



KARNAH VALLEY: A REALM CRADLED BY PEAKS

"Where Myths Carve Mountains and Rivers Sing History"

Perched 6,000 feet above sea level in the northwest of Kashmir, the Karnah Valley emerges like a forgotten epic between the jagged teeth of the **Shamshabari** and **Karanu** ranges where **Gujjars**, **Bakarwals**, **Paharis** and **Sikhs** coexist. Accessible only by navigating the treacherous **Nastachun Pass** a serpentine trail coiled at 10,000 feet - this land of 2379 square kilometres, at its heart split by the **Kishanganga River**. The **Shamshabari** Mountain stands at an altitude of 12,000 feet, stretching between **Ramhal** and **Karnah**. It remains snow-covered for most of the year, with glaciers that feed the **Batmooji River** - a vital water source for the Karnah region. Renowned for its breathtaking panoramic views, Shamshabari is an integral part of Karnah's tourism.

Legends claim Karnah was once Satsar, a primordial lake mirroring Kashmir's ancient geography. Villages like Tangdhar and Dildar slept beneath its waters, while Zarla - now a windswept plateau - thrived as a prosperous hilltop haven. Here, Raja Karan, the valley's mythic founder, sculpted civilization from wilderness. His palace ruins cling to Karanu Mountain, where leather-lined reservoirs (sarr) still whisper of his ingenuity. He split the Aaridal Ridge, unleashing floods that birthed the Kishanganga and etched Karnah's destiny into stone.

Kalhana's **Rajatarangini** immortalizes Karnah as a land of **sun-worshipping warriors**, their rebellion etched in Diladar's excavated relics. The Pandavas, too, left their mark: half-carved pillars in Mooji's forests trace their abandoned bridge over the **Qazinag**, while **Sanskritized** field names - **Aawra**, **Thakri** - hint at agrarian mastery. Even **Lord Krishna** wandered here, christening the Kishanganga, while Ram's exile echoes in Keran's Raja Ram diyan ladiya caves.

In 1846, Maharaja Ranjit Singh crowned Teethwal the valley's administrative hub, but the 1947 tribal invasions severed Karnah's northern limbs - **Shardha**, **Lipah**, **Ashkot** - leaving them marooned across the LoC. Teethwal's bustling mandi (market) crumbled to ash and Tangdhar rose as the new tehsil capital. Cut off from Muzaffarabad, its historic lifeline, Karnah languished in isolation until the **Chowkibal** Road pierced the **Nastachun Pass**, stitching the valley back to Kashmir's pulse.

The Pahari people are not just inhabitants of the mountains; they are custodians of an ancient heritage that blends history, folklore and nature into a unique identity. From the untamed beauty of Karnah to the towering heights of Shamshabari, their lives remain intricately woven with the landscapes they call home. Ensuring their traditions, language and historical sites are preserved is essential to maintaining the **cultural richness** of the **Himalayan region** for generations to come.