

**OLD SPIRITS IN NEW CONTEXTS: THE SUPERNATURAL
NARRATIVES FROM THE FOLKLORE OF KINNAURA
TRIBES OF INDIA**

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Abstract

In the process of understanding the Indian civilisation the transmission of cultural tradition of both continuity and change may be seen within the totality of a communication system. Within the total system a crucial subsystem is the oral means as expressed for instance in the performance of myth, songs, dance, tales, proverbs and riddles. All of these are the forms of Folk Literature, having no written language and transmitted by word of mouth through the generations. Folk tales, like other forms of Folk Literature are the medium of imparting knowledge, travel from one story teller to another with certain modifications and changes depending upon the whim and idiosyncrasy of the individual storyteller. The Folk tales of Kinnaur, Himachal Pradesh India, a tribal district serves as a last boundary of India as of other indigenous societies of the Himalaya are ,one of the most comprehensive repositories of the folk wisdom. In these, one may found the preserved unpretentious manner the hopes the aspirations of the people the hard realities of their mundane existence and wonders of the unimagined world that they have cherished through generations. The subject matter of Kinnauri folktales is very varied, covering a vast panorama, extending over *Religious tales, Historical Tales, Ghost Tales, Tales of Fairies, Ethical Tales, Animal Tales* etc. One of the most significant things that Ghost stories do is communicate to us about culture. Like any folklore, supernatural narratives directly or indirectly tells about the very different culture of this small district situated in the remote antiquity of Himalaya. The research article is written to give a representation to this district which has a rich culture, beliefs still somehow devoid of many basic facilities of life. The Ghost stories of Kinnaur represent their unique culture and belief system.

Being a tribal district Kinnauri people have an affirm faith on god, goddess and besides these, there are, said and believed, other spirits, which stand in between good and evil spirits.

The tales of ghosts and spirits, inspired by the instinct of primitive inquisitiveness are probably the oldest in the tradition of telling tales. The people of this small district are preserving that old age tradition of belief in ghosts. These dire beliefs can be seen in their rituals where they try to satisfy the evil spirits with some oblation or with something else so that they would thwart the evil deeds of these spirits. This sort of beliefs are very distinct and very conservative in the modern age of ours that anybody may feel uncomfortable to accept these but this beliefs really inspire me to give their culture a representation. *Dafrentoo*, a very popular ghost of Kinnaur, is said to accompany the person who travels in the darkness of night, and he appears to be the simple man and has the power to appear and disappear. *Ban shira*, a spirit living in the forest and in big trees guides a man in his night journey through forest and quarrels with ghosts for a man and overpowers ghosts the evil spirits. But at times Ban Shira causes men and women ill and he has to be offer oblations for curing the diseased on account of his *doshang*. In all fairs and festivals, edibles are cooked in all households and then offered in the name of god, goddess, and good spirits are also idolised along. In some part of Kinnaur a ghost festival *jagang*, is also celebrated from the yore to please the ghosts and expect they would not harm anyone. They are offered with edibles, goat flesh and etc.

Chon a ghost is believed to be the most dreaded, as whoever comes across this ghost cannot be stay alive. This ghost is said to have one eye in the centre of his forehead and his eye is very sharp and glaring never misses to spifflicate whatsoever comes front of it and its range. Neither it can see sideways nor upwards and downwards. Kali sets it free during night and it descends along spurs and mounds to the rivers in search of cremation grounds by the riversides. Chon licks up the ashes of of burnt dead bodies. It is believed that chon walks on with a noise resembling that of *argas*, the bell wreath around the neck of riding ponies and horses, thus Chon gives alarm when walking. It is said if somebody happens to see it, he should simply sit down not in the passage of a path but by the side so as to avoid his sight. In order to keep away the ghost, the *darchhods* [flegs written Buddhist mantras on it] are placed on the roof of every house and mane stone heaps are kept in the boundary of villages.

After having a glimpse of some description about the beliefs of the people of Kinnaur regarding the ghosts, under mentioned popular ghost tales will justify concluding the research work.

THE SHEPHERD AND GHOST IN CAVE

There is a big cave in the left side of Themgarang Khad near sangla village. There is a cave known as '*Bujalang Ag*' near that khad [river fall], that provides shelter to hundreds of sheep and shepherds. One day two shepherds took shelter in that cave with the folk of sheep. One of them goes to bring some eatables from nearby place but did not come back to the cave

and his companion has to live alone therein with sheep. There used to live a ghost in the cave, and he was watching them up waiting eagerly to get them separate, so as to play mischief one of them when alone. The chance of ghost comes with the diminishing of light. Hearing some noise the shepherd called out his expecting fellow but the ghost responded and consuming the form of the body of a man came in. The ghost took seat just opposite to the shepherd but didn't say anything. Ghost started imitating shepherd. So, if shepherd stood up the ghost too stood, H and if shepherd offered fuel to fire the ghost would do the same. If the shepherd feared the ghost, the ghost repaid. When the shepherd spread out his bed for sleep the ghost jumped in the bed and was ready to sleep with the shepherd.

The shepherd rose up and had a stick in his hand and lifted up the stick for striking at the ghost, the ghost did the same. The shepherd got fatigued after all and felt sleepy. The ghost has gone away laughing and shrieking when the shepherd woke up from the nap. Poor shepherd lost his soul. The ghost snatched away the soul of the shepherd when he was inactive in sleep. But he lives for some time later after the event. The next day the companion of the shepherd came back to the cave and thus he narrated everything to his companion.

THE STORY OF HINA DANDUB AND LATEE SARJANG

Hina Dandub and Latee Sarjang is the most popular in most parts of Kinnaur. Though deeply steeped in fantasy, people regard it to be an actual happening. Many local versions of this tale are current among the people. The late of Hina Dandub and Latee Sarjang is also recorded in the Tibetan Buddhist texts. According to one popular version, once the king of village Pangi, Shar by name, had a daughter named Latee Sarjang and a son named Hina Dandub.

It so happened, that the wife of king while on the deathbed, took a promise from raja that he would not remarry after her death lest her children -Hina Dandub and Latee Saiang should be ignored. Once, the raja went out in a forest for hunting. There he met a beautiful maiden, seated on a rock. She incited the king and he married her. In fact, she was a treacherous demoness, who wanted to kill the prince and princess. To fulfil her objective, she conspired with the royal astrologer-cum-void. One day, as per plan, she pretended to be sick. Raja immediately summoned the royal astrologer-cum-void. He declared that the rani was critically sick and she could only be cured if the levers of prince and princess were fed to her. When the queen and her accomplice, astrologer-cum-void, pressurised the raja, he had to relent. He ordered that the prince and princess be killed and their levers fed to the Queen.

Accordingly, the royal children were given to the butcher, who took them to a distant cliff, but failed to behead them. Twice he lifted his dagger, but once the maternal uncle of those

children appeared from the rock and stopped him. In the next attempt, their deceased mother appeared from a water pond and stopped the butcher. Ultimately, he let the royal children escape, and to save himself from the punishment, killed dogs and took theft levers to the palace.

Wandering in the forest, the children lost track of each other. The young prince happened to meet an old woman. She took him to her hut, fed and clothed him. She took him to the town, where she learnt that the king of that kingdom had died without an heir, and the customary process for finding the new king was being followed. That custom provided that a person chosen by the royal parrot by throwing a garland around his neck shall be the king. As the providence had it, the parrot garlanded the young prince, who was enthroned as the king of that kingdom.

On the other hand, the grief-stricken young princess kept searching for her brother in the forest, and assuming that he has been eaten by the wild animals, would pick pieces of bones, assuming those of his brother, and put them in a necklace. At last she reached the town, where she learnt that her brother was the king. She became a street singer. Once, the raja heard her voice that instantaneously reminded him of his lost sister. He asked one of his servants to get her footprints, which he at once recognized of her sister. The raja immediately brought her to his palace, and both lived comfortably.

After sometime, the young raja and his sister thought of visiting their father and theft demonic stepmother. They took a small army and went to meet their father. In the company of that demoness, he was in a pathetic condition. On seeing his children, he was filled with deep remorse and died. The son performed his last rites. As he was returning from the cremation, he saw his demoness stepmother carrying a carcass of dog on her shoulder. On seeing the young king, she threw the carcass and pounced upon him. However, the young king shot an arrow and killed her. A *chorten* [*tomb*] was built over her ashes at Pangi lest her spirit should torment the people.

THE STORY OF SKIN GHOST

Some 35-45 [c.1895-1905] years ago, a skin ghost is said to have been seen and have been encountered in Sangla village. One of the Mathes of Sangla Deota, named Phulma bland (now dead), was going from his (home) house to the deota temple to join with his colleagues in keeping watch at the temple. When he was halfway [to the temple], a skin rolled [to] this side and that side in [front of] his feet so that the effort of the skin was to fell down the Mathes. He took courage and did not fall but kept treading on the rolling skin ghost till at last the skin ghost was tired and transformed itself into a tree-like, long erect shape. He looked like a 'prai' in darkness and went on growing thicker and still

longer whenever Phulma Nanad the Mathes looked up at him the ghost, Phulma was about to lose courage when he recollected two things said of ghosts, i.e. never get fear from them but to take them as toys for man's play and never to look up but to keep the eyes looking downside so that the ghosts are never able to defeat a man nor are they able to grow up bigger and bigger. Phulma kept his eyes down and gathered himself, ready for the wrestle with the ghost. The ghost became as little in size as a man. Phulma caught hold of him and they went on boxing. The Mathes Phulma got the ghost within his embrace, pulled off some hair of moustache of the ghost, a portion of which hair, it was said, the Mathes possessed during the whole of his afterlife, to show to people and to relate the story. Unfortunate it is for the writer of these few pages that he missed seeing the ghost moustache hair with Phulma Nanad, the Mathes. When within the strong embrace and as it was losing its moustache hair, the poor ghost wept and shrieked shrilly and grew thinner and thinner till at last he transformed himself into nothing and got out of cruel Phuhna's grasp and ran away shrieking in[a shrill voice again and again. A ghost is a toy for a man!

THE STORY OF ESCAPE OF A MAN FROM THE GANG OF GHOSTS

Once upon a time Phulio Fair was going on at Sungra [name of village], all the people after having danced went home, but one man stayed there as he fell asleep, and left alone at the temple. When no human being but himself was there, a gang of ghosts came in the temple saying: 'there is the smell of some human being and the human being will make a nice morsel for us'. Though the utterance of ghosts frightened him yet collecting his courage he rose on his feet and said: 'do not devour me now but let me lead a dance of your party.' He snatched away the 'Pyurg', a small three edged sword, from the hands of the Rākshasa, the ghost who was about to lead the dance, and the dance went on whirl about, but he, the only man leading the dance of ghosts, was busy thinking of getting out of the gang of dancing ghosts. He thought of a water-well near Sungra temple and led the dance of ghosts to that direction. All the ghosts were fully absorbed in the dance and it came to the well site. The man with 'gurze' in his hands jumped into the well, which was not more than knee-deep. He turned himself under half roping of the well, but the ghosts, too, were smart enough and thought of 'measuring' the water depth. They had a ball of woollen string; they tied a small stone at the end of the thread and plunged it in the water. The man, being under by half the length of rope of the well, kept rolling up the thread again into the ball, so that the ghosts finished their ball of thread and said: 'the water is endlessly deep and we can do nothing to have the man out of it now. Alas, we lost the first

chance of devouring him. We lost a ball of fat in that man'. The day dawned and the gang of ghosts could no longer harm the man in the well. They had vanished. The man came out of the water well, related the story and showed the 'gurze' of the ghosts. The man was of the 'Borantu' family of Sungra and in honour of his cheating the ghosts, his successors have to dance with that very 'gurze' of the ghosts for three rounds copulsorily, leading the dance in Phuliach at Sungra[name of village] every year.

Summing up all it can be assert that although under the changing scenario when the forbidden and fear places and surroundings of yore have become more open and oft frequented, the ghost tales may be found gradually losing their terrifying character, yet these still have the attraction and grip over the people and such tales are most told ones. People of Kinnaur are still preserving these ghost stories and all most all generations, old or new are aware of these. These tales are deeply steeped in the dramatic ironies joy and sorrow, agony and ecstasy, melancholy and cheer, hate and love, intrigue and frankness reflect numerous aspects of the K innauri folk life in a most intimate and vivid manner. This research work is a little effort to compliment their beliefs and tell them though they are not that much advanced as the main stream people are yet with their primitiveness they are valued and appreciate by all.

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