

# Sacred Local Ritualistic Mobility of Population: A Case of Select Villages in Haryana

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## Abstract

The most cohesive aspect of Hinduism consists of a set of place-specific rituals occurring at the grassroots level in villages distant from the pilgrimage circuits. Many of these rituals have been practised since antiquity, passed down through generations, and remain largely overlooked in existing literature. This paper examines the relationship between a major caste and the local sacred sites within each of the five selected villages. Extensive primary data (from 980 households) has been gathered, including numerous narratives and oral histories related to faith in local village deities. The history of a village's origin largely determines the presence of certain sacred locations within it. By examining the frequency of visits to these sites on specific occasions, we find that these village deities rank among the most revered in Hinduism. For many individuals, such everyday visits represent the only pilgrimage they may undertake in their lifetime. This study examines the connection between people and village temples, including Pachvir, Bhaiyan, Chogan Mata, Saiyad, and Pitr Madhi, as well as the number of households (HH). The grassroots level of Hinduism still requires broader coverage and exploration to better understand the religion of the masses in India under the expansive canopy of Hinduism.

**Keywords:** religion, local sacred places, rituals, pilgrimage, village godlings, Hinduism.

## Introduction

Religion permeates nearly every aspect of its adherents' lives. The word "religion" has its roots in the Latin word "ligare," meaning to bind. It is defined as a set of fundamental ideas and practices that unite people within a cosmos, an ordered world, and connect them within the

community (Eck, 2012). Hinduism is the oldest religion to emerge among the peoples of the Indo-Gangetic plains, dating back approximately 4,000 years (Knox & Marston, 2015). All religions worldwide possess unique rituals and sacred practices. Hinduism is a fusion of various religions, with different cultural

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regions of India practising specific rituals (Ramachandran, 2015). This results in Hindu rituals being highly contextual and place-specific. In this study, five caste villages from Haryana have been selected to investigate their local patterns of religious mobility to various sacred places.

The most cohesive aspect of Hinduism, characterised by a set of place-specific rituals, is found at the grassroots level in villages well removed from the pilgrimage circuits. Many rituals have been practised since antiquity, passed down through generations, and are often overlooked in literature. Hardly any works are dedicated to grassroots Hinduism in villages, except for “Everyday Hinduism” by Joyce Flueckiger (2015). Pilgrimage serves as a broader term for this religious movement, which involves travelling from one place to another in search of the Almighty and is not compulsory in Hinduism. Bharati (1963) maintains that pilgrimage is highly meritorious but not essential for spiritual welfare. Numerous generations of Hindus have passed away without undertaking any pilgrimage, and many, to this day, have not embarked on one. However, at the village level, they engage in a full circuit of ritualistic visits. Their religiosity revolves around local sacred places that have existed in or near their residences for generations. Their transpositions of national and regional gods and goddesses in the village fulfil their sacred aspirations for all causes. This paper explores the

richness of grassroots Hinduism in five select caste villages, namely Isherheri, Shidipur, Balaur, Naya Gaon- Sainiyan (Bir Barkatabad), and Gangarwa, which have majority households of Jats (54 per cent), Brahmans (53 per cent), Ahirs (74 per cent), Sainis (34.5 per cent), and Chamars (28 per cent) respectively in the Jhajjar district of Haryana state (Table 1).

### **Materials and Methods**

This work is grounded in a humanistic perspective. Here, places are on the central agenda.

To explore the essence of a sacred place in the eyes of the people inhabiting it, the identities attached to these places for various life cycle events were the central concern of this study.

A field survey was conducted to collect household-level primary information on people’s religious connections in the study villages on a census basis for select castes to minimise any biases. The study was conducted from January 2020 to March 2021, with a three-month hiatus due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Exploration was the primary driving force behind it. A door-to-door survey was conducted using a pre-designed questionnaire with theme-based inquiries. A total of 980 households (Table 1) were part of the enquiry. Narratives and focus group discussions laid the groundwork for visualising the history of local sacred places and their origins. Visits to local sacred places were tabulated to facilitate

caste-wise population studies from the study villages.

The selection of villages was guided by the local saying, "Char kos pe badle paani, aath kos pe vaani," which means that natural and human traits change at a distance of approximately 12 and 24 kilometres, respectively. To maintain physical and cultural homogeneity, all selected villages were chosen within a 12-kilometre radius of each other to assess the similarity or dissimilarity of place-specific rituals.

### **Study Area**

The geographic coordinates of the selected village, Isherheri, are 28°37'48" N and 76°56'6" E, located in the Bahadurgarh Tehsil of Jhajjar district in the state of Haryana. The village's relative location is interesting, as it is bordered on three sides by the National Capital Territory of Delhi. Bahadurgarh, a border town in Haryana with the status of a block and tahsil, lies 9 km north. En route

to Delhi, it is connected to Najafgarh town, just 6 km to the east. It lies 250 km south of Chandigarh, the capital city of Haryana. In regional terms, it forms part of the southeastern Bhangar belt of the Punjab-Haryana plains. All five study villages are situated in close proximity (Fig.1).

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Sacred Places**

Religion is a powerful cultural trait that pervades human existence. It is revealed in tangible and intangible forms. One manifestation of religion is the sacred place. India's cultural landscape is rich in religious or sacred places of various hierarchical levels, ranging from local to national. These seats of divine presence have always been an integral part of human life. Places hold significance for us because they have meaning. Places mean different things to different people and perhaps even different things at different times (Turbshaw, 2005).

**Table 1**

*Select Caste Population Under Study in Five Select Villages*

Name of the village	Select Caste	No. of Households (HH)	Population		
			Male	Female	Total
Isherheri	Jat	214	629	577	1206
Shidipur	Brahman	177	580	506	1086
Balaur	Ahir	295	1040	918	1958
Naya Gaon (Bir Barkatabad)	Saini	234	975	864	1839
Gangarwa	Chamar	60	172	176	348
<b>Total</b>		<b>980</b>	<b>3396</b>	<b>3041</b>	<b>6437</b>

Source: Primary Survey, 2020-21

**Figure 1***Location of the Select Study Villages*

As places with sacred identities transform into pilgrimage routes connecting various tirthas, dhams, and temples associated with different Gods and Goddesses, sacred rivers and groves become an integral part of Hindu culture, creating a distinctive cultural landscape that weaves 'Tirtha' as a place of spiritual crossing, where the Gods are close and the benefits of worship generous, and 'Dham' as the home of God or the dwelling place of God (Eck, 2012).

The repetition and transposition of nearby places may be a quest to minimise distance by human choice in order to feel the presence of God. Therefore, the core concern is to explore and understand the essence

of Hindu ritualistic places and the meanings conveyed by these locations at the grassroots level.

### ***Local Sacred Places of the Study Area***

The term "local" refers to sacred places within the village or near the village (within the village's boundaries or nearby) where only the people of a particular village worship. Each village, since its inception, has a local sacred place dedicated to the *gram-devata* within or close to its boundary (Table 2). These sacred Hindu local deities

are tangible in almost all Hindu villages, often with only minor changes in their local nomenclature.

**Table 2**

*Consecrated Local Sacred Places of the Five Study Villages (Jhajjar district, Haryana)*

<b>Sacred Place</b>	<b>Village Name</b>
Pachvir	Isherheri, Balaur, Gangarwa
Chogan Mata	Isherheri, Shidipur, Balaur, Naya Gaon (BB), Gangarwa
Bhaiyan	Isherheri, Shidipur, Balaur, Gangarwa
PitrMadhi	Isherheri, Shidipur, Balaur, Naya Gaon (BB), Gangarwa
Mata Sati Madhi	Isherheri, Shidipur, Balaur
Saiyad	Isherheri, Shidipur, Balaur, Naya Gaon (BB), Gangarwa
Shiva Temple	Isherheri, Shidipur, Naya Gaon (BB), Gangarwa, Balaur*
Hanuman Temple	Isherheri, Shidipur, Balaur
Shani Dev Temple	Shidipur, Naya Gaon (BB)
Dada Budha Temple	Naya Gaon (BB)
Kali Mata Temple	Naya Gaon (BB)
Paal Wala Baba Temple	Shidipur
Balagnath Temple	Shidipur
Radha Krishan Temple	Balaur
Shri Ram Temple (U/C)	Gangarwa

Note: \* Balaur has Shiva and Radha-Krishan temples in the same complex; BB- Bir Barkatabad

Source: Primary Survey, 2020-21

These places are sequenced in Table 2 according to the order of their origin on the villages' landscape.

**Pachvir.** Pachvir, as the village guard, is symbolised as an iconic hero who protects the village, circumambulates the village on a blue horse every night, and keeps the ill spirits at bay outside the village. It ranks first in origin and reverence within the village's sacred landscape. "In central India, a typical village guardian is a male deity Thakur Dev riding a horse, with a protective ritual role but no extensive narrative" (Flueckiger, 2015, p. 33). It is the first shrine to come into existence on the very day a new settlement was established.

There are two conceptual bases for the presence of Pachvir in Hindu villages. One establishes its religious base in Hinduism with the concept of an aggregate connotation of five saints revered in the region, known for the welfare of people during their lifetime.

The Panchpir concept in the Rajasthan region supports this. These five Pirs are Pabu Ji, Hadbu Ji, Ramdev Ji, Mangaliya Ji, and Meha Ji (<https://www.rajasthangyan.com/Rajasthan?nid=35>).

It suggests that Panchpir was part of the Hindu tradition, under the influence of the great Hindu Pir Goga Ji of Medi. However, the oppressive nature of Muslim invaders significantly affected the

nomenclature. The second concept involves the Muslim origin of Panchopir. Pir is an Urdu term used to describe a holy man or spiritual leader.

Besides Hindu saints, Muslim Pirs (Saints) and Saiyads (Heroes) were also revered by a large section of the Hindu community. The Panchpir (Panchopir), or the five saints, had the largest number of adherents among Hindus in the North-West Province of British India from 1801 to 1856. They were worshipped by some 53 castes, of whom 44 were definitely Hindus, and about 16 were of good social standing. The original five *Pirs* were the Prophet, Ali, Fatima, Hasan, and Husain. However, there was a considerable variation in their names and numbers from place to place” (Jain, 1986, pp. 164-165).

Ibbetson (1919) remarked about *Panchpir* (*Pachvir*):

“...each village has its *Panchpir* in addition to its *Bhaiyan*. Often this is no more than a mud pillar with a flag on the top or similarly marked spot and generally seems to be near a tank or under a *Jaal* (Salvadoro Oleoides) tree and away from the village, but at Asauda village (near Bahadurgarh) it is much more like a *Bhaiyan* in appearance. In Nayabas village (near Sampla), it is said that the first man to die in a village after its foundation becomes Panchpir, and the second is *Bhaiyan*. Little seems to be known about the worship of this deity” (Ibbetson, 1919, Vol. 1, p. 195).

The concept of Pachvir is as old as the Indian villages themselves, serving as a local guardian and Deity

of the settlement. However, its name may be influenced by the Islamic vocabulary of *Panchopir*. Still, some pronounce it Pachvir, Pachpir, or Pachbir (in Hindi, Bir; in Sanskrit, Vir, and in Urdu, Pir, which have the same meaning). The second thought that justifies it as a Hindu shrine is its archetype; facing east is not a common feature in Muslim archetypes; a Saiyad is typically found in a south-facing shrine. *Pachvir* is possibly a misnomer derived from Panchopir or distorted from the Hindu concept of Gramdevta to Panchopir during Muslim rule. However, today, it exists in three out of five study villages in the Hindu archetype style, where Hindus revere it ritualistically (Figure 2).

Only three study villages, namely Isherheri, Balaur, and Gangarwa, possess a Pachvir shrine (Table 2). Shidipur and Naya Gaon (Bir Bakatabad) do not have Pachvir, as Shidipur is a double village located near Lowa Kalan (Kheda of Maan gotri Jat), separated only by a narrow street or lane. At the same time, historically, Naya Gaon was a Beed (forested area) belonging to Barkat Ali, the Nawab of Kharkhoda, around 200 years ago. Consequently, these two villages were not settled in the same manner as the other three. This suggests that the history of a village's origin has a significant impact on its sacred sites.

## Figure 2

### *Shrine of Pachvir in the Village Isherheri*



This sacred place is visited by the entire village, regardless of caste, during festivals such as Holi and Diwali, which are celebrated for birth and marriage rites, as well as to offer the first milk from cows and buffaloes. The month of '*Jyestha*' (May-June) is ritually special for bathing *Pachvir devta* (Table 3).

**Chogan Mata- the Mother Goddess.** The omnipotent form of Shakti, locally known as 'Chogan

Mata' (a symbolic representation of the Mother Goddess's presence at a crossroads where four lanes meet), is a local sacred site in every village. *Chogan Mata* ranks second, as it is consecrated after the creation of *Pachvir/Khera*. As a transposition of the Mother Goddess, it has been present in every Hindu village since its inception. It is locally known as '*Mata*.' The Mata is situated in the wilderness on the outskirts of the settlement (Figure 3). However, the ever-increasing population has encircled it within the ambit of settlements. "The village goddess makes the primordial association of *Shakti* with the earth concrete" (Eck, 2012, p. 275).

On any auspicious day, festival, or family function, and when a family member is affected by a disease such as measles, typhoid or chickenpox, unique offerings are made to *Mata*.

## Table 3

### *Reverence of Pachvir as a Local Sacred Place in the Study Villages*

Village Name (No. of HH)/ <i>Pachvir</i>	Frequency to visit	Isherheri (214 HH)	Balaur (295 HH)	Gangarwa (60HH)
Daily		11 (5.1)	02 (0.7)	0
Weekly		14 (6.5)	0	0
Fortnight ( <i>Amavasya</i> or <i>Poornima</i> )		07 (3.3)	04 (1.4)	0
On festivals such as Holi and Diwali, etc.		213 (99.5)	292 (99)	09 (15)
On special occasions, such as weddings, births, and other significant events.		213 (99.5)	294 (99.7)	59 (98.3)
On fasting days, such as Mondays, etc.		04 (1.9)	02 (0.7)	0
During <i>Jyestha</i> Month for <i>Bheli</i> * and <i>Cheed-Peed</i> **		213 (99.5)	243 (82.4)	15 (25)
To offer the first milk of a cow/buffalo (HH who keep domestic milking animals at present)		157 (73.4)	200 (67.8)	19 (31.7)
Do not visit		01 (0.5)	01(0.3)	01 (1.7)

Note: Figures in parentheses indicate the percentage; Villages Shidipur and Naya Gaon do not have *Pachvir*

\**Bheli* denotes the distribution of jaggery in a fixed quantity of 4.25 Kg.

\*\**Cheed-Peed* offers jaggery-sweetened wet flour cooked in mustard oil or ghee. \*\*

Source: Primary Survey, 2020-21

**Table 4***Reverence of Mata Chogan, a Local Sacred Place in the Study Villages*

Village Name (No. of HH)/ Frequency to visit <i>Mata Chogan</i>	Isherheri (214 HH)	Shidipur (177 HH)	Balaur (295 HH)	Naya Gaon (BB) (234 HH)	Gangarwa (60 HH)
Daily	24 (11.2)	11 (6.2)	75 (25.4)	37 (15.8)	13 (21.7)
Weekly	05 (2.3)	14 (7.9)	03 (0.3)	03 (1.3)	0
Fortnight ( <i>Amavasya/Chaturdashi</i> or <i>Purnima</i> )	09(4.2)	01(0.6)	02(0.7)	01(0.4)	01(1.7)
On festivals such as Holi and Diwali, etc.	213(99.5)	177(100)	294(99.7)	234(100)	60(100)
On special occasions, such as weddings, births, and other significant events.	213(99.5)	177(100)	294(99.7)	234(100)	60(100)
On fasting days, such as Mondays, etc.	03 (1.4)	0	02(0.7)	0	0
During Jyestha Month for <i>Bheli</i> * and <i>Cheed-Peed</i> **	213(99.5)	164(88.7)	217(73.6)	231(98.7)	60(100)
To offer the first milk of a cow/buffalo	0	11(6.2)	64 (21.7)	165(70.5)	02(3.3)
During diseases such as chickenpox and typhoid, etc.	213(99.5)	177(100)	287(97.3)	234(100)	60(100)
Do not visit	01(0.5)	0	01(0.3)	0	0

Note: Figures in parentheses indicate the percentage; BB- Bir Barkatabad

\**Bheli* denotes the distribution of jaggery in a fixed quantity of 4.25 Kg.

\*\**Cheed-Peed* offers jaggery-sweetened wet flour cooked in mustard oil or ghee.\*\*

Source: Primary Survey, 2020-21

The unique role ascribed to Mata is linked to the health of family members. According to the elderly folk of these villages, particularly

women, Mata's small shrines serve as the focal point for daily, weekly, monthly, and annual rituals (Table 4).

**Figure 3**

*Image of Mata Chogan in Village Naya Gaon*



**Bhaiyan.** Shrines of *Bhaiyan* evolved as the third sacred place and ranked third among a village's local sacredscape. After the consecration of *Pachvir/Khera* and *Chogan Mata*, the shrine of *Bhaiyan* came into existence in these villages, reflecting the villagers' faith in their ancestors. In a newly settled village, the first person who died was assigned the status of the village's *Bhaiyan* or *Bhumiya*.

Ibbetson (1911, Vol. 2, pp. 374-75) writes about *Bhaiyan*:

In southeastern Punjab, the village deity is *Bhumia* or *Bhaiyan*. There, when a new colony or village is founded in south-eastern Punjab, the first thing to be done before houses are actually built is to raise a mound of earth on the spot near the proposed village and plant a jand tree on it. Houses are then built. The first man who dies in the village, whether a Brahman, a Jat, or a Chamar, is either burnt or buried on this mound, and a masonry shrine is built in his name. The fortunate man is deified as the *Bhumia*, or Earth God, worshipped by Hindus of all classes in the village and regarded as its sole guardian deity. At weddings, the bridegroom, before proceeding to the bride's village, pays a visit to this shrine and makes offerings to it. If an ox is stolen, a house is broken into, pestilence breaks out, crops fail, rainfall is scarce, locusts visit the village, or any other calamity befalls, *Bhumia's* shrine is the first place to which the Jats resort for divine help. Such faith is placed in this deity that, in the event of a plague, the villagers will not vacate their houses without consulting the *Bhumia*. Thus, in Jind, we find the Phogat

tribal *Sidh* and a *Bhumia* in every village. Nearly every Jat tribe in that State has its *Bhumia*, but some have a *Khera* instead, and others again style their *Jathera/Khera/Bhumia* (Ibbetson, 1911, Vol. 2, pp. 374-375).

**Figure 4**

*Shrine of Bhaiyan in Village Balaur*



Figure 4 shows the shrine of *Bhaiyan* in the Village of Balaur. The most important rituals at *Bhaiyan* include the offering of the first milk from domestic animals, compulsory visits during marriage rituals, and the observance of *Bheli\** and *Cheed-Peed\*\** rituals during the *Jyestha* (May-June) month (Table 5).

**Table 5**

*Reverence of Bhaiyan as a Local Sacred Place in the Study Villages*

Village Name (No. of HH)/ Frequency to visit <i>Bhaiyan</i>	Isherheri (214 HH)	Shidipur (177 HH)	Balaur (295 HH)	Gangarwa (60 HH)
Daily	01 (0.5)	07 (4)	03 (01)	01 (1.7)
Weekly	02 (0.9)	04 (2.3)	01 (0.3)	0
Fortnight ( <i>Amavasya/Chaudasor Poornima</i> )	26 (12.1)	04 (2.3)	168 (56.9)	07 (11.7)
On festivals such as Holi and Diwali, etc.	213 (99.5)	161 (91)	294 (99.7)	44 (73.3)
On special occasions, such as weddings, births, and other significant events.	213 (99.5)	177 (100)	294 (99.7)	59 (98.3)
On fasting days, such as Mondays, etc.	01 (0.5)	0	02 (0.7)	0
During <i>Jyestha</i> Month for <i>Bheli*</i> and <i>Cheed-Peed**</i>	213 (99.5)	157 (88.7)	258 (87.5)	34 (56.7)
To offer the first milk of cow/buffalo (HH who keep domestic milking animals at present)	157 (73.4)	122 (68.9)	206 (69.8)	23 (38.3)
Do not visit	01 (0.5)	0	01 (0.3)	01 (1.7)

Note: Figures in parentheses indicate the percentage; Village Naya Gaon (Bir Barkatabad) does not have *Bhaiyan*.

\**Bheli* denotes the distribution of jaggery in a fixed quantity of 4.25 Kg.

\*\**Cheed-Peed* offers jaggery-sweetened wet flour cooked in mustard oil or ghee.

Source: Primary Survey, 2020-21

**PitrMadhi or Ancestral Shrines.** Ancestor worship is a universal practice (Sayers, 2013). Each society regards its forefathers. In Hindu society, ancestor worship has two aspects: Shraadh is practised in the month of Ashwin (September-October), and a Chhatri or Madhi is offered in the name of family ancestors for both daily and occasional rituals. The primary concept behind ancestor worship is to accumulate heavenly merit by allowing the deceased to reconnect with their living descendants.

Ibbetson (1919, Vol-1, p. 199) writes:

“For another reason, in a village in Gurgaon, the spirit of young men who died childless, discontented, and unwilling to leave their home is also supposed to haunt the family or village. Worship of the dead is performed in two forms: the sainted dead (Pitr) and the malevolent dead

(sonless dead)” (Ibbetson, 1919, Vol. 1, p. 199).

To pacify or counter Pitr, a stone or a set of three or five bricks is commonly placed outside the home or in fields called Pitr Madhi. Hindus' faith in their ancestors is as old as the religion itself. Some individual households may not have Madhi, but within a Kunba, one will find some Pitr Madhis (Figure 5). These rank fourth among local sacred places. These are personal matters of a particular household.

**Figure 5**

*Pitr Madhi at Village Isherheri*



**Table 6**

*Visiting PitrMadhis, A Local Sacred Place in the Study Villages*

Village Name (No. of HH)/ Frequency to visit <i>PitrMadhi</i>	Isherheri (214)	Shidipur (177)	Balaur (295)	Naya Gaon (BB) (234)	Gangarwa (60)
Daily	31 (14.5)	09 (5.1)	45 (15.3)	30 (12.8)	01 (1.7)
Weekly	05 (2.3)	04 (2.3)	08 (2.7)	24 (10.3)	0
Monthly (Amavasya)	131 (61.2)	98 (55.4)	182 (61.7)	195 (83.3)	16 (26.7)
On festivals such as Holi and Diwali, etc.	131 (61.2)	98 (55.4)	182 (61.7)	197 (84.2)	16 (26.7)
On special occasions (marriages, birth, offering the first milk of a cow/buffalo, during <i>Shraddhs</i> )	131 (61.2)	98(55.4)	182 (61.7)	197 (84.2)	16 (26.7)
Do not have <i>PitrMadhi</i>	83 (38.8)	79 (44.6)	113 (38.3)	37 (15.8)	44 (73.3)

Note: Figures in parentheses indicate the percentage; BB- Bir Barkatabad,

Source: Primary Survey, 2020-21

Many families perform a daily bathing ritual, light lamps, and offer food to their ancestors, while others visit during special family functions, such as weddings and childbirth (Table 6). On special occasions, the *Pitrs* are fed before the household members eat their meals. On the morning of each month's *Amavasya*, a family member offers fresh food, mainly sweetened rice boiled in milk (*Kheer*), and lights a lamp inside the small shrine.

**Sati Devi Mata Shrine.** Three villages, namely Isherheri, Shidipur, and Balaur, have Sati Mata shrines, each with its own origin story and narrative behind it. These are ranked fifth, as their origin dates back only 250 years to the sacred landscape of these villages. Therefore, visiting these shrines is not compulsory, but associated households are welcome to visit here.

At Isherheri, the sacred place was inherited by one family (now comprising 24 households) when they migrated to the village nearly 170 years ago. A small shrine to Sati Mata is located at Shidipur village, situated near the Bani Wala Johad, a pond adjacent to the village forest. According to villagers, it was made by a Baniya (village grocer) who lived in the village during the pre-independence era. No particular ritual is practised at this shrine on any specific day, but everyone

entering the temple complex pays respect to this shrine. At Balaur village, there is a famous shrine dedicated to Sati, a lady who willingly bears the brunt of her husband's wrath. The villagers reported that this incident occurred during the Muslim period. Later, this place became the habitat of the Ahirs of Balaur, and Sati's site became part of their fields. A man from Balaur was working in his field when the soul of 'Sati' asked for a little space for herself. She offered one boon: if someone is irritated by skin problems like rings (daad), visiting this place on the day of Amavasya will alleviate the issue. From approximately 250 years ago to the present, it has been a place of faith for the villagers (Fig. 6 and Table 7).

### Figure 6

*Small Shrine of Sati Devi at Village Balaur*



**Table 7***Reverence of Sati Mata Madhi as a Local Sacred Place in the Study Villages*

Village Name (No. of HH)/ Frequency to visit <i>Sati Mata Madhi</i>	Isherheri (214 HH)	Shidipur (177 HH)	Balaur (295 HH)
Daily	02 (0.9)	22 (12.4)	02 (0.7)
Weekly	01 (0.5)	27 (15.3)	02 (0.7)
Fortnight (Amavasya – No Moon Night)	03 (1.4)	-	269 (91.2)
On festivals such as Holi and Diwali, etc.	02 (0.9)	36 (20.3)	171 (58)
On special occasions, such as weddings, births, and other significant events.	02 (0.9)	28 (15.8)	154 (52.2)
On <i>Boli-Kabuli</i> for boons/ skin problems/fasting days.	-	77 (43.5)	33 (11.7)
During the Jyestha Month for 'Bheli'.	-	-	02 (0.7)
To offer the first milk of a cow/buffalo	-	-	02 (0.7)
On Panchami (5 <sup>th</sup> day) of the <i>Bhadrapada</i> month	24 (11.2)	-	-
Do not visit	190 (88.8)	05 (2.8)	06 (2)

Note: Figures in parentheses indicate the percentage.

Villages Naya Gaon (Bir Barkatabad) and Gangarwa do not have *Sati Mata Madhis*.

\**Bheli* denotes the distribution of jaggery in a fixed quantity of 4.25 Kg.

\*\**Cheed-Peed* offers jaggery-sweetened wet flour cooked in mustard oil or ghee. \*\*

Source: Primary Survey, 2020-21

**Saiyad.** Ibbetson (1919, Vol. 1, p. 195) wrote about *Saiyad*:

It is a site associated with a Muslim saint or war hero who lived or died in this location. In Gurgaon, the Saiyad's place is in the Mohammedan village, which is what *Bhaiyan* is to the Hindus, but Hindu residents in the village revere it, just as Mohammedans do the *Bhaiyan*. Though built in the form of a tomb, it is erected whenever a village is founded. "The spirit of Saiyad, like that of a boot, must not touch the ground" (Ibbetson, 1919, Vol. 1, p. 195).

*Saiyad* is a place dedicated to a Muslim pir, or Sufi saint or hero. Sufism (Hindu-Muslim confluence which enacted the bhakti sect) also influenced Hindu followers, who had faith in Muslim *Pirs* in a secular way. *Pir* and *Saiyad* have the same connotations in Urdu and Arabic,

respectively, as mentioned during an interview by a Maulvi at the Dujana mosque in Jhajjar district. Due to an extended period of Muslim rule, lasting approximately 700 years, their influence is visible in the form of various *Pirs*, *Saiyads*, and mosques across the northern plains. As all the study villages were settled during Muslim rule, such places are apparent in the surroundings of these villages (Figure 7).

In the study villages, *Saiyads* are regarded as Muslim identities; therefore, they are not ranked among the local Hindu deities. These are seen as intruders in the Hindu sacred landscape, revered by some Hindus for different reasons. *Shrine of Saiyad at Village Isherheri*,

*Shidipur, Balaur, Naya Gaon (BB) and Gangarwa, respectively*

**Figure 7**

*Shrine of Saiyad at Village Shidipur*



The most important day to visit *Saiyad* is Thursday. Therefore, many people from these villages visit the shrine on Thursday, but this visit may not be weekly. Preferably, Thursday is chosen by a significant number of households in the study villages to pay respect to the shrine (Table 8).

**Table 8**

*Reverence of Saiyad, a Local Sacred Place in the Study Villages*

Village Name (No. of HH)/ Frequency to visit <i>Saiyad</i>	Isherheri (214 HH)	Shidipur (177 HH)	Balaur (295 HH)	Naya Gaon (BB) (234 HH)	Gangarwa (60 HH)
Daily	0	04 (2.3)	04 (1.4)	0	0
Weekly	03 (1.4)	18 (10.2)	37(12.5)	16 (6.8)	0
Monthly (on <i>Amavasya</i> )	04 (1.9)	0	12 (4.1)	0	0
On festivals such as Holi and Diwali, etc.	01 (0.5)	117 (66.1)	266(90.2)	76 (32.5)	01 (1.7)
On special occasions, such as weddings, births, and other significant events.	0	154 (87)	263(89.2)	232 (99.1)	06 (10)
On Thursdays (but not weekly)	23 (10.7)	57 (32.2)	102(34.6)	73(31.2)	02 (3.3)
During Jyestha Month for ' <i>Bheli</i> '*/ <i>Cheed-Peed</i> **	23 (10.7)	43 (24.3)	56 (19)	06 (2.6)	0
To offer the first milk of cow/buffalo (HH who keep domestic milking animals at present)	0	26 (14.7)	113 (38.3)	45 (19.2)	0
Once or twice a year	100 (46.7)	34 (19.2)	13 (4.4)	26 (11.2)	17 (28.3)
Do not visit	94 (43.9)	12 (6.8)	20 (6.8)	02 (0.9)	39 (65)

Note: Figures in parentheses indicate the percentage; BB- Bir Barkatabad

\**Bheli* denotes the distribution of jaggery in a fixed quantity of 4.25 Kg.

\*\**Cheed-Peed* offers jaggery-sweetened wet flour cooked in mustard oil or ghee.

Source: Primary Survey, 2020-21

The most critical observation among all the sacred places described so far is the number of non-visitors to the *Saiyad* (Table 8). Approximately half of the households at Isherheri, the majority of households at

Gangarwa, and a few households at Shidipur, Balaur, and Naya Gaon do not visit the village of *Saiyad*, regardless of the occasion.

**Village Temples.** Temples are discussed village by village, as each

village has several temples, and each has its own story behind the sacred construction. Building a temple dedicated to any god or goddess is considered a pious or noble act among Hindus. All the selected villages currently have more than one temple (Table 2). However, until the 1970s, none of the villages had a temple within their territory. The only sacred places were Mata, Bhaiyan, Pachvir, etc. In the 1980s, a few well-to-do families built a small personal temple. All villagers visited these. Previously, a Shivling, a rounded stone terrace, was located under trees near the village pond (*Johad*) in each village. Large and beautiful temple complexes in Hindu villages signify the village's prosperity.

Two temples exist at Isherheri; however, the only village temple dedicated to God Shiva was built in the late 1990s and is visited by the entire village. It was constructed by collecting donations from the villagers.

Shidipur has five well-built temples within the village boundary. The first temple that most village people visit on auspicious occasions is that of Baba Navatiya, commonly known as Paal Wala Baba, the Kuldevta of a larger section of the village population. In addition, the village features one Shiva temple, two Hanuman temples, and a Shani Dev temple, which houses an idol of Baba Balaknath.

The Ahir village of Balaur currently has two temples: one is a

private temple dedicated to Hanuman Ji, built in 1980, and the other is the Radhe-Krishna and Shiva temple, constructed in 2010.

### Figure 8

*Shiva Temple at Village Gangarwa*



Compared to other study villages, Naya Gaon (BB) is a village with a high concentration of temples. They had overcome the fear of the Nawab's rule in the pre-independence era, which had prevented their ancestors from building even the primary local Hindu sacred places. Presently, five temples dedicated to God Shiva, one each to Dada Boodha (the Kuldevta of the villagers), Shani Dev, and Kali Mata, represent the village's sacred landscape. Second, it also highlights the village's social segregation during religious gatherings. Sainis have their own distinct Shiva temple, known as Prachin Shiva Mandir; Jats possess a different one, while Luhars have constructed theirs.

However, Shiva presides over the entire sacred landscape.

Gangarwa has one temple dedicated to Shiva in the village (Fig. 8), which was constructed with village funds in 2007-08. In 2019, the villagers began construction of a new temple dedicated to Lord Shri Ram,

following the Ayodhya verdict, which is still under construction.

At present, temples are the centres of religious activities in all the study villages, including daily and weekly ritualistic visits for special occasions such as family functions (weddings, births, etc.) and festivals.

### Conclusion

A common Hindu householder visits many sacred places in the local environment throughout their life journey, from childhood to death, but

this is a highly unsung aspect of Hinduism. Little space is given to this sacred movement and faith in the world of literature.

Larger centres of Hinduism, such as Haridwar and Varanasi, are very much in the spotlight, both internationally and locally; however, the most densely populated areas are still the least represented. Almost all caste villages have reverence for one or more sacred places, such as Pachvir, Bhaiyan, Chogan Mata, and temples, throughout their lives.

**Table 9**

*Frequency of Visits to the Main Temple in Each Village*

Village Name	Isherheri	Shidipur	Balaur	Naya Gaon (BB)	Gangarwa
Main temple of the village	Shiva	Paal wala Baba	Radhe Krishan	Shiva	Shiva
No. of Households (HH)	214	177	295	234	60
Daily	21 (9.8)	55 (31.1)	61 (20.7)	40 (17.1)	03 (5)
Weekly	33 (15.4)	34 (19.2%)	57 (19.3)	45 (19.2)	02 (3.3)
Fortnight (Amavasya or Poornima)	10 (4.7)	159 (89.8)	12 (4.1)	06 (2.6)	0 (0)
On festivals such as Shiv Ratri, Janmashtami, Holi, and Diwali.	207 (96.7)	158 (89.3)	295 (100)	234 (100)	60 (100)
On special occasions, such as weddings, births, and other significant events.	213 (99.5)	159 (89.8)	295 (100)	234 (100)	60 (100)
On fasting days, such as Mondays, Thursdays, and Fridays.	127 (59.3)	22 (12.4)	153 (51.9)	191 (81.6)	46 (76.7)
During the Shravan Month, offering water to Shiva	171 (79.9)	31 (17.5)	229 (77.6)	212 (90.6)	55 (91.7)
Do not visit	01 (0.5)	08 (4.5)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)

Note: Figures in parentheses indicate the percentage; BB- Bir Barkatabad

Source: Primary Survey, 2020-21

At the village level, Hindus have the highest frequency of local visits, ranging from daily ritualistic

processes to weekly, monthly, and annual festivities, as well as special occasions. Moreover, this has been a

longstanding tradition in Hindu villages since antiquity. However, its character and intensity are changing rapidly in response to shifting economic, social, and moral paradigms. The grassroots level of Hinduism, which is highly contextual and place-specific, seeks wider coverage and exploration to gain a deeper understanding of the religion practised by the masses in India.

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