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Fairs and Festivals
Place, Occasion & Events

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THE FAIRS AND FESTIVALS of Garhwal aptly and explicitly reveal a kaleidoscopic view on its rich and varied cultural heritage alongside exhibiting the dynamic social fabric of the region. Deep rooted in the local traditions, these events not only create the much needed recreation and entertainment opportunities to the hill populace but also act as an effective platform for regular socio-cultural and economic exchanges. Celebrated in spontaneous continuity and with great enthusiasm, the fairs and festivals are also vitally crucial for consistently enriching the spiritual life of the local people. They are so many, so varied, and so lively colourful that Garhwal can be conveniently termed as 'The Land of Festivities'.

The flow of life in the region, as in most parts of Himalaya, is governed by the cyclic rhythms of nature, where songs, dances, fairs and festivals come to the inhabitants as naturally as songs come to birds in the spring. Mythologically, the beginning of cosmos is traced to *Nirankaar* (formless), to *Onkaar* (the word), to *Jalankaar* (the water), and from the water originated the first godhead who subsequently created the universe and its animate and inanimate beings. And when everything was created, a festive get-together of gods was held in *Deoangani*. Ever since, the seasons goad the urge of the folks for dances, plays, fairs and festivals. The fact is supported by the practice of indispensable use of flowers that blossom during different festival seasons. It is evident from the fact that the **Fuenli** (*Reinwardtia indica*) is to be used during the one-month festival of **Fuldei** (offer-the-flowers) or fetching the **Brahm Kamals** (*Saussurea obvalata*) from the Himalayan meadows is a religious norm for all festivals held during the month of *Bhadaun* (August-September).

Interestingly, there is a practice of using specific generic names for different fairs and festivals based on certain common factor(s). Thus, **Thaul** cognate with sanskrit word *Sthal* (place), **Mela** cognate with *Milan* (get-together), **Ausar** with *Avsar* (occasion), and **Kauthik** with *Kautuk* (curiosity) are the words used for fairs in various regions. While **Thaul** (place) signifies the importance of the venue hallowed by a miraculous, heroic, sacred act of a god, hero, or saint; the term **Mela** (meet) reflects the social necessity, and the word **Ausar** (occasion) cognate with sanskrit *Vatsar* (new year) suggests the creative urge for festivity with the advent of new season. **Thaul** is the term for fairs used in Tehri, Pauri, Uttarkashi districts and, Pinder valley of Chamoli. **Ausar** is the term used in the vicinity of Joshimath (Chamoli) and **Mela** a general term in vogue in all regions of Garhwal.

Festivals are the commemoration and celebration of sacred and significant dates in the annual calendar of any community. When a festival-venue becomes attractive enough to pull large scale visitation from outside, it becomes a fair. The inclusiveness of the fairs includes sacred geography (**Thaul**), lust or curiosity for spectacle (**Kauthik**), longing for togetherness (**Mela**), religious urge for communion with the divine, and innate responses to the changing rhythms of nature (**Ausar**).

Thus **Visitation** is key to understand the system of *Tirth Yatras* (pilgrimage) — a tradition so strong in the Pan-Indian life. Mahabharat says that the *Tirthas* (pilgrimage places) are

* The lore of the mask dance-dramas accompanying the processional performance of *Jakh*, *Kans* and *Dwari* in Chamoli district narrates it while the dramas are shown.

Fair Crowd
 Whatsoever may be the occasion, the fairs and festivals in Garhwal are celebrated in spontaneous continuity and with great enthusiasm. Quite often the men and women folks dance and sing out the lores and legends of the deities. Huge crowd gathers turning the event into a colourful festival.



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auspicious because the soil, water, and the air of the places were once upon a time hallowed by the visit, use, and *tapa* (ascetic heat) of a god, goddess or a saint, and hence all these elements of nature are endowed with miraculous power. "By journeying to these powerful places and performing certain actions there, pilgrims obtain what are called 'fruits' which usually comes as transformation of themselves or their life situations" (Sax, 1991). In his study of the rituals, Turner (1991) observes that pilgrimage is strongly associated with 'normative communities' a system of codes and regulations that seeks to preserve and maintain an original experience of direct, immediate, and total confrontation of human identities which end to make those experiencing it think of mankind as a homogeneous, unstructured, and free community. In this way even a pilgrimage to a little distance off, singly or in a procession of large crowd going to participate in a fair assumes the same significance and exemplifies "the topography of the inclusive, disinterested, and altruistic domain".

The dazzling variety and number of fairs and festivals of Garhwal mirrors an exuberant, throbbing, and age-old tradition which, over the years, has been trying to assert, define, redefine and reinforce itself either by conscious efforts of its leaders or out of the momentum and force of its own instinctive drives. The trend has been consistently enriched with the addition of ever newer fairs, over the years. Patanganya, Badhani Tal, Madho Singh Bhandari *thauls* in Tehri, and Shahidi Melas etc. are some such recent inclusions and the painful gathering where a score of Uttarakhand agitationists either lost their lives or were maimed may add to the increasing list.

Figure 19.1
Cultural valleys
in Garhwal
Himalaya



The carnivals of Garhwal can be broadly classified along three criteria, (i) Thematic celebrations such as religious, seasonal, sportive, agricultural, and government sponsored exhibitions, (ii) Religious celebrations associated with shaivism, shaktism, vaishnavism, local shamanism etc., and (iii) Localised celebrations from valley to valley (Figure 19.1).

Motives

Sacred Geography

If myths of every village of Garhwal could be collected, one would excitingly find that every stone, well, rivulet, tree, hillock and even cultivation is attributed to the Pandavas, Shiva, Shakti, or Ram, Laxman, Sita, Gaura (Nanda), Nags, Vir Devatas (the gods of power) and other gods. According to popular belief every river and rivulet has sprung up by the grace of the gods or goddesses sitting at the mountain top. An interesting myth goes like,

Jhora dance

During the nine day Nanda Festival, men and women folks gather in good number and sing and dance on the myths associated to the Goddess Nanda, believing her to be on a sojourn in their village.



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Baulya, the powerful god of Lastar valley wanted to divert the Lastar river to eastern Bangar which was resisted by Vasudev, his younger brother. Baulya was defeated in the divine duel and Vasudev brought the river to the western Bangar and thus became the presiding deity of the entire *Patti*. To commemorate his feat and to express the gratitude towards him, a great festival is held once in every 12 years at the shrine of Vasudev. Important to note here is that 'only such sacred places are chosen for the fairs, so that the visit to them may also bring about a blissful change in the life situation of the devotees'.

One remarkable feature of *Garhwali* ethos is the deep sense of gratefulness to the forces of nature. Thus, the patron god of a village or string of villages, called **Bhummyal** has to be offered a *Thaul* (festival and the concomitant ritual) every year as a mark of *expression of gratitude*. In the same convention the deities of rain, hailstorm, forest, wind, justice, livestock etc. and also the deities of Pan-Indian pantheon have to be given a *Thaul* which is believed to re-enliven the power of the deities, and, in turn, ensures the security, and well-being of the folks.

Fascination for Music, Colours, and Crowds

The human settlements are located far apart on varying slopes of the valleys and the population is thin, which had been much thinner earlier. Owing to lack of road communication, the interaction between villages and *pattis* used to be rare. The agricultural chores kept the folks confined to their fields and forests, leaving very little time for leisure and pleasure. Hence, an irrepressible desire for seeing the human spectacle and natural colours grew strong in their hearts. Here was God's plenty offered to them in a fair — the

human faces divine, the melodious music of human voice, young lasses and lads, dances, drums, and songs, and all the other sensual pleasures added with the fine flavour and grateful scent of sweets and other hill delicacies. Further, the bountiful season imparted the backdrop of riot of colours exuded by the vernal blossom. Children and women who generally remained confined within the village boundaries relished the festivals most.

Drive for Togetherness

The geographical loneliness, as stated earlier, was most sharply felt by the *dhiyans*[†]. In the olden times, a girl was married off around an age of 6 to 12 years. As a child she would shuttle between her *mait* (natal home) and *sasural* (in-laws house), often being subject to harassment and deprivations. After some years of marriage, she was entitled to a kind of yearly Casual Leaves for 10 to 15 days during the plentiful season of *Bhadaun* and slack agricultural period of *Jeth* (May-June) alongwith a Privileged Leave for one month during *Paush* (December-January). Besides, she was kept under a strict probation by her mother-in-law until she did not arrive in her late twenties. A daughter-in-law was supposed to be as tough-hardy as the ploughing oxen, as either of the two (oxen and *bahus*) could not afford to have a kid-glove treatment and delicate food. Toiling hard in her in-law's alien milieu, she would suffer from the agony of a persistent longing for her *maities* (her younger brothers, sisters, her aging parents and her childhood-chums). This predicament of a *dhiyan* subsequently became the dominant strain of thousands of songs those which were composed and sung by the lasses while reaping in a solitary April-field or gathering fodder amid rhododendron blossoms. Come *Chaitra* (Spring) and every father or brother set out on a journey to distribute *aala*^{**}. *Nirmaitya dhiyans* — females who had lost every member of their natal home, writhed and squirmed in pain in this season and wailed out the sorrowful songs of the *Bagdwaals*^{***}.

If so excruciating was the life of females, a *mela* provided a rare opportunity for the *maities* and *dhiyans* to meet. Informations would be flashed months in advance that the mother would come to meet her daughter in a particular fair. Touching scenes were witnessed at the time of departing. Here and there in every nook and corner of the *mela* space a daughter could be seen crying in the lap of her mother as if pouring volumes of sorrow and pain into the cosmos.

Religious Urge

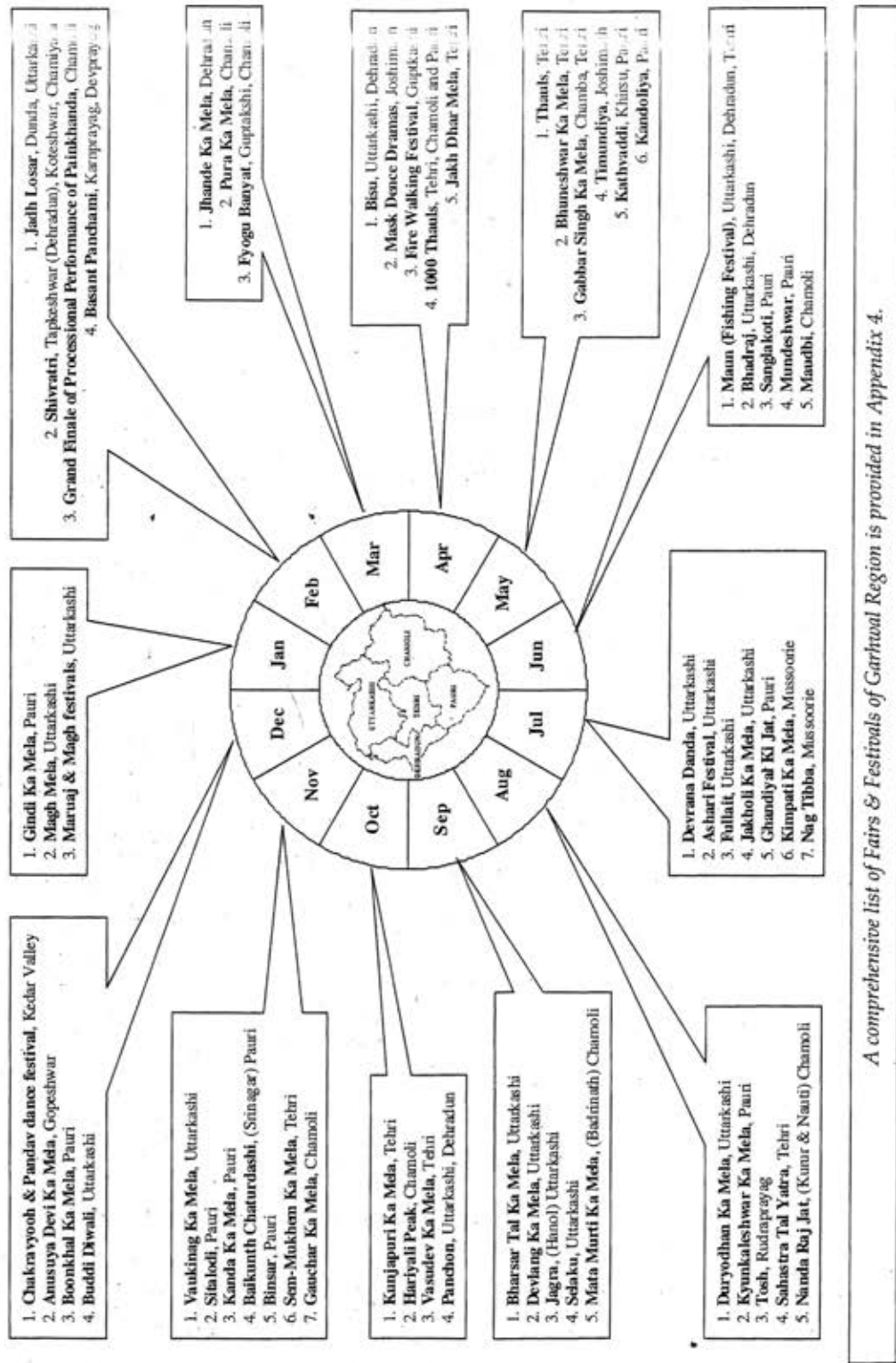
Jung (1974) writes that religious urge is an expression of human psyche. Human psyche, he says, is made of *anima* and *animus*, *eros* and *logos*, that is, the female and male contents. Whereas the *anima* prompts us to create, to believe in a system of *Prakriti* and *Purusha*, song and dance, the *animus* causes reasoning and sometimes disbelief. The folks of Garhwal,

[†] An outmarried female, *Dhiyan* is a key concept to understand the social and cultural ethos of Uttarakhand. She is the sacred cow, and assumes the significance of a deity. No function is deemed ritually efficacious unless the *dhiyan* has been invited and properly honoured.

^{**} *Aala* is a package of sweetmeats that is compulsorily distributed to *dhiyans* in *Chaitra* month by the *maities*.

^{***} *Bagdwaals* were the chiefs of an estate. Jeetu, the head of the family became over romantic, and an insensible erotica led him to highland fairies. The fairies forfeited Jeetu's life, and his family also perished.

Figure 19.2
Calendar of
important fairs
and festivals in
Garhwal
Himalaya



dominated by this *anima* content, are a highly devout community who see the existence of divine forces in every tree and stone. The divine powers are worshipped as deities and invited to earth periodically; their lives are re-enacted through rituals, dances, and dramas, and they are then given a good bye. Some deities, like *Nain* in Pinder Valley, follow a unique course of revival and death. Thus the *Jaat* (processional journey), *Banyaat* (re-enactment), and *Deora* (divine visitation) are held for several deities of Garhwal. The climax of such rituals turns into a massive fair attended by devotees ranging from five to twenty thousand.

Seasonal Rhythms

In this land, festivals occur with the change of the seasons, showing the harmony of human heart with nature. *Baisaakhi* (*Bissu* in Jaunsar), *Shivratri*, *Vasant Panchami*, *Maun* (fishing sport held in June), *Raam Aid* (hunting festival held in January), *Gindi Ka Mela*, *Jhakari*, *Selpati*, *Thauls* etc. are the manifestations of such urge (Figure 19.2).

To understand exactly what the fairs and festivals of Garhwal are like, representative profiles of each kind of festival is given below.

Calendric Happenings

As said earlier, human hearts here tick-tock with the rhythm of nature. If there is a vernal bloom outside in nature, the hearts also thrill in ecstasy and the *madanotsavas* begin.

The winters are waning away, *Panya* (Himalayan Wild-Cherry) has burst forth into blossom and the flower buds have begun appearing in Peaches and *Kachmaar* (Mountain ebony), motivating young lads and lasses to dance in the moonlit night in the village square. Their melodious voices can be heard the night long by those sleeping in their cozy beds far away. The weather being rosy, the folks flock in great crowds to sacred *prayaags* and temples to take holy dips and have *darshanas*, on the Vasant Panchami day. The intensity of the spring increases and *fuenu* flowers mark emergence of the Spring. Now the hills and slopes are shot aflame with a thousand colours of flowers. *Dhaura* (Fire-Flame-Bush), *Sakina* (Hany Indigo), *Malu* (Climbing Bauhinia), *Burans* (Rhododendron), *Kilmora* (Indian Barberry), *Karaunda*, *Basinga* (Malabar Nut), *Palas* (Flame of the Forest), *Semal* (Silk Cotton Tree), *Amaltas* (Cassia), *Mango*, *Kunja* (Wild Rose), and dozens of other flowers surreptitiously burst forth on every slope and meadow as if proudly displaying the presence of their effervescent and musical empire.

The corresponding natural rhythm finds expression in human celebrations. From the first of *Chaitra* (Marh-April), the Children strew fresh *Fuenu* flowers at every doorstep all the while singing "*Ghoga mata fuliyan phool/ de de mai dal chaun!*" (By the grace of the spring goddess the flowers have blossomed. Mother, O, mother (lady) give us the corn gifts). There is a copious regeneration in the trees and plants and the new leaves shine as brightly as do the flowers.

Under the benevolent eye of this graceful season, the *dhol* and *damaun* players' minstrelsy begins singing and dancing out the songs of Spring and of the unhappy lot of the lasses

whom the misery and fate transformed into Spring flowers, birds, and trees. The first lines inaugurate the season:

Dharati Mata Ki, O, Ritu Seva Boda
Upari Agaas Ki, O, Ritu Seva Boda
Rait Prajaa Ki, O, Ritu Seva Boda

(The Spring pays her salute to thee, O, mother earth, the sky above and the folks below).

"Thus the seasons return like the circular rounds of corn-thrashing oxen, the melting snow in the high hills is followed by the flooding blossom of rhododendron, meoli (Koel) sings on the slopes and ghugooti (Cuckoo) in the fields. Those who have not already lost the horse of life, shall meet the loving embrace of the season!, but those bereft of the horse of life, shall never see the face of the blossom. The conches shall blow, the drums shall beat the melodies shall fill the sky, the paddy shall grow in the soil, the sea of humanity shall swell again, but thou, O, thou alone shall not be there".

This stanza from a wailful song from *Bagdwali* myth expresses best the existentialistic frame of Garhwali psyche, and also why they want to live up every moment of the new season. This is why there is a festival every day in every shire of Garhwal.

Thauls and Ausars

The term *Thaul*, as said earlier, refers to fairs held on the name of deities and persons who achieved historical significance in their life time. But when an individual wants to perpetuate the memory of his ancestor or any departed member of the family, he donates a fulsome amount of money or land for holding a fair. Such fairs are baptized as *Jhaankar*. From the first to the last of *Baisakh*, such *Thauls* are held in *pattis* adjacent to Tehri (the capital of the erstwhile King of Garhwal), Pindar valley (Chamoli) and Nayar valley (Pauri). The villagers can readily recall the dates of every *Thaul* in their own *patti*.

The fair is set in motion with *Pooja* or *Yajna* where the temples stand, and with other mundane preparations where the place is simply sacred and significant. By the afternoon the processions from village after village either along with the *Doli* (palanquin) and *Nishans* (ensigns) of deities or without it, dancing, whistling, and shouting to the pounding long tattoos of drums, tearing blasts of trumpets and horns, and catchy tunes of songs start flowing into the arena.

'Who shall enter the arena first?' is always a touchy issue and, therefore, such rights and claims stand properly defined. But where geographical conditions do not facilitate it, or some groups deliberately defy it, a furious conflict arises leaving scores of participants wounded. Thus the one-up-manship for bathing in Pinder river leads to a severe conflict and resultant stone throwing between the processionists of *Mahamrityunjay* of Aser and Mal Devata of Mal village, standing on the opposite banks of the river. Such conflicts are very common in the *thauls* of Tehri district. Kiru Bagari of Kandi village in Khas *Patti* was done to death in one such a conflict in *Pathaldu thaul*. His saga is still sung in dance numbers ('*Jhumailo*' etc.):

"Fighting lonely and helpless, my Kiru!
Like a sacrificial buffalo and gourd,

Mask Dance
at tribal village of
Lata (Malari
valley).



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*They pushed you over the cliff.
Dashed you against the rock.
Oaks are green and rhododendrons red.
But Kiru, for all, your blood is shed".*

The dancing groups, tend to divide into two and a tug-of-war is arranged to channelize the waywardness. Such fairs are always multifocus. The women are busy buying and eating, young and romantic men dancing and singing, the priests performing pooja, mothers and daughters exchanging their woeful tales, and the querulous lot staging their duels.

Ausars in Chain, Selang, Saloor Dungra, Barosi, Bargaun, Dhak, Tapoban, Bhawishya Badri, Lata, Tolma, Sugi villages around Joshimath follow the same calendar as do the *thauls*. But the former is flawlessly programmed into the sequence of dance and drama performed by the masked characters. Special events like *Garur Saara* and *Hastola* (Bargaun and Bhawishya Badri), *Suraj Pattar* (Lata), and *Rammaan* (Saloor Dungra, Barosi, Selang) are also added to make the fairs eventful.

Bissu the corruption of the word *Baisakhi* (Visuwat Sankranti) stands alone as a fair and festival. It arouses to gaiety, rhythmic motion, and song each and every village in Rawain (Uttarkashi), Jaunpur (Tehri), and Jaunsar-Babar (Dehradun). Participation of each member of the community, even if one were in America, is naturally expected. The houses and village streets are decorated with the lines of rhododendron flowers, the fields are worshipped, a square, representing Goga (the god of season) is demolished, and finally the sensational game of bow and arrow, *Thoda*, is played. After a couple of days *Bissu* is

held at a central place inviting participation of the entire *patti*. Processions of individual villages to the arena of the fair present war like scenes. The number of people in *Bissus* like Thani Daandaa's make upto twenty thousand. *Nati* is danced and finally the bow and arrow game begins. Inflexible rules like hitting the arrow only below the knee, and hitting it without disrupting the rhythm of dance providing the footwork of the sport, and in the end begging pardon from the man hit have to be observed. The target-man dances with an axe in hand, and in the olden times, he was allowed by law to behead the bowman should he hit the arrow above the knee. The victorious bowman announces his brave lineage to the crowd and all of them cry together "*Hil Hil mere Bisuye*".

Festivals of annual calendar also throw up small fairs (see Appendix 4) such festivals express gratefulness and obsequence to the powers of nature. *Dol Jaatara*, *Chweela* (*Biskuttoo*) in *Chaitra*, *Maudhavi* in *Jesth*, *Asaris* or *Jakholis* in *Aashar*, *Saunez* in *Shravan*, *Jagaras* in *Bhadaun*, *Haryalkas* in *Aswin*, *Burhi Diwali* in *Margshirsh*, *Marauj*¹ in *Paush Magh* etc. are such festivals.

Angling the Fish and Hitting the Ball

Maun, i.e., *Timru* powder or killing the fishes with *Timru* (*Zanthoxylum alatum*) powder, is the grand sport of Rawain Jaunpur, and Jaunsar-Babar regions. In a subdued manner, it is also held at Satpuli and Massaun (Pauri). But Aglad and Bhadrigad (Jaunpur-Tehri); Kamold, Mungara, and Barani Gad (Rawain-Uttarkashi); and Daragad, Kirangad,

Dungiara, and Riknaad (Jaunsar-Bhabar-Dehradun) are famous for holding the *Maun* festival.

The claimants to the fish treasure group themselves into two, generally consisting of the fishermen from two slopes of the catchment. *Timru* powder is arranged turn by turn every year. The rival groups come to the riverside in a threatening procession, wielding sticks and axes, dancing and singing, and tying red and white cloth-pieces around their heads as if willing to become martyrs. In the ancient times, the leaders of the group would walk stark naked, threatening the adversaries. The parties collect strictly to the places allotted to them at the riverside. The horn plays a signal and the powder bags are beaten open by the headmen. The powder is poured into the river and the sport begins. Serious

Maun (Fishing Festival)
Hundreds of community members participate in this fishing festival held along various rivers in Yamuna valley. Powder of *Timru* (*Zanthoxylum*) plant is poured into the river in sackfuls. Poisonous affect of the powder, makes the fish an easy catch.



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¹ *Marauj* or 'killing of goats' festival is held on the 29th of *Paush* in Rawain and around 26th of *Paush* in Jaunsar-Babar and Jaunpur.

clashes also occur, as reported in 1978 at Purola, over the catch. The catch is taken home and the biggest fish is offered to the village deity.

Gindi ka Mela, 'The Ball Sport' is held in Mawakot, Dadamandi, Sangura, Thal Nadi, Kathghar, Kanskhet, and Ghandiyal in Pauri district on Makar Sankranti. A stuffed ball is made out of hard leather with two hooks to hold, measuring one foot in diameter. Here also the parties are divided into two on the basis of either slope, catchment, or *Patti*. The dancing and drumming processions approach with flags and ensigns and stand face to face like two battling armies. The ball is placed in the centre of the field, the trumpets and drums thunder and the game begins. The spectators shout in support of their players— numbering in hundreds — and drums play all the while. Strange are the rules of this game. It is not kicked like Football, it is lifted with hands; it is not hit against the goal-post of the adversaries, it is to be carried back to one's own boundary. Scores of players stick together to the ball trying to snatch out. The jostling drives them through bushes, cobble stones, and sometimes into the river bed, making all the spaces a playing field. The game continues until a win is registered even if it were midnight.

Gend Ka Khel or '*Idā*' is played on the 30th of Paush or the day next to *Marauj*. The ball is made of the hide of a sacrificed goat, in the size and manner of the one made in Pauri district. The game assumes dangerous proportions in Dewara village in Singtur *Patti* (Rawain) of Uttarkashi.

Other sport festivals include *Selku* (Mukhaba, Saunra, Lata, Gorsali Sainji-Uttarkashi), *Devlang* festival (Rawain), *Buffalo fight* (Tehri), *Laang* festival (Tehri, Pauri, Uttarkashi)

Panyaan Pati
Enactment of a Mahabharata myth where Lord Krishna retrieves the ritual tree of *Panyaan*, and enslaves an evil serpent. The event is part of a six-month-long Nain festival held in Pindar valley.



Jagan Purush

The sacrificial man for the *yajna*. Figure of a *rishi* (sage) is made up of clay. It is pampered with food and beverages and 360 ritual marriages during the *yajna*. It is ultimately thrown into the *yajna kund* (fire place).



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held by the Beda caste, and the *Kathbaddi* (Khirsoo-Pauri). In *Seiku*, the oracle of Someshwar walks on a line of sharp edged axes. A tall cedar tree is fixed in *Devlaang Parva* (Gangtadi in Rawain, Uttarkashi) to which a large number of wooden matches are fixed. After the Pooja, the matches are torched and the devotees divide into *Sathis* (the 60 *Kauravas*) and *Pasis* (the five *Pandavas*). They try to uproot the cedar tree and tilt it towards each other, as a trial of strength. In the *Laang* fair and ritual, the performer sets his stomach upon a revolving bearing set atop a 30 feet tall log. He pirouettes upon it announcing loudly the sponsors of each round.

Bart, rope-sliding, which survives in the form of *Kathvadi* (wooden *Veda* performer) is held every year at Khirsoo (Pauri). The *Veda* or *Baddi* was treated as a sacrificial object — he was given sacred bath, his wife was given enough money and golden jewellery, and a

piece of gold fixed in his mouth, a white scarf around his head and sacred rice on his forehead. Many a great thrilling fair was held until 1925 in many parts of Tehri. Now the *Kathbaddi* of Khirsoo is the only surviving vestige. The view point has also changed. The *Kathbaddi* is treated as a Bridegroom visiting Kailash and returning the third day as *Ujala Baddi*— ‘the flaming Baddi’ with burning torches tied to his hands. Seven thousand spectators attended the Khirsoo fair in 1996.

Modern Festivals

Not only new fairs are being added to the list of traditional *thauls* (Patanganya, Badhani Tal, and Madho Singh Bhandari in Maletha, Tehri), but, the local administration has also been organising sport rallies, autumn festivals, exhibitions, cultural festivals, and *Balmelas*. Fairs like Gauchar Mela and Uttarkashi Magh Mela draw an incredible crowd and business transactions run into crores. The autumn festivals held at district and block headquarters are also big crowd-pullers. In these festivals perfunctory attempts are being made to bring to the proscenium stage the folk songs and dances of the people, sans ambience, and thus most of such ventures prove abortive.

Agricultural Festivals

There is a long list of such festivals which occur because some agricultural ventures are undertaken collectively. Thus, going for *Nakdoon* root (Rawain) in *Shravan-Bhadaun*, *Choona pangar* (Kedar valley), going for *babla* grass (Tehri) *Paddy* plantation (Urgam valley, Chamoli), and Dagar and Nailchami (Tehri) etc. become a sort of festivals of the annual calendar.

Cosmic Rhythms

Imitating the pattern of cosmic rhythm of the solar system, festivals are held every 3rd, 6th, 12th and 24th year as per the frequency allotted to several gods and goddesses separately, thus, according to horoscope and the destined sun signs befallen to the share of each god and goddesses the occasion for holding a festival is decided by the astrologers.

Processional Performances

Large scale festivals are held during processional performances of deities which go on their human journey through the territory of their devotees which is deemed to be the territory of the deities themselves. In this way, it ensures the participation of the entire fraternity and creates an occasion to show solidarity among members of a community. Its heightened and charged atmosphere plays a therapeutic role for its individuals. It also serves as an arena where the community plays out their shifting alliances and conflicts. And lastly the performances are a show of community strength implicitly threatening the royal *status quo* (Kirshenblatt-Gimlett and McNamara, 1986).

Although, every festival contains the elements of processional ritual, some of them are processional per se *Nanda Raj Jaat, Choti Jaat, Nandikund Jaat, Deoras of Shaktis, Tungnath, Madhyamaheshwar, Nain, Vasudev, Mahasu, Jaakh, Kans, Dwari, Hariyali, Kartikeya, Trijugi Narayan, Uma Devi, Karn, Duryodhan, Someshwar, Ghandiyal, Hooneshwar Nagarja, Baulya, Kandar, Silgur, Kailwapir, Agastyamuni, Kumasen, Sahaja Devi, and Nagela* are some performances in this regard.

Jakh

The oracle of *Jakh*, the god of rain, performing the 'fire walking feat'. He walks through a 20x15x8 feet heap of burning ambers unscorched and *unswayed*, while drums and trumpets play a fortissimo.



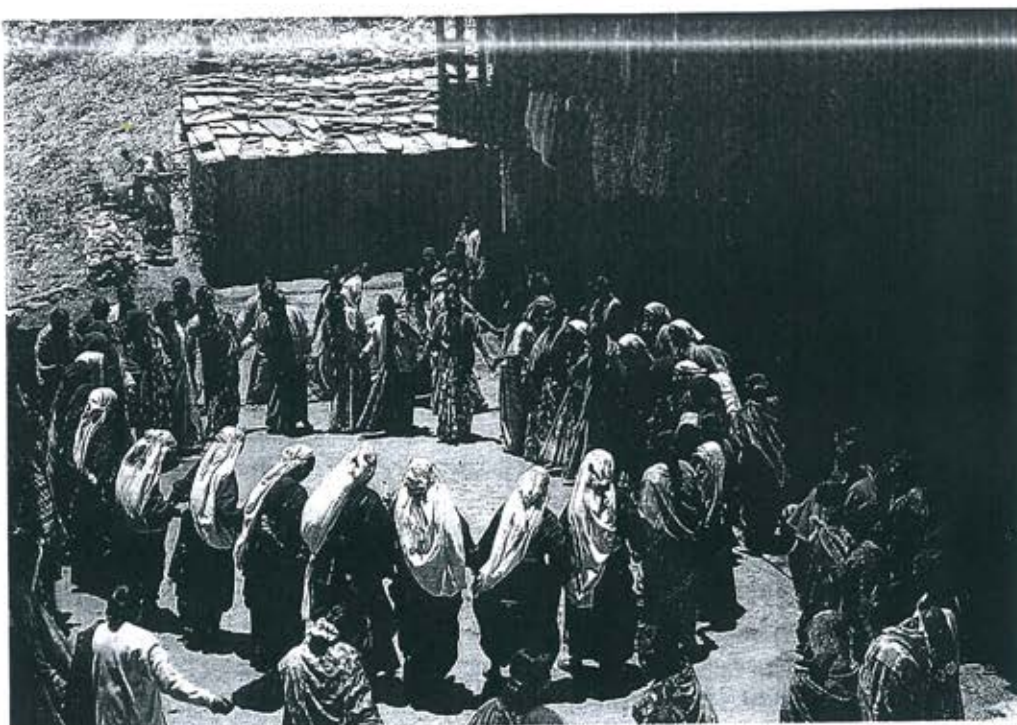
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A profile of *Jakh* processional ritual around Joshimath will reveal the structure of all such performance.

Jakhs (Yakschas) were the sixty thousand soldiers of Yakscha Raj Kuber, the Keeper of North direction ('*Van Parva' Mahabharat* 139, 5-7). The ballad sung in Bemru (Chamoli) village narrates him as Bahrubahan, the warrior of Mahabharat, who lived through the war with his trunkless head. After the war, he was taken around on a pilgrimage to all sacred places of Kedarkhand (legendary name of Garhwal) by Bhim as an act of penance for having him beheaded by deceit (by Krishna). The myth is re-enacted in Dummak, Kalangot, Bemru, Baunla, Pokhani, Tangani, Palda, Urgam, Thaing (Rampur), Pakhi, Raigaun, Lasi villages

Dhankuri dance

A circular dance in Bampa village, a winter settlement of *Marchha* tribe. Dhankuri — a popular dance of Garhwal, is also known by other variants viz., *Jhumallo*, *Taand* and *Chanchuri*.



D R PUROHIT

Chakryavyooh

This episode of Mahabharata is enacted in the open fields during the Pandava ritual. The fortification array is constructed with bamboos and techni-coloured clothes.



TRIBHUWAN

Nanda Ghunti

Nanda Ghunti is one of the prominent summits encircling the Nanda Devi Basin. On the base of this beautiful mountain lies the Hemkund lake — the final destination of the Raj Jaat procession. On this mysterious peak, the pilgrims believe, lights of the ritual lamps are seen in the dawn.



TRIBHUWAN

around Joshimath (Chamoli) and in Jakhdhar (Near Narayankoti in Mandakini valley). The event runs over six months in villages around Joshimath while it is concluded in three days at Jakhdhar[†].

Jakh performance around Joshimath can be described under the following features:

1. The ritual recurs after every 24 years.
2. The presiding deity begins showing inauspicious symptoms to the devout subject once the tenure of 24 years has passed, so that the festival may be held whenever falling due.
3. Soon a ritual pledge is made to invite the deity and to hold its festival on a stipulated date.
4. On the due date, first, a purificatory ritual is held by circling a goat, a pig, a hen around the village and then sacrificing them^{††}.
5. All relatives and *dhiyans* have already been invited with utmost care and attention.
6. With all festive excitements, the *Pooja* begins at around 7 p.m. The image of the deity is

[†] On the 2nd of *Baisakh* a thrilling fire walking event is held. It is preceded by a mysterious *gothi* (Sacred Parliament), a procession, and *mundi* (collection and piling up of firewood in eleven layers measuring 18 feet high. The *mundi* is then burnt and converted into cinders.

^{††} The sacrifice is called *Ashtbali* (sacrifice of eight including animals and fruits). The village is given a 'Kilan-bandhan'—ritual fencing.

Nanda Doli

The (palanquin) of the Nanda Devi of Badhaan, parambulates every year from Kurur to Bedini - Deorara and back. Every twelfth year this event leads to Nanda Raj Jat. The golden opulence of jewellery is an accumulation of ornamental gifts offered to the goddess over the years. The motifs intricately carved on the icon have a body of myths and legends behind them.



TRIBHUWAN

Chausingya

As per the popular belief, the 'four horned ram', which takes birth every 12th year, is a sure symptom of Nanda's call to the people of her parental land to invite her into Rishashau. The ram acts as a freight carrier of the goddess and leads the 17 day Raj Jaat procession. Onwards the last destination of Raj Yatra, this ram climbs up alone to finally disappear in the snows.



O P KANDARI

given a purificatory ritual (*Shakali-Karan*). It is enlivened and then brought out to a thatched tent, close by the permanent temple (the space is called *Banatoli*). Now, the *maitis* of the deity (The villagers of Pokhani in case of the Jakh of Bemru) arrive with *Kandi-Kaleo* (a big basketful of porridge, deep fried breads, lentil cutlets etc.) A remarkable feature of the gods and goddesses here (Uttarakhand and Himanchal) is that every one of them has a *mait* (natal village) and a *sasural* (in-law's village). In *Banatoli*, Jakh is given a *Kachhana* (make-up, ornamentation, and consecration) by the *maitis*. The deity hoisted atop a pole, is animated and endowed with miraculous powers (sixty four magical properties are consecrated inside the hexagonal ensign of the deity). It then comes to *Kilamuni*—an eminent and fortified space marked for overnight rest. All-night-through, the history of the deity is sung. In the next morning, three *dharis* (bearers of the ensigns) are selected by the possessed oracle of *Jakh* by way of hitting with a sword randomly at any three of the devotees present there. Since the *dharis* have to go on a pilgrimage for six months, they arrange provisions for their family and re-plan the earlier schedules. Their heads are tonsured, they take a ritual bath, and come to *Kilamuni* where a goat is sacrificed and the *dharis* purified by lipping up the fresh blood of the goat. In the daytime, the procession of the god reaches a place where he is offered *Chholbhatta* (homo-profanization of the sacred with common feast). A goat is also sacrificed here. On the fortissimoes of *dhol* and *damaun* (folk drums), the shrill sound of gongs, the ruffling and gliding blasts of *Bhankoras* (long trumpets), the procession, made up of the ensign, *Kandi-Kaleo*, masks, utensils, the priest, oracles of different attendant deities, and the devotees move from door to door.

Choked with overwhelming happiness, the devotees relate to the god, as they would to their guardian as to how they have suffered or prospered over past years. The god blesses them and assures them of all well-being and at times tells them the reason of their miseries. The procession finally concludes with *dhoop chharo*—‘incense and myrrh’ at *Panchayati Chowk* (council square) where the deity is prayed, in soothing songs, to go to sleep.

Around 10 p.m., the mask dance-drama begins in the arena (patio). As many as 18 masked characters appear and present some full-length plays, some cameos, and some tableaux. However, the myth of Nrising, *Bagh* (lion) *Hiran-Chittal* (deer), *Baraah* (boar), and Ram, Laxman, and Sita is enacted only on days of *Bharaatraas* (the nightlong performance), an event in which a goat sacrifice is binding. The dance-dramas with masks are performed every night all through the six-month procession, come what may, rain or snow.

Staying for three days in the village, the procession then heads towards the other villages of the god's territory. First, it goes to Rudranath (one of *Panch Kedars*), pays its obeisance to lord Shiva and returns. Passing from village to village, the deity, then, goes to Badrinath. *En route* the procession, the *dhiyans* offer him *dhiyan bhatta* (a feast by *dhiyan*). The feast includes meals, cash offerings, and, if possible, goat sacrifice. The procession travels through all deitically important and *dhiyanta* (where a *dhiyan* is married) villages obligatorily, and finally returns to the seat of the god. Wherever it passes through, a *mela* gathers. On the final or sendoff day, a huge crowd of devotees gathers in the village. The *pundits* perform a *yajna*, and enactment of the myth of Lord Krishna's visit to *Naaglok* (the sphere of the snake King), called *Seera*, is held. The *dharis* are ritually profaned so that the gods, who have by now developed an attachment to the former, may harmlessly leave out their souls. A *dhiyan bhatta*, in return of whatever the *dhiyans* gave to the god, is held in the end and rich offerings given to the *dhiyans*.

The affair has considerable financial implications and the collection from the devotees comes up to Rupees 1-2 Lacs. However, the villagers are also heavily taxed and each household contributes about Rs. 1000/- to 3000/- to the organisers, in addition to what they have to spend on feeding a large number of guests on the opening and the final day of the performance.

The festival is decorated with dances like *Dhankuri*, *Chanchari*, *Jhumailo* that are played every night, in addition to the masked performances.

Other Processional Performances

The famous *Nanda Raj Jaat*, *Chhoti Jaat*, and *Nandikund Jaat* re-enact the myth of the post-marital journeys of the divine *dhiyan* Gaura (Nanda the consort of Shiva) between her natal place Risaasau and her husbands place Kailash. The *Raj Jaat* covers the longest traverse of 280 kms from Kansua in Atagad valley to Homkund (Trishul Mountain) and secures participation of some five lac devotees. Next in range and magnitude comes the eternal procession of Chalda Mahasu organised on both the flanks of Tons river in Jaunsar tribal belt of Dehradun district. Wherever the deity travels, it travels with living goats and rams offered to it, and the number of devotees present at the time of its movement is counted to be twenty to thirty thousand. The processions of Shakti recreate her incarnation,

her settlement in a particular place. The other episodes re-enacted are *Samudra Manthan*, slaying of Mahishasur, *Panya Puri* (it is also called *sera dhani*), *Sabla Sol* (shape of a snake made out of *babla* grass), *Airwala Jhopari* (a thatch made for the oracles of deities and bearers of ensigns of the deities where the former are ritually profaned on the last day), and *Jagan Purush* (the sacrificial man for the *yajna*). The procession of *Nain* (nine serpent sisters) varies in an event called *Kanspaara* (tearing out the body of Kansa, the demon maternal uncle of Krishna). But it stands unique in that when the nine km long snake shape of the goddess made of grass is pulled towards the river alongwith her ensign, representing her violent death in the mythical past, the shaman succeeds in arousing the emotions of the devotees. He sings a wailing song, the male villagers repeat it, and, some minutes past, a woman or two start sobbing. The sobs become infectious—more women weep—and with a lightening speed the snake is pulled into two directions—down hill and up hill. Virtually all women present there wail hysterically and rush after the snake believing that their snake *dhiyan* is going to meet a violent death even as now. On the final day of the *Nain* of Sankot (Badhan, Pindar valley) in the year 1995 some twenty thousand spectators and devotees were reported to be present.

More or less, a generically similar pattern of events follows in other performances. Only the masks are distinctive feature to Nanda, Kaans, Dwaari, Jaakh, and Shakti processions of Painkhanda (Alaknanda valley) and Dasholi (Nandakini valleys) of Chamoli. Some performances also include *Ashtbali* (64 *balis* including the buffalo sacrifice). The processional performances held on the seasonal migration of the *dolis* (palanquins) and *nishans* (signs) of Badrinath, (Joshimath to Badrinath), Rudranath (Gopeshwar to Rudranath), Tungnath (Makkoo-Tungnath), Madmaheswar (Okhimath-Madmaheswar), Gangotri (Dharali-Gangotri) and Yamunotri (Kharsali-Yamunotri) also entail sizeable *melas* twice a year.

Fairs at Stations and Altars

The festivals of Heet, Binsar, Narayan, Pandav, Bagdwal, Goreel, Bhairava, Nrising, Timundya, Danguris, Dauniya, Bungkhaal, Chandrabadani, Surkanda, Pokhu, Ghandiyal, Maniknath, Sahaja Devi etc. are held at their main shrines. Several rituals are held for several deities and massive *melas* occur on the day of special events like *Chakravayoo*h (Pandava), *Paddy Plantation* (Bagdwaal), *Neeli Chaunri* and buffalo sacrifice (Goreel), *Goat eating* (Timundya), *Hijacking* (Danguris), *Ashtbali* (Dauniya, Bungkhal, and Kanda in Pauri), *Poison Play* (Sahaja Devi), *Rot* (Maniknath), *Janti* (Ghandiyal, Pandukeshwar), *Pati* (Nandadevi of Nagpur Chamoli), walking on sharp edges of axes by Selku (Mukhaba, Uttarkashi), the enactment of Madho Singh Bhandari's venture of bringing Kailwapir god from Champawat (Kumaun) to Budhakedar (Tehri) etc. are a few of such fascinating performances.

Unique fairs are held in Kamleshwar (Srinagar), Anusuya Devi (near Gopeshwar), Balkhileshwar (Balganga valley), Mahadev Temple in Kandarsyun (Basar-Tehri), Madhim fair (Dalgaun-Basar, Tehri), and Ghantakaran temple (Burhkoti-Pilkhi, Tehri), Punanu (Khas *Patti*), and Semgarh (Karakot *Patti*) where young women and their husbands desiring to have a baby, perform a night-long prayer. They keep a standing watch keeping a burning earthen lamp in their palms, and in some temples, they also

give an *abhishek* (sacred wash) to the *Shivlinga*. Records have it that most of them are blessed with a child.

Conclusion

That the cultural tradition survive and become resources, the culture has to be supported and nourished from outside without tinkering with its structural fabric. A well defined Government policy must be announced towards the culture, e.g., whether person/ persons, *Autaaris* (oracles) of Pandavas etc., or one organising *Gindi Mela* or *Maun* are entitled to avail leaves from their jobs. Whether the cultural performers are to be put at the lowest priority and to be treated like hired dancers and singers or to be given the dignity of an artist. All these and many other questions have yet to be answered.

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