

Kashmir: The Land of Rishis—A Journey Through Time

Dr Priyanka Vaidya

“Reader for long looks at the images and goes deep into the spell of forgotten and destroyed glory of Bharat and sees a historian holding pen like a sword.”

Thus, Brigadier AP Singh’s adventurous spirit led him to explore new horizons to explore Bharat by diving deep into India’s rich heritage. As observed in his book *Kashmir: The Land of Rishis- A Journey Through Time* (2023: New Delhi, Akshaya Prakashan, pp. 160) through its ancient architecture, monuments, and knowledge systems.

उत्तरं यत् समुद्रस्य हिमाद्रेश्चैव दक्षिणम् ।
वर्षं तद् भारतं नाम भारती यत्र सन्ततिः ॥

The book primarily serves as an enthralling guide to the history of the places and shrines visited by the author. The author’s journey is vividly depicted through an intricately detailed route map, inviting readers to step into his footsteps and experience the region’s wonders. The voyage commences at the enchanting Dal Lake, its shimmering waters reflecting the centuries of history and tradition that have unfolded on its shores. The Shankaracharya Temple, perched majestically on the eponymous hill, stands as a sentinel to the spiritual heritage of Kashmir, providing panoramic views. The book immerses readers in the allure of Gulmarg, celebrated for its lush meadows and awe-inspiring vistas. The Mughal gardens of Shalimar Bagh and Nishat Bagh, adorned with symmetrical design and exquisite craftsmanship, stand as a testament to the opulence of their era. A vibrant burst of colours awaits at the Tulip Garden during the bloom season, while the Kheer Bhawani or Ragnya Devi Temple beckons as a place of profound spirituality. The ancient

Temple at Manasbal and the tranquil Manasbal Lake speak of a history intertwined with natural beauty. The journey through Naranag Temples leads to the hallowed grounds of the Mata Bhadrakali Temple in Handwara. The Shailputri Temple and Kotitirtha in Baramulla reveal the deep-rooted religious diversity of the region. The Ganganor Prachin Temple in Baramulla and the Kapaal Mochan Tirth Devigam in Shopian provide glimpses into ancient Hindu beliefs and practices. The Aharbal Waterfall, a natural wonder, refreshes the senses, while the Mother Ragnya Bhagwati Temple at Manzgam in Kulgam symbolises unwavering faith. As the journey unfolds, it encounters holy springs and the Surya Temple in Mattan, Anantnag, showcasing the spiritual mosaic of the region. Pahalgam, a picturesque destination, leads to the serene landscapes of the Aru Valley, Chandanwadi, and Betaab Valley, each an embodiment of natural beauty. The Mamaleshwara Temple in Pahalgam adds a touch of divinity to the journey. The journey’s zenith is reached at the lofty heights of Sinthan Top, followed by the serene charms of Kokernag and Achabal. The Martand Sun Temple, with its ancient grandeur, and the picturesque Verinag, where history and nature coalesce, leave an indelible mark on the traveller’s soul. The voyage culminates with the passage through the Qazigund Tunnel, serving as a portal to the culmination of this extraordinary odyssey—a journey through the enchanting landscapes, sacred sanctuaries, and historical treasures of Kashmir, meticulously documented in this captivating historical book.

This book is also a journey through time. The author reflects that his primary interest revolves around decolonising Indian history. He appears as a traveller, explorer, reader, researcher, photographer and journalist to fathom and reveal Kashmir’s original history, which

* Fellow, IAS. Associate Professor in English, ICDEOL, HP University, Shimla. She can be reached at drpriyankavaidya@gmail.com

has been manipulated and buried just like the broken temples and burnt pages from times immemorial. The writer is rebellious, courageous and bold to present the neglected aspects of the history of Kashmir.

Historians have faced challenges in establishing a clear connection between the past and the present, leading to doubts and misunderstandings regarding Kashmir's historical significance and its crucial role in the development of Bharat. This book contributes to fill the vacuum by offering a new perspective, ensuring that every reader can quickly grasp the nerve of the times. It revives awareness of many ancient sites that have faded into obscurity over time and evaded from maps designed by various partisans and vested interests. The writer takes the readers to lesser-known destinations, providing alternatives to overcrowded tourist spots. This book is a journey through Vedas, Puranas, and Rishis from ancient to present times. Photographs captured by the writer speak volumes and demystify the golden heritage of Bharat, the crown of our motherland.

The historical perspective of the temples of Kashmir embodies the ancient splendour of Hindu civilisation, which once produced unparalleled wisdom, art, sculptures, and spirituality. Presently, these temples endure, safeguarded by armed personnel against potential enemical and terrorist threats. With the temple priests absent, it falls upon these uniformed individuals to perform rituals and maintain the spiritual vitality of these sacred sites. The reader enters into a realm of beauty as well as of void by seeing the present scenario through the lenses of an amateur, yet truthful historian who wants to fathom the true history of golden heritage. Although these temples have weathered the test of time, they struggle to thrive for ages. They are standing unshaken in devotion of their people on the foundation of the teachings of Vedas and Puranas. The demolition of these temples would mark the end of an era, a way of life, and a civilisation that can never be resurrected. The writer has dared to revitalise the glorious history by decolonising the mistaken minds by writing this book. This book projects that the temples' greatest adversaries have not been natural forces but rather those with their mistaken faith and ideology are intent on the extinction of Hinduism.

The images given in the book possess a subtle depth, captured by a photographer who has approached them with profound gratitude and love for Bharat, aiming to safeguard the legacy of these temples for future generations. He didn't only document the wrecked walls, boundaries, inner architecture, plants, and shrubs; he also sought to convey the haunting, melancholic message they carry and their rich history. Brigadier Singh's book shakes the reader to the extent that he cannot escape that

melancholy for long. The book helps reader to shape mentally the shapeless and form the formless, dilapidated ashes of time.

Readers can experience sadness, trauma, fear and nostalgia after going through the book. Several temples come alive on the pages of the book and sing the glory of Bharat. A feeling of connection and proximity can be felt by every Indian who wants to read the distorted, neglected aspects of the narratives of Bharat. Many historical places in Kashmir still stand tall after challenging the traumatic times and invading monsters. Although the broken walls and idols project the tyrannies of time and the victory of rich culture and civilisation. On the leaf of the book, the Union Minister and former Chief of Army Staff, General (Dr) VK Singh, mentions that the book explores hidden natural marvels in the area and introduces travellers to captivating, previously undiscovered attractions. He comments: "Historians have been unable to connect the past with the present effectively, which has resulted in ambiguities and misconceptions about Kashmir's history and the central role it has played in Bharat's emergence as a civilisation. This book provides an insight into this missing link, which is conveyed without clutter, making it easily comprehensible even to a lay reader. The book also describes numerous ancient places, knowledge about which has been lost over time."

The book tries to discover Kashmir's multifaceted history and cultural heritage. It delves into the rich tapestry of Vedic influences, linguistic origins through etymology, and insights from ancient texts like the *Nilamata Purana* and *Rajatarangini*. Furthermore, it meticulously examines foreign accounts and references to Kashmir, highlighting its global significance. It also delves into the spiritual landscape, identifying various practices of Saivism and Shakti worship, which have deeply shaped the region's religious and cultural traditions. The transition to Muslim rule in Kashmir is also documented, providing a historical context for the region's complex political evolution. It is a critical part of the narrative, offering a nuanced view of the region's political history. At the same time the book offers insights into the contemporary situation in Kashmir, addressing some of the challenges. Additionally, it explores the intriguing question of dating Adi Shankaracharya's visit to Kashmir, a topic of scholarly debate. Finally, the book unveils the remarkable reign of Emperor Lalitaditya Muktapida, including his ambitious vision of Akhand Bharat, which adds a fascinating historical dimension to the narrative.

In all, it is a treasure trove of knowledge and insights into the multifaceted history of Kashmir. It traces the region's evolution through the ages, examining its rich past and the cultural amalgamation that shaped it. In

In addition to discussing Vedic references, the book offers readers a glimpse into the etymology of Kashmiri names and terms, shedding light on the linguistic roots of the region. The exploration of foreign references to Kashmir showcases its global significance and the intrigue it has held for travellers, scholars, and explorers over centuries. It doesn't just focus on historical aspects; it also delves into the spiritual fabric of Kashmir, discussing

the practices of Saivism and Shakti worship, which continue to play a vital role in the region's religious and cultural identity. It also addresses the present situation in Kashmir, providing readers with context and insights into contemporary challenges. Thus, the exploration of various aspects ensures that readers gain a holistic view of Kashmir's history, culture, and significance in the broader context of India's heritage.