

*The
Splendour
Of
Himalayan
Art
And
Culture*

Ashok Jerath

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Preface

The Himalayas are a source of inspiration and challenge to the researchers, intellectuals and adventurers. The lofty mountains with snow-clad peaks and lush green forests fascinate one and all. They are honoured to be the abode of gods of Hindu pantheon. It was here the Vedic literature was created in its ravines, caves and highland settlements. In Vyas Gufa, situated at the Indo-Tibetan border area, was created the lofty epic of Mahabharata by the great seer Vyasa. According to the tradition, he dictated it to Lord Ganesha and the echoes of its hymns are still vibrating in the air. This has been confirmed by a researcher and a traveller of eminence. This also happens to be the land of the great races of the Panchjanya, who possessed great knowledge and wisdom. The Panchjanya included the Devas, Gandharvas, Nagas, Yakshas and Kinners. They were the races ruling the Heaven, the *swarga* with their super human powers and wisdom attained by them by their continuous research and meditation. The ranges right from Garhwal Himalayas to the Karakoram had early settlements of the Aryans, where the Aryan culture flourished and it is presumed that world's best literature was created in this region. The great seers and Rishis like Angira, Attri, Vashista, Kashyapa, Agastya, Pulastya, Asita, Vamdeva, Goutam, Prashar, Jamdagni, Manu, Parshuram, Shringa, Vyasa and a score of others meditated in the highlands of the Himalayas for the welfare of the mankind. The splendour of art and culture of this area lured intellectuals, the art connoisseurs and critics to study and work here to know the ultimate truth of the art in relation to human values. The myths and the mythology of this region were helpful in creating some magnificent works of the classical literature. Every cliff of the Himalayan ranges is dedicated to the gods and goddesses of the heathen followed by the Hindu pantheon. Its

forests and lush green valleys always dominated the plains as far as its rarefied free atmosphere is concerned.

The Himalayas, according to the experts in the field of geology, are recent in origin compared to some other mountainous ranges but the people of this region and their culture is as old as the civilisation of mankind. It is from this region that the civilised world emerged with its rich culture. The art and architecture of this region has fascinated the critics and art historians alike. The literature flourished here has inspired and influenced the thought of some of the great men of the nobility. Many early civilisations owe much to this land. It is from here that the men of great wisdom went to other lands of the globe to spread the message of goodness and nobility. The Himalayas are rich in natural resources. Perhaps these are the only ranges wherefrom the forms of different species of vegetation and animal life travelled to the whole globe. They are remarkably rich in minerals and precious stones for which the powerful kings fought fierce battles and the history of the Himalayas might need much to be researched. What we have learnt about the early settlers of this region is quite scant, but, nevertheless what we have inherited as legacy is superb in form and execution. It is doubtful, if it will at all be possible to explore the mysteries of the Himalayas despite the high technique of modern science. We are proud that we are the inventors of these great old civilisations.

The present work pertains to art, culture and architecture prevalent in the lower ranges of the Himalayas particularly around Dhauladhar ranges culminating at Zaskar ranges of Western Himalayas; thus right from the foothills of Shivaliks to Zaskar ranges myriad forms of culture are noticed. The prominent tribes of Himachal Pradesh—Kinners, Lahaulis, Gaddis, nomads and Gujjars have been discussed in detail in this book. Their life style, rituals, democratic set up and above all their manifestations in the field of art and architecture are the significant areas studied and discussed. Panchjanya as described in classical literature of heathen, had their settlements in this region. Devas, Nagas, Gandharvas, Kinners and Yakshas were the most potential races inhabiting the region ranging from the Garhwal Himalayas to Zaskar ranges in the west. Out of these five races, Kinners of Kinnaur region of Himachal Pradesh have kept their inheritance intact. In addition to Kinners, the people

of Lahaul and Spiti, who owe their origin to Mongoloid races, possess unique customs and way of life. Gaddis, although, have their settlements in Chamba and Bharmour, yet most of them are nomads. In the same way Gujjars are generally nomads and they are always on the move along with their flocks of sheep and goats. They move to the higher ranges during summer months and to the lesser heights during the winter season in search of green pastures.

In addition to the cultural heritage of the people of these ranges, some buildings of importance having unique architecture like Vice-regal Lodge, Shimla, Tara Palace, Al-Hilal, and some rare temples like Baijnath, Chamunda Devi, Bijali Mahadev and Hidimba Devi temple of Manali are also discussed. Different forms of temples including Shikhra style, Pagoda type, Hill style and Pent roof type of temples are also studied with details.

Pahari art of miniature paintings has impressed the art historians and connoisseurs of art alike. This was the region where Pahari style of miniature paintings originated and flourished. Mankot, Basohli, Jammu, Kangra, Guler, Chamba, Nurpur, etc. were the erstwhile hill states wherefrom this style travelled to other Pahari regions in north India. Kangra Kalam, Basohli style of miniature and Jammu school of Pahari paintings marked their impression in the pages of art history. Manak and Nainsukh, the celebrated artists, belonging to the same family, were responsible for the origin of main Pahari styles of Jammu, Basohli and Kangra schools. They were real brothers and it was their progeny who originated other styles of miniature paintings of Nurpur, Chamba and Guler schools.

In this book, the splendour of art, architecture and culture of the people of Himachal Pradesh has been covered. However, references have also been made of Basohli, Jammu, Mankot, etc., as the Pahari art of miniature paintings had its own legacy in these erstwhile kingdoms.

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The People and Tribes

The Himalayas, the pinnacles of human culture, legends and the abode of gods in Hindu culture, are the cradle of strange people popularly known as tribals. On the plateaus of these mountains several strange tribes still exist in their primitive forms. They have kept their culture alive despite several constraints. Rajis, the cave dwellers of Pithoragarh, Marchhas of Mana and Niti, the valleys situated at Indo-Tibetan border in Garhwal region, Jads of Gopeshwar and Chamoli, the nomads of Jammu, Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh popularly known as Gaddis and Gujjars, Kinners of Kinnaur region of Himachal Pradesh, Lahoulis of Indo-Tibetan border areas of Himachal, the Dokpas, popularly known as the purest clan of Aryan origin and Changpas of Ladakh are but a few of the tribes whose sociological and anthropological studies are still to be explored in detail.

GADDIS—THE NOMADS

Gaddis are the nomads of the lower ranges of the Himalayas. Their mobile *Bashas* exist in Jammu and Himachal Pradesh especially on the plateau of the ranges situated on both sides of the river Ravi. They, in particular, inhabit in the upper ranges of Ladda, that is, Panchary, Sanga, Galiote and the slopes of Bani in Jammu region leading to the ranges of Zanskar in Ladakh region. In Himachal Pradesh at Chamba, Bharmour, Kullu and in a few places of Kangra we find the settlements of Gaddis though Bharmour is the main town around which many of these tribals have settled. In fact, this town is known as Gadheran— the region of Gaddis.

Bharmour is a beautiful spot accessible through metalled road from Chamba to Kharamukh. It is at a distance of 47 kms covered in two and a half hours. Then one has to cross the river and go on travelling on the other side of the Ravi. Earlier there was no bridge for vehicular traffic, as such the people had to travel on foot to reach the other side of the river where stood a bus to carry them to the town. Bharmour is situated at a distance of 18 kms from Kharamukh. It is a divine land of conifers, apples and pears inhabited by innocent and god-fearing people, Gaddis, the godly people.

Gaddis are Hindus and believe in Hindu gods and goddesses along with a number of tribal deities. They are so innocent and god-fearing people that for them every natural element is a symbol of some god. Most of the local gods worshipped by them have strange stories. People in Bhumag area worship three local gods, Sankri Devta, Sopore Devta and Sankhpal. All the three gods have their places of worship at the plateau or on the cliffs of mountains. During pooja, every year, people from all walks of life assemble in the courtyard of the shrine and the festival begins. Sankri Devta is a principal local god who is worshipped by all people of Bhumag region. Its temple is situated at the plateau of a hill having a height of almost 6500 feet surrounded by the conifers but the courtyard is wide enough to accommodate ten thousands of people. The temple of Devta is erected on a square platform which tapers up gradually at the apex designed in a simple Shikhra style with square sandstones. Placed nearby is a broken chariot with a single horse carved out of a monolithic rock, symbolic of the chariot of the god. The image of god is carried on a godly palanquin by the priests while the head priest follows the palanquin fanning the deity with a tuft of peacock feathers during festival days. The festival takes place in the month of *Sawan* when the people from far and wide assemble in the courtyard to witness Dev Jatr and to get their wishes fulfilled. Goats are sacrificed and their mutton is distributed as *prasad* among the devotees. They also offer chains popularly known as *sankles* of various strengths. Chains of steel, silver and, very rarely, of gold are offered at the time of festivals, especially when the wishes of the devotees are fulfilled.

The Gaddi people sing, drink and dance chanting the hymns of Sankri Devta. A particular dance, popularly known as *Kudd* is the

attraction of the occasion. Dancers dance in a circle, two steps forward and retreating a step at regular intervals. The dance catches speed with time and on the rhythms of drums, *kaihal* and other folk instruments. To wave off the chill of the night they burn logs of wood in centre around which dancers move. The dress of the people is simple. The males wear an apron-like long attire which goes down upto knees and a rope-like sash is bound at the waist, popularly known as *tigra*. They put on the turban of white or cream colour. They are fond of tight trousers. During winter *pattu* coats and baskets are used. The shoes are generally home-made with rough cloth but now-a-days they are using the leather shoes too. The men folk are fond of earrings of gold which are small in size covering only the earlobes. Women wear coloured attire like apron bound at the waist with several yards of woollen rope, the *tigra*. They are very fond of ornaments. Bead necklaces, earrings, noserings popularly known as *nath*, toerings, bangles of various strengths are but a few ornaments used by the ladies. The married ladies use *nath* as nosering and *koul*, a cone-shaped silver ornament, on their head. The ornaments are generally made of silver but sometimes gold is also used in rich families. The married women are fond of rich embroidered clothes of gay colours.

The Gaddis are in fact nomads who move along with their flock of sheep to higher pasturelands, though they have their permanent settlements at villages on the lower heights. They move to the higher ranges during summer months but in winters they get down to the lower heights. At the higher ranges they build up temporary dwellings as a shelter against rains and other natural calamities, but at lower ranges they have permanent settlements. However, they do not come down from the average height of 5000 feet. Their main vocation is to rear sheep and goats from which they get wool and milk. Wool is sold in the market. Sometimes the sheep and goat skins are also saved after getting the mutton of the animal and sold with all the enthusiasm. Ladies are expert in weaving the woollen clothes especially the sweaters, *pattu* and a number of other woollen garments. These woollen garments are dyed with homemade colours. Green colour is extracted from the bark of walnut trees, red from *katha* and yellow from flowers. These colours are treated chemically in such a way that they form permanent

colours. Coloured designs are given to the garments while weaving the coloured threads. Apart from weaving, the ladies help their menfolk in the cultivation. Maize, rice and a few legumes are grown in the terraced farms. In addition to the sheep and goat they also domesticate cattle like cows and buffaloes for milk. Among the fruits, apples, apricots, pears and nuts like walnut and almond are the favourites.

Matrimonial rituals are simple but magnificent. Mostly they are ceremonised collectively. The people from all the communities are invited to participate. They drink, dance and enjoy the whole night. The marriage is of several types. 'Dohri' is the marriage when the groom gets the bride who is the sister of his sister's husband so that two persons marry the sisters of each other. 'Dharme-Punye' is the marriage when the bride is offered to a man without any pre-condition. It is supposed to be most auspicious. In fact, the lads who do not possess any sister are married to the lonely girls of another family. The rituals are like those of the marriages performed in the Hindu families in the plains. The oath of husband and wife in true of their core is conducted while performing *Yagna*. Dowry system is prevalent but not on large scale.

Sometimes the men marry two girls one after another but it is very rare. The second one is not a real marriage. In fact, the married lady, if beautiful, is invited to come and live with and her husband is given the cost he had spent during his marriage, but this is possible only if the lady consents to live with another man than her real husband. Sometimes the financial conditions of the husband enforce him to leave his wife in lieu of some money and if he manages to get the money in due course of time he can pay back the amount and take back his wife even after several years' gap during which she might have given birth to children. The lady along with the kids is brought back home with all the fun and fare as if they have won some battle. Sometimes the ladies, not finding the atmosphere congenial, may leave their husbands and join with the families of the persons they have affinities with and remain with them throughout the life or till they feel satisfied with the situations.

Among the fairs and festivals almost all of them are related to the religious beliefs. Their gods travel during the festivals, the occasion is called *Jatr*. Several such *Jatrs* are in vogue when the

deity is carried in a palanquin followed by the *Chelas* or the followers who while in trance profess the future happenings. It is supposed to be a very important occasion for the commoners who gather in thousands to sort out their problems and ask the questions to these *Chelas* who sometimes give the exact answers. It is mysterious, but it does happen. For getting their wishes fulfilled they worship several local gods like Vasuki, Baba Bhairh, Surgal, Gugga, Tansu Nag, Boula Devta, Akkharh Devta, Kounsar Nag, Jalsar Nag and a number of goddesses like Jakhni Devi, Pingla, Mansa, etc. But above all, the god of gods is Mahadev or Shiva. They are the disciples of Lord Shiva.

GUJJARS—THE GYPSIES OF THE HIMALAYAS

It is really a feast for the eyes to see the flocks of cattle—sheep, goats, cows and buffaloes trotting by the roadside escorted by some ferocious dogs to the tune of the whistles of their masters. Masters are elegantly clad with beautifully embroidered garments. These are the gypsies of the Himalayas, popularly known as Gujjars, who are always on the move.

Several books on the cultural heritage of Gujjars have been published so far but their place of origin is not established yet. Most of the historians stress upon the fact that they came from the Middle Asia and reached India in search of green pastures and meadows. Some of the researchers believe them to be a section of the valiant clan of the Huns while others claim them to be true Aryans who established their colonies in the northern part of this country spreading upto the plains of Ganges. Gujjars have been mentioned in several epics and in a number of classical books with myriad noun forms—Gujjar, Gujar, Goojar, Goojjar, etc. In *Harsh-charita* by Bhan Bhat, there is a reference that during the reign of Prabhakar Vardhan there were some powerful domains of Gujjars. We find mention of these Gujjars in the diaries of foreign travellers that there were several powerful kings of Gujjars who used to assist the more powerful kingdoms and thus were the deciding factors in tilting the power from one kingdom to another. There are still some Gujjar settlements in several middle east countries which point to the fact that once they were settled there and established their kingdoms. Several such families are still there in the ravines and at the

base of Hindukush which speak Gojary language similar to that of the language spoken by the Gujjars of this part of the world. Gujjars reside in several cities and the localities of Attak, Peshawar, Jhelam, Rawal Pindi, Gujranwala, Sialokote, Lahore, etc. in Pakistan. They believe in Islam. Gujjars living in India are having secular outlook. Most of the clans of Gujjars living in U.P., Gujarat, M.P., Haryana, etc. are Hindus but those who go about the Himalayas along with their flocks are the believers of Islam. Most of their castes are the same as those of Rajputs—Chauhans, Khatana, Kasana, etc. Most of them have been converted long long ago. There are three distinct clans of Gujjars. Those who are permanent settlers in the rural or suburban area depend upon cultivation though a few of them are educated and are in service. Those who rear the cattles especially buffaloes and depend upon selling their milk are Dodis. They are the most handsome Gujjars, the representatives of the real Aryans. The third clan of the Gujjars is of nomadic nature. They are the Bakarwals who are always on the move. They rear sheep and goats the flocks of which move during the changing seasons along the roadsides and in the pastures and meadows. It is really a feast for eyes to see thousands of sheep and goats escorted by Gaddi dogs which hound the animal in their fold whenever there is a trespass. They are the guards of the flocks and understand the language of their masters. Bakarwals are always on the move. During summer months they move from the plains to the Himalayas especially to the valleys in Zanskar ranges where they get huge pastures stretched miles together. Gumery and Dras, the coldest parts of Ladakh are rich in greenery during acute summers. At the start of winter they start moving towards lesser heights and plains. Thus right from the base of the Shivaliks to the highland valleys of Ladakh is the domain of these nomads.

In addition to their flock of sheep and goats they carry with them ponies and horses on the backs of which household goods are kept. They include tents, utensils, clothes of daily use and other articles of use in the travel. In fact, all their assets are carried on the horsebacks. Wherever there is a place to spend night they settle down and form a *dera* with open tents to accommodate the family members. They may stay there for more than a day provided there is enough greenery for their flock.

Social Milieu

These nomads are hardworking people. The male members of the clan are tall having broad shoulders with cute cuts. They are having open milky visage, however, a few of them are dark in colour too. The elders are bearded. They wear long shirts and salwars of dark colours. Jackets of black or dark colour are always in use but *pattu* coat is in vogue during winter only. They use white turban in the style of Turks. Big leather shoes are in vogue which are nailed heavily at the soles. The females are thin and tall. Their attire is almost similar to that of their male counterparts. They are very fond of braiding their hair. Numerous small braids divergently appear from the upper part of the forehead and convergently slide down to a single braid of hair at the back. They usually wear a dark coloured cap on their head covering the turning point of the braids. They carry their younger kids on their back in cloth cradles fastened around their backs. Sometimes young lambs are also cradled. Newly born lambs are always carried on the backs to lure the sheep mothers. The free hands are always busy prompting the young lambs to move ahead and the 'mother sheep' to follow. Bakarwals are expert in whistling the tune which is understood by the sheep, goats and the dogs. They change the direction of their journey with the tune of the whistle of their masters. However, there are some naughty animals which do not pay heed to these whistles. These animals are controlled by the hounds. They are hounded back by the big canines. Of course the dogs are the most disciplined animals of the whole lot. Most of the work of these people is done by these dogs. During the night halt, the newly born lambs are set free so that their mothers take charge of them and suckle their young ones. Dogs are let free to guard the whole flock and they are always alert to push back any intruder whosoever it may be; even the beasts are torn apart if they happen to attack the herd.

Women folk at once start making the *dera* look like a house. Kitchen is made in the open unless there is rain when they try to get the shelter under the protruding rock or in a natural cave they get on their way. The hearth for cooking the meals is always in open, arranged temporarily with stones; twigs of wood are used to lit fire. They are fond of maize bread which is prepared from the flour

made out of powdering the maize grains. Vegetables especially the green leaves of various herbs, potatoes and sometimes *dal* and curry are also used with a bit of chillies and raw onion. They are also fond of mutton. *Ghee* and *shakkar* are their best delicacies. While the ladies prepare the food, menfolk enjoy on *hukah* or gossip near the hearth to get the warmth during winter season. They lit torches during the night to shun away the wild animals. The next morning they pack their luggage on the backs of horses and ponies and start for the next halt. The process goes on until they reach the green pastures where they stay for pretty long time until they feel that their flock has taken enough.

The rituals and other celebrations are very simple. Almost every celebration starts with the distribution of *ghee* and *shakkar* among the poods and the kith and kins followed by the chanting of the folk songs. At the time of new births and also during marriage ceremonies hilarious folk songs are chanted. They are generally the love epics popularly known as *Masnavis*. Thus *Masnavis* like Saifal Malook, Heer Ranja, Laila Majnu, etc. are recited accompanied by folk music instruments like bag pipe, *algoja*, *mattian*, flute and drums.

Marriages are very simple. They are ceremonised without any vanity or show. Marriage procession comprises of horse riders. After the ceremony is over the bride is brought on the back of a horse. Marriage parties are received with *ghee* and *shakkar* distributed among all the persons accompanying the *barat*. They are given a feast of delicious food including sweets, rice with several types of curries, mutton and fruits. Generally the marriages are arranged by the family members but sometimes there may be mutually agreed marriages between the bride and the bridegroom. Occasionally, there may be a number of young lads opting for a most beautiful girl of the clan. When there is a competition, the cattles are offered in lieu to the parents of the girl. The bidder giving the highest bid wins the battle, of course the will of the girl is always sought by the mother of the girl confidentially. Once it so happened that a young Bakarwal gave away his whole herd of animals only to get the hand of a beautiful damsel. Other members of the community offered him some animals in gift and to some extent he was compensated. Marriages are conducted by the priests of the mosques generally in

Niquah style. Both the sides are asked about their consent followed by the recitation of *Ayats* from Quran Sharif.

The Bakarwals are the scholars of nature. They know the seasonal flowering, grasses and medicinal herbs of various kinds. They are the doctors of their herd and apply the medicinal herbs to the cattles whenever they are sick. Some of the Bakarwals collect medicinal herbs during their travels which are sold in the market at handsome price. Milk, curd, butter, ghee, etc are the ingredients sold by these nomads to make their both ends meet. They also sell raw wool which is cut once in a year in case of ordinary sheep but twice in case of Australian breed which they rear now. The cutting of wool generally takes place in the summer months. They are rich persons having thousands of animals in their herd. Now-a-days they have opened their accounts in the banks also and a few of the rich parties possess lockers too.

Since they are always on the move their children cannot study in traditional schools. Considering the fact J&K Govt. has introduced the process of mobile schools. Teachers especially Gujjars and Bakarwals are arranged to move along with the caravan of herds. They are the mobile schools. Teachers selected for these schools are the educated Gujjars and Bakarwals.

Democratic Set-up

Bakarwals always move in groups. A single *kabila* may consist of several families together. Each family used to have a head of the family and all of these heads combine together to elect their leader. Generally it is unanimously decided and the most active one or the most powerful and rich is elected to perform the duties of a leader. This headman of the herds is popularly known as Mukadam. These Mukadams were, once upon a time, the most powerful persons who used to decide the fates of the feudal lords. Even now they play an important role in deciding the trend in the general elections in the area. All the quarrels of the families are settled by these headmen of the clan. Even the major disputes between the clans are solved mutually among themselves. The deciding person used to be the Mukadam whose verdict is supposed to be final. Bakarwals seldom go to courts for getting justice. It is only when they are forced that

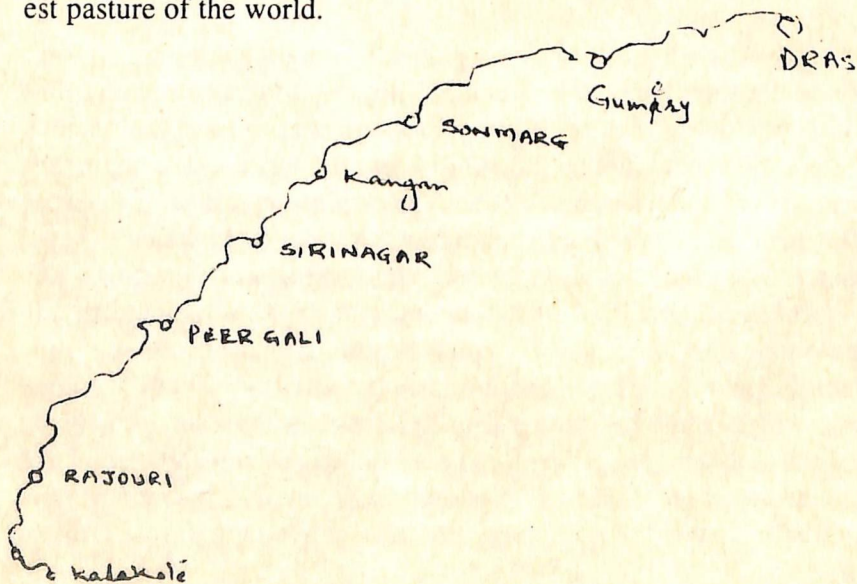
they knock the doors of the courts. Generally these disputes are extra-territorial, i.e. they do not concern with the clans only but the state is also involved. Then the Mukadams are helpless and they have no option but to go to courts for the cause of justice. Generally these cases are against the forest department and revenue department. Such disputes arise when they are not allowed to graze their cattle in a particular locality. These people are fed up with these legalities as they are so prolonged that it becomes rather impossible to have justice in a few sittings. So they try to avoid such proceedings.

Base Camps of Bakarwals/Gujjars

There are four major base camps of Bakarwals/Gujjars in Jammu province. They spend winter months in these camps and start for the higher ranges in the beginning of summer. The two important base camps are described below.

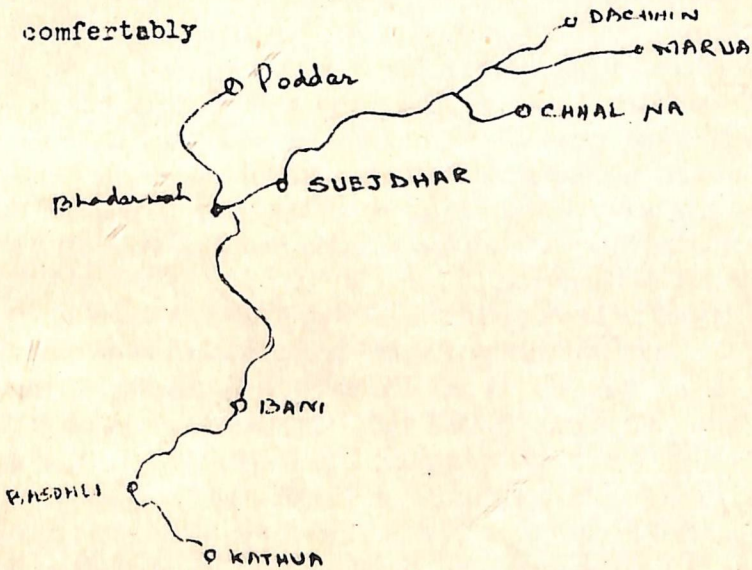
1. Kalakote

It is an important camp of nomads in Jammu province where thousands of these nomads depend upon the greenery during the cold months and start for higher ridges in summer via Peer Gali, Gurez, Kangan, Sonmarg, Gumery and finally reach Dras, the coldest pasture of the world.



2. Kathua

The nomads having camp at Kathua during winter months move to the higher ranges during summer via Bani to Bhadarwah, Poddar, Chhalna, Dachhin and Marua. It is a bit difficult tract yet the herd make it possible to make its way easily and comfortably.



KINNERS—THE HIGHLANDERS

The Himalayas have been the haven of our great thinkers and mystics. Vedic literature was written in the holy caves and ravines of the Himalayas. Its beautiful surroundings, cascading waters, snow-clad mountains were always the source of attraction for the mystics, scholars and the adventurers who ventured to know the mysteries of the highest ranges of the world and their people. Upper ranges of the Himalayas along with the ranges situated on the other side of borderline with Tibet were looked upon with reverence as heaven—the *Swarga*. The work done in this field through the researches of the holy scriptures, Vedic literature and Pauranic pantheon by the scholars have shown positive results confirming the

physiography of *swarga*. Nirukta (3-2-2) and Aetrey Brahman (3-37) narrate in a hymn—

पंचजन मम होत्रं जुषध्वम्

that five clans were the inhabitants of this land. They were named as *Panchjanya*. They included Devas, Nagas, Yakshas, Gandharvas and Kinners. In fact, this was the first phase of Aryan inlet. Devas, Nagas and Yakshas were famous for their knowledge, valour and rich cultural heritage. Their culture was propagated by the great seers popularly known as *Rishis* who were thinkers, original researchers and above all great experts in meditation. Devas were the masters of *Swarga*. They were wise, of a scientific temperament and brave people and above all they were known for their supernatural powers. They had invented *Amrit*, an ambrosia which made this clan immortal.

Parallel to Devas, were Nagas who were also powerful. They invented another preparation named *Sudha* to immortalise their clan and in this way, they were able to come in the line of Devas. Yakshas were famous for their knowledge and extra-terrestrial powers while as the Gandharvas and Kinners were famous for their beauty and artistic faculties. Devas, Yakshas and Gandharvas either disappeared in due course of time or mixed up with other clans but Nagas and Kinners kept their identity intact and established their regimes in the highlands of the Himalayas. Kinners are still having their region named Kinnaur, a district of Himachal Pradesh.

The plateau and the regions in which these clans lived have also been pointed out by the *Rishis* and the authors of the great epics and references of their inhabitation can be traced throughout the Hindu pantheon. In the post researches, the intellectuals and researchers have given their point of view about the places where these clans established their kingdoms. The Kingdom of Devas so called the *Swarga* was established on the higher ranges of the greater Himalayas. This region was rich in flora and fauna, cascading waters, medicinal plants and, above all, was a health resort. On this land the great seers, scientists and thinkers like Mrug, Angira, Atri, Vashista, Kashyapa, Agstya, Pulastya, Vamdeva, Asita, Gautama, and others worked for the benefit of humanity. This region was the central point of their studies.

There is a reference in Mahabharata of Pandavas' entrance to the *Swarga*:

ततस्ते नियतात्मान उदीचीं दिशमास्थिताः ।
ददृशुर्योगयुक्ताश्च हिमवन्तं महागिरिम् ॥

It refers that Devindera received Yudhishtira with his chariot after Yudhishtira crossed the Alaknanda and Saraswati rivers and approached the great glaciers of Alkapuri. This place must be near the Mana pass situated on the borderline of Indo-Tibetan border. From there only starts the region of Tibet.

स्वर्गं त्रिविष्टपं प्राप्य धर्मराजो युधिष्ठिरः ।

It means that the area nearby Tibet was of *Swarga*. Second among these five clans was the clan of Nagas. The Nagas were ruled by the great god Shiva and his disciples called Gana Nayakas. The central place of this kingdom was Kailasha and it was spread all over Kashmir, Sinkyang, Zanskar and the hilly region of Karakoram. There are many places ascribed to Nagas in Kashmir, viz. Verinag, Kukarnag, Anantnag, etc. and the old Kashmiri ladies wear a headgear having the shape of serpent which cascades down to their toes. There are several references of fight between Devas and Nagas to establish their superiority and the decisive battle was fought in the leadership of great god Shiva against Devas when Sati, the wife of Lord Shiva, on being insulted jumped into the *Havan Kunda*. Several stalwarts of Devas were killed in this historic war and with great difficulty Lord Shiva was consoled and thereafter for several centuries the regime of *Swarga* was ruled as per the directions of Lord Shiva.

The third great clan was of Yakshas. Their domain was around Alkapuri. Kuber was the ruler of this kingdom. Alkapuri was famous for its natural beauty and the materialistic richness. Alkapuri glacier feeds Alaknanda and other rivers. This kingdom was spread upto the ranges of Dhaulagiri. The kingdom had two valleys and from there only a path leads to Satopanth and Gaumukh. This was the famous Vishnuloka and there existed a famous shrine of Badrinath, which is still a pious place. Nearby the Mana village, the last Indian village on the borderline of Indo-Tibetan border, there

are a number of historical places like Vyas Gufa, where the great seer Vyasa created the great epic of Mahabharata. There is a spot where the Saraswati river appears and a rock bridge called Bhimpul was constructed by the mighty Bhimdev so that Droupadi could cross the river. It is said that when Droupadi, while going to *Swarga*, could not cross the river Saraswati, mighty Bhima joined the two banks of the river with a big rock, now called Bhimpul. With Kuber, a seer named Manibhadra, is also worshipped in this region by the tribals of the area. Perhaps the name of the Mana village is ascribed to the great seer Manibhadra.

Kinners were the masters of the present Kinnaur region of Himachal Pradesh and their kingdom was spread upto the river Ravi including Chamba and Kangra regions of Himachal Pradesh. Even some regions of Jammu on the other side of Ravi were included in this kingdom. The ruler of this kingdom was also Kuber.

In due course of time several national and international tribals, who were more powerful, in the time to come, overpowered these Panchjanyas. Among these clans Rakshasas of south India were more powerful. They were the descendants of Pulastya who established a powerful kingdom in south India. They were so powerful at a time that they attacked the Amravati of Indira, the capital of the kingdom of Devas. Devas had to seek the assistance of the Suryavanshi kings of the Bharata. On the other side, Asuras of Asuria, may be the present Syria, attacked this land with all their might that Indira had to request the great scientist of Aryavarta to assist him to finish the most powerful Asuras—Rahu, Ketu and Bali. Pishachas were also powerful tribals, among them the Mangols were expert in warfare, who not only looted the region but in due course of time settled in this region of the Himalayas. They entered this region through several passes of the Himalayas. Some of them had to face the Nagas and Yakshas and most of them returned back but a few of the families settled on the highlands which were not easy to approach. Slowly and steadily these clans—Devas, Nagas, Yakshas, Gandharvas, Kinners, Asuras, Rakshasas and Pishachas got mixed among themselves in such a way that they could not be segregated. That is why several tribals with Mangoloid appearance and touch of southern languages can be traced in the highlands of the Himalayas. But the Kinners have preserved their identity to some

extent though their area has been restricted to Kinnaur district of Himachal Pradesh only.

Kinners were the most beautiful people and a number of anecdotes can be traced from the holy scriptures; the most chivalrous race of Devas was lured by the damsels of this land. Kinners were the most wonderful singers, they, therefore, found their places at the Darbar of Lord Indira, the king of Devas. They were even sent on important assignments to lure the great seers so that they might not revolt against the regime of lord Indira as most of the seers, popularly known as *Rishis*, had superhuman powers attained by them through meditation and *sidhis*.

We find that the Kinners are the most handsome people among all the Himalayan races. They are expert in music and dance. Kinner dances are famous for their slow rhythmical steps and for their musical effects. No festival or ritual is complete with the performance of a dance. Dancers move to the rhythms of their musical instruments like drums, *nagaras*, *shehnai*, *bugjal*, flute, *ransingha*, *karnal*, etc. These musical instruments are played by a particular clan, popularly known as *Bajantry*. They are the best instrumentalists but are taken to be of lower status in society. Among all the dances of Kinnaur, *Kyang* is superb. It is performed in several ways. There are at least six forms of *Kyang* which are in vogue. Generally each dance starts with the hymns sung in praise of their gods followed by the musical flutter and the dancers led by the leader, known as *Ghumeri*, enter the arena. These dances cater to the time, seasons and rituals. Different dances are performed on different occasions. Of course, there are a few dances the performance of which can be enjoyed on all occasions and in all seasons.

The people are modest, unpretentious and decent as far as their dealing and behaviour is concerned. They are honest and industrious. Females are more attuned to the labour in the fields and cultivation while the males either assist them or go away in search of better jobs. They are open to the strangers and there is no *parda* system prevalent in the society. Their hospitality is exemplary. Often their openness and frankness is misunderstood by the strangers and a number of such references can be traced from the books written by the foreigners. In fact, they could not analyse their behaviour and social aspects with genuine efforts. Superficial studies

done in this field have damaged their assets to some extent.

Kinners, as other Aryans, were the worshippers of nature. The tradition of worshipping the natural objects like rivers, streams, falls, trees, mountains, etc. has come down to this day too. They worship several village gods and goddesses. Dabla Deo is worshipped in several villages of Kinnaur. Maheshra is the incarnation of Lord Shiva and several aspects of Shakti are also worshipped. Classical Hindu gods like Vishnu, in the aspect of Badrinath, Durga as Shakti and Shiva are but a few examples which are taken with reverence. Buddhism or more precisely Lamaism has made its way in the interiors of the Kalpa valley. In fact, the area near the borderline of Tibet has been influenced much by the preachings of Dalai Lama. However, both Hinduism and Lamaism go side by side. Lamas are invited to complete the rituals in some Hindu families too. Puh side of Kinnaur is having Lamaism in full swing. One more aspect baffles the sociologists that perhaps this is the only region where Brahmins are not found. All the rituals are either performed by the Lamas or by the commoners themselves. While performing marriages Pandits are not invited.

The people have several castes like Thakurs, who are supposed to be of higher status and most of them ruled the region with smaller principalities, Negis have the prominent role to play in the social and political life of this region. Since the region is far away from the main land of the Himachal Pradesh the means of transport are very scanty. Of late illiteracy is being overcome with the opening of schools even in the remote villages and the people are getting facilities to educate themselves. A few of them have migrated to plains to get better education and employment.

Kinners are cultivators at large. They rear the flocks of sheep and goats and a few live on pastoral life. Fruits like apricots, golden apple and several variety of wild fruits are being processed and exported out of the region. The land is rich in medicinal plants and a few of the families collect medicinal herbs and sell them in the market. The businessmen from the plains come there to collect the material to be sold in the markets of the plains. During the time prior to 1962 a number of Tibetan traders used to come there to do trading. Even the Kinners would transact with the Tibetans but it was very rare.

Matrimonial Relations

Polyandry was the custom of the pastime. A collective marriage of brothers of a family was ceremonised with a single girl irrespective of the age of the grooms. Generally the elder brother had the say in this type of marriage. A proposal of marriage was put up by the groom's family through a middleman of repute. If accepted by the parents of the bride the parents or the middleman would approach the family of the bride with a token of gift like an ornament, golden nosering or a necklace which would be accepted by the parents of the bride on her behalf. Generally a bottle of home-brewed liquor was also carried along with the message which was readily accepted and distributed among all the members present followed by the worship of the village gods and goddesses. A Lama was called who recited certain hymns to ward off the ill spirits. Even before the settlement of the marriage Lamas were consulted so as to get the prediction of good marriage. On a decided day the eldest brother along with a few kith and kins would leave for the bride's home. They were received by the family members of the bride and were given a feast. The whole night they used to sing and dance and next day the groom with the bride and bridal party would leave for their home where the whole party was received at the door by the elderly ladies, mother and other relatives of the bridegroom. The merry-making used to go on for three days when the people of the locality were invited over a feast. All the brothers who would be the husbands of the bride used to be decorated with bridal turbans connecting with a string to the attire of the bride and certain pledges were conducted in favour of the bride so that she would be recognised as the lady of the family. This traditional system of marriage had many positive points for example, the land in possession of the family always remained intact. There was never any problem of the distribution and division. The whole family worked as a unit and the lady at the helm of the affairs was never deserted. She had never to see the bad days of widowship as long as any one of the brothers was alive. Generally in such cases younger brother might leave the family to join the monasteries especially in Puh region. Then there used to be some queries about the emotional attachment of the lady with all her husbands. The author of these lines has confirmed from different authentic sources that there was

never a family feud on the basis of the emotional attachment of the lady with a particular husband. Generally in such cases the work was divided among the brothers. Some one looked after the household business, generally the elder one, and the others would go for cultivation and spend a pastoral life. Hence there used to be a single man at a time in the house to spend the night with the lady. However, when there were other brothers at home only a single would go in and enjoy cozy company of the lady who would shrewdly decide the turn. To indicate that some one was inside they would keep the footwears outside the door or hang a cap on the nail outside the door of the private room. Then there was the question of how the parentship of a baby was to be decided? When a baby was born generally the eldest groom was called as great father and the younger ones as smaller ones. Sometimes the eldest baby was named after the eldest husband and others according to their status.

Since there used to be a lot of difference of age between the lady and the youngest husband as such certain problems of adjustment cropped up and sometimes the younger brothers had left their families, either married other women or adopted Lamaism and went to monasteries to carry on the meditation. This type of traditional marriage was having a negative point also that most of the ladies who were not married, remained throughout their lives as spinster depending upon their brothers for their livelihood or went to monasteries as nuns. Slowly and steadily this custom has become obsolete.

Monogamy is the slogan of the day now. People are educating themselves and for them the polyandry has lost its charm now. Monogamy marriage is again arranged by the parents and the process is almost the same. There is another type of marriage in which the boy and the girl decide their fate and the would-be bride is carried away forcibly to the house of the bridegroom by the friends of the groom. The parents of the bridegroom afterwards send the proposal to the parents of the bride for the marriage. The parents of the bride ask the consent of the girl; if she is ready the marriage is performed. Occasionally, in such cases, the girl may not agree; then she returns to her parental house.

Polygamy was also one of the matrimonial customs among the Thakurs and the landlords to keep pace with the work of cultivation and household arrangements. Sometimes if the man did not get any

issue from his first wife he would go for a second marriage. In polygamy the elder wives were having upper hand in deciding the family matters. There is hardly any evidence of civil marriage in this region.

Now people are adopting the ways of single families thus monogamy is popular among the persons of new generation. Those living in the remote areas have still kept up their traditional values but on the whole the areas located nearby the main roads are turning their garb speedily.

Kyang—The Fascinating Dance

Kinners were famous for their musical renderings and dances. The dainty damsels of this region fascinated gods, the Devas, so that a number of *Apsaras* who displayed their talents before the gods were used in several intrigues to degrade the high souls reaching to the level of perfection by dint of their meditation. The tradition of music and dance has been an asset of the people and till today the rituals, religious festivals and social assemblies are not complete without music and dance.

Situated at the borderline of Indo-Tibet region, Kinnaur is rich in its scenic beauty and lush green forests. Apple orchards spreading miles together are the feast for the eyes of the visitors. The succulent fruit of yellow colour has a special flavour and is in much demand in the plains. The people are well-built and handsome as far as their physical structure is concerned. They are fond of lavish food and drinks. The drinks are prepared from apple and almost every second family brews the liquor which is the main drink used during rituals and festivals. Social gatherings start with a glass of this drink followed by music and dance. The Kinner ladies are fond of ornamental dresses studded with precious stones and richly embroidered. They are also fond of ornaments of silver which adorn their handsome features.

Dancers dance to the tune of musical instruments played upon by particular instrumentalists belonging to a particular clan of the society called *Bajantry*. They are supposed to be of low status in the social circles. Drums, *nagara*, *shehnai*, *bugjal*, flute, *ransingha*, *karnal*, etc are the local musical instruments used in the dances.

Among all the dances of Kinnaur, Kyang is the most popular dance. It is conducted in more than six forms. The change in form is indicated with the help of rhythms on the drum and gestures of the dancers. The main form of Kyang is called Dabar Kyang. In this dance the dancers dance in a circle led by the male members followed by the females. The leader is known as Ghumeri. He leads the dancers with a tuft in his hand swaying on lateral sides. This tuft is known as Chamvar of the god. In fact, the dance starts with the worship of the god through this Chamvar and when the leader approaches the venue of the dance the flutes and drums come to life instantaneously. First of all, hymns of gods are sung during the time the leader goes on swaying the Chamvar. The leader with his left hand picked up by the right hand of the third person in the row is the only dancer having right hand free holding the Chamvar. While in the sequence, every dancer is bound by the hands of alternate dancers till the circle is complete. As far as the movement of the feet is concerned they sway from left to right and from right to left in slow motion of rising waves. Alternately they move in slow rhythms in the centre also giving the idea of low tide ebbing downwards. Sometimes the dance performance continues till late night. Drift in sequence of the dance is always there on the instance of the leader. At the juncture of the new rhythm there is an utterance of words—‘Shabashe, Shabashe’.

There is another form of Kyang popularly known as Pulasho. It is in vogue in the valley of Nesang. It is staged without any song and only the rhythm of the drums help the dancers to act, gradually heightening the pace till it stops suddenly. Somahelang is another form. In fact, it is a song of flowers blooming during spring season in the valley of Shyalkhar. The dancers dance in a circle with very slow movement. In the form of Bang Parishming Kyang the dancers sing the popular song of Rop Thulpa, a romantic song, with fine footwork which is the essence of this dance form. Dhungru which is also called Vakyang is another form with a line of two dancers on each side facing each other give their performance. Generally, gents and ladies stand in a queue alternate to one another. They pick up hands of alternate dancers. In the performance a line sways forward while the other one retreats with the same swaying motion. Then the second line moves forward with the same gait while the

first one retreats and the process goes on. This form of Kyang is conducted without any instrument. The dancers dance on the rhythm of the songs which are either attributed to the gods and godly images or to the great men of the society especially belonging to the royal families. It is very popular form of Kyang and is performed in Dhungal Bheesh festival of Kamru fort situated in the valley of Sangla.

In addition to these forms, Kyang is also performed by two dancers while the singers and the instrumentalists display their talent in the background.

The traditional dresses of the dancers are richly decorated and embroidered. The ladies and gents both wear round caps with twigs of flowers tugged in front of them. The married ladies wear the head ornaments the network of which extends to their forehead. Woollen attires of *pattu* are in vogue. They tie woollen ropes at their waist. These dances are performed generally during festivals which are celebrated in the summer months as most of Kinnaur region is covered with a layer of snow during winter and early spring.

LAHAULIS

The people who inhabit the higher mountains of the Himachal Pradesh covering the altitude of at least 10,000 feet above the sea level and occupy the land of Lahaul and Spiti district of Himachal Pradesh are Lahaulis. Lahaul and Spiti is the largest district of Himachal Pradesh as far as its area is concerned. It touches the border of Jammu and Kashmir to its north and of Tibet to its east. It lines with Chamba, Kangra and Kullu districts to its south-west and west. Kinnaur district of Himachal Pradesh lies to its south-east. Due to its height and extreme climatic conditions most of its land is inhospitable and rugged and forms a sheath of cold desert like that of Ladakh. It comprises of three main valleys—Chandra, Bhaga and Chandrabhaga valleys. Chandra valley is rough enough for the inhabitation with great mountainous region; its plateau are fed by the glaciers causing vegetation at intervals overcast by meadows and pastures which form the grazing centres for the herds of the nomads during acute summer months. Chandra river flows through

its ravines naming it as Chandra valley. Local people name it Rangoli. The Bhaga valley is comparatively fertile one and suitable for cultivation. Potatoes and beans are the main crops of the land. Bhaga river feeds the valley. It is popularly known as Gara. The land that stretches from Darcha upto Tandi is richly populated and cultivated by the people. The third valley popularly known as Pattan starts from the village of Tandi where the two rivers, Chandra and Bhaga meet forming a common river Chandrabhaga popularly known as Chenab in the plains. This valley is stretched upto the boundary line with Chamba and is the most fertile land of the region. Most of the villages of the region find their settlements in this valley only.

Historically and culturally this region of Himachal Pradesh had very close association with Ladakh and Tibet, hence both Tibet and Ladakh influenced the social milieu and the culture of the people. Even the languages spoken in this region are either Tibetan or influenced by Tibetan language. People are Mongoloid in appearance with flat facial bones, small noses and narrow foreheads. They are of medium height ranging from five feet to five and a half feet. Occasionally, we find tall persons having six feet or so in height. Hinduism and Buddhism are the two main beliefs prevalent among the commoners. The aweness of the grandeur of the nature has caught the fancy of the people to such an extent that mountains, their peaks, trees and big boulders have become the godly elements for them. They worship these natural objects with all their reverence. Gyephantang of Lahaul and Jamlu of Spiti are the common example. They erect poles clad with perchants in the centre of the heaps of stones and pebbles representing the great god Shiva. The scenes of this type of worship can be witnessed at the higher ridges of Lahaul and Spiti. They believe in spirits and to make them happy they sacrifice sheep and goats. Even yaks were sacrificed before the advent of Buddhism. Buddhism adopted many practices of Hinduism so that both Hindus and Bodhs worship the common gods and goddesses. Several religious places are examples of this harmonious development. Guru Ghantal monastery situated at the confluence of Chandra and Bhaga rivers and Triloknath shrine are the examples of this common cultural heritage. Even after the advent of Buddhism the commoners' fear of goblins and spirits made

them to worship the spirits. Tantric Lamaism associated itself with such beliefs—"There are many benevolent spirits and malevolent demons who are supposed to dwell in trees, rocks and hill-tops, and before whom the Spiti Buddhists sacrifice sheep and goats. They believe greatly in witches, sorcerers and the evil eye. This form of Tantric Lamaism keeps its hold on the people by an association of dread and fear of spirits dead or inanimate. . . . There is a taboo even on the planting of trees or opening of new sources of irrigation." (M.D. Mamgain, *Lahul & Spiti*, p. 53)

A.F.P. Harcourt in his book, *The Himalayan Districts of Kooloo, Lahoul and Spiti* published in 1972, also states the same fact: "It is true that no human sacrifices at this time take place, but goats are offered before trees when water courses are opened in the spring, or in festivals at the beginning of harvest." (p. 65)

Buddhism is the chief religion revered by the Spitians as well as by the Lahaulis. Like Ladakhis they chant the popular hymn 'Om Mane Padme Hum'. These hymns are scribbled and placed in prayer wheels which they rotate while chanting them. They believe that in this way the hymn is multiplied by the number of rotations of the wheel and they get the credit of all. The hymn is carved on the metallic sheets and stones which are kept in the religious shrines and sacred chambers. Mane walls are erected in Ladakh just in the outskirts of the settlements. These Mane walls are having a layer of Mane stones placed on the surface. These Mane walls are believed to prevent the ill souls to enter the villages. Even the small perchants fluttering in the air fastened with strings to the vertical poles carry the writings of this hymn. Even some high ridges are regarded sacred which are worshipped with aweness. Gyephang La is one of those revered mountainous ridges. A deity with the same name, Gyephang is believed to dwell on the apex of the ridge. It is a belief that this deity protects the people from natural calamities and bad spirits.

There are a number of monasteries scattered throughout the valleys of Lahaul and Spiti. Guru Ghantal is the oldest of all the monasteries which contains a number of wooden idols. It is situated at the confluence of Chandra and Bhaga rivers. This monastery is revered as the religious shrine both by the Hindus and the Buddhists alike. An image of Mahakali of black stone finds its place in

the monastery along with three statues of Buddha—Nawang, Namgial and Padmasambhava. It is said that this monastery was handed over to Lama Namgial by Rana Triloknath, a Hindu disciple of Namgial. Earlier a portion of the revenue from Lahaul was offered to the shrine. At present the monastery is in possession of a piece of land the production of which is being used for the lamas serving the monastery.

Shashur monastery is another important religious shrine situated near the village of Keylong. It is famous for a festival held in June every year wherein a play is enacted by the lamas. It starts with a procession of the priests of the monastery led by the chief lama. The main attraction of the play is a clown conducting acrobatics. He amuses the audience with his jests and grimaces.

Kardhang monastery was an old monastery which was renovated later in early 20th century by a great seer, a lama of miraculous powers. He was popularly known as Lama Norbu who with his efforts initiated a number of Lahauli families to Buddhism. The monastery is situated in the village of the same name, Kardhang.

Kye monastery is another famous religious shrine of Buddhists. The monastery is a storehouse of traditional musical instruments used in festivals and during performances of a religious nature. The monastery is popular for its mask dance which is witnessed by the locals and outsiders every year.

These monasteries are looked after by the head lama, known as Khanpo who is assisted by a number of other lamas in the administration and ritual ceremonies of the shrines. These head lamas are elected in rotation in certain monasteries whereas in some others the tenure of headship is left on the will of the head lama who generally retires after a service of five to ten years. However, he goes on performing his duties of a religious teacher and assists the newly elected head lama whenever his services are required.

The society of Lahaulis comprises many communities, viz. Thakurs, Bodhs, Shipis, Lohars, Hesis, Balras, etc. Thakurs were the ruling class in erstwhile state of Lahaul. They were respected by the commoners and the people of lower strata of the society used to serve the Thakurs. Bodhs believe in Buddhism. They predominate the Chandra and Bhaga valleys. They were shown as Kanets in the records but they came from the Mongoloid race. Their

features, viz. narrow forehead, developed cheekbones and small eyes speak of the fact. They are mostly cultivators but now-a-days they have resorted to business also and have proved to be shrewd businessmen. Swanglas are the cultivators in general and possess land. They have come from the Aryan lot. Both Bodhs and Swanglas are the scheduled tribes. Shipis and other lower castes serve Bodhs and Swanglas in cultivation and thus depend upon them for their livelihood. The Garas are the artisans and they are also called Lohars and work as smiths. They mould the iron and other metals to make the household equipments. A few of them are expert in making jewellery. Garas assist the Bodhs and even Swanglas in several rituals. They play an important role in the rituals of death customs of Bodh community. In the same way Bhats and Shipis play almost the same role in case of Swangla community. Garas are musicians and play musical instruments. The councshell carriers and drum beaters, during the procession of the dead, are generally the Garas.

Generally the marriages take place within the community itself. Swanglas once looked down upon Bodhs but that rigid class system is not prevailing now-a-days. Both the communities eat, drink and dance collectively during the fairs and festivals. However, they do not give their daughters to Shipis in marriage. In the same way the lower communities too marry their wards within their communities only. However, some exceptions are always there. There is a community doing the ministerial job for the society. They are known as Hesis. There is another community expert in straw work. They weave baskets and other articles of daily use and are known as Balras. They occupy some land also to cultivate for their families. The food and other products of daily use in kitchen are produced in these fields.

In Spiti there is no rigid class distinction as such. The people who ruled the land were respected with a title of Nono and their females as Zho Zho. There were a few families living in the villages—Kyuling, Mane, Gue, Gooling and Geumal. The artisans included carpenters, smiths and beta, the musicians. There was, once, a servant class living on the labour and serving the higher classes of the society especially the landlords. They were known as Yogpas.

A number of festivals and general assemblies are organised in

different seasons of the year. In addition to the religious ceremonies, there are a number of social functions and festivities connected with the land and its production. People plough their fields on some auspicious days fixed by the lamas. After the seeds are sown a procession of the land-owners led by the lamas goes round the fields chanting the hymns followed by a collective feast and a round of home-brewed Chhang. After the germination of seeds another round of get-together is organised. Sometimes a sheep is sacrificed in the name of Lha, the protector of the land, so that he may help the seedlings to grow healthy. At the time of harvest another ceremony is held similar to the first one. The people are not allowed to cut the crop till the harvest is declared. They do not use iron sickles before harvest. However, if they need the grass leaves or a bit of raw corn they pluck it or use the sickles made of horns or wood. After the harvest, a gala ceremony is organised with collective feast and several rounds of drink and dance activities.

Birth customs are observed in different manner in different valleys. Gotsi is the main custom in Chandra and Bhaga valleys when on the birth of the first child a feast is arranged for the people of the locality. The villagers go to the house of the host and shower their blessings. Sometimes they bring with them flowers and locally brewed Chhang. After a week of the birth of the child, lamas are invited for *Shudhikaran*, that is, the purification ritual when they recite the hymns from the holy books and bless the child. *Mundan* ceremony takes place when the child is one year old. In this ceremony the maternal uncle is the initiator. The ceremony is celebrated with the worship of the gods by lighting the lamps followed by other rituals.

Marriage

Generally joint family system was the call of the past days when polyandrous marriages were the need of the time. Elder brother was married with a bride and the younger brothers were supposed to be the grooms of the bride automatically. When the match was decided, the elder brother would go to the bride's house alongwith a few persons and after a stay for a night they perform various rituals and would bring the bride alongwith him. Sometimes due to certain reasons, a younger brother might go to bring the bride. The

bride was received by the elderly ladies at groom's residence and then after the formal reception with the chanting of the traditional songs the common bride was linked with the grooms with the help of a thread fastened to their turbans at one end and to the little finger of the bride on other, thus symbolically binding them together for the whole life. The common bride was given the assets or at least a document was prepared to this effect. Ladies in polyandry enjoyed much privileges. It was the lady who decided all the social matters; even the matrimonial ceremonies were decided as per the directions of the lady. She had to decide the turns shrewdly to bed with and it was she who decided the paternity of the child. Sometimes these children were named after their paternal ranks. For instance the elder child was named after the elder groom of the lady whereas the second one was named after the second groom and so on, irrespective of their original paternity. Generally one of her husbands used to be at home while others went alongwith the herds or to the fields for cultivation. However, when there were more than one husbands at home, the lady, very cleverly, decided the turns. To indicate that some one was with the lady, in privacy, one had to keep his shoes outside the chamber or his umbrella or cap hanging on the wall outside the private chamber. This type of marriage prevented the distribution of land. It was a joint property of the family. Lady was the symbol of integrity of the family. But there were several hindrances in such social bindings. There used to be large gap of age factor between the lady and the youngest husband who might look for another source for his biological needs. Sometimes the younger husband might opt for another bride but then he was debarred from the ownership of the land. However, in such marriage the lady never saw the miserable days of widowship. On the death of a husband there was another one to look after her. It was the elder brother who was taken as the incharge of the household matters but after his death the responsibility fell on the second one and so on. However, polyandry is not practised now-a-days.

The second type of the marriage was polygamy when a male would marry more than one lady. In such marriages the elder bride always wielded more powers and had right over the important decisions of the family. These marriages were prevalent among the

landlords when more hands were required to look after the asses especially the herds, cultivation and other household activities. Sometimes these marriages were performed only to get an issue if the first bride could not give birth to a male child. Generally second or the third marriages were performed with the consent of the first bride. However, there were certain exceptions.

Monogamy is the need of the modern times. The new generation is opting for single families independent of any binding. Monogamy in Lahaul region is performed with the consent and advice of Jhoya, the astrologer. The parents of the groom consult them for suitability of the girl in their mind. Once decided the elderly persons visit the house of the bride and offer Chhang and Khatak to the family. Then the marriage is settled. On the decided day, a few of the respected people of the village, Jhoya and a few friends of the groom visit the family of the bride and offer Khatak, Chhang and an arrow to the bride's family. The whole night there is merry making session when a feast of Chhang and eatables is given. They sing and dance the whole night and the next day return with the bride. Curious enough that neither the groom nor his father visit the family of the bride in the marriage procession. The bride is received by the elder ladies of the family of the groom. Again there is a merry-making session over Chhang, singing and dancing. This type of marriage, when all the formalities are performed, is named as big marriage popularly known as Ta-bhagston whereas there is another type of marriage which is called the marriage by theft. In such cases generally there is an understanding between the bride and the groom. The boy offers some money and other gifts to the girl and if accepted it is taken as consent of the lady and the marriage is performed in a simple ceremony avoiding any ritual. The parents do not generally interfere in such relations. However, their role begins after the consent of the girl is taken. This type of marriage is popularly known as Kunmai-bhagston.

In Spiti region, the marriages take place amongst the same clans but they should not belong to the same *Gotra*. During marriages a number of rituals are performed, for instance when the marriage party reaches the bride's house a number of boulders are erected. Their number cater to the number of members of the marriage procession. Generally there are 101 or 51 or 9 or the minimum

three big stones which are to be removed by the marriage party before the members are allowed to enter the house. Sometimes trees are planted before the entrance of the house. These are to be removed over the chanting of the traditional songs. The girl is concealed by her friends and only after getting money from the treasurer accompanying the procession they are allowed to see her. Even the entrance to the house is not allowed without getting money. The girl is brought with a *khatak*, a white scarf, bound around her neck. There is another ritual performed to keep peace in the family. A stone is erected before the entrance of the house of groom at which an earthen pot is broken and the lama recites some hymns from the holy book. The lama is gifted with *khatak*, some money and other articles before he departs. The bride is taken into the family fold and then starts the bridal game when in a wide open utensil powered corn is kept and a lady conceals a coin in the powder which both the bride and the groom have to locate single-handedly. The process is repeated a number of times and the winner is applauded merrily. However, if the bride wins, the friends of the groom jeer at him followed by a collective feast.

Extramarital relations before and after the marriage are not taken morally bad but there must be the consent of the two. Sexual relations with younger brother of the husband are common and the husband does not mind provided he must not be ignored when required. It is a free society with very little inhibitions. Foreigners are not allowed to exploit this situation. However, of late Lahaulis and Spitians have become sensitive to this type of relations too. Monogamy has acquired many habits of the plains too. Dowry system, which was very rare in the past, has now found its grip in this society also. Widow marriage was common but now the youngsters opt for the new bride. However, it is still regarded as the part of social bindings. In the same way the divorces are common. When both members agree to divorce they fasten a thread joining the two through their little fingers and pull apart to break it symbolising that a thread of relations binding the two is broken and they are separated and free now. Sometimes the woman is to be provided with financial security if the man wants to get rid of her. Some amount is decided by the elders of the society. Generally divorces take place due to misunderstandings as well as due to ill-

deeds of any one of the two. The lady may get fed up with the gambling and drinking habits of the man and the man may accuse the lady with infidelity. The decisions are taken by the elders of the society or by mutual understanding. Neither the civil marriages are in vogue nor the people go to courts for getting the verdict of divorce.

MALANA—THE OLDEST PARLIAMENT OF THE WORLD

Malana is a small village of about 500 families situated on a plateau of Chandrakhani mountain at a height of about 12000 ft. It is surrounded by the lush-green forests, rugged mountainous ranges and difficult tract not easy to climb. That is why the outsiders could not influence the traditions of this village for thousands of years. This village can be approached through three difficult routes, the less difficult among all is the route of Jari. Jari is a small village which can be approached by mini bus or taxi. While proceeding to Manikaran one can drop at Jari. From Jari the mountainous path leads to the village of Malana. Malana is about nine kms from Jari, and with a little effort, normally a visitor reaches Malana from Jari in five or six hours.

The main occupation of the villagers is cultivation but the produce is not enough to suffice the needs of the inhabitants, thus cattle rearing and collection of medicinal herbs are the other sources of livelihood. The people with their herds climb down to the areas of Mandi and Suket during winter. The main food crops include wheat, millet and maize. The whole land is in the name of the god of the village known as Jamlu Devta. The villagers work in the fields and are known as *Majaras* of the god. After harvest, a fraction of the produce is always offered to the god which is stored in the holy store of the temple. This stored crop is used in various religious festivals and rituals. Even an outsider is served with the food taken from the store of the god.

Jamlu Devta is the rustic form of the great saint Rishi Jamdagni. As the legend prevails Jamdagni was searching for a most conducive place for meditation. He was carrying eighteen images of the gods in a basket, symbolic of all the gods of the world, the wild wind scattered these images throughout the Beas valley. Wherever

these images fell they became the gods of the locality. Jamdagni Rishi came to Malana and found the locality quite suitable for his meditation. So he stayed there for a while before proceeding further. Slowly and gradually the people from far and wide especially from the high ranges of the Himalayas came there to settle. Since the saint was the most revered his verdict in disputes and deciding matters was always final. This tradition still exists among the masses. Strange enough, throughout the valley of Beas, the images of local gods were established but in this village there is no image of Jamlu Devta, instead Khanda of Jamlu Devta is taken as a symbol of the god. Jamlu Devta is named as the chief deity of Kullu valley and whenever there is a convocation of the gods of the valley the final verdict of Jamlu Devta is taken as the supreme one. Jamlu Devta communicates with the masses with the help of its *Gur*, the principal disciple.

The most astonishing fact of the village is its democratic setup. Malana society elects the members to administer the locality in peace. There are two houses of the elected members, the lower and the upper house. The lower house is named as Kanishthang while the upper one is Jeyshtang. Jeyshtang has eleven members out of which three are permanent members and eight are temporary ones. These eight members are elected out of four wards called Chug. Each Chug is again divided into two parts, each part is called Chhuddi. The four wards are—Thamyani, Nagvani, Palchani and Durani. So two elders are elected from each ward, i.e. one from each Chhuddi of every ward. These elders are known as Jathera. Three permanent members include Karmishth, i.e. the chief of the village and the main administrator. In fact, he is the chief executor of the will of the god. He is generally elected from Thamyani ward. Second is the priest known as Pujari of the Jamlu Devta. He is elected from Nagvani ward and the main function of the pujari is to perform the rituals and religious ceremonies, and to worship the god as well as to attend the religious ceremonies performed in the locality. The third permanent member is Gur. Gur is always elected by the Devta himself. It used to happen at some special occasions of religious convention when the soul of Devta entered the body of any person of the locality. He will shiver and profess the prophecy beyond human existence and powers. He will be elected as the Gur.

Gur is the communicator of god's will. They are the three permanent members of the upper house and serve the Devta and the upper house throughout their life. The eight temporary members may be elected. When there is death of a member or any one of them resigns, they all have to quit the house and the elections are declared in which the members of the two houses participate. Only the mature persons of the referred Chugs participate in the election.

The lower house is known as the Core. One mature member of each family is taken as member in this house. Generally the chief of the family is taken as the member. If there is no mature male in the family then the mature lady of the house is taken as the member. The consent of the lower house is obligatory in every decision. Though the matter is resolved in the name of the upper house yet until or unless the lower house gives its consent the matter lingers on. As such, sometimes the elders have difficult time to make the members of the lower house understand the gravity of the situation. Generally the consent of the lower house is always there. However, when there is no proper understanding between the two houses the matter is brought before the Devta in the temple where the Devta gives its final verdict through its Gur. It is binding on each and every person of the society of Malana. All the administration of the village is conducted with the help of the Jeysthang, the upper house. It includes the progress of the village, the business and any matter of importance. To help and assist the Jeysthang there are four officers called Fougaldars. These Fougaldars are again elected from the four wards. To execute the decisions of the upper house is the main responsibility of these Fougaldars. They are also responsible for the security of the inhabitants. Each one of the Fougaldars gets Rupee one yearly from the deposits of the Devta. Generally there is no problem for these officers as the decisions are unanimous and abiding. Every villager is having great regard for these officers who work in the name of Jamlu Devta. There is a legend that the Devta always looks after them but never leaves a sinner or a culprit unpunished. This fear and regard makes everyone disciplined. There is no reaction against any decision taken by either of the house or the Supreme body, the Jamlu Devta himself. That is why no example exists in the records of civil courts of Kullu district that any one of the residents of Malana village has ever approached the court

for any judgement.

Apart from the lower house represented by the adult members of each family there used to be an assembly of the villagers before the godly place where each and every member of the village irrespective of age and sex participates and is free to ask the Gur about the problems faced by them. These problems are generally of personal nature. This assembly is known as 'Ra Deo'.

The village of Malana comprise of two distinct parts. They are apart from each other at a distance of about a hundred metres and in-between these two parts lies the worship place, i.e. the temple of Jamlu Devta. They are known as Soura Berh and Dhara Berh. The place of the god is called Harcha. In this comparatively plain place, is erected the stage having length of about 15 feet and breadth of about 12 feet with a height of about two and a half feet. It is the meeting place of the two houses. Whenever there is need, one of the members of a house calls three times from this stage with the utterances of the words 'Doye Gatake' so that whosoever listens to the voice leaves behind the work and assembles there so that immediately the members join to start the proceedings. Sometimes they are postponed for better times or in the absence of any one of the three permanent members. But if one feels more urgency he would come and sit nearby the stage and burn the twigs of wood so that when its smoke is seen by the members they are collected and the proceedings take place immediately, taking account of the urgency of the matter. If the decision taken by the elders as well as the members of the lower house is not agreed upon by the complainant he may appeal in the Darbar of the god. The process is called 'Chhabe Pona'. Before going to the temple the permission is obligatory from the upper house first. Both sides of the quarrelling parties have to bring one goat each of the same size. They are bound on the two sides of the stage and the men belonging to them sit on their knees bending their face by the side of their goat. Both are covered with a cloth of piece. Gur, the communicator of the god recites the godly hymns and puts the grains of rice in the ears of the goats, whosoever shirks its body first to shun away the rice grains is supposed to be looser and the other side wins. The looser goat is cut into pieces and thrown into the stream while the other one is cut and distributed among the audience attending the ceremony. Thus

the final decision is over which is not only binding but also obligatory. Earlier, according to a foreign traveller, . . . These two goats were given the poisonous needles and during the ritual whosoever died first was supposed to be looser. Hence that goat was thrown into the river. The looser side has to be fined. After the process is over both the sides compromise and ill-will prevailing among them is waved off with the help of a collective feast in which a few of the elders join; thus the atmosphere remains congenial.

People of Malana are simple and to some extent are beautiful in their looks. They possess the normal height and mixed features of Aryans, open forehead, round head, a bit long visage and shining face with the glow of crimson colour. They wear long *Jamas* of wool and cover their head with round cap. The women are beautiful and braid their hair in different platelets bound together at the rear. They are very active and participate in almost all the rituals of the village. The marriages take place in the village only. Generally the spouses are selected from different parts of the village. The bride may be from Dhara Berh and groom from Soura Berh or otherwise. A few of the marriages have also taken place in the nearby villages like Rashmale, etc. But it is very rare.

The language spoken in Malana is typical one. It is more or less understood by a few villagers belonging to nearby localities only. For a foreigner, it is very difficult to understand it. It is called Kanashi language. The utterances the Gur rendered during trance are called 'Kanash Dana' which means the utterances of the god, hence the name of the language is Kanashi. It includes a few words of Kulluvi, Sirmouri and Sanskrit. It is strange that despite several claims that work has been done in this field not a single linguist has tried to explore the possibility of its analysis. Some of the historians think that earlier it was the settlement of Khasas and due to the difficult terrain the locality was isolated from the so-called civilised world and they had kept the traditions and language alive and unadulterated. Their traditions, fairs and festivals are intact. Twice a year the symbols of Jamlu Devta and other gods of the temple are taken out of the chambers to have Darshana and the people participate with all their vitality. *Falgun* and *Sawan* are the two months auspicious for this ritual. During Falgun month the golden image of Akbar is also brought out of the chambers of the temple. There is a

legend that a Sadhu was travelling with two gold coins of Malana village when he was caught by the Mughal soldiers. He was imprisoned and the gold coins were deposited in the treasury of Akbar the great. The same night the king had a dream in which he saw Jamlu Devta directing him to release the Sadhu and deposit the gold coins in the treasury of Malana temple. Akbar himself supervised the operation and found the coins joined together. He was so overwhelmed that he sent his golden image symbolic of his person along with the gold coins to the treasury of Jamlu Devta. The golden image of Akbar is still there in the treasury of the god.

Once a year the disciples of the Jamlu Devta go out in the valley of Kullu to collect material for the depository of the god. They feel that each one living in the valley of Kullu is the disciple of Jamlu Devta and owes to the god a bit of his or her earnings. The collected material is deposited in the store and the money saved in the treasury for the hard days to come.

The people of Malana think themselves superior to all the communities settled in the valley of the gods, i.e. Kullu. Whenever a foreigner visits the village he is looked down upon by the inhabitants and they utter the words like 'Shoon, Shoon'. It is only when the outsiders wash themselves that they are accepted and received with food, etc.