



SHARDA PEETH **A BEACON OF ANCIENT WISDOM AND SPIRITUAL LEGACY**

Nestled in the Kupwara district of Jammu and Kashmir, Sharda Peeth stands as a revered spiritual, educational and cultural landmark. Rooted in the legacy of the Hindu Shahiya dynasty, this ancient site once served as a pinnacle of learning and religious discourse. Situated near the confluence of the **Kishanganga**, **Madhumati** and **Sargun** rivers in the **village of Shardi (Muzaffarabad)**, it remains a symbol of India's intellectual and philosophical heritage.

Sharda Peeths temple, constructed in the classic Kashmiri architectural style with red sandstone, reflects the region's artistic grandeur. Though historical records are sparse, 19th-century accounts by British archaeologist Aurel Stein note its walls rising 20 feet high, with pillars towering 16 feet. The site is also the **birthplace** of the **Sharda script**, an ancient writing system that shaped regional scholarship.

At an elevation of 6,500 feet, Sharda Peeth housed a renowned university, ranking among India's top four centers of learning during its zenith. A hub for Buddhist teachings, it attracted scholars from **Nepal**, **Tibet**, **Japan** and beyond. The university's influence radiated through mountain passes like the Drawah Valley (along the **Kishanganga River**) and **Lipah-Nekot**, connecting it to Kashmir's heartland. Graduates often settled in the **Karnah Valley**, leaving cultural imprints evident in villages named after saints **Sadhupora**, **Bhatpora**, **Khasala** and others. Archaeological finds, such as Buddha idols unearthed during Tangdhar's Mini-Secretariat construction, underscore its **Buddhist** legacy.

The Pahari-speaking communities served as custodians of Sharda Peeth and Taxila, inheriting a cultural lineage tied to luminaries like **Chanakya** (Kautilya) and **Chandragupta Maurya**. Historians trace Pahari's roots to pre-Ashokan times, when it flourished as a lingua franca alongside **Buddhism**. The Sharda script facilitated Buddhist teachings and literary works, spreading the language across Tibet and Nepal. **Karnah** being a **Pahari valley of Kashmir** holds profound historical and cultural ties to Sharda Peeth, the ancient temple and learning centre now located in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir. Due to its strategic geographical location and historical trade routes, Karnah served as a vital gateway connecting the Kashmir Valley, Pahari regions and Sharda Peeth, fostering cultural, religious and intellectual exchanges for centuries.

Karnah's significance lies in its role as a transit hub for scholars, traders and pilgrims traveling between Kashmir and Sharda Peeth. Before the Partition of 1947, the valley was a bustling thoroughfare, with routes linking Kupwara, Karnah and Sharda facilitating the movement of people and ideas. Pilgrims from Karnah and neighbouring areas frequently journeyed to Sharda Peeth, a revered centre of learning and spirituality dedicated to **Goddess Saraswati (Sharda)**. The influence of Sharda Peeth extended beyond religion, shaping the linguistic and cultural heritage of Karnah's Pahari, Kashmiri and Dardic communities.