

RELIGIOUS TERRORISM -THE LATEST THREAT (JUXTAPOSITION OF JAMMU'S HERITAGE - LIVING AND VIBRANT VERSUS DEAD AND DECAYING)

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The fabric of Indian culture is woven from the tangible and intangible cultural and built heritage of the country. Over the centuries the sharing of common history, customs, beliefs etc, has been giving the people of India a feeling of akinness and a sense of common identity. Therefore, the heritage sites which dot the country are of immense importance to the people of India. In spite of this it is often seen that the cultural heritage sites are ignored and neglected. The general lack of interest in the maintenance of the cultural heritage sites of India makes them vulnerable to threats from factors like population pressures, ill managed tourism, environmental degradation, vandalism, theft, religious terrorism etc.

In this paper I propose to highlight the threat which is posed to the sites in Jammu region of the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir by the recent phenomenon of terrorism fuelled by religious fundamentalism. I will also suggest measures which need to be taken or already have been taken to protect the sites from the depredations of such terrorists.

The state of Jammu and Kashmir, also known as 'Paradise on Earth', is situated on the northern part of India covering an area of about 22,22,236 sq km.¹ It is bounded by Tibet in the East, Pakistan in the West and Turkmenistan in the North and the Indian states of Himachal Pradesh and Punjab in the South. It comprises three distinct geographical regions, differing in topography and culture - the foothills of Jammu; the valley of Kashmir and the starkly beautiful cold desert of Ladakh. Amongst the three regions Jammu, perhaps, offers the widest diversity of terrain, beauty and heritage sites.

The Jammu region which derives its name from the city of Jammu, which is the winter capital of the state, is dotted with numerous heritage sites like temples, shrines, forts, palaces, etc. In fact, the temples and the shrines which dot the region are of two kinds – those that have fallen into disuse and are now merely historical monuments and those which have a hoary past but are still revered and worshipped by the people.

In the following Paragraphs, I will be discussing 4 sites which are quite old but are still vibrant and living and 2 heritage sites which are now merely historical monuments. I will also discuss the threats which they face from terrorism, spawned by religious fundamentalism.

Religious terrorism announced its arrival on the world stage by carrying out the dastardly and horrendous attack on the world trade Centre in New York and the Pentagon in

Washington on 11th September 2001. Prior to that, the threat that emanated from religious terrorism had been demonstrated by the notorious Taliban of Afghanistan who felt no compunction in systematically destroying the world heritage site of Bamiyan Buddhas.² However, the world preferred to ignore this threat in the fond hope that this was an isolated incident and there would be no repetition. The events of 11th September 2001 however, jolted the world which then realized that any place, organization or country which does not conform to the way of thinking of the religious terrorists is considered a fair target for destruction by them.

The Vibrant and Living Heritage of Jammu

The shrines and temples which represent the living heritage of the Jammu region are Shri Mata Vaishno Devi ji, Raghunath Temple Complex, Bahu fort cum temple complex, Sudh Mahadev temple, etc. These temples/shrines are dedicated to various Gods and Goddesses of the Hindu pantheon and are frequented by thousands of people from every nook and corner of India. These living heritage sites of Jammu region have been constantly under threat of attack by religious terrorists since the last one decade. In well thought out and orchestrated actions, forces inimical to India have tried to engineer a serious communal divide in the country by trying to destroy the shrines and holy places of the majority community in India. They hope that this will lead to the dismemberment of India. Many such instances have already occurred in the last few years and some of them have been highlighted in the succeeding pages.

VAISHNO DEVI (The Holy Cave): The holy cave shrine of Vaishno Devi ji is situated on the Trikuta Mountain in the Shivalik Himalayas at an altitude of over 5000 feet. The origin of the shrine is shrouded in mystery. It is believed that the Devi (Mother Goddess) petrified Herself into stone inside the cave so that she could worship the Supreme God and become one with Him. The rock formation which symbolizes the Goddess is about 5' 6" high located at the end of a 90' long cave. Water gushes out of the base of the rock formation. It is a SWAYAM BHU (self revealed) shrine and is one of the most revered places in India. The shrine of Mata Vaishno Devi ji was first discovered by Pandit Shridhar about thousand years ago³. It attracts almost 6 million pilgrims annually in spite of the fact that they have to trek 24 kilometers on foot up and down a steep mountain.

The Terrorist Threat (attack)

Intelligence agencies have intercepted many messages of the terrorists to blow up the holy shrine especially during the run up to the Indian Republic Day (26th January) and Independence Day (15th August) celebrations. All such evil plans have till date been foiled. In the early months of this year a group of terrorists who had planned to attack the shrine of Mata Vaishno Devi ji were shot dead a few kilometers from the shrine. On **April 15, 2002** one of the terrorist outfits was able to explode a bomb of low intensity at “Ban Ganga” the base camp of Vaishno Devi in which two people were injured.⁴ The threat to the shrine continues to loom large as large numbers of religious terrorists are hiding in the surrounding mountains.

Till the year 2001, the shrine used to attract 6 million pilgrims annually from all over the world, who used to pump nearly 200 million dollars into the economy of Jammu every year.⁵ After the terrorist attacks, the pilgrimage has dwindled to less than 4 million and there has been a drastic decline in the income of the region. If the attacks persist, there is a possibility that people may stop visiting the shrine altogether which will deliver a crippling blow to the economy of the region. Besides, if the religious terrorists can succeed in destroying the shrine, it is likely to trigger a communal conflagration in the country with unthinkable consequences.

RAGHUNATH TEMPLE: Raghunath temple is situated in the heart of the city of Jammu and is surrounded by a group of other temples. The temple is dedicated to Lord Rama. The work on the temple was started by Maharaja Gulab Singh, founder of the Kingdom of Jammu and Kashmir in 1835 AD and it was completed in 1860 by his son, Maharaja Ranbir Singh.⁶ The temple contains representations of almost the entire Hindu pantheon, though the emphasis is on the various incarnations of Lord Vishnu. The inner walls of the main temple are covered with gold sheet on three sides. There are many galleries with lakhs of ‘Saligrams’. The surrounding Temples are dedicated to various Gods and Goddesses connected with the epic Ramayana. The complex houses a rich collection of ancient texts and manuscripts and attracts a very large number of pilgrims.

The Terrorist Threat (attack)

The Raghunath Mandir was recently in the news because of the terrorist attack on the shrine on **March 30, 2002**. The local dailies covered the attack with the headlines - “*Fidayeens strike at historic Raghunath Temple*”. The heart of Jammu city, the historic temple complex and busy market square was rocked by a fierce and suicidal attack that left ten people dead.⁷ The incident has terrorized the common citizen leading to a dwindling in the number of pilgrims.

BAHU FORT / TEMPLE: It is popularly known as Bawe Wali Mata. It is housed within the Bahu fort complex. It is

said that the nucleus of the fort was laid by Raja Bahulochan over 3,000 years ago. However, nothing of the earlier construction remains. The existing Fort belongs to the 18th century, when it was renovated by the Dogra rulers. The temple inside the fort is dedicated to Goddess Kali. Every Tuesday and Sunday, pilgrims throng this temple to perform Arti & Puja. Bawe Wali Mata is the presiding deity of Jammu.

The Terrorist Threat (attack)

The most recent terrorist attack was on the **13 of July, 2002**, near the Bahu Temple complex in Qasim Nagar, when terrorists opened fire and killed 27 innocent people,⁸ though the shrine escaped any kind of damage. This incident has been condemned internationally. One has to realize that the terrorists are capable of doing anything and when living heritage is targeted, it is not only the monument which is at risk but human life, which is much more important than any monument, is also at grave risk.

SUDH MAHADEV/MAN TALAI/GAURI KUND: Sudh Mahadev is well known for its archaeological importance, as well as being a great pilgrimage centre. The Shiva temple at Sudh Mahadev attracts many pilgrims during the Asad Purnima festival, which takes place in mid June each year. The festival features three days of music, singing and dancing. The main shrine has a black marble carved figure of Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati. The temple Also houses an iron trident known as the “Shiva Trishul”. The trident is believed to have been used by Shiva to kill a demon.

Man Talai is situated 5-kms from Sudh Mahadev and is of archaeological interest due to the red earthenware and terra cotta figures discovered here.⁹ It is said that the Baraat (Marriage Party) of Shiva had been served food in the earthen ware found there.

Gauri Kund, is a small cave associated with Goddess Parvati. Sculptures from Hindu Mythology can be seen at the Pap Nashni Bauli (springs).

The Terrorist Threat (attack)

Sudh Mahadeva shrine is in a thick forest on the Shiv Garh mountains in District Udhampur. It provides a safe haven for terrorists due to its undulating landscape and thick forest cover. This place has been used by the terrorists for hiding explosives, arms etc. A rocket attack was launched on Sudh Mahadeva on 25th April 2002 killing one innocent civilian and injuring five others. It was suspected that a terrorist group “*Mujahideen (Ansari group)*” was behind the attack.¹⁰ Explosives, arms etc have also been unearthed in this area.¹¹

The Dead and Decaying Heritage of Jammu

The temples of Babor and Krimchi represent the dead and decaying heritage of the region. These remains are tangible reminders, which allow people to understand and appreciate

their past.

BABOR : Babor site is known for its five partially ruined temples with carved figures of the Hindu Gods. The construction of the temple complex falls between 9th and 11th centuries. The temples have elaborate and minute carvings and are dedicated to various Gods and Goddesses of Hindu Pantheon like Shiva, Narsimha, Krishna etc. The group of temples are scattered over an area of more than a Kilometer.

KRIMCHI : The group of six temples at Krimchi were perhaps constructed in the 9th century and show the influence of Orissan style of temple architecture. Four temples out of the group of six stand on the same platform which is raised from the ground. The other two are on the lower plane. One of the four is comparatively better preserved. The temple is a structure of finely cut and chiseled stones and measures 7.90 meters in length and 6.08 meter in width. The whole temple complex is richly carved.

The Terrorist Threat (attack)

These two temple complexes are situated on undulating terrain and are surrounded by dense forest. The area thus provides a natural haven for the terrorist groups operating in the district of Udhampur in Jammu region. The presence of terrorists in this area has actively discouraged the officials of Archeological Survey of India (ASI),¹² who are responsible for maintaining these sites, from visiting them and looking after their day to day maintenance. As a result these temple structures are decaying and are likely to suffer irreparable damage if the current situation permits. However, no direct attack in the form of blowing up either of these temples has been reported so far. This is probably due to the fact that these temples do not attract any worshippers and are merely places visited by scholars and tourists interested in the subject.

It needs to be kept in mind that if the dead and decaying heritage is attacked and destroyed, it would lead to the destruction of cultural sites but if the living heritage of the region is attacked and destroyed, the consequences could lead to communal unrest thereby destabilizing the country and dividing it on a communal basis. Every effort is required to protect the cultural heritage of the region otherwise it could encourage the fundamentalists all around the world to destroy the heritage sites. The living / non-living heritage of the region also needs to be protected so that communal harmony is maintained and the economy of the region continues to prosper.

The world body has listed a number of **Sites in India** to be a part of World Culture and Heritage but the heritage sites of Jammu and Kashmir do not fall in this category. The Taj Mahal, which is a world heritage site, is under a serious threat from terrorist attacks. However, the shrine of Vaishno Devi ji in Jammu is the number one target of religious terrorists as per the information of the intelligence agencies. There is

hence a need to include the historical site of Vaishno Devi in the list of protected monuments. .

No doubt there is a growing role of International Law in support to protect the patrimony, whether international, national, regional or local in times of armed strife but so far no International / National Agency has come forward with significant solutions to salvage the heritage of Jammu region.

Public Awareness Campaigns

The government of Jammu and Kashmir has taken the initiative of planning awareness campaigns for the people of Jammu and Kashmir. It has formed Mohalla committees i.e. self help associations of the members of the community with the objective of making the common citizen aware of the threat emanating from religious terrorism and the action to be taken by each individual at the time of an attack by them. The public is also being made aware of the threats from bombs or other explosive materials through print, electronic media etc.

It needs to be pointed here that the total population of the state is 10,069,917 as per the census of 2001 and the literacy rate is 54.46%, which is below the National average of 65.38%.¹³ In view of the fact that the literacy levels are low, it is not easy to reach out to the entire population.

Certain measures like providing police protection to the shrines, installing electronic gadgets etc. have also been taken but these measures are not enough as there is a need to do much more in this direction. More Public involvement is required if these sites have to be protected.

In view of the above, there is an urgent need for mobilizing the local public opinion and make them alive to the threat from religious terrorism. There is also a need to appeal to the 'World Organizations' (dedicated to the cause of conserving and preserving the cultural heritage all over the world) and make them aware of the threat which looms large over the heritage of Jammu. The threat from the religious terrorists who are operating in India generally and Jammu and Kashmir specifically and the steps taken by the state government and the agencies in dealing with them could be taken into consideration while planning the strategies for conserving and protecting the heritage sites all over the world from the threat of religious terrorism.

As Professor Patrick J. Boylan in his paper Protecting the World's Cultural Heritage in Times of Armed Conflict, emphasized that there also is a need to change the minds and hearts of people so that they recognize that what they are either neglecting or deliberately destroying in wars and other armed conflicts are not just the cultural symbols of an enemy - whether an international enemy, or just a person of a different racial, ethnic or religious group living in the next village or even the next house. Humanity is a single species less than 4,000 generations old, with what is ultimately a common, though rich and diverse, culture. Destroying the physical evidence of any part of this is not just an attack on

the enemy's culture; it is equally an attack on our own culture.

Therefore, there is a need for the world to sit down and chalk out a common strategy for protecting the cultural heritage sites spread all over the world from various threats including the most recent threat from religious terrorism so that the cultural heritage of the world can be preserved for posterity.

Notes

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- ¹Ahmed Feroz , Director of Census Operations, Census 2001 – Provisional Population Totals, Jammu & Kashmir, Some Salient Features. P 1
 - ²Press Trust of India 13 December 2001, Times of India, Delhi Edition 14 December 2001, Hindustan Times, Delhi Edition, 14 December 2001.
 - ³Goswami Anil, Vaishno Devi – The Shrine, (Ved Pushp Publishers, J&K, Second Edition 2001), P 27.
 - ⁴Press Trust of India 15 April 2002, Excelsior, 16 April 2002, Jammu Edition.
 - ⁵Chief Executive Office, Vaishno Devi Shrine Board, J&K.
 - ⁶Shastri Kaka Ram, Shri Raghunath Mandir, Jammu (Dharmarth Trust, J&K, 1962), P 3.
 - ⁷Press Trust of India 30 March 2002, Excelsior 31 March 2002, Jammu Edition, State Times, 31 March 2002, Jammu Edition.
 - ⁸Press Trust of India 13 July 2002, Excelsior 14 July 2002, Jammu Edition, State Times, 14 July 2002, Jammu Edition.
 - ⁹Archeological Survey of India.
 - ¹⁰Excelsior 26 April 2002, Jammu Edition.
 - ¹¹Office of the Divisional Commissioner, Jammu.
 - ¹²Archeological Survey of India.
 - ¹³Ahmed Feroz , Director of Census Operations, Census 2001 – Provisional Population Totals, Jammu & Kashmir, Some Salient Features. P i.

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Papers presented & published

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Bahu Fort – Emergence of the Duggars of Jammu Region, presented in National Seminar on Harappan Civilization in the section Indian History & Culture Society.

Archeology of Jammu, presented in Indian History Congress.

Historical Geography of Jammu Region, presented in the Seminar of History & Culture of Jammu Region.