

CULTURAL PROCESSIONS IN THE CENTRAL HIMALAYA: HISTORICAL AND SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE

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Received Date : 26-10-2023
Accepted Date : 24-11-2023
Published Date : 30-11-2023

ABSTRACT

Cultural processions in the Central Himalaya are centuries-old practices. These are celebrated in the entire region and all seasons. Further, these processions are well-integrated with nature, places, culture, and society. This paper examines the cultural processions and their historical and spiritual significance in the Central Himalaya. The cultural processions take place when the idols of folk deities both male and female, including Dolies and Nishans, are carried by the devotees from their abodes to other cultural places. The priests, devotees, and a large number of people follow the processions. The Dolies and Nishans are decorated with colourful clothes and ornaments. Musical instruments such as Dhol, Damau, and Bhankore (Ransingha) are played. The devotees sing Jagars (folk songs) and dance. During the processions, all people wear colourful dresses. They walk barefoot about 10-12 kilometers in a day. The time of the profession varies from one day to six months, depending upon the existing culture. The route of the procession is pre-decided. Every day, the procession stays in the next village, which falls on the route and it continues till the procession ends. These processions have high historical importance and lead to spiritual attainment.

Keywords: Cultural procession; Pilgrimage; Festival; Jagars; Central Himalaya.

INTRODUCTION

The Central Himalaya is an integrated part of the Himalayan Region. It represents the Himalaya in almost all aspects. It has rich natural and cultural diversity (Sati 2023). Natural diversity includes diversity in landscapes, climate, biodiversity, and agrobiodiversity. Similarly, the cultural diversity in the Central Himalaya is rich. It practices diverse social systems, cultures, customs, fairs, and festivals. Practicing cultures, customs, and rituals is the way of life of people of the Himalayan region.

The Central Himalaya is known as the land of Lord Shiva, Lord Vishnu, Goddess Shakti, and many folk deities. It is the abode of sages, Rishis, ferries, witches, and Guru Kulas, where spiritual preaching is imparted. There are thousands of folk deities, which

are the manifestations of Shiva, Shakti, and Vishnu (*Ekoham Bahusyam* – Chandogya Upanisad). The omnipresence of God is mentioned in the Sanskrit's Shloka, '*Isha Wasam, Idam Sarvam, Yad Kinchit Jagatyam Jagat*' (Ishopanishad Verse 1), which means that God lives in every particle, in the air, water, trees, food grains, in all creatures, and everywhere (Sati 2022). The celebration of fairs, festivals, and cultural processions in all months and all seasons is common in the Himalaya.

Cultural processions in the Himalaya are centuries-old practices. It is performed in various ways. Pilgrimage to the Himalaya is one of the forms. Pilgrims from all walks of life mainly Hindus, Sikhs, Jains, and Buddhists visit the highland and river valley pilgrimages. Pilgrims believe that visiting the pilgrimages once in a lifetime liberates their souls from the cycle of birth and death (Sati 2023, 2015). Cultural processions from one cultural realm to another and different geographical locations have high historical and spiritual significance. The duration of the procession varies from a day to six months and subsequently, the number of pilgrims who follow the cultural procession varies. These are known as 'Dev/Devi Yatra', 'Doli Jatar', and 'Diora'.

The idols of folk deities, along with Dolies¹, Nesans, and Chhantolies are taken away by the priests and devotees, followed by hundreds of people for the cultural procession. These processions go through the river valleys, dense forests, high altitudes, and rural and urban settlements. Every day, 10 to 12 km distance is covered, depending on the location of the settlements. The priests and devotees, who carry the idols of folk deities, walk barefoot. They wear colourful clothes. Women wear ornaments – Nath and Bullak, made of gold, and Hansuli and Dhaguli, made of silver. Nath and Bullak are worn on the nose, Hansuli in the neck, and Dhaguli in the hands. The procession starts early in the morning and devotees sing Jagars². Other plays musical instruments – Dhol, Damau, and Bhankora. The singers sing Jagars to raise the folk deities and to make a procession to another destination. They sing *Biji Java Biji Java Panchamana Devo, Bhavo Byegi, Bhavo Byegi, Bhavo Byegi, Bhavo*. It means O' five Devs (deities), awake, it is morning. Priests perform puja. The whole day, the priests, devotees, and others do not take food. In the evening, the idols of folk deities are kept in the Devsthan (abode of deities) in the village. Jagars are sung, and Dev/Devi Naach is performed by the devotees (called 'Dev Dangers'). Bhoj is served with a variety of traditional food items and seasonal fruits. Milk-

¹ Wooden made palanquin decorated by colourful clothes and ornaments inside which the idols of folk deities are kept for procession.

² Jagars are the folk songs sung in praise of both folk deists and ghosts. On the occasion of the cultural processions, Jagars are sung to praise Dev (male deity) and Devi (female deity).

made beverages and fruit juices are also served. And this process goes on till the cultural procession ends.

The folk deities whose idols are taken out for the procession vary from one cluster of villages to another as every village has its family deity, which is known as Kul Dev/Devi. Dev and Devi represent for male deity and female deity, respectively. The pilgrims belong to two cults – Shaiv and Vaishnav. The followers of Lord Shiva and Goddess Shakti are called Shaiv and the followers of Lord Vishnu are called Vaishnav. The idols of Lords Shiva, Vishnu, and Goddesses Gaura, Nanda, and Bhagawati are carried out in the cultural procession along with the other folk deities related to them. The procession of folk deity Nanda or Gaura takes place to send her to the home of her husband i.e. Lord Shiva. The other folk deities go out to see the well-being of devotees and to bless them. The procession is comprised of priests, devotees, old, and young people of the village/s who participate in the cultural procession.

Some cultural processions are fixed twice a year. The highland pilgrimages remain closed during the six months due to heavy snowfall. Therefore, the idols of deities are brought into their river valley dwellings during the winter. During the summer, these idols are carried to their highland dwellings. The shifting of the idols of deities is followed by a large cultural procession every year. Badrinath is the seat of Lord Vishnu. His idol is brought to Joshimath during the winter. Kedarnath is the seat of Lord Shiva and his idol is brought to Ukhimath. Similarly, the idols of Goddesses Ganga and Yamuna are brought to Mukhawa and Kharsali, respectively from Gangotri and Yamunotri, the highland pilgrimages. The idols of Tungnath, Rudranath, Madhyamaheshwar, and Kalpeshwar are brought to their winter dwellings. These highland pilgrimages are the seats of Lord Shiva. Vaisakhi festival is celebrated in many parts of the Central Himalaya. During the festivals, the idols of folk deities mainly Lord Shiva, Devi Bhagawati, and Mal Mutha are carried to the river banks where the devotees take baths with the idols of folk deities. The procession of folk deities is carried out on the day of the Sakranti of Vaisakh every year.

This paper aims to elucidate the historical and spiritual significance of cultural processions in the Central Himalaya. It studies how these cultural processions are celebrated, their duration, traditional foods, and beverages offered to the folk deities, and folklore – dances and songs performed during the cultural processions. The changes in the cultural practices in different cultural and sub-cultural realms during the processions are also examined. There is no study conducted on the cultural procession in the Central Himalaya so far. This is an original study and the first of its kind.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The holistic combination of learned and shared beliefs, values, and practices is known as culture. It is a core concept of anthropologists' work and creates cohesion in a group. Culture is dynamic. It evolves within it, based on the needs of the people. It also evolves the combination of many cultures, the contact of one culture with others. The term 'Culture' was coined by Edward B. Taylor in 1871. He defined culture as a complex system, which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, and customs (Taylor 1871). Now, the definition of culture has expanded leading to multiple definitions with some centrally unifying principles. Taylor (1881) defined culture as it is possessed by man alone. Later on, the subject matter of culture led to multiplication and diversification (Kroeber and Kluckhohn 1952). The past culture is also called ethnicity today. However, it encompasses much more. It allows for both unification of people and division between groups. Culture is a way of life and a day-to-day activity. It decides our food habits, clothing, and the processes of celebrating the fairs and festivals. Therefore, culture includes languages, ideas, beliefs, customs, codes, institutions, tools, techniques, works of art, rituals, and ceremonies. Meanwhile, the culture is highly influenced by nature – geographical conditions.

The culture in the Himalayan region is unique and diverse. It can be seen in architecture, languages, dialects, rituals, beliefs, and clothing. The diversity can also be seen in the ornaments of various precious metals – mainly gold and silver. Mainly, four religions exist in the Himalayan region, such as Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, and Animists. In a few territories, Christianity exists. These religions and cultures spread in Pakistan, India, Nepal, Bhutan, and China, the major countries that fall under the Himalaya. The culture varies from one religion to another. Hindus are the most populated in the Himalaya. The Himalaya is personified as Shiva. Goddess Parvati is believed to be the daughter of the Himalaya. The Himalaya is also considered the father of the Ganga River. The Central Himalaya (Uttarakhand), which is an important segment of the Himalaya, practices traditional ethics, moral values, the simplicity of nature, and a rich mythology. The people of the Himalayan region perform Dev/Devi Puja, a method of offerings and prayers of specific deities. They worship land, forests, water, and food. *Anna Brahma Raso Vishnu* is the popular Sanskrit proverb, which means the food grain is Lord Brahma and water is Lord Vishnu. The cultural procession is the most important practice in the Himalaya, which integrates the people, places, and nature, and leads to spiritual attainment.

THE STUDY AREA

The Central Himalaya is located within the Himalaya almost in its central part (Fig. 1). It has a rich culture and cultural heritage. It is the most pious land and an abode of folk deities – Shiva, Shakti, Vishnu, and their incarnations. Many highland and valley pilgrimages are located here. These pilgrimages have rich historical, cultural, and spiritual significance. Every year, hundreds of thousands of pilgrims visit these pilgrimages for spiritual attainment. Many fairs and festivals are celebrated throughout the year. These fairs and festivals are coexisted with nature and culture. The folk go knick and knick and dance with nature's rhythm. They worship land, water, forests, food grains, and all components of nature. Similarly, cultural processions are common and observed every month. There are three major and many sub-cultural realms. The major cultural realms are Kumaon, Garhwal, Jaunsar, and Bhabar. The culture, customs, and rituals vary from one cultural realm to another. There is a proverb that '*kos-kos par badle pani, char kos par bani*'. It means that water changes every mile while language changes every four miles.



Fig. 1: Major cultural realms of the Central Himalaya

METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted using a qualitative approach. The description is based on the interview of the pilgrims, priests, and the old and experienced people, who are involved in these cultural processions. The author participated in many cultural processions from time to time and observed the ways these are performed. He travelled almost the entire Central Himalaya and experienced the cultural and spiritual importance of these processions. A calendar of cultural processions was prepared and a case study of some important processions was carried out.

Major Cultural Processions and Their Significance

Processions of folk deities have high cultural significance in the Central Himalayan. These processions take place throughout the year, changing with seasons. Table 1 shows 31 major cultural processions. The highest processions occur in the three months of Jaishtha, Shravan, and Bhadrapada (June, July, and August). A few cultural processions take place in the winter i.e. Posh (December) and at the start of the summer i.e. Vaisakh (April). In the Kartik (October) and Falgun (February) months, cultural processions also take place. These cultural processions are celebrated for a day to six months. These are observed in almost all the river valleys and the entire Central Himalaya. The idols of all folk deities – Vishnu, Shiva, and Shakti, and their various forms are carried out in these processions by priests. Devotees and a large number of people follow them.

These processions in the Central Himalaya integrate different societies belonging to various cults, castes, and creeds. Further, these preserve the rich culture and cultural heritage, traditional attires, food, and beverages. Both natural and cultural diversity in the Central Himalaya is rich. By performing these processions, the pilgrims walk from one cultural realm to another and through spectacular natural landscapes. Integration of natural and cultural landscapes for the social, economic, and cultural well-being of the native people is another significance of these cultural processions. Diversity in traditional crops, mainly in millets, is rich. Further, these processions conserve the traditional crops since the products from millets are offered to the folk deities during the procession.

Table 1: Major cultural processions

S. No.	Cultural procession	Place	Month	Duration
1.	Kund Jatar	Uttarkashi	Falgun Sakranti	Three days
2.	Mahadev Vaisakhi Jatar	Pindar Valley	Vaisakh	Five days
3.	Char Dham Jatar	All four highland pilgrimages	Vaisakh-Kartik	Six months
4.	Goddess Durga Diyara Jatar	Chamoli and Rudraprayag	Jaishtha – Bhadrapad	48 days
5.	Bhagawan Vasudev Diyara Jatar	Jakholi, Rudraprayag	Jaishtha	Six months
6.	Goddess Nantoli Diyara	Badri-Kedar	Jaishtha	Month-long
7.	Kailash Mansarovar	Pithoragarh to Kailash	Jaishtha	Month-long
8.	Adi Kailash	Pithoragarh to Kailash	Jaishtha	10 days
9.	Dyavora Jatar	Pithoragarh	Jaishtha	2-3 days
10.	Baba Bhairav Nath Diyara Jatar	Mandakini Valley	Jaishtha	22 days
11.	Goddess Bhuvneshwari Doli Jatar	Devprayag	Jaishtha	15 days
12.	Doli Utsav Jatar	All four highland pilgrimages	Jaishtha and Kartik	2-3 days both times
13.	Rudreshwar Mahadev Jatar	Uttarkashi district	Ashad-Shravan	Two months
14.	Kanwad Jatar	From north India to Haridwar	Shravan	Month-long
15.	Mandaan Folk Jatar	Madhyamaheshwar valley	Shravan	Five days
16.	Dev Snan Jatar	Chaukhutia	Shravan	Day-long
17.	Jatura Jatar	Jageshwar	Shravan	Month-long
18.	Bhagawan Triyuginarayan Diyara Jatar	Triyuginarayan	Shravan	88 days
19.	Kanwad Rath Jatar	Devprayag Taluk	Shravan	Four days
20.	SNDRJ	Nauti to Homkund	Bhadrapad	22 days
21.	Khatling-Rudradevi Maha Jatar	Tehri district	Bhadrapad	Month-long
22.	Sahastra Tal-Mahasara Tal Jatar	Tehri district	Bhadrapad	Week-long
23.	Panwali Kantha-Kedar Jatar	Rudraprayag district	Bhadrapad	Week –long
24.	Nanda Devi Folk Jatar	Tharali, Chamoli district	Bhadrapad	Three days
25.	Fyunlanarayan Nanda Devi Jatar	Painkhanda	Bhadrapad	Seven days
26.	Hill Jatar	Pithoragarh	Bhadrapad	1-5 days
27.	Naini Devi Diyara Jatar	Kadakot <i>Patti</i>	Kartik-Chaitra	Six months
28.	Binsar Dev Jatar	Chamoli district	Posh	Month-long
29.	Uma Devi Jatar	Karnprayag	Posh	Month-long
30.	Kobeshwar Mahadev Jatar	Narayan Bagar	Posh	Six months
31.	Kalash Jatar	Entire state	Throughout the year	Day-long

Source: Compiled by the author

There are many cultural processions carried out in the Central Himalaya. All these processions are important. However, some cultural processions are very popular and these have a high impact on the people and society. A case study of some very popular cultural processions was carried out and elucidated.

Shri Nanda Devi Raj Jaat

Shri Nanda Devi is the most adorable folk deity in the Central Himalaya. She lives in every heart and is worshipped by all. Her idol is sent to Homkund, a snow-fed perennial lake in the high Himalaya every 12 years. The procession is called Shri Nanda Devi Raj Jaat (SNDRJ). This is the longest cultural procession, which goes for 177 km (one side) and takes 20 days. The entire route is characterized by river valleys, settlements, agricultural fields, dense forest areas, alpine pasture lands, perennial lakes, and snow-clad mountain peaks. This route is called the Nanda Path (Table 2; Fig. 2). These natural and cultural landforms make the Nanda Path divine. Goddess Nanda is the wife of Lord Shiva, who lives on the Mount Kailash of the Himalaya. This cultural procession starts from Nanda Devi Temple, located in Nauti Village in the Chamoli district. The temple is located at about 1500 m altitude. It has 11 stoppages in the inhabitant villages such as Eda Badhani, Kanswan, Sem, Koti, Bhagoti, Kulsari, Chepadyun, Nandakeshari, Faldiya, Mundoli, and Wan. It goes through several sub-cultural realms of Chandpur, Ganga Par, and Badhan. The altitude of these villages varies from 1100 m to 2444 m. The last inhabitant village is Wan (2444 m). These villages are located almost equal distance of an average of 10 km. A motorable road goes up to Wan Village. Meanwhile, the priests and a large number of pilgrims follow the procession by walking. A few people travel by bus or taxi. At every stoppage, the dinner is served by the host village for every pilgrim. The next morning, the procession goes to another village. It continues to the last village Wan. At Wan village, every pilgrim is checked for health, and based upon the result, the pilgrims move for highland trekking. From Wan, the procession goes for about 53 km through Gairoli Patal, Bedni Bugyal, Shila Samundra, Jyuraglidhar, Chandmyaghat, Roopkund, and Homkund. It is a tough trek and therefore, it takes 6 days to reach Home Kund. The highest altitude of the route is 5000 m. After reaching Homkund, the pilgrims come back to Noti village on the same day.

Table 2: Nanda Path

Procession	From	To	Distance	Altitude
First day	Nauti	Eda Badhandi	10 km	1220 m
Second day	Eda Badhandi	Nauti	10 km	1650 m
Third day	Nauti	Kanswan	10 km	1530 m
Fourth day	Kanswan	Sem	10 km	1530 m
Fifth day	Sem	Koti	10 km	1350 m
Sixth day	Koti	Bhagoti	12 km	1410 m
Seventh day	Bhagoti	Kulsari	14 km	1130 m
Eighth day	Kulsari	Chepadyun	10 km	1200 m
Ninth day	Chepadyun	Nandakeshari	10 km	1325 m
Tenth day	Nandakeshari	Faldiya	10 km	1500 m
Eleventh day	Faldiya	Mundoli	10 km	2120 m
Twelfth day	Mundoli	Wan	15 km	2444 m
Thirteenth day	Wan	Gairol Patal	8 km	2722 m
Fourteenth day	Gairol Patal	Bedini Bugyal	9 km	3200 m
Fifteenth day	Bedini Bugyal	Shila Samundra	8 km	4000 m
Sixteenth day	Shila Samundra	Jyuraglidhar	7 km	5000 m
Seventeenth day	Jyuraglidhar	Chandmyaghat	7 km	4800 m
Eighteenth day	Chandmyaghat	Homkund	7 km	4000 m
Nineteenth and twentieth	Back to Nauti village		177 km (one side)	

Source: Compiled by the author

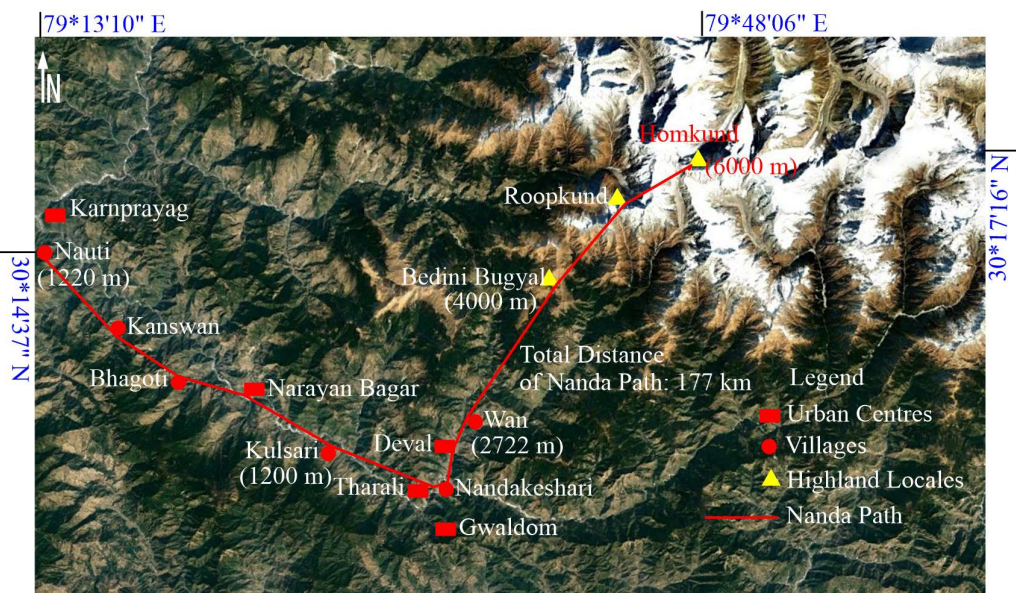


Fig. 2: The Nanda Path showing a 177 km route leading to Homkund from Nauti village via many rural and urban centres.

This cultural procession is led by a Khadu (four-horn goat), the idol of Shri Nanda Devi, and the priests. As the procession proceeds, the Dolies and Chhantolies (made of wood with idols in the middle) of Shri Nanda Devi from other villages, join it. After a 10 km journey in a day, the procession halts in a village on the route, where the villagers welcome the priests and pilgrims. Delicious traditional foods are served, folk deities are worshiped, and Jagars are sung. '*Safal hai jai Nanda tumari Jatara, Khoi ka Ganesha Nanda mori ka Narena*' meaning O' Goddess Nanda, we wish you a happy journey. Lords Ganesha and Narayana will take care of you, is the popular Jagar, sung during the Nanda Jatar. In the folk culture, it is believed that Lord Ganesha lives in the first gate of the house and Lord Narayana lives in the window of the house. The next morning, the cultural profession goes to another destination. More Chhantolies and pilgrims join the procession. Nandakeshari is a village, situated on the banks of the Pindar River. This is a transitional village where two cultures – Garhwali and Kumaoni meet. The idol of Shri Nanda Devi of Almora and Chhantoli of Kurur join the main procession and thus, Nandakeshari is called 'Cultural Triveni' (Fig. 3). The idols of other folk deities from different parts also join the procession.



Fig. 3: The Dolies and Chhantolies of Goddess Nanda from Noti village, Kurur, and Almora are meeting at Nandakeshari before Deval, in the Chamoli district. Photo: By Author

Besides the Nanda Devi Raj Jaat, which comes after 12 years, the folk celebrate Nanda Jatar every year in Bhadrabad. A fair is celebrated before Nanda Jatar, which is known as 'Pati Fair'. It is celebrated mainly in the Pindar and Saryu river basins. After the celebration, Goddess Nanda is sent to Kailash, an abode of Shiva. The devotees carry fruits, vegetables, and food items, along with the idol of Nanda Devi. The route goes along the Pindar River and then it turns to upslope village Wan. The trekking goes through the tough route reaches Bedni Bugyal and finally goes to Rookkund. After leaving the Nanda's idol in Rookkund, the priests, devotees, and people come back to their respective villages.

Cultural Procession of Lord Shiva

Lord Shiva is a folk deity with its abode in the Himalaya. He lives in every person. He is believed to be the husband of Goddess Gaura. Many cultural processions of Lord Shiva take place in the entire Central Himalaya. Some of the processions take place in the villages of the Pindar River Basin in Vaisakh (April) when the idols of Lord Shiva, known as Mahadev, and his various forms go for a day procession from his abode to the Pindar River bank with priests and thousands of pilgrims follow it (Fig. 4). The idols, priests, and pilgrims take a holy bath in the river. Thereafter, the pilgrims dance with the idols of fold deities. Lord Shiva appears in the body of his devotees and they dance. Vaisakhi is celebrated in three places – Karnprayag, Panti, and Meing Gadhera. People from the surrounding villages join the celebration. Before the Mahadev procession, houses are cleaned and painted. All people irrespective of their age – child, young, and old wear new clothes and participate in the procession. Temporary shops are open for a day for shopping. The procession comes back to their respective places and the idol of Mahadev is placed in his abode. This procession continues for five days. During five days, the people across the region – the Pindar Basin and the state visit their relatives and participate in the procession. Along with the cultural procession of deities, fairs, and festivals are celebrated. Local food dishes are cooked and served to the guests. The families of the villages, where the cultural procession takes place, invite their married daughters (called Dhyand) and children to participate in the procession. They gift clothes, jewelry, and food items to their daughters. The gift is known as Aou. The cultural procession of Shiva and other deities is very popular in the Pindar Basin and its surrounding area.



Fig. 4: One-day cultural procession of Kobeshwar Mahadev. The pilgrims take the idol of Mahadev to the Pindar River bank for a holy dip. Photo: By Author

Cultural Procession to the Highland Pilgrimages

The Central Himalaya has four world-famous pilgrimages – Badrinath, Kedarnath, Gangotri, and Yamunotri. At the beginning of the summer i.e. April, a cultural procession goes to all highlands pilgrimages separately (Fig. 5). Further, in October, the cultural procession comes back from the highland pilgrimages. Hundreds of thousands of pilgrims participate in the procession. The first cultural procession of the idol of Lord Vishnu starts from the Narasimha Temple of Joshimath to Badrinath (40 km), and it takes three days. Joshimath is the winter abode of Vishnu. Ukhimath is the winter dwelling of Lord Shiva. A cultural procession of Lord Shiva's idol followed by priests and pilgrims goes 66 km to Kedarnath, the highland pilgrimage and the summer dwelling of Shiva in April. In October, the idol is brought back to Ukhimath with a cultural procession. Gangotri is the highland pilgrimage. It is an abode of Mother Ganga, a female deity. In April, a cultural procession goes from Mukhawa/Mukhimath to Gangotri with the idol of Goddess Ganga and thousands of pilgrims follow it. The distance is about 32 km and it takes three days. In October, it comes back to Mukhawa for six months. The last highland pilgrimage is Yamunotri. The idol of Goddess Yamuna goes to Yamunotri from Kharsali, the winter

abode of the Goddess, with a cultural procession, and in October, it comes back and her idol is placed in the Raj Rajeshwari Temple at Kharsali. The distance is about 20 km.



Fig. 5: Cultural processions (Jatars) for the Four Dhams (a) Badrinath Jatar from Joshimath to Badrinath (b) Kedarnath Jatar, from Ukhimath to Kedarnath (c) Gangotri Jatar, from Mukhawa to Gangotri (d) Yamunotri Jatar from Kharsali to Yamunotri. Photo: By Author

There are four other Doli Jatars performed twice in the year in the Central Himalaya. These are Tungnath Jatar, Madhyamaheshwar Jatar, Rudranath Jatar, and Kalpeshwar Jatar. All deities are the manifestation of Lord Shiva. From Ukhimath, the Doli Jatar goes to Madhyamaheshwar, and from Makkumath; it goes to Tungnath, the highland pilgrimages, in April-May and these come back to their winter dwellings in October-November. The other Jatar goes from Gopinath Temple Gopeshwar to Rudranath and Kalpeshwar. Madhyamaheshwar is about 20 km trek, Tungnath is 4 km, Rudranath is 17 km, and Kalpeshwar is a 3 km trek from the road. Besides these Jatars, pilgrims across

the Indian sub-continent and abroad visit the highland and valley pilgrimages during the six months of summer. This period is called 'Yatra Season'.

Spiritual Significance of Cultural Procession

The cultural processions have high spiritual significance in the Himalaya. These processions integrate the people, places, and nature. People of different cults, castes, creeds, and beliefs observe these processions. Most of the processions go through the snow-capped mighty Himalaya. Shri Nanda Devi Raj Jaat and Nanda Jatar go up to the Home Kund and Roopkund, respectively, situated at about 4000 m altitudes. Some places that fall on the way have more than 5000 m altitudes. Himalaya is personified as an abode of Shiva. Mount Kailash in the Himalaya is the place where Lord Shiva performs penance for the welfare of people. The Kailash Mansarovar Jatar goes up to the Mount of Kailash. Hindus perform Jatar to appease their deity i.e. Lord Shiva and for the attainment of Moksha (salvation). The Char Dham Jatar, Chhota Kailash Jatar, Jatar of the Valley pilgrimages, and Dev/Devi Jatars are performed for salvation and liberation from the cycle of birth and death. Places like Bedni Bugyal, Dayara Bugyal, Roopkund, and Home Kund are related to the abode of folk deities and through which the cultural procession goes. Mountain peaks – Trishul, Nanda Devi, Kamet, and Chaukhamba are named after the folk deities and these have a very important place in the Himalayan culture. Worshiping land, forests, ghosts, water, and food grains has a significant place in the Himalayan culture. During the cultural procession, these natural entities are worshiped. Pipal trees, a natural spring called Naula, and jungle Dev are worshiped and the newly harvested crops – paddy, wheat, and millets are offered to folk deities during the procession. Dev/Devi Naach is performed during the cultural procession. Folk deities appear in the human body and they dance. This process is called 'Dev Avataran'.

CONCLUSIONS

Cultural processions are the centuries-old festivals in the Uttarakhand Himalaya, practiced since time immemorial. This study reveals that cultural processions are celebrated in all parts of Uttarakhand and almost every year. The duration of processions is from one day to six months and the distance of processions is from 5 km to above 200 km. The ways of celebrating these processions and the folk deities vary from one cultural realm and another and in each sub-region. These processions promote the culture, languages, food, and beverages. However, the devotees who follow the processions are

local people, except for a few pilgrims. This study suggests that cultural processions need to be popularized at the national and international levels so that pilgrims within and outside the country can take part in these processions. This will enhance understanding of the unique cultural procession in the Himalaya. Further, the region is observing cultural erosion in all respects. Therefore, the cultural procession will integrate and unite the people and will take them towards spirituality. This will further lead to humanity and brotherhood among the people.

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