

Post Your Property
It's free!!!
*Buy *Sell *Rent
www.jammuproperty.com

BOOKING OPEN
2BHK/3BHK FLATS
at Gurgaon, Noida,
Noida Extension, Greater Noida



Cont: 9419101229, 94191-76665
ENTRUST
REALTORS & CONSULTANTS
www.jammuproperty.com

PILGRIMAGE TO MANIMAHESH

Kaushal Kotwal

The annual yatra of Manimahesh commences from Laxmi-Narayana Temple in Chamba in the month of August / September. Also the scared Chhari of Lord Shiva is taken from different holy places of Chenab Valley of Bhadarwah tehsil and adjoining areas of the tehsil Bhadarwah of district Doda. In this sacred yatra chelas of Lord Shiva along with many devotees of Lord Shiva proceed to Manimahesh tirth in Himachal Pradesh. Some accompany the chhari and some go directly to Himachal Pradesh. The Chhari is taken to the sacred lake of Manimahesh, which is one of the chief tirthas in the district. Of late people from north India and beyond have started visiting this sacred lake. The lake is situated at the height of 13,500 feet above sea level and at the base of Manimahesh Kailash peak a (18,564 feet), 92 km from Chamba, where pilgrims take holy dip. Manimahesh Kailash is a virgin peak. In 1968 an Indo-Japanese team led by Nandini Patel made an unsuccessful attempt to scale the peak. The devout attribute the failure to the divine prowess of the holy mountain. On the margin of the lake is a small marble Shivaling called Chaumukha. Manimahesh is 27 km from Bharmour. During the mela days, bus service is available upto Hadsar, 14 km from Bharmour. The pilgrimage is generally done in two stages. Between Dhancho and Manimahesh lake, there are minor places of pilgrimage known as Bandar Ghati, Gauri Kund, Shiv Kalotri and Ganesh Ghati. The trek from Dhancho to Manimahesh lake is difficult in patches. Just short of the lake is Gauri Kund where women take a holy dip before returning to home. The pilgrimage to Manimahesh is considered sacred like that of Amarnath, Badrinath and Rameshwaram. During the mela days several bhandaras are set-up for the benefit of pilgrims and meals are served free of cost. Pack animals are also available for those who do not want to carry their luggage themselves.

Legend also mentions that Shiva performed penance on the banks of Manimahesh Lake. In the same vein, it is mentioned that Gaddis, the tribes of this region, adopted Lord Shiva as their deity. Gaddis are the people who reside in the Gaddi Valley which is the name of the upper regions of Ravi River where the Mount Chamba Kailash lies. Further, according to the legend, the Shiva, who lived in Mount Kailash, the highest mountain of the state, gifted the Gad-

dis with a Chuhali topi (pointed cap), which they wear traditionally along with their other dress of chola (coat) and dora (a long black cord about 10-15 m long). The Gaddis started calling the land of this mountainous region as 'Shiv Bhumi' (Land of Shiva) and themselves as devotees of Shiva. The legend further states that before Shiva married Parvati at Mansarovar Lake and became the "universal parents of the universe", Shiva created the Mount Kailash in Himachal Pradesh and made it his abode. He made Gaddis his devotees. The land where Gaddis lived extended from 15 miles (24 km) west of Bharmour, upstream of the confluence of Budhil and Ravi rivers, up to Manimahesh. Manimahesh was also considered the abode of the three Lords of the universe namely, Shiva, Vishnu and Brahma. Manimahesh was reckoned as the heaven (Kaliya) of Lord Shiva. The waterfall seen at the Dhancho on the way to Manimahesh Lake, and which emanates from the lake, was considered as the heaven (Vaikunta) of Vishnu. The heaven of Brahma is cited as a mound overlooking the Bharmour city. The Gaddis also believe that Shiva resides in the Mount Kailash for six months, whereafter he moves to the netherworld handing over the reigns to Lord Vishnu. The day he departs to the netherworld is observed by the Gaddis reverentially every year, which is the Janmashtami day, the eighth day of the month of Bhadon (August), the birthday of Lord Krishna (an incarnation of Lord Vishnu). Shiva returned from the netherworld to Bharmour at the end of February, before the night of his wedding and this day is observed as the Shivratri day; Gaddis observe this also as a festive day since Shiva and Parvati returned to Mount Kailash in the Gaddi land.

Etymology of 'Manimahesh' signifies a "jewel (Mani) on Lord Shiva's (Mahesh's) crown". According to a local legend, the moon-rays reflected from the jewel can be seen from Manimahesh Lake on clear full moon night (which is a rare occasion). However, it has been inferred that such a phenomenon could be the result of reflection of light from the glacier that embellishes the peak in the form of a serpent around Shiva's neck.

A legend in which Lord Shiva himself is tricked is narrated. According to this narration linked to Dhancho where pilgrims spend a night on their way to Manimahesh Lake, Lord Shiva, pleased with the devotion of one his ardent devotee Bhasmasur (an asura or demon)



bestowed a boon, which gave powers to Bhasmasur under which Bhasmasur touching any one would reduce that person into ashes. Bhasmasur wanted to try this boon on Shiva himself. He, therefore, followed Shiva to touch him and get rid of him. However, Shiva managed to escape and enter into the waterfall at Dhancho and take shelter in a cave behind the rolling waters of the fall. Bhasmasur could not get through the waterfall. Then, Lord Vishnu intervened and killed Bhasmasur. Since then the fall is considered holy.

A rare event of the first sun's rays falling on the Mani

Mahesh peak is seen in reflection in the lake like saffron tilak. This display in the lake has enhanced the legendary belief of the Gaddis on the sanctity of Manimahesh Lake at the base of the Mount Kailash, which they visit on an annual pilgrimage. This event has also contributed to the practice of taking bath in the lake on Janmashtami day or Radhashtami day, fifteen days after the birth of Lord Krishna.

Devotees who are blessed with darshan of the light of sacred mani on the day of Janmashtami chant "Sab Kuch Paa Liya Is Sansar Mein In Darshano Ke Saath, Jeevan Safal Ho Gaya Bholenath Ki Kripa Ke Sath".

VDCs ON VIGIL



Avtar Bhat

Since their constitution in 1995 when militancy was on peak in the state of J&K and people in the hilly belts of Jammu region were also looking for mass migration in view of increasing massacres and terrorist attacks on them, the Village Defence Committees (VDCs) did a commendable job in weeding out terrorism from their areas and restored peace and people's confidence.

Perturbed over increasing terrorist violence and massacres after the militants spread their tentacles in Jammu region, as well, the then Union Government led by P V Narsimha Rao was left with no alternative but to constitute VDCs in the State for restoration of democratic and political process. The VDCs did a yeoman's service to the militancy ravaged people since their constitution in not only providing security to the people in their respective hamlets in remote and secluded areas of the State but also assisted the security forces in anti terror operations.

However, recently a controversy dogged the VDCs with separatists as well as their sympathizers launching a vicious campaign against them and demanding their disbanding which is seen as a big game plan by nationalist people to force their mass exodus from the hilly belt of Jammu on the pattern of mass exodus of minorities from the Valley which took place in 1989-90.

Defending the role of VDCs, the militancy affected people of Jammu region said that the move was aimed at reviving the militancy in

the region whose back had been broken by VDCs as the militants and their harbourers were more scared of VDCs at present than security forces because they (VDCs) managed to keep the terrorist at bay and did not let them enter those areas after 1995 where the VDCs were constituted by the Government.

Not only the VDC members and their SPOs belonging to minority community in erstwhile Doda district or in twin border districts of Poonch and Rajouri, but VDC members belonging to majority community are tooth and nail opposed to the demand of disbanding the VDCs in the hilly reaches and term it as a part of big conspiracy to give militancy a new lease of life in this belt which otherwise has no chance of its revival in presence of VDCs.

Once VDCs are disbanded in militancy affected areas of erstwhile Doda district and twin border districts of Rajouri and Poonch, the militants will re-group again, said Mohammed Asgar (name changed) a VDC member from a remote village of Bhadarwah. After the increased infiltration across the border the dreaded Lashkar-e-Toiba is trying to re-group its cadres in this belt and start operations, he added.

He, while counting the role of VDCs said it was because of their hard efforts and vigil that Hindus and Muslims live in complete peace and harmony in the erstwhile Doda district where the militants tried to create a communal divide earlier by making selective killings. When Muslim majority at various places resisted against this they targeted them also and

many people from both the communities lost their lives in militants' attacks prior constitution of VDCs in 1995, he added.

He said soon after the constitution of VDCs they not only protected their hamlets, maintained peace and communal amity but also kept the terrorists at bay as they did not dare to enter those hamlets where the VDCs existed.

The VDCs are still needed in this hilly belt as the terrorism has not been completely eliminated from there, said Ramzan Wani (name changed) from a remote village in Doda district. In view of fresh infiltration from across the border and terrorist attacks on army and police personnel at border and within the State as well as the killing of ex-Director of SKIMS which are not isolated incidents, the Government has to remain vigilant and proactive. This shows militants are neither out nor down and in view of the recent intelligence reports, the Government should revive its pro-active strategy to thwart their designs as militants are trying to regroup again by making appeals to youth through pamphlets and posters to join their ranks, he added.

Disbanding of VDCs is a game plan of separatists who at the behest of Pakistan and ISI want to revive the sagging morale of militants, said Manjit Razdhan a BJP leader from Bhadarwah. They (separatists) and their mentors across the border want to create the nineties type situation in the hilly reaches of Jammu again to force the migration of nationalist people from there and militants get a free deal in ruling the roost. Maintaining that the VDCs role in anti militancy operations is before

every body as well as Government of India, which was instrumental in their constitution in 1995 to start political and peace process in the state by installing a political Government.

He said infiltration has again started in border belt and dreaded militant outfit Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT) wants to spread its net work again. The appearance of posters in various areas of Kishtwar recently and appealing youth to join militants ranks is an indication in this regard. Accusing the Government of its failure in taking a tough stance against terrorism and eliminating the terrorists, he said the people who have been part of anti militancy operations in this hilly belt feel demoralized at present. Whosoever fought against the terrorism has been demoralized by the Government and against some people false charges have been leveled, he added.

The SOG has been closed and those locals who were working with it and who had played a leading role in elimination of dreaded terrorists have been transferred to far of areas, he said. This way the Government was also trying to create fear psychosis among the masses and further the game plan of separatists, he added.

Highlighting the exemplary courage and valor displayed by VDC members in the hilly belt of erstwhile Doda district, he said many of them laid down their lives in fighting terrorism and in Dachen area of Kishtwar a group of VDCs was eliminated in 2001 by terrorists but still they did not give up and continued their fight against terror. Seeing that their game plan of forcing the migration of nationalist people from erstwhile Doda district will not work in presence of VDCs, the separatists have started throwing feelers against VDCs by defaming them and leveling wild allegations against its members, he added.

Mohammed Rafiq, a youth from Kishtwar while defending the VDCs said that in case they are disbanded the situation will again deteriorate in this hilly belt and become worst than 1995 when they were constituted to instill sense of security among the people who were scared of militants and trying to migrate to other areas for their safety and security. Let the Government restore peace fully in the State and break the back of terrorists as well as their harbourers and then talk of disbanding militancy.

Situation is not conducive for disbanding VDCs said Ramesh, a VDC SPO as after surrendering their guns, the VDC members will become the safe targets of militants who are still active in hilly reaches like Galadhar in Doda etc. "Justifying continuance of VDCs and appreciating their role, he said we saved our villages, protected people and assisted security forces in anti militancy operations."

He said prior to the constitution of VDCs in 1995 militants attacked twice our hamlet Kund-sarow in Doda and after the VDCs were constituted we eliminated three militants and since then no one dared to attack the village.

Same have been the views of Ali (changed name) from a remote village in Bhadarwah who said seven people were killed in his village by militants prior to constitution of VDCs in 1995 and forcing the people of both the communities to flee from the village. Then SSP

Doda called them and people demanded setting up of a police picket in the area, which he rejected saying that the Government does not have the manpower. "It was he (SSP) who asked us to constitute VDCs and fight terrorists by themselves". "We agreed this and eight VDCs were constituted and given eight guns-four to Hindus and four to Muslims. Since then people are living in complete peace and without any threat he added.

He said once the VDCs are disbanded the Government should make arrangements of providing quarters to all villagers at safer places so that they don't become the targets of militants again.

Rubbishing the separatist Hurriyat propaganda and its demand on disbanding VDCs, a local Sarpanch in a remote area of Bhadarwah said that Hurriyat leaders including Syed Ali Shah Geelani has no locus standi in demanding disbanding of VDCs as it is for the Government to take a decision. Since the threat is still there and situation has not become conducive, it will not be advisable to disband VDCs who have done a commendable job in elimination of militants from hilly reaches of Jammu region, he added.

He said VDCs provide security to people and they are a threat to anti national and anti social elements and not to the peace loving people. The Hurriyat is misleading the people in this regard by raking up the issue of disbanding VDCs which should be rejected lock stock and barrel, he added.

Justifying the role of VDCs BJP state spokesperson and National Executive member, Dr Jitendra Singh said that they were constituted in desperation by then Union Government led by P V Narsimha Rao in 1995 which wanted to start political process in the state and install the people Government there. The maximum benefit of constituting VDCs went to NC as smooth conduct of elections after over six years of Governor's rule became possible in the State and Dr Farooq Abdullah was installed the Chief Minister.

He said the malicious propaganda launched against the BJP is quite wrong as if the VDCs were only its brain child, Dr Singh said had they been not there the restoration of political process would have been a distant dream at that time. He alleged that both Congress and NC were exploiting the issue of VDCs from time to time for political gains. In 1990 both the parties used VDCs as a breakthrough against paralyzing terrorism, now when the elections are approaching both the parties have joined the separatist bandwagon in demanding winding up of VDCs.

He said to fight terrorism and protect people in remote villages, constitution of VDCs by arming villagers themselves to tackle militants was thought to be more feasible option. Recalling that both State and Central Governments at that time had backed the move to set up VDCs as it was also considered to be a major money saver since each member of the VDC was to be paid a humble sum of Rs 500 per month for his services, thus saving the Government crores of rupees that it would otherwise had to spend on stationing troops in remote and secluded villages.