CHAPTER V I

SEASONAL Festivals

CHET:

Chet is the first month of new year day of the Salavahana era \(^1\) (Punjab Government: Panjan States Gazetteer: Chamba State, Lahore 1910 p/218) and the people celebrate the first day of this month with the belief that the new year will bring in its wake happiness and prosperity. On this day the Dhaki or Turi (a class of the scheduled castes, like the Marasi of the Punjab, they earn their livelihood by singing and dancing) go from village to village to sing and dance in the courtyard of the village temple continuing to entertain the people with their songs and music throughout the month. This festival is called Chtrali or Chetra. \(^2\)

The Chetrali in Kullu \(^3\) are the nights in Chet (March) when the women assemble and dance in the village green. The men only watch the show and take no part in it. The women dance to their own singing, each song having a dance peculiar to itself. For example Runjke


is sung by the women grouped in two lines, one representing the lover, the other his mistress.

In Kullu Chetrali is also known as Lingti. In Bharmaur region of Chamba, this festival is called Dholru ki-Sankrant. It is celebrated in the first week of the month of Chet. The people believe it is lucky to hear the name of the month first, from the mouths of Dumnas or low caste musicians, who in accordance with ancient custom, go round for eight days from door to door, each with a drum or dhol, singing and playing. Presents of clothes, grains and money are given them.

In Kinnaur this festival is pronounced as Chatrol. The main idea behind its celebration there is to ward off the evil or malevolent effect of the stars and to pray for good crops. The ceremony commences at dusk, when in each house-hold, a pitcher is filled with a mixture of hot embess and ash, over which some roots of incense are thrown. Cooked victual are also then mixed in the pitcher. It is then waxed round the heads of each family member and thereafter the pitcher is brought out and taken bralam i.e., to a place within or outside the village where fair paths converge. There the pitcher is broken with a thud. Breaking of the pitcher

4. a) Rose, H.A. P. 471. op. cit.
   b) Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal, 19, P. 133, 218, 226.
symbolises death of the evil. During this festival walls of the houses are painted with figures of trees, ears of corn and the figures of domestic animals.

BAISAKHI:

(Hindi) called Bishy or Bissu (Shimla Hills), Beesh (Kinnaur), Bisowa (Kangra) and Lishoo (Pangi-Chamba), is the most popular festival of Himachal Pradesh. It is generally held on the 1st Baisakh (13th April). But in some parts, it starts even two or three days earlier. The main theme behind this festival is to restore vigour, vitality and strength, and to get the villagers ready for the ensuring harvesting season. This signifies the bloom of spring. Lusty trees of apple, apricot and peaches with pink flowers in the fields and orchards and red rhododendrons against the background of white snows provide a joyful scene for the celebrations.

The word Bishu is a derivation of 'Vishuv'. After winter when in the spring season the sun enters in Tula and Mashe, the days and nights are almost equal. This span of time is called Vishuv times. This period is considered very auspicious and therefore festival is held and celebrated with great enthusiasm.

6. शुद्धरात्रियोग्यमेव विषुवः, तुतिवांसेवे । तुला मेषोऽक्षोऽध्यात्मिकः दिनः तृतः

Vishnu Purana 2.8.68.
In Kinnaur, Baisakhi festival, Bishu or Beesh is also called Ras-Kayang (ras, from Sanskrit Rashi, a zodiacal sign, and Kayang from Sanskrit Kaya) is the day on which the Sun reaches the zodiacal sign of Aries. In India it is generally known as the Meshi-Sankranti or Vishuva-Sankranti. Throughout Shimla hills, it is called Bishu-ka-Saza. The dancing and singing with great rejoicing are the main features of the festival.

The preparations for this festival begin much earlier. The houses are white-washed. Women get busy washing clothes and cleaning the houses many days before the festival. A great deal of shopping is done with special consideration to women's clothes and sweets for the children.

A week before the day of the festival, a long pole is erected in the courtyard of the village temple. Then, everyday in the evening the young boys go to the jungle and collect dry twigs, branches of trees and grass which they pile up around the pole. On the top of the pole a Kelta (conical bamboo basket) is fixed and dry twigs, branches of trees and grass are piled up around. This is called Jhalra. On the morning of Baisakhi day, it is set on fire and the rejoicing young boys dance around it.

7. Joshi, Tika Ram, Ethnography of Bashaher State. J.A.S.B. September, 1911, P.548.
8. गोजही भिलाई: हिमालय का प्राकृतिक ज्ञान तथा इतिहास के लिए नगरतिर्युल संस्थ, अप्रैल 21, 1963 प. 11-12
Another function to which the children and women look forward is the singing and dancing by the Kolis (scheduled castes) of the village or of nearby villages which goes on from morning till evening. On first Baisakh the history of the god is recited (Bharata) at most temples. The ring dance is performed and singing is done in praise of the village deity. The singer adds a couplet or two in praise of the eldest person of the village who rewards them by paying cash which ranges from one to ten rupees. The dancers also perform mask dances. These dances are locally called 'Bura' and 'Sih'. The dancers go from one village to another while singing and dancing. This ceremony is called 'Braich' in the local dialect.

Baisakhi or Bishu festival is held on the 1st of Baisakh (13th April). This day has a special significance. Early in the morning, the Turi-Dhaki-Bajgi (all the three names are synonymous and are the sects of scheduled castes) take a round of village announcing 'happy new year' with the beat of the drum.

9. a) Rose, H.A. Glossary of the Tribes and Castes. Lahore, 1911, P.
After this the men, along with the village boys, go to the jungle to bring Brass flowers (rhododendron) which they had plucked the previous day and hidden there. These boys return before dawn. They make fastoons of the flowers and hang them round the roof and verandah of the temple.\textsuperscript{10} They also take some flowers home and place them on the doors of their houses. At the same time they light a bonfire. This bonfire is called Jhalra.

In the morning all members of the family bathe. Some people go to Haridwar to have a dip at Har-ki-Pauri, others go to Giri-Ganga, Tatapani near Shimla, Markanda in Bilaspur and Ban Ganga in Kangra valley. The women and children dress in their best. Women put on traditional jewellery. In the evening special meals are cooked and people distribute food among the lower castes.

During the day time Bishu fair is held in several villages. It is held on a high summit under the flag of the village deity. The people dance, sing, play \textsuperscript{11}Thoda\textsuperscript{11} (archery) and feed their friends. The women sit on the terraces and their newly stitched bright garments add colour to the spectacle. To break the monotony, the women also join in dancing.

\textsuperscript{10} Rose, H.A. \textit{op. cit.}
\textsuperscript{11} Diack, A.H. P.88. \textit{op.cit.}

\textsuperscript{11} Punjab Govt. \textit{Punjab State Gazetteer: Simla Hill State, 1910, Jubbal State, Lahore, 1911, P.15.}
In Chamba on the Baisakhi day, the people plaster the floor with cow-dung and thereafter take bath. Then they fill the earthen pots (ghara) with water and place on some grain strewn on the floor with other fruits of the season. After puja by a priest these are given, in the name of the Pitrs (ancestors) to Brahmans or to a sister's children. The scheduled castes put grains in the pot instead of water. Special food like Patanda, asklti Shakkar, ghee is prepared. Married daughters and sisters are also invited on this festival.

At Suni the clay images of Shiva and Parvati made about eight days ahead of Basoa (Baisakhi) are decorated with ornaments and flowers. In the evening marriage of Shiva and Parvati is solemnized with local musical beat. Next day these imagees called Lahaul are taken by Bhats in procession to Kaighat where these are submerged in the river Sutlej.

RALI:

Connected with the Baisakhi is the Rali Festival of Kangra region which is celebrated with great enthusiasm. The details of this festival vary from place to place, the following may be regarded as typical.

The Rali is a small earthen painted image of Shiva and Parvati. The Rali festival is a long one and occupies most of Chet (March-April) upto the Sankrant of Baisakh (April). Its celebration is entirely confined to young girls and is in vogue all over the Kangra region. All the little girls of the place turn out of their houses one morning in March and take small baskets of dub (turf grass) and flowers to a certain fixed spot, where they throw them into a heap. Round this heap they stand in a circle and sing. This goes on every day for ten days, until the heap of grass and flowers reaches a respectable size. They then cut two branches having three prongs at one end and place them, prongs downwards, over the flower heap so as to make two tripods or pyramids. On the single uppermost points of these branches they get a Chitrera or painted image maker to construct two clay images, one to represent Shiva and the other Parvati. All the girls join in collecting the clay for these, and all help as much as they can in the construction of the images themselves this being a "good work". The girls then divide themselves into two parties, one for Shiva and one for Parvati, and set to work to marry the images in the usual way, leaving out no part of the ceremonies, not even the Barat or procession. After the marriage, they have a feast, which is paid for jointly by contributions solicited from their parents. After this at the next Sankrant (Baisakh) they all go together to the river side and throw the ralis 15. Indian Antiquary, Vol.XI, P.297.
into it at any point where there happens to be a deep pool and weep over the place, as though they were performing funeral obsequies. The boys of the neighbourhood frequently worry them by diving for the ralis and rescuing them and waving them about, while the girls are crying over them. The object of this festival is to secure a good husband. Rali fairs are also held on a small scale in all the principal places in Kangra, but the chief ones are at Kangra itself, where the Banganga is the river used for the disposal of the ralis, and at Chari, a village 15 kms from Kangra on the river Gajj.

The origin of the festival is derived from a story that a Brahman once gave his full grown daughter in marriage to a child. When the ceremonies were over and the bride was being sent to her husband's house, she saw how things really stood. So in her despair she stopped her doli (Palanquine) bearers on the road by a river, and called out to her brother, Bastu. "It has been my fate to be married to a child, and I live no more. But in future, in memory of my wretched fate, let girls make three toy images of each, one of me, one of my husband, and one of you, my brother, Bastu, and let them worship these images for the whole month of Chaitra (March-April)

every year until they be married. Then let them marry these images, as I was married, on the first of Baisakh, and on the second or third thereafter let them take the images in a doli to the banks of a river and there let them drown them in it. And let this be done in honour of me, Rali, the bride, Shanker, my husband, and you, Bastu, my brother. The blessing that shall spring forth from this rite shall be that she who performs it shall never marry an unsuitable husband." Saying this she sprang into the river, and was drowned and in their grief at this, her husband and brother drowned themselves also. Ever since then the worship of Rali, Shankar and Bastu, has been universal throughout the Kangra region.

Many songs are sung by children in honour of Rali, and the images are adorned with wild flowers. The children bathe every day during the month of Chaitr, and fast on the first, second and fourth Mondays of that month. The images are dressed up according to the means of the parents, and are finally thrown into a river with songs and ceremonies. While the girls are picking the bansuti flower for the ceremonies, they sing the following song:

SAB SAB SOHELIYAN BEBO, JURI-MURI AYAN, JURI-MURI AYAN:
RALIYE SOHELAR BHENAR DURON;

All we maids are come together, dear, are come together;
O Rail, friends and sisters from afar.
Others collected flowers in their baskets, dear;
Rali collected them in her skirt,
Others made Chaplets and double chaplets dear,
Rali made fourfold garland.
The Chaplets have been made and hanged upon the nails, dear.
But Shankar, who should take them, is afar.
The garlands are dried at the foot of our cots, dear,
As Rali died (in sorrow) for Shankar, Sardaru Balhari.

An other version connected with the celebration of Rali festival is that the young beautiful Virgins belonging to different villages from their particular groups. They mark the beginning of this grand festival by singing hymns.

In the middle of March they start worshipping the so-called "pistus' (idols of Rali and Shankar). They bring these pistus to the place of worship, a special
room is selected for keeping these pistus where they are duly worshipped every day. On the first day of such a worship, the virgins of the village get ready at six in the morning and start waking the supposed sleeping pistus.  

UTT UTTH PISTUS SOTRHYA, TERI JAGAN BELA HOI BHALYA.
TERI TOTO KARDI JHURPHURIAN, TERI MENA LENDI RAMJI DA NA.
UTTH SHAKERA SOTRHYA, UTTH UTTH RALIEY SOTRHYA.
TERI JAGAN BELA HO BHALYA, TERI TOTO KARDI JHURPURIAN.
TERI MENA LENDI RAMJI DA NA.

'Get up O idol, it is waking hour. The birds chirp outside and the female parrot is remembering god.'

Then the young virgin bring flowers to worship these pistus. While preparing to visit the gardens, the girls sing thus:

UTTH VO VEERA CHIAKUA KUTHERA, IBI VO DES CHIAKNA VI HEY NA.
UTTH VO VEERA CHIAKUA KUTHERA ION TO EQA 'OUTJOYON' VI HEY NA.

'Get up O brother, and gather flowers containers. But they are not available here. Get up O brother, and you yourself gather flower containers as even girls are not available for performing this religious task;

Enroute to fetch flowers, they sing thus:

**MEIN KNE BHABO PHULAN JO CHALIAN, PHULANI PHULAI PHULAA**

**MERI BHABO MERE BOLE**

**MORE SABAK SUNAIN MERI BHABO, MERE BOLE.**

'My brother's wife and I go to collect flowers, you grow 0 sister-in-law (Bhabi) like the flowers, as the peacock makes this prophecy.' While passing through the streets of Kangra town, they sing thus:

**Jgo Jago Shahar de logo**

**Dharami jo jage Bharhote,**

'Awake 0 people of the town, the holy men have got up.

Only the sinners are yet sleeping.'

Reaching the gardens they collect fresh and beautiful flowers for worship. They bring flowers and sing thus:

**SABH SABH SAKHIYAN PHUL LIEYAN**

**TEIN KITHU LAGAI EDDI DER,**

**PHULAN CHUGEND RAM JO MILYA**

**MEIN UTHU LGAI EDDI DER**

"All girls have brought flowers, where did you get so late?
Since Lord Rama met me, therefore, I got late."

While leaving the girls had shut the doors of the room where the pistus are placed. Now the pistus are asked, through a song, to open the door.
"What is this hustle and bustle in the temple of Lord Shiva?
That it is of the flowers. What does the prayer mean and
who do the people say? That it is the prayer to Lord Shiva
and people praise his victory.

Such activities go on until the last day. The
virgin maintains fast every Sunday. Five days before
the festival the virgin separate the two pistus and keep
them in different houses. They separate into two
groups, one belonging to Rali and the other one to
Shankar. Each member sleeps along with their respective
pistus.

After five day, they celebrate the marriage of
Rali and Shankar. Th girls themselves play different
roles. After the marriage ceremony the two pistus are
consigned to the river. Men, women and children dance
to the beat of drums as the pistus are immersed.

In Mandi, this episode is known as Lahula Mela.
Rali is here called lahaul, the daughter of a poor
father. The story is the same as that of Rali festival
of Kangra. Folklore connected with the Lahula festival
is sung on this day. It runs:-

19. ठाकुर, विधा यद्य, विधु का स्वप्न: हिथु-अयोध, जिभस, 
    जून 20 मई 1988 कृं 78
BISOWA RA DHIARA BAPUA HO,
JUGA JUGA YAD RAHEN A MAREA BAPUA HO,
BISOWA RA DHIARA BAPUA HO
PARLIA DHARA TE TIN JANEE UTRE
IE GAYE RE LAHULA RE REBARE BAPUA HO
BISOWA RA DHIARA BAPUA HO
NAHAI TA DHOI LAHAULA KHUB SAJAI HO,
SABH GAHNE PAHNI LAHAULA SUGHAN BANAI RO,
MUKI JANDE SARAEE CHAO, MARAE AA BAPUA HO,
BISOWA RA DHIA RA BAPUA HO.
AKIE PASAE LARAE RE PALI JAE SAJADI,
DUJAL PASAE LAHAULA RE ARTHI JAE SAJADI,
ANJHUA DAE HUGI JANDAE HAR BAPUA HO,
BISOWA RA DHIARA BAPUR HO,
JUGA JUGA YAD REHNA MAREA BAPUA HO,
BISOWA RA DHIARA BAPUA HO.

My Bapu Bisowa day will be remembered for long. In that ridge three men are coming down. They have asked for the hand of Lahaula. For marriage Lahaul was dressed with bridal costumes. But on account of this unsuitable she is feeling disgusted. Therefore she had ended her life. At one place, the palanquin of bridegroom is being decorated and on the other had her pyre is being decorated. The whole atmosphere has become sorrowful. The people were shedding tears. My Bapu, this day will be remembered for ever.
In Chamba Bisowa, the festival of Baisakhi is celebrated with great enthusiasm on the 1st Baisakh. On this day the daughters and sisters visit the house of their parents. On this day special bread of ragi called Pindri is prepared and relished all. Women dance in the courtyard of their houses. These dances are known as Ghuram dance. While dancing they sing Bisowa song:

AYA BISOWA AMA PANJE SAATE
MINGO SADA NAYA KOI HO.
AYA BISOWA AMA PANJE SAATE
BHAWA JO BHAJEI AMA SADOOARA HO.
BHAIU TA TAERA DIHAE NIKKA YANA,
APPU, ENA, APPU JANA HO
AYA BISOWA AMA PANJE SATTE,
BABU JO BHAI SEEI SADUARA HO.
BAPU TA TAERA DHIE BIRDH SIANA,
APPU ENA, APPU JANA HO.
PINDRI TA BHAI SEEI MAAE, AYA BISOWA,
BISOWAE DA SADA NA KOI HO.
PINDRI TA PINDRI MAAE, APPU LEHAIE,
PINDRI E PATHE MINJO DIATE HO.
JINHA BHAINA DE MAAE, BHAIE MARAE,
SEH RODIAN ANGAN DOUARA HO.
JINHA DHIAN DE MARAE AMA_BAPU,
SEH, RANDIAN MAILAE TEHARA HO.

20. Ibid. p.79.
The festival attracts people from far and wide. It is interesting how people wait for this festival every year, as it intoxicated by its very fragrance.

HARYALI:

Haryali (Kangra & Sirmur), Rhyali (Upper Shimla hills), Dakhraim (Jubbal and Kinnaur) and Shegtsum (Lahaul) is a festival of rainy season. It is celebrated on the 1st of Shrawan (16th July) corresponding to mid July to mark the advent of the monsoon and its songs are Laman and Jhuri.

This festival is known as Haryali (Greenery) i.e. the festival of the rains. Some ten days before this day, seeds of five or seven kinds viz. Wheat, barley etc. are mixed together and sown ceremoniously by the head of the family or the family priest in small baskets filled with earth, or in a small bed of earth prepared near the place where the household gods are kept. Water is sprinkled twice at the time of worship and the place is fenced off with cotton thread.

On the last day of Ashadha, one day before the actual celebrations, a kind of mock wedding is performed with a wooden hoe and, as many kinds of fruits of available are placed near the tender saplings. Amidst the tender growth of the seeds are placed clay images of lord Shiva and Parvati. The images are prepared and gaily painted by hand by the girls and women of the family.
When the images have been so placed, the mistress of the household dresses in her best and offers worship at the altar duly assisted by the family priest. The family priest chants: O Haryali, may thou ever remain in the green fields and may thou give the grace and take away sufferings of those who worship thee:

The remaining ceremony is performed next day i.e. on 1st of Shrawan called Skaranti. This day's worship is performed by the master of the house. He cuts the green stems, which after they have been offered to the gods, are worn on the head-dresses by the young and old alike. Some plants are kept on the upper frame of the doors. Haryali is regarded as one of the most important festivals and on this day even the cattle are given a rest. The farmers pick out lice, bugs, fleas and other parasites, locally called cheeren, from the cattle and put them into the cowdung balls which are carried away by the children and young outside the village and burnt with the shrubs. Those cow-dung balls, containing the blood sucking insects, are burnt because during this period cattle are usually infested with such parasites and it is believed that cattle get rid of these if burnt in this manner on first shrawana. In Sarkaghat area of Mandi this festival is called Chirnu. On this day every household give a bath to their cattle. They also

collect fleas and bugs clinging to their skin in an earthen pot and close its mouth. Then in the evening the villagers light a fire in the open place and every house throws in it their pots of bugs. Special foods are cooked on this day.

In some places of Himachal Pradesh this is called Haryali-di-saji. This is because in Mandi, Bilaspur, Solan, and some parts of Kangra it derives its name from Cheeren (an insect) and is called Cheeren-di-saji. Swinging ropes are tied to the strong branches of the trees where children and women swing and sing songs throughout the month.

In many places, this festival is also called Shiv Chautri. The family priest writes a short of Mandala having 16 squares on a piece of paper as shown below:

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<tr>
<th>7</th>
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The number (1 to 16) are written in the squares in such a way that their sum total vertically, horizontally or diagonally is thirty-four (locally called Shiv Chautri). This Chautri is pasted on the upper frame of the door on the 1st day of Shravana. It is believed that the Chautri drives away the evil spirits and ushers in happiness and prosperity to the occupants of the house.24

In some areas above Shimla and Kinnaur, Haryali is known as Dhakrain and in Rohru area it is called Dhaknol.25 In Kinnaur people go to the higher ranges to bring home zoagor and losar flowers to make garlands which are offered to the village deity. These flowers are then distributed among the villagers. The idol of the deity is taken out of the temple to the village ground in a palanquin by the attendants accompanied by the priest. There the people especially women, dressed in their best and profusely decorated with flowers, gather, while a band of musicians plays on the drums, cymbals and trumpets etc. the deity dances, swinging in his chair supported by the carriers. Sometimes, one of the 'guest-deites' dances alongside. Men in the crowd who are keen at dancing also join in. With the deity and the musicians in the centre, the dancers circle round, taking careful steps, singing couplets which the musicians render on their instruments.


The dancing continues till evening. New dancers are always ready to take the place of those who drop out fatigued, but revelry goes on from early afternoon till dusk when the god returns to his temple.

In the Nichar region of Kinnaur, when the fair is over in the evening, the villagers divide into two parties, called Kimpalaya and Bumpalaya. At midnight the Rumpalayas come down with splint-torches in their hands. The Kumpalayas await then in the temple premises. For distinction, every person from Rumpalaya wears a garland of flowers. Both the parties come face to face with the torches whirling round each others' head. The merry-making continues for about two to three hours.

In the Chergaon area of Rohru Tehsil of Shimla District this festival is called Dhaknol. On this occasion the villagers make small idols of cattle out of kneaded flour. In the afternoon the idols are taken to an open place near Chalala village. Women and children also accompany the men. The people from nearby villages also come with the same idols. Before the sun set, the elders place the images on the ground and the children beat them with sticks amidst cheer and shouts and thus the festival comes to an end.

In some areas on the day of Haryali or Rhyali fairs are held at which archery (Thoda) is played.26

In Lahaul, the festival is called Shegtrum. On this day, early in the morning totu (Balls of Sattu capped with butter) incense of cedar and marigold flowers are taken to the roof of the house by every householder and offered to Gophan or Guru Ghantal by throwing them in the air.

CHRAWAL:

This is a festival of fire and is celebrated on the first of Bhadon (August-September) and continues for one full month. On the 1st of Bhadon the people dig out a small circular piece of earth from their fields and put it on a slab or piece of wood. On the circular piece of earth, another slab is placed around which turf grass and flowers are fixed. This whole is called Chira. Then, this Chira is placed on the outer edge of the varandah. In the evening, the elders in the house worship Chira by burning incense and offering fruits. After this the burning splinters are placed on the Chira. Special foods are cooked on that day.

The children of the house sing Chira couplets. On the last day of the month, the eldest male member of the household again worships Chira and makes the offerings. Next day, that is, on the 1st Asoj, this Chira is removed and thrown on cow-dung heap from where it is taken to the fields. Some people also call it 'Prithvi Puja' i.e., earth worship.
The psychological idea behind this is to destroy the insects which attack the crops and fruits during the rainy season.

In some places, the people make a clay-idol of Shiva and worship it by burning an oil-lamp every evening in front of the image throughout the month. And at other places, the people burn oil-lamps before the idol of the village-deity throughout the month. They think that the gods take rest and sleep during this month.

The farmers do not yoke their oxen during those months. They take their cattle, sheep, mules and ponies to the high-land pastures. In Kullu, this festival is called Badranjo which means the festival held in Bhadon.

In Chopal region of Shimla District, Charawal festival is held in the name of a local deity named Shirgul Deota who is also known as Bijat Deota. On the day of the festival the people assemble in front of the temple during the night with burning wood splinter torches in their hands. They sing songs particularly meant for the occasion. They circle the temple three times. After that two men light their torches and the

celebrations begin. The priest of the temple worships the deity.

This is a celebration of fire which in local terms is known as Chira and Chrawal is its synonym. On this day the people throughout the area burn Chiras in the villages around their houses and temples. These Chiaras are lit throughout the month of Bhadon (August-September) and the aim of celebrating this festival appears to be protecting the crops from insects.

In Chamba this festival is called Pathroru ki Sankrant. It is indeed a festival of flowers. On this occasion the people indulge in general feasting but it is only the girls who dance on this day. A special dish called Pathroru (green leaves coated with gram flour, rolled and steam-baked) are cooked for the festival.

PHULECHI:

This is essentially a festival of flowers celebrated during the month of late Bhadon or in the month of Asoj. This festival is celebrated only in Kinnaur region on different dates. It is also called Ukhyang, which is a combination of two words U and Khyand. U means flower and Khyand means to look at flowers meaning thereby the delight in flowers. It is

after this festival that autumn begins. Various kinds of flowers are used in this festival of which Rongal, Liskarch, Khasbal and Gyalchi are more common.

Generally people celebrate this festival on the hill tops near their villages. One or two days before the festival a person from each household proceeds to the high hills to collect flowers. All the flowers are deposited in the cave called Udeoro just above the festival place. There, the oracle of the village deity, who is kept waiting for the arrival of the flower gatherers, proceeds first of all to worship and appease the mountain spirits and goddess Kali, supposed to be accompanying the party, by sacrificing a goat. Then they return to the village singing the Ukhyang song.

Next day the entire population of the villages congregate at a fixed place near the fair ground. The village deity is taken out of the temple to the ground in a procession preceded by the temple band. The flowers brought from the hills are woven into garlands. These garlands are handed over to the priest to be offered to the deity, thereafter these are distributed among the people. The priest utters the forecasts about crops, changes of seasons etc. Afterwards the flower gatherers go to the cave and bring flower loads to be taken to their homes. In the evening they return to the village and sing and dance in the santhang (temple courtyard) with the deity. Next day also people dance in the
Santhang for some time and the festival concludes.

**General:**

The majority of the population in Himachal Pradesh are Hindus forming 95.8%. Out of Hinduism developed a new religion of Buddhism. Buddhists form 1.2% who live in the border area of Lahaul, Spiti and Kinnaur. The virile religion of Islam which came from the north-west in the wake of invading forces over eight centuries ago had profound influence on life in many parts of India. In the latter medieval period some muslims came to the hills as traders or fugitives and settled here and there. Some of them took the agriculture. Now they form 1.6% of the population. They observe their festivals like Id-Ul-Zuha, Muharam, Idul-Fiter, Id-Milad-ul-Nabi in their traditional manner and therefore no special reference is required to be made here.

Sikh religion had its beginning in the early sixteenth century as a reformist movement in Punjab and was led by Guru Nanak who preached oneness of god and equality of all men. The Sikhs forms 1.2% of the population. Their important festivals are Hola, Baisakhi and Guru Parb. These are held at Poanta Sahib.

Christianity came to these hills with the coming of British, when the Christian missionary started their work in the middle of the 19th century. Christians in Himachal Pradesh are mostly Indian converts and they
form 0.1% of the population. They celebrate Christmas and Easter.

In Himachal Pradesh all religions enjoy full equality and the followers of each faith celebrate their festivals with traditional gaiety.

To the many festivals, ancient and traditional, has been added a modern one—that of the Republic Day on January 26. Its celebrations are particularly spectacular in Shimla and at the District headquarters. A magnificent police parade is held at which Governor takes salute. At times deotas are also brought to the celebrations at Shimla. Folk dances are performed. Himachal Day is celebrated on 15th April every year. On this day in 1948, 30 odd hill states were integrated into one unit which came to be known as Himachal Pradesh.

1st November is celebrated as Greater Himachal Day. On this day in 1966 Punjab hill areas of Kangra, Kulu, Lahaul-Spiti and Shimla Districts were integrated with Himachal Pradesh. On 25th January, 1971, Himachal Pradesh was granted full statehood. This day is also celebrated with great pomp and show. To the people at large these new national and regional festivals have hardly any consideration but in governmental circle these are celebrated with great show.
IN GENERAL:

In general it may be said that the belief in their deotas is very real among the people of Himachal Pradesh. The occasion when the idol is animated by the presence of the god are celebrated by festivals and fairs attended by all the worshipper of the god and also by visitors from outside the village, so that social life of the country is closely interwoven with its easy-fitting religion. The idol is carried out of the temple by the priests and attendants, and his band of musicians accompanies blaring uncouth music from drums and cymbals and trumpets and is carried to the village greens, where a large gathering awaits him in the shape of idols brought from neighbouring villages with their escorts of attendents, worshippers and musicians. All people dress in their best and profusely decorate themselves with flowers. The deota dances, oscillates up and down in his chair by his carriers who of course are under his influence, and sometimes on of his guest deotas or devis dances alongside of him. The contagion extends to the men in the crowd or to such at any rate as are expert dancers; they join hands and form a ring, the god and his musicians in the centre, and circle round with a graceful step, shouting the words of the airs which the bandsmen are playing on their uncouth instruments. This merry revel goes on from early afternoon till dusk when the idol return to their temples.

In the festivals of Himachal Pradesh we see that the ancient ceremonies have survived which are not usually found in the plains and several of those are of great interest.