

# SHRI MATA VAISHNO DEVI

## *THE SHRINE*

CHANDER M. BHAT



**Vaishnav Devi Temple at Katra, Jammu**

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by

**CHANDER M. BHAT**

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THE CONSORT (POWER) OF *VISNU* SHAPING CREATION. *VISNU* IS ONE OF THE SACRED TRIAD OF GODS ENTRUSTED WITH THE POWER OF PRESERVATION OF THE UNIVERSE. THIS DUTY HE IS REPRESENTED TO HAVE BEEN DISCHARGING BY TAKING VARIOUS INCARNATIONS. HIS PERSONIFIED ENERGY OR *SAKTI* IS CALLED *VAISNAVI*. SHE GIVES SYMMETRY, BEAUTY ORGANISATION AND PATTERN OF FORM TO CREATION. WITH HER MIGHTY FORCE SHE MAINTAINS A NETWORK OF UNIVERSES.

*VAISHNAVI* ALSO MEANS THE POWER THAT MAINTAINS THE BEING-CONSCIOUSNESS. SHE IS THE SUPREME POWER, *PARA SAKTI*, THE PRESIDING *MAHESVARI* OVER *MAHAKALI*, *MAHALAKSMI* AND *MAHASARASVATI*. HER OTHER NAMES, PET TO *SAKTA* DEVOTEES, ARE *LALITA*, *BHUBANESVARI* AND *VAISNAVI*.

*BHAVANI NAMA SAHASRA STUTHI*

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Worship of the Mother Goddess dates back to din antiquity when it was prevalent among many races and societies in different parts of the world. In India worship of the Mother Goddess goes back to the time of the Indus Valley Civilisation i.e. about 3000 B.C. Shri Vaishno Devi Ji is a most exhilarating and fascinating pilgrimage. Though the formal pilgrimage starts from the first of autumn *navratras* and remain in full swing for about three months, the devotees now visit the shrine throughout the year in large numbers. Shri Vaishno Devi has commanded the allegiance of people, high and low, from early times. The founder of the Sikh faith, Guru Nanak and Maharashtran saint, Nam Dev are believed to have visited the shrine.

The holy Cave of Shri Vaishno Devi Ji lies nestled in the folds of the mighty Trikuta Mountain fifty kilometers from Jammu, the winter capital of the state of Jammu and Kashmir upto the town of Katra. From Katra onwards the pilgrim has to trek on foot for a distance of twelve kilometers to reach the holy Shrine. Enroute the pilgrim crosses Banganga, Charan Paduka, Adhkwari and Sanji Chhat before one reaches the holy Cave. Mata Vaishno Devi Ji is one of the most popular shrines of the country.

According to the legend, Pandit Shridhar first discovered the holy shrine of Vaishno Devi Ji, about a thousand years ago. There had been only one tunnel, which had been created by nature, which led into the shrine. This tunnel was used for both entering the holy shrine and for coming out of it. Second tunnel was opened for public in the year 1977 and the third tunnel was dedicated in the year 1998.

The cave in which the goddess has taken her abode is nearly ninety eight feet long and is 5200 feet above sea level. The symbols of a large number of Gods and Goddess of the Hindu pantheon can be seen in the holy Cave. At the mouth of the original tunnel to the holy Cave can be seen the symbols of *Vakra Tunda Ganesha* on the left hand side of the rock face. Adjacent to the symbol of Lord Ganesha can be seen the symbols of *Surya Dev* and *Chandra Dev*. When one crawls into the holy Cave through the natural tunnel one crosses over the *Dhadh* of Bhairo Nath who was beheaded by the Goddess at the entry point to the holy Cave. The *Dhadh* is fourteen feet long. After this can be seen the symbol of Lord Hanuman called *Launkra Beer*. The pilgrims have to wade through water beyond the *Launkra Beer* point. Twenty three feet beyond *Launkra Beer*, on the left upper hand side, the roof of the cave flares out and the weight of this over hang appear to be resting on the innumerable heads of *Shesh Nag*. Immediately below *Shesh Nag* can be seen the *Havan Kund* of Mata. Adjacent to it can be seen the symbols of *Shankh*, *Chakra*, *Gada* and *Padam*. Higher up, almost touching the ceiling of the cave are the symbols of the five *Pandavas*, the *Sapt Rishi*, the *Thein* of the divine cow, *Kamdhenu*, *Brahma* and *Vishnu* and *Shiv* and *Parvati*. Three feet further ahead, on an elevation some what lower then *Shiv* and *Parvati*, can be seen *Khamba* that was gripped by the legendary worshipper *Prahlad*. Diagonally below this, at the water level can be seen the *Yantra* with innumerable mystical signs and symbols inscribed on it. Twenty-two feet beyond this point is located the *Sher Ka Panja* symbolizing the lion which is the mount of Mata Vaishno Devi Ji. The distance from the entry point to the *Sher Ka Panja* is fifty-nine feet. Thirteen feet beyond this, immediately above the head of the worshippers, is located the symbol of the Primary Hood of *Shesh Nag* which appears to be bearing the weight of the roof of the Cave at this point. The length of the cave up to the primary hood of *Shesh Nag* is seventy feet. Six feet further ahead, on the left hand side, are the symbols of *Shankar* and *Gouri*. Thirteen feet beyond the symbols of *Shankar* and *Gouri* are located the holiest of the holy *Pindies* of "Mata Maha Kali Ji", "Mata Maha Lakshmi Vaishno Devi Ji," and "Mata Maha Saraswati Ji". The length of the Cave up to this point is ninety-one feet. To the right of the holy *Pindies* on the upper side one can again identify the sumbols of *Ganesh*, *Surya Dev*,

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*Chandra Dev* and Goddess *Annapurna*. Slightly behind the holy *Pindies*, on the right hand side can be seen the symbol of the seated *Sinh Raj*. A little ahead of it can be seen the full hand of the Goddess raised in the *Vard Hast* mode granting boons to the world. Immediately opposite the Holy *Pindies* is the natural symbol of Lord *Pashupati Nath*.

Water gushes out of the base of the holy *Pindies* and flows out of the holy Cave. It is known as *Charan Ganga* and this water is collected in small containers by the devotees and taken home. The same water is also channelised to the bathing ghat and the devotees take a bath in this water before they join the queue for *Darshan* of the holy *Pindies*.

On 30<sup>th</sup> August 1986, Governor of Jammu and Kashmir, Shri Jagmohan passed Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Act and the management and administration was taken over by a statutory board called Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Board.

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**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**



**Chander M. Bhat**

Born on 20th March, 1960 in Murran a village in North Kashmir, Chander M. Bhat is presently working as an Assistant Supdt. Posts, in Department of Posts, Govt. of India. His articles regarding Posts and of non-political nature stand widely published in various papers and magazines of the country. A booklet "How to Collect Stamps" published by the Department of Posts, has earned him genuine accolades. He worked on the project of tracing the roots of his co-villagers and of the village Murran, resulting into the culmination of a widely acclaimed book "Murran ...My Village. Man with depth, Chander M. Bhat has also another book, "Ocean by Drops" (collection of poems) in his vase having colorful poems. His book "Ancient History of Jammu and Kashmir", confirms his researching capability. Various research papers like "The Splendor that is Amarnath" and "Vitasta...The Sacred River of Kashmir" are valuable additions to his works that has proved very fruitful and guiding force in the exile period of Kashmiri Pandits community of which the author is also a member.

Presently the author is working on "OOL...THE NEST" - a six volume project [each volume of about 2500 pages] on all the 595 Kashmiri Pandit villages of Kashmir.

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