

Popular Beliefs and The Rise of Folk Deity in Western Himalayas: A Study of Dev Kamru Nag of Mandi Region (Himachal Pradesh)

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Abstract

Rise of folk deity is a concept that depends on the devotion, faith, and the popular beliefs of the people. When common masses observe something miraculous or a supernatural phenomenon, they start considering this as a deity. There are rich descriptions in the oral folk tradition of Mandi which deal with the local expression of religion and popular beliefs of the common people. Numerous folk songs and gathas are devoted to explaining the origin of nature and deities. Many gathas are mainly based on the supernatural and magical acts believed to have been performed by the local deities. The continuous repetition of a gatha over centuries and the association of the local deity with some character in the religious epics such as Mahabharat and Ramayan strengthens the faith of the people in the deity. Dev Kamru Nag gatha is one such example of a dev gatha which reveals the popular beliefs of the people of the Mandi region. The deity acquires a special place of importance and influences the popular beliefs of the local people. The aim of this research is to investigate the origins of Dev Kamru Nag, a local deity in the studied region. The study has been conducted by applying both theoretical and empirical research, by engaging in survey studies and interaction techniques; it further supplements the published material that is already available on folk tradition. An attempt has been made to trace the connection between the folk traditions and the origin of the deity, and also to study the impact of the deity in the region.

Keywords

Chhahidi – traditional stories, songs, beliefs, and the customs connected with Dev Kamru Nag sung during the Kamru Nag fair.

Deokhel – a kind of practice which describes the relationship between human and supernatural.

Gur – priest

Jheel – lake

Kuldevta – clan deity

Lokgatha – folk ballad

Introduction: Verbal Tradition and Popular Beliefs

Religious performances can be a component of oral tradition and have a symbolic significance reaching far beyond the explicit content of a particular text. Several studies of folklore have moved towards a performance-oriented perspective. Likewise, the anthropological study of religions requires investigation into both the content and context of religious performances. This endeavour entails seeing religious activity as event the doing of religion.

There are two related problems. First, verbal traditions, whether written or oral have frequently been ignored by anthropologists studying religion not only in Himachal Pradesh but also in India. Thus, the scholarly use of verbal traditions is still in a nascent stage, as anthropologists have tended to investigate ritual actions, while ignoring the accompanying words. Yet, as Edmund R. Leach has noted, 'Ritual, as one observes it in primitive communities, is a complex of words and actions. It is not the case that words are one thing and the rite another. The uttering of the words itself is a ritual.' Oral literature is a part of a larger event, the religious performance, which occurs in a definite social setting.

Historians and the anthropologists are equally engaged in locating, preserving, editing and analysing texts, often those of a particular locality. But they need to view these texts within their specific social context. They have to not only document the details of that social context but the symbolic significance of oral or verbal texts. Anthropological studies of religion tell much about what is transmitted, but not very much about how, and to/from whom. 'Then the inter-relationship of what is transmitted, how, by whom, and for whom, has a symbolic significance which extends beyond the texts.'

According to Susan S. Wadley, in our dealing with popular religious expression, we must distinguish those verbal traditions that are religious and those which are not. We can eliminate from our consideration only the most obvious non-religious traditions mainly funny stories and jokes whose primary purpose as seen in both context and content, is to be humorous. A similar problem arises when we attempt to distinguish the verbal traditions that have been used in a ritual. If a particular verbal tradition occurs primarily in the context of a fast, festival, worship, or fate, it can be considered to be of ritual importance. While dealing with religious beliefs, the variation between the great traditions and little traditions are often constantly raised. However, such a distinction is difficult to make. If we are dealing with verbal traditions, we can analyse even these texts and attempt to make a systematic ordering of beliefs. But despite important questions of religious beliefs which arise when we are working with verbal traditions, a focus on these verbal traditions in their social scenario too must be there.

Wayland D. Hand suggested in his article, 'The fear of Gods, Superstition and Popular Belief' that, 'the relentless climb of man from the primitive state to a life of increasing knowledge and culture has been marked by the retention of age-old beliefs, irrational ideas and superstitions that he has been unwilling or unable to discard.' These beliefs could be insignificant bits that have survived from the past, or superstitious practices that have persisted due to ignorance. People are sometimes prone to accept the first and easiest explanation of a phenomenon rather than one that requires greater reasoning.

Bruce Jackson argues that, 'In the search for explanations for different kinds of phenomena and events that are given in subjective terms, it becomes clear that not all the apparent superstitious beliefs grow out of purely personal beliefs. Many beliefs are inherited from earlier times.' Both, the belief in the internal forces as well as the outward events that he experiences, compel man to search for underlying causes and a logical reason. But the causes can never be truly and objectively determined and so this search goes on endlessly.

However, this is not an individual activity, all men have similar experiences, and society collectively seeks answers to many such questions. As a result of this, they provide their own notions in trying to analyse and provide answers. This leads to the emergence of some plausible lines of cause and effect. Once broadly acceptable causes have been identified, an appropriate course of action is recommended.

Wayland D. Hand contended that, 'since these measures accord with the best knowledge on the subject available within the group, they soon become an approved method of treatment in much the same way that factual and scientific data are handed down within the various trades and professions in modern life. Moreover, because the efficacy of the treatment or procedure has been proved to everyone's satisfaction, it can safely be recommended to others, and is thus passed on and finally handed down to posterity.'

While it is commonly acknowledged that these old and traditional beliefs and superstitious practices are the common legacy of people, it nevertheless, is often a society that has not yet achieved very high levels of literacy. Yet we also need to recognize that superstition exists in all sections of society. It is encountered even among people who have obtained different degrees of formal education. The mental, spiritual and religious outlook of illiterate persons is based on their prevailing knowledge about the physical world that they live in. The average person who is representative of his or her time and conditions need to be taken into account there. This will suggest the range of irrational beliefs and practices that constitute the substantial part of the mental baggage of superstition that exists in a society.

Even in the modern world, there are numerous popular beliefs and superstitions. Indeed, there are so many of them that may exist in any region. For many of these beliefs different variations can be easily created from the old models. The great creativity that exists in this sphere also explains the wide acceptance of a simple idea. This makes popular folk belief and superstition easily the most prolific genre of folklore with a capacity to survive through long historical periods.

A Study of Religious Expressions and Popular Beliefs of Mandi Region

As similar to India and Himachal Pradesh, in Mandi region the history of Hinduism has been dominated by three major gods called Tridev who are Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh (Shiv). The figure of Tridev that found in many Sanskrit texts is controlled and mediated by Brahmins, who, because of their mastery over the texts, were regarded as religious leaders of society. Formally structured Hinduism is a religion shaped by efforts to construct a uniform, parallel system of beliefs and religious practices. But there is a huge difference between the Hinduism mentioned in the scriptures and the vernacular forms of the religion that are expressed and practiced by common people.

The aim of this chapter is to explore narratives of Mandiyali folklore in their social context. It is believed that *gur* and *pujari* (priest) are the main authorities who exercise control over traditional beliefs and stories relating to local deities that appear in different genres. The stories related to the birth of the local deities, their magical powers and their heroic past events are narrated and preserved in myths that establish the world order on a cosmic scale. S. Lourdasamy writes that, 'legends about the interaction between gods and human are set in the mundane reality of historical time, providing models of religious and social behaviour. One of the main functions of legends is to link social reality with the supernatural sphere and to affirm the active participation of deities in the everyday life of villages.'

In Mandi region, the temples of local deities attract the attention of travellers and visitors with their colourful statues. The external beauty of these statues is striking, and their iconography can reveal the status of featured deities, their membership in the Shiva and Vaishnava lineages, their relationships, marital status, even names and nature, ranging from a benevolent mildness to a fierce bloodthirstiness that is satisfied only with regular sacrifices of goats or sheep. However, even more knowledge about the deities is spread orally and remains embedded in the memory of the people. It is expressed in either ritualistic behaviour or verbal form like songs, ballads, stories etc. Without conducting interviews with the local people we could only have guessed the role of deities in the worldview of society and the web of beliefs that influences daily life. The deities have their own sacred space of temples and statues. The narrative world includes sacred myths about the origin of the world and stories about the supernatural interventions of deities in the lives of the people, whose daily wellbeing depends on the deities' blessings or anger. This narrative area of interest does not form a uniform mass for verbal expression. It can be seen more as a system of different genres with their separate poetic features, functions and connections with specific traditional groups such as the priests (*pujaris*), castes, families and sometimes whole villagers. There is a lack of written or literary sources about local deities of the region. Almost all narratives circulate in the form of oral ballads or stories related to the deities. There are extraordinarily rich descriptions in the oral folk tradition of Mandi which deal with the local expressions of religion and popular beliefs of the common people. This entire set of traditions claim legitimacy similar to that of local popular history.

Numerous folk songs, *gathas* and stories are devoted to explaining the nature and origin of deities. These *gathas* are often a glorification of the brave and magical acts believed to have been performed by deities after they adopted a human form and interacted with people in a particular space and time. Here, an attempt has been made to explore the historical significance of these powerful local beliefs for the common people of the region.

Rise of Dev Kamru Nag as Folk Deity

The rise of Dev Kamru Nag as a folk deity is derived from the popular beliefs of the people, and these beliefs are observed in the local folklore. There is an ancient temple of Dev Kamru Nag on top of a hill in front of lake surrounded by the thick forest of deodar. The temple of Dev Kamru Nag is located in the Kandhi Kamru Nag panchayat of Tehsil Gohar (Chachyot) of Mandi district of Himachal Pradesh. It is situated 3,334 m above sea level among the valleys of Balh and the Dhauladhar range. A place Rohanda lies 28 km away from Sundernagar and 47 km from the Mandi town. Next, to reach the temple there is an on-foot route from Rohanda to Kamru Nag which takes about 3–4 hours and is about 6 km on steep mountain terrain. Nowadays, motorable paths have been made that end near the Kamru Nag temple. The temple is constructed in hill style and made of timber. The idol of Dev is made of stone and situated inside the temple. The origin of the deity is found in the local tradition and folklore, specially in folk ballad.

Folk ballads are an integral part of folklore of any region. The ballads and, for that matter, the whole folklore has been mostly the inheritance of simpler, non-literate societies that lack written forms of literature. They reflect popular beliefs and in the long history of their recitation many changes seem to have taken place in the main stories connected with the deities. The influence of local elements is natural, but on many occasions, additions are also made to the narrative through the likes and dislikes of a particular singer. According to the times, they try to make the story more attractive for their patrons and listeners thereby changing its character.

There are a large number of dev *gathas* that are religious ballads concerning gods and goddesses. They have a religious sanctity and are associated with certain rituals. They are sung only on special occasions, and that too, only by the *gurs* or *chelas* of the deity concerned. Metallic objects like *katar* (swords), *shangals* (chains), *lohas* (spears) all are worshipped during *deokhel* after the recitation of the *dev-gatha*.

Deokhel is a practice which describes the relationship between human and supernatural. S. Wadley is of the view that, 'The types of communication which are believed to exist between human and God are one type of man-God relationships. Possession refers to communication from God to human complements, communication by priests and other specialists from human to God.' Possession rituals, like other rituals, require the services of specialists. The role which these specialists play is crucial to understand the relations between human and God which are being expressed in these rituals. There are priests and specialists who worship the gods, who know the sacred sayings and conduct the rituals that are necessary to keep the gods happy.

Every village god of Mandi has its own story to tell. But not all of them are in the ballad form. Nevertheless, there are certain events associated with deities which have been transformed into beautiful and famous ballads. They are not only admirable because of their lyrical content but also important on account of their cultural and historical descriptions of the traditional life of the Mandi people.

How Dev Kamru Nag rose as a folk deity, how the people's faith in the deity increased, and associations of him with which great historical personality, the answers to all these questions can be found in a very popular legendary folk ballad of Dev Kamru Nag prevalent in the Mandi region. This *gatha* traces the origin and describes the bravery of Dev Kamru Nag. The *gatha* is as follows:



Dev Kamru Nag temple and his images

Mahabharata rayudh Kurukshetra hunelagya

Rajeraneyara dal-badaltethipujya

Pandavakaurava jo karnemadaad

Mahabharata rayudhethi hone lagya

Rajeraneyach raja dasya

Naanvtesraratnayakshbataya

Pahadara raja se sunaya

Horbadabhaari se veer bataya.

According to the *gur*, Muni Lal of this deity, who recited this *gatha*, Ratna Yaksha (King of the mountain region), was eager to participate in the Mahabharata war between the Pandavas and Kauravas. He was a very brave and generous king. When Lord Krishna came to know this, he tried his level best to stop the raja from taking part in the battle. This was because Lord Krishna knew if Ratna Yaksha took part in the battle on the Kaurava side, the Pandavas would never win. So, he disguised himself as a *gwala* or cowherd and stopped the raja from going to Kurukshetra. He first tested the raja and finally asked for the raja's head as an act to prove his generosity. The raja immediately cut off his head but also expressed his desire to see the battle of Mahabharata. To fulfil his desire Lord Krishna took the raja's head and placed it on a long bamboo stick and fixed it in the battlefield. But the raja's bravery and miraculous power so affected the battle that it was not coming to an end. Then Lord Krishna requested the raja to be fair and also gave him the offer to become the *Kuldev* of the Pandavas if they won. Raja accepted the proposal and promised to remain just and fair. Finally, the battle was won by the Pandavas.

After winning, the Pandavas asked the raja to express what he desired. The raja said he wished to go back to his mountain region where he truly belonged. So, the Pandavas took the raja's head in a box and started their journey to the Himalayas. During the journey they reached a place called Nalsar of Mandi Janpada and stopped there and decided to enshrine the raja's head there. But the raja was not happy about the place and thus the Pandavas had to move on. Thereafter, they reached Kamru *Jheel*. The *gwalas* and other people of that place welcomed the raja and he expressed his willingness to be enshrined there. The Pandavas were not pleased by this and asked the raja why he preferred to stay there. The raja replied that the place was his native land. He had been born there in his previous life in the form of a snake from a woman's womb. But one day when his mother left him in a box, a woman came and tried to steal the box. He got frightened and ran away and reached the banks of Kamru *Jheel*. He took shelter of the long kumbro grass, where later his mother found him. Since he was found there; his mother named him Kamru Nag. He said that he was the same Kamru Nag of his previous life who took birth as the Raja Ratna Yaksha in his present life. Further, he also believed that if that particular place could provide safety and shelter to him in his previous life, it would keep him safe in this life as well. Hence, the Pandavas enshrined him there; took his blessings and continued their journey to the Himalayas. At present, the place where Dev Kamru Nag resides is known as Kamrauh near Rohanda. Dev Kamru Nag is very popular because of his divine powers in the Mandi region. He is also generally referred to as the 'Deity of Rain.' If somewhere in Mandi region a drought situation occurs, people worship the deity, to end this situation.

Traditional stories, songs, beliefs and the customs connected with Dev Kamru Nag are called *Chhahidi* in the local dialect. *Chhahidi* is a synthetic concept, covering and blending expressive forms that can be differentiated as distinct genres. Every year in the month of June, a famous fair takes place at the temple of this deity. The fair is locally known as Sarnauhali mela. There is a lake in front of the temple which is known as Kamru Nag *Jheel*. There is a strong belief that if a needy person of any caste worships the deity to fulfil his or her desire, and the desire of that person gets fulfilled, and then he has to offer something to the deity. If he is willing to offer gold or other precious metals, he drops them into the lake or if he is willing to sacrifice a goat, he sacrifices a goat. This tradition of offering gold, silver and money in the lake has been followed for centuries and the lake is believed to have a hidden treasure worth billions. The people come on the 1st date of *Ashadh* month according to *Vikrami Samvat*, i.e., mid-June, when the mela takes place. On the occasion of the mela, hundreds of sheep and goats are sacrificed in the name of the deity. The narratives construct a

sacred space of the temple where certain purity rules must be followed. Local people believe that if persons with evil intentions, black magicians and thieves enter the great pond of Kamru Nag, they go blind. These beliefs of the people obviously strengthen the trust of the people in the powers of deities to control the social sphere.

The Kamru Nag deity was honoured greatly by the rulers of the ancient Mandi state, and he was made the head of the Shivratri Mela Committee. The history of the Shivratri fair in Mandi town is an interesting tale linked with the setting up of Madho Rai as the supreme ruler of the Mandi state. Madho Rai was a successful ruler of Mandi, and he occupied the throne of Mandi because of the disability of Suraj Sen (1637-1664). Suraj Sen's eighteen sons all died in his lifetime, and in despair of an heir he caused to be made a silver image which he named Madho Rai and to which he assigned the kingdom. A silver image of Madho Rai was kept at the Raj Mahal of Mandi. This image of Madho Rai has a flute in its hand. Madho is a name of Vishnu, and Rai signifies heir apparent, or Tika Sahib.

This silver image of Madho Rai is still carried in sacred procession in Mandi on festival days, and bears a Sanskrit inscription of which the following is a translation:

‘The image of Vishnu was made by the order of Raja Suraj Sen who named it Madho Rai. Bhima, a goldsmith, made the image in the month of Magh (mid-January to mid-February), JikNachattar.’

Since then, the rulers served the State as servants of Madho Rai and custodians of the State. Suraj Sen's successors have also held the deity in great reverence. This God is represented with precedence over all other Gods on various religious occasions. It is suggested in *The Gazetteer of the Mandi State* that around 1792, the Raja of Kangra Sansar Chand (1775-1823) invaded Mandi and captured Ishwari Sen (1788-1826), Raja of Mandi, conveyed him to Sujampur and held him a captive for 12 long years. Later, with the help of Gurkhas, he was released and returned to Mandi. According to local tradition, this particular incident is linked to the observance of the Shivratri fair. On the occasion of his return to Mandi, he was given a reception at his state capital, and he invited all hill deities of the Kingdom and held a grand celebration, and this day happened to be the Shivratri festival day. Since then, the tradition of holding the Mandi fair during Shivratri is observed every year in Mandi town. Madho Rai is the chief deity of this fair and the palanquin of Madho Rai, to this date, leads the way of other deities in the fair, followed by Dev Kamru Nag.

There is an incident in this connection that took place during the reign of Raja Bhawani Sen (1903–1912), stated in *The History of Mandi State* as follows:

‘One event is mentioned in connection with Mr. Garbett's period of office in Mandi. There is a temple and tank dedicated to Kamru Nag in the Chichiot Tehsil. This hill deity is believed to be very exclusive, and no Sudra is permitted to approach his tank and shrine. Pilgrims throw silver coins and ornaments into the tank as offerings, but the copper coins are appropriated by the Pujaris. It is believed by the people that a large amount of silver has accumulated in the tank. In the course of his tour Mr. Garbett got to know about it, and desired to put the supposed treasure to some use by taking it out of the tank after drying it up. He made the suggestion to the Raja and asked him to visit the place and decide for himself. The proposal was opposed tooth and nail by the Pujaris and the worshippers of Kamru Nag. On the way it rained very heavily, and the Raja and Mr. Garbett had to stop at Chichiot. It is said that Mr. Garbett took some wild hill fruit which brought on a severe attack of dysentery necessitating his taking leave.’

The local people ascribed the heavy rain and illness to the wrath of the deity, and it only strengthened their belief in Dev Kamru Nag. It was after this incident that Raja Bhawani Sen honoured the deity by making him the head of the Shivratri Mela Committee. It is worth noting here that Dev Kamru Nag does not come to the Mela ground to rest with other deities in the fair.

On the opening day of Shivratri fair, Dev Kamru Nag visits Madho Rai at Damdama palace and then he goes to the temple of Shyama Kali at Tarna hill near Mandi town. The Chief Administrative Officer, Deputy Collector, or someone else from the Government, first goes to Tarna to honour Kamru Nag by giving him holy chadar. After that, other deities are honoured by the administration. Dev Kamru Nag remains at this hill till the last day of the fair and on the last day he comes to Chauta bazar. From here, he goes back to his place where the deity resides. Supernatural and miraculous power showed by Dev Kamru earned him the special status of Bada Dev in Mandi region.

It is believed by the local people, that Kamru Nag controls the rain, and if worshipped during droughts, he gives abundant rain. This belief amongst the people is further perpetuated by a popular story which is told by *gur* of this deity, Muni Lal. The legend emphasizing his power of bringing rain is widely known in Mandi. According to this legend, during the reign of a certain young ruler of Mandi there was a severe drought in the kingdom. The ministers, who were unhappy with the ruler, devised a trick to remove him from the throne. They went to him and gave him an ultimatum that if he could not provide water to his people he should abdicate. The ruler prayed at the temple of Kamru Nag. His prayers were answered immediately. It rained so heavily that the people got scared. Finally, the ministers pleaded for the king's pardon and begged him to stop the rain. The ruler sent them to Kamru Nag and exhorted them to surrender to him in all humiliation. The rain stopped after that. It is also said in Mandi that if Kamru Nag is not properly honoured and respected, he causes heavy rains during Shivratri.

The local people also believe that the deity protects them from snakes. He is also considered as a deity who fulfils wishes. After fulfilment of wishes people drop their offerings like gold, silver ornaments etc. in the lake. The lake he protects has remained unpolluted and any attempt to rob it off its precious offerings is unthinkable.

All these beliefs makes him Bada Dev of the region and the common masses have full faith in his supernatural and miraculous power.

Conclusion

Supernatural has always been an important part of the Indian culture. All *dev gathas* and folk stories related to the deities of this region are devoted to the origin of local gods and deities who had supernatural powers and used them for the welfare of the people. *Dev gathas* and stories of local deities, inculcate the values of peace, brotherhood, valour, and sacrifice amongst the people.

Each village god in the Mandi region has its own story, but some events associated with the deities have been transformed into famous ballads, providing cultural and historical insights into the traditional life of the people. Folk ballads play a significant role in expressing the religious beliefs and often undergo changes over time. Such religious beliefs help compose the folklore of the region. There are a number of *devgathas*, related to gods and goddesses, such as Dev Kamru Nag *gatha*, Gugga *gatha*, Narsingh Veer *gatha*, etc., which reveal the religious beliefs of the people of Mandi region. These deities acquire a special importance and influence the religious beliefs of the local people. The research work describes the rise of Dev Kamru Nag as a folk deity based on popular beliefs and local folklore.

Dev Kamru Nag is present in different villages of Mandi region in the form of statues and shrines, but this deity's power is revealed in various genres of religious folklore that depict him as a guardian of justice and ritual purity. This deity is considered to be a God of rain and is worshipped by the people in Mandi region which is also reflected in folklore and other local narratives as well.

Kamru Nag, the legend of Mandi is about a temple surrounded by a thick forest which protects the environment of that area. During the Mahabharata battle, a yaksha came to the battlefield and locating Lord Krishna, offered the latter his services. The yaksha had mammoth skills and he announced that he could turn defeat into victory. Fathoming the danger he posed, Krishna tricked the yaksha into sacrificing his head. The head was then placed on a bamboo stick near the battlefield thereby enabling him to witness the battle according to his last wish. Today, we can see Dev Kamru Nag temple on an isolated spot surrounded with thick forest. It is told by the gur, Muni Lal, of deity that Dev Kamru Nag does not like noise. Hence construction around the temple is completely forbidden, and as such there is no habitation for miles surrounding his temple. There is a clear water lake near this place, and he is its supervising deity. Whether Kamru is a Nag or not is not, the question which we deal with in this article is the reverence he evokes and that has protected the area around his temple from being cleared and inhabited. Today when there is a rapid clearing of forest land and pastures for residential buildings that is taking place, such checks are meaningful in many ways. The lake he protects has remained unpolluted and any attempt to rob it of its precious offerings is unthinkable. According to the History of Mandi State by Man Mohan, in 1911, one event is mentioned in connection with Kamru Nag. C. C. Garbett was an officer of the Indian Civil Service who had, at the request of the Raja Bhawani Sen, been lent to the Darbaras Settlement Officer. When this officer learnt that there was a temple and lake dedicated to Kamru Nag in Chachyot area into which pilgrims threw large quantities of gold, silver coins and ornaments, he desired to put this treasure to some use by taking it out of the lake after draining out its water. He made the suggestion to the raja and asked him to visit the place and decide for himself. The proposal was opposed tooth and nail by the pujari and the worshippers of Kamru Nag. However, C. C. Garbett and Raja Bhawani Sen were unable to reach the temple due to heavy rain. More astonishingly, Garbett suffered a serious attack of dysentery. On his recovery, Garbett abandoned the plan of taking out the gold and silver without disclosing the reason and later returned to England. Such historical incidents through the past have strengthened the faith of the people in the deity and his powers, and the deity has been honoured with the status of Bada Dev in the studied region.

There is no reason to doubt that in religious communities, plots of such narratives get actualized in experiences of daily life and are perceived and interpreted according to the oral tradition. Like Dev Kamru Nag, the other famous deities of Mandi region such as Gugga, Mahu Nag, Shikari, Hurang Narayan, etc. are not encountered only as statues in village shrines but may also appear to the members of religious communities all over the territories they guard. Oral traditions model the perceptions of witnesses and the ways they report their experiences, and the religious beliefs of the people evolve by the encounters with the supernatural.

Thus, if someone wants to understand the origin and the role of deities in religious communities, it is not sufficient to only study the construction and structure of their shrines, temples, rituals, and the holy scripts relating to them. We also need to study folklore and its religious genres, which also require interaction with the priests, *gurs* and the local people who have had some experiences of the supernatural. This indicates to a social sphere which also has an integral space for the supernatural in form of deities, who influence the lives of the

local people and their beliefs evolve and strengthen with their experiences which result in a cultural unity of the Mandi region.

Hence, we see how the thinking and beliefs of the people regarding supernatural phenomenon and deities impact the social and religious organization. Folklore is a rich source which gives considerable information about the religious beliefs of the people and how deeply these affect the social and religious lives of the common masses. Thus, we see that the religious beliefs of people bind them together and create a rich cultural heritage which should be preserved.

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