

# Ritual to Performance: Jaagars of Kumaon

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# INTRODUCTION

## TOPIC OF RESEARCH

My research aims to study a body-possession ritual, *jāgar*, which is an extremely popular form of deity-worship in Kumaon. This ritual is extremely popular in both Kumaon and Garhwal Regions of Uttarakhand, India. The ritual involves the invocation of a folk deity through a ritualized singing of a special genre of songs called the *jāgars*, by a bard who is called a *jagariya*. The deity invoked is incarnated into the body of a medium called a *dāngariya*, who then addresses the gathering and listens to their petitions and gives them advice. The ritual ends with the departure of the deity from the medium's body. The ritual is mostly held in times of crisis, unexplained illnesses or any other problem. It is held at both household and community(village) levels. People of the region have a great faith in the powers of their deities and believe in the efficacy of the ritual to solve their problems.

The current research aims to study the importance of the ritual in the lives of the people of Kumaon and how it forms an inseparable aspect of their cultural lives and being. The study focuses on the importance of the ritual in the formation of a Kumaoni identity, how it generates a sense of belonging and association with the land and people even amongst people who have settled down in places far away from their ancestral homes. The study also aims to study how the ritual reflects upon their social, religious and metaphysical beliefs in relation to life and death, their concept of being and human existence.

The first chapter gives a general introduction about the state of Uttarakhand and the location of Kumaon within the state. The chapter also includes details about the history, culture, and economy of the region as it forms an important aspect of the understanding of the people and the region itself.

The second chapter deals with the certain essential components of the *jāgar*, which form the basics of a *jāgar* ritual and are integral to it. These include the folk deities who are worshipped in the region. These are the deities who are invoked and incarnated in the ritual. Next is a description of the bardic tradition of Kumaon, which has both religious,

social functions as well as serves the function of entertainment. the Nath Yogis and Tantrism were two extremely influential forces in the region and greatly affected the religious and cultural beliefs of the locals. Not only are the Nath Yogis worshipped in the ritual, but their philosophy and metaphysics have importance in the Kumaoni ritual practices. Tantrism also has affected the Kumaoni rituals in a similar manner. The chapter also provides information about the religion and major non-orthodox religious rituals of the Kumaoni: the rites of propitiation, possession, sacrifice and procession of which jāgars form a central part.

The third chapter gives details and description of the jāgar ritual and the main functionaries of the ritual the bards who sing in the ritual and the mediums who get possessed by the deities. the chapter also includes a portion about diviners who are also get possessed by deities.

The fourth chapter contains the analysis of the ritual. It looks at the ritual as well as the performance aspect of the ritual. Beginning with the metaphysical concepts of the Kumaonis, the chapter moves onto Bakhtin's concept of the carnival and carnivalesque and how these concepts are recurrent in the jāgar ritual and the various jāgar stories that are sung to invoke the deities. This section further analyses the concepts' similarities to the metaphysics of the Nath Yogis. It is a known fact that Bakhtin is often regarded as a poststructuralist even when his works were published several years previous to the poststructuralist. The further sections analyze the rituals relation to identity formation, generation of a sense of belonging and association with the land ,language and culture.

This chapter also views the performance of the ritual in terms of its efficacy and its importance for the sense of well-being. The last section of the chapter analyzes the dynamics between power and language and how language affects power and how power depends on language.

The fifth chapter gives a conclusion for the research.



## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A lot of ethnographic and anthropological studies have been carried out to study the rituals, folklores and myths of Kumaon as well as Garhwal. The early studies have focused on the social structure, institutions of family and household, caste stratification, kinship system and marriage systems of the region.

Gerald D. Berreman's monograph *Hindus of the Himalayas*<sup>1</sup> concentrated on Garhwal and had a three-fold focus: "1.) to provide an ethnographic community study in an important and previously unreported culture area of India. 2.) To analyze the functioning and interrelationship of kin, caste and community ties in a Hindu society known to be differently organized in some significant respects than those of the adjacent and well known plains; and, 3.) To study the effect of recent governmental programs and other outside contacts on a relatively isolated and conservative Indian community" (1993:2).

R. D. Sanwal<sup>2</sup> (1976) in his PhD thesis also concentrated on caste and social stratification in Kumaon. He combines historical and anthropological perspectives to give a first systematic and historically based account of caste structure and caste interactions in the hills. His work presents a three-fold hierarchy of politico-economically defined status groups in the region and their correlation with ritual ranks (*Varna*) which cuts across this hierarchy. His work though has been criticized for being overly derived from the *invented* history of Kumaonis that have been produced during the British rule.

Monica Kregel (1992) and Joanne Moller (1993) also follow their predecessors but emphasize strongly on women's perspective, with focus on women's daily routine and interactions. Their works though include small sections on the *Jaagar* ritual practice in the region.

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<sup>1</sup> Berreman, Gerald D., 1963. *Hindus of the Himalayas: Ethnography and Change. Delhi etc., Oxford University Press*

<sup>2</sup> Sanwal, R.D., 1976. *Social Stratification in Rural Kumaon. Delhi, etc. Oxford University Press*

Allen C. Fanger<sup>3</sup> (1990) in an article on jaagar ceremonies differentiates between the various types of jaagar that exist (house jaagar or inside/village jaagar; outside jaagar; village jaagar; jaagar held in the times of crises; jaagar held for thanksgiving) .he further gives a description of the functions and roles of the essential participants and has included a description of one jaagar performance.

Several works by native as well as non-native researchers focus on the myths, folktales and rituals of the region. The earliest anthologies of the folklores of Kumaon and Garhwal include Pandit Ganga Dutt Upreti's *Proverbs and Folklore of Kumaon and Garhwal (1894)* and *Himalayan Folklore* by E. Sherman Oakley and Tara Dutt Gairola. Another such work on the religion and traditions of the region is E. Sherman Oakley's *Holy Himalaya: The Religion, Traditions and Scenery of Himalayan Province (Kumaon and Garhwal)* (1905). Upreti<sup>4</sup>, and Sax focus on the tradition of oral poetry in the region and their performance in various cultural settings and rituals. These include local versions of the *Mahabharata* and the highly popular love epic of *Rajula Malusahi*, focus being the translation, transcription and documentation of these ballads and epics.

Marie Lecomte-Tilouine<sup>5</sup> has worked extensively on the politics, culture and history of the central Himalayan region. Her work focuses mostly on the institutionalization of spirit possession and the bardic tradition in Nepal and India's western Himalayas and the role of these rituals and oral tradition in the social and political organization of the various kingdoms. Her works also study the impact and relevance of these traditions in the contemporary society.

William Sax<sup>6</sup> has worked extensively on the oral traditions and body possession rituals of the Garhwal Himalayas. His work deals with ritual praxis (1990, 1991a+b, 1994) and

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<sup>3</sup> Fanger, Allen C., 1990. The Jāgar: " Spirit Possession Séance among the Rajputs and Śilpkārs of Kumaon." In: M.P. Joshi, Fanger and Brown (eds.). *Himalaya: Past and Present*. Almora, Shree Almora Book Depot

<sup>4</sup> Upreti, Mohan n.d. *Malushahi – the ballad of Kumaon*. New Delhi, Sangeet Natak Akademi

<sup>5</sup> Lecomte-Tilouine, Marie, 2009. *Bards and Mediums: History, Culture and Politics in the Central Himalayan Kingdom*. Almora, Almora Book Depot

<sup>6</sup> Sax, William S., 1991a. *Mountain Goddess: Gender and Politics in a Himalayan Pilgrimage*. New York and Oxford. Oxford University Press

attempts to decipher the implicit meanings of different ritual practices for the cultural and social life in which these rituals are embedded. As meaning is related to context, the worldview of the people has to be taken under scrutiny, not as static cultural determinants but as dynamic sets of ideas and practices. Sax tries to show the interactions between places and people in the social as well as political context and how traditions are the objects of reinterpretation through the agent. For him the pilgrimage of Nanda Devi (*Mountain Goddess* (1991)) is a ritual dramatization of a social practice wherein girls on being married have to leave their homes and live with their in-laws. Similarly, the *Pāṇḍavalīlā* is a dramatic translation of local versions of the *Mahābhārata* performed by villagers. It has a strong association with the Rajput traditions and can be interpreted as a re-affirmation of a Rajput identity as well as the unification of the village. Possession of the performers occurs in this ritual drama too, and is a central to it. The overcoming of the distinction between the actors and the characters in the play is crucial to its integrative value.

## METHODOLOGY

The field work was conducted in two phases, one in August-September, 2014 and second in May-June 2015. During the first phase, primarily informal interviews were conducted with the jagariyas (the bard) who perform these rituals, some village elders and members. The field work also assisted in the collection of secondary sources in the form of books and magazines related to the topic which have added to the understanding of the ritual. In the second phase of the fieldwork the researcher participated in and observed the jāgar ritual around which this research is primarily based. The field work in the first phase was conducted in Village Jalikhan, block Sult Block, Tehsil Ranikhet, District Almora and the second phase was conducted in Village Bhanoli, Block Bhikiyasain, Tehsil Ranikhet, District Almora. The secondary data sources collected for the research includes books and magazines related to the topic as well about the history, society, religion and culture

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----- 1990. "Village Daughter, Village Goddess: Residence, Gender, and Politics in a Himalayan Pilgrimage." *American Ethnologist* 17.3 pp. 491-512

----- 1991b. "Ritual and Performance in the Pāṇḍavalīlā of Garhwal." In: Arvind Sharma (ed.), *Essays on the Mahābhārata*. Leiden, Brill, pp. 274-295

of the Kumaoni people, which greatly helped in analyzing and interpreting the findings of the fieldwork.

## CHAPTER ONE: BACKGROUND

### 1.1 UTTARAKHAND

#### 1.1.1 INTRODUCTION

Uttarakhand was carved out of the state of Uttar Pradesh and formally came into existence on 9<sup>th</sup> November 2000 after long years of agitation since the first demand floated out in 1897, which turned into a mass movement by 1993-1994. The Uttaranchal Bill for the formation of a separate for the hill people was passed by the Uttar Pradesh Assembly in 1998 and the Uttar Pradesh Reorganisation Bill was passed by both the houses of the Parliament in the year 2000 resulting in the formation of the state as Uttaranchal even when the movement had been called the Uttarakhand movement. Again in the year 2006 the state assembly's demands were consented and the legislation to rename the state as Uttarakhand was passed. The interim capital of the state is Dehradun, and the high court is located in Nainital.

#### 1.1.2 DEMOGRAPHICS<sup>7</sup>

The state has a total area of 53,483 Sq. Kms. out of which 46,035 Sq. Kms is hill (approx. 86%) and 7448 Sq. Kms is plains. The state has a forest cover of 38000 Sq. Kms that is around 70%. The latest census reports the total population to have crossed the crore mark with 1,01,16,752 people with an average population density of 189 per Sq. Kms. The male population comprises 51% of the total, and the decadal population growth rate was recorded at 19.17%. The state has a sex ratio of 963 females per 1000 males, which is higher than the national average of 940. However the child sex ratio is only at 886 for which the census report voices concern and demands "immediate enforcement of PC and PNDR Act in full force along with behavior change communications to stop female

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<sup>7</sup> Most data has been taken from the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India website <http://www.censusindia.gov.in/>

foeticide”.<sup>8</sup> The state has an average literacy rate of 79.63% which again betters the national average of 74.04% with 88.33% male literacy rate and 70.70% female literacy rate.

The population distribution shows a lot of variation which also reflects the urban/rural divide as well as mountains/plains divide in the state. Maximum population densities are found in the Haridwar, Udham Singh Nagar and Dehradun which are urban areas as well largely sub-montane, Dehradun being a valley. Lowest population densities are in the districts of Uttarkashi, Chamoli and Pithoragarh which are located in the higher reaches of the Himalayas. Most population is rural (69.45% of the population) with a total of 16793 villages out of which around 80% have a population of less than 500 people, only around 17% with a population between 500-1999 people. Villages with a population greater than 2000 people are rare (approx. 3%). Most villages are small and also extremely scattered being separated from each other by hills and valleys which makes administration and provision of services and facilities a rather formidable task.

### 1.1.3 ECONOMY

The state has emerged as one of the fastest growing economies in the country and became the state with the 2<sup>nd</sup> highest GDP rate in the financial year 2014. Agriculture, tourism and hydropower form the most important economic sectors of the state. However, increasingly people are giving up agriculture and looking out for other jobs in towns and cities and there is a continuous migration of people from the villages. Other service sectors like IT, higher education, and banking are on the rise and there has been a considerable growth in the industrial sectors like automobiles and pharmaceuticals with the establishment of industrial townships and estates places like Haridwar, Pantnagar, and Kotdwar etc.

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<sup>8</sup>Source of information -<http://www.ukhfw.org/> and [utrenvis.nic.in/data%5Cstate%20profile%20demography.pdf](http://utrenvis.nic.in/data%5Cstate%20profile%20demography.pdf)

#### 1.1.4 GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Most of the state is mountainous and the northernmost reaches in the greater Himalayas have some of the highest mountain peaks and in the country and is barren, dry and ice-covered. Nanda Devi Peak is the highest in India at 7816(25,643ft) meters above sea level. The highest reaches also have several glaciers and glacial lakes which give rise to several important rivers of the country. Two of the most important Indian rivers The Ganges and the Yamuna originate in the Himalayan glaciers. The elevations between 3000 to 5000 mts are covered with alpine shrubs and meadows. The lower elevations between 3000 to 2600 mts form the treeline and have the subalpine coniferous forests which further lower, between elevations of 2600 to 1500mts are covered by the broadleaf forests. The subtropical pine forests cover the regions below 1500 mts. The lowland between the Gangetic Plains and the lowermost Himalayan Mountains, the Terai-Bhabhar region has dense deciduous forests and grasslands. The temperatures and climate vary greatly with the change in elevation levels. While the highest elevations are in a permafrost zone, most of the hills have a cold climate and often temperature nears zero in winters. The temperatures in lowers mountains and sub-montane plains are higher and often it gets very hot in summers. All regions of the state receive good rainfall, specially during the monsoon season the region receives very heavy rainfall resulting in transport and communication problems as roads and lines breakdown. The weather is unpredictable specially in the mountains, specially in relation to the rains, where even a light shower of rainfall can make the temperatures dip considerably. Therefore people often have the habit of carrying an umbrella along.

#### 1.1.5 FLORA FAUNA

The entire state is extremely rich flora fauna and can be said form one of the most important biodiversity hotspots in the country and is home to some of the most exotic species including the elusive snow leopards, musk deer, and monal bird. It is home to a large number of wild animals including several types of feline species including tigers and leopards, primates like langurs and rhesus monkey, several types of deers and antelopes, elephants, wolves and foxes, wild boars and bears etc. Reptiles like crocodiles,

gharials, and several varieties of turtles are also in abundance. A large number of bird species are also found in these regions including varieties of dippers, thrushes, woodpeckers, wild fowls, pigeons, kingfishers, parakeets, quails, owls etc. Some sightings of rare birds like the Bean Goose have also been sighted here. Several butterfly species are also found here like the red Helen and Common Tiger.

There are several species of trees, plants and herbs that are found in Uttarakhand. evergreen oaks, conifers, cypresses and rhododendrons are abundant. Thick Sal forests are also found. apart from that there are several varieties of fruit trees and flowers found. There are hundreds of local varieties of cereals and other agricultural plants that are found here. There are several exotic plants and herbs also found here like the Brahmakamal. The Valley of Flowers has more than 500 varieties of flowering plants.

There are 6 national parks in the state covering an area of about 5000 Sq. Kms with Nanda Devi Biosphere Reserve and Valley of Flowers (both being UNESCO World Heritage Sites), Jim Corbett National Park, the first national park of India, Rajaji National Park being the most prominent ones. These also form some of the most important tourist destinations of the state.



## 1.2 KUMAON

Kumaon forms one of the two major administrative divisions (the other being Garhwal) of Uttarakhand. Out of the total 13 districts in the state, Kumaon comprises of 6: Almora, Bageshwar, Champawat, Nainital, Pithoragarh and Udham Singh Nagar. The topography in the first 5 districts is largely mountainous with most of Pithoragarh and Bageshwar falling in the higher reaches of Himalayas. Almora, Champawat and Nainital fall in the middle regions Himalayan region while Udham Singh Nagar and some portions of Nainital form the sub-montane plains. Tibet borders it on north, Nepal on the east, Garhwal on the west and the state of Uttar Pradesh on the south. Some of the important towns are Nainital, Haldwani, Almora, Ranikhet, Dwarahat, Kashipur, Pantnagar and Pithoragarh. The State High Court for Uttarakhand is located in Nainital.

Kumaon shares two international borders with Nepal on the east and Tibet on the north. Its western boundaries are formed by the other administrative division of Uttarakhand, Garhwal. The sub-montane regions of Terai and Bhabhar form the southern boundary with the state of Uttar Pradesh. These two regions were till the late 1800s extremely dense forests and swamplands which were impenetrable and therefore kept the region quite isolated from the rest of the nation. Now they form some of the most fertile agricultural regions of the state. Most of the region of Kumaon is hills, with some of the highest mountain peaks of the country. There are more than 30 peaks in the region which are higher than 5500 meters in height. Nanda Devi at 7816(25,643ft) and Kamet near the Chinese border, at 7756 meters (25,446 ft.) are amongst the highest peaks in India. There are several rivers and glaciers in the highest mountain tracts, many of which feed the streams to the Ganges. Apart from the several perennial rivers there are many small rivers and streams in the region. The river Kali Ganga or Sharada forms the international border with Nepal. Other important rivers are Rāmgangā, Kosi, Gori Ganga, and Dhauliganga. The climate is mostly cool except for the plains and in the deep fertile valleys where it is generally very hot. Sometimes the climate is extremely severe in the long winters especially in the higher regions. The region also receives abundant amounts of rainfall and snow, with the Siwalik Ranges getting more rainfall than the middle Himalayas and snow in the higher Himalayas.

## 1.2.1 HISTORY OF KUMAON

### KUMAON THROUGH THE AGES

The earliest descriptions of the region in Vedic literature refer to the region by the name of 'Manaskhand' while the region of Garhwal is referred to as 'Kedarkhand'. Together they both form the region Uttara Kausala. Most commonly it is believed that the word 'Kumaon' comes from the older nomenclature 'Kurmanchal' where 'kurma' or Sanskrit for tortoise refers to the 'kurmavatar' or tortoise-incarnation of Lord Vishnu who happened here. The term Kumaon is of a much later origin around 15<sup>th</sup> or 16<sup>th</sup> century.

### PREHISTORIC ERA

A number of Old Stone Age to New Stone Age sites with various kinds of burial sites, rock paintings, and painted rock shelters and caves have been discovered around the town of Almora. Some of the most important ones have been discovered in a place called Lakhudiyar (meaning a hundred thousand caves, 'Lakh' - lac; 'udiyar' – cave) near river Suyal near Almora town. Also several menhirs and megaliths, primitive pottery, bangles, beads, metal rings, anthropomorphic figures etc have been discovered.

People belonging to the Kol community, who are believed to be the direct ancestors of the Silpkar castes (scheduled castes) of the region are believed to be the original inhabitants of the region. The Kols are supposed to be an aboriginal tribe belonging to Austro-Asiatic Munda branch. A group of people of Tibeto-Burman origin, called the Kiratas, from south-east China region are also considered to be one of the earliest settlers of the region who inhabited the northern most tracts of the mountains here. The present day tribal communities of Bhotias, Rajis, Bokshas and Tharus are believed to be their descendants. It is believed that these ancient people were later joined by pre-Vedic Aryans and subsequently by the Vedic Aryans somewhere between the 1500-1000 BCE. The 'Khasas' are believed to have been the pre-Vedic Aryans who settled in the region and are the ancestors of most of the population here. It is mostly believed that these early settlers followed some form of shamanic religion and also practices animism and nature worship. M.P. Joshi regards the Kurus to be the earliest Vedic settlers of the region based

on Peter Zoller's discovery of "pre-Vedic, archaic Sanskrit-kentum features in the Bangani dialect which is spoken in western Garhwal".<sup>9</sup> The Aryans who settled assimilated these traditional religious practices in their religion.

The early history of the region is rather unclear, however, and the only sources are the Vedic texts, which mention the existence of a number of tribes in the region. The Mahabharata mentions the presence of a number of tribes like Kiratas, Chinas, Khasas, Kamvojas, Gandharas, Barbaras, Hunas, Yavanas, Tanganas etc. all these have been described as Mleccha tribes.

## ANCIENT HISTORY

### KUNINDAS AND PAURAVA-VARMANAS

the Kunindas are believed to be the first of the dynasties known to have established a kingdom here around the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE. They are known to have practiced an early form of Śaivism and had trade relations with Tibet which were mediated by the Bhotia tribes of the region. They practiced Vedic rites and also worshipped a goddess, mostly assumed to be Durgā-Lakshmī who is depicted as a two-armed deity on coins.<sup>10</sup> This period is marked by an increase in pilgrimages to the region and an influx of the people from different regions of the country. Along with Hinduism, the Kunindas also supported Buddhism which prospered till around 7<sup>th</sup> Century as the presence of Buddhist monasteries is mentioned by Hieun Tsang in his travel records about his visit to the region. The presence of Buddhism is also evident from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE Ashokan rock edict found in Kalsi, near Dehradun.

The Paurava-Varmanas ruled from around 5<sup>th</sup> century to 7<sup>th</sup> century AD and claimed descent from the Kuru Kings. They replaced the Kuninda rule which lasted till the around 5<sup>th</sup> Century A.D. until they were eclipsed by the Paurava-Varmanas. They were a local

<sup>9</sup> Joshi, Maheshwar P. (1990). *Uttaranchal (Kumaon-Garhwal) Himalaya: An Essay in Historical Anthropology*. Almora. Shree Almora Book Depot. page 16

<sup>10</sup> Joshi, Maheshwar P. (1990). *Uttaranchal (Kumaon-Garhwal) Himalaya: An Essay in Historical Anthropology*. Almora. Shree Almora Book Depot. page 26

dynasty that rose to power and are attributed to have introduced the tradition of Naga worship in the region. They also practiced Vedic rituals and sacrifices and worshipped the serpent god Virāṇeśvara.<sup>11</sup> Brahmanical rule was firmly established in the region under their rule.

## MEDIEVAL HISTORY

### THE KATYURIS

The next major dynasty to have ruled in the region is the Katyuris. They ruled between 7<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> century A.D. Many suppose them to be a kingdom with a tribal organization because they are mostly referred to as ‘Nine Lac Katyuris’ in the local tradition. Some attribute them to be descendants of the Kunindas, who after losing power earlier to the Paurava-Varmanas, rose again to power from Joshimath. They later shifted their capital to Katyur, present day Baijnath. Their capital was called *Kārttikeyapura*. The Katyuris ruled both Kumaon and Garhwal. The first king of the dynasty was Vashudev Katyuri, also called Vasu Dev or Basu Dev. He was known to be a follower of Buddhism, but later converted to Hinduism. As the kingdom flourished, so did the Brahmanical tradition, while Buddhism lost all its roots completely. It is believed that Adi Sankaracharya visited the region between 8<sup>th</sup> and the 9<sup>th</sup> centuries to propound Hinduism and the decline of Buddhism in the region is mostly attributed to his efforts. The Katyuris are most famous for their architectural style and during the Katyuris reign several of the oldest temples of the region were built. Siva and Durga were the most revered deities and it is believed that the Katyuri Queen Jiya Rani who is also worshipped as a folk deity established the practice of the worshipping of Nanda Devi (a form of Sakti/Durga) in the region.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid; page 41

## LATER KATYURIS

Despite their fall in the 12<sup>th</sup> century Katyuris continued to rule in some pockets as they had given rise to a number of offshoots who established their rule in various parts of the state. It is believed that despite losing power, one branch of the Katyuris continued to rule from their original capital *Kārttikeyapura*. In Pali (area around present day Ranikhet in Almora) an offshoot of the Katyuris ruled from 12<sup>th</sup> century AD till the Chands displaced them. Another major scion of the Katyuris were the Raikās of Doti (present day western Nepal)-Sira (present day Pithoragarh region of eastern Kumaon) who sometimes are described as two separate branches and sometimes as one. They were overthrown by the Mallas between 12<sup>th</sup> -13<sup>th</sup> century A.D. Another scion of the later Katyuris established a kingdom in the present day Askot region in Pithoragarh. It is believed that this line of rulers was established by Abhaypala around 1279 AD who was the grandson of Brahm Dev an early Katyuri king. They ruled until the early 1800s when the kingdom became a part of the British empire.

## THE CHAND DYNASTY

The Chand Kings overthrew the Katyuris somewhere around 11<sup>th</sup> - 12<sup>th</sup> Century AD. The Katyuris had become extremely unpopular in the last years of their reign and people were extremely unhappy under their rule and supported the Chands in their conquests of the Katyuri lands.

## EMERGENCE OF KUMAON AND GARHWAL

The fall of the Katyuris around the 12<sup>th</sup> century resulted in an extremely chaotic situation in the entire region. There was a rise of several small principalities in each of the valleys, each having declared their freedom/independence. Eventually two powers came to rise: Chands in Kumaon and Pawars in Garhwal.

The situation was particularly bad in Garhwal, where the region got divided into several '*gadh*' which according to tradition are believed to be 52 in number (Raturi, 1980: 154-

57)<sup>12</sup>. A major cause for this was the very difficult terrain of the region, which divided the land in many small isolated pockets which made it very difficult for any ruler to establish proper systems of communication as well as administration in the region.

However in Kumaon, because of the relatively better landscape with larger, flat fertile valleys, which could support larger populations and had better natural resources we see the rise of 8 principalities in the post-Katyuri period, namely: Sor, Askot, Doti-Sira, Katyur, Champawat, Gangolihat, Pali.

However, by the year 1525 AD, the Chands (also called Chandras) defeated their most competent adversaries, the Raikas of Doti-Sira and had established their rule all over Kumaon including the regions of Terai and Bhabhar. The origin of the dynasty obscure, and there is no general consensus. However, it is believed that they had migrated to Kumaon from Kannauj near Allahbad and Soma Chand is believed to be the first ruler. However, many believe him to be a mythical character (Joshi, 1990:70)<sup>13</sup>. They emerged as one of the eight principalities of Kumaon after the fall of the Katyuris and had their capital at Champawat. As they acquired control over entire Kumaon by mid 1500s, they shifted their capital to the current city of Almora in the year 1563. they ruled till the 1790s before the Gurkhas invaded Kumaon and defeated them.

Most records including Mughal records show that the Chand kings paid visits to the Delhi Sultanate and later Mughal kings. Baz Bahadur (1638–78) AD is regarded as one of the greatest Chand kings who with help from Shahjahan attacked Garhwal which was under the rule of Prithvi Shah. Time and again Kumaon and Garhwal fought for supremacy and legitimacy of authority from the Mughals whose hegemony they had accepted.

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<sup>12</sup> Raturi, Harikrishna (1980). *Gadhavāla kā Itihāsa*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Tehri. Bhagirathi Prakasana Griha

<sup>13</sup> Joshi, Maheshwar P. (1990). Uttaranchal (Kumaon-Garhwal) Himalaya: An Essay in Historical Anthropology. Almora. Shree Almora Book Depot. page 70

## RISE OF BEAURACRACY AND ARISTOCRACY

Beginning with the Katyuri rule we see an increase in the importance of aristocracy and bureaucracy which is revealed by the presence of several metal plate inscriptions, court ledgers, official record books, local traditions practices, oral tradition etc. The king practiced his rule through a number of offices which formed a hierarchical system of administration in the kingdom. Thus there were many intermediaries between the ruler and the ruled. This had two major consequences: one it created a royal barrier between the masses between the king and masses and second it gave him a high stature and eventually a godly status amongst the people. Both were extremely important for the maintenance of the sovereignty of the king. The people held their king in the highest regard, and believed in the divine origin of the kingship.

Another interesting aspect was that with that despite the king being sovereign, he depended a lot on the local chieftains and his bureaucracy to be able to hold onto his power. As most of the settlements were scattered and isolated from one another, they almost functioned as independent administrative units with a community elders being their leaders who held the power. The king was dependent on the agreeability of these elders and chieftains for his own authority. He was dependent on them for resources both material and human. And it was the bureaucracy that handled all transactions and communications between the king and the chieftainship. In later stages we see that, these connections and associations were used for political and social upward mobility which had wider implications for the establishment of societal and caste structure of Kumaon

The Chand kings did a number of developmental works in Kumaon. They established many townships in the region including Kashipur (by Kashinath Adhikari, a governor in the Chand kingdom), Rudrapur (by Raja Rudra Chand) and Bazpur (by Raj Baz Bahadur Chand). They built several temples also including ht famous Goel Dev Temple at Ghorakhal, near Bhimtal and Baleshwar temple. The arts also flourished during their reign and the iconic style of ornate woodwork on doors, windows, lintels etc. emerged. The copper plate grants discovered in Almora and Pithoragarh reveal that the Chand kings also patronized the Nath Sect and several monasteries for them were built for them.

## THE GURKHA RULE AND ADVENT OF THE BRITISH IN KUMAON

The Gurkhas under the strong leadership of Prithvi Narayan attacked the Chand kingdom in 1790 and annexed Kumaon as well Garhwal region. They brought about several changes in the administrative system and had a great influence on the socio-political set up of the region. They established absolute monarchy and the influence of the bureaucracy was reduced. Several of the social climbers who had earlier gained power and position, lost their statuses. They also imposed several taxes and made changes in the revenue management and land management systems. As a result an autocratic and centralized power was established. The local tradition hold the Gurkha rule as very tyrannical and oppressive and often regard is as one of the darkest periods of their history. Thus when the advent of the British was a rather welcome relief for the people of the region.

## THE BRITISH RULE IN KUMAON

The Anglo-Nepalese war of 1815-16 saw the fall of Gurkha rule and with the signing of the treaty of Sughuali/Siguali both Kumaon and Garhwal came under British Rule. According to Joshi (1990: 105)<sup>14</sup> the British had decided to annex Kumaon and Garhwal “mainly because of commercial and economic considerations”, while “its political significance is only secondary”. However, the British rule was not oppressive like the Gurkha rule and the British officers dedicated themselves to the cause of social welfare. They brought a number of reformations and stopped evil practices. Traill’s memorandum to the then Assistant Commissioner of Dehradun, Shore “raised a series of questions concerning slaves, notably, emancipation of hereditary slaves, status of the children of slave girls from their masters, slave property, age limit of a slave at the time of his/her sale by parents in case of famine, etc.” Joshi (1990: 105)<sup>15</sup>. They were equally concerned about the status of widows and wanted to ascertain that “the relations of the deceased person not to sell his widow. Every widow to be at her own disposal”<sup>16</sup>. The sati practice

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<sup>14</sup> Joshi, Maheshwar P. (1990). *Uttaranchal (Kumaon-Garhwal) Himalaya: An Essay in Historical Anthropology*. Almora. Shree Almora Book Depot. page 105

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* pg 105

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* pg 106



and slavery were abolished and worked towards the upliftment of the lower sections of the society. They took several steps to make better the living conditions of the people and provide all with basic amenities and food provisions. They helped out the needy by granting money for cultivation. Often they gave money out of their private funds. “[...] the British took keen interest in public hygiene. They patronized constructions of roads, wells, and canals. They financed people to run shops in order to maintain supplies and provisions. They also advanced money to needy persons for bringing waste lands under cultivation.”<sup>17</sup>

Therefore, during the British rule the region a uniform, stable administration came to exist in the region. They further introduced land reformation by introducing regulated land tenure systems, introduction of individual ownership of land and established new settlements. They also introduced westernized education to the region and helped people of the region to move out of their lands into the urban areas. Nainital, Almora, Ranikhet became very important British settlements and cantonments. The valiance and bravery of the local and their warfare capabilities led the British to acknowledge them as a martial race, and the famous Kumaon Regiment of the Indian Army was established.

#### INDIAN INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENT

The hill regions of Kumaon and Garhwal were not untouched by the independence movement. Specially after Mahatma Gandhi’s visit ot to Kumaon Soon the entire region was ablaze with anti-British movements. The Sult Tehsil became one of the primary centres for anti-British movements. The Saalam Salia Satyagrah led by Ram Singh Dhoni saw many people dying for the cause of Indian independence. Gandhi called it the Bardoli of Kumaon after the Bardoli Satyagrah Movement. Several Kumaonis joined the Indian National Army of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose. Two major causes for resentment against the British were the Coolie Begar System and the British forest policies. While the forest policies cut off the forests from the locals reach, snatching away the most important resource of the hill people. The forests were the life line of the people here and

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* pg 106

provided them with all their basic necessities. The Coolie Begar system required the locals to provide the visiting British officers with attendants to carry their things as well as supply all provisions and accommodations without any payment in return. Those who did not serve the officers were penalized. This caused great dissent and resentment amongst the locals.

## 1.2.2 FOLK ART FORMS OF KUMAON

Kumaon has a distinct and rich cultural which is enmeshed with the religious beliefs of the people. At times it is very difficult to recognize the line between the two. Kumaonis are deeply religious people and it pervades each aspect of their life. Despite the hardships of a life in the harsh hills, has not only taught the people here how to survive but also to live. The culture of Kumaon is resplendent with various art forms and traditions which are unique to the Kumaoni identity. There is a huge diversity of oral tradition, folk dances, folk music, traditional theatre forms, traditional art and handicrafts that are uniquely Kumaoni and an integral part of the Kumaoni life. People are really fond of celebrating fairs and festival and all major Hindu holy days and local festivals are celebrated with a lot of fanfare and excitement. Even the major Hindu life ceremonies like birth, and marriages are celebrated on a large scale. Traditionally the people lived in closed knit communities where all celebration was done at the community level. Here primarily the oral art forms are being discussed.

### TRADITIONAL THEATRE FORMS

There are several folk theatre forms which are highly popular. Most are organized in open spaces or in temporary structures created for the same in open fields that can accommodate large audiences.

#### **Ramlila**

Traditionally 'Ramlila' based on the Ramayana were organized at village levels during Dusshera festival to mark Lord Rama's victory over Ravana. Most characters were locals from villages and the props and techniques were whatever was locally available. But after the 1940s with the introduction of modern performance techniques by Udayashankar, who stayed in Almora, the theater form evolved into more professional form. The *Ramcharitmanas* forms the basis of all scripts and the performance is mostly in the form of dialogue between the characters. Traditionally all characters are performed by males and women do not perform. The art form has also been greatly influenced by the modern theatre forms like Parsi Theatre. it has been given a status of a representative style of Ramlila by UNESCO.

## **Bhaḍ**

This is a solo art form which can be considered to be similar to the art form Pandvani. The bard who performs is referred to as a “bhāt”. The bard sings and performs praiseful narratives and genealogies about warriors and kings. mostly the origin of this form is attributed to the tradition of court minstrels accompanying their kings and troops on wars, hunting expeditions. Traditionally the nobles and aristocracies also invited bards to perform on celebration like marriages, birth ceremonies also. The bard is accompanied by musicians who stand behind him on the stage. one of the legendary performers of this genre was Jhusia Damai who was renowned for his skillful renditions of narratives. The genre combines prose which is narrated and verse which are sung accompanied by dancing in between. It is a dying art form now.

## **FOLK MUSIC AND FOLK SONGS**

Kumaon has a very rich tradition of folk singing and there are several genres of songs that are sung on different occasions

- **Religious songs :**

Religion influences every aspect of Kumaoni life and art forms do not remain untouched by its importance. These include all varieties of songs which are sung in relation to all religious ceremonies and important life-ceremonies of the Kumaonis. Religious songs related to Vedic-Puranic deities as well as folk deities are abundant, these can be sung on several occasions. The major Hindu deities like Siva-Parvati, Lord Rama, Lord Krishna, Lord Ganesh, Sri Krishna etc. are very popular. These songs describe various incidences mentioned in the major Hindu scriptures like the Mahabharata and Ramayana. Apart from these there are songs about the most popular folk deities like Goril/Goel Dev, Kalbisht, Nanda Devi, Gangnath, Haru-Siam, Pandavas, Aide, Masan etc. Other major theme is nature and natural forces: Sun, Moon, Fire, Water, Wind, mountains, rivers, flora-fauna and related deities.

One of the most important genre of song sung are the Jāgar songs. These are special songs which are song to invoke deities into human mediums for their incarnation. These include themes from Vedic literature which are adapted to lend them a local flavor and life-stories of local deities. There are no fixed texts of the songs and version vary from place to place.

Another major genre are the ‘Mangal’ or ‘Shagun’ sung to give an auspicious start to occasions. These are the songs sung in important life ceremonies like child birth, naming ceremonies, tonsure ceremonies, weddings etc. These are sung mainly by the women folk of the household or the village who receive token gifts. These are sung for good luck, happiness and welfare. Most women will be seen singing them alongside the ongoing ritual ceremonies which adds a unique ambience of all ceremonies.

- Songs related to agriculture and work:

The Kumaonis live in close knit communities, especially in the villages and all workload is shared amongst community members. All farm related activities like tilling, preparation of seeds, sowing, irrigation of fields, harvesting of crops have associated songs which are sung while people are at work. The ‘Gudail’ are songs sung during the tilling of land and preparatory phase of farming. ‘Hurkiyabol’ or ‘Hurkibol’ is a very important genre which his sung during the sowing of grains and rice seedlings on the fields. The ‘*Hurkiya*’ who can be a professional bard or any person adept at singing lead the group, singing to the beats of a ‘huḍuk’ i.e. an hourglass drum, while women sow the saplings.

- Songs sung during festivals and fairs:

These include the various songs sung during fairs and festivals, by both men and women. While most fairs are marked by the presence of dance and song troupes of professional performers, there are also song and dance forms that people perform. These include songs sung while dancing the traditional group dances like *Jhoḍā*, *Chappeli*, *Cāncari* etc. people form concentric circles and sing and dance

alongside one another. Another important genre in this type are the songs sung in singing contests like *Bhagnole* and *Bair*. These are extempore singing genres with themes ranging from scriptures to nature, general everyday situations to philosophy etc. The genre not only requires singing skills but also wit and intelligence to be able to perform well.

Another type of songs sung are those sung on special local festivals like Phool dei, Ghughtia, Harela etc.

- Other: other themes and genres include the seasons, love stories, tragedies, satires etc.

## KUMAONI DANCE FORMS

### **Choliya Dance**

It is probably the most renowned dance form of Uttarakhand. It is a martial dance believed to have originated over a thousand year back. It sees its origin among the warriors of 'Khasadesh' or Khasa kingdom, where warriors abducted and married women of their adversary clans/kingdoms at sword point. Though the tradition does not exist anymore, the dance form is still performed in Rajput weddings and dancers accompany wedding parties to the bride's house. Now it has become a representative art form of Kumaon.

The performers are adept in handling swords and shields and perform mock-fights, acrobatic antics, showy sword feats. They are not professional dancers. As they perform, they appear to incite each other by making faces, mock each other and make false war cries as if advancing for an actual attack. They wear the traditional full warrior attires, flashing swords and weapons and are accompanied by full paraphernalia of flags and banners. Their musicians accompany them playing warrior tunes and beats. The main musical instruments used are the Raṅsingha, Dhol, Turi.

The costumes consist of a Churidar Pyjama (trousers), one long Chola (shirt), cross belts worn across the torso, waistbelt, special cloth belts on their legs and a turban. They decorate their face with sandalwood pate and red vermilion. They also wear earrings and at times necklaces. A full ensemble consists of 22 persons, eight of which are dancers, and 14 musicians and other members.

### **Jhoḍā/Jhora**

it is a very popular community dance form, danced in fairs and at festivals or any other festive occasions. it is specially popular in the Almora-Ranikhet-Someshwar-Dwarahat belt. Anybody can participate in the dance and general barriers of social hierarchy are broke in this dance. However, the lower caste dance separately. Both men and women participate in the dance. Full circles or semicircles are formed where mostly men and women take alternate positions and hold each other's hands or waists swaying and moving in one direction moving sideways with bodies slightly bent forward. The steps are mostly lead by the person at the end of the row who matches footsteps to the drums in varying patterns. The dance is performed alternating clockwise and anticlockwise movement of the row. The row moves in one direction and then with the change of beat switches to the other direction. Singing accompanies the dancing and generally 5-6 people begin the dance and slowly more and more people keep getting added to the rows. The men and women dancers, themselves provide the singing following the lead of the Hurka. There is no particular costume for the dance, as mostly people have come for some occasion like a marriage or attending a fair. Therefore people dress up in their best and come all decked up. Technically there is no limit to either the duration of the dance or to the number of people who can dance at a time. a much more complex version of the dance is the two-storied or multi-storied jhoḍā where a second row of dancers dance standing on top of one row. The persons on top move automatically with the movements below. In some places it is also known as 'phāg'.

The songs sung in a jhoḍā are mostly religious in nature or are praiseful narratives about famous warriors or kings.

### **Cāncari**

Cāncari dance form resembles with jhoḍā. The primary difference is that in a cāncari two opposing rows are formed who stand facing each other. The songs sung are mostly themed around love, romance and flirtations. They singers from opposing rows also ask questions to each other in the verse form.

### **Chapeli**

Chapeli is a dance form mostly seen in fairs where a song and dance troupe performs for the general entertainment of the public. The performance is done by men who act like a couple. One of the men dresses up like a woman holding kerchief and mirror in his hand while the other hold the musical instrument, *Hurka*. Both performers are professional singers and one of them leads. The singing and dancing is mostly themed around love and romance and the performance is amorous, however, it also includes comic elements. Unlike the previous two dances that focus on footwork this dance form is based on hand-movements of the dancers.



## CHAPTER 2: ESSENTIALS OF A JĀGAR

### 2.1 THE FOLK DEITIES OF KUMAON

#### 2.1.1 INTRODUCTION

In Kumaon the major types of deities found are: deities belonging to the *Śaiva* and *Śākta* tradition, deities belonging to the ascetic tradition specially *Gorakhnāth* and the other members of the *Kanphatā Yogis* Sect and some deities of the *Vaiṣṇava* tradition, though they are more numerous and popular in Garhwal region. Former kings and rulers, people who died unnatural deaths or did not receive proper funeral rites, supernatural forces, ghosts and spirits also form a part of the general pantheon. Therefore the pantheon can be divided into the *thul-devtā* i.e. greater gods these include the greater Hindu gods like *Śivā*, *Durgā*, *Rāma*, *Kṛṣṇa*, *Hanumān*, *Gāṇeśa* etc. these are believed to be the pure gods they belonged to the *Sat Yuga*, while the local pantheon is generally regarded as impure, as most of the deities originated in the *Kali Yuga*.

Most of the deities were people once, who lived in these very lands. Some were natives and thus are ancestors to the people who live here. Each household/family, each clan/kinship group, each village has its own deities. Thus people are very familiar with their gods, who are involved with the community at all levels and in all activities of daily life. These deities are invited to and participate in all social events and festivities and it is a must for the people to obtain the blessings of their gods and constantly be in their grace for a smooth functioning of life. Therefore people have a very close and intimate relationship with their gods who are like any other members of the family. People talk to them, deliberate with them, fight with them, plead with them to agree, even get angry at them, and times even threaten them. The deities also desire adoration and attention from the devotee, and if offended or angered they punish their devotees. At times the deities are so angry they stop all communication with the devotees and abandon their seat. Then the devotees have to plead and coax them to get them talking again. The relationship is rather mutual both are interdependent on each other to define them.

All folk deities of Kumaon regard *Guru Gorakhnāth* as their ‘*guru*’ i.e. he is their master, mentor, teacher, spiritual leader. When the deities are incarnated in a *jāgar* ritual they move across physical and metaphysical space and go to his abode in *Pātāla* (the netherworld) to pay respect to him before coming to the venue.

In the Kumauni context, the term ‘*Devi*’ or ‘*Devīā*’ is not restricted or limited to what it means in other parts of the country. Where on one side it refers to the Vedic and Puranic gods and goddesses, on the other hand it also refers to all those folk deities/forces which have individual identities, characteristics, areas of rule and methods of ritualistic worship and propitiation. Each village has a presiding deity along with several other protective deities who look after the welfare of the entire community, the farms and the fields, the rivers and the forests etc. in a similar manner, each family/household have ancestral deities, lineage deities and clan deities.

These deities and gods are an indispensable part of the social life and all cultural activities. And to a great extent, these deities influence the individual and community life. It would not be wrong to say that for the people of this region, these local deities hold greater importance and are accorded a higher place, as compared to the Vedic and Puranic deities. The Vedic and Puranic are remembered and worshiped only at major Hindu festivals or holy days in accordance with the Hindu almanac. Or else, these are worshipped at special events like naming ceremony, marriage, death. These deities have no special significance in the day-to-day activities of the people, and have no direct impact on the lives of the people.

On the contrary, the local deities if angered or offended can wreck havoc in the lives of people or help them sail through times of difficulty. Neglecting the deities or not worshipping them properly on a regular basis is like an open invitation to trouble for oneself. People believe that these deities can cause calamities, render their fields and farms infertile/unproductive, cause discord and crisis in families etc. One could also suffer from mental and physical agonies and afflictions. On the other hand when appeased and pacified through the prescribed rituals they can bless you with good health, prosperity, keep the fields and animals productive, grant wishes and help get riddance from bad luck.

Thus instead of worshipping the unfamiliar Vedic-Puranic gods that require extensive and complex preparation, as well as necessitate the officiation of the ceremony by a *purohit* (Brahmin priest), people prefer to worship their household/family deities whom they are familiar with and do not require extensive preparation or the performance of the ceremony by a Brahmin priest.

Another important aspect is that an orthodox Hindu ceremony is not only more complex in nature, but it requires a lot of investment/expenditure in terms of material requirement and is completely controlled by the Brahmin priest who performs it on behalf of the devotee and uses chants and prayers in Sanskrit which the layman is unable to comprehend. He thus is completely depended on the priest to convey his complaint or petition to the god. The devotee's role is mostly passive and he continues to participate in it without a complete knowledge of the process. In contrast a ceremony conducted for a local deity is conducted in the layman's language, he is familiar with the steps of the process and can communicate with the deity on his own, express his thoughts and feelings in his own language, without the mediation of a *purohit*. Thus a person is more comfortable and in sync with all the proceedings.

Thus for a person a '*Devtā*' is that supernatural force or divinity which can grace him with well-being and prosperity. The *devtā* can not only get riddance form illness, sorrow, afflicting ghosts and spirits but also has the power to punish a culprit for his acts and provide justice to the victim. People believe that if a person is wrongly accused and seeks justice from deities, they grant justice even case where the person has received none from the judiciary. In cases where the felons escape punishment due to lack of witnesses, evidences and testimonies, the culprit's actions cannot escape the eyes of the divine force and will be punished. A very good example of this faith in the justness of a deity is *Goril/Goel Devtā*, who is considered to be the God of Justice in the entire Kumaon region. Seeking justice, people submit petitions in the form of letters and affidavits to the deity at its Chitai Temple in Almora, and hang them on the trees in the temple complex, hoping that the deity will make a ruling in their favour and grant them justice.

People believe that these deities are omnipresent and omnipotent and look out for them all the time. Nothing escapes their knowledge and they constantly stand in protection of

their true and righteous devotees. It is believed that these deities and their grace always accompanies devotees protects them even in far way places. These deities are especially concerned about the more vulnerable of their devotees like women, children and the destitute. Deities never abandon their devotees, even when they leave the region of their influence. For example, a deity always accompanies the outgoing bride, the daughters who on marriage not only leave their families but also leave her motherland to her in-laws. The in-laws in return accept and respect the new incoming deity and provide it with a place amongst their lineage /clan deities and in times of crisis visit the abode/place of origin of the deity and perform the appropriate ceremonies. Therefore for the people these deities are their rulers as well as custodians, their protectors as well as their judicature.

It is conceived that for their deities their existence is grounded in their need amongst mortal men. The faith that men have in their deities, their powers and abilities and the acceptance of the control that these deities have on their lives, and in return the god's ability to answer men, assist them and ameliorate their lives defines their being and identity. At the same time it is important for the deities to have superiority over the world of men. They crave for power and authority and relish it. They fight and compete with other deities showing off their might and powers to prove themselves to be better than others. The super-powers one possess, the strength of one's aides, the number of followers and believers one has, the extent of region of influence, the kinds of supernatural and fantastical feats one can accomplish, all determine the greatness and imminence of the deity.

Most of these deities originate in the mortal world and despite becoming divinities their behavior and demeanour continues to be human. They suffer from the same weaknesses that mortals do and have emotions and desires. They desire the adoration and affections of their devotees. They want their devotees to respect them and be afraid of them, they become happy when their followers remember them, organize festivals and ceremonies in their honour. They like to feel important. When devotees don't worship them or neglect them they get angry and upset. At times they abandon their seat and refuse to answer their devotees. They no longer care for their devotees and do not offer them any protection or assistance. Then they may also refuse to incarnate into the medium and

severe all communication from people. Yet when the followers ask for forgiveness repenting their folly, beseeching the deity to the deities make up with their devotees and forgive them too. Another important point is that like all other member of the community, they too have social bondages and ties, obligations, duties and responsibilities that they cannot neglect or escape from. They are as much as part of this world as they are of the supernatural world.

A peculiarity in their nature is that while on one hand they are responsible for the well being and prosperity of the people. They look after them and assist them in times of crisis, redeeming men from misery and pain. Yet, if unhappy they do not refrain from using their power to make hell the lives of people. Like a tyrannical ruler, they will torture people, destroy their fields and produce, harm the cattle and in extreme cases unflinchingly inflict serious illness and death. Therefore, people are constantly in awe of their deities and fear them. Even when away from homeland, they do not forget their deities and always comeback every few years to pay their respect to their gods. No one can dare to negate or oppose the god's word and they should never be ridiculed.

Another reason that people feel a deeper association with their folk deities is that most of these deities originally were mortal beings, men, women and children who roamed these very lands, breathed the same air, drank from the same rivers and fed off the same earth. They were their own flesh and blood, their ancestors, and their kin. The history of most of these deities tell that most of they once were people who because of their exceptional courage and remarkable deeds of public welfare were respected, admired and revered by the masses. With time they came to be worshipped as deities. Some are believed to have been born with supernatural powers and fantastical abilities. But it is not the case with all of the deities. Those who were victims of extreme injustice at the hands of the law or authorities or led unhappy, sorrowful lives facing the inhumanity and cruelty of others and died violent, sad deaths are also believed to turn into powerful deities and spirits. In several cases it was seen that the spirits of such people had come back to revenge the injustice done to them and eventually had tormented the perpetrators of their suffering until they had to beg for forgiveness and had performed special prayer services and rituals to pacify these sprits. Such spirits are believed to protect the weaker and more

vulnerable members of the society. There are many such deities who are the patron deities of the more backward and poor castes of the region. There are also certain malevolent deities who once were extremely cruel but powerful men and rulers, who were known for their tyrannical rule and viciousness. However, even upon death returned time and again to torment their subjects. Thus people have been worshipping them and they have turned into powerful deities whom people fear.

Each of these deities have their own areas/ domains where they are highly venerated and have maximum influence. It may be region of their place of origin or the place where they attained deification or even may have accomplished some great feat. However, it is not that the deity's influence is restricted to its domain. The deities are omnipresent and go wherever their followers do and protect them always. At times certain deities are specific to certain communities or castes. In such cases they are not particularly worshipped by other communities but nonetheless they are not completely free from them too. Each deity has its own method of worship and some specific objects or things that are unique to it and a necessary component for its worship. Unlike the Vedic and Puranic gods there is no fixed process or fixed set of Mantras which are to be used. Orthodox Hindu ceremonies have huge lists of required materials and provisions and a whole lot of paraphernalia and apparatuses are necessary for the execution of the ceremony. Often supplies asked for are specific and costly, there are a lot of restrictions imposed on the person organizing the ceremony and a lot of preparation goes into it. The ceremonies often include several sub-ceremonies or rituals which too have specific requirements and system of conducting them. Moreover, the ceremony is actually performed by the Brahmin priest, who alone has the knowledge of the Vedic texts and knows which hymns and mantras have to be made use of. He is to be treated with the utmost reverence and respect. Whatever he says has to be agreed upon without question. Whatever he demands as necessary for the ritual has to be provided. And at last he has to be thanked for his services and paid for it either in money or material. Additionally the ceremony is conducted in Sanskrit which the layman is unable to understand and is generally clueless about what is going on. The entire process is complex and has a lot of pomposity and fanfare involved which eventually renders the entire thing somewhat hollow and meaningless. It only remains to be a duty or obligation that one has to complete to fulfill

their social commitments and bondages. On the other hand the system for a lineage/folk deity is much simpler and can be conducted with minimum specific requirements and restrictions. Though a fixed pattern and structure can be observed to act the framework for the ceremony, generally the system is much more flexible and varies even from place to place. It is modified in accordance with the deity being worshipped and keeping in view the turn of events. No occurrence of the ceremony is similar to other. The deities can be worshiped using any provisions that are presently available or prepared at home; therefore a poor man can also have a ceremony organized without much difficulty. The only specific requirement is of the any objects that are unique to a deity, or associated with the deity, for example, a specific kind of food preparation that a deity prefers or an article representative of the deity etc. More importantly the presence of a Brahmin priest is not required for conducting the ceremony. The seniormost member of the clan/lineage or community/village can be the priest and conduct the ceremony.

As far as the Vedic-Puranic divinities are concerned the region does not have tradition of their worshipping and neither are there any sects or communities dedicated to this pantheon. There are neither any temples nor shrines dedicated to the deities like *Agni*, *Indrā*, *Varuna*, *ŪŚā* etc. nor are there any archeological sites dedicated to these deities. The temples dedicated to major deities like *Śivā*, *Durgā*, *Rāma*, *Kṛṣṇa*, *Gaṇeśa*, *Hanumān*, etc. all belong to the medieval and later periods when the immigrant populations from the plains introduced the Vedic-Brahmanical tradition in the region. The only deities that actually gained a lot of popularity and foothold in the region and specially in Kumaon are *Śivā* and *Śakti*. Their dominance in Kumaon has been to the extent that Vaiśṇavism could root itself here. According to Badridatt Pandey (1937: 651)<sup>18</sup> there are some 350 temples in Kumaon out of which only 8 belong to the *Vaiśṇava* tradition those too have been established in the recent past. In contrast, Garhwal has a longer and more rooted *Vaiśṇava* tradition as it gained popularity after *Śankarāchārya* and *Śri Rāmanujāchārya* visited the region in the 8<sup>th</sup> and the 9<sup>th</sup> century.

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<sup>18</sup> Pandey, Badridatt (1937). *Kumaon ka Itihas*. Almora. pg 651

Another major difference between the folk deities and the Vedic-Puranic deities is that most of the deities are formless, faceless and are represented using either simple stones and rocks, iron tridents, iron staffs or iron oil lamps that are placed in a shrine/sanctuary constructed for the deity. Most have the shrine located in a spot keeping in view the nature of the deity. Traditionally most houses in Kumaon do not have a separate temple constructed. Instead *thān* were built in the same room that the hearth/fireplace was. The lineage and clan deities are mostly placed in the *thān*. All rituals and ceremonies were conducted in this room. A separate shrine was constructed only in cases when a deity specifically asked for one. Or a separate *thān* was constructed outside the house in the courtyard or in the field for the out-of-lineage deities who accompany the new brides into their in-laws place. Such deities though included into the household pantheon, are never to be members of the lineage deity pantheon. However, they cannot be neglected and thus are given a place and worshipped as and when necessary. Other deities may be placed under trees, on the river-fork, the river bank, in the fields, on mountain tops or any such place associated with the deity. For example, the *Bhumiya Dev* i.e. the protector god of the lands who looks after the entire village community and protects their lands and property is generally placed at some community land in the middle of the village and a shrine is built there.

The entire Himalayan region is referred to as “*Devabhoomi*” the ‘Land of the Gods’. It is believed that divinity resides in each and every thing here. Each stone and mountain each stream and river is sacred. Therefore it is not at all surprising that there are hundreds of gods and deities that people worship and have faith in. these deities are as diverse as the landscape here. the geographical and cultural diversity that one finds in the region is reflected in the diverseness that we find in the nature and form of the folk deities. Even within a village community, the deities can be differentiated into the *grāmdēvtās* (village deities), *kuldevtās* (lineage/clan deities), *iṣṭdevtās* (family/personal deities), *jāti devtā* (caste deities), *pitar devtās* (ancestral deities or manes) etc.



### 2.1.2 CLASSIFICATION OF THE DEITIES

The deities can be classified into several types on the basis of:

**Area or Region:** broadly speaking apart from a few highly popular deities that are worshipped in both Kumaon and Garhwal, each region has deities who are particular to it. Some of the most popular folk deities that are prevalent in both Kumaon and Garhwal zones are: *Nāgdevtā*, *Nāthsiddha*, *Bhairav*, *Kshetrapāl*, *Sidhuvā-Bidhuvā*, *Nandā Devi*, *Nirankār*, *Narsingh*, *Ghantākarn*. Another group of popular Kumaoni deities that are worshipped in some areas of Garhwal are the *Katyūrī Gods*. The deities *Goril/Gwal Devtā* and *Gorakhnāth* were also highly popular in Garhwal region before a ban was imposed by King Sudarshan Shah. Deities like *Bhairav*, *Kshetrapāl*, *Bhumiā*, *Nāgnāth* are worshipped in Nepal as well as by some scheduled tribes in Himanchal Pradesh.

Most gods and goddesses do not even have very large areas of influence, and are generally restricted to a village and nearby locality or to a valley or a group of villages. Within the Kumaon Mandal can be divided into three regions on the basis of the distribution of deities found there.

- A. Eastern and Northeastern Kumaon<sup>19</sup>: some of the greater deities worshipped in the Kali Kumaon and Sor-Pithoragarh regions are: *Goril*, *Chaumu/Chamaldev*, *Aiḍi*, *Kshetrapal*, *Mallikārjun*, *Siddhnāth*, *Bhumia*, *Balenāth*, *Saim* and *Haru*. There is a large number of minor local deities worshipped here. some of these are: *Hinglā*, *Ghatku*, *Akhiltārini*, *Kalchin*, *Tyunā-Byunā*, *Nauliyā*, *Kailu*, *Barma* etc.
- B. North-Central Kumaon: this includes the region around Almora-Bageshwar. Some of the major folk deities of this region are *Chaumu*, *Kalbiṣṭ*, *Aiḍi*, *Goril/Golu*, *Haru*, *Saim*, *Bhwalnāth*, *Gangnāth*, *Nirankar* (in *Pali-Pachaun* area), *Jhakar Saim*, *Vaidynāth*, *Baramdev*, *Dhamdev*, *Syūrā*, *Pyūrā*, *Bhumiā*, *Kshetrapāl* etc. the minor deities of these region are *Nāgdevtā* worshipped in Bageshwar district and *Danu* (*Danav*) *devtā* worshipped in the Danpur Pargana.

<sup>19</sup> Ramsingh (2002), *Rāg Bhāg*. pg 64, 111-12; 244-253

- C. The Bhotia tribes in the Pithoragarh district Kumaon also worship several local deities. Some of these are: *Sangas, Pujyuras, Salihas, Lor, Gabla etc.* *Gabla* is the deity worshipped for prosperity and wealth. They also worship a deity called *Kebang-Rang-Chim* which is similar to the *Ardhanarishvar* form of *Śivā-Parvati*. *Chan devtā* is worshipped to get riddance from the perils of the mountains.
- D. The tribes residing in the Southern regions of Thatwad and Buksad also have their own deities apart from the Vedic-Puranic deities. Most of the local deities are formless and do not have any temples also. The primary deities of the Boksa tribes are: *Bhumiā/Bhumsen, Haijapeer, Jaspur Devtā, Jaharpeer*. The prominent female deities are: *Vandevi/Hidimba, Hulka (Ulka), Atriya, Sundari, Ansar, Sheetala, Kalika etc.* The major deities of Thatwad are: *Bhumia/bhumsen, Aiḍi (Aheri), Aerimal, Bharamal, Narayan, Bhairav, Kharga*. The female deities worshipped in this region are: *Parvatiya devi, Punyagiri, Kalika, Sheetala, Jwala, Huluka, Purva, Durgā, Parvati etc.*
- E. Along with the local deities there is a large number of different forms of *Śakti* or *Devi* who is one of the most revered deities of the Kumaon region. A number of Vedic-Puranic Devis worshipped in the region: *Chandi, Durgā, Kali, Mahakali, Gaura, Parvati, Chamunda etc.* Apart from these there are several forms of *Devi* who are highly popular amongst the people here and are supposed to be very powerful. These include: *Punyagiri, Nandā Devi, Ghad Devi, Ranchula Devi, Anyari Devi, Gadh Devi, Byandhura Devi, Dhaula Devi, Manila Devi, Nanda-Sunanda, Hingla Devi.*

**Source of Origin/Existence or Yonī (form of life):** on the basis of their origin or how they came into existence the deities can be divided into those belonging to a godly/divine origin; to a demonic origin; those who died a ‘good death’; those who died a ‘bad death’ and enter into a *Bhūt* (Ghost)/*Pret* (Spirit) status/form; and those who have a mixed kind of origin. The folk deities of Kumaon can be sorted into different kinds of

beings. Since ancient times it is believed that these lands have been inhabited by various types of beings – mortal and immortal; gods, demigods and celestial being; demons, ghosts and spirits; and all kinds of corporeal and incorporeal supernatural beings and forces. man, flora and fauna, mountains and rivers, rain and wind all have an associated deity and these are revered. Ancient Vedic text often have described this region as an abode to divinities and a recreational retreat of several types of mythical and celestial beings like *Gandharvas*, *Yakshas*, *Kinnars*. Mount Kailas is the abode of *Śivā*. the mountains, and valleys, the forests and the meadows, the caverns and the gorges are all believed to be inhabited by various kinds of demons and spirits. the rain and the mist, the winds and the storms are all guarded by divinities. Divine and supernatural powers reside within each being here.

It is important to note here that the unlike the West, the conceptualization of the divine as separate from the demonic in the Indian Tradition is not in black and white. they are neither opposites nor complementary, neither contrary nor contradictory to each other. It can be best described as a rather gray zone where it is all of these at the same time none of these. While the godly can err and be ‘bad’, the supposedly bad can righteous and ‘good’. There is no clear cut categorization of the good God and the evil Satan and demons, ghosts and spirits do not necessarily have a negative connotation. In a similar manner neither is death regarded as an end or termination of movement. It is rather a stage from where the next phase of the entire ritual journey of the soul begins, the phase of true movement, i.e., ‘transcendence’.

The categorization is as follows:

A. **Gods:** though it is believed that there are several types/races of gods who inhabit these mountains, out of these the most popular ones as folk deities are those belonging to the *Nāga* race. Though the region has a tradition of worshipping of Hindu gods like *Rāma*, *Kṛṣṇa*, *Hanumān* etc., however these are never worshipped as folk deities. These are categorized as “higher gods”. The *Nāga* race are believed to be a fabulous race of serpent beings having a human head and torso, with a lower body like that of a snake. It is believed that these beings sprung out of *Kadrū*, wife of Sage *Kaśyapa*, or from *Surasā* in order to people *Patālā*, one of the regions below the earth. These are

worshipped as a form of *Lord Kṛṣṇa*. There are several deities of Saivaite and *Śakti* tradition like *Bhairav*, *Kalika* that are also worshipped in the region. These are the various forms of *Śivā* and *Śakti (Durgā)*.

- B. Demi-gods:** these include various races of demigods and celestial beings who are generally attendants to other gods and deities, as well as the masters of art forms like music and dance. *Gandharvas* (a class of celestial musicians), *Yakshas* (demigods who are attendants to *Kuvera*, the Hindu god of wealth), *Kinnars* (demigods who have horse-like heads; these are believed to be the musicians and singers at *Indra's* court. *Indra*, the King of gods in Hindu mythology). Other such deities include the class of *Chausath Joganiya* (Sixty-Four Yoginis) – females beings created by and attendants to *Durgā*, *Bavan Veer* ( Fifty-Two Warriors), *Pariyan* (forest and nature fairies) and *Anchariya* (celestial maidens who reside the skies and the high mountain tops), *Gadh Devi* (beautiful water maidens/nymphs)
- C. Ghosts and Spirits:** these are mostly deities associated with 'bad death'. When a person dies untimely or violent deaths or had unhappy lives full of sufferings, their souls are unable to pass into the otherworld. Such souls turn into ghosts and spirits that haunt the earth and seek vulnerable beings to victimize. these are generally malevolent and fierce and have frightful forms and appearances. They haunt dark, dangerous places like forests and wilderness, cremation grounds and secluded river banks etc. most these are demons, monsters, ghosts and apparitions associated with the dead and the netherworld. Offerings made to them also include objects otherwise regarded as impure and defiling in nature. Most require animal sacrifices for appeasing and pacifying them. These are also mostly associated with the Tantric tradition. Some examples are:

*Masān* – these are wrathful violent spirits with frightful appearances who roam the cremation grounds. These are spirits of the deceased who whom obsequies have not been performed or not done properly. Their territory lies between two confluences of a river.

*Khabis* – these are terrible demon spirits who are the guardians of the forests and pastures and inhabit dark gloomy forests and mountain caves. They can change form and often stalk travelers guising as herdsmen.

*Aidi* – this monstrous deity is extremely popular in both Kumaon and Garhwal. There are several versions about its origin and about its life story. It is believed that he was a valiant solitary hunter who died a violent death. Most versions describe him as a giant with eyes on the top of his head carrying a bow and arrow. He roams the mountain passes and forests and always moves in a procession sitting in a palanquin with a train of ghosts, demons and faeries as attendants. The procession also includes his two dogs (named *Jhabua* and *Kathua*) that have bells tied to their necks which ring continuously and can be heard. It is believed that his aim is infallible and the victim is rendered maimed. It is also believed that if someone has a direct encounter with him, the person instantly dies. But if a person survives, the deity graces him with infinite wealth and prosperity. It is also popular as a protector deity of dairy and farm animals and is associated with fertility and growth. It is worshipped to ensure that animals have a safe parturition. It is given offerings of milk and other dairy products. However, it also accepts animal sacrifices and if angered harms the animals.

*Anchariya* and *Pariyan* also belong to this category as they are believed to be the restless spirits of young women or virgins who die untimely deaths. They are included in the demigod category as they are related to the *Apsaras* and *Matrikas* who have a godly/divine origin. They attack young women and render them crazy and demented. Offerings of cosmetics, jewelry and trinkets are made to appease them.

D. **Elemental Beings:** entire Himalayan region is resplendent with the most grand and panoramic vistas of nature. Nature is always at its full force here. the sheer immensity of nature's forces has had a great impact on the minds of the inhabitants of this region. While the grandeur and richness of its resources provided man with sustenance, the ferocity/fury of its powers also shook man to his core. As long as humans have inhabited these lands, they have known that their lives depend on the clemency of nature and its forces. Thus they have associated nature with divine powers and supernatural forces. Each element of nature has a god or deity which is the commanding authority. And it is important for people to have the grace/favour of these deities for prosperity and well-being. These include deities of the skies and the winds, deities of the mountains and the fields, deities of the forests and the rivers.

*Bhumiā* and *Kshetrapāl*: these are the protector deities of the lands. Each village has a *Bhumiā* to protect its lands which includes the agricultural land, as well as the forests. *Bhumiā* protects the farms from draughts, floods, storms and hail. He also protects the land from wild animals, insects and rodents etc. It is mostly represented by a few erect stone *lingams*. It is worshipped from time to time and presented with animal sacrifices. It is also worshipped at the time of all major festivals, at the time of the sowing season farmers offer some seed grains to the deity and the portions from harvest is offered to the deity. Apart from this the deity is worshipped at all important ceremonial occasions like marriages and naming ceremonies and tonsure ceremonies.

*Chaumu* and *Badhān*: these are the deities of farm animals specially the dairy animals. *Chaumu* is the protector deity of animals that graze in open pastures and live in flocks/herds. it is made offerings of milk. If the milk is used or impure, the deity harms the cattle. On calf's birth, the cow's milk is offered to the deity for the first 10 days. It is said to have four faces thus the name (*chau*- four, *mu*-face/mouth). It protects animals which get lost or go astray and assists them back to their home by showing them the way. It is also worshipped as a an incarnation

of *Śivā*. it is believed to be a form of the four-faced *Paśupati*. Some also associate it with the Vedic deity *Pūshan*, a guardian deity of the flocks and herds, whose chariot is drawn by goats. *Badhān* is also a god of the cattle. It is worshipped on the 11<sup>th</sup> day after birth of a calf in a ritual similar to that of the naming ceremony done for children. It is made offerings of the *naivedya* (food consecrated to a deity, an offering, oblation) and *prasād*. From the 12<sup>th</sup> day onwards the cow's milk is used for consumption.

*Gadh Devi, Pariyan and Anchariyan*: *Gadh Devi*, the name comes from the Kumauni word *gārh* for small river/stream which is its residence. She is an incarnation of *Kḍāli* or *Durgā*. According to the folklore she was born to save people from the cruel rule of *Ravana*. She is considered to be a deity of justice. People seek her help for any injustice done to them. *Pariyan* and *Anchariyan* are attendants to her and they were also created at the time of the incarnation of *Gadh Devi*. These reside at riverbanks, as well as on mountain tops and roam the skies. These are known to attack girls and women.

- E. **Mortals**: a number of folk deities worshipped in Kumaon as well as Garhwal are those who once were human beings who lived here. after their death they turned in to powerful deities and came to be worshipped by the masses. these came to be gods/deities because of various reasons. Some of the kings and rulers were popular because of their good deeds and acts of social upliftment and admired and respected by their subjects. Certain others were known for their cruelty and tyranny and were greatly feared by their masses. The Siddhas and Yogis were mostly known for their superpowers and magical abilities. they were revered as well as feared. The warriors, hunters and herdsmen were valiant, brave and mighty and most of them became victims of conspiracies and murder plots. Then there are the unfortunates who either suffered at the hands of the society or died unfortunate deaths and turned into ghosts/spirits. These can be classified into basically three kinds based on their social class.

KINGS AND RULERS: a considerable portion of Kumaoni Bardic Tradition is dedicated to tales and songs (described as *Vamśāvali*) about the various lineages of rulers and kings. These describe the lineage and history/origin of these rulers. These also describe the life and times during their rule. Several of these epics narrate their great deeds and important events from their lives. The stories range from battles and wars, love stories, conspiracies and tales of revenge and vengeance etc.

*Katyūrī Jāgars* have an important place in this tradition as these are about one of the most prominent dynasties in the region, the *Katyūrīs*. Many members of this dynasty are worshipped as lineage deities and *jāgars* are organized. Their *gathas* are also have a historical importance and thus are sung in festivals, fairs and cultural events. Worshipping of *Katyūrīs* is primarily prevalent in regions of *Katyūr* Valley (around Dwarahat) and in the North-Western region i.e. Pali-Pachau. According to the *jāgar gāthās* the *Katyūrīs* were numbered some nine lac in total. Out of these, *Baram Dev*, *Dham Dev* and *Jiyā Rānī* are renowned all over Kumaon. *Baram Dev* and *Dhām Dev* were known for their tyrannical rule and the kingdom turned against them. one version of the legends states that they were eventually defeated by Chand King *Vikramchand* and were killed. Their dead bodies were thrown into the river Ramganga. They then turned into ghosts and started to traumatize their subjects thus people began to worship them. In time they were given place amongst the folk deities. Another legend about *Baram Dev* mentions that he was very distrustful of his subjects and constantly feared a coup. Thus while travelling he got the handle-bars of his palanquin nailed into the shoulders of his attendants, so that they would not throw his palanquin down the hillside. It is said that eventually asset of his attendants decided that his rule had to end. Thus while on a journey, they along with the palanquin carrying *Baram Dev* dove off cliff. The king as well as the attendants died.



Several members of the *Malla Dynasty* who ruled regions from Doti (Nepal) to northeastern regions of Kumaon i.e., Sor-Pithoragarh during the Medieval Period also are worshipped as deities: *Churmalla, Malaynāth, Nāgimalla, Jagatmalla* etc.

*Goel/Goril, Haru, Nandā* are other deities that belong to royal families. These are amongst the most popular folk deities of Kumaon. Another important fact to note is that according to legend many of these rulers became disciples of *Gorakhnāth* and took vows of asceticism.

SIDDHAS AND YOGIS – Tantrism and asceticism has a very old tradition in the Himalayan region, specially the *Kanphatā Yogis* and the *Nāth Panth* have been highly popular in the Kumaon region. Several practitioners and followers of these traditions lived in Kumaon. They were highly respected and revered by the locals. The locals often sought the aid of these ascetics and *Siddhas* for their troubles. Among the *Siddhas* the most popular deities are *Gorakhnāth, Machendranāth (or Matsyendranāth), Malaynāth, Siddhanāth, Trilokināth, Gangnāth, Bhwalnāth*.

OTHERS – this includes warriors, hunters, herdsman who in their lifetime became victims of political conspiracies, vendettas and those who committed suicides or were murdered because of others' jealousy, ambitiousness etc. *Kalbiṣṭ, Gangnāth, Bhwalnāth, Aiḍi*.

*Bhwalnāth*: it is believed that he was the son of the *Chand King Udayachand*. However, he had renunciatory tendencies from his childhood and had no interest in becoming the king. Soon he left the kingdom to become an ascetic. But owing to a political conspiracy, he was murdered along with his pregnant wife by his own brother *Gyānchand*. All three then returned as ghosts and started to torture the culprits as well as their descendants and relatives. Eventually the practice of his worship spread amongst the subjects too and he became a folk deity.

**Nature and Behaviour:** on the basis of nature and behaviour deities can be classified in to two types, malevolent and benevolent deities.

- A. Benevolent deities: some deities are mellow and good-natured. These mostly include the *Rājāngi* deities, i.e. those belonging to the royal dynasties/lineages and those belonging to a godly origin. They are humble, always aid people in their troubles and grace their followers/worshippers with boons and blessings. They grant wishes and are justice-loving. most are those who in their lifetimes were respected and renowned for their acts of charities, social welfare, justice etc. These deities are generous and kind that can be appeased with even simple offerings and oblations. However, some ask for animal sacrifices. Most popular deities are: *Katyūrī Devs, Dham Dev, Baram Dev, Gwal /Goel Dev, Nanda, Jiyā Rānī*.
- B. Malevolent deities: these deities are violent, destructive and troublesome in nature. They mostly include deities of demonic origin, and ghosts and spirits of those who died violent/untimely deaths and no proper funeral rites were performed for them. these are not easy to pacify and cause lot of agony to the affected. They cause destruction to agriculture and to the cattle also and create lot of hindrances in all aspects of life. They always ask for animal sacrifice. Some of the more known deities are: *Aiḍi, Gangnāth, Masān* etc.

## 2.2 KUMAONI BARDIC TRADITION

Kumaon has a very rich oral tradition, comprising of folklores, folktales, myths, and creation stories. There is also a very rich database of indigenous knowledge on a number of domains like agriculture and farming, weather and climate, flora and fauna. The region also has a very rich tradition of folk music and folk dance forms which add to this vast corpus of oral tradition. Apart from these there is a huge repertoire of epics, ballads, chronicles and genealogies (*vamśāvali*) about the various dynasties and bloodlines of the region. Traditionally people have lived in close-knit communities, with a lot of sharing and exchange. No ceremony or life-event for an individual or family can occur without the participation of the community whether it be *nāmkaṛaṇ* (a child's naming ceremony), *chuḍākarm sanskāṛ* (tonsure), *janeyū sanskāṛ* (rite of passage for males), *byāh* (marriage rites), *kriyākarm* (death rites) etc. Agriculture and farming formed the basis of life in the hills and had a deep impact on the culture and traditions of the people. Several festivals and fairs of the region are in accordance with the agricultural cycle of the hills. A number of folk arts have also evolved around the agricultural lifestyle of the people. *Hurkiyābol* is one such music form performed at the time when the agricultural season begins i.e. during the tilling of and land (*boāi*) and at the beginning of the harvest season (*katāi*). Often these two activities are done in consultation with a priest. It may be performed either by the low caste bards, i.e. the hurkiye-badi or any other person who has musical talents to play the *huḍka* and sing.

The oral tradition and indigenous knowledge corpora form an important aspect of the ethico-moral system of the Kumaonis. It forms a framework as well as sets guidelines which form the basis of morality and the norms of behavior and conduct. It defines the acceptable social and personal conduct, as well as is the basis of cultural and social finesse and the moral sense of the distinction between good-bad and right-wrong. Importantly, all this is not solely applicable to the mortals, but also to the deities – who, in this being equal to the mortals – have these rules and restrictions, norms of conduct to follow. They too have social obligations and responsibilities and commitments to fulfill. They also cannot leave things unattended so, or do as they please always.

Though all members of the community are familiar with the oral tradition and carry forward it and preserve it whether it be the religio-moralistic sacred section of the repertoire or the social-entertainment one, the bards hold a very special place in the Kumauni culture as the main repositories of the oral tradition as their knowledge is not limited to merely ritualistic or entertainment purposes. A good or expert bard is the one who along with the songs and tales has a good knowledge of (1) the laic, scriptural and metaphysical bases of the ritual, (2) the entire ritual process and its execution, (3) its purposes and aims and, (4) the results/effects it brings to the people.

The bardic tradition in Kumaon can be divided into two broad categories of religio-sacred and the social-entertainment one. The religio-sacred category includes bards from all castes, whereas the social-entertainment category includes bards from the lower caste alone. The Kumaoni bardic tradition thus includes two kinds of bards; one is the set of *jagariyās* who only perform in religious rituals, and those who perform in both contexts – ritual as well as for entertainment. *Jagariyās* are the bards who perform a *jāgar*. These are further categorized into the high-caste *jagariyās* and the low-caste *jagariyās* who belong to the caste of *Dās-Dholi-Damai*. Traditionally the *Dās-Dholi-Damai* were the artists who performed as *jagariyās*, but later on higher castes also began to take up this profession. The other set of bards is that of *Bādi – Auḷī /Huḷkiye*. These are lower caste people who traditionally had singing and dancing as their sole profession and did not do any farming and had no other means of earning. They perform at other social events or for entertainment, being at the lowest rung of the social ladders, they never perform the *jāgars*.

This distinction extends to the repertoire too. One can broadly categorize the songs into those used for invocation of the deities/possession rites and those for any other purpose, but the categorization is not very clear-cut and varies from place to place. Gaborieau (1977)<sup>20</sup> –classifies the songs into two broad categories of songs of religious purposes which include *jāgars* – the songs for the invocation of deities and inducing possession or trance in the medium (xxi), and the *bhārāt* – the songs sung to please the gods (xv); the

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<sup>20</sup> Gaborieau, M. (1977). Introduction to 1977 edition of Oakley, E. S. and Gairola, T.D. (1935). Himalayan Folklore. Kathmandu, Nepal. Ratna Pustak Bhandar.

second category according to Garobieau is of the *bharau* – the songs about local warriors and heroes and sung at social events, at home or fairs/festivals for entertainment or used for agricultural rituals (xv). However, this differentiation does not hold true to all regions in Kumaon.

On a broader basis these songs and ballads can be classified into two categories: (1) *jāgars*: these are performed in the *jāgar* ritual. Mostly these are regarded sacred and as well as powerful as these help in the incarnation of a deity. Therefore, one should not sing them without reason or the ability to handle the power that these carry. These may or may not be sung by the other people of the area. These can be further divided into:

1. Purānic – these include the stories or episodes taken from the *Mahābhārat*, *Rāmāyana*, *Bhagwatgītā* and other such epics and various sections of the different purānas, or other stories about Purānic deities. Often, the stories have a local version, which varies from the original.
2. Religious stories about the local gods and goddesses.
3. Kings, rulers, and warriors of the various dynasties like *Katyūrīs*, *Chands*, *Pāwars*, *Mallas*, *Gurkhās* that ruled over the regions including Kumaon, Garhwal, Nepal, and Tibet and the Terai-Bhabhar were constantly at war with each other till the 18<sup>th</sup> century, form a large portion of these stories.
4. Stories about people who became deities because of their good deeds, or because they had been wronged and suffered great agony.

The ritual involves a singing or performing of a narrative which can be prose or verse or both to the accompaniment of traditional musical instruments. There are no hard and fast rules regarding the selection of the text, it depends on choice of the *jagariyā* what he sings for an invocation. Mostly narratives about the life and deeds of the concerned deity are used or sections from the *Mahabharata* or other such Vedic-Puranic stories are taken as these can be sung for any deity. However, narratives about Vedic/Puranic deities, folk deities, former rulers and kings, warriors and great men, supernatural beings, magicians, renouncers etc. can be used for that particular deity. Though most narratives are about the life of these deities, or descriptions of wars and combats, or descriptions of their appearances, their clothes and possessions etc., in case of epics like *Mahabharata* the

important or popular sections of the story are selected. The aim is to rouse or charge up the deity and therefore, moving and exciting portions stories are selected. Most of these stories are also a part of the general corpora of folklores and myths, so these can be used for general entertainment as well. Most people are familiar with the stories, they know the details, the twist and turns of the story and some might even know the words and the melody as performed by the *jagariyā*, yet no one outside of the ritual may do the performance. Therefore, the *jāgars* are sacred narratives that are reserved for the ritual purpose alone. Most *jagariyās* refuse to sing *jāgars* at all outside of the ceremony. These words are powerful and any sort of careless use of these words can cause the deities to be offended or angered. Thus no form of ridiculing or imitating of the *jāgars* is allowed.

There are other very popular folk epics and ballads like *Rājulā Mālusāhi* which are never sung for *jāgars*. Though these stories may be used for entertainment purposes and people may narrate their own version but it will never be sung proper. Outside of the ritual context, a bard can participate in public entertainment events if he wishes to.

Often people are known to participate in *Bhagnole* or *Bair* competitions. Both of these are extempore forms of folks singing which are not accompanied by dance. *Bhagnole*: these are songs with couplets that comprise of one and half lines. A singer continues to add such couplets to the original one. Because they form a linked up series these are known as *joḍ* also. Mostly *joḍ* are themed around *śringār ras*. *Bair*: the word means fight or altercation/competition. The singers are opposed to each other in a verbal face-off where each tries to outdo the other not only with one's musical talent but also with one's wittiness and creativity in creating verses. These are often sung in fairs and festivals and huge gatherings of audience sit around to see who wins these musical bouts. The compositions are often rhetorical, twisted with meanings, and idiomatic and like puzzles. These may comprise of topics ranging from epics and *Purānas* to history, everyday life events to philosophical matters. Thus it is a platform to showcase not only one's musical talents but also one's knowledge and intelligence. Both these forms of singing are very popular in fairs and festivals and in public gatherings.

The bardic tradition of Kumaon also sees its root in the historical royal bards, minstrels and balladeers who served the rulers and kings, nobilities and other powerful upper caste

people. Often their services were required at a number of important events where they sang praises and laudatory songs for their masters. These included songs praising the greatness and achievements of the master, as well as their war and military expeditions. Additionally these bards often even accompanied their masters to the battle fields and sang and performed there for the troupes as well their masters. This served a double purpose of motivating the troupes for warfare as well as these bards kept account of the succession of events in the battlefield. These bards were also invited to sing and dance at the house of their masters at celebrations and festivities. Generally, singing and dancing was considered to be a lowly activity, therefore it was done by the lower castes. At these events the bards sang auspicious songs, laudatory songs, as well as entire genealogies of the master's ancestry and family history known as *vamśāvali*. Most bards acquired these genealogies from their ancestors/elders who too had been serving these masters over generations. Therefore these *vamśāvali* also form an important source of the mythico-historical origin of the people. As people resorted to mytho-praxis for social stratification, these genealogies played an important role in determining the line of descent and place of origin of the various castes and classes of the region, which finally got reflected in the patterns of social mobility(both upwards and downwards) and the eventual status attained.

Oral tradition in Kumaon has a very large number of genres and varieties in itself: folk music, folksongs, ballads and epics, folklores/folktales, myths and mythologies, proverbs, idioms, anecdotes, riddles and puzzles, traditional knowledge systems, genealogies and annals etc., more or less all of these are a part of the Bardic tradition in some way or the other. Though these genres/varieties have their own subtypes and varieties, these demarcations at times overlap. A narrative may have several versions, may be sung as a ballad in a *jāgar* and yet also be a very popular folktale. For example, the lifestories of the most popular deities such as *Nandā Devi*, *Jiyā Rāni*, *Goril*, *Saim*, *Kalbiṣṭ* etc., are not only sung in *jāgars*, but they are also very popular and favourite folktales that people know here.

Most of the bards interviewed inform that all knowledge related to the non-orthodox rituals of propitiation and possession is called *gāndharvidyā*. This term sees its origin in the skill and knowledge (i.e., *Gandharvavidyā*) of the *Gandharvas* (the race of celestial

beings or demi-gods, who were skilled musicians and artists who performed in the court of the *Indra*, the King of Gods in Hindu mythology ). Thus it is a skill with a divine origin and therefore has more than just singing and dancing to it. The mythology, stories, songs, the formulae of magic and sorcery are all within the repertoire of the *jagariyā/puchyar/gaṇtuā*. This along with the knowledge of singing and dancing confers on the *jagariyā* the ability to induce possession in a medium and cause the deity to incarnate in this world of men. It also confers on the *puchyar* the ability to prophesy and communicate with the divinities. Therefore for most bards their art form is divine and carries power as well as responsibility towards the greater good of the people.

### 2.3 THE NATH YOGIS AND TANTRISM

Another characteristic that makes the Kumaoni ritual tradition unique is the importance and popularity of the renunciatory and ascetic traditions specially of *Guru Gorakhnāth* and the sect of the *Nāth Siddhas or Kanphatā Yogīs* ('Split-eared' *Yogīs*) and their association with Tantric practices. Though such sects and practices have been very popular all over the country and specially among the North Indians, their influence on the Kumaoni traditions and rituals may be attributed primarily to two reasons : (1) the popularity of the Himalayas as a holy region and home to some of the most important Hindu shrines which resulted in a constant influx of people from all over the nation to the region and made the region a favorite resort/haunt for *Rishi-munis, sādhus and yogīs* since the Vedic times; and (2) the high popularity of the Saivite and Sakta traditions which happen to share certain commonalities with the renunciatory and ascetic traditions. It is a known fact that in Kumaon, the Saivaite and the Sakta traditions have been far more influential than any other tradition.

The *Nāth Sect* is a North Indian order (*sampradāya*) of *yogīs* with the ultimate spiritual goal of the attainment of final 'release' i.e. "*samādhi*" or "*maheśvara*" (Sivahood) through complete union with the supreme deity *Siva* (Dasgupta, 1969: 221)<sup>21</sup>. In the *Nāth* tradition *Śivā* is regarded as the *Parabrahma* or *Paratman*, the Supreme Being. The *Nāth*

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<sup>21</sup> Dasgupta, Sashibhusan. (1969). *Obscure Religious Cults*. (Third Edition). Calcutta. Mukhopadhyay.



*yogīs* aim to accrue *siddhīs* i.e., occult and supernatural powers and enlightenment. Thus a primary aim of the *Nāth yogīs* is to attain a state enlightenment and liberation from not only the cycle of reincarnation, but also from miseries/desires of the world; and on the attainment of this state of enlightenment to utilize it for the betterment of the others.<sup>22</sup>

The term ‘*nāth*’ means ‘master, lord, protector’, therefore *Adi Nāth* means ‘Original Lord’. *Adi Nāth* is the name given to *Śivā* who is regarded as the first *Nāth*. Originally the sect comprised of a lineage of the *Navnāthas*, ‘the Nine Nāth’, of which *Śivā* in the form of *Adi Nāth* was the first. The *Navnāthas* all are believed to have been incarnations of Lord *Śivā* who have attained enlightenment and continue to live in the mortal world in hidden from the eyes of the common man. According to one view the *Navnāthas* represent nine saints of the Hindu tradition.<sup>23</sup> It is believed that *Lord Kṛṣṇā* directed them to incarnate in the *Kāli Yuga* to reinvigorate the yogic tradition. Thus nine *yogīs* of the previous ages – Kavi *Narayan*, *Hari*, *Antariksha*, *Prabuddha*, *Pippalayan*, *Avirhotra*, *Drumila*, *Chamas* and *Karbhajan* reincarnated as the *Navnāthas*<sup>24</sup>: *Machindranāth* or *Matsyendranāth*, *Gorakshnāth* or *Gorakhnāth*, *Jalandernāth*, *Kanifnāth*, *Charpatnāth*, *Nageshnāth*, *Bharatnāth*, *Revannāth* and *Gahinināth* respectively.

From amongst the *Navnāthas* *Matsyendranāth* and *Gorakhnāth* are also revered in Tibetan Buddhism as *Mahāsiddhas* (great adepts) and are believed to possess great powers and to have attained spiritual perfection. By convention there are eighty-four *Mahāsiddhas* in both Hindu and Tibetan Buddhist traditions, with some overlap between the two lists. A *Mahasiddha* is one who has through *sādhnās* (discipline towards the

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<sup>22</sup>This attainment is the active aspect of the *Nātha* system which most closely resembles the final goal of Buddhism, i.e., Bodhisattvahood, wherein the enlightened *yogin* is driven by a spirit of ‘universal compassion’ to uplift the moral and spiritual condition of others (Dasgupta, 1969:220).

<sup>23</sup> Kanchi, Vijay Srināth and Salunke, Dr. Sunil(2015). “The Lesser-Known Nāth Yoga Sect and Its Insightful Metaphysics”. *The Esoteric Quarterly*. Winter 2015. pg 81

<sup>24</sup> There seems to be lack of consensus over who all comprised the *Navnāthas*. There are different lists of names giving different names.

pursuit of a goal for spiritual realization) like meditation and yoga attains the *siddhis*, i.e. spiritual, supernatural, psychic, occult and magical abilities or perfections. A *mahāsiddha* is empowered enough to be a guru. Sashibhusan Dasgupta in *Obscure Religious Cults* (1969:212) describes the *aṣṭa* (Eight) *siddhis* (perfections) that are well known in the school of *yoga* and that the *Nātha Siddhas* display:

1. *Aṇimā*: the power of becoming as small as an atom
2. *Mahimā*: the power of becoming big
3. *Laghimā*: the power of assuming excessive lightness at will
4. *Garimā*: the power of becoming as heavy as one likes
5. *Prāpti*: the power of obtaining all objects at will
6. *Prakāmya*: the power of obtaining all objects of pleasure at will
7. *Isītva*: the power of obtaining supremacy over everything
8. *Vaśitva*: the power of subduing, fascinating or bewitching

The sect is an initiatory *guru-śiṣya* (master-disciple) lineage tradition, where membership is given on taking up *dīkṣā* (initiation) from a guru, who becomes the spiritual master of the disciple. The *Nāth yogīs*<sup>25</sup> are often called the *Kanphatā Yogīs* (Spilt-Eared Yogis) when after reaching the third and final stage of initiation into the sect the earlobes of the initiate are pierced/spilt in a ceremony and earrings called *kundalas* are inserted into the ears. The *Kanphatā Yogīs* are known for their spiritual virtues as well as their vices. While they are known to possess *siddhīs*, powers of healing, exorcism, rainmaking etc.<sup>26</sup> they are also notoriously known for their habits of debauchery, moneymaking by selling magic charms, sorcery and witchcraft activities etc. In the *Kanphatā* tradition, these activities are believed to be important to acquire and *Gorakhnāth* himself was known to

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<sup>25</sup> The *Nāth Yogīs* are also known by several other names like *Nāth Siddhas* because they masters the *siddhis* and *Gorakhnāthis* after Guru *Gorakhnāth* who indisputably is the most influential of the *Nāth Yogīs* and the establisher of the sect of the *Kanphatā Yogīs*.

<sup>26</sup> Briggs, G. W. (1973). *Gorakhnath and the Kanphata Yogis* (Delhi reprint of Calcutta 1938 edition). Delhi. Motilal Banarsidass.

practice all these arts. Popular legends tell that he had the ability to bless people with fertility, bring back the dead and restore life, miraculous healing and rainmaking powers, he was an expert of exorcism and he could travel across the three worlds (heaven, earth and the netherworld).

The *Nāth yogīs* first emerged around 9<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> centuries and gained immense popularity under *Matsyendranāth* (who is regarded as the first mortal leader of the sect) and reached its zenith under the leadership of Guru *Gorakhnāth*, who wrote down some of the most important *Nāth* literature and is regarded to be the inventor of *Haṭh Yoga*. The sect is known for their occult and supernatural powers and all forms of esoteric knowledge. They practice the intense form of yoga, the *Haṭh Yoga* and train their bodies hard to attain siddhis.

## GORAKHNĀTH AND THE EIGHTY-FOUR MAHASIDDHAS

*Gorakhnāth* in the Kumaoni tradition is a mythico-historical figure. It is said that he toured the Kumaon region. The nath yoigs were very popular and received patronization from the Chand Kings of Kumaon. He is regarded as the *gurū* to all folk deities, *jagariyās*, *puchārs/gaṇtuās*, *dāngariyās* as well as the presiding *pujārīs* in most of the temples belonging to *Bhairava* and to the *Śaiva* and *Śākta* traditions. He resides in *Pātāla* (the netherworld or the Land of the Dead), and keeps an eternal sacrificial fire or *dhuni* alighted. It is believed that the world was created from this fire. Along with the *Nāth* Sect, *Gorakhnāth* is also associated with the *Eighty-Four Siddhas*, the *yogīs* who have said to have attained *the siddhis* (great powers or perfections). Most of these are either regarded to be disciples of *Gorakhnāth*, or else members of the local pantheon of the Kumaoni folk deities as well as local deities found in different regions of North India (Briggs, 1973: 137-8).

The approximate time of the emergence of the sect was the period when the *Vāmācāra* (left-hand path) traditions and tantric practices were extremely popular and the inclination of the thinkers and the masses was towards the esoteric and occult practices.

The tantric and yogic practices were intertwined at this time, as is evident from the entire system of the *Nāth Yogīs*. The *Vāmācāra* and Tantric practices include both include the non-orthodox religious practices involving the use of the prohibited substances and were considered inferior as well as looked down upon by the traditional and orthodox Hindus.

*Vāmācāra* traditions, specially tantric practices allow the use of *Pancamakara* (also known as the Five Ms) which are considered taboo in the orthodox Hindu tradition and which a religious Hindu should abstain from. These are believed to be a hindrance of spiritual growth. The *Pancamakara* include *madya* (wine), *māṁsa* (meat), *matsya* (fish), *mudrā* (could mean parched grain or gestures), and *maithunā* (ritual intercourse). On the other hand the tantric practices relied on these to attain *siddhis* and *mokṣa*.

The history of Tantrism in its early stages is highly obscure for no written records are present and some suggest pre-Vedic origin to it, believing that the earliest seeds of Tantrism germinated in the guise of fertility cults of the pre-Vedic, pre-Aryan civilizations and tribals who worshipped nature and Mother Goddess. In the later stages the low castes and the outcastes of the Hindu society came to be associated with Tantrism primarily because of its inclusive nature and accessibility to men and women of all castes and creed. This is generally attributed to the supremacy and liberalness of *Śiva* who became the most popular god amongst people, specially those who has been denied the right to Vedic/Brahmanical ceremonies and worshipping by the orthodoxy.<sup>27</sup>

Tantrism developed around the 5-6<sup>th</sup> century A.D. and continued to flourish until 14<sup>th</sup> Century C.E. greatly effecting both Hinduism and Buddhism. This was a period marked by great economical, social and political changes. After the end of *Gupta* Rule and the decline of the *Harshā* Empire, several small kingdoms emerged and declared their independence. Feudalism was rampant amongst the Hindu kingdoms and the Muslim domination was on rise. the influence of the orthodox Brahmanical Hinduism decreased and there was an emergence of lother cults and sects which focused on the local languages instead of Sanskrit and several languages developed. this was partly because of the increasing regionalism due to absence of a central power. Thus religious movements

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<sup>27</sup> Kanchi, Vijay Srināth and Salunke, Dr. Sunil(2015). "The Lesser-Known Nāth Yoga Sect and Its Insightful Metaphysics". *The Esoteric Quarterly*. Winter 2015. Pg 92

like *Śaivism*, *Vaiṣṇavism*, *Bhakti Cult*, *Tantra* came into force. Tantrism had a firm hold by the 10<sup>th</sup> and the 11<sup>th</sup> centuries C.E., but on the other hand Buddhism had lost stature and faded out of India, establishing roots in the neighboring regions like Tibet and Bhutan. Buddhist Tantrism, however, had been established by the 7<sup>th</sup> century C.E with the spread of the tantric practice along with the movement of Buddhism along the silk-road route.

Thus we see that Tantrism arose as a philosophical as well as ethical opposition to the established orthodoxy and aimed to destroy the rigidity of the old traditions and customs and exposing the irrelevance of the scholasticism that had gripped the thinkers and hieratic religious practices and their futility for the masses.

Therefore while Śivā is the ultimate being the *Brahman* and therefore the creator and the controller of the phenomenal universe who could deliver one from all bondage and suffering, yet this phenomenal world, as the manifestation of his power, *Śakti*, is not illusory or unreal. For these yogis this world is as real as Śivā, even when it is transitory and limited. This is because *Śakti* is inseparable from Śivā and is not different from Him. *Ādi Śankara* in the renowned *Śakta* hymn *Saundaryālahiri* (c. 800 CE) writes: "*If Śivā is united with Śakti, he is able to create. If he is not, he is incapable even of stirring.*"

*Śakti* embodies the dynamism and energy of the cosmos. She forms the force behind its material existence. Śivā is the transcendent aspect of *Śakti*. Thus, Śivā (*Brahman*) can be regarded to be static *Śakti* and *Śakti* is the dynamic form of Śivā (*Brahman*). "There is no Śivā without *Śakti*, or *Śakti* without Śivā. The two [...] in themselves are One." <sup>28</sup> This concept in most religious arts is depicted in the form of the *Ardhnārīśwara*.

*Ardhnārīśwara* signifies the totality that exists beyond duality and the non duality of existence. At the same time it also signifies the diverse and dynamic nature of the absolute being that is manifested in the limitlessness of universe (cosmos or macrocosm) as well in the innumerable forms of beings (the individual being or microcosm) that exist in this universe. It is both formless and manifest and active and inactive at the same time.

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28 From *Ādi Śankara's 'Saundaryālahiri'* in: Subramanian, V. K. (2006) [1977]. *Saundaryalahari of Sankaracarya: Sanskrit Text in Devanagari with Roman Transliteration, English Translation, Explanatory Notes, Yantric Diagrams and Index* (6th ed.). Abhinav Publications

Thus all dichotomies are unified and merged together in him. Additionally, the concept of *Ardhnāriśwara* also brings together two conflicting concepts: renunciation and materialism. While the renunciatory principle is represented by *Śivā* who is the ascetic, the materialism is denoted by *Pārvati* who is a householder.

Therefore the aim of a *Nāth Yogi* is twofold: attainment of *siddhis* (powers or perfections) through *sādhnā* (spiritual discipline), like yogic practices, to become a *Siddha*. But the *Siddha* has a greater goal of maintaining a permanent state of *Siddha*, i.e. become a Mahāsiddha by the further perfection of perfection. This is connected to the higher goal of attainment of nirvana/enlightenment with the mortal body and use of one's abilities to assist fellow beings. and the ultimate goal is to attain the final 'release' i.e. *samādhī* or "maheśvara" i.e. unification with the supreme god *Śivā* (Śivāhood). (Dasgupta, 1969: 221)

## Key Tantric and Yogic concepts of the Nāth Yogis

- The body is a microcosm which replicates the macrocosm (universe). And as a yogi attains higher levels of spiritual awareness, more he would find himself as one with the macrocosm, until he becomes one with the Absolute Being. Thus aim is to attain goals (spiritual as well as material) through the use of *prāna* (life-force or energy) that fills this universe
- *Śivā* and *Śakti* are manifest in each being, each entity of our cosmos and the world is nothing but a cosmic play of *Śivā* and *Śakti*. The unification of these two in the human body is possible through awakening of the *Kundalini*. *Śakti* resides in each human being in the form of a dormant primal life force called *Kundalini*, which when awakened and united with *Śivā* who has a seat in the crown *cakrā*, leads to spiritual enlightenment. *Kundalini* can also be awakened by spiritual practices such as yoga or meditation.

- Initiation and spiritual discipleship under a qualified adept (guru) is very important in both traditions as both traditions hold the guru in great reverence. The disciple should be completely surrendered to his guru, have the utmost devotion towards the guru and should give up all worldly attachments, aspirations and ambitions.
- It is possible to attain enlightenment in the embodied state i.e. the human body.
- The absolute reality is not distinguishable from the manifest samsārā (world). A major consequence of this concept was that the laymen could aim for spiritual liberation and enlightenment and hope to get rid of the cycle of suffering and ignorance through tantric and yogic practices. Thus the maxim “nothing exists that is not divine”.
- The recognition that spiritual illumination also leads to acquiring of a number of psychic powers *siddhis*, which the yogis use for spiritual and material purposes; and emphasis on first-hand experience and experimentation rather than reliance on derived knowledge.
- Importance of ritual and *sāadhanā* for attainment of powers. It includes the use of yoga (including the use of *pranayāma* – breathing exercises and *āsanās* – body postures), *mantrās* (reciting of chants), *mudrās* (hand gestures), *yatrās* (holy pilgrimages) and processions)

## CHAPTER 3: JAGAR RITUAL OF KUMAON

### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

*Jāgar* means ‘to keep vigil or to awaken’ (from Hindi ‘*jāg*’ for ‘to be awake or to awaken’) and refers to the ritual as well as to the particular song sung to invoke a deity. This ritual holds a special place amongst the non-orthodox religious ceremonies of Kumaon. It holds a central position amongst these rituals because it facilitates the awakening and *avatār* or incarnation of the folk deities into human mediums through possession. In case of the rites of propitiations, specially *Chal Puja*, *Masan Puja*, the *Gaṇtuā/Puchyar* (diviner) is possessed by its deity to get to the basis/cause of the affliction. A full-scale *jāgar* is not required to create possession in the *Gaṇtuā*; he invokes the deity to enter into a semi-possessed state where he can communicate with his deity. Sometimes the afflicting deity/spirit may ask for a *jāgar* to be conducted for it and for it to be given a place amongst the victim’s lineage deities. The deity is then made to dance in the *jāgar* conducted, and a temple is built for it. In some cases, the *Gaṇtuā* and the afflicting deity both dance. Similarly in the *jāts*, ritual processions of deities, most deities are incarnated into mediums for the ritual journey across their area of dominion. At times *jāgars* include animal sacrifices in honor of the deities or their aides (*gaṇ*).

A deity is invoked through the singing of a song or epic related to the deity by a *jagariyā* (the bard or the conductor of the *jāgar*) accompanied to traditional instruments, who then gets incarnated into the body of a medium, the *dāngariyā* (*dāngar* - animal/mount, also *ghvaḍ* or horse), who becomes possessed by the invoked deity. The deity invoked is asked for its blessings and grace and people put forth their problems to the deity, who offers help and advice to the devotees.

Most *jāgars* can be conducted with a minimal amount of paraphernalia and offerings. Traditionally, the only requirements were of a sanctified space near the *thān*, an oil lamp, simple offerings of fruits and some *halwa-puri* (sweet pudding and fried bread) as



*bhog*( consecrated food offerings for the deity) as well as *prasād* (portions from the *bhog* used for oblations that the attends partake in). And the other requirement was that all functionaries and *syonkār/syonāi* and other members of the household would wake up in the morning, take a bath and should fast for the day. The *jagariyā* would be given a verbal invitation on some previous day. A Brahmin priest was not required for the ritual ceremony.

*Jāgars* can be divided into two kinds:

(1) the first type of *jāgar* is organized at the household level. This is a small-scale version of the *jāgar*, which is held at the home of the *syonkār*<sup>29</sup> i.e. the supplicant/requester or arranger of the event. it generally is the head of the household which is organizing the puja for their deities. the word *syonkār*. The wife of a *syonkār* is referred to as a *syonāi*.<sup>30</sup> A household level *jāgar* is generally organized only for the members of that particular household or close blood relatives. Their presence is important and obligatory in this case. However, if someone from outside the family wishes to attend, they can attend the ceremony. Mostly a household *jāgar* is held for the *iṣṭdevta* (tutelary gods) and *kuldevta*(lineage gods) of that particular household or patrilineal kin group. A household level *jāgar* is also mostly held inside the house, in the room where the *thān* i.e. the household shrine of the *iṣṭdevta* is located. This in the traditional houses is located in the room with the kitchen fire. Otherwise it is held in the *patāṅgaḍ* or the front yard of the household without a fire lit.

(2) the second kind of *jāgar* is the *dhuṇi* or *junār* which is a large scale version of the *jāgar* and includes the entire village community. A *dhuṇi* is mostly done for *Devi* (in various forms of *Durgā* or *Śākti*). It is generally held in the premises of the village temple or in a large field where a large number of people may be easily accommodated. Within the ritual arena, the central part is cleared up, consecrated and a huge fire is ignited which is called a *dhuṇi*. This *dhuṇi* can has to be kept ignited of the entire

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<sup>29</sup> In the literal sense the word *syonkār* means ‘a rich man’ or ‘a prosperous man’

<sup>30</sup> It is also used to refer to a supplicant who has been afflicted or any member of the household which has been affected. The word *syonkār* can refers to any male supplicant. Similarly, the word *syonāi* can be used to refer to any female supplicant.

duration of the event. a major difference between a *jāgar* and a *dhuṇi* is that a *dhuṇi* always has a fire lit, while it is not necessarily required for a *jāgar*. as the entire village is involved in the ceremony, the deities invoked in this ceremony are the (*grām devtā*) village deities and not the household level deities. often as the entire village is involved, the event may conclude with the organization of a special prayer service at the village temple and a *bhandārā* may be organized.

Another importance distinction is the distinction between the *bhūteri* (inside) *jāgar* and the *bāheri*(outside) *jāgar*. A *bhūteri jāgar* is mostly restricted to a maximum of 11 days and is always done for an odd number of days i.e. 1 day, 3 days, 5 days, 7 days, 9 days, and 11 days. While the *bāheri*(outside) *jāgar* is more elaborate and has a larger number of *dāngariyās* participating. It is conducted for a minimum period of 2 days to long as 22 days. There are certain deities whose *jāgar* is always conducted outside in the open, with a *dhuṇi* burning. Another major distinction between the two is that in an outside *jāgar* the main instrument for invocation of the deities is the *dhol* and *damau* which is played by *Harijan jagariyās*, called *Dās*. They are generally called to conduct *Devi ki Dhuṇi*, the *jāgar* for the entire village community.

*Devi ki Dhuṇi* is a community event and entire village is invited to participate. People visit the *Dās*' house in a procession with musical accompaniment and escort him to the venue of the *Dhuṇi*. He arrives at the venue seated in a '*doli*' or palanquin with a train of escorts. Often the entire procession also carries along two huge flags called the '*niśāṇ*'. One *niśāṇ* carrying person leads the procession and the other one is carried by a person who trails the tail of the procession. The *Dās* along with the procession takes a round/circumambulates the *dhuṇi* on the palanquin and then the customary '*tīkā-pithyā*' is done. The *Devi* is offered *bhog* (consecrated food items prepared for a deity) and '*tīkā-pithyā*' is done to her also. Generally a small prayer service is conducted before the *bhog* - *ārti* etc. is done, then *bhog* is offered. The *Dās* is the first to be served food from the *bhandārā*, after *bhog* is offered to *Devi*, but because he belongs to a lower caste, he sits separately and eats alone or along with the other low caste functionaries.

*Jāgars* can be done at any time of the year, as per the requirement of the devotee. Also most households traditionally organize a *jāgar* for their household deities either annually or in a gap of 2-3 years. The mediums for these *jāgars* are some of the members of the household. These *jāgars* are mostly conducted elaborately and all household members and close family relatives are invited to attend. However, it is the presence of the members of the patrilineage which is important. At times there can be upto 7-8 generations of a patrilineal kin group or the entire patrilineal kin group attending. This large scale ceremony is mostly organized at the ancestral house where the lineage had first settled down and contains the *thān* of the *kuldevtas*. Such an event may last for a period of upto 3 to 11 days. A special longer event is organized when a new *dāngariyā* or initiate has to be selected from amongst the family members. This mostly happens in case when a medium has died or has become too old and is no longer fit to bear/carry the deity. Then along with the *jāgar*, a ceremony of ritual bathing of the deity is also conducted, and the deity is taken for a *snān* in holy waters of the Ganges to places like Hardwar. Sometimes a major catastrophe or tragedy occurs which affects all members of the kin group. In this case also a large scale *jāgar* will be held for the household. A small *jāgar* without involving the entire family and relatives are conducted at home when a person is troubled or has been suffering for a long time. Major reasons for this could be severe or unexplained sickness, some crisis in the household, to settle family disputes, low agricultural produce, cattle has lost yield (*hāk lagnā, najar lagnā*) or has had a series of stillbirth or miscarriages. At times a deity desires for a *jāgar* to be organized for it. But *jāgars* are not conducted only in times of distress, a small scale *jāgar* can be organized to thank the deities when a wish has been granted, or before some celebration or major life-events like marriages.

Similar to the tradition of biennial or triennial *jāgar* conducted at the household level, *jāgars* are organized at the village level every few years and the entire community participates in the event. these are mostly referred to as *Dhuṇi* and are conducted in honor of the village deities. These are conducted to honor the deities, and seek their blessings

and protection for the entire village, all its members including the animals. Also these are organized in case there has been some natural disaster like drought or floods or unfavorable weather which might harm the crops. People also conduct these so that the deities would bless them and grant them good harvests, good produce and prosperity and abundance would remain at home and in their lands and forests.

Though *jāgars* can be organized at all times, and whenever a person is in trouble, but generally *jāgars* are not organized in the months of *Bhāda*(August-September) and *Pūs*(December-January). *Devi jātrā* and *jāgars* can be done in *Chait* (March-April). *Kārtik*(October-November) *pūraṇmāsī*(full moon) is considered to be a good day for organizing of *jāgars*. *Masān Pūjā* (also called as *hawā lagna*) can be done at any time but are most effective in the months of *Bhāda*(August-September) and *Pūs*(December-January). However, nowadays people also organize these at the times of holidays so that maximum number of people can participate.

Most of the deities worshipped and invoked in a household level *jāgar* are ancestral/lineage gods or the *kuldevtās*. When there is some trouble in the family either the family deity or a major deity whose forte the trouble falls in. this is because most of the major deities have their own domains of forte. All ancestors worshipped are also categorized as *bhūt*, while *dyapt* or *devtā* includes all major gods and the folk deities.

Some of the commonly worshipped deities are: *Gwal/Goel/Goril*, *Narsingh*, *Katyūrī Dev*, *Nāg Devtā*, *Haru-Saim*, *Jiyā Rānī*. Each deity has its own song/ballad that is sung to it. there is no major difference in the ritual process for the deities, however different things may be offered to different deities. . If a *bhūt* has been worshiped, generally things like *pagdi-sāfā* (turban-head scarf), *kurtā-pajāmā* (shirt-trousers) are given as offerings. For a female deity/spirit being worshiped, people generally get *dhoti* i.e. sari and other cosmetics, toiletries and other small ornaments/adornments that women use. It is taken by the *jagariyā* or the *bhakerū* in case the *bhūt*/deity does not wish to keep it. Animal sacrifices are made for deities like *Goel* and *Narankar* – specifically for the deity's aides:

*Shāṇ* and *Bāṇ*. For *Goel Devta*- offerings of '*dhagul*' - silver bangles are made, the possessed medium put it on during the ritual. Later on these are taken off and placed in the *thān* along with other articles of worship. All the articles and offerings used in the ceremony are taken by the family *jagariyā*. They are also given money or clothes or daily provisions as payment.

*Masān*(spirit/ghost) and *hawā-pāni*(elemental beings) dance (*i.e. nācṇī*) when invoked. These are made to dance in order to exorcise them from the victims' body. *Jāgar* or *pūjā* done for them is basically a form of healing/remedy for affliction. *Masān* generally ask for certain remedial or redressal steps/ measures to be taken. For example, it might ask for an animal sacrifice or certain articles (clothing, adornments etc,) as offerings. Or it might even ask to be turned into a deity and would want the victim household to construct a shrine for it and regularly worship it. When the household agrees and makes a commitment to do so, the deity is pacified (*shānt ho jātā hai*). The deity comes under control and is said to have become sober (*dheet marjyaat* – stay in its limits) it is made to release the victim and is propitiated properly and turned into a deity, so that it cannot harm anyone. When as deity is added into the household pantheon it is called a *thānbāsi dyapt* (deity residing in the *thān*). Mostly, the *puja* will be held at the assumed place of affliction and the offerings made to these are never taken back home. They are discarded.

The time and date for a *jāgar* is mostly decided in consultation with the *jagariyā*, keeping in view his commitments and convenience as well as that of the *syonkār*. At times organization of a *jāgar* is done after consultation with a *puchyar/Gaṇtuā* who suggests it as a solution to some affliction. Once the date is decided invitations are given out. Invitation for the (*dhuni*) *jāgar* is not particularly handed out to people as it is a verbal invitation. It is an open invitation, anyone can participate in a *jāgar* and there are no restrictions except for menstruating women, pregnant women. Also people who have undergone ritual pollution *i.e.* pollution because of a birth (*nātak*) or death (*sūtak*) in the family are also not allowed to attend or hold a *jāgar* until the prescribed time-period of

defilement(in terms of number of days) has been observed. However, special invitation (*nyūt* or *nyōt*) is given to the functionaries/performers of the ritual i.e. the *jagariyā*, the *dāngariyā*, the *bhakerū*. However, a person may invite the entire village for a community dinner or *bhandārā* at the concluding day of the household *jāgar*. It is not a traditional practice but has caught up popularity now. There are no particular customary prescriptions or restrictions that the organizers, functionaries or attendees have to observe. But generally on the day of the *jāgar*, people are required to take a bath, the *dāngariyā*, the *syōnkār* and supervisors of the ‘*devkārya*’<sup>31</sup>, who are in some places referred to as the *pujārī*<sup>32</sup> observe fast.

### 3.2 A GENERAL OUTLINE OF THE EVENTS IN A JAGAR

The general sequence of rituals within a *jāgar* is as follows: the event begins with a *Sandhyā Puja* and *ārti* which is held in the household *thān*. This is followed by a consecration of the ritual space and the *dhuṇi* (fire-space) in preparation for the *jāgar*. the fire is then lit up in the *dhuṇi* and worshipped. Following this the *āsan* for the deities and their weapons and arms are installed in the *dhuṇi* fire. These remain there until the entire ceremony is over then are returned in their place in the household *thān*. Next is the worshipping and blessing of the *jagariyā*, his assistants and their musical instruments. In this entire duration the *jagariyā* and his assistants play their instruments but there is no singing. The gathering then breaks for dinner. The second phase begins with the singing of an invitation song or *nyot* to all gods. This is followed by the singing of the *jāgar* for invoking and incarnating the deity. As possession occurs the medium beings to violently shake and tremble. The deity announce its arrival by shouting out loudly. The deities dance and move around the fire as the *jagariyā* completes his performance. when the

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<sup>31</sup> ‘*devkārya*’ refers to the entire ritual as well as the smaller arrangements and preparations required to be completed for the ritual. These include cleaning, consecrating and setting up of the *thān* as well as handling of all the paraphernalia generally associated with the *thān*. it also includes the arranging decorating/setting up of the *thān* and the *dhuṇi* place, preparation of the *bhog* and *prasād* etc.

<sup>32</sup> The supervisors or *pujārī* are not the *purohīts* from the Brahmin caste. Anyone who wishes can work for the ceremony, but generally these tasks are performed by men, amongst whom a senior member of the family/clan/village can functions as the overseer in consultation with the *jagariyā*

*jagariyā* stops the deity settles down in its *āsan* and the next phase begins, during this time the deity converses with the gathering. During this time the *jagariyā* does not sing but only keeps playing the instrument lightly to accompany the deity. As the end of the *pūch* (*lit.* ‘to ask’) the deity readies to depart. It blesses the entire gathering and throws rice grains in the air over their heads and in the four directions. With this the deity departs and the medium collapses to the ground. The *jagariyā* stops playing and this marks the end of the ritual.

Slowly the arena begins to empty as people leave for their homes. The priests and others in-charge of the ceremony then begin to clear up the arena and wrap up the event. Often post ritual, people gather together to discuss the events of the ritual over cups of teas and then retire. Those who have been asked to hold *jāgar* or any special prayer service or to make special offerings or *dān* etc., pledge to do it within a certain period of time that is decided after consulting with the deity. Often a *Dwār Puja* may be organized the next day. It is like a closing ceremony, where all deities are worshipped one last time in the household *thān*, before relatives leave for their homes.

### 3.3 FUNCTIONARIES IN A JAGAR

#### 3.3.1 THE JAGARIYA

The *jagariyā* is the main functionary in a *jāgar* ritual. He is the conductor of the ceremony and sings the songs that cause possession in the medium, *dāngariyā*. The term is derived from the term ‘*jāgar*’ which means ‘to keep vigil or to awaken’ (from Hindi ‘*jag*’ for ‘to be awake or to awaken’) which refers to the entire ritual as well as to the particular song sung to invoke a deity. Therefore *jagariyā* is the one who ‘awakens’ the gods and compels them to enter the land of the mortals. Gaborieau describes him as the one who directs the *jāgar* (Gaborieau<sup>33</sup>, 1975; 149 “... *celui qui dirige le jagar*”). However, the work of a *jagariyā* is not restricted to performing and singing at religious

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<sup>33</sup> Gaborieau, 1975. "La Transe Rituelle Dans L'Himalaya Central: Folie, Avatar, Meditation." in *Purusartha: Recherches de Sciences Sociales sur L'Asie Sud*. Vol. 2. Paris. pg 147-172.

rituals. As a central player in a *jāgar* ritual they are the ones who with their knowledge and expertise, not only to awaken the deities, but also to guide the pace and rhythm of the ritual. As important repositories of the oral tradition of the region, *jagariyās* are bards who are adept in the musical arts who are respected for their divine abilities and form an important element of the social fabric.

The musical abilities of the *jagariyā* is distinct from that of a regular singer or musician not only because it serves ritualistic and religious purposes, but also because it cannot be learned without divine intervention/providence. It is not merely an art form but more of a way of life which requires a lot of perseverance, devotion and deep faith in the powers of the gods for the acquisition of the skill. The knowledge system associated with the art is called *gāndharvidyā*<sup>34</sup> (from *gandharvavidyā*) the divine skill of the demigod races of *Gandharvas* and *Kinnaras* who were musicians in *Indra's* court. The art form is a *guru-siṣya paramparā* (master disciple tradition) where teaching is completely oral and pragmatic. However, everyone or anyone cannot be a *jagariyā*, apart from the talent and training, it is believed that until the deities approve of a person, or bestow their grace and blessings, one cannot be a *jagariyā* in entirety and would not be very successful at performing *jāgars* and making *avatārs* (incarnations) happen.

Traditionally it is a hereditary art form, with the knowledge and skill passing down from father to son, but not necessarily. At times children of relatives or people from outside of the family would be accepted as novices. When training is done under the mastership of another *jagariyā*, whom the learner accompanies as an assistant in *jāgars*. The disciple learns through observation and hearing to the songs and music as the *jagariyā* performs. Often the learners are seen assisting the *jagariyā* in small chores and preparation and arrangement of required things. Often the trainee participates in the *jāgar* as '*bhakeru*' or '*hyūvār*' i.e. a kind of chorister or backup singer who do not sing in the *jāgar*, but only

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<sup>34</sup> *Gandharvavidyā* is a term which is generally also used to refer to all music, theatre and dance forms in the Indian tradition. The word is derived from *Gandharva Veda* an ancient Indian treatise on all forms of performance arts including dance, music, and theater. The *Gandharva Veda* formed an appendix to the *Sāma Veda* and later on became the source of the *Nāṭya Śāstra*.



repeat the last few words of a verse or repeat and draw out the last note or chord of a line/verse. They also sometimes play the accompanying instrument, *thāli*. The *thāli* is an indispensable accompaniment to the *huḍuk* and both are played together.

As the *jagariyā* sings and chants, narrating the stories about life and deeds of the deity, he binds all present including the medium(s) into a spell, arousing the gods and invites them to come amongst their people. The deities then incarnate the bodies of the medium and dance, at times perform stunts and feats with the fire, and address the gathering that waits in awe. The *jagariyā* along with his bhakeru (choristers) not only provides the rhythm to which the deities dance, but through the modifications/alternations in the rhythm and speed of the playing, controls and paces the entire event. Therefore these alternations therefore demarcate the various phases of the ritual as well as the sequence of possession, beginning with the initiation/commencement with the evening prayer/invitation to the deities to the departure of the deities. He *also* directs the devotees about the proceedings supervises the ritual.

The invocation of the deities is not simply of a prescriptive or customary nature to gratify/appease a deity like in the Brahmanical ceremonies where the priest chants the mantras and makes oblations and finalizes the proceedings. A *jāgar* on the contrary is a more interactive process, where the functionaries as well the supplicant and audiences interact with each other. Along with the appeasing of glorifying of the gods, a *jāgar* is held for the welfare and betterment of the family or village who organize it. Therefore when the deities are incarnated, they enter into a conversation with the gathering, listening to their pleas and complaints and offer them solutions and advice. These conversations and interactions are mediated by the *jagariyā*. Often there might be differences or misunderstandings between the petitioner/devotee and the deity (or even amongst members of the audience) and at times neither of the two relents. Then as the guru to both, the *jagariyā* helps both parties to reach consensus and reconcile and offers his own suggestions. He *also* interprets what the deity speaks and forwards the message to the gathering.

As families/households/clans inherit their deities and the tradition of their worship passes down from one generation to the next, the *jagariyās* are *also* a part of their inheritance. Therefore each family/household/clan has its own *jagariyā* who always performs the ceremony for them. Often it happens that the father or some other relative of a *jagariyā* catered to the previous generation of the family. Thus a family/household always prefers one's own *jagariyā* for performing of the ritual, but in case he is unavailable, some other *jagariyā* is contacted. A major reason for this could be that he would be more familiar with the family/household and the deities than some other *jagariyā*. Most *jagariyās* are affiliated to a number of families and often travel across villages to provide services. Most *jagariyās* restrict themselves to a surrounding area of three to five nearby villages but if highly renowned for his skills, a *jagariyā* may, on request, travel far and wide to perform the ritual for new customers also. Therefore experience, age, good musical and singing abilities and the number of successful rituals and incarnations, determines the kind of popularity, social standing and respect a *jagariyā* would receive.

CASTES SYSTEM AND JAGARIYA – Traditionally the bards belonged to the castes located at the lowest rung of the Kumaoni society, the *Doms* or the *Śilpkār* communities whose primary occupation was not agriculture. These bard communities can be further divided into two kinds: the *Das-Dholi-Damai* and the *Badi-Auji/Hurkiye*. The *Das-Dholi-Damai* have a higher status than the *Badi-Auji/Hurkiye* as they traditionally did farming along with playing of the musical instruments, thus they relative had more independence. But the *Badi-Auji/Hurkiye* were completely depended on the higher castes for sustenance as they did not do farming at all. They were mendicant performers who along with their wives and daughters moved from villages to villages entertaining people. Dancing and singing of women was highly disapproved of and often these castes were accused immodesty and debauchery, as a result they were considered even more impure than the *Das-Dholi-Damai* and therefore do not participate in the *jāgar* rituals as officiants for the higher castes.

As the higher castes considered any form of contact with animal hide defiling, they did not take up the role of *jagariyās*. However, nowadays there are several *jagariyās* belonging to the higher castes who play the *huḍuk* (hour-glass drum) as well as the bronze *thāli* (dish). The high caste *jagariyās* do not generally play the *dhol* (a barrel-shaped drum played on its sides) or the *ronthi/damau* (a kettle drum). Because they can cater to the clients in both ways, as a Brahmin *purohit* as well as a *jagariyā*, several Brahmin priests have taken up the profession. It adds considerably to their earnings. Also it might also be that certain higher caste households may prefer them over the low caste *jagariyās*.

Apart from performing the *jāgar* for their client families, the *jagariyā* also carry out other functions like: accompanying clients on pilgrimages and visits to holy shrines. installing of idols in the deity's *thān* and also selecting the stones for it. when the deity demands they accompany the deity on its pilgrimages. They may accompany an newly initiated *dāngariyā* to the deity's shrine and for the ritual bathing ceremony, but it is not so everywhere. For example, in some places, the *jagariyā* for *Narsingh Devtā*, did not accompany the client party for a trip to Joshimath, which is the main seat of the deity. While for a household with *katyūrī dev* as lineage gods, the *jagariyā* not only accompanied ,but an entire team of musicians accompanied the client party to *Chitrashila* the main seat of their main deity, *Jiyā Rāni*. the *jagariyā* and the team performed all throughout the journey also.

Even though a *jagariyā* may belong to lower caste, in the duration of the *jāgar* he is treated with utmost respect and reverence. He and his art is worshipped as he has the ability to control the deities and make them dance.

One popular myths regarding the *Dās jagariyās* describe the first *Dās*, *Dharam Dās*, and show them to be special attendants to gods. There are many versions of the myth. According to legend , once all deities were present at *Mount Kailās*, when they were afflicted by poison. Everyone became worried about the spreading effect of the poison, so

they all rushed to request Lord Siva for help. Lord Siva then asked those in attendance to wipe their sweat and put it on a nearby rock. From this emerged a man who was named 'Dharam Dās'. At that moment 'Biñbhāt' created a *dhol* named 'Vijaysār' and 'Rāi Dās' fitted it with hide. Then *Dharam Dās* sang a 'vinatī' (*lit.* request) and played the *dhol* and annihilated the effects of the poison. Since then the descendants of *Dharam Dās* have been involved and given importance in religious ceremonies and rituals.

Kumaon has been greatly influenced by the *Nāth* tradition and has several deities who are believed to have been devout disciples of *Guru Gorakhnāth*. *Guru Gorakhnāth* is often considered the spiritual guru of all deities, bards, mediums, diviners and in a *jāgar* ritual he is personified by the *jagariyā*. And the *dhuñi* fire represents the eternal fire that *Gorakhnāth* keeps maintained in the *Pātāla* (the netherworld).

Another version shows the deep impact and influence that *Nāth* tradition has had on the religious beliefs of the Kumaonis. According to this version, *Lord Śivā* created *Dharam Dās* as the guru to 'vīrs' (great warrior deities). He was a devout worshipper and believer of gods. Once the *Kumu Dev* (the Kumaoni gods/deities) were looking for a guru and went to him. Offering him their services, they asked him to be their guru and the protector of their *dharma*. In reply, *Dharam Dās* questions them that what caste would he then belong to? The gods replied that out of the four *varṇas* that *Lord Brahma* created, *Brahman*, *Kshatriyas*, *Vaisyas* and *Shudras*, he would belong to the lowest, but they would honor him and respect him. They would follow him as they follow the *thul-devtās* (great gods). He agreed saying that in return they had to vow to follow the path (*rāstā*) he shows to them and they should have utmost *guru-bhakti* (devotion to the guru). He also says that until they believed in him, they would be worshipped by their people. In the end, he asks them to go to Hardwar and offer their services to *Guru Gorakhnāth*. *Guru Gorakhnāth* accepts their services and tells them to be good to the needy and help them.

Therefore a *jagariyā* also plays the role of the guru of all those present in the arena at the time of the *jāgar*. He is the guru of the deities and all present in the gathering. The deity addresses the *jagariyā* as 'Guru'. He provides the spiritual and ethico-moral guidance.

Therefore in some areas the *jagariyā* is also termed as the *dharmiya*, the purveyor/custodian, protector and reservoir/source/fountainhead of *dharma*<sup>35</sup>.

Therefore in the ritual context it is the duty of the *jagariyā* to control a bad situation and help the clients when they are unable to please or placate an angry deity. Even the most stubborn of the deities have to listen to their guru, and cannot disagree with him. The influence of the Nāth tradition is also reflected by the fact that the art form is learned in *guru-siṣya paramparā* manner, where an accomplished *jagariyā* takes students under him. The student lives with the *jagariyā* and accompanies him on his performances. There is also similarity in the fact that learning and practicing of the art also requires discipline like the *Nāth Yogis* do. Acquisition of the skill not only requires dedication, it also requires active participation in spiritual and religious activities like praying and worshipping daily, listening to sermons and making pilgrimages to important temples and shrines etc.

### 3.3.2 THE DANGARIYA

The *dāngariyā* is the medium who gets possessed by a deity in the *jāgar*. The term comes from the word '*daṅgar*' which mean animal in Kumaoni. They are also referred to as '*ghvaḍ*' – meaning horse or ride, or '*paśwa*' (animal or mount). All these names reveal that a *dāngariyā* is someone who serves as the vehicle or conveyor and facilitator through which the deities arrive at the ritual arena and communicate with their devotees. The *dāngariyā* are respected for the divinity they manifest and not considered to be sorry beasts of burden. Both men and women can be a medium to a deity and there is no particular rule that male deities are incarnated on men only and female deities on women. However there are certain deities that who are known to get incarnated onto women only – *Gangnāth*, *Jiyā Rāni*, and there are also deities who incarnate onto men only – *Haru*,

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<sup>35</sup> *Dharma* is the path of righteousness and living one's life according to the religious and moral code of conduct as described by the Hindu scriptures.

*Goril/Goel, Saim , Siddhanāth* etc. Mostly the position of the medium is inheritable and is passed from father to son, or mother to daughter, or within the same lineage to a close relative of either sex.

In most *dāngariyās* possession occurs only through the singing of a *jāgar* by a *jagariyā*. They cannot get possessed on their own. In this regard *gaṇtuā* or *puchyar* is different from a *dāngariyā*. A *puchyar* is more like a diviner who can communicate with his *iṣṭdevta* on his own by calling out to the deity. A *puchyar* can be *dāngariyā* and get possessed by a deity in a *jāgar* also. A *dāngariyā* can get possessed by more than one deity also.

In a *jāgar*, mostly the mediums sit in a cross-legged position with their eyes closed. Or they may sit in a squatting position. As the *jagariyā* sings, the *dāngariyā*, begins to focus on the deity and loses connection with the rest of the gathering. Initially the medium stays very still and do not speak at all. Slowly as possession occurs there is a marked difference in the body language and behavior of the medium. Soon a medium begins to tremble, which is generally regarded as the first sign of the arrival of the deity. As the deity enter the body of the medium, the trembling and the shaking increases. Often in cases where the deity is not incarnating, some holy water is sprinkled on the head of the medium to make the deity incarnate. The entering of the god is said to be painful and usually the deity enter into the body from the head. As the deity incarnates completely, the medium generally lets out a very loud cry, and shakes and trembles violently. The deity then gets up from its *āsan* and begins to dance around the *dhūṇi* in circles. Often if there are more than one *dāngariyās* who have been possessed, they all may dance. Often they might embrace each other in an swinging motion, or they might apply ashes from the *dhūṇi* onto themselves and each other. Sometimes the deities pick out their weapons from the fire and dance holding onto the. Or they might beat themselves with it. some *dāngariyās* are known to have swallowed burning embers from the *dhūṇi* or entire bundles of burning cotton wicks dipped in oil. Some are known to have the ability to swallow nails, or bend thick bars of iron with bare hands etc. such acts are *also* done to prove that the authenticity of the possession as well as this is seen as a way of directing the ‘heat’ that in

their body during possession. If the possession is authentic, then no harm comes at all to the medium. It is credited to god's miraculous powers.

Proving one's possession is necessary when a new initiate has to be selected. Often, if from amongst the candidates a person claims to be possessed, he is subjected to a number of such tests by other *dāngariyās*. Such tests are not limited to physical acts. At times a person may prove his possession by reciting scriptures or other sacred texts, even though he has never learnt them or studied them. However, just accomplishing something miraculous does not ensure acceptance. One has to also prove one's ability by making predictions and foreseeing things and informing others about it. Often after a new *dāngariyā* has been initiated, the deity along with the medium is taken to Hardwar or some other important holy shrine next to a river for ritual bathing. The initiation is incomplete without the ritual bathing.

Each deity has its own mannerism, habits and carriage. Each deity also has different temperament which is often reflected through the mediums. The medium mimes the characteristics of the deity that possesses him/her. Some deities are very mellow, reticent and peaceful. They do not shout or cry or jump around and do not speak too much. While some other deities are very violent and make a lot of noise by screaming and shouting. Some are gentle and easily pacified, they reconcile easily and accept even the simplest of tokens. While others are forceful and demanding. They do not agree and neither relent and may demand for better offerings or a separate *thān*. In such cases the *jagariyā* helps calm down a violent or unrelenting deity. He reminds the deities of their duties towards their devotees. and also reminds them of their promise to always help people.

When a *jagariyā* sings a *jāgar*, he is not only recalling the events of the past, he also recreates them and the deity experiences those events again. That is why, while possessed by the deity, mediums dance around the *dhuṇi* enacting the events that they are experiencing in the narrative. Another important aspect is that when possessed by a deity, the medium loses his/her consciousness, which is replaced by that of the deity. Therefore, the medium becomes the god whatever the medium says is believed to be the words of the gods. Most of the mediums have no recollection of what they had done

or said in their state of possession. Because a medium, in this sense has no control over matters, the role of the *dāngariyā* is rather passive.

When more than one deities are to be incarnated it usually happens in a hierarchical order, beginning with the main most powerful deity, the weakest deity being incarnated at the end. Each deity is invoked separately and at the end of each ‘dance’, the particular deity converses with the devotees, listens to their troubles and offers advice and blesses them. at times the deities may make particular demands and ask for certain tasks be done for them.

Most mediums have to maintain a relatively greater level of purity and cleanliness to prevent their deities from contamination. Therefore in daily life too, they follow greater restrictions as compared to the other people, including refraining from usual contaminating activities like eating food touched by menstruating and pregnant women; meeting people with a *natak* or *sutak* contamination (pollution due to birth or death in the family), before the stipulated period of contamination have been completed; also eating outside food etc. ; indulging in immoral activities like gambling etc. when in a ceremony also, a medium is required to follow a number of austerities and stay separate from rest of the people, mostly in the temple spending time praying, meditating etc.

### 3.3.3 THE PUCHAR/GANTUA

Another functionary who has the ability to invoke deities and create possession is the *gaṅtuā* or *puchyar*. A *gaṅtuā* / *puchyar* is a diviner or shaman who has the ability to invoke a tutelary deity into his own body. His invocation of the deity is not accompanied by a *jagariyā* or any musical instrument. Most *gaṅtuā/puchyar* in a session sit in a meditative stance and invoke the deity. A *gaṅtuā/puchyar* is often associated with a particular deity, which is his *iṣṭdevta* (tutelary deity) whom he invokes when he needs to make a divination or prophesy. A *gaṅtuā/puchyar* generally performs two kinds of tasks: (1) to make readings for an affected person. A person who has been afflicted or has a trouble visits a *gaṅtuā/puchyar* to know the cause of his troubles and to get a reading done for them. This is called a *pūch* or *pūch karne jānā*, i.e., ‘to ask’. For this they take



with them a *ucyāṇ* - which is a package made out of *bedu/timil* leaves on which a coin(s) or some rice grains are placed. Then some water is sprinkled on it. This is then moved around in a circular motion round the head of the sufferer. This is then taken to the *gaṇtuā/puchyar* who makes a reading from it by reading the rice grains. On the basis of the reading, the *puchyar* suggests what all can be done to cure the victim, or in case a deity is angry, how to pacify it. A deity may ask for a special *puja* or ritual to be done or may ask for a *jāgar* to be conducted. (2) to conduct special *pujas* like *hank puja* or *gussa* (anger) *pujna* which are primarily done to get rid of the ire/rage of a *devtā* which it has directed towards the victim. These are basically rituals done to get rid of an afflictions from spirits and malevolent deities, or even at times afflictions directed by or powered through some person's jealousy, anger, indignation. Sometimes these occur even without a person realizing the impact of one's feelings or words on the other person. Thus the affliction in these cases are supernatural forces or energies which negatively affect a person.

A consultation with the *puchyar* may be done either at his home or at the victim's where the *gaṇtuā/puchyar* is invited to come. The procedure is rather simple. Unlike in a *jāgar*, where the functionaries usually have to follow a number of restrictions, it is not so with the *puchyar*. Also no particular preparations are required. The *puchyar* only needs clean up consecrate the space where he would take his seat. He then arranges his seat in the consecrated space and bows to it. Following this the *gaṇtuā/puchyar* takes the seat and light up a lamp and burn some incense and apply *tīkā-pithyā*. Following this he sits in meditation for a while concentrating his attention on his *iṣṭdev*. As he recites the chants in his head, he slowly gets possessed with the deity. He then seeks divine intervention to know the cause of the trouble. If the victim has been inflicted with a spirit or supernatural force, it is commanded by the incarnated to show and identify itself. As the afflicting deity shows and identify itself, the victim may begin to dance and move around violently. A conversation ensues between the *gaṇtuā's* deity and the afflicting deity is asked why it has attacked the victim. As the attacking deity reveals the cause of affliction, the *gaṇtuā/puchyar* asks it to leave the victim's body and promises that the appropriate remedial steps will be taken to pacify the deity. Often a *chal puja* is done in the next session to help the deity achieve freedom and assist it on its journey to the 'Land of the

Dead ' or a *jāgar* is conducted. Thus the deity will be propitiated and is wanting, probably given a spot in the lineage pantheon of the victim's family.

Thus a *gaṇtuā/puchyar* can be regarded as a special kind of *dāngariyā* who has the ability to invoke the deity in his body on his own without the requirement of a *jagariyā* and additionally he has the ability to also communicate with the deity and talk to him. The *gaṇtuā/puchyar* is also aware of the proceedings and is infact the conductor of the entire ritual. All movement and speech of the *gaṇtuā* is directed by the deity who gives the *gaṇtuā* '*isārā*' (meaning: sign, signal, indication pointer, hint). This nature of the deity-*gaṇtuā* relationship is different from that between a deity-*dāngariyā* where on the incarnation of ht deity into the *dāngariyā*'s body, the *dāngariyā* is one with the deity and whatever he speaks is what the deity speaks. All movements, gestures are divine and all speech is god's speech. It is believed that during the possession, the medium has no consciousness of his own; his being is taken over by the deity. After the deity departs, the mediums do not have any recollection or knowledge of what had happened and what they had said and done.

For all three of these functionaries, their positions confer the on them a special role in the society. their roles bring them respect, as well as importance that their social status might elude them. while most *jagariyās* belong to the low caste, and are otherwise regarded as defiling and polluting are central to the ritual and are a 'guru' to all including the deities who pay deference to them. in a similar manner the *dāngariyā* and the *gaṇtuā* also are respected by their people. Even while the role of a *dāngariyā* is passive, yet he is the chosen one. He is chosen by the deity to be its vehicle. The *gaṇtuā* also has the divine grace that allows him to communicate with the gods. Not only are their suggestions and advice taken for all kind of problems, but it is believed that one should never insult them in case the deity is offended. Their suggestions are also taken in the village matters. Alos for all three it is important that they maintain the purity of their office and behave morally and be sincere and righteous. Any misuse of office or their divine abilities angers the deities , and as they have granted them with divine grace, they can take it away too.

traditionally, for most *jagariyās*, singing and playing musical instruments was the only means of livelihood. But is not so in the present times. For several of the *jagariyās*, performing in *jāgars* is a part time job, which they pursue taking out time from their work schedules. Many *jagariyās* are teachers, or government employees, or do some private jobs, some also are farmers. As anyone can be a *dāngariyā*, they come from different castes, social and economic strata, and different educational and professional backgrounds. Most ethnographic works describe them as mostly comprising of the downtrodden or outcastes, or from the vulnerable or weaker sections of the society, who are illiterate and ignorant. But it is not true, several of the *dāngariyās* are well-off as well as well educated. Many work in good institutions and are professionals. And neither do they view being a *dāngariyā* as demeaning or lowly.

It is their spiritual, moral and religious duty to assist men as well as the deceased to achieve liberation or *mokṣa* with the help of the powers that they have. And performing their office properly and with all sincerity, keeping the welfare of the people in mind, helps them take a step more towards their own. This brings us to the more generalized concept of ritual journey. Like most Hindus, Kumaonis also believe in the concept of liberation of the soul (atma) from the cycle of reincarnation and unification with the *Parabrahma* as the ultimate goal of one's being. But our karma and worldly desires/attachments (*moh*) and inability to distinguish the real from the illusion (*māyā*) does not let us attain this state of transcendence. Seeking their release, souls are constantly on a journey between the worlds, travelling through physical and metaphysical space to attain liberation. And it is the duty of people to help their deceased to make this journey from a spirit (*ātmā/bhut-pret*) to a that of a deified ancestor or *pitṛ* and eventually to liberation.

People believe that even after death, their ancestors as deities or powerful spirits look after them and are equally involved in their life-matters as any other living being. Their influence and powers continue to affect them in both, good and bad ways. Therefore death, does not end their connection from their lands and their people, it only adds a new dimension to it. all ancestors and deities are a part of the mortal world as much as any other person. Often their existence is also manifested through the various forms of

supernatural forces that affect our daily lives. Therefore there is a continuity between the natural and the supernatural world, between heaven and earths and death is but only a transition point in this journey. Therefore death is not necessarily negative, not an end, but another step towards transcendence. Most of them regard it as an honour that their gods have selected them to communicate with their devotees.

Of course, their status is also accompanied monetary and other benefits. The *jagariyās* now play professionally and are paid in cash. In season time, a *jagariyā* can make considerable earnings through his skill. Along with that they may be given provisions, clothes etc. as gifts. In a similar manner the *dāngariyā* also take the clothes and other such offerings (*bhet*) made to him. Generally they do not receive monetary offerings. The *gaṇtuā* also do not charge for the services they provide, they accept whatever the client wishes to give. It is believed that asking for money or goods or expecting it corrupts the selflessness of the act, and reduces the power of the deity.

### 3.4 PERFORMANCE OF A JĀGAR

The *jāgar* ceremony attended was a 5 day event, held at the ancestral home of the extended family where the *thān*(household) was located. As most of the members of the family live in cities, a group of approximately 60-70 people had gathered for the ceremony. The ceremony was being held after a gap of 5 years, because of a death in the family. Therefore it was a grand affair, including a *bhandara* held at the end of the ceremony for the entire village community. Also, because in the last edition of the ceremony a new *dāngariya* had been initiated the deities were also taken to Haridwar for *snān*(ritual bathing) on the second day of the event. *Jāgar* sessions were held on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> day of the event.

The household *thān* was located in a second floor room on the left side of the house. The *thān* inside the room was on the backside right-hand corner. The room itself had been divided into two inner and outer rooms: the inner room consisted of the *thān*, completely separated by a full wall from the outer room which formed the sitting area. The *dhuni* was located in a separate stage like raised cemented platform with a wall only on one side.

The square fireplace was in the centre and to its left was huge banyan. The entire dhuṇi area was on the right of the house. The front of the house had an open stone floored yard which had foot high stone wall on all sides. Apart from the main *thān* in the house, which primarily was the than of the head deity, each deity had a *thān* of its own in the nearby fields. Along with the household deities, *thān* for several other deities were also there. Most *jāgar*s are conducted in the night, after everyone has taken meals. However, *jāgar* session of day 2 was held at night at the separate dhuṇi area, and then again in the outer puja room of the house. *Jāgar* sessions of day 4 were held in the day time, beginning with the first in the *thān* room for the main deity, and then individually at the *thān* of each household deity in the fields. There were a total of 4 *dāngariyas* involved 3 of them were members of the household and one had been invited from the village. A total of 6 household deities were worshipped. The main household deity is *Anhyari Devi* (one of the many forms of Sakti). The remaining deities are those who had accompanied the women ancestors from their *mait* (natal home) when they got married into this family. These deities were given place in the household pantheon, but their *thān* were constructed separately. Some of these deities One for the *bhiteri* (inside) *jāgar* and one for the *bahari* (outside) *jāgar*, they also played for. Two sets of *jagariyā* were employed, one who played the *huduk-thali* and the other who played the *dhol-damau-raṅsingha* (an S-shaped trumpet). Each deity has a preference whether it would ‘dance’ at *huduk-thali* or to the *dhol-damau-raṅsingha*. Also some deities do not dance in the open while other do.

Here only the *jāgar* ceremony held at day 2 has been described.

#### PRE-RITUAL PHASE

On day 1 an opening puja-aarti (prayer) ceremony was held in which the deities were brought out, cleansed, bathed and consecrated and installed in the *thān*. Idols, images, and symbolic weapons if all deities are placed in the *thān*. This phase includes all the preparation for the upcoming days of the ceremony, where the puja-aarti was repeated every day, both in the morning and in the evening.

## DESCRIPTION OF THE JĀGAR CEREMONY ON DAY 2

The ceremony began with a *Sandhyā Pujā* (evening prayer ceremony) ritualized consecration and arranging of the ritual space. It is done at the time of twilight, hence the name. it included a customary *puja-aarti* in the household *thān*, in which all the household deities and the *thul-devta*( major Hindu pantheon) were worshipped and *bhog* was offered to them. This was followed by the consecration and purifying of the ritual space. The place is cleaned and washed. Then *gangājal*(holy water from the Ganges), and *gaumutra*(cow's urine) is added to water which is sprinkled on the ground and the room in which the jāgar has to be conducted. In a similar manner the outside space where the dhuni is lit is also consecrated. it mostly comprises of a cleared up square space in the ground. Often a *mandala*(a ritual symbol ) this designed in the centre of the dhuni on which the fire is lit. The boundary of the fire alter is painted with traditional designs called *aipan*. The *āsan* (also called *dulainch*) or seats for the of the deities which usually is a woolen blanket is placed. The number of *āsan* is according to the number of dangariyas sitting. Here four asan were placed. The mediums sit on these *āsan* during the jagar. In a similar manner the seats for the jagariya and the audience are set. The *āsan* is generally placed facing the north associated with heavens and the divinity. The seats of the jagariya and his assistants is placed facing south, directly opposite to the *āsan*, across the dhuni which occupies the centre. The remaining two sides left are occupied by the audiences. Often the seating is arranged at some distance from the dhuni, which leaves a squarish empty area, where the deities dance and move around.

This phase is commenced with a customary playing of the musical instruments without any singing and the *tīkā-pithyā*<sup>36</sup>(for consecration) of weapons or arms representative of the deities. While jagariya (the one with *dhul-damau-raṅsingha*) and his assistants play

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<sup>36</sup> the auspicious Hindu rite or customary observance of applying vermilion and rice on foreheads. It is also applied to objects for sanctification. In this manner the objects are blessed as well as worshipped.

the instrument, the dangariya carries the weapons or arms of the deities (iron staffs, tridents and tongs) in a platter and places them in the dhuni. The four cardinal directions are worshiped by lighting lamps, incense and offering flowers on the four corners of the dhuni. Each of the weapon is also worshipped and *tīkā-pithyā* is put on them. A lighted cotton wick is also put on each of these. In a similar manner the asan are worshipped. Then the dangariyas in a queue, in the order of successive incarnations that will happen, with the first dangariya carrying a aarti ki thali (a platter with a lit lamp, some flowers and incense) in his hands and begins to slowly circumambulate the dhuni fire in a clockwise direction. They bow in front of the asan, and as they reach the jagariyas, they bow in front of them, and apply *tīkā-pithyā* to them. Each of the jagariya repeats the act of bowing down in front of the asan and the jagariya. Their musical instruments are also blessed with the *tīkā-pithyā*. The whole process is repeated for 3-4 times. The jagariyas stopped playing and everyone took a break for dinner. Meanwhile the jagariyas, smoking and talking sat around the fire, heating the membrane of their drums, so that it gives a nice resonating sound.

After the dinner, everyone gathered at the dhuni platform for the jāgar. A thali (platter) with tika-pithya was passed around as everyone settled down in the arena. The dangariyas also took their seats in a cross-legged position, and waited for everyone to settle down. The jagariya and his team initiated the ritual with an invitation song *nyot* to all deities and gods to attend and bless the event. He sings to all nature also, including the mountains and the rivers, seas and the winds, sun and the moon etc.

Singing of the *nyot* is immediately followed by the singing of the jāgar song, following which the possession of the deity occurs. It is important to note that there are different sets of musical beats called *chāl* for each deity. So when different deities have to be invoked the jagariya plays different *chāl*. The jagariya slowly begins to sing, pausing in between verses to beat his drums. As the story progresses, the tempo and force of the singing increases. Slowly the medium begins to stir and shake, begins to move his hands

all around. The solo sound of the drum is now accompanied by the kettle drum as well as the ransingha, and now as the possession becomes evident, the bhakeru begin to repeat the last few words of each verse, after the bard. As the music and the singing become louder and louder, suddenly the medium begins to shake suddenly and cries out loudly as if in pain. As the main deity of the house is a *Devi*, with the confirmation of the incarnation a scarf of cloth is arranged over his head, while he still trembles and shakes in his seat. The other medium who gets possessed by the *Devi's* aid also incarnated and rising up, moves to the fire to pick up the long iron tongs, puts it on his shoulder and begins to move around the fire dancing. The deity begins to shout “adesh adesh” (command me, command me). As the incarnation becomes complete, the jagariya stops his singing and now only plays the drums to provide the deity with the correct beats.

It is the time for the deity to address its devotees who have gathered there, a plateful of ash and other full of rice is put in front of the deity. One by one the devotees line up to bow down in front of the deity making their offerings of clothes, fruits etc. in front of the deity. The deity listens to each one's problem and issues, assuring them that she will always protect them and bless them. Before leaving the arena, the deity gets up and showers uncooked rice grains over the heads of all the gathered people, who try to grab some of this rice to keep it as a blessing from the deity. As the deity departs the jagariya stops playing and the medium collapses to the ground, some members from the audience move ahead to help the medium get up because the body gets jammed with all violent motion. Thus the ritual ends.

#### POST RITUAL PHASE

Slowly the arena begins to empty as people leave for their homes. The priests and others in-charge of the ceremony then begin to clear up the arena and wrap up the event. Often post ritual, people gather together to discuss the events of the ritual over cups of teas and then retire. Those who have been asked to hold *jāgar* or any special prayer service or to make special offerings or *dān* etc., pledge to do it within a certain period of time that is



decided after consulting with the deity. It is called *karār dharṇā*, i.e., people sort of enter into a bond or obligation that they should preferably fulfill within the decided period of time. It is also applicable to those people who wish to do so willingly and those who had made a vow/pledge previously making a wish (*manautī*) earlier, which has been fulfilled, promising to hold a puja or *jāgar* in honour of the deity. Sometimes after a *jāgar*, specially in case of a *jāgar* held at the household level, the household might organize a *bhandārā* or community banquet or feast which anyone can attend. It is not compulsory to organize it. Animal sacrifices may also be done as a post event, especially if the deity has asked for it. The sacrificed animal is then cooked and consumed. In several places the practice of animal sacrifice has been stopped and instead coconuts are used. Sometimes the deity or the *dāngariyā* wish to make a visit to a holy shrine like Hardwar or to the main shrine of the deity (*devtā kā dhām*). The *dāngariyā* may go alone or go along with other people. At times they wish the *jagariyā* to go along with them, who then makes the trip too. Sometimes when a *nyā avtār* or a new incarnation has occurred i.e. a new *dāngariyā* has been selected or chosen, then the deity and the initiate *dāngariyā* has to be taken for a *snān* or holy bath. This may be done as a post event ritual after a *jāgar* ceremony or may also be done as a part of the ritual itself. Mostly the deity is taken to Hardwar, or to a nearby holy shrine or temple with a major river flowing. For e.g., the deity may be taken to Bageshwar at the banks of river Saryu. Also some powerful deities may wish to visit their original residence. Example, Narsingh, is taken to Joshimath, near Kedarnath.

## CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS

For the Kumaonis, the entire cosmos is a continuum where the physical and the metaphysical are linked to one another. The three realms of the Heaven, Earth and Hell are linked with this continuous space and are important destinations for souls aiming towards the final release or nirvana. Therefore even after death one's journey does not end, it just takes on a new road, from the physical to the metaphysical. And it is the duty of mortal to assist the souls of the dead on this remarkable journey. Thus death is not viewed in a negative connotation here. For even those who die violent deaths have gotten the chance to become deities.

Thus death is regarded as transition stage where a soul begins a new journey. This ritual journey is reflected in a number of concepts: the coming back of the devotees to their ancestral homes, the deities are taken on tours of their own lands in the celebratory '*jāts*', a deity comes back to the world of mortals through incarnation in mediums and finally in the *jāgar* stories that the bards sing of the journey that a deity makes in the stories.

While life means movement and motion, for Kumaonis death does not necessarily indicate the opposite of it i.e. stopping of all motion, or losing movement. Even though the body loses all motion, death leads the soul on its way to metaphysical movement. There is a concept of good death and bad death amongst the Kumaonis. A 'good death' means when you die content, having fulfilled your desires and ambitions. When you die after a long good life and die in a peaceful manner. This kind of a death when followed by proper funeral rites is a 'good death' and turns you into *pitr* a deified ancestor. A 'bad death' is the one which is violent, sudden, early and which catches you when your ambitions and desires had not been fulfilled. This turns you into a *prêt* or a *bhut* who haunts the mortals seeking their assistance for liberation. However, they both never really leave your side and are great influences on mortal life. *Jāgars* are important rituals which help you communicate with them and assist those who have not been given proper funeral rites or have desire unfulfilled.

There for *jāgars* as a ceremony are liminal in nature and create that liminal time-space where the physical and the metaphysical, the living and the dead, the *pitr* and the *pret*

can come together and all assist each other to move towards the goal of liberation. Therefore, jāgars are points of regeneration, revival and growth. Despite with the connection with the dead and the netherworld the movement is ultimately upwards and positive.

Thus instead of being parallel or opposed to each other a continuum of all the dualities (macrocosm-microcosm, life-death, upward-downwards, heaven-hell, ghost-deity) is created. This liminality extends into space and time. The space and time is transformed so that the ritual does not recreate the past, it becomes it. What people experience in the ritual is not visualize, or hear the past, they live it. In the body of the dāngariyā-there is no distinction between the deity and the man. They are one yet not the same. With the awakening of the god, the dāngariyā does not cease to exist, yet no one can say that the god has not come. It is a celebration of the dead as well as the living. These thoughts are reflected in Bakhtin's concept of the cosmic whole and the regenerative principle of the earth and of death.

Thus we could say that a jāgar creates a moment of completion, culmination and convergence of forces that results in regeneration and restoration and recreation and to refresh and renew. It is therefore also a moment of contemplation, revision, reflection, introspection and meditation. It is the point where the group makes and breaks itself to come out stronger. Sort of a remolding process. In this way the concept seems to be similar to Turner's concept of Social Drama.

As an event of social identity jāgar involves all members of the household or the community and which includes the dead also and not only the living members of the household/community. As a ritual it creates that possibility for movement across worlds, not only of the ancestors/spirits/deities, but also of men towards transcendence and nirvana. The deities incarnate/ come into the bodies of their mediums travelling through physical and metaphysical space which is described in *the jāgar gāthās* sung in the *jāgar* ritual. Their journey begins in from their abode (generally denoted as Mount Kailāśa), through holy shrines across the land and then to the eternal *Dhuṇi* (fire) of *Gorakhnāth* that burns in the netherworld, where after paying deference to their *guru* they return back to their abodes.

The renunciatory principle with its regenerative power at the bridging/communion of the metaphysical with the physical, of the dead with the alive, of the macrocosm with the microcosm is at the core of this ritual which has healing, growth, fertility, agricultural productivity and spiritual development as its goal.

Most importantly, the ritual encompasses the concept of death in a complete opposition to its general conceptualization. Death is not negative, not an end, neither destructive nor associated with the evil or the demonic. Death instead is positive, it is regenerative, a way towards rebirth and growth. This conceptualization is similar to one put forth in Rabelais' as well as Bakhtin's work. As Rabelais inverts all the negative connotations of death and the grotesque/carnavalesque, we see a similar process in going on in the *jāgar* context, where too an inversion of the general social order and practices takes place. The grotesque and the carnivalesque is celebrated and practiced. A celebration of life, fertility, growth and progress through a rather inverted mirror.

#### **4.1 THE 'CARNIVALESQUE' IN JĀGAR**

For Bakhtin, the relationship between people, one's self and the other was characterized by the inevitability of the influence they have on each other. Each individual for him was unique and irreplaceable. However, no one could really ever see one's exterior and can comprehend it only through others' perspective. This influences not only how a person comes to be, but also influences what a person thinks of himself and how he sees himself. This is because we always exist in relation to one another, like coordinates in space and time, constantly interacting with each other, with our own selves and the world around us. Therefore the individual can never be fully known or revealed to the world; the self is 'unfinalizable'. A person can never be isolated because even when alone we listen to our own self as another person and we interact with our surroundings. Therefore we are always in a dialogue, with people, with our surroundings and even with ourselves.

This concept of 'multiple voices' or 'polyphony', a term he borrows from music, he extends to Dostoevsky's works, which carry multiple voices. In *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1963), he describes his novels as containing multiple voices which

are not dominated or subdued by the author's voice. Neither are any of the voices complying to a single perspective. Each voice is distinct from the other and has its right, its validity. There is not only a plurality of voices but also of consciousnesses and realities. The multiplicity of voices, of consciousnesses, of truths and ideologies gives dialogism a polemical nature and open-endedness. Therefore it is ridden with possibilities and subjectivities. This dialogism permeates every from and every use of language and is present in all areas of life: literature, ethics, politics, law, culture etc. All language is socially charged and value-laden.

In our daily lives we are always dealing with somebody else's words more than our own. We respond to other people: we argue, we defend, and we disagree. We remember and repeat what they say: we recall past memories, we refer to others' words, we quote what others say. And we are capable of carrying out an inner dialogue: whether it be thinking, evaluating ourselves or even dreaming. It is this indispensable use of others' utterances and usages that make creative our own language use all speech and discourse is *heteroglossic* i.e., it consists of other's speech, words, sentences, utterances. But these are not incorporated not our language simply like neutral dictionary entries. The context, assumptions, reactions associated with these utterances are also incorporated into our use of them.

*When we select words in the process of constructing an utterance, we by no means always take them from the system of language in their neutral, dictionary form. We usually take them from other utterances, and mainly from utterances that are kindred to ours in genre, that is, in theme, composition, or style. (Bakhtin, p.87)<sup>37</sup>*

Bakhtin opposes this dialogism to *monologism*, which is for him is a corrupted or distorted form of the former. For Bakhtin all language is inherently dialogical as well as directed towards communication. *Monologism* holds a single dominant perspective or consciousness as true and standing, therefore for Bakhtin it is not only closed but also inhibitive which rejects and represses what is non-conforming. Other perspectives or voices do not have any rights, and their ability to produce meaning is denied. Therefore

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<sup>37</sup>Bakhtin, M. (1986). *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*. Trans. McGee, Vern W. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press

others are in a state of non-being. *Dialogism* on the other hand accepts multiple voices or perspectives, each different but equal, which interact with one another. And it is not necessary that for one to be correct, other has to be wrong. This interaction of perspectives and ideologies has the ability to break down the existent authoritative order and the dominant social structures. Therefore the emphasis on language in communication, than on language as a system in the Saussurian sense.

He viewed carnival and the concept of carnivalesque as very important in this regard. Carnival inverted the existent social order by breaking through hierarchies, rejected the dominant culture and ridiculed the authority. Carnival provided a space where multiple voices and perspectives could freely interact and express. It was marked by utopian freedom, equality, and cooperation which people become a part of the collective and cease to be individuals.

For Bakhtin, an *expression* in its context of exchange and relation to the other (other people and their word and the lived world) formed the main unit of meaning and therefore truth. And this applies to all forms of expression whether it is everyday conversation or complex art forms. He insisted that art was oriented towards communication which he defines as an exchange of meaningful messages. Life for him is already organized through human behavior and cognition and thus, laden with a system of values when it enters the artistic domain. Art transforms this 'material' into new systems which mark further new values to it. For Bakhtin, novel was once such important form of art, because it had the ability to include a number of speech genres, styles, voices, without losing its own original form. Each word in a novel is '*reinvolved in a dialogue*', therefore, there could be no one-voiced novel and by the virtue of this fact, each novel is polemical in nature. Because of this the carnival or carnivalesque principle formed an integral part of his concept of novel. Folk culture was an area of great interest to him and carnival/carnivalesque was inherent to it. Krystyna Pomorska writes in the foreword to *Rabelais and His World*: "*One may say that just as dialogization is the sine qua non for*

*the novel structure, so carnivalization is the condition for the ultimate "structure of life" that is formed by "behavior and cognition.""* (Bakhtin, x )<sup>38</sup>

Carnival was not merely a celebration and those attending nor just a gathering of people who ate, danced and laughed together, carnival was a revolution that defied that set norms of behavior and the rigidity of the authority. Carnival as a social institution, opposed the official protocols and norms of conduct. It allowed free mingling of people regardless of age, sex, status and profession. It created a sort of second world full of human relations and freedom which was very much distinct from, the severity of the official and political world. He traces this kind of folk culture to the world and life in the earlier 'pre-class' 'pre-political order' stages of human civilization where these two aspects of the world existed, but they were not segregated. The official and the non-official, and the sacred and the profane co-existed. The seriousness of authority was not exempt from the laughter of the masses which had the right to ridicule them too.

He saw carnivalesque manifestations of this folk culture in three humorous and interrelated forms:

1. Ritual spectacles: carnival pageants, comic shows of the marketplace.
2. Comic verbal compositions: parodies both oral and written, in Latin and in the vernacular.
3. Various genres of billingsgate: curses, oaths, popular blazons.

The anti-establishmentarian and anti-authoritative spirit of the carnivalesque is well reflected in the jāgar ritual as well in other non-orthodox religious rituals of Kumaon: the rites of propitiation, procession and sacrifice. All of these rites with jāgar as a central element form as very unique tradition which can be attributed to the great influence of the *Nath Panth* and Tantrism on the religious beliefs of the region. Because it is interesting to note that despite being one of the holiest places for the Hindus since the Vedic times, when there already was flux of people from all parts of the country, the region did not

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<sup>38</sup>Bakhtin, M. (1986). *Rabelais and His World*. Trans. Helene Iswolsky. Bloomington. Indiana University Press

lose its tradition of worshipping of the folk deities and instead Hinduism got assimilated into their religious practices.

As the history of both Tantrism and the Nath Yogis reveals, both emerged at between the 5<sup>th</sup> and the 8<sup>th</sup> century C.E. when Buddhism was on a decline and Hinduism riddled with the hollow pomposity of scholasticism and unnecessary complexities. It was period of great economical, social and political changes. After the end of *Gupta* Rule and decline of the *Harshā* Empire, small kingdoms declared independence. Feudalism rose in the Hindu kingdoms and the Muslim domination was on the rise. At the same time the influence of the orthodox Brahmanical Hinduism waned with increase in local cults which focused on the vernacular instead of Sanskrit and several languages developed this was partly because of the increasing regionalism due to absence of a centralizing power. While Tantrism grew with the increasing interest of people in the esoteric, occult practices, witchcraft etc and the *Vāmācāra* (left-hand path) traditions (which allowed the use of *Pancamakara*: *madya*, *māṅsa*, *matsya*, *mudrā*, and *maithunā*), the Nath yogis promoting the importance of practice and experience over abstract learning. They focused on the practice of hath yoga and the attainment of *siddhis* ( occult and supernatural abilities) to final unification with Siva who is immanent, all pervading and ever-evolving.

Thus we see that the Tantrism and Nath Yogis arose in a philosophical as well as ethical opposition to the established orthodoxy and aimed to destroy the rigidity of the old traditions and customs and exposing the irrelevance of the scholasticism and hieratic religious practices and their futility for the masses. Both of these traditions in a manner reflect the anti-establishmentarian and anti-official spirit of the carnival. Both like the carnival arose out of an opposition to the dominant and hegemonic practices and culture of their time, provided an alternative to the people in place of the serious, inflexible and often controlling authorities who claimed all rights of speech and expression. The popularity of these two tradition was based on two facts: (1) they both promoted the fact that to attain nirvana it was not necessary that one have deep knowledge of the scriptures and the sacred texts, which primarily was the forte of the Brahmins instead bodily practices like yoga and meditation could help one in his *sadhana*, (2) the use of the *Pancamakara* (also known as the Five Ms) which are considered taboo in the orthodox



Hindu tradition(specially by the Brahmins amongst the higher caste), were used as a means of attaining *siddhis* and *mokṣa*. Therefore people did not have to follow the very strict code of personal conduct for spiritual growth; (3) the inclusiveness of the Nath Yogis whose acceptance people from all castes and creeds amongst them, made the highly popular amongst the lower and the outcastes who were scorned by the orthodox Hindus, (4) the use of simplified rituals and use of vernaculars instead of Sanskrit.

Foremost, these traditions refuted the scholasticism and dominance of Sanskrit in the religious and spiritual domain. While the Nath Yogis wrote and professed in the vernacular, and rejected the dominance of the Brahmins as leaders. They highlighted the meaninglessness of the complex rituals that were performed, where a layman understood nothing. They opposed the orthodox rituals which has become extremely complex, required a vast variety of material supplies to perform and posed various kinds of prescriptions and restrictions on the supplicant.

Secondly, while the orthodox Hindu belief system viewed the human body and the bodily needs, specially of the female body, in negative light as corrupted, and as a hindrance to spiritual growth, the tantric and Nath tradition view body as a microcosm reflecting the macrocosm, and *Siva-Sakti* as manifest in the human body as the *Kundalini*, which when realized led to enlightenment. One way to realize it was through *maithunā*(visualized or actual ritual intercourse). The ancient tantric Saivite *Kāpālikas* were known to and covered himself in the ashes from the cremation ground, and propitiated his gods with the impure substances of blood, meat, alcohol, and sexual fluids from intercourse unconstrained by caste restrictions. The *Kāpālikas* thus flaunted impurity rules and went against Vedic injunctions. The aim was power through evoking deities, especially goddesses.

As in Bakhtin's material body principle is we see the cosmic, social, and bodily elements as an indivisible whole, we see that, for the Nath Yogis and in Tantrism, the body principle was important.

Despite lack of concrete evidence a pre-Vedic origin is suggest to Tantrism. It is believed that the earliest seeds of Tantrism germinated in the guise of fertility cults of the pre-

Vedic, pre-Aryan civilizations and tribals who worshipped nature and Mother Goddess. Bakhtin too, traces back the folk culture to the 'pre-class', 'pre-political order' world which combined the sacred and the profane, making reference to the Roman Saturnalias. The Nath Yogis, too believe in a regime of yogic practices aimed at the transmutation of the sexual fluids into elixir. These points reflect the similarity to the productivity of the material bodily lower stratum which is so often highlighted in Bakhtin's *Rabelais and His World*.

Another similarity in these two traditions and Bakhtin's concepts of carnival is inclusiveness. As carnival gave people freedom and equality, these two traditions made themselves accessible to all classes of people, to all sects, and to both the genders. One could not only follow these as belief-system but also could become members if they had the dedication and perseverance. A number of outcaste and low caste people became followers and propounders of these traditions, who were not even considered worthy of the orthodox Hindu ceremonies and therefore had been largely denied any form of religious or spiritual teachings. Within these sects, then people found the freedom to express themselves.

The highly influence of the Nath Panth and tantric practices in Kumaon is visible not only the non-orthodox religious practices of the Kumaonis but is also very much present in the folk culture of the Kumaonis. The bardic tradition as well as the remaining repertoire of folklores, folktales, myths and superstitions are replete with elements of the carnival and carnivalesque.

### **CARNIVALESQUE ELEMENTS IN JĀGAR RITUAL**

*It [carnival] belongs to the borderline between art and life. In reality, it is life itself, but shaped according to a certain pattern of play. In fact, carnival does not know footlights, in the sense that it does not acknowledge any distinction between actors and spectators. Footlights would destroy a carnival, as the absence of footlights would destroy a theatrical performance. Carnival is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people. While carnival lasts, there is no other life outside it. During carnival time life is subject only to its laws, that is, the laws of its own freedom. It has a universal spirit; it is a special condition of the entire world, of the world's revival and renewal, in which all take part. Such is the essence of*

*carnival, vividly felt by all its participants. It was most clearly expressed and experienced in the Roman Saturnalias, perceived as a true and full, though temporary, return of Saturn's golden age upon earth.*<sup>39</sup>

Like Bakhtin's carnival, *jāgars* are also events that belong to the borderline of art and life. The event is not merely something that people attend and become witness to. It is something that they experience and more than experience live. It is patterned around and entire sequence of interrelated events where along with the functionaries the audience as well participates in the spectacle that unfolds in front of them. All present are equal participants whether they be men, women or children, young or old. For all of the gathering, the *jagariya* is their *guru* or master, including the deities who are incarnated. In a similar manner, the medium becomes their god and guest who has been invited to visit them. The god status or becoming-god status of the mediums is maintained throughout the event, they are called the '*autāri*', the ones with the incarnation. They are the ones who will turn into gods. They stay separately from the rest of the household and public, mostly restricted to the temple(*thān*) premises, following the restrictions to save their bodies that will receive the god from pollution. However, after the ritual is over, they mingle with the public. All present in the gathering behave according to the rules of the *jāgar*.

There is a temporary reversal and suspension of the social order. In the ritual, he is given the place of the *guru*, the spiritual and religious master, whose duty it is to show the gods and the mortals the right path. The otherwise polluting *Dās* is revered and respected. He is the main coordinator of the entire event and controls the pace of the ritual. He is a director, actor, singer and the musician for this play. The high caste supplicant and medium pay deference to him, embrace him, sit next to and accept their affection and returns it with his own. He has the power to control the deities, to summon them and to send them back too. When a deity is stubborn and does not listen, he is the one who makes the deity, relent and settle matters. The relationship between the deity and the master is unique. They respect each other, at the same time, they can be antagonistic to

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<sup>39</sup> Bakhtin, M. (1986). *Rabelais and His World*. Trans. Helene Iswolsky. Bloomington. Indiana University Press

one another. Sometimes a *jagariya* needs to make use of all tricks in his arsenal to make the deity incarnate. He praises, pleads, flatters, coaxes and at times even threatens the deity. He has that power. However, at the end of the ritual he loses this status of the guru, though he continues to be praised and respected for his skill.

The audience has an interactive role in this spectacle. When the bard sings, they listen to the life story of their deity, or some fantastic incident from his life. The medium enacts out the entire life sequence of the deity, experiencing his pain and suffering, his birth and death, his victories and losses. The audience also relives these moments with the deity. As they share the deity's life-experiences the deity also talks to gets into conversation with them, the deity listens to their sorrows and problems, congratulates them on their success and celebrates with them, scolds them when they make mistakes and even punishes them.

There is great feeling of oneness amongst the members of the gathering. All wishes, all hopes, all pain and all happiness is shared. People assist each other, and support each other. At times people from the audience also gets possessed by deities who demand worship and propitiations. It is a very emotionally charged environment, with people brimming with a mix of feelings which often break out in cries, weeping, anger and happiness. It is very difficult to differentiate them that who is the actor and who the audience is. The entire spectacle is a lived reality which is shared by all. It embraces all those who are present, and no one can remain untouched. It creates a sense of belonging and togetherness to the group and to the community.

## **KUMOANI FAIRS AND FESTIVALS**

Traditionally Kumaon has been highly popular for its fairs and festivals which are celebrated with great pomp and show. The total number of festivals and fairs that Kumaonis celebrate in a year can atleast be counted to a fifty. In Kumaoni the word for fairs and fetes is '*kautik*'. Some of the most famous fairs in Kumaon include: *Syāldeh Bikhauti Melā*, *Devidhura ka Melā*, *Bageshwar Uttaraini Melā*, *Māsi Somnāth Melā*, *Baisi*, *Nandāṣṭami*, *Athwād*. Apart from these there are several *jāts* which are held. These

are ritual procession of the most prominent local deities, the most famous one being *Nanda Devi Rajjāt*. Kumaoni holi is celebrated for over a month and is known for its extensive repertoire of *phagun* songs which are extremely popular and entertaining. Most of these are associated with natural or cosmic cycles, like the cycle of agricultural system or weather cycle. Some are associated with the certain important historical and social events.

Despite being religious in nature, and being organized in honor of a deity, still these festivals include a lot of fanfare and merrymaking. People gather in large numbers, entire villages turn up. Women are specially excited as it means freedom from all the backbreaking work they have to do. Temporary market places (haats) are put up. Swings, slides, and ferris-wheel are installed. Goods ranging from food items, clothes, jewelry, utensils, to farm tools, domestic cattle are sold. Troops of bards and singers are seen playing their musical instruments and singing. People gather together in concentric circles, dancing and singing. There is relatively more freedom, with men and women dancing traditional dances and singing the most popular songs. There are entire genres of folksongs and folkdances which are performed on these occasions. In some places competitions are held for singing and dancing. Troops of acrobats and performers come from distant places, and so do magicians and tricksters who are seen luring customers with offers and gifts. Often some traditional medicine-practitioners are also seen who claim curing all sorts of problems. Fortunetellers and astrologers also have queues of customers waiting for their chance. There's abundance of food and meat that people share with one another.

People laugh, dance, play and enjoy themselves. They forget the great difficulties that they face in everyday life with the hard work they put into fields, providing for the family, in other works. It is a special occasion for women, because they get the chance to move out of the household for something apart from working in the fields. It is a day when they dress up, wear their best clothes and jewelry. They can have the entire day to themselves. For some it is an important moment of reunion with families and friends whom they see after a long time. They can move about freely, eat whatever they like, talk however they like and be themselves. Specially at festivals like *Holi*, when women can indulge in

harmless flirtations and joking with other men. Therefore the '*kautik*' creates a second world for them, where they are free and equal to the rest. Most of these festivals also fall at the time of seasonal change and changes in agricultural cycles, which mark them as celebrations of nature's fertility and abundance as well mark new beginnings.

## **THE IMAGES OF CARNIVALESQUE AND GROTESQUE IN KUMAONI FOLKLORES AND FOLKTALES**

Rabelais' work is full of descriptions of the material bodily principles, images of human body with food and drinks. Human bodies defecating, urinating, indulging in sex, dying. It is also full of human images which are gross, disgusting and at times horrifying. All human forms are often exaggerated, specifically with focus on the lower body strata, i.e., the bowel, abdomen, genitals etc. There is also a focus on the all the orifices of the body. The body is not depicted in its conventional beauty or in terms of the conventional aesthetics, instead it is highly exaggerated, this is the concept of grotesque realism. In all the mutilations, decomposition, defiling and exaggeration underlies the principle of degradation. However, it the degradation of all that is high and abstract, is what is transferred to the material level, to the level of the earth. While to degrade means associate with the lower stratum of the body, in all acts of defecation, copulation, conception, pregnancy, and birth, it yet has a positive regenerative aspect.

The Kumauni repertoire of folklores, folktales and myths(including several songs sung in *jagars*) are replete with carnival images but also contain several elements from grotesque realism. Almost all stories of the *jāgars* have fantastical, otherworldly elements in it. From extreme amounts of food being consumed to miraculous births, to descriptions of deaths and bloodshed, all kinds of elements exist in these stories.

## **MIRACULOUS CONCEPTIONS AND BIRTH**

A number of deities in their stories are depicted to have been born in miraculous ways. Either they were conceived by miracle, or they were born through some other orifices or

part of the body or were even took birth through animals etc. This has similarity with the carnivalesque birth of Gargantua through his mother's ear. These stories also include incidences of children born with prodigious capabilities and capacities. E.g. Goril, *Haru-Saim*, Gorakhnath, *Matsyendranath*. Guru Gorakhnath was believed to have been delivered through a cow's mouth, while *Matsyendranath* was conceived in a fish.

*Haru and Saim* : In the *jāgar* of twin deities *Haru* and *Saim*, their mother *Kalinara* conceives both of them miraculously. The story goes that, *Kalinara* was a very virtuous woman and faithful to her husband, however once while taking bath in the Ganges at Hardwar, a ray of sunlight entered her womb and she conceived. Because she could not go back home now, she started to live in the Guru Gorakhnath's cloister, where she served him well. When *Haru* was born, on the 5<sup>th</sup> day she went to take the ritual bath in the river. However, she was attacked by a monster. As *Haru* was born with divine providence, he foresaw the attack and goes to save her. Meanwhile, Guru Gorakhnath discovers that the child is missing from the cloister. So he took a grass blade, and with his miraculous power, he turned it into a baby boy. This child was named *Saim*.

## **GROTESQUE DEATH**

A number deities worshipped are those who died as a result of personal vendettas or conspiracies. Therefore several of the tales depict the death of these deities in gruesome, cruel manner. E.g. the monster deity *Aiḍi* is believed to have been a huntsman who lived roamed the forests hunting game with along with his two dogs. He was an expert marksman. Once owing to an ill-omen his mother advised him to not go hunting, but he did not relent. On the forest, he decided to rest and tied his two dogs to his legs so that they would not roam. But the ferocious dogs saw some game and ran after them. As a result, his body got ripped apart and his legs got detached from his body. Even now it is believed that he roams the forests in full procession, sitting on a palanquin. His dogs and attendants accompany him.

## **EXAGGERATED BODY FORMS**

Kumaoni folklores and myths are replete with monsters, ogres, and supernatural beings who have exaggerated body forms. The *Aheḍi* are believed to be giants who roam the mountain tops and have eyes in the tops of their heads. They are farsighted, but cannot see those really close to them. Then there is the example of troll like monsters *Tyūṇā-Byūna* who had insatiable diets.

## **EXAGGERATED AMOUNTS OF FOOD CONSUMED**

The theme of exaggerated food stuff is directly related to abundance and is one of the oldest from of grotesque that one finds. This theme of abundance is also related to Mardi Gras, when salting of slaughters oxen is to be done. Even in the story of birth of Gargantua, his mother's delivery is induced because she ate excessive amounts of tripe. This concept of "feast for all the world" is widely popular and present throughout the book. In the Kumaon context the concept of animal sacrifice is similar this carnivalesque celebration. Most deities ask for sacrifices for appeasement. Till very recent past, this practice was so widespread that in the major temples like *Golu Dev Temple in Chitai*, thousands of animals were sacrificed.

## **THE IMAGE OF WOMAN**

Neither in grotesque realism nor in carnivalesque images is woman conceived negatively. She is essentially related to the material bodily lower stratum and is ambivalent. She degrades and regenerates simultaneously. She is the womb and the principle that gives birth. However when her ambivalence is trivialized she is merely reduced to a foil for men's avarices. In this case, she is depicted as wayward, false, lustful and materialistic. But according to Bakhtin these cannot be the moral traits of beings, because in these images woman represents the debasement and regeneration. She is instead showing the limitations of her partner(man) namely, avarice, senility, stupidity, hypocrisy, bigotry, false heroism and abstract idealism.



The regenerative aspect of woman is highlighted in several of the jāgar stories. Specially in that of Goril/Goel Dev and Jiya Rani. In case of Goril when he has to prove his noble birth, he calls out to his mother who has been seated in a room separated by 7 metal walls to the king's court, in miraculous manner, she hears him and milk spouts from her breast which breaks through the 7 wall divide and enters Goril's mouth. Thus the truth of his noble birth as well as that of his wicked step-mothers is revealed.

*“The material bodily principle in grotesque realism is offered in its all-popular festive and utopian aspect. The cosmic, social, and bodily elements are given here as an indivisible whole. And this whole is gay and gracious. In grotesque realism, therefore, the bodily element is deeply positive. It is presented not in a private, egotistic form, severed from the other spheres of life, but as something universal, representing all the people. As such it is opposed to severance from the material and bodily roots of the world; it makes no pretense to renunciation of the earthy, or independence of the earth and the body.”<sup>40</sup> (Bakhtin, pg. 19)*

In a similar manners the crowd in the marketplace, is not simply a crowd. It is a whole of people, who have got organized in their own way, i.e. the way of the people. It is not simply their presence what brings them together. Their coming together is concrete and sensuous. This is why each feels that he is a part of the collective, where, the individual does seem to cease but only to an extent. Every contact, every physical touch also holds a meaning and connects the individual to the community.

*The material bodily principle is contained not in the biological individual, not in the bourgeois ego, but in the people, a people who are continually growing and renewed. This is why all that is bodily becomes grandiose, exaggerated, immeasurable. This exaggeration has a positive, assertive character. The leading themes of these images of bodily life are fertility, growth, and a brimming-over abundance. Manifestations of this life refer not to the isolated biological individual, not to the private, egotistic "economic man," but to the collective ancestral body of all the people.”<sup>41</sup> (Bakhtin, pg. 19)*

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<sup>40</sup> Bakhtin, M. (1986). *Rabelais and His World*. Trans. Helene Iswolsky. Bloomington. Indiana University Press.

<sup>41</sup> Bakhtin, M. (1986). *Rabelais and His World*. Trans. Helene Iswolsky. Bloomington. Indiana University Press.

Grotesque presents to us an contradictory and double-faced fullness of life. The old and the new, the negative and the positive are all alongside one another. Both contain regenerative and growth principles. Here destruction and death are essential phases and inseparable from the birth of something new and something better. The result always is abundance and increase. Change, renewal and death all associated to festive perception of the world. These are associated with freedom, equality and abundance. It depicts the immortality of the human race thorough its images of death too. Because even with death a way is opened for a new life to come to earth. The death of nurtures the life of another. Therefore death cannot be negative. In a similar manner we see that the jāgar ritual through the mediums brings back the deities who once lived as mortals. It is this regenerative power of life which makes them come back to be a part of the mortal world again. Even during the ritual it is often seen that the deity's entire life story is depicted by the medium as the bard sings. From the conception of the deity to its birth and then death, everything is depicted in the singing and the movements of the medium.

## **5.2 THE PERFORMANCE IN THE RITUAL**

The ballads sung in order to invoke the gods are a part of the entire repertoire of folktales and myths of the Kumaunis. These stories and ballads are never to be narrated outside of the ritual ceremony. The speech of the *jaagariya* is fluid, elaborate and the singing rhythmic and expressive. It is his duty to keep the entire spectacle intact. He has to have not just the attention of the gods, as well as that of the entire audience. A full scale ritual often involves lots of friends, relatives, neighbors, and sometimes even entire villages attending the ritual.

The possession is the pivotal moment of the ritual, when the myth and iconography, context and memory, power and morality all come together. The possession confirms the power of the gods as well the efficacy of the ritual. This is a performative moment. The *jaagariya* has a responsibility to display his competence. Despite the prescriptive nature of the rituals and the ballads sung, the *jaagariya* often makes improvisations, adds local anecdotes and humorous twists and delves in conversations with the audiences for effect.

He has to generate an atmosphere where the real and the imagined become one. Though the relation between the deity and the *jaagariya* is like that of a guru and disciple, there is often tension present between them. Therefore the *jaagariya* often has to struggle to make the god appear. Using his music and songs he has to compel the god to appear. The audience judges the efficacy of the performance and the authenticity of the possession. The speech of the *dangariya* (medium) on the other hand is rather broken, repetitive, disjointed and at times incomprehensible. As the medium gets possessed there is a marked change in his body posture. Initially, the medium has a calm and still posture, but as the god enters his body, there is a marked change in his breathing pattern, which becomes rapid and short. The medium soon begins to tremble and shake with the force of the god's power. The composed posture is soon replaced by a dancing, jumping and shouting, and the medium in a rhythmic manner goes round and round about the sacred fire ('*dhuni*'). Often the possession is characterized by antics and postures particular to the deity who enters the body. For example, often women in the audience get possessed by Kali. They let their hair loose and whip it back and forth; they may often stick their tongue out in the iconic Kali posture. Those possessed by the Narsimha (the half-lion, half-human incarnation of Lord Vishnu) roar out like a lion, and prance about the area. To prove the authenticity of their possession, the possessed often walk through, or jump at the fire. They also may lick the iron rods and tridents stuck into the '*dhuni*' (fire) and hit themselves with those rods. Most of the possessed later claim to have no memory of the possession or any of their actions.

Performance as Richard Schechner states, " must be understood as a "broad spectrum" or "continuum" of human actions ranging from ritual, play, sports, popular entertainments, the performing arts(theatre, dance, music), and everyday life performances to the enactment of social, professional, gender, race, and class roles, and on to healing(form shamanism to surgery), the media, and the internet".<sup>42</sup> The underlying notion being that any action that is framed, presented, highlighted, or displayed is performance.

The *jāgar* ritual is a performance in this exact sense that it is framed presented, highlighted, and displayed in a religious context but also in a community setup or

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<sup>42</sup> Schechner, R. (2003). *Performance Studies: An Introduction*. Routledge. London and New York. pp 2

amongst a group of close blood relatives. In such a case not only are all the actors in the performance, highly familiar with the audience, but within the audience people identify with one another. In such a case the scrutiny and evaluation of the functionaries as well as the audience becomes even more critical. Thus there is a need to perform better for all of them.

He further adds that performance is reflexive, therefore an attempt to comprehend the world of performance is also an attempt to comprehend the world as performance. Performances whether of arts, ritual or of everyday life are made of 'restored behaviors' i.e. actions which are rehearsed or prepared. Restored Behaviour is a key concept in performing. We realize that all aspects of our behavior are either acquired or learned. Therefore our person is made of an invented behavior. Therefore, often even when we believe that we are doing things according to our will it is not true. We are doing exactly what we have been taught to do or rather told to do. We see ourselves perform as much as we think we are seeing other people do so, even in our everyday lives. With our daily routines and habits. This includes all kinds of activities from official to home chores, etc. There are, therefore, many "me's" within each one of us and we never even realize that.. For Schechner the possibilities of 'acting', 'getting into the skin of the character' or 'being in a trance' or being 'possessed by a spirit' would all not be possible without the existence of our multiple selves. We can thus define a 'performance' as a marked or a highlighted segment of behavior which has been separated from the ordinary 'living life' and can be worked upon, stored, recalled, transformed or transmitted. It is symbolic and reflexive. It signifies as well is signified.

The performance of a medium depends on how authentic people believe the possession is. Despite that, there are certain protocols and ways of behavior, even as a god or in possession, there are pointers for the medium that would mark his performance as good or bad. And these are to be learned and often mediums acquire them as they gain experience and learn to live with their ability. A deity always addresses his devotees as '*syonkar*' and '*syonāi*'. Calling someone out with his /her names is considered disrespectful even for a deity. The same goes with the *jagariya*. A *jagariya* is always addressed as a *guru*. He is respected and everyone shows deference to him. The audience also when talks to their

deity refers to him as '*parmeswara*' i.e., as 'the almighty god'. People remember and recall what they asked their deity for, remind him of his duties and promises. At times while disputes are being settled, the root of the affliction any date back to some incidence of fight in the past, or some generations back.

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett says to perform is to do, to behave and to show.<sup>43</sup> 'To do' is to execute or to carry out to completion some action, or to discharge a duty. By 'to behave' she relates to what Erving Goffman called performance in everyday life. Whether by habit, custom or law, performance encompasses the social practices that are a part and parcel of what Pierre Bourdieu calls *habitus*. 'To show' is when the doing and behaving is displayed and the action becomes theatrical. Thus we see that to perform is to carry out some form of action. Performance is integral to our lives, all our activities, interactions and our communication system. It plays a key role in the shaping of our worldview, our society and our culture.

As Victor Turner puts it: "*Cultures are most fully expressed in and made conscious of themselves in their ritual and theatrical performances.[...] A performance is a dialectic of "flow", that is, spontaneous movement in which action and awareness are one, and "reflexivity", in which the central meanings and values and goals of a culture are seen "in action", as they shape behavior. As performance is declarative of our shared humanity, yet it utters the uniqueness of particular cultures. We will know one another better by entering one another's performances and learning their grammars and vocabularies.*"<sup>44</sup>

For turner, most of the theatre, all over the world ,derives not from the complete social drama with all its components i.e. breach, crisis, redress, reintegration or schism. Theatre derives from the 'redress' portion of the social drama. For him, it is the ritual process instead of the judicial, political or military process which is important here and where drama derives from. Most redressive rituals include divination which helps a person to

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<sup>43</sup> Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Barbara. (1999). "Playing to the Senses: Food as a Performance Medium ". *Performance Research* 4, no. 1 . pg 1-2

<sup>44</sup> Turner, V. (1980). From a Planning Meeting for the World Conference on Ritual and Performance, quoted in introduction to Richard Schechner and Willa Appel (eds), *By Means of Performance*, p.1

know the cause of his/her problem. A diviner can be approached for any sort of problem whether it be illness or conflict. Certain kind of curative rituals like possession and exorcism are also included in redressive rituals.

All the non-orthodox Kumaoni rites: rites of propitiation, possession, procession and sacrifice fit into this bill with the ritual of *jāgar* holding a central position amongst these. *Jāgars* is connected to all of these rites. In itself *jāgar* is a rather versatile event which the devotee can make use of as per his need. The *jāgar* serves the purpose of divination because, the deity predicts the future for its devotees and tell them how things are going to be through a reading of rice grains. Often amongst the crowd there are people who accompany those who have unexplained illness or have been behaving erratically. The deity recognizes the presence of any malevolent spirits or deities and scares them away.

The entire set-up of a *jāgar* is in the manner of a stage performance. There are number of preparations that one has to do before hand as well as in between the rituals as the situation would demand. Arranging of the space, and ritually marking it out as sacred. There is the arrangement and preparation of the remaining paraphernalia like the deity's (*aujār*) weapons, (*niśāṇ*) the flagpoles that lead the procession, all the offerings, woods for *dhuṇi* etc. At times, in between the ritual the deity may ask for something, so there is always someone who is working backstage running errands. Also as preparations go on, and the night proceeds, people come trickling in, talking, laughing. There is a lot of anticipation in the crowd. Often you hear people discussing what happened in a particular *jāgar*. They look forward to their see their deities 'dance'. Even in between *jāgar* sessions, while everyone takes rest, people move about, discussing the events of the previous session. Often one can see the *jagariyas* sitting down together, smoking *hukkas* or *bidis* discussing techniques and other details. The performance of the *jagariyas* is also analyzed. What did he sing? How well did he sing? How good was at making the gods dance? In this sense, the *jāgar* is more like a play, or even a carnival/marketplace, where people go for a spectacle and for entertainment. Despite being deities, later on, performances are analyzed and discussed.

Most *jagars* have mediums and at times even people getting emotionally very charged up. These performances are passionate almost bordering on violent. There is an extreme

display of emotions which people would perhaps otherwise not expressed, along with the abandonment of social behavioral rules. Often in the jāgars members from the audience get possessed. Sometimes, it's the person next to you and you never anticipate it. It all adds to the excitement and thrill of the show. Often when possessed, women let their hair down, scream and shout, jump and dance even in front of their elders. But when someone gets possessed, regular rules of etiquette are forgotten. Traditionally it physical contact of a woman with either the father-in-law(*saur*) and the elder brother-in-law(*jeth*) is forbidden. Traditionally, they did not even address each other directly. But in a jāgar one may see a women medium possessed dance in front of them or even alongside them.

This is where we see a connection between the Bakhtin's carnival and Turner's concept of social drama have the similarities. Both are separate from the regular space and time and create a space for the people which does not follow the existent rules of normalcy. Also they both provide the chance to expression of one's self.

Even when each person knows the entire process of the ritual, the sequence of events, each performance is a like a first performance. No one knows how the vents would turn out to be. How would the deity appear? What would be its reaction to the invocation? Would it be pleased with the preparation or would it find faults? Who would get scolded by the deity? Who would be praised for their devotion? Etc. This makes each performance is different from the other. This brings us to the concept of 'iterability' and 'differance'.

Another important associated concept is that can one say that the ritual is extremely important for healing and for justice. This primarily shows the rituals as a very important redressal processes that the community/ individual could in question can make use of in the time of crisis. Most jāgars are held in times of crisis or to solve unexplained problems. It represents the 'truth prevails' idea. People often go to a deity when they cannot get any help from anywhere. They believe their deity will assist them. Therefore the idea sort of rejects the modern concept of justice and governance which fails people. Therefore thoruhg their acts of worship people question and reject the judiciary and administration – sort of anti-authoritarian, like the carnival where the state, its authorities, official seriousness is all mocked.

### 5.3 THE AUSTINIAN PERFORMATIVE

The concept of the performative was explained by linguistic philosopher J.L. Austin in lectures delivered in 1955 at Harvard University (posthumously edited and published as *How to Do Things with Words*). Austin coined the word “performative” to describe utterances such as, “I take this woman to be my lawful wedded wife” or “I name this ship the *Queen Elizabeth*” or “*I bet you ten dollars it will rain tomorrow*”. In these cases, as Austin notes, “*to say something is to do something*”. In uttering certain sentences people perform acts. Promises, bets, curses, contracts, and judgments do not describe or represent actions: they are actions. Performatives are an active part of “real life”.

Austin’s theory of ‘*performative utterances*’ (*How to Do Things with Words*, 1962), sort of shifted the focus of language study from form and meaning to the relevance of the context, intention and the propositional content of an utterance. Language not just means something, it also does things. He gave the term *constative* for descriptive statements that could be evaluated on the basis of their truth value, a simple example of which could be the sentence: *the cat is on the mat*, whereas the term *performative* was given for an utterance that resulted in the performance of an act. These cannot be evaluated in terms of their truth value but instead depend on what he termed the *felicity conditions*, i.e. if the action was completed or not, was the person eligible to do the act or not, was the entire process followed or not, did the persons involved have the intention to do the act or not, etc. Searle expanded Austin’s theory of *locutionary*, *illocutionary* and *perlocutionary utterances* into a more generalized Speech Act Theory with a five-way classification of illocutionary speech acts and a introducing the concept of indirect speech acts.

He classified illocutionary speech acts into the following into the following five types:

- **Assertives:** speech acts that commit a speaker to the truth of the expressed proposition, e.g. reciting a creed. These include suggesting, putting forward, swearing, boasting, concluding.



- **Commissives:** speech acts that commit a speaker to some future action, e.g. promises and oaths.
- **Directives:** speech acts that are to cause the hearer to take a particular action. These include commanding, asking, ordering, requesting, inviting, advising, begging.
- **Expressives:** speech acts that express the speaker's attitudes and emotions towards the proposition. These include congratulating, making excuses, thanking, apologising, welcoming, deploring.
- **Declaratives:** speech acts that change the reality in accord with the proposition of the declaration, e.g. baptisms, pronouncing someone guilty or pronouncing someone husband and wife

Indirect Speech Acts involve making utterances that mean more than the inherent meaning of the utterance. It requires that the hearer and the speaker share some common background information and contexts. Searle describes indirect speech acts as follows: "In indirect speech acts the speaker communicates to the hearer more than he actually says by way of relying on their mutually shared background information, both linguistic and non-linguistic, together with the general powers of rationality and inference on the part of the hearer." According to William Sax, *'successful performative utterances index antecedent social conditions, and this is obvious in the case of ritual and ceremonial speech'*. The *jaagar* ritual is 'performative' in this sense, but only to a limited extent.

The time and place of the ritual have to be specific. There are elaborate smaller rituals that need to be performed in a fixed sequence. Each of the smaller ritual also has a specific process which has to be followed to ensure a successful possession. The

performers have to be competent and knowledgeable of their field. They have to follow certain prohibitive rules before they can perform the *jaagar*, these include performing special prayer ceremonies, fasting and have to stay away from any wrongdoing etc. similarly even the audience has to have some competence and eligibility in terms of knowledge of the rituals and complete faith in the power of the gods. If someone organizes the *jaagar* half-heartedly, or doesn't wish to get involved, the incarnation will not occur and the ritual will be a failure.

Also the ritual language used by the *jagariyā* (*guru* or master) as well as the *dangariya* (medium) has several illocutionary and perlocutionary effects. The master invokes the gods with his singing and music. He summons the deity to come into the mortal world. To do that he makes requests, implores the god to come, he cajoles the god and appeases him. At times when the god does not incarnate, he commands and orders the god to make an appearances. Sometimes the gods/spirits have to be threatened. In such cases even the audience may plead and beg the gods to appear and have mercy on them by hearing to their prayers. Similarly, the god on incarnating, may make demands for special services, advice the petitioners. When the deities are angry, they reprimand and rebuke. They may also declare some person to be the cause of the family's or the community's problems. The accused then begs for mercy and forgiveness and on his part will make promises to the god that he/she will make amends. Thus the god like an overseeing body provides guidance and support.

These interactions between the masters, spirit and petitioners are not just a means of solving personal issues, but also are a means of reminding the people of their duties as an individual, as a member of the village community. The ritual not just reaffirms people's faith in the deity, but also serves as a tool to reaffirm their identities, their social position and their sense of belonging to the community/village. It is a very important source of morality and ethical norms for the working of the society. Often *jagars* are held in times when the family or the village is suffering or facing problems that threaten the family and social structure at large. *Jagars* are also held at the time of celebratory occasion like festivals or at New Year or at the start of new agricultural cycles to thank the gods for their benevolence and care.

#### 5.4 IDENTITY, BELONGING AND COMMUNITAS

While Austin and Searle's Speech Act Theory gave performance theorists a chance to focus on what ritual actually does than what it means, it was in wake of Judith Butler's work on gender, identity and performativity which rather set the tone for performativity and performance to feature as a prominent theoretical base in ritual studies. Further on, Derrida's critique of the Speech Act Theory also shaped recent theories on speech acts and rituals and the socio-political contexts they are always situated in.

Butler problematized belonging by turning our attention to the production of the self as an effect of the performance that we believe stems from our identity. One does not simply or ontologically belong the world or to any group within it. Therefore one needs to question how identities continue to be produced, embodied and performed, effectively, passionately and with social and political consequences. Butler's 'performativity' is neither a dramatic performance nor an Austinian performance out and out. It is rather based on mimesis that is unwilled and unknown. Butler argues that the notion that one belongs to a particular gender or sex is problematic not just because of historical and cultural variations, but also because it is effect that is performatively produced, it is constituted of the identity it is purported to be. One *learns* to be a man or a woman through a number of discursive practices including speech acts. Therefore the very ideology that that the performative embodies creates the gendered body. While her initial works have primarily dealt with gender and sex, this concept is applicable to identity formation processes at large and to the mechanism of social and cultural structures which construct and maintain our identities. Ritual is one such social structure with not just creates our identity but also includes methods and means of keeping our identities intact and reinforce them.

For Butler, the strength and enduring nature of gender lies in it being continuously performed, through hundreds of little put on acts of reiteration and interpellation, a concept she derives from the Derridian critique of the Speech Act Theory. Then what about rituals? Do they too in some manner reiterate and reinforce our identities?

Elsbeth Probyn(1996) highlighted the ‘affective’ dimension of belonging , i.e. it involves not only ‘be-ing’ but also ‘longing’. There is a sense of yearning implied within the term. Which means that belonging is not simply a connection which one sees between identity and the community or the place of belonging. There is an added sense of how one identifies oneself which raises the question of ‘agency’ and the subject. It is important to see how these two concepts in relation to Butler’s ‘performativity’ lead to the production of selves as ‘effects’ keeping in view the question of belonging. Therefore if we take the temporally performative nature of our identities, important questions are raised here about the production, embodiment, and performance of identities with political and social consequences. As Butler states in *Gender Trouble (1990:40)*, “identity is the effect of performance, and not vice versa”.

Sax (Sax, 1991, 1995, 2000, 2002) argues that public rituals are the sites *par excellence* where identities and relationships are created, reaffirmed, re-iterated and sometimes reconfigured. Moreover, rituals are much more powerful self-defining acts because they act at a more fundamental level of the body and not just language. This is reaffirmed by the criteria that audiences have to decide the efficacy and success of a *jaagar*. A successful possession is characterized by the medium’s display of fantastic (and at times gravity-defying )acts in the form of passing through the fire unhurt, swallowing ambers, licking red-hot iron rods and by making revelations and by divulging of information which the medium otherwise could not have known. The contorted body, the passionate speech and the highly energetic dance and jumping of the deity is something which the audience experiences first hand and is proof enough for them.

Keeping in view butler’s view of the affect of belonging , we see that jāgar generates a sense of belonging in those who participate in the ritual, whether they are the performers or the audience. The closeness one shares with another, the encouragement that you get to seek answers from your deity, seeing the fact that all present are being affected by the incessant hypnotic sound of the musical instruments all generate a sense of belonging. You experience each moment along with the others who are sitting close next you. Despite the seriousness of the ritual, and the solemnity around, there is a sense of

camaraderie. People sit together, eat together, pray together. There is a unison and in action.

Turner's concept of liminality and *communitas* are equally relevant here to understand the sense belonging and identification with the group that one feels on participating in a *jaagar* ritual. The possession of the medium mostly occurs at what can be considered to be the midway of the entire ritual. The possession is a liminal phase for all gathering and not just the medium because the individual as well as the collective has stepped out of their normative structure and are in a sort of hung-in-between phase because despite the fixed procedures and order of events, each *jaagar* is different and no one knows exactly how the next step will occur or what the outcome will be. As the possession reaches its peak the atmosphere gets highly charged and a number of people from the audience get affected by the power of the deity and become possessed. As a spirit/god possess the person sitting next to you and he too begins to dance and jump and scream. You may not even see the possession come to you. Therefore the entire collective experiences the liminality. It is this experience, which loosen what Turner would refer to as a structure. Irrespective of gender, caste, age, social status, possession can happen to anyone and they all dance, jump and scream together forgetting their identity and their defined social role. The audience becomes whole undifferentiated communion, a *communita* for Turner. This liminality and *communita* further strengthens the bond that the community members feel towards each other and with their community. often such a sense of belonging is also characterized by the presence of a 'sacred space' or a territory where the community belongs. For example, the *jaagar* is mostly held at the village common grounds or the village temple. This territory invokes a feeling of loyalty, belongingness and collective identification, as Ann Marie Fortier suggests, the effects of forms of performative belonging can work to maintain religious affect and community, such that the question of belonging necessarily incorporates the issue of how common histories, experiences and places are created, imagined and sustained.

the incarnation of the god – who once was a mortal – through the medium, the retelling of his life story, and his coming back to his people, lets the people recall and reconnect with the places and times that are thorough these very acts are recreated.

In this regard, we see a similarity between what Bakhtin describes as a feeling of community and togetherness, that participants in a carnival or marketplace felt and the *communitas* of Turner's social drama. Both can be compared to liminal phases, where not only is the social order upturned, but a sense of belonging is created in this special zones. As Bakhtin writes: "Thus Rabelais recreates that special marketplace atmosphere in which the exalted and the lowly, the sacred and the profane are leveled and are all drawn into the same dance."(Bakhtin 1968: 160). The market place was a place where all "performances" had something in common and were imbued with the atmosphere of freedom, frankness and familiarity.

Here again we see the concept of belonging, identity, territoriality. The market place is like a ritual space which has transformative power. It transforms all people into equals and gives them a space where they can express themselves. A *jāgar* is like Rabelais's market place /carnival and Turner's social drama as a person has the choice to talk to his deity freely and in his own tongue. It is distinct from a Brahmanical ritual where the priest performs and one sits as the audience, unable to understand what is being said and done. The relation between the deity and the devotee is a very intimate one. therefore there are no formalities between them. their conversation is open and intimate. It is a language of everyday use. Barbara Myerhoff (1978:22), describes such "definitional ceremonies" as a kind of collective "autobiography", these are means by which a group creates its identity by telling itself a story about itself. in the *jāgar*, the *jagariya* sing the life story of the deity, at times specially for lineage gods, the *jagariya* sings the *vamsavali* , the genealogy of the household, describing the greatness of the ancestors. This adds to their sense of belonging and oneness. The ritual being held at the ancestral house, where the previous generations had lived, made a living , spent their entire lives and died, makes the gathering emotional as well as generates a feeling of togetherness. They recreate their selves and those of their ancestors whom they all remember in this moment.

For Turner most social dramas, implicitly contained some means of public reflexivity as a means of redressal system. This system more specifically come into use in the phase of 'crisis' when the social order and norms have been loosened up, and there is an opening up in the society which the group makes use of to assess their current situation.: the

nature and the strength of their social ties, the power and significance of their symbols, the effectiveness of their legal and moral controls, all are tested at this moment. For turner, beyond repair, the fissure in the group cannot be covered up and in all probabilities the group would break down. But if the group is strong enough to see through its mistakes, it will emerge renewed and reinvigorated. The ties between the members will have become stronger, and there would be more equality and togetherness.

### **5.5 CITATIONALITY, RITERABILITY AND PERFORMATIVITY**

Butler indicates that conceptualization of performativity is derived from Austin's performative utterances, but also draws on Derrida's reformulation of the performative. for Derrida, this performative is more of a citation than a being a founding act by the subject. It is a reiteration of something that has already been said and done. Therefore, hegemonic social political structures that produce these identities themselves are incapable of sustain themselves. Thus they are dependent on individuals who 'cite' and 'reiterate' them. Derrida rejects the emphasis that Austin puts on the subject's intentionality and the context of the act. For him the context for a speech act can never be determined or identified because of the possibility of never ending citationality and iterability of the speech act. This is also the basis for his rejection of rejection of the primacy of speech over writing. Therefore, there is no prediscursive identity and it discursively produced. This perspective puts more weight on the speech event itself, requiring us to examine how speakers manipulate ideologies and identities through speech. Each instance of reiterability of and citationality of the speech acts allows us challenge the hegemonic and dominant social structures, institutions and cultural practices. Iterability is not only the repeatable structure of a mark but also refers to the possibility of the mark to break away from its context and still function as a meaningful sign under new or different contexts.

Iterability not just rejects the 'pure' or uncontaminated forms of speech and language, but along with that it also rejects the notion of the unity and coherence of the subject. This is

because the subject who makes an utterance is not the same as the one who was before the utterance and the one after it. The subject is also divided and transformed.

In context of the *jāgar* one can never be sure when the '*devta*' begins and the mere mortal does. Though the arrival and the existence of the god is supposedly established by the various changes that occur in his behavior, speech body language etc., yet at for different members of the audience may have difference opinions about him. For some people he is the god who is not to be questioned and whose speech is true and final. Yet for some he might be an impersonator whose job at that time is to represent the 'will of the gods' and provide the people with the required answers, advice, suggestions. On a personal level one might agree or not agree it is a matter of personal choice.

A change which surely can be noticed is that and which can be said to be one of the important reasons why there is a decreased belief in the power and existence if the gods is the spread of literacy and the increased independence(in the sense of being able to support themselves as individuals who as opposite to community living). People do at times have questions, and criticize and analyze the ritual from a more object point of view. Does the incarnation really happen , or is it just a trance like state or further is it only a performance which has the only purpose of giving people answers to questions which are difficult to answer otherwise.

Another aspect linked to this is the incoherence that one can observe in the speech of the god as opposed to that of the *jagariya*. While the possessed person's speech is broken, at times not even sentences or phrases but just words are spoken. The *devta* does not speak out in a fluent, flowery rhetoric, instead stutters, mutters, and takes a lot of pauses. he might shout, cry, scold, and at times might even speak in a riddles, something one might not even understand. therefore, the god's speech one can say is ambiguous and with multiple interpretations and meanings. This again brings us back to the fact that meaning is never fixed, and always leaves a trace. This is also similar to Bakhtin's rejection of monologism, because behind every speech and every utterance exists another one's. As we take and make our own what is somebody else's speech, we take all its previous meanings and contexts with it.



This discussion of Butler's performativity along with Derrida's concept of iterability can be expanded to the Deleuzian concept of 'order words' and 'incorporeal transformations'. The Derridian iterability can be linked to the concept of *difference* to the differing and deferring trace of the linguistic sign. The implication of the iterability of the sign always involves a degree of violence, transformation and transformation even in the apparent repetition, iteration and citation. This itself is very apparent in the manner in which Derrida takes apart Searle's 'Reply' to his 'Signature Event Context' in 'Limited Inc. a...b...c'. iterability rejects the presumed coherence and unity of the subject, the 'I' that utters the performatives.

## **5.6 PRAGMATICS OF THE LANGUAGE IS THE POLITICS OF THE LANGUAGE**

In a similar fashion, without any direct reference to the performative, Deleuze talks about the 'language of events', and presents the notion of the singularity of an utterance/event. He develops a concept of 'propositions' and its 'sense'. He draws distinction between the 'state of affairs' and 'incorporeal effects' which see some parallelism in the Austinian contrast between constative and the performative. In the 'Postulates of Linguistics', Deleuze and Guattari give their general theory of language as a system or an assemblage of 'order-words'. 'order-words' are not simply propositions, but are 'speech acts' that are connected with some form of 'social obligation'. Therefore, along with bringing an event into being, they also regulate and construct social and political relations. Therefore, order-words are not just speech acts they are an assemblage of commands based on 'social obligations'. Therefore for Deleuze and Guattari all language is command, i.e. our existing language orders us to behave and think in a particular way; the world is intersubjectively ordered and participate in this order. Eventually what prevails is hearsay: something that has already been said and already been heard. Therefore *the pragmatics of the language is the politics of the language*.

Deleuze and Guattari make their point by giving the example of a school mistress who instructs the children about grammar. She does not provide them with information, but rather prescribes to them the rules of grammar. Therefore they conclude that, “language is not made to be believed but to be obeyed and to comply to commands”. Language thus is not simply manipulated by those who make use of it. Rather, the language when given to us is already laden with relations of power even before the subject puts it use, and on the contrary language determines the subjectivity of the subject who use it. This is why at the end of the essay they say that the rule of grammar ‘is a power marker, before it is a syntactical marker’.

Deleuze and Guattari give the concept of ‘*incorporeal transformations*’ which they describe as interpellative performatives, which are speech acts that result in an instantaneous transformation of corporeal entities into something else, for example, the judge’s sentencing of an accused turns him into a convict. The ritual act also involves certain such instantaneous utterances made by the god incarnate affects all those who are present. This is specially apparent in cases where the *jaagar* is organized to seek answers for problems like epidemics, bad crops or family feuds etc. the moment the god declares a particular person to be cause of the problem, or blames somebody’s bad Karma for the bad luck, the petitioner instantaneously turns guilty, and has to under penance in some or the other form to account for his crimes or mistakes. other such cases are those of family disputes and legal disputes, wherein, the moment the god answers in favor of one party, the other is transformed into the wrongdoer. This has parallels with the Deleuzian concept in the sense that for them these acts are performed by authorities who have claims of legitimacy and the legal right to make these decisions. For example, the justice imparting power that *Goel Devta* has over the region and the people subverts the juridical authority and of the local courts and the Indian Law.

Therefore we realize that language is always invested with power. It is not merely a tool or an instrument (unlike what Austin’s ‘How to “Do”...’ suggests. ) because language is always manipulated and transformed by those who use it too, and in turn they transform the language too. There is a two-way power relation working here, which we even see in the *jāgar* ritual.

The speech of the god's despite the fact that it is ambiguous , incoherent and to some delirious, has authority. the god's words are final as well as sacred. No one should imitate or ridicule them. All gathered have to be attentive and compliant and accept the spoken word. Whereas if a person outside of the context of a jagar would have such a speech he may be considered incompetent or maybe even unstable to even be eligible to be heard. They may not be taken seriously, or be regarded a nuisance to people. What he speaks then will be of no importance. But because the words are spoken by the gods, it has been invested with power even prior to use by a person.

Similarly, the speech, tone, the language used by the god forms an important aspect of the performance, as a crucial yardstick for the quality of performance. Each god has his own manner, habits, or certain phrases or greetings that they always use. These words help define a god.

Each interaction between the guru, the good and the supplicant is interesting and has its own dynamics. The relation between the three is a power-play, which is characterized and defined by the kind of conversations that the god-guru, god-suppliant, suppliant-guru have with one another. Also it includes the audience role as important. For example, at times when a supplicant is no willing to accept the god's will, or there is an altercation between the god and the supplicant, it is the role of the guru to calm down the parties and make them come to common ground. It is his order (“adesh”) that the deity complies to. The same applies to the audience who do not have a singularly passive role, but constantly interact with the gods and the supplicants as well as the guru. After the ritual is over it is their verdict that will declare a performance good or bad , successful or not.

the god may ask the supplicant to make pledges to which not only the *guru* is a witness but also the entire audience. Always the pact or the “*karar*” between the deity and the devotee is a verbal one. And next time, if the pledge is unfulfilled, it might get pointed out publically by the deity. Often deities refer back to the conversations and interactions that had occurred in previous editions of the jāgar. This is to remind all present that breaking a pact is neither correct nor acceptable.

However, the most interesting aspect of this power-play between the deity and the devotee is that actual deliberations occur in this ritual. The setting might be theatrical and dramatic, but often very serious issues are discussed and sorted out too. From property disputes to thievery to petty crimes all are raised. Also at times are raised other genuine issues like low produces and yields in the farm.

A very interesting conversation in this regard is a long debate which had lasted between the deities, jagariyas and members of the same house where the fieldwork was conducted. It happened nearly a 70-80 years ago, when the elders of the family decided not to make animal sacrifices to the deities. It was too cruel. A long deliberation had ensued where both sides debated for days as the deities were reluctant to give their 'food'. However, eventually the deity conceded to their devotees' demands and since then the practice has been dropped. This happened years ago even before any attempts to stop the practice had been even made at large scale levels. This shows the power of words that the devotee and the jagariya holds.

## CONCLUSION

The study reveals that the jāgar ritual not only forms an important religious component of their life but is an equally important cultural and identity marker for them. The ritual not only generates a sense of belonging and association with a larger Kumaoni identity, but also generates a sense of belonging and association with the land and the ancestral home. Most elders believe that it is an important way in which the newer generations who are fast losing touch with the Kumaoni culture, language and identity come to know what being a Kumaoni means. As it is also a community event, people form close associations for a successful organization of the ritual and this brings all of them together, regardless of age, sex, and social status. Additionally it generates a deep feeling of camaraderie and unison among all those present. It is an occasion to forge new bonds as well as renew old ones. This sense of belonging and identification with larger identity is not only linked with the ritual being held in ancestral homes or community lands but also because the deities that are worshiped were once human beings, the ancestors who lived in these same lands and breathed the same air. The stories don't simply invoke the gods, they bring back the past and the present together where the ancestors and the people can communicate and express themselves. While the deities come back to their homes, the devotees get the opportunity to welcome their ancestors into their lives and offer them their services. This aspect of extending hospitality to anyone who comes to your door is very important in Kumaoni life. The ritual reinforces the Kumaoni belief in the importance of community living and community life as integral to the Kumaoni identity.

The ritual also reflects upon the religious, social and metaphysical beliefs of the Kumaonis. Their belief in the importance of a peaceful afterlife is reflected in their concept of 'bad death' and 'good death'. A good death can lead you to the highest level or transcendence while a 'bad death' is the biggest hindrance to it. The study also shows that for Kumaonis the existence of a person does not cease with his death. It only moves onto a new level, a new stage. The dead continue their association with the living in the form of supernatural forces who continue to guide them and influence their lives. Therefore for kumaonis death is just a transitional point in the entire journey towards transcendence and unification with the ultimate being, the Paramatma.

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