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## MAGAZINE

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# KHEER BHAWANI CALLING

Sanjeev Bhat

Set in scintillating beauty of Chinar trees, Kheer Bhawani Tulmulla has historically been an abode of reverence for Hindus.

It is during the "Zaistha Ashtami" that a Mela gets underway every year when thousands of devotees from far-off places come here in large numbers for offering prayers and having the Divine Darshan of Devi Khir Bhawani. Using private vehicles, taxis and state Government provided buses, thousands of devotees flock to the shrine place and pay obeisance to Mata Kheer Bhawani, situated about 24 kms from summer capital of Srinagar city towards its north-east direction in Tulmulla village of Ganderbal district of Kashmir province.

This is perhaps the only mystical spring in the world where the colour of spring keeps on miraculously changing which is ascribed as the manifestation of the Goddess, serving as an advance signal about what is going to happen in the near future. The light green, milky, pink colours of the spring are suggestive of the auspicious omen while as the black is indicative of some inauspicious future happening. In Kashmir these changes are taken for granted as Devi Kheer Bhawani's indications of the future course of events.

The truth about the Mystic Spring is woven with legend and a symbol coinciding with the Ramayan times. The legend goes like this : Shri Ragyna " was put in 'Sani-wari" (a small earthen pot) by " Ravana". After "Ravana" got killed as a consequence of his 'Dush Karmas', Mahavira, under the instructions of Mata Ragyna, brought the Devi on his shoulders in the same 'Sani-wari' to 'Satisar-Desh' i.e. Kashmir- to make the Tulmulla's Main Jal Kund her abode. Even those places became 'Vaishnav pithas' where even some Jal drops from the 'Sani-wari' had fallen during this expedition.

The abode of the 'Maha Ragyna' is this Mystic spring. This temple is a divine invitation to all the devotees to see how the Para-Prakriti functions. On the entrance gate of the main temple is "Shree Chakra" which is the indicator of the 'Shakti' of Devi Bhagwati. This Kheer Bhawani Mystic Jal Kund is situated in the centre of many islands. Around it



The mystic spring at Kheer Bhawani temple.

flows small streams named "Gang-Khi" the water to which comes from the main Sindu river. It is said that water to "GangKhi" seeps in through Amarnath and Gangibal. All the islands are covered by small trees.

It was Bringesh Sahita" which was the source of all the information related to the Dhams / Holy places of the Kashmir. In one such Sahita titled "Ragyna Pradurbava"-the description of the sacredness of the shrine of 'Kheer Bhawani' Tulamulla, Kashmir is given. As per one legend the learned Brahman of Bohri Kadal, Srinagar Sh. Govind Ji Gadoo

Upon reading a 'Dharam Grantha' set out for locating the sacred place. As per another legend a devout Brahmin Krishna Taploo envisioned the Goddess who came in his dream and manifested herself as a serpent and directed him to move in the north-east direction. He then set-out on the Yatra by following a Serpent, finally reaching the sacred spot to which the Serpent had led him to.

When the Serpent demarcated the Holy Kund, Panditji marked the place where the Serpent had stopped, stood-up and finally immersed. That is how this sacred "Jal Kund"

became known to the masses who would thereafter come to this place in large numbers.

Earlier a Shatoosh tree which had grown in the main Jal Kund was the place considered as the 'Vas Sathal' of Devi Bhawani and the prayers were offered there. Later Dogra Rulers beautified the main "Jal Kund". The existing temple was built by Maharaja Pratap Singh in 1896 A.D. Under the supervision of Pandit Vedi Lal Dhar this small marble shrine was constructed in the shape of an island in the middle of the sacred spring, fur-

nished with metal railing and its surroundings paved with Baramulla Stones. One Shah Radha Krishen constructed the retaining wall for the 'Amrit Kund'. Currently the Shrine is being looked after by the Dharmarth Trust.

The design of the main "Jal Kund, having seven corners, is somewhat irregular and has allegorical meaning. The temple in which the Goddess resides is the Centre (Bhindu) the spiritual fountain of power. The surrounding water of the island is the ocean of infinite life energy full of dormant potentialities, which spread, unfold, expand and transform into tangible reality - and the Goddess under the Canopy is the Precious Stone that grants all desires.

Before entering the Shrine premises the devotees take a Holy dip in the Gang-Khi. Devotees do "Parikrama" of the Holy Kund. They gather in front of the Holy kund along with the "Pooja Samigri" for prayers as per the conventions and immerse in the Holy Kundwater, Milk, Sugar, Badam, Mishri, Kishmish, flower Petals and Lotus Flowers as their "Shradha-Suman". As these flower petals gather along with the other "Pooja-Samigri" on the surface of the Kund it looks like a "Divya Darshan" and this floating splendor looks like a "Devi-Prasad". Devotees do "Samohik Arti" by lighting the earthen Ghee lamps and by singing the praise of the Divine Mother and seek to get merged themselves in "Adi-Shakti-Saroopas Divinity.

Unprecedented rush of displaced Kashmiri Pandits at Kashmir shrine of Khir Bhawani (Tulmulla) on Zeistha Ashtami-the Mela day (which this year falls on Monday, June 17) has, in fact, over the years, turned the shrine place into an abode for re-unification of KPs as this shrine place has eventually become a call-back epicenter- inducing the Kashmiri Pandits from across the country to visit Kashmir valley to celebrate Zaistha Ashtami in form of a Kheer Bhawani Mela thereby bridging gaps in minds of Kashmiri Pandits besides reinforcing communal amity between Hindus and Muslims as besides most Kashmiri Pandits, the local Muslims also flock the Kashmir valley on this day to participate in the annual Mela at the shrine place.

# THE GREAT GENERAL

Col J P Singh

Maharaja Gulab Singh was born on 21st October 1792 corresponding to 5th Kartik 1849 at Smailpur, Jammu. His father Mian Kishore Singh did not put a satchel and books on his shoulders or gave toys and kites in his hands but gave him a bow and arrows. As he grew up, he showed interest in hunting. Like any privileged youth, he would go out on the horse back to see the landscape and ride along the ravines. He would watch the thundering monsoon clouds and the fast flowing streams. The thunders of the clouds and serenity of streams stirred the inner of his heart and kindled in him the desire of doing something remarkable in life. His grand father Mian Zorawar Singh took keen interest in his bringing up and sent him to live with his brother Mian Mota, Madar-ul-Maham of Raja Jit Singh, the last ruler of Jammu. Gulab Singh learnt the art of warfare and manners of the courtiers from the younger brother of his grandfather.

Somewhere between Lahore, the capital of Maharaja Ranjit Singh of Punjab and Kashmir, the citadel of Afghan rulers, lay a small township of Akhnoor, earlier known as 'aankhon ka noor'. The prolific Chanderbhaga River (Chenab) blessed this landmass. This is the town where historic Buddha Stupas at Ambaran representing existence of Buddhism and magnificent forts of Akhnoor and Ambaran exist depicting its pristine glory. It was here, under the Jeo Pota tree at the Northern bank of a river Chenab that Maharaja Ranjit Singh anointed Gulab Singh as the ruler of Jammu on 17 June 1822 and set in motion the consolidation of a vast empire of Gulab Singh's dream.

Meteorite rise of Gulab Singh dates

back to 1808 when at the tender age of 16, he distinguished himself in the battle of Gumat. He led a contingent of young Dogras and blunted the successes of Sikh Army and forced them into treaty with Raja Jit Singh. Impressed by his courage, bravery and swordsmanship, Bhai Hukam Singh Chimni, the invading Sikh Chief, narrated the story of his prowess to Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Ruler of Punjab appointed him as cavalryman and soon elevated him to the command of a cavalry unit. Imbued with the spirit of adventure and gallantry, Gulab Singh rose to be an astute strategist of Ranjit Singh.

In 1815 AD Maharaja Ranjit Singh led an expedition to invest Garh Damala Fort which was a lofty castle in the Jalandar Doab frontiers. This strong mud fort was once the headquarters of Hoshiarpur principality. Maharaja Ranjit Singh therefore prepared well for the siege. He was not happy about Gulab Singh's overstay at Jammu. On being informed of the impending attack on the fort and seeing it as an opportunity to win Maharaja's favours, Dhian Singh sent a message to Gulab Singh to join the ranks at Hoshiarpur. It is mentioned in Gulabnama that while the Maharaja was mounted on the majestic elephant and was inspecting preparations for assault on the fort, Gulab Singh surfaced in front of the Emperor and performed the formalities of salutations. After that Gulab Singh pulled up his horse swiftly like wind and put a handful of coins in the King's 'hawardai' as a token of obeisance. The horse rested his front hoofs on the forehead of the regal elephant. It astonished the spectators. Aloud note of approbation arose. Maharaja was so pleased of this act of chivalry that he asked Mahoot to receive

the 'nazrana'. When Maharaja diverted his attention towards storming the fort, Gulab Singh being anxious to lead the attack on the enemy and storm the fort, exhorted the Maharaja to watch his feats. Gulab Singh pulled the reins of his horse and all alone fell upon the enemy as a lion. In the twinkling of an eye, Gulab Singh crossed the moat of the fort and got atop the coveted castle; dug down his spear like a flag on the wall of the fort. By this heroic deed he made history in the splendor of dash and gallantry. On witnessing this rare dash, valiant blood thirsty warriors got inspired and assaulted the fort from all sides. Soon the contest became a bloody affair. After sometime the resistance broke at the entrance of the gate. The royal force marched in. Maharaja amazed at such an unexpected and instantaneous victory, prostrated himself in sincere gratitude at the threshold of the Almighty. He bestowed untold honours and favours to Gulab Singh. Jagirs of Lala Chabara and Ramgarh were given to Gulab Singh with authority to raise 200 horsemen. Gulab Singh went to Lal Chabara, two neighbouring village near Sialkot, took control of his Jagir and enrolled fresh sowars to raise his own army. Due to constraints of space, only onesuchdaringfeatsbeing enumerated.

As a military commander he rendered meritorious services to his master in all his campaigns especially in Multan, Attock, Kabul, Kandhar, Manerka, Dera Gazi Khan, Reasi, Kishtwar and Kashmir. By a rare bold strategy he captured Raja Agha Khan of Rajouri & neutralized Mian Dido who had been eluding Sikh forces for a long time. With his similar other remarkable contributions, conscientious and loyal services,



192ND CORONATION DAY 17 June

Maharaja Ranjit Singh could expand and consolidate his Empire. Maharaja Ranjit Singh had realised that control of Dogra country was a difficult task. His wisdom in enlisting services of able Dogras was at once obvious and prudent. The country side was disturbed. Each chieftain plundered his neighbour. Gulab Singh's abilities were over taxed in restoring order. Hence Maharaja Ranjit Singh made a prudent decision to make him ruler of troubled Duggarland. Gulab Singh received striking recognition when Maharaja Ranjit Singh personally installed him Raja of Jammu on 17 June 1822 when he was just 30.

By knitting together scattered principalities of erstwhile Jammu empire of Raja Rajan Ranjit Dev, he laid the foundation of a future State of Jammu and Kashmir. Gulab Singh received vast jagirs in Punjab including Salt Mines of Pind Dadan Khan on the right bank of

River Jhelum worth lakhs on lease and in addition exercised authority over hill territories from Ravi to Jhelum.

He extended his rule far and wide by capturing Ladakh, Baltistan, Gilgit and 500 sq miles of Tibet. No Indian ruler in the past, not even Chandragupta Maurya or Mughal emperors had attempted to invade Tibet but Raja Gulab Singh did it in 1841. His brave General Zorawar Singh drew swords with the Tibetan Army and thus extended the borders of Dogra empire to the other side of Himalayas. It was to the credit of this great genius that by the time he was 55, he extended the borders of his empire touching China in the North, Tibet in the North East, Uzbekistan and Afghanistan in the North West & NWFP in the West. Gulab Singh was so great a general and so astute a statesman that his contemporaries referred to him as 'Ulysses of the Hills' and 'Talleyrand of the East'.

Maharaja Gulab Singh who created a vast State of Jammu and Kashmir and changed the Indian map, was a symbol of nationhood and secularism. He is one of the few historical legacies that India can be genuinely proud of. By extending borders too far to the North, he provided ample strategic depth to the capital of India. His contributions to our political, cultural and religious lives are remembered on 17th June every year at Jeo Pota by Raj Tilak Celebration Committee Akhnoor and on 21 Oct every year at the Royal Retreat by Maharaja Gulab Singh Memorial Trust. His Highness left for his heavenly abode on 30th August 1858 from Srinagar at the age of 66. His memory will help us sustain nationalism, ethnicity and regional pride. Magnificent statue of His Exalted Highness in front of elegant Amar Mahal tells remarkable tales of wisdom, sagacity & achievements of the founder ruler.