CHAPTER-V

Social and Cultural Festivals

HOLI OR HOLIKA:

Among the Hindu festivals Holi may be mentioned as the most popular. It is essentially a festival of the people. It heralds the coming of spring and occurs on the full moon day in the month of Phalgun (February-March). It is fertility festival which has its origin in the aboriginal orgies of some powerful tribe and even now retains many of its original characteristics of the fertility festival of primitive society. The chief features of the Holi celebration are dancing and singing songs, sprinkling of coloured powder and water on one another and general crowds merry-making by the people.

Even old men join in the mery-making and are painted by women and children. Children parade the streets with syringes and bottles containing coloured water and threaten to discolour the clothes of passersby who are, however, allowed to go un-molested on payment of a small sum. Mischief and frivolity rule the day. Holi for obvious reason is dearer to the lower classes than to the upper.

There are many interesting theories which explains its origin. According to some traditions, the festival

1. a) Thomas, P. Hindu Religion, Customs and Manners, Bombay, N.D. p.146.;
is celebrated in honour of Krishna's triumph over the female friend Putana whom he killed while taking breast. The myth is symbolic of the death of winter.\textsuperscript{2} Another belief is that Kama was burnt to death by Shiva on this day. In south India the songs sung on the occasion of the festival include lamentation of Rati on the death of her husband.

The most popular belief connects this festival with the burning of Holika, sister of Hiranyakasipu, the demon king and father of Prahlada. The legend says that Hiranyakasipu had obtained from Brahma the boon of immunity from attacks by man, beast and god; he had Brahma's assurance that he could be killed neither by day nor by night, neither inside or outside his house.\textsuperscript{3} Protected by his immunity, Hiranyakasipu over reached himself. He forebade worship of all the gods and substituted worship of himself. He was, therefore, particularly incensed to discover that his own son Prahlada remained an ardent devotee of Vishnu. Hiranyakasipu tried persuasion and he tried torture, but still Prahlada refused to give up his worship of Vishnu, claiming that Vishnu was omnipresent and omnipotent.

\textsuperscript{2} Thomas, P. \textit{Epics Myths and Legends of India}, Bombay, N.D., P.141.

Hiranyakasipu enraged at his son's obstinacy, finally ordered the serpents to fall upon him and bite him to death. But Prahlada was unaffected by this attack and remained obdurate; the serpents meanwhile fell into feverish disarray, their fangs broken and fear in their hearts. Vast elephants were sent against Prahlada, he was thrown over precipices; he was submerged under water. But all to no avail. Hiranyakasipu could not kill his son. At last he sought the help of his sister Holika who was immune to fire. She took Prahlada in her lap and sat on the pyre. When fire was set to the pyre Holika was consumed by the fire but Prahlada came out alive without any burns. Therefore Holi is celebrated to commemorate the miracle escape of Prahlada and burning of Holika in the pyre.

Finally, one evening, the demon king, in exasperation at his son's repeated assertion of Vishnu's omnipresence, pointed out a pillar in the doorway of his palace and demanded to know if Vishnu was there inside it. Prahlada declared that he certainly was, where upon Haranyakasipu said that he would kill him, and he kicked the pillar. At this Vishnu stepped out of the pillar in the form of Narasimba a creature who was half-man and half-lion, and tore Haranyakasipu to pieces. The circumstances of Haranyakasipu's death fell outside the

conditions of Brahma’s boom for the time was evening
neither day nor night, the place was the doorway of the
palace—not inside nor outside the demon’s house, and the
assassin was a man-lion—neither man-beast or God.

The Holi festival on the India plains originated
in the remote past. It was brought to the Himachal hills
centuries ago by Rajputs and other Hindus who came here
in search of security and holy places. The Rajput
adventurers and commercial classes settled in the towns
and thickly populated settlements. They started to
observe their religious beliefs and celebrate their
festivals and fairs.

Holi is not much observed in rural Himachal but
during the hey day of the princely states it was
celebrated with great enthusiasm in their capitals. The
rulers used to participate and mix up with the commoners.
The most famous Holi as of Sujanpur-Tira. The city was
founded by Raja Ghumand Chan (1755-1775) of Kangra and
later on his grandson Maharaja Sansar Chand (1775-1823)
made it his capital. In his court many paintings on the
Holi theme were painted depicting Krishna sprinkling the
Gopies with coloured water and also getting thoroughly
sprinkled in turn. J.C. French, states that O’Brien,
an Irishman, was in the service of Sansar Chand. French

further mentions that at Alampur (Opposite Sujanpur Tira) he saw a painting in which O'Brien was shown sitting in Sansar Chand's Darbar at the time of the Holi festival. They are squirting the red colour at each other, O'Brien taking a leading part.\textsuperscript{6} He was dressed in Indian custom, except for his hat, which resembled a soft black clerical one. The painting was in a coarse local style. Its date according to him was probably 1810, as Sansar Chand was depicted in as being in his middle age.

Rough play with coloured powder, characteristic of Holi in the plains does not take place in Chamba. Such celebrations take place during the Hori festival in the beginning of Baisakh.

Firewood is collected from the different parts of adjoining areas during the day, and piled up near the palace, where two large bonfires are prepared. As evening sets in these are lit and many other may be seen blazing on the adjacent hills. Some religious ceremonies are performed by a Brahmin before the fires is lit and the people afterwards throw in grains and walk round the flame. Puja is again performed near the hearth. The people also observe the festival privately in the same manner in their own homes. It is doubtless connected

\textsuperscript{6} a) French, J.C. Himalayan Art, O.U.P. 1931, P.82.  
\hspace*{1cm} b) Randhawa, M.S. Travels in the Western Himalayas, Delhi, 1974, P.57.
with the event of the new year, which formerly began in Chet.

RAKHPUYA:

(Shimla hills) Rakhi, Rakhri or Raksha-bandana (tying the protective amulet) (Hindi), Salonoo or Brakhali (Mandi, Sirmaur), Rakhrunya (Bilaspur, Shimla) from Rokhri, a thread, an punya, full moon, is a festival held on the first moon in Sharawan (August) when the Brahmans don a new sacred thread consecrated by the Vedic hymns and, threads (Rakhi or Rakhri) are tied by a Brahmin round wrists of their patrons to protect them for a year. There is a popular legend that Brahma gave to Brahmans Rakshabandana (Shrawan full moon day) as their festival, Dashehra to Kashtriyas, Diwali to traders and Holika (Holi) to Sudras. Gifts are made to the Brahmans and friends are feasted.

Some call it a festival of sisters and brothers. In the Urban areas, the sisters tie Rakhris or maulis (red cotton threads) round the wrists of their brothers.


and seek protection and affection from them. Brothers like-wise, give them money and sweets.

The ceremony called Rakshabandana is described by Hemadri in *Vrata* Vol.11 P.190-195 N.S.P.121 PC 284-85, Vratarka (Folio 335a-336a). One should rise at sunrise on full moon of Shrawan and after offering tarpana to gods, sages and pitrs, get prepared a packet (or amulet) containing whole rice grains and mustard and decorated with gold (thread) and strung together with variously coloured threads and have such an amulet (Rakhi) tied. In the case of a King, a pot should be placed on a square raised in the palace and the King should occupy his seat together with his ministers. He should be surrounded by courtesans and music and benedictory words should go forth, gods, Brahmins and arms should be first honoured, then the royal priest should tie the Rakhi (Amulet) to the accompaniment of the mantra. 9

"I tie on you that where by Bali, the very powerful king of Rakshas (demons), was bound; O protective (amulet), dont slip off, slip off. All including Sudras and other...

9. देवानिततातिरिया सुर्भोर्त्तो संप्रवृत्त प्रभाम । ततु प्रापिताः पशुपति विचार्य याच ||
दान वेदी महावल: । तेन सामाग्रिकानि रे या चल या चल ||
भृगुवैतिः । 137: 19-20

human beings should get the Rakhi tied after honouring priests according to ability. When this is done, a man lives on happily for a year".

The story connected with the origin of this festival is that Indra was the arch enemy of Daityas (demons). He has been mentioned several time in Rig-Veda and quoted as god of rain and thunder storm. In Puranas he is referred as the Deva King. He married Sachi Devi (also known as Indrani), daughter of a Daitya Chief named Puloma, who was killed in battle. A later tradition says that she was carried off forcibly by him. In Rig-Veda one speaker says 'I have heard that among all these females Indrani is the most fortunate; for her husband shall never at any future time die of old age.

Puranas mentioned him at constant war with the giants and demons (Rakshas) by whom he was for a time deposed. To seek redressal from this set back he went to his guru Brihaspati. He told his guru that he had

been finding it very difficult to win over the Daityas and sought his blessing. At this time his wife Indrani was with him. Finding her husband in despair and helpless Indrani told him that she had a device which will make him victorious over the Daityas. Then she brought a bracelet (Rakhri) and tied on the right wrist of her husband and said that 'this protective amulet (Rakshabandhan) will protect you in the battlefield and make you victorious over your enemies.'

After tying 'Rakhi' on his wrist, Indra with fresh courage and hope went to the battlefield and defeated his arch enemies, the Daityas. Skand Purana connects the Rakshabandana festival with the Daitya king Bali who ruled during Tretayuga age. He was grandson of Prahlada. Bali did all in his power to propitiate the gods by honouring them. He ruled well and was loved by his people, but as far as the gods were concerned his one defect was his great ambition. Having extended his

kingdom as far as he could on earth, Bali could direct this ambition only in one direction—towards the kingdom of the gods. The celestials consulted together and Indra was advised by the sage Brihaspati that the power Bali has gained by his sacrifice could not be resisted—Indra would inevitably lose his kingdom to Bali. Brihaspati's prediction was accurate, and the gods were turned out.

The Gods again consulted among themselves and it was decided that Vishnu should become incarnate as the son of Aditi and Kashyapa, one of the seven rishis. This child grew up as the dwarf Vamana. Relying on Bali's reputation for generosity, Vamana approached the king and asked for the gift of three paces of land. The gift was no sooner granted than Vaman began to grow to an enormous size. He then made two paces, which covered all the earth and the heavens and thus won back for the gods the whole of Bali's kingdom. But Bali's merits, acquired through sacrifice and austerities had to be recognised; accordingly Vamana relinquished his right to a third pace and Bali was granted dominion over the remaining area of the universe, the neither region called Patala. Bali was also permitted to visit his lost kingdom once a year, and this visit is regularly celebrated annually.

But a critic describes this Puranic event in another way. Before Manu came to India, there had been only a few Aryan kingdoms in North India. But there were numerous Daitya kingdom. There was one large and very
powerful Daitya kingdom along the Indus in the Punjab) under Bali, often mentioned as an emperor. To enter India proper, the southern immigrants had to fight Bali first. But they were not strong enough to attack Bali. So Vishnu thought of a manoeuvre. On the Sutlej or Beas, they lived for sometime and gathered sufficient strength there. Then one day, Vishnu a dwarf in size, went to Bali and humbly asked him for small piece of land to live in. This kind Bali granted him. Vishnu thus obtained a footing in Balis kingdom. This poor beginning gradually turned into a pretty fair colony filled in by those new settlers. After several years, Vishnu strengthened his army, fought Bali, defeated where he conquered a new land. Some Hindu affirm that Bali went to South America where he conquered a new land called after him Bali Bhumi, now Bolivia, but tradition preserved in the Mahabharata and the Pranas gives the following:

"The large State of Bali, grandson of Prahalada lay on the Upper Indus. Many Aryan settlers, sages and seers lived in the State. Bai is described as the earliest Indian emperor, though of the Daitya branch of the Aryans. When Vishnu was preparing for a conflict, the Aryan settlers requested him to rid the land of his tyranny. Certainly they promised him help. Bali was duped, defeated and driven out from his realm. This deceitful victory of dwarf Vishnu is magnified as the divine work of our fifth incarnation. Bali fled to Bengal with his faithful followers.

17. Mazumdar A.K. Early Hindu India. Delhi (Reprint of 1917)
There is a narration in James Tod's Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan that "the festival of the Rakhi is in spring, and whatever its origin it is one of the few when an intercourse of gallantry of the most delicate nature is established between the fair sex and the cavaliers of Rajasthan. Though the bracelet may be sent by maidens, it is only on occasion of urgent necessity or danger. The Rajput dame bestows with the Rakhi the title of adopted brother and while its acceptance secures to her all the protections of a 'cavaliere servente: scandal itself never suggests any other tie to his devotion. He may hazard his life in her cause, and yet never receive a smile in reward, for he cannot even see the fair object who, as the brother of her adoption has constituted him her defender. But there is a charm in the mystery of such connexions, never endangered by close observation and the loyal to the fair may well attach a value to the public recognition of being the Rakhi-bund Bhai, (the Bracelet-bound-brother) of a princess. The intrinsic value of such a pledge is never looked to nor is it requisite it should be costly, though it varies with the means and rank of the donor, and may be of flock silk and spangle, or gold chains and gems. The acceptance of the pledge and its return is by the Kalchli or corset, of simple silk, or satin, or gold brocade and pearls. In shape or application there is nothing similar.

in Europe, and as defending the most delicate part of the structure of the fair lady it is peculiarly appropriate as an emblem of devotion.

The emperor Humayun was so pleased with this courteous delicacy in the customs of Rajasthan, on receiving the bracelet of the princess Kurnavati, which invested him with the title of her brother, and uncle and protector to her infant, that he pledged himself to her service. He proved himself a true knight and abandoned his conquests in Bengal when called on to redeem his pledge."

Story behind this event is that in C.1533 A.D. Sultan Bahadur Shah of Gujarat attacked Chitor and subdued it. Before this Rani Kurnavati sent a Rakhi to Humayun and sought his help. At that time he was on his way to Bengal. He returned towards Rajasthan and drove away Bahadur Shah. After this the Rana of Chitor re-occupied Mewar. In Rajasthan many romantic tales are founded on 'the gift of the Rakhi.'

Rakhi used as an armlet or preservative against evil (Raksha) consisting of a piece of thread or silk or some more costly material bound round the wrist or arm with an appropriate mantra (Prayer). Besides its

   b) रायगढ़ दान, भारत का स्थितिपत्र. दिल्ली, 1986, भाग 2 खंड 1, पृष्ठ 28.
application to children to avert the effects of evil eyes or to protect them against Dains or witches, there is one day in the year, the Rakhi purnima or full moon in the month of Shrawana (August) when it is bound up on the wrist of adults, by friendly or kindred Brahmins, with a short prayers or benediction. This tying should not be done when Purnima is mixed up with either 14th or the following pratipad. It may, in order to avoid these two, be done even at night.20

SAIR:

The chief festival of people in the Kangra valley is the annual Sair, observed on the first day of Asoj (September) apparently associated in some way with the harvest. During the early hours of the morning of the day a barber goes with galgal fruit, turf, lamp in a bamboo basket announcing the arrival of that auspicious day. Men, women and children bow to the fruit, which is considered an emblem of the fruits of the harvest about to be reaped and of the happy termination of the rainy season. People offer coin, grains and walnuts. Afterwards, the offerings are taken by the barber, and the Sair is placed near the source of a spring or water source (Boli). There is a special repast in the afternoon, and the women sing songs.21 All members of the


family meet that day. The women clad in their best and the best food is cooked and partaken. This is a Bara Din of the hillmen and everybody tries to be among his family that day. It marks the departure of the rainy season and the people thank God for the rains having gone leaving their houses and crops undamaged. An insect called tida or situ (grasshopper) skips about at that time of the year and chirps incessantly. The people say that its peculiar sound is an announcement of the happy day. Its notes are said to mean, "Sair has come," Sair has come."

At other places like Shimla hills barbers show mirrors to richmen, who give them rewards. Everyone makes an image from clay, puts flowers on it and places it before his house. Rich foods are prepared on the first day of this month. In the evening illuminations are put up all round the image which is worshipped.

In Chamba this festival is called Sair ki sankrant—the first day of Asoj. The ceremony is held to mark the ingathering of the autumn harvest. New grain is worshipped with the kimb or lemon. Sanj or sweet bread fried in ghee is made, and worshipped along with the new grains of the seasons. On this day Shiva is believed to forsake his abode on the Kailash peak, near Brahmaur, and retire for the winter to the lower regions of the earth called Payalphur, where he remains till Shivaratri come round in the month of Phalgun. On the same day the
Gaddi shepherds in Pangí and Lahaul begin their return journey towards the outer hills.

**LOHRI OR MAGHI:**

Lohri is a gala day of the hill people in the lower hills. This festival called Lohri is celebrated on the first of Magha (mid-January), but in the upper hills and valleys this is known as Maghi or Saza. It is more than an extra-ordinary festival. It is a season of festivals extending well into a whole month. When the Rabi crop has been fully and finally sown, villagers enjoy temporary relief from the hard agricultural labour. They feast and celebrate and avail themselves of this time to meet their relations from far and near. The fun and prolic not only helps in their emotional release, but also in maintaining social solidarity. After sowing the winter crops, people have little to do in the fields owing to snow and extreme cold. Moreover, it becomes impossible to do any kind of outdoor work. Then it is the time for rest and merry-making.

On this festival at least one goat is slaughtered in every household. In a large family even two goats are slain. The goat is fed throughout the year. It is fed on fresh green leaves and on pieces of bread regularly so that it may fatten. Food stuffs like ghee, jaggery, flour and rice are stored and kept for the
festival. The actual celebration for the Maghi festival begins a few days before the start of the month. It starts on the 28th Paush (in January). The first day is known as Asklaut and the second Dawalauti, the third Allraniti and the fourth, which falls on the first of Magha is called Saza. The goats are sacrificed on the Saza day. The whole month of Magha (January) is spent in feasting and merry-making. Relations and friends are invited and entertained with delicious preparations and meat. Everyday one finds villagers visiting each other. During these days people also invite ballad singers to their houses to sing from the Ramayana, Mahabharata, Bharatri Hari, Guga etc. in their local dialect. This goes on for several nights. In some places after dinner dances are held in which many participate. This continues till late at night.

In the Kinnaur area Maghi is known as Sazo. This festival is celebrated to bid farewell to local deities at the time of their departure from their respective village temples for the temporary sojourn in the Kailash Mountain, the abode of Shiva, during the winter seasons. On the Sazo day the local deity is first of all worshipped and thereafter all the decorations like jewels, clothes including the mukhangs are removed and the bare ark of the deity is left in the temple and the decoration, mukhangs etc. are safely deposited in the Kothi. From the temple to the kothi while the clothes,
jewels and mukhangs are being carried, Sazo githang (farewell song) is sung. After this festival no musical instruments can be sounded during the succeeding eight days. A dance without musical instruments is, however, held every day for the following seven days, for about an hour, in the santhang. For a fortnight complete silence prevails in the village charging the atmosphere with some sense of gloom and poignancy due to the departure and the absence of the deites.

In classical literature Maghi is called Makarasankranti. It falls, owing to the position of the equinoxes, on the 13th or 14th January in the month of Paush. Sankranti means the (apparent) passage of the sun from one rasi (sign of the Zodiac) to the next following and hence the rasi in which the sun enters is designated as the Sankranti of that name. When the sun leaves the rasi called Dhanus and enters the Makara rasi that is called Makarasankrant.

A person should observe a fast for three days or one day in honour of Makarasankranti. In modern times Makarasankranti is more social festival than a religious one. No fast is observed and hardly anyone performs rites, though many people bath in the holy lakes or in

Tirthas like Ganga at Haridwar and elsewhere. Sesame is very much in evidence, particularly the plains and adjoining hill areas and people greet each other by giving articles from simple sesame coloured with saffron and go about say 'take these sesame and jaggery and speak sweet words'.

According to the modern astronomical calculations the winter solstice occurs on 21st December and on that day commences the Sun's apparent march towards the north. But in India people who follow the almanacs based on the ancient methods and data think that the Sun's march towards the north takes place on the 14th of January. They are thus about twenty three days behind the correct Makarasankranti owing to the procession of the equinoxes. This fact was recognised even in the medieval Dharmshastra work.\(^{23}\)

The origin of the observance of Makarasankranti cannot be very ancient. Thus Sun's apparent northward march for six months has been mentioned in Brahmana and Upanishidas texts at least one thousand years before Christ.

In modern Panchangas, Makarasankranti being deemed to be a deity several curious matters are added viz. sankranti rides on some Vahana. In the rural areas of

\(^{23}\) Ibid., P.222.
Himachal Pradesh there is a belief that from Makarasankranti the sun rides on a lame ram who walks slowly and therefore the days become longer and nights shorter.

The Lossar festival is celebrated in the entire tribal belt of the border district of Lahaul, Spiti and Kinnaur and also in the Tibetan colonies of Manali, Dharamshala and Baijnath. The old Buddhist shrines, commemorating Padamasambhava's marriage with a local princess at Rewalsar in Mandi district, also emerges as a centre for these religious celebrations.24

The word Lossar in the Kinnauri means new year. This is held to celebrate the beginning of the of the new year during Poh Shudi Shukla Paksha, bright fortnight of the moon. A day earlier preceding the fair Khuras and Chiltas are prepared. Early in the morning an elderly man gets up and prepares brayangs. This is a sattu stupa made from barley flour. It is considered auspicious first to see the brayangs. On top of the brayangs some butter is smeared and kept ready before other members of the family get up. A bottle of wine and some other articles such as Chilgoza are kept in a thali (platter), before the Sattu idol and a butter lamp is also lit near it.25

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In Kinnaur early in the morning the villagers unfurl and hoist new Darchhotis (Cotton flags) on their roofs. The Darchhot cloth is printed with mantras. Lamas paint these in the Labrang monastery were wooden moulds are kept for this purpose. Then two men take the Darchhot and hoist it on the roofs and a worship is performed with barayangs and wine. The elderly man offers charnamrit of wine and some sattu to the other man. While distributing wine he utters losomatashis which means 'may the new year be bright and prosperous'. After that they enter the main residential room and offer charnamrit of wine to all the family members repeating losomatashis which is reciprocate by the members of the family. Vitukon, a special dish of parched maize flour boiled in water is prepared and served to all the members of the family. This is done before the dawn.

When the sun rises, villagers visit each others houses and visit relatives. They exchange chilgoza garlands. The losomatashis are repeatedly uttered and reciprocated. The garlands of Chilgoza are offered more by the scheduled castes to the upper castes people who in return give them fried cakes and Chiltas and wine.26

During the day time a dance is organised. The dancing party is led by a good dancer who holds a Chaunri in his hand. Chaunri is made from Yak tail fitted with

26. Ibid. P.50.
a silver handle. The dance continues till late at night or if the weather permits, it may continue during the whole night. On the third day during the night in an other temple Khachi Lagang the lamas and Jomas (nuns) organise a religious dance in which villagers take part till the morning.27

Lossar indicates the beginning of new year and is held in the last week of Phagun through part of the religious festivities. On the eve of Lossar, Yak dance is more a symbolic reflection of the Flora and Fauna of the inner and trans-Himalaya, enacted to entertain the congregation than an observance of a truely religious rite.

Yak an useful animal in the snow bound region of the Himalaya also finds place in the fold imagery. Named after the animal, Yak dane is one of the folk and religious dances that are performed on a festive occasion in a courtyard of the monastery. Some young lamas, wearing masks of Yak, dance just to please the audience. The dance like any other ritual of the tribals, is done to the accompaniment of the monastic musical band.

Apart from the tribal areas, this dance performance can also be seen at the monastery at Rewalsar and in the Tibetans camp at Dharamsala, Manali, Baijnath etc.

One can also witness the Chham dance on the eve of Lossar. A sacred masked-dance as it is, actually meant to commemorate a historical event of the 9th century in which a cruel kind Lang Darma, who had been responsible for persecuting numerous Buddhists, was stabbed to death with the help of phurbu, hidden under sleeves of the long robes the Lama had worn while performing a ritual dance. The magic dagger later became a symbol used by the Lama to exercise malignant spirits or pinning down the evil demons. The dagger has over the years taken a shape of typical ritual attribute, made up of a clover leaf blade topped by the head of Khyung (guruda) bird. This mystery play is also staged by the red hats to mark the birthday of Padmasambhava, the apostle of Tantrik Buddhism.

The Lossar festival in all the monasteries in Himachal Pradesh offers an opportunity to the people to witness various masked dances and dance dramas, reminiscent of a cultural past.

HALDA:

Halda is a new year festival of Lahaul but it is only the people of Chandra and Bhaga valleys who celebrate it sometime in between mid Paus and mid Magh.

(January). The festival has something in it both of the traditional new years and the Diwali the people celebrate in the plains of India. The exact date of the festival is calculated by the abbot of Sha-Shur monastery. At one time the local Thakurs used to fix the date, but they have long since transferred their prerogative to the abbot of Sha-Shur. On Halda night the moon enters for a little while a circle of five stars known as birzi. If the day happens to be Tuesday, it is dubly auspicious for mangal is the day of agni or fire, and Halda is the festival of lights. In the past the date was conveniently changed if it was in some way in-auspicious for the thakur and his family. Not so now.

Halda means a torch. This is made of dry willow and cedar faggots. The festival, which resemble Diwali in many ways, is not Budhist festival. The Sha-Shur abbot fixes the date, but otherwise the lamas have nothing to do with it. It is celebrated in all the valleys, including Pattan, which is predominantly Hindu. Very likely its origin goes back to the pre-Buddhist period in the valley or perhaps it is the result of the rule of the Hindu Rajas of Kullu over Lahaul for many years.

On the day of the festival, Halda torches are prepared with great care. There should be one for each grown up male in the family. These are put against the wall in the oldest room in the house. On the wall above
these a new coat of dung and mud is spread. A circle is drawn on the floor and divided into seven or nine parts, in each of which little cakes of flour and dried flowers are stuck. A nail is hammered into the centre of the circle. White wool is also pasted in it. This is known as the shrine of Shiskar-Apa.

There are some variations in this from place to place. In some houses the circle is drawn and decorated daily for as long as the festival lasts. The abbot fixes the length of the festival which varies from seven to nine days. In most places the circle is drawn only once and last for all the days. In Kolong estate to the north of Keylong, the people generally write two mottos below the circle. "Losomatashishong" means "new year greetings" and Lakhim Karpo D-aldo" means the food of the god be in our mouths.

During the Halda days all other shrines and gods are ignored. The people worship each morning at the shrine of Shiskar-Apa. The festivities centre around Shiskar-Apa who is the goddess of wealth in the lamaistic pantheon as known to the tribals of this side, in fact, means grand-ma and as such the divinity is looked upon both with regard an affection. Their image of Shiskar-Apa is that of an old woman with silver white hair. She carries a golden stick, and is out and about in the early hours of the morning. She may enter a house and give all that the inmates wish for goats, sheep, yaks,
wool. People get up early to perform puja at her shrine to entice her.

On Halda morning puja of Shaska-Apa is performed and requests made for various gifts. People are no extravagant in their demands on the poor lady. Chhang is handed around and ceremoniously drunk. The Halda torches are worshipped. The men then to visiting neighbours, where Chhang is naturally offered. They make it a point to visit houses in which a death has taken place in the course of the last year. Consolation is offered by saying, "A new year is coming. Now you should put off this mantle of sorrow. You have mourned long enough. The dead will not return." The inmates are persuaded to put on flowers and jewellery which they had discarded after the death and thus the period of mourning is ended at Halda.

In the evening at an auspicious time fixed by the lamas, the torches are ceremonially lighted. Before lighting them a short-puja is held with Chhang of which a cup is offered to each family member. One man carries two torches, the rest of the family men carry one each. This is not a rigid rule and the number of torches carried by each family is fixed by tradition. In the house the men chant Om ah hum. The torches are taken out handle first and with the light facing into the house. Once outside the house the torch is pointed to the west and the men chant 'Halda Ho' the extra torch
is stuck outside the house. The men of the village then collect and march to the spot fixed by tradition for the burning of the torches, all the while chanting 'Halda Ho' the extra torch is stuck outside the house. The men of the village then collect and march to the spot fixed by tradition for the burning of the torches, all the while chanting 'Halda Ho'. The women and children follow to watch the fire, while the elder people stay back in the house. The torches are burnt at a considerable distance from the village. Thus the upper Kyeland people come to a place in lower Kyolang. The lower Kyolang people go to the Beelig nullah and the Beeling villagers go down towards Tandi. This is because of a belief that the torches carry with them all the evil of the old year. It is, therefore, best to burn them away from the village.

The men in the procession hold high burning faggots. They chant 'Halda Ho'. Behind it comes a crowd of women and children. The procession is led by drum beater. At a place selected for the function, the men throw their torches in a heap on the snow where they begin to burn with a fiery glow. The men stand around the fire and women and children watch from the slopes. All the participants take out sticks, each about one metre long, with heads of sattu lamps. They gather around the fire and balancing the sticks like javeline, with the heads towards the fire, start to chant "Karding rana Bawala" may it pierce the throat of the Karding rana,
and "Guspa Rana Shosha" may it pierce the heart of the Goshal rana.

The rana of Karding and Goshal were barons who ruled the area before the rule of the Kullu Rajas. Obviously they were tyrants. There is a widely current legend which depicts the cruel nature of the rana of Goshal.

No wonder the people hate the memory of those ranas. A last lusty shout of, "Guspa rana shosha" and with final flourish the men hurl their javeline into the fire. A great shout goes up from the watching crowd. The drum beaters beat a farewell tattoo, and the crowd fade away into the darkness.

On the second day of Halda each family sattu figures of goats, sheep, horses and other animals. These are roasted and kept on a shelf. On the third day of the new moon, these figues are taken to the roof. The moon is worshipped, and pieces are broken from each figure and thrown in offering. Chhang is offered and drunk. In Kolong and Sissu estates a dried goat or sheep head is shown to the moon. It is eaten next day. The people pray to the moon "Ama das tshe tashe'- mother moon may you have a long life. The sattu figures are given to the children and the next morning they go from house to house with these. People give them Sattu, and occasionally money for their trouble. They prepare gruel and have a feast.

29. Sharma, D.D. Lahaul Kai Halda Tatha Khogal Utsav'.
On the final day the people prepare lumps of sattu with butter, and feed the crows and ravens early in the morning. The belief is that those who feed the crows early will finish their work on the crops early in summer. The people shout from their roofs "Pos Pos" for that is how they call the crows. Of course the crows take their time and come after sunrise.

The first month of the new year is most auspicious for prayers. One prayer during this period is equal to one thousand at any other time. Therefore the lamas spend this month in the monasteries in prayers and fasting.

Some people celebrate Halda slightly in a different way. Two or three persons from every house come holding burning sticks of pencil cedar in their hands. They assemble at a place which is selected by the lama. The burning sticks are first piled together to make a bonfire, and later thrown in the direction where the villages of Gushal and Kardag are situated. What they utter at this moment is 'Guspa rana shesha la' and 'Kardang rana beba la' meaning thereby that this offerings and greetings be kept by the rana of Gushal in his heart and by the rana of Kardang in the goitre.  


After the offerings, the people disperse and return to their homes where they worship Shiskar Apa—generally a midnight affair, followed by meals and drinks. Next morning the youngsters turn to the elders and wish them good luck.

 Though the festivities continues for two or three days the people keep to their own doors and there is no mix-up of any sort. During these days drinking and dancing keep the people busy but a guest is never welcomed.

 The Halda festival of Upper Lahaul is celebrated by the Swanglas in the pattan valley with little variation in detail but under different name. Here it is called Khogaa—the light festival.\(^{32}\) On this occasion, some members from every home take out torches of thin pencil cedar sticks. The burning sticks from the whole village are piled up together at a place outside the village. Devdar (Cedar) needles are thrown into the fire with a view to purifying the atmosphere.\(^{33}\) Some pieces of buck wheat bread are also thrown in the fire in the name of Gophan an Brajeshwai Devi.\(^{34}\) Then they throw away some of the burning sticks with slogans to scare away the evil spirits. After this, the people return to their homes and take meals with rounds of Chhang. This festival lasts for three days.

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\(^{32}\) Negi, T.S. *Scheduled Tribes of H.P. Shimla*, 1976, P.107.

\(^{33}\) Sharma, D.D. P.75.

\(^{34}\) Tandi P.61
KUIN:

After fifteen days of the Khogala festival Kuhn is celebrated by both the Swangala and the Bodhs of Pattan valley. This festival is held on the last day of the dark fortnight (Amavasya) of the month of Phalgun. A day before the festival a huge quantity of marchu (fried cakes) is prepared. On the following marchu is eaten, but first some morsels are thrown away as an offering to Gapan deota and many other deotas. The next early morning sprouts of barley are also offered away likewise. On this day, like the Dussehra festival in the other parts of the country, the elders are greeted by the youngers, with offerings of barley spouts and jolune (dried marigold flowers prepared like medals). In the midday, all the villagers assemble at one place and go to the house of the village oldest person to pay their respect to him by offering flowers and touching his feet. After this, they go to the next eldermost one and so on. These visitors are served with chhang and marchu and tsampa cakes. In large villages this round takes two or three days. The celebrations are marked by delicious and sumptuous meals. They wear new clothes and ornaments especially the women folk. Every day the housewife worships deities and lights butter-lamps before Bara-raza. Bara-raza means two small wooden torches which are made during the Khogala festival, left unburnt and kept in the corner of the room covered with a shawl.

and a black *gilgit* cap. It takes, roughly, the shape of an effigy, hollow at the bottom in a triangular shape, where the offerings are placed. On the first night of the festival they make a jar-like snow figure, called Rachu, on the top of each house. They place flowers and green branches of pencil-cidar on it. On the same night the doors and the pillars of the houses are drawn with *Swastikas* locally called *Khogunu*. During worship they invoke many deities among whom one is Senapati Sikandar (Alexander the Great). This is something very intriguing. It is said that the Dard community inhabiting Punial and Yasin (Pakistan occupied areas of Ladakh and Gilgit) also worship Senapati Sikandar as their great ancestor in the festival of mask dance.\(^{36}\) Kuku festival lasts four or five days. After Kuku married women of Pattan valley go to the house of their parents to pay respects to them with a pot of *chhang* or other presents.

**GOCHI:**

A festival of Bhaga Valley—generally falls in the month of Phalgun. The purpose of the festival is to celebrate communally on a village level, the births of all the male children who were born during the preceding year.\(^{37}\)

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Great preparations are made by the family which is blessed with the male child. Relatives and others start visiting the house in the morning and they are all entertained with chhang.

The mother of the male child puts on the best of her clothes and adorns herself with a variety of ornaments and jewellery that she possesses. All mothers with their male children are taken out in a procession to a spot which becomes the venue of joint celebrations with a silver bottle of Chhang held in hands they are accompanied by the girls-married or unmarried whose parents are alive. Locally these girls are called "Kalchorpa". These escorts not necessarily relations are also clothed and ornamented in their own beauty, not less than the privileged mothers. All this creates a superb spectacle.

The lady is escorted by two men, one carrying a burning stick of pencil cedar and the other leaves of pencil cedar tied in a lamb's skin. The torch bearers are also those whose parents are alive. Other privileged mothers also join the procession the same manner. The mother, who first gave birth to the son during the proceeding year, leads and those who gave birth later follow her in order of seniority.

38. Gill, M.S. Himalayan Wonderland, Delhi, 1974, P.124.
The procession with loud drumming proceeds to a place of the village deity. The drummers belong to the blacksmith class. There are not many of musical instruments to play upon but the sweet notes of flute add their own charm to the all pervading sound of drum beating. A bonfire in the courtyard of the Lakhang (temple) is lit a day or two earlier and a young boy, well dressed, keeps a guard over it round the clock.

A very striking feature of the whole show is the mock shooting with hows and arrows.

Landagpa, the village priest, worships the god with bow and arrow. The lamb's skin, stuffed with leaves of pencil cedar which appears like a live animal is placed on a tree and is shot by the priest of Lakhang or by any male member of his family. The object is shot from a distance of about 20 metres. The priest shoots three arrows in the first instance and in all nine arrows are shot. And as the object is hit it arouses admiration from the people who gather there in large number to witness the show. The general belief is that the successful shots will bring in as much male children in the village in the ensuing year.


b) Gill, M.S. Himalayan Wonderland. Delhi, 1974, P.128.
An interesting feature of the Gochi celebration is a token marriage of the children below 6 years. Butter is the only gift that the boy's parents give to the girls on the occasion. It has no binding on the boy and the girl to enter matrimony when they come of age. But it does seem that at some stage of history the token marriage must at an appropriate time be taking the shape of matrimonial alliance. The two children who are pushed into the ceremony should necessarily be those whose parents are alive.

Another highlights of the celebrations is snow balling. In this the young boys and the girls are particularly alive. Standing on the slopes or on rooftops they hit each and every person passing through the lane of village path. At the venue of the Gochi celebration also snow balling continues resulting in a great jest and fun.

After the worship of the village deity is over, the people disperse but the relatives and friends move in a group and visit all those houses where male children are born. Drinking and dancing go together sometime all over the night.