Popular Beliefs in the Kangra State

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Kangra is one of the largest districts of the Himachal Pradesh, which covers an area of 2,554 square miles. In ancient Indian traditions the term Kangra is depicted as Trigtra which means “the land of the three rivers”. Kangra was the largest district of composite Punjab hills which was transferred to Himachal Pradesh on 1st November, 1966. The present Kangra district came into existence on 1st September, 1972. Dharamshala is the administrative headquarters of the district. The native people are the Kangri people and the native language is Kangri, which is very similar to Punjabi. Its predominantly Hindu populated area comprised of Brahmans, Rajputs, Banias, Schedule Caste and OBC population, although many Tibetans and others who follow Buddhism have also settled here recently. There are also minority populations of Sikhs, Muslims, and Christians. The beliefs remain central part of people’s life. The present study intends to recreate the broad picture of the popular beliefs practiced in the area from time immemorial. Moreover depicts the changes that have occurred in the belief pattern of the people, with the transformation of Kangra society and culture over the years.

Popular beliefs are studied as a sub-field of social sciences like history and anthropology which examines spiritual beliefs that develop not independently from religion but still outside of established religious institutions. The word ‘belief’ in Webster’s dictionary means an acceptance of something as true. Hooker opines that no man attains belief by the bare contemplation of heaven and earth. It is the belief that stays the attitude; it is the individual, family or clan which empowers the belief. A belief includes not only spiritual cure with the deity, but also traffic with devils or fiends. From the remotest time, man has been worshipping the supernatural forces, which were beyond his reach. The question which arises in one’s mind is as to what worship is the term cannot be correctly translated into any language, purposefully. One may say that the worship is the active side of the religion. Even, so the meaning does not stop the notion of the act; it is the belief that stays the attitude; it is the individual, family or clan which empowers the belief. It cannot be defined either by the objects for in the context of worship, it included not only spiritual union with the deity, but also traffic with the devils or fiends; while it cannot be separated from the intercourse of man with man. It is believed that the strange and dangerous objects and phenomena as well as the fatal incidents added to the turning of the man towards worship of the invisible forces.

We are born with the nature of self-preservation and self-development, and the more this instinct moves us onwards on this
path, the more do we become conscious of how much we have to depend upon phenomena for qualification of our desires and feelings and for the preservation and development of our life. We thus experience a close relationship between ourselves and the phenomena and world in which we live and move.

In pre-British days, Kangra and the surrounding hill districts were divided into numerous petty states. Although the figures never add up consistently, there are conventionally said to have been twenty-two states between the rivers Chenab and Sutlej, and these were divided by the river Ravi. Of the powerful of western groups was Jammu, and of the eastern groups was the Katoch kingdom of Kangra. Many of the smaller states are reputed to have been founded by younger son of Raja of one the larger ones. It is impossible to say whether such traditions have any historical validity or simply reflect contemporary political and status relations between the royal clans. The tradition of common origin is preserved, and is embodied in the sharing of common gotra, until recently ban has been put on the intermarriage. The Ruling families which did not claim to be related as distant agnates intermarried. But neither putative agnatic descendents, nor repeated intermarriage, seem to have inhibited the rajas from frequent attacks on each other’s territory. With the decline of Mughal Empire the hill states reasserted their independence from Delhi. Kangra kingdom reached its height under Sansar Chand (1775 to 1823) who imposed his overlord ship throughout the neighbouring hill areas.

In course of the development of our experience, we learn to conceive some kinds of phenomena as good and beautiful, since they confer benefits and pleasure upon us, and some as evil and ugly, since they inflict injuries and unpleasant sensations upon us. Some are found to be beneficial under certain conditions and injurious under others. Similarly some of the supernatural powers are found to be beneficial and friendly, when we can turn them into good account by dint of our own efforts, and injurious and hostile, when we cannot properly adjust ourselves with them or employ them wisely to serve our purposes. Therefore, some of the supernatural powers, which were the grounds of all powers and phenomena of the world, the recognition of whose existence was found by reason to be necessary for an adequate explanation of the phenomena of experience, were termed as Devotas or Deo (Deities).

The worship of the clan deity (Kula-Deo) and village deity (SthanDevotas) was the most significant aspect of the traditional and incomprehensible folk of the Western Himalayan regions, which had substantially contributed to the making of the culture of hilly society. The predominant beliefs of the people of this region centered around the idea that their lives and their world was controlled, in addition to the kula-deos and sthandevotas by innumerable spirits both good and bad. These were responsible for all unusual and unexpected boons and events, as well as disasters and calamities.
Every clan and village was under the protection of these local deities, who were their principal guardian deities; the hilly folk relied on their clan and village deities for an easy solution of their problems and misfortunes. Therefore, their religious beliefs did not advance beyond the traditional worshipping of their clan deity and village deity. It can be safely inferred that though the hilly folk was unaffected by Brahminical ideas and beliefs, yet some of the inhabitants, besides worshipping their clan and village deities, also worshipped different divine forms of Shiva and Vishnu. But they did not worship them as their principal guardian deities. It appears that the concept of universe did not interest the western Himalayan folk. The clan deity and the village deity were regarded as the principal guardian deities and worshipped under a great variety of different names in different villages and clans. In every village the shrine of these local deities could be seen. Some of the deities were periodically worshipped and propitiated. Whenever the natural calamities befell on the villagers and draught hit the village or cattle disease made its appearance, the whole clan turned for protection to the clan deity/village deity. It is observed that this local vis-à-vis any other universal god’s deities were considered to be more helpful in adversity and calamity. During such times, the *kula-deolsthandevota* was approached by the member of the victim’s family or elders of the village through *Gharinta*, or *Dewa* (whose body the spirit of *kula-deolsthandevota* took possession of) for knowing the cause of trouble/calamity and the remedies thereof.

The *Gharinta* answered the queries. The remedies to these as suggested by the *kula-deol/village deity* were religiously followed. If need arose, the concerned deity was made to appear by the sacrificial offerings of sheep, goats or buffalo. Water was often poured over the animals back or into the ears and if the animal shivered, it was presumed that the sacrifice had been accepted by the related deity. Later the actual mutton of the sacrificed animal was consumed as *prasadam* by the family members and people of the concerned village.

According to the local traditions, these deities were more intimately concerned with the happiness and prosperity of the clan and the village. The people believed that even the cattle were protected from the fatal diseases by these deities. One peculiar feature of these deities was that the female deities were predominant and their male counterparts occupied only a subordinate status. It was because of the belief that the females were connected with fertility. Most of the female deities are shown to have male attendants, who are supposed to guard the shrines and carry out the commands of the female deities. Although the male deity had a shrine to himself, his shrine was generally crowded with clay figures and mask of female deities. It is observed that the temple priest (*Pujari*) was bound to offer prayer and offerings first to the female deity and then to the male deity.

The present work studies the different beliefs of the people popular in Kangra and their important role in the life of the people of the state. The main focus is on the
superstitions, obsessions, social taboos and popular omens. Also the work scrutinizes the fact as to how these beliefs determined and influenced the people of Kangra State.

Among the popular beliefs, worship of ancestor’s spirit forms the basis of belief and custom. Ancestor worship as opined by Herbert Spencer is rudimentary form of religion. The worship of ancestors is one of the main branches of the religion of the Indian races. One needs to understand why do people worship their ancestor and what is the need of worshipping them? The concept of soul and life after death was universal phenomenon. The basic idea for worship of ancestor was to acquire pun and prosperous life. “It is clear that the dead ancestor passed into a deity, protecting their own family, and receiving suit and services from them as of old, the dead chief still watches over his own tribe, still holds his authority by helping friends and harming enemies; still rewards the right and punishes the wrong.”

Among the high class Hindus, ancestor worship is the universal faith. Ancestor worship pertains to a family or agnates only; the guardian spirit has to be of, a family, a specific village or a clan or a region. In India every orthodox Brahmin member of a family in evening before taking his meal, offers oblations of water to his ancestors as a daily routine. Among the high and middle class Hindus whenever any auspicious ceremony is performed, it is one of the essential parts of the ceremony that the ancestors should be invited and worshipped along with the gods; generally this is done a day or two before a wedding or before performance of some other important Hindu ceremonies. Some Brahmins and children are fed in the name of the ancestors or family deities, so that no evil forces may befall the family during the ceremony.

Ancestor Worship in Punjab Hills

There are many forms of ancestor worship in hills. The idea behind worship of ancestors seems to be that the living acquires pun or merit by allowing the dead to rejoin their forefathers. In Chamba popular form of worship is the placing of a stone or a board called pita, in a small hut beside a spring. Other form of ancestor worship is the eviction of way side seats in the villages for adders. In some parts of the valley erection of a dhavija, or monolith near a village with rough figure of the deceased can be seen. The erection of the stone slabs, monolith are accompanied by religious rites. A large scale feasting of people takes place. The customs also prevails in Mandi, Suket and Kullu. In Chamba childless spirit is known as Autar. The spirits harass surviving relations until they are appeased. Silver Amulet with a human figure is commonly worn by the members of family to ward off evil spirit. These spirits harass or benefit only their family members. The Autar punishes his collaterals when they try to temper with the socio-cultural continuity. They also reward their good behaviour which measured in terms of socio-cultural dimension.

In Punjab Hills memorials are usually in form of small slabs. Figures are also carved on the slab of the deceased. The rites which
are held during caution differ. The person who dies in an accident or away from home requires long lasting ceremonies. The idea behind it is twofold; the spirit acquires from the act of charity performed by the dead man’s descendants. Secondly: it is believed that spirit being provided a shelter place will be able to quench its thirst. Ancestor worship also takes place in the form of construction of a bridge over a stream in the name of the deceased or construction of a new road popular all over the hills.

The classes of spirit

There is a popular belief in Hills about the Bhut and Chureel. It is also termed as prêtr. It refers to the spirit of man who dies on ill death, i.e. due to violence or accident. In Kangra a Bhut also called a Baital, they became active at night and have no temples. They are usually propitiated by offerings in sickness or misfortune. They are believed to have nats and victimize the weak. Chureel are often described as the ghosts of women dying while pregnant, or on the day of the child’s birth. It is believed that worst Chureel is a ghost of pregnant women dying during the Diwali. They haven’t people during late evening. In Kangra the Chureel was believe too long for her child, but to be a curse to all others. To protect a women’s becoming a Chureel, small round headed nails are driven through her finger nails. Iron rings are welded on her thumbs and big toes together. If Chureel has no surviving rival wife in this case an image of the deceased should be made of stone and worshipped. These Chureels are warded off by the sacrifices with the help of the Chelas.

Worshipping of Nature

The worship of nature is being in force in popular religion and deity is propitiated and negotiated in many diverse ways but through all the rites with which they can be influenced runs according to the pantheistic idea. Human speculative and rational faculties develop more rapidly than his capacity for accurate observation and logical control of intuition. There is a firm belief and safe basis that nature provides auguries which are a certain indication of coming events. We know the causes of an eclipse and can theorize on the causes of earthquakes are under the temptation to attribute them too supernatural agencies, but to primitive philosophers or metaphysicians it is self-evident that all phenomena in nature, whether trivial or impressive are due to the working force which is imminent in all things. It is difficult to say what the primitive religion was, out of which the religions and superstitions of today have grown, but it is easy to conjecture its general outlines. It is combined with magic, whose object to attain power over the material universe generally and in particular get children ensures good harvest, and destroys enemies or at least secure immunity from their onslaught. H.A. Rose argues that God speaks through all nature. Everything living or inanimate speaks as mouthpiece with equal authority. There is a lesson and meaning for mankind in all nature, if man has but the wit and knowledge necessary to comprehend its speech, initiated the varied lore of divination the slightest hints are full of meaning. The flying of birds towards
south in autumn is an indication of the approach of winter. Nature predicts many things to people, who are close to her.

Most prominent among nature gods has been SurajDevata. It is believed that after each harvest and occasionally between while, Brahmans are fed in his honour. Each morning sun is generally saluted with an invocation as the good omen when a person steps out of his house. On Sunday the people abstain from salt and they do not set their milk as usual to make butter from, but make rice milk and give a portion to the Brahmans. Sun god is par excellence the great god of the villagers, who will always name him first of all their deities.

Worship of Moon is also important nature god in Hindu tradition. Hindus take seven threads from the end of their turban and present them to new moon her at first sight. After that they throw the end of turban round their necks and say, “O moon, make us prosperous and happy and grant us bread and clothes in plenty”. After this exchange with one another the salutation Ram Ram and the younger bow to their elders. If Hindus see a new moon in Bhadon, a day called patherchawti or day of stones, they consider it so unlucky that they fear misfortune or a false accusation, and believe that to avert it they will throw stones into their neighbour houses in order to cause them to abuse them in return in which case they will suffer in their stead.xiii

Planet worship is important in Hindu mythology. A number of Hindus worship Sanichar or planet Saturn, known as Chhanchandeota. Dakaut Brahmans are clients of this malevolent divinity; they begin in his name and receive from the faithful gifts of oil and iron. Sanichar is the god after whom Saturday is named and the Dakaut receive offerings on that day. Similarly the worshipper of Buddha is the man with a reverence for Buddha and the later probably refer to the planet Mercury, from whom Budhwar or Wednesday is named. Mars or Mangala is held sacred in many matters like commencing a house; when the all nine planets are invoked together. During eclipse Hindus take bath in a sacred river or stream to be pure in order to repeat mantras which will release sun or moon from Rahu and Ketu’s perception. Hindus believe that if husband of pregnant wife for the first time looks at an eclipse, his child will be abnormal or deformed in some way.xiii

Earth worship is prevalent in all parts of India. Earth is worshipped as Dharti Mata. Worship of earth assumes many forms. The pious Hindu does worship to her as he rises from his bed in the morning; and even the indifferent follows his example when he begins to plough and sow In the hillsxiv when a cow or buffalo is first bought, or when she first gives milk after calving, the first five streams of milk drawn from her are allowed to fall on the ground in honour of the goddess, and every time of milking the first stream is so treated. xv Common prayer used by peasants during first ploughing is: ‘keep our rulers and bankers contended and grant a plentiful yield; so shall we pay our revenues and satisfy our money lenders’.
Peasants do not start year ploughing on a Monday or a Saturday. Earth worship is held on the 14th of the light half of Katikis popularly known as the surgtkai or feast of lamps. On this day men and women wake up early in the morning, go out to bath and then women set afloat mats of rushes on each side of which they place seven lamps alight.

The rainbow: There is an ample curious folklore about the rainbow. Most of the Hindus considered it as the Dhanus (bow of Shri Rama Chandra. Muslims called it as the bow of baba Adam. The Punjabis called it as the swing of bibibai, the wife of the saint sakhisarwar. In Sanskrit, it is called rohitam, the invisible bow of Indra. In the Kangra it is called Paniharin or the female water bearer.

The Milky Way: The Hindus called it as Akashganga or the heavenly ganges, bhagwankikachari or the court of God, Swarga-dwar or the door of paradise. Thunder and lightning: thunder and lightning are considered ill omened. In the old mythology lightning (vidyut) was one of the weapons of the marutas, and the parjanya was the deity who wielded the thunderbolt. Many legends inform us that the soul of the first man came to earth in the form of the lightning. Thus yama was the first man born of the thunderbolt, and he first covered the path of death to become regent of the dead.

Earth quakes: Earthquakes are also naturally an object of terror. Pythagoras believed that they were caused by dead men fighting beneath the earth. According to common explanation earthquakes are believed to be occurring due to the shifting of a horn by sacred bull that supports the whole world. Some people believed that earthquake was caused by the anger of earth’s mother due to the rise of sin in the world. Others believed that it occurred due to a fever in the earth’s interior. There is popular belief among Hindus that it is auspicious if its shock was felt during day time and doors were open but if it occurred after midnight it was a bad omen.

Tree worship

Tree worship is very popular among Hindus. Traces of tree worship are still very common. Tulsi (ocymum sacrum) and Pipal (Ficusreligisa) are universally worshipped. Mahesh Sharma opines that worshipping of tree in hills is held as very sacred. It possesses the significance of fertility. Women worship Pipal and banyan tree to ensure fertility and longevity of their husbands. Pipal and banyan trees are regarded as the most sacred trees. The pipal is also worshipped as the abode of the Panjpiri and Narsingh. Pipal and banyan trees are found in the most of the villages. Leaves of these sacred trees are used in religious ceremonies. No one is allowed to cut wood from sacred trees. In higher areas of hills, where a pipal tree does not grow, Deodar tree is held sacred. Many Nag and Devi temples are found in cedar groves.
Trees near temple are said to be temple property. Many trees like mango, dhak (buteafundosa) ak (cleotropisprolera) are used during religious ceremony and held auspices during marriage but worship of pipal is believed to be equal to that of the gods. Some trees are believed to be abode of malevolent spirits such as keinth, fig, pomegranate etc.

Mahesh Sharma informs us that Tulsi is grown in every household in Kangra and is held very sacred. The worshipping of Tulsi is regarded as part of the Vaishnava ritual called Bhuteghi which means destroyer of fiends or evil spirits. Tulsi is also regarded as Vishnu’s plant because it is sweet scented. It is said that in some parts of Kangra if unmarried girl succeeds in performing the marriage ceremony with the object of her choice round a fire made in the jungles with certain wild plants her betrothals is annulled and the marriage holds good.

**Worshipping of Animals**

Animals popularly worshipped in the hill states were snake, monkey, cow and fish. Various superstitions were attached to these animals. Snake worship was the most popular animal worship in the hill. Worship of Naga and Naginis prevalent at various places in the district of Kangra was very popular. Nag and Nagini worshipped on the festival of Nagpanchami.

Superstitions regarding snakes are as follows: Snakes are worshipped as the Lord of hidden treasure. If someone spotted a snake on Sunday, the Hindus believed that one would see it for eight consecutive Sundays. It is also believed that lighting would strike a tree if it had a snake hole under it. If a snake bit a peasant he or his heirs would build a shrine on the spot to prevent a repetition of the occurrence. KarunaGoswamy called Nagas the “capricious water spirit”. Some of the Nagas were worshipped in an atrophic form, images showing a hood behind the head of the deity. In Kangra there was a belief that snakes that hibernated appear to be recognized by the following custom in November. Since past many years a festival is being held at Kangra after every Diwali called Nag-ka-puja, in order to say good bye to the snakes. During this Puja the image of snake is made up of cow dung and it is worshipped. After this event if any snake is still found, it is called Ningra or ungrateful and is killed forth with.

In Kangra certain persons were believed to be immune from snake bite. A man allowed himself to be bitten by a poisonous snake once a year in the rainy season. Such persons were said to be intoxicated while getting bitten. Some people believed that the snake that bit was a female and that is why they recovered easily. In Kangra the cure from snake bit was known as dalihalua. It was a magic rite performed by taking a handful of shoots. In this rite snake’s ancestors were raised; and wound fanning by them. Pouring water and milk down a snake’s hole was considered as a preventive measure against a snake bite. In Thana Ranital is a shrine to Nag Jamwalar of Nag
of Janwal tribe. At this shrine the snake bite was cured and goats used to be sacrificed.

In Kangranag temples are rare, though snake worship is common among the people. Temple of Indra nag was founded by Rana of Gbaniara. The idol in the temple is that of his family god here the fair is held on the 1st of Jeth. In his temple the image of snake is engraved on a slab. At each harvesting season Jagra is celebrated and the poor are fed. Sacrifices are also observed and sadhus and faqirs are entertained. The popular belief among the people of that area has been that the prosperity of the harvest depends on this god. If he is not pleased, it is said to cause hail and drought.

Superstitions: Good and Bad Omens popularly believed in Punjab Hills

Evil eye

The term evil eye is generally accepted as a translation of Nazar. The word nazar denotes a good deal more than the evil effects of an ill missing person’s gaze. There was a belief that person born of low caste may cast a nazar upon a man of high caste because of the envy of him which they are supposed to feel. Anything beautiful when looped by a person beat on mischief prompts him to do harm.

Anything ugly in itself is safe from the evil eye. To avert evil eye, it is believed that small black stone amulet should be worn on the shoulder or round the neck. It is called Nazarwattu. In Chamba evil spirits show powerful influence on fair complexioned children. To keep them away black thread tied on neck and black mark put on a child’s forehead. In Sirmur region a person with an evil eye is known as dag. Evil eye generally affects those people who are charming and good looking. They do not affect ugly things. To avert evil eyes charms are held.

Minor superstitions

Good and bad omens are innumerable, black is unlucky and if a man goes to build a house and turns up charcoal at the first stroke of the spade, he abandons the site. There is an belief that owls foretell desolate homes; and the koilis also especially unlucky. Chief among good omens is the dogar, or two water pots one on top of the other. This should be left to the right, as should the crow, the black buck, and the mantis; but the snake to the left. To sneeze is auspicious, as you cannot die for little time after. So when a man sneezes his friends grow enthusiastic and congratulate him, saying ‘live a hundred years’; on the other hand it is said that sneezing is always a bad omen among Hindus. Sneeze from anyone near prevents person starting on a journey or any important business. He will sit down for a while before recommencing and if he should fail even then he will attribute it to the sneeze. But after sneezing you may eat, drink or sleep, but you must not go on a visit.

Besides sneezing, other bodily affections are ominous. Thus a movement of right eyes lid or a singing in the right ear means the joy, and of the left the grief. A movement of the flesh in the right upper arm or shoulder means that you will soon embrace a friend,
but one in the left portends a debilitating sickness. A tingling in the right palm means a gain of 2 or 3 rupees at least. In the sole of either foot tingling denotes a journey or that you will put your feet in the mud—serious calamity. Shaping one’s leg while sitting on a chair or couch means loss of money. Yawning is very unlucky and to avert evil.

Twitching (sank) of the right is a lucky omen in Kangra, and the general science of its omens is summed up in the lines. If the lower left eyelid twitches, know there will be a blot on the happiness. If the upper lid twitches, say all will be delight and pleasure. If the outer lids twitch there will be wealth and gain; but if the inner twitches, it brings loss. For the right it will be the reverse.

**Omens**

A large number of omens are naturally connected with the horse, probably because he is a valuable animal and was used to be the representative or vehicle of the sun-god. His actions, colour and form therefore are all full of significance. If you have to buy a horse and he shakes his head it is a warning to you against purchasing him, but the reverse if he paws the ground in welcome. If an owl hoots thrice on a man's house, he must quit it for 3, 7 or 11 days, placing thorns at its door and feasting Brahmanas, sacrificing a goat and offering a broken coconut before he re-entering it. Dogs are peculiarly gifted for they can see evil spirits moving about and so their howling is a portent of evil. If out for hunting one sees a dog rolling on its back, the gain will be plentiful, but if it lies quietly on its back in the house it is praying for help and some calamity is imminent.

There is popular belief that when out for shooting it is very lucky to meet a garner, a name applied in the Punjab to a small kingfisher with bright blue plunge, which is let out of its cage at the Dashera as a sacred bird regarded as good omen. A cat or a crow throwing water over itself denotes a coming guest. The hazards of travel have led to the development of something like a science of augury in regard to it. Before starting on an important journey a Hindu will consult a Brahmin as to what day will be auspicious and if he cannot start on that day, he will send on a paitra, a small bundle of necessaries, to some place near the gate by which he intends going, and start himself within the next two days.

When starting on a journey if a Brahmin or dumna (low caste) is met, or any one carrying an empty pot (ghara) or basket (kilta), the omen is unfavorable, and the traveler turns back. But if during the course of a journey child or a person carrying full gharas (pot) of water is met, the omen is favourable. If when setting out on any purpose you meet a person carrying an empty gharas it is an ill omen. But it is considered a good omen if the water pot is behind you. So too it is inauspicious to meet a person carrying wood, but the reverse if he comes behind you. It is unlucky to meet a widow but a good omen to meet woman with a male child.
Taboos or Tabus

There are beliefs in hills that eating the propensities of another’s food causes 100 generations to burn, and is nearly as bad as back biting which condemns countless generations to the flames. Red food is said to be avoided by Hindubanias as it resembles flesh. It is sometimes said that Hindus consider it unlawful to eat food cooked by an unmarried woman. In Hindu families of hills food cooked by women during mensuration is not eaten. In some families Hindu does not wear a white turban as long as his father is alive. However, some tabus are clearly based upon delicacy of feeling. To accept any help from a daughter or to make any use of her property is considered as a sin. To drink water from well or to rest under the shade of the tree among high-caste Hindus are other taboos prevalent in society of Kangra. The taboos on new vessels of metal among Hindus may be removed by letting a horse eat out of them. Some orthodox Hindus rub the new vessels with ashes to purify them from the touch of their low caste makers.

The horse is here probably symbolical of the sun-god. Among Brahmans and other high caste-Hindus no food that has been in the house during an eclipse of the sun or moon can be eaten and it must be given away. But to avoid this necessity halwai keep some kusa or dub grass, in the baskets of sweet stuff during an eclipse.

Worshiping of Birs or Hero Godlings

The heroic godlings

These dieties have special local worship of their own. The number of these godlings is immense, and their functions and attributes so varied, that it is extremely difficult to classify them on any intelligible principle. Some of them are pure village godlings, some godlings have risen to the rank of national dieties or increased in status. Some are in all probabilities the gods of the degraded races, whom we may tentatively assume to be autochthonous. Many of these have almost certainly been absorbed into Brahmanism at a comparatively recent period.

The literal meaning of Birs is “Heroes”. Birs were classed as minor dieties, but people believe that they are strong and extensive. Among the Birs the most popular in the Hills and especially in Kangra is SindhuBir. SindhuBir is the whistling god, whose whistling sound announces his approach. SindhuBir is regarded as the incarnation of Shiva. He is also known by different local names like Chattarpal, Lokapal, BhimpalSangipal. SindhuBir is regarded as the protector of harvests and is a fertility deity. He is appeased by the sacrifices of animals. The whistling spirit or Demon is believed to take possession of the person who has caused him offence. He indulges in the theft of corn milk, butter, which he transfers to his special worshippers. Mostly peasants have a faith in the Bir. They invoke Bir on many occasions of difficulty. They offer him karahi or halwa. There are many women who believe that they are possessed by SindhuBir.
Sindhu Bir has many songs dedicated to him.xxix

Worshipping of Siddhs

The cult of siddhs is of very great antiquity. Worshipping of saintly men or semi–divine beings in Punjab Hills is common. There was a wide worship of the Siddhas throughout the area. This belief is popular in lower Himalayas. The siddhas are often associated with are major deity but they are worshipped in their own manner. They probably represent defied ascetics of ancient times. They are propitiated in the same manner as Devi and Devatas are addressed. An important and popularly Siddhas of Kangra was Baba BalakRupi. His shrine situated near Sujapur in Kangra. His temple was built during the time of Sansar Chand Katoch. Another siddha worshipped is popularly called Deot Siddha.

The popular beliefs in Kangra state is similar as practiced all over Himachal Pradesh with slight changes. These belief systems have been practiced from time immemorial and with time became integral part of their lives and they have tremendous impact on their behavior. People still have faith in ancestor worship, Bir worshipping and Sidhh worship are popular among the people of Kangra. On other side the beliefs in minor superstitions like bad eye, good omens, and bad omens have decreased to some extent.

Endnotes

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