



**Women's Sacrifice for Drinking Water in the Western Himalayan Region  
A Case Study of Mandi, Bilaspur and Chamba Districts of Himachal Pradesh**

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**Abstract**

*Indian society has been a patriarchal society where in the female gender has faced a lot of atrocities and women have been subjected to many evil customary practices. Not only they had to follow these evil traditions, but they were sometimes forced to lay down their lives for the sake of well-being of either their husbands or the society.*

*One of these included the problems related to the availability of drinking water in the studied region. For this sake the rulers of the princely states resolved to human sacrifices as guided by their priests and they sacrificed women instead of men and mostly preferred their daughter-in-laws.*

*A few descriptions related with this practice are found in the folklore of Mandi, Bilaspur and Chamba regions of Indian State of Himachal Pradesh. There are also some descriptions of this practice in some books on the history of these regions. This customary practice prevailed not only in the studied regions, but almost in every part of western Himalayas. There are water sources even today in the areas where the sacrifices were made. The aim of this article here is to do research on this tradition in Mandi, Bilaspur and Chamba regions and how this tradition affected the society. Also, an attempt has been made to trace the connection between folk traditions and historical development related to this practice.*

**Keywords**

*Bauri-* water spring

*Kul Purohit-* family priest

*Kund-* water reservoir

*Lokgatha-* folk ballad

*Sadhu, Rishi-* ascetic, saint

## Introduction

In ancient India, women occupied a very important position, in fact a superior position to men. It is a culture whose word for strength and power itself is feminine - "Shakti" means "power" and "strength." In Vedic times women and men were equal as far as education and religion were concerned. Women participated in the public sacrifices alongside men. One text mentions a female *Rishi* Visvara. Some Vedic hymns, are attributed to women such as Apala, the daughter of Atri, Ghosa, the daughter of Kaksivant or Indrani, the wife of Indra. Apparently in early Vedic times women also received the sacred thread and could study the Vedas.

But with the passage of time, the society shifted to a more patriarchal system and there was a gradual decline in the status of women. Many evil practices came into being which were disadvantageous and hurtful to women. The social evils and customary practices like *sati*, early marriage, bride-price, etc suppressed women and made them suffer.

Thus, women have made significant contribution to the society, although their importance has not always been fully recognized. The status that women enjoy in a society might be considered an important indicator of its culture. Much of this, of course, depends on the particular period, place or people that are being studied.

In a diverse, yet traditional society, such as that of Himachal Pradesh, cultural traditions and the social status of women would vary according to the variety of social conditions and other factors. Not only in Himachal Pradesh, but almost everywhere women have usually occupied a depressed social position and suffered neglect and demoralization.

In the Himalayan region, people had strong beliefs in local deities. When natural disasters like draughts happened; they used to pray to their local deities and an offering was made in form of a human sacrifice to please the Gods. Often, women from royal families were sacrificed for getting rid of severe water scarcity due to draughts. Rulers of the princely states followed the wordings of their priests who would ask for a human sacrifice to please the Gods. Mostly, the Rajas sacrificed their daughter-in-laws instead of a male sacrifice. These incidents occurred in most of the princely states of Himalayan region.

For the research work, considerable material has been obtained through personal interactions and field-work done in Mandi, Bilaspur and Chamba region. The efforts have been made to familiarize with the traditions prevailing in the area. During the field work, researcher has found that individuals belonging to different sections of society in Mandi, Bilaspur and Chamba still retain a lot of information on women sacrifice for drinking water. The material so collected is correlated and analyzed. The government publications, books, identical studies in gazetteers are of substantial use. Some personal interviews of some singers of the *lokgatha* (folk ballad) have also been carried out. The study is conducted by applying both theoretical and empirical research, by engaging in survey studies and interaction technique.

## History

The history of human sacrifice was an ancient tradition throughout the world. This kind of sacrifice was mostly done to please the deity and to save human life from the natural disasters. The human sacrifices were also due to the beliefs and blind faiths of the people. The oldest evidences of human sacrifices were found in ancient civilizations like Egypt, Mesopotamia, Greece, Rome, Indus Valley, etc. There may be evidence of retainer sacrifice in the early dynastic period at Abydos of Egypt, when on the death of a King he would be accompanied with servants, and possibly high officials, who would continue to serve him in eternal life. At about 2800 BC any possible evidence of such practices disappeared, though echoes are perhaps to be seen in the burial of statues of servants in Old Kingdom tombs. Retainer sacrifice was also practised within the royal tombs of ancient Mesopotamia.

Human sacrifice was not a particularly common occurrence among the Germanic people, being resorted to in exceptional situations arising from crises of an environmental (crop failure, drought, famine) or social (war) nature, often thought to derive at least in part from the failure of the king to establish or maintain prosperity and peace in the lands entrusted to him. Evidence of Germanic practices of human sacrifice predating the Viking Age depends on archaeology and on a few scattered accounts in Greco-Roman ethnography. For example, Tacitus reports Germanic human sacrifice to Mercury, and to Isis specifically among the Suebians. Adam von Bremen recorded human sacrifices to Odin in 11th-century Sweden, at the Temple at Uppsala, a

tradition which is confirmed by *Gesta Danorum* and the Norse sagas. According to the Ynglinga saga, King Domalde was sacrificed there in the hope of bringing greater future harvests and the total domination of all future wars.

As far as Indian subcontinent is concerned, in India human sacrifice is mainly known as "Narabali". Here "nara" means human being and "bali" means sacrifice.

The earliest evidence for human sacrifice in the Indian subcontinent dates back to the Bronze Age Indus Valley Civilization. An Indus seal from *Harappa* depicts the upside-down nude female figure with legs outspread and a plant issuing from the womb. The reverse side of the seal depicts a man holding a sickle and a woman seated on the ground in a posture of prayer. Many scholars interpret this scene as a human sacrifice in honor of the Mother-Goddess, although many historians doubt it.

Regarding possible *Vedic* mention of human sacrifice, the prevailing 19th-century view, associated above all with Henry Colebrooke was that human sacrifice did not actually take place. Those verses which referred to *purushamedha* were meant to be read symbolically, or as a "priestly fantasy". However, Rajendralal Mitra published a defense of the thesis that human sacrifice, as had been practiced in Bengal, was a continuation of traditions dating back to Vedic periods. Herman Oldenberg held to Colebrooke's view; but Jan Gonda underlined its disputed status.

Human and animal sacrifice became less common during the post-Vedic period, as *ahimsa* (non-violence) became part of mainstream religious thought. The Chandogya Upanishad includes *ahimsa* in its list of virtues. The impact of Sramanic religions such as Buddhism and Jainism also became known in the Indian subcontinent.

It was agreed even by Colebrooke, however, that by the Puranic period—at least at the time of the writing of the Kalika-Purana, human sacrifice was accepted. The Kalika Purana was composed in Northeast India in the 11th century. The text states that blood sacrifice is only permitted when the country is in danger and war is expected. According to the text, the performer of a sacrifice will obtain victory over his enemies. In the medieval period, it became increasingly common. In the 7th century, Banabhatta, in a description of the dedication of a temple of Chandika, describes a series of human sacrifices; similarly, in the 9th century, Haribhadra describes the sacrifices to Chandika in Odisha. The town of Kuknur in North Karnataka there exist an ancient Kali temple, built around the 8-9th century AD, which has a history of human sacrifices.

Human sacrifices were carried out in connection to please the god and goddesses until approximately the early modern period and in Bengal perhaps as late as the early 19th century. Although not accepted by larger section of Hindu culture, certain tantric cults performed human sacrifice until around the same time, both actual and symbolic; it was a highly ritualised act, and on occasion took many months to complete. Many human sacrifices were carried out to please the deities to get rid of the natural conditions of draughts and famines.

#### **A Case Study of Mandi District of Himachal Pradesh**

The present district of Mandi was formed after the merging of two princely states, Mandi and Suket, on 15<sup>th</sup> April 1948 when Himachal Pradesh came into existence. Ever since its formation, the district boundaries have not changed. According to the *Gazetteer of Suket State*, the chiefs of Suket and Mandi are from a common ancestor of the Chandrabansi line of Rajputs of Bengal. The Suket State is said to have been founded by Bir Sen in 765 A. D. and the separation of Mandi from Suket took place in the year 1200 A. D. up to that time, it was a single state of Suket. In 13<sup>th</sup> century Bahu Sen had quarrelled with his elder brother, Raja of Suket, and left to seek his fortune elsewhere. It was at Manglaur in Kulu that eleven generations of his descendents are believed to have lived. The first Raja of Mandi in a fuller sense was Ajbar Sen who came to the throne in 1527.

In Mandi region, there was an incident related to the sacrifice of a woman, for availability for the drinking water. There is a famous folk ballad of Mandi region that depicts the sacrifice. The *Raja Hari Chand Gatha* is a ballad based on the sacrifice of a woman for her family, her husband and for the subjects of her kingdom. *Raja Hari Chand Gatha* is concerned with a King named Hari Chand. His name is very close to the Raja Hari Sen a ruler of Mandi during the 17<sup>th</sup> century. According to the story, Raja Hari Chand's daughter-in-law laid down her life to end a severe drought that had occurred in his kingdom. It is possible that this *gatha* refers to Raja Hari Sen. But unfortunately, we have no written records about this incident. But luckily even today the place where the sacrifice was made, there is a water spring and this place is known as Ranibai which is 5

kilometres far from Mandi town. To begin with, Raja Hari Chand made a tank (spring) for his subjects, but this tank did not offer even a drop of water.



Rani Bai where Queen of Mandi sacrifice her life for water

The *gatha* is as follows:

*Harichand Raje bauri banaai  
Bauri banaai  
Bauria jo paani nee aaya  
Bauria jo paani nee aaya.*

*Raja- Saadyan ta saadyan ho  
Kula re ya pandata jo  
Kula re ya pandata jo  
Bauria ch paani nee aaya.*

*Pandta-Kula re je pandt o  
Pandt bolde raje jo  
Putra ri bali charhani o  
O harichand rajea.*

*Rani- Putar taa mera o par  
Raja jaani te bhi pyara ho  
Bahua ri bali chadhani ho  
Harichand Rajeya.*

*Bahu- Sadya ta sadya mata  
Kula riya naina o  
Kula riya naina o  
O Sira ri kargi kaanghi  
Dilo jaan mata meriye.*

*Bahu- Putra jo rakhya o aamma  
Jaani te bhi pyare o  
Kula jo kalank dekhye laandi  
Sun mata meriye.*

*Kethi o bhi ta chali chali  
Meri chajliye dheeye o, chajliye dheeye o  
Kes bhi ta karna mera singar  
O, dilo jaan dheeye.*

Bahu- *Hatike aaungi jebe*  
*Sone ra paat lagangi*  
*Sun aamma meriye.*

Bahu- *Chineya ta chineya o bhaio*  
*Dudha bale eet dekheya laande*  
*O pyare o bhaio*  
*Aaunga ta aunga*  
*Mera putar dila te bhi pyara o*  
*Pingha meri dudha ria dhara*  
*Dilo jaan bhaiyo.*

*Rakhya ta rakhya*  
*Mere Naina jo ghaware*  
*Aaunga to aaunga ta mera*  
*Kant bhi pyara o*  
*Naina ke nain malanga*  
*O pyare o bhaiyo.*

According to the *gatha*, the Raja consulted his family priest or *Kul Brahman* in this matter. He was told that if he sacrificed a human being, especially of his own family, the water would begin to flow out of the tank. The king agreed to this suggestion of the Brahman and told his wife about it. His wife suggested that instead of their own son, they should sacrifice their daughter-in-law. In this way, the daughter-in-law was forced to sacrifice herself. While the servants of king were putting the mud bricks around her, she requested him not to close her breast with bricks so that she can feed her little son. She also requested them not to cover her eyes as well so that she could see her husband whenever he came around. But the servants did not listen and did their work. At the end she was totally closed with bricks and put to death. It is a very pathetic *gatha*. It indicates that in this sacrifice she is treated as a member of the royal family, but this is not to give her benefit but to undertake a suffering. Thus the daughter-in-law was always treated as an outsider and never attained the status of a full family member like her husband. It is believed that at the spot where the daughter-in-law of the Raja sacrificed her life a water spring appeared and the problem of water scarcity of the nearby villages and Mandi town was resolved for a long time and the spot got famous by the name of Rani Bai.

#### **A Case Study of Bilaspur District of Himachal Pradesh**

The State of Bilaspur came into existence in AD 657. According to History of Punjab Hill State Bir Chand was the founder of Bilaspur State. Like many other hill States, Bilaspur was able to maintain its political integrity for centuries due to its inaccessible geographical character and remained completely sovereign for a great length of time. In the terms of folklore Bilaspur is also a rich hilly district. The folklore of Bilaspur contains many historical events and socio-religious aspects of local people and history. Like Mandi, the position of women in Bilaspur was also negligible; the women were forced to do anything for man's sake. There are many folksongs or ballads prevailing in Bilaspur that depict the position of women.

The ballad of Rukmani belongs to an unknown period, but it appears to be a legend and an event that must have taken place in a period when the rule of superstition and unwise influence of Brahmanism on the innocent people was extreme in the area. Any sacrifice by anyone in the society for a cause was made with a sense of great conviction and purpose. A sect of Naths, named as Aughar, had their stronghold in the area with their headquarters at the location of present Shitala temple at Auhar. The river Sutlej flowed nearby, the level of which was quite above, almost touching the temple premises. The original name of the village then was Aughar. In due course of time, as more development took place, another name called Auhar came into vogue. The Aughar sect worshipped both Bhairon and Shiva. They wore black clothes. Their followers believed in tantrism and miracles. The people of the area had blind faith in their charismatic power, which these Aughars fully exploited. No wonder when the drinking water was scarce, the people looked towards these Aughars for solution. These Aughars indulged in reckless pieces of advice, which included even human sacrifice. People heeded their recommendation. Rukmani *gatha* is one of the famous folk ballads of Bilaspur which tells us that, like Mandi region, in Bilaspur the women

sacrificed their lives for the water. Human sacrifice was a part of our history. This is one such case. Rukmani gatha is as follows:

*Supna je hua Rukmani jo saure sunaya  
Kagda likhi likhi Rukmani jo sadaya  
Tere bina ni huna kam jo jaruri haa  
Supna je hua Rukmani jo saure sunaya.*

*Kare aai Rukmani saura tesa ke galanda  
Bauri ethi se hai, pani nai haa tesa  
Supna je hua Rukmani jo saure sunaya*

*Prohat bolhan khatar pani re putra ri bali o laini  
Suni saure ri gal rukmanie khub bacareya,  
Boli se saure ke pani layi ma apni bali deni  
Supna je hua Rukmani jo saure sunaya*

*Dhyara bali ra aaya hor se arja kardi  
Sab ang chinyo paiyo akh meri chinyo naa  
Lara mera banka paiyo, Chao dekhne raa  
Supna je hua Rukmani jo saure sunaya.*

*Sab ang chinyo paiyo paira mere chinyo naa  
Pabbi meri chauli paiyo paira mere chhundi  
Supna je hua Rukmani jo saure sunaya.*

*Sab ang chinyo paiyo chati mere chinyo naa  
Pau mera jga te nyara ,pukh lage dhudh main pyana  
Supna je hua Rukmani jo saure sunaya*

*Sab ang chinyo paiyo sira mere chinyo naa  
Amma meri chauli paiyo sira gundi jandiya  
Supna je hua Rukmani jo saure sunaya.*

*Tuse kajo ronde paiyo, ban de o panchhiyo  
Esa bauriya bich pani o pee laina  
Pani ye juga juga tuso mile  
Mela es jagha karna jarur  
Supna je hua Rukmani jo saure sunaya.*

*Saure jo milniyan lariyan hor bateria  
Amma bapu jo ni dhiu milni  
Supna je hua Rukmani jo saure sunaya.*



The place where *Rukmani* sacrificed her life and water burst out.

According to the popular belief Rukmani, the heroine of the ballad, was the daughter of a peasant from village Traiharh. She was married in village Barsand, on the other side of the river Sutlej. For ages, the people of the villages of Barsand, Salasi and Kalar had been suffering from scarcity of water. They had to walk long distances to carry water from the Sutlej River. It was a daily, tiring exercise. Over and above, the residents of Traiharh village from their side of the river would trouble them; they would not allow them to take water from the river. They would create hurdles and throw stones at them. This continued for years, to the utter desperation and suffering of the affected villagers. After some time, these villagers got together and organised community worship before their God and prayed to redress their miseries. Their prayers were heard. According to the *gatha*, the father-in-law of Rukmani had a dream in which god appeared and told the old man that water would spring out in his village provided he made a sacrifice of his son at the altar of the deity. In the morning the old man told the villagers about the dream. His son was away during those days and his daughter-in-law Rukmani was in her parental home. The old man told about his dream to his family priest. The priest advised him that instead of his son he can use his daughter-in-law for the purpose. So he called upon his daughter-in-law and told her about his dream. Rukmani heard of the dream. For her, the very thought of losing her husband was horrifying. If he died, her life would become painfully unbearable. She desperately wanted to save her husband. She offered herself for the sacrifice. Her plea was considered and accepted by the father-in-law, the villagers and the Aughars. Rukmani was walled alive brick by brick. While the ritual was going on, she herself was instructing the masons to leave a hole through which she could see her husband when he returned; leave a little space where her feet were visible so that when her sister-in-law came, she should be able to touch them; leave a hole at the breast level that when her son sought her, she should be able to feed him milk; and leave a little space open where her hair could be combed when her mother would come to see her. In the end, she bade adieu to the people of Kehloor and addressed them that she had made the sacrifice for their cause and exhorted them to commemorate her sacrifice by way of organizing a fair every year. In the end of the *gatha*, Rukmani expresses her emotions and says that her in-laws will get a new bride for their son but her parents lost their beloved daughter and will never meet her in future. Soon after, water gushed out in profusion. A great Kund, (water-reservoir), now called as Rukmani-kund, of an immeasurable depth came to exist ever after.

There is another popular story related to the sacrifice and the Rukmani Kund. According to the local tradition, once an acute scarcity of water prevailed in the area. A *sadhu* asked for the water from a woman, but she expressed her helplessness and narrated the woes of the people to

him. The *sadhu* was moved by the miseries of the people and suggested that if the local *Nag Devta* was propitiated by sacrificing a woman having a suckling child to him, he might grant their wish and produce water from the dry and barren hill slope. A local woman named Rukmani came forward and offered herself for the sacrifice. As directed by the *sadhu*, she was ritualistically offered to the *Nag Devta*, and her body was buried at a lonely spot on the mountain slope. After sometime, milk started oozing out of that spot and soon after water started flowing out, forming a little pool, which later developed into a *kund*. That *kund* became known after the name of that woman as the Rukmani Kund. This *kund* is held sacred by the people. It is believed that infertility in a woman could be cured by a purificatory dip in this *kund*.

Groups of village bards and minstrels wander about in villages in Bilaspur in the month of August every year and sing the memorial ballad of Rukmani with great reverence.

#### **A Case Study of District Chamba of Himachal Pradesh**

The State of Chamba came into existence in the mid of 6<sup>th</sup> century AD. According to the Gazetteer of the Chamba State the chiefs of Chamba are from the *Suryavanshi* line of Rajputs of Ayodhya. The Chamba state is said to have been founded around 540-550 A.D. by Maru of an early Sen dynasty of Ayodhya. In 6<sup>th</sup> century he came to the valley of Ravi river, defeated the local Thakurs and Ranas and found a small state named as Brahmpur. Later on one of his successors, Sahil Varman shifted his capital from Brahmpur to the Champa town, which was named after his beloved daughter Champa Vati in the 10<sup>th</sup> century. At present this new capital of Sahil Varman is known as Chamba. There is an interesting story about the Chamba town and the human sacrifice associated with it, given in the Gazetteer of the Chamba State.

According to the Gazetteer of the Chamba state, meanwhile Sahil Varman had been engaged in extending his rule, and had brought under his sway all the petty Ranas who still held the lower portion of the Ravi Valley. On this expedition he was accompanied by Charpatnath, one of the yogis, and also by his queen and daughter. Previous to its occupation by Sahil Varman, the plateau on which the town of Chamba stands was within the domain of a rana, who had conveyed it in *sasan* or gift to a family of Kanwan Brahmans. Champavati, the Raja's daughter, took a great liking to the place, and asked her father to find a town and make it his capital. Sahil Varman was desirous of acceding to her wish, but all the land fit for building purposes had passed into the hands of the Brahmans, and he was unwilling to dispossess them. At length an arrangement was effected, whereby, in recognition of their proprietary rights, eight *chaklis*- Chamba copper coins- were promised in perpetuity on the occasion of every marriage in the town. The land was given up, and the above condition has been observed ever since. The Raja then founded the town, and named it Chamba after his daughter.

An interesting and pathetic legend has come down to us in connection with the settlement of the new capital. Chamba is another historical place of Himachal Pradesh where we have found a historical event related to the human sacrifice for drinking water. Like Mandi, the victim of sacrifice was the queen Naina devi of Raja Sahil Varman. The local people remember this incident through singing a folk ballad, *Suhi gatha*. This ballad is also known as *Sukrat* in Chamba district. The *Suhi gatha* or *Sukrat* is as follows.

*Gurke chamke bhaua megha ho, ho rani chambyali re desa ho*  
*Kihan gurku, kihan chamkan ho, ho amber bharore tare ho*  
*Kethi te ai kali badali ho, kethi ta baraseya megha ho*  
*Chhati te ai kali badali ho, naina te barseya megha ho*  
*Sukrat kudiyon chidiyoe, sukratnraje de behade*  
*Sukrat kudio chidiyo, sukrat Lakshmi panihara*  
*Thanda pani kihyankari peena, tere naina heri heri jina ho*  
*Sukrat kudiyo, sukrat raje re behade ho*  
*Sukrat kudiyo chidiyo, sukrat nauna pani hara ho.*

There was no good and convenient water supply, and the Raja was anxious to solve this problem. He therefore had a water-course made from the Sarota stream round the shoulder of the Shah Madar Hill, behind the town. For some reason the water refused to enter the channel prepared for it, and, in accordance with the superstitious notions of the time, this was ascribed to supernatural causes. The spirit of the stream must be propitiated, and the Brahmans, on being consulted replied that the victim must be either the Rani or her son. Another tradition runs that the

Raja himself had a dream in which he was directed to offer up his son, whereupon the Rani pleaded to be accepted as a substitute. The Raja was unwilling to accede to her wish, and wanted to offer someone else, but she insisted that if there must be a sacrifice she should be the victim. Her wish prevailed and accompanied by her maidens, and bare-headed as for sati, she wended her way up the hill to the spot near the village of Balota, where the water-course leaves the main stream. There a grave was dug and she was buried alive. The legend goes on to say that when the grave was filled in the water began to flow, and has ever since flowed abundant.



The place where *Rani Naina Devi* sacrificed her life and temple dedicated to her.

It is stated in the Gazetteer of the Chamba State, Yugankar, the son and successor of Sahil Varman, mentions his mother's name in the only copper plate of his reign which has been found. It was Naina Devi, and she may possibly have been the Rani referred to. In memory of her devotion a small shrine was after-wards erected by her husband on the spot, at the top of the present flight of steps, where she is said to have sat down to rest. A *mela* was also appointed to be held yearly, from the 15<sup>th</sup> of the *Chait* (mid March) to the 1<sup>st</sup> of *Baisakh* (mid April). It is called the *Suhi Mela*, and is attended only by women and children, who, in their gayest attire, climb the steps to the shrine, and there sing the Rani's praises and present their floral offerings. They are all entertained at the Raja's expense on this occasion. The steps are not ancient, having been constructed by Rani Sarada, queen of Raja Ajit Singh (A.D. 1794-1808). Suhi Mata Temple stands as an honour to the sacrifice of Queen Suhi- the wife of Raja Sahil Varman.

### Conclusion

An important conclusion can be made that the women have always been a target of the male dominant society. In Himalayan region, most of the evil customary practices have been associated with women. Women were not considered important and hence they were subjected to all kinds of ill-behaviour.

Himalayan region is well known for its diverse cultural heritage and also for the supernatural beliefs of the local people in form of many local deities. These local deities have always been worshipped faithfully by local residents as failing in doing so resulted in bad consequences in form of draughts, illness and doom. Therefore, since old times sacrifice of animals like goat, sheep, etc as an offering to the gods for maintaining peace and well-being has been going on.

But, the *lokgathas* discussed above shed a new light on this matter where a human sacrifice is made for welfare of the whole community. Water scarcity was a major concern in many Himalayan regions which also included Mandi, Bilaspur and Chamba regions of Himalaya. It can be considered a gruesome act to kill a person and offer blood to the gods for ensuring water supply

in the region. Since women held a weak position in the society, they were always made to stand forward in such executions forcefully, although in some cases willingly as well.

The research describes the plight of women of the region and the extent of superstitious beliefs among the general as well as royal people of those times. We also come to know the place of *kul brahmans* and holy priests in the society who were considered no less than the gods.

The *gatha Raja Hari Chand*, which was more commonly recited in Mandi, was slightly different to the *Suhi Gatha* of Chamba and *Rukmani gatha* of Bilaspur. In the Chamba story Rani Naina Devi, sacrificed herself, but in the *Raja Hari Chand Gatha*, the Raja's daughter in-law was forced to sacrifice herself to end the scarcity of water in the kingdom. In *Rukmani gatha* the lady Rukmani who led her life to end the water problem, was from the common section of society of Chandpur. According to the story, after her burial, water began to flow from that place.

To conclude this article and a comparative study of above described, the *gathas* show that it were the women who were forced to sacrifice themselves. The other fact which these *gathas* reveal is that there was an intense shortage of water in many parts of the hills and the common people believed that this problem could be solved through many sacrifices.

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