



The Daffodils of the Western Himalayas: A Study of History and Geography in the Folklores of Sirmaur Region in Himachal Pradesh

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Abstract

Human interaction with natural world remained symbiotic since centuries. With the passage of time, this interaction found expression in various records of art, songs, and stories etc. Places, people, and environment remained an important part of such records. The threads of these observations in the form of oral history are being probed now at regional level as well. Sirmaur, which is a western Himalayan region in Himachal Pradesh presents an interesting canvass on geographical past through its solid and liquid boundaries and to study such past through folklores is a fresh attempt in this direction. Present paper looks at the region and landscapes through folklores in Cis-Giri and Trans Giri area in Sirmaur. The web of geographic locations gets highlighted in the paper through the story of human turned deity, Shirgul. He is the main character in the folklores of Trans-Giri area. Several places are associated with the life and adventures of Shirgul that find mention in these folklores. Gugga, Dom and Bhangayani are other mythical deities who come from different geographical locations and find mention in local stories and songs. Present research travels through streets of past in a small western Himalayas area but opens up to present four squares of Indian folklore studies connecting through common thread of history and geography. The paper concludes with the translation of several stories and songs in the area highlighting both solid and liquid boundaries, natural premises along with historical and cultural formations in the area. The sample field survey has been further supplemented through literary sources for better understanding of geographical past depicted in folklores and folk songs of Sirmaur.

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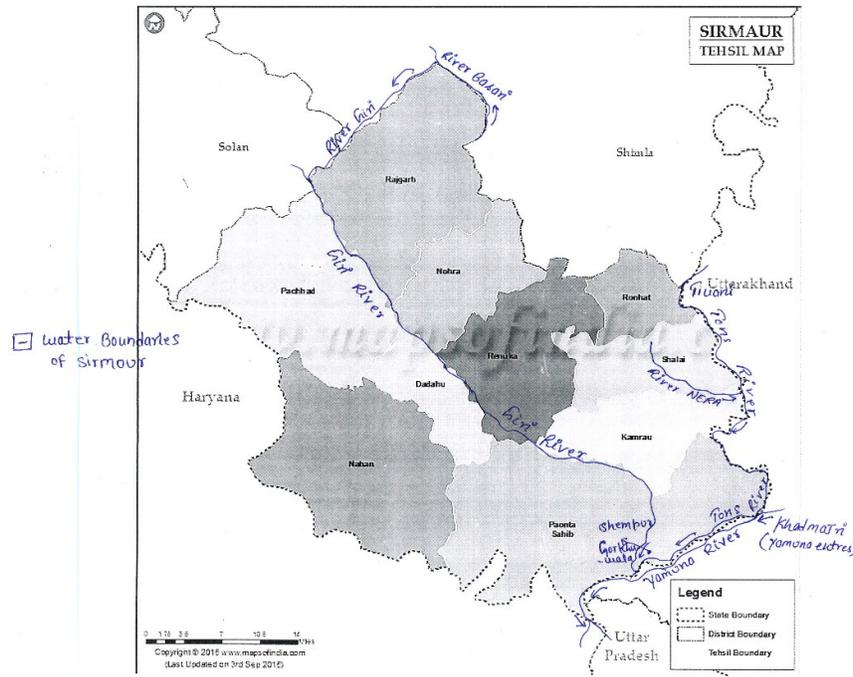
Introduction

The human activities triggered by development taking place at various level has raised serious issues of preservation of environment, culture, society and somewhere even its own existence. Through folklores, that run parallel with folk songs and folk beliefs, a new attempt is being made to see the places in past and observe the level of development or degradation of these places that took place since unknown past. Myth and legends provide another base to social and religious traditions that help not only in linking defragmented past but also connecting people and places. Common masses have acted as the guardians of the traditional value system preserved in the folklores and folk songs. As the term 'oral tradition' is gaining ground for the researchers working on anthropology, history and sociology, folklore and its anecdote has played an important role in continuity and preservation of 'popular antiquities'. Thus, the expression 'oral tradition' applies both to process and its products. The products are oral messages based on previous oral messages, at least a generation old (Vansina, 1985: 3). The difference between the sources of oral historians and oral traditions is of time and space where former rely upon are reminiscences, hearsay or eyewitness accounts about events and situations which are contemporary, the later passes from generation to generation and keeps the event alive with addition of several contemporary elements of each generation. No one can deny that oral traditions have kept alive several legends of history who do not find any mention in mainstream history writing.

Folktales and History with special reference to Sirgul in Sirmaur

In Indian context, folktales of several states carry distinctive characteristics of narrations like folktales of Bengal and Assam is noted for magic and witchcraft, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh for superstitious beliefs and practices, the South and Maharashtra for fairs and festivals, the Panjab is known for folksongs and folk romances (Temple 2002: ix). The western Himalayan region of India stands no exception to such narratives where folk traditions play a major role as connecting link between myths, legends and several historical narratives. Folklores are full of descriptions of scenic beauty, rivers, streams, forests, and several other natural premises. Human activities taking place in these premises form another narrative in oral traditions in Himalayan region. Sirmaur, is one of the districts of Himachal Pradesh, lying in western Himalayan region, presents a blended study of geographical descriptions, spaces, legends and myths sung in local language. Shirgul is a historic figure in the folklores, folksongs and historical studies of region. Like several other historic and mythological figures that appear in folk literature at pan-India level, the story of Shirgul in folklores carries the narrative of conversion from human being to divine lord. His story is full of miracles and bravery. Before venturing into the polemics of the status of Shirgul and places associated with him in Sirmour, it is essential to understand the geographical space of the area that has been cited in stories and songs of Shirgul. Most of the area of present Sirmaur district lies in Shivalik range except Dun valley which is called Kiar-da-dun. It touches the boundaries to Shimla on north, to Solan on north-west, to Haryana state on west and south and states of Uttrakhand and Uttar Pradesh to the east. The tributary of

Yamuna River, Giriforms the liquid boundaries of the district by dividing the region further in to two parts: Trans and Cis. Trans is the area that has hilly terrain with scanty population, boundaries touching Shimla and Dehradun. Cis is area on the other side of Giri River having thick population with boundaries touching Punjab and Haryana. Trans is having more indigenous social and religious structure, whereas Cis has brahmanical influence. Trans area remained socially more stable with monolithic hill-population whereas the migration of population in Cis area consisted of several social and religious population-based waves.



Map 1: Showing solid and liquid boundaries of Sirmaur

Present paper highlights several places of historical importance that finds mention in songs and stories on Shirgul which is full of geographical narratives of the area. It is also an attempt to place folklore history of Sirmaur before Raja Rasaloo and Karam Parkash that has been attempted by R C Temple (2012). Field survey was conducted almost for half a decade for the present research. It was found that Shirgul has a distinctive place in the religion of Trans area of Sirmaur. It also highlights expansion of territories (by Shirgul) from plains to hills (from Shaya to Churdhar) and visit of hill-king to plains (Delhi and Ambala region). About Shirgul, the criteria of factuality though cannot be fixed in real historical sense as it hinges on folk tales that has been compiled recently only. Based on present folktales and folklores, we tend to fix it between 11-13th century[‡]. He holds his presence as deity in the whole Sirmaur area. Presently due to brahmanical influence Shirgul is being considered as incarnation of lord Shiva. The temples of Shirgul are spread all over the area of Sirmaur, though his main abode is considered Chur-dhar. People who believe in the power of Shirgul

[‡]The reference of Turks and Gugga help us to generalize this time period on the basis of average time-period.

as god extol his presence through temples. The narratives are full of grandeur of Shirgul in local stories and songs. Besides talking about the power of Shirgul as deity, singers have natural tendency to talk of valour of Shirgul as warrior and the glories of the area he captured. Besides folklores also cover the environment and geographic setting of the venues where Shirgul resided and ruled. In this reference, the first place that comes in to limelight is Shivaga. It lies in present day Rajgarh area of Sirmaur. It was in Shivaga/Shavaga or Shaya where Shirgul was born, Manaun, Sarahan, Chanju, Throch, Neval, Hammal, Bahrog, Thach, Naroz, Thod, taali-teesari and bathaudhar, Faagu, Panjah village of Maulil, Topi dhar, Sarahanti, Satamu/Satambo, Jau-Lahsun –ka-tibba, Chadoli nala, Aolkhad (Sainj), Brar, Haamal, Chehta, Baahal, Mashrah, and Gohda, all these places are subject-matter in the stories and songs associated with the activities/incidents related to Shirgul's life. Interestingly, these areas on the basis of routes can be divided into two parts; both reaching finally Churdhar. One is from Sarahan and another from Noharadhar. Most of the areas cited above fall in Trans region and are considered the territory of Shirgul even today. Development activities in these areas are very meagre.

Besides field work of almost half a decade, present study is based on two folklores on Shirgul devta (God) that has been edited by Shyam Singh Ghuna under the title, *Shirgul* and by Dula Ram Chauhan under the title, *Shirgul Mahima*. It presents a case of human-turned-local deity in Trans area of Sirmaur that later spread in to larger areas and presently holds influence in more than three districts of Himachal Pradesh i.e. Sirmaur, Shimla and Solan. Both the stories, though have same theme and plots but their environment and narration are completely different. Where the *Sirgul* is having rustic plot; *Shirgul Mahima* is more structured and having royal plot. Coming to the mythological origin of Shirgul's family; he was the elder son of king Bhukdu and queen Dudamma which is again controversial when taken from the point of view of Shyam Singh Ghuna (p. iv preface).



Image 1: Garabghrah of present Shirgul temple where Shirgul as deity has been placed.
(Picture was taken during the field survey done during 2015-16)

In plots (*Shirgul* and *Shirgul Mahima*), story opens with the title, Bhukdu (king) and Dudma (queen). In *Shirgul*, the scene of July evening near a well has been presented of Shavga village. On bawri (small water reservoir) village women lot are seen where queen Dudma was commented upon by one of her colleagues for not having children. It leaves queen Dudma in grief and she leaves without fetching water. Hearing this and looking at the sad face of his wife, Bhukdu (husband) decides to go to Kashmir to meet a brahman who could have some possible solution to infertility issue. It could be exaggeration that infertility was the issue with land, animals and natives of the area including his wife. While explaining the environment around Bhukdu's house, the story in *Shirgul* speaks about cattle-herd tied in backyard and open, fresh air around the house due to hill plains. The ladders of his house were of deodar (a kind of wood) (Ghuna 2005:4). As Bhukdu decided to go to Kashmir to see Pandit Panu, he found him a scholar of Sancha way of prediction. Panu asks Bhukdu to get married to a Brahmin girl. After returning back from Kashmir, Bhukdu did the same and in this way the infertility of whole Shavaga area was gone (Ghuna 2005: 16-7). In *Shirgul Mahima*, Bhukdu has been presented as King Bhukdu along with his childless queen Damayanti. On the request of queen, king Bhukdu got married to brahman Loj's sister Dudma (Chauhan 1994: 4-5). He had two sons and one daughter. The story in *Shirgul Mahima* narrated that queen Damyanti also got pregnant after six months of Dudma's conception. Dudma delivered a boy and king sent a Brahmin to Manaun village where Dudma's brother Pandit Loj resided. Loj sent one brahman from Manaun, another from Sarahan to Shavaga (Chanuhan 1994: 8-9). Most of the part in the story has village backgrounds.

The news of Damyanti's conception reached to her father Dambu as well who seems to be Rana (title of feudal lord). He reached the house of king Bhukdu to take his daughter home as per custom in the area that the birth of first child takes place at maternal home. After three days queen Damayanti reached Sarahan via Mandah Lani valley. The festival of Chadyoli seems to be associated with villages like Chanju, Throch, Neval and Hammal from where rani Damayanti belonged to (Chauhan 1994: 9). Mandah valley formed boundary between king Bhukdu and Rana Dambu. Also in *Shirgul Mahima* we get reference of bad weather during rainy season in Rajgarh area especially in the area beyond Mandah Lani valley (towards rana's area). Bahrog is another area that finds mention in the territory of king Bhukdu. Next area crossed by Rana with his daughter was Stamboo to Thach. At Thach, queen Damyanti gave birth to son and place was named Saranhati. Queen Damayanti belonged to Sarahan area hence was called Sarahanti queen as well. Thach area where queen gave birth to son is now called Bangapaani (Chauhan 1994: 12). It has been mentioned in *Shirgul Mahima* that queen Dudma's son was named Shrikul/Shirgul and Damayanti's son was named Bijat. Later queen Damyanti, who belonged to Jubbal area of present Shimla, died after giving birth to a daughter. Queen Dudma's daughter was named Bijai. After six years, queen Dudma also died (Chauhan 1994:15-23).

Here both the stories take different turns where in *Shirgul* story king dies and in *Shirgul Mahima*, both queens die. According to *Shirgul Mahima*, Rana, the father of queen

Damayanti took Bijat and Bijai along with him and Shirgul and Chandeshwar and their sister went to Loj brahmana's home (Chauhan 1994: 27). Whereas *Shirgul* story says that, 'After father's death, queen Dudma shifted to her brother's home at Naroz village (Ghuna 2005:18). Both stories agree that king went on pilgrimage to Kedarnath, Badrinath etc. *Shirgul* narrated that king died in Haridwar at Har-ki-paidi (Ghuna 2005: 17). *Shirgul Mahima* opined that king died at Thod near Sirmaur (Chauhan 1994: 35). Narration in both stories coincides again while narrating the stories of the cruelty of Shirgul's aunt. The elder son Shirgul was assigned shepherd task. Shirgul used to stay in forest, and had a bad time during rainy season. Fed up with the behaviour of his aunt, finally Shirgul left Naroz for Shavaga along with his brother and sister. After returning to Shavaga, Shirgul planted trees of sweet orange and navel oranges in a garden which shows that Shavaga might be a hotter place in lower ranges of Sirmaur. From *Shirgul Mahima*, it comes out that Shirgul had territorial extent in Sirmaur and Jubbal area. Also *Shirgul Mahima* defined that above Shavaga was Topi dhar, Sarahanti, Satamu and Jau-Lahsun-ka-tibba. Jau-Lahsun-ka-tibba was called Chud-chandni/Chud-shikhar or Chud-choti. From the top of this mountain, one can view Yamuna Nagar, Ambala, Dehradun, Maysoori and Chakrata area. From Chud-dhar, about 20km away is Chaukhat Mountain. From Churdhar, one can see Kailash Mountain from east to north. On the eastern side of chur-dhar one can see Maansarovar even (Chauhan 1994: 46). Berog or Bahrog are the grounds in Chur-dhar. This incident indicates the first migration of Shirgul from geographically unstable area to fertile zone where he could cultivate rice and fruits. After this stability, he planned to occupy new areas.

During his stay at Shavaga, Shirgul came to know about a demon/king[§] who was in Chur-dhar area and was terrorising people. He decided to kill the demon/king and starting preparing for Chur-dhar battle. In *Shirgul Mahima*, we come to know about the name of demon/king as Chudiya. Also that Shirgul called Bijat and Chandeshwar also for discussion on battle with Chudiya. When all preparations were made, then convoy moved for Chur-dhar. According to *Shirgul Mahima*, Sarahanti area was occupied by Pingula female demon^{**} that acted as informant for Chudiya if anybody wanted to come to Chud-dhar. Shirgul killed her first and moved forward to find Chudiya. Chudiya asked his army to settle in western side of Churdhar area called Teesari. (Chauhan 1994: 49). Furious battle took place there and Chudiya had to run to eastern direction towards Kala Bagh. Finally, Chudiya went to shelter himself in Chadoli nala. From Chadoli nala, he went to Sainj area near Aolkhad (Chauhan 1994: 51). Dula Ram Chauhan, writer of *Shirgul Mahima* presents an interesting debate on Bijat devta whether he was incarnation of god Indra or Dharam-raaj or Jiproo dev with finally placing Bijat in incarnated role of Indra. As Shirgul and Bijat got their life due to blessing of goddess Kali, hence after every three years, kheer is served from Shirgul temple to Kali temple. This is prepared from the fields of rice that belongs to the land of Shirgulgod (devta) in Toke-ki-bandhi/ rajkanwar-ka-khet in Faagu-kyar area. Kheer is prepared with the milk of

[§]As a part of myth, in most of the folk narratives, to highlight the grandeur, battling kings (of opposite party) were presented as demons.

^{**}She might be a feudatory of Chudiya who was assigned lower territories of Chur-dhar to rule.

cow of Chhabroni breed. *Jatar* (religious convoy) is taken from Banga-paani to Bahrog in specific manner only.

The narratives indicate that Shirgul was holding the territory in lower ranges of Sirmaur and it was a war for occupation of higher ranges. In the war demon/king was defeated and Shirgul became the occupant of new territory. The narration of happiness of people in the area shows that they invited Shirgul to defeat and kill the demon/king of the area and after that Shirgul got the title of 'maharaja Chudeshwar Shirgul Dev'. (Ghuna 2005: 25). In both narrations, we find reference of population increase in Churdhar area (Ghuna 2005: 24 & Chauhan 1994: 55). Leaving aside mythology of demon in Chur-dhar area, it seems that Shirgul after becoming king, ventured for lower residencies in the Chur-dhar that was full of water and rice-plains. Even today, festival is organised in favour of Shirgul before cutting of rice-crop in these areas where war took place.

After gaining Chur-dhar, Shirgul decided to visit Delhi is confirmed narrative in both stories. Whereas *Shirgul Mahima*, it has been written further that it was on invite of Delhi sultan that both Shirgul and Chandeshwar went to Delhi (Chauhan 1994: 58). Shirgul called his friend (who might be in his cabinet) Churu to hold the responsibility of Churdhar. The conversation between the two shows that Chudiya was still preparing for war and was holding himself for the right opportunity. Ultimately, Shirgul went to Shavaga before departing for Delhi (Ghuna 2005: 30-1).

The story of Shirgul gets its extended threads from western Himalayan region to Haryana and Delhi with the historical reference of visit of Shirgul to Turkish capital of that time i.e., Delhi. In the story, we find reference of Gugga, again a mythological legend in western Rajasthan. Though both stories (*Shirgul* and *Shirgul Mahima*) suffer at several levels from 'Folk Fallacy' established by Dundes (1978: 119-20). In *Shirgul*, comes the reference that before leaving for Delhi, Shirgul put forth the idea of sending his younger brother Chhandishwar to Churdhar. While Chhandishwar did not want to leave Shavaga, he refers to gardens of sweet oranges and navel oranges planted by Shirgul and looked after by Chhandishwar. He also refers to the food-grain of Churdhar (Fafra) which was difficult for him to eat (Ghuna 2005: 33) than rice of Shavaga. It shows Shavaga was a fertile rice growing belt and Chud-dhar was a difficult terrain not only to live but even to eat as wheat crop (fafra) was different from the lower ranges.

In *Shirgul* it has been referred that Shirgul selected warriors of Brar, Haamal, Chehta and Baahal area (250 in totals) to accompany him to Delhi. It also covered the incident of a female forest thief in the area of Redu-riyad who was skilled in guerrilla war tactics. The soldiers of Shirgul had to fight a defensive battle as they were not aware of the geography of the area. Ultimately female forest thief suffered defeat. (Ghuna 2005: 36-7). Shirgul reached the Bagad area which seems to be western Haryana which is present Sirsa, Fatehabad, Bhiwani, Charkhi dadri distt. The narration in the story carries specific weightage as people of Bagad area seems to know kaak-bhasha (language of crow). This incident indicates the meeting to Gugga (a mythical ward-lord of Rajasthan area) with Shirgul (Ghuna 2005: 39).

Shirgul Mahima speaks about Shirgul and Chhandeshwar reaching Delhi in ten days. It skips the narration of any meeting with Gugga. According to *Shirgul*, due to hardships of the journey, the resources of convoy were exhausted. They decided to stay in one of the gardens in Delhi. As their stay was without permission/intimation to the king in Delhi, hence king sent a small army to defeat them and bring before the ruler. Shirgul was defeated and was imprisoned by the Delhi king. (Ghuna 2005: 43-4). According to *Shirgul Mahima*, in prison, Shirgul met other rulers like Dom Thakur of Kuthan, Peer Saheb (Gugga) of Bagad etc. (Chauhan 1994: 63). Gugga of Bagad state took the help of a lower caste female who was working in the palace, to get out of the prison along with Shirgul. (As Bhangi is a low caste term, hence this lady was called bhangani/bhangayani). As this lady got scared of her fate in Turkish court for helping Gugga, hence she requested Shirgul to take her along with him (Chauhan 1994: 69-70). The temple of Bhangayani is in Haripur-dhar today. Surprisingly, she is considered the goddess of negative energies and people come with complaints against wrong-doings done to them and then pray to goddess to bring the person to justice by punishing. *Shirgul Mahima* narrated the stories of her negative energies during her travel from Delhi to Chud-dhar (Chauhan 1994: 72-3). The narration in the story also points out ignorance of Shirgul to the geography and estimate of resources while travelling to altogether new place. Due to lack of communication and transportation links, very few campaign from hills in western Himalayan ranges could be conducted by the hill-kings whereas hills proved a shelter house to fugitive kings of western India who established their reign in later centuries.

The story in *Shirgul Mahima* talks about demon/king named Chaukhat who was brother of Chudiya. He invaded Churdhar in the absence of Shirgul. Churu, who was in-charge *in-absentia* called for help to Shirgul. He reached with Dom Thakur, Gugga Peer, Mahasu and Bhangayani Devi (Chauhan 1994:74). The place where they took their first halt was called Panchkula. As goddess Kali appeared to help Shirgul, hence the place where Kali was placed in *pindi* (a kind of round stone) form was called Kalka. From Kalka, Shirgul went to Gohda, and further to Manaun. From Manaun to Shaya, Faagu-kyar. Shirgul sent his soldiers through Bahrog route and himself went to Sarahan to seek help from Bijat, his brother. Now Shirgul, Bijat and Gugga reached Kala-baagh. There after a fierce battle, they defeated Chaukhat demon/king. Places with Sanwalighodi and Harshipaidi names are associated with this battle (Chauhan 1994: 83). *Shirgul Mahima* provides very important information that headless body of Chaukhat demon kept roaming/moving over the area of Chaukhat, Girtu, Khada-pathar, Khadralla, Sungri, Morar to Kailash. Then he was thrown by Shirgul and Bijat on the other side of Giriganga at Girtu. From Girtu, he went to Chhampur, Narkanda and Khadralla. Being headless, he was called Vinsheera (without head). Even till today, sacrifices are offered to Vinsheera in Jubbal area. (Chauhan 1994: 84-5). Shirgul re-established his empire. He appointed his brother Bijeshwar, king of Sarahan area where he is worshipped now as Bijeshwar Maharaja. His territory covered modern Jubbal in Shimla in Himachal Pradesh to Jonsar-Bawar area of Uttarakhand where he is worshipped as Bijat maharaja (Chauhan 1994: 52). Chhandeshwar was given Manaun. To Bhangayana was given area of Haripur up to Mohil where her temple was established.

Shirgul seems to have married to Dundi Devi and Gadoli Devi. There was water crisis in the area of Churdhar. Shirgul decided to take help of Mahasu of Anhol area. It seems to be a case of population expansion due to which water crisis evolved in the area. Shirgul also went on pilgrimage and after eight months reached Mansrovar. He finally built a *bawri* (small water reservoir). Villagers from Chehta, Baahal, Haamal parganas came for temple formation of Shirgul out of gratitude. From Gadhala or Gauruwa, which is a village at the distance of twenty kilometres, was brought the slate for temple roof of Shirgul maharaja. The villagers of Bodhna village of Chanju pargana refused to come for labour. But ultimately Budhiya Negi of this village sought solicitation and came for labour of the temple of Shirgul maharaja. (Ghuna 2005: 55-6). No such story comes from *Shirgul Mahima* (Chauhan 1994: 89).

Analysis of Songs on Shirgul

The folklores present a unique case of dialogue between the past and the present (Henkes and Johnson 2002: 125). To place both the stories in 'genre^{††}' is not possible when it comes to poetic narration of the same story. R C Temple opined that where the folktale and the bard's poem exist side by side, as in the Punjab, the latter is the older and the more valuable form of the same growth, though, of course, the influence of the folktale will react on the poem (1978: xxiii). Another point about folk-poem that renders more valuable than a folktale is a true reflex of popular notions. Here are three songs collected that deal with Shirgul and are sung in the area of Sirmaur. The translation of first song goes as:

“Shab, in your house of king of Shabag (Shavaga) son was born. For whole life, Shirgul did rice cultivation. Cultivation was done in the manner that once sown was cut seven times. His Maternal aunty provided him lunch. Sattu was given to him. Before eating he asked his maternal aunty, 'why didn't you bring water to clean my hands?' She challenged him that if you are a man of capability, arranges water immediately. Shirgul got angry hearing this. He hammered land in the field where he was sitting with his foot and water came out. Shirgul loosened his bulls as well. With this fountain, fields of Shavaga area were filled with water” (Thakur 2013:346-349).

There is another reference in the folklore that reads as: A traders group reached Dhindh mountain cave. There appeared a python. Shirgul killed (ate) that python. Devraj Shirgul prepared for kitchen. To light the fire for food, he used his foot as burner (chulha) and prepared kheer (sweet dish made of rice and milk). Mughals from Delhi came to kill cows. Shirgul offered resistance. He (Shirgul) threw away the kheer vessel and went to fight Mughals. He killed them with his sword. In the above mentioned song, there is another version of Shirgul story where Mughals (instead of Turks) came to Shavaga.

††The term genre has been defined by Alan Dundes in *Essays in Folkloristics* in detail describing various events and coming to conclusion that genre division varies with folklores of given civilization and often artificially limit research as it is not possible to place all folk narratives in to one category (105-8).

Another song starts with the eulogy of Shirgul, 'let the bells in the temple of Shirgul remain banging always. Let the flame always remain alive. May his power be always accepted with honour. Shirgul, the son of Bhukru is the ruler of three worlds. His power is sharp as sword. His glamour is like morning sunshine. He (Shirgul) is the head of hills and son of soil. He makes the world shine through his valour and is able to establish his kingdom by defeating his enemies. The native/resident of Chur-chandni, this Shirgul dev is like demon of death for his enemies. He is the savior of poor' (Sharma 1995: 270-271). Folklores speak very high about Sirgul as deity and highlights miracles performed by him. The song opens with the time narration that when barley crop was ripening. In the month of Falgun (Feb mid to March mid) was Shirgul born at Shivaga. He was brought-up at his uncles' place (mother's brother). Shirgul out of anger, with force of his foot brought water-fountain out of soil as his aunt did not offer him water. Also all sattus (flattened wheat/rice) turned in to wasps, as his aunt gave him food full of dead bees. Out of anger, he threw sattus on ground and it was converted in to wasps. These wasps killed his aunt. Shirgul shifted to Chur-dhar, leaving Shavaga. Shirgul went to Delhi on the request of local traders who were cheated by traders of Delhi. He killed enemies with the help of Gugga peer and Bhangayani Devi. Then he returned back from Delhi to Chur-dhar. He threw a stone from churdhar with such strength, those branches of Banyan tree fell out of that stroke. The vessel of kheer reached Churdhar. Shirgul killed demon who was terrorizing Chundu bhagat in Churdhar area (Sharma 1995: 270-2).

Folklore on Shirgul are sung in a typical form called *Panjda/Panjra* (a particular form of singing) in local dialect (Sirmauri/Hatti) in Trans area. The singers of *Panjda/Panjra* are very few. The story of Sirgul not only talks about magical powers Shirgul used to hold but also about the natural disasters that took place and Shirgul saved people of Trans from such catastrophes. That is how he acquired the venerated status from a human being to king and ultimately as god whose temples are found frequently in the area and people specifically worship Shirgul during natural calamities. The singings of panjada do not follow consistency throughout the area. It differs with the change in area. The other deities associated with Shirgul; Bhangayani, Bijat and Gugga, find mention in both, stories and *Panjada* songs. Therefore, it goes without saying that the credit of popularizing the places in Sirmaur as deities' territories goes to folklores and folksongs that speak high about the valour and grandeur of Shirgul as happened in most of the Indian folklores. It provides important information on Sirmaur area before the arrival of kings from Rajasthan who occupied Sirmaur in twelfth century onwards. R. C. Temple has covered folklores of Raja Rasaloo and Mahi Parkash of Sirmaur who appeared on the political canvass in later centuries. He also mentioned only about *Panjara/panjada* songs whereas present study goes beyond songs that are not sung as *Panjara/panjada*. In these songs reference of birth of Shirgul, beauty of Churdhar temple and works done by Shirgul has been highlighted.

Another song is a prayer to Shirgul to keep all bad omens and spirits away and seeking his blessings. Seeking his blessings, the devotee sings that let Shirgul keep his blessed hand on us. We shall always be serving you as our God. Your temple is in Shaya. You bath in pure water of Churdhar. Whole world sings prayers of Shirgul deva. Let us

The ecology comes on forefront in both tales while describing the places belonging to various activities of Shirgul. The foremost amongst list was Shavaga. The Shavaga village has bawri (small water reservoir) where village females were seen fetching water. It was highlighted that whole village was suffering from infertility of land, female and animal species well. Village seems to be in foot-hills where fresh air could be felt around due to hills. Deodar trees are in abundance. People used to walk long distances which are clear from Kashmir visit of Bhukdu and Delhi visit of Shirgul. People used to carry stuff in Shikdu/kilta which is kind of bamboo basket which still people use for various purposes. Also area was fertile where rice cultivation was in abundance. Also it was an area where citrus fruit cultivation used to take place. The same cultivation pattern is being followed in the area since centuries.

Churdhar area had scarcity of water. Also scanty population reference comes at several places. Due to the height of the place, Delhi and area around could be seen. That is how Shirgul got inspired to visit the place. It also shows that Churdhar had two different approaches; one from Sarahan and another from Nohara dhar. The ecological setting of Manaun village where Shirgul spent his childhood was comparatively plain area where shepherd used to go for pastureland for their cattle. Area was green and had plenty of water. Also the area was full of caves where shepherds used to take shelter during rainy season. Also, we get reference of bad weather during rainy season in Rajgarh area especially land beyond Mandah Lani valley. The reference of the area taali-teesari and bathaudhar also comes in *Shirgul Mahima*. Near taali-teesari, there is a cave called as Devta-daav cave by people of the area. Its end opens at Faagu. Also there are evidences of water-run flour mill in the area which is supposed to be made by Shirgul.

Regular reference of water bodies add a classical charm to the venues described. Besides bowri in Shavaga/Shaya village, the reference of two rivers Haamlati and Shalvi besides Giriganga also comes. Lakes like Mansrovar find a regular mention in folklores. In one of the narratives, reference of understanding of crow-language by Gugga also comes. Here it is important to mention that historically Gugga veneration started late in Sirmaur region as compared to the time period mentioned in these folklores. But there is no denying the fact that Gugga held an important place as god in lower caste people of Sirmaur today. As mentioned in the story as well that Shirgul assigned him some territory, hence the map below has been prepared keeping in mind his temples established at various places in Sirmaur.

Another place that finds mention in Shirgul folklore was Gadhala, which is a village at the distance of twenty kilometres from Shirgul temple in Chur-dhar. The place is very beautiful. This place finds mention for the reference of the slate which was used for temple roof of Shirgul maharaja. The location of the first temple of Shirgul (made of slate-roof) supplements the observation of Stella Kramrisch that it was believed in ancient India that even gods like human beings loved places that were full of scenic beauty and the lush green ambience. That is why the *Brihatsamhita* of Varahamihira and *Bhavishya Purana* say, ‘The



Image 3: Entry gate to Shaya village
(Picture was taken during the field survey done during 2020-21)



Images 4 & 5: Picture was taken during the field survey in 2016 and second was taken in 2021. In its present form pagoda roof-style has been introduced



Images 6 & 7: Wooden idol and *pindi* form of Bhangayani
(Picture was taken during the field-survey of 2016)



Images 8 & 9: Gugga temple and idol inside in Shilai
(Picture was taken during the field survey during 2019)

Later one notices, division of territory by Shirgul where he keeps churdhar for himself, Haripurdhar for Bhangayani and Gugga at Shilai region. Brother of Shirgul, Bijat was given Rana's area who was his maternal grand-father, Chhandeshwar was given Manaun. It can be seen as the beginning of caste system in Sirmaur region where Shirgul is a deity of all castes with pan-area influence. Bhangayani and Gugga are lower caste deities. Shirgul is worshipped more in Trans area whereas Gugga has influence in Cis area where it comes to liquid boundaries division.

Conclusion

Folklores are provider of rich source of historical, geographical and ecological information of Indian past. The present narratives in the paper not only take history of Sirmaur back from an identified literary past to folklorist mythological source, rather it can form a connecting link between scattered archaeological sources in Sirmaur as well. Explorations of geographical locations, flora-fauna, water bodies through folklores in Sirmaur is also new attempt in this direction where through its solid and liquid boundaries, narrations in old running stories is forming a panoramic background. Due to change in life-style of people, modernization, increasing population and several other factors, water bodies are shrinking fast, cash crops are being preferred more than traditional crops due to economic reasons. Still in remote areas of Shilai and Rajgarh traditional way of life is being followed.

Very few attempts have been made to study history of Sirmaur through folklores especially identifying the places in Sirmaur region. The present narration in two stories hints at social and physical environment. Both stories are full of facts and fiction which cannot be ruled out in oral history tradition and it has to be supplemented by strong historical evidences to be placed before the shelves of history books. This study through folklore in Sirmaur area with parallel running folk songs, folk beliefs and field survey present a unique amalgamation of cultures of the people residing in the region that takes away its sense of monolithic culture.

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