

Hudh Mata: The Unidentified Shakti Peetha of Dachhan

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Abstract: *The sacred geography of the Indian subcontinent is intricately woven through the Shakti Peetha tradition, believed to mark the spots where the divine body parts of Mata Sati fell. While classical texts enumerate between 26 to 108 Shakti Peethas, many spiritually potent sites remain outside these canonical lists. This paper examines the Hudh Mata shrine in the Dachhan Valley of Jammu and Kashmir, near the Hudh Kund Mountain, and reconsiders its cultural, spiritual, and mythological significance through textual references, folklore, and regional traditions. Specific emphasis is laid on the nearby shrine of Trisandeshwar Bhairav, aligning with the tantric belief of Bhairava protecting each Peetha. Based on the verse from Tantra Chudamani, which locates Sati's throat (Kantha) in Kashmir, and supported by oral narratives and devotional practices, the study argues for recognizing Hudh Mata as an unidentified Shakti Peetha—Kanthadesha—of the Dachhan. This research contributes to the evolving discourse of devotional cartography, challenging classical boundaries and validating localized sacred memory within the Shakta tradition.*

Key Word: Hoth Mata, Trisandeshwar, Kaikoot, Trisandhya, Doodh Ganga, Bhramsar.

1. INTRODUCTION

Hinduism is probably one of the oldest religions, with its origins tracing back to prehistoric times. Its sacred rituals, beliefs, and legends are deeply rooted in antiquity. Hindu folklore holds a rich history, filled with mysterious characters, vast narratives, and remarkable parallels with modern scientific concepts. In Hinduism, Brahma is attributed as the creator, while Vishnu is a preserver, and Shiva is a destroyer. (Mishra, 2020, p. 17). Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva are all phenomenal Gods, and in Hindu legends, 'God' signifies the magnificent privileged, while the term Goddess' addresses the heavenly. God creates the Goddesses, and the Goddess empowers God to understand his God-hood. In mythologies, Saraswati is said to be Brahma's consort, Lakshmi is Vishnu's consort, and Shakti is Shiva's Consort. God cannot exist without Goddesses. (Pattanaik, 2006, p. 67) Innumerable temples dedicated to various forms of the God and Goddess are found in different parts of the Indian Sub-continent and other parts of the world. The presence of temples in villages, cities, and highlands, their deities, dedicated to the welfare and protection of the people there. The followers of deities seek their blessings in times of joy and sorrow. (Bhalla, 2017, p. 75). Interestingly, these sacred shrines are an important source of Indian culture. Waterways, mountains, shrines, and river streams have been blessed by tradition, ethos, and association, and for centuries, visiting these places has been considered a significant obligation for Hindus.

2. DACHHAN: A SPIRITUAL RESERVOIR OF VEDIC HERITAGE

Dachhan, cradled in the rugged Himalayan landscape of Kishtwar in Jammu and Kashmir, stands as a timeless spiritual enclave with deep roots in India's ancient religious consciousness. Revered for its serene isolation and natural grandeur, it has long been regarded by sages and local communities as a land where divine energies converge. According to traditional accounts and corroborated by scholarly research (Prashant, Kashmir Times, Sunday Edition, 28 July 1985), Dachhan was not only a site of ascetic practice but also a cradle of early Hindu textual compilation. It is believed that parts of the Rig Veda and Atharva Veda were composed or systematized within this very landscape, especially in the natural caves scattered throughout the valley. These caves are said to have served as meditative dwellings for rishis and munis, offering them solitude amidst nature's sanctity for spiritual realization and scriptural reflection.

Among the most evocative of these sites is the Bathistal Cave (Kak, 1924, p. 22), shrouded in local lore and mythological symbolism. Situated near the celebrated handprints of Kunti Mata, this cave is linked to the Mahabharata, specifically

the narrative of the Pandavas' exile, who are said to have traversed through Marwah and Dachhan. (Singh, 2021, p. 21) Such associations not only enhance the historical depth of the region but also position it within the broader epic and sacred geography of ancient India. The presence of Kunti Mata's handprints further symbolizes a direct connection between the mythic past and the physical terrain, rendering Dachhan a living archive of oral and religious memory.

Beyond Bathistal, the Dachhan Valley encompasses a constellation of sacred and culturally rich sites that have remained largely unacknowledged in mainstream historical and archaeological scholarship. Among these are the Shivlings and Yoni Peethas of Sounder, venerated as profound symbols of Shaivite and Shakta devotion for cosmic energy. The Bhim Ka Jharna, a striking natural waterfall, is traditionally linked to the legendary strength of Bhima from the Mahabharata. Pandav Daijan serves as a mythic-geographical site where narratives of the Pandavas are deeply inscribed in the terrain. The Shivlingas of Dilgoot continue to draw devotees for ritual worship within the Shaiva tradition. Equally significant are the Virat Mata Mandir, believed to uphold ancient goddess worship practices; the rock inscriptions at Sirchi, which may date back to the early medieval period and warrant epigraphic analysis; and the historic Kaikut Mandir, a significant spiritual site associated with the local royal patronage of Kishtwar. Collectively, these sites highlight Dachhan's spiritual geography and its underexplored role in the cultural and religious history of the area.

Together, these sites offer a multidimensional understanding of Dachhan—not only as a geographic region but as a sacred reservoir of religious practice, oral tradition, mythological memory, and archaeological significance. Despite its cultural wealth, Dachhan remains marginalized in broader historical narratives. Its spiritual landscape, still vibrant through living traditions and pilgrimage practices, urgently calls for scholarly exploration, preservation, and documentation. Doing so will not only restore its rightful place in India's sacred geography but also deepen our understanding of how remote Himalayan regions participated in shaping the intellectual and spiritual foundations of Hindu civilization.

3. HUDH MATA: THE LIVING SHAKTI OF DACHHAN

Located at coordinates 33.55°N and 75.98°E in Tehsil Dachhan, Hudh Mata is situated on the banks of the Anath Nalla, which flows into the Marusudar River, which is referred to in the Nadi Skuta hymn of the Rig Veda as 'Vridh Maru', one of the sacred tributaries of the Chenab. (Bakshi, 2008, p. 48) Approximately 310 km from Jammu and about 82 km from Kishtwar, the shrine holds immense spiritual significance in the region. The widespread reverence for the Divine Feminine in Hinduism, particularly within the tradition of Shaktism, finds profound local expression in the worship of Hudh Mata, regarded as the guardian goddess of Dachhan. Just as sacred texts like the Devi Mahatmya exalt the goddess as the origin of all cosmic energy, the people of Dachhan revere Hudh Mata as the embodiment of divine power, nurturing motherhood, and protective force. Believed to reside atop the Hud Kund Mountain, she is especially honored during the annual Hudh Mata Yatra, a spiritually charged pilgrimage that reflects ancient traditions of goddess worship. The natural landscape of Dachhan—with its flowing rivers, thick forests, and snow-fed streams—complements the ethos of Shakti, reinforcing her connection with purity, nature, and sacred geography. The veneration of Hudh Mata thus represents a living legacy of the Shakti tradition, deeply rooted in regional beliefs while resonating with the broader theological framework of Hinduism. Her presence transcends mere religious devotion, symbolizing the cultural resilience, spiritual identity, and sacred heritage of the people of Dachhan.

4. HUDH MATA AND THE MYTHICAL ORIGIN OF SHAKTI PEETHAS

According to Hindu mythology, during the Treta Yuga, a powerful king named Daksha Prajapati had a daughter, Sati, who deeply desired to marry Lord Shiva. However, Daksha disapproved of this union. Defying her father's wishes, Sati married Shiva. In time, Daksha organized a grand Yagna (sacrificial ritual), inviting Lord Brahma, Lord Vishnu, and all deities—except Lord Shiva and Mata Sati. Upon learning of the event from Rishi Narad, Sati urged Shiva to attend, but he refused, cautioning her against going uninvited. Nevertheless, Sati insisted and joined the Yagna alone.

At the Yagna, Sati was insulted, and her father openly denounced Lord Shiva, deeply humiliating her. Overwhelmed by grief and shame, she sacrificed herself in the Havan Kund, invoking her inner yogic fire, known as Yog Agni. When Lord Shiva learned of Sati's death, he rushed to the site. In his rage, he created Veerbhadra from a lock of his matted hair. Veerbhadra destroyed the Yagna and severed Daksha's head, casting it into the sacrificial fire. Shiva, consumed with sorrow, lifted Sati's charred body onto his shoulders and began the Tandava Nritya, the dance of cosmic destruction.

To protect the universe from Shiva's wrath, the gods approached Lord Vishnu, who used his Sudarshan Chakra to dismember Sati's body. Her body parts fell across different regions of the Indian subcontinent, and the sites where they

landed became revered as Shakti Peethas—sacred spaces devoted to the Divine Mother. According to local folklore, one of these consecrated body parts is believed to have fallen in Dachhan, at the present-day site of Hudh Mata, thus making it a potential Shakti Peeth. Hudh Mata, also locally known as ‘Hoth Mata,’ derives her name from the word Hoth, meaning “throat” in the regional dialect, and Mata, meaning “mother.” According to folklore, it is believed that one of Mata Sati’s body parts—specifically her throat—fell at this location, thereby sanctifying it as a Shakti Peeth. The temple of Hudh Mata is majestically perched atop Hudh Kund Mountain in the Anant Nalla valley, marking it as a spiritually significant pilgrimage destination.

5. KANTHADESHA AND THE SACRED GROGRAPHY OF SHAKTI PEETHAS

Ancient texts offer varying enumerations of the sacred Shakti Peethas. The Shiva Charitra mentions 51 sites, while the Kalika Purana cites 26. Tantra Chudamani and Durga Saptashati identify 52 Peethas (Karansinh, 2016, p. 11), whereas the Devi Bhagavatam expands the number to 108 (Sharma, 2018, p. 2). The Sthala Puranas, which chronicle the legends of sacred sites, also specify the divine narrative of Shiv and Shakti and the consecration of temples at these spiritually potent locations. According to Tantra Chudamani (Tantrachudamani) the throat (kantha) of Mata Sati fell in Kashmir, described in the verse:

काश्मीरेकण्ठदेशञ्चत्रिसन्ध्येश्वरभैरवः।

महामायाभगवतीगुणातीतावरप्रदा।

Kashmire Kanthadesancha Trisanhyesyara Bhairavah |

Mahamaya Bhagavati GunatitaVarapradha ||

Some modern scholars and spiritual thinkers have further suggested that the Amarnath Cave might be one such Shakti Peetha, believed to be the place where Sati’s throat fell. However, classical lists of 51 or 108 Shakti Peethas do not mention Amarnath. The Amarnath cave’s spiritual significance, where Lord Shiva is believed to have revealed the secret of immortality (Amar Katha) to Goddess Parvati (Amarnath Ki Amar Kahani). This evolution reflects the fluid and layered nature of devotional geography in the Himalayas. D.C. Sircar, in his work “The Sakta Pithas, notes that there is no reference to the celebrated Sarada and Amarnatha tirthas of Kashmir in the classical lists of Shakti Peethas. (Sircar, 1998, p. 44)



Fig. 1 Hudh Mata Bhawan

In this context, Dachhan, historically and culturally linked with Kashmir, is gaining recognition among local devotees and scholars as the true Kanthadesha—the terrestrial where Mata Sati's throat is believed to have fallen. There is also a revered site known as Trishandeshwar Bhairav, dedicated to Lord Bhairav, a fierce and protective manifestation of Lord Shiva. This shrine holds deep spiritual significance in the region and is believed to be closely associated with the legend of Mata Sati. The presence of Trishandeshwar Bhairav near the Hudh Mata temple not only adds to the religious sanctity of Dachhan Valley but also aligns with the Shakti Peetha tradition, where Bhairava is considered the guardian deity of Shakti Peethas, protecting the divine feminine energy that resides in such sacred spaces. This belief is rooted in cultural memory and regional interpretations of the Shakti Peetha tradition, a powerful lens through which to view Hudh Mata's temple as a vital yet under-recognized center of Shakti devotion.

Hudh Mata is venerated on the sacred peak of the Hudh Kund Mountain, located in the Anant Nalla Valley of Dachhan. This mountain holds profound spiritual and religious significance for the local inhabitants. Over time, in reverence to this holy site, devotees began referring to the deity as "Hudh Mata" instead of the earlier name "Hoth Mata." This change reflects both the deepening sanctity associated with the mountain and the evolving devotional traditions that link the goddess directly with the natural features of the region.

6. SACRED CORE OF THE HUDH MATA

Hudh Mata is revered as the divine abode of Lord Shiva and Goddess Sati, holding immense spiritual significance for devotees across the region. Situated amidst the mystical landscape of Dachhan Valley, the site encompasses a constellation of sacred elements that are central to local religious belief and practice. These include:

6.1 The Pindi of Mata Sati: Believed to mark the very spot where the kantha (throat) of Mata Sati fell, the stone Pindi represents the goddess. Local legends state that snakes often appear near these sacred stones. Witnessing such serpents is considered a divine blessing, believed to signify eligibility for the darshan of the entire Shiv Parivar (Shiva's divine family).



Fig. 2 Pindies outside the temple



Fig. 3 Pindies inside the Temple

6.2 Shiv Guffa (Cave of Shiva): This small natural grotto, with a narrow entrance accessible only by crawling, houses three self-manifested Shivlingams. On the cave's roof is a natural formation resembling a cow's teat, from which a milky-white liquid continuously drips onto the lingams—an awe-inspiring phenomenon believed to be divinely orchestrated.



Fig. No. 4 Shiv Guffa

6.3 Garbhjooni (Womb Passage): Adjacent to the main cave lies the symbolic Garbhjooni, a narrow passage said to represent a cosmic womb. Devotees believe that crawling through this passage leads to spiritual purification, washing away sins accumulated in past lives.



Fig. No. 5 Garbhjooni

6.4 Hudh Kund (Sacred Pool): A small yet revered water body known as Hudh Kund is located nearby. Folklore holds that divine visions (darshan) of Lord Shiva, Goddess Sati, and other deities have been seen in its waters, imbuing the Kund with an aura of sanctity and mystery.



Fig. No. 6 Hudh Kund

6.5 Hudh Kund Stream: Originating from the revered Hudh Kund Mountain, a slender stream flows gently past the sacred shrine of Hudh Mata Bhawan before merging into the Anant Nalla River, one of the serene tributaries of the mighty Marusudhar. This stream holds deep religious significance for the devotees. As part of the pilgrimage tradition, worshippers take a ritual dip in its holy waters before proceeding to the temple. This sacred act is believed to cleanse them of past sins, purifying both body and soul, and preparing them for a spiritually fulfilling darshan of Hudh Mata. The stream thus serves as both a physical and symbolic gateway to divine grace in the Dachhan Valley.

These sacred components make the Hudh Mata Shrine not only a place of pilgrimage but also a living embodiment of Shaivite-Shakta traditions, steeped in natural divinity and a rich mythic heritage.

7. HUDH MATA AND THE SACRED SURROUNDINGS

The shrine of Hudh Mata is not only a divine spiritual center but is also set against one of the most breathtaking natural backdrops in the Dachhan Valley. Cradled by towering mountain ranges, the entire region is a sanctuary of natural beauty and spiritual energy. Nature has richly blessed this valley with dense woodlands, aromatic medicinal herbs, sacred springs, glacial rivers, and snow-draped cliffs. These pristine landscapes are not just scenic wonders—they are interwoven with centuries-old spiritual traditions and serve as the setting for numerous holy sites, making the journey to this area both a physical and a spiritual pilgrimage. The broader spiritual geography of the Hudh Mata region includes several revered sites:

- **Changiz:** The Sacred Flame-bearing Mountain.
- **Nag Devta:** The Guardian Deity of Hawal
- **Trisandeshwar Bhairav:** A powerful guardian deity at the threshold of the sacred valley.
- **Nag Devta:** Sacred Guardian of Pransan
- **Kaikut Mandir:** A Forgotten Legacy
- **Kaikut Monoliths:** Echoes of Forgotten Shaivite Heritage
- **Namaskar Sathan:** The Place of Salutation.
- **Dand Hooy:** The Cave of Divine Guardians
- **Trisandhaya Mata:** associated with the mystical Trisandhya stream.
- **Doodh Ganga:** A sacred watercourse believed to carry divine energy.
- **Brahma Peak:** A celestial mountain that holds mythological significance.

Each of these places adds layers of meaning to the pilgrim's experience, anchoring them in a spiritual world where the divine manifests through both form and landscape.

7.1 CHANGIZ: THE SACRED FLAME-BEARING MOUNTAIN.

The first sacred site in the vicinity of Hudh Mata is Changiz, located at Wanthawal—a revered mountain enveloped in spiritual mystique and profound devotion in the Dachhan Valley. According to local belief, this holy peak is the origin of a radiant flame said to travel each day to the sanctum of Hudh Mata Bhawan, illuminating the shrine with its divine presence. This celestial journey of the flame is regarded as a daily offering from the mountain to the goddess, symbolizing unwavering devotion and the eternal connection between nature and the divine. The phenomenon inspires awe and deep faith among the people of Dachhan, who venerate the mountain as a living symbol of sacred continuity. With its tranquil surroundings, sweeping vistas, and spiritual aura, Changiz stands as a beacon of devotion, where faith transcends ritual and becomes an enduring tradition in the heart of the Himalayas.

7.2 NAG DEVTA – THE GUARDIAN DEITY OF HAWAL

Nag Devta is one of the most sacred and spiritually revered sites located at the root of Hudh Mata in the Hawal region of Dachhan. Deeply embedded in local belief and tradition, this site holds immense religious significance, particularly for the residents of Suid, especially the Chacknoo and Kainser communities who own agricultural land in Hawal. For generations, they have regarded Nag Devta as a powerful guardian spirit who blesses their land and protects their crops. As part of their traditional practices, before initiating any agricultural activity, they first conduct a Bhandara (sacred offering) at this site to seek divine blessings. This ritual is performed exclusively by a male family member who dresses in Bhojpatra (Himalayan birch bark), signifying ritual purity and ancient custom. Interestingly, women were historically not permitted to even partake in the prasad (blessed offering) from this site, reflecting the deep-seated ritual restrictions

and the site's perceived sacred intensity. Nag Devta thus stands as a powerful symbol of agrarian spirituality and protective divinity, rooted in the sacred geography of the Hudh Mata Valley.

7.3 TRISANDESHWAR BHAIRAV: THE GURDIAN DEITY OF HUDH MATA

Trisandeshwar Bhairav stands as the revered guardian at the threshold of the sacred Hudh Mata Valley. Located at Taarpachan, between the quaint hamlets of Hawal and Pransan, this holy site is not just a place of worship but a sentinel post believed to safeguard the spiritual sanctity of the entire region. According to local legend, every evening, Lord Bhairav, a fierce manifestation of Lord Shiva, is said to mount a white horse and ride toward the Hudh Mata shrine. This divine journey is believed to symbolize his eternal vigilance and protective grace over the valley, its inhabitants, and the pilgrims undertaking the sacred yatra. His invisible presence ensures the safety, order, and sacredness of the region. For devotees, Trisandeshwar Bhairav is not just a deity to be venerated but a guardian spirit whose divine watch reinforces the mystical aura of Dachhan. His shrine remains a significant halting point for pilgrims, where prayers for safe passage and spiritual strength are offered before proceeding toward the higher elevations of the yatra.

7.4 NAG DEVTA: SACRED GUARDIAN OF PRANSAN

Nag Devta is one of the revered sacred sites located at the base of Hudh Mata in the spiritually vibrant region of Pransan. This shrine holds immense religious importance, especially for the people of Suid, particularly the Mukadam, Bhandari, Lohrey, and Nathwal communities who own agricultural land in the area. For them, Nag Devta is regarded as one of the most potent spiritual forces, believed to safeguard their fields and livelihoods. During the annual Hudh Mata Trisandhya Yatra, Pransan becomes a significant halting point for pilgrims. As the yatris arrive at this serene site, they are warmly received by the residents of the small hamlet, who offer breakfast as a humble expression of devotion and hospitality. This sacred space not only preserves the spiritual heritage of the region but also exemplifies the deep-rooted connection between divine reverence and communal harmony.

7.5 KAIKUT MANDIR: A FORGOTTEN LEGACY

Situated about 13 kilometers from Dachhan and just 1 kilometer before the Hudh Mata Bhawan, Kaikut Mandir stands amidst a dense forest of diverse flora. What sets this temple apart is its original construction using deodar wood, a material not native to the immediate area.



Fig. No. 7 Kaikut Mandir

Mythological accounts suggest that this wood was transported from Turin Bham, a region roughly 30 kilometers away, located above the towns of Tunder and Pranges, indicating the temple's significance and the considerable effort invested in its construction. This historic Shiv temple was constructed by Raja Maha Singh, a ruler of Kishtwar, dating back to the 17th Century, approximately 400 years ago. (Dhar, p. 23) The uniqueness of Kaikut Mandir lies in the fact that it is one of the rare wooden temples of its kind ever found in Kashmir. This architectural distinction suggests that Dachhan Valley had long-standing cultural and spiritual ties with Kashmir, possibly dating back to ancient times. The valley's sacred geography and its link with Hindu pilgrimage culture further substantiate this connection.

7.6 KAIKUT MONOLITHS: ECHOES OF FORGOTTEN SHAIVITE HERITAGE

Tucked beneath the wide, sheltering branches of an old walnut tree near the ancient Kaikut Mandir lies a quiet yet deeply revered site marked by a group of monolithic stones. These monoliths are revered as sacred artifacts dedicated to Shaivite. Their exact origin remains unknown, lost in the folds of time and memory, and they bear no inscriptions or historical records to explain their placement or purpose. Yet, despite the absence of written history, the site holds a powerful spiritual presence. The stillness surrounding these stones is not just physical—it reflects a deeper, sacred silence that continues to attract quiet acts of devotion from locals. From this point, one can also view the shrine of Hudh Mata Bhawan, connecting this humble site to the larger network of sacred landscapes. This visual and spiritual alignment reinforces the belief that the area is part of an ancient, interconnected religious tradition rooted in nature, myth, and enduring faith.



Fig. No. 8 Kaikut Monolithic

7.7 NAMASKAR SATHAN: THE DEVOTEE'S CALL

Among the deeply revered spots is Namaskar Sathan, a site immortalized by the devotion of Maha Nand, also known as Razik Budda, a saint from the village of Pransan. In his younger days, Maha Nand would trek daily to offer prayers at the Hudh Mata Shrine. However, during the final period of his life, weakened by age and physical exhaustion, he was unable to make the full journey. Determined not to miss his daily worship, Maha Nand once again set out toward the shrine. But after covering some distance, he collapsed in fatigue at a particular spot and folded his hands in prayer, invoking the goddess to come to him instead. Deeply moved by his unwavering devotion, it is believed that the goddess answered his plea. The very next day, the Hudh Mata shrine miraculously shifted one kilometer from its original location. That site came to be known as Namaskar Sathan, or "the Place of Salutation," a symbol of the reciprocal bond between a true devotee and the divine.



Fig. No. 9 Namaskar Sathan

7.8 DAND HOOY – THE CAVE OF DIVINE GURDIANS

Just a few meters from the sacred Hudh Mata Bhawan lies a naturally formed cave locally known as Dand Hooy, where “Dand” means “bull” and “Hooy” means “cave.” This long, shallow grotto, partially enclosed by a massive boulder, is spacious enough to shelter more than a hundred people. According to local tradition, this sacred site is believed to be the resting place of Nandi, the revered bull and divine vehicle (vahana) of Lord Shiva. It is also thought to be inhabited by Shiva’s fierce yet devoted Ganas—supernatural beings such as Bhootas, Naagas, Yakshas, and others—who are known to serve as his attendants and protectors. In the context of Hudh Mata worship, these Ganas are also regarded as the divine protectors and spiritual aides of the Goddess herself. Their constant presence near the temple cave is symbolic of their role in guarding the sanctity of the sacred valley. Dand Hooy is not merely a geological feature but a powerful spiritual site, representing the protective forces that stand in eternal service of the Divine Mother in the heart of the Himalayas.

7.9 TRISANDHYA MATA: THE MYSTERIOUS STREAM OF DIVINE TIMINGS

About 2 kilometers from the sacred shrine of Hudh Mata, nestled within the serene heights of the Anantnalla Valley, flows the mystical Trisandhya stream—locally revered as Trisandhya Maa. Unlike any ordinary watercourse, this stream emerges supernaturally from the top of a mountain and flows only three times a day—at dawn, noon, and dusk. For the rest of the day, the stream remains mysteriously dry, making its rhythmic resurgence a phenomenon of deep spiritual and natural wonder. What amplifies the uniqueness of Trisandhya is the absence of any visible lake or water source at the top of the mountain. Yet, the volume of water during its flow is so high that watermills (gharats) can operate with ease. The origin of this intermittent stream remains unexplained by hydrology, adding to its miraculous character and religious importance.



Fig. No. 10 Trisandhya

According to D.C. Sharma, the water recedes from the bottom once it touches the mainstream, vanishing mysteriously. There are occasions when the stream does not flow at all—a moment of disappointment for pilgrims who await a sacred bath, which is believed to grant great spiritual merit. (Sharma, 1995, p. 205) Scholars such as G.N. Gunhar have compared this sacred water body with the spring-based Nag worship traditions found in Bhaderwah and Kishtwar. In these traditions, springs are the abodes of Nagas (serpent deities), and water itself is a divine element linked with cosmic balance. The same cultural symbolism is evident in the reverence of Trisandhya Maa, where Nag-devta worship intertwines with natural divinity. (Gunhar, 1975, p. 81)

In essence, Trisandhya Mata is not just a stream but a living symbol of divine rhythm, manifesting the unity of faith, nature, and ancient Himalayan spirituality. Pilgrims and scholars alike continue to be captivated by this timeless marvel, reflecting the profound sanctity of the Hudh Mata region.

7.10 DOODH GANGA: THE MILKY STREAM BENEATH BRAHMA PEAK

Located approximately 4 kilometers from the Hudh Mata Shrine, Doodh Ganga is a pristine spring that flows through the expansive alpine meadows lying at the base of the majestic Brahma Peak. This sacred spot is locally referred to as Satter-Sahn, meaning “the flat ground”, owing to the vast level terrain that opens up in the heart of the valley.

The stream derives its name—Doodh Ganga, or “the Milk Stream”—from the milky white color of its waters, which shimmer with an otherworldly brightness as they course over the glistening stones. The sparkling flow, surrounded by lush green grasses and rolling meadows, adds to the ethereal charm of the landscape, drawing visitors into its tranquil and sacred aura.



Fig. No. 11 Doodh Ganga

Throughout the year, the water of Doodh Ganga remains icy cold, and during the winter, heavy snowfall renders the region inaccessible, making it a secluded and untouched realm. There are no permanent human settlements in the area. However, during the summer months, local shepherds from Dachhan ascend with their cattle for grazing, occasionally setting up temporary shelters in the meadows to take advantage of pastures.

The unspoiled beauty, spiritual atmosphere, and serene natural surroundings of Doodh Ganga contribute significantly to the mythological and cultural landscape of the Hudh Mata pilgrimage route. It is a place where nature and divinity coexist, offering a moment of peace and reflection for those who venture into its sacred fold.

7.11 BRAHMA: THE SACRED LAKE OF BHRAMA

Brahmsar, derived from Brahma Sarovar (where ‘Brahma’ refers to Lord Brahma and ‘Sarovar’ means lake), is one of the most sacred and scenic destinations in the Hudh Mata pilgrimage circuit. Situated at an altitude of approximately 8 kilometers from the Hudh Mata Shrine, Brahmsar is regarded as a spiritually purifying site. Pilgrims customarily reach here after visiting Kaikut Mandir, Hudh Mata Bhawan, Trisandhya Mata, and Doodh Ganga, completing a sacred trail of divine experiences. At Brahmsar, devotees gather to offer prayers and bathe in its icy waters, which are believed to cleanse one's sins and grant spiritual upliftment. Brahmsar highlights the serene and glacial beauty of the lake, encircled by towering snow-clad peaks.

According to local folklore, the three majestic peaks surrounding the lake represent the Trimurti—Brahma (the creator), Vishnu (the preserver), and Shiva (the destroyer). Some traditions specifically interpret them as the three faces of Lord Brahma, symbolizing divine omnipresence and cosmic balance. The Brahma Peak, a notable summit in this region, not only holds mythological importance but also draws the interest of mountaineers from both India and abroad, making it a focal point for mystical as well as adventure tourism. (Qazi, 2005, p. 215)



Fig. No. 12 Brahmsar

Thus, Brahmsar is more than a geographical marvel—it is a spiritual sanctuary, combining natural grandeur with profound religious symbolism, and completing the sacred geography of the Hudh Mata Yatra.

8. THE SACRED JOURNEY: SHRI HUDH MATA TRISANDHYA YATRA

The concept of Yātrā—a sacred pilgrimage or spiritual journey—has been a core component of Hindu religious life since ancient times. Rooted in the worship of nature, Hinduism reveres rivers, mountains, trees, and sacred caves as embodiments of the divine. Undertaking a Yatra is not merely a physical journey, but a spiritual pursuit aimed at inner purification, blessings, and divine communion.

In the Dachhan region of Jammu and Kashmir, the most spiritually significant pilgrimage is the Shri Hudh Mata–Trisandhaya Yatra, held annually during the Hindu month of Ashadha (June–July). This sacred pilgrimage attracts thousands of devotees, transcending religious boundaries, as people from diverse backgrounds participate with deep faith, believing that their wishes are fulfilled through this holy journey. The founding figure of this Yatra is Mahatma Dina Nath, a revered spiritual saint of Dachhan. Initially, the Yatra commenced from Sounder Dachhan in 1983; however, it was later relocated to begin from Geeta Bhawan, Jammu. The spiritual legacy of the Yatra was further institutionalized when its commencement was shifted to Dharalan in Kathua, the site of the Samadhi (final resting place) of Mahatma Dina Nath. This site continues to serve as the starting point of the annual pilgrimage, particularly the Trishul Yatra—a ceremonial procession in which the sacred trident, symbolizing divine energy, is carried with great reverence.

The Yatra is divided into two main segments:

- Trishul Yatra, beginning from Dharalan (Kathua), travels through Jammu and Kishtwar.
- The Charri Yatra, which starts from Sounder Dachhan, proceeds through the spiritually rich highlands of the region.

8.1 Yatra Route: The full route of this seven-day Yatra encompasses several sacred stations and halting points. It follows this sequence:

Dharalan (Kathua) → Jammu → Kishtwar → Sounder → Loharna → Suid → Panjdharma → Dilgoot → Anantnalla → Gowkooth → Hawal → Trisandeshwar Bhairav → Pransan → Kaikoot → Bhawan (Hudh Mata Shrine) → Trisandhaya Mata → Doodh Ganga → Brahmsar.

8.2 Halting Stations: To ensure the comfort and spiritual rhythm of the pilgrims, night halts are arranged at Jammu, Kishtwar, Sounder, Dilgoot, Gowkooth, and Kaikoot. Each station is not only a resting point but also an opportunity for devotional singing, rituals, and community bonding.

8.3 Duration: The Yatra spans seven days, with each leg covering important spiritual milestones:

1. Day 1: Dharalan to Hudh Mata Mandir, Jammu
2. Day 2: Jammu to Kishtwar (Gori Shankar Mandir)
3. Day 3: Kishtwar to Sounder (Hadha Krishan Mandir)
4. Day 4: Sounder to Dilgoot (Virat Mata Mandir)
5. Day 5: Dilgoot to Gowkooth
6. Day 6: Gowkooth to Kaikoot
7. Day 7: Kaikoot to Hudh Mata Bhawan and Return Journey

This Yatra, rich in mythological connections, breathtaking natural beauty, and collective devotion, reflects the cultural soul of Dachhan. It is a living tradition that binds the past to the present, offering pilgrims a transformative experience through the divine lap of the Himalayas.

9. CUSTOMS AND RITUALS TRADITIONS OF HUDH MATA

Customs and traditions form the backbone of human civilization, and in the Indian subcontinent, particularly within Hinduism, they occupy a central place in shaping social and spiritual life. In the sacred valley of Hudh Mata, these customs are deeply ingrained in the cultural consciousness of the people and are inseparably tied to the religious ethos. Temple worship and pilgrimage in this area are enveloped in legendary myths and time-honored rituals that reflect an enduring belief system. These include acts of atonement, purification rites, recitations, and yajnas (sacrificial offerings), all performed to seek blessings, fulfill desires, or attain moksha (liberation).

The Hudh Mata valley is dotted with spiritually significant sites and draws thousands of pilgrims throughout the year. Devotees exhibit deep faith in the divine mother and celebrate life's key transitions with her blessings. Rituals such as all-night jagratas (vigil singing), day-long hawans (fire offerings), and the offering of prasad by the temple priest are regular practices. In some cases, bali (goat sacrifice) is also observed as a symbolic act of devotion. Newlywed couples often visit the shrine to seek blessings for a harmonious married life. Women who struggle with fertility also visit with the hope that their prayers to the goddess will be answered.

Moreover, seasonal migration patterns of pastoral communities like the Gujjars and Bakarwals play a unique role in sustaining these traditions. Every summer, they bring their cattle to graze in the high-altitude pastures around Hudh Mata, and it is a widely held belief among them that failing to pay homage to the goddess could result in divine displeasure, often expressed in the form of cattle illness or loss.

These deeply rooted customs not only preserve ancient ritualistic practices but also reinforce the community's spiritual bond with the divine, making the Hudh Mata valley not only a geographical location but also a vibrant center of living tradition and devotional culture.

10. CONCLUSION

The Hudh Mata Valley stands out not just for its breathtaking natural beauty but also for its profound cultural and spiritual richness. The landscape is adorned with sacred sites, ancient traditions, and a vibrant folkloric heritage that continues to thrive in the hearts of the people. The region's cultural diversity, expressed through its rituals, pilgrimage practices, and sacred geography, adds a unique charm and spiritual aura to the entire valley.

The enduring belief system of the people, rooted in folklore, may not always distinguish between historical fact and myth, yet it remains a powerful force shaping religious life. These beliefs, whether factual or symbolic, form an integral

part of the community's identity. The valley is continually alive with pilgrims who arrive to seek blessings from the divine mother and partake in age-old rituals of devotion and purification.

The pilgrimage route through the valley is both sacred and symbolic. The journey begins at Trisandeshwar Bhairav, the first significant holy site and spiritual gateway to the Hudh Mata region. Devotees believe that Lord Shiva, in his fierce Bhairav form, resides here to guard the entire valley. After offering their prayers at this entrance, pilgrims proceed toward Kaikut Mandir, a historically significant temple attributed to a ruler of Kishtwar. Nestled amidst dense forests, this temple is believed to have ancient ties with Kashmir and stands as a testament to the region's deep-rooted cultural exchanges.

The spiritual heart of the journey lies at Hudh Mata Bhawan, the most revered site in the valley. Here, devotees witness various manifestations of divinity: the Pindies representing Goddess Sati, the sacred Shiv Guffa containing natural Shivlingams, the symbolic Garbhjooni (womb-shaped cave), and the holy Hudh Kund. These elements embody the spiritual essence of Shiv-Parivar and serve as focal points of worship and meditation.

After receiving the blessings at Hudh Mata Bhawan, pilgrims continue their journey to other spiritually potent sites: Trisandhya Mata, where a miraculous stream flows three times a day; Doodh Ganga, a spring of milky waters surrounded by lush meadows; and finally, Brahmsar, a serene alpine lake believed to represent the divine trinity of Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva. Ritual bathing in these waters is considered highly meritorious and spiritually purifying.

The annual Hudh Mata Yatra, held during the month of Ashad (June–July), draws devotees from across the country. This sacred journey is not just a religious pilgrimage but a reaffirmation of faith, tradition, and communal harmony. It reflects a living cultural legacy where mythology, spirituality, and natural beauty converge, making the Hudh Mata Valley a unique and timeless center of devotion.

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