

A Local Practices Brief
by the
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PRAGYA



Festivals of Lahaul & Spiti

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Introduction

Festivals reflect the true essence of a culture. They are always joyful occasions when the community gets together to have some fun, entertainment and relaxation.

The unique land of Lahaul and Spiti has a number of special occasions for celebration, which are observed with devotion to seek the blessings of God. In the earlier days most festivals and celebrations were connected with the ideology of the people and also the agricultural cycle. In the absence of any other means of amusement, fairs, festivals and folk dances were the only and highly popular form of entertainment, specially during the winters, when no other economic activity was possible. However, festivals were not only for pleasure, they were also occasions of thanksgiving, joy and happiness, in a world very deeply influenced by the Buddhist philosophy. Even today a number of traditional festivals are celebrated, though many others have lost significance in the wake of changing socio-economic scenario.

In the land of Spiti and Lahaul, the concept of festival survives through oral tradition and community participation, evolving from each generation to the next. Most of the festivals of the region are of the Buddhist tradition. There are many special or holy days in a year as recognised and celebrated by the Buddhist community. These include the birthdays of Bodhisattvas in the Mahayana tradition or other significant dates in the Buddhist calendar. The most significant celebration happens every May on the night of the full moon, when Buddhists all over the world celebrate the birth, enlightenment and death of the Buddha 2,500 years ago. It has come to be known as the Buddha Day.

Typically on a festival day, people go to the the local temple or monastery and offer food to the monks, take the Five Precepts and listen to a Dharma talk. In the afternoon, they distribute food to the poor and in the evening, join in a ceremony of circumambulation of a stupa three times as a sign of respect to the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha. The day typically concludes with evening chanting of the Buddha's teachings and meditation.

Some holy days are specific to a particular Buddhist tradition or ethnic group. The people of Lahaul and Spiti use the Lunar Calendar and the dates of the festivals vary from valley to valley and also between Buddhist traditions like Sakyapa, Gelugpa, Nyingmapa, etc.

Some of the important festivals of this land are described in this booklet. The festivals included here are not only of Buddhist origin, but also from the Hindu pantheon and the local deities.

I. Festivals of Lahaul

Garzha, as the land of Lahaul is traditionally known, is divided into five main valleys - Pattan, Tod, Ghar, Mayar and Tinan, each having its own dialect and cultural uniqueness. However, there is an underlying cultural continuity in these valleys as well, made more prominent by the fact that a majority of them are Buddhists. The people of these different valleys celebrate common festivals, though they are called by different names, and the time of celebration varies slightly, depending upon the agricultural season. Normally in Pattan valley, festivals are celebrated around 15-20 days ahead of other valleys. Once or twice a year, each *Gompa* performs the *chham* dance festival, with the aim of driving away all evil from the region. Also, the new year celebrations are common throughout Lahaul, celebrated after the agricultural season, during the winters, when all the people are relaxed and have time to make merry. Apart from the common festivals, there are some important fairs and their associated celebrations, in each different valleys, such as the Pori fair in Mayar valley. Some major festivals of Lahaul are described in the following pages.

Ia. ***New Year in Lahaul***

The festival of lights known as Diwali which signifies the close of a year and the beginning of the next is celebrated all over India each October. A similar celebration which might be called a "festival of lights of Lahaul" is observed as Khogla in the Pattan valley, and Halda in Ghar and Gondhla around the end of January or early February each year; in Tud valley it is celebrated as Losar.

~ **Halda**

One of the most important festivals of Lahaul, the Halda is celebrated in all the 5 valleys (Tinan, Pattan, Tod, Ghar and Mayar) with only minor variations in customs. Legend has it that in the past during a war with Ladakh, the King of Lahaul not being sure of his return from the battlefield, ordered the people to celebrate Halda before he embarked on his assault on the enemy.

Generally held in the month of January, the dates vary from valley to valley and year to year. In Ghar valley it is celebrated ahead of other villages. The Buddhist lama residing at the Guru Ghantal monastery, consults the lunar calendar, to fix the date of Khofla each year to coincide with the full moon, but the preparations begin much earlier. In every house, cedar wood is split into fine strips and then tied together into bundles to make a torch called *Halda*. The torches are then piled up to form something like a teepee and decorated with dry flowers, rather like a Christmas tree. Incense and oil lamps are placed beneath this pile, along with sweetmeats and fried bread and marchu (local bread) to worship the local village deity. The next morning, a congregation of representatives from each household visits each house in turn, where they are invited to share a simple feast. In the evening, the *haldas* for each house are lit and brought together at a central square. This is repeated four or five times, each in honour of a different deity. When the ceremony is over, the villagers return home to the most sumptuous dinner they can afford. The round of visits to each others' houses usually continues for two or three days.

Halda signifies the advent of the new year, the casting away of all evils of the previous year and the worship of the goddess Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth and prosperity. It begins with the ***Sad Halda***, which is celebrated to propitiate all the local deities. It is performed near the house by burning a small torch, reading or reciting some scriptures, and burning *Juniper*, just as is done while performing daily prayers in the house. This is followed by the ***Rum Halda*** held to propitiate all animals, also performed near the house, like the *Sad Halda*. The main ritual of the whole festival is the ***Shug Shug Halda*** held to drive away the devils, held in an open area outside the village.

In Tinan valley, this festival is typically celebrated around the 15th of January. As mentioned, the festival signifies the driving out of all evil spirits (which cause all ill health and other calamities) from the area/village. Early in

the morning, men dressed in traditional attire go to the forest to collect firesticks. After their return, a lavish feast commences. The real ritual begins in the evening. The *lamas* (monks) check the time from the *pothis* (religious text) and at the indicated hour in the evening, all the men - women do not participate in this - march towards an open area (which is considered to be sacred) carrying torchlights (bundles of burning firesticks). The procession moves from one village to the next, hailing '*Halda! Halda!*', meaning 'go away', and at every village more and more men keep joining. Then at the chosen sacred place, all the torches are dug into the snow. The lama offers a small amount of meat and rice to the evil spirits. The most respected village elder is made to hold a torch and utters "*Halda! Halda!*" and thus the celebration is concluded.

In Ghar valley too, the Halda is celebrated in a similar manner. Opposite the place where the firesticks are placed, people place bowls containing *ghee* and *sattu* (a local dish). Then the bundles of firesticks are opened and firesticks are thrown in a particular direction (chosen by the *lamas*) one by one, while shouting '*Haisha bhai Haisha*'. Then the bowls are filled with snow and brought back home. Some people also collect snow in their shawls. After reaching home, people congratulate each other saying '*Halda mubarak!*'. Then a small game is played before the men are allowed to enter their homes: when the men return home, the women bar the door to them and ask 'what do you want?', to which the men reply with answers like gold, silver, diamonds, cattle, etc. - items signifying prosperity. This goes on for some time, and then a small ritual (*shagun*) is performed by burning some leaves of *Juniper*. And that night the men are specially fed with meat from a lamb's chest, delicacies of the region, - a gesture of appreciation for the fact that the men have returned after performing a very important ritual which would bring good luck in the coming year.

This festival goes on for three days. All Lahaulis abstain from work and stay at home and enjoy good food and rest during these days. The festival is concluded with everyone wishing each other 'Happy New Year' (*ju*) by exchanging dry flowers. Thus, the Halda marks the beginning of the new year for the Lahauli people.



HALDA BONFIRE

~ Losar

In Tod valley, the *Halda* is known as *Losar*, and is celebrated in much the same manner. The panchayat representatives approach the head lama of *Gemur Gompa* with a bottle of *Arak* (local wine) and a white Tibetan scarf (*khatak*), and he then announces the date for *Losar* after consulting the sacred texts. In this valley there is a tradition that on the day of *Losar*, young people greet the elders by saying *Jule* (a greeting as a mark of respect). Otherwise the elders are not greeted everyday and only the monks and local medical practitioners are wished *Jule* on a daily basis. For seven days following *Losar* the people feast, drink and make merry. The main items in the *Losar* meals menu are *Gyuma* (fried goat or sheep intestine, stuffed with gram or wheat flour), sheep meat and plenty of *arak* and *chang*.

~ Khun or Phagli

Another important festival of Lahaul is the *Phagli* or *Khun*, celebrated mainly in the *Pattan* valley. Since *Phagli* immediately follows *Halda*, the two are often considered synonymous. This festival heralds the beginning of the new year of the traditional calendar and is significant for the worship of Lord Shiva, since *Pattan* valley belongs to the Hindu faith and *Himachal* is considered the land of Lord Shiva.

On the first day (*kuhn-yat*) the rituals begin at midnight. A *Shivalinga* (idol of Lord Shiva) is made with ice on the roof of the house, either by using an upturned basket or cow dung and Deodar tree twigs. The following morning (*shil*) before sunrise, the *Shivalinga* is circumambulated while holding a torchlight made from goat wool (*laccham*) tipped with butter. Apart from Shiva, people also worship the household deity (*kul devta*), the village deity and other important deities like the *Naga Raja*, *Raja Gephan* (the most powerful deity in Lahaul, worshipped by one and all) and the Goddess *Hidimba*.

Another feature of the *Phagli* festival is the paying of respect and obeisances to the elders by the younger generation. The eldest man of the village is offered flowers by the villagers and he and other elders give their blessings to them in return. Also, gifts in the form of socks (women knit these for their close relatives), flowers or money (usually given by men to their wives), etc., are exchanged among family and friends. This is followed by feasting and drinking.

~ Nang Dhon & Phi Dhon

Nang Dhon, a festival of *Tinnan* valley, is a celebration which lasts for three to four days. Close relatives gather to eat, drink and make merry. Since only close relatives are involved, people cook special dishes to treat each other. It is celebrated in the month of January, immediately after the *Halda*, as a gesture

of welcoming the new year.

Phi Dhon is also celebrated mainly in the Tinnan valley, and is similar to the *Nang Dhon* festival. It is considered a time of interaction among all people of all age groups. During the night, people dance and enjoy.

Ib. Celebrations for the Birth of a Male Child

~ Gochi

This festival, celebrated mainly in the Bhaga (*tod & ghar*) valley, marks the celebration of the birth of all the male children in the preceding year. It falls in the month of February and is celebrated mainly by those families in whose houses a baby boy was born the previous year. All families organise feasts for their relatives and friends. The party is thrown in the name of the male child and a lot of *chang* (local wine) is also served.

All women blessed with male children the preceding year, march in a procession (dressed in the traditional attire, singing and dancing to the sound of drums and flute), each carrying her baby, and accompanied by other villagers, to a place where the village deity (tree or bush) is believed to reside. An interesting ritual by the village priest (*labdagpa*) involves the shooting of nine arrows into a stuffed lambskin dummy, the number of times the arrow hitting the target symbolizing the number of male children that would be born in the following year.

Gochi is a day devoted to the worship of the Keylong *devta* (local deity of Ghar valley). The Keylong *devta* is offered *sattu* (roasted barley flour), *ghee*, *chang* (local wine) and Deodar tree twigs. *Ghee* is used to make the dummy of a sheep's head, which is then placed on the pile of *sattu*. Green stems of Deodar are used to make incense (*dhoop*) which is also offered to the *devta*. Then the village *lohar* (blacksmith) plays *nagara* (traditional wind instrument), and the priest recites holy verses and performs rituals. The Keylong *devta* has no temple devoted to him, but is believed to reside in a Deodar tree/shrub in lower Keylong, as well as in a field in upper Keylong.

~ Raldax

Raldax is a festival similar to the above described *Gochi*, but is observed on a larger scale, where not only the nearest relatives, but all villagers gather to celebrate with the families who are blessed with male children.

Ic. Prayers for a Harvest

Bumkhor is a festival related to agriculture and is celebrated mainly in Tod valley. It falls in the fourth month of the Tibetan calendar (i.e. June). People accompanied by lamas walk in a procession through fields full of crops, carrying religious books (*kangur*, i.e. 108 texts) on their backs. It is believed that this would lead to a bumper harvest. The ritual culminates in a *puja* performed by the lamas with the sharing of *chang* and food.

Id. Pori - The Fair at Triloknath

This 3-day fair held in the month of August in Triloknath in Pattan valley, attracts pilgrims from the entire Western Himalayas, viz, Ladakh, Zaskar and other places, who come to pay homage to the deity of Triloknath (lord Shiva or Avalokiteshwara) in a famous temple located at a village of the same name.

Every morning and evening during these three days, people circumambulate the abode of the idol 3 or 7 times, rotate the prayer wheels, prostrate several times in front of the idol and light butter lamps and utter prayers. After the paying of homage on the first morning, the festival begins. The main attractions are the numerous stalls selling all kinds of mementoes and traditional dances performed by the local people in the evenings.

On the second day, the *Thakur* of Triloknath village, riding on a decorated horse, leads a traditional procession which heads to the place where legend has it that seven angels (youngest of whom is believed to be the idol of lord Triloknath) appeared from seven springs. This is the most important ritual of the fair. The procession of the *Thakur* then returns to the fair grounds for more festivities, which continue into the third day. The *Thakur* (also called *Rana*) presides over the proceedings of the festival from a vantage point, which is the verandah of a two-storeyed house.

Temple of Triloknath

This is one of the very rare places in the world which is held in equal reverence by the followers of two different religions. The temple of Triloknath - one of the holiest places in India - attracts flocks of sadhus, religious personalities, and a large number of devotees from all over India, especially in the month of August when the festival of Pauri is held for three consecutive days. At the same time, a large number of Buddhist pilgrims from Ladakh, Zaskar and other parts of India also visit Triloknath. Hindus believe this temple to be the abode of 'the lord of three worlds' (Triloknath), who is a manifestation of Lord Shiva, while the Buddhists revere the temple due to the presence in it of one of the Bodhisatvas, Avalokiteshwar (Chenrezig in Tibetan), the Buddha of transcending awareness, believed to be the symbol of Buddha's compassion. The temple was given a Buddhist shrine look by Guru Padmasambhava by installing in it the six armed image of the Avalokiteshwar during the 8th century..

Ie. Chham at the Gompa

The Chheshu is a festival celebrated in various monasteries of Lahaul, in the summer months of May, June or July. People from all over the valley assemble in the gompas to witness the celebrations. Lamas perform a special worship in the morning and then perform the *chham* dance, popularly known as the devil dance. The performers wear gorgeous dresses and dance to the music of drums and cymbals, wearing different kinds of masks, some of them highly grotesque and frightening. Other shows consist of pantomime and dancing and chanting of religious verses. The monotony of the proceedings is relieved by the antics of a clown. The victim of the numerous pranks played by the devils in these dances/pantomimes is King Langdarma of Central Tibet who was severely opposed to Buddhism. The dance owes its origin to Tibet and signifies a fight between the good and the evil. The celebrations of the Chheshu festival also involve copious drinking and dancing.

~ Dangpo Chheshu & Nyipe Chheshu / Dembrigya

In Tod valley *Dangpo Chheshu* is celebrated on the tenth day of the first month of the Tibetan calendar. It is celebrated over two days. Lamas offer *tsog* (feast) to the Goddess *Paldon Lamo* (*Kali*, the protector goddess) and other deities and pray for peace and prosperity. The selection of the households to be responsible for the organising involved for the next year's celebration of festivals is also done with any two households of the village being nominated for the task.

Nyipe Chheshu or *Dembrigya* is celebrated on the tenth day of the second month of the Tibetan calendar. People from all twelve villages of the valley gather but the '*tsog*' (a religious cake made of roasted barley flour, butter, local wine, dried cheese and sugar or jagery) offering is done only by the head lama of *Gemur Gompa*. The offerings are made to *Guru Rimpoche* (founder of Tibetan Buddhism in the 8th century) and wishes are made for peace and prosperity. Food and drink are collected from each household and people enjoy together. Four members from the villages coming under the domain of the *gompa* are given the responsibility for carrying out tasks like the announcement of marriages, death, etc., in the following year.

~ Gemur Chheshu

In Tod valley, *Gemur Chheshu* is celebrated for 3 days, usually on the 18th, 19th and 20th days of the fifth month of the Tibetan calendar. This is the only festival in which all the followers of '*Durukpa Kargupa*' sect gather at *Gemur Gompa* (*Samten Chholing Gompa*). On the first day of the festival, the *lamas* prepare for *cham* dance, which is then performed by around 16 lamas, on the second day. It is said that this performance was done even by the *Guru Rimpoche* himself. It is believed that since the mask worn by the dancers is so fearful, whosoever can watch this dance without fear, is able to face death in

a peaceful manner and successfully pass through *Bardo* (the phase between death and a new life). On the third and last day of the festival, there is feasting and drinking. On all these days, cultural programmes are organized in the evening.

CHHAM - the mask dance

This is a sacred mask dance performed in the monasteries by the lamas on special festive occasions. The lamas put on gorgeous, colourful dresses and specially prepared masks of various devils, spirits or dragons from the pantheon of Tibetan Buddhism. The masks are of grotesque appearance symbolising the various types of dreadful monsters one's soul comes across after quitting this worldly abode. It is believed that on watching the chham dance one becomes familiar with these monsters and hence does not get intimidated by them on one's journey after death. Gemur, Tayul and Shashur monasteries are well known for their 'devil dance-dramas'.



CHHAM DANCE

The most popular Buddhist sect in the region of Lahaul is the Kagyudpa sect which is followed by the lamas of Gemur, Tayul, Shashur, Kardang, Peukar, Gurughantal and Labrang monasteries.

Guru Ghantal - *High over the confluence of the rivers Chandra and Bhaga, this is regarded as the oldest monastery in Lahaul. Two great figures of Trans-Himalayan Buddhism were associated with it - Padmasambhava and Rinchensang-po. This enshrines an image of the goddess Vajreshwari Devi (Dorje Lhamo), a wooden image of the Buddha and a marble head of Avalokiteshwara. Also said to be sealed in a dark airless room, is the visage of the demon Tsedak who once ravaged the area till it was captured.*

Kardang - *One of the most revered places in Lahaul, it has a large library and is also the repository of some exquisite thangka paintings, musical instruments and old weapons.*

Shashur - *Surrounded by a rare patch of woodland, this*

gompa was founded in the seventeenth century by Deva Gyatso. The festival of Shashur Tseshe is held every June/July when monks dressed in masks and colourful costumes perform dances. The monastery is known for the images and paintings it houses.

Tayul - *'Tayul' means 'the chosen place', and so the local legend says that the main prayer wheel rotates on its own on certain occasions. It has a huge statue of Padmasambhava and its library houses the one hundred and one volumes of the sacred Kangyur text.*

Gemur - *This is a small monastery, well known for its 'devil dance-drama' enacted every July.*

II. Festivals of Spiti

In the land of Spiti, a number of festivals are celebrated, the most important ones being Gutor and Lossar. Also, the Gompas of the different zone of Spiti - Lower Spiti (**Sham**), Pin, Middle Spiti (**Bharchik**) and Upper Spiti (**Tud**), celebrate their own festivals, which are marked by the performance of the mask dance, which is always staged in a courtyard inside the monastery. Some important fairs of the region are the famous *La Darcha* fair, and the Tribal fair (which has become quite popular in the last 15-20 years).

Dancing, singing and drinking are must in every festival of Spiti. Festivals are typically held during the long winter months when people are confined indoors. Each celebration or ritual is a kind of *Mela*. Sometimes, hours of slow and monotonous group-dancing to the accompaniment of a song relating a story from either Spitian history or a folklore or the glories of Lamaistic worship are performed. The celebrations continue at a very leisurely pace. Typically, a lot of *chang* is also consumed. The drink is sipped slowly, the cup filled after every sip or two; an empty cup is believed to disturb the continuity of the celebrations (Bajpai, S.C. 1987. *Lahaul-Spiti, A forbidden Land in the Himalayas*. Indus: New Delhi. pp:71).

IIa. Initiation of the Festive Season

~ Jib-Jed

At Thang-jyal monastery in the Spiti region, a religious festival called the **Jib-Jed** takes place in the month of October, and a month later a similar festival called **Gutor** is held at the monasteries at Kye, Tabo, Dhankhar and Pin. The purpose of these festivals is to protect people from diseases and epidemics and ensure health, happiness and all round prosperity. The rituals are believed to cleanse the village and its people and the whole world from all evil.

~ Gutor

Gutor is held in the 9th month (*Dawa Gopa*) of the Buddhist calendar which corresponds with the month of November. Two or three days are spent in joint worship or prayer. On the fourth day the lamas perform the famous devil dance. The abbot and the superior monks, dressed in full canons, sit around the courtyard of the monastery, clanking huge cymbals to a leisurely tune. Other monks dress themselves in brilliant silk robes and grotesque masks or extraordinary head dresses, and with strange weapons in thier hands dance in tune with the instruments, advancing and retreating, turning and whirling with the demons. The demons, it is believed, had become too powerful and so tyrannical over mankind that the gods descended from heaven, took the shapes of strange beasts and in that guise fought with and destroyed them. On the 28th of the month of *Dawa Gopa* (9th month of Buddhist calendar), the first day of the festival, a huge five feet structure (*torma*) is made with barley dough and on the 29th of the month of *Dawa Gopa* (9th month of Buddhist calendar), the second day of the festival, this *torma* is thrown down the mountain by the head of the old gumpa and then burnt. This symbolizes the destruction of all evil, illnesses, etc., of the past year. On the last day, cultural programmes are also organised.

Each of the seven villages that come under Dhankhar gumpa contribute a little amount of grain for this festival. The residents of Dhankhar village make the food and stay arrangements for the guests from other villages.

In Tabo monastery, instead of *Gutor* a festival known as *Chakhar* is celebrated every four years. This festival is attended by all the people of the valley.

I Ib. The Ladarcha Fair

In the days of the Trans-Himalayan trade routes, Spiti used to hold a barter trade fair in Ladarcha, a large, gently sloping pasture at about 4200 metres, located near Chichum. The spot is a centre point for the nearing neighbours like Ladakh, Kullu, Manali Lahaul, Kinnaur, Rampur, Western Tibet, Changthang, Kargil, Zaskar. Held in August, this fair used to see traders from several neighbouring lands meet and exchange products - traders from Tibet, Changthang and Rupshu would bring pashmina wool, sheep, yaks, churpe (local cheese) and semi-precious stones; Spiti would trade in barley and horses; textiles, sugar and iron goods would be brought in by traders from Rampur and Kullu.

The closure of the Sino-Indian border caused the cessation of this practice. However, Ladarcha still remains an occasion for celebration. The spot where the Ladarcha fair is held has also been changed. Now it is held in the capital town of Spiti, i.e., Kaza. Though the barter system of trade does not exist anymore, people from different places still get together to buy and sell things. At another level, it has become an occasion for the authorities of the state government to visit Spiti and for Spitians take this opportunity by showcasing their culture to the authorities, reporting the facts and figures of the area's condition and requisitioning for any development or facilities, which it severely lacks.

IIC. The Horse Race/ Namkan Fair

Every year a horse race is held near the Dhankhar lake. These races are held on the 10th or 13th day in the 6th month of the traditional calendar. Men and women dressed in traditional attire go up to the lake, carrying meat, butter, *sattu*, etc., and have a feast. The expert horsemen take part in the race there, in which they have to ride round the lake. There is no prize for the winner, but the acknowledgement of the villagers and recognition as the best horse rider is more than sufficient. After the conclusion of the Namkan fair, the monks go up to the lake and conduct prayers to cleanse the lake (*tuisol*).

In this region, the horse is considered a very precious animal and this fair is celebrated to honour their importance in the Spitian life. Any legend or story of the region invariably has a horse in it. Even today, a person possessing a good horse is considered a rich or a well-off person. The best breed of horses in Spiti, can be found in Pin valley. It is believed that the people of Pin valley are experts in domestication and training of horses and highly skilled in equestrian pursuits.



Participants in the horse race

IIId. Prayers for the Dead . . . & the Alive

Sanchoti (post-death ceremony), a peculiar festival of Pin Valley is celebrated by each **Khangchen** (i.e. *Bara Ghar*, literally meaning big house, which are the original inhabitants of a village and the major land owners) once in every six or seven years. In this festival the *lamas* pray for the longevity of those alive and the noble birth for the dead souls, and festivities last for four or five days. Meat and *Chang* are liberally served to all. This festival is a religious festival sponsored by the Khangchens and treated to all the villagers whosoever attends. Pin Valley belongs to the Nyingma tradition of Tibetan Buddhism, so some festivals and ritual differs from the other parts of Spiti. The whole Pin people are devotees of the Kungri gumpa. During Sanchoti, monks are invited and honoured from Kungri gumpa. This is one of the biggest celebration in Pin where all the Pin valley people and their relatives from the other parts of Spiti can get together.

Ile. New Year in Spiti

The festival of *Losar* is celebrated to welcome the new year in the Tibetan calendar. *Losar* is a *Bhoti* word which means New Year. This festival is celebrated around mid-November. On the first day of the festival, the *lamas* and villagers go around the village with torchlights in their hands and a prayer (*Haso* - to awaken the deities to be propitiated) is chanted by the *lamas*. Then the torchlights are thrown near the riverside. The next day people enjoy the festival by having dinner together, followed by local dances and music. Though *Lossar* is New year celebration but New year is counted differently in different region. Usually, After the completion of cultivation work, people rejoice and celebrate the completion of the one cultivation year and welcomes the new year. Rituals are performed to welcome the New year with good omen so that the whole coming year would be of luck, happiness and prosperity without any obstacles. People wear new clothes and garments on the day and prepare special delicacies. Local wines are prepared from one month in advance and in abundance so that there is no shortage of wine during the celebration. Few days following the new year, people one another for feast at individual's house. This is celebrated equally in the whole of Spiti.

IIf. Prayers atop the Kunzum

The *Sangsol* is an occasion celebrated every year on July 4th atop Kunzum pass. This ritual had been begun by His Holiness *the Dalai Lama* in the year 2000 and has continued since. His Holiness had been unable to visit the holy lake *Chander-tal* near Kunzam top where he was supposed to perform a religious ceremony, and hence performed the ceremony at the *Sangsol* peak from where *Chander-tal* is visible. This is a ritual performed to awaken the deities and the protectors of the region. Everyone from Lossar and nearby villages goes to Kunzum and the monks from Key Gumpa are invited to do the *puja*. All the people pay their homage to the deities and protectors and prays for their blessings. Food, snacks and tea are carried so that there can be feasting and merry-making including much singing and dancing, at the end of the ceremony.

IIg. For a Good Harvest

The *Chhewa Sum / Phunda Thangbo* festival is celebrated towards the beginning of March every year. All the villagers gather at the monastery and the lamas pray for better agricultural produce, favourable climatic conditions, a disease-free environment and peace and harmony in the villages. All the religious ceremonies are performed during the day, and at night people dance and drink *chang*. This ritual is done to ensure a good start to the cultivation that year. People pray for a good yield, good water, good soil, etc., since the people in the area depend solely on cultivation for their livelihood. It is of great importance to the people to conduct these rituals at the beginning of the agriculture season, believing that otherwise their survival in this harsh land would not be possible. This is an attempt to appease the forces of nature and ensure they remain benevolent.

IIh. Lord Buddha's Sermon Day

Every year, the *Thuppa Chhijji* festival is celebrated on the 2nd of July. On this day, all the villagers gather at the monastery where the *lamas* worship the Lord Buddha and discourses on his teachings are held for the villagers. Lord Buddha is believed to have preached his sermon to five lamas at Sarnath on this day. This occasion is celebrated by Buddhists around the world. In Spiti also, people gather in their respective monasteries on this occasion. The *gompa* arranges for the community feast, this responsibility lying with the *nyerva* (the *Gompa* incharges). They collect food material from the villagers, - flour, pulses, tea leaves, etc., or whatever else the devotees offer. On the day of the festival, a community meal is prepared by the *nyervas* and cooked only in *ghee* (clarified butter), and served to all the villagers.

III. Lord Buddha's Return

The *Labab Thuichen* festival is celebrated every year on the 22nd of November. It is believed that Mahatma Buddha returned to the earth from heaven after delivering a sermon to his mother. All the villagers and the *lamas* pray at the monastery. In the evening, some villagers and *lamas* who keep a fast, go around the villages with prayer wheels (*maney*) in their hands. This day is highly revered in Spiti and people believe that on this day if prayers are offered sincerely, the merits are enhanced.

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