

The *Bhārata/Jāgara* of Maulā alias Jiyā Rānī as Narrated in Doti (Far Western Nepal) and Uttarakhand (India): Text and context

Maheshwar P. Joshi

The items selected from the past are often so chosen as to legitimize the values and codes of the present. In selecting and recasting cultural items we highlight some and marginalize others. *The act of selection becomes a dialogue with the past* (Thapar 2000: 4, emphasis added).

Introduction

Based on the testimony of inscriptions (the earliest dating back to the 4th century AD), literary accounts, and local traditions it may be suggested that Far Western Nepal and Uttarakhand formed one single polity for centuries under the Katyūri dynasty. Therefore, both regions inherit a shared past or collective memory. The *Bhārata/Jāgara* of Maulā alias Jiyā Rānī, a Katyūri princess, as narrated in Doti (Far Western Nepal) and Uttarakhand (India) is an example of this common heritage. This paper traces the origin of the Maulā alias Jiyā Rānī narrative to the widely known theme of the sixth century AD Sanskrit drama the *Devī Chandraguptam*, which in turn is rooted in the Imperial Gupta history of the fourth century AD. Using the princess as a motif, as in the *Devī Chandraguptam*, it shows how certain important events form the contexts that mediate the folklore under discussion and how its texts are modified accordingly. It also examines the functional aspect of folklore and its efficacy in the articulation of ideology and political power.¹

There is no doubt that before the emergence of the nation states of

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India and Nepal, the Central Himalaya (parts of Far Western Nepal and Uttarakhand) formed a single polity under the Katyūrīs. Literary and archaeological evidence suggests that the Katyūrīs were the lineal descendants of the Kuṇindas (Joshi 2007). Inscriptions dated between the 4th and 13th centuries AD show that their kingdom was called variously Karttṛpura, Kārtikeyapura, Kārtikapura, and Kartiyura (modern Vajjnath, District Bageshwar, Uttarakhand); therefore they were christened as Katyūrīs (see Joshi, forthcoming). Inscriptional evidence from Far Western Nepal also reveals that the appellation *Katyūrā* was already in vogue in the 15th century AD, as evidenced in the copperplate inscription of Śāka 1411 (AD 1489) of the Raikā king Parvatī Malla (Pāṇḍeya 2065 VS: 96). There are two phases of the Katyūrī rule. The earlier phase may be called the Central Katyūrī (c. AD 650-1200) when the Katyūrīs ruled from Kārtikeyapura and their kingdom extended from Far Western Nepal to Garhwal, and the latter phase when their kingdom disintegrated in the 13th century AD and gave birth to several independent principalities, mostly established by the scions of the Kārtikeyapura Katyūrīs, among which the following are known from the inscriptions (Joshi 2005):

1. The Brahmas/Bams, the Pālas, and the Raikās (in Far Western Nepal-adjoining eastern Kumaon region, Uttarakhand);
2. the Later Katyūrīs (in Katyur, District Bageshwar, Uttarakhand);
3. the Later Katyūrīs (in Baramandal, District Almora, Uttarakhand);
4. the Later Katyūrīs (in Pali, District Almora).

It may be noted here that inscriptional evidence proves the existence of the Katyūrīs from at least the 4th to the 18th century AD. Interestingly, they are still invoked, albeit only culturally, in Far Western Nepal and Uttarakhand as evidenced in the *Bhārata/Jāgara* of Maulā, alias Jiyā Rānī, which is part of a larger corpus of narratives associated with the Katyūrīs. The *Bhārata* of Maulā is a narrative sung in Far Western Nepal to entertain the people, whereas the *Jāgara* of Maulā alias Jiyā Rānī is a narrative performed in spirit possession séances. However, as we will eventually note, the texts of these two narratives are based on a shared past or collective memory.

In recent years narrative analysis has gained wide popularity and has become a common approach not only in the humanities and social sciences but also in the natural sciences (Czarniawska 2004: 2-3, *in passim*).

For a student of history, narrative analysis is exceedingly useful in unfolding the past in the absence of historiography (Thapar 2000: 1-5 and 21-23, Hegarty 2012: 15-23, *in passim*). Indeed, White considers:

the historical work as what it most manifestly is—that is to say, a verbal structure in the form of a narrative prose discourse that purports to be a model, or icon, of past structures and processes in the interest of *explaining what they were by representing them* (White 1975 [1973]: 2, Joyce 2002: 4-17).

Hegarty's recent study of the *Mahābhārata* shows that as a narrative the *Mahābhārata* has 'a strong sense of the past, of its approach to that past and of its own purpose', as it forms 'part of a wider textual and social context in early South Asia'. Therefore, in his work he moves 'from narrative analysis to inter-textual comparison and historical reconstruction' (Hegarty 2012: 2). Hegarty draws our attention to 'the role of narrative in the formation of consensus understandings of both past and place' (*Ibid*: 4), which makes it an 'empowered activity' (*Ibid*: 7). Hegarty's insightful observation on South Asian historiographic traditions, in which he says: 'the absence of "historiography" or "history proper" in no way equates to the absence of a consciousness of the past', is central to the present essay, because in this respect narratives bear on cultural memory (*Ibid*: 21-22) or a shared past (*Ibid*: 95). He shows how the *amṛtamanthana* (churning of the ocean) episode is a narrative construction of the Vedic past associated with the ritual of Soma sacrifice (*Ibid*: 95). He notes:

[...]there is compelling evidence to link the Mahābhārata's cosmogonic narrative of *amṛta* churning with the *soma* pressing that is so central to Vedic ritual practice...

In the Mahābhārata, it is the *yajña* that is 'inserted in time' and... also inserted into place. Ritual is, however, subsequently usurped by alternative modes of religious practice. Indeed, the stage is set for the encompassment of *yajña* by *kathā*, that is to say, of ritual by story. It is of critical importance in this regard, then, that the churning of the ocean narrative provides the basis for an aetiology of not just the cosmos but also of the Mahābhārata itself, and furthermore that these two creations are fundamentally interrelated. Here we will move

from a series of complex parallels between creative ritual action and stories that dramatize ritual action to a concerted attempt to replace rituals with stories: a narrative *coup d'état* (*Ibid:* 99-100).

As regards places, Hegarty (*Ibid:* Ch. 4) gives a detailed analysis of places occurring in different chapters of the *Mahābhārata*. He aptly remarks:

What is of key importance is the global reach of this description and its anachronistic inclusivity (which would be the case whatever the period of composition of this portion of the *Mahābhārata*). By this I refer to the fact that the authors of the text, regardless of the first- or second-hand sources of their geographical information, chose to present the known world as it was at the time of authorship and not at the time of the historical action they describe. Our fabricated heroes, the Pāṇḍavas, have been inserted in a quasi-Vedic past, but have been situated in a very contemporary place (*Ibid:* 148).

It has already been noted that the *Bhārata/Jāgara* of Maulā alias Jiyā Rānī is part of a larger Central Himalayan narrative placed under the rubric of the Katyūri *Jāgara*, which also includes the famous oral epic *Mālūsāhī* (Meissner 1985). For a student of Central Himalayan history, Hegarty's mode of analysis of the *Mahābhārata* as a narrative, if extrapolated to the Katyūri *Jāgara*, can serve as a useful tool in unfolding the shared past of the Central Himalaya in the absence of its historiography. We will eventually notice that in the *Bhārata/Jāgara* of Maulā alias Jiyā Rānī, we come across the cultural memory/shared past of the Central Himalaya of Kārttikeyapura times inserted into the quasi-Katyūri past situated in contemporary places like Ajaimiryākoṭa, Bānghāṭa, Gubari, and the *paṭṭi* of Kumāūm in the case of the Doti (Far Western Nepal) text of the *Bhārata* of Maulā, and Chitraśilā, Kāṭhagodāma, and Raṇachulāhāṭa in the case of the Uttarakhand text of the *Jāgara* of Jiyā Rānī. It may be noted here that

[...] the etymological definition of text is much broader. Specifically, *text* is derived from the Latin *texere*, which means “to weave.” This aspect of the definition suggests that text is like a cloth, a material object, woven of many different threads, all combined to create a coherent whole. The word also figuratively suggests the “theme or

subject on which anyone speaks; the starting point of a discussion” (*Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*). So in its most encompassing sense, *text* can refer to words, objects, ideas, and behaviors. Frequently, when we use the word *text*, either on its own or in conjunction with the words *folklore* or *folk*, we intend it to mean all these complex possibilities, as well as the particular content of a particular item of folklore (Sims and Stephens 2011: 19).

In the following section of this essay we will notice how skeins of different ideas, situations and characters are woven into the pattern of the Maulā/Jiyā Rānī narrative. So far, only two texts of the *Bhārata/Jāgara* of Maulā/Jiyā Rānī are known, namely, the Dotiyali text (hereafter DT) sung in Far Western Nepal and the Uttarakhandi text (hereafter UT) current in Uttarakhand, India. Here I will give a summary account of these two texts which shows that the particular content of both texts is the seizing of the Katyūrī queen Maulā/Jiyā Rānī by her consort’s opponent.

The *Bhārata* of Maulā (DT)²

Literally, *bhārata* means war (Monier-Williams 1986 [1899]: 753, 798). However, in Far Western Nepal it denotes legends of heroes and heroines, which in genre are analogous to the legends of the *Mahābhārata*. Also known as *huḍakeli*, these are sung during festivals and ceremonies (Bināḍī (in press), Zoller 2001: 84 and fn. 14) by folk musicians called *damāīs*, who belong to the Śūdra community. The DT of the *Bhārata* of Maulā informs us that King Pirthāmadeu of Ajaimiryākoṭa (capital of Doti, Far Western Nepal) had seven queens, amongst whom Maulā was the chief queen. She had no progeny, therefore she went out on a pilgrimage and ultimately settled at Bānghāṭa, where she practiced austerities for years and prayed for a baby without being impregnated. While she was bathing there, her matted golden hair fell into the river and was carried far away by its current to a place where it was netted by the royal fishermen of Kumaon. Taking it for gold, they presented it to the Kumaoni kings Sāladeu-Bisāladeu, who at once noticed that it was a tuft of golden hair. Fancying that a woman with such hair ought to be beautiful, they ordered the fishermen to find

2 I am thankful to Sri Vasudeva Pandeya who kindly sent me a copy of the DT which is being published by Prof. Jairaj Pant.

her and bring her to them. The fishermen found Maulā at Bānghāṭa and forcibly took her to the Kumaoni kings who proposed to marry her. Helpless, Maulā agreed to this, provided that the kings arranged for her a good house built separately (independent of the residences of the other queens), got a *sijurako sāḍo* (bedcover?) knitted for her, and finally arranged a grand sacrifice for the marriage ceremony there.

The kings agreed to the terms; accordingly, Maulā was brought to the ceremonial place. The marriage rituals commenced and Maulā made five circumambulations with King Sāladeu, uttering: ‘salutations to *buvā* (father/fatherly) Sāladeu’ on each circumambulation. Sāladeu stopped the rituals because Maulā had addressed him as *buvā*. Then he asked his younger brother Bisāladeu to marry her instead. Maulā again made five circumambulations, this time with Bisāladeu, uttering: ‘salutations to *kkā* (uncle) Bisāladeu’ on each circumambulation. The ritual was again stopped, because she had addressed Bisāladeu as *kkā*. Compelled by the circumstances, Sāladeu-Bisāladeu adopted her as their daughter, and thought about arranging her marriage with a suitable prince. Accordingly, they sent invitations to the princes of the four cardinal quarters. Thereupon, Maulā pleaded: ‘o *buvā* you should have invited only one person, you have committed a mistake by inviting princes from the four quarters, it will create animosity’. In the meantime she conveyed a letter through her parrot to King Pirthāmadeu, informing him of her situation and asking him to attend the event of her marriage in the garb of a *jogī*.

King Pirthāmadeu arrived at the fort of Sāladeu-Bisāladeu in the garb of a *jogī* on the fateful day. When Maulā saw him present there, she announced that since she could marry only one person, whereas there were many prospective grooms, if they agreed she would toss up her necklace in the assembly and would marry him on whose *tāṭa* (neck) it fell. The princes agreed. Thereupon, in the name of her chastity and steadfast devotion to her husband, Maulā tossed up her necklace, praying that it would fall on the neck of King Pirthāmadeu. Her prayer was granted and the necklace fell on the *tāṭa* of King Pirthāmadeu, who disclosed his identity in the course of events, and they were reunited.

2. The *Jāgara* of *Jiyā Rānī* alias *Maulādevī* (UT): The term *jāgara* is derived from Sanskrit *jāgr* (awakening), and contextually offers varied meanings (Monier-Williams 1986 [1899]: 416, Staal 1963, Smith 2006: *in*

passim, Joṣī 2011: *Adhyāya* 4). In the context of the *Jāgara* of Maulā it stands for the spirit possession ritual (on *jāgara* rituals see Fanger 1990, Krengel 1999, Zoller 2001: 82, Bernède 2001, Lecomte-Tilouine 2009), in which Jiyā Rānī, alias Maulādevī, is invoked along with her consort Pritamadeva and their attendants, all of whom are deified. Their respective spirits possess specific individuals who are seated in a definite order (Joshi, Fuloriya and Bhatta 2009). The UT has some minor variations, but all represent Jiyā Rānī/Maulādevī as the queen of the Katyūri king Pṛthipāla/Pritamadeva captured by the *Turkī* /*Paṭhāna* (local expressions in folklore, denoting Muslims) at Chitraśilā near Kathgodam (District Nainital, Uttarakhand) and her rescue by *Nau Lākha Katyūri* (the Nine Lakh Katyūris).³ It may be noted here that the historicity of the characters portrayed in the narrative cannot be established because their names are not found in the vast corpus of epigraphic source-material; nor do they fit in with the diachronic frame of Central Himalayan history.

In the present study I am using the Pali Pachhaun (District Almora) text collected by us (Joshi, Fuloriya and Bhatt 2009; Joshi *forthcoming*) as it is in vogue in the very heart of the Later Katyūri territory. It narrates that King Pṛthipāla of Raṇachulihāṭa (Kārttikeyapura, capital of Central Katyūri, modern Vajjnath, District Bageshwar)⁴ had two queens, the elder being Gaṅgāvatī and the younger Jiyā Rānī. It is said that once Pṛthipāla went to Haridvāra (District Haridwar, Uttarakhand) to take a ritual bath, when simultaneously Jairāja Khātī of Bhilare and Sunapati Sauka of Bhoṭa also arrived there to bathe. These three met and promised that as and when the occasion arose they would establish matrimonial alliances with one another. Accordingly, in the course of time, when Jiyā Rānī, daughter of Jairāja Khātī, was twelve years old, she was married to the hundred-year-old-Pṛthipāla. She was a devout person and wanted to give birth to a righteous son. Therefore, she prayed to Śiva who was pleased with her devotion and assured her that she would be blessed with the desired son,

3 The *Jāgara* of Maulā alias *Jiyā Rānī* forms part of the corpus of the Katyūri *Jāgara* which has been collected by several scholars, notably, Prayāga Joṣī (vide Śarmā 2007), Bhaṭṭa (2002), Joshi, Fuloriya and Bhatt (2009). One of the Garhwali versions published by Oakley and Gairola (1977 [1935]: 121-26) represents Joshimath area (District Chamoli) as the place of the event with Narasiṃha as the presiding deity and the abductor as 'Bhaga Turank [Turk in other versions], Raja of Bhanikot'.

4 Other versions of the UT current in Garhwal represent him as king of 'Katyur-garh' (in Joshimath?) (*Ibid*) or Khairāgaḍha (Bhaṭṭa 2002) in Garhwal.

provided that she bathed in the Gaulā and prayed to him as Chitreśvara Mahādeva at Chitraśilā (near Kathgodam, District Nainital, Uttarakhand) without any companion. Jiyā Rānī requested Śiva that because it would be dangerous for her, a woman, to go to Chitraśilā alone she may be allowed to take her *Guru* Gavāli along. Śiva consented. On the first day of the month of Māgha she took a bath in the Gaulā, and arranged her *nau gaja* (nine yards) and *aṭhāra hātha* (eighteen hands, also equal to 9 yards) long golden hairs, one of which broke off and flowed to Kāṭhagodāma (some three kilometres from Chitraśilā). At Kāṭhagodāma seven Turk brothers, each riding a horse, were crossing the Gaulā. Their horses' feet became entangled with Jiyā Rānī's flowing hair. The seven brothers climbed down from the horses and pulled out the hair. Fascinated by its length and golden colour, they at once felt a desire to carry off the woman to whom it belonged.

Meanwhile, as directed by Śiva, Jiyā Rānī prayed at Chitreśvara and conceived miraculously without being impregnated. In the course of events the left eye of Jiyā's *Guru* pulsed. Taking it as a bad omen and anticipating danger, he asked Jiyā to go back. In the meantime the seven Turk brothers arrived at Chitraśilā. The *Guru* directed Nisau Mahara, who had accompanied them from village Maharagaurm, to hide Jiyā. Nisau Mahara cracked a boulder with his dagger and Jiyā was hidden in the crack. However, Jiyā's hair remained exposed and the Turks detected it. They told the *Guru* to take the woman out so that they could carry her away. The *Guru* said that the woman was King Pṛthipāla's queen, that he had no right to give her to them, but that if her rescuer did not arrive within three days he would get her married to them.⁵ The *Nau Lākha Katyūri* (Katyūris numbering nine hundred thousand) arrived in time and rescued Jiyā Rānī. After ten months she bore a son who was given three names: Dhāma Deva after *dharma* (righteousness), Dulā Sāhī after *dūdha* (milk), and Satauji after *sata* (truthfulness).

5 Pāṇḍe (1977: 53) summarily notes that when Jiyā Rānī was captured at Chitraśilā and was being taken away on horseback by Sayyada Paṭhāna, she agreed to go with him on the condition that he would treat her as a daughter for twelve years, and that if the Katyūris did not rescue her within the stipulated time she would marry him. When the Katyūris learned about this they sent their army and she was liberated. It compares well with a somewhat similar motif from India, which reads 'Abducted princess tells her abductor to wait for her menstrual period of 12 years to terminate' (Thompson 1955-1958: motif number K 1227.10.1).

Context

It is clear that these two texts narrate one, single event, i.e. the capture of Maulā alias Jiyā Rānī, queen of Pirthāmadeu/Pṛthipāla/Pritamadeva, a Katyūrī king, but their respective contexts are different. Here the term *context* is used ‘to mean everything that surrounds the text—the setting, people, situation—anything in addition to the expressions, item, idea, or objects being shared’ (Sims and Stephens 2011: 19).

Thus, the DT sung in the Doti region of Far Western Nepal represents Pirthāmadeu as the king of Ajaimiryākoṭa (Far Western Nepal) and situates the event in the region from Bānghāṭa (?) through Gubari (?) across the *paṭṭi* (strip of land) of Kumāurī (Kumaon) where the *koṭa* (fortified palace) of Sāladeu-Bisāladeu was located. No mention is made of the precise location of the palace of the Kumaoni chief. However, Sām̐kr̥tyāyana (VS 2015: 67) reports an inscription of AD 1597 from Vajinath (District Bageshwar) recording the name of the Katyūrī king Sukhaladeva. If Sāladeu and Sukhaladeva refer to one and the same person then he can be identified as a Katyūrī king. Be that as it may, it is clear that the DT refers to the capture of Pirthāmadeu’s queen Maulā by Kings Sāladeu-Bisāladeu of Kumaon, who amicably give her back to Pirthāmadeu. It is clear that the DT is sung in the context of the royal families of Doti and Kumaon, who evidently formed a homogeneous community, interrelated either through the common Katyūrī lineage or else through matrimonial alliances between the Katyūrī and Chandra lineages.

The UT narrating the legend of Jiyā Rānī is sung in the Kumaoni districts of Nainital (Ranibagh, Mukteshwar, and Baitalghat region), Almora (Salt, Pali Pachhaum, Borarau, Kairarau, Dhamush, and Doba), and Bageshwar (Katyur Valley), and in several areas in the Garhwali districts of Pauri (Rikhadikhal, Idakot Malla, Dhumakot) and Chamoli (Joshimath). It invariably situates the event in the context of Jiyā Rānī’s capture by the *Turkī*/*Paṭhāna* (i.e. Muslims) at Chitraśilā (Ranibagh-Kathgodam) and their encounter with the Katyūrīs. Interestingly, available evidence from the works of contemporary Muslim historians coupled with local traditions clearly shows that the Muslim inroads into the Kumaon hills from this region took place when the Chandras were ruling in Kumaon and the Paṁvāras in Garhwal (Atkinson 1884: 520-29, 537-39, 543-49, 561-65 and 581-90, Zaidī 1997: *in passim*, Joshi 2012). Therefore, the Muslim encounter with the Katyūrīs is a fiction. As may be noted, the context of the UT is

noticeably different from that of the DT in that here the actors involved belong to two heterogeneous communities representing two different religious communities and nativities. It may be added here that the Rohelā Muslims were much despised in Uttarakhand, owing to their iconoclastic activities and heterodox religious practices (Bahadur 1916: 192). That is why, despite traditional political rivalry and protracted wars between the chiefs of Kumaon and Garhwal, when the Rohelā Muslims occupied Kumaon and vandalised Brahmanical temples the Garhwali king came to the rescue of the Kumaoni king (Joshi 2012).

Discussion

It is worthwhile noting here that whereas in the Doti region the *Bhārata* of Maulā is sung to entertain people, in Uttarakhand the *Jāgara* of Jiyā Rānī, also called Maulā, is performed exclusively as a spirit possession ritual under the priesthood of the Dāsa section of Śūdras. Jones (1976), in his analysis of different forms of spirit possession in the Nepal Himalaya, observes that spirit possession plays a significant role in sociological functions. In the traditional society of Uttarakhand, spirit possession rituals, called *jāgara*, play a significant role. Thus, while studying the Kumaoni *jāgaras*, Kregel notes:

The protection of territory and keeping it free from guilt and the intrusion of evil is relevant for both, house- and *dhuni-jāgars*. In both contexts, actively dancing and speaking supernaturals are linked to a mythological past. The deceased kings who were the original owners and protectors of the land form the core of the mythological past. Their sufferings and struggles as well as their authority are present today and are kept virtually alive through the rich folklore presented in the first part of the *jagar*. These legends are an indispensable part of every *jagar* and they contain a message in their own right. They strengthen the territorial identification of the listeners, although these deified kings are not bound to one place. Their legends describe adjacent areas and holy places and widen the territorial imagination...

A general feature of *jagars* is their articulation of ambivalences. The suffering person (victim of an evil spirit) experiences at the same time the potential powers of a 'judge' pointing to offences that concern the family or community as a whole. On the one hand, *jagars*

serve to re-establish and confirm social order; on the other hand, they provide a critique of human desires and actions. Powers of the person are, apart from acting as mediums, expressed through the power of curses. Anger and dissatisfaction, as attributes of personal feelings and reactions, are only given space in this context. Curses are of a female domain. With regard to property rights—a mail domain—intentions and motives do not count; traditional rights are applied purely and simply without taking persons into account (Krengel 1999: 280-81).

Spirit possession in Uttarakhand is predominantly a Dāsa (Śūdra community) vocation, which I have discussed at length elsewhere (Joshi 2010 and 2011, Jośī 2011, Berreman 1963, Dumont 1959). It is enough to say here that one of their sections claims to belong to the Maheśvara *gotra* and another claims descent from the Āī Dāsa son of Brahmā and his consort Gautamī Devī. Such beliefs lent them a ritual status corresponding to that of Brahmins, which is further strengthened by their claim to being the ‘Dāsa’ (slave/attendant) of the concerned deity. By virtue of this ritual status, like the Brahmins, they tailored genealogies of their clients and assigned them Katyūrī status—the process of Katyūrisation—whereby a multitude of Uttarakhandi people were transformed into what is proverbially known as *Nau Lākha Katyūrī* (the nine hundred thousand Katyūrīs), as may be noticed in the Katyūrī folklore sung in Far Western Nepal, Kumaon, and Garhwal.⁶ In the Katyūrī *Jāgara* sung in Uttarakhand, some of the legendary Katyūrī princes, who are otherwise portrayed as cruel characters during their lifetime, are deified as benevolent spirits. Interestingly, many other deified spirits are also invoked along with them, one of them being Lākuḍa-bīra. Elsewhere, I have shown that this Lākuḍa-bīra is in fact Lakulīśa, the twenty-eighth incarnation of Śīva (Joshi 2007-2010). Thus, here we notice the amalgamation of a great tradition with a little tradition. Significantly, in the course of *jāgara* rituals, the *jāgari* (the

6 Some of the *vamśavalīs* (genealogical accounts) bearing on the Katyūrī lineages are preserved in manuscripts found in the private collections of the folklore singers under reference. A xeroxed copy of one such manuscript collected by the late Sri Chandra Singh Rahi, the famous Garhwali folk-musician, from a folklore singer of Joshimath (District Chamoli, Garhwal), was made available to me by Piyush Bhatt, Archaeological Survey of India, New Delhi (see Plates 8a-8b-8c, Joshi (forthcoming)).

priest in the *jāgara* ritual) commands the deified spirits (see Plate 1) so as to enable the devotee to communicate directly with the deity (Fanger 1990: 179). This is a feat that is beyond the capacity of a Brahmin priest, for the invoked deity is always represented symbolically in the great tradition. Since these *jāgara* rituals used to be performed in village shrines attended by a large number of people, the *jağari* was able to publicly display his ability and power to bestow divine status on his patron as the lineal descendant of some deified spirit or another. At the same time it also meant that if the *jağari* could control the powerful spirit of the deceased princes, the living one could also be managed. To some extent these measures also served as deterrents to tyrannical rule. Thus, spirit possession played a significant role in the political society of Uttarakhand (Joshi 2010, Jośi 2011: *Adhyāya* 4-5).

Historically, after the decline of the Central Katyūri kingdom the socio-political functions of Far Western Nepal and Uttarakhand took different courses, therefore the texts of the *Bhārata/Jāgara* of Maulā/Jiyā Rānī were regenerated in keeping with changed contexts, as will be clear from what follows.

The famous Russian folklorist Vladimir Propp, while analyzing the contents of the folklore compiled by Afanas'ev, notes:

In a series of wondertales about the persecuted stepdaughter I noted an interesting fact: in 'Morozko' [Frost] (No. 95 in Soviet editions) the stepmother sends her stepdaughter into the woods to Morozko. He tries to freeze her to death, but she speaks to him so sweetly and so humbly that he spares her, gives her a reward, and lets her go. The old woman's daughter, however, fails the test and perishes. In another tale the stepdaughter encounters not Morozko but a *lesij* [a wood goblin], in still another, a bear. But surely it is the same tale! Morozko, the *lesij*, and the bear test the stepdaughter and reward her each in his own way, but the plot does not change. Was it possible that no one should ever have noticed this before? Why did Afanas'ev and others think that they were dealing with different tales? It is obvious that Morozko, the *lesij*, and the bear performed the same action. To Afanas'ev these were different tales because of different characters in them. To me they were identical because the actions of the characters were the same (Propp 1997 [1984]: 69).

It may be noted here that Propp has shown that, despite its compositional imaginary, folklore is by and large embedded in historical events. He says:

It is obvious that the study of folklore cannot be limited to the investigation of origins and that not everything in folklore goes back to a primitive state or is explained by it. New formations occur in the entire course of people's historical development. Folklore is a historical phenomenon and the science of folklore, a historical discipline. Ethnographic research is its first step.

Historical study should show what happens to old folklore under new historical conditions and trace the appearance of new formations. We cannot ascertain all the processes that occur in folklore with the transition to new forms of social structure, or even with the development within the existing system, but we know that these processes occur everywhere with surprising uniformity (*Ibid*: 11).

Interestingly, while discussing the subject-matter of history, Collingwood emphasises events that express thoughts, elaborating upon which he adds:

Thus the vague phrase that history is knowledge of the individual claims for it a field at once too wide and too narrow: too wide, because the individuality of perceived objects and natural facts and immediate experiences falls outside its sphere, and most of all because even the individuality of historical events and personages, if that means their uniqueness, falls equally outside it; too narrow, because it would exclude universality, and it is just the universality of an event or character that makes it a proper and possible object of historical study, if by universality we mean something that oversteps the limits of merely local and temporal existence and possesses a significance valid for all men at all times. These too are no doubt vague phrases; but they are attempts to describe something real: namely the way in which thought, transcending its own immediacy, survives and revives in other contexts; and to express the truth that individual acts and persons appear in history not in virtue of their individuality as such, but because that individuality is the vehicle of a thought which,

because it was actually theirs, is potentially everyone's (Collingwood 2012 [1936/1940]: 303).

Using these statements to explain the *Bhārata/Jāgara* of Maulā alias Jiyā Rānī, a critical analysis of the event of the queen's capture leads us to visit the famous Rāma Gupta-Dhruvadevī-Chandragupta episode. This is the central theme of Viśākhadatta's drama the *Devī Chandraguptam*, a lost work dating from *circa* the sixth century AD. The core of its content is preserved in several sources,⁷ and runs as follows: There were two brothers of the famous Imperial Gupta dynasty, namely, Rāma Gupta and Chandra Gupta. The former is represented as a weak king who suffers a humiliating defeat at the hands of a Śaka king (4th century AD) and is consequently forced to surrender his queen Dhruvadevī to the latter. In order to save him from this humiliating situation, his brother Chandra Gupta seeks the support of a supernatural power by practising *vetāla-siddhi* ('vampire's support', a magical practice) and goes to the camp of the Śaka chief in the garb of Dhruvadevī and assassinates him. Later on, feigning madness, he also assassinates Rāma Gupta, marries Dhruvadevī, and ascends the throne (for the original passages and reconstruction of the episode see Bhandarkar 1932, Gupta 1974: 135-56, Raghavan 1963: 863-82).

Thus, the theme using a princess (here Dhruvadevī) as a motif recurs in several literary and other works noted above, albeit in different contexts: 'simply defined, a motif is a small narrative unit recurrent in folk literature' (Garry and El-Shamy 2005: xv). As may be noticed, here the motif emerges from 'attendant circumstances of the action' (Thomson

7 The core plot of the *Devī Chandraguptam* is preserved in the *Abhinavabhārati* of Abhinavagupta (early eleventh century AD), *Śrīṅgāraprakāśa* of King Bhoja of Mālava (AD 1011-1055), and *Nātyadarpaṇa* of Rāmachandra and Guṇachandra, pupils of Hemachandra, preceptor of the Chālukya king Kumārapāla (AD 1145-1171), and the *Nāṭaka-lakṣhaṇa-kōsha* of Sāgaranandi. The narrative was so popular that it was also written in Arabic, and later on Abul Hasan Ali translated it in his *Majmal-ut-tawārikh* (13th century AD). In addition, stray passages of the drama are also found in the *Harsha-charita* of Bāṇa (c. AD 650), the court poet of Emperor Harsha, the *Kāvya-mīmāṃsā* of Rājaśekhara (early tenth century AD), the *Āyurveda-dīpikā-ṭīkā* - a commentary on the *Charaka-saṃhitā* written by Chakrapāṇidatta (12th century AD), copper plate inscriptions of the Rāshṭrakūṭa kings Amoghavarsha (AD 800-878) and Govinda IV (AD 930-935), and the *Rājāvalī* of Mṛtyuñjaya Paṇḍita written as late as AD 1808 (Bhandarkar 1932, Raghavan 1963: 863-82, Gupta 1974: 135-56, 291, Thaplyal 2012: 147).

1955-58).⁸ Thus, originally there appears a 'political episode dramatised in *Devī-Chandra Gupta*' (Bhandarkar 1932: 193-94) that tells of the fate of a princess in the context of her consort's weakness or strength in military action. In the *Harsha-charita* it is summarily stated that the Śākapati was assassinated by Chandra Gupta in female garb due to the former's lust for the other's wife; here the context is clearly the lustfulness of the Śākapati. The reason for this lust may be explained in the light of the *Majmal-uttawārikh*. It is the only work that states that the princess (i.e. Dhruvadevi) was charming, that she possessed extraordinary qualities that made every prince want to court her, and that for her part she loved only Barkamāris (i.e. Vikramāditya, an epithet of Chandra Gupta). It is told that Barkamāris brought her to his home. However, King Rawwāl (i.e. Rāma Gupta), the elder brother of Barkamāris, took hold of her. This news reached his father's enemy, who, taking advantage of the situation, invaded Rawwāl's kingdom and forced him to surrender the princess and his allies' daughters. Thereupon, Barkamāris came to the rescue of his family's honour by entering the enemy's camp dressed as a woman, along with his trusted attendants, to assassinate the raja and his retinue. Later on, feigning madness, he also killed Rawwāl, married the princess, and ascended the throne. Thus, here the motif gains prominence by virtue of her charming qualities. The *Āyurveda-dīpikā-ṭīkā* uses the narrative to illustrate potentials of human conduct in the context of sham madness, i.e. when a sane person feigns madness. It says, 'perceiving fraud is *upādhi*, its meaning is disguise (*chhadma*), its result is the consequence that takes place later. For instance, to obtain [the] murder of his brother and others at some later date Chandra Gupta fraudulently declared himself mad' (Gupta 1974: 150). Significantly, in the *Kāvya-mīmāṃsā* the narrative is retold in the context of *kāthottha* (an historical event), illustrating an example of literary composition meaning 'that some king named Śarma Gupta [most likely a mistake for Rāma Gupta] having been besieged by a Khasa (Śaka) ruler was compelled to give him his queen Dhruvasvāmini' (*Ibid*: 149-50). It is this very work that situates this episode in the Central Himalaya. Accordingly, the women of Kārttikeyanagara sing the glory of Chandra Gupta, the

8 Some related motifs recorded by Thompson (1955-1958) are as follows: No. T52.7. *Princess asked for in return for sparing palace*. India; No. T104. *Foreign king wages war to enforce demand for princess in marriage*. Icelandic; No. M146.7. *Vow of enemy chief to marry princess of besieged city*. Jewish.

assassin of that *Khaśādhīpati* who had inflicted a humiliating defeat on Śarma Gupta and forced him to offer his queen Dhruvadevī to him (i.e. the *Khaśādhīpati*). Bhandarkar (1932), on the authority of Śaṅkarārya,⁹ shows that this *Khaśādhīpati*, living in the Himalaya, was the preceptor of the Khaśās, and that this event took place at Vaijnath (Kārttikeyapura of the Katyūri inscriptions, modern Vaijnath, District Bageshwar, Uttarakhand). He further adds that the name Khaśa ‘is almost the letters Śa-ka reversed... with a slight change’.

Be that as it may, it is clear that the *Devī Chandraguptam* is retold in different contexts, and accordingly the character of the motif—the ‘princess’ (i.e. Dhruvadevī)—also tends to change. Thus, the original narrative, i.e. the *Devī-Chandraguptam*, depicts the motif as a symbol, the possession of which determines the political hegemony of a ruler; in the *Harsha-charita* it is an object of lust due to which a ruler loses his life; and in the *Majmalut-tawārikh* the motif represents a charming princess of remarkable qualities, hence a bone of contention. This last image of the motif was also adopted in the folklore of the Central Himalaya, albeit with modification (Propp 1997 [1984]: 93), as the princess (Maulā/Jiyā Rānī) was portrayed with golden hair and great character, ‘something remarkable or worthy of remembering’ (Thompson 1955-58). Such a motif was ‘important enough to be remembered, something not quite commonplace adoration’ (Garry and El-Shamy 2005: xv, Oakley and Gairola 1977 [1935]). That is why her abduction was a common concern for the people of her husband’s kingdom. It may be added here that abductions ‘by humans are also a part of folklore and literature, but Thompson did not include many motifs about human abductors’ (Silver 2005: 381).

Thus, the *Devī Chandraguptam* served as a prototype for the *Bhārata/Jāgara* of Maulā/Jiyā Rānī. It agrees with the observation of Allen and Montell that folklore

[...] tends to represent the past in terms of prototypes and their subsequent re-embodiments. Oral narratives generally cluster around particularly important events and people. Time is telescoped to bring key events into direct association. The original protagonists may be

9 Śaṅkarārya wrote a commentary on the *Harsha-charita* in AD 1713 in which he glossed the term *Śakapati* as *Śakānām-āchāryah* (‘preceptor of the Śakas’) (Gupta 1974: 148).

displaced by characters who are locally more prominent, or more relevant to the present' (Allen and Montell 1981: 32-7).

In this connection Collingwood's observation is worth citing:

Because the historical past, unlike the natural past, is a living past, kept alive by the act of historical thinking itself, the historical change from one way of thinking to another is not the death of the first, but its survival integrated in a new context involving the development and criticism of its own ideas (Collingwood 2012 [1936/1940]: 226).

Obviously, as I have already shown, on account of its uniqueness, the event of surrendering the queen of the defeated king to his victor was a widely known motif, as such at some point of time it was also spatially associated with the Katyūrī territory, i.e. Uttarakhand and Far Western Nepal.

Indeed, it is to the credit of the authors of the folklore of Doti and Uttarakhand that they re-situated the story of *Devī-Chandraguptam* temporally and spatially in the changed regional historical contexts. It corresponds to selective copying:

Selective copying is frequently motivated by a need to adapt the copied elements to local conditions and 'needs', e.g. to pre-existing repertoires, to cognitive orientations (as manifested in the organization of kinship, polity, ownership, ideology of the human self, aesthetic ideals, etc.), or to the demands of an audience and the circumstances of patronage (Zoller 2001: 97-8).

It is clear that here the motif originates in classical Sanskrit literature, but a horizontal relationship (Zoller 2001) between the *Bhārata* of Maulā and the *Jāgara* of Jiyā Rānī is obvious. Thus, in the case of the Later Katyūrīs of Doti who styled themselves Raikā, history reveals that their main political rivals were the Kumaoni kings belonging to the Chandra dynasty, with whom they were engaged in protracted war, alternating with the occasional truce resulting in matrimonial alliances (Atkinson 1884: 527 ff, Joshi: 2005). It is interesting to note that these two dynasties rose to power almost simultaneously in circa 14th century AD and continued to flourish up to the latter half of the 18th century AD, until both were uprooted by

the Gorkhas. Interestingly, political rivalry between the chiefs of Doti and Uttarakhand finds an echo in several folktales of this area (Oakley and Gairola 1977 [1935]: 9-10, Gaborieau 1977: xxix-xxx, xxxiii-iv, Bernède's archives [*Huḍakeli/Bhārata* of Bhiyā Kaṭhāyata], Joshi (*in press*)). It is in this context that in the DT at first Maulā is described to have been captured by the Kumaoni kings as a gesture of animosity, and later on, as a matter of reconciliation, they return her to Pirthāmadeu of Doti with due courtesy as their adopted daughter.

In the case of the *Jāgara* of Jiyā Rānī, it alludes to the Rohelā (Muslim community of Rohelkhand, roughly Bareilly region, UP) invasion of Kumaon, their seizing of Almora, the capital of Kumaon, and their eventual defeat (AD 1743-45) by King Kalyāṇa Chandra of the Chandra dynasty (Joshi 2012). It may be noted here, as already mentioned above, that the Muslim inroads into Uttarakhand hills took place only during the post-Katyūrī period, when Uttarakhand was divided into two main principalities, namely Kumaon under the Chandra dynasty and Garhwal under the Paṁvāra, who were constantly at war with each other for political hegemony. However, when the Rohelā Muslims from the adjoining plains invaded Kumaon and occupied its capital Almora, the Garhwali king came to the rescue of the Kumaoni king (Joshi 2012). Clearly, using the theme of the *Devī Chandraguptam* as a trope, the folklore singers were performing for the audience of Kumaon and Garhwal to warn them of the impending dangers of Muslim inroads into the hills, and the potential consequences of such an eventuality. Therefore, the Katyūrīs were represented as the principal characters in the UT because they were respected equally by the people of Uttarakhand as their rulers before the rise of the chiefdoms of Kumaon and Garhwal. This fact is supported not only by the Katyūrī *Jāgara* but also by a large number of inscriptions and monuments (Joshi, Fuloriya and Bhatt 2009, Joshi (*forthcoming*)). The audio-visual representation of this aspect can be witnessed in the annual fair held on the occasion of the *Uttarāyaṇa* (*Makara Saṁkranti* = transition of the Sun into the zodiac sign of Capricorn [Makara] on its celestial path, mostly falling on January 14) at Ranibagh (District Nainital), where thousands of devotees of the Katyūrīs from different villages of Kumaon and Garhwal assemble on the eve of *Uttarāyaṇa*, and hold the *Jāgara* of Maulā/Jiyā Rānī village-wise from dusk to dawn in a spectacular display of the spirit possession ritual (see Plates 2-7; Joshi *forthcoming*).

Interestingly, both the DT and the UT avoid mentioning the humiliating defeat of one of the principal characters (i.e. the consort of the princess, here the Katyūrī king Pirthāmadeu/Pṛthipāla/Pritamadeva), which forced him to surrender his queen Maulā/Jiyā Rānī and resulted in a fratricidal war. Instead, the texts depict the royal couple reunited without any blemish. Admittedly, such an episode did not fit into the context of the belief system of the socio-political milieu of Far Western Nepal and Uttarakhand and was therefore not included in the texts. White aptly remarks:

The historical narrative does not, as narrative, dispel false beliefs about the past, human life, the nature of the community, and so on; what it does is test the capacity of a culture's fictions to endow real events with the kinds of meaning that literature displays to consciousness through its fashioning of patterns of 'imaginary' events (White 1987: 45).

Thus, here the functional aspect (Propp 1997 [1984]: 117, Sims and Stephens 2011: 181-82) of this folklore is clear.

Elsewhere, I have shown (Joshi 2010 and 2011, Jošī 2011: *Adhyāya* 5) that the traditional singers of the Central Himalaya used folklore to spread an ideology of divine or superhuman elements in some of the characters of royal lineages, which successfully brought about coherence in a faction-ridden political society in the interest of the ruling class, who were the patrons of the folklore performers. This ideology enabled the rulers to exercise power to contain their subjects, collect revenue, and muster up courageous persons to defend their territories or wage wars against their enemies. This accounts for the survival of ruling dynasties in the Central Himalaya for centuries without maintaining any regular army, as evidenced in traditions and archaeology. Significantly, folklore also inspired individuals to develop courage and might, and to display it publicly, apparently as a deterrent to oppressive rulers. This genealogy of folk performers, to use Foucauldian terminology, is couched in *jāgara*, *bhārata*, *huḍakelī*, etc., and is current all over the Central Himalaya.

It has been suggested that '[a]lthough critical studies tend to focus on the ideology of dominant groups, these are always opposed by subordinate groups, which can overcome both coercive and ideological controls'

(Miller and Tilley 1984: 13). However, the above discussion, though brief, clearly shows that subordinate groups can also create ideology and thereby command dominant groups. In fact, in traditional Central Himalayan society, the folklore singers (sadly taken for subordinated groups) acted like the elite group (Jośi 2011). That this ideology continues to hold ground as strongly as ever, even after the old regimes have vanished, follows from observations in the Census Reports of 1901 and 1931:

The Doms [the folklore singers of present essay] have always believed in the power of evil of the ghosts of injured persons and in *karma* (reincarnation), and as Mr. Burn (now Sir Richard Burn) pointed out [in U.P. Census Report of 1901] ‘these two beliefs, which are shared by many Khasiyas, were not without considerable effects on practical morality, one result of which is seen in the fact that hardly any police are required in the hills’ (Turner 1933: 560).

While discussing the text and context of folk traditions, Wadley (2005: chs. 4-5, and *in passim*) lays special emphasis on ‘performance’. She notes:

A performer of an oral epic must know much more than a melody and accompanying words. Although elaborate dramatic treatments of epics (such as found in *nautankī* performances) immediately catch the eye and appear to be the most complex performative treatments, the sung narrative traditions have their own complex, innovative, and creative means of performance (*Ibid*: 145).

As may be noticed, the two texts of the *Bhārata/Jāgara* of Maulā alias Jiyā Rānī sung before two different audiences clearly show two different contexts of performances and support Wadley’s observation. These texts bear ample testimony to the ingenuity of the authors of the folklore in weaving historical events, rituals, and cultural praxis into a narrative texture.

Conclusion

These examples clearly show how context shapes text. The texts reveal that for their authors it was the event that mattered and not the characters associated with it; they were not concerned about whether

those characters were real or imaginary. Thus, folklore tends to represent the past in terms of a unique event. From generation to generation the performers had the recollection of that event, which each generation resituated spatially and temporally as the then prevailing politico-social context demanded. It is implied then that the authors of these texts are selective in preserving the memories of the past. Interestingly, Hobsbawm has noted similar situations in Western traditions:

The element of invention is particularly clear here, since the history which became part of the fund of knowledge or the ideology of the nation, state or movement is not what has actually been preserved in popular memory, but what has been selected, written, pictured, popularized and institutionalized by those whose function it is to do so (Hobsbawm 1996: 13).

While concluding, it may be noted that the literary, archaeological, and ethnographic evidence clearly suggests that Uttarakhand and Far Western Nepal comprise one, single culture area (Gaboreau 1977: xii, Joshi (*in press*)). The *Bhārata/Jāgara* of Maulā alias Jiyā Rānī is an icon of this oneness.

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Plate 1: Spirits of the deified Katyūrī kings offering their salutation to the *jagari* (folklore singer belonging to the Śūdra community) in the course of the *Jāgara* of Maulā/ Jiyā Rānī in front of the temple of Jiyā Rānī at Ranibagh (District Nainital, Uttarāyaṇa annual fair, morning of January 14, 2012).



Plates 2a-2b-2c-2d: *Jāgara* of Jiyā Rānī in action (Uttarāyaṇa annual fair), possessed persons and devotees from Mukteshwar (District Nainital, Pl-2a, night of January 13, 2012), and Salt area (District Almora, Pls-2b, night of January 13, 2012; 2c and 2d, night of January 13, 2013) in Kumaon. Note the female figures representing Jiyā Rānī.



Plates 3a-3b: Night procession of the devotees after a ritual bath, with folklore singers from Mushiya Khan (District Pauri, Garhwal, Pl-3a, January 13, 2012); procession being led by persons possessed by the Katyūri spirits waving daggers – the Katyūri attribute (Ranibagh Uttarāyaṇa annual fair, morning of January 14, 2013).

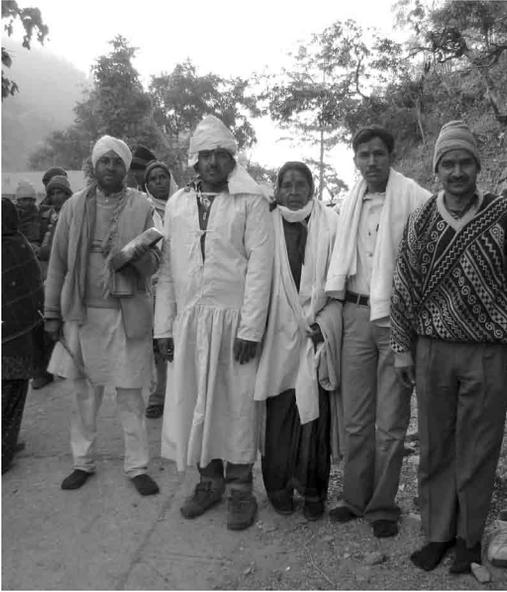


Plate 4: Devotees from Dhumakot (District Pauri, Garhwal). The second one from the left is dressed in traditional Katyūri upper garments. To his right is the folklore singer and to the left the female medium of Jiyā Rānī (Ranibagh Uttarāyaṇa annual fair, morning of January 14, 2013).



Plate 5: Persons possessed by the Katyūri spirits with Jiyā Rānī in the centre. From Talla Salt, District Almora (Ranibagh Uttarāyaṇa annual fair, morning of January 14, 2013).



Plate 6: Devotees from Garhwal (including persons possessed by the Katyūrī spirits) taking a ritual bath in the Gaula, marking the commencement of the *Jāgara* of Jiyā Rānī on the eve of the Ranibagh Uttarāyaṇa annual fair (night of January 13, 2014).

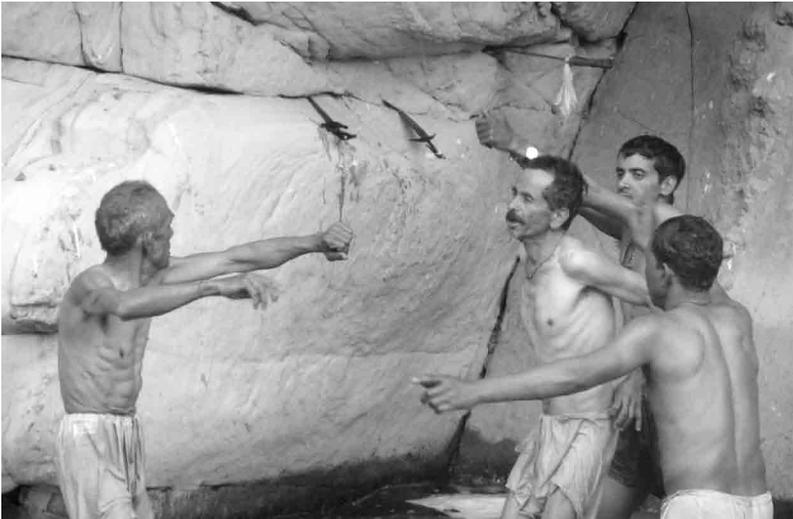


Plate 7: Guru Kaśmīrī group (from Bhaunikhāl, Salta, District Almora) belonging to the Śūdra community, possessed by the Katyūrī spirits and driving daggers into the cracks of a rock across the Gaula at Chitraśīlā-Ranibagh, thus re-enacting the feat of Nisau Mahara, an attendant of Jiyā Rānī (Ranibagh Uttarāyaṇa annual fair, morning of January 14, 2012).

