

# **Bala Devi of Balahama, Srinagar**

## ***Isht Devi of Dogra Rulers***

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Ancient Hindu Shrines in Kashmir are under constant threat of oblivion either due to neglect or destruction.

The village Balhama named after the Goddess Bala Devi is thirteen kilometers from Srinagar and is surrounded by the village Wuyan in the east, Khanmoh and Zewan in the north and Pampore in the west. The shrine of Bala Devi is connected with link roads from the National Highway IA via Sempore and Pampore town. From Sempore the Shrine is at a distance of 4 kms and from Pampore at a distance of two kilometers.

### **BALA DEVI SHRINE**

The shrine of Bala Devi has Jagir has thirty kanals of land attached to it. Around the shrine proper are twelve brick pillars covered with the galvanised iron sheets. The space in between the pillars is fenced with grills. This sort of renovation was undertaken in 1975. Earlier the shrine was open on all sides. Around the five sacred devdar trees in the shrine are twenty stone idols of gods and goddesses. Painted with Vermillion these are of ancient date. There is also a Shiv Linga in the Shrine.

### **MYTHOLOGY**

Bata Devi is mentioned in Mahakala-Samhita, Mantra Mahodadhi, Sri Lalitopakhyan and Haritayan Samhita or Tripura-Rahasya.

The three eyed Bala Devi has the moon crescent above her forehead and she has in her hands the book and beads, and the other two hands are in Abhay and Dhyan Mudra. She is of red complexion and wears red clothes. Sometimes she is depicted holding Ankusa and Pasa in addition to beads and the book. She is bedecked with the necklace of gems and pearls.

The account of Sri Bala Devi is given in the 22nd chapter of Sri Lalitopakhyan which forms part of Brahmmand Purana.

According to this text Sri Bala Devi is said to be the daughter of Sri Lalitmaha Tripura Sundari. At the age of nine years she became terribly angry after seeing the Bandasura and his thirty sons who were marching ahead for a war. Bala Devi requested her mother Maha Bhatarika Sri Lalita Tripura Sundari to allow her to fight with the Bandasura. Permission for which was not allowed by her mother because of her tender age. On her daughter's insistence she not only gave her the permission but also one of her shields and number of her attributes. With this preparation she proceeded on a chariot towards the battle field. After an intense fight she was able to kill the thirty sons of Bandasura.

In Haritayan Samhita or Tripura-Rahasya, (Chapter 63), Bala Devi at the age of eight years is said to have fought directly with Bandasura. Knowing that her mother won't give her the permission she quietly

proceeded towards the battle field on a chariot followed by Mantrani and Dandani.

Bala Devi was able to pierce the mighty forces of Bandasura with her rain of arrows and then confronted the Kutilaksh, riding on a mighty elephant, the commander of the forces of Bandasura. Bala Devi showered the arrows on the elephant and thereafter killed Kutilaksh. Bala Devi alone destroyed the army of Bandasura and then directly confronted the Asura. Instead of attacking Bala Devi, Bandasura showered flowery arrows on the Devi. Seeing this the charioteer of Devi was astonished and asked the Devi the reason for the same. Bala Devi said, "In the last incarnation Bandasura was Mahadoot of Srilakshmi and his name was Manik Shekhar. He was an ardent devotee of Bagvati Lalita Maha Tripura Sundari. Because of the curse on him he became Asura and he was told to earn salvation only by being killed by me. Knowing that I am the daughter of Sri Lalita Amba he is worshipping me." The war was destined and both began to fight. After defeating the opponents Bala Devi returned to her abode, Sripuri.

## **FOLK LORE**

According to the local folk lore the original abode of Bala Devi is in the South India. It is said that the saint of the temple had a dream in which she told him to visit Kashmir where he could have her darshana. The saint along with his devotees as per the divine blessing visited the village of Balahama which was a dense forest at that time. The goddess gave darshana to the saint in a spring. In order to keep the sanctity of the shrine she directed him to plant trees around the spring. The saint planted five saplings of Devdar trees around the spring which in the course of time grew to full size and covered the entire spring. The spring is no more visible today. The five Devdar trees are believed to be more than five thousand years old and are the principle object of veneration.

Bala Devi is the family deity of the Dogra rulers in the Valley. Dogra ruler, Maharaja Pratap Singh used to walk bare foot for about a kilometer to reach this shrine as a matter of respect and devotion towards this shrine. Devotees used to worship by reciting the hymns in the praise of goddess and the milk was offered.

Every year havan was performed in the month of Magh on the day of Tikchorum. Havan was also performed on other auspicious days especially on Haar Chorum. Late Pandit Jai Lal of Balahama was priest of this temple till his death in 1993.

## **MANAGEMENT OF THE SHRINE**

Till 1947 the Shrine was maintained by the Dogra regime and later it was taken over by the Dharmarth Trust. But it was not taken proper care of by the Trust authorities on the pretext that there was no income from this Shrine. The local body named Bala Devi Asthapan Committee was formed in 1973 with Pandit Niranjana Nath as President, Pandit Omkar Nath as Secretary, Pandit Prithvinath and Pandit Radha Krishan as members. The first task the committee undertook was to fence the land around the shrine to prevent encroachment. Seeing the initiative taken by the villagers the Dharmarth Trust also came into action and sanctioned one chowkidar for the shrine. The committee played a great role in renovating the temple and arranging the religious functions from time to time.

Under the present circumstances one can only hope that powers of Bala Devi will act as a shield against the forces of evil, ignorance and darkness till the dawn of a new era of peace and prosperity.

Five families are still living in the village, Pt. Niranjana Nath expired in January 1999.