FAIRS

The origin of fairs goes back to remote times. They are the institutions established to centralize the supply and demand of merchandise at a particular place and time. They are considerable events in the life of the districts where they take place, for people come there from remote regions to buy and sell and to visit the various side-shows which accompany the fairs. Apart from their commercial importance, they have a religious and traditional aspects, and are not without their lighter side, people take compulsory leave from their daily routine, agricultural or otherwise, and adorn themselves with their best. They assemble in the open to sing and dance to enjoy the moment of life.

In these congregations the people unfold their talent by abandoning themselves to the lifting tunes of hill orchestra. This abandonment in ecstacy to the higher values of music and dance, standing throughout night vigils, does not satiate the participants and with ever increasing zeal and enthusiasm these congregations conclude with a more eager waiting for the next occasion.

The concept of a fair in Himachal Pradesh is quite different from that in other parts of the country. The fairs here are held at natural sites in or near temples or on hill-tops, at a time of religious feast and under the control of priests, chiefs or officials in order to guarantee security. The cluster of shops, chain of merry-go-round and idyllic sports do not adorn the fair venue here. The community god and their devotees form a congregation which according to tradition environs create a fair atmosphere and gods with their devotees dance and participate on such occasion, the sanctity of which is preserved with zealousy. Some are commercial or agricultural fairs. Most of these are held in an atmosphere of eclat and gaiety displaying peoples' traditional urge for a get-together in a style unique to the hills.

Every fair and festival in Himachal Pradesh has a legendary origin which is the governing factor in each of such gatherings. Hill people are very much in love with their tradition and, therefore; they tend to perpetuate their social life in its original style.

Fairs as a media of mass recreation are very popular in Himachal Pradesh. All the year round there is a regular cycle of fairs held in various parts of the State. They may be divided into following types:

1. Seasonal fairs.
3. Trade fairs
4. Fair connected with festival.

Men, women and children of all ages, classes and creed flock in hundred and enjoy the numerous fascinating feature of the fair-wrestling, archery, singing and dancing etc. They play on instruments such as Kettle Drums, Drums, Trumpets. To a lover of culture, a Himachal fair is an aesthetic treat.

Nearly every hamlet has a fair during summer and care is exercised to prevent adjacent hamlets from having their festival on the same day. There is almost continuous succession of fairs. The village deity is carried out of temple with music to the village greens where there is a congregation of other gods and people. The deity dance in the centre. The people form a ring round the deity, singing, dancing and shouting bustily. Women with gayhead dress Dathu and check plaids form bright groups of spectators on terraces succeeds in hitting his adversary's leg between the knee and ankle, he envinces his joy by dancing on one leg and flashing his bow high in the air with shouts to which spectators often respond. The adversary then takes the bow and arrow from the archer and tries his own skill. Thus the play goes on. Another interesting feature of this fair is wrestling locally ccalled chinj. In fact
Wrestling and archery in the fair is held to revive the old sense of chivalry and to create enthusiasm among the people.

In Balson and Chopal areas of Shimla District there is a queer custom. On the eve of Bishu fair the organiser invite the people of other areas by putting up a thorn fencing around their water sources (Water springs) and inform by sporting on the top of the ridge regarding their misdeed. There is no compulsion if the person is caught during this, if he is not caught the people of that area are bound to attend the fair.

The people generally assemble to pay their homage to their deity Shirgul and no particular dresses are put on except by the parties who participate in archery game. Both the hosts and quests parties display archery between themselves to bring forth the vitality and to arouse chivalry.

In the past when there were no means of communications and sources of entertainment these fairs were started. These fairs sometimes solve social, economic and political problems of the area.
BISHU FAIR

In Kinnaur, Shimla hills and Sirmour, Baisakhi mela is called Birshu. In Kullu it is called Birshu and in Bilaspur, Kangra and Chamba this mela is called Bisowa. There are inumerable fairs held throughout the year and any visitor can see the colourful hill folk perform folk-dances to the strains of the hill orchestra. Most of the fair are in commemoration of some events whose origins are lost in the legends and as such have a religious significance. One of the biggest fairs is Bishu or Bisowa fair, the fair of the spring season or say Baisakhi, held on their best and gather together in the fair grounds. The village deity is carried in a palanquin by two men. The palanquin is preceded by the temple musicians known as Turi or Dhaki dancing and beating drums, kettle drums and blowing trumpets. This is followed by the priest and other men. As soon as the procession reaches the village green hill top, the site of the fair, the village god starts dancing oscillating up and down in his palanquin on the shoulders of his carriers. The excitement spreads among the people and they also start singing gracefully and dancing, holding sticks and swords in their hands. The god and his musicians sometime stand in the centre and circle round and round, shouting the words of the air while the bandsmen are playing. After this people from the crowd join

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hands and dance gracefully. Along with this dancing goes on what the people call Thothe-ka-Khel a test of skill on archery. The players put on long boots and thick trousers. One takes a large bow, which novice can not draw, and an arrow made of reed with flattened ends; he draws the arrow back to the ear and tries to hit the legs of the other man standing about ten yards away moving his legs briskly to and fro. If the archer succeeds in hitting his adversary’s leg between the knee and ankle, he enunciates his joy by dancing on one leg and flashing his bow high in the air with shouts to which spectators often respond. The adversary then takes the bow and arrow from the archer and tries his own skill. Thus the play goes on. Another interesting feature of this fair is wrestling locally called chinj. In fact wrestling and archery in the fair is held to revive the old sense of chivalry and to create enthusiasm among the people.

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5. Sirmur State Gazetteer 1934, Lahore, 1939, p.68.
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Bishu fair is held throughout Himachal Pradesh under different local name of the fair. The list of such fairs is very long. These are held on different dates starting from middle of Chet (end of March) and go on upto the end of Jeth (mid June). These are celebrated according to local customs, tradition and fashion of the region where they are held. Each fair has its own story of origin and tradition. A few of these are detailed below.

On Baisakhi day in Chamba town Sui fair is held in the memory of the sacrifice of Rani Naina Devi of Raja Sahilavarman of Bharmour. The story goes that in the early 10th century A.D. Sahilavarman (C.920 A.D.) conquered the lower Ravi Valley. He shifted his capital from Brahmaur to a place which he named it Chamba after his daughter Champavati and in the later period came to be known as Chamba. There was no good and convenient water supply and the raja was anxious to meet this need. He therefore has a water course made from the Sarola stream round the shoulder of the Shah Madar Hill, behind the town. For some reason the water refused to enter the channel prepared for it, and, in accordance with the superstitious notions of the time, this was ascribed to supernatural causes. The spirit of the stream must be propitiated and the Brahmins, on being consulted replied that the victim must be either the rani or her son. Another tradition runs that the raja himself had a dream in which he was directed to offer up his son. Whereupon the rani pleaded to be accepted as a substitute. The raja was unwilling to accede to her wish, and wanted to offer some one else, but she insisted that if there must be a sacrifice she should be the victim. Her wish prevailed, and accompanied by her maidens, and bare-headed as for Sati, she wended her way up the hill to the spot near the village of Balota, where the water-course leaves the main

stream. There a grave was dug and she was buried alive. The legend goes on to say that when the grave was filled in the water began to low, and has ever since flowed abundantly.

Yugakara, the son and successor of Sahilavarman mentions his mothers name in the only copper plate of his reign which has been found. It was Naina Devi and she may possibly have been the Rani referred to. In memory of her devotion a small shrine was afterwards erected by her husband on the spot, at the top of the present flight of steps, where she is said to have sat down to rest. A mela was also appointed to be held yearly from the fifteenth of Chet to the first of Baisakh. It is called the Suhi Mela and is attended only by women and children, who in their gayest attire, climb the steps to the shrine, and they sing the rani's praises and present their floral offerings. They were all entertained at the raja's expense on this occasion. After the merger of Chamba state into Himachal Pradesh the expenses, on account of this entertainment are borne by the Municipal Committee, Chamba. The steps are not ancient having been constructed by Rani Sarda, queen of Raja Ajit Singh A.D.1794-1808.


There can be little doubt that legend is founded on fact such a sacrifice was quite in keeping with the spirit of the times, and it is noteworthy that the mela has been held from time immemorial affording strong proof of the truth of the story as related. It is significant too that although a death in the royal family during any other mela necessitated its immediate suspension this did not apply in the case of the suhi mela which was never interrupted.  

The fair is held on the last three days of Chet (April) every year. Last day of the fair is known as Sukrat. In case the Sukrat falls on Friday, it is celebrated the next day. The day is considered to have a dying effect. Years ago when superstitions among the people there were still strong, cutting of fruits and branches of trees and collecting of green leafy vegetables from the gardens or from the field are not done on Friday. This is because of the consideration that the tree or the field would dry up. With such beliefs Sukrat is not held on Friday so that there should be hope of the continuation of the fair in future.

12. Ibid., p.110.
On the evening of closing day Sukrat song is sung. This song is connected with the fair. Some people call Sukrat as the night of sorrow and some say that Sukrat is a happy night. This song express happiness and prosperity to all.

First of all the girls visit the shrine of Devi and offer prayers and sing in praise of Devi. After this they come down at the Naun by the side of the main road and there they sing churais-songs of the season. Naun denotes a place where the streamwater was brought in a channel.

In three days of the fair Gaddi and girls belonging to Bharmour and adjoining areas are entertained by the Municipal Committee, Chamba by serving them free food, sweet and money. They sing and dance there.

The people from outside do not attend the fair because only women and children participate in it. Besides this harvesting of wheat starts.

Naina Devi Fair

The most notable place of worship in the Bilaspur district is the temple of Naina Devi, situated on the hill top of that name which rises some 1,000 mts. above the sacred town of Anandpur in the Hoshiarpur district, and which is so conspicuous a feature of the landscape viewed from the plain country of Roper and Una district of Himachal Pradesh. Naina Devi temple commands a magnificent and panoramic view of Holy Anandpur Sahib Gurudawara on one side and the beautiful picturesque view of Govindsagar lake on the other. It is 70 kms. from Bilaspur.

There are conflicting versions about the origin of the temple. The mythical tale prevalent among the people about the goddess Naina Devi is that once Daksha

Prajapati invited gods and kings to join in a great Yajana, he was performing. On this occasion he did not invite his daughter Sati who married Lord Shiva without his consent. She was greatly hurt when she came to know about it. She told her husband that she would join the Yajana even she was not invited. Shiva advised her not to go but she left for her father's house. On reaching there she found her parents were not happy with her presence. That she could not tolerate. For retribution sake, she jumped into the Yajana Kunda and died. On learning this her husband Lord Shiva reached there and took her body on his shoulder and in a horrible outrage started a tandava dance, which was to bring deluge on earth. To save the world from annihilation gods prayed before Lord Vishnu. It was only then that Vishnu cut the dead body of Sati into many pieces. These pieces fell at different places. People believe that Sati's eyes fell at a place which came to be known as Naina Devi.

The Chronicles of Kahlur-Bilaspur mention that the temple was built by Raja Vir Chand, the founder of Kahlur principality somewhere in the 9th century A.D. Here again the legend says that a cowherd (Ahir) named Naina was grazing his cattle on the hill where the temple now stands. He observed that his cows were draining

   ii) हिन्दू महापुराण, मोरेस प्रेस, श्रीरामपुर, 1951, पृ 9-16
their milk on a white stone. He informed Raja Vir Chand, who proceeded to the spot. He dug out the spot and a beautiful image of goddess Durga was found during the excavation. A temple was built to enshrine the image and the place was called Naina Devi to commemorate the Ahir who had provided the first information.  

The story goes that Guru Govind Singh (1666-1708) before embarking on his campaign against the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb (1656-1707) came upto Naina Devi in 1699 AD to seek the countenance, of the goddess to his enterprise. He brought with him a Brahmin of Banaras, named for his piety and learning, on whose advise a burnt offering (hom) was made of many tons of ghee, sugar etc. The fire was kept burning for months, until at last the goddess appeared. Th Guru was terror-striken, but managed to present his sword, which the goddess touched, and then disappeared. The Brah-man pronounced the interview satisfactory, except for the fact that the Guru had shown fear at the sight of the goddess. This defect could only be removed by the sacrifice of one of the Guru's sons. The Guru was willing that this should be carried out, but the mother of his four sons flatly refused to give up any one of them. A compromise was eventually made by the sacrifice of one of the guru's followers and when this was completed the goddess appeared once more and promised the Guru that his sect should prosper.  

Now Gujjars inhabit Naina Devi area. They proclaim the legend of founding the temple by Raja Vir Chand and cowherd Naina as correct. Some of them claim to be the descendents of the same Ahir. They feel that previously they used to have prayers at the temple but afterwards handed over this duly to the present clan of priests. Now the priests enjoy this privilege and get the money which is offered to the goddess. For a long time these priests used to give the Ahirs a part of the money offered to the goddess. This was in token of the proprietary right.

With the founding of temple the people from the neighbouring areas started to come on pilgrimage. Necessity was felt to start annual or biannual religious functions. People generally believe that these religious gatherings came into being during the life time of Raja Vir Chand (C 900 AD). With the passage of time these gatherings became permanent features and assumed the shape of fair though it may be on a smaller scale at that time.

Three fairs are annually held here on the top of Naina Devi hill where goddess's temple stands magnanimously. Two fairs are held on Navratra days in Chet and Asauj. But the most important and the popular


A religious fair is held in Sharwana (July-August). This fair starts on Shrawana Ashtami of waning moon and continues for ten days every year.

According to the priest of the temple, in the remote past there used to be only two fairs during the Chet and Asauj Navratras in a year. As far the Shrawana Ashtami fair they relate a hearsay which has come to them from their ancestors.²² There was a Sodhi family at Anandpur who used to visit the temple during the Navratras. Once an old woman of the family declined to visit the shrine on these crowded occasions and instead wished to go on a pilgrimage on the Shrawana Ashtami. By and by the number of pilgrims increased to such an extent that it ultimately become a regular fair. Below the temple is a tank which is called Sodhi-Ka-Talab from where a long flight of stone steps starts towards the temple. This tank was built by the same Sodhi family, as tradition says.

The reason advanced for the popularity of this fair is, that by this time people of various occupations in the plains are free from their work and have ample time to attend to such pilgrimages. But the farmers are busy in their field work during the two Navratra's.

People start coming to the temple right from the Shukla Pratipada of the Shrawana month. Hindus, Sikhs

and Muslims from far flung areas of Punjab, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh visit the temple to pay their homage to the goddess of eyes. Some of the devotees cross the tall end of the journey to the temple by prostrating themselves on the roadside and almost crawling which is known as Sastang Dandvata. Thousands of devotees and pilgrims are seen chanting hymns, singing devotional songs and offering prayers during the mela.

Mostly pilgrims avoid to stay in the small town for more than a day or two and get back to their homes after offering prayers. Only these, who have suitable arrangement for stay extended to them by their Pandas remain there for more days. About seventy percent of the congregation come to the fair from the plains of the Punjab, and about 10% from Delhi, U.P. and other states. The remaining comprise of beggars, local villagers, officials and traders.

While wading through streams and ponds pilgrims often throw a few coins in the water. These are collected by beggars. Some pilgrims especially old women come on mules. Some devotees lie down on their way to temple in obeisance of the goddess ad continue this hard process till they reach the shrine and finally submit their humble prayers. The pilgrims are called dandanti.

23. H.P. District Gazetteer: Bilaspur, Shimla, 1975,
The pilgrims during Naina Devi fair undergo volunteer ordeals to appease the goddess in lieu of the fulfilment of their desires or to seek her kind blessings to cast away evils. The devotees come to temple in groups while singing various devotional songs and hymns in praise of goddess of eyes. In the olden times, besides offering gold and silver miniature umbrella (Chhatras), flags (dhawajas) cocomits, halwa and a buffalo used to be sacrificed by being rolled down away by an erstwhile ruler of Bilaspur for worshipping the goddess, but now this practice of worshipping the goddess has been entirely changed. Now-a-days the pilgrims make offerings of coins, gold and dhwajas to the goddess for having her blessings.

Where people congregate for leisure, pleasure and pilgrimage the market comes up. As such a large number of shopkeepers, traders, hawkers and peddlers come to the fair to have their brisk trade. Besides this confectioners, photographers, bangle-sellers and Chatwalas have their hey day. The pilgrims consider it auspicious to buy something on this holyday. Women buy combs, bangles, collyrim, mirrors and sweets for the children.

It is staunchly believed that if one pays one's reverentful homage during ten day of Shrawna Ashtami fair at Naina Devi, one seeks benign blessing of kind hearted
goddess who is held in esteem by lakhs of her firm devotees who mainly constitute from the northern India.

A tragedy occurred in the last week of August 1978 when due to heavy rains for days there were landslides and about hundred acres of land below Naina Devi temple caved in and about a hundred houses, below were buried. The temple was in danger.

**MINJAR**

**CHAMBA'S FESTIVAL OF RAINS**

Shrawan is the month of the rainy season in India. At this time when the monsoons break all over the country, rain festivals are celebrated with local custom, colour and tradition in different regions.

Such festivals are held to welcome the rains after the hot dusty summer and to pray for the prospects of good crops.

Essential as the monsoon, is, it is even more necessary in the hill areas, where the crops are almost entirely dependent on the rains.

Thus every year in the second fortnight of the Bikrami month of Shrawan, Minjar-ka-mela, a rain festival, is celebrated for a week in Chamba, a town in Himachal Pradesh.

Chamba town is picturesquely situated on a plateau above the junction of the Ravi and the Sal or Saho. It is built round a rectangular green which here, as elsewhere in the Himachal Pradesh is indicated by the name of Chawgan.

The Ravi is essentially the main stream of Chamba. Its ancient name, Iravati (Refreshing) is found in Sanskrit literature. In the Rigveda the Ravi is mentioned under the name of Parusni. In Chamba the Ravi is called Ranti, in the Central portion Ravva, and in the lower part it is known by the name Ravi which it bears in the plains. Thus we meet with the intermediate stages through which the original name has become changed to its modern form. In the Vanshavali the river is regularly referred to by its Sanskrit name Iravati. In some of the copper-plates it is called Rayva, but usually it is simply indicated as Noi (Skr. Nadi) "the river".

26. Rigveda, VII, 18,63, 15; X, 75.
There is no reason to doubt the tradition that Chamba was founded by Sahilavarman (920-940 AD) as two Copper-plates grants issued by his son and grandson, are dated from Chamba as the seat of government. In these inscriptions the name of the town is spelt Champaka. Its earliest mention is literature occurs in the 
Rajastrangini. In connection with the expenditure of Ananta-deva of Kashmir (102-1063 AD).

Originally the principality (Chamba) consisted only of the area around Brahmaur, the old capital. But it was greatly expanded by one of its ruler Raja Sahilavarman, who reigned in the 10th century (C.920-940 AD). It is said that Raja Sahilavarman had an only daughter who was dearly loved by him. The princess took a great liking to the plateau which stands by the right bank of the Ravi river and is the present site of Chamba town and asked her father to build dwelling there and make it the capital. Threafter, Raja Sahilavarman after settling with the Brahmins who owned the land on the plateau built a town there and named it Chamba after his beloved daughter. A less romantic explanation for the name of the town is that it is derived from the Chamba tree (michelia Champaka) which grew in abundance in its

29. Vogel, J.Ph., p.10. op.cit.
30. Rajatrangini, VII, 21 S.
31. Khandalavala, Karl. "Princess's Choice" in History 
neighbourhood. It seem very likely that the name of the goddess (Champavati) is derived from that of the tree, so that this in any case would be the origin of the name of the town. 32

The Raja and the inhabitants of Chamba asked the saint to make arrangements to enable everyone to visit the sacred Hari Rai temple.

The saint told the Raja and his subjects to assemble at the Champavati temple. Here, with the assistance of some Brahmin from Benaras, he arranged a Yajna for seven days.

The Brahmins prepared a cord of seven different colours and named it Minjar. When the Yajna was completed, the river changed its course and everyone was able to visit the Hari Rai temple.

Some sources put forward a different story. According to it when Raja Sahilavarman made Chamba his capital then the river Ravi used to flow very near to the town surrounded by maize field of the inhabitant of that area. During the rainy season the river generally used to destroy the crop and flood the town. The damage to the crops was a great loss to the people as well as to the chief as the people were unable to pay their

32. Vogel, J.Ph., p.10. op.cit.
revenue to their ruler. The raja was much worried and he consulted his courtiers and Brahmins. After a great deal of consultation it was decided to worship the river and offer sacrifice to the god of water. It is said though ridiculous, that a damsel with new clothes and ornaments was offered to the river.33

It is mentioned that after this the river receded and on account of flood in the river there was no damage to maize crop. But the custom of this sacrifice remained continued for many years. It is contemptuous and laughable stroy.

Named after a fair princess and reminiscented of a tree with fragrant flowers, Chamba evokes romantic feelings among people who admire this jewel of Himachal Pradesh. A folk song from the valley tells that "the lovely one feels happy in the mountains of Chamba, which are bathed in showers of rain". Situated in the bosom of the middle Himalayas, Chamba has preserved its identity inviolate, during the period when the plains were ravaged by fanatical hords which poured into India from the mountain fastness of Central Asia.

Since Chamba mostly remained unaffected by the alien influence, it affords a wonderful opportunity to study its age old cultural heritage amongst which Minjar-Ka-Mela is one of the most important fairs of the region.

This fair is connected with the worship of rain and land which according to legend, was one prevalent amongst the local aborigines.

The fact that the festival begins and ends on a Sunday is possibly connected with sun worship still prevalent in some of the interior regions.

There are many beliefs regarding the origin of the festival. Some believe that it is celebrated to worship varuna—the God of water.\(^3^4\)

According to legend, in the tenth century, the river Ravi flowed through Chamba town (where the present Chowgan is situated), and the Champavati temple stood on the right bank of the river and the Hari Rai Temple on its left.

At that time a saint lived in the Champavati temple who used to swim across the river every morning to worship at the Hari Raj temple.

After sometime people raised their voice against this custom. Then this was immediately stopped. But the pre-element succeeded in substituting buffalo for the damsel.\(^3^5\) This custom remained in practice but ultimately this was also abandoned probably in the year

35. Ibid. P.1.
At this the Brahmins again had consultation and then decided to offer Nariyal (Coconut) to the river Ravi.  

Here the views of J.C. French I.C.S. are worth quoting. He writes that "Once a year in Chamba there is a picturesque ceremony which dates back to ancient times. All the ranas and chiefs and village headmen come into Chamba town to renew their homage to the Raja. Ornamental arches in the form of gates with towers are put up on the four roads which lead to the four provinces of Chamba, and they are decorated with the appropriate local symbols, so that the men of each province come into Chamba under their own sign. A great durbar is held where the Raja sits in state with his mesahibs (peers), soldiers and ministers, and receive homage. Afterwards there are sports, both ancient and modern. Among the former are wrestling and archery, pole and tent pegging". Perhaps he refers to this fair.

According to another tradition, when Raja Pratap Singh Verman of Chamba returned home after defeating the Raja of Kangra (1559-86) his subjects presented him with sheaves of maize as a token of their love and gratitude.

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The Raja kept these sheaves in his place as sacred. To celebrate his victory, he held a festival in Chamba, later known as Minjar-ka-mela, where he distributed the minjar or the sheaves of maize.

Every year the Raja and his subjects celebrated this festival to commemorate the victory. During the festival the people offered sheaves of minjar or maize to the ruler who had fed them so well.

Later on the people began to present these sheaves of maize amongst themselves, and it became an important feature of the festival.

Dr. J. Hutchison of the Church of Scotland Mission, Chamba and author of History of 'Punjab Hill States' informs us about the celebration of Minjar-ka-mela in the early decade of this century. In his words 'the essential part of the mela consists in the throwing into the Ravi of a male buffalo as a sacrifice to the river god. A week before the time comes round each person has a silk tassel made, which is attached to some part of the dress and worn. This is called a Minjar.

On the day appointed, the Raja and his court proceed to the spot where the mela has been held from time immemorial. There a great concourse of people assemble. The raja gives the signal by throwing into the river a coconut, a rupee, drub grass, and some flowers and
thereupon the live buffalo is pushed into the flood. The Raja throws his minjar in after the buffalo and all the people follow his example. The animal is then closely watched as its fate is believed to foreshadow prosperity or adversity for the coming year to the reigning family and the State. If carried away and drowned, the event is regarded as propitious, the sacrifice having been accepted. If it crosses the river and gets out on the other bank, this also is propitious—the sins of the town having been transferred to the other side of the river. But if it emerges on the name side, coming evil is portended to the State. Being a devoted thing, the animal, if it escapes, is retained till the following year, doing no work, and is then cast in again and so on till finally carried away and drowned. People remember a buffalo which was thrown into the river annually for about ten years and was saved from the ordeal after the practice was abandoned. The buffalo is provided at the expense of the State. This mela is probably of aboriginal origin and connected with the earth worship, which was so prevalent among the aborigines of the hills. It was probably intended to secure good rains and a bountiful harvest.

Once there was an acute famine in Chamba. Practically no sheaves of maize were available. The Raja went to some wise Brahmins who, after consulting

the sacred scriptures, suggested silken tassels as a substitute for maize sheaves.

Thus the minjar festival was celebrated, and afterwards it rained for several days, resulting in a bumper crop. Since then the festival has been known as the festival of rain, with the Rajas of Chamba taking an active part in it and offering prayers to the rain god.

During the week long celebrations everyone in Chamba wears a silken tassel with stalks of minjar—the maize plant as a symbol of their prayers for a bountiful harvest.

Minjars are sent to friends and relatives together with fruits, sweets and money. On the third Sunday, a mass ceremony is held on the banks of the river Ravi, and minjars are immersed in the river.

The immersion ceremony, which is the most important part of the festival, is preceded by a colourful procession which starts from the Raghunath temple in the ancient Akhan Chandi Palace of the Rajas of Chamba.

The procession is led by the Chief guest, generally a minister, an followed by thousands of the hill people, a hill orchestra, brass bands and bagpipes.
Previously the Raja of Chamba led the procession, seated in an elaborate howdah on a painted elephant decorated with ornaments. The idol of Raghunath, the presiding deity of Chamba, used to be carried in a gaily decorated palanquin in the centre of a mile-long procession.

All along the route from the palace through the main bazar of the town to the river bank, thousands of gaily dressed hill people pay homage to lord Raghunath.

In the days gone by, the procession consisted of decorated horses, shehnais, folk dancers, khidmatgars (Servants) in their traditional garb and palanquins carrying musicians.

When the procession reaches the place of immersion on the river bank, the chief guest stands on a decorated platform.

Amidst the chanting of mantras, he throws his minjar, a rupee, a coconut, some drub (grass) and flowers into the river as an offering to the rain-god. After this, all the people throw their minjars and offerings into the river.

Until quite recently a male buffalo was also consigned to the waters as a sacrifice to the water god. A few folk-songs are sung and the ceremony comes to an end.
Betal leaves and perfume are offered to the Chief guest and others of high rank as a symbol of good will. The procession then returns amidst singing and dancing to the Chawgan. Here people from different parts of Chamba sing seasonal songs in praise of the rain and water gods. Certain songs peculiar to the Minjar Fair of Chamba called *Kunjari* are sung with great gaiety. It will not be out of place to mention here that previously a women fair known as Bhajari used to be held for two days on Monday and Tuesday following. The peak day of the fair near the Narsimha temple below the right of stair leading to the Chammunda temple. Now the women too take part in the main festival at Chawgan and the Bhajari has ceased to exist. Minjar is considered an auspicious and happy occasion and the families where marriages have been recently held celebrate the occasion with great enthusiasm.\(^{41}\)

Previously the Raja of Chamba, in his traditional dress of gold brocade and preceded by drums and trumpets, was carried in procession across the Chawgan Maidan to inaugurate the fair. Now that the state no longer exists, the Deputy Commissioner of the district is taken out in procession. There is an opinion that an official is a rather poor substitute for the splendidly clad Raja, who apart from the prestige of

\(^{41}\) Randhawa, M.S. *Travels in Western Himalayas.* Delhi. 197, p.135-36.
his ancestor, was an impressive. Moreover, the sheddy western clothes worn by the officials wholly fails to create an aura of grandeur to which citizen of Chamba had been accustomed.

During the Mela, a volume of businessmen increases manifold. Thousands of people from far of places like Kangra, Jammu and Punjab come to participate in the fair. The businessmen in order to make the best use of the opportunity, establish huts and other moving shops in different parts of the town. Particularly in Chawgan area. The visitors mostly from the plains would hardly forget to buy of Chamba Chapels, a tin of honey or the other reputed products of Chamba whereas the villagers mostly buy utensils, cosmetics and other durables. 41(a)

**DUSSEHRA AT KULLU**

Dussehra, commemorating the victory of Lord Rama over Ravana, is celebrated all over India but the Dussehra of Kullu called Dashmi by the people of Kullu has got its own significance. The celebration continue for a week every year. Dussehra at Kullu commences on the tenth day of the rising moon i.e. on Vijay Dashmi day itself and continues for seven days. There is no retold of Ramayana, but the assemblage of gods and goddesses from the interior of the valley at Sultanpur is for annual meet.

In the absence of archaeological or literary sources it is not certain when Sultanpur was founded, but it appears to have been, if existent as insignificant hamlet until the reign of Raja Jagat Singh (1637-1672 AD), when it was within the territory of the Lugwnuttee (Lag), rana whose brother Sultan Chand, was the ruler of the filage, to which he apparently gave his own name. Jagat Singh, who ruled in Kullu during the later period of the Emperor Shah Jahan and the earlier years of Aurangzeb, seized the whole of the country up the Sarvari valley towards the Bhabu pass and Sultan Chand being killed when defending Sultanpur. The territory of Lag was annexed. Having thus completed the conquest of the whole of the upper Kullu valley, Jagat Singh transferred his capital from Na<gar to Sultanpur, probably about 1660 AD and built a palace for himself and a temple for Raganath there.

Dr. J. Ph. Vogel opines that the conquest of Sultanpur a century earlier, in the reign of Raja Bahadur Singh (1532-1559), who also called himself Sultan Singh, and mention that the city is said by same to have been founded by Sultan Singh. Dhalpur the venue of present day Kullu Dusschra is said to have been founded by Raja Bahadur Singh but he named it after his


43. Punjab District Gazetteer: Kangra District, Part II-Kullu, 1918, p.28.

44. Ibid., p.28.
brother Mian Dhal Singh who was a great warrior and gave his brother many victories, they used Dhalpur Maidan as a military cantonment giving training to their men.

Dhalpur, which is the venue of colourful Kullu Dussehra Fair is a place of legendary significance and historical importance. Situated at a confluence of the great river Beas and its one of the chief tributaries the Sarvari. In Rigveda Beas river is mentioned as Vipash. It is also mentioned as Arjikiya. Dhalpur Maidan has come to us with different names. In the remote past it was known as 'Thara Kardu ri Soh'. Soh is a flat and plain place surrounding or in front of a temple where deota holds its periodical gatherings and celebrates its annual fairs, and Thara Karda are traditionally the first eighteen deotas who first of all came to be worshipped in the valley. A legend goes that once the great Vedic Rishi Jamadagni was returning to Kullu through Spiti after visiting Kailash. After staying at the top of Hamta pass for some time he started his journey towards Malana village via Chandrakhani. Rishi had with him, eighteen murtis i.e.

46. Rig Veda, Mandal 3, Sukt 23, Mantra 1.
47. Ibid., Mandal 8, Sukt, 53, Mantra 11.
idols of gods placed in a *karandu*, a basket, when he was at the top of Chandrakhani mountain a heavy wind blow, the idols of the *deotas* were flown away from the basket and scattered all over Kullu valley. The idols, wherever they fell, appeared in the form of gods and the people began to worship them. Thara Kardu i.e., the eighteen gods subsequently made Dhalpur Maidan as their central place of meetings where they used to sit together at least once a year during the days new forming Dusschra festival.

There is still an other legend after the name of this Maidan. According to this legent 'Shada' is only a shorter form of *Katagil Shad*, which is another Dhalpur name of this Maidan. Now, according to local parlance Shad is 'big field' which Dhalpur Maidan certainly is. But what Katagli actually means is a matter of research. Katagli may be a corruption of Sanskrit *kartargiri* which might have remained a popular name for deotas of this region. The name *Katagli Shad* that is, the field of gods might have been prevalent after thara Kardu ri Soh, but before Shada as explained above. The fact gives support to the claim that Dhalpur Maidan where the fair is held, has remained a place of meetings of all the *deotas* of Kullu valley from time immemorial.49

49. Ibid., p.3.
Kullu Dussehra the subject of our investigation here was introduced in Kullu by Raja Jagat Singh sometime in the seventeenth century. It is said that owing to his sin in demanding pearls (or a daughter) from a Brahman, who preferred to burn himself and his family in his house rather than submit to the exaction, Jagat Singh found himself in the chains of a curse, and in expedition of his crime was constrained to steal the idol of Ragunath from Ayodhya, and set it up in Kullu, transferring the whole kingdom to the god, and himself remaining as its vicegerent. As mentioned above Jagat Singh conquered Lag in 1657 AD and transferred his capital from Nagar to Sultanpur and built palace for himself and a temple for Raghunathji and up till 1920's all guide and travel books refer to this capital simply as Sultanpur but after this it came to be called Kullu which is now the headquarters of district administration and meeting place of thousands of Kullu deotas.

On the opening day the idol of Raghunathji saddled in a gaily attired chariot and attended to by village gods mounted in colourful palanquins, is pulled from its fixed place in Dhalpur Maidan to another spot across the ground by big ropes. Before this the high priests steps out in front, and with every appearance of extreme devotion prays to the god and sprinkles

50. Kullu Gazetteer 1918, p.28.
water before the shrine and the leading men of Kullu, headed by the Rai. The decendent of the Kullu Rajas or his son called Tika dressed in dhoties, coats and the famous round velvet Kullu cap, walk rapidly three times round the rath of Raghunath amid the incossant bray of the trumpets and beating of cymbols and tom-toms. Then the Rath (Chariot) is pulled by Raja and male members of his family and the public at large. The pulling of ropes is regarded sacred by the local people. This forms a huge procession. All the gods of the valley have to visit Kullu on Dussehra in order to pay their homage to Raghunathji. A notable feature of Dussehra is that it cannot start unless the powerful goddess Hadimba known as the patron deity of Kullu Rajas, arrives from Manali. She stays at Ramshilla on her arrival and is respectfully brought by the royal priest to the fair. The Jamlu god of Malana also comes, but stays over the other side of the river at the place named Dhobi, almost opposite the Dhalpur Maidan, and watches the proceedings of the fair from there.

On the following days in the mornings and evenings the gods are invoked and paraded. The people remain busy buying, selling, singing and dancing during these seven days of the fair which concludes with the burning of Lanka. The chariot of Raghunathji is taken near the bank of the river Beas on the last day of the festival where a pile of wood and grass is set on fire which symbolizes the burning of Lanka and is followed
by the sacrifice of chosen animals (buffalo, goat, cock, fish and crab) in honour of Durga. Penelope Betjeman (Penelope Chotwode), the author and a great traveller writes that "Nothing more confusing to the uninitiated when Hindu ritual observance why should the goddess Durga, who is the Shakti (female power) of Shiva, not Vishnu, be propitiated in a ceremony which is essentially Vaishnavite? Especially on the devotees of Vishnu (of whom both Rama and Krishna and avatars) hate blood sacrifice. But it was told that as the Dussehra celebrates the victory of Rama over Ravana, the demon king, offerings are made to Durga because she is the goddess of victory, having with the aid of her faithful lion, slain so many enemies of the gods". The chariot is brought back to its original place and the idol of Raghunathji is taken to its temple in Sultanpur. The attendant gods also disperse for their destinations.

The famous idol of Raghunathji which commemorates Ram Chandra was stolen from Ayodhya in July, 1651 A.D. by one Damodar Das and installed at Kullu. The then ruler Raja Jagat Singh invested, the kingdom in the idol and himself became its Kardar.

The circumstances connected with the installation of Raghunathji's idol gave birth to some sort of periodic celebrations. In the hills, each village has

52. Kullu Gazetteer, 1918. p.66.
a god. It is the village gods that forms the nucleus of social and community life. Raja Jagat Singh, under the influence of Bairagi Krishan Das who got Vaishnavism introduced into the valley and wanted the local faiths to be subordinated to this creed, initiated the practice of hill gods gathering together to pay homage to Raghunathji once a year, around Dussehra. Church was already subordinate to the state, now theology was further harnessed to serve regal ends. The temples housing the gods received various assignments of rent through land and collected grains. The produce was enjoyed by the inhabitants of the village of the gods.53

Where people get together, a market normally springs up. Thus, this growth supplemented the annual Dussehra fair. Due to the situation of Kullu on the trade routes connecting Yarkand, Ladakh, Tibet and Lahaul & Spiti on one end and with the plains of Punjab on the other, the festival regarded the annual market with the festivities. It became a trade market mainly for sheep, horses, wool, namda, patti, carpets and other hill product. The Britishers opened the valley to the people of plains. With the opening of this valley, the trade pattern, the religious affiliations and the way of celebrations changed considerably. The religious rituals have now been reduced mainly to customary performances.

The timings of Dussehra incidently came to be so adjusted as to be in the last brightest days of the weather after which the bleak winter started, closing all the high passes and restricting movements. It roughly commences from the last day of Dussehra in the plains, incidently affording time for the plains men to be here for trade. The celebrations of Dussehra in Kullu on the conclusion of festival in plains is a mystery for which no historic background is available.

The birth of Dussehra in Kullu lay in the royal fads and nourished on religious, social and economic factors and ultimately came to be well established, because of the inborn love of the hillmen for fun and floric, displayed in community signing and dancing.

Enthusiastic crows throng to the Dhalpur Maidan from long distances to witness the spectacular celebrations. At night it is time for entertainment. The lovely maidens are draped in their festive finary. They wear a Kurta or a long woollen or silk embroidered frock coat reaching upto the ankles, a Salwar cut in the typical Himachal style with a scarf-like cloth called dhatu over their heads. Their jewellery is as distinct as it is exotic they wear huge silver necklaces of tiny rosette intricately studded with blue and green enamel pendants and another made of coins. The hair is done with silver jewels not to be found elsewhere.
The balu nose ring is extremely special consisting of a round gold stud granulated very intricately. The earrings are also made of gold while the rest of the ornaments are in silver. The menfolk wear woollen shirts with either a long coat or a sleeveless jacket and woollen pyjamas in grey or brown. Like the women, they tie a piece of cloth round their waist. The famous Kullu caps dorn their heads.

Both the men and women break out with gay abandon into restless rounds of community singing and dancing as an invocation to the gods. They perform the famous Naati dance derived from the Sanskrit Natya or Naritya, while the men sway rhythmically, the women do the intricate steps in circles. As the tempo increases, the dancers display a vigour which explains their joyous and carefree attitude to life. Dancing comes quite naturally to these sensitive rural folk and is a spontaneous expression of their happiness. The whole atmosphere is filled with the harmonious beating of drums and the stimulating notes of the Shohpai.

In a valley where social contacts are limited due to deep forests, towering hills, and severe snowfall, Dussehra is also an excellent occasion to renew friendship and business contacts. It is also a highly auspicious time to arrange matrimonial alliances.

A large fair and exhibitions are organised by the villagers to market their local products: the prominent ones being handwoven shawls, pattus, caps, traditional silver ware and, of course, Kullu's luscious apples.

Apart from its deep religious significance, Kullu Dussehra has over the centuries, have enriched with local customs and traditions. The people's respect for religion, their pride in their history and folklore, their love of dance and music is all so clearly depicted in this magnificent fair that it now mirrors the real life and culture of Himachal Pradesh.

LAVI FAIR OF RAMPUR BUSHAHR

The historic and famous Lavi Fair of Rampur Bushahr is one of the biggest and most important fairs in the inner Himalayas which is held at Rampur, 100 Kms from Shimla starting on the 25th Kartika (11th November) every year and continues for three days. This has been primarily a trade fair, with a long history.

Though the fair is being held on an organised basis for the last three hundred years, its origin is stated to be much older. The Bushahr chronicles records that Raja Kehari Singh, the 113th from the founder Parduman was the ruler of Bushahr. He ruled from 1639

AD to 1696 AD with his headquarter at Sarahan in the upper Satluj valley. He annexed the southern principalities of Karangla and Sarj, established his supremacy over Delath, Kumarsain, Kotgarh, Balson, Theog, Darkoti. He was easily the most powerful chief in the Western Himalaya in his time. His exploits in Mandi, Suket, Sirmaur and Garhwal earned him the admiration of Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb, who conferred on him the title of Chhatrapati.

After subduing his southern neighbour he invited them to join him on his Tibetan expedition. Finding them reluctant to accompany him, he took a large army and proceeded to Tibet posing himself to be on a pilgrimage to Kailash-Mansarovar. It was round about in 1681 A.D. During this period a dispute was going on between Tibet and Ladakh over the boundary between these two countries. This culminated in a war between Tibet and Ladakh in 1681-83. The Tibetan army was led by Mongol Tibetan General, Golden Tsowang. In 1681 AD a war broke out between Ladakh and Tibet and Raja Kehari Singh with a large army was on a pilgrimage to Mansarover. On the way he met the Tibetan general. He asked Raja Kehari Singh for help to which he readily agreed and a treaty of friendship and trade was made.

58. Ram Rahul, p. 103. op. cit
59. Ibid., p. 96.
According to this treaty the Tibet and the Bushahr would remain friends and the traders from both sides would enjoy all facilities without payment of any tax. Horses from Tibet and swords from Bushahr were exchanged in token of friendship. On account of this treaty free trade between Bushahr and Tibet increased and Lavi fair was started probably at that early time at Kamru or Sarahan because the present town of Rampur was founded much later by Raja Ram Singh (1767-1799) fourth in the line of succession from Kehari Singh.

Professor L. Petoch gives the best available information about the 'Treaty between Tibet and Bushahr 1681 AD' in his valuable article in 'The Tibetan-Ladakhi-Mughal War of 1681-83' in the 'Indian Historical Quarterly, Vol. XXII, September 1947. At the time of that war there was an alliance and a brief general agreement about friendly relations and the exchange of envoys between Raja Kehri Singh of Bushahr and the Government of the Vth Dalai Lama. On account of the help given by Raja Kehari Singh and treaty of Tingmosgorg in 1684 AD upper Kinnaur was given to Bushahr. This was seized from Ladakh.


   ii) Ram Rahul, p.96. op. cit.
This important contemporary document was discovered by A.H. Francke at Namgya near Shipki Pass in Kinnaur in 1906 while he was on archaeological exploration of Kinnaur, Spiti and Ladakh. At Namgya he met one Hira whose ancestor came from Tibet and settled there. In his diary Dr. Francke records about this document that 'In the course of our conversation he (Hira) exhibited an extraordinary knowledge of things historical, in particular with regard to the battle of Basgo in 1646-47. When I expressed of a document of ancient times. After such persuasion he produced it, and it turned out to be a copy of the treaty between Raja Kehari Singh of Bushahr and the Lahasa Government, headed by Galden Thsag (Thsedhang). This Galden Thsang is the very general of the Tibet-Mogalian army who had conducted the seize of Basgo. Of this most important document, I ordered a copy to be made at once and offered Rs.1/- for it. As our conversation on my return visit to Namgya was heated that logical, it did not became quite plain from his talk, whether he had copied his paper from an old document in his possession of from a copper-plate of the Raja of Bushahr. If the latter be true, this would be the first copper-plate inscription in Tibetan, and the Raja of Bushahr ought to be urged to open his archives to students of history. The manuscript gives a short account of the war between Ladakh and Lahasa in 1646-47 and contains

a few, but important local names. The difficulty is to assign them their proper places on the map. That the document is not forged, is quite plain from the internal evidence.'

J.C.French, an officer of Indian Civil Service visited Rampur Bushahr in 1930. He mentions that 'Near the Shish Mehal is a Hindu temple with a fresco painted in the Tibetan style. There is a similar picture in the Potala, the Dalai Lama's palace at Lhasa. The subject is a treaty between Bushahr State and Tibet in the days of Mughal Emperor. It is interesting to find it side by side with the Shish Mahal frescos.

The fair is believed to have started in 1681 AD after a trade treaty was signed between the Bushahr State and Tibet during the reign of Raja Kehari Singh. His capital was at Sarahan and it is presumed that at that time the fair was held there. Raja Ram Singh (1767-1799) shifted his capital from Sarahan to a place on the left bank of the Satluj which he named after his name Rampur.

In Rigveda this river is mentioned as Satudru. At a short distance Nogri Khad joins the Satluj river.

64. Rigveda.
Rampur is 135 Kms from Shimla on Hindustan Tibet Road. Its elevation is 1,000 mtrs. above sea level. With the shifting the capital the venue of the fair was shifted to Rampur. During Gurkha occupation of Rampur from 1810 to 1815, the fair received a great set back as the Raja Mohinder Singh moved to Kinnaur. The Gurkha devastated the town.

Capt.C.P.Kennedy, the first Political Agent and Superintendent of Hill States mentions in a report to the Government in 1824 that 'the inhabitants (of Rampur) appear very industrious and have a manufactures of coarse shawls and other woollen. There is an excellent bazar, and at three period of the year fairs are held which are attended by people from the Sikh plains, Cooloo, Kunawur, Tartary Ladauk and Cashmere. One occurs in the month of May, one in October, and one, called the Dhal Mela in December. In the fair one person from every zameendar's house in Kunauwar must be present, and the whole armed, whence the name Dhal. Hatchets and battle-axes are the most common arms. There are a few matchlocks, shield and swords. This militia march through the town at this period and are mustered before the Raja's residence, when they fire a valley.'

"Rampur may be considered the emperium of these states. It is a channel of commercial communication between Chinese Tartary, Ladauk and Cooloo. It is the resort of people of many countries, characters and customs. The Tartar was observed putting his wool in one scale and receiving its weight in tobacco, or coarse sugar, from the trader of the plains of India, neither of them being able to comprehend each other's language. The common steel yard was observed in general use in the fair for weighing article of trade.

It is curious to note from the report that tea from China and bars of silver, stamped by authority, from Yarkand, toys from Russia, were occasionally found at the Rampur fair. Mandarin Chopeticks, cups and saucers were also seen in Kinnaur. Dresses of men of rank, some of them very costly, silks, satins of very beautiful patterns and texture were also available in the fair in the early nineteenth century. 66

Before the occupation of Tibet by the Chinese in fifties the inhabitants of Kinnaur especially of Tukpa, Shua, Sialkhar used to trade directly with Tibet. 67 Their trade with Tibet or Ladakh was duty free by ancient agreement. 68 This commerce with these countries produced more than enough to pay their contribution to Bushahr.

66. Ibid., p.291.
67. Shimla Hill States-Bahahr, Lahore, 1911, p.62
The members of each of the above mentioned Parganas formed separate group, and no member of one group could join or trade with an other group. Business was generally done at Gartok. The traders used to travel to Tibet in large parties, well armed, as the road was infested with robbers. All trade matters were settled by committee consisting partly by traders and partly by Tibetans.

The traders used to bring from Tibet wool, Pasham, salt, borax, numdahs, carpets, and Charas and dispose of them at the Rampur fair.

In older times the principal merchandise were wool, Pattu, blankets, pashmina cloth, neoza (edible pine nut), Zira (curmin), honey, ghee, violets, dhup, apricots, grapes, Yak's tails, and mohra (aconite, white and black). Black aconite is very difficult to procure. It grows on the Belun mountain, and fetches very high price. These articles were brought to Rampur and sold there at the annual fairs of which there are three. (1) Lavi from 22nd Kartik to 1st Magh, (2) Dhal Baisakh to 1st Jeth. 69

The first named fair is the most important, and is an interesting spectacle. The Kinnauri traders bring down large herds of sheep and goats carrying bundles

69. Shimla Hill States-Bashahar, Lahore, 1911, p.61
of wool, Pasham and woollen products. Kinnauri ponies and tiny donkeys laden with pattu, blankets, neoza, zira etc., comein from various parts of Kinnaur, many of them the property of commercially inclined lamas. There are lama horse dealers too, who dash about an Spiti ponies, showing off the paces of their mounts.

The fair is said to be a mere shadow now-a-days of what it once was, but in blankets, pattu and neoza, at any rate, a brisk trade seems still to be done. Every one who comes to the fair prefer to buy for himself a new blanket, patti for coat, and Bashahri cap.

Fine peshmina is usually purchased by merchants, leaving only the coarse variety for local weavers. Rampur Bushahr used to be very well known for pashmina chaddar or shawl, but this industry is facing a slump because of the steep rise in the prices of raw material.

The purchase of livestock is also done on large scale. Chumurthi ponies from Lahaul Spiti and Kinnaur are big attraction of the fair. There is also a display of horsemanship.

Rampur-Bushahr starts humming with activities well before the start of the fair. The town gets a facelift and the fair ground is tastefully decorated.

The fair which had the patronage of the rulers of Bushahr State, is now organised by the local Municipal Committee every year in the month of November.
The fair till the early fifties, had the character of an international fair, in as much as traders from across the border, i.e. Tibet, Ladakh, Afghanistan, and Samarkand. But now the fair is only a pale shadow of itself as it received a setback with the occupation of Tibet by China. Despite this major setback, Lavi still retains its trade character. Now instead of Tibet, the bulk of merchandise for sale comes from the plains and instead of Tibetan imports, it consists of cotton, quilts, duries, sheets, hoseries, second hand garments etc.\(^{70}\) in the changed context, it was but natural for Lavi to lose its commanding heights and importance. Nevertheless, all efforts are being made to maintain the importance and grandeur of this fair. The Municipal Committee, with its limited financial resources, is doing its best, yet the limitations are such as cannot be easily surmounted. It is generally realised that in order to maintain the importance of Lavi, some other attraction besides trade should be provided. Accordingly for the last several years, steps have been taken to give it a cultural tinge too. Every year now cultural programmes, consisting of folk dances, folk songs, variety entertainments and Kavi Samalans are being organised and they are becoming increasingly popular. Folk dance parties from Kinnaur, Kullu and other adjoining areas, Quawals and artists from plains and Shimla participate in the programme. The provision

of cultural programme during the fair, shall besides adding to the attractions and importance of the fair gives a filip to the revival and promotion of folk dance and music, which resumed the valleys of this far flung backward area. The cultural heritage of the area, the glimpse of which we have in our folk music and dance, need to be revived and promoted. It may be pointed out here that unless earnest efforts in this behalf are not put in, there is every danger of its becoming extinct. It can not be allowed to die, as a result of the corrupting influence coming from outside. As such, it can be very safely asserted that this programme is serving a very useful purpose.

The State Government has taken various steps to revive the glory of this trade fair by promoting the handicraft of the area. Prizes have been introduced for the best handlooms product and handicraft displayed at the "development exhibition". A separate Kinnauri market is set up where pashmina, wool and its products, carpets and dry fruits etc. are sold.

As regards the legend or origin the name of fair, there is no definite information. The tradition has it that in local dialect Loi means shearing of sheep and since the wool and, woollen products were the main commodity in the fair they started calling it Loi which gradually changed to Lavi. At the same time people call

Loi for the woollen blankets. Moreover Loi means to take or to receive things and since there is much buying and selling of things in the fair, it may have been named Loi. This is just a probability.

In the past, local villagers held bon-fires on the return of shepherds and graziers from high pastures. To this day, the features has persisted while during day time hectic trade activity is witnessed all over the town and at night folk dances and music around small bon-fire are organised.

RENUKA FAIR

Renuka fair of Sirmaur is an important one in the series of cultural events of this Pradesh. This colourful fair is celebrated for three days starting on 11th day of the rising moon of Kartika (first fortnight of November) on the bank of Renuka lake. The circumference of this lake is about 15 Kms. and in shape it resembles a human figure. This lake is associated with Renuka, the wife of a Vedic sage Jamdagni and mother of Parshu Rama. This account is again supported by a very strong local tradition according to which Jamadagni and his wife Renuka lived in the region of the old Sirmur State of Himachal Pradesh where a lake is still called Renuka in memory of Jamadgni's wife and is regarded as a place of pilgrimage by local Hindus.72

Thousands of years ago, so the legend goes, Renuka lived with her husband, Rishi Jamadagni, near the present Renuka lake. Parshurama, God's incarnation before Rama, was one of five sons of sage Jamadagni and mother Renuka. He was born in the village Jammu, in Sirmur. Once mother Renuka, while fetching water from a stream came across a Gandharva pair making love. Her sexual urge aroused, and a tiny hole developed in her pitcher of water. When she reached home the sage became unhappy with his wife. He ordered his five sons to kill mother Renuka. The first four sons worshipped the sage, but they refused his command one after the other. Furious, he cursed them with a change of sex, and they all became girls. Parshurama, the fifth son, was very devoted to his mother, but he agreed to do what his father wished. Sad he was to carry out his dread command. However, with a sharp-edged axe he cut the head of the mother he loved so much, but no sooner had he cut her head the axe got stuck in his closed palm. He tried and tried to throw it away, but it would not leave his hand. Sage Jamadagni advised him to go on a pilgrimage of expiation to sacred places to rid himself of the curse.

Carrying the body of his mother on his shoulder and with the axe still in his hand, he moved from place

to place across the Himalayas until he come to Nirmand in Kullu. There he received a boon from the Divine Mother for the revival of his dead mother. Parshurama built a temple there for his mother Renuka. He also dug a tank now known as Renuka lake in Sirmur district.

A few years later sage Jamadagni met his wife and son again. As ill luck would have it, the sage was killed by a ruler, Sahasrajuna, who coveted Renuka for her beauty to escape his clutches Renuka jumped into the same lake from which she was pulled out by the gods themselves. Parshurama avengaged his father's death and his mother's honour by wiping out the entire ruling clan twenty-one times. It is said that during his campaign against the rulers, he used to visit his mother on a particular day in the day of Kartika (October-November) on the 10th lunar night of the waxing moon cycle. That day is still celebrated by the people as Renuka Fair. Parshurama and his four sister are worshipped with Jamadagni and Renuka.

74. Ibid., p.47.

75. According too the Pujari of Renuka, that Parshurama's brothers did not become water and no tank is attributed to them, the smaller tank being generally known as Parshurama's tank. Jamadagni called the brothers cowards, and turned them into women, so that they are now known as Parshurama's sisters and called devis or goddesses. The eldest is La Devi in Birla village (described amongst Devis); the second Dormai; the third Bhadmachhri (or Bhadar Kali);. These two live together and have several temples, the most important in Sirmur being at Delar (a village in Poanta Tehsil), and the fourth Kamli, whose temple is at Chana in Renuka tehsil.
The Puranic story is slightly different from the local legend. It mentions that once when Renuka's sons were all absent, to gather the fruits on which they fed, Renuka, who was exact in the discharge of all her duties, went forth to bath. On her way to stream the behold Chitraratha, the prince of Mrittikavatti, with a garland of lotuses on neck, sporting with his queen in the water, and she fell envious of their felicity. Defiled by unworthy thoughts, wetted but not purified by the stream, she returned disquieted to the hermitage, and her husband perceived the agitation. Beholding her fallen from perfection, and shorn of the lusture of her sanctity, Jamadagni reproved her, and was exceeding wrath. Upon this there came her sons from the wood, first the eldest, Rumanwat, then Sushena, then Vasu and then Viswavasu; and each, as he entered, was successively commanded by his father to put his mother to death, but amazed, and influenced natural affection, none of them made any reply; therefore Jamadagni was angry, and cursed them and they became as idiots, and lost all understanding, and were like unto beasts and birds. Lastly Rama returned to the hermitage, where the mighty and holy Jamadagni said unto 'kill the mother, who has sinned, and do it, son, without repining'. Rama accordingly took up his axe, and struck off his mother's head; whereupon the wrath of the illustrious and mighty Jamadagni was assuaged, and he was pleased with his son, and said, since then last
obeyed my commands, and done what was heard to be performed, demand from me whatever blessings thou wilt, and thy desires shall be all fulfilled'. Then Rana begged of his father these boons the restoration of his mother to life, with forgetfulness of her having been slain, and, purification from all defilement; the return of his brothers to their natural condition; and for himself, invincibility in single combat, and length of days, and, all these did his father bestow. 76

Parshurama did not stay with his parents, instead he wanted to go for ponance to Badrinath in Garhwal hills. Before, leaving, he promised to visit his parents once a year on the 10th day of the rising moon of Kartika. Ranuka fair, it is believed, is held every year to commemorate Parshurama's visit to his mother. 77 Right from that time this became a religious ceremony. This fair commemorate the annual meeting of Renuka and Parshurama.

On the 1st day of the festival i.e. on the 10th day of the bright moon of Kartika the idol of Parshurama is taken into a decorated silver palanquin from village Jammu about 9 Kms. from the lake. The planquin is

carried by the priests. This palanquin is preceded by the banners and silver maces. From the temple the palanquin of Parshurama is taken to the bank of Giri river. There the other local deities await. From there the procession proceeds to the site of the fair. The local gods follow the palanquin of Parshurama of Jammu. Before them move about 30 persons playing on the local musical instruments. This is followed by a party of dancers wearing a typical dress called Chola. They, with the beat of a drums dance and sing devotional songs. On the way the devotees offer flowers to the deities. On arrival at the Renuka lake the deity is given a bath in the lake to signify the son touching his mother's feet in respect. After this the deity is taken to the temple there.

On the night of 11th of rising moon at about 4 A.M. the priest is inspired by the divine force of Parshurama and he begins to dance. At that time the devotees put questions to him and he answers their questions. Sometime some other people also get possessed by the god.

At dawn the idol of Parshurama is again bathed in the lake and the people visit the temples at Renuka and Parshurama and make offerings to the deities.

Thousands of people from Uttar Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh throng to the mela grounds near the lake and rejoice in these festivities with utter
devotion. They dance, sing and abandon themselves to their traditional observances all these days.

Another feature of Renuka fair is that by this time the cultivator who have gathered their Kharif crops, are in a position to dispose of the local agricultural products. They are also equally in need of sundry supplies for use in the fast approaching winter months when it becomes rather difficult, if not altogether impossible on account of snow fall and severe cold, to move from one place to another. The fair, therefore, not only provides healthy recreation and amusement but is also a very good marketing place for the people. The high landers bring mostly on their backs and sometime on the mules, products like blankets, wool, walnuts, ginger, turmeric, pulses etc. for which they find ready customers at Renuka. At one end of the temporarily established township of hutments or stalls a place is appropriated exclusively by the ginger merchants. From the plains businessmen flock to the place bringing with them gur, shakker, kerosene oil etc. The temporary stalls are seen stocked with all assertions of goods. These includes bangles and boots, cloth and crockey, silver ornaments and provisions, hosiery and toiletries, utensils and fruits, vegetables and what not. Sweet sellers also do a rearing business.

The place remains full to capacity during the days of the fair and offers a spectacular variety of activities. A number of temporary hearths consisting of two or three stones are set up. Here the people are soon cooking, eating, sleeping, talking and busy in all sorts of recreation and amusement. People mingle up irrespective of class, caste and sex considerations. The congregation affords a fine view of the contrast between the highlanders and the people from the plains. The men with white woollen caps, most with loie (Sirmuri coast) and often with bare-footed are the residents of upper parts of the Poanta and the Renuka tehsils. Those with ordinary coats and trousers or sometimes in dhoti and turban are from the lower parts of the Nahan tehsil and the adjoining areas of the plains of Ambala and near about. The coloured dhatus (head dress of women) t-ied round the heads by women of the hills contrast very sharply and pleasingly with the green background of the forest foliage.

Folk dancers from remote and interior areas of Sirmur clad in long garb with loose sleeves add to the gaiety and charm of the procession as they dance to the accompaniment of the folk music and hurd, drums and trumpets. Hundreds of thousand devotees throng pilgrim spot from district an northern states to steal a glimpse of Parshurama on the occasion.
During the fair, the 1.6 Km. patch between the Giri river and Renuka lake is turned into a humming camp. Villagers hailing from far off places stay for a couple of days. Night long cultural shows including folk dances by different organisation render the calm and serene surroundings of the Renuka into a melody. Devotional songs lend an air of sanctity to the atmosphere already filled up with folk songs and dances.

Devotees believe that Renuka is immortalised in the form of the lake where a dip on Kartika Ekadashi is considered holy by pilgrims. Since the fair is visited by a large number of people, extra buses are pushed into service from places like Poanta, Delhi, Haridwar, Chandigarh, Ambala and Yamunanagar. Besides, the tourist lodge and huts, the sheltered accommodation is available at P.W.D. rest house, Kisan Bhawan at Dadahu and the Kubja Pavillion at Renuka itself.

During the Sirmur state time, the District Board used to manage the fair. After 1948 the arrangement were supervised by Tehsildar. Now Renuka Development Board arrange and manage the Renuka fair annually. This Committee also make arrangements for exhibiting cinema show, drama, fire works, Kariala and wrestling matches. The Agriculture, Animal Husbandry, Forest, Industry Department etc. also hold exhibitions.

On the closing day the deotas of Katab and Masu leave the fair on Dwadshi or Triyodshi. The deotas of Jammu returns to his village on Purnima. The persons who accompany deotas are provided with free meals during their stay by the Fair Management Committee. They are given some presents in the form of cash and some portion of the grains received as offerings in the temple. It is one of the highest fair of Sirmur region.

Shivratri: Mandi's Fair of Hundred Gods

Shivratri which commemorates the marriage of Shiva and Parvati and heralds the spring in Mandi has been celebrated with great enthusiasm for hundreds of years. The town of Mandi onsconced in a bowl shaped valley in the Shiwaliks, between the confluence of the Beas and Suketi rivers, burns with festivity and rejoicing as now over eighty gods and goddesses together with their retinues like a Barat journey in form all sides to attend this auspicious marriage. In their wake thousands of villagers and merchants, jugglers and peddlers in their traditional customs surge into Mandi town. The festival is celebrated by a week long mela.

The celebrations of Shivratri is closely linked with the founding of Mandi town. Until 1520 AD Purani Mandi was the capital and the present Mandi was a forest in the hands of Rana Gokal of Salhiana.

An interesting legend is associated with the transfer of the capital and the palace of the Ruler to the present Mandi town. Raja Ajbarson (1499-1534 AD), the ruler, saw in a dream several nights in succession a cow offering milk to the image of Shiva. This dream was recounted to his ministers and courtiers. On an investigation they discovered that the dream was reality. A cow crossed the river every day and offered its milk to the idol. Raja Ajbersen after visiting the spot had a temple constructed in 1527 AD now known as Bhutnath temple. This temple was the first construction. Thereafter Raja Ajbersen became an ardent devotee of Shiva and shifted his capital to this new place. It was since then that the Shivratri fair came to be celebrated.

Shivratri begins on an austere note. The people of Mandi observe fast on this sacred day. Later the gods and goddesses who have their shrines in the surrounding hills trickle into Mandi. They come on their Rathas accompanied by their priests, worshippers, drummers etc. The gods first pay their homage to a silver image of Shri Madhav Rao an incarnaten of Vishnu.

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The image was installed in Mandi in 1648 AD by Raja Surajsen (1637-1664 AD) who having no heirs, dedicated his states to Madhav Rao.\textsuperscript{83} They then pay their homage to Bhutnath temple in the heart of the city.

During the princely days it was a general rule that each god on arrival used to pay respects to Madho Rao before he proceeds to the palace to meet the ruler. On the second day of the fair, a parade of gods was used to be held on the Padal ground, near confluence of Beas and Suketi rivers; the various deities which numbered about 100 at that time were arranged according to precedence in line, along which the Raja with his officials used to pass to receive their homage. Madho Rao as already noted did not attend except when the Raja could not act for him, but his absence was attributable to the fact that the far was held on the great festival in honour of Shiva, a circumstance which supported the conclusion that the adoption of Vishnuism as the State religion was of comparatively later date.\textsuperscript{84}

The gods, however, now admit the nominal suzerainty of Madho Rao. They are subject to his order and must attend upon him when summoned.

\textsuperscript{83.} i) Griffin, Lepel H. The Rajas of the Punjab, Lahore, 1970, p. 578.

\textsuperscript{84.} Punjab Gazetteer: Mandi State, 1920, p. 63.
It is true that much has changed over the years, yet the basic character has remained intact. The village deities are still brought to Mandi town from all accessible places, although the absence of the old gods is disappointing. For casual onlookers the chariots of gods and goddesses may look alike, but for an analytic mind each deity has a different chariot, a distinct mask or Mohara etc.

The first to arrive a day prior to Shivratri are two gods i.e. That Marghayal and Dhagandu Marghayal, along with two goddesses i.e. Bagalamukhi and Budhi-Vairave. Later on, considering the seniority and superiority of Prashar and Kamarunag, they are also co-opted to arrive on the same day, as well as Dev Budha Bingal of Manigal. The latter used to have a very promising chariot known as Karandu, while the former are represented by Chadi, i.e. a silver staff and Surajpebha, including their undisputed spiritual and temporal powers.

Among the village deities of olden times used to be several Narains, Mahadevas, Nags, Markandas, Balokomeshwars and Gahharies. Generally, the goddesses had their own identities and among them there are Puranic, epical and purely aboriginal goddesses as well. Prominent amongst goddesses are the Ambika of Nau-Pahau, Bhagwati of Belu, Ambika of Katola with special chariots not akin to those of Bhdi-Bairava, Bagalomukhi,
Dhunavati, Kashmini, Shakambari, Devidhar-ki-Nagan and Misu-Parasari. Exceptions are the chariots, of Devi Markhakhan of Kalipar and Devi Hadimba of Gumma. Their chariots are like those of the gods and they are mistaken by the casual observer to gods.

The gods, known as Narains are not representations of Vishnu. The Puranic god of the Hindus. Careful studies of folklore associated with this origins and narrations of their needs, i.e., Bharatas are entirely different. The three great Narains of Hurang, Katauni and Pashakot hail from Ghuhar. The Sanor valley had Khaviastu-Narain and Kogasi-Narain and similarly there used to be Bilhi-Narain of Nirgarh and Bailu-Narain of Junjahali.

Amongst Mahadevas the most conspicuous was Magru who used to stay during the festival of Shivratri in the old place complex. An other representative of Mahadev used to be a god known as Khundijarha who is an occasional visitor to the Shivratri fair. This god belongs to a place Deohari on the border of former Mandi State and Kulu. Its main temple or Dehara was in Mandi state whereas its bhandar or kothi was in Kulu, Adhi-Purukh of Uttarasaral was worshipped as Brahma.

Many a god and goddess has their names ending with 'Nag'. It is not clear whether they are the vestige of race of Nagas or symbolic of snake worship. Kamru Nag has his special place and all the Bala-Kumeshwara are supposed to be his progeny. Dev Bamag of Sanor who
is held in big esteem and is supposed to be the first minister of Madhoral Shambu-Nag used to visit from Kalipar in Saraj and Chapanadu-Nag from Mangash of Suraj area. Shayati-Nag is from Dehar and Mahunag from Taror.

Gahuries are a class in themselves. They are supposed to be the subordinates of the important gods. 'Gahari' word is deviative of 'garh' i.e. protector of a fort or a district in the Jurisdiction of a senior god. Uttarasal has Lajhanu-ka-Gahari, Suraha-ka-Gahari, and Drani-ka-Gahari. The god hailing from Jogindernagar tehsil has Gaharis of Banwara (Mastpur-Chuhar), Batheri, Tariyala, and Galu near Gumma. Generally speaking, these Gaharies are under the supervision of this immediate superior gods.

Some striking names of gods belong to the rishis of prehistoric era. Most conspicuous among them is Prashar, Markandaya, and Sukhdev which is Dagandhu. Sukhdev is said to be the son of Ved Vayas- the author of the epic Mahabharata. Similarly, the Dev Budha Bingal is worshipped as Vishwamitra.

The deotas to the Shivratri fair are accompanied by more than three thousand followers. On an average there are about seventy to eighty persons with each

deota. Among them seven to eleven persons are temple musicians. Their musical instruments includes, drums, kettle drums, karna, Ransinga, Shahnai. Besides drum players, there are four to eight persons, who carry a deota chariot on their shoulders in twos, after one another to the fair. Then these priests and Mahants of deotas who also accompany him to Mandi Shivratri fair.

Just to give a bird eye view of the deota is that the images of deities are carved on a brass, silver or gold sheet. Mostly brass or silver is used for the images. Then these images are stucked on to a wooden structure, known as Ratha which resembles a palanquin. The couch of the structure is generally of 75 cm. and about 1 mt. in height. This wooden palanquin for the deota is covered by coloured cloth, beads and flower garlands. At the centre of the lower portions two long wooden or bambo poles are passed through. A number of masks are stucked on all sides. The covering is prepared from the loops of white cloth, joined at the centre. In case of goddess an ornamental mini-umbrella of silver known as Chhatra is put on them. They are covered with a large scarf.

There are a number of stories connected with the power of the deites in fulfilling the wishes of the people. Such incidents greatly help in maintaining their faith in the deota institutions.
There is a deota named Narain Dev of Hurang, in Chauhar area, who also visits this fair every year. One Rani Prakash Devi, wife of Raja Sahib Son, prayed before him for a son and promised to make a golden image of the deota. Her prayers were soon granted. Out of great joy, she fulfilled her promise and presented a gold mohra of the god to him.86

Some of the deotas exceed each other in dignity and honour, for their stateliness and may be for their riches and actions.

If two deotas of equal rank meet each other for the first time during the day, they bow to each other for a few moments. It looks as if they embrace each other. It is said that persons carrying them bend sideways, to exchange their salutation. Sometimes a deota of a lower rank, salutes a deota of higher status. Similarly devis also pay their respect to some deotas.

After paying their respect to Madhorai the deotas in twos or threes dance for a few moments. Those gods dance by swinging given to them by the persons who carry the palanquins. In due course they are seated down on a cloth sheet at a fixed place in the fair ground. Villagers who are enthusiastic to see the deotas bow before them and present their offerings mostly in coins or flowers. In return the priest gives them a few bits of grains, rice or wheat and a few petals of flowers. For bits of grains, which the local people call

pachawal, there is a superstition that if the number of grains received by the devotees is an odd number, ones wishes would come true. In case of the even number the wishes might remain unfulfilled.

The number of days of the mela is ordained by the astrologer. Each day of the mela is further dedicated to the various temples and Mandi such as Jagan Nath temple, Tarna Devi, Jalpa Devi, Triloki Nath etc. During the mornings the gods go in procession to the specific temple for worship and later grace the fair ground where the public can also pay homage to them.

In earlier times this was also a trade fair in which merchants from far and near found an opportunity to make brisk sale of their wares. These days the fair has assumed a new dimension having sports, games, exhibitions depicting the progress of the region and cultural programmes in the evenings. The importance of the deotas has began to recede in the last decade.

Banthara is one of the main activities of the fair. It is a typical folk drama which serves a great deal in entertaining the rural folk. It is a play replete with comedy and humor. All the dialogue spoken by the actors in their local dialects have a satirical element in them. Some social customs and habits are ridiculed.
For instance in a play an elderly woman on the stage grumbles that all her rivals are having an army of children and she is still sterile though a decade has passed even after her third marriage. Then with a poor, miserable expression she prays to have at least a dozen sons so that she could be able to contribute in the nations strength by sending them to the army.

Banthara is held without any stage. It resembles somewhat like a local play-form called Kariala which is very popular in Solan and Sirmur areas. The costumes of the actors are somewhat funny and comical. Dholak, Karnal, Narsingha and shahnai are main musical instruments used by singers.

Some elder persons say that during the reign of Virsen of Suket State, people were uneducated. To educate them he ordered to do this through folksongs and folkdramas and named this programme as Vanthara, which means to teach them by recreation means. In due course vanthara changed to banthara.

On the last of the fair Chaddars (clothes of specified length) are presented to each of the gods. At the end of the fair Mandi town once again return to its normal. Gone for another year are the reverberation of the drums, trumpets, cymbals and pipes which resound all day during the mela.
The Nalwari fair has fallen in the exclusive share of Bilaspur town. It is not held with such enthusiasm anywhere else as in Bilaspur. The idea of the Nalwari fair was conceived by W. Goldstein, the Superintendent of Simla Hill States in 1889 AD (1946 VS). The idea was motivated by the dearth of cattle of good breed, especially bullocks, so indispensable to good agriculture which is a prominent feature of economy of hill terrain from Bilaspur to Mandi. It requires least emphasis that this need could not be locally supplied. Similarly, the success of individual efforts to procure bullocks from plains could hardly be undoubted.

As such, to begin with, the people of the Nalagarh, Ropar, Una, Hoshiarpur districts and adjoining areas of Punjab and Uttar Pradesh were encouraged to bring into the fair, the bullocks of good breed. During the four or five days duration the sale and purchase of cattle takes place.

But now, as it is, the fair has assumed quite a different shape. At present it appears from the sale and purchase of the bullocks that the hill peasants do not so much depend on this supply. The fair appears

to have entirely a local touch. It is mostly the gathering of the people and cattle of this hill terrain and traders of cattle of adjoining areas. The fair, in due course of time, has not only met the badly felt need of the area, but has also adequately given a fill up to the production and availability of the bullocks of good breed from within this area itself.

Thus, the importance of the fair in the present context cannot be exaggerated. It is least based on religious or recreational consideration. Notwithstanding, it is closely connected with economy of the area. This fair has great socio-economic importance. It encourages the local breeders to improve the livestock and exchange their experiences with breeders who came from within the State and even from the neighbouring States of Punjab and Haryana. This fair has the same place in the life of the people of this region of the Pradesh as Lavi fair occupies in the life of the people of upper parts of Himachal Pradesh.

This annual fair starts on the 4th Chet (17th March) every year. The Government gives prizes, and so no entry fee is charged. This occasion also makes an excuse for racing, wrestling and other amusements. Furthermore, the fair depicts achievements of the Government in the field of agriculture and horticulture in the State through various types of exhibitions set up during this fair.
The Nalwari fair also gives an example of the ancient Pahari culture which is presented to the people during the cultural programmes.

After the conclusion of this fair at Bilaspur, the traders start moving with their catties towards Nalagarh, Sundernagar, Bhangrotu, Barchhawar in Sarkaghat and ultimately Kangra where similar Nalwari fairs are held. 89