

TEMPLES OF KATAS: THEIR HISTORICAL AND RELIGIOUS SIGNIFICANCE

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Öz: Katas Tapınağı: Tarihi ve Dini Önemi: Katas Tapınağı (Punjab Pakistan) Hindu mitolojide çok ciddi bir öneme sahiptir. Nitekim kuruluşu hakkında birçok mitolojik kurgu yer almaktadır. Tapınağın kurulduğu bölge aynı zamanda Raj Katas olarak da bilinmektedir. Bu bölgede değişik Hindu dinlere ait bir çok tarihi yapı kompleksi de mevcuttur. Bu tarihi mekan birçok uygarlığa şahitlik yapmış olup bunun izlerini de üzerinde taşımaktadır. Bu önemine rağmen malasef akademik düzlemde ciddi anlamda çalışılmamıştır. Bundan dolayı biz bu çalışmamızda bahis mevzuu bu tapınağın tarihi ile önemi hakkında bilgiler vermeyi amaçladık.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Katas Tapınağı, Raj Katas, Punjab

Abstract: Temples of Katas (Punjab-Pakistan) hold a very important place in the Hindu mythology especially due to a sacred pond which has different stories regarding its formation. Also this area known as Raj Katas, consists of several historical buildings; mostly related to different branches of Indian religions. Moreover, this place has seen countless invasions and various civilizations, which resulted in impression of other religions on the culture of this area in different periods. However, due to the partition of India their importance has been generally forgotten. This article is aimed at tracing and compiling the history of the temple in order to educate people about its significance. The foremost issue associated with Raj Katas is that no author of international standing has worked on this topic. That resulted in lack of material on this topic.

Key Words: Temples of Katas, Raj Katas, Punjab

Problem Statement

The present author tried his best to collect the available sources, most of which are works by local writers. The problem with majority of these works is that they do not follow the academic standards and do

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not abide by a set manual of style for citation of the sources on which they rely. Besides, there are a lot of contradictions between the statements of these authors on various issues. Therefore, for collection of authentic information, author had to rely mainly on interviews with some of Hindu Pundits and religious scholars. This too was not free from problems as it was found that some of the Hindu religious leaders were not quite clear and consistent on this particular topic. Also their fear of being minority in Islamic Republic of Pakistan was a factor for not becoming too much open on discussing their religious activities and teachings. However, despite having such difficulties author tried to come up with a clear understanding of the topic at hand. Major part of the present project has been carried out in the form of fieldwork; that is interviews with Hindu personalities and field observation.

Introduction

In the Chakwal district of Punjab-Pakistan, a cluster of historical Hindu temples and residential buildings are located. The complex of these buildings is known as Raj Katas, where Hindu *Brahmans*² and *Kashtriyas*,^{3,4} have been supposedly involved in religious practices from thousands of years.

The real name of Katas was “*Katakasha*” or “*Katak-Shal*” which became Katas with the passage of time.⁵ *Katakasha* literally means “weeping eyes” in Sanskrit language.⁶ According to another tradition, the real name of Katas was “*Teksh Raj*,” which means “King of snakes”.⁷ *Subhan Rae Batalvi* in his book *Summary of the Histories* has termed this place as “*Kott Chena*”. All of these names coupled with the legend of the Lord *Shiva*⁸ and the death of one of his wives have given this place significant importance in Hindu religion.

2 The intellectual and spiritual leaders of Hindus e.g. religious personalities and teachers.

3 The protectors of Hindu society e.g. politicians, police and the military.

4 The two most superior castes in Hinduism out of four, including “*Vaisyas*” on number three which are the skillful producers of material things in the society like merchants and the last and the lowest cast “*Shudras*” the followers or the maintenance people for the so-called menial workers or hard laborers.

5 Raja Muhammad Arif Minhas, *Pakistan Ky Asaar e Qadima*, Islamabad: Jadid Traders Book Center, 1997, p. 414.

6 Personal Interview of Pundit Jairam Maharaj, 17/03/2012 (Karishna Mandar Saddar Rawalpindi).

7 Sahibzada Sultan Ali, *Salt Range mein Asaar e Qadema*, Chakwal: Asad Muhammad Publishers Rawalpindi, 1998, p. 99.

8 Also known as *Maha-deva* (Great God). He is a popular Hindu deity who is believed all and in all as the creator, preserver, destroyer, revealer and concealer of all beings in *Shaivism* (one of the four most widely followed sects of Hinduism). However, he is considered “the Destroyer” or “the Transformer” only among the *Tri-murti* concept of Hinduism (the Hindu Trinity of the primary aspects of the divine).

Of these buildings in Raj Katas, the *Shiva* Temple and the temples of *Satt-garrah* are famous. However, for Hindus the most important object related to this historical site is the sacred pond, which is located amid various temples. This pond is believed to be in existence from time immemorial and according to *Mahabharata*,^{9,10,11} it was discovered by one of the five *Pandus*¹² when he was looking for water.¹³ According to the legend, this pond represents the tears of the Lord *Shiva* who wept on the death of his wife so much that his tears made this pond. These legendary connections with *Shiva* give the pond in Raj Katas an importance that supersedes anything else in the whole complex. Apparently, all of the temples in this area have been built to express the sanctification of this sacred pond.

One is reminded of the fact that the caste system in Hinduism precludes free mixing of different castes. The Raj Katas has remained the pilgrimage destination for the *Brahmans*, and *Kashtriyas*. Even today, the pilgrims pay visit to this area to take a bath in the sacred pond and to pay homage to the *Shiva* temple.¹⁴ The importance of *Shiva* temple lies in the red stone that has been attributed to the Lord *Shiva*. It is believed that the sacred stone blesses the devotees with children. Another important part of Raj Katas is the adjoining language university. This place has remained one of the important seats of learning *Sanskrit language*.^{15,16} Some references indicate that Al-Biruni (973-1048 CE) has also spent some time in this university and learnt Sanskrit language.¹⁷ While staying here he attempted to measure the circumference of the Earth and wrote his book *Kitab-al-Hind*.¹⁸ However, there is no strong evidence that Al-Biruni had himself built this university.

- 9 Liaqat Ali Khan Niazi, *Tarikh e Chakwal*, Chakwal: Anjamun e Toqeer e Adab, 1992, p. 147.
- 10 It is often translated as "the great tale of the *Bhârata dynasty*" of Hindu tradition. The *Mahabharata* is the longest known Sanskrit epic that has been described as "the longest poem ever written." Basically, this epic narrates of the *Kurukshetra War* (Happened sometime between 16th and 10th century BCE – fought for 18 days) and describes the fates of the *Korus* or *Kaurava* and the *Pandus* or *Pandava* princes in the consequences of this war. However the war resulted as a victory for *Pandus* and its allies with the fall of *Korus*.
- 11 *Mahabharata*: The author consulted Hindu pundits in Islamabad and Rawalpindi-Pakistan. They admitted that Raj Katas is mentioned in *Mahabharata* but they were unable to point out.
- 12 5 sons of *Pandu*, who ruled some part of India in ancient period and main characters of *Mahabharata*.
- 13 Muhammad Abid Husain Minhas, *Tarikh e Kahoon*, Chakwal: M.S Composing Center, Bhoon, 2002, p. 38.
- 14 Personal Interview of Mr Sajid, 26/02/2012: Guide in Katas.
- 15 Niazi, *Tarikh e Chakwal*, p. 147.
- 16 It is the ancient language of India and the Indian subcontinent. Primarily, it is famous for being liturgical language of Hinduism.
- 17 Abid Minhas, *Dywtain ka daes Raj Katas*, Rawalpindi: Nazku Art Printers, 2007. p. 17.
- 18 Personal Interview of Mr Sajid, 26/02/2012: Guide in Katas.

This place has seen countless invasions, which resulted in impacts of other religions on the culture of this area. Raja *Harri Singh* mansion beside the temples is one such indication. Subsequent buildings and temples show the influences of not only Hinduism but also that of Jainism, Buddhism and Sikhism. After the partition of the Subcontinent,¹⁹ Hindus abandoned this area and migrated to India.²⁰ Ever since, the temple complex has come under the control of Archaeological Department, government of Pakistan.

A Brief History of Raj Katas

History of Raj Katas predates the birth of Jesus by hundreds of years. No one knows how many nations and civilizations have been in this place. There are no authoritative works that show the genesis of this place and other related details. Some indirect references to this place give only a bleak picture of this place and times have wiped the exact face of this area. Even the names of this place have been changing. For instance, during the British rule, Katas was famous by the name of *Ammar Kand*.²¹

Raj Katas consists of several historical buildings related to various religions and civilizations. These buildings were constructed in different periods. According to legends, the sacred pond relates to early history of Hinduism, temples of *Satt-garrah* relate to the times of *Pandu* brothers, the Sanskrit university relates to the period of Al-Biruni and the *Buddhist Stupa*²² related to period when Buddhism thrived in this part of the world. Most of the writers focus only on the sacred pond and temples of *Satt-garrah* providing some random information and without going into much detail.

Legends apart, one of the known reconstruction or renovation of this place took place in the reign of King Akbar (1542-1606 CE). After that, Sardar Gulab Singh (1792-1857 CE) gave support for plaster and renovation of the Raj Katas. Now, Government of Punjab-Pakistan has allocated 1.0523 million dollars for renovation of this complex and the renovation of it is in process. Already, a considerable work has been done.

19 Generally it includes the core lands of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

20 Personal Interview of Mr Riaz Malik, 05/04/2012: Ex-Headmaster of High School Chakwal.

21 Minhas, *Dywtanka daes Raj Katas*, p. 6.

22 Literally meaning "heap"; basically, it is a mound-like structure made up of mud or clay or a cairn, containing Buddhist relics and especially used by Buddhists as a place of meditation.

References are found about Raj Katas in the *first mandal*²³ of *Mahabharata*²⁴ and *Rig Veda*.^{25,26,27} Apart from these two sources, it is hard to find any other historical book with any reference to Raj Katas. The famous book of Hindu legends *Mahabharata* was written between 400 to 200 BCE (some modern scholars say it was written between 1000 to 1500 CE, while according to some Hindu *Pundits*²⁸ its history dates back to 4000 BCE).²⁹ *Mahabharata* gives an indication of this place in the story of *Pandus*³⁰ when they were given exile of 12 years and also in the story of *Ram* or *Rama*³¹ during his exile of 14 years with his wife *Sitta*³² and brother *Lakhan*. This place is also attributed with the birth of the Lord *Shiva*.³³ It is also famous for the legend of the death place of *Shiva's* beloved wife *Satti* or *Par-Vatti*³⁴ and the resultant formation of pool. According to the Hindu beliefs, the sacred pond at Raj Katas temple in Chakwal district of Punjab-Pakistan and *Pushkar Lake* in the district of Ajmer Sharif-India are two eyes of *Shiva*.³⁵

Before partition of India and Pakistan, Hindus from around all India use to come here twice in a year for their religious practices. They used to visit this place on the first day of *Besakh*³⁶ and then in the beginning of winter session.³⁷ According to another tradition, there used

23 First part or session.

24 Ali, *Salt Range mein Asaar e Qadema*. p. 97.

25 Minhas, *Pakistan Ky Asaar e Qadima*. P. 414.

26 First part of *Vedas*, out of four including "*Yajur Veda*", "*Sama Veda*" and "*Atharva Veda*". In Hinduism, these four *Vedas* are believed as directly revealed knowledge by *Brahma* (the creator).

27 The *Rig Veda* contains several mythological and poetical accounts of the origin of the world, hymns praising the gods, and ancient prayers for life and prosperity.

28 The term originates from the Sanskrit language that means "learned or teacher".

29 Personal Interview of Pundit Jairam Maharaj, 17/03/2012 (Karshna Mandar Saddar Rawalpindi).

30 5 sons of *Pandu* and grandsons of *Vyasa* (a central figure in most Hindu traditions, who is often praised for classifying *Vedas* into four parts).

31 In Hinduism, he is believed to be the seventh *avatar* (descent) of the Hindu god *Vishnu*. He is the Supreme God of *Vaishnavism* (one of the four most influential denominations in contemporary Hinduism) and "the Preserver" among the *Tri-murti* concept of Hinduism (the Hindu Trinity of the primary aspects of the divine).

32 She is considered by Hindus to be an *avatar* (descent) of *Lakshmi devi* (Hindu Goddess of wealth, love, prosperity and beauty) and the embodiment of perfect womanhood.

33 Minhas, *Dywtoun ka daes Raj Katas*, p. 14.

34 Minhas, *Pakistan Ky Asaar e Qadima*, p. 414.

35 Personal Interview of Mr. Raja Asif Bhagwani (Ex-President Pakistan Hindu Council Karachi)

36 The day of *Baisakhi* is celebrated in various regions of India by different names and different rituals. This is because the day of *Baisakhi* holds special significance for Hindus along with *Sikhs*. For Hindus, April 13th mark the time of New Year in Hindu solar calendar and they celebrate the day with rituals like bathing, partying and worshipping. Another legend associated with the day is that Goddess *Ganga* descended to earth thousands of years ago on this day. Many Hindus therefore celebrate the day in the honor of Goddess *Ganga* by taking a sacred dip in the river *Ganga* or sacred lakes.

37 Mazhar ul Islam, *Potohar*, Islamabad: Look Wirsy ka Qaomi Idara, 1978, p. 126.

to be one annual festival in this area.³⁸ At present, the arrival of visitors from India depends on the diplomatic situation between the India and Pakistan. In the recent years, however, pilgrims from India are coming regularly to this place in the months of February and March.³⁹

Description of Raj Katas's Historical Temples Complex

Raj Katas consists of multiple temples. According to an estimate, it contains above one hundred temples that have been built over thousands of years.⁴⁰ Different temples have been constructed in different regimes. Thus, the historical buildings of Raj Katas symbolize different civilizations and depict the cultures of different invaders over. At present, the main observable parts are as follows:

Shiva Temple

As one enters the complex, *Shiva* temple comes first. Its entrance is a recessed round arch with faint cusps and a rectangular opening to the north. The importance of this temple is supreme as it contains a holy rock. This is believed to be the rock of God *Shiva*. The details of the legends about the rock will be discussed in the next section.

Bara Dari

Basically the word "Bara-Dari" means a building with 12 doors. It is linked with the sacred pool and lies on its east. There used to be four minarets over this Bara Dari, which got ruined with the passage of time. There used to be a big statue in this place that was worshiped by Hindus when they used to live in this region before the partition of India and Pakistan.⁴¹ Hindus used to sit in this Bara Dari and perform their religious services.

Sacred pond

It is considered as one of the most sacred pond by Hindus. The importance of this pond is only second to *Shiva* temple as its water is considered holy by the Hindus and is also attributed to the tears of *Shiva*. The water of this pond is used for the purification from sins. Before partition every year hundreds of Hindus use to visit this pond in the month of February and March to take bath in its water.⁴²

38 Batalvi, Subhan Rae, Zaidi Hasan Nazir, *Khulastul Tarikh*, Lahore: Markazi Urdu board, p. 118.

39 Personal Interview of Mr Sajid, 26/02/2012: Guide in Katas.

40 Personal Interview of Mr Abid Minhas 26/02/2012 (Chairman Research Society Chakwal).

41 Minhas, *Dywtanka daes Raj Katas*, p. 23.

42 Personal Interview of Mr. Raja Asif Bhagwani (Ex-President Pakistan Hindu Council Karachi)

Temple of Hanu-maan

The *Hanu-maan*⁴³ temple is on the western extreme of a high rectangular enclosure with entrances on the south and the north. The temple's ceiling is undecorated, and lime-plastered. This temple was made with the local stone. The roof and different parts on the walls have become damaged.

Temple of Ram-Chandara

Rama or *Ram-Chandra* is the Hero of *Ramayana*⁴⁴ and this temple was built to worship him in this area. This temple is situated to the west of the Sacred Pond and is closed from all sides except for an entrance on the east. The double-storied structure has eight rooms of various dimensions on the ground floor and a staircase at the south leading to the first floor. The temple has two *jha-ro-kas* (balconies) that had been severely damaged but now renovated by the efforts of Pakistan Government.

Note: Akbar became Mughal emperor at the age of thirteen in 1556 CE; He built cordial relations with Hindu *Raj-puts*⁴⁵ and married from their families. He spent a huge amount of money on the renovation and rebuilding of the temples of Katas and *Stupas* of Buddah. He also appointed a Hindu governor named "*Mann Singh*" to look after this area.⁴⁶ *Mann Singh* renovated *Satt-garrah* Temples and built *Shiva*, *Hanu-maan* and *Ram Chandara* Temples in Akbar's era, whereas according to some writers these temples were built in latter era.⁴⁷

Meeting Hall and the Residences of Pundits

The meeting hall was the place where Hindu *pundits* and the *Rajas*⁴⁸ would meet and discuss the religious issues.⁴⁹ Besides meeting halls, there are small residences where *pundits* used to live. All of their houses are of same color and size.

43 A Hindu god, who is an ardent devotee of *Rama* according to the Hindu legends. He is also a central character in the Indian epic *Ramayana* (one of the great Hindu epics).

44 *Rāma* and *ayana* together means "Rama's Journey". It tells the story of *Rama* whose wife *Sitta* was abducted by *Ravana*, the king of Lanka (present day Sri Lanka).

45 A Sanskrit term routed from *raja-putra*, means "son of a king". They claim to be descendants of ruling Hindu warrior classes of North India and rose to prominence during the 9th to 12th centuries. Until the 20th century, *Raj-puts* ruled in the states of *Rajasthan* and *Surashtra* (present day Indian region)

46 Minhas, *Tarikh e Kahoon*, p. 57.

47 Personal Interview of Mr Abid Minhas 26/02/2012 (Chairman Research Society Chakwal).

48 A Sanskrit term which means a monarch or princely rulers.

49 Personal Interview of Mr Sajid, 26/02/2012: Guide in Katas.

Mansion of Harri Singh

On the extreme western end of *Ram Chandara Temple* is located the mansion of Harri Singh. Before construction of the mansion, this place was women's abode during the reign of some *Maharaj(as)*.⁵⁰ As one enters the main entrance, one finds ten rooms. They are followed by three lawns and two outdoor halls. In 2006-7, under a Punjab government's renovation project doors, roofs and the damaged parts have been repaired or replaced. *Harri Singh Nalwa* (1791-1837 CE) was a general of *Maharaj(a) Ranjit Singh* (1780-1839 CE) and the ruler of Kashmir.⁵¹ He got impressed with the beauty of this area and constructed this mansion. He used to spend some time in this place with his family.

Remaining's of a Buddhist Stupa

The remains of a Stupa here affirm the Buddhist influence. Doctor Stain, an archaeologist who visited the place in 1889,⁵² holds the view that all of these historical remains have been built in the time of *Ashoka*⁵³ (ca. 304-232 BCE). After the decline of Buddhism, the Hindus took hold of this place and changed the place to Hindu temples. According to Hsun Tsang, a Chinese tourist, there was a 200 feet high Buddhist Stupa in Katas which was made by Ashoka.⁵⁴

Temples of Satt-garrah

It consists of a group of seven ancient temples. It is located to the extreme east of the Raj Katas. The biggest temple is termed as *Vishnu ji Maharaj* (God Vishnu). Other six temples are as follows: *Shiva ji Maharaj*, *Ganesh ji Maharaj*,⁵⁵ *Shiva Ling Maharaj*, *Par-Vatti*, *Kali Mata* and *Lakshmi Devi*.⁵⁶ At present, all of these temples have become remains and the government of Pakistan has a plan to build them again.

The length of *Vishnu ji* temple is 68.5 feet and its breadth is 54.5 feet. A statue found from this temple is made from red stone. It is 3 feet in height and has three heads and four arms. The left head was that of lion

50 A Sanskrit title for a "great king" or "high king".

51 Muhammad Daood Tahir, *Nae Manzaleen haen Pukartin*, Lahore: Feroz Sons Privite Limited 2005, p. 299.

52 Ali, *Salt Range mein Asaar e Qadema*, p. 100.

53 An Indian emperor who ruled almost the entire Indian subcontinent from ca. 269 BCE to 232 BCE.

54 Farzana Masih, *Temples of the Salt Range*, University of Peshawar, 2000, p. 155.

55 He is one of the best-known and most worshipped deities in the Hinduism. Ganesha's elephant head helps him to be easily identified. Hindu sects worship him regardless of affiliations and he is widely believed to be the patron of arts and sciences and the God of intellect and wisdom.

56 Minhas, *Pakistan Ky Asaar e Qadima*, p. 94.

and the one in between was that of a human and the one on the right side was that of a pig. The temple of *Shiva ji Maharaj* depicts the God of natural law. *Ganesh ji* depicts the God of intellect and wisdom. *Shiva Ling* temple is known for giving children and is termed as the Creator. *Par-Vatti* temple illustrated the wife of *Shiva ji Maharaj* with the gentle aspect of Goddess *Durga* but on the other hand *Kali Devi* temple which means black Goddess illustrated the fierce aspect of the Goddess *Durga* in the sort of second personality of *Par-Vatti* with being Goddess of magic and sin. Because of that *Par-vatti* is considered to be a complete incarnation of Goddess *Durga*. It is argued that *Pandu brothers* during their exile for 12 years lived in Katas and made the seven temples of *Satt-garrah*, also known as *satt-gharra* (seven houses).⁵⁷

These temples belong to the latter style of Kashmir architecture which prevailed under the *Kar-Kota* and *Varma* dynasties from 625 to 939 CE and as the Salt Range belonged to the kingdom of Kashmir during the greater part of that time.⁵⁸ It is also said that above mentioned *Ram Chandara* temple was also built in this period as it was built in Kashmiri Style too.⁵⁹

Among these temples, “*Shiva Temple*” and “*The Sacred Pond*” are the center of religious activities of Hindus nowadays.⁶⁰ Hindu pilgrims come to Katas every year during the months of February, March to perform certain religious activities. But worldwide Hindu celebrates the *Shivaratri*⁶¹ on 26th of ‘*Magha*’ (according to Hindu calendar) which falls in February or March as per the Solar calendar.⁶²

There are some other significant historical places around Katas Temples like Al-Biruni University and small temples constructed by the followers of *Shiva* when their prayers were answered and desires fulfilled. The temples of Katas are mostly constructed on square platforms.

Al-Biruni University / University of Sanskrit Language

According to one tradition, the great Muslim philosopher, al-Biruni, remained in Katas for a certain period to learn Sanskrit language and build this university. It is also said that he wrote his magnum opus,

57 Sufi Muhammad Din Zar, *Tazkarah e Jehlam*, Lahore: Shoaib Graphic Art Printers, 1984, p. 14.

58 Farzana Masih, *Temples of the Salt Range*, University of Peshawar, 2000, p. 164.

59 Ali, *Salt Range mein Asaar e Qadema*, p. 119.

60 Personal Interview of Mr Sajid, 26/02/2012: Guide in Katas.

61 It is a Hindu festival, celebrated every year in reverence of Lord *Shiva*. It is the day when Lord *Shiva* was married to his second wife *Par-Vatti*.

62 Personal Interview of Mr. Raja Asif Bhagwani (Ex-President Pakistan Hindu Council Karachi).

Kitab al-Hind, in this area.⁶³ It is said that the great Muslim ruler of Afghanistan Mahmood Ghaznavi (971-1030 CE) invaded Bhera (At present a district of Punjab-Pakistan) and adjoining areas in 1006 CE. As a result, the present area of district Chakwal (At present a district of Punjab-Pakistan) including Katas also came under his rule. It was under his patronage that Al-Biruni lived in this area and learned Sanskrit.⁶⁴ However, some critics claim that Katas Raj University was already famous for its languages and al-Biruni simply spent some time in this area to learn the language. They do not agree that al-Biruni was the founder of this university but they do agree that he had lived in the castle of Malot (At present, a city in Chakwal district of Punjab) for two years in the adjoining area.⁶⁵

Legends about Raj Katas and the Sacred Pond

Raj Katas

Mahabharata is the book in which we find the reference to the war between *Pandus* and *Korus* at the place of Katas. *Pandu* was the ruler of the *Bharata-Varsha*⁶⁶ with the capital of *Hastinpur*.⁶⁷ He had five sons named *Yadhishthira*, *Bhima*, *Arjun*, *Nakul* and *Sahadev*.⁶⁸ On the death of *Pandu*,⁶⁹ the rule was transferred to his blind brother, *Dhritarashtra*, as his sons were still minors. However, the uncle took care of his nephews and gave the rule to one of his nephews. This caused a great deal of resentment among his sons especially with *Duryodhana*; eldest of the 100 brothers as he was dreaming of becoming the ruler. These 100 brothers are known in the history as *Korus* or *Kaurava*. *Korus* had made a plan to kill the *Pandus* and put their house on fire. However, *Pandus* escaped safe and went to the mountains of *Jehlum*.⁷⁰ *Arjun* (one of the five *Pandus*) impressed *Draupadi*, the daughter of the *Raja of Panchaal*⁷¹ in *Swayamvara*⁷² with his skills

63 Personal Interview of Mr Sajid, 26/02/2012: Guide in Katas.

64 Niazi, *Tarikh e Chakwal*, p. 148.

65 Ali, *Salt Range mein Asaar e Qadema*, p. 119.

66 A name of ancient Indian Kingdom, geographically known as Indian subcontinent at present time.

67 At present an area in *Meerut district* in the Indian state of *Uttar Pradesh*.

68 Minhas, *Dyutaun ka daes Raj Katas*, p. 7.

69 According to another reference the rule was transferred to *Dhritarashtra* not because of *Padu's* death but his voluntary renunciation of Kingdom. This was due to the fact that killing conjugal couple accidentally gave *Dhritarashtra* a chance to overcome in power.

70 It is a district in Punjab province of Pakistan.

71 An ancient Kingdom in present India.

72 *Swayam* in Sanskrit means self and *Vara* means bride-groom. In ancient India, it was a practice of choosing a husband. It was a contest, in which a list of suitors arrives at the girl's home or a specific venue on the appointed day and ask for her hand. The girl and her family get to choose among the suitors, sometimes through evaluating the completion of various tasks assigned. When the girl identifies the husband of her choice, she used to garland him and a marriage ceremony was being held immediately.

and married her. However, in the subsequent years, his elder brother *Yudhisthira* lost a gambling match and had to surrender everything including his all brothers. His blind uncle came in between and a deal was sought according to which the five *Pandus* had to live in exile for twelve years. The *Pandus* lived in Katas and made place of worship and residence (*Saat-garrah*) in Katas. It was their time in Katas that rose this place to prominence and a reference to this place has come in the book of *Mahabharata* that illustrated the war between the *Pandus* and *Korus* in which *Pandus* accomplished an everlasting victory over the *Korus*.

According to another story, the great God of Hindus, *Shiva*, was born in this place and it was his birth that has given prominence to this place.⁷³ This has led to the ultimate belief in Hinduism that this place is sacred from time immemorial. Raj Katas is also famous because of the belief that the great sacred book of Hinduism, *Mahabharata*, has been written in this place.⁷⁴

The Sacred Pond

In Sanskrit language, this pond has been termed as *Kataksha*, which means, “weeping eyes.” In the subsequent years, this word changed to *Katasha* or *Katta-kasha* but the meaning remained the same. Now this pond is termed as the sacred pond of Katas. Many legends are attributed to the sacred pool. The depth of this pond as per the Hindu belief is unlimited⁷⁵ and it depicts the signs of *Shiva* the God. However, according to independent researches, the depth of the pond is 300 feet. Overall it is believed that the sacred pond of Katas is next to the pond of *Javala-mukhi* (Ajmair-India) in its importance and was one of the biggest places of worship for Hindu devotees. According to *Mehkma Asar-i-Qadimah* “Hsun Tsangs” a Chinese tourist has said that this sacred pool has been called by several names in the past like, *Wiss*, *kund* or *Zehrela chasma* (poisonous lake), *Amar Kund*, *Chamar-Kund* and *Katak-sha Kund*.⁷⁶ Some historians mentioned its name *Katta-Kassha* or *Katak-Shell*, they say that the name was changed to Katas in the later periods. In *Mahabharat* Katas pond is called spring (chashma) of the world. According to *Mehkma Asar-i-Qadimah* its name was *Teksh-Raj* which means in Sanskrit “mansion of snakes” and with the passage of time it became prominent as Katas.

73 Personal Interview of Mr Malik Safdar Husain,05/04/2012: (Teacher in High School Katas).

74 Ali, *Salt Range mein Asaar e Qadema*, p. 97.

75 Personal Interview of Ram Channa Lal,22/04/2012 (Islamabad).

76 Sign Board of *Mehkma Asar-e-Qadima* of Government of Punjab Pakistan, in Raj Katas: 26/02/2012.

There are several other legends attributed to this pond which give it a paramount importance.

According to another Hindu tradition earth has two eyes and the pond of Katas depicts the left eye of the earth. The right eye of the earth lies near *Ajmair* at a place called *Amar-kand* pond, also known as *Pushkar*.⁷⁷ It is said that the death of the wife (either *Par-Vatti* or *Satti*) of *Shiva* made him weep to the extent that this place became a pond out of his tears.⁷⁸ He wept to the extent that rivers of tears flew through his eyes and miraculously two ponds were formed. One of them was formed at *Pushkar* or *Pokhar* in *Ajmair-India* and the second in *Katak-sha* or *Katak-shel* in *Punajb-Pakistan* (now known as *Katas*).

According to some religious circles of Hinduism, the wife of *Shiva*; *Satti*, burned herself at her father's place. As *Shiva* went there, he found eight pieces of her body excluding head and feet. He threw away all those eight parts in different directions. He also threw away the head in the sky and feet in the earth. The two eyes of *Shiva* marked on *Ling*⁷⁹ depict the weeping eyes of *Shiva*. The earth is weeping on this tragedy of the death of God's wife and the sadness of *Shiva*.⁸⁰ This has led to the formation of two sacred ponds of tears.

Another legend involves the death of *Shiva's* horse *Katas*. According to this legend, on the death of his beloved horse,⁸¹ *Shiva* cried so much that his tears created two holy ponds, one at *Pushkara* in *Ajmer-India* and the other at *Kataksha*, now known as *Raj Katas*.

Decreasing Water Level of the Sacred Pond

One of the major concerns raised by several Hindu scholars is that the holy places of Hinduism are not taken care of by Pakistani authorities. They raise questions about the proper care of their sacred pond in *Raj Katas*. They say that no doubt the government of Pakistan is putting efforts in renovation of the temples and the adjoining areas for giving facilities to Hindu Pilgrims but no efforts are done for preservation of the sacred pond. They say that due to the negligence on the part of Pakistani authorities the water in the sacred pond has reached its lowest level and the pond is close to getting completely dried.

77 Mufti Gulam Sarwar Qureshi, *Tarikh e Makhzan e Punjab*, Lahore: Dost Associates Publishers, 1996, p. 314.

78 Personal Interview of Mr Sajid, 26/02/2012: Guide in *Katas*.

79 Mostly known as *lingam* or *linga* in Hindu society. In Sanskrit, it means mark or sign. It is a representation of the Hindu deity *Shiva* which is being worshiped in temples.

80 Personal Interview of Pundit Jairam Maharaj, 17/03/2012 (*Karshna Mandar Saddar Rawalpindi*).

81 Personal Interview of Mr Sajid, 26/02/2012: Guide in *Katas*.

The water supply to a nearby town named *Choa Syedan Shah* was sanctioned from this pond before partition on the condition that the water in the pond would be maintained to a certain level. Until 2007, there was no shortage of water in the pond. However, recently three cement factories have been built in the area of Tehsil⁸² *Choa Syedan Shah* of district Chakwal-Punjab. One of the cement factories has installed tube wells close to this water, which has caused water level to decrease. One of the reasons for this problem is that the whole *Potohar region*⁸³ (In north of Punjab province) is facing the lack of rain that has decreased the underground water level. The sacred pond has also been affected by this situation. Perhaps because of the ignorance about the importance of the sacred pond for Hindus, the renovations plans by the Government of Pakistan have not taken into account the issue of its decreasing water level.

Was Shiva Born in Katas?

Some local writers mention that he was also born here in Katas.^{84,85} After that, we try to unravel the most important view. In one of my interview with a *Brahmin Pundit*, I found this view wrongly ascribed to Hindus. He exclaimed how God could be born. He told me that *Shiva* has always remained in sky, as he is a God (creator).

The Partition of India and Subsequent Developments

After the partition of India, most of the Hindus, if not all, from the areas of Pakistan migrated to India. Katas also became abandoned and religious practices were stopped.⁸⁶ Situation became worse in 1948 when heavy floods and monsoon played havoc with this area.⁸⁷ These rains damaged the area to the extent that water reached the present day Youth Hostel located next to Raj Katas and temples were severely damaged. None of the governmental authorities paid heed to this area and left it on the mercy of nature.

India's former deputy prime minister L.K Advani visited the temples in 2005. In 2006-07, Pakistan decided to place *Murtis* (statues) of Hindu Gods in the temples of *Satt-garrah* and restore them to their original state to attract visitors. The budget allocated for the project was approximately half a million dollars. The government decided to

82 It is an administrative division of city or town.

83 It is a plateau in north-eastern Pakistan, forming the northern part of Punjab.

84 Minhas, *Pakistan Ky Asaar e Qadima*, p. 414.

85 Personal Interview of Amir Shezad 26/02/2012: In charge Head Engineer Raj Katas.

86 Brg. Gulzar Ahmad, *Yad e Ayam* (Katas, Jehlam: Maqtiba Jamia Qartas 1960).

87 Personal Interview of Mr Riaz Malik, 05/04/2012: Ex-Headmaster of High School Chakwal.

import idols of Hindu Gods from various monuments in India to Pakistan. A three-member archaeological team visited neighboring India, Sri Lanka and Nepal to collect *Murtis* (statues) of Hindu Gods. At present, the renovation project has been completed and the place is ideal for the tourists. Necessary arrangements have also been made for the Hindu pilgrims.

Negligence about Katas in Historical and Archeological Research

A general negligence about Raj Katas in historical and archeological research is noticeable. A student of Quaid-e-Azam University, Islamabad, has carried out a detailed study under the title of "Temples of Chakwal" and quite strangely this study lacks any reference to the Raj Katas.⁸⁸ One of the reasons for this negligence is that the historical road built by Sher Shah Suri (1472-1545 CE) from *Peshawar*⁸⁹ to *Kalkutta*⁹⁰ did not pass through the district of Chakwal. Likewise, when the British decided to make Grand Trunk Road, they used the same route. This put the area on a back foot. Another possible reason is that in 1935 CE, Sir John Marshall discovered the ruins of ancient civilization in Taxila, Punjab-Pakistan. This brought an added international attention to the area of Taxila and its historical significance. The fame of Taxila, eclipsed the importance of Katas Raj.

Conclusion

Raj Katas has a historical and religious significance that cannot be denied. Many legends have been attributed to it. The real significance of this place is due to the sacred pond. Most of the legends ascribe this pond to the tears of *Shiva* who wept on the death of his wife to an immeasurable extent.

However, there is dearth of scholarly work on this topic. The discovery of *Gandhara civilization*⁹¹ has shifted the entire focus of archaeologists towards that area and this area has been neglected. The migration of Hindus from this area after the partition of India and Pakistan too, resulted in a general negligence about this area and its historical and religious significance. The need of the hour is to highlight the importance of this historical and religious site.

88 Sabena Iqbal "Hindu Temples in Chakwal" (Journal of Asian Civilization. Vol: XXVIII, 2005), p. 157.

89 Present-day Pakistan.

90 Present-day capital of the Indian state of West Bengal.

91 It was an ancient civilization in present-day states of northern Pakistan and northeastern Afghanistan, which lasted from c.1500 to 500 BC.

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Pictures Gallery



Fig. 1: Entrance of Raj Katas and view of renovated temples.



Fig. 2: The Sacred Pond and the view of Temple of Ram Chandar.



Fig. 3 and 4: Temples of Sattgarrah before and after renovation.