Himal Pradesh

mutilated genitalia. Rather than ruin their business, most merchants give the expected few rupees, and in exchange, receive the blessing that they will prosper in the next year. Some merchants even work out a weekly or monthly contract with their local group of Hijrās.

Ancient Sanskrit plays utilized Hijrās or cross-dressers as comical characters. This tradition is presently represented in popular Indian cinema, where either real Hijrās or impostors are employed to play light, humorous roles, in stark contrast to the very masculine heroes and very feminine heroines portrayed.

References


Mekhala Natavar

see also

Ali; Birth Songs; Divālī/Diśāvālī; Gender and Folklore; Holi; Navarātri

Himachal Pradesh

Himachal Pradesh—"the land of the abode of snow"—is a state cross-cut with mountain ranges, dividing inhabitants into distinct cultural regions. Although an administrative unit, it is a cohesive group in name only; the diversity of peoples in the state makes it impossible to speak of its folklore in general terms.

Among the districts represented in Himachal Pradesh are Una, Hamirpur, Bilaspur, Solan, Sirmaur, Kangra, Mandi, Shimla, Chamba, Kullu, Kinnaur and finally Lahaul and Spiti. The state government has attempted to promote Pahari "of the mountains" as the state language. However, Pahari itself is distinctively shaped by regions, and is a conglomeration of partially mutually intelligible dialects: Kangri, Chambiali, Kullui and so on. Furthermore, in Kinnaur, Lahaul and Spiti, Tibetan-Burman languages are spoken.

Himachal Pradesh can thus be conceptualized as representing an intersection of cultural features shared with the plains—particularly Punjab—and those associated with Tibet. While Kinnaur, Lahaul and Spiti are strongholds of Tibetan Buddhism, Tibetan refugees are also present elsewhere in the state, particularly in Kangra (the Dalai Lama's government in exile is based in Dharamsala, Kangra). Hinduism is practised in other areas, with strong regionally based traditions. Muslims are represented mostly by the nomadic, buffalo herding Gujjar tribe. Enclaves of Sikhs are also found here.

Mountains are often associated with sacred centers in South Asia, and Himachal Pradesh is sprinkled with pilgrimage sites. Festivals associated with the calendrical cycle also draw pilgrims and tourists from other regions of India. Popular festivals include the Kulu Dassera celebrations (in October), pilgrimages to the Goddess Jwalamukhi in Kangra (April and October) Śivratri celebrations in Mandi (February), the Renuka fair by the lake in Sirmaur (November), and ritual dances celebrating Tibetan New Year, Losar, in the monasteries of Lahaul, Spiti and Kinnaur (February).

The present state of folklore scholarship in Himachal Pradesh is far more descriptive than analytical. Popular collections and travelogues are the norm. At this time there is ample scope for further ethnographic research in this area.

References


Kirin Narayan

see also

Central Himalayan States; Pilgrimage; Tibet

Hinduism

see Cosmology, Hindu; Fate, Hindu; Goddesses, Hindu; Mythology, Hindu; Shrines, Hindu; Syncretism

Hīr/Rānjhā

The tale of Hīr and Rānjhā is one of many popular romances from the Punjab and northwestern India, part of a longstanding oral tradition with roots in the Persian *masnavī* (rhymed narrative poems, often on romantic or Sufi themes) and Punjabi *vār* (ballads of praise). Surviving written versions of *Hīr/Rānjhā* date to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and new versions are still being composed. The language of the earliest written Punjabi versions of *Hīr/Rānjhā* is challenging even for native speakers; many recent editions of different versions of the story include Urdu or modern Punjabi translations and commentary.

In its most basic form, it is the tale of the love of Rānjhā, who leaves his family after being cheated out of his inheritance, and Hīr, the beautiful daughter of a village chieftain. Rānjhā secures a job tending