

Sacred Myths and Folk Belief: A Narrative Analysis of Himachal Pradesh's Five Shakti Peeth

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Abstract

One of the most significant sacred practices in Hindu religious geography is represented by shakti peeths. Deeply ingrained in cultural narratives and devotional practices, these temples are linked to the epic tale of Goddess Sati and Lord Shiva. Out of 51 the five great Shakti Peeths of Himachal Pradesh, sometimes referred to as Dev Bhoomi (Land of Gods), are Naina Devi, Jwala Ji, Chintpurni Devi, Brajeshwari Devi and Chamunda Devi. By concentrating on regional beliefs and mythological customs that are preserved in Hindu Puranas and classical manuscripts, this research study investigates these sacred sites via the lens of narrative analysis. The study investigates the relationship between local folklore and pilgrimage customs and the stories found in works like the Devi Bhagavata Purana, Kalika Purana and Shiva Purana. According to the research, the Shakti Peeths in Himachal Pradesh serve as both sacred religious locations and hubs of cultural memory, where legendary stories are consistently passed down orally and through ceremonies.

Keywords: Local beliefs, Myths, Shakti peeth.

Introduction

Hindu religious theory and devotional rituals lay a strong emphasis on the devotion of the Divine. Hindu religious religion is firmly rooted in the concept of Shakti, which stands for the universe's dynamic cosmic energy. Shakti, who appears as the goddess Durga, Kali and Parvati, is thought to be the ultimate creative energy that keeps the universe going.

Many Hindus Puranas, including the Devi Bhagavata Purana, Kalika Purana and Shiva Purana, depict the beginnings of the Shakti Peeth tradition. The mythological story about Goddess Sati, a spouse of Lord Shiva and the daughter of King Daksha, is told in these writings. These stories claim that Daksha planned a massive sacrificial ceremony (yajna) but purposefully excluded

Shiva. Sati immolated herself out of anger and sorrow after witnessing her husband being insulted at the ceremony (Devi Bhagavata Purana, Book 7).

Shiva was devastated to hear of Sati's passing and began to explore throughout the universe with her body. Lord Vishnu utilized his Sudarshan Chakra to split Sati's body into multiple pieces in order to save Shiva's terrible sorrow and anger from destroying the entire universe. These body parts fell in various places around the Indian subcontinent, which subsequently developed into Shakti Peeths, or sacred shrines (Kalika Purana, Chapter 18).

One of the most important areas connected to the Shakti Peeth practice is Himachal Pradesh. The state's spiritual significance is enhanced by its hilly terrain, historic temples and vibrant cultural traditions. There is five well-known Shakti Peeths in Himachal Pradesh: Naina Devi, Jwala Ji, Chintpurni, Brajeshwari Devi and Chamunda Devi.

In addition to being places of religious devotion, these temples serve as archives for regional stories and cultural recollections. Community identities and pilgrimage customs are still shaped by the tales connected to these holy locations. The purpose of this study is to use narrative analysis to examine the five Shakti Peeths in Himachal Pradesh by looking at both local beliefs and Puranic stories related to these temples.

Methodology

A qualitative research method called narrative analysis aims to comprehend how stories and narratives influence cultural meanings and human experiences. Narratives are frequently used in religious contexts to impart moral principles, spiritual beliefs and collective memory. There are several types of narratives in the case of Shakti Peeths:

- Mythological stories from the Puran, The preservation of temple stories in manuscripts
- Local communities' oral folklore
- Songs of devotion and tales of journey

The current study draws from local temple customs as well as Puranic writings including the Devi Bhagavata Purana, Kalika Purana and Shiva Purana. The research seeks to comprehend how religious meanings are created and preserved through storytelling by examining these narratives.

Shakti Peeths' Puranic Origins

Several Puranic writings contain the earliest references to Shakti Peeths. One of the most thorough accounts of the places where Sati's parts of the body fell may be found in the Kalika

Purana. The theological importance of these locations as expressions of divine feminine energy is also elaborated in the Devi Bhagavata Purana.

The disintegration of Sati's body represented the dissemination of divine power over the planet, according to the Devi Bhagavata Purana (Book 7). A comparable form of Bhairava, who represents Shiva, is accompanied by each Shakti Peeth, which symbolizes a distinct facet of the goddess.

Eventually, these sacred locations developed into pilgrimage sites where followers may feel Shakti's holy presence.

Shakti Peeth in Himachal Pradesh

- **Naina Devi**

The Himachal Pradesh district of Bilaspur is home to the Naina Devi Temple. The Puranic tradition states that this is where Goddess Sati's eyes (nayana) fell (Kalika Purana, Chapter 18). The Gobind Sagar Lake is seen from the temple's high location. According to local stories, a farmer found the holy location after seeing the goddess in miraculous visions. Those who worship the goddess fervently believe that she showers spiritual vision and grants their wishes.

The temple's status as a significant spiritual hub is reinforced by the thousands of pilgrims that visit it during the Navratri festival.

- **Jwala Devi**

One of India's most unique Shakti Peeths is the Jwala Ji Temple in the Kangra area. The temple has natural flames that come from cracks in the rock in place of an idol. The Devi Bhagavata Purana claims that these flames stand in for Goddess Sati's mouth. According to local customs, the flames are everlasting expressions of divine energy. The belief in the flames' divine origin is reinforced by historical traditions connected to the temple, which tell of various monarchs' unsuccessful attempts to put them out. According to temple folklore, Emperor Akbar grew curious and traveled to witness the miracle for himself after learning about the holy temple where eternal flames burn without fuel. According different tales, he first attempted to put out the flames using water and iron plates in an effort to measure the goddess' power. But his efforts were in useless as the flames persisted.

It is thought that after seeing this, Akbar acknowledged the goddess's divine might and respectfully offered the temple a golden umbrella or chhatra. The umbrella eventually changed into an unidentified metal, according to local legend, which followers see as an indication of the goddess's extraordinary might.

- **Chintpurni Devi**

It is said that Goddess Sati's feet fell at the Chintpurni Temple in the Una district. The Sanskrit terms chinta (worry) and purni (remover) are the source of the name Chintpurni, which means "the goddess who removes worries." Devotees who sincerely worship at the temple are said to be liberated from their worries and challenges. When people visit the temple, they frequently recount stories of their desires being granted and their experiences being remarkable.

- **Brajeshwari Devi**

According to the Kalika Purana, the Brajeshwari Devi Temple in Kangra marks the spot where Goddess Sati's breast fell. This temple has a long history and has undergone multiple reconstructions as a result of natural disasters and invasions. Local stories frequently highlight the goddess's role in keeping the area safe from bad luck. During the Makar Sankranti festival, when unique ceremonies are carried out, the temple is very important.

- **Chamunda Devi**

The terrible form of the goddess Chamunda is honored at the Chamunda Devi Temple, which is situated in the Kangra Valley close to Dharamshala. The goddess Chamunda defeated the demons Chanda and Munda in the conflict between the forces of evil and the goddess Durga, according to the Markandeya Purana. Local customs closely link Chamunda Devi to the Shakti Peeth network in Himachal Pradesh, despite the fact that it is occasionally seen as distinct from the traditional list of Shakti Peeths.

Local Myths and Beliefs

The religious life around the Shakti Peeths in Himachal Pradesh is significantly shaped by local stories and oral traditions. In addition to being sacred sites referenced in mythical literature, these temples have strong linkages to the customs and beliefs of the surrounding community.

Many devotees think that through customary rites and channels, the Devi- Devata (deity) actively communicates with her believers.

The existence of holy chariots or “raths” connected to the deity is a significant feature of these practices. Devotees carry the deity’s rath in processions at festivals and special events. A “gur” (a spiritual medium or priestess) may experience a divine state known as bhaav during the procession, according to local belief. Locals use the gur to ask concerns, seek advice and ask the deity for blessings. A deep belief that the goddess is present among her believers. The goddess’s power extends beyond the main temples of these Shakti Peeths, even though they are regarded as the original or primary sacred sites (mool sthan). Over time, followers of the same goddess have built smaller temples and shrines in various locations. Many families continue to worship the goddess adored at these Shakti Peeths in their local temples while keeping spiritual ties to the main shrine since they consider her to be their Kuldevi (family deity).

The Shakti Peeths continues to be living centers of religion where mythology, regional customs and communal beliefs come together to perpetuate the spiritual culture of the area through these stories, rituals and devotional activities.

The stories are also preserved in the devotional customs of Himachal Pradesh’s Shakti temples through the singing of kirtans and bhajans by devotees at religious ceremonies. Devotes use devotional songs to tell the stories of the goddess during occasions like jagran, Navratri celebrations and temple festivals. Lines that researcher want to quote of Bhajan are given below:

“नैन तेरे माँ नैना देवी
चरन तेरे चिंतापूर्ण
धड तेरा माँ दिल काँगडे
ज्योता जगदीया ज्वालामुखी”

(Bhajan Ganga)

Conclusion

Himachal Pradesh’s Shakti Peeths is a significant junction of local cultural narratives, pilgrimage customs and mythology. This study demonstrates how sacred narratives uphold the religious value of these temples by examining both Puranic scriptures and regional storytelling customs. The region’s spiritual identity and the cultural legacy of Shakti worship are still shaped by these stories.

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