

**KUMAUN IN THE 19th CENTURY :
A STUDY OF THE ASPECTS OF
CULTURAL CONSCIOUSNESS**

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled "KUMAUN IN THE 19th CENTURY : A STUDY OF THE ASPECTS OF CULTURAL CONSCIOUSNESS", submitted by Padmaja Taragi in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY DEGREE, has not been previously submitted for any other degree in this or any other university. We recommend this dissertation to be placed before the examiners for evaluation.


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I

Introduction

A glance at the popular struggles in Kumaun during the 19th century, prompts an enquiry into the nature of popular consciousness in Kumaun during that century. The Kumaunis during the 19th century, took on the might of the colonial administration in this region, in protest against exploitation as *coolies* under the system of *begar* and also against the infringements upon their customary rights over forests. These popular struggles elicit questions about their perception of their surroundings and the manner in which they conceived the contradictions within their society.

Many questions arise. What were the patterns of thought that prevailed among the Kumaunis in the 19th century? Did these undergo any transformation in the course of the century? Did these warrant the opposition that the Kumaunis posed to the colonial administration. I have attempted to answer these questions through an analysis of the cultural expressions of the Kumaunis during the nineteenth century.

What is culture? Peter Burke defines culture as a system of shared meanings, attitudes and values, and the symbolic forms (performances, artifacts) in which they are expressed or embodied¹. Culture in the sense is therefore a part of a total way of life. Popular culture then is the culture of the non-elite, the ordinary people. It is the little traditions which develop out of the very way of life. That then is popular culture as counterposed to the culture of the elite, the 'Great Tradition'², which is acquired in universities and school and therefore comprises the learned tradition. The elite might participate in the 'Little tradition', but the learned culture remains beyond the purview of the ordinary. In Kumaun during the 19th century the majority was of the ordinary peasant

¹ Burke, Peter; *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe, Great Britain, 1978, prologue.*

² These concepts of Great Tradition and Little Tradition are incorporated here from Peter Burke; *ibid.*

cultivators - the Kassiyas; it is their culture as much as their values and attitudes which is the object of study under the present paper. It is their popular traditions which best convey their perceptions of their environment. They not only tell how the people perceived their surroundings or themselves and how they oriented themselves around these, but also implicit in them were the desires of the people. The popular traditions thus furnish us with the ideas and images which are indispensable for any reconstruction of the popular world view of the Kumaunis in the nineteenth century.

Though there are some writing on Kumaun's Popular culture, their emphasis is seldom on historical perspective. On the other hand many of the 19th century writing have been appropriated for contemporary descriptions of popular culture. These writing are moreover by way of narrative description with minimal attempt at any kind of analysis. At the most they adopt a casual approach in explaining the cultural peculiarities and attribute them to the difficult physiographic and economic conditions.

In a recently published work, 'Hamari Kavita Ke Aankhar', the author Girish Tiwari and Shekhar Pathak, have looked into the ideological content of Kumauni poetry, both folk and written poetry. While they have looked into the content of the folk poetry for their reflection on conditions in medieval ages, they have also highlighted the role of the folk singers in transforming the oral traditions. At the same time they also show how the folk legends were put to an exploitative use by those in authority to extract work from the peasant labourers during the 19th century. They however do not look into the folk tales from the point of view of ideas that might have obtained among the listeners during the 19th century. It is in their analysis of the ideological content of Kumauni poetry that the authors just about hint at the revolutionary potential or the lack of it among the 19th century poets. Once again they do not look at these from the point of view of the evolution of popular ideas during the 19th century. Thus the structure of the ideas of the Kumaunis and its evolution during the 19th century in context of a changing environment needs to be looked into. Further while much work has been done on the popular struggles in Kumaun during the 19th century. The study of the popular ideas and culture

remains an area of neglect. It however needs to be borne in mind than the study of the popular ideas is as imperative as that of popular struggles, to any enquiry into the role of the people in ushering social, political or economic transformation. It is this lacuna, that this thesis attempts to fulfil. This thesis has been divided into four Chapters.

The first chapter deals with the religious beliefs of the Kumaunis during the 19th century. It first delineates the extent of popularity of Hindu religion among the Kumaunis and thereafter deals with the beliefs and observances associated with both the worships of the Puranic deities as well as the local deities. This chapter also deals with the popular beliefs in ghosts and demons. An attempt has been made to cull out from their religious beliefs and observances, their perceptions about their environment and their attitude towards life.

The second chapter deals with festive rituals. Both Puranic festivals and local festivals. An attempt is made here to discern the ideas - both apparent and implicit, associated with their observance.

In the third chapter I have dealt extensively with two genres of the Oral traditions that obtained in Kumaun during the 19th century. The first is of narrative songs or 'Legends of Heroes' which has been analysed for the values and attitudes obtaining among the listeners, the second are folk sayings or Proverbs which represented popular values and attitudes in so far as they committed these to speech. While the motive of the hero in the folk legends has been used to represent folk ideals during the 19th century, social stereotypes in the proverbs have been used to indicate popular motivation.

The fourth chapter deals with the tradition of literate writing- its evolution from traditional themes written in Sanskrit, to themes on the social, political, and economic environment of the Kumaunis, written in the popular language. Just as the ideological content of the writings evolved, similarly the audience towards which it was geared evolved. It is in this context that the written traditions have been included in a discussion otherwise on popular traditions.

I have made wide use of the observations of travellers, administrators and

missionaries on Kumaun and its inhabitants during the 19th century. For religion and ritual, I mainly relied on E.T. Atkinsons, the Himalayan Gazeteer, first published in 1882. This is the only comprehensive work on this subject during the 19th century, and so far as the field work for it was done by local personages, is fairly reliable. All other sources for the period merely repeat Atkinson's record. There are very few sources for the earlier period, among these are the occasional observations made by travellers and administrators during this period. These however are very similar to observations contained in the Himalayan Gazeteer and thus suggest negligible change if any, atleast in the values and attitudes that were reflected in their popular traditions.

For Oral traditions I mostly used folk legends compiled by T.D. Gairola in Himalayan folklore, first published in 1933. The collection of the legends of heroes once again pertains to the last quarter of the 19th century and therefore it was not possible to study these as a source for the evolution of their ideas.

The other work widely used was G.D. Upreti's 'Proverbs and Folklores of Kumaun and Garhwal's, first published in 1894. This work so far as it represented a collection made from the older generation, can be treated as quite representative of popular attitudes during the major part of the nineteenth century.

The source for written traditions were mostly the published works of Poetry during the nineteenth century.

Apart from these there are some books written in Hindi on the different aspects of popular culture of Kumaun; These however do not add in any important way to the corpus of the available evidence or even analysis.

II

Symbolic Traditions - Religion

In an age when man knew not reason or science, religion and rituals were important means by which he tried to comprehend his surrounding and orient himself towards them. In Kumaun one finds in the 19th century the persistence of many primitive beliefs and rituals. As yet many of life's mysteries were still unsolved and new phenomena occurred only to add to their bewilderment. Such inexplicable events were sought to be understood in terms of the supernatural, which was often also invoked to enable existence itself. Thus rationalized religion came to be the mainstay of the Kumauni people.

In the 19th century popular worship in Kumaun Himalayas extended both to the Gods and Goddesses of orthodox Hindu religion and to the deities of local origin¹. While the local deities evolved out of and were manifestations of the peculiar hill environment, the Hindu Gods and Goddesses had had quite a chequered history in the Himalayas. The Hindu Gods and Goddesses, especially Shiva and Shakti were believed to have been known to the Kuumaunis even from the very beginning of the historical period in Kumaun ie. around ca .500 B.C.². However during the early centuries of the Christian era the popularity of the Hindu deities seems to have suffered considerably at the hands of an aggrandizing Buddhism³. A situation which was remedied only in the 8th century when Shankaracharya reinstated the worship of the Hindu deities and proffered a more envolved form of Hinduism, that is, one backed by philosophy⁴. Thereafter, there came a steady stream of migrants to the hills who subscribed

1. Latham, Lt. Col. A.: Handbook for the Indian army, p.26.

2. Joshi, M.P.: 'Kumaun: Archaeological and Historical perspective' in K.S. Valdiya (edited), Kumaun Land and People, p.73-86.

3. One authority, however, claims on the basis of archaeological evidence that the influence of Jainism and Buddhism was not very extensive in these hills - Joshi, M.P.: *opcit*, p. 78.

Hiuen Tsang who visited the hill country about 634 A.D testifie to the peaceful coexistence of the followers of both the Buddhist and Brahmanical faith.-Oakley, E.S.: Holy Himalayas, p.90-94.

4. Atkinson, E.T.: The Himalayan Gazetteer. (Vol II, p.77).

to this new orthodox Hindu creed. They even succeeded in monopolising for themselves all positions of power and privilege during the five hundred years of Chand rule, from the 13th to the 18th century.

Thus far then, their religious beliefs became a standard worthy of emulation. And there obtained in Kumaun a peculiar instance of many Kumaunis claiming connection with these castes from the plains⁵. This must have necessarily resulted in a general diffusion of orthodox beliefs and rituals though its intensity varied according to proximity to immigrant agglomerations; that is, the areas closer to immigrant settlements were necessarily more deeply influenced by the orthodox Hindu faith than the areas further away, the remote interiors experiencing almost negligible or no impact at all⁶. Thus in Kumaun, during the 19th century there obtained basically two major configurations of religious ideas, the one superimposed and the other organically linked to them. I shall consider below the entire gamut of ideas under each, obtaining in this region.

Popular Worship of Hindu Gods

We have already noted above the popular motivation for worshipping the Hindu deities. In this regard Lt. Col. A Latham's observation is significant.

"Whatever their original belief may have been the Khasiyas are now Hindus; they have for centuries been under the influence of the Brahmanical priesthood, all their feelings and prejudices are strongly imbued with the peculiar spirit of Hinduism: and although their social habits and religious beliefs are often repugnant to those who strictly observe the ceremonial usages of Hinduism the people are becoming, year by year, more orthodox in their religious observances.

Influenced by modern fashion, the Khasiyas have sought to identify themselves with the dominant Hindu castes, ... All see that honour, wealth and

⁵ Berreman, G.D.: 'The U.P. Himalayas: Culture, Cultures and Regionalism' in O.P. Singh (ed), The Himalaya: Nature, Man and Culture, p.227.

⁶ Kapur, Tribhuvan : Religion and Ritual in rural India: A case study in Kumaun, p.16.

power are the hereditary dues of the castes officially established by the authors of the Manava - Dharma Sastras and seek to connect themselves with some higher than their own. Even at the present day the close observer may see the working of those laws which have in the course of centuries transmited a so-called aboriginal race into good Hindus"⁷ .

Thus even while the orthodox religion provided the standard, however, the ideological and ritual nuances of Hinduism remained mostly incomprehensible to the ordinary people during the 19th century⁸ . In such a situation they would necessarily have had to make do with whatever traditions they had on their hands and what they could best make out from the orthodox faith. Thus even while honouring the Hindu deities many of their beliefs and practices were rather of a local hue. Thus far they become important source for the study of their values and attitudes.

Among the Hindu deities Shiva and his Shaktis were the most popular. They were followed by Vishnu and his Shaktis, Ganesha, Kartikkeya, Surya, Hanuman, Garur etc. In the following account, I have dealt with the extent of worship of Shiva, Vishnu and Shaktis, the popular conception of the deities as well as the popular practice of worship of each of these deities.

Popular Worship of Hindu Gods - Shiva

The Extent of the Worship of Shiva

Atkinson observes there were as many as 250 Shiva temples in Kumaun, of which 64 were dedicated to the female counterpart of Shiva namely Kali, Nanda, Chandiga and Durga, in that order of frequency. In addition to these there were at least 20 temples dedicated to Bhairava and Nagraja. Bhairava being the lower form of Shiva and Nagraja at times identified as one also⁹. Besides these elaborate structures, there were innumerable minor temples at the confluence of

⁷ Latham, Lt.Col. A.: *opcit*, p.19.

⁸ Atkinson, E.T.: *opcit*, p.859.

⁹ *ibid*, p. 701.

every considerable rivulet in the Kumaun Himalayas. Also at many places conspicuous boulders and rocks were dedicated to Shiva, as lord of the Nagas or as identified with the village gods Goril, Chaumu etc. This would indicate that the worship of Shiva was indeed very popular among the hill people during the 19th century. This popularity had much to do with the popular image of Shiva. This we will presently delineate.

Popular Conception of Shiva

In the popular mind, Shiva was identified with the mountain¹⁰ for there were many myths and legends which ascribed him to the Himalayas. Not only was his home among the mighty snows, but even his consort Parvati was said to have been the daughter of Himalaya himself. Further innumerable legends of the deeds of Shiva had been enacted here in the Himalayas. All such beliefs in Shiva's Himalayan antecedents could only have been further reinforced by the establishment at Kedar in the Himalayas, of the shrine most sacred to Shiva. Thus was Shiva, the dweller on the mountains. This identification of Shiva with the mountains would have necessarily contributed in making Shiva's worship more popular in these hill districts.

These popular myths and legends also ascribed to Shiva many elements of fear, as well as of adoration. He was visualized as one with braided hair and matted locks, frequenting cemeteries and as performing awful rites; as attended by hosts of goblins and spirits, bathed in the ashes of funeral pyres, wearing a garland of skulls and ornaments of human bones, as lord of being whose nature was essentially darkness. Yet at other times he was also shown as bearing the symbol adored by devotees, ashes, a staff, a tuft of hair, an antelope's skin and a digit of the moon, his body shining like an evening cloud. Thus he was at once God of death and destruction, fearsome, terrible, and yet of benevolence manifest, deserving of adoration and veneration¹¹.

Just as his form was, so were his attributes. So that if on one hand Shiva

¹⁰ Oakley, E.S. : opcit, p. 180.

¹¹ ibid, p.180.

was conceived as the lord of destruction who unleashed unbounded devastation with his third eye (in the form of Trinetra or the three-eyed), on the other hand he was the God who enabled regeneration and reproduction and yet at another time he was the healer God. In all these attributes Shiva was believed to have emanated from the Vedic God, Rudra, the lord of thunderstorm, of lightening and rain and thus far manifested his powers as well¹². Shiva was also identified with Agni or the Fire God, especially since Rudra himself as fire and lightening was the form of fire. Thus Shiva had various others names which reflected the traits of Rudra or of Agni. Those which made him the 'dweller on the mountains', 'having dishevelled hair', cruel, fierce, the healer, auspicious; were derived from his character as lord of storms; and those such as 'blue-necked' (Nilakantha), like wreathed smoke, golden armed (Hiranya - bahu), and thousand eyed, like sparks, belonged to him as lord of fire¹³.

Thus traditionally Shiva was conceived as the manifestation of the traits of Rudra and Agni. In addition to these Shiva was also worshipped in Kumaun as lord of demons, as Bhutesh, Betaleshwar etc. Further at the lower extremities Shiva was identified with Bhairava, "the terrible one" and admitted an altogether different pattern of veneration, a pattern which incorporated many elements of the local belief system, especially the cult of sacrifice to the female counterpart of Shiva. Infact, it was the worship of Shiva as Bhairava that has led many scholars to believe that Shiva might well have emanated from the primitive cults¹⁴.

It was these attributes of Shiva, which were the focus of all worship in his honour. Thus in Kumaun the shrines that were sacred to Shiva came to be known either after some older form of Shiva, eg: Kedarnath, Rudranath; or after some legendary exploit or after some manifestation of his powers, eg: Mrityunjaya,, the conqueror of death; Kamleshwar, the lord of the lotus; Pinakeshwara, the bearer of the bow Pinakin etc.. Further temples to Shiva were

¹² *ibid*, p.180-182.

¹³ Atkinson, E.T. : *opcit*, p.721.

¹⁴ Oakley, E.S. : *opcit*, p.171.

erected by and known after the name of the persons, who so instituted the shrine in Shiva's honour, eg: Dipchandewara and Udyotchandeswara were forms of Shiva, worshipped in temples erected by Raja Dipchand and Udyotchand at Almora in Kumaun. At times the shrine of Shiva was named after the place where the worship prevailed, eg: the Chaur Mahadev¹⁵. However despite the fact that Shiva was worshipped under numerous names, he was invariably represented all over Kumaun in the form of *linga* or the phallic symbol¹⁶. A symbol which many scholars believed represented the mountain home of Shiva. Yet there were other scholars who believed that the early inhabitants being puzzled about the mysteries of life and birth came to represent those ideas by the phallic symbol; this symbol was then carried by tradition to the present times¹⁷.

The Popular Worship of Shiva

In all the important shrines, major observances were held on the days sacred to Shiva. Of these *Shivratri* (February - March), *Navratri*, *Nagpanchami* and most of the *Sankrants* ie. the days which marked the passage of the sun from one constellation to another, were especially sacred to Shiva and were observed with much ritual gaiety¹⁸.

On all such occasions the people from nearby villages would flock to the major shrines, a special attraction being the religious - commercial fair on such occasions. Ordinarily the worship was very simple and comprised the pouring of water over the *linga* and the offering of flowers among other things. The leaves of the *bel* and the flowers of the *dhatura*, *Kapur nai*, *jati* and the rose were specially sacred to Shiva. On special occasions such as *Shivratri*, at Jageshwar, Shiva was made the object of special devotion. The idol was bathed in succession with milk, curds, *ghee*, honey and sugar; cold and hot water

¹⁵ Atkinson, E.T. : opcit, p.780.

¹⁶ Oakley, E.S. : opcit, p.179.

¹⁷ *ibid*, p.177.

¹⁸ For more details see Appendix I, Table I.

being used alternatively between each bathing. Further each bathing had its appropriate invocation, prayer and offering. While the rites derived their sanctity from the Puranas, the Tantras were the source for the "*mantra*", the use of mystical formulae, of mysterious letters and syllables and the practice of *Nyasa* and other gesticulations". Worship also involved bathing at the sacred *kunds* or reservoirs, an act believed to ensure salvation. Shiva was also worshipped by the recitation or *Jap* of the one hundred and eight names of the lord, counted along the beads of the *rudraksha* rosary. Atkinson observed that in practice few remembered all the names and therefore made do by repeating just one name, eg: "*Om Shivaya Om*" or "*Om Mahadeo*" as often as they could¹⁹ .

Such was the manner of worship observed in honour of the more orthodox forms of Shiva. However, as we have seen above, Shiva was also worshipped in Kumaun as Bhairava or 'the terrible one' and infact his worship in this form was very popular among the masses²⁰ .

Crooke observed with regard to Bhairava, that one of his distinctive forms was Kal Bhairon - generally represented by a rough stone covered over with oil and red lead. He was said to be very terrible and when offended, difficult to be pleased. By some he was believed to be an incarnation of Siva himself and by others as a spirit much in favour with the god Siva. He was also consulted as an oracle.

The same godling was also known in other form as Lath Bhairon. "Bhairon of the club", Batuk Bhairon or "The child Bhairon," and Nand Bhairon, in which we may possibly trace a connection with the legend of the divine child Krishna and his foster- father Nanda. Bhut Bhairon or "Ghost Bhairon" was represented as the deified magistrate of the city, who guarded all the temples of Siva and saved his votaries from demons"²¹ .

Crooke was of course observing this with regard to the general worship of

19 Atkinson, E.T.: opcit, p.860.

20 ibid, p. 783

21 Crooke, W. : An introduction to the popular religion and folklore of Northern India, p. 68-69.

Bhairon prevailing in Northern India as a whole. In Kumaun too, Bhairon was similarly conceived as God of terror and demonism and his worship therefore incorporated exaggerated symbols of appeasement. This is evident from the practices observed by the sect especially devoted to Bhairava viz, the *Kanphata* or the 'split - eared' Yogis. These Yogis, were the priests to the Bhairava form of Shiva, but they directed all their propitiation to his female counterpart or Shakti. They worshipped both the *linga* and the *yoni*; the *linga* symbolic of the male energy and the *yoni* symbolic of the female energy. They rejoiced in the union of the *linga* and *yoni* by giving vent to their own passions. Their rituals were typically those of the left handed sects²², prescribed by the Tantras or magical treatises and comprised the use of 'the elements of the five *makara*' or words beginning with 'M'; viz, *matsya* (fish), *mansa* (flesh), *madhya* (wine), *maithuna* (women) and *mudra* (mystical gesticulations).

Their ceremonies, admitted as they did, of vile practices, were practiced normally in secret, and even where they were held publicly only the initiates could participate in them. Their rituals marked by extreme licentiousness and indulgence, however remained confined to the particular sect alone. The ordinary people generally had an attitude of revulsion towards these rituals and those who observed them. Atkinson observed with regard to their attitude. "It is not therefore astonishing that the temple priests are, as a rule, regarded as a degraded, impure class, cloaking debauchery and the indulgence in wine women and flesh under the name of religion²³".

The lack of popular appeal must have considerably restrained the observance of such rituals, for they were not only less frequent here as compared to neighbouring Garhwal²⁴, but were also on the decline. Infact by early 20th century they seem to have ceased to be observed²⁵. Such dislike for

²² These rituals were in contrast to the right handed rituals, which were more orthodox. They comprised the offerings of milk, curds, *ghee*, honey and sugar to the lord and were observable in the worship of the higher form of Shiva and Vishnu. - Oakley, E.S.: opcit, p.157.

²³ Atkinson, E.T.: opcit, p.866.

²⁴ *ibid*, p.865.

²⁵ Pandey, B.D.: *Kumaun ka Itihaas*, p.631.

the crude ritual associated with Bhairava worship did not necessarily mean that the people actually rejected the idea or the philosophy of immoderation. Meanwhile the local people venerated Bhairava in much the same manner as they venerated the local deities. For not only was Bhairava made the object of special worship on the *Sankrants* ie, the days which corresponded to the zodiac and at harvest times, just like the local deities, but both were even attended by the same set of priests, derived from among the *Yogis* or *Khasiyas*, the ordinary hillmen. These however were merely symptoms of similarities, there must have necessarily been a greater underlying unity of ideas associated with the two set of deities, the lower form of Shiva and the local deities. Infact one opinion actually has it that Bhairava was originally Bhairon, a simple village deity who was with a slight change of name adopted into Brahmanism as Bhairava²⁶ .

All in all it seems it was the terrible form of Bhairava which likened it to the local deities = a form which incited so much awe, that its propitiation first and foremost became necessary to preclude its wrath. Thus Bhairava and his attendants enjoyed a status quite similar to that of the local deities, in the eyes of the common people. Thus apart from the few shrines (only 20 in Kumaun) dedicated to the Bhairava form of Shiva, Bhairava too like the local deities came to be housed in innumerable rudimentary structures scattered all over rural Kumaun. However even while Bhairava was the most popular object of veneration, the ideas associated with his worship, need not necessarily have defined the intellectual horizons of the ordinary rural people. Surely the existence of alternate systems of belief and worship with regard to Shiva and accessibility to them must have exercised the minds of a people who stood on the threshold of the Hindu faith.

Popular worship of Shiva was also mostly actuated by the popular beliefs associated with the different Shaiva shrines in Kumaun. Most of these had to do with divine presence or indications of divine presence among the devotees. Thus, the many different sounds and sights, possibly of periodic occurrence in these hills and mostly accruing to natural physical phenomena were explained

²⁶ Crooke, W.: *opcit*, p.67.

as indications of divine presence. For instance at Kedarnath²⁷, on the crest of the great Peak - a smoke like vision, possibly a cause of "The whirlwind gathering up the finer particles of snow" was assumed to be the smoke of sacrifice made by some zealot and Shiva it was believed always made himself visible in answer to such propitiation. Likewise curious sounds heard at Kedarkhand, on a particular day, viz. *Adha Margashirkh uprant*, were attributed to the lively prattle of gods and goddesses, who it was believed assembled there to engage in festive sport. There were still some other indications of divine sanction, which occurred as alterations on the sacred idol itself, eg. at Tunganath, one of the five Kedar shrines, on *Shivratri*, the *linga* was believed to appear as enhanced in size to the true believer, whereas to the evil minded no such favour was granted. At Jageshwar, there was a votive offering of a certain king, in the shape of his own image holding a lamp; it was believed that initially the hands had been as high as the king's forehead and had only now descended to the level of his chest; that they would further descend to his feet and only then his sins would be forgiven. There were still other beliefs attached to the appearance of the divine forms. At Rudranath temple, in the *Saraswati Kund* a large fish was believed to appear on the 14th of the dark half of each month and when propitiated with offerings, granted to the faithful, the accomplishment of their desires. Many people also believed in the efficacy of fasts, pilgrimages, charity and other self-effacing deeds. At Jageshwar for instance, women desirous of children stood all night long before the God's idol with lighted lamps on their upturned palms.

However what was singular about the hill people was their ability to hold their own against the general Hindu belief in self abnegation and even self-immolation. While both Traill and Atkinson observed a peculiar practice of self-sacrifice at the *Bhairav Jhamp* and at *Mahapanth* in the Kedarnath Khand, in the belief that one was thus offering oneself to God, Traill's observation in this regard is discerning.

27 Kedarnath, itself is located in Garhwal, however the fact that it was the ultimate embodiment of all that was sacred to Shiva, thus far then it would exercise a profound influence on neighbouring Kumaun as well.

"In the rear of Kedar is the Himalayan peak of *Maha Panth* celebrated in Hindu mythology, as the point at which the Pandavas devoted themselves and from whence they were taken upto heaven: a similar blessing, it is believed, will be conferred on every virtuous and pious person, who may reach the peak, or perish in the way: from twenty to twenty five votaries annually sacrifice themselves in the attempt to ascend the *Maha Panth*, or Great Way or by throwing themselves over a precipice, called *Bhairav Jhamp*, in the neighbourhood by suicide, at the latter spot, the votary expects to have realized in his future state, that object and wish for which he expressly devotes himself. These suicides are chiefly from Guzerat and Bengal, and commonly leave their houses for the avowed purpose of proceeding to *Maha Panth*, and such sacrifices by hill-people are rare; it may, therefore be reasonably presumed, that they are not occasioned by the influence or suggestions of the priest and attendants of the temple"²⁸ .

By the last quarter of the 19th century, it seems the practice was forbidden by the British Indian Government and was no longer encouraged by the priests either²⁹ .

These popular beliefs are important in as much as they reflect upon the popular fascination with notions of divine proximity and faith in divine beneficence. Thus the people believed that God was approachable and answered the supplications of his devotees, but he demanded an active and intense faith on the part of the believer too. The people too, devised ways which they thought would enlist God's cooperation in enabling and enriching human existence. The notion of eschewing existence, for whatever reason, be it for realisation of divinity itself or for realisation of certain desires in the next life, were yet far from their minds. An interesting observation made by Reverend Thorburn on the motives of pilgrims to Badrinath and Kedarnath is pertinent in this context.

²⁸ Traill, G.W.: 'Statistical sketch of Kumaun', Asiatic Researches, Volume 16, p.211.

²⁹ Atkinson, E.T.: *opcit*, p.773.

"The popular idea that the pilgrims are goaded forward in their long and painful journeys by a pungent conviction of sin is a very great mistake. While in a general sense many will confess that they hope to obtain remission of their sins, none will set this forward as their chief object. Recovery from sickness, long life, good fortunes, the birth of a son, the fulfilment of a vow, or more frequently a vague idea of performing a work of great merit, are the reasons which usually seem to prompt them to undertake the pilgrimage"³⁰ .

From the above account it is evident that Shiva was indeed a very popular deity in Kumaun. Not only were there a great number of shrines dedicated to him, all over Kumaun, but even more, he lent himself to popular worship as lord of Nagas and whenever identified with the village Gods Goril, Chaumu etc. Further even though different ritual observance obtained in Kumaun with regard to the worship of Shiva, the natives worshipped him after their own peculiar manner; thus far therefore they had to restrict themselves to lower forms of Shiva, especially Bhairava, the higher forms believed as being averse to such practices. Not only this, but Shiva as Bhairava had immense destructive potential and therefore needed to be regularly appeased. This commonality of ritual and form between the local deities and lower form of Shiva led to increased familiarity with Bhairava. Further their beliefs about Shiva pointed to their need to evoke his assistance not only to enrich their life, but to safeguard it in the first place, beliefs which evinced a 'this worldly' attitude.

Popular Worship of Hindu Gods-Vishnu

The Extent of the Worship of Vishnu

The other important deity who received special obeisance from the Hindus was Lord Vishnu. Exactly how popular the Vaishnava faith was in Kumaun in the 19th century, is evident from the number of temples dedicated to Vishnu. Atkinson observes that there were only thirty five Vaishnava temples in Kumaun, of which eight were dedicated to the female counterparts of Vishnu. In addition

³⁰ Indian Notes And Queries, Volume IV, No.46, August 1887, note 693.

there were twenty temples where both the lower forms of Shiva and Vishnu namely Bhairava and Nagraja were made objects of special worship³¹.

Infact as compared to the worship of Shiva, the worship of Vishnu was of a comparatively recent origin³² and many of his incarnations Rama, Krishna as also Hanuman became popular

in Kumaun only during the Chand period (13th-18th century)³³. Atkinson had also made similar observations with regard to the worship of Vishnu in Kumaun. He observed,

"There is no great Vaishnava establishment in Kumaun, the temples to Raghunath and Siddh Nar Simha at Almora existing only from the removal of the seat of government from Champawat to Almora about three hundred years ago. The Vaishnava temples at Bageshwar appear to be of considerable age, but now are of but very local importance. Dwara.. has several Vaishnava temples, chief of which is Badrinath, an offshoot of the great establishment³⁴.

Thus the worship of Vishnu appears insignificant as compared to the worship of Shiva in the Kumaun hills. Infact Atkinson opines that there was initially an opposition to the introduction of the Vaishnava faith among the non-Brahmanical hill tribes. This conclusion he had evidently reached at from the mythological tale of Prahlad. Prahlad the son of Hiranayakasipu remained strong in his devotion to Vishnu, despite the threats and attempts on his life, ordered by his proud father. Finally the Daitya king tired and challenged the force which should so protect his son to reveal itself. At this Vishnu burst forth from a pillar, in his Nar-Simha or man lion form and ripped the proud king apart. Thereafter Prahlad reigned and the Vaishnav faith evidently prospered. Atkinson regards the daityas as symbolic of the non-Brahmanical tribes and therefore his contention³⁵.

31 Atkinson, E.T. : opcit, p. 701.

32 It dated back only to the early medieval period in Kumaun (7-11c. A.D.) - Joshi, M.P. : opcit, p. 78.

33 ibid, p. 82.

34 Atkinson, E.T. : opcit, p. 789.

35 ibid, p. 787.

Apart from the Vaishnava temples in Kumaun, there was in neighbouring Garhwal - the supreme Vaishnava shrine of Badrinath, where Vishnu was worshipped as Nar-Simha, the man lion incarnation. Its presence no doubt must have exercised a strong influence on the faith and practices of Vaishnavas in Kumaun. But all said and done the worship of Vishnu in Kumaun was quite limited and of comparatively recent origin.

Popular Conception of Vishnu

According to the popular mythology Vishnu was the preserver; protector of good from evil; deliverer, who at various times had descended upon the earth to relieve it from the tyranny of the evil. It is held that Vishnu assumed nine incarnations to save mankind at different times. These nine incarnations were mainly those of Matsya, the fish; Kurma, the tortoise; Varaha, the Boar; Nara-Simha, the man lion; Vamana, the dwarf; Parshurama, a Brahman; Rama, the heroic figure who defeated the evil incarnate Ravana; Krishna, the heroic figure who came to destroy the tyrant Kansa; Buddha; and finally the tenth incarnation, it was believed, would appear towards the end of the Kali-age as the Kalkin incarnation. Vishnu was therefore also worshipped in these forms in the various temples dedicated to him.

Apart from these mythological forms of Vishnu, to the popular mind Vishnu was essentially the preserver God. Oakley's observation in this regard is very pertinent. He observes,

"Vishnu is the God of contented middle classes, of those to whom life is dear and enjoyable; and in Krishna worship there has always been a tendency to exalt the pleasurable, and even to give a religious sanction to profligacy"³⁶. Orthodox Vaishnavism differentiated the divine and human soul and thus allowed man to recognize and worship with rapt devotion, his lord. Vaishnavism also supported the Brahmanical supremacy and the brahmanical ordering of society into castes.

³⁶ Oakley, E.S.: *opcit*, p.190.

Apart from the worship of the more orthodox forms, the Vaishnava creed had also incorporated within it some of the non-Brahmanical elements, especially the worship of *Nags* or snake worship and not only was Vishnu worshipped as *Nagraja*, but there were many Vaishnava shrines in Kumaun dedicated to Nag worship.

eg: at Bastir in Mahar; to Kedar Kalinag in Pungaraun; to Bini or Beni Nag, in Baraun; to Karkotak Nag at Pandegaon in Chhakhata; to Vasuki Nag at Gudyara in Danpur; to Nagdeo Padamgir at Dol in Salam and to Nagnath at Lodh in Borarau, at Than in Katyur, at Champawat and in Dhyranirau³⁷ .

Thus Vishnu made himself available to two planes of thought, while the orthodox worshipped him as one of his nine incarnations and upheld the orthodox belief system, the local people also worshipped him in his lower form as *Nagraja*.

The Popular Worship of Vishnu

With regard to the religious practices of the Vaishnavas, no animal sacrifice was ever made to Vishnu. Instead the offerings comprised of milk, curds, *ghee*, honey and sugar also known in religious parlance as *Panchbali*. Oakley quotes a Brahmin from Almora, on the practice of the Vaishnava creed in Kumaun.

"The Vaishnava temples are called *Thakurdwara*, or "gate of the lord". There are four of these in the town of Almora and they are common throughout the province. They are separately named after either Vishnu, the Sun, Badrinath, Krishna, or Nara Singha. Not only is there the usual worship and offering .., but a kind of popular service takes place at times in these temples, called *Katha*, when the smritis or shastras... are read and expounded. A learned pandit is employed for this purpose and paid by subscription. In some temples such religious services or lectures take place only during the rainy season, when people have more leisure, from three to six in the afternoon. In others they are

³⁷ Oakley, E.S.: *opcit*, p.190.

held all the year round. On festival days there is worship at the different temples, when the priests read portions of the Yajur Veda as prayers and invocations, and these are not explained"³⁷.

This type of congregational worship was typical of Vaishnava practice and was absent from the Shaivite worship. However, such practices must have obtained more in the immigrant enclaves, as is evident from the fact that it was an Almora Brahmin describing it. Further, that such beliefs and practices were limited, is evident from the few Vishnu temples that obtained in Kumaun in the 19th century.

Meanwhile Vishnu as Nagraja admitted of a more unrestrained worship, as noted before in the case of Bhairava too. The priests who attended to Nagraja were believed to practice the left handed rituals and thus must have partaken of fish, flesh, wine, woman and mystical gesticulation just like the Yogis who attended to the Bhairava form of Shiva³⁸. However, ordinarily the snakes as symbols of Nagraja, were worshipped in the daytime and at night dancing was practiced by those whom they inspired. G.D. Upreti holds that their cult was chiefly practiced in the parganas of Gangoli and Danpur. There was also a special domestic worship held in their honour on *Nagpanchmi*; further offerings were made to snakes, very often carried by wandering Yogis, or milk was placed near holes in which snakes were known to live³⁹.

The popularity of Nag worship however, derived more from their tradition of worshipping snakes than from any acceptance of ideas imposed from above. Except this, the Vaishnav creed was rather slow to gain acceptance by the local inhabitants. Not only did it rely a lot on literate tradition which were alien to the lay worshippers but even the social order and moral ethics it expounded were all of alien derivation. Further unlike the demon form of Shiva, which served as in channel for the incorporation of the local inhabitants into the Hindu faith, in

³⁸ Oakley, E.S.: *opcit*, p.232.

³⁹ Oakley, E.S.: *opcit*, p.232.

the Vaishnavite creed there were no parallels either of belief or of ritual to that of local beliefs. Nag worship though included in the creed, was really quite apart from it in essence. Further Vishnu was typically a benign and passive deity, which possibly could have been the reason why he was less attractive than the dynamic Shiva in the Kumaun hills. This is not to say that the believers of Vishnu were any less volatile than those of Shiva. Just as there were the Shaivite ascetics or *Sanyasis* so there were also the Vaishnav ascetics or *Bairagis*. The two were known to have had in the past very often taken up cudgels in defence of their respective sects against one another, often even resulting in sanguinary conflicts between the two. Captain Raper once noted one such incident at Haridwar during the *chait* fair even as way back as 1760 when a conflict between the *Gosains* and *Bairagis* left atleast 1800 *Bairagis* dead on the field⁴⁰. However by the latter half of 19th century it appears that such animosity between the followers of the two sects had largely abated and to the ordinary Hindu both deities were equally dear, though greater importance may have been attached to one or the other⁴¹.

Popular Worship of Hindu Goddesses - The Shaktis

Apart from the male gods - their female counterparts also received special veneration. These *Shaktis* or personified energies of the male gods were seen as interceding with the lord on behalf of his devotees. They therefore automatically became objects of worship for the ordent for the ardent devotee. However they were not only worshipped along with the main deity but many shrines in Kumaun were dedicated to their exclusive worship. Thus for them, the *Shaktis* transcended their subordinate role vis-a-vis the male god and came to be worshipped in their own right. Thus the cult of *Shakti* assumes greater significance in an analysis of popular religious beliefs.

40 Raper, Capt. F.V. :- Narrative of a survey for the purposes of discovering the sources of The Ganges', Asiatic Researches, Volume II, p 456.

41 Oakley, E.S. : opcit, p. 184.

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Extent of Worship of the Shaktis.

With regard to the extent of *Shakti* worship, Atkinson observe that of the 250 Saiva Temple in Kumaon, 64 were dedicated to the *Shakti* or female form alone, and of the 35 Vaishnava Temple only 8. Further the *Saktis* of Nagraja and Bhairav were also worshipped as forms of Saiva Saktis. Of the Saiva *Sakti* Temples 18 in Kumaon were dedicated to Kali ; whilst the *Sakti* forms of the Bhairav Temples were also known as incarnation of Kali. Nanda came next in popularity, and then Chandiga and Durga.⁴²

Apart from the more elaborate structures, very often the goddesses were also represented just by a heap of stones on a peak. The goddess Nanda, a Shaiva *Shakti* infact pervaded the entire region of Kumaon in this rudimentary form.⁴³

From this observation it is clear that the worship of Shaiva *Shaktis* was more prominent in these hills than the Vaishnava *Shaktis*. This corresponded to the relative popularity of the male deities themselves and perhaps because they incorporated similar traits.

Popular Conception of the Shaiva Shaktis

Atkinson states that there were different *Shaktis* corresponding to the different elements of Lord Shiva. Thus Shiva as Rudra, had his consort in the form of Nanda, Uma, Ambika, Parvati, Haimavathi. Shiva as Agni was accompanied by Durga or Jwala ; Shiva as Lord of demons was accompanied by Nirriti, the goddess of all evil, in the form of Kali, Chandi, Chandika. He further observes that Durga who was originally the consort of Shiva as Agni, as was evident from her fiery form, eventually came to represent the evil goddess Nirriti and was worshipped as such in Kumaun.⁴⁴

42 Atkinson, E.T. : opcit, p. 701.

43 ibid, p. 793.

44 Atkinson, E.T. : opcit p. 794.

In Kumaun there were temples to Nanda, Ambika and Mallika who were likened to Parvati, the consort of Shiva as Rudra. Just as Rudra was the 'Dweller on the mountain', so was Parvati identified as the daughter of the mountain. The myth of goddess Nandadevi especially spread widely, as evident from this name given to the villages, towns, peaks, lakes, streams, rivers, and fairs,⁴⁵ Her worship was very popular even among the Khassiyas or the lower classes, who worshipped her as Upharni or Uparde and represented her very often merely by a heap of stones on a peak. Infact as Nanda, the consort of Shiva seems to have evolved into a more personalized deity, in the sense that people perceived a keener familiarity with her. She was less the formal deity of the kind in the Hindu pantheon and was believed to exercise tremendous influence on their environment. She therefore was sought to be kept in constant good humour, for any neglect of her worship could spell misery for them.

Durga, the consort of the Agni form of Shiva, also had many temples instituted in her honour, in the Kumaun hills. However here, Atkinson observed, that as a norm bloody sacrifices were made to her - thus she was more the representative of the demon Shakti⁴⁶. In sacred tradition, she was the one who slew Mahisha - the demon with a buffalo head who was at war with the gods. She thus symbolized the triumph of good over evil, and in keeping with this tradition, she was worshipped even under many different names. Thus there were shrines dedicated to Durga as Tripurasundari, the goddess who destroyed the three aerial cities of the Asuras or demons, a feat which Indra with all his might could not achieve. She was also worshipped as Brahmiri, for having assumed the form of a bee to fight the demon Mahisha. Elsewhere in Kumaun she was worshipped as Jaya, Jayanti, implying victory, and as Akashbhajini, everywhere typifying the same essence of victory.

Again to the Nirriti form of the Saiva *Shakti*, there were many temples in Kumaun. It was as Kali or the dark one that the demoness Shakti was especially

⁴⁵ Joshi, Prayag : Kumauni Lok Gathaain, Vol. 1, p. 279.

⁴⁶ Atkinson, E.T. : *opcit.* p. 794.

popular here and she was worshipped under many different names viz. Bhadrkali, Dhaukali, Mahakali, Kalika etc. Infact so popular was faith in Kali, that wherever she was believed to have had wrought great miracles, her image was taken from there and installed at other places, where she continued to be known after her original home. Infact there are many instances of this kind. Kali was also worshipped here as Chamunda and Chandika her most terrible forms. Chandika like Chamunda was represented with a necklace of skulls and with the crescent moon on her forehead. In the sacred legends she was described as the goddess of the barbaric forest and mountain tribes, who was pleased with human sacrifices. As such her worship was unpalatable to the more orthodox. Other than Kali, the demoness Shakti was also venerated as Ulka. The 'flame or demon - faced goddess'; as Ugra 'the terrible goddess', as Syama 'The dark one'; as Vrinda and as Naini. Thus the goddess of evil as true counterpart of Shiva as Lord of demons was represented as utterly hideous, adorned with symbols of death. As thriving on macabre rituals ; and just like Shiva in his terrible aspect was popular in these hills, so was his Shakti. Besides the Shaiva Shaktis, there were many other local goddesses eg : Bannidevi near Almora ; Chandraghanta in Chakkata and Siloti ; Akhiltarini in Khilpati ; Khimal Khiyal Devi in Hat ; Uparde in Kosiyan, whose original legends forgotten, were then revered as forms of Kali or Devi

Popular Worship of Shaiva Shaktis

Shaiva *Shaktis* were most often propitiated with animal sacrifices and especially so on great occasions, when the worshippers offered 1, 2, 5 or 8 goats as obalitions. These were slaughtered enmasse and formed the consecrated food from which all worshippers partook. Infact in the former times the Shaiva Shakti's at Purnagiri in Tallades Hat in Gangoli and Ranchula Kot in Katyur were known to be appeased with human sacrifices, which had by this time been substituted by coconuts.

On one such occasions of sacrifice, Reverend Oakley happened to witness the macabre ritual performed in the honour of Nanda *Devi* during the summer of 1903. He observed. "Nanda is a very favourite object of worship in Kumaun.

She has many temples dedicated to her in the province, where animal sacrifice is performed at stated seasons. In the summer of 1903 a severe outbreak of cholera occurred in Almora and its neighbourhood, and its cessation was popularly supposed to be due to the grace of the goddess Nanda - mainly, .. from the idea that she had demanded victims and was at length satisfied. There were great offerings of buffaloes and goats at the temple of Nanda *Devi* on Sunday, 30th August. The villagers of Khatiyari, close to Almora, sacrificed a buffalo, the body of which I saw, decapitated, being dragged with ropes through the bazaar by a crowd of people beating drums and shouting frantically. Women of the lower class from neighbouring quarters, dressed in their best clothes, were running with vessels to secure their portion of the blood and flesh. The people of the Dumtola quarter, inhabited by artisans of the Dom caste, sacrificed a hundred sheep, every family in which a death had occurred making an offering...⁴⁷

Thus the wrathful Goddess was believed to be placated only by bloody sacrifices. W. Crooke however observed with regard to such rituals, that the animal was believed to be a manifestation of the calamity, and chasing him or killing him was believed to eliminate the calamity as well. In Kumaun he observed that this scapegoat merged into a regular expiatory sacrifice ⁴⁸

The Shaiva *Shakti* were especially honoured at festivals held during the two harvest seasons and on every *Sankrant* in the greater temples. In some temples the *Chait* (April) and *Asoj* (October) *Nauratris* were also observed in their honour. Nanda was made the object of special veneration or *Nandastami* in the month of *Bhadon* (mid August to mid September), when fairs were held at many places all over Kumaun, in the honour of her wedding with Shiva. At Nainital, the attendance at the *Nandashtami* fair was nearly 6000.

The *Shaktis* of lower forms of Shiva viz Bhairava and Nagraja were worshipped by the Kanphata Jogis, who were notorious for the practice of left

⁴⁷ Oakley, E.S. : opcit, p. 172.

⁴⁸ Crooke, W. : opcit, p. 107 - 111.

handed rituals in connection with their worship of the Shaiva *Shaktis*. Atkinson observes that the *Shaktis* were divided into two classes, both of which were represented in these districts, the Dakshinacharis and Vamacharis. The Dakshinacharis followed the right hand or open orthodox ritual of the Puranas in their worship of Shakti, whilst the Vamacharis on left handed branch adopted a secret ceremonial which they did not care openly to profess. He says, "The distinction between the two classes is not so apparent in the mass of the Saktis here as amongst the extreme of either class. The more respectable and intelligent, whatever their practice in secret may be, never profess in public any attachment to the grosser ceremonial of the left handed Saktis, and it is only fair to say that they generally reprobate it as opposed to the spirit of the more orthodox workings"⁴⁹

Popular Worship of Other Shakti forms

The concept of Vaishnav *Shaktis* had not really become popular with the hill dwellers and separate temples to these were not really known, as such they were mostly worshipped along with Vishnu.

There was one separate temple to Naini at Lakhanpur, who was regarded as a Vaishnava *Shakti*. There were other more ambiguous goddesses, eg : Putreshawari and Yakshani is Almora who were by some regarded as Vaishnava. Likewise there were temples to the *Shaktis* of some other Hindu gods, eg : Narsinhi, the consort of Narsimha had a temple at Almora and Varahi, the consort of Hari had a temple at Devidhura and at Basar in Patti Salam. These goddesses along with Maheswari, Ambika, Vaishnavi, Aindri and Chandika were especially worshipped on the Matree Pooja. Apart from these Hindu goddesses and the local goddesses who were worshipped as manifestations of the former, there were still other goddesses who had a greater influence on the environment. Sitala *Devi* on the goddess of small pox had temples at Almora. Jogeshwara, Nati is Bel and at Dwarahat. She was represented as a woman dressed in yellow, with an infant in her arms. The

⁴⁹ Atkinson, E.T. : opcit, p. 865.

officiating priest generally belonged to the currier caste who were initiated through a rude form of Shakti ceremonial. The goddess was offered red powder, rice, flowers, sweetmeats and coins in her worship.

Thus it seems that just as Hindu Goddesses were an important part of Hindu religious system, similarly even the hill dwellers revered the female energy ; but whereas in the Hindu religion they were mainly regarded as channels through which to supplicate the lords, in the hills they had come to hold their own. Of these, the Shaiva *Shaktis* especially were regarded as exercising an active influence on the environment and infact Nanda *Devi* was typically a Kumauni goddess and was very often made the object of fervent worship. Neither was the worship of the female form, entirely of foreign derivation for the worship of the local goddesses attested to the prevalence of a local tradition of deifying the female energy.

Among the other Hindu deities, Ganesha, Kartikeya, Surya, Hanuman and Garur had some temples in Kumaun, but their worship was nominal in the hills, being more or less limited to the orthodox Hindus. Along with the deities some deified mortals were also worshipped, the sages Dattatreya, Agastya, Parasara and among others Ghatotkacha, Mandhatri, Bhimasani, Goraknath had an odd temple or two in their honour in Kumaun.

To conclude the account of the prevailing beliefs of the ordinary people with regard to the Hindu religious ideas - it is important to understand the dynamics of its propagation in Kumaun. In a nutshell, the migrant Hindu community sought to incorporate the local inhabitants into a viable socio-political structure ; this it did by granting them the status of Khasiya Brahmins and Rajputs and also the symbols that accompanied their new status. Although it was relatively impure as compared to the actual Hindu castes themselves it nevertheless provided a channel for easy incorporation of the local inhabitants into the Hindu fold. Further as the migrant Hindu community monopolized all socio-economic and political power and distinguished themselves as the elite, Hinduism automatically became a standard for everyone to emulate. This way the Hindu religious beliefs and ideas gained greater influence in Kumaun. However

of these, those forms and rituals were most popular which were essentially proactive, which inspired in them an awe of divinity, even as they were feared for exercising tremendous influence on their environment, forms which as we shall see further, essentially, partook of the same spirit as their local traditions.

Popular Worship of Local Gods and Demons

Apart from worshipping the Hindu Gods and Goddesses, the people of Kumaun had faith in a host of local gods and demons⁵⁰. Infact belief in local gods and demons formed the core of popular religion in Kumaun. These gods and demons had emanated from the local environment and in turn were believed to exercise the most potent influence on the same. Supplication to these therefore was almost always accorded first priority; though not always as a matter of right, but more due to a keen sence of intimacy perceived with these.

The relative status of the Local Gods and Demons and Hindu Gods and Goddesses in Popular thought.

The common people evidently accorded a much higher status to the great Gods of Hinduism, than to the Local Gods and demons. This is apparent from their epithet of '*Deva*' or "the shining ones" as compared to the epithet of "*Devata*" or "Godling" ascribed to the local gods and demons⁵⁰. But while the Hindu Gods were regarded as more formal and more distant, it was with the Local Gods and demons that the people had a greater rapport. This state of popular beliefs it seems obtained throughout the 19th century. Their greater popular appeal vis-a-vis Hindu Gods and Goddesses was observed both in the beginning and towards the end of the 19th century by E.W. Traill and E.T. Atkinson respectively. E.W. Traill observed in the beginning of the 19th century.

"To the polytheism of the Hindu creed, has been here superadded a variety of local superstitions and great bulk of the population are now Hindus in prejudices and customs, rather than in religion. Every remarkable mountain,

⁵⁰ Crooke, W. : opcit, p. 1.

peak, cave, forest, fountain and rock has its presiding demon or spirit, to which frequent sacrifices are offered and religious ceremonies continually performed by the surrounding inhabitants at small temples erected on the spot. These temples are extremely numerous throughout the country and new ones are daily being erected; while the temples dedicated to Hindu deities, in the interior are, with a few exceptions, deserted and decayed'.⁵¹

In the last decades of the century E.T. Atkinson made a similar observation "Notwithstanding the number and importance of the more orthodox forms of Vishnu and Siva in this portion of the Himalaya the non-Brahmical deities ... have far more worshippers and are more constantly addressed. Amongst the peasantry of the high-lands the cult of Vishnu is little known and Siva is worshipped under the form of Bhairava or the ling, but the common resort in times of trouble or distress is Goril, Chaumu, Haru and the other village gods."⁵²

Thus no doubt the worship of Hindu deities gained increasing favour among the local population, as is evident from the earlier observation on their religious beliefs, nevertheless the worship of local gods and demons remained predominant among the lower classes throughout the 19th century. Infact so much was the popular zeal for the local Gods that very often they were reckoned even by the orthodox and conceded a place in their religious pantheon. Thus there were instances of the local deities attaching themselves as wardens to the temples of the greast gods eg: at Jageshwar there was Kshetrapal, at Badrinath Ghantakaran, at Kedarnath Bhairava and at Tunganath Kal Bhairon this infact was often regarded as the first step towards the ultimate elevation into the circle of the deities of the first class.

"The local position of the shrine very often defines the status of the deity .. In many places as the pilgrim ascends to the greater temples, he comes to a place whence the first view of the shrine is obtained. This is generally occupied by some lower class deity who is just beginning to be considered respectable.

51 Traille, G.W. : opcit, p. 161.

52 Atkinson, E.T. : opcit, p. 839.

Then comes the temple dedicated to the warden and lastly the real shrine itself. There can be little doubt that this represents the process by which gods which are admittedly within the circle of the dieties of the first class, such as the beast incarnation of Vishnu, the elephant headed Ganesha and the Saktis or impersonation of the female energies of nature, underwent a gradual elevation."⁵³

This process, W. Crooke observed towards the end of the 19th century, was still discernable at that time⁵⁴ . Further there were also instances when the same shrines and the same idols lent themselves to worship by two different followings eg : the temple to Bholanath, where the orthodox Hindus worshipped him as a symbol of Shiva and the common people worshipped him as a manifestation of their popular deity.⁵⁵ Thus even when the local population was gradually coming under the influence of orthodox beliefs, the orthodox had to increasingly recognize the omnipresent popular belief in local gods and demons.

Popular conception of the Local Gods and Demons

The religion of the local people comprised predominantly of belief in benevolent deities and malignant spirits. Atkinson observed about the general nature of popular religion that "The truth is that popular religion in these hills is a worship of fear and though Bhagwan is named as the great god, he is supposed to allow mischievous and malignant spirits to injure the person and property of the people... The efforts of all are directed to appease the malevolence of these spirits who are supposed to lie in wait to take advantage of any error willingly or unwillingly committed."⁵⁶

Thus all calamities like famine, epidemic, disease and death were seen as indicators of divine wrath and fervent prayers were offered to prevent their occurrence. However when it did manifest itself, the villagers thronged the village

53 Crooke, W. : opcit, p. 49

54 ibid, p. 50.

55 Atkinson, .T. : opcit, p. 817

56 ibid, p. 839.

temples making all kinds of promises and sacrifice to appease the wrathful deity. It was natural that a people overawed by their environment and only partially comprehending the nature of human existence and of other life forms should attribute their misfortune to some external force. However, at the same time they were willing to assume the onus for it, believing it to be the effect of their negligence of the gods worship. What was significant was that it was not only fear that motivated these simple villagers to take recourse to gods, but aspirations for worldly prosperity led them to regard these gods as patron deities. The deities served another purpose as well, that of acting as arbiters and ensuring justice to those aggrieved in the many conflicts that were inevitable in an inequitable society. Thus god for the villagers was an external force, very superior and possessing super natural powers, mostly wrathful, yet at times benign, however, all in all just. Thus the villagers had not only a relationship of fear, but one of reliance on the local deities. As far as the demons and malevolent spirits were concerned, they were regarded as the greatest obstacle to those living, which nevertheless had to be suffered and duly propitiated. All conceptions in consequence of their 'dangerous' living. At the same time they did not have any notion of submission or subordination to these malevolent forces. While the demons and evil spirits were always sought to be exorcised, the benevolent deities were sought on a basis of quid-pro-quo and in this instance an unbegetting god was almost always abandoned.⁵⁷

Popular belief in benevolent deities - the deified spirits and the local village Gods

The deified spirits were mostly those of royal personages of middle ages⁵⁸, or even those of the plebian, who were almost always outstanding in some manner, either in their attributes or in their peculiar situation. Thus many deities were those who had been victimized in their life times. These were therefore believed as wanting to seek revenge on those who had wrought such injustice upon them. Among these were Bholanath, Ganganath and Kalbisht. The

57 *ibid*, p. 839.

58 Bisht, L.S. : 'Cultural Perspective of Kumaun : Folk Songs Dances and Literature', in Valdiya (ed.), *opcit*, p. 180.

popular legends built around these deities reflect on how the people conceived them.

The legend of Bholanath

The tale of Bholanath, revolved around court intrigue. Among the two sons who were born to Udai Chand, King of Almora (1678-98) from two different wives, the elder took to evil ways and was therefore expelled; while the younger ascended the throne as Gyan Chand. The banished, however, returned to Almora, the Kingdom's capital and there set up his quarters and assumed the disguise of a *Jogi* or religious mendicant. While living in this fashion, he developed illicit liaisons with the wife of a Brahmin. In spite of his disguise, he was recognized and when Gyan Chand learnt of it, he feared that the elder brother had come to retrieve the throne. He therefore ordered for the assassination of the prince and his companion. There were, however, three figures in all, one disinherited prince, the expectant mother and the unborn child; their lives thus abbreviated, they turned into spirits and were known to afflict the people of Almora and among them especially the gardner caste, one of whom had conducted the execution.⁵⁹

There is yet another tale about Bholanath, in which he is identified with one *Jogi* who possessed miraculous powers such as penetrating within closed doors. Once in this manner he entered the private chamber of the King and the Queen. The King was so annoyed at the intrusion that he slew the *Jogi*. Killing a *Jogi* was no ordinary incident. The magnitude of the offence was emphasized by visiting the curse of the *Jogi* upon the King, so that, thereafter, the king knew no rest and he was continuously dislodged from his resting couch. Later on, on the advice of his courtiers he had eight temples erected at Almora to pacify the spirit of Bholanath.⁶⁰ It was believed that this deity along with his consort and child, if neglected began to harass the people. An instance of this had in fact itself become legendary; it was believed that once

59 Atkinson, E.T. : *opcit*, p. 817.

60 *ibid*, p. 818.

during the course of administrative rearrangements, the English overlooked the worship arrangements for the deity. However, they were visited by such a storm of stones, that they had to at once restore the worship of Bholanath.⁶¹ Thus it had become almost mandatory to worship Bholanath during all happy occasions and social or domestic ceremonies.

In the context of Bholanath, it is necessary to reiterate his identification with Shiva. At Almora the eight temples dedicated to Bhairav form of Shiva were also the venue for worshipping Bholanath and infact the very same idols were worshipped as representations of Shiva by the orthodox Hindus and as of Bholanath by the ordinary people – Bholanath therefore seemed to form the connecting link between the two classes of people, the orthodox and the ordinary.

The Legend of Ganganath.

The tale of Ganganath, the favourite deity of the outcastes or Doms also revolved around a theme similar to that of Bholanath. In that the son of one Bhabichand, *Raja* of Doti quarrelled with his family and became a religious mendicant. In the course of his wanderings he arrived at Adoli, a village of Kumaun and there developed affections for the wife of a Brahmin, who was away at Almora. The *Jogi* disguised himself as a servant and obtained employment in the house of the woman. When the Brahmin learnt of it he had the two murdered. Thus in this tale too there were three figures who died unfulfilled, the two lovers and their unborn child. So Ganganath was to be propitiated with offerings of a goat, cakes, sweetmeats, beads, a bag and a pair of *Jogis* earrings—mostly accessories of a *Jogi*; his mistress "Bhana" was offered a skirt, a stole ('*dopatta*') and a nose ring and their child was made the offer of a coat and anklet. It was believed that Ganganath had an eye for the young and beautiful and that such persons would need to constantly propitiate him, lest he harrassed them. Otherwise Ganganath was a beneficent deity and would assist

61 *ibid*, p. 818.

the aggrieved who invoked his help⁶² Ganganath was worshipped all over Kumaun and had special temples in his honour at four or five places.

The Legend of Kalbisht

Other than the royal spirits noted above, there were also some plebian spirits, who nevertheless possessed certain exceptional attributes. Among these Kalbisht or Kalua was of special importance and his protection was invoked over cattle and crops. Kalbisht was identified with one Khasiya (low class) neatherd who lived in a village near Binsar two hundred years ago from the present date . He became a victim of village rivalry and was murdered by his own kin. After death he became a benevolent spirit and his name was specially invoked as a charm against wild beasts. He was especially invoked by the descendants of his enemies if ever calamity befell them or their cattle and crops in Kaparkhan and Palipachaun.

There are different versions of the tale of Kalbisht, but all recount tales of his tremendous prowess and his untimely death due to the deciet of his kin.⁶³

There was a temple to Kalbisht in Kaiphal Khan and also in the neighbouring areas.

Apart from the deities who were deified mainly because they were feared, lest they harmed someone in a fit of vengeance; there were other deities who were spirits of such local personages as had enjoyed considerable local repute in their times. Thus in this category was Goril, who even during his lifetime became an object of worship for he possessed the spescial power of hindsight; Haru who had through severe penances, acquired the power of healing or ever the Katyuri *Rajas* who were believed to have been immensely evil. The popular belief about these deities is well illustrated by their Legend.

62 *ibid.*, p. 819.

63 *ibid.*, p. 828.

The Legend of Goril

The story of Goril, perhaps the most popular deity amongst the ordinary people was replete with the extraordinary. The coming of Goril was foretold by certain unusual events even before his birth. His father, identified as Jhalrao, the Katyuri King of Champawat, met his mother Kali accidentally while on a hunt. She, at that time was a celibate, and was deep in meditation. She possessed divine vision and prowess enough to unlock the horns of two fighting bulls, all very remarkable traits. The King was so impressed with her beauty and bravery, that he underwent the most severe ordeal to obtain her. Thus the tale recounts many extraordinary events which brought the two together. Later Kali bore the King a son, but the other queens besotted with envy replaced a pumpkin instead, without the knowledge of the King. Next the child was sought to be disposed off in a number of ways, but he survived all attempts at his life—once again portentous of his being extraordinary. He was at last flung into the river Goriganga, but once again he survived and was brought up by a fisherman. Later, when he was older, he rode a wooden horse to the banks of the river from where his step mothers fetched water. There he broke all their pitchers and insisted that his horse should drink first. When the queens tittered at the prospect of a wooden horse drinking water, he retorted that if a woman could give birth to a pumpkin, then why couldn't a wooden horse drink water. The queens, offended at his impudence had him brought before the King. To the King he recounted the tale of the evil queens. The queens were all assassinated and Goril recognized as the hier apparent. It was this special power of hindsight which made Goril an object of reverence even during his life time.⁶⁴

Goril was perhaps the most popular deity in rural Kumaun. He had many temples in his honour in Borarau, Kali Kamaun, Mahar, Katyur Uchakot, Malli Doti etc. all decorated with white 'chirs' or strips of red cloth⁶⁵. At Than in Katyur he was especially sought by sick people and was made the object of

64 *ibid*, p. 821.

65 Bisht, L.S. : *opcit*, p. 181.

worship every third or fourth year.

The Legend of Haru

Haru represented the spirit of Raja Harishchandra, the pious and benevolent King who gave up his kingdom to become an ascetic through deep meditation and severe austerities. Harishchandra had acquired the power of healing and due to it, became an object of special veneration during and after his life time. The popular belief held that immense prosperity would come from worshipping Haru and his companions. So much was the popular faith in Haru's power that the people actually coined an adage 'with Haru comes prosperity, with his departure adversity.'⁶⁶

There was a temple to Haru at Than in Katyur and to his ascetic companions in other places. The temples of Haru and Saim, the God of boundaries were generally together. In their roofless temples instead of idols there were hearths or *Dhuni* or fireplaces which must have been for the sacrificial fires. In the centre of the *Dhuni* was fixed a Trident (*Trishul*). The blessings of the deity were sought by smearing one's forehead with the ash from the *Dhuni*.⁶⁷

The legend of Katyuri Kings

Like Haru was a descendant of Chand dynasty, some descendants of Katyuri dynasty had also become objects of worship. Raja Brahm and Raja Dham, the last two independent Kings of Katyur, it was believed were cruel and tyrannical. They were put to death by the Chand King, Bikramchand, who also annexed their territories to Chand dominions. The Katyuri Kings thus annihilated along with their retainers, became spirits and were particularly revered in Pali and Katyur, the region where they had reigned.

A quaint belief existed regarding the demarcation of the domain of the

66 Atkinson, E.T. : opcit, p. 830.

67 Bisht, L.S. : opcit, p. 181.

Chand and Katyuri spirits and it was believed, neither ever trespassed into the other's territory, ⁶⁸ and neither could both be worshipped on the same spot.

All the above legends were thus built around secular themes of romance, adventure and intrigue; simple tales woven either around the royal court or rural countryside. These legends in so much as they reflected on how the people conceived their deities, they reflected as much on some of the values that were sought to be impressed upon the people. These legends rarely did expound the ideas of faith, of devotion, of self effacement, of spiritualism and the like and wherever these occurred these were only incidental. Instead the idea that recurred in legend after legend was one of retribution or vengeance. Thus many of the deified spirits were of those who had been wronged against and who avenged themselves on their foes either in their very life time or who became spirits after death to harass their foes, eg : Goril avenged himself on his evil stepmothers during his lifetime, by having them exposed and eliminated; while Bholanath, Ganganath, Kalbisht were known to have become spirits who haunted their foes and even their descendants. Thus the idea of justice ultimately done, that evil doers were ultimately punished, was very strong and so far symbolized the triumph of good over evil. But this idea of good, of the righteous was not really evolved. There were benign deities no doubt, but these were deified more because they possessed the power to effect transformation, eg : Haru, who could accomplish whatever he willed 'the barren became fruitful, the poor became wealthy; the miserable, happy; the blind were restored to sight; the lame learned to walk and the wicked became virtuous".

They were not visualized as the essence of virtuosity as such. On the other hand their deities were deified mortals, derived very much from the same social milieu, however, exceptional either in their particular situation, or in certain of their attributes, eg: Bholanath was a banished prince, further suspected of coveting the throne therefore executed. Along with him, his expectant mistress Barhini and their unborn child were also deified, for they too represented an unusual situation. Likewise Ganganath a prince who abandoned his

68 Atkinson, E.T. : opcit, p. 831.

possessions, in a fit of rage, later developed illicit liaisons with another man's wife, and was killed due to it. Here again Ganganath, along with his expectant mistress and unborn child were made objects of veneration. Likewise Kalbisht a neatherd, however, possessing exceptional prowess, became a victim of village envy and was therefore eliminated. The three dieties were not represented as being virtuous or as being exceptional otherwise, but it was their "typically unjust situation" which gave them their special status. Similarly there were other beings who were deified because of their exceptional attributes, some even superhuman attributes, eg : Goril who possessed hindsight, Bholanath who as the *Jogi* possessed the power to enter within closed doors. Haru who possessed the special power to remedy anything, Kalbisht who offered protection from wild animals etc. It was for these reasons that they were deified and not because they were the particular embodiment of moral or ethical values, values which the society may have felt were worthy of worship and therefore of endorsement. Thus, the minds which must have engaged in religion and religious legends must have come across many ideas, of which it seems notions of retribution and redress were the ones sought to be impressed upon the people most often. Other than the deified spirits the people also worshipped certain local village deities such as Kshetrapal or Bhumiya and Chaumu and Badhan. These were inevitably related to husbandry, the main occupation of the people, hence their worship was indispensable to the village society. Thus every village had a small temple, often no more than a few feet square, sacred to Kshetrapal, the protector god of fields and boundaries. Kshetrapals protection was especially invoked at the time of sowing and harvesting. He was generally the caretaker of the village and in that capacity partook of offerings on all joyous occasions - whether marriage, birth of a child or any other good fortune. Kshetrapal was not known to possess anyone, nor to injure one or one's crops, in order to force his worship. Neither did he demand annual sacrifices; but was believed to be content with whatever humble offerings the peasants provided.

Kshetrapal was also worshipped as Saim or 'The dark one' at Jageshwar; where he even received offerings of goats. Infact Saim was more of a demon and

was sometimes even known to possess people, a sign of which was that the hair of the scalplock became hopelessly entangled.⁶⁹

Likewise there were various cattle gods too. Infact in the villages every cow was dedicated to some deity or the other, who had their own set of strictures. Among such cattle gods were Chaumu and Badhan.

The worship of Chaumu, it was believed, began as early as mid 15th century. An interesting tale related how it was initiated. It was believed that once a man carrying a crystal *linga* to his home, stopped enroute at a place, to quench his thirst. To enable himself to drink water, he had to disburden himself of the *linga*. Later when he tried to lift the *linga* again, he was unable to do so and only the force of a number of villagers could move the stone. The *linga* was therefore at once reckoned as a divine symbol. Even while the men were preparing to secure it, the *linga* crept uphill on its own to a place on the boundary between the villages of Ryuni and Dwarasaun. There, a temple was built to the *linga* which thereafter came to be known as Chaumu's *linga*. The worship of Chaumu included the ritual of sprinkling milk on the *linga* and making offerings of goats among other things ; these were later divided into equal halves between the two villages. Chaumu was the protector god of cattle and it was believed that all complaints made at the temple would be redressed on the promise of some sacrifice to Chaumu. If however his worship was neglected some harm would befall the cattle or its yield. So strong was the belief in the cult of Chaumu, that a man who purchased a cow at Dwarsaun or Ryuni was under obligation to carry the cult over to his own village and to continue it there till the cow or any of its progeny was alive. When the cattle were taken to the *bhabar* in winters, the peg to which they were tied was worshipped as the symbol of Chaumu. There were certain strictures with regard to the worship of Chaumu. Chaumu was not to be offered milk of cow for ten days after she had calved, nor the milk milked from any cow in the evening - for those who offered it such milk, it was believed, lost their cow. Even men could

69 *ibid*, p. 825.

not partake from such milk of a cow dedicated to Chaumu.⁷⁰

On the other hand, Badhan, also a diety of cattle was believed to be more mild; he did not only not demand any animal sacrifice but also did not vex people incase they neglected his worship.⁷¹

These village deities were thus conceived as manifestations of the productive forces, ever so indispensable to the villagers, struggling to survive. Therefore other than offering worship to them, they also laid down elaborate rules to prevent their misuse.⁷²

The above delineation of popular beliefs about deified spirits shows that god was associated with even as basic a thing as the means of subsistence, eg. Kshetrapal with fields and crops, or Chaumu and Badhan with cattle and their products. This shows that his assistance was invoked by man in the very effort to survive. Further god for the Kumaunis were no mere passive deities, but their intervention was sought, through the idea of incarnation, in the mutual strifes of the people. Thus god was often pleaded to punish the evil doer by possessing him or inflicting some damage on him or was made to incarnate himself in an oracle, during a ceremony called *Jagar Lagana*, to whom then, problems were posed and solution sought. Infact god was even made to arbitrate between conflicting groups of people, through a ceremony called *ghat dalna*. Naturally then god was not visualised as one distant diety, who in the ultimate analysis controlled the universe but was one who was near at hand, approachable, who could affect the day to day living of the people as well. Thus his involvement with man was perceived as intense and concrete. Further god was also worshipped, that he may shower prosperity and grant boons to the devotee, ie. for something more than enabling survival and peaceful coexistence. Lastly fear was a dominant force in compelling worship and many of the deities were worshipped to prevent them from unleashing their ire. Bholanath, especially was known to inflict cataclysms while other deities would either resort to injury to

70 *ibid*, p. 828.

71 *ibid*, p. 830.

72 Bhatt, Pushpalata : *Kumauni Lok Kathaon Mein Jan Jeevan*, p. 87.

persons or their property or to possessing an individual in an awful fashion, eg. Ganganath, Saim etc. Thus their worship was almost obligatory on all people or on certain classes among them, eg. The gardener caste in particular worshipped Bholanath ; the outcastes worshipped Ganganath ; the herdsman worshipped Kalbisht etc. However fear alone did not lead people to worship their deities. As was mentioned above, people also worshipped them due to positive faith in the virtues of the deity. Infact certain deities, such as Kshetrapal on Badhan or Haru who were not known to be revengeful, in the sense of inflicting injury incase their worship was neglected, even they were worshipped regularly in good faith. Also the terrible deities were not known to be unreasonable and only caused trouble to those who neglected their worship and could be appeased by the appropriate ritual. Thus even while many of the cataclysms were seen as evidence of gods' wrath, in a harsh environment especially, fear of it should have been the motive force behind faith. But god himself was not visualised as a malign force. He was not worshipped only to appease his wrath but even to enlist his cooperation to fight the exigencies imposed by their difficult physical and social environment. Thus there was also a noticeable element of hope and positive faith in their religious attitudes. Thus far they did not perceive themselves as helpless against their formidable environment.

Secondly the notion of retribution, was attached to the neglect of the deity's worship alone. It was not used to impose any social or ethical codes on Kumauni society. At the most the deity's ire could be invoked on those who had done mischief to others, but for this also the deity had to be particularly addressed by the aggrieved. There was no notion of automatic retribution to act as a deterrent to social mischief; no concept of 'sin' as such either. Thus it was basically a religion of self preservation and self advancement and it did not impose any obligation on the people except that of propitiatory rituals.

Thirdly, other than the ceremonies in which god was made to incarnate himself, the other rituals in honour of local deities were very simple. They consisted in the main, of offerings to the deities, of mostly milk, sweetmeats, rice, cakes and at the most goats were sacrificed on more serious occasions. Also on certain occasions the deities were honoured by general festivity in the

form of fairs, *bagwali* or the stone slinging contests etc. There was no notion of self-abnegation, in the form of absolute dedication of the self to the deity or even self sacrifice, as at times attached to Hindu beliefs. So much so that even the priests who conducted the worship of the local deities, viz. The *Kanphatiya Jogis* or *Khasiyas*, could partake of worldly pleasures. Infact on the contrary this priestly class was known to observe rituals marked by indulgence. Thus it seems religion for the Kumaunis was essentially a means to assist them in their existence.

Popular belief in malevolent spirits

Apart from the worship of deified spirits, popular belief in demons, ghosts and fairies was very widespread. These were all necessarily malevolent and a tremendous hindrance to the living and all mishaps of man and animal were attributed to their ill presence. This rampant belief in the evil species once again indicates the hazards of the environment, which due to incorrect comprehension, were seen as emanating from some external force. However there was an essential difference between deities and demons. Oakley observed.

"The people of Kumaon reckon two classes of Gods. Those of royal descent and those of demonical origin. The former are supposed to be possessed of more reasoning power than the latter, to be indeed almost omniscient ; while the demons are often of only half human intelligence and may easily be deceived by false show or promises. The royal deities are generally well disposed, or may be made so by employing proper means of persuasion, and are asked for boons. The demons on the other hand, are spiteful and evil minded. No good is to be expected from them, but when they, prove troublesome they must be propitiated."⁷³

It seems from this that there was a lack of seriousness with regard to the demons, who however created enough panic in the hill society, because of their numbers and compounded malevolence.

73 Oakley, E.S. : *opcit*, p. 205.

An interesting account of the live belief in evil spirits has been given by G.D. Upreti. He observes,

"It is common to hear people professing to have seen spectres and ghosts or evil spirits at night assuming male or female forms, disappearing, and then appearing in some other form, it may be in the shape of animal and with their appropriate voices. Occasionally they are reported to have appeared in hideous gigantic figures, then turning into a misty pillar and vanishing. These are seen by one or more persons, and always at night, preferably when people are alone. They play these tricks to frighten people. If a person is really frightened they take hold of his soul, but cannot harm anyone who does not fear them. The personation of the deities drives away ghosts from people who have been possessed by them. They are said not to dare to appear to devout person or one who is clean in mind and body. Dirty and wicked people fall into their clutches. They are generally malevolent. Money received from them at night, turns into pieces of bone the next day. They often try to imitate the conduct of human beings, but fail in the end. They understand human language, but cannot speak it clearly. They are pleased when they cause the death of a human being through their devices. People therefore guard against them, and have recourse to the personation and worship of the deities as a safeguard against their influence."⁷⁴

In the presence of an overbearing environment, most men would become susceptible to such beliefs, no doubt. However the fact that these forms appeared mostly at night and that too at isolated places and assumed mostly familiar forms of man or animal or exaggerated version of these; this shows that they were more the mental makebeliefs of minds so disposed, rather than real. Moreover not everybody fell prey to these evil forms; the stronger minded could easily avert their malevolence. Further there were even ways and means to beat their sinister beings. Such rationalization of belief in demons and evil spirits however does not in anyway detract from their preponderance or significance in

74 Upreti, G.D. : Manuscript notes, in Oakley, E.S. : opcit, p. 219.

these hill climes.

These demons and spirits had to be propitiated too. The manner of appeasing them was drawn from the manner in which they were conceived. Oakley observed.

"The deities of royal descent are said to have the faculty of knowing the wishes and propensities of men's minds, whereas the ghosts and devils have no such power, but can perceive only what is openly done or said. They are also said to be more troublesome and destructive when they are out of the control of the royal Gods. Meditation and heartfelt worship are useless as addressed to the ghosts and demons, so they are usually worshipped with pomp and outward show. They are propitiated along with the royal spirits so as to avoid their spite and malevolence, but the latter are worshipped seriously with the hope of obtaining worldly prosperity.⁷⁵

The following account describes the particular belief in the evil spirits that prevailed in Kumaun in the 19th century. Though E.W. Traill accounted for its preponderance in early 19th century, his account about the particular forms of evil spirits is at variance with those of later writers. The following narrative has been taken from E.T. Atkinson's *Gazetteer of the Himalayan provinces* and G.D. Upreti's manuscript notes included in E.S. Oakley's "Hoiy Himalayas".

G.d. Upreti holds that the popular belief was that, demons and evil spirits were the means through which the gods vented their wrath.

"The popular belief is that each of the principal local Gods is accompanied by a band of ghostly attendants, namely, sixty four *jogans* or goblins and fifty two heroes, who remain at his command. These subordinate genies are also incarnated and worshipped along with the chief Gods. The common people believe that unless periodically worshipped and personated, the deities become angry, and in their wrath allow their evil spirits and ministers to prey on men in the form of epidemic diseases and suchlike calamities ... Ghosts, it appears, are

75 Oakley, E.S. : *opcit*, p. 211.

rarely worshipped or personated singly, but generally in connection with other deities, whose staff or retinue they form."⁷⁶

Among the race of demons, the most monstrous was Masan. Masan was believed to frequent charnel grounds and to possess persons passing by. The general belief was that when the wicked and tormented died they became ghosts for sometime. When a thousand such souls had completed their term as ghosts they would combine to form the demon Masan. Thus Masan combined in himself the malignance of a thousand ghosts and in this capacity was the chief of them all. He was thought to be of black colour, with feet turned backwards, his features were huge and hideous. Anyone who chanced upon Masan died of fright instantly or if possessed by the demon became gravely ill or went mad.⁷⁷

Khabish like Masan was believed to haunt burning grounds and was met in dark glens and forests as well. It was believed that he assumed different shapes, mostly of man or animal and imitated the voices of different animals or of shepherds calling out to their flock. At times he was known to assume the guise of a religious mendicant and accompany travellers, but he stood out by his gibber. He too, liked to frighten people, or take possession of them causing them to fall ill.⁷⁸

Airi was the ghost of a hunter, who was believed to frequent high hills and forests, at night, in search of game. He was accompanied in his hunt by a retinue of fairies, who had their feet turned backwards; by his litter bearers, Sau and Bhau and a pack of hunting dogs with bells around their necks. Airi was said to be of a tremendously hideous form with eyes on the crown of his head and four arms filled with various weapons. Any one who chanced upon him was certain to die either out of fright of his awful appearance or would be lynched by his dogs and the fairies who accompanied him. Even so much as the mere spit

⁷⁶ Upreti, G.D. : *opcit*, p. 210.

⁷⁷ Oakley, E.S. : *opcit*, p. 220

⁷⁸ Atkinson, E.T. : *opcit*, p. 820.

of Airi, should it fall on anyone, it would cause deep injuries to his person. Not only this, but should one hear the bark of Airi's dogs at night, one was certain to meet some calamity. Whenever an animal was found dead in the jungle without any discernable injury, he was said to have become victim to Airi's arrow. Likewise at time Airi's arrow was believed to penetrate from chimneys, into houses and affect its occupants. Such were the baneful beliefs associated with Airi. However if anyone survived his encounter with Airi, he was disclosed the presence of some hidden treasure, which could be as much as gold *mohurs* or as little as bones - so the belief went.⁷⁹

Airi had his own peculiar worship. There were numerous temples to Airi in the area of Kali Kumaun; they were normally found in isolated hill tracts and were never seen in inhabited places. Airi was represented in these as a trident surrounded by stones which were assumed to be his companions, Sau, Bhau and the fairies. At certain places the deity and his followers were also represented in image form. Special ceremonies were held in his honour during the ten days of *Chait Navratris* in March, or, at certain places during *Asoj Navratris* in the months of September - October. The villagers would sit around special bonfires and sing the legends of deities and dance to the accompaniment of kettle drums. Some of them were believed to become possessed and leapt into flames or belaboured themselves with hot iron ladles. These devil dancers were then made objects of special veneration as representatives of Airi and were given alms throughout the festival. While in this state, they bathed twice and ate but once during the twenty four hours ; they allowed no one to touch them, as they considered other men impure, and no one other than themselves was allowed to conduct the worship of Airi, till the duration of the festival. Milk, sweatmeats, cakes and coconuts were offered as oblations. At times goats were also sacrificed and a piece of cloth stained in their own blood was hung as a banner near the place of worship. Worship comprised of sprinkling water over the holy stones accompanied with simple litanies .The sacrificial offerings were divided and devoured between the

⁷⁹ *ibid.*, p. 825.

spectators themselves.⁸⁰

Runiya, a malignant spirit frequented the northern parganas of Kumaun. It was believed that Runiya came riding on coursers formed of huge boulders, its trot audible for great distances through the dark silent nights. He was attracted specially to women and should any woman fall prey to Runiya she would inevitably waste away, till she finally died. Like Runiya there were numerous other spirits in these northern parganas. For instance Balchan had a temple at Dor in Juhar ; Kalchanbhausi had a temple at Toli in Danpur, Naulo had a temple at Jarkandar in Askot and at Bhatkot in Mahar; Kalsain had temples at Madkot in Juhar, Kapkot in Danpur, Rai in Mahar and Jarkandar in Askot; Chhurmāl had a temple at Than and Taili Hat in Katyur, Dor in Juhar and Jarkandar in Askot ; Hari at Mensain in Juhar ; Hushkar at Jarkandar and Dharchula in Askot and Kokarasi at Khabela in Khat Dasan of Jaunsar. In the lower hills Nagdhara had a temple at Saurphatka is Salam ; Chharaunj Dyau at Chharaunj in Salam ; Vidyānath Siddh at Charoti in pargana Chhakhata.⁸¹

Another specie of the malevolent type were the fairies, also known as ancheri, kechari, pari, chanchari. They were visualized as females, of destructive and troublesome disposition. The snowy ranges were their special haunts and they were mainly worshipped in villages skirting the snows. They were believed to especially possess young men and women and cause them to fall ill and favour those who wore any article of red colour. A scarlet thread around the throat was believed to be a sure preventive of colds and goitre. The fairies were worshipped by invoking them to come and possess young women, to whom then a goat was sacrificed and along with sweetmeats, garments and jewels in miniature were offered as oblations.

Then there was a whole tribe of ghosts known as *Gardevis* because, they frequented water spots. It was believed that wicked people, or those who died by accidents, such as falling from a tree or precipice, by drowning, snake-bites,

⁸⁰ ibid, p. 826.

⁸¹ ibid, p. 831.

on wild beasts, women who died in childbirth, suicides, and all who died a violent or wilful death or those whose funeral rites had been neglected, after death became ghosts for a time. These then haunted the scene of their death and terrified passers by, sometimes even following them home and taking possession of their houses. Among such ghosts, were the *Tola* who were believed to be the ghosts of bachelors of mature age, who had died unmarried and were met in solitary deserted places.⁸²

There was also the species of *ghar bhuts* or family ghost, known to haunt particular families by causing affliction or accidents, for having caused them an unnatural death or for not having atoned for it and all afflictions and accidents in the family were blamed on these⁸³

Popular perception of Local Gods and Demons

The Kumaonis' predisposition to belief in demons and spirits becomes abundantly evident from the above account. The proliferation of such malevolent spirits, whether deities or demons is often cited as cause for fear. Infact fear of god's vengence was seen as the compelling force behind their worship of them. While their fear was justified, keeping in view the catastrophes - the illnesses, the epidemics, the accidents and other mishaps which occurred often in their harsh surroundings, at the same time they were not pessimistic ; neither were they given to fatalism. Just as demons and deities abounded so also cures to counteract their curse were numerous. Not a remedy was lost in the effort to salvage life from the clutches of malevolent influences. A popular remedy with the hill people was that of personation. In this the diety was made to incarnate himself in some person, who then acted as his oracle. As was noticed above, any calamity, whether it was in the form of a grave illness, or accident, loss or theft of property, was attributed to the wrath of the deities or demons. At such times people resorted either to the village astrologer or *ghantuwa* to determine the cause of the affliction or to the idol of the diety himself calling upon him to

⁸² ibid, p. 832.

⁸³ Oakley, E.S. : opcit, p. 219.

render justice by wreaking vengeance on those who should so have visited the curse on them. In the first instance, the relatives of one so afflicted, tied some rice and a copper coin in a little bundle and thrice waved it around the victims head, seeking to know the cause of the malady. They then took it to the *ghantuwa*, who opened the contents of the bundle upon his right palm and from the movement of the grains determined the cause which harassed the victim. If it required a simple remedy, the *ghantuwa* himself prescribed some medicinal herbs, which if it cured the ill person raised the esteem of the *ghantuwa*. Mostly, however the *ghantuwa* announced the presence or possession by a deity or demon and the manner in which he might be appeased. The people then called a *Jagariya* or *dungaria*, the devil dancer of the particular spirit, that they may invoke the spirit, and ask of it the reason for its ire. At times the *Jagariya* was invited over to someone's house, especially in the case of one's illness. He was there offered some tobacco to inhale, so that he may become intoxicated. The ritual then commenced and legends of the deity were sung to the accompaniment of drums and cymbals while the *dungaria* mimed the different episodes. While in this state, some where along, he would work himself to a state of tremendous excitement and then as though all of a sudden, become possessed by the deity. The onlookers then worshipped him as the deity's incarnation and asked of him why he so afflicted the person and how he would be appeased. The oracle would then pronounce upon the deity's annoyance, whether it was due to the neglect of his worship or because the victim had harmed somebody, who inturn had invoked the deity to curse him thus, and also whether the deity had come of his own accord or had been sent by some dead relative. The spectators then promised to make amends, should the affliction be alleviated. At times the *dungaria* and the sick person, both were branded with hot iron in an attempt to cauterize the disease effectively.⁸⁴

These ceremonies also known as *Jagar*, were sometimes held on a big scale at the site of the village temple, especially in the months of *Asoj* (October), *Mangsir* (December) or *Chait* (March) during the moonlit halves. At times they

⁸⁴ Atkinson, E.T. :opcit, p. 824.

lasted for 22 days and at times even for 6 months. On such occasions the villagers would gather at the temple site and there around a huge bonfire or *dhuni*, sing and mime the legends of the deities sought to be invoked, to the accompaniment of drums and cymbals, while in this state some of them would become possessed by the deity and his companions and act as their oracles. The spectators then asked of them solutions to their problems and later worshipped them as incarnations of the deity with offerings of he-buffaloes, goats, cocks, pigs, lizards and pumpkins; the last being apparently a substitute for human offerings. Along with these sweet cakes, sweet meats, rice - pudding, milk, curds, fruits and flowers were also offered. A portion of these offerings was taken by the priest and the rest devoured by the worshippers themselves. On the whole, such concerted dancing or *Jagars* were considered to be pleasing to the gods and as securing the welfare of the community.⁸⁵

Apart from the above manner of invoking god and seeking his assistance in allaying the troubles of the hill dwellers, at times the villagers themselves resorted to the village temple and there throwing the handful of rice in front of the idol sought the deity to avenge them on their enemies, who should so have brought adversity upon them. It was believed that if the complaint was genuine, the detractors were invariably punished in the form of some calamity, upon which, they would in turn resort to the *ghantuwa*, to the *Jagariya* and *dungariya* and thereafter soon make amends upon knowing the cause. However if the complaint was false, the complainant himself suffered some calamity. This was a popular way to effect justice, without having to incur expenditure at the courts and at the same time being assured of a corrective remedy. This method also called *ghat dalna*, became an important means to seek god's intervention in their mutual strife and god was made to act as arbiter, both as police and judge.⁸⁶

Just like ways and means were devised to prevent the divine spirits from affecting the mortals, likewise they devised methods to prevent the menace of

⁸⁵ Oakley. E.S. : opcit, p. 207.

⁸⁶ ibid, p. 209.

ghosts. Thus whenever a ghost harassed someone, he had to be suitably appeased. He was propitiated with an offering of half-cooked *Khichhari* (rice and pulse), prepared hastily, for it was believed that even while being thus worshipped, the ghost could take possession of the worshipper. The rite was to be performed in a quick manner at night, in a jungle or place where four roads met⁸⁷. Another manner of preempting the ghosts or spirits of the dead from harassing the living was by taking urgent steps immediately, even when attending to the last rites of the deceased. Thus before the pyre was lit, a piece of the shroud, used to cover the corpse, was hung on a nearby tree as an offering to the spirits which were believed to frequent the burning grounds. When returning from the burning grounds, a thorny bush was placed at a point where the road intersected with another and the nearest male relative trampled it with his feet urging that the spirit of the dead should not trouble them.⁸⁸

Thus just as there were a multitude of malevolent forces, whether they manifested themselves in the form of gods wreaking vengeance upon the people, or of demonical spirit harassing them, there were similarly a plethora of ways to counteract their malevolence. Hope always triumphed over despair.

To conclude, one finds in Kumaun, in the 19th century, coexistence of two faiths. One, the live faith of the people - the belief in local godlings; another, exercising a dominant influence on the people-the Hindu religion. It was with the local deities, that the Kumaunis shared a more spontaneous relationship. These local deities had emerged from the local environment, mostly as spirits of men, dead and thereafter deified or demonified according to their influence on the environment. Ofcourse because they had emerged from the local environment, they were seen as exercising greater influence on it, than the Hindu deities. Further there were numerous legends which emphasized the bond between the deities and the local people. What was discerning about their religion was a tremendous sense of fear which pervaded their faith in the deities. Whatever calamities occurred and which must have been of frequent occurrence,

⁸⁷ *ibid*, p. 212.

⁸⁸ Atkinson, E.T. : *opcit*, p. 832.

were attributed to the displeasure of the deities. These gods were therefore worshipped to avoid their wrath or to appease them so that they might revoke their curse. However apart from fear they also evinced a keen sense of confidence in the gods. Thus not only were all apprehensions sought to be allayed by soliciting the deities but at times of adversity, the gods remained their ultimate recourse and great promises of oblations were made in case the crisis was resolved. Further active intervention of the deity was sought even in the day to day strife of the people. In fact even when the local deities were seen as ruthless, they were never without reason and the people owned the onus for invoking their ire.

Thus the local people had a relationship of dependence and trust on their deities, yet at the same time the people were no mere passive supplicants. In fact despite their faith, they were required to initiate the process of redress themselves. There was no automatic deliverance for them. Thus if justice had to be done the gods had to be particularly invoked or else justice would remain unrealized. Thus on the one hand the gods were seen as dynamic, on the other hand an alert faith was required of the people too.

For the Kumaonis religion served the prominent purpose of assisting existence, whether it was by allaying calamities or by enhancing productivity or by mitigating social conflicts. The last of these was served well by the fear of retribution attached to the commitment of social crime. Religion was not related to their social ordering, in the sense that, unlike Hindu religion it did not impose any kind of social or moral obligation on the Kumaonis. Divine wrath was mostly due to neglect of the worship of the deity and never really due to any aberration in the moral or social behaviour of an individual. There was as such, no concept of sin or of divine punishment for it. At the most punishment was imposed, when invoked by someone through *ghat* to redress a particular grievance.

The two ideas that recur in this entire account, are of retribution and justice. The idea of retribution was not only reiterated in legend after legend, but an eye for an eye was an important impulse behind social behaviour and

religion itself became an invaluable aid for wreaking vengeance on one's detractors especially through the ceremony of *ghat dalna*. So also their notion of justice was very strong. Whatever may have been the limitation of their conception of justice, once defined, they strove to preserve it at all costs.

Even when the Kumaunis were exposed to a more evolved religion, ie. the Hindu religion, they worshipped only those forms to which they were more familiar. Thus the worship of Shiva and his *Shaktis* became more popular than the worship of Vishnu and *Shaktis*. It was essentially the dynamic form of Shiva which was responsible for his greater popular appeal; moreso it was Bhairava the terrible form of Shiva, which in its likeness to the local deities, was the more popular form among the local people. Terrible forms were more popular because of the element of fear attached to the neglect of their worship, a consequence of their apprehensions about their environment and the need for self preservation. At the same time it cannot be claimed that idealization of such terrible, proactive deities was a reflection of their own subconscious urges - the compelling urge to overcome their limitation by assuming intimidating dimensions. Next, despite their overbearing environment, they were not given to fatalism. This was evident from the essential nature of their worship, wherein they sought to invoke the deities in the ceremony of *Jagar* or his assistance in *ghat*, to thrash out every remedy before they finally gave up. Likewise they did not indulge in notions of renunciation and the like, rather they sought to realize the full potential of life - a fact which becomes evident from an examination of their rituals.

III

Symbolic Traditions - Rituals

In the previous chapter - it was suggested that the Kumaunis, basically inhibited by an overpowering environment, came to be obsessed with the belief in the presence of virulent forces. Thus their entire religious focus was on how to appease these forces, so that no harm may come to them. At the same time they were confident that they could through their manner of worship pacify the virulent forces. This faith, coupled with their tremendous regard for life was reflected in their rituals as well.

Rituals refer to the use of action to express meaning, as opposed to the more utilitarian actions and also to the expression of meaning through words or images.¹ Ritual then is symbolic action. The Kumaunis in the nineteenth century observed a whole many sacred and secular rituals, through the first they celebrated the glory of god and through the second man himself in his environment. While many of the sacred rituals - both Puranic and local were observed in some detail in the preceding chapter, what is discussed presently are those rituals - both sacred and secular, which were the main fare of popular festivals, and were therefore an important setting for the projection of some of their values and ideas.

Given below in narrative form are some observations on the Puranic² and local festivals of Kumaun, made during the nineteenth century. While the Puranic festivals were generally occasioned by the different phases of the moon, the local festivals were occasioned by the passage of the sun through the twelve

¹ Burke, Peter : Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe; p. 180.

² The Puranic festivals, it can be supposed had atleast been adopted by the locals near the immigrant agglomerations. Their observance in the remote interior is a matter of conjecture. Even where they were adopted, they acquired a peculiarly local hue. The peculiar composition of the population where the immigrant orthodox Hindus were marginal in numbers and the local indigenes preponderant, had necessitated the incorporation of a substantial section of the latter into the Hindu fold. The Khasas had therefore been ascribed the status of Brahmans and Rajputs, though ritually they were to be inferior. The Sanskrit culture thus made available to them, there was a need to emulate it as well - for it was one means to identify with the migrant castes who also held the monopoly of power. Such reasons and the consistent interaction over centuries, led to the popular adoption of Puranic festivals, even while they retained their local customs.

different constellations. These festivals consisted of a particular set of sacred and secular rituals - which are discussed below.

The Puranic festivals

These sacred occasions in Kumaun were observed either with fasts, piety and other purifactory rituals, whence they were called *Parv*; or with festive gaiety and celebrations, in which case they were called *Utsav*³. While it was the element of enjoyment and of revelry among others, which led to the greater popularity of the latter kind, the inability of the common people to comprehend the niceties of Sankritic traditions prevented them from observing the so called solemn rituals⁴. These however must have necessarily been observed by those among the Khasiyas who had any pretensions of orthodoxy or who hoped to be considered higher due to it. Some of the more popular Puranic festivals observed by the Kumaunis in the 19th century are enumerated below.

Chait Navratris

The *Chait Navratris* were observed during the first nine days of the light half⁵ of the month of *Chait* (March-April), which were dedicated to the special worship of the Nau Durgas or the Shaktis of Shiva, as also to her other forms, viz, Kali and Chandika. On the first day itself at some places the statues of the goddess were established and '*Harela*' (a ritual in which five different seedgrains are sown in a mud-basket, which in few days sprout into young shoots) sown. Those who ate flesh sacrificed animals to the goddess, chanting names of her terrible form, while those who did not, offered grains and flowers and used the names of one of the milder forms in the consecration. Many devotees observed fast on all nine days. On the ninth day or *Ramnaumi*, festivals were held in honour of Ram at many of his temples in Kumaun. On the tenth day, the devout completed their *Navratri* fasts and after offering the *Harela* to the Goddess, wore them on their heads. Thereafter the affluent feasted and gave alms to the

³ Pandey, B.D. : *Kumaon Ka Itihaas*, p. 684.

⁴ Atkinson, E.T.: *Himalayan Gazetteer, Vol II*, p. 859.

⁵ The light half and dark half are the different phase of the moon which correspond to its waxing and waning respectively.

Brahmans.⁶

Bat-Savitri Amavas.

This day was observed on the last day of the dark half of the month of *Jeth* (May-June), by all women who were desirous for the welfare and longevity of their husbands. On this day women observed fast in honour of Savitri and Satyavan and narrated tales of how Savitri through her intense devotion not only saved her husband from the clutches of death, but even obtained for him the gift of longevity from Yama, the god of death, himself. The Kumauni women made images of Savitri, Satyavan and Yama under a *Peepal* tree and made offerings of objects, symbolic of marriage, to Savitri. They simultaneously sanctified a thread containing twelve knots and later put it on as a necklace, in the hope of obtaining long years in marital union.⁷

Ganga Dasahra.

This day was observed on the tenth day of the light half of the moon, in the month of *Jeth* (May-June) throughout these hills. The day marked the birth of Ganga, the worship of Nagas and Manas. Special assemblies were held on this day at many temples all over Kumaun and bathing in the Ganges enjoined. On the domestic front a Brahmin would go to his patron and stick to the entrance of their houses a small paper containing three '*Shlokas*' This was called a '*dwarapatra*' and was intended as a charm to protect the inhabitants of the house from thunder and lightning during the oncoming season of rains. In return the Brahmin was given some honourarium.⁸

Janamastami

Janamastami was observed on the eighth day of the dark half of *Bhadon* (August-September), in honour of the birth of the Krishnavtar. This festival was especially sacred to the Vaishnavas, who observed fast on this day. Pictures of

6 Atkinson, E.T. : opcit, p. 847.

7 This information was given by Mr. Deepchand Pant.

8 *ibid.*

Krishna and episodes from his life were drawn on the walls and worshipped and all birth rites - Krishna Janam, Jat Karm, Shasthi Puja, Matri Puja, Namkaran were performed for him.⁹

The month of *Bhadon* was sacred to the local deities as well and festivals were held in honour of Kelu Pir, Ganganath, Karttikeya, Dipa Devi and Pushkar Nag.¹⁰

Nag Panchami or Birura Panchami

Nag panchami was observed in honour of Nag Devta, on the fifth day of the light half of the month of *Bhadon* (August-September). This day was also sacred to Siva who as Rikheswar, was the lord of Nagas and was represented thus as surrounded by serpents and crowned with a chaplet of hooded snakes. This day was also known as *Birura Panchami*, from the practise of preparing *Birur* seven days before, by dipping a small bundle of wheat grains, dub grass, turmeric and fruit in a utensil containing five lentils soaked in water. On the morning of *Nagpanchami* people painted figures of serpents and birds on the walls of their houses. They then took a wisp of grass and tying it up in the form of a snake dipped it in the 'Birur' and this they offered along with money and sweetmeats to the serpent god. On this day women observed a fast and partook of food which was grown apart from the use of plough, on fields, for the use of ploughs it was believed would have led to the death of snakes. Several fairs were held at the site of Naga temples, eg. at that of the Karkotak Nag in Chhakata, in honour of Agyara Maharudra at Papoli in Nakura and at temples of local deities at Dhaulnag, pargana Gangoli, Mostmano in Sor and at Bhaglinga Devchula in Sira.¹¹

Nandashtami

Nandashtami was typically a Kumauni festival, observed in honour of Nanda Devi - the Shaiva *Shakti*, on the eighth day of the light half of the month

⁹ *ibid*

¹⁰ Atkinson, E.T. : *opcit*, p. 850.

¹¹ *ibid*, p. 851.

of *Bhadon* (August-September). It was popular all over the upper parts of Kumaun and was the occasion for great assemblies at Almora, Nainital and also at Ranchula Kot in pargana Danpur. On these occasions two images made of plantain stocks were established on a palanquin or '*Dola*', as representative of Nanda and her consort, two days before the *Ashtami*. On the *Saptami* and *Ashtami* the *Devi* was worshipped with animal sacrifices and great fairs were usually held on these two days. On the tenth day the *Devi* was carried on her palanquin all over town in a great procession and finally immersed or abandoned at some unfrequented spot. At Almora Atkinson recounts of 1878, a young buffalo was sacrificed and a descendant of the royal lineage gave it the first blow with his sword and later others followed suit¹². In several other villages the custom was more pagan. The animal was fed on the preceding day on a mixture of rice and pulse and on the day of the sacrifice was worshipped with sweetmeats and decked with garlands. The headman of the village, then laid his sword across its neck and the beast was let loose, then all proceeded to chase it, pelt it with stones and hack it with their knives until it died. This custom especially prevailed in villages where the form Mahish-Mardini, the slayer of the buffalo headed demon, was worshipped.

Nandashatami was also known as *Saaton-Aathon*, from its celebration on the seventh and eight day. It was especially held as sacred by women. On the seventh day or the '*Amuktabharan Saptami*,' after ablutions, the women would gather together, and with some fresh ears of grain taken from the fields (generally rice at this time) make the image of Goura-Maheshwar. The women generally observed the day by keeping a fast. After worshipping Goura-Maheshwar they put on a thread with seven knots as a bracelet on their left arms. Men wore a similar bracelet with fourteen knots on their right arms on the fourteenth day or the '*Anant-chaturdasi*' after this the women would sit around generally to sing and dance.

On the *Ashtami* the women repeated the observances of the previous day and among them the married women especially abstained from all cooked

12 *ibid.*, p. 851.

food, the abstinence actually being from fire and all things obtained therefrom. They also made necklaces out of *Dub* grass, which they wore in the hope of begetting 'good fortune, children etc. After ablution and worship they gave these with an invocation and a present to a Brahman and wore instead necklaces of gold, silver, or silk thread according to their means. It is this ritual which also gave the festival the name of *Durbashtami*. *Dub* being a grass which had a wide spread all over the hills and was perhaps therefore symbolic of fertility. On this day too the women engaged in singing and dancing and also narrated the tale of Banbhata *Raja* or Gwall *Deuta*. In the villages the celebrations of Aathon lasted for over a month, and every night people gathered around bonfires and sang *chachari* and *Jhoda* the typically Kumauni folk song.¹³

The Asoj Navratris

The first nine nights of the light half of *Asoj* (September-October) called the *Asoj Navratri* were, like the first nine nights of *Chait*, specially devoted to the worship of Shakti. The first day was called 'Devi-Sthapana', on which the idol was set up. On this day '*Harela*' was sown i.e. seedgrains of five winter crops (i.e. crops to be sown in the approaching winter and to be harvested in June the next year) were sown in small specially prepared mud basket, amongst which nine pebbles were established as symbolic of Naudurga. Many devout observed all the nine days as fasts and listened to the renderings from the '*Durga Paath*'. On the *Mahashtami* on the great eighth the devout fasted all day and on *Naumi* or the ninth day buffalos and goats were sacrificed at the *Devi* temple in large numbers. In many villages *Jagars* were held on this eighth day in honour of Goril, Ghatku and Ghatokacha. On the tenth day or Vijaydashmi the '*Harela*', which by now had sprouted was offered along with red vermillion to the gods and goddesses and then worn by the devotees on their heads the Nav Durga were then taken for immersion.¹⁴

13 Deepchand Pant, *opcit.*
Also Atkinson, E.T. : *opcit.*, p.852
14 Atkinson, E.T. : *opcit.*, p. 854.

The Vijayadashmi was also observed to commemorate the commencement of Rama's expedition to Ceylon for the rescue of Sita. It was also known locally as 'Payata' or 'Pait', from the sweet meat 'petha' which formed an important item of the feast given to friends and relatives on this day.¹⁵ At many places, *Ramleela* or the episodes from Rama's life were enacted during the *Navaratri* and fairs were held on *Dushara* or *Vijayadashmi*. This was the principal festival of the Kshatriyas or Rajputs.¹⁶

Deepawali:

Deepawali, a major Puranic festival was celebrated in the month of *Kartik* (October-November) on the fourteenth day of the dark half or on amavas, to celebrate the triumphant return of Rama after retrieving Sita from Ravana. This day was therefore celebrated as the festival of lights in honour of their return. Deepawali was also sacred to Mahalaxmi, the Goddesses of wealth who was especially honoured by the locals by incessant gambling, for a fortnights duration prior to this day.¹⁷

The next day which fell on the first day of the light half of the moon was observed in honour of the demon king Bali or of Krishna as Govardhan. The door-step was smeared with cow dung and the images of Bali and his family were rudely drawn thereon and received domestic worship. Likewise cows and calves were worshipped as symbolic of Krishna.¹⁸

The second day of the light half of *Kartik* was observed as *Yama-Durtiya* or *Bhaiyya Duj*, when sister honoured their brothers in memory of Yamuna honouring Yama. On this day the villagers at some places, such as Champawat, Patua in Sui and Syalde Pokhar in Dwara engaged in 'Bagwali' or 'stone-slinging matches'.¹⁹ In these matches the villagers divided themselves into two teams which were pitted against one another. The object of contest was

15 *ibid*, p. 854.

16 Pandey, B.D. : *opcit*, p. 688.

17 *ibid*, p. 689.

18 Atkinson, E.T. : *opcit*, p. 855.

19 *ibid*, p. 855.

either to force the passage of a stream or to gain possession of a stone pillar or some such object. Each party used its slings, and with the singing of a martial song the contest was begun. The teams then pelted one another with stones, and the party which succeeded in capturing the object won the laurels. This sport which resulted in considerable bloodshed was considered as especially appealing to the Goddess Shakti who was believed to be pleased at the sight of blood. The wounds obtained were treated by leaves of stinging nettles. Atkinson observed that the custom owing to its sanguinary character was prohibited. So that combatants mainly amused themselves by pelting stones at some boulder or conspicuous tree.²⁰

Basant Panchami:

Another festival which though of Puranic derivation, had been totally indiginized, was that of *Basant Panchami* or *Sri Panchami*, held on the fifth day of the light half of the month of *Magh* (January-February). Atkinson observed " Even in Kumaon where the customs and ideas of the plains have not yet thoroughly permeated the masses, amongst some classes, young children beginning to learn are taught to honour Saraswati on this day, whilst the Baniya worships his scales, the soldier his weapon's, the clerk his pen, the ploughman his plough and others the principle emblem of their profession or callings"²¹ . This day was also celebrated in honour of the advent of spring and handkerchief dyed in yellow were worn by the locals. Also young shoots of barley, at this time a few inches in length were offered to the gods and goddesses and then worn as a head dress. Sisters and daughters of the family applied the vermillion mark on everyone's forehead. From this day onwards also commenced the celebrations of the *Holi* season, with festive singing and gaiety daily among all classes.

Shivratri:

The fourteenth day of the dark half of the month of *Phalgun* (February-

20 *ibid*, p. 871.

21 *ibid*, p. 857.

March) was considered as especially sacred to Shiva. On the day previous, the pious fasted and all night long worshipped the deity; next morning they performed ablutions and after making offerings to the idol and attendant priest, they broke their fast. The day was then observed as a holiday. In the great Shiva establishments the ceremonies were conducted with great splendour, especially at Bageshwar and at Jageswar. Elsewhere ceremonies were much simpler and at homes a *linga* was made of clay and worshipped there itself. At the '*mahapuja*' at Jagashwar, the idol was bathed in succession with milk, curds, ghee, honey and sugar; cold and hot water being used alternately between each bathing. Each bathing had its appropriate invocation, prayer and offering which according to Atkinson were similar to those prescribed in the plains.²² On *Shivratri* great fairs were held at Devthal (pargana Baramandal - approximately 3000 attendance); Nileshtar Bhikyasain (pargana Palipachāun - approximate attendance 5000); Kapileswara Mahadeo (palipachāun approximate attendance 7000); Ranibagh Chitrashila (Chhakhata - approximate attendance 4000). Tirath (pargana Kota Pahar - approximate attendance 1000).²³

Holi:

Holi, also of Puranic derivation, had acquired in Kumaun a peculiarly local hue. Associated as it was with the legend of Krishna and his dalliance with the milkmaids, it had come to embody a lot of revelry and licentiousness among the people. *Holi*, celebrated in the light half of the month of *Phalgun*, (February-March) comprised six days of intense festivity, when people rambled from place to place singing in groups. Atkinson quotes a passage from the Bhavishyottara Purana to elucidate the origins of *Holi*. It is believed that in the time of Yuddhisthira, there was a king named Raghu whose subjects were once troubled by a demoness. The unhappy king sought the advice of Narada Muni, who directed them to go forth in full confidence on the last day of the light half of *Phalgun* and laugh, sport and rejoice, to build a bonfire and circumbulate it uttering whatever should come to their minds. The demoness appalled thus by

²² *ibid*, p. 858.

²³ Pandey, B.D. : *opcit* p. 680-683

the vociferations, by the oblations to the fire and by the laughter of the children, retired²⁴ . Likewise Holi was also celebrated in this manner.

On the eleventh of the light half of *Phalgun*, the '*cheer*' was established from whence the day got its name as '*cheerbardhan*' day. The '*cheer*' is translated as 'cloth' and was possibly symbolic of Krishna's play, wherein he deprived the bathing maids of their clothings. On this day the people obtained from each house two strips of cloth, one coloured and one white, and after offering them before the *Shakti* of Bhairava made use of them thus. A pole was established on the ground and two sticks attached to the top transversely in the shape of branched 'T' and from these the pieces of cloth were suspended. The people next circumbulated around the pole, singing songs in honour of Krishna and the maids. This ceremony was observed by all those who assumed connection with the castes from the plains. Among the Khasiyas apparently a trident was set up instead, as symbolic of Pasupati. On the day of the full moon, the '*cheer*' was uprooted and was taken from house to house, it was then brought back and re-established. Holika or the great bonfire was burnt at midnight. On the first of the dark half of *Phalgun Holi* or '*Chharari*' as it was locally known was celebrated. On this day people partook of alcohol or other intoxicants, and proceeded from village to village throwing red powder on each other and singing obscene songs. The *Holis* of Satrali, Patiya, Gangoli, Champawat, Dwarahaat etc were especially renowned. The *Tika Holi* took place two days after *Chharari*, when thanks offering were made, according to ability, or account of the birth of a child, a marriage or any other good fortune. In some village a community kitchen or *Bhandara* was established, where everyone came and feasted.²⁵

Apart from these above occasions, many other days were held as sacred and observed with fasts, piety and prayers, among these were the '*Chaturthi*' or fourth days; the '*Chaturdasi*' or fourteenth day; the '*Deodasi*' or the twelfth day of the two phases of the moon in each month. The *Ekadasi* on the eleventh

24 Atkinson, E.T. : opcit, p. 867.

25 Deepchand Pant, opcit.
Also Atkinson, E.T. : opcit, p. 867.

day was likewise especially sacred to Vishnu, and was observed for some or the other wish fulfillment by certain sections among the orthodox Hindus, eg. widows, older people, married or childless women etc. All such observances were, however more the religious fare of the orthodox among the Hindus and the common people remained mostly outside their ambit. To some of these days certain strictures were also attached against some or the other kind of work for instance on *Ajota* - the full moon day of *Chait* (March-April), no animal was to be yoked.²⁶ Similarly on '*Akshai Tritiya*' or the third day is the light half of *Baisakh* (April-May) no one was allowed to plough²⁷ and on '*Anadhyay Dwitya*' or the second of the light half of *Jeth* (May-June) pupils were to be excused from studies²⁸. Likewise many other days in the year were observed as rest days for man and animal both.

What emerges from the above account is that these sacred rituals were observed to honour some Puranic God or the other, and therefore incorporated mostly rituals of worship or rituals which commemorated certain events from the God's legends. Thus while the *Navaratri* in honour of Durga, *Shivratri* in honour of Shiva, *Nag Panchami* in honour of Naga, *Nandashtami* in honour of Nanda were mostly rituals of worship; *Holi*, *Diwali*, *Janamashtmi* were all commemorative of similar events in the myths of the respective gods. Other than celebrating the glory of God certain rituals were also observed to honour nature. Thus *Basant Panchami* and the wearing of yellow clothes and green barley shoots on this day were done to welcome spring. Other than these apparent reasons, there was a strong element of reciprocal reward, such as of general well being or prosperity or wish fulfillment, that attached itself to the serious observance of these rituals. For instance, the rituals of offering objects, symbolic of marital status to Savitri on *Bat Savitri Amawas* and hearing of the tale of Savitri and Satyavan was also observed in the hope of prolonging their own marital state. The ritual of wearing the '*Dor*' or thread with seven knots on '*Amukta-bharan*' *Saptami* was also observed with a view to similar reward. The ritual of wearing a necklace made of '*Dub*' grass was associated with fertility,

26 Atkinson, E.T. : opcit, p. 848

27 *ibid*, p.848

28 *ibid*, p.849.

and therefore all married women did so on *Durbashtami*. Likewise gambling on *Diwali* was ritualized and was symbolic of an invitation to material prosperity. *Basant Panchami* was similarly observed for success in ones calling and *Ganga Dusahra* for protection.

Apart from the sacred aspect, there was the secular aspect as well. Thus the festival provided great occasion for revelry and ribaldry, violence and all manners of self gratification on the one hand, on the other, there were occasions for observing amity, for exchanging greeting and gifts and blessing as well. It is, however, imperative to note that while gambling and partaking of intoxicants and other means of rude insinuations were ritualized aspects of *Diwali* and *Holi* respectively and were thus far imbibed by the people, it was the rituals of violence and of collective singing and dancing which were typically indigenous. These have been further highlighted in the following account of local festivals.

The Local festivals

The local festivals were also the traditional festivals of Kumaun. These were mostly occasioned by the 'Sankrants' or the passage of the sun from one constellation to another and thus far symbolized the changes in the seasons as well. While all Sankrants were held as very auspicious and were marked by some or the other observances, some of them were of special significance and were celebrated with much festive gaiety by the locals of Kumaun. Among these the *Makor Sankrant* (Capricorn) which had originally signified the commencement of the new year, and the *Mekh (Aries) Sankrant* which now signified the new year were specially important.

Chait Sankrant or Halduwa Sankrant

The *Chait Sankrant* marked the commencement of the spring season, it was therefore celebrated as the festival of *Phooldevi* or "the flowers on the threshold". On the first day of Chait young boys and girls arose at day break and collected the flowers of rhododendron and the peach blossom which at this time were in abundance. They then took some rice coloured in turmeric (*Haldi*)

and red vermillion and sprinkled this on the flowers. With these flowers and rice they smeared and adorned the thresholds of their parents houses and later repeated the same ceremony at the doors of their neighbours and relations chanting simultaneously a short prayer for the prosperity of the house holder and hoping for the return of many more such occasions of worshipping his threshold. In return the children received presents of food, cloth, cash, rice or gur. The rice was made into sweetmeats called 'Shai' which was partaken in the evening by everybody, the young girls being served most liberally.

At some places the entire month of *Chait* (March-April) was thus spent in similar festivity daily, with the thresholds of the house being daily cleared and adorned with flowers. On the first and last day a special worship was done, rich meals were prepared and the whole day was spent in feasting and amusement. Beginning this day the low caste hurkiyas or bards went from village to village for an entire month singing and dancing and received in return presents of clothes, food and money.²⁹

The Mekh Sankrant or the Bikh Sankrant

The *Mekh Sankrant* (Aries) marked the commencement of the new year and was therefore regarded as very significant. While most of the more important temples both of Shaiva and Vaishnav derivation held special services on this day, the Khasiyas or the peasant population also celebrated the day with much fanfare and frolic. Fairs were held at many places such as Thal, Dwarahat, Siyalde, Chaugarh and Lohakhaai. The *Hurkijas* or the hills singers and dancers rendered 'Pahari' songs and people danced to them. The people celebrated the day by eating fish and 'vadas' due to which they developed windy colic. Thus they along with the children were submitted a remedy known as 'Tala-dalna' in which an iron rod was heated and applied to their navels in order to drive poison (*bikh*) out and hence the local name *Bikh Sankrant*.³⁰

29 Pant, S.D.: *The Social Economy of the Himalayas*, p.231.

30 Pandey, B.O.: *opcit*, p. 684

The Kark Sankrant or Hariyala

The *Kark Sankrant* was observed as *Hariyala* or the 'festival of rains' Ten to twelve days prior to this date the *Hariyala* was sown. Seeds of five or seven kinds of crops which were to be sown in the oncoming rainy season, and to be harvested in December - eg: barley, wheat mustard, pulse and maize were sown solemnly with due ceremony by the head of the family or the family priest in small mud baskets or small beds of earth specially prepared for the purpose near the place of household worship. The *Hariyala* bed was then fenced with cotton thread and was sprinkled with water daily at both tours of worship till the last day of *Asoj* (June-July). This day was observed as *Harkali Mahotsav*. On this day a kind of mock weeding was done with a wooden hoe and different kinds of flowers and fruits were placed near the young shoots. In the midst of these shoots were placed brightly coloured clay images of Gaura-Maheswara, Kartikeya and Ganesh. The lady of the house then offered these worship in memory of the marriage of Shiva and Parvati. On the next day, which was the day of *Sankranti*, the master of the household cut down the green *Hariyala* stems which were then offered to the Gods. Later the young girls of the house applied 'Tilak' or vermillion mark on each family members forehead and placed the *Hariyala* carefully on their heads. In return they received presents in cash or kind. The whole day was then spent in throwing stones, or eating, singing and making merry³¹ otherwise merry-making. The *Kark Sankrant* was also the great day of the *bagwali* or the stone-throwing contest at Chamdyol in Patti Gumdes, Ramgar in Patti Ramgar, at the Narayini temple in Siloti and at Bhimtal in Chhakhata.³² Though the custom had as such been prohibited and was much also much reduced in its sanguinary character, by the end of the 19th century.

On this day also many of the village deities, Saim, Haru, Gol etc were specially revered and from this day onwards, for twenty two days daily 'Jagar' was observed in their honour. Some people who observed the fast for twenty two days stayed at the temple site itself to look after the deity and the *Dhuni* or

31 Pant, S.D. : opcit, p. 232.

32 Atkinson, E.T. : opcit, p.870.

sacred fire. They bathed thrice daily and ate but once. At night the deity was invoked of whom then the spectators asked for blessings of health, prosperity, progeny etc.³³

The Sinha Sankrant or Wallgiya Sankrant

The *Wallgiya Sankrant* was observed on the first day of *Bhadon* (August-September). This was a time when there was abundance of vegetables and milk. Hence curds and vegetables were offered by all, to those in authority over them. Thus tenants offered them to their landlords and the young people to their elders. Previously local craftsmen, who were mostly outcastes used to make presents of their handicrafts to men of authority and received in return presents or giving of gifts in cash or kind. It was from this custom of '*Olag*' that the Sankranti got its name of *Olgia* or *Wallgiya*. Ever this custom had begun to ebb towards the beginning of 20th century. Also on this day everyone, including the poorest of the poor had to perforce partake of '*ghee*' or '*clarified butter*', thus the *Sankrant* was also called '*Ghee Sankrant*'.

It is ironic that even though the class of '*shilpkars*' or craftsmen was considered as beyond the pale, nevertheless there existed a ritual whereby gifts made by them were accepted by the twice born castes. That this custom fell into disuse with the march of time was probably due to increasing commercialization of the rural economy. Some remnants of it, however, continued to be observed throughout the 19th century.³⁴

The Kanya Sankrant or the Khataruwa Sankrant

The *Khataruwa Sankrant* was observed on the first day of *Asoj* (September-October) to celebrate the onset of winters. On this day a huge bonfire was lit in a central place in the village and boys gathered cucumbers and flowers which they flung into the fire calling out '*Bheloji bhelo*', even while they leapt across the fire or beat it with long sticks.

³³ Pandey, B.D. : opcit; p. 685.

³⁴ This information was given by Mr. Shekhar Pathak

On this day, for the last time fodder was available in plenty before the long dry spell of winters and therefore all domestic animals were fed well. At night torches were lit and waved in all the corners of the cattle shed to drive away the evil spirits, diseases etc.³⁵

Atkinson observes that Khataruwa was celebrated in memory of the victory of the Kumaun Kings over the Garhwal Kings and the bonfire was symbolic of it, while the revelry was symbolic of the vindication of the Kumaunis over the Garhwalis.³⁶

Makar Sankrant or Ghugutiya Sankrant

The *Makar Sankrant* or *Ghugutiya* were observed in the middle of January when winter was most severe and there was general scarcity of food and fodder. On this day children were woken up early in the morning, bathed and cleaned. Then sweetmeats were cooked from flour and sugar baked in sesamum oil or 'ghi' in the shape of wild pigeons, called 'Ghugut' and other objects such as swords, mirrors, shields etc. These were then strung into necklaces with an orange in between and one such necklace was strung around the neck of each child. The children would later in the day call upon the birds, shouting 'Kale Kale' and offer them portions of these necklaces, and eat some themselves.

This custom perhaps also had something to do with the pilgrimage enjoined for the elders on this holy day of *Makar Sankranti*. Thus while the elders went away for the day to bathe in the nearest brook, symbolic of the Ganges, they made such arrangements as above to preoccupy the children while they were away.³⁷ Great commercial fairs were held at Bageswar and Thal Baleswar on this day.

The Village Fair : A Popular Event

A special event on all festive occasions was the village fair. Both on

35 Pant, S.D. : opcit, p. 234.

36 Atkinson, E.T. : opcit, p.871.

37 Deepchand Pant : opcit.

days of Puranic as well as of local festivals, the site of some or the other village temple was the venue for a major fair. These fairs were perhaps the only occasion for any kind of commercial transaction. Therefore they were very important for the villages of Kumaun.³⁸ However, apart from the commercial aspects there were sacred and other secular aspects to each fair as well. Thus in each fair ample amount of religious activity and entertainment was visible. Oakley made the following observation on the religious and commercial fair at Bageshwar on the occasion of *Makar Sankranti* when fifteen to twenty thousand people gathered " .. The religious part of the mela consists in the bathing that takes place before daybreak on the appointed day. On the previous day great masses of villagers from the surrounding district come pouring in with their families, many of them dragging logs and branches of trees from the jungle, with which they make bonfires on the slopes around, the weather being cold during this season. All night they camp around these innumerable fires, singing and chattering ... at the earliest light of dawn a hush falls over the scene, and the whole multitude steps down to the river, ... in the cold waves of Ganga, and then set out on their homeward journey."³⁹

S.D. Pant observed about the fair at Bageshwar." The annual fair is held here at the confluence of the rivers Sarju and Gumti on Makar Sankranti day. Some 20,000 people, consisting mainly of Bhotiyas and Kumaunis, assemble here. Every Pargana is well represented at this fair.

The fair begins one day before Sankranti..., and lasts for four or five days. All kinds of domestic animals, implements, articles of clothing, and indeed everything that is produced in the country, are displayed for sale...

The religious ritual of the fair..., consists in bathing before daybreak at the confluence... after bathing, an offering of water to the god Shiva in the Bagnath temple is essential. Those who are more religiously disposed continue this practice of bathing and offering water for three days in succession. This is known as Trimaghi, or the observance performed during the first three days of

38 Pant, S.D. : *opcit*, p.193.

39 Oakley, E.S. : *Holy Himalaya*. P. 59.

the month of Magh (January-February). Among the men, some shave their heads and offer rice ball to their departed ancestors..

The lighter side of the fair is to be seen round the innumerable camp-fires lit throughout the surrounding area, where the people encamp according to their villages. Round every important camp-fire the villagers sing, dance and gossip all night long. They have their love songs, duets and folk-dances, the most common of which is the ring-dance of the Danpur people, known as Chanchari.

During the day time the villagers march in procession along the main thoroughfares, beating drums of all sizes and tones, blowing shrill trumpets, rattling rusty swords, and waving their banners. They move at a snails' pace, and spend the whole day in sight seeing, singing, dancing, and general merry-making. Some of them will sail round and round in a "round about" contraption. Of recent years the national folk dances and village processions are being superseded by the gramophone, the bagpipe, the magic lantern shows.

Formerly agricultural exhibitions and pony races and other sports were held under official auspices..."⁴⁰ .

The fairs of Devidhura, Vykiasen, Sialde and Somnath etc. comprised in addition the sham warfare or *Bagwali* noted before. At these fairs all classes and castes intermingled and as such there were no restrictions against the outcastes as well.⁴¹

The Ritual Motifs

The local festivals in as much as they were opposed to the everyday, were therefore observed with special gaiety. The people would clean themselves and their houses and plaster their houses with cowdung afresh. They would observe the day as a day of respite and while adults concerned themselves with the sacred ritual of honouring the gods, the children participated in the ritual

40 Pant, S.D. : opcit, p.195.

41 Shekhar Pathek : opcit.

play. They would also attend the fairs wherever these were held and participate in of the general merriment to be observed on such days.

A distinctive feature of the local festivals was the association of young children, of girls who had not approached puberty as yet and of boys who had, as yet, not been invested with the '*Janeo*' or the sacrificial thread, with all the festivals. The girls especially had the honour of initiating the local festivities. The significance of this association could have been the association of purity, or of rejuvenation with the youth. It can, however, also be postulated that this special treatment emanated from the desire of adults to give to the children their best ; before they were saddled with adulthood and the corresponding responsibilities.

The local festivals comprised of the sacred rituals which were conducted by the adults in honour of the family deities. The celebration of *Harela* on the occasion of the marriage of Shiva and Parvati, when seedgrains were sown in a mud basket and few days later the young sprouts were offered to the Gods, was specially symbolic of fertility and was perceived as such even by the hill people, who recited '*shlokas*' or short Sanskrit verses, after the priest, to that intent. The family deities were first offered veneration on each of these festivals.

The secular rituals were mostly symbolic of nature and were observed to express man's solidarity with nature. There were certain rituals which symbolized the onset of certain seasons for instance the ritual of *Phooldevi* heralded springtime; *Haryala* heralded the rainy season and *Khataruwa* the winter season. There were other rituals which symbolised the season itself, for instance *Ghughutiya* was symbolic of winters and *Walligiya*, of the rainy season.

Apart from the formal ritual, the people participated in singing and dancing, pelting stones, lighting massive bonfires and playing about them, Bagwali and other festival contests that were a regular feature of the fairs.

An important aspect of these rituals was that of expressing amity and communal solidarity not only across homesteads, with neighbours and relations,

but also across the divisive barriers of age, caste and class. While there are innumerable evidences of these social barriers in the writings of the poets of this period, evidences of quarrels among neighbours and relation abound. Infact the '*Paharee*' seemed to have a special penchant for litigation. "Many hundreds of the paharees would sell all they have and beggar themselves, to be able to indulge in litigation with an obnoxious neighbour. They are in the practice, too, of inventing the most incredible complaint; they rush into court, petition is hand, with such frantic gestures and furious eloquence, that a person unacquainted with their habits would be led to suppose they must have been robbed and plundered, and at least half-killed, when the cream of the whole affair perhaps turns out to be that some neighbour either looked or spoke angrily at him, or laughed at him"⁴². Such recourse to travelling officials was had over and above their own local method of obtaining justice through the ritual of '*Ghat Dalna*'. A people thus intolerent of even triflings would scarcely have accepted the inequity of caste and class, were their hands not tied down. It can therefore be postulated therefore that these rituals of violence, of Bagwali, of Khaturwa etc. provided them with a sense of glory, although momentarily, but nevertheless essential to vindicate them against the constraints of their actual life situations.

That there might have been a threat to the social solidarity is also borne out from the fact, that a recurrent theme in these festivals was the need to express solidarity with the community, as also to reiterate the structure of authority and reinforce it through the custom of Wallgiya.

To conclude, festivals whether Puranic or local, incorporated some sacred and some secular rituals. While many of the sacred rituals were observed to honour the Gods, Puranic or local, many were also observed with a view to wish fulfillment; wishes that enriched life with progeny, prosperity, longetivity etc. The secular rituals mostly endorsed man's solidarity with his environment, comprising both man and nature and yet some of them were symbolic of mans desire to contravene the same.

42 Barron, P.: Notes of wandering in the Himmala, p. 141.

IV

Oral Traditions

The 'word of mouth' was throughout the 19th century in Kumaun yet the most powerful medium of expression. As such, it was also employed to transmit many of the folk traditions of Kumaun. Infact the folklore and folk sayings were known only through oral transmission¹. These, therefore, qualified as oral traditions, even as they were transmitted from generation to generation through 'word of mouth' alone.

It is evident from the singular status of the oral mode of transmission that there should have been a vast corpus of oral tradition. But what is known to us of the oral traditions that were current during the 19th century in Kumaun is only from evidences that were documented by Taradutt Gairola, Reverend E.S. Oakley and G.D. Upreti at the turn of the last century. However, this is most pertinent for our purpose as it represents the 'repertoire' that obtained in Kumaun during the 19th century. Of this 'repertoire' the folklore represented the values and ideas of the people in so far as they elicited their interests, while the proverbs and folksayings committed to speech the same.

To begin with the folklores first, these might have obtained under many different genres, as is evident from the present corpus of folk literature². However, it was only the religious legends, the legends of house, tales of wit and wisdom and animal lore that were recorded towards the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century. Of these the religious legends have already been observed in the first chapter on religion and ritual. Apart from these, there were legends of heroes, also called *Bharau* in the local dialect. Taradutt Gairola, often during his youth heard these tales from the local bards or *Hurkiyas*, it is these that he has presented in the volume 'Himalayan Folklore'.

¹ Oakley, E.S. and Gairola, T.D. Himalayan Folklore, p. 2.

² Pandey, Trilochan: Kumauni Lok Sahitya ki Prishtbhoomi.

There are also available many tales of wit and wisdom and animal lore collected assiduously by E.S.Oakley during a period of forty years in Kumaun. These are, however, more universal in their content and intent, as the author himself pointed out³. As such it is meaningless to look for ideological form in them which had a bearing on Kumaun alone.

The legends of heroes or *Bharau* were tales of real persons, mostly kings, chieftains and other 'typical characters' who once lived in these locales. Apart from the content of these legends, even the 'setting' or the atmosphere in which the tale was recounted at times tells of the values and ideas that were to be had among the listeners.

Originally, as is evident from the many allusions in the legends, these legends were mainly composed and sung by the family bards of kings and chieftains either to entertain them in the courts or to encourage them on the battlefield. Towards the end of the 18th century, however, when the English East India Company overwhelmed the petty hill kingdoms, so that there were no more wars between kingdoms or feuds between local chieftains, both, the sources of inspiration and of patronage dried out. Thus separated from their original settings these bards or *Hurkiyas* ventured out among the people, singing legends of the heroes who had been their repertory already standardized at the time. Towards the end of the 19th century, Taradutt Gairola tells us about how during his youth he himself would call the bards from far and wide, to hear from them their quaint and thrilling legends and ballads⁴. He however missed to note down the manner in which these tales were recounted during his days - an omission which makes any research on the subject poorer due to the lack of it. Nearer our times Marc Gaborieau conducted extensive field work on the content and context of the legends in Kumaun, in the Almora area in 1970-71. He indicated that these legends or *Bharaus* were either for general entertainment or for stimulating workers and were sung by professional bards or *Hurkiyas* on certain occasions when people were gathered together. For

³ Oakley, E.S. and Gairola T.D., *Op cit*, p. 190.

⁴ Gairola, T.D. *ibid*, preface. p. 2.

instance during religious ceremonies, occasioned by the birth, initiation or marriage celebration in private houses; or even when listeners gathered together with the intention of passing their long winter evenings listening to these legends; or at religious fairs; or when workers worked in the rice fields during transplantation and weeding times, the bards entertained them with their musical rendering of the legends of heroes. Given below are some of Gaborieau's observations with regard to the manner of performance -

"The style of performances varies from area to area;.. In the Almora area of Kumaun, the bard sits facing his audience and plays the *hurko* while telling the story. He sings most of the time, but some passages are declaimed or even simply spoken. By his side sit two assistants who, at the end of each stanza; join in to repeat the few last words or a refrain, and to hold the last note until the bard begins a new stanza. Performances in eastern Kumaun... are much more spectacular. The bard puts on a special ceremonial dress consisting of a white pleated-skirt; a black waist-coat, and a white turban. Several bells hang from the strap of his *hurko* and ring while he plays, dances and mimes the episodes of the story he is telling. Most of the text is declaimed and punctuated with the beats of the drum. Between episodes are inserted songs devoted to certain standard themes such as the dress of the hero, fighting, or lamentation or the death of the hero. The bard intones the lines; a few assistants, who stand in the background, join in and play additional drums. The audience sit in a circle around the performers.

The stories of heroes are also sung to encourage and entertain workers in the rice fields, at the time of transplanting and weeding. In Kumaun such performances are done to the sound of the *hurko*. The bard standing in front of the line of the workers and dancing.. such are the main circumstances in which bards sing their songs nowadays⁵.

This evidence of the occasions when *bharas* were sung has been corroborated by Shekhar Pathak and Girish Tiwari. These authors also give

⁵ Gaborieau, Marc: Introduction to Oakley and Gairola, Himalayan Folklore, p. 15.

evidence of an exploitative element that was attached to the singing of the *bharaus*, especially during agricultural operations. The village headman or *Padhan*, according to them arranged for *Hurkiya Bol* - a cooperative effort in which the *Hurkiya* or bard lent his music, while the peasants laboured on the fields of the *Padhan*. Though as such this form of cooperative labour is quite common in many parts of the world, but in Kumaun it was corrupted due to excesses. Evidently in Kumaun, on such occasions only the *bharaus* were sung, for they must have worked well to stimulate the peasant labourers. The authors suggest that the peasants so charged with the heroic deeds of the protagonists, were made to deflect their newfound stimulation towards harder labour on the fields, all free of cost. In all this the stimulation was afforded only momentarily, for the purpose of the agricultural operations and all notions of defiance and the like imbibed from the legends were automatically forgotten under the fatigue, at the end of the operations. Thus the *bharaus* were used by the authorities to extract greater labour from the peasants and free of cost and not to encourage any ideas of revolutionariness as such⁶. Apart from this suggestion, the merit of the *bharaus* lay in the fact that the peasant was willing to render free labour in return for the momentary boost experienced while singing the legends along with the *Hurkiya*.

Likewise the association of *bharaus* with some other specific occasions must have been due to their potential to arouse suitable sentiments. For instance, why should these legends of heroes be sung on occasions of marriage, birth, initiation and the like; perhaps because they could sustain the mood of buoyancy which went with such moments of man's ascendancy. While at fairs, the narration of such legends complete with music, song, dance and drama, must have complemented the *joie de vivre* induced in the multitudes, by the general atmosphere of conviviality. Lastly in the long winter nights, when men were gathered and had considerable time on their hands for reflection, the recounting of these legends must have provided them with ample ideas and images to ponder about and thus pass their time. I will presently deal with what

⁶ Tiwari, Girish; Pathak, Shekhar: *Hamari Kavita Ke Aankhar*, p. 26.

might have brought these performances to arouse such emotions; but first I must postulate similar instances when the legends were recounted for the 19th century as well. From the above account it is clear that the arena for these performances increased much from the end of the 18th century to the present times. Further if one is to follow the logic of encroachment by commercial forms of entertainment on all occasions even at the cost of traditional forms, especially in the 20th century⁷; it would be difficult to deny that the areas of these performances were at least equal if not more, towards the end of the 19th century in Kumaun.

Now for the reasons for the inherent appeal of these legends, four elements may be postulated. Firstly the aura of legitimacy about the entire performance; secondly the claim of historicity and therefore of authenticity; thirdly the style of rendition; fourthly because they posed certain ideas and values which the community felt beholden to.

Apart from the general association of the legend of heroes with certain occasions, there were other norms as well, these legends were sung only by professional bards, who belonged almost always to the caste of the untouchables. They were believed to be the descendants of the former *Hurkiyas* or bards who were attached to the local kings or chieftains and therefore they laid claim to be the sole repositories of the historical traditions of Kumaun. Further the tales were enunciated and even performed in a particular manner, as is clear from the evidence cited by Gaborieau. So much so that even a particular ceremonial dress was worn during such performances in East Kumaun. Thus, so far as there was a general code which the bards followed, there was a certain legitimacy associated with the performances which must have added to the credibility of the narrative. The bards themselves emphasized the authenticity of their repertoire by quoting lengthy genealogies of the protagonist or by giving concrete evidence of their existence at one time. For instance they would give examples of relics or commemorative objects that could still be found or songs

⁷ Marc Gaborieau also observed that the tradition of folk legends was gradually dying out. Gaborieau, Marc: *Opcit*, p. 41.

of heroes and their deeds which were still sung in certain regions in their remembrance. While all such instances made the legends more plausible, the very fact of such historical traditions imparted to the amorphous masses a sense of identity, a legitimate feeling of righteousness; a very important reason for the popular appeal of the legend of heroes.

The third factor which can be postulated as important for the appeal of the legends was the manner in which they were recounted. Gaborieau has observed the particular style of enunciation and the adoption of music, dance, drama - all means to highlight the narrative. Besides these audio-visual modes of presentation the narrator himself made use of many devices to capture the attention of his audience and even the legends had their fair share of magical allusions, hyperbole and fantasy. Infact, the narrator's skill was considerably exercised in providing vivid descriptions of battle scenes, of the hero's attire etc, even while he tried to strike his audiences with wonder by giving successive turning points to one legend itself.

Having delineated the many pull factors that must have acted to attract the audiences, I turn next to the matter of these legends of heroes i.e., the ideas and images projected by the legends, that found currency among the people. What follows is a summary of some of the legends that were popular in Kumaun, with some quotations from the narrative to highlight the values and ideas incorporated in the legends. But first it is important to outline the historical context of these legends, which formed the backdrop against which these values and ideas were projected.

From what can be gleaned from the account of these legends, which cover the period from 800-1700 A.D., it seems that Kumaun during most of this period was controlled by many petty chieftains who at times were feudatories of some overlord, but mostly were independent or striving for independence. These chieftains were constantly embroiled in internecine wars over the minutest of pretexts, such as some love intrigue or rude behavior of a neighbour etc. This constant warring left the Kumauni society much marred by battle scars, the symbol of which were the many widows and the destitute children of the

deceased warriors, biding their time to take revenge. These battles called for the pooling in of all resources, the battle strength of the feudatories, the magical powers of the Brahmins and the loyalty of both men and animal. While the society was thus convulsed by the battle cries, there were increasingly a number of contraventions of the socio-economic order - all backed by the might of the dagger.

The following legends partake of the basic trade of chivalry. They have for convenience, been classified according to the broad theme of the legend, which corresponds to the main objective of the protagonist. Certain legends which incorporated two to three themes were however less amenable to such classification, but they have nevertheless been placed under one or the other category.

Rebellion

Hyunraj Mahara

Once upon a time a great warrior named Hyunraj Mahara lived in Kotligarh, with his six brothers. They were the Khaikars of the king of Champawatgarh. The king had imposed illegal cesses and once Hyunraj Mahara refused to pay them. The king took offence and attacked the Mahara's fields but was beaten back by Hyunraj Mahara. Next the king conspired with the Belwals, the family priest of the Maharas to get them exterminated. But the Maharas got the better of them too. Ultimately the mother of the Belwals gathered together her remaining clan and gave to each one a poisonous potion, that they may die rather than perish at the hands of the inferior Maharas.

"..The Maharas were a blood thirsty and ferocious race who applied human blood instead of vermillion on their foreheads... The Rajas of Champawatgarh exacted various illegal dues from the Khaikars; such as one seer of ghee per milch buffalo, one leg of each goat killed, twenty percent of the money received as bride price, taxes on disused water-mills. Hyunraj Mahara stopped these illegal dues. On this Khadak Singh, Raja of Champawatgarh, sent an ultimatum to Hyunraj Mahara ordering him either to pay the dues or to

leave Kotligorh. On reading the Raja's order the Mahara replied that the Raja could do what he liked

..When the mother of Dattu and Chandu saw that her sons had been killed, she filled a large cauldron with milk and mixed poison in it. Then she called all her family together and told them that it was much better to commit suicide than let their bodies be touched by the Mahara Khasias. They all drank the poisoned milk and died. Thus the whole line of the Belwals became extinct."⁸

Raja Brahmdeo's war against the Champawat Rajas

Dhamdeo and Brahmdeo, princes of Katyurgarh were feudatory chiefs under the kings of Champawatgarh - Thorchand and Bhagchand. The Chand kings made many illegal exactions which the katyuri princes resisted. The Chand kings were furious at this infraction and commanded Brahmdeo to give his daughter in marriage to Thorchand Katyuris, who were of a higher caste than the chands, were infuriated by the suggestion war ensued and the Chands were finally decimated. Thereafter, Dhamdeo and Brahmdeo proclaimed their independence and ruled in peace everafter.

Given below are some quotes from the narrative.

"The pedigree of Dhamdeo and Brahmdeo Princes of Katyurgarh is as follows:

Brahm Kunwar, Jot Kumar, Sat Kumar, Urni Kumar, Dham Kumar, Asanti, Basanti, Gora Sabla Rai, Milchaunri Rai, Milchauri Ujjan, whose sons were Dhamdeo and Brahmdeo..

..Owing to the various illegal exactions of the Rajas of Champawatgarh, Dhamdeo and Brahmdeo stopped their tribute and declared their independence... In order to further annoy and insult Thorchand and Bhagchand, they collected a large heap of small broken pieces of earthen pots to represent the cash presents and put them in a box. They also filled a pitcher

⁸ Oakley, E.S. ; Gairola, T.D. : opcit, p. 133-137.

with wasps and closed it to represent presents in kind and sent them to Champawatgarh..

.. They sent another letter to Brahmedeo asking him to give his daughter in marriage to Thorchand, failing which, his territory would be invaded and his fort razed to the ground. On reading the letter Dhamdeo and Brahmedeo's blood boiled with rage. They said, "How dare the Chands of Champawatgarh, who are inferior to us in social status, ask the hand of our daughter in marriage?" They replied, refusing either to pay any tribute or to give their daughter in marriage to Thorchand. They challenged the Chands to come with all their forces to a place called Jawari Sera and fight against them.

..The whole valley of Jawari was covered with the enemy's army, and looked as white as the frost in winter on guiral trees in full bloom in spring .. The women of Katyur began to weep and cry like the Meluri bird;....⁹

Kunji Pal and Kirti Pal

Once upon a time when Guru Gyanchand was the king of Champawatgarh, his brothers Thorchand and Trimal Chand imposed many illegal dues on the peasantry of Chauras Pattis. The latter ultimately revolted one day under the leadership of Kunji Pal of Thati Silakot and stopped all payment of the illegal taxes. Upon this Guru Gyanchand attached Kunji Pal to bring him to book but Kunji Pal resisted bravely. When Kunji Pal asked his brother Kirti Pal for help, the latter declined and Kunji Pal had to fight the enemy single handed. Kunji Pal in his turn always helped his brother, despite the latter's selfish behaviour and there are several instances of this in the legend. Once Guru Gyanchand called upon Kunji Pal to subdue the recalcitrant tenants of Kumoli village in the Doon, in return for which he promised to give his daughter in marriage to Kunji Pal's son. Kunji Pal did what his overlord wanted but Guru Gyanchand went back on his word when it came to giving away his daughter. Instead Guru Gyanchand worked upon a ploy and employed Kirti Pal himself to kill his own brother Kunji Pal. Kunji Pal's wife, Gangamala was reduced to utter destitution;

⁹
ibid, p. 144-146.

she gave birth to a son posthumously whom she named Khetrapal. Khetrapal grew up in the forest and from the very beginning performed portentous feats. When he was twelve years of age he asked his mother the whereabouts of his father. Gangamala recounted her tragic tale, upon which Khetrapal resolved to take revenge. He was blessed in his attempt by some godmen who gave him magical objects to beat his enemy with. Khetrapal used these and was able to wreak revenge on Guru Gyanchand as well as his uncle Kirti Pal and married Lilavati in the end.

The following are some excerpts from the narrative.

"...Kunji Pal was a great hero and called all the Khaikars together and resolved to stop payment of all such illegal taxes....

... Kunji Pal was a great warrior. His breast was six cubits broad, his feet were one and a quarter cubits in length, his head alone weighed five maunds. On reading the Raja's letter his blood boiled with rage. The hair on his arms stood on end and the strings of his coat burst asunder...

...Kunji Pal ..., putting on his armour, rushed into the midst of the army of Gyanchand and mowed down the whole army with his shining dagger.. The battle field was covered with corpses and streams of blood flowed....

..Kunji Pal killed twelve thousand men of the enemy with his dagger..

..On hearing this Gyanchand shook with rage. He called his brothers and courtiers and said that the marriage of their daughter to Kunji Pal's son, their Khaikar, would be a great disgrace to their family.

..Kunji Pal had greater regard for his brother's life than even for his own.

In the meantime Kunji Pal's wife, Gangamala, was delivered of a male child in the mountain cave. The baby was a giant. His back was one cubit broad.

There Guru Gorakh Nath and the other nine Sidhas appeared before him, and, taking pity on him, gave him a magical coat, called *jhar jhar khanta*, and a

flute, saying that, by putting on the robe, the wearer would become invisible, and, by playing or the flute, his enemy would dance to death. They blessed Khetrapal and disappeared.

..Khetrapal then asked Gyanchand to give back his father's head to him. As soon as Kunji Pal's head was dug up, it flew up in the sky and immediately bullets showered down on Gyanchand's palace, destroying it completely and killing all the inmates..."¹⁰

2. Vendetta

Baghdeo the warrior

Once upon a time a great Prince Koku Rawat of Kokukot, had seven queens but no male issue. Koku therefore married for the eighth time, one Kunjawati in the hope of begetting a son from her. When Kunjawati was with child, she asked her husband to procure her some venison. With much difficulty when Koku did spot a deer in the forests, that deer too escaped and took shelter on the lap of one Gauria Gangola of Gangolihat. When Koku pleaded, Gauria refused to part with the deer a fight ensued and Koku Rawat was killed. Thus Ransura Bhagdeo born posthumously to Kunjawati must avenge the death of his father. The following are some excerpts from the legend.

"..In due course Kunjawati was with child. In the ninth month of her pregnancy she felt a craving for deer's flesh and requested Koku to procure it for her. Koku Rawat offered to provide her with the flesh of goats, fish, and fowls; but the Rani wanted venison only..

..At Gangoli Hat their lived a great warrior by name Gauria, who was eighty years old and had seven sons and fourteen daughters. His dagger weighed nine maunds. He had a hemp rope a hundred cubits long girded round his waist. The deer ran and sat on the lap of Gauria Gangola...He said he would rather give his own son in exchange for the deer...

¹⁰ *ibid*, p. 105-118.

...Kunjawati was with child when her husband died. In due course she was delivered of a son of unusual beauty and strength. His eyes shone like a diamond. He had long shapely arms and legs and was as strong as a buffalo. He was most precocious in growth and people predicted a great future for him. He was named Ransura Bhagdeo..

..On hearing it Bhagdeo was full of rage and broke nine stools on which he sat, one after another. The house shook. He asked his mother's permission to go and fight with the enemy...

...On hearing this Champhu fell at Bhagdeo's feet and said, "Sir, I am your family bard. I accompanied your father during his war against Gangolas. After his death I was made a prisoner of war by the enemy. The Gangolas also captured your father's war-horse and hounds. I am now at your service. You should first get back the horse and the hounds. Then only will you be able to defeat the enemy." Champhu then took Bhagdeo to Gauria's stables where the horse was tied. The horse at once recognized its old master and became quite tame. Bhagdeo also seized the hounds. The dogs also recognized Bhagdeo and began to lick his hands. Then Champhu gave Bhagdeo his father's sword and other arms, which had also been captured by Gauria.."11

3. Rectification

In these legends, the hero's aim is to rectify some wrong eg: Hansa Kunwar rectified the wrong done to him by Trimal Chand or Supia Rawat who would not stop from punishing his own mother from the destruction she wrought on the family or the Belwals of Belihat who abduct the wife of another man and have to pay for it with their lives.

Hansa Kunwar

Once upon a time a prince named Jhalu Rai ruled in Khimsari Hat. He had seven sons. Once there was a famine in Khimsari Hat and as a result Jhalu

11. *ibid.*, p. 63-68.

Rai's family was reduced to destitution. One of his sons Hansa Kunwar had been betrothed to Saru the daughter of Trimal Chand, but Trimal Chand on seeing their depreaved state tried to avoid the marriage between his daughter and Hansa Kunwar. Instead he made a ploy to kill all of Jhalu Rai's sons. He called one Ghoga, warrior of Biral Nagar to accomplish the task and promised to give him his daughter in marriage instead. At the same time he told Hansa Kunwar that Ghoga was planning to elope with Saru, and that Hansa Kunwar would have to give him battle to prevent him from doing so. A great fight followed in which all were killed and Saru became Sati.

"When Trimal Chand saw the House of Khimsari Hat reduced to such extreme poverty, he hit upon a plan to avoid the marriage of his daughter to Hansa Kunwar. He wrote a letter to Ghoga, the warrior of Biral Nagar, in which he said that he would give his daughter in marriage to him if he killed the seven sons of Jhalu Rai, who wanted to carry her away by force, and also promised him a big jagir. At the same time he also wrote another letter to Hansa Kunwar to the effect that Ghoga was about to elope with his daughter Saru, who had been betrothed to him (Hansa), and that he should come and fight against Ghoga....

...The earth shook like an earthquake when Hansa Kunwar fell on the ground.

...When Saru recovered her senses, she prayed to Hati Kunwar to let her become Sati with her lord Hansa Kunwar. Hati Kunwar prepared a funeral pyre. Saru mounted it and, placing Hansa's corpse on her lap, was burnt to ashes..."¹²

Ranu Rawat and Supia Rawat

The Airwals revolted against the king of Srinagar owing to the latter's illegal exactions. The king called upon one of his feudatories Hinwa Rawat of Kulawalikot to subdue the Airwals. Both Hinwa and son Bhinwa gave the

¹² ...ibid, p: 89-92.

rebels a tough fight but were treacherously killed in the end. Thereafter Mainawati, wife of Bhinwa, commanded her twelve years old son Ranu Rawat to avenge the death of his forefathers. Ranu did so successfully. But fate had more travails in store for him. In his absence, his wife Bimla had developed an illicit relationship with his cousin Jhankru. When Ranu took her to task for it, the unabashed women taunted him for having also abandoned his first wife to whom he had been betrothed by his parents when still unborn. The hero thus discomfitted set out to amend the wrong committed albeit inadvertently to his first wife Sushila. He had to fight a battle with the girl's father and prospective husband and though triumphant he too was killed in the battle. Later a son was born to Bimla. He was named Supia Rawat. Supia took upon himself to avenge the death of his father and his hand did not stop to raise even on his own mother the root cause of all the trouble, but he was stayed by his grandmother Mainawati from doing so.

"..Mainawati, wife of Bhanwa, was a great heroin and bore the calamity with fortitude and vowed to revenge the death of her father-in-law and husband... Mainawati called her son and said, "Dear Ranu, thy father and grandfather have been killed by the enemy. Thou art a worthy son of a worthy father. Go and revenge thy forefather's death. Thou hast descended from a long line of warriors. Thou hast sucked the milk which can break through even an iron plate. Surely thou canst kill the enemy. Fear not, go and fight, and vindicate the honour of thy family." So saying, she pressed her breast and caused a stream of her milk to flow with such force that it made a hole in a thick iron plate. Ranu mustered courage and obeyed.

...a big battle ensued which lasted for nine days and nine nights. Ranu mowed down the army of the Airwals with his sword like figs. While Ranu was fighting against the enemy Champhu Hurkea was singing songs in praise of his master in order to cheer him. After killing the whole army of the Airwals, Ranu marched into their village and killed all the inhabitants there of. The Airwals had buried the heads of Hinwa and Bhinwa in a drain under the staircase of their house. Ranu dug up the heads and brought them home in a triumphant procession...

...On reaching home he went to his mother Bimla and said, "O thou wretched old hag, thou hast been the cause of the ruin of our family. The only punishment suitable for thy foul deed is death. " So saying Supia drew his sword to kill her. But, Mainawati stopped him and said that it was a great sin to kill one's own mother, however wicked she might be. Supia was thus persuaded to spare Bimla."¹³

Belwals of Belihat

"...Once a great calamity befell the Belwals of Belihat. They sowed grain which produced nothing but husk. Their families gave birth to daughters only; their she - buffaloes bore bull calve; their goats, he-goats, their cows gave birth to bulls...

The Belwals were very perturbed by all this and when they consulted their astrologer as to the cause of their misfortune, they were told that it was due to the wrath of Badrinath and were recommended a pilgrimage to the shrine straightaway. While on their way to the shrine, the Belwals saw and were captivated by one Jusyani, wife of Chhotu Budera. They forced themselves upon her and dragged her with themselves to their home thus relinquishing their pilgrimage. They would not be stayed even by the counsels of their old mother and as a result had to pay for their misdeed with their lives even as they were killed by Chhotu Budera Chhotu Budera in turn was killed by Dhamdeo and Brahmddeo, Rajas of Katyargarh, who were appealed to, by the widows of Belwal brothers to act thus.¹⁴

4. Contests or Trials of Stength

Chhapila Hyunr

This legend relates the bravado of Chhapila Hyunr. Once upon a time a Prince named Chhapila Hyunr ruled at Ujjain Nagari. He sent out challenges to

¹³ ibid, p. 157-166.

¹⁴ ibid, p. 148-150. —

all the Princes far and near for a trial of strength, a great warrior, Rudri Kathait of Bamsu Bangar was also amongst them. Chhapila first challenged Rudri Kathait to fight with him.

"A great battle ensued between them lasting for 7 days. On the seventh day Chhapila flew up in the clouds, came down upon Rudri and cut off all his limbs with his dagger. Rudri fell on the ground; but soon recovered himself and shot an arrow at Chhapila, which pierced his heart.."

Rudri's son Udi on coming of age sought to avenge the murder of his father, but was also killed in the attempt, by Chhapila Hyunr. Thereafter, a brahmin from Udi's army offered his services as charioteer to Chhapila Hyunr and once when the latter was unarmed, the brahmin taunted him. This led to a battle between them, and though the brahmin defeated Chhapila Hyunr, ultimately Chhapila Hyunr got the better of him, killing him before he expired himself.¹⁵

Ajwa Bampla

Once upon a time four wrestlers challenged Guru Gyan Chand - Raja of Champawatgarh for a trial of strength. Mani Padyar an old warrior was sent for to give the wrestlers a fight, but the latter killed him.

"Mani Padyar was eighty years of age. His hump touched the heavens; while his belly reached the nether regions... Mani Padyar smoked his *huqqa* which weighed nine mound. He tied round his waist nine mounds of roasted flour (*satu*) and the same quantity of tobacco for his journey. He tied wooden planks on the back and front part of his body in order to keep it straight. He put on his armour.. His wife began to weep. he consoled her and said that heroes and he -goats were born to die an early death...

...Mani Padyar told the Raja to stop the rations of the four Pahlwans. When their rations were discontinued the Pahlwans became wild with rage.

¹⁵ *ibid*, p. 151-152.

They threw away their caps; Their top knots began to wave in the air; and they ground pebbles with their teeth in rage. They threatend to raze the whole of Champawatgarh to dust.....

All the four Pahlwans attacked Mani Padyar. Mani Padyar fought against them single - handed for six days and six nights. At last he fell on the ground like a huge log of sandalwood and died."

Next, Salu and Malu of Bawalikot were sent for. They were only twelve years of age; they too were killed by the wrestlers. Their wife Dudukela gave birth to a son Ajwa Bampla posthumously. She feared that her son might meet a fate, similar to that of her two husbands and therefore sought to get rid of him. Ajwa Bampla was a child prodigy and when twelve years of age, fought the four wrestlers and defeated them. He, however, became victim of a court conspiracy and Guru Gyan Chand got rid of him. But soon enough when once again plagued by notorius elements, Gurū Gyan Chand was forced to recall Ajwa Bampla.

"The baby, who was a born hero, first lived upon the leaves of the nettle, when he had eaten up all the leaves he began to eat its stem; and when he had finished the stems be dug up its roots and lived upon them till he was six months old..

When Ajwa was six years of age... He would bring from the jungle loads of grass and fuel which even six grown up men could not lift. He would bring home live stags and deer and jump over poles a hundred feet high. When Ajwa was twelve years old he once returned from the jungle riding an a big tiger.

"Her husband's blue-eared war-horse had became wild since his master's death.. he found the horse in the jungle. The horse, recognizing his former master's son, shed tears of joy...."¹⁶

¹⁶ *ibid*, p. 126-132.

5. Romantic Legends

Malu Sahi and Rajula

After a great deal of prayer and piety a son was born to Raja Dham Sahi of Katyurgarh. At the same time a daughter was also born to Raja Saunpati Sonk of Saunkot. Dham Sahi's son was named Malu Sahi and Saunpati Sonk's daughter, Rajula. On coming of age Malu Sahi was wedded to two princesses. Rajula was also to be married to one Guna Pal, Prince of Jalander. But as providence would have it, Rajula and Malu Sahi were visited by each other in their dreams and thus being completely besotted with each other they resolved to have each other. Malu Sahi was after many trying incidents, able to get Rajula.

Kala Bhandari

Kala Bhandari sees in his dream the beautiful Udaimala daughter of Dhamdeo who lives in Kalnikot. Kala Bhandari instantly falls in love with her and despite the remonstrances of his parents sets out to look for her. The two, Kala and Udaimala instantly fall for each other and live together in concealment for some days. When Kala Bhandari asks Dhamdeo for the hand of Udaimala, Dhamdeo asks of him a certain sum as bride price. Kala Bhandari soon enough gets an opportunity to earn the money to be paid as bride price. The Raja of Champawat is challenged by four warriors to a trial of strength. Kala Bhandari is called to fight them and when victorious is suitably rewarded. But by when Kala reaches Dhamdeo the bride price, Dhamdeo has already promised Udaimala to one Rupu Gangsara who had conferred rich gifts and money on him. Udaimala communicates to Kala her plight through his dream. Ultimately Kala is able to save her, but himself dies. Udaimala commits Sati.

Sumeru Rautela and Rani Surma

Once upon a time there lived two brothers Badal and Chand of Chandikot. Neither had any issue. At long last when one of Badal's wives conceived and in such a state asked for venison the two brothers could not refuse. While on their

expedition, the two brothers once got embroiled with one Dewan and were killed by him. Kunjawati was soon delivered of a son-Sumeru - who the astrologers divined, would have to be married within five days, if he was to survive. Rani Surma, then twelve years of age was brought to marry him. Rani Surma had scarcely got over her shock of being married to an infant, when she was carried away by the villainous Dewan who intended to marry her himself. But Surma kept him at arms length by swearing celibacy for twelve years. When Sumeru was about twelve years he inquired about her whereabouts and upon being told about it set out to retrieve her.

The story builds through a series of intractable situations eg: The Rani's request for venison; the compulsion of holding Sumeru's wedding on the fifth day from his birth; Surma's pledge of celibacy, to convey the twist of faith.

Asa Rawat

Asa Rawat was a great warrior from Bhopatikot. Once his village was visited by a great famine; Asa Rawat, in order to save his family from the misery of starving to death, called upon all of them to commit suicide by taking poison. Only one wife was allowed to live for she was with child. She soon gave birth to a bonny boy and called him Bhana Rawat. Bhana Rawat was a child prodigy and performed many feats of strength. Later he ventured abroad in search of employment. He saw and fell in love with Saru, the daughter of Dharni Kaluni of Kalunikot. But Saru had already been betrothed to Butela; thus the hero had to overcome this obstacle before he could unite with his beloved. Even while the hero succeeded in his attempt, he himself got killed and Saru committed Sati.

6. Legends about Heroic Women

Brahma Deo and Birma Dotiali

Brahmdeo, ruler of Katyargarh was betrothed to Birma Dotiali, daughter of Iswaru, the Dotiyal chief of Dotigarh, when just a child. When Brahmdeo's father Gambhirdeo was about to die, he got his son married to Bijora instead. Bijora bore him seven daughters, but no son. At Doti, Birma Dotiali became of marriageable age and her marriage was fixed to Khadag Singh of

Champawatgarh. Birma communicated to Brahmdeo to come and take her away. Brahmdeo was a great magician and his craft came very handy in Doti which was the land of magic. Even while he fled with Birma, he was given a chase by Prince Khadag Singh and his father Raja Nirmal Chand of Champawatgarh. Ultimately the seven daughters of Brahmdeo came to his rescue and while giving the enemy a tough battle, perished themselves. Brahmdeo performed the funeral rites of his daughters and their heroic deeds became legendary in Katyurgarh.

"Raja Brahmdeo was anxious to get a son to continue his line, as the daughters were like a fruit without seeds...

When his seven daughters saw the enemy approaching, they went to their father and urged him to go and fight against the enemy. But Brahmdeo expressed his inability to fight, taunted them and said, "If I had only one son, instead of you seven daughters, he would go and fight the enemy and save my honour." His daughters felt much humiliated and consoled their father and begged his leave to go and fight the enemy...

Then they requested their father to give them soliders' uniforms to wear...

The Routelis drew their swords and rushed into the army of the enemy and began to cut off their heads like so many plantain trees. The ground was covered with the dead bodies of the enemy and streams of blood flowed..."¹⁷

Raja Pritamdeo

Raja Pritamdeo of Katyurgarh was very old and yet issueless. On the advice of his nephew, he proposed to Amardeo Pundir of Mayapur Hat for the hand of his seven year old daughter Moladei. Not only was the proposal preposterous due to the tremendous differences in age but was inconcievable due to the lower status of Katyuris than the Pundirs. The marriage, however, did take place on threat of force. On one occassion the child bride taunted the groom about

¹⁷ ...ibid, p. 138-143...

his old age, on another occasion Pritamdeo asked her to return to her father's house to conceive. Moladei took offence and instead set off on a pilgrimage where she prayed for and was blessed with a son. The legend then recounts many incidents to emphasise her chaste character. She finally returned to Katyur and though Pritamdeo accepted her and her son Dula Dhamdeo, but the other queens continuously instigated the king against them. In the end, however, Dula Dhamdeo stood vindicated and ascended the throne.

"The god was pleased with her and caused the ray of the sun to penetrate her womb, by the heat of which she became pregnant. In due course, a son of extraordinary beauty and strength was born to her, who was named Dula Dhamdeo..

The fisherman took Bhaga to Nagni Ghat. There he saw Moladevi bathing in the river and was charmed by her beauty...On seeing the men, Moladei was much frightened and prayed to her family goddess to save her honour".¹⁸

7. Other Miscellaneous Legends

Jag Deo Panwar (Katyuri)

This legend relates how the worship of Goddess Mahakali came to be instituted in Dharanagiri. Once upon a time, Jag Deo Panwar and Jai Singh Panwar, two cousins ruled over Dharanagiri. While Jag Deo Panwar was very generous, Jai Singh Panwar was a great miser. Once Mahakali visited their kingdom in the guise of a beggar to beg alms on behalf of her father. Her father Chanchu Bhat of Malsigarh had lamented that he had no sons who could so beg for him, therefore Mahakali had taken it upon herself to do so. When Mahakali went to Jai Singh Panwar, he made a great show of poverty and did not part with a farthing, but Jag Deo Panwar even offered her his own head. The goddess incarnate was pleased with his sacrifice and while she restored Jag Deo Panwar back to life, she cursed Jai Singh Panwar. Jag Deo Panwar by deed, engraved upon a copper plate, dedicated half of his territory for the

¹⁸ ibid; p. 121-126.

worship of Mahakali. This copper plate was said to still exist, thus immortalising Jagdeo's name.¹⁹

Panchu Thag

Panchu Thag was a highway robber who thrived on harrasing the inhabitants of village Bamora. Once, one Musa Saun was born in village Kailadhukri, who from childhood performed many feats of strength. Musa Saun on coming of age resolved to kill Panchu Thag and setting rest all the apprehension of his mother by demonstrating to her his strength, he set out to achieve his goal. It took the hero both strength and intelligence to beat Panchu Thag. Ultimately the hero returned triumphant and surprised the village which had been in mourning over him.²⁰

Ramolla

The Ramolla legend was more in the nature of an epic, which combined in it many episodes, but Gairola gives only three tales connected with this legend. The Ramolla were the legendary musicians and magicians believed to have lived in Garhwal. They at times were allied to and at times against Lord Krishna and his brothers Brahma Kunwar and Sarju Kumar. The head of the Ramolla family was Gangu Ramolla, who was first an enemy of Krishna but finally acknowledged him as his overlord.

Gangu of Ramolihat was very affluent but at the same time very sceptical about religion and the merits obtaining therefrom. Once Lord Krishna decided to teach him a lesson and therefore reduced him to absolute penury and helplessness. But Gangu Ramolla did not relent. The God then demonstrated his omnipotence through a series of miracles, till at last Gangu was forced to concede the presence of God. Gangu then honoured the God by building a number of temples in his name. The god inturn restored Gangu to his former estate and blessed him with two sons Sidwa and Bidwa.²¹

19 *ibid*, p. 118-121.

20 *ibid*, p. 59-63.

21 *ibid*, p. 95-99.

The legend further recounts how Sidwa and Bidwa having lost their mother were brought up by a Yogi. The Yogi sent them to Bengal to learn the art of magic and Sidwa and Bidwa became the most powerful magicians in the world. As such they were often summoned by the Krishna family to render help in time of difficulty.

On one such occasion, Krishna wanted to marry the beautiful Jotramala daughter of Sonpal, the ruler of Tibet, the land of magic. Krishna then summoned Sidwa to accompany his brother Surju Kunwar to Tibet to fetch Jotramala for him. The expedition encountered many hazards on their way, some of them such as the seven witches who converted Surju into a spotted ram, or the fairies who carried Surju away to their abode, or the one footed men who gave them battle, or even the sisters of Jotramala who poisoned Surju Kunwar. But the duo were able to overcome all such obstacles by the help of magic and were able to bring back Jotramala for Krishna.²²

On another occasion Krishna desired to marry Moti Mala, the princess of Tibet and obtain the special dice which she possessed. He, therefore, asked his brother Brahma Kunwar to fetch her for him. But Brahma Kunwar was outwitted by Motimala. Finally Krishna had to summon Bidwa to rescue Brahma Kunwar and bring back Motimala for him. This legend is once again replete with magical allusions and fantasy.²³

All these legends can be studied for the values and ideas of the people of Kumaun in the 19th century, through the medium of the hero and the villain, archetypes of the cherished and the undesired, who manifest the advantages and dangers to the Kumauni society respectively. To begin with, the hero, is inevitably one who is victorious over some malevolent force or the other and so far as such a hero is admired by the audience, thus far he represents their desire for triumph over similar forces. The first instance is of the hero as a rebel. As such he rebels against exploitation by the kings, mainly in the form of illegal

²² *ibid*, p. 42-47.

²³ *ibid*, p. 79-83.

cesses imposed upon the people. Thus Hyunraj Mahara rebelled against the king of Champawatgarh; Brahmdeo rebelled against Thorchand and Bhagchand, the king of Champawatgarh; Kunji Pal revolted against Guru Gyanchand- all due to similar excesses committed by the king. The kings are mostly represented as autocratic, arbitrary, and infact even as devious, as turncoats and as easily led. For instance other than the arbitrary imposition of illegal taxes, the kings became deliberate offenders against rules of caste hierarchy even as they forced their feudatories of higher ritual status to give to them their daughters in marriage. eg: Thorchand asked for Brahmdeo's daughter on the threat of using force. Likewise Pritamdeo asked for Pundir's daughter who was not only of a ritually higher status but also much younger to Pritamdeo Katyur. Further the kings were often shown as turncoats and as retracting on their words, eg; Guru Gyanchand promised to give his daughter -Leelavati in marriage to Kunji Pal's son in return for service rendered by Kunji Pal; however later Guru Gyanchand not only went back on his promise but even had Kunji Pal murdered treacherously. Likewise Trimal Chand is represented as an evil king, who on seeing the indigent condition of Hansa Kunwar refused to even recognize him as his daughter's husband. The king is also represented as easily led, as when Gyanchand got rid of Ajwa Bampla despite his merit, only due to hearsay. Even as the king was endowed with all such negative attributes, it showed that the popular mind had no particular deference for authority. However, at the same time the hero is also shown as the pillar behind law and order and administrative stability. For instance the hero chieftains often went to the aid of their overlord in quelling refractory elements in one or the other part of the kingdom. Thus Hinwa and Bhinwa Rawat went to suppress the Airwals of Doon; Kunji Pal who had himself rebelled against Guru Gyanchand later came to his overlords help to suppress the recalcitrant peasants of Kumoli village in Doon who were guilty of only a similar offence. The hero is also often represented as fighting notorious elements who threatend the kingdom. Thus Mani Padyar, Salu and Malu Negi and Ajwa Bampla come to the assistance of the authorities to subdue such elements. Shekhar Pathak and Girish Tiwari saw such notorious elements as symbolic of the leaders of the contemporary factions who were forever conspiring to get hold of the reins of the administration, that

they may better exploit the kingdom and its people. In the edition that they subscribe to, Ajwa Bampla is shown as an enlightened hero who is always at vigil against an oppressive administration complicated by the selfish policies and intrigues of the administrators. However Ajwa himself is also an administrator and thus far represents opposition from within the administrative structures²⁴. At other times the hero is seen as suppressing brigandage, just like when Musa suppresses Panchu Thag. Thus the people were mostly sceptical about the Authority; they had to however concede the necessity of its existence. And the hero too was at once anti authority and at once akin to authority.

The second stereotype of the hero is of one who has suffered adversely at the hands of compatriots but who is subsequently vindicated. Thus the often repeated image of the hero as one who has had to live in extremely indigent and at times inimical conditions, tucked away in deep forests or cave dwellings or has had to live on the mercy of unkind relatives who never cease to taunt him about his parentage. But ultimately the hero triumphs not only over his circumstances, but is also able to vindicate the honour of his family. There is every likelihood that in the hero's triumph the people sought reassurance against the immorality of their own times, against infidelity, treachery, victimization and the like. Thus Khetrapal, a denizen of the forest later stakes his claim to his rightful share and to Leelavati after killing her father Guru Gyanchand and his uncle Kirti Pal who had treacherously killed his father Kunji Pal. Also Supia Rawat kills all those who had wronged his father Ranu Rawat and does not stop even to kill his own mother Bimla, who had been disloyal to her husband. Bhagdeo likewise sought to kill Gauria Gangola who had unjustly killed his father Koku Rawat. Chhotu Budera kills all the Belwals who had forcibly abducted his wife.

The third stereotype of the hero is of the romantic type and so far as love triumphed over barriers of caste, and of bride price, of child marriage, it symbolized the audiences desire for release from similar constraints and for greater realization of one's self. Thus Malu Shahi from the class of the ruling

²⁴ Tiwari, Girish; Pathak, Sheker: opcit, p. 33-34.

elite falls in love with Rajula, the daughter of a wandering merchant and flock owner; Kala Bhandari handicapped by his inability to satisfy the demand of his father-in-law to be, for bride price, gets the better of him by murdering Udaimala's groom and achieving his own union with her. Similarly Bhana Rawat kills the man to whom Saru had been betrothed as a child, to enable his own union with her. The hero may have or may not have eventually succeeded, but so far as he tried he represented wishful thinking on the part of the audience too. Yet on the other hand these very legends espouse the very same social institutions, even as they show the adult hero as honouring his marriage vows taken as a child, at any cost; or when they espouse the institution of caste. Infact very often honour or self worth is related to the defence of these institutions. Thus Ranu Rawat seeks Sushila out, to whom he had been betrothed even before birth or Hansa Kunwar who embraces death in his attempt to retrieve his childhood bride Saru. Likewise caste too was a matter of honour and any aspersions on one's caste were met with severe retaliation. Thus Chhapila Hyunr even when dying reaches out to strike a blow at the Brahmin Naithani who had taunted him about his Kshatriya status. The mother of Belwals likewise calls upon her entire clan to commit suicide rather than perish at the hands of the inferior Maharas. There is also the often repeated image of fathers who were willing to lay down their lives rather than give their daughters in marriage to men of inferior castes. Thus it can be postulated from the above motifs, that even while the people saw stability in the age old traditions there was a growing desire to be disencumbered from its constraints.

There is yet another motif of the hero, that of the woman hero. The unusual image of the women who rise above their station to take on the garb of warriors is exemplified in the legend of the seven daughters of Brahmdeo Katyur who fought to defend their father who had all the while been grieving for the lack of a son. Likewise there is the image of Moladej who even when she bears a child out of wedlock, bears it from a much superior Divine source and that too without transgressing her chastity. All such images reflect the desire of women to break out of their typeset and for release from repressive notions of morality.

Thus far then the hero and the villain reflect the desires of the people

themselves. Other than the main theme however there were similar motifs in the subthemes of the legends, which again reflected on the popular values and ideas in as much as they exercised their thoughts and emotions.

Proverb

So far we have seen how the legends of heroes which were popularly heard by the hill men reflected some of their own ideas and values. Proverbs on the other hand were short witty sayings, words which men spoke in response to their environment. In the near absence of literacy, these constituted their only learning, their wisdom, with which they expressed their reckoning of life around them. Thus far therefore the Proverbs constitute an important source for the study of their ideas and attitudes.

The following proverbs have been taken from the collection made by Pandit G.D. Upreti in the course of long years spent in different and remote parts of Kumaun and Garhwal in the last quarter of the 19th century. Possessing a keen appreciation of their significance, Upreti attempted to gather the proverbs and maxims from the very lips of the people themselves, 'from old men of respectability and knowledge'. Moreover being a Kumauni himself he was well equipped to translate these for the general reader without losing their original nuances. His collection of proverbs can therefore be taken as fairly well representative of 19th century Kumaun. These proverbs, as far as they incorporate categories of people and of objects from the all to familiar environment, as symbols to indicate certain ideas, thus far, they are useful to the study of values and attitudes of Kumaunis in the 19th century.

Quite apart from the normative structure of any society, there are innumerable undercurrents that illuminate the actual dynamics of that society. Proverbs are one means that enable a closer look at such social undercurrents, at the multifarious urges that kept the society agog with anxiety. And even as people made a jibe at each other they inadvertently revealed the standards they had set for themselves. But more than that these antagonisms pointed to the restiveness of a people who could well do with some social transformation.

From the profusion of proverbs, certain stereotypes can be isolated. These stereotypes have here been analysed for the attitude the people had towards the different social groups and for standards implied therein for themselves and for the popular motives behind such insinuations as well.

Proverbs related to Brahmins

The Kumauni society in the 19th century was constituted of a number of binary opposites. On the one hand were the *Bith*, who as clean castes were counterposed to the Dom or unclean castes. On the other hand even among the Bith, there were the *Thuljat* or immigrant castes who were not only counterposed but ranked higher as a whole to the Khasas or the indigenes. Even along such lines of distinction there was a commensurate distribution of power and privilege. Thus while the immigrants - the Brahmins and Kshatriyas, had through the centuries strengthened their hold over all sources of power and privilege, the Khasiyas had been relegated to the subordinate position of cultivator and labour class, while the Dom or outcastes remained beyond the pale. From such basic social cleavages stemmed the attitudes of the different social categories towards each other. To begin with how did the majority of the people who were also the Khasiyas view the Brahmins.

Proverb: Whatever the Pant says, do it; but do not do what he does.²⁵

The Pants were one caste amongst the immigrant Brahmins, who were not only ritually most superior but also very powerful. As such even while they could do as they pleased, the ordinary peasant had to obey their command. In as much as it represented the truth the proverb incorporated popular resentment against the powerful Pants. Among the Brahmins were also the priestly class who often became objects of popular derision due to their parasitic disposition.

Proverb: The Saradha commenced, the Brahmans awoke,
The Saradhas ended, the Brahmans became lean²⁶

²⁵ Upreti, G.D. : Proverbs and Folklore of Kumaun and Garhwal, p. 390.

²⁶ *ibid*, p. 255.

Proverb: At the approach of Kanyagata ... when the kansa grass begins to flower, the Brahmins leap with joy nine bamboos.²⁷

The priestly class of Brahmins who rendered no useful service to society other than ministering during religious ceremonies, nevertheless enjoyed greater prestige than the ordinary villagers only on account of their ritual superiority. Infact, they were a depraved lot much habituated to live off the people. The higher regard shown them was therefore quite unpalatable to the rustic villagers, who therefore ridiculed them as greedy and grasping. The proverbs show how the approach of *Kanyagata* or the sixteen days of *shraddh*, were eagerly awaited by the Brahmins who hoped to be feasted and given alms by those wishing for bliss for their dead ancestors. However with the *shraddhs* over, the Brahmins reverted back to their mean condition. There is yet another proverb which contrasts their penurious state to that of the affluent state of Rajputs.

Proverb: Starving where Brahmins (reside),
Everything to be had where Rajputs (reside).²⁸

Brahmins were very lazy and had to perforce live on begging whereas the Rajputs, were very industrious and had every necessity in their homes, available at all times. Thus if one was to take refuge in a village settled by Brahmins alone, one was sure to starve there, however if one took refuge in a village of Rajputs, one was sure to be comfortable. The Brahmins were further typecast as extremely narrow minded and too bigoted for their own good. An instance of this was often quoted as a warning against similar divisiveness.

Proverb: Eight Brahmins of the village of Patiya, but nine ovens.²⁹

The maxim derived from the tale of eight Brahmin kinsmen of the village of Patiya in Kumaun, who once set off on a journey accompanied by their Khasiya *coolie*. Now each of the Brahmin was so fastidious about the norms of

27 *ibid*, p. 252.

28 *ibid*, p. 233.

29 *ibid*, p. 46.

cleanliness and purity, that at the first resting place each began to cook his food separately. At this the Khasiya coolie, who might have otherwise accepted food from a Brahmin, became suspicious about their purity and therefore built himself a separate oven.

Thus the Brahmins were seen as arbitrary, as bigoted and as avaricious, all attributes which were quite disquietening for the ordinary people. At the same time there was no denial of their stature. Does the popular derision of the class of Brahmins, not point to a veiled urge for similar rewards?

Proverbs related to the Doms or outcastes

If the Brahmins were at one end of the purity - impurity continuum, the Doms were at the other. Thus as much as the Brahmins enjoyed high social status, thus much the Doms were held in contempt what was ironical was that the Doms performed all the 'menial' services for all of society and yet the entire society ranged themselves against these social outcastes. This attitude of revulsion towards the Doms becomes evident from the proverbs.

Proverb: A caste woman lays her hand upon a Duma (low caste man)³⁰

Proverb: To eat one's own food, after it has been touched by a dum³¹

Proverb: The peculiar smell of a Dom and a he-goat never dies out³²

These proverbs were used to lash at the awkward mistakes or predicament from which there was no escape and these were therefore likened to the defiling touch of a Dom. Further the Dom was believed to constantly exude a peculiar odour; this was used as a symbol of the evil propensities of mean people which likewise never abated.

The Doms were not only thus confined beyond the pale, they were further made objects of popular caricature. They were represented as proud, as

30 *ibid.*, p. 291.

31 *ibid.*, p. 270.

32 *ibid.*, p. 232.

flaunting, as lethargic, as greedy and as ever eager to associate with the cleaner castes.

Proverb: The Dumani (female Dom) worth a quarter of pice has the pride of two pice.³³

Proverb: Neither on the ground, nor in a vessel, but in the head of a Duma³⁴

Proverb: A very proud Duma who goes beyond the limits of his caste puts salt in the rice milk (ie. instead of sugar)³⁵

The Doms were thus represented as swollen headed, who often because of their pretensions ended up doing awkward things, and were thus used as symbols to warn against like conceit. The Doms were further represented as extremely lethargic and as unduly demanding more than what was due to them. Infact this propensity of theirs was used to caution against any kindness shown to them or people like them.

Proverb: The Duma will neither plough nor manure the fields, but at dinner time is envious.³⁶

Proverb: The Dom employed to castrate a steer demands a castrated steer as wages and wants something to pay for his tools as well ³⁷

ie. he wants wages exceeding the cost of job done.

Proverb: If you are kind to a Dumani, she will take the oppurtunity to ask for salt³⁸

And yet despite their menial plight the Doms were represented as forever craving for association with the Biths, so much so that even an injury done to them by a Bitha was welcomed by them, so long as it defiled the Bitha too.

33 *ibid*, p. 248.

34 *ibid*, p. 251.

35 *ibid*, p. 248.

36 *ibid*, p. 182.

37 *ibid*, p. 411.

38 *ibid*, p. 125.

Proverb: The Dum's vessel says " When shall I go to the dwellings of the Bithas?"³⁹

There were yet other proverbs which indicated how the society exploited the Doms.

Proverb: O, Duma I shall keep you if you do not commit theft or adultery.⁴⁰

The Doms had no doubt been typecast as great scoundrels, yet they were a useful lot and especially to the agriculturists. They could be had for ploughing, for tillage, for making and sharpening agricultural implements, carrying loads, building houses etc. However, even in employing them, shrewd persons would have them believe that they were doing them a favour instead. The unconcern for the Doms is also typefied in the following proverbs.

Proverb: If my fields are ploughed, I do not care if the Duma's bullocks be killed by a leopard.⁴¹

Proverb: No one believe the poverty of a Bith (patrician) or the dying (from starvation) of a Dom⁴²
ie. these are contradictory to reality.

Such attitudes of derision show the typical response of a class who being subordinated itself, wanted to perpetuate the subordination of the Doms in turn. So that while the Doms were represented as hankering for a status similar to theirs, they were not naturally fit for it. In the case of Doms it was not their attributes of haughtiness, lethargy, presumptuousness and the like which constituted a threat to society, as much as their very existence as an impure caste; leave alone any attempts or their part to actually assume superiority.

39 *ibid*, p. 232.

40 *ibid*, p. 170.

41 *ibid*, p. 380.

42 *ibid*, p.107.

Proverbs related to the class of Baniyas or traders

The Baniyas were a class of traders and shopkeepers, who enjoyed a status quite independent of the ritual hierarchy. The peasants who daily interacted with the Baniyas however had their reservations about them.

Proverb: O Sir, come and eat some treacle!

Write it down, write it down, write it down!⁴³

The Bania was very polite when inviting customers but at the same time did not miss an opportunity to charge them for his wares.

Proverb: Any man more acute than a Bania is a madman.⁴⁴

Infact the Bania was called 'Sau' or 'Saha' which also meant one hundred, so the villagers believed, because he had a hundred cunning ways.

Proverb: A baniya is willing to fall if he can profit by it.⁴⁵

Proverb: A baniya will cheat only those with whom he is well acquainted.

And a thief will rob only those whom he knows⁴⁶.

ie. those who will not be able to overpower them because of the acquaintance

The peasants thus regarded the baniya as very clever and always on the look out to defraud his customers. Such an attitude was natural in view of the tremendous dependence of the peasants on the banias right from procuring their provision from him, to selling him their grain, to borrowing from him in times of need. In all these dealings the baniya always had the upper hand and thus became an object of popular derision. However, in as much as the villagers regarded the banias as cheats, they believed they could outwit him at it.

43 *ibid*, p. 8.

44 *ibid*, p. 7.

45 *ibid*, p. 340.

46 *ibid*, p. 389

Proverb: This man who brings flour is of Gangoli, you should cheat him well.

The dumb of Gangoli (who has brought) five parts of powdered chalk mixed with one part of flour for sale⁴⁷.

Once a baniya, on seeing a villager approach from the side of Gangoli, told his friend, another baniya, to deceive him. The villager overheard them but quietly completed his dealing with the Baniya, and having done so retorted that he, who was thought of as dumb had just palmed off five parts of powdered chalk mixed with one part of flour instead of all flour, to the Baniya.

Proverb: The Baniya who is most sly is exceeded by a villager in craft.⁴⁸

ie. a Baniya could only meet his match in a village.

Thus the Baniya even though represented as clever, could not get the better of the peasant and it was always the peasant who had the last laugh. The peasants reviled him because they perceived the power he exercised over them, at the same time they always asserted their superiority over him.

Proverbs related to the class of Yogis or ascetics.

The Yogis or ascetics were a ubiquitous lot, who very often begged food of the people. They could have originally belonged to any caste, but once they took on the garb of a Yogi, they were meant to have abandoned the ways of the world. But in reality other than the genuine ascetics, there were many imposters too, who because of their vile practices brought the whole class a bad name.

Proverb: A shaven *jogi* and powdered medicine (are not distinguishable)⁴⁹

ie. no one could tell whether the *jogi* was a Brahmin or Dom or to what caste he belonged, as all *jogis* were alike; similarly powdered medicine was

47 *ibid*, p. 7.

48 *ibid*, p. 8.

49 *ibid*, p. 398.

difficult to analyse.

Proverb: Failure is ascribed to a *Natha*, but success to a *Siddha*.⁵⁰

Nathas were a sect of ascetics who were yet involved in the material world, but the *Siddhas* were those ascetics who observed severe abstinence and stringent penances, through which they were believed to have acquired miraculous powers. Thus in the popular mind misfortune was associated with *Nathas* and good fortune with *Siddhas* and those on whom fortune thus devolved were dubbed likewise.

Proverb: is there any place where a *Jogi* cannot get ashes and a potter earth?⁵¹

It was a very easy matter to become a *Jogi*, for a man who had failed in all other efforts to get a living. Thus the people had no particular regard for this class; on the other hand they were typecast as greedy, as foolish and as frauds.

Proverb: One became an ascetic in order to get much food given him but starved on the first stage of his journey.⁵²

Proverb: As soon as the *jogis* hand is dry, he becomes hungry again.⁵³

Proverb: A *Jogi* while alive is constantly munching, and when dead is buried again and again.⁵⁴

The *Jogis* thus were used as a symbol to denote covetous people. Not only this but many *jogis* were held to be phonies who could not last out in the face of temptation and soon gave up all pretense to sincerity.

Proverb: Nothing is forbidden to a Faqira; why do you stop the pieces of meat? Let them come on.⁵⁵

50 *ibid.*, p. 170.

51 *ibid.*, p. 41.

52 *ibid.*, p. 104.

53 *ibid.*, p. 408.

54 *ibid.*, p. 317.

55 *ibid.*, p. 178.

The proverb derives from an anecdote related about a *Faquir* or Vaishnav ascetic, who once agreed to go to a feast only after a great deal of persuasion and assurance that the greatest care would be taken not to allow his food to be polluted. While the host strictly abided by his word and made preparations to cook the mutton in a separate kitchen; the *Faquir* on the other hand even while he feigned fastidiousness could not hold himself when he actually saw the others partaking from it. The *Faquir* thus commanded his host to allow him at least the soup of the dish for it consisted of nothing but Ganges water. Having tasted it once, the *Faquir* asked for some more. While the host was thus pouring it out for him, taking utter most care not to let the pieces drop, the *Faquir* remonstrated as above.

Proverb : Wherever did he become a Jogi, and how old are his Jatas.⁵⁶

These proverbs expressed the popular suspicion about the *jogi's* sincerity and were used for similarly pretentious people, not only this, but the *Jogi* was also represented as extremely foolish who got so carried away by the reverence he received that he forsook all he had for it

Proverb : The hair on ascetic's head are taken away or distributed as blessings.⁵⁷

Proverb : The 'Jai' of a Jogi goes in blessings.⁵⁸

Thus while the peasants did not jibe against the serious practice of ascetism, the popular mind never ceased to censure the class of acetics who were insincere. For even while they got away with casting aside all responsibility they never really ceased to seek self gratification, as such they posed quite a threat to the morality and stability of Kumauni society. It could also be that as these jogis represented that unencumbered and carefree lifestyle which a cast and rule ridden society would have cherished for itself, but which since it could illafford, it therefore castigated them for it instead.

56 *ibid*, p. 166.

57 *ibid*, p. 166.

58 *ibid*, p. 70.

Proverbs related to the class of Khasiyas or ordinary Peasants

Having dealt with the various other constituents of Kumauni society we come full circle to the peasants themselves and look into how they visualised themselves, ie, what was the self image of this vast mass of Kumauni peasantry who were the most preponderant among all the social classes of Kumauni society. as has already been noticed under the proverbs related to the class of Baniyas, the peasants did not think of themselves as simpletons who could be easily beguiled against their own interests. On the other hand they thought they were cleverer indeed, than the most clever people, ie. the Baniyas. But there were other images of them as well

Proverb : The Khasiya is so simple that he will demand a long coat in exchange for a cap implying that Khasiya's were basically rogues who combined great cunning with apparent simplicity.⁵⁹

Proverb : A hill man's 'No' is worth a hundred rupees⁶⁰

Proverb : No country is so liberal as the hills, but they will not give anything without a stick.⁶¹

Proverb : The Khasiya the more he is besought the surlier he becomes.⁶²

Proverb : You can manage a villager by professing to agree with him.⁶³

Proverb : A Khasiya when entreated becomes ungracious.⁶⁴

All the above proverbs reflect how the hill rustics were regarded as highly intractable and incorrigible and that a certain cunning had to be used to get them to cooperate. So that at times force was advocated and at times concurrence had to be feigned with them in order to have their compliance.

59 *ibid*, p. 234.

60 *ibid*, p. 231.

61 *ibid*, p. 231.

62 *ibid*, p. 391.

63 *ibid*, p. 279.

64 *ibid*, p. 235.

Further the Khasiya or hill rustic was shown as highly temperamental, whose temper if aroused knew no bounds.

Proverb : When a Khasiya says 'Da Pai', then nothing will stop his rage⁶⁵ ie. a Khasiya when ill treated would forbear for a longtime, but when he was unable to control his anger he would say. 'Da Pai', "very good, see now" and then nothing could stop him from even assaulting the offender.

Proverb : The anger of a Khasiya is like the thirst of a buffalo⁶⁶ ie. just as a buffalo when thirsty drinks up all the water of a pool, likewise when a Khasiya was angered, he could go to any length.

Just as he was obdurate and temperamental, similarly he was typecast as unreliable.

Proverb : The Khasiya will never prove to be a friend, nor a croton holy. ⁶⁷

While such stereotypes of the rustic villagers reflect the frustrations the higher classes may have felt in their attempts to exploit them; such attributes could well have been defensive mechanisms employed by the rustics, owing to a basic sense of distrust of the classes who they felt would exploit them.

Other than the different social groups, women often became the target of public criticism. The Kumauni women had a hard lot. She did not only have to raise her family but had to perform all kinds of chores right from looking after the fields, to fetching water, to gathering fuel wood, to cooking food. Thus even as she was reduced to a drudge, therein lay her value to a Kumauni peasant. The Kumauni peasant had often to pay for his wife in terms of bride price and thus exacted all the labour he could out of her. This is typified in the following proverbs.

65 *ibid*, p. 230.

66 *ibid*, p. 230.

67 *ibid*, p. 234.

Proverb : If I had a wife, what should & cry for ?⁶⁸

At the same time the women were often made objects of illicit liaisons. This it seems posed a constant threat to Kumauni society

Proverb : One's wife's paramours and pebbles in the shoe⁶⁹
(are very troublesome and embittering to the heart)

Women were typecast as unpredictable and as widows were represented as shameless and as possessing a shrewish temper and loose tongue. This is evident from the following proverbs.

Proverb : Kills her husband and then becomes a satti; ⁷⁰

Who knows the ways of women.

- **Proverb :** No sooner does a woman become a widow than she loses all shame⁷¹

Proverb : A widow ruins a village and the monda (rice water) spoils vegetables food.⁷²

Proverb : Who would build a wall across the mouth of a stream and who would abuse a widow to her face.⁷³

Proverb : If a widow, a buffoon, and a wild buffalo, become mad or angry, what is to be done ?⁷⁴

There were other images of the women as well, which represented them as incapable and as lacking courage.

68 *ibid*, p. 293.

69 *ibid*, p. 228.

70 *ibid*, p. 384.

71 *ibid*, p. 385.

72 *ibid*, p. 274.

73 *ibid*, p. 275.

74 *ibid*, p. 279.

Proverb : If women manage a village it will become a desert⁷⁵

Proverb : A vegetable seen by a man and a tiger seen by a woman are not to be trusted.⁷⁶

Thus even though the woman was invaluable for society, it was deemed necessary to keep her under control, lest she strayed, like widows often did after the death of their husbands.

Even while the proverbs illumined the attitudes of the different social groups towards each other, behind the popular stereotypes could be detected the popular motivation. Thus for instance behind the stereotype of Brahmin, as one greedy and grasping, one could discern a subtle desire for like status. Such popular motivation can perhaps be better understood against popular perception of the sources of power and of power itself. To begin with what was the attitude of the people towards authority, the very quintessence of power. In this respect their attitude towards the political authority, the king, and towards social authority, the caste systems, can be gauged from the following proverbs.

Proverbs regarding the king :

- The oil given by a Raja should be taken in one's skirt⁷⁷
- When a king punishes, the world knows the fact⁷⁸
- A kind hearted king has numerous subjects⁷⁹
- As the king is so are his subjects⁸⁰
- A father gives a village and a king does justice⁸¹

75 *ibid*, p. 385.

76 *ibid*, p. 204.

77 *ibid*, p. 176.

78 *ibid*, p. 176.

79 *ibid*, p. 176.

80 *ibid*, p. 176.

81 *ibid*, p. 186.

Likewise the Proverbs related to caste are :-

- One can tolerate the slandering of his mother, but not that of his caste⁸²
- No caste and no land, Lord of nothing.⁸³

The above proverbs represent the popular ideal of authority. Whether king or caste. This is not to suggest that they accepted the actual authority, with all its aberrations. Infact as the above analysis shows they entertained considerable notions of contravening the same, specially when it came to their own aspirations for ascendancy in this context it is significant the note how they perceived both power and the lack of it.

Proverb : Whoever wields a sword is called Guladara (chief)⁸⁴

Proverb : All sit on the side where the sun shines⁸⁵

Proverb : His is the share who has a club⁸⁶

Proverb : Flies will flack round treacle⁸⁷

Popular perceptaions about the lack of power

Proverb : Who will enquire the rate of Madhura (cheap course grain)⁸⁸

Proverb : Pechhwa's flight is up to the roof⁸⁹

(Pechhwa is a small bird - here symbolic of a poor man whose powers of action are limited)

Proverb : God has made you a coward

82 *ibid*, p. 14.
83 *ibid*, p. 172.
84 *ibid*, p. 11.
85 *ibid*, p. 245.
86 *ibid*, p. 144.
87 *ibid*, p. 245.
88 *ibid*, p. 238.
89 *ibid*, p. 245.

but why do you not threaten to bleat.⁹⁰

It was their beliefs associated with the concept of power which were decisive in their attitude towards those who possessed it and those who did not. Thus if at a more apparent level the proverbs were popular apothegms sputtered to deprive adversity of its sting, at the conceptual level they reflected not only popular perceptions of the different social constituents but also what constituted adversity in the popular mind. Thus far they represented the popular desire to overcome such adversities.

To conclude this chapter it can be said that as far as the proverbs point to the popular consciousness of the social contradictions and as far as the legends made available to them the heroic ideal of dissent, the popular masses were quite amenable to the idea of social change.

90 *ibid.*, p. 11.

Written traditions

So far we have seen how the religious, the ritual and the Oral traditions of the Kumaunis reflected on the structure of their ideas. Written traditions were however different for they emanated from a small section of the people. they were nevertheless, very important, not only as a source of ideas, but also because these ideas were sought to be popularised among the people. Thus any reflection on the structure of ideas in 19th century Kumaun makes it imperative to consider the written traditions also.

The tradition of literary writing began in Kumaun about 1800 A.D. with the works of Gumani Pant (1790-1846); it was carried forward by Krishna Pandey (1800-1850) and Shivdatt Sati (1848-1910) and assumed a very purposeful form under the pen of Gaurda (1872-1939). Their works not only provided an enabling view at the situation of hill society in 19th century, but at a certain stage sought to provide the hillmen with impetus to reform, to awaken... As such it could very well represent the starting point of a nascent nationalism. Thus Kumauni poetry was not merely another form of expression, it became, especially by the latter half of the 19th century, the most powerful mode of expression.

Pertinent to our study of the structure of ideas, incorporated in Kumauni poetry, is an examination of its potential readership in Kumaun in the 19th century. Since these works emanated from a very thin crust at the top of society, mostly literate Brahmins, their relevance as ideas current in the 19th century Kumaun would be enhanced by a measure of the extent to which they pervaded society.

While it is very difficult to establish the popularity of Kumauni poetry, in terms of the number of people who had access to it, however, if one was to proceed along the index of its transmission, one could gather some idea of its potential audience. Now, as the century progressed, different poets utilized

different modes to transmit their poetry, viz. oral or visual modes, dependent as much on towards whom they oriented their work, as on the state of technology of transmission. For instance in early 19th century when printing and publishing were as yet distant things, poets wrote their compositions on scrolls. They would have then depended mostly on oral transmission. Increasingly more attractive techniques were devised to capture the audience such as singing and enacting the verses in front of them, as exemplified by Krishna Pandey. It was, however, in the last quarter of the 19th century when printing and publishing had come into vogue, that the poet used paper as a medium to popularize his works. Even then, it is quite imaginable that oral transmission of the poets' works would have continued to play more than merely a supplementary role, especially in a society constrained due to its limited literacy.

Popular Literacy

At this stage what is pertinent is the question of the literacy habits of the people. For literacy habits and for that matter literacy rates indicate the level of comprehension of a people. Not much can be discerned about the literacy habits of the people, except for brief statements by administrators on the content of education in Kumaun. Traill,¹ at the beginning of 19th century observed.

"There are no public institutions of the nature of schools, and private tuition is almost wholly confined to the upper classes. The teachers are commonly Brahmins, who impart to their scholars the mere knowledge of reading, writing and accounts. The children of respectable Brahmins are also taught Sanskrit, and are occasionally sent to Benares to complete their studies, where they pass through the usual course of Hindu education, consisting of theology, astronomy, judicial astrology, and sometimes medicine".²

Similarly Henry Ramsay³ observed for the latter half of the 19th century

¹ G.W.Traill was commissioner of Kumaun from 1816-1830

² Traill, G.W.: 'Statistical sketch of Kumaun,' *Asiatic Researches*, volume 16, p. 164.

³ Sir Henry Ramsay was commissioner of Kumaun from 1856 - 1884.

"There is great difficulty in bringing education within the reach of all, though we do not attempt to teach more than to read and write, and arithmetic of the simplest kind. Under present circumstances this is sufficient for the mass of the people, and if any sharp boy wishes for a higher education which his father cannot afford, he can obtain a scholarship to the Almora school. The better classes who are desirous of educating their children well, can afford to pay for them, and though our education was said to be in a state of backward, simplicity, Kumaun can.. boast of a higher percentage who can read and write than any other district in the province."⁴

Thus right through the 19th century education was basically utilitarian. It taught the students basic knowledge of reading and writing and accounts to meet practical needs, rather than to dabble in intellectualism. Further its impartation from private institutions through most of the 19th century must have not only limited its content but also its dissemination. Education in Kumaun did not overcome its limitations, till after 1857, when with the establishment of Kumaun circle under the Department of Public Instruction, public instruction increasingly became the norm. The following figures quoted by E.T. Atkinson in the Himalayan Gazetteer highlight the active spread of education.⁵

1850 : for Kumaun and Garhwal : 121 Hindi and Sanskrit schools held in private dwellings.

with 522 pupils, over 4/5 of whom were Brahim + One school of urdu — for 10 pupils.

- Schools supported by the government.

1871-72 for Kumaun : 23 tehsil schools with 1815 pupils

23 village schools with 1787 pupils

⁴ Atkinson, E.T.: The Himalayan Gazetteer, Volume III, p. 544.

⁵ *ibid*, p. 543 - 544.

1 girls school with 21 pupils

- Schools aided by the government

2 Anglo vernacular schools at Almora and Nainital

7 vernacular schools near Ranikhet

1 female school.

- Schools supported by the government.

1884 - for Kumaun :

6 Tehsil schools with 541 pupils

110 village schools with 6270 pupils

1 female school with 64 pupils.

- Schools aided by the government.

14 Anglo vernacular schools with 1462 pupils

2 vernacular schools with 179.

By early 20th century the spread of education had increased multiple fold.⁶

		Total population	male students	female students	Total students
1928	Nainital	276875	9541	1521	11062
	Almora	530338	23593	1587	25180

Whereas these figures illustrate the spread of public instruction, it can be safely assumed that private instruction must have made its own contribution. These figures as far as they point to the spread of education they indicate the general ambience of literacy, an ambience most conducive for the spread of

⁶ Pandey. Badri^ott, :Kumaun Ka Itihas, p.485 .

ideas incorporated in Kumauni poetry. However, did this literacy, given the pragmatic content of formal education, in any way enhance the comprehending abilities of the people ? Henry Ramsay's observation in the affirmative is significant.

"The good effected by education is already visible in the increased intelligence shown by the rising generation of young men who have attended the schools, the decrease of bigotry and superstition and the increased desire for schools as shown by the applications for their establishment... The spread of education has done much to undermine the influence of Brahmins which was formally so absolute in this province."⁷

Thus in so far as literacy enhanced the capabilities of comprehension, it was no doubt an aid to the spread of ideas, incorporated in Kumauni poetry. The poet could have however transcended literacy barriers - it depended on how well he translated his message in the popular idiom.

The above examination of literacy trends is only a partial reflection on the popularity of Kumauni poetry. Moreover, it is based more on assumptions than on precise evidence. More important in this context would be an examination of the orientation of the poets, ie. to whom did they orient their poetry. This would include, along with an analysis of their works an examination of the methods of transmission employed.

Gumani Pant

The earliest evidence of written traditions in Kumaun are the works of Gumani Pant (1790-1846). Even Grierson acknowledged him as the earliest writer in his knowledge who composed principally in Sanskrit⁸. Gumani lived at a momentous juncture in time, when the old order was yielding place to new. He was witness to the extinction of the old Kumauni ruling houses and the establishment of the Gurkha's rule and subsequently the expulsion of Gurkhas

⁷ Atkinson, E.T.: opcit p. 543.

⁸ Grierson, G.A.: Linguistic Survey of India, Vol. I, Part I, p. 3.

and installation of the English East India Company's rule. It was a time of transition. While the old life patterns had not died out as yet the new ones were just beginning to find their feet. Consequently the same trend got reflected in his work. Most of his early work was composed in Sanskrit and contained traditional themes on religion, philosophy, medicine and astrology⁹. Apart from these he also wrote a number of verses aimed at eliciting royal patronage. For it is believed that he regaled royal audiences not only at Tehri and Kashipur, but even as far as Nahan, Kangra, Alwar, Gwalior and Patiala¹⁰. Infact he also composed a verse in honour of the Commissioner of Kumaun, Lushington (1838-48).

Hunargah keena na virsha mahina, na daulat mahina, talua naa na ghar var,

*Lagi Karjdaari, yahi marj bhaari, haro arj saari, suno banda parwar,
Mujhe khub rojee, inaayat karoji, khushi se Lasington commissioner bahadur,*

Badi aap daani, Kare duabani, hamesha gumani khada hua haajir¹¹.

8611-111
Gumani here states that in Kumaun, there is a lack of schools, of monthly rains, of the monthly salaries, of trees and houses. Poverty and indebtedness are the greatest afflictions of the people of Kumaun. He prays that if the commissioner ameliorated their grievances, he would stand forever at his attendance.

Thus Gumani wrote mostly for an exclusive audience, especially so in the earlier period of his compositions. Moreover many of his verses seem to have been written clearly for the amusement of the erudite. They involve much linguistic play, literary allusions and *double entendre*, which were aimed to capture their imagination. In one such verse, given below, he uses a different

⁹ Bhatt, Uma: *Kehe Gumani*, p. 6.

¹⁰ The Sanskrit verses Gumani composed in honour of the rulers of Patiala, Alwar and Nahan are still preserved in the respective State archives - Singh, Bhagat: *Hindi Sahitya Ko Kurmaanchal Ki Dain*, p. 16.

¹¹ Bhatt, Uma: *opcit*, p. 14.



language in each line, and yet unites them in composition

Baaje Lok Iriloknath Shiv ki pooja Karain to Kerain (Hindi)
kwai kwai Bhakt Ganesh ka jagat mein baaja huni ta huni (Kumauni)
Ramro dhyān Bhwani kar chānamagardan kasele garan (Nepali)
Dhanyatmatul dhamneeh Ramte Rame Gumani kavi (Sanskrit)¹²

Similarly in another verse in Khadi Boli he describes how the name Tehri was derived.

Surgang tati, raskhan mahi, dhankosh bhari yahu naam rahyo, ...
In teen padon ke banaye basyo akshar ek hi ek lehyo,¹³
Janraj Sudarshan Shah puri, Tihri is kaaran Naam rahyo.

Here the poet describes Tehri as one situated next to the Ganges (*Surgang tati*), its land replete with resources (*raskhan mahi*) and its kingdom abounding in wealth (*dhankosh bhari*) and from the last letters of each of these three descriptive phrases he derives the name Tehri.

The poet also composed numerous verses wherein he illustrated the nature of certain problems by the use of local adages. Known in Kumauni literature as 'Samasya Purti', these he composed mainly in Sanskrit, with the last line incorporating a proverb in Hindi, Kumauni or Nepali.

Swapna Gatsmarsum nimit Kashmalmaptvati madhi chintam
Hetumaptash cha dushamiti varo 'Peer Kuthoraiki baidya Jethano'¹⁴

In this Sanskrit verse the poet incorporates a Kumauni saying, to illustrate the pain of desire for a son; and this anguish he says cannot be disclosed either, just like one cannot complain of the pain of private parts to one's own brother-in-law, who is a doctor.

12 Pant, Durgesh; Tiwari, Girish (ed): *Shikharon Ke Swar*, p.12.

13 Bhatt, Uma: opcit p. 15.

14 Pant, Durgesh; Tiwari, Girish (ed.): opcit, p. 14.

Thus writing of poetry was more of a craft with Gumani. However, the poet did not restrict himself to mere ornate compositions. He seems to have evolved in his perspective of life around him. Towards this development he also adopted the live languages of Kumaun of his time, viz Kumauni and Khadiboli¹⁵. It has been surmised that these compositions of Gumani are of a later date, for some of them contain his criticism of the British administration, which therefore ascribes them to a period when the British were firmly implanted and their policies known¹⁶. Thus it is probable that with time the poet evolved a broader vision of society around him.

His verses in Kumauni though very few in number as compared to his compositions in Sanskrit, indicate the extent of the poet's identification with his surroundings. In single stanza poems, the poet describes the virtues of local fruits - *kaphal* and *hisaalu*, banana and pomogranette, of his village Gangoli, during famine and during plenty etc. These are composed in a simple manner but are novel in their conception.

*Khana laayak Indra Ka hum chiyā bhulok aaye padan,
Prithvi mein lag yo pahar hamri thati rachi daivale,
Yeso chitt vichaari Kaphal sabai raata bhaya krodhle,
Koi aur buda khuda sharamlai neela dhumela bhaya.*¹⁷

In this poem, Gumani personifies the local berry *kaphal*. He says that the *kaphal* believed that they deserved to be had by Gods, but as luck would have it they were sent to the earth and there too, to the hills. It was then that they turned red out of chagrin and the older among them turned purple out of shame.

The poet, however, went beyond mere banter and penetrated deeper into the socio-political realities of his time. In one verse Gumani summed up the

15 Traill, G.W.: Opcit, p.164.

16 Bhatt, Uma.: opcit, p. 3.

17 *ibid*, p. 16.

exploitative character of Gorkha rule. He observed that during Gurkha rule, after carrying the heavy loads of treasures on their heads, day after day, not a hair remained on anyone's head, obviously pointing to the policy of heavy taxation of the Gurkha rulers, where by all was extracted from the poor peasantry of Kumaun. That despite this the people did not leave Kumaun, Gumani is grateful to the king; here he possibly intends satire.

*Din Din Khajana ka bhaar ka boknale,
Shiv-Shiv Chulimenka baal nai ek kai kaa;
Tadpi muluk tero chodi nai koi bhaja,
iti vadti Gumani dhanya Gorkhali raja !¹⁸*

In yet another verse the poet describes the pathetic plight of a hill widow. In the hill society widows had considerable license to live as they pleased. This had not only earned them a reputation for immodesty, but they were ascribed a spiteful nature and were avoided for their vituperative tongues. In his description of a hill widow Gumani described how a widow thus shunned by society, found it very difficult to get by.

*Haliya haath pado kathin lai, hai gaich din dophari,
Baanyo bald milo cha ek diju ko, kaanr jaan main dain huni nasyuda bina
Maano ek gurunsh ko khichdi sun pencho lag ni milo,
Main dhuala hun hai kaal haraano, kaan jaar ? Kya dhana karun ?¹⁹*

Here the poet described how a widow, living all by herself, found it very difficult to get her fields ploughed. She goes looking for a plough man, but finds one only in the afternoon she might obtain the left bull from her sister-in-law, but whom would she ask for the right. Nobody will even lend her as much as two hundred and fifty grams. of *dal*, that she might prepare a meal for the ploughman. For she is a widow and for her, even death is lost.

These verses reflect that the poet was indeed sensitive to the social

18 Pant, Durgesh; Tiwari, Girish (ed.): opcit, p. 14.

19 *ibid*, p. 13.

anomalies around him. In certain other verses he hits satirically at the dissimulators in Kumauni society and also at certain life styles and preoccupations of the Kumauni people.

*Aaye Kanyaag gat, phule kaano,
baaman uchchale nau nau baans.
Laga sol srad baaman log sabain jaga
Khari laskari kheer pandudda ki
Kalo kalo tapkiya, bhuno gaderi aur mula
beeta sol srad chin mein, 'aakashchani bhai.'*²⁰

In this verse the poet alludes to the greedy brahmins in Kumauni society. He observes how, when the month of *shraddh* approaches, the brahmins become overjoyed. The sixteen days of *shraddh* in the month of October are a time, when along with obeisance to all ancestors, the pious Hindu is enjoined to feed and gift the brahmins. Thus on all sixteen days the brahmins who are otherwise on a frugal diet, get to eat the choicest of foods. No wonder they eagerly anticipate these days. But once the *shraddh* season is over the brahmin is left gaping at the skies.

Gumani also composed in khadiboli, which was also the spoken language of the time, both in the hills and the plains. It is these compositions which elevate Gumani to an incomparable position among intellectuals of his time. For therein Gumani presented his scathing critique of the English administration and contemporary social conditions. This he did at a time, when it was not yet the norm to criticise the English. There is no doubt though that he evolved towards this viewpoint only gradually. For amongst his earlier verses in Sanskrit, are some that confirm his early pro-British attitude. In these he expresses admiration for the English who came from faraway and established their rule in India. They built roads and bridges and put an end to brigandage²¹. Such a view was not inconsistent in an age when the positive attributes of the English

²⁰ Tiwari, Girish; Pathak, Shekhar: *Hamaari Kavita Ke Aankhar*, p. 58.

²¹ Bhatt, Uma; opcit, p. 7.

East India company's rule stood starkly in contrast with the exploitative rule of their predecessors, the Gurkhas. However, very soon Gumani had shed all haloed notions of the English. It is held that the English neglect of men of talent such as him, possibly led to his alienation²². Whatever it be, it enabled the poet to break new grounds.

In a poem titled 'Phirangi Varnan'²³ Gumani described the coming of the English, their motive in coming to India, their mal-administration and other social malpractices that occurred under their rule. He composed numerous verses, where he expressed amazement, or at times awe and even disappointment at the coming of the English.

*Apne ghar se chala phirangi pahuncha pahale Calcutte,
Ajab top barnatti kurti naa kapde kuchch na latte,
Saara Hindustaan kiya sar bina ladai kar phatte,
- Kehat Guman kaliyug ne yo suruva bheja albatte.*²⁴

Gumani here portrays his perception of the foreigner as he first came to Calcutta. He wore strange clothes, a hat and collared shirt, but what amazed Gumani most was that he conquered the entire Hindustan without waging even one war. He muses, perhaps *kaliyug* had sent this parrot, so strange to India, attractive to look at, but one that would gnaw away the yield.

In another verse he expresses admiration for the English who even after coming from so far, could establish their sway among the mighty kings of Hindustan, and this he considers their good fortune, that they should fight the heroes of India.

*Door vilaayat se jal ka rasta kara jahaaj sawaari hai.
Saare Hindustan bhare ki dharti vash kar daari hai
Aur bade Shahon mein sabme dhaak badi kuch bhari hai,*

22 *ibid*, p. 3

23 These verses have been taken from Bhagat Singh's, *Hindi Sahitya Ko Kurmaanchal Ki Dain*. They are originally from Gumani Virchit *Kavya Sangrah*, published at Etawah in 1897 by Devidatt Pandey.

24 *ibid*, p. 23.

Kahe Gumani dhanya phirangi teri kismat nyaari hai, ²⁵

If he admired the English for their bold ventures, at the same time he expressed disillusionment at the conquest of Hindustan...

*Ko jaane tha villayat se yahan phirangi aawega
Ko samjhe tha hikmat karke Hindustaan dabaawega*

.....
Kahe Gumani Hari ichcha ka koi paar na pawega ²⁶

He held the lack of education among Indians to be the prime reason for the conquest of India for had there been greater literacy, the kings would have comprehended the true nature of the British. They would then not have warred amongst themselves to their own detriment.

*Vidya Ki Jo badīi hoti phoot na hoti rajan mein
Hindustaan asambhav hota vash karna lakh barsan mein...* ²⁷

What was more amazing was that at this time, when even all over India, the Indian people had not awoken to the true nature of the English East India Company, this poet living in relative seclusion, tried to understand the motive behind East India Company's rule.

*Angrez ke raaj bhare mein loha mahanga sone se
Daulat kheenchi duniya ki so paani peevein done se* ²⁸

He warned that in this rule of the English, iron would cost more than gold, for the English had taken upon themselves to extract the wealth of the entire world; and towards this motive they had expanded the tentacles of their trade in all directions. Soon the people would be left just with cups made of leaves to drink water from, for so much would they be impoverished.

25 *ibid*, p. 23.

26 *ibid*, p. 23.

27 *ibid*, p. 22.

28 *ibid*, p. 22.

Gumani also endeavoured to sum up the conditions of Kumaunis under the British. He complained in one verse, that ever since the English snatched the throne, corrupt officers ruled the roost. In the countryside everything lay devastated, there were no crops, no irrigation. So much was the damage that people had begun to migrate from Almora.

*Aaye gore na rahee raaj gaddi,
jhooti rishwat khor munshi mussaddi
na paida hai ann dhore na naddi
Almode se door ko khench laddi²⁹*

In another verse Gumani observed that the English ruled over the people by barbaric means. It was virtually military rule, with the police stationed at forts, *kotwaalis* and even *bungalows*. He complained that the low caste people were suddenly enriched and the brahmins and banias impoverished. Even the backward people, little educated, now paraded as gentlemen.

*Kare phirangi raaj aabadi dharti mein na jungle hain.
Kampu paltan jage jage par kile kotghar bangle hain
Chude aur chamaar dhanandhar, baman baniye kangale hain
Adham jati ke pade likhe sab babu mister bante hain³⁰*

There were no bridges over rivers, nor were there roads anywhere and thieves held sway all over Kumaun. In such a situation the rulers relied much on the soldiers, to impose law and order and thus even the ruled were subjected to their atrocities. The notorious elements made the most out of such a situation where the ruler and the ruled were alienated from each other. Gumani exclaimed that such an administration was indeed unique in the whole world.

*Puldaryav jage jage sadak hain na jor hai, chor ka,
Raajee rayyat hai sipah vash mein dushman bhi khusman hai*

²⁹ *ibid*, p. 21.

³⁰ *ibid*, p. 19.

*Duniyaan mein Angrez ki yeh amlaari ajab kya kahen,
Hoti puran Ramraaj sam jo dukhi na hote Guni* ³¹

Gumani also expressed disappointment against the inequitable and partisan nature of the company's rule and complained against the company's policy of imparting favour only to certain people. In the following verse he observes that for those alone are all matters resolved in moments, for those alone does the nautch girl perform and even the king hankers after, whom the English choose to favour.

*Usi ki vipatsab palak mein phiregi,
Usi ke pari chauk gaati phiregi,
Usi par chanwar chatra jodi phiregi,
Jisi par miharvan hoga phirangi!*³²

Even as the administration changed hands, many changes were implemented in the lives and properties of the people, giving rise to a multitude of grievances. The new land settlements implemented by the British from time to time, affected the very life vein of the people. Even as they gave rise to many cases of land disputes, they threw the people at the mercy of the British system of justice, a system unintelligible to them. Before long many were embroiled in legal altercations leading to their successive impoverishment. Bribery had become an often resorted practise to avail the loop holes in the British system of administration. It was an administration which perpetrated corruption to such an extent that even justice could be bought to favour offenders of state and the people. Corruption was indeed a ubiquitous feature of British administration, a point which Gumani and after him many poets raised again and again.

Whatever were its demerits, atleast under the ancient system of justice only the defaulters were penalised. In comparison the British Indian legal system was full of loop holes. There was so much scope for arguments and

³¹ *ibid*, p. 19.

³² *ibid*, p. 20.

counterarguments that an entire ruling could be altered in favour of defaulters and against the aggrieved. False witnesses could be implanted and law thus manouvered. So dismal was the state of affairs that even degrees could be had by bribing and deserving students were deprived. What was more, it was the servant of the English themselves who was perpetrating such malpractices.

*Jo hai jaali bada sawaali paapon se na darta hai,
Likhe banaaye tamassuk jhute gawwaahon ko dharta hai.
So rishwat se degree paawe sachcha ro ro marta hai,
Kahe Gumani julam phirangi amla tera karta hai.* ³³

So pervasive was the corruption, that people were willing to part immediately with fifty to hundred rupees, if only they could have the ruling altered in their favour. They would then gather at homes and conspire with the keepers of justice, to devise an altered case. Gumani, however, still believed that had the English masters got to know, such underhand dealings would not have gone unchecked.

*Sau pachash is mukkaddme par kharch kare to jhatat,
Ghar majmoon jamaye masauda karun chitt ka patat.
Aisa riswatkhor musaddi kare muluk sab chatat.
Kadi phirangi jane to sab ye pahunche marghat.* ³⁴

As for the breed of such unethical people, who could be bought over to give false testimony for just anyone, who could take false oaths by the holywater of the Ganges and holy texts, who could sell their honour for money's sake; Gumani wondered how such debased people would ever improve.

*Rishwat Khaaye gawaah viraani vajah sabooti karte hain,
Gangajal Hari vansh halaf ki raah haath par dharte hain.
Paise Khatar dharm ganwaya maut parai marte hain,*

³³ *ibid*, p. 21.

³⁴ *ibid*, p. 21.

Kahe Gumani ab ye paapi kaise paar utarte hain. ³⁵

Gumani also attacked the increasing commercialization of values in the new age. Among other things, the increasing use of money as a medium of exchange had bestowed it with such power, that it had become the major arbiter of loyalties, between fathers and sons, between family and friends.

*Jis ke khatar prem bisar ke put pita ke sarg lada,
Jis ke khatar chori aaphat kaid khaane beech pada,
Jis ke khatar bhai bandhu aur isht mitr se bair pada,
Kahe Gumani so sabse kalidaar ruppaiya ek bada.* ³⁶

He believed that without money, every thing was redundant: All merits, whether learnedness, prowess or beauty were undone, without the power of money.

*Hota rahe dhurandhar pandit pade Bhagwat Bharat hai,
Hota rahe bada jorowar ladai jang nahin haarat hai.
Hota rahe ajab khoobssoorat roopkala chavi dharat hai,
Kahe Gumani jag mein gun kalidaar bina sab gaarat hai.* ³⁷

Finally overcome by their pervasive presence, the poet noted in a tone of bitter resignation, that the English would leave only the day rivers got sucked in by the desert sands, the day, big boulders would float on waters, the day the clouds fell on the earth due to their weight, implying that it was next to impossible.

*Ja din setoon te nadiyan sab retin mein atkai ghirangi,
Ja din nau samaan bani kahun, bhaari shila jal pai tarangi.
Ja din megh ghata dharti par upar se balkhai girangi
Va din jani Gumani kahe chati chod vilayat jay phirangi*³⁸

35 *ibid.* p. 21.

36 *ibid.*, p. 20.

37 *ibid.*, p. 20.

38 *ibid.*, p. 22.

Gumani's perception of the English and their administration remains by far his most significant contribution to the realm of ideas in the early 19th century, not only in Kumaun but perhaps in entire India. What is more significant is that he did not limit himself only to the grievances of the Kumaonis against the English, but tried to understand the all India ramifications of their presence. This has deservedly entitled him to the claim of India's first national poet, a claim, however, yet in wilderness³⁹

Another poem of Gumani in Khadiboli titled 'Kashipur Varnan' describes the evils that became current among the Kumaonis, when they migrated to Kashipur in the Tarai, out of fear of Gurkha atrocities

*Kadi Jaspur patti phir kadi to chilkiya
Kadi ghar mein sote bhar nayan bhore uthchale
Sabhi tattoo ladain banaj rojgaari sab bane.
ajab dekha kashipur sahar saare jagat mein.*⁴⁰

Here the poet laments the fate of the people who were uprooted from their homes in the hills, where they once lived peacefully, till misfortune befell on them and they had to migrate to Tarai with all their belongings. Kashipur itself was a permanent jambooree, with plenty of things to be seen and had. Once there the hungry peasants of Kumaun could whet their eyes and appetite.

*Jahan puri garmagaram tarkaari chatpati
Dahi boora doone bhar bhar bhale baman chakein*

.....
*Yahan Dhela nadi Dhig rahat mela din chipe,
Jahan patti patur jhalkhat parisi mahal mein,
Tale thokar khate pherat sab gadugulin mein.*

³⁹ Singh, Bhagat:opcit, p. 23.

⁴⁰ These verses have been taken from Bhagat Singh's Hindi Sahitya Ko Kurmaanchal Ki Dain. They were originally published as Gumani Virchit Kavya Sangrah at Etawah in 1897 by Devidatt Pandey

*Ajab dekha kashipur shahar sare jagat mein.*⁴¹

However, a deep social malaise had set in too. Once there the people rid themselves of all social bindings that were current in Kumaun and lived as they pleased. As a consequence greed, avarice and deception were at large. The astrologers and physicians hardpressed for work roamed house to house, while the impersonators tried to swindle the people.

*Kathaa waale saste phirat dhar pothi bagal mein,
Lai thaili goli ghār ghar hakimi sab karain.
Rangila sa patra kar dharat joshi sab bane
ajab dekha kashipur sare jagat mein*⁴².

Thus we see that Gumani had in his own life time, made a significant move away from traditional themes and exclusive confines, to write about contemporary socio-political conditions. This was an important step towards orienting himself towards the people. But more important was his attempt to compose in Khadiboli and Kumauni - the popular languages of his time.⁴³ However, if the work of the poet actually reached the people themselves, is difficult to ascertain, but if word of mouth was powerful enough, then his work would have definitely had a popular reception. In this regard Uma Bhatt observes that, the fact that most of his compositions were retrieved from among the people themselves shows that he had gained popularity among the people too⁴⁴. Not only that, he styled himself as a people's poet by dropping his more Sanskritized formal name, Lokratna Pant and instead assumed a pseudonym 'Gumani', of Arabic derivation, which he used in the last lines of each of his⁴⁵ compositions.

41 Singh, Bhagat : opcit, p. 18.

42 ibid, p. 17.

43 Gumani adopted Khadiboli at a time, when it was just a spoken language and Brijhasa was the actual medium of literary writing in North India. Thus Gumani's compositions in Khadiboli, belonging to early 19th century would rightfully entitle him to be called the first poet of Khadiboli, a claim otherwise ascribed to Pandit Shridhar Pathak, based on his composition 'Ekantwasi Yogi', 1886 - Bhatt, Uma. opcit, p. 18.

44 Bhatt, Uma : opcit, p. 3.

45 ibid, p. 4.

Gumani did orient himself towards the people by writing about them, however, Shekhar Pathak and Girish Tiwari⁴⁶ hold that he did not go full way in this effort and perhaps that is why omitted to look at the social contradictions of his time, the exploitation of the lower classes by the higher classes, the presence of an extensive market in slaves. That he did not establish a truthful picture of society which would have spurred social consciousness, that he lacked the radicalism expected of a poet of his stature. This is difficult to accept from a poet of his keen perception and benefit of doubt should be granted him, especially in the absence of his other works in Khadiboli and Kumauni⁴⁷. However, he stands answerable, in case of deliberate omission. Nonetheless that he did initiate the trend of writing about the common people, is significant, when contemporary literary styles were yet confined to romanticism.⁴⁸

Thus Gumani's major contribution lies in the fact that he brought Kumauni poetry out from its traditional confines and close to contemporary reality. How close he approximated to the actual reality is quite another matter. Further by choosing contemporary languages for these verses he endowed them with life force. This trend which Gumani initiated was carried a step ahead by his contemporary, Krishna Pandey.

Krishna Pandey

Krishna Pandey (1800 - 1850) also wrote on contemporary themes. It is believed that he took his verses amidst the people singing and enacting these for them⁴⁹. He thus endowed his works with an audio-visual effect, a very powerful mode of transmission indeed. However, he himself could not have

⁴⁶ Tiwari, Girish; Pathak, Shekhar : opcit, p. 54-59.

⁴⁷ It is believed that Gumani composed much more even in Khadiboli and Kumauni. Devidutt Pandey, who compiled Gumani's poetry in 1897 as 'Gumani Kavi Virchit Sanskrit aur Bhasha Kavya', mentions that he had published the poets' 'Bhasha Kavya' in a separate volume. That, however, is not available today. - Bhatt, Uma : opcit, p. 4.

⁴⁸ Singh, Bhagat : opcit, p. 17.

⁴⁹ Tiwari, Girish ; Pathak, Sekhar : opcit, p. 59.

reached out to too many people, in which case oral transmission must have been the only way to popularize his works among the people.

Krishna Pandey is best known from his solitary surviving verse 'Kalyug Varnan'⁵⁰. In this he likened contemporary conditions to Kalyug - the age of general debasement. Hailing his countrymen, he warned them of the abysmal plight that the current age had brought them to.

He told them to sell off their houses, resign their jobs and leave, for Kumaun was no larger worth staying.

*Mulukiya yaaro kalyug dekho
ghad • kudi bechi ber istifa lekho*

for despite the presence of many holy shrines, like Badri and Kedar, the people had become irreligious. — — —

*Badri Kedar bad bhayaa dhaam
dharm karm ki ke nehaati pham*

In every house brothers quarreled; thus was Kumaun divided.

*Bhai biraadar ghar ghar maar
muluk Kumaun mein padi goyo chaar*

and further a worse time would come, when even fathers would not be spared by their sons.

*Hausiya yaaro kalyug aalo
Chyaalaakaa haath lai baabu maar khaalo*

all over Kumaun the *Kaphua*⁵¹ wailed, its wailing was a reminder that women were being ill treated by their men.

⁵⁰ Pant, Durgesh ; Tiwari, Girish : opcit, p. 16.

⁵¹ Kaphua is a local bird, whose call is likened to the wail of a women

*Mulk Kumaon mein Kaphua baanso
Jwe kan hai gayo khasam ko jhaanso*

and everywhere there was such blatant exploitation of women, that men all around made promiscuous advances towards them, but no one ever came to help them in their hour of need.

*Chaar din meri Bhauji Bhaj Ram ! Ram !
Harnaam aalo parnam Kaam*

The women themselves had become so ungrateful, that they were no longer happy when their men bought them skirts from their hard earned wages.

*Mulukiya logon kalyug sunno
ghagro di ber jwe nehaati gunno*

What was more, the people had become addicts of foreign objects. For just a coat of foreign cloth, they were ready to incur debt and mortgage their homes

*Bilainti Kapdok bannayo coat
Reen kari ber ghar kudi dhot*

The poet took the instance of one village where despite nine headman, (a situation arising from the English distributing headmanship as favours to their partisans) no one knew when it was struck by misfortune. So corrupt and ineffective was the system of administration; and the interests of the headman were joint to the English rather than to the people.

*Ek garh ka nau chiya padhaan
Ghar baji gayo kai kain nai phame.*

In Kalyug Varnan the poet describes the socio-political afflictions of his time, right from the degeneration of morals and values, consequent upon the changes in the new age, to maladministration and its repercussions. That this single poetry is just about a glimpse of the poet's horizon, need hardly be said,

that it exhibits an increasing trend of concern over the contemporary social malaise is the more significant.

If Gumani and Krishna Pandey endowed Kumauni poetry with life, the subsequent poets gave it a purpose. Kumauni poetry struck full force at the contemporary socio-political situation under the pens of Shivdatt Sati and Gaurda. While both these poets composed mostly in Kumauni and also Khadiboli, making their works comprehensible to the common people ; poetry writing in the latter half of 19th century got tremendous fillip with the commencement of printing and publishing in Kumaun. These poets began to publish their works on pamphlets and also in newspapers thereby reaching a larger audience. There is no doubt though that in a situation of restricted circulation⁵² of printed material and limited literacy, oral transmission would have yet remained the norm.

Shivdatt Sati

With Shivdatt Sati poetry came closest to ground reality. For he looked minutely at Kumauni society itself, in as much as he described the problems they faced in their day to day life and denounced their prejudices and superstitious practices. What is perplexing, however, is his inability to relate their living problems with the actual perpetrators of the exploitative arrangements - the British. For if one finds in his poems a protest against the local power-brokers, at the same time there is in them praise for the British too.

The first among the 19th century poets to really look critically at his own society, Shivdatt Sati wrote vigorously against the religious hypocrisy upheld by Kumauni society. He scoffed at the religious system, which by prescribing irrational observances, mulct the pious of their valuables and strengthened the hold of a parasitic class of Brahmins on society. In a poem on the ceremony of *shraddh*⁵³ performed for the deceased, he hits out at the gullibility of the

52 One can gain an idea of their limited circulation from the fact that Almora Akhbar a popular weekly in the last quarter of the 19th century began with a circulation of 50-60 copies and reached a maximum of 1500 in 1917, when it was replaced by Shakti a National Newspaper in 1918.

53 Tiwari, Girish, Pathak, Shekhar : opcit, p. 64.

people. He comments on the irony, that when alive, people are uncared for, but after death, their kin ensure that their death ceremonies are performed in the right manner.

*Jyun chan dukh diyo kar barbad
Mari ber Gaya Kashi kari lai sarad*

The poet admonishes the people over their extravagance at such ceremonies. The *shraddhs* are performed in honour of the dead, as part of which, a feast is given to all who gather to pay their last respects to the dead, and money and gifts are given to the *Pandit* who performs the last rites. Similarly, the performance is repeated for all the dead ancestors on the sixteenth day of *shraddh* in the month of October. The poet therefore tries to prevent them from such ritual indulgence, by prevailing upon them that not a sue of all that is spent during the *shraddhs* ever gets to the dead, but it is the greedy brahmins and the hordes of relatives who benefit.

*Sarad mein aayee ber mariyan ni khana,
Baman jyu Khayee jani biradar nana ...
Tu murakh smaj chain ija paali meri,
Bamanak ghar jaali sab cheej teri.*

Similarly he wrote against the religious prescription of pilgrimages and fasts and other rituals observed in order to overcome guilt, due to sinful activities. These were only general prescriptions and observing them in no way compensated for the extent of each individual's guilt. As such observing them only amounted to a farce.

*Devta ka lijiya Tu jaale Gangvaar.
.. Kain Janni patdiya karmon ka haal*

In a similar vein he wrote against the most improbable, irrational myths and propaganda endorsed by different religions of the world. In "Ghazal Kumauni

Bhasha ka"⁵⁴ he says it is difficult to believe that Krishna held the lofty Govardhan mountain, atop his little finger; or that Jesus who was born of Mary's womb, was actually the son of god; or that Quran actually supports the decimation of non believers - that god should want to kill his own creation. The poet argues that one should not in the name of religion pursue one's own selfish designs. For why should god be pleased with the sacrifice of animals. Such falsities in religion should not prevent the truth from prevailing.

*Hamaar kai ber dharme ki baat chipaai nijani,
Saanchi baat jhuti le yo batai nijaani.
Girraj jyuki kaathak vishwas ni aun,
Aangul mein parvatai ki dhar uthai nijani.
Hariyan ka garbh batik bhayo yesoo masih,
Parmeshwarak putr cha kai ber batai nijani.
Quraan mein lekhiyo cha kauni katal karo kaphirnauk,
Ishwarai ki aisi aagya Tau pai nijani.*

*Aapun arthak liji bin apradh,
Vismillah kari ber kai ki jyar katai nijani
Dyaputaunk liji punya samjhi tyaraak din,
Bakarok khor aang hai charkai nijaani
Mithiya baton par Shividatt Sharma baat ni karna
Vedaant hamaar kai ber gavain nijani*

Shividatt Sati thus struck a reformatory note when he criticised the people for their backward notions. More important he also gave voice to the miserable plight of the people at the hands of the subordinate governmental staff. In a poem titled "Ghasiyari Patrol"⁵⁵ he underlined the exploitation of the poor peasant woman at the hands of the *patrols*, appointed by the government to oversee the forests. The *patrols* had become a power unto themselves and perpetrated all kinds of misdeeds on the village people on the threat of

⁵⁴ Pant, Durgesh; Tiwari, Girish : opcit, p. 18.

⁵⁵ Tiwari, Girish; Pathak, Shekhar : opcit, p. 65.

disallowing them their traditional rights over forests. In this poem the Poet states the travails of the women grass cutters who are more terrified of the *patrol* than the ranger himself.

*Dhamkauch patrol ranger hai baqi,
chipi rauch jungle mein gaadi ber taki ...*

The *patrols* would harass the women and threaten them to come to him, lest he be angered. Shivdatt Sati portrayed the helpless plight of such women. One such woman complains, that when all women have given him their sickles, why does he call her to him.

*... Saban ka daatul diya main kilai latyucha ?
Meri ber shaan kari najik balu cha*

that even the zamindaars are helpless against the *patrols*, then whom should they go for help

*... Pahadak jamidar garib kangal,
Kaithai kunu, ko suncha, janglat ka haal...*

The *patrols* are so troublesome, it becomes very difficult for the women to go to the jungles.

*Patrol dukh dini padi jani sun,
Junglo ka bado bed, bed kasi jani ban.*

When a poet of such a keen perception adopts an overall pro-British stance, his motives become suspect, for it is most unlikely that he did not perceive the nexus between the rulers and the consequences of their policies, especially at a time when the rulers were coming under increasing attack, all over India. When even in Kumaun the trend of critical appraisal of the British had been initiated. Thus is one verse he observed, that under the English rule both the mighty and the meek could partake of the benefits, that it had enabled people to get promotions and prestige, such a rule he likened to a lotus that had bloomed in India, or to the rising of the moon on the Indian horizon.

'Ek ghat pani pini baakri te bagh

.....
Aabad rahe yeh angreji amal
Muluk India mein khila hai kamal

.....
Ijjat mili hai promotion mila,
Vilayat ka chand ajab hai khila 1.⁵⁶

Such a stance however in no way eclipsed the merits of the poet, for he had contributed towards the realm of ideas significantly by initiating introspection and calling for social reform. This trend was further strengthened by Gauridatt Pandey (1872-1939). Gaurda's themes were totally infused with the spirit of his surroundings. Infact his poetry became totally synonymous with the age, where in verse after verse he wrote about the current preoccupation of the people, whether as serious as the national movement or as trivial as contemporary fads and fancies. Further Gaurda made his poetry a medium to educate the people on the current National scene ; towards this he composed a number of verses on the Non Cooperation movement, the Salt Satyagraha, the Round table Conference etc.

His verses were composed in a very simple style, often based on lyrical format similar to the local folk songs⁵⁷. This rendered them very singable and infinitely more attractive to the people. Infact this must have aided their transmission among the local people. Gaurda would often sing his own compositions at fairs and other public gatherings, many times sitting amongst the rural folk popularizing his poetry as part of the propoganda for Nationalism⁵⁸ . A number of his verses also appeared in the local newspaper, such as Shakti, besides Gaurda used to publish his poetry on pamphlets at his own cost and distribute

56 *ibid*, p. 66.

57 Pandey, Charuchandra : Kumauni Kavi Gaurda ka Kavya Sangraha, p. 7.

58 *ibid*, p. 5.

them among the people⁵⁹. Thus Gaurda was truly a popular poet; his subjects, his style of composition, and his efforts to reach out to the people confirm this. His efforts were recognized, when in 1934 at a public reception to honour him, he received a gold medallion from the people of Almora. On one side of it was inscribed 'Kumaon Padak 1934' and on the other "Pandit Gauridatt Pandey, Kumauni Bhasha ke Mahan Kavi".⁶⁰

Gaurda's poetry was an instance of the tremendous evolution of the structure of ideas in late 19th century Kumaun. By this time the Kumaunis had begun to increasingly formulate their grievances against the British administration in Kumaun, whether in regard to forest problems or to forced labour - and all this was not only reflected in Gaurda's works but he further inspired them to seek redressal of their grievances.

The first step towards redressal was unity of the people. Gaurda therefore enunciated the concept of 'Kummaiya' or 'Kumauni' or one belonging to Kumaun. He thus underlined the need for attachment to Kumaun and pride in it. By this he hoped to engender in them the fervour of belongingness and to enable them to rise above themselves and think of Kumaun and their country first.

In a verse titled 'Hamro Kumaun'⁶¹ the poet envisioned a golden past for Kumaun and sought to inspire pride in it. He demonstrated the uniqueness of Kumaun and reminiscenced an era of plenty in the days of yore. He claimed to belong to Kumaun and claimed Kumaun as his ... that his fields were here, and of here everything, the tarai bhabar, the rivers, hills, forests, were his

Hamro Kumaon, hum chau Kumaiyyai, hamri cha sab kheti badi.

Tarai bhabar, ban, bot, ghat, gaad, hamara pahad pahadi.

That he was born here, lived here and this is where he would die. This is where his ancestors belonged; then, where else could he go? That he chose to

59 *ibid*, p. 5.

60 *ibid*, p. 7.

61 *ibid*, p. 1.

be reborn here again and again, for he loved the land.

*Thain bhayaain ham, thain runla, thain chutlin naadi
Pitar kudi cha thain hamri, kaan julaan yaikan chadi
Thain janam phir-phir lahunla, yo thati hamar ladi*

That Kumaun was indeed unique, it had the holy shrines of Badri and Kedar and beautiful valleys of flowers; the five prayags and Uttar Kashi were all before him, the highest mountain Himalaya and behind it Kailash were all here.

*Badri Kedarai dham lai yain chan, kasi kasi chan phulwari
Paanch prayag Uttar Kashi, sab chan hamaara adhyaadi
Saban hain thulo Himaanchal yaan cha, Kailash jaika pichaadi*

The poet then reminiscenced that the kings of yore were independent and their reigns were blissful. Men of wisdom, poets and physicians, astrologers and Gantuwas⁶² abounded here.

*Raja lai Yaanka swaadheen chiya sundar chin rajwaadi
Pandit kavi Vaidi jyosi chi bhala gantuwa yaika khiladi*

Here there was milk and curds in plenty and sacks full of grain. Everyone stayed on great mountain heights and were likewise very accomplished. At that time they could extract any amount of stones, lime, iron, copper etc., as they wished from the mines of Kumaun.

*Roonchiya dai dood. ghyu bharu theka, naaj kuthli bhari thaadi
Ooncha mein rai ooncha chiyaan ham, ni chiyaan kwai lai anaadi
Pathar chuna luva Tama Khani lyunchiyan man dhyan kai gaadi.*

The ghats, the grasslands all belonged to them together and were not demarcated in between them. They obtained timber for construction, fuelwood and pinewood to light torches and dried pine leaves from their forests. The gardens in front of their houses would be laden with walnuts, pomogranettes

⁶² Men who practice the art of divining from grains of rice

lemons and oranges and in every house there were cows.

*Panghat gochar sub chiya aapun, taar lagi nai pichaadi
Baar - pirul - patel laakdo; lyunchiyaan chilkar phaadi
Akhod, daadim, nimuva, naaring, phal runchi bada adhyaadi
Goru, bains, baakra ghar - ghar sitkai, paal chiyaan gwala ghasyaari.*

What is borne out from this verse is a rather simplistic desire for idyllic living, complete with food, clothing and shelter; something which had become their right by the nature of its antiquity. It was also something that was perhaps denied to them in the present age, which therefore led the poet to incite the people to demand what had by tradition been theirs.

The poet thus wrote in a verse⁶³, that India was theirs, her land was theirs, that they should not be afraid of anyone. However the foreigners had entered in and had begun to terrorise the people, to kill them, to confine them and even exacted *begar* out of them. However when the entire country was awakening to their menacing aspects, the Kumaunis were still unaware.

*Hamro Bharat jimi hamaari, kai ka li baujyu ko dar ni haarti.
Videsi ai ber debi debi ber, ghuse char bhitas khabar ni haanti,
Murda banai ham khaad haalaan, satai coolie bardais laicha
- Oothi gayo cha abyo desh saaro, hadiyai tum cha phikar ni haanti*

The foreigners ransacked everything, all the forests, all the unmeasured lands, houses and rivers. The Kumaunis were forbidden to fish in their own waters, the restrictions on grazing in the forests, had depleted their stocks of cows, buffaloes and goats. In this rule, no one got to eat enough, nor did one get justice.

*Banbot benaap ghar gaad loota maacha haman kain maran ni dira
Janglat dukh lai goru bhains bakra gothar mein kaika kati ni haanti
Milo nai pet bhari ta gaas kaikar na nyay millo ye raaj maaja.*

⁶³ Pandey, Charuchandra : opcit, p. 16.

The subordinate staff and the agents of the government, the *patwaari* and the *patrol* were all in all and had to be bribed regularly, lest they chose to obstruct the work of the villagers. If one did not reach on time to extinguish forest fires, the forest incharge imposed *challan*. There was no manure for the seeds to germinate in the fields and at homes there was no grain and that the English did not even let the people express their grievances.

*Patwaari Patrol phajeet karni bina khaaja di giyar ni haanti
Aaga bujhuna mein ni puji payo janglat wala chalan karni.
Bin mol parai biyain ni jaman anaaj muthi bhari gharan ni haanti
maran hamar kain daadai ni dina dapha laagan cha bulaan mein lai*

The poet then besought the Kumaunis, that what were they waiting for, when else would the time come. There was not even a broken utensil in their houses. They must now prepare themselves to fight for the redressal of their grievance, and fight till they obtained *swaraj*. For there was no solution to these problems other than *swaraj*.

*Dekhi kya raucha bakhat kab aalo phuto paalo lai tumro ni haanti
Hai jawo thada kasi ber o nyara paigau kumun ka vaasi
Ilaaj saara dukhur ko ab tau swarajya prapti hai doosar ni haanti.*

Gaurda also gave powerful expression to the movement against *coolie utar* in Kumaun⁶⁴. *Coolie utar* was a system of forced labour exacted by government officials and English travellers in Kumaun hills, where the difficult terrain and the lack of boarding and lodging facilities as well as transport facilities acted as great impediments. They therefore made it obligatory for all the landowners in kumaun to provide services as part of the land settlements. Thus all landholders (*hissedaar* and *khaikars*) and along with them even the tenants at will (*sirtans*) were compelled to render forced labour. They were made to carry the luggage of the Englishman in transit, as also other loads comprising building materials in the deep interiors of the hills. They had to help towards construction of

64 *ibid*, p. 47.

temporary rest houses for them and also work on public work sites such as building of roads, bridges etc. Though they were meant to be remunerated for services rendered, it was either not done, or was too inadequate. Moreover the people were forced to supply provisions (*bardaish*) for the touring officials. The requisitioning agents, the *patwari* and *tehsildaar* often took away their stock of food, grass, fuel and even utensils, leaving behind a trail of depravity.⁶⁵ With the advent of the forest department the burden of these services on the Kumauni villagers doubled, as increasing number of officers now began to tour these tracts in order to supervise the reserved forests⁶⁶. Gaurda in his long poem on *coolie utar* enlisted the grievances of the villagers and called upon them not to render *coolie begar*, at any cost, whether it meant taking a beating by sticks or even going to jails.

*Mulk Kumaun ka suni liyo yaaro,
Jan diya coolie begar.
Chahe padi ja dande ki maar.
Jhel huni lai hovau tayyar*

He urged them not to render *coolie* services again, for there was no such law that could compel them to do so. That now that they had thrown off this evil into the Ganges⁶⁷, they should never resume it again.

*.. ab coolie ni dhūn kai karo karar
.....
Kanoon nahanti kari hai vichaar
Paap bagai haich gangjyu ki dhaar.
ab jan dharo aapna khwaar.
...*

⁶⁵ Guha, Ramachandra: The Unquiet Woods. Ecological Change and Peasant resistance in the Himalayas, p. 25.

⁶⁶ *ibid*, p. 101.

⁶⁷ This refers to the gathering at Bageshwar in January 1921, where amidst thousands gathered at the *Uttaraini fair*, Badridutt Pandey gave a call to refuse *utar*. Following this, the village headman flung their *coolie registers* into the Sarju river - Guha, Ramachandra: *opcit*, p. 111.

In a similar vein Gaurda implored the people to fight tooth and nail against the infringement of their forest rights. Forest management initiated in Kumaun after 1850, accelerated in the 1890s. What fell prey to these preservation methods, were the traditional rights of the peasants in grazing, lopping and burning of the forest floor, as also in trade in forest produce. Between 1911 - 1917 with active measures to convert the hitherto protected forests into reserved forests, the alienation of the peasants from their forests was complete⁶⁸. Gaurda called upon the peasants to resist the official encroachment upon their forests. He tried to prevail upon them that as the movement for redressal in the rest of the country achieved its goal, even their grievances would be redressed and their rights restored eventually.

*Jungle ka lai dukh bola paar.
kaam jan kariya-koi ganwaar
Jungle mein tum khebardaar
Huna laagi rai mulk sudhaar
.....
Manimani kai milla adhikaar⁶⁹*

Thus Gaurda not only propounded the identity of the Kumauni, he also appealed to the people to fight for their rights. At the same time he enjoined Kumaunis to become one with the nation. In the wake of the national movement he wrote innumerable songs on Gandhi, *charkha*, handspun, *swadeshi*, *satyagraha*, nonviolent noncooperation. These compositions were extremely simple and repetitive in their message, but they were distinguished by their immeasurable patriotic fervor. One verse⁷⁰ especially epitomized his total commitment to *Swarajya*.

*Bhaarat ka oona koono sab janin ka bhitari bat,
Nikalanch yoi yaaro han to swarajya lyunla.*

68 *ibid*, p. 44-45.

69 Pandey, Charuchandra: *opcit*, p. 50.

70 *ibid*, p. 15.

*Chaahe Qaid haman kari beer, chahe baandhi ber maaran
 par ham to yoi koola - ham to swarajya lyunla
 Chahe mari kati diyo dhadkan alag kari diyo
 munlo ta yoi kaunlo - ham to swarajya lyunla
 munli kai phodi diyo, nas nas nikaali, liyo,
 Phir swansai yoi kaulo - ham ta swarajya lyunla
 Swansai lai nikali liyo, kaphan lai dhanki diyo,
 par lashai yoi kauli - ham to swarajya lyunla
 laashan kain khadai halo, chahe jalai diyo,
 par had to yoi kaulo - ham to swarajya lyunla
 Hadan kain phodi ber, chaakha mein pisi liyo
 Pisyuva ta yoi kaulo - han to swarajya lyunla
 Pisyuva kain chaaro kari ber kapaal mein lagaaro
 Vibhut yoi kauli - ham to swarajya lyunla.*

Hence the poet observed, that from every corner of India the call for *Swaraj* resounded. He proclaimed that even if he was imprisoned, tied and beaten he would ask for *Swaraj*. Even if he was killed and his head severed from his body, his mouth would still ask for *Swaraj*. Even if his head was broken, his veins extracted, his breath would still ask for *Swaraj*. When his breath was extracted and he was covered up with shroud, his lifeless body would still ask for *Swaraj* and when the body was buried or burnt, the ashes would still ask for *Swaraj*. If ashes were to be ground to dust, the dust would ask for *Swaraj*. When this dust was applied on the forehead as "*uibhuthi*", it would again ask for *Swaraj* only. Thus the poet proclaimed that till his last atom, he would be committed to *Swaraj*.

However, Gaurda was no blind follower of the Nationalist creed, but was a discerning patriot. Thus if in one verse he denounced the moderates, in others, he warned against the new breed of opportunistic politicians. Conveying his message through an amusing anecdote, a style typical of Gaurda and attractive even to the listener, he nonetheless delivered the message home.

Thus in one, verse⁷¹ he portrays a women who complains about her husbands double standards. That why should he have bought her a georgette saree when he preached about *swadeshi*. Had he become a leader to deceive the people.

*Main sun Iyaachaa kilai georgette ki saadi main kain gheen laganch tai
hai chi haadi*

*Swadeshi swarjiya tum bani runcha, lecture deencha tari khapdi
Neta bani runcha mulk thagar huri, chanruva niti ta parijau dhadi.*

Even the Christian women had become devotees of *swadesh*, when they cast off their foreign gowns and the foreigners donned Gandhi caps and conducted social service in the villages. Then how could he forsake honour. In his lust for power, he had lost his commitment to Nationalism and perhaps it was due to the likes of him, that hooliganism was on the increase in the entire country. However, Gaurda warned that he was on the lookout for such elements and would censure them even in public.

*Isaini lai ab swadeshi bhagatchar, gain pali khedi, dhayang hai gaadi
Gwaara lagai ab Gandhi topi haalni, graim sudhar kaa chan adhyadi
Mani naakha tukaiki sharam lai chainch, kasi-iniyatai tumlai bigaadi
Tab mains kuni gundyol hai gaich, mad mein aaye diyo dhyey chhadi
Kansun chhiluk bali dosh chaarch, nyatna ka padiya chh oo pichhaadi*

Just as Gaurda supported the Nationalist creed, so he endorsed its constructive programme, whether it was *harijan* uplift or prohibition of liquor and gambling. In Kumaun the Doms or the untouchables were an acutely aggrieved lot, for they had traditionally been regarded as agents of social pollution and were therefore shunned by society. Gaurda presented this traditional prejudice against Harijans by way of a dialogue between a biased woman and her reformed sister-in-law⁷² Thus by the use of an amusing

71 *ibid*, p. 44.

72 *ibid*, p. 113.

instance, he presented the entrenched biases, and also the new wave of upliftment of *harijan*.

In this verse one woman expresses her shock to her sister-in-law at the blatant transgression by the *Swarajists*, who had begun to indulge in hitherto inconceivable activities, like embracing the untouchables, dining in common with them and even carrying them on palanquins through the bazaars.

Sunichh gusyani anhoti kala lagai doom gala chutiyol bhai.

Dhari bhangi mulya daani main keani mein oo bazaar ghumai raksyol bhai

Yo swarajya wala baig dhwala bhalikai bigda bhusiyol bhai.

Khan pina bhayo unra dagada sakbhakh kari yo bhanyal bhai.

Her sister-in-law refutes her saying that matters such as restrictions on interdinging and untouchability were not religion. All four varnas were one. Only if every one was united could *swaraj* be obtained. Everywhere people were ridding themselves of such restrictive rules, and they should denounce it too. For was it not hypocrisy when such perpetrators of untouchability could go ahead and drink water from a leather lined tank or consume *Kheer*⁷³ cooked in three parts water. Why have such double standards?

Khan pheene chuachhut dharon nibhai, charjaatin ki ek tol bhai

Jiti jaali tabai yo swarajya ladai sabnaiki kamar jo kasyol bhai

Sabka chyaal bawaari varai khan bhai, aapuri muftai paksyol bhai.

Tumro tau dharm dhadi padi jaalo, yaas dharman mein thukyol bhai.

bhains chaam laagi pani pi bamni nal tankin mein chutiyol bhai

pani teen hissa jai daadh mein ho khirkhaj puri chokhiyol bhai.

Gaurda similarly tried dissuading people against alcoholism. He warned that alcohol was bad and should not be consumed. Once drunk, men would lose all sense of propriety, and talk loose. They would get beaten up for their misdemeanour and the entire family had to suffer because of it

⁷³ Water is traditionally considered impure in Kumauni society, thus anything cooked in it is also considered impure.

*Sharab badi kharab yaikni mukhada ni laguno
mukh lagai yo raandi to khwaar mein ukli janchh.
Kuna nikuna loganch aapur maarai khaanchh
bal buddhi sub bhrasht hoonch gharkuoli bechai jaanch*

.....
*Dushkarme - Karman ko phal yo ghar mein sabar pinanchh.*⁷⁴

Gaurda's commitment was not mere lip service. He had himself suffered at the hands of social hypocrisy, when he and his entire family were socially boycotted, as a consequence of his brother returning after studying agricultural science abroad⁷⁵. This had left a deep impact on him and he got back by denouncing the entire belief pattern as hypocritical and obsolete.

Gaurda criticized those upholders of sanatan dharm, who having lost sight of the gem of true religion, fussed about its external manifestations. He was most satirical about the apparent dissimulation in their acts. They would sprinkle half a jar of water on their shoulders, and spouting Har Garge Har Har consider themselves cleansed. They would sprinkle some water on their dirty starched "dhotis" to purify themselves. They plastered their cooking spaces with infected cowdung and yet they insisted on eating only food cooked in milk.

*Aaduk lotiya pani kana khiti kuni, Ganga Hari Hari Hari.
maili kadi kadi maan ki dhoti bhai pani chitai chokhi kari.
Sadiyai gobar latpatai chul lipo jai mein bhaya kid padi.
Karni pak swayan bagula bhagat jyu chwa khai khani har ghadi.*⁷⁶

While the cat was allowed to trespass into the cooking place, even though it might have eaten mice and was consequently impure; the dog was shooed. Likewise while a living goat was disallowed inside on grounds of pollution, his meat was cooked and eaten with much relish. While food cooked of lentils and

⁷⁴ Pandey, Charuchandra: opcit, p.100.

⁷⁵ ibid, introduction, p. 20.

⁷⁶ ibid, p. 68.

rice could be had outside, rice could not be eaten, for it was considered impure.

*Musa syun hadai buhai birai lai oonch risya ghadi ghadi
Bhairav vaahan kukur the har koi kuni - hadi hadi hadi.
Jyunai bakra ki risya choot bhai mariyai pakai sapdi
Bedwa choli rwata sabai chwakh bhya bhatai ki chootai badi.⁷⁷*

In towns these very same villagers partook from the same tank of water and men of all four castes drank water of the same tap having leather washers. Where do their pretensions vanish then? They partook of onion, garlic, eggs and chicken and were hope to conduct marriage alliances with people who had such life styles. Then why did they preterd otherwise?

*Chaar jatan ko ekai gagro loha ko chaunkuniya chh.
Bhains cham au naikal lagiya shahar mein pani piniya chh.
Bhyargaur au aitipan ka tum sabai jani bartmiya chh.
Aab batavau dharan tumharo runi chh ya janiya chh.
Pyaaaj laasan au anda murgi varpan gappa kaniya chh
Hotel Botel vaalnasur tum rishta heeni aankh taaniyan chh⁷⁸*

The poet further criticised certain festivities of Sanatan Dharm such as *Holi*, for it served as an excuse for general hooliganism. Men from all castes would spring ash, coaltar and muck on each other, use abusive language in front of women, drink and dance naked before all.

Holi kheliya dharm sanatan mein. Khub dhoom machai charon jaatan mein.

*chaara kachyarai ki au coaltar ki gali bakiya baini maatan mein.
Bhaang majum atar lai khaya, nangda nachiya laakhan mein⁷⁹*

77. *ibid*, p. 69.

78. *ibid*, p. 111.

79. *ibid*, p. 83.

However Gaurda knew that social reform was no easy task. Social afflictions were too deeprooted to be ameliorated just by cosmetic treatment. The entire belief system had to be overhauled and this called for persistent and determined commitment. Thus in verse after verse, Gaunda attacked religious pretensions and prejudices of Kumauni society. Not only this, he actively involved himself in social reform. At a time when it was absolutely inconceivable to educate untouchable boys, he induced the *shilpkaar* boys of Patiya village to study alongwith the high caste boys⁸⁰. Thus Gaurda did not only practice what he preached, but was brave in his commitment.

If on the one hand Gaurda struck at the roots of outmoded observances, he also attacked the blind emulation of new fads and fancies concurrent with the dawn of modernity. He was astonished at the way people had forsaken all modesty and equanimity in their mania to modernizē. Thus in one verse⁸¹ he observes that it had become fashionable to educate one's sons, even if after that they got no jobs and had to sit at home. For all the painstaking efforts of parents to bring up their children, all they got in return was disrespect and disregard. For in keeping with modern fashions sons would shave of their moustaches, irrespective of the fact that their fathers were still alive. They not only did not bother to bathe on the tenth day after their fathers demise in order to purify themselves, instead they partook of such impure foods as eggs and chicken. They had begun to keep long hair on their heads, and wore flaired trousers and short blazers. They would gamble all day long and puff cigarettes to keep up with the times.

*Aaj kalan ko fashion yo chun suniya syaini baig sbai.
Padi guni berain ghar baithichar baujyuki chala udhedi
knai.
Sainti pali sagun unn sun jyunai unra junai munyai
Mariya unra dasai dinn mein chyal randa lai sutak ni nai*

⁸⁰ *ibid*, introduction, p.6.

⁸¹ *ibid*, p.74.

Gati kriya oon kan bat karla anda murgi varpan khai

.....
Khwaron jhankari suraal ghagri jasi blazer coat bhai kaman takai
Charon pahar bhai tashai baji cigarette churut jali mukhai.

The women too followed new fashions. They put on sarees over their skirts; they had forsaken all signs of marriagehood ie. 'birdi', bangles and other jewellery. They might have covered their heads in front of their in-laws, however once outside they did away with it. They thrust all responsibility of home and hearth to servant boys ; they had taken to wearing short blouses, baring their chests and wore clips on their hair.

Syainnin ka lai haal sunau mani dhoti bhitari ghagri lukai
Chuda charawa tikuli binduli gahno pato suhaag bhusyai
Ghar par ghonghat jhethan sasur oon sadak bhai par malikai bhai.

.....
Bhitari pan ko kam sabai oon naukar jyu ka haat mein rai.

.....
adhbaunli aangoli chaati khuliya tedi syuri kilip lukai.

Even the old man and his woman had not stayed behind they had forsaken the observances of Sanatan Dharm and consumed garlic, onions savouries and wheatmeats made of grains. The old women put on footwear and the old man liked to wear a blazer. They had forgotten all about prayer and piety and took tea without rinsing their mouths. They wont have medicines prescribed by physicians, but would consume brandy mixtures instead. On their hands they liked to wear wrist watches on leather straps and even then they upheld religious pretensions.

Kaans ja puliya bud badin lai dharm snatan gaad bagai.
lasan pyaaj lai khana laga luni anaaj bazaar mithai
Budiya chappal pairon laagi budjyu blazer coat datai.
Sandhya pooja jab tap phuko bin mukh dhwee ye chahaa hod yai.
Baidin nushdhi gheen batooni barandi mixture jahat ghatkai

*Chamad tasam laagi haath mein ghadi bhai usi kai budiyal bhat pakai
Baamni pani lai vi kain chainchh pakhard phiri lai veek mi gai
Dhanya ho mahima fashon teree kas kas rang dhang tweel dekhai.*

Gaurda also wrote verses on the current craze for cinema and for tea both newly introduced in kumaun. The kumaunis had such fascination for them that they pervaded all aspects of their lives.

In direct contrast to these, Gaurda endorsed the traditional values of love and respect between family and friends. He wrote a number of verses where he pleaded for affection between spouses, between mothers and daughters-in-law. These relationships especially seem to have been under duress in Gaurda's society.

It would have become evident from the above narrative that Gaurda's poetry spanned a vast gamut of themes covering all aspects of the socio-political and economic conditions of his time. Gaurda combined in himself the ideals of a nationalist and social reformer, the might of a poet's 'pen' and the zeal of a propagandist. Thus written tradition under him reached their acme in the 19th century, both by way of evolution of ideas and its total identification with the people.

These written traditions of Kumaun thus provide a melange of pictures, obtained from 19th century Kumaun. They portray the socio-political and economic conditions of kumaon in the 19th century as nothing else will. Stringing together these different portrayals at different points in time, one gets a picture of a people relatively backward throughout the 19th century; stooped in myth and superstitious religion they fell easy prey to new values concurrent upon the coming of the English. The increasing lust for money and power successively undermined traditional social values of love and respect for family and friends. Even towards the end of the 19th century they remained a curious mix of backward tradition and superimposed modernity. There can be little doubt that these descriptions pertained more to the townspeople, who came in contact with the foreigners, rather than to countryfolk. In the countryside, on the other hand was a picture of the people struggling hard against the rigours

of a difficult terrain and climate, of a people impoverished at the hands of the rulers who extracted everything from them but did not in any way compensate them. This was true under Gurkha rule and even under the English rule. Infact under the English their exploitation was worse, for their traditional rights over forests were curtailed and forced labour imposed on them. While earlier they would migrate to Tarai, when they could no longer bear the torture of repeated exploitation, towards the end of the century a new mood to resist was increasingly being generated. Thus while the written traditions of 19th century Kumaun do convey an approximate picture - of the superstitious and obsolete practices of the Kumaunis in the 19th century; of their reactions to the new values of modernity; of Kumaunis vis a vis their exploitative rulers, of the contradictions within the family unit - they also omit a lot. Girish Tiwari and Shekhar Pathak have especially criticized all these poets for their lack of radicalism in overlooking the internal contradiction within Kumauni society itself⁸², especially in an age of increasing consciousness of rights, of justice of liberty.

While thus situating the inadequacies of the written traditions of 19th century Kumaun, there is no doubt that the structure of ideas embodied in these written traditions evolved towards increasing identification with the people. From writings on archaic themes of religion and philosophy, it emerged towards the first reckoning of its surroundings in the first quarter of the 19th century itself. Infact in the first half of the 19th century itself, the trend of criticism of Kumauni society had been initiated. The second half of the 19th century saw written traditions evolve towards critical introspection and reform. By the last quarter of the 19th century it incorporated ideas of the rights of the Kumaunis, of justice, of equality of the people. True the concept of rights was very simple, deriving basically from their environment, yet it showed increasing consciousness on the part of the people. Why this identification of written traditions with the people is significant? It shows that the structure of ideas in Kumaun had evolved to a point of consciousness of 'man' above everything else,

⁸² Tiwari, Girish; Pathak, Sekhar: opcit, p. 53-79.

be it superstitious religion, backward tradition or even fatalism. Faith had been restored in mans capacity to rise above his circumstances.

Not only did poetry writing evolve in scope, but in language and style too. After a brief association with Sanskrit, it very early adopted Khadiboli and later Kumaoni for its expression. It had also in the early stages itself, broken away from the constricted format involving linguistic jugglery and ornate style. Instead through most of the 19th century it was written in fairly simple and direct manner. Rhyme and rhythm were its essence. It took its reference from Kumaun, its images and symbols from Kumaun and very often incorporated even the local sayings. This must have not only made it infinitely more attractive but must have aided its acceptability by the people.

Thus even as written traditions increasingly adopted a popular style for easy comprehension, they also moved out of secluded confines to reach larger audiences, initially at the courts and later bigger public gatherings, such as fairs. The poets themselves began to go out amongst the people and recite their works to them. Later with the beginning of publishing technology - pamphlets and newspapers became the most important aides to the spread of the literary traditions. Thus just like the ideas were increasingly oriented towards the people, they were increasingly sought to be disseminated among them too. Thus, it is in their association with the people that the ideas incorporated in the literary traditions became more relevant to the study of the structure of ideas in 19th century Kumaon.

VI

Conclusion

Popular culture, in as much as it emanates from the very way of life of a people, it mirrors their ideas, their values and attitudes. This assumption was the starting point of this enquiry into the ideological structure of the Kumaoni people during the 19th century.

This enquiry had been prompted by the transformation of the people of Kumaun during the course of the 19th century, when they became acutely conscious of their rights. They not only took on the might of the state in defence of their rights, but also urged social reorganization on more equitable lines. In this context, I questioned the potentiality of their ideas and values for effecting this transformation.

To begin with, the religious beliefs and practices of Kumaunis showed that they mostly worshipped those forces, which were essentially destructive in nature. This was quite understandable given their tremendous awe of their harsh environment, where calamities were not of infrequent occurrence. Their gods were mostly seen as the embodiments of such destructive forces, and needed to be constantly placated, lest they manifested their malevolence. Thus Shiva as Bhairon, the 'terrible one', the different Shaiva *Shaktis*, Nanda, Durga, Kali, etc and the host of local godlings were worshipped with tremendous fervour, to keep them in good humour. Further just like the gods were visualized as extremely terrible,, they were likewise sought to be appeased by exaggerated symbols of worship. Thus the rituals of bloody sacrifices and also of periodic invocation of the deities themselves was considered most effective.

The worship of these forms was motivated by the desire to waive off the hazards to their lives, but the people also appealed to the creative energies of the same deities for the fulfilment of their desires for progeny, prosperity, longevity etc. Further they even sought the arbitration of the deities, in their

daily strife. In this sense then it was not merely a religion of fear, but they evinced a positive faith in the creative forces of the Gods as well and elicited his active intervention for facilitating their lives. Thus their religious attitudes were rather this worldly and they sought to realize the full potential of life. Further while self-abnegation was far from their minds, they were not given to fatalism either, in the sense that they would try everything in their power to preserve life, before giving up. The Kumauni people thus had a certain sense of being, to preserve which they were even often brought into confrontation with each other, and the attitude of an 'eye for an eye' remained the motive force behind a lot of their social action.

While they sought to thus preserve their lives, they also sought to improve their station in life. The popular desire for transformation towards a more equitable society was reflected in the rituals of violence and the rituals of harmony and comradeship. While the rituals of violence, *Bagwali*, *Khaturwa* etc. imparted a sense of victory, which was so necessary for the self conviction of the masses, otherwise constrained by their actual life 'circumstances', the rituals of comradeship, of amity, affirmed their desire for social integration. For instance on *Wallgiya* the outcaste craftsmans made gifts to those in authority, children made gifts to the elders etc; while this affirmed the natural and social hierarchy it provided the alternative motif of what the people might have actually desired.

These ideas of social transformation were further exemplified in their oral traditions. The legends of heroes which endorsed the political and social order, suggest that the people may have perhaps perceived a threat to the stability of the traditional order, from their own disillusionment with it, and thus needed reassurance. That this might have been so is apparent from the popular motif of the hero as a rebel against authority and as a rebel against social traditions. At the same time the hero also fought against the treachery of compatriots, against victimization and the like - all symptomatic of popular desire to overcome similar evils, a consequence of the inadequate and inequitable distribution of the resources.

Meanwhile the popular stereotypes of the various social constituents

provided ready motifs of what the people thought of as assets and as liabilities. Even as the people jibed against each other, the 'Khasiya' peasants, at those who enjoyed social prestige or superior status, either due to their ritual superiority or due to the possession of wealth and power, or even at the symbols of freedom from all social restraints - the Yogis: the upholders of authority on the other hand jibed at the Khasiyas who possessed the labour power and the entire society ranged itself against the Doms or the social outcasts, who nevertheless were important for the innumerable and indispensable services they rendered to society. Likewise women were also jibed at, and for all their virtues were represented as objects of ridicule. What is important here is that even though these insinuations represented some of the popular aspirations however so far as the motifs were obtained from within society, it showed the popular desire for social rearrangement, not for radical transformation *per se*.

— It was these ideas and attitudes, reflected in the symbolic and oral traditions of the Kumaunis which provided inspiration to the poets of 19th century Kumaun and forced them to evolve from their traditional and ornate poetic writings to reckon the contemporary environment. Thus the poets wrote on a whole range of themes, from the critique of the English administration to self introspection to urging reform and redressal. True, they overlooked the need for structural transformation, perhaps owing to their upper class prejudices, however, even this trend was initiated towards the end of the 19th century by the Kumauni poet Gaurda. This poet further forged an identity for the Kumaunis as '*Kummaiya*' (ie. one who belonged to Kumaun) and joined the popular desire for social transformation to the nation's struggle for freedom. Further these ideas transcended the realm of learned tradition, even as the poets oriented themselves towards the people by writing in the local dialect, by going among the people during fairs and singing to them their compositions, set to tune in folk style, or by writing them down on pamphlets and distributing these to the literate among the masses, who further disseminated them by word of mouth; these ideas were thus being conveyed to the ordinary people, with the object of imbuing them with these. Thus it can be assumed that they were increasingly becoming part of the popular tradition.

Whether these values and attitudes underwent any change during the course of the 19th century is difficult to ascertain from the paltry evidences at our command. However, it has been suggested that towards the beginning of the 20th Century, the transformation of the material framework of Kumaun - the building of better communication network, the arrangements for better public health, the consequent increase in population, the increasing commercialization of Kumauns economy - led to the transformation of some cultural expressions as well. Thus the fairs declined in importance and were held less frequently. Moreover the cultural expression of the fairs gave way increasingly to their commercial expression. Further rituals like *Wallgiya* were almost lost to the people - another consequence of the commercialization of values. However, it is my conjecture, that this could have also happened because of the increasing assertion by the traditionally subjected classes, under the new ordering of society; where they not only increasingly organized themselves to demand their rights but were suddenly bestowed with the power of the popular vote under the new democratic order, introduced in stages during early 20th century. These evidences however barely touch on the transformation of ideas and attitude during the course of one hundred years and above of British rule in Kumaun and further research on this subject is necessary.

The popular culture of Kumaun thus provided rich traditions of the popular desire for self-sustenance and self enhancement. While there were innumerable motifs of opposition, of protest, of revolt and of violence against the political and socio-economic order; there were at the same time many motifs of the popular ideal of authority, as just, as benevolent as protector etc; and also of socio-economic transformation or rearrangement in a more equitable manner. Having been thus nourished on such traditional themes of protest and change, it was inevitable that the Kumaunis should have opposed the English administration when it trespassed not only their traditional rights but also their sense of self esteem.

GLOSSARY

<i>Ajota</i>	The day on which cattle are not yoked
<i>Bagwali</i>	Stone slinging match
<i>Bairagis</i>	Sect of Vaishnava ascetics
<i>Bhabar</i>	Foothills
<i>Bindi</i>	Red vermilion dot used to adorn a woman's forehead
<i>Cheer</i>	Cloth
<i>Coolie</i>	Porter
<i>'Da - Pai'</i>	'Very good, see now!'
<i>Deva</i>	The Shining ones
<i>Devata</i>	Godling
<i>Dhotis</i>	Loin cloth
<i>Dhuni</i>	Sacred fireplace
<i>Dola</i>	Palanquin
<i>Dor</i>	Thread
<i>Dub</i>	Grass
<i>Faquira</i>	Ascetic
<i>Gardevis</i>	Water sprites
<i>Ghantuwa</i>	Astrologer
<i>Ghee</i>	Clarified butter
<i>Gur</i>	Jaggery

<i>Haldi</i>	Turmeric
<i>Huqqa</i>	Smoking draw pipe
<i>Hurkiyas</i>	Bards
<i>Jagar Lagana</i>	Invocation of the dieties
<i>Janeo</i>	Sacred thread worn only by the twice born castes
<i>Jogi</i>	Ascetic
<i>Khichhari</i>	Dish prepared from rice and lentils
<i>Kunds</i>	Sacred bathing pond
<i>Mantra</i>	Chant
<i>Nags</i>	Snakes
<i>Padhan</i>	Village headman
<i>Pahari</i>	Hillman
<i>Pait</i>	Sweat meat
<i>Pandit</i>	Priest
<i>Paru</i>	Festival
<i>Patrol</i>	Forest watchmen
<i>Prayags</i>	Junction of two rivers
<i>Raja</i>	King

<i>Sanyasis</i>	Shaivite ascetics
<i>Satu</i>	Porridge made of flour
<i>Satyagraha</i>	Truth force
<i>Sau</i>	Hundred
<i>Shlokas</i>	Sanskrit Couplets
<i>Shraddhs</i>	Ceremony performed for the dead
<i>Swaraj</i>	Self rule / Independence

<i>Tehsildaar</i>	Subordinate Government Official.
<i>Thakurdwara</i>	Temple
<i>Thuljat</i>	Higher castes
<i>Trishul</i>	Trident

<i>Utsav</i>	Festival
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<i>Vadas</i>	Savoury made from lentil
<i>Varnas</i>	The hierarchy of the four Hindu castes; Brahmans, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, Shudras
<i>Vibhuthi</i>	Ashes from a sacred fire place

Appendix I

1. Table I

Popular Worship of Shiva in Kumaun hills

Names of the Lord	Place	Ritual Observance	Attendance during fairs
Nagnath	(i) Almora	Worshipped daily	
	(ii) Champawat	Fair on Chait 8th ie. on the 8th day of Chait Navratris in Chait. (March - April)	The temple is served by Kanphata Jogis
Rataneshwar	(i) Almora	Worshipped daily	
Bhairava	Almora	There are six temples to this form with the prefixes Shankara, Sah, Gaur, Kal, Batuk and Bal	
Nileswar	Maloli Nayan	Fair on Shivratri, in the month of Phalgun (February - March)	
Someswar	Almora	Daily worship Fair on Shivratri (Phalgun) Fair on Holi (Phalgun)	
Kshetrapal	Almora	Daily worship	
Kapileswar	Bhatkot, Bisaud	Fair on Uttarayani ie. Winter Solstice in December, when the sun commences on its northward journey	

Names of the Lord	Place	Ritual Observance	Attendance during fairs
Pinakeswara	Borarau	Fair on Kartik poornmasi (October - November)	
Sukeswara	Borarau		
Rupeswara	Borarau		
Betaleswar	Khatyari, Syunara	Fair on Shivratri, in the month of Phalgun (February - March)	
		Fair on Mekh Sankrant (which corresponds to the Aries constellation, and also marks the beginning of the new year in Kumaun)	
Bhimeswara	Bhimtal	Fair on Maithun Sankrant (Corresponds to the Gemini constellation, towards the end of May.)	
		Bagwali on Holi	
Risheswara	Bisang	Fair at Navratri	
Patal Bhubaneswar	Mar, Baraun	Fair on Shivratri, in the month of Phalgun (February - March)	
Koteswar	Pansat, Baraun	Fair on Kartik Badi 14th ie. on Deepawali amavas (October - November)	
Rameswar	Rameswar, Bel on the confluence of Ramganga and Sarju rivels	Fairs on the last day of Baisakh (April - May)	5000
		On the last day of Kartik (October - November)	5000

Names of the Lord	Place	Ritual Observance	Attendance during fairs
		On Makar Sankranti (Corresponding to capri- corn constellation).	7000
		On Shivratri in Phalgun (February - March)	
Jagannath	Mahar, Sor	Fair on Anant 14th, in the month of Bhado (August - September)	
Thal Kedar	Waldiya, Sor	Fair on Bhadon Sudi 3rd (August - September)	
Bhag Ling	Sirakot, Sor	Fair on Bhadon Sudi 14th or Anant 14th (August - September)	
Pacheswar	Mar, Saun, on the junction of Sarju and Kali rivers	Religious, commercial fair on Makar Sankranti (corresponds to Capricorn constellation)	
Baleswar	(i) Thal, Baraun	Great fair on Makar Sankranti corresponds to Capricorn constellation)	10000
	(ii) Champawat	Fair on Kark Sankranti (Corresponds to Cancer constellation - towards end of June)	
Pabaneswar	Dindihat, Sira	Fair on Kartik Sudi 14th (October - November)	
		Fair on Phalgun Badi 14th or Shivratri (Phalgun - Febru- ary - March)	

Name of the God	Place	Ritual Observance	Attendance during fairs
Malik Arjun	Askot		
Ghatku	Chauki, Charal	Fair on Asarh Sudi 8th (June - July)	
Briddhkedar	Chaukot	Fair on Kartik poornimasi (October - November)	
		Fair on Baisakh poornimasi (April - May)	
Bibhandeswar	Kuna, Dwara	Fair on Shivratri or Phalgun Badi 14th (February - March)	
		Fair on Mekh Sankrant (Corresponds to Aries constellation, towards end of March)	5000
Nagarjun	Dwara		
Bajinath	Bajinath	Fair on Phalgun Badi 1 4th or Shivratri (Phalgun, February - March)	
Bagnath	Bageshwar, on the confluence of Gomati and Sarju rivers in Talla Katyura	Great religious, commercial fair on Uttarayini. (ie. Winter Solstice in December when the sun commences its Northward journey)	20000
Ugra Rudra	Papdi, Nakuri	Great fair on Nagpanchami in the month of Bhadon (August - September)	
Uteswara	Utoda, Salam	Fair on Shivratri (in Phalgun, February - March)	
Jageswara	Darun	Great fairs on Baisakh poornimasi (April - May)	5000

Names of the Lord	Place	Ritual Observance	Attendance during fairs
Briddh Jageswara	Darun	Great fair on Kartik poorn-masi (mid October - mid November)	5000
		Largest endowments in Kumaun	
Dipchandewara	Almora	Daily worship Founded by Raja Dipchand in 1760 A.D.	
Udyot Chandewara	Almora	Daily worship Founded by Raja Udyotchand in 1680 A.D.	

- The source for column I, II, III is E.T. Atkinson's Himalayan Gazetteer Vol. II and column IV is B.D. Pandey's, Kumaun Ka Itihaas.

2. Table II

Popular Worship of Vishnu

Name of the God	Place	Ritual Observance
Siddh Nar Singh	Almora	Served by Acharya
Raghunath	Almora	served by Brahmacharya
Rampaduk	Almora	Fair on Ramnavmi, in the month of Chait (March - April)
Ramchandra	Giwar	Fair
Beni Madhub	Bageswar	Fair
Trijugi Narayan	Bageswar	Fair
Kalinag	Pungaraun	Fair
Badrinath	Dwara	

3 Table III

Popular Worship of Shakti

Name of the Goddess	Place	Ritual Observance
Nanda	(i) Almora	Fair on 7th to 9th of Bhadar Sudi ie in the month from mid August to mid September. The especial celebration in honour of Nandashtani
	(ii) Ranchula Kot	Fair on 8th Alesh Sudi (June - July)
	(iii) As Uphami in Amel, Kosiyaan	Fair-Jeth Dasahra on Ganga Dasahra (May - June)
	(iv) Bhagar, Malla Danpur	
Ambika	Almora	No fair
Mallika	Mahar	Fair
	Borarau	
Durga	(i) Dunagiri	Fair on Chait Sudi 8th ie on Durgashtami during Navratri (March - April)
		Fair on Asarh Sudi 8th, (June - July)
	(ii) Dhurka Darda, Salam	Fair on Asarh Sudi 8th (June - July)
	(iii) Kholagaon, Lakhanpur	

Durga in also worshipped under the following names

Tripura Sundari	Almora
	Beninag

Name of the Goddess	Place	Ritual Observance
Brahmani	Ranchula, Katyur	Fair: Chait Kuar 1st to 9th ie during the Chait Navratris in the month from mid March - mid April
Jaya	Shailachal, Bel.	
Jayanti	Jayatkot, Borarau Dhwaj	
Akashbhajini	Mar, Saur	A great fair on the last day of Chait (March - April).

Forms of Kali

Bhadrakali	Kan	
Dhaulkali	Naini, Lakhanpur	
Mahakali	Devipuri, Kota Darun Gangolihat	Both at Gangolihat and Purnagigi, Kali was in former times appeased by human sacrifices. At both places she is likened to Kali of Calcutta and is offered coconuts as subsidiary oblation
Purnagiri	Tallades	At Purnagiri the season of pilgrimage is from November - April
Kalika	(i) Askot	Fair on us Sudi 14th. (December - January)
	(ii) Hat, Bel	A curious practise is observed here. The prospects of the harvest are divined from a certain well. If the spring in a certain time fills the brass vessel, in which the water is caught - to the brim - then a good season may be expected. If only half full, scarcity is expected and if only a

Names of the Goddess	Place	Ritual Observance
Ulka	Almora	little water comes - a draught is expected Assembly on 10th of Asoj Navratri ie. Bijaydashmi in the month of September - October. The town is illuminated on 13 -15 of Kartik (October - November). The worship entails unbounded revelry and indulgent sport, debauchery, gambling during the season.
	Naula Chakhata Chaur	
Ugradevi, Ugyani	Dhudiya Giwar	Fair
Syama	Tikhun	Fair on Chait Sudi 8th ie Durgashtami during Chait Navratris in (March - April) Fair on Asarh Sudi 8th (June - July)
Naini	Nainital	Fair on 10th Jeth (mid May - mid June) at Bhuwali
Chandika	(i) Kanalliya, Gangoli (ii) Jageshwar.	Usually worshipped on every Sankrant, ie the days which mark the passage of the sun from one constellation to another.

Column I, II, III have been taken from E.T. Atkinson's Himalayan Gazetteer Vol. II.v

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