



*Myths,  
Rituals  
and  
Beliefs  
in  
Himachal  
Pradesh*

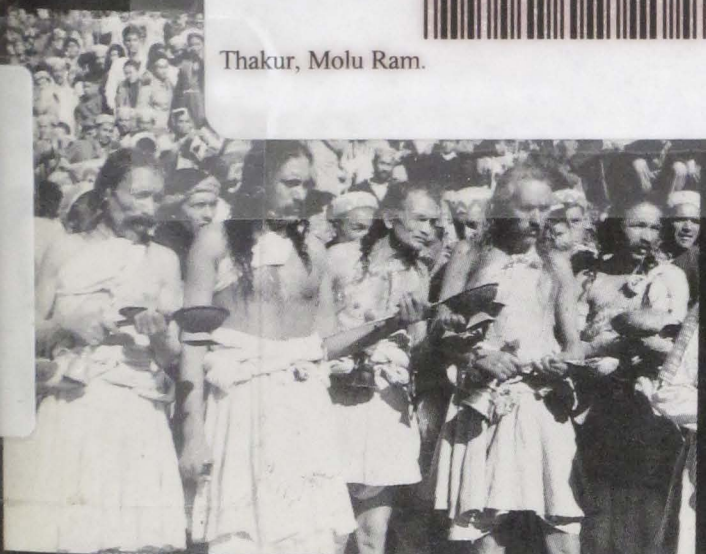
Myths, rituals, and beliefs in Himachal Prade  
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# MYTHS, RITUALS AND BELIEFS IN HIMACHAL PRADESH

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## *Preface*

For the English speaking people 'if there is any way to heaven it is through hell', but for the Indians the path to heaven ascends from the Himalayas. And the Himalayas with preponderant mountain-chains are inhabited by very interesting people with splendid religious history, mythology, folklore and traditions. They hug their primitiveness as much as they embrace the pinnacles of civilization. They present a rare blend of the old and the new. Their myths and rituals speak of their hoary past. The present book deals with the folklores, beliefs and superstitions, rites and rituals, myths and mythology, legends and legendary tales and conventions and traditions of people of Himachal Pradesh.

Myths and rituals play a very important role in the social, cultural and religious life of a community. Broadly speaking myths are the beliefs around which overall activities of the people revolve and the rituals are the way and procedures through which these myths are translated into action.

The social and religious life in the hills is very much different from the plains. The hill people are neither exclusively Shaiva nor Vaishnava. They are, essentially, all in one. They worship Shiva as much as they deify Vishnu and his incarnations. The same person has as much regard for Shiva as he has for Vishnu or Shakti. The hill people rather worship a large number of village gods and goddesses and in their polytheistic belief they observe a large number of rituals in their daily life.

The subject of myths and rituals has, recently, attained special significance in the hands of anthropologists, folklorists and sociolinguists. They are no more looked down upon as a medley of

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meaningless practices of superstitious communities. They, rather, contain certain elements of truth of a community life. Consequently, they form a part of our living tradition and constitute significant phenomena which keep alive our interest in many ways. Certainly they do not grow in isolation and, therefore, they explain things when facts elude. They are, thus, commemorative of certain important events and their study may lead us to some clues of historical and anthropological significance. Again, in their rhythmic procedure they have an intrinsic ability to survive as a vehicle for manifesting emotions, attitudes and sentiments towards the religious sacrament.

The myths and ritual behaviour function as a conceptual apparatus in the life of a family, a tribe or a community. A large number of rites are performed with a view to achieve some goal or end. The end may be physical like good health, beauty, longevity etc; social like fame, wealth, power, status and so on; and natural like rainfall, floods, droughts, plentiful crops etc. These goals are achieved by combination of meritorious actions and ritual performances. Thus, the myths and rituals of ancient people that have come down to us are of scientific value because their analysis throws light on the peculiarity of primitive thoughts. They speak of the mental perception of their environmental phenomena.

The western Himalaya is the home of gods and goddesses and of god-fearing and honest people who have respect for all the religions. Their old conventions have never stood in their way of progress in this science dominated world. Their gods never fought for religion. Their fight was always aimed at promoting peace and harmony and feeling of mutual trust among the people. Eliot had once said, "The world turns. The world changes, but one thing does not change: The perpetual struggle between good and evil". It is this 'perpetual struggle' that the legends, myths and rituals of this book symbolize culminating in the fact that good always triumphs over evil.

The subject dealt with in this book is not the work of single investigator. It requires the assistance of many scholars, and I have great pleasure in recording my indebtedness to all those scholars and writers whose works stimulated my interest in this task. I have frequently consulted and made use of many books and articles appearing in *Somsi, Himbharati, Himprastha, Giriraj* and *Vipasha*

magazines. My thanks are due to all those authors and writers. I have made due mention of these references at proper places, but where it has not been done, my sincere acknowledgements are explicitly expressed here.

In conclusion I would express the hope that the publication of this book will stimulate the interest of scholars and students for further investigation in the field.

M.R. THAKUR



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# 1

## *The Land and History*

Literally 'an abode of eternal snow' Himachal Pradesh lies in the lap of Himalayas—the great Himalayas about which the former Prime Minister of India, Jawahar Lal Nehru had once said:

“Himalayas are not only near to us, but also very dear, for they have always been a part of our history and tradition, our thinking and poetry, our worship and devotion. They are not only physically present in India, dominating the vast Indian plain, but for every Indian, they convey a deeper message.”

The Himalayas, as such, do not find any mention in the Vedas. They refer only to *Himavata* or *Himvanta* indicating hills clad with snows which are the source of water and river which ultimately flow into the sea.<sup>1</sup> Again, when speaking of rivers, particular mention has been made of ten rivers<sup>2</sup> i.e., Ganga, Yamuna, Saraswati, Shutudri (Satluj), Parushni (Ravi), Asikni (Chanab), Marudvridha, Vitasta (Jhelam), Arjiki (Beas) and Sushoma. Most of these rivers run through that part of the Himalayas where the present Himachal Pradesh is situated. Furthermore, there are frequent references of *Mujavat* or *Munjavat* mountain peak where *Soma lata* was found. In Rv. X.34.1 it has been said “The tumbling air-born (products) of the great Vibhidaka tree (i.e., the dice) delight me as they continue to roll on

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1. हिमवतः प्रसवन्ति सिन्धौ समह संगमः ।

आपोह मह्यंतद् दैवो ददेन हृदघोत ॥

—अथर्व. 6.24.1

2. इमं मे गंगे यमुने सरस्वति शुतुद्रि स्तोमं सचता परुष्या ।

असिक्न्या मरुद्वृधे वितस्तयार्जीकीये शृणुधा सुषोमया ॥

—ऋ. 10.75.5

the dice-board. The exciting dice seem to me like a draught of Soma plant growing on Mount Mujavat.”<sup>1</sup>

Now, Majhat is, and has ever been, a mountainous tract between Kulu and Mandi districts above Shamshi, locally known as Soms, near Kulu. The mountain top is a treasure of herbs and herbal plants and on the 20th of Bhadon of each year people, experts in the subject, collect more than sixty herbs to be used as fermentation for the preparation of *sur* ‘an intoxicating drink’.<sup>2</sup> Incidentally, there are three common features in this regard—Soms village (now town) may have some relation with *Soma* plant of the Rigveda, Majhat a mountain resembling to Vedic Mujavat and important herbs having the qualities of Vedic *Soma*. In the Mahabharata the situation of this mountain peak is described as such—‘*Giri Himvanta prishthe Mujavat nama parvata*’ i.e., the mountain named Mujavat is situated on the back of Himvanta hill. It is, therefore, not improbable to imagine that Mujavat of the Veda may be the present Majhat of Kulu of Himachal Pradesh and Himavanta may refer to present Hamata in the same locality. This might add a new chapter for the study of the geography of this part of the Himalayas in Vedic age. Again, it is interesting to note that in the Atharva Veda (Kanda 216 Adhyaya 5, Skt. 39 Verse 8.)<sup>3</sup> Soma has been shown growing alongwith another medicinal drug ‘Kushtha’ on the Nava Prabhransana in the Himavata top. Now, this Kushtha locally known as ‘*Kunth*’ is abundantly found and obtained in Lahul and Kulu area. It cures headache (*shirshamaya*), disease of the eyes, bodily affliction, especially fever and hence called fever-destroyer (*takma-nasam*).

During the Pauranic Period, however, the concept of the Himalayas was clearly defined when Skanda Puran specifically mentions Himalayas and talks of its five traditional divisions namely Nepal, Kurmachal, Kedar, Jalandhar and Kashmir.<sup>4</sup> Himachal

- 
1. प्रावेपामा वृहतो मादयन्ति प्रवा तेजा इरिणे वर्वतानाः ।  
सोमस्येव मौजवतस्य भक्षो विभीदको जागृविर्महा मच्छान् ॥ —ऋ X. 34.1
  2. For further details reference is invited to Vedic Soma-ras, Sura aur Pahari Sur, pp. 52-60 of *Pahari Samskriti Manjusha* by M.R. Thakur.
  3. यत्र नावप्रमंशनं यत्र हिमवतः शिरः । तत्रामृतस्य चक्षणं ततः कुष्ठोऽजायत ॥  
स कुष्ठो विश्वभेषजः साकं सोमेन तिष्ठति ।
  4. खण्डः पंचः हिमालयस्य कथितः नेपालः कूर्माचलौ ।  
केदारोऽथ जलंधरोऽथ कश्मीरो इति संज्ञोऽन्तिमः ॥

generally coincides with the old Jalandhar Khand. In Bhagavadgita Lord Krishna says 'स्थावराणां हिमालयः (अहं)' 'among the eternal mountains I am the Himalaya'. However, the conception of Himachal Pradesh, as such, is still obscure with no reference of this name either in Vedas, the epics or the Puranas. There are, none-the-less, frequent references to *Trigarta* and *Kuluta* which form major part of the present Himachal. The above quoted Jalandhar division might not necessarily include the plains of Jalandhar. Being a division of the Himalaya, its main area consists of the mountainous region popularly known as Trigarta. In a sense Trigarta corresponds to the Jalandhar group of states and Hema Chandra specifically describes Jalandhar as synonymous with Trigarta.

### Trigartas

In his book *Ashtadhyayi* generally dated to the 5th century B.C., Panini has described Trigarta as an *Ayudhajivi Sangha*, that is, martial republic and a confederation of six states known as Trigarta Shashtha (V. 3.x.116). Here Trigarta stands for 'three valleys' or the region drained by the three rivers i.e., Satluj, Beas and Ravi. Again, in the Mahabharata there is a reference to the *Samsaptaka ganas* of Trigarta which may mean that at the time of great epic there were seven constituent units of Trigarta and by the time of Panini one of the unit might have either got freedom or merged with some other unit.

The Pauranic tradition regards Trigarta as mountain tribe and not as a geographical unit. It is not unusual to call the people of a particular region with the name of that region, but it excludes the possibility of the plains of Jalandhar being in Trigarta. According to V.S. Agrawala the central portion of Trigarta formed by the valley of the Beas was also named Kuluta, now known as Kulu. Its ancient capital was at Nagar on the Beas, a name included in the *Katryadi gana*. *Mandamati Yavadi gana* was perhaps modern Mandi lying to the south of Kulu.<sup>1</sup>

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1. V.S. Agrawala, *India as Known to Panini*, p. 53.

## Kulutas

The earliest reference to Kuluta is found in the Ramayana<sup>1</sup> and the Mahabharata.<sup>2</sup> Although the word available in the Ramayana is *Koluka* and in the Mahabharata *Uluka*, yet Sir A. Cunningham, Wilson, E.J. Rapson, Dr. Hirananda Shastri all have unanimously agreed that both these words were used for a people of northern India and they related to that part of the country where now Kulu is situated. According to them these words are 'manifestly a clerical error.'<sup>3</sup> These words occur alongwith Kashmir, Sindhu Sauvira and Gandhara etc. and all these must be neighbouring countries or people. Brihatsamhita and Markandeya Puran also refer to it alongwith the tracts in northern India.<sup>4</sup> A chapter of *Kulantapitha Mahatmya* of Brahmnd Puran gives a topography of a land which, according to Dr. Hirananda Shastri corresponds to the present Kulu. It says, '*Kulantapitha* lies to the north-east of Jalandhar and south of *Hemakuta* mountain.' Hemakuta is presently known as Hamta. The Kuluta chiefs issued their own coins bearing a legend like '*Rajna Kolutasya Virayasasya*'. Over a dozen of them have been found. It is, however, interesting to note that none of them has been found within the territory of Kulu or Himachal Pradesh. Most of them were traced in Taxila. Certainly, the coins might have travelled to far off places in business and trade transactions, but some coins might be available nearby.

In addition to Trigarta and Kuluta there were many other independent states throughout the northern India along the Himalayan foothills. The Buddhist literature gives a list of *Sotsa-mahajanapadas* i.e., sixteen republics, which are said to have been in existence before the advent of Mahatama Buddha. These states indulged in frequent fights among themselves for supremacy. The kingdom of Magadha was the first to make such a successful attempt under Bimbsara

- 
1. मरीची पट्टनं चैव शैव्यं च जटिलस्थलै ।  
सौवीरं अंगलोकं च कोलुकमेव च ॥ (रामायण, किष्किन्धा काण्ड)
  2. काश्मीराः सिन्धुसौवीरा गान्धारा दर्शकास्तथा ।  
अभीसारा उलूताश्च शैवला वाहलिकस्तथा ॥ (महाभारत, भीष्म पर्व. 53)
  3. J. Hutchison, J. Vogel, "History of the Panjab Hill States, Vol. II, p. 416.
  4. कुलूताश्चाहू काश्चैव ऊर्णा दारवास्तथैव च ।  
एतेदेशा उदीच्यास्तु प्राच्यान् देशान् निबोधत ॥

sometime during the second half of the 6th B.C. The Magadha ruler expelled Chandragupta and insulted Chanakya, a great diplomat.

According to Jain and Brahmanical traditions as contained in *Mudrarakshasa* of Vishakhadatta and *Pari-shishtaparavan*, when Chanakya's initial attempts could not uproot king Nanda of Magadha, he went to '*Himavanta Kundam*' i.e., Himavat Kuta and made '*mettikaya*' i.e., friendship or alliance with its ruler named '*Parvo Raya*' i.e., king Parvataka and promised to divide the Magadhan kingdom between him and Chandragupta after defeat of Nanda. Parvataka helped Chandragupta with his people such as the *Sakas*, the *Kiratas*, the *Kambojas*, the *Parasikas*, the *Vahlikas* etc. and the joint forces defeated Nanda ruler. Unfortunately, Parvataka could not get half the Magadha kingdom because he was, soon after, got slain by *vish-kanya* i.e., a poison-gil as a result of Chanakya's intrigue. Parvataka's own territory was annexed to the Mauryan dominion. Chandragupta, further, tried to extend his influence deep into the hills of northern India but he was checked by a combined force of five kings. Chitravarma of Kuluta was one of them.

At one time Mauryan rulers swayed over all the north Indian hill states, but following the disintegration of the Mauryan empire many of the tribes and rulers of the hills declared their independence around the beginning of the 2nd century B.C. Many of them stressed their political authority by issuing coins for the purpose of trade. In the first half of the 2nd century B.C. Trigarta chiefs issued coins bearing the name of '*Trikata Janapada*'. On these coins three storeyed building was described as *stupa* by Allan and as *samthagara* by many other scholars.

### **Audumbaras**

Of the other republics of this period Audumbara is next to strike in the later half of the 2nd century B.C. Their coins offer valuable numismatic evidence to reconstruct the old history of the present Himachal Pradesh. More than 103 copper and silver coins bearing variously the names of Dharaghosha, Shivadasa and Rudradasa etc., the great kings of Audumbaras, were found at Jwalamukhi and Iripal, both in Kangra district. One side of the coins bears *udumbara* tree, elephant, an undulating line representing a snake or a river, *chakra*,



lotus and the name of the king with the word '*Audumbara*' in Brahmi and Kharoshti scripts. The other side depicts sage Vishwamitra, three storeyed temple, *swastika* sign, trident and bull *nandi*. Some coins of this tribe were found at Pathankot and Hoshiarpur districts and from all these evidences, it has been established that Audumbaras were the rulers of Kangra of Himachal Pradesh with extension upto Gurdaspur and Hoshiarpur.

### **Kunindas**

Another important and ancient tribe of this region was Kunindas. They have been referred to in the Mahabharata, Brihatsamhita and Vishnupurana in different forms like Kulinda, Kuninda, Kaulinda, Kunninda etc. They have been shown as mountaineers and neighbours of the Trigartas. Fifty-four copper coins of Kunindas were found at Tapa Mewa in Hamirpur district and three silver coins were found near Jwalamukhi. Their coins bear a Brahmi legend like '*Rajna Kunindasya Amoghabhutisya Maharajasya*'. The copper coins seem to be meant for local circulation while the silver coins served as a medium in the trade transactions outside their own territory. The *Kunets* of Kulu, Shimla and Sirmaur districts are known to be the descendants of the Kunindas and their area was the centre of their influence.

Likewise, four copper coins of the *Yaudheyas* have been found in Kangra district. These, however, do not suffice to relate them to Himachal. Their coins bear a legend '*bahudhanaka Yaudheyanam*' in which *bahudhanaka* is identified with Rohtak region of Haryana which seems to be the central seat of the Yaudheyas although their influence might have spread to a part of Himachal Pradesh.

### **The Hindu Hill States**

The closing period of the Audumbara republic state seems to be the first half of the 1st century A.D., and no Kuninda coins seem to have been issued after 200 A.D. Therefore, the 3rd century A.D. seems to be the beginning of different smaller states of the post-Muhammadan or pre-British period of this part of the Himalayas. Apparently, they formed two groups—cis-Satluj and trans-Satluj. The trans-Satluj group consisted of the following main states:

- |             |            |              |
|-------------|------------|--------------|
| 1. Chamba   | 5. Siba    | 9. Mandi     |
| 2. Nurpur   | 6. Jaswan  | 10. Suket    |
| 3. Datarpur | 7. Kangra  | 11. Kulu     |
| 4. Guler    | 8. Kutlehr | 12. Bangahal |

Nothing authentic is known about the early history of these or of the cis-Satluj group states, nor any reliable documents are available to construct the account, except the Vanshavalis i.e., the genealogical rolls of the rulers which, though, all the states have carefully maintained, contain nothing more than the names. At many times the Vanshavalis, themselves, are self-contradictory when compared with each other. What can, however, be positively known is the fact that this part of the country was, originally, ruled by petty chiefs bearing the title of Rana or Thakur either as independent ruler or under the suzerainty of a paramount power. They were, in fact, the result of the disintegrating elements of the former strong republics. At the fall of the Audumbaras and Kunindas, their local chiefs got independence calling themselves Ranas or Thakurs and their rulers known as *Apthakurai* i.e., self-styled *thakur*-ship. *Apthakurais* were not well-knit organized units. They kept fighting each other constantly and there was a rule of injustice and cruelty. This is known by the *bharthas* of the village gods who state how they subdued their coercive force. Such *bharthas* cannot be looked down easily because the traditions and conventions are the main sources of history of these hills where the written record is scanty and unreliable. Circumambulating his whole territory after every five years Katrusi Narayan of Tarapur (Kulu), at the end of the journey loudly asks '*Thara Thakur kuniye mare*' (who killed the eighteen Thakurs) and those present declare with louder voice '*Narayane mare, Narayane mare*' (Narayan killed them).

Their rule must have persisted for pretty long time, but Chinese pilgrim Hiuen Tsang who visited India from 630 to 643 A.D. does not speak of any such administration. He visited *Che-lan-to-lo* i.e., Jalandhar which corresponds to the Trigarta and about which he states that it was 1000 li in length and 800 li in breadth from north to south. Its capital was 12 to 13 li in circuit. It is stated to be situated to north-east of China-po-ti (Chinabhukti) and south-west of Kiu-lu-to (Kuluta). The position thus described seems to correspond with Kangra valley.

Kangra seems to be the most ancient and most popular of all the hill states. It appears to have been founded by Susarma Chandra who was an ally of the Kauravas in the Mahabharata, although local legend speaks of Bhum Chand as the first Raja who sprang from the perspiration of the brow of the goddess of Kanga. Many names appear in the Vanshawali of the state, but most of the earlier names appear to be more mythical than real. Historians are, however, of the view that Kangra is one of the oldest royal families in India as having 'genealogies more ancient and unbroken than can be shown by any other royal families in the world'. Much is known about the Kangra fort and its Katoch Rajas in the works of the Muhammadan historians, but for a long spell of period nothing chronologically is known. It is only after Prithvi Chand (1330 A.D.) that the History of the Panjab Hill States mentions the Rajas and their events in systematic order. Guler, Jaswan, Siba and Datarpur are offshoots from Kangra.

Nurpur is believed to have been founded by one Jhet Pal who was a younger brother of Tomar Rajput king of Delhi. The original capital of Nurpur was Pathankot previously known as Paithan or Pratishtan. In the time of Akbar the capital was transferred to Nurpur then known as Dhameri. Cunningham deduces Dhameri from Udumbara and concludes that this was the centre of Udumbara kingdom. Under Jagat Singh (1619-46) the Nurpur state reached the zenith of its prosperity and his name is, even now, remembered with pride and respect.

Chamba is, perhaps the only state in the hills which has somewhat authentic and reliable Vanshawali because it is supported by inscriptions, epigraphical records and copper plates found in the state. It was founded by Meru Varman somewhere in 680 A.D. with his capital at Bharmaur which was then known as Brahmpura. Sahil Varman (c. 920 A.D.) transferred his capital to Chamba.

Suket state with headquarter at Pangna was, first, founded in about 1211 A.D. by one Vir Sen son of Rup Sen who had formerly settled at Ropar after his ancestors were expelled from Bengal. During about 1330 A.D., Bahu Sen quarrelled with his elder brother Sahu Sen and retired to Mangalor then in Kulu, acquired a small tract and established himself as a small chief. Subsequently, his descendant Ajbar Sen founded Mandi town as a state in 1527 A.D.

Kulu is one of the oldest principalities in the western Himalaya.

Direct from Ramayana and Mahabharata down to 7th century A.D. when Hiuen Tsang travelled India and wrote his travelogue, Kuluta finds its place in the most authentic records of the country. Professor Rapson, Dr. A. V. Bergny, A. Cunningham and Dr. Hirananda Shastri, all have unanimously ascribed the old Kuluta coin bearing the legend '*Rajna Kolutasya Virayasasya*' to the first or second century of the Christian era. Hiuen Tsang writes that "*Kiu-lu-to* being contiguous to the snowy mountains, there are found here many medicinal (roots) of much value. Gold, silver and copper are found here . . . The people are coarse and common in appearance and are much afflicted with goiter and tumours. Their nature is hard and fierce. They greatly regard justice and bravery. There are about twenty Sangharamas, and 1000 priests or so. They mostly study the Great Vehicle; a few practise other schools (*nikayas*). There are fifteen Deva temples; different sects occupy them without distinction. In the middle of the country is a stupa built by Raja Asoka. Of old the Tathagata came to this country with his followers." It looks Kulu was then a centre of Buddhism and so far the name of the country is concerned, Kuluta dropped its suffix 'ta' only after 7th century A.D. to come to be known as present 'Kulu'.

Bangahal with its capital at Bir-Bangahal was founded by one Brahman. Prithi Pal was its strongest ruler who was, however, treacherously murdered by his father-in-law Raja Sidh Sen of Mandi in 1720.

### Cis-Satluj Group

Among the cis-Satluj group of states, Bilaspur, Bushahr and Sirmaur were the most important principalities. Bilaspur situated on both side of the river was, previously, known as Kahlur state after the original capital. It was founded by Bir Chand (c. A.D. 900), one of the five sons of Hariharchand of Bundhelkhand who had, alongwith his four sons, come to visit Jwalamukhi and who was killed at Nadaun by the Kangra Raja. Bir Chand, subsequently, conquered Bara Thakurais of the adjoining areas. Kahan Chand the eleventh Raja conquered Hindur or Nalagarh and gave it to his second son named Sujit Chand.

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1. Samuel Beal *Chinese Accounts of India—Travels of Hiouen Thsang*, Vol. II, page 210.

Rampur Bushahr is one of the oldest principalities of this area. Bordering Tibet, this state has, always, been of a great strategic and trade importance. A tradition traces its foundation to Pardhuman i.e., Pradyumna the elder son of Lord Krishna. He married the daughter of a local chief Banasur of Shonitpur i.e., the present Sarahan, established a state and made it its capital. Kamru had, also, been its capital in old days. Raja Chatar Singh is said to have annexed whole of the area of this state south of Sarahan. Raja Kehri Singh during 1639-1696 further extended the boundary upto Kumarsen, Theog, Kotkhari and Darkoti. Raja Ram Singh (1767-1799) shifted his capital to present Rampur.

A prince of Jaisalmer is supposed to be the founder of Sirmour with the title of Subhans Parkash with capital at Rajban. Udit Prakash (1217-1227) shifted his capital to Kalsi. Later, Karam Prakash transferred his capital to Nahan somewhere in 1621.

Between the Satluj and the Yamuna rivers, there were a number of *Thakurais* in old days. When Britishers took over this part of the country, all these *Thakurais* were under Sirmour. Popularly, they were grouped as *Bara Thakurais* (twelve *thakur*-ships) and *Thara Thakurais* (eighteen *Thakur*-ships). *Bara Thakurais* consisted of

- |            |             |             |
|------------|-------------|-------------|
| 1. Baghal  | 5. Keonthal | 9. Mehlog   |
| 2. Kunihar | 6. Kuthad   | 10. Mangal  |
| 3. Beja    | 7. Baghat   | 11. Koti    |
| 4. Dhami   | 8. Bhajji   | 12. Bharoli |

*Thara Thakurais* were:

- |           |             |              |
|-----------|-------------|--------------|
| 1. Jubbal | 7. Theog    | 13. Dhadi    |
| 2. Balsan | 8. Kumarsen | 14. Sangri   |
| 3. Rawin  | 9. Khaneti  | 15. Sari     |
| 4. Ratesh | 10. Delath  | 16. Kotgarh  |
| 5. Ghund  | 11. Darkoti | 17. Karangla |
| 6. Madhan | 12. Tharoch | 18. Kanaitu  |

Among the *Bara Thakurais*, Keonthal was the largest of all. It was founded in about 1211 A.D. by Giri Sen who was the younger brother of Bir Sen, the founder of Suket state. For many years it remained a major force among the remaining *Thakurais* and in about 1800 A.D., the Keonthal Raja had under him eighteen minor

Thakurais. Likewise, among the *Thara Thakurais*, Jubbal wielded great authority and importance. But whatever their size and position, the Thakurais were, always, at their loggerheads, each Thakurai trying to usurp the other. Larger Thakurais were, certainly, in a better position holding the neighbouring smaller Thakurais under their sway. At one time, Karangla and Kanaitu near Narkanda were under Kumarsen, while all of them were, once, a part of Bushahr state. In addition to the above quoted Thakurais, for some times, Nawar, Dodra Kavar and Pundar were also separate Thakurais. But they were, later on, annexed by Rampur Bushahr. Similarly, Rawin and Darkoti were, for a long time, under Jubbal. During the reign of Raja Bir Chand of Kahlur, all the Bara Thakurais were annexed by Bilaspur state.

During the last few years of the 18th century a struggle was going on between the Rajas of Sirmaur, Hindur and Kangra for the control of Bara Thakurais. In the fight that ensued Raja Ram Saran Singh of Hindur emerged more successful and stronger controlling the Bara Thakurais and annexing a large area of Sirmaur state. At this Raja of Sirmaur invited Amar Singh Thapa, the Gorkha General who was staying at Kumaon after conquering Garhwal and Kumaon territories. Thereupon, Gorkha army not only defeated Hindur Raja but also occupied all the Thakurais and the states of Shimla hills. The whole area remained under the administration of Gorkhas from 1802 to 1814. In connivance with the hill people British declared war against the Gorkha rule in November 1814. The hill people and their chiefs offered all help on the assurance of reinstatement under British guarantees and the Gorkhas were finally expelled from this part of the hills in 1815. The hill chiefs were granted *sanads* and the area came under British protection.

Subsequently, on the termination of first Sikh war the hill tracts between the Satluj and Beas were, under the treaty of 9th March 1846, ceded to the British Government.

### **Evolution of Himachal Pradesh**

On the 8th March 1948 the rulers of twenty-one princely hill States of Punjab and Shimla hills signed an agreement which resulted in the formation of Himachal Pradesh as a Chief Commissioner's province

from the 15th April 1948. These states were Baghal, Baghat, Balsan, Bushahr, Bhajji, Beja, Chamba, Darkoti, Dhami, Jubbal, Keonthal, Kumarsen, Kunihar, Kuthad, Mehlog, Mandi, Mangal, Sangri, Sirmaur, Suket and Tharoch. In addition, there were nine tributaries: Delath, Dhadi, Ghund, Khaneti, Koti, Madhan, Ratesh, Rawingarh and Theog. Bilaspur stayed out. Most of its area was to be submerged by the Bhakra reservoir and big problems such as the rehabilitation of displaced persons and payment of compensation were likely to crop up. It was, therefore, considered proper that Bilaspur should remain under the direct control of the Central Government.

Out of the above mentioned states, only five were full states, the largest having an area of 3500 square miles. Thirteen were less than 100 square miles each and three were less than 10 square miles each.

When the Constitution of India came into force on the 26th January 1950, Himachal Pradesh and Bilaspur became two separate Part 'C' States. On 6th September 1951 'Government of part C States Act' came into force. It provided for Legislative Assemblies being constituted for part 'C' States including Himachal Pradesh. Thirty-six seats (including 8 seats reserved for Scheduled Castes) were allocated for Himachal Pradesh Assembly. Provision was also made for a Council of Ministers with the Chief Minister to aid and advise the Chief Commissioner.

The Himachal Pradesh and Bilaspur (New State) Act, 1954 provided for uniting Himachal Pradesh and Bilaspur. The new State was allotted one seat in the Rajya Sabha and four seats in the Lok Sabha. The strength of Legislative Assembly was raised to 41. Total area of the State was, then, 28,241 sq. kilometres. The State Reorganization Commission, 1956, headed by Shri Sayid Fazl Ali, gave a majority verdict (Shri Fazl Ali himself dissenting) for merger of Himachal Pradesh and PEPSU with Punjab. Under the Act a Union Territory could not get a Legislative Assembly. The people and the leaders of Himachal Pradesh therefore, offered to forgo their Legislative Assembly than going for merger with the Punjab. Himachal Pradesh thus became a Union Territory under an administrator designated as Lieut. Governor, on 1st November 1956. The State Legislative Assembly and the Council of Ministers thus ceased to exist. Things were, however, soon set at right when the Territorial Councils Act, 1956, which came into being with effect

from 1st January 1957, provided for setting up of Territorial Council in Himachal Pradesh with 41 members. Twelve seats were reserved for Scheduled Castes. With effect from 1st July 1963, the Territorial Council was replaced by a Legislative Assembly. The Council of Ministers was also revived.

The Parliamentary Committee on the demand of Punjabi Suba was set up on the 28th September 1965, under the chairmanship of Sardar Hukam Singh, Speaker of Lok Sabha. This provided an opportunity to the hill people to press for their long-felt demand of merging the hilly areas of Punjab with the Himachal Pradesh. Their demand found acceptance at all levels and, subsequently, the Punjab Reorganization Act, 1966 provided for the transfer of hill areas of Punjab to Himachal Pradesh. As a result Himachal Pradesh was enlarged on 1st November 1966, with the integration of districts of Kangra, Kulu, Simla and Lahul and Spiti and sub-division of Nalagarh, parts of Una tehsil of Hoshiarpur district and villages Bakloh, Balun and Dalhousie of Pathankot tehsil of Gurdaspur district. Finally, the statehood was granted to Himachal Pradesh on 25th January 1971, when it became the eighteenth State of the Indian Union.



## 2

### *The People and Tribes*

It is futile to believe that this part of the country was, originally, altogether uninhabited and deserted and it was established by only foreign people including Aryans coming from abroad. This was, in fact, the bugbear purposely created by foreign writers. It is now admitted that the Aryans belonged to this part of India and they were not alone as single tribe with homogenous character, but there were many other tribes side by side living with them having their own unity of race and religion whom they called Dasas and Dasyus. In the category of Dasas and Dasyus, the Aryans included all those people who were their enemies, with whom they were in constant fight and whom they abused by calling them *anasah* 'without nose', *krishna tvacah* 'black-skinned', *mridhra vacah* 'stammering speakers' and *sisnadeva* 'phallus worshippers'. These adjectives were, it is certain, more out of jealousy than out of contempt. Surely, the Aryans proved superior to Dasa-Dasyus with quick horses in their service, with knowledge of the third metal (probably the iron), and worshipping the bright forces of nature, getting help from nature-gods like Indra against black magic of Dasas. Thus, in the great struggle they emerged victorious and wrote history favourable and congenial to them. Had Dasa-dasyus won, the shape of the history of the world would have been quite different.

Now, who were these Dasa-Dasyus? Certainly, Dasa or Dasyu was not a single race, nor a clan or a tribe, nor a certain class of people. Dasa-Dasyus, in fact, included many tribes and the scholars—whether foreign or Indian—unanimously termed them as aboriginals. The Veda or Vedic sages did not mention them with specific names.

But these names came on to surface soon after the Vedas in the subsequent literature where we find frequent references to Kols, Kirats, Kinnars, Khashs and Kuninds (Kunets). These all five 'Ks' are the aboriginals of this region of the country.

## Kols

In the long history of mankind, there has been racial intermixture among the population of this hilly tract. The Aryans never followed a policy of extermination of the conquered foes. There was always an attempt of amalgamation by way of intermarriage and deep social contacts. But it is, at the same time, not difficult to distinguish the one from the other. Kolis are one of the most popular and widely spread communities in Himachal Pradesh and they are none else but the descendants of the Kols. It looks that the Kols had their presence during the Vedic period itself, because at one place Shambara has been shown as 'Kolitar Shambara'.<sup>1</sup> Now, Shambara was a great leader of Dasas who lived in deep valleys of Himalayas. Shambara may either be *kol-itwari* (used contemptuously) 'belonging to', or *koletar* 'not belonging to Kol,' but it looks the Kols, then, certainly were. Otherwise he should not have been referred to as Kolitar Shambara. In Rv. VII. 18.19 it has been said that among the Dasas who fought against Sudas in the battle of Ten Kings were Ajas, Yaksus, Sigrus, Bheda, Bhalans, Gangus, Simyus etc. Now, some of these names like Shigru, Bhedu, Gangu, Jakhu and Shimu are very common among the Kolis of Himachal Pradesh. General Cunningham believes that the Western Himalayas were at one time occupied by a true Kolian group from the same race as the Kols of the central India.

In fact, the Aryans were spread over the outer Himalayas, footlands of Himalayas and the adjacent plains popularly known as 'Sapt-sindhu' an area drained by seven rivers. They seldom penetrated deep into the inner Himalayas and they were afraid of the snows and the darkness in the deep valleys usually engulfed by thick clouds. The middle and inner Himalayas were under the strong-guard of the Dasa-Dasyus who vehemently blocked their uphill advance.

The scholars consider Kols to be Proto-Australoids of the paleolithic stage of culture. Kolis were, perhaps, the first to mix with

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1. उत दासं कौलितरं बृहतः पर्वतादधि। अवाहिन्नन्द्र शम्बरम्।। (ऋ० 4.30.14)

Aryans and to adopt their culture and, therefore, they have been termed as Kolarians with indigenous religious beliefs. Among Kolis are the Halis, Chanals, Sippis, Doms etc. They are most sturdy, strong and hard workers and are the backbones of minor cultivation and village industry and the economic position of the state largely depends upon them.

### **Kinnaras**

A large tract of tribal areas of Himachal Pradesh belongs to Kinnaras or locally known as Kanauras. Particularly, the area comprising of Kinnaur district and Kanawar Kothi of Kulu district is their traditional home. In the classical literature they have been shown alongwith Gandharvas, Yaksas, Rakshasas, Vidyadharas, Urugas<sup>1</sup> etc. Except for Rakshasas all the remaining races have been shown in good sense. These names, originally, implied classes of mythical beings, but later they indicated certain tribal peoples. According to D.C. Sircar the Kinnaras and Yakshas were probably names applied to some Himalayan tribes, while Gandharva appears to have been the original name for the people later called Gandhara.<sup>2</sup> Kinnaras have also been called Kimpurushas i.e., *kim* 'what kind of' *purusha* 'human-being'. It means a distinct race somewhere between human beings and gods. Alongwith Gandharvas and Vidyadharas, the Kinnaras are known as heavenly musicians and singers. This traditional quality is found immensely imbibed in the present day Kinnars of Himachal Pradesh. Their conception is, in no way, mythical now. They speak a language other than Aryan language although it has sizeable Sanskrit words in its vocabulary.

### **Kiratas**

In Vedic literature Kiratas appear in different forms. In Atharva Veda 5:13:5, Kirata is used in a vile sense- 'कैरात पृश्न अपतृण्य बभ्र' "O

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1. गन्धर्वान् किन्नरान् यक्षान् रक्षोविद्याधरोरगान् ।

कलापग्रामकांश्चैव तथा किंपुरुषान् खसान् ॥

2. D.C. Sircar, *Studies in the Geography of Ancient and Medieval India*, p. 62.

Vile one, O Clinger, O lurking in the grass.” It has been addressed in a series of abusive terms. In Vajasaneyi Samhita and Taittiriya Brahmana Kirata is a name to a people who might be living in the caves of the mountain because they are shown as dedicated to the caves (*guha*). Thus from the position of a snake living in the cleavages during Atharva Veda, Kiratas reached the stage of a people dedicated to caves by the time of Brahmanas. Explaining the position of Kiratas Macdonell and Keith (vide Vedic Index, vol. II, p. 158) say that ‘In the story of Asamati there appears as the two priests who are opposed to the Gaupayanas, Kirat and Akuli according to the Pancavimsa Brahmana, or Kilata and Akuli according to the Satapatha Brahmana. No doubt the name is chosen, not as that of a historic person, but as a suitable designation of a hostile priest; for it is probably identical with the name of the mountaineers.’

Kiratas have mostly been mentioned alongwith Kols and it is believed that they reigned over a large portion of Nepal. In fact, they were spreading from Kashmir to Assam and Nagaland. Presently Malana glen in Kulu district is the centre of their habitation and influence. They differ from their surrounding peoples Kinnars of Kinnaur, Lahule and Spitians of Lahul and Spiti district and Indo-Aryans of Kulu on account of their language, appearance and dress though they believe in Hinduism. Their language is very much different from those in use in their neighbours. Their language is known as Kanashi. It seems to have some relation with Vedic *kinasa* (Rv. IV.57.8) which means ‘a ploughman or a cultivator of soil’. Malanis are usually agriculturists but in old days they were pectorals.

### **Khashas**

So far as ethnological investigation is concerned Khashas are the most controversial people in the hills. Many theories have been working concerning them. Foreign scholars are unanimously of the opinion that the Khashas are also Aryans but they came to India much before the Vedic Aryans. According to Pauranic references Khashas, alongwith Yakshas and Rakshasas, were the sons of Khasa the wife of Kashyap sage. Harivansh Puran considers Kashyap to be the progenitor of both human-beings and animals and the Khashas were among the human beings. D.C. Sircar and some other scholars

identify them with modern Khakhas living about Kashmir. Many foreign writers believe that Khashas are the Kassites living on the east of the Caspian sea. The fact of the matter, however, is that the Khashas were and are the real inhabitants of this area and they gave Aryans the toughest fight because they were their next door neighbours. Even now the Khashas are very proud Rajputs of Solan, Sirmaur, Shimla, Kulu and Kinnaur districts. In their popular martial folk play 'Thoda' they loudly declare:

*Bina Tikke Thakure Majhgaon ra Khoshia  
Deo Shirgul ri jubri de puja  
O lohu ra bhukha Khoshia.*

"I am Lord Khashia of Majhgaon under no other Raja or Thakur (quite independent and obeying no kings), have reached the arena of Shirgul god. I am hungry Khashia of the blood of my opponents." They have been brave great warriors ever since, and have been enjoying and holding very high social status and position in the old principalities. Others were scare of them saying '*Khasho ar nasho no dhizo*' i.e., donot rely upon Khash and *nash* 'nails'; they can scratch you at any moment. They are very quarrelsome and revengeful and it is proverbially said '*Khasho ri cheli khai punchhti di ag lai*'. They take their revenge even by marrying their daughters to their enemy.

In the Mahabharata Khashas have been shown alongwith Kiratas, Pulindas (Kunindas), Shabaras and Tukharas in the north, and in the Nilmat<sup>1</sup> Puran they have been noted as residents round Kashmir, where Shakas have been shown different from Khashas although many scholars consider the two as a single race. In the hills polyandry had been widely current among the Khashas. About them it is generally said '*Khasho ri kia rish, ek man bab bish*'; "Don't envy Khashas, they have one mother and twenty fathers". This fact relates Khashas to certain Vedic Dasas, because it is believed that promiscuity might have been in vogue at a certain stage of early Aryan society. According to Dr. R. Sastri "society at that stage was maternal or matriarchal rather than paternal or patriarchal. Words

1. दार्वभिसारगौंधार जालन्धरशकाः खसाः।  
तंगणा माण्डवाश्चैव अन्तर्गिरिवहिर्गिरिः।।

such as Daityas, son of Diti, Vainateyas sons of Vinata, Kadraueyas sons of Kadru, Anjaneya son of Anjana, Jabala son of Jabala and Jaratkara son of Jaratkaru are taken as indicative of the uncertainty of the real begetter and of the unsettled condition of the society which rendered promiscuity among women a necessary evil.”<sup>1</sup> Many scholars of the Vedic period agree with Dr. Sastri on this account, but some of them are of the opinion that this promiscuity was prevalent in the society of Dasas and not among the Aryans. They believe that some of the names selected in the above extract by Dr. Sastri belong to non-Aryan tribes, e.g. Vinata, Kadru, Anjana etc., and cannot be cited to prove that the matriarchal form of family existed in Aryan society.<sup>2</sup> Thus, although the opinion differs whether the polyandry was in vogue among the Aryans, the consensus, however, is that it was prevalent during Vedic period and, therefore, it certainly was ceremonious among the Dasas. Consequently, it looks not unbelievable that Khashas might be descendants of Kavasa who was the son of a slave girl and was taunted as being such ‘*dasyah putrah*’.

It looks that Dasa-women captured in the war, after their husbands have been killed or even un-married girls, were kept in subjection and treated like harlots or chattels. This might have led to polyandry among the Dasas and the practice might have come down to Khashas as an heritage and Kavasa (Kavasha) might be their ancestor.

### Kunind-Kunets

Many theories revolve round the Kunets. They are said to be ‘*kunits*’, that is, the Rajputs who ignored orthodoxical way of Hindu life and resorted to negative attitude like the widow-marriage and non-adherence of Brahmanical birth and death rites. The word is, further, said to be a conjunct of ‘*kanya*’ and ‘*hita*’ i.e., those who in love of their daughters did not follow the practice of murdering the female-child. Negatively, the word may be derived from ‘*kanya-hata*’ i.e., who used to kill their daughters a practice which had been in vogue among the Rajputs. Some scholars hope that word is derived from Sanskrit word ‘*kanishtha*’ thinking that they are the descendants of

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1. Dr. R. Sastri, *Evolution of Indian Polity*, p. 2.

2. Abinas Chandra Dass, *Rgvedic Culture*, p. 104.

Aryan and non-Aryan bloods. There are others who consider them to be the descendants of Varaha-mihira's '*kunatas*' who are not well versed in dance. Kunet can also be derived from '*Kanvata*' i.e., the descendants of *Kanva* Rishi to whom some hymns of the Rigveda are ascribed, or the sage who brought up Shakuntala as his daughter. Kunets all live in the forests where Kanva used to live and where he brought up Shakuntala.

There are many other derivations; the more the merrier, and every time it has been defined the interpretation has been found too insufficient to be acceptable. Late Lal Chand Prarthi has, after a detailed discussion, unsuccessfully considered them to be '*khanaits*' taking that they all follow agriculture as profession and derive their name from Sanskrit root '*khan*' which means 'to dig'.<sup>1</sup> It is, however, difficult to identify Kunets with any of these definitions.

It is sure that the word 'Kanet' (more proper pronunciation for 'Kunet') came into use in the first Settlement Report of 1862-65 and Census Report of 1881 for the first time. Before that the word is nowhere found in the written record of our literature. It is most probable that the word '*kanet*' must not have come all at once. Nor the compilers of the reports have unearthed it accidentally. It must have had a long history to travel before its appearance in the records. Again, it has been invariably said in all reports and District Gazetteers of Kulu and Simla Hill states that the *Kanets* have two clans i.e., *Khasha* and *Rahu*. Here *Rahu* does not mean one of the twins—Rahu and Ketu, although Rahul Sankrityayan asserts that in Simla hills *Khund Kanets* worship Rahu and *Kuran Kanets* worship Ketu. Any way, here Rahu means Rao Rajput which includes Rawat and Rawal Rajputs too. But here the real point of interest is that the *Khashas* have been shown as a class or a clan of *Kanets*. Now *Khashas* have a very long history. Their name frequently comes in the Ramayana, the Mahabharata and different Puranas. The historians have transcribed them pre-Vedic and said that they are also Aryans but they came much before those Aryans whose language and culture we own now. The question arises that how this ancient race came to be known as a clan of the *Kanets*. Once again, therefore, *Kanets* must have a history older than, or at least equal to, the history of the *Khashas*.

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1. लाल चन्द प्रार्थी: कुलूत देश की कहानी, ए० 222.

In order to trace that history we go back to the Vedas, the epics and Puranas and find a race the 'Kunindas' who are as old or even older than the Khashas. The two have, invariably, appeared side by side. Many references can be reproduced to this effect and it can be safely said that the present Kanets are no other than the old Kunindas. Cunningham found no reason to hesitate in holding that 'the Kunindas are represented by modern Kunets of Kulu and other hill districts of Simla.'<sup>1</sup> Etymologically the derivation of Kanets from Kunindas is both possible and probable. How did the Kunindas (or present Kanets) came to dominate the Khashas? The reason is very clear. Soon after the Pauranic period the Khashas came to lose their importance while the Kunindas continued their progress. It is heartening to note that Kunindas had one of the finest republics (Janapadas) flourishing in north-West India since sixth century B.C. to second century A.D. It is during this period that they dominated their Pauranic colleagues like Kinnaras, Kiratas, Gandharvas and the Khashas etc. The Kunindas successfully fought the rising tide of Magadhan imperialism. They even kept their political power and prestige intact against the great powers of Sakas and Kushanas. They had extended their reign upto Saharanpur and Ambala districts where their coins have been discovered in large number.

The Kanets are basically agriculturists and they are successful farmers. They also keep cattle, sheep and goats which keep them busy during off-season when there is no field work. They are, thus, well-off, prosperous agricultural class in the state. They have been following polygamy as against polyandry of the Khashas. Many wives are considered as assets for their field work. They are well-built and healthy lots.

## **Gaddis**

Gaddi is another important tribe of Himachal Pradesh. Gaddis are spread over a large area of Chamba and Kangra districts, especially in Bharmaur and on both sides of Dhauladhar. They represent different classes like Brahmans, Khatri, Rajputs, Thakurs, Rathis and menials.

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1. Sir A. Cunningham, *Coins of Ancient India from the Earliest Times down to the Seventh Century A.D.* (reprint) Varanasi, 1963, p. 70.



Conventionally it is said that Chauhan Rajputs and Brahman Gaddis came to Chamba from plains alongwith their Raja Ajaya Varman some time during 750-770 A.D. According to another belief they are some Hindu population of plains who fled to hills to escape the persecution and bigotry of Aurangzeb. A couple of references, however, take their origin long back to Vedic period. According to Rigved 7.83.4 and 7.83.8 Tritsus have been shown using *shvityanchah* i.e., white cloak with *kapardinah* i.e., clotted-hair knotted on the right side of the head with ribbons. Tritsus were the inhabitants of an area which later on came to be known as Trigarta i.e., the present Kangra and adjoining area. These references relate Gaddis as descendants of Tritsus of Vedic period, because the Gaddis also wear white *chola* and keep long hair. *Urna* i.e., *un* or wool is very frequently mentioned in the Rigveda (4.22.2, 5.52.9). The Parushni (Ravi) country and the banks of the Sindhu or the Indus were famous for their wool (Rv. 10.75.8).<sup>1</sup>

Gaddis are semi-pastorals and semi-agriculturists. They own large flocks of sheep and goats which they call *dhan* i.e., wealth because they are their chief source of wealth. With their flocks they come down to low hills bordering the plains during winters and go back to high mountains during summers. Many of the Gaddis own lands and do farm work. Gaddis have the reputation of being good at making bargain because he asks for an over-coat in exchange of a cap:

*Gaddi mittar bhola*  
*Denda top mangda chola.*

Men Gaddis wear a white *chola* 'a long coat', 60 foot-long black *dora* 'a waist rope made of wool', *safa* 'a turban' and a short trouser. The Gaddi women wear a woollen *pattu* known as *cholu* with a *dora* round the waist which tightens it with the body. The head is covered with a *chaddar* and a *salvar* on the legs.

### Lahulis

The people of Lahul and Spiti district are a mixed breed of Indo-Aryan and Indo-Tibetan stock. According to District Gazetteer 'the

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1. Abinas Chandra Das, *Rgvedic Culture*, p. 212.

pre-historic Lahulas belonged to a mixed race of Mundari aborigines and Tibetans, the amalgamation of whom must have taken place in Lahul some 2,000 years B.C. The mixed character of their origin is represented in their history which shows them inhabiting a country where three kingdoms meet, and ruled always by one or more of their larger neighbours.<sup>1</sup> The Lahulis are born businessmen, merchants and traders and this characteristic had helped them to come up from a very low life-style to a most highly flourished and developed society of the state. The trade routes from Indian plains particularly Punjab to Ladakh, Tibet and even to China via Lahul and Spiti and Kinnaur remained busy from time immemorial. Caravans of Tibetan laden sheep carrying wool, salt, borax and more precious merchandise of Central Asia had always been a source of most profitable trade of Lahul people who would exchange the articles with wheat and barley of the plains of India. The travelling sheep were, at the same time, of much demand by the Kulu farmers who regarded them as *chokha sauda* 'a fair game'!

Now when the old trade has diminished, the construction of worlds highest highway through Lahul and introduction of cash crops have brought jeeps, trucks and buses into the area. The potatoes, tomatoes, cabbages and hops dominate the trade scene now.

Once the Buddhism was thought to have come to stay permanently in Lahul and Spiti. Large number of gonpas and chhortens are evidences to that effect. The original function of these structures was to contain relics of the Buddha or, to some extent, of the *lamas*.

In course of time they became monuments of salvation and institutions of regular worship. Even now the Buddhism is widely spread and thoroughly followed in Spiti Sub-division and upper areas of Lahul. Else-where, however, the religious beliefs are fastly changing and there is a heavy trend towards Hinduism. So far as fairs and festivals are concerned Buddhistic beliefs, rites and rituals are very much prevalent every where. Previously Lahul people had joint family system with polyandrous form of marriage. This custom, too, is fastly changing. In fact, they show a great mental resilience and capability to inculcate and get benefit from new ideas and

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1. Kangra District Gazetteers, parts II—Kulu and Saraj, III—Lahul, 1917, p. 188.

schemes. Fuelwood saving devises like improved *chulas*, use of pressure cookers, LPG cylinders and even solar cookers, growth of willow and poplar trees and a number of cash crops in the cold hostile environment of the region have altogether changed their traditional way of life.

## **Gujjars**

The Gujjars in Himachal Pradesh are mostly Muhammadans but there are a few belonging to Hindu Rajput community. They are mostly pastorals, very few of them resort to farming. They keep herds of buffaloes. They follow a nomadic life moving with their cattle from place to place in search of grazing grounds. In summers they usually live in higher mountains and during winters they come down to plains. Moving from place to place is fashion of their life. Their proverb says "If you are settled, you are like a stone." They mainly earn their livelihood by sale of milk, *ghi* and butter. Financially they are not very low, but they are addicted to their old customs and habits hesitating any change in their social life.

Their tradition speaks that Gujjars originally owned a Rajput descent and some scholars consider them to be the result of the great Yajna performed at Mount Abu. Many of them were subsequently converted to Islamic thought during the reign of Aurangzeb. Many Gujjars claim to have descended from Suryavansi kshatriyas. They do not strictly follow the Muslim way of life although they keep holy Quran in their houses, believe in *dozakh* and *jannat* and perform *namaz*. They are religious-minded and honesty and loyalty are greatly imbibed in their character.

The Gujjars are a fine, brave, strong, polite and manly race with hospitable and handsome features. They are simple, mild and inoffensive in manners. They always like to live in peace and harmony. Due to their nomadic way of life they have very few permanent settlements. Maingal in Chamba district is one of such village where they have over a dozen hamlets. At such places they like music and dance. *Dholak* is their main musical instrument and they dance with sticks in their hands while some of them keep singing songs with hands on their ears.

The Gujjars wear simple but characteristic dress. Men use *safa*

'a turban' or a white cap, *kurti* 'a shirt with collars and pocket on the chest; *basket* 'a buttoned up waist coat without sleeves', *tehmat* 'a checked coloured cotton sheet wrapped round waist' and a *tamba* or *salwar* 'a sort of loose trouser.' Women wear a *dupatta* 'a coloured cotton sheet as a head-gear.' *Kurti*, *dor* 'a woollen sheet wrapped during winter', *churidar suthan* 'a tight pyjama or trouser'. Women also use *jhoomb* 'a type of head gear made out of cotton sheet wrapped in a particular manner. It protects the wearer from sun and rain.

The tribals of Himachal Pradesh are going through a great process of transformation. Their old profession is getting more and more complex. No doubt the tribesmen love their great past, their history and their traditional customs and rituals which make their homes a treasure of handicrafts, exquisite paintings, *thankas*, famous *gudmas* and religious institutions like *gonpas* and temples. But the tribal people particularly Gujjars and Gaddis are already facing grave hardship due to the fact that the wild migratory rules and facilities available earlier to their stocks were drastically changed soon after the partition. The individual states are, further, imposing restrictions on migratory grazing facilities. They are, therefore, naturally attracted to the new ideas and schemes of the Government. The efforts of the Government to bring them closer to the main stream of central development life and the desires of the tribesmen to get more and more from the governmental programmes, are clear indication of the rapid socio-economic and cultural change in the quality of life of the tribal areas of the state. The residents of Kinnaur, Lahul, Spiti and Pangi are making due changes in their way of life. They grow cash crops in abundance because of the suitable agro-climatic condition. Apples, plums, apricots, potatoes, peas and a variety of dry fruits fetch them an encouraging financial reward.

# 3

## *Myths and Mythology*

The quest for understanding this world and the environment surrounding us has been as primitive and persistent as search for food and shelter among the human beings. From the very beginning, various creation myths were framed by teachers, seers and sages to satisfy the desire for knowledge regarding the beginning of things. The most highly developed mind of the Aryans has ventured to understand the 'Great Unknown'. The gods came later in this world and so they are unable to tell us how the first being came into existence, how the creation began. Their imagination, however, could work and the saints sang<sup>1</sup>:

There was neither existence, nor non-existence,  
The kingdom of air, nor the sky beyond.  
What was there to contain, to cover in-  
Was it but vast, unfathomed depths of water?  
There was no death there, no immortality.  
No sun was there, dividing day from night.  
Then was there only THAT, resting within itself.  
Apart from it, there was not anything.

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1. नासदासीन्नासदासीत्तदानीं नासीद्रजो नो व्योमा परा यत् ।  
किममावरीव कुह कस्य शर्मन्नम्भः किमासीत् गहनं गंभीरम् ॥

न मृत्युरासीदमृतं न तर्हि न राज्या अहन आसीत्प्रकेतः ।  
आनीदवातं स्वधया तदेकं तस्माद्धान्यत्र परः किं चनास ॥

तम आसीत्तमसा गुलहमगेऽप्रकेतं सलिलं सर्वमा इदम् ।  
तुच्छ्यनाभ्वपिहितं यदासीत्तपसस्तन्माहनाजायतैकम् ॥

At first within the darkness veiled in darkness,  
Chaos unknowable, the All lay hid.  
Till straightway from the formless void made manifest,  
By the great power of heat was born that germ.

(Rv. X.129, Griffith's translation)

Thus, the beginning was, indeed, very mysterious. No earth, no sky, no air, no water, no death, no immortality. Infact, there was neither existence 'sat' nor non-existence 'asat'. There was only *tadekam* 'that one' the Brahma resting with himself. And from the heat of His great desire of creation '*tapasah mahima ajayatah* i.e., the universe began.

### Creation of Universe

This process of knowing the truth has never ceased. The mind in the hills has, always, been very imaginative and the mythological conception prevalent among the people of the hills, about the creation of the universe has been very simple but interesting. Three important folk ballads deal with this subject—*Enchali*<sup>1</sup> prevalent in Gaddi dominated areas of Chamba and Kangra districts and in the lower belt of Himachal Pradesh; *Barlaj*<sup>2</sup> popular in Kulu, Shimla and Solan districts and *Yukuntras*<sup>3</sup> sung in the tribal areas of Himachal Pradesh.

According to all of them there was, in the beginning, complete darkness—no earth, no sky, no Kailas (mountain), no air, no water, no moon, no sun, no stars, no morning, no evening. If there was any body, it was the wondrous guru:

नहीं थीया धरती, नहीं थिया कास,  
नहीं थिया मेरु कैलास।

1. For complete ballad reference is invited to pages 14 to 36 of *Himachali Lok Gathaen* edited by Ram Dayal and pages 19 to 27 of *Himachal Lok Sanskriti ke Srot* by Dr. Banshi Ram Sharma.
2. Barlaj was first compiled, edited and published by Tika Ram Joshi in his 'A Dictionary of Pahari Dialects' appearing in the Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1909. Reprint by Himachal Academy of Arts, Culture and Languages, Shimla, 1989, p. 149-157. It, subsequently, appeared in *Kului Lok Sahitya* by Dr. Padma Chandra Kashyap at pages 131-138 and *Himachali Lok Gathaen* ed. Ram Dayal at pages 2-13.
3. Pages 27-33 of *Himachal Lok Sanskriti ke Srot* by Dr. Banshi Ram Sharma.

नहीं थिये पौण, नहीं थिये पाणी,  
 नहीं थिये चन्दर, नहीं थिये सूरज।  
 नहीं थिये तारे, नहीं थिये श्याणू,  
 तां थिये गुरु न्यारे।

(*Enchali*)

Then, somehow, two-and-a-half grains of mustard fell down from the wallet of *Siddh-guru*. The two and a half grains of mustard were sown in a small field. Having been sown the grain began to grow. When grown up, the mustard plants were weeded. Being well weeded, they began to ripen. Being ripen and cut, they were heaped at one place. After cleaning and thrashing, what was the produce? Two and a half grains of seed produced a *chhuru*<sup>1</sup> of grain. Likewise, *chhuru* of mustard got *patha*,<sup>2</sup> *patha* produced *jun*,<sup>3</sup> *Jun* got *Khar*<sup>4</sup> and *khar* finally produced a *kharshu*<sup>5</sup> of mustard seed.

सिद्ध गुरु री झोली का ढाई दाणा शेरयो रा झाड़ा।  
 ढाई दाणा शेरयो रा म्हारे श्वाड़ियो बीजो।  
 बीजी बीजो रो शेरयो जामदे लागे।  
 जामी रो शेरयो गोड़ने लाए।  
 गोड़यो शेरयो पाकदे लागे।  
 पाकी लूणी रो शेरयो कुनुयें लाए।  
 गाही मण्डी से क्या होआ पवाजा।  
 ढाई दाणा बीजो रा छूरु होआ पवाजा।  
 -- -- --  
 खार भरी बीजो रा होआ खारशू पूरा।

(*Barlaj*)

Now, the *kharshu* mustard wanted someone to protect and use them. The *guru* collected *maluni* i.e., the dust of the body mixed with perspiration, prepared an idol and induced life in it. It came out as *Mansa Devi*. The *guru* gave her seven *kalashas* i.e., the finials or earthen pots. After ten months first *kalash* was broken and there came out *Brahmath*. The *guru* found him unable to run the administration of the coming universe. After ten more months breaking

1. Chhuru = 1½ Tolas. 2. Patha = 1½ kg. 3. Jun = 16 pathas. 4. Khar = 20 juns, Kharshu = 20 khar.

of the second *kalash* brought out *Vishnu*. He, too, was weighed and found wanting. Then came *Mahadev* out of the third *kalash* after another ten months.

### The Earthquake

Mahadev agreed to protect the universe and to run its affairs provided he was given the Sun, the Moon and two bulls named *kaula* and *dhaula*. They all came out of the remaining four *kalashas*. Mahadev kept *kaula* 'the black bull' with him as his companion, and made *dhaula* 'the white bull' to hold the earth on his twelve horns turn by turn:

धौलेआ बैला भाईया,  
तू लेणे पिरथी रे भारो ।  
धौले बैले बारहे सिंगे उप्पर धरती घमाई ।  
सम—सम भारे धौला लैदा,  
पापे रा बोझ नी लैदा ।

(*Enchali*)

Whenever the white bull gets tired, it changes over the weight of the earth to the second and the third horns and so on. This changing over creates tremours and earthquakes.

With the sun and the moon, came forth the sky and the earth, the days and the nights, the sheep and the goats, the cows and the buffaloes, the birds and the plants. All the world became bright:

सीरा ठासिग्यो माथे सोरगे,  
पैरा ठासिग्यो आकाश पडताले ।  
प्याशदो लागो सारा मात लोग ।

(*Yukuntras*)

### Birth and Death

There was, however, none to rear and foster the birds and the animals, the trees and the plants so created. So a man of gold was made, but he did not answer the call of the *guru*. Subsequently, men of silver, the brass and copper and iron were made one after the other. But none could answer when the *guru* called them. Man of nine yards



and of the size of a fist 'githmithlu' was also tried, but all in vain. So a man of clay and dust was made who successfully answered the call. He was, however, very obstinate and discourteous. Instead of being polite he gave a savage reply. This annoyed the *guru*. He gave him a short life and cursed:

फिटक दिंदा मेरा भोला स्वामी ।  
 जे 'ठंडे नाले धुआंकारा ।  
 कै नेला सकल संसारा?  
 ढाई गज कपड़ा फिरी दो लक्कड़ ।  
 मरदीए बेला तू लेई जाला ।  
 पाप ते पुन, सच कने झूठ ।  
 दुहियो संगे तेरे जाला' ।

(*Enchali*)

“(You) will be burnt in the cold ravine. What will you take from this world? Two-and-a half yards of cloth (coffin), two sticks of wood when you die. Your sinful acts and virtuous deeds, the truth and the false will accompany you.”

### The Analysis

It may be assumed that the *Siddh guru* or the *guru nyara* in these ballads is Prajapati—the Creator, the Almighty who is, for all purposes, omniscient, omnipresent and omnipotent. Mansa Devi, the first to come out of his perspiration i.e., his mind (or soul, *manas*) is none else but the Mother Goddess who is *jaganmata* 'the mother of the universe'. Later she developed as inseparable consort of Lord Vishnu (*nitya-gamini*) and also as *adi guru* or first leader mediating between the Lord and the devotee. Brahma is the Brahma the Creator of the universe but, here, unable to run its administration. *Bishnu* is *Vishnu* the preserver, the protector and the benefactor who, too, was not in a position to hold the responsibility of administering the universe. *Mahadev* is that great *Shiva*, the destroyer, but capable of running the affairs. This is because he is the great primeval cause, the origin of the creation, the *sada Shiva*, the god that 'ever was and ever will be.' He is the five-headed deity representing *srishti* (creation), *palan* (preservation and protection), *samhar* (destruction),

*nigraha* (punishing the wrong) and *anugraha* (mercy and compassion). In this form he is worshipped at many places of Himachal Pradesh, a specimen being '*Panch Vaktra*' on the left side of the Beas river in Mandi.

This is an imagination of a sensitive mind of the hill people, how-so-ever, primitive it might be. Our scriptures of great thinkers have also made similar observations. They say that when Prajapati arose from the primordial waters he wept, exclaiming 'For what purpose have I been born if I have been born from this which forms no support?' . . . That (the tears) which fell into the water became the earth. That which he wiped away became the air. That which he wiped away, upwards, became the sky. From the circumstance that he wept (*arodit*), these two regions have the name of *rodasi* (worlds).\*

### Rituals Connected

The three ballads are sung on specific occasions, one of which is *nawala* of Gaddi community. Etymologically *nawala* has many versions. It is, perhaps, derived from the word *nava-mala* meaning 'new garland' or 'nine-garlands' used in the function. It is also said to be derived from *navalaya* i.e., 'new house' because it is, usually, connected with the rituals when a new house is occupied. Again, *nawala* might mean 'nava-wala' concerning the nine members associated with the performance of the rituals i.e., the owner of the house, a *jogi*, four *bande* that is, the singers one *chela* and two *sevaks* i.e., *katwal* and *patwal*.

Whatever it is, *nawala* is an important ceremony accompanied by unique rites while *Enchali* being sung. It is conducted at night. A square *mandal* is sketched with wheat or rice flour on the floor in the centre of the main room of the house. A *Shiva-pindi* is placed on it in the centre. Heaps of rice, *mash* and wheat are also placed nearby. One, five or nine garlands of seasonal flowers are hung from the ceiling over the *pindi*. A priest or *jogi* conducts the ceremonies and while performing the worship offers a *samkalap* wherein he mentions the articles being offered in the sacrifice which usually contain nine kg of wheat or maize, nine kg of some other grain, a coconut, some sesamum, dry fruit, honey and *ghi* etc. These are, later on, given to

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\* Donald A. Mackenzie, *Indian Myth and Legend*, p. 100.

the jogi conducting the ceremonies. The services of four persons called *bande* are requisitioned who sing Enchali and other devotional songs, in praise of Lord Shiva throughout the night. A goat may also be sacrificed.

As soon as the sacrifices are offered a *chela* goes into trance. He is said to be possessed of the Lord Shiva himself. He, then, answers the questions put to him by the owner and members of the house or by any body else present there. Next day a big feast or a *dham* is arranged to the relatives and friends. On this occasion a couplet of a song sung is as under:

आटे कूटे तेरा मंडणा लखाया ।  
 लै बो स्वामी अपणा उधारा ।  
 चौले मांहे तेरे कोठे भराए,  
 लै बो साइयां अपणा उधारा ।

“A *mandal* has been prepared with flour in your honour. O Lord, take your obligations. Your store is filled with rice and pulses.” The garlands which kept suspended above the *mandal* all through the function are preserved with great care. They are worshipped on auspicious occasions like births and marriages.

### The Lightning

According to another legend, Mahadev actually appeared as a ‘*Bijli Mahadev*’. He first made an idol of black clay. It could not answer his questions and it turned into *gomaya* i.e., the soil. He then made a mould of brown clay. It turned into trees and plants. He, again, tried the black clay. This time, on being called it answered with a word ‘*chun*’ and Mahadev at once said, ‘*dheka mauthad beuri dhun*’ (this side life that side death) and was made to be burnt on his death. Had he not replied in *chun* he would have been made to be buried. Mahadev, then, started to the great mountains from *nihul* ‘plains’ via Katipahli, Jalandhri and Kalaunt and reached *Hathi ra gaulu*. *Kalaunt* was a great demon devouring all the gods and godlings that came on his way with the aim of ending their generation ‘*kulant*’. *Kalaunt* came across Mahadev at Mathan.

Mahadev struck his forehead with a mace. His bones scattered at Kapasli where the red stones are proof to this day. In order that

*Kalaunt* does not reappear, Indra was required by Mahadev to crush him with lightning off and on. The lightning, in fact, falls on the *pindi* of Shiva which is placed over the spot where *Kalaunt* was crushed. This is, thus, the mythical background of falling of the lightning. The broken pieces of the *pindi* are collected and placed over the spot with pure butter and the *pindi* is reset after some time.

## Great Deluge

According to another local tradition coupled with the Pauranic legend, the present world began from Manali—the present name for Manwalaya i.e., the home of Manu. After the great deluge when whole of the previous world was immersed under the flood water perishing every thing on earth, the boat of Manu alongwith Sapt Rishi i.e., seven other great sages Kashyap, Attri, Vasishtha, Vishwamitra, Gautam, Jamadagni and Bhardwaj, was carried towards the Himalayas by a fish whom Manu had once saved when she was only a small fingerling. The boat rested, as stated in the Bhagavatam, at Himavat which is the present *Hamta* near Manali.

The seven sages, soon, became *indriyajit* i.e., the victor of the passion and were not interested in procreation. So Brahma created Shat Rupa from his left side and Manu and Shat Rupa lived together at Manwalaya i.e., the present Manali and gave birth to a number of children. The first was Priya Vrat and the second Uttam Pad. There were three daughters who were the main progenitors of the human race<sup>1</sup> which soon spread throughout the world when the deluge had blown over and the flood water receded.

Manu and the seven *rishis* are now worshipped in different parts of Himachal Pradesh as village gods. Manu has an ancient temple at Manali. It is only in Kulu valley that Manu is deified as an important deity. Vasishtha is the presiding deity at village Bashisht on the left bank of the Beas near Manali. His special occasion of worship is on 1st of Baishakh and 12th of Kartak. Gautam and Vyas have a joint temple at Goshal where three-faced stone idol is main object of deification. The third face is said to be that of Kanchan Nag. The place where Vyas practised penance on Rohtang pass is the source of the river Beas. Vishwamitra was the patron sage of Audumbaras an

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1. P.C. Roy Chaudhury, *Temples and Legends of Himachal Pradesh*, p. 36.

ancient tribe of the hill area now comprising Himachal. The cult of Jamadagni is widespread throughout Himachal.

### **The Eclipse**

Regarding the lunar eclipse a myth says that once the father of Moon borrowed some money from Rahu—a cobbler, on interest. Somehow, he could not repay his loan. The interest went on piling up and multiplying, so much so that it became impossible for the father to repay the amount. So, the father gave his daughter Moon to Rahu against the loan. But before Rahu could take Moon as his bride, the moon flew to the sky. So whenever, the money-lender Rahu goes to sky to bring the moon, she hides herself so long as men on earth do not give plenty in charity to Rahu in the shape of *satnaja* i.e., seven types of grains mixed together, and loudly call:

*Rahu raksa mhari chandra chhor*  
*Le til, masha, chaul, khor.*

“O Rahu leave the moon. We offer you grains like sesamum, urad, rice and khor etc.” Rahu is believed to cast a skin of cow over the moon. Its shadow falls on the earth. It gets defiled. Therefore, no food is taken during the course of eclipse. When the eclipse is over the rooms are plastered with cowdung, the utensils cleaned before the food is taken.

### **The Sun and the Moon**

According to another legend Sun and Moon were brother and sister. Once they went to their *mama*'s (maternal uncle's) house to attend a marriage. While going, their mother asked them to save and bring something to her. Sun ate up everything, but moon saved some share for her mother. While coming back home, the Sun snatched Moon's savings on the way and ate them too. When the mother came to know all about it, she was angry and said to the Sun, “As I am burning with anger and rage, may you also burn in agony for ever.” So the sun became, and is even now, red hot. For the Moon she said, “May you always prosper with peace and tranquillity.” Saying this the mother made them fly to the sky and govern the days and the nights.

In the beginning, the days and nights were equal and always bright. As soon as the sun set out the moon would rise. So the animals kept on grazing all the time and men were at work all through. So the Narayana (Katrusi Narayan) created *niharkhe* 'krishna-paksh' i.e., the dark-half and *shukle* 'bright half' of the month. Thus, came the days and the nights, months, seasons, hot and cold weather.

Narayan, further, made cowdung and cow urine sacred in compensation of the favour done by the cow to Narayan by revealing him the secrecy of the fact that the world (earth) is round. Narayan also made mountains and hills by piling up the cowdung and cow-urine. At one time, *bajarmukh* came out of the heap of cowdung and rivers and streams flowed out of his mouth.

### The Peace and Prosperity

The mythological association with the establishment of peace and prosperity is told by many gods and goddesses in different ways. For example the Shuwang Chandika of Kostampi village in Kinnaur gives the following version<sup>1</sup>:

*Tha-rayin, ronch-rayin, Kothi Mathas, Ranshyan, Dhanshyan; dwapar-shul muluk mati thati zikyak, Lanka maryak, dash-Raban khanchyak, Banashur haryak, bag bantho Ropa gomfa chumak, ju muluk mati thati Skyalkharu shong Rogiu thud te'g tege duta preta Rana Thakra maryak, rakhul skukhul lan lan Kanchi nagarich bat chhnag ka ka, Saranang raj pat zikyak. Deoraji-pang thu ati arzi lano duyin?*

“O Kothi *mathas*, O Ranshyan, O Dhanshyan<sup>2</sup>, wait a little, hear: after the *dwapar jug* I created the earth and its countries. I destroyed Lanka and killed Raban of the ten heads. Banashur was defeated by me, and taking my share I came up to reside in the

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1. Notes on the Ethnography of the Bashahr State, Simla Hills, Punjab, by Pandit Tika Ram Joshi, some time Private Secretary to the Raja of Bashahr; edited by H.R. Rose, C.S. Punjab, and appearing in Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal (September, 1911, Vol. VII, No. 9), p. 543-544.
  2. Ranshyan and Dhanshyan are both septs of Kanets residing near Kothi or Kostampi village.

temple of Ropa village; this country of the world, from Shyalkhar down to Rogi village, was inhabited by goblins, ghosts, Ranas and Thakars, who were destroyed by me. I established peace and prosperity, and having brought a young Brahman from Kanchi city I established my throne at Sarahan. Say, what do you wish to ask the deity?"

### *Thara Nags-Thara Narayans*

The worship of deities has an interesting mythical bearing. It says that, once, the great Vedic sage Jamadagni was returning from his pilgrimage at Kailash. He had with him eighteen images of different gods in a *kardu* or *karandu* i.e., a basket on his head. When he reached Chandrakhani mountain top near Kulu, Banasur the great demon of Malana ruling on the other side of Chandrakhani sensed the approach of the great sage whom he always thought his great enemy and danger to his security. He, therefore, sent an harrowing wind across the mountain top which lifted the images of eighteen gods from the *karandu* and threw them off scattering all over the valley. Wherever these images reached, they appeared in the form of gods and they all came to be known as *Thara Kardu* i.e., eighteen great gods coming out of the basket. Dhalpur ground was the place where they used to meet periodically and it is traditionally known as '*thara kordu ri soh* i.e., the meeting place of eighteen gods. Their annual convention here, subsequently, developed into a great fair which now takes the shape of world fame Dussehra festival.

It looks, rather with certainty, that the eighteen gods were all Narayans, because there exists a great traditional saying '*Thara Nag-Thara Narayan*'. In fact, the cult of '*Athara Narayans*' came into force as a direct counter against the hither to widely spread semi-animistic cult of *Athra Nags* and their contemporaries like the Jamlus, Chambhus, Bhotantis, Hirmas etc. Among these Narayans are Jeev Narayan of Jana, Katrusi Narayan of Tarapur, Trijugi Narayan of Diyar, Jamani Narayan of Kashawari, Sarsai Narayan, Hurang Narayan etc.

As for the *thara nags*, the legend says that during one of his sojourns after the great serpent sacrifice (*Sarp Yajna*), Basu (Basuki) Nag married a girl of Laund family of Goshal village in Kulu valley.

With that girl he had eighteen Nag sons who were, in his absence and according to his instructions, brought up by his wife in a *bhandal* 'a big pitcher' by offering them milk every morning after they were worshipped by placing *dhup* 'incense' over the burning charcoals in a *dhangiara* 'incense pot'. One day when the mother of the Nag children was out, her mother, instead, took the *dhangiara* and the milk and as soon as she lifted the lid of the *bhandal* the Nag children raised their heads for the milk through the mouth of the pitcher. Seeing the snakes raising their heads the lady was frightened and in her horror and perplexity the burning charcoals of the pot fell over the Nag children in the pitcher. They broke open the pitcher and flew in different directions and wherever they reached they emerged as Nag *deotas*. Some among them are Shirghan Nag of Bhanara who has the neck of the pitcher round his *shir* 'head', Kali Nag of Shirarh whose body became black due to the smoke, Peunli Nag of Batahar who became pink, Dhumal Nag of Halan who got darkened, Tundi Nag of Pini who lost his arm. One of the Nag child lost his eyes. He remained at Goshal and is known as Kana Nag.

As time passed by the eighteen Nags and eighteen Narayans got multiplied and *Thara Kardu* deities became *thara krur* i.e., eighteen crores gods and goddesses in the Himalayas and Himachal became popularly known as the Valley of Gods.



# 4

## *Faith and Religion*

The galaxy of gods in this part of India is infinite. They are worshipped in towns and cities, in villages and localities, in temples and shrines. They dwell in rivers and ravines, in springs and streams, in brooks and lakes, in valleys and dales, in stones and rocks, in trees and plants, in fields and high peaks, over mountains and hills, in woods and forests. In fact they live every where because there are gods who are homeless and also wandering deities. There are still others like Banashiras, Banabirs, Banasts etc. who have no shrines and visible symbols but a special locality or habitat is assigned to them where they are propitiated.

The reason for such a high number of deities in the hills is apparent. It is believable that the earliest settlers and every group of subsequent settlers, occupying the small and hither-to desolate and deserted areas in the thick forests and shrubs which had been the abode of much dangerous and devastating demons, devils and spirits, felt the need of divine protection, searched for the natural forces and established shrines dedicated to the guardians which still survive throughout the land developing a more sophisticated but systematic way of veneration.

Among the higher Hindu Pantheon, there are large number of temples dedicated to Vishnu and Shiva throughout the state, though the worship of Brahma has greatly languished. His only discernible temple is at Khokhan near Kulu as *Adi Brahma* where he has one *ashta-dhatu*, eleven silver and two brass *mohras* fixed in the *rath*. Brahma's consort is, further, worshipped at Malkota near Bharmaur in Chamba district, as Brahmani Devi. A brass idol of Brahma and

Brahmani riding a lion is the chief object of adoration. Another temple of Adi Brahma is at Tihri (Uttarsal) in Mandi district.

Shiva is worshipped under many names. In fact, he has many characters and many attributes and he is revered under each of his qualities. The main form of deification in a Shiva temple is that of a *lingam* in a *yon*i with *Nandi* his *vahan* 'the vehicle' in front of his temple usually facing the *lingam*. It is a common sight in almost all Shiva temples in the Pradesh, but a specimen is at Manimahesh temple at Bharmaur where the *jalahari* is rectangular instead of conical as is usually the case in other Shiva temples. In Chandra Shekhar temple at Sahu in Chamba district Shivling is placed over a copper stand believed to be a part of the original Shivling. In front of the temple is a large-sized Nandi whose right foot is raised as if ready to start. Local tradition says that the Nandi used to move in the fields surrounding the village and graze the crops at night without any knowledge to the villagers. They tried their best to find out the animal who although eating the crops, yet the output was by far the best in the area. Once, a lady suspected the Nandi and kept a watch over him. At night when Nandi was just to move out she said, 'O, thus, it is you who perish our crops.' And Nandi, at once, stuck in a position as it is now.

Shiva has the best of his worship during Shivratri when people keep fast throughout the day and welcome him by the fall of the night by sacrificing for him rams and goats calling:

*Ishara mahadeva ka khano tere  
Khadu ri dalki anjo re phere.*

"O Great Shiva, what will you eat? Meat of the ram or intestines'. Before making such an offering every family keeps waiting for him with a hope:

*Sain ajo parui tiro ji Sain ajo parui tiro  
Sune re chhatro firo ji, Sune re chhatro firo.*

"Our Lord is coming from that peak of the far off hill. Golden canopy is shining over him."

As *Vaidyanath* 'the physician', Shiva is worshipped at Baijnath in Kangra district. As *Ardhanarishwar* he has a beautiful temple in Samkhetra street in Mandi dedicated to this form. As *Maheshwar*

'the Great Lord', Kinnaur is the land of Shiva where eighteen Maheshwar brothers have temples at different places. As *Neelkhanth* 'the god having poison in the throat' he has his abode near Srikhand peak in Outer Seraj. At a number of places Shiva is also propitiated as *Gangadhar* i.e., the god who held the river Ganga in his matted hair. He is also 'Lord of universe' *Vishweshwar*. In this position he has a great temple in Bajaura which is famous throughout the world for its unique structure and sculpture.

But by far the most prominent worship of Shiva is in the form of Mahadev, although all the Mahadeos cannot be regarded as manifestation of Shiva, because many of them are only village gods claiming greatness among the smaller deities of the area as 'great deities' i.e., Mahadeos. Such is the tradition throughout the State. Some village gods claimed their predominance by declaring themselves or by declaring by their worshippers as '*bara deo*', '*mahadeo*', '*Mahasu*' or even '*bara Mahadeo*'. In Tehsil Chacheut Kamru Nag is known as *bara dev*. So also Katrusi Narayan of Tarapur in Kulu district. The fact, however, remains that there are large number of deities under the nomenclature of Mahadeo and some of them are rightly considered as manifestation of Shiva like Kaleshwar Mahadev, Tapteshwar Mahadev, Karbireshwar Mahadev, Narvadeshwar Mahadev, Nandikeshwar Mahadev etc. Most of the Mahadev are known after the name of the place of their worship, like Shamsari Mahadeo of Shamsar, Bini Mahadeo of Bini, Jawanu Mahadeo of Jawani, Hatleshwar Mahadeo of Hatli, Purag Mahadeo of Purag, Mamleshwar Mahadeo of Mamel etc.

Despite all his manifestations, however, Shiva is always and everywhere Shiva, none else:

मनोबुद्धि अहंकारः चितानि नाऽहं  
 न च श्रोत्रः जिह्वः न च ग्रण नेत्रः  
 न व्योमभूमिर्नतेजोन वायु  
 चिदानन्द रूपः शिवोऽहं शिवोऽहं ।

'I am neither mind, ego, intelligence, nor thought, neither ears, nor tongue, nor the senses of smell and sight, neither am I ether, earth, fire, water or air; I am pure knowledge; I am Shiva, I am Shiva'.

The worship of Vishnu is, also, in no way less than that of Shiva, although a general belief is that worship of Shiva predominates in

Himachal Pradesh. The fact, however, remains that Vaishnavism is widely spread and in many parts of the Pradesh the cult of Vishnu and his incarnations dominates that of Shiva and his manifestations. In this regard it has been rightly said:

*Hari ke hazar nam, lakh nam Govind ke.  
Krishna ke karor nam, pat nam Vishnu ke.*

'Hari has thousand names and Govind one lakh. Krishna has crore names and Vishnu is in every leaf of the trees and plants.' In the hill, Vishnu is *Daridra Narayan* i.e., the protector of downtroddens, as against the Shiva whose following is mainly confined to towns and cities dominated by high class Brahmans and Khattris. Vishnu is '*Janardan*' and is very popular in the rural areas and among the ordinary agricultural community. It is remarkable to note that the presiding deities in chief areas of the Pradesh are among Vishnu, like Raghunath in Kulu, Madhav Rao in Mandi, Laxmi Narayan in Chamba, Murli Manohar in Sujampur, Bansi Gopal in Bilaspur and Parshu Ram in Renuka (Sirmaur). The following of Vishnu may be gauged by the reverence of large number of Narayans and his nine incarnations—*Matsya* 'the fish', *Kurm* 'the tortoise', *Varah* 'the boar', *Narsimha* 'the man-lion', *Vaman* 'the dwarf', *Parshu Ram*, *Rama*, *Krishna*, *Buddha* and the tenth would be incarnation *Kalki*. There are as many as 65 Narayans in Kulu valley alone. All of them were having their own lands before the enactment of the Occupancy Tenants (Vesting of Proprietary Rights) Act. Then, there are large number of temples dedicated to Raghunath, Vishnu, Madhav Rao, Thakur Saligram, Thakur Chaturbhuj, Jagannath, Ram Chandra, Krishna etc. Among these, the adoration of Krishna and Ram Chandra is far extensive. These two are, further, deified in conjunction with their consorts Radha and Sita respectively. Krishna cult is, again, surmounted by his many names like Govind, Gopal, Murlidhar, Murli Manohar, Bansi Dhar, Bansi Gopal, Devki Nandan, Keshav etc. Thakurdwaras are found in every part of the Pradesh showing the tremendous hold of Vishnu cult.

Some of the Vaishnav temples are very important like Laxmi Narayan, Bansi Gopal and Hari Rai temples at Chamba, Narsingh temple at Bharmaur, Satya Narayan temple at Pangna, Murli Manohar at Sujampur, Katrusi Narayan at Tarapur, Jagannath at Nahan,

Thakurdwara at Masrur containing three stone images representing Rama, Lakshmana and Sita etc. All these temples are remarkable monuments of architectural structure and sculptural excellence. They reveal the main features of Vishnu cult and Vaishnav thought. In Hari Rai temple at Chamba is enshrined a four-faced exquisite bronze image of Chaturmurti Vishnu 1.17 mt high. The four faces of Vishnu represent *bal* (vigour and strength), *Jnan* (knowledge), *aishvarya* (wealth and spiritual power) and *shakti* (energy) and the four hands hold *shankh* (conch-shell), *chakra* (wheel), *gada* (mace) and *padma* (lotus). In the case of Hari Rai temple Chaturmurti Vishnu holds a fully blossomed lotus in his upper right hand and a conch in his upper left hand. His lower right hand is placed on the mace projecting head of Gada-devi facing Vishnu but tilted away from him. His lower left hand is placed on the wheel-shaped halo on the head of Lambodra who is also looking up to the lord. This image weighing about 338 kg was, once, stolen from the temple on the night of May 6-7, 1971 and was re-installed on the 8th July, 1971 after its recovery on the 25th June, 1971, in a godown at Mazagaon, Bombay.

Laxmi Narayan temple at Chamba has a legend behind it. It is believed that the Raja of Chamba wanted to erect a Shiva temple at this place. He sent his nine sons to bring the marble for the purpose of an idol, but when it was broken to make the idol, a frog was found in it. The Raja again, sent his nine sons but they were killed by the robbers on the way. He, then, sent his tenth son to bring a piece of marble, who was successful. In the face of the first two instances, instead of Shiva an image of Vishnu was made and installed in the present temple.

Parshu Ram has an important temple at Nirmand in Kulu district where Bhunda 'a form of narmedh yajna i.e., human sacrifice' used to be held after every twelve years. There is another temple at Dadahu in Sirmaur district where an annual fair is held for three days during bright half of the Kartika month. Similarly, Narsingh has a temple at Bharmaur where a brass image of man-lion incarnation of Vishnu is venerated. It is interesting to note that some times Narsingh or Naharsingh is mistaken for Narsimha. However, Nar Singh (or Nahar Singh) is only one of the *Bavan Birs* 'fifty-two heroes', although it is sure, he is more popular than Narsimha 'the man-lion' incarnation, among the women folk throughout the State. His temples are thronged

by barren women who want an issue or women who are desirous of having a son. Whenever his blessings are sought, his *chela* sings an incantation:

*Mere Narsingha, Niranjania Veera  
Veere ne mohi baulia, Veere mohi baulia jag sara  
Jithu kaniyan kwarian tithu basa tera  
Bhai ghar Mathurach, Gokul liya avtara.*

‘O my Narsingha, O great Niranjan, You have captivated me. You have captivated the whole world. Where the maids and virgins are there is your home. Your home is in Mathura, you have taken incarnation in Gokul.’

The cult of Devi is, also, very prominent. She is venerated under various names. According to Devi Bhagavat ‘Mahakali with Shiva, Mahalaxmi with Vishnu and Mahasaraswati with Brahma are the embodiments of Shakti i.e., force and energy’, but Durga is the most popular form of Shakti and her most popular form of worship is as Mahishasuramardini. Her chief temples, as such, are Lakshna at Bharmaur, Shakti at Chhatrari, Hatkoti near Jubbal and Mrikula at Udaypur. She has many other smaller but beautiful temples throughout the Pradesh, where she is shown killing the demon Mahishasur and thus typifying the victory of virtue over sin. At Bharmaur the goddess holds a trident (*trishul*) in her upper right hand, a sword (*khadga*) in her lower right hand, a bell (*ghanti*) in the upper left hand, and the tail of the buffalo (Mahishasur) demon in her lower left hand. At Hatkoti she has been shown with eight hands—her four right hands hold *trishula*, *mala*, *chakra* and *khadga*, and her four left hands are holding *dhanush*, *ghanta*, *dhal* and demon’s head by the hair.

According to a local legend, the great battle between the Shakti Mata Durga and Mahishasur took place near Bilaspur in Himachal Pradesh and after slaying the fearful demon, Durga threw his head in a nearby Brahm Kapali kund on *Shravan ashtami* i.e., eighth of the bright-half of Shravan month when a great fair takes places every year in Naina Devi temple, where she first appeared. Nearby, at the Kali temple in Pangna a buffalo-bull used to be slayed every year on the 8th day of Navaratra actually symbolizing the slaughtering of the demon Mahishasur.

In other classical mythical forms she is worshipped as a great

destrucress 'Kali' at Shimla, Mandi, Pangna; as destroyer of Chand and Mund demons 'Chamunda' near Dharamsala. As slayer of Raktavija demon of false ego she is worshipped as Chandika. She is also Mansa Devi i.e., the goddess born from the mind of Lord. In this form she is the chief deity of Sainadhar in Sirmaur district where she has three main temples at Manariya, Maridhar and Keinthdhar. There is, further, a renowned temple of Bhima Kali at Sarahan where she has been the family deity of Bushahr State. She had granted the regency to the Raja of Bushahr and was regarded as the ruler of the land. Similarly, Devi Tara has been the family deity of Rajas of old Keonthal state. As Uma the ideal housewife devoted to the husband and welfare of her children, in fact the whole mankind, she has a large number of temples singly as well as with her husband as Umashankar. In fact Shakti has two-fold nature—white and black, gentle and ferocious. Uma and Gauri are gentle forms of the Shakti while Durga and Kali are fierce forms. In Himachal all these forms are in worship. In Tribal area of Kinnaur Mahakali is known as Paldan Lamo, where she is shown in dark-blue colour with three eyes and four hands, holding in the right hands a sword and a human skull, and in the left hands a lotus and a long trident, wearing a garland of human heads and a snake of green colour as her sacred thread. She rides a mule. Her fierce teeth and her tongue are exposed.

Himachal is the home of Vedic Aryans. Therefore, the Vedic saints, sages and even heroes of the Mahabharata are revered as gods. There are a large number of temples dedicated to them. Parashar has two temples, one at Sanor in Mandi the other at Kamand in Kulu district. Saura-panju in Bhadon and Kamandipor in Magh are two famous fairs in his honour. Lomash Rishi is worshipped at Rewalsar in Mandi. He has another temple at Pekhri in Banjar Tehsil. Jamadagni is the chief of an old republic at Malana. His another place of worship is at Dadahu in Sirmaur district. He is also associated with Tatapani in Mandi district. A tradition says that saint Jamadagni brought forward these hot springs to entertain his guest-king Sahasrarjuna. Gautam has two temples. One of them is at Manali where he owned land for which he enjoyed a *mafi* of Rs. 21.00, the other temple is at Manihar Kothi Kotkandhi. He has, here, one ashta-dhatu, seven silver and one brass *mohras* 'masks'. Similarly, Kapal *muni* enjoyed a *mafi* of Rs. 9 and Anas 11 at Manali before the enactment of Tenancy

Act. Now the land is cultivated by his old tenants as owners of the land. Likewise, Vyas sage has a temple at Manali where he owned land. Darbasa has a temple at Palgi (Kulu). On 20th Baishakh he visits all the villages of his area and has a big fair. He has another fair on 20th Jeth every year.

Once when Narad was circumambulating Kailash he was attracted by the spiritual songs of village women at Ninu, Kothi Kandhi (Kulu). He was so much engrossed in their sweet songs that he decided to stay there. The villagers have built a shrine for him and he, now, permanently stays there. Chyavan is worshipped as Chaman Rishi at Najan Kothi Kot Kandhi. Markandeya has wider range of popularity. He has one temple on the foot of Bandladhar in Bilaspur where a big fair takes place on 1st of Baisakh every year. He has three temples in Kulu district at Makarahar, Balagarh and Manglaur. At each place people tell the story of his appearance and it differs at every place. At Makarahar, the image of the sage appeared out of the water when flood receded in the Beas river. At Balagarh he appeared alongwith a goddess Bala Sundri. Manglaur had been a fief of the Mandi Rajas and Markandeya was their family god. Shringa has two temples—one in Sakiran and other in Bijepur (Bagi). He has an annual fair at Banjar in the month of Jeth.

Among the Mahabharata heroes, Pandava brothers are deified at Baridhar in Solan district. All the five brothers have separate temples there. A big fair is held there on the first of Asadh. There is another famous temple known as Panjbir temple at Dhamserh (Dharamberh) near Kulu. Six unchiselled permanently fixed stones are main objects of adoration. They are known to be Yudhishtira, Bhim, Arjun, Nakul, Sahdev and their mother Kunti. There is a fine shrine at Sidhwa (Deberh) in Banjar tahsil of Kulu district, dedicated to Ghatotkach. In the *Hargi* he comes to meet his mother Hadimba at Manali. There is another important temple of Ghatotkach at Ruhadu in Mandi district. The deity has one asht-dhatu one gold and six silver mohras. According to a local belief Mahun Nag is, in fact, a name of Karn of the Mahabharata. He has a famous temple in Karsog Tehsil of Mandi district.

By far the most important are the village gods and goddesses. They are so closely connected with the metaphysical and religious life of the hill people that there is hardly any activity which is beyond



their sphere of influence. They are numerous and their deification highly diversified. There are Jamlus, Mahasus, Shirguls, Pals, Gahrís, Nags, Dums, Thans, Banads, Sippis, Banshiras and many others. Most of them are known by the name of the place of their worship or by the name of the places of their appearance. Some scholars have taken Jamlus to be Jamadagni, but all the Jamlu deotas are not Jamadagni, although there are many who are certainly the great sage Jamadagni, as for example, Jamlu of Malana who was, in fact, throughout his old cult, known as Ra-deo and not Jamlu. Certain scholars consider Jamlu to be Jamlung of tribal areas. This is far from truth and most highly hypothetical. It takes Jamlung prior to Jamlu while the boot is on the other leg. It is a well known fact, and linguistically true, that Indo-Aryan Sanskrit words have gone to Kirati and other tribal languages by mainly two suffixes ‘ang’ and ‘as’—Sk. *swarg* = Ki. *swargang*, Sk. *dwar* = Ki. *dwarang*, Sk. *ritu* = Ki. *ritung*, Sk. *Parmeshwar* = Ki. *Parmesharas*. Thus, Jamlu precedes Jamlung. Tribal area of Lahul and Spiti was, till recently, known as ‘garza-khadoling’ i.e., the country of witches, devils and demons. Devtas ‘gods’ entered there at a very late stage when Jamlus were holding sway over the whole Kulu and surrounding areas and, naturally, its cult spread in tribal areas as Jamlung at a very late stage. Jamlu, in fact, appears to be ‘Yamlu’ i.e., representative of *Yamloka* or one of the fourteen forms of ‘Yama’ the god of death. On the other hand, Jamlung is Jam-la or Jam-lha i.e., lord of the soil.

Similarly, Mahasu is not ‘Maha Shiva’, as is mistakenly considered to be by some scholars. ‘Su’ (or *shu*) is a Kirati-Kinnari word for ‘deity’. So Mahasu means ‘great divinity’. Just as all Mahadeos are not the real manifestation of Mahadev or Shiva, so also Mahasus are not the forms of Mahashiva. They are higher or greater *deotas* among those surrounding them.

Then, among the village gods are *Siddhs* (like Devat Siddh, Chano Siddh, Moria, Kaloli or Karori Siddh, Godria Siddh, Marghati Siddh etc.), *Naths* (Charpat Nath, Shobha Nath, Twaru Nath, Garib Nath, Gopi Nath, Biru Nath, Mukti Nath etc.), *Babas* (Baba Fattu, Baba Rudru, Baba Baroh, Baba Lakhbir etc.), *Gugas*, *Birs* ‘heroes’, *Pirs*, *Lakhdats* and many others. Chano Siddh is that great siddh who was sent by *Kansa* to kill Krishna. He has his temple at Dangra near Pragpur and is worshipped particularly by Barad and Dumna

communities. They invoke him even to harm their enemies when they use broom up side down while flooring the shrine.

There is a wonderful tradition of Bavan Bir cult in the hills. Narsingh, Bhairo, Hanuman, Keilu, Gugga, Batal, Khetarpal etc. are some of the most potent Birs i.e., heroes whose blessings are sought by the people to ward off the effect of illness and troubles. Their *chelas* bring them to service by singing incantations. For example Sendu (Shindu) Bir is summoned for help with the following *mantra*:

*Chhatarpal, Lohpal, Agnipal  
ka potra Shindu Bir chale,  
Sangalpal chale, Thikarpal chale,  
Bhuinpal ki putri maan Kunthardi  
ka putar chale, Punya ka Bhai chale,  
Guron ka Sikh, mhara saddia aye  
Mhara Bhajia aye,  
Parbat gupha ot base bab tera  
Shindu Bir tu hei bhai mera  
Laga lagaiya dur kare, vipat ai dur kare  
Guru ki shakti, hamari bhagti,  
Phure mantra chale bacha  
Mahadev ki pare duhai.*

“Grand son of Chhatarpal, Lohpal and Agnipal may start. Sangalpal may start, Thikarpal may start, Bhuinpal’s daughter Kunthardi’s son may start. Brother of Punya may start, disciple of Guru come at my call, come at my worship. Your father dwells in the shade of the mountain. Sendu bir you are my brother. Ward off the trouble, send away the trouble. Guru’s force and my devotion may work atonce, let the voice of Mahadev work.”

This mantra is repeated 101 times at night for 21 days by the river side or at the spot where the deads are burnt. Basically what is Bir to Hindus so is Pir to Muslims. In practice, however, they are venerated by both the communities with equal faith and even after partition there are many *mazars* and *dargahs* which attract large crowd of devotees. At the *mazar* of Pir Baba Dumbey Shah at Nagrota the caretaker of the tomb is a Brahman and the devotees are almost all Hindus. On every Thursday he lays a *chaddar* on the tomb and there is a *mela*-like atmosphere when a large number of people

especially women come to make offerings at the shrine. Similarly, the *dargah* of Baba Fazil Shah who is said to have made alive the dead son of Raja Sansar Chand at the cost of his own life, is looked after by a Hindu family at Bharmoti some 2 km from Nadaun. At the *khanqah* of Pir Saluhi at Kaluah in Nurpur people offer milk regularly. Due to the scarcity of water Pir Saluhi is said to have struck the ground with his *khundi* 'an iron rod' and a spring gushed out.

Among the village Devis, some have common names like Bala Sundari, Tripura Sundari, Kirpa Sundari, Bhagasidh, Bagla Mukhi, Sharda, Achhra etc. There are others who are peculiar in their name and fame. At a number of places she is simply known as Devi or Devi Mata without any specific name and at many other temples she is popular on the names of the villages where such shrines are situated—like Girdasan Devi, Mangla Devi, Khanibari Devi, Jhatwari Devi, Bari Devi etc. Such Devis have seldom more than a local reputation. At Haritaliagar in Bilaspur the goddess is known as Haria Devi. A fair is held there on the 8th and 9th day of Jeth every year. Sui Devi is, in fact, the queen of Chamba who gave her life for the sake of *kuhl* 'water course' which wanted human sacrifice before it could be constructed successfully. The *kuhl* to the town was every time damaged by the night. The king had a dream that in case some one dearest to him was offered as a sacrifice to the Kuhl the construction might be successful. The matter came to the knowledge of the queen and she pondered, "If the *Raja* is sacrificed the *riyaya* 'his people' get heirless; if the son is sacrificed the *vansh* 'dynasty' goes heirless. The daughter is *praya dhan* 'others asset'. If the daughter-in-law is sacrificed the son becomes widower and might not get a son. So I am the only choice for a sacrifice for the sake of water to the town." And Sui Rani was buried alive.

Similar legend is narrated about Ruhla-di-Kuhl in Kangra district and Rukmani *kund* of Bilaspur. A girl of Taredh village was married to a Rundh family Rajput ruler of Barsandh village on the otherside of river Satluj near Gehrvin in Bilaspur district. Barsandh is on the top of the hill and there was no water round about. The people were facing hardship in the absence of water despite their repeated efforts to dig a well. Once, the ruler had a dream that in case his son or his daughter-in-law is offered as a sacrifice the water could come out. The girl named Rukmani offered herself in preference of her husband.

She was sacrificed and the present Rukmani Kund is the result of her sacrifice.

One of the most popular goddesses of Himachal Pradesh is Hirma (or Hadimba) who has her temples throughout the State and every where she has similar legends to relate. Before her marriage to Bhim the Pandav brother of the Mahabharata, she was a Rakshasi and her brother Hadimb used to bring her human being for her food. Bhim killed Hadimb and married Hadimba and they had a son Ghatotkach a great warrior who fought on the side of Pandavas in the great war. She, subsequently, became a goddess and she has a pagoda type temple at Dhungri near Manali. She is regarded as the patron goddess of the Kulu rulers and she takes the major share of the sacrifices at the end of the Kulu Dussehra including the head of a the buffalo. At her temple at Baridhar in Solan district, the face of her image is turned towards one side. It is said that Bhim, out of some anger, once slapped the deity in a fit of rage deforming her face. At Mahlog in Shimla district a ridge of the hill is known as Hadimba dhar. In Kinnaur Hadimba was married to Banasur and they had eighteen children who are now worshipped at different places. She has her shrines at Nehra, Burka, Baror, Mahla in Chamba district. Mahla temple was founded by Raja Prithvi Singh in honour of the goddess. There is another important temple of this goddess in village Taljane of Patan valley in Lahul. It is jointly managed by three Kothis of Jahlman, Jobrang and Shansha. A stone idol is the chief object of worship. Previously a yak was offered as a sacrifice every year, but now a goat is offered instead. This is particularly done when rain is required.

Jalpa is very popular in Chamba. She has over a dozen of temples there. She is one of the seven sisters of a poor Brahman couple. A Rakshasi had devoured them all, but due to the great devotion of their father and the mother, the girls emerged as goddesses. Jalpa was youngest and could not go anywhere and stayed in her village Mahla, while Laxna went to Bharmaur, Shakti to Chhatrari, Chamunda to Chamba, Ambika to Kangra and two others to Paraur and Baira. Due to her auspicious and bountiful nature, Jalpa's worship spread to a far larger area, reaching Kulu and Sirmaur districts.

Similar legend of seven sister-deities is told about Paroli-Wali-Devi of Chhatrari in Chamba. Seven sisters were leading a peaceful

and harmonious life. But one day they quarrelled and decided to get separation. They sent their youngest sister to fetch a balance from the village Meri, so that they could weigh and divide the jewellery and the gold. She, however, got delayed and in her absence the remaining six sisters divided the wealth and left to far off places leaving her no share. When she reached home she was greatly shocked and disturbed and wept bitterly. Her tears made the soil dark as it appears now near the temple. The rocky space near-by became red by the blood of her toe which she hurt when she stumbled against the rock. She is now worshipped as a deity.

Kali Ori is not the personification of Durga Kali. She is sister of Jeev Narayan. Once she put her hand to a corpse lying at Shirarh. She, thus, got defiled and Narayan kicked her off to Shirarh. She turned herself into a girl, came to Archhandi and destroyed sixty cruel Rana-Thakurs. She, then, turned into a mohra. A Bhandari found it and kept it in a half-filled store-box (*Kothri*). In the morning the *kothri* was full of grains. The people enshrined the mohra in a temple and worship began.

In the Devi Bhagavat, it has been said that the Devi who came into being with creation of the universe is the 'nature' herself and the village goddesses are the art, power and energy of the nature.<sup>1</sup> This is true with regard to hill goddesses. They control the forces of nature and are believed to have power to inflict or to remove disease in man and beast. Thus, Phungnis are the deities of rain. Whenever there is a drought, people worship them sacrificing a lamb or a goat. Jognis are the controller of four directions. People venerate the respective Jogni before starting on important long journeys. They harm a person if he goes upto the high ranges (which are their abodes) adorned in attractive flowers and gaudy clothes. Siya or Pujarli Devi is the deity of crops, because she came out in the 'siya' i.e., furrow of a *zamindar*. Her worship yields good crop. *Bihmata* (*Vidhimata*) controls and records the future of the newly born child. Therefore, she is worshipped at the time of the delivery so that Bihmata records the infant good fortune. She made the son of a pregnant woman a *dewti kira* i.e., glow worm, because the woman refused *Bihmata* her fire

1. सृष्टिरादौ च या देवी प्रकृतिः सा प्रकीर्तिता

याश्च याश्च ग्रामदेव्यः स्युस्ताः सर्वा प्रकृतेः कला ॥

देवी भागवत् 9.1.7

when the latter went to ask for her for the fire. Nauni Devis are the goddesses of milk, butter and *ghi*. New milk or *ghi* is first served to or, kept aloof to be given later on at some fair for, the Naunis before using for personal purpose.

Tripura Sundari of Nagar in Kulu district is also known as Kailashan. She put her hand in *patal* and was, therefore thrown away from Rumsu her original home to Mashara near Nagar. She receives clothes from the dead bodies' 'Coffin'. The clothes are made sacred by sprinkling water from the conch-shell. The clothes are kept by Jathala for a year. On the day of Birshu festival which takes place on the 1st of Baishakh, Jathala brings all those collected in a year. A fixed number of clothes are given to Jathala and Kholidar and all rest to the Devi. Devi Bhawani is also worshipped, sometimes, as Devi Bakbani i.e., goddess of eloquence. She is, usually, worshipped with the following mantra:

*“Maiya ridh de, sidh de, asht nau ridh de,  
bansh ki birdh de Bakbani.  
Maiya gyan de, dhyan de, sarb sukhman de  
abhaya bardan de, Bakbani.  
Maiya dukh ko dur kar, sukh bharpur kar, meri  
as puran kar,  
Jaya Sri jagti jot, Sri jagti jot tu Ambka Rani.*

“O Mother Bakbani give us wealth and power, also coveted nine virtues and flourish our race. Give us knowledge, and all pleasure and make us fearless. Remove our all problems and give us pleasure. Fulfill my desire. Victory to thou who is full of brilliance and brightness.”

Bhima Kali of Sarahan has a five storey temple with silver coated doors and a mixture of both Hindu and Buddhist style of architecture amongst the picturesque scenery of lofty deodar trees. A legend says that sage Bhimgiri was once returning after visiting Kailash the abode of Shiva. He had with him a stick dedicated to Durga to which he used to offer worship and *aradhana* every morning and evening. When he reached Shonitpur (present Sarahan) he stayed for the night there. But in the morning when he wanted to start his journey the stick became too heavy to be lifted. He soon realised that the goddess wished to stay here. But the area was infested by devils, demons and

witches. The goddess acquired the disguise of Bhima and destroyed them all. Hence she is known as Bhima Kali now.

At the border of Mandi and Kangra districts on the Mandi-Pathankot road, there is an important temple of Maheshwari Devi in village Ahju. It is believed that once a great Brahman devotee Mani Ram had a dream in which the goddess told him that she was buried in the castle for a long time and wished to come out and be enshrined in a temple. Next morning Mani Ram told the villagers about his dream. They went to the place shown in his dream, excavated the place and soon found the idol of the Devi. They installed the idol and worship began.<sup>1</sup>

The temple is situated and the idol of the Devi enshrined in one of the two old *garhas* (forts) and the goddess is, therefore, more popularly known as Garhwali Mata. These *garhas* have their own history to tell. Although the exact history of their installation is not known, yet they play an important part in revealing the history of this area. These were, it is believed, the strongholds in the possession of Prithi Pal Raja of Bangahal which made Sidh Sen the Raja of Mandi (1684-1728) worried about the growing strength of Prithi Pal who was his son-in-law. Sidh Sen, therefore, invited Prithi Pal to Mandi on the pretext of seeking his assistance against Suket. On his arrival he was inveigled into the Damdama palace and murdered. His body was burnt, but his head was buried in front of the palace on a spot now marked by a pillar in the middle of tank now known as Sankan garden. On the pillar a light is kept burning every night. At the murder of Prithi Pal his mother-in-law, the Rani of Sidh Sen poisoned herself to death and her daughter, Prithi Pal's wife, committed suicide by thrusting dagger into her stomach.

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1. Rajesh Kumar Kotwal, *Mata Maheshwari Devi aur Ehju ke Kille*, p. 13.

# 5

## *Legends and Traditions*

The gods and goddesses assume most diverse form in the hills. This enormous growth is, of course, no exception in the case of Himalayan gods. Even in the Vedic age, in the beginning, there were only thirty-three gods. Rigvedic 1.139.11 says, "Gods who are eleven in heaven; who are eleven on earth and who are eleven dwelling with glory in mid-air, may be pleased with this our sacrifice." This number, however, gradually increased as new gods were discovered and added to the pantheon and it soon reached a figure of 3339 (Rv. III.9.10).<sup>2</sup> But, in our case, not only gods and godlings but even demons and devils are venerated. In this context, the mythological conception of gods in the hills is wedded by many characteristic features among which two are most striking—humanistic behaviour of the deities and localization of gods.

### **Humanization of Gods**

Since time immemorial, there has been a steady and perceptible process of humanization of gods and, now, they are almost human beings. They eat, drink, walk, live and dance with their worshippers. The deity talks with them face to face. Every village god has a

- 
1. ये देवासो दिव्येकादश स्थ पृथिव्यामध्येकादश स्थ ।  
अप्सुक्षितो महिनैकादश स्थ ते देवासो यज्ञमिमं जुषध्वम् ॥ (1.139.11)
  2. त्रीणि शता त्री सहस्राण्यग्नि त्रिशच्च देवानव चासपर्ययन ।  
औक्षन् घृतैरस्तृणन् बर्हिरस्या आदिद्धोतारंन्यसादयन्त ॥ (3.9.10)



number of *ashta-dhatu*, golden and silver or brass *mohras* (the masks). One of them is invariably the main and principal mask which emerged in the beginning and represented the *devta* himself. These *mohras* are decked in a wooden *rath* or *palki* i.e., a palanquin which stands already well furnished with coloured silken clothes, ornaments, plants and flowers.

This *rath* is then carried on the shoulders (or in some cases on the head of a person) of two persons by way of two long and thin poles crossed in between and known as *zamanis* or *aglis* (Sk. *argala*) to the accompaniment of a grand orchestra consisting of scores of drums, trumpets, *karnals*, *ransinghas*, *nagaras*, *bhanas*, *thalis* etc. In this position the deity shows his anger or ecstasy, his approval or disapproval, his assertion or negation. When angry it jerks violently up and down, oscillates sharply this side or that side and runs through the crowd without any control of the persons who are carrying him. When accepting or approving, it tilts towards the object or the man who is so saying, the tilting other side means his disapproval. In this position Jeeverang devta of Sangla in Kinnaur district accepts or rejects nine (sometimes eleven or thirteen) pitchers full of *chhaphasur* (country fermented liquor) on the day of Bishu festival which takes place on the first day of Baisakh. The *chhaphasur* pitchers are placed in a line in the lawn in front of the temple. The devta inspects all the pitchers one by one and accepts them if found in order. If a pitcher is rejected, its *chhaphasur* is thrown away and new pitcher is brought in its place. When the required number of pitchers are accepted, every owner of the family takes some *chhaphasur* to their home for use at the time of the first sowing of *kharif* crop while the remaining *chhaphasur* is drunk by all in the presence of the four deities of the village.

When necessary the deity, in this position, undertakes long journey over the shoulders of the worshippers. Baidra of Kotkhai and Mahasu of Shimla etc. go to Kedarnath, Badrinath and Haridwar on pilgrimage. Bias Rishi of Kuinri and Naina Devi of Sundar Nagar visited Kulu Dussehra in 1995 travelling 135 and 92 km. respectively on foot.

The deity is always accompanied by his *goors* (disciples) with long hair on their heads and one of them is invariably a *malegha* (head) *goor*. He is devta's spokesman. At pertinent moment or on

special occasions he gets into trance and in his religious frenzy shakes himself vehemently. It is, then, considered that the spirit of the *deota* has entered him. He is, then, considered and addressed as a *deota*. In that position, whatever he speaks is taken to be the voice of the deity concerned. He gives answers to all sorts of queries.

The god sometimes gets very much annoyed from his men. He, therefore, quietly leaves his temple and goes to stay with one of his relations. Some abnormal happenings take place and on asking the *goor*, the people come to know about the fact. They, therefore, beg pardon of him, pay fine and go to the temple where he is temporarily staying with the same procession as described above and bring him back by offering lambs, sheep and goats at a number of places on the way. If Kamru Nag of Chacheut in Mandi district becomes angry, he sends heavy rains and causes floods. In that case, either he must be suitably propitiated or else a nearby *deota* Bardnag of Jwalapur should be worshipped who controls rains and subsides floods.

The village gods have, thus, social relationship as human beings have. They are linked and tied by their family relations and kinship. This relationship is not simply a matter of belief, but this happens by way of their emergence or appearance. This may be explained by citing a specific instance.

One of the most important of these divinities is Mahasu with regard of whom a legendary tale tells us that at the end of the *Dwapar yug* when Krishna and Pandavas disappeared in the Himalayas, the *Kali yug* started and Uttarakhand was infested by demons and devils devouring the people and plundering the villages and towns. The most dangerous of these demons was Kirmar who, once, devoured seven sons of a religious Brahman named Huna, when they had gone to Tons river to take bath. When their mother Kirtaka went out to search her sons, Kirmar tried to molest her, but the chaste wife, at once, turned to God and prayed:

*Putra dukh dukhiya bhai, perbal avla aj  
Sati ko sat jat hai, rakho Ishwar laj.*

“I am distressed at the loss of my sons and today I am under the power of others. O God, I am a chaste woman. Keep my chastity.” Her prayer was heard. She became invisible to Kirmar and she returned home. The couple, then went to Hateshwari Durga Mata

who was all powerful and who, they thought, would help them. Durga Mata was pleased with their prayer and devotion and guided them to go to Lord Shiva over the Kashmir mountain.

Huna went there. He practised penance, gave up eating grain and using clothes, lived on vegetables and used bark of trees. Shiva was pleased with him. He appeared before him and asked if he desired any boon. Huna implored:

*Uttar khand mein rakshas base, manukhon ka karte ahar  
Kul mulak barbad kiya, abadi ho gai ujar  
Tum hi Rudra, tum hi Vishnu, Nand Gopal  
Dukh hua sur-sadhuon ko, maro rakshas tat-kal  
Sat putra mujh das ke, nahan gae jab parbhat  
Jab ghat gae nadi Tons ke jinko Kirmar khayo ek sath.*

“The demons dwelling in the northern region are devouring the people. They have destroyed the country and devastated the population. You are Rudra, Vishnu and Nand Gopal (all in one). The gods and sages are in distress. Kill the demon at once. In the morning my seven sons went to take bath. When they reached the bank of Tons river, Kirmar ate them all.”

Shiva was highly moved by his agonizing imploring. He bade Huna to go and gave him rice, flower and a lamp, and told him that Shakti goddess will, first, appear in the garden at Maindarath. “O Brahman, go home, keep confidence in me. Many devtas will come out of her limbs. Gods will appear from her body and heroes from her every hair.” Huna was, thus, sent back with his wife:

*Vida kiyo jab vipra ko, diye akshat, phul, chirag  
Shakti rup pahle prakt bhai Maindarath ke bag.  
Ghar jao vipra apne, rakho mujh par tek.  
Shakti rup ke ang se, ho gae dev anek.  
Pragte ang se devte, rom-rom se vir.  
Stri sahit vida kiyo 'rakho man main dhir.*

Huna went home with his wife. He kept the flower, the lamp and the rice concealed beneath the *pipal* tree standing behind his house, as directed by Shiva, and performed daily worship. On the third day after full moon of Bhadon a fountain sprang up there, wherein the Shakti appeared. ‘On the head of Mother goddess was burning a

chafing-disk. And Botha Mahasu was born shining like the rays of the sun:

*Mathe bale mai re agni re gethe.  
Botha raji Mahasu hoi suraj re bhekhe.  
Chhati se marte chakkar chal  
Janma Chalda, Mata ra lal.  
Mata Deo Lari ne hath kiye khare  
Bashak Pawasi donon hath do jhare  
Chauth mein upne Mahasu char.  
Panchmi hoi tithi di deo Kiyalu Banar  
Sher Kaliya Kiyalu hue Botho re Vazir.  
Romo hoe romo de nau lakh vir.*

“Placing her hands round her breast, the Mother goddess brought forth her (second) son Chalda Mahasu (that is, one who goes round to visit other places and gods). Mother Deo Lari (the local name given to the Goddess) raised her hands. Bashak and Pawasi (the other two gods of this area) both came out of her two hands. On the fourth (of the light half of Bhadon) the four Mahasu (brothers) were born. On the fifth were born the gods Kiyalu and Banar. Sher Kaliya and Kiyalu became the ministers of Botha Mahasu. Nine lakhs of heroes came forth from the hair (of the goddess).”

On the request of the pious Brahman Huna and by the orders of Devi Mai, the Mahasu brothers and their two commanders killed not only Kirmar, but also his associates Singi of Majhog, Keshi of Hanol and many other demons. The place where Kirmar was killed is known as Khandai where the marks of his sword on a rock still bears the testimony of the event. When they emerged victorious after killing all the carnivorous demons the Botha Mahasu himself distributed the kingdom among them all as under:

*Raj sabhe devto ko is tarah banta  
Rajdhani Pawasi dena Devan ra danda  
Bashak ko Bavar dino poru Bilo Boli sathe  
Pawasi bel dino Punwaso jo Bel pashe  
Kalu Kotla hu dino Kiyalue Banar  
Bothe Chalde Mahasu ro raj hoa sarv pahar.*

“To Pawasi he gave the main territory the mountain of Devan, to

Bashak he gave Bavar area with Bilo adjoining Sathe, to Pawasi he, also, gave Bel area which is called Bel Pashe. He gave Kalu Kotla to Kiyalu and Banar. And both Botha and Chalda Mahasu became the rulers of the whole of the hill tract.”

This is the mythical ballad of one of the most important and widely venerated deity and his three brothers and two of his heroes. He wields such a popular reverence that not only his region but whole of the present Shimla and Solan districts were, previously, rightly known as Mahasu district. In the before-quoted distribution of area, it will be seen that Chalda Mahasu was not given any specific area. Botha Mahasu always stays at Hanol. To Chalda he said:

*Desh hua mulak, Sri Chalda tumhara,  
Hanola khe bhejna Kuto ra kara.*

“O Sri Chalda, all this country is yours. You can go anywhere you like in Mahasu area and everywhere you will be worshipped like myself and like my other brothers. Wherever you go, the inhabitants will worship you particularly by performing a *jagra* in the *Nag-chauth* and *Nag-panchmi* days in Bhadon each year. But you shall have to pay or send *kut* (dues payable to gods) to Hanol.” So actually it is the Chalda Mahasu who has the widest popularity in the Mahasu area.

Thus, Botha Mahasu, Chalda Mahasu, Bashak and Pawasi are the four brothers and Kiyalu and Banar are their Wazirs. Among the deities, the relationship is not always confined to individual class of gods. It, rather, exists between gods of different classes. Jamadagni of Malana is brother of Gephang *deota* of Lahul and Hadimba of Manali is their sister. Whenever necessary, and particularly when the *chhari* i.e., the wooden pole representing the deity, gets old, Gephang goes to visit his elder brother at Malana. Jamadagni welcomes him with three or five *darus* i.e., wooden logs brought from his own forest. These are kept together for the night and by the morning one of the logs gets separated. That *daru* is, then, decorated with colourful clothes and silver canopy and the same is used as *palki* or new *chhari* for the Gephang *deota*. This is the tradition, perhaps, because there is scarcity of wood or trees in Lahul area.

Kamru Nag of Mandi is supposed to have seven sons. None of them is, however, Nag. Six of them are Balakameshwar of Dhanesar

Garh, Balakameshwar of Badi Gamanu, Balakameshwar Ghugta of Sila Kipad, Balakameshwar of Tikkar, Balakameshwar Bhangrohi of Bhozeri and Balakameshwar of Sayari. Goddess Phungni of Tiun is sister of seven Narayans. Katrusi Narayan of Tarapur in Kulu is the eldest of them. Whenever, he gets annoyed he goes to stay with his sister at Tiun. Likewise, when Devi is angry with his worshippers she comes to stay with Katrusi Narayan.

The most popular Meshur (Maheshur) *deotas* of Kinnaur are eighteen brothers and sisters. Five of them stay in village Chagaon, Sungra, Bhawa, Pawari and Mebar and their sisters Chandika at Kothi, Usha at Nichar, Chitrarekha at Taranda and Pirasan at Nathpa. Some of the brothers and sisters were deaf and dumb. Their father is Banasur and mother Hirma (Hadimba). Chitrarekha of Taranda, Usha of Nichar and Maheshur of Sungra come to visit their mother whenever they so desire. Chandika of Kothi village is the eldest of them all and while dividing their ancestral property, she kept the most fertile land for herself. When some one objected for the lesser share, she tried to calm him down by giving another small land.<sup>1</sup>

- (1) *Thuchala dena Kulu devta, thuchala shongho Hirma Devi  
Banasiras lotishchha olo chhongsa vyo duk*
- (2) *Zom ki cha zom ho grosa thanang  
Vyahe hona ho gorboring agg ho*
- (3) *Gurbin ho Hirma Devi ne, gurbin ho  
Zae sina ho sorai yungring, zae sina.*

“(1) From below to up came Kulu devta, from below to up came Hirma Devi. Banasur said ‘shall go for salt business’. (2) They met at Grosa Thanang (near Sungra). (They) married in Gorboring cave. (3) Conceived: Hirma Devi conceived. Born eighteen brothers-sisters: born.” When the time for dividing the land came, all of them asked their elder sister Chandika “*Kisi banthya ho gangicha ringze, kisi banthya*” (you divide the property, O elder sister, you divide) She was very clever and:

*Aneno tagish, Chandikas, beshtolo yothang.  
Mang-mang dusha sata shualing.*

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1. For complete ballad and other details reference is invited to pages 220-224 and 370-373 of *Kinnar Loka Sahitya* by Dr. Bansi Ram Sharma.

“Chandika kept (*pargana* ‘piece of land’ of) Sata Shua hidden under her hair for herself.” To others she said:

- (1) *Kino tode ho, Grosa Shankaras, kino tode*  
(for you is, O Shankar of Sungra, for you is)  
*Kino tode ho, Grosa Thanango, kino tode*  
(for you is, Sungra territory, for you)  
*Nosta mani ho, Gangicha Ringze, Nosta mani ho*  
(This will not do, my sister! this will not do)  
*Nosma nima ho, Piriyon Soranang, nosma nima ho*  
(This will not do! Then take golden Sarahan as well).
- (2) *Kino tode ho, Bhabeo Shankaras, kino tode*  
(for you, O Shankar of Bhaba, for you is)  
*Kino tode ho, Bhabeko Khunang, kino tode*  
(for you is, Bhaba territory, for you)  
*Nosta mani ho, Gangicha Ringze, Nosta mani ho*  
(This will not do, my sister! This will not do)  
*Nosma nima ho, Spiti Khago, Nosma nima ho*  
(This will not do! Then take area of Spiti as well).

This is how Chandika divides the land of her forefathers among her brothers and sisters. For some of them she gave nothing. At least, there is no indication in the ballad regarding the deafts and dumbs and if any share was ever given to them. In the legend there is only a reference of one dumb sister whom the Chagaon Maheshar wanted to keep with him. He keeps her *mohra* with him whenever he goes out.

### **Localization of Village Gods**

Another chief characteristic of the mythology of village gods in Himachal Pradesh, is the localization of the deities. This has three-fold significance—specific jurisdiction, local emergence and feudal form of administration.

#### **(1) Specific Jurisdiction**

In the first instance, every deity has his own area of jurisdiction which is known as *har* and its joint session as *hargi* or *harka* or

*harsha*. The people under its jurisdiction are called *harie*. Each divine family rules over its own territory consisting of a village or a group of villages. The deity has been a titular and spiritual head of its territory. Each strive for maintaining territorial integrity and internal sovereignty. We may, safely, imagine that as the *deotas* emerged and their number increased, there has been a division of territories among themselves so that each shall have complete sway over his territory and that there was no transgression. We have seen above a division of areas among the Mahasu brothers and their heroes and another division among the Maheshuras of Kinnaur. There has been a similar distribution among the Dum *deotas* presently known by the name of the areas of villages of their share like Dum of Pharal, Dum of Kotla, Dum of Kupri, Dum of Parojusha. Similarly, Marechh family of *deotas* divided their country among its seven members—Dithu of Dholaser, Marechh of Malendi, Bareog in Kumharsen, Shawan in Shangri, Banar, Kirti in Kotgarh and Behna in Outer Seraj. There had been similar divisions among the Jamlus and among the Mahadeos. Even where there has been no regular division or distribution, each major village god or goddess has a specific locality of jurisdiction irrespective of the fact that there might be smaller gods or his *sevaks* (servants) within his territory. In their desire to maintain their integrity and, at the same time, in their efforts to extend their influence and supermacy, there have been instances of usurpation and consequent fights among the *deotas*. For example, Gramang Narayan lost his ear (hearing power) in such a fight with Hurang Narayan and, consequently, whenever Gramang Narayan has to be evoked, his main instrument *bhana* has to be played at his ears.

In a similar fight, Nag deota of Shaila lost his territory to Padoi deota who even occupied the temple of Nag in which he lives to this day. Nag deota fled to Dhali where he is worshipped by the people of that village.

According to local tradition, the aforesaid seven Marechh brothers came from Manasarovar lake and fought with Bhambu Rao who blocked their way at the boundary of his state. He was, however, defeated and they came to his capital Hatu from where they occupied their respective areas.

The boundaries of the *har* are clearly defined and each god watchfully safeguards his own interest and the welfare of his subjects



within his domain. Any transgressor would be punished. In one of such cases, Devta Sipi had lost his nose. He, once, stole a *deodar* tree from the territory of a neighbouring Nag deota when he was sleeping. The latter, soon, woke up and chased the culprit. Sipi ran with the tree, but had not gone very far when he fell down and broke his nose. The tree also got dropped from his shoulders and is now growing upside down at the site where it fell down. Its branches are now downwards.

There is another *deodar* tree with its branches downwards near village Ropri in Kulu district. It was thrown by Katrusi Narayan over Rupa Thakur in a fight near the boundary of the two. The Thakur got buried under the tree and the Narayan has now full control over his territory as well.

Adi Brahma of Khokhan on the right side of the river Beas and Trijugi Narayan the Diyari Thakur on the other side were at their loggerheads each claiming supermacy over the other. Adi Brahma was enamoured of Rajeshwari, the sister of Diyari Thakur. He wanted to seduce her. So Diyari Thakur got his sister married to Parashar Rishi residing a little higher from Khokhan, at Kalaun near the top of the hill. Rishi Parashar, however, could not keep peace with his wife and, one day, annoyed over a issue, took hold of his cudgel and wanted to strike her. She ran to her safety and Parashar followed her. Near Bajaura, when Rishi was likely to overtake her, Rajeshwari, on the advice of Markandeya, touched a corpse lying nearby. She was, thus, defiled and Rishi left her. Even now Parashar does not allow any woman to enter his temple. Rajeshwari is also deified as a Devi and she, and in consolation of her, Markandeya use coffins.

When Diyari Thakur got his sister married to Parashar, Adi Brahma abducted Diyari Thakur's wife. Thereupon, Diyari Thakur attacked Adi Brahma with bows and arrows. Adi Brahma hid himself in a cave, but Thakur's arrows all turned into stone and can be seen even now surrounding his temple. Adi Brahma, then, threw his arrows from Rohgi, a higher place and struck Thakur's temple at Diyar and it got tilted and is still in that position. None of them could, however, dispossess the other from respective territory because river Beas stood on their way.

In the case of Himachal Pradesh, it is interesting to note that the folk traditions of the hill people commemorate the events, heroes and

popular personages more by oral lores than by making records, inditing history or erecting material monuments. This may be true due to the gross illiteracy that was prevalent in the hills, but it is also not false that the people have not allowed memorable events to diminish, and have kept their name and fame alive. In order to keep the memory of their martyrs, heroes, ancestors and philanthropists alive and fresh they have improvised the method of mythical tales, ritual ceremonies, legendary ballads and songs to be recited and retold year after year, generation after generation and erected temples or shrines, wherever possible, housing wooden, stone or metal images or even crude stones, chiselled or unchiselled.

Now Dom (also called Domeswar) was, originally, neither a celestial being, nor a Pauranic divinity, nor a classical god, but only a terrestrial hero and ordinary person of flesh and blood. The legend says that Shura and Pargi were two brothers of village Shariana in Ratesh (now in tehsil Theog). Shura had no son. On the advice of his wife Shura went to Hatkoti Durga imploring her for a son. He resorted to fast unto death, Durga got pleased and appearing with all her attributes blessed him with a boon of two sons. Subsequently, he had two sons the elder Dom and young Kon. But, as ill luck would have it, their father died when Dom was eight years old. The two brothers were, then, brought up by their sister Kapri who, too, died soon after. On some issue the two brothers fell out and Dom left the house and joined a service with Thakur of Darkoti for grazing sheeps. While serving Darkoti Thakur, Dom once killed a notorious dacoit Nandu of village Tahu of Kot area.

Dom had, certainly, signs of super-human power. He left his native place for plains and sought service in the kings army at Delhi. In a test Dom could successfully split a small grain in the centre of a hanging horse-hair while none else could do so. Pleased with his service, the king set two deotas, Mahasu and Shirgul, free from the prison on his request. They, then, flew back towards their homes in the aerial steed of the two deotas alongwith three vessels full of gold given to Dom by the king as a reward. They halted at Binu. Gods went to their places and one of the vessels was buried there, where it turned into a *bawli* i.e., a waterspring. The second vessel was buried in Gothan where a temple stands now. The third was buried at a place where *chaura* (a stone platform) is existing at present. On

reaching his village, Dom sought service with the Thakur of Rajana. They both successfully defeated Thakur of Kumarsen with whom Rajana had a boundary dispute. But, later on, it is said, Thakur of Kumarsen got Dom killed with the help of a Tibetan *tantric*. But Dom soon emerged from the ashes in the form of an idol. It was enshrined in a temple. Another idol was prepared by two persons named Sunu and Sanaki. It was enshrined at Gothan.

Similar legend is popular about Mul Nag, who dispossessed three well established gods of erstwhile Keonthal and Madhan states. Kalu was one of the five brothers of Bharana village in Madhan. He was hermit and a devotee of a *sadhu* who happened to come to their village. One day the *sadhu*, some-how, disappeared and Kalu set out in search of the *sadhu*. He visited many places, but all in vain and at last died.

On his death he got perverse, became a *sareli* (a big snake) and began devouring men. Three deotas of the area Dodru, Bathindlu and Malanshar were helpless to check him. When the gods could not do anything, four Shilu brothers of Kelti village took courage and killed the snake with spears. In the head of the snake were found two images. One of them was jet black with a *singhasan* on which the Nag reposed and two Devis sitting on either side. The image, through an inspired Brahman, announced that he was the Mul Nag and if properly propitiated he promised them progress and prosperity, peace and tranquillity. They did so. The Nag claimed the dominions of the three deotas. On denial by them, the Nag took the form of a lightning and destroyed Malanshar's temple. Thereupon Malanshar fled to Pujarli, Bathendlu to Chotha and Dodru to Dobra in Madhan. Nag deota, thus, occupied the whole territory of the three deities and got his temples built at Dhar, Jadun and Kiari.

Where there is no regular fight for dominance, the deities are dispossessed of their area by deceitful manners. According to a legendary convention, a Jagarnathi goddess, once left *Nihul desh* (plains) and started for hills. She visited many places and, at last, reached Bhekli near Kulu. The peaceful and calm atmosphere and natural scenery of this place attracted the goddess and she decided to stay there. But it was already the abode of a *Than deota*. The Devi told him that Jognis (goddesses of the hills) were inviting him at the top of the adjacent mountain. *Than* went out and the Devi, at once,

occupied his place. Nearby was another god 'Sari Narayan'. Jagarnathi invited Narayan to play dice on the condition that if he was defeated he would leave the place for her. Narayan lost, made Devi his godsister, begged for a small place behind her temple for temporary visits and left for Sari another village away from Bhekhli. Whenever he comes to Bhekhli for periodical fairs, he stays in that temple.

Later on, Sari Narayan and Than devta approached Surya Deva to help them in restoring their lost territories. A fight took place and the arrows of Surya struck both Devi's and her associate's legs. They become lame, but Surya could not dispossess the goddess of the acquired territory of Than and Narayan. She became the sole proprietor of the land. She, subsequently, came to be known as Bhekhli Devi. Even now she does not come out of her temple when the sun is over the sky and walks with lame steps alongwith her bodyguard.

## (2) Local Emergence

The second significance of localization of gods lies in the fact that whether the local deity is a Vedic Deva, a Pauranic trinity, a classical god or a Rishi or a hero, he has his own local convention of adoration and emergence. The deities came into worship not because of their Vedic or Pauranic greatness, but because of their miraculous appearance and ostentatious display of unusual power to dispel the evil spirits and oppressive forces which had, hitherto, been cruelly devastating the hill people.

Thus, the Adi Brahma of Khokhan in Kulu district is not venerated as a Creator of Universe, but as an *ashta-dhatu mohra* (eight-metalled mask) which was digged out by a six months old breast-feeding girl of a widowed mother from her field. The *mohra* spoke in dream to be of Brahma and promised prosperity to those who worshipped him. This prosperity actually flourished and demons, altogether, were destroyed when people adorned the *mohra* in a *rath* and established it in a temple.

*Bhut Nath*, obviously, is the Lord Shiva, but according to local legend, his cult came into being because a cowherd saw a cow dropping milk from her udders over a piece of stone and Raja Ajbar Sen, at the same time, confronted a dream, dug up the place, found

the idol of the Shiva, erected a temple and worship started. Raja, subsequently, won successive victories and brought prosperity to his people.

Similarly, Kunjeshar Mahadev in Palampur is, according to classical belief, a manifestation of Shiva. But he is venerated there not as a Shiva, but as a deity who came into being in a nest of a crane. It is said that it was a site of a grove of *bel* trees and a crane made its nest in one of the *bel* trees. In the meanwhile, Raja Dilawar Chand of Kangra who was childless, had a dream that if he built a temple of Mahadev, he would be blessed with a son. A search for the *pindi* shown to the Raja in the dream, was made and, consequently, an image was found in the nest. A temple was erected and the idol gracefully placed there. He was named Kunjeshar Mahadev after the name of crane which is locally known as *kunj*. Raja later on got four sons.

Again, Gautam Rishi is not worshipped because of his great contribution to the Vedic culture, but because when a *Nandha luhar*, 'a dumb blacksmith' of Goshal village was ploughing fields of his master, an idol came out with the tip of the plough and Nandha brought the *mohra* home, cleaned it, plastered his small room with cowdung and placed it at one corner. His dumbness was gone. His labour brought him more and more profit. People came to know the reason. They built a temple and the worship began as that of Gautam Rishi as told by the *mohra* itself.

At Mashran in Chaupal, the local deity is known as Maheshwar, but in fact it is an *ashta-dhatu* image found in an excavation. Once a man was imprisoned. When he was released, two persons met him on his way to home. He related to them a dream about the hidden deities at a particular place. They, therefore, dug the earth at the site and found two *mohras*. They enshrined them one at Pujarli and the other at Mashran. They are brother deities.

According to a popular legend, it is said that a ruler of Suket State, once, lived in his Jagir at Samarli near Pangna. In the Jagir area there was a *Bhekhal* tree on which a barley-shaped substance of gold grew every day. After some time, the tree got uprooted and two images of Narsingh emerged from the ground. One image was brought to Pangna and enshrined in a temple which is now very popular Narsingh temple. The other image was taken to Rampur Bushahr

where another temple was built. Subsequently, the trunk of the tree was got hollowed and from this five drums were prepared and placed in the temples at Mamel, Kao, Duttanagar, Mahun Nag and Nirmand.

Even where classical legends are in vogue, they are coupled by the local mythical conventions which, actually, gave them special significance. Thus, according to a Pauranic myth Daksha Prajapati, once, arranged a *Mahayajna* (a sacrifice ceremony) to which he invited Brahma, Vishnu, great sages Vasishtha, Dadhichi etc., Gandharvas, Kinnaras and Vidhyadharas. But his own son-in-law Shiva was not invited, because he had, once, annoyed Prajapati by his dexterous behaviour when Daksha Prajapati called him 'lord of devils and demons'. When Shiva's consort Sati came to know of it, she, despite repeated warnings and constant refusal of Shiva, went to Kanakhal the place of *Mahayajna*. There she could not tolerate the insult of her husband whose statue was placed at the gate, and committed suicide by throwing herself in the sacrificial fire. Shiva came to know of the incident. He instantly reached there. His third eye opened. He started *Tandava Nritya*, picked up the dead body of Sati and ran towards Kailash, his traditional abode. The whole world was shaken. It was burning from his wrath and grief. The humanity was terrified. So were the gods, saints and sages. Then, on the requests of all of them, Vishnu sneaked along behind Shiva cutting parts of Sati's body so that her blood might extinguish the fire of dissolution. In the process the eyes of Sati fell at a place where now Naina Devi's temple stands in Bilaspur district, her feet at Chintpurni in Una district, her tongue at Jwalamukhi, her breasts at Hatkoti in Shimla district, her torso (trunk) at Kangra (where stands the temple of Vajreshwari), her *kapal* (brain) at a place where Kapali Bhairo temple stands near Kangra.

But, this all is not sufficient for the innocent mind of the hill people. They wove up their own myths round the different phenomena, which have actually given prominence to them. Thus, it was Naina a cowherd who having been puzzled at seeing his cow milching a stone out of her udders, dug up the place and found an image of the goddess with large sad eyes. People enshrined them in Naina Devi temple. People of Kangra bewildered by severe and prolonged drought fasted long, did *havan* and penance to propitiate the Goddess Durga who showed them the spot where the torso of Sati was lying. People dug it

out and put it in a temple now known as Vajreshwari temple. Again, Bhagat Mai Dass was woken up by a strange girl from his sleep on the way when he was going to his father-in-law's house and led him to a place where the feet of Sati were lying at Chintpurni. Similarly, at the site of present Kapaleshwar temple, the *kapal* of Sati fell from above and Bhairon (an attribute of Shiva) standing below caught it and placed it in a temple. It is, further, said that Raja Bhim Chand, a great devotee of Durga had a dream that Maha Shakti has appeared somewhere in his kingdom in the shape of nine flames, those of Mahakali, Annapurna, Chandi, Hinglaj, Vindhya Vasini, Maha Laxmi, Saraswati, Ambika and Anjini Devi. A search was made and the site was traced in the heart of thick forests. Raja cleared the site of the bushes and constructed a temple known as Jwalamukhi temple.

Again, according to Pauranic myth Kailash is the traditional home of Shiva and his consort Parvati. But the local legend says that the people of this part of the Himalaya were finding it difficult to go to Kailash every time for pilgrimage. So an ancient king and a devotee of Shiva got Shiva agreed and brought down the Kailash to Raldang in Kinnaur, and made it the home of all *deotas* who particularly come over to stay here during the month of Magh when all sorts of festivities and commotional activities get stopped for the whole month in all the villages. Shiva himself stays on the top of the adjacent mountain known as Khaskar. Sweet music is at times heard on its summit. Raldang is known as Raldang Kailash. In between the two is a pool of water surrounded by mountains. The legend says that once a saint came over here to worship Shiva. He penanced for many years. Shiva got pleased, appeared before him and asked for a boon. Saint asked for a favour which, instead of pleasing Shiva, incurred Shiva's displeasure. He was, thus, turned into a rock. This rock can be seen from Kalpa. It changes its colour thrice a day—white at sunrise, red at mid-day and green at sunset. For the people of the hills it is meritorious to circumambulate the Kailash keeping it always on their right.

In the hills, such a local element has made the Vedic and Pauranic gods close to their own present day environment and, thus, make them addressable to all kinds of obstacles and problems. Since for these hill people Raldang-Kailash is the actual Kailash, the real Kailash is popular as the king of glaciers. A folk proverb says:

*Tise gangskyi rgyalpo yin*  
*Purgyul rii rgyalpo yin*  
*Maspang mthsoyi rgyalpo yin.*

that is:

Kailash is the king of glaciers,  
 Purgyul is the king of mountains,  
 Manasarowar is the king of lake.<sup>1</sup>

### (3) *Feudal Form of Administration*

Still another special feature of the village gods is their feudal form of administration. The whole of the land whether arable or otherwise belonged to the deity concerned. He did not cultivate the land himself. He had sublet the land either to his own people or to the smaller gods who, in turn, got it cultivated through their cultivators as their tenants. The tenants gave fixed share of the produce to the *deota* keeping the remaining for their personal use. Not only land, even forests were the property of village gods. Even now, there are plots from where no trees are cut except for the personal use of the *devtas* concerned. The system has gradually languished, no doubt. Particularly the passage of the Occupancy Tenants (Vesting of Proprietary Rights) Act, has dealt a death blow to the feudatory administration of the gram *deotas*, confiscating their *mafis*, making tenants the true right-holders and leaving the deities without any source of income, but it has left an interesting residue.

Every feudal lord had dependent feudatories subordinate to it. They owed to the higher authority their allegiance not only by way of regular homage to it, but also by paying *kut* i.e., revenue fee for the land assigned to them. It is, almost, a political hierarchy—*baradeo* (higher god) at the top, small godlings as his *wazirs* (ministers) below him, their *Birs* (bodyguards) still at lower level and the *bhors* (officials or servants) at the base. For example, Junga was the chief deity of old Keonthal state. He had five feudatory states, viz. Koti, Theog, Madhan, Ghund and Ratesh. Further below were eighteen tracts of *deotas* like Kalaur, Manuni, Kaneti, Baldeo, Kawalideo etc.

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1. A.H. Francke *Antiquities of Indian Tibet*, p. 37.



None of his subordinates could hold a *jag* without specific permission of Junga Devta. Similarly, Chaturmukh of Kotgarh has five fief gods namely Benu, Janeru, Khoru, Merelu and Basara. Shirpal is his wazir. The five minor *deotas* are known as *bhors*. They work as *chaukidars*. Khachli Nag is his *guru*. Usually, the *wazirs* (ministers) occupy smaller temple adjoining the main temple or even away from it or in some cases his image is placed near the door.

Koteshwar has Bhura as his subordinate. They were, once, holding a fair at Chhachhori when Ditu another *deota* joined them. At the end of the fair when they were entering the temple the people, as usual, offered two goats for sacrifice, but Koteshwar declined to accept them saying that they had with them a third *deota* as a guest and that a third goat should be offered for the guest, too. People offered the third goat but Ditu refused to accept it saying that he gets only human flesh and that a virgin girl should be sacrificed. God Koteshwar got angry and arrested Ditu and was not released unless he had sworn never to eat human flesh again. This pleased Koteshwar and made Ditu his *wazir*.

Whenever there was division of territories, the seniormost god was feudal lord and the juniors were either subordinate deities under him or ministers. We have seen such divisions in the cases of Mahasu *deotas* and Maheshurs of Kinnaur. Similar division was made by Sri Gul *deota*. He gave Nahula village to his brother Chandeshwar. He had Devi Ram his Wazir to whom he assigned Karli. Devi Ram had two sons as subordinate ministers. To the elder son Rabbu he gave Jorna and adjoining area in Jubbal State, and to Chhinu, the younger son, he gave Sarahan and surrounding villages.

The feudal system was, more or less, perfect. The subordinates used to pay their share of the produce regularly, because they hold the land on the wishes of the feudal lord. Perhaps the best illustration of this quasi-political organisation of the hill cults is offered by the following account of Jamadagni of Malana.

Jamadagni or Jamlu as he is popularly known is the titular and spiritual head of Malana, a secluded area away from other population in Kulu district. He has twelve dependent feudatories subordinate to him as Jamlu of Saman, Jamadagan of Sati, Jamlu of Daifri, Jamlu of Shangchar, Jamlu of Shegli, Jamadagan of Parini, Jamlu of Narol (in Jagatsukh), Jamlu of Shiah, Jamadagan of Ursu, Jamlu of Pashi,

Jamadagan of Neri and Jamlu of Sis.

Further below them, Jamlu has a dozen of *dogharas* (out-houses) such as at Baladhi and Bishna in Kothi Kais, Rasol in Kothi Kanawar and at two villages in Kothi Harkandi. They have lands and large *mafis* in all these places.

Malana is inhabited by four *chugs* (dynasties)—two in *Dhara berh* (division) and two in *Sara berh*. Each *chug* has further two *chhuddis* (sub-dynasties). For successful republican administration, Jamlu has two houses. *Jeshthang* (the upper house) has eleven members. Eight are elected by members of eight *chhuddis* and are known as *Jatheras* (the elders). Three membes i.e., a *Karmisht*, a *Pujari* and a *Goor* are nominated by *deota* Jamadagni himself. The lower house *Kanishthang* or *kor* has a senior member of each family as its member. *Jeshthang* serves as a council also. It decides all kinds of cases whether criminal, civil or revenue. According to Sir James Lyall "they decide all disputes which arise among the people of Malana, their decision is never questioned and our courts are never troubled with cases from the villages,"<sup>1</sup> except, however, a rare appeal to the god himself. Again, Jamadagni's authority was unquestionable and on his account Malana has been a city of refuge whence no criminal could be carried off if he got there. There are, further, four *fogaldars* whose duty is to see whether the decision of the council has been executed.

Now, every dependent feudatory has to pay its dues in time. But there might be some defaulters. So all the membes of the lower house, except those exempted by the deity, would cross over the pass Chandrakhani on the opposite side of which the feudatories are situated, in the months of Maghar or Posh and collect the dues for the land assigned by their *deota* to the lower gods and the people. Then, after the name of their deity whole mass of share-collectors are known as 'Ra-deo'. Some times, only membes of the *Jeshthang* would go. Then they were known as 'baris' i.e., councillors. During all these visits, the Malana men feed free at the expense of their hosts, but no doubt, their food is considered in the accounts of the revenue taken with more or less accuracy. In this way they collect the share, mostly in kind, from all the Jamlu shrines feudatories to Malana Ra-deo.

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1. As quoted at page 264 of *A Glossary of the Tribes and Castes of the Punjab and North-West Frontier Provice* by H.A. Rose, Vol. III.

For the successful administration of the affairs of the individual gods, every deity has a number of office bearers:

*Kardar* is, in a sense, the manager of the *deota*. He manages all the affairs of the deity and is responsible for the maintenance of the temple property. Originally he was *kardar* or *kordar* i.e., collector of the *kar* (taxes) or *kor* (revenue of the god). This post is, generally, hereditary but his appointment has to be approved by the Government because, presently, he is responsible to the Government for the affairs of the god.

*Goor* is the spokesman of the god. He speaks on his behalf even in the absence of the deity at a particular occasion. He is always selected by the god himself whenever he so wishes.

*Pujyara* or *Pujari* has the duty to worship the god. He makes all arrangements for the daily or periodical worships. He is nominated by the deity but within certain specific families and not outside of them.

*Bhandari* or *Mandhari* is an official like a store-keeper. He is responsible for the upkeep of all the articles like musical instruments, clothes and ornaments, foodgrain and other property of the deity.

*Kathiala* or *Katwal* literally *kothi-wala* is the assistant of *Bhandari*. Since *Bhandari* has a lot of work to do, he is assisted by *Kathiala*. In the absence of *Bhandari* he looks after the *bhandar* i.e., store. He also assists *Kardar* in collecting the share of the produce from the tenants of the *deota*.

*Kayath* keeps the account of the temple. He is, in fact, accountant of the devta.

*Kahar* carries the *rath* (palanquin) of the *deota*. Sometimes, he is also known as *Zamani*.

*Nashandars* are those who carry paraphernalia of the *deota* from one place to another. Whenever the deity comes out of his temple he is accompanied by large number of instruments and other articles such as drums, *nagaras*, *ransinghas*, *karnals*, *bhanas*, trumpets etc. Every *Nashandar* is entrusted with the responsibility of one of such instruments and articles. He takes it from the *Bhandari* and returns it safe to him at the end of the fair or festival. Since most of them are responsible for playing the musical instruments, they are also known as *Bajantris*.

# 6

## *Ritual Forms and Traditional Practices*

The mythical conception of gods and the ritual procedure of their worship in the hills are much different from those prevailing in the plains and other parts of the country. The metaphysical and religious beliefs of the people are manifested in the way of worship and the rites observed. The Vedic gods are found venerated at a number of places. At Nirath in Shimla district there is a Sun temple with about three feet high Sun idol reputed to be over eight hundred years old. At Suraj Kund temple in Sundarnagar the object of worship is an *ashta-dhatu* image of the Sun. Similarly, a stone idol of the Sun is deified at Nahan on the Sirmauri Tal. But in all these Sun temples the cult practices are not the same as were in vogue in the Vedic period. In fact, the way of worship has always been a by-product of cultural behaviour. In the higher religion of the Vedas, the main mode of worship was the *Yajna-ritual* where various gods were invoked round the fire-altar. This was, further, associated by *vrata*, *upavasa* (fast) and *dana* (charity) etc.

This was followed by the Brahmanical form of veneration which has its seeds in the Bhagawat Gita prescribing '*patram pushpam phalam toyam*' i.e., worship by offering leaves, flowers, fruits and water etc. This, further, gave rise to that form of worship which is popularly known as '*puja*'. *Puja* is the worship of an image or symbol of the divinity by treating it, after it has been consecrated, as a living personality, and bringing before it, as before a living being cooked food, vestments, ornaments and other offerings like the flowers, the produce of the earth, incense, fruit, leaves etc. by waving lights in front of it singing, playing and dancing before it.

This *Puja* is the main form of worship in almost all the temples of higher Hindu pantheon where the idols of Shiva, Shiva-Parvati, Vishnu, Laxmi Narayan, Rama, Krishna are enshrined throughout the State. The *puja* is performed twice, once in the morning and then in the evening. In such temples, usually, regular priests are serving. In the morning the priest performs the *puja* after taking bath and putting on a *dhoti*. He bathes the main image of the shrine with mixture of milk and water and applies sandal-wood paste to all the deities. Then he recites *arti* ringing a small bell with one hand and holding a *dhangiar* or a bronze plate containing incense and a lamp with the other. In this way worship is made to all the deities and *puja* is concluded by blowing a conch-shell. The same process is applied in the evening but the image is, usually, not bathed and it is *arti* which dominates this time.

In the morning when the images (in some temples *mohras*) are bathed, different incantations are recited. The most common of them is as under:

आदौ स्नानः अमृतः वृद्धि कृत्वानि  
अचार्यः सूरजः मात्राणि दुग्धारिणी  
इतु सितु सामितु थर्पवेदा  
तऊं ध्याऊं हुताशनम् ।

“Thou art the great teacher, giver of prosperity, the Sun *deva*, milk giving mother, Sita, Savitri, the fire *deva* of the Atharva-Veda. I pray before thee and thou art being bathed.”

After giving a bath to the idols the priest lights a lamp fed with butter or *ghi*. At that time, too, the priest uses certain incantation, for example:

आग्रा जोत सूरजा जोत दीवा वाले,  
देव आतरा वाले, कालका माई रछिया करे,  
कोठार भंडार भर-पूर करे, पुत्रा फल दे,  
इतिशान कलिशान, सम्पूर्ण समोप्रति ।

“Lamps are being lighted for Surya *deva* and god-incarnation. O Mother Kalka! Protect us, fill our stores, bless us with sons; may peace prevail all over immediately.” This is, in fact, the peace-invocation which has a wide intention in view. It is addressed to get

peace as well as freedom from three kinds of troubles and obstacles like *God-sent* (आदि-दैविक) such as lightning, thunder; or *phenomenal* (आदि-भौतिक) such as fire, flood, land-slide; or *purely* subjective (आध्यात्मिक) such as lack of faith, insincerity etc.

Now, the main invocations are different with regard to different deities and the ritual is highly diversified. Some of them are common as found in plains or in higher circle of Brahmanical cults, but there are a few which are peculiar to Himachal Pradesh. In the case of Vishnu and his derivative deities, the priest holds in one hand a *zhari* or a bronze plate containing flower, leaves of fragrant trees or plants like *paza*, *bethar* and dhup, grains of rice, *kumkum* or *kesar* etc. In the other hand he holds a small bell. Then with the music of the bells and drums etc. outside the temple, he recites the following mantra:

प्रथमे मच्छ-रूपेणम् मात शंखावती पिता पूर्व  
ऋषि सहदेवं जल साग्रे पृथीवः अरिपूजेनं  
शरणं नमोनमः

द्वितीए कूर्म रूपेणं मात कर्णावती पिता  
विलोचन ऋषि सहदेवं शरणं नमोनमः ।

तृतीए वराह रूपेणं मात लीलावती पिता  
कौल ऋषि सहदेवं शरणं नमोनमः

चतुर्थे नारसिंघं मात चंद्रावती पिता  
हरिब्रह्म ऋषि सहदेवं शरणं नमोनमः ।

पंचमे वामन रूपेणं मात लंगावती पिता  
विलोचन ऋषि सहदेवं शरणं नमोनमः ।

षष्ठमे परशुरामं रूपेणम् मात रेणुका पिता  
जमदग््न जी सहदेवं शरणं नमोनमः ।

सप्तमे श्रीराम रूपेणम् मात कौशल्या पिता  
दशरथो सहदेवं शरणं नमोनमः ।

अष्टमे माता देवकी पिता वासुदेवं पुत्रं  
श्रीकृष्णाय नमोनमः

नवमे बुद्ध रूपेणं सहदेवं शरणं नमोनमः ।

दशमे रूपेणं कौन होवे, कब होवे,

माघ मासे शुक्ल पक्षे रेवती नक्षत्रे शनिवारे  
अष्टम् दिवसे कल्कि रूपेण सहदेवं शरणं नमोनमः ।

First of all, I salute the great god *Machh* 'Matsya' (fish) incarnation whose mother was Shankhavati and father Purav Rishi.

Secondly, I salute the great god Kurm (tortoise) incarnation whose mother was Karnavati and father Bilochan Rishi.

Thirdly, I salute Varahrup (Boar) incarnation whose mother was Lilavati and father Kaul Rishi.

Fourthly, I salute Narsimha (man-lion) incarnation whose mother was Chandravati and father Hari Brahm Rishi.

Fifthly, I salute Vaman-rup incarnation whose mother was Langavati and father Bilochan Rishi.

Sixth, I salute Parshu Ram incarnation whose mother was Renuka and father Jamadagni.

Seventh, I salute Shri Ram whose mother was Kaushalya and father Dasharath.

Eighth, I salute Shri Krishna whose mother was Devki and father Vasudev.

Ninth, I salute Budha Rup incarnation.

Who will be the tenth incarnation and when will he assume the form? He will assume it in the month of Magh, in the light-half in the Revati Nakshatra on Saturday, the eighth day of the month. He will be Kalki. I salute him."

This invocation has shorter form too:

*Namo ad ala, namo Brahm bala  
Namo ad nathi, namo shankh-chakra  
Namo padm-dhari  
Namo Machh Kachh Barah avtari  
Namo Narsingh Kurb ki dhari  
Namo Asht ashtangi, namo chhail kari  
Namo Shri Suraj devta, namo namaskara.*

"I salute you who were in the beginning. I salute the all powerful Brahma of the beginning who holds conch, wheel, lotus, mace. I salute the Incarnations in the shape of Fish, the Tortoise, the Man-lion. I salute one with eight forms and who is all beneficent. I also salute the Sun devta." Among some village gods and goddesses the following incantation is very popular:

देवा देवा सबतो राजा विष्णु भावा,  
 थापशवाणी बेखरचामी काती कुतमोशी,  
 काशम चामी बेखरचामी,  
 का नित्वा का सित्वा रूढ़ चनाना सूड़ चनाना,  
 पहलिया देवी दैल कुमारी,  
 द्वितीय देवी हथजखमाली,  
 तृतीय देवी बेखरचामी,  
 अग्र चंदन, कुंगुआ धूप,  
 अजगर—मजगर वर छाऊं  
 सिंह वाहन लाऊं दुर्गा नाऊं  
 दुर्गा देव भोवन चण्डी  
 ताते लोहे घड़े लुहार  
 हम नहीं जाने देवीए भरम तुम्हार  
 बाटे घाटे रछिया करनी  
 शत्रु को डऊंरू भक्षा करनी  
 ओं नारदा सारदा मामा जिमदा  
 अष्ट भुजा चतुर्भुजा,  
 देवी भगवती जय देया महाराज।

The language of rituals is always a code which cannot be expressed in human language. It is kept scrupulously secret from the knowledge of general public, while the procedure is highly technical and any error in form, however minute, may destroy the efficacy of the ceremony. The incantations have travelled from generation to generation and from mouth to mouth of, usually, illiterate disciples. They cram the wording without going for their meaning or context. Many mantras have, therefore, gone obscure and it is useless exercise to go for their meaningful illustration. The above incantation may be explained thus:

“I salute Vishnu who is the god of gods and king of all . . . (obscure) . . . I also salute the first goddess Dail Kumari, the second goddess Hathjakhmali, the third goddess Bekhartsami. I offer incense, sandal, vermilion, *dhup* to one who has the decoration of snakes, to Durga riding the lion, to Bhawaneshwari, to Chandika whose *swarup* I do not know. Please protect us on our way of life, from troubles. Our enemies may be destroyed by Narda, Sharda, eight-handed Durga.



O Devi Bhagwati be victorious.”

Nag cult is one of the oldest customs in the hills and many rituals are associated with this cult. Nagas are regarded as water-spirits. They not only cause rain, but also control the floods. If Kamru Nag of Chacheut Tehsil is not properly propitiated he causes heavy rains during Mandi Shivratri disturbing all the business and programmes of the fair. Then a goat is sacrificed to satisfy him. On the other hand, Barnag or Barad Nag deota of Jwalapur is worshipped in order to stop the heavy rain. In such a case, the Nag deota is taken to Parashar lake of Saenor village where he stays in the temple of Parashar *rishi* for the night and by the morning rain stops making the day sunny.

According to a legendary ballad once the Raja of Bushahr prisoned twelve devtas of his area who, although promised to bring rain and save the area from heavy drought, were unable to do so. Finally it was Devta Golinag of Pujarli in Rohru Tehsil who caused the rain and so the Raja and the people heaved a sigh of relief. He is, now, popularly known as *Meghraj* i.e., the king of clouds.

Nag Panchmi falling on the fifth of the light-half of Shraavan is the main occasion of Nag adoration when an image of the Nag made of cow-dung is worshipped. Again, soon after Diwali festival and usually in the month of Kartik when the winter starts and snakes go into hibernation a special Nag-puja is performed to say good-bye to the snakes. If any snake is seen after this, it is known as *niugra* ‘ungrateful’ and must be killed forthwith.

A specimen of the Nag invocation is available with regard to Nages deota of Sangla village in Kinnaur who is addressed thus:

*Jai bitingla, jai kharakla, Jai patula, jai  
thorasha, jai chhalimcho, jai dankhecho,  
dalecha upabocha, chi pabocha, jai barja,  
jai shing khambling, jai shyang, braling,  
jai shyang khambling.<sup>1</sup>*

“O thou, who livest within the well, be victorious; who lives in the

1. Notes on the Ethnography of the Bashahr State, Simla Hills, Punjab, by Pandit Tika Ram Joshi, some times Private Secretary to the Raja of Bashahr; edited by H.A. Rose, C.S. Punjab and published in Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, Vol. vii, No. 9, September, 1911, p. 539.

holes, be victorious; who canst go into a vessel be victorious; who canst swiftly run, be victorious; who livest in the water, be victorious; who livest on the precipice, be victorious; who livest upon the trees, be victorious; who livest in the waste-land, be victorious; who livest among the meadows, be victorious; who has power like the thunderbolt, be victorious; who livest within the hollow trees, be victorious; who livest among the rocks, be victorious, who livest within the caves, be victorious.”

The cult invocation of Devis is very much diversified and complex as against the few and simpler invocations of Shiva and his attributes and Vishnu and his incarnations. Almost each Devi has her own ways of worship and tabus attached to them. For example, *Bih-mao* or *Bihmata* i.e., *Vidhimata* has special days of worship and *vrat* ‘the fasts’ starting from first Sunday of *Jyeshtha* month and lasting for sixteen days. On the first day, the senior-most married woman whose husband is alive, sits before the idol of *Bihmata* placed on a purified *patra*. She takes *kumkum* ‘vermilion’ and 32 grains of *akshat* ‘unbroken rice’ in her folded hands, bows 32 times before the idol and places them in front of it. This is repeated twice with 16 flowers each time and once more with 16 *durva* grass. Then is offered special *bhog* of *satu* made of barley which was sown empty-stomach in the month of Ashwin, harvested empty-stomach in the month of Baisakh and ground empty-stomach in the month of Jyeshtha. Then the goddess is propitiated with the following *mantra*:

जेठो म्हीनो त्वार वार, बाहमणे घरे आई बी-मां,  
 चुडदे नाके पिजरे केशे आई, बाहमण देवे नहा धोआ,  
 बीअ पाटणो, मेऊवे-ध्वाऊओं,  
 प्रातः स्नान करा, हाथे पैरे महदसीरी गुंदा,  
 चन्द्र, सूरज बी-बचात, नरक सीड स्वर्ग सीड,  
 धूप-दीप नैई वेदय, दण्ड प्रणाम, प्रशन केरा।

“In the month of Jyeshtha on Sunday, goddess Vidhimata has come in the house of a Brahman with running nose and dishevelled hair. The Brahman (woman) got her washed and bathed, made her sit on a purified seat, herself first taking bath, and made the goddess compatible with sun and moon with ladders going up to heaven and down to hell, and made her happy, offering her incense, lamp and

sacred food and bowing before her.” This is repeated for sixteen days when 16 new stories are told one on each day.<sup>1</sup>

Rites and rituals in the case of the most of the village gods are, further, different. They do not have such elaborate rituals to be performed. *Puja* is not conducted twice a day. It is performed only on specific occasions. Again, here the *puja* is dominated by sacrificing animals. Bloody sacrifice, thus, holds the fore-most place. It is almost a universal religious rite in the Himalayas. The system has, certainly, its seeds deep rooted in the Vedic *homa* in which a wood-fire was lighted on an alter and certain offerings of food in the shape of meat and fat and *soma* or spirituous drinks were offered. Incense is burnt, no doubt, but it is not the same as found elsewhere. This is either *bethar* tree whose leaves give fragrance when dried and burnt on the glowing coals, or flowers and leaves of a plant commonly known as ‘*dhup*’! Its flowers which are white in colour and leaves are burnt in a *dhangiar* or *dhanera* usually a bronze pot on one side and a handle on the other. Ringing of bells and sounding of conch are accompanied by beating of drums. Two or three fairs are, usually, held in a year when a great concourse of people takes place in the *soh* ‘a green ground’ near the temple. Every time the deity goes back to his temple a goat or a sheep is invariably thrown over the deity at the door of the temple so that any malevolent spirit, devil, demon or witch may fall upon the carcass and leave the deity safe to enter the temple. This is called *warna*.

In all other cases, particularly in a *maan* or *sukhna* i.e., ‘an offering for the fulfilment of a desire’ the sacrifice has a ticklish process to undergo. A lamb, a goat or a sheep is produced before the *deota* or before his *chela* or *goor* acting as *deota*. The *chela*, then, puts few grains of *akshat* (full rice) into both the ears of the goat, sprinkles a few drops of water over its body at three places—head, middle and tail, then brings the pot of burning incense before the mouth of the goat, recites certain *mantras* and leaves the goat free in the centre surrounded by men. This is called ‘*pachi pana*’. The goat or sheep soon shivers. If it does not once, the *pachi* is repeated twice or thrice or even many times till it quivers at last. At that moment it

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1. For stories and other descriptions see article “विधिमाता और हिमाचल प्रदेश” by Amrit Kumar Sharma, appearing at pages 34-44 of *Somsi*, July, 1985.

is believed that the victim has been accepted by the deity and it is immediately beheaded. It may be noted that the trembling or quivering of the animal is not due to the uncanny habit of shivering of the goat. The tremour in fact, implies the acceptance of the *sukhna* or *maan* and there has been instances when the same goat or sheep has been produced for many times, year after year, unless it is finally accepted in that particular annual ritual. The ritual is, thus, unique because the shivering denotes the actual acceptance of the offering by the deity and not the water as one might suppose, which is responsible for the animation.

# 7

## *Birth-Death Rituals*

### **Birth Rites**

Women in hills are actively associated in agricultural and other manual work. They work hand-in-hand with their men-folk. They are, therefore, by nature strong, sturdy and robust in health. Such a woman, usually, does not take any special prenatal care, except a few superstitions and ritual performances. A pregnant woman, usually, does not visit deep forests, cremation ground or any unfrequented place. She avoids to see a dead body or to visit a place where people get together to mourn. She does not look at any eclipse. It is believed that if any expectant mother happens to view an eclipse the child may develop some deformity. She, further, does not engage herself in cutting and sewing the old clothes while her *dhak* or *patku* around her waist. If she is, somehow, essentially to do such work she will unwind the *patku* i.e., a long strip of cloth girdling her waist before doing such cutting and stitching. Otherwise, it is believed that the child is liable to harelip.

Excepting these beliefs she, however, continues to do light work both at home and in the fields, but she is not allowed to carry heavy loads or to perform hard labour. She does not exert more nor does she climb trees. She takes ordinary food, but avoids too much salt and too much chillies. Chillies make the child irritant and salt creates much mucous and the child suffers nose-running.

### *Athwin*

In old days, *athwin* ceremony was performed in certain parts of

Himachal Pradesh. At the beginning of the eighth month of pregnancy, the would-be mother used to worship Ganapati placed on a red *chauki* for a week or two. During this period she must not bathe, change her clothes or cross a river. The family priest was consulted, who after consulting his books, used to work out an auspicious time and date. At that particular hour, the would-be mother was taken to a stream accompanied by her mother-in-law or some elderly woman and the priest. There the priest would perform certain puja and then she was made to bathe under the shadow of a tree in full bearing. She would, then, use new clothes sent by her parents. The priest would then again perform worship in honour of Ganapati and *Navagraha* i.e., nine gods. For this service the priest used to get the clothes of the woman and some cash. This ceremony is not very common these days, but in certain villages the ceremony is still performed but only at the birth of the first child. The belief behind this rite was that the mother would get male-child.

### *Bhath*

In rural areas, a secret ritual is performed by women. When a woman becomes pregnant, she sets aside one *anna* (now fifty paise) in the name of family god or *Bir* i.e., the village god as an appeasement of the deity so as to ensure smooth and auspicious delivery. In old days Gaddi woman of Chamba used to put aside four *Chaklis* (old coin) with her necklace in the name of Kailu Bir during the early pregnancy.

The delivery always takes place in one of the rooms of the ground floor of the house. At the time of confinement, an old woman of the village and a female relative (usually the mother-in-law) help in the delivery. There are, usually, no trained *Dais* in the villages, but every village has some old women expert in doing the duty of a *Dai*. After the delivery the umbilical cord is cut with a knife or a *kat* (shearing scissor). This is called *Nalwa chhedan* or *Nahlu katna*. The placenta is buried by the old woman at a place where it cannot be dug out by a dog or a cat. She also washes the soiled clothes of both the mother and the child. This woman is, usually, given clothes, bed sheet and some money ranging from two to five rupees. In some places, immediately after the birth the child is weighed against corn. This corn is also given to the old woman. The women assisting the

delivery are considered polluted and they keep themselves away from the upper storey of the house and other persons so long they do not wash their clothes and take bath themselves. Soon after the birth, the child is bathed in lukewarm water. Some iron implement like a sickle or an axe is placed under the mother's pillow to ward off evil eye, and to prevent dreadful dreams.

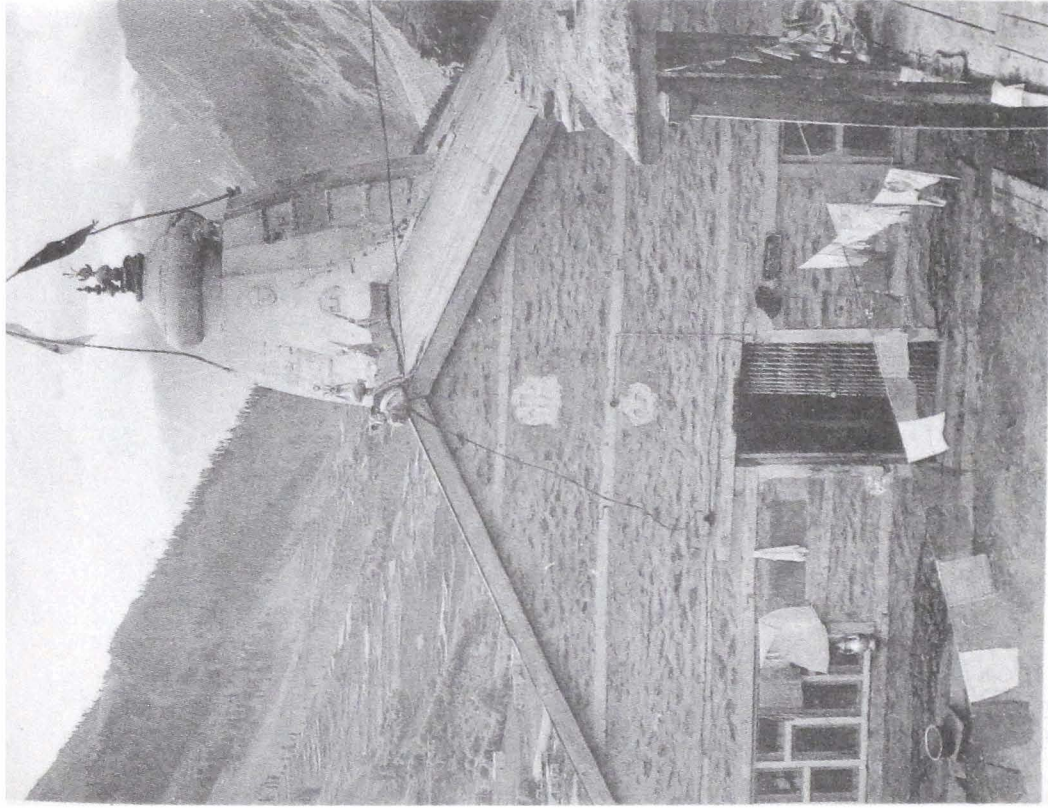
The birth of a male-child is celebrated with great joy. Some ritual songs are sung by the village women gathered in the house. They are offered *gur*. Some other religious ceremonies depending upon the social and economic condition of the family are also performed. Villagers and relatives offer *dub* grass or flowers to the father (and at some places to mother as well) by way of congratulation. No fuss is made when a girl is born. In well-to-do families the time of the birth of the child is noted for preparing the horoscope. This horoscope is prepared by the family *Prohit*. If some stars are not found favourably placed, the *Prohit* suggests some alms-giving to avoid the evil effect of the planet. The first letter of the child's birth name is also indicated by the *Prohit* in the horoscope.

### *Giari or Chhota Gauntriala*

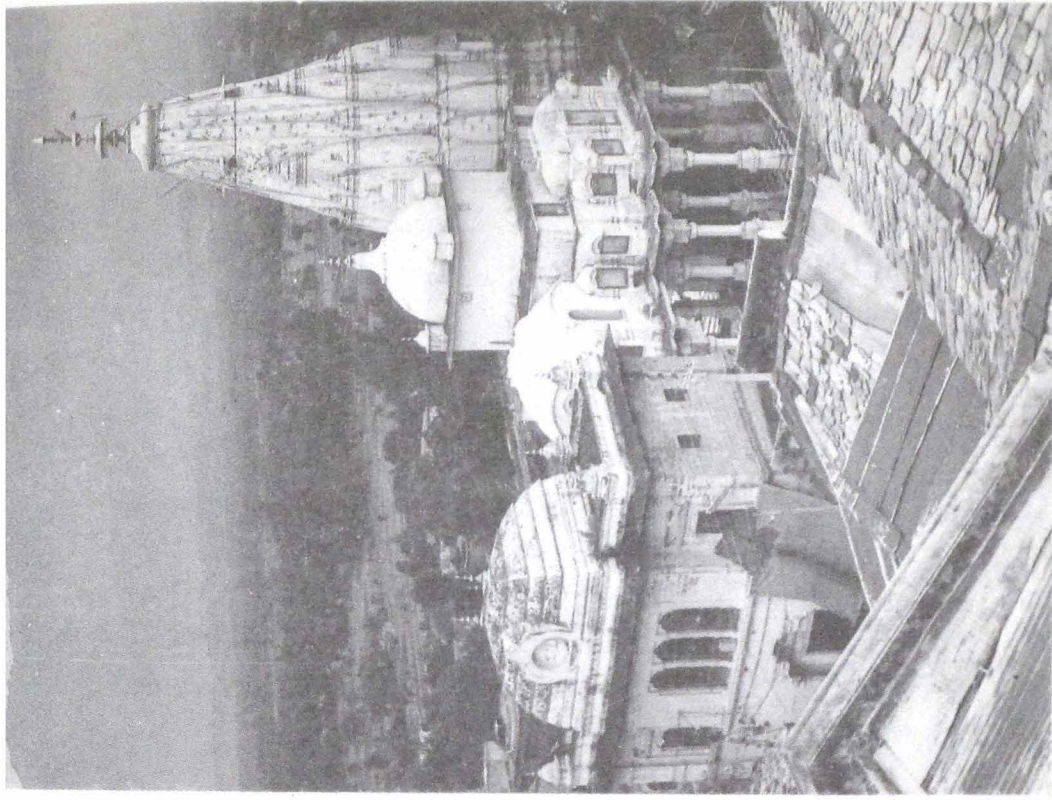
In certain parts of rural areas, two ceremonies of purification are performed. The first is called *giari jalna* or *chhota gauntriala*. It is, generally, performed on the third or fifth day when a *havan* is performed. The whole house is cleaned and sprinkled with *Ganga-jal* or water of a *sarovar* mixed with the urine of a cow. The mother of the child has a bath for the first time after the baby's birth. Her clothes are washed. She and the child are given new clothes and they enter the upper storey of the house, but she is still considered impure and she cannot touch things other than those meant for her.

### *Gauntriala*

The entire household is considered uncleaned and polluted up to the performance of a rite called *gauntriala*. This is performed on the thirteenth day of the birth of the child by Rajputs, on the 11th day by Brahmans and on any day between eleventh and thirteenth day by Harijans. From the day of birth to the day of *gauntriala* the period is

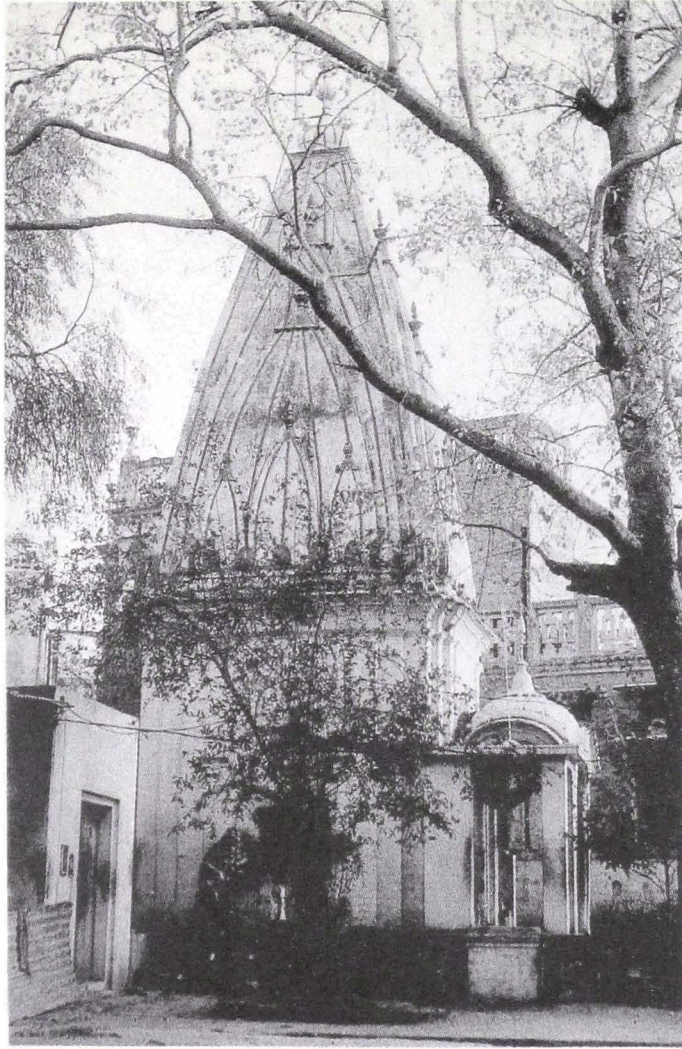


1. Trilokinath temple at Keylong.

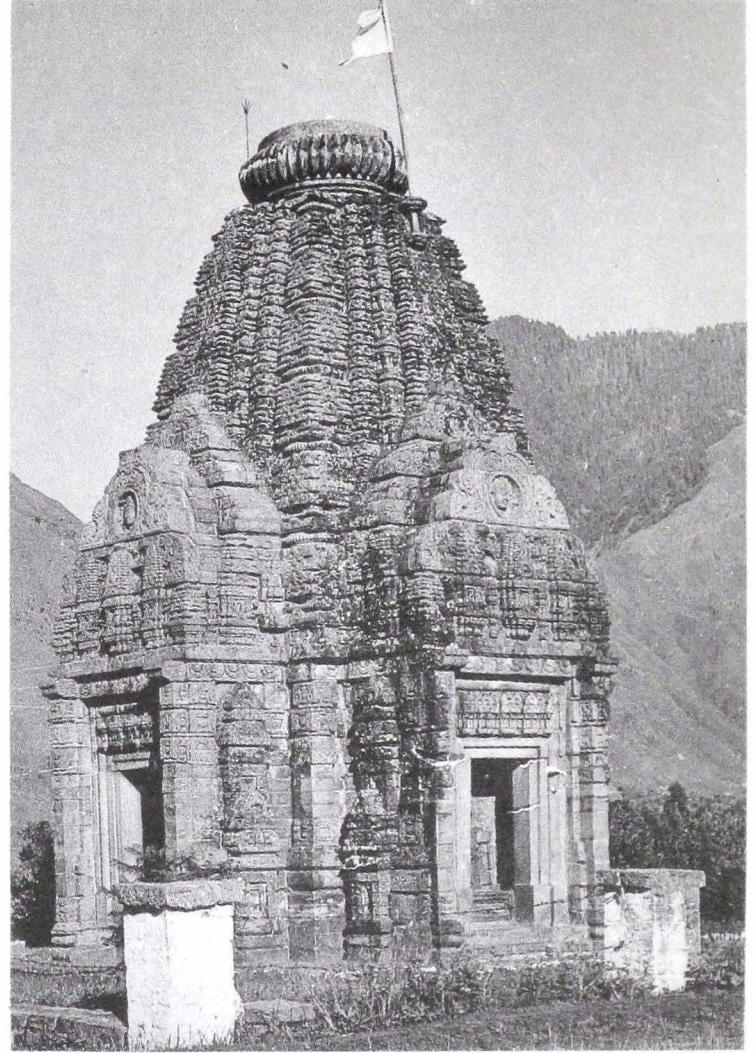


2. Vajreshwari temple, Kangra.





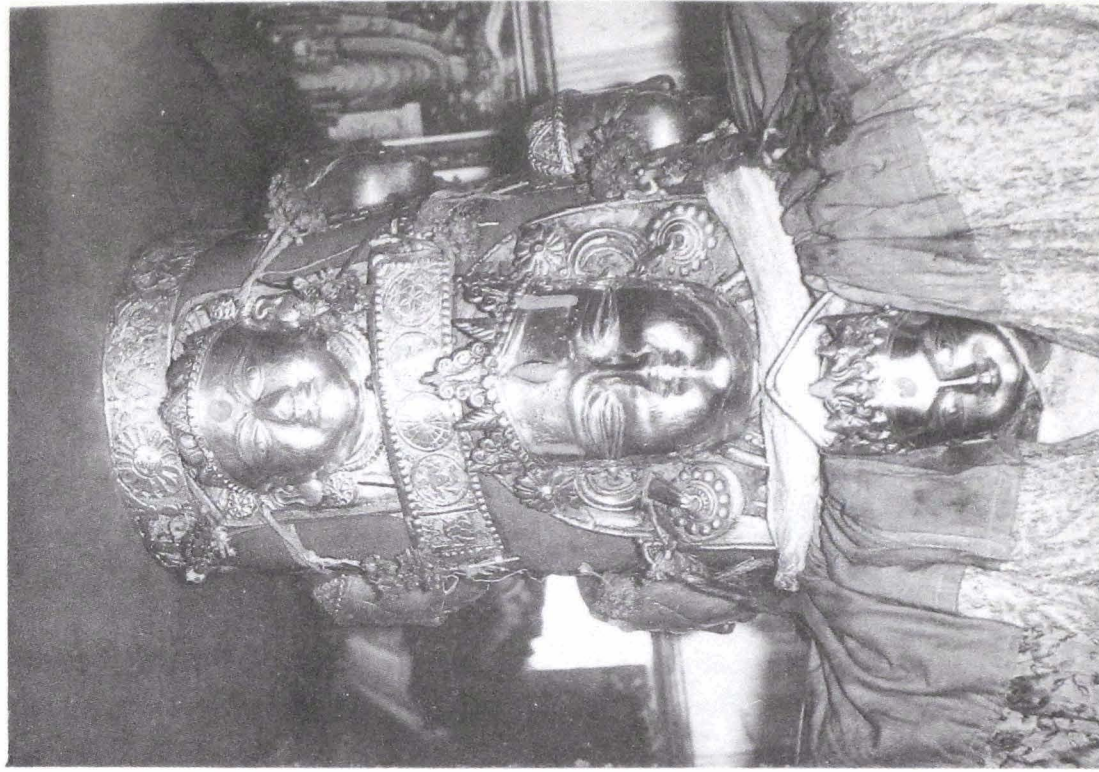
3. Shiva temple at Una where a *Yajna* is held on the next day of Shivratri.



4. Bajaura temple in Kulu district.



5. Chambhu Deota of Nirmand.



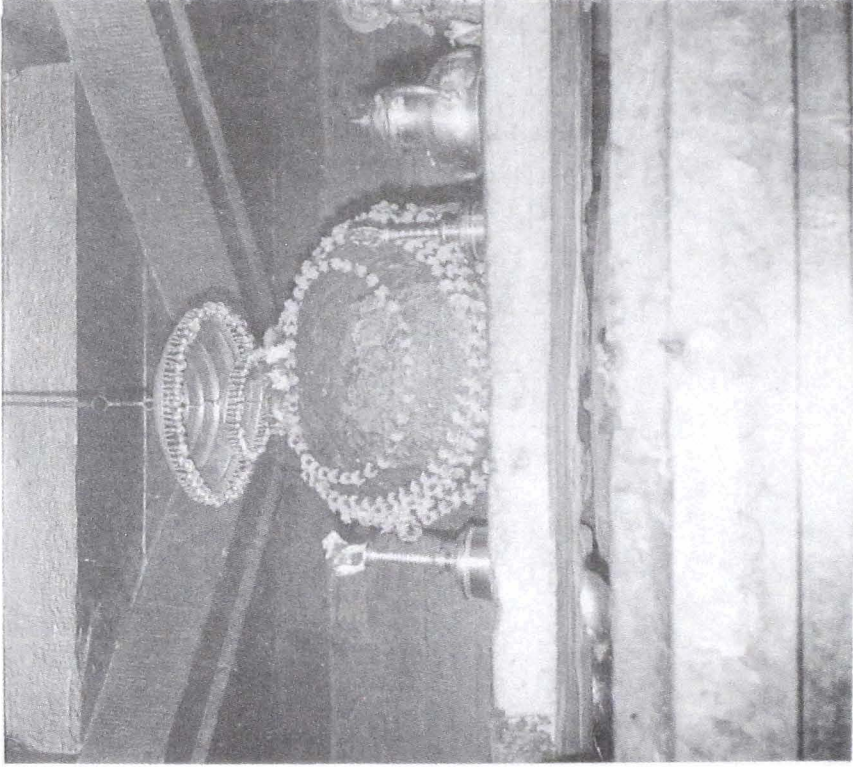
6. Triple Mohras of brass on the rath of a Kulu god.



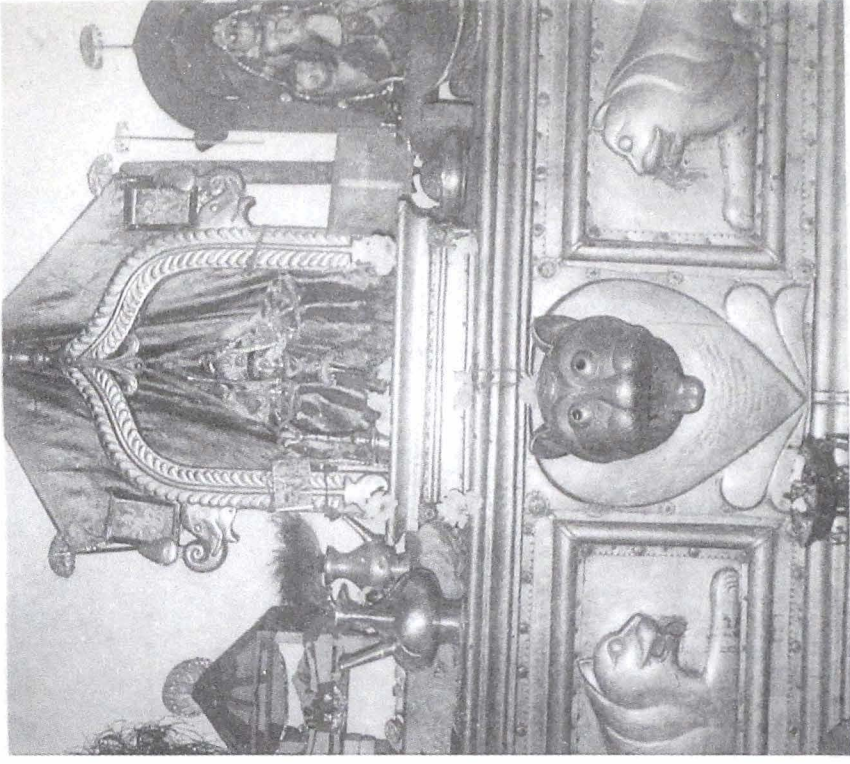
7. Brass Mohra of a Deota at Shand utsava.



8. Sui Rani of Chamba.



9. Shivaling at Sahu in Chamba district.



10. Jalpa Devi of Mahla, one of the seven sister-goddesses of Chamba.



11. Late Prime Minister Indira Gandhi being received by the artists of Kulu folk dance group.



12. Late Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and Chief Minister Virbhadra Singh with folk dance troupe of Himachal Pradesh.



13. Local Trinity—Saint Vyas at the top, Gautam in the middle and Nag deity at the base, at village Goshal in Kulu district.



14. Ritual dance 'Deokhel' at Hargi in Kamand. Goors with Dhangiara.



15. Ritual dance 'Hulki'. Head Goor is on the *Zamani*



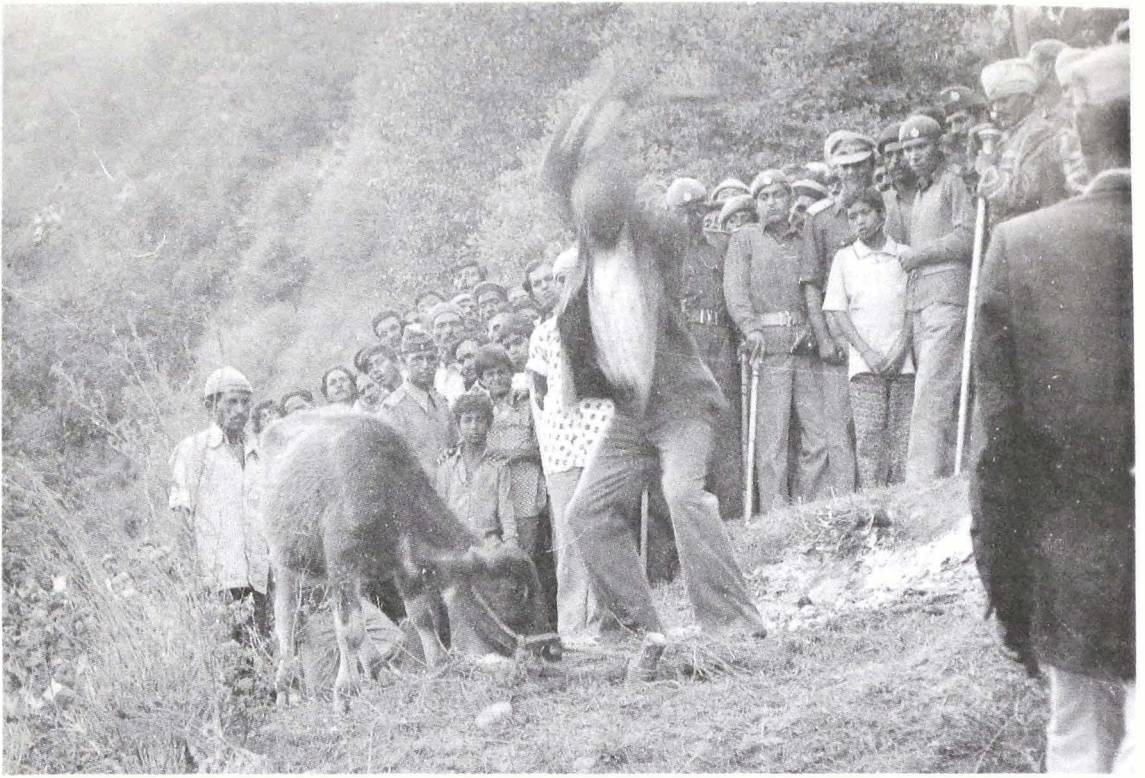
16. *Goor* presenting chain and *Katara* dance.



17. Gahri Devta of Baragran going for Kahika festival.







19. Buffalo being sacrificed at the Dussehra festival at Kulu.



20. Chhaphasur, a ritual drink being offered at the Bishu fair while dance is going on in the background.



21. Ghurei female folk dance of Chamba.



22. Nati, the Pahari folk dance begins with salutation to Shiva 'the Natraj'.



23. Babie! My heart yearns for a Lalri dance.



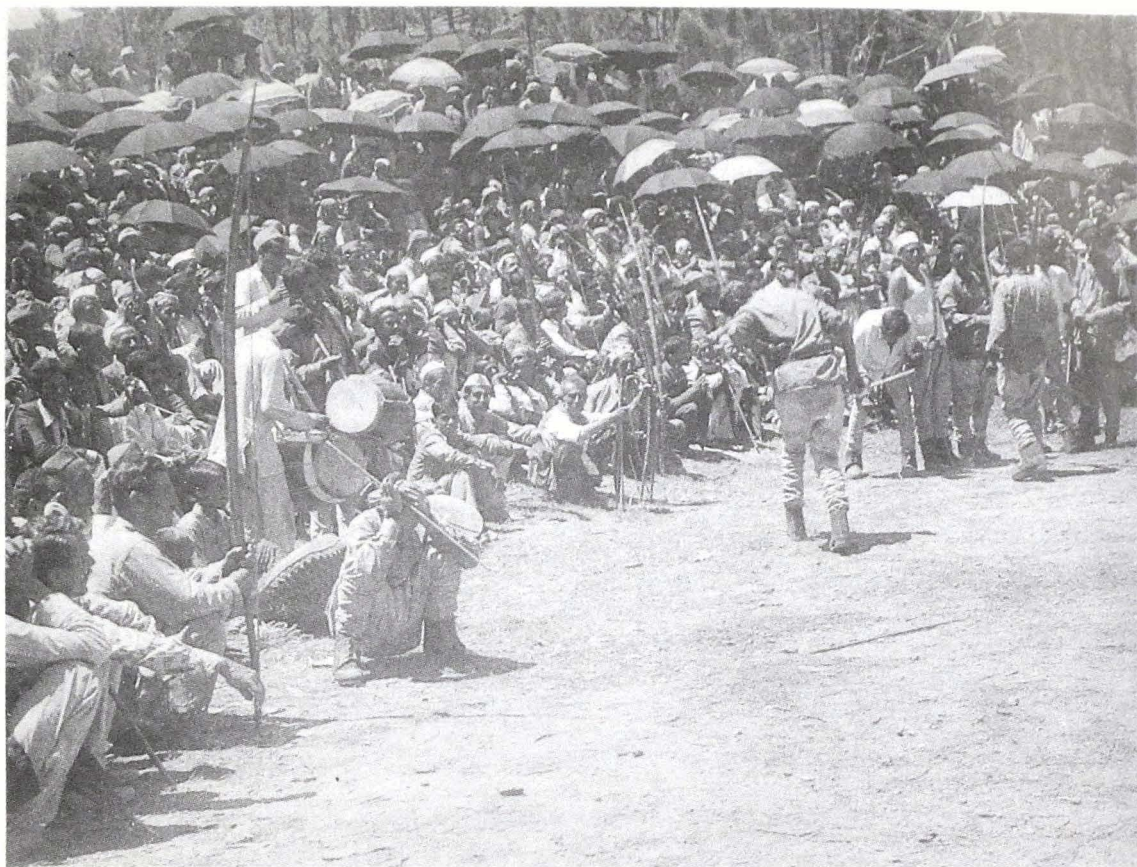
24. Bakhli folk dance performance.



25. Female dancers in Mala *nritya*.



26. A view of folk dance in the Dussehra.



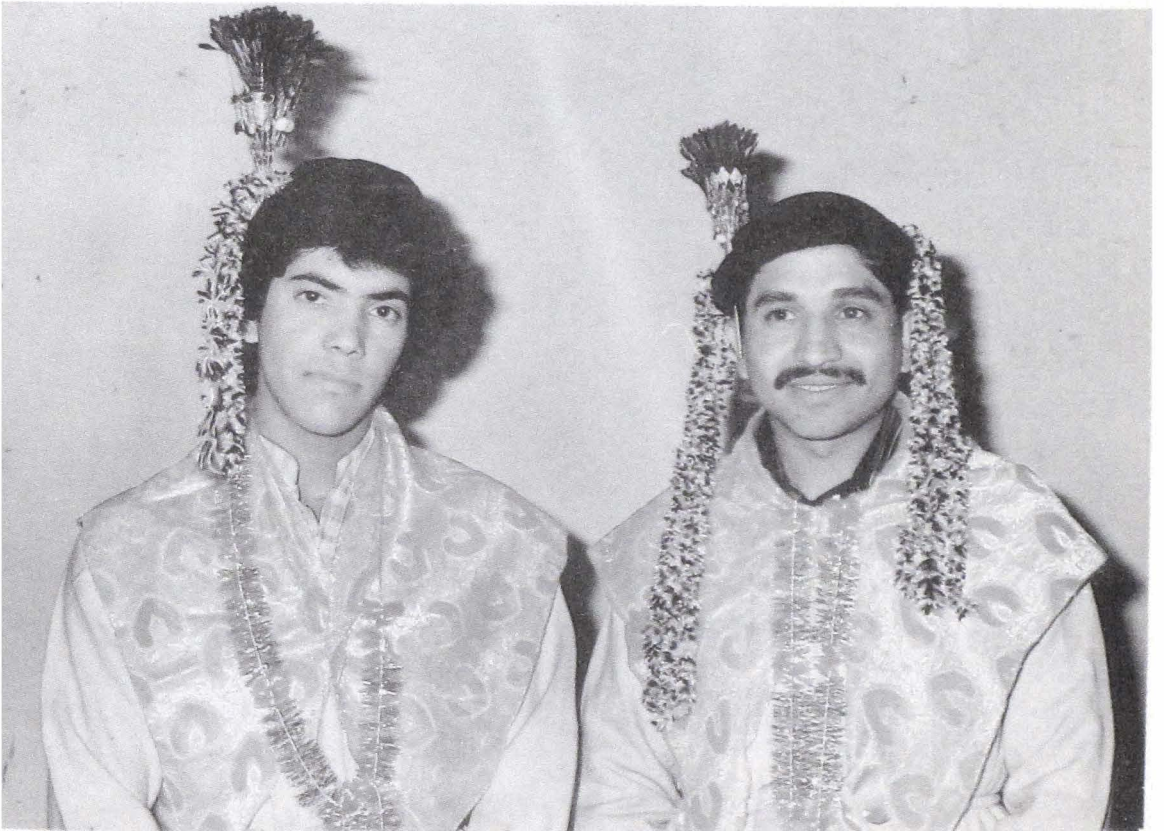
27. Getting ready for the Thoda martial play.



28. We enjoy a Kortha dance.



29. Dance is a ticklish skill.



30. Two folk dancers with traditional costumes and dress.



31. Chhwa dance in the tribal area.



32. Chham performance by tribal monks.

called *sutak* and no one accepts meals or drinks from such a household till *gauntriala* is performed. For this purpose the mother and the child are given a bath. Their old clothes are removed for washing and they put on new or already washed old clothes. The house is swept and cleaned. The floor is coated with cowdung. The village priest conducts purification rites by performing *havan*. *Panchgavya* i.e., a mixture of *go-mutra* (cows urine), *Gangajal*, milk, curd and *ghi* is sprinkled all over the house. The mother and the father of the child and other senior members of the family also sip it a little. The family is now considered clean. It is called *gauntriala* because the *gauntra* i.e., cow's urine is an important part in this taboo. The mother can, now, move about and there is no inhibition against her touch. At this time, the friends and relatives gather and household serves them meals. This ends the *sutak* i.e., the uncleaned period.

### *Rahu-bhedan*

In urban areas some Brahman families perform some other ceremonies. *Rahu-bhedan* is one of them. In this case, an image of *Rahu* planet is made of clay. This is subsequently, pierced by an arrow by the father of the child. This is done to dispel the evil effects of the stars.

### *Bidh-bihai*

Another ceremony is *bidh-bihai*. It is performed for male child only. An image of clay and cowdung is made in which a silver coin is placed. It is worshipped with the recitation of *mantras* by the *Prohit* on the day of *gauntriala* and with the song of the woman as under:

*Bidh-Bihai mata Bidh Bihai,  
Aj mhare ghar ai mata, mhare ghar ai,  
Badhai ho mata teri badhai.*

The figure is, then, kept in a *patara* (basket) together with the *bidh-bihais* of other male members. It is worshipped on every birthday all through the life and is consigned to some stream after the death of the person concerned. *Bihai*, in fact, is '*badhai*' i.e., congratulation for the life span of the person concerned.



### *Shashti Pujan*

Another ritual *shashti pujan* is performed by the family priest. He consults the horoscope of the child and worships all those planets which are not favourable for their appeasement. Relatives offer presents to the child and the mother.

In the rural areas, there is a tradition prevalent among the villagers. The mother, aunts and married sisters of the mother of the new child (whether male or female) bring for her some *ghi* (upto half a killo or more), flour of wheat or rice. This is called *swahitha* i.e., gift for the *swasthya labh* (early recouping of health after child birth.) They also bring new clothes and small bangles of silver to the child.

Some more rites are performed by Brahman families as enumerated below:

### *Nish Kraman*

This is the first view of the child by the father. The father has first look at the child on the eleventh day, or an any earlier day considered auspicious.

### *Surya-Avalokan*

Usually on the day of *nish kraman* the child has his first glimpse of the sun. This is known as *surya-avalokan* or *dhoopa rihana*. In certain parts, this ceremony is conducted by family priest. He conducts the mother and the child outside the room reciting some *mantras*. Then, they view the sun. Some amount, say rupee one, is paid to the priest.

### *Bhumi Upaveshan*

After *surya-avalokan*, some land or floor in the room is smeared with cowdung. Right leg of the child is then, made to touch the place.

### *Food for Mother and Child*

In urban and rural areas, different kinds of food is given to the

woman during the postnatal period. In the cities and well-to-do families the woman is served with dry food like almonds, raisins, dry dates, pista, coconut and *sonth* or dry ginger and sugar. All these things are crushed together and roasted in *ghi* with wheat flour, *suji* or *mungi*. Then the mixture is made into small balls and given to the woman with milk. This type of food is known as *pinni*, *sundh* or *balh*. During *sutak* no other bread or any foodgrain is given. Chillies, meat and sour things are prohibited.

In the rural area the popular food of the woman is *bari* or *gainda*. This is like *halwa* of wheat flour prepared in boiling water and taken with large quantity of *ghi*. No sugar, *gur* or salt is mixed with it atleast for two weeks of the delivery. Subsequently, only salt is added and this food is taken for two to three months. It is considered to be very nourishing and easily digestive.

The new-born child is given *ghutti*. It is an indigenous medicine consisting of some extract of local herbs like *ajwain*, *banafsha* or rose leaves. In some parts the child is only given *jai-phal* with mother's milk. Mother's milk is poured on a *batti* (a flat small stone) and then the *jai-phal* is rubbed over it. When the mixture is a little thick it is given to the child. It is given twice a day i.e., in the morning and evening. It helps to tone up the digestion of the child and helps to regulate the bowl movement.

### *Khoitri Bharna*

In the rural areas, the woman who does not conceive for a considerable period or who gets abortion or who loses her children in infancy, is subjected to a special ritual treatment by the *goor* of the village devta. On a specific date prescribed by the *goor*, the house is suitably cleaned. The woman takes bath and puts on already washed clothes. Some food is prepared on the directives of the *goor* and then at midnight the woman is taken to a lonely place alongwith her husband and a few male relatives. There a *khoitar* (a trench) is dug. The *goor* draws out a *mandla* (a special drawing) with the wheat flour in the trench. The woman is, then, made to sit inside the trench surrounded by earthen lamps fed with *ghi* at four corners of the *mandla*. The trench is covered, first, by planks of wood and then earth is placed over the planks. After that, barley seeds are sown over it. The *goor*

recites certain *mantras*, performs some rites with the food brought with them, and after some half-an-hour the earth and the planks are removed. The *goor* recites some *mantras* over mustard seed, binds them in some pieces of clothes, fastens them in handspun threads and ties the same round the waist of the woman. She is, then, taken out of the trench. The trench is, finally, filled up in such a way that no body subsequently could find out that this ceremony has been conducted here. This is called *khoitri bharna* or *khoi bharna*.

### *Namkaran Samskar (Naming Ceremony)*

Name-giving ceremony is performed, usually, on the day of purification. The name is usually proposed according to the *rashi* shown in the horoscope at the time of birth. *Prohit* or the father whispers the selected name of the child in the ear of the baby through a conch. He says 'O Balak, here-in-after named as such, may you live long'. In rural areas this ceremony is not usually performed. There the name is either given after the name of birthday like Suanru, Manglu, Budhu, or after the name of the month of birth like Chetru, Phagnu, Sharhu etc. or on the particular characteristic of the boy such as Shetu (whitish), Kalu (blackish), Lahnu (weak), Thulu (fatish) etc. These names, however, are no more popular now.

### *Anna-Prashan*

When the child is five or six months old, he is given cereal food for the first time. At an auspicious time *kheer* made of rice, milk and sugar is prepared. In villages, *lugru* of rice and *gur* or *khichri* made of rice, pulse and salt is prepared. Family priest performs puja and this preparation is touched to the mouth of the child. The priest is given some cash for his service.

### *Cutting of Teeth*

There is no ceremony connected with the cutting of teeth. If, however, a child cuts his upper teeth first, it is considered a bad omen for his maternal uncle, who must, if he wishes to avert ill fortune, present the child with clothes dyed blue.

*Mundan (Hair Cutting Ceremony)*

Mundan ceremony of the male child is performed in different ways. This ceremony is connected with the hair cutting of the boy for the first time. It takes place when the child is three, five or seven years. In certain places this is done in a simple way. An auspicious date is calculated by the *Prohit* to remove the hair and the local barbar or some one from the relations may cut the hair for the first time. He is, then, given a feast alongwith other friends and relatives. This ceremony is also known as *jarolan* ceremony.

In fact, in rural areas, the hair of the new-born male child is preserved in the name of the village god. The hair is, then, known as 'jotu'. The *jotu* is considered sacred and is washed only in fresh water kept in the pot which may not have been used for any other purpose earlier. Even soap is not used for washing such hair. During *jotu* the boy is not taken to any other's house. On specific functions of the devta (such as *kahika* which may take place after five or seven years) the child is given bath. He puts on new clothes. He is, then, taken to the particular festival of the devta. The *goor* of the devta simply touches the hair of the child with a *kat* (a shearing scissor) or removes only a tuft of the hair and complete hair cutting is done by the parents themselves later on at their own home. In some cases, the *Pujari* or *Pujarin* cuts the hair of the child and he/she receives some cash upto Rs. 5 from the parents for this service. At such an occasion sweets are distributed or specially prepared meals are served to those who are present.

*Karn-Vedhan (Pricking of Ears)*

In the case of female child for whom *mundan* rite is not necessary, a similar ceremony of *karn-vedhan* is performed when she is four or five years old. This ceremony of piercing the ear-lobes is done by an elderly lady of the house or from amongst the relations who pricks the child's ear with a needle or a thorn. In some families, this is an auspicious day and to mark the ceremony sweet or *gur* is distributed. Now-a-days only a few households perform this ceremony. In good old days, women in the villages had upto fifteen bores in each ear and at the time of marriage the would-be husband was, first of all, to

pay for atleast two tolas of gold for *khundis* i.e., small ear-rings worn through these bores.

### *Yagyopavit (Sacred Thread Ceremony)*

This is an important rite performed, usually, by Brahman community who are (or used to be) considered *dwij* (twice-born). This ceremony gives them the credit of second birth symbolising the spiritual birth. Without this *yagyopavit* ceremony a Brahman is not considered worthy of his high caste. This relates to the putting on of the sacred thread '*janeo*'. This consists of three threads of spun cotton of varying length, usually, of ninety-five *chappas*. Each *chappa* represents the length of the cord that would go round the four out-stretched but closely held-together fingers of the right hand. It is, usually, worn on the left shoulder and under the right arm and its triple form is supposed to symbolise Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva—the Hindu trinity.

This ceremony is usually, held between the age of eight to twenty years. The family priest works out an auspicious time for the ceremony. A *havan* is performed and a big feast is arranged. The women sing ritual songs. The head of the boy is shaved. He puts on yellow *dhoti* i.e., the mendicants robes and approaches his priest for *guru mantra* and then the *janeo*. But since the thread is to be worn by well-read persons only, the priest asks whether he has learnt Sanskrit and old scriptures from Kashi. If the boy has done it, he is immediately given the *guru-mantra*. If he has not, he is first required to learn all this at Kashi. Since it is, however, difficult now to do so, a way out has been arranged. For this education, the boy goes to another room of his house, where another priest, acting as the one from Kashi, is sitting. He learns a few words from that priest and then he goes back to his own *guru* for *guru-mantra* and the *janeo*. When the formalities are complete, the priest gives him the *guru-mantra* and the *janeo*. The boy, in return, gives *guru-dakshna* to the priest.

For this *guru-dakshna* he begs alms with begging bowl in his hand from all those present in the function. They give him some grains like rice, *til* (sesamum) and cash. He gives the same to the priest with some money from his own side and then gets the *guru-mantras* and the *janeo*. Among *guru-mantras* Gayatri *mantra* is a

must. This ceremony is also known as *upanayan samskar*. If owing to certain reasons, the ceremony cannot be performed during the prescribed period separately, the ceremony may be combined with the marriage ceremony. Sometimes, this ceremony is done with *jarolan* i.e., hair cutting ceremony.

The *janeo* is very essential for a Brahman to remind him of his great duties as senior-most member of the society. The *janeo* is always prepared by a Brahman and is removed at frequent intervals and must be replaced if broken. When, somehow, broken he speaks through gestures only till a new *janeo* is worn. It is inauspicious to wear a *khandit* i.e., broken *janeo*. Whenever, he goes out for answering the call of nature, he would invariably lift the sacred thread to his right ear.

Such an elaborate rite is hardly performed now. These days, a *havan* is performed. The boy wears the sacred thread through the chanting of *mantras*. A Brahm-bhoj (feasting of Brahmans) and other relatives is arranged. At times even Rajputs and Mahajans used to wear the *janeo*. But, now, the ceremony is fast disappearing.

## Marriage Rites

Of all the celebrations, marriage is the most important and colourful ceremony. Manu saint had prescribed eight types of marriages. Out of them Brahm form of marriage is most popular in the hills. It consists of an elaborate procedure involving a series of rites and rituals spread over a considerable period. Certain degrees of relationship are forbidden for marriage in different communities. The higher castes do not marry within their own *gotra*, nor with a family belonging to mother's *gotra*. In certain other communities mother's *gotra* is no longer considered a taboo. No inhibition is attached to this. In fact, in all communities clan exogamy is the fundamental and basic rule of marriage. Intra-clan marriage is considered to be a serious crime.

For a girl, the age of marriage is, generally, fourteen to seventeen years, while the boy gets married between sixteen to twenty years of age. At present, however, the marriage takes place at much higher age.

Many forms of marital relationships are in vogue in the hills. It

will be better, first, to talk of Brahm or Vedic marriage which is most widely prevalent form of marriage.

### **Rituals about Betrothal**

The first step towards the matrimonial alliance is that of engagement. As soon as the children reach marriageable age, the parents start becoming anxious. Search for a spouse starts from both sides. Family background is, generally, the main consideration. The parents of the girl look for a good, educated boy and a prosperous family for their daughter. Similarly, boy's parents always prefer a good-looking, gentle and homely girl for their son. This search brings out different forms of engagement like:

- (a) Kurmai
- (b) Mangni
- (c) Sagai
- (d) Barni

These terms are, at present, inter-changeably used, although basically, they have separate significance attached to them.

#### **(a) *Kurmai***

*Kurmai* is, in fact, a decision of the *kurums* i.e., the parents of the boy and the girl. The boy and the girl play little part in such an engagement. Even the consent of the boy and the girl is, generally, not taken and the engagement is arranged by the parents themselves. In *kurmai*, the initiative is generally taken by the people on the boy's side. Once a broad selection is made, a proposal is sent to the girls parents from the boy's side through the boy's maternal uncle or other relation. The girl's parents make direct enquiries about the economic means of the boy's family and other matters in which they are interested. Among agriculturists, land-holding is also among chief considerations. When the consent of the girl's father is obtained, the horoscope of the boy and the girl are tallied. If the horoscopes are favourable, the priest fixes auspicious dates for further ceremonies.

### *Roka or Thaka*

The first ceremony is known as *roka* or *thaka*. On the appointed date fixed by the priest after consulting the stars and horoscopes, the father of the boy accompanied by one, three, five or seven persons pays a visit to the girl's father and gives the girl two ornaments and three suits (*salwar*, *kurta* and *dupta* constituting a suit). A *puja* of Ganapati is performed by the priest. The girl may use either an ornament or a suit. This confirms the betrothal.

### *Tikka*

After *thaka*, the priest of the girl's father finds out an auspicious date for the next ceremony. That date is conveyed to the boy's family. On the fixed date, the priest and some relatives of the girl's side go to the boy's house. They take with them a basket containing a *dhoti*, shirt, turban, *janeo*, a golden finger-ring, vermilion and coconut. This basket is usually carried by the village barbar or in his absence by some village man. The procession is, sometimes, headed by the village band. On reaching the boy's house, they hand over the objects to the boy who puts on the clothes.

Meanwhile, some relatives and friends from the boy's side assemble to participate in the ceremony. When the boy takes his seat clad in the clothes sent by the girl's father, the priest performs Ganesh *puja* and applies *tilak* on his forehead while chanting sacred *mantras*. All those present congratulate the boy and his parents who distribute sweets and entertain the guests with refreshment. The women sing auspicious songs. This ends the ceremony known as *tikka*. The party from the girl's father's house returns the same day or the next day.

### (b) *Mangni*

Another form of engagement is *Mangni*. Here the initiative is taken by the people of the girl's side. On finding a suitable boy his parents are consulted and, if they agree, the father of the girl sends his priest to the boy's house. The horoscopes of the boy and the girl are compared and if they prove favourable, they decide to go for further arrangements.



Then, the family priest is again consulted. He suggests auspicious date and time. On that date the bride's priest takes to the bridegroom's house a silver rupee coin, red vermilion, a *janeo*, dry fruits, a betelnut, a bit of saffron and some sweets and jaggery. On reaching there, he hands over the presents to the boy's father, performs Ganesh *puja* and applies *tilak* to the boy's father. The boy wears the *janeo*. The ladies of the neighbourhood gather and sing auspicious songs. Sweets and jaggery are distributed among the gathering and among friends, relatives and neighbours. In well-to-do families musicians are engaged and community feast is held.

Now, it is boy's father's turn to reciprocate. On an auspicious day he, accompanied by his family priest, takes a few ornaments for the girl. The ornaments are presented to the girl. This is known as *rupna dhalni* and this completes the *tikka* ceremony. The priest, then, fixes auspicious dates and times on which further rituals are to be performed.

### (c) *Sagai*

Sometimes, *kurmai* is also known as *Sagai*. But, in fact, *sagai* has a little different significance. This form of engagement was originally prevalent only among those communities where, in case of divorcee or a widow, second marriage was admissible. Literally, *sagai* means 'saga banana' i.e., to make one's own relation. It is a commitment by the boy or the father of the boy to accept the entry of a previously married girl into the fold of their own family. In fact, an unmarried girl has no *gotra* of her own. It is the *gotra* of her father which is, usually, considered for marriage purposes. The girl gets *gotra* of the family in which she is married. Once she is married, she is the woman of the *gotra* of the family where she is so married. And, when such a girl, somehow, gets separation from that family and somebody wants to marry her, she is accepted in the third *gotra* by way of *sagai*. Such a marriage or engagement does not take place from the house where the girl was first married. On being divorced or becoming widow, she goes back to her parents and it is from that house that *sagai* takes place. This marriage has been very common among agricultural community where woman is a great asset for the field work and where second or widow-marriage is common.

However, at present, no such distinction is made. The words *kurmai* and *sagai* are interchangeably used signifying the same process. One word may be substituted for the other without any difference. The ceremonies described under *kurmai* are performed in *sagai* as well.

#### (d) *Barni*

*Barni* means to betroth a *vadhu* (daughter-in-law) to the *var* (bridegroom). This rite is prevalent among the Harijans and some other lower classes of Kulu and Mandi districts. Originally, the *barni* was contracted upon between the father of the boy and the father of the girl when the children were minor. It used to take place even when the children were not even one year old. But, at present, *barni* relates to major couples too. It is an engagement in which the father of the boy pays certain amount (say one hundred when the two are still few months or years old and one thousand or more when they are of marriageable age) to the father of the girl and the latter promises to give his daughter to the boy in marriage at a specific time. At the appropriate time proper marriage takes place in which other formalities are performed which will be discussed later on.

### Rituals Before Marriage

#### *Laganotri*

When the *kurmai* or *mangni* is completed with the *tikka* ceremony, the *Prohits* of two sides meet and decide the whole schedule of the marriage. This schedule indicates the dates and time according to which further rituals are to be performed. When the two families are very far off, the schedule is prepared by the boy's priest and it is got confirmed from the girl's priest. Two copies of this schedule are prepared, each side keeping one copy. This schedule is called *laganotri*. The priests are paid at least Rs. 1.25 each for preparing the *laganotri*. Among other details this *laganotri* prescribes the time when first ornament or cloth is to be prepared and collection of food material is to be done. This is also known as *sarvarambha muhurat* (auspicious time to start different rituals).

*Neundra*

Seven, five or three days before the marriage both the sides invite their close relatives and one person from each house of the village (in case of village marriage). In their presence the list of those who are to be invited is prepared and the village *Prohit*, barber and some persons of the village so as to make them in odd number (one, three, five or seven considering the fact whether invitees are many and from different villages) are entrusted the duty of sending invitations. The invitation is also sent to odd number of invitees. Even number of invitees are considered inauspicious. In the villages, they apply *tilak* on the forehead and wear garlands so that everybody knows that he is the '*chhandu*' i.e., one who conveys invitation. From this day onward, the ladies of the neighbourhood or of the whole village assemble in the house, perform different duties relating to marriage during day time and sing auspicious songs and dance to the accompaniment of musical instruments during the night. These songs are known as '*ghorian*' at the house of the bridegroom and '*suhag*' in bride's house. *Ghorian* and *suhag* songs differ in content and character.

*Drub Ceremony*

This is another important ritual performed in the villages. It takes place a day or two before the actual marriage. A relation of the boy, preferably a sister, sister-in-law or an aunt offers *arti*. Another woman stands nearby with a metal plate containing drub grass, rice and vermilion. *Tilak* is applied to the bridegroom and all others present.

In the marriage ceremony *mama* i.e., maternal uncle of the bride or bridegroom plays major role. He is given special invitation. When he comes, his sister i.e., mother of the bride or groom receives him at the door-steps singing welcome songs and before he steps over the threshold of the house, he has to put some cash into the vessel of water held by the sister of the groom or sister of the bride's father. He brings with him some clothes and ornaments according to his financial status, as his share towards the marriage expenses. This is called '*dharm dan*'. In case of boy's marriage the *mama* brings *sehra*, *toran* (a small gate-like structure), *jora* (a pair of shoes)

according to his financial position. He also gives *dhamru* i.e., a feast to all present on the day when bridegroom starts for the house of the bride. If the marriage is of the girl, the clothes and ornaments brought by him must include a *nath* (a nose-ring). He also brings clothes for his sister which she puts on at the time of *kanyadan*. In return, the groom's mother presents him a *than* of cloth.

### *Samuhat*

The first ritual performed at the time of marriage is 'samuhat'. The family priest performs *puja* by reciting *mantras*. Food is served to neighbours and invitees. At night the women sing and rejoice. They also organise dance. They are given *shakar* or *till chauli*—parched rice and *til* mixed in jaggery.

### *Batna*

On the day of marriage or from three, five or seven days earlier (as indicated in the *laganotri* by the priests) *batna* is applied to the boy and the girl at their respective house. *Batna* is a preparation made of barley flour, turmeric, orange and mustard oil and is applied to the body. This *batna* is applied by relations one by one. While doing so they sing songs. *Mehndi* is also applied on the hands and feet. After applying *batna*, all present sprinkle mustard oil in the hair of the groom with grass blades. This is known as *chhota tel*.

### *Sand*

Usually, a day before the departure of the marriage party or at any auspicious time calculated by the priest *sand* or *shanti yagya* is performed during the night. The priest conducts a *havan*. *Navgrahas*, Ganesh and *kalash* are worshipped. They are worshipped to invoke their blessings for successful and peaceful termination of the marriage. The *puja* is also performed by the maternal uncle of the groom. Nine types of grain are offered to the nine stars in *navgraha puja*. These grains are given to the priest in addition to *dakshana* and a turban. Food is served to those who are present. The women sing sacred songs. This is also done in bride's house.

## Rituals on the Day of Marriage

### *Jal-puja*

Marriage day starts with *jal puja* (worship of water). This is, in fact, worship of Varun devta. The maternal uncle of the bride or bridegroom and *suhagan* ladies (ladies whose husbands are alive) go to the *baoli* i.e., village water source to the accompaniment of musical instruments and singing of the auspicious songs. Two or three ladies carry *thalis* (brass plates) containing *mauli* and vermilion. The priest also accompanies them. At the *baoli* the priest performs *puja* by chanting *mantras* and fills the pots with water. Then the procession returns making circles on flat stones or walls on the way by vermilion. This indicates the invitation for Varun devta to the house where marriage is taking place. On reaching home the water brought from the *baoli* is used by the bride or bridegroom for her/his bath.

### *Bara Tel or Batna*

Then, the bridegroom sits on a *chauki* for a bath. The women sing songs. His sisters, aunts and a few other women relations apply *batna* to the body of the groom and sprinkle oil in the hair one by one. This is known as 'bara tel or batna' ceremony. After *batna*, he finally takes a bath with *dahi*. After taking bath he sits on an *asan*. A drawing with wheat flour forming a *mandap* is drawn around it. Auspicious drawings are also made on the wall near the *mandap*. The village priest performs *puja*. *Sehra* and clothes brought by maternal uncle are presented to the groom. He puts on a *dhoti* or *pyjama*, a saffron coloured *pagri*, *kurta*, *choga* and a red shawl. His maternal uncle ties the *sehra* over his *pagri*. In villages, even married sisters of the groom present *sehra*. In that case, it is pre-determined that the number of total *sehras* should remain in odd figure. Sometimes, the dressing is done by the barber who receives some cash for this service.

### *Tikka-Tamol*

Then starts the *tikka-tamol* ceremony. The mother and the grandmother of the groom come near to the *chauki* and put a red mark on

his forehead and gives him a *tamol*. Some coins are given to the barber after having been waved over his head thrice or five times. This is called *warna*. The groom's mother again gives him a second *tamol* which he retains himself. With this starts the gift-presenting ceremony. Sisters, aunts and other close relatives of the groom come one by one and put *tilak* on his fore-head and give *tamol*. A *tamol* is a gift consisting of a piece of cloth, or cap or handkerchief, sweets and some cash. Some relatives give *tamol* to the groom's father and brothers also. This *tamol* is retained by them. The boy gives some dry fruits and cash tied in the handkerchief to the priest. This ceremony finishes when, at the end, groom's *bhabi* i.e., sister-in-law puts *kajal* in his eyes for which she receives some cash upto five rupees. This ceremony takes full forenoon.

### *Suhag Pitari*

Then a steel box or a brief case is got ready. It contains five, seven or nine suits (*salwar, kameez, blouse, sari*), cosmetic box, set of ornaments, shoes, socks etc. for the girl as well as *mewa, mauli, kumkum* and *supari*. This is called *suhag pitari*. Among the things, *balu* (nose-ring) or *mang tika* (an ornament of the head) made of gold and *redha* or red *dupatta* are very necessary. These days, the *khundis* (golden ear-rings) have gone obscure in the villages, but golden eartops and nose-pins have become necessary articles of *suhag pitari*.

### *Var Yatra (Marriage Procession)*

Beautifully attired in this way, the groom then leads the *janj* or *barat* i.e., marriage procession either in *sukhpal* (palanquin) or on horse back or on foot as the case may be. In case the *sukhpal* is used, it is decorated with flowers, silvery threads and colourful hangings. A dagger and a coconut are placed in it. A small *lota* containing mustard oil is tied to the *sukhpal*. When the groom goes on foot or on horse back, these articles are placed in a basket. The family priest always accompanies the *barat*. The younger brother of the groom also sits with him in the *sukhpal* or on the horse back. He is called *sabhalara* or *laraksi*. He remains close to him till the marriage is complete.

Once he leaves the house, the groom does not enter it again without the bride. The *sukhpal* is carried by, usually, four persons called *kahars* or *zamanis*. These are, generally, Harijans and are paid Rs. 2 to Rs. 20 according to the distance to which the *barat* is to go. They are also given free meals. The marriage procession is headed by village orchestra consisting of *dhol*, *nagara*, *karnal*, *ransingha* and *shahnai* played by *hesis* or *turis* who are traditional musicians of the area. While on way, some coins are thrown over the *sukhpal*. It is believed that this action wards off ill luck for the bridegroom.

After the marriage party has left for the bride's village, the ladies of the house and neighbourhood gather together and make merry and sing songs. The songs are accompanied by dancing and the whole programme is conducted behind the doors. No male members are allowed to come in. Songs are sung to the tune of *dholak*. There is no limit to the farce that may be played by the ladies and generally, no decency is observed. Even old ladies may be required to dance with others. This is called *bharuan* and is common to all classes of the village.

### **Rituals at Bride's House**

Somewhat similar rituals are also performed at bride's house. The bride is dressed in pink or red clothes presented to her by her maternal uncle. This, generally, consists of *salwar*, *kameez*, *dupatta*, *ghagri* and red *chaddar*. All relatives prepare to receive the *barat*. When the procession is close to the bride's village, four persons from amongst the relatives of the bride replace the persons carrying the *palki*. This is done to show respect to the bridegroom.

On reaching the village of the bride, the party is received by the bride's people, priest and village elders. Her father, however, does not go to receive the party at that time. The marriage party does not go direct to the bride's house. It is, first, led to another house where arrangements for their stay are made. Here all, except the bridegroom, are served light refreshment.

### *Tikka Ceremony*

Soon after, the priest of the bride, accompanied by the *barbar*, meets the marriage party. The *barbar* (in his absence some body else) carries

a basket containing a yard of cloth (some times embroidered), coconut, almonds, betelnut, vermilion and a few coins. Bride's priest applies *tilak* on the forehead of the groom and presents other items to him. The coins are not taken by the bridegroom. Instead, the father of the groom adds double the amount and the entire money is taken by the priest.

### *Tel Taulaie*

This is another ritual performed soon after. The priest, barber (and in his absence some one else) and one of the relatives of the groom serving as a cashier, visit bride's house with a big plate (or basket) containing *shakkar* (sugar), *dori* (red thread), some ornaments and an earthen bowl full of mustard oil for *Ganesh puja*. The *puja* is performed in a room decorated for the *lagan* ceremony. The women from the bride's side sing auspicious songs on the occasion. Later, the cashier distributes *shakkar* and a few coins to each of the singing woman.

### *Milni*

After light refreshment the *barat* starts for the bride's house. On the way function of *milni* is conducted. Member of the marriage party are welcomed and the bride's father accompanied by his other relatives and friends comes to meet them. The father of the girl and the father of the boy are soon locked in an affectionate hearty hug, in the centre of the path spreading some cloth. They are followed by others.

The groom is, then, taken to the bride's house where he takes a bath. The oil taken by groom's men is mixed with the *tel* of bride's side. This is known as '*telmel*'. The groom uses this oil and gets a *dhoti*, a *janeo* and a ring of gold. Then, the *suhag pitari* containing ornaments and clothes etc. brought by the groom is presented to the girl's mother under the recitation of Vedic *mantras*.

### *Lagan*

This is the most important ritual. At the appropriate time, already worked out by the priests in the *laganotri*, the bridegroom



accompanied by the priest, his father and others, is taken to the *mandap*. The *mandap* or the *vedi* is a wooden structure consisting of four poles on which is supported a light canopy of wooden splinters. It is nicely decorated. A roughly carved wooden peacock is fixed on the top of the canopy and on the four corners wooden parrots and other birds may also be fixed. It is attractively decorated with flowers, green bamboo, mango or *pipal* leaves and buntings. Then a *havan* is performed. A sacred fire is lit in the centre of the *mandap*. This sacred fire is tended with other wood. At the time of *havan* the fire is fed with small offerings of *havan samagri* i.e., a mixture of barley grains, *til*, *ghee*, raisins, dry dates, betelnuts and the like. These offerings are called *ahutis*. Each *ahuti* is thrown into the fire at the end of each mantra read by the priest while others utter the word 'swaha'.

The bride-groom usually sits at one corner of the *mandap* facing east. Bride also joins the *mandap*. She is conducted to the *mandap* by her maternal uncle. She sits by the side of the groom with her face veiled. The bride's parents sit usually facing the north. The priests of both sides sit close to each other. Other members of the *barat* sit around the *mandap*. In one corner women make room for themselves. At the farther end the musicians sit with their musical instruments. The music is, usually, at its best and women sing marriage songs.

The priest of the bride starts ritual ceremonies. While he reads sacred *mantras* from the scriptures, he also attends to the practical rituals. He directs the groom to throw flowers, rice and *kungu* in the *mandap* many times. The first recitation is of *swasti vachan*, in which others present join him. They do it with rice-grains in their hands which they shower here and there in the *mandap* when the recitation is over. He performs *navgraha puja* and invokes blessings of the planets for the happiness, prosperity and longevity of the couple.

Then starts the Ganesh *puja* which is necessary to remove all obstacles. The priest takes a piece of cloth which is tied round the waist of the bride. The other end of the cloth is tied to the *patka* of the bridegroom. This cloth is known as *lagan-patka*. Now the workload of the *puja* increases and both the priests join together to complete the *puja*. One of them recites the text and the other attends to its practical side. Many times the bride and the bridegroom are required to throw rice, flowers and *shakkar* at the sacred fire. Sprinkling of

water, *ghi*, throwing of red vermilion, coconut and betelnut may mark certain definite stages of the marriage ceremony which continues for three-four hours.

### *Kanya dan*

While all this is going on, women sing *mangal* songs and musicians do their part off and on when required by the priests. Then, comes the time of *kanya dan*. It is performed by the parents of the girl. Both the mother and the father of the girl hold some water mixed with milk and *kusha*-grass in their hands while the priest chants *mantras*. As soon as the citation is over the water and milk mixture is poured on the hands of the groom. This indicates that the daughter has been given to the groom. This ceremony is also known as *panigrahan*.

### *Sapt-Padi*

Then comes the *sapt-padi* ritual. The bride and the groom are asked to go round the fire seven times. This is, usually, done by them. But in certain cases this is done in a special way. Three rounds are taken when the *havan* is lit and after a short interval three rounds are taken again. In these six rounds the bride leads the groom as they are tied together with the *lagan-patka*, but in the seventh round the bride follows the groom. At each time the priest recites from the scriptures and usually translates it for others. The recitations contain some of the best marriage vows. Some are from the bride's side enjoining upon the groom to do this and that for the good of the bride. Whereas others are on behalf of the groom binding the bride to be faithful and devoted copartner in life. In this way the bride and the groom take oath of fidelity to each other. *Pheras* (rounds) of fire signify that they have taken the oath of faithfulness to each other in the presence of Agni Devta i.e., the fire-god. After this the bride would sit on the left side of the groom becoming a lawful wife—*ardhangni* (a better-half).

### *Shaya Dan*

The parents of the bride display, in the courtyard, each item that they intend to give to their daughter. The items, generally, consist of two

cots with beddings, blankets, a steel trunk, some ornaments, utensils, sewing machines and some other articles of daily use. The relations of the bride also give presents to her. The bride receives gifts, both in cash and kind, from her relatives and friends.

### *Kamdev Puja*

The couple is, then, taken to the main room of the house. While the bride gets easy access, the path of the bridegroom is blocked at the door by the sisters and friends of the bride. He cannot enter the room unless they are paid some cash. Sometimes the girls encash him heavily before letting him go in. Inside they worship two roughly drawn figures on the wall representing Kamdev (the god of love) and his wife Ratti. Then the newly-wed couple are required to play some games while the women sing songs. In one game, a coin is thrown in a *thali* full of milky water. The couple has to search for the coin. Whoever brings out the coin first, is cheered (usually the one is bride) while the other is gently teased. There are many other games in which the bridegroom is made the butt of ridicule by his sisters-in-law. He is also made to recite some verses from the scriptures. All this is done to test the skill of the groom and is done in fun and good mirth.

The newly-weds are, then, brought out and they perform the *vedi puja*. The couple worship the *vedi* under which the marriage was conducted. The marriage party is, then, entertained on a good feast, usually, called *dham*. It consists of boiled rice, two or three types of cooked dals, *madhra*, *paldha* and one sweet dish. When the *baratis* are taking meals the women of the bride's side sing songs. These songs are, invariably, indecent called *galis* (abusives), but nobody minds them.

### *Sir Gundi*

Before the marriage party returns with the bride, her hair is beautifully dressed. This is known as *sir gundi* ceremony. She takes the oil left out of the *tel-taulaie* ceremony. During hair dressing the bridegroom remains sitting by her side. Then, the bride puts off her dress brought by the maternal uncle and puts on new clothes brought by her in-laws. She wears the *chak*, clips and *tika* on her forehead.

*Vidayagi*

Then comes the most touching scene of the marriage ceremony. This is the moment of departure of the *barat*. The bride takes leave of her father, mother and other relatives and friends. They give a send-off to the girl with a heavy heart and moist eyes. The women sing special songs. The bride is taken to a place where a covered palanquin is kept ready. She sits in this 'doli' as the palanquin is called, and the marriage party starts for the return journey. Bride's *doli* is followed by the *palki* of the groom. The younger brother or sister may join the bride in the *doli*. This procession is led by the band.

**Rites on Return to Groom's House***Vadhu Pravesh*

When the procession reaches the house of the groom, the bride is received with special care. She is brought out of the *doli* by the mother of the groom. They are received at the door by the sisters of the groom who perform *aarti*. They may even block the passage by standing across it and allow the couple to enter the house only when they have received some cash payment. All this is done in a fun. The couple enter the house at an auspicious time as worked out in the *laganotri*. Singing of ladies goes on. Here, they sing welcome songs congratulating the mother of the groom on this occasion. *Kalash* and Ganesh *puja* is performed inside the house.

*Muhn Dikhai*

The bride is taken to a separate room and the women of the house and relations gather there. Turn-by-turn they lift the veil and have a glimpse of the bride and also offer some cash. This is called *muhn dikhai*.

*Darim Puja*

On the same day or early next day, the couple are taken to perform *darim puja*. The priest takes them to a *pipal* or pomegranate tree

with musicians playing the band and women singing auspicious songs. On reaching the tree the priest performs the *havan*. Then they tie hand-spun yarn round the tree and go round it five or seven times. A fruit or *pipal* tree is considered a symbol of fertility and the couple worship it with the fervent hope and prayer that they may be blessed with children especially male ones. When they come back, the '*toran*' is cut and the bride enters the house.

The bride is, further, taken to the village *panihar* or *baoli* i.e., water source accompanied by some women. She brings water from the *baoli* and that water is distributed among the members of the family.

### *Dham*

On the day the *barat* returns to the house of the groom, the *baratis* and members accompanying the bride are entertained, but the actual *dham* is offered by the father of the groom the next day when all relatives, friends and neighbours are invited. The menu of the *dham* is, usually, the same as described for bride's house.

### *Final Ceremony*

Finally, the priest unties the *sehra* of the groom. It is handed over to his mother who keeps it safe.

### *Ghernu-Phernu*

Return of the bride to her parents house is called *ghernu-phernu*. On the third day of *vadhu pravesh* the bride accompanied by her husband, visits her parents house. The younger brother or sister of the bride also accompanies them back. Some *pakwan* are taken by them. On return the parents of the bride also give special cooked food. These are, subsequently, distributed among the neighbours and friends on reaching the groom's house.

### *Marriage among Harijans*

There is only minor difference between the marriage customs of the scheduled castes and others. They do not obtain the services of a

Brahman priest, but have their own priest who belongs to their own caste and is capable of performing the rites with their own *mantras*. Where they do not have their own priest, they get the *laganotri* prepared from a Brahman priest and subsequently follow it in short without *mantras*.

On specific date the bridegroom walks to the bride's house accompanied by some of his men and band. The oldest women of the bride's house welcomes them with *dhoop-dip*. The sisters and friends of the bride block the path of the groom at the door and allow him to pass only when he offers them some cash. They take their seats inside the house. The father of the bride ties a white *pagri* over the head of the groom and also applies *tilak*. As a *chhudi* (dowry) the girl is given agricultural implements such as sickle, *kilan*, *kudal*, *dach* and some garments such as *pattu*, *thipu*, *gachi*, *thali* and *lota* etc. The *barat* is entertained on a feast. When they return they are given a big loaf of flour called *pahur*. The bride is accompanied by some of her relatives. They are known as '*ladhar*'. Each of the member of the *barat* is given some small amount which is known as '*topa*'. In return similar amount is also paid to the members of the *ladhar* by the groom's parents as *topa*. The ladies are given *thipus* i.e., head-dress. A goat is slaughtered and a good feast is given to all the relatives and the members of *ladhar*. They return the next day.

### Other Forms of Marriage

The ceremonies described above relate to Brahm *vivah* or Vedic *vivah* (marriage) which is prevalent among the higher and middle classes. This marriage is sacrament and, as a matter of rule, dissolution is not permissible. Formal divorce is not recognized. In addition to this form of marriage, weddings among middle and lower classes are celebrated in many other ways as described below:

#### *Deo Biah*

Among other forms of marriages, *Deo biah* is most popular in villages and it has, almost, the same sanctity as Brahm *vivah*. Here the marriage is performed according to the customs of village gods and the wedding rites are performed not by the Brahman or priest but by

the *goor* of the devta. He is not consulted in negotiations, but once a formal choice has been made, the devta is consulted whether the marriage will be auspicious and lucky one. The *goor* does not verify the *janam kundlis* i.e., horoscopes of the boy and the girl, nor they are maintained by the village communities. Instead, the *goor* consults the devta through his *mantras* and some other prevalent rituals known as *chhoda kerna* or *deo puchhna*. These terms will be explained later. When the consent of the devta has been obtained, the parties go for further ceremonies which are, almost, the same as explained in Brahm marriage. The only difference is the fact that in all these ceremonies the duty of the priest is performed by the *goor*. *Neundra* (invitation) to the relatives is sent after consulting the devta. The total number of invited families should always remain in odd numbers. The *goor* decides the time and date for different ceremonies, although his time is not exact. He has his own way of timings—before, after or at the time of sunrise or sunset, before or after *nuhari* (breakfast), before or after *kalar* (lunch), *dupohri* (dinner) and *biali* (supper) etc. He conducts *tikka*, *tamol*, *samuhat* and *batna* etc. He accompanies *barat* and carries out different rituals at appropriate occasion. At every ceremony, he performs *puja* of the family god. He is assisted by the *goor* of bride's father in his duties.

### *Burazdei*

In *Deo biah*, there is a *barat* from girl's side also. When the marriage procession starts return journey, the bride is accompanied by the father, brothers, sisters and their relatives to the accompaniment of a large band. This procession is called '*Burazdei*' i.e., the *barat* of the *dei* (the girl). This time the procession has more pomp and show. *Burazdei* is entertained by the father of the groom on *dham* twice—once on reaching and again while returning the next day. Sacrifice of goat is an essential part of the *Deo biah*. The bride and bridegroom cannot enter the house without sacrificing two or three goats.

### *Barni Biah or Beokari*

As already explained, *barni* is, in fact, a form of betrothal. But when this betrothal leads to final marriage, it is called *barni biah* or *beokari*. Once it was the most popular form of marriage in villages,

but it is now losing its importance, although, it is not completely extinct as yet, and is still popular among some classes. This marriage, in a way, relates to Gandharva marriage of Manu. Usually, the betrothal is done while the girl and the boy are still minor. But even at marriageable age, *barni* takes place earlier than the marriage, and pecuniary is invariably struck. The father of the boy would pay some amount in consideration of the agreement. The girl is, then, known as 'mangetar' (betrothed) and the money paid for her as 'barina'. This *barina* is neither 'indirect dowry' nor 'diverted bride wealth', because it does not form a part of bride's gift. It is, for all purposes, 'bride's price' as the *barina* is completely utilized by the parents of the girl for their own purposes.

Child marriage is not much prevalent in the villages of this part of the hills. Marriage takes place usually when the girl and the boy attain the age of puberty and are able to run a household and work in the agricultural field.

Once the *barni* has taken place, and the *barina* has been paid, the girl cannot be married to any other person. It has been said:

*Juni ri shoiri teiri niyahi*  
*Josa be barni teie biyahi.*

(His is the spring harvest who sowed the autumn one. As,  
his is the bride to whom she was betrothed).

This saying has a customary sanction behind it on two facts. In the first instance, the custom recognises the right of the tenant who has held the land during the *kharif* harvest to continue it in possession during the following rabi crop, even if the amount of tenancy is returned in the meanwhile. In the second case, a man has full right of marriage to a girl who has been betrothed to him, although final marriage ceremony (or written documents) may not have been performed at the time of the betrothal. Thus, if the girl elopes with person other than the one for whom she has been engaged, the matter takes a very serious turn and may lead to a feud. The matter cannot be settled simply by returning of the *barina* amount by the girl's father. The boy (or boy's father) can claim much higher amount which has to be paid if the things are to be amicably settled.

In such marriage the *shastras* are not followed nor a priest or an astrologer is consulted, but the wedding is performed in the simplest



way usually by the *goor* of the devta. Sometimes, *agni puja* is performed when the bridegroom followed by the bride makes five or seven rounds of the sacred fire.

Instances have come into notice, when cross-cousin marriage is also acceptable in *barni* weddings. A boy can marry his father's sister's daughter or his mother's brother's daughter. In relation she is to him *buberi* in the former case and *maleri* in the latter. But he cannot marry his father's brother's daughter who is sister to him. Nor can he marry his mother's sister's daughter who is *maseri* to him. In fact, direct cousin marriage is a taboo, but cross-cousin marriage is in vogue.

### *Ganesh Puja Biah*

In certain villages the marriage process is very simple. Some people from bridegroom's house, with or without him, go to the house of the bride. Dress her up, put a *dhatu* or *thipu* on her head and bring her home to the bridegroom. On arrival of the bride in the bridegroom's house, a goat is sacrificed in the name of local deity. If a priest is available he conducts *Ganesh puja*, otherwise, the *goor* of the devta performs *puja* of the family god. Few persons accompanying the girl, particularly, her sister, friends and brothers are given feast, alongwith relatives and neighbours of the groom. Bride's people return to the village next day. In Chuhar, Nachan and Outer Seraj area this is known as *Badani Biah*.

### *Bata Biah*

*Bata biah* i.e., exchange is also common. In this kind of marriage, there is no transaction of money. It is an exchange of brides and bridegrooms. This is a marriage by exchange of sisters. If a father gives his daughter in marriage to a boy, he gets the sister of the bridegroom for his son in exchange. If the bridegroom has no sister, his cousin-sister can also be a party. Any sort of exchange admissible under the custom can take place. This exchange may be conducted as a *Brahm vivah* or *Deo biah* according to the custom of the parties. All formerly described ceremonies and rites are observed in this kind of marriage.

### *Stamp Marriage*

Among agriculturist community woman wields a great authority and influence. She is a great field worker. An agriculturist cannot do justice to his fields if he has no wife to assist him in agricultural work, to till his land. So, in this part of the hills husbands have a plurality of wives.

Agriculture is the main profession of the hill people, and this profession entails labour. So an agriculturist needs more and more hands to work in his fields. So from time immemorial polygamy has been very common. Husbands have a number of wives. But the woman, at the same time, fully knows her worth. She knows her husband requires her for field work which, in fact, she does very sincerely and with great labour. Local saying has given her another importance:

*Chau thinde dera*  
*Eksie chhewrie basera.*

(The place where four men live is a lodging house. The place where a woman lives is a home).

It shows that a house without a woman is nothing more than an inn. So, fully conscious of her value to her husband as a field worker and a domestic master, she rules her husband and she likes to rule alone.

Therefore, to curb his love for many wives she has found out a way to keep him within his limits. Whenever a man approaches her for betrothal, she (or her parents) takes him to the court and execute a legal contract binding the future bridegroom by a written agreement not to take another wife unless his first wife proves barren or becomes maimed. If he does it, she will be entitled for maintenance or she will be free to get herself married somewhere else when he will not be entitled for any compensation. Certainly, the man has his own conditions, too. In case she leaves her would-be husband without solid reason or elopes with someone else, he will be entitled for amount and compensation prescribed in the agreement deed.

Once the agreement has been executed, they go for regular marriage according to their custom. This is called a stamp marriage. Any property or cash given either by the parents or by the bridegroom

in such marriage is known as 'chheti' and the woman is the sole owner of this property. This marriage is a remnant of *Prajapatya vivah* of Manu, where similar proceedings have been laid down.

### *Karewa or Jhanjrara*

Widow marriage is very common in the villages, particularly among lower classes. Among them there is a saying that a woman is never a widow, because woman being a great assistance in the agricultural duties, she easily gets new husband. There are, however, certain considerations. Among the agriculturists a widow inherits her deceased husband's land. Therefore, until recently, the woman used to marry any of the living brothers of her deceased husband, as a matter of convention, so that the land remains the property of the family. Such a marriage is known as 'karewa'. But, it looks, this convention never led to a happy life, because it is said:

*Bher jinhari binti, bhabi jinhari jo  
Panj-sat jinhare putar, tinhare na kushal ho.*

(Those who have to do with sheep, those who marry their brother's widow, those who have several sons, never lead a peaceful life).

As a result, this custom is, now, fast dying out. She is, now, at liberty to chose a husband outside the family. In such cases, the marriage is known as 'jhanjrara'. In this kind of marriage, the couple sits by the side of a *dip* (lamp fed with ghi) and a *kumbh* (pitcher). They worship them in the presence of some persons. After performing the *puja*, the man places a *dori* on the widow's head. This is known as 'dori pana'. A simple feast is served to those who gather there. This is also true in the case of divorce marriage. Divorce is permitted among the agriculturist and a divorced woman, usually, gets second marriage.

### *Chulh Puj Biah*

Among lower classes where the financial position is very weak, there is the simplest way of wedding. Negotiations take place between the parents of the boy and girl. The consent of the two is also obtained.

The negotiations are usually kept secret. At the time of some fair or festival, the boy helped by his friends takes the girl to his house. Her friends may also accompany her. On reaching bridegroom's house, they are made to sit together and a goat is thrown across their heads. It is, then, immediately slaughtered. The bride and the bridegroom, then, enter the house and the first thing that the girl does is worship of *chulha* i.e., the hearth. *Dhoop-dip* is arranged, the girl performs the *puja* of the hearth, applies it *tilak* of vermilion. Others present also apply the *tilak*. A feast of the slaughtered goat is then arranged. This is called '*chulh puj biah*'.

### *Brad Phuk Biah*

In old days there was a peculiar form of marriage. A boy used to take a girl, with or without her consent, to his house. This was done quietly and without performing any ceremony. This situation, generally, rose when the negotiations broke down, because either father or mother of the girl or boy did not agree to the proposal. In such a case, the boy sought an opportunity and somehow, getting it used to carry the girl by force. Efforts were, again, made to obtain the consent of the parents, but if all efforts failed the couple would secretly go to a jungle, set the *ber* or *bradi* bush on fire and perform five or seven circles round it. Only the fire was a witness to such a marriage, but once it has been so arranged the marriage was considered to have been rightfully made. This was known as '*Brad Phuk Marriage*'. This marriage was, frequently, resorted to by those who went for elopement.

*Brad phuk*, in fact, was nothing but a social sanction to an illegal marriage, and it was prevalent in almost every part of these hills. It was common that if a betrothed but as yet unmarried girl can succeed in performing the marriage ceremony with another man or even with object of her choice round a fire made in the jungles with certain wild plants, her betrothal (or a former marriage) was annulled and the marriage so performed held good. Even marriage with trees has not been uncommon. In old days, married woman having strained relations with her husband or her in-laws, frequently sought refuge in *brad phuk* marriage. In fact, this was a very notorious way of annulling the legally performed earlier marriage. As a result, this has

led to feud and danger to life. Many times, *brad phuk* marriages took serious turn, even led to head-hunting. In such feuds it was said 'zindi meri phuki teri', i.e., she is mine so long she is alive. She can be yours only when she dies. This custom has, therefore, been legally banned during British rule and these days such marriage is not even heard of. This is a sort of *paishach vivah* of Manu's definition.

Among agriculturists elopement is not uncommon. Although, the *brad phuk biah* has been banned yet it has not curbed the tendency of elopement. Such elopements are, now, settled only by paying 'Randh' i.e., compensation to the former husband. In certain cases, *Randh* upto ten thousand rupees has come into notice.

### **Lucky and Unlucky Months for Marriage**

In rural areas the months of Kartik, Margshirsh, Phagun and Jeth are considered lucky for marriage. Among these also, Kartik is considered to be the best month. This is supported by *baramasa geet* which runs as under, when the girl says:

Shankar, do not marry me in Marghshirsh,  
Those are the days of frost.

Shankar, do not marry me in Posh,  
Posh has the coldest wind.

Shankar, do not marry me in Magh,  
Those are the days of sacred bath.

Shankar, do not marry me in Phagun,  
Those are the days of *phag* festival.

Shankar, do not marry me in Chaitar,  
*Bana* flower blossoms in those days.

Shankar, do not marry me in Baishakh,  
*Juhi* flower blossoms in those days.

Do not marry me in Jeth, Shankar.  
*Kuhi* flower blossoms in Jeth.

Shankar, do not marry me in Asarh,  
Those are the hottest days of the year.

Shankar, do not marry me in Shawan,  
Those are the days of rains.

Do not marry me in Bhadon, Shankar,  
Those are the days of Dagwans.

Shankar, do not marry me in Asoj,  
Those are the days of *kapas*.

Marry me in Katak, Shankar  
Katak are the days of marriage.

## Death Rites

If marriage is the happiest occasion, death is the saddest day of man's life. But the two are *sine quo non* parts of human life. When the end seems near, the dying person is removed from the *charpoy* (bed) to the floor. Death on a cot is considered inauspicious. The superstition is 'man came to naked earth, he must go to the naked earth'. The place is first cleaned by a cow-dung coating and few strands of *kusha* grass are placed on it. Then the bedding along with the dying person is laid on this place with head facing the north. A last moment act is of distributing of some alms, and if he is a well-to-do person, he may give a cow, clothes, utensils and foodgrains in alms. This is called *daan*. With such a *daan*, it is believed, that the soul of the dying person would depart peacefully. *Panch Ratna* consisting of gold, silver, amethyst, *moonga* or pearl is put into the mouth of a dying person belonging to a high class. In lower classes, it consists of honey, *gangajal*, cows urine, *tulsi* leaves and gold-washing.

As soon as a person breathes his last, an earthen lamp is lit and it is kept burning day and night for ten days after the death. Information about the death is conveyed to the villagers and the relatives. All villagers irrespective of caste and creed, assemble there. They prepare an *arthi* i.e., bier. Near relatives bathe the corpse with lukewarm water. The dead body is shrouded in white cloth. It is, then placed on the bier. Before the corpse is taken to the cremation ground, a *pind* (ball of barley flour) is offered to the departed soul. The Maha Brahman chants *mantras*. The bier is, then, carried to the burning ghat in a procession. The first men to carry the bier on their shoulders are two near relatives of the deceased who go barefoot. One man keeps on blowing the conch shell at regular interval and others chant 'Ram Nam Sat Hai'.

When the body reaches halfway, it is placed on the ground and a second *pind* is offered here. After this offer the body is taken to the cremation ground. On reaching there, the *arthi* is laid down on the ground. Then, the pyre is prepared on a rectangular pit. The dead body is placed over it with its head towards the north. The shroud is torn from near the mouth and *panchratan* and *ghi* are poured into the opening.

After this, the pyre is lit from near the head. The Maha Brahman chants *mantras*. When the corpse has half burnt, the chief mourner performs the *kapal kirya*. He taps the head of the corpse with a long bamboo stick three times and then throws it over the pyre. Most of the villagers return soon after, but some relatives remain there. When the corpse is completely burnt ashes are picked up by the near kinsmen. Sometimes they are picked up on the third day. The ashes are thrown in the nearby river. Those who can afford send these ashes to Hardwar where they are immersed in the Ganges.

*Pind dan* is offered for ten days. Small balls of kneaded barley atta are made. The main relative throws them in the running water to the accompaniment of *mantras* chanted by the priest. *Shuddhi* is performed on the tenth day when the entire house is cleaned and all clothes are washed. The lamp is put off and buried deep in the jungle. Thereafter, the village priest performs the *havan*. Some may arrange for the recitation of Garuda Puran which narrates the journey of the soul in the other world where a judgment is passed on the basis of good or bad deeds done by the person concerned in this world. Till this day the members of the family do not sleep on the bed but sleep on the floor.

*Kirya* is performed on any day between eleven to seventeen days according to different castes. Till this day the relatives of the deceased do not take onion, *heeng* or *haldi*, eggs, fish or meet. This period is known as '*patak*'. On this day Maha Brahman 'Acharj' is invited. The priest performs *havan*. Acharj is given full suit of clothes, a cot, utensils, *ghi* and grains. On this day, the household gives a community feeding to all relatives and friends. In villages this is known as '*gati*' ceremony.

In urban areas the Acharj is given five to ten *kacha* seers of rice every month for one year. This is called '*mahiki*'. On the first, second and third death anniversaries some clothes or other *daan* is given to

the Acharj. These anniversaries are called *pahli barkhi*, *duji barkhi* and *tiji barkhi*. The fourth anniversary is known as *chaubarkha*. On this day, in addition to the *daan* to the Acharaj, village people and relatives are also served food. After the *chaubarkha*, *sharadh* are performed annually in which Brahmans and village children are served with meals.

In villages when offering *pind daan* on the last day, it is said 'This is the last *daan* for you. From this day you are not ours and we are not yours.'



# 8

## *Devta Institution and Its Rituals*

The village devtas in Himachal Pradesh are not simply objects of worship. They, rather, constitute an institution which governs all social, cultural, moral, economic, religious and political life of the village folk. In the faith of the people of which these devtas are held and the manner in which this faith is expressed, they have large number of traditions and conventions governing their day-to-day life. These traditions, superstitions and conventions which, at present, prevail in this area go a long way to show that the area might have been, once, infested with supernatural forces and what people could not understand, they began to worship. What is more, any one who could propitiate the supernatural spirit or exorcize evil spirits began to acquire commanding importance and unique influence and was looked upon with awe and reverence and all bowed to his authority. The sorcerer, thus, became the leader and subsequently, his spirit or the spirit propitiated by him became sine quo non of the social life of these valleys.

The manifestation of the supernatural powers would have drastic consequences, in the first instance, and secondly might have remained in force for a sufficient longer period, that now, when centuries have passed since, the people are still sticking to follow the old traditions and they have force and sanction of social law.

### **Sacred Water**

The devtas influence the village in many ways. For example, water brought after washing the *mohra* or *pindi* i.e., the idol of the devta is

considered most sacred one and no guilty mind dares to take it, for such a person shall be the victim of 'dosh' and 'khot' i.e., spite and rage of the devta concerned and shall find frequent visits of evil spirits to his house. How far they are right in their predictions is not a question to be considered, but to what results this perjury before the deity leads is really very momentous, because the fear of the devta keeps the guilty minds tongue-tied and do not have the guts to drink that sacred water, which would otherwise, annihilate them. This is, how, there are lesser chances of robbery and theft. This is not an episode, any body could see that there is not a single lock on the doors of our houses even today when the foreign influence is exceedingly increasing.

Before British period the village devtas have all spiritual and temporal authority and source of all power, and there was absolutely no necessity of a court or a judicial system. Every problem of an individual or of the society as a whole, was decided by the verdict of the devta whether through its spokesman 'goor' or through its own indications. Even during British rule or in free India today, civil and revenue (of course not criminal) cases pending in the court can be decided by resorting to the old tradition. In such a case the two parties agree before the court to settle their case by '*deo dhoya pina*' i.e., drinking water obtained after washing the devta's idol. The court appoints an oath commissioner. On the fixed date each of the parties takes one he-goat and accompanies the oath commissioner to the temple of the devta (in Kulu Kaushu Narain who is most popular oath-giving devta). This information is conveyed to the devta before hand. On reaching there, first of all the *goor* of the devta, in the presence of the oath commissioner, the Kardar, Pujara and other attendants of the devta, warns both of them of the dire consequences of taking a false oath. When they agree to face the consequences, the *goor* brings water after washing the idol of the devta and recites *mantras* over *akshats* (unbroken grains of rice) placed in a *kanse-ri-thali* (plate made of bronze) with incense burning in a pot.

He worships the devta and after the *puja* is over, he puts some *akshats* into the ears of both the he-goats brought by the parties. This is called '*pochi pana*'. The party whose he-goat first shakes its body drinks the water and he wins the case, although the actual decision is read out by the court on a fixed date in the presence of the oath

commissioner and the two parties. The he-goat is slaughtered and the devta men make feast of it. The losing party takes its he-goat back with him. The oath commissioner is paid Re. 1 by the winning party. Similarly, Re. 1 is paid to the *bhandar* of the devta. The second party accepts the verdict of the devta, as also of the court, and he never goes for an appeal. It may be seen that although the goat is slaughtered after it shook its body, yet there are instances when the false oath taker suffers heavily bearing even heavy death toll of the near and dear. This is a part of the Customary Law of the people of this area.

### **Faith in Devta**

First time when a British officer (Assistant Commissioner, Kulu) confronted this situation was sometime during 1888. In her book, *How I Shot My Bears: or Two Years Tent Life in Kulu and Lahoul* (London, Sompson Low, Marston & Company, 1893, p. 110-111) Mrs. R.H. Tyacke, thus, writes:

“The little temple (at Naggar) was formerly the scene of a curious custom for settling legal disputes. Two goats, one the property of the plaintiff and one of the defendant, were placed in the temple and the Brahmin in charge sprinkled water on each. The case was decided in favour of the owner of the goat who first shook the water off. They say, not so many years back, this method of settling dispute was resorted to by the Assistant Commissioner for the time being under the following circumstances:

“Two old women had a quarrel about some jewels, each accusing the other of having stolen them. They did not appeal to the Commissioner in court, but persistently annoyed him to settle the case for them informally. To get rid of the importunate widows (?) the official bethought him of the time-honoured goat test. He tried it, and which ever goat shook first—I forget which it was—the owner of the other said it was evidently the pleasure of the god of the temple that she should lose, and both departed satisfied.”

This practice at the Nagar temple is, however, no more in vogue these days. The institution of the village gods and the sovereign authority of the devta has certainly dwindled with the dawn of the

modern civilization and establishment of new system of socio-political structure, but the remnant of the old system can still be seen prevalent in a secluded village of Malana of Kulu district. The way of decision differs from devta to devta but the basic provision remains the same. Writing in 1958, Mr. Colin Rosser in his article 'A Hermit Village in Kulu' appearing in the book *Indian Villages* edited by M.N. Sirinivas (Asia Publishing House, 1960) says:

“But, as in all matters in the village, Jamlu is final authority and, if any individual protests against a Council decision, he can appeal to Jamlu and have the case decided by the god. This is done by an ordeal in which two young goats are used. In a civil case, each side supplies a goat. In criminal cases, both the goats are paid for out of the god’s treasury. The Pujara sprinkles water from a special pot belonging to the god over the back of each goat. Then all wait to see which goat will shiver first. The goat shivering first is held to belong to the loser in the dispute. This decision is now absolutely final (since it expresses the personal judgement of Jamlu on the case) and held to be binding on all concerned. Sometimes, this ordeal by goat will entirely reverse the decision of the Council, but the Council members do not seem in the least perturbed when their ruling is, thus, proved wrong. They appear to feel that it is only human to err sometimes and that, in doubtful cases, the accused can always appeal to the infallible judgement of Jamlu.

Jamlu is not only the final court of appeal in the judicial machinery of the village. He is said to be omniscient and omnipresent, and is regarded as particularly malevolent when his rules (i.e., the custom of the village) are not obeyed. He is believed to punish automatically—by blindness, leprosy, madness, death, and a wide variety of minor ills—any one giving a false oath or attempting to bride a member of the council.”

### **Devta and his Spokesman**

Among these gods are Brahma, Vishnu, Mahesh, Narayan, Rama, Krishna, Parshu Ram, Narsimh, Ganesh, Hanuman, Rudra, Mahadev, Sadashiv, Ganesh of Vedas and Puranas; Vashishth, Gautam, Manu, Jamdagni, Parashar, Vyas, Shringi, Narad, Shandal, Kapil among the

early saints and seers; Saraswati, Lakshmi, Parvati, Durga, Hadimba, Syama Kali, Bagla Mukhi, Tripura, Bala Sundri, Tara, Rajeshwari, Chamunda, Bhagasidh etc. among Devis; Baski, Kali, Dhumbal, Shesh, Piunli, Shirghan etc. among the Nagas; Baba Balak Nath, Bir, Panj Bir, Biruthan, Ajmal etc. among the Nathas and Sidhas. But, there are still many more who are mostly known by the name of the place where they are worshipped.

Each devta has a large number of *karkuns* (officials). *Kardar* manages its affairs, *Pujari* conducts *puja* (worship), *Bhandari* is storekeeper, *Goor* is its spokesman, *Kathiali* looks after granary, *Kaith* is accountant, *Kahar* is Rath-carrier, *Bazgis* or *Bajantris* are musicians and drummers and *Nishandars* are those who carry instruments and other articles of the devta.

Among these all, *goor* (I prefer this spelling to the traditional 'gur' due to its actual pronunciation among the people and, further, because it is not 'gur' which we eat and which is offered to the gatherings in certain rituals) holds the supreme authority. This is because he is the spokesman of the devta and has direct contact with him. He is selected by the devta himself. On a particular festival when the devta is in full procession busy in Hulki or Deokhel, the spirit of the devta enters a particular person when he goes into a trance and behaves in an extraordinary manner throwing his headgear. Many do not want to be a *goor* because, once he is *goor* he has to follow a number of taboos—He will not wear shoes of leather. He will not cut his hair, will not smoke, cannot take eggs or chickens, cannot take meals in a house where any of the ladies is in menses.

There are many different ways in which a particular devta selects a *goor*. But once he is selected, he does not automatically enter the goorship. He is still a *bathar* i.e., a novice. To be a real *goor* he has to undergo a number of rituals and tests. Every devta has its own tests to find out whether he is or can be a real *goor*. For example, in case of Jamlu devta of *Malana*, the *bathar* has to go through two ordeals to prove his competence for the exalted post. First, "a trench is dug and the *goor*-elect is made to lie down in it. A wooden plank is laid over the trench, earth is shovelled on to cover it and seeds are strewn over the earth. After half-an-hour, the earth and plank are removed. If the *goor*-elect is alive, he is declared to have passed the first test. He must then go to Girwa Kothi and fetch *losar* and *gogal*,

two aromatic herbs that grow there. Girwa Kothi is a huge rock bearing, as I saw later, an amazing similarity to a house, situated near the top of a snow-covered mountain, at an altitude of 16,000 ft. Girwa Kothi is believed to be inhabited by fairies who weave a spell over the traveller by their magic, so that when he is approaching their abode, it no more looks like a house. Fetching *losar* and *gogal* from its vicinity is no easy task.”<sup>1</sup>

### **Ruhar Piana**

Then comes the next ritual. When the *bathar* has successfully gone through the test, an auspicious date is fixed by the *malegha goor* (head priest) after consulting the devta.

On the appointed day (which is, usually, the next festival) the devta is brought out of the temple with great pomp and show to the accompaniment of a large band consisting of a number of *dhol*s, *nagaras*, *dholaks* ‘drums’, *karnals*, *ransinghas* ‘trumpets’, *shehnais* ‘pipes’, *dhonsus* ‘kettledrums’, *bhanas* and *thalis* etc. Almost naked (except *chola* from the waist to the knees) the *goors* throw loose their long and clustery hair and dance with complete serenity and gravity holding in their hands *ghondis* (bells) and *dhangiaras* (iron incense burners). All the *goors* perform *deokhel* with *lohas* (iron cudgels), *kataras* (small swords) and *shangals* (iron chains) turn by turn.

In the meanwhile the *bathar* also accompanies them, but does not join the *deokhel*. As soon as the *deokhel* is over, all the *goors* form a circle with the *malegha goor* in the centre. They all keep on reciting *mantras* and dancing to the accompaniment of the musical band. Soon, the *bathar* jumps over the shoulder of the *malegha goor* and, while he is on his shoulder, a goat is thrown across their heads, and as soon as it falls down on the ground on the other side, it is at once slaughtered. The slaughtered head is taken to *bathar*’s mouth and he drinks the blood oozing out of the slaughtered head of the goat. This is called ‘*Ruhar Piana*’ i.e., blood sucking ritual. With this the *bathar* becomes the real *goor* of the devta concerned. Throughout his life, he will observe all the taboos stated earlier and

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1. G.D. Khosla, ‘Journey to Malana’ published in *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, July 25, 1976.

will never cut his hair, although he can, and invariably does, shave his beard.

This is, however, not sufficient. He is now to learn a large number of *mantras*. These *mantras* relate not only to the ceremonies and rituals of the devta, but majority of them are concerned with the treatment of diseases, ill health, worries, problems and troubles of the individual and the society as a whole. A complete *mantra* of a particular subject is known as '*mala*' and a perfect *goor* is supposed to know more than five hundred *malas*. No written records of these *mantras* are available. They are all learnt by heart. Old *goor* conveys them to the new *goor*. But, the new *goor* does not get them as a right. The old *goor* conveys these *mantras* only to a disciple of his confidence.

Armed, thus, with the authority of the devta and knowledge of *mantras*, the *goor* is a man of great importance and his influence is greater even than the head of the village and other officials of any status. He has a lot of ritual engagements. No ceremony or undertaking is commenced without first consulting him. He helps in fulfilling the social, cultural, financial, spiritual and religious needs of the people and guides them in all their activities. He possesses a virtual monopoly in interpreting the will of the devta. At certain ceremonies, the god's spirit enters him and he goes into a state of possession. He establishes contacts with the supernatural force i.e., god. In such a position he becomes the vehicle of communication between the god and the villagers. Shaking his body and trembling violently with his uncut long hair swinging out as he shakes his head sharply from side to side to the sound of frenzied drumming of the band, he indeed looks a wild figure.

In this state, he jerks out with voice of devta, answers the questions put to him (rather to the devta) by the devotees and directs them about the ceremonies and requirements of the devta. He indicates solutions to the disputes of the people and to the problems troubling the village. He, further, conveys the threat of what ill is likely to befall individuals or village as a whole, in case the orders of the devta are not obeyed by them. He is, thus, the man who performs all *pujas*, ceremonies, rituals of the devtas, individuals and the society as a whole by different manners. Every devta has more than one *goor*. Some have over a dozen of *goors*. Each has similar influence

in his area of activities. But for the functions of devta, they are headed by a *malegha goor* (head priest). It is the *malegha goor* who conducts the major ceremonies of the devta. Every function of the devta involves a number of rituals and some of them are performed for the ceremonies of the individuals and society, as well.

## Chhoda

Every function of the devta is preceded by doing *chhoda*. *Chhoda* is also done in the community functions, if necessary, and in individual families when a member of the family or family as a whole, is facing certain troubles or problems. A *kanse-ri-thali* (bronze plate), *akshat* (unbroken grains of rice), *dhoop* and *dhangiarara* or *dhadachh* are the necessary ingredients of the *chhoda*. Every household and every temple has a *thali* for this purpose. Rice is got ready then and there. *Dhoop*, here, is not *guggal* which is used in temples and daily worship in the plains. It is, rather, the leaves of a 'bethar' shrub which grows on the mountain tops over 12,000 feet height; or else it is the flower or a particular herb known as *dhoop* which grows between the height of 6000 and 8000 feet. The leaves of *bethar* or flowers, along with leaves of *dhoop* are collected, usually during autumn and are kept aloof to dry. When dried, it is mixed with *ghi* and placed on burning charcoals.

*Dhangiarara* is a particular pot made of iron, bronze or brass. It is similar to *karchhi* (an iron cooking ladle) i.e., a big spoon used in every house for serving dishes, *dals* or vegetables. Its tail end is bending downwards to serve as a leg. There are two other legs near its other end. Their joint with the main rod supports a cup. So it has two cups—bigger one at the top and smaller one in the middle. Whenever function starts the bigger cup is filled with burning charcoals and over them *dhoop* mixed with *ghi* is placed so that it keeps burning giving a pleasant smell through its smoke. In the smaller cup, are kept *akshats* and some *dhoop* readily available. *Dhangiarara*, thus, means a pot having 'dhadhakta hua angara—dhangiarara'. It is also known as 'dharachh' i.e., *dhoop-ka-karachh*.

When a *chhoda* is to be conducted, a room is properly cleaned before hand. The *goor* of the devta sits cross-legged usually facing east or the temple of the devta at one side of the room and others sit



in front of him in semi-circle. A small place before the *goor*, on the floor, is given cowdung coating making a circle. This is known as *chauka*, and the process as *chhoda kerna*. The *goor* places *dhang-iara*, with *dhoop* burning in it over the cowdung coated round marked place i.e., *chauka*. Then, he takes *thali* in his left hand over the five fingers forming a cup. The *thali* contains *akshats* and one round flower of *dhoop*. He takes a small stick '*kathi*' in his right hand and strikes the *thali* resting on the fingers of left hand. It gives music and the rice and the flower of *dhoop* move round and round. He enchants *mantras* and all others present at that time make wild requests to the devta to tell them all about the problem for which the *chhoda* is being done. With the movements of the *akshats* and *dhoop* in the plate the *goor* finds out any thing relating to the situation.

In the case of occasional fairs and festivals or other function, *chhoda* is done to find out the exact time when the *rath* (palanquin) is to be adorned, and how and when other connected ceremonies are to be performed and whether every thing is right to bring out the devta for the fair etc. If the *goor* finds, through *chhoda*, that some formalities are lacking, he directs them all to complete those formalities first.

## **Deo Pirhna**

When the above formalies are over, the *Bhandari*, *Pujari* and priests etc. start to adorn the *rath*. Usually several elements are involved in it. First, there is the wooden structure known as '*chirag*' i.e., the wooden structure forming the main palanquin. These are different for the devtas which are carried on head and those carried upon the shoulders. How these *chirags* are made is quite another part of the story, which may not be related here. Sufficient to know that every devta has one or more *chirags* already prepared. In the case of devtas carried on shoulders this wooden structure is, generally, two to three feet square size at the bottom and above four feet in height. At the centre of the lower portion two long wooden poles known as '*agals*' or '*zamanis*' are passed through. This wooden frame is covered by silken or other precious coloured choths known as '*bagas*' and, then, there are *mohras*, a sort of masks made of gold, silver or brass. It is in these *mohras* that the spirit of the devta resides. Particularly, there

is one main *mohra* in which resides the soul of the devta. Now the wooden structure is adorned by these *bagas* and flowers and garlands. *Mohras* have their specific place in the *rath*. Then, there are *chhochh* or *chhatras* i.e., canopies which are placed at the top of the *rath*. There are other precious ornaments. Decked with all these *mohras*, *bagas* and ornaments etc. the *rath* is ready for the fair. The whole process is known as '*deo-pirhna*'.

### **Chherina-Ubharna**

When the *goor* has been doing *chhoda*, he is in his ordinary position. He conducts the *chhoda* and at the same time, is talking with other persons around him. Then, he is consulting the devta through the *akshats* and '*bhumbhru*' as the one flower of *dhoop* in the *thali* is so called.

However, before the real ceremony of specific occasion starts, all the *goors*, including the *malegha goor*, sit down in a line with *dhangiaras* and *thalis* on the *chaukas* before each of them. There is one *ghondi* (a bell) also at the side of each *dhangiarara*. Bell is the same as we see in temples in plains. Each *goor* is wearing one under-wear, a big *chola* and a cap. All of them take out their arms from the sleeves of the *chola*. The sleeves are, then, tied round the waist. All the musical instruments are played in a particular tone. The *goors* begin to tremble. They enchant *mantras*, call for the devtas and soon they become possessed of the spirit of the devta. Their caps fall down from their heads and the long hair swing backward. This is known as *chherina* or *ubharna*. The band is immediately dispensed with and music stopped.

### **Barshoha**

The *goors* are not, now, in their ordinary position. They are possessed of devta's spirit. They do not look straight. Their sight is inwardly inverted. They have gone into a trance. In this position, the *malegha goor*, first, recites a part of the history of the devta known as *bhartha*. He makes only a cursory reference of the story leaving the details for the annual fair Phagli or Birshu. However, he relates the present position in greater details. How the people are losing faith in his

existence and, therefore, how they are suffering from many troubles, what they should do to lead a respectable life? What troubles are in store for them in case they do not observe his teachings? How he is looking after their interest? And, coming to the point, in what way they should celebrate the present festival. He promises deliverance from all troubles and unhappiness provided they worship him sincerely as their ancestors had been doing. This part of the story is known as *barshoha*. *Barshoha* has another significance. Once in a year either at the time of *Birshu* which is the first day of the new year or *Phagli* which is the last festival of the year, he states the *Varsh-phal*, i.e., all good and bad points for the coming year.

### **Deo Puchhna**

Now, it is the turn of the audience. They can jointly or severally ask for the reasons due to which they are presently suffering and how to solve the problem's—like droughts, floods, epidemics etc. He tells them the reasons and suggests the ways and means to come out of the trouble.

Finally anybody present may consult him about his own troubles—ill health, mental worries, trouble to his cattle and sheep, why he is not having a child or when he is to get married and so on and so forth. Even one asks the devta to help him in searching out good job, in coming out successful in a court case or in examination etc. The devta hears every body patiently. He knows the reason and he guides them properly. The *goor* in his inspired state, gives replies to all sort of questions. Each time he states the reply of the devta, he confirms his answer in another way. The *goor* gives grains of *akshats* from his *thali* to the person concerned. If the grains are five or seven, the wishes of the individual will be fulfilled, or his troubles will be solved smoothly. Otherwise, some obstacle will stand on his way. In that case, he will ask for the solution and the devta will give him further advice. This is known as *deo puchhna*. This continues for a couple of hours.

When the *Bhartha* and *Barshoha* is over the musicians get indication and the music starts. Every one holds his *nishan* and musical instrument. The thalis are collected by the *kardar*. *Goors* get up holding *dhangiar* in one hand and the bell in the other. With

bells holding high they order the others to move and the whole procession starts to the *soh* i.e., the ground of the *dehra* or temple. The devta remains in the centre of the procession, *goors* walking before and after him.

## Ritual Dances

### *Hulki*

On reaching the ground two ritual dances are performed. First of them is known as *hulki*. The devta and his *goors* assemble at one side of the *soh*. The music changes. It is not the music of the ordinary procession, it is the music of dance now. The devta starts dancing and with him the *goors* and people accompanying him, all dance. The peculiarity of this dance is that neither it is danced in a circle nor there is any row as is, generally, found in the case of folk dances. Every body dances in his own way—one is for all and all for one. There is no intertwining. The *goors* keep close to the devta holding *dhangiaras* and bells in their hands and moving them, alongwith their bodies, very majestically from left to right and right to left. The god is carried by the bearers oscillating it side to side and up and down by the elastic shafts. When they reach the other end of the *soh*, all bow to the god and start dancing back to the place from where they had started. In this way the procession makes either three, five or seven rounds considering the time left for the purpose. In the case of certain devtas the *hulki* dance is performed round the *dehra* (temple) and in some other cases, *hulki* is danced round the *dhwajas* (flag poles). *Dhwajas* are 60 to 80 feet high beams of deodar trees installed in the centre of the *soh*. Their installation has quite another story which may not be stated here.

### *Deokhel*

When the *hulki* dance is over, the devta is made to sit on a *chauki* inside the temple or outside of it. The pujara and some other persons keep sitting with the *rath* while all others again move to the centre of the *soh*.

In the centre of the *soh*, all those present make a wide circle—

wide enough to accommodate the whole procession. The musicians make another inner half circle. The *goors* stand in a row at another corner of the circle, rather making an inner row. In the meanwhile, the *kardar* of the devta pitches, in the centre of the circle, all those weapons which the devta used, in very old days, to subdue his opponents—demons, ghosts, witches etc. Now, the music changes to *deokhel* tone which is very slow in nature. The *goors* sit in the row in order of seniority—the senior one sitting on the right of the junior. With the change of music, the *malegha goor* starts to the centre of the circle. He is followed by the *kardar*, but while the *goor* moves dancing, *kardar* moves in his ordinary steps. It may be noted that while *hulki* was a dance for all, *deokhel* is confined to *goors* alone. No body else can join it.

When the *malegha goor* reaches the central place, he dances round the installed weapons three times. Holding *dhangiar* in left hand and bell in the right he, first, faces east and dances, three steps to the left and three to the right for a while. Then he changes his direction, takes an about-turn and dances in a similar way facing the west. This is repeated facing the north and finally the south. All the while he keeps muttering the *mantras*. In this way, it appears, he, in the first instance, pays obeisance to the four directions for blessing him with power and strength. Then he hands over the *ghondi-dhorachh* to the *kardar*.

Then he picks up *loha* i.e., spear from the ground and dances with it facing east, west, north and south. This shows how he used the spear during the battle. He hands this over to the *kardar*. Then he repeats the dance with *shangals* (iron chains) and *kataras* (swords) etc. The last dance is with that important tantric bush '*bhekhal*' branches. He does not hand it over to the *kardar*. Instead he throws it away over his head backward.

This is followed by the dance of other *goors*. First of all, the seniormost of the remaining *goors* bends down his body, proceeds dancing to the central spot, touches the feet of *malegha goor* who raises him up. Then they dance first joining their hands together and then with the *kataras*. Each holds *katara* in his right hand while joining their left hands. Soon, they exchange their *kataras*—each gives his *katara* to the other. They dance, again for a while then it is the turn of two more *goors* to join the dance in a similar way. This

continues till all of them move to the centre and dance joining hands with each other. In the end, they leave their hands and dance freely. Almost naked, except *chola* from the waist to the knees, and their long hair swinging, they dance with complete serenity and gravity in the beginning leading to a violent and vigour dance at the end. As stated earlier, it is exclusively a dance of the *goors* and no body else can join it, and it is usually at this time that new *goors* turn out amongst the audience. Any body being possessed and going into a trance when dancing violently and his cap is thrown down from his head, is considered to have become *bathar* of the devta leading to the position of a *goor* as explained earlier. He is, at once, given a *katara* with which he keeps dancing till the end of the *deokhel*. When the *deokhel* is over, the procession starts to the spot where the devta is sitting. Then the musicians are dispensed with. The *goors* sit down in a row. Now it is the turn of the general public to offer their presents and ask the devta about their personal problems. It may take another two-three hours.

### **Deo Mandharna**

The devta returns to his temple the same night if the fair is meant for one day only. Otherwise, he returns after two or three days on the completion of the fair or festival.

As soon as the devta reaches the steps leading to the room of the temple, a goat is sacrificed by throwing across it. It is believed, that if any demon or ghost may be accompanying him, it may fall upon this victim while the devta will silently enter his abode. The *malegha goor* sums up the proceedings of the day telling particularly if any thing unusual has happened.

These are the rituals performed every time the devta is taken out of the main temple for any fair or festival. Each fair and festival has, however, its own rituals apart from these explained here.

# 9

## *Dwelling Rituals*

Construction of dwellings plays important role in the life of an individual. A large number of ceremonies and rites are observed in the construction of the houses in urban and rural areas. In the hills Baishakh, Poh, Magh, and Phalgun are considered to be lucky months for starting the construction of a house. If some one starts the construction in Har, the house will breed mice and if it is started in Jeth there will be loss of money in the construction of the building. Chaitra month will make the household a pauper—*Chaitar peta laga reitar* i.e., in Chait the fire (of hunger) rasps the stomach. Katak and Bhadon are considered dark months and will bring misfortune.

### **Foundation Ceremony**

In villages, the man who proposes to construct the house collects a handful of earth from the site selected for the construction of the house and takes it to the *goor* of the devta. He recites *mantras* over the earth so brought and predicts an auspicious time for laying the foundation of the building.

A *chanahra* (an architect) or a *thawi* is engaged by the man and he digs the foundation covering the main walls of the house. On the morning of the specified date the *chanahra* and the owner of the house get up early in the morning when it is still dark and all others in the neighbourhood are sleeping, take bath, prepare *halwa* (*gur* will do in case the financial position is not very good), collect *kungu* (vermilion), *dori* or *mauli* and a lamp fed with *ghi*, all in a *thali*. They, then perform a *puja* at a certain place of the foundation. They

apply *tilak* to a particular stone already selected, tie *dori* round it, offer it halwa and then lay it at a particular place. Mustard seed sanctified by the *goor* or the priest through his *mantras* are sprinkled all over the place. In old days a goat used to be sacrificed at this moment. But this practice has long disappeared. They, then, start the construction work immediately and by the dawn of the day they complete full round of the construction so that no body knows where the foundation stone has been laid. It is kept thoroughly secret. The *halwa* or *gur* is distributed among those who happen to visit the place throughout the day. The foundation rites are called *vastu* or *shila sthapan* or *pathru lana* (setting up of the foundation stone). In some villages, at the auspicious time and date worked out by the family priest for starting the work, the priest performs *havan* which is conducted by the eldest member or the owner of the house. When the *havan* is over the household distributes *halwa*.

The house, usually, faces east. But north and west are also not unlucky. It must not face south. This brings poverty. The builders make every effort to avoid a south aspect. A house must not be constructed at a place where, in a previous fire, some animals or human beings have been burnt alive. When a house is under construction the members of the household do not go to a place where people get together to mourn till the house is complete.

### **Duar Sthapan**

Another ritual is performed at the time of fixing the door. When the door-frame is complete, *puja* is performed and mustard seeds purified with *mantras* by the *goor* are tied in a small cloth and then it is fastened to the lintel with the *mauli* or handspun wool-thread. This averts any sort of calamity and brings prosperity to the inhabitants. *Gur* is distributed among those who are present.

### **Bhanda-Laying Ceremony**

*Bhanda* is the main beam at the highest pitch of the roof. In the hills, roof is, usually, in slanting position so that the snow does not gather at the roof and falls down to the ground. *Bhanda* supports the whole structure of the ceiling and the roof. It is, invariably, made of complete



deodar tree. Over two-three dozen men are required to adjust it at its proper place. *Bhanda*-laying ceremony is performed on an auspicious date calculated by the *goor*. Before doing so, *puja* of village god is performed. Mustard seeds, and rice are tied in a cloth and the same is fastened to the *Bhanda* with the *mauli*.

The roof is covered by slates. If the construction has been made by a *thawi*, another ritual is performed. When the last slate is placed a *puja* is performed and the *thawi* is, then, required to get down to the floor from inside the house. He cannot get down from the outer side of the house. In fact, the moment the *puja* is performed, the *thawi* gets down the stair and the last slate is covered immediately. It may be noted that so long the building is not complete *thawi* can get down from any side he likes. But on the last date, when the roofing is complete, he will have to come down from inside the house staircase. He is paid his dues and subsequently he does not enter the house.

### **Chulh Banai**

In the rural household, *chulha* i.e., the hearth is given a special sanctity. No body can sit over it. No body can jump over it. Women cannot touch it during her menses. When a new house is constructed special significance is attached to *chulh-banai* i.e., the erection of the hearth. First the *goor* of the village god is consulted to find out an auspicious time. At that specified time he worships the village deity before fixing the *githa* (the main stone forming the base of the hearth). On the completion of the hearth, *puja* is again performed. A *tilak* is applied to the newly constructed *chulh*. Then *halwa* is prepared. It is offered to the village deity, then to the *chulh* and finally it is distributed among all those present at that time.

### **Occupation Rites**

Different rituals are performed in urban and rural areas at the time of occupying the house. In urban areas, before occupation a Brahman is asked to fix the *mahurat* or lucky time for entrance. As a preliminary, green leaves from seven trees or from a *peepal* tree are tied to *mauli* and hung on the outer door. Five, seven or eleven days before the actual ceremony, a *pandit* performs *havan* inside the house. Sat

Narayan *katha* is also recited. Gods are worshipped. On the fixed date some drawings of gods are drawn on the ground, together with that of Vasta (the house god). The priest recites *mantras*. Then the owner of the house and his wife enter the house with *kalash* or jars full of water. A feast is arranged. This is called *pratishtha* ceremony.

### Gharpeshi

In the social life of rural folk *gharpeshi* i.e., *grih-pravesh* (occupying the house) is given an importance only next to marriage. In some parts, *gharpeshi* is celebrated on a scale higher than that of marriage. Only two months of the year i.e., Maghar and Phalgun are considered lucky for performing *gharpeshi* ceremony. Or, if necessary Jeth can also be a possible good month. First, the *goor* consults the family god for fixing an auspicious time for the *gharpeshi*. Once the time is fixed the owner of the house gets busy in making all arrangements, because he is to invite all his relatives and friends at the time of the *gharpeshi* and they are to be entertained on a very high-scale feast.

Five, seven or nine days earlier the house-owner invites all villagers and a few of his relatives to his house. He conveys them the decision to perform *gharpeshi* ceremony. He entertains them on an ordinary meal and selects, out of them, three, five or seven persons who are entrusted the duty of conveying invitation to all his relatives. Before they leave for the work entrusted to them the wife of the house-owner applies *tilak* on their foreheads and offers them flowers which they tuck up in their caps. They wish her successful and peaceful *gharpeshi* and start for their duty the same day. They cannot wait for the next day, although once they start it, the invitation may be completed in two-three days. If they do not start the same day, it is believed, some ill luck may befall either them or the owner of the house.

A day before the *gharpeshi*, the priest conducts *havan* in the newly erected hearth. A sacred fire is lit in it. It is tended by other wood. The priest recites *mantras* and the fire is fed with small offering of *havan samagri* i.e., a mixture of *til*, barley, *ghi*, honey and dry dates. Then Ganesh *puja* is performed requesting him to remove all obstacles. Finally, *puja* is offered to the village god as well.

Early in the morning, while it is still dark, first the village god is

worshipped by the *goor*. Then one goat or a ram is taken to the top of the house by the *goor*. He is accompanied by the owner of the house and a dozen of other persons. On the roof of the house they form a circle leaving the goat or the ram in the centre. The *goor* recites *mantras* on few grains of rice and then puts them into both the ears of the goat or the ram. This is known as *pochi pana*. The goat is then left free. All present make requests to the village god to accept the offering. As soon as the goat shakes its body (known as *bizhna*), it is considered that the sacrifice being offered has been accepted. Sometime four or five *pochis* may be required to make the goat shake itself. If the goat does not shake itself even then, that is the indication of some faults on the part of the owner of the house. He may admit the fault and agree to pay fine to the village god. The goat cannot be slaughtered unless it shakes itself. After agreeing for the fine, the goat may shake its body and then it is immediately slaughtered on the roof of the house. The horns are placed on the top of the roof for ever. This is an oblation to the house. The horns are never brought down unless they are blown away by wind or perished away in sun and rains. The gathering is, then, offered feast of the meat of the slaughtered goat and *bhat* (cooked rice).

### **Gharvasan**

*Gharpeshi* rituals are performed in a little different way in Chacheot area of Mandi district. There, *gharpeshi* is known as *gharvasan*. On the date specified by the *Prohit* after consulting the village god, when the relatives and friends of the owner of the house have gathered there, the village god accompanied by all the officials and a number of Bajantris (musicians) arrives there by the fall of the night. They are welcomed by performing *puja* of the devta and by throwing *warna* of a goat over the devta on the ground on its other side. Then the devta is placed in one of the rooms of the ground floor known as *khurh*. The *Prohit* conducts the *havan* and performs *puja* of the devta. Soon, the *goor* is possessed of the power of the devta and he conveys the feelings of the devta to the owner of the house who requests the deity to bless him with prosperity and success in life. If every thing is all right, the deity blesses him and promises him good returns of the *gharvasan*. Finding an opportunity many others ask the

devta through the *goor* about their own problems and he guides either of them in a manner which satisfies them all.

When this is over, the *goor* takes a goat to the roof through the *siur* or *ghunghar* which is a passage inside the house from the lowest floor on to the roof. He is followed by *Prohit*, *Mehta*, *Katwal*, *Haru*, the owner of the house and a score of other persons. All will have to go through the inner passage i.e., *siur* and no body can go to the roof by any means from outside the house. They take *jogni* or *mashals* i.e., burning sticks of wood to serve the purpose of light. Among other things, they also carry with them *satnaja* (a mixture of seven kinds of grains), lamps fed with *ghi*, *kundhri* (earthen pot) containing about one kg. *ghi* and some cooked food. The *goor* also takes with him *loha-ka-gurj* i.e., a spear which represents the devta. He fixes this spear in the centre of the roof and a lamp at a distance. Some *ghi* is poured over the spear from the *kundhri*.

One *mashal* and one lamp are placed at the farthest end of each corner of the roof. The priest sprinkles *panchgavya* i.e., a mixture of milk, honey, *ghi*, *gangajal* and *gomutra* all over the roof and inside the rooms. Musicians sitting below outside the house play their music and *luhar* (a blacksmith) enchants *mantra* from below and the priest from above the roof, both throwing barley in all directions.

When all formalities have been completed, the owner of the house and the *mistri* (the carpenter) get down through the *siur* and it is closed after them by putting a slate over it. Soon, the goat is slaughtered at a corner of the roof in such a way that its head is thrown down to musicians and the trunk is thrown on the opposite side of the house. The persons on the roof take the food they had carried with them and get down through a staircase placed at the outer side of the house. The ceremony on the roof is known as '*kasha dena*'.

The devta is, then, taken to the upper storey of the house known as '*bahur*' from the *khurh*. Another goat is sacrificed at this time. Out of these sacrifices the heads of the goats slaughtered at the room, *bahurh* and *khurh* are given to the *mistri*, the *goor* and the priest respectively.

The remaining meat is cooked and a big feast is offered by the owner of the house to the devtamen and his relatives gathered at the *gharvasan*. The village god returns the next day.

The house so purified is not, now, an ordinary structure or a house surrounded by four walls. It is a *ghor-grih* (a house-cum-temple). It is, now, *suchi grih* (purest of the pure dwellings) and is to be maintained with perfect sanctity and purity. One may or may not instal an idol, the god has entered it and *tala* i.e., the third or the last storey is its abode. It is invisible but omnipresent, omniscient and omnipotent. This house cannot be made *jutha* (impure) by *sutak* (when birth takes place) or *patak* (when some one dies) and by any other bad acts of the members or non-members of the house. This dwelling is to be maintained with piety and purity.

# 10

## *Festival Rituals*

Himachal Pradesh is fairly rich in the matter of fairs and festivals. They are held all through the year following the cycle of seasons and they reflect the various facets of our cultural heritage. They present a colourful spectacle marked by revelry and rituals. Each has its own beauty and splendour, but some of them deserve special mention.

### **1. Birshu**

Although calendar year begins from the month of Chaitra, the agricultural year, in the hills, starts on the first day of Baishakh which is popularly celebrated as Birshu or Bishu festival with great enthusiasm and fervour. In fact, the whole month is hummed with activities and Birshu fairs continue throughout the month, however, it is the first day of Birshu which calls for special attention.

Birshu is, actually, the festival to celebrate the commencement of the *varsh* i.e., agriculture-year. It is, thus, celebrated as a New Year day. Many ceremonies and rituals are performed on this day. The preparation for the Birshu, in fact, starts a day earlier. On the previous day, all houses and their surroundings are properly cleaned. Cowdung mixed clay coating is given to the floors and walls of the houses. Clothes, rags and patches, are thoroughly washed. It may be seen how marvelously bountiful part the faith of the devta plays in the social life of the village community. The village people are generally awful busy in their field work and the climate is generous and salubrious. Obviously, therefore, they do not find time and necessity to bother much for their sanitation. Instances are not lacking

when, in some parts, people do not wash some of their clothes for months together. But the faith of devta makes them to go for compulsory sanitation. If a man fails to do so, misfortune will be sent by the devta and devil will besiege his gate.

### *Ritual Bath*

So, having cleaned and decorated their houses on the previous day, the new year starts with ritual baths. People go to Riwalsar, Vashisht, Manikaran, Tatapani, Khirganga, Sreulsar and many other *sarovars* (small lakes) and *sangams* (confluence of rivers) and take holy bath. Those who cannot go to these shrines for a bath, already keep stored water from such sacred sources and they take bath in their houses, after mixing this water with *gangajal*. *Gangajal* and *gomutra* (urine of cow) is, then, sprinkled all over the house.

### *Worshipping the Family God*

Every household cooks rice and after mixing *ghi* and honey in it, a part of it known as *bhojan* is offered to the family god. In some villages, Virshu is also celebrated as *Karu saza*. They prepare big *rots* i.e., sandwiches of wheat flour, potatoes and different kinds of pulses. These are then offered to the family god in a curious way. In a room the children stand in two lines facing each other with *dach* (an axe) or sickle in their hands. The owner of the house, sitting at the head of the two rows, rolls the sandwich between the two lines of the children and the children strike the *rot* while it is rolling. In case none of them could strike and cut it and it rolls through them, it is believed that the offering has not been accepted by the devta. They will, then, have to make amends in some other way. It is, usually, cut and after offering a few chips to the god, it is distributed among all. Food is taken only when the above rites have been performed. Before that every member of the family abstains from food.

### *Bhartha*

In the meanwhile, a *havan* is performed in the temple of the village god. *Ghi*, honey and barley mixture is offered as *ahuti* in the *havan*

*kund*. The priest performs other *puja*. *Goor*, *Kardar*, *Pujara* and other *karkuns* attend this *havan*. The god is propitiated for the successful completion of the festival. Then, the devta is taken out of the temple. After performing *hulki* and *deokhel* ritual dances, the *goor* of the devta recites *bhartha* (a complete story of the devta) in a greater detail. In some cases *bhartha* takes a lot of time. Devta Krishan Narayan or Kothi Tarapur relates whole story in Ropri in more than eight hours. He states who he (devta) is? From where has he come? What made him to leave his own place and what routes he followed? Who accompanied him, what made him to stay here? What were the troubles from which he emancipated those who were, then, living here? This is the same story related by the devta every year without any deviation. Then, he changes over to *barshoha*. After reciting its most often repeated dogmas at every festival, he comes over to describe the *varshphal*. It is, in fact, his share of the proceedings he received in the annual conference held under Indra during winter days when he had gone to heaven for attending the annual meeting. He states what he has brought for his people for the present year. Whether there will be (as his share) good or bad crops, heavy rains or lack of it, flood or drought, diseases or epidemics both for the human beings and the cattle, the condition of the pests and fauna and flora and so on and so forth. The devta (through his *goor*) also suggests them the auspicious days for, first ploughing and harvesting the Rabi and Kharif crops.

### *Vrishabh Worship*

Birshu is also known as a festival of Vrishabh *puja* i.e., the worship of bullocks or cattle. At many places the young bullock is offered to the devta and then it is set free, after observing some rites, for breeding purpose. Instance of Vrishabh *pujan* at Bhekhli in Kulu may be quoted as an example:

Nag Devta of Sari village selects one of the calves of the village. It is brought to the temple. The *goor* of the devta recites *mantra* and applies *tilak* to its forehead. It is then, taken round the temple of the devta to the accompaniment of devta's musical instruments. The *goor* keeps on reciting *mantras* so as to cast away any bad influence (of witches and *jognis*) on it. They start for Bhekhli village. On reaching



there the calf is presented to the Bhubneshari Devi of the temple (Bhekhli Devi). Now it is the Devi's *goor* who performs the *puja* and then sets it free. No one can hurt this calf and it serves breeding purpose.

### *Zaura Floral Offering*

Bishu is marked by a peculiar form of propitiation of god on the new year day. This relates to offering of *zaura* flower. Some twenty days earlier, the house-wives take a pitcher or two, fill them half with earth and cowdung and sow barley seeds in them. The pitchers are kept in dark at the corner of the house properly covered so that sun does not approach it. Soon the seeds sprout out. Water is sprinkled everyday and children are asked to show their teeth so that the plants give out broader leaves. Due to the absence of sun the leaves turn yellow. On the Birshu day they are drawn out along with the roots; small bunches of these leaves are made and then offered to the god. The yellow tufts of young barley look very beautiful and they are stuck to the palanquins of the devta. These are, further, tucked up in the caps and over the shoulders of men and women.

### *Ploughing Ritual*

In lower hills, it is also the day of season's first ploughing. Even in higher hills although actual season of ploughing starts a little later, Birshu or any day soon after as selected by the village god, is considered to be the best day for *panah pana* i.e., to auspiciously get the ploughing started even on a small field. Before starting to plough every farmer prepares a *pindla* (a ball of kneaded flour of wheat). He lights a lamp fed with *ghi*, performs *puja* of the village god and applies *tilak* to the *pindla*. Then small pieces of this *pindla* are thrown in all directions. This is known as '*pindla shotna*'. Then, a part of it is offered to the bullocks ready for ploughing. Before sowing seeds he offers prayer:

*Jai Ann Devta, deo-devi re name pozi,  
sadhu-santa re name pozi, jiju-kamru re name pozi,  
chiru-changhare re name pozi, raj-kaja re name pozi,  
dan-dharma re name pozi.*

“Victory to you, Grain God! Grow in the name of gods and goddesses, grow in the name of saints and seers, grow in the name of pests and insects, in the name of birds and animals, in the name of rulers and reformers and in the name of alms and religion”. It is a long prayer asking the god to grant a plentiful yield, sufficient enough that the entire creation is fed with utmost satisfaction.

### *Shudhi of the House*

In some parts of these districts, the houses are guarded against all ill-omens and evil spirits by performing another ritual on this day. Every household prepares a *satrewri* i.e., a twine of *baggarr* grass (which is considered very auspicious, because the *baggarr* is believed to be the hair of Sita, the consort of Rama). It must be long enough to go round the whole building. *Brah* (rhododendron) flowers and mustard seeds tied on small pieces of cloth are attached to it. It is, then, worshipped by offering *dhoop* and *ghi*-fed lamp. Before the night falls and when all members of the family and cattle are inside the house, this twine is hung round the whole house so that the complete building is covered by it through the outer walls. The belief is that the house has been secured from all misfortunes and evils for the whole year. Small twines of *baggarr* grass and flower are also hung at every door of the house. This is an oblation to the house god.

## 2. Salahar

Soon after Birshu, another very important festival is held on the first Monday or Thursday of the light half of Baishakh. It is known as Salahar involving a number of rituals.

### *Mountain Worship*

Early in the morning, when it is still dark, the *goor*, *pujara* and *kardar* go to hill top with a *chhelu* (kid). There, first of all, they cook rice, mix it with *ghi*, make some lamps out of kneaded wheat flour and prepare two *patris*. Two flat stones are arranged. Some *bhojan* i.e., cooked rice with *ghi* is placed over them alongwith lamps fed with *ghi*. The same is offered to the *jogni* and *jagnah*. As soon as

crows swallow the *bhojan* from the *patris* placed at some distance, it is considered that they (i.e., *jogni* and *jagnah*) have accepted it. Although the offering is made in the name of *jogni* and *jagnah*, in fact, it is the worship of mountain, because *jogni* is the goddess and *jagnah* the god of mountains. This part of the Salahar festival is connected with the pastoral life of the hill people where cattle and sheep breeding is a part of their subsistence.

### *Worship of Mother Earth*

After performing *puja* of *jogni* and *jagnah*, they return to the village. A part of the *bhojan*, already kept sacredly, is offered to the village god. Then, by blowing *ransingha* and *kahal* (trumpets) completion of *jogni-jagnah puja* is announced to all in the villages. The moment they hear the blows of trumpets the eldest woman of every household, at once, starts to her barley field carrying with her *bhungri* (small balls of kneaded wheat flour), *goshtu* (burning dry cowdung), a sickle and an empty *kilta* (a big basket on her back).

On reaching her field, she, first of all performs the worship of Goddess Earth. Although little known to the people by its name and existence, it is, in fact, worship of Vasundhara, as is apparent from the way of *puja* that every woman performs in her field. Waving her one hand with *goshtu* in the air, she throws pieces of *bhungri* with her second hand, all over the field of barley, praying at the same time:

*'Jayakar Dharti mata, teri khoni khauti khai,  
Ann dei, dhan dei,  
Shaddar dei, phara dei,  
Teri jau, gehun ri seri,  
Kothri darthe bhori keri.*

“Victory to the Mother Earth. I worship thee. We live on what you produce. Give us foodgrain, give us wealth in plenty and enough. Fill our vessels with wheat and barley.”

After offering the prayer she, for the first time after a long spell of winter which is a dormant period for agriculture, applies her sickle to the young and as yet unripe barley plants, and brings a few saplings full of ears of young barley in her *kilta*.

### *Worship of Domestic God*

Reaching home she prays the *grih devta* by *bhungri* and *goshtu*. Ears of barley are offered to the god. Then, barley ears are stuck, with cowdung, to every door of the house, *kothris* and *darthas* i.e., wooden vessels meant for storing grain. The barley ears are then offered to village devta, *Than*, *Patal*, *Vir* and *Devi*.

From morning upto this stage of festival, every member of the family keeps fast. After performing *puja* and other ceremonies, some barley ears are mixed with rice and the rice is finally cooked. A small part of the cooked rice and barley ears is placed in a plate. *Ghi* is mixed in it and then it is offered to the devta. Before taking this cooked rice every member will say '*aglu dei*'. To this all will say '*aglu bhi khai*'. First part of it indicates a request to the god that we may meet together next year and perform the *puja* again. The second part is as if a reply from the god that 'you will take it next year too.'

### **3. Kahika**

After Baishakh the next important month is Sawan. It is popular for its Kahika festivals. Although Kahikas are held even in Jeth or Bhadon in certain cases, yet the actual days of Kahika are in Sawan. No devta celebrates Kahika every year. It is celebrated after three years by a few devtas. There are many where it is celebrated after five, seven or nine years. People try to postpone it because it involves heavy expenditure and a lot of formalities, but once the devta has shown its desire, it has to be performed sooner or later. It is the case where the Kahikas are celebrated on irregular intervals. There are, however, devtas in whose case the periodicity is defined and Kahika must take place after the lapse of requisite number of years, even if the people may or may not like to celebrate it.

Kahika attracts gathering more than a fair and in importance it is only next to Kulu Dussehra and Mandi Shivratri, but for all purposes, it is a religious performance and is considered as a great *yajna*. Certainly, every devta celebrates Kahika after lapse of some specific years, yet every year some Kahikas can be seen at one place or the other and almost same rituals are performed at each Kahika whether celebrated in Kulu or Mandi district.

*Kahika Kharerna*

Etymologically, Kahika is derived from Sanskrit word '*kashtika*' meaning branches. Four *kashtikas* i.e., branches of *kelo* (deodar) tree are pitched up in the form of a square. In most cases, these are not branches, but are complete young trees about five metres high. Some inhibitions are particularly attributed to their installation in the ground before the temple. For example, while they are cut, they must not fall down. People will hold them as they were. While bringing them to the requisite place their tops must not touch the earth. In case the top of any of them does touch the ground, it is considered most ominous and either the devta or the persons carrying them will suffer. So a *chhalit* (sacrifice of a kid) must be performed if such an exigency arises. They must be brought in their standing position. Further, the persons concerned must cut them with empty stomach. That is, they keep fast and abstain from any sort of food.

In fact, different taboos and rituals are performed at different places while selecting and cutting the branches for the festival. For example, in the Kahika of Phungni Devi of Hurang, some mystical rites form a very interesting part of the ceremony. The duty of cutting the poles or branches is entrusted to five persons of the village who are selected every time by the Devi herself. They clean their houses properly and wash their clothes a day before the function. On the day they keep fast and do not take any thing not even water. Early in the morning the *karkuns* of the Devi and many from the surrounding villages gather before the shrine of the Devi. A procession is formed headed by musicians, trumpeters and drummers followed by *kardar*, *pujara*, *kathiala*, *goors* and the five selected persons and the general public. The journey starts to the forest close by. On the way *sattu* i.e., flour of parched barley and mustard seed are scattered in the air so as to drive away any ghost or mischievous spirit which may join the procession. On reaching the forest, a deodar tree is selected by the Devi through the *goor* who, at once, ascends it with the *dhangiar* (censer of incense) in his hands. He is followed by the five persons entrusted with the duty. They carry with them a sheep which they sacrifice on the tree among the branches. They drop the carcass, at once, to the ground so that, it is believed, the demons, ghosts, *jognis* and witches which may be thronging round shall seize upon it and

leave the tree without infection. Then they quickly cut branches of the tree with their axes and hold them above and do not allow them to fall to the ground. They carefully bring them down to the ground and placing them on their shoulders the procession starts the return journey throwing *sattu*, mustard seeds and *bhekhal* as before. All come dancing and waving branches of tree, *bhekhal* bush, sticks and brandishing axes and swords. The *goors* play with *kataras* (daggers) in their hands. When they reach the temple, the Nar takes the branches for installing the *Kahika*.

The four branches are pitched in a way that they form a square of about five metres (in old days five yards). They are tied at the top with a piece of cloth forming a canopy or a tabernacle. This is known as '*kahika kharerna*' i.e., to install or pitch the *kahika*. A goat is sacrificed as soon as the *kahika* is erected. A sacred square is marked out on the ground inside the *kahika* with medial and diagonal lines with wheat flour. One *handi* (a small earthen pot) and a *tokra* (basket) full of grains are placed under the *kahika* over the square so formed. An earthen lamp fed with *ghi* is placed over the grains of *tokra*. Some wooden images prepared for the occasion are placed at the intersection of the diagonal lines. All the devtas, their *goors*, *pujaris* and *kardars* sit round the *kahika*.

### '*Chhidra Yagya*'

Nar plays a prominent roll in the *kahika* ceremony. Nar is, in fact, a cast which is considered lower than the Kanets and higher than the Kolis of this area. Whenever and wherever a *kahika* is to be organised a Nar family is invariably invited for conducting the requisite rituals. Nar keeps fast for the whole day. He abstains from food, but he is given milk at the expense of the devta or devi. He is, invariably, accompanied by his wife, or, if he is unmarried, by a woman of his caste. The presiding devta provides them with new dresses. Every other devta participating in the *kahika* gives one turban and some cash to the Nar and a *dupatta* to the Naran (Nar woman). Soon, the priest of the devta performs *Shanti yagya* under the *kahika*. He throws grains and fruits of various kinds, sacred grass, *ghi* and honey into the fire, while the Nar, Naran, other members of his family and the devtas and their *goors* get up and dance round the *kahika*. After

dancing for a while, they all sit down round the *kahika* as before. The Nar, then, starts the all important ritual of the *kahika* known as *Chhidra*. In addition to devta-men, others present in the function go close to the *kahika* to share the *chhidra* ceremony. Literally, *chhidra* means 'release', or 'freedom from' and here, the term is used for release from an oath, or purification from an infringement of social rules or from ceremonial pollution.

Another word for *chhidra* is '*chhol bhorna*'. This elucidates the function of the *chhidra*. '*Chhol*' is from Sanskrit word '*kshal*' which means to wash way, to clean, to cleanse or to purify. So *chhol* or *chhidra* is a ceremony which washes away all sorts of sins of the man and the devta. By doing this ceremony, all kinds of *pap* (sins) are washed away and all sins are, in turn, taken by the Nar himself. Nar secures salvation to all by accepting their sins for himself. All sins go to him.

For *chhidra* purposes, a heap of barley-grains is poured at one place under the *kahika*. Leaves of *bhekhhal* shrub are mixed with the barley. The Nar, sometimes keeps them in a basket by his side. He first of all, cleans the devtas present in the *kahika* and then their men (*karkuns*) are freed from their sins. Nar chants *mantras*, takes handful of barley and *bhekhhal* and pours them into the stretched and open hands of all persons sitting in a circle round him. When he completes full circle he throws barley and *bhekhhal* over other gatherings. Everybody wants to get these grains and leaves of *bhekhhal*. This gives them salvation from their own bad acts, omissions and commissions. These barley grains and *bhekhhal*, further, relieve them from all physical and mental worries. Those who are relieved move away while more others press round the Nar for absolution, each offering a copper or silver coin and a few grains of barley in his hands. The Nar, in turn, recites his *chhidra mantras* and throws barley and *bhekhhal* over their hands and heads, relieving them of all kinds of sins. One may have, accidently, killed a cow or a monkey or a cat and may be haunted by their spirits, a second may be afflicted by illness due to his misdeeds, some one's house may have been haunted by ghosts, witches and other evil spirits, another may have missed worship of the god or forgotten his promise of *bhath* and may be suffering due to these omissions and so on and so forth. The individual ills are many, and even when a person may be conscious

of no specific peril or affliction, there are always the intangible powers of evil which, however, unseen around every human being await the chance to bring misfortune. And so the remitter of the sins some times absolves the worshippers from faults in general and sometimes from a definite incubus. But whatever he does, he always throws leaves of *bhekhhal* and grains of barley as he pronounces the absolution:

*Pap-kukarm kerira hola ta chhidra hoasa,  
dosh-khot keruda hola ta chhidra hoasa,  
goru-gobha be dukhderia hola ta chhidra hoasa,  
Gow-bauchhu, kute, bille marede hole ta chhidra hoasa,  
ghor-dhis hoiri holi tuinra bhi chhidra hoasa,  
aib-burai kamoiri holi ta chhidra hoasa,  
jhuthi kasam khairi holi ta chhidra hoasa.*

In this way, the Nar recites a long mandate—"If one has committed sin or evil he is hereby exonerated. If one has committed some sin of killing cow, calf, dog, cat, he is hereby freed, If one is guilty of jealousy, hatred, rage and vice, or one has taken a false oath, he is hereby relieved of his sins."

When two persons on inimical terms have, secretly, prayed to the god in a mysterious way to cause injury to the other known as '*nihase dene*', and subsequently want to resume their cordial relations, *chhidra* is performed in a little different way. A long piece of *drub* grass is brought by one of them. It is held by the one at one end and by the other at the other end. The Nar reads out his *mantras* and at the end asks them to take oath that if so and so has injured so and so (each pronouncing the name of the other) it is their *chhidra* and each hereby begs his pardon. When they speak so the Nar throws barley and *bhekhhal* over them and cuts the grass in the middle. A goat is, invariably, sacrificed in such a case. A part of it goes to the Nar.

When the Nar takes all the sins over his head—the sins of the devta, *goor*, *pujara*, *kardar*, musicians and all others—he will die. Yes, death is the 'be-all and end-all'. Of course, that will not be the end of Nar's life. He will be given a new life by the Deo Brahma i.e., the deva, free from all sins.

When the *chhidra* is over, all the devtas perform dance round the *kahika*. There is a precedence in dance. Usually, *Gahri* devta



(where he is present, although there is a general belief that no *kahika* can be performed without a *Gahri devta*) leads the procession. He is followed by his *goor* and then his *pujara*. He is followed by the host devta, his *goor* and his *pujara* and so on, others following by way of seniority so as to complete the circle. Nar does not join the row, He and his wife remain inside the circle. Then the Nar puts on the sacred thread '*yagyopavit*' and he calls names to every body present. He abuses devta, his men and all others. He and the Naran speak obscene, behave obscene. Naran cuts jokes with the devta-men. For a while obscenity with them is rampant both by speech and action. They perform their obscene action with each devta, *goor*, *pujara* and others. In this way the procession dances seven times round the *kahika*.

### *Death and Rebirth of the Nar*

Then starts the next session. All the devtas, *goors*, *pujaras* and many others gather under and round the *kahika* for the last rite of the day which relates to the death and rebirth of the Nar. Different rites are observed in different *kahikas*. Usually, the Nar sits in the centre of the *kahika* under the cloth just on the spot where *havan* was performed. He is, surrounded by all *goors* and devtas. The music is at its peak. The musicians, drummers and others beat dozens of *dhols*, *nagaras*, *dhrags*, *dholaks*, *dhonsus* (all drums), play *kahals*, *karnals*, *bhotu kahals*, *ransinghas* and *shehnais*. The crowd rushing towards the centre are pushed back by throwing *sattu* over their faces. At this moment the *goors* bear the wildest form ever seen. The frenzy of the *goors* grow more and more violent. They are busy not only in getting the Nar dead, but are also protecting the *hars* i.e., the people of the devtas from the attack of *jognis*, ghosts, demons, witches and other cruel spirits which make the best of their time at such an occasion.

While all *goors* are, thus, jumping and tumbling with *kataras* (swords), *shangals* (chains) and *ghondi-dhorachh* in their hands, the face of the Nar is covered by a piece of cloth, the *malegha goor* recites the *mantras* over some rice and mustard seeds and puts them into the mouth of the Nar. A one rupee coin is also put into his mouth. He, then, shoots one arrow in the air and another one over the head of the Nar, making him insensible and senseless. He is known

to be dead. He is taken by two men on their backs each holding his left and right hands. Another person holds his legs. Three yards of cloth is put on his body as a shroud. The *malegha goor* announces the death of the Nar by holding high in the air and ringing the *ghondi-dhorachh*. In some cases the Nar is laid on a bier and a funeral shroud wrapped round him while the musicians play the music for the dead. Four men carry the corpse.

The whole procession then moves round the temple or in the *soh* making five or seven rounds. Every body is dancing, the wife of the Nar some times dances, some times cuts jokes with the *goors*, *pujaras* or any body in the procession. Other members of the family of the Nar present the best of their obscene behaviour. They even display objects prepared out of wood and gourd depicting sex. Holding high in their hands, the objects are exhibited all through the function.

After the requisite number of rounds, the procession returns to the *kahika* spot. The Nar is brought beneath the *kahika* and devtas and goors surround him, The same scene as we saw when making the Nar dead, is repeated. It is the test of the *goors* and devtas to make him alive again. They recite *mantras*, throw rice and mustard seeds in all direction and fight hard to restore him to his senses. And, after, a long struggle the Nar comes to his senses. The *kahika* is at once thrown down and the procession leaves for *hulki* and *deokhel* with which the function comes to an end.

*Kahika* is, certainly, a remnant of *Narmedha yajna* of Vedic and *Puranic* age. It contains all the elements of *Narmedha yajna*. The Nar is sacrificed and then brought back to life. According to a legend Narayan once committed so grievous a sin that he was smitten with leprosy. To get rid of it he was advised to perform a *Narmedha yajna*. But every time he tried to perform the *yajna*, the *asuras* (devils) would come and disturb the whole proceedings. Being helpless, he remembered Vishnu who appeared and told him that in case one of the two couples of Nars living in heaven could come down and perform the *yajna*, it could be successful. Narayan himself went to *Indraloka* and found Chitru and Pavitru two Nars living with their wives Chahi and Chakari. But when Narayan reached their, they were not in their house. He waited and waited but they did not come. Narayan became impatient and in the heat of anxiety, he set their house on fire. Observing the smoke coming out of their house,

the Nars and Narans rushed to the spot and finding their house on fire they began to weep bitterly. They said “We can rebuilt the house, no doubt, but what about our *damru* and *khartal* (the two musical instruments) by playing which we used to get *greth bhar* (equal to the length between stretched forefinger and the thumb) gold every time we play with them before Indra Devta.” Just then the Narayan appeared before them and told he had kept back the *damru* and the *khartal* and can give them provided one of the couples could come down on the earth and help him in performing the Narmedha *yajna*. They agreed provided Indra allowed them. On the request by Narayan, Indra allowed one of the couples to help Narayan in the matter.

Nar and Naran came down. For purpose of *yajna* they formed a tabernacle of wood on their four little fingers by sitting at a distance. The *asuras* tried their best to disturb the *yajna*, but were helpless because the tabernacle was not based on the ground and they could not disturb the structure in the air. So Narayan got the Narmedha *yajna* done and he was cured of the leprosy except his little finger. To prevent this malady from spreading, periodical cleansing is done at the *kahika*.

The little finger could not get relief because after the completion of the *yajna*, although Narayan gave them a lot of *dan* (gift), yet forgot to give them *dori* (read thread) and *lugri* (a country fermented liquor). Narayan was satisfied with the treatment, but his men were anxious to keep the Nar and the Naran on the earth so that their help could be obtained as and when need be. So they resorted to an obnoxious method. Oil was a taboo to the Nar families. Narayan’s men poured oil over the Nar and Naran when they were just to fly to the *Indraloka* and consequently they could not go back to heaven and remained here to release the Narayan and his people periodically from their sins. Every time the *kahika* is held, *dori* forms an essential part of the *kahika* and the Nar and Naran are given strong dose of liquor to drink.

#### 4. Dagwans

The fourteenth day of the dark half of the month of Bhadon and the next day of conjunction, that is, the day of Amavas is known by

different names in the hills, like *Dagwans*, *Dagyali ri rat* and *Daini ra saza* etc. It is a general belief that these two days of the year (particularly the Amavas day) are meant for *dains* or *dags* i.e., witches, when they come down from their traditional abode *Ghogar Dhar* and wander here and there in search of their victims. Even a sight of them is considered unlucky. They are believed to know some *mantras* (incantation) or *jadu* (magic) by which they can assume the form of a tiger or vulture and any attractive thing which comes into their sight is destroyed. They devour any thing they lay their hands upon. Therefore, they must be kept away from the houses. To avert this danger people go to the *goor* taking with them some rice or mustard seeds. The *goor* enchants *mantras* over these seeds and every house-owner returns to his home with these seeds. He mixes some leaves of *bhekhhal* bush and pieces of *chhorgan* stone (white hard stone) with these seeds. *Bhekhhal* is a *tantrik* thorny bush which keeps the *bhut-pretis* (ghosts and demons) and *dains* and *dags* (witches) away. The sharp edges of *chhorgan* stone are supposed to prick the skins of the *dains* and *ghosts* so that they run away from them.

Before the night falls, it is ensured that every member of the house and cattle are in the house. Then every owner of the house climb up the roof of the house and calls names to the *dains*:

*Dainie randie Ghogaru dhara be ja,  
Apna ala bochhu kha,  
Apne bhai be bhari ne,  
Mhare ghore na door ja.*

“You widow witches, go to your residence at Ghogar Dhar, devour your own calves, take your brother to lift your loads and keep away from our house”. Saying this, he throws the mixture of mustard seeds, *bhekhhal* and *chhorgan* stone all over the roof, places small branches of *bhekhhal* bush and this mixture at three different places on the top of the roof, fires gun (where available) and comes down immediately. Then, he pastes this mixture at the lintel of each door of the house with the help of cowdung. Further, the mixture is thrown at every nook and corner of every room. Then *puja* of gods is performed and offering of *siddu's* (small balls of kneaded wheat flour cooked in boiling water) with *ghi* is made to the devta.

It is believed that on the third day i.e., on the night of the sixteenth Bhadon, all the devtas congregate at Dhar Kambogir in Mandi district. The four *jognis* also come there from four sides i.e., east, west, south and north and a battle starts between the devtas and the *jognis*, until one party defeats the other. If the devtas win, the land yields a good harvest that year, but the victory of the *jognis* is calculated to bring famine.

## 5. Shoiri or Sair

Shoiri or Sair is essentially an agricultural festival. It is celebrated on the first of Asuj, when the farmers get ready for harvesting *shoir* i.e., kharif crop. It is celebrated in different ways at different parts of Himachal Pradesh.

In Mandi and Bilaspur districts, barber of the village gets up early in the morning and goes from house to house with a basket in his hand containing a *galgal* (a citrus fruit), flowers, a lamp fed with *ghi*, some vermilion and paddy shoots and turf. He announces the arrival of the auspicious day. Men, women and children bow to that basket which presents the emblem of the fruits of the harvest about to be reaped. They offer grains to the barber and present some coins in the basket. People wear best of their clothes. Special dishes are prepared and relished on that day. This also makes the termination of rainy season. In some cases, barber also carries with him a mirror and shows well-to-do people their faces in it. They offer him some cash.

In most of Kulu district and adjoining parts of Mandi district, Shoiri is celebrated in another way. Children of the village get up early in the morning, collect flowers of different kinds and taking them in their hands, they go from house to house. They offer the flower to every member of each house saying Nameste. In return, every household gives each of them some coins and walnuts. The children complete the visit of all houses of the village before sun rise. It is, now, the turn of the elders. They offer *dub*-grass, flowers (especially *losar* flower which is brought from higher hills where it grows) to each other and they exchange with one another salutations 'Ram Ram', 'Nameste' and 'Dhalki'. While doing so the younger of the two of both sexes bow to their elders. This is called '*juba dena*' or '*juba bandna*' and continues throughout the day. Early in the

morning the first *jub* is offered to the *chulh* (hearth) and *grih-devta* by the eldest woman of the family.

Rice is cooked. It is mixed with *ghi* and honey and the first part of it is offered to the family god, and then all enjoy it. This is considered a very important day and every one tries to remain in the house on that day.

## 6. Magha Ra Saza (Maghi)

Magh is the coldest month in the hills. Winter, at this time, is at its peak. This is also comparatively idle month when fields need little tending and agriculture virtually comes to a stand still. Particularly, when there is snow people greet the onset of winter with joyous celebrations throughout the month. The whole month of Magh is, therefore, dedicated to *agni-puja* i.e., worship of fire. Although, no worship is made as such in the name of Agni Devta, yet the way in which different ceremonies are performed during the whole month, makes fire-worship apparently clear.

### *Masant*

Lohri, in the hills, is confined to cities and towns only and its celebration is in no way different from that in the plains. Children sing songs at the door of each house, collect *khichri* and enjoy themselves on the day of Lohri. People of the towns and cities specially prepare *khichri* (rice and urd pulse cooked together) and relish it with *ghi*. They also distribute *rewris*.

In villages, the night of Lohri is known as Masant 'last day of the month' and is a part of Maghi celebration. It is not celebrated as an independent festival.

### *Madraison Puja*

A day earlier, every house and its surroundings are properly cleaned and decorated. Cowdung mixed clay coating is given to the floor and the walls. Then three rough and crude figures are made with this cowdung and clay mixture on the *jonla* i.e., the central beam in the main room. These figures are, usually, three in number—two of them

shown coming into the house with their heads facing inner side and one going out facing the outer door. They are known as *Madraisan* and are so roughly sketched that in ordinary parlance when people see someone very clumsy and lethargic, he is sarcastically addressed as '*Madraison zenba*' i.e., how like a *Madraisan*. A circle showing the head, a dot inside it depicting mouth, a line at one side showing neck and a rectangle below it showing the body, is all that constitutes the *Madraisan*. Two other circles are also drawn near them—one representing the pitcher of *lugri* (country fermented liquor) and the other *kundhri* (earthen pot of *ghi*.)

On the night of Masant these *Madraisans* are offered a peculiar worship. Special food comprising of *bhalle*, *babru* and *bhaturu* is prepared. Before the members of the family take meals, this special food is first offered to the roughly made *Madraisans* on the *jonla*. First they are worshipped with *dhoop* and *dhangiarra*. They are addressed as 'Narayan' and *Varsha re pahune* i.e., guest of the year. Then a morsel of the special food is actually put into the so-called mouth of each of the three figures. Then, *ghi* is sprinkled over the *kundhri* and *lugri* over the figure of pitcher. While making such offer, the owner of the house requests them to come year after year and bless him with prosperity and various gifts. When the *puja* has been performed, the members of the household take their meals. After taking meals, they make *shauli* (burning sticks of devdar and kail wood) and *bhalle* and *babru* etc. and place them on the outer door or steps leading to the house. They then perform *puja* and call loudly:

*Hui dialie hui,  
Mhare phara-n bher bhokri sui,  
Hore re phara-n kuti sui.*

“Welcome for the Diwali. Give us goats and sheep and bitches to others”. Soon after, the male members of each house come out of their houses, every one carrying a *masaula* i.e., bunch of burning sticks. These lighted torches are shown at every house, presenting a wonderful feast of torches. Then, with the *masaulas* in their hands they proceed to the village common land where they had already collected woods and stored them in huge pile.

### *Ghiana Puja*

On reaching the place, all of them surround the pile of wood with torches in their hands. Encircling the heap of wood, thus, the *goor* of the village god chants *mantras* and all others offer worship in different ways. The most common prayer is:

*He su mangal, kesu hath*  
*He su mangal, Raja hath*  
*He su mangal, Riyaya hath*  
*He su mangal, sewak hath*  
*He su mangal, dharti hath*  
*He su mangal, devi hath*  
*He su mangal, deo hath*  
*He su mangal, kesu hath.*

“Oh gracious god, aid the fruits of the earth, of the Raja, of the subjects, of the servants of the state, of the land, of the goddess and the god.” The moment the *puja* is over, the large heap of the wood is lit with the *masaulas* by all of them from all sides. When the pile of the wood catches fire, all *masaulas* are thrown over it. Soon a large *ghiana* (bonfire) is made. Its flames and fumes run high in the sky. All of them begin dancing around the *ghiana*. While dancing, they sing most indecent songs. Sometimes, they are most obscene. After performing some rounds of the bonfire they light new *masaulas* which they had brought with them and leaving the bonfire burning, they start for a round of the village with torches in their hands. While making the round of the village, they keep on singing the indecent and obscene songs. The belief behind such songs and dances is that *asuras* (demons, witches and ghosts) are driven away from the surroundings of the village. These obscene songs are known as *bandhu* and *jihru*. Women do not take part in such songs and dances. They even do not hear the songs and keep sitting in their houses separately enjoying themselves with beautiful songs bereft of any obscenity.

### *Ghiana Shaman*

After completing the round of the village, they return to the *ghiana*. Obscene songs and dances are resumed. Singing *bandhu* and *jihru*, they dance in circle around the bonfire. Holding hands of each other



in the circle, each performer of the dance tries to throw the other to the *ghiana*. They continue dragging each other towards the inside and outside till one gets exhausted and lets go, sending all the rest sprawling. The dance continues till the rising of *Bhianu Tara* (morning star). At this stage comes the most exciting part of the ceremony. It relates to '*ghiana shaman*' i.e., the rite of extinction of bonfire. By this time, the whole stock of wood has turned into a huge pile of burning coals. The *goor* of the devta brings oil, vermilion, *mauli*, *akshat* and mustard seed in a *thali*. All present stand in circle around the bonfire while at one side of the *ghiana* the *goor* chants *mantras*, performs worship of the fire and throws the aforesaid articles into the bonfire. Simultaneously, he himself jumps over the heap of the burning charcoals. Sensing his indication, all others jump over the fire tossing away the charcoals. They jump from this side to that one scattering the charcoals all over the ground. For a while, there is complete chaos, all jumping, dancing over the fire and throwing away the fire and charcoals with their feet. This continues till the fire is completely extinguished. This extinction of fire is essential, otherwise the village will be infested with several diseases particularly with *khaji* i.e. the skin disease.

It is considered that the *juthi-ag* (polluted fire) has been subdued. With this the old troubles and difficulties of the old year are believed to have been put to end and the new year will start with new hopes and aspirations. The ceremonies do not end here. The *goor* or an old man goes to a nearby house and begs fire from the owner of the house. He brings fire and with it a new bonfire is made which is kept burning for atleast seven days when *satdiala* 'seventh day of the *diali*' is celebrated. In some villages it is kept burning upto the last day of Magh month which is celebrated as *Tarayan Saza*.

Next day i.e., the first of Magh is celebrated as *Magha-ra-saza*. Like Shoiri, the children visit every household early in the morning. This time they offer *dub*-grass or barley plants instead of flowers as the latter are not available during winter. The children are given coins and nuts. The elder persons offer *dub* or barley plants to each other wishing progress and prosperity.

## 7. Shivratri

Shivratri festival has a special significance in the social, religious

and cultural life of the people of Himachal Pradesh. Although, a week long State level fair is organised in Mandi town, the real charm of the Shivratri lies in the villages where it is celebrated in a manner quite different from that prevailing in the plains. The festival is, generally, held on the Krishna Chaturdashi i.e., the fourteenth day of the waning moon of Phalgun, but the actual preparations start much earlier.

Worship of Shiva in temples begins a week earlier. Devotional songs are sung and *katha* is recited during day and night. Every house and its surroundings are properly cleaned and decorated. People get themselves busy in collecting commodities for the celebration of Shivratri and material for preparing the *mandap*. On the day of Shivratri, people take bath early in the morning, keep fast the whole day and take meals only late in the evening.

### *Shiva Worship*

At one corner of the main room a beautiful *mandap* is drawn with wheat flour and different colours. The pictures of Shiva and Parvati are drawn or their pictures duly framed are placed on the walls near the *mandap* (a place prepared for *puja*). A heap of rice is raised in the centre of the *mandap*. A wild citrus fruit *galgal* (or *kapu*) representing Shivling is placed over it and a garland made of seven, nine, eleven or seventeen (depending upon the height of the room and keeping odd number) *galgal* is hung from the ceiling to the heap of the rice. Two rough idols, one made of the soil of one's own field and the other that of cowdung, are also placed on either side of the heap of rice. These represent Gauri and Ganesh. This forms the complete family of Shiva (Shiva, Parvati and Ganesh). Valuable ornaments of the household are also placed round them.

These are, further, surrounded by a number of rough-shaped goats and rams of kneaded wheat flour. These are considered to be the offerings to the Shiva. Delicacies cooked for the occasion such as *bhalle*, *babroos* etc. are also placed all around the *mandap* which, further, is surrounded by a number of earthen lamps fed with *ghi*. Besides, three massive wheat breads called *rot*, each weighing about two to nine kilograms are placed by the side of the walls facing the *mandap* over *paza* tree leaves. These are decorated with red vermilion.

One of these is for Shiva, the second is for Parvati and Ganesh while the third is meant for the family god. In certain households a goat is also sacrificed in the name of Lord Shiva, and while the head of the goat is placed by the side of the *mandap*, the rest of the meat is cooked for the meals.

Then starts the *puja*. An earthen lamp is lighted in which a lot of mustard oil and a big wick prepared from cotton yarn are put into it. It is the duty of the household to see that the light from this earthen lamp is not put out before the entire *puja* of Lord Shiva is complete. They believe that Shiva himself visits every house of his devotees and his presence is made known by this lamp which shoots its flame much higher than before as soon as the Lord comes to the specific house. In case the lamp extinguishes before the *puja* is performed, it is considered a bad omen and the household has to sacrifice a goat to set aside the evil effects.

After the *puja*, the members of the family break their fast and take food cooked for the occasion. Then they visit each others house. In the morning, the objects made of wheat flour and earth are buried at a solitary place so that no body walks over them at any stage later on. The rice used for the *mandap* is given to Naths, while the garlands and *puja* leaves are hung outside the house.

In the foregoing pages some of the important rituals and traditions relating to them prevailing in the hills have been described. Their performance may differ from place to place. However, most common practice of these rituals has been given. These rituals have been kept alive by the *goors* of the devtas and the Brahman priests. It is sure, the main language in which these religious rites are conducted is kept secret from the knowledge of the general public. The knowledge of *mantras* is mainly confined to the *goors* and priests and the procedure is extremely technical so that any error in form, however, minute may destroy the efficacy of the ceremony. Even the best rituals can become boring, but the fact stands that they are connected with religion where a renewal of emotions and faith comes natural to the believer and this makes them interesting. The birth-death rituals may not be very different from those prevailing in other parts of the country. However, the rituals relating to village gods are certainly peculiar to these hills.

*Thoda: A Ritualistic and  
Romantic Folk Play*

According to a legendary belief prevailing in Himachal Pradesh, the Kauravas of the Mahabharata were not 100 brothers. They were 60 and, hence, their descendants are now called *Shathas* i.e., of the sixty. But the Pandavas were five, as in the epic, and their followers are known as *Pathas* or *Pashas* i.e., of the five. The Shathas and the Pathas are, again, traditionally the two clans of the great pre-Aryan Khashas who, according to our old scriptures, were the sons of Rishi Kashyapa. Kashyapa had two wives—Krodhavasa and Khasa. The former is known as the ancestor of Pishachas and the latter is the mother of Khashas. The Khashas were warriors of commendable fame and were active participants in the Mahabharata battle. According to the Sabhaparva, they were the rulers of an area around Shailoda river and they offered ‘*piplik*’ gold to Yudhistira at his Rajsuya *yajna*.

But in the great war they fought on the side of Kauravas against their counterparts who, under the leadership of Ghatotkacha, were the allies of the Pandavas. Ghatotkacha was Bhima’s son by Hadimba, a demoness who had loved him during his sojourn in the forests. Hadimba is now the grand-mother of all the gods of Kulu valley and the chief goddess of Kulu Dussehra. She has her temple at Dhungari near Manali in Kulu. Now, whether the Shathas are the descendants of Kauravas and the Pathas of the Pandavas, or whether the Shathas is the clan of Khashas who fought on the side of the Kauravas and

the Pathas are the descendants of Ghatotkacha, the fact remains that the Shathas and the Pathas are directly concerned with the great war of the Mahabharata and they have, during these centuries, kept up their traditions of chivalry through their annual traditional warfare, an interesting folk-play called 'Thoda'.

The performance of Thoda is most interesting and thrilling from the start to the end. The play does not start on any sophisticated, well-set stage or platform. It is played on an open ground. The Shathas and the Pathas invite one another every year, starting from Bishu i.e., Baisakhi fair celebrating on the first of Baisakh to the end of Shravana. The start of Thoda play on the first of Baisakh has another legend behind it which corroborates the belief that the Khashas are directly concerned with the great war of the Mahabharata and their Thoda play is reminiscent of the fabulous account of dynastic struggle and great civil war. According to their belief, when after a long and peaceful reign, as a result of their great victory at Kurukshetra, Yudhistira and his brothers abdicated the throne and set out for the Himalayas to enter the blissful city of gods, they told the Khashas of this area that they would return the next Chaitra, i.e., the first month of the next year.

### **Their Faith**

But they never came. The Khashas however, pin their faith on the return of Pandavas in Chaitra and so, they never utter the name of the first month i.e., Chaitra. It is the village musician Turi, and his wife Turan, who go on singing from house to house and village to village and announcing "*panj Pandu ailo Chaitra mahina*" (It is the month of Chaitra when, according to their promise, the Pandavas are to return to Hastinapura through this place). The Khashas wait for the whole Chaitra month in chanting the folk Mahabharata known as Pandavain, and when the Pandavas do not come they set for their traditional Thoda play on the first of Baisakh.

The fight and the play start with an invitation. At one place it is the Shathas who invite the Pathas for the fight and the play, and at another the Pathas invite the Shathas for the Thoda. Suppose the Pathas are to invite the Shathas, a few young men of the Pathas will go to the '*Baoli*' or the water spring of the Shathas village and cover

it with thorny shrubs and hide themselves, a few yards away, among the trees to find the reaction of the Shathas. Any man, boy, girl or woman first going to the *baoli* and finding it “bound” will know the reason, and before clearing it and drawing the water will go back to the village and inform the village head of the happening. The village headman himself taking a few youngmen with him, goes to the spring and accepts the challenge by a loud and long call “*lohu ra bhukha Kalpou Khashia aila lerne khe Patha de.*”

The bloodsucker Kalpou Khashia, the name of Khashia clan accepts the challenge for the fight with the Pathas on such and such date and at such and such place. The young Pathas hiding among the trees will hear the call, go back to their village and inform their village head of the acceptance of the challenge by the Shathas.

Preparation for the play and the fight starts in the traditional way in both villages. As winter ends, the youth get their weapons ready—*farshas* (axes), *gandasas* (hatchets), *dangras* (big axes), *trars* (swords), *dhalas* (shields), guns, arrows and bows. Of course, all are not to be used, except in emergency, but they are to show the strength of their armour. On the appointed day the Shathas, who have been invited, start from their village with full pomp and each carrying at least one weapon in his hand. If someone has no weapon, he should have at least a big club with him. To the sounds of drums and trumpets, and with occasional mock firing and brandishing of their weapons, they proceed to the Pathas village.

### **Path Blocked**

On the other side, the Pathas are also ready with equal force to meet the onslaught. They have got the arena for the fight and the play prepared. The arena is called ‘*jubbar*’ (from Sanskrit ‘*durva*’). On reaching the arena, the Shathas are not allowed free access to the *jubbar*. Their path is obstructed. They force their way into the arena, but the Pathas do not allow them to enter. A great struggle ensues in which each party tries to show its strength and energy. This sometimes results in an actual fight. But such occasions are rare. Anyway, whether or not the Shathas are strong, either they force their entry or else they are finally allowed to enter the arena. This is because the actual play has to take place. The whole arena looks like a battle-

ground with every one dancing, jumping, screaming, singing, crying, shouting and pushing the other ahead. This goes on for some time, and when it is over each party occupies either side of the *jubbar* for further play to start. The audience, consisting particularly of women and children, sits all round and on the high edge of the *jubbar*.

An the play starts. A young man from the Shatha side enters the *jubbar* with an arrow in one hand and a bow in the other. He kisses his bow and arrow, invokes his family god, the great Vijat, and challenges the opponents. One man from the opposite side advances to the centre of the arena. He praises the *jubbar*, salutes the Thoda and prays to his family goddess of 60 hands to bless him with success. The musicians sitting on one side of the *jubbar* play their instruments, sound the drums and blow the trumpets. The two begin to dance majestically. They come close to each other and there are crisp dialogues. Each calls himself a lion, a high caste Khasha Rajput capable of shooting down a flying kite, born to rule and submitting to none; the other a jackal, a coward, a slate of third rate quarry, incapable of shooting a sleeping dog, a slave of slaves. Each narrates stories of the brave fights of his father and forefathers, reminds the other of the previous occasion when one had defeated the other, warns the other to be careful and advises him to run for life. The dialogue starts from hero worship but is dominated by humour and satire. This is one of the most entertaining moments of the play where wit and wisdom prevail. This provokes the other Shathas and the Pathas. The youth sitting on either side of the *jubbar* cannot resist the temptations to show off their bravery and dexterity. Therefore, many others enter the arena, brandishing their bows and arrows.

The Thoda is necessarily a fight of bow and arrow. The bow is locally known as *dhanu* (Sanskrit *dhanush*) and the arrow as *shari* (Sanskrit *shar*). The bow is generally made of a local wood called *chamba*. It is, according to the height of the fighter, one-and-a-half to two metres long. The arrow is made of *nargali* or *phiral* wood. Its size is consonant with the size of the bow from one to one and-a-half metres. It is hollow from inside like bamboo. Its broader side is fixed with the string of the bow and through the hollow part of the other side is pierced a solid piece of wood measuring about 10 to 12 centimetres. This piece of wood is known as *thoda*. The *thoda* is either sharp-edged or flat. Ordinarily, the fighters use a flat-edged

*thoda*. But where there is a long standing rivalry or where the fighters are experts the *thoda* used is sharp-edged and, in that case, the *thoda* is called a *kaur* (bitter) *thoda*, as against an ordinary *thoda*.

### Costumes

The upper part of the dress of the fighters is an ordinary one, but they wear special shoes and 'trousers'. The shoes are made of *shaila* grass. The trousers have many folds from the knee down to the ankle. The *thoda* is a combat. There are many in the field. But the fight is only between two of equal strength. They fight a duel. No one will throw an arrow upon a third fighter. When they have danced and exhausted their dialogues each will ask the other to shoot his arrow first. Shooting first is considered a cowardly act. If the fight is longstanding, they do it in turns, otherwise one of them has to agree to shoot first.

There are certain agreed principles of fight. No one can strike unless the bow is stretched to full arm's length. The hind hand touching the ear. He shall always aim at the lower part of the leg below the knee. Any strike above the knee may result in an actual fight. This is considered the most inefficient part of the fighter. Shooting takes place by turns. When blood comes out through the *suthan* the fight stops. No one can take advantage of another's unpreparedness. While one aims at the other, the other keeps on dancing and swiftly moving his legs. This is the climax of the play. If the striker hits at a right place, he jumps up and declares! "I had not spared even the four-footed fast running stag. How can I spare him with the two legs? Here is a sluggish buffalow silenced for ever."

But he is not actually silenced. It is his turn now. He takes up his position and sends his arrow flying. If he too is successful he celebrates the victory. He, too, quibbles. "A jackal had trespassed into the *jubbar* and there he is prostrate on the ground. I believe in paying back and I have paid him in his own coin." If someone fails, the other taunts him. Since this is a play in which the arrow aims at the '*thuda*' i.e., the lower part of the leg (Punjabi '*thud*'), it is known as Thoda. Actually, however, it looks so be the reminiscence of a popular Sanskrit drama *Tripuradaha* once staged by sage Bharata, a "play of Samavakara variety dealing with the exploit of Shiva



himself.”<sup>1</sup> The play goes on till late in the evening. Fighting all the day, they never get tired. When it is dark, the Pathas take their guests to their homes and entertain them. This is how the Shathas of 60 Kauravas and Pathas of five Pandavas have maintained their traditional warfare of the Mahabharata.

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**पत्र-पत्रिकाएं**

1. हिम-प्रस्थ : लोक सम्पर्क विभाग, हिमाचल प्रदेश
2. हिम-भारती : भाषा एवं संस्कृति विभाग; हिमाचल कला, संस्कृति और भाषा अकादमी
3. सोमसी: हिमाचल कला, संस्कृति और भाषा अकादमी
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5. गिरिराज: लोक-सम्पर्क विभाग, हिमाचल प्रदेश

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