

A Royal Ritual of Mandi State

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Introduction

The former Princely State of Mandi in Himachal Pradesh came under British control in 1846 but was governed by its hereditary rulers until 1947. After the abolition of princely rule, Mandi and the neighbouring state Suket were transformed into an administrative district with Mandi Town, the former capital, as district headquarters. Mandi had an area of ca. 1200 square miles. In 1900 the population numbered about 175,000. The population of the district is near 800,000 today.¹

This paper mainly deals with the Śivrātri Fair, which is attended by more than one hundred local gods and goddesses from the area of the former state and still is the biggest event in the festival calendar of Mandi, a spectacular staging of royal rule even today. I am mainly concerned with the time before 1950, and in fact the festival as it can be observed today is still largely based on the choreography it had during "state time". Formally, the Śivrātri Fair is a kind of cross-breed, combining the features of a local *melā* as is commonly found in this region, and of a royal court assembly, presided by both the *rājā* and by the state god Mādhorāo, an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu, that is, by both the ruler terrestrial and the ruler divine.

It has been noted that Śivrātri, Śiva's main festival celebrated in the month of Phāgun (Skt. Phālguna; February-March), is not a likely occasion for a royal festival (cf. Fuller 1992: 106ff.). Far more typical is Navrātri, "the nine nights" (dedicated to the Goddess Durgā) in September-October, culminating in Vijaya Daśamī, her glorious victory over the buffalo demon

¹ The paper is based on fieldwork and archival studies undertaken between 1987 and 2004. I use unpublished materials, for example a handwritten *bhārthā* (hagiography) of a local god, and a manuscript of the local history of Mandi (referred to as "local history" in the text) based on the genealogical recount of the *rājās*. Some parts, including the title page, are missing. It was transcribed from Ṭāṁkrī script into Devanāgarī in 1947 with the assistance of the owner, a member of the Rajput nobility.

I am grateful to Raja A.P. Sen and late Rani Kiran Kumari for allowing me to read the files on Śivrātri in the archives of the palace in Mandi. Most papers concern the time after 1900 but some refer to earlier periods.

I frequently write of a deity as if he or she was in fact acting, or not acting. This is in accordance with people's ideas and collective experience and practice. I agree with Sax who reasons that deities should be considered as authentic agents in the western Himalayas (2002: 157ff.).

Mahiṣāsura. It may also seem odd that a central part of the main festival of Śiva should be played by Mādhorāo, i.e. Kṛṣṇa. However, the contradiction is not felt in Mandi. In terms of local history, the choice of Śivrātri seems wholly plausible. A regular fair had probably been in existence long before Mādhorāo was appointed, and a fair on very similar lines is celebrated in Kullu on Vijaya Daśamī where the god Raghunāth, another *avatāra* of Viṣṇu, was placed on the throne at almost the same time as Mādhorāo.²

The *rājās* lost their position after independence, but are still recognized in the context of state ritual. I will refer to the incumbents as *rājā*, *rānī*, etc., because I want to avoid repeated formulas such as "the descendant of the last ruler", and also because the old titles are still used in Mandi even though this is an anachronism.

The economic and political significance of Śivrātri cannot be treated here but it should be mentioned that as an event that involves virtually the whole town and a large part of the rural population, it is of considerable economic importance, and also serves as a stage for public appearances of high politicians and officials.



Fig.1: The palace of Mandi (ca. 1915).

² Rose (1980 [1919]: 474f.); Hutchison and Vogel (1982 [1933]: 458).

Historical Outlines

Mandi emerged as a polity in the 10th or 11th century in the hinterland of the kingdoms of Kullu, Kangra and Suket. Beginning as a tiny chiefdom, by the 14th century it had developed into a polity of more than local power, which was independent of its neighbours in fact if not in name. The first capital near the present town of Mandi was also founded in this time. Few historical data exist about this period but some excellent wooden temples bear witness to the means and aspirations of the founders. The shift of the capital (*nagar*) closer to the present site indicates a reorientation of territorial policy towards the lower Beas valley farther west.

At the beginning of the 16th century, Mandi was finally constituted as a state in the full sense. The rulers unequivocally attained royal status and assumed the title of *rājā* and other requisites of royal power.³ Attempts to establish a state had been made earlier, but were only successful when *Rājā* Ajbar Sen conquered the site on the other bank of the river Beas and founded a new town there. The capital is one of the central symbols, and sources, of royal power, one of the "seven limbs" constituting a kingdom (Inden 1982: 102). Ideally the buildings, architecture, sculpture and layout of the town all contribute to proclaim - and create - the greatness of the ruler, and this was understood by Ajbar Sen. For him, the foundation was an act of great historical significance, a large step towards power and glory, and he proved to be right in the long run, as Mandi took up its position as one of the more important states of the region and retained it for 400 years. The site must have been coveted by the Mandi *rājās* for a long time but was defended by the *rāṇās* of Suket to the bitter end because of its strategic value.

Once the site was in the possession of Mandi, construction was undertaken on a fairly large scale. In local Rajput history, it is described thus: after his victory (in 1526), Ajbar Sen "thought of building a palace and a capital". First the temple of Bhūtnāth (Śiva) was built where the *liṅga* of the deity had revealed itself. The *rājā* then "took the firm decision to found the town and obtain a palace", and the foundation stone (*pāthru*) was set for "a fortress with a square courtyard and towers on all four corners" and with separate buildings for governing (*davāṅkhānā*) and for the collection of trade revenues (*zagātkhānā*).⁴

³ This is a shared opinion (Griffin 1990 [1870]: 632; Emerson 1920: 28f.; Hutchison and Vogel 1982 [1933]: 378f.; Man Mohan 1930: 22) which is acknowledged by local history, architecture, cult of royalty, etc. The rulers also entered royal marriage circles (cf. Emerson 1920: 29; Man Mohan 1930 23).

⁴ Quotes from the "local history". *Davāṅkhānā*: from Hindi/Urdu *dīvān*, a minister; *zagātkhānā* from *zakāt*, a revenue, tax, or levy imposed by the *rājā* (cf. Pahārī-Hindī Śabdkoś), or, more particularly, "transit dues" (Habib 1999: 72f.).

The scope of the endeavour did not escape his rivals' notice. Alarmed, the *rājā* of Suket sent his spies to enquire about the astrological moment (*muhūrat*) at which the temple's foundation stone had been set. He was told that the moment bore great power (*prabhāv*) and that Mandi would gain command (*hukm*) over the kingdoms in all directions. In order to prevent this, he sent his astrologer to Mandi, who treacherously persuaded the *rājā* to have the foundation ceremony repeated - i.e., the *pāthru* removed and newly set - thus undoing the effects of the earlier ceremony as the propitious moment had passed. When the stone was moved, blood came out of it and the *rājā* realized his blunder, but the magical power (*karāmat*) was gone forever. (There are more examples in the history of Mandi when the power inherent in foundation ceremonies was either destroyed or appropriated by a rival, an indication that the buildings themselves and their astrological conjunctions were believed to generate power.⁵)

The next step was the establishment of the town: "Traders" (*mahājan lok*) and "excellent people" (*bhale ādmī*) arrived from distant places, travelling in palanquins (i.e., neither on horseback, as warriors, nor on foot, as poor people would) and were assigned places to build their houses. Finally, the town was given a name: "excellent scholars and astrologers" were called who found out from the scriptures that a *ṛṣi* named Mandav had sanctified the place, hence the name Mandi. (In fact the name Mandi, literally "market", had been in use before; Man Mohan 1930: 22).

Even from this brief description it can be taken that something extraordinary was going on. This is what *Rājā* Ajbar Sen thought himself, and apparently the neighbouring *rājās* thought so, too. The temples, architecture, buildings, the scholars and Brahmans who were sponsored, everything was more magnificent than before. The palace, with a square courtyard and four towers, was built on a similar plan as its predecessor but bigger, boasting the imposing number of "39 apartments". The expansion of trade and changes in the administrative and revenue system are indicated by the construction of special buildings for the government (*davānkhānā*) and the collection of trade levies (*zagātkhānā*); elaborate funeral monuments (*barselās*) also dating from this time give an idea of court life and the cult of the rulers (Diserens 1988). A new kind of society was called for, an urban society with people, otherwise than warriors, who

⁵ E.g., in the 16th century an ambitious *raṇā*, lord over an important salt mine, wanted to build a temple pond. His priest betrayed him to the *rānī* and told if she arranged for the consecration ceremony herself, the place would fall into her hands. She went there secretly during the night to do so, and soon afterwards the area was conquered by Mandi (Man Mohan 1930: 23).

were wealthy, educated and of high social status⁶, and a more sophisticated terminology was adopted: the temples were called *mandir* instead of *dehrā*, the palace *mahal*, not *berhā*, the town *śahar*, a proper town, instead of *nagar* (which in Himachal is the seat of a ruler but not necessarily an urban settlement).

Another significant change took place in temple construction. The royal temples in the capital were big stone structures in *nagara* style, the first on Mandi territory. This was an explicit departure from the wooden temples in Pahari style the rulers had sponsored before and which continued to prevail in the rural areas. Stone temples, some very ancient, already existed in a number of places close-by⁷ and were perhaps requisite for a proper kingdom. A corresponding departure can be observed in the practise of religion. This may seem undramatic but it set apart the urban temples from those of the local deities. In the latter, religious cult mainly rests on two cornerstones: gods or goddesses (*devtā* or *devī*⁸), personified by mobile images (*rath*)⁹, leave their temples for touring their area (*hār* or *ilāqā*) and meeting other deities; and they have oracle priests (*gur*) who, in a state of possession (*khel* or *mehar*), serve them as mouthpiece. They are thus immediately present, communicating with people and with each others by the movements of the *rath* and by speaking through the *gur*. Local deities are consulted for most matters of personal or general concern within their area of jurisdiction, and they are a most important ordering force, a factor of power, in the rural areas of Mandi. A crucial role is played by the *gur* who conveys divine speech. The power and efficacy of the system is based on the fact that it is deeply inscribed in the constitution of the local communities and that virtually the whole community is involved. People are wary of manipulation and partiality, and the *gur*'s influence is dependent upon his credibility. His authority lasts as long as people believe that he embodies the deity when possessed but not beyond. He is not the deity's representative or "executive force". This is rather vested in the temple management and in the community as a whole who follows divine command.¹⁰

⁶ Khatri, later the dominant caste of landholder, traders, and state servants, had been present before but probably were less numerous. See Hesse (1996) and also Conzelmann (1996, ch. 3).

⁷ As e.g. Chamba, Kangra, Kullu, and Kahlur. See note 21; Singh (1983); Thakur (1996); Handa (2001).

⁸ *Devtā* is male (sg. and pl.), *devī* female (sg.). Collectively, the deities are called *devtā-devī* or *devtā*.

⁹ Literally "(temple) chariot"; the *raths* of Mandi are shaped like palanquins.

¹⁰ The working of these forces at the local level are analyzed by Berti (2001), and Luchesi (2004).

This whole complex is absent in the capital. None of the urban temples, with the sole exception of Mādhorāo, had a processional image, and none at all had an oracle attached to the deity. They received regular worship and sacrifices through their priests who were employed by the *rājā*. If they were consulted for an important decision, which occasionally occurred, an oracle as an intermediary was not involved.¹¹ A tradition that the deities resident in the temples of the capital possessed people does not exist. Perhaps, they were too powerful and "big" to be comprised by a human medium. Whatever the notion, urban priests did not convey divine speech, and they did, and still do, not have an authority deriving directly from the deity.

The installation of Mādhorāo in the mid-17th century as the ruler of the state marked a decisive transformation. The cult of Kṛṣṇa was implanted at the centre of royal power, and the *rājā* turned into the god's vice-regent and first worshipper in accordance with classical concepts of Hindu kingship (Fuller 1992: 127). The adoption of the Kṛṣṇa cult must have been welcomed by the sophisticated urban society as an approximation to mainstream hinduism. It must also have helped to bridge the gap between the urban society and the largely illiterate villagers. By appointing Mādhorāo as the divine ruler and putting him at the head of the local deities, these were transformed into a *darbār*, a royal court assembly. The relationships between the capital and the rural areas of Mandi were thus reshaped. Ranks and privileges of local deities were fixed in relation to Mādhorāo, and the deities were formed into a hierarchy. The court gained more control by imposing on the *devtās* its own order and concept of kingship. At the same time, the villagers were assigned a central part in the pageant of court and state ritual.

The reign of *Rājā* Siddh Sen (1686-1758) should also be mentioned, as it left deep imprints in history as well as in the townscape of Mandi. If we follow the "local history", Siddh Sen was the only ruler of Mandi who openly aspired to become *cakravartī*, a universal ruler (albeit on a very modest scale). Siddh Sen was preoccupied with tantric sacrifice and fortified the capital with a number of temples and other structures meant to enhance his power. Among these was a tank beneath the palace under which the dismembered body of his daughter's husband, the *rājā* of Bhangahl, was buried.¹² Later, a pillar was erected in the middle above the

¹¹ A story famous in Mandi is the decision over the succession to the throne in a kind of ordeal held in the Bhūtnāth temple in the 18th century, in the presence of the *rājā* and the important people of the town (Man Mohan 1930: 59; Nutan 1988: 32).

¹² Emerson (1920: 38) and Man Mohan (1930: 48f.) say Pirthi Pal was Siddh Sen's son-in-law; according to my manuscript he was his wife's brother. The tank,

severed head and a light was kept burning, and at a corner a double temple was erected for Bhairav and Kālī; the area near the tank served as festival ground for the Śivrātri Fair until after "merger".

By the end of the 17th century the Mandi *rājās* ruled over a fairly large area. Within the main territories, local powers had been reduced; internecine warfare receded and local chieftains (*thākurs* and *rānās*) were no longer able to assert themselves. It was in this period that the petty chiefdoms were changed into *wazīrīs* one after the other; *rānās* and *thākurs* were increasingly replaced by officers of the *rājā* and once-independent principalities integrated into a more regular governmental structure.¹³ It appears that by 1650 the Thakurs had fallen into political insignificance.¹⁴ They were excluded from the Rajput nobility; in the Śivrātri Fair, they formed part of the retinue of the local deities but were not socially recognized by the urban high castes in their own right.

The *Pax Britannica* in 1846 put an end to a period of invasions and plundering by the armies of Kangra, the Gurkhas, and the Sikhs which had lasted for several decades and left the country ruined and exhausted; it was therefore proverbially appreciated by the people of Mandi (Mandi State 1908: 16). Unlike Kangra and Kullu, Mandi was not annexed by the British and the *rājā* was granted "full administrative power" within the state (Man Mohan 1930: 113). Boundaries were frozen, and feuds and warfare stopped. Areas which had frequently changed hands between Mandi and Kullu or Suket were now firmly attached to one state or the other, and territorial affiliations became unequivocal. Otherwise, rights in land were not much affected by British Law; major reforms were postponed until after 1900, and even then there was little interference with the administration of temples and temple land (Emerson 1917: 27f.). However, as local powers were increasingly incorporated into an administrative system, they suffered a further loss of political and jural functions.

drained and changed into a *bazār*, is still a visible landmark. That Siddh Sen intended to become a universal ruler is only mentioned in the said manuscript: "The work for the Siddh Sagar [the tank] was started. ... The magician Madan told [Raja Siddh Sen] that he should sacrifice a *rājā*, then Mandi would gain universal rule" (*je es talāoā kesī rāje rī bali hoe, to Maṇḍī rā cakravartī rāj humg*).

¹³ The term *wazīr* generally refers to the post of a minister whether he served a chief or a *rājā*. In the local history, the term is first used for a territorial and administrative unit in connection with Siddh Sen (1684 to 1727). *Wazīrīs* in this sense are not mentioned in other sources. This may be incidental; apparently, Kullu had territorial *wazīrīs* much earlier (Suket Gazetteer 1908: 7).

¹⁴ According to Emerson, the last independent local chief on Mandi territory was conquered around 1650 (1920: 34f.).

It is impossible to sum up all of the changes in the course of the 20th century, which affected all aspects of life. Two developments had a major impact on the organisation of the Śivrātri Fair, viz. the abolition of princely rule in 1947 and subsequent integration of Mandi into the Indian Union – still referred to as "merger" – and the land reforms of the 1950s. The district authorities took over the running of the fair and many of the earlier functions of the *rājā*, and they curtailed his prerogatives as best they could. In particular, they aimed at excluding the court hierarchy and the "state regalia" which were displayed by the *rājā* during the festival. In 1951, for the first time, they enforced that Mādhorāo took part in all the processions along with the *rājā*, and the symbols of the princely state were no longer admitted.¹⁵ Democracy also reached the local gods and goddesses. Previously, participation in the processions had been limited to a small, privileged group, but now they were now opened to "all *devtās*".¹⁶ As the process was no longer checked by the court, new deities began to crop up and attended the fair. All this contributed to undermine the traditional hierarchy, but eventually it led to the near-collapse of the fair. In 1960, the *rājā* stopped joining the processions, and the most prestigious deities began to stay away. Later, the *rājā*'s ritual role was tacitly restored for all functions that take place on palace ground although officially this is not taken notice of.

The situation was further destabilized by land reforms. Urban landlords lost their estates in the villages and the tenants, mostly Thakurs or Kanets, became the owners of the land they cultivated. Temple lands (*śāsan*) were also confiscated and redistributed. The temples thus lost their maintenance and had to find new sources of income. The question of who acquired temple land through which channels is still a touchy subject.¹⁷ In order to raise money, temples took to attracting patrons from outside by trying to gain a reputation for curing (or causing) illness and granting

¹⁵ In 1950, the *rājā* was accompanied by his courtiers, bodyguard, bearers with whisk of yak's hair etc., and "the State Regalia". In 1951, the bodyguard was replaced by a "guard of honour" furnished by the police, the "Mandi State Band" was replaced by a military band, etc. (Details from the programs edited by the Fair Committee.)

¹⁶ This is explicitly stated in the program of the fair (written in English): "[After the opening ceremony] His Highness will arrive at Shri Raj Madho Rao Ji's Temple from where a Procession headed by all Devtas will start ... Shri Raj Madho Rao Ji, all Devtas and His Highness will return in procession to the former's temple." The participation of both the *rājā* and Mādhorāo, and the inclusion of "all Devtas", are unprecedented.

¹⁷ Much of the land was appropriated by the managers (*kārdārs*) and other temple officials. Conflicts about this are still going on in many villages.

other favours; the deity's power and the charisma of the *gurs* thus became a factor in the competition for clients.

Mādhorāo and the Rājā - The Ruler Divine and Terrestrial

The story of Mādhorāo's appointment is well-known: "The eighteen sons born to Rājā Suraj Sen all died after birth. Therefore, in the year 1705 [A.D. 1648], he installed Madhorao's image in the palace, and Madhorao alone became the *rājā*", the human *rājās* henceforward acting as his "deputies" or "vice-regents" (Emerson 1920: 63). As is indicated by an inscription on the image, this probably took place during the Śivrātri festival.¹⁸ Mādhorāo is represented by a small, handsome silver image. It normally rests in his temple in the old palace but is taken out in procession on several occasions during the year. By far the most important of these is the Śivrātri Fair in February-March which lasts for eight to ten days and is a complex happening. Mādhorāo, together with the *rājā*, acts as the host of the local deities who gather in the town, giving them a formal reception and leading the processions arranged at various stages of the fair, receiving their homage and presenting them gifts of honour (*cādar*) before they return home. It should be noted that however urgent Rājā Suraj Sen's concern may have been (succession by a collateral is always a critical situation) the lack of a son was the occasion but not the cause for handing over the rule to a deity; in Kullu also, an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu was placed on the throne, although the explanation is different.¹⁹

Śivrātri stands out from other festivals in Mandi as it is celebrated as a state fair. Probably a *melā*, a congregation of local gods and goddesses, had already been in existence before Mādhorāo's nomination. As has been mentioned, in its present form, the Śivrātri Fair combines features of a *melā* and of a *darbār*, a royal court assembly. This may come close to its historical beginnings – as the *melā* of Bhūtnāth, which was transformed into a *darbār* by the installation of Mādhorāo. The opinion most favoured in Mandi is that the *melā* has been celebrated since the foundation of the Bhūtnāth temple, but took on a different, "twofold quality" (*divyūnit ho gayā*) when it was newly inaugurated as a *darbār* of the *devtās* under Mādhorāo.²⁰ Mandi town has a number of important Śiva temples. Śivrātri is, of course, observed in all of them, but the fair is principally dedicated to Bhūtnāth, whose temple, besides the palace, is the nucleus of the town. Although it is not recorded when the fair was established, the fact that Mādhorāo was made the ruler of the deities of Mandi, and that his image

¹⁸ According to Emerson (1920: 35), the date is "the year 1705 [corresponding to A.D. 1648], on Thursday, the 15th Phagan"; see also Man Mohan (1930: 34).

¹⁹ Rose (1978 [1919], Vol. I: 474f.); Hutchison and Vogel (1982 [1933]: 458).

²⁰ Mian Kashmir Singh in the program of 1982.

was mobile, designed for going on procession, suggests that the local deities were present at the event, and that his function was much the same as in later times, viz. presiding the fair and going in procession.

Mādhorāo's functions in the fair are crucial for the concept of kingship as it worked in Mandī. With Mādhorāo for the first time a form of Viṣṇu assumed a central part in the religious cult in the capital and the state as a whole. Mādhorāo has some remarkable characteristics that are important for his role, and he combines features of both urban and village deities in an unusual way: he is the only deity residing in the capital who has a mobile image which enables him to move about, but unlike the village deities he does not have an oracle. These differences come into play in the Śivrātri Fair and especially the receptions and processions, where the complicated relationships between the *rājā*, Mādhorāo, the courtiers, and the local deities were most visibly enacted and had to be presented in the proper order. The installation of Mādhorāo was a reduplication of the ruler, the ruler divine and the ruler terrestrial appearing as separate figures who, however, were firmly linked, forming an indissoluble couple.²¹ This was paralleled by a reduplication of the court, the *darbār* of deities presided over by Mādhorāo, and the *darbār* of men presided over by the *rājā*. I think that this construction solved a problem, a contradictory point in the relationships between the *rājā* and the local deities. It was not a question of the *rājā*'s divinity – which was hardly drawn into doubt (Gazetteer 1920: 61) – but rather whether he was divine for the *devtās* as well as for his human subjects. Nor was it a question of facts; at least in later times the *rājā* of Mandī "exercised over [the *devtās*] ... very definite jurisdiction" (Emerson 1920: 63).²² Mādhorāo offered a solution to the problem of hierarchy: as he was a god, the deities had to accept his rule, and as the *rājā* acted in his name and lieu, the two of them were legally equivalent.

The *rājā* is closely identified with the deity. Their peculiar relationship is highlighted by a detail from the processional order. The *rājā* participated in processions on four important festivals in the course of the year, Śivrātri, Holī, Daśaharā and Dīpāvalī. On Daśaharā and Holī, the ruler and the god went together, with Mādhorāo's palanquin going in front of

²¹ Fuller (1992: 106 f.). The identification of the *rājā* with Viṣṇu had reached the area long before but nothing is known about cults. There is no textual evidence but temple architecture can be quoted. Most notable in the vicinity is the temple of Baśesar (Skt. Viśveśvara) Mahādeva in Hat-Bajaura, built in the 9th century (Thakur 1996: 56) with sophisticated reliefs of Gaṇeśa, Viṣṇu and Durgā; it was the very place where the future Mandī *rājās* started their - to begin with rather unsuccessful - career.

²² Diack (1899: 43).

the *rājā*. However on Śivrātri and Dīpāvalī, Mādhorāo was normally represented by the *rājā* (Emerson 1920: 63). Mādhorāo only took part in the processions when the *rājā* was not there.

Why should the ruler not appear along with Mādhorāo in the Śivrātri procession when on other occasions he did so without hesitation? Vidal saw in this a provisional inversion "of the hierarchical relation normally prevailing between king and *avatāra*", the *rājā* stepping into the position due to Mādhorāo (1989: 220). I think that the salient point lies elsewhere. The processions during Śivrātri were essentially different from those on other holidays. These other ritual occasions, although celebrated in public, were largely an affair of the court and the urban society, and deities from outside the town did not take part. Śivrātri is however an assembly of local deities from many parts of the realm. If either the *rājā* or Mādhorāo headed the processions, this meant that their position was identical vis-à-vis the deities. The pomp and ceremonial was alike for both – the same palanquin, attendants, insignia, and music, and the same order of procession. The fact that they occupied the same position in the procession must have brought it home to the audience that sovereignty and royal power were equally embodied by both. The strict separation thus ensured their identification with each other – they were identical in position and function for the participants. This point did not escape the democratic government. It was the reason why the district authorities enforced the participation of Mādhorāo along with the ruler, putting the latter in perspective, and for the same reason, the ruler soon withdrew from the processions for good.

Another question that has rarely been considered is how Mādhorāo actually ruled (or rules). Upon closer examination it appears that everything the local deities of Mandi do or once did – "deciding criminal and civil law, redistributing property, appointing and dismissing officers, settling disputes, levying fines, organizing attack and defence, or the prosecution of feuds"²³ – Mādhorāo does not. He has no *gur* or anyone else to make known his judgements, orders, or advice, nor is there a tradition that he inspired the king, or his priest, by causing dreams or in any other way. Mādhorāo did not take an active part in government at all. He embodied divine rulership but left the business of politics and administration to the *rājā* and the agencies of government – the courtiers, officers, ministers, scribes, scholars, advocates, etc. This does not mean that Mādhorāo was controlled by the *rājā*, or his priests, or other agents.

²³ Quoted from the Conference Paper; see also Sax (2002: 157).

Apart from possessing the image, which was and is important²⁴, there was no point in controlling the god because he kept aloof and nobody could claim that he knew his mind. This construction must have helped to limit the influence of Mādhorāo's priests as they did not have any authority deriving immediately from the god but were employees of the *rājā* in the first place.²⁵ If Mādhorāo had an executive force it was the Dharmārth, the "State Welfare Office" (more precisely, the "Office for the State Dharma") which was in charge of the temples and kept the records. It was run by scribes and priests, not by divine inspiration. Mādhorāo served as a pivot of the traditional hierarchy of local deities as viewed and shaped by the court. Rank and privileges might be seen as emanating from him, but he did not take direct action. This must have made him more acceptable to the local deities because he did not interfere with them beyond court protocol.

The Śivrātri Fair of Mandi - The Locale

As has been mentioned, the centre of the festival was the Bhūtnāth temple and the palace, along with the residences of the *rājā* and of Mādhorāo, i.e. the very nucleus of the former capital.²⁶ Other temples are also involved but can be treated only briefly. All of them receive their share of worship, but some have special importance. The Goddess does not play an obvious role at Śivrātri, but the festival is also celebrated in *devī* temples, most prominently Śyāmākālī on a hill above the town. Traditionally, goats were sacrificed there during the fair, and the local *devtās* went there on the second day. Few deities go there now, and animal sacrifices have been stopped. As will be seen below, Siddh Kālī, whose temple is near the tank, receives an animal sacrifice before the fair is concluded.

Two goddesses residing in the palace act as hosts of the fair in addition to Mādhorāo. Not much action is focused on them, and since the festival takes place in the palace few people are aware of them; these are quasi-private goings-on of the royal house. The first goddess, Rājarājeśvarī, does not have an image but is represented by a *śrī yantra*. The temple was near that of Mādhorāo but was shifted to an interior courtyard around 1960.

²⁴ Abduction of images was part of warfare. The question of property also gained importance after "merger" since the district authorities attempted to get hold of the image.

²⁵ Income from temple lands was rather modest in the case of Mādhorāo (Mandi State 1904: 63).

²⁶ Like other important religious festivals elsewhere, Śivrātri in Mandi is celebrated in temples and in people's homes by worship, fasts, and other observances. Although this aspect is very important, it is left aside here, and I deal with the public fair only.

During the fair the goddess occupied a separate room near the courtiers' quarters; nowadays, Parāśar Ṛṣi's insignia are kept in the temple. Devī Rupeśvarī, a substantial silver image with tantric features, had been the tutelary goddess of Mandi's strongest fortress and was brought to the capital after the *Pax Britannica*.²⁷ She is visited by Mādhorāo on the first and last day of the fair. Both goddesses seem to represent different aspects of royal rule. Rājarājeśvarī apparently represents a more impersonal, abstract concept of royal power (*śakti*) whereas Rupeśvarī is more closely identified with the *rānīs*. The relations between Mādhorāo and Rupeśvarī seem to parallel those between the male and female domains of the palace; both represent separate spheres of royal power, the internal sphere which was inaccessible to the public, and the more visible, public sphere.

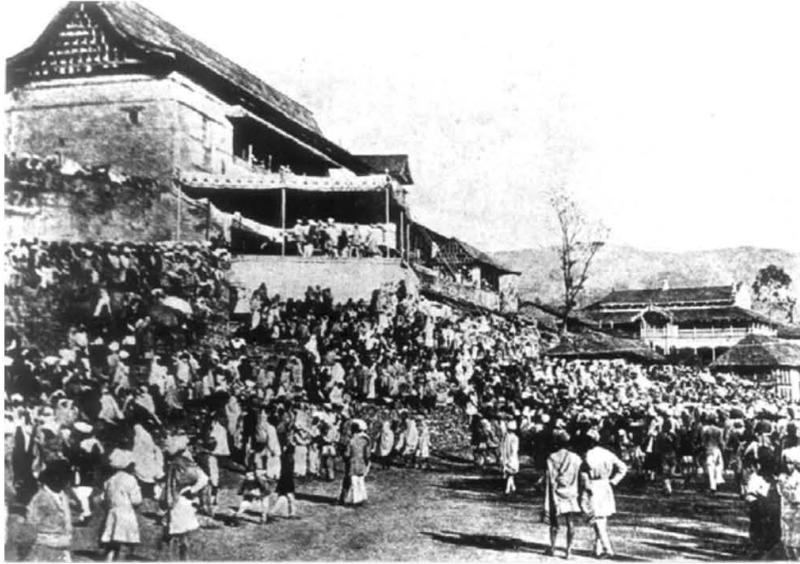


Fig.2: The festival ground with the raja's pavilion during Shivratri (ca. 1915, previously published in Emerson, 1920)

The palace area was much more extended before 1950 than it is today. Much of it has since been included in the public space of the town and

²⁷ See V.C. Thakur (1990: 74).

built up with government buildings, houses, and *bazārs*. Before "merger", most of the important functions took place in the palace or palace area. The main festival ground was spread out between the palace and the tank in front of it; the deities gathered there every day near an elevated pavilion reserved for the *rājā*; the minor processions (*jaleb*) performed on every other day started at this pavilion and went around the tank. The opening and the final processions had a different route. Both started at the palace and went to an open plain named Paddal outside the town, which is now the festival ground. The first procession went there directly, but the final procession made its way through the lanes of the *bazār*, actually a circumambulation of the Bhūtnāth Temple. This route is still followed by other processions of Mādhorāo²⁸, and by the god Ādi Brahmā on the last day of the fair (to be described below).

The Sequence of Events

In the 1930s, the fair lasted about 11 days. It was suspended during World War II and resumed in 1947. The duration was reduced for financial reasons; presently, it lasts for seven to nine days. I will first give a summary of the program of the fair and then discuss the participants and their relationships. Separate receptions by the *rājā* and Mādhorāo were only introduced after 1950. Earlier, both receptions took place in the palace and were presided by the *rājā* and Mādhorāo together, the gods and goddesses first bowing to the god and then to the ruler.

- (1) Nowadays, the first reception is first given by Mādhorāo in the presence of the Śivrātri Fair Committee and other dignitaries; when it is over, Mādhorāo proceeds to the palace and the reception is repeated but presided over jointly by the *rājā* and the god. The very first deity who is received is Kamru Nāg, an important mountain god from the southern part of Mandī. Next come two gods and two goddesses, associates of Parāśar Ṛṣi, Kamru Nāg's rival in rank. This is the time-honoured order. Sometimes a deity opts out – which would have been unthinkable during "state time" – and two others made their way into the group, but otherwise it is unchanged. Every *devtā* is accompanied by its *gur*, *pujāri*, *kārdār*, insignia bearers and a band with trumpets and drums. Mādhorāo has an even larger staff.
- (2) On Śivrātri day, Mādhorāo is worshiped and then proceeds to the Bhūtnāth Temple to be present at the *pūjā* there. Traditionally, it was performed by the *rājā* or rather by the "Dharmārth Manager"

²⁸ Cf. Hesse (2003).

in his presence. Today the *rājā* does not participate and the *pūjā* is performed by Mādhorāo's priest.

- (3) Afterwards the public reception takes place for the rest of the deities. The program is much the same as on the previous day but takes several hours as dozens of gods and goddesses throng the palace area. This time, the god Parāśar Ṛṣi is received before all others. A strict order of precedence is kept at the beginning, but later it is relaxed and the deities are received as they arrive.
- (4) The opening procession on the next day draws the greatest crowd. Mādhorāo is again worshipped, and the Chief Minister or another guest of honour assists in the *pūjā*. The procession is led by Mādhorāo in his palanquin, accompanied by his priest, servants, musical band, and some distinguished *devtās*. Besides officials and important persons of the town, district and state governments, nearly every group and committee in Mandi is represented, from kindergartens to cultural and professional associations. This procession is much longer than the route to the festival ground, and the rear-guard arrives long after the opening is over and Mādhorāo is back in his temple. In theory all *devtās* join, but only a part of them can push their way in, and many arrive by less ceremonious but more easily manageable roads.
- (5) During the *melā*, the deities gather on the festival ground every day, giving *darśan*, answering questions, and enjoying each other's company; *raths* can be seen dancing with joy, and celebrating their reunion. When not busy otherwise, *raths* are "sitting" on the ground in long lines, groups being based on status and regional association. The best places should be reserved for the "traditional" participants, but these are sometimes usurped by newcomers, and conflicts keep arising.
- (6) A second procession with Mādhorāo takes place in the middle of the fair; it is less pompous but more relaxed than the first one, and was introduced after "merger" as a substitute for the minor processions around the tank.
- (7) Two important rituals take place on the last night of the fair and the next morning respectively, viz. the *jāg*, a fire sacrifice performed for the well-being of the ruling house, and the *kār* in which a protective line is drawn around the town by the god Ādi Brahmā and a *jogṇī* (Hindi *yoginī*) associated with him.
- (8) On the last day the deities come to the palace early in the morning and are worshipped by the *rājā*. Later, gifts of honour (*cādar*) are distributed amongst them on his behalf. Traditionally these consisted of money, pieces of cloth, sweets, and an occasional coconut; although not valuable materially, they were appreciated

as token of their close link with the ruling house. After 1990 they were replaced by a cash payment given out unceremoniously by the administration and a connection with the traditional gift relationships between the rulers and the deities of Mandi is hardly recognizable any longer.

- (9) Finally, Bhūtnāth and Mādhorāo are worshiped again, the last procession of Mādhorāo goes to the festival ground, and the local deities take their leave.

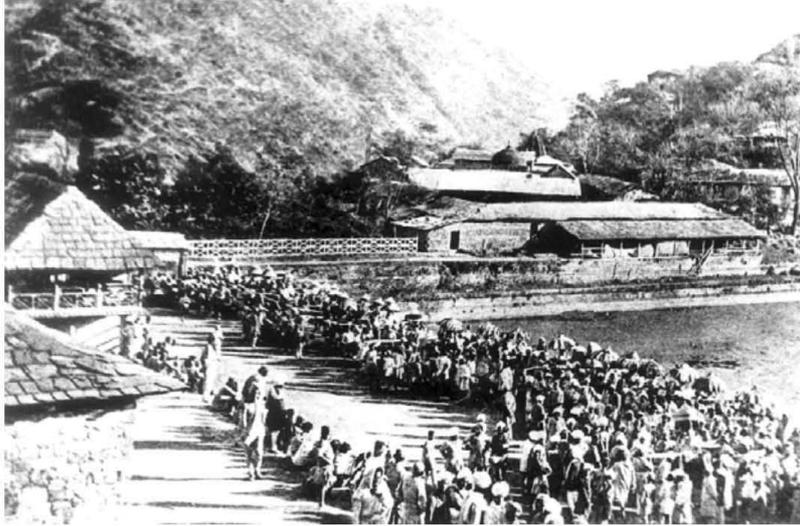


Fig.3: Devtas and people on the festival ground (ca. 1915, previously published in Emerson, 1920).

The Court of the Deities

The idea that there was a separate court of the deities is expressed in a note written after "merger": "In Mandi State on Śivrātri the *devtās* had their own *darbār*, and their rank (*darzā*) was fixed, and they were received by the ruler accordingly".²⁹ Everything concerning the *devtās* – insignia, gifts, the form of the *rath*, and, most important, temple land – was controlled by the *rājā* and the Dharmārth where the records were kept.

²⁹ Handwritten note, undated, from the palace archive.

The centrality of the ruler and the human court on all occasions can hardly be overstated. During the fair, the deities gathered every day in front of the palace arranged in a long line on the basis of rank and region; the spatial arrangement of the *raths* on the *melā* ground was thus a reflection of the regions that made up the kingdom³⁰. Sometimes these are loosely linked together and overlapping, but there are some contiguous areas united by a particularly important deity recognized as suzerain, or elder, by the others. The *rājā* arrived in the afternoon, escorted by his bodyguards, personal attendants including bearers with whisks of yak's hair and peacock feathers; he was received and conducted to the raised pavilion by the "Chief Minister, Executive Councillors, the President and Members of the Shiv Ratri Fair Committee"; the state band played the state anthem when he arrived and left the festival ground. In the evening, *jaleb* was performed, a procession around the tank, the *rājā* sitting in *tam jham* (his palanquin) or, later, in his car if he wished, accompanied by a select group of deities (six gods and a goddess); the exact position of each – whether going in front or behind the *tam jham*, on the right or the left side, etc. – being prescribed by protocol. When the *rājā* was absent, his place in the procession was taken by Mādhorāo; from old programs it appears that the choice who went was the *rājā*'s. For every event the list of participants, their position in relation to the *rājā*, etc. was regulated. The *rānī* and other ladies only took part in function within the confines of the palace, and they watched from the upper veranda. The pavilion, called "State Box", elevated high above the festival ground was an ideal stage on which the pageant of the court revolving around the *rājā* was displayed in front and above the court of the deities. Closest to the *rājā*, besides personal attendants, were generally "the Chief Minister, Executive Councillors, the Leading Mians and all the other Mians present in the town and First Class Officers" (Mian was the title borne by the *rājā*'s close agnatic relatives). The deities thus witnessed every day the pageant of the court revolving around the *rājā*.

It is no wonder that the new democratic government was keen to reduce the palace's domination of the fair. Opposite the *rājā*'s pavilion, where the important *devtās* used to sit, a stage was built for the "cultural program" in the evenings. The slope from the palace has been furnished with stone steps for sitting, part of it covered by a pavilion-shaped roof. It is now the audience who sit in the elevated position, the spectacle being staged below.

By analogy with the *rājā*'s court, the deities were divided into "courtiers" (*darbārīs*) and "commoners" or "ordinary *devtās*" (*devtāgaṇ* or

³⁰ This is confirmed by a few old photographs and sketchy lists of the order of seating that survived in the archive of the palace.

devtā-devī). The *darbārīs* with their retinue were and still are accommodated in a separate portion of the palace. Again, the order is hierarchical and the centre is Rājarājeśvarī who represents royal power. Only *darbārīs* take part in the first reception, and on the second one they come before the others. Before "merger" only *darbārīs* were allowed to go in processions; even today only *darbārīs* go near Mādhorāo's palanquin. They include a group of distinguished goddesses, many of whom did not (and still do not) appear in public, indicative of their aristocratic status (not all goddesses among the *darbārīs* are in *pardā*). Another group, the "office-bearers", has special ritual functions which will be described below. Last not least, many of the *darbārīs* have golden masks which were gifted by a *rājā* or *rānī*. For various reasons, about half of the old *darbārīs* no longer attend the fair and their place was taken by others, all of them renowned deities with long-standing relation to the royal house and Parāśar Ṛṣi.

The ordinary *devtās* were ranked but it is not easy to establish a clear-cut hierarchy (cf. Vidal 1988: 224). Some had special merits, such as having granted a victory or the miraculous birth of a son, and were distinguished by royal gifts – precious *mohrās*, umbrellas, standards, silver staffs, fans, and the like – which were displayed in the procession. This still holds today, but any deity can acquire these paraphernalia now if someone pays for them. Most of them stayed in temples or the houses of bigger landlords. Today, schools and other public buildings are also used, and a few deities have purchased land and built their own quarters.

During the fair, the deities, besides the aristocratic goddesses, move to the festival ground where they can be approached by the public for blessings and divination. The order of sitting is no longer officially regulated but some of the regional groups are still intact. In theory, the best places are reserved for the distinguished deities but are sometimes usurped by upstarts who reach early. Affinities are expressed in the form and decoration of the *raths*, the shape and arrangement of *mohrās*, etc. During "state time", the closest approximation to a linear order was probably realized on the last day when the common deities were worshipped by the *rājā* and given *cādar*. For this purpose, they sat in long spiralling lines in the palace garden in order of precedence, and relative rank, or favor of the court, was thus visibly displayed. This is no longer the case; the *pūjā* is still performed, but it is not a public function any longer and the exact order of seating does not matter much.

The number and participation of *devtās* is not easy to establish as proper lists are almost unavailable in Mandi, but the common deities must have numbered about 80 or 90.³¹ If the *darbārīs* are added, the number is

³¹ This number can be estimated by comparing the available lists.

approximately the same today. There is no essential difference between gods and goddesses in status or function but the male gods are more numerous; statistically, the proportion is about 2:1. About one-third of the deities attending now have come up after "merger", but as many old ones dropped out. Some new deities are popular, but few have any prestige in the eyes of the older ones.

The Guardians of the Kingdom

Two important rituals are performed by renowned mountain deities, or their *gurs*, before the conclusion of the fair: the *jāg* on the last night of the fair, and the *kār* in the next morning before the deities leave. The former is a fire sacrifice performed for the protection of the ruling house. It is not a public event and takes place in a palace courtyard. During "state time", few people besides the royal family were allowed to take part; even a few years ago it was not widely known, although it was announced in the programs.³² In the *kār* a protection line is drawn around the town. Unlike the *jāg*, the *kār* is nowhere mentioned, and I became aware of it only by chance. Both rituals were essential for the well-being of the ruler and the realm.

For the *jāg*, a *maṇḍala* is prepared and firewood is piled on it while the musicians – a big band with drums, *karṇāls*, *raṅsings* and a *śahnāi* – waits. The music begins after the fire is lit. The *gurs*, wearing special garments but no shoes or trousers, together invoke their deities by secret *mantras*. The first *gur* then starts to perform. After putting down his cap and the upper part of his garment he opens his long hair, which is essential for trance. He then purifies his body with water and incense. Before making his first round, he touches a drum. Led by an assistant carrying a silver staff (*charī*), he circumambulates the fire several times driving away demons and evil spirits (*bhūt-pret*), whirling burning sticks from the fire around his body, then the *saṅgal* (iron chains fastened to a staff) and *guraj* (an iron staff, the special weapon of the *gurs*). He finishes by uttering *mantras* for the well-being of the ruling family. An assistant then wraps a white cloth around him and leads him to the side, where he makes predictions about the coming year. The performance is repeated by the other *gurs*. Each *gur* after finishing his part is received by his predecessor with a peculiar dance, said to represent Śiva's dance, the *tāṇḍava*. During "state time", seven or even nine *gurs* used to perform, but now the number is five and sometimes less as not enough new *gurs* are recruited.

³² Since the Śivrātri Fair was accorded the status of a "National Fair", it is covered by TV news and became quite popular.

In the *kār* a magical line is drawn around the town by the god Ādi Brahmā or Ādi Purukh whose temple is near the important Dulchi pass, the inroad of armies from Kullu. The *rath*, accompanied on the way by two *gurs*, follows a route around the old quarters of the town. Along the way, handfuls of barley flour are thrown into the air, and a male goat is taken along. The procession ends at the temple of Siddh Kālī and Siddh Bhairav opposite the palace. One of the *gurs*, wielding two swords, performs a slow dance in front of the *rath* and then suddenly is possessed by Kālī, sticking out his blackened tongue and holding it between the sword-blades. At the same moment, the goat is sacrificed at the temple. The ritual then ends abruptly; the *gur's* trance ends, and Ādi Brahmā, i.e., the *rath*, goes to join the deities waiting for the final procession to begin. One of the *gurs* represents Adi Brahma, the second apparently a *jogñī* associated with him. *Jogñīs* are difficult to identify. They are sometimes benevolent but also very dangerous, and people avoid talking about them. Although invisible and unspeakable, they are the constant companions of the mountain gods who are powerless without them, and they turn invariably up in their vicinity.³³

To sum up: all the deities whose *gurs* perform in the *jag* are close associates of Parāśar Ṛṣi, in effect his ministers; they are an exclusive circle among the *darbāris*, consisting of the deities who recognize Parāśar as their suzerain. That the same group as today also performed in the 1930s – and probably much earlier – is confirmed by the files in the archive of the palace. That they really represent the realm of Parāśar Ṛṣi becomes clear from the *bhārthā* ("legend of the deeds and origin") of one of the gods of the group, Dev Śukdev Ṛṣi, grandson of Parāśar and son of Beās Ṛṣi (who is also identified with the river flowing through Kullu und Mandi). At the end of this text, it is recounted how Parāśar Ṛṣi distributed offices among the deities³⁴:

"On this very day, your grandfather (Parāśar Ṛṣi) gave you (Śukdev) the head ministry (*sīrī-wazīrī*) of the eighteen *karlū*³⁵ (i.e., all the local gods of Mandi),

the office of keeping revenue records (*nīmācār*, from *amīn*³⁶) of the eighteen *karlū* he gave to Dev Caṇḍohī,

³³ Cf. Emerson (1920: 124); Diserens (1991). That a *jogñī* with her *gur* in fact takes part was confirmed by a chance note on the payment - made on the *rājā's* behalf - for the ritual (palace archive).

³⁴ *Bhārthās* are transmitted orally. This one was dictated by the former *gur* to his grandson. In theory, the *bhārthā* is recited by the deity through the *gur* and should be in the first person sg. (Berti 2001: 108ff.), but the one quoted by me is in the second person, the god being addressed by his *gur*.

³⁵ Correctly, it should be *karḍū* (M.R. Thakur 1997: 48f.).

the office of head of police (*kuṭalpaṇī*, from *kaṭvāl*) of the eighteen *karlū* he gave to Dev Barnāg,

the office of manager (*palsrūmī*, from *pālsrā*) of the eighteen *karlū* he gave to Tepru Nāg,

the watch over the four irrigations channels³⁷ he gave to Nārāyaṇ,

the watch of the four mountains he gave to the god Ādi Braha (sic) of Ṭihri,

the office of *purohit* of Saraṇḍī (the site of Parāśar's temple) he gave to Mārkaṇḍa."

The "four mountains" refer to the local cosmogony as retold in the *bhārthā*: at the beginning, "the first four shoots of the *parāśar* [which is a tree here] came out, and from the four shoots the four mountains came out", that is, the world of Mandi.

These are the outlines of a kingdom governed by Parāśar Ṛṣi. The offices he distributes are central concerns in the constitution of a polity: rights in land, revenue, police, irrigation, priesthood, and protection from demons and other enemies coming across the mountain passes. Beside the regions (*ilāqās*) governed by his ministers, his realm includes those of many other gods and goddesses. It covers a contiguous area that embraced several *wazīrīs* and more than thirty deities recognized by the Dharmārth.³⁸ Of the *darbārī devtās* I could make out, almost twenty belong to this area, which leaves only five or six for the rest of the state. The posts enumerated above should be regarded with care. Two versions of a story seldom agree even within a close group of deities. Most of the offices have several incumbents with identical claims, a fact that can only be bewildering for outsiders. Nor is it clear that Ādi Brahmā would recognize Parāśar as superior, since he is a powerful god in his own right.³⁹

Although Parāśar's importance is unchallenged, his suzerainty is limited and Kamru Nāg, who is of equal rank, has a similarly large realm in the southern part of Mandi. Besides, a considerable part of the area is attached neither to Parāśar nor to Kamru Nāg, and similar albeit smaller groups can also be identified.

Kamru Nāg had one function of eminent importance: he was the most important rain god of the realm. Parāśar Ṛṣi is equally reputed, and so are Ādi Brahmā and all mountain deities as Hurang Nārāṇ in the north and

³⁶ A "government officer concerned with investigation of land or revenue claims" (McGregor).

³⁷ *cahuṃ cale rā pahrā*; this is how I understand it.

³⁸ V.C. Thakur (1990: 94).

³⁹ He is also linked with the fiercely independent deities of Cuhār who do not recognize Parāśar. For Cuhār, see Vidal (1988: 129).

Magrū Mahādev and Śikārī Devī who guard the southern border. However, it is Kamru Nāg who has a direct link with the capital, the ruler and Bhūtnāth, and all three of them were linked together in the rain ritual called *gaṛuā*, sometimes resorted to in times of severe drought. In this ritual the *gur* of Kamru Nāg was called, and met the *rājā* of Mandi in the Bhūtnāth temple. They went down to the river Beas and fetched water, which they poured out on the *liṅgam* in the temple. This immediately summoned Kamru Nāg. The story goes that as soon as the water flowing through the drainage channels reached the river again, clouds gathered above the temple and rain would fall unfailingly. A strong link was thus established between Kamru Nāg and the ruler.⁴⁰

In fact, the careful symmetry with which Parāśar Ṛṣi and Kamru Nāg are treated conceals the fact that there are considerable differences in their roles and in their relationships with the *rājās*. Both were privileged in that they did not have to attend the *melā* "personally" but could send their insignia (*niśān*) instead. In the palace, these were placed on opposite sides of the same room (nowadays Kamru Nāg does not stay in the palace any longer). The special treatment Kamru Nāg enjoyed as being the first god to be received in the capital was counterbalanced by giving Parāśar the same position on the next day. The second reception was less prestigious, but by separating them, the question of exact rank could be circumvented. Here, symmetry ends. The processions and the *jāg* and *kār*, deemed essential for the well-being of the ruler and the capital, were virtually monopolized by Parāśar and associates. The deities associated with Parāśar Ṛṣi were more numerous and ranked higher; they furnished the majority of the *darbārīs*, whereas no deity in Kamru Nāg's retinue was admitted.

Parāśar Ṛṣi was the oldest and most powerful lineage god (*kuḷj*) of the rulers, and his area of jurisdiction must have closely corresponded to the earliest polity, the nucleus of the future state. The area ruled over by Kamru Nāg was added to Mandi much later, towards the end of the 17th century.⁴¹ The fair under Mādhoraō had been working for some time. As Kamru Nāg was a powerful god and lord of many gods and goddesses, an important position and some special function had to be found for him if he was to be included in the Śivrātri, one that would show his direct link to the ruler and the gods of the capital.

⁴⁰ The *gaṛuā* is part of local folklore and was described to me by several people. Nobody knows when it had last been performed; the most precise answer was "during state time". It is mentioned by Nutan (1988: 33). Belief in this ritual is still strong, and Kamru Nāg is thought to be in charge of the capital and vicinity.

⁴¹ See. Man Mohan (1930: 50; 38f.; 43f.).

Conclusion

The deities in the Śivrātri represent the regions of the former state.⁴² The ruler's centrality is less conspicuous since he was removed from public functions. Nevertheless he remains indispensable even now because otherwise Mādhorāo would be without a kingdom, and the reception of the deities would lack all splendour.

In the case of Mandi, the ruling deity is not a lineage god of the rulers. Probably Parāśar Ṛṣi as a local god could not be imposed on other areas. The *rājā* also effectively reduced the influence of the *gurs* by introducing orthodox Brahmanical ritual in the capital. Parāśar retained his position as tutelary god of the lineage but was excluded from current politics. The power of local clans was reduced. In the Śivrātri the villagers were treated as the retainers of territorial deities. The realm of Parāśar Ṛṣi looks like a proto-state, but this holds on the divine plane only. Parāśar Ṛṣi is a deity, as are his ministers, officers and other associates, but there are no corresponding institutions on the ground. Local power was effectively restrained by state government. Communities still were more or less independent with regard to internal and inter-village affairs as long as they did not oppose government. Thus, divine rule at the local level was opposed, and submitted, to royal rule. No deity could act against state law.

This arrangement is quite different from divine kingship as described by Sax (2002: 157) where a god actually "rules as a divine king" and is "served as both a king and a god" by people. In this form of "government by deity (*devatā kā rāj*)" (Sutherland 2003: 33), the god and the king are identical; conflicts cannot arise but it seems to work best when a human ruler is absent or without influence. Apparently, in Mandi a more modern and complex form of state was introduced which had already been established elsewhere, as for instance in Kangra, by abolishing but also utilizing structures of the earlier, constituent polities. Divine rule was completely transformed. The importance of deities and temples within the communities may even have increased when the rule of – terrestrial – Thakurs ended. The fair was an occasion for the deities to do what they liked best: *melnā-khelnā*, meeting at sacred places and playing their divine play. Political power was completely played down, and the ensemble of local bodies were presented as an idealized picture of the kingdom. Attendance of the fair and recognition of the hierarchy are no longer

⁴² This is a common assumption (Mandi State: 39; 1920: 63; Vaśiṣṭh 1997: 28) and is endlessly repeated. When mapping sites of deities, I found that in fact the *raths* only come from a portion of the state area, viz. the higher regions in the southern and eastern part; virtually no *rath* comes from the area west of the river Uhl or west of the town Mandi.

mandatory now, but the *rājā's* ritual sovereignty still is the most binding aspect of the fair for the *devtās*.

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