

RESEARCH

Cultural Categories of Space and Time Among the Gaddis of Bharmaur



"Cultural categories of Space and Time among the Gaddis of Bharmaur" is an ongoing in-house project under the *Loka Parampara* Programme of the *Janapada Sampada* division of the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts.

The Gaddis are a semi-nomadic, pastoral group, whose economic activity revolves around sheep rearing and agriculture. The Bharmaur sub-Tehsil of the Chamba District, Himachal Pradesh is the homeland of the Gaddis and is called *Gaddiyar* or *Gadderan* after the name of its inhabitants. *Gadderan*, situated on the Dhauladhar range of the Himalayas, is not just a physico-geographical entity, but possesses a symbolic multilevel identity.

It is believed that Gadderan is situated on the *Yoni Basin (Jalhairi)* of Lord Shiva. It is also seen as the Brahmlok of Brahma. Brahma here is to be understood in terms of the original deity and the ruler of Bharmaur, who is none other than *Bharmani Mata* (the Goddess *Bharmani*) herself.

The most fascinating data on how a Gaddi gives symbolic meaning to the place he inhabits comes from various legends associated with *Chaurasi* - a temple complex at Bharmaur. *Chaurasi*, which according to a popular belief contains eightyfour *shivalingas*, represents the celestial kingdom both at the micro and the macro level and to the wise or to those with deep inner vision the real and the pure celestial kingdom is perceivable. Thus, *Chaurasi* is not a mere reflection or a replica of the original kingdom, but it is in fact the real celestial kingdom. It is immortal and remains intact during the cosmic dissolution. *Chaurasi* is also both a cosmic and a temporal space.

Origin myths of the Gaddis explain the origin of the world from the *Kalasa* and the *Mulavriksha*. First a Banyan tree appeared in the *Kalasa*. the upper portion got transformed into three faces of Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh. The lower part of the tree became *Prithvi* (Earth), on which later appeared *Rishis* and *Gurus*.

In one of the myths Brahma first created a man of Gold, but it would not breathe, no matter how much Brahma blew into his mouth. The same fate was met with man made of silver and copper. Brahma then took a small piece of earth (*Mitti*), created a human form out of it and blew into his mouth and the form became alive.

The Gaddi was created from a speck of dust from Shiva's body. The act of creation took place when Shiva was seated on his royal seat (*Gaddi*) and hence the name Gaddi was given to his human form. Shiva later gave the Gaddi his own garb and a flock of sheep to tend.

The Mani-Mahesh mountain, situated 36km. north-east of Bharmaur village, is said to be the abode of Lord Shiva, where he lives with his wife *Mata Gorja*, at his benevolent best. Mani Mahesh is worshipped as

Mount *Kailash* and a pilgrimage to the holy lake *Dal*, situated at its feet, takes place annually.

Mani-Mahesh was revealed to the human eye for the first time when a leper king, came to Chaurasi to worship Shiva. Shiva not only cured him of his disease and gave him his garb (traditional Gaddi dress), but also revealed the grandeur and splendour of his *Kailash* to him.

Shiva is believed to reside at Mani-Mahesh for a period of six months and then migrate to *Piyalpuri* (the netherland) during winter. The migratory pattern of Gaddis coincides with the migratory period of their main deity - Lord Shiva. The Gaddi notions of Space and Time as well as their eco-socio-cultural configurations are conceptually derived from this upward downward movement of Lord Shiva. The Gaddi annual calendar of activities is accordingly divided into two halves and represents two distinct modes of life during the summer months at Bharmaur and high passes of the Dhauladhar, and winter months in the valley of Kangra.

The Mani-Mahesh *Jatar* (pilgrimage) is one of the most important events of Gaddi festival calendar. Through this *Jatar* the Gaddi not only celebrates his socio-cultural and moral order but attempts to transcend this order, going beyond the boundaries of mundane space and time in order to be one with the cosmic realm of Lord Shiva - the Lord of the Dhauladhar. This pilgrimage brings together people from all over *Gaddeeran*, binding them with one faith and one identity - the Gaddi, as he is and as we should know him.

Molly Kaushal