

Ritual, Performance, and Transmission: The Gaddi Shepherds of Himachal Himalayas

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I can still visualize the fierce dance of Dhudu—the appellation of Shiva for the Gaddi shepherds of western Himalayas—that leaves him alone, forsaken by his wives: Gorja (Girija) and Ganga. This dance drama is enacted and ritually sung by the Sippi *chela*-oracles—the low-caste wool-clippers who are also the oracles of Shiva—during an offering of *Nauala* (a sacrificial offering made to Shiva in his local form as Dhudu by the Gaddis). The *Sippnaitus* or Sippi *chela*-oracles dance in trance, possessed by Dhudu, and accompanied by a warlike beat played on *nagara* (“kettledrums”) and *narsingha* (“longhorns”). I can still hear the young ones crying, even as numbers of Gaddi men and women lapse into trance, joining the *chelas* in a dance that has slow rhythmic movement yet is fearsome to behold. Recalling the scene, I can still feel the chill traversing through my spine. I reproduce the last stanza of the *Nauala* song that I first recorded in 1990 (unpublished):¹

Nacch Dhudua Jatan vo khilari ho/ Dhudu naccheya jatan vo khilari ho . . .

Dance, O Dhudu, dance!

Dhudu dances with his matted-locks swaying,

With his dreadlocks swaying.

Dhudu dances with his matted-locks swaying.

Dhudu dances and he throws down his crown

Down falls Ganga, she falls down from his crown

Ganga falls down on the earth.

Asks Gorja: who are you, what are you to him?

Says Ganga: I am his mistress.

Over this both Ganga and Gorja fight,

Gorja and Ganga quarrel over Him

Their garlands of pearls break apart.

¹All the songs used in this paper, unless cited, were collected during the course of my first field survey in 1990-91. All translations are mine (Sharma 1991). Also refer to my recent works on Chamba, which form the basic source on Chamba in general (Sharma 2001 and 2009).

They hit each other's legs with sticks,
 They hit each other's arms with pestles,
 They hit each other's heads with spades.

Gorja is incensed; she goes to her natal home.
 Who will help bring Gorja back to you?
 The devout Bhagirath takes back Ganga
 The Ganga is taken back to earth.²
 You, O Dhudu, You remain alone
 Dhudu is now left alone.
 Dhudu puts the entire flora in a box,
 Dhudu puts the entire fauna in a box.
 The box he puts under his pillow,
 For twelve years he goes off to sleep.
 For twelve years there is famine on earth.

Dance, O Dhudu, dance!
 Dhudu dances with his matted-locks swaying,
 With his dreadlocks swaying.

Nauala is a prestige-rite or transformative ceremony held particularly as thanksgiving after the performance of certain rituals of passage, consisting of invocation and propitiation by offering a he-goat as the sacrificial animal. The ritual is performed by Shiva's *chelas*-oracles, the Sippis, who enter into trance; possessed, as it were, by Dhudu. The trance possession is considered auspicious and with it starts the ceremony in which a ram or he-goat is offered. The indication of acceptance of sacrificed is divinized by sprinkling water on the sacrificial animal. If the animal shivers visibly, it is an indication of acceptance and if the animal does not, the sacrifice cannot be made. The sacrificial meat is then served as a part of the feast made over to all the participants/devotees by the host conducting this ritual. While the Sippi-*chela* is in trance, he makes prognostications about the clan, some general predictions of larger interest, such as one about weather (if there will be drought or much snow, or it will be a normal year). Then he takes specific questions by the host-family, and offers solutions. The devotees also take the opportunity to ask personal questions about the maladies afflicting them, or questions regarding the present and future worries. While the possession dance ends after a while, the devotional invocation of Dhudu—mostly focusing on his marriage to Gorja (Girija, the mountain goddess), or the relationship between Shiva and Gaddis—goes on throughout the night.

This paper documents the Nauala ritual as a prism for folklore and social change. I have used my fieldnotes and others' documentation to map tangentially the altered perception and articulation of changing self-identity of the Gaddis. In the following sections, I argue that the

²Bhagirath was the mythical king of Ayodhya, the forebear of epic hero Rama, who meditated for years and performed many austerities to win favor with Shiva. The object of his worship was to bring the celestial river Ganga, which provides salvation, to earth. He wanted Shiva to shield the impact of turbulent river Ganga, soaking the water in his dreadlocks, before making it flow across the Indo-Gangetic plains into the Bay of Bengal.

Gaddis shepherds, who were displaced from their ancestral habitat and the ways of nomads, adopted new ways to perform this ritual. As the significance of ritual in their lives changed focus, so did the ways of performance and transmission. The changing transmission of Nauala performance points to the larger process of social change. These changes correspond to long term changes in the ethnographic profile of the shepherds, as narrated in the following section.

Transforming Ethnographic Profile

Dhudu played a distinct social role in the lives of Gaddi shepherds. Shiva was personalized and integrated into the belief and life of these pastoralists like nowhere else in South Asia. Such integration congealed their identity around this deity who influenced their day-to-day life, influenced their rites of passage, and marked major events in a yearly pastoral cycle. The relationship was reciprocal: Shiva was for pastorals as the Gaddis were for Shiva. The existence of each without the other was not conceivable. In their myths, the shepherds facilitated the stay of Shiva on mountain top, just as Shiva ensured bounties for shepherds.

The Gaddi shepherds³ were distinct in their attire of *chola* and *dora*: a knee length coarse woolen frock coat tied firmly on the waist by an 18-meter long woolen rope (Fig. 1) (CDG 1910:205-06; CDG 1962:186). Their movement was fixed and cyclic, with certain rights over pasturage spread across landscape and altitude. They spent the summers in alpine pastures of Lahul and Spiti, while the winter months were lived in the lower hills of Kangra, Utrakhand and Panjab. Traversing the altitudes ranging from 4000 meters to 100 meters in a year, the seasonal migration of Gaddis from the alpine pastures (Lahul and Pangni) to Gadherana—their homeland—and to the temperate pastures (Kangra and the lower hills) was not arbitrary, but well worked out in a time framework (Fig. 2). This was woven into their belief system as well, wherein they worked out the migration of Dhudu into summer and winter abodes (Kailasha and Pyalpuri), corresponding to their migratory cycle. The itinerary earlier was also tied to the cycle of village-fairs, providing them trading opportunities with the local society.



Fig. 1: A Gaddi couple in traditional dress, Chunaid village, Gadherana. Photographed by author in 1990.

³The attention of readers is drawn to the following works on Gaddi shepherds, which deal with various aspects of their lives and profession: Barnes (1850); Lyal (1872); PCR (1881); Rose (1883) and (1909); O'Brien and Morris (1900); CDG (1910 and 1962); KDG (1926); Brahmaur (1964); Devi Kothi (1964); Chitrari (1964). More recent works include: Bhasin (1987); Newell (1957 and 1967); Saberwal (1999); Shashi (1977); Handa (2005); Sharma, Manorma (1998); Wagner (2013). For a migratory account see Noble (1987); for an anthology, Lal and Kumar (2012). See also Dhir (1972); Negi (1972); C. Singh (1997); Bhattacharya (2003); Sharma (2012a and 2012b).



Fig. 2. The Gaddis moved across altitudinal zones in their quest for pasturage. In this Kangra painting from the Archer collection, stylistically dated to c. 1900 (Archer 1973: II: 234. Pl. 76), the painter depicts one such family on the move with their flock—sheep and goats—that is guarded by the Gaddi shepherd dog. One can see the heavy load that they carried and how they stowed provisions in the loosely tied upper garment. Courtesy Sotheby's.

The routine of herding through different pastures was, however, regulated by the state. For instance, the state controlled their movement by regulating pastures, canceling right-to-way, and controlling access to routes and pastures during migrations (KDG 1926:89). Such changes underpinned the dependence of Gaddis upon the settled agrarian society. The sustained exposure and interaction between the nomads and settled communities led to hierarchical stratification of the shepherding community over time. As a survival strategy, the Gaddis sanskritized/universalized their social organization, and appropriated dominant caste identities in ways tailored to facilitate social correspondence with the plains-people

that they were interacting with, and on whom they were dependent for summer's lodgings, pastures, livelihood, as well as to further their economic gains (Sharma 2012a:13-35). Thus, in order to facilitate an interactive trade situation, the pastorals appropriated the caste superstructure, even though they remained external to its social dynamics.⁴ In the process, much like other peripatetic communities interacting with settled peasant communities (Markovits et al. 2003:8; Sauli 2003:215-39), the shepherds were relegated to the fringe of the larger social order. Such interactions, mediated and regulated by the state, however exemplify the confrontation of traditional past with the powerful trends of modernization, wherein indigenous arrangements were defined and opposed against externally originating institutions “at variance with local conditions and much less responsive to regional contingencies” (Bhattacharya 1995:54; Chakravarty-Kaul 1996:4).

Significantly, these changes also meant that the entire family did not move to pastures, as they once did. During summers, when the shepherds grazed their flocks in alpine pastures, the women stayed back in their sedentary base in Gadherana, growing summer crops. Their men

⁴Such external changes, without major change to their internal structures by 1955, resulted in confusion particularly to the ethnographers assuming them to be a part of homogeneous Hindu society. Newell (1955:101-10), for instance, defined the Gaddi marriages as isogamous because of his vantage position of caste as internal to the Gaddi society, just as it was in the Indian mainland. Such is his confusion that he then tries to reconcile this with statements like: “Yet in spite of this isogamous process taking place it is not in conflict with the principle of endogamy for it is the Gaddi which is the name of the caste” (106). If Gaddi is a caste name, then what do stratification and hierarchy within it mean? If it is different, then why call it a monolith? In a way, this is also the problem of colonial anthropologists as well as the nationalists following them, wherein they were obsessed with fixing caste into “people” or “tribes” based on the notions of occupations, corresponding to the concept prevalent in the Indo-Gangetic plains. They refused to understand that it could be the other way around, or a more complex and nuanced process as in the case of changing identity of the Gaddis.

visited them off and on, taking turns (Axelby 2007:35-75). This was the community time, when they fraternized by offering such rituals as Nauala. However, the community spread out during the winters as the flocks moved on to the temperate forests of lower hills—Kangra, Jammu, Sirmaur, and so on. The family, particularly women and children, was forced to stay with the local society, often offering menial help. They were provided lodgings. In return, the Gaddi women performed domestic chores and sustained themselves by working as porters and laborers. This, moreover, brought them into everyday cultural contact with settled agrarian society, and later when they settled in these areas, these cultural contacts facilitated their integration into this society.

Since the 1980s, however, more and more Gaddis have sold off their flocks and settled down in the lower hills. As they were integrated into the larger society, they adopted the lifestyle, dominant beliefs and lore of the society they immigrated into. In the process they also lost base with their own lore and customs, as well as the custodians of rituals like the Sippis. As the process of migration, interaction and seasonal settlement with the peasant society, and finally permanent relocation and settlement in the lower-hills firmed up, it also resulted in change in the Nauala ritual performance.

Nauala Performance

The Nauala was a ceremonial event for which the nine Gaddi *als*, or clans, met in veneration to Dhudu. Unlike other Hindu deities, there was no temple or dedicated ceremony to Dhudu except the performance of Nauala ritual by the Gaddis. The ritual was offered by the family on transformative occasions and was sanctified by the elders/shamans of the nine clans. The Nauala ritual was a way of reaffirming their allegiance to Dhudu. The participation of clan leaders or members of all clans reaffirmed the bond of community, a feeling that was otherwise hard for people who were nomads and had little contact with each other during the course of year as usually their herding routes and locations were far apart.

When I first participated in the Nauala ritual-performance in Thanetar in 1990, the Gaddi shepherd village in Gadherana, the singing began with the *Reharas*, a caste of professional bards called *bhagats* (literally “singers of devotional music,” who also performed animal sacrifice). They sang the rather lengthy myth of cosmogony that established the organic relationship between Dhudu and the shepherds. It is only towards the end of this singing that Dhudu is formally invited to the household where the sacrifice in his honor is offered. The Nauala song has three distinct parts. The creation or *brahmakhara*, which is sung in a very slow rhythm by the *Rehara*-bards, followed by *bharath* (“the middle”), and finally the *var*, or the finale, which is frenzied singing and dancing epitomized by the “dance of Dhudu” song produced above (Sharma 1991:248):

Mrigasanayen diyan dhupan je paiyan . . .

The month of peak-summers,
When the body perspires effusively,
With your right hand, my lord,

You extracted a thick layer,
 Of perspired-dirt!
 With the left hand
 You sculpted,
 A human form out of it.
 In this statue you “blew”
 The essence of life.
 You called this “life” a “human”!
 It stood erect, in awe and devotion.
 The “human” who could listen
 Your words,
 Who stood with hands folded [in supplication],
 Were known as Gaddis, the shepherds.
 The shepherds pray in your name,
 We worship you, in words and deed,
 My lord, the great benevolent
 Dhudu—he-who-is-ever-smearred-in-ash.

This opening stanza of Nauala singing is known as *brahmakhara* or the word of creation (from Brahma, the creator). It is only towards the end of the creation myth that Dhudu is invited as a guest in whose honor sacrifice is offered. The invitation having been made, in come running the Sippnaitus, the oracles, and as they get possessed, and once the sacrifice is offered, the Nauala ritual starts:

Kuni samiye tera mada ditta . . .
 Who is the host (*assami*) that prepare your *manda*
 (Who is the swami who prepared your *mandala*)
 Who strung together the garland, you wear?
 The learned *pandit* wrote my *mandala*
 The dexterous gardener made the garland.

Mand is the bread made by four persons of the host family (*sami* or *assami*) and neighbors to be offered to Dhudu. This bread is made of millets and honey. However, these days the word *mand* is substituted by *mandala*, the figurative diagram used in Hindu worship of the nine-planets (*navagraha pujan*). Similarly the word *assami* or *sami* used for host is changed into *swami*, used for the Brahmin-priest. Hence, the host is replaced by the agency of priesthood, which dominates the ritual. Thus by subtle rearrangement of words the change in transmission agency and officials of rituals is effected and legitimated.

The song then continues to invoke the fierce aspect of Dhudu, the protector of shepherds and forests (Sharma 1991:248—new translation):

Aoyan vo samiya sanjhkariya belan . . .
 The brown locks dangle on the forehead

The matted-locks adorn the head,
 Your neck is covered with the garlands
 Made of *rudraksha* beads.
 Come my lord, go my lord
 At the time when sun sets;
 Stay with us, be our guest tonight.
 We offer food, we offer water,
 All offerings are displayed in front of you,
 You take back, the great lord,
 Today you take back what you gave us.

At this point the frenzy of Sippnaitus starts. They have come in running, possessed, singing. The air is filled with music: the longhorns, the kettledrums, and high pitched singing. The he-goat or ram is offered and water sprinkled over it by the *chela*. If the sacrificial animal is accepted, soon the blood flows, which is smeared on the foreheads of oracles, and maybe the host. Some oracles also drink ritually the blood dripping from the head of the sacrificed animal. Thereafter, the oracles with blood smeared foreheads start doing the “voices” (talking in tongues in the voice of Dhudu), prognosticating. Many people join this frenzy, dancing in trance. Now Dhudu is invoked in this frenzied dance. Substances, cannabis in particular, are used, legitimated as “herb” by the Nauala singers. The song is set against the backdrop of the seasonal migration of these shepherds, when they move to the higher mountains and alpine pastures in summers. Dhudu too moves to the mountains for the six months, to return to the lower hills in winters. (unpublished):

Niladesan te nata laiaunda . . .

The sky is overcast
 There is hint of thunderstorm
 Today, my lord, is the ominous night
 Dhudu goes today to the mountain-top.
 What will you, Dhudu, do on the mountain-top?
 I will get the “herb” from the mountain-top.
 I will order a dancer from the Niladesa.

Who is the ruler of Pyalpura?
 The Naga-serpent is the ruler of Pyalpura.
 Who is the king of heaven?
 Inder is the one who lords over heaven.
 Who is the one who rules over the humankind?
 Dhudu is the one who rules over the humankind.
 Kamakhya is the goddess of the Kurudesas.
 What does Kamakhya bestows to us?
 Kamakhya confers the gifts of sons.

What is significant is how various Hindu deities are associated with Dhudu in the body of song. The threefold division between heaven, netherworld and earth is interesting. Indra—the wielder of thunderbolt who controlled rain, the Vedic high-god—is the ruler of the divine sphere. Serpents or *nagas* are the lords of netherworld, called Pyalpara. Dhudu is prominent on earth, among humans. Yet the lower regions, the temperate winter abode of Dhudu and the Gaddis, is also called Pyalpara. But Dhudu embraces it, as he wears snake on his body, thus unifying the two worlds in his person. There are tantric associations in the song as well—intended or not—but, interestingly, of Kamakhya, the prominent deity of the east—called Kurudesā (?), or the country of Kauravas—who bless them with sons. Son preference is built into the body of song, echoing the patriarchal structures similar to the peasant society that these shepherds interacted with (unpublished):

Jadi mun lainda dhara para . . .

Dhudu goes today to the mountain-top.

What will you, Dhudu, do on the mountain-top?

I will get the “herb” from the mountain-top.

The play of the *nata*-dancer is so enchanting!

All “herbs” come to watch the spectacle

But the “herb-hypnotic” is not to be seen.

The herb that kills the loved ones,

The herb that induces the dancer to dance!

The “herb-hypnotic” was caught hold of,

It was caught and produced in front of you.

What shall we do with this herb?

We shall process the herb.

What shall we do with the residue?

Shall make intoxicating-drink from it,

Which is like eating a “living” lamb [?].⁵

Dhudu gulps down a tumbler full of the intoxicating-drink,

He bares his chest,

His eyes are bloodshot.

Dance, Dhudu, dance,

Dance with your elf-locks untangled.

Dance I shall, but there is no music?

Break your breasts and make the resonating-bowl of them,

Pluck your hair and make the stings out of them,

Break your fingers to make plectra out of them.

⁵The centrality of sacrifice and the use of intoxicant *bhang*-cannabis, which is generally associated with Shiva, are legitimated in this ritual process. It seems that the processing of *bhang*, the intoxicant, is fused with the blood of sacrifice.

Dance, O Dhudu, dance!
 Dhudu dances with his matted-locks swaying,
 With his dreadlocks swaying.

This song ends with the verses first reproduced, of dancing Dhudu left alone by Gorja and Ganga. He is angry thereafter, a phase that leads to long period of famine. He thus needs to be placated and the process of life started. The Gaddis placate him by dancing, sacrificing, and worship. Night-long vigil, therefore, is kept in his honor and devotional songs are sung. These ritual songs or devotional songs are called *ainchalis*.

While Shiva as Dhudu is the major focus of the singing, of late the *ainchalis* influenced by their cultural contact with the lower hills and Panjab plains have made an inroad, particularly those singing the exploits of Krishna and Rama, the two predominant Vaishnava devotional themes. As the Gaddis started settling down in the lower hills, the singing of songs other than Shiva were introduced as *ainchalis*, which kept the tempo of night-long vigil to Dhudu going. Later, as we will observe, some of these themes were filtered into the structure of Nauala ritual performance, indicating a nuanced shift in ritual emphasis that moved closer to the society they were migrating into.

The Nauala ritual songs were sung exclusively by the professional ritualists and bards: the Sippis and *Reharas*. During the course of ritual/ceremony, the *Reharas* received customary dues in kind, along with Sippnaitus, who presided over these ceremonies. The Sippis also had a right over the head (*munda*), hooves (*tunda*), and skin (*khaladu*) of the sacrificed animal. The *Reharas*, on the other hand, received fixed customary dues for their singing during the months of *jatras* (“pilgrimages”) in summer from predetermined families bound in a mutually reciprocal service relation. Interestingly, the *Reharas*, as well as Sippis, also acted as wool-clippers for these shepherding families. The ritual performance and professional activities were therefore enmeshed into each other, binding the performers and the shepherds. This relationship was at the root of sustaining the clans of transmitters, which has declined in recent times.

Changing Ritual-Performance

As observed earlier, the significance of Nauala for the Gaddi shepherds was such that the members/leaders of the nine clans met in veneration to Dhudu. Later, as the Gaddis started settling down in the lower hills and gave up shepherding, there was a shift in the meaning of the ritual as well. As the clans could not meet in the large disparate areas that the Gaddis settled in, the meaning of Nauala also changed. Hence it came to mean a performance consisting of nine people: the *chela*-oracle, priest, four singers, the host who offered sacrifice of the ram, the slayer of the sacrifice, and the cook. There were changes in the transmission as well as the ministrants of the ritual. As the settlement forced adoption of social categories of the society in which the Gaddis settled—hence classified in caste terms—the need to reaffirm community identity weakened. The oracles, thereupon, gave way to the Brahmin-priests (as noted above in the subtle change made in the opening verses of the ritual), and the ritual became more like the Hindu invocation of gods. Nauala, the gathering of nine clans and later of nine people, thereafter

transformed into *Nava-ala*, or the nine houses, with each house conceived as the seat of a major planet (*navagraha puja*), just like the standard modern Hindu worship. In this altered form of worship, Shiva is invoked along with the goddess and Ganesha. The *dham* (“rice-feast”) is now given the next day after the worship, just like the Hindus of Kangra do, though the animal sacrifice still retains centrality in the ritual performance.

As observed above, the Brahmin-priests made small changes in the opening verses of Nauala to accommodate their ritual structure. Concurrently, in the areas around Chamba and the southern slope of the Dhauladhar mountain range where the Gaddis settled in large number over time, the role of Sippis, were systematically edged out by the Brahmins, which is also visible in the shifts in Nauala performance. Even prior to the Brahmins, the Jogis edged out the Sippis as *chelas* of this ritual. The Jogis, a class of Shaivite ascetics/householders who professed tantric and yogic practices, were associated with the state formation of Chamba. Thus they had significant presence and enjoyed prestige in Chamba, Jammu, and Kangra (Sharma 2009). The householder Jogis were also a class of singers known for singing *Jogi-Magh*, a devotional genre sung in the month of *Magh* (February). It seems that in Chamba and in the southern slope of Dhauladhar range, where they had some presence, they replaced the Sippi-*chelas* and became associated with the Nauala ritual. This may be perceived in the Nauala performance in such areas as well, where they emphasize the role of Jogis in bringing Shaivism to the area, a subtle way by which the Sippis were distanced and their own role in worship legitimated. Other deities are mentioned, unlike the opening lines of creation—*brahmakhara*. An alternative cosmogony is thus envisioned, an attempt to sanskritize the Nauala ritual by attributing causation to known Hindu deities. As has been documented also by Manorma Sharma (1998:74), I translate the opening lines of Jogi variant of Nauala song (unpublished):

Hoya na thi, sansar ha thiya/ Tarloki Nath bhunta . . .
 When there was no earth,
 When there was no air, no world,
 Tarlokinath, the lord of three-spheres (Shiva) was there.
 The four goddesses (Indrani), five Pandavas,
 The four Narayan, and seventh the goddess Sheetla
 Eighth, the clan deity, the Nagas (serpent deity), the nine Naths,
 One Arjun, the Mahabharata hero, Siddha Bhairavanath,
 The lakes, the water . . .

While other deities are mentioned in this Jogi variant, Shiva continues to remain central to the Gaddis, albeit in altered form. Shiva is perceived as Trilokinath or the Lord-of-three-worlds, who gives boon of “herding” to the Gaddis as his special messengers.⁶ At one level this change in name makes little difference; at another level, we see how the Jogis use this myth to sanskritize, to universalize the local within the larger Hindu perspective, which is welcomed by the Gaddis

⁶There are other songs to this effect, whereby Gaddi men are professionally endowed as shepherds while women (*Gaddan*) are blessed with beauty (*rupa*) by Shiva. How gendered stereotypes and work divisions are reinforced once the shepherds settle down with peasant communities is an interesting insight gleaned from these songs.

who were already sanskritizing their social structures to integrate with the settled communities they were migrating into. Dhudu, the local thus gives way to Trilokinath, the sanskritic.

This song of alternative creation was then followed by the verse where Shiva is invited, a part where Jogis affirmed their relationship with Chamba in general and Gaddis in particular (Sharma 2009:78):

Dacchan desan te Siddh-joggi aye/ tu mere samiya . . .

From the southern country

Siddha Jogis came.

Come Dhudu, come in the evening

Come and be our guest tonight.

Nine men give you the offerings of *Nauala*

O Dhudu, let me repay your debt.

Dance O Dhudu, dance with your locks swaying

Dance O Dhudu, dance . . .

The change in the ritual structure is also mapped. It's a ritual of paying back the debt of Dhudu (*lai jayan samiyān apana udhara*), offered by nine men. Like an innovation in the opening verses of the *Nauala*, a new ending is also offered to the ritual structure. After a night-long vigil and singing of *ainchalis* or devotional songs, the *Nauala* ritual ends with the rise of sun, the chirping of birds. All the deities participating in the sacrifice-ritual must go back to their domains; all humans to their chores. All people, metaphoric birds, are exhorted to leave the house after the auspicious night (Sharma, Manorma 1998:74):

Utth mereya pankeradua/ Hoyi hain naketan ho . . .

Get up and rise, my little bird,

The new day has begun.

Get up and rise (go away), my little bird,

Those on night-vigil are still awake.

Get up and go away my little bird,

The lord Ganapat (the elephant-headed deity) is wide awake.

Get up and rise, my little bird,

Sheetla, the goddess of pox, is wide awake . . .

The ritual comes to an end with these verses. These days, however, the *dham* is given to the entire village, as is a practice in Kangra valley and other lower hills, on the following day in commemoration of the successful passage of the *Nauala* ritual. While earlier the community revisited its identity in the sacrificial feast on the night of *Nauala* performance, these days it is more of a vestige that has little meaning in terms of community binding. The rice-feast in fact is more meaningful as it is given to the entire village, in which the Gaddis and other communities participate, which serves as a process of integrating the Gaddis with the communities they have settled in (for caste and *dham*, Parry 1979:95-101).

The Nauala ritual singing was exclusively a masculine domain, though women participated in the ritual process. There were, however, exclusive masculine ritual activities. For instance, even if women partook of the sacrifice, they were not part of the sacrificial ritual; yet they were equal ritual-partners in the Nauala offerings to Dhudu along with their husbands. In recent times however, the *ainchalis* sung during the night of vigil (*jagra/jagrata*) have slowly been replaced by *jatras*, local pilgrimage to various shrines as part of wish-fulfilling or thanksgiving. The pilgrimage songs, called *bhents* (“to a goddess”), and *bhajans* (“devotional songs”), picked up from the Panjab plains or lower hills, have slowly acquired the spiritual center-stage, if not totally replacing the *ainchalis*. These songs are sung more by women, even if they do not constitute their exclusive domain. Such singing has made a huge impact on the structure of Nauala in Kangra, which is reflected in the Nauala song as well. These changes make significant alterations in the myth and reinvent it to cater to the new found identity of the Gaddis: shepherds physically displaced from their homeland, who do not herd, and live like peasants in the lower hills. The new myth rearticulates their identity as plains-settled caste stratified community who worship various Hindu deities, Shiva being one of them (Sharma, Manorma 1998:76). This may be contextualized in the Nauala variant of dancing Dhudu song from Kangra (unpublished):

Shiba mere mahadeba bo/Sikra ma tadi lagayi . . .

Shiva, my great lord
Goes up to the mountain top to meditate,
Shiva, my great lord.
Shiva is dancing with his hair lose,
With his hair dangling, Shiva dances,
Shiva, my great lord.

The dear Rani Gorja, Rani Gorja,
Is dying of stomachache, Rani Gorja
Of stomachache is she dying,
Shiva, my great lord.
What shall you bring from dread-locks,
Shiva, my great lord.
I shall bring Thakur down from my crown [head]
Shiva brings Thakur down from his head [the mountain top]
Shiva, my great lord.

How the cosmologies are inverted is interesting. How iconography is challenged and reworked is a pointer to the way social change enters a subtle way into the mythological plane. In the first song, translated in the beginning, the dance is used to bring about two realities in the persona of Shiva, who is envisioned as a mountain: first, seating forest in the person of goddess, Girija—the daughter of the mountain; second, the rivers flowing from the mountain in the person of the river goddess, Ganga. The two are shown quarreling over their matrimonial right over Shiva, who is left alone as a consequence of his shared sympathies. This myth is, however, inverted in this

song. The goddess, in this song, is in pain and the medication is sought in the Vaishnava symbol: Thakur or Rama. Is Shiva distanced in the lives of shepherds? Obviously this intervention does not represent the centrality of Shiva in the lives of these people. This is, indeed, a culturally nuanced intervention, as Rama is perceived as an inclusive integrative symbol prominent within the larger community of Kangra women singing. The intervention not only distances the Gaddis from their shepherding roots, but also is seen as a tool to integrate them into the peasant society of the lower hills where they are settling.

The change in the ritual structure is indicative of the shifting role of Dhudu in the lives of Gaddis and their attitude towards ritual. Today, the temples of goddess and other deities have appeared even in Gadherana. While Dhudu retains centrality in their lives, various deities are also worshipped and invoked at different times. Nauala is offered every now and then, though the function and meaning of ritual is no more the same. This shift is consistent with the process of change, so evident in the altered economic and social structures of the Gaddis.

Changing Transmission

During my first visit to Gadherana in 1990, my rather rudimentary and cumbersome cassette player proved to be an unimagined asset. After each recording the performer wanted to hear what he had sung. The Gaddis were dumbfounded! I would be forced to play the same song umpteen times to various audiences—amidst amused banter and laughter—before I could undertake the second recording. The fact that they could hear their own voice evoked in them a notion of “immortality,” the recording being a reminder of their presence on earth. Many warmed to me and acceded to my request simply because they wanted to leave their mark on the cassette player. The way their oral traditions were being transmitted was already changing and unwittingly I was also an agent of change. While I could document—record and write—they have since started producing their own cassettes, CDs (and of late VCDs), with music playing to the beats of popular Hindi films that cater to the local sensibilities and market. In the process, the traditional transmitters have taken a back seat and are fast vanishing; the earlier songs have been modified; the myths sanskritized. The identity has undergone change.

While I was in Gadherana, I was mostly recording with two traditional performers. A professional bard or *Rehara* from the village Chaleda, named Kathu (Fig. 3), and Bhagal Ram of village Thanetar, a *Bhagat* or ritual performer. Like the Dom musicians of Kangra, *Reharas* sing to the accompaniment of *daf* (“one-headed hand-drum”) and *dotara* (“double-stringed instrument”). Bhagal Ram played on *dholak* (“two-headed hand-drum”) while singing, usually accompanied by his daughter and his son-in-law (Fig. 4). The function of these performers was twofold: first, transmitting the self-actualizing history of the shepherds and their relationship with the sacred, which was intimate and personal, and second, sensitizing them as well as associating their identity with the pan-Indian sacred ethos. They would, thus, sing the myth of cosmogony, the *ainchalis* of Nauala—of Shiva, Krishna and Rama—and also sing the Nath legends popular in north India (Gold 1993): of Puranbhagat, Gopi Chand, Bhatrihari (Temple 1884). Bhagal Ram would also sing devotional songs that were rather popular in Kangra.



Fig. 3. Kathu, of village Chaleda (Grima *panchayat*): Photographed by author in 1990.



Fig. 4. Bhagal Ram of village Thanetar, Gadherana, along with his daughter and son-in-law. Photographed by author in 1990.

Bhagal Ram, who became a *bhagat*, or singer of devotional music, following his father's footsteps, was one of the first in Thanetar to sell his *dhan* ("flock") and settle down in a Kangra village in the early 1980s. His son was averse to the peripatetic life and became a taxi driver. His grandsons had little use for the Gaddi traditions, except for ritual purposes, as they wanted to be mainstreamed by the dominant, the perceived superior culture. Bhagal Ram's daughter and son-in-law occasionally accompanied him, as also in some of my recordings, but after his death they gave up altogether. Their offspring refused to follow the shepherding profession and have no education in the lore of community. The transmission lineage of Bhagal Ram faded out with him. The same was the fate of Kuthu, the *Rehara* professional singer. His sons too despised his ways of moving from family to family, from fair to fair, singing and earning small amounts or collecting customary dues. Though he did not migrate out of Gadherana, his sons did. After his death, his singing-lineage died with him, too. Today, one occasionally gets to hear the *Reharas* singing in *jatra*-pilgrimage, as in Chhatrari or Bharmaur temple towns in Chamba (Brahmaur 1964; Chitrari 1964), for instance, but there are very few professional *Reharas*. The sedentization of many Gaddi families, the sale and pooling of flocks, the inroads made by monetized economy and technology, severed their relationship with the shepherds as clippers of wool. The severance of this service relationship affected their customary relationship as performers as well. Rarely do they now visit the far-flung and sparsely populated villages in Gadherana simply to sing and collect their customary dues. It is, in fact, not economically viable.

The transformation of ritual lore, the dying lineages of traditional singers and ritual specialists, and the eventual preservation and transmission of ritual-lore through audio and now video technology underscores the larger dynamics of change and reaction to modernity. The advent of education also played a critical role in this change. The semi-permanent or permanent settlement of families in the plain areas exposed the children to schools (where opportunities were more!), particularly after 1980s. While earlier there was only one school in Bharmaur town, schools were also opened in assorted Gadherana villages. Conceived as the school-on-the-move, these were functional during summers, in continuation to and complementing the school in the

plains (Kangra, and so on.) that catered to the educational aspirations during the winters. The aspirations of this literate generation moved towards settlement away from Gadherana, giving up herding and finding employment for themselves and education for their children in the plains. The educational exposure (in terms of world-view as well as job opportunities) however goes a long way in redefining the Gaddi identity, from transhumant shepherds to plains-settled agriculturists, along with sanskritization of identity over a period of time.

The complex process of sanskritization (a dynamic beginning with marginalization of the ego-identity, demonstrable influence of the dominant ethos, and finally unquestioningly imbibing the ways of the dominant—in this case the region of settlement) presupposes a movement away from herding and herders. Since the ethos of the settled community is much different from that of the herding society, this process helps us in understanding the transformation that took place in the structures of everyday life (for instance, giving up the traditional dress and adopting the western ways of dressing), redefining and reformulating major life events, notably marriage, death, and so on. For example, traditional forms of marriage by exchange (*batta-satta*), or elopement (*jharphuk*), were looked down upon and gave way to the Hinduized ritual, formalized by a Gaddi-Brahmin priest (Phillimore 1982:326-57; 1991:344; for changes in past 150 years, Kapila 2004:397-409). Obviously, there is not a complete severance with the past, though the “native” “traits” are relegated to margins. This resulted in a kind of shifts and transformations as we charted above in the structure of Nauala performance.

In recent times, the self-perception of Gaddis has come full circle. Quota politics for job reservations and other privileges, as in other parts of India, prodded the Gaddis to rearticulate and reassert their “tribal” identity as distinct from the “peasant” identity. After 2002, the Kangra-Gaddis were recognized as a “Scheduled Tribe” (ensuring quotas in jobs and in educational institutions, along with other protective measures within the larger grouping of STs), resulting in reassertion of their distinct identity markers. Thus, traditional dress has made a comeback on ceremonial and ritual occasions. There is a kind of informed “negotiation” as to when to resort to (or assert) traditional identity and when to be fixed in the “modern.” Another marker of distinction is the reinvention and transmission of the Gaddi folklore, particularly through the medium of market controlled CDs/DVDs (Wagner 2013). The performance of Nauala, albeit in its altered form, is one such reassertion.

The market however has a way of romanticizing and glamorizing to find base with heterogeneous sensibilities. For example, the cover of CDs/VCDs stereotypes ethnic communities by portraying them in exoticized traditional dress, not the westernized or north Indian clothing that they wear. Recently, Wagner has analyzed how such stereotypes are perpetuated: the CD/VCD cover usually portrays a Gaddi woman in excessive traditional dress and jewelry holding a lamb, while a Gaddi man is invariably shown playing on a flute, surrounded by his flock. The snow capped mountains, goat or sheep flock, and rivers, form the background. Thus the connection of the shepherds to the wilderness in counter distinction to the urban milieu in which these music-discs find place is accentuated (Wagner 2013:25-38). The Nauala ritual lore is also glamorized. The “dance of Dhudu” is removed from its context and presented as one song, with “fusion” music and dancing Gaddis. Only the portion that challenges Dhudu, romanticizes the use of cannabis, is frenetic in rhythm and conducive to dancing is sung and presented in these numerous music-discs. In the process, however, the traditional identity of

Gaddis as exclusive Shaivite shepherding community is rearticulated and their lore preserved and transmitted—even if it is hemmed, processed and modernized (westernized). This makes a perfect market sense, which creates and harnesses the perceptions of tradition and modern.

Conclusion

Recently, I was again invited to the Nauala ritual hosted by a non-shepherd Gaddi settled in Kangra and heard an audio-cassette playing the song “Dance of Dhudu,” recorded apparently by a Gaddi settler in Kangra to music influenced by the Bombay film industry. The Sippnaitus were not invited, as now they do not officiate at every Nauala sacrificial offering. The settlement of the pastoral Gaddis over a disparate and widespread area discourages this small community of *chelas* from officiating at the rituals taking place in far-flung areas from their habitations in Gadherana or the land of Gaddis. It makes no economic sense to them. Rather, the local Gaddi-Brahmin priests or else other oracles of dubious denominations, like the Jogis, preside over these and other community rituals as the rights of marginal Sippi *chelas* have been taken over and then innovated upon. In fact, there have also been court cases over the rights of differing communities to officiate over this ceremony in Chamba and other places where the Gaddi now live (Sharma 2009:304-39). In the process, the tenor of ritual—its sanctity, lore, and process—universalized. Even though the change conformed to the dominant tradition of ritual performance prevalent in the area, the distinctive trait of this ritual as a sacrificial performance was however retained. Noticeably, the change is more evident in the performance and reception of the song, which has mutated into an entertaining musical that is divorced from the context of ritual performance. While the sacrifice of the goat retains centrality in the Nauala ritual, the dance of Dhudu, which is liminal and cathartic, has acquired different meaning. It is no longer of sacral significance only. I witnessed how the inebriated youngsters danced as the pre-recorded audio-cassette played on, while the elderly looked on with amusement or frowns. The words were there . . . but there was no atmosphere. The fearsome dance of Dhudu did not invoke fear; nor awe and veneration as I experienced in the first instance; it was rather an entertainment!

The inebriated young modern Gaddi men dancing to the music of pre-recorded rendition of “Dance of Dhudu”—the finale of Nauala ritual-performance—is a reflection of change, about self perception, and the process of changing perceptions and market intervention. The way the context of modernization is perceived and modernizing sensibilities asserted, how aspirations are articulated and fulfilled, and how performance and tradition are reinvented, preserved, transmitted, and asserted may be glimpsed in that brief display. This interpretation, however, motivates us to revisit the process of dislocation and disembodiment of the “self” and ritual performance-text.

As the significance of Nauala ritual-performance in the lives of displaced Gaddis, removed from their ancestral habitat and nomadic ways, changed focus, so did the ways of performance and transmission of ritual-text. The displacement also severed their relationship with traditional transmission lineages of ritual-text, visible in subtle variations in ritual-performance. In the process, however, the tenor of ritual—text, performance, and agency—mutated into an unrelated “modern” musical score, removed both from the context of ritual-

performance as well as its human interface, the identity bearing text. The transformation of ritual text, dying lineages of traditional singers and ritual specialists, new interpretations and transmission agencies, and eventual preservation and transmission of ritual-lore through audio and now video technology, underscores the larger dynamics of change and engagement with modernity. This is the engagement of dislocated “identity” negotiating to reinvent itself through ritual-performance. But as the ritual performance-text becomes fragmented—uprooted and decontextualized—it only mirrors the dislocated disembodied self.

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