hints towards a one-sided indulgence in the tantric rituals. As mentioned above, to walk this path requires a lot of training and even then, it is fraught with serious perils as sacred rites of these secret and esoteric

nature could disintegrate into something completely antithetical to its actual purpose. Furthermore, eventual aim of all mystical practices is to experience spiritual bliss and inner transformation. All the *Siddhis* or abilities one acquires are a by-product of this journey and are not the end itself. Ravan in his desire for power over the outside world and acquiring the *Siddhis* forgets about the inner work required on this journey. Sacrifices on the outside are no longer enough to satiate the goddess who now requires the inner sacrifices from the aspirant to take the transformation to the next level. When Ravan is unable to do so, goddess calls on Hanuman to take her back to her own abode.

Once the Goddess made her decision to move, she reaches out to the Ram Bhakt Hanuman to guide and carry her to *Satidesha*. There is a saying in Hindi “Pehle Hanuman, Fir Bhagwan” (Pattnaik, 2008) which means First Hanuman then God. He is the gatekeeper to entrances of cities, citadels, temples and homes. Also known as *Sankat Morchan* i.e. remover of obstacles he closely associated with Lord Rama as his beloved devotee. The colloquial saying states truth very simply, if you want to achieve divine union spiritual bliss, follow the example of the monkey-god. But he is no ordinary monkey. In ramayan, monkeys are called by the term *Vanar* which translates as Forest man who dwells away from the human civilisation. But he is no ordinary *Vanar*, he has divine lineage as well. There are many myths narrating the birth of Hanuman and his fatherhood is shared by 3 individuals; Kesari (Monkey, *Vanar*), Vayu (Wind god) and Lord Shiva. He has physical strength and abilities like flying, changing his size etc and at the same time he is also a poet, a scholar and a grammarian.

He is one of the most well-liked characters in the epic ramayan, and even one of the most popular deity in the Hindu pantheon. His many adventures, all of them in selfless causes, his humility despite his supernatural strengths and most importantly his display of intellect and wisdom in times of crisis truly makes him in the eyes of the devotee ‘*Mahavir*’ the great hero. It also inspires hope in them that as he helped Lord Ram in the times of his trouble so shall he do the same for them in their times of need. He derives his strength and intellect from the tapas generated in him as he is a celibate. Devdutt Pattnaik mentions that “in the Vinaya Patrika of Tulsidas written in Awadhi in sixteenth century, Hanuman is described as 'manmatha- manthana' (he who churns the desire in the mind) as well as urdhava-retas (he who through meditation draws his semen upwards towards the mind than towards the womb). Thus, he is at once celibate and sexual; all erotic energies are transformed into wisdom in his being. Therefore, hanuman was much adored by Tantric yogis, sadhus, sanyasis and vairagis, who gave up worldly life and smeared themselves with ash and became ascetics” (Pattnaik, 2013).

Though considered a beast he has all the qualities that are considered rare in humans and worthy of adoration i.e. Humility, Compassion, Strength and Wisdom. If Ravana is an initiate then Hanuman is the spiritual adept; Ravan has intellect which failed to transform him and Hanuman

then stands for the 'monkey mind' which has been transformed through devotion and discipline. Hence, the goddess requests him to carry her and her snakes to the north, to *Satidesha* and help her find the perfect abode for her and her snakes. Like innate to his nature he stayed outside her temple as a gatekeeper till she settled down where he still stands guarding faithfully.

Transformation of The Goddess

After being disheartened by the behaviour of Ravan and his Rakshasas, the immovable Goddess decides to move and asks Hanuman to carry her and her snakes to the land in the North known as "*Satisara*". Ravan's Lanka lay in the south which is the direction of death and change, the land of Matsya Nyaya, where rule of the jungle is supreme. Goddess then changes direction and moves North, the land of Pole Star and permanence, "which represents a state of mind where there is no dependence on nature, no fear of death, no fear of scarcity or predation only Bliss, stillness" (Pattnaik, 2011). If Ravan rules the South, then North is the direction of Kuber, the Yaksha who is the half-brother of Ravana. Both brothers are born through a Brahmin father but fail to become one.

While Kuber hoards material wealth, Ravana views divinities as commodities to be hoarded which is why he is always seeking to take Gods like Shiva, Vishnu and Goddess (Shakti) to the south. Through a divine boon Kuber is made the guardian of North direction so as to guide people towards wisdom. This indicates the balance one needs to achieve between the material world and spiritual world. One needs wealth which can be monetary prosperity or any other kind to overcome the basic fears so that the individual can work towards moksha or liberation.

If we look into the mythological history of the land of Kashmir, this journey undertaken by the goddess and her choosing the valley of Kashmir as her next abode starts making sense. In Nilmat Puran, which deals with the origin of the valley of Kashmir it is written, "Vaisampayana (said): O best amongst the Kings, the Goddess Uma is the same as Kashmira. What was formerly an enjoyable, heart enrapturing lake for six Manvantaras since the beginning of the Kalpa, became a beautiful territory in this Manvantara" (Nilmat Puran, verses 12-13, page 4). Goddess Uma is the divine consort of Shiva, hence the name given to the ancient lake was *Satisar* meaning Lake of the Goddess Sati. Furthermore, the text goes into details about the origins of the land from the time of the destruction of the world after the end of last Manvantara, the preservation of Manu and the Goddess turning herself into a ship which carried the seeds which is fastened to a mountain later known as Naubandhan by Vishnu himself. "The Goddess Sati, with the body in the form of a boat, becomes the earth and on that earth comes into being a lake of clear water, Known as Satidesha, six yojanas long and half of that in breadth, enjoyable, heart enrapturing and the sporting place of gods" (Nilmat Puran, verses 45-46, page 12).

The land of Kashmir is personification of the Goddess herself. It is her abode where she is comfortable residing. After being in the South in her *tamasic* form, she returns to her abode and

takes a *sattvic* form. From an angry Goddess Shyama she transforms into a calm and still Goddess Maharajni. It is going to be her permanent dwelling as she is in her element here and so are her accompanying snakes. It is also noted in Nilmat Puran, that Vishnu, after being approached by the King of the Nagas (serpents) Vasuki, allotted Satisar to Nagas where they were promised protection from persecution. So, it is a homecoming for the Goddess and her companions.

Snake is an animal that has a lot of ambivalence attached with it. It is mentioned in world mythologies as cosmic creator, progenitor, destroyer, sacred being or as a symbol of energy itself. “Because it sheds skin, it symbolises resurrection. Because they are capable of strangling with its sinuous movements it signifies strength. In India, snake cults or cults of the spirit of the snake are connected with the symbol of waters of the sea. They also are regarded as the guardians of the spring of life and of immortality and also of the superior riches of the spirit that are symbolised by hidden treasure” (Cirlot, 1971).

In the Tantric tradition the feminine cosmic energy of the Kundalini is symbolised by a coiled serpent at the base of the spine in the *Muladhara Chakra*. Slowly through conscious effort one can learn to awaken her using various techniques. “When she lifts her head, she moves through the spiritual channel piercing through six chakras. The seventh chakra is located at the crown of the head. Here, Shakti in her serpent form is joined to Shiva in a union” (Wangu, 2002). The Crown chakra lies in the north and the Muladhara chakra lies in the south. The serpents then stand for an aspect of the Para Shakti, which is the divine spark in all of us. This northward journey of the goddess then is also a journey of a Tantric sadhak, turning within and evolving from a fear based worldly existence to experiencing the eternal bliss of union.

But bliss will be achieved only when the Goddess achieves union with her consort Shiva who resides in the north. It is interesting to note that that even when the Goddess was residing in Lanka, she was placed in The North East i.e. *Ishan kone* or the Corner of the Gods which according to the science of vaastu shastra, is ruled by Lord Shiva. And when she arrives in the valley, after circumnavigating around the valley she settles in the North East. Similarly, she is carried along with her serpents on the head of Hanuman, who as we have seen is associated with Lord Shiva as well. The Goddess also asks Hanuman to order the snakes to creep into the marsh when she has selected her abode, indicating that Hanuman is a spiritual adept who has control over his own Kundalini and his own Shakti. Hence it can be said that on this journey, a spiritual seeker who inculcates the values embodied by Hanuman, will be the one who will lead the Goddess to find her permanent abode and experience the divine bliss.

Mata Maharajni chooses a marsh as the next abode for her and her serpents. Marshes can be freshwater, saline, or brackish wetlands and usually inundated either by surface or groundwater. They are rich in nutrients and minerals and hence sustain lot of life who have adapted to this special

environment. “A marsh can be a metaphor for transitions or passages in a wider process where consciousness experiences itself in the muck, stuck between permanently dissolved and the yet to be, a purgatory of sorts” (Ronnberg & Martin, 2010). This choice of abode, which is so different from any other *asthan* of the goddess in the valley points to the fact that here the Goddess will return to primordial womb where she will be in incubation till the time is right to re-emerge transformed and evolved.

Goddess Emerges as Kheer Bhawani

There are two legends associated with the present site of the temple and the spring. These are Hierophanies which sanctified the temple and the spring of Mata Kheer Bhawani in the psyche of local population. Samsar Chand Koul (1954) writes, “There is a legend that a long time ago the goddess appeared to Pandit Govind Joo Gadru who arranged to go in a boat from sowura ghat to the swampy side of the anchar lake. He took with him a number of earthen vessels full of milk and when he found the spring, he poured milk into it. Following is another version of the process which is said to have brought the spring to light. A pious Brahman Krishna Pandit saw a vision in which he was informed by a Deva (an angel) that the spring of Khir Bhawani lay among the swamps of Tulamulla. 'How shall I be able to find out the spring?' He asked. 'Engage a boat as far as shadipor, and from there a serpent will guide you. When you will reach near the spring, the serpent will jump into it. That is the spring ', was the reply. He did as he was told, engaged a boat and came as far as shadipor. A snake was seen swimming over the water of the swamps. The boat followed the snake, which halted at a particular place where Shri Krishna Pandit fixed a long stick to indicate the position of the holy spot. After the snake moved in an oddly rectangular direction, the space thus covered by it was demarcated with the fixation of sticks over the marshy area. Thus, was the divine spring discovered” (Koul, 1954). From the divine spring, an idol of the Goddess and a shiva lingam were recovered which together are installed in a high chamber built inside the spring. A shiv lingam and an idol of Goddess together cannot be found in any other Hindu holy place in the valley.

The concept of a Hierophany was given by Mircea Eliade. It can be defined as a manifestation of the sacred in an object that is part of the natural or profane world. Wherever it occurs it is a sacred place. He writes that, “A sacred place is what is because of the permanent nature of the hierophany that first consecrated it. The hierophany therefore does not merely sanctify a given segment of undifferentiated profane space; it goes as far to ensure the sacredness will continue there. There, in that place, the hierophany repeats itself” (Eliade, 1954). This means once transformed by a hierophany, that particular place will continue to be in communion with the sacred and also allow people who come there on pilgrimage to do the same.

Another characteristic is that the place is never chosen by man rather it is revealed to him like in the instances mentioned here where the place of the spring was revealed in a vision and the

path was shown by a snake. But not everyone can enter, a ritualistic purification is required to be in presence and communion with the divine. As the Goddess is in her sattvic form in *kal yuga* as mentioned by Bhairavi in the beginning of the mahatmya, she requires purity of the mind and body from her devotees before they enter her abode. Hence it is a common practice to ritually fast and avoid non vegetarian food before one enters the temple compound. Also, the offerings are made of Milk, Sugar and *Ghee* all three rich and nourishing foods. These are symbolic of abundance in the material world but what is offered in the feet of the divine will be consumed by the devotees as well in the form of Prasad. *Prasad* literally means a gracious gift. It denotes anything, typically an edible food, that is first offered to a deity, saint etc and then distributed in His or Her name to their followers or others.

Prasad has a rich history of meanings since Vedic times. It was defined as a mental state experienced by gods, sages, and other powerful beings and is marked by spontaneous generosity and the bestowing of boons. In later texts references to prasad as a material substance began to appear. In its material sense, prasad is created by a process of giving and receiving between a human devotee and the divine god. The deity then 'enjoys' or tastes a bit of the offering, which now is divinely invested and this is then called prasad which is received by the devotees to be ingested. In the shrine of Mata Kheer Bhawani, this prasad is not only for your immediate family but it is in fact meant to be distributed amongst other fellow devotees. Symbolically then, the blessings of the goddess are meant to be shared with others with a generous heart to mirror the temperament of the ever-generous mother divine.

The goddess is asking her devotees to engage with the material world but with an evolved mentality. One which is not stuck in the fight or flight mode of lower impulses rather from a balanced mind where one is aware that material wealth provides us with the base from which one can pursue the wisdom that will set us free from the cycle of rebirth. She is the primordial mother hence she fulfils all worldly desires of her devotees but at the same time she is the Shakti that can transform a man into Shiva, God himself. What is required is the right mental attitude and devotion, involving all the senses in her worship and then turning inwards and stilling your mind.

Conclusion

The word temple is derived from the Greek word 'Temenos' which means a secluded realm. A dwelling place of god, a shrine set apart from the secular world. It calls the devotee to undertake a pilgrimage which requires full participation of the body, mind, and soul. A pilgrimage is not a journey of the mundane kind, its not just about the movement from place A to place B. Looking at it from the spiritual perspective, it is more about the act of seeking, inquiring, and living with intensity through new and profound experiences. True journeys are not about escaping the mundane life or difficult situations rather they are about evolution. Mata Kheer Bhawani is calling her

devotees to undertake this very journey which will lead to their psychological and spiritual evolution. And like a good mentor she has left behind breadcrumbs for the faithful to ensure the success of all who follow her diligently. She calls on to those who may choose to hear, to undertake this journey from without to within and evolve. Rising above the dualistic thought where there is no difference between the material and the spiritual world or between Shiva and Shakti for the seeker. Senses are not to be shunned but rather fine-tuned so that they become partners not road blocks on the path of liberation. Bhoga and moksha is equally important, what is expected is that you find in yourself that stillness which will hold you steady no matter what is happening around you.

These insights from the mahatmya of Mata Maharajni are in line with the philosophical arguments shared by the scholars of Kashmir Shaivism. In his great treatise on Tantra, the great Shaivite philosopher Abhinavagupta, writes “Impurity (mala) is ignorance (ajnana) and is the root cause of samsara” (Tantraloka, IX.99). Three types of impurities or malas have been talked about in Kashmir Shaivism; *anava mala* which has been called the ‘primary limiting condition’ causing an individual to feel *apurna* or incomplete, cut off from the source of everything the universal consciousness. The next one is *mayiya mala* which is the cause of consciousness of difference (*Bhinna- vedyā- prathā*) which is expressed in cognition as ‘this is mine’ and ‘that is not mine.’ Finally, there is the *karma mala*, which consists of mental impressions (*vasnas*) that carry an individual from one life to the next, in a way trapping us in the cycle of rebirth. By asking the devotee to look inward and work towards rising above the lack mentality and the dualistic thought the Goddess is showing the path of liberation to her followers. Though the journey might be long and arduous, each small step in the right direction counts too.

In the rituals of the Goddess strict asceticism is not encouraged rather emotions and senses are engaged but the lesson that is to be learned is that the outward act must be mirrored in the psyche too. One-sidedness, as displayed by Ravan is particularly disliked by the Goddess. Jankinath Kaul 'Kamal' writes “Worship does not mean offering flowers, abulation, oblation, burning of incense and other gross form of worship. It rather consists of in settling one's heart on the ether of consciousness which is above all thought contacts. It really means dissolution of self with perfect ardour (in supreme consciousness)” (Kaul, 1996). Put very simply, your outer worship and rituals are of no use if it is not helping you evolve spiritually and psychologically.

“To be a good man (*sajjana*) consists in the fullness (*purnata*) which comes from the sole realization of the ‘state of servant of the Lord’. For someone who is not full (*apurnata*), because he thinks ‘I must fill (*purayisyami*) myself completely!’, harms (*apakaroti*) the other (para) – or [at least,] he does not help (*upakaroti*) [him]; consequently, he is a bad man (*durjana*)” (IPVV, vol. I, p. 27). In the above quote by Utpaladeva, he beautifully explains the transition of the individual when he rises from an insecure, need driven behaviour to a more compassionate one. Ratié (2009)

writes explaining this “the good man (*sajjana*) is no longer the one who restricts his action according to his belief in the value of the distinction between merit and demerit, but the one who is perfectly free from such a restriction. He is a good man not because he would conform his actions to the category of meritorious acts in the hope of acquiring some merit—which would still be, ultimately, a selfish motive—but because he has recovered his identity with the whole, so that he does not lack anything. He does good simply because he is aware of his fullness—he is an altruist because he no longer depends on any other that he would have to fight, seduce or enslave” (Ratié, 2009). The pilgrimage one always must be aware of, is from the without to within. It is something which the great Ravan was not able to do, but which Hanuman accomplished successfully. Ravan could not rise above his tendency of hoarding and grasping for power while Hanuman was an example of compassion and selfless devotion. Consequently, the lord of rakshasas lost the goddess and her grace after installing her in his house, while Hanuman accompanied her back to her abode and gained her favours. Shakti that lies within all of us, we must find that centre and ground ourselves in it. The outward rituals and rites are just the tools to help us go within, but if despite of all the spiritual exercises there is no change in the outward behaviour, then the devotee has lost the plot and will not be able to achieve that union of Shiva and Shakti, which is the blissful state. A person who has experienced this bliss, no matter how fleeting it might be will be forever be transformed.

I am reminded of an instance which involved Swami Vivekananda and his experience of the Goddess Kheer Bhawani when he visited Kashmir during his tour around the country.

“Then Swamiji said, on the way back, he returned to Srinagar by the common route by which the pilgrims return. A few days after returning to Srinagar he went to visit Kshir Bhavani Devi and staying there for seven day worshipped the Devi and made Homa to Her with offerings of Kshir (condensed milk). Every day he used to worship the Devi with a mound of Kshir as offering. One day, while worshipping the thought arose in Swamiji's mind: 'Mother Bhavani has been manifesting Her Presence here for untold years. The Mohammedans came and destroyed Her temple, yet the people of the place did nothing to protect Her. Alas, if were then living, I could never have borne it silently.' When, thinking in this strain, his mind was much oppressed with sorrow an anguish, he distinctly heard the voice of the Mother saying: 'It was according to desire that the Mohammedans destroyed the temple. It is My desire that I should live in dilapidated temple, otherwise, can I not immediately erect a seven-storied temple of gold here if I like? What can you do? Shall I protect you or shall you protect me!' Swamiji said: 'Since hearing that Divine Voice, I cherish no more plans. The idea of building Maths etc. I have given up; as Mother wills, so it will be.' disciple speechless with wonder began to think ' Did he not one day tell me that whatever saw and heard was but the echo of the Atma within me, that there was nothing outside? ' and

fearlessly spoke it out also - 'Sir, you used to say that Divine Voices are the echo of our inward thoughts and feelings '. Swamiji gravely said: ' Whether it be internal or external, if you actually hear with your ears such a disembodied voice, as I have done, can you deny it and call it false? Divine Voices are actually heard, just as you and I are talking'" (Majumdar,1965).

This incident highlights that humility and devotion are highly valued qualities which the goddess holds dear and are the keys for this inner transformation, we must become like Hanuman only then we will be successful. The journey of the goddess from south to north not only talks about the transformation of the psyche that is expected in a devotee but it also captures beautifully the progression from traditional Tantric philosophy to the predominant philosophy of the valley i.e. Kashmir Shaivism. With its belief of the material world as being real to emphasis on working with the thoughts and intellect as a path to liberation to the importance of the Shiva-Shakti dyad in the Tantric schools of this philosophy as well as the importance of mental worship. Goddess Kheer Bhawani comes to embody all these beliefs beautifully. She is truly reflective of the unique ethos and traditions of the Kashmiri Pandits.

I would like to conclude by saying that in the modern world which is heavily driven by competitive mentality and a society which can at times resemble the jungle where *matsya nyaya* reigns supreme, the mahatmya of Mata *Maharajni*, reminds us that there is another mode of existence which is rooted in the Self, in which you reclaim the Shakti within and transcend anything that life and the world throws at you.

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