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*Field Report on the Budhi Diwali Festival: An
Observational Study of Cultural Exclusivity and Local ,
Identity in Sangla Valley, Kinnaur District, Himachal
Pradesh*



Zangu Nages Temple Sangla

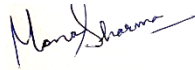
Location: Sangla Valley, Kinnaur District, Himachal Pradesh **Date of Observation:**
November 21, 2025

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Department: Department of Geography, Government College Sanjauli Course ,
BA Geography (Skill) , Batch 2025–2026.

1. Acknowledgements

I on behalf of my class extend my sincere gratitude to the faculty of the Department of Geography, Government College Sanjauli for providing the crucial opportunity for this field study, which allowed for direct engagement with the region's cultural landscape. Special appreciation is also extended to the residents of Sangla Valley, who, despite strict protocols of privacy, shared fundamental information regarding the Budhi Diwali festival, thus providing essential context for this report.



Faculty In charge



Principal

2. Introduction

This report documents the observations made during a compulsory field visit to Sangla Valley, Kinnaur District, concerning the observance of the Budhi Diwali festival on November 21, 2025. The festival, locally characterized by its delayed timing compared to the widely celebrated national Diwali, signifies a distinct cultural and calendar variation specific to the upper Himalayan regions. Due to the festival's highly private and sacred nature, which mandates strict community gatekeeping, observation was severely restricted. This report, therefore, focuses on documenting the external and permissible aspects of the ritual, specifically the evening *Aarti* (ritual worship), entry customs, and preliminary participant gathering.

3. Objectives of the Study

The primary objectives guiding this limited-scope ethnographic observation were:

- 1.To document the visible, socio-religious practices associated with the Budhi Diwali festival in the Sangla Valley.
- 2.To systematically record and collate information received through interactions with key local informants.
- 3.To analyse the mechanisms of cultural preservation and the symbolic importance of exclusivity inherent in the festival's protocols.

4. Methodology

Given the constraints imposed by the community's adherence to traditional protocols, the methodology employed was primarily non-participatory and qualitative.

Data Collection Methods

- **Non-Participatory Observation:** Direct visual observation was limited exclusively to the exterior assembly and the duration of the public evening *Aarti*. Crucially, documentation through photography was strictly prohibited, necessitating detailed note-taking.
- **Informal Interaction (Key Informant Interviews):** Basic information regarding the participating deities and general festival context was gathered through brief, informal exchanges with local residents. The scope and depth of information received were constrained by the private nature of the event.
- **Secondary Comparative Analysis:** To contextualize the limited primary data, reference was made to documented traditions of the Nirmand–Kullu Budhi Diwali festival. This comparative approach is justified by the established cultural and historical interconnections between the ritualistic practices of the Greater Kinnaur and Kullu regions.

5. Study Area: Sangla Valley, Kinnaur District

Sangla Valley, a geographically significant area within the Kinnaur district, is renowned for its distinct natural environment and deeply entrenched indigenous culture. The specific village hosting the festival was a small settlement, reinforcing the finding that the observance is a highly localized and community-centric event, emphasizing homogeneity and exclusivity in participation.

6. Protocols to be followed by Outsider

Access to the festival ground was governed by stringent protocols designed to enforce respect and maintain ritual purity:

1. **Photography Ban:** The use of cameras or recording devices was unequivocally prohibited within the vicinity of the festival, highlighting the community's commitment to protecting the sanctity of the ritual space.
2. **Mandatory Kinnauri Attire for Outsiders:** All visiting non-locals were required to wear the traditional Kinnauri Woolen cap (*Topi*) prior to entry, serving as an explicit symbol of respect and temporary adherence to local cultural identity.
3. **Restricted Access:** Permission for external observers was confined strictly to the *Aarti* time, confirming the ritual's core activities commencing post-*Aarti* are reserved exclusively for authorized community members.

Traditional Attire and Symbolic Expression

The local participants were uniformly clad in their complete, traditional Kinnauri woollen attire, including intricate headgear and shawls. This collective and detailed adherence to traditional dress served a dual function: as protective wear against the high-altitude climate, and more importantly, as a powerful, visible assertion of regional cultural pride and communal identity.

Documentation of Principal Deities (*Devta Ji*)

The ceremony was distinguished by the presence of three palanquin-borne deities (*Devta Ji*), whose identities were partially elucidated by local informants:

- **Bering Nath Ji Association:** One deity was identified as Bering Nath Ji, locally believed to be the consort (husband) of Mata Hateshwari, the renowned principal deity of Haatkoti in the Rohru Tehsil (district Shimla) . This connection highlights the extensive regional network of faith. **This regional interconnection between these deities came as a surprise to us as an outsider.**



- **Nag Devta Origin:** The presence of a *Nag Devta* (Serpent Deity) was noted, with its mythological origin traced to **Baraadsar Lake**, a highly sacred, traditional regional body of water located on the borderlands of Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand. This linkage further underscores the pan-Himalayan scope of the local belief system.

Baraadsar Lake

Limitations on Ritual Observation

The crucial finding is that the principal, complex rituals constituting the full Budhi Diwali celebration began only after the public *Aarti* concluded. As outsiders were mandated to depart at this juncture, the study's primary data is confined to the ingress customs, the initial assembly, and the *Aarti* itself.

7. Discussion

The findings of this field report are significantly shaped by the inherent difficulty in accessing the core ritualistic components of the Budhi Diwali festival. The stringent gatekeeping mechanisms—

the photography ban, mandatory respect attire, and the phased exclusion of non-locals—are not merely security measures but function as powerful sociological tools.

This exclusivity suggests that the Budhi Diwali in Sangla Valley operates as a vital mechanism for **cultural self-preservation** and the maintenance of a distinct local identity against external influence. The community actively determines who is allowed to witness and, consequently, interpret their sacred tradition. While this limitation constrains comprehensive ethnographic documentation, it provides a valuable insight into the functional role of secrecy in Himalayan socio-religious systems, where the privacy of the ritual ensures its purity and enduring authenticity for the community itself.

8. Conclusion

The Budhi Diwali festival in Sangla Valley is confirmed to be an event of profound cultural and religious importance, characterized by a highly protective attitude towards its core rituals. Despite the field observation being restricted to the periphery of the event (entry protocols and the *Aarti*), the experience provided robust evidence of the community's strong cultural identity, reflected in the mandatory traditional attire and the systematic exclusion of non-participants from the main ceremony. The presence of deities with linkages to regional sacred sites (Haatkoti, Baraadsar Lake) highlights the festival's deep roots in the wider Himalayan cultural and mythological landscape. Future research efforts would require established community liaison to negotiate a deeper level of non-disruptive, participatory observation.

9. References

- **Primary Source:** Field visit observations and informal interactions with local informants in Sangla Valley, Kinnaur District, on November 21, 2025.
- **Secondary Source:** Comparative literature on the Budhi Diwali traditions of the Nirmand–Kullu region, utilized for contextualizing the cultural and ritualistic interconnectedness within the Western Himalayas.
