



The Pangwala People of Pangri Region: Ethnography of Rituals and Ceremonies

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the role of rituals and ceremonies of the Pangwala tribe in the Pangri region of Himachal Pradesh. The cultural identity and traditions of the Pangwala people become the pride and identity of this region, which is tried to analyse in ritual and ceremonies. The data were taken from the numerous villagers through observation and interview schedule. The content analysis was used to identify the rituals and ceremonies of this tribal community. With this regard, an ethnographic perspective was applied to the study of the description of the Pangwala ritual, focusing on the internal elements and their functions in the Pangwala society. Among the findings of this community is how important it is to preserve their beliefs to safe and keep the peace of the village. The study is highlighted to ensure people that the existence of the ritual and ceremonies is still implemented in the modern era as a part of the ancient heritage.

Keywords: Ethnography, Pangwala, Pangri, Traditions, Rituals.

INTRODUCTION

The cultural rituals and ceremonies of the Pangwala people become their pride and identity. The Pangwala traditional villages are situated mostly in remote areas. There has always been peace and harmony among the people. While all the residents did not have family ties, the spirit of brotherhood between members of society has always been closely intertwined. Rituals and ceremonies have played an important role in bringing the traditional Pangwala together and creating a harmonious atmosphere in the village. The process of rituals and ceremonies among the tribal people are often described as a reflection of its backwardness by western researchers. The younger generation of the Pangwala community shows interest and commitment to preserve the cultural heritage and treasures of the Pangwala tradition contained in rituals and ceremonies.

Objective and Methodology

Study on Pangwala cultural and customary heritage is still lacking and this has prompted the researcher to conduct this study in the hope to bring better understanding among

the community that is manifested in the process of ritual and ceremonies. This study aims to review and examine the rituals of preservation of customs and traditions contained in traditional ceremonies and celebrations centred in the community of the Pangwala villages in the hopes of fulfilling the following objectives, the first is to describe and evaluate the influence of the ritual and ceremonial process in moulding the life of the Pangwala people. This study is an ethnographic study. Qualitative methods are applied in this study with the main focus is primary and secondary research. Through primary research, the collection of data and information is collected through fieldwork. Interviews were conducted among informants in various villages. However, in addition to fieldwork, researchers used the library research method, and interviews were also conducted to obtain additional information. This study examines social settings from an internal perspective and producing descriptions and analyses, rather than using numbers, to obtain meaning.

Cyclic event in Pangwala people Birth

It is seen that the birth of the male child is welcomed.

After the birth of the male child they go to *deher* (temple) for worshipping the deity giving flowers as the symbol for congratulations. The villagers and relatives come for congratulations. They bring some sort of eatables like sattu, puri, dry fruits, fruits and sweets from the confectionaries. The purification ceremony is performed on the 12th day of the birth. It is called Baaro. After nine months, the name of the child is named. The maternal uncle shaves the hairs. This ceremony is called Mundan. The ceremony of a birth of a child is called Sangtangra. All customary and religious ceremonies take place after the birth of child. The pregnant mother is given the usual meals but *desi* (local) *ghee* is increased in her daily routine food. She is not allowed to take up any heavy and tough work. The delivery case is usually attended by an elderly woman of the house or of the village community. A trained midwife is called only when the delivery has become complicated.

Badhaie Dena (Process of Congratulating)- When the birth has taken place, the husband or any other man from the house informs the parents of the mother and conveys good words of the birth of a newborn. The messenger is given *sattu*, *ghee* and chapatis. The next day the messenger leaves and at the time of his departure, the household gives approximately half a kilo of *luchies*,

which he carries home. On the third day after the birth, all relatives come to greet the lucky pair. They bring either a goat or *bakroo*, *ghee* and *luchies*. One of the girl's parents also arrives on the same day. He/she brings *luchies*, *cheena* and *ghee* with him. A small quantity of butter is also brought for massaging the child. Sometimes the girl's parents visit on the ninth day instead of the third day of the birth of the child. They bring a separate bundle of *luchies*, *ghee* and *cheena* for the midwife. All the relatives stay for only one or two days. The child is brought out of the room in the first, second or third month of birth.

Purification Ceremony

The ceremony of purification occurs mainly on the third, ninth or twelfth day of the birth of newborns. All the mother's dresses are washed and the house is cleaned. In the late evening, the child is given a bath with warm water mixed with the urine of a *choori-cow*. After bath the child is massaged with butter. No soap is used for bathing him.

Food for the mother- For the first three days after the delivery, the mother is given *halwa* (made of refined flour) each morning with a fair quantity of *ghee*. In place of sugar, salt is added. For lunch and dinner, she is given big chapatis with *ghee*. After three subsequent days, she takes average food but the amount of *desi Ghee* rests high. For ten days after the delivery, she is given very little water to drink. On an average for the first ten days after

the delivery, she is made to take balanced and appropriate portion of *ghee*.

Naam Sanskaar- After the first, third, seventh or ninth month of the birth of a child, this ceremony is held. On an appointed day all villagers are invited and a dinner is given. The newborn child is taken out before the gathering. The child is named and called with name by the father.

Mundan Rituals- The *mundan* ceremony is also celebrated on the day of the *Naam Sanskaar* ceremony. The maternal uncle performs the rituals of hair cutting. After this process, every villager of one household offers some rupees to the child, which the mother collects. The amount of money collected is spent to make some sort of lucky piece for the child. The cutting hair of baby is placed in a *kiltoo*. For this a special *kiltoo* called *gugto* is taken and cow dung is applied on both the sides. The hair is put between two *bakroos* or *mandays*. A man is deputed to carry it to *adhwari*. On reaching there he digs a pit and buries it. Sometimes the *kiltoo* carrying the hair is kept in the house for a year and then taken to the *adhwari*. The man who performs this duty is given chapatis and a definite quantity of *ghee*.

The child is taken outdoors on the third, seventh or ninth day after birth. On the first *Punahie* festival, it is the duty of the parents to take the newborn to the village deity. They carry with them a *bakroo* made of *atta* and *ghee* and *halwa*. After offering this to the deity of the village, these things are distributed among the villagers as *parshaad*. On returning home, a grand feast is thrown which includes heavy consumption of wine.

Praja-ka-Bhoje (Public Feast)- A day is fixed for entertaining the villagers. In this feast the villagers are served with *luchi*, *Ghee* and *kari*. Meat and wine are also served. The *praja* in return gives flowers to the parents of the newborn as a symbol of their good wish. When the child is taken to visit his maternal grandfather for the first time he gets a ram and some utensils. While returning, the maternal grandfather also gives *luchies*, *manday* and a definite quantity of *ghee*.

Marriage

The high castes, Rajputs and Brahmins can inter-marry. The rituals is similar among the lower classes, the Lohars, Dhakies can also inter-marry. A marriage is prohibited between kinsmen on the father's side and on the mother's side. A boy may search for an appropriate girl for himself. When he has found a girl and she is also willing to marry him, further issues are taken by the parents of both sides. A marriage is performed in three subsequent stages *pillam*, *fakki* and *chakki*.

Pillam- Through a third party the parents of the boy approach the parents of the girl and explore the possibilities of such a marriage alliance. If the girl's parents agree to it, both the sides fix a suitable day when the boy could meet the girl. On the appointed day, the boy pays a visit to the girl's parents, accompanied by three or four of his friends. The boy brings with him three or four bottles of wine, *luchies* and a piece of ornament. All the members of the girl's household and the boy's party sit together and dine. The girl and her parents also join this party. Later on the girl accepts the piece of jewellery brought to her by the boy. This ceremony is called *pillam*. The coming of the boy and his party to the house, and the girl's acceptance of the jewellery article indicates that the girl's parents have given their consent to the marriage. This ceremony is celebrated only for a day. At night they get together and eat and drink. Next day in the morning the boy and his party return to their homes. *Pillam* as a traditional ritual is more significant than the actual marriage, after this very day the boy keeps on frequently visiting his fiancée. After this day, the girl is the boy's wife legally, and if she becomes the mother, the boy will be the lawful father of the newborn. Though, she does not leave the home of her parents until the final marriage ritual is performed.

Fakki- Within a time period of one year a day is finalized by both the parties to celebrate the *fakki* traditional ceremony. The boy brings bottles of wine, *luchies* and *halwa* with him. The girl's parents might also ask for anything else other than eatables, i.e., jewellery or clothes. Usually, the boy and his party reach in the evening.

Lum- As night falls, both the parties sit together. The girl's parents also collect their friends and relatives. At this stage, the girl's father asks for *lum*, a ceremony in which the boy's side gives money to all the girl's relatives. However, it remains to be decided by each relative whether he will or will not accept the *lum*. After the *lum* ceremony, the boy's side gives sixty to seventy *luchies* wrapped in a *pattu* to the maternal uncle of the girl, who distributes them among the gathering and the *pattu* is passed on to the girl. The girl's side serves food to all persons present which again includes *luchies*, *halwa* and *kari*. When the meals are over, women dance till the early hours of the morning. According to their capacity, the boy's side distributes monetary rewards, and this the women afterward distribute among themselves. All of them stay overnight at the girl's place. In the morning, the girl's parents entertain all with *luchies*, *manday*, *cheena* and meat. The boy and his party leave in the evening. At this stage the girl's parents give about a seer of *sattu* and twelve to thirteen *luchies* to every man of the party. If the boy likes he can stay for some days more, otherwise he

also leaves the girl's place the same day.

Chakki- This is the term used for the final marriage. After the *fakki* ceremony is over, both the parties again fix a day within one or one and half years of *fakki*. The practice is that the boy generally chooses to go to the girl's house on Sunday, Tuesday or Thursday and takes the bride home on Monday, Wednesday or Friday. *Vaisakha*, *Asadha*, *Kartika*, *Pausa*, *Magha*, and *Phalgun* are considered auspicious months for marriage. The bridegroom visits the bride's house and leads a *barat* directed by the *diwaan* and *patmarah* and the cousin of the Bridegroom. *Patmarah* is the name specified to a person for performing definite responsibilities in the marriage. He carries a sword ceremony with him, it is believed, renders protection to the groom against ghosts and evil spirits. The bride and groom wear a traditional dress. No music is played. Besides the actual *barat* of the groom, some *bhari* are also engaged to carry *kiltoos* of *luchies*, *halwa* and bottles of wine. The *bharies* deposit their load at the bride's place and return the same day. On this occasion, the bride and groom take bottles of wine, *luchies* and *halwa*. Everyone assembles in a room at the girl's place and while the bride and bridegroom sit next to each other incense is burnt before them. Both of them then offer prayers before the village deity. This ceremony marks the end of the final performance of the marriage ceremonies.

In the evening a meal consisting of *luchies*, *karies*, meat and wine is served to the guests. Women sing and dance. The following morning, the bride wears new clothes and ornaments which are given to her by her parents. Accompanied by her maternal uncle and a brother, she then sets out for her in-law's place. The procession is headed by the *diwaan* and the *patmarah* going ahead, and the couple following them. The *patmarah* keeps a sword with him. The maternal uncle and the brother of the bride join them later. When the procession reaches the bride and groom's place, a member of the household fires three or four shots in the air, which signals the couple's arrival. It is also a small ceremony performed to scare away ghosts and other evil spirits barring their house entrance and the couple. The couple stops at the main door. Meanwhile the eldest member of the house comes out carrying burning incense. He, first of all, worships the village deity, seeks the blessings of good luck for the couple, and then offers it to the couple. With this ceremony performed, the couple enters the house.

Dowry- The dowry of the bride includes a *choori*, sheep, goats and household utensils. The bride's brothers and other relatives also give her some presents.

Panihaan Ceremony- This ceremony is also called *baidikhailna*. Both the bride and the bridegroom are sent

out of a demarcated portion called as *panihaan*. On the other side, the maternal uncle of the bridegroom prepares two *totus* with half a seer of *sattus*. The upper parts of these *totus* are given a cup like shape and are filled with *ghee* and honey. The maternal uncle covers both of these *totus* with his hands. The left hand's *totu* is meant for the groom and the bride's right hand. Before a small gathering of villagers and other household members, the couple is signaled to take up their respective *totus* and eat them in the shortest possible time. Any one of them couple finishing earlier is considered smart, and the other one lagging behind becomes the laughing stock of the gathering. Those accompanying the bride, i.e., the maternal uncle and the bride's brothers, are called a *diwants*.

When the *panihaan* ceremony is over, the household entertains the *diwants*, the *patmarah*, and the *diwaan* with *halwa* and *luchies*. They are also given the locally brewed wine to drink. After a gap of about an hour, *rihani* takes place. In *rihani*, guests are given *ghee*, *chapaties* and honey. For two days a large quantity of wine is consumed. Every evening there is dancing and singing. In the case of the *diwants*, they are not allowed to drink water for these two days, and in its place, they keep on consuming wine. On the third day the *diwants* return home and on their departure, the household gives them four to twelve seers of *sattus*. On this day, the *diwaan* and *patmarah* also go home on the evening of the third day, when all the guests have left, the household organises a *jattar*. All the neighbouring villagers are invited. Singing and dancing once again becomes the highlights of the programme. Wine is served to the gathering.

Gauna Ceremony- The *gauna* ceremony is called *phironi* in the local dialect. While the *diwants* are preparing to leave, they call aside the bride and give her an early date to visit her parents. On the fixed day, the bride accompanied by her husband, visits her parents. She also takes with her *luchies* which on reaching there are distributed among members of the household. The couple stays there usually for three to four days and when they depart, the bride's parents give them equal quantities of *luchies*, *sattu* and *ghee*.

OTHER TYPES OF MARRIAGES

Topilana

It is a widow re-marriage and is allowable a year after the demise of her husband. In presence of two reputable men of the village community, the new husband gifts the widow with a *joji*. Her acceptance for this *joji* means she gives the consent for the remarriage. If a man desires to marry the widow, he must get her parents' consent and pay a certain sum. He can then take her home as his wife.

Marriage by force

This is a kind of marriage predominant in the region. A boy and a girl fall in love, and both of them find some sort of obstacle in their marriage; the boy elopes with the girl. *Jatras* are reflected to be the best times for this drive. The boy fixes an eye on the actions of the girl. After finding a chance he forcibly brings her home. The weeping and crying of the girl is attributed to merely a show. The parents and other relatives of the girl who are on the scene do not interfere. These days slightly better methods are adopted. The abduction usually takes place in the night when the girl arrives at a secret place of rendezvous. From there, she absconds with her lover. After three or four days, the boy's father visits the parents of the girl accompanied by one or two of his relatives. They carry with them a goat and bottles of wine. Both sides sit together and discuss the matter. The discussion becomes hot but ultimately, the girl's side agrees to the marriage. Thereafter they present the wine and goat and if the girl's parents accept it, it becomes a legally recognised marriage. Then one day, the bride visits the house of her parents accompanied by her husband. This is the *gauna* ceremony. She stays there for a day or so and then finally returns with her husband.

Divorce

Among the Pangwala women have every freedom, and divorce is recognized. There are two forms, one in which the husband pays to his wife for her new husband, or gives his consent for the divorce before two respectable men of the village and then breaks a dry branch in two pieces over her head, in token of having broken the previous marriage alliance with her. The second form is that the husband accepts a certain sum from the lover of the lady and then breaks a dry stick in two either over the head of the lady or over the money accepted in token of having broken the previous marriage. In both these cases, the wife is free to remarry.

Death

The person whose end appears nearer is carried to the ground floor. As the custom is no one is accepted to die on the cot. The dying man is immediately laid on the floor. Every care is taken that he does not lie between any two wooden beams of the roof. Otherwise, it is believed that the person dies with great difficulty. Some drops of *gangajal* are poured in his mouth. One more rite is performed at this stage. When the person is breathing his last the eldest man of the house brings melted *ghee* in a bowl. All the house members then assemble around the dying one and turn by turn pour a drop of *ghee* in his mouth with their fingers. If any member is absent, the eldest member pours *ghee* on his behalf also. After death, the head is put towards the

north and the feet towards the south. In this region almost all houses face south, and the back happens to be in the north. If any house is not built on this pattern, the dead man's head is laid facing the back of the house. The news of the death is delivered to all the relatives, who arrive soon after. When everybody has gathered, three persons of the family are selected to execute the death rituals. One is called as *barohie*, a male member of the house. The second is called *kuri*, a small girl, and third is *laiwanti*, a married woman. The *barohie* informs the villagers of the death. The *kuri* does not have any duty on the first day. The *laiwanti* prepares *pulleys* for the *pandit*, *barohie*, and the *kuri*. She also washes all clothes of the house on *kathi*. After some time, the *praja* starts gathering before the house. *Aryas* also reach there with their traditional musical instruments, consisting of *sankh*, *ghanta*, *dhole*, *nagarah* and flute. On reaching they start playing the funeral music through which they offer their condolences to the bereaved family. They play the music thrice and on the third time the corpse is brought out of the room. Before the arrival of the *praja* the corpse is already given a bath in warm water. The *praja* then dresses the body in clothes consisting of a *tope*, a pair of gloves, socks, *pyjama*, shirt and *pattu* made of *khasaan* white cloth. This local dress of the dead man is known as *coffen*. Thereafter the corpse is again brought into the house and other relatives touch the dead body with some coins and pass them on to *arya*. While doing so they uncover their heads. The household spreads a piece of *khasa* on the floor and the body is laid over it. Other relatives of the deceased also bring pieces of *khasa*, called *coffen*, which are spread over the corpse.

Vimaan

On the sound of the drum, the *praja* brings out the corpse. When the ceremony is being performed in the house, the *praja* outside, prepares a *vimaan* by joining two logs of wood outside the house. This *vimaan* is placed at a certain place, away from home. This particular place is named as *vaitarni*. The body is then brought out and laid over it. In all the four angles of the *vimaan*, small lamps, designed with kneaded *atta*, and filled with *ghee* and lighted with a burning *jagni*. The nearest male relative of the deceased walks three times around the corpse, bare headed. A ram is also headed three times around the body and is lastly handed over to the *aryas*. The *vimaan* bearing the dead body is then covered with red and yellow cloth. The nearest male family member, who had earlier marched thrice round the *vimaan* remains headed right upto the burning ground. The rest of the relatives wear their caps. Headed by the *aryas* the *vimaan* then proceeds towards cremation ground. On reaching there, the villagers bring their own quota of fire wood and a pyre is made. A piece of *khasa* is

spread on the pyre and the corpse is laid over it. It is again covered with another piece of *khasa*. Thereafter, the entire corpse is completely covered with dry wood. The head is positioned towards the east and the feet towards the west. The *khasa* pieces of those relatives of the deceased who do not want them to be burnt along with the corpse are brought back by the household. The male relative takes three rounds of the pyre and, in the third round sets it on fire. All the village people who have gathered around the pyre, later on help to burn it. When the body has been completely burnt the ashes are collected and immersed in the river Chanderbhaga river. If any household wishes, he can also take the bones to Haridwar.

Funeral pyre

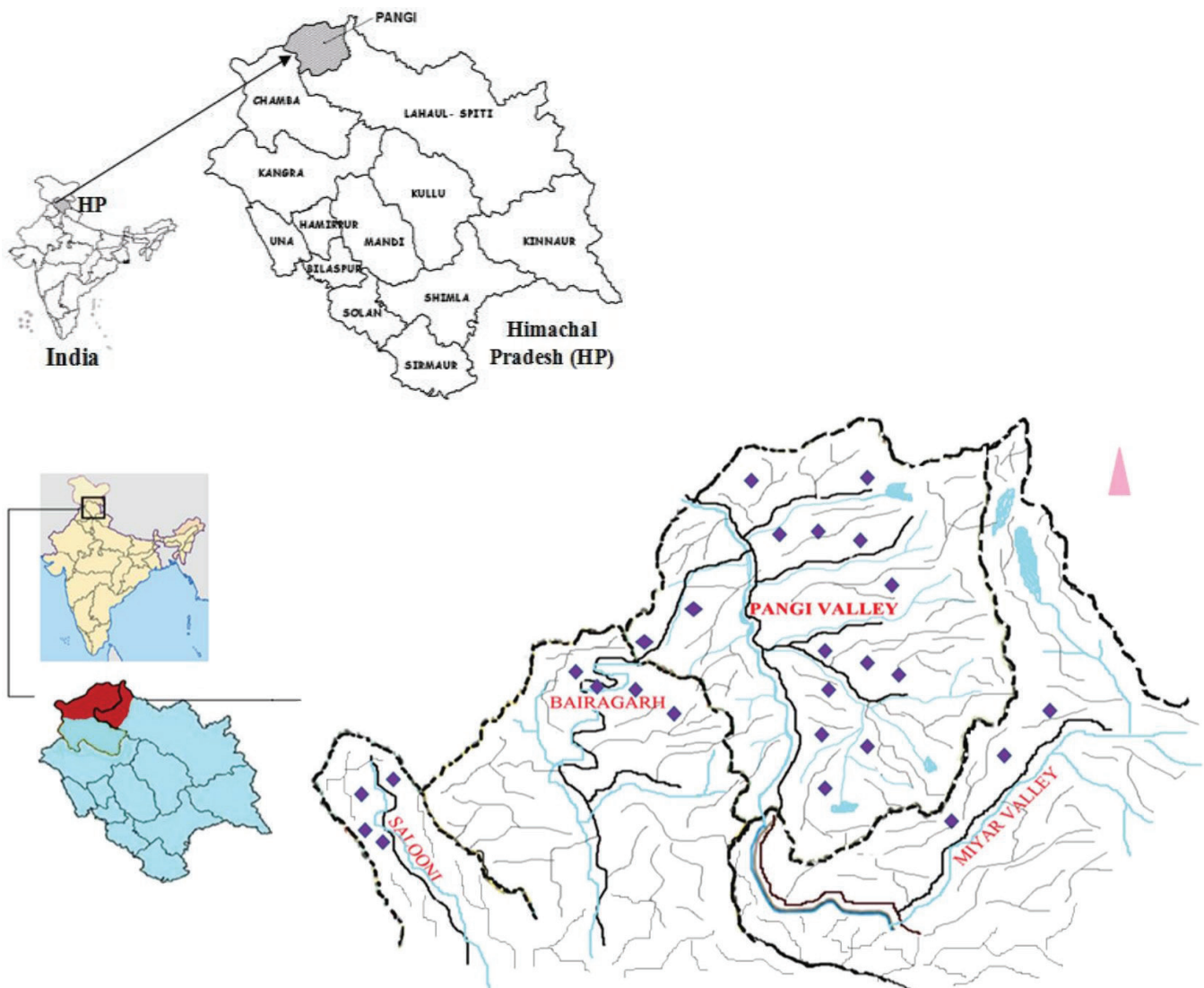
After disposing the ashes, all the villagers assemble at a place. Here the community members of the *praja* find out who among the villagers did not join in the funeral. The absentee is charged with fine. When the funeral ceremony is over, the villagers return to their homes. The household concerned brings back the empty bowl of *ghee*, remaining pieces of *khasa*, *sankh* and *ghanta*. All these things are heaped in the upper storey. All the village people who joined the funeral take only one meal a day or three times *sattu* for the first three days after the death. Apart from it, they also cook one big *chapatti* each in the evening and give it to the household of the deceased with some amount of *ghee*. This *chapatti* and *ghee* are meant for the *kuri*. On return from the cremation ground, the bereaved family keeps awake the whole night and mourns the death.

Kathi/ Kirya Ceremony- The *kirya* ceremony is called *kathi*. It takes place on the third day after the death. The household concerned invites villagers and relatives, including *aryas*. Chapatis are cooked and given to the villagers, together "with a little *ghee*. On this day, the village *pandit* is also called. He burns incense before the feast starts and through the sacred *mantras* purifies all the remaining pieces of *khasa*. If any family does not execute *kathi* on the third day it will then call the villagers on the ninth, thirteenth or a month after the death and treat a feast. Each of the nearest relatives gives some quantity of wheat to the household. Thereafter, for the first year every month, a feast is organized on the day the death occurred and all villagers including the village *pandit* and the *aryas* are invited. After one year, a big *kathi* is again organised. The *praja* is invited for the feast. Special food containing *manday* and *cheena* are prepared. The village *pandit* and the *aryas* are also invited. Before the feast begins a small *Havana* is conducted. The village *pandit* chants *mantras*. When the treat is over and relatives are leaving for their households, the host family gives each one of them some *manday* and *cheena* to take home. The *pandit* who

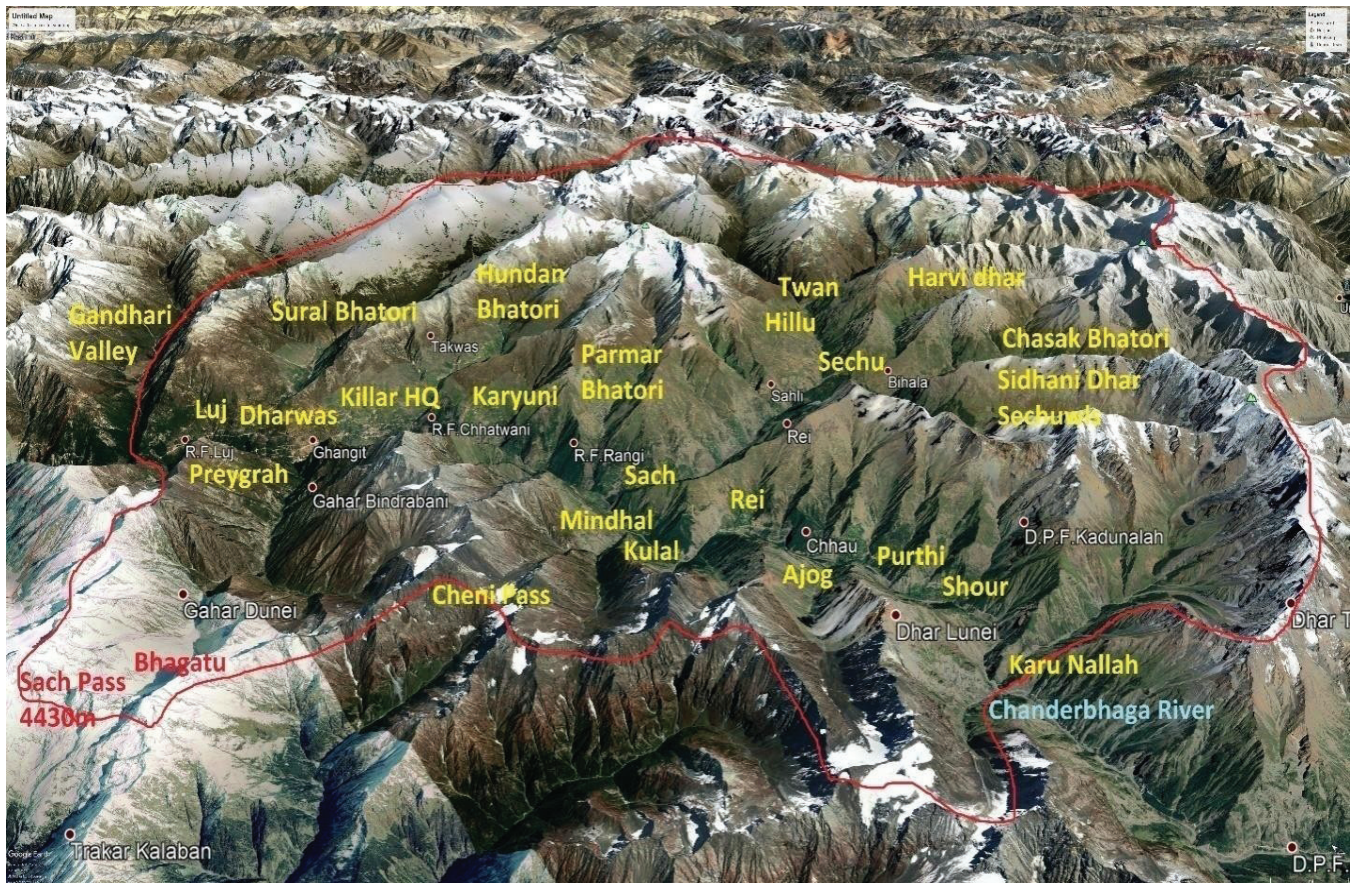
conducts the *Havana* is given clothes and utensils beside the usual quota of eatables given to all relatives. This is the symbol of the end of all rituals connected with the death.

Dhoj- In this region, stone slabs called *dhoj* with pointed heads and wearing round circular stones are also erected in memory of one, or more than one deceased person. These slabs bear rough inscriptions about the deceased and are prepared by the shepherds. When a *dhoj* is to be erected, the household fixes a day and invites the entire *praja* to the function. The villagers dig a big hole for the *dhoj* in the compound of the house. Earlier, the

dhoj was worshipped by the eldest male member of the household. The village *pandit* conducts this *puja*. It is placed in the pit, and again the *mantras* are chanted by the *pandit*. When it has been erected thus, the *aryas* go round it three times, playing the village orchestra. All this is over; the household entertains the guests with a grand feast. Wine is heavily consumed. When the feast is over and the guests are about to leave, the household gives each man *manday* and *cheena* to be carried home. In the case of the *aryas*, the quantity of *manday* and *cheena* is raised in quantity per man.



Map of Pangi Valley Distt. Chamba (Himachal Pradesh.)



Google Map of Pangi valley, the main sub valleys and main villages are marked by the authors.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, several conclusions are presented to discuss the purpose and objectives of the study. The first objective of the research which aims to describe the ritual process and ceremonies has been achieved by exploring several events and rituals ceremonies participated by researchers in traditional villages which embraced close cultural and traditional practices. Through the findings of the study, it is concluded that the Pangwala people have the same beliefs. This is the factor that forges and strengthens their relationship as a society that gives birth to social norms in the Pangwala community to be easily understood and followed. This shows the important rituals and ceremonies as a very important social institution.

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Declaration: *We also declare that all ethical guidelines have been followed during this work and there is no conflict of interest among authors.*

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