CHAPTER - IV

TRANSMISSION OF A SACRED TRADITION: WORSHIP THROUGH LEARNING IN THE ISHWAR ASHRAM
Plate VIII

Photograph of Swami Lakshmanji
INTRODUCTION

In this chapter we shall see that at the Ishwar Ashram the focus of religion and worship is on the practice of dedicated study of Shaiva Texts, so as to attain self realisation. The ashram was set up by Swami Lakshmanji in 1936, although it represents the original parampara of Kashmir Shaivism which began in Kashmir during the 8th century A.D. This tradition of learning has been transmitted down the centuries through a chain of preceptors, of whom Swami Lakshmanji is the representative in the 20th century Kashmir. At the Ishwar Ashram, Swami Lakshmanji taught his followers the principles and practices of Kashmir Shaivism, for over half a century, by regularly taking classes on Sundays. This was open to all irrespective of caste, colour, religion or gender. Over the years, Swami Lakshmanji had a vast following, primarily among the Kashmiri Pandit householders of Kashmir. At the time of his death in 1991, most of these followers had migrated from Kashmir to various parts in the state, the country and world over. At present the members of the group are in diaspora, with the largest concentration at Jammu, where they have set up a new Ishwar Ashram. The group is passing through an interregnum and functioning with the help of the Ishwar Ashram Trust, a registered body which was set up by Swami Lakshmanji himself, but was reactivated only after his death. The unity of the group is now preserved
through the tradition of learning of Shaiva texts, as started by Swami Lakshmanji who is now worshipped as the founder by the members of the sect. Although the tradition lays stress on Sanskrit learning, the sect basically functions as a devotional group.

SECTION - I

ISHWAR ASHRAM AT JAMMU

The Ishwar Ashram in Jammu was set up in June, 1992 at 2, Mahindra Nagar, Jammu, on the property (a big house and 800 square meters of land), given by Dina Nath Ganjoo, a close associate and devotee of Ishwar Swaroop Lakshmanji Maharaj. Known as 'Swamiji' to his devotees and disciples, Lakshmanji was a renowned Kashmiri Pandit Scholar Saint who lived at Ishber, Srinagar, till his Mahasamadhi (death) in September, 1991. Lakshmanji became famous nationally as well as internationally as the exponent of Kashmir Shaivism, popularly known as Trika philosophy. His contribution to the promotion and propagation of this philosophy led to its revival in recent times as a distinct part of Kashmiri Pandit culture, which was otherwise almost vanishing due to the seclusion of the valley and its political changes. "The saint-scholar gained spiritual ecstasy of jiwan mukta (liberated while living) and in his own country came to be known as the 'Sage of Ishber' to whom all sorts of people -
young and old, male and female - came to pay obeisance and receive blessings or a blissful touch" (Koshur Samachar, November 1995, Pg 21).

During the year 1989, there was a rise in and intensification of militancy in the Kashmir Valley. Common life was affected and people were terrorised and an atmosphere of gloom and despondency was widespread. The impact of the rising violence was felt more in the old city, from where subsequently the mass exodus of Kashmiri Pandit community was to take place first, after the incident of 21st January, 1990. Although some of Lakshmanji's devotees resided in this area, most of his devotees came from the newly developed areas and the new suburbs of the Srinagar city, from where it was easier to communicate to Lakshmanji's ashram located on the outskirts of the old city, on the main road leading to the famous Nishat Bagh, at Ishber. Nevertheless, the impact of the growing violence was felt in these areas too. The worried devotees would rush to Lakshmanji, seeking spiritual solace in the face of grave threats.

"At the ashram, Lakshmanji would ask his disciples to recite from various Shaiva texts. He would personally, put Tyok (sacred mark, made out of red vermilion paste) on their foreheads. Here it is interesting to note, that even to terrified Muslim devotees from the neighbourhood, who sought his
blessings, Lakshmanji would advise to put on Tyok,\textsuperscript{1} using water. (Personal conversation with Prabhaji in March, 1994).

After the incident of 21st January, 1991, the lives and honour of Kashmiri Pandits in particular were threatened especially in the old city. Lakshmanji gave shelter in his ashram premises, to some of his devotees and their families from the old city e.g., Mrs. Khema Moza, a 50 years old lecturer who resided in the troubled area of Habbakadal shifted to the Ishwar Ashram in February, 1990, after a male member of her family was killed by the terrorists. Although Lakshmanji did not directly ask any devotee to leave the valley, he did give hints about the impending troubles that the community had to face. According to some of my informants there was a visible change in his attitude in 1989. Normally peaceful and unperturbed, Lakshmanji would now get angry and shout at people on smallest pretexts. "He would easily lose his temper, especially if he saw any devotee, man or woman without the Tyok on his or her forehead. He would also strongly condemn the non vegetarianism, prevalent among the Kashmiri Pandits. He would say that to counter the unforeseen disaster all the Kashmiri Pandits

\begin{itemize}
  \item Since Muslims do not put Tyok on their forehead, water Tyok would be invisible.
\end{itemize}
must put the Tyok, become vegetarian and recite Shaiva texts" (Personal conversation, Prabha, March 1994).

As the trouble began to grow, Lakshmanji would ask his devotees to come to the ashram everyday and recite two texts, Sambpancasika and Sri Amriteswar Bhairavastuti.

In the month of Bhadun, the festival of Zaram Satam is celebrated by Kashmiri Pandits as the birthday of Shri Krishna. Every year, the devotees would gather at the Ishwar Ashram where Lakshmanji would hold elaborate celebrations. In 1989, when the devotees arrived, they were in for a terrible shock. As my informant Sushma Bhat said:

"On the Zaram Satam, Swamiji was in a bad mood. He did not allow anyone inside the ashram. Whoever came was asked to stand on the lawns, men on one side and women on the other side. Most of the devotees were carrying something or the other in their hand, some had boxes of sweets or packs of fruits etc., apart from their purses and bags. He asked everyone to throw away their things and

2. Originally from the Varah Purana, its commentary by the 11th century Shaiva Scholar Ksemaraja was translated by Lakshmanji in 1943.

3. From Netra Tantra.

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stand in the sun. It was a hot day and the sun was shining brightly. Soon people were tired, parched and uncomfortable. But swamiji was unrelenting. As soon as a devotee entered the premises from the main gate of the ashram, he would ask him or her to throw away whatever he or she was carrying and stand with others. I remember a young woman came in carrying a purse. When she was asked to join others, she put down the purse nearby, swamiji at once got furious, and hurled her purse far away, from which her keys and money flew out. He reprimanded her for being shortsighted and holding on to 'mere' keys and 'some rupees'. It was towards the evening, that swamiji asked us to come inside the ashram, put the Tyok on our foreheads and giving us some prasad, asked us to go back home. Although we could not understand why he did that, then, but looking back we realise that this was an indication of what was going to happen to us later (i.e. after migration). We would have to leave our belongings, and material wealth (as we did with our purses and bags) and live in miserable conditions (the sweat and thirst under the hot sun)." (Personal conversation, August 1994).

As the situation further deteriorated in the valley,
his devotees began to leave. Lakshmanji predicted that the situation would remain like this for next twelve years. However, Lakshmanji stayed on in the valley, till 1991. In February, 1991, his prime disciple and life long companion Sushri Sharikaji, expired at Jammu. Immediately after that Lakshmanji went to California to stay with his American disciples for sometime. When he returned to Kashmir in August, 1991, it was detected that Lakshmanji was suffering from cancer - of which he died on 27th September, 1991 at the residence of his nephew, Dr. Maharaj Krishen Raina in Noida, U.P.

Despite the passing away of Lakshmanji and the ongoing militancy in the valley, the Ishwar Ashram at Ishber, Srinagar is still open, primarily because some of his disciples and devotees continue to live there. Prabhaji Matteo, one of his closest disciples alive, who lived in the main ashram since 1962 and Khema Moza, whom Lakshmanji had given refuge in the ashram premises since 1989, still reside there. Families of Vijay Kumar Koul and Pran Nath Ishberi also live nearby. These people are carrying on the various activities of the ashram and keeping alive its traditions as of yore. Despite the turbulence through which the valley has passed since 1989, the birthday of Lakshmanji has been celebrated with due solemnity and ceremony every year, without a break, at Ishber, through the dedication of the inmates. However, the efforts and initiatives of those
who migrated outside, to Jammu and Delhi, cannot be overlooked. Groups of devotees and disciples journeyed to the ashram at Ishber, Srinagar in the face of heavy odds - curfews, shoot-outs and hartals - in order to participate in the birthday celebrations, all these years. These people carry from Jammu the necessary goods needed for the performance of havan, (the fire rites) and the where-with-all needed for arranging the Naveed, (the sacred feast), for all the participants.

Of the three religious groups in the present study, it is this group which has been able to maintain contact with its ashram in the valley which continues to be a part of their sacred geography today. Over the years, the yearly trip to Ishber for the birthday celebrations has turned out to be like an annual pilgrimage for the devotees and disciples.

Prior to 1991, there were around ten families of Lakshmanji's devotees and disciples who were Jammu based. These families made regular trips to Ishber to visit their preceptor as well as celebrate functions. At Jammu, they met on Sunday, though not regularly, to hold Sunday Puza, i.e. recitation and devotional sessions. With the migration in 1990, the number of these devotees and disciples increased substantially. Also due to the turbulence each faced in his/her personal life, the need was felt to hold the Sunday Puza, regularly. To facilitate the
congregation of these disciples and devotees, therefore, setting up of an ashram in the land of migration became a priority. To do so became possible in June, 1992, through the timely donation of a place by Dina Nath Ganjoo. At this ashram, the Ishwar Ashram, Mahindra Nagar, Jammu, the devotees and disciples practise, spread and continue the tradition of Kashmir Shaivism, in accordance with the wishes of their guru, Lakshmanji.

Most of the devotees (95%) have migrated from Kashmir in 1990. Of these around 45% now own their own house in Jammu. All the devotees live in the Jammu city and are well off. Most of them have been rich engineers, doctors or administrators of Kashmir. The women are all well qualified many of them being professionally qualified too. Being associated with a tradition of learning Trika Philosophy, by and large, this group exudes scholarship. The group consists of individuals with high educational, professional and economic status in the Kashmiri Pandit society. This group is most diasporic of the three under study, in the sense that its members are scattered globally. Around 56% families have one or more members living in America, Canada, Middle East, Europe, Australia or Indonesia. At Jammu all the devotees are Kashmiri Pandits, who claim that their native place is Kashmir and the native language Kashmiri. Most of them (52%) are not sure whether they would ever return to the valley. For them the Ishwar Ashram at
Srinagar is like a place of pilgrimage, visits to which are made once in a year by some family members. Although the group has some non-Kashmiri devotees as well—mostly the research scholars or disciples of Lakshmanji—they do not normally come for any celebrations to the Jammu ashram. These devotees can be seen at congregations held in Delhi at the residence of Maharaj Krishen Raina, Lakshmanji’s nephew, in whose house Lakshmanji breathed his last. The devotees of Delhi congregate here for the 'Sunday Puza' and for his birthday and Shradha celebrations.

**ORIGINAL PARAMPARA**

Kashmir Shaivism is called the Trika philosophy which is based on the threefold energies of Lord Shiva. These three energies are called the *Para*, *Parapara* and *Apara*. *Para* means the subjective energy of Lord Shiva. *Parapara* means the cognitive energy of Lord Shiva. *Apara* means the objective energy of Lord Shiva. The Lord Shiva, in the form of pure limitless and all containing Consciousness is ever vibrating (*Spanda*) and resides in the subjective energy (*para*) as *Param Shiva*. The individual being in the world, on the other hand, resides in the objective energy (*Apara*) and is the victim of sadness and sorrow and is entangled in the wheel of repeated births and deaths. The Trika philosophy teaches, how the individual in the world immersed in the inferior energy can be carried towards the superior energy of *Param Shiva* through the cognitive energy (of Shiva). The
cognitive or intermediate energy offers three opayas, stages of attainment of Paramshivahood. These are not sequential, but depend upon the ability of the seeker. The first stage of Anavaopaya which corresponds to the usual system of worship, yogic effort and purification through breath control. The second stage is Saktopaya maintaining a constant awareness of Shiva through discrimination in one’s thoughts. The third stage is Sambhavopaya in which one attains instantly to Paramshivahood simply upon being told by the guru, preceptor, that the essential self is Shiva. There is a fourth stage, Anupaya, 'no means', which is the mature souls recognition that there is nothing to be done, reached for or accomplished except to reside in one’s own being, which is already of the nature of Shiva (Malini, April 1995, Pg 12).

As an esoteric and contemplative path, Kashmir Shaivism stresses both knowledge and devotion. Emphasis is put upon personal meditation and reflection by the devotee as well as the guidance of a proper preceptor, guru, whose grace is the blessings of all sadhana. Sadhana leads to the assimilation of the individual self (in the world) in the Paramshiva until the self and Shiva stand revealed as one. The goal - liberation - is sustained recognition (pratibhiyana) of one's true self as nothing but Shiva. There is no merger of soul in Shiva as they are eternally non-different.
Kashmir Shaivism stresses on man's recognition of an already existing oneness with Shiva. It is the most single minded monistic school. Kashmir Shaivism accepts no restrictions based on caste, creed, sex etc. Every curious and devout aspirant can have access to it both theoretically and practically. It gives more importance to practice and logical discussions than to bookish knowledge. "In its theory it comes closer to the theism of Bhagavadgita while in practice it advises to live the life of a householder and to practise, side by side, Shivyoga, for the sake of self realisation. It does not advocate renunciation. It prohibits all practice in the suppression of one's emotions and instincts and advocates the path of their sublimation. It does not ignore the worldly and heavenly aims of life consisting of objective enjoyments. It rather advocates a path of both bhakti, enjoyment and mukti liberation both of which can be pursued side by side. (B.N.Pandit, 1977)

According to the tradition of Kashmir Shaivism, Lord Shiva originally set forth 92 systems (Tantras), of which 64 were monistic (Bhairav Tantra) while 10 were dualistic (Shiv Tantra) and 18 were monistic-dualistic (Rudra Tantra), which were eventually lost to mankind. In the beginning of kaliyuga, Lord Shiva taught sage Durvasa the theory of Bhairav Tantra and commanded him to expand the thought in all of the universe without restriction to caste, colour or
creed. Sage Durvasa taught it to his son Tryambaka, after whom this school of thought is named. The sixteenth descendant in the line, Sangamaditya settled in Kashmir in the 8th century A.D. who continued the tradition of passing on the knowledge of Shaiva philosophy through his son Somananda, the fourth descendant of Sangamaditya. He lived in Kashmir in 9th century A.D. and is the originator of the Pratyabhijna school of Shaivism and the author of 'Shiva Dristi'. Upto his time, the initiation into the monistic thought of Bhairav Tantras took place from father to son. From Somananda onwards this initiation took place from master to disciple. Thus Somananda's disciple was Utpaladeva, who was followed by Lakshamanagupta who became the master of the great Abhinavagupta. Meanwhile, in the 9th century, Vasugupta, a teacher in the school of Tryambaka, re-originated the Spanda school of Kashmir Shaivism, when the 'Shiva Sutras' were revealed to him. Spanda means 'liberation' and the system directs the aspirant to concentrate on each and every movement in this world. Kallata, a disciple of Vasugupta composed 'Spanda-Karika' in which he expressed the principles contained in 'Shiva Sutras'. Both these works deal with the Sambhavopaya, the highest type of yoga prescribed in Trika System. Kallata's disciple was Mokul and grand disciple was Induraj. Induraj taught Abhinavagupta as well. Abhinavagupta, who lived in Kashmir in the later part of tenth century and the beginning of eleventh century was the greatest exponent
of the philosophy. He wrote detailed commentaries on the various topics that had appeared before him. Such writings as Utpaldeva's *Shiv Shastra*, was further created and recreated by him so as to give it profoundness. The earliest ancestor of Abhinavagupta was a famous Brahmin, Attrigupta who lived in the Ganga Yamuna Doab area. Attrigupta was a great Shaiva scholar who was invited by King Lalitaditya of Kashmir, to live there. Many generations after him, one of his descendants, Varahagupta became a great scholar of Shaiva philosophy. His son Narsimhagupta was the father of Abhinavagupta. Abhinavagupta wrote many books some of which are not even available today. His important works, however, are the *Tantralok*, of which he wrote 14 volumes and *Parmarthaarth*. Lakshmanji was deeply influenced by the works as well as the lifestyle of Abhinavagupta. Writing about him, Lakshmanji says "Abhinavagupta was a great scholar and Shaiva teacher who possessed knowledge in all matters related to Kashmir Shaivism. The versatility of this genius was recognised in his own time. He was one of the best authorities on Shaiva philosophy and various branches of Sanskrit literature. The great Acharya sat at the feet of many teachers for the traditional and authoritative knowledge. Such was his humility and devotion that these teachers imparted to him all the learning they possessed. The celebrated author of *Kavyaprakasah*, Rajanaka Mammather calls him the Shankracharya.
of Kashmir" (S.Bhat 1995, 87).

After Abhinavagupta the monistic thought and philosophy of Kashmir Shaivism was carried further by scholars such as Ksemaraja, Jayarath and Shivopadhaya in the centuries that followed. However, with the coming of Islam and the resulting social transformations of the masses, Kashmir Shaivism began to lose its hold on the people of Kashmir. Although in the 19th century, Shaiva mystics such as Ishar Joo Shair, Lala Joo Kokur, Manakak Monga and in the 20th century Shaiva acharyas such as Ramji, Mahtab Kak, Vidhyadhar and Govind Kaul were active, yet the isolation of the valley and the Muslim domination kept the following relatively small. It was the scholarship of Lakshmanji and the like who in the recent times brought these old scriptures to light again and republished them. By doing so, Lakshmanji revived the parampara of those scholar saints who preached Kashmir Shaivism in the past.

MAKING OF A GURU

Lakshmanji was born on 9th May, 1907 into the family of Rainas at Fateh Kadal, Srinagar. His father Narayan Dass was a well known and wealthy man, a leading citizen of Kashmir. Narayan Dass was among the first few Kashmiri Pandit boys, who studied in an English medium Christian Missionary school in Srinagar. After school, he began to work as an assistant to an English lady who ran a provision store. Through her Narayan Dass came in touch with other
English people who helped him to establish a flourishing business. On the advice of an English man, Narayan Dass took an initiative in building house boats, which he let out to visitors, English men as well as rich natives (like the royalty and nobility from various states in India). He was the first Kashmiri who took to wearing western clothes and riding a bicycle. At the same time, Narayan Dass was a deeply religious man who took care to keep his traditional values intact. Along with his wife Arnaimal, Narayan Dass was a great disciple of Shaiva Saint, Ramji, to whom he donated a three storeyed house to set up an ashram. This ashram named 'Rama-Trika-Shaiva Ashram' still stands in Fatehkadal, 300 meters from Narayan Dass's house. Ramji lived in this ashram, dividing his time between self meditation and shivayoga as well as imparting knowledge of Shivagamas to his worthy disciples. One of these disciples, Mahtab Kak, from Kralgam, Kashmir, became his chief disciple who carried on the work of the ashram after Ramji’s death in 1915 A.D.

In these circumstances, Lakshmanji was born into the family of Narayan Dass in 1907 A.D. As soon as the news of the birth of a son reached Ramji’s ears, he is said to have literally danced with joy and exclaimed, "I am called Rama, let the child be called Lakshmana". Lakshmanji began to show his leanings towards spirituality early in life. The young Lakshmanji would not eat non-vegetarian food, he vomited and
fell sick if he was given an egg or a piece of meat accidentally. At the age of three Lakshmanji would make Shivalinga, out of the mud he played with and would ask his elder sister to decorate the same with pretty flowers. At the age of five, he would sit down to meditate, along with his elder brother, who was already initiated into Shaivism by Swami Ramji. When asked what he saw in such a condition, young Lakshmanji would say 'Bada Bod' - God, the Supreme Lord. While in meditation, Lakshmanji would often faint or show other signs of abnormal behaviour which worried his parents. Fearing that Lakshmanji is subjected to witchcraft or is under the influence of an evil eye, Lakshmanji's parents took him to Ramji. When Ramji saw him, he smiled and advised the parents not to disturb the child and let him do what he wanted to. Ramji also asked his parents to make preparations for the yagnopavit ceremony of Lakshmanji. At the young age of five, Lakshmanji was taken under his spiritual care by Ramji, who taught him the Gayatri Mantra and some yogic exercises according to Shaiva discipline. When Lakshmanji was seven years old, Ramji died. On his death bed, Ramji entrusted Lakshmanji to the care of his chief disciple, Mahtab Kak.

Although Lakshmanji went to a secular school, there is no evidence that he distinguished himself as a student at that stage. During his school years his main interest seems to have been in singing devotional songs and going into
trance while doing meditation. During this period there were many uncanny occurrences. For example, his teacher suddenly fell ill for sixteen days, after punishing Lakshmanji by hitting him with sixteen cane strokes for meditating in the class. When Lakshmanji was in his pre-matric, Narayanji, his father fell ill. Lakshmanji was then asked to leave school and join the vast business. This gave Lakshmanji more time to himself which he spent in the study of Shaiva Shastra from his guru Mahtab Kak. He devoted more time to the practice of yoga as well, as he did not want to confine himself to the theoretical side only. For this Lakshmanji would get up at 2 A.M. to practice yoga till the morning. From early childhood, Lakshmanji had not eaten non-vegetarian food at all, although the Rainas had a regular meat-eating household. The family did try hard to make him eat non-vegetarian food but Lakshmanji never agreed to do so. As he grew up, he made his mother cook for him in a separate vessel lest the food is touched by the ladle used by the rest of the meat-eating family. On Shivaratri, (a major festival among Kashmiri Pandits when a variety of mutton and fish dishes are cooked and eaten), separate vegetarian dishes were made for Lakshmanji.

By the time Lakshmanji was 16 years old, he was finding it difficult to live with the family. He would go into Samadhi, (trance) for hours together, even while working at his workshop. Slowly he lost interest in the
business for which he was often reprimanded by his father. So one day, he left his house taking with him only a lion skin which he used to sit on while meditating. He went to Sadh Malyun. Meanwhile before leaving the home, Lakshmanji left behind a note saying "My dear brothers, I am leaving in search of the Supreme, kindly take care of my parents". A search for him followed at once. Messages were sent to the relatives as well as the police was informed but without any success. Ultimately, Lakshmanji's parents along with one of their sons-in-law, set out to look for him. On instructions from Mehtab Kak, they set out to Sadh Malyun where they found him in meditation under a tree. The parents urged Lakshmanji to return home, but he told them that he would not live with them. Seeing that the son was reluctant to live with the family, Narayan Dass offered to build a separate house for him but urged him to live within their sight. Lakshmanji agreed and till the new house was built at Marbal, he lived in a village near Harwan. From here, Lakshmanji first went to his guru, Mehtab Kak and with his permission and blessings shifted to the new house at Marbal. This house was near his father's house as well as Mehtab Kak's ashram. It was here that Lakshmanji undertook a deeper study of Shaivagamas.

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4. A peaceful forest glen with springs about 67 kms from Srinagar where from ancient times, saints and ascetics, including his preceptor Mahtab Kak, went to seek spiritual enlightenment.
with the help of other renowned teachers of Kashmir Shaivism. Till now, Ramji had initiated him by dristi darshan, (through mere vision), Mahtab Kak introduced him to the parmarth, (union with the supreme reality) but his knowledge about the shastras, (religious and philosophical texts) had yet to be completed. For this Lakshmanji began to take formal tuitions from a prominent scholar Maheshwar Nath Razdan. For three years, Lakshmanji was taught Sanskrit language and grammar. Then, under Maheshwar Nath Razdan, Lakshmanji began to study the history as well as the philosophy of Kashmir Shaivism. This went on for seven years. During these years, Lakshmanji conducted a detailed study of the various texts written by the Shaivacharyas from 7th to 14th century A.D. Most of these works were available in manuscript form to procure which he was helped by Maheshwar Nath Razdan. Among these prominent Shaivacharyas, it was the life and works of Abhinavgupta which impressed him the most. In 1933, with the help of his teacher, Lakshmanji brought out his first publication. This was a Kashmiri translation and interpretation of a great Kashmiri epic, GitarthSanqreh written by Abhinavgupta.

SECTION II

EMERGENCE AS A SCHOLAR SAINT

In 1935, Lakshmanji left Marbal to live in his new ashram which he built at the foothills of the mountain,
Mahadev above the Ishber village. According to his close disciple, Janki Nath Kaul 'Kamal', "He chose this spot because his ideal teacher Abhinavagupta, one of the most prominent authors of Kashmir Shaivism, had lived somewhere around this place about nine centuries ago" (Koshur Samachar, October 1995, 36). It was here that Lakshmanji emerged as a spiritual guru (teacher); he began to impart the knowledge of Shaivashastras (texts) as well as the Shivayoga (practice), which he had himself perfected by now. His first important disciple was Sushri Sharika Devi (called Deviji) whom he had initiated in 1932. Sharikaji found a worthy preceptor in Lakshmanji and led a life of celibacy, in utter penance for attaining perfection in the monistic Shaiva order, by learning and practising Shaiva shastras and yoga under him.

**SUSHRI SHARIKA DEVI**

Sharikaji was born into a prosperous Sopory household of Saraf Kadal, Srinagar in 1913 A.D. Her father, Jialal Sopory was an engineer by profession and a follower of Arya Samaj. Her mother’s name was Radhika Rani. As a child, Sharikaji was quiet, gentle and spiritually inclined. She would play games such as making paper boats on which she would write ‘Shiva-Shiva’ and float them in the river flowing by her house. The Sopory household was religious minded and used to invite a non-Kashmiri ascetic, Swami Muktanand to spend summers at their house every year. Swami
Muktanand saw Sharikaji’s interest in spirituality and taught her ‘Hathyoga’ and ‘Pranayama’ for meditation, without formally initiating her. Sharikaji would practise these daily for three hours in her thokur kuth, (the house shrine). Inspite of this passionate spiritual inclination, Sharikaji went about in her everyday life like any girl of her age, helping the womenfolk in their household chores etc. Lakshmanji was known to the Sopory household as Sharikaji’s eldest brother, Jawaharlal was married to Lakshmanji’s elder sister, Gunwati. Jawaharlal was fond of his brother-in-law and often invited him to his house. At the Sopory’s house, Lakshmanji was friendly to Jawaharlal’s younger brother, Mohan Lal who was of the same age as Lakshmanji. After Lakshmanji emerged as a saint and Shaiva teacher, Mohanlal would visit him at Marbal to learn Shaivism. As Mohanlal observed his sister Sharikaji’s interest in spiritual activities, he talked about it to Lakshmanji, who asked him to get her along to Marbal whenever he came. At the age of thirteen, Sharikaji began to visit Lakshmanji to learn Kashmir Shaivism.

Meanwhile in keeping with the tradition, Sharikaji’s family began to look out for a groom for her. As Lakshmanji heard this, he told Sharikaji that she was not destined to be married and that she must give herself upto spiritual pursuits. When Sharikaji informed her family about it, they did not listen to Lakshmanji’s advice. Soon
a match was found for Sharikaji and she got engaged. After the engagement, the boy whom Sharikaji was to marry, saw a dream in which Goddess Durga appeared before him with a sword in her hand and threatened to kill him if he married Sharikaji. The frightened boy informed his family and the engagement was called off at once. The incident created disquiet in the Sopory household. They blamed Lakshmanji for encouraging Sharikaji into spirituality. When Sharikaji's elder brother and father went to meet Lakshmanji, he told them to give up the idea of Sharikaji's marriage, as she was a parambramcharyain, i.e., celebate from previous births. However, the men not being convinced, tried to pressurise Sharikaji to give up spirituality. But Sharikaji's mother, Radhika Rani, who believed in Lakshmanji, prevailed upon and convinced her husband and son not to force Sharikaji into a marriage. So the family accepted Sharikaji as a spiritually elevated person and allowed her to go on with it. In 1930, Lakshmanji formally initiated Sharikaji as his disciple, at Gopitirth, where they had gone on a family picnic. My informant Mohanlal Sopory, who was with them at that time recounted the whole incident:

"The picnic was organised by Swamiji (Lakshmanji) who invited Deviji, Prabhaji, Motilal and me, too, to go with him. We had taken servants to cook for us and had put up tents to stay over night. It all began at 5 PM, a day before our return to
Srinagar. Swamiji, Deviji and I were discussing the *opayas* in Trika philosophy, when Deviji asked Swamiji to show her God. It started in a light mood. Initially Swamiji kept on changing the topic, he told her that he did not have such powers, that he was an ordinary being etc. But Deviji persisted and kept on crying. This went on for the whole evening, Deviji was crying while Swamiji kept on watching her. Meanwhile the others came to enquire what the matter was but Swamiji asked everyone to go away. Only I was allowed to stay there. After about seven hours had passed, it was past midnight when Swamiji finally relented. He asked Deviji to worship him. Deviji went out and got flowers with which she decorated Swamiji and worshipped him. After this, Swamiji asked her to meditate. While meditating, Deviji went into a trance and stayed like that till 5 a.m. Swamiji then put his hand on Deviji's head who coming out of the trance was like a different person. She was ecstatic and said that she could see God everywhere. At this Swamiji told her to ask God that they (Lakshmanji and Sharikaji) should be together for ever and become one. Deviji repeated this after him. Then Swamiji took her to a river flowing
nearby and helped her to take a bath. After the bath, Swamiji blessed her and told her that she had been initiated by him." (Personal conversation, Mohanlal Sopory, May, 94). After Sharikaji was initiated, it is said that she became seriously ill. The family got renowned doctors to treat her but she did not recover. It was only after Lakshmanji came to see her and offered her some grapes to eat that Sharikaji began to show signs of improvement. On this visit to Sharikaji's house, Lakshmanji informed her parents that the time had come for Sharikaji to leave her home and stay with him. When Lakshmanji built his house at the foothills of mountain above Nishat, Jialal Sopory built a separate house for Sharikaji, next to his house. Lakshmanji and Sharikaji shifted into their respective houses together, after the Purusacharna Yagna in accordance with the Kashmiri Pandit tradition. At the new ashram, Lakshmanji began to systematically teach her Kashmir Shaivism, along with the practical aspect or Shaiva Yoga.

NIVRITI

At this ashram, which was at the foothills of a forest, secluded from the main city, Lakshmanji lived a life of Nivriti i.e., a life and discipline of a world renouncer.
As my informant PrabhaJI said:

"This was the phase of Swamiji's self evolution along with the establishment of Guru Shishya parampara which is very essential in Kashmir Shaivism".

There were other disciples of Lakshmanji too who had been initiated by him at Marbal. These disciples would often visit Lakshmanji at the new ashram and stay for some days. Prominent among them were Neelkant Bakaya, Jagarnath Bramcharya, Udai Nath and Janki Nath Patwari.

The ashram where Lakshmanji and Sharikaji lived was like heaven. Situated at the foothills of a forest, it was surrounded by lush green garden and colourful flowers, fruit bearing trees and vegetable garden. They had their own cows for milk and servants to run errands for them. The ashram was peaceful and secluded, away from the main city. Wandering ascetics often came to the ashram to spend a night or so. Sometimes their family members would come to look up Lakshmanji and Sharikaji. As both the families - Rainas and Soporys - were large and extended, they had many relatives who were mostly well connected and influential people. These relatives were the first people to become Lakshmanji's devotees. Prominent among them were the Zutshi's of Sathu Babarshah, Srinagar, the Ganjoos of Bhana Mohalla, Srinagar, the Kilams of Anantnag, Kashmir etc. These relative - devotees visited Lakshmanji at the ashram to learn
Shaivism.

In 1938, Lakshmanji visited certain places outside Kashmir and met saints of high order. He spent some time at Sevagram with Mahatama Gandhi and had a glimpse of Sri Aurobindo at Pondicherry where the Mother gave Lakshmanji due recognition. From there, Lakshmanji went to Tiruvanamali to meet Ramana Maharishi. From him, Lakshmanji received Drishti Diksha - (initiation by mere sight). On his return from this trip, Lakshmanji went to Marbal house where he remained in solitude for four months. Here he conducted a detailed study of Tantralok, an encyclopedia of Kashmir Shaivism written by Abhinavagupta. During this time he acquired the Asht Siddhi although he made use of this very rarely. In 1943, Lakshmanji published the Hindi translation of Sambpancasika which he wrote, adding important hints to it as footnotes. In 1958, he brought out a lucid book in Hindi giving exposition of the twelve forms of Shaiva Yoga, preceded by the original Sanskrit text.

In 1944 there was another permanent addition to the ashram - Prabhaji Mattoo, the younger sister of Sharikaji. Prabhaji was much younger than her sister. Though she knew Lakshmanji from her childhood days, initially, she was not very much inclined to the spiritual world. In 1944, Prabhaji was widowed after two years of married life. Lakshmanji
invited her to come and join Sharikaji and him at the ashram where he initiated her into the spiritual world of Kashmir Shaivism. The two sisters lived together thereafter in close association with Lakshmanji, who taught and groomed them to become experts in the field of Kashmir Shaivism. Prabhaji had inclination towards studies and began to undergo secular education as well. She completed her ‘Prabhakar’ (Honours in Hindi) with flying colours.

Prabhaji had a flair for writing too. As Lakshmanji taught Kashmir Shaivism to both the sisters, Prabhaji would take down copious notes. Later with the permission of and encouragement from Lakshmanji, she translated these lecture notes into Hindi and put them in the form of books, which she published from time to time. In 1944, Lakshmanji taught the two sisters Abhinavagupta’s Gitarth Sangreh (whose Kashmiri translation was brought out by Lakshmanji in 1933). Prabhaji translated it into Hindi and got it checked by Lakshmanji. In 1985, she published it in Hindi as Sharmad Gitarth Sangreh. Another instance relates to the publication of Trika Shastra-Rahasya Patrika, by Prabhaji in 1994. Lakshmanji wrote this book himself. In 1987, every Monday, Lakshmanji would sit down in total silence to write this book. Within a year the book was almost finished, so he called the two sisters to teach them its contents. Once the lectures were over, he handed over the manuscript to Prabhaji, asking her to preserve it, which she did till she finally published it, after Lakshmanji’s death, in 1994. In
1989, Prabhaji also published the Hindi translation of the 'Panchastavi', the well known hymn on Goddess Durga, as taught by Lakshmanji in 1973.

Along with his progress in spiritual attainments, Lakshmanji propagated the Shaiva faith so effectively that scholars and seekers of truth were drawn towards him, not only from India but also from abroad. In 1950, a French Scholar, Dr. Lillian Silburn came to study Shaivism under Lakshmanji. She stayed for some years and translated certain Shaiva texts into French. Dr. Oscar Botto, who came from Italy and studies under Lakshmanji, translated Shaiva hymns into Italian. In 1956, a shakta scholar Rameshwar Jha, originally of Bihar (Mithila) came from Banaras, to Lakshmanji's ashram. He had been facing problems in the practical aspect, Shivayoga, for which he sought Lakshmanji's help. In their first meeting, Rameshwar Jha was initiated by Lakshmanji through Shaktopaya in accordance with Shaivyoga. The two developed mutual respect for each other; Rameshwar Jha being the disciple expressed his feelings in the shape of verses (Shlokas) that he wrote in praise of his preceptor, while Lakshmanji showed it through his tolerance towards Rameshwar Jha's smoking habit. Rameshwar Jha stayed in Kashmir for a few years before returning to Banaras where he taught in the University. Although Lakshmanji was his guru, Rameshwar Jha gave equal respect to Sushri Sharikaji and called her
Goddess Durga.

With the passage of time, Lakshmanji and Sharikaji felt the need to spend more time for their meditation and self realisation. As said earlier, the ashram was like a regular household. Being scenic and peaceful, it became a haunt for relatives, devotees, scholars and disciples. All this meant spending time for overall management and hustle bustle of everyday living. So in 1961 Lakshmanji sold off his house and shifted from the hilltop to the main road below. Here he built an ashram complex called the 'Ishwar Ashram'. The name was given by Sharikaji who called Lakshmanji, Ishwar Swaroop. Sharikaji too sold off her house and along with Prabhaji came to stay in the new Ishwar Ashram. They built a two storeyed house, where, on the ground floor rooms were made for the sisters, while the first floor had accommodation for Lakshmanji. In this new ashram, Lakshmanji made a rule that no visitors were allowed in except on Sundays. Also except for Sharikaji, Prabhaji and Lakshmanji, nobody was allowed to stay overnight in the ashram. As the place was on the main road and directly connected to the main city, people could commute to and fro on the same day.

On Sundays, the Ishwar Ashram was kept open to the public. On this day, Lakshmanji held nearly four hour class in which he gave discourses on Tantralok, Shivyutras, and
other Shaiva texts. The classes would be held for the disciples as well as devotees. Lakshmanji spoke both in Kashmiri and Hindi, explaining in simple language the esoteric philosophy to make the people understand it. Sometimes he would read out and explain verses from *Panchastavī* and *Bhagwat Gīta* too. At these discourses one of the two sisters, Prabhaji or Sharikaji, would recite verses sent by Lakshmanji’s disciple Rameshwar Jha. Later on these verses were put together in the form of a book, *Guru-Stūti* - which is now read by the disciples as the main text at various congregations. Apart from the Ishwar Ashram, Lakshmanji would also give lectures at the premises of Shri Ranbir Shiva Temple at Gupta Ganga which is under the Dharmarth Trust under the trusteeship of Dr. Karan Singh. Here, Lakshmanji gave lectures on various spiritual topics for the elevation of common people, using illustrations from everyday life, to make the difficult concepts easily understandable. Lakshmanji took special classes for his foreign students whom he taught in English. These lectures appeared later in the form of a book entitled, *Kashmir Shaivism - the Secret Supreme* which was published in 1985, by the Universal Shaiva Publications, the Publishing House set up by Lakshmanji himself.

Lakshmanji would also give special assistance to the research scholars from India and abroad who came to study the philosophy of Kashmir Shaivism. In 1965, Thakur Jaidev
Singh came to study Kashmir Shaivism and stayed at Srinagar for many years during which time he studied the Trika philosophy under Lakshmanji. Later Jaidev Singh published some of the books such as the **Pratyabhijna Hrdaya**, 1978, **Shiv Sutras**, 1977, **Paratrisika** and **Vijnabhairav** or Divine Consciousness in 1979. Another prominent disciple and researcher is Dr. Bettina Baumer who lives in Banaras. Among the other important disciples is Janaki Nath Koul 'Kamal' who is a renowned Vedanta Scholar of Kashmir. He was initiated by Lakshmanji to study Shaivism. He has written many books like **Pajar Pajran**, **Bhavani Sahasrama** and **Indrakshitrotam**. Some disciples, who were stimulated by Lakshmanji's lectures, and expounded the Shaiva texts. Prof. Nilakant Gurtoo wrote Hindi translation of **Paratrisika** and **Spandakarika**. Kamla Bawa, another disciple, translated the text and commentary of **Pratyabhijna Hrdayan** into Hindi while Prabhaji translated into Hindi **Para Pravesika**, **Paramarthasara** and **Guru Stuti**. Prof. Makhanlal Kukiloo has rendered the Hindi translation of **Sri Amriteshwar Bhairav Stuti**, **Sharika Charcha** and **Maans Khana Pap Hai**. He has also composed **Shatanamawali of Guru Dev** i.e. 108 names of Lakshmanji.

In 1965, Lakshmanji went to Varanasi to present a paper on 'Kundalini Vijnana Rahasyam' at the All India Tantra Sammellan held under the auspices of the Varanaseya Sanskrit University, where he was applauded by the great
luminary Gopinath Kaviraj and other scholars of repute. In early 70's, the same University conferred on Lakshmanji the degree of D.Lit, honoris causa, in recognition of his splendid and valuable service to the cause of Sanskrit. In 1973, the Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Art, Culture and Languages presented the robe of honour to Lakshmanji.

In accordance with his schedule, Lakshmanji would observe silence on Mondays. He would spend the whole day in reading and writing the Shaiva texts, without speaking to anyone. Infact both Sharikaji and Prabhaji would also spend the whole day in silence, communicating only through gestures. At times, Lakshmanji would go to the 'God's House' - a tiny cottage built in a beautiful small garden near the previous ashram - where he would spend the entire day alone in deep meditation. Most of the books that he wrote were written on Mondays. In 1964, he published a book in Hindi Shiv Stotrawali which is a maiden translation with footnotes in Hindi, originally written by the 11th century Shaiva scholar Utpala Deva. For the other days in the week, Lakshmanji followed a routine. In the mornings, he held classes for Sharikaji and Prabhaji, giving them elaborate and systematic insight into the discipline. He would spend a few hours everyday in meditation. Lakshmanji performed meditation in a separate room where no one was allowed to enter except Sharikaji. Sometimes he would meet visitors in the evening but with prior appointment. Several outstanding
figures in the field of spirituality as well as politics, would visit him. Some of them are late Smt. Indira Gandhi, the former Prime Minister of India, Dr. Karan Singh, former ambassador to U.S.A. J. Krishnamurti, a renowned philosopher. Among the spiritual luminaries who visited him are Maharashi Mahesh Yogi. Swami Ram Das of Kanhangarh, Mangalore, Swami Muktanand of Ganeshpuri, Swami Ranganathan, the President of Sri Ramakrishna Mission, Swami Sivanand Saraswati of Divine Life Society, Rishikesh and Swami Sankarananda of Courtallam.

PRAVRITI

Although recognition to Lakshmanji as a scholar-saint, came very early, but it was after he shifted to the Ishwar Ashram, that the number of his devotees increased manifold. These included families of rich businessmen such as Motilal Kitroo, Brij Nath Sapru, Mohanalal Wali, Mahendra Nath Buju, Makhanlal Dhar, Kashinath Bhan, Tej Kilam etc. Others included high ranking officials like Badri Nath Kotru and Gopinath Kotru, the two brothers Who were officers in the Indian Police Service. Mr. Raghunath Warikoo a civil servant from a wealthy landed family. His wife, too, was a prominent woman disciple of Lakshmanji. They lived in their bungalow near Ishwar Ashram. There are also Engineers such as Arzan Nath Thusu, T.N.Vaishnavi, Girdhari Lal Ganju and Dina Nath Ganjoo (who donated his massive property for making an ashram in Jammu). As Lakshmanji’s name began to
spread among the devotees outside the valley, the number of Kashmiri Pandit devotees outside the state began to rise. At Delhi, families of Kamla Bagati, Sevaji Munshi, Samvat Prakash Dhar, Captain Kachru, Col. Omkar Nath Bhan, Pran Nath Raina etc., became his devotees. These devotees would visit Kashmir every year to meet Lakshmanji. Lakshmanji would also visit them at Delhi in winters. These devotees would usually visit the Ishwar Ashram on Lakshmanji’s birthday. As a number of devotees built their houses around the ashram - like Raghunath Warikoo, Dina Nath Ganjoo, Inder Krishna Raina - devotees would stay overnight at these houses, as overnight stay at the ashram premises was not allowed.

BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION AT SRINAGAR

Lakshmanji had been celebrating his birthday with a lot of enthusiasm ever since his parents died. A big feast was given to relatives and devotees and the whole day was spent in reciting from Shaiva texts. As the number of devotees increased, they would all participate in the preparation for the feast as well. The devotees would come from Banaras, Delhi and Jammu. On the next day, as they would prepare to leave, Lakshmanji would distribute gifts to them, sometimes these gifts would be as costly as a Pashmina shawl or gold jewellery. Prabhaji says,

"This was the beginning of Pravriti as the simple Guru - Sishya relationship gave way to a household
like system, where people would now lay stress on grand feasts and ceremonies rather than proper reading and writing of Shaiva texts.

Among the important occasions that Lakshmanji celebrated were the Shradha (Death anniversary) of his two gurus - Mahtab Kak and Ramji. On these days, hawan (fire rites) would be organised and priests invited to hold it according to Vedic rites. Lakshmanji along with his disciples would hold recitations from Sambpancasika and organise a feast for all those who came. On Navreh, the new year day among the Kashmiri Pandits, Lakshmanji would wear new clothes and visit a temple along with some of his disciples, who would come to wish him on this day. On the Shravan Punima, in the month of Shravan, celebrated as Lord Shiva's birthday, Lakshmanji would hold a pooza, where he would make a Parthishur i.e. an image of Lord Shiva made of brown clay which is worshipped and later immersed in the water. On Zaram Satam, celebrated as birthday of Lord Krishna, Lakshmanji would read the eighteen chapters from the Bhagwad Gita.

With the increase in the number of devotees, all these days became big festivals and began to be celebrated on a large scale. Usually Lakshmanji would concern himself with only the recitations and leave the ritualistic and preparatory part to the two sisters. As the number of
devotees grew, the devotees too began to get involved in the preparatory aspect, sometimes even sidelining the two sisters.

VEGETARIANISM

One distinct thing about the feasts, whether religious or secular, is that only vegetarian food is cooked and served by the group. Lakshmanji was very particular about vegetarianism. Infact, once a person became his disciple, he or she would be expected to become a vegetarian. Even on the festivals of Herat, when non-vegetarian dishes are cooked according to Kashmiri Pandit tradition, Lakshmanji and his devotees would cook and eat only vegetarian food. Infact, when Lakshmanji visited the Isht Devi, Jwalaji at Khrew (Titular deity) he would carry offerings of vegetarian dishes, though the Goddess is normally offered non-vegetarian food.

SOCIAL GATHERINGS

Lakshmanji did not live the life of a total recluse, though he normally lived away from his relatives. Whenever there was a marriage in his family or in the family of his relatives, Lakshmanji would fully participate on all the occasions. However, there was only one condition - the food had to be vegetarian. As the devotees increased in number, Lakshmanji would visit their houses, too, on social occasions. Infact Lakshmanji would accompany the Barat or receive the Barat as well.
BUILDING AN ASHRAM COMPLEX

In 1982, Lakshmanji suffered a heart attack after which he thought of constructing a Shiva temple in his ashram complex. He named it Amriteshwar Bhairav Mandir. He also built a satsang hall for holding the Sunday Puza and hawan shalla, for the hawan ceremonies. He also constructed some rooms, to be used by the guests when they visited the ashram on his birthday celebrations.

MIRACLES

Janki Nath Koul 'Kamal' writes, "Though Swamiji was a master of occult powers, he never made a display of those powers. Swamiji was against them being used as he was convinced that the use of occult powers was an impediment on the spiritual path. He was a master of self-control or care. However, he appeared to have made use of his divine powers sparingly and with great caution. Not only his close disciples, but also unacquainted people of different beliefs, from far and near, some of whom had not even met the Swami in person, were convinced of his powers which he might have used unassumingly for their upliftment. (Koshur Samachar, Nov. 1995, 22). Many of my informants gave examples of incidents which were miraculous and performed by Lakshmanji for them or for those known to them. These ranged from curing illness such as cancer and kidney stones, stopping rains and thunderstorm on the marriage ceremony of
their children, being blessed with a never ending flow of money etc.

THE TRUST

In 1988, the process of Pravriti was complete when Lakshmanji formed a trust to look after the functioning of the organisation he had built. Although this was done on paper, the Trust never really functioned till after the death of Lakshmanji. The only field where it functioned was to set up a publication house, 'Universal Shaiva Publications', which published a couple of books based on the lectures given by Lakshmanji. The publication house later shifted to California, where Lakshmanji’s American disciples run it now.

THE FOREIGN DISCIPLES

Although Lakshmanji had many foreign disciples who came from time to time to study Shaivism, an American couple John and Dennise, became prominent in the group. This couple came to study Kashmir Shaivism under Lakshmanji in 1971. They purchased a house near the ashram and soon rose in Lakshmanji’s estimation. Lakshmanji was very fond of the couple. Soon Dennise gave birth to a baby boy who was named as 'Virish' by Lakshmanji. The boy grew up with Lakshmanji and was looked after in the ashram itself. In 1985, the couple had to leave for California, after having spent thirteen years at Srinagar. Even after going back to
California, the couple remained in touch with Lakshmanji. In fact the latter went to meet them in April 1991, a few months before his death. Interestingly, one of my informants said,

"Lakshmanji would say that Virish had come to the earth to take over from him (Lakshmanji), the tradition or parampara of Kashmir Shaivism".

(Personal conversation with Virinder Ganjoo, May 1994).

However, this view is not held popularly, especially after the migration and the death of Lakshmanji. Although the American disciples have been spreading the faith in California - having built an Ishwar Ashram there and published some books of Lakshmanji - the disciples of Lakshmanji in India, do not, by and large, consider them of much significance. The main reason for this is the emergence of foreigners as rivals to the native disciples.

SPIRITUAL ASCENT OF SHARIKA DEVI

Sharikaji in the meanwhile began to rise spiritually. She knew 85,000 verses of *Tantra Lok* by heart. She had read and mastered all the Shaiva texts available and taught by Lakshmanji. Although she did not write to translate any works, however she was the only disciple of Lakshmanji whom he accepted as a realised soul, one with Shiva. He called her Deviji, meaning the goddess and would refer to her as Ashtadasbuzi goddess with eighteen arms. He often asked his
disciples, who came on Sundays, to bow before her as she was 
Shakti herself. According to Prabhaji, 
"Swamiji even admitted that she (Sharikaji) was as 
good as him. Many times he would ask the devotees 
to take prasad from her".

In 1970's Lakshmanji asked Sharikaji to initiate 
devotees, especially women. After initial hesitation, she 
agreed and soon had a good number of disciples of her own. 
Her prominent disciples are Yoginder Ticku, Khema Thussu, 
Betina Baumer etc. Sharikaji was a cool and calm person 
although witty too. She was the only one with a wit to give 
answers to Lakshmanji. Sharikaji was Lakshmanji's disciple 
par excellence. Infact by his own admission, Sharikaji had 
even surpassed Lakshmanji in her realisation of Shivahood. 
(Personal conversation with Prabhaji, May 1994).

With the coming of the foreigners, there was a shift in 
the balance of power in the ashram, the consequences of 
which have bearing on the post Lakshmanji era. As said 
éarlier Lakshmanji had a soft corner for the foreigners, the 
reason for this as given by the informants vary. According 
to Prabhaji,
"Swamiji had been brought up in a western 
atmosphere, he liked the foreigners, as they could 
understand things well".

But Mohanlal Sopori views it differently,
"The foreigners have one quality which Swamiji found lacking in his Kashmiri disciples - i.e. Dedication. After all these Angrez (foreigners) left their home and came to live with him for thirteen years, how could Swamiji overlook this."

Perhaps the latter was the reason, however, as Dennise began to become prominent, some of Sharikaji's devotees began to feel threatened. Meanwhile a certain section of women disciples, along with Dennise began to be viewed as contestant for Sharikaji's place. However Sharikaji was above all this. Around the end of 1990, Sharikaji suddenly began to behave strangely. She would remain engrossed in meditation for longer than usual. According to Prabhaji, her constant companion since 1945,

"Those days Deviji would remain unusually quite. When I asked her what the matter was, she gave a queer answer saying 'there is no necessity to talk any more'. Another unusual thing was that Deviji was not taking her baths regularly which she had been very particular about in the past. When I asked her about this she again said, 'I do not need water baths now, I have had the divine bath'. I got anxious and asked swamiji to talk to her as she was behaving strangely. Swamiji only smiled and informed me that Deviji was experiencing the bliss which is attained on reaching the highest
level of sadhna (meditation). But slowly this began to tell on Deviji's health and very soon she fell seriously ill. Although the doctors could not diagnose her illness, Deviji's condition became worse. On February 2, 1991, Deviji left the world to become one with parmarth" (Personal conversation with Prabhaji May, 1994).

SECTION III

COMMUNICATING THE CULTURAL HERITAGE

Lakshmanji had re-established the tradition of reading, writing and practising Kashmir Shaivism in the valley in the recent times, by setting up the Ishwar Ashram at Ishber, Srinagar. Although various organisations expostulate the esoteric teachings of Shaivism to some extent, the original parampara is represented by Lakshmanji's group.

In the post 1990 era, the Ishwar Ashram group had to cope with two almost simultaneous developments. The first was the migration in 1990, of most of the devotees from Kashmir and the second was the death of the preceptor, Lakshmanji in 1991 without naming any spiritual heir. As the devotees from Kashmir migrated to various parts in the state, the country or world over, they made arrangements for organising the Sunday Puza in the place of emigration. Since they were passing through an emotional crisis, the need for the spiritual congregation was felt more acutely.
The migrant devotees of Delhi for instance would go to Faridabad on every Sunday where one of Lakshmanji’s prominent devotee, Kamla Bawa, established a temple-cum-ashram complex. When Lakshmanji came to Delhi for his treatment in 1991 he was staying at his nephew’s house in Noida, UP. Thereafter the devotees would throng in this place every day. After Lakshmanji’s Mahasmadhi, his nephew preserved the room and the things used by him, like the bed, the chair, canestick etc., as relics of the guru. Noida residence then became the venue for the Sunday Puza. The Faridabad ashram also functions like before, with the local people joining in. According to the office bearers at Jammu, around 38% of the devotees are new i.e. have came into the fold after migration. Lakshmanji’s American disciples at California have had a small hall built for organising lectures on Shaivism since long. With the migration of some of the devotees to California now a regular Sunday Puza is held, where about 60-70 people congregate on every Sunday. At Jammu to begin with, the group would congregate at the residence of some devotees but later with the timely donation of the property by Dina Nath Ganjoo, a big ashram was set up in 1992. In all these places of worship, the devotees congregate for the Sunday Puza, where the Shaiva texts are recited and the tradition of learning and studying Trika philosophy is kept alive. However, with the death of Lakshmanji and Sharikaji, there is a void that has been
created as far as the preceptor is concerned. About 56% of the devotee say that the presence of a guru is very important for the tradition as initiation into Shaiva yoga is an important part of the learning. So far there is no consensus on who the next guru would be. Although Prabhaji, the younger sister of Sharikaji, who was Lakshmanji’s prime disciple, is accepted as suitable by many devotees, the Trust members do not seem to accept her as a guru. Individually, the devotees give Prabhaji a great deal of respect and according to some of them, she gives initiation when asked for, but formally the group is without a guru. At California, the American devotees say that their son Virish has been proclaimed the future guru by Lakshmanji, which is however totally unacceptable to most of the Kashmiri Pandit devotees. In another instance, Lakshmanji’s nephew, Pran Nath Raina, claims that his father and Lakshmanji’s brother Nilakanth Raina is spiritually next to Lakshmanji as he was close to the latter before his death. Nilakanth Raina’s N.R.I. daughter is constructing a splendid ashram at D.L.F. Qutub Enclave, Delhi. She has as yet not decided whether to gift it to the Ishwar Ashram Trust or to establish a separate Trust to look after this new ashram. (Telephonic conversation with Pran Nath Raina, March 1996).

After the Mahasamadhi of Lakshmanji in 1991, the Ishwar Ashram Trust was activated following its formal registration on 4th May, 1992. The Ishwar Ashram Trust has a four member
Board of Trustees, namely Mr. Samvit Prakash Dhar, a 70 years old retired officer of the External Affairs Ministry, Government of India. He is based in New Delhi although he keeps going to the United States of America where his son lives. Mr. Inder Krishen Raina, 55 years old businessman, who lives in Jammu and Delhi as his business demands so. He is the grand nephew of Lakshmanji. Mr. Brij Nath Kaul, 52 years old who has been Lakshmanji's disciple from his childhood. He is a migrant and lives at Jammu. Mr. Mohan Krishen Wattal is a businessman in his early fifties. He is among the few Kashmiri Pandits who still live in the valley, along with his family.

One of the important devices used for recruitment is, the social service which the Trust has undertaken to perform for specific target groups such as the non-devotee migrant camps at Mishriwala near Jammu. The Trust has set up free medical aid as well as scholarships for the education of these migrants.

"By doing this, the Trust hopes to make them familiar with the tradition of scholarship that Lakshmanji stood for" (personal conversation, Brij Mohan, June 1994). "Buses are sent to bring these people for their participation in the festivals and elaborate cooking is done to feed them". (personal conversation, Brij Nath Patwari, May 1994).
The various activities of the group are funded through the contributions made by the registered devotees and disciples who had unanimously agreed to do so in one of the meetings held by the Trust. Apart from this, regular donations are received by the Trust for building funds, celebration of Birthday and other important functions where people in general contribute. The account of this money is audited by the regular Auditors, M/s. Swarup Handoo Associates, every year. The Ishwar Ashram Trust functions with the following objectives in view:-

1. To establish, run and maintain centres for propagation of Shaiva philosophy of Kashmir and also establish centres for meditation, discourses, satsangs etc.

2. To publish, print, acquire, buy or sell books and publications of Shaiva philosophy.

3. To preach, propagate and encourage vegetarianism and abstinence from Drugs, Narcotics and Alcohol.

4. To offer scholarships to enable deserving persons to pursue and research in Shaiva philosophy.

5. To uplift the educational level of women and improvement of their status.

6. To organise educational welfare measure for the children.

With these objectives in view, the group performs
various activities to communicate its cultural heritage. The heritage of a group is made of the ongoing religious culture of people. Jack Goody suggests that three fairly separate complexes of material are involved when one generation communicates its cultural heritage to the next. (Goody: 1968:28). The first and most concrete is the shape of the material world which includes the natural resources, buildings, utensils and artifacts. Second are the standardized ways of acting, which, he says are often taught by verbal means but usually are learned by imitation e.g. ways of worship, correct dress, a sign language. The third complex of tradition is made up of those channeled through words and resides in the particular range of meanings and attitudes which members of a society attach to their verbal symbols (R.B.Williams, 1984; 152) The message and tradition of the Lakshmanji group too are communicated through three complexes of tradition - the arrangement of physical surroundings to convey messages, standardized way of acting of ritual and verbal symbols. We shall examine each of these below.

**COMMUNICATION BY PHYSICAL SURROUNDING**

The physical surroundings communicate to people messages in the 'language' that can be 'read' by them. For many disciples and devotees (my informants) the making of Ishwar Ashram at Mahendra Nagar, Jammu reminds them of the set up of Ishwar Ashram at Ishber, Srinagar. The ashram has
The second anniversary of MAHA SAMADHI (JAGH) of GURU DEV ISHWAR SWOROOP SWAMI LAKSHMAN JOO (of Nishat Ishbar) falls on Monday the 4th of Oct. 1993. Same is being held at Jammu ASHRAM at 2-Mahinder Nagar, Canal Road, Jammu.

The function will start at 6 a.m. with Hawan etc. which will conclude at 5.30 p.m. after which 'PRASHAD-VITARAN' will start.

The devotees & brethren are requested to participate & have prashad.

Secretary
Ishwar Ashram Trust
(Ishbar Nishat)
2-Mahinder Nagar, Canal Road,
Jammu-180002.

Plate IX

Public Announcement in The Excelsior, Jammu,
2nd October 1993
been built on a vast property donated by Lakshmanji’s disciple, Dina Nath Ganjoo. It is a two storeyed house, with a big lush green lawn, laid out in front of it with multi coloured flower beds and proper pathways. A lone tall cypress tree which stands out in verdant grandeur as a symbol of the fir topped forests of the valley.

The house has been renovated to meet the requirements of an ashram, which has been made along the lines of the Ishwar Ashram at Ishber, Srinagar. The ashram has a big satsang hall, where the Sunday-Puza is held, a hawanshalla for performing the fire rites on important occasions and an assembly hall for the accommodation of large number of devotees on these occasions. Apart from this, it has a one bedroom set built for the caretaker and several other rooms of which some are used for the office purposes as well as for storing of publications. A large kitchen block where food can be cooked for over a thousand people and a big water tank has been added to the main house.

A temple has also been built in the ashram complex, on the lines of the Amriteshwar Bhairav Mandir of Ishber Ashram Srinagar. The temple has a Shivalinga and a photograph of Abhinavgupta, an 11th century Saint Scholar of Kashmir in it and is open to the general public as well, everyday, for a fixed period of time.

The satsang hall where the disciples congregate to keep
alive the tradition of Sunday-Puza is fitted with a powerful public address-cum-music system. On one side of this hall, there is a dais like structure of red mosaic built at three levels. In the centre of the dais a large colour photograph of Lakshmanji is prominently placed, which is flanked on both the sides by the black and white photographs of his two gurus, Ramji and Mahtab Kak, which are kept at a higher level. To the left of Lakshmanji's photograph, at a lower level, on the dais is a coloured photograph of his prime disciple Sushri Sharika Devi. All the photographs have sandalwood garlands put around them and are placed on cream coloured silken sheets embroidered with golden thread. Besides these photographs, there is a pair of Khav, wooden slippers of Lakshmanji and other small relics like Pankha (fan) Takia (bolster) Gadwa (a small water pot) which he used that are put on display for the visitors to see. The men and women disciples and devotees sit separately in rows, facing the dais. Thus rules for conduct are communicated and reinforced through the organisation of physical space. Absence of statues or images of any guru communicate the Shaivite tradition of non belief in idolatry.

The hawan shalla is a half closed hall, with two sides being kept open for letting smoke pass. Fire rites are performed here on some occasions such as the Mahayagna or the death anniversary of the gurus. It is interesting to note that in the Shaivist tradition, the hawan has to be
performed according to the vedic rites. (B.N. Pandita: 1977)

There are many poster-sized colour photographs of Lakshmanji put up all over the ashram, each depicting him in a particular pose and mood on various occasions at different places. One of the photographs shows him seated with eyes closed, deep in meditation with flower petals strewn all over him, taken on his birthday at Ishwar Ashram, Srinagar. In another photograph he is seen seated under the Par Bhairav Dham tree, at his Srinagar ashram dressed in a traditional Kashmiri Pandit pheran. These photographs are arranged so as to transport the viewer back to Ishwar Ashram at Srinagar, to get glimpses into the life of Lakshmanji.

All together it is a big and impressive ashram. The size of the complex communicates the importance and prestige of the group. A trip around the ashram makes the viewer recipient of very elaborate messages about the Lakshmanji group.

COMMUNICATION BY STANDARDISED WAYS OF ACTING

At all the functions held in the ashram the devotees, through standardizes ways of acting, communicate various religious and cultural meanings. Whatever they do, from eating to worship, reflects the ways of the groups. As the group is made up of only householders, there is no way to identify a person as Lakshmanji's devotee, merely on the basis of his or her dress or such external sign. The one
important way to be marked as a follower of the group is by regularly attending the various functions, associated with the group beginning with the Sunday-Puza held every-week on Sunday mornings at the Ishwar Ashram, Mahendra Nagar, Jammu.

The whole morning is spent in recitation from the Guru Stuti and other Shaiva hymns and texts, followed by formal class held by Professor Nila Kanth Gurtoo who teaches Kashmir Shaivism from texts such as Tantralok. The devotees arrive at the ashram premises at 8.30 AM. The caretaker, Virinder Ganjoo, opens the satsang hall early in the morning and has it swept and cleaned well before the devotees arrive. Choicest flowers are picked up from the garden outside with which the photographs of Lakshmanji, Ramji, Mehtab Kak and Sharikaji are decorated by him. When the devotees arrive, men and women sit in separate rows facing the dais. Although the devotees recite together, the session is conducted by Shri Sapru, who directs the devotees from one hymn to another. Usually they read out from the Guru-Gita, in praise of their preceptor, Lakshmanji. This is followed by a Shaiva hymn Mahimastotram which praises the Lord Shiva. This is followed by Amrteshwar Bhairav from the Netra Tantra and Sambpancasika, originally from the Varah Purana. The group also recites the 108 names of Lakshmanji, from the booklet Shatanamawali written by Makhanlal Kukiloo. The recitations are held in Sanskrit
language and emphasis is laid on correct pronunciation. Those who are considered to have the right pronunciation sit in front of the mikes so that the correct sounds are produced and vibrated into the air. Most of the devotees arrive ahead of or on time to find a place and sit, forming proper rows. Those who come late first walk over to the dais, passing through the space in between the separate rows of men and women. At the dais, they offer flowers and other offerings that they may have brought with them. Bowing in front of the dais, they walk back to sit on either side and join others in recitation. At the dais, copies of the Guru Stuti are kept, for those who do not carry their personal copies. These are to be used in the ashram only. When the recitation is over, the devotees put away the books and stand up in their places.

The organiser then distributes flower petals to each one of them, pushpanjali, which they hold while standing. Another person walks with holy water, the amrit, and sprinkles it over all the disciples individually. Once everyone is given the pushpanjali and has been sprinkled with amrit the aarti begins. Aarti is waving of lighted lamp around the photographs of the gurus while everyone sings praises to the Lord. When the aarti is over, each person walks up to the altar and offers flowers at the dais and bows in front of it. With this the first part of the Sunday Puza comes to an end. Some disciples leave
immediately thereafter for home, after taking prasada from the organisers.

In one corner the Trust puts up for sale the publications, while some disciples may give donations for which receipt is given. Other people may break up into small groups for informal chats. This goes on for about half an hour after which people regroup for the second phase of Sunday Puza, classes on Kashmir Shaivism. Some people come only to Attend these classes and some leave after attending the first session only. However, most of the people stay for both the sessions. In these classes, lessons are given from the commentaries by Lakshmanji on the different Shaiva texts of the Shaivist scholars from 9th to 14th century AD, especially the Tantralok of Abhinav Gupta, Shivstotravali of Ksemaraja, and the Shiv Sutras of Vasugupta. Professor Nilakant Gurtu also explains the meanings of the Shlokas from Guru Gita and of other texts which form the part of the sacred literature of the group. Proper diction and pronunciation is taught to those who attend the classes. The holding of these classes on Kashmir Shaivism is a continuation of the tradition started by Lakshmanji himself. My informants stressed on the fact that Lakshmanji was a teacher par excellence who had the ability of making difficult esoteric ideas easily comprehensible to common devotees. What is emphasised by the informants is that all the disciples and devotees went eagerly to attend
his lectures not only because he was speaking but also to listen to 'what' he was speaking. This seems to be different from what Babb observes about Sai Baba's discourses. He says that devotees go to hear Sai Baba's discourses not for its content but because it comes from his mouth. For Baba's devotees simply listening to him is elevating and they attend the lectures only as an act of worship. (Babb 1987, 184) However, in the case of Lakshmanji's discourses its content— the exposition of Kashmiri Shaivism— is of utmost importance. This way the group continues to hold classes on Kashmir Shaivism even after Lakshmanji's death. The presence of cognoscenti is prominent at these congregations. All those present possess a commitment towards the learning, the Shaiva literature and tradition. Knowledge of Sanskrit language is a must at this gathering.

The devotees (and disciples) congregate at the ashram on Sundays as well as other important occasions throughout the year. The group follows the Kashmiri Pandit calendar and celebrates its new year on Navreh, the first day in the bright fortnight of the month of Chaitra. The other important functions in common with Kashmiri Pandits are the Shravan Punim, Zaram Satam and Herat. However among the important functions are those which are particular to this group. These include the birthday celebrations of Lakshmanji as well as the Shradha (Death anniversary) of Lakshmanji, Ramji, Mahtab Kak and Sharikaji.
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tr>
<td>Chaitra</td>
<td>Suklapaksha, Pratham</td>
<td>Navreh</td>
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<td>(March)</td>
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<td>Vaishaki</td>
<td>Krishnapaksha, Dashmi</td>
<td>Lakshmanji’s Mahajayanti</td>
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<td>(April)</td>
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<td>May</td>
<td>Ninth</td>
<td>Varsh (Lakshmanji’s English Birthday)</td>
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<td>Har</td>
<td>Shuklapaksh, Purnima</td>
<td>Guru Purnima</td>
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<td>Shravan</td>
<td>Shuklapaksh, Purnima</td>
<td>Shravan Punim (Raksha Bandhan)</td>
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<td>Badun</td>
<td>Krishnapaksh, Ashtami</td>
<td>Zaram Satam (Janam Ashtami)</td>
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<td>(August)</td>
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<td>Ashwin</td>
<td>Krishnapaksh, Divitya</td>
<td>Bi-Annual Shrada of Mehtab Kak</td>
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<td>(Sept.-Oct.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ashwin</td>
<td>Krishnapaksh, Tritya</td>
<td>Bi-annual Shrada of Sharikaji</td>
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<td>(Sept.-Oct.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ashwin</td>
<td>KrishnaPaksh, Chaturti</td>
<td>Mahayagna of Lakshmanji</td>
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<td>Ashwin</td>
<td>Krishnapaksh, Chaturdashi</td>
<td>Bi-Annual Shrada of Ramji</td>
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<td>Kartik</td>
<td>Shuklapaksh, Chaturti</td>
<td>Mahajayanti of Mahtab Kak</td>
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<td>Shuklapaksh, Divitya</td>
<td>Mahajanti Sharikaji</td>
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<td>(December)</td>
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<td>Pos</td>
<td>Krishnapaksh, Dwadashi</td>
<td>Mahajayanti of Ramji</td>
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<td>(January)</td>
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<td>Mag</td>
<td>Krishnapaksh, Chaturdashi</td>
<td>Mahayagna of Ramji</td>
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<td>(January end)</td>
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<td>Falgun</td>
<td>Krishnapaksh, Triyodashi</td>
<td>Herat (Shivratri)</td>
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<td>(February)</td>
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Navreh which falls on the first day in the bright fortnight of the month of Chaitra, is celebrated as the new year day among the Kashmiri Pandits. On this day close disciples visit the ashram early in the morning and spend a couple of hours reciting the Guru-Gita together. As one of my informants said,

"It is like going to a temple on the new year’s day to seek the blessing of Almighty for the coming year".

The birthday celebrations of Lakshmanji is one of the biggest yearly events celebrated by the group. The advertisement announcing the day and inviting everyone to participate in the celebrations, appear in the local newspapers as well as the magazines regularly for a week. The ashram is cleaned and decorated a few days before the birthday. Life size photographs of Lakshmanji are decorated and kept on a make-shift dais inside a tent (Shamiana) which is a temporary structure set up on the lawns. There are sign boards put up from the main bus-stop directing people towards the ashram.

Naveed is taken together by participants seated in rows on the floor. Food is served by disciples themselves in steel plates which are kept on the white sheets. The day begins with the recitations from Guru-Gita and Shatnamaavali followed by chanting from Shaiva hymns and scriptures like
Plate X

Naveed being served on Lakshmanji's Mahasamadhi,
on 4th October 1993
the Sambpancasika and Mahimaastotram and Amriteshwara Bhairav Stotram etc. These recitations go on for four hours or so. People (devotees as well as non-devotees) keep walking into the ashram and sit in the satsang Hall (which is filled up at once on this day), the assembly Hall, or inside the shamiana in the lawns. Speakers are fitted in all the three places, as a result devotees can hear the whole programme even from outside. Devotees carry with them offerings—packets of sweets, fruits and dry fruits, which are kept in front of the make-shift dais in the lawn (in case, it is late) or on the dais in the assembly hall, depending on the situation.

The whole atmosphere is charged with resounding of the chantings in Sanskrit. Meanwhile in the kitchen block, cooking is done by professional cooks (waza) who are helped by volunteers and servants (usually the domestic servants of the disciples or even office peons in some cases) who help in cutting, washing and processing of the vegetables. Fixed menu is laid out and typical Kashmiri Pandit dishes are prepared - Lyader Chaman (cheese made in turmeric), Dum Alu (Potatoes cooked in chilly and yogurt), Moong Dal (Pulses), Muj Kal (Radish cooked in chilly and tamarind), Monjhak (Knolkhol), Chok Wangan (Brinjals), Muj Chutney (Radish and yogurt dish) and some other seasonal dish. Apart from this, Khir (Sweet dish made of Rice and Milk) and Tahar (Yellow Rice with butter) are served.
After the recitations are over, the Khir and Tahar is taken to the gor, the priest who is invited to perform prepun i.e. the traditional ritual in which Gods are worshipped on birthdays among Kashmiri Pandits. Once the prepun is over, the Naveed, sacred food, is served to the people. As the people come in big numbers this goes on for three to four hours the last batches (of volunteers mostly) eating only late in the evening. While devotees have Naveed, some of the close devotees who have been writing poems and Lilas in praise of their preceptor, Lakshmanji, read or sing them aloud to the audience. Prominent among them are Dina Nath Ganjoo, Kamla Bhagati, Raj Dulari Kaul. Others like Prof. Makhan Lal Kukiloo, Janaki Nath Koul ‘Kamal’ and Prof. Badri Nath Kalla, who read out papers on topics related to the religious history of Kashmir, Lakshmanji’s life and philosophy of Kashmir Shaivism. Devotees listen to these attentively for the whole evening. It is a whole day spent in reading and reciting from the Shaiva texts as well as partaking in sacred feast together.

The Varash is the celebration of Lakshmanji’s birthday according to the solar calendar. On this day only close disciples come to the ashram and read the Gurustuti and other texts. A similar routine is followed on the Guru Purnima as well. Shravan Purnima is celebrated among the Kashmiri Pandits as the birthday of Lord Shiva and Janam Ashtami is celebrated as the birthday of Lord Krishna. On
both the days Kashmiri Pandits fast and go to temples. These days were celebrated by Lakshmanji at Ishwar Ashram, Srinagar. In keeping with the tradition, the disciples come to the ashram on both the days to hold recitations from theShaiva texts. The bi-annual Shradha, death rites of Lakshmanji's guru, Mahtab Kak and his disciple Sharikaji fall just before the Mahayagna i.e. the death anniversary of Lakshmanji. As a result, these two days are observed along with the preparations for the observation of the Mahayagna. On the Mahayagna, a big hawan, (fire rites) according to Vedic tradition is performed. On this day too, invitations are sent out to people through the newspapers and magazines, inviting participation in the event. The day begins with a hawan for which the priests are engaged. The disciples sit near the hawan kund in the hawanshalla (from where they spill over to the satsang hall, assembly hall and the lawns) and recite the various shlokas especially from the Sambpancasika and Gurustuti. Most of the disciples fast on this day, eating only fried potatoes and lotus stems without salt. The hawan goes on till well after the noon time, after which Naveed, the sacred feast, is served to the invitees. After the sunset all those disciples who were fasting, have their meals together, which is the same food as is served to others. On this day, too, around one thousand people have food in the ashram.
The Mahayagna of Lakshmanji's two gurus, Mahtab Kak and Ramji as well as his disciple Sharikaji is celebrated on a small scale - only close disciples are invited to the feast, while the recitations and the yagna is performed just the way it is done on Lakshmanji's Mahayagna. Thus the group performs various activities in order to communicate its cultural heritage, which is made up of the ongoing religious culture of its people, and is transmitted through an intricate network of communication.

COMMUNICATION BY LANGUAGE

Language, either spoken or written is the important means of communication in any group. In the Lakshmanji group as in Hinduism in general, oral transmission and written transmission go hand in hand - the guru and scripture. Although much of what one learns about their religion comes in oral form, but focus is now on the written material as well. The written material in this tradition is available in a wide range of forms - the poems, the narratives of varying lengths, commentaries and books. The following are the scriptures of the Lakshmanji group:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Canon accepted</th>
<th>Works attributed</th>
<th>Other important works</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>by Lakshmanji</td>
<td>to Lakshmanji</td>
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<tr>
<th>Bhairav Tantras</th>
<th>Gitarth Sangreh</th>
<th>Guru-Gita by R.Jha</th>
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<tr>
<td>(Rudra, Yamala,</td>
<td>(Kashmiri)</td>
<td>(Sanskrit)</td>
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<td>Malini, Svachanda,</td>
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<td>Vijaya and Netra)</td>
<td>Shiv-Stotravali</td>
<td>Amrteshwar Bhai-</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(English and Hindi)</td>
<td>rav by M.L.Kukiloo</td>
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<td>Parmarth Saar</td>
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<td>(Sanskrit)</td>
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<tr>
<td>(by Abhinav Gupta)</td>
<td>Karmanya Pradipika</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(Hindi)</td>
<td>Kashmiri Shaivdar-</td>
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<td>Tantra Lok</td>
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<td>shan Yam/Niyam by</td>
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<td>(by Abhinav Gupta)</td>
<td>Sambpancasika</td>
<td>M.L.Kukiloo</td>
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<td>(Hindi)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gita Sangreh</td>
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<tr>
<td>(by Abhinav Gupta)</td>
<td>Lectures on Practice and Principle</td>
<td>Swami Lakshmanji ki Jivini by</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bhagwat Gita</td>
<td>in Kashmir Shaivism (English)</td>
<td>Prabhaji</td>
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<td>(English)</td>
<td>Triakashahtra Raha-</td>
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<td>Secret Supreme</td>
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</table>
Lakshmanji accepted as fundamental, sacred scriptures of Kashmir Shaivism. He urged his followers to study these and follow them as a guide for proper living. This include the divine scriptures such as *Rudra Yamala, Malini Vijaya, Svachanda* and *Netra*, all of them are classed among *Tantras*, the divine scriptures which deal with monistic belief system, the basis of the philosophy of Kashmir Shaivism. Lakshmanji lay emphasis on the study of Shaiva texts written by Abhinav Gupta, especially the *Tantra Lok*. *Tantra Lok* is a voluminous work of great importance in the field of the practical side of Kashmir Shaivism. This work recognises seven systems of logic practice which are the means to shed off ignorance and to attain the final realisation of the self as Shiva the absolute. Trika system has been assigned the highest position among these seven systems and is dealt with in detail in this book. The work also throws light on the secrets of the theory of this philosophy. Other works of Abhinav Gupta that are recommended are *Paramarth-Saara*, *Paramartha-Carca*. These minor works of the author are of great help to the beginners. Lakshmanji also stressed on philosophical lyrics such as *Bhairav Stotram* which are written in praise of Lord Shiva by Abhinav Gupta as well as *Shiv Stotrawali* of Utpala Deva. Other works by the same author, a commentary on *Shiva Dristi* also forms a part of the sacred canon of the group.
Lakshmanji himself wrote commentaries in Hindi on some of these books and gave extensive lectures to scholars as well as commoners at the Sunday Puza and at other places where he lectured during his lifetime. After his Mahasamadhi, similar classes are organised by scholars who were trained by him, like Neel Kanth Gurtu and Makhan Lal Kukiloo, and have continued to give expositions of these texts. These ancient texts are supplemented by the works written by Lakshmanji himself during his lifetime. Most of the ancient texts were either not easily available to common people or incomprehensible, as they were written on birch wood and in the old Sharadha script. So Lakshmanji wrote simplified commentaries on these important works in the Devnagari or English script. The first book by Lakshmanji was a Kashmiri translation and commentary on Gitarth-Sangreh, an eleventh century Shaiva work by Abhinav Gupta which is based on the Kashmiri version of the Epic Mahabharata. The remarkable thing about this work is the additional Shlokas (twenty-seven in number) that it has than the one read outside Kashmir. This book was published in 1933 and presents the Gita from Shaiva viewpoint. Lakshmanji also wrote Hindi translation with commentary on Abhinav Gupta’s Tantra Lok as well as Utpala Deva’s Shivstotrovali. The other important Hindi translations include the one on Sambpancasika, from the Netra Tantra an eulogistic philosophical lyric written in praise of Sun God and Karmanyā Pradipika, giving wonderful exposition of the
twelve forms of Shaiva Yoga. In his book, **Lectures on Principles and Practices in Kashmir Shaivism**, written in English, Lakshmanji has lucidly explained the practice of Shaivayoga to be followed by the devotees. In another book **Kashmir Shaivism - Secret Supreme**, Lakshmanji has explained in detail the basic tenants of Kashmir Shaivism. This book is based on the lectures given by Lakshmanji in 1970-71 to his foreign disciples. Both the books were published by the Universal Shaiva Trust - the publishing house set up by Lakshmanji himself, which later shifted to California where his American devotees are running it now.

The third category of books which form the part of the sacred literature are those which have been written by Lakshmanji’s disciples and devotees. These include the works of learned disciples such as **Trika Rahasya Shastra**, **Shrmad Gitarath Sangreh**, **Panchastavi** by Prabhaji, **Shiva Sutras**, **Pratyabhijna Hrdaya**, **Vijyananabhairava** by Thakur Jaidev Singh **Bhawani Sahasranama**, **Indrakshi Stotram**, **Pajar Parjaw** etc. by Janaki Nath Koul ‘Kamal’, **Amriteshwar Bhairav** and **Shatnamavali** by Makhan Lal Kukiloo. These books have been written by them under the guidance of Lakshmanji. This category also includes books written by Lakshmanji’s devotees abroad and the poetry books written by his devotees such as Dina Nath Ganjoo, Kamla Bhagati and Raj Dulari Kaul. All these books have been greatly inspired by Lakshmanji’s teaching and throw light on the philosophy of Kashmir
Shaivism.

Material from the sacred literature mentioned above provides the verbal content for most of the rituals and programmes in the ashram. On the Sunday Puza as well as on important functions, recitations are held from the Gurustuti, written by Rameshwar Jha. This book contains shlokas i.e., verses written in Sanskrit, in praise of the preceptor Lakshmanji. These shlokas were written every year by Rameshwar Jha at Banaras on Lakshmanji's birthday and sent to him. On the birthday, Sharikaji would read them aloud to everyone present there. After the death of Rameshwar Jha, the disciples at Srinagar, compiled these shlokas into a book form and began to recite them on Sunday Puza and other functions.

Shatnamavali written by Makhan Lal Kukiloo contains the 108 names of Lakshmanji describing his nature as that of Shiva. This book is also recited in every congregation. The group also brings out monthly magazine Malini. Apart from these books, other types of mass media are also used, eg., the audio cassettes with lectures of Lakshmanji are played on major ceremonies when people congregate in great numbers. Video recordings are also made on these days and these cassettes are later shown to the devotees.

Thus we see, how the Lakshmanji group transmits religious and cultural messages through a network of
communication using the sacred geography, sacred festivals and sacred literature, which gives the group its voice and identity. Those who receive these messages are both the insiders or devotees as well as the outsiders or non-devotees. These include the initiated disciples, the relative-devotees and the families of these disciples and devotees who had been regularly visiting the Ishwar Ashram at Ishber, Srinagar to meet and seek Lakshmanji's blessings. Through the intricate network of communication, messages are sent and received by the same people in the group so that a sacred world is created by this process of communication. As Edmund Leach observes, "When we participate in rituals we 'say' things to ourselves ..... We engage in rituals in order to transmit collective messages to ourselves". (Leach 1976, 43, 45)

Information is also communicated to outsiders in order to attract new members into the group. Outsiders such as the non-devotees, curious visitors to the ashram, researchers and scholars are welcomed to participate through the advertisement in papers on important occasions and get exposed to the sacred world of the group so as to communicate through its intricate network of communication, messages and truths that have been learned, shared and preserved in the sect.
CONCLUSION

The group at present is passing through an interregnum. The *ashram(s)* that are being set up contain relics and photographs of the *guru*, Lakshmanji. It is worth noting that the faith lives only in the devotee’s ongoing relationship with the guru, the relics provide a focus for otherwise objectless devotional energies (Bab 1987, 88). From the point of view of tradition this has its dangers too; it can degenerate into the mere worship of object and place that is condemned in the tradition of Kashmir Shaivism as idolatrous. In addition, the *ashrams* provide the props against which the drama of legitimacy can be enacted. There are already different people who are believed to be the custodians of the literary-cum-charismatic tradition propagated by Lakshmanji. Whether this interregnum is going to become a ‘succession problem’ is to be seen. Due to the migration and diaspora, the faith is spreading far and wide, however, the group basically remains to be a Kashmiri form of Shaivism and even when it exists outside Kashmir, it is the religion of the Kashmiris. In this congregation we may well be on the verge of exemplifying what Daniel Gold has characterised as the movement from *Parampara* to *Panth* (Gold 1982, 163).