

DIVINE HEADS

DIVINE HEADS
FOLKLORE OF MAHASU REGION
IN THE
WESTERN HIMALAYAS

(Divinity Cults, Myths and Legends)

B.R. SHARMA



GOLDEN JUBILEE SERIES

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Preface

Mahasu region located in the Western Himalayan ranges is very interesting area for field work in Folklore Studies. Several ethnic groups and other communities inhabiting this region, are still practising age-old social activities and beliefs. It is stretched up to the plains in lower Shivalik belt on the one side and Tibetan border on the other and covers one of the thickly populated tracts in the uplands.

Folklore is comparatively a new field of scientific study of culture and new definitions of the terms relating to this study are being coined. Since its inception, it has been associated with 'primitive' and 'savage' people. This inference is not only partial but is capable of giving a wrong notion of the studies related to folklore. This new field of study is apprehensive of some risks and stakes including the arduous task of field study and documentation of social habits including the study of myths, rituals, beliefs and folktale etc. in unbiased and scientific manner and cravings of scholars for designing new definitions on the basis of printed literature produced from different angles. It is not easy to understand the context of living social and cultural history with all its undercurrents and absolutely necessary contents. We cannot undertake the study of folklore while sitting in a library and our knowledge of language can hardly be of any significant value for understanding the psyche of folkmind. What we require the most, is the oneness with the social and cultural life of the people about whom we want to collect material for documentation and assessment. Classification and evaluation of folk material cannot be taken by hypothesis only as it requires bulk of information coupled with very authentic and specific approach to reach some conclusions. The conclusion with regard to one group or community, can hardly be applied in the same fashion to another set of people. Folklore, thus, is very sensitive and tender field, not suitable and convenient for those who don't have the capacity and aptitude to understand society as a whole.

The term 'primitive' or 'savage' is not a soothing gesture in any way to a particular society as to associate the study of folklore with only

primitive or savage people having social practices whose roots are engraved in antiquity, is not appropriate. 'Folk' and 'Lore' two independent terms denote that it is a study of the knowledge and wisdom of the common people who may not either be primitive or savage in any case. It is, thus expedient that broader view of the term 'Folklore; be taken and the people who are studied are not rated among primitive or savage as every race or community has its own set of behavioral functioning and to call a society backward or highly civilized, is only a subjective approach. The division of various fields of folklore study also requires some rethinking. Up to the present times, myth or mythology is not considered an essential component of oral literature. This approach has, obviously jeopardized the scope of scientific study under the new discipline. The study of myth is comparatively more difficult than to collect material relating to folksongs, folktales, ceremonies, rituals and other social beliefs.

Stith Thompson has rightly put it that, 'the essential of all folklore study is collecting and attempting to understand that which has been collected'. The creative genius of the common people has much to depend on traditional knowledge and the myth-making or setting trends is the major obligation of creative genius who is one among the thousands of his society. If at all, the redesigning of the components of folklore is possible, in my humble opinion, these should be (i) the study of myth (ii) the knowledge and documentation of ritual, (iii) the in-depth knowledge of social beliefs, and (iv) the study, collection and documentation of folk narrative, including folk ballads, folk songs, folk tale, proverbs, sayings and any other aspect related to narration or speech.

With this approach in mind, the present volume on folklore, is devoted to the study of Divinity Cults, Myths and related legends. The society, in this part of the country, cannot be properly understood in the absence of the study of divinity cults. In the forthcoming volumes on the subject, other aspects referred to above, would be taken up and finally an index of folklore of the region is proposed to be compiled to make it a compact and comprehensive study. In order to allow this volume a sense of completion, the last Chapter has been devoted to the crude classification of myths, but this is not, at all, final as much more material on other aspects of folklore would be forthcoming and more information on myths, motifs and narrative may be included, analysed and classified.

I am greatly indebted to the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla through its Director, Professor Mrinal Miri, a scholar of repute and his

colleagues for providing me with an opportunity to spend some time at the Institute as a Fellow and take advantage of the facilities including the invaluable library service to compile the present volume. I have no intention and ambition to claim that the work being resented, is of some merit but in case it is of any use to the scholars and researchers in the field, I shall consider my endeavour to have paid dividends. I am aware of the shortcomings in the volume and, if allowed time and grace by the Almighty, shall try to effect modifications and corrections wherever possible, in the forthcoming volumes.

I am grateful to all those who equipped me with the information on folklore and atmosphere to work on this monograph. My sincere gratitude is due to Shri S.A. Jabbar, Academic Resource Officer, Shri A.K. Sharma, Public Relations Officer, Dr. Debarshi Sen who willingly discussed matters relating to the present project and to Shri Joginder Singh Verma who never appeared to be fatigued and lacking in spirit while getting the matter typed and fed to computer time and again. I shall be failing in my duties if I don't express my gratitude to my wife Pushp Lata Sharma, my son Pankaj Lalit and his wife Poonam for all their assistance in the accomplishment of the project.

Hindol
Shimla

B.R. SHARMA

Foreword

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CHAPTER ONE

The Land and the People

The Himalayas, since time immemorial, have posed an immense source of attraction to man. This highest and the youngest mountain on our planet is believed to have emerged from the bed of the pre-historic Tethys¹ Sea some sixty million years ago. The fossils of the ape-like *Dryopithecus* and *Ramapithecus* found in the Shivalik ranges secure that this region cradled and nurtured man in his evolutionary stage as also that the signs of life appeared in the Himalayan slopes millions of years ago. Through a process of evolutionary adaptation, a branch of huminids, which—during the transition in the terrain—came into existence in the area, gradually evolved as man's direct or indirect ancestors during the late Pliocene age. The rock-shales of Spiti are known to contain deposits of several species of ammonites and belemnites, testifying that the Tethys Sea existed from the end of the Carboniferous period to the end of Eocene. The Himalaya is like the cosmic bridge with its integrated ecosystem providing a habitat for people of various ethnic origins and faiths. The great saints of India and the epic heroes visited several places in the region to meditate. Numerous *Tirathas* (centres of pilgrimage) have been established in the region. Myths and legends here added dimensions of meaning to the facts of geography.²

Himachal Pradesh, the land of sublime and beautiful contrasts in terms of scenic beauty and social life, is situated in the lap of western Himalayas. The area, adorned with a mosaic of valleys, hills and snowy mountain ranges, lies between 32° 22' 44" to 33° 12' 40" N (latitude) and 75° 45' 55" to 79° 04' 20" E (longitude). The altitude of the places in the state varies from 450 metres to 6600 metres above the mean sea level.

The state has three distinct geographical divisions, viz., outer Himalayas or the Shivalik, inner Himalayas or mid Himalayas and the greater Himalayas or the Alpine zone.

Topographically, the diversity of its 'plain-to-mountain' stratigraphic gift has bestowed on the Himalayas the status of being a region of

marvellous scenic beauty and climate suitable for all seasons. In the words of Nicholas Roerich, 'It would be miserable and poor attempt to compare the Himalayas with the rest of the *best* mountain ranges of the world. The Andes, the Caucasus, the Alpes, the Altai, all the most beautiful heights, will seem single peaks when you will compare mentally the supreme mountain ranges of the Himalayas'.³

In the sub-Himalayan belt adjoining the Punjab plains, the hill stations of Kasauli, Dagshai, Sabathu, Solan, etc., have all the attributes of ideal resorts. Shimla, the capital of the state, is situated in the krol belt. As is mentioned in the records of the Geological Survey of India (Part-I, 1939), while studying the structure of Shali 'window' near Shimla, W.D. West mentioned, 'The foundations of our knowledge of geology of this area were laid by H.B. Medlicott in his memoirs published in 1864. In that work, the Shali area provided him with a problem of peculiar difficulty in the sense that less metamorphosed rocks appeared to dip in all directions beneath more metamorphosed rocks.' The rocks were found to be of volcanic origin and it was concluded that, 'the problem thus stated is solved when it is understood that we are dealing with the immense thrust that has brought a sheet of older rocks to rest more or less horizontally upon younger rocks, the whole having been subsequently gently warped and partly denuded. In modern terminology, the former area referred to by Medlicott (the Chor-Shimla area) is a klippe of older rocks resting upon younger rocks. The latter area (Shali area) is a window of younger rocks appearing from beneath older rock belts.'⁴ The krol belt separates the lower Himalayan zone from the Shivalik system. The Tethys Himalayan zone covers the Spiti Valley, whereas the higher Himalayan zone touching the southern part of Lahaul and Spiti region, is adorned with snowclad peaks and a perpetual snow line. The majestic array of the white peaks guard the attractive green mountain slopes, lush green forests, emerald meadows, murmuring streams and the habitats in the valley all around in the north eastern side.

The Emergence of Himachal Pradesh

Before the formation of Himachal Pradesh on 15 April 1948 there were, in all, 31 princely states in the region. In the beginning, Himachal Pradesh was the result of an integration of 30 princely states clubbed together to form a separate 'C' State. The four districts of the state were as under:

- (1) Mahasu: Comprising 26 princely states (including feudatories), namely: Bushehr, Keonthal, Baghal, Baghat, Jubbal, Kumarsain, Bhajji, Mahlog, Balsan, Dhami, Kuthar, Kunihar, Mangal, Bija, Darkoti, Tharoch, Sangri, Kyarkoti, Delath, Ratesh, Ghund, Theog, Madhan, Rawin, Dhaddi and Khaneti.
- (2) Mandi: Mandi and Suket States.
- (3) Sirmaur: Sirmaur State.
- (4) Chamba: Chamba State.

The State of Bilaspur (Kehlur) did not join Himachal Pradesh and was retained as 'C' State. It was also made part of Himachal Pradesh on 1 July 1954.

Out of these 31 States, twenty were known as Simla Hill States and included Sirmaur, Kehlur (Bilaspur), Bushehr, Hindur (Nalagarh), Keonthal, Baghal, Baghat, Jubbal, Kumarsain, Bhajji, Mahlog, Balsan, Dhami, Kuthar, Kunihar, Mangal, Bija, Darkoti, Tharoch and Sangri. Among these twenty Hill States, Bushehr State was the biggest one with an area of 3257 square miles, while Bija and Darkoti were the smallest states with an area of only four square miles each⁵. Nalagarh, one of the Punjab Hill States was not included in the newly constituted Himachal Pradesh. The State of Mandi was merged into Himachal Pradesh on 1 May 1948. Chamba, Suket and Sirmur were called the Punjab States. Descriptions of the Hill States along with their feudatories will clarify the position more clearly:

1. Bushehr State with feudatories of Khaneti and Delath.
2. Keonthal proper with its feudatories of Koti, Theog, Madhan, Ghund and Ratesh.
3. Jubbal proper and its feudatories of Rawin and Dhadi.
4. Baghal, Baghat, Kumarsain, Bhajji, Mahlog, Balsan, Dhami, Kuthar, Kunihar, Mangal, Bija, Darkoti, Tharoch and Sangri.

Adjustment of Areas

In 1950, as a result of demarcation of the Provinces and States, Himachal Pradesh incorporated the following areas:

- (a) Solan Cantonment, Kotgarh and Kotkhai from the erstwhile State of Punjab.

- (b) The villages of Sansog and Bhattar from Uttar Pradesh.
- (c) The area of Kufri and villages of Dhar Khulag, Goila, Jamraha, Nathal, Kunjiara, Sureta and Baragaon Jungle from the erstwhile State of Pepsu.

The following areas of Himachal Pradesh were transferred in exchange of the above mentioned areas:

- (a) The built-up area of Sanjauli, Bharari and Chakkar, including a portion of Prospect hill was transferred to the erstwhile State of East Punjab.
- (b) The built-up area of Kasumpti and Patti Rihana (excluding the area in which Himachal Courts were located) were also transferred to the erstwhile State of East Punjab.
- (c) Two small portions of Rampur Vanka and Kotah villages lying between Shimla and Bharauli were transferred to the erstwhile State of Pepsu.⁶

Re-organisation

Consequent to the reorganisation of the Punjab State, the following areas of the erstwhile Punjab State were transferred to Himachal Pradesh on 1 November 1966:

- (a) Areas of Kangra, Kulu, Lahaul and Spiti and Shimla.
- (b) Nalagarh Tehsil of Ambala district.
- (c) The Kanungo Circle of Lohara, Amb, Una and Santokhgarh of Una Tehsil of Hoshiarpur district.
- (d) Dhar-Kalan-Kanungo Circle of Pathankot Tehsil of Gurdaspur district.⁷

The Census Report (1951) reveals that the population of Himachal Pradesh at that time was 9,83,367 living in 7,456 villages and the ten towns of 23 Tehsils and four districts covering an area of 10,451 square miles.⁸

Nalagarh Tehsil on transfer to Himachal Pradesh was made a part of Mahasu district and Shimla was also transferred to Mahasu till the district of Solan and Shimla were carved out after the reorganization of Mahasu district when its name was changed to Shimla district later on.

Mahasu as District

The Mahasu district, at that time, had the following Tehsils:

(1) Solan; (2) Arki; (3) Kasumpti (including Suni Sub-Tehsil); (4) Theog (including Kumarsain and Kotkhai Sub-Tehsils); (5) Jubbal; (6) Chopal; (7) Chini; (8) Rampur; and (9) Rohru. According to the Census figures, 1951, Mahasu district had a population of 330,614 and its area was 10,451 square miles. The density of population was only 70 persons per square mile as against 94 of the State.

Of the total population of the district, 95% constituted of agriculturists and the remaining 5% were non-agriculturists.⁹

The data relating to 1951 Census report concerning Mahasu district includes Kinnaur and Solan districts (excluding Nalagarh Tehsil, which was not included in Mahasu at that time). Chini Tehsil of Mahasu district and some areas of Rampur were separated from Mahasu in order to form a tribal district of Kinnaur during the year 1960, following which, Mahasu district included Solan and Arki Tehsils upto the reorganisation of districts during 1972 when Mahasu was given the name of Shimla district and the areas consisting of Solan and Arki Tehsils—including the areas transferred to Himachal Pradesh and located in these regions—were transferred to form a new district of Solan. The present study relates to the compact Mahasu district of the year of creation of Himachal Pradesh and the areas absorbed in it as a result of the reorganisations that occurred from time to time. This district extended from the last point of Kinnaur to the area bordering Punjab and Haryana in the lower Shivaliks including erstwhile Nalagarh (Hindur) State.¹⁰

Climatic Conditions

The altitudes of places in the Himalayas vary from 2000 ft to 21000 ft and as such, the climatological features vary considerably. The climate of the lower tracts is similar to that of the plains of the Punjab, except that the heat in summer is less intense here. At altitudes from 5,000 to 20,000 ft the summer is mild and the winter severe with heavy snowfall.¹¹ The whole of the area can be divided into three main climatic zones, namely; (i) the Shivalik zone (approximately 610 m to 1150 m), where the temperature varies from 10 to 26° C with an average rainfall of 1500 mm; (ii) the lower Himalayan zone situated between an altitude varying from 1000 m to 2000 m and including the areas north of Shimla. This

zone is characterised by a cool, humid and temperate climate with light summers and cold winters with an average rainfall varying from 1500 mm to 3000 mm; (iii) the higher Himalayan zone is located between an elevation of 2000 m to 3000 m and above. It covers the upper reaches of Shimla and Kinnaur districts. The climate of this zone is cold and temperate with temperature ranging from 1° to 17° C. Dodra Kwar and parts of upper Kinnaur fall in the rainshadow belt where heavy snowfall is experienced during winter with mild rainfall during the monsoon.

To understand the social system of the region, it would be relevant to discuss in brief the information relating to the seventeen princely States with their feudatories, which constituted Mahasu district, as mentioned in the preceding pages.

Bushehr

Bashahr or Bushehr, the largest State among Simla Hill States, was situated between 31° 6' and 32° 4' north latitudes and 77° 33P' and 79° 2' east longitudes. The total area of the State was 3,820 square miles bounded on the north by Spiti, on the east by Tibet, on the south by Tehri Garhwal and the Raiengarh Pargana of Keon thal and on the east by Jubbal, Kotkhai, Kumarsain, Kotgarh and Kulu. The upper or northeastern portion of Bashahr was called Kanawar and the rest of the State as Kochi. Chini, Rampur and Rohru were the three Tehsils. Chini consisted of most of Kanawar and included the Parganas of Sialkhar, Shua, Rajgraon, Bhaba and Tukpa. Rampur comprised Baghi, Mastgarh, Raik, Kanchhin, Dassau, Atharabis and Pandrabis. Rohru had eight parganas, namely; Pandrasau, Nawar, Mamdalgarh, Bhamburai, Rajgarh, Surkhli, Bathli and Dodra Kwar.

The principal rivers in the State included the Sutlej and the Pabar. The River Sutlej flowed in a general direction from northeast to southwest and covered a stretch of about 98 miles within the State, cutting a great mass of mountainous spurs with very precipitous sides and descending from about 7,600 to 2,800 between narrow cliffs and steep mountain slopes. The principal rivers by which the drainage of Mahasu region is carried off include Sutlej, Pabar, Giri Ganga, Tons, Yamuna, Gambhar, Gambhrola and Sarsah. The climate of upper Kanawar is semi-arid. The rainfall at Wangtu, recorded about 70 inches annually, dropped to 43

inches at Kilba, a place about ten miles east of Wangtu. At Pooh, it was only 16 inches. Practically speaking, the monsoon rains are spent before they reach Kanawar (Kinnaur). The ruling family of Bashahr State associates its descendance from Aniruddha, the grandson of Lord Krishna. Aniruddha's father, Pradyuman (Parduman) came to the area to visit the temple of Bhima Kali, the goddess. The capital of Pradyuman, the first ruler of the State, is believed to be at Kamru in Tukpa Pargana of Kanawar.¹² According to another legend, the ruling family, two Brahman brothers came from Kanchanpuri. The younger one, named Pradyuman (Parduman), was coronated as the ruler of the State and the elder one settled at Rawin, a village near Sarahan and acted as advisor to the ruler. The Brahmans of Rawin village remained the spiritual advisors to the Raja and his family¹³. It is said that for sixty-one generations, the Raja never had more than one son. There was a practice of the prince being raised in a village until he was five or six years old, not to be seen by his father until after the first-hair cutting ceremony¹⁴.

According to the State Gazetteer (1910), one of the Mughal emperors conferred the title of Chhatrapati on Raja Kehri Singh of the State on seeing that he was sheltered by a natural cloud, wherever he went. It states (P.6) that 'the emperor asked for an explanation, and the Raja naively answered that it was the favour of the gods and goddesses of his country, who wished to protect a hill man from the unaccustomed heat of the plains'. The Mughal emperor, whose name is not mentioned in the reference, bestowed upon him a dress of honour, the title of Chhatrapati. The legend confirms that the rulers had staunch faith in the powers of local deities. The Khashas and Kanets are the main communities and Kanets form the bulk of the population. The residue is made up of Rajputs, Brahmans, a few traders, and lower castes, of which Kolis are the most numerous, but which include *Luhars* (metal workers), *Badhai* (carpenters), *Rehrs* (herdsmen), etc.¹⁵

The first class, i.e. Kanets here trace their origin from the old Mawis, a defiant community of the ancient times which instigated people against the ruling Thakurs and Ranas.¹⁶ Bushehr is reported to have 25 Mawi khels, Jubbal has 24 khels, Keonthal 10, Kotkhai and Kumarsain six each and most of the other States have one or two such khels. Khels are the sub-sections of the community which are called 'Khund' or 'Khoond'. 'Mawi' and 'Khund' are important terms in the social life of the region. The ceremony of Bhunda (rope-sliding) and Shand are particularly

performed only in the villages where there are the Khund Kanets or the Khasha people. It is interesting to note that the revenue records of the erstwhile States had entries of all Rajputs as Kanets and there is hardly any reference of the Khashas as a separate community, whereas in folklore and popular legends, Khashas have been referred to as chivalrous Rajputs, superior to Kanets.

The two categories of Kanets are mentioned as Khash or the Khund Kanets and Ghara Kanets. The former considered themselves as superior to the latter and had Khunds, whereas the Ghara Kanets had none. According to Rahul Sankrityayan, prior to sixteenth century, the whole of Kinnaur was divided into seven Thakurais (owned by Thakurs) who were also called 'Khund'. All the Khunds had Thakurs as their rulers. He has given details of these 'Khunds' as under:¹⁷

<i>Name</i>	<i>Place</i>	<i>Deity</i>
1. Doshu or Doshi Khund	Gaura and beyond	Basaroo
2. Pandrah-Bish Khund	Ghanvi	Lachhi
3. Athara-Bish Khund	Sungra	Meshur (Meshu)
4. Wang-po Khund	Bhaba	Meshur (Meshu)
5. Pa-gram (Rajgram) Khund	Tholang (Chagaon)	Meshur (Meshu)
6. Chhu-wang Khund	Chini (Chhu-wang)	Chandika (Kothi)
7. Tukpa Khund	Kamroo (Mone)	Badrinath

The term 'Khund' or 'Khoond' is related to the social system in the hills and associated with the Khashas. The Khunds of Kinnaur, as suggested by the author, were certainly the ancient Thakurais belonging to the Mawis but these indicate that 'Doshu' means two hundred, 'Pandrah-Bish' indicates $15 \times 20 = 300$ and Athara-Bish is $18 \times 20 = 360$. According to some scholars, such Khunds belonged to the subordinate officials or representatives of the sovereigns who, at a short notice, could ask for a certain number of warriors from a particular 'Khund'. It may also be a term related to revenue collection in the area. The Khund Kanets are also found in other areas of Shimla and Sirmaur districts where they are divided into two groups of Shatha (Sixty, i.e. Kauravas) and 'Pasha' (five, i.e. Pandavas). Thus, Khund, as a term denotes: (i) a particular Pargana; (ii) a community of warriors; or (iii) a family whose ancestors saved the life of others with their feats of bravery, courage and security. In some cases, the term is applied to the heroes without the consideration of caste, social hierarchy and kinship. The Khunds of Khashas are full of legends of their

valour and sense of pride. A couplet from a song relating to Badhali Khund confirms this assertion:

*Aur kaura khoshia Gaula O bata !
Tyare naien painda pani de Lata !!*

(The other Khashas involve themselves in lofty talks only, but there is none to put his foot in your shoe!)

The term Khash or Khashia is a respectable one and, in the folk songs of the region, it is applied to warrior heroes belonging to particular khels. It is, however, curious to note that right from the census of 1881 AD—in which the record in respect of various communities in the region was made available—the inhabitants didn't display any inclination to have themselves recorded as Khash, Khash or Khashia. This phenomena made the exact enumeration of the community rather difficult, but in folklore, the references of Khash, Khashia or Kanet are distinct. In Kinnaur and Shimla, the term Khash or Khashia is respectful for warrior groups of Rajputs who are mentioned as Kanets in the revenue records of some Shimla Hill States but in the sub-mountain region, the nomenclature of Khash has become derogatory and the Kanets generally don't apply this term for themselves. In Kullu also, it is not relished by all Kanets and other Rajputs. They, however, prefer to be addressed as Thakurs. This implies that Khash and Kanets have been two distinct communities in the hills. Later, as a result of the same tradition, interaction and fusion, a strong amalgamation took place due to social conditions and local requirements. According to the Gazetteer of Bushahr State (1910:21), the second class of Kanets comprises the supposed aboriginal tribes, Khash, Rahu, Kuran and Kanari, which are also sub-divided into countless Khels. So far as the Shimla Hill States are concerned, the majority of Khash inhabitants is confined to the Bushahr and Baghat states. The section of Kuin is believed to include the oldest of the Khash families and considered to be slightly superior to the ordinary Khash. The Gazetteer (P.21) records, 'There are only a few Rahus in the Simla hills, as has been stated already. More than one-third of the Bushahr Kanets are Kurans, and so far as can be made out, the Kanaris are identical with the Kurans. The Rahus and Kurans are said to have been originally Khash. The Rahus became worshippers of the planet Rahu, and so were called by this name. The myth reminds of a popular belief in Kinnaur where the Nagalu or Chanal, a basket-maker community, still rejoices at the time of eclipse to suggest

that their ancestor Rahu has overpowered the Sun or Moon—as the case may be—to get back the loan extended by him to either of them.

In Kinnaur, the low castes are called Chamang and Domang. The shoemakers, weavers and the like are called Chamang and the blacksmith, carpenters, etc., are termed as Domang.¹⁸ The Chamang act as Hales (ploughmen) to the upper caste people, whereas the Domang or Koli perform other jobs. The temple musician-band comprises the artistes from both these communities. In upper Kinnaur, the religion of Buddhism is quite popular. The inhabitants, in parts of Pargana of Sialkhar and Pargana Tukpa and in two or three villages of Pargana Shua, are of Tibetan stock and called Nyms, Jads or Zars and are also alluded to as Kanets. This is an additional instance of the wide applicability of the term¹⁹. General Cunningham (Vol.XIV, Archaeological Survey of India), arrives at the conclusion that the Kanets are identical with the Kunindas or Kulindas of earlier Hindu history and are a mixed race sprung from the Khashas who, previous to the Aryan invasion, occupied the whole sub-Himalayan country from the Indus to the Brahmaputra. He divides the Kanets into three main tribes: the Chauhan, belonging to the upper valley of Pabar; the Mangal, occupying the whole country to the west of the Pabar basin and giving its name to the state of Mangal or the Sutlej; and the Rao, whose country is Rawin or Raiengarh, not the small tract known nowadays by that name, but an extensive territory including the Pabar, Tons, and Rupin Valleys, the principal place of which in former days was Hatkoti on the Pabar.²⁰ Ibbetson (Punjab Census Report of 1881) recognized only two main tribes of the Khasia and the Rao and described the Khasias as more orthodox Hindus in their religious observances. The Kullu Gazetteer of 1883-84 mentioned the Kanets as belonging to an aboriginal stock with two divisions of Khasia and Rao.²¹

Bushehr has rich cultural heritage. Its very name Bushehr or Bashahr seems to be a corruption of 'Bish-her', a legendary name of Lord Shiva, the eradicator of 'poison' (*visb*). This region, during ancient times, formed a part of Kailash range where once the ruler was Lord Shiva himself. It is a meeting point of Hinduism and Buddhism, tribal and non-tribal culture and Indian and Tibetan art. Modern and primitive practices and thoughts flourished in the social life of the region concurrently and the folk religion contained some unique clues to ancient cultures and people including the Kirata, Asura, Mongoloid, Nag, Kinnara, Gandharva and other mythological races which are believed to have left their imprints in the cultural life of the inhabitants. The popular religion of the region was

a primitive form of animism, overlaid with a thin veneer of Hinduism. Almost every village had one or more village gods to guide and protect the inhabitants. The superior deities were obeyed and respected by the subordinate or junior deities. The wooden palanquins of gods and goddesses are even now taken out of their shrines and made to dance with the help of bearers. The medium, while in trance, explains the wishes of the deity and the followers pay devotional heed to the utterances. There is a principal god of Ghori (a cluster of villages), a Paragana. According to the State gazetteer (1910-25), 'one of the commonest types of legends attached to the origin of a *deota* is that he was a man of divine origin or attributes, whose mission was to free the earth of certain demon, and that having accomplished his task he was deified by the people who had suffered from the existence of the demon.'²² Even malignant spirits are worshipped as deities out of fear and offerings and sacrifices made to them from time to time. Some of the ghosts gradually reached the status of gods by means of the terror which they inspire.²³ The Khund Kanets have a platform, called Thahri or Thairi, in their habitats. The marriages and other religious ceremonies are conducted on a Thairi. The village gods sometimes go on long pilgrimages to Badrinath, Jwalamukhi and Bajreshwari Devi at Kangra as per their wish, exhibited through their mediums.

Bhima Kali was the state goddess of Bushehr and Mahesura or Monshiras of Sungra village was her Wazir. Various spirits worshipped in the region in addition to the established village gods, include Lankra, Kali, Sauni, Shakti and a form of local ghosts and minor spirits. The people of Kinnaur believe that the soul of the dead go to Raldang, a place near Kinnar Kailash. Shri Khand Mahadev (18,626 ft) is a famous peak where Lord Shiva and his consort Parvati are believed to live and meditate. At Kamru fort in Kinnaur, the temple of Bhima Kali is considered to be of a much earlier period. The shrine served as a place of great importance to the rulers of Bushehr who had to pay obsequence at it at the time of their coronation ceremony. The state was known as Rampur Bushehr or Bashahr and 'was held under subjection by the Gurkhas between 1803 and 1815. But on the expulsion of the Gurkhas, in the latter year, the British Government, by a Sanad, dated 6 November 1815, confirmed the Raja of Bushehr in possession of all his territories, except Rawain (which was transferred to Keonthal), subject to the payment of Rs 15,000 per annum as a tribute. This was eventually reduced to the sum of Rs 3,945 per annum in compensation for the abolition of transit duties. The

Raja is required by this Sanad to furnish troops to aid the British Government in time of war, and the labour for construction of roads in Bushehr territory²⁴. Three hereditary Wazir families of Poari, Kohal and Shua assisted the Raja in the administrative matters related to the various regions of the State.

Keonthal

As a result of an agreement made during 1815, the Raja of Keonthal and his heirs in perpetuity got the authority over the petty states of Theog, Koti, Ghund, Kiari and Ratesh as feudatories to the Keonthal State.²⁵ The state consisted of six detached *Ilaqas* or tracts; namely, a southern circle comprising ten Parganas of Fagu, Khalashi, Tir Mahasu in Fagu Tehsil, Dharech, Ratesh, Karoli, Jai, Paroli, Jhajot and Kalanj, in Junga Tehsil; northern circle comprising four Parganas, viz., Shili, Matiana, Rajan, and Chadara in Fagu Tehsil; Pargana Rimar, Pargana Rawin, Pargana Rampur and Pargana Wakna. In Pargana Khalashi lies the Mahasu Dhar²⁶. The highest peaks of this Dhar are Mahasu and Deshu. On Deshu peak and Bekhali Dhar, there are ruined forts in this Pargana. Prior to the Gurkha invasion, Keonthal 'is said to have been the overlord of eighteen minor Thakurais, viz., Koti, Ghund, Theog, Madhan, Mailog, Kuthar, Kunihar, Dhami, Tharoch, Sangri, Kumharsain, Rajana, Kharentu, Maili, Khalasi, Bagri, Dighali and Ghat'.²⁷ But the record doesn't seem to be an authentic one. Of these, the first four existed as feudatories of Keonthal state in addition to Ratesh which was made a feudatory with no tribute. It was later made subordinate to the Raja of Keonthal in September, 1915 vide Sanad No. I vii.

Feudatories of Bushehr and Keonthal

Khaneti was a small state consisting of two portions, namely, Sadhoch and Saraj, situated on either side of the ridge between Baghi and Narkanda. According to the account in the Gazetteer of Khaneti State (1910: 3-4), 'A thousand years ago, the whole country between Kotkhai and Kumarsain and the Nogri Khad in Bushehr was under the sway of a Chief named Bhambu Rai, whose fort was on a high hill some two miles to the north of Baghi. Bhambu Rai, it is said, would get up in the morning and go twenty miles over hill and dale to bath in the Sutlej near

Rampur. He would then go forty miles as the crow flies, to Hatkoti on the Pabar to say his prayers, and get back to his fort, another twenty miles, for breakfast. Some time in the eleventh century, Rana Kirat Singh arrived from Gaya, driven thence by Mahmud Ghazni. He acquired some land from Bhambu Rai at Karangla and settled there.²⁸ Later, Rana Kirat Singh died and a son was born to him posthumously and brought up by Bhambu Rai. His name was Uggan Chand. He succeeded the kingdom. The state of Khaneti was made a feudatory of Bashahr in 1816 by Lord Moira, the Governor General alongwith Dhuletoo (Delath) and Karangal.

Delath

Delath State was surrounded by Bashahr except on the west, where it touched Kotgarh. During 1860, Khaneti was made a sovereign state with some conditions of payments on various occasions to the Raja of Bushehr. The area of Delath was only eight square miles with a population of 1673 as per the census report of 1941. The state of Keonthal was 'founded by one of Rup Sain's three sons who fled to different directions from Ropar where Rup Sain had established his kingdom and built a fort. The father of Rup Sain had established his kingdom during the time of Shahabuddin Ghorī. The three sons of Rup Sain, who left Ropar for different directions, established their kingdoms in the hills. Bir Sain went to Suket, Giri Sain or Tam Sain established his kingdom at Keonthal and Hamir Sain left for Jammu.²⁹ The ex-rulers of these states are, thus, still related to the family of Rup Sain and their history can be ascertained from the records. Shihab-ud-Din Muhammad-Ghorī or Muhammad of Ghor was assassinated on 15 March 1206 on the banks of the river Indus.³⁰

Koti

Koti State was situated adjoining Shimla and east Sanjauli also formed a part of this state. The ruling family here was a branch of the Rajas of Kulehr in Kangra. The story, according to the *Gazetter of the State* (1910:5), relates that Lakhan Kumar, ruler of Sirsa Pattan in Rajputana, came on a pilgrimage to the temple at Kangra. The Raja of Kangra killed him in an attack. After some time, he suffered from leprosy and dreamt that in case the heirs of Lakhan Kumar—who was killed in an unwarranted attack—were located and given due regard, he could be rid of the disease.

The priest had taken Ranu, the son of Lakhan Kumar, secretly to Mandi. He was brought back to Nadaun, the seat of kingdom of Kangra at that time. 'The Raja restored him his property and married him to the daughter of his son. Later, he was installed as Raja Ram Pal at Kutlehr. The twenty-fourth Raja from Ram Pal had five sons and a daughter. The eldest son succeeded him and the other four—Chiru, Chand, Shogu and Bhogu, with their sister, came to Mul Bhajji in the valley of the Nauti Khad below Mahasu.³¹

Chiru and Chand became the rulers of Bhajji and Koti States. Shogu and Bhogu went to Fagu with their sister who, after her death, became the goddess of Dharech in Keonthal. Shogu is still worshipped as a deity at Fagu. Bhogu married a Kanet girl and his descendants are known as the Fagianas Kanets.³² The population figures of Koti, according to the 1901 census report, were 7,959 and its area covered only 44 square miles.

Madhan

Madhan or Kiari State was located between 31° 5' and 31° 12' north and 77° 26' east. It had an area of 23 square miles with a population of 3,704 as per the 1901 census report.³³

Ghund

Ghund State, with an area of 13 square miles, was located between 31° 21' and 31° 61' north and 77° 27' and 77° 33' east on the Crest and sides of a high ridge which separated the valley of the Giri from that of one of its tributaries. This State is believed to have been founded 'by a man named Garnolu Modi, who lived in a village called Ghund, and called the entire territory by this name. The family claims its descent from a Chandel Rajput who settled first at Ram Sarai in Garhwal and later migrated to Bilaspur. His four sons established the Madhan, Theog and Ghund principalities.³⁴

Theog

Theog State, lying between 31° 21' and 31° 9' north, and 77° 21' and 77° 31' east was over 144 square miles with a population of 5,654 (1901 Census). The ruling family had a common origin with those of Ghund and Madhan.³⁵

Ratesh

Ratesh State was a Thakurai on the right bank of Giri river, consisting of only four villages with about three square miles of area. The population was 449 as per the 1901 Census report. It may have remained a flourishing State in the past and its first ruler is said to have been Rai Singh, a brother of Raja Karam Prakash of Sirmaur, who ruled the State during 1616-1630 AD and from whom Rai Singh received five Parganas³⁶.

Jubbal

The State of Jubbal was situated on the right bank of Pabar river, bounded by Sirmaur in the south, and on the east by Rawin pargana of Keonthal, the small State of Rawin, the Dehradun district and the Tharoch State. The State of Bushehr to an extent towards the north and the State of Balsan and the British Tehsil of Kotkhai were situated to the west of the State. The ruling family claimed its descent from Raja Ugar Chand of Sirmaur, whose summer residence was at Saunpur above Hatkoti. Once, when the Raja had to leave for Sirmaur hurriedly, he left his queen at Hatkoti under the care of Bir Bhat, the leading Brahman of Hatkoti. The Raja died in a flood which ravaged the State. His death was purported to be the result of a curse of an acrobat 'Natni' who died due to fall while trying to cross a certain space on a cotton thread with a promise by the Raja to allow her half his kingdom on completing the successful feat. The thread was cut by the attendants of the Raja while she was midway. As a result, she had a mortal fall. Bir Bhat, on learning that the Raja would not return, married the Queen who already had a son, named Karam Chand and subsequently gave birth to two sons named Mul Chand and Duni Chand. Karam Chand founded the Jubbal dynasty and Mul Chand and Duni Chand established Sairi and Rawin principalities, respectively, after the partition of property after the death of Bir Bhat.³⁷

The Purohiths of Hatkoti are believed to be the descendants of the son of Bir Bhat from his first wife. His son, during his lifetime, served as the spiritual advisor to his three brothers who established their States in the region. The State of Sairi was extinct and Rana Karam Chand transferred his capital from Saunpur to Jubbal. Finding that the place had a special type of grass called 'jub', 'dub' or 'drub' which grew overnight even after being cut the last evening, the place was named Jubbal (a grassy place).³⁸

Hatkoti

The rulers of Bushehr, Jubbal and Rawin, wanted to assert control over the temple and lands of Hatkoti. This dispute remained alive between 1886 to 1899 when it was declared as a joint property of all the three States mentioned above, by the Superintendent of Hill States. In 1896, the small State of Rawin and Dhadi were declared dependent on Jubbal to the extent of presenting a formal *nazar* every year. The area of Jubbal State, according to the State Gazetteer (1910: 3), was 285 square miles with a population, of 21,172 according to the Census figures of 1901. The density of population, at that time, was 74.3 per square mile. The State was located between latitudes 30°46' and 31° 3' north and longitudes 77° 28' and 77° 54 east.³⁹ There were 21 Parganas in the State.

Rawin

Rawin, the tributary of Jubbal State, was located towards the east of the northern part of the State. The Gurkhas, after capturing the region, made Runa the Rana of the State, whereas Uchba, the son of Rana Himmat Singh the ruler—who passed away before the arrival of the Gurkhas—accompanied Amar Singh Thapa, Gurkha General to Kangra and died there. The Gurkhas were expelled by the Britishers in 1815 and a portion of the State on the east of Pabbar was handed over to Garhwal. The Sarachli Pargana on the east of Pabbar containing Raiengarh fort, the villages of Batar and Katasu alongwith some other areas, remained with the Thakurai. Upto 1830, the areas of Sarachli, Batar and Katasu were retained as British territory when these were subsequently transferred to Keonthal in exchange for Shimla. According to the Gazetteer (1910: Rawin State 3-4), "The remainder was restored to Runa by a "hukmnama" dated 16th March, 1816, and signed by Lieutenant Ross, Assistant Agent to the Governor-General. In 1823, Bairagi, claimed to be the legitimate son of late Himmat Singh and contested to be the successor to the throne. Captain Gerard, the political agent, gave a decree in favour of Bairagi and he became the Thakur of Rawin. By this time, Runa had passed away and his sons received some villages as maintenance. During the year 1896, while settling the dispute regarding the status of Rawin and Dhadi, and the wish of Thakurs of these States to be either independent or—in case of feudatory status—to be a tributary to Garhwal, the Government of India ruled that the States were independent of one another, and as such,

the rulers be styled as Thakurs and enrolled among the Simla Hill Chiefs recognising the superiority of Jubbal.⁴⁰

Dhadi

Dhadi was a small State consisting of three or four villages and about 1600 acres of valuable forests. Very little is known of the origin of the State and it was, in all probability, subordinate to the original State of Rawin. It was bounded by the Dehradun village of Batar in the north, Sansog village and Chhachpur forest of Dehradun which were transferred to Himachal Pradesh in the west. Salna village of Rawin in the south and the Pabbar river and Pargana of Keonthal towards the east.⁴¹

Kumarsain

Kumarsain, a State of approximately 90 square miles in area, was situated between the Sutlej and the Giri and bounded by the Sutlej on the north, by the States of Ghund and Balsan on the south, on the east by the Bashahr and Khaneti States and British Kotgarh; and on the west by the States of Sangri, Bhajji and Keonthal. The founder of the ruling family was Kirat Singh, about whom a reference has already been made. Kirat Singh is believed to have come from Gaya about a thousand years ago. The ruler of the region, earlier to him, is said to have been the *deota* Kot Ishwar Mahadeo. The story of his becoming the ruler is recorded in the Kumarsain State Gazetteer (Part A) contained in the Gazetteer of Simla Hill States (1910: 3-13). According to the legend, a cowherd woman (*gowalin*), while grazing her cattle at Samali, saw that a snake came out of tree and drank the milk of her cows. After the villagers prayed to the snake, it appeared in the form of Mahadeo and settled in the arms of a Brahman. This Brahman took him to his house and worshipped him there for some time till a temple was erected by Sunu, a powerful Mawai, at Kothi Mandholi, according to the wishes of the *deota* who desired that his shrine be built at a place where locusts appeared. It was at this place that the locusts appeared and from that shrine, the deity ruled the country until the arrival of Kirat Singh, the first ruler. Kirat Singh is said to have come for fear of Mahmud Ghazni. As per another account, Kirat Singh and his son Pahar Singh 'acquired the Kumarsain, Kotgarh and Khaneti State by conquest from Bhambu Rai, the Rakshasa of Delath'.⁴²

Kumarsain was named after eighteen potters (*Kumhars*) who were the inhabitants of that place. When Kirat Singh arrived at the place where the potters were busy plying their wheels, he found that his cat was killed by a rat who appeared from beneath one of the wheels. Kirat Singh, feeling disgusted over the incident, decided to settle at Kumarsain and approached Kot Ishwar Mahadev to allow him to stay there. The deity, on knowing that Kirat Singh wanted to settle at the place where the potters lived, asked the *kumhars* to shift to some other place. But they refused and were destroyed by him. A pregnant woman, who was saved, went to Bharara village where her descendants still continue to reside. Kirat Singh's two sons were Pahar Singh and Kartar Singh. Kartar Singh, on division of the State, became the ruler of Kumarsain and Pahar Singh named his portion as Khaneti State. According to yet another version, Kirat Singh and Pahar Singh were brothers who look over the region by force.⁴³

Baghal

Baghal State ranked next to Keonthal among the Shimla Hill States. According to Baghal State Gazetteer (1910:3) it is a perversion of Gabhal, meaning the central part of the country, the centre of a group of States. Others associate the name with Baghar, the class name to which the ruling family belonged. The area of the State was 124 square miles and it was bounded by Sutlej and State of Mangal to the north, Dhami and Kunihar states located to the east and Nalagarh and Bilaspur states formed its borders on the west. The Capital of the State was at Arki. The ruling family traced its descent from Aje Dev, a Panwar Rajput who came from Ujjain. The State had four Tehsils—Arki, Darla, Dhundan and Sarli.⁴⁴

Baghat

The State of Baghat was situated between 30° 50' and 30° 55' north, and 76° 63' and 76° 66' east. The name of the State is probably derived from *Bau* or *Bahu*, a word meaning many, and *ghat*, a pass. According to some others, it is a corruption of Bara Ghat, i.e. twelve ghats.⁴⁵ Some scholars associate this term with Raja Virat, a ruler during the period of Mahabharata in whose kingdom the Pandavas stayed for sometime, while in exile.

The capital of Bagat State was at Solan, consisting of three separate portions, viz., Takroli or Dasanda, the Somna or Basal and the Bhochali Parganas, extending from a point three miles to the northeast of Solan on the east, to a point about a mile to the south of Sabathu on the west and from Sanawar to a point three miles east of Kalka stretching upto Kasauli.⁴⁶

The Parganas of Basal (Baghat), Ghar and Taksal were captured by Rana Inder Pal in the sixteenth generation of Basant Pal or Hari Chand Pal, a Panwar Rajput, the founder of the State. Basant Pal (or Hari Chand Pal) came from Dharanagari in the Deccan and settled at Basant Pur. It was during this period that the State came to be known as Baghat, and, as such, it seems probable that the term Basal may have something to do with the present nomenclature, i.e Baghat. Historically, the event is of great importance to the rulers. According to popular legends, the earlier rulers of the region were Mawis.

Bhajji

Bhajji possessed an area of 96 square miles only. The State was bounded on the north by Suket, on the east by Sangri and Kumarsain, on the south by Keonthal, Madhan, Koti, Patiala and Dhami and on the west by Baghal. Located between 31° 7' and 31° 17' north and 77° 2' and 77° 23' east, on the south bank of the Sutlej, the State capital was at Suni and its population, according to the 1901 Census report, was 13,309. The founder of the ruling family came from Kangra, and acquired the possession of the State by conquest.⁴⁷

Mehlog

Mehlog (Mahlog) State was located between the States of Kuthar and Nalagarh some thirty miles to the southwest of Shimla between 30° 52' and 30° 5' north, and 76° 52' and 76° 58' east. The population figures, according to 1901 Census report, were 8,968 and the area of the State was 43 square miles. The capital of the State was at Patta, a place situated at the foot of Kasauli hill. According to the legend mentioned in the Mahlog State Gazetteer (1910: 3-4), Lord Shiva asked Bir Chand Raja of Ayodhya to go on pilgrimage to Mansarover and establish a kingdom at Bhowana, near Kalka in the foothills of Shivalik after defeating the

Mawis, who were settled there. Bir Chand came to Bhowana and defeated the Mawis. The State of Bhowana flourished until the time of Kandosi Chand, the sixth ruler from Bir Chand, and extended up to Delhi.⁴⁸ Kandosi Chand was defeated by the Raja of Sirmaur and had to flee to his father-in-law, the Rana of Keonthal. He, then, was able to get back twelve Parganas which were named as Mahlog with the State capital at Kotgharsi. Bhowana existed even during the Mahabharata period and according to legends, deity Ghurka, whose temple is located at Gharsi village in Ghurka Dhar, is believed to be Ghatotkach, a hero of the epic Mahabharata.

Balsan

Balsan State was also called Ghodna State. It was situated at a distance of about thirty miles from Shimla on the left bank of the Giri Ganga between 30° 58' and 30° 7' north: and 77° 24' and 77° 35' east. The ruling family was a branch of the king of Sirmaur. It remained a feudatory of Sirmaur for many generations and at the time of the Gurkha invasion, it was a subject to Kumarsain along with Bharauli and Madhan.⁴⁹

Dhami

Dhami was 26 square miles in area and was situated between 31° 7' and 31° 13' north, and 77° 3' and 77° 11' east at a distance of about 16 miles west of Shimla with its capital at Halog. The population of the State, according to the 1901 Census was 4,505. Dhami was bounded by Bhajji on the east, by Patiala on the south and on the west by Baghal. The ruling family came from Raipur in Ambala where it had shifted from a place near Delhi after the invasion of Shahab-ud-Din Ghori during the twelfth Century.⁵⁰

Kuthar

Kuthar State had an area of only twenty sq. miles and was situated on the opposite side to Sabathu. Five Parganas—Rihani, Ghar, Shil, Dharuth and Pheta, were occupied by Mawis. Gradually, they were conquered and the area came to be known as Kuthar. Biju, the son of a Raja of Kotguru (Kotgarh), who turned to be a *faqir* and had come to the place, was worshipped as a deity in the State. The State was located between 80° 55' and 31° 1' north, and 76° 57' and 77° 1' east.⁵¹

Kunihar

Kunihar lay some fifteen miles west of Shimla between 30° 39' and 31° 7' north and 76° 59' and 77° 3' east. The State area was approximately seven square miles with a population of 2,168 (1901 Census). Abhoj Deo, the founder of the State, came from Akhnoor in Jammu and acquired the State by conquest around the year 1154 AD. While coming with a band of warriors, he was turned aside from his direct route by the news of a revolt in Bilaspur and fought with the Keonthal State troops at Raikot, a fort to the south of Hat Kot, the capital of Kunihar⁵².

Mangal

Mangal State, with an area of only twelve sq. miles, was situated on the left bank of the Sutlej between 31° 18' and 31° 22' north, and 76° 55' and 77° 1' east. It was bounded by the river Sutlej on the north and Bilaspur and Baghal states in the south. The population of the state, according to 1901 Census, was only 1,227. The State Gazetteer (1910:3) records, Mangal is almost the most inaccessible of the Hill States. Its area consists of a series of precipitous hills. Originally a tributary of Bilaspur, it was declared independent at the end of the Gurkha War. Beyond this, the State has practically no history. The ancestors of the ruling Ranas came from Marwar.

Beja

Beja state was only of four sq. miles lying on the western slopes of the Kasauli hill. The population, as per the 1901 Census, was 1,131. It was bounded on the north by Kuthar, on the east by Patiala and Kasauli, on the south by Patiala and on the west by Mahlog. (Beja) remained a tributary to Bilaspur upto 1790. The ruler was titled Thakur by Sanad, dated 4 September, 1815. (1910: 3-5).

Darkoti

Darkoti (1910: 3) was one of the smallest of all the independent Hill States. Lying 40 miles to the east of Shimla, it measured only four sq. miles. It was bounded by Jubbal State and the British *Ilaqa* of Kothkhai. The population of the State in 1901 was only 518. Owing to the state

being small, no tribute was taken from it. Although under the jurisdiction a ruler, any sentence of death passed by the Rana required the confirmation of the British authorities.⁵³

Tharoch

Tharohch (Tharoch), with an area of 75 sq. miles, was situated near and to the west of the Tons and Pabbar rivers (1910:3). With a population of only 4,441 (1901), Tharoch consisted of two portions, the smaller being Kiran *Ilaqa* and the larger situated two miles to the north. The State, earlier, constituted a part of the Sirmaur State.

Sangri

Sangri State had an area of 16 square miles with a population of 2,774, according to the 1901 Census figures. It was situated on the left bank of the Sutlej between 31° 16' and 31° 22' north, and 77° 28' east. Kumarsain and Bhajji touched the State boundaries from southwest corner. In the past, the State belonged to Bushehr.⁵⁴

A brief account of Shimla Hill States, as quoted in the *Gazetter of the Simla District* (1888-89): 4) is appended below:⁵⁵

Simla Hill States

<i>Name of State</i>	<i>Total Area</i>	<i>Population (1881)</i>	<i>Supposed Revenue</i>	<i>Tribute</i>
	Square Miles	No	Rs	Rs
Sirmur (Nahan)	-	112,371	2,10,000	-
Kahlur (Bilaspur)	448	86,548	1,00,000	8,000
Bashahr (Bushehr)	3,257	64,345	50,000	3,945
Hindur (Nalagarh)	249	53,373	90,000	5,000
Keonthal	112	31,154	60,000	-
Baghal	124	20,633	60,000	3,600
Baghat	60	8,339	8,000	603
Jubbal	257	19,196	30,000	2,520
Kumarsain	94	9,515	10,000	2,000
Bhajji	94	12,106	23,000	1,440
Mailog	53	9,169	10,000	1,440

Balsan	50	5,190	7,000	1,080
Dhami	29	3,322	8,000	720
Kuthar	19	3,648	5,000	1,000
Kunihar (Kunhiar)	9	1,923	4,000	180
Mangal	13	1,060	700	72
Bija (Beja)	4	1,158	1,000	180
Darkuti (Darkoti)	4	590	600	-
Taroch (Tharoch)	75	3,216	6,000	288
Sangri	16	2,593	1,000	-

Presently, the earlier Mahasu district, with a population of 330,614 spreading in 4,695 sq. miles and an average density of 70 persons per sq. mile,⁵⁶ forms three districts; namely, Kinnaur, Shimla and Solan. The previous nomenclature of Mahasu applies to none of them. The density of population, according to various tehsils of Mahasu district of 1948, was as under:

Solan (265), Arki (208), Theog (192), Jubbal (107), Chopal (82), Rampur (49), Rohru (80), Chini (12), and Kasumpti (176).⁵⁷ As per the Census Report (1951), there were only 2901 villages in the district stretched from sub-montane area of the present Solan district to *Shipki-la* in the present Kinnaur district. The population figures of the region according to 1991 Census, are as below:

<i>Name</i>	<i>Total population</i>	<i>Area in kms</i>	<i>Literates</i>
1. Shimla of the District	614,892	5,131.00	338,752
2. Kinnaur of the District (Tribal)	70,931	6,401.00	35,035
3. Solan of the District	379,320	1,936.00	201,744
Total	1,065,143	13,468.00	575,531

The percentage of population in the area under study is about 22.22% of the total population of the State. Mahasu region, thus, has the distinction of having a scheduled Tribal as well as non-scheduled tribal population. The Kinnauras, a scheduled tribe inhabiting Kinnaur district, are a part of the Himalayan group of Tibeto-Burmese, whereas the people of Shimla and Solan district speak Mahasui dialects of Pahari languages. The cultural variation in these erstwhile States, the system of village deities and their peculiar status at different places as well as the myths and legends

relating to them, efforts of the rulers of these principalities to preserve and protect the ancient traditional cultural system and the communities residing in the region—provide all vital and important information in the study of the folklore of this area.

A detailed information with regard to various communities in erstwhile Simla Hill States, is available in the Census Report, 1931, Vol. XVII, Part II, vide Table XVII relating to 'Race, Tribe or Caste' (P.281 ff), which carries the following figures:

<i>District or State</i>	<i>Total Population</i>		
	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>
Bushehr	50,193	51,751	102,244
Nalagarh	24,379	21,296	45,675
Keonthal	24,038	21,009	45,047
Baghal	12,712	12,280	25,022
Jubbal	13,585	11,872	25,457
Other Simla Hill States	37,200	33,191	70,391

Various communities reported to have been inhabiting the region are as under:

Aggarwal, Ahir, Arain, Arora, Brahman, Chamar, Chhimba, Chuhra, Dagi or Koli, Darzi, Dhobi, Dumna, Faquir, Ghirath, Gujjar, Jat, Jhivar, Julaha, Kahar, Kamboh, Kashmiri, Khatri, Kumar, Lohar, Machi, Mali, Mirasi, Mochi, Nal, Pathan, Qasab, Kanet, Buddhists Kanet, Rajpur, Total Rajput including Hindu, Sikh, Buddhists and Muslims, Ramdasia, Saini, Sansi, Sarera, Sayad, Sheikh, Sunar, Tarkhan, Teli, Tank Kshatriya, and Dhiman Brahman.

The study indicates that the Khash community didn't figure as a separate one and might have been included either among the Kanets or Rajputs. The mention of Beda, a rope-sliding performer class at the time of Bhunda ceremony also doesn't find mention in the list. 'A Glossary of the Tribes and castes of the Punjab and North-west Frontier Province' (1883 (rpt. 1970): 499,79) contains entries of these communities in its Vol. II, which are reproduced below:

Khash

Khash or Khaush's a 2class of group of Kanets found in Kullu and the Simla Hill States of Kotkhai, Balsan, Jubbal, Bashahr, etc. It comprises a

number of *khels*, such as Khashta of the Kinnaur. The *khash* takes Kuran girls in marriage, but does not give their girls to Kurans. The Khash is also styled Katal. In Bushehr, of the Khash Kanets who hold good positions in the State service and so on observe the rites of the Brahmans and other twice-born castes.

Beda

About Beda, the mention is:

Beda, (F.n. In Traill's *Statistical Account of Kumaon* at p. 51) an account is given of the propitiatory festivals held in villages dedicated to Mahadeva. Here, Badis or rope dancers are engaged to perform on the tight rope or slide down an inclined rope stretched from the summit of a cliff to the valley beneath. The Badis do not appear to be a caste: (1) a musician caste in Ladakh: See Ind. Art. 1901, p. 330; (2) The caste which supplies the potential victim who rides on the rope at the Bhunda sacrifices in the upper Sutlej valley: See North India Notes and Queries, IV, 144.

The Khash or Khas and the Beda are still residing in the Mahasu region and the omission of the mention of such communities who perform the assigned functions in various rituals is against the spirit of studies in the field of folklore.

Approach in Folklore

Folklore has a deep relationship with historical facts and primordial customs. Background information and historical data relating to communities and individuals help in the study of folklore to arrive at conclusions with regard to continuing traditions. The motivative approach of the enthusiasts, the bearer of traditions and the researcher as well as inquisitiveness and curiosity associated with the preservation of diverse traditions of folklore with an emphasis on collective unconscious of a particular society have an essential and deep-rooted bearing on the study of social habits. Richard Dorson, in an article on collecting folktales, rightly asked the question. 'Why does the collector gather and publish tales? (Dorson 1957: 54).' The psychology of collecting and preserving folklore material must have to be taken into account. Classification of the collected material is a labourious task but in the absence of it, the collection would remain as it is. Rigby and Rigby (1944: 75-76) asserted that, 'the striving for form also manifests itself in the tendency of modern

collectors to follow a specific sequence in forming and arranging collections, as well as in the desire to complete definite “sets” or series of exhibits. The nature of these sequences will vary according to the subject of the collection itself. They may be historical or geographical....’. It is for this purpose that the study, classification and conclusions of the material relating to folklore is based on the population of a particular area. The knowledge about the social groups helps to understand the underlying intrinsic formulations and value-systems, habits and traits of a particular social phenomena which is so important in the study of folklore of an area as of the western Himalayan region, as will be evident from the details made available in the foregoing pages.

A brief account of some communities in the region is available in the Gazetteer of Simla Hill States and Census Reports. H.A. Rose, in the monumental contribution titled ‘*A Glossary of the Tribes and Castes of the Punjab and North-West Frontier Province*’ (three volumes)⁵⁸, has produced a detailed alphabetic record of the communities in the region. As is said in the Preface to Volume II, the work ‘has no pretensions to finality’. It is made clear that, ‘The compilers’ aim has been to collect facts and record them in the fullest possible detail without formulating theories as to the racial elements which have made the population of the modern Punjab, the growth of its tribes or the evolution of caste. For information regarding the various theories which have been suggested on these topics, the reader may be referred to the works of Sir Alexander Cunningham (Archaeological Survey Reports: more especially Vols II, V, and XIV for the Punjab. Also, his *Ancient Geography of India, The Buddhist Period*, 1981), Belloew; (*Races of Afghanistan and Yusufai*) and Nesfield; (*Brief View of the Caste System of the North-Western Provinces and Qudh*: Allahabad, (1885), The Census Report for India, 1903, and *The Races of India* may also be referred to as standard works on these subjects (p. 1).

During the past years, Anthropological Survey of India, under the guidance of Dr K.S.Singh, Director General of the Survey, has conducted a survey of the communities inhabiting the country, under the Project, ‘People of India’. Under this Project, about 124 communities of Himachal Pradesh were studied (for details see Volume XXIV, 1996). The living communities go on adding to their folklore and enrich the human culture with their traditional culture passed on to the next generation systematically by way of myths customs, rituals, fairs and festivals and unsystematically through the happenings of everyday life. It would not be out of place to quote Sir Denzil Ibbetson on the study of Anthropology

in India, when he says, 'In the first place, it is impossible to assert of any addition, however apparently insignificant, to the sum of human knowledge that it will not turn out to be of primary importance. The whole fabric of the universe is so closely interwoven, mesh by mesh, that at whatever out-of-the-way corner we may begin unravelling, we may presently assist in the loosening of some knot which has barred the progress of science.'⁵⁹

Communities

Brahmans, Rajputs, Kanets, Baniyas, Kolis, etc., are the main communities in Mahasu region. The Gazetteer of the Simla District (1888-89) carries the following information about the tribes and castes of the region:

The village population is chiefly composed of Kanets, Kolis, Brahmans and Rajputs. All the chiefs of the Hill States are Rajputs. The Kolis are outcastes who will eat anything and perform any sort of service. They are very numerous and often employed as farm servants.

The Kanets are practically by far the most important element in the rural population of the whole of the Simla States. They are popularly supposed to be Rajputs who have lost their caste by allowing the practices of paying money for a wife, and of the second marriage of widows (*Karewa*). The tribe is very numerous in Kangra, and a full account of it is given in the Gazetteer of that district. In the Simla Hills, four classes among the Kanets rank higher than the rest and are known by the title of Khundh (Char). Their names are Bhaunthi, Parihar, Chippar, and Balhir. The other subdivisions of the tribe in these hills are: Kohal, Gahru, Baruri, Chakar, Katlehru, Suraji, Khash, Bandni, Chrola, Badalwal, Talanu, Rohal, Katalik, Pirival, Janwal, Dolal, Rohana, Kulharnun, Noru, Laddogarth. The Kanets, indeed, all classes of the hill population are simple-minded, orderly people, quiet and peaceful in their pursuits, truthful in character, and submissive to authority. They hardly require to be ruled, and both in the British district and the independent States, are left much to themselves. The Kanets are all Hindus, orthodox in most points, but permitting the re-marriage of widows.

Among the Brahmans of the rural part of the district, one grade, called Sasaki, is superior in popular estimation to the rest. It is from this grade that the Rajas and Ranas of the Hill States select their priests. Other Brahmans resort freely to agriculture to which even the Sasanis have no objection, if other resources fail. The principal point of distinction between the Sasanis and other Brahmans is said to be that the former do not allow the re-marriage of widows, whereas it is the custom among other Brahmans for a widow to marry the brother of her husband.⁶⁰

The situation referred to above has considerably changed with the period of a hundred years since the publication of the Gazetteer. Khash subdivision of the Kanets, as mentioned above, indicates that the most of the Kanets don't belong to this subdivision. This is only partly correct. All the Khash people residing in the region associate themselves with the Kanet community. However, their clans were separate. The Sasani is not a subdivision of the Brahmans but those priests who received land grant or gift from the rulers on various occasions, were known as 'Sasanis'. The information, thus, is not authentic and complete.

In Bushehr, 'Kanets form the bulk of the population. The residue is made up of Rajputs, Brahmans, a few traders, and lower castes, of which Kolis are the most numerous, but which also include *Lohars* (metal workers), *Turis* (musicians), *Nagalus* (basket makers), *Badhais* (carpenters), *Rehrs* (herdsmen), etc.⁶¹ About the Rajputs, it is said that the non-ruling Rajputs are merged in the Kanet tribe. Both Gaur and Saraswat Brahmans are found in Bushehr, the latter being the more numerous. There are divisions of 'all Brahmans, the Shukul, the superior priestly class, and Krishan or the lower ministrant class comprising such sections as the Bhat and the Acharaj.'⁶²

According to General Cunningham (Archaeological Survey of India, Volume XIV), the Kanets are identical with the Kulindas or Kunindas of early Hindu history and are a mixed race sprung from the Khashas, who, previous to the Aryan invasion, occupied the whole sub-Himalayan region. Cunningham divides the Kanets into three divisions of Chauhan, Mangal and Rao. Ibbetson is of the view that 'they have descended from intercourse between the Aryan immigrants and the women of the hills.'⁶³ Khasia and Rao, according to Ibbetson and the Kullu Gazetteer (1883-84), are the branches of the Kanets. The Simla District Gazetteer refers to three main sections of Kanets, viz., Khas, Rahu and Kuthara. The Khash, the original inhabitants of the Himalayan region, were a people without caste or class distinctions. They were governed by their own Panchayat system. Their dominant sections and individuals were, in due course of time, known as Mawis or Mawanas. The Mawis, later, formed small confederacies and lived by preying on one another. Eventually, they were overthrown by local rulers, Brahmans and Kshatriyas and others who were fed up with their atrocities. The relationship of the term 'Kanet' with 'Kunit' (violator) or 'Kanya Het' (daughters' love) as asserted by some authors, certainly appears farfetched as the historical accounts of the community do not establish them to be so.

The Kanet *khels* provide important clues to their social system and one aspect which did not receive the attention it deserved, is of village or *khel* deities. The tradition of village gods can provide the grassroot information and infrastructure to solve the question of the religious and social system of the Khashas and the Kanets and their inter-relationship with one another.

Khels are the subsections and these are called khund by the heroic people of the community. Each khund has a separate deity who is invoked through medium and commands received from him. In some Simla Hill States, as already mentioned, Kanets, Rajputs, Brahmans and Kolis formed the major chunk of population. In Baghal State, now a part of Solan district, the Brahman community had two classes—Sasani and Dharebar. The Sasanis were *muafidars* and considered themselves as superior to the Dharebars. The Sasanis, according to the State Gazetteer (1910: 5-6) served the Rajputs whereas Dharebars were the priests of the Kanets and lower castes. The tradition has now faded away and there is no distinction between the two.

In Baghat State, the Khas Kanets are said to have come from Bushehr. Their principal subdivisions or *khels* are Barser, Gopral, Khanogu, Jasti and Dharu. These are basically place names, indicating their native villages, as Barseru may be from Bushehr or Basaru (a village in Bushehr) and Gopral from Gofri another place in that state.

Two interesting legends about the origin of Khash Kanets, is given in the State Gazetteer of Baghat State (1911: 6-7). First, 'They are sprung from a Rishi who came into existence in the following manner. A woman once left her child in charge of a Sadhu, and went away on an errand. Before arriving at her destination, she had misgivings about the child, and turned back thinking that perhaps the Sadhu might go to sleep, and a wild beast carry off the child. She returned to the Sadhu, and found him with his eyes shut engaged in prayer and meditation. Without disturbing the Sadhu she took up the child and went away. When the Sadhu opened his eyes, he found the child gone, and thought that some beast must have taken it. So he made a figure of a child of Kusha grass and prayed to god to give it life. The prayer was granted, and presently, when the woman came back once more with her child, he presented her with the second child. The latter became a Rishi, and his descendants were called Khash, a corruption of kusha.'

According to the second legend, the Khash community is a descendant of an officer of the army which Kalyaman (whose reference is available

in the Mahabharata epic), the emperor of Kabul, brought down to help Jarasandh, Raja of Chanderi in his battle against Lord Krishna. Both these legends are not based on historical evidence but establish that community is associated with Aryan stock of people. The Kanets have matrimonial alliances with the Khash community in the area and both the communities are inter-related.

In Jubbal, now in Shimla district, Kanets form a majority of the population. They are divided into various sections and are by profession horticulturists and agriculturists. The Rajputs are also of two grades, the one who don't touch the plough and the other one who till their land themselves. The ploughing classes are called 'halbahu' and, were considered lower in status as compared to the non-tillers. There is, however, no such discrimination now and the landholders are considered better off. Turis are also agriculturists but their distinctive occupation, since ages, has been, music. They played their musical instruments in the premises of the village temples or on any other festive occasion. Badhais help in construction of houses. The Kolis are the landowners now but previously, they were tenants and attended to the services of their landlords. Rehars were the herdmen and sometimes also worked as cobblers.

In Rawin State, a feudatory of the erstwhile Jubbal State, the percentage of population of various communities, according to the 1901 Census report, was recorded as: Kanets 51%, Rajputs 10.6%, Brahmans 8% and other castes (chiefly Kolis and Turis) 30.4%. This establishes the fact that the Kanets were followed by the population of Kolis and Turis.⁶⁴

In Kumarsain, the majority of the population belonged to the Kanet community and the other communities included Brahmans, Rajputs, Kolis, Badhais, Kumharas and others. According to the State Gazetteer (1910: 6-7), 'It is said that the ancestor of the Kanets once broke his Janeo or sacred thread, while up a tree. According to the strict rules, he could neither move nor speak under such circumstances. He refrained from doing so for three days, but then he got tired and came down. After that, he could never wear the sacred thread again.' Kanets and Rahunis didn't intermarry during the old days. Rajputs were the relations of the ruling family and the Kanets were considered lower in social status as compared to Rajputs but there is no difference now. Kolis, according to the Gazetteer (p. 7), were also the weavers and all the menial classes were forbidden to wear gold ornaments without special sanction from the authorities.

In Bhajji State, the Kanets were in more in populace as compared to the Rajputs and Brahmans and in Dhami State, the Brahmans and Kanets were in about equal numbers. The sections of various communities in the State were known after the names of their villages, viz., Tungru of Tun, Dagoh, Kunal of Kun, Gurogru of Gurogi and Lachhogi of Lachhog village. In Kuthar State, the Brahmans, Kanets and Kolis were the principal communities. The Kunihar Brahmans were the oldest settlers in the State and were known for their astrological and medicinal skills. Brahmans, Rajputs and Kanets were the principal communities. In Tharoch State, the population was mainly of the Kanets.

Religion

The inhabitants of Mahasu region are Hindus of approximate orthodoxy. Buddhists are found in upper valleys of Pooch and Hangrang in Kinnaur. In the Gazetteer of Simla Hill States (1910: Bashahr 25-26), an assessment of the religion of this area suggests that, 'every village has a *deota* (deity) of its own, and many have more than one. Some of these are superior, and some inferior; some rich and others poor. We usually find that there is a principal god or goddess for each Pargana, who is identified with some form or incarnation of one of the regular Hindu deities. One of the commonness in types of legends associated with the origin of the *deota* is that he was a man of divine origin or attributes, whose mission was to free the earth of a certain demon, and that having accomplished his task, he was deified by the people, who had suffered from the existence of the demon. Possibly, the significance of such stories is that the deities of an earlier heathenism have been dressed out in a new guise by the Brahmans.' The statement is only partly true and the situation in the area is changing fast. The faith in deities and spirits is still there but with the spread of education, dogmas and blind faith in religious life are fading away. Spirit worship in the form of village gods is not a form of demon worship. It is, however, true that some heroes of medieval times are being worshipped in the form of village deities. The phenomena has administrative, social and religious significance and a detailed discussion will be taken up in the next chapter.

The religion of the hill folk can be divided into seven branches, mentioned below:

1. Worshippers of Shiva of Shakti—Shaivites and Shaktas.
2. Vaishnavites—the worshippers of Vaishnava deities.
3. Local gods who were living beings at one time and were deified due to their achievements.
4. Malignant spirits who turned to be benevolent and are worshipped out of fear or otherwise.
5. Deities related to Hindu mythology but termed as Asuras or anti-pantheon.
6. Wild spirits who are occasionally propitiated by arranging fairs, festivals and other ceremonies in or outside the habitats.
7. Deities of other religions, i.e. Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Jainism, and certain primitive religions, etc.

Nature and Ancestor Worship

The practice of ancestor worship and nature worship is exhibited through various ceremonies. People, on some festive occasions, go to the hilltops and perform *pooja* to the hillgods who are refrained from visiting the villages. Ancestor worship is performed on the hilltops and the departed family members are presented offerings of dishes, etc. This practise is prevalent in *Shradhs* and other ceremonies also. The dead are believed to stay in spirit form on snowclad mountain peaks. In Kinnaur, Kinner Kailash or the mountain of Khaskar is believed to be the abode of Lord Shiva and a portion of the mountain, called Raldang, is considered to be the resting place of the dead. Shrikhand peak is also considered as the place of meditation of Lord Shiva. In Kinnaur, the progeny of Banasur and Hidimba is worshipped as village gods. They include Chandika of Kothi village, Sungra Maheshur at Sungra (Grosnam) near Nichar, who is considered to be the Wazir of Bhima Kali of Sarahan, Bhabha Maheshur or Monshiras, Chagaon (Tholang) Monshiras, Devi Ukha (Usha) of Nichar and the Goddess Chitralkha of Taranda village.

In Shimla district, the principal deities include Mahasu, Shirgul, Dom, Koteswar Mahadeo, Parshu Ram, Bijat of Sarain, Goddess Bhima Kali of Sarahan, Goddess Hatkeshwari, Janglik, Banad, etc. The tradition of village gods diminishes in the Solan district (called Lower Mahasu till the formation of the district during 1971) and the famous gods worshipped in a cluster of villages are Bara Deo, Biju, Dano, Banni Devi, other goddesses and some minor gods, etc. The spirit of a deceased man,

if not accorded proper rites after death, is supposed to haunt the family house and inflict misfortune on the members of the family or their relations. The disturbed spirit is called *Pap*. The *Pap*, sometimes, is offered *Pooja*, as directed by the 'medium' or the oracle who mediates between the spirit and the living members. The spirit is made to leave the habitat after propitiation with the help of magicians or shamans. *Newa*, a spirit of a deceased man who happened to die discontented due to childlessness, deception by someone or any other situation which disturbed the soul of the dead due to some happening during this material existence, is propitiated by erecting a small hut in which a stone, metal or wooden image in the name of the dead is placed for worship, or an image of the dead kept on a water source, a *baoli* (water trough) or in the fields owned by the man while he was alive. *Newa* is worshipped in a certain manner on no-moon's day (*Amavasya*), as directed by the priest or a medium. A field which is considered unfit for cultivation after it is placed in the name of *Newa* is called *Sog*. The image of *Newa* is called *Newa*, *Och* or *Diai* in Shimla and Solan districts but in Kinnaur, where Tibeto-Burman with an admixture of Kirati are the spoken dialects, it is called *gurobach*. It is curious to note that sometimes *Pap* and *Newa*, after the installation of their images in the habitats, attain the position of a deity in due course of time.

Fairs and festivals of the region include a full cycle during the year and the places of their celebrations stand decided, alongwith their period of observances. Bhunda (rope-sliding ceremony), Shand or Shant, Badhpur, etc., are traditional and occasional ceremonies conducted after decided or irregular intervals but the annual ceremonies are performed without interruption. Boodhi Diwali (Old Diwali) is an annual function in some villages in the region.

The management of temples and medium system is a typical social organization in the region associated with the pre-historic oral traditions of the communities settled in the area. These practices have contributed a great deal to the enrichment of folk traditions in general and folklore in particular. Fairs and festivals, birth, marriage and death customs are also very typical in this region.

In Kinnaur, the Phulaich fairs are arranged during the months of September and October and are an important feature of the social and religious life of the people. The festival, though a ceremony of flower worship, is a service for the souls of deceased ancestors. In some villages,

traditional and secret songs called 'Gitkareng' or 'Geethang' are sung by special singers called 'Gitkares' who are not allowed by the concerned village gods to sing the song on any other occasion during the year. The ceremony has no exact counterpart outside Kinnaur but in other parts of the region, such typical festivals continue to be arranged.

The cult of Banasur in Kinnaur, the cult of Junga in erstwhile Keonthal State, the cult of Parshu Ram in outer Seraj and parts of Bushehr, the cult of Mahasu in Shimla, the cult of Shirgul in parts of Shimla and Sirmaur and the cult of the Pandavas and Bara Deo in Solan, are some of the very important divinity cults relating to the village gods of the region, indicating mythological and pre-historic traces of various communities settled in this part of the country.

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CHAPTER TWO

Ancient Hill Tribes and Castes

The Himalayan region has remained the abode of people of various mythological and historical tribes even prior to the time of the Vedas and the epics. It is not possible to correctly ascertain the religion and stock of inhabitants of those days as no systematic written record of the people is available. It is, however, clear that varied climatic conditions, topographical situations and magnificent scenic beauty as well as openness of the valleys attracted the settlers and some mythological and historical races made the region their permanent or temporary dwelling place. The remains and ruins of monuments, temples and religious places; the names of places associated with different languages; the remnants and myths related to ancient cultural traditions either since forgotten or handed down to the present people; costumes and ornaments as well as living habits and ritualistic performance of ceremonies, fairs and festivals, confirm that the earlier dwellers of the region belonged to varied sets of people with typical as also fantastic social traits. The fusion and amalgamation of social and cultural phenomena was so impressive that all the settlers had to agree to the demanding situations, as the alternatives left with them were comparatively limited when compared to other regions where the societies had to face less challenges of everyday life. Socio-linguistic scenario in the region bears testimony to the fact that the speakers of different languages have left their indelible imprints on the present culture of the people. As was the case of other parts of this mighty mountain, the northwestern Himalayan region, with its easy access, attracted wanderers, raiders and traders alike.

The ancient inhabitants of northwestern Himalayan region can be divided into two broad categories of mythological and historical tribes and castes.

The mythological races include those people who find mention in the scriptures and religious literature of the country and are considered to be demi-gods or of divine origin. These races include Kinnaras, Gandharvas,

Yakshas, Nagas, Asuras, Pitrs, Rakshasas, Pishachas, etc. Some of the mythological tribes are also historical, as they continue to exist even at the present time with their changed social system, nomenclature and identity.

The historical races whose references have been found in the ancient records and inscriptions, etc., include the Kiratas, Kunindas, Kanets and other communities associated with the Varna system of Manu. The followers of Buddhism, Jainism, Islam and Christianity also have historical recognition in the region. The folkloristic traditions of a region are based on popular antiquity. Without having some idea of the past of a particular people, it is difficult to have a fair assessment of the present social system. It is for this purpose that a keen observer of the folkloristic wealth of a particular region should keep in mind the mythological sequences and historical references of the people.

The Himalayas, in its grandeur and mystery, nurtured the belief that this was once the abode of gods. Kalidasa, the great Sanskrit poet, called it a measuring rod of the earth. Nicholas Roerich was so fascinated with the grandeur of the snowclad lofty peaks of the mountain, that he did not want to equate it with any mountain in the world. Rabindranath Tagore rightly called it a bridge between divinity and mankind. It was the abode of celestial beings and even the people living in far flung areas in the remote valleys of mountain, had been deified by the authors of scriptures. This phenomena occurred partly due to lack of information about them and partly because of strange myths and legends made available to outsiders about them.

Among various communities settled in the western Himalayan region, the Khashas and the Kanets are most numerous in the upper and middle belts of the State of Himachal Pradesh. The Khashas or the Khashiyas, as they call themselves, are a branch of Aryan settlers whose traces can be found in ancient literature, i.e. the Mahabharata, the Ramayana and the Puranas. They are said to be a pastoral and nomadic tribe of Central Asia, which entered Indian soil from the northwest and settled in Kashmir and Punjab before moving to the other regions of Himalaya mountain out of compulsion and attraction of pastures. The 'Scythian Hordes' and other invaders forced them to move to the mountain tracts during the pre-historic period. The Kanets include the Khashas as one of their sub-groups and all the families of the Khashas located in the erstwhile Simla Hill States are shown as belonging to Kanet community in the

State revenue records. It is, however, difficult to say that the largest Kanet community formed a major tribe of the region and the Khashas were a part of them or otherwise. In order to understand the ethnicity of the Khasha-Kanet people, it would be worthwhile to discuss the mythological tribes first. The term Khashiya or Khasiya has folkloristic connotations and the brave Rajputs of the hills associate themselves with Khashas in their assertions, folktales, folksongs and legends, whereas 'Kanet' is a generic term for Rajputs of ordinary social standing, i.e. for those who are not associated with the ruling class of Rajputs by way of blood relationship. The term 'Khasha' is more frequent in the literature about Paharis and the term Khasiya or Khashiya is used in common parlance.¹

The Kinnaras

Kinnaur is a border district of Himachal Pradesh. The inhabitants of this district are called 'Kinnauras' or 'Kinnaras'. Before its emergence as a district on 1 May 1960, this part was known as Chini Tehsil of erstwhile Bushehr State prior to Independence and later, after the creation of Himachal Pradesh as a part 'C' state during the year 1948, a Tehsil of Mahasu district of the state. The area is surrounded by Tibet in the east, Garhwal in the south, Spiti in the north and Mahasu (now Shimla) district in the south west. The tract is immensely important as the inhabitants of Kinnaur are called Kinnauras or Kinnaras and a mythical tribe of Kinnaras, the celestial musicians of the court of Indra, the ruler of *Swarg* (heaven) are believed to be their ancestors. The nomenclature of Kinnaur continued since prehistoric times and any association of the present inhabitants with the mythical Kinnara people is based on similarity of place and community names. It would not be out of place to record the brief account of these people in succeeding pages.

A terse outline will help to have a peep into the past history and culture of the community. The Kinnaras are the biggest scheduled tribe in the region. They find mention in the classical literature, the Puranas and the theological literature of the Jains and the Buddhists. Iconographic references of the ancient mythical Kinnara tribe, whose people were called *Ashwamukh* (horse-faced), *Geetmodi* (joyful with songs), *Harin Nartakas* (deer-dancers), *Mayu* (magical), etc., are quite abundant in art

and literature. These people were considered demi-gods and counted among the ten Dev-yonis as defined by the author of the *Amarkosha*:

*Vidyadharaps-Yaksh-Raksho-Gandharv-Kinnarah,
Pisacho-Guhyakah siddho Bhootoami Devyonyab²*

Among the ten celestial beings, *Amarkosha* has enumerated: (i) Vidyadhar; (ii) Apsar; (iii) Yaksh; (iv) Rakshas; (v) Gandharva; (vi) Kinnara; (vii) Pisacha; (viii) Guhyak; (ix) Siddha; and (x) Bhuta as mentioned after Vidyadharas in the above Shloka. In *Amarkosha* (Vyom Varg 2/74), four names of Kinnaras as Kimpurusha, Turangvadan, Mayu and Kinnar have been mentioned.³ It is further referred to in the same book (3/3)⁴ that the Kinnaras lived on Gandhamadan mountain which was one of the seven mountains; namely, the Himalaya, the Nishadha, the Vindhya, the Malyavan, the Pariyatra, the Hemkuta and the Gandhamadana. In the *Mahabharata*⁵ they have been mentioned as the allies of Vaishnavan (Kuber) along with Yaksh, Kimpurush, and Rakshasa. In *Adiparva* (66/8), it is mentioned that Kimpurushas were the progeny of Pulah and the daughter of Daksha.

In Valmiki *Ramayana* (Kiskindha kand, third Sarga/50), there is a mention of Sugriva directing a brave *Vanar* to proceed to the Himalayas in search of Sita, the consort of Lord Rama and reach Sheetoda river near Vaikhanas Sarovar which formed a part of Kuru Pradesh and where Gandharva, Kinnara, Siddha, Naga and Vidyadhara roamed about. Himvan Parvat has been mentioned as the dwelling place of the mythical⁶ races of Rakshasa, Pishacha, Yaksha, Vidyadhara, Kinnara and Apsaras in *Matsya Purana*. The Kinnaras lived in Kimpurushdesha and Arjun, in his *digvijai yatra*, reached their country and met their ruler Drumputra. He, according to the Digvijai Parva of the Maha-bharata, later attacked Hatakdesh and conquered Guhyakas, the people of that country. After conquering Gandharva Desh and Naga Desh, he reached Mansarover. With this account, it can be inferred that during the period of the *Mahabharata*, these kingdoms adorned the names identifying the present-day mythical races in the region and these people bore the testimony of being inhabitants in flesh and blood. It is suggested that the ancient Kinnar-Desh was situated in the Himalayan region and since no other area is identifiable with their mythical name, Kinnaur is the only possibility in this regard. The boundaries of the Kinnar-Desh or Kimpurushvarsh are not exactly known but it is not out of place to mention that this area

might have been quite large as compared to the present district of Kinnaur, a small tract situated between $31^{\circ} 05', 50''$, and $32^{\circ} 05' 15''$ north latitude and $77^{\circ} 45'$ and $79^{\circ} 00' 35''$ east longitude with an area of only 6,553 sq. kilometres.⁷

Not only in Hindu scriptures, the Kinnara (Kinner) found their name included among less divine personages even in Jain and Buddhist literature. The Jain scriptures mention Pishach, Bhut, Rakshasa, Kinner, Kimpurush, Mahorag (Nag) and Gandharva in the list and Buddhists had the following classification of demi-gods: (i) Dev, (ii) Yaksha, (iii) Naga, (iv) Rakshasa, (v) Gandharva, (vi) Asur, (vii) Garud, (viii) Kinner, and (ix) Mahorag.

This information indicates that Kimpurushas were not included as a separate group by the authors of the Buddhist literature and the Mahorags were considered as a different community from Nagas. The Jains, however, had only seven categories of divine beings including Mahorag, the Nags.

The local people call 'Kanauring' as their habitat and the language spoken by them is also known by this very name. The other names of the region are, Kunu or Khunu, a mountainous tract by Tibetans; Kinner Desh (Rahul Sankrityayan); Kanawar (T. Grahame Bailey and others); Koonawur (Gerard, G.A), Koorpra (Gerard, G.A), etc. About the language of the people, Rev. Francke (1872: 10) mentions, 'this language was noticed as early as 1817 by Gerard, who published a vocabulary of it. Diack made a grammar, but the true nature of this language was not recognized, until Rev. Bruske of the Moravian mission, began to study the language thoroughly and made a translation of the gospel of St. Mark into it. It was then recognized, as pointed by Sten konow, that the grammar of this language shows close affinities to Mundari (spoken in Chhota Nagpur)⁸. He maintains that during the remote past, amalgamation must have taken place between Munda aboriginal tribes and Tibetans. G.A Grierson (LSI, 1967(R): 17, 77) points out that Kinnauri is a pronominalized language and pronominalization is a characteristic of Kol or Munda languages of the Austric family. This phenomena could only have been acquired through contact with Austric speeches now suppressed. Tobdan maintains that Kirata, the Mongoloid people—whose first mention is found in *Yajurveda*—were inhabiting the Himalayan region in the remote past and during the course of their movement from east to west. The earliest of them came in contact with

the Kols and the Mundas. The speakers of Indo-Tibetan languages whose dialects possess the characteristics of pronominalization, represent the earliest group of entrants, among whom Kinnaras are the one. According to him, this is also corroborated from the fact that the Kinnauras and Lahaulas are the westernmost dwellers among all such peoples and it appears that in due course of time, one of these groups of people came to be recognized as Kinners⁹. This hypothesis is a simple confirmation of the opinion expressed by Rahul Sankrityayan, who thought that the Kirata and Kinnara belonged to the same stock of people. We shall discuss this theory in depth while dealing with the Kiratas. Here again, Tobdan suggests that there is yet another tradition found about the Kinners in Tibetan literature. In fact, these descriptions may perhaps belong to much later period as compared to those found in Indian literature and it would not be surprising if some of them are based on Indian sources. According to the tradition of Bon, the pre-historic religion of Tibet, the area was originally inhabited by two tribes known as Mara or Mi'-am-chi (Kinner of Indian literature) and sMi' (human beings). The country was then ruled by gods and it was named as sMara or Lha-yul Gung-thang (country of gods). The description about the Kinners in the Tibetan tradition, their antiquity, their association with gods and the area of their habitation greatly coincides with those found in Indian literature (or Nam-dag 1983: 21).¹⁰

Kimpurushvarsha, the mythical abode of the Kinnars, was also known as Hemkut and formed a part of nine divisions of Jambudvipa. In Pauranic period, Agnidhra, the son of Priyavrata along with his consort Barhishmati, was the ruler of Jambu dvipa. He married Purvachiti, an Apsara and had nine sons. Their names were: Nabhi, Kimpurush, Harivarsh, Ilavrit, Ramyak (Ramyā), Hiranyamaye (Hiranyavan), Kuru, Bhadrashva and Ketumal. When the Apsara deserted the king and went back to Brahmlok, he divided the whole of the kingdom among his sons. According to this division, Nabhi got Him Varsh; Kimpurush was given Hemkut Varsh; Naishadhvarsh was allotted to Harivarsh; Ilavritvarsh was given to Ilavrit which included Mount Meru; Ramyak was allowed Ramyakvarsh including Nil Parvat; Hiranvan got Shvetdeepvarsh; Kuru was given Shringadvvarsh; and Bhadrashva got Bhadrashvarsh which was located with Meru mountain towards the eastern side. The youngest son Ketumal got Gandhamadanvarsh¹¹. This division places Kimpurushvarsh at the second place and the list shows that the areas beyond the Himalayan

region were also included in the kingdom at that time. Alexander Cunningham associates the name Kanawar with its present natives who are designated as Khashiyas or Kanets and says, "in fact, the people of kanawar generally are called Kanets, a name which is said to designate a people of mixed race. The proper name of the country is, therefore, most probably Karnawara, the country of Karanas, or people of mixed race, a name usually applied to the offspring of a degraded Kshatriya and Kshatriya female."¹² The assertion is untenable because 'Kanwar' is not a recent name and the interpretation has nothing to do with the mythical Kinnara race. Moreover, the Karens, a subgroup of Kanets, as mentioned in the Gazetteer of Simla Hill States (1910-1911), is not found only in Kinnaur. This seems to be a farfetched conclusion of the nomenclature and is liable to be contested by the inhabitants.

Rinchen Zang-po, born in 956 AD went to study in Kashmir during the year 974 AD and later became a famous *Lotsava* (translator). He established several monasteries in the Himalayan region. He was one of the foremost monk scholars responsible for laying strong foundations of Buddhism in Kinnaur. With the adoption of a new religion by the people, the most valuable links of the past stand demolished and only the folk religion has the undercurrents preserved in the rituals, fairs, festivals and customs to help the explorers to arrive at any conclusion.

In the *Rgveda*, there is no reference to the Kinnara people.¹³ According to *Vayu Purana*, they lived on Mahanil Parvat in the Himalayas. D.C. Sircar refers to Kinnaras and the Gandharvas as ancient tribes, who, in later literature, were transformed into mythical beings. He maintains that Yaksh, Kimpurush and Khash were the inhabitants of the Himalaya.¹⁴ According to some scholars, Kinnaras had the head of horse, whereas the Kumpurushas had the body of horse and head of a human being.¹⁵ In the *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*,¹⁶ the theory of 'horse-head' and 'horse-body' is endorsed. The mistake about the theory of 'head of a horse' has probably occurred due to the name of 'Ashwamukhas' given to the mythical Kinners. The assertion of 'the body of a horse and face of a human being' is based on Greek mythology where a creature with the body of a horse and head of human being is mentioned¹⁷.

Kinner, Gandharva, Yaksh, Nag and Dev were known as Panchjana (five people) of Vedic period and the inhabitants of *Swarag* (heaven). But in due course of time, the alienation of the Panchjana was changed and it included Gandharva, Pitr, Dev, Asur and Rakshasa.¹⁸ In Kavya Mimansa

of Rajshekhar, the Kinnara and the Khasa have been mentioned as the dwellers of Kartikeyanagar. Kinnaras formed a constituent of Panchjana of *Swarg* but all the natives of the place were collectively called Devas¹⁹. The Nagas, one of the other constituents of Panchjana, connived with the Dasyus and plotted against the Devas. Later, the Gandharvas and Yakshas also behaved in the same manner and the unity of Panchjana was disturbed.²⁰ In *Amarkosha*, various references to Kinnaras are available. Kuber was the Gan-nayak (head) of Kinnar-Lok.²¹ Ratnakar Shastri maintains that Kinnar-Desh included Kulu, Chamba, Kangra, Jammu and Sapt Sindhu regions and also that Vipasa, Iravadi (Ravi) and Chandrabhaga originated from the region.²² He is of the opinion that the area of Kinner-Desh as estimated by Rahul Sankrityayan to be about seventy miles in length and its width should have been more than that. Rahul Sankrityayan maintained that the boundary of Kinnar-Desh touched Kalsi in Deharun, a place where an inscription of king Asoka was found.²³ According to Ratnakar Shastri, Kuruvansh was related to Kinnaras.²⁴ He did not give any proof for his theory and, as such, it requires further research. In the *Mahabharata* (Van, Part-V, Chapter 109), there is a mention of Yudhishthira's visit to Kimpurush Khand served by Siddhas and Charans. The references of Kimpurush Khand are available in *Raghuvansh* (4/78) and *Nirukt* (Poo 2/3).

The Gandharvas

Gandhar or Gandharva-Desh included the valley of Swat river, Sindhu-kosh (Hindukush), Turushk (Turkistan), Nishadh and Kamboj. It had its capital at Pushkalavati (the present Char-Sadda). A portion of Kashmir situated, between Gandhar and Kimpurush-Khand, was a part of Nag-Desh. According to Ratnakar Shastri, Devasur Sangram was fought in the plains of Gandhar and Purushpur (Peshawar), due to which it retained the privilege of being the capital of the state.²⁵ The State of Gandhar comprised Dard, Balhik, Kamboj, Trigarta, Darvabhisar and Koknad areas. Suval ruled the region during the regime of Yudhishthira and attended the Rajsuya Yajna arranged by him.²⁶ Tumburu, Narad, Haha, Huhu and some others were the musicians of the Gandharvas who adorned the court of Indra. Vishwvasu, who ruled the region prior to Suval, was a great musician himself. He played the Brihati Veena. Arjun

learnt Dhanurvedya and music while staying in *Swarg*.²⁷ The famous Apsaras of Gandharv-Desh included Grihtachi, Menaka, Rambha, Swayam Prabha, Urvashi, Gopali, Chitrasena, etc. Gandharv Vivah was admitted as a legal marriage by Manu in his *Manusmriti*.²⁸ Scriptures such as *Chandogya*, *Brhadaranyak*, *Shatpath* and *Aitreya Brahman*, etc., vividly mention the social and religious life of the Gandharvas. King Dashratha went to Swarg to suppress the unrest created by the Gandharvas on the invitation by Indra, the ruler of Swarg. Rani Kaikeyi got a boon from her husband in the battle; on this promise she sent Ramchandra to exile for fourteen years.²⁹ Panini (about 900 B.C) was the most famous scholar of Gandhar. He belonged to northwestern town of Shalatur. He stayed in Gandhar for seven years, as is clear from a Sutra in *Ashtadhyayi* which reads, 'Gandhari Sapt Samah.'³⁰ Some scholars infer that the Ashwamukh (horse-faced) Kinnaras, though human beings, were the owners of horses of good quality and travelled with them, wherever they went.³¹

According to *Vayu Purana* (69.11), the sons born to Suyasha and Pracheta in the community of Gandharvas were called Yaksha and their ruler was Kuber. In *Brahmand Purana* (2.16.9), the Gandharv country has been referred to be located in the Himalayas. The country was in Swarg and the Gandharvas entertained the Devas with their music. *Brahmand Purana* (3.7. 117-170; 255; 8.10; 24.59; 4.36.16) and *Matsya Purana* (6.45; 8.6) refer to them as demi-gods like Yaksha, Rakshas and Pishachas. Chitrarath was their ruler. They had eleven Ganas,—Abhraj, Andhari, Rambhari, Suryavarcha, Kridhu, Hast, Suhast, Muradhvan, Mahamana, Vishwvasu and Krishanu. Gandharva-Desh was famous for its horses and according to *Brahmand Purana* and *Vayu Purana*, one of their branches was also associated with Nags. The *Mahabharata* (Sabha Parv V, 28.6) confirms that the area surrounding the Mansarover Lake was protected by the Gandharvas and Arjuna, and at the time of 'Digvijai', it got three horses, namely, Titir, Kulmash and Manduk as a gift from them. According to *Bhagwat Purana* (3.3.3; 9.20. 15-16), *Brahmand Purana* (4.15.5) and *Vishnu Purana* (3.10.24), the Gandharva type of marriage was conducted with the consent of bridegroom and the bride and no mediation was required. Pururva brought Urvashi from Gandharva Lok and a part of *Sam Ved*, was named as Gandharva Ved, as referred to in *Vishnu Puran* and other scriptures.

Kimpurushas and Kinnaras

Kimpurushas and Kinnaras were born out of the reflection of Brahma.³² They lived in Kailas and were specialized in music and dance. According to *Brahmand Purana*, the seven sages of *Swarg* gave training of religion to the Kimpurushas. Both the groups were the followers of Kuber and served him. The Kinnaras, being the Ashwamukhas, have references in *Brahmand Purana* (3.22.56), *Matsya Purana* (4.53) and *Vayu Purana* (47.57; 69.31).

According to *Brahmand Purana*, the Kimpurushas were the progeny of Pulah and Krodhvasha. In the *Purana* (3.356; 7.171; 444; 467; 8.72), it is mentioned that Bhut, Pishach, Kinner and Vanar communities were born to Pulah and Krodhvasha. *Vishnu Purana* (1.15.125) also confirms this information. Bhim, according to *Matsya Purana* (6.43; 146.18) and *Vishnu Puranas* killed some of the sons of Krodhvasha. The Nag are also associated with the same parentage. *Vayu Purana* (70.64-65; 73.24.25) also confirms that the progeny of Pulah included Danav, Gandharv, Kinner, Bhut, Sarp, Rakshas, Pishach etc. In *Bhagwat Purana* (5.2.23), the name of the consort of Kimpurush was Praturupa and she was the daughter of Meru. Nine daughters of Meru were married to nine sons of Agnidhra. The presentation seems to be symbolic but not entirely hypothetical.

According to *Vishnu Purana* (II,2/14), the Kimpurushvarsh was nine thousand Yojan in length and extended from Himvatvarsh to Hemkut mountain. It was situated in the southern side of Mount Meru. The Sabha Parva of the *Mahabharata* places this region beyond Dhavalgiri in the north of the Himalaya mountain. As per its mention in *Matsya Purana* (114/63) and *Garuda Puran* (55/2), it was located in the southeastern position. According to *Vaman Purana*, the people of the region were attractive and enjoyed longevity whereas, *Vayu Purana* establishes the Kinnaras to be the progeny of Ashwamukhas who had numerous Ganas. Mahadev appeared in the form of Kirata in their country. They played in the Indra Van and there were several *van* (forests), viz., Uma Van, Sar Van, Kraunch Van, Shail Van, etc., in their country. They had one hundred towns in the Himalayan region.

Some of the references quoted above may seem contradictory and may not lead one to reach at an exact conclusion about the Kinnaras but it is evident from the inferences that the Kinnaras, lived in the Himalayan

region. The present inhabitants of Kinnaur worship eighteen deities as their village gods in addition to Buddhist and minor deities who came to the region at a later stage. The father of their eighteen gods and goddesses is believed to be Banasur, a character of the *Mahabharata* times, who, according to the Kinner mythology, married Hidimba after their first meeting at a place near Gorboring Aag (cave of chaos) at Sungra Village. This union resulted in eighteen sons and daughters, namely, Chandika, Sungra Maheshur, Bhabha Maheshur, Chagaon Maheshur, Usha of Nichar, Chitralekha of Taranda and others. The entire region was divided by these brothers and sisters among themselves and the distribution was made by the eldest sister Chandika of village Kothi who retained some area of Kinnaur for herself without disclosing it at the time of division. Banasur is told to have come from Guge Chantrang or *Chanthang* (Tsaprang), a place in Tibet and Hirma, according to an account, was a native of Lahaul. It establishes that Asuras were also known to the ancient Kinnaras. In fact, Asuras, the natives of Assiria, were the elder brothers of the Devas or Suras.³³ Though Kinnaras are Tibeto-Burmese speakers, yet some archaic terms found in their language establish them to be an ancient tribe. The words include Kherang (milk) a corruption of 'Ksheer' (Sanskrit), Gol (Moon), Golsang (month), Deshang (village), Dakhenang (worship), Diyusang (day), Doshang (curse or sin), Shastrang (puzzles), Vamang (reverse), Romang (hair), Roshang (to get annoyed), etc. The Kinnauri vocabulary shows a queer admixture and amalgamation of Sanskrit, Kirati, Tibetan and Hindi as well as Pahari words.

Culturally, the fairs and festivals of the Kinnaras include nature and ancestor worship. Flowers are offered to the village gods after getting them from the mountain tops on festive occasions and a festival of flowers (*Phulaich*) is celebrated with great pomp and show. These polyandrous people of the past call themselves as Khashiyas and have menial classes of Dome and Koli in the region.

Kinnaras have their separate identity and even during the regime of the ruling princely state, their area was known as Kanawar, whereas the rest of the state of Bushehr was called Kochi region. Their fame remained in the minds of people through oral legends and mythological literature of the country, ever shining, since time immemorial.

The Asuras

Asuras, according to Kuiper,³⁴ constitute the ‘central problem of Vedic Religion’ as they are considered to have been associated with the first stage of creation of the universe. According to Sampurnanand, the terms of Deva and Asuras were synonymous in the beginning. Vrtrasur, who was killed by Indra, has been called ‘Dev’ but, later, this tradition got reversed and ‘Asura’ became a derogatory term. The word ‘Dev’ was used as ‘Devta’ in the later literature in India, whereas in Iran ‘Ahurmazda’ (asurmahat) or the biggest of the Asuras was known as the highest of supreme god.³⁵ The Asuras in India became demons. The conclusion drawn by Wash Edward Hale³⁶ in this regard is noteworthy. He writes, ‘in the *RV*, the struggle between the Aryans and the indigenous people is often mentioned, but it is normally expressed by saying that Indra fought these people. Thus, when a verse in the *AV* says that Indra fought the Asuras, the Asuras referred to could easily be indigenous enemy lords.’ He further asserts, ‘a comparison of the usages of Asura—with the usages of Dasa and Rakshasas—supports this last point. Rakshasas clearly refers to non-human, demonic beings. These are more often opposed by Agni or Soma than by Indra. However, dasyu and dasa are used to refer to human enemies of the Aryans and these are usually opposed to Indra. Thus, when Indra is opposed to Asuras, the Asuras are likely to be human. There also seems to be another connection between Asura and Dasyu and Dasa. Dasyu and Dasa - become extremely rare in the same texts in which Asura begins to be used often with a bad connotation. Perhaps the plural usage of Asura for enemies was virtually synonymous with Dasyu and Dasa and replaced these words in later texts. There are also several verses in which Dasyu and Asura appear in close connection—perhaps even in apposition in some cases.’ It is clear from this statement that Indra was a human being and Dasyu, who are synonymous with Asuras, were also human being. When the ‘plural usage of Asura’ denotes human beings, why can’t we think that the term ‘Asura’ in singular form would also mean the same? His statement (p.179) that, there is no being in Vedic literature who is called an Asura in the godly sense in the early literature and is later called an Asura in the demonic sense. Hence, the change that occurs in India is in the usage of the word and not in the nature of group of beings to which that word applies,’ requires further discussion as the term Asura has

been used in both the senses extensively in the Vedic literature. We shall take up further discussion in the issue while talking about the role of Asuras in various ritualistic observances and legends available in the region.

The Kiratas

Kirata, Khash, Shak and Kanets or Kunindas are the communities who are believed to have settled in the Himalayan region in the remote past. The Kiratas are mentioned in the ancient literature and they came into possession of the areas from Assam to Nepal, Kumaon, Kangra and other areas of Himachal Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir.³⁷ In Assam, Sikkim and Bhutan the Kiratas are still settled. In Kumaon, the Raj Kirata or Raji community is currently available. The Tihri region has been mentioned as Kirata area in the *Mahabharata* and according to *Kashyap Samhita*.³⁸ Yamuna Valley remained a stronghold of the Kiratas. In Kangra, Baijnath was known as Kirat or Kir Gram (the place of the Kiratas) up to the twelfth century AD.³⁹ The people here worshipped the spirits of ancestors, mountains and rivers and village gods and sacrificed animals to appease them.⁴⁰ The people of this Tribe, according to G.P Singh (1990: 1), constitute the major segments of the Tribal communities living in the Himalayan and sub-Himalayan regions, forest tracts, mountainous areas and the Gangetic plains, valleys and deltas of India.⁴¹ The Kiratas had a dynastic rule in ancient Nepal from the epic age down to seventh century AD (G.P. Singh, 1990: 15). They are referred to in *Shukla Yajurveda* (XXX.16) and the *Atharvaveda* (X.4.14), where they have been mentioned as the dwellers of caves and mountains in the eastern Himalayan region. The tribe finds numerous mentions in evidences of archaeological significance (G.P. Singh, 1990: 28-34). Hecateus (Hektaios), a Greek historian who belonged to Miletus during B.C. 549-486, refers to a north Indian tribe Kalatia or Kallatia which may etymologically be identified with the Kiratas of the region.⁴² Some scholars are of the opinion that the Kiratas were of Mongoloid origin, but this theory has been repudiated by the others.⁴³ The Kiratas were also known as Dasyus *Mahabharata* Santi Parva, 65, 13-15, 17-23). Vasudev Saran Agrawala, while giving the historical interpretations of *Mahabharata* [Bharata Savitri (Santi Parva), Vol. 3, pp. 60-63], as quoted by G.P. Singh (1990: 63) remarked that the eighteen kinds of Dasyus comprising both

indigenous and foreign races—the Kiratas, Yavanas, Gandharas, Cinas, Sabaras, Barbaras, Sakas, etc.—had settled in different parts of India before the dawn of the Gupta age and were leading the life of the Dasyus. The Dasyus neglected the religious rituals and rites suggested by the Aryans.

Suniti Kumar Chatterjee⁴⁴ strongly pleaded in favour of the Mongolian or Mongoloid origin of the Kiratas. According to him, ‘The name Kirata is for the first time found in the *Yajurveda* (*Shukla Yajurveda, Vajsaneyi Samhita*, XXX, 16; also *Krsna Yajurveda, Taittiriya Brahmana*, III, 4, 12, 1). In connection with the *Purusamedha* or ‘man offering’ sacrifice, where a list of all kinds of human beings and animals symbolically or figuratively offered to the gods as sacrifice is given, we find the following passage:

*guhabyah Kiratam; Sanubhyo Jambhakam;
Parvatebbayah Kimpurusam.*

Which means, ‘A Kirata, for the caves; a Jambhaka (long-toothed man?) for the slopes; a Kimpurusha (an ugly man, a wild man, an ape) for the mountains.’ Though the meanings elicited by him are open to doubt, the reference of the text is useful to trace the history of the tribe. While supporting the theory of Indo-Mongoloid nomenclature of the Kirata, he wrote, ‘They may, for convenience, be described in English as Indo-Mongoloids; and this is a term which defines at once their Indian connection and their place within the cultural milieu in which they found themselves, as well as their original racial affinity (1951: 23).’

Atkinson (*Himalayan Gazetteer*, Vol. II, Part 1, p. 363) mentions: ‘There is every reason to suppose that the Nagas, Kiratas and Khashas entered India by the same route as the Aryans, and that the Kiratas were the first to arrive, followed by the Nagas and then the Khashas. The earliest notices regarding the Kiratas bring them westward as the Jumna in the first century.’ G.P. Singh (1990: 134-35) maintains that the interpretation of the data as mentioned in the *Mahabharata* (Aranyaka Parva, 141, 25) shows that they had expanded upto Rampur Bushahr (close to the valley of Spiti in Himachal Pradesh) in the western side of the Kuninda Pradesh in the mountain tracts of Yamuna in Dehradun district. The total area occupied by them became popularly known as Kirata-desa (V.S. Agrawala, *Bharata Savitri*, Vol. 1-1, p. 268).

The folklore of the Kirata people or its admixture with the oral and written literature of other communities, undisputably forms an invaluable treasure of the cultural traditions of our country. The pure Kirata people are difficult to be found but whatever is left of them in the shape of recorded and unrecorded folklore, history and social system, must invite the attention of one and all of us. The folktales of the scattered Kirata tribes, their manners and customs, myths and legends, folk arts and other forms of folk literature are all helpful not only for comparative study of our present and past system but history also as rightly pointed out by G.P. Singh when he says that, 'Kautilya (fourth Century BC) was probably the first Indian classical scholar to distinctly recognize the historic value of folk literature in a broader context by affirming that '*Puranamitivrta - makhyayika Dharamsastra Arthasastre Ceitihasa*' (The Purana record of the past, tale, illustrative story, the secular literature and Arthasastra all are itihasa (History)).⁴⁵

The ancient Janapadas of the Kiratas, Pulindas, Kuru, Pancala, Matsya (Virata), Magadha, Anga, Vanga, Kimpurusha, Suhma, Kausika, Tamralipti, etc. were sanctified by the sacred water of the Ganges. It is said that Isvara, the king of the Kiratas, ruled between the Ganges and the Yamuna and the territory of the Kurus lay to the south of this kingdom.⁴⁶ It is worthwhile to mention here that the territory of ancient Kurus lay to the southwest of Kinnaur or Kinnerdesh where the ancient Kinnara or Kimpurusha tribe lived. The Kinnara people, even today, have the metal image of Ishvara as the image of the greatest of their gods fixed in the palanquins (*Rathang*) of their village gods. Ishvara image is believed to be the symbol of lord Mahadeva and the palanquins that are used for the village gods are associated with the deities belonging to the progeny of Banasur and Hidimba. It seems probable that the pre-historic population of the Kiratas had Ishvara, Banasur and other Asura Kings as their rulers and Hidimba was their brave ruling queen at one time. During the *Mahabharata* period, the territories of Kiratas and the Tanganas formed a part of the domain of King Subahu, a ruler of the Kunindas. The Kunindas or Kulindas were the inhabitants of the Himalayan regions as mentioned in the *Mahabharata* (Aranyaka Parva, 141, 25, 26, and 29; Sabha Parva 4.21-22). In their creation myth, the Kinnaras sing the legend of Ishur (Ishvara) and address him as Mahadev.

The Kunindas also have been placed somewhere to the east of the River Sutlej. According to G.P. Singh (1990: 347-48), 'The territory of

the Kunindas has also been located in the mountain tracts of Yamuna in Dehradun district wherefrom their coins have been discovered. In the northeast of the Kunindas, the Janapada of the Tanganas and in the west, the Janapada of the Kiratas was located. The extensive domains of Subahu situated on the Himalayas abounding the horses and elephants were densely inhabited by the Kiratas, Tanganas and the Pulindas or Kulindas. King Subahu was the lord of all these tribes, whom he received at the frontiers of his dominion, paying them respect and honour. His influence extended upto the mountain Himalayas and the mountain of Gandhamadan in Kailasa side in Tibet.⁴⁷ Karna captured one of the forts of the Kiratas in the middle Himalayan range (*Mahabharata*: Drona Parva, 4.6). The Kiratas, the Khashas, the Nagas, the Cinas and other tribes of the northern part of the Himalayas maintained a high degree of civilization and lived in forts and walled towns, as pointed out by Atkinson (*Himalayan Gazetteer, Vol. II, Pt. 1, p. 363*). The Kiratas have left their indelible marks on the folkloristic traditions of various regions of Himachal Pradesh. Rahul Sanskrityayan, in search of the pure Kirata traditions and language, travelled to Kinnaur, Lahaul and Spiti many times and wrote extensively on the subject. He has contributed significantly to the cause.

The Khashas

The Khasha, Khasa, Khas, Khasiya is yet another important community in the region. In traditional revenue records of the erstwhile hill states and even today, they are mentioned as Kanets. According to the *Mahabharata* (II, 1822 ff), the Khashas dwelt near the river Shailoda which was flowing between the mountains of Meru and Mandara. The other tribes mentioned in the region were the Paradas (the people beyond the Indus river), the Kulindas and the Tanganas. The Tanganas have been located by G.A. Grierson, at Tanganapura district near Badrinath. These people brought gold-dust as recorded by Herodotus (III, 104).⁴⁸ The Khashas, Kashmiras, Urusas (the inhabitants of Hazara), Pishachas, Kambojas, Dards and Sakas were conquered by Lord Krishna. In the *Bhagwat Purana* (II, iv, 18), they have been mentioned as the dwellers of northwestern region alongwith Kankas as Sakas (G.A. Grierson, op. cit., p. 5). The *Manusmriti* (X, 22, 44) also places the Khashas in the northwest. In *Bharata's Natyashastra* (XVII, 52), they have been referred to as speakers of Bahliki language.

Varahmihira places the Khashas with Kulutas (people of Kullu), Tanganas and Kashmiras. (Grierson: *Ibid.*, p. 6), quoting Varahmihira (Chapter XIV, 6; XIV, 30), writes, 'In the northeast, Mount Meru, the kingdom of those who have lost caste (*nasht-rajya*), the nomads (pasupals—worshippers of Pashupati), the Kiras (a tribe near Kashmir, Stein, *Rajatarangini*; trans. II, 217), the Kashmiras, the Abhisaras (of the lower hills between the Jhelum and the Chinab), Dardas (Dards), Tanganas, Kulutas (Kullu), Sairindharas (not identified), forest men, Brahmpuras (Bharmaur in Chamba), Darvas (close to Abhisara), Damras (apparently a Kashmiri tribe, Stein II, 304ff), Foresters, Kiratas, Chinas (Shins of Gilgit, see above, or Chinese), Kunnindas, Bhallas (not identified), Patolas (not identified), Jaturasas (Jats ?), Kunatas, Khashas, Ghoshas and Kuchikas (not identified). It will be seen that every one of the above names which has been identified belongs to the northwest. Regarding the Kaunindas or Kunindas, it may be mentioned that Cunningham (Rep. Archaeological Survey of India, XIV, 125) identified them with the Kanets of Simla Hill States, whose name he wrongly spells 'Kunet'. The change from 'Kuninda' to 'Kanet' is violent and improbable, though not altogether impossible. It would be simpler to connect the Kanets with Varahmihira's Kunatas, but here again there are difficulties. For the 'r' in 'Kanet' is dental, not cerebral. Such changes are, however, not common in 'Pisacha language'.

The conclusion arrived at by the G.A.Grierson with regard to the Kunindas and Kanets is not based on cultural and scientific observation. It seems that he did not possess the knowledge that 'kunet' or 'kanet' are the same people. It seems plausible that the people of Kuninda community have been mentioned only in the region adjoining the areas of present Himachal Pradesh and there is majority of the people belonging to Kanet community, especially in Kullu, Mandi, Kangra, Shimla, Solan, Sirmaur and Bilaspur districts. It is not improbable that the present population of Kanets is associated to the ancient kunindas. Moreover, in Himachal Pradesh, there are several places having a Kuninda base, Kunihar in the Solan district is one of them. The main point of consideration is not to the association of Kunindas with Kanets or Kunaits, but of the Khashas and Kanets. If the Khashas and Kanets belong to the race of Kunindas, the problem of identity would not arise. In some of the Khasa villages in Rampur Bushehr as well as some other areas, Bhunda, the ceremony of rope-sliding is still prevalent, but in the lower Himalayan belt, this is not found among the Kanets. In Kullu,

however, the ceremony of Kahika, in which a man from Nar Community has to act as an object of symbolic sacrifice, is quite popular. The Bhunda ceremony, in which a man from Beda community, slides down the rope prepared by him for the purpose and tied to two poles fixed on slopes, and Kahika, where the Nar has to become unconscious or pretend to be so in order to be lifted like a corpse by the villagers to encircle the village temple, are almost identical in nature with some local variations. It appears that Kulindas, a branch of Kunindas inhabiting the Kullu region and the rest of the people spread over the Himalayan foothills, later dragging or pushing back the original or earlier inhabitants who were known as Khashas to the people in the Himalayan interiors. These subdued Khashas didn't want to identify themselves as a separate community fearing further clashes and, thus, didn't object to their entry as Kanets in revenue records but secretly opted to maintain their traditional customs and ways of life. In their folklore, the Khasas depicted themselves as a warrior race but in written records, they were mentioned as inferior or ordinary people. The tribes such as Kiratas, Kinnaras, Kimpurushas, etc., who were already occupying the interiormost and most difficult tracts of the Himalayan highland, might have received a shock when they found the Khashas infiltrating into their populace. The ancient tribes of Kinnaras, Kimpurushas, Yakshas, Gandharvas, etc., got amalgamated with the new tribes. The people remembered their strange and spectacular folklore, portions of which were recorded by the authors of the epics and scriptures so as to give them an interesting reading. Thus, they retained their prestigious positions in Indian mythology. Some of these tribes were recorded as demi-gods, whereas others had to find their place among the beings of the underworld. The amalgamation resulted in fascinating folkloristic treasures and the old and forgotten customs are preserved in the cultural undercurrents of the region.

Subdivisions of the Khashas

Guha has divided the Khasa, etc., into three subgroups while mentioning them as a branch of western Brachy Cephal group of races. These include Dard, Armenoid, Khas, etc., or Alpanoid and Shaka, etc. or even Dinaric. These people came from Central Asia after crossing Iran, Afghanistan and settled in the western slopes of the Himalayas. These races were different from the earlier inhabitants, the Kols, the Kirats and the

Dravidians and possessed the quality of becoming assimilated with Aryan people as well as among themselves.

The Dard

The Dards were scattered even upto the Panjab region and according to Sabha Parva (27/23-25), Arjun conquered the countries of the Kambojas and the Dards. Jai Chandra Vidyalkar has identified Kamboja with Badakshan and Pamir. The Dard country was, perhaps, located south of the Kamboj country.⁴⁹ Adi Parva (67/58) and Anushasan Parva (35/17-18) mention that Dard Desh was near Bahlik in the northwestern part of India.

The Dards spoke Pishachi and Sanskrit scholars studied the language. Gunadhya wrote his *Brhatkatha* in Pishachi Prakrit but the treatise is not traceable now. However, it is believed that *Brhatkatha Manjari* and *Katha Saritsagar* are based on this legendary work. The Dard languages have influenced the languages of Punjab and Pahari and were also spoken in western Tibet region (Grierson, *LSI* Vol. I, Part I, p. 109).

According to Van Parva (177/12), the Pandavas, after starting from Badrinath, reached the capital of Subahu, the ruler of Kulindas. They reached the city of Subahu after receiving precious gifts from Tushar and Dards who were under the Kulindas and these places were endowed with natural wealth, precious stones, etc. The Dards were later absorbed among Kulindas, Kanets and Khashas, etc.

The Khashas: Their Branches

The Khashas were the inhabitants of Central Asia and came to the Himalayan region via Iran, Afghanistan and settled in Chitral, Kashmir, Himachal, Uttaranchal and in areas located upto western Nepal. The second branch of the Khashas entered Punjab and settled upto Bengal in the plains (Majumdar and Pushalkar: *Vedic Age*, p. 164).

In *Mahabharata* the Khashas of Kulind Janapada have been mentioned as permanent settlers who lived on agriculture and pastoralism. The Kulind, Khash, Dard etc., had their separate identities during this period. Due to the shortage of Brahmans, these people did not observe their rituals according to Brahmanic system (Dabral, *History of Kunindas*, op. cit., p. 73).

Various communities residing in the Kulind Janapada including Nag, Gandharva, Yaksh, Rakshas have been mentioned in Adi Parv (69/28), Van Parv (139/6), Drona Parv (179/25-27), Van Parv (153/11, 139/10, 139/12) and Adi Parva (74/94). The Yaksha and Rakshasas find mention in Van Parv (139/7-10), Adi Parv (169/9-10, 139/12, 43/31) and Hidimb Vadh Parv, Bak Vadh Parv, Jatasur Vadh Parv, Yaksha Yudh Parv and Ghatokach Vadh Parv. Dron Parv, Adi Parv and Van Parv contain various legends relating to the Rakshasas.

Dhaumya, a village god in Una district, was the Guru and Purohit of the Pandavas. The Pandavas, in the guise of Brahmans, reached Matsya, Trigarta (Kangra), Panchal and Keechak areas alongwith Kunti and went to Ekchakra Nagri (Chakrata). The Kshas who had settled in the villages were neighbours to Kulindas.⁵⁰ The Kulindas, probably lived in migratory villages as shepherds. The Nags lived near Gangadwar (Adi Parva 213/13-14). In the *Mahabharata*, there is no mention of any Kulinda village in their Janapadas. However, their towns and places find reference in the epic. On hearing the news of the killing of Bakrakshasa, the villagers of the adjoining habitats reached Ekchakra. Ekchakra, Kulind Nagar, Varnavat and Shonitpur are the names of some of the towns. Ekchakra was located near River Yamuna from where the Pandavas reached Somashrayan Ashram situated on the banks of the Ganges after walking for a full day and night. Dabral identifies Ekchakra with Chakrata in the Dehradun district. The ruler of this settlement lived in Vetrakriyagrih (Betgaon). After defeating him, Bakasur captured the territory. He used to take a man, two buffaloes and twenty loads (*khari*) of rice turn by turn from the natives for his use. Bhim saved the villagers after killing Bakasur.⁵¹ In Karsog, (Mandi district), there is a popular legend that the place was known as Ekchakra during the *Mahabharata* period and the Pandavas established Mumail temple after killing Bakasur at that place. Ekchakra is still the name of a place in Karsog valley.

Subahu

In Van Parva (145/39-54), the Pandavas reached the town of Subahu, the Kulinda ruler and he took them to Himvat Pradesh, to a place located in the territory of origin of river Yamuna (Yamunotri). In Kinnaur, as already said, the progeny of Banasur and Hidimba are worshipped

as village gods and goddesses. Chitralkha is the goddess of Taranda village, Hirma or Hidimba the village goddess of Kafaur village and the spirit of Banasur is believed to stay with his eldest son Sungra Maheshwar or Mahasur. This indicates that the present Sarahan might be the ancient Shonitpur. The place is situated in erstwhile Rampur Bushehr State which forms a part of Shimla district. According to Shalya Parva (54/9-15), Balram, the brother of Shri Krishna, visited the Plax-Prasavan Tirtha located on the place of origin of Saraswati river. It was at this Tirtha that Vishnu meditated during the ancient times. The daughter of Sage Shandilya also meditated and went to heaven from this place. Karp Van Tirtha was near this place. The Ashram of Mitravarun was also nearby, on the western bank of River Yamuna. Indra, Agni and Aryama worshipped and meditated here (Shalya, 54/9-15). In Van Parva (83/84), the list of Tirathas in Sirmour region include Dharamtirth, Gyanpavan, Saugandhik, Plax-Prasavan, Ishanadhyushit, Shatkumbha, Panchyagya, Trishulkhat, Shakambhri Devi, Suvaru Tirth, Dhumavati, Rathavart, Dhara and Gangadwar. Renuka, Bhimatirth (may be in Kangra or Bhimakali of Sarahan), Yoni Tirtha are also located in the region of present Himachal Pradesh (Kane, *Dharmshastra ka Itihas*, Vol. 3, p. 1373 and Ramgopal Mishra, *Tapobhumi*, p. 153).

The Janapadas

In Van Parva (82/92-97), there is a mention of Jwalamukhi Tirtha which, according to Ramgopal Mishra, was known as Varba Tirth in the past. In Bhishma Parva (9/1/67-70), there is a mention of Janapadas, Upniveshas and Kulas. Shudra, Abhir, Dard, Kashmir, Parshu, Khashir, Antchar, Pahlav, Girigahvar, Atreya, Bhardwaj, Stanposhik, Proshak, Kulind, Kirat, Tomar, Hanyaman, Kabhanjak, etc., are the names of various Janapadas. The mention of Kulind and Kirat Janapadas separately confirms that these were two separate tribes. Khashir was also a separate Janapada. In Sabha Parva (26/3-4), Kulind Janapad has also been called 'Vishay'. In Bushahr state of Himachal Pradesh, Vishat used to be the Wazir of the local ruler. The term might have been taken from Vishay or Vishai. Dhananjai conquered the Mahipatis (rulers) of Kulind Vishai. In Van Parva (140/24-26) again, the Kulind has been called as Vishai. Pandavas felt happy after seeing the great 'Vishai' of Subahu. Kirata and Tangana were residing there with their elephants and horses. The term

‘Vishai’ might be used for conquered or subjugated area. The term seems to have some relationship with Vasa, the place of a ruler where he stays for some time.

Kulindas

The Kulindas had hundred Kulas (Kulind-Shatsam Kulam). Subahu has been addressed as ‘Kulindanamishwarh’ or the Ishwar of the Kulindas. Kulind, according to Dabral (2049: 116), were probably a branch of the Kiratas. Subahu has been addressed as ‘Kulind Raj’ and ‘Kirat Raj’. In ancient literature, the term ‘Ishwar’ has been used to denote the Raja or Prithvipati and not the Almighty.⁵²

Trigarta

Trigarta was located between Ravi, Beas and Satlej rivers and was also known as Jalandharayan. In Drona Parva (ch. 17 to 32), there is a mention of Trigartas fighting against the Pandavas in the Mahabharata battle. The six components of Trigarta, according to Kashika were: Kondoparth, Dandaki, Kroshtaki, Jalmani, Brahmgupt and Janaki (Agarwal, *Paninikaleen Bharat*, p. 431). It is difficult to identify them Rajanya, according to him, were the Ranas of Kangra region. This designation is still prevalent with some of the erstwhile state rulers. Trigarta, the neighbouring state of the Kulindas, was very powerful and the army of Trigarta sided with the Kauravas in the epic battle. Virat was also defeated by this army. The Kulind Raj had the army arranged by Ghatotkach, the son of Bhim and Hidimba (Dabral: op. cit.: 131) in his territory, but the Rakshasas did not submit to the Kulind Raj though they were staying in his territory. Ganasabha was called the committee of the representatives of various Kulas represented by their Sayanas.

Other Areas

Brat or Pug, during the period of Panini were the Sanghs who lived on dacoity, killings and booty, etc.⁵³ According to Vasudev Sharan Agarwal, the name of Kangra might have been associated with ‘Kank’ tribe which,

after having arrived from Central Asia from 'Sugdh', settled in the region.⁵⁴

In Bhishm Parva (9/54) and Sabha Parva (27/5), the region of Kullu or Kulut has been mentioned as Ulut, and Uluk respectively. The Raja Brhant of this region was defeated by Arjun during the Digvijai. Panini might have made a mention of this region in his Katryadi gan (4/2/9).⁵⁵ Champa, the present Chamba was also a Janapada of a warrior tribe (Ayudhjivi Sangh). Mandi has been identified with Mandvati and Suket with Sukut. Sukut has been mentioned with the Janapada of the Kulindas in the Sabhaparva (14/16).⁵⁶

Gabdika is the present Gaderan or the place of the Gaddi tribe. During the period of Patanjali, the area was inhabited by the non-Aryan people. Yugandhar was a separate Janapada with Sheelvarman, as ruler whose Ishtika inscription was found at Jagatgram, mentioning that he had expanded his kingdom upto Kalsi. Yugandhar was located on the banks of River Sarsawati in the present Ambala region. The Ishtika inscription describes the region surrounding Kalsi as Yugshail. The ancient name of Kalsi was Kaalkoot or Kalkoot. Yugandhar, according to Dabral (2049: 120), might be located on the western bank of the River Yamuna. Kaalkoot, a separate Janapada, according to the *Mahabharata* and *Ashtadhyayi* was located in the region situated between Rivers Ton (Tamsa) and Yamuna. Kalsi was the capital of this region. The present Jaunsar was the Yamun Pradesh of the ancient times. In *Atharvaved* (4/9/10), the area around the region of Yamuna river has been mentioned as Yamun Anjan. Even now, the black soil of 'Anjan' is available at some places. Due to the availability of black Anjan, the name of the mountain might have been Kalkoot or Kala Pahar (Agarwal, *Panini Kaleen Bhartvarsh*: pp. 69-70). Kalesar is still the name of a mountain range located towards the western side of the region. The Khashas have also been mentioned in Sabha Parva, where some tribes have been referred to as presenting gold to Yudhishtira in the Rajsuya Yajna. The Khas, Parad, Tangan and Kulind participated in the Mahabharata battle. About two dozen Sanghas were located in this mountainous region. In the whole of the region ruled by the Kulinda, the number of the Sanghas was four times those of the Trigarta Sanghas. The rulers of Trigarta, Kuluta and Kulind, during the Mahabharata, were Susharma Chandra, Brihant and Subahu (Sumukh), respectively.

The Arrangement of Kulas

According to Dabral (2049:121), the old people of various *kulas* or Sanghas nominated or elected the rulers (Rajas) of respective Janapadas. The sources of water of the ruling families (Vish, Vith) were separate and the people of other families could not take water from them. The old people (boodha, Sayana) were incarnated as the seniormost (Murdhabhishikat) in the Kulla. In Van Parva (140/24), there is a mention of one hundred *kulas* of the *Kulindas*.

Khund as ancient Kulas

It is not out of place to suggest that these *Kulind* or *Kuninda kulas* later emerged as separate *Khunds* or the warrior groups and had their own deities. They tried to institute supremacy over other sub-groups and established their own places of worship. The deities were the spirits of ancestors who guided the particular *kula* either to arrange fights against others or to make friendship at times. The Trigartas and the Kulutas were not included in the *Kulinda Janapada* but possessed a separate identity (Dabral 2049: 122-23). The Thakurais of the *Kunindas* continued even upto recent times and the more powerful of them became *Mawis* or *Mawanas* who defied the rulers from time to time. The fighting spirit of the *kulas* exhibited itself in feuds and robbery. Community or group system was such a powerful factor among the *kulas* and the rulers that even the deities and their mediums helped and practised it. The practice still continues in some cases.

Assimilation

The *Kulind Janapada* included the settlements of the Kirata, Tangan, Partangan, Jyoha, *Kulind*, Khash, Tushar, Dard, Parad, Jhash, Nadyot, Pradyas, Deeraghvenik and the tribal people of Kol—Munda group as well as Brahmans and sages, etc.⁵⁷ The cultural traditions, living habits customs and manners were diversified to a greater extent and were exhibited in the varied cultural scenario of the region. *Vratyastom* was the system of *Yajna* through which the outsiders with their different religions were converted to the fold of the desired religion. The *Vratyastoms* were of four types, namely; (i) through traditional rituals, (ii) for those who belonged to criminal tribes, (iii) for younger generation,

and for (iv) senior or sthavir people (Agarwal, *Panini Kaleen Bharatvarsh*, p. 455). The Bhojak worshippers, Agnikula Kshatriyas, Huna Brahmans and Huna Kshatriyas were adopted and converted through the arrangement of such Yajnas.

The Khashas and the Kanets were the most powerful communities and the assimilation was possible only with them. Among the Khashas, local deities were worshipped through the mantras in common parlance. The outcastes included Dagi and Dom communities who played musical instruments in the shrines. The Vish or Vith were the Swaran (upper class) and the second group consisted of Dagi or Dom. There was no other group worth mentioning. The Vratyas were the bards who performed religious ceremonies. Gradually, with the marriage alliances among cross communities, Kanet and Khash emerged as single units and the rulers belonged to these groups only. In the Van Parva (177/11), the Thakurais of Kulind Janapada were called Kulind countries, '*Deshan Kulindasya cha Bhumiratnaan*'. The tradition of preparing palanquins for deities continued and can be seen in the villages of Himachal Pradesh even upto now. According to Dabral (2049: 126-27), the local deities in the State belong to different communities, viz., Tushar, Parad, Dard, Tangan, Partangan, etc., and it would be found that they were worshipped by Kolarians, Mundaris, Kiratas, Kinnaras, Kanets and Khashas, etc. But it is not easy to find out their relationship with the related groups.

Social and Religious Systems

Different communities had their own Garh or forts. Each 'Pur', the main town of the group, had a separate fort. In the Garh, some representative of the ruler used to stay with the armed men. The villages were controlled by the Sayanas of the village. The village and Nagar or Pur deities were revered by one and all. Garhpati were the protectors of the forts.⁵⁸ Even now, in parts of the State, the Garhiyas protect the ceremonies and are either Kanets or Khashas, the responsible persons who act as the persons in charge of the assigned jobs at the time of ceremonies, viz., Bhunda, Shant, etc.

Kulindraja has been called 'Dvijmukhya or a superior Brahman in the *Mahabharata* and in Drona Parva (121/20/21 and 29), Parad, Kulind, Tangan, etc., have been addressed as Dasyus. 'Samaj' ceremonies were arranged to allow opportunities to the learners to exhibit their skill in

weaponry, shooting, etc. These occasions were utilized to display and stage Dev-Danav and Yaksh-Rakshasa battles on artificial standards. The practice of arranging *Thoda* (arrow-battle), *Bhunda* (rope-sliding ceremony where a scheduled caste has to slide down a rope indicating Vritra), *Boodhi Diwali* on which various dramas and fights are arranged and some other festivals in the State have such arrangements even upto now. The Pandavas replaced such stage performances by emerging as heroes of the common folk and the society started grouping of the performers as the Pandavas (Pasha) and the Kauravas (Shatha). This was done for the sake of stage performances only, but some times, the practice became an instrument of discord on the basis of family, community and region. According to Drona Parva (121/31-32), though neither the Pandavas nor the Kauravas are mentioned to have known and practised the art of stone throwing, yet some ceremonies to play with and throw stones on the opposite group were started in their name. Bhindipal and Srig have been called Nalika and Gulel in the *Amarkosha* (2/8/91). Parigh was the name of a stick with iron on one of its corners. Parigh and Kuthaar (axe) are found in some temples even today. Praas and Kunt were the terms for Bhala. Tomar, according to the Tikakaar (transliterator), was the name for Gandasa. According to Karn Parva (5/7), the soldiers from the Kulind Janapad who participated in the battle of the Mahabharata, used the sun-like shining Tomars.

During the Mahabharata, those who fought with bows and arrows were called as 'Dhanvi' (Karna Parva, 85/6). The Kulind warriors used Mahayas (large arrows) against the enemies. These arrows were called 'Patri' or 'Sapatra'. The *dhanusha* used to shoot the Patri or Sapatra were called Mahayas or Maheshvash. Kautilya has mentioned that a *dhanush* measures five hands, i.e. seven and half feet in diameter and it seems that this was the standard measurement of a *dhanush* used during the Mahabharata battle. Such type of *dhanushas* (arrows) were used in the battle fought between Puru and Alexander the Great (Agarwal: *Panini Kaleen Bharatvarash*, p. 416). Patri or Sapatra had a coating of iron towards their corners to make them pierce deep into the skin after tearing the clothes or *kavachas*. In *thoda*, the arrows of this measurement continue to be used. At Nirmand, there are some ancient weapons related to Lord Parshuram.

In Mandaan ceremonies, the Pandavas are represented by their mediums who are otherwise ordinary folk but with the overpowering of

the spirits of the Pandavas, behave quite unusually and sometimes climb the trees, go to deep waters or traverse high hills or ascend the dangerous trees in frenzy and under the possession of the concerned spirits. Some of them take on big loads, behaving like the mighty Bhim and some others lift and take out large arrows lying in the shrines which, otherwise, would have been a difficult task to perform. The Kauravas and the Pandavas are represented by two different wrestling or contesting groups. This indicates that these practices were related to the Mahabharata times. Harul and Pandvain or Panwaras testify the prevalence of these traditions these days. With this arrangement, the people of various groups defended themselves from the attacks of their enemies belonging to the opposite communities.

Kinner Desh and Yaudheyas

Kinner Desh was perhaps on good terms with the Kulindas. Kulut and Kulind were both afraid of the power of Trigarta. Both of them allied with the Pandavas in the *Mahabharata* war (Dabral: 132). This assertion, however, requires more scriptural authentication. Towards the south of Kulindas, there were Yaudheyas belonging to Yugandhara region and Shardanda. The Pandavas visited Matsya, Panchal and Trigarta after coming out secretly from Lakshagriha.

Brihant and Senavindu

The Asura architect Maya built a unique palace and committee hall for Yudhishtira on the banks of the Ganges for which he brought a special type of Saphatic (precious stone) from Vindusar (Sabha 3/10-18). This confirms that Asuras also existed in human form at the time of the epic battle. Sumandal (Purmandal-Jammu) was conquered by Arjun (Sabha Parva 26/3-7, Chapter 26 and 27). Vasudev Sharan Agarwal (*Bharat Savitri*, Vol. I, p. 144) identified seven Thakurais of the present Himachal Pradesh during the epic period. Brihant was the ruler of Kulut region, who fought against Arjun. His neighbouring ruler was named Senavindu (Sabha 27/5-10), whose kingdom was handed over to Brihant, the ruler of Kulut region. Panchgan may be Pangi, Susankul was Spiti and Uttar Kulut may have been Lahaul (see, Sabha 27/12, 27/11). Dev Prastha was the name of Senavindu.

Utsav Sanket

Utsav Sanket (Sabha 27/3-10) were the Seven Ganas of the Dasyus. In Utsav-Sanket (identified around Kinnaur by Agarwal: *Bharat Savitri*, Vol. I, p. 152), the marriages of the eligible young boys and girls were performed at the time of various fairs and festivals and other ceremonies collectively. Probably, in Utsav Sanket regions which were seven in number, there might have been a tradition of dormitories or *Kumar-Kumari grih* where the young boys and girls assembled at night after receiving the Sankets (gestures) by the girl's *dupattas* (Dabral: *Uttarakhand ke Bhotantik*, p. 190 and *Kulind Janapad ka Itihas*, Vol. I, p. 136). These Utsav Sankets have been accounted among Dasyu countries who conducted robberies in other areas. Trigarta was conquered by Arjun and Nakul and remained under attack by Arjun (Drona Parva 17/12-13). The Kunind Raj Sumukh (Subahu) gifted a spectacular conch shell (*Shankh*) to Yudhishtira at the time of Rajsuya Yajna (Sabha 51/7ff and 51/17-30). Susharma was the son of Vridhkshe. Sansaptak warriors with Susharma were Surath, Sudharma, Sudhanva and Subahu. The brothers of *Susharma* who participated in the Mahabharata battle included Satyasen, Chandradev, Mitradev, Shatrunjai, Saushruti and Mitravarma (Karna p. 27/12-25). The conch shell gifted by Sumukh (Sabahu), when sounded, made all those present unconscious, excepting eight men, including the five Pandavas, Dhaumya, Satyaki and Krishna (Sabha 51/7 ff). In Sabha Parva, there is a list of 44 rulers of Himalayan region who presented gifts to Yudhishtira at the time of Rajsuya Yajna. They include, Kirat, Dard, Darv, Durvibhag (Ajaiya), Audumbra, Parad, Balhik, Kashmir, Kumar, Ghor, Hanskayam, Shivi, Trigarta, Yaudheya, Madra, Kaikeya, Ambashth.⁵⁹ In Van Parva (20/20-21) and (1/14 and 20/20-21), there are references of the Pandavas going to the banks of the Ganges and Arjun meditating at Indrakeel peak to beget the blessings from the Lord Indra.

In the Van Parva (36/6-12), it is mentioned that when the Pandavas were staying in the Kamyak Van, Jaidratha, the ruler of Sindhu-Sauvir, with the help of Raja Kshemankar of Trigarta; the eldest son of the Kulindraj; the son of Subal, the Ikshavaku Raja; Kautikasya, the son of Surath, a ruler of Shivi kingdom; took Draupadi forcibly away. This indicates that the Kulindas also opposed the Pandavas at some stage.

Raja Jaidratha was married to Duhshala, the sister of Duryodhana, and, as such, his alliance with the Kauravas like Susharma Chandra of Trigarta, who was also married to one of his sisters seems to be natural. During their secret exile (*agyatvas*) the Pandavas stayed with Virat. When Keechak, a minister of Raja Virat was killed by Bhim in the guise of a Gandharva, Susharma was in the court of the Kauravas and Duryodhan felt delighted on hearing about the death of Keechak. In Virat Parva (30/2-10), there is a reference of the snatching away of the cows of King Virat in Matsya Desh. Duryodhan and Susharma attacked the Virat kingdom from two sides and Susharma, after defeating the Virat king, captured him but Bhim got him released and imprisoned Susharma. But later, on the advice of Yudhishtira (Virat, Adhyay 35-39), he was also released. Susharma went back to his country after facing an insulting defeat and Duryodhana too was defeated by Brihnalla (Arjun). The wife of King Virat, Sudakshna was the daughter of the rulers of Kekaiya. Her daughter Uttara was married to Abhimanyu.

According to Udyog Parva (4/3-15 and 4/19), the Pandavas invited the hill rulers of the northwestern states to participate in the battle in their favour. They included Brihant of Kuluta, Senavindu of the country adjoining Kulut, Suvastuk, the rulers of Balhik, Paurav, Shak, Palhav, Kamboj, Dard and Subahu. The Kulindas were great warriors and in Karna Parva (chapter 85), their bravery has been acclaimed by the author of the epic. It is, however, possible that some of the petty rulers of the Thakurais located within the territory of Kulinda Janapada might have sided with the Kauravas as the infights and feuds continued to exist among the various rulers of the region and this practice is noticed even upto the independence period, when all the principalities had to be abolished. The eldest son of Kulind-Raj (Van Parva 267/6-12) revolted and took side of the ruler of Sindhu-Sauvir (Jaidratha) and fought against the Pandavas but all the other sons of Subahu fought and sacrificed themselves as the faithful allies of the Pandavas. According to Drona Parva (121/13-15), the Shakas, Kambojas, Bahlik, Yavan, Parad, Kulind, Tangan, Ambashth, Paishach—who knew the art of stone throwing—were the allies of the Kauravas, out of whom Dard, Tangan, Khash, Lampak and Kulind were skilled warriors and some of them belonged to the ‘Vishai’ of the Kulindas (Drona, 121/42-43).

Stone-throwing practice

The Kalkut and Yamun Thakurais situated in the areas of present Sirmour and Kalesar to Kalsi-Jaunsar-Bawar, also sided with the Kauravas which endangered the sovereignty of the Kulinda janapada. There is a very interesting account of the warriors who fought while throwing stones on the enemies. The Dard, Tangan, Khas, Lampak and Kulind were expert in stone throwing and such sort of warriors were destroyed by Satyaki (Drona 121/42-45).

Brihant, the ruler of Kulut was present in the Swayambar of Draupadi (Adipana 185/7) and sided with the Pandavas. He accepted the supremacy of the Pandavas after being defeated by Arjun at the time of Digvijai (Sabha 27/5-9). He accepted the invitation (Udyog, 4/13) to side with the Pandavas in the Mahabharata battle. According to Drona (23/76-7) and Karna (12-13) Parvas, he fought and was killed by Duhshasan. Kshemdurti, another ruler of the Kulut Sangh, though invited by the Pandavas (Udyog, 4/18) preferred to take the side of the Kauravas and was killed by Bhim (Karna, 54/25-4).

Ghatotkach was a great hero of the Mahabharata battle. His chivalrous acts have been mentioned in Drona Parva (179/29-38, 179/48-62, 175/4 ff and 179/24-28). He was like the Kiratas and the Asuras.

Prasthala

Susharma, the ruler of Trigarta, was the son of Vridhakshem. Surath was also a ruler of one of the Trigartas. He was killed by Nakul while trying to release Draupadi from the bondage of Jaidratha (Van. 271/12-28). Susharma fought against the Pandavas and was known as Prasthaladhipati (the ruler of Prasthala—present Pathankot), which indicates that Trigarta had extended its boundaries upto Panthankot or even beyond it and at that time; Pathankot might have been the capital of the state.

The brothers of Susharma, according to Drona Parva (17/16-21), included Satyarath, Satyavarma, Satyavrat, Satyeshu and Satyakarma. He went to the place of battle with his ten thousand charioteers and was assisted by another thirty thousand charioteers from Malav and Madrak countries, all of whom took a pledge to defeat the Pandavas and to kill Arjun. They performed a *Havan* (sacred fire) after conducting fire worship and decided to use grass (*kusha*) clothes and strange *kavachas*. They applied

ghee to their bodies and put a *mekhla* (waist string) made of Maurvi, a particular type of grass (*trin*). According to Drona Parva (17/22-24), these heroes were prepared to sacrifice their lives in the battlefield for the sake of success and victory. The details of the battle and the performance of rituals are mentioned in the Drona Parva (17/26-37 and 40-47).

Sansaptak heroes

The Sansaptak heroes accompanying Susharma included Surath, Sudharma, Sudhanva and Subahu. They could not withstand the attacks of Arjun and ten thousand Sansaptakas alongwith four thousand Narayani Sena heroes (who were given by Krishna to Duryodhan) came to the spot to challenge him (Drona, 17/26-37 and Adhyay, 27). In Karna Parva (27/12-25), the six brothers of Susharma, namely Satyasen, Chandra Dev, Mitradev, Shatrunjay, Saushruti and Mitravara were killed by Arjun. The Sansaptakas were so great in number that after the death of ten thousand heroes by Arjun, fourteen thousand pedestrians, ten thousand charioteers and three thousand riders of elephants and horses remained.⁶⁰ Arjun slayed forty-five sons of Satyakarma, Satyeshu and Susharma in the battle (Shalya Parva 27/38-48). In Stri Parva (26/33-37), there is an account of the cremation of Brihant, the ruler of Kulut, five Kekaiya prince heroes, Susharma and Ghatotkach, the Rakshasaraj. The Trigartas have been mentioned in Ashwamedhik Parva (74/1-4, 74/9-34) also. Aniruddha, the grandson of Krishna, married Usha, the daughter of Banasura. This establishes the relationship of the Yadavas with the hill region. Though the exact place of ancient Shonitpur which has been referred to as the capital of Banasura is not known yet, it was somewhere near Kinnaur or Kinnara-Desh as the village deities of the area are believed to be, even upto now, the progeny of Banasur and Hidimba. Dabral (p. 156) is of the opinion that the capital was somewhere in Kedar Khand. Though much has been said about the various Kulas of the Kunidas or Kulindas, yet their religious beliefs and mythological situations require to be studied thoroughly in order to ascertain their unity and growth on the basis of their origin and commonalities.

Vajra, the son of Aniruddha, could not succeed in reigning at Hastinapur due to the opposition of Abhiras, and the Nags, the successors of Takshaka. According to Rai Chaudhury,⁶¹ Parikshit, the successor of the Pandavas, is a historic personality, as is established by post-Vedic and

epic literary sources. His regime was limited upto Kurukshetra and Kurujangal and its northern boundary touched the Kulinda Janapada. In the south, the State extended upto Shursain (Mathura) and Matsyaraja (Virat). In the west, the boundary touched Rohitak (Rohtak) and Uttar Panchal (Ruhelkhand). Vajra, the son of Aniruddha was the ruler of Indraprastha. Takshak, at the time of 'Sarpsatra,' of Janmejy, was sheltered by Indra. He was the son of a Brahman father and a Nag mother. Janmejy stayed at Taxila after the Sarpsatra. The grandson of Krishan and his successors could not rule at Indraprastha for long and Kakshsen, the son of Janmejy, replaced them. The Pauravas ruled over Punjab till the arrival of Alexander the Great. Shatanik, the second son of Jammejy, was the ruler of the eastern part of the state with its capital at Hastinapur. Shatanik was followed by Ashvamedh Dutt, Adhiseem-Krishan and Nichakshu who ruled over Hastinapur for 60-70 years.⁶² Adhiseem was born in the fourth generation of Janmejy and Divakar of Ayodhya and Senajit of Magadh were his contemporaries.

Among the sub-groups of the Aryans, Nag, Shivi, Panchal, Videh, etc., were quite famous. The tribe of the Kurus was very powerful and contained the regions of Meerut, Delhi, Muradabad, Haryana, Punjab and Rajasthan and some parts of the Himalayas. During the Vedic period, the Kurus were called 'Uttarah Kuruvah' or 'the Kurus who came from the North pole region'.⁶³

The Kanets, in the erstwhile state of Bushehr—which was the largest state bordering Tibet—were divided into two hypergamous groups; namely, the Khas and the Karan or Rahu, from whom the Khas took daughters but did not give them brides in return. The Kanets were originally Thakurs, but lost status by adopting the site of widow remarriage.⁶⁴ At one time the Kanet *septs* of Kanawar have been mentioned as divided in three grades, which were as under:⁶⁵

1. *First-grade Kanets*

Pargana Rajgaon

	<i>Sept</i>	<i>Village</i>
1.	Bairyan	Chugaon or Tholang
2.	Shamtas	Sapni or Rapang
3.	Wangmo	Kilba
4.	Thangar	Kilba

5.	Daames	Urni or Ura
6.	Moelas	Miru or Mirthing
7.	Sana	Miru or Mirthing
8.	Shwal	Yula
9.	Daprato	Mellam or Yana
10.	Bitryan	Punang
11.	Sakhan	Chugaon or Tholang
12.	Rokeru	Chugaon or Tholang
13.	Deran	Chugaon or Tholang
14.	Dalyan	Chugaon or Tholang

Pargana Shuva

15.	Bores(s) Pores	Jangi and Sunnam
16.	Ranshyan	Yuwaring
17.	Dhanshyan	Brele
18.	Farakpa	Kothi or Koshtampi
19.	Palsar	Tailing
20.	Aldang, Angldan	Labrang
21.	Chhugpo	Kanam
22.	Khadura	Rarang
23.	Barji	Lippa
24.	Shyaltu	Lippa
25.	Tholpa	Ropa
26.	Loktas	Kanam and Sunnam
27.	Pangtu	Pangi
28.	Shuryan	Rog
29.	Laspa	Labrang
30.	Sili	Kanam
31.	Gyolang	Pilo or Spilo
32.	Tharmi	Tailang
33.	Puan, Puang	Labrang
34.	Makala	Ropa
35.	Mispon, Mishpon	Jangi

Pargana Inner Tukpa

36.	Bist	Pawari
37.	Kallam	Richpa or Rispa
38.	Rathu	Rirang or Ribba
39.	Nyokche	Thangi

40.	Dhangeh	Morang or Ginam
<i>Pargana the Outer Tukpa</i>		
41.	Repaltu	Sangla
42.	Chetha	Sangla
43.	Changkung	Kamru or Mone
44.	Fanyan	Sangla
45.	Dudyen	Kamru or Mone
<i>Pargana Pandrabis</i>		
46.	Yulan	Natpa
47.	Chogla	Barakamba
<i>Pargana Tharabis</i>		
48.	Tyuras	Sungra or Grosnam
49.	Jogto	Panowin
50.	Zintu	Bari
2. <i>Second Grade Kanets</i>		
<i>Pargana Inner Tukpa</i>		
1.	Bralbang	Rirang or Ribba
2.	Chamapo	Richpa or Rirang
3.	Kathu	Richpa or Rispa
4.	Mojrang	Rirang and Rispa
5.	Pankar	Rirang and Rispa
6.	Rakshas	Rirang
7.	Shyali	Morang or Ginam
8.	Sotha	Barang
9.	Ungya	Rirang and Rispa
<i>Pargana Shuwa</i>		
10.	Kharyan	Pangi
11.	Shyuna	Asrang
12.	Turkyan	Chini
13.	Khimapa, Khyunpa	Poo or Spoo or Puwe
<i>Pargana Rajgaon</i>		
14.	Anchhan, Angchan	Chugaon or Tholang
15.	Mashaan	Mellam or Yana

3. Third grade Kanets who worked as Potters

- | | | |
|----|------------------------------|---------|
| 1. | Wangchhaan, Wangchhan Morang | |
| 2. | Waza | Chugaon |
| 3. | Mewar | Ropa |

The Septs are not applicable these days for the purposes of ascertaining the social status of the Kanet families, but it is clear from the list referred to above that there are 68 Septs in all, out of which some seem to have Bhoti origin and the remaining either indicate the names of their previous habitats or the present location of the family concerned. No Rajput family has been included in the list and it appears from the statement that the social status for the purpose of marital alliances was the main consideration. Though there are no Brahman families in the tract, yet in the remaining part of the State (Kochi area), the Brahmans were divided into three grades, viz., Uttam—who did not plough; Acharaj—who received the *Ashubh dan* or impure donations of the other Brahmans and Rajputs. They took daughters in marriage from Krishna Brahmans who ploughed fields and were basically agriculturists.⁶⁶ The Shukla Brahmans considered themselves superior to Krishna and Acharaj but these considerations are fading fast. According to Mian Durga Singh, 'The Kanaitis are said to be aborigines of the hill-tracts, and were independent, brave and given to marauding. . . . Every part in a village had its own head, known as the *movanna* (leader), who used to get his share of the plunder and a small tribute as his *haq-i-sardari*. The whole mountainous country was divided in this way; the first quality of land being given to the gods as rulers and the next to the *movannas*. The ruins of the houses of the *movannas* are to be found still. They are big castles-like buildings'.⁶⁷ He further maintains that, 'All the tribes, except the Brahmans, the Kshatriyas, and the Vaishyas consider themselves *kuin* (ancient inhabitants)'.⁶⁸

Khel and Khund

The *khel* is the subsection of the community within which marriages can't take place. The *khel* does not extend over more than twelve generations. *Sutak-patak* is also taken into consideration only upto seven generations. The sub-divisions of the Kanaitis that can intermarry include, Khash, Rahu, Karun, Khanari, Chandel, Chauhan, Dogre, Mehta,

Dadarwal, Behrwal, Pabarwal, Jad and Lama.⁶⁹ It appears from the list that it has been prepared on mere heresay and without any authentic information as the subdivisions mentioned here include even Jad and Lama, who belong to Tibetan society and Lama is only a religious phenomena among the Buddhists and not a subdivision of a particular community. Chandel, Dogre, Khanari and Mehta are also doubtful divisions. With this discussion, it is, however, evident that the Khashas didn't object to the nomenclature of Kulind or Kunind for them. Due to this reason, they were recorded as Kanets by the respective administrative units. Varahmihir (505-589 AD) has mentioned the Kunind along with Brahmipur, Kirat, Kulut, Harhur and China (Tibet) in his *Brihadsambhita* (14/33). During the seventh century, the Karkotak and Nag Rajas had left numismatic evidence in Kashmir. Kidar Kushan, ruled the hilly terrain including the parts of Himachal Pradesh during the fourth century AD and the ruler, whose name on the coins is written as 'Kidar Kushan Sha' might have been the contemporary of Samudra Gupta (340-375 AD). The Prayag inscription of this ruler (Samudragupta) doesn't make a mention of the Kunindas who had, earlier to him, Sheel-Varman as their ruler. Among the rulers of the western territories, he has counted the Yaudheya, Madrak, Abhir Devputrashahanushahi, Shakmurund, etc.⁷⁰ Amoghbhuti (60 BC), a Kuninda ruler, had to face the Shaka and Kushan invaders due to whom his power and sovereignty received great blows. The coins of Chhatreshwar, Bhanu and Ravan of Bhaidgaon, which are dated back to the period between 243-290 AD depict the miserly state of these rulers.⁷¹ The Khashas are identified with Yakshas of the ancient times (Dabral, 2052 (Vik.; 498).

According to B.S. Guha (Racial elements in the population, 16F), 'In Indian literature, the Proto-Mongoloids or Palaeo-Mongoloids are known as Kiratas. They are found in the sub-Himalayan region and also in Assam. Their nasal formation is 'medium but of low elevation', with the characteristic arrested development usual among Mongoloid groups.⁷² The earliest references to the Kiratas are available in *Atharvaveda* and the *Yajurveda* as already mentioned. Among the Limbus who belong to the branch of the Himalayan Kiratas, there is a legend that their ancestors were ten brothers born in Benaras. They divided themselves into two groups. One of the groups went directly to Nepal, whereas the other went to Tibet.⁷³ Pargiter maintains that the Kiratas are associated with the

Cinas, a Tibeto-Mongoloid people who inhabit the country of Tibet and the region along the entire range of the Himalayas.⁷⁴ Chattopadhyay, while referring to Pargiter, endorses 'that the land of the Kulutas comprised the modern Kullu near the source of the Beas. As 'L' and 'R' are often interchangeable in local dialects, some scholars maintain that Kullu and Kuru are one and the same. If this view be accepted, then the Kulutas had Nordic and broad head base.'⁷⁵

The problem of Kanet and Khasha of the hills is quite a complex one. As regards to their inter-relationship, it is interesting to note that the regions where the Khasha population is in a majority, they have the *Khund* system. The term has been discussed earlier also but it has such a vast connotation and bearing that there is always a scope of further discussion, especially with relation to the cultural background of these people. The area under study has so much of diversity in cultural traits that the Kanets located in Solan districts bordering the plains of the Punjab and Haryana have different social habits as compared to the Khashas located in Shimla and Kinnaur regions. The people of Kinnaur—Kinnaras as they are called—have assimilated the mythological backgrounds of India and Tibet, the Kirata culture and Mongoloid blood and practise the earliest and primitive forms of life with a blend of cross-cultural background of Buddhism of both the countries. Their deities belong to the Asura race, their language is Tibeto-Burmese and their fairs, festivals and other ceremonies are full of pre-Vedic and post-Vedic references. They call *kherang* (*ksheer*) to milk and 'Samudrang' to River, as mentioned earlier. About the term 'Samudra' for River, Sadhakar Chattopadhyay says, 'It has been pointed out in the Vedic Index that in the Rigvedic age, the term Samudra often denoted the lower course of Indus.'⁷⁶ In that case the question arises whether the earliest population of the region was Aryan or Non-Aryan stock of people.

The Khashas have their *Khunds* which belong to various *Kulas* of these people. A *Khund* has its own separate identity and friendship or adversary with any other *Khund*, is a normal way of life. In earliest days, each *Khund* had clear cut counting of the heads of persons who were either killed by the people of the enemy *Khund* or the heads they had slaughtered during the course of fight due to 'Voer' (enmity). Till an equal number of the people were butchered, there was enmity, called *Haad*, i.e 'bone or life', and even water could not be accepted from the enemy *Khund*. Later,

these *Khunds* were called either Pandava (Pasha) or Kaurava (Shatha). Though the Pandavas were only five in number, yet the Pasha *Khund* would have as many as there could be the members of the group. The Kauravas are told to be one hundred brothers but according to the local understanding, they were considered to be sixty only and the group thus was named as 'Shatha' or sixty. These *Khunds* opposed each other in the sport, called Thoda and even while facing each other with big bows and arrows in the arena, they would not desist from actual fighting in case the situation demanded so.

Various *Khunds* of the *Khasbas* denoted the number of young marksmen and warriors, probably to be supplied to the concerned rulers on exigencies or the amount to be paid to the rulers as revenue of the land occupied by a particular *Khund*. The *Khunds*, at times, had their own deity and a place of a goddess called 'Thehri' 'Thaat' or 'Jaaga', where the abducted person of the opposite *Khund* would be presented before being sacrificed. These *Khunds* were counted in twenties only, apart from their specific names. Some of the major *Khunds* in Shimla, Kinnaur and parts of Sirmaur include the following:

SHIMLA DISTRICT

1. *Shillo-Shathi* (Kaurva group) Pargana Shilla (A 12x20 or Bara beesh group)
2. Paralu-Pargana Parali (A Shathi group of 6x20), Chheh beeshi
3. Gochi-Pargana Nagpur (*Nagah*) (A Shathi group of 6x20), Chheh beeshi.
4. Chinghaan-Pargana Pauria (A Panshi (Pandava) group of 6x20)
5. Dharaan-Pargana Pauria (A Shathi group of 6x20)
6. Dhawaan-Pargana Pauria (A Shathi group of 6x20)
7. Lohraan-Pargana Matal (A Panshi group of 12x20)
8. Jhagta-Pargana Shantha (A Panshi group of 6x20)
9. Badhan-Pargana Shantha (A Panshi group of 6x20)
10. Chanjaan-Pargana Chanju (A Panshi group of 6x20)
11. Thundu-Pargana Hamel (A Shathi group of 12x20)
12. Puzaik-Pargana Rinjhat (A Panshi group of 12x20)
13. Hagarte-Pargana Kiran (A Shathi group of 12x20)
14. Nyoli-Pargana Nyol (Zothreyu) (A Panshi group of 12x20)
15. Nanahru-Pargana Nyol (Ghari) (A Panshi group of 12x20)

16. Chad-Pargana Chehta (A Shathi group of 12x20)
17. Sunayi-Pargana Shaak (A Panshi group of 12x20)
18. Thundali-Pargana Bahal (A Shathi group of 6x20)
19. Jhanane-Pargana Jhinna (A Pansha group of 12x20)
20. Puzaik-Pargana Zakhauli (A Panshi group of 12x20)
21. Bhikta-Pargana Stota (A Shathi group of 6x20)
22. Bakaan-Pargana Kiran (A Panshi group of 6x20)
23. Hidaan-Pargana Kupvi (A Panshi group of 6x20)
24. Dhamrau-Pargana Stota (A Shathi group of 6x20)
25. Bigraau-Pargana Bigrauli (A Shathi group of 6x20)
26. Angrau-Pargana Chanaana (A Panshi group of 6x20)
27. Bizraau-Pargana Nagpur (A Shathi group of 6x20)
28. Basaan-Pargana Punder (A Shathigroup of 6x20)
29. Jhavaik-Pargana Piyuntra (Jhavaink) (A Panshi group of 6x20)
30. Gaang-Pargana Jakholi (A Shathi group of 6x20)
31. Badalaogu-Pargana Jakholi (A Shathi group of 6x20)
32. Khaog-Pargana Jubali (A Panshi group of 6x20)
33. Nanaahroo-Pargana Jakholi (A Panshi group of 6x20)
34. Singhtaou-Pargana Bargaon (Bhaote) (A panshi group of 6x20)
35. Bakhogi-Balsan area
36. Kalaasi-Balsan area
37. Karaahi-Sirmaur area
38. Mandhraana-Sirmaur area

KINNAUR DISTRICT

There are seven *Khunds* in the Kinnaur district. A reference of these has already been recorded in the previous Chapter. They include *Do Shau* (200), Pandrah Bish (15x20), Athara Bish (18x20), Wangpo *Khund*, Pagram (Rajgramang), Chuwang and Tukpa *Khunds*. Basaaru, Laachhi, Meshu or Meshuras (Monshiras), Meshu (Monshiras) of Bhabha, Meshu (Monshiras) of Chagaon or Tholang and Badrinath of Mone of Kamru are the presiding deities of these seven *Khunds*, respectively. The *Khunds* in this region seem to represent a cluster of villages as an administrative unit of the erstwhile Bushehr state. The first *Khund* mentioned above, forms a part of Kochi area of the State and rest of the six cover the entire of the district of Kinnaur.⁷⁷ The cluster of villages in the State of Bushehr was called Ghori and some ghoris formed a Pargana. A few Parganas

formed a *Khund*. The term is related only with the Khashas. The sub-groups of the Khashas in *Pandrab Bish* Pargana and adjoining areas include Kedarta, Parshetka, Sadaani, Kambi, Kastainu, Kuchat or Jishtu, Ritchu, Dhirta (the assistants of Mawi or Movannas of ancient times), Khanna (shareholders of the property of the ruling family), Baradu, Kayath, Damta, Jant, Chepta, Chant, Kanet, Alel, Thaanku, Snail, Maahta, Niltu, Badhel and Bhaink. These subgroups are not the *Khunds* in themselves but each one of them may have been associated with some *Khund* of the ancient times. A *Khund* must have a history of protecting or saving someone even at the risk of life. A *Khund* is also called 'Beel' in Jaunsar Bawar and some parts of Shimla district. By Shatha and Pasha (*Pansha*) Beel, we mean that a group of villages, where the Khasha families are located should, include all the followers of Shatha (Kauravas) or Pasha (Pandavas), as the case may be.

The Mahasu Deity

Mahasu, the major god of the Khashas, had four brothers. One of them was the Chalda Mahasu, who was always on the move from one village to the other on his palanquin. This deity has no shrine but his schedule of tour is generally pre-decided. The deity is worshipped by both the Pandavas (Pasha) and the Kaurava (Shatha) groups who are, otherwise, opposed to each other. He completes a single round of his visit to the Satha and Pasha Beels in Uttar Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh in a twenty-four-year period. His schedule of visit in Shathi Beel in Uttaranchal (Jaunsar Bawar) and Himachal Pradesh, is as under:

1. *Shathi Beel (boundary) in Uttaranchal*—Twelve years in both the areas
 1. Bhajoli koti
 2. Kindud
 3. Mange ki koti
 4. Mauna
 5. Masheek
 6. Utpalta
 7. Simaanta
 8. Daseu

Shathi Beel in Himachal Pradesh:

1. Zaanog
 2. Tharoch
 3. Thangaar
 4. Mundol
 5. Raru
 6. Bhajoli koti
2. Panshi or Pashi Beel in Uttaranchal, District Uttar Kashi—Twelve years in both the areas of Himachal Pradesh and Uttaranchal_
 1. Bhutaanu
 2. Cheenvan (Cheeuaan)
 3. Baamsu
 4. Beethri and back to Bhutanu

Himachal Pradesh

5. Khashdhar in Rohru
6. Barsante ki Dhar (Jubbal)
7. Bholar (Jubbal)
8. Dhaddi Rawat (Jubbal)
9. Arhal (Rohru)
10. Jakhnoti (Rohru)

The Chalda (moving) Mahasu stays for twelve years in Pashi Beel and for the remaining twelve years, his stay is in Shathi or Shatha Beel—in both the areas, as already mentioned. He decides his stay in a particular village himself and his medium (*Gur*), while going into trance, makes the decision known to the votaries. The deity has a herd of goats called *Ghanduye* who accompany him from one village to the other. The communities mentioned in the previous pages will be studied with particular reference to their cultural traditions in the Chapters to follow. Information about the Mahasu brothers will be discussed in detail in the Chapter relating to divinity cults in the region.

The Himalayas are a goldmine of culture. The racial groups of ancient times have left their indelible marks and imprints on the traditions being followed by the inhabitants these days. Though it is not clearly possible to associate a particular custom with the subgroups considered to be belonging to a specific community of pre-historic periods, yet the area and community-wise celebrations of ceremonies and village god system

can unfold numerous such interlinkages of the past. Among various interesting customs prevalent in the hill society of Northwestern Himalayan region, the institution of village gods is the most remarkable one.

Ancient Coins

Among the ancient tribes, viz., Kinnara, Gandharva, Yaksha, Khasa, Kanet, Nag, Trigarata, Kulinda, etc., some of them are of historical importance, whereas others have been associated with mythological heritage. Kulind or Kunind Janapada has been referred to by Panini in his *Ashtadhyayi* (4/3/113 and 4/3/93).⁷⁸ The coins of Shak, Kushan, Audumbra, Nag, Yaudheya, Chauhan, Tomar, Garhwal, Kashmir, Kangra, Trigarta, Kullu, etc., establish that the rulers of these groups had the regions of this Pradesh under their sway from time to time. Mohammedan rulers also had a deep impact on the administrative history of the regions. Nishk, a gold coin which finds its mention in R.K. Samhita (3/4/75), has not been found anywhere in the region of the northwestern Himalayas. 'Karshapan' or 'Kahapan', which was known as 'Ahat', (coin), was traced by Cunningham at Shrughn (Sughgaon), the ancient capital of Uttarakhand. The coin is related to the fifth century AD and belongs to Buddhist rulers.⁷⁹ The Kunninda coins bear the signs of Bodhi Vriksha (Bodhi tree), a small shrine with a Triratna in the front portion and the rays of the sun in the rear part. The Kaad (Kad) subgroup of the Kunnindas also issued coins in copper bearing an engraved image of Kartikeya having a trident in his left hand and a small bag in his right hand. The Kad coins were issued during the period 225 BC to 175 BC but coins bearing no signs were issued prior to it and date back to a period around 300 BC and even earlier.⁸⁰ The coins of Kunindas have been found at Tappa Mewa in Hamirpur and Jwalamukhi in Kangra,⁸¹ and some other places in the Kangra district. The Kuninda Janapada included sub-montane areas of the present Himachal Pradesh, i.e., districts of Sirmaur, Solan, Shimla, Bilaspur, Mandi, Hamirpur, Una and parts of Kangra.⁸² It stretched even upto the present Kullu and parts of Shimla districts. Shiv Prasad Dabral maintains that the Districts of Pithoragarh, Tihri, Dehradun and parts of Haridwar in Uttaranchal as also some parts in the plains surrounding Muradabad, Bijnaur and Saharanpur also formed parts of Kuninda Janapada.⁸³

Ancient Janapadas

The ancient geography of the epic period establishes that Kaikeya country was situated between Asikini (Chandra-Bhaga) and Vitasta (Jhelam) rivers with its capital at Rajgriha (Giri Vraja). This has been identified as Rajauri of the present times.⁸⁴ The capital was directly linked with Ayodhya, according to Valmiki *Ramayana* (Ayodhya Kand, Sarga 71 and 70/29-30). Bharata travelled on this route to Rajgriha with more than one hundred chariots driven by camels, bullocks, horses and mules, enroute crossing the Sudama mountain. Arjun (Sabha 27/11) also conquered Sudama kingdom. Shrugan, the capital of Kuninda Janapada has been identified by Cunningham as Sugh, where Dayalgarh and Mandalpur villages near Jagadhari are located these days.⁸⁵ Trigarta, Kuluta, Kinnar, Yaudheya, Audumbara, Darv and Abhisar, Kirat, Dard, Gandhar, etc., were ancient Janapadas whose boundaries remained uncertain due to constant attacks and feuds in the northwestern region.

Nabush was a powerful ruler of the *Chandravanshis*. His son *Yayati* was a great warrior and established his kingdom upto the banks of Vedic Saraswati River. Saraswati originated from the hills of present Sirmour district. Yayati married Devyani, the daughter of Shukracharya, the priest of the Asuras. He also married Sharmishtha, the daughter of Vrishparva, an Asura king.⁸⁶ King Yayati divided the kingdom among all his five sons, Yadu, Turvasu, Anu, Druhyu and Puru. Ushinar, who was born in the eighth generation from Yayati had five sons, whose names were Shivi, Yaudheya (Nrig), Nav, Krimil and Ambashtha. Shivi established Shivi kingdom near Multan, Sauvira in Sindh, Kaikeya in Jhelum and Chenab, Madrak in Sakal (Sialkot) and Jambu (Jammu). Yaudheya established Yaudheya state in the region near Montgomery and northern Bikaner. In Punjab, Nav established a kingdom named Navrashtra. Krimil and Ambashtha also established their separate states in their name.⁸⁷

Sansaptgana and Utsav Sanket

During the Mahabharata period, Subahu was the ruler of Kulinda Janapada. Prativindhya was the name of the ruler of *Sakal Dweep* (Sialkot) and the rulers of the hilly region which later came to be known as Simla Hill States, called the 'Samsaptgana'. Their names have not been mentioned.⁸⁸ These rulers supported Subahu and Trigarta King Susharam

Chandra in the Mahabharata battle and sided with the Kauravas. According to Vasudev Sharan Agarwal, the ruler of Kuluta at that time was Vrihant, who was also called as Pravateshwar. The other principalities adjoining Kuluta region included Modapur, Vamdev, Sudama, Susankul and Uttarakulut. Uttara Kulut can be identified with the present Lahaul and Spiti region and a part of Ladakh. 'Panchgana' were the small regions in the area and Senavindu ruled Dev Prastha, which formed a part of Panchjana. A ruler named Vishvagashva belonged to the Puru dynasty and ruled a kingdom nearby. The Dasyus, who are believed to be seven small principalities, are known as *Utsav Sanket*. Vasudev Sharan Aggarwal has identified these with the Kinnara region of Rampur Bushehr State.⁸⁹ Sabha Parva (28/1-5) mentions that Arjun, after conquering Kimpurusha Desha and Guhayakas of Hatak Desh (western Tibet), went to Mansarovar. Hatak Desh was located towards the north of Kulind Janapada.⁹⁰

Kulinda Janapad

During the Mahabharata period, Kulinda country was divided into numerous small states. Sabha Parva (26/3) indicates that there were several rulers (Kulindaan Shatshankulaan) and its boundaries touched Trigarta country. Towards the west, Kinnara Janapada had a separate identity.

The people of Kulinda Janapada⁹¹ have been referred to at four places in the Mahabharata. These include:

1. *Khasaan Jhashaan Nadyotan Praghasaan diraghvenikaan, Pashupansch Kulindansch Tanganaan Partanganaan.* (Sabha Parva, 26/6 ff).
2. *Khasa ekasana jyohah Pradrah deeraghvenvah, Pardashch Kulindashch Tangnah Partanganah* (Sabha Parva, 52/3).
3. *Kirat Tanganakiranam Kulindshtsam Kulam.* (Van. Parva, 140/25).
4. *Kirat ragyo Vishayam Subahoh Pinasturaan Dardanshch Sarvan* (Van Prava, 177/11).

According to Shiv Prasad Dabral 'Charan'⁹² the classification of the tribes mentioned in these references can be formulated as under:

1. Kirat, Tangan, Partagan and Jyoha.
2. Pashup Kulind.

3. Ayudhjivi Dasyu—Pin Tushar, Dard and Pard.
4. Ekasan Khash.
5. Pradar (nomads), Jhash, Nadyot, Praghas, Deeragh—Venik

The Dooms (Dom)

The Proto-Australoids (*kol-Mund-Shambar*) are not included in this list. According to Grierson (*LSI* Vol. I, Part I, p. 447), these people entered India during the pre-historic period and contributed to the development of post-stone age implements culture, speaking the Mundari or Kolarian language. The Kolarian people are settled over a vast terrain including the hilly and plain regions of Indian soil, Indo-China, southern parts of China, Indonesia and the Pacific islands.⁹³ The people of this race had curly hair, a good deal of beard and moustaches, comparatively smaller head, snub nose, lowered of jaws, a small stature and deep wheatish colour of skin.⁹⁴ The Shabars, who are called as Mundaris or Australoid, had to serve the Kiratas and the Khashas on the slopes of the Himalayan mountain or had to retreat to the inaccessible zones on the Himalayan heights in the places situated near the high snow-clad peaks on the borderland. The Hun Desha, the Tibet and especially, western Tibet was also inhabited by some groups belonging to this race.

According to Dabral (op. cit. p. 51), the Kol-ta, Dom, etc., groups belong to Kolarian race though the origin of 'Dom' is not exactly associated with the race. Dom-ba are Luhars in Spiti and the term indicates 'a small habitat'. 'Doomna' or 'Dom' are the basketmakers and 'Domba' in Spiti are the menial groups of outcaste people. According to Grierson there are several 'Dom' languages prevalent in India. Some scholars associate 'Dom' or 'Domra' with 'Drum' or 'Dramir' terms of Tamil language. Prysulaski asserts that the term 'Dom' originate from Austric (Kol-Mund) group of languages and is used for a community who begged with blowing or playing with 'Damroo', a musical instrument. According to him, the Damroo was made from 'Tumba' which is called 'Drum' in Chhota Nagpuri, Dumair in Kharwari, Dumeri in Uriya and Dumari in Nepali.⁹⁵ Atkinson is of the opinion that the Doms of Himalayan region are the slaves of the Khashas and differ from the people of this tribe in the plains. They serve the Khasha families in the region and are found mostly in the villages where the Khasha people are associated. Doms are found in almost all the regions of the Himalayan mountain. Doms are

divided in numerous subgroups. Pandey in his book *Kumaon ka Itihas* (pp. 61-71) has mentioned about two dozen subgroups of this community. Ratoori (*Garhwal ka Itihas*), Williams (*Memoirs of Dehradun*), Mandi, Suket and Kangra Gazetteers and some other works mention the Dum or Dumna. They are Hindus by faith. Atkinson has given a detailed account of the people of this community.⁹⁶ In Kinnaur, these people are called 'Domang' and in Spiti, they are known as 'Beta' or 'Beda', the musicians and Zo, Domba etc.⁹⁷ The Koli or Dom are Hindi/Pahari or local dialect speakers and can't be easily associated with the Mundari speakers. They are not the slaves of any other community but only minority groups having limited resources at their disposal and obliged to serve the upper caste inhabitants in the region. They are good artisans, artists and shilpis.

The Kiratas

The Kiratas have been called a group of Mongoloid race but it is not so. According to Grierson (1967: Vol. I, Part I, pp. 41-85), the Kiratas, after assimilating or pushing the Mongoloids back to the border areas of Kinnaur, Lahaul-Spiti and Ladakh settled in these Himalayan regions.⁹⁸ Dabral (2049 Vik. 52-53) associates Kirnar (Kiratmen), Kinnar, Kir-At or Kirat to the same origin and asserts that with the passage of time, the term Kir-nar was replaced by Kinnar or Kimpurush. He quotes from *Amarkosha* (1/71) while saying, 'Syat Kinnarah Kimpurushah' (2049 Vik.: 53). He is of the opinion that 'Kir' were also called 'Chirs' or 'Chir', and Chilat or 'Chirayata' (a medicine) is associated with these people. He says that in the Himalayan region, these terms were changed to Tir, Mir and Gir. Tir are called Tharu, Mir are known as 'Mihar' and Gir are associated with 'Gir-t or 'Ghirath'.⁹⁹

In *Vajrsanei Sambhita* (3/16), *Taittiriya Brahman* (3/4, 12/1) and *Atharava Veda* (10/4/14), the Kiratas find mention. They have also been mentioned in the literature relating to Ayurveda. The Kiratas collected medicines from the hilly region where they lived. As already mentioned, Chirayta was the medicine associated with their name and it is known in Kirati as 'Chilat' also. In *Matsya*, *Markandeya*, *Vayu* and *Brahmand Puranas*, *Mahabharata* (Bhishm Parva 2/51-57) and in *Brihat Sambhita* (5/381), these people have been referred to as a hill tribe.¹⁰⁰ Due to their appearance,

they were named as 'Ghotakmukh' or 'Ashwamukh'.¹⁰¹ Upadhyaya (*Kali Das ka Bharat*), as quoted by Dabral (2049 Vik.: 54), says that the Kiratas lived in Mithila-Tirhut, Nepal (Kirat or Kiranti Desh), Kumaon (Raji Kirat Tribe), Garhwal (the names of villages with 'Kir'), Tihri (Bhilangna or Bhilganga river), Taknon area of Gangotri where they were called Kirati during the Rigvedic period. Yamuna, where according to *Kashyap Samhita*, the Kiratas lived and Kangra which was known as Trigarta with Kir-gram (the present Baijnath) and whose ruler was called Kir-Raj, were the ancient habitats of the Kirata tribe. They are found in original or in a changed form in these places even today. The poet Kalidas has referred to the Kiratas as the inhabitants of Zanskar, Rupshu and the vast area stretched upto Kailash Mansarovar. In Assam, Sikkim and Bhutan, the people of this tribe are settled in majority to date. With this detailed account of the Kiratas, it is evident that some scholars have confused the Mongoloid population located on the Himalayan borders as the original and real Kiratas, but the case is not so. These people have been called as 'Mon' in Tibeto-Burmese and Khmer in the language of Kambodia. Thus, the joint name assigned to them is Mon-Khmer. Anthropologists have called them the 'Paeleo Mongoloids.' In Sabha Parva, the Kiratas of Assam are addressed as 'Poorvi Kiratas' and in Kishkindha Kand of the *Ramayana*, there is a mention of Samudri Kiratas.¹⁰² The ancient Kirata population, due to its location in remote and comparatively inaccessible regions, was influenced by Mongoloid people.

According to Rahul Sanskritayan (Rgvedic Arya, p. 83), the Bhot of Ladakh, Lahuli of Chamba (now Lahaul and Spiti), Malanees of Kullu, Kinnaras, Jad of Nelang, Marchha and Tolchha of Mana and Niti, Joharis of Millam, Raj Kirat of Askot, Magar and Gurang of Western Nepal, Limbu, Yakha and Raiee tribes of Eastern Nepal, Lepchas of Sikkim, Nagas of Assam and numerous Mon-pa tribes inhabiting the Kamrup region are the remanents of the ancient Kirat tribe. As already discussed, this list also infers that the Kiratas are intermixed Mongoloid people who settled on the higher ranges of the Himalaya mountain and presently speak the Himalayan group of Tibetan and Burmese (Tibeto-Burmese) languages. Some of the common elements of these tribes can be identified as under:

1. The languages spoken by them are influenced by Kol Mundari languages.

2. The tribes inhabiting Lahaul, Spiti, Kinnaur, Bains, Chaudans and Darma in the hills of Himachal Pradesh and Uttaranchal as well as those belonging to Kiranti group and inhabiting Nepal, practise Toshim, Rambang, Hambaghar or a Ghotul-like tradition called Kumar - Kumari, Grih (Ghotul or Ghumkariyan) on almost the same pattern as is practised by Oraon of Chhotanagpur, Mundas and Ho tribes. This confirms that Mundaris have been assimilated by these tribes during the pre-historic period.¹⁰³

Later, the Kiratas were either made to leave the areas or assimilate themselves among the Khashas, Dardas, Pishachas and Shakas who were also pastoral tribes like them and some of them had the instinct of inflicting the atrocities like eating of flesh of the dead (*Dardas*), taking raw and uncooked meat (*Pishachas*) and behaving like untamed animals.¹⁰⁴

The Khashas assimilated or pushed the Kiratas on the Himalayan slopes. This is the reason that the Kirati people are found only in the interior of the Himalayas and the Khashas are settled on fertile lands on the lower Himalayan regions as compared to them. Some subgroups of the Kiratas, known as the Ghirat, Chahang, Bahti, Nihir, Boksa and Tharu, etc., survived in the lower regions but these too couldn't withstand the admixture of blood and culture. Guru Vashistha stayed among the Bhil or Bhilra in the Bhilangna region in Uttar Pradesh, with his wife Arundhati and, according to Kedar Khand, started living as one of the tribals, namely, the Bhil-Kirat. In Kedar Khand (106/11/12), it is mentioned that Vashistha stayed in his 'Him Danv' Ashram, behaving like the Bhil Kirat and eating the meat of the wild animals after killing them and when Rama came back from exile, he went to Him Danv Ashram to call him back and found that the saint was passing his days as one of the tribals (Dabral, 2049 Vik.: 56). Lord Shiva met Arjun in the guise of a Kirat on the banks of the River Ganges.

According to Van Parva (177/11), Subahu, who is mentioned as the ruler of the Kunindas, has been referred to as *Kirat-Raj* or the ruler of the Kiratas. In *Puratatva Nibandhavalī* (pp. 115-19), Rahul Sanskritayan makes a reference of the Tharu tribe who also forms a constituent of ancient Kirat group. In *Bhishm Parva* (9/52), there is a reference to *Tir-Girh* or *Tir-Bhukti*, the present Tirhut, which might have been associated with Tir or Tharu tribe of the present times.

The Buksa and Mihir of Dehradun and other places belong to the same stock of people.¹⁰⁵ A reference of the Ghirath tribe is found in the Kangra Gazetteer (p.173), describing them as the inhabitants of the district and living on agriculture. They are settled in the most fertile valleys of Palam, Kangra, Rihlu, Haldun or Haripur and some other areas.

The Tangan

Tangan, Partangan (the remote Tanganas) were the businessmen dealing with Suhaga, which was called 'Tankan' in the ancient literature. In *Brhat Samhita* (10/12; 14/29 and 16/6), they have been addressed as Tangan and vide 14/12 and 17/25 in the same work, are addressed as Tankan. Tankan, (*Suhaga*), according to Dabral (p. 59), is taken from *Slachal (Suhaga)* of Tibetan or Bhoti. This term for Suhaga is now available in most of the Indian languages.¹⁰⁵ According to *Brihat Samhita* (10/12), the Tanganas have been described as residing with Kulut, Khas and Kashmir and according to 54/29 of the same treatise they were settled in the east-south direction alongwith Kir, Kashmir, Abhisar, Dard, Kulut and Kirat. In Sabha Parva (52/2-3), they were located alongwith Partangan, Jyoha at Meru and Mandar mountains in the valley of Shailoda river, which was full of Kichakvenu (Deviringal) forests. According to the *Mahabharata* and the works of Kalidas, Meru and Mandar are the peaks of Rudra Himalaya in Garhwal and the mountain range from Rani Hat to Kedarnath is called Mandarachal even now.¹⁰⁶ The Tanganas, who have been mentioned in present Taknan region adjoining Badrinath and where Tangan village is situated. Pargiter has also confirmed them to reside near Badrinath (Moti Chandra, *Upayan Parva*, p. 76). This area is not too far from Kinnaur.

The Kunindas

In the *Mahabharata*, Kunind and Kulind have been mentioned and, according to Sabha Parva (28/6), were a pastoral tribe. In *Brihat Samhita* (14/30), they have also been mentioned as Kaunind. The Kunindas have been mentioned to be the settlers of Ishan (northeast) direction along with Meruk, Nasht, Pashupal, Kir, Kashmir, Abhisar, Dard, Tangan, Kulut, Sairindhara, Vanrashtra, Brahmpur, Darv, Damar, Vanrajya, Kirat and China, as already mentioned.

The Kunindas were referred to even before the Mahabharata period. The monoliths of ancient times available in various parts of Himachal Pradesh are believed to have been built by Mowa, Mawi, Mon or Mortan people who are considered to be the ancestors of the Kanets, (Dabral, *Kulind Janpad ka Pracheen Itihas*, Vol. I, p. 62). Mon-yul and Mon-pa were the country and the people of Kuninda country. Cunningham, however, suggests that 'Mon' may be an Indian term applied to denote the amalgamation of Kulind-Kanet with the Kol-Munda people. The suggestion is not based on sound arguments. The term is probably related to Kirata language.

According to 1881 Census reports, the Kanets residing in Kullu (52863, i.e. 58.5%), Lahaul (4566, i.e 76.5%), Spiti (2878, i.e 95.1%), and in Mandi (1901 Census) were 47%, respectively. In Suket, their percentage was 44. The population of Kanets in Bhajji, Baghat, Baghal, Dhama, Nalagarh, Theog, Rawaingarh, Khaneti and Bilaspur was also quite considerable and in majority. Originally, the Kanets seem to be belonging to Kirat race (Dabral, op. cit. p. 63). The assertion, however, requires further confirmations through cultural and historical studies.

According to Cunningham (*Archaeological Survey Report*, Vol. 14, p. 127), the Kunindas (Kanets) were divested of their power by Rajputs and Brahmans who came from the plains in southern Garhwal, Kumaon, Sirmaur and some other areas. In remote areas, the Thakurais of the Kanets continued to exist even upto a later stage. According to experts, traces of monoliths and chiselled stones exhibit that at Dwarahat, Joshimath, Rawaingarh in Pabbar Valley and some places located on the watershed of Satluj, Beas and Chenab in Himachal Pradesh, and their Thakurais existed for a long time (see Cunningham, op. cit. p.132).

Uptil the Mahabharata period, the Khashas and the Kanets had separate identities. The social and religious customs of the Kanets were liberal like those of the Khashas and the strictness of Hindu scriptural rituals lacked in them to a some extent in some cases, as they had their own system of social ethos. Later, the Khashas were assimilated with the Kanets and now the Kanets have two sub-groups, namely, Khashia (Khas) and Rao. The Rawantas of Rawaiengarh are the Raos, according to some scholars but it is not easy to demarcate the difference in the social habits practised by various groups.

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CHAPTER THREE

Origin of Myths and Institution of Village Gods

In primitive societies, nearly everywhere, it is a common belief that a man, once dead, does not cease to exist and though the dead do not form the part of a group of living beings, yet they go somewhere else to lead a life fairly similar to the one here on earth. According to E.W. Smith, 'We speak of our beloved dead as if they were in heaven, while at the same time many of us think of them as ever near us. Some among us also naturally cling to the idea that they sleep their last long sleep in God's acre. So the African will say, in almost the same breadth, that the dead have gone to a great village under the earth, where everything is pure and where they till the fields and reap abundant harvest; they have gone to some far country in the east or north; that they are in the forest surrounding their earthly home; that they are wandering in the guise of wild animals; that they are in the grave, which is the house of the dead.'¹

The myths relating to folk beliefs, folk-tales, rituals and village gods provide essential data for interpretations of the social mind of a particular society. The primitive myths are not isolate in their character and have a definite bearing on the life style of the people where these are prevalent. It is, of course, a critical factor so far as the study of anthropology, sociology, folkloristics and history is concerned. They exemplify the traditional milieu and record the effects of passage from oral to written forms of social habits of the people.

According to G.S. Kirk, 'Myths concern us not only for the past, they play in all primitive, illiterate, tribal or non urban cultures, which makes them one of the main objects of anthropological interest, not only for the grip that versions of ancient Greek myths have gained through the centuries on the literary cultures of the western nations, but also because of means of endearing insistence on carrying quasi mythical modes of thought expression and communication into supposedly scientific age.'² While referring to Levi-Strauss, he further says, 'Claude Levi-Strauss's

theory entails that all myths are speculative, or problem-reflecting, when properly understood. Proper understanding requires concentration on our underlying structure of relationships, rather than on their overt content or any nearby allegorical interpretation.³

Myth, according to Mircea Eliade, is an extremely complex cultural reality⁴. Kirk admits that there is no one definition of myth, no platonic form of a myth against which all actual instances can be measured, as the myths differ enormously in their morphology and social functions⁵. The Greek myths, have been studied at length by the western scholars, from the base of researches in the field, but this was perhaps done because recorded material of rituals, folk-tales and social beliefs was available to them in abundance, whereas the Indian literature, written in Sanskrit, was comparatively difficult to be deciphered and interpreted by them. It is interesting to note that almost all Greek myths are about gods, or derived from rituals and these are either quite distinct or indistinguishable from folk-tales. Though some scholars⁶ do not agree to the assertion that all myths are related to gods, yet it can safely be said that myths have their roots in supernatural beings and their actions. They may, however, be the heroes of the past who not only were blessed with mysterious powers but were also deified at some stage. Myths, thus, are concerned with gods, demi-gods, deified heroes, rituals relating to the supernatural beings and folk tales associated with the events of magic and mysticism. Angelo Brelich (*Gli Eroi Greci*, Rome, 1958, p. 23f.) is of the opinion that mythology has gradually revealed that it cannot be reduced to factors outside religion, and today it is considered on the same plane as the other fundamental forms of religion, if not indeed as their ultimate source.⁷ Kirk is sceptical about this definition and asserts, 'Even this implication that all myths are associated with religious beliefs, feelings or practices seems misleading. Many myths embody a belief in the supernatural, and, for most cultures that will involve polytheistic religion, but many other myths or what seem like myths, do not.' If we look outside Greece, there are many myths of savage societies that have no known or probable connection with any cult, and concern beings who, although may exist outside historical time and perform fantastic and supernatural actions, are not gods and have nothing to do with religion: they are men, often the first men who established customs and practices and are classified by outside observers as 'cultural heroes.'⁸ S.N. Kramer (*The Sumerians*,

Chicago, 1963, p. 144) found that 'Sumerian myths have little if any connection with rite and ritual in spite of the fact that the latter played so important a role in Sumerian religious practice.'

Theodor Gaster ('Semitic Mythology' in SDFML, II, 989) has pointed out to a phenomenon which is quite relevant to the Himalayan scenario. He puts, 'Semitic myths are embodied in poems designed originally to be enchanted or recited at religious exercises. Their object was to provide an interpretation of ritual in terms of connected stories. In course of time, however, many of the underlying rituals fall into disuse, so that the myths survived as purely literary compositions to be modified or elaborated at will. It is mainly in this developed form that they have come down to us...'

According to G.S. Kirk, 'Tales of the origin of clans in particular localities (for men are supposed to have emerged from the earth) are used to justify a clan's claim to autochthony and the possession of certain lands and prerogatives, or perhaps to disguise the obvious falsity of such a claim, and they are the best example of what Malinowski named 'charter myths'—a term still much used by anthropologists. Some such myths are recited on important ceremonial occasions to reassert and confirm local rights, loyalties and beliefs. Yet such repetitions of a myth are not really 'ritual' or sacred in specific sense and provide little justifications for separating these tales from those of fertility or the origin of *kula*-exchange.'⁹

E.R. Leach¹⁰ asserts that 'Myth, in my terminology is the counterpart of ritual. Myth implies rituals; ritual implies myth; they are one and the same. Myth, regarded as a statement in words 'says' the something as ritual regarded as a statement in action. To ask questions about the content of belief which are not contained in the content of ritual is nonsense', and 'ritual action and belief are alike to be understood as forms of symbolic statement about the social order'. Ruth Benedict (*Myth—The Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*, XI, 1933, p. 179) is of the opinion that, 'For the purposes of study, mythology can never be divorced from folklore,' and that—'myths are tales of the supernatural world.'¹¹

Thus, we see that myths concern supernatural beings and are associated with rituals, folk-tales and other social beliefs. In the words of Stith Thompson, the celebrated author of the *Motif Index of Folk Literature*, the distinction between myth and folk-tale is quite artificial. In the

Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology and Legend, he maintained that, 'There is little agreement in the use of the term myth. But it can certainly be regarded as one branch of the folk-tale. It concerns the world as it was in some past age before the present conditions were established. It treats creation and origins, and therefore, may be identified with creation and origin legends. When it handles adventures of the gods, it may well be identical with the fairy tale. Many divergent theories as to the nature of the myth have been held in the past. All of them contain a grain of truth but none offer entire satisfaction.'¹² It is correct to say that myths took place in timeless past and they have some 'serious underlying purpose' whereas folk-tales are associated only with day-to-day social situations. However, it is true to say that there are some identical motifs in folk-tales and imaginative myths. According to some scholars, three major developments, namely, realization, discovery of the unconscious and its relationship with myths and dreams and lastly, the structural theory of myths took place in the field of the modern study of myths.¹³

We are only concerned with the myths relating to village gods in the region under study and, as such, will take up the issue of the types of myths available in the folklore at some later stage. It is, however, relevant to say that the Himalayan region has not received the attention of the scholars in the field and as would be clear from the data collected for studying myths of various types, it is sufficient to invite the attention of folklorists, anthropologists, sociologists and historians to some new fields which have, upto now, escaped their attention. Max Muller maintained, that 'the true history of mankind was the history of man's religion' and myth-building was something morbid, a mythological religion always pre-supposed a healthy religion.¹⁴ According to him, approach to the science of religion and the science of language should be similar.

Claude Levi-Strauss is of the opinion that, in order to understand what a myth really is, we must choose between platitude and sophism. He says, 'some claim that human societies merely express, through their mythology, fundamental feelings common to the whole of mankind, such as love, hate, or revenge or that they try to provide some kind of explanations for phenomenon which they cannot otherwise understand—astronomical, meteorological, and the like. But why should these societies do so in such elaborate and devious ways, when all of them are also acquainted with empirical explanations? On the other hand, psychoanalysts and many anthropologists have shifted the problems away from

the natural or cosmological toward the sociological and psychological fields.¹⁵ He further suggests, 'Ancient philosophers reasoned about language the way we do about mythology. On the one hand, they did notice that in a given language, certain sequences of sounds were associated with definite meaning. Their attempt, however, was thwarted from the very beginning by the fact that the 'same sounds were equally present in other languages although the meaning they conveyed was entirely different. The contradiction was surmounted only by the discovery that it is the combination of sounds, not the sounds themselves, which provides the significant data.'¹⁶ According to him, 'myth is language, functioning on an especially high level where meaning succeeds practically at 'taking off' from the linguistic ground on which it keeps on rolling'. He sums up the discussion by making three points, viz., (i) If there is a meaning to be found in mythology, it cannot reside in the isolated elements which enter into the composition of myth, but only in the way those elements are combined; (ii) Although myth belongs to the same category as language, being, as a matter of fact, only part of it, language in myth exhibits specific properties; and (iii) Those properties are only to be found above the ordinary linguistic level, i.e., they exhibit more complex features than those which are to be found in any other kind of linguistic expression. Levi-Strauss goes on to say, 'If the above three points are granted,—at least as a working hypothesis—two consequences will follow: (i) Myth, like the rest of language, is made up of constituent units; and (ii) These constituent units pre-suppose the constituent units present in language when analysed on other levels namely, phonemes, morphemes, and sememes but they, nevertheless, differ from the latter in the same way as the latter among themselves; they belong to a higher and more complex order. For this reason, we shall call them gross constituent units.'¹⁷

It is correct to say that the task of analysing mythological literature and more so, oral literature available in various societies, require team work and technical expertise. In the words of Levi Strauss, 'A variant of average length requires several hundred cards to be properly analysed. To discover a suitable pattern of rows and columns of these cards, special devices are needed, consisting of vertical boards about six feet long and four and half feet high, where cards can be pigeon-holed and moved at will. In order to build up three-dimensional models enabling one to compare the variants, several such boards are necessary, and this, in turn, requires a spacious workshop, a commodity particularly unavailable in

western Europe nowadays. Furthermore, as soon as the frame of reference becomes multi-dimensional (which occurs at any early stage, as has been shown above), the board system has to be replaced by perforated cards, which in turn require IBM equipment, etc.¹⁸ Mythology is based on the linking of the scientific thought with fantasy.

While defining the structures of myth, Edmund Leach says, 'The distinction that history is true and myth is false is quite arbitrary. Nearly all human societies possess a corpus of tradition about their own past. It starts, as the Bible starts, with a story of the creation. This is necessarily 'mythical' in all senses of the term. But the creation stories are followed by legends about the exploits of 'the culture heroes (e.g. King David and King Solomon), which might have some foundation in true story, and these, in turn, lead on to accounts of events which everyone accepts as 'fully historical' because their occurrence has been independently recorded in some other source.'¹⁹

Max Muller, a Sanskrit scholar and a German-born philologist, propounded the theory of solar mythology, which was greatly acclaimed by other scholars. A myth, in simple words, is a narrative dealing with gods, demi-gods, or culture heroes. 'The myth is concerned with; (i) creation of the world; (ii) the establishment of the present order; (iii) the origin of people; (iv) tribe; or (v) culture trait.'²⁰

According to Gayley,²¹ the types of myth include, (i) Explanatory—'Naive guesses at the truth' and (ii) Aesthetic—Originating in the 'Universal desire for amusement' including historic and romantic types.

Gayley further divides myth into reasonable and unreasonable categories. Stith Thompson is of the opinion that a century hence, scholars will review some current pronouncements with the same degree of amused incredulity that we express on reviewing some of the theories of a century ago.²² Malinowski held that myth is 'not symbolic, but a direct expression, a narrative resurrection of primeval reality, told in satisfaction of deep religious wants, moral cravings, social submission, assertions, even practical requirements.'²³ The interpretation or definition as well as origin of a myth is not the concern of the primitive mind but these are so 'interwoven with their whole outlook on life,' that these have to be taken as a part of their thought, way of life and rituals. 'Myth' according to Malinowsky, 'contains germs of the future epic, romance, and tragedy; and it has been used in them by the creative genius of peoples and by the conscious art of civilization.'²⁴

There are several definitions of myth and much has been said on it by various scholars. We find that the social situations in the western countries are different from the one found in remote areas of this country and, as such, the western scholars could hardly analyse that spirituality and divine beliefs form the major component of life style in this part of the world. The mythical life, here, influences the material world and social setup. The images and shrines of various gods are the source of solace, encouragement and guidance to the people and before taking up new pursuits, these are venerated and remembered. The village god system in the western Himalayan region and in some other parts of the country deviates from the routine visits to the shrines by the devotees in the sense that in these regions, the godlings or deities are taken to the people outside the temple premises and beliefs and myths related to them, effect and constitute the way of life of the followers.

Village Gods: A Preliminary Survey

The mind of man is a very complex phenomena. In the words of J.G. Frazer, it refuses to acquiesce in the phenomena of sense. By an instinctive, an irresistible impulse, it is driven to seek for something beyond, something which it assumes to be more real and abiding than the shifting phantasmagria of this sensible world. This search and assumption are not peculiar to philosophers; they are shared in varying degrees by every man and woman born into the world.²⁵ In addition to whatever is visible to us in the world where we live, we have an imaginary and invisible phenomena associated with our mind and waiting for an immediate manifestation. The material world, with all its illusions and disillusions, is not so attractive to us as is the case of the unseen and visionary enchantment, a purely imaginary world located behind the curtain of immediate sensations of light, colour, touch, sound and scent, etc. The multitude of spirits conceived by us in our thoughts and practice are the creation of age-old thoughts of human beings, either out of fear or the idea of deriving benefits through some magical and spectacular phenomena. The man has always tried to simplify the complexities of the actual and imaginary world and to unite them to derive maximum benefit for him. He has, since the ages, endeavoured to reply the questions of both the worlds in the way best suited to him and when joined by others to behave in the same manner, a particular religion is born. Frazer explains the situation and says, 'a gradual process of science or the

materialistic interpretation of the world may be traced in the history of religion or the spiritualistic interpretation of the world. Savages explain the phenomena of nature and of human life by supposing the existence of a multitude of spiritual beings, whether gods or ghosts, who people the sky, the air, the sea, the woods, the springs, the rivers, and by their actions bring about all the varied effects, which a materialistic philosophy refers to, as the agency of impersonal forces.⁷²⁶ As already said, man has tried to find out suitable interpretations to all happenings and situations and to alleviate the evil effects of invisible as also, the visible one, but intriguing and complex problems, and social modes, manners, rituals and customs become established. This system was evolved through suggestions, practices, taboos, observations and recurring experimentation in the beginning at individual level and, with the passage of time, at collective and social levels.

The Role of Language

Language played an important role to establish certain norms and practices as it proved to be a vehicle to convey the experiments, ritualistic practices and the effect of the utterance of particular words at a given situation. The primitive man was of the view that every object whether animate or inanimate, had life, feelings and emotions like that of which he was conscious and a soul or a spirit of every object guides its effects, actions and existence. The destiny of human beings, in some cases, rested on the wishes, happiness and favourable attitudes of the spirits who manifest themselves in various ways when propitiated by uttering the coined words in a particular manner and through ritualistic observations. This philosophy of thought was commonly known as the theory of animism. Frazer while quoting a five-couplet of some poet on this phenomena, 'millions of spiritual creatures walk the earth unseen, both when we wake and when we sleep' (1926 : 5), goes on to say, 'after man had peopled with a multitude of individual spirits every rock and hill, every tree and flower, every brook and river, every breeze that blew, and every cloud that flecked with silvery white the blue expanse of heaven, they began, in virtue of what we may call the economy of thought, to limit the number of the spiritual beings of whom their imagination at first had been so prodigal. Instead of a separate spirit for every individual tree, they came to conceive of a god of the woods in general, a Silvanus or what not;

instead of personifying all the winds as gods, each with his distinct character and features, they imagined a single god of the winds, an Acolus, for example, who kept them shut up in bags and could let them out at pleasure to lash the sea into fury. To put it otherwise, the innumerable multitude of spirits or demons was generalized and reduced to a comparatively small number of deities; animism was replaced by polytheism. The world was now believed to be governed by a pantheon of gods and goddesses, each with his or her individual character, powers, and functions, in virtue of which they were entrusted with the control of particular departments of nature or of human life.²⁷ The process of abstraction and generalization took the craving man to the evolution of the thought of monotheism, i.e. one solitary deity or the controller and the maker of the whole universe and the minor spirits.

According to some scholars, the forms of natural religion belonging to simple folk or the primitive people can be divided into two main components, viz., the propitiation of the dead or the ancestors with a view to seek their blessings for the well being of their successors and the worship of nature. The worship of nature, according to J.G. Frazer²⁸ is based on the idea of personification of natural phenomena assuming 'the character of formidable and dangerous spirits whose anger it is his wish to avoid, and whose favour it is his interest to conciliate', and the worship of the dead is related to the idea, 'the dead retain their consciousness and personality' and that 'they can powerfully influence the fortunes of the living for good or evil. To put it otherwise, the human soul is supposed to survive the death of the body and in its disembodied state to be capable of benefiting or injuring the survivors. Thus, a belief in immortality, or at all events in the survival of consciousness and personality for an indefinite time after death, is the keynote of that propitiation or worship of the dead which has played a most important part in history and has been fraught with the most momentous consequences for good or evil to humanity.' (1926 :18).

Abhinav Chandra Dass²⁹ explains the phenomena in different words while saying, 'a belief in the continuance of individual life, even after death, seems to be ingrained in the human mind, and the idea of final extinction, like the flame of a lamp blown out, is repugnant to it. The appearance of dead persons to their near relations naturally conjured up the existence of an invisible world—the world of spirits or the dead. This belief and the belief in the existence of some superior power or spirit who

controls our life and death, and is the bestower of our happiness and misery were the root causes of the birth and growth of religion. With these fundamental beliefs for its basis, men have built up their ideas of religion, which vary differently according to the different stages of their mental development, and invented customs, rites or ceremonies which, in their opinion, are best calculated to conduce to their happiness and well-being, not only in their present life, but in the life after death’.

The division of natural religion into the two branches referred to above, is not complete in itself as we find that the existence of numerous deities doesn't fit in the two branches. The linguistic and religious historical base suggests that the victorious groups of people in the past subjugated the vanquished tribes and forced them to adopt the social and religious systems of their victors. The worship of deities belonging to other social groups can be enumerated under a separate category as some of these spirits neither belong to the branch of the dead or the ancestors nor are associated with the norms of nature worship. The cultural contacts and racial fusions have to be taken into account while making an in-depth and systematic study of religious life of social and racial groups. In an area, like the one under study, one has to consider the impact of mythological and historical tribes with particular reference to inter-racial and intra-racial conflicts and class considerations. The antiquity of *Itihas* and the *Puranas* is so intermingled in the social life of the people here that some ceremonies have direct and subtle references to the mythological period, whereas the continuation of some other rituals can be traced back in the history of other groups of people. The cultural scenario of the groups has a complex cultural rapprochement, interdependence, unity and diversity that typical characteristic features are exhibited only through the institution of village gods which has experienced a minimum amount of alterations and change since ages. The institution is now under the threat of extinction as the impact of education and media finds it difficult to cope with its time-consuming and abstract demands and requirements.

It is not possible to ascertain the period of the origin of the most ancient of the deities prior to the period of the *Mahabharata* and, ‘While re-constructing the history of India prior to the *Mahabharata*-war, which is presumed to have been fought in 1428 BC, Altekar has tried to fix the dates of the Dasarajna-yuddha (1900 BC), of Grtsamada (2700 BC) of Srnjaya Sahadeva (2000-1800 B.C), etc.’³⁰

Folk religion, especially the tradition of worship of deities, is the living history of the people. Max Muller also believed that the true history of mankind was the history of man's religion. According to him, religion was closely connected with language and, therefore, the approach to the science of religion should be similar to that of the science of language. He considered religion a powerful vehicle of the realization of the Divine in the actual, the consciousness of good and bad and the faith in the divine ordering of the world.³¹ According to him, there were no traces of fetishism, i.e. worship of objects, such as, stones, shells and bones, etc., in the *Rigveda* though they began to appear in more modern hymns, particularly those of the *Atharvaveda*. These were called as tangible objects and, while, mentioning about other classes of objects related to the psychological analysis of the Vedic religion, he referred to two more classes,—semi-tangible objects, such as trees, mountains, rivers, the sea and the earth; and Intangible objects, like the sky, the stars, the sun, the dawn and the moon. In his *Hibbert Lectures* (198), he observed that the semi-tangible and intangible objects are associated with the ideas of semi-deities and full-deities, respectively, in the Vedas. According to him, the objects belonging to these two classes served to the ancient Vedic Aryans as the windows to look into infinitude or divinity.³² Hermann Brunnhofer is of the opinion that the original home of the 'Indian Sanskrit-Aryans' was Iran and Turan and that the Vedas were written in Iran. He even went on to say, 'Many Vedic *Rsis* did not only never set foot on the Indian soil but, they presumably did not know India'.³³ The conclusions are ill concerned, far-fetched and unrestrained.

Mountains play an important role in preserving ancient civilizations and cultures. The sacredness of mountains is not only a materialistic phenomena; it is associated with the creation of the world. According to G.M. Bongard-Levin, 'the Ural range is the belt of the supreme god thrown by him from the sky, at the creation of the world. Since then, the belt stretches throughout the world, forming its fulcrum, and the great mountains (Urals) are the 'Centre of the Earth'. He asserts further, 'this again takes us back to the ancient legends of the Indo-Iranian peoples: great sacred mountains appeared at the time of the creation of the world; these cover the earth with their roots, and somehow from its centre. The Indians, Iranians and Scythians called these mountains golden and held that there were golden lakes at their summits and that golden streams flowed there. The Urals were also called golden; the song about the sacred

Urals as recorded by the Finn scholar, A Kannisto, from amongst the Mansi in the beginning of the twentieth century, mentions the lake with golden shores at the summit of the northern Urals, both sides of which were inhabited by the Ugric tribes. The northern Urals alone were called the 'earth's belt' (the name Ural was first used only for southern Urals). The Ugric legends about the highest mountain have many mythological motifs alongside concrete geographical basis. Legendary features are particularly distinct in the folkloristic tradition of the neighbours of the Ugric tribes'.³⁴ The statement, in general, is true for the Himalayas too.

The Indo-Iranian tribes contributed, to certain extent, in shaping great ancient civilizations of Central Asia, India and Iran. The ancient myths and legends of Indo-Iranians speak of the period of the joint habitation of these people. According to Hermann Brunnhofer, Kandarpa, the god of love, may have been Gandharva, who survived from antiquity and is identified with Centauros of Iranian mythology. The ancestors of the Indo-Iranian tribes, according to G.M Bongard Levin (1980 :117), 'familiarized themselves with sacred mountains, northern Ocean, "polar" phenomena.' The knowledge of 'polar' lands was received from the northern neighbours, the Finno-Ugric people. The flights of *rishis* and souls to the north; some, the Iranian 'haoma' and their preparation methods; the ancient name of Cannabis, known as "bhaang" in India and "banha" in Avesta; "Pangh" or "Panh" in the Ugric languages (Kanty and Mansi); the myths relating to the stealing of the sacred plant Soma in Indian traditions and the place of god Haoma on the highest summit of Hara; the strange birds in the two mythologies; etc., establish that there existed similarities in the beliefs and rituals of the people of both the regions. According to him (Levin) (1980:103), 'archaeological and ethnographic materials show that the large "wonder-bird" became a part of the circle of mythological images, prevalent amongst the remote ancestors of the Finno-Ugric peoples of the northeastern Europe and Urals. Already in the nineteenth Century, scholars paid attention to the large numbers of metallic images found in these areas, of the real and particularly fabulous animals, birds and bird-like creatures—popular images of myths and legends of the Permian and Ugric peoples. One of the frequent subjects is that of the "bird", with human face depicted on the chest. The bird, quite frequently, has the figure of a full-sized man on its body. Similar objects were discovered in the areas round Kama and in the trans-Urals during excavations of the monuments of the

archaeological cultures. This gave the scholars material for dating such finds (works of A.V. Zbrueva, A.P. Smirnov and V.N. Chernetsov). Metallic figures, including those depicting the birds with the human faces on their chests and of a man of the size of a bird, can be witnessed in these territories for archaeological cultures beginning from the second half of the first millenium BC. Side by side with the figures of mythical winged monsters, ritual images of real birds, hawk, crow, falcon, etc., have been widespread among the ancient tribes of the areas around the kama and in the Trans-Urals.³⁵ The reference of Kinnaras as Ashwamukhas (horse-faced) is also associated with such like myths of the people of pre-division times of the Aryans. In the dialect of the Kinnaras, a scheduled tribe of Himachal Pradesh, there is no term for 'north' and the term 'Golsang' denoting 'month' conveys the interconnection of two separate words, i.e, Gol = Moon, and Sang = to open or to produce light. This indicates that these people counted their months according to Lunar system and the beginning of new month was counted from the new moon's day.

There is a clear mention in the *Rigveda* (VII. 95.2), that the River Saraswati flowed from the Himalaya right into the sea. A reference of Purva Samudra (Eastern Sea), which doesn't appear to be the Bay of Bengal, is also available in the *Rigveda* (X.136, 5). The geographical evidence has now proved that a pleistocene sea existed and covered the Gangetic trough at the foot of the Himalayan range and was gradually filled up by "the waste of the high lands."³⁶ According to Abhinav Chandra Das, 'the original cradle of the white Neolithic Peoples of Europe, the ancestors of the present European races, was in the Punjab and Iran, situated in southwestern Asia, whence they entered into Europe with Aryan speech and Neolithic culture about 15,000 or 20,000 years ago, when the ice had permanently receded to the north from southern and central Europe.'³⁷ He further observed that, 'the advanced settled Aryans of the Punjab were a white race, but the nomadic Aryan savages were of dark complexion in consequence of their vicissitudes of climate. Hence, they were called "blacks" and "black Skinned" Dasas and Dasyus by the Rigvedic Aryans.'³⁸ There is no indication of the existence of caste-system in the *Rigveda* in the sense in which we now understand it and snake worship was also unknown. However, during those days, various types of sacrifice and the Soma sacrifice, etc., were prevalent and the Aryan people were partly pastoral, partly agriculturist and had patriarchal system

of family life.³⁹ According to Macdonell (*History of Sanskrit, Literature*, Ch. VII : 182-183), 'in the *Rigveda* the object of devotion was the gods, for the power of bestowing benefits on mankind was only a means of influencing their will in favour of the offerer. In the *Yajurveda*, the sacrifice itself has become the centre of thought and desire, its correct performance in every detail being all important. Its power is now so great that it merely influences but not compels the gods to do the will of the officiating priest. By means of it, the Brahmans may, in fact, be said to hold the gods in their hands.' The *Samaveda* is the book of words employed by the class of Udgatr priests at the Soma sacrifice. The musical notes, while uttering *Samanas* or chants, called *gaanas*, indicate the prolongation, the repetition and the interpolation of syllables⁴⁰ to produce the desired vibrations and atmosphere deemed so necessary for conducting the ceremonies. The new ceremonies, 'such as the human sacrifice, the universal sacrifice and the sacrifice to the Manes' were introduced during the period of *Yajurveda*. The *Atharvaveda* was composed later when the Aryans knew the whole country from Gandhara, the Mujavat and Balhika in the north and west down to Magadha and Anga in the east (*AV.V.22*).⁴¹

The *Pancajanah* or *Pancarkstayah* (RV. iii, 37, 9; 59, 8; viii, 32,22; IX, 65,23; X, 45.6; *Panca-carsanyah*-RV V; 86, 2; VII, 15, 2; IX, 101, 9; *Panca-krstayah*-RV ii, 2, 10; iii, 53, 16; IV, 38,10; X,, 60, 4; 119, 6; *Panca-ksitayah* - RV. I, 7, 9; 176, 3; V, 35, 2; vi, 46, 7, vii 75, 4, 79, 1;) whose reference has been made earlier also, have been variously defined by commentators of the Vedic culture. These five clans possessed homogeneous civilization, a common god system, religious beliefs and customs and lived in well-organized village communities (*gramas*) as is mentioned in the *Rigveda* (1,44, 10; 114, 1; ii, 12, 7; X, 146, 1; 149, 4; etc.). They had Gramanis as their leaders (RV. X, 62, 11; 107,5). According to Sayana, they constituted the four castes and the Nishadas. This interpretation is not acceptable to the scholars of the Vedic culture as the caste system, according to Abhinav Chandra Das (1925 : 45), finds mention only once in the Tenth Mandala of the *Rigveda* (X.90, 12). The western scholars are of the opinion that the verse in question is of later origin, because of the language not being as archaic as that of the most of the Rigvedic verses.

According to some scholars, these *Pancajanah* or *Pancarkstayah* consisted of five tribes, namely, the Bharatas and the Trtsyus, the Purus, the Anus, the Druhys and the Turbases. There is no doubt that 'these

five tribes developed a comparatively high state of culture in Rigvedic times'; but there were other Aryan clans, some of whom were not as advanced as they. We find mention, however, of certain Aryan tribes in the *Rigveda*, some of whom, though not subscribing to the orthodox Vedic faith were, nevertheless, as advanced as the Rigvedic Aryans. But they were not liked by the latter, and addressed by the hateful names of Asuras-Dasas and Dasyus, terms which seemed to have been applied to all persons, savage or civilized, who were not one with the Vedic Aryans in religious sentiments, or who performed different religious rites, and observed different social customs.⁴² The *Pancajanah*, comprising the Devas, Nags, Kinnaras, Gandharvas and Yakshas, have also been mentioned earlier and now it seems quite reasonable to discuss this issue in the light of the prevailing social system of the people, particularly with reference to the tribes inhabiting the Himalayan region at some later stage. It is to be pointed out that Rudra, the Rigvedic god, was later known by the names of Ishana, Mahadeva and Ishwara. He is still worshipped in the name of 'Rudra' in some of the villages in Shimla district and in Kinnaur, the palanquins of the village gods carry the image of 'Ishwara' or 'Ishur' as the principal idol of the deity.

According to Sudhakar Chattopadhyaya,⁴³ 'if we now study the history of the battle of the ten kings, we arrive at some interesting conclusions. The Bharata King Sudas appears to have fought two battles, one on the bank of Purusni or the Ravi and the other on the Yamuna. In both, he was victorious (*RV. VII. 18-20*). His western enemies were Puru (dubbed as Mrdhvarac), Yadu and Turvasa (condemned as Dasa), Anu, Druhyu, Alina, Paktha, Bhalanas, Siva and Visanin. His eastern enemies were Aja, Sigru and Yaksu, evidently totemistic Proto-Australoid tribes. Of the tribes that opposed Sudas at the River Ravi battle, the location of three tribes can be determined with certainty. A passage of the *Rigveda* shows the Purus as living on the River Saraswati but the classical authors locate them on the Jhelum., It is, thus, possible that the present region of Himachal Pradesh might have come under the influence of some of these tribes. The Aryans, according to Abhinav Chandra Das (1925: 48-50), were 'autochthonous to Sapta-Sindhu which, comprised Gandhara in the west, and Kashmir and Bactria in the north, and their evolution as a race began in that region from very primitive times when man had been scarcely much removed from the condition of anthropoid apes. The Aryan manufacture, had passed through all the stages of development, viz.,

eolithic, palaeolithic and neolithic before he knew the uses of metals and emerged into the earliest stage of culture and civilization.’ According to him, the word Parshu, in the *Rgveda* (VII. 83,1), as told by Sayana, means, ‘the rib-bone of the horse, the edge of which is as sharp as a sword and fit for cutting.’⁴⁴ He maintains that the word *prthu-parshavah* (*RV.* VII 83,1) may have meant a heavy iron sickle with which men armed themselves in war.

The Vedic gods included the fire (Agni), Dyava, Prthivi, Parjanya who takes the place of Dyaus, the husband of Prthivi in *Athravaveda*, Varun, Mitra, Indra, Bhaga, Vala, Surya, Atri, etc. These people were divided into Janah or tribes which had a pyramidal system as under:

Janah (or tribes)
!
Visah (Cantons or districts.)
!
Gramaas
!
Gosthi (or vrajās)
!
Gotra
!
Kula (or families)
!
Grha (household)

Macdonell (*Vedic Index*, I, p. 171) and Keith are of the opinion that, ‘the word Kula, as an uncompounded word, does not occur before the period of the Brahmans. But the word “kula-pa” ‘house-protector’ or chief of the family is mentioned in the *Rgveda* (X. 179, 2) as inferior to and attendant on the Vrajapati in war, the latter being perhaps the leader of the village contingent of the clan.’ (*RV. Kulapa na vrajapati carantam*). When the compound word Kula-pa occurs in the *Rgveda*, we can safely conjecture that the word Kula also was in the family, and even the family itself. There is no distinct mention of Gosthi in the sense of an aggregation of Kulas or Gotras in the *Rgveda*, though the word Gostha in conveying a sense of ‘standing place for cows’ occurs in several verses (*RV.* I. 191, 4; VI 28, 1; VIII 43, 17). The word Vraja in the sense of a place ‘where cows go for pasture’ is equivalent to Gostha, and the Vrajapati occupied

the same position as the Gosthipati of later times, the Kulapa having been inferior to and attendant on him (*RV. X. 179,2*). The Kula or family was, therefore, the unit of the tribe or jana.⁴⁵ We shall compare and study some facets of Vedic culture later and restrict ourselves only to the tradition of Village gods in the region at the moment.

Gramdevta

The tradition of the Gramadevta is a typical system of folk religion in the middle and higher belts of Himachal Pradesh. The village deities have four distinct forms, namely, (i) the deities of Aryan and Non-Aryan Pantheon; (ii) local deities not related to Vedic deities directly but considered off shoots to the various principal deities of Hindu or Buddhist religion, (iii) the evil spirits propitiated and worshipped as village or household gods, and (iv) the heroes who performed miraculous acts for the welfare of the people in human form and later deified by the followers. It would be out of place to categorize the spirits in the beginning on the basis of their origin, history or prevalent myths and, as such, a detailed list of these gods would follow:

Gram Devatas in Mahasu—A Comparative List

<i>Sr. No.</i>	<i>Name of the god or Seat of God</i>	<i>Name of Village</i>	<i>Territory</i>	<i>Remarks</i>
1.	Devi or Durga	Kiari, Shil,	Kotkhai and	Worshipped
	Jubbal, Hatkoti	Kotgarh	throughout	
2.	Chaturmukh	Mailon	Kotgarh, Khaneti and other Villages	
3.	Dum	Himri, Danthla,	Kotgarh,	
	Pumlahi Bhot,	Ubadesh		
		Shamathla, Dalan, Nehra, Sarmala		
4.	Marichh	Kepu, Sawan	Kepu, Gharal and Nanja Swan territory	
5.	Deva-Kirti	Kirti	Kirti, Bhanana and Shawat	
6.	Bhoteshar	Bhothi	Bhothi, Bagahar Mahori	
7.	Baindra	Devri, Dun, Bachhunchh	Majhghor and Thakariaghgor,	

8.	Chambi	Breon	Mandalgarh Kotkhai-Breon and Auri	
9.	Maha Deva	Purag, Dalsar, Koti Madhati, Pojali	The god of half Chhebisi and other villages	
10.	Nag	Navaru, Bari, Chathla, Ghunda, Kathori, Khabal Kim, Shedri	Chathla, Pungrish	
11.	Kali Tuna	Rakh Chambi, Bagi Kupar	Kotkhai, Kumarsain.	
12.	Shravan Nag	Shoshan	Kotkhai	
13.	Baindra Tani	Khari and Pidara	Kotkhai	
14.	Nandhrari	Pijarli	Kotkhai	The patron of Chewar Gajdhar Chehr Shalewar Darkoti State and half Chebisi
15.	Nandan	Devri	Khaneti	
16.	Devi Ad Shakti	Kacher	Kumarsain	
17.	Magneshar	Kot	Kumarsain	
18.	Bhima Kali	Sarahan	Bushehr	
19.	Mahasu	Shekhal and other places, Mandhol, Pal, Gajyari, Pauria	Bushehr State Manjheti and Daraunk Parganas also	
	(1) Pabasi	Chapaari, Rohaal	Balaar in Rawin State, Chapari and Loharkoti	
	(2) Pabasi	Gavaas	Bushehr State	
	(3) Godaru Pabasi	Daswani, Khaniara		
20.	Panch Nag	Jangleka, Devdi, Tangnu, Pekha, Gosakvari	Has temple in each of the five villages	
21.	Chasralu	Gosakvaari	The god of two or three villages	
22.	Narain	Jabal, Kinu	Chhebisi, Jabal	
23.	Deva	Jakhroti		
24.	Khantu	Devi Dhar and Ranol	Rajgarh	

25.	Bakraalu	Dalgaon and Rohru	Spel	
26.	Meshar	Pojarli	Half of Mandalgarh	
27.	Nag, Lodar, Narain	Pojarli and Narain	The gods of Naavar	
28.	Dholu, Shalu	Karasa, Melthi	The gods of Ghori Karasana and Naavar in Navar	
29.	Nageshar	Jharag	The god of Pandra Sau	
30.	Devi Durga Hatkoti	Hatkoti	Bushehr, Jubbal and Rawin States	
31.	Kharanu	Kharahan	The god of Rek and Samaat	
32.	Palthan	Sholi Alar	The god of Mastgarh and	
33.	Khanasi	Barkal, Mahbuli	The god of Barkal and Seo	
34.	Kaleda	Kaleda	Bushehr	The god of Kaleda and Phola Villages
35.	Chatarkhand,	Brandli, Dwara	Bushehr	The gods of Mangleshar Kanchhin area
36.	Lachhmi Narain Manjheoli	Kumsu, Paat,	Bushehr territory	Shalati
37.	Khantu, Deva, Khokhi	Majhali, Darkali	Bushehr	The gods of Barshol area
38.	Devi Jiji	Munush	Bushehr	
39.	Kangleshar	Deothi	Bushehr	
40.	Chhari Gudri	Kareri	Bushehr	
41.	Jaakh	Racholi	Bushehr	The god of four/five villages
42.	Gasu Dev	Gasu	Bushehr	
43.	Basheru	Bushehr	Bushehr	The god of Tin Kothi but universally worshipped
44.	Jhangru	Manjhgaon	Bushehr Panjgaon	The god of
45.	Maha Rudr	Kiao	Bushehr	The god of Khionitcha
46.	Jal	Sarpara	Bushehr	The god of Kao Bil
47.	Badri Nath	Kamru	Bushehr	Tukpa

48.	Thakur Dwara	Nesing, Ghund	Bushehr	The god of Nesing farmers, god of farmers in Ghund
49.	Raghu Nath	Sarahan	Bushehr	
50.	Narsingh	Rampur	Bushehr	
51.	Parshu Ram	Larsa, Dansa, Shingla, Shaneri, Nirat, Nandla, Torsa.	Bushehr	
52.	Devi Mansa	Ghorna	Bushehr	Ghorna
53.	Kadhasan	Deothi	Bushehr	
54.	Rai Re Mole	Kadhaaran	Bushehr	Kadhaaran, Shilgri and Dhar
55.	Cheoli	Shela	Bushehr	The gods of Shelta
56.	Chitra	Chandni	Bushehr-	
57.	Kadasan	Tali	Bushehr	Parli Phati
58.	Bageshar	Bageshshar	Balsan Shakh,	Katar, Bagesar State of Balsan and other villages.
59.	Gon	Bakrari	Balsan Shakh,	Kalsi
60.	Nainon	Devti	Balsan Shakh,	Paali
61.	Banaar	Sarachali	Balsan Shakh,	Rawin
62.	Mahasu	Hanol	The god of Rawin territory	
63.	Nagahu	Jaili		
64.	Baneshar	Chohag	Ponar, Keonthal State	
65.	Padoi	Parol	Sangri, Kumarsen and Bhajji States	
66.	Baano	Banaar	Banaar	
67.	Grehan	Deoti	Shila	
68.	Shilgur	Ghund	Prala	
69.	Banthia	Janog, Chikhar		
70.	Junpru	Padrog		

71.	Banaar, Ralhi ka Banaar	Sharachali	Banaar territory in Jubbal and Barhal Rana of Jubbal
72.	Shirgul or Bijat	Sarahan	The god of Bis so
73.	Santopia	Dhaar	
74.	Shari	Shari	
75.	Rihatna	Thalog	Jakholi
76.	Gona	Bodhna	Shak
77.	Devi Jagraasan	Pojarli	Shak
78.	Kunera	Pojarli	
79.	Devi Dundi	Dhabas	Jalhoti, Hamaal
80.	Maheshwar	Mashraan	Sangri State
81.	Thaan	Swan	
82.	Tawansi	Baragaon	Maghidhar
83.	Milakyum	Akpa	
84.	Nagas	Anmeshras, Barang, Bruang, Ghato Kamba, Kilba, Natpa, Mewar, Miru, Ponda, Sangla, Sapni	
85.	Nagin	Bari, Chamralang (a hamlet opp. Sangla)	
86.	Narain (Naraan)	Barsering, Chaasang (between Bruang and Sangla) Chini, Shohang, Urni, Yula, Sungra, Bhaba, Chagaon	
87.	Mathi Devi	Chhitkul	
88.	Maheshras (Monshiras)	Sungra, Bhaba, Chagaon, Krabe, Mewar	
89.	Ukha	Nichar, Teg (Bara) Kamba	
90.	Dabla	Dabling, Dubling, Kanam, Pooh (Spuwa), Syasho, Taling	
91.	Tungma	Gyabung	
92.	Gyangmayung	Jangi	
93.	Bhimakali	Mone (Kamru), Sarahan	
94.	Badri Nath	Kamru	
95.	Markaling	Khwangi	
96.	Chandika	Koshtampi (Kothi), Kosme (Koshmir), Ropa, Yuwaring	
97.	Chhakoling Dambar	Labrang	
98.	Tangla	Lippa	
99.	Deodum	Nako	
100.	Ormig	Morang	
101.	Sheshring	Pangi	
102.	Khormo	Pilo (Spilo)	
103.	Pathoro	Punnam (Purbani), Rarang	
104.	Shankras	Pawari (Por)	
105.	Shanshras (Shamshiras) Shanaishehara	Rakchham	
106.	Kasuras	Ribba (Rirang)	

107. Kulyo Rispa (Richpa)
108. Rug-shu Rogi (Roghi)
109. Munko Tailing
110. Rapukch Thangi
111. Tarasa Taranda
112. Chitralkha Taranda
113. Kali Ramshahr
114. Lakhdata Dehdi (Nalagarh)
(Sakhi Sarwar Sultan)
115. Devi Nalagarh
116. Guga Pir Manpur, Nalagarh
117. Junga Junga, Pojarli
118. Tara Tara Devi (goddess of the
ruling family of Keonthal State)
119. Jipur Worshipped in the temple of Junga
120. 22 Tikas of Junga
(i) Kalaur, (ii) Manuni, (iii) Kaneti, (iv) Dev Chand, (v) Shaneti, (vi) Mahanpha
(vii) Tinu, (viii) Khateshwar, (ix) Chadei, (x) Shaneti and Jau, (xi) Dhuru (xii)
Kulthi, (xiii) Dhanun, (xiv) Dum, (xv) Raita, (xvi) Chanaana, (xvii) Gaun,
(xviii) Biju, (xix) Kusheli Deo, (xx) Bal Deo (xxi) Rawal Deo, (xxii) Kewali
Deo (See, Keonthal State Gazetteer, Part A, : 1910: ii to v).
121. Ath-Bhuja Dharech
goddess (sister of
Shogu-Bhogu)
122. Shogu Fagu
123. Bhogu Fagiana, Fagu
124. Chand Mulkoti
125. Chiru Bhajji
126. Klainu Deo Kiar (on a ridge called Deo Dhar)
(Jamdagini from
Kullu-*Dudhadhari* or
Vegetarian)
127. Sip Deo Mool Koti
(probably Shiva)
128. Sharali Deo Sharal village in Koti territory
(Deo Junga)
-a *Dudhadhari*
129. Gambhir Deo Chanaari village in Koti
130. Dhandi Deo Pagog and Kaimhali in Koti State
131. Bhat Deo Badaih village in Koti
132. Korgan Deo Chhabalri village in Koti
133. Nana'l Deo Kogi Village (near Naldera)
134. Dhanu Deo Chhabrog Village in Koti and in Keonthal
135. Shyani Deo (State Koti Gazetteer : 9)

- (Cook of Kyali village, Koti State above mentioned nine deities).
136. Shrigul(Shirgul) Mool Ghund
137. Thakurdwara Mool Ghund
138. Deota Ghremi Deoti
139. Lachmi Narain Arki
140. Bani Devi Gharnun
141. Baara Deo Bari Dhar Shiva according to Baghal State Gazetteer (1910:6)
142. Har Sang Deo Harsang Dhar -do-
143. Madhor Deo Mangu village Worshipped after death. A sonless man turned to be a god (1910 : 6)
144. Duhgali Darla Dhar
(Dughli) (Parallel to Bari Dhar)
Deota
145. Vishnu (Jaionaji south-east of Solan)
Chaturbhuj
146. Mahabir Mahranji (Solan)
Baghat State
147. Thakurdwara Anji, Daosi, Solan,
Paurot (Narsingh)
148. Shivala Bhoch, Jagaat Khana, (In Solan-Baghat Guga-pir,
Solan Narsingh bir and Sur are
worshipped)
149. Biju Baghat State-Matival
150. Shrigul Chur mountain, 1910: Jubbal State Gazetteer
(Bijat) Jubbal (p.10) Shrigul called Bijat
(Biju) in Jubbal, (Mahashiva
(1910: 13)
151. Bijai (sister of Kotkhai, Sirmaur
Bijat)
152. Mahasu (Shiva) Pabar Valley,
Garhwal
153. Hatkoti Hatkoti (Hatkeshwari Devi)
154. Ganga, Shiva Kupar Peak
Lakshmi Narain
155. Kali Devi Kupar Peak Jubbal State (13)
156. Koteshtar Kothi Mandholi Kumar Sain
Mahadev (came from Hatkoti, State Gazetteer) 1910: 3
(Shiva) Pabbar)

157. Adshakti Bhagwati	Tikkar Hill		
158. Devi Kasumba	Kheksu		
159. Magneshwar Mahadeo (Mandni Deota)	Pargana Sihal (Kumarsain)	Born as snake	
160. Dum	Sharmala in Pargana Sihal, Kotkhai Bushahr	Joint fair at Samokhar (Kumarsain State Gazetteer : 10)	
161. Kali	Shali Peak (Nine other temples else where)		
162. Shiva	Tattapani (property of hot spring water)	Bhajji State Gazetteer (1910 : 4)	
163. Jit Danon (A boy in the beginning)	Jaton (Mahlog State)		
164. Gurudwara	Hari Pur	Bhajji State	
165. Ghurka (Ghatotkach)	Gurka Dhar, village Gharsi	Bhajji State	
166. Biju Devta (Bijai Pal)	Kuthar	Kuthar State	A son of Raja of Kotgarh
	god	Bijat, another	
167. Bijat	Sarahan		
168. Dano	Kunihar		
169. Devi Jalpa	Beja (Kasauli Hill)		
170. Devta Biju	Beja (Kasauli Hill)		
171. Chalda Mahasu	Tharoch		

According to a preliminary survey conducted under the aegis of the Department of Culture and Language, Himachal Pradesh and by the author there are 378 main temples in Solan, 720 in Shimla and 169 in Kinnaur districts. The total number of shrines in the region under study is thus, about 1267. Out of a total of about 4000 main temples in Himachal Pradesh, the ratio in Mahasu region comes to about 1:3 only. Out of these, the maximum number of temples is in Shimla district.

The temples in Solan include Gurudwaras, Shiv Dwalas, Durga temples, Radha Krishan Shrines, Siddh Mandir (Sanair), Baba Balak Nath Shrine, Shiva, Balmiki, Baba Kaul Dass, Janaki Mai, Tara Devi, Mata Sheetla, Ram Chand, Mahavir, Kali, Naina Devi, Jwalamukhi, Moolleshwar, Parithan (Dadi Bhola), Guga Pir, Narsing, Jalpa Devi, Siddh Chalyoni, Mansa Devi, Nag, Bara Dev, Chandi, Panj Piri (Vikrampur),

Nikjhalo (Kiari), Bani Dev, Devta Madhor, Dano Deo (Kunihar), Sheetla Mandir, Dev Dakhaani, Mahu Nag, Gasiyan Devi (Apsara), Church (Sanawar), Chhamrog Deota, Logsan Devi (Naubag), Hanuman (Nihara), Junga Dev (Theekur), Mahasu Devta (Huno), Dev Brajeshwar (Bagetu), Satya Narain (Jaayal), Dev Bhaapna (Amani), etc.

In Shimla, the deties in addition to the ones already mentioned in the list include:

Devta Dehrgo (Pajol), Chambi Devta (Baraiyon), Boindra Devta (Devri), Pali Devta (Pal), Karaal Devta (Nagindri), Kharaanu Devta (Kharan), Maha Dev (Daivag), Lankra Pir Devta (Kiari), Lankura Veer (Anu), Nar Singh Veer (Dalsaar), Devta Nandan (Shilli), Padhra Devi (Padhran), Toni Mata (Chayor), Shalu Devta (Pujarli), Devi Nagar Kothi (Sheel), Rudar Devta (Karivan), Chhauhu Devta (Tandali), Devta Chholu (Sharog), Makar Devta (Bachhunchh), Paras Ram (Khaskandi), Shimood (Rohru), Goraru Devta (Kotsari), Devta Dholu (Adhaal), Morushu (Khatadi), Sheelonu (Thamteeda), Kilbalu (Khashali), Kwar Jakh (Kwar), Devta Banshari (Ladot), Chohin (Miyudi), Khanu Nag (Sanol), Jabal Narayan (Jabal), Sandaar Deota (Shila Desh), Dhaara Devta (Jakha), Nag Bahinaj (Khabal), Vishnu (Guma), Devta Devi Dhar (Devi Dhar), Devta Thakur (Rantaadi), Devta Grahen (Deothi), Devi Dehan (Ghund), Chitra (Chandni), Rai ro mul (Kadharan), Kataasan (Neri), Langri (Kalna), Chewali Devi (Pundar), Chewali Devi (Ser Chak Wagana), Kaulu Veer (Basa Bagain), Guru (Ghorna), Balageshwar (Balag), Bakhog Deota (Bakhog), Yageshwar Deota (Panderan), Pijyali Manteshwar (Panderan), Mahasu Nag (Cheyar), Deota Kameshwar (Bagain), Deota Baleshwar (Palana), Chamreshwar (Ganauri), Mahadev (Sharmala), Kalu Nag (Dhar), Kali Nag (Badaihna), Maheshwari Devi (Shari), Devi Nagar Koti (Mahog), Kamaksha Devi (Kalahar), Laxmi Narain (Rando), Nandan Devi (Kamod), Garnot (Gajaut), Thori (Cheog), Ambika (Rajeta), Bhima Kali (Ratanpur), Nar Singh (Dhar), Harkaar (Dharath), Krishan Deota (Dawat), Ganpati (Hiyoon), Jajar (Kuyaroo), Gauna Deota (Karog), Vishnu (Batol), Dhandi Deota (Kyar), Purgan (Chhabur), Sipi Deota (Jungle Sipur), Saukat mochah (Badhai), Biju Devta (Dooh), Kayali Deota (Kayali Deota (Kayali), Binju Deota (Barog), Mahali Deota (Pujarli), Mahu Nag (Jungle Manoon), Kalika Devi (Ruhalthi), Katheshwar (Koti), Ram (Mehli), Narsingh Deo (Junga), Junga Deota (Been), Junga Deota (Thund), Manoon Deota (Paradi), Junga (Patgaher), Shaini Deota (Kayali), Kathesar (Pari-Bharech), Kathesar (Kadairi),

Manuni Deota (Gajheya), Junga Devta (Pujarli), Kiyaloo Devta (Mathayik), Chhawani Veer Mahasu (Saluakra), Kauloo Deota (Rampuri), Banod Deota (Shirthi), Dasu Deota (Satandli), Shed Kulia (Saskir), Rathi Deota (Kelwi), Veer Deota (Paonta), Katodi Deota (Dhansar), Gudaru Deota (Giltadi), Deota Banad (Jhagaan), Kiyaloo Deota (Jungle Kiyala), Balod Deota (Naktada), Shedkulia (Sainj), Banohar Deota (Mehana), Nageshwar (Jharag), Kiyaloo (Jhagtaan), Banad Deota (Jakhod), Banoo Deota (Banahri), Bhindoo Devi (Chhoan), Vatgeshwar (Vahli), Malendu (Malendi), Shelag Devta (Shelag), Pandor Devta (Shila), Dhaneshwar (Bharethi), Marich Devta (Swana), Raghu Nath (Kumarsain), Thaan Deota (Yarshu), Koteswar Deota (Koi), Thaan Devta (Pauchi), Marich (Kirti), Chaturmukh (Mailen), Maharudar (Kiyao), Kungal (Mundhair), Luharu Devta (Ganwin), Sigsani (Khamri), Palthan (Sholi), Laxmi Narayan (Mashnoo), Laakh Devta (Racholi), Khandeshwar Deota (Shaneri) Chhija Deota (Deothi), Dharali (Nensu), Patar Deota (Mashnu), Kajal (Chaso), Nagalkheen (Kim), Chitra Devi (Naar), Jariyan (Bhanol, Mohajel), Shirgul (Dhatali), Maheshwar (Mashran, Kuthan, Navi), Ganker (Masra), Hanuman (Juni Kalan), Harsing Deota (Chhanog), Dhanu Devta (Dawarsu), Neem Deota (Halot), Deota Pandoya (Ogli, Malgi, Gharogra, Jadheri), Dhanu Devta (Paliyar), Dandi Devi (Neod), Suri Devi (Bamot), Kathan (Domehar), Deota Pandoya (Kothi, Pandoa), Deota Kurgum (Garkan), Kurgum (Sananoo), etc.

District Kinnaur, as already mentioned, has 169 temples associated with various deities. The most significant of them are:

Narayung (Asrang), Milakhyung goddess (Akpa), Kasurajas (Ribba), Nag (Ribba), Lalag/Lagang (Ribba), Kuldeo (Rispa), Ormig (Moorang), Deota Lavrang (Nesang), Deota Rangrip (Rarang), Thakur Thaani (Rarang), Galdan Chhokar (Lippa), Durga (Ribba), Kimshu (Ribba), Mahasu Deota (Moorang), Ralyushu Deota (Thangi), Deota Ganduya (Thangi), Rg. Rg. Tagma (Charang), Narain (Ramni), Narain (Punang), Maheshwar (Sungra), Nag Deota (Nichar), Chitralkha (Taranda), Nag Deota (Bari), Buta Deo (Gharshu), Maheshwar (Bhaba), Nag (Magpa), Maheshwar (Katgaon), Kimshu Narain (Bhaba-Bei), Deota Kuldeo (Panwin), Ukha-Usha (Nichar), Hidimba (Chaura-Kafor), Nag (Natpa), Kuldeo (Chamraling), Narain (Bhaba-Katgaon), Jalnaag (Yulla), Maheshwar (Chagaon), Shiv (Chagaon), Kuldeo (Rupi), Sarga narayan (Meeru), Sarga Choroni (Meeru), Devi Nagin (Chhota Kamba), Narayan (Yulla), Devta Narayan (Rupi), Sadher Deota (Rupi), Maheshwar (Kangos), Narayan (Urni), Vishnu (Urni), Usha-Ukha (Bara Kamba),

Narayan (Kalpa), Chandika (Kothi), Markaling (Khwangi), Devta Shishering (Pangi), Narayan (Chini), Vishnu Naryan (Chini), Nag (Barang), Narayan (Roghi), Bhairo (Kothi), Chandika (Duni), Deota Maheshwar (Mebar), Deota Ishur Narayan (Purbani), Karthun (Pawari), Naring Chholing (Ropa), Chandika Devi (Ropa), Devi (Gyabong), Shiv, Lagang (Gyabong), Dugar (Sunnam), Deota Aiyangyar (Labrang), Deota Tangma (Rushkulang), Tashi Chholing (Kanam), Sangachholing (Spilo), Kharmoshu (Spilo), Deota Yulsa (Sunnam), Narayan (Kilba), Mathi Devi (Chhitkul), Shanshiras (Rakchham), Badu Naryan (Batseri), Nag (Sangla), Badri Narayain (Kamru), Narayan (Shong), Narayan (Barua), Narayan (Sapni), Narain (Chansu), Nag (Barua, Sapni), Chinrazi (Nako), Thakur Dhiwana (Leo), Sanga Chhoeling (Sumra).

Shanti Lal Nagar⁴⁶ is of the opinion that the image of Mahishasur Mardini in Hateshwari temple, Hatkoti, Shimla, belongs to the seventh century AD, the images of the goddesses in Kali temple Nako, Rairemool Devi temple, Kadharan, Ravatana Devi temple at Ravatan date back to the medieval times, and the Siva Lingas at (i) Hatkoti, (ii) Kotesvara Mahadeva temple at Kot, (iii) Mananesvara temple at Maanan, (iv) Siva temple Jubbal, and (v) Mahesvara temple, Mahasu temple at Mahasu, originally belonged to the seventh century AD. The Siva-Deol temple at Hatkoti and the Sivalingas at Maanan and Jubbal can be dated back to medieval times, whereas the Maheshvara temple at Mahasu was built during 1895 A.D. According to Nagar the Sivalingas in the Siva temples at Balag and Brat belong to seventh-eighth century. The Sivalinga in Rudra temple at Balag and the stone image of Siva Parvati in the Siva temple, Rampur Bushehr belong to ninth-tenth Century AD. He is of the opinion that the copper image of the god in Duttatreya temple at Duttanagar, a deserted miniature temple at Hatkoti, the stone image of Surya in Surya temple at Nirath and Braat might belong to seventh-eighth centuries. He further maintains that a metal mask, besides, the image of Kali in Bhima Kali temple, Sarahan, the image of Mahisasur Mardini in Durga temple at Maanan belong to seventh-eighth century AD while the metal masks in Adi Shakti temple, Kumarsain and Ashtabhuj temple at Dharoch could belong to twelfth-thirteenth century AD. He places other images and metal masks of the goddess in Chambi Devi temple, Breon; Chhatresvari Devi temple, Nirath; Durga temple, Jhina; Khadasana Devi temple Deothi; Kiari Devi temple, Kiari; Mansa Devi temple, Chorna; Dundi Devi temple, Dabhas; Shari Devi temple, Tiali to a later period, i.e., between fourteenth to eighteenth century, respectively. According to

him, the Shiva images in Siva temple, Balag; and the Dhaneshwar Mahadeva temple, Kepu and at Mushran belong to seventeenth century AD.

According to Shanti Lal Nagar, metal images, masks and stone images in Bijat Devta temple, Sarahan; Baidra Devta temple, Bachhoonch, Banar Devta temple, Thana; Banthar Devta temple at Janog; Bashahru Devta temple, Pashoda; Dhana Devta temple at Bihar village; Dhumi Devta temple at Dalan; Jakha Devta temple at Gagrani; Kanara temple at Pujarli Pabasi; Narayan Devta temple at Pujarli, Narayan Devta temple at Jabal; Devta temple at Rohal; Pandava temple at Masli; Parshu Ram temple at Rampur Bushehr; Rathi ka Banaar temple at Barhal; Ravandu Devta temple at Devidhar, Shikru Devta temple at Jorna and Shingal Devta temple at Jorna as well as images in Goli Nag temple at Pujarli; Nag temple at Chadara and Panchnaga temple at Janglik belong to eighteenth-nineteenth century AD, excepting the metal image and mask at Bijat Devta temple, Sarahan which can be placed back to the medieval period.

According to Nagar's assessment, the Kali temple at Chini village in Kinnaur is one of the earliest temples in the area.⁴⁷ He places the metal masks in Chandika Devi temple at Ropa and Kothi; the square ark of the goddess in walnut wood and metal mask in Mathi Devi temple at Chhitkul; metal mask in Chitralkha Devi temple at Taranda village and metal mask in Hirma Devi temple at Chaura-Kafor to have been constructed during the seventh-eighth century AD. According to him the metal mask and the image of Kali 'in Markaling temple at Khwangi and Bhima Kali in Kamru fort belong to seventeenth-eighteenth century respectively. The metal mask in Maheshvara temple at Katgaon, the images of Lord Badrinath in Bardrinath temples at Kamru and Barseri might belong to nineteenth century A.D. He places the origin of temples and metal masks relating to Gandharpas Devta at Jani, Kasurajas at Ribba, Narenas of Urni, Morang Devta temple, at Morang; Kuldevta of Panvin, Shonshiras Devta at Rakchham, Sheshering Devta temple at Pangi, Ark temple Sunnam; Ukha Devi temple, at Nichar; Bhagwati temple, at Rakchham; Maheshvara temple, at Sungra (with metal mask) to eighteenth and nineteenth century and is of the opinion that Mahasu temple at Talingi, Baring Nag temple at Sangla, Dabla Devta temple at Kanam and Chakoling Devta temple Labrang, along with the masks, might have been built during the eighteenth and nineteenth century AD

only. Nagar is of the opinion that Buddhist Stupa at Chetru in Kangra belongs to Ashokan period while the Kanhiara rock inscription belongs to Kushana period. He maintains that the image of Padmasambhava in the monastery at Rewalsar in Mandi was built during the eighth century AD.⁴⁸ The Buddhist monasteries at Nako and Kanam were constructed in the tenth-eleventh century. Buddhist monasteries at Rarang, Ribba, Charang and Pooh are believed to have been built by Ratna Bhadra (Rin Chen Zangpo) in tenth-eleventh century AD, whereas the age of the monasteries at Leo, Jangi, Lippa, Namgya, Chini, Chango, Chaarang, Chuling, Rispa, Spilo, Sunnam, Tashigang and Thangi cannot be correctly ascertained, although these, along with the Buddhist shrines at Ribba, Pangi, Rarang, Nathang monastery and Nesang, belong to a later period ranging between twelfth to nineteenth centuries. Some of them, are, however, built by the great translator-scholar Ratna Bhadra (Rin Chen Zang-po) during the tenth-eleventh century.

The brief account of the temples and deities given above, makes one believe that the earliest temples in this region belong only to sixth and seventh centuries and no trace of any earlier history of religion of the inhabitants of the region can be ascertained on the basis of archaeological findings. In no way does it infer that the system of construction of shrines, masks, images and palanquins of the deities started during that period only. We may have to focus our attention on the antiquity of some terms available in local dialects especially related to the divinity cults along with the historical and sociological backgrounds to arrive at a conclusion. In Kinnauri, the palanquins of local gods are called 'Rathang' (Rath-Chariot), a term used in the Vedic period when the Soma plant used to be brought to the habitats in 'Raths' by the Devas. There being no roads in the hilly terrains, the term 'Rath' was probably used to denote palanquins in which the plant was respectfully brought from the hilltops to the villages. We shall take up this issue for further assessment and at the present stage, would restrict ourselves to another important and relevant point of the classification of the deities in the region as without doing so, it may not be possible to ascertain the folk religion of the ancient inhabitants scientifically. The names of various major village gods have since been recorded and without going into the details of the areas and coteries covered by each of them, we may take up the case of 'families' of various deities in the present case.

Classification of Deities

A brief summary relating to the categorisation of various deities can be prepared as under:

Maheshuras

Maheshuras are the most popular and powerful gods of Kinnaur region. According to the survey referred to above, though the area covered by them is not bigger than that covered by Vaishnav and Narain Devtas and Buddhist deities, yet the dominance and mythological background with which they are connected, make them important in the whole sequence.

Mahasu

Mahasu, the god of masses in greater part of Shimla district, has reached the villages of Kinnaur and is the Lord in three temples, though small, but indicators of his popularity in the region. In Solan district, there are three temples of the deity. Thus, he has supremacy over other gods and deserves our special attention. Shirgul, Doom, Koteswar, Chikhreshwar, Parshu Ram, Marich, Rudra, Durga and other manifestations of goddesses, including Bhimakali of Sarahan, who was the presiding deity of Bushehr State, also command great respect among the people. There are several Nag temples in Shimla district also, as are found in Kinnaur and Solan districts.

In Solan, there are gurdwaras, Durga temples, Shiva temples, Balak Nath, Mahasu, Vaishnava, Siddhas, Nag, Panjpir, Thakurdwaras, Junga Deota, Hanuman, Guga Mehri (Guga Shrines) and some local god temples. The number of Gurudwaras and Thakurdwaras, is considerable. Guga has great impact on the people and is worshipped as a snake-god in the area.

Kinnaur

According to an estimate and a bird eye view of the situation, the Maheshur gods and their sisters, including Chandika, Usha, Chitrakleha (Chitrarekha), etc., are worshipped in eighteen shrines including Sungra, Gramang (Bhaba) and Rajgramang (Chagaon) Kothis, which include

considerable areas. There are 27 shrines associated with Narayan, 20 related to other Vaishnav gods, 16 of Nag deities, 58 Buddhist religious places of worship, 16 related to Nag *deotas*, 8 of Kimshus (household gods), seven Shiv Lingas, three places of worship for the Mahasu *deota* and 20 for other gods of different categories, including spirits and local gods in Kinnaur. The total number of such shrines is approximately 169 in the area.

In Kinnaur, there are two types of village gods,—those having their wooden palanquins (*Rathang*) and the one who have only mediums (*Grokch*) and are worshipped in the form of a long pole (*Phabrang*) decorated with coloured pieces of cloths or even without any symbol. The deities of *Phabrang* belong to Buddhistic faith and are worshipped in Hangrang Valley beyond Pooh. The pole or the *Phabrang* is held by only one person who dances with it while placing it on the waistcloth (*Gachhang*) in such a way that it remains almost parallel to his body. He holds it with his hands while dancing.

The palanquin of a deity is made of wood and two long poles form its arms (*bahis*) which help the palanquin to be taken by the bearers on their shoulders. The *Rathang* is decorated with bronze, silver or gold images fixed around the palanquin and covered with black tufts of yak hair woven in the form of thread and strings. The head and neck of the deity is round in shape and covered with the black strings from all sides to cover the images fixed to the wooden neck in the palanquin. A deity, being a spirit only, is invisible and is represented by the *Grokch* or the medium. Each one of the village has numerous mediums to represent various spirits, not necessarily having their wooden palanquins but believed to be staying in the vicinity to assist or to create obstacles to the actions of the *gramdevta* (village god). The village god is a supreme power in the village and, sometimes, has his or her assistant god who also has his palanquin and obeys the orders of his superior god. A medium is unable to convey the wishes of god until he goes into a trance and, in order to confirm or to win the confidence of the people, he shakes his head, throws his cap backward to be held by some follower before it falls to the ground and distributes mustard seeds in odd number to establish that whatever he professes is the wish of the deity. The strings on the head of the palanquin are called the *jata* or the cluster of hair of the godling. The images are put and tied in three rows to the wooden neck of the deity and are called *mukhang* or face of the god or goddess. The arms of

the palanquin are quite long to enable the bearers from both the sides of the palanquin to take the same on their shoulders and swing it in such a way that it exhibits the dancing of the spirit. There is a common belief among the followers that the invisible spirit of a deity resides in the palanquin and controls its forward, backward and upward movements.

The decorated palanquins (*rathang* or chariot) of the village gods are brought out to the premises of the shrines and made to dance. The votaries question them regarding their welfare or future problems of the habitat. The *rathang*, while being taken by the bearers on their shoulders, moves forward and backward and even upwards. In case the response to the problem posed by a follower is in affirmative, the *rathang* bends towards the side of the seeker but if it moves towards the opposite direction, it indicates that the answer is in the negative. The reply of the spirit is interpreted by the *Grokch* or the medium and in case of further queries, he puts the questions to the deity in such a way that the reply in 'Yes' or 'No' is forthcoming with the forward or backward movements of the palanquin. Six persons, including two from the sides and remaining four from forward and backward position keep the palanquin intact. The swinging of the *rathang* is indicative of the presence of the spirit in the palanquin and, at times, the movements which occur fiercely establish that the spirit is either annoyed or overjoyed, as the situation may be. The spirit speaks only through the medium who always remains present at the time of rituals and dances of the gods. In the areas of Shimla and parts of Solan, the deities have separate types of palanquins and their images are kept open towards the front side of their palanquins but the system of mediums who are called devahan (the vehicles or *vahans* of gods), *gur* (perhaps Gurus in ancient times), *mali* or *chela* is the same as is the practice in Kinnaur. According to folksongs relating to the construction of various *rathang* for deities in the remote past, the names of two legendary artisans, namely, kyangtu carpenter and zoto goldsmith are fresh in the memories of the folk of the region. Both these names are typical and no such names seem to be found in the area these days, 'kyangtu' seems to be a Kirati or Bhoti name, whereas 'zoto' appears to be the name of the person who had long hair 'jata'. The palanquins, as already mentioned, are covered with the twisted threads made out of the black hair of yak and are called 'jata' or 'zoto' in common parlance. The names of kyangtu Badhai (carpenter) and 'zoto' Sunar (goldsmith) are associated even with the deities whose palanquins were prepared in the

recent past. Surga Choroni, a deity of Miru village, who appeared about hundred years ago, and is believed to be a sky (swarg/surga) or heaven god, has also a song according to which his *rathang* and images were made by kyangtu carpenter and zoto sunar.⁴⁹

The Rathang

During the princely regime, the rulers of Rampur Bushehr state used to donate the images of gold to major deities, viz., three Monshiras of Sungra, Bhabha and Chagaon, Chandika of Kothi and Badrinath of Kamru and the silver and brass or bronze images were made out of the funds of the respective deities. Typically, the images of all the gods of the region are carved out as having moustaches and those of the goddesses are made with nose and ear ornaments. In upper Kinnaur, however, we find exceptions to this practice and major images of the concerned deities are shown on the front portion of the palanquins. There are no ornaments with some goddesses in the region. At the time of the decoration of a village god or a goddess, the folk musicians play on their instruments. While dancing, the *rathang*, is in no case, allowed to touch the ground as it is considered to be a bad omen for the followers. The bearers believe that the joy of the deity makes the palanquin lighter in weight and it becomes heavier when the deity is displeased. The bearers are called *chalmiya* and only true followers are allowed to perform as *chalmiya*. The *gokch* (oracle) is the spokesperson of the deity and his utterances are considered as the celestial voice. The attendants of the god are called *kardaars*. The *kardaars* devote themselves to the services of the village deity and their number varies, according to the local requirements.

The Kardaars and Badaarn

Mohtmim or Mohatmin, as he is called by the villagers, looks after the property of the village god. He is the principal caretaker of the landed property and his name is entered in the revenue record as the representative of the deity for maintenance. During former times, the duties of Mohatmims were hereditary and only traditional families were entitled to have this right. There is a tradition of allowing some fixed remuneration for the Mohatmim. He commands respect in the village and on his death, the biggest drum (*bam*) of the shrine accompanies the dead body to the

cremation ground and a fine piece of cloth as coffin is offered to the departed soul on behalf of the deity. This signifies great importance attached to the person concerned. A new Mohatmim is initiated by arranging a ceremony called 'Badaaran'—the term denotes to elevate, purify or to make great. This is, in fact, a coronation ceremony of the Mohatmim, pujaras (worshipper) and *grokch* (medium). At the time of Badaaran, three images of Gore (Gauri), Gange (Ganga) and Ishur (Ishwar) are taken out of the *rathang* of the deity and brought to the house of the new kardaar for worship, the attendants of the deity are invited to the house of the new initiate and a piece of white cloth sent by the village god is offered to him as a token of respect and recognition. If the new kardaar is not in a position to arrange a lunch to the invitees, the ceremony is performed in the premises of the temple and a feast is arranged on behalf of the village deity. In some villages, the badaaran ceremony is arranged while initiating Shu Mathas (the manager of the deity) and the Shu Charas, yet another kardaar of the village god. Dishes and drinks, such as, Poltu, kheer, kangni, meat and wine, etc., are served to the invitees and song of Badaaran is sung before the images of gods. The Badaaran song is a song of the origin of mankind and the creation of universe. The new *kardaar* has to take bath in a nearby river or some other water source on this day.

The Grokch

Grokch, Gur or Mali is the medium (oracle) between the divine spirit and the followers. In the lower regions of the state, he is also called 'Chela'. He conveys the wishes of the god while in trance and possessed by the divine spirit. It is a matter of interest that a particular medium acts only for one god throughout his life and cannot change or alter the spirit at his will. The *Grokch* does not leave the village without the information of the spirit as he is the main functionary of the system and in his absence, the divine spirit seems to have become speechless and ineffective. He converses with the deity, conveys his message to the people and solves their problems with the help of the presiding spirit. When the deity is not in form and his palanquin and images are kept in the temple, the *Grokch* satisfies the followers while going to trance at his residence. It is believed that the *Grokch* is a personified god available to the people at all times and he can call the spirit at his will to get a message from him. Grogmo or 'Krogmo' in local dialect means to go to trance with the

possession of the spirit and, thus, the *Grokch* is the one who performs this act. The *Grokch*, while in a fit of trance and trembling with the divine energy, shakes his head gracefully as if handled by something beyond his manly power and capability. While shaking his head, his black cap (*thepang*) falls backward and is held by a man waiting for the happening as it is considered inauspicious to allow the cap to touch the ground. The *Grokch*, as already mentioned, utters some words as an indication of the wish of the divine spirit and in order to confirm that whatever he said was the utterance of the deity, distributes some mustard seeds to the persons standing nearby. In case the number of the seeds received by each one of them is odd, i.e. 1,3,5,7,9, or 13, it is maintained, that whatever he said was true, but if the number is even, i.e. 2,4,6,8,10 and 12, it conveys that the *Grokch* was articulating without the divine confidence and in that case, he has to repeat the exercise. The seeds generally do not exceed the number of thirteen. These seeds are considered sacred and put on the heads later. In Thangi, Sapni, Ribba, Nichar, Kilba and some other villages, the *Grokch*, at the time of Badaaran, has to take bath and eat two or more flowers of 'Dongor' or 'Zongor' to purify himself. The 'Dongor' flower is found on the hill tops and is considered sacred. It is offered to the deities during the flower festival 'Fulaich' held during the month of September and October. It is a type of 'Brahmkamal,' the lotus of the Brahma. The *Grokch* is entitled to receive the head of the sacrificed goat at the time of ceremonies. No fixed remuneration is given to the *Grokch*, but he enjoys certain privileges and has to lead a pious and saintly life with his wife, children and family members. He often grows long hair and a beard.

The treasurer is responsible for the wealth of the deity and keeps the keys of the treasury with him.

The Kayath is the incharge of the godown of the deity. He maintains the record of granary. Shu-Charas is the manager who invites people for the service of the god and, in case of the departure of the deity from the village to some other place, works out the number of attendants to accompany him. In some villages where there is no Shu-charas, this type of duty is performed by Shu-Mathas, who is also the manager of the deity for certain purposes. Bhandari (incharge of the godown and incoming cash, etc.), Bajantri (village musicians numbering about eighteen in some villages), Konsang kones (helper in the kitchen of the deity), Chaprasi (peon) and Gar, are other *kardaars* of the village gods in the region. The *kardaars* are attentive to their assigned jobs and render selfless services to

the god.⁵⁰ Various village gods are very rich and have considerable moveable and immovable property, as per the number of followers who contribute according to their capacity.

Types of deities in Kinnaur

According to a popular belief, there are eighteen major deities belonging to the lineage of Banasur and Hidimba in Kinnaur. Before discussing the myths of the origin of various gods and goddesses in the region, it would be worthwhile to classify them. These include:

1. Meshur (Monshirus) gods and goddesses

1. The village gods of Chagaon, Sungra, Bhaba, Pawari and Mebar.
2. The goddesses of Kothi (Chandika), sUsha or Ukha (Nihar), Chitrlekha of Taranda, Hirma or Hidimba of Kafor, Tirasan and Pirasan of Natpa and Barakhamba.

2. Nag gods and Nagin goddesses

1. Nag deities of Brua, Sangla, Barang, Yula, Urni, Bari, Natpa, etc.
2. Nagin goddesses of various villages.

3. Narayan and kul Devta

The Narayan god of Sungra, Bhaba, Chagaon, Badrinath, Chini, Kumru Narayan, Urni, Panwi, Garshu, Dutarang, Asrang and Roghi. The Kul Devta of Moorang and some other villages are also believed to be Narayana devtas. These are subordinate deities in the villages where Monshirus (Maheshur) are the principal gods.

4. Gods and goddesses of Buddhist Pantheon

1. Dabla, Yulsa, Milayung, Tungma, Chakoling, Talsa or Talingsa, etc.
2. The goddesses include Yungmayung, Jan or Zan, Dabla, Puh, Lamo and Mathi.

5. Housegods and goddesses

1. These gods include Mahasu, Veer, Maating-Chhangaan (the sons of the earth), Nags and Dedum, etc.
2. Kaali and Nyuge.

6. The gods and goddesses having abodes outside the habitats

1. Crop gods and goddesses.
2. Ghosts and other evil spirits—Chan, Khon, Khungas, etc.
3. Mountain spirits—Saoni, Yogini, Vanshira, etc.

The Monshirus

The most efficacious and mythical deities of Kinnaur include the Maheshuras of various villages,—Sungra, Bhaba, Chagaon, Pawari and Mebar, and their sisters, namely, Chandika of Kothi and Ropa, Ukha or Usha of Nichar, Chitrarekha of Taranda, the goddesses of Chhota Kamba, Bara Kamba and Natpa villages. According to a legend, Banasur the ruler of Guge in Tibet, met Hidimba at Mullet Dhar near Sungra village and after deciding to stay together in ‘Gorboring Aag’ (the cave of Chaos), they had eighteen children. Chandika, the eldest sister, divided the region among them and kept Ropa Valley concealed under her plait. She, thus got two shares.

The progeny of Banasur and Hidimba rule the entire region of Kinnaur and even beyond it, as deities. These eighteen brothers and sisters were:

1. Chandika – Kothi village
2. Sungra Monshirus (Meshur – Sungra (Grosnam) village
3. Bhaba Monshirus – Kotgaon (Gramang) in Bhaba Valley
4. Chagaon Monshirus – Chagaon (Tholang) village in Rajgramang Valley
5. Usha or Ukha – Nichar village
6. Chitrarekha or Chitrarekha – Taranda village
7. Durga – Chhota Kamba
8. Durga – Bara Kamba
9. Pore Parka – Pawari village
10. Mebar Meshur – Mebar village
11. Chagaon Durga – Dumb and deaf sister whose small image is placed in the Jata (cluster of hair) of Chagaon Meshur
12. Pirasan – Lives on a rock below Nathpa village besides Satluj river and has no temple
13. Pujarli Maheshwar – Pujarli village in Shimla district
- 14-18. Deaf and dumb brothers and sisters whose whereabouts are not known.⁵¹

Chandika, became the goddess of two villages, namely, Ropa and Kothi. The brothers, though not satisfied with the areas allotted to them, had to accept them ultimately as their sister argued that she had given a fair deal to all of them. Sungra Maheshur, got the area extending from Sungra to Sarahan and the valleys of Bhaba and Rajgramang were given to the Maheshurs of these areas, respectively. The actual names of these

Maheshurs, who are called Monshirus or Shankrus in local parlance, are not known but they are addressed with the names of their respective villages only. Banasur and Hidimba are Pauranic personages. When, at Rarang Panungo, a pasture located near Wangtu, the division was made, the parents of these deities did not get their shares. Hidimba or Hirma, the mother, is now the village goddess of Kafor village near Chaura, the western entry point to the district of Kinnaur but she has no *Rathang*. She is worshipped as a household goddess (Kimshu) in Sungra and some other villages. The spirit of Banasur, the father, is believed to stay with his eldest son Sungra Maheshur in the upper storey of his shrine at Sungra and it is believed that the spirit often pays a visit to his sons and daughters located in various villages. The spirit takes the form of an invisible snake and at Chagaon, when a strong wind or storm is experienced, the inhabitants enquire from the *Grokch* of the deity whether or not the father of deity had come to his son. In case the oracle confirms that the 'soul' of the father has come to the village, the premises of the shrine are cleaned and bones, etc., found in the vicinity are removed before the departure of the spirit who is given a warm send off by the villagers. While accompanying the *Rathang* (palanquins) of both the deities of the village,—Monshiras and Narenas,—the village musicians go to a particular place in a procession with their musical instruments. A snake of flour is prepared and kept in a basket with a burning lamp not to be seen by the followers while leaving the place as the snake signifies the spirit and to look back to see it or the basket in which it is placed, is considered to be inauspicious. The ceremony is called 'Shu Bonu-Samyamu.'⁵² The spirit is worshipped in the form of a snake and no ceremony is arranged at the time of its arrival in the village. As indicated by the medium, the procession goes to the direction to which the spirit is to depart.

Mahadeu Vau Karmu

In Bhaba, there is no tradition of the departure of the spirit but it is received with great rejoicing. In Sungra village, where the spirit stays in the temple of the deity, a ceremony known as 'Mahadeu Vau Karmu'⁵³ denoting 'to receive the father of the deity' is arranged on the instance of the *Grokch* and the spirit is respectfully taken to the temple where it relaxes for three years. In Sungra, Veer, Kali, Teshu, Durga and Hidimba,

the mother has no palanquin, as already mentioned, and whenever the spirit of Banasur visits the village, he is not given a send off outside the habitat but a ceremony is arranged in the Santhang, the temple premises.

Hirma or Hidimba is worshipped as 'Hirbani'⁷⁵⁴ at the time of rope-sliding ceremony (*Bhunda*) arranged in some villages in Shimla and Kullu district. This indicates that the worship of the goddess has its roots in antiquity and the ancient population of the area worshipped this goddess, the heroine of the Mahabharata period. The Beda, the rope-slider, who belongs to Beda community and prepares a rope for sliding at the time of *Bhunda* ceremony, has to observe certain restrictions, such as, taking bath and meals only once a day, observing piety in every respect, including keeping the place free from dirt while working at the rope prepared out of a sacred grass called *Munji* or *Munj* brought by the followers on an auspicious occasion. The offering of the Beda, with traditional chanting of mantras and rituals to the goddess Hirbani, reminds of the practice of human sacrifice in the remote past. Banasur, the father of deities in Kinnaur was a hero during the Mahabharata period and his daughter Usha was married to Aniruddha, the grandson of Lord Krishna. In Kinnaur, the practice of *Bhunda* is obsolete but it remained in vogue at Nichar upto the previous century. In order to have a fair idea of principal and junior deities of various villages of Kinnaur, the following table may help to have clearer perception of the system:

<i>Sr. No.</i>	<i>Name of Village</i>	<i>Name of principal deity</i>	<i>Name of junior gods</i>
1.	Chhitkul	Devi Mathi	Guptraj
2.	Rakchham	Shamshir (Shonshiras)	Saunig, Nag Devta
3.	Badseri, Batsering	Narenas	
4.	Sangla	Nages	Nages
5.	Kamru, Mone	Badrinath Singh	Kalyan Singh, Chhatra
6.	Chanshu, Chashang	Kuldeo	
7.	Bruang Brua	Nages	
8.	Shong, Shuang	Narenas	
9.	Baturi, Baturing	Nages	
10.	Sapni, Rapang	Nages	
11.	Kone, kanai	Narenas	
12.	Kilimba, Kilba	Narenas	Vishnu, Nag
13.	Yana, Jani	Gandherpas	Nages
14.	Punang	Narenas	

15. Mellam, Ramni	Narenas (Kuldev)	
16. Panwin, Panang	Kuldev	
17. Nalche, Nichar	Usha (Ukha) Devi	A new god recently emerged.
18. Sungra, Grosnang	Meshur	Narenas
19. Paunda, Tarane	Kalinag	
20. Taranda, Tarane	Chitralekha	
21. Sholding	Chitralekha	
22. Nigulsaring, Nigulsari	Chitralekha	
23. Thach	Chitralekha	
24. Chaura	Nages	
25. Kapurang, Kafor	Hirma Devi	
26. Rupi	Teras	Narenas
27. Tekamba, Bara Kamba	Nagin	
28. Chikamba, Chhota Kamba	Nagin	
29. Garshu, Gorsho	Narenas	
30. Salarang, Solaring	Narenas	
31. Natpa	Nages	
32. Kandhar, Kandharo	Nages	
33. Roktarang, Rokcharang	Nages	
34. Bei, Bete, Yote	Meshur of Katgaon	Kamshu Narayan
35. Katgaon, Gramang	Meshur	
36. Dutrang	Kuldeo	Narayan
37. Yangpa	Kuldeo	Nages
38. Huri, Hure	Meshur	Kamshu Narayan
39. Kafnoo, Kampurang	Bhabha Meshur (Monshirus)	
40. Homte	Bhabha Meshur (Monshirus)	
41. Tholang, Chagaon	Meshur (Monshirus)	Narenas
42. Urane, Urni	Narenas, Narayana	Nages
43. Yula	Nages	
44. Mirthing, Miru	Sarga Choroni	
45. Roge	Narenas	
46. Chine, Chini	Narenas	
47. Kalpa	Koshtyampi Chandika	
48. Brelingi	Koshtyampi Chandika	
49. Yavaringi	Koshtyampi Chandika	
50. Telingi	Koshtyampi Chandika	
51. Khawangi	Markaring/Markaling	

52. Koshtyampi, Kothi	Koshtyampi Chandika	
53. Pawari, Por	Parka	
54. Mebar	Meshur (Monshirus)	Rakshu,
Kali,	Kusumnalangeh	
Mahasu, Nyuge, Vir		
55. Barang	Nages	
56. Purbani, Pannam	Kuldeo	
57. Ridang, Ribba	Kasurajas	
58. Rispa	Kuldev	
59. Thange, Thangi	Bores Kulo	Raspukshu, Kedar, Nale
60. Kuno	Bokti, Samtar	Rapang Kimshu
61. Charang	Bokti, Samtar	Rapang Kimshu
62. Gyenam, Murang	Ormi, Kuldeo	Chandika
63. Nesang	Zongchen, Sangche	Melagyung
	Yung	
64. Pange, Pangi	Shishering	
65. Raarang	Pathoro	
66. Akpa	Milayung	
67. Jange, Jangi	Yangma yung	
68. Lidpa, Lippa	Tangta Narenas	Talsa
69. Asrang	Narenas	Rapang Nages
70. Spilo	Kharmoshu Devi	Yalsa
71. Kaanam	Dabla	
72. Labrang	Chakoling	
73. Karla	Kharmoshu Devi	
74. Shyasho, Chhyasho	Dabla	Zona
75. Sungnam, Sunnam	Yulsa	
76. Gyabung	Tungma	
77. Ropa	Chandika, Kali	Yulsa, Vishnu
78. Hango, Hang	Yulsa	
79. Yuling, Choling	Naidak	
	(Nai-Tirtha, dak-owner)	
80. Liyo, Lee	Zomatok	Talangsa
81. Nako, Nao	Purgyul	Vidum
82. Tashigang	Gyalbo Kungan (Gyalbo-Maharaj)	
83. Namgia	Yulsa, Dabla	Besara, Kuldev, Narayan
84. Khabo	Yanza	
85. Dubling	Tungma	
86. Dabbling	Tangma	Dabla
87. Spoo, Pooh	Dabla	
88. Maling, Meling	Purgyul Shu	
89. Chango, Chang	Dabla	Yulsa, Dedum

90. Shyalkhar, Kyaharkhar	Shooma, Yulsa	Gyilbu, Yulsa
91. Sumra	Shama	
92. Ruskulang	Narenas	
93. Kachrang	Narenas	
94. Bare, Bari	Nages	
95. Skyuba, Skiba	Nagin Devi	
96. Karaaba	Paana (Pandav)	

The Meshurus (*Monshirus*) deities and their sister goddesses are considered powerful and disciplinarian spirits. These gods are egoistic, clever and benevolent but they do not hesitate to be deceitful and envious, according to situation, as depicted through folksongs related to them. These gods are so self respecting that none of them visits the villages or domain of other uninvitingly. However, the elder brothers and sisters have the right to ask the younger ones through their *Grokch* to pay occasional visits to their shrines and villages at will. They are keen to see that their followers are given due regard on their arrival in their host villages. The inhabitants of villages of the junior gods are considered junior in status and whenever a senior deity visits the habitat of a junior god, the accompanying villagers are lodged in the houses of the followers of that deity as their personal guests, according to the prevalent social system of their distribution to each household for hospitality. These villagers have to see to the comforts of their guests to their satisfaction. Maheshur brothers, according to a social belief, do not visit each other's villages and if at all, such situation arose in the past, human sacrifice was a requirement. The folklore accounts, however, are silent on such an eventuality, excepting an ancient legend that the three divine brothers, now residing in Sungra, Bhaba and Chagaon villages, used to assemble at a place called 'Rarung Panungo' above Wangtoo in order to perform a ritual in which human sacrifice was performed. According to yet another legend, it was at this place that the division of the land was made during the pre-historic period and the brothers were allotted different regions being controlled by them even upto now.

The Maheshur or Meshur god brothers are the village gods of the villages, Chagaon, Sungra, Bhaba, Mawari and Mebar, and the goddess sisters are located at Kothi and Ropa (Chandika), Nichar, (Ukha or Usha), Taranda (Chitralkha), Kafor, (Hidimba or Hirma), Tirasan and Pirasan at Natpa and Barakamba.

The Nag deities

The Nag gods and goddesses are considered to be the deities of fertility, earth, crops and weather. They avoid feuds but, if compelled, inflict misfortune on evil-doers. The famous Nag deities belong to Brua, Sangla, Sapni, Barang, Yula, Urni, Bari and Natpa, and their consorts or sisters are called Nagin goddesses, as is evident from the list of deities appended in the preceding pages. In some cases, the Nag deities are believed to be incarnations of Lord Vishnu also.

The Narayan deities

The Narayan or Kuldeota is a separate category. The village gods of Sungra, Bhaba, Chagaon and some other villages where Maheshur are the presiding deities, Narayan or Narenas are believed to be junior to them, and, though they are also having their separate medium (*Gorkch*) and palanquins (*Rathang*), they assist their senior gods, the Maheshuras, and are asked by them—through their mediums—to perform the divine functions in their absence or in their company, as the case may be. The palanquins of the Maheshuras are not allowed to be touched by the people belonging to the scheduled castes, whereas those of the Narenas can be lifted by every one. The scheduled caste communities have faith in them and other deities also but Vishnu is their community god and the medium of this god belongs to their community only. Small shrines of this god are found in the localities of these people who have their hamlets in one corner of the village. These people earn their livelihood by working in the fields of the upper caste people. They plough the fields of these people and are called 'Haales' or ploughers also.

Buddhist deities

The Buddhist deities are known as Dabla, Yulsa, Milayung, Tungma, Chaakoling, Talsa, etc. The goddesses include Yungmayung, Zan, Dabla, Lamo and Mathi. These deities are believers in non-violence and generally do not believe in animal sacrifice. There is, however, a common belief among the votaries of various gods and goddesses that even if a deity who does not accept animal or bird sacrifice may require it to be served to his *ganas* or attendants and, as such, sacrifice is almost an essential ritual.

Wild Spirits

Wild spirits are some spirits, i.e. cropgods and goddesses; ghosts including Chan, Khon, Khungach, etc. and Saoni (pl. Saonige) residing around hilltops, protecting the peaks and animals in the pastures, who are believed to pay occasional visits to the habitats. The crop-gods such as Khetrapal (Kshetrapal) are worshipped by preparing sweet pudding, *doo* (saltish pudding), sweet breads in the fields at harvesting time and throwing small pieces in all directions while invoking these spirits. The evil spirits (ghosts) are not generally worshipped but are driven away by the *Grokch* by applying sacred water in the names of village gods and chanting mantras meant for the purpose. These spirits haunt the habitats, forests, gorges and other lonely places, including the grazing pastures and mountain tops. They are believed to empower anyone whosever comes their way. These can also be directed by black magicians to harm others. These spirits are inferior to the mighty spirits of the deities and their effects are curable by the *Grokch* (mediums) of village gods. The mountain tops are haunted by a typical types of spirits called Saoni (singular) and Saunige (plural).

The Saonige

The Saoni are believed to be brothers and sisters who control and protect the crops in the fields situated near the hilltops (*Kandha*), in snow and glaciers and herds of sheep and goats and see to the general welfare of the people residing in the villages down below the mountain tops. When, during the ceremonies in the villages, the musical instruments are played, these spirits are allured to come down to the habitats to attend the functions but their stay in the habitats beyond the period of a ceremony is considered inauspicious. The natives ensure that these spirits are driven back to their respective places surrounding the hilltops and, as such, there is a curious practice that obscene remarks in loud voices are uttered by the people present on the spot. It is believed that these shy and sensitive spirits, who, according to a popular belief are brother, and sisters, cannot afford to hear the vulgar language and are constrained to leave the habitats without any further delay. The Saonige are, however, invoked and invited to visit the villages during 'Phaguli' or Phag festival, synchronizing with the Holi festival of the plains, held annually during the month of Phagun (Feb.-March), when they are served with delicious traditional food and

given a hearty send off to their abodes. During this festival, songs highlighting the role of these spirits are sung and they are described as protectors of pastures on the hilltops, herbs, flowers, vegetation, minerals, snow, water sources and harbingers of prosperity to the inhabitants.

The Festival of Flowers

During Phulaich (flower festival), when young and old are keen to bring and offer flowers for their gods from the hilltops, the saonige are propitiated by offering dishes and sacrificial animals before plucking flowers from the *kandhas* (hilltops) and, after the festival is over, none is allowed to visit the hilltops, fearing the wrath of the saonige. Though these are not allowed to stay in the habitats, yet people consider them to be benevolent spirits. It is thus, not, out of place to associate them with Vedic Ashwins, the divine healers, whose references are available in the mythological literature. They are mentioned as protectors of herbs in heaven.

The cult of Saonige (*Ashwini Kumars*)

Ashwini Kumar, according to mythological sources, were two vaidyas (healers) of the devtas and were the sons of Apsara Prabha (Ashvini) and Surya (Sun). They were youthful, handsome, benevolent and divine personalities who roamed over the sky in early morning before the usha appeared.⁵⁵ They are twin brothers who do not depart (*Rigveda*. 3.39.3). According to Nirukta (12.2), one of them was the son of Nisha and the other of usha and according to this interpretation, they were born, separately and may not be twin brothers. The time of their birth is considered to be between Usha and sun rise in the morning (*RV*. 8.5.2). According to Rigveda (1.118.1; 2.180.1; 7.67.10) and *Taittiriya Samhita* (7.2.7), they were younger to the Devas and their Chariot was golden in which they traversed the earth and heaven within the span of one day (*RV*. 3.58.8). In *Rigveda* (1.44.5; 8.8.4; 7.70.3; 63,1; 8.62.4; 10.39.3; 8.18.8), they lived on earth, sky, trees and hilltops and gorges but their actual abode is unknown. They were capable of blessing issueless women with offsprings, turning the old to young and relieving people of sufferings. According to Siddheshwar Shastri Chitrav,⁵⁶ the myths of Ashwini Kumars are the outcome of the Aryans' experience in the North

Pole where they visioned astronomical and meteorological light or Aurora Borealis and were able to symbolize the rare natural phenomena in the form of Ashwini Kumar brothers, as indicated by Shri Vader also. According to another legend, when Sangya was roaming in the guise of horse (mare), Vivasvan copulated with her after taking the form of a horse which resulted in the birth of Ashwini Kumars. Sangya, later considering him as an interloper, emitted the semen through her nostrils and, thus, two Ashwini Kumars were born. They have been mentioned with the names of Nastya and Dasra in the *Mahabharata* (Anu.150) and are called Shudras among the Devas (*Mbh.* Shan. 207, 26) and at other places, as the healers of the Devas and themselves as Devas of Vaivaswat Manvantar.⁵⁷ They bestowed Sage Chyavan with youthfulness and Madri got two sons, namely, Nakul and Sehdev from them (*Mbh.* A.90.72; 115.16-17; V.123; Bh. 9.3.23-26).

These references amply establish that Ashwini Kumars, living on the hilltops and acting as custodians of herbs, may be the 'Saonis' of the Kinnaras. Kinnaras, being one of the five Janas of heaven (*devlok*), might be carrying the Vedic symbolism in their beliefs as was practised during the pre-historic period. The Ashwinis have been mentioned as symbols of the earth and sky and day and night also by the Niruktakars.⁵⁸ This belief suggests them to be in male and female forms also. The myths relating to Saonis are not only prevalent in Kinnaur, these are found in other areas also where they are called 'Jogini' 'Kali' or 'Yoginis, haunting hilltops, gorges and isolated spots. The belief on these benevolent but wild spirits, is a strong link between pre-Vedic communities and their mythology and the present thought process. This confirms that the early settlers in the hills belonged to Aryan fold and *devlok* was a part of the region.

The deity cult in Kinnaur can, thus, be divided into four categories: the Shaivism, the Vaishnavism, the Buddhism and that of the other spirits staying inside and outside the habitats and the wild spirits.

The cult of *Monshirus* or Maheshuras is very popular and in the areas where the influence of Buddhism is not strongly prevalent, the palanquins of the village gods have eighteen images. The Maheshuras are the sons of Banasur and Hidimba. Banasur, the father of eighteen deities of the region, met Hidimba at Mulatdhar, a place situated near Sungra village. They later stayed in 'Gorboring Ag' (Cave of Chaos) near Sungra and gave birth to eighteen sons and daughters, as already mentioned.

Division of Territory

The division of the territory was made by the eldest sister Chandika, who concealed Ropa Valley in the cluster of her hair and got Kothi village as her share. All the brothers objected to the areas given to them but goddess Chandika did not relent. She later asked her sister Usha (Ukha) to send her husband Honu (Aniruddha of the *Mahabharata*) to accompany her to Tibet to barter in salt. She agreed and directed Honu to accompany his sister-in-law. Chandika, on reaching Chini (Kalpa) village, requested him to stay back in a watermill owned by her and see that there are enough grains to be converted into flour in the mill. She told him that the watermill should not move empty and in case there was a shortage of grains to be grinded, he should put his hair of the head (*jata*) to avoid malfunctioning of the mill. She went to Kothi to get ready for the journey but came back rapidly waiting to see that grains were finished and Honu put his hair in the mill to avoid movement of the grinder devoid of anything in it. Honu, on finding that there were no grains left in the watermill, put his '*jata*' in it to restrict the empty movement of the mill. He little realized that Chandika had a plan to put him to death and had desired him to be put in a helpless condition by asking him to put his cluster of hair in the mill. She, on seeing Honu entrapped in the mill, came out with her dagger and attacked him. His head was separated from his body with a stroke but to her surprise, she found that it got assembled again and again and Honu would come to life more vigorously. The body of the demon, however was bleeding profusely and the goddess become terrified. She prayed to all her brothers one by one to come to her rescue but none of them agreed, as they were all annoyed with her deceitful division of the territory.

Chandika at last, called her nephew Markaling (Markaring), the village god of Khawangi. He came but expressed his helplessness saying that he was not capable of finding any solution to the problem. He, however, was successful in convincing Chagaon Maheshur to come to their rescue. He, on reaching the spot, found that a black bee was hovering over the slaughtered body of Honu. He suggested that Chandika should kill the black bee instantaneously to avoid Honu to come to life again. She, following his advice, killed the bee and Honu was thus put to an end. Banasur, after his death, preferred to stay with his eldest son, the Sungra Maheshur and his spirit is still believed to be visiting the shrines and

places of his sons and daughters from time to time. In Chagaon, whenever a bone of some creature is found in the premises of the shrine, a storm blows or some bad omen is reported by the villagers, it is surmised that the spirit of Banasur had come to the village. On confirmation by the *Grokch*, the villagers arrange a ceremony, i.e. 'Shu bonu Samyamu' (the departure of the father of the god) and the deities Maheshur and Narenas escort the procession in their palanquins and with a musical band to the direction to which the spirit wants to be taken. On reaching the desired point, a basket containing a snake made of flour paste with a burning lamp is left behind and none is allowed to look back, fearing that in case of violation of this taboo, the onlooker would die within a year.

In Bhaba, the spirit is not given a send off as the case is in Chagaon, but on the indication by the medium (*Grokch*) of Bhaba Maheshur, the father is accorded a warm welcome and the followers take the spirit to the temple in a procession. The mythology of the Kinnaras indicate that they remained a powerful and independent tribe during the ancient times.

The hero of the Kinner mythology, Banasur, is a Pauranic character. He was the eldest of all the hundred sons of Raja Bali. In *Matsya Purana* (187.40), the name of his mother is given as Vindhyaivali. He belonged to Shonitpur or Lohitpur.⁵⁹ In some references, the name of the mother of Banasur is given as Ashna. His daughter Usha, married Aniruddha, the grandson of Lord Shri Krishna. The name of the grandfather of Banasur was Prahlad and that of his great grandfather, Hiranyakashipu. Bali, the father, is said to be the son of Virochan and thus he is called as Bali Vairochan also. In the Devasur battle, Vidyadhara, Gandharva, Yastra, Dambar, Tumber, Kinner, Nag, etc., races sided with the Devas, whereas Vishvarma, Vim, Kanakbindu, Kumbhaj, Asiloma, Ekchakra, Rahu, Viprachiti, Keshi, Hemamali, Maya and Vritrasur (Vritasur) were the chiefs of the army of the Daityas and Danvas.⁶⁰ According to a song of the deities of Kinnaur, Banasur told Hidimba that he came from Guge Chantrang (Tsaprang) in Tibet, whereas Hidimba came from Kullu-Lahaul. Chanthan was formerly subject to independent princes, but their authority gradually merged into the supremacy of the Chief Pontiff of Lassa (Moorecroft, II 364). In *the Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal* (Part I and II (New Series), Vol. XIII Nos. 245 to 150, 1844, p. 231, it is stated that, 'these independent princes were Hindoos; and claimed a Rajput descent. Their chief place was Chaprang on the Sutlej, and they ruled over the districts around the Mansarovar Lake, and westward, as far as Ladakh. The Pitti valley was also their's.' This statement corroborates

that the ancestors of Banasur, who were known as Asuras in Indian mythology, might have been ruling the country across and beyond the Himalayas and these areas formed a part of Swarga (heaven). The term Trivishtap used for the present Tibet and the ancient mythological heaven (*swarga*) also confirms this assertion.⁶¹

Hidimba, the goddess of Kafor, doesn't have any palanquin (*Rathang*) and is known as 'Hirma' by her followers. Usha, Chitralekha and Sungra Maheshur come to see the goddess in their palanquin occasionally. The medium (*Grokch*) of the goddess, while in trance, tells that the goddess, with the help of Saonige (hill spirits) pushed back the ruling Pandavas from the region by using an iron blade to put a portion of the mountain on them. There are numerous temples of this goddess in other parts of the state. These include Dhungri temple at Manali, Hirimba temple at Jahlma in Lahaul, Sriyun temple in Bilaspur, Hirbani image at Nirmand in Kullu. In Kullu, the goddess is believed to have bestowed the kingdom to the ruling family. Similar is the case in Chamba, where the ruling family considered the goddess as their Kuldevi (clan goddess). In Kullu Dussehra, the goddess Hidimba of Manali is brought last of all the participating deities which indicates that she has been able to maintain her superiority over them, though Raghunathji has become the presiding deity of the state. Raja Geypong (locally called Ghepan), the principal deity of Lahaul, has Hidimba as her junior goddess to assist him in his functions.

Soul of wind

The spirit of Banasur visits Kafor village also. On his arrival which, is indicated by a strong storm, saltish pudding (*Doo*) of flour is prepared and distributed. In Sangla village, though there is no temple of Hidimba, yet whenever a violent storm is experienced, people assemble to put fire and mustard seeds in an earthen vessel and take it to some place outside the village. This ceremony is called 'Hirim Samyamu' (departure of storm). It is, thus, evident that there is common belief among the people of the region that air or storm has a 'soul' which after propitiation, can be sent out. There is yet another belief that the deities appear in the form of air or storm and in order to satisfy their souls or spirits, some rituals should be arranged. It appears that the primitive belief of the soul of air has been associated with Banasur, Hidimba and other deities in the region.

According to this belief, whistling helps to invite the soul of air but there should be no whistling sound when air is required for winnowing the grains at the harvesting time.

Hirbani (Hirma) is a devil goddess. According to the *Mahabharata* (Sabha Parv, 7-36) and *Vishnu Purana* (Ch. 32 and 33), she was married to Bhim and gave birth to their son Ghatotkach. Aniruddha, the grandson of Lord Krishna married Usha, the daughter of Banasur and Hidimba. An image of Hirbani is made and worshipped during *Bhunda* ceremony and she is considered as presiding deity of the ritual and offerings are made in her name. Bhunda is a typical rope-sliding ceremony in which a person (Jyayi) from Beda community is made to slide down the rope prepared by him for the purpose, as already discussed.

Nag cult

Nag deities are worshipped in various villages of Kinnaur. The gods of this type are believed either to have born from lakes or other water sources. They are fertility and crop gods and control the weather conditions also. The Nag deities of Brua, Sapni and Ponda villages were born in Ponda village. A legend goes, that Tunkey, a girl from Ponda, was married in Brua village where there was scarcity of water. When she requested her father to do something for the redressal of the difficulty, he gave her a basket and instructed not to open it on the way and keep it inside the cattleshed (*khud*), i.e. the ground floor of their house. While going back to her house, she opened the basket at two places as she was curious to know about the contents in it. She found that at both the places, small snakes rushed out of the basket and disappeared in the bushes nearby. To her surprise, water springs started gushing from the bushes and still exist on both the places which are situated near Wangtu and Karchham. On reaching her home at Brua, she opened the basket and found that some snakes entered their cattleshed. Next morning the people found that the ground floor of the house was full of water. On finding that Tunkey wouldn't go to fetch water from a distant source, a witch who was residing in that very village, suggested her that the water so produced was not fit for human consumption. Tunkey was quite simple and without much thought, she wanted to know the way out to dry out the room. The wicked woman told her that it could be done if the stool (night soil) of a dog is burnt inside the room and snakes coming out due to smell were put to death at the door. The young girl obeyed her and slaughtered all

the snakes on the door. Thus, the place became dry and the pieces of the bodies of the snakes formed to make a dragon. The dragon started from Brua and passed through Sapni village, ultimately vanishing on the top of the hill above that village. The passage of the dragon is still visible from Brua towards Sapni village and beyond.

The Nag deota of Urni village was staying under a rock outside and some years earlier, requested the village god Narayan to take him out to the village. This was agreed to by the god and now the villagers have prepared a palanquin for him also. Since Narayan deota was not competent to decide about the issue, the case was referred to Maheshur of Chagaon village, under whose domain Urni village falls. The Nag of Bari village appeared in a water tank above Miroo village around two hundred years ago. The three Nag deities of Sangla Valley were born out of a lake on the top of the mountain facing the valley. The myths relating to the origin of snake gods are numerous and have an interesting relationship with primitive human thought. Tunkey belonged to Dunkhar clan in Ponda and none of the successors of that family are alive but the building in which the water appeared, is being used as the Kothi (godown) of the god. The dragon, after emerging from the pieces of the cut up snakes, reached a point called Duling and disappeared in the water tank. After some time, a shepherd of Rohru found that one of his rams used to leave the herd and graze around the reservoir. One day, getting outraged with the unusual practice of leaving the herd everyday, he killed the animal with his dagger and took its head with him to his house. On reaching his place, he found that small pieces of gold were inside the mouth of the ram in place of unchewed grass. The shepherd came back to the spot to find more gold, but it was not available. On returning to his village, he gave the gold to a goldsmith to prepare an image of the deity, but every time it was tried to be converted to an image, three faces would appear in it. In his effort to set the image in the desired shape, his hammer struck his forehead, killing him on the spot.

The image divided into three, came to 'Saumang Choori' pasture on the hilltop (Kandha), above Brua and Sapni villages. All the three deities divided their areas at that place. The first one went to Brua village from where the snake had come to the lake. The second deity occupied Pekha village in Rohru Tehsil and the third one got Sapni (Rapang) village in Kinnaur. All the three gods never came to Brua after their emergence and the followers believe that their mother also stays at that village in an invisible form. They also believe that once, at the time of the assemblage

of all the three brothers, they decided to carve out a big ground near Brua in the remote past, and the eldest brother, the god of Brua village, was asked to control the flood caused by two brothers of Sapni and Pakha for the purpose. The Brua god could not control it and only a small levelled place could be made available at Brua which is being used as the field of the deity of the village. The ground at Chholtu near Tapri is the part of sand brought by these deities for this ground desired to be utilized at Brua. Ponda, from where Tunkey brought the basket containing the snakes, is believed to be the birthplace of these deities and whenever any of them visits the place, sacrifice of a ram or goat has to be made at the pond at that village.

Origin myths of gods

The origin myths of various deities in the region are fascinating in nature and content. Chhitkul Mathi, the village goddess of Chhitkul, the last village on the border of Tibet in Sangla Valley, came from Vrindavan via Tango village in Tibet. She accompanied the shepherds from Tango to Chhitkul and is believed to be the consort of Badrinath of Kamru village. Keeping in view the polyandrous practices in the region, the deity of Batsering village, who is the elder brother of Badrinath of Kamru, is also believed to be the husband of the goddess. The medium of the goddess exhibits the power of the deity by walking on fire splinters in trance during the festivities. Gupt Raj is the assistant or junior god of the village and the household god (Kimshu) is the Rapang Shu, the deity of Sapni village.

Kedar Nale, the goddess of Thangi village, is the consort of Bores Kullo, the deity of that very village. According to a legend, Bores Kullo was created by Kasu Rajas, the presiding deity of Ribba village, out of clay. Kedar Nale's father wanted to marry his daughter to a deity who proved to be the best cook in competition. Bores Kullo, with the help of Saonige, prepared the best food as they had put mud in the preparations of other gods. Daacho Saoni supplied material for preparation of food to the competitors which contained mud. This helped *Bores Kullo* to have a matrimonial alliance settled with Kedar Nale. Kimshu is the third god of the village of Thangi. Kasurajas of Ribba village appeared at Sharfo, a place above the village and arranged Phulaich fair. Guruka, the original god was, at that stage subdued.

In Rakchham village, Saonige (Saoni) are worshipped as goddesses. They came from Kailas and their leader (the Saoni), went upto Kullu to look for suitable musicians. In all the six old families of the village, paintings depicting the arrival of the goddess Saoni from heaven (*swarg*) are made and explained on the fourteenth day of Magh every year. In the event of some mistake in the painting, the concerned family has to entertain others on wine. Shonsheerus (Shanishchar-Saturn) is the village god of Rakchham. He came from Garhwal and is one of seven brothers. The rest of the six brothers of this deity are in Garhwal. This deity brought 'Marza U' flower to Shoney hilltop (Kandha) above the village. The medium (*Grokch*) of the god tells that he was brought to the village by Saonige goddesses in ancient times. It is interesting to note that 'Shonshirus' was a deity during the Vedic period, whose references are available in Vedic literature. He was, obviously, not Shanishchar (Saturn) and had an independent identity. The Nag *deota* of the village came from Baraal Lake with the Nag deity of Sangla village. There is yet another deity in Rakchham village, the goddess Bhagwati. She appeared only about hundred years back. Her *Grokch* asserts that she manifested herself in order to trace out a Shivlinga in the boulders lying above the village. She is now considered to be senior to the Saonige Devi. Mahasu, Rangmu, etc., are household deities (Kimshu) and their places of worship are located on the opposite side of the village. They are called 'Birs' and assist the major gods in their activities. According to the belief of the inhabitants, there are no snakes in the area where the 'Birs' are located. In other villages of the region also, the household gods are considered as 'Birs' (Veer) or assistants of superior gods.

Gandharpas (Gandharva), the village god of Jani, was previously a deity of Yashang, a hamlet of Chagaon village. The Chagaon Maheshur, in order to send him out of the village, suggested that whosoever throws a stone to reach across the Sutlej river flowing down below, would be the ruler of that portion of land. Gandharpas agreed and threw a stone which reached the spot across the river but Maheshur's stone could not reach as he didn't want to leave the village. He was thus made to shift to Jani village. In Jani village, Narayan is the junior god to Gandharpas. Devta Narayan of Chhota Kamba shifted to Garshu village and the goddess, a sister of Usha of Nichar, occupied his place. Her image was traced out by a potter of the village.

Buddhist god Yulsa came from Lhasa (Tibet) to Namgia, the last village near Shipki pass. His temples are in Hango, Sunnam and Ropa villages also. The Buddhist gods have a long pole as their symbol. The pole is about ten feet in length and held by a man whenever the god is brought out from the shrine. In case the pole falls on the ground due to any mistake, a black goat is sacrificed as compensation for purification. In Namgia village, the god Basaru was brought from Basara village in Rampur subdivision of Shimla. Kuldeo Narayan is the deity of the scheduled caste community. Dedum, Kali, Gyalbo and Mantokpa are household gods. In case the Mantokpa is not worshipped properly, he sends the members of family to trance and the situation changes only when wine is served to others by them. In Hangrang Valley, the hillspirits (Saoni) are called Chan. This is a Tibetan term for such gods.

Dabla is a powerful god of Upper Kinnaur area. They are nine brothers and sisters. Dabla of Kanum came from Lhasa on the back of a yak. According to a popular legend, the deity, after entering a cave, shot at the Yak with an arrow. The arrow hit a place on a rock below Nesing village and water started gushing out. The neck of the image of the god, who is shown riding a horse, is shown turned backward, whereas the neck of the village god of Sunnam, who is also shown riding a horse, is straight. Once when an ironsmith, in order to save silver, made the neck of the deity straight like that of the god of Sunnam, he got angry and the artisan had to redesign it. There are five images of Pandavas surrounding the image of the god. The medium of the Pandavas also goes into trance. This is an interesting example of the assimilation of the two cultures. The *Grokch* of the Pandavas goes to trance at the time of 'Soting' (from Satya-truth) ritual. The god is vegetarian. Dedum and Narenas are household gods in the village.

Tangta Narenas of Lippa came from Tango village in Spiti. The followers believe that during 1961, when the house of *Zungnas* family was engulfed in fire, the three white stone symbols (*Chhara*) disappeared. In Asrang village, the local god Narenas is a recent arrival and the Nages (Nag) came from Sapni village. According to a legend, human sacrifice remained in vogue in pre-historic times in Lippa and the ritual was performed at Trimang, but with its discontinuance, a bullock was sacrificed for some time.

The Badrinath of Kamru remained the god of Rampur Bushehr and his place was next to goddess Bhimakali. Badrinath came to Kamru from Vrindavan. Kamakshya (Kumukhya) Devi, the Bhimakali of Kamru fort,

is considered to be a very powerful goddess. It was on her name that village Kamru was established. Langura Veer (bir) is the assistant deity to the goddess. He is offered sacrifice of a ram once a year. Kalyan Singh and Chhatra Singh are two other deities who ruled Bushehr State as Rajas at one time. According to the genealogy of the state, Kalyan Singh was 112th in the lineage, whereas Chhatra Singh was 110th in succession. Badrinath is not taken to anybody's house as he is a very prominent deity in the region. The last ruler of Rampur Bushehr, Raja Virbhadra Singh, the present Chief Minister of Himachal Pradesh, is the 122th in the genealogical order.

Shishering is the village god of Pangti. His image appeared from a stone on which people used to sharpen their sickles. Three other images (*mulhras*) were later found to have emerged from that very stone and it was found that the shape of the stone broadened. These three deities are known as: (i) Roghi Narenas of Roghi village; (ii) Markaring (or Markaling) of Khwangi village. Markaring is the same god who is believed to be the nephew of Devi Chandika of Kothi and helped her in establishing her victory over Honu, the husband of Usha of Nichar. Rarung Pathoro of Rarang was the third image. Vayoch, a Nag devta of Pangti is the Wazeer (minister) of the presiding deity Shishering, who is a follower of Buddhism. Vayoch came to the village from Kilba.

In Ropa, the principal deity, is the Goddess Chandika, the sister of Maheshuras of Sungra, Bhaba, and Chagaon. The goddess, though unmarried, according to some sources, is believed to be the consort of *Ormig* deity of Morang village. According to a legend the goddess visited Morang village every year to attend a ritual organized under the aegis of the local god Ormi of that village. The remains of sacrificed goat used to be buried at some particular point. There was a tradition that the *Grokchs* (mediums) of both of the deities were required to find out the buried remains on the opening day of the festival. The *Grokch* who succeeded first, brought honour to the deity concerned. Once it was decided by both the deities that in case the *Grokch* of the goddess Chandika could not trace out the bones before the *Grokch* of Ormig, she would have to enter into matrimonial alliance with the god. Chandika was boastful of her Celestial powers and, as such, consented to the condition contending that her *Grokch* couldn't fail. As per the agreed conditions, the *Grokch* of the goddess could not find out the remains and that of Ormig succeeded. The goddess left the arena in disgust and never attended the function later, but the inhabitants of Morang got a *Rathang* (palanquin) made in

the name of the goddess and started treating her as the consort of their village god.

The *Rathang* of the goddess is decorated at Ropa after every three years. At that occasion, each family residing in the village has to offer a goat and pudding for worship and clothes to the goddess. A sword, called *Khandoma*, with its broken head, is also worshipped in the shrine. There is a belief that the goddess had killed *Honu* and other demons with this *khandoma*.

Kimshu (household gods) of this village include Maating Chhangaan (the clay children), Kali, Nag and Veer (Bir). Yulsa god stays in Kandha above Ropa village. The followers of this god prepare a cluster of his hair out of a special grass, known as 'Kyang Kyang' and bring the deity to the village in palanquin during the month of Baishakh (April-May). There is a custom of playing and beating with this grass on reaching the village. According to a belief, if any woman in her menstruation cycle, or her husband, tries to cross a water channel (*kuhl*) located near the temple of Yulsa, either there are rains or there is some harm to the concerned persons. Kali has no palanquin in the village but commands respect for being the companion of Chandika. The families who rear the goats used for carrying load, offer a goat to her annually on an individual level. Vasdev is the household god, the custodian and protector of the cattle wealth. He is worshipped once or twice a year. Veer and Kali are also household gods and the goddesses.

Chhakoling is a Buddhist god of Labrang village. Khormo Shu, a Buddhist goddess, is the village deity of Spilo village. She came to the village after the Mahabharata battle with her brother 'Chhakang Shu', the god of Labrang village. Dedum and Kali are the household deities of Labrang. Khormo shu Devi is also known as Chakravarti Devi.

Yulsa is the village god of Sunnam village. The village gods include *Maating Chhangaan*, Tangta shu, Porka shu and Narenas (Narayan). Maating Chhangaan has been shown as a serpent on the wall of Sunnam temple and in a small shrine outside the village, there is a small hole on the wall. It doesn't seem possible for an adult man to enter the shrine through this hole but the *Grokch* of Maating Chhangaan, while in trance, enters the temple through it whenever there is ceremony relating to the village shrine.

Kyangmayung, the god of Akpa village, changed his place with his sister Milayung, the goddess of Jangi village. The god and the goddess

came from Kailas, and Kyangmayung, the god of Jangi, keeps the sword (*Khanda* or *Khando*) belonging to his sister Milayung of Akpa, with him. He receives sacrifice of goat for his attendant Kimshuang.

Morang or Murang, as it is called locally, is an important village in the upper part of Kinnaur. The village god Ormig, who has already been mentioned as the consort of Chandika of Ropa, came to the village from *Ropa Khak* (Gyabung) in Ropa Valley. There is yet another version of the legend related to the marriage of Chandika of Ropa with Ormig which states that the deity used to go to Ropa on a ritual called *Bonang* after every twelve years. On this ceremony, there was a practice of sacrificing 108 goats by the villagers. The bones of these goats were buried at a specific point and the deity had to dig these out on the succeeding ceremony after every twelve years with his miraculous power. The *Grokch* of Chandika, on one occasion located the exact point rapidly and this humiliated the god. He felt insulted and later married Chandika, as discussed earlier. It is to be noted that Ormig, being Kuldeo, is a Vaishnavite deity, whereas Chandika belonging to the family of Banasur and Hidimba, is an Asura and a Shaivite goddess. In Morang village, the Kimshu (household gods) are Hirim (Hanuman?), Vedraan (the Kimshu of the Raja family who settled in the village), Saangon, the spirit having her abode on a mountain and capable of controlling snow and water and Teshu (Tegshu, big deity) settled in the village during the earliest times. Kali, another Kimshu is worshipped for protecting crops and keeping away diseases. In Lippa, Ormig, the village god of Morang is worshipped as Kimshu and his palanquin is made out of grass. Dabla is the village god of Hango.

The village god of Leo, Zomatok came from Tibet. His *Grokch* gives *Dhoop* (*Ghol*) with the celestial power of this deity to cure the patients. Talangsa, a god with the key of Raldang, a place of the dead on the Kailas range, is a typical spirit. His *Grokch*, while in trance, asserts that in case the people don't obey his command, he would open the lock of 'Raldang' to allow the living being to die. Rapang Nages, the serpent deity of Sapni, is also worshipped as a deity in Leo village. It is said that the Nages came from Sapni (Rapang) to kill a Lama. He could not do so and attracted by the natural beauty of the place, decided to stay at the village. He had come to kill the incarnated Lama of Tiraasang, a place near Leo village. His symbol (*phabrang*) is kept in a house with a family and is brought out on special occasions. Naidak (the owner of a sacred place), is the

village god of Chuling village. He also wanted to kill the Lama of Tirasang and met the Lama in the guise of a yak. *Shu ma*, *Yulsa* and *Gyalbu Yulsa* are the deities of Shyalkhar village and they have their separate mediums. Purgyul-shu is the god of Maaling and Nako villages. Purgyul is the highest peak in Kinnaur. Dabla, Dedum and Yulsa are the gods of Chango village.

In Mebar village, Rak Shu (stone god) has an interesting legend related to it. It is said that at the time of construction of the temple of Maheshur, a son of Banasur and Hidimba in the village, a stone (boulder) would obstruct the construction work. The masons started taking it out and throw it outside the premises but to their surprise, they would find it at the old site every morning. Ultimately, it was recognized as a god. Kali, Kusum Nalageh-shu, Mahasu, Nyuge, Veer, Maating Chhangaan and Vazeer Kanalosya are the household gods of Mebar village. Vazeer Kanalosya punishes the defaulters of the social system.

In Wangpo valley (Bhaba), Maheshur, Kuldeo, Kamshu Narayan, Vishnu, Nages and Paanaa (Pandav) are the deities under worship. Kamshu Narayan were seven brothers but due to some feud against Maheshur (the son of Banasur), he threw them in a ravine. One of them was rescued by the people and he is now the god of Village Bei in the valley. The six others could not be saved.

Paanaa (Pandav) are the village gods of Kraba and Surchome in Bhaba valley. It is curious to note that the Pandavas are considered opponents of the gods belonging to the family of Banasur and Hidimba and according to various legends, they could not penetrate into the region in the beginning, i.e. during their lifetime. They are, however, worshipped as Kimshu or minor gods. The folklore of the region, however, have only a few accounts in the form of songs and legends relating to the Pandavas. In the *Mahabharata*, Hidimba, the sister of Hidimb married Bhim, one of the Pandava brothers, but according to the folklore of Kinnaur, the Pandavas were uprooted from the lower parts of the region by Hidimba with the help of Saonige. The legend of Honu, the accounts of the progeny of Banasur and Hidimba and the tradition of worship of their sons and daughters amply establish that Banasur, during the days of the Mahabharata battle, was the ruler of the region and Hidimba might be a brave daughter of some community, inhabiting the Himalayan region. The mythological background of the Kinnaras, through their village gods, is the oral record of their history and culture of the hoary past and it is

not improbable that the authors of the great epic based their literary and mythological accounts on the folklore of the people. They were keen to present the verbal accounts in a systematic and fascinating manner, which provided interesting material to the reader of mythology.

The gods of the region are inter-related. The hierarchical system among them speaks volumes of the social system of the inhabitants. They have been humanized to a great extent. They are friendly masters of the people. Though tactful among themselves, they know how to nourish the interests of their votaries. A number of them go to Indrapuri (heaven) for some time during the month of Paush and Magh (January-February) and bring prosperity to the people who have staunch faith in them. They don't react violently against the evil spirits (ghosts) haunting the inhabitants but negotiate and reconcile the matter with them and make them agree to leave the habitats even after accepting sacrifices. The unwanted spirits visiting the villages are escorted by the village gods to the places away from the villages with processions of followers and musical bands. In Chagaon, in Ragul festival, the deity is given a send off to Indrapuri. On his arrival, in the village after some days, a festival of 'Shu Jab' to receive him back is arranged.⁶² The gods are the life breath and lifeline of the people of the region and they can think of nothing more auspicious and important than them.

'Shiva,' according to N.M. Penzer,⁶³ 'was originally a local Himalayan god, who with Vishnu, gradually became a Chief among the whole Hindu pantheon. This would assume that he was a non-Aryan deity who grew into prominence and wore a necklace of skulls. Why? Was this a non-Aryan aboriginal notion? Among the Andamanese, who may be taken to be among the most untouched aborigines in existence it is still the custom to wear skulls of deceased relatives.' Lord Shiva is the god of Kinnaras but he is not worshipped in the form of a Shivlinga. The images in the palanquins, however, place Ishuras in the most prominent position and two metal images of Gorey (Gauri) and Gangey (Ganga), the consorts of 'Ishuras' (Ishwar) Mahadev and daughters of *Yukuntras* (the king of snows), a legendary ruler of the Himalayan region whose '*Ainchali*' songs are quite popular in the region, are fixed around him. Shivlingas made of wood are worshipped in the temples of the Maheshur as deities. It can be inferred from the account given above, that though the deities are associated with Banasur and Hidimba, yet they are related to a primitive form of Shiva worship.

The Maheshur of Pujarli in Shimla district, a brother of Monshirus, is worshipped as Lord Shiva and the legends of his origin in that area are not associated with Banasur and Hidimba. This might have taken place due to outside influence. Dedum and Chhubdud, who are believed to have come from Tibet, are the spirits of water. In Nichar area, which is less influenced by Buddhistic culture as compared to the other regions, it is worthy of notice that here too, the Dedum are the spirits believed to be dwelling in the temples of the Maheshuras. These old temples are called 'Deoglang', a term not known in other parts of the Mahasu region. The monasteries are called 'Lagang' as the Lamas (monks) live in them. The compound or premises of the temples, called 'Santhang', denote that the term is derived from 'Santhaagar' where the Buddhist monks used to assemble, according to the religious scriptures.

Various divinity cults practised in the region provide a living cultural history and have their affinities with the races and people even away from the region. The domain of the Maheshuras extended upto Tibet, Rohru (Shimla), and Spiti and Buddhistic traditions, myths and faiths have the influence of Tibetan shades of Buddhism. Narayan is the assistant diety of Maheshuras and Vishnu is the god of scheduled caste community. This phenomena, culturally significant, is prevalent in some parts of Shimla district also. The inter-relationship and humanization of village gods, with all their social traits including feelings of friendship, enemy or hostility, heroism and shrewdness, according to situation, are depicted in the folklore and beliefs of the people. The medium and oracles play an important role in the entire setup and their interpretations, while in trance, are carried out as the commands of the celestial being, the village god. The people have undaunted faith in spirits and the percentage of possession syndrome is quite considerable due to the unfailing belief of the devotees in various types of spirits controlling everyday life of the people of the region.

Meshuras of Kinnaur: Legend and Lore—Another Version

Banasur meets Hirma

Banasur was the ruler of Sarahan (Shonitpur). He was a great devotee of Lord Shiva. Earlier to it, he belonged to Chanthang in Tsaprang of Guge province in present day western Tibet. Once he visited Kinnaur and reached Mulat Dhar, a place located near Sungra village. Hirma or

Hidimba was also on a visit to that area during those days. She belonged to Lahaul region. After their formal introduction, they decided to be united in wedlock and stayed in a cave known as Gorboring Ag (the cave of Chaos). The cave is situated near the main temple Thanang, at Sungra (Grosnam) village in Nichar Tehsil in Kinnaur. According to a legend, eighteen deities of the region—out of whom seven brothers and sisters including Chandika of Kothi, Monshiras gods, respectively, of Sungra, Bhabha and Chagaon villages, Usha of Nichar, Chitralkha of Taranda and deaf and dumb sister of Chagaon village being the most conspicuous—were born.

Division by Chandika

Chandika, the eldest of all the offsprings, who later divided the whole of the region among all the brothers and sisters of divine origin, was born out of the nose of her mother Hirma, the goddess of Kafor village. She tactfully concealed a fertile and even a portion of Sarak pargana in her plait before the division was convened and, thus, was able to get two shares allotted for her. These shares were the Kothi area around Kalpa and Ropa Valley beyond Kanam.

According to the division, Sungra Maheshwar was allotted the region of 18/20 pargana. He showed his unwillingness to accept it and told that the portion was barren and full of boulders and rugged terrains. He was, then, given an additional area extending upto Sarahan and was made the presiding deity of the region.

Bhabha Maheshwar got Bhabha (Katgaon) valley and on his dissatisfaction, was allowed Spiti region also. Chagaon Maheshwar got 'Pagram' or the area of Rajgramang which includes Chagaon, Urni, Miru, Sapni to Ramni area located on both the banks of river Satluj. On his reluctance to accept the share, he was told that there was a gold mine at the top of Chagaon and a silver mine below. Nichar area was given to Usha and Taranda area came to Chitralkha who is also called Taranda Durga.

Bhabha Maheshwar goes to Kullu Sarahan and Spiti

Bhabha Maheshwar went to Kullu Sarahan, a village situated in outer Seraj, beyond Baghi. He brought Bir *devta* from that village to Natpa in Kinnaur and left him there. He went back to Sarahan and stayed there

for some time. Later, he went to see his area in Spiti where Khar *devta* was the god. He ousted him from there and established his sovereignty with the help of other local gods. He still visits Pin Valley of Spiti after every three years in the shape of his Kalasha (vessel) and divine emblems and after every sixth year, his *Rathang* (palanquin) is taken to the region. The votaries of the deity in Bhabha valley accompany the spirit with eatables. In the past, a palanquin of the deity was kept in the valley as a symbol of his presence on a permanent basis.

Deity as Monal

Once, when the deity came to Bhabha in the form of a monal bird, he sat on the top of Mangpa Maldung and Zangkhaning (gold mine). On reaching Bhabha village, he relaxed on a cedar tree. The tree was so big that whole of the shrine including a large Shivlinga was carved out of it. It is said that the tree was so large in size that when it was cut, its branches reached Karabe village, though it belonged to Bhabha (Katagaon) village.

The Image

A man from Atkatu clan, on finding the monal on the tree, shot the bird. He, to his astonishment found that it turned into an image. He put it in the godown of grains and found that the quantity increased immensely. The interior of godown would seem as a water tank at times. This led to accept the deity as a powerful spirit.

The Nages

The deity decided to visit the adjoining area in his *Rathang*. When he was taken to Kalnoo, the inhabitants started worshipping him with the offering of excreta of a dog. These people belonged to Rasakafnoo family of the Thakur who were called Listiche Kayath. They showed the plough of gold to the deity and boasted that they were very affluent. The deity decided to invite Nag deity from Kullu Sarahan. At that place, seven Nag deities were staying and the deity wanted to take the most powerful of them to Katagaon to avenge his insult. He requested them to accompany him but none of them agreed. He offered to sacrifice eighteen rams to the one who helped him. One of the gods agreed to accompany him to Katagaon. Both of them reached Katagaon and settled there.

Kamshu Narayan

Before the arrival of Bhabha Maheshwar, Kamshu Narayan was the local deity of the village. Bhabha Meshwar and Nag went to Speeshur Naling (Moranung), a small stream nearby and brought the water of the Satu tabanch in a leather container (*khaltu*) with which they flooded the area by causing heavy rainfall for seven days. They also abandoned the water of the stream for seven days and caused a lake. The water of the lake was later released. It flooded the whole valley, including Rasa Kamkun Thakur, the ruler and Devta Kamshu Narayan. An image of Kamshu Narayan was retrieved from a stream *Majatang* at Baei and the other one with a pot (*Lambu*) of brass was found at the river bank near Nirath. The Kamshu Narayan at village Kandhar belonged to Baei earlier.

Bugs created

The deities, with their divine powers, created big bugs to drive away the family members belonging to Listiche Kayath. The Kayaths of Listiche ultimately left the place and settled at Magpa. The Maheshwar, thus, was successful in establishing his terrain in Bhabha valley with the help of the Nag deity.

The Maheshwar was keen to allow the Nag a place of his choice. He showed him the place of Rastumpi Chang to which he didn't agree. He was taken to Ralo Chang, Ti, Charang Chang and Jalta kap, but none of these places suited to him. On seeing Gyare, he agreed to settle there. The deity is still believed to continue living there.

Feud over a pot

Bhabha Maheshwar tried to strengthen his grip on the area. He started moving from one place to another, listening to the grievances and tales of woes of his votaries. He wanted to lay hand on a golden vessel suitable for lighting eighteen lamps and belonging to Kamshu Narayan. There was a feud between the two gods in the Nirol temple (secret shrine). The feud (*Shuddang*) took a serious turn when the Maheshwar pushed Kafnoo Narayan to the wall and the latter kicked the former with a stone which struck to the foot of the deity hurting him. The event is still remembered by arranging the fair of *Bangkayang* in the month of Paush every year during which the entire costume and ornaments of the Narayan are

exhibited on a wooden plate made of Braikling plant which is three ft. long and two ft. wide. A dance programme is also arranged on this occasion, as informed by Chattar Singh Mukhiya, Katgaon. 'Bang' in local parlance, indicates leg or foot and 'Kayang' means dance, i.e. the dance related to the foot.

The incident establishes that there were feuds between the followers of Shaivishanavism and those of Vaishnavism. The myths related to the legend are quite interesting. These are:

1. The marriage of celestial beings, namely, Banasur and Hidimba belonging to two distant places.
2. The abode of the celestial couple in a cave of chaos (*Gorboring/ Garbar* or Chaos and *Ag* cave) and the birth of their progeny in the cave.
3. Distribution of division of available portions of territory by the eldest sister, Chandika.
4. Concealment of fertile land under the plait and to get the allotted plot according to the division.
5. Dissatisfaction over the allotment and reconciliation after getting additional benefits.
6. To bring another deity from a distant place and help settle him in a village.
7. Predestined visits of a deity still continuing in a particular locality like the one in Spiti by Bhabha Maheshwar.
8. Deity flies in the form of a monal bird.
9. Cedar tree used to construct the shrine and Shivalinga carved out from the trunk of the sacred tree where the celestial bird rested.
10. Extra large size of the tree made it to fall upto the next village.
11. Monal bird, on being shot, turned into an image.
12. The image, when put in the godown, made the grain increase immensely.
13. The godown, where the image was kept, would appear as a water tank sometimes.
14. This phenomena helped the acceptance of the deity as a powerful spirit.
15. Showing a gold plough to exhibit wealthiness.
16. Flooding the area by bringing water from a stream in a leather container.

17. To cause rainfall for seven days and abandon the flow of water in a stream by the gods.
18. Two gods of different origin and faiths join together to drive away the third one.
19. The flood caused by the gods wipes out human beings and the deity, whose images are found on the river banks.
20. The deity shifts to other place and settles there.
21. The deity helps his friend to select a suitable place for settlement.
22. Feud of the deities over an object.
23. A spirit hurts the other with a stone.
24. The event is remembered by arranging a ceremony every year.
25. Board of Bhekhal or Braikling plant is used to display objects relating to the deity.

Conclusion

The legend of Maheshwar suggests that the domain of these gods extended even upto Kullu and Lahaul Spiti in the remote past.

The legends of Mahasu of Shimla, Jaunsar Bawar and Maheshwars of Kinnaur have numerous similarities including their birth, mystic powers and division of land among them. The Maheshwars and their sisters have been shown as powerful deities with an inclination of shrewdness. They don't meet each other without some sort of sacrifice. People in Kinnaur don't remember any event during which all the brothers and sisters were together. The division of land took place at 'Rarang Panungo' in Kinnaur and at Choor peak in Shimla region. Both these spots are located at a considerable height. Their myths, though distinct, establish that their legends have been designed to place them at an extraordinary position in their respective communities.

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CHAPTER FOUR

The Cult of Mahasu

In Mahasu region, as elsewhere in the western Himalayan social setting, the tradition of worship of spirits as village deities is quite common. These supernatural beings are propitiated by way of fasting in their name, making them dance in their palanquins (*Rathang*), arranging ceremonies occasionally or after intervals and taking them to various sacred places, including their birthplaces, as the case may be. Ritual fasting (Radin: 1914) is a method of bringing spirits into relation with man. Religious feelings are also superinduced by way of fasting and the deities, according to a popular belief, don't accept anything offered to them by a person who has already taken his food. There is a tradition in some of the regions that the jobs relating to the gods in their temples are performed with an empty stomach and, as such, even the craftsmen, artisans and other workers associated with various acts of repair and service, etc., consider it their sacred duty to go on fast and take their meals once a day. In *Simla Hill States Gazetteer* (1910: 25), while referring to the religious and social customs in Bushehr State, it is mentioned: 'Popular religion of these hills is a primitive form of animism or demon worship, which has been overlaid with a thin veneer of Hinduism. Every village has a *deota* (deity) of its own, and many have more than one. Some of these are superior and some inferior; some rich and others poor. We usually find that there is a principal god or goddess of each *pargana*, who is identified with some form or incarnation of one of the regular Hindu deities.' The statement, as would be seen, is only partially correct as many of these spirits don't have any relationship in their rituals and origins with Hindu divinity cults. The comparison and blessings of some spirit is sought by fasting, ritualistic performances and offering of sacrifice of animals and other objects. This practice is quite common in the area and while some inhabitants and votaries remain on fast for some days before the actual ceremonies, others procure goats and rams to be sacrificed to appease these spirits. The ancient tradition of the worship of divine spirits is firmly

rooted in the soil as a living folk religion patronized by the village-folk. This folk cult is not a chance occurrence but is socially a well-preserved one and highly stylized. It is associated with a complex system of rituals, possession syndrome, beliefs, music and dances, festivals, social and religious entertainments and narratives. Folk epics, ballads, ritualistic performances, myths, quasi-mythological and secular themes form the basis for events in this field. The concepts of nature and forms of ancestor worship in a primitive society in ancient times, formed roots of such traditions. In order to have a fair idea of the types of deities in Shimla and Solan districts of Mahasu region, it would not be out of place to discuss some of the myths relating to their origin and miracles.

The cult of Mahasu

Mahasu is the most widely worshipped deity in Mahasu region. There are several legends relating to the emergence of the Mahasu brothers. According to one, which is recorded by H.S.Emerson,¹ Kirmat Danu, a demon, ruled the region located between Tons and Pabar rivers. He loved to wallow in human blood and claimed a victim twice a year from each hamlet in his domain. Out of seven sons of a Brahman couple, only the last one was left and all the rest were sacrificed at the time of ensuing half yearly sacrifice. Terrified and possessed with the fast approaching time of sacrifice, the mother of the boy once exclaimed, 'Mahasu, Mahasu—Mahasu of Kashmir will save our child'. Una Bhat, the father of the boy, was a great Tantric. He had never heard the name of Mahasu earlier. His wife, in a state of possession, explained that in Kashmir, 'there is a god named Mahasu, who if pleased, would be the savour of the child'.

Bewildered with the proclamation of his wife and seeing to his failing health due to old age, he was at a loss to decide about his future course. He, ultimately, decided to consult Pandit Nag of Hatkoti, who had visited far flung areas, including Kashmir. Pandit Nag, when contacted, advised him not to undertake such a long journey at that part of his life. Ultimately, Una Bhat decided to do it alone. He, with the decision, was full of vigour and vitality and felt as if his body was lifted into the air.

He soon found himself by a tank beneath whose waters the great Mahasu dwelt. He, however, didn't know about it. Chekurya, one of the Wazeers (ministers), appeared at the scene and advised him to wait for Mahasu. On hearing the tale of woe and predictions, Una Bhat retired

to a field and waited silently for the god. To his surprise, a golden image emerged from the ground. He grabbed the same tightly and suggested that he would allow it to go only if there is a promise to save the life of his son.

Mahasu asked him to return home and make a plough of solid silver with a share of pure gold. He advised him to have a pair of bullocks who had not been yoked earlier and to plough a portion of his land every day till his arrival on seventh Sunday after the start of the action. He advised him not to do any ploughing on that day and conveyed that he would come with his brothers, ministers and army. The gold image, after this, slipped from the grip and disappeared. A Brahman was asked to close his eyes and think of Mahasu by the image. He did so and with a twinkling of an eye, found himself within the limits of his village.

He started ploughing a portion of his field every day till the sixth Sunday when he found that from each one of the five furrows five deities sprang out. From the first furrow, appeared Bhotu, from the second Pabasi, from the third, Bashik, followed by Chaldu or Chalda and from the fifth emerged their heavenly mother.

Mahasu brothers

All the four brothers are collectively called Mahasu but each one of them is also known as Mahasu brother. The assistants, Birs, officers and the army of the god emerged from the loosened earth in the field. Chekurya, the minister, appeared with three of his colleagues, namely, Kapila, Kailu and Kailat. A minor god Chaharya also appeared along with them. It is believed that there are fifty-two (according to some, sixty) Birs (Knights) of the god, who act as his assistants and all of them appeared with him. On seeing the miracle, the Brahman fell unconscious but regained soon on recollecting the assurance given by Mahasu.

Kirmat Danu lived in a deep dark pool and was attended by a host of evil spirits. On having been challenged and later defeated by god Mahasu and his assistants, he had to flee across the mountains beyond Pabar river. Mahasu chased him to Nirwara in erstwhile Dhadi state and hacked him to pieces upon a rock which bears marks of sword cuts even upto the present times. The spirit of the demon is believed to be still surviving and out of fear, the inhabitants of these areas worship it.

Due to impatience and miscalculations, the god and his assistants

appeared at Mendrat, the native village of Una Bhat, a week earlier to the scheduled period and the mother and her son gods waited buried underneath the earth for Una Bhat to break its sun-baked crust. As he drove his plough, three brothers underneath were inadvertently injured with the blade of the plough. Bhotu got injured in the knee and thus became lame. Pabasi's ear was damaged and Bhasik's vision was obscured due to thrusting of the ploughshare into one of his eyes. The god brothers later decided to divide the terrain among themselves, as was done by the Maheshur brothers of Kinnaur. The division was effected at Chauradhar, a place near Mendrath.

Bhotu or Bautha (sitting), due to his injured leg, decided to relax at his temple at Anel or Hanol in Uttaranchal and exercise his sway around its precincts.

A portion of the Garhwal State fell to Pabasi's lot where he has six original country seats and spends a year in turn. Basik, due to his defective eyesight, is unable to undertake long journeys and has thus decided to visit the four main centres of his worship in successive years.

Chaldu or Chalda, who was quite healthy, was not allowed any particular place to settle but could go anywhere he found followers. He desired to observe the rights of his brothers. His worship, with the course of time, extended to a vast country including Tihri-Garhwal, Jaunsar Bawar and even upto Kumaon in Uttaranchal and the districts of Shimla, Kinnaur, Solan, Outer Seraj in Kullu and Sirmaur, etc. He spends twelve years time in visiting his followers and, according to a popular tradition, every household is expected to pay something as offering to his ministers. The priests and temple managers also get a small share of the offerings and the remaining portion is added to the treasury of the god. The peasants offer something additional to his attendants, including musicians, etc. He spends some time after the completion of his wandering in the area, relaxing at his shrine built in village close to Anol (Unol—a name associated with Una Bhat).

According to a legend prevalent in Bushehr, Mahasu's dynasty ruled in Kashmir. Chasralu, a rival ruling god, had animosity with Mahasu, who struck him with his sword below the belt and chased him over the ranges of snowclad peaks down winding valleys and through dense forests for many days. Chasralu, terrified by the great chase, entered a deep cavern at Pekha and none could drive him away from his lurking place. On the command of Mahasu, the cavern was continuously watched by four supporting gods who included: (i) the Jakh of Janglik Village, (ii) Beri

Nag of Tangnu, (iii) Chillam and Narain of Dudi and Goswari, and (iv) the Nag of Pekha, Peka or Pekian to serve as watch and ward to the mountain passes to the north, Pabar river and valley to the west, and southwardly directions, respectively. All these deities were made incharge of the directions assigned to them and Mahasu renounced his control over them as he didn't want his enemy Chasralu to leave the dungeon at any cost. He left the place with his brothers and ministers and settled at Anol (Unol), the centre of his worship.

Chasralu

Chasralu, in due course of time, attracted the attention of the people who started worshipping him by arranging fairs and festivals in his honour. A skilled diviner was sent inside the cavern every year to offer prayers and receive divine gifts pouring from the roof and other sides of the cavern. The medium (oracle) would explain to the devotees the omens associated with the emergence of various objects appearing inside the cavern. A pigeon was considered as a harbinger of sickness and disease; a calf as an indication of good harvest; a snake as an indicator of serious trouble during the year; the visions of apparitions during the prayers and incantations would indicate deaths and so on. The medium, while in trance, would predict strange and unbelievable instances, including hidden treasures, hoards and missing objects, etc. About 150 years back, a priest of Mahasu asserted that god Chasralu melted into nothingness and dissipated into space.

H.A. Rose² wrote, during 1883, that on the assertion of a priest of Mahasu, the god would take over the charge of the region again on the departure of Chasralu. The people were angry for breach of Trust on the part of the god and came out with sticks and staves not to allow Mahasu in their hamlets. Misfortunes fell on the resistants and ultimately, Mahasu had to be accepted by the people in the region. Mahasu's five divine Wazeers are represented by way of wooden or stone images. Shil village is one of the earliest seats of Mahasu in Bushehr. The legend goes that several hundred years ago, a ruler of Garhwal came to Hatkoti to pray to the goddess to bless him with a male issue but having got annoyed for the indifference by the Zaildar and other officials, took them to Garhwal and imprisoned them for their behaviour. He was later blessed with a son and decided to liberate them. Some of them were believers in Mahasu and attributed their release and gift of the son to him. The Zaildar

belonged to Shil village and he, as a token of his reverence, got the shrine of Mahasu constructed in his village.

Shalu: An emblem of Nature Worship

Shalu was the ancestral god of Shil and, with the passage of time, Mahasu established supremacy over him also. The term 'Shalu' is associated with 'Shal', a grand assemblage, before the goats and sheep are driven to the Alpine pastures. Shalu is the god of shepherds and herds and his hallowed emblem is taken by the shepherds during their journey to the pastures after having been lent from the temple. This emblem is drum shaped vessel and, according to a legend, Shalu, in earlier times, manifested himself as a big ram on an occasion. None, including the shepherded dogs, could harm him. A man, ultimately, getting angry, slayed the big ram with his axe. Beneath the carcass, two dazzling images of the god were found. Both of them started moving and one of them went down the edge of the plateau to submerge into a mountain torrent. The second image was taken first to the place of halting and later to the village where a shrine was built in the name of the god named 'Shalu' by the Brahmans. The drum shaped-emblem is carried from the temple by the leader of the herdsmen who is privileged to take it while slung by chains across his shoulders. On reaching the camp it is worshipped and a goat is sacrificed to appease the god. At the grazing ground where the god first appeared, rituals and offerings are observed. Shalu is thus, a typical type of pastoral god and an emblem of nature worship. He has strong ties of herdsmanship and peasantry, whereas Mahasu is vengeant and through his legendary emergence, is also associated with mother earth, yet he is not considered as a pastoral deity. It is, however, a matter of curiosity that the believers of Mahasu don't sell their milch animals, viz., she-buffaloes and cows to the non-believers of the god as it is believed that the god accompanies the animals to the household and may cause harm to the concerned family, if not properly worshipped and propitiated.

Mahasu and Rishi Panchmi

Almost everywhere in the region, Mahasu is believed to be a strong deity capable of showering blessings on his followers and inflict calamities on non-cooperators and non-believers. The Wazeers of the deity are

worshipped and propitiated by the followers to appease the god. It is a common belief that the god doesn't believe in sacrifices of animals but his Wazeers, Birs and other attendants accept the sacrifices made in the name of the deity. Mahasu is specially worshipped in ceremonies arranged on Rishi Panchmi (the fifth day of the bright half of the moon during the month of Bhadrapada (Aug.-Sept.)) Rishi Panchmi is an occasion on which manes were remembered during the ancient times and the spiritual gurus were honoured by the disciples. The tradition is also associated with the worshippers of Lord Shiva. On this day, the priests take the images and vessels of the deity to a neighbouring stream or fountain and bathe them according to the ancient rites. The wrapped images are secured against contamination and vulgar gaze. Sweetened cake of wheat-flour is offered to the Wazeer of Mahasu. The deity, like Lord Shiva, prefers to remain in the company of ghosts, evil spirits, *Birs (Ganas)* etc. As indicated by H.A. Rose, a large pile of ashes heaped somewhere nearby the shrine indicates his association with Lord Shiva. He is, no doubt, a dreadful god but to associate him solely, with Lord Shiva, the main deity of the cult of Kashmir Shaivism, can't be easily ascertained, as Shiva has no brothers, his origin is not known and there is enough folkloristic evidence to say that he (the Mahasu) is not considered to be the major god among all the deities of the region. Mahasu cult, shrouded in mysteries, is typical in many ways, including the mode of worship and establishing four brothers as one god but with separate domains, attributes and peculiarities. Pabasi, one of the brothers, didn't allow his followers to take milk until recently and they reared cows only to use milk for the worship of the god. They were not allowed to tender buffaloes and cocks. In Indian mythology, there is hardly any reference in which all the divine brothers are addressed by a single title of only one god. The division of the area on geographical basis might have been one of the considerations keeping in view the vastness of the region, but the divine brothers had no attribute-based divisions and all of them are capable of bestowing worldly prosperity on the followers. Rishi Panchmi is believed to be the day on which god Mahasu emerged from the field of Una Bhat near Mendrath.

In Sirmour district, the headquarters of Mahasu are at Sion, a village in Renuka Tehsil. His devotees, who own milch animals, offer milk to the deity on the day of worship. Shirgul and Parshu Ram are revered widely as compared to Mahasu in the area. The *Jagra* (night vigil) of Mahasu is held on Rishi Panchmi during *Bhadrapada*. (Aug.-Sept.) The

god accepts the sacrificial animal only when water is poured on its head and it nods its head. As already mentioned, the cattle tendered by the followers of Mahasu are not considered beneficial by non-believers of the god or the followers of other local deities and are not allowed into their cattlesheds without the permission of the concerned gods.

Sindhoo—The Whistling God

Sindhoo, the whistling spirit, who according to legends, hails from Kashmir and Jammu region, is believed to be one of the *Birs* (assistants) of Mahasu. The spirit commands respect in Shivalik regions including Jammu, Kangra, Bilaspur, Jaswan, Dun of Hoshiarpur, Sirmaur, Kullu, Mandi, Solan, etc. A whistling sound proclaims his approach. Sindhoo, known as Nahar Singh Bir, was a shepherd. *The Kangra District Gazetteer* (Vol. I, pp. 77-78 and 316) mentions him as an incarnation of Lord Shiva, which is not correct. He is stated to be a malignant spirit causing madness, burning of houses, stealing crops and otherwise immoral acts, but it is not true. He is believed to burn down the houses of those with whom he is displeased and supply corn, milk, ghee, etc., after being taken from other places, to his followers and worshippers. There is a popular belief that he can be mastered by charms repeated at suitable places for twenty-one days. It seems that the attributes of the whistling spirit, referred to above, are based on common myths about the deity. The spirit uses peepul trees as his abode and showers favours on his followers. The diviners using his prayer songs (*Bharnis*), while playing on pitchers and metal plates (*Gharthaal*), are capable of inviting the spirit to the desired places to ward off evil effects of malevolent spirits, magic spells, barrenness, incurable diseases, effects of black magic, etc. To the astonishment of the audience, the spirit, in his whistling voice, announces his arrival and asks the welfare of the followers present at the scene. Due to his white clothes, he is addressed as Dhaulu (Dhaval, White) Bir also. He goes out of his way to help his devotees and is appeased by offerings of sweetened pudding (*halwa*) and *janeu* (sacred thread) beneath the peepul trees. He acts according to the wishes of his devotees and some of them even gossip with him for long intervals, calling him as their friend, guide and well wisher.

According to H.A. Rose,³ Sindhoo is called Dariala (Dori-wala, a shepherd having waist-string), Kiraroowala (having *Kiraroo*, a basket on his back), Lohan Pal (lord of metals), Sanghin Pal (lord of chains) and

Bhumi Pal (lord of earth)⁴ In an invocation song of this spirit in Kangra, he is referred to as the grandson of Ngar Hir and is associated with the family of Chhatrapal, Lohpal, Agripal, Sangal Pal, and Thikarpal. According to some legends, he was the son of the daughter of Bhumipal, namely, Kunthardi and brother of Punia.⁵ Some of these names occur in various chants, (mantras), used to ward off the effects of snake bite, black magic and evil spirits, such as jogini, etc., and a few of them are found in the genealogical table of Garhwal rulers. Some of these names don't appear to be real and natural and sound like adjectives, for example, Lohpal conveys the sense of one who cares for iron, Agri or Agni pal is the protector of fire, Sangal pal is the protector of chains and Thikarpal is one who cares for clay pots. Since the principal shrine of Sindhoo Bir is at Basohli and in his invoking songs, this place finds occasional mention. It will not be out of place to mention that these mantras are spread in the whole of the western Himalayan region starting from Jammu-Kashmir to Himachal Pradesh and Tihri Garhwal. There seems to be a good deal of alterations and local inferences in the original text of the mantras designed by Nath and Siddha mendicants during the medieval period of Hindi literature. The smaller shrines of this spirit are at many places including Dhar and Bhanguri in Gurdaspur (Punjab), Gangath in Kangra, Dhaura in Bilaspur town and at numerous places in Mandi, Kullu, Solan and Shimla. He is offered *halwa* (pudding) and *janeu* (sacred thread), at every harvest. Everywhere he is believed to be great admirer of beautiful and young ladies and prefers to possess them with his spiritual powers to allow them to act as soothsayers with his grace. The *chela* (medium) invokes the spirit after burning incense and meditating with mantras on him.

The spirit is so benevolent and docile that it acts according to the commands of its votaries. A believer from Hamirpur once explained that during pre-partition days, he along with his friends, was working at Karachi and on one black out night, they didn't have tobacco or cigarettes with them. Since the bazaars were closed and none was allowed to lit fire in the houses, so, they thought of invoking Sindhoo Bir and pray to him to manage some tobacco or cigarettes for them. All of them meditated on the spirit after using some incense in the dwelling in pitch dark. After some time, the spirit started whistling and enquired about the welfare of each one of them. After addressing him as 'Baba Nahar Singh' an usual title of the spirit, they explained their problem and prayed for some solution. The spirit jokingly asked them whether they consider him to

be their servant to work at that odd time. With folded hands, they told that he was their only saviour in that far off place and they could not pass the night without using tobacco or cigarettes. The deity then vanished for a while and after some time, tobacco and cigarettes started dropping from the roof. In his whistling voice, he said, 'I think that is enough of it. Take it and don't disturb me any more.' The votaries were overwhelmed with joy and requested him to do them another favour by letting them know whether their family members were all right at their native places. The spirit expressed reluctance as the places were quite far off from Karachi, in the Himalayan region. The devotees knew that their prayers would not go futile, so they insisted time and again and the Bir left for their homes and brought the messages from their family members, which were to their satisfaction. Such instances are numerous and the people approach the mediums of this spirit to get redressal of their problems.

H.A. Rose (1970: 316) has mentioned that the Sindhoo Bir, according to a myth in Chamba, was associated with two goddesses, namely, Rari and Brari. Another legend relates these hill goddesses as Andla and Sandla. In Chamba, the goddesses Chahri and Chhatrahri are also worshipped with him, indicating a relationship between all three. These cults of two wives or associates is widespread in the hills and indicates that Baba Nahar Singh, a religious man, might be belonging to the Gaddi tribe which inhabits Chamba and parts of Jammu region. H.A. Rose (1970: 317) states that Brahmani, a goddess of Bharmaur in Chamba whose temple is at Bhat or Bhutan, is also believed to dance with Sindhu Bir. He is worshipped in Lahaul also. He is one of the major *Birs* (Knights) of Mahasu whose origin is also associated with Kashmir. The Sindhoo Bir (whistling deity) should not be confused with Nar Singha, an incarnation of Lord Vishnu as these are altogether two different deities worshipped in the region. It is a common belief that Sindhoo Bir acts according to the directions of Mahasu, his master.

Sindhoo Bir, whose abode is considered generally to be on peepul trees, as already mentioned, is believed to be a Vaishnavite deity. He doesn't accept animal sacrifice but living goats and rams are offered to him at his place of worship. He is worshipped with pudding and young girls are served with sweet food in his name. A sacred thread (*janeu*) is also tied round the *peepul* tree on which he has his abode. The worshippers of Mahasu believe that he, alongwith other attendants, emerged from the earth when Una Bhat was at work in his field. The mediums of the

whistling god, who act as oracles when possessed by the spirit, belong to various communities, a fact which amply demonstrates that the spirit doesn't believe in caste system, as is the case with some of the local gods. In upper areas, where peepul trees are not grown, the whistling god's shrines are small and attached to the temples of Mahasu. He has no metal or wooden image and is worshipped only by offering *halwa* and flowers, etc., on the wooden *Kharaun* (wooden footwear) which symbolize the deity. However, in some places, including Nandpur, the ancient capital of Rawingarh state, the Bir was worshipped by the ruling family and his lifesize wooden image still exists. It is interesting to note that Bir Shedkulia, a Wazeer of Mahasu, who has his influence and places of worship in Jaunsar Bawar also, is believed to be a whistling god like Nahar Singh Bir. Whether both these *Birs* are one or have separate identity, is a matter of confusion. Shedkulia is considered powerful in the regions where god Mahasu is worshipped but in Shivalik regions mentioned above, Mahasu is not worshipped and even so, god Nahar Singh Bir has his existence. It is, thus, clear that Nahar Singh and Shedkulia are two separate whistling gods in the region and should not be intermingled.

The other *Birs* of Mahasu include Kalu, Malu, Kapla, Kailat, etc., and no exact information of all the 52 or the 60 *Birs*, believed to assist the god, is available. In Gajehri village in Theog Tehsil, a big ceremony is arranged on Rishi Panchmi day in honour of Mahasu deity. According to Hira Singh, the Gur (Devahan) of Mahasu deity in the village, the whistling god is called 'Shedkulia Bir'. The father of the present Gur (medium) Hira Singh, was also the medium of the god and whenever he went into trance, the Shedkulia *Bir* would indicate his arrival with the whistles which were audible to all those present to witness the ceremony. There are three Gurs of the deity and about thirteen other Gurs represent various *Ganas* or *Birs*. Kaulu, Malu and Shedkulia are the significant assistants, among them, but Kaulu is believed to be the strongest one. The votaries of Mahasu don't use milk of their cows about four or five days earlier to the ceremony. The people of scheduled caste community are not given milk by the upper caste people. On Rishi Panchmi, the palanquin of the deity is taken to the tank on the hilltop where the deity manifested himself in ancient times. This is done to rejuvenate and revitalize the spiritual attributes of the deity. There is a popular belief among the people that the village gods require to be taken to the places of their manifestation on intervals to regain and strengthen their

supernatural powers. On Rishi Panchmi, the oracles of the deity and the *Ganas* cure the ailments of the believers by sprinkling cowurine on their heads and serving them with some drops for drinking the same. *Vibhuti* (ash) of the bonfire (*Ghiyana*) is applied on their foreheads. The mediums of the *Birs* belong to lower castes and are considered less effective and junior to the Gurs of the major deities. Besides, Nahar Singh (Shedkulia in Shimla and Sirmaur areas), Malu, Kailu, Kholu, the other *Birs* include Phandka, Salu, Lankura and Mamda (perhaps Mohamad), etc. Mamda Bir is kept in the Mukut (headgear) of the deity. Thaan or Jaakh is the *Bir* who protects animal wealth. Thaan occupies a prominent place and his symbol is kept with the Chanwar of the deity. Bhairon or Bhairava is also one of the *Birs* of Mahasu. Bhairon is the attendant of goddess Kali. In Shimla, he has no separate shrines. Among some of the forms of this spirit Kal Bhairon (who frightens death), Bhut Bhairon, Batuk Bhairon (child Bhairon), Lath Bhairon (Bhairon with a club) and Nand Bhairon are worshipped near the temples of goddesses, especially Mahakali. Kal Bhairon is worshipped in the form of Khetrapal (the protector of fields). Khetrapal is believed to reside on peepul trees and women worship him there when their babies are ill. He is considered as the serpent king, Sheshnag also (Rose, 1970: Vol. I.P. 317). Khetrapal is the owner of soil and household. He is worshipped as crop god in Kinnaur and Shimla regions. In Chamba also, the Khetrapal is the god of soil and is propitiated before ploughing in order to secure good harvest. The spirit is revered in other hill areas also and a small portion of field is left uncut in his name at the time of harvesting.

In Shimla

In Shimla District, the Mahasu brothers have the maximum number of places of worship and their followers are in millions in Shimla, Sirmaur, Uttaranchal and the adjoining areas of Kullu, Mandi, Bilaspur and Kinnaur. The number of gods has been estimated to be 155 and these include Launkra Veer, Chambi, Dhaulu, Bakralu, Makar, Jakh, Thakurdwara, Banaad, Malendu, Chaturmukh, Jal Devta, Palthaan, Pandoya, Devta Kurgan, etc., who occupy smaller areas as compared to some others but are still considered to be quite effective deities. Shirgul has 25 Shrines, Doom 45, Nag 47, Koteswar 7, other local gods, including Chewali, Dhandi, Purgan, Biju, Kayli, Manoon, Kathesar,

Shadi Devta, Dasu, Rathi, Kalodi, Kiyalu, Balod, Banohar, Banaad, Harsing, Neem and Kathaan, etc., are worshipped in 50 places in their respective shrines. Durga, with her various manifestations including those of Bhagwati, Hatkoti, Kali, Tauni, Nagarkoti, Dehan, Chitra, Katasan, Langri, Chewali, Maheshwari, Bhimakali, Kamaksha, Nandan, Tiyali, Ambika, Durga, Tara, Mata, Mansa, Kalika, Devi, Sheetla, Dandi or Dhundwi/Dhundi, etc., is worshipped at 120 places. Mahadev, in the form of the village god, has 20 places for worship, Rudra is worshipped at 10 places, Parshu Ram in 21, Marich 12, Hanuman 31, Shiv at 42 places, Vaishnav gods including Narayan, Vishnu, Laxmi Narayan, Jabal Narayan, Krishan, Ram, Jagan Nath, Raghu Nath, etc., are worshipped at 33 places, Kilbalu at 18, Chikhreshwar at 9, Hatkoti Durga at 12 and Junga Devta at 15 places. The places of worship are not indicative of the followers and their exact number is not possible to be ascertained, as almost in every big settlement, the followers of different gods are located and the clusters of villages have their common principal deities. The total number of places of worship of various gods referred to above has thus, been worked out approximately at 720, whereas in Kinnaur, such places are 169 and in Solan the number comes to about 378, out of a total of 1267 in the whole of Mahasu region.

In Solan

In Solan, according to the rough estimate, the Gurdwaras (the places of worship of Guru Granth Sahib according to Sikh religious faith), are 82, Durga shrines 85, Shiv temples 80, Balak Nath shrines 5, Mahasu temples 3, Vaishnava shrines 22, Siddhas 17, Narsing 8, Nag 14, Bijeshwar 10, Panjpir 14, Thakurdwaras 32, Junga Deota shrines 4, Guga Mehri 15 and worship places of miscellaneous local gods including Suragdvari, Parithan, Chaduwara, Harsing, Naijhalo Dev, Dev Daakhani, Chiri ka Pani, Jit Dano, Church, Chhamrog and Bhapna devtas, etc., come to 35.

The survey account relating to various gods and goddesses, as mentioned above, is not final and does not depict the exact number of villages or the devotees residing in particular villages. This overall survey, however, indicates the attitude of the local people towards various religious faiths, i.e. the folk religion of the inhabitants. The indepth approach of the people towards various sects relating to other particular faiths is

sympathetic and there are no beliefs associated only with the gods of their own religious faiths. One may sit and sing with the people who belong to different religious faith in the villages. The worship of different gods and goddesses does not impair the unity and social and religious fabric of the people. However, with this assessment, three aspects of religious life of the people in the hills come to light. These are:

1. The people in Kinnaur region are even now maintaining their mythology through their village gods and upto Pooh, the undercurrents of ancient culture are quite visible. This aspect helps the researchers to peep into the past of the population and some valuable hints that link them with mythological as well as historical setting can be worked out. The inhabitants of Hangrang Valley and places beyond Pooh speak of Tibetan influence and their original cultural traits are submerged into new religious faith. Their gods and goddesses are of Buddhistic origin, but they too are preserving the beliefs of original inhabitants in the form of ceremonies, rituals and traditions. This aspect can be studied after having a full length discussion on the folk religion of the people of lower Kinnaur.

2. The Rohru Tehsil of Shimla district adjoining Kinnaur and Utaranchal is under the influence of both the regions. The Kilbalu deities use the same type of wooden palanquins with covered heads, as is done in Kinnaur. Dodra Kwar region, a land-locked area, has maintained the oldest cultural traditions and Jakh (Yaksha) devtas are worshipped there. In Rohru, the Vedic, or even pre-Vedic traditions may have existed for a long time. As such, this area is worthy of more indepth study as it serves as a link between Kinnara and Khash culture. The area of Sambrar, as would be discussed in the ensuing pages, might have been associated with Shambar, the main rival of King Divodas in the Vedic period and some of his forts, out of 99 as mentioned in the *Rgveda* (4/263, 7/994, 1/130), might have been located in this region. The rulers in the mountains who were contemporary to Shambar, include Chumuri, Dhani, Shushn, Pip, etc., and it is mentioned in the *Rgveda* that he was killed in the mountains (Brhatah Parvatadadhi) and lived in the high mountainous region (Parvateshu Kshiyān)⁶ The Aryans, after killing the Dasyu King Shambar, had advanced to the banks of rivers Saraswati and Yamuna. The location of the battle of ten kings in the Vedic period can be identified somewhere in the sub-mountain regions of Himachal Pradesh. Rahul Sankrityayan has already suggested it to be in the Kangra Valley.⁷ He quotes from the

Rgveda that the name of the place of battle was 'Udbraja' and it was surrounded by rivers or water from three sides. He indicates Nurpur as the place as its mention as 'Dhameri' in the ancient records, according to him, may be a corruption of 'Udbraj' itself.⁸

In Shimla region

Shimla region has the credit of being the focal point of pre-historic, modern and western cultures in the present times. God Mahasu has his main place of worship at Unol or Hanol in Uttaranchal where one of the four Mahasu brothers, the 'Boutha', Baitha or the sitting Mahasu resides. Mahasu is a collective name of four deified brothers, namely, Basik, Chalda, Bautha and Pabasi. Legend traces their origin in Kashmir and according to some, they may be the incarnation or manifestations of Lord Shiva. With the present survey, it is clear that Mahasu is the most powerful and vastly worshipped god of the region. The other gods of the region are Shirgul and his brother Bijat and Sister Bijayi. Chandeshwar, another village god, is also worshipped in some areas of the region.

Chikhreshwar Mahadev, Koteswar Mahadev, Boindra, Gudar, Banaad, Marich, Junga and goddesses such as Bhimakali, who originally belong to Kamru in Kinnaur and whose main temple now, is at Sarahan in Shimla district, Hatkoti whose place of origin is believed to be at a place near Chanshel mountain in Rohru Tehsil, are the main goddesses of the region. The local deities who wield influence in some of the areas, are Doom, a hero of the ancient times, Bhut Devta of Mai Pul, Balgeswar of Balag village, Devta Padoi, Dano of Sunni and some others already mentioned in the preceding pages.

It is worthwhile to discuss myths, legends and beliefs relating to village gods and the rituals with which they are associated, in order to explore the past history, cultural phenomena and the folk mind of the inhabitants of the present times. It is probable that some missing links, which otherwise are beyond explanation and do not find mention in the scriptures or published literature, may come to light and the riddle of worshipping various village gods by way of typical social system accepted by the natives since ages, be solved. It is evident that no cultural system can exist without social psychology at the base. The institution of village gods is a powerful social system in the region and nothing, without the knowledge of the local deity, can take place in the habitat. The village

gods belong to different faiths. They behave like human beings, have family members, relationships, friendship and animosity and are endowed with human sentiments, including ideas of touchability, affection, hatred and remorse and, yet they are revered, obeyed, propitiated and followed by the devotees. They are mainly of two types, viz., (i) those who were born as human beings in the region and worked miracles during their life time, and those (ii) who were sprouted from the earth or vacuum and manifested themselves in spirit form or in the shape of some creature and made inhabitants to accept them as their god and install them in the shrines and propitiate through rituals. Thus, the spirits of gods are worshipped either out of reverence or out of fear, as a deity is considered capable of doing favours or harm to the worshippers. The shamans (Gur) dominate the institution of village gods and the deity can converse or convey his commands or feelings only through the mediums (Gur, Mali or Chela) who are also called *Vahan* or *Devahan* (the vehicle of god) in some areas and *Grokch* in Kinnaur.

Before proceeding further, it would be appropriate to say that the spirits who are worshipped as gods are of two types, i.e. benevolent and malevolent. But even the malevolent spirits don't harm their followers. However, they don't allow them to disrespect them or break the social norms set up by them. Even the spirits of *Bhut* (ghosts), those of men (*visv devta*), and *Mashaans* or *Paaps* (evil spirits who didn't get salvation after the death) are worshipped. The ancestors are worshipped as benevolent spirits by the families and, in some cases, as village gods also. In Solan district, particularly in the areas adjoining the Punjab and Haryana states, the people have developed interest in following the religions of the plains. The worship of the mother goddess and Lord Shiva, according to the system of temples and not through wooden palanquins, is conducted in the lower areas of the state. In the areas adjoining upper Mahasu, or Shimla district, some village gods, however, have their wooden palanquins in which they are taken from one place to the other by their votaries. These deities include Dano (Sehsrarjun or Krit Virya of the epic times), Harsing, a hero, Kurgan, a prince of Sirmaur State and some others. Baba Balak Nath of Deotsiddh in Hamirpur district, Naina Devi of Bilaspur, Guga Jaharpir, a hero of Rajasthan worshipped as a snake god and Pandava brothers are some of the principal deities in the region. Banni Devi (forest goddess), Mahasu, Siddhas, Veers (including Naarsingh, a popular god of Bilaspur who is believed to be a

shepherd), Nag, Junga, Hanuman and some local heroes like Jit Dano, Ghurka (Ghatotkach, the son of Bhim and Hidimba, who is believed to have born in one of the caves near Kunihar) are some of the deities worshipped in the Solan area. Detailed notes on some of them and their places of birth and activities will follow.

It is now sufficiently clear that the ancient system of village gods, as practised in Kinnaur and parts of Shimla district, receives a setback in Solan district, especially in the areas adjoining the plains.

Notes on religion in the Gazetteers of various Simla Hill States testify that the people in this region followed a primitive form of animism overlaid with a thin veneer of Hinduism. Some scholars, such as Rahul Sankrityayan, J.H. Francke, Snellgrove, Cunningham, Tucci, S.K. Chatterji, Mohan Rakesh, Tika Ram Joshi, Jaschke, Gerard, K.S. Singh, M.S. Randhava, Ibbetson, H.A . Rose, Harcourt, Penelope Chetwode, Grierson, T. Grahame Bailey, Frazer, etc., felt attracted towards various aspects of history, social life, language, ethnicity, mythology, etc., of the region. In order to find out the traces of pre-historic backdrop including the impact and remnants of Indus Valley Civilization, Kirata, Asura, Gandharva, Kinnara, Naga and Yaksha cultures, sufficient material in an unsystematic and scattered manner has been produced, especially within a span of about 150 years from now. Even so, the question of interlinkages of various pre-historic communities and their traces in the present day culture could not be presented authoritatively. This happened due to the difficulties of collecting grassroot information from the folk religion after studying the social habits in the field to acquire firsthand information on the subject.

Rahul Sankrityayan was of the opinion that Shambar, the Son of Kulitar and who a *Dasyu* and fought against Divodasa in the plains of Kangra, is said to have 99 forts in the Himalayas, some of which were destroyed in the legendary battle of Ten Kings *Dashrajna*. On the basis of some typical ceremonies like, *Boodhi Diwali*, associated with Bali an Asura ruler, *Bhunda*, a rope sliding ceremony associated with *Bihund* the son of Asura, named *Hund* and a type *Kabhika* of Vedic *Narmedh Yajna* prevalent in the Kullu area, it can well be said that these ceremonies cannot be a mere coincidence and might have got some links with the inhabitants of remote times. G.A. Grierson, on the basis of the findings of some earlier linguisticians, established that Kinnauri, Lahauli and the dialects of Spiti have some bearing of Mundari languages of the remote

past. S.K. Chatterji and General Cunningham tried to ascertain that the Kirati influence on language and culture of this region, is quite apparent.

An area in Rohru Tahsil of Shimla district is locally called Sambrar. This area is located near Samarkot, and comprises about 15 villages, namely, Bamnoli, Pujarli, Salaut Tikari, Khanola, Joli (Zoli), Sharmali, Bajain, Bhaloon, Nasaari, Jaraashi, Perhni, Sungri, etc. In Rohru Tehsil, surrounding the area of Sambrar, there are ancient forts of Mandalgarh, Tikkargarh, Bhambhu Rai, Rajgarh, Surkhuligarh, Janglagarh, etc. At Jangla, there is a big boulder believed to have been thrown to that place with the 'Dheeng' (catapult) system of warfare. 'Dheeng' was a typical stone-throwing system applied during warfare in the remote past. The warriors having expertise in this system were employed by 'Sansaptakas' who assisted Susharam Chandra, the king of Trigarta in the Mahabharata battle. Even in the Dashrajna battle (the battle of ten kings), references of this art are available. Later, 'Dheeng' system was applied by the Greeks when they fought against various kings of the Indian territory. The Mawis or Movannas who deified the local rulers in the mountain region were aware of this art and applied it from their forts while engaged in war against the rulers. Typically, big boulders were tied to a strong chain or rope after being fixed to a channel (cavity), made in a trunk of a tree used for the purpose. The soldiers would fix the portions in such an angle against their enemies that the big stones tied to them with the string would hit the target unflinchingly. The trunks of the trees used in such a warfare are no more available but the boulders at Jangla and Sainj are living examples of this mighty arrangement. According to a popular belief, most of the forts in Rohru area were destroyed through 'Dheeng' system during the pre-historic period.

In Sambrar area, the village deities are, (i) Meshur of Sambrar and Pujarli who, according to a legend, is said to be a son of Banasur and Hidimba. The other brothers of Meshur are at Sungra, Bhaba and Chagaon in Kinnaur. Chandika of Kothi, Ukha or Usha of Nichar and Chitrallekha of Taranda are believed to be his sisters. The people of Kinnaur consider this god as one of the brothers of their deities but in Sambrar area, the followers are unaware of the legend of the deity. (ii) Bachhinchhar, the village deity of Bachhunchh village is considered to be the brother of Meshur. Thus, both of them might have got their relationship with the Asuras of the mythological period. (iii) In Spail, in Dalgaon Valley, the deity is named Bakraalu (born among goats). The Bakraalu, like some

other deities in erstwhile Bushehr State, arranges *Bhunda* (rope-sliding ceremony). The Shal Devta of Kulgaon, who is said to have been born in Kupri Melthi and god Parshuram of Nandla village also arrange *Bhunda* ceremonies. The rope-sliding ceremonies, thus, are arranged in only five villages in Rohru Tehsil which include Sambrar, Bachhunch, Spail, Kulgaon and Nandla. Baakralu Devta of Spail (Dalgaon valley) was born in Dalgaon village in the region. The fort at Samarkot is believed to have been constructed by Sambra rulers of antiquity. The term Rohru (associated with *Rudhir-Ruhar*-blood) and Sambrar indicate towards pre-historical references of the region.

The deities of the villages have a strong feeling of hierarchy among them. There is a principal deity of each Pargana and the inhabitants in each village have faith in the local deity of the habitat. These gods have a human-like relationship with their counterparts and invite them to their places or go to visit them in their shrines.

The Khashas, Kanets, the ancient Kiratas, the Asuras and Nags of ancient Indian tradition have left indelible imprints on the cultural system of the people in this area. The village god system, followed by various rituals and ceremonies, serves as the key for unfolding the past. Uniting links in the system on the basis of myths and legends related to various important deities of the region provide important information on the ancient patterns of life in the region.

The cult of Jana

Chasralu, the adversary of Mahasu, had a typical cult of selecting 'Jana', a divine representative, the symbol of ancient theocratic rule, associated with the performance of various rituals in his cavern. H.W. Emerson, as quoted by H.A. Rose (1970: 475-77), discovered that the people of Tikral and Pekha had retained their own internal system of theocratic rule in which the confederacy of the five gods played a leading role in selecting a Jana. The essential qualifications for the incumbent of this amazing institution of pre-historic times envisaged that the child, considered eligible for selection as Jana, should not be of less than two years of age and must belong to one of the certain families of Pekha village who alone enjoyed the privilege of providing candidates for the purpose. Both of the parents of the child should be alive and the ceremonies of tonsure and naming must not have taken place. All the five local deities responsible

for selecting the Jana, according to the prevailing traditions, would assemble in their palanquins in the premises of the temple of the Nag of Pekha, who was one of the five gods. No outsider or a person belonging to scheduled caste was allowed to witness the ceremony. The Jakh devta of Janglik village used to be the head of the council of gods for the purpose. The father of the future Jana bowed his head, conveying his acceptance for the purpose before all the five deities turn by turn. The test was repeated until the choice had fallen three times in succession on the same family. Before the final selection, the boy was bathed in the five products of the cow, dressed in a suit of new clothes and seated with honour on a consecrated square. The diviners of all the five gods endowed him with divine strength while laying the sword or dagger of the concerned deity on his head, hands and other parts of the body, turn by turn.

The Jana was required to be brought up very carefully, observing all the dictates, such as, not seeing a crow, a Koli or a stranger; not taking fish and liquor; not remaining alone; staying in a temple outside the village until the period of impurity caused by a birth of a child, death of someone or a cow calving in the family. He would cease to be a Jana in the event of the death of either parent, on reaching the years, of discretion or breaking any of the taboos. His term lasted for seven or eight years after which a new Jana was to be appointed soon, as it was considered inauspicious to have the situation vacant for a long time as the worship of Chasralu could not be undertaken without the presence of a Jana. The Jana was only competent to perform worship at the cavern of Chasralu and, at the time of observances, he was allowed to be accompanied by the heads of the families who were permitted inside. Secret songs related to Goddess Kali, allowed only to be sung at that very occasion, were presented inside the cavern. The Jana, in many cases, behaved like a ruler of the tract and not merely an embodiment of divinity. He also settled the disputes. The five deities very often brought to him in their palanquins were believed to charge and re-charge him with their divine strength to enable him to deliver superb decisions. The child without any experience in shrewdness was pure in his heart and approach and he delivered judgements with divine initiation as Jana. The decisions of the Jana, a child of little understanding, were obviously a symbol of safeguard against partiality and fraud. He was considered a deity in living form and could decide even such feuds which had community and habitat importance, viz., distribution of grazing land and rotation of irrigation, etc. H.A. Rose

(1883: 487) points out, 'there is, thus, nothing improbable in the theory that the Jana was the theocratic ruler of a group of Kanets, appointed by the gods whose vice-regent he was, that his sayings are regarded as inspired and therefore binding, that he exercised temporal as well as spiritual authority, and that the confederacy of villages under his jurisdiction at one time acknowledged no other ruler'. He goes on to say, 'in support of a wide application of the same principal, it may be observed that the jurisdiction of local gods corresponds closely to natural division, that they are known as *Kul ke Devta* (gods of the family), and that the worship of a common deity is still of very strong bond of unity among the worshippers.' According to him, the association of Jana with good fortune and prosperity connected him with the magical aspect of early kingship. Though the practice is obsolete now, yet, in the adjoining areas, the tradition of appointing of Jana is still prevalent with some modifications. In Jabal, where Narain is the village god, a Jana is appointed for the period of a ceremony which is celebrated at intervals of more than three years. He has to follow certain ancient traditions which have been in practice since time immemorial. His cry is considered a bad omen, he can't touch anybody during this period, he remains secluded and is worshipped as a deity. He is offered sacrifice of a goat or ram as is done to the deity and even would accept human sacrifice in the remote past (Rose, H.A. 1970: 478). The Jana is attired in a girl's costume and there is a legend that Jana, in original, used to be girl who died on the way and in order to make the ceremony a success, a boy from the neighbouring habitat was taken by force and attired as a girl to establish that any untoward incident didn't occur. The ceremony went off very well and the outcome was gratifying. This made the tradition take a turn and Jana has now to wear the costumes of a girl. This tradition is now associated with superstitions and taboos.

Jana in Kinnaur

In Kinnaur, the institution of Jana is still prevalent, albeit in a modified form. In Chhota Diwaal festival in Sangla, four persons from four privileged families are selected by the village god to manage the ceremony. They are called *Potomang*. Three more persons are nominated for five or six years to act as incharges of the godown. They are called *Jetheras*. The *Potomang* extract wine to be used during the ceremony and, with

the consent of the deity, appoint two men as *Singhaan*. The *Singhaan* are also called *Zolya*. They are considered as the representatives of the deity. None can talk to them and they should not touch anybody. They wear red gowns and ornaments as is the case with the Jana of Jabal in Shimla district. Their specific duty is to cut a snake made of the bushes and branches of Shiwan, a special type of small bushlike plant without thorns, whose branches are flexible enough to be moulded as a coiled snake. The snake-symbol made of branches is called *Baanaa* (may be Banasur). The symbol is made by the scheduled caste people of the village and is taken by both the upper caste and lower caste people held by tail and mouth, respectively, to a nearby ravine, as if taking it to drink water. It is again taken back to a place called 'Zolaring' where an obscene song is sung to ward away its evil effects on the inhabitants. This symbolic snake is kept in a coiled position and the two *Singhaans*, along with the worshipper (*Pujari*) of the deity, cut it into small pieces. The 'head' of the snake is kept in the temple of the village god and the pieces are distributed among votaries to be kept as a safeguard against evil spirits and misfortune. The *Singhaans* go to the houses of all the villagers to bless them on behalf of the deity.⁹ The practice, practically, is a modified form of *Bhunda* prevalent in Shimla and Outer Seraj in Kullu in which the rope-slider Beda also acts as scapegoat to ward off evil effects of supernatural beings and is considered as the representative of divine powers after his initiation for the purpose of the celebration of *Bhunda* ceremony till the day of the actual performance. Interestingly, the rope-sliding Beda is called *Jyaali* and *Zolya*, in Sangla, is a term conveying an identical meaning. The Jana practice, as referred to above, has since been discontinued at Pekha but is still alive in various villages in an altered form in the region. In Kamru village in Kinnaur, two persons nominated as *Charba* during Phaguli festival, have to remain secluded and are required to take bath before every activity related to the festival. On the fifth day of Phaguli festival in the village, two *Singhaans* are nominated by the deity, and their duty is to protect the deity, named, *Parborais* (may be Parbat Raj of Indian mythology) from any untoward event. In Rakchham village, 'the men of god' (*Shu-mi*) are nominated by the village god from six of the original families of the village eight days prior to 'Mahang Songaan' (15th day of Magh—Feb-March) festival. The *Shu-mi*, who are six in number, have to stay inside the temple for eight days, performing ritualistic worship and reading a

manuscript on the 14th of Magh at night. The contents of the manuscript are not divulged.

Tradition of Jana

The tradition of 'Jana', as the term indicates, is to humanize the deity. The Jana, representing the spirit used to be as pure as the benevolent spirits. Though the practice of Jana is existing in an altered form, yet the study of its existing types testify its roots in the most primitive way of life when the recognized form of government or administration was theocracy, exercised through a human agent and considering the sanctity of the epitome, the ruler was considered a humanized divine. H.A. Rose (1970: 479-80) has reproduced an interesting zoological study from the *Times* magazine. According to it, 'in all times and countries, man has regarded crows with superstitious awe, knowing them for birds of all omen, the familiars of witches and evil spirits, and the confidants of deities whom they never fail to betray. Odin took them for his heralds and councillors, but could not trust them, and they blabbed the secrets of Valhalla. They were the scandle-mongers of Olympus, and to their evil-tongues poor Coronis owed her death. Indra, in wrath at their tale bearing, hurled them, we are told, down through all the hundred stages of his heaven. No bird surely had nobler opportunities, none has been so highly honoured; and everywhere it proved itself unworthy of its trust.'

Ceremonial pollution due to the sight of an evil bird such as crow, death of one of the parents or any other undesirable situation, as discussed above, is an important component of the idea of making a ritual pure and sacred. Ceremonial contamination caused due to death or birth or sight of an unwanted element is a matter to be taken with seriousness so far as the case of human psychology is concerned. J.G. Frazer has also made a mention of such practices and considerations while discussing the worship of Attis, Adonis and Osiris in the Golden Bough. In Greek rituals also, there are ample evidences of pollution theory. In many cases, the sight of a widow, a low caste person, a parentless child or an orphan or a woman with an empty pot are considered inauspicious during the ceremonies. In the words of H.A. Rose, 'the notion that a child of living parents is endowed with a higher degree of vitality than an orphan, probably explains all the cases of the employment of such a child in ritual, whether the particular rite is designed to ensure the fertility of the ground

or remove the curse of barrenness or to avert the danger of death and other calamities. Yet it would probably be a mistake to suppose that this notion is always clearly apprehended by the persons who practise the customs. In their minds, the definite conception of superabundant overflowing vitality may easily dissolve into a vague idea that the child of living parents is luckier than other folk.¹⁰ The vitality theory is not only applied to the oracles and special representatives of the deities appointed to perform specific rituals during ceremonies but even the village gods are subjected to it, when they, in their palanquines (*Rathangs*) are taken to the places of their birth or the considered abodes of their parents outside the habitats or even distantly located places from the villages after some intervals with a view to rejuvenate them to work with greater vitality after taking sacred bath or even being energized while staying at particular spots for sometime. The mediums (*Gur, Grokch, Mali*, etc.) of the deities in the villages should have living parents and should not be widowers at the time of their initiation as oracles. The closing of the door of shrines for the period of pollution occurred due to birth or death in the families of any of the major *Kardars* of a temple is also indicative of pollution and vitality theory in the minds of the people. Vitality in the spiritual field is employed in two ways; firstly, the spirit or its representative should be capable of influencing the ritual and leading it to achieve the desired purpose for which it is arranged and, secondly, it should be powerful enough to protect the followers from the negative effects of evil spirits who are believed to haunt the places of ritual or feel attracted to the place of performance of hearing the musical tunes or delighted with good smell of incense. An incoming or invading spirit, if not checked with persuasion, force or abusive and obscene language, is believed to harm the inhabitants and may contribute to cause bad results. A mighty village god, through his medium, disallows minor spirits to enter the place of performance or worship and an unpolluted atmosphere where only upper caste local devotees and the mediums having no objectionable background are allowed to function. He is the harbinger of good crops and prosperity. A sufferer in any way, is devoid of vitality and his presence is believed to affect the outcome of the ceremony to which he is associated. An unfortunate person is considered imperfect and unworthy of inviting good fortunes for others. It is this feeling that contributes to good and bad omens, taboos and considerations relating to time, space, colours and superstitions. These beliefs are, however, very primitive and in strict conformity with animistic conceptions of the remote

past. Growing long hair on the head and having a long beard by the *Gur* (medium) of the deities, to conceal the hair of a child after tonsure or to offer them to some god at his shrine, to place them in a sacred tree, offer them to a stream, are also associated with the idea of protecting and enhancing the spiritual energy. Even bad words and bad thoughts are avoided on sacred ceremonies. In this region, obscenity in words on some permitted occasions, i.e. at the end of a ceremony, with a view to drive away the evil spirits out of the habitats, it is not a taboo. The belief mentioned in the legend relating to Mahasu that he was to come to Una Bhat on the seventh Sunday, testifies the common feeling that Sunday (*Aitwar*) is the day of *Avatar* or incarnation of a divine spirit. In Kullu and some other hill areas, Sunday is believed to be associated with *Avatars* and not with Ravi (Surya or Sun).

Mahasu is not adulated by those who worship other gods. The people of some places feel that terrible Mahasu should better be kept off than to wait for driving him off later. The god Mahasu, when annoyed, is believed to wage war with other spirits, compelling them to accept his supremacy, inflict curse on women to become barren, destroy crops and herds, make the inhabitants quarrelsome, garner the grains, inflict illness on children, cause natural calamities, decimate the stocks of sheep and goats and other domestic animals by way of diseases, make the milching animals dry and create bad weather, thunderstorms and hailstorms, etc. He manifests himself with dreaded dreams and other awful gestures and articulations through natural phenomena. When pleased, he is capable of showering immense bliss in the shape of acquisition of property and wealth by way of known or unknown sources, adding members to a family, allowing rich crops and making the votaries wealthier overnight. He is, thus, a benevolent and a malevolent spirit at the same time. In the words of H.A. Rose, 'Mahasu could afford to be magnanimous towards a foe completely crushed and beaten.'¹¹ He is believed to destroy the houses of non-believers and non-cooperators and fill the huts of his followers with immense wealth. He is assisted by his *wazeers*, the fifty-two *birs* who are further assisted by their subordinate spirits.

Celestial Administration

The system and jurisdictions of village or area, deities afford a striking reflection of the local administrative, ruling, political, religious and social conditions, forming a compact and complex network of superior and

subordinate cults and traditions. Like their rulers, in the social system, the deities often have their Wazeers, ministers (Kardars) and other officials. The village gods act as theocratic rulers, subordinate to none but acting according to the directions of the concerned princely rulers from time to time and having their junior deities as their Wazeers who could be deputed by them to perform such duties as are dictated to them through the *Gur* (mediums) of the concerned devtas. The shrine with the premises of a deity is called *Deem* in Shimla and *Sangthang* in Kinnaur. In Kinnaur, the deity is called *Shu*, whereas in Shimla and Solan, he is called *Deo*. The premises of a shrine are called *R-a-n (Raun)*, i.e. battle or a battlefield which denotes that in primitive times, these complexes served as battlefields and in Kinnaur, the term *Sangthang* or *Santhang* indicates it to be a place meant to serve as *Santhagars* (congregation places) for Buddhist monks. The *Raun* (arena) signifies a sacred and beautiful courtyard. The *deity*, a ruler, takes a round of the entire region of his followers after an interval of one, two or three years or more, to attend to their problems on the spot and ensure proper protection to them. The yatra, so undertaken, is called *Dawala*. *Dawala* is a system of collecting tax or annual offerings. It is a sort of collection of tax for the land owned by the deity in various villages or localities. The *Dawala* is an area in which a particular god is worshipped and where he is believed to own the entire landed property now in possession of his followers or votaries. Each family in the *Dawala* considers its obligation to depute at least one member to accompany the deity during the tour. A goat is sacrificed at every place where the god halts for the night. He stays only at such places which are fixed and scheduled for the purpose long ago.

Mahasu: Legends and Lore – A Local Version

Una Bhat: His Journey to Kashmir

Una Bhat, a poor Brahman, having seven sons, lived in a village near Mendrath with his wife Kailawati. A demon named Kirmir also lived in Poornavat (Poornaut) water tank at Mendrath. Once Kailawati went to take water from the tank. When she started filling her pitcher with water from the tank, the demon appeared and held her with his arm. Shedkulia, the whistling god, saved her with his sword. He suggested her to call Mahasu from Kashmir to get rid of sacrifice loving demon Kirmir who had already taken the lives of her six sons under an agreement of offering

a man as sacrifice to him after every six months to save the life of other villagers. He suggested that Uma Bhat could bring Mahasu brothers from Kashmir to kill the demon.

At Hatkoti

Una Bhat went to Hatkoti and prayed to Hindwan, the ruler and the goddess Hateshwari to help him in his mission of inviting Mahasu brothers from Kashmir. Hindwan dissuaded him to proceed to Kashmir as he was infirm with advanced age and didn't know anything about the route to Kashmir. But he did not agree to his suggestion and insisted upon going ahead with his plan as there was shortage of water in his region and the demon had killed the majority of the population. He shuddered with the idea of sacrifice of his last son. Hindwan, on hearing his tale of woe, agreed to help him. Una Bhat started for Kashmir and was told that in the beginning there is a narrow valley (Sangeri Ghati), where a virgin girl is required to be sacrificed (Kumari Pathi). Laukhiyo and Khikhaiti forests were on the way after the valley. There, poisonous flies kill the passersby. Cats and snakes also posed fatal dangers on the way. After that, one had to walk on foot for long distances. Beyond that, one saw the stars made of iron and bushes of metal difficult to be crossed. From that point, the houses of Mahasu brothers were visible. On reaching there, Una Bhat saw the palaces made of gold with piles of silver treasures.

The garden of Kailoo

Una reached the garden of Kailoo where there was the conference of all the Mahasu brothers. He sought the help of Kailoo to reach the Mahasu brothers. Kailoo suggested him to come in the morning when all the Mahasu brothers would come to take bath. In the morning, he met the Mahasu brothers and related the tale of woe to them. He told them that the demon had killed six of his sons. He prayed to them to accompany him to Kiran area, i.e. his native place. They assured him of help and suggested that he should plough a field with a plough made of Bhaikhal wood, gold and silver. The Shali and Mali bullocks ploughed the fields of Una Bhat near Mendrath. On the destined day, Basik Mahasu, when appeared, had an injury with a portion of plough in one of his eyes. On the second farrow, the Botha Mahasu got injured in his knee and was

unable to walk. On the third line of the plough, Pabasi (Poasi) Mahasu was also injured in his ear. Later, Chalda Mahasu was born. He escaped injury and was quite fit. Last of all, mother Devlaari emerged. A *baoli* (water source) of water from Kashmir was also brought to the place with them. Their sister Baolain (Baoli) also took shape. The four Mahasu brothers had four *Birs* (warriors or attending deities). Shedkulia and Kailoo wazeers were also born. The four *Birs* were born as a result of cutting of various portions of the body of Lord Shiva who did so in anger after being teased by Karmasur, a demon, during his meditation. The four *Birs* were known as Kapla Bir, Kailoo Bir, Kailath Bir and Shedkulia Bir. Lord Shiva asked them to kill demon Karmasur. They chased him and cut his arm at a place now known as Bhujkoti. At Kharamba, his *Kharau* (the wooden footwear) fell and at Mundali, his head was slain. He fled further and the blood of his body dropped at a place from where a river named *Karamnash (Tons)* emerged. After killing the demon, all the four *Birs* came back to lord Shiva and requested him to assign them some errand. The lord asked them to go to Kashmir and stay in a tank till he ordered them to attend to some other job. Obeying him, they went to Kashmir and stayed in a tank.

Ganesha the Winner

According to a mythological reference, when Lord Ganesha was declared to be superior and worthy of worship at the first place after having circumambulated his parents on the back of his vehicle, a mouse, his brother Kartikeya was annoyed on the partial treatment of his parents. Lord Shiva told him that only he had been given a physical manifestation of human flesh and bones. Kartikeya, not pacified with the treatment, started cutting portions of his body and making four shares of the throttled limbs, threw into the sea. These shares were eaten by four Nags residing there. The names of these Nags were Ulal Nag, Vimal Nag, Basuki Nag and Bhaduana Nag. The pieces of limbs consumed by these Nags changed into four princes in the stomachs of the Nags and later were born as four Mahasu brothers. These Mahasu brothers are known as Basik Mahasu, Botha (Sitting) Mahasu, Pabasi Mahasu and Chalda Mahasu. Fifty-two *birs*, who were born out of the drops of blood of the body of Kartikeya include Rang bir, Jang bir, Udai bir, Betal bir, Kilbalu, Tilbalu, Jwad, Banaad, Narsing, Bhairav, Augaatbir, Chharda bir, Kalwa bir, Kali Durga,

Char Devi Kalyani (four manifestations of Kalyani goddesses) and numerous other *birs* and goddesses. All the fifty-two *birs* stayed in the same water tank where demon Karmasur was killed.

According to yet another legend, when the Pandavas left the areas of Jaunsar Bawar, Pashibeel and Devghar and even, about five thousand years earlier to them, this region was occupied by demons who acted according to their will and killed people who challenged them and came in contact with them. These demons were killed and driven away by the Mahasu brothers and they are worshipped as deities for their acts of human welfare and brave deeds.

Kirmir: the demon

Kirmir, the dreaded demon took the life of one person everyday, ate grains of several fields in one stroke and the meat of a goat everyday. The inhabitants, awfully terrified by his actions, approached him to take the life of the sacrificed person offered to him after every six months. Out of seven sons of Una Bhat, six were offered to him turn by turn and the seventh and the last one, namely, Sumaakh, whose image is worshipped with the image of Chalda Mahasu even these days, was about to die as a result of his turn of being offered to the demon. As already mentioned, the name of the wife of Una Bhat was Kailawati. She went to fetch water from Poornavat tank as there was shortage of water in summer. Kirmir demon, on hearing the voice of filling the water from the tank, came out and tried to capture her with his hand. Shedkulia, the whistling god, appeared in the pitcher on hearing the cry of Kailawati who instantly entreated Mahasu for help. He suggested her to approach Mahasu deities for killing the demon.

Una Bhat, on his way to *Hatkoti*, reached a place named Rainkothi where a Rani, whose name was Huraindi, ruled the area. The Rani desisted him from calling the Mahasu brothers saying that they would ruin her kingdom. Una considered it a bad omen and put a branch of Bhaikhhal on his cap to cast off the ill effects of such a suggestion. He reached Majhog village where Nagarjun Majgaal was the ruler. Nagarjun also put him the same question and advised him not to contact Mahasu brothers for the purpose. Una paid little heed to the advice of both the rulers and reached Hatkoti. He contacted Buddha Pundiyan? (Himdiyan *or* Hindwan) and stayed with him. Hindwan asked him to take his meals

but he refused to accept food before getting assurance for help. The ruler accepted his demand and guided him to the route to Kashmir. He told that the path was full of difficulties as high mountains, turbulent streams, wild animals, thick forests full of beasts like tigers, lions, bears, etc., places where ladies played musical instruments and menfolk danced to the tunes and womenfolk also sang and danced as directed by their counterparts, a river full of grass and difficult to be crossed, temples and godowns of gods from where it is impossible to go further were the unusual things on the way.

Shedkulia Bir

Una Bhat overcame these miseries with the blessings of Shedkulia Bir who waited for him at the water tank in Kashmir. Shedkulia concealed him in the godown of Angaar Devta. Afterwards, Una reached the Mahasu brothers who were residing under water in the tank. They agreed to rescue him after reaching Kiran area. Una Bhat was helped by Shedkulia all through and with his mystic powers, he, after closing his eyes, reached Lalwaad village near Mendrath. On reaching his village, he ploughed his field with a golden plough and four Mahasu brothers were born.

Dharamkala, the Mother of Birs (Vir)

First of all, Mother Dharamkala emerged from the earth. One corner of the plough touched the 'Kuchhi' (armpit?) of the mother and, crying with pain, she sat in the lap of her Vir Gudar. After that, Basik Devta (Basik) appeared and he also sat after holding the finger of his Vir, Kapla. He was injured in the eye and being the eldest god of the flesh of Kartikeya, Kapla Vir wanted to be freed by detaching his hand from him. Botha Mahasu was held by his Vir Kailoo (Kamaloo) with his finger. Pabasi Mahasu, who came late, injured his ear with the point of plough and was held by his Vir Kailath. Chalda Mahasu was helped by his Vir Shedkulia who held him by his finger. After this, their sister Balaini (Bolayini) was born. As already mentioned, Birs, who came to manifest themselves following them, included, *Tilbalu*¹, *Kilbalu*², *Bhanikshar*³, *Angaloo*⁴, *Naarsing*⁵, *Kalwa*⁶, *Bhairon*⁷, *Chharda*⁸, *Kali*⁹, *Pashupatinath*¹⁰, *Jaldevta*¹¹, *Kukursi*¹², *Peer*¹³, *Khabaaba*¹⁴, *Rangbir*¹⁵, *Jangbir*¹⁶, *Betaal Vir*¹⁷, *Udambir*¹⁸, *Diludi*¹⁹, *Kilaioodi*²⁰, *Jhaangru*²¹ four goddesses (*Kalyani*), etc. Una paid his respects to them. The four Betals who are said to be the sons of Mata

Kankali are also believed to be *Birs*. They are (i) Naarsing, (ii) Lankura, (iii) Dudadhari and (iv) Kalkoti.

Killing of Kirmir

The Mahasu brothers enquired from Una Bhat the dwelling place of Kirmir Danav. He told them that he stayed in Poornavat water tank. The brothers reached the place in search of him. On seeing them, he belittled his body and tried to escape. While fleeing, he reached Kuddoo Tal where he was caught and killed. He turned into Jivasloo Devta in whose name the goats are sacrificed. The Mahasu brothers conquered Arakot, Kaashte, Bhate, Raitheek where Hurendi was the ruler. The Raja of Majogi was also deprived of his kingdom before they reached Raigi. At Raigi, Shigudia Raigal was the ruler. He had horns of gold. Shedkulia Vir conquered him and got hold of the gold horns and other ornaments.

Chathasheen: The consort of Vishnu

All the deities reached Mendrath. A rich man, namely Natola stayed there. He connived with the demons and informed them about the arrival of human beings. They killed the humans and got their wealth. Devranu and Shakranu were also conquered. They moved towards Hanol where Vishnu was living. His Rani was Chathasheen Devi. Her temple was constructed by the five Pandavas. Vishnu was worshipped in these temples. They found that a musician (*Dhaki*) was playing on musical instruments while the prayer to Lord Vishnu was going on. Mahasu brothers asked him to beat his drums for them. He wanted to know the payment for doing so. Shedkulia told him that he would get double the payment which he got for working for Vishnu. The Dhaki started playing for Mahasu. Vishnu, on finding that his musician had betrayed him, left the temple and the Mahasu gods occupied it. Vishnu was annoyed on seeing Mahasu brothers.

Vishnu: The original god of Hanol

Vishnu asked the reason for the Mahasu's arrival at Hanol. He wanted them to leave the place as they had misled his musician (*Dhaki*). Shedkulia told him that he who was the winner in the fight, would be the owner of that place. He suggested him that there would be battle for nine days

and nine nights and whosoever continued playing with the *Dhar* (continuous flow of gold) of gold owned by him, would be the winner. Vishnu had vast treasure of gold and, as such, he agreed to play with gold for nine days and nights.

Shedkulia played the trick

Vishnu and Shedkulia went to the river side where Shedkulia hypnotised Vishnu and threw sand towards him. It struck his eyes and he could not differentiate whether his adversary was playing with gold or something else. After nine days, the gold owned by Vishnu was exhausted. He, then, asked Shedkulia to let him know about the quantity of gold in their possession. Shedkulia told him that the stock of gold with them was as high as sky and as low as underworld. Vishnu then admitted defeat and, along with his Rani Chattaksheen Devi, left the place for forest. Gila Shishta, a Wazeer of Vishnu, lived at Hanol. He was unhappy on seeing the plight of his lord and challenged the Mahasu brothers for a fight. On the instance of Chalda Mahasu, Shedkulia shot arrows towards him which pieced his body and he died. They occupied his mountain (Shaila/Shila) also.

Khooni Gaad

Later, Mahasu deities reached Khooni Gaad (bloody stream) and went to Nilokhalti where Patko Janjaal was the ruler. They defeated him also. Shedkulia, with his mystic powers, made the door of the cave in which he was living, so small that his head got stuck with it while coming out. He was, thus, killed with miraculous powers of Shedkulia. After bringing Khooni Gaad under their control, the Mahasu went back to Hanol where Junja Raja accepted them as the rulers of the region. Junja was a warrior ruler who had brought several small deities and rulers to his sovereignty. All of them accepted the rule of the Mahasu brothers.

Bagoor ruler

During those days, a ruler was living in Bagoor village. He ordered his subjects to supply the entire quantity of milk of cows and buffaloes to him without leaving even a drop of it to their use in their households.

Once the cow of a woman whose turn was to supply milk to the ruler did not yield milk. She, then gave her own milk denying her child of it. The ruler found more taste in the milk and on inquiry, was told about the real happening. He, then, ordered all the breast feeding mothers to supply their milk to him. This resulted in killing of innocent children and feeding the cruel ruler. His name was Bagta Maneo. The village of Maneoti is attributed to him.

The ruler came to know about the arrival of Mahasu brothers in the region. The whole population had gone to see them at Hanol. The deities came to know about the atrocities of the ruler. They assigned the job of defeating him to Shedkulia. When Bagta Maneo was sitting under a Kail tree, Shedkulia killed him. The people of Bagoor still worship Shedkulia at their place in a temple built in his name.

The great Division

After bringing the whole of Kiran area under their sway, the Mahasu brothers came to Chauradhar, a place located above Tiuni on the border of Himachal Pradesh and Uttaranchal, in order to divide the whole region among them. They allotted the area of Mendrath to their mother Dharamkala (Devlaari according to some other legends). The temple of Dharamkala still exists at Mendrath. Basik demanded Hanol but Botha Mahasu was also interested in it as he had an injured leg. Basik, on hearing the argument of Botha (sitting) Mahasu, agreed to his proposal and wanted to remain a guest at Hanol for one year. Botha also wanted him to stay with him at Hanol for one year at his convenience. The practice still continues. Thus, Hanol was allotted to Botha Mahasu who is still worshipped in the temple constructed by the Pandavas. Shedkulia is the village god of Devghat even now. Kiran area has the following villages:

Maneoti, Dunga, Thamwada, Shawda, Kharog, Bangeori, Kuwa, Thangaar, Thithroli, Jawaach, Kimola, Govar, Ramdada, Telor, Bannaur and Kashak.

Basik's share

Basik got the Bawar and Devdhar areas and Pabasi got Panshibeel in Uttarkashi. Chalda Mahasu didn't get any area as there was no region left now. He felt offended and wanted to go back to Kashmir, his original

place. On seeing him unhappy, the Basik Mahasu gave his Chhatra to Chalda Mahasu and invited him to be his guest in Jaunsar Bawar and Dev Dhar. Pabasi Mahasu invited him to his area Panshibeel for twelve years. He also said that the people of his area would worship him for twelve years. Botha Mahasu also invited Chalda to be his guest while going from one area to the other.

Chalda Mahasu

Chalda Mahasu was now satisfied and agreed to stay on and move from one place to the other in the region. The four sisters of Mahasu became the deities of Balayari, Dhangu, Palasu, etc. Kapla Vir decided to stay with Basik at Akhrait (Akhret). His temple still exists there. He is considered to be a *Bir* of great might. Kailoo Bir decided to accompany Botha Mahasu to Hanol and is also worshipped there. Kailath Bir went towards Dev Van with Pabasi Mahasu. Even now, his temple is there.

Wazeers of Mahasu brothers

Shedkulia accompanied Chalda Mahasu. Thus four Birs got their appointments as wazeers of all the Mahasu brothers. Shedkulia is considered to be the Wazeer of all the Mahasu brothers as he is one of the most powerful attending spirits. His place is at Raigi in Dev Dhar, where he had killed Raigal.

Division completed

The goddess Kali Mata controlled all the four directions and preferred the jungle as her abode. Durga Mata was placed at Hatkoti where her old shrine is also located. Jawad and Banaad were sent to Kotla and Gudar was sent towards Bushehr and Kumarsain. Pars Ram Devta was sent towards Sirmaur, whereas Lankura Vir was sent to Dev Dhar. All the deities who reached late at the site, were detailed to stay with Botha Mahasu at Hanol and obey his orders. All the four Mahasu brothers and other deities are still worshipped in Jaunsar Bawar and Dev Dhar, i.e. in both the regions of Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh. With the passage of time, these deities established their shrines in other areas also.

Kilbalu

According to a legend, Kilbalu, the deity of outcaste communities, especially the Koli, started his journey to Chohara in Rohru in Shimla district. On the way, near the snowclad pass over the mountain, he found that Pabasi Devta, who stayed in Dev Van in Uttarkashi, relaxing in the guise of a snake. Kilbalu asked his identity from him. Both of them became friends and started towards Chohara. On the way, some mountain spirits, who are called Saoni or Kali, met them and invited them to play chess with them. They defeated the goddesses and started towards Chohara. At Siuni Sar, they met Shimniya demon. The Siuni lake was owned by demon Shimniya who didn't allow anyone to take water from it. Both the deities were thirsty and couldn't resist taking water from the lake. In a fight, Shimniya was defeated by them and after some time, he too wished to accompany them to Chohara as their friend. Shimniya became the helper of Kilbalu and the oracle of the deity puts an iron rod (*Baan*) across his nose and cheeks in the name of the demon who does not allow pain or bleeding. The sword and an image of Shimniya is kept by god Kilbalu with him. The Kilbalu images and shrines are in about forty villages in Chuhara valley in Shimla district, including, Shalot, Peja, Khashdhar, Masli, Kharshali, Larot, Gumma, Mandri, Rohal, Chargaon, Jabal, Hatgaon, Jatwari, Diswani, Jangla, Rohru, Janglik, Diyudi, Tangnu, etc.

Deities born

After death, the *Shikha* (hair of head) of Kirmir fell at Netwar. Dev Pokhu was born out of this. His *Chunalu* (heart) fell out at Diudi, where Chasralu was born. His tongue fell in the ravine of Dak village. This place is situated near Shalot village. In Dak, the village deity is Jiwashlu. Jiwashlu is believed to have emerged from the tongue of Kirmir demon. Thus, we see that Pokhu, Chasralu and Jiwashlu are born out of the slaughtered limbs of demon Kirmir. They are all considered brothers and are the spirits of lower plane. Kilbalu and Mahasu cannot be asked to act according to the wishes of human beings.

Shrines of Mahasu in Rohru

In Rohru region of Shimla district, the shrines of Mahasu god are in the following villages:

1.	Khashdhar	-	Chalda Mahasu
2.	Dali	-	Pabasi
3.	Masli	-	Pabasi
4.	Astani	-	Chalda Mahasu
5.	Jatwari	-	Pabasi
6.	Ganwan	-	Pabasi
7.	Jakhi	-	Mahasu, Gorla
8.	Disivani	-	Pabasi and Gadaru
9.	Chhupari	-	Gudaru
10.	Shekhal	-	Mahasu
11.	Bahilad	-	Mahasu
12.	Giltad	-	Gudaru
13.	Thauli	-	Gudaru
14.	Kharshali	-	Pabasi, Boinsar
15.	Dak	-	Pabasi, Gorla, Jiwashlu
16.	Gawas	-	Gudaru
17.	Rohru	-	Shikru
18.	Chilala	-	Mahasu
19.	Theoti	-	Mahasu
20.	Pujarli	-	Mahadev

Chasrala

We have discussed the legend of Chasralu and his cave near Pekha in Rohru. It is interesting to note that Chasralu is worshipped as a village god in Diudi village. According to a common belief, the soul, after leaving the human body, travels to a place known as Chasrala. The place, like Kinnar-Kailash in Kinnaur near which the place of the lord of dead is believed to be located in Raldang range located opposite to Kalpa, is said to be situated in a snowy mountain near Chaunshel peak. Chasrala or Chisrala is located near Maila, Diudi, Tangnu and Chaushel in Rohru tehsil of Shimla district. The myth of Chasralu, is thus, related to god of death and the demon Kirmir of the Mahabharata period. As already said,

Chasralu was an adversary of Lord Mahasu. Chasralu is, thus, the lord of death whose place is known as Chasrala on the high mountain peaks.

Myths in the legend include:

1. Sacrifice of six sons of Una Bhat to demon Kirmar.
2. Hindwan, the ruler of Hatkoti.
3. Hazardous path to Kashmir
4. The garden of Kailu
5. Appearance of Mahasu brothers
6. Injuries to gods with plough damaging the ear, knee and legs
7. *Birs* of superior gods
8. Ganesh gets the head of an elephant
9. Four Nags eating away the flesh of the body of Kartikeya
10. The consumed flesh turns to be a *Bir* (a warrior god)
11. Fifty-two *Birs* serving the principal deities
12. Huraindi, the ruler queen
13. Dharamkala, the mother of gods. She is also known as Devlaari.
14. Chathaksheen, the consort of Vishnu, the god who ruled at Hanol before the arrival of the Mahasu brothers.
15. Shedkulia, the whistling god, plays the trick by converting sand to appear as dust of gold.
16. The door of the cave made smaller with spiritual powers to bar the demon from coming out.
17. Junja, the ruler of Hanol region at the time of the arrival of Mahasu brothers.
18. Bagoor ruler consumed milk of the cows and women, creating a panic among human beings and putting children to death.
19. Division of the region by Dev brothers. Shares of various gods.
20. Kailbalu, a faithful *Bir*.
21. Pekha and Chasralu born out of the limbs of Kirmir. Strange practices of their worship.
22. Chasrala—A place of lord of death.

Conclusion

It is now amply clear that Mahasu brothers wield a great deal of influence in the region of Jaunsar Bawar, Uttar Kashi and Dev Van Uttaranchal, Shimla, Sirmaur and Solan district of Himachal Pradesh. This cult has

reached Kinnaur, Solan and Mandi regions also. Mahasu cult has greatly influenced the folk religion of the northwestern Himalayan region. Some scholars associate with the cult of Buddhism on the grounds that according to them, the image in Hanol temple is believed to be that of Lord Buddha.

According to O.C. Handa, 'the Mahasu devta Temple at Hanol on the Tons in Bawar region of Chakrata Tehsil in Uttaranchal has still preserved its Buddhist tradition, not only in the image of Buddha which people regard as Mahasu Devta, but also in the Kushana-type layout of the original structure now only in a ruined state' (*Buddhist Art and Archaeology*, 1994, p. 178). He mentions that in Lakhawad in Chakrata Tehsil, there is a temple of Mahasu Devta in which the Botha Mahasu is worshipped. The marble image of the deity being worshipped in the temple is of the Buddha in *Bhumi Sparash Mudra* and belongs to the eighth century AD. At Basoi, situated about 31 kms away from Chakrata, there is a temple of Botha and Chalda Mahasu. In the main temple of Mahasu at Hanol, the images of Chalda, Devlari, Botha Mahasu, Kapla Vir and Shedkulia (front line) and those of Pabasi, Kailu and Natari (the polyandrous wife of Mahasu brothers) are worshipped.

Pokhu Devta at Naitwar is a ghost deity born out of the limbs of demon Kirmir whose *Pujari* worships him while turning his back towards the image and looking in the opposite direction.

Madhu Jain (*The Abode of Mahashiva*, 1995, p. 78) is of the opinion that at Hanol, the Buddha idol itself represents Lord Mahasu. She asserts that, 'similarly at Sarahan, Shirgul, i.e. Shri Guru (Padmasambhava) has come to be considered as Shiva although an image of the Buddha cited in *Bhumi Sprasha Mudra* exists at the altar'.

Keeping in view the living folkloristic traditions of the region and the system of worship conducted by the Pujaris and Pandits, it is, however difficult to agree to the assumptions that the images in these shrines are of Buddhist religion and Buddhism remained the practised religion of the masses as the myths, legends and rituals related to these cults do not substantiate this hypothesis. The cults nowhere link themselves with Buddhism on the whole. These can, however, be associated with the community of the Khashas who are staunch believer and followers of the Mahasu deities. The historical association, as referred to earlier, also does not fall in line with these assertions.

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CHAPTER FIVE

The Cult of Shirgul

Shirgul or Shrigul is a widely worshipped deity in Shimla and Sirmaur districts, with his votaries in Solan and Jaunsar Bawar areas also. He is a historical figure believed to have been born at Shawga or Shaya village in the present Rajgarh Tehsil in Sirmaur district in a ruling family. His father Bhukroo was the ruler of Rajgarh. Guga, the snake god; Dum devta of Kuthan (Guthan) in Shimla; Bijat Raj devta of Sarain (Sarahan) in Shimla below Churdhar and Chandeshwar Devta of Sirmaur region are said to be his contemporaries in addition to Bhangain and Bijayi goddesses of the same area. Bhukroo, the father of Shrigul, was earlier issueless and went to Pandit Desh Nath alias Deshu of Kashmir with a wish to be blessed with a son. He was accompanied by Roona Thakur of Dhar Thana. They reached Raina Bari Mohalla of Srinagar after two months' journey and stayed in Jogi Lankar suburb there. The Pandit was a great Tantric. He suggested the ruler to marry a second time in a Brahman family to beget a son. He gave him some *vibhuti* (ashes) from the *Havan kund* along with some dry fruits to be served to both the Ranis.

On returning to Shaya, Bhukroo married Dudma, the sister of Loz Brahman of Manaun. The name of his earlier wife was Damyanti. The *vibhuti* and dry fruits were given to both the Ranis as advised by the Pandit and both of them were blessed with male children. Dudma gave birth to Shirgul (Shrikul), whereas the name of Damyanti's son was Bijat Raj. Later, both the Ranis gave birth to a female and a male child, respectively. Rani Damyanti's parents were at Sarain and her daughter was named, Bijayi. The second son of Dudma was named Chandeshwar. Rani Damyanti passed away soon after the birth of Bijayi. Rani Dudma gave birth to yet another female baby and after her death, her brother Loz Pandit took her children to his house where they were maltreated by his wife, the maternal aunt, by not being served with suitable food. The Rana of Sarain took the children of Rani Damyanti to his house. Bijat and Bijayi were comfortable at his house but Shirgul, Chandeshwar and

their sister had to face odds while tending the domestic animals. Shirgul was asked to take the sheep and goats towards Bathau Dhar and Chandeshwar to go towards Tali-Tisri with the cattle and the sister to take the cows towards some different direction. This was done with a view to kill them but they miraculously escaped the trap. Their cattle also didn't fear wild animals.

Bhukroo, the father of the children, passed away at Thod while coming back from Badrinath-Kedarnath. His shrine and Samadhi still stand there. Disgraced by the maternal aunt over drinking water, Shirgul produced a spring of water by striking the earth with his foot. The balls of Sattu containing insects inside were struck against a boulder near Arkhati Nalah, a place where it can be seen even upto now in a fossilized form. A water mill started moving without water due to spiritual powers exhibited by Shirgul. Apprehending a violent storm and rain, Shirgul advised his brother Chandeshwar to take back the cattle from Tali-Tisri. On foreseeing that there was little time left, he took away some clay and pebbles from the peak and threw them to carve out a cave (hole) to let the cattle pass through it to reach their place safely. Those cattle who feared to enter it, were turned into boulders that still lie at the site. The size of the cattle was reduced to suit to the size of the cave to allow them to pass through it. Shirgul did it with his supernatural powers and the cave is called the Devta-Daav, i.e. the cave of god. It is believed that the smoke of the fire burnt at Tali Tisri, the door of the cave, appears on the other side of the mountain near Phagu. Chandeshwar and his sister, leaving the cattle with their maternal aunt, were advised to leave for Manaun. Dev Shirgul disappeared and in the meanwhile black clouds with thunderbolts appeared on the sky and a violent storm lashed the area. The hailstorm included iron and stone sleet, the traces of which can still be found around Shaya.

Shirgul—The lord of weather

Shirgul, the lord of clouds and thunderstorm wiped out the clouds and bad weather after a short while and a bright sun appeared. The name of the sister of Shirgul and Chandreshwar was Gwali or Garali. She is also called Kuyat, or Kujyat as it was soon after her birth that her mother passed away and, thus, she proved to be inauspicious for her mother. She is also called Gudali, a corruption of the term Gawali (tenderer of cattle). Her shrine is located at Panjah village in Pargana Molil in Sirmaur and

her image was traced alongwith those of Bijat Dev and Bijayi Devi at Bholna Khad during the sixteenth century.¹

During the course of the storm, bees covered the whole of the area and Gudali also turned into a bee with her mysterious powers. The strings and ropes with which the cattle were tied turned into snakes with the supernatural powers of Chandeshwar. The bees attacked the maternal aunt, stuck to her body and she died due to snake and bee bite. On the initiation of Chandeshwar, the sister came back to her original form while Shirgul invoked Goddess Durga to pacify his sister and help her to return to her original shape and form at Manaun.

Shirgul, who had appeared at Manaun after his disappearance from Tali Tisri peak, tossed some grains in the sky and helped his sister into her original form. On seeing the developments, the people came to know that all the three young children were blessed with divine powers. *Kheer* was offered to them by the people and they found that it was shared by the invisible goddess Durga also. *Kheer* is offered at Chandeshwar Shrine since then. The people insisted that Shirgul should accept the throne of his father Bhukroo at Shaya. He accepted the offer and after his coronation ceremony, visited Thaud (place), where his father had breathed his last. He went to Manaun to see his ailing maternal uncle, Loz Pandit. He cured his patients with his supernatural bliss and applied *vibhuti* (sacred ash) on their foreheads. Chandeshwar also treated patients suffering from incurable diseases. They got deified during their lifetimes and their devotees spread all around.

Churia Danav and Chaukhat Demon

At Churdhar, a peak situated at an elevation of 11,966 ft above the mean sea level in the outer Himalayas, there lived a demon called Churia Danav during those days. Another demon, named Chaukhat Danav, dwelt at Chaukhat peak located at a distance of about twenty kilometres facing Churdhar. Both of them were contemporaries and related to each other. Churdhar or Chur peak is called Topi Dhar, Sardhanti, Stamu, Jau-Lehsun Tiba Chur Chandni, Ling Tiba, and Lingo ra Tiba also.²

Shirgul and Chandeshwar decided to drive away Churia and Chaukhat demons as they were torturing the people. Bijat Raj also assured his brothers of his help in the matter. While going towards Churdhar with his armymen, Shirgul sharpened his sword at Bathaudhar. A stone on

which it was sharpened, is known as 'Bhalekhar Pole'. It is placed near the forest guesthouse at Bathaudhar and worshipped by the followers and the cuts on it testify to the event. Piungla, an ogress, served as *Chowkidar* (sentry) to the peak. On seeing the army, she tried to attack it but could not succeed. Her conch shell (*Shankh*) was turned into a stone. Shirgul transformed her also into a boulder. Both these stones are called 'Shankha-Ghori'. At Tisri, a fierce fight took place and Goddess Mahakali helped the army of Shirgul in the guise of bees. The bees sucked the blood of the demons produced by Churia Danav with his magic powers. Demon Churia decided to leave Churdhar and fly away via Kala Bagh, where he was obstructed by Bijat Raj. Bijat became unconscious due to the blow of the demon who went down and entered a deep gorge (*nalab*) below. The gorge is called 'Charoli Nalah'. Shirgul, with the help of magic clay thrown on all directions, produced clouds and thunderbolt (*vajra*) which followed the demon in the gorge. He was killed at Sainj and the hole through which he passed to that place, is a water channel now. It is called 'Ol khad' and water disappears in it even now. The hole was created by demon with his supernatural powers and thunderbolt followed him through it. This hole is called 'Ol' and Asrau Radoo. *Kheer* was offered by Shirgul to the hovering bees, a manifestation of Goddess Mahakali. Shirgul, who was much worried about the state of health of his brother Bijat Raj, also felt exhausted and became unconscious. Chandeshwar wanted to touch and lift him but a celestial voice was heard saying, 'Don't touch him'. A legend goes to say that with the divine powers of the Goddess Mahakali and his own celestial bliss, he went to Yampuri, the court of the lord of death. He, along with Bijat Raj, the partial incarnation of Lord Indra, came back and Bijat was imbibed with spiritual powers to regain consciousness. He is considered to have control over death and is called Ziproo Deo (the lord of death) also, but whether he is the incarnation of Lord Yama, is not proved by myths and legends, whereas there are folkloristic traditions that at the time of the birth of Bijat Raj, Debu Pandit, a Tantric, invoked Lord Indra to relieve Rani Damyanti of labour pains and the lord touched the mother with his *vajra*.³ The *vajra* (thunderbolt) invoked by Shirgul and Bijat followed and chased the demon. This time too the thunderbolt was used as a weapon to frighten the cruel maternal aunt and to exhibit supernatural phenomena.

Offering of kheer

The *kheer* to be offered to the goddess every alternate years, is prepared with basmati rice produced at Phagu *kyar*, a place where Shirgul had the first experience of his divine powers. The basmati rice is sown in 'Raj Kunwar ka khet' and 'Teeka ki Bandhi' fields at Phagu *kyar* and this is separated from the chaff while rubbing with the hands only. No other method is applied to extract the grains. In order to observe the utmost sanctity in the ritual, the basmati rice secured from the particular fields mentioned above and extracted by way of rubbing with hands only, has to be cooked in cow milk to be turned into *kheer* for use of the divine spirit. The milk of an ordinary cow could not be used for preparing this special type of offering. A special cow reared by Chhabroni Rajput for the purpose was called 'Bedaagi Gaaye' (sacred or unblurred cow). The Bedaagi Gaaye should have the following qualities:

1. The tail of the cow should not be cut.
2. Horn of the cow should not be broken or damaged.
3. Calf or the young one of the cow should not have died.

The woman who milked the cow should observe fast for one week prior to extraction of the milk. She should take her bath before milking the cow and should have led a *bedag* (pious) life and should belong to a respectable family, where there is no antisocial tradition and period of pollution due to birth or death during the days of ceremony.

Place of birth of Bijat Raj

Bijat Raj, the deity of Sarain was born at Banga Pani, a place located on the way to Sarain from Shaya. Rani Damyanti Devi was on her way to her parents' house at Sarain when the labour pains started and she gave birth to Bijat Raj. The *Jatar* (group of pilgrims), while going to Churdhar for worship of the goddess, stay at Banga Pani for the night. On the second day morning, the procession moves to Behrog, a spot where Shirgul fought against Churia danav. When the *Jatar* halts at Banga Pani, the night is considered an auspicious occasion to milk the cow at around two a.m. in the early morning at Shaya.

Basmati and sacred milk for the Ceremony

After milking the cow, the extracted milk is taken to the upper storey of the shrine. A man at the upper storey takes the milk to the roof with the

help of his assistant through a *Sandhraali* (a small ventilator). The *Kinkar* who is also called Gurnita, is the medium acting as an oracle of the deity when the spirit possesses him. He waits for the milk at the roof and on receiving it, puts it in a vessel (*Charoo*) made of copper, holding the small pack of basmati rice in one of his hands. The sacred basmati rice, after being taken to the roof, is believed to have been imbibed and sanctified with the *Hawa* (*ruh* or spirit), the soul of the god. He starts directly to Churdhar with these objects to be offered to the deity at the peak. It is believed that the Goddess Mahakali accompanies him all the way and whosoever meets him on his journey, has to face the wrath of the goddess. It is considered safe to cover the maximum distance to the place before the day break, as in that case, the fear of coming across passersby is minimized. It is not the Kali herself who is believed to accompany the Kinkar but he, at that time, is believed to have become the *Vahan* (vehicle) of the goddess and is not auspicious for the on lookers.⁴ Once the Kinkar was not allowed by shepherds (*bhadaale*) and their herd to cross the way and he got late. On reaching Tisri, he found that a strong wind was blowing. It gradually turned into a violent storm and terrible cloud burst. All the sheep and their owners were struck by thunderbolt and died as if sacrificed in the name of the goddess. The Kinkar, awestruck with the experience, decided to perform penance and joining both of his feet in a typical way to form a hearth, prepared *kheer* on it. After putting the *kheer* in a vessel, he started towards the peak. On reaching Ling-ka-Tiba, he found that the vessel was empty and the *kheer* was accepted by the goddess. Since then, the people fear facing the Kinkar and he also tries to avoid them. A goat is sacrificed on his arrival at Behrog. The *Jatar* (procession) consists of only such persons in whose families there is no pollution due to birth or death during that period. It is also kept in mind that the consorts of the accompanying members are not in their menstruation cycle during those days, as such conditions are also considered unworthy to undertake worship.

According to a legend, during the eighteenth century, Dharma and Deva were accompanying the *Jatar*. The wife of Dharma was in her menstruation cycle but he didn't want to disclose it. He accompanied the Kinkar Molyan to the peak and offered *kheer* to the goddess. He was blown off in a violent storm and his body was not traced. The practice of offering *kheer* has since been abandoned and the images are bathed and worshipped. It is believed that Chuhru, a *chowkidar* appointed by Shirgul to watch the visitors, lived near the peak.

Invitation to visit Delhi

Shirgul and Chandeshwar, along with some other rulers and known persons, were invited to Delhi Darbar by the then rulers without assigning the reason for doing so. According to some legends, this might have taken place some time during the thirteenth century, as Qutb-ud-din Aibak, who ruled the country during the period 1206-10 AD, has been described by historians to be 'in possession of almost the whole of northern India as Lieutenant of his master and his representative in India'.⁵ Habibullah, in his book *The Foundation of Muslim Rule in India*⁶ described the position in 1206 in these words, 'the Turks had overrun the whole of north India, but on Muizzudin's death, found themselves in effective possession only of Sind and parts of the Punjab and the Gangetic valley with Rajput resistance increasing in extent'. Ibn-Batuta, the Moorish traveller of the fourteenth century, does not include the name of Aibak in the list of Muslim sovereigns of India. According to historical accounts, the coronation of Aibak took place in 1206 AD, but he is not counted among the Sultans of Delhi and no currency issued by him, is available. Aram Shah (1210-1211) and Iltumish (1211-1236) succeeded Aibak. The Rajputs did their best to drive away the Turks after the death of Qutb-ud-din Aibak but Iltumish succeeded to bring them under his domain. There is a reference that, 'it was found difficult to defeat a local tribe which was fighting under their chief named Bartu or Pirthu. The Turks were defeated by them on many occasions and more than a lakh of the troops were destroyed by them. It was only after the death of Pirthu that the local tribes were subdued'.⁷ It is, however, not clear whether Bartu or Pirthu was a leader of some Himalayan tribe, but the account establishes that the local rulers were engaged in a stiff battle against the Turks and Shirgul might have been one of them. Historian Minhaj-us-Siraj described Iltumish as a virtuous, kind-hearted sovereign who was matchless towards the learned and the diviners and a great 'protector of the lands of God' and a 'helper of the servants of God'. These assertions indicate that he was considerate towards the individuals blessed with divine powers and it may be possible that he invited such people to Delhi. The folkloristic evidences prove that Shirgul, Chandeshwar, Dum and some other such extraordinary persons were invited to Delhi. It is, however, not possible that these heroes were given the reception they deserved as according to the legends more than thirty persons accompanied them to Delhi and

reached there after ten days' journey. Some instances such as slaughtering of a cow before them and the deception case by a *bania* (businessman) to cheat the customers from the hilly region seem to have been added later to make the legends more appealing.

Shirgul and Chandeshwar met Dum Thakur of Kuthaan and Guga Chauhan in jail. All of them possessed mystical powers. It is, however, not based on authentic records whether Guga Chauhan was imprisoned by the Turks. He was contemporary of Shirgul. Shirgul made Bhangayan, a sweeprress, as his god-sister and sought her help to free him from the jail after untying his leather handcuffs and iron chains. It is a common belief that he could not free himself from leather handcuffs as the supernatural powers diminish if leather is touched with teeth. He, in that case, required someone else to help him. Guga Chauhan freed Shirgul after cutting the leather chains and handcuffs with a knife supplied by Bhangayan, the sweeprress, through the ventilator. He then came out of the cell in the guise of a snake. The *chowkidars* outside the jail went to sleep with his divine vibrations and he unlocked the cells to enable Shirgul and others to come out. All the locks opened at Guga Chauhan's touch. Since he used his teeth to cut some of the leather chains, Shirgul desired him to stay with him but not to touch him as he was polluted with this action, though the former restored his lost supernatural powers.

After getting liberated from prison, Shirgul, Chandeshwar, Dum, Guga and some other celestial personalities', their physical manifestations, halted under a peepal tree in north Delhi near the present Chandni Chowk. The Mohammandan ruler (name not indicated), alarmed with the news of fleeing of the prisoners, directed his police force to launch a massive hunt to locate the culprits. On reaching the spot, the soldiers were amazed to see them in police uniforms. Confused by this, they took their own men accompanying them as culprits. The policemen shot dead their own companions and let the fleeing prisoners go. Shirgul and his fellow men showed their mystic capabilities in curing patients suffering from incurable diseases. Shirgul, who was Anshavtaar (partial incarnation) of Lord Shiva, threw some clay towards the sky and caused a violent storm and rain. The rulers, having come to know of their supernatural powers, offered them jobs in the administration, which they declined. The place where they stayed and displayed their miracles was named Fatehpuri, an area near Chandni Chowk. The peepal tree under which the divinities relaxed, still exists near Fatehpuri Masjid and people pay their obeisance

to the gods there. In the hill regions there was no regular system of sending messages and information through messengers. As the distances were covered only by walking on foot or while using horses, a unique Tantric method known as *Gohri* or *Gohdi* was used by experts or those blessed with magical powers.

Chuhru, the *chowkidar* of Churdhar peak, sent a *Gohri*, a stone tied to a letter which fell on the peepal tree and came down to Shirgul Deo sitting beneath it. The message contained in it, conveyed that Chaukhat Danav was torturing Chuhru and his family members who were hiding under a boulder and the demon wanted to attack Churdhar peak. *Gohri* is also called *Chaakhli* in some areas. The practice is no more in vogue now and this legendary system of conveying messages is known to none these days but people in Jubbal, Sirmaur and Shimla areas speak of this strange phenomena which is said to have been effective till the previous century. Some references of this are available in Tantric literature relating to Bajrothi and Satkal. The message conveyed that the *Gohri* be returned after confirmation but the people who were present to witness the phenomena insisted on keeping it as a token of memory. Shirgul agreed to their request and it is believed that the stone is still kept and worshipped in a temple in Fatehpuri. It conveyed that everything, including food, energy and weapons, was exhausted and Chuhru's concern caused worries. A small shrine under the peepal tree at Fatehpuri might be related to this event but it is not possible to associate or testify to correlate the happenings with the present situations at that place.

The Turk rulers honoured the heroes with female horses each in addition to swords and *dhal*. They, however, refused to be accompanied by security forces of the rulers and wanted to start alone. Bhangayan, who had helped them also appeared and wished to accompany them. She flew in the sky in the guise of a black cloud and horrible storm. Her unbearable radiance would make the onlookers unconscious. All the creatures felt restless due to this development and prayed to Shirgul not to allow her to act in that manner. He, getting outraged, divested her of her divine powers and she fell on the ground. Later, the powers were restored to her with a stipulation that she was not to misuse them. Shirgul desired her to follow his directions in future, which she is doing even now. He wanted her to act for the welfare of the people.⁸ Her temple is at Haripur Dhar in Sirmaur.

Panchkula

The five deities of the hills who started from Delhi after their imprisonment, included (i) Shirgul Deo, (ii) Chandeshwar Deo, (iii) Dum (Doom) Thakur, (iv) Guga Pir, and (v) Mahasu. Bhagayan (according to some Bhangayen) was flying above in the sky in the form of a black cloud. On reaching a plain spot by evening, Shirgul invoked Goddess Chandika and sought her help by saying that Chaukhat Danav had attacked Churdhar and was torturing his followers to avenge the death of his brother Churia Danav. The goddess assured them of her help and vanished. On their way back to the hills, the five *devtas* halted at Panchkula, the place of five 'kula-isht' 'kula' means village or clan and 'isht', the desired deity). Kula-isht is the clan or habitat deity and the term 'Panchkula' indicates 'the place of five *kulas* or deities'.⁹ The hill people, going to the cities in the plains, used to stay at Panchkula, a sacred place for them, for the night and it developed as a small town in the sub-montane region.

The Goddess Chandika was invoked by Shirgul at this place and a small temple 'Chandi Mandir' was raised here in sweet memory of the event. Around Chandi Mandir, a small Cantonment area in the vicinity of Panchkula has come up. On the ensuing morning, Chandika, as Kali or Kalika, appeared in the form of bees to kill the demon. Shirgul pacified the goddess and prayed to her to come to their help when they invoked her. The place where Kalika had appeared in the form of bees, is now called Kalka. The place is situated in the outer Himalayan foothills. Before reaching Shaya, Shirgul and his companions halted at Gohra for the night. With the help of the accompanying deities and war heroes, Chaukhat Danav was defeated and the family members of Chuhru rescued. The deity, after throwing a handful of clay towards the sky and causing rain and thunderbolt, converted the demon and his allies into boulders which are still lying below the peak. Under the spell of the deity, the demon could not remove the boulders to kill Chuhru as they increased in weight and size and became heavier. Chuhru and his family members were turned into invisible beings which helped them to escape the eyes of the demon. The female horses (mares) of the gods reached the spot near the peak with *pavanveg* (speed of air) to save the lives of their followers. The mare on whom Shirgul rode, was wheatish (*Sanwali*) in colour and later it turned into a stone which is worshipped by the devotees,

who offer flowers and coins to it before reaching the Chur peak. Guga attacked the demon in the guise of python (*Ajgar*) but he would not yield. He was capable of changing forms and finding the situation wanting, Shirgul invoked Goddess Mahamaya, whose *vahan* (vehicle) appeared at once, lashing the peaks with storm and black smoke. A dazzling light engulfed the peak and deprived the demon of his magic powers. The head of the demon was severed by the hero with his sword and the cuts so inflicted can be seen on a boulder which is believed to be the physical body of the demon. The boulder is lying at Harshi Pairi near the place of Sanwali Ghorī on the way to Churdhar above Kalabagh. Harshi Pairi (a sacred-staired climb) is a steep ascent but the devotees cover the spot as Shirgul treaded the path.

Shedkulia

The headless waist of the demon ran away towards Chaukhat peak and nobody knows where it stopped afterwards. The mountain ranges of Churdhar, the highest peaks in the outer Himalayas, are known as Chaukhat, Girtoo, Kharapathar, Khadrāla, Sungri, Maurar, etc., part of Kailas range of the higher Himalayas. According to various legends still available in the folklore of the region, Shirgul and Bijat destroyed the waist of the demon by creating a thunderbolt and striking the demon with it and threw it down in a gorge near Girtoo across Giri Ganga. It is believed that the spirit of the demon still haunts Chhajpur mountain range but doesn't dare go back to the domains of Shirgul and Bijat Raj. Chhajpur range is less in elevation (11,336 ft) as compared to Churdhar range (11,966 ft). The headless demon is called Bانشira (*binshira* or without head) and wanders in the region located between Theog, Narkanda, Khadrāla, etc., and has been known terrified the inhabitants several times since then. According to a folksong quoted by Dulla Ram Chauhan,¹⁰ Mahasu deity—with a view to relieve his followers from his menace,—allotted him a place near Rai tree at Chhajpur and Shedkulia (the whistling god), the assistant of Mahasu, debarred him of leaving the place allotted to him. In Jubbal, this spirit is still appeased with an offering of a goat at the time of *jag* (*yajna*) and other ceremonies relating to Mahasu devta.

Shedkulia, the Bir (warrior) of Mahasu materializes the wishes of the deity. He is also known as Devta Banaad. Some years ago, when Shedkulia,

was displeased with his followers due to some omissions committed by him, he let loose the Banshira who not only terrified the people but put six or seven of them to death after frightening them. The votaries of Banaad were so scared that a ceremony was arranged to propitiate Banaad and to bring Shedkulia around. About two hundred goats and rams were sacrificed. The ceremony of this type is called 'Pooj'. According to a belief, Banshira spirit rolls like a football and frightens the people.

Bhangayan

Bhangayan or Bhagayen rules over Ilaqa Mohil in Sirmaur. On her request to extend the domain allotted to her as only some villages would not suffice her, she was allowed by Shirgul to accept animal sacrifice from her followers anywhere and help them lead a prosperous and satisfied life. It is believed that she informs Shirgul before leaving her domain and never tortures her votaries. She, however, doesn't cross over to the areas of Shirgul, Bijat and Dum without their permission. She also consults other deities of respective domains when prayed by the followers in distress and invited to accept offerings. The image of the goddess in her shrine at Haripur Dhar, faces Churdhar, the direction of Shirgul who wanted her to have a vigil of her area on all times. It is interesting to note that any one requesting the goddess to visit his dwelling or area outside her domain, is required to offer *Chheed* (tax or money for permission) in the name of Shirgul. *Chheed* money amounts to one Rupee and the assigned coin or note is kept separate till it is offered to the deity in his shrine at the earliest convenience. The followers believe that after the ritualistic token offering of *Chheed* money, the goddess initiates action in favour of the votary and destroys his adversaries. She is believed to cause bad health to the domestic animals of the family against whom she is invoked. This is done to establish the prowess of the goddess and if the indication is not adhered to, she causes calamities on the family. The sufferer then goes to a *kinkar* or a purohit to find out the cause of his loss. On coming to know that it was due to the curse of goddess Bhangayen, the head of the family may try to appease her with a sacrifice of a goat, and if accepted, she leaves the family. The goddess is believed to be cruel and, as such, people are terrified of her. It appears that due to her harsh approach, the folk mind has tried to find solace in the idea that she acts according to the directions of Shirgul.

Shiv Linga at Churdhar

During the ancient times, there was scarcity of water at and around Churdhar peak and Shirgul wanted to do away with it. He went to the top alone and spread mist on every side of the peak. He caused such a violent storm that none could withstand it. Bijat, who was assisting him in the endeavour, suggested the people to go down beyond Behrog. When the population reached Behrog, the storm advanced towards the east and vanished, leaving the peak glittering. On Mansarovar, a peak facing Churdhar towards the higher Himalayas in the east, a storm started emerging and gradually advanced towards the Churdhar peak. The peak was unclean due to the dwellings and rule of demons in the past. Heavy rain and violent storm sanctified it. Shirgul stretched his hands and a mysterious Shiv linga appeared on them. He placed it at the water source at Kalabagh.

Shirgul disappeared after placing the Shiv linga at the site and reached Goruwa village situated at a distance of about three kilometres away from Sarain. Two Brahman brothers who lived there with their mother, thinking that somebody had come to demand *sidoo* and *ghee* from them, tried to put him off. Shirgul asked the mother to send her sons to Churdhar peak next morning and left the place in a hurry.

The old lady went inside and, to her surprise, found that the *sidoos* (a special preparation) she was preparing, had turned into cowdung cakes and the pot of *ghee* was empty. She rushed outside to invite Shirgul to take his food with them. He had gone a bit far off and hearing her voice said, 'I am not hungry and won't take my food but you would get back what has been got lost'. On coming back, she found everything at its proper place. The sons of the woman started to Churdhar peak as desired by the miraculous man. They could not trace their way beyond Halde Jubbar, a place where the earth shakes on jumping on it. The grassy lawn is marshy from inside and appears as if a separate patch of land is placed on the spot.¹¹ They relaxed under a tree for a while and to their surprise, found that a continuous line of moving ants was paving its way upward to the peak. Driven by inner impulse, they decided to follow it, and thus, reached Kalabagh.

Shaoo and Shunkoo

On reaching Churdhar peak, Shaoo and Shunkoo (the two brothers) were asked by Shirgul to perform the duties of priests and architects.

They didn't know anything and expressed their ignorance about their jobs. Shirgul threw a pebble at a point where a line of ants was moving and making a circle surrounding the Shiv linga and demarcating the covered area of the shrine proposed to be built. When the temple was ready, people started flocking to it. Shirgul told the followers that even a small piece of stone or a pebble taken from Churdhar, and properly worshipped, would be as sacred as a visit to Churdhar peak, the abode of the deity. The pieces of stones taken from Churdhar are worshipped as symbols of Shirgul in the habitats in the area. Shirgul is the presiding deity of Churdhar peak and is believed to control the weather and bless the people with prosperity and happiness. Bijat is the deity of Sarain, whereas Chandeshwar is the village god of Manaun in Sirmaur.

Rabbu and Chheenu

Rabbu, son of Devi Ram Wazir, a follower of Shirgul, constructed a water tank at Johnra village, where water gushed with the supernatural powers exhibited by Shirgul. Rabbu is the junior deity at Johnra. Chheenu, another son of Wazir Devi Ram, who was entrusted the responsibility of administration in Shaya state after the demise of Bhukroo, the father of Shirgul, is the Wazir of Bijat Raj at Sarain. Bijat ruled over the parganas of Hamal, Chehta, Chandlog, Chandna, Satohta, Piyunja, Newal, Shaak, Chanju, Badgaon, Shantha, Tharoch, etc., Parganas of Jubbal state, Ladri and Kangra Parganas of Jaunsar Bawar in Uttaranchal, which were transferred to that state and upto 1910 formed a part of Sirmaur State.

Like his brother Shirgul, Chandeshwar also disappeared at Churdhar peak. The area of Rabbu, as divided by Devi Ram, includes Bahal, Jakholi, Balsan, Ghund, Ratesh, Pajhol, etc., and the area allotted to Chheenu comprises Hamal and Chanju etc. located on the other side of Churdhar mountain. Rabbu constructed a temple of Shirgul at Johnra. Images of Shirgul and Bijat were installed by Chheenu in the shrine constructed by him with the assistance of the followers at Sarain. At Shaya, the images of Shirgul and Chandeshwar were prepared and installed by Devi Ram Wazir, the father of Chheenu and Rabbu.

The images from all the above places were taken in processions to Hardwar for dip in the sacred Ganges before installation in the respective shrines. The procession proceeded via Thaud, a place where Bhukroo was cremated and the images placed at his Samadhi for some time with a view to allow them to pay their homage to him. At Shaya, the palace of Bhukroo

Maharaj was converted into his shrine and after taking a dip at Hardwar, the images were taken to Churdhar for a sacred bath and purification, prior to their installation in respective shrines.

As already mentioned, during the regime of the Slave Dynasty (1206-1290 AD), there were social upheavals and the rulers wanted to convert people to Islam. The period of Qutb-ud-din Aibak (1206-1210) witnessed the emergence of brave and divine heroes. Iltumish (1211-1236) imprisoned them and his government had to suffer setbacks due to their actions. The Khilji dynasty (1290-1320) was not so cruel towards Hindus but during the Tuglaq dynasty, Feroz Shah Tuglaq imposed Jazia tax on Hindus and invaded parts of present Himachal Pradesh during 1360 AD, destroying places of worship, looting the shrines and damaging the images at various places, including Jwalamukhi temple in Kangra from where he fled with considerable booty. It was during these periods that the people put some images under the earth or in caves and gorges to save them from the invaders.

The images traced

The images of Bijat Dev and his two sisters, Bijayi and Gadai, were concealed in a cave in Bholna Gad (ravine). The place is situated at a distance of about six kilometres from Haripur Dhar in Mohil area in Shilai Tahsil of Sirmaur district. Feroz Shah ruled upto the year 1388 AD and tortured the Hindus. Sayyad and Lodhi rulers (1414-1526) also misbehaved with the Hindus. The inferences and historical records mention the cases of atrocities committed on Hindus, but it is difficult to say with authority about the most cruel of the rulers who compelled the followers of Shirgul and Chandeshwar to bury their images under the earth. These images were, however, traced by a scheduled caste person of Kalesu community at Phagu Kyar when these struck his plough in a field. A legend goes that on seeing them, he tried to extract them from beneath the earth, but on hearing a celestial voice commanding him not to touch them but to inform a man from Dhari village, and another from Shawgi village, he had to abandon the idea. He informed the residents of both the villages and a man of Dhari village was possessed by the spirit of Shirgul. The medium, while in trance uttered, 'Dev Mukhdet' which means, 'the sacred appearance of the deity'. Whenever a spirit, after possessing the medium, wants to inform the audience of its arrival, these words are uttered by the oracle. The deity appointed the people of Dhari

village as his Kinkars. The Dharu Rajputs of Dhari village were made the Pujaris of the temple at Shaya and the family of the person who was possessed by the spirit was appointed as Kinkar of the god. The inhabitants of Shawgi (Neri and Sanohat) were asked to maintain the accounts of the shrine and act as managers. The tradition continues. The *devta* collects his share of grains and money from the followers every year. The imposition of standard *patha* as measurement in respect of Shirgul at Shaya, was decided by Kainthua Sayana during the regime of Raja Karam Prakash (1771-1815 AD). A *patha* of iron was made by him and the *koot* (tax in grains) of the deity, was collected after weighing with that *patha*. During 1888 AD, the great grandson of Kainthua Sayana, Dhian Singh Zaildar got a new *patha* made for the purpose. It was made by Madaik, a goldsmith of Chopal village and is still in use. The perpetuity of the management, including collections in the form of cash and kind, is typical tradition with the institution of village gods in the region.

Shrines of Shirgul

According to an assessment, Shirgul is one of the most powerful deities, next only to Mahasu in the region. There are numerous big and small temples of this deity and the people living in Bahal, Jakholi, Hamal, Chanju, Chandog, Shak, Pundar, Bamta, Tharoch, Newal, Piyujunta, Chehta, Stota, Chanana, etc.; parganas in Chopal Tehsil of Shimla, Balsan, Ghund; and Ratesh parganas of Theog Tehsil and the residents of all six Tehsils of district Sirmaur are staunch worshippers of Dev Shirgul. In almost all the villages of Kotkhai, some areas of Jubbal Tahsil and parts of Solan district, there are numerous big and small temples of this god and symbols of the deity are kept and worshipped by all the followers in the region.¹² Shirgul and his brothers and sisters have their myths prevalent even in Jaunsar Bawar. In all the villages where the descendants of Rabbu and Chheenu have settled, there are shrines and palanquins of the deity. The Rabta Devahan (oracles) belonging to Rabta community are the inhabitants of Johnra (Tehsil Chopal), Bhujjal, Payen, Bakhota (Tehsil Rajgarh) and Manel (Tehsil Renuka). In Uttaranchal, there are six villages, including Chanjav in Bhanadhar Khat (Pargana), whose inhabitants are followers of Chureshwar Mahadev (Shirgul) and visit Churdhar to take sacred bath and worship the god. In Deyogar Khat where Anu, Atal, Kunui, villages are located and in Shilli Khat in Mossari village, in Maleta village in Baram Ilaqa and in Mundan, Churani and Budre villages in

Jaunsar area, there are shrines of Shirgul Devta. He is also worshipped in the Janpur area in Cis-Yamuna. Though it is difficult to ascertain the actual number of the votaries of this deity, yet the area in which they are found, is spread in the whole of Mahasu and Jaunsar Bawar regions, as is the case with the god Mahasu. It is curious to note that the family members of both the deities have been deified since ages and both of them are believed to be the incarnations of Lord Shiva, the greatest of the Himalayan gods. However, the cults have succeeded in maintaining separate identities.

Gods eager to come out

The images of Shirgul and his brothers and sisters remained concealed in caves and beneath the earth for centuries and, according to a common belief, anyone who passed by that way heard the sound of beating of drums and playing of musical instruments. The mediums and oracles asserted that the gods were anxious to come out but the inlets of the holes were guarded by powerful spirits and access to the same was dangerous. The passers-by became scared and could do nothing. The caves were believed to be guarded by the spirits of ancestors and ghosts. A Tantric Brahman, Bija Ram Kheu of Tikri village undertook to retrieve the images. He advised that the person holding the images should not look back to avoid *Yam-baan*, the arrow of the Lord of death. He also warned that the noise created by the spirits from behind may disturb the carrier but he should not attend to it. Pt. Bija Ram Kheu, with a party of about twenty members took a goat for sacrifice at the site. Some members stayed at Beiyog Ghati with the sacrificial goat and waited for the advance party to return. The advance party members were asked by the Pandit to wait till the supernatural voices and sounds stopped and after entering the cave, took out the images of Bijat Dev, his sisters Bijayi and Gadai. The Chambalu Nagara (special drums) pair was also handled by some. While coming back, they heard the voices of calling, weeping, laughing, falling of stones on the way behind them and addressing them by name. They saw the visions of barriers of bushes, snakes and other similar phenomena but remained undeterred. Prior to the return journey, the goat was sacrificed to the invisible ancestral spirits and ghosts who were chasing them from the cavern. On reaching Panjah village, the images were cleaned, bathed and worshipped. Dula Ram Chauhan (1994: 188-200) informs that according to some sources, the team found a young girl

taking water from a place near the cave and on enquiry, it was told that there was a *Jagra* ceremony of Bijat Raj should. They insisted that she accompany them to the cavern and she gave them parched grams to be substituted with grams made of iron which was bound to be given to them in the cave. In the cave, they were offered seats made of coiled snakes and served the iron grams which they didn't use and, instead, chewed their own grams. On Bije Ram's indication, they left the place quickly but found that all the objects were moving out with them. The legend seems to have been coin to attached more mythical background and flavour to the incident and it seems to be a piece of some popular tale.

Deity installed

Panjah belongs to the Khashas of Panshi or Pandava clan. The Sathi clan of the Khashas, who are considered to be the allies of descendants of Kaurvas (only sixty, according to local beliefs), are settled in Bagian village nearby. Desirous of possessing the images recovered by Pt. Bija Ram, the Shathas of Bagian village contacted Bognia Jarwal of Jarwa village, a notorious thief of those days, to steal the images for them. He agreed to accomplish the feat and after putting off the lights in the temple after *Pooja* one day, succeeded in taking away the images of Bijayi goddess to Badhaul village where a temple was constructed in her name.

Shathi Bhoj, an area associated with the descendants of (sixty) Kauravas, comprises fourteen villages,—Dhasakna, Rangaon, Dujoori, Chanjwav, Gawao, Badbao, Goil, Thaula, Bholaona, Staan, Naien, Suphar, Shilayen and Nichla Jarwa. The people of Shatha or Shathi community assembled and installed the images in Badhaul temple. Thus, Bijayi became the goddess of Shatha community.

The people of Panshi Bhoj, an area in which the families of Pansha or Pasha (Pandava) Khashas are settled, include the villages of Pajahan, Tikri, Tatba, Beiyog, Dimayina, Uparla Jarwa, Junyali, Dahar, etc. The Panshi people gathered at Panjah (Pajahan) and decided to construct a temple for goddess Gadali and install her image.

The image of Bijat Raj was still at Pajahan. It started to exhibit its miracles. At the time of *yajna* ceremony at the village, a Brahman of Koolag village thought of stealing the image and take it to his native village, Koolag. He succeeded in doing so, and took away the image but it started frightening him in dreams. He was compelled to take it to

Sarain. One day, when he started to Sarain while taking the image on his head, the people of Bhalu, a village on the way, insisted that he should hand it over to them. He agreed and kept it there. Later, they also were frightened by the spirit and, ultimately, it was taken to Sarain and installed in a temple. The residents of Bhalu took the image to Sarain with great pomp and show. The event is believed to have taken place during 1653 AD, when Raja Madan Prakash (1651-1662 AD) ruled over Sirmaur State. A two-storeyed temple was built at Sarahan (locally pronounced Sarain) for the purpose. Raja Mahi Prakash, who was coronated in 1719 AD, was a great devotee of Shirgul. During his regime, a severe draught was removed by the deity. The Raja visited Shaya and repaired the *Deem* (castle-type shrine). He visited Sarain and laid the foundation stone of the temple building. He dedicated new images to the shrine at that place and visited Churdhar peak also.

The images of deities in Sarain temple include Mal Pooj (Mool Pooj). It is the image of Rani Damyanti. The image is not taken out and is kept on the left side. Bijat Dev Pooj or the image of Bijat Raj is placed in the middle. The image is taken to Hardwar for performing a sacred bath after every ten years or so. The *rath* (palanquin) of the deity is also taken with him. The journey is performed on foot and the procession reaches Bharli (Bhurli), a village near Vikas Nagar after about a month. The palanquin is kept there and the Bhandari puts the image of the deity in specially prepared bag and places it against his chest while moving to Hardwar and back to the place. On reaching back at Sarain, a grand *yajna* is arranged.

The *Pooj* (image) of Shirgul is placed in the right. He is taken on a journey to the villages of his votaries after every five or six years. The divine journey is called Dhyankra or Dhawankra and it requires about a year's time for its completion. A great *yajna* is arranged after the journey is over and the followers are invited to attend it with great fervour.

The *ilaqas* of the votaries include Hamal, Chehta, Chanju, Chandlog, Shantha, Shak, Poondar, Bamta, Tharoch, Newal, Stohta, Chanana, etc., in Shimla district, Shillai, Paonta, parts of Tehsil Renuka and other scattered population in various villages in Sirmaur district and parts of Jaunsar and Bawar in Uttaranchal.

The images retrieved from the cavern, are believed to have been hidden there during the regime of Tughlaq rulers. According to a popular legend, during those days a Thakur of Khaloti village near Kuhradi in Pargana Hamal, was adversary of with the people of Thundu community and was

killed by them. The Thakur belonged to Khetwan clan. Two ladies of his family had gone to their parents' house at Madhona, when they came to know about the incident. Scared by the happening, they could not return home as otherwise also it was not a safe period in the hills due to invasions of the Tughlaqs. The cruel administrators destroyed images of the deities and misbehaved with the womenfolk. The inhabitants of Swala, Chiuna and Linggar were brave followers of Shirgul. They were known with the name of Chhinte Deve. On seeing the bad days ahead, they decided to save the lives of the two women, both of whom were pregnant and also shifted the images to safer places.

The Images taken to a safer place

A man from Chhinta family of Sawala village undertook to take the images of Bijayi and Gadai goddesses to a safer place and to save the lives of the pregnant sisters. Starting from Sawala at night, they reached Sarain and took the images; Chambaloo, a sacred vessel and *Nagar Jori* (a pair of sacred drums) with them. The votary went to Churdhar to seek permission from the deity to take the images to a safer place along with the objects mentioned above. He prayed to the god for his welfare and security. Starting from Churdhar, he went to Oonchi Ayan Mool, Chhandyara and Luthkari and put the images in Bholna Gad (ravine). Later, he, along with the women, went to the house of Raneu Thakur and told him about the whole endeavour. The Thakur agreed to help the ladies in distress and contacted a man of Dehti clan in Panjah village. The man was the last one in the clan as he had no issues and his wife had passed away in the past. The Thakur discussed the matter with him and convinced him to marry both the sisters. Chhinte Deve was given shelter in the godown meant for preserving grains (*khadoli*). The descendants of Chhinte Deve are now called Khalyanti, as they were saved with the help of *khadoli*. The Dehti of Panjah and Chhinte Deve are important and responsible *kardars* of Bijat Dev and their ancestors contributed to rescue the images of the deity. The Dehti families are living in nine villages and are associated as foremost *kardars* of the deity.

Protection from Natural Calamities

Shirgul, known as Chureshwar Mahadev, and his brother Chandeshwar as well as their sister Godali are worshipped to protect people from natural

calamities. They shower blessings and prosperity on the votaries. Bijat and his sister Bijayi are considered to be capable of averting natural calamities and bad weather. The group of five gods and goddesses were living beings and worked for the welfare of their subjects and associates. Bhukroo was a ruler and the mothers of the present gods under discussion worshipped as divine beings, were also present in their physical bodies on earth. Though their areas of dominion are defined, yet the whole set of these deities belonging to the fold of Shirgul are believed to function under one presiding deity, the Chureshwar Mahadev or Shirgul. From the myth of Shirgul it is evident that the unusual weather at Churdhar and around it, created a sense of distress and uncertainty in the minds of the people living in these areas and the cult of Shirgul has helped them to find solace in adverse natural conditions.

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2. ———, 1994, *Ibid.*, pp. 44-45.
3. ———, 1994, *Ibid.*, p. 53.
4. ———, 1994, *Ibid.*, p. 54.
5. Mahajan, Vidya Dhar, 1970, *Muslim Rule in India*, S. Chand and Co., Delhi, p. 75.
6. Habibulla (Dr.) *The Foundation of Muslim Rule in India*, pp. 87-88.
7. Mahajan, Vidya Dhar, 1970, *Muslim Rule in India*, op. cit., p. 81.
8. Chauhan, Dula Ram, 1994, *Shirgul Mahima*, op. cit., pp. 72-73.
9. ———, 1994, op. cit., p. 74.
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The song is :

Andi, O Theogi Pando O Ghundo
Udhai ra adme Ubau ni mundo
Kewal Rama Vai Ubau, ni . . . mundo
Liliye Khachre Chore na rasha
Sandhu re jangle baithe O dasha
Kewal Rama Vai baithe. . .

11. ———, 1994, op. cit., p. 88.
12. ———, 1994, op. cit., p. 118.

CHAPTER SIX

The Cult of Dum

Dhaun, the brother of Raja Sumer Chand of Darkot, lived in Himti village of Kumarsain. In a feud with the Thakur of Samarkot, he killed him and had to shift to Shraiyan village in Ratesh State. The name of his son was Shoora, an epithet to his valour. Shoora was in animosity against the Thakur of Kot and had to flee from Sharaiyan to Himti where his uncle Kon lived. Shoora had no offspring and the cause was attributed to the event of his father's crime. On the insistence of his wife, he undertook a journey to Hateshwari Devi at Hatkoti. He meditated at the temple for seven days without accepting anything. The goddess was pleased due to his penance and suggested that he should take some rice from her temple and give it to his wife to eat. There is saying:

*Char dane Chawlaan re udkau ra paane
Aiyiyen rouh Shoorya tere garbane rane.*

The water of four grains of rice made the Rani pregnant. The son, so born, was named Dum or Doom. This was, perhaps, because the ancestors of Shoora belonged to Domehar.

Goddess guides Dum

The parents of Dum passed away when he was only eight or nine years of age. After the death of his parents, the young boy had to shift to Darkoti, where he was employed as a servant to graze cattle of the ruler. He grazed the sheep of the Thakur, but was not paid any remuneration. One day, a sheep was misplaced and he was unable to trace it out. He started weeping loudly. On hearing his voice, the goddess Hatkoti (Hateshwari) put off the lights in and around the shrine with her divine powers as she considered herself the divine mother of the child who was born as a result of rice grains bestowed by her to his parents. She went to the child in the guise of an old lady and enquired about his identity

and cause for weeping. He told that he was parentless and a goat of the Thakur with whom he was serving, had got misplaced somewhere. The woman, on hearing his tale, advised him to sound a whistle with which all his sheep and goats would assemble before him. She also blessed him with a boon that whatever he spoke in future, would prove to be true and he would be a 'sidh-vak' (true foreteller).

Dum did accordingly, and all the herds assembled before him. The lost sheep was also there. He would take the herds to Kharapather and turn them into stones (*shila*) till the evening, when, after conversion and transformation, they would be driven home. The boy would engage himself in games and play throughout the day and the sheep and goats would go hungry. Gradually, the animals started dying due to starvation. The Thakur ultimately turned him out. Earlier to it, he was asked by the wife of the Thakur one day to bring the head of Nandu Twal, a thief who stole their utensils. Dum went to the house of Nandu Twal and started serving him as his servant. One day he killed Nandu Twal with his axe (*dangra*) and reached Darkoti with the head and placed it before the wife of the Thakur. On seeing the head, she became frightened and asked him to leave the place at once to avoid death as he had committed a serious crime. This was done to get rid of him. He left the residence of the Thakur and after halting at Madhavna, went to Delhi via Shimla.

Competition in marksmanship

There is a legend that a competition in arrow marksmanship was going on at a place at Delhi. He also participated in it and pierced seven iron plates and coconut hung with a hair, with his arrow. He was declared the winner and the news of his strange feat spread all around. The Turk rulers also came to know about the young man and wanted him to be produced before them. They wanted to be sure of his supernatural powers. The order of the rulers was obeyed and Dum produced before them. After having come to know about his supernatural powers, he was put behind bars. He met Shirgul Dev, Chandeshwar, Guga Pir and Mahasu, in the jail and became friends with these other blessed people. After some time, these spiritual heroes were released and some incentives and gifts were allowed to them which Shirgul and some others declined to accept.

Dum and Mahasu got Charus of gold

Dum and Mahasu wanted to have money (*maya*) and demanded three *charus* (*vessels*) full of gold *asbrafis* which they had seen on the banks of river Yamuna. Dum got two *charus* and Mahasu was allowed the third one as per his wish. The Turk rulers put forth a condition that if they could lift them to their places, they could have them for themselves. They looked towards Shirgul for help and he threw a handful of clay on them which made them to move automatically with his supernatural powers and blessings of the mother goddess. As already mentioned, on their return journey, they stayed at Panchkula from where they went to Gaura via Kalka.

Mahasu went to Darkoti from Gaura with all the three *charus* and took one of them as his share to Namhol. The remaining two were left at Darkoti. Dum had to go to Shaya with Shirgul and fought against Chaukhat Danav at Churdhar. He was with Shirgul during the remaining period of his life and, on his disappearance, stayed at Shihli village for some time. There is a small temple of Dum Devta in that village. Dum stayed at Bhot village, situated at a distance where there is also a small shrine of the deity. In search of suitable place for his abode, he went to Darkoti where he demanded the *charus* (*vessels*) given to the Thakur by Mahasu. The Thakur refused to part with them. He, then, left for Himri. On the way, the Goddess Kali was invoked by him by taking clay from the earth and meditating on Shirgul. He threw the clay towards the Thakur. Both the *charus* came out after breaking the wall and followed Dum to Kuthaan.

Death and Deification of Dum

On reaching Kuthaan, Dum came to know that a battle was going on between the Ranas of Kumarsain and of Rajana in which the latter was defeated. The Rana of Rajana, on having come to know that a great warrior had come to Kuthaan, went to see Dum and requested him for help in the feud. Dum agreed and the battle started again. The enemy was forced to accept defeat. The Rana of Kumarsain came to know that Dum possessed supernatural powers and could only be defeated if an enchanted arrow was brought from a particular Tibetan Lama. The ruler went to Tibet and brought an enchanted arrow from a Buddhist monk.

On his challenge, Dum led the forces to the battlefield. The Rana of Kumarsain shot Dum with his mysterious arrow and he was killed instantaneously. His physical remains were cremated at Bakhairi, the conjunction of two rivulets. When water was put to extinguish the fire after cremation, it started burning as if oil had been used for the purpose. The phenomena continued for six days. The scared people prayed to the spirit of the dead to come and rescue them in the matter. Responding to their prayer, the spirit directed the water from kula baori, a water spring, to flow towards Bakhairi (Bakheri). The water reached a point on a precipice (*dhank*) near Bakhairi and after piercing it, made its way to the cremation ground where the fire was extinguished. The divided precipice can still be seen in the same condition. With this miracle, Dum was acknowledged as a divine spirit and two goldsmiths of Himri were asked by the followers to make images of the deified hero. The names of the goldsmiths were Sunu and Sunaki.

Designing of metal images

Both the goldsmith brothers tried to design the images after melting the metal but could not succeed as the spirit wanted to have the same made at Kuthaan. On the seventh day, the dismayed smiths left the hope of their success in carving out and moulding the images. They went to take their meals outside. The spirit, on seeing their plight, took mercy on them and initiated a child who was playing nearby, to put the melted metal in the mould. The child, after doing so, went out and the goldsmiths, on coming back, found that two images with a joint at the back were ready. Later, the people of Kuthaan brought one of the images to their village and the other one was left at Himri. The images were installed in two shrines at both the places. Dum is worshipped widely and his shrines are at the following places: (1) Rajgarh (Sirmaur), (2) Mond, (3) Matli and Nera (Chopal), (4) Bhot, (5) Sheeli, (6) Bhamdhol, (7) Bhajji, (8) Khashdhar, (9), and Kuryal.

Kuthaan is the main place of worship of the deity but his images and symbols are kept in small shrines and houses by his devotees all over. He is called Domeswar Mahadev and is believed to be related to the Chauhan clan.

According to another legend, Dhan and Kan were two brothers. They were born in the Darkoti (Kotkhai) royal family. They killed the Thakur

of Samarkot in a feud and the Rana of Darkoti expelled them from his State, fearing the wrath of the Raja of Bushehr. During those days, their house was at Domehar (Kotkhai) from where they shifted to Sharaiyan in Ritesh or Ratesh State. Later, Kan stayed in Kamaali or Himri in Kotkhai. While staying in Sharaiyan, Dhan was blessed with two sons. His elder son was Shoorā and the younger one Pargi. Both the brothers were very brave and the ruler of Ratesh was not in good terms with them.

After some time, both the brothers went in search of their Uncle Kan and before reaching Kamaali, Pargi preferred to stay at Banlog, a village in Shili Pargana. His successors still stay in that village. Shoorā reached Kamaali (Himri) in Kotkhai. Being issueless, he meditated at Hatkoti for some time and was blessed with a son having divine virtues and powers and unmatched valour, at the instance of goddess Hatkoti. The father, attached to his ancestral place Domehar, named the son as Dom or Dum, an association with Domehar. In his youth, Dom had to serve the ruler of Darkoti as his shepherd boy. One day, when one of the sheep was missing, he started weeping loudly. Lord Shiva and Parvati, who were going by that way, heard him weeping and taking mercy on him, blessed him with *shabar mantra* which gifted him with the powers of *vak-siddhi* (supernatural bliss of foretelling the truth). The Shabar Mantra made him a mystic, who, while uttering 'Jadaant' would turn the objects static and lifeless and by bidding 'Khulaant' would transform the inanimate objects into mobile ones. He would transform the sheep and goats into stones while grazing them in the pastures and turn them to their original forms at the time of taking them back to the house of his master in the evening. The cattle started dying due to hunger. As already said, Dom killed Nandu of Rahu village to fulfil the desire of the wife of his master, the Thakur, and brought his head to testify the event. The Thakur turned him out and he stayed at Banlog in Shili Pargana for some time again. His uncle gave him about six bighas of land, which even now is the property of the deity.

According to the legends, Dum went to Delhi during 1150 Vikrami (1093 AD) where Tanwar Rajpur rulers had arranged a shooting competition. The participants were required to shoot at the target fixed on seven iron plates which were tied to a coconut, hanging on a hair, with an arrow. According to the condition, the unsuccessful participants were to be put in jail. Dum won the competition and got three *charus* (vessels) full of coins (*mudras*) as his reward. During those days, Mahasu

and Shirgul, along with some other companions, were in jail either due to their failure to shoot the target or owing to their supernatural powers which irked the rulers. Dum got Mahasu and Shirgul freed from jail and all of them came to their places in the hills.

Dum helped the Thakur of Rajana in a battle against the Rana of Kumarsain and defeated him several times. The Rana of Kumarsain wounded Dum in one of the battles with the application of black magic by a Tibetan monk. Dum was wounded at Bhaunch village where the battle was fought. He created a spring of gushing water in a barren and bushy hill near Bhaunch by shooting of an arrow. The spring still exists. After his death, his cremation was arranged at Kyaru near Bhaunch. The exact name of the place was Bagheri. The cremation fire could only be extinguished with the water of Kooda *baoli*, as already mentioned. The *baoli* is still existing. After his death, Dum appeared in a dream to a resident of Kaamali who belonged to his clan and wished to be worshipped as a deity. Sunnu and Sunaki, the two goldsmith brothers, were asked by the followers to prepare the images of the hero to worship him after his death. The images could not be designed for several days as already mentioned, and the artisans became disappointed and fatigued by taking their meals once a day, as is the tradition while attending to the jobs relating to village gods. One day, when they went out to take their meals, the image got completed automatically before their arrival. On the seeing the miracle, they were astonished and passed away awe-stricken. The first temple of the deity was made at Himri and, after that, a shrine was raised at Kuthaan. The rulers of Junga state remained devotees to the deity.

Aicha

Once a Brahman named Aicha was the minister of the Raja of Keonthal (Junga). The ruler was unhappy with him and his incumbents killed him by throwing down him a precipice due to which the Raja was cursed and had no heir to the throne. He performed to Dum devta. The deity, through his oracle, advised him to construct a square water tank at Bhalawag and fill it with water from Ashwini *kbad* (rivulet). Eighty-four Brahamans and girls were served with meals and the same number of cows given in donation. Two lifesize images of Aicha were made, of which one was taken by the Raja with him and the other one installed at the site. After that, the Raja was blessed with a son and he arranged *jatra* ceremonies in honour of the deity at various places. In the State Gazetteer of Keonthal

State (1910:17), it is mentioned, 'whenever there is an occasion of coronation or birth of Tika in the family of Raja of Keonthal, the Raja of Junga (Keonthal) arranges a *jatar*. The *jatras* are arranged at various places in the state.'

Jatars

The Domeswar is taken in a palanquin to the shrine of Mata Kotkali, believed to be his mother. She is invoked by placing a flag on the palanquin. The main *jatars* are arranged at Guthan, Keonthal, Theog, Ghund, Kandaghat, Subathu, Kuthad. On the completion of *jatar* ceremonies within one year, the Badhatar festival is arranged. This festival is a symbol of the completion of *jatar* ceremonies and the beginning of relaxation period of the deity in his shrine. The followers of the god are called Kalyainey.

Shrines of Dum

The shrines of the deity are classed as, (i) main temple, (ii) temple, (iii) Devra, and (iv) Chaunra. The famous temples of Dum devta are at Guthaan (Kuthan), Himri (Kotkhai), Dhar, Mahauri, Saambar (erstwhile Theog State), Kelar, Matli, Basmol, Naihra, Bhalena, Davaiyan (Ratesh-Theog), Charain (Ghund-Theog), Namana (Ghund-Theog), Gadhadi (Ghund-Theog), Baivan (Kotkhai), Kadhail (Kotkhai), Janaul (Chagaon-Kotkhai), Jangrauli (Chagaon-Kotkhai), Kunthil (Sirmaur-Rajgarh), Haliala (Balsan-Kotkhai), Mandroli (Kotkhai), Jadholi, Naihra, Pudog, Chadaina, Kamali, Dhaila (Kotkhai), Himri (Bhajji-Sunni), Pamlahi (Kotgarh), Dargoti (Kotkhai), Saiyi, Kumharvi (Bushehr), Sharaiyan (Ratesh), Girab (Kaimlli-Shimla), Phaagga (Kaljoon-Shimla), Darwa (Kuthar-Kasauli), Shiva (Kuthar-Kasauli), Bamdhol (Jubbal), Manlog, Bishudi, Bhaunch (Shilli-Theog), Dhangvi (Balsan-Kotkhai), Dargot and (Kotkhai).¹ With this brief account, it is clear that Devta Dum has a considerable following and remained the state or presiding deity of some princely states.

A popular god

During the state regime, Dum used to take his *jatar* (journey) after every five to ten years and covered Keonthal, Kuthaar, Mahlog, Bashahr, Kotkhai, Jubbal, Khaneti, Baaghal, Koti and some other hill states. Junga,

the state god of the state of Keonthal, made him his junior but he commanded great respect among his followers even then. Dum is one of the twenty-two important deities, designated as Tikas of Keonthal and his cult is most remarkable. According to H.A. Rose,² the three families of gods, viz., the Nag, the Dum and the Marechh, besides the more orthodox families of Kot Ishwar and the Devis are the most remarkable in the hill states. Like most of the other deities in the region, Dum is appeased by offering fresh *ghee* in the shrines. A different version of the legend is provided by H.A. Rose, in his book, *A Glossary of Tribes, and Castes of Panjab and North Western Frontier Province* (1970 (reprint): 448-451), wherein Khalnidh, an aged Kanet, went to worship Hatkoti Devi who gave him some rice and said that two sons would be born to him. They grazed cattle and the goddess conferred on them the power of doing anything they wished. On their death, their *paap* or *khot* began to vex the people and they were deified and propitiated by worship. The brother who migrated to Katian (properly Guthan) is also called Nagarkotia. He is the brother of the Dum devta of Sharmala (Kumarsain). Shura, an old Kanet, lived in Himri village in Pargana Chagaon of Kumarsain. He had no son. His wife Pargi insisted that he should get married again to beget children. After seven days of worship at Hatkoti, the goddess appeared to him with all her attributes and granted him a boon of twin sons to be born to his wife.

The parents of the children died after seven days and they were nursed by a sister named Kapri. The twin brothers were blessed with signs of superhuman powers even during their early age. After the death of their sister, they were orphaned and employed as cowherds with the Thakur of Darkoti by the people. They were careless towards the cattle and devoted their time to their favourite game of archery. They went to Delhi in search of employment after having been turned out of their job due to their negligence. They found a job in the army of the king. One day, an archery competition was arranged and to test the skill of his archers the king set up a *tawa* (iron plate) from which hung a horse hair with a small grain in the centre. No one in his army could split the grain with an arrow, except these two recruits, and the king was greatly pleased with them, but as his Rani told him that they were not common soldiers but possessed a magical virtue and should be dismissed to their native hills with a suitable reward, he gave them a huge vessel (*charu*) full of coins which they could not lift. They were about to depart when two *deotas*,

Mahasu and Shirgul, who were prisoners at Delhi (Mahasu and Shirgul were captives at Delhi for being devil oppressors in the hills) appeared and calling upon the brothers for help—as they belonged to the same hill country as themselves—promised that if they petitioned the king for their release, they would be set free.³ On the request of the Dum brothers, the king released Mahasu and Shirgul. The deities felt pleased and agreed to help the youth in carrying the vessel home. They told the two brothers to mount their aerial steeds, look towards the Kailas hill, touch the vessel and whip up their horses to alight at Binu, a place near Guthaan village. Before going to their dominions, they buried the vessel at Binu. It is believed that the vessel with the coins turned into water which flows into the *baoli* located on the boundary of Kumarsain and Keonthal and the aerial steeds disappeared on Mount Kailas.

Kon, the god of Keonthal

Agitated by the trouble created by two brothers who broke pitchers with their arrows on the heads of ladies caring little for the orders of the Thakur of Rajana in whose territory the place Binu was situated, the people and the Thakur brought the brothers to bay in a battle in which the elder brother, named Dum, was killed. The younger brother named Kon, was also killed and both the brothers were cremated at the places where they had fallen. The descendants of Kon settled in Keonthal and are called Kathaan.

Two miraculous images emerged out of the ashes of the mortal remains of the brothers and haunted the Thakur in his sleep by creating mischiefs. They, thus, became *paap* or the spirits of ghosts. The Thakur tried to appease the *paap* and in order to help them attain peace and salvation, conveyed them to Nagarkot in Kullu where they were presented to the goddess (perhaps Tripura Sundary who is believed to be in association with the dead and accepts their garments even today). According to the legend, the images vanished instantaneously. The people prayed to the goddess to help the images take their shape again. Some believe that the goddess reproduced the images but according to others, the replicas of the original images appeared at the site. It is to be pointed out that Nagarkot is the ancient name of Kangra town where the presiding deity is goddess Bajreshwari. She is also a powerful goddess. Since Dum is called Nagarkotia, it may a reference to Nagarkot and not Nagar in Kullu

region. The Dum of Sharmala has been called Nagarkotia Devta since then. The image of Dum was installed at Sharmala and that of Kon taken to Guthaan village. According to a different version, both the images were installed at Sharmala at first and the people of Guthaan stole one of them and took it to their village. The women of Sharmala address Dum by his pet name of Naanu. Rajaoli ceremony was held after some interval in the state of Kumarsain and it coincided with the coronation ceremony of new ruler of the State. The Devta toured his dominion after this ceremony. This rite has now been abandoned as there is no coronation ceremony now.

Chershi

During the past years, Magneshwar, Kot Ishwar and Dum attended a festival at Samokhar. Due to discord among the deities, the ceremony was abandoned. A *chershi* (fine) is levied on Dagrot people due to this cessation and the god visits the villages from whom the fine (*chershi*) is due. This tax is collected in cash and kind. The Dum of Sharmala had seven *khunds*. The term *khund*, as already mentioned, denotes the communities of the descendants of Mawis or awannas. It also appears to mean a tract of country. The *khund* Kanets in Bushehr are distinguished from Ghara Kanets. They are sometimes called Neru or Niru and certain religious ceremonies, such as Bhunda and Shaant, are only performed in villages where there are *khund* Kanets.⁴ Seven *khunds* of Kanets who recognize the authority of Dum of Sharmala are, Baghalu or Charogu in Khaneti, Atnet and Relu in Bushehr, Dogre or Rachla in Kumarsain and Dharongu in Balsan. Charogu, Relu and Dharogu valleys are more inclined towards the worship of Dum of Guthaan,⁵ but it hardly makes any difference as the cult is the same at both the places.

The number of worshippers of deities increases by way of relationships and increase in population of votaries of a particular godling. Fulfilment of wishes also contributes towards the change in faith. The cases of attachment or detachment with a deity also depend on the mutual relationship of local deities, who, with friendly ties, are invited to attend ceremonies in the dominions of other village gods but with the severed relationship due to various social reasons, the followers of different spirits also avoid praying to alien deities. When the followers of Dum objected to the coming of Magneshwar Maheshwar to take part in a ceremony of

Samokhar village, Rana Pritam Singh of Kumarsain imposed *chershi* (fine) on the inhabitants of Daakun, Rabog and Jadun, the worshippers of Dum.⁶ Later, the fine was required to be paid in cash but the strained relations of the gods hampered the faith and mutual relationship of the inhabitants. Since Shoora and Pargi lived at Himri, the images of Dum and Kon were first brought to Himri and then taken to Sharmala and Guthaan. H.A. Rose (1970: 452) refers to yet another legend, according to which Dum brothers were killed by the Mawis even before the Thakurs of Rajana ruled the area. There are, thus, three versions available with regard to the history of Dum devtas. According to the first version, they were contemporary of Mahasu and Shirgul who were tortured by Turks and put to jail. The second version, confirms that Dum brothers met Mahasu and Shirgul in jail, yet there are indications that the incident took place during the rule of Tanwars, i.e. during 1093 AD, which doesn't seem probable. The third one, as quoted above, places the Dum brothers even earlier, i.e. in an era of the Mawis. We shall try to assess the situation after discussing the case of Guga, the snake god who is also said to be the contemporary of these deified heroes.

Pilgrimage of Dum

Dum goes on pilgrimage to Kangra after some intervals. The tradition confirms that the images might have emerged out at the ashes at Nagark (Kangra) and not at Nagar in Kullu, as according to a local belief, almost all the deities in the region are taken to their birthplaces occasionally and this cannot be an exception with the Dum brothers. In Karel village near Himri, there is a small shrine of the Dum and a reference to arrange *Bhunda* on the advice of the oracle at Guthaan is also available.⁷ At Karel, yet another spirit of Bhat Devta is worshipped in the temple of Dum devta. The legend relates that a Saraswat Brahman of Mateog village was once prosecuted by the Rana of Kumarsain on some offence. While under arrest by a constable, he requested him to allow him to take bath in Satluj river where he committed suicide by drowning. He became a demon afterwards and started frightening the constable in visions and dreams. His image was later placed by the people in the temple of Dum. There is a common practice that the images or symbols of terrifying evil spirits are kept in the temples, and the presiding deities are believed to administer control on them to save the people from their menace. In Seraj area also,

there are some temples of the deity and he has his shrines in Sadhoch, Pharal, Kotla, Kupri and Parojusha in Pargana Chhaibisi. Dum, like other deities, protects harvests, cattle and property. He allows prosperity to the worshippers and helps milching cattle to give more milk. No *khin* is performed for him and he has no *bhor* (assistant deity). However, at Kupri village, a *khin* mela is held occasionally.

Tradition of hero worship

The cult of Dum is a tradition of hero worship. The deity has cordial relations with other local deities and is considered to be one of the major deities of the region. Though Dum and his brother did not belong to a ruling family—as is the case with some of the other deities—yet his valour and distinguished qualities earned him the status of a god. His brother Kon is also worshipped as ‘Dum’ and people devoted to one brother equally respect the other. The spirit is believed to have the feelings of friendship or disregard for other godlings, as the case may be, but comparatively less taboos are followed by his votaries. He is a typical example of hero worship in the hills.

REFERENCES AND NOTES

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3. ———, 1970 (reprint) op. cit., Vol. I, p. 450.
4. Gazetteer, Simla Hill States (Bushehr) 1910, op. cit. p. 21, See Footnote p. 451, Part I of the *Glossary of Tribes and Castes of Punjab and North-Western Frontier Province*, op. cit.
5. Rose, H.A., 1970 (reprint) op. cit. Glossary, Part.I, p. 451.
6. ———, *Ibid.*, p. 451.
7. ———, *Ibid.*, p. 452.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Cult of Guga

Guga was a companion of Shirgul and according to legends, he directed his followers to worship the hero wherever his votaries are settled. The people belonging to lower strata of society, the scheduled caste communities of the present times, requested Shirgul to direct Guga to be their deity. They wanted to construct shrines of the deity in their habitats and install his images in them. Guga didn't want his images to be worshipped in the shrines but agreed to have an iron bar as *kada* (arm-ring) and *sankla* (iron chains with arrow-shaped edges) as his symbol. This was agreed to and the oracle (Kinkar) of the deity, in order to show the magic powers of the god, puts the *sankla* (chains) in fire and on heating it, beats his back with it. The act doesn't harm the Kinkar in any way. The *kurda* (symbol) of Guga Pir is installed in his shrines after performing traditional rituals and the Kinkars of the deity make these *kurdas* red hot on various occasions to beat themselves on their backs in order to exhibit the mysterious power of the snake god. The evil spirits are driven away by showing them a *kurda*. The symbol is also applied to beat the patients suffering from incurable diseases considered to have been caused by evil spirits. The beating is applied as a curative measure to drive away the unwanted spirits. The spirit of Guga exhibits itself through the mediums (Kinkars or Gurs) on the ceremonies relating to *jagra* (vigil) and *shaant yajna* arranged in honour of the Shirgul devta. The Panjra type of *pooja* (worship) is dedicated to Guga Pir only and Shirgul is also remembered in it. This also establishes the close relationship between the two deities. On Guga Navmi day and *jagra* ceremony of the Pir, Guga's magic powers are exhibited by his oracles and staunch followers of the deity. The *kurdas* are taken to Churdhar for a dip in the holy water before installation in the shrines constructed by scheduled caste people. The practice is still in vogue in the area and these gods are taken to Churdhar after an interval of every third or fifth year before the *jagra* ceremony takes place in the village.

The *jagra* ceremony is arranged as a night-long vigil in the name of various deities, including Shirgul, Mahasu, Guga, etc. The ceremony is called *jag* or *jagaran* also. Panjra ballads and legends are sung on various occasions and contain historical and mythological accounts of these deities. These serve as propitiatory prayers presented in local dialects and folktunes.

Birth of Guga

Guga Chauhan was born in Mewar or Baagar Desh. His father, Jeur, was the ruler of Dudhnehra, Daruheda or Dadneroo state. Bachhla, Guga's mother, was the daughter of Raja Baldev Raj of Ghazni. According to legends, Jeur has also been mentioned as Dev Raj. He was issueless and his wife Bachhla arranged his second marriage with her younger sister, Kachhla, who was also not blessed with an offspring for some time.

Guru Gorakh Nath, with his disciples, halted in a garden in the State and Bachhla devoted herself to the service of the Guru. After twelve years, the saint asked her to approach him for getting a boon in the early hours of ensuing morning. Kachhla came to know of this and decided to go to the sage earlier to her. Guru Gorakh Nath, taking her for Bachhla, gave her two fruits to be taken for getting two sons. Later, when Bachhla approached him as per his direction, he rebuked her for coming twice but on knowing that she didn't come earlier and Kachhla had impersonated her, gave her a boon to be blessed with a son having supernatural powers. After meditating on Basuki, the snake god, he got some Guggal Dhoop for her as there was no fruit left in his *gudri* (mysterious bag). The Guru told her that she would conceive immediately after taking Guggal Dhoop given to her and her son would defeat and kill the sons of her sister.

Saneer Dei, the sister of Jeur, conveyed falsely to her brother that the Rani was carrying the illegitimate son of the Guru in her womb. The Raja wanted to kill Bachhla but could not do so. Kachhla also tried to kill her by putting a snake in her palanquin but she escaped. She had strange dreams and directions from the child in her womb. He wanted that she should stay at her house before his birth and not in her parent's house as otherwise people would call him Naanakoo (a child born in his maternal uncle's house).

Birth delayed

Guga did not take his birth for one year as he conveyed to his mother in dream that he would be born when the Satak (pollution) of the earth is removed by Guru Gorakh Nath. Bachhla served the Guru while he was in Samadhi and on his enquiry after the completion of meditation, related to him the wish of her unborn child. He assured her ending the Satak of the earth to allow the child to take birth. On Bhadrapada Krishna Ashtami (eighth day of black half of Bhadrapada), Guga was born with the help of a blind midwife who conducted the delivery outside the main gate of the palace of Raja Jeur (Dev Raj), as Bachhla couldn't reach her palace after starting from Gorakh Tila, the camp of Guru Gorakh Nath, who handled the Satak of the earth till Guga was born. The midwife was blessed with eyesight after the event. The Raja was told in a dream that the child was his legitimate son. He heard the sound of beating of drums at the time of the birth of the baby and soon after, the Rani was brought back to the palace. Due to his birth taking place in *mandal* (waiting room outside the main gate of the palace), the child was also called Mandaleek and those who sang the ballad of Guga in group, are called as 'Mandli' (a group of singers of the song relating to Guga). In Chamba, the group of such singers is called Mandaleek or Mundalikh even upto now. As he was born as a result of the Guru's blessings and Guggal Dhoop given by him to Bachhla, his mother, the infant was named Guga. The twin sons of Kachhla were born at almost the same time, and named as Arjun and Surjan. Guga had yet another sister named Gugari. According to a legend, Guru Gorakh Nath blessed the ruling couple of Raigarh with a daughter, a Nag Kanya, a suitable match to Guga during his later life. He told the Raja that the son of Raja Dev Raj of Garh Dadrehra would be his son-in-law. The Guru gave a bit of guggal to a sweeperess on the banks of River Yamuna to be thrown away in the river. She tasted it and gave birth to Kailoo Veer (a deified associate of Guga). A mare, who was grazing nearby, took the guggal thrown in the river while drinking water from, and consequently, Neela Ghora (blue horse) was born to her. According to yet another legend, the ruler of Garh Bengal and not of Raigarh was blessed with a daughter and he named her as Surihal.

When Surihal became of marriageable age, a Brahman contacted Guga in Garh Dadrehra for matrimonial alliances with her. The holy marriage took place despite the resistance of Arjun and Surjan who were also

brought up by Bachhla after the death of her sister Kachhla. Arjun and Surjan demanded their share in the domain, for which Guga didn't agree. They, then approached Prithvi Raj Chauhan for redressal of their grievances. It is also said that Guga stayed with his in-laws in Garh Bengal after his marriage for one year and on coming back, found that his father had died in between and his stepbrother had usurped the power. He was not allowed to enter his domain. This resulted in a battle in which both the brothers, namely, Arjun and Surjan were killed. Guga was helped by Guru Gorakh Nath and Kailoo Veer in the battle.

Guga brought the slain heads of his stepbrothers to his mother who, after becoming outraged with the action, asked him not to show his face in future. Obeying her, Guga approached Gorakh Nath at Gorakh Tila and served him for some time. After acquiring *siddhi*, he served his people for long and became famous for his supernatural treatment of snake bite. Guga's magic healing of snake bite became so popular in northern India, that even clay or dust applied to the bite in his name, was believed to cure the patients. He relieved the sufferers of supernatural and psychic ailments and a thick sweetened bread (*rote*) offered in his name would assure safeguard against all types of snakes and troubles relating to ailments. Guga was considered a Siddha and a Pir. A cult of snake god was gradually emerging in his name. The Hindus and Mohammadans both revered him as a divine and supernatural being.

The Turks ruled the country during those days. Scared of people having mysterious powers, they put them behind bars. Guga, along with Shirgul, Chandeshwar, Dum and some other heroes from various parts of the country, were detained and put behind the bars without any fault whatsoever. He, as already mentioned, accompanied Shirgul and Dum to Churdhar after their release from jail. He conveyed his welfare to his wife Surihal at Garh Dadehra by way of intuition and telepathy and went to see her during the nights. Surihal assured him that she would not divulge the secret of his visits to his mother. On Shraavan teej, the ladies of the town went to seek the blessings of Bachhal, the mother of Guga and requested her to send Surihal with them.

Bachhal agreed and called for Surihal immediately. Surihal was waiting for Guga, wearing her ornaments and best garments. All the ladies were astonished. They tried their best to enquire about the reasons for doing so. She was hardpressed to divulge the secret and received severe beating from them. At last, they came to know that Guga was visiting her secretly.

Bachhal didn't believe and waited for her son to come the next night. On seeing him, she tried to catch hold of him, but he went back, never to come again. He travelled across various parts of hilly tracts where his shrines were built by his followers. Prithvi Raj Chauhan (1170-1190 AD), is believed to be one of his contemporaries. Satyendra, Col. Tod and William Crooke are of the opinion that Guga died during the thirteenth century in a battle against Feroz Shah. The *Bharathas* (ballads) relating to Shirgul, Bijat, Dum, Chandeshwar and Guga—prevalent in the region giving credence to oral history maintained by the mediums of these deities and folkloristic legends—establish the fact that all of them were contemporaries. With the study of these ballads, the conclusion about the time of Guru Gorakh Nath and other Naths can also be ascertained.

Ibbetson

According to Ibbetson,¹ Guga is Guga Pir, Zahirpir, the saint apparent or Bagarwala (from Baagar). His grave is near Dadrewa in Bikaner. He is said to have ruled over the northern part of Bagaar (Baagad) or Rajputana. According to some legends, he flourished about the middle of twelfth century and being a hero, is called Guga Bir. According to information and local traditions, he changed his faith to Islam and is called Guga Pir, the saint. In eastern region of Punjab, he is considered to be the greatest of the snake kings. In some parts of the Punjab, his switch (*chhari*), consisting of a long bamboo surmounted by peacock feathers, a coconut, some fans and a blue flag are taken by *jogis* or sweepers, while asking for alms during a particular time in the rainy season every year. His shrine is called Marhi. He is worshipped throughout the sub-montane tracts in Himachal Pradesh and in the Mahasu region. The legend goes that Shirgul directed the scheduled caste people to accept him as their deity. This corroborates the fact that his followers were mainly belonging to the downtrodden section of the society in the beginning but now there are no caste barriers in belief and folklore. At Mandor, the ancient capital of Jodhpur, there is a famous equestrian statue of Guga on a rock and in Hissar, he is worshipped as Ram Dewa, who like Guga, disappeared alive on horseback. H.A. Rose (1970: 172) has given a chart of the descent of Guga's family lineage which is as under:

<i>Sawarai,</i> xxx	<i>Sister of Jewar,</i> xxx Baachla Guga	<i>Brother of Newar</i> xxx Sister of Kaachla Arjun Surjan
Surel or Seral <i>Sawarai,</i> x	<i>Sister of Jewar</i> x Baachla Guga Surel or Seral,	<i>Brother of Newar</i> x Sister of Kaachla Arjan Surjan daughter of Singha, Raja of Karanpur rup (Kamru (Kararu) Des in South)

The legend of Guga has been mentioned by H.A. Rose (1970: pp 172ff. Vol. I), Sir R.C. Temple and Col. Tod in addition to some other historians. H.A. Rose mentions the name of the priest of Raja Jewar as Rangachar and according to him, the maid Hira Dei was instrumental in taking Bachhal to Guru Gorakh Nath. The saint, when told by Bachhal about the deceit of Kachhal, declared that Kachhal would die at the birth of her twins who would live for only 12 years. H.A. Rose believed that Kachhal was the wife of Newar, the brother of Jewar, whereas Sir Richard Temple assumed her to be the second wife of Jewar. R.C. Temple believed that 'Sabir Dei, the sister of Jewar, poisoned the mind of the Raja to send Bachhal to her parents' house at Gajni (the old name of Rawalpindi) or Gajnipur.

Bachhal was pregnant and one of the bullocks applied to drive her cart was bit by a snake on the way. Guga, seeing the plight from the womb of the mother, directed her to apply a twig of neem tree on the wound of the bullocks in the name of Guru Gorakh Nath. The bullock was miraculously cured. The dead ox, having been brought to life with a spell of Guru Gorakh Nath, was able to take her to the house of her father at Gajni fort where Guga refused to be born even after a period of twelve months of pregnancy. The name of the father of Bachhal has been given as Chandrabhan here.

Guga was born at Garh Darera on the midnight of 8th-9th Bhadrapada. The votaries of Guga use fans of flowers and blue flags as his symbols. Though Kachhala's twins were born earlier, Jewar put Guga as his heir to the throne which turned to be the root cause for the feud between them. H.A. Rose refers to the incident of breaking of pitchers of village

women on their refusal to allow him drinking water when he went out hunting. According to a legend, the name of the father of Chhariyal or Sirial has been given as Sanja, who, after betrothal, backed out to give a marital hand of his daughter Chhariyal to Guga. Guga, vexed at the refusal, invoked Basuki Nag, who sent Tatig Nag to help him. Basuki Nag was invoked by Guga's playing flute. He sent Tatig to Dhupnagar,² a place across seven rivers where Serial lived in the country of Karu (Kamru) whose patron goddess was Kamachhya, the goddess of wizards. Tatig Nag cured her from snakebite, caused by him in the guise of a snake. Raja Sanja agreed to marry her to Guga after she was cured by Tatig Nag with the application of neem tree solution. The name of the grandfather of Guga has been mentioned as Raja Amar in the legend.

After being abused for treatment at the hands of his mother for killing Arjan and Surjan, Guga wanted to bury himself under the mother earth, but could not do so, as he was Hindu by creed and needed to be cremated after death. He was directed by the mother earth to approach Haji Rattan of Bhatinda for conversion of religion. He met Haji and Khwaja Khijr, a Mohammandan and a water-spirit and changed his creed with their help. The name of Firoz Shah also occurs in the legend.

In a version, current in Bijnor district of Uttar Pradesh, Raja Amar Singh ruled Maru Desa (Baagar) during the regime of Prithvi Raj Chauhan, the ruler of Delhi. Kanwar Pal of Sirsa Patan in Bijnor married his daughter Bachhal to Jewar, the son of Raja Amar Singh of Maru Desa. The couple didn't have any issue and practised austerities and penance. Achhal, the sister of Bachhal, waylaid in veil, received two bar corns of Guru Gorakh Nath in place of her sister at the end of her services to the Guru. Gorakh Nath was staying in a garden along with his disciple Kahni Chela at that time. On knowing that Achhal deceived her sister and got the boon from him impersonating Bachhal, Gorakh Nath rubbed his head and gave some dirt from it to her. The three other females who were barren and known to Bachhal, were each given a small portion of the boon. These were a Brahmani, a sweeper's wife and a grey mare. Bachhal kept only the fourth part of the gift for herself. In due course of time, all the four females became fruitful. Guga was born to Bachhal and was known as Zahar Pir. The Brahmani gave birth to Nar Singh Paanre, Patiya Chamar was born to the sweepress and blue horse, a *bachhra*, was born to the mare. After seven months, Guga, from the womb of his mother—instructed her not to stay in the house of her parents at the time of his

birth as people would call him Nanwaar or Nanakoo, i.e. the one born in a maternal uncle's house.

During his youth period, Guga went to Bundi and found Surial, the daughter of King Sanjai in a garden. He played dice with her, defeated her and won her hand in marriage but the betrothal was declined by Arjan and Surjan. The marriage procession started on the ninth of Bhadrapada (black fortnight-*badī*).

After the marriage of Guga, Arjun and Surjan were jealous of him and when Guga shot a deer while hunting in a jungle, they claimed falsely that it was shot down by them. Guga claimed the deer and in a feud, both the brothers were killed. According to H.A. Rose (1883: 178), the deserted mound of the maternal grandfather of Zahar Diwan lies at a distance of nine Kos from Nur and 27 Kos from Hissar.

Col. Tod

According to Col. Tod,³ Guga was the son of Vacha Chauhan, a ruler of Jangal Des and his kingdom stretched from the Satluj to Hariana, with the capital at Mehera, or Guga Ka Mairi, on the Satluj.

A portion of Rajasthan desert is still called Guga-ka-Thal and there is a legend that Guga, with his 45 sons and 60 nephews, was killed on Sunday while defending his capital. This is the reason that Sunday is held sacred to the worship of Guga due to his death on this day. The practice of observing Sunday as the day of Guga, is prevalent in the whole of Rajasthan.

Pedigree Guga's

H.A. Rose (1883: 177-78), while quoting Sirsa Variant, gives Guga's pedigree as under:

Umar (Sic) Chauhan, a chieftain of Bagar in Bikaner		
	!	
Jhewar	X	Bachhal
	!	
<i>Ugdi</i>	-	<i>Guga</i>

Guga who was born at Dadehra in Bikaner about 50 miles from Sirsa and who flourished as late as the time of Aurangzeb (1658-1707). The dates quoted by him, however, are not based on historical facts. In this

version also, he was asked and rebuked by his mother about the welfare of Arjun and Surjan whom he had killed prior to coming back home. Arjun was killed with his lance and Surjan was hit with his sword. Javaadia, a fine breed of horses in certain parts of Rajasthan, is associated with the legend of Guga.

Guga becomes Mohammdan

Guga, later became Mohammdan and subsequently sank to the earth at Mori, a place situated at a distance of 24 miles away from Sirsa in Haryana. At Mori and Dadrera, fairs in the memory of Guga are held on 8th and 9th of Bhadrapada every year, which are an ample proof of the historicity of the snake god. He was faithful to his wife for twelve years and visited her at night. Bachhal, suspecting a foul play by Surial, watched secretly and caught him one day. He then discontinued coming to the place.

Nabha version

According to a Nabha variant, Guga was born in Bikaner at Dadrera to Raja Jewar Chauhan and Bachhal. Gorakh Nath visited the area with his disciple who was an Aughar and caused the dried trees and plants to bloom again with his miracle by applying *vibhuti* to them. Achhal, the sister of Bachhal, borrowed her clothes and received two barley corns from Gorakh Nath in her place. Bachhal had to serve Gorakh Nath for another twelve years. On the completion of the term, Gorakh Nath went to King Basak with Shiva to demand one out of his one hundred and one sons for Bachhal. Basak agreed but his queen refused. In the words of H.A. Rose 1970 (reprint): 179), This incensed the Raja who foamed at the mouth, and Gorakh Nath promptly saturated some guggal in the saliva which was given to Bachhal. Bachhal took a bite of it and gave the rest to the wives of a Brahman and a sweeper and a little to her mare. Bachhal gave birth to Guga, the Brahmani to Narsingh, the sweepress to Bhaju and the mare to a blue colt. Narsingh and Bhaju were both killed in a battle against Arjun and Surjan during the division of property. Guga took the heads of Arjun and Surjan to show them to his mother. On being rebuked, he went twelve *kos* in a jungle and on an elevated place, prayed to the earth to swallow him up. The earth refused, saying that he was a Hindu. He was then converted to Islam by Pir Khwaja Muhi-Ud-Din, Ratu Haji and Miran Sahib who appeared

at the scene to relieve him of the situation. Guga then recited the Kalma and disappeared beneath the earth. His tomb still stands there and a fair is held on this spot on Bhadon Badi nine every year. A legend says that the Hindu and the Muslim both accepted him as their kinsman and Hindus are not cremated but buried within the radius of twelve *Kos* from the spot. This tradition could not be verified from other sources, but H.A. Rose refers to Longworth Dames, who suggests that the Bishnois living in that area buried their dead. Whether it was done due to the belief referred to above or owing to some other influence, could not be ascertained. At the tombs of Narsingh and Bhaju nearby, the libations of liquor and offerings of grams and sacrifice of he-buffaloes are made, respectively.

Gurgaon version

In the Gurgaon version, Jewar, a Chauhan Rajput lived at Duruhera (Dardrera) in Hissar district. Guga spent his days at *dhauli dharti* (grey land) situated nearby. Bachhla served Sadanand, a disciple of Gorakh Nath for twelve years but was unable to beget any boon from him. Guru Gorakh Nath came later and the dried trees and plants in the garden bloomed. The Raja and his Rani went to see him but since he didn't want to see a woman, he closed his eyes when they approached him. She, later, contrived to touch the bell which hung in his tent rope. The Jogi opened his eyes and asked the reason for doing so. Bachhla served him for twelve years. Kachhla then disguised herself for Bachhla and was successful in receiving two barley corns. On realizing that Bachhla's sister had supplanted her, the Guru gave a piece of guggal out of his wallet which she ate and became pregnant. The name of Jewar's sister is given as Sawerai in the legend. She complained to Jewar of the suspected infidelity of Bachhla. Sewaldah was the name of the maid of Bachhla. She was quite devoted to the Rani and vouched for her innocence and saved her life. Jewar, displeased with her, drove her away from his house and she started on a cart to her parents' house at Sirsa.

On the way, Bachhla passed a snake's hole wherein Basuki Nag was residing with his family. He thought Bachhla's unborn baby to be enemy and asked his Purohit and queen about the action to be taken in the matter. Astik, on their advice, was asked to bite Bachhal. He bit the oxen to stop the cart. Bachhla fainted on seeing the plight and went to

sleep. In a dream she was directed to tie the *dara* on her and on the head of the dead ox. Astik, on seeing it, didn't dare to bite the queen and she left for her parent's house. After some days she, on the advice of unborn baby, who didn't want to take birth in the house of the grand maternal uncle, went back to her husband's house where she was not treated well by him. He made her stay in a ruined hut at Daruhera. As mentioned in this legend, Guga was born on Tuesday, the 9th of Bhadon in Samvat 563 Vikrami in the region of Rai Pithora at midnight.⁴ Thus, eighth of Bhadon is considered as his birthday. At his birth the dark house was illuminated and the old blind midwife regained her eyesight. He bade his mother in a dream to put an impression of a hand (*thap*) on the door of the hut so as to avert evil. Guga later on married Seral (Sirial) and Narsingh Bir and Kaila Bir were his assistants. It is curious to note that Narsingh and Kaila Bir are the two disciples of Guru Gorakh Nath who accompanied him to the place, according to H.A. Rose (1970(R): 181, footnote) and both of these *Birs* are considered to be the assistants of Mahasu deity in Shimla region. Arjun and Surjan, here also, tried to prevent the marriage of Guga with Sirial but failed. Sirial is told to be the daughter of Raja Sindha. The legend takes a somewhat new turn when it mentions that Naru, the wife of the Purohit, didn't give water to Guga and he broke her pitcher by shooting at it with his arrow. The breaking of the pitcher drenched her clothes with water, and the Purohit, wanting compensation for the insult meted out to him, demanded a whole village as his remuneration to conduct the marriage of Guga with Sirial. Guga didn't agree to the demand as he had already given him one hundred and one cows as donation.

Another version

According to another version, Kachhla, the mother of the twins passed away and the Children were brought up by Bachhla as her adopted sons. She was keen to see that they got their share in the property of Raja Jewar, for which Guga was not prepared. The twins, instigated by the Brahman, went to Prithi Raj, the ruler at Delhi, to request him to help them get their share. Prithi Raj sent his officer Ganga Ram to effect the partition but he was maltreated by Guga and sent back with a blackened face.

Prithi Raj and Guga

Prithi Raj came with his army to teach a lesson to Guga and detained his cows for the night on the instance of the Purohit. Guga, not finding his cows attacked Prithi Raj with a force comprising of the people of 22 surrounding villages, together with Gorakh Nath's invisible array.

On reaching the battlefield, Guga stated that in case any of the warriors from the other side was able to take out his spear from the ground, he would leave the field after surrendering to Prithi Raj. But none could succeed in pulling out the spear and a battle was pitched. Guga defeated the king, smote off the heads of both his cousins and tied them to his saddle. He forced open the gates of Hissar town and forced the king to submit and beg pardon. Bachhla, on seeing the heads, cursed him and he, while standing beneath a Champa tree, prayed to the mother earth to swallow him up. The earth bade him to learn yoga from Ratan Nath Jogi, who was staying at Bhatinda and called Haji Abul Raza Ratan Tabrindi or Tabarhindi, and accept Islamic faith to so as practice Kalma. Guga agreed to do so and after learning yoga from Guru Gorakh Nath, approached Dhauli Dharti with a prayer to give him some place underneath. His prayer was acknowledged and he was engulfed along with his horse and arms on the 14th Badi of Asauj. A shepherd who saw Guga disappearing, conveyed the happening to Bachhal and Surial. They came to the site but found no trace. Surial, in a dream on the following night, was asked by Guga to pass the rest of her life in devotion to god. She agreed but demanded that he should contact her every night. Guga agreed too but with a condition that his visit to her would not be disclosed at any cost.

On seeing that Surial was always happy and put on new garments everyday, her mother-in-law and other ladies of the vicinity started suspecting her of some foul play and suspected a secret relationship with someone. On Tij festival day, after some years, some women wanted her to accompany them to the festival. It was a late night festival and Surial was thinking of the arrival of Guga. The matter of her refusal to accompany the ladies was conveyed to Bachhal, who decided to watch the person who was to come to her at night. As usual, Guga came and the mother caught hold of him. He cast his mantle on the ground and bade her to pick it up. When she stooped to take up the mantle, he put spurs to his horse and, saying that as per her wishes he is not going to

show his face to her, disappeared at once. The Mori shrine at Daruhera was built by Mohammad Ghori after his victory over Delhi. According to a legend, the drums of the army of Mohammad Ghori, while passing through Daruhera, ceased to sound instantaneously and on getting the information that it was the place of Guga, he prayed that in the event of his success in the battle, he would construct a shrine at the place. He achieved his goal and constructed a shrine as a token of reverence to Guga.

This legend takes us back to the period of Prithvi Raj Chauhan and Mohammad Ghori. In that case, Guga could not be contemporary of Aurangzeb, as already referred to. Before discussing the historical perspective of the legend, it would be better to have an idea of some other available legends and myths related to the snake god and his legendary contemporaries.

Guga cult in Himachal Pradesh

In various parts of Himachal Pradesh, the cult of Guga is so popular that his ballad—like an unwritten and oral epic, is sung by his votaries of all communities, especially between the period of Rakshabandhan and Guga navami. As already mentioned, Guga navami is the day of the birth of the snakegod and in order to arrange fairs and festivals at various places in the region, the *Bharatha* (folk ballad) of Guga is presented by the Mandlis (groups singing the ballad from door to door) in the whole of the region, excepting the tribal belt.

Kullu

According to a legend in Kullu (H.A. Rose 1970: 182), Guga was killed by witches (*Dains*). After his death, he reappeared in the guise of a cowherd and other cowherds knocked him down with a mace on the head. Guga emerged half way from the earth. His upper half is called Zahir-pir and the lower half as Lakhdata. Guga and Gugri were brother and sister who were born to mother Bachhla. The sons of Kachhla, Bachhla's, sister were known as Jaur and Jareta. The fight between Guga and the two brothers took place because they wanted to have a cow called Gogo, belonging to Brahma. Guga wanted to rescue the animal, and as a result, killed both the brothers.

Chamba

According to the cult of Mundlikh in Chamba, Guga, a Chauhan Rajput by clan, lived at Garh Dandera, near Bindraban during the time of Prithvi Raj, the last Hindu king of Delhi (AD 1170-1193). He fought against the Mohammandans and was beheaded in a battle. He continued to fight without his head and disappeared beneath the earth while only his spear point remained visible. Hence, the name of Guga is also Mundlikh. Guga died on the ninth day of the dark half in Bhadon and from that date, for eight days his *shraadh*, called *gugnaih*, is observed at his shrine. This account of H.A. Rose (p. 183 ff) is misleading as the *gugnaih* is a term for Guga navami, the ninth day of dark half in Bhadon and not for eight days period starting from that day. On the ninth day, all the mundlikh assemble at the shrines of Guga and give a finishing touch to the programmes of singing the ballads of Guga during the period starting from Rakshabandhan, a festival held eight days prior to Guga navami. In his shrines, called Mehri or guggehris, Guga is accompanied in stone or clay idols by Kailu, his wazir, Gugri, his sister on a mare, Narsingh, Guru Gorakh Nath, etc.

Nurya Sidh and Gurya Sidh

In Chamba, Guga's father is mentioned as Devi Chand. Bachhla, being issueless, retired to a forest for self-mortification and after twelve years, Kachhla succeeded in getting a boon from Gorakh Nath in her place. She purloined the clothes and jewellery pertaining to Bachhla to present herself before Gorakh Nath one day earlier to the appointed date. She received barley seeds as a boon. After twelve years of meditation by Bachhla and her failure, Gorakh Nath gave her a handful of ashes which she threw on the ground, angry over the offer. The ashes sprang on the ground and as a result of it, Nurya Sidh and Gurya Sidh were born. Both the Siddhas began to worship the Guru.

Bachhla's father was Raja Kirpal of Ajmer and her brother was Pithoria (Prithvi Raj). Gorakh Nath gave another handful of ashes to be taken by her on reaching home but without caring for the directions, Bachhla took whole of the lot instantaneously. As a result, her belly started bulging out and she knew that she had conceived. She went back to her place where she was rebuked by her husband that she had brought a bastard from the

Jogis. She was driven away by her husband, annoyed over her silence. While going on a bullock-cart to her parents' house, she heard a voice from her womb that she should go back as the child did not want to take birth at his maternal uncles' house. Bachhla went back on hearing the advice of the unborn. A daughter named Gugari was also born to Bachhla. Guga was born on the first Sunday in Magh in the morning. Mundlikh (Guga) became the ruler Rana at the age of seven, when his father abdicated in his favour. In the legend, the name of his wife was Surjila, the daughter of the Raja Bengala. Surjila was, prior to her marriage with Mundlikh, betrothed to Basak Nag, the ruler of the Nags. Mundlikh went to Gaur Bengala with a large retinue to celebrate his nuptials. He was accompanied by 52 Birs, including Kailu Bir, his Kotwal and Hanuman bir among many other supernatural beings and an army of nine lakh soldiers and members of the marriage party.

On the way, Kailu Bir was assigned the task of keeping an eye on the enemy camps. He found that on the other side of the mountain and across the river, Basaki Nag was camping with his army. Kailu Bir was in the guise of a Brahman. He succeeded in contacting Kalihar, the army Chief of Basaki. He asserted that they would destroy Mundlikh's army and kill Kailu Bir and his Kotwal. On Kailu's suggestion, they concealed themselves in grass which was tramped down by the army horses of Guga and burnt by producing fire from the nailed hoofs.

Surjila cast a spell on the party as she did not want to leave her father's place. Hanuman, foreseeing the situation, managed to throw away the garland offered to Mundlikh thrice. He also broke the sorceress' nether garment, making it loose, leaving her naked. This annoyed Guga, who called Hanuman, a monkey.

Hanuman, disgusted, left for Garh Dadner immediately and the sorcerer succeeded in casting a spell on Mundlikh and his army enlarging them for twelve years. In the meantime, Arjun and Surjan emerged more powerful at Dadner and demanded a share in the regime.

Panch Kalyani, a wonderful calf, was born at Dadner during this period. Arjun and Surjan contacted Mahmud of Ghazni for his help for their mission to take possession of the country as also of Panch Kalyani. The town was captured without any resistance from the other side. As a token of reward, Mahmud demanded Gugari for his harem. Gugri entered the chamber of Guga where his turban and sword were kept. By invoking Guga, she came out wearing the turban and sword in her hand

and defeated Mahmud Ghaznavi. Gugri, later, was betrothed to Ajai Pal, a friend and well wisher of Guga who lived on his estate not far away. Ajai Pal saw a dream of Guga fighting headless. He started to Gaur Bengala with five *Birs*, including Narsingh and Kali Bir. They sang songs of Dadner in the form of mendicants and hearing them singing one day, Mundlikh came out. Later, all of them were released and Surjila was brought to Mundlikh's place.

Mundlikh fought thirteen battles against Mohammendans and carried the 'Guggiana Duhai' to Kabul. In the last battle, he was beheaded but fought while riding his blue horse, the Nila rath. He was followed by Ajai Pal. It is said that had he fought headless for a period of two ana a half *gharis* (about an hour), he would have survived, but after two *gharis*, two kites appeared on the sky and said, 'Behold! Wonderful Warfare is this ! Mundlikh is fighting without his head!' Mundlikh, on hearing it, turned towards Ajai Pal and this tilted his balance. He put his hand on his *pagri* and came to know that he was headless. In the battle, he fell from his horse and died on the ninth day of the dark half of the moon in Bhadon. His Shraadh is observed in every shrine for eight days. Guja visited his wife as per his promise every night as told in the legends in other areas. Gugri noticed Guga coming to see his wife and clasped the neck of Nila horse. Guga told her that since she had noticed him, he could not come again. It is curious to note that in the legends prevalent in most of the areas in Himachal Pradesh, there is no mention of Guga turning to be a Mohammendan for the purpose of getting a place underneath the earth. The reference of his wars against Mohammendans seem contrary to his thought, but then why the Mohammedans also consider him to belong to their community, is a question to be answered.

The Mundlikh

According to H.A. Rose (1970:187), the name Mundlikh was probably a title given to Rajput warriors who disguised themselves in the wars of the time. 'There were five Rajputs who bore this title among the Chudasama princes of Girnar in Kathiawar, the first of whom joined Bhima deva of Gujarat in the pursuit of Mohmmad of Ghazni in A.D 1023'. He further writes that, 'from the Chauhan bards, who were his enemies, we learn that Jaya Chandra Rathore, the last Raja of Kanauj (killed in 1194, AD) also bore this title. He had taken a leading part in

the wars with the Mohammedans, whom he again and again defeated, or drove them back across the Indus. At last, enraged with Prithvi Raj of Delhi, he invited Mohammad of Ghori to invade the Punjab, with the result that both Delhi and Kanauj were overthrown and the Mohammedans triumphed. Jai Chand was drowned in the Ganges in attempting to escape.'

Tod (p.447) places Guga as a ruler of a kingdom situated at the bank of Satluj with its capital at Chihera. According to him, his father was Vacha Raja who defended his realm against the invasion of Mohammedans. Briggs locates it at Behera (Bhera?), a town situated on the Gara (Sutlej) and often mentioned in early history. He mentions in his *Ferishta* (p. ixii) that the place is referred to in connection with the first Muslim invasion. In *Gorakh Nath and the Kanphata Yogis* (1982: 195), he maintains, 'An interesting aspect of his power over nature is found in legends which relate Gorakh Nath with serpent powers and functions. The entire cycle of Guga legends illustrates the first; and the various stories told about his control of the serpents in Nepal, and the consequent failing of the rains, illustrate the second. Guga received his power over serpents, through discipleship, from Gorakh Nath, and he learned the art of charming snakes likewise from his great guru.' At Bharmar in Kangra, where the Pujari is of the lineage of Shibo who worshipped Guga about 500 years back and was blessed with the spiritual power to cure snake bite by administering water and clay, is still followed with of the application of water used for bathing the images and earth (*mitti*) on the bite. In Kangra Deo Raj, in place of corrected Jewar, is mentioned as the father of Guga. According to the Kangra Gazetteer (1904: 102-8), 'Guga is brought up with the foal and taking it with him, goes to woo a beautiful maiden with whom he lives, being transformed into a sheep by day and visiting her by night. In his absence, a pretender arises who is refused admittance by a blind doorkeeper who declares that on Guga's return his sight will be restored.'

Guga is offered a thick and sweet bread (*rot*) or *churi*. He is always represented on horseback and his shrines, unlike others, are open sheds of typical designs, generally located outside the vicinities. In Kangra and other places in Himachal Pradesh, Guga is believed to control hidden treasures. He finds mention in Jain tradition also, and as stated by H.A. Rose (p. 190), carries an important position. During the times of Nandibrahm who reigned 2431 years ago, Chandkosa, living in a forest

near Kankhal, in the form of a venomous snake, was turned to Guga by 24th Autar Mahabir Swami when he passed by his hole. This inference seems to be quite incorrect as, from all sources, we gather the information that Guga existed during the eleventh century or after that and Mahabir Swami was a contemporary of Gautama the Buddha, five centuries before Christ. The approach to associate every snake legend with Guga is not fair. In the first volume (p. 191) of the *Glossary of Tribes and Castes*, Rose mentions that Guga is known by nine names associated with nine types of serpents, including Anant, Vasuki, Shesh, Padm, Nabh, Kambal, Shankhpal, Dharatrashtar and Kali. The *kulas* recorded by him are incorrect. Guga is not associated with the nine *kulas* of the Nag community. He had simply acquired the power to cure snake bite and charming the snakes. To try to establish Guga as an incarnation of Lord Vishnu also seems to be a farfetched inference. The singers of the ballads relating to Guga use *Damroo*, *Thali* and an iron-chain (*sangal*) while moving from place to place, presenting portions of the ballad in local Pahari language and popular folk tunes.

The divinity cults relating to Mahasu, various *Birs*, Chasralu, Shirgul, Chandeshwar, Bijat Raj, Dum, Guga and his associates are extremely significant, especially keeping in view the folk mind and socio-historical background of the region. A detailed observation on these cults will be taken up in the backdrop of myths and divinity cults in the region. The information relating to various myths in the background of these cults is, no doubt, the most authentic oral history of various communities and people settled in the region since time immemorial and through the ages.

REFERENCES AND NOTES

1. Rose, H.A, 1970(R) *Glossary of Tribes and Castes of North-Western Frontier and Punjab*, Vol. I, pp. 171ff.
2. ———, 1970(R) *Ibid.*, p. 175.
3. Tod, *Rajasthan*, Vol. II, pp. 16, 413.
4. Rose, H.A.1970(R) *Ibid.*, p. 180.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Other Village Gods in Mahasu Region

In addition to Maheshura gods and the goddesses in Kinnaur and five major gods, namely, Mahasu, Shirgul, Dum, Bijat and Guga in Mahasu region, there are numerous other important village gods carrying interesting myths and legends since time immemorial and dominating the village life. Keeping in view the typical legends of their origin and myths relating to them, it would be interesting to discuss some of them to understand the collective conscience of the people as a whole.

Dev Suni

Dev Suni, the village god of Pahal, is also known as Dev Dudadhari (milk god) and Dev Damodar. He is worshipped by the inhabitants of about ten villages in the vicinity. Dev Damodar is celibate as also a bachelor. His images are kept in a veil and women devotees are not allowed to have his *darshan* (glance). Dev Suni is believed to be Vashnavite in faith and does not accept animal sacrifice. There is no palanquin of the deity and his bronze image faces the north. In the shrine, there are 19 images of various godlings, including one of Sehsravahu (one thousand-armed demon of the Mahabhartta period) who is worshipped as a god in various villages. A horse made of silver and another one made of bronze (Ashtadhatu) are considered to be the vehicles of the god. The horse faces the image of the god in such a position that it looks ready to allow the god to take him for a ride. It is considered a bad omen to see the horse falling and, as such, utmost care is taken to keep it standing by the attendants and *Kardars* of the temple. In case of taking of the image of the god to any other location, the image of the horse is taken first of all. There being no palanquin of the god, the images are taken in a vessel called Kaund—a basket, which is always carried by the bearer on the head. The leaves of 'Paja' tree grown in the premises of the shrine, and considered auspicious, are used as incense for the deity. The courtyard of a shrine is called 'Ron' (a derivation of

battlefield) in Shimla region. The term indicates that in the ancient times, feuds might have been settled in the courtyards of religious places. In Kinnaur, it is called *Santhang*, a place for discourses by the monks. In Kullu, it is called *Soh* (Sauh), a place of god, pledge, truth or a sacred place related to a deity. The term is quite akin to *Santhang* in Kinnaur. In Kullu, *Khaul* is the open space utilized for the dances of the deity. It seems to be a related term with *Khalihan*, an open space used for separating grains from the chaff. The medium of god is called *Devan* or *Devaha*—the vehicle of god, in Shimla. No dwelling of human being can be constructed higher as compared to the temple. *Korad*, the main beam of the shrine, is covered with iron sheets. In the villages, there is a practice of constructing a raised *Chabutra* (platform) about five feet wide and ten feet long to be used for the Panchayat of a *Devta*.

The main function of the deity is called *Jatar* and *Bhandara* (*Bhadera*) and is the feast arranged in the name of village god. The worshipper (Pujari) of the Dev is called *Sheni*. The newly wedded couple are taken to the temple to pay obeisance to the spirit, a ritual called *Dhaal Karna* to greet. The collection of grains on annual basis by the god is called *Shain* or *Bashnoya*. The votaries of a particular village god consider it their obligation to offer *Bashnoya* to their deity. There is a tradition in Pahal that whenever the deity is taken from the *chauki*, he has to be placed on *Shain*, the grain collected as *Bashnoya*. This ritual is conducted by a man from Saik community in the village. In *Bhadera* (*Bhandara*) and *Jagra*, the grains (*Shain*) are collected keeping in view the landed property of a family. The *Shain* is weighed according to *Lee*. The land of Pahal is only eight *Lee*. The two divisions of the village, are, thus four *Lee* each. Each family of the division of *Lee* has to contribute three *Pathaas* as *Shain*. At the time of *Bhadera* ceremony, the share of *Shain* is half as compared to *Bashnoya* at the time of *Jagra*. The collection is shared by the *Kardars* after being offered to the deity. The palanquin of the deity is touched by the Saik with the hand before being lifted by the bearers (*kahars*). Saik was the ancestor of the group, as is the case with Sataik, the other group whose ancestor was Sataik, according to the local legends. Ghangrera and Gaklera groups are named after Ghanghar and Gokal, respectively. The Gaklera helps the three groups in the performance and the scheduled caste musicians play musical instruments and bring dry rice husk for the function. The people of this community are called 'Jairoo', of the people of Pahal.

The village god Damodar is worshipped on the first day (Sankranti) of every month, four famous festivals, *Badhera* (*Bhandara*) after every six months, *Jagra* (*Dev Yatra*) after every alternate year and on *Parvat* (mountain) Pooja on the fifth year. The four main festivals are Bishoo, Sair, Mal Purnima and Deewali. On every occasion, the deity is worshipped by offering ghee of cow, rice, wheat, milk and kheer. *Ghee* and cow milk are considered sacred and prepared with utmost piety. The flour used for preparing bread, etc., in the premises of the temple is grinded within the compound and to use flour prepared in a watermill outside the temple premises, is a taboo. The Pujari himself (worshipper) has to extract oil of *Khuomani* (a type of chestnut) fruit for use at the time of ceremonies. The oil is used for lighting lamps, etc. The cow whose milk or *ghee* is used for various rituals, is kept aloof and not allowed either to mix with other cattle or to be touched by a woman in her menstrual period. The villager contribute grains to feed the cow. These grains are called *Dala* (feed for the cow).

The Cow

The cow whose milk or ghee is used for worshipping or propitiating village deity, should have calved. In case of death of the calf or the concerned cow before the event, the ghee prepared for the purpose can't be used. The cow is milked only by the *Devan* (medium) of the deity and the milk, after being taken to the temple, is used for preparing curd, butter and ghee. The *lassi* so made can only be used by the male members. It is a taboo for the female members. In case of men not using it, the same is poured on the earth.

Jagra and taboos related to it

On *Jagra* ceremony every third year, the deity is taken to Bamot, the place of birth of the godling. The place is situated at a distance of about three kilometres from Pahal. After considering the auspicious time according to *Chandrama* (moon), *muhurat* (auspicious occasion), no impurity (due to child birth or death) of *Sutak* or *Patak* in the families of main worshipping groups, namely, Ambreda, Dhaik and Saik, the intimation regarding the actual time and date of the ceremony is conveyed to the votaries by way of loud calling (*haak*). On hearing it, the use of cots for

sleeping, eating onion, garlic, masoor pulse, wine, meat, egg and taking food and having sex with a family having impurity due to *Sutak* or *Patak* in the village, is abandoned forthwith. Contact with a woman in her menstrual cycle is also avoided. The mediums have to fast on the days of ceremony. On the day of *Jagra*, the images of the deity are cleaned and the main gate 'Paul' is kept open. The villagers are informed in a loud voice *haak* about the opening of the 'Paul', indicating that none should risk climbing a tree, throwing dirt towards the shrine or indulging in an act disliked by the godly spirit. The deities located in adjoining villages and powerful gods worshipped in the region are invoked and called upon to grace the occasion. Some of these include Bhadrakali of Shalangri, Dev Suni, Dano, Darwani, Mata Bhadrakali and a few others. The procession of the deity starts in the afternoon. It is a taboo for the women folk to come out before the procession. Gangajal is sprinkled on the route by a man who has fasted, in order to make the atmosphere pollution free. The medium of *Dano* deity leads the procession while intimating the onlookers not to obstruct the path of the deity.

On the way, God Dhandhi, a non-vegetarian deity who stays in village Nhwat, receives god Damodar. He is believed to be the god-brother (*Dharmbhai*) of the deity, Dev Suni. Those accompanying the procession are not allowed to wear leather shoes. On reaching Bamot in the evening, it is announced in loud voice that the deity is performing *havan* and none should come out of one's house. Even animals are not allowed outside. The mediums go to trance and inform the audience of blessings and security by the spirits. To pour milk on the image of the deity is considered auspicious. While the deity is outside the village on some job, the ladies don't use cots or any other object made of crop plants to sleep at night.

Birth of god Damodar and related Myths

Regarding the birth of God Dev Damodar, there is a legend that after the Mahabharata battle, two Brahmans, Amroo and his brother, terrified with the horrible scene in the battle, came to Bamot in search of a place suitable for solace and mental peace. Amroo, being a Tantric, knew *kak-bhasha* (language of crow), *geedar-bhasha* (language of jackal) and *Sabar* (mantras). He also followed *Ulook-bhasha* (language of owl) and *Shwan-bhasha* (language of dog.) On reaching the place (Bamot), they experienced that a Pindi (stone image) was wailing. The Pindi was of

Dev Suni (Dev-Damodar). It oozed milk. The cows of the villagers used to release milk on the image. The god is thus, known as Dudhadhari (the bestower of milk). The broken image, due to which the spirit was crying with pain, was rejoined by Amroo. The sign of the joint is still visible. This image is a round-shaped soft stone. In the shrine, the other images are of Sehsravahu (the demon) known as god Dano and of Hanuman (Mahavir). While treating it, Amroo covered the image with a piece of his turban.

After some time, both the brothers left the place for Pahal and brought the image of Dudhadhari with them. One of them became the worshipper of the Dev and the younger one started worshipping Sehsrabahu and the goddess. On division, the elder brother retained Sabar Ved (Vidya) and the younger brother was associated with the work of Pujari (worshipper). At a time when repairs of Devra (Shrine) are undertaken, the image of the god Dudhadhari is covered with a piece of white cloth as was done by Amroo while reuniting the broken pieces of the image. The goddess of Kabra Dhar, a place situated near the village, is believed to be the mother of the god. She is also worshipped by the medium (*Devahan*) of Dev Damodar. The name of the brother of Amroo was Adhaik. The Dhaik group associates its lineage from Adhaik. There is a legend that one day, the wife of Adhaik, while milking her buffalo, noticed that some other lady was simultaneously milking the same buffalo from the opposite side. She conveyed the incident to her husband who tried to catch hold of the unknown intruder but failed. He then decided to chase her downward. They reached the ravine below Pahal village. On seeing that he was unable to overpower her, he drew a line and warned her not to cross it again. Stopping immediately, she retorted, 'You have fixed the boundary line for me but did not inquire about me. As fulfillment of your desire, I shall stay at Ghatadu and never enter the village again'. She also conveyed that she was his *Isht Devi* (the divine spirit whom he worshipped). On hearing the celestial voice, the village felt sad and requested her to accompany him to the village again. She would not agree but instead asked him to accompany her to her place. On reaching the bank of the ravine, she asked him to close his eyes and follow her. She then took him inside a cave which looked like a palace. He stayed there for some time and wanted to go back to his village. While leaving, he was given a leather bag as gift. She instructed him not to open the bag before reaching home. But curious as he was, he wanted to find out the contents in the bag on the way. On

opening it, he found that some straws of rice chaff fell on the ground. He threw these away and took the bag with him but on reaching home, it was traced that the remaining portion of the objects had turned into gold. He rushed back to the place again but found nothing. At Ghatadu, the devotees worship a boulder as the image of the goddess. It is said to be the same boulder on which the cows used to pour milk before the manifestation of the goddess. The goddess is called Shalangari Devi as the name of the spot is Shalanga. According to a common saying, there used to be a basket full of *Sattu* (barley flour) and pitcher of *lassi* (processed curd) available at the spot for the use of the passers by.

Bhadrakali and Bhimakali

Goddess Shalangari, the Bhadrakali, is believed to visit her sister Bhimakali of Sarahan twice a week on every Sunday and Tuesday at night. The people staying in the watermills on these days assert that the voices of *chitchat* and drums are heard and the flow of water to the watermills gets disturbed occasionally, causing disturbance in the smooth functioning of the watermills. The phenomena is attributed to the meeting of the two divine spirits. It is believed that Deo Suni or Devta Damodar is the incarnation of Lord Krishna and the reason for offering of cow milk and butter prepared with utmost piety is, thus, understandable. The goddess Shalangari is considered to be the symbol of Yogmaya whose reference is available in the *Mahabharata* and *Shrimad Bhagwad Purana*. She manifested herself as Bhadrakali in Kaliyuga. Shalangari Devi is worshipped as Bhadrakali, the god-sister of Dev Damodar, a Vaishnavite deity, the incarnation of Lord Krishna.

Dhandhi

Dhandhi deity of *Nhewat* village was a Rajput of Koti State in his human form. He was elevated to divinity status owing to his saintly and justice-loving traits. When the spirit was brought to Nhewat by his followers, he was opposed by votaries of other gods, but after having been granted shelter and powers by Dev Suni, he was allowed to stay there. Both of the deities then became god-brothers but Dhandhi takes meat as per his human habits, whereas Dev Damodar doesn't accept non-vegetarian food.

The Dano

Dano, the Kritvirya of the epic period, was a great Tantric. He is known as Sehsravahu, i.e. having one thousand arms. He is Rajput deity by caste. He was brought to Pahal village from a place known as 'Bainsh ka Nal' (Bamboo grove). He was the ruler of Bhajji State and his main place is still believed to be at Bainsh ka Nal. His capital was at Suni. According to a legend, he was brought to Pahal according to the wishes of Dev Damodar to help the welfare of the cattle who either didn't milk or died prematurely in the area. He is propitiated to avoid epidemic and ailments of cattle. A he-buffalo is reared in the name of Sehsravahu (Dev Dano) in the village. Earlier, his medium belonged to *kadhal* community, a section of Rajput group but now the *Devahan* (medium) is from the scheduled caste community. In case of some calamity and natural catastrophe in the area, the Dev Dano is invoked first of all even upto now. In Pahal, he is believed to be a vegetarian god and is also worshipped at a *chabuttra* in the field surrounded by plantation of trees. This establishes him as the spirit protecting the crops. This deity has his shrines at Kandaghat, Shilad, Thachi, Hari Choti, Chanaladi, Bijhal and several other places situated in a vast area. Apart from being a god of harvest, he is a powerful animal god and is offered *ghee* as *Pached* (a ritual according to which the *ghee* prepared out of the milk of a buffalo or cow prior to the consumption of the same by the concerned family is offered to the deity as a token of thanksgiving gesture). On Diwali or Maal Purnima day, *halwa* for offering is prepared with this type of *ghee* only.

Darwain

Darwain (Dwarpal) is the manifestation of Bhairav and acts as gatekeeper deity. His image is generally made of wood but stone images are also made and established outside the temples. He is a vegetarian deity. In local parlance, his images are also called *Thambh* (Pillar). He is mostly associated with goddess shrines and another of his manifestations, is Launkra.

Naivi

In Bagh village near Pahal in Shimla district, a girl named Naivi was born to a family. Her father was Shibu. She was married in Ambreda family

in Pahal village. On departure, she kept some of her ornaments and other valuables in the custody of her brother who later refused to give them back on demand. Feeling disgusted, she put herself to flames in the courtyard of the shrine of Dev Damodar. She died and the temple was also destroyed in fire. Her spirit was deified and the village god Damodar desired through his medium that she would stay in the temple of the deity. The goddess is now kept wrapped in red clothes even during ceremonies. The Ambreda people don't pursue matrimonial relationships in Bagh village, as desired by Naivi. The place where Naivi committed suicide was abandoned and the shrine was shifted to the present site. The abandoned place is not used for any purpose as the fear of haunting by the spirit looms large. According to a legend, one Nokhu who constructed his house ignoring the common faith had to die due to leprosy and his house was gutted in fire. Now the family has shifted their dwelling place to another spot and is prospering. The spirit is worshipped as Goddess Naivi and propitiated with God Damodar. At Thachi, a place situated at a distance of about ten kilometres westward from Pahal, the principal deity is Sehsravahu but Dev Kurgan, Hanuman, Darwani and Dumb goddess (Tata Durga) are also worshipped.

Dumb goddess

The medium of the Dumb goddess can't utter a single sentence while in trance and is interpreted by mediums belonging to other deities. Dev Damodar once made a woman, who was looking at his palanquin, stick to a window. When she prayed and offered to present her ear-rings to the deity, she was pardoned. The *Dano Dev* is also powerful god. His image vanishes and is traceable only when it comes back automatically. Once Diwali festival could not be celebrated as the image got lost and was not traceable but after sometime, it was found hidden in the courtyard of the shrine near the image of *Baliraj*, the Asura king and a local god in whose name a bonfire is lit in the premises of the shrine on Diwali. The sacred wood (*Samidha*) used to lit the bonfire are called *Rahoti*. On this day traditional songs of *Ramayan* and *Thavroo* are sung throughout the night and Baliraj is propitiated in the morning. The bonfire in itself is called Baliraj. It is believed that Baliraj was the grandson of *Prabhad* the father of king *Vairochana*. He was very kind hearted and a popular ruler. His spirit is believed to bless the votaries on Diwali day every year. Diwali

is called '*Deothan*' or the day of the awakening of the divine spirits. *Deothan* is the main function of the deity and on this day the people collect *Samidha* from the forest and place these in the premises of the shrine for lighting the bonfire at night. Grains collected from various households are put in the bonfire to appease the firegod. This practice is called '*Dala Dena*'. The spirit of firegod is invoked to protect crops from wild animals, bad weather, natural calamities and other unfavourable situations. A lamp is kept burning before the symbol of Baliraj throughout the night. In the early hours of Ushakal (morning), a lady from the family of the medium of Dev Damodar in her best attire and laden with ornaments, comes to the courtyard of the shrine with three lamps out of which one is kept before Baliraj and the remaining two are placed at the main gate of the shrine. After doing so, she goes back to her house and the mediums of all the village gods go to trance and predict the good or bad time ahead. They ensure security and blessing to the devotees and the ceremony of *Deothan* comes to an end.

Mountain worship

In the ceremony of *Panch Bali* or five sacrifices, the main aim is the mountain worship (*Parvat Pooja*). The ritual is performed at Mashabon ki Dhar, a small mountain situated above Pahal village. The festival of mountain worship is arranged after every five years and as the name indicates, five sacrifices, respectively, of a she-goat, ram, cock, Panshakra and fish are offered to the mountain god. Earlier, a he-buffalo was sacrificed on the occasion but now this tradition has been abandoned. The ceremony is not associated with Dev Damodar or any other deity of the village. Pahal is located at a distance of 32 kilometres from Shimla, the state capital of Himachal Pradesh.

Koteshwar

Koteshwar is the presiding deity of Kumarsain state. He was the divine ruler of the state when there was no Raja. He is the manifestation of Lord Shiva and is also called 'Trimukhi'. A legend goes that during his regime, he had nominated one member to his court from each family to assist him in managing the affairs of the state. It is said that before coming to Kumarsain, there was a temple of Koteshwar Mahadev at Sarata in Kotkhai

pargana. It was destroyed due to heavy rain and floods and reached Pabbar river from where a portion of it was dragged to Hatkoti by the villagers. Koteswar, on reaching Hatkoti, started manifesting in the guise of Shiv linga to serve the Hateshwari goddess. Once, Gorkha warriors who invaded the region tried to steal the precious image of the mother goddess. On seeing this, the goddess became angry and drove away the thieves with her *virat* (large) manifestation. Koteswar Mahadev assisted the goddess in her ordeal. After this event, the Mahadev is worshipped in the shape of a box-type cabin (*Kothri*) at Hatkoti.

Obru and Shobru

There is a legend that once two Tantrics, namely, Obru and Shobru belonging to Rajtadi village in Ubadesh in Seraj Pargana came to Hatkoti for a glimpse of the mother goddess. On finding the presence of some other powerful divine spirit at the place with strong vibrations, they applied *Vashikarna Mantra* on Koteswar Mahadev in order to hypnotise him and his brother. After doing so, they put both of them in a *Tumba* (vessel) as captives and wanted to take them to Satluj river for immersion. They didn't, however, realize that three sisters of Koteswar Mahadev followed them secretly to safeguard the deity. They were in the guise of Kali. On the way, they made the vessel to fall down on the ground. This way Koteswar succeeded in getting liberated. Obru and Shobru tried their best to recapture the spirit but failed. The place where the deity was released, was full of Shrambal trees and Kashmal bushes. Shrambal is a wild flower and Kashmal is a medicinal herb. The place is still known as Shrambal and is located about three kilometres away from Kingal in Shimla district on the Hindustan-Tibet national highway.

At Shrambal

At Shrambal, shepherds grazed their cattle and sheep. The deity started feeding himself by sucking the milk of cows in the guise of a snake. The owners of the cows apprehended that the servants might be milking the cows during the day. At last the spirit appeared as a snake before Dhani Ram, a resident of the vicinity and made him realize that he was a divine spirit. He prayed to the snake to appear in his original form after coming to the sheet of cloth he had spread for him. On hearing his prayer, the

snake converted himself as a lizard (*Chhipkali*). The Pandit, later, put him in a clay pot. The next morning, there was a *Trimukhi* (three-faced) image in place of the lizard. The three-faced image is a combination of the images of Mateshwari, Kedarnath and the Mahadev himself. The image was accepted as the presiding deity of the village and installed in shrine.

Bhambu Rai and Cat

There is a legend that Bhambu Rai, a demon ruler of Kumarsain and Sholi, tortured his subjects. They approached Koteswar Mahadev to be rid of the tyranny. Bhambu Rai destroyed the demon with his celestial powers and Kirati Singh was installed as the ruler of the state. The old temple of the deity was at Mandholi near Kumarsain. Once Kirati Singh, Raja of Kannauj came to Kumarsain on sightseeing and sport. His cat was with him. It was killed by a white rat near the present palace of Kumarsain where only potters lived during those days. The Raja was surprised on seeing the event which was due to the miracle of the deity. The *Devta* afterwards installed Kirati Singh as the ruler. It was in the year Samvat 7 Vikrami that he occupied the throne and accepted the deity as the family god of the ruling family. He is still worshipped as a principal deity in the region and his images are brought out in the *Rath* (palanquin) on festive occasions.

Jal Devta of Sarpara

Sarpara is situated in Pandrah-Beesh Pargana of Shimla district. The presiding deity of the village is Jal Devta (water god). According to a legend, there lived a man whose name was Rai Partu. He was very rich and had a seven-storeyed house. The remains of this building can be seen in the village even now. The village is famous for a water tank (*Sarovar*) which is believed to be the abode of the water god. Rai Partu had a beautiful daughter. Her name was Lamdoodi (literally, having long breasts).

The legend of Lamdoodi

One day, during the month of Ashadh (Jul-Aug), Lamdoodi went to cut grass in the area of Sarpara Sarovar and found that nine flowers blossomed

in the tank. Wanting to offer some of them to the deity, she went inside the tank to pluck some of them. Unluckily or as the fate would have it, she got entrapped in the mud and could not come out. Her father was worried and asked the villagers to search for her but there was no trace of her.

After six days, the girl appeared on a boulder on the top of the mountain above the village. She was accompanied by a saint. On seeing her mother at work in the fields down below, she started weeping as she wanted to go back to her family. The saint, on seeing her disappointed, allowed her to go to the village with an instruction that she would bring up her offsprings carefully. She agreed and left for the village. After some-time, she give birth to nine snakes. She felt ashamed and didn't like to disclose the fact to the people. She would feed them secretly. As time passed by, there was more and more need of milk which was difficult to be obtained. Suspecting that there was something which the daughter didn't want to share with her, the mother one day sent her to the fields and herself stayed back at home to find out the truth. She found a basket under the stairs in which all the snakes were being brought up. Thinking it bad for the family, she dug a pit in a field nearby and made a hearth on it to put each one of the snakes to death after baking them on an iron plate. She started putting the snakes on the hot iron plate on the hearth but all of them, excepting the youngest one, managed to escape. The youngest one was stuck to the basket out of fear and was thrown in the bushes of *Bhang* (an intoxicating herb) near the field with the basket.

Nine Snake gods

All the snakes, leaving the village in disgust, wandered hither and thither and settled in the places where they are worshipped as village gods. They include Banda Nag of Bonda village near Sarahan, Mahu Nag (Suket), Dethwa Nag of Dethwa village in outer Seraj, Raie Nag of Kharga village in Kullu, Jakru Nag of village Dhara Sarga, Kaovil Nag of village Labana in 15/20 area, Jandhori Nag of village Jandhori in 15/20 area, Tunan Nag of village Tunan (Kullu) and Bhagailru Nag of village Sarpara. The inhabitants of Sarpara village found Bhagailru Nag in the bushes of *Bhang* plants and returned him to Jal Devta, the father. All the sons, excepting Mahu Nag, pay their visits to Jal Devta from time to time and the votaries have to arrange functions in their honour. It is believed that Mahu Nag

in Suket was unable to cross Satluj river and, as such, was exempted by his father from coming to Sarpara. Raie is deaf, as one of his ears was damaged in the fire. The term 'Raie' denotes the same meaning. He, on reaching Jandhori, exhibited his miraculous powers due to which he was accepted as the village god by the people. He is taken to the *Saur* (water tank) in Sarpara every second or third year and is required to arrange a feast (*Dham*) for the inhabitants of the village.

According to a belief, Raie Nag, fed up with visiting the *Saur* water tank at Sarpara every now and then, decided to have his own *Saur* (water tank) at Jandhori (Phancha). He brought some water from the *Saur* at Sarpara and put it in the tank at Jandhori and started worshipping it. When Jal Devta came to know about the incident, he felt outraged and banned his entry to Sarpara. Now the Nag doesn't come to Sarpara but worships his parents (Jal Devta and Lamdoodi) at his own village. There is some similarity in the shape of tanks and vegetation at both the places. The grass and plants are also similar in shape and variety. The shrine of the deity is called 'Devti'. The people of Phancha village are also the followers of Jaakh (Yaksha) Devta. The Nag deity has his own palanquin (*Rath*) in which there are seven images of various other gods, including Sa-Devta (the god of snow), who accompanied the deity from Shrikhand peak where he had been taken during the year 1974 AD. Shrikhand is the abode of Lord Shiva. The spirit of Sa-Devta was detected only when the deity came back to his village after the pilgrimage. On reaching the village, this spirit started creating troubles. Later, there was an agreement between the two and his image was placed in the *Rath* of the deity. The temple committee seeks the approval of the deity before implementation of the decisions taken by it. According to a common belief, nothing can be concealed from the spirit. Earlier, the Nag was the principal deity and sole custodian of the area situated between Dhanpan Kanda, the top of the mountain, to Kandri and Soorkoot. He lost a major portion of his territory in gambling. The Jaakh of Phancha village helped him to regain his territory and the Nag, in gratitude, gave half of his domain to the Jakh Devta as his reward.

Journey to Indrapuri

On Magh Sankranti, the first day of Magh (Jan.-Feb.) the medium (*Mali*) of the deity conveys the outcome of the events and proceedings of Dev

Sabha, which is held for about one month at Indrapuri. He informs the devotees about good or bad times ahead and guides them about the measures to be taken for ensuring peace and prosperity. This faith is prevalent in the entire region, as mentioned earlier. There are big trees around the *Saur* at Jandhori (some say 'Janghori') which are believed to have been converted from crop plants grown in the area with the divine powers of the deity at the time of the construction of the *Saur*. The small plants were made to grow as big trees overnight, according to their belief. Every family has to contribute at least four *Patha* of grains annually to the god.

The birthplace of Nine Nag deities

Jal or water god worship is quite ancient. Varuna is the god of clouds and water. Jal or Jar devta of Sarpara (the village of Sarp = Nag or Sar = water tank or 'Sarp Sar' the tank of Nag) is a curious phenomena as nowhere else is the water god worshipped in the name of Jal 'Devta'. According to a strange myth, there lived one 'Raipaltoo (Rajpartu) family in Sarpara. Raipaltoo is Kinnauri term indicating sheep breeders and families of this name still reside in some villages of Kinnaur. In Sangla, Raipaltoo is a traditional family of ancient origin. During the month of Chaitra (March-April), there is dearth of grass and the cattle breeders have to arrange it from the fields or nearby difficult spots. It was during that month that the female members of the family of Raipaltoo were at work and the head of the family became worried that there was no grass for the cattle at home. The name of the field where they were doing agricultural work, was Sheela (having dampness and mud).

The old lady of the family asked one of her daughters to arrange for some grass, as evening was fast approaching. The daughter started collecting and cutting grass and reached *Sar*, (*Saur* in local parlance), the water tank near the village where she found green grass. She saw a flower of lotus blooming in the tank and wanted to have it. As she came closer, the flower started going back into the mud and forgetting the risk of being entrapped in mud, she developed a keen desire to have the flower in her possession. Ultimately, she was drowned in the mud and there was no trace of her whereabouts.

The family members failed to trace her but after some time, when moving with a sage on the spot at the mountain spot overlooking the

village, the Tank and the Sheela field, she appeared and called her mother. The villagers down below were amazed to see both of them at the spot on the mountain. Her mother called her to the village.

On hearing her voice, the sage allowed her to follow her family members and instructed that she should take care of her offsprings after their birth. She agreed and went back to her parents. After some time, she gave birth to nine snakes and kept them hidden in the cattleshed at some distance. She would milch the cow and feed the snakes with the milk. On seeing the lessened quantity of the milk, her mother got suspicious and went to milch the cow herself. The snakes, as usual, tried to drink milk from the pot while it was taken by the old lady on her head, mistaking her for their mother. The girl's mother was frightened and tried to kill the snakes. She burnt fire at Thung, a spot near the village in order to put the basket containing the snakes in it. Her name, according to a myth, is said to be Lamdoodi (having large teats) as her breasts were large in size. This name seems to be a mythical one as there has been no practice of having such subjective types of nomenclatures in the area. The myth relating to the feeding of the snakes becomes more amazing with this name as it indicates that Lamdoodi also feared the snakes and might be feeding them with her breast milk from a distance, which elongated her breasts. The serpents (Nags) fled away and some of them were burnt partially. The youngest one remained stuck to the basket as it feared coming out and even now the metal image of Jal Devta has a symbol of the stuck child with it. It is placed on the palanquin of the village god. All the rest of eight Nag children went to different villages from Sarpara and come back to the place near the water tank where Lamdoodi ultimately vanished in it. As already said, these Nags included Banda (Sarahan in Shimla), Janghori (or Jandhori), Dethwa, Kaovil, Tunan, Kharga, Mahu (Mandi), Jahru Nag and Dharasarga. In addition to them, there is one brother whose whereabouts are not known as he could never return to Sarpara after he left it. The Nag Devtas of Kharga and Tunan are the symbols of only one Nag as we find numerous places related to only one god. Mahunag of Mandi has several establishments in the whole region but he, according to the origin, is only one. As such, the number of these brothers is only nine but there may be some variations in the names of places where these brothers are settled. It is said that Mahunag was taken by the honey bees with a view to save his life and reached 'Chaira' cave with the bees where he stayed for some time. Later on, the

people of Karsog area took him to his present place of worship and he is now known to have the spiritual power to ward off the effect of snake poison. According to beliefs, he was advised by his mother not to cross Satluj to meet her as it would deprive him of his spiritual power to depoison a patient only by remembering him. The Banda Nag of Banda near Sarahan, tried to take her mother with him to Sarahan across the river Satluj and suggested that in the event of her fear to cross the river, he would expand his body to form a bridge over the river, but she was so terrified that she could not dare crossing it and had to go back to Sarpara. Banda Nag wanted his mother to come to a spot known as 'Kavchho' opposite Sarahan. She got settled as per the wishes of her son and, even today, the Nag is brought in a palanquin to a place 'Kui ki Dhar' near the spot and pays his homage to his mother. While going back to Sarpara, the mother perspired and sweat, the drops of which fell at various places helped water springs emerge. A place near Kavanda, where Lamdoodi put some milk from her breasts, has a spring of milky water. Banda Nag is the eldest brother and mythically has some relationship with *Bahand*, a special rope shaped serpent made of straws at the time of Boodhi Diwali, a traditional festival of the region. *Bahand* is prepared only by scheduled caste people and cut into pieces by upper caste people while singing the ballad of *Kaab* in some villages, including Ravin near Sarahan and Nirmand.

Banda Nag is received by the musicians of Jal Devta on his visit to Sarpara at a distance of about one kilometre from the village. On reaching the village, the deity goes to his place of birth and circumambulate the tank before meeting his father in a palanquin. The *chowkidar* of the deity, Praodhia, meets someone in the form of a devil and the villagers offer a ram in his honour. This is done even when the spirit of the devil is invisible. It conveys that the Praodhia is the spirit of a demon, though he acts as an incumbent of the deity. The palanquins of the deities are dipped in the water of the *Saur* and are not taken out till a sound of 'kar kar' is heard from the palanquins. This sound conveyes the rejuvenation and revitalization of the concerned gods who, according to a common belief, get fatigued and weary by the use of their spiritual energy applied for the welfare of their followers during the intervals. This exercise allows them to recoup their lost energy and get afresh for the job of welfare of the votaries.

At the time of initiation of a new medium to any of the brothers, the aspirant has to go to the *Saur* while in trance, where he takes off his

clothes and wears only a *dhoti* to enter the *Saur* with an empty *kro* (sacred vessel of the god). He then dives in the tank. The water of the *kro* is considered to be so sacred that it is used as *Gangajal* and kept in the temple till the next visit of the concerned deity. Before going into the tank, the new *gur* is taken to the nine Pindis installed in a small temple in the *Saur* and the medium bows his head before the Pindi of his deity. Presently, the family of Parshetak Negi is staying in the house which was once occupied by Raipaltoo family whose daughter Lamdoodi was the mother of the Nag gods. The Jal Devta seeks the permission of the goddess before going ahead with any new job.

There are six images of metal in the palanquin of Jal Devta, out of which one is the image of Jal Devta, the second Mohra is of the ninth son of the god. The third Mohra, the small one, is of the goddess. The fourth and the fifth images are adjusted for beautification of the palanquin.

The myth of Pujari

Jakh deity of Phancha is also called Jakh Narayan. There are two separate images of Jakh and Narayan in the palanquin. Narayan is the original deity, whereas Jakh came from a cave near Jakho village near Khaneri in Rampur Bushehr. The worshipper, after his initiation ceremony (*Badaaran*), can neither take his meals with his family members nor is permitted to dine in a group. He uses his own kitchen and utensils. Even outside his village, he had to prepare his meals separately. He is not to permit anybody to touch him while taking his food. In case of violation of this rule, the defaulter and the Pujari both have to undergo some punishment, may it be fine, taking bath or offering sacrifice, etc. The defaulter has to bear the expenses of purification of the Pujari, if it is established that he committed the sin. The term of the position of a Pujari is generally one year, extendable on the will of the deity. Normally, after *pooja* (worship), the *Rath* can't be lifted for dancing and attending to the queries for about three hours. While bringing water to the shrine in a sacred vessel (*Jari*) after taking his bath, the Pujari should neither touch anyone nor talk on the way. The devotees fix nails and coins on the door of the shrine as a symbol of prayer to the deity for fulfilment of their desires. Mahasu and the goddess (Thaur) are other deities worshipped in Phancha village. In the palanquin of the Jakh deity, there are five images—Narayan, Jakh, Devta Kajal, Devta Garait and Parauriya (the gatekeeper).

The image of Garait is made of silver and those of Naryan, Jakh and Kajal are made of bronze. The symbol of Parauriya is made of brass. This distribution signifies the status of the deities. An inscription written in unknown script is also visible but no body has been successful in deciphering it so far.

The Myths of origin of Jakh and Narayan

Devta Jakh came from Racholi in Rampur Bushehr. In Odda village near Rampur Bushehr, there lived a landlord in the remote past. His name was Dadu. He owned a ram, who started leaving for some unknown place silently. The landlord found it difficult to trace the animal everyday and getting outraged with the situation, he thought of a plan to tie the woollen thread to one of the horns of the ram. The woollen ball was retained at home to allow the required thread stretch automatically. He found to his surprise that the ram went about three kilometres and stopped. Dadu followed the thread and found that the ram was halting at a place named Jakho. The ram was licking an image below a big stone. Dadu brought the image and put it in his store. The next morning, it was found that the store was full of Kara, a mini variety of local peas and the image had automatically shifted to a corner of the room, called *khande* or *khon*.

One day, when the *khande* was opened by the wife of Dadu, she found that it was full of water in place of peas. The spirit was considered and accepted as a deity and the people of the village started worshipping it. After sometime he wanted to leave the place as the village belonged to another deity, Kajal. Changing of places, peeping about the grains in the store and transforming the peas into water were some of the awe-inspiring attributes of the deity.

Deity in the form of crop seed

According to another legend, some people from Shuwa Pargana in Kinnaur came to Rampur Bushehr to pay the usual *Batravar* or *Thara*, a practice of paying respects to the ruler. They had bows and arrows for security as a symbol of their tribal identity. While going back to their region, they found that the tips of their arrows had grown sprouts of barley, called *seel*, in common parlance of the area. After reaching their village, they were asked the cause for such development. They approached their village goddess Chandika, a famous goddess of Kothi village for the purpose, and came to know that some strange spirit had accompanied

them from the state capital. She also asserted that the spirit was very powerful and, if annoyed, could harm the inhabitants. She also suggested that two she-goats were required to be offered to appease the spirit and make it go back. The goddess sent back the spirit after offering sacrifice. Starting from Shuwa Pargana in Kinnaur, the spirit crossed Satluj river and reached Khyuncha village in 15/20 Pargana. At that time, there was a goddess in the house of Jintoo family belonging to Badhial Khandan. The Jakh came to know from her that Raie Nag had lost the whole of the *ilaqa* while gambling with Apsaras at Dhanpan hilltop. She also conveyed that the sport between the Apsaras and the Nag deity was still continuing but a rat turned the *Pashas* turtle to favour the Apsaras. The Jakh took a cat with him and climbed to the mountain top to help the Nag deity. On reaching the spot, he met the Khyuncha Nag and offered his cap as a token of respect to him. He gave him the cat to be kept with him at the time of the game. On seeing the cat, the rat didn't come out and the Apsaras were defeated. The same thing happened for the second round also and the Nag was able to get his territory back from the mountain spirits (Apsaras or *Saunige*). Before the second round, the Nag had promised the Jakh to allow half of his territory to him in case of his victory and on winning, the later parted with half the portion.

Division

Later, both of the deities went to the hill top above Jandhori village to divide the terrain between themselves. As a token of the boundary fixed by them at that time, an *Okhali* can still be seen at the place. The Jakh of Pancha got the portion lying towards Pancha and surveyed his terrain while flying in the guise of a Garud. The name of this portion was given as Pancha Daire. In that portion, Dainta, a native of Pancha, had grown various crops such as Bathu, Chaulai, etc., at that time and when the Jakh visited the site, the crops at once turned into trees of Cedar, Rai, etc. On seeing the phenomena, the inhabitants of Pancha were amazed. Narayan, through his medium, conveyed to them that a mighty god had come to the village. The people put the image of the Jakh over the image of Naryan in the *Rath* but the following morning, it was found that the masks had changed their places. This situation was repeated till the image of Narayan was placed above the mask of the Jakh on the palanquin. This arrangement is prevalent even upto now.

The Myth of Red Calf

It is said that during pre-historic period Mawi, a warrior community, inhabited Betha Kuphar, a place near Phancha village. They later shifted to Kandri and some of them settled at Phancha. Betha Kuphar was ruined and the villagers started grazing their cattle at that place. After some time, a red calf with a white mark on its forehead started appearing and sucking the milk of the cows grazing in the pasture during the day, which resulted in no milk for the owners. No grazier was able to catch hold of the calf but they followed and chased him everyday. The villagers, on receiving the information, tried to lay hand on the calf but in vain. Disgusted, they went to the place with axes and arrows to kill the animal. The calf did not appear that day. When they repeated their visit with determination, the divine spirit appeared on a young boy, who, while in trance, told them that he was Narayan and was a benevolent spirit. He wanted to be installed as a deity and promised prosperity to the village. The villagers agreed and accepted him as their village god. A shrine was also constructed in his name. Dev Narayan is, thus, a senior deity in the region. The people, however, have faith in all the deities mentioned above and it is curious to note that they believe that the palanquin of the Jakh Devta dances even without images in it. He, then conveys his wish through his medium even without the use of masks during some fairs and festivals.

Cult of Kurgan of Mandhod

Mandhod is situated at a distance of about 43 kilometres away from Shimla. The shrine of Dev Kurgan has its entrance from the west. The deity is said to be a prince of Raja of Sirmaur State whose name was Kurgan Prakash. According to a local legend, Raja Vir Prakash ruled Sirmaur in the remote past. He had four sons. This family was destroyed in a flood as a result of a curse by a *Natni* (dancer and acrobat) who was deceived while crossing the river on a rope. According to the promise of the Raja, she would have got half of the state, had she been successful in her endeavour. On seeing that she would cross the river on the rope, the officials of the Raja cut the rope and threw her in the river. He survived and came to Sharog village in Suni area. In due course, he developed intimacy with a family of Bashailari village. He fell in love with a girl of that family and was killed. His head was chopped off. According to yet

another version, the prince was gifted with supernatural powers and could bring even the dead to life. Those who had control over social setup, were disturbed with his arrival in the area and wanted to wipe him out of the scene.

Head of the deity

After the assassination of the prince, his assistant brought his head in a basket (*kilta*) to the place called 'Hiyun' with a view to immerse it into River Satluj. On reaching 'Mheshe ki Dhar' above Mandhod village, he kept the *kilta* aside and relaxed for a while. He heard that the head of the prince was demanding water to drink. There being no water around, the man was in a fix as he could not leave the dead body alone and fetch water as desired. He was directed by the Prince to strike the earth with his spear to get water. He obeyed and found that after the fifth stroke, the Satluj water started gushing out from the hole. The water of the source during winter is as clear as the water of Satluj river and during the summer and rainy seasons, it has the same colour as that of the river water which is muddy during these days. It establishes that the source of water is the river flowing down hill. Mhesha ki dhar has now become famous due to this water spring and its changing phenomena. Ladies in their monthly cycles are not allowed to go to the spring and pollution period due to birth or death in a family, is also a taboo for the concerned families. According to a popular belief, the defaulters are subjected to see a dreaded snake in the vicinity by the deity.

The bodyless head of the prince wanted to have a place to settle in Mandhod village. He sent his assistant to look for the possibility. He went to the Mansa Devi temple, which is about two kilometres away from the place. The corpse of the prince was lying there in isolation. The assistant, on reaching the shrine, was not allowed inside by the gatekeeper (*Dwarpal*) and was devoured by him after a scuffle. When he didn't return, the spirit of the prince contacted the goddess and related the whole episode. The goddess asked the *Dwarpal* about the stranger and he at once produced the assistant from his mouth alive. The goddess accepted the deity (Kurgan) as her god-brother and allowed him a place of abode at Shimbaldhala. The head of the prince turned into a *pindi* (image) at the place.

Myths of pouring of milk and the bleeding Pindi

A cow poured milk from her teats on the *pindi* everyday while grazing in the pasture nearby. The owner, not finding milk in the evening, tried to find the truth. The *pindi* was in a pool and was later tried to be taken out by the villagers but it could not be lifted as it grew heavier. The Pindi also grew in length and breadth. During the trial of extrication, a man hit the head of the *pindi* with his hammer out of disgust and a cut was inflicted on it inadvertently. Next day, when a man of Saral family was going to the watermill by that way, he heard wailing and stopped for a while. He thought that the voice was emerging from beneath the earth and started digging it. The *pindi* was found bleeding. This man tied the *pindi* with his turban to provide some solace to it. The bleeding stopped and the man succeeded in bringing the image out of water and placed it on earth. Soon after, Kurgan explained the whole episode and desired that a shrine be built in his name. Even now, the medium of the deity is from the Saral group. The assistant of Kurgan, who took the head of the deceased prince, is the assistant of the deity. There are twelve masks in the *Rath* of the deity. The mask of Kurgan is exhibited at the top, followed by the Mohra of Mansa Devi, the goddess. She is called Bansai or Bandev, the wild deity. According to a belief, she was brought from Qila Kangra (Kangra Fort) and remained the deity of those who vanquished the Ranas of the area. The third Mohra is of Devi Vemika. She has been depicted with two snakes playing at the lower part of the image. The fifth Mohra is of the guard or assistant who is known as the Bhaur (assistant or junior deity) of Dev Kurgan. The sixth image is of Dwarpal, the gatekeeper of the goddess, who is considered very strong. In addition to these images, there are six other Mohras to decorate the palanquin. There are several shrines of Dev Kurgan, including some in Solan district.

Messengers from Bilaspur

It is said that at one time two constables of Raja of Bilaspur were going to Suni, the capital of Bhaji State, to hand over a letter to the Rana. They reached Mandhod and, feeling hungry, wanted to take some fruits from the garden. Dhumkalu, the medium of Kurgan didn't allow them and told them that these were to be offered to the deity first of all. One of them attacked the medium with his sword but didn't succeed. The medium snatched his sword. The constable went back and reported the

matter to the Raja. The Raja decided to call the medium to Bilaspur. Receiving the invitation, the medium wanted to take the deity with him. This was allowed by the Raja. The *Rath* of the deity started for Bilaspur with his votaries and wherever the procession halted on the way, the people constructed shrines in honour of the deity. Such shrines are at Mangoo in Tehsil Arki, Sangohi, Kararaghat, Dawaru, Halog (Dhami), Bathmana, Kolka, etc. The Raja came to see the deity at Bilaspur and he was received with great honour. But the legend goes that with his entrance in the palace, the walls developed some breaches. The medium was possessed and went into trance in the presence of the Raja and he called the constable whose sword was snatched by him. The constable found that there were thousands of swords and the medium (*Gur*) asked him to take his sword out of the stock. The constable was in a fix to see the swords made of gold, silver, iron and other metals. He was shown a golden sword followed by a silver one, which he refused to accept. At last he recognized his sword and got it. The Raja prayed to the deity to pardon him for the disrespect shown to him by his incumbent.

Mansa Devi of Mandhod

There is a legend that in the ancient times, two brothers dethroned the Rana of Mandhod region and captured his regime. One of them became the ruler and the other acted as the priest. Their presiding deity was Bhimakali. Her temple was at Kangra. According to the tradition, the ruler was required to attend the court of the goddess at least once a year. The new Rana established the shrine of the goddess in his area and started attending to her everyday. Earlier to it, he directed three Brahmans belonging to Dawarsu, Dharyana and Palyal communities to go to Kangra and escort the goddess. They brought the Amshavatar (a portal of incarnation) of the goddess Bhimlakali, the Mansa Devi in a basket (*kandi*). *Kandi* is a basketlike vessel made of branches, copper, silver or bronze which, in the absence of palanquin (*Rath*), takes the deity from one place to the other. This is considered to be a divine vessel.

Bhimakali as sister of Mansa Devi

On reaching the village, the priests kept *kandi* under a Peepal tree and informed the Rana of their arrival and success in their pursuit. After some time, the basket could not be lifted. The Rana was informed in a dream

that he should not take away the basket from the place as the goddess had selected the spot for herself. A temple was erected at that very spot. Dev Kurgan, as already mentioned, is the god-brother of the goddess and her mask is kept in her palanquin. Mansa Devi considers Bhimakali of Sarahan as her sister. The temple is said to have been built during the regime of Akbar the great. The mention of Bhimakali of Kangra and Sarahan establishes that during the pre-historic period, the territory might have been ruled by one single ruler or there might have been frequent visits to these places by the inhabitants of both the regions.

Devta Chikhreshwar

Chikhreshwar is a powerful village god in Theog region in Shimla District. Chikhar is the name of the village where the shrine is located. The deity is called Deo and the shrine is known as Deem. The deity stays in a small shrine, namely, *Deora*, for two or three days after the pilgrimage or visit outside the place as it is believed that the evil effects recede by doing so. The courtyard of the shrine is called 'R-a-n', a term akin to battle. The images of the god are called *Putla*. There are seventeen *Putlas* (images) in the palanquin of the deity. The chief among these is of 'Saina Nanoo'. It is interesting to note that 'Saina Nanoo' is believed to be an aged deity and, as such, he is not supposed to do any job. The working chief god is known as Devta Baanthiya. According to a popular belief these two images were acquired quite amazingly.

The legend

The legend relates that in the remote past, there lived a poor girl in Chikhar village. She belonged to a downtrodden family. She used to graze the cattle of the villagers for her livelihood. Once, one of her cows started urinating at a plant of Chhanwar, a type of local vegetation. On seeing it, the girl became eager to know about the reason of doing so. She dug the earth to see the roots of Chhanwar grass. It was strange that the cow, after urinating on it, would eat the grass everyday and on next day, a similar grassy plant would be available. While removing the grass, she found two images of 'Saina Nanoo' and 'Bhanthiya' hidden beneath the earth. The image of Saina Nanoo was a bit damaged from a point at the nose. This injury can still be seen on the image. The cut got inflicted

with the implement applied by the girl for digging out the images. As soon as the girl touched the images, she turned into a stone slab as she belonged to an untouchable family and was not permitted to touch the divine images. The stone slab placed at the door of the shrine is of that girl and it carries a carved figure of the girl. These two images are of great significance. These were brought to the village, where a temple was constructed for them.

Devta Jaunku

The automatically sprouted images include an image of Devta Jaunku. This image appeared at a place situated at about three furlongs away from the habitat. The name of the place is Jakholi. Jaunku, as the name indicates, is a Jakh or Yaksha deity. It is kept in the shrine of god Chikhreshwar. Another important image of Jadraai also emerged at Jagheri, a place situated at a distance of about one kilometre from Chikhar. He is believed to be a very powerful deity with sixty vehicles (*Vahan*). He is the minister (*Wazir*) of Chikhreshwar. Jadrai accompanies the principal deity during his tours and pilgrimage, acting as his main assistant. Other images are of Khagali, Dalesar, etc. Khagali, as the name indicates, is a bird (*Khag* in Skt) and may be Garuda. However, there is no such impression in the folk mind. These deities are also believed to have emerged from the earth. Their names are associated with the places from where they sprouted.

At Janog

The images of all the deities are placed in Chikhreshwar shrine. A temple of Chikhreshwar at Janog has replicas of the images of all the deities but the original images are at Chikhar, as already mentioned. Worship in the respective shrines is conducted by the followers turn by turn, where the deity is staying. The villagers don't take their morning and evening meals before offering prayers. *Ghee* of cow is used for worship while that of buffalo is a taboo. *Ghee* to be used for the purpose, is specially prepared and is called *Deon*. The cows reared to allow *ghee* for *Deon*, are kept in separate rooms. Their milk is not used for any other purpose as the *ghee* for *Deon* is to be prepared out of it. While boiling butter for preparing *ghee*, utmost care of cleanliness of the room surroundings, pots and the

individuals, is essential. The pots of curd and butter are touched only after taking bath by the nominated persons. The cows brought up for the purpose are called 'Hashi Gaw'. In sub- mountain areas also, *ghee* kept for the deity is called *Hainsa*. Both the terms *Hainsa* and *Hashi* belong to the same origin. In Shivalik areas, *Hainsa ghee* is not used by the members of the concerned families but is meant for worshipping the 'Jakh' who resides in the wooden piece with which the cow or buffalo is tied. Pudding is prepared with this milk and distributed among those present after conducting worship of the wooden pole with which the concerned animal is tagged with a rope. The 'Hashi Gaw' is kept in a room called 'Hash Obra'. The person preparing *Deon* has to abstain away from any type of addiction and be pious in letter and spirit.

Panzo

Besides Magh or Sazo (the first day of Magh month) and Dewali Rishi Panchmi (Panzo) is a great festival. Panzo is celebrated during the month of Bhadrapada. On this day, some deities are taken to hilltops and worshipped. This is a festival of nature and ancestor worship. On this day, Devta Jadrai is taken to his birthplace known as Jagheri. Various types of grains are offered to him at Deorighat. At the time of the tour of Chikhreshwar to other places, four images, respectively, of Chikhreshwar, Banthiya, Jadrai and Saina Nanoo are placed in the palanquin. The rest of the deities are not taken out of the shrine. Janog deity is Chikhreshwar himself. The deity takes a trip all over his area once in three years. This *yatra* of the god with musicians is called *Dwala*, literally the payment of tax and annual offerings to the village god. It is a tax for the landed property of the deity used by his followers. *Dwala* (Diwali) denotes the area in which the deity is worshipped. Every family in the *Dwala* has to allow at least one member to accompany the god during his visit to the area. The visit is of about one week's duration. During the tour, the god stays only at the places fixed for the purpose since time immemorial. He doesn't prefer to stay at new places for the night. During his stay outside the shrine, a goat has to be offered to him everyday. The distance and milage to be covered by the team and the deity, is thus, predecided. The followers accompanying the god during his visit to his regime are divided in various groups to be attended by each one of the family in the villages on the way. In case of misappropriation

by the Bhandari or any other *kardar* of the *Devta*, one has to suffer the curse of the god. The curse is called *dosh* and it may entail the defaulter to mental tension, loss of property, damage to anything dear to him and even ruining of the family. Fearing the situation, dishonesty of every type is avoided. The *chaukidar* of the shrine is called Jagala or the one who keeps a vigil. The *Devta* manifests himself through the *Devan* or the medium who goes to trance (*khel* or *zan*) after being possessed by the spirit. His utterances are considered to be the commands of the deity. Some times, he expresses his opinion even without being asked. This happens when there is a violation of the usual practices and disregard to the god due to undesirable behaviour. While in trance, the *Devan* sometimes prespires and dances, at others sings in frenzy and still at others, feels composed and glitters with supernatural power and glow. He appears not to think but to speak and make flawless statements and commands, as the case may be. He is fearless and straightforward in behaving as the spokesman of the almighty. He expresses his displeasure on *kamarg* (bad acts) done by his followers. He speaks about some events which are hitherto unknown to the people or even to the man himself in normal conditions.

Deevan

Devan or *Deevan*, the medium is nominated by the deity himself and he is mostly from the same community or the family from where there have been the mediums in the past. This, however, is not a common rule. When the medium goes to trance (*zaw*) for the first time, a goat is sacrificed and a ceremony is arranged to install him to the position of *Gur* (medium). The offering is called Mandrola. The *Devan* of Chikhreshwar is always from the Jortha family. He has only one *Devan* at one time.

God Banthiya

The god Banthiya has another powerful associate deity in his family, known as Jadrai. The supernatural powers of these two deities are separate but identical and complementary to each other especially at the time of some acute situation. Jadrai, the *Wazir* comes out with solutions through his medium. The *Devan* of Jadrai is vigorous and a loud talker, as the

deity represented by him is quite bold and powerful. Banthiya alone is believed to be incapable of controlling the adverse situations which are called *vahan*. Whenever various deities assemble on some auspicious occasion, there is fear of such undesirable situations created by outside and malignant spirits accompanying the guest deities. *vahan* is an undesirable phenomena, an unwanted situation created by external spirits. Due to *vahan* a human being or animal may face death, illness, injury, etc., and thus, this needs to be controlled by a powerful spirit with force. The *Devta* Jadrai is blessed with 60 assistants, powers or *Kalaas* which are employed to drive away the unwanted evil spirits. He helps to maintain the ageold tradition of untouchability and its violation is also called *vahan* or obstacle. Jadrai nominates his *Devan* from Jharaik Khandan in Kundli village. He has to be initiated at the birthplace of the deity in Jhageri village and act as such for Chikhreshwar at Janog. During the ancient times, a man from Kundlighar prayed to the god to help the ruler of Theog and wanted to serve him. Since then, the practice of selecting a Kandhlai, a member from Kundli group, continues. The adviser of the deity who, in addition to other kardars, is known as Saina (a wise man). The advice of the Saina is generally accepted by the spirit. The Saina is from the same family each time. He is not given any wages but gets a fixed portion of the income of the deity.

Kheen

Chikhreshwar is known for his miracles. Once, one of his images was stolen by a thief from Pachhoonch village in Kumarsain tehsil. At the time of moulding of the bronze image, the hammer of the blacksmith slipped and injured him with a wound on the forehead. Whatever the thief did, turned against his wishes. The boiled grains appeared as dung cakes to him and his newly born calf in the cattleshed in the ground floor of the house, was found on the top floor. Verified, he returned the stolen objects to the shrine and prayed to be pardoned. This didn't appease the god and he was punished by him, as a result of which his family was ruined. *Kheen*, a ceremony arranged by the followers on the fulfilment of a wish, is an important occasion. On this day, the images of the god are led to the house of the person who arranges the ceremony and taken inside the dwelling in a traditional manner. A goat is sacrificed on the occasion. This ceremony is arranged to propitiate the deity by the family

settling in the village as outsiders. The term *Kalaina* denotes the followers of some other deity settling in the domain of the deity. *Kheen*, thus, is an arrangement to secure the blessings of the village god for peace and prosperity at a new place. In case of *kheen* by the traditional followers of the deity, the *Yajman* (client) doesn't extend invitation to the *Kalainas* of a particular deity but the extension of invitation to their deity indicates that the *Kalainas* of the deity would come to grace the occasion. The amount of donation or *dakshina* paid to the deity is called *Bishthi*. It is to be noted that during the Vedic period, 'Vish' was the term applied to denote habitat of a particular group or community and Vishthi, Vishtu, Vishat, Vishpati, etc., are remnants of that social system. In parts of Bushehr and especially Kinnaur, Vishat or Vishath is an honorific and family name to the persons belonging to Wazir families of the area. The tradition of Vishthi indicates that this practice still continues since ancient times and applies to pay tax to the head or chief of the Vish who was later recognized as the deity or the supernatural head of a particular habitat. On this occasion, the Kardars of the Devta also get some Dakshina according to the tradition. The compound of the shrine is called R-a-n in common parlance. The term indicates about the place of battle in ancient times. *Sangram* or *Ran* are the original terms for battles of Vedic times as already pointed out. Bonfire (Baliraj) in the compound of the shrine on Boodhi Diwali day is also indicative of pre-historic tradition of fire worship. The inhabitants still offer grains and *ghee* to the Baliraj, the fire god.

Shant

Shant is one of the important functions arranged after an interval of several years. It is generally arranged when the main wooden beam (*kurad*) fixed at the top of the shrine is to be replaced. On this occasion, the deities of the adjoining areas and villages are also invited. The mediums of various gods have to participate and exhibit their supernatural powers at this time. They have to boldly face the flames emanating from the *Havan kund* as it is one of the tests of endurance of the deity. The deities in the adjoining areas of Chikhar village are Maanan Devta of Matiana, Devta Guthaan, Devi Shadhi and Devta Chadaara. They are the chief guests on the occasion. Chikhreshwar is also invited by them whenever there is a big ceremony in their villages. *Shain* is the honour given to any

of the invitee gods on this occasion. It is awarded to the most powerful and miraculous deity. After receiving the honour, the concerned deity is considered superior to all others attending the *Shant* festival. He is given a place of prominence and his *Asan* (seat) is placed higher. The mediums go to the top of the roof of the shrine on the auspicious day of replacing the beam (*kurad*). In a trance they perform their duties in that celestial state. Some of them still stand at the narrow *kurad* where hardly anybody can sit. At this time, prophecies and sacrifices are also made.

Nan

Nan is another important ceremony of the deity. Devta Chikhreshwar goes to yet another place, namely, Nagarkot in Kangra for pilgrimage. The images of the deity are bathed in the *Sarovar* there with traditional rituals. The images of the deity are taken after being wrapped in a red cloth and put close to the chest of the taker to avoid any mishap to them. It takes about three weeks to complete the journey on foot. The village gods don't allow their followers to engage any vehicle for pilgrimage and they, along with the images of the deities, have to cover the distances solely on foot. The Pujari, medium, Bhandari, Sachiv, Saina and all other *kardars* attend the programme. The deity doesn't stay in any dwelling and tents are pitched at pre-destined spots. The mediums identify the sacred places suitable for halts with their supernatural powers. A goat is sacrificed at the place of night halt. The mediums of Jadrai and Banthiya go to trance at every place. A white sheet is spread at the place to allow the mediums to sit on it while going to trance as it is believed that the evil spirits haunting the place feel scared with it and are unable to influence the predictions and the programme of pilgrimage. On return to Chikhar, the regular abode of the deity, he stays in Deoro, a small shrine for the night and is taken to the main temple the following day after performing traditional rituals. On this day, the experiences of the pilgrimage are related by the medium in the R-a-n (premises) of the shrine.

The Joginis

It is a common belief that the hill goddesses (Kali or Joginis) of the region accompany the deities in their pilgrimage. The *vahan* (obstacles created by evil spirits) are not allowed to disturb the journey. The goddesses also have their mediums. The Devis include Devi Kanag of Kanag Tila, a

place situated at a distance of about four kilometres from Theog. Bhimakali, Nagarkoti, etc., are famous hill goddesses accompanying the deity during this pilgrimage. The goddess Nagarkot (Kangra), takes her medium with her. She is the goddess of Nagarkot (Kangra). He accompanies her to the place. The hill spirits are called *Saonige* or *Saoni* in Kinnaur and don't have shrines in the habitats. They are believed to stay on the hilltops adjoining the villages. They are propitiated on various occasions. During Phaguli festival, these spirits are invited by the inhabitants to their homes and served meals but are sent back to their places, as allowing them to stay in the habitats is considered inauspicious for the entire village. In order to drive them away after the festivals, obscene utterances in open places and before the audience are not considered a taboo. This practice is a substitute of nudity cults prevalent in some communities located in comparatively warmer climate.

Dev Chikhar is an important deity in Theog region and has preserved ancient social beliefs and traditions. Some of the myths related to his maintenance and social practices are of great interest to the sociologists and anthropologists.

Devtas in Dodrakwar

The village gods in Uttrakhand and Himachal Pradesh are the amalgamations of folk deities, epic heroes and mythological sages. Folk or tribal deities were venerated by indigenous inhabitants who had strong faith in spirits of various types. Kinnaras, Gandharvas, Yakshas, Asuras, Nagas, Rakshasas and numerous other mythical communities inhabited various parts of our country, especially the Himalayan region in human form. With the breaking or loosening of communication and interactional links between the people of the plains and mountains due to various reasons, the authors of the epics and other scriptures included the less known communities into the fold of mythological beings. The available folk legends, tales and written accounts, as well as other aspects of folk literature accounted for the placement of these ethnic people in the chronicles of our mythological literature. Myths related to different social rituals and thoughts contributed to reconstruct the hypothesis of gods, demons, demi-gods and evil spirits. Kinnara, Gandharva and Yaksha are counted among the demi-gods and are believed to be the court musicians of Lord Indra, as already mentioned.

Post Mahabharata battle scenario

According to a belief, it is said that after the Mahabharata war, Lord Krishna directed the heroes and sages to settle in Uttarakhand in body or spirit form to attain salvation, as it was considered to be the most sacred place. Uttarakhand includes the whole area of northwestern Himalayas, i.e. parts of Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Tihri and Garhwal. Myths have been called the fossils of human thought and habits and, as such, these lead us to peep into the most primitive social milieu and that too in the regions which are less accessible and have retained the pre-historic traditions and beliefs. Dodra Kwar, situated in the remotest part of Shimla district, is one such region. In Utrakashi Janapada of Uttaranchal adjoining Dodra Kwar, some Kaurava heroes, including Duryodhana, are worshipped as village gods in the region. On the other hand, Pandava brothers, their mother Kunti and their consort Draupadi are also worshipped as deities in other areas of Garhwal and Shimla region. In earlier times, Dodra Kwar was known as 'Dash Sho Kwar' or Kwar with a population of Ten hundred human beings. The inhabitants of Dodra Kwar talk of clans, viz. Seruval, Mewal, Palwa, Jariya, Bachhuwal, Davrar, Thakur, etc., associated with the villages of Seri, Mee, Pali, Jariyana, Bachuwari, Devrari, Thakurwari, etc., but neither these clans nor the villages exist now. This indicates that since time immemorial, there have been upheavals and transmigration of people, but the traditions continued unabated.

Gosangu

There is a legend that at Rikhni there was a family of Betan Vansh. It had employed a cowherd whose name was Guratu. One day, while grazing his animals, he saw a cow going towards Rupin river. He followed it to some distance and found that it went to Gosangu conjunction. The boy found that five bearded and long-haired (*Jatadhari*) boys appeared on the scene and sucked the milk of the cow one by one after taking bath in the urine of the cow. He witnessed the scene but could not disclose it to his masters due to fear. The owners started doubting the boy for sucking the milk as they would not get it in the evening. One day, the boy disclosed everything to the villagers. They wanted to see it themselves and accompanied the cowherd to the spot. They tried to catch hold of the

five boys. All of them tried to escape but one of them got entrapped and was caught by the long hair of the head. He too succeeded in getting rid of the villagers and some gold hair remained in the hand of the person who caught him. He took them to the village. At night, the cowherd had a dream in which he was directed to prepare an image of the divine spirit out of the golden hair which were brought to the village. Thus an image was prepared and worshipped.

Deity as cat and Shameshu deity

At that time, Bering Nag was the deity of the area. The new deity started pressing the villagers to worship him as the presiding deity. The inhabitants didn't agree to the proposal and suffered destruction at his hands. The whole population was, thus, wiped out by the spirit. The medium even now declares in trance that he was dropped from heaven and appeared after piercing the earth. He further declares, 'I was such a power at one time that I ran on the pool of blood, entered the dwellings of the inhabitants in the form of a cat and ran away in the guise of a guard from the door.' The text is, '*Swarag koi chhutu Unh teh/kupri kaatih upchu teh/Lahure taalu mai, anduteh/Ek, Satiya tatra thii/Biraali re bheshe aashu teh/Garude bheshe nandu teh.*' It is a belief that when the deity entered the houses of the people as a cat to put them to death and took away their children in the guise of a guard, he, thus, made the 'Das-sau' or ten hundred *kwar* devoid of human beings. The cowherd was, thus, compelled to establish him as a major deity whose name is 'Kwar Jakh' or the Yaksha of Kwar area. According to the belief of the people, the five longhaired boys were the Pandavas. The Kwar Jakh is considered to be the incarnation of Bhim, one of the Pandava brothers and he calls Shameshu Devta of Lewari-Phetadi Patti as his brother. Shameshu deity is the incarnation of Duryodhana, one of the Kauravas. Yet, even in the *Mahabharata*, the Pandavas and the Kauravas, though being brothers, were enemies which resulted in the epic battle. Thus, it is not difficult to believe that *kwar Jakh* of Dodra Kwar in Himachal Pradesh and Shameshu of Lewari-Phetadi in Uttaranchal are the two *Mahabharata* characters. Written evidences, however, don't depict Bhim to be so cruel as to kill human beings and this character seems to be of some pre-historic tribal god who might have been a demon.

Pandavas in Suravasa

The legend goes that the Pandavas spent some time in a cave at Suravasa in Rupin Valley. Suravasa, 'the abode of gods', according to a common belief, was levelled by Bhim and converted into a field in which Draupadi grew rice. The crop of rice could not ripen and proved to be a failure due to cold weather conditions, but the levelled fields still exist. According to yet another legend, Raja Virat of the Mahabharata period used to come to take bath at Bararasar (may be a corruption of Viratsar or the water tank of Virat), Barar or Baratu is the presiding deity of 'Bararasar'. Pandav Shradh, a local ceremony and Draupadi Naach, a folk dance in the name of Draupadi, the consort of the Pandavas, are also associated with the epic. Bararasar and Baratu, a lake and the deity, also suggest the impact of the Mahabharata culture on the social life of the people.

Dodra war area was gifted by the ruler of Tihri Garhwal to the Raja of Rampur Bushehr in the remote past. The Thakurs in the region belonged to the lineage of Kamru Thakurs in Kinnaur and a Thakur named Kehr Singh was murdered by the people for his cruelty, at the time of a fair. Thakur Kehr Singh tortured the inhabitants immensely by grabbing honey, butter, milk and all other things from them. He was killed at Parar-Virat. Dev Chand of Kitrabari, who was assigned the job of killing him, put him to death while he was smoking tobacco by an orthodox method of bending forward down to the earth. The elder Rani of Kehr Singh was killed at Ghatugar in a watermill. The second Rani who was pregnant at that time, was whisked away by her sympathisers through a tunnel to Dharagar in Jaunsar Bawar. The elder Rani is now the *Kuldevi* (goddess of the clan) of the Thakurs of Kwar. Her temple is in Katol village where her image is enshrined. The people of Jakha village are considered as their *Goshtan* (friendly, or belonging to their clan as clan-brothers) by the Thakurs for their gesture of saving the junior Rani. The Thakurs don't accept food from the inhabitants of Kitrabari for putting the elder Rani to death.

Jattu

The younger Rani, in due course of time, gave birth to a son who was named Tara Singh. He was addressed as *Jattu* (fatherless son) by others and one day, when he came to know about the entire episode, he decided

to attack Dodra Kwar. He put the villages of Kitrabari and Pujarli on fire but couldn't establish control over the area. Raja of Rampur Bushehr, later, directed Pawari Bisht Ranjit Singh to attack Dodrakwar. He did so and captured the region. A folk song relates the incident:

*Seema mapa, Masli mera, Khasha ri Dhar;
Thora raha mapne ro Dodra Kwar.*

It mentions that Ranjit Wazir reached Masli and *Khash ki Dhar* with his army and conquered these areas including Seema and now, Dodra Kwar is not far off. It is said that the Bisht used to keep three-fourth of the revenue received from the region and deposited only one-fourth in the treasury. Wazir Ram Bahadur succeeded Wazir Ranjit Singh (Ranji Wazir) and proved to be a better administrator. According to local traditions, the Bisht used to get one share of the family property at the time of division and in case of issueless family, the entire property was transferred in the name of the Wazir in the region. It is also said that the Wazir stopped depositing the share of the state in the treasury and established his own supremacy in the area. He kept Yuvraj Raghunath Singh and Raja Shamsher Singh in the dark for several years, pretending that since the people were poverty-stricken, no taxes could be levied on them. Tika Raghunath Singh went to Dodra Kwar himself and finding immense grievances and restlessness of the local inhabitants, exonerated the Wazir who had to pass the remaining period of his life in exile in Chatra village in Jaunsar Bawar. He, however, is said to have come to his native village Pawari in Kinnaur in the guise of a sage to meet his relatives. The Raja appointed Negi Dharmesen Bisht, a relative of Wazir Ran Bahadur, as his minister to the region.

Practice of Dum Dhoom

The Raja of Bushehr, on knowing that the Thakur was maltreated by the people of the area, sent a *Dhum* (Dum) to crush the agitation. Dum was a practice under which disobedience and revolt was crushed with the help of army and the local people. The people who formed a part of Dhoom did not care for law and order and taught the agitators a lesson. The agitators of Dodra Kwar, who were put behind the bars, were released on the following day of the death of Tika Raghu Nath Singh during 1906 AD. The *Gorkhas* also entered Dodra Kwar with a view to capture it but

were driven away by the local inhabitants. Their weapons are still preserved in the godown of Jakh Devta at Kitrabari shrine in Kwar area. Raja Padam Singh exempted the people of the region from *Baith* (*begar*). According to *Baith* system, every household was required to send at least one of his members at their own expenses to Rampur Bushehr to do the work of the state free of cost. The area was made a part of Mahasu District in Rohru Tehsil after the formation of Himachal Pradesh during 1948 AD. A primary school, the sole educational institution in Dodrakwar was opened during 1920 AD. During 1983, it was given the status of Tehsil and during 1988, it was elevated to the administrative level of subdivision. Only nine villages with 838 families with total population of 5013 persons (1991 Census) are located in this land locked area. The principal communities are Thakur, Rajput, Koli, Julaha and Thathera. The Pujaras who are Brahman by caste have matrimonial relationship with Rajputs also. Dodra (8775 ft), Kwar (8500 ft), Jakha (9000 ft), Pujarli (5500 ft) and Pandar (9500 ft) are some of the famous villages of the area. One can reach Dodra Kwar after crossing Chanshil Pass (13000 ft).

Kwar Jakh and Hanol

There is a legend that when Kwar Jakh was on his pilgrimage to Garhwal, he was forcibly taken to Hanol temple belonging to Mahasu god. The followers of the deity had to remain without their deity for some time. A shepherd of Raipatu (Raipaltu) clan of Sangla in Kinnaur was successful in liberating the deity and while taking him back to Dodra Kwar, stayed with a family of 'Bisibadwan' at Khash Dhar for the night. On having come to know that the man was with the deity, the members of the family attended him well and worshipped the deity. The god, since then, treats the members of Bisidwan family as his *Goshtan* (clan-brother).

In Dodra Kwar, the village god is the only chief administrator. He guides, dictates and controls the social system. Kwar Jakh with his Asuri, Tamsik and sacrificial attributes, is the presiding deity of the valley. He is considered to be a very powerful and Tantric god who administers his powers with fair and foul means. He loves animal sacrifice.

Jakh Janglik

Jakh Janglik is worshipped in Dodra and Chohara valleys. His shrine is at Janglik in Chohara valley. After passing two years in Janglik and

Kinnaur, he visits Dodra in the third year. He is a brother of Mahasu Devtas and is also called 'Pabaasi Mahasu'.

Dhara Jakh

Dhara Jakh is the deity of Jakha, Dhara, Jiskoon and Pandar valleys. He, although a Tantric and sacrifice loving by nature, doesn't horrify the people. He is the younger brother of Kwar Jakh. It is said that Dhara Jakh and Kwar Jakh were born at Gosangu. The shrine of the deity is its abode and court. The guests are looked after and fed by the village god. He conveys his messages through his mediums. According to the religious beliefs of the people, these spirits have abandoned their physical bodies since Dwapar yuga but with their spiritual powers, are active even now. The shrine has three portions, namely, Bhandar, Deuth and Deora. The ground floor of temple is called 'Dobul'. Only the special *kardar* is allowed to enter the Dobul. The temple walls have obscene carvings and paintings. Brahm Kamal, Naisar, Lily, Jiyan, Jaiyari are the varieties of flowers offered to the deities. Jaiyari has numerous types out of which white Jaiyari is the most auspicious. It is believed that the collector of this flower can not be harmed by evil spirits, magic and hypnotism etc. There is a saying that once a sage, in order to play a trick, asked the villagers to pull him with a string tied to his feet. He did not move even an inch. A shepherd carrying white Jaiyari flower was passing by that way. He at once exclaimed that the string was not tied to the foot but to a trunk of a tree. The sage, on hearing it, at once rushed to the shepherd and snatched away the flowers. The shepherd couldn't say anything afterwards and agreed with the villagers that the sage had mystic powers.

Brahm Kamal

Brahm Kamal is considered to be the king of flowers. There is a saying that once the flowers started querelling on the issue as to who was superior to all of them. Naisar was told that it had only the quality of good smell and Lily Jayan was told to have good appearance. At last, all the flowers agreed that Brahm Kamal was the king of flowers as it had fragrance and beauty blended with heavenly bliss. It is grown at the height of about 14000 ft above the mean sea level. The text of this folksong reads:

*Phoolori adi na phoolori na maniya
Naisora etah lily Jaina bantiya
Phoolra barma seh kaunla Jethah.*

The Pandavas

The Pandavas have deep rooted ritualistic position in the religious life of the people in Mahasu region. According to a legend, in Outer Seraj, the Kauravas lived in Koil village, whereas the Pandavas stayed in Bayal. The capital of Raja Virat of the *Mahabharata*, was Nersu in Outer Seraj. Nandi was the name of the cowherd of the Pandavas. He grazed the cows in Lohad Thach, a pasture nearby. The place is located at a distance of about seven kilometres from Nirmand. The cowherd took the cows to Churkanda for grazing during the summer season. Churkanda is famous for Churkanda Yogin, a mountain goddess who receives her share of offerings during *Bhunda*. When there was a feud among the Pandavas and the Kauravas, Bhim picked up a boulder and put it towards the east of Koli village so that the village might not be visible in the morning. Later on, this mound was known as Dudhli Dhar or the Hillock of Milk. The places named after the Pandavas include 'Churi Chhandemu Dhar,' Shattladhar, Tatkathei Sarli, Bhimo Kotha, Ghurdrone, Kuntamaiyon Chhedu, Kuntamai Dhruna, Bhimochharoto, Kuntamaiyon Shershon, etc. Mandva is a place where the Pandavas used to perform *Havan* and *Ravakot* is said to be the *Laksha Grih* of the *Mahabharata* where the Kauravas tried to burn the Pandavas. 'Bhimo Pold', or a shoe belonging to Bhim, is also situated in Outer Seraj. While trying to cross the River Satluj, the Pandavas reached 'Trudiyon teer' where a Rakshasa named Dhani killed every fifth, passerby. Bhim, being the fifth was devoured by him but he killed him by piercing his belly. The kitchen of the Pandavas is called 'Panda Tioon'. The clay of 'Jashkumar mati' is considered as pious as the earth of Kurukshetra where the *Mahabharata* battle was fought. The local people use this clay as a lie detector and swear by it. Kunwaar, the son of Bhim, was born to the Virgin daughter Hudka of Raja Chahatradhari. Lodi Nag deity of Lod is the incarnation of Nandi, the cowherd of the Pandavas.

Behni Dev

Behni Dev is the village god of Behna village in Outer Seraj. The deity gives clothes for the Chhatra of Lord Parshu Ram in Nirmand and

conducts Shikhpher (circumambulation) at the time of rope sliding ceremony. This deity was once a Brahman of Braul village who was drowned in Satluj river while going to attend Shikhpher during *Bhunda* in Nirmand. His spirit started sucking the milk of a cow in the guise of a snake. The name of Behna is believed to be on his name.

Shamshir Mahadev in Outer Seraj is the manifestation of Lord Shiva who appeared after the completion of meditation by a Rakshasa living on Shami tree on the conjunction of Orli and Porli rivulets. As demanded and prayed by the devotee Rakshasa, Lord Shiva stayed there to liberate the demon and was called Shamshir Mahadev. A cow started pouring milk from her teats on a hidden Shivlinga and it was excavated by the villagers. It is said that Lord Parshu Ram went to Nirmand by this path. Shamshir Devta, during the earlier times, had the right of Shikhpher during *Bhunda* at Nirmand but when the threefaced image of Lord Parshu Ram was stolen once, the votaries replaced it by the similar image of Shamshir Mahadev. The deity did not like it and demanded back the image. It was given back but the deity does not attend the rope sliding ceremony now. Earlier, Shamshir also arranged *Bhunda*, which has since been discontinued.

Budha Mahadev

Budha Mahadev (old Mahadev) of Nithar village in Outer Seraj is a famous deity. He is invited to the Nirmand *Bhunda* ceremony and, is sometimes, responsible for conducting *Shikhpher* ritual. Once a farmer of Socha village was ploughing his field. He found that a glittering metal image obstructed the work. He brought the image to his home and placed it in the grains. The grains of Kauni crop were taken by ants in a line upto Nithar where the villagers constructed a shrine of Budha Mahadev. Earlier, the name of the deity was Mahadev only but, according to a legend, an old Brahman or a sage was absolved in the spirit after a good deal of meditation which led the deity to be named as Budha Mahadev. The deity receives the cloth sheets offered to the deceased.

Ganeshi Dev and Parshu Ram

Once upon a time, Lord Parshu Ram went to pay his respects to Lord Shiva. He was obstructed by Ganesha as Shiva and Parvati were busy in some very important discussion and had asked their son not to allow

anyone to enter their palace. Parshu Ram did not like the behaviour of Ganesha and in a feud, uprooted one of his teeth. Ganesha started crying and the divine couple came out. Parvati requested the lord to punish the disciple. Lord Shiva pacified her but Parshu Ram himself was sorry for his action. He was later pardoned by Ganesha and both of them became friendly. Parshu Ram invited Ganesha to visit his area and, if appealed, settle down at some suitable place in the region. He agreed and came with Lord Parshu Ram. They visited various sites but Ganesha did not want to settle at a place where some other deity exists prior to him. They reached Kharahan. Lord Parshu Ram left him there as he liked the place. He climbed up a tree to see the whole area. He found that there were two families of birds on a banana tree. Both the pairs had four and three offsprings, respectively. The parents had gone out and the small birds were chirping. Ganesha saw that a snake had climbed the tree and was trying to eat them. The kids of one of the pairs flew away but those of the second pair, in a trial to go away, were drowned in River Satluj. The incident was seen by a shepherd who related it to the birds on their return. The third and fourth kids stayed at Kharahan on the same tree and the second went to Mailan village. All of them exhibited their miracles. The deities of Kharahan are Jishur and Dethu, the two birds who stayed in the village and the deity of Mailan is known as Chaturbhuj about whom some references have already been made. The eldest of them went to Kadeli in search of a suitable spot and later shifted to Majheuti. While coming in contact with dung and urine of a cow in the village, it was converted into an image and started staying in a bush. A cow belonging to a villager of Khaneuti, would pour milk from her teats on the image while a ram started licking the nose of the image. A cowherd, finding both his animals missing, decided to tie a string to their necks and hold the ball thread in his hands. He found that the nose of the image had gone flat due to licking by the ram. He brought the image and installed it in a shrine. Even now, the image sometimes gets lost and is found in the bushes. Once, Parshu Ram visited the place, suggested Ganesha and to shift to a safer place. On his advice, he shifted to Shiushwad Dhartu and as a result, his shrine is located at Kothi Majheuti. Ganeshi Devta had the privilege to conduct Shikhpher at the time of rope-sliding ceremonies at Nagar and Nirath. It is believed that the consorts of Ganeshi deity, namely, Riddhi and Siddhi also joined him at the place and all the three represent three mounds near Majheuti. The image of the deity

without his teeth, has no parallel anywhere in Himachal Pradesh. The deity is worshipped by the inhabitants of Majheuti, Khaneuti, Biunthal, Pheeda, Pei and Koshali villages.

Mangleshwar

Mangleshwar Mahadev was born in Manglaad rivulet. He left his place of birth in search of some suitable place for settling down. On the way, he chanced to meet a *Pajjara* (worshipper) coming back from Haridwar. He entered the bag of *sattu* and provided him with *sattu* without opening the bag. He would place *sattu* (balls of barley flour) in the pocket of the *Pajjara* and this traveller got them without opening his bag. He reached Bayel village and in order to cross Satluj river, put his *Kamandal* (vessel) upside down and crossed the river on it. He reached Duttanagar, accepted Duttatreya as his Guru and on his advice, went to Dwada via Khaneti. He turned himself into an image and appeared in the bag of a Thakur. The Thakur left the image on the way and went home. When the Thakur started constructing a house, it would fall down during the night. In order to know the reason, he approached a Pandit of Nehra village. The Pandit told him that he was suffering from a curse of the deity who was thrown away by him. A shrine was then constructed for the god.

Gur and related myths

The deity is believed to stay in a big water tank at Duranai. His new medium has to bring clay and pebbles from the bottom of the tank. Birshi fair is arranged every year at Dwada during the month of Jyeshtha (May-June). Chaturkhand of Brandli also attends this festival. After every seventh year, a ritual to bring a spirit, the son of Bhambhu Rai out of the shrine, is arranged on Birshu or Birshi. The spirit is taken out by a Brahman belonging to a particular clan and the farmers of the area assist in pushing the palanquin forward. At this time, mourning tunes are played on musical instruments. Earlier, the fair was arranged at Deidhar, a place situated at some distance but the votaries managed to take it to the present site after slaying the head of a dancer and taking it to Daver. The warriors who chopped the head of the main dancer were bestowed the title of *Khund* (martial group). This fair is now arranged at Dwada, a better place for the purpose.

Mangleshwar Devta of Dev Nagar

Dwada of Dev Nagar is located about 32 kilometres away from Rampur Bushehr. There is yet another legend that a Thakur ruled the area and his palaces were near Nehra. The place was known as Badhela and the ruling Thakur was called Badhela. During his advanced age, he thought of visiting various temples in the Himalayan region. He, according to the tradition, got some *sattu* prepared for the pilgrimage.

While the Thakur was coming back after the pilgrimage, he relaxed at *Manglad* in Mandi and took out some *sattu* from his bag. The spirit entered his bag unnoticed. On the way, he crossed Satluj river after visiting Mameshwar and Kao temples and in the absence of some Katnaoos (buffalo skin swimming objects), used his small water pot for swimming with the help of a supernatural phenomena, the spirit which was accompanying him. On reaching Nirath, he was amazed to see that he was feeling afresh and untired though he had covered a long journey on foot. Whenever he would try to open his bag for taking out some *sattu*, he would find some ladoos in his pocket. He crossed over to Nirmand for Darshna of the goddess Ambika and afterwards came back to Rampur.

At Duttanagar, the spirit appeared before the deity Duttatreya and told him that he had been accompanying the Thakur from Manglad Khad in Mandi and wanted to settle down somewhere. He sought his help in the matter. Swami Duttatreya asked him to wait for some time.

The Thakur reached home near Dwada. Swami Duttatreya told the spirit that Dwada (present Dev Nagar) is the right place for his stay and wanted him to be given Kanchhini area as his kingdom. When the Thakur was halting at Dwada for a while, he opened his bag and wanted to take out some *sattu*. To his surprise, he found that the image of the deity was in the bag. Getting suspicious of some evil happening, he threw the image in a nearby pond and went away.

On reaching his home, he found that some masons were at work to construct a new palace for him. On the next morning, he was pained to see that the wall constructed by them had fallen down during the night. This happened many times. Ultimately, he called a Pandit to help him solve the riddle. The Pandit used his *sancha* and told him that some divine spirit was unhappy with him. In order to confirm the prediction, he went to the house of the Pandit. On entering the house, the Pandit's wife tried to put him off by saying that her husband was not at home. For this act, she fell down from the second storey of the house but didn't experience

any injury. She realised her mistake and prayed the spirit to pardon her.

When the Thakur came to know that some spirit had accompanied him from Manglad, he at once remembered about the incident of throwing away the image at Dwada. He went back with his men and took out the idol from the pond. The image was afterwards installed in a temple and the deity was given the name of Mangleshwar god. The deity relieved the people of diseases, famine and all sorts of ill happenings and was established and worshipped as the presiding deity of Kanchhin area. Devi Sheetla's image is also installed in the temple of Mangleshwar.

Durga of Bahli

At Bahli, situated at a distance of about 42 kilometres, Durga, the deity of the village, is said to have been established by a Rani of Garhwal who had her *Basa* (palace) at that place. She used to come to Bahli during summer and once, when she was staying there, she found that there was a widow in the village whose seven daughters were tortured and killed by the soldiers of the Rani. The spirits of the dead daughters started teasing and torturing the Rani and her own seven daughters died due to the menace. The Rani was in great agony and on coming to know that the spirits of the dead daughters were haunting her, she started worshipping them and made their temples at seven places. One of the temples is at Bahli and the remaining six are located at different places. The goddess at Bahli is known as Durga of Bahli.

With these observations and legends of the deities in the region, we find that the most of the village gods are associated with similar myths. Some of these are:

1. Most of the images of the deities were traced out by the graziers. Licking the idols or covered stones by their rams, cows and sheep is a common phenomena.
2. The most common myth is related to the water phenomena and the idols, when put in a godown, fill it will water. Water is the utmost requirement of the people after food and, as such, any spirit capable of producing water is most welcome to the habitat.
3. The divine spirits are related to other deities.
4. The temple architectural style in the region is indigenous or Pahari style in most of the cases.

Hateshwari Devi

At Hatkoti temple in Shimla district, a big vessel is tied to a chain outside the main temple. It is said that during one rainy night during *Bhadrapada*, the worshipper of the goddess dreamt that two metal (copper) vessels were flowing down in Pabbar river. In the morning, he went to the banks of the river along with other followers and was able to extricate both the vessels and brought them to the temple. At one night during the rainy season, the vessels started moving towards the mainstream of the Pabbar out of whom one was caught by the people and tied to the toe of the goddess but later kept outside in the courtyard of the temple, tied to a strong iron chain. It is said that during the rainy season, on some occasions, a whistling sound is heard without any explanation for it.

According to a legend, there was a Brahman who had two daughters. He dedicated themselves to the welfare of others. They adopted ascetism and wandered from one place to the other. Once, they were moving about, the younger daughter got tired and rested at one spot depending upon fruits and vegetables. The elder reached Koti village as she did not stop and has now a temple at Koti or Hatkoti. The younger sat in a field and went on meditating till one day she vanished away to leave only a boulder as her symbol. The people, on finding the boulder, started worshipping it and gradually a temple was constructed at the spot.

During those days, there was no other temple and the ruler of Jubbal was also impressed with the event. He also started worshipping the goddess. The villagers believed that the goddess was an unmarried virgin and, so, she is worshipped in that form as Hateshwari Devi.

People believe that Rambhasur, the father of Mahishasur demon, after defeating the gods in the heaven, established his kingdom at Ravingarh (Rambhigarh). He appeased the god of fire and was blessed with a son who was firelike and could not be defeated by either Suras or Asuras. Rambhasur worshipped and meditated for thousands of years and arranged an *yajna* at the place after the completion of his meditation. He was blessed with rebirth and immortality. The place was then known as Rambhalaya. Mahishasur changed it to Rambhigarh and established victory over the gods by pleasing Lord Shiva.

After defeating Indra, the lord of the *Devas*, Rambhasur made *Mashraan* (Machhran) his capital. The place is known as Mahishasur also. He then drove away all the *devas* from the heaven. At Maheshran

(Mashraan), the Lord Shiva is worshipped in the form of Shivlinga as well as in the state of the image of the lord. The devotees still practise offering the first milk of cows or buffaloes to the Shiv Linga. Pabbar is also known as Parvati river. She killed Mahishasur. The battle between the goddess and the Asura (Mahishasura) was fought at Asiloma Darkoti, Bishkulti, Badhal, Chambi, Chiua, Tiuni, Ashudi, etc. and Durghar, Bashkal, Vidal, Tamraa, Chiksharakhya, Trimain, etc., warriors of the army of Mahishasura were killed at these places.

Boindra

At Bachhunch, the famous deity is Bandra or Boindra. This temple is in Pahari Pagoda style. The temple has a legend that some ruler of Bushehr destroyed the temple but, on reaching Bushehr, he suffered from stomachache. A Buddhist monk told him to re-erect the temple and he obeyed by calling woodworkers from Mandi and getting the temple reconstructed. The stones used in the temple were brought from Sarahan. The Shilpi who was attempted to be killed by the people to avoid construction of the similar type of temple elsewhere, is believed to have jumped from above and his footprints can be seen at a place near the temple. The *kalash* of the temple is resting on a Devdar tree in the premises. At Bachhunch, *Bhunda* festival is arranged after every twelve years.

Shikru Devta

Shikru Devta's temple is at Rohru. He is the Ishat Dev of the local people. He is worshipped in five villages of Jakhad, Gangtoli, Tandali, Dashalani, and Rohru. He is, thus, also called Panjvasa. It is said that at one time, the area suffered from famine due to dry spell. Shelu, a grazier, lived in the area of famine. He was an expert in flute playing and would pass his time while playing on his flute. Once, while grazing his herd, he reached the top of a mountain where a small lake Chandra-Nahan exists. It is situated on the Chanshal peak. He witnessed a strange scene, according to which in the midst of the lake, he saw a man standing before him. The man said that he was the lord of the lake and was very pleased with his flute playing. Shelu asked him to make his village green with his supernatural powers. He agreed, but demanded seven sheep as his reward.

In order to test him, Shelu wished that the man should take his flute and a lotus flower to his newly wedded wife who was staying in his native village. The god agreed. Pabbar emerges from this lake. The god put the flute and a lotus flower in the river and allowed them to flow with the currents downward.

The flute and lotus flower flew towards Rohru in the river and, reverted in a small rivulet, the tributary of Pabbar, reached the place from where the villagers used to get water. The wife of Shelu, at that very time, reached the river to take water. She was not dead but the grazier loved her so much that he remembered her all the time. The flute and lotus came to her pitcher. Fearing that her husband might have drowned in the river, she died. Shailu came to his village after some time and an epidemic erupted in the village after some days. Shelu remembered that he was to offer seven goats to the watergod. He went back to Chandranahan lake and played on his flute. The deity did not respond to the voice of his flute and also did not come out. Shelu felt convinced that the god was annoyed with him due to delay. Feeling disgusted, he jumped into the river and found that the water god was standing before him. He forgave the grazier for being late in offering sacrifice and wished to stay with Shelu in his village. He was given a *Kilta* of grass by the deity with the instruction not to place it on earth on the way. While coming to his village, he became tired on the way and relaxed for some time throwing away the grass in the *Kilta*. On reaching home, he found golden straws in the *Kilta*. He went back to collect the abandoned grass but found nothing. He found that there were golden images there. He was directed in a dream by the deity to take the images to his village. Since the deity came from Chandranahan via Shikari (Shikadi) stream, so he was called Shikadu. During the period of Raja Padam Singh, the deity exhibited his power by bringing rain during famine after receiving a sacrifice of seven goats. During the reign, all the mediums of various deities were put in prison for not being able to bring rain but Shikadu's medium proved his mysterious power.

Hatkoti temple, according to legends, was built by Raja Sirmaur Parkash of Sirmaur during the thirteenth century. He was a powerful ruler and brought Kotkhai, Theog, Kumarsain, Ghund and Jubbal under his domain. The capital of Sirmaur during those days was at Kalsi in Utter Pradesh. Hatkoti might have been his capital for some time. Sumak Pur or Somak Tibba is still famous in his name. It is situated on the back

of the Hatkoti temple. In a legend, some ruler of his clan was cursed by the goddess and his palaces destroyed overnight. Bhambhu Rai, the son of Bhamasur, Banasur, Pandavas and so on so forth are the famous heroes of the region.

Bakraalu

Bakraalu was born in Dalog village where a ceremony is arranged after twelve years when he is brought to his birthplace. It is said that once a shepherd of Dalog village was grazing his sheep and goats when he came across an egg of Chakor. He brought the egg with him and put it in his godown. After three days, he found that the egg was replaced by a Chakor. The Chakor at once came out through the window and vanished in the bushes near the village. A goat of the shepherd would go to the boulder where the Chakor was hiding itself. It would lick the Chakor everyday. The shepherd, on finding the goat missing every day decided to follow it. One day, he reached the spot and tried to catch the Chakor. The Chakor flew away and reached Madhog village. The inhabitants of Madhog also could not catch the bird. He went to Sharan and from there to Jhareshi, Dhangu Jungle and finally reached Dalgaon. The people of Dalgaon constructed a shrine for him and gave the Bakraalu name to the spirit.

Bakraalu exhibited several miracles to the people of Dalog who were the worshippers of Nag Devta. The Nag deity told them that, 'Bakraalu deity of Dalgaon who was born from an egg in your village, wants to visit his birthplace.' The inhabitants of Dalog then went to Dalgaon and invoked the deity. He suggested that a fair be arranged at Dalog in which he should also be invited. Since then, a fair is held at Dalog after every twelve years and Bakraalu is invited as a guest of honour to it. The Nag deity was born in the water tank at Nehra and reached Bahli after his pilgrimage to various places in the region. The goddess of Bahli did not entertain him but when he told that he was born from a pool at Nehra, she accepted him as her god-brother. *Bhunda* festival is arranged at Dalgaon after some interval and alongwith Bakraalu, the Nag Devta also attends it.

Dalog is an important place in the region as the deity was born there.

Palthan

Devta Palthaan was found by a Bhak Rajput of Thaili village in the form of an image. He brought the *Mobra* (image) with him and kept it in the shrine of Altasna. Altasna was doing meditation and, after the advent of the image, found that her meditation was complete. The villagers arranged a festival at Matreud Dhar. A woman from Bhodja village didn't like it as dancers belonging to all the communities were dancing together. She sang:

*Teri Bari Deuri Chubri nacha Chamari,
Mere aaye Bhudje Jatra Laun Makaari.*

The deity didn't like the ironical language as there was a mention of some communities and bad arrangement in the Jatar. He went back to Bhudja where a festival is arranged during *Bhadrapada*.

Devta Jhanguru was born in the *kothi* of Chak Bhudja and nourished on the milk of cow which he sucked in the guise of a snake. He also belongs to Bhudja village and his fair is held on seventh day of *Bhadrapada*. The images of Jhanguru and Palthaan are placed in the same palanquin (*Vinan*).

Bhambu Rai: The Demon King

The legend of Bhambu Rai, a demon king, is associated with Devta Palthaan of Sholi. Bhambu Rai and Ahimal were two friends who, after getting frightened to see the Mahabharata battle, came to this region and stayed at the *Tila* (mountain) of Kot after constructing a castle. Bhambu Rai became Rana, the ruler and appointed Ahimal as his minister. Bhambu Rai has become a legendary hero as it is said that he was so powerful that he used to go to Duttanagar to take bath in Satluj, meditate at Kot and go to Hatkoti to perform pooja every day. He became so arrogant that he started relishing the meat of the breasts of women. Once, when a young woman from Punan who was married in Add village and going from her in-laws house to that of her parents, her breasts were cut by the assistants of Bhambu Rai on the way and she went wailing to her father and died at his feet. She was earlier directed by her father to go to Sholi and pray to the deity but there was no relief. The subjects were fed up with the atrocities of their ruler and on the advice of Palthaan, a fair was

arranged at Nankhari. The deity came in the guise of a bird. Bhambhu Rai was also invited. The name of the spot where the fair was organized, is now called Thaptu. It was arranged on the fourth of day *Bhadrapada*. The deity, in the form of *Sonkhag* (golden bird) started chirping. By this event, the place is known as 'Soni' or 'Sholi'. Under the direction of the deity, the Rana (Bhambu Rai), Ahimal and the queen were killed by the people who had assembled there for the purpose. They found four images in the palace of the Rana which were of Bhambu Rai, Ahimal, the queen and her son (prince) who were killed in the fair. The image of the Rani was given to the Beduwalas and that of the prince to the people of Dwada. The images of Bhambu Rai and Ahimal were placed in the Kothi at Sholi. A ceremony to propitiate these spirits and their images, is arranged after an interval of eight or nine years at Sholi, Bedu and Dwada respectively. The entire property of Bhambu Rai is placed in a *Kothi* without any door and nobody knows about the objects kept inside it. The fair which was earlier held at Bhudja, has now been shifted to Nankhari Dhar. During this fair, the shepherds bring Losar flowers for distribution to the visitors. A traditional belief of applying *ghee* to the Shivlinga of the deity is still practised at Sholi. On the first day of Magh, the medium of the deity remains on fast. He is taken and escorted by the Thakur of Karangra to the shrine the next morning. The medium goes to trance at the temple and tells the suitable time for Ghritma festival for (applying ghee to the image). The *ghee* applied to the image is tested and checked thoroughly to see that there is nothing to suspect about its purity. The Ghritma is removed on Maghnon or the last day of Magh and it is generally found that sprouts of barley, wheat and some other crops come out on the image, indicating good crops, good or bad incidents and indications about rain, famine, deaths, etc., in the area. At Sholi, *Bhunda*, Bhadoji, Badhpoor and Sha (Shaant) ceremonies are arranged from time to time. The last Bhunda was arranged during the year 1982 after about sixty years.

Boodhi Nagin

Sareur Sar lake is situated at a distance of 25 kilometres from Nirmand near Jalori pass. According to a legend, an old Nagin lived in the meadow (*Thach*) of Sareur Sar. She had eighteen children. She used to bring wood from Kandi forest and water from Jalori pass. One day, when she had gone out, her children were at home. She had a servant whose name was

Chhapara. When Udo Pandit of Batada came to know that the Nagin had gone out, he tried to dry the lake with his Tantric powers. On seeing this, Chhapara extended his body like a tree and informed the neighbours. The people gathered and started abusing the Pandit. The children were frightened and jumped out of the lake. The Nagin reduced the Pandit to ashes. On seeing this, she was accepted as a goddess by the people. She went in search of her children and named the villages on the names of her children. The names of the offsprings are: Bachheru, Shildu, Khadi, Doba, Kharkhan (Nither), Dwashi, Binadi, Rakhau (Dhamota), Shanani (Shrigarh), Pajhari, Kuiri, Tukrasi, Maroti, Seri, Sareuri, Lagishri, Barli and Dhanai. According to yet another legend, the eighteen children include:

Bhadhoshha (Palaich), Nohanda, Churli (Bagad), Riyasi (Baramgarh), Taradi, Katmori, Sharshai, Kuikanda, Devari (Jabad), Tana nag (Chuai), Ghuroni (Jalori), Paneu (Janja), Chhatri (Radhopur), Patarni, Tharui, Shiyadi, Jibhi and Mohgi (Suket).

The list indicates that the area has numerous Nag deities. Each one of them has different rituals and myths associated with him. It is interesting to note that eighteen is considered a sacred number in the local folk traditions. Sidh Udo figures as a great Tantric in the folklore of the region. He belonged to Batada or Laund village in Outer Seraj.

Skirani Devta

Skirani deity is the god of Skirani Kandha in inner Seraj area. His fourteen-storeyed shrine is located at Chehni. In the premises of this huge and unique shrine, a seven-storeyed *Kothi* is situated beside the Veni Madhav temple. Skirani deity is believed to be the incarnation of Shringi Rishi of mythological times. One of his temples is located at Sarahan in outer Seraj also.

The legend suggests that Raja Dashrath, after the *Putreshthi Yajna* ritual for begetting sons, married his daughter Shanti to Shringi Rishi, the son of Vibhandak Rishi. The couple came to Ghyaghi and settled there. Ghyaghi is situated between two narrow mountain ranges and so they did not like the place. Shringi Rishi, after some time, left for Skiran Kandha, whereas his consort Shanta went to Sareur Sar (Sareur Lake) about which a reference has been made in the preceding pages. Shanta is now known as Boodhi Nagin. During those days, their whereabouts

were not known to the people but at one time when the mountain goddesses (*Yoginis*) of Skiran Kandha were busy playing, Udo, a Tantric of Laund village, with a view to attract their attention, interrupted their play by holding the ball with which they were playing. They requested him to release their ball as they had to go to Skiran to see Shringi Rishi. On hearing this, he released their ball and came to know that Shringi Rishi was meditating in the Kandha (mountain slopes).

During those days, a Thakur ruled at Chehni. His territory was large in size, but he had no issue. He donated his area to Shringi Rishi, and constructed a huge temple of the god at Baghi. Once, the Raja of Kullu won a battle against the Raja of Mandi with the blessings of the deity. After that, the deity was allowed a privileged place in Kullu Dussehra. The deity has four main places of his worship including Ghyaghi where there is an image of the god; Sharthi, where there was a pool of water red in colour which put the onlookers to death and was put by the deity under the earth (obscured); and Skiran where there is a Pindi of the deity. It is said that the temple at Sharthi was constructed at the site of red water. A fair of the god is arranged on 4th of *Savan* and the first day of *Jyeshtha* every year. The votaries of the deity are the inhabitants of Chehni, Shikari, Fatehpur, Tilokpur and Khadagad Kothis.

Khagsu Mata

Khagsu goddess was born at Bara Kui. She is the sixth sister of the seven Bharari goddesses. When four Chambhu deities and seven Bharari goddesses selected their places of choice, she flew from Chadakot and appeared at Gachedi forest near Odi in Kumarsain. Later, a devotee, came to Koti in Kumarsain after paying a visit to Hatkoti. He had come from Hinglaj. On the prayer of a Brahman, an image appeared on his lap and ants, in a line, came upto Madholi where his temple was constructed. The place was later known as Koti Madholi. A brahman, while coming back from pilgrimage, stayed at the place and could not sleep well. He was disturbed by a spirit. He, with his Shabar Mantra, put the spirit of the goddess in a vessel of water and started downward. The goddess then prayed to Koteswar Mahadev to help her. The Brahman could not see light while going down and, as such, had to come back with the miracle of the deity. He, after sometime, started on his journey again and on reaching Karari ki Dhar, his foot slipped and the vessel was broken. This

freed the spirit. Three spirits emerged out of it. One of them is Mahakali, who stayed at Hatu peak. The next one is Mahalaxmi of Gachedi and the third one is Mahasaraswati of Panjvi forest near Luhri in outer Seraj. She is now the goddess of Khegsu. During the recent past, when the road was under construction, she appeared in the guise of an eagle, according to a local belief. She is known as Kashmunda also and according to some, she is the Kusumbha goddess.

According to a common belief, Khegsu is deaf and dumb who can neither hear nor speak. *Bhunda*, ceremony used to be arranged in the temple of the goddess in the past. At the time of coronation of the Raja at Kumarsain, the sacred vessel (*kro*) of the goddess used to be brought to Kumarsain and Kotgarh. Earlier, Lavi festival was also arranged at Khegsu after the Lavi of Rampur Bushehr but, according to a common saying, the golden cap of the ruler of Bushehr was lost due to some mismanagement in the fair once and the Raja said, 'My cap is lost but you have lost your Lavi'. Since then, the fair could not be held.

The people of Khegsu, according to a legend, were so proud and vain of their affluence that even the Pujari (worshipper) would go to the temple riding a horse and sacred water for *pooja* was brought with the help of a horse. As a result of this type of arrogance, the goddess became angry and a voice was heard from the precipice (*Dhank*) near the village, which said, '*Yanda aun keh Syanda*' which meant, 'whether I should come now or after some time'. The Pujari, on hearing it one day said, 'You better come just now.' On hearing it, the whole *Dhank* came down, destroying the habitat and leaving only the shrine. Nirsu and Boodhi Diwali festivals are even now arranged at the place but the inhabitants are not so rich now.

Gada Durga

Once a Thakur from Dethwa was constructing a house with the help of a carpenter who belonged to Inner Seraj. At the time of his departure, the daughter of the Thakur insisted on to accompanying him to her maternal uncle's house in Inner Seraj. The Thakur agreed and directed the carpenter to escort his daughter. On reaching Ghusaini conjunction, he, while taking rest for a while, asked her to fill his *bukka* (*smoke pot*) with water from the rivulet. The girl obeyed, but didn't like it. She left the place and didn't come back to him. She was not found anywhere and turned into a boulder.

The carpenter related the entire episode on reaching his village. The girl went to Hansa Tirtha to meditate as she thought that touching of the smoke pot and the body of the carpenter had polluted her. She appeared at Ghushaini as four-armed goddess after the completion of her meditation. She directed the carpenter in a dream to construct a temple for her. She came to Bandal village on the request of the Pujari who belonged to that village and worshipped her till he became old. Her medium still belongs to Hansa Tirtha. As she was found in a gorge her name is Gada Durga. She accepts the sacrifice of a goat but hates wine. It is a common belief that if a person comes to the shrine in drunken condition, he is punished by the spirit.

Surya Mandir at Nirath

The Sun temple (Surya Mandir) at Nirath, a place situated at a distance of about seventeen kilometres from Rampur Bushehr, is perhaps the only Sun temple in the region. There is a legend that the temple was constructed by the Pandavas to get rid of the evil effects of the sin of killing their brother Karna. It is in Shikhara style of Gupta period. Rahul Sanskritayan has made a reference of this temple in his famous book '*Kinnar Desh.*' Earlier to it, Marshall made its first ever reference during the year 1908 and mentioned that an inscription is available in some cave situated near the village. A.H. Francke tried to locate the inscription but failed. Since then, no effort was made to trace out the inscription and the mystery of this temple remains unsettled. The front portion of the temple is about 3.90 metres in a square Mandap form and it is believed that this might have been constructed after the settlement of the habitat. There is a sloping roof above the Mandap. The sanctum sanctorum is about 8.10 metre high and ancient stone images of very fine art styles are exhibited in it. The main stone image is of the Sun god with a seven-horse chariot and his feet covered with socks, as we find in most of the Sun images elsewhere. The images of other deities of Hindu mythology are also exhibited in the temple. They include Vishnu, Laxmi, Ganesha in dancing posture, Shiva and Parvati, etc. The small shrine of Chhatreshwari Devi in the premises of the main temple, is an outstanding example of folk art. According to some scholars, the temple is not of Chhatreshwari Devi but of Chhaya, the consort of the Sun god.

Duttatreya Temple at Duttanagar

Situated at a distance of about twelve kilometres from Rampur Bushehr, the Duttatreya temple is of great significance in the region. The temple has two rooms out of which the outer one is about four metres in a square form and the inner one, the Garbhagrih, is about four metres long and two metres wide. In the sanctum sanctorum, the copper images of Duttatreya, Anuya (the mother) and Atri Rishi (the father) are placed in a wooden altar in a standing posture. The images are about one metre in height. The temple, according to beliefs, was built by Lord Parshu Ram, the disciple of Sage Duttatreya. During the Gorkha invasion, the golden images were taken away by the invaders.

Duttatreya, like Bhagirath of the mythological age, wanted to bring a heavenly river down to the earth and it was with his penance that River Shatadru appeared on the land of this region. Soon after its appearance, it flowed so swiftly that the cottage of sage Duttatreya was destroyed in a flood. Later, the temple was reconstructed. According to some, Lord Parshu Ram meditated at four places, now called *Thehris* i.e. the places of his stay. These are Dansa, Shaneri, Ladlsa and Shingla. The *Thehris* are not his sole places of meditation and he is said to have stayed for comparatively longer periods at five *thaans*, namely, Nirmand Kao, Mumail, Neerath and Duttanagar, while meditating. Lord Parshu Ram encountered a demon at Kao and brought him upto Duttanagar. His name is called Dantaasur or demon having large teeth. The local inhabitants believe that Dantasur was killed at Duttanagar and this place may have been called as Duttanagar due to this event. The legend, however, is not tenable as there is no evidence of such an episode either in record or in folk literature. The place might have been the spot of meditation of Sage Duttareya, whose mother Anuya made three major gods of Indian pantheon appear as mere children. She later, agreed to convert them to the original statures on their request and repentence. They wished to be born as the sons of Ansuya and Atri and, as a result, Duttatreya with the attributes of Lord Shiva, Vishnu and Brahma was born. The spring of water, now a step-well (*Baori*) appeared due to the spiritual powers of Lord Parshu Ram at Duttanagar and its water is believed to be cold during summer and hot in winter. The temple had 400 *bighas* of land, which yielded 64 quintals of rice before the application of land ceiling act. But now there is no income to the temple as the land

stands allotted to the cultivators. Duttatreya has numerous local legends associated with the deity. These establish that he had great spiritual powers and his main place of worship has been Basara village in Rampur Bushehr State, where he is worshipped as a village god even now. A rope-sliding ceremony (*Bhunda*) is arranged in this village. The ceremony is presided over by the village god. The arrangement, thus, establishes a link with Nirmand, the place of meditation of Lord Parshu Ram, the disciple of Sage Duttatreya. Duttatreya has links with various gods of distant and adjoining villages and is associated with Shukracharya, the village god of Dansa, where also the rope sliding ceremony is arranged after intervals. It is believed that Duttatreya, as a deity, was at Duttanagar and his image was found at Gopalpur near the palace of the ruler by the people of Munsh village.

There is a myth that the sage started collecting milk of the cows in his *kamandal* (vessel) in order to attract the attention of the villagers. The cows stopped giving milk at their cattlesheds. The villagers went to the pasture to find out the reason. They came across a sage who showed them his *Viraat Swaroop* (enlarged size) and asked them to construct a temple in his name where *havan* be performed daily.

According to a legend, a Raja who was the devotee of Sharaikoti goddess and village god of Deothi village, on seeing the smoke of *havan* emerging from Basara village, ordered his servant to put the village to fire as he did not want any other deity to be worshipped in the vicinity other than these two gods in whom he had faith. The incumbent obeyed the order and set the whole village on fire. The settlement was thus reduced to ashes but Duttatreya sat on the top of the temple and was saved. He later, asked a Pandit from Jadeen (Jareen) village to spread his sheet of cloth to enable him to come to it. He obeyed and kept the spirit in image form in a vessel meant for preparing pulse. The god was happy and desired the Pandit to ask for a boon. He demanded water for irrigating his fields. The wish was granted. The god reached Deothi village where the ruler of Sirmaur was resting. Duttatreya wanted to kill the whole family of the ruler. After putting him to death, he went to Sirmaur to revenge upon the other living members of the family. The family members prayed for safety to god and promised to construct a fine temple for him at Basara. It was accomplished and Samadhis of Pujaris were also constructed in the back side of the shrine.

Sharai Koti Durga

Sharai Koti temple is located at a distance of about 45 kilometres from Nogli, a place situated near Rampur on the banks of River Satluj in the western Himalayan region. The place is situated above 3,000 metres from the mean sea level and the sister of Sharai Koti Durga is worshipped at Kaovil even now.

According to a legend, Sharai Koti Durga belonged to Kaovil village in pre-historic times. The legend goes that in Deothi village, there lived a Brahman devotee who was blessed by the goddess in the guise of a woman. She warned that since bad times were ahead, two *yajnas* be organized at two places to avoid great loss to life and property in the area. She suggested that two ceremonies be arranged at Deothi and Sharai Koti respectively. After arranging *yajna* at Deothi, the people arranged the second *yajna* at Sharai Koti where the goddess manifested herself. She was worshipped as a deity there. Even now, the medium (*gur*) of Deothi village is the medium of Sharai Koti goddess. There are six wells in the premises of the temple. These are associated with the following village gods:

1. Gaso Devta
2. Basara Devta
3. Durga Sharai Koti
4. Devta Kilbalu of Kuhl village
5. Devta Deothi and
6. Beshtu Kuan (the well of Beshtus)

Beshtu Kuan which was given to Beshtu clan people as a gift for showing bravery in killing a dreaded bear in ancient times. The goddess is famous for granting boons for offsprings. Couples who beget sons as a result of propitiation of the goddess, make it obligatory to conduct the tonsure ceremony of their offsprings at the place of the goddess. The water of the wells, about which a mention is made earlier, is like the water of the Ganges and it is believed that there is no smell or pollution in it, even when kept in bottles for a long time. The dreaded bear wanted to break the idol of the goddess but was killed by shooters belonging to Beshtu clan. Some marks of the attack of the bear can still be seen on the image of the goddess. The Sharai Koti Durga is believed to be a powerful and wish fulfilling goddess in the region and devotees reach the difficult

spot after braving the hazardous path and steep ascent. The place, however, has its own natural charm and attraction.

The image of the goddess is partly broken but—as an exception to the common belief that broken images may not be worshipped—it is worshipped with great reverence as the goddess is believed to be bestowing blessings even in this form. The temple is round shaped and a typical example of hill architecture.

Satyanarayan temple of Bushehr

This is the most attractive temple of Bushehr valley. It was constructed during 1926 AD by the later ruler of Bushehar State. The other temples at Rampur Bushehr town include a Buddhist monastery constructed during 1897 AD by Tika Raghunath Singh. Purohit Mandir was constructed by Pt. Hari Dutt Purohit who brought the idol of Badrinarayan from Badrinath and installed it in the temple. Janaki Mai or Gupha Mandir, situated on the banks of river Satluj, was constructed during 1838 AD. Raghunath temple, known as Chaubacha Raghunath shrine, is associated with Tika Raghunath Singh who wished for an offspring and meditated here for the purpose. Chaubacha is a corruption of *Chab+bacha* (wish for a child) but the nomenclature seems associated more with the name of the place having mud in olden days. Baori Mandir was constructed during the fourteenth or fifteenth century. In this temple, the image of Bihai (Vidhi Mata, the mother spirit of destiny), made of cow dung on the day of the birth of a child, is worshipped and washed at the Baori of the temple on a piece of cloth (*Phalroo*) used by the newly born baby on Shudhi day (*Guntryala*). It is believed that to hold doing so, the child would remain healthy and happy and blessings would be bestowed on him/her by the temple goddess.

Narsing Mandir and other temples

The Narsing Mandir at Rampur was constructed by the Rani Suketi with whom Narsingh came to the place after her marriage in the royal family of Bushehar state. It was constructed during the year 1859 AD. The Narsingh temple had its *Jagir* (landed property) at Rispa (Kinnaur) and Sunda Bhaora (Chirgaon) villages, but it has now been allotted to the tenants. This temple belongs to mythological Narsingh incarnation

and not to Narsingh of folk legend fame. It has metal images of Narisingh, Jagdamba, Radha Krishna and Shaligram. The image in Hanumanghat Mandir is believed to have emerged from the Satluj during the regime of Raja Mahinder Singh of Bushehr. Bhutnath Mandir was constructed by some saint who stayed here for some time, during 1788 AD. Ayodhya Nath temple was constructed by Raja Ram Singh during the period 1844-1856 AD. It is said that Raja Ram Singh was married to the royal family at Ayodhya and got this temple constructed for his Rani to enable her to perform worship in it. Besides, Dade Shah, a Faqir, is also remembered for his Dargah which is believed to be a wish fulfilling spot in the town.

Bhimakali

At Rawin village near Sarahan in Shimla District, there is a temple of Jageshwari Devi. The village is known for 'Rawin Pothi', a sacred manuscript yet undeciphered. The manuscript is worshipped and taken to various villages in the region where there are auspicious ceremonies. Like Rawin Pothi, Bhimakali temple at Sarahan is of prime significance in the whole of the Himalayan region.

According to Durgasaptshati, the following shloka is of religious and spiritual importance:

*Punashbrahm yadaa Bheemum kritvaa Himachaley !
Rakshaansi bhakshyishyaami muneenaam traan Kaarnaat !!
Tadaa maam munayaah sarve stoshyantyaan bhramoorttayah !
Bheemaadevi ti Vikhyaat tanmenaam bhavishyati !!*

(Durgasaptshati)

Sarahan is associated with mythical Banasura of the Mahabharata, whose daughter Usha married Aniruddha, the grandson of Lord Krishna. It seems that due to over enthusiasm of the court Pandits, the whole issue of the chronological chart of the ruling family of Bushehr and its relationship with the lunar clan of Rajputs as well as Usha, the daughter of Banasur, has become confused. The ruling family wants to establish that it belongs to the solar dynasty whereas the Vanshavali associated it with Pradyuman, the son of Lord Krishna, a hero belonging to the lunar dynasty. Keeping this in view, the relationship of Bhimakali with Banasur or those belonging to the ruling family as their family goddess, there has

been no effort to study the issue afresh and to discover the roots of the myths and legends relating to it. Some important folkloristic clues are, however, available in the adjoining areas. These include:

1. Banasur and Hidimba are the parents of the deities of Kinnaur region.
2. Shukracharya (the Guru of Asuras), Duttatreya, Parshuramand Brihaspati (the Guru of Suras), had meditated in the region and pre-historic traditions of Shaant, *Bhunda*, Boodhi Diwali and Kaab, etc., are still prevalent in the area.
3. There has been an amalgamation of mythological and social traditions in the region and Bhimlakali, having been associated with the ruling family, remained beyond the approach of common devotees. It was associated with the written mythological literature only and no archaeological or anthropological researches are available on the issue.
4. Bhimakali, basically, was a powerful deity even in the fort at Kamru, the ancient capital of Bushehr rulers. The name of Kamru in local parlance is Mone, i.e. the place associated with Mon community of ancient times. Mon-Khmer is the language of ancient Kiratas, who are associated with the Mongoloid people of present times. It would be meaningful if the traditional links of Bhimakali, Banasura, Hidimba and chronological history of Bushehr rulers are researched upon keeping in view these points. It would, however, be worthwhile to associate the findings with Indian mythological records too as, since time immemorial, these places have been serving as refuge and sacred spots for spiritual enlightenment and ancient sages, while staying in these areas, incorporated legends prevalent among the local inhabitants, in our mythological literature. The legend of Hidimba and Banasura is one such instance, according to which Hidimba has been mentioned to have married Bhima and his brothers (though this is not a polyandrous case, as she did not accept his brothers as her husbands) according to the *Mahabharata*.
5. Bhimakali is believed to have sisters, one of whom is Ambika of Nirmand and Kangra and the goddess of Shali Tibba is also mentioned as her sister. These legends would also provide significant material for further researches in the matter.

Dev Puran, Raj Puran and Tapa Puran are mentioned as three brothers

and Banasur in the beginning was the minister (*Mantri*) of Raj Puran. He ultimately went to Mansarovar and brought River Satluj. The three brothers mentioned above, were the devotees of Annapurna. Is the same goddess the present Bhimakali? The father of Chitrakleha, who has been mentioned as a sister of Usha (goddess of Nichar) and the daughter of Banasur in regional folklore, accounts, was Kumbhand, the minister of Banasur according to the *Mahabharata*. In Kinnara folklore Chitrakleha is mentioned as the sister of Usha but in the *Mahabharata*, she is recorded as her friend. The scriptural 'Shonit', indicating River Satluj also requires to be taken into account while discussing 'Shonitpur' as the capital of Banasur.

According to common beliefs, there are two goddesses in the temple of Bhimakali at Sarahan, out of whom one is married whereas the other one is a virgin. It is also said that a sage Bheema Giri stayed at Sarahan during the Dwapar Yuga. He had his goddess installed in his stick. On the completion of his meditation, his stick became so heavy that he could not lift it and had to commission it at Sarahan. This led to the name of Bhimakali. According to some legends, the goddess came here from Hatudhar and killed Bhandasur, a demon king before permanently settling at Sarahan. She is also associated with Shrikhand, the place of meditation of Lord Shiva and Parvati.

It is interesting to note that Bhimakali, through her medium, addresses the rulers of Bushehr to be belonging to 'Domnyaan' clan. The clan name indicates that it is close to Kirati, the roots of language once prevalent in Kinnaur. 'Shu' and 'Dombor' are the terms used for village god or a deity in Kirati dialect spoken in Kinnaur. 'Domnyaan', thus, indicates the meaning of belonging to the family or clan of gods or serving the deities. As already mentioned, the people of Rampur Bushehar state maintained that the ruling family belonged to celestial origin. This was, however, the case with other principalities also. The theory of divine origin of the rulers is not only local, as it was acceptable even in ancient Greek and European countries too. The idea is deep rooted in slavery and devotion to the ruling families universally.

Raghunath Temple at Sarahan

There is a legend that there was enmity between the rulers of Bushehr and Kullu. In a battle against Raja Vijai Singh of Bushehr, the ruler of

Kullu was killed. He kept an image of Raghunathji with him, which was taken by Raja Vijai Singh to Sarahan after his death. Later, the temple of Raghunathji was erected and the festival of Dussehra started at Sarahan on the style of Kullu Dussehra. The festival starts on the day of Vijai Dashmi. The festival of Dussehra continues for three days.

Nrisingh Temple at Sarahan

As a matter of tradition, at the time of change of a capital, the image of Nrisingh is taken to the new capital. The image of Nrisingh from Sarahan temple has now been taken to Rampur Bushehr at the time of change of the capital. Shaligram images were also taken to the new capital from the old one. This is one of the reasons for availability of Shaligram images in various temples at Rampur Bushehr.

Lankra Veer Temple

Lankra Veer of Sarahan is very famous. According to folklore, there was a practice of human sacrifice in the pre-historic times. This deity is also known as Patal Bhairav as there is a well in the premises of the temple which is believed to be very deep and there was a tradition to throw a sacrificial man in it, as indicated in the legends prevalent in the area.

Shrikhand Mahadev, opposite Sarahan, has several legends to its credit. The Bhasmasur legend mentioned in the *Shiv Purana* also got emerged here and there are big boulders on which an undeciphered script is written. It is said that during the Mahabharata period, the Pandavas visited this place and Bhim would write the details of income and expenditure on these stones. The place is considered sacred and a nature's paradise. Bhim Dwari or the Cave of Bhim is also fascinating and a source of amazement.

Kilbalu temple at Gaura

Kilbalu gods are found in the villages of Rohru and Dodrakwar. It is believed that these deities have some relationship with Kilba village in Kinnaur. Kilbalu deity at Gaura, the village of Gaura Devi the goddess is believed to have been brought by a Rani who was married to some ruler of Bushehr in ancient times. The temple is more than 1000 years old. Devta Kilbalu is believed to be Nag Devta but in Rohru area, these deities are the incarnations of Lord Vishnu.

Devta Jhangru of Majhgaon

There is a legend that a Harijan *gwala* (cowherd) used to graze the cows of the villagers. One day, the cows didn't allow milk on their return to their respective cattlesheds. The owners found the ensuing day that a calf with long hair was sucking milk from the teats of the cows. It was named Jhangru and believed to be the incarnation of Lord Shiva. An owner tried to catch hold of the calf and, to his astonishment, found that the stone on which the cow and the calf were standing got divided into two and the calf turned into two small images. The name of the village, where it happened, is Talara. Here, the deity is worshipped as Pathar Devta (stone deity), as it originated from a stone.

Laxmi Narayan of Kinno

The deity Laxmi Narayan was born at Bawara Dhar where a shepherd used to graze his herd. A ram would go out and lick a stone. The grazier followed the ram one day and found that there were seven images. He could not get any of them as they disappeared and went to different places. The image of Laxmi Narayan was found by a farmer while ploughing the fields and was established in a temple. In order to get rid of the demons, Laxmi Narayan sought the help of Kali Nag and Devi Chitralekha at Tiranidhar. These three deities meet at Tiranidhar after an interval of three or four years even now. Kali Nag is the village god of Bari village near Nichar and Chitralekha is the deity of Taranda near Sungra. It is said that a door of Badrinath Dham opens with the recitation of name of this deity.

Kundra Nag

Kundra Nag of Kunni is said to be the brother of Nag deities born in Sarpara village but there is no reference available as evidence to prove so. However, it is said that Raja Padam Singh brought the image of Kundra Nag from the palace of the ruling family at Rampur Bushehr and established it here. One of his images was kept in Bhimakali temple also. There is Pathar Devta at Mashnu about whom it is said that a sage at Mashnu started worshipping a stone and the people, on his departure, started worshipping it as it is believed to be a wish-fulfilling stone god.

At Gopalpur, the deity is taken to a bush of thorns (*Kuhi*) in a palanquin and kept there for some time. This festival is held on 21st and 22nd days of *Baisakh*. On this day, two serpents come out of the bushes and lick the images of the deity. At that time, the palanquin is covered with a cloth and this scene is not allowed to be witnessed by the followers but the people see the snakes going back to the bushes. The people have great faith in the deity.

Shukracharya of Dansa

Dansa, the place was famous in the name of Danyapuri in Dwapar yug. Lord Parshu Ram attained *shaanti* (peace) at this place. The main temple in Pahari style in round shape, has a Parshu Ram temple in its premises.

Bhadrakali or Shikari Devi's temple is at a higher altitude above the Shukracharya temple and people believe that whenever there is no rain or snow, a buffalo sacrifice to the goddess helps in good rain or snow. In the Shukracharya temple, there is an image of Gashaini Devi in bronze with four arms. The goddess is shown riding a lion. Thirshoo, Birshi, Bhadkarth during Bhadrapada, Mari fair and Bhana Panche, etc., are important fairs in the village. During Mari Mela, the main deity is taken to Mari, a place where there is a small temple of Tur Narayan, who is worshipped by the shepherds at that time.

Shaneri was known as Shamayapuri in Dwapar yug and has the temple of Khadeshwar and Jahru Nag Devta. The image of Jahru Nag is believed to have been brought by a Zamindar of Karari village who retrieved it from a pond in that village. When the pond was filled with debris due to a landslide from above, the Zamindar while ploughing his field got the image. Nag Dehuri is worshipped in Karari village at the place of the origin of the deity. Jahru Nag is taken to his birthplace after every three years. It is interest to note that his birthplace is known as Nag Dehuri. The deity is placed at a rock during his stay there which has some holes. At this time, a snake comes out sometimes and licks the main image of the deity before going back to his hole. As stated earlier, the birthplace of Jahru Nag is Sarpara but he might have appeared at Karari village after his arrival to the place. Devta Khadeshwar is the incarnation of Lord Shiva who does not leave the four *thebris* during festivals. His Nandi is headless, as it was damaged by the Gorkha invaders.

There is yet another legend of Devi Gashaini of Dansa village. It is

said that she is the Kuldevi of a family whose origin is believed to be in Kumaon. It is also said that the Kumaon family was staying in Dansa village for some time and a man from the family went to purchase some articles from Lavi at Rampur but when he returned, he couldn't cross the main gate (*Praudh*) of his house. He, failing in doing so, asked his wife to help him. She came out with *Dhurachh* (incense pot) and prayed to the spirit for help. The man was allowed to enter but it was found, the next day, that a trident (Trishool) appeared from the *Balcha* (luggage). Later, it was found that there was a bronze idol having four arms of the goddess which was installed in a temple.

At Shingla, the image of Yogeshwar Devta is believed to have been found in a field while ploughing it in Uhrugram where there is still a temple of this Shaivite deity, the incarnation of Lord Shiva. There is the *Shayangaddi* (sleeping or resting chair) of Lord Parshu Ram near the Yogeshwar temple, about which it is believed that lord Parshu Ram slept here for about two and a half *ghari* and as a result of it, golden leaves poured during this period. There is another legend that Parshu Ram brought water to the place by shooting an arrow at a boulder in the village which can still be seen. There is also a cave temple at Shingla associated with Hanuman who was worshipped by a Brahman.

There is a legend that Lord Parshu Ram suffered from leprosy due to having slautered the head of his mother Renuka, though she was resurrected later. In order to ward off the sin, he was suggested by Kulguru Pandits to establish four *Thehris* (Dansa, Lalsa, Shaneri and Shingla) and five *Sthans* (Kao, Mumail, Duttanagar, Neerath and Nirmand) and settle Brahmans from four directions of the country with gods and goddesses. Brahmans from Ujjain, Paatan are the main settlers at these places. At the time of *Bhunda*, nine *kalashas* of gods and goddesses belonging to these village are brought to the celebrating villages. Mangla Kali, the goddess of Lalsa village, is one among them. Lalsa was known as Layapuri during those times. Mangla Kali is worshipped in the form of a stone in fifteen images of about 4', 3', ½' and 2' in height. These stone images are always kept wet in *ghee*. Gaadu, the *ghee* obtained first of all from a newly confined cow, is offered to Mangla Kali who is believed to have been installed at Lalsa during the Treta yug, even earlier to the arrival of Lord Parshu Ram at this place. She killed the demon who was torturing Lord Parshu Ram, which establishes that she was existing earlier to his arrival. There is *Thani* (relaxing place) of Lord Parshu Ram near the

temple. There are images of 'Doganu' and 'Sarichi' spirits in the temple. Ceremonies of *Bhunda*, *Diyaali* (Diyavadi), *Thirshu* and *Bhadoji* are celebrated in the village. At the time of 'Pher' after every three years, the medium of the goddess pierces his cheeks with an iron rod. This is called 'Bambar'. It is a bloodless feat to establish the power of the village deity.

In Bushehr rope-sliding ceremonies are arranged at *Majheuli*, *Basara*, *Dansa*, *Deothi*, *Duttanagar*, *Sholi*, *Kharahan* and *Neerath*. Till recently, *Gopinand Visht* used to be the main instrument in the arrangement of these functions.

Birshu or *Thirshoo* ceremonies were started by the Pandavas when they visited these areas during their exile. *Shaanti* is also a very important festival in the region. It is believed to have been started with the advent of Brahmanism in the area.

Devta Nareshwar of Kumsu

The temple of *Devta Nareshwar* is in *Pahari* style and a magnificent example of art style. In the temple, *Devta Nareshwar* is in the form of a palanquin, whereas *Devta Laxmi Narayan* is worshipped as a *shila* (boulder). *Laxmi Narayan* are believed to be seven brothers. *Devta Nehra's* Mohra was traced by a shepherd in *Nehra* village, who kept it in *Kothar* (godown) which was set to fire by the deity and, when opened, was found to be full of water. While leaving village *Nehra*, the deity took the daughter of the local *Nag* deity with him. The *Nag* got outraged at this act and threw boulders on *Nareshwar*. These stones can be seen near *Kumsu* village and *Nirmand* even now.

The deity, prior to coming to the village, lit some lamps at various places and said that he would settle down only at a place where the lamp remained lit in an unmoved state for a longer time. It was at *Kumsu* that the lamp remained lit and the deity settled there.

Mahasu's temple is at *Taklech Bheda*, about 24 kilometres from *Rampur Bushehar*. *Devta Kangleshwar* of *Deothi* has an interesting legend of origin. It is said that a shepherd took his herd to the top of mountain and found that one of her ram had a golden hue on its mouth. He thought that the ram might be grazing in a place where there was a gold mine. He prepared a thread out of the wool of 18x20 (360) sheep and tied it with the horn of the ram and allowed it to go wherever it wanted. He followed it and found the place where *Kangleshwar's* image was identified

with Bharmasa Chhatra flower overhanging on it. He found that there were seven images of various deities. He took out one of them. When the image of Kangleshwar, all the rest of the images vanished. He wanted to establish it was taken out, at *thach*, a place located down below, but there was no water. The deity originated water at a place about 4 or 5 kilometres down below and still goes to the spot after every twelve years.

The shepherd belonging to Sangrah clan kept the image in a godown. During those days, a Raja of Sirmaur was staying at Sharaikoti due to the fear of the Gorkhas. He got the information about Kangleshwar through a dream. He procured the image from the shepherd and, with the course of time, became a tyrant due to the effect of the same. On seeing the behaviour of the ruler, the deity in the guise of a saint, informed the Raja that his services were urgently required in his kingdom at Sirmaur as the people were terrified with the arrival of the Gorkhas. The Raja had to leave the place.

During those days, Devta Basara also lived in this region. He wished that whosoever deity would set fire to Kubag grass in water and burn lamps with water, would be the deity of the region. Devta Basara and Devta Kangleshwar tried their luck. The arrow shot by Basara reached upto Sandabag and the arrow of Kangleshwar became stuck to a stone at Phatti Oon. The marks of this shot can still be seen at a boulder near Nogli. Thus, Deothi (Bara beesh) was ceded to Devta Kangleshwar. The temples at Basara, Dansa and Deothi are believed to have been built by the ruler of Sirmaur. Deothi temple in Pahari style of architecture is quite unique.

The brothers of Kangleshwar, as already suggested, are seven in number. They include:

1. Devta Chhija in Deothi.
2. Devta Kangleshwar.
3. Dogru deity in Lalsa.
4. Fourth brother in Kumsu.
5. Fifth is Lahru Veer Known to be staying in Manvi Lachha.
6. Sixth is Sholi Deota.
7. Seventh deity is in Tikkar in Rohru.

Maharaja Shamsher Singh used to come to Deothi every third year to listen to the *Bhartha* (*Barsho*) of the deity. The deity goes to Kasha Kanda (Kasha peak), which is his birthplace, after every twelve years. He is

accompanied by his devotees also. He is believed to be the Chief Minister of Sharai Koti Durga.

Devta Shaleshwar

Devta Shaleshwar of Kareli, like other deities of the region, goes to Indrapuri on Magh Sankranti for a month. His Shivlinga, wrapped in *ghee*, is kept concealed inside the temple and on the arrival of the deity, it is found that some objects, including barley seeds are attached to the closed Shivlinga. It was tested by someone in the ancient past by giving the keys of the door to a person residing in Tanash village located at a distance of about three km. from the place and, on finding the grains attached to the Shivlinga, the deity was named as Shaleshwar, the lord of Sholi, a place situated about 45 km. away from Rampur Bushehr. Devta Palthaan of Sholi has a temple just one kilometre away from Shaleshwar temple. *Bhunda* was arranged at Sholi during the year 1982. Devta Palthan killed Bhambu Rai, a demon who stayed in Kot Tibba. There are 12 images in the palanquin of Palthaan deity, among whom the topmost is of Bhambu Rai and the middle one is of Palthaan deity. At the time of worship of the deity, the demon Bhambhu Rai is worshipped. The placement of Bhambhu Rai's image at the top of the palanquin is said to have been done as a sequel to fulfil his dying wish as otherwise he would inflict misfortune on the people; yet, to worship him first of all would encourage the evil spirits. Thus, the people devised a way to show *dhoop* to the image of Palthaan first of all and then rotate the incense pot in such a way that Bhambu Rai receives it at the end.

Devta Lohpurush

Devta Lohpurush (ironman) is a typical example of personification and deification of spirits. Lohpurush is believed to be the main deity of Nankhari. He came here from Rupi village in Kinnaur with a woodworker (carpenter). The deity was considered powerful in other areas also and didn't consider Palthaan to be powerful god as compared to him. He didn't show any respect to Palthaan. Devta Palthaan, with a view to avenge his insult by Lohpurush, managed to install the deity in the colony of outcaste people upside down. This was done to relieve the god of his powers. He was buried below the main gate (*Praudh*) in the ground floor

of the temple with his face downward after digging a deep pit to serve as plinth of the shrine. Lata Ladsī, another deity of Nankhari area, is worshipped in the form of a pillar of the temple situated above the storey given to Lohpurush and yet another deity, Ghret, is worshipped in the form of an image in the temple.

Kajal Devta

Kajal Devta is the Maharudra who stays in Gaso village situated about 16 km. away from Rampur Bushehr. In the palanquin of the deity, there are images of Vayu, Jal and Kajal deities. The image of Kajal is jet black. A pot half filled with oil and kept in the temple, fills with oil automatically with the advent of rain and gets empty in the event of impending famine in the area. This is believed to be the miracle of the deity.

Devta Maharudra

Devta Maharudra or Kajal is the elder brother of Devta Basara (Duttatreya) of Basara Village. Devta Basara, when approached for good harvest and rains, sends the seekers to Kajal Devta (Maharudra) for help and wishfulfilment. Both of the deities are known for blessing people with prosperity, good rains and good crops. An image of Devta Gaso (Kajal deity) is kept in the palanquin of Basara devta.

Devta Darmukh

Devta Darmukh of Belpul village, situated at a distance of about 22 km. from Rampur Bushehr, is believed to be Lord Shiva's incarnation or manifestation. There is a palanquin of the wife of Bhambu Rai, who is worshipped as a goddess now. In a fair arranged on 2nd and 3rd of *Bhadrapada* every year, the palanquin of the deity is kept in the courtyard of the temple and people arrange local dances around it. The palanquin of the queen (Rani of Bhambu Rai) is brought out in a fair arranged after seven or nine years.

The image of Darmukh was found by a shepherd and later placed in the shrine. Shanodu, a servant and devotee of Lord Shiva (Darmukh), is believed to stay in a basket (*Chhar*) and is taken with the deity whenever he goes out. In Manjhbelu, another spirit 'Jaga Thod' is also worshipped.

Chaturmukh Devta

Chaturmukh Devta of Melon, a village located about 15 km. away from Narkanda, is worshipped in the whole of Kotgarh area. Devta Chaturmukh, Jishur and Ishur were born at Kharahan. During Shaant festival arranged after 25 to 30 years, all these gods come to see each other. On reaching Melon, a Havan Kund is opened by them after offering the sacrifice of a goat.

There is an interesting legend associated with the arrival of Chaturmukh at Melon. It is said that a young man in Kotgarh area was always ready to fight against ghosts and demons. He lost one of his eyes in a fight with demons, due to which people started worshipping him as a *kana* (half blind) deity after his death. He later became violent and people offered to sacrifice a human being to appease him. An old lady had seven daughters who were offered one by one to the cannibal deity. She wanted to save her last daughter. She approached the deities of Kharahan for help. She wanted to offer herself in place of her daughter but the deity refused to accept her. The three Devtas of Kharahan assured her of their help and asked her to wait for it.

The Kana Devta of Kotgarh was feeling restless due to hunger but the old lady was waiting for providential help. Ultimately, it came and the deity was destroyed in a storm along with his temple. Now the people were keen to invite any of the three deities to settle permanently in Kotgarh area. They left the choice on the deities. It was decided that during a fair, a *Devta* whose palanquin gets lighter in weight, be adjudged to have agreed to settle at Kotgarh. During the course of the fair, the people of Kotgarh found that the palanquin of Chaturmukh got lighter in weight and, thus, they decided to take him to their village. They were resisted by the villagers of Kharahan but, ultimately, had to submit to the will of the deity. A temple was constructed in Pahari style in Melon village for the deity, who is considered to be very powerful one.

Laxmi Narayan

Laxmi Narayan of Kashapat was also found by a grazier at Bawala Baori. He found that one of his sheep went to an unknown place every day and come back in the evening by herself. He followed her one day and found that at a water source (*Baori*), there were seven images, where the sheep

licked one of them. On seeing him coming, all the six images, except the image of Laxmi Narayan, vanished. The shapherd brought the image with him to the village and a temple was constructed for it. The grazier offered *dhoop* to the images before bringing the image to the village. This was done with a woollen blanket as there was nothing else available for the purpose. On reaching home, the image was kept in a godown where it filled with water the following day. Since then, Devta Laxmi Narayan was considered as 'Varun', the god of water and snow. His other six brothers are:

1. Majhewali Narayan
2. Manjhgaon deity
3. Kinnoo deity
4. Jani Laxmi Narayan in Kinnaur
5. Ramni Narayan in Kinnaur
6. Jabal Narayan of Jaabal village in Rohru

Their sister, Mansa Devi of Munash village is also a famous goddess. Once, Raja Padam Singh (1914-1947) of Rampur Bushehr, during the Dussehra festival at Sarahan, asked all the brothers to give evidence of their miracles by coming to a particular spot and take seat without the help of the buman being. Laxmi Narayan of Kashapat came to the seat without the help of human beings and on seeing the miracle, the Raja announced that Dussehra would be arranged at Kashapat every year at the expenses of the state. This was done till the end of the rule of princely states.

Devta Jishur

Devta Jishur or Jaishree is the manifestation of Lord Shiva. He stays at Kharahan. His two brothers are believed to be the manifestations of Brahma and Vishnu. The Devta Kharahan and Raja Sarahan were considered to be the real heir to the throne of Bushehr. Devta Jishur and Ishur have 22 images made of different metals. *Bhunda* of Kharahan is quite famous. The legend of arrival of Jishur and Ishur is related to Lord Parshu Ram and Ganेशha. It is said that once Parshu Ram went to Kailas and wanted to meet Lord Shiva but Ganेशha did not allow him to go inside. There was a feud between the two. After some time, Parshu Ram realized that he misbehaved with Ganेशha and, trying to please his friend,

brought him to Kharahan area. Ganesha, on reaching the place, found two birds having separate families and staying at a tree with four offsprings. The two birds were Jishur and Ishur. Parshu Ram had vanished, leaving Ganesha alone as he wanted him to settle down at Kharahan. He later left for Majheuti and settled there.

At Majheuti, the image of Ganeshi Devta was found by a grazier belonging to Kanoli village. A ram of the shepherd was found always licking the image of Lord Ganesha. He brought the image to the village and a temple was constructed. It is about twenty km. away from Rampur Bushehar.

At Kharahan, Ganesha saw that a snake was trying to eat the offsprings of the birds when the parents were away in search of food. The offsprings of one of the bird family succeeded in flying, whereas those of the next family tried to fly and, and failed to do were drowned in a pond nearby. Later, two offsprings who went to Kharahan were called Jishur and Dethu and the third one turned into a shining image and this image remained lying in bushes till the wife of the grazier poured milk on it and their ram started licking the image. This made the nose of the image a bit flat. The nose of the image of Ganesha Devta, thus, is somewhat flat. His temple is at Mejheuti.

Durga of Khamadi

Durga of Khamadi village was brought by a saint who came to Khamadi with his small *gathari* (luggage in wrapped cloth) and gave it to a servant of the temple for taking care of it till he came back. The servant put the luggage in a godown and, after some days, found that there were three images.

Durga of Munsh village appeared in a water pot (*Tokani*) of an old lady during the period (1810-1815 AD) when Gorkhas attacked the area. Devta Palthaan of Delath is believed to be the brother of Palthaan of Sholi. His birth took place during the month of Jyeshtha. Two pillars in his temple area believed to be Panjveers.

Banbir Devta

Banbir Devta of Tutu village in Delath is the manifestation of a bird called Baarad in local parlance. Baarad is a sacred bird. Tutu was called Dabiagarh

also as there were about 160 (*Dobe* or *Baolis*) in that village. Banbir Devta was brought from Suket in the form of an egg. The egg, when being brought in a small bag of grains, turned into an image (*Mohra*). It was later placed in a temple. Thirshu is a famous festival of the area, celebrated on 19th and 20th April every year.

Doom of Lailan is in a *putla* (image) form. The term 'Doom' indicates *putla* (image) only.

The grazier who came across the image of Darumukh of Belpul wanted to sell it in the market but could not reach the market as he could not see anything while going to the market and was able to have a clear vision only when wished to come back. Nobody could steal the images even later as the whole temple would start trembling and a Mahatma, with a trident and moon on his head, would stop them from taking away the images.

Devta Chhatrakhand

Devta Chhatrakhand of Barandari appeared in the guise of a saint. He stayed at Keem for 12 years and meditated there. The flat stone on which he meditated, can be seen even now.

With Madhog clan people who were settled at Keem, Devta Chhatrakhand went to Khanash (near Sarahan) and stayed under a tree. He is worshipped under the tree where he stayed for some time. After that he reached Madhog via Shaglagarh where he stayed at Devdar (Cedar) tree for about twelve years. Then he went to Kadeli village. At village Karandari, near Kareli, he saw a palanquin of a deity made by the children for playing with it and entered it. He decided to stay at Barandari. Later, his image was found by a member of Paund family in the form of a *Chhatra*.

The man of Paund family put the image in godown where it filled the *kothar* (godown) with water. Fearing something unusual, the man buried the image at crossroads away from the village. The deity got annoyed and started creating troubles in Paund family. Once the spirit of the deity possessed the medium and the members realized their mistake. They brought the image back and made its palanquin and started worshipping it. Its palanquin has nine images, namely of Chhatrakhand, Panjveer, Lahruveer, Shakrogu, Karbhoot, Kora and Jhangru Devta etc. The deity was established on 18th of *Paush* and a fair is held on that day to celebrate the occasion.

Jaghori Nag

Jaghori Nag was also found by a grazier in an image form. The Devta Jakh of Phancha was born in Jakho Divaar (cave of the Yaksha near Kanehri). They are three brothers, namely:

1. Phancha Jakh (the eldest one),
2. Racholi Jakh of Racholi, and
3. Jakh of Bhandar in Rohru.

The grazier found the image of Jakh of Phancha at Kurabahvi dhar. The spirit started sucking the milk of sheep, goats and cows in the form of a calf. He was later identified and placed in the village temple. The idols in the palanquin of the Jakh include those of Devta Narayan, Ghret, Kajal, Bijal, Sahdev and Praudhia. These images are eight in number.

Devta Naghela

Devta Naghela of Keem village is believed to be the son of nine Nagas. The deity originated at Dhamodi in Tehsil Nirmand of Kullu on a cliff. In Dhamodi, the village god is the brother of Naghela devta. The deity is taken to his place of origin after every twelve years. On getting the image from the hilltop, the peasant went first to Kasholi village and later to Ambika in Nirmand.

Ambika asked the deity to kill the Rakshasa (demon) who was creating trouble at Ropa village near Nirmand. There was a fierce fight between the two and the *mashaan* ghost was defeated. On the request of the son of the *mashaan* to shield him, the deity agreed to take him along. The god entered Bushehr with the innocent and dependent son of the *mashaan* and stayed at Lateda village for fifteen years after coming through Majhali. There is a legend that a princess of Bushehar was suffering from some incurable disease. The Raja tried his best to save her life and one day, disappointed, he was advised by a maid servant from Keem village to approach Naghela for treatment. The god agreed to cure her and treated her. The Raja made a temple for Naghela in Keem village as a token of his homage to the deity.

Naina Devi of Khunna

Khunna, a village near Shingla, is the home of Acharaj Brahmans who are invited to perform the last rites in the royal family of Bushehr. Naina

Devi of Khunna is quite popular and famous and it is said that the bronze images in the temple were presented by the father of a Rani who belonged to some royal family in Kangra and married in Bushehr. The Raja, later, gave the images to the Acharaj Brahmans along with *Chhatra* and *Chanwar*. This perhaps happened after the death of the Rani.

Deo Pani

A man from Nirmand went to Radeni Dhar above Bali Chauki in Mandi Seraj with his *Bhana* (a musical instrument). With this instrument, the goddess Ambika of Nirmand also travelled to the place and manifested herself there. She occupied the place after terrifying the Narayan god who was already staying there. There was no water available and she produced it with her spiritual powers there. The spring of water is still known as 'Deo Pani' or the water of god.

Sehsvavahu

Rishi Jamdagini had his ashram at Jamog Jeori near Tatta Pani and the capital of Sehsvavahu was at Suni. Sehsvavahu killed the sage in a feud for Kamdhenu cow. Parshu Ram, the son of the sage, was taking his bath in a hot spring at Manikaran and came to know through his celestial powers that his father had been killed. He rushed to the spot and the hot water drops of the spring fell on the way. It is believed that hot water springs visible right from Manikaran in Kullu to Tattapani on the border of Mandi district have emerged due to that happening. Sehsvavahu is worshipped as Danu (demon) god in and around Suni and Kunihar.

Mahu Nag of Chaira Cave

Raja Karn of the epic period is believed to be Mahu Nag of Chaira cave. According to a legend, Karn died in the Mahabharata battle but his wish to donate more and more to the people for their welfare remained unsatisfied. His spirit wandered in search of some suitable and peaceful place and reached Chaira cave where he lived in the guise of a snake. Once a scheduled caste girl came near the cave while grazing her cattle. She was terrified on seeing the snake and fell down unconscious. She died and the people came to know about the snake in the cave. An image of

the deity was found by a farmer at the time of ploughing his fields. The present temple in Shaindal village was built on the indication of ants who encircled about five *bighas* of land for the purpose. Once the thieves tried to steal the images of the deity but the spirit concealed herself as a honey bee (Mahu). The eleven images stolen by the thieves, went to villages of Kot, Shalot, Khudan, Kakru, Shirgal, Pali, Kot (Mandi), Bedu, Narod, Khov and Banech and the main *mohra* stayed back at its original place where the shrine of the deity still exists. The birth anniversary of the deity is celebrated on the 3rd day of *Shravan* (June-July). The main image in the palanquin is placed on the top and is called Arshi. The deity of Bareogi village is believed to be a manifestation of Guru Dronacharya of the *Mahabhart*. He is the priest of Mahunag. Dronacharya the deity Mahunag manifests himself on the first day (Sankranti) of every month through his medium.

The medium, at the time of initiation, jumps in the River Satluj and has to bring sand and pebbles from the bed of the river to exhibit the spiritual power of the god. The medium of the deity is called *Gur* or *Ghreta*. A New *Ghreta* is the grandson of the old *Ghreta*. The deity has twelve halting places (*Thebrian*).

Dhamuni and Mahu Nag

Once there was a feud between Dhamuni Nag and Mahunag. Both of them wanted to establish supremacy on the other. With a view to reach some settlement, both of them decided to level the mountains located in their regions turn by turn. Dhamuni covered the mountain with mist, whereas Mahunag made his mountain smaller in size. When Mahunag came to know about the deception, he also raised the height of his mountain by putting an iron rod at Chaira cave. In Chaira cave, he is believed to live as a snake. At Shaindal, an image and drums are kept as his symbols. At Mahu, his main image and *pindi* are worshipped and at the fourth place, i.e. Dard, his temple stands erected. Mashanu (ghost god) and Nanga Dev (naked god) are his assistant deities. They are worshipped in a small temple on a precipice nearby. Being a great giver (*daanveer*), the deity does not possess or accept anything made of gold. He has only silver objects in his store and even if an attendant gets a gift in his name or does some fraud, the deity does not punish him like other deities as he is quite liberal in his approach towards his votaries. He is

believed to be one of the nine snake sons of Jal Devta and Lamdoodi, a god and goddess of Sarpara village in Pandrah Bish region on the other side of river Satluj and is said to have come to Chaira cave as a honey bee (Mahu). His name, thus, is Mahu Nag.

Lord Vishnu

The scheduled caste communities in the entire region of Mahasu are the worshippers of Lord Vishnu. They speak a distinct dialect in Kinnaur and parts of Shimla. These social beliefs speak of their separate ethnic identity.

Beema (Vidhi Mata or the mother of destiny and creation), is worshipped on a wooden plate on which images are engraved. These images are the engraved figures and the Brahman women relate sixteen stories associated with them. During the month of Jyeshtha (May-June), they remain on fast to appease *Vi-ma* (Vidhi Mata) in some villages. The details of these sacred stories are given separately. The *Vi-ma* is worshipped by Suhagin (ladies having husbands) and the girls.

Visit to Indrapuri

The village gods are believed to proceed to Indrapuri during winter (in the month of Magh) and in Devasur Sangram there, they desire better welfare of their devotees. This is common myth in the region and varies to seven, fifteen or thirty days absence of the deities from their respective villages for the purpose. During the period of absence, no auspicious activity, noise or new job is done in the habitats and people do not come out after the sunset, fearing the presence of demons outside. Devtas, Devis and other spirits worshipped in the villages are superhuman beings whose real appearances are exhibited only through their images and whose powers are manifested in the trance state of their mediums. Their divinity, in some cases, is touched by human capriciousness, benevolence and liberal mindedness and other traits common to individuals in flesh and blood. The deities, as discussed earlier, have diverse origins as royal personages, heroes, natural phenomena, incarnation of gods and saintly personalities, heroes of ancient times or blessed or rejected beings of their times. Even animals are sometimes regarded as deities after their deaths. The assisting spirits to gods are worshipped as gods themselves.

As we discuss the strange names of various gods, various legends and

30. Kali Bari	Shyamala Devi, Kali, Durga
31. Sanjauli	Dhingoo Devi
32. Prospect Hill	Kamana Devi, Krira Devi
33. Moolkoti	Shivji, Devi, Gachaki
34. Dagogi	Dulu Devta, Dome Devta
35. Shenal	Gan Jundu Devta, Kutung (tree)
36. Kogi	Jai Gan Devta, Dome Devta
37. Tikar	Durga
38. Shilru	Dhandi Devta
39. Kamali	Kamali
40. Mungar	Dhandi Devta
41. Charrari	Tara Devi
42. Kateoli	Hanuman
43. Shamlog	Devta Kalyanoo
44. Chanai	Sheetla Devi
45. Bhatla	Kalyanoo Devta
46. Dagog	Dulu Devta
47. Thothi	Dulu Devt.
48. Badog	Gwaltu Devi, Dome Devta
49. Majheri	Nannal Devta
50. Kot	Jwalamukhi mata
51. Shera	Mahunag Devta, Tara Devi, Mansa, Dhingoo, Devdhar Mata
52. Need	Jwala Mata, Chamunda Mata, Naina Devi
53. Dhar	Dome
54. Kanda	Korgan, Mashadi, Sip, Boarh, Dome, Tara Devi, Gashki, Shiv
55. Khaliantu Mahavir	Thakurdwara, Narsingh Devta, Gopal,
56. Gharkan	Korgan Devta
57. Snau	Korgan Devta
58. Kathnol	Korgan Devta, Thakurdwara
59. Shali Peak	Bhimakali (of Sarahan).
60. Dalana	Bhimakali.
61. Shogi ridge	Sauni Devi, Shiva (Wooden structure)
62. Panjali	Baithandhu Devta, Saunr Devi
63. Kalanpur (Guma)	Devta Mrich
64. Chabbarli	Korgan Devta
65. Deothi (Bhajji)	Shivji, Bhimakali of Shali
66. Mul Bhajji	Pandoi Devta
67. Saukti	Gan Devta
68. Hiun	Dome Devta

69. Seri	Dome Devta
70. Batol	Durga, Tara Devi, Brijeshwar Devta, Nag (Doomi) Devta, Vishnupanchayatam, Bharakha Devta
71. Kalar	Ratar Devta., Dome Devta
72. Sharog	Dome Devta, Ratra Devta, Bhir Devta
73. Bharoi	Ratra Devta
74. Raman (Ramahan)	Saunr Devi
75. Sarail	Kapooro Devi
76. Majhiwar	Baithandlu Devta
77. Sheel	Pashar Devta
78. Brari	Dhandi Devta
79. Kelti	Dhandi Devta
80. Neri	Durga Mata
81. Vivant	Jwala Mata
82. Chola	Jwala Mata
83. Bhaihili	Doomi, Nag
84. Haro	Ratra Devta
85. Panti	Ratra Devta
86. Jadoon	Bhimakali, Kalu Nag
87. Lanoo	Loveshwar Devta
88. Sandhu	-
89. Nal	Dudheshwar Nag
90. Koti (Madhan)	Loveshwar Devta
91. Darabla	Loveshwar Devta
92. Khanechi	Narsingh
93. Thakurdwara (Dharampur Madhan)	Narsingh
94. Dodra	Dudheshwar Nag
95. Bagnail	Durga Mata, Narsingh
96. Khanoo	Loveshwar Devta
97. Himri	Dome Devta
98. Banuna	Saraswati
99. Graon	Sunnu Devta
100. Sandhoa	Pandoi Devta
101. Dharagara	Pandoi Devta
102. Damoh	Bhagwati Devi
103. Karyali	Bhima Kali, Karyali Devi
104. Darabla	-
105. Palag	Baithandlu, Shatka, Hanuman
106. Khob	Mahunag
107. Basantpur	Bhimakali, Shamshan Kali, Durga Kali

108. Taror	Korgan Devta
109. Dadheog	Jhalwali Devi Mata
110. Mandhor Ghat	Shembaldhalu (Shiva), Mansa Devi
111. Salot/Soumi (Mandhor Ghat)	Korgan Devta
112. Bashialru	Durga, Bhimakali
113. Devi Mor	Naina Devi
114. Seoni Kalighat	Kali, Bhima Kali, Shatka/Bhairon, Dano Devta (Sehsravahu)
115. Seoni Palace	Thakurdwara
116. Badeya	Bhatar Devi, Bhat Devta.
117. Bhatta Kufar	Jwala Mata
118. Talag	Bhima Kali
119. Shurala	Shurali Devta
120. Bin	Maru Devta
121. Galog Bagh	Narsingh Gopal
122. Duno	Maharu Devta
123. Sakori	Panch Mukh Mahadev
124. Sadhupul	Durga Mata, Hanuman
125. Chail	Baba Sidh
126. Madag	Tara Devi
127. Tara Devi	Tara Dev.
128. Anand Pur	Shivji
129. Goswani	Tara Devi
130. Kalel	Dano Devta
131. Behar	Dano Devta
132. Kufar	Durga
133. Kufta	Kali
134. Saihli	Jaigan Devta
135. Bagi Jubbar	Mahu Nag Devta
136. Dudhli	Kali Mata
137. Padhai	Kali Mata
138. Bharari	Dhandi Devta
139. Saven	Mahavir Hanuman
140. Gadhen	Dome, Pandoi, Bhagwati, Devkar Devta
141. Pandoa	Pandoi Devta
142. Kalyana	Bhima Kali (Sarahan)
143. Shoghi	Tara Devi
144. Behar	Bhairon
145. Himri	Dome Devta.
146. Sandhoa	Pandoi Devta
147. Fair Lawns	Durga
148. Mashobra	Durga

149. Manoon	Devta Manooni
150. Koti Dhar	Mahu Nag
151. Nala	Manooni Devta
152. Gajhea	Manooni Devta
153. Parari	Manooni Devta
154. Shilon Bagh	Durga Mata
155. Fagu	Deshu Mata
156. Koti	Tara, Shivji, Katheshwar Devta, Paul Devi
157. Munda Ghat	Manooni Devta, Hanuman
158. Jais	Durga Mata, Gachki Devta
159. Jagheri	Jadai Devta
160. Bakhog	Sogu Devta
161. Fagu	Durga Mata
162. Garange	Kaleshwar Devta
163. Gijant	Pandoi Devta
164. Gijari	Mahasu Devta
165. Dhalian	Durga Mata
166. Tiali	Jaishri Devi
167. Dohan	Domeshwar Devta.
168. Talai	Shivji
169. Dhar (Kandru Dhar)	Kalu Nag.
170. Kujara	Kalu Nag.
171. Thathal	Pandoi Devta
172. Tikkar Tibba	Durga Mata
173. Nyori	Kalu Nag
174. Batlog	Durga Mata
175. Bharana	Kalu Nag Devta
176. Thathal	Pandoi Devta
177. Roni	Shivji
178. Gadha Kufuar	Shivji
179. Dhaklu	Durga Mata
180. Kamahali	Dome Devta
181. Shramala	Durga, Krishanji, Dome Devta
182. Kalhar	Kamaksha Devi, Dome Devta
183. Shari	Maheshwari Devi
184. Mahog Area	Devi
185. Patinal	Devi, Devta Patinal
186. Ganodhi	Kaneshwar Devta, Devi, Devta
187. Kadhut	Deveshwar Devta, Devi with Devta
188. Matli	Dome Devta, Devi with Devta, Kot ki Devi.
189. Dhawan	Dome Devta, Deura, Devi, Devta
190. Kishaur	Nag Charai Nanu with other deities, Durga

191. Kuthar	Durga, Mahasu Devta
192. Bagheshar	Durga, Bageshwari Devi
193. Nehra	Dome Devta, Nag Devi
194. Kashna	Durga, Gaun Devta
195. Devthi (Parala)	Chakleshwar Devta, Durga Mata
196. Maipul	Bhuteshwar Devta
197. Khaneori	Pandoi Devta
198. Devthi (Kishaur)	Nag Charail
199. Bishnog	Khanta Devta, Devi
200. Khanar	Domeswar Devta
201. Balag	Mangleshwar Devta, Durga and others, Shiv
202. Bagahgh	Urga
203. Dhar	Kali, Dome Devta
204. Klind	Nandeshwari Devi, Kali
205. Mahori	Dome Devta
206. Manan	Manan Devta, Durga Devi
207. Shilaru	Shilaru Devi
208. Janog	Devi with Devta, Durga
209. Dharech	Brijeshwar Devi, Hanuman, Shivji
210. Guthan	Dome Devta
211. Rajana	Thakurdwara
212. Kangal	Kangal Devi
213. Chakul	Kali Devi
214. Bharere	Dhaneshwar Devta
215. Seveni	Pandoi Devta
216. Pharal	Pandoi Devta
217. Koti Dhar	Pandoi Devta
218. Baragaon	Bharmeshwar Mahadev, Kali Devi
219. Banar	Kali Devi
220. Hathea	Kali Devi
221. Badeog	Pandoi Devta
222. Bhadwag	Shivji
223. Dhala	Shivji
224. Shaidri	Nag Devta
225. Sawanh	Machovir Devta, Kali Devi
226. Kararu	Dome Devta
227. Shangri	Thenashar Devta
228. Berha	Thenashar Devta
229. Dhali (Kumarsain)	Nag Devta and others
230. Kumarsain Matha	Saraswati and others
231. Malan	Chaturmukh Devta, Nya Devta

232. Dhanal	Vir Devta, Nag Devta, Nya Devta
233. Fral	Marecha Devta, Dome Devta
234. Kingal	Durga Mata
235. Kupvi	Nagal Kotia Devta (Nagarkotia)
236. Sumloge	Bhagwati Devi
237. Karvati	Nag Devta
238. Narkanda	Sharavali Devi
239. Koti	Durga Mata, Koteswar Mahadev, Koti Devi
240. Kotgarh	Durga
241. Kachadri	Adi Shakti Devi
242. Odi	Bhagwati Mahamaya Devi, Adi Shakti Devi
243. Malandi	Kaleshwar Devta
244. Thin	Nag Devta
245. Bai	Marecha Devt
246. Dhota Ser	Marecha Devta, Durga Mata
247. Shala	Pandoi Devta
248. Dhali	Nag Devta

These are some of the deities of Satluj river watershed region of Shimla. The other areas from where the rivulets are not the tributaries of River Satluj, have not been included in the list. The exact list of deities, thus, will not be available in detail but most of the major deities have been discussed in this volume. The study of various myths of the divinity cults have been taken up and similarities and variations discussed. It amply exhibits the social traits and attitudes of social and folk mind of the region. Some scholars are of the view that folklore has evolved from historical facts and primordial customs. The vestigial remains of archaic origins are termed as survivals in culture. Folklore, in fact, is the study of these survivals and links. There has been a good deal of discussion on myth-ritual theory and the exponents of this theory believe that all myths were evolved from ritual. In order to understand folk mind which directs and preserves the vast treasure of myths and rituals, systematic study of cultural variants and folkloristic trends is essential.

Conclusion

According to Stith Thompson, 'systematic indexing' and, comprehensive classification of the materials in all kinds of traditional narrative becomes more apparent. Our great libraries of folklore, enriched by the ceaseless

activity of field workers and scholars, grow daily more difficult to explore. Tales, ballads, myths and traditions have poured in from all parts of the earth, both civilized and uncivilized, so that no man, however great his industry and skill in languages, can read the thousands of volumes in a life time. The rich variety of myths in the region under study attracts the scholars to take up the study with a view to have an idea of the pre-historic trends, practices, beliefs and systems which contributed to frame the present social setup with so much of interesting variations but apparent oneness and cohesive approach to life. The narratives have been discussed in the present volume and rituals, beliefs, folktale and modes of folkart and folktheatre would form the part of next volume. The third and last volume of the series will be devoted to the classifications of myths, folklore and indexing of the related material.

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CHAPTER NINE

Understanding Folkmind

Folk traditions play an important role in human civilization and culture. Folklore is the study of belief, custom, religion, narrative and art still practiced by the people. It covers the mythic system and investigation of myth. Without understanding myth, ritual, belief, folktale, legend and folk ballade it is not possible to understand folkmind of common folk who is the custodian and protector of the content of folklore.

Myth, according to some scholars, is the groundwork of folklore but it is the other way round. Mythology in the words of Lewis Spence, is the study of primitive or early form of religion while it was a living faith and 'a myth is an account of the deeds of a god or super-natural being, usually expressed in terms of primitive thought whereas folklore is more related to the narrative part or the survivals of old belief or custom practiced and told by uneducated, semi-educated common people who form the bulk of society residing any where in any part of the world.' Folklore, thus, is not fragmented study of older beliefs found among primitive people and their continuation up to the present times but it is a scientific approach to understand folkmind and collective conscience of the people who are the preservers and custodians of such beliefs and practices, by way of their social and cultural heritage. The study of myths, thus, is the study of gods, their evolution and their relationship with men and the universe in the light of customs, traditions and modes of living and thinking. Folklore is a varied subject, which covers the spoken and unexpressed material relating to every day life. The knowledge derived from tradition rather than from formal instruction and written sources, is folklore. It is an important instrument to understand folkmind and the nature of man. Popular beliefs and practices are the lore of the people and the study of folklore covers the knowledge acquired through oral channels, behavioral practices and rituals exhibited by way of expression of oral wisdom and useful skills. It covers the study of myths and rituals, naming of persons and places, popular practices and beliefs and traditional skills including arts and crafts of peasants or country people.

In order to have a clearer perception of folkmind or collective conscience, the three phases of approach, i.e., collection of material from the field, its classification and proper evaluation are of primary significance. It goes without saying that an honest study of folklore is an arduous job and likewise arrangement and classification of the same requires ample vision, training, knowledge and skill.

Myth is the basic and primary component of the study of folklore. In fact, without understanding mythic roots of a people and their approach to various prevalent myths relating to different aspects of life, especially, folk religion to which most of the material relating to myths, is associated, one is unable to understand the spirit and soul of folklore. According to simple definition, a myth is a narrative dealing with gods, demigods and culture heroes. It is concerned with (i) creation of the world, (ii) the establishment of the present order, (iii) the origins of a people, (iv) tribe or (v) culture trait. Folklore, and more so, myth is a product of cultural assimilation, long established traditions enriched by liberal borrowing and generous lending. The process of assimilation, merging and developing of various folkloristic traits including language are necessary elements to enrich and understand folkmind and its approach to adaptation of cultural components. We find that majority of the primitive elements lie buried since ages and previous births of individuals in the form of hidden thought process and social actions manifested in modified versions of tales, legends and myths.

In Himalayan folklore wealth in general and in the traditions of the area under study in particular, we find very many interesting examples of such assimilation and adaptation. This area is of prime importance for the study of various aspects of supernatural phenomena relating to the obigraphy and different shades of cultural *amalgamation* which took place over a long span of time as suggested in Chapter three of the present book. Legends play an important role in tracing the social-historical background and beliefs associated with emergence of myths and related divinity cults. We find in the areas of study that here legends and actual happenings are intermingled in such a way that flavour and scent of folktale heritage is apparent even in cases which are evidently based on actual happenings and events. This has been done to deify warriors, culture heroes and persons having supernatural blessings with a view to add immortality or long life to their actions which might have proved eye openers and guiding lights to the folkmind in the remote or recent

past. It would not be out of place to mention that in most of such cases, existing material from folktales and myths from other cultures has been beautifully incorporated and exhibited to make the accounts more mythic and note worthy. As is the case every where, the legendary heroes frequently have wonderful conceptions and approach and it is not uncommon for them to communicate with other creatures and elements of nature. They have uncanny power called sixth sense, marvelous body strength, unusual qualities of changing forms, doing things of extraordinary nature, endurance and sense of valour culture tends to evolve from savage beginning towards semi civilised and completely civilised state.

It is interesting to note that Mahasu region is very fertile and responsible custodian of varied cultural heritage and the common folk living in the region is not concerned with theory, evolution or growth of the idea of myth. We can see myth and legends interwoven with divinity cults vibrating and at work in every day life of the people. Bronislaw Malinowski rightly said that, "myth contains germs of the future epic, romance, and tragedy; and it has been used in them by the creative genius of peoples and by the conscious art of civilisation."² According to him, myth exists in all cultures and it is an indispensable ingredient helpful to strengthen tradition by tracing it back to 'supernatural reality of initial events' (introducing folklore, p. 34) on studying the present state of myths available in the region, we may like to share the views expressed by Tylor when he maintains. "The general thesis maintained is that myth arose in the savage condition prevalent in remote ages among the whole human race that it remains comparatively unchanged among the modern rude tribes who have departed least from these primitive conditions, while even higher and later grades of civilisation, partly by retaining its actual principles, and partly by carrying on its inherited results in the form of ancestral tradition, have continued it not merely in toleration but in honour."³

In order to have sufficient material for classification, analysis and evaluation, study on more than two hundred village gods, is incorporated in the present volume. The information covers about one thousand myths relating to these gods. The references from earlier works have been tested and put to scientific frame without interference and, as such, this is the pioneering approach in the field of research and study of myth and folkmind. It is, however, worthwhile to mention that an ordinary man

is bound to confuse myth with motif. Motif refers to be a single element. According to Stith Thompson, "The smallest element in a tale having the power to persist in oral tradition⁴ is motif. Whereas myth is a part of tradition and it is an account of the deeds of a god or supernatural being and through its animistic concepts, minor acts of propitiation and supplication exhibit themselves in a simple way". The ritualistic acts in a moderately simple society are away from complexity and seem to be natural and unconscious performance giving ample manifestation to the prevalent myths. Keeping these qualities in view, the area is very rich in mythical wealth.

CLASSIFICATION OF MYTHS

Myths relating to divinity cults available in Mahasu region can be classified as under:

1. *Myths associated with birth of gods and their types*

Detailed accounts of birth of gods and their types have been discussed in the preceding chapters. It would, therefore, be appropriate now to refer to the associated myths briefly.

In Kinnaur, Banasur and Hidimba met at Mullet Dhar, a place near Sungra and stayed in the cave of chaos (Gorboring Ag) as father and mother to give birth to eighteen children who are now the village gods of the region. In cosmogony myths of various countries in the world, there is a mention of the state of chaos and conflict. Though the situations and myths are different almost in each case, yet we find a shadow of these situations in the origin myth of gods in Kinnaur. It would be of interest to discuss some of the cases of conflict in world mythologies here.

In Indian creation myths, a hymn from the *Rig Veda* refers to the situation:

"Gloom, hid in gloom, existed first - one sea, eluding view.
That one, a void in chaos wrapped, by inward fervor grew."⁵

In Babylonian accounts of creation, the state of chaos has been mentioned in these words:

Tiawath created a host of grisly monsters and carried on unrelenting war against the enemy, but in terrific combat with Marduk, she was annihilated. The sea was to the Semitic mind symbolical of chaos and trouble.⁶

In Japanese myth of creation, there is a reference of chaotic mass like an egg of obscurely defined limits which contained germs of life.⁷ According to celtic idea of the origin of man, two primary existences of God Cythrawl are respectively a stage of struggle and evolution. American Indian creation myths also speak of chaos and conflict Lewis Spence (p. 174), while quoting Jeremaih Curtin in 'Creation Myths' of Primitive America, reproduces:

"That earlier world had two periods of duration—one complete and perfect harmony; another of violence, illision and conflict. The result and outcome of the second period was the creation of all that is animated on earth except man. Man, in the American scheme of creation, stands apart and separate; he is quite alone, peculiar and special. Above all, he belongs to this continent. The white man was unknown to American myth-makers, as were also men of every other race and of every region outside the Western Hemisphere." It is thus clear that American creation myths are the accounts of conflicts, happenings and struggles.

It is not difficult to reproduce material of this type from other mythologies of the world but it is a curious point to be taken note of that the myth of the origin of gods in Kinnaur has embraced such an idea which is available nowhere in the region. This approach makes the area quite distinct for further study on mythic heritage.

The greatest of the gods in Kinnaur are the Monshiras or Maheshurs who were born in a cave. Nag deities are associated with lakes or ponds. Boreskullo of Thangi Village was born out of clay. Golden image of god Mahasu appeared from the ground. Chasralu, Pokhu and Jiwaslu were born out of the heart, hair of the head and tongue of Kirmir demon respectively.

Shirgul and Chandeshwar were born to Dudma, the new queen of Bhukru of Shaya. Bijat and Bijayi were the children of Rani Damyanti. Dum was born to Shooru whose wife became pregnant after taking some rice given by the goddess Hateshwari.

The mother of Dum or Domeswar was Mata Kotkali, now a goddess. Gugga Chauhan was born to Rani Bachhal as a result of getting a fruit as boon from Guru Gorakh Nath. He was born after twelve months pregnancy. Dhandi, the deity of Nhewat was a Rajput of Koti State. Obru and Shobru, the two gods were two Tantrics.

Nines Sons of Jal Devta (water god) of Sarpara are the village gods of different areas in Outer Seraj and Shimla. Images of various gods are

traced by graziers during the course of grazing of animals in pastures and mountain slopes.

Mangleshwar deity was born in Manglad rivulet. He left the place in search of suitable spot for settlement. He entered the bag of a worshipper who was coming back from Hardwar. The worshipper got the Sattus for eating without opening his bag as the spirit would put it in his pocket.

Bakralu god was born in Dalog village. He left it and appeared in the guise of an egg of Chakor in a pasture. A shepherd took it to his home and kept it in the godown. The egg got converted into a Chakor after three days. It flew through the window and stayed in a bush in the forest. A goat of a shepherd started licking the nose of the bird while getting vanished from the herd. The grazier tried to catch hold of the bird but couldn't. It flew to Madhog, Phangu Jungle and finally reached Jalgaon. Since he was spotted by hepherds two times, the people thought it better to address as Bakralu.

Nag deity of Nehra was born in a water tank at Nehra. A Rajput of Thaili village found the image of Palthaan. He brought it and placed the same at Altasna. Devta Jhangru was born in village Kothi of Chak Bhudja. He took milk of a cow in the shape of a snake. Khegsu Mata was born at Bara kui. She is one of the seven Bharari sisters. The goddess appeared in the *guise* of an egg and she is believed to be deaf and dumb. Sharaikoti Durga appeared at Kaovil. Laxmi Narayan was born at Bawara Dhar. Kali Nag was born at Bari Village. A sage who worshipped it while staying in the village brought Pather Devta (stone god) of Mashnu. Zahru Nag of Shaneri village, was brought from a pond by a zamindar of Kirari village. The god is taken to his birthplace after every three years.

Gashaini Devi of Dansa came in a luggage of an inhabitant from Lavi fair in Rampur. He could come to know only about it when he could not cross the door. He kept the luggage in a corner of his house and his wife on unfolding it, found that a *trident* was there. The *trident* got converted into bronze image. Lakshmi Narayan gods are believed to be seven brothers. A grazier traced an image. He put it inside the godown and found it to be full of water. While leaving Nehra, the god took the daughter of Nag deity with him. Getting outraged with the behavior, the Nag deity put boulders on the way. These can be seen even now.

The myths of the birth of gods are as many as the number of deities is. An effort has been made to present only a few to enable the reader to

find out the most significant variations of origin myths. The myths under this type can be categorised as under:

1. Birth in a cave and division of territory.
2. Birth from ground in the form of an image (as is the case of Mahasu gods) and division according to attributes. The Mahasu brothers are the best example of this type. They include:
 1. Pabasi, having his ear damaged with the blade of plough.
 2. Basik's vision impaired and obscured.
 3. Bhotu (Botha) having damaged knee and unable to undertake long journeys and staying at Hanol only.
 4. Chalda quite healthy and has no shrine. Always on the move from one village to other.

Nag deities emerged from water sources. Images of some of the deities showed miracles and succeeded in being recognised by the people. Most of the deities are located by shepherds and peasants. Some of the spirits manifested themselves in various forms, particularly birds, snakes and images. The Monshiras who are the village gods of allocated settlements and areas, questioned the propriety of their shares at the time of the division of portions but Mahasu brothers settled the issue amicably and stay with each other without inhibition, whereas Monshiras brothers abstain from meeting each other. Monshiras are comparatively straightforward and free of tantric influence whereas Mahasu is shrewd and complex in disposition. He is assisted by 52 Veers but there is no mention of the assistants of Monshiras gods excepting Narayan gods. The influences of assimilation of different cultural traits and pastoralism are quite apparent in these myths.

2. Myths relating to Progeny of gods

Eighteen children born to Banasur and Hidimba in Gorboring Ag (cave of chaos) are the principal deities of various villages in Kinnaur. Bhambu Rai, the ruler of Kumarsain region and his Wazir Ahimal are believed to have seen the Mahabharata battle before coming to the region.

Boodhi Nagin, a goddess and the spouse of Shringi Rishi (Skirani devta), lived in Sareur. Sar, a pond of water. She was the daughter of king Dashratha, the father of lord Rama and was married to Shringi Rishi after Putreshti Yajna at Ayodhya. She had eighteen sons who are the

village gods in a vast area of Outer Seraj in Kullu and adjoining areas in Shimla district. A Tantric named Siddh Udo wanted to dry the lake in which Boodhi Nagin (Shanti Devi being her earlier name) stayed with her children. She was away in search of food and her servant and well wisher Chhapra was looking after the children. On seeing Udo Tantric, he expanded his body and became very tall. By this way, he was able to inform the people of the area. Siddh Udo was killed by them. The boodhi Nagin came back in the mean time and reduced Udo to ashes. She was then, deified and is one of village gods of the area. Earlier, Shringi Rishi (now Skirari Devta) and Shanti came to Gyaghi village in Kullu and stayed there for some time. The temple of the goddess is believed to have been built at a site where there was a pond of red water, the site of which made the visitors blind.

The daughter of the Thakur of Dethwa who wanted to go to her maternal uncle's house in Banjar, got annoyed with the carpenter accompanying her to the place and got turned into a boulder. Later, she appeared at Ghoshaini village after her penance and told the people that she was staying in a gorge. She visited Bandal village also. She is now known as Gada Durga as she was recovered from a Gad (gorge). Devta Naghela is the son of the Nags, who were born at Sarpara.

3. Myths of propitiation of Gods by offerings

The gods are propitiated with the sacrifice of goats and sheep, mantras and incantations and knowing their wishes by mediums while going into trance. Meeting of gods require sacrifice. Flowers are offered to the deities. Lighting of lamps and offering of incense also helps to propitiate the spirits. Human sacrifice was also required to appease some gods in the remote past. Sacrifice of buffalo is a tradition at some places. Saltish pudding (doo) is also offered to deities in Kinnaur. Sacrifice is offered after having fast for complete day. Shirgul and Guga are remembered and propitiated through Puja ballads.

Bachhal propitiated Guru Gorakh Nath for twelve years to beget a son but her sister Kachhal got a boon by deception.

Bhambu Rai, a demon king was killed by Palthan, the village god of Sholi along with his wazir Ahimal, Rani and the prince and their images were kept in the kothi of the temple of Palthaan at Sholi. The images of the Rani and the prince were later, shifted to Baduwala and Dwada. In

order to appease them, ceremonies are arranged at Sholi, Baduwala and Dwada respectively have their fairs after an interval of 8 or 9 years. The image of Bhambu Rai is placed at the top of the palanquin of Palthaan but worshipped at the end. In Ghritma festival, the god Palthaan is propitiated by ointing ghee to the Pindi on the first day of Magh every year.

4. Myths of driving away of spirits

Obscene language is used to send back Savni, the spirits residing on the hill tops, to their places after the ceremonies are over in the villages. It is considered inauspicious to allow them to stay back in the habitats.

Chasralu was driven away by god Mahasu after being chased to Pekha where he entered in a cavern. The Kurda (iron chain) of Guga is shown to drive away evil spirits from the vicinity. The symbol of the god is used to get rid of the evil spirits. Sacred water from the pot (kro) of a god helps to drive away evil effects. It is sprinkled at the affected spots.

Guga is propitiated by offering Rote (*sweet and thick bread*) and incense of Guggal towards his shrines. This helps to drive away evil spirits also.

5. Myths relating to division of areas among deities

Chandika, the eldest sister of Monshiras gods divided the areas among her brothers and sisters at Rarung Panungo, a place located near Wangtu in Kinnaur. Their parents Banasur and Hidimba were not allotted any separate area. Hirma (Hidimba) is settled at Kafor village but has no Rathang, a symbol of dignity and status among deities. The spirit of Banasur stays with Sungra Maheshur . The brothers never meet one another but are taken to their sister goddesses as per their wish. Chandika got two portions as she managed to keep Ropa Valley under her plait of hair and didn't include the area in the division. Her brothers were not happy with their shares in the beginning but reconciled later.

Mahasu brothers divided the area at Chauradhar near Mendrath. The division was done by Basik, the eldest brother. He was liberal in allotting the areas and found that no portion of land remained as his share. He, then decided to retreat to the hinter and high land. He is now the owner of uplands. These brothers meet each other and has no history of feud among them.

Nine Nag brothers, the progeny of Jal Devta of Sarpara also decided to stay in different villages. Eighteen sons of Boodhi Nagin of Sareur Sar also got settled in different villages and localities. Narayan brothers of some places also shared separate areas. Bharari sisters who are seven in number, are the goddesses of separate regions.

Devta Jishur, Dethu, Chaturbhuj and their brother decided to stay in different villages. Four Chambhu devtas also stayed separately. Devta Kangleshwar has six brothers, namely, Devta Chhija in Deothi, Dogru deity of Lalsa, Kumsu god, Lahru staying at Manvyi Lachha, Sholi Devta and deity of Tikkar village in Rohru tehsil. The seventh brother is Kangleshwar himself. Though there is no reference of their division of area, yet they are believed to have chosen their place according to their choice and agreement.

Devta Panjbir (five brothers) always stay together and don't have individual attributes.

With this brief discussion, it can be inferred that the deities in the region follow the traditions established by social beings for their system. The related myths infer that the division of areas was done by the eldest brother or sister and while visiting each other on various ceremonies, they follow the system of social hierarchy.

6. *Deception or cheating by gods and their feuds over objects and territories*

There are three types of cases relating to deception or cheating by the supernatural beings:

1. Deception by the eldest *deity*.
2. Feuds among family members of a deity .
3. Deception or breach of trust by a god with other supernatural beings or human beings.

Chandika, the eldest sister of the Maheshuras concealed Ropa Valley under her plait of hair at the time of division of the area. She, in order to kill Honu, the husband of her sister Usha of Nichar, asked him to put his long cluster of hair in empty moving water mill and keep it moving till she came. He obeyed and his head was stuck with the water mill making him unable to move. She attacked and tried to kill him. Dacho Saoni helped Kedar Nale goddess to mix mud in the food served to the competing spirits. Boreskullo succeeded and was able to marry Kedar

Nale due to this mischief. Saonis (hill goddesses) are believed to be tactful in alluring the visitors at mountain tops. Guruka god was subdued by Kasurajas of Ribba. Chagaon Maheshur and Gandharpas of Yashang wanted to stay at Chagaon but the Maheshur acted tactfully. He asked Gandharpas to compete and decide about the matter. Both of them participated in stone throwing competition. They decided that the one who is able to throw his stone to reach Jani village facing Chagaon, would be the winner. The Maheshur didn't use might and his stone couldn't reach Jani whereas Gandharpas, being a simple spirit, threw it with full force and succeeded in winning the competition. He had to move to Jani and is the presiding deity of that village.

Chasralu was driven away by Mahasu who made him to enter a cave near Pekha. Shedkulia made Binshira to stick only to Chhajpur forest. This enabled Mahasu to get established in the region.

Palthaan, the village god of Sholi killed Bhambu Rai in the guise of a bird (Sonkhag). There are numerous references of gods disobeying and torturing the human beings and it is evident that the tendency to fight, cheat and harass is still prevalent among some supernatural beings. The evil spirits exhibit their designs very often and when appeased, don't harm the human beings. The gods, however, are not depicted as evil spirits but in order to maintain their status, they too have to behave in a different way at times.

Feuds over territories are very many and are decided with mediation of other supernatural beings.

7. Family and social relationship of supernatural beings

The myths relating to this field include various cases, such as, Banasur stays with his eldest son Sungra Maheshur at Sungra and occasionally visits his sons and daughters.

Badrinath of Kamru and Narayan of Batsring are brothers. Dabia has nine brothers and sisters. Mahasu has three brothers excluding him. His mother Devlari also appeared with her four sons, namely, Basik, Baitha (sitting), Pabasi, and Chalda. They have 52 Veers (warriors) and a host of assistant and helping spirits.

Shirgul, as already discussed, has Chandeshwar, Bijat, Bijayi, Gawali as his brothers and sisters and his mother Dudma and father Bhukroo were living beings. Bhangayen is the god sister of Shirgul who freed him from the jail after cutting the leather hand cuffs and iron chains.

The relationship of god-brothers and god-sisters is quite common among the village gods. They maintain their relationship as is done by their followers.

8. Myths relating to appearance and change of Forms

Mahasu are four brothers. They are called Mahasu separately and individually. There is no division of attributes and their supernatural powers are believed to be identical in most of the cases. Monshiras deities also have undefined supernatural authority and have complete control over their respective areas. They are known with their village names.

Saonige, the spirits controlling the slopes and pastures at the tops of mountains are known collectively. They are believed to be brothers and sisters. Dum and his brother on are two village gods but both of them are known as Dum Devta.

Monshiras appear in different forms. Banasur is worshipped as snake at the time of 'Shu Bonu Samyamu' ceremony in Chagaon. There are several myths relating to the change of form and appearance by a deity. According to beliefs a spirit met a Lama in the guise of a Yak. A deity flew in the form of Monal. Palthaan deity helped people to kill Bhambu Rai in the guise of Sonkhag (golden bird). Some images of spirits, when put in the godown made the grains increase immensely. Mahasu appeared in the form of images, as already discussed. Guga came out from the cell in the form of a snake. Dum turned to be an image and started haunting the Thakur in his dreams.

Gashaini Devi changed her appearance from trident to an image having four arms. In brief, it can be said that every supernatural being is capable of changing the form and appearance and has enormous capacity to do things which are considered impossible by human beings.

9. Myths relating to arrival and departure of spirits

Violent wind as indicator of the arrival of the spirit of Banasur in Chagaon. 'Hirim Samyamu' the ceremony of praying to the spirit of wind to leave the area at Sangla.

Departure of village god of Chagaon to Indrapuri is celebrated by lifting his palanquin up ward and arranging a ritual of Ragul. The arrival of the deity from Indrapuri after attending a celestial function is indicated by the medium of scheduled caste community, in some villages.

The hill spirits are entertained with food during Phaguli festival. They are invoked and invited with the help of the swinging of palanquins of the village gods. The village gods, thus, serve as mediators for inviting outside spirits to the villages and sending them back.

The evil spirits are called by the monks by blowing an instrument called 'Kangling' and made to leave the habitat quickly by chanting Mantras. Among the various devices applied to keep away the alien spirits from the habitats, the branches of braikling plant are also placed on the roof tops of the houses.

In order to appease the spirit of Banasur, dust is removed from the premises of the temple.

10. *Taboo Myths*

It is a taboo to look back at the snake of flour and the lamp lit at the time of 'Shu Bonn Samyamu', the departure of the spirit of the father of the god.

Hill tops are not visited by inhabitants after Phulaich festival fearing the wrath of Saonige. Saonige are not allowed to stay back in the settlements after ceremonies are over. Touching of palanquin of a god by an outcaste is a taboo.

Jana used to be a theocratic representative of god and the tradition is followed in modified form in some villages of Shimla and Kinnaur. To talk to 'Singhaan,' the representative of village god in Sangla during a ceremony, is taboo. In Jabal village where Jana is still a practice, the crying of the representative, is a taboo.

It is a taboo to use rice grown in any other field than Phagu Kyar for preparing kheer for offering at Shiv Linga at Churdhar. Phagu Kyar is the place where Shirgul experienced supernatural bliss for the first time. The chaff from the rice corn should be separated by rubbing with hands only.

To use milk of a cow other than the one tendered by Chhabroni Rajput family, is a taboo. The cow should be bedaagi (unblurred) and should have the following qualities.

- (i) Its tail should be uncut.
- (ii) Horns should not have been broken.
- (iii) Calf should not have died.
- (iv) Extractor lady should observe fast for one week and should not belong to a family which has its unsacred past and be spotless.

- (v) There should be no period of pollution.
- (vi) She should take her bath before milking the cow.
- (vii) The cow should be milked around 2.00 A.M in the morning and the person carrying the milk for preparation of kheer should start immediately to Churdhar.
- (viii) Milk should be kept in the upper storey of the shrine after being taken in through a small ventilator (Sandhrali).
- (ix) The Kinkar (Oracle) should put the milk in a charu (vessel) made of copper.
- (x) Hawa, the spirit in the form of wind should sanctify it. It is, however, difficult to certify this phenomena but if the conduct is not violated, it is deemed that the 'Hawa'(spirit) is happy.
- (xi) No body should see the carrier (the Kinkar) who takes the milk, on the way.

It is a taboo to touch or wear leather objects while going inside the shrines.

11. *Myths regarding rejuvenation of spirits*

The village gods make it a point to be taken to their places of birth after some interval. The palanquins are kept at the birth place for a day or two and it is believed that the spirit is regaining the lost vitality. Hirbani, in the form of a goddess made of clay during the rope-sliding ceremony is believed to provide security and safety to the entire ceremony with her celestial powers. The spirit of Honu hovered like a bee and after killing it with the help of Chagaon Maheshur, goddess Chandika felt relaxed. Matokpa, a village god in upper Kinnaur sends non-believers to trance and they have to entertain others on wine as punishment. The spirit of Dum had got polluted due to having killed the Thakur and others, and was purified at Nagarkot. A sinned spirit was called 'Paap', Paap can only be cured if made to take a bath at sacred place or sanctified by an oracle. Dum is taken to his place of origin for his rejuvenation. Bakralu visits his place of birth after every twelve years duration.

12. *Myths of symbols associated with spirits*

In rope sliding ceremony (Bhunda) a rope of Munji (Saccharum Munja) is prepared by the slider Beda. The rope is the symbol of Vritra, the

legendary demon. It is placed across some natural water channel and is considered auspicious for the people.

Saoni, the mountain spirits (Ashwini Kumar) are believed to be the symbols of earth, sky and night. Hirim is the spirit of wind in Sangla. Symbols of gods, the images are believed to be saved by the spirit itself in the event of some calamity. In Rampur Bushehr region a house was reduced to ashes but images of the god placed inside, got disappeared and emerged at another place to be worshipped by votaries.

Braikling plant (*Prinsepia Utilis*) is considered to be a sacred herb for keeping away the evil spirits. It is used for performing rituals related to supernatural beings.

Iron Chain (Sankal), bar and Kada are the symbols of Guga, the snake god. He is worshipped with Guggal Dhoop in his Marhis (Shrines).

There are several myths associated with the symbols or forms of deities. A deity in the form of cropseed or bee, is a common belief. Mahunag (the bee god) bit his adversaries by taking the form of bees. Jagati Pat Shila placed in Nagar castle in Kullu, is believed to have been brought by bees to the place.

Snakes are considered to be the symbols of snake gods. Superstitions and beliefs are also associated with the appearance of ants, crows, jackals and owls etc. The images of deities are believed to be the actual gods.

13. *Myths relating to Cults*

As already mentioned, the village gods converse with the evil spirits visiting the habitats and convince them to leave the villages. In some places, they are given a ritualistic send off. Deities in most part of this region dance in wooden palanquins and the bearers swing these backward and forward to elicit responses in affirmative or otherwise. The mediums are the spokespersons of the spirits and while in trance, they represent the deities and act as oracles.

The visits of village gods to Indrapuri for bringing prosperity to their followers, is a common belief with which myths relating to the

Celestial administration, hierarchy among deities, precautions to avoid visits of evil spirits to the habitats during the absence of gods are related. Myths relating to the divinity cults are numerous and include the search of gods for suitable abodes, assistance by fellow spirits, feuds, incarnation theories and the utilitarian aspects of the institution of village gods. For

instance, goddess Mathi of Chhitkul migrated from a village in Tibet to the present location. Lord Parshu Ram helped Ganeshi Dev of Majheoti to get settled there. Various village gods are the spirits of mythological and legendary heroes of the past. Four village gods appointed by Mahasu to have a vigil on Chasralu include (i) Janglik Jakh, a Yaksha spirit, (ii) Beri nag of Tangnu, a Nag deity, (iii) Chillam of Dudi, a local folk god and (iv) Narayan deity of Goswari. The Nag Pekha was also associated with the arrangement. This list of gods indicate that mythical division of spirits didn't hamper the social and spiritual beliefs of the people. Jana tradition established that the representative of god is as powerful as a god himself. He is deity in humanised form. Potomang and Zolya or Singhaan are the relics of ancient Jana tradition. Binshira, or headless demon haunts the areas surrounding Chhajpur forests. He is offered sacrifice of animals by the people to avoid his visits to the habitats. Lodi Nag deity of Lod village is believed to be the incarnation of Nandi, the Cowherd of the Pandavas. The deity Behni Dev gives cloth for preparation of Chhatra of Lord Parshu Ram of Nirmand.

The system of rituals relating to the cults is based on sound mythic knowledge and is not haphazard.

14. Myths regarding deification of heroes

Banasur, Hidimba, Ganesh Dev, Parshu Ram, Bheema Kali, are mythological characters. The Pandavas are worshipped as village gods in a vast area. Mahasu was put behind the bars according to legends, and as such, might have been a living hero. Shirgul and his associates are all portrayed as living beings at one time. They were deified during their life times. Guga Zaharpur, the snake god, Dum, Dhandi, Naivi, Obru and Shobru, Kwar Jakh (incarnation of Bhim) and Dhara Jakh and several other heroes of ancient times, are deified and worshipped in the region.

The reasons for deification include, being of saintly nature, Extraordinary valour, simplicity of a high degree, remarkable sense of guiding people and gift of supernatural bliss. The evil spirits who have been deified are believed to be so powerful as were considered invincible by the village gods. These are worshipped out of fear of their evil deeds. Image of Aicha Brahman, who was murdered, is worshipped as a deity. Numerous innocent people who ended their lives by committing suicide since time immemorial, are worshipped as benevolent spirits either by

concerned families of their successors or the whole habitat. Some of the ruling families had the tradition of installing their ancestors as gods by inter-mixing folktale elements into the historical deeds of such personalities. Keeping in view the tendency of hero worship in the region, detailed accounts of deeds of five major gods, viz; Monshiras, Mahasu, Shirgul, Dum and Guga along with some others have been dealt with in the related chapters. It would, therefore, not be appropriate to discuss the same again.

According to an estimate, there are more than half of the deities whose accounts can be placed under ancestor worship. The rest of the deities worshipped in the region include those who emerged from under world, air, water, sky, pastures, fields, forests and the incarnations of ancient heroes, sages, tantrics and other legendary personages. Even the spirits of bullocks, birds and demons are worshipped as deities. Bhoot Devta of Maipul is one such case.

It may be concluded that the folkmind in the region is quite alive and sensitive to the favours done to the society and it is conscious of recognising and honouring the services rendered by any being. This type of collective approach has resulted in multiplicity of deities and animistic traditions.

15. *Journey of gods to other Worlds*

As already stated, the village gods are believed to visit Indrapuri (heaven) during the month of Magh every year. They, then act as the harbingers of prosperity and good luck for the followers. The villages are believed to be devoid of deities during that period and fear of haunting of evil spirits looms large. People take precautions not to do any thing new, make a noise or arrange any ceremony. They don't come out after sun set or late at night in some of the areas.

In Rakchham village, at the time of a ceremony, the earliest settled families prepare and exhibit paintings depicting the visit of the goddess from heaven. In Chagaon, Ragul festival is arranged to give warm send off to the village deity at the time of his departure to Indrapuri.

It is a common belief that spirits can visit any place any where in the world or even outside it. They can be invoked and prayed to come back without any loss of time. The concept of Indrapuri is quite vague. In Kanam, the local deity is believed to go to 'thoring' which indicates 'Upland' or Upper World. In lower Kinnaur, people believe that Indrapuri

is some where beyond high mountains and in Shimla region, people believe that Indrapuri is at Sarahan where goddess Bheemakali is the presiding deity. According to some indications, Indrapuri is some where near 'Raldang,' the place of the dead on Kailas range facing Kalpa, whereas some others believe that the deities assemble at Kailas Mansarovar and the conference is chaired by Lord Shiva himself.

16. *Myths regarding stratification of deities*

The concept of senior and Junior gods, their Wazirs, assisting spirits and evil spirit, is prominent in the region. Junior gods, generally, don't visit the villages controlled by senior or major deities without prior intimation but senior gods may come to pay a visit to the habitats forming domain of junior gods. The status of the followers of deities of higher status was considered higher for the purposes of performance of rituals upto the time of princely regime. But this is not so now. Besides junior gods, Veers, Joginis (Saoni), Kimshu (household god), Khatingshu (courtyard deity) and ancestral spirits belonging to various families are the spirits to be propitiated from time to time.

Gods staying in a particular village since time immemorial, can't claim to be principal deities. During princely regime, the rulers were competent to elevate or lower the status of a particular deity. The state god was the prerogative of the ruler. Lord Badrinath of Kamru was made the state deity at one time and Narayan deities were made junior gods in the villages where Monshiras or Maheshur were the presiding deities. Bheema Kali, the principal goddess, being the family goddess of the ruling family of Bushehr *state*, commanded the highest respect in the minds of the people in Rampur Bushehr region. The amalgamation of Shavism, Vaishnavism and Shakta cults can, thus, be, seen in the region.

The original god of Jani, the Narayan is believed to be junior to newly arrived god Gandharpas from Yashang. Vishnu, though worshipped by scheduled caste people in their habitats, is one of the principal gods of Hindu pantheon. A village god is believed to accompany the newly wedded girls to their in laws' houses according to their wishes and thus, he becomes household god (kimshu) of the new family. Nag Devta, a Hindu god of Pangri, is the wazir of god Shishering (a buddhist god) of that village. Kali is also a Kimshu in some cases. Chekuriya, Shedkulia (the whistling god), Kailu and Kailat are assistants of god Mahasu. The god is believed to have 60 Veers (according to some 52) as his assistants.

Kilbalu is the god of sheduled caste community in Rohru and Chadgaon areas of Shimla district. His origin is in Kilba village of Kinnaur district. The Pujari of Jiwaslu, god of death in upper Shimla, doesn't see the image of the deity as he looks towards opposite side at the time of worship of the godfearing the wrath of the deity which might result in the death of the worshipper.

The gods have all potent attributes and, as such, deities for protection of various aspects of life are not separate but some of them are believed to have distinctive supernatural powers. Shirgul commands control over wind and storm, snow and rain. Gugaa is blessed with curing snake bite and Dum is the protector of harvests, cattle and property. The Khetrapal (Kshetrapal) is a crop god and Yama is the lord of death who controls cremation grounds. His representatives in the region are Chambhu, Jivaslu and manifestations of some goddesses.

17. Myths regarding attributes of deities

The village gods are believed to be all powerful. They are the protectors of life and property of their followers and some times have to behave as revengeful, cruel and malicious ones, as the situation may demand. There are cases of feuds and agreements of these godlings. Chandika deceived Honu, the husband of her sister Usha and slaughtered him but on seeing that his neck would join the body again and again, got terrified and sought the help of another god, her nephew. The god may bestow blessings or inflict curses on the believers.

There are myths of snakes causing water springs after coming out of the baskets. Kasurajas, the village god of Ribba, created another god Bores Kullu out of clay. Some of the gods are believed to be strictly vegetarian whereas some others are interested in sacrifice and offering of wine to them. Purgyl shu is the presiding deity of Purgyl peak, the highest one in Kinnaur.

A god takes occasional round of his domain and receives gifts and offerings as a routine tradition. Chheed, a type of tax is paid to Shirgul through goddess Bhangayen. Dum doesn't accept kheen (tax) and there is no bhor (assistant god) to him.

There is an interesting myth of the Pandavas in Dodra Kwar. A cow used to go to Gosangu conjunction of Rupin river every day. Five bearded and long haired youngmen would appear on the scene and suck the milk

of the cow. When the villagers tried to catch hold of them one day, all except one fled away. The last boy also escaped but his golden hair remained in the hands of a villager who caught him. He is now the village god and his images are prepared out of the golden hair of the boy who was caught. He is known as Kwar Jakh and is the incarnation of Bhim, a Pandava brother. The attributes of gods are numerous and beyond comprehension.

18. *Dismemberment of spirits*

There are some references of myths of this type. We don't find feuds among gods where they quarreled and handled their opponents physically, excepting that of the spirit of Honu, the husband of Usha, who was invited by goddess Chandika to accompany her to Tibet and asked to put his beard in a moving water-mill in case the grains to be converted into flour, got exhausted. He was killed by her with her sword and to her surprise, she found that the slaughtered neck of the demon would rejoin the body time and again.

Baffled by the situation she remembered all her brothers one by one for help. But none would come as all of them were unhappy with her for her partiality and deception during the division of the area among them. Lastly, she called Markaling, her nephew, for help and with his intervention, the god of Chagaon village agreed to help her. On reaching the spot, he suggested to kill the hovering bee. By doing so, Honu did not get resuscitated and died.

In Brua village, Tunkey put the snakes from the basket in her cattle shed. The shed was full of water the next morning. A witch suggested that the snakes be killed by giving incense of the laterine of a dog and with the smoke, the snakes would disappear from the room. She suggested that Tunkey should stand on the floor and kill the snakes with an axe. She followed her advice and killed all the snakes emerging out of the room and threw them in the courtyard. The pile of the dead snakes started moving and turned into a python who crossed the nearby mountain and vanished in a lake there.

Amroo, a man who was passing through a ravine, heard the wailing voice of the broken and bleeding image of god Dudhadhari. He tied his turban around the Pindi and it stopped bleeding. The colour of the turban was white and even now the image of the deity is wrapped in a white

cloth at the time of ceremonies. The broken Pindi got rejoined and repaired automatically.

19. *Myths of Miracles by spirits*

The deities in the region exhibit their supernatural powers by way of miracles. Some of them would be good examples for the study of myths relating with the godlings.

A shepherd found that his ram was missing every day. He followed it and killed it being outraged over its behaviour. He brought the head of the ram with him. On reaching home, he found that the ram had golden straws of grass in his mouth. He went to visit the spot and found a Pindi (image of the god) who was installed in a temple later.

'Khandoma' a dagger used to kill Honu by Chandika, is still preserved in the temple of the goddess at Ropa. Zomatok is the village god of Leo village in Kinnaur. His oracle cures patients with the supernatural powers of the god by giving an incense.

Talangsa, the god of Leo village, says that he has the keys of the place of the dead (Raldang) and can open it if felt offended. The spirit of Maheshur created bugs to frighten the family members of Listiche Kayath.

An image of a god when put in the grains, increased the quantity immensely. The godown was turned into a lake with the supernatural powers of the god whose image was kept in it for the night. Water brought in a leather container, flooded the area. The cats belonging to Shirgul didn't fear wild animals. Shirgul struck a water spring after touching the earth. The balls of Sattu containing insects got stuck against a boulder and these can be seen in a fossilised form. A water mill moved automatically with the supernatural powers of Shirgul. The god brought rain, snow and violent storm. A cave was carved out by Shirgul by throwing pebbles and dust. The frightened animals who couldn't enter the cave due to their bigger size, were reduced in size. Shirgul had supernatural powers to vanish at will. Sleet, iron and stones were caused due to the supernatural powers of the god. Gudali turned into a bee with her supernatural powers.

Ropes and strings were turned into snakes by Chandeshwar. Bees sucked the blood of the demon. Mahakali in the form of bees helped Shirgul. Bijat Raj is the Zipru deo, the lord of death. Bhangayen goddess appeared in the form of a black cloud. Boulders increased in weight and size and could not be lifted by the demon. Sanwali mare of Shirgul turned

into a boulder and is worshipped by devotees. The head of the demon turned into a boulder.

Dishes got changed to cow dung cakes and didn't remain worth eating. Bajrothi or Gohri, was a Tantric system of sending messages. Deity pierced seven iron plates with an arrow with a coconut hung with a hair. Gold turned into water and started flowing. The god restores eyesight. Head of Kurgan slaughtered but even then spoke. The spirit of Behni Dev started sucking milk of cows in the guise of a snake. Shamshir Mahadev was traced when a cow started pouring milk on his image. Ants chained in line and showed the spot for constructing a temple at Nithar village. The nose of deity made flat by licking and is worshipped in the temple.

Pouring of milk by cow helped to trace the image. Mangleshwar helped the Pujari to cross the Satluj on Kamandal. Palthaan killed Bhambu Rai in the guise of a bird. Khegsu Mata flew as a bird. Ants came in a line to Madholi where her temple was constructed later. The Pandit put the goddess in a vessel but it was broken with her supernatural powers. Duttatreya enlarged his body. The temple of Kumsu Narayan was built at a place where the burning lamp could not be blown off by the wind.

The deities have immense powers and exhibit them on various occasions. The myths related with this phenomena can be categorized as under:

1. Change of forms by the deity.
2. Changing the natural conditions.
3. Manifestation by way of other creatures and performance of strange acts.
4. Efforts to change the existing systems by guidance or warning.

20. *Miscellaneous Myths*

Among miscellaneous myths such myths, which have not been discussed under other sub headings, are placed. These include:

1. *Myths relating to ancestor worship.*
2. *Myths relating to Nature worship:*
 1. The peak of Churdhar purified by bringing rain and snow.
 2. Hawa, in the form of air, purifies the milk to make it sacred for worship.
 3. Mountain worship conducted by offering five sacrifices at the top.

4. Worship of Jal Devta (Water god), Nag Devta (snake god) and their progeny.
5. Worship and bringing of Jaiyari flower for protection from evil spirits. Use of braikling, a herb, for driving away evil spirits.
6. Shelu, an emblem of Nature worship. He asked the god of the lake to take his flute and lotus flower to his wife.
7. Bakralu, a god of the goats, searched by a shepherd.
8. River Sahtadru appeared due to the penance of Duttattreya.
3. *Myths relating to the world of evil spirits and demons:*
 1. A Victim accepted by the demon twice a year.
 2. Kirmir Danu lived in a deep and dark pool.
 3. Demon worshipped as deity out of fear. : ‘
 4. Pokhu, Chasralu and Jiwaslu appeared from the limbs of the demon Kirmir.
 5. Chaukhat and Churia Demons were the owners of two high peaks.
 6. Headless demon called Binshira. He was allotted a specific place by Shedkulia.
 7. Images of the spirits started frightening people in dreams.
 8. Bhambu Rai, the demon king was killed by Palthaan in the guise of a bird.
 9. Rakshasa living on a tree (Shaitt) on the conjunction of Orli and Parli rivers.
 10. Dantasur demon killed by sage Parshu Ram.
4. *Myths regarding use of miracle herbs:*
 1. Braikling plant (Prinsepia Utilis) used To display objects relating to the deity and driving away evil spirits.
 2. Guga propitiated by offering Guggal Dhoop.
 3. Some flowers considered as belonging to the supernatural spirits.
 4. Indra hid from Vritra in Brahm Kamal found around the mountain tops.
 5. Plucking and offering of flowers only on auspicious occasions.
 6. ‘Maza U’ flower brought by the deity.
5. *Myths relating to the gods changing their places/habitats:*
 1. Gandharpas changed his place of stay.
 2. Devta Narayan of Chhota Kamba village in Kinnaur shifted to Garshu.

3. Dabla came from Lhasa to village Kanam on the back of a yak.
4. Ganeshi Dev selected suitable place for him.
5. Chhitkul Mathi came from Tibet to Chhitkul.
6. *Myths regarding the feuds, agreements treatment of godlings:*
 1. Chandika's medium could not trace the bones buried under the earth and she had to abandon her visit to Moorang.
 2. Maheshur and Nag agreed to stay apart.
 3. Shirgul and his brothers maltreated by the Thakur.
 4. Beda, who slides down the rope during the Bhunda ceremony, is elevated in status. He is considered to be the representative of the deity who conducts and arranges Bhunda and is allowed to ride the palanquin of the concerned deity.

Socio historical back ground of the deities.

The major gods in the region are believed to be contemporary to each other. These include Mahasu, Dum, Shirgul and his brothers and sisters and Guga who were put behind the bars by the Delhi rulers. The events of these gods assessed individually, are of interest but don't substantiate the theory that all of them were human beings as the origin of Mahasu brothers is shrouded in mystery. He seems to have been born in some family in the present Jaunsar Bawar area. If this is proved after research, it would then, not be difficult to reach a conclusion about his contemporaries.

Mahasu appeared in a field at Mendrath with his brothers and mother. Shirgul and Bijat Raj are believed to have been born at Shaya and the place of Bhukroo, their father is historical. Guga's period can be stretched between tenth to thirteenth century as the periods of Guru Gorakh Nath and Chauhan rulers are not finally decided as being contemporary. Dum, was no doubt a warrior but his period also can not be ascertained finally as there is no written and authentic evidence to do so. It, however, can be said that the folkloristic evidences emerged out of the discussion and material on these and other village gods, make it sufficiently clear that the period of emergence of divinity cults in the region, don't in any case, go beyond the fifth-sixth century A.D. Even the gods who are mythological personages like lord Parshu Ram, Duttatreya, Shrivahu and the Pandavas etc. did not have their shrines before that period. Mahasu, though brought by Una Bhat from Kashmir, seems to be a Khasha god and Shirgul represented the Kuninda rulers of ancient times. The cult of Maheshuras

in Kinnaur seem to be sufficiently older as compared to Mahasu and other gods of the region. Their temples also appear to have been built earlier to the shrines of other gods.

The matter incorporated in the present Volume is based on field information and may, thus, not have the authenticity of written records but it is a field work so essential for the study of folklore and especially of the region which has retained Chronological oral records right from pre-vedic period to the present times.

Conclusion

Myths account for religious element in primitive examples and try to explain primitive scientific notions and beliefs. Tylor, while explaining Primitive culture (Vol. I, p 369) asserted, "when the attention of a man in the myth-making stage of intellect is drawn to any phenomenon or custom which has to him no obvious reason, he invents and tells a story to account for it." The savage mind interprets the phenomena in his own way. Lang explains the role of myths in these words, "They frame their stories generally in harmony with their general theory of things, by what may be called 'savage metaphysics.'" Our present day superstitions and faiths as well as myths associated with them are fossilised ideas of the prehistoric man. The myths and legends experienced and retold by us in the present world are the relics of antiquarian animistic beliefs. In the words of Lewis Spence (1921: 23), "Spirit stories which have obviously a primitive setting or atmosphere are almost certainly animistic. Thus, tales which describe the soul as a bird or a bee, flitting about when the body is asleep, are either direct relics of an animistic age, or have been inspired by earlier animistic stories handed down from that age. The tales of spirit journeys to the other world, the provision of implements, weapons, shoes, and so forth, placed in the grave to assist the soul in its progress to the land of shadows, invariably point to an animistic stage of belief- the belief in a separable 'soul', in an entity entirely different and apart from the 'tenement of clay' that has perished".⁸ Supernaturalism and Fetishism are closely linked with animism. According to supernaturalism, the dead could inspire awe and nature could do anything unbelievable with its mysterious powers.

Fetishism makes one believe that spirits and supernatural beings inhabit every object including vegetation, stones and water etc. The fetish, thus,

may be anything including 'a bone, a stone, a bundle of feathers, a fossil, a necklace of shells, or any object of peculiar shape or appearance. Into this object the medicine-man may lure the wandering or banished spirit, which hence forth becomes his servant, or again, the spirit may of its own will take up its residence there.' The spirit may quit the fetish only if permitted by its 'master.'⁹ It is, thus, clear that fetish-spirit may even be treated to be a god but it has a subservient role to play and it can be castigated in case of its denial to act according to the desires of its owner.

This discussion leads us to believe that the most of the legends related to various myths available in the region under reference, evolved round the spheres of supernaturalism, fetishism and animism. Deification of heroes and other supernatural occurrences, such as, worship of a stone god, godly actions by a simple man, bringing of large stone slabs by bees, changing of forms with supernatural powers, flying of heroes in the sky, being able to cause rain and storms with mysterious powers, snakes with supernatural bliss being able to produce water springs, killed snakes taking the shape of a dragon, rams acting as harbingers of hope of finding a new deity and cow milking on a boulder to indicate the presence of a deity etc. are related to supernaturalism while the birth of gods and goddesses in different forms and performing rare acts of bravery by killing demons etc., are the myths related to the phenomena of animism. The stories according to which ordinary objects like trees, stones, water sources, animals etc. became godlike and sanctified as sacred spirit are associated with fetishism. Some beliefs, viz. using obscene language for driving away the spirits, objects associated with gods being shown to ward off evil effects, message of deity through the medium, taboos associated with propitiation of spirits, division of areas among divine brothers and sisters, deception of gods, deities having traits and sentiments of human beings, gods changing the forms, spirits causing storms to harm the non-believers, miracles of a spirit and its representative in human form, visits to birth places by the godlings and the beliefs of their rejuvenation, mountain gods and goddesses as protectors of herbs and crops on hill tops, use of some plants as wish fulfilling ones, beliefs associated with reincarnation of gods and sages, association of village gods with Pauranic heroes, journey of gods to other worlds, stratification of gods as senior and junior.

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