

CULTURAL IMPORTANCE OF RELIGIOUS AND TOURIST PLACES OF DISTRICT BILASPUR OF HIMACHAL PRADESH

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INTRODUCTION

From the beginning, Himachal Pradesh was one of the major states of India which were not affected by the exotic cultures and traditions. But with the passage of time and technical advancements, it is changing rapidly on its various aspects. Along with this, Himachal is a multicultural and multilingual state. The total population of Himachal includes the tribal population, mainly consisting of Gaddis, Gujjars, Pangwals and Lahauls. Himachal is world famous for its handicrafts and its natural heritages. Carpets, leather work, shawls, paintings, metalware, wooden works and paintings are appreciated across the globe. Pashmina shawl is one of those products which remain in high demand. The cultural tableau of the state is displayed through local music and dance. Chambayali Nati, Kinnauri Nati, Sirmauri Nati, Shimla Nati, Gidda and Bhangra are the main dances of Himachal Pradesh, while Bhyagada, Laman, Ghodis, Sitniyan and Navala are some types of folk music. Let us describe the folk culture of Himachal Pradesh. Such activities are absolutely essential in the cultural development of the state. The daily food of Himachalis is parallel to that of the rest of the states of North India. Although Hindi is the state language but many people speak Pahari in which Mandiyali, Kangri, Chamyali, Pangwali, Lohli, Kinnauri, Baghati, Bilaspuri, Kulavi dialects are prominent. Majority of Himachal's population is dependent on agriculture and animal husbandry. As far as house construction is concerned, the ancient style of house construction in Himachal is still prevails in HP which was mud mortar and slates were installed on the roof of the house. But today pucca houses are constructed in Himachal by using cement, rebar and tiles. As far as the history of Himachal Pradesh is concerned, it is as old as the Indus Valley Civilization. The excavations carried out in different parts of HP proves the fact of its history. In ancient times, the original inhabitants of this region were known as Das, Dasyu and Nishad. In the 19th century, Maharaja of Punjab and Rajashtan Ranjit Singh annexed many parts of this region to his kingdom. When the British came, they defeated the Gorkha people and also annexed the princely states of

some kings to their empire. Himachal Pradesh had five important princely states, in which Kahlur, Hunder, Mahasu, Trigart, Kalind, Kulutades, Suket were the main princely states.

Bilaspur is the district in Indian state of Himachal Pradesh. The Bilaspur town of the district is situated on the bank of near Govind sagar, an artificial lake, geographically it is situated in the north-west of state's capital Shimla. Bilaspur is also known as 'Kahlur' ancient times. It was included in the 14 princely states of Himachal in the south-eastern side of the Sutlej River. Bilaspur is situated at an altitude of 670 meters above sea level. The city is extremely popular for its religious tourism. New Bilaspur town has been hailed as the first planned hill town of the country. Bilaspur is also known for its ancient forts. The experience of the tourists visiting here is completely different from other places. People who are fond of some different types of tourism, like this place very much. To its north are Mandi and Hamirpur districts while to the west It touches the boundary of Una and Nalagarh of Solan district is the south. in Bilaspur district, Temple of Naina Devi, Baba Nahar Singh at Dholera, Rukmani Kund, Shahtalai town with premises of Baba Balak Nath Temple, Luhnu Maidan, Haridevi Temple, Holy hut of Baba Kalyan Das (Kala Baba), Vyas Gufa, Temple of Rishi Markandeya, Bahadur's Fort, Mata Soohani Devi Temple, Bhakra Dam and Govind Sagar Lake are the picturesque and delightful places of Bilaspur district. All these places are the centre of attraction of tourists across the world. Shri Naina Devi Temple is one the major temples of Himachal Pradesh. It is situated on the hills of Shivalik mountain range. It is one among the 51 Shakti Peethas which were formed from the body parts of Goddess Parvati/Sati. Shri Naina Devi is the sixth form among the nine goddess forms of North India. These nine goddess are Vaishno Devi include Maa Chamunda Devi, Maa Vajreshwari Devi, Maa Jwala Devi, Maa Chintpurni Devi, Maa Naina Devi, Maa Mansa Devi, Maa Kalika Devi, Maa Shakambhari Devi Saharanpur. Shri Naina Devi is one of the holy pilgrimage sites of Hindus. This place is connected by National Highway No. 21 i.e. Chandigarh to Bilaspur, Mandi and Kullu. Tourists can also reach this place by their personal vehicle. There is also a ropeway to reach the temple. It is situated at an altitude of 1100 meters above sea level. It is believed that the eyes of Goddess Sati has fallen at this place. The main attraction of the temple is the Peepal tree which is centuries old. To the right of the main entrance of the temple is the idol of Lord Ganesha and Hanuman. After entering the main gate, two statues of lion are visible. The lion is believed to be the vehicle of the maa shakti. There are three main idols in the sanctum sanctorum of the temple. Kalratri Maa is on the right, Naina Devi Maa in the middle and Lord Ganesha's idol

on the left. Along side the temple there is also a pond of holy water. There is also a cave which is known as Naina Devi Cave.

All the 51 Shaktipeeths are situated in the different part of india. The origin story of all these is same. All these temples are associated with Lord Shiv and Maa Sati. According to hindu scriptures, the body parts of the goddess had fallen at all these places. King Daksh, the father-in-law of Lord Shiva, organized a yagna, in which he did not invite Shiv and Sati because he did not consider Lord Shiv as his equal. This thing was quite painful for Maa Sati and she reached the Yagna without any invitation. Lord Shiv was insulted a lot at the place of Yagna, which Maa Sati could not bear. For the sake of Lord Shiv's honour jumped into the Havan Kund. When Lord Shiv came to know about this, he came and took the body of Maa Sati from the Havan Kund and started doing tandav. There was an outcry in all the three worlds (Patallok, Mrityalok and Gokulloka) due to the tandava. To save the entire universe from this crisis, Lord Vishnu cut apart the body of Maa Sati into 51 parts with his Sudarshan Chakra. The parts where ever they fell, became Shakti Peeths. Mahakali due to hair fall in Kolkata, Mata Bajreshwari due to fall of some part of chest in Nagarkot, Maa Jwala Devi due to fall of tongue in volcano, Maa Mansa Devi due to fall of head near Panchkula, Haryana, due to ankle fall in Kurukshetra Maa Bhadrakali, Maa Shakambhari Devi due to falling of head on Shivalik mountain near Saharanpur, Maa Hinglaj Bhavani due to the fall of Brahmastrandhra near Karachi, Maa Kamakhya Devi due to fall of womb in Assam, Mata Chintpurni at una etc. It is believed that the eyes of Maa Sati had fallen in Shri Naina Devi. This is the reason why the temple has got the name of Shri Naina Devi.

Chandigarh can be reached by plane as a way to reach the temple of maa Shri Naina Devi. After this, the journey of 115 kms can be done via Kiratpur, Garamod by bus or car. The second nearest airport is 'Amritsar' as well. The train facility can be availed up to chandigarh and nangal and after these destinations the tourists or pilgrims have to travel by bus or car. Chandigarh is well connected by road to all the major cities of the country. Shri Naina Devi is located at a distance of 350 kms from Delhi. The roadway is well equipped with all facilities. There are maximum number of hotels on the way where one can rest and stay. The roadway is in good condition.

The second centre of attraction in district Bilaspur is the beautiful temple of Baba Nahar Singh situated on the hills of Dhaulra near the headquarter of District Bilaspur. It was his majestic King Deep chand who built the temple of Baba Nahar Singh near his palace at Dhaulra. Hundreds of devotees visit here every day. It is a popular belief that Baba Nahar Singh came to Bilaspur from Kullu with Kumkum Devi, the queen of

the majestic King Deep Chand of Kahlur princely state. Raja Deep Chand took over the reign of the princely state of Kahlur from 1653 to 1665. Raja Deep Chand married princess Kumkum of Kullu. At the time of farewell, the princess's doli suddenly became heavy and Kahar could not lift the doli. When the king asked his royal priest its secret, the priest told that the god is angry and this god wants to go to Kahlur with the princess. The King agreed and the doli suddenly became as light as a flower. It is also a folk belief that after that the foot-paduka princess of Baba Nahar Singh Veer came to Kahlur i.e. Bilaspur with the doli of Kumkum Devi. The ancient temple of Baba Nahar Singh remains the centre of attraction for visitors and devotees even today. People worship this deity in Kullu with reverence and faith. Baba Nahar Singh is also the family deity of Kullu's royal family. Baba likes sweet rot of flour, betel nut, Googal Dhoop, clove and cardamom. When the new crop arrives, people offer rot to Baba's temple here whenever the vow of devotees granted by deity, they thank the deity by singing and offering in the hope of prosperity. Devotees also consider him as Veer Bhajiya. There is description of 52 heroes in religious texts. Baba Nahar Singh is also one of those 52 heroes. In reverence of deity a fair is also held every year in the temple on every Tuesday of Jyeshtha month (i.e. May-June). This temple of Bilaspur district is known throughout the country for its faith, justice and purity. It is also believed about the temple of Baba Nahar Singh that any devotee who comes here with true devotion and pure heart and becomes aware of his own mistakes. This temple is located in the city of Bilaspur. It can be reached by bus or taxi. The nearby railway station and airport to reach this spot are located at Nangal and Chandigarh respectively.

The hut of Baba Kalyan Das (Kala Baba) in Bilaspur, Himachal Pradesh is also a delightful shrine. Baba Kalyan Das ji was also known as Kala Baba, who relieved the suffering of the people by staying in a hut at a distance of 5-6 kms from Chamlog Barmana. Baba has given up his body some year ago, but even today when any suffering person or devotee remembers him with a true heart, he in some or the other form is still redressing the sufferings of these people. The residents of Bilaspur still offer prayers to him and his miracles are discussed abroad as well. The stories of Kala Baba ji are not hidden from anyone. Kala Baba never touches money and there used to be a sheet and bag on his body. Even today that sheet and bag is present in his holy hut. When a person suffering from any disease used to come to him to diagnose his disease, then Kala Baba never touches the said woman or man. He used to cure their diseases with his feet only. At that time, when someone wanted to give Dakshina to Babaji, it was put in Baba's bag. Another interesting fact about Baba is that he is seen at the same age level and it is told that he has crossed the age of 300 years. Whenever

there was Bhandara in Kala Baba ji's ashram, thousands of people used to come to take Bhandara. The Bhandara never fall short. Kala Babaji used to take only milk and fruits. He never accepted food. The place where Kala Baba ji has lived in his hut used to have a serious water problem, so Baba Ji struck his tongs on the earth. The water shower burst from the earth. His blessing in the form of today, there is continuous water supply and a stepwell has been built there and water is quenching the thirst of thousands of people of that area.

One another interesting story is that once Baba ji was going from Chamlog to Bilaspur on foot, there used to be very few buses at that time. He waved his hand to stop the bus. The bus driver did not stop the bus. After some time, Baba ji reached in front of the bus again on the next turn, then he waved his hand to stop the bus but the bus driver again did not stop the bus. When the bus driver reached at Bilaspur with bus, he was utterly shocked when he saw that Babaji had already reached at Bilaspur. The bus driver stopped the bus and immediately fell at the feet of Babaji. At present, Baba ji has built an inn in the Shaktipeeth Haridwar. This inn is famous by the name of Kala Baba of Bilaspur. Here devotees stay and give some donations for the inn as per their capacity. A committee has been formed to look after the work of the inn so that the work of the inn can run smoothly.

The next historical and religious place which is to be discussed Vyas Cave. It is a place full of natural beauty located in district Bilaspur is one of the historical and very thrilling places. Before this the name of this place was Vyaspur. Because of the location of a historical Vyas cave, the name Bilaspur was to this district. The king of this place also built a place for himself in Bilaspur and Devmati temple for the residents in front of the Ranganath temple. Raja Kalyan Chand of Vyaspur (Bilaspur) had eight sons and Tara Chand was the eldest son among them. After becoming the king, he conquered the hilly region up to Mahlog by climbing Hindur. The 'Taragarh Fort' and 'Taradevi Mandir' both were built after his name at Nalagarh. In fact, the old city of Bilaspur is completely submerged in the Gobind Sagar lake, but the cave here is still safe. This cave is considered as a religious place. This popular cave is situated at the foot of the city, the place is believed to be famous for the revered sage Vyasa, according to mythological beliefs, Sage Vyas meditated in this cave for many years. 'Vyas Cave' is situated on the banks of river Sutlej.

The pilgrimage to Char Dham is considered incomplete without taking a bath in Markand, the Taposthali of Maharishi Markandeya in Bilaspur district of Himachal Pradesh. Thousands of people throng here for holy bath on Baisakh festival (in April month). This bath starts in the Brahma Muhurat and remain continuous throughout the day. Due to its association with Lord Shiv and Markandeya, this place has become the

centre of faith of the Hindu people. According to the legend, after the severe penance of sage Markandeya, Lord Shiv gave him the boon in the form of son Ratan. But, along with the boon, god also mentioned about the son's short life. As the son's age increased, the father became worried for the life of Ratan. The child Markandeya was also a paternal devotee with a sharp intellect. Sensing the mind of his father, he started doing penance to Lord Shiv for the redress told his father's worry. When only three days were left for the completion 12 years of the age, he made a sand Shivling and get assimilated in Shiva's penance. The messengers of the death came to take away his life, but when they started moving towards the devotee child, flames came out of that sand Shivling and start burning the messengers of death. Defeated Yamdoot went to Yampuri and narrated the whole situation to Yamraj (The god of death). When Yamraj himself came to take his life, Markandeya ji held Shivling in his arms. Shiv appeared from the Shivling and ordered Yamraj to go back to Yampuri. It is believed that this incident happened on the eve of Baisakhi. A spring of water broke out at that place, which is today known as Markandeya Tirth. A huge fair is held here on Baisakhi, in which devotees from far and wide come and take a holy bath throughout the day started with Brahma Muhurat. The details of this account are also read in the Markandeya Purana Hindu scripture. Markandeya Tirth is more than Char Dham. Even today after visiting the Char Dham, people reach the holy bath in Markandeya. The devotee reach the temple throughout the year to take the holy bath. The bathing here has a special significance especially on Baisakhi festival.

Rukmani Kund in Bilaspur district also has its own historical religious and cultural significance. This is about the time when Himachal Pradesh was ruled by small princely states. Once upon a time the Auhar area of the district Bilaspur was facing acute water problem and people had to fetch water from river Sutlej. Everyone tried hard to dig the well but no water came out anywhere. Due to this all the people of that area were very sad and disappointed. One night the king of Barsand, which is 4-5 kms above Auhar, had a dream in the night that if he sacrifices his eldest son or daughter-in-law, then all the problems of the people of the area will be solved. The king gets upset thinking that how will he sacrifice his son. At that time King's daughter-in-Law Rukmani had gone to her maternal home village named Tared and the king immediately sent a call to her. When daughter-in-law comes from her maternal home, the king narrates his dream and says about her sacrifice. A day is fixed and after worship she was buried alive in the wall. As soon as the masonry was finished, it is believed that the stream of milk started flowing there and then water started flowing. At the place where Rukmani was buried, with the passage of time a pool appears there. The grass was grown on the rocks and local people believe that it is Rukmani's hair. People tie ribbons and bangles with grass as an offering to Devi Rukmani. Even

now the people of Tared area neither drink nor bathe in this water. These people do this in grief of the sacrifice of their daughter. Baisakhi fair is held here every year and Wrestling (Chhinj) is also organized. People come here to bathe on the occasion of Baisakhi and other festivals. A small temple has been built here for the worship of Rukmani Devi. There are bathrooms for bathing of women and men. Many people also enjoy swimming in this pool. It is said that bathing here gives benefits in skin diseases. There is a cave in front of the pool and it is popularly believed that this cave leads to the Guggaji temple located on the other side of the hill, a short distance from Geharwin. There is no direct bus service from the district headquarters to reach this place. From Bilaspur one can reach Bhaged and Bhaged to Auhar or Kallar which is on Bhaged-Rishikesh road and can be reached by climbing on foot. There is an unpaved road about 2 kms distance on the Auhr-Geharwin connectivity road, from where one can reach on foot or by car. There is also a song on Rani Rukmani which is sung by popular singer Karnal Rana of Himachal Pradesh. Through the lyrics of the song, Rani Rukmani is remembered with graceful eyes and the unforgettable sacrifice made by her for the welfare of masses.

Bhakra-Nangal Dam also has the status of special place in Himachal's tourist places. This hydroelectric project has been built on the Sutlej river in Bilaspur district of Himachal Pradesh and Nangal in Punjab. This dam has been constructed under Bhakra-Nangal Project. Its height is 741 feet (226 m), which makes it the second highest dam in India after Tehri Dam. It is the country's largest multi-purpose river project, which was dedicated to the country in 1963. The construction of the Bhakra Nangal Dam began in 1948 and was completed in 1962 under the direction of American dam builder Harvey Slochem. It was launched on 22 October 1963 by the Prime Minister sh.Jawaharlal Nehru. Its main purpose is irrigation and electricity generation. The hydroelectric power plant on this dam generates 1325 MW of electricity, The Project supplies electricity to Haryana, Rajasthan, Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh besides Punjab. At the inauguration of the Bhakra Nangal project, Pandit Late sh. Jawaharlal Nehru had said-"There is something amazing, something awe-inspiring in the Bhakra Nangal project, something that shakes your heart when you see it. Bhakra is the new temple of the resurgent India and it is a symbol of India's progress." The width of this Project is 625 feet in the base and 30 feet at the top. This hydroelectric project is a joint project of Rajasthan, Punjab and Haryana, in which Rajasthan has a share of 15.2 percent. This project provides electricity to more than 250 small and big villages and towns apart from Sriganganagar, Hanumangarh, Sikar, Jhunjhunu and Churu districts.

Govind Sagar is a man-made lake located in Bilaspur district. It was named after the 10th Guru of the Sikhs, Guru Govind Singh. This lake was formed due to the construction of Bhakra Dam on the Sutlej River. This lake holds the highest position on the map of India. The lake has proved an invaluable spot for tourism, irrigation and agriculture. The terrain here seems to have turned into a paradise. The clean water is flowing in the form of a spring from the holes of the dam built on the river satluj, 20 Kms from Govind Sagar Lake. 'sh. Naina Devi Temple' is situated at a distance and on the hill there is a holy pilgrimage place of Sikhs named 'Anandpur Sahib'. Both Hindus and Sikhs consider it sacred. In the month of August, a huge fair is held at the temple of sh. Naina Devi. On the special occasion thousands of devotees come here to have darshan. At present, in addition to Govind Sagar Lake, four large lakes have also been built at this site, Their construction development project is in progress. Fort built on top of a hill named Bahadurpur in Bilaspur district of Himachal Pradesh has an altitude of 1980 meters. It is considered as the highest point of the district. Forty Kms away from Bilaspur. Fort was built near Tepra village of Pargana Bahadurpur. Beautiful forests of deodar and banyan surround this place from all sides. Fatehpur, Naina Devi hills, Ropar plains and Shimla mountain ranges can be seen from this fort. This fort was built in the year 1835, which has been greatly damaged in the present time.

As a religious place and picnic spot, Soohani Dhar is another picnic place in Bilaspur. it will not be an exaggeration. It is called the Maya Lok of nature. Himachal Pradesh is also called Dev Bhoomi because it is the abode of gods and goddesses. Soohani Devi Temple is situated in village Kotla of Ghumarwin tehsil in Bilaspur district, far away from the din of city. There is a grand and huge temple of Mata Soohani Devi in the middle of forest, which is situated on a hill in the middle of the forest on Doon Road. It is almost 10 kms from Ghumarwin. This temple was built about nine hundred years ago. Temple was constructed by two Brahmin brothers according to the instructions of the goddess. About nine hundred years ago, the priests and local residents told that two brothers found a stone idol of Maa Soohani Devi while ploughing in the fields. They thought to replace the idol from the place where they found it. But in the dream, one of the brothers found that it is not possible even to move the idol. So they considered it as the direct instructions of the goddess. After realising this, They left the thought to replace the idol. But they both carried on their search for the suitable place where the idol may be situated. Finally they found the present temple premises situated on the top of Soohani Dhaar for idol consecration and temple construction as well. Now they again tried to lift the idol from the field, This time the idol became very light. It was the consent from goddess. The happiness

of both the brothers knew no bounds. While hailing the goddess, they easily established the stone idol on the top of the hill and laid the foundation for the construction of the temple. With the cooperation of the residents a new temple has been built here after renovating the old temple in the year 1980. Soohani Devi is famous as the family deity of thousands of families of the vicinity. That is why there is an influx of devotees at this place. Bhagwat, Ratri Jagran and Jatra are often organized here on Navratri and on special occasion.

Hari Devi Temple, a mythological and famous religious place situated in the Gram Panchayat Lehiri Sarel of Ghumarwin sub-division, Bilaspur district. It is in the Shivalik hill range of the Himalaya and is still a symbol of people's faith. The temple is situated on a hill about two kms from Dangar on the Shimla-Dharamsala National Highway 103. Every year a fair is organized here on 21st May. Elderly people say that this temple was established by the Raja of Bilaspur. The reason behind the construction of the temple the king did not have any children. On this visit to this religious place, the pledged for the construction of the temple if goddess Hari devi blessed him with a child. King's Desire was fulfilled by the goddess and he happily followed his pledge. After having the happiness of a child, The king and queen visited the temple. The queen named the goddess as Hari Devi because the goddess has blessed them with a child which is known as Goddess Hari in local dialect. Due to its proximity to Mandi and Hamirpur districts, people come to see this fair. On this day, people get the blessings of happiness and prosperity of children and family from the goddess by offering wheat crop that has come to the house. It is a miracle that it does rain on this day no matter how clear the weather is. Being situated in the Shivalik Hill range, it has been a major centre of excavation and exploration of the Archaeological Department of the Government of India since its inception. Millions of years old fossils have been found here. The search continuous even today, due to which this place has emerged on the world map.

CONCLUSION

Therefore, Bilaspur district of Himachal Pradesh holds its own place in religious and cultural terms. In the district where Bahadarpur Fort, Bhakra-Nangal Hydroelectric Project and man-made lake Govind Sagar keep their historical importance, at the same time Markandeya Temple, Mata Soohani Temple, Mata Hari Devi Temple, the temple of Baba Nahar Singh ji in Dholra, near the headquarters of district Bilaspur, temple of Maa Naina Devi, Maa Rukmani Kund, Vyas Gufa and Baba Kalyan Das ji's hut also have religious and cultural importance. Because of this, the district Bilaspur is one of the major tourist places of Himachal Pradesh.

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