

# *Havan Kuṇḍ*: Significance of the Sacred Fire Rituals in *Bhūṇḍhā Yajñā*

PANKAJ NEGI\*<sup>1</sup> AND B. K. SHIVRAM<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Research Scholar and <sup>2</sup>Professor

Department of History, H.P. University, Shimla (H.P.) India

\*Corresponding Author

## ABSTRACT

The *Havan Kuṇḍ*, or sacrificial fire pit, serves as the ritual epicentre of Vedic and post-Vedic fire ceremonies known as *havan* or *yajñā*, central to various Indic religious traditions. This study examines the scientific, symbolic, and socio-ecological significance of the sacred fire rituals conducted within the *havan kuṇḍ* through *bhūṇḍhāyajñā*<sup>1</sup>. Drawing from an array of scriptural texts, ethnographic observations, and interdisciplinary research, this paper offers a thorough analysis of how the meticulous geometrical design of the *kuṇḍ*, along with the careful selection of herbal offerings, including *samidha* (wood), *ghṛta* (ghee), and *havishya* (grains) and the controlled combustion process elicit specific physicochemical and environmental effects. These include air purification through antimicrobial phytochemicals, thermogenic ionisation, and psychological impacts mediated through *mantra*-induced sound resonance. By weaving traditional metaphysical concepts with contemporary scientific inquiry, this exploration highlights how the *havan kuṇḍ* serves as a spiritual conduit and a sophisticated instrument for promoting holistic well-being and responsible environmental stewardship. Through this lens, the *havan kuṇḍ* reveals its essential role in bridging ancient traditions with modern ecological consciousness.

**Keywords:** *Havan Kuṇḍ*, *Bhūṇḍhā Yajñā*, Vedic Fire Rituals, Herbal Offerings, Environmental Effects

## INTRODUCTION

The commencement of *bhūṇḍhā* is marked by meticulous preparation, including opening and offerings

at *havan kuṇḍ*. The *havan kund*, or fire altar, can rightly be described as the centre of the *bhūṇḍhāyajñā*. It serves as the sacred space where divine energies come together<sup>2</sup>. The preparation of the *havan kuṇḍ* for

1. The most peculiar to the study region (upper Tons River basin in the Western Himalayas) that fascinated or appalled the non-natives, especially Europeans, is *bhūṇḍhā*. That consists of stretching a gigantic oil-soaked rope from the top of a hill to the foot of an opposite hill, and a ritually prepared lower caste (*beda*) man slides down in a sitting posture. British bureaucrats, army officers, and travellers visited the study region and dubbed it— ‘weirdest ritual’. Based on preliminary ethnographic data, the researcher observed that local communities of the study area often engage in elaborate rituals such as *bhūṇḍhā*, *shānt*, *bhadoji*, *tānā*, etc., to appease their deities. This is considered the largest village-level religious ritual across the western and central Himalayas, which drew (now) over a lakh people. In the past, the event used to occur every 15-20 years, but now it happens after 40-50 years. Often lengthened or shortened according to circumstances. The four days of *Bhūṇḍhā* comprise various rituals, including the Invoking deity’s blessings at *Havan Kuṇḍ* (fire altar), *Sagherā* (convergence of divine and human agency), *Shikhā-pher* (god’s triumph over evils), *Beda* (rope sliding), *Uchar-pāchar* (departing), etc.
2. This is the sacred fire pit for offerings. It serves as a central element in *yajñā*, typically constructed commonly from clay in a rectangular shape that tapers at the base. When food is offered to the *havan*, the fire consumes it, acting as a medium for the gods to accept the offerings. Lise Winer, *Dictionary of the English/ Creole of Trinidad & Tobago: on Historical Principles*, Montreal: McGill Queens University Press, 2009, p. 425.

**How to cite this Article:** Negi, Pankaj and Shivram, B.K. (2025). *Havan Kund*: Significance of the Sacred Fire Rituals in *Bhūṇḍhā Yajñā*. *Internat. J. Appl. Soc. Sci.*, 12 (5 & 6) : 482-493.

offerings is a careful process that begins with thoroughly cleaning away remnants from the previous *bhūṇḍhā*. It must be washed to ensure purity and symbolise renewal, establishing the sanctity necessary for the fresh offerings. On the auspicious day chosen by the deity through the oracle, it is opened with grand rituals. Dates are presented as odd numbers, symbolising growth and positivity, while even numbers are considered completeness or finality. The temple records indicate that the large stone lid of the *havan kuṇḍ* is usually removed about 19 days before the *bhūṇḍhā yajñā*, commonly referred to as *kuṇḍ khōlnō* (opening of *havan kuṇḍ*). However, openings vary greatly depending on the location. At Nirmand, the *kuṇḍ* is opened about six months before the actual *yajñā*. During a recent *bhūṇḍhā* at Dalgaoon, we noted that the *havan kuṇḍ* was opened seven days before the *bhūṇḍhā*. This indicates a departure from the established convention. From start to end, daily offerings are made in the sacred fire pit to honour the gods and goddesses for blessings. A day before the actual commencement of the *yajñā*, ‘*Annapurnā Lakshmi*’ (the goddess of food and nourishment) is worshipped, symbolising gratitude and invocation. A *ram* is ritually sacrificed in the *kuthār* (grain store)<sup>3</sup>. Access to the sacred area surrounding the *havan kuṇḍ* is restricted for folks. The priests perform daily rituals at the *kuṇḍ*, worshipping the gods and making offerings to seek blessings for the success of the *yajñā*.

### Onset of the (opening) *Havan Kuṇḍ*:

The opening of a *havan kuṇḍ* involves a series of ritualistic steps to ensure the ceremony is conducted with reverence and precision. In the realm of traditional Hindu rituals, the *havan kuṇḍ* holds significant importance as it serves as a sacred fire altar utilised for *yajñā*, which are sacrificial rituals. In this context, the opening of the *havan kuṇḍ* is an auspicious event that is carefully considered as it is traditionally done at a time determined to be astrologically favourable, known as *muhurat*. The documents give us precise information about the opening of *havan kuṇḍ*. These documents indicate that the

preparation and opening of the *havan kuṇḍ* occur approximately 7, 9, 11, 13 or even 19 days before the commencement of the actual *yajñā*<sup>4</sup>. According to Alexander Gerard,

The duration of the Hoom varies according to the grandeur and revenue of the *deota*. At Nirmand it is said to be two and a half years, and at Dalas six months. It concludes immediately before the mela begins, and the pits are then shut up by boards, the most superstitious people believing that the fire continues burning until the next *Bhoonda*<sup>5</sup>.

The formal celebration of *Bhūṇḍhā* begins with the opening of the stone lid of *havan kuṇḍ* for offerings, which otherwise remains closed before and after the *yajñā*.

The fire is placed in an earthen vessel sunk some four feet in the ground. This vessel is called *nabhe kuṇḍ*, and it is only opened for the *bhūṇḍhā*, a large stone being placed over it in which the sacrifices at the *Bihunda* are performed<sup>6</sup>. People put on a fire in an earthen vessel sunk deep in the pit of *havan kuṇḍ* and make offerings along with chanting mantras to please *devi/ devtā* (gods/



Source: Photo by Author, Pankaj Negi

Fig. 1 : *Havan Kuṇḍ* (Dattnagar)

3. Temple Archival Records (Pujarli), Basta No. 1, 1869.
4. Temple Archival Records (Pujarli), Basta No. 1 (1869), Basta No. 2 (1885), Basta No.3 (1899), Basta No. 4 (1924).
5. Captain Alexander Gerard, *Account of an Attempt to Penetrate by Bekhur to Garo and the Lake Manasarowara for the Purpose of Determining the line of Perpetual Snow on the Southern face of the Himalaya*, London: J. Madden & Co., Leadenhall Street, 1840, p. 317.
6. William Crooke, ‘Bihundah Fairs- Kullu’, *North Indian Notes and Queries*, A Monthly Periodical, Vol. 4, No. 4 (1894), p. 56.

goddesses) for the success of the *yajñā*. In the event of both the opening and closing of the *havan kund*, a goat will be sacrificed<sup>7</sup>. Alexander Gerard, while travelling through Nirmand, gives sketchy information about the *havan kund*:

...before the grand *mela* which is called *Bhoonda*, there is a ceremony named Hoom, which is as follows: Two pits of masonry about twelve feet deep are opened; one is filled with water for the ablutions of the *brahmins*, and in the other a constant fire is kept up, into which a certain proportion of dates, sugar, rice, raisins, newsas, ghee, oil, and sandalwood, daily thrown for a certain period<sup>8</sup>.

P. C. Kashyap provides insightful information on the ceremonial opening of the *havan kund* at Nirmand as follows:

The first step is to open the *havan kund* which lies covered under a massive circular stone slab since the conclusion of the previous *Bhūṇḍhā*. The sacrificial pit, called *nābhi kund*, is a square about a metre deep and wide. It is in the centre of a beautifully- carved wooden enclosure. Opening means the removal of the slab, which is right of Devi Ambika, who exercises it through her *goor*, known as *badābhojgi*. Shortly after dusk *Naroro Sarori*, a select band of people representing different castes, assemble in a spacious columned hall of the two-storeyed building over the Parsurama inside the citadel to witness the *goor* strike the slab with a spear (*khāndā*) symbolising its removal. A band of *Māhatās* (belonging to the artisan class) lifts the slab and place it in a corner of the enclosure. The pit is cleared of ashes and other remains of the previous sacrifice. it is washed, pasted with cow dung and made ready to receive the sacred fire<sup>9</sup>.

Sudarshan Vasishth writes,

After the collection of necessary resources, the first step is to conduct a *havan*. A large clay idol of *kali mata* is made near the *havan kund*. This *havan* can continue for years; for example, during the *bhūṇḍhā* of 1962, it lasted for six months, while in the previous *Bhūṇḍhā*, it lasted for one and a half years. The royal priest of Bushahr from Ravin (near Sarahan) is specially invited. In addition to the *havan*, the *jaljātar* and Bushahr's family priest would draw a line to appease the evil spirits. Sacrifices are also offered<sup>10</sup>.

During the field survey, the researcher was informed by a *Brahmin* (Knahiya Lal) who had witnessed all significant events (being Brahmin) of the *Bhūṇḍhā* at Pujarli (Rohru) in 1995 that the 'opening and closing ceremony of the *havan kund* was/is performed by the chosen priest under the command of select deity'<sup>11</sup>. At Pujarli (in *bhūṇḍhā*), the opening and closing ceremony of the *kund* is conducted by the priest of an upper caste *Brahmin* (*nagrā*) from Dattnagar (Rampur)<sup>12</sup>. During a personal conversation with *nagrā* Purohit, he shared his experience and mentioned that he was invited ahead of the actual *bhūṇḍhā* to initiate the *yajñā* ceremony. He is the one who shall open the stone lid of the *kund*<sup>13</sup>. In lieu of this task, he will receive expenses equal to 26 days, including wheat, rice, salt, ghee, oil, jaggery, tobacco, turmeric, and clothes<sup>14</sup>.

The historical records stored in the temple archive at Pujarli offer us valuable insights into the specific rituals and ceremonies conducted during the opening of the *havan kund*. This useful information provides a deeper understanding of the traditional practices and traditions observed at the temple, shedding light on these rites'

7. Interviewee—Keshav Nand Sharma, Age 67 years, Village- Sholi, Tehsil Nankhari, Distt. Shimla, Himachal Pradesh, Date-09-05-2024.
8. Alexander Gerard, *Account of an Attempt to Penetrate by Bekhur to Garo*, p. 317.
9. P.C. Kashyap, *Living Pre-Rigvedic and Early-Rigvedic Traditions of Himalayas*, Delhi : Pratibha Prakashan, 2000, p.88.
10. Vasishth, *Himalaya Gatha (2) Parva-Utsav*, pp. 81-82.
11. Interviewee—Sh. Knahiya Lal, Age 62 years, Village- Bhamnoli, Tehsil Rohru, Distt. Shimla, Himachal Pradesh, Date-09-10-2023.
12. Interviewee—Sh. Layak Ram Bhalooni, Age 57 years, Village-Bhaloon, Tehsil Rohru, Distt. Shimla, Himachal Pradesh, Date-10-12-2023.
13. Interviewee—Sh. Khuba Nand Sharma, Age 75 years, Village- Dattnagar, Tehsil Rampur, Distt. Shimla, Himachal Pradesh, Date-09-010-2022.
14. *Temple Archival Records* (Pujarli), Basta No. 6, 1961.

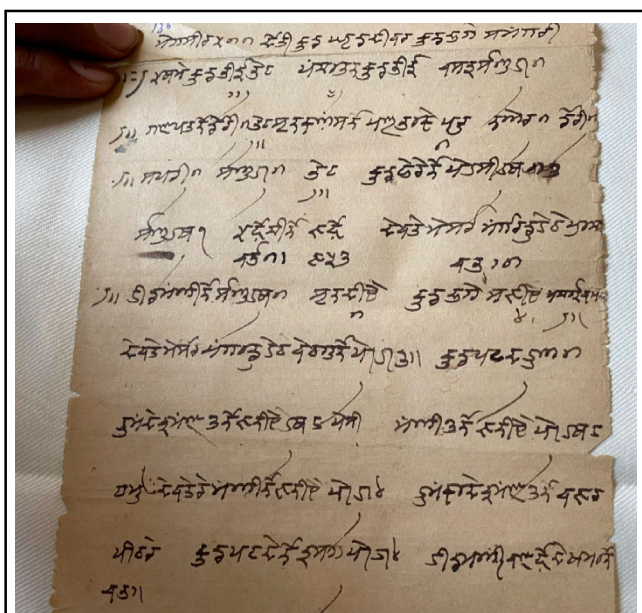




Source: Photo by Author, Pankaj Negi

**Fig. 2 : Conversation with Nagrā Purohit, Khuba Nand Sharma**

cultural and religious significance.



Source: Photo by Author, Pankaj Negi

**Fig. 3 : Opening of Havan Kund (1869)**

### Transliteration:

1. मेगसीरप्र 11 दोलीकुंडअगेसमगरी
2. प्रथमेकुंडभीत्रभेट, पंचरतनकुंडभीत्रबसत्रसालुहा 1
3. गणपतनोडोरी 1, सन [सायन] कलसनोपणभरकेपरु 1 नलेर [नरेल] 1 डोरी 1
4. सपारी 1 सालुहाथ 1 भेंटकुंडकेफेरेनोपेऐसीहाथ 12
5. सालुहाथ 7 प्रवोची [प्रेची] नोजवो [जौ] देवते
6. मेसरामंगराडुहेठेपुरच
7. हीडमलीनोसालुहाथ 1 सयनदीऐ 1 कुंडाअगेसीजीऐ 4 पांचगभमंझ
8. देवतेमेसोरमंगराडुहेठेठगुनोपेहा 2 कुंडपटदहुल 1
9. हुमदेब्रमण 2 नोजनीऐहाथ 8 पेसीमली 2 नोजनीऐहाथ 8
10. धमुईदेवतेरेमलीनोजनीऐहाथ 4 हुमकरदेब्रमण 2 नोबजरपीठरे
11. कुंडपटदेनोत्रसगहाथ 4<sup>15</sup>

### Translation:

On the morning of *Meghar Pravishtell*, the following materials are required for offerings before opening the *havan kund*: firstly, the *bhent* (donations, mainly in the form of a coin) is placed inside the *kund*, a ceremonial structure used for rituals. Then, put the *panchratan* (a combination of five sacred elements) in the *kund*. To lord Ganesh, a *sālu* measuring one *hāth* in length and a *dōrī*, a *pāru* (copper pot) filled with water for the *sāyankalash* (placed in *Ishan Kon*)<sup>16</sup>, one coconut, one *dōrī*, one betel nut (*supārī*), and one *sālu* for the top of the *pāru*, and 1 rupee offering put into the *sāyan kalash*. In addition, 12 *hāth* of plain cloth (*painsikapdā*) and seven *hāthsālu* are used to cover the *kund* from all sides. Barley is required for the *parāch* (the grain on which the deity sits). The divine seats of Meheshwarand Mangaradu (local *devtā*) are also prepared on grain. A clay idol of Goddess *Heedmali* (*hirmā devi*) is meticulously established near the sacred *kund*, Which holds a special place in the mountains. According to the tradition, one *hāthsālu* is required to cover *Heedmali*. One lamp (*sayāndiyā*) and four other lamps (*diyās*) are placed inside the *kund*. The purification process involves the use of *panchgrabh* (five products derived from the cow). A plain cloth of 2 *hāth* in length is used for the seat of the revered deities Meheshwar and Mangradu. As the *kund* is opened with solemn reverence, a *hul* (ram) is ceremoniously sacrificed, symbolising the spiritual significance of the ritual. The

15. Transliteration and Translation work throughout research paper are mine.

16. *Ishan Kon* typically refers to the northeastern direction in the context of Hindu architecture, *Vastu Shastra*, or traditional Indian practices. In *Vastu Shastra*, which is the traditional Indian system of architecture, *Ishan Kon* is considered the most auspicious direction. It is associated with the northeast corner of a house or building and is believed to bring prosperity, health, and positive energy to the occupants.

two Brahmins performing the *yajñā* are given sacred threads eight *hāth* in length in return for their work. During this auspicious occasion, the two revered *māli* (oracle) of the deity are ceremoniously adorned with sacred threads that are eight *hāth* in length. The *māli* of *Dhamui devtā* (esteemed local deity) is traditionally honoured with the sacred thread, carefully measured to a length equivalent to 4 *hāth*. During the sacred *yajñā*, when the *Bajarpeeth* (*Shailaputri* idol carved on a stone slab) are made, and *kund* is ceremonially opened, the two revered Brahmins who officiate the ritual are honoured with the presentation of a four-hand-long (4 *hāth*) *tarāsag* (red and white silk cloth)<sup>17</sup>.

### **Cleaning of Havan Kund:**

The process of cleansing a *havan kund* is quite intricate and involves several steps to uphold its sanctity and ensure its proper functionality. Keshav Nand Sharma generously shared crucial insights into the preparations preceding the *havan* ceremony. According to him, the remnants of the previous *havan*, such as ashes, partially burnt wood, and other materials, are carefully removed. The *kund* is then gently washed with water, often mixed with a bit of cow dung and mud, which are considered purifying substances in Hindu tradition. After washing, it is left to dry completely. Finally, the *kund* is adorned with fresh materials like sandalwood paste, turmeric, and *kumkum* (vermilion)<sup>18</sup>. This cleaning process not only keeps the *kund* in good condition but also honours its spiritual significance, ensuring it is pure and ready for the divine fire offerings.

### **Havan Kund Purified by Panchgavyā:**

After cleaning the *havan kund*, it is purified with *panchgavyā*, which involves using a traditional mixture of five products derived from the cow, revered in Hindu culture for their purifying properties. According to Kushal Sharma, *Panchgavyā* consists of cow dung, cow urine, milk, curd, and ghee (clarified butter). The process of purifying the *kund* starts with a thorough cleaning to

remove any physical impurities. Once the cleaning process is complete, a carefully balanced mixture of *panchgavyā* is prepared, ensuring the correct proportions of each component. This mixture is sprinkled or applied inside the *kund*, symbolically cleansing it of any negative energies or impurities<sup>19</sup>. The cow dung and urine are traditionally believed to possess natural disinfectant properties, symbolising purity.

### **Havan Kund cleaned by Panchāmrit:**

*Panchāmrit*, ‘five nectars’, is traditionally used in Hindu rituals for its purifying and sanctifying qualities. It is used in various religious ceremonies for its spiritual significance and auspicious properties. To bathe the *kund*, the first step is to ensure it is clean by removing any debris or ashes from previous ceremonies. The *panchāmrit* is then prepared by blending the five ingredients in appropriate proportions. The *kund* is then gently bathed with this mixture, often accompanied by the recitation of *mantras* to invoke divine blessings and purify the space. During the field study at Gawas (Chirgaon, Shimla), Vishav Dev Kanal (leading *pandit* of *devtā* Gudarū) gave us valuable information about the bathing ritual of *havan kund*. According to him, after purification, the next step is bathing *havan kund* with *panchāmrit*, a sacred process involving a consecrated mixture of five ingredients: milk, curd, honey, ghee (clarified butter), and sugar<sup>20</sup>. This ritual act symbolises the anointment of the *kund* with purity and sacredness, making it ready for the holy fire offerings. The use of *panchāmrit* not only cleanses the *kund*, ensuring that the environment is imbued with positive energies and sanctified for the upcoming rituals.

### **Rituals at Havan Kund:**

After preparing the *havan kund*, several intricate rituals are meticulously performed to invoke the blessings of deities. A *Ganpati/Ganeshpujā* is conducted to seek the deity’s blessings and remove any potential obstacles to commence the ceremony. Following this, the *kalash*

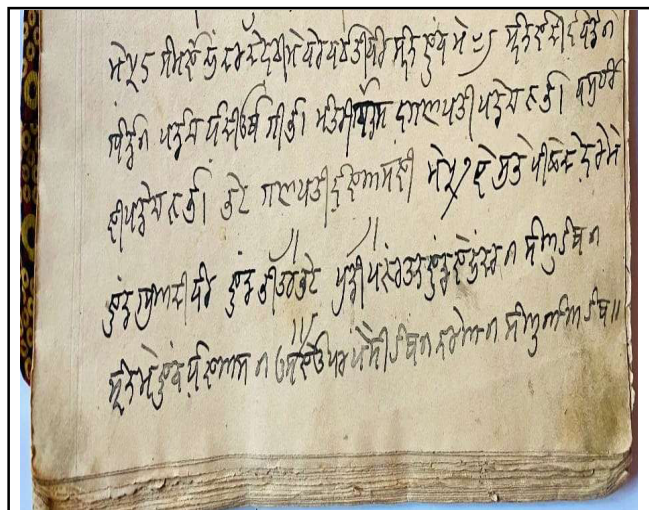
17. *Temple Archival Records* Pujarli, (*Tānkri Text*), Basta No. 1, 1869.

18. Interviewee—Sh. Keshva Nand Sharma, Age 67 years, Village- Sholi, Tehsil Nankhari, Distt. Shimla, Himachal Pradesh, Date-09-05-2024.

19. Interviewee- Kushal Sharma, Age 65 years, Village- Nandla, Tehsil Rohru, Distt. Shimla, Himachal Pradesh, Date-10-09-2023.

20. Interviewee—Vishav Dev Kanal, Age 61 years, Village-Nandla, Sub-Tehsil Jangla, Distt. Shimla, Himachal Pradesh, Date-14-04-2024.

*sthāpanā*<sup>21</sup> ritual takes place, during which a consecrated copper pot filled with water is ceremoniously established, symbolising the embodiment of divine presence. The central ritual entails offering of various items such as ghee, grains, herbs, and wood into the sacred fire while chanting *mantras* to invoke celestial energies and blessings. Our understanding of the rituals performed after the opening of the *havan kuṇḍ* primarily relies on the *Temple Archival* records of 1981 (1924) it provides valuable insights.



Source: Photo by Author, Pankaj Negi

Fig. 4 : Rituals, onset of the Opening of *Havan Kuṇḍ*

### Transliteration:

1. मंत्र 8 शामकोअंदरदेवठीमेंबरबठातीबारसयानकुंभमें 1, सयानकादीबाबडा 1
2. खाडा 1 पडाचयादीउथागीभा।मातरीखोनसवागणपतिपडेचज (जौ) भा (भार) वसुधारा /वसुधरो
3. कीपडेचजभा।भैटगणपतिवाकलशकी।मेंघरप्रविष्टे 9 कसुभेपीछेदेवोरेमे
4. कुंडखुलदीबारकुंडभीतरभैटपुडीपंजरतनकुंडकेअंदर 1 सालुहाथ 1
5. सयानमेंकुंभवाकलश 1 उसकेऊपरपैसीहाथ 1 नरेल 1 सालुलालहाथ 1

### Translation:

On the evening of *Menghar Pravishte* 8, as part of the ritual inside the main temple (*devthi*), before lighting the *ishan* lamp (*berbathātibār*), it is customary to place a donation (*bhent*) of 1 rupee in the pitcher (*sayān kumbh*) located in the northeast corner. Additionally, this

ritual requires a big lamp (*sayānkā dibā*) near the *sayān kumbh*. A ram is sacrificed. *Mātri Khonas* (made from cow dung and placed on a wall), Ganesh and *vasudhārā* (ghee) seats (*parāch*) are prepared from barley (*jo*). Donations are placed in both the Ganesh and the *Kalash*. While opening the *kuṇḍ* in the temple's *devrā*, ritually, donation and *panjratān* are put inside the *kuṇḍ*. A pot or urn is placed in the Ishaan (*sayān*) direction. A coconut, one *hāth* plain cloth and one *hāth* red *sālu* are placed on top of the pot<sup>22</sup>.

### *Pujā* at *Havan Kuṇḍ*:

A daily *pujā* at a *havan kuṇḍ* is considered to invoke divine blessings. During the *pujā*, various offerings, such as ghee, grains, and fragrant substances, are placed into the fire as offerings to the deities. The ritual is performed by invoking the divine presence through chants, prayers, and reciting sacred texts. The *bhūndhā* ritual in fact commences with a meticulous preparation of the *havan kuṇḍ*. The process involves a thorough cleaning of the sacred *kuṇḍ* and meticulously arranging essential materials, including wood, ghee, and various herbs. Additionally, offerings such as grains and sweets are carefully placed within the *kuṇḍ*. The fire is then ceremoniously ignited using sacred items like camphor or cow dung cakes, symbolising the divine presence of *Agni* (the revered fire god)<sup>23</sup>. P.C. Kashyap provides profound and invaluable guidance on the sacred practice of igniting the *havan kuṇḍ*, enriching our understanding. He writes,

A contingent of temple functionaries proceed to a designated household, whose privilege it is to give the fire. In the middle of the procession walks a ram, a deep copper vessel, on its horns. The vessel contains a lamp and a fire pot with 12 iron bars. The head of the family welcomes the procession. His wife worships the accompanying musical instrument. The copper vessel is carried inside the house for formal worship. The iron bars are placed on live, glowing embers and when red hot are arranged squarewise in the fire pot. Sacred hymns are recited and devotional songs sung all the while. The vessel with the fire is again placed on the horns of the ram and brought back to the *havan kuṇḍ*, whereby then,

21. A sacred ritual performed at the beginning of a *pujā/yajñā*.

22. *Temple Archival Records* (Pujarli), Basta No. 4, 1924.

23. Interviewee—Sh. Keshav Nand Sharma, Age 67 years, Village-Sholi, Tehsil Nankhari, Distt. Shimla, Himachal Pradesh, Date-09-05-2024.



a *Kathaid* has installed a life-size clay image of *Kālī* in *ishān* corner. Amidst chant of Vedic hymns the vessel is lowered into the *kund*. a sudden hush descends, moments later, the fire is lit in the sacrificial pit and the chant rises to a crescendo.<sup>24</sup>

H.A. Rose provides important information about the beginning of the *bhūṇḍhā* at the sacred *kund*. He writes,

Four brahmins pray and sacrifice daily by burning rice, fruit, ghee and goat's flesh, the fire being placed in an earthen vessel sunk some four feet in the ground, and image of goddess being set up opposite to it, and small brass image of that goddess being placed near it. This vessel is called *nabne kund*, and it is only opened for the *Bhunda*, a large stone is placed over it on which the sacrifices at the *Bhunda* are performed<sup>25</sup>.

During the *havan*, the priest chants specific *mantras* and prayers to invoke the presence of various deities and celestial forces. Offerings are made into the fire while reciting these *mantras*, symbolising gratitude, devotion, and seeking blessings for health, prosperity, and harmony<sup>26</sup>. The historical documents at Pujarli offer detailed insights into the exact count of Brahmins and

their assistants who partake in the sacred ritual of daily *pujā* in *havan kund*. In addition, the records also provided comprehensive information regarding the rights (*haq*) to which they are entitled in recognition of their contributions.

### Transliteration:

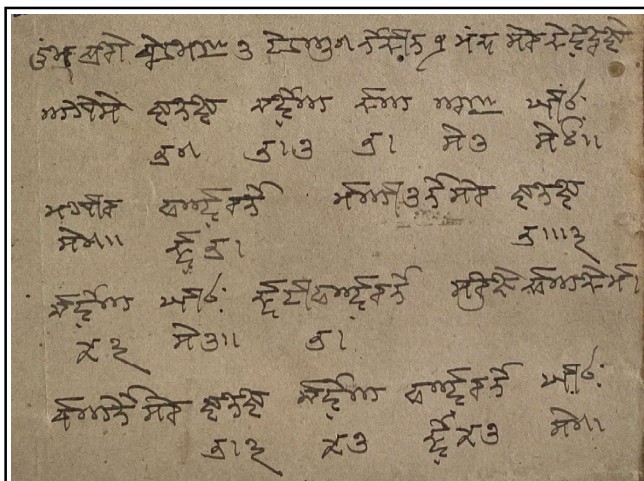
1. हुमअगेब्रेहमण 2 टेहलु 1 नोदीन 9 मंझसेरदेवोडके
2. लेखेसेकनकभा 1, चवोलभा 2, दाल, लुण, घीई
- 3 .मखीर, फलवार, नोमाली 2 नोसेरकनक
4. चवोलघीईदावोटीफलवारनोसरुजेढालदेमा
5. वालेनोसेरकनकचवोलफलवारनोघीई

### Translation:

Two leading priests (Brahmins) and one helper (*tehlu*) mainly conduct the *yajñā* over all nine days. They received various food items for their work, such as one *bhār* wheat, two *bhār* rice, pulses, salt, ghee, honey, and buckwheat flour. Two *mālī* are given wheat, rice, ghee and buckwheat flour. The one who puts the offerings for the sun (*Sarujedhāl demā*) will also get the wheat, rice and ghee<sup>27</sup>.

According to Praveen Jhingta (priest of the *devtā Meshar*), *havan* at the *kund* continues consecutively for fifteen days during *bhūṇḍhā*. He adds,

The rectangular shape *kund* (Pujarli) is about a metre deep and wide. The ceremony starts with *Cheitu purohits* (from Bhamnoli) igniting the *kund*. The daily *havan* will be performed by three *purohits* from respective families of Bhamnoli—*Cheitu*, *Jhingta* and *Himalayan*. Main *kārdārs* (functionaries) of the temple committee, *Mohatmeen* (head), *Khazānachi* (treasurer) and *Bhandārī* (In charge of the store) shall smooth the progress of the ceremony<sup>28</sup>.



Source: Photo by Author, Pankaj Negi

Fig. 5 : Roles of Brahmins at *Havan Kund*

24. P.C. Kashyap, *Living Pre-Rigvedic and Early-Rigvedic Traditions of Himalayas*, p.88.

25. H.A. Rose, *A Glossary of The Tribes and Castes of The Punjab and North-West Frontier Province*, 3 Vols, Lahore: The Superintendent Government Printing, 1911-1919, Vol.1, p.346.

26. Interviewee— Sh. Jagdish Shukla, Age 60 years, Village-Khaskandi, Tehsil Rohru, Distt. Shimla, Himachal Pradesh, Date-14-04-2024.

27. *Temple Archival Records* (Pujarli), Basta No. 3, 1899.

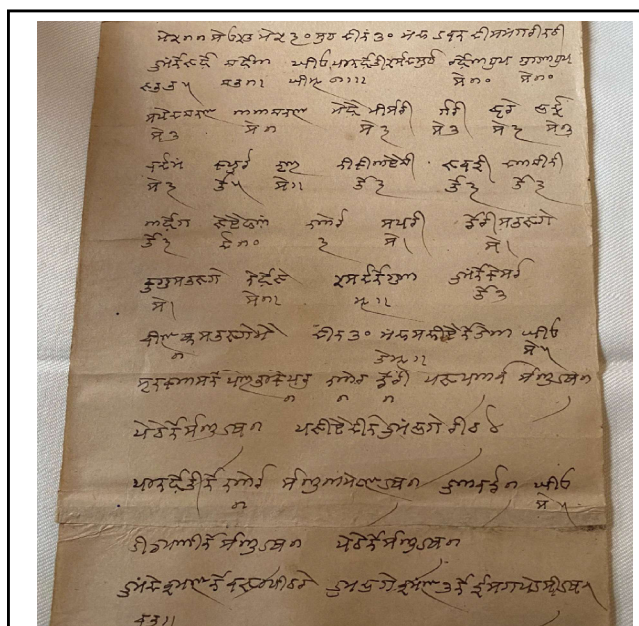
28. Interviewee— Sh. Praveen Jhingta, Age 49 years, Village-Bhamnoli, Tehsil Rohru, Distt. Shimla, Himachal Pradesh, Date-08-01-2024.

The smoke from the fire is believed to carry the prayers to the *heavens* and purify the surroundings. According to Keshav Nand Sharma, the *havan* concludes with the distribution of *Prasād* (blessed food)<sup>29</sup> to participants, signifying the culmination of the ritual and the sharing of divine grace. Daily *havan* ceremonies are regarded as a means to maintain spiritual discipline, foster positive energy, and invoke blessings for the well-being of the whole community<sup>30</sup>.

### Ingredients used in *havan*:

*Yajñā* (fire ritual) involves various sacred ingredients. Each ingredient carries its own symbolic and spiritual significance. Common ingredients include ghee (clarified butter), which is used to sustain the fire and symbolise purity and nourishment. Grains such as rice, barley, and sesame seeds are frequently offered, representing sustenance and fertility. Dried herbs and wood like sandalwood, camphor, and specific types of sacred timber (such as white and red sandalwood) are used to fuel the fire and create a fragrant smoke that purifies the environment. Other offerings might include dried fruits, sugar, and various types of incense, all contributing to the sensory aspects of the ritual and enhancing the sacred atmosphere<sup>31</sup>.

Additionally, sacred powders, including turmeric and vermilion, and occasionally milk and honey, are used in various ritual stages. Each ingredient is believed to invoke specific deities, bring about spiritual benefits, and align the participants with divine energies, making the *havan* a profoundly significant and holistic spiritual practice<sup>32</sup>. *Temple Archival* records of 1869 provide detailed information about the ingredients used in the *havan* during the *Bhūṇḍhā*. These records meticulously list clarified butter, grains, dried herbs, aromatic wood, and specific local ingredients unique to the region. This comprehensive documentation preserves traditional practices. Such detailed records ensure the continuity and authenticity of



Source: Photo by Author, Pankaj Negi

Fig. 6 : Ingredients used in *Havan* (1869)

the ceremonial practices over generations.

### Transliteration:

1. मंत्र 11 सेउप्रमंत्र 30 सुधदीन 20 मंझहवनदीसमगरीनी
2. हुमनोजवोजतत 5 [जोताठी 5], चवोलचत 1 [चावलताठी 1], घीइसेर 1 परनावोतीप्रसादसुधरावोलधुपसे 10 [सेर 10], गुगलधुपसे 10 [सेर 10],
3. सपेदचनणसे 2 [सेर 2], लालचनणसे 1[सेर 1], मेवामीसरीसे 3 [सेर 3], गरीसे 2 [सेर 2], छवारेसे 3 [सेर 3] अद्रासे 2 [सेर 2],
4. बदामसे 3 [सेर 3], कपुरतो 5 [तोला 5], नीकीलेपेचीतो 3 [तोला 3], जबत्रीतो 3 [तोला 3], दालचीनीतो 3 [तोला 3],
5. लवंगतो 3 [तोला 3], जेएफलदा 10 [दाने 10], नलेरा 3, सपारी, डोरीसभजगे
6. कुगुसभजगे, नेवोजे, प्रसादनोगुड, हुमनोकेसर
7. बीणाथान 1 सभजगेमेदीन 20 मंझसीझीऐनोतेल, घीइसे 5 [सेर 5],
8. सनकलशानोपणभरकेपारु 1, नलेर 1, डोरी 1, पंजपलबनोसालु 1 हथ 1
9. पेठेनोसालु 1 हाथपजीएदीनेहुमअगेरीठ 4
10. परनवोतीनोनलेर 1 सालुलमेणहथ 1 हुलबडा 1
11. हीरमलीनोसालुहथ 1 पेठेनोसालुहथ 1
12. हुमदेब्रमणनोबजरपीठरेहुमअगेब्रमण 2 नोत्रसगपेहसीहथ 6

29. *Prasād* is a term used in Hinduism that refers to a religious offering made to a deity, which is then distributed to devotees as a blessed gift. It can take various forms, such as food, fruits, or sweets. *Prasād* is considered sacred and is believed to carry the deity's blessings to those who receive it. It is a symbol of gratitude and divine grace in Hindu worship.

30. Interviewee—Sh. Keshva Nand Sharma, Age 67 years, Village- Sholi, Tehsil Nankhari, Distt. Shimla, Himachal Pradesh, Date-09-05-2024.

31. Interviewee— Sh. Ravi Sharma, Age 38 years, Village-Khaskandi, Tehsil Rohru, Distt. Shimla, Himachal Pradesh, Date-24-12-2024.

32. Interviewee— Sh. Knahiya Lal, Age 64 years, Village-Bhamnoli, Tehsil Rohru, Distt. Shimla, Himachal Pradesh, Date-14-04-2024.



**Translation:**

The offering continues for 20 days, from *Menghar Pravishte* 11 to *Menghar Pravishte* 30. The materials required include, barley (*Jo*) 5 *tāthi*,<sup>33</sup> rice (*chāval*) 1 *tāthi*, ghee (1 *ser*)<sup>34</sup>, *raval dhoop* (10 *ser*), *guggal dhoop* (10 *ser*), white sandalwood (*safedchandan*) 2 *ser*, red sandalwood (*lālchandan*) 1 *ser*, *mevā* (mixture of dry fruits almonds, cashews, raisins), *mishri* (sugar candy or rock sugar) 3 *ser*, coconut (*gari*) 2 *ser*, dry dates (*chuārae*) 3 *ser*, ginger (*adrak*) 2 *ser*, almond (*badām*) 3 *ser*, camphor (5 *tolā*)<sup>35</sup>, cardamom (*eliachi*) 3 *tolā*, mace (*jāvitri*) 3 *tolā*, cinnamon (*dālchini*) 3 *tolā*, cloves (*laung*) 3 *tolā*, nutmeg (*jāyfal*) 10 pieces, three coconuts, and betel nut (*supāri*). These materials play a crucial role in the ceremonial practice of *yajñā*. Additionally a small rope (*dōrī*) and vermilion (*kumkum*) are kept. *Prasād*, prepared with jaggery, is offered to the deities. Saffron is also required in the *yajñā*. Oil and five *sers* of ghee are given for lighting the lamp in the *yajñā*, which lasts for 20 days. The *sayān kalash*, is prepared with a *pāru* filled with water, topped with a coconut, and given a ceremonial touch with a *dōrī*. 1 *hāthsālu* is required to cover *panch palabh* (banyan leaves, pipal leaves, mango leaves, gooseberry leaves, black plum leaves) and one *hāthsālu* for pumpkin (*pethā*). Four sacrifices (4 *Reeth*) are made near the *yajñā* on the ritual's fifth day (*panjiyedeene*). The conclusion of the *yajñā*, known as *puṇahuti*, involves the offerings of one coconut and a *Hul* (a ram). *Hiramali* is covered with one *hāthsālu*, and one *hāthsālu* is wrapped around the outside of the pumpkin. Gifts are also given to the Brahmin who makes *Bajrapith*, and 2 Brahmins who perform the *yajñā* are given six *hāth*

long plain *tarāsag* (plain silk cloth) as a donation<sup>36</sup>.

**Invoking the Deities:**

Invoking the host deity and other deities near *havan kund* is a central part of the ritual. The purpose is to create an atmosphere of spiritual connection and to seek the divine presence to bless and guide every aspect of the proceedings. The sacred ritual begins with the purification of both the surroundings and the participants using water from the revered Ganges river<sup>37</sup>. All essential items, including ghee, *samagri* (a sacred mixture of herbs and other elements), and wooden sticks, are carefully arranged for further proceedings. After the materials are arranged near the *havan kund*, a small amount of camphor and ghee is used to kindle the fire. This carefully nurtured flame, burning within the sacred space of the *havan kund*, is considered the medium through which offerings are conveyed to the divine and followed by the invocation of deities through prayers and *mantras*. Offerings are made into the fire while chanting '*Swāhā*', symbolising the dedication of the offerings to the divine<sup>38</sup>. Throughout the ceremony, hymns and praises specific to the deity are recited to glorify their virtues and seek their favour. The ceremony concludes with a final, larger offering (*Purnāhuti*), followed by *ārti* and the distribution of *prasād*<sup>39</sup>.

The process begins with the priest or practitioner chanting specific *mantras* and prayers to invoke the presiding deity, who is often the main focus of the ritual. This invocation is subsequently extended to include other deities associated with various aspects of life and the cosmos. A sacred fire is lit in the *havan kund*, symbolising Agni, the fire god, who serves as the divine messenger,

33. *Tāthi* is a customary unit of weight measurement that has been traditionally used in the Indian subcontinent for centuries. In modern weight systems, one *tāthi* is equivalent to 1250 grams (1 kilo and 250 grams).

34. The *Ser* is a historical unit of weight measurement that has been traditionally used in the Indian subcontinent. In modern terms, one *ser* is equivalent to 933 grams, which is slightly less than a kilogram.

35. The *tola*, a traditional unit of mass widely employed in South Asia. Originally, a *tola* corresponded to 11.66 grams, but in current contexts, particularly in the measurement of precious metals such as gold and silver, it is often standardised to 10 grams.

36. *Temple Archival Records* (Pujarli), Basta No. 1, 1869.

37. Interviewee- Kushal Sharma, Age 65 years, Village- Nandla, Tehsil Rohru, Distt. Shimla, Himachal Pradesh, Date-10-09-2023.

38. Interviewee— Sh. Jagdish Shukla, Age 60 years, Village-Khaskandi, Tehsil Rohru, Distt. Shimla, Himachal Pradesh, Date-14-04-2024.

39. Interviewee—Sh. Keshva Nand Sharma, Age 67 years, Village- Sholi, Tehsil Nankhari, Distt. Shimla, Himachal Pradesh, Date-09-05-2024.

carrying offerings to the gods. Offerings such as ghee, grains, herbs, and other sanctified items are poured into the fire while chanting the names and attributes of each deity, requesting their presence and blessings. This multi-deity invocation adopts a holistic approach, seeking protection, prosperity, wisdom, and peace. The presence of the deities is believed to fulfil ceremonial intentions and provide spiritual and material benefits to participants. Once the deities are invoked, the host deity is offered various traditional items such as flowers, fruits, water, incense, and specially prepared food, symbolising devotion and respect. The worship culminates in the *ārti*, a ritual where a lamp or camphor is lit and circled by the deity's image, representing the dispelling of darkness and the presence of divine light. This worship seeks the deity's blessings for health, prosperity, and spiritual growth while reinforcing the devotees' connection to the sacred, filling the environment with positive energy and sanctity<sup>40</sup>.

### Worship of Navagrah (Nine Planets):

Worship of the nine planets, or *Navagraha puja*, is an essential ritual in Hinduism aimed at appeasing the nine celestial bodies, which are believed to influence various aspects of ritual as well as the life cycle. The nine planets include: *Surya* (Sun), *Chandr* (Moon), *Mangal* (Mars), *Budh* (Mercury), *Guru* (Jupiter), *Shukr* (Venus), *Shani* (Saturn), *Rahu* (North Lunar Node), and *Ketu* (South Lunar Node). In the *bhūṇḍhā* ritual, after opening the *havan kund*, these planetary deities are first worshipped by chanting specific *mantras* and doing the necessary purification. The sacred fire is lit in the *havan kund*, and offerings such as flowers, fruits, grains, incense, and ghee are made to each planet. Each planet is associated with specific colours, materials, and offerings, and these are used during the *puja* to invoke the corresponding deities properly. For example, red flowers and red sandalwood are used for Mars, and

yellow items are used for Jupiter<sup>41</sup>. Symbols of each planet are placed at their designated spots. Each spot is decorated with specific items associated with the respective planet, such as flowers, grains, and coloured cloths, to honour their unique attributes and energies. The *mandap* is adorned with lamps, incense, and offerings. This careful and respectful arrangement of the *navgrah mandap* ensures that the space is ready for the worship and invocation of the planetary deities, setting the stage for a harmonious and effective *Navagrah puja*<sup>42</sup>. Knahiya Lal provides valuable information on the ritual practices associated with *navgrah* worship: 'A goat is sacrificed to sanctify the *navgrah* mandap. The area is purified and decorated, with holy water sprinkled on the goat, a tilak applied, and flowers placed on its forehead. *Mantras* are recited to invoke the *navgrahas* for their blessings. After the sacrifice, the meat is cooked and shared as *prasād*, believed to balance planetary influences and promote well-being and prosperity'<sup>43</sup>.

The culmination involves a symbolic act of immersion after invoking and appeasing the *navgrahas* through prayers, offerings, and possibly rituals like the *navagrah puja*. The immersion or symbolic worship of the nine planets, known as *navagraha visarjan*, is a ritual that concludes the worship of these celestial bodies in Hindu traditions<sup>44</sup>. This typically involves preparing small representations or idols of each planet using materials such as clay, metal, or even food items like grains or lentils. These representations, often in the form of small figurines or yantras (geometric diagrams), are then ritually immersed in a water body such as a river, lake, or ocean. The immersion symbolises the release of any negative energies associated with the planets and marks the completion of the worship cycle. During the immersion, *mantras* and prayers may be recited to seek the blessings of the *navgrahas* for the success of the *yajñā* and the prosperity of all those involved<sup>45</sup>.

40. Interviewee—Vishav Dev Kanal, Age 61 years, Village-Nandla, Sub-Tehsil Jangla, Distt. Shimla, Himachal Pradesh, Date-14-04-2024.

41. Interviewee—Sh. Keshav Nand Sharma, Age 67 years, Village-Sholi, Tehsil Nankhari, Distt. Shimla, Himachal Pradesh, Date-09-05-2024.

42. Interviewee-Kushal Sharma, Age 65 years, Village-Nandla, Tehsil Rohru, Distt. Shimla, Himachal Pradesh, Date-10-09-2023.

43. Interviewee—Sh. Knahiya Lal, Age 62 years, Village-Bhamnoli, Tehsil Rohru, Distt. Shimla, Himachal Pradesh, Date-09-10-2023.

44. Interviewee—Vishav Dev Kanal, Age 61 years, Village-Nandla, Sub-Tehsil Jangla, Distt. Shimla, Himachal Pradesh, Date-14-04-2024.

### ***Devi Hadimbā (Hirmā):***

Before the ritual at the *kund*, the terracotta image of *kālī (Hirmā)* is meticulously adorned with intricate gold jewellery, including earrings, necklaces, and bangles. The image is placed at the front of the *havan kund*, where fire is contained in an earthen vessel that is sunk about four feet into the ground. The offerings continue until the *bhūndhā* is completed. These practices are believed to ensure the successful and auspicious completion of the *yajñā*. Once the *yajñā* is finished, the intricately crafted terracotta image, adorned with significant and exquisite gold ornaments, is ceremoniously and reverently placed in the pit of the *havan kund*. This ritual symbolizes the preparation for the next *bhūndhā*. The ornaments will then be evenly distributed among the sacrificial priests. This distribution ensures that everyone involved is rewarded fairly for their important contributions<sup>46</sup>.



Source: Photo by Author, Pankaj Negi

**Fig. 7 : Slate Lid of Havan Kund (Pujarli)**

### **Conclusion:**

In conclusion, the *havan kund* serves as the focal point of the *bhūndhā yajñā*, embodying a sacred space where divine energies converge and rituals unfold with meticulous care. An extensive period of worship unfolds within its confines, dedicated to invoking divine blessings for the successful completion of the *yajñā*. Multiple offerings pour this ceremonial fire; these offerings are made with the heartfelt intention of seeking their grace and ensuring their support to ward off any evil outside obstacles. Every stage—beginning with the meticulous

preparation and the reverent opening ceremony and culminating in the profoundly heartfelt final offering (*puṇnāhuti*)—underscores the significance of divine order and highlights the sacredness of the rituals. The daily rituals and prayers at the *kund* embody a devout and unwavering commitment to preserving cosmic harmony and invoking divine blessings. Numerous local and external scholars have conducted in-depth studies on the *bhūndhā yajñā*. However, their primary focus has remained mainly on the dramatic rope-sliding ritual on the third day, often overlooking the pivotal role of the *havan kund* and the associated rituals. During the field study at Dalgaon, the researcher observed that the *havan kund* is not merely a ritualistic element but serves as the spiritual core of the *bhūndhā yajñā*.

## **REFERENCES**

- Bhūndhā* documents from the Temple Archives at Pujarli, Bachunch & Dalgaon (*Tānkri* texts).
- Temple Records (*Sarbang*) Pujarli, Basta No. 6 (1961).
- Crooke, William, Bihundah Fairs- Kullu, *North Indian Notes and Queries*, A Monthly Periodical, Vol. 4, No. 4, 1894.
- Census of India*, 1961, Himachal Pradesh, Fairs and Festivals, Vol. 5, Part 7-B.
- Emerson, H.W. (1920). ‘The Historical Aspect of some Himalayan Customs’, *Journal of the Punjab Historical Society*, Vol. 8, No 2.
- Francke, A. H. (1914). *Antiquities of Indian Tibet*, Calcutta: Superintendent of Government Printing.
- Gazetteer of The Shimla District*, Punjab District Gazetteers, reprint, Delhi: Indus Publishing Company, 1997 [1904].
- Gerard, Alexander, *Account of an Attempt to penetrate by Bekhur to Garo and the Lake Manasarowara to determine the line of perpetual snow on the Southern face of the Himalaya*, (ed.) George Lloyed, London: J. Madden & co. Leadenhall Street, 1840.
- Harcourt, A.F.P. *The Himalayan Districts of Kooloo, Lahoul and Spiti*, reprint, Delhi: Vivek Publishing House, 1972 [1871].
- Mazumdar, A.K., *Early Hindu India*, reprint, New Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 1981[1917].

45. Interviewee— Sh. Jagdish Shukla, Age 60 years, Village-Khaskandi, Tehsil Rohru, Distt. Shimla, Himachal Pradesh, Date-14-04-2024.

46. Interviewee—Sh. Keshav Nand Sharma, Age 67 years, Village- Sholi, Tehsil Nankhari, Distt. Shimla, Himachal Pradesh, Date-09-05-2024.



- Moorcroft, William and Treback, *Travels in the Himalayan Provinces of Hindustan and the Punjab, Ladakh and Kashmir, Peshawar, Kabul, Kunduz and Bokhara*, 1819-1825, London: John Murray, Albemarle Street, 1841.
- Punjab States Gazetteer (Simla Hill States- Bashahr State)*, reprint, New Delhi: Indus Publishing Company, 1995 [1910].
- Rose, H.A., *A Glossary of The Tribes and Castes of The Punjab and North-West Frontier Province*, 3 Vols., Lahore: The Superintendent Government Printing, 1919.
- Shuttleworth, H.L.H, 'An Inscribed Metal Mask discovered on the occasion of the Bhunda Ceremony at Nirmand', *Acta Orientalia*, Paper read before the Dutch Oriental Society on April 21, 1922.
- Traill, G. W., 'Statical Sketch of Kumaon', *Asiatic Researches*, Vol. 16, 1828.
- Vogel, J.Ph. and Hutchison, J. (1994). *History of the Punjab Hill States*, 2 Vols, New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, Vol. 1.

\*\*\*\*\*