

FAGLI: THE ART AND TRADITION OF BANJAR VALLEY, HIMACHAL PRADESH

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the rich cultural heritage and artistic craftsmanship of the Fagli Festival of Himachal Pradesh, celebrated towards the end of winter, usually in February and March. This festival brings together communities to celebrate the agricultural cycle and pay honor to the deities that protect their lands. This annual event plays an important role in showcasing the art, culture, and traditions of this region, highlighted by its rituals, colorful processions, traditional music, dance, and performances with masks. These masks are made mostly from materials like wood and adorned with feathers, leaves, flowers, mohair, and vibrant polychrome. The article explores the folklore behind this festival, the skillful artistry involved in making Fagli masks, and its cultural rituals. Furthermore, it sheds light on the social and cultural aspects of the festival, including gender roles and community participation. As the festival continues to grow in popularity on social media due to its distinctive rituals, it raises the concern about the importance of preserving such cultural practices. At the same time, it highlights the festival's potential to promote tourism in the area.

Keywords: Artistic craftsmanship, cultural traditions, Fagli masks, festival, folklore, heritage, Himachal Pradesh, rituals.

INTRODUCTION :

Himachal Pradesh, the northern jewel of India, often referred to as “the ‘Devabhoomi’ which means the adobe of Gods,” (Balasubramanian, 2013) is mostly known to people for its breathtaking landscapes, but it also carries a rich cultural heritage. The region is home to a diverse community that celebrates its unique identity through colourful rituals, celebrations and festivals. Among the many festivals that grace the cultural calendar of Himachal Pradesh, Fagli stands out for its liveliness, spiritual zeal, and unique cultural customs.

The word '*Fagli*' or '*Phagli*' comes from the word 'Phag' which is the last month in the Hindu calendar that usually falls between February and March in Gregorian calendar. Phalguna is recognized as the 12th month of the Hindu calendar, marking the conclusion of winter and the onset of spring. This month was especially significant for the farmers as it marked the end of harvesting season and start the preparation for the next planting season (Phalguna Month 2025: Important, key festivals and other details, 2025). The end of winter is celebrated worldwide through various festivals and traditions one of these is the Fagli Festival of Himachal Pradesh, takes place in the month of Phagun (February - March) to celebrate the return of local deities after their winter hibernation. It also represents the victory of good over evil. Masks are a significant part of this celebration, serving as expressions of religious beliefs, dance traditions, and divine beings.

The English word “mask” first originated in the 1530s from the French word “masque”, which means a covering used to hide or guard the face (THE MASKED TRADITION OF INDIA:- FACES & MUD, 2023). Oxford Learner’s Dictionaries defines '*mask*' as: “Something that you wear over your face to hide it, or to frighten or entertain other people.”

In the Chapter 23 of *Natyashastra*, written by sage Bharata Muni (Ghosh, 1951), also talks about the use of masks in performance. The chapter uses the word *Pratishirshak*, for mask referred it more like a headcover or helmet rather than a full-face mask (Ghosh, 1951).

Bharat Gupt's exposition on masks highlights that the act of wearing a masks in ancient Greek and Indian tradition centers on the concept of 'rebirth' (Chandra & Chishi, 2010). When an performer wears a mask, they leave their personal identity behind and take on the identity of the character they are playing.

Masks have been used by humans long before written language existed (Masks in History). Throughout history, masks have been used for both practical and ceremonial reasons, as well as in the performing arts. Throughout human civilization, two primary kinds of masks- are widely recognized: "one that is based on an individual's imagination, like that of demons, deities, and ancestors" and "two that is based on morphological features like anthropomorphic¹ and theriomorphic²" (THE MASKED TRADITION OF INDIA:- FACES & MUD, 2023). The oldest known masks, made from stone or seashells, were discovered in the area now known as Israel, Palestine, and Jordan, and are about 9,000 years old. Although wooden masks were likely used even earlier, few have survived due to weathering. The oldest surviving wooden mask is thought to be a crest mask representing an aardvark, found in Angola and dating back to around 900 C.E (Masks in History).

The origins of masks in India are deeply tied to early dance rituals and folk ceremonies, which shared element of rudimentary theatre. The use of masks is often linked with dances performed by devotes as offering in temple. Eventually these ritual dances transitioned from sacred temples settings to theatrical spaces. Despite the shift, the essence of these performances

¹ Human features

² Animal features

remained intact, continuing to depict stories from epics like Mahabharata, Ramayana and the Puranas (Kothari, 1980). Therefore, mask is an object worn on the face, that are used for a variety of reasons, including protection, disguise, performances, and entertainment, and are often associated with rituals and ceremonies.

Masks are a captivating element of cultural heritage across the world, found in regions like Papua New Guinea, Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ghana, Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Japan, Indonesia, Taiwan, and India (Masks of the World). In India, various regions and tribes have their own unique cultural masks, such as the Chhau Masks from West Bengal, Odisha, and Jharkhand; Theyyam Masks and Kummatti Masks from Kerala; Bhuta Masks from Karnataka; Monpa Masks from Arunachal Pradesh; Bodona Masks from Assam; and Fagli Masks from Himachal Pradesh.



Figure 1. *Mask bearers performing the traditional Fagli Dance.* Source: Photo taken by the author on 13 February 2024, in Chehni Kothi, Banjar Valley, Himachal Pradesh, India.

OBJECTIVES:

- To document the rituals, practices and traditions of the Fagli festival as a medium of artistic expression

DATABASE AND METHODOLOGY:

In this paper I have used qualitative research methodology combining both primary as well as secondary data collection to explore the cultural significance, folklore and artistry of Fagli Festival. The primary data has been collected from the ethnographic field work from the study area through observations, semi-structured interviews with local people and visual documentation of costumes, masks and ceremonies from 13th February – 16th February 2024. The secondary data is sourced from historical texts, books, blogs, published and unpublished research works and journals. Data analysis involves thematic and narrative approaches to uncover the cultural and aesthetical significance behind the cultural practices.

Criteria for Participant Selection

The participants for this study were selected based on their role and involvement in the festival, as well as their accessibility during the fieldwork. Some of the criteria included participants must be permanent residents of the selected villages, active participation in the festival as a performer or priest and willingness to share their experiences and stories. Gender based challenges were identified, as women often hesitate to discuss anything about the festival.

Table 1. Participant Profile Table

Participant ID	Age	Gender	Role in Festival	Village	What They Shared
P1	32	Male	Former Mask Bearer	Chehni Kothi	Shared the mask and costume making process.
P2	47	Male	Priest	Chehni Kothi	Explained rituals and the deep-rooted belief system of the community.
P3	19	Male	Observer/Audience	Bihar	Shared a story about his great grandfather making one of the festival mask.
P4	49	Female	Stall Keeper	Bihar	Shared her perspective on participating in the festival as a female.
P5	36	Male	Tourist	Chehni Kothi	Explained that he has been staying in Chehni Kothi for the past 7 months for blogging and exploration. He shared his personal observations about the community's belief, their cautiousness around outsiders and history of the Chehni Kothi.
P6	28	Male	Observer/Audience	Beendi	Talked about the folklore associated with the festival.
P7	63	Male	Observer/Audience	Beendi	Provided an in depth explanation of the all rituals and ceremonies conducted over 4 days

STUDY AREA:

The study area focuses on the Banjar Valley, one of the five sub-division of Kullu District of Himachal Pradesh, India. It is located in the middle of the Himalayan Range at the geographical location of the area is latitude of 31.63° N and longitude of 77.35° E. While the Fagli festival is observed in several villages across Kullu like; Malana, Hallan, Chachogi, Soil, Duwara, Jana, Badagram, Fojal, Shaleen (मौलूराम ठाकुर, 2012) Tinder, Pekhari, Nahin, Dingcha, Sarchi, Faryadi, Tirthan valley, Chain Kothi, Jibhi, Bahu and Behlo (Manta, 2024) but this research focus specially on three villages within the Banjar Valley i.e. Chehni Kothi, Bihar and Beendi. The selection was carried out using the Convenience Sampling technique, due to the accessibility and convenience in February (considering snow), heritage significance of the region and its tourism acceptance and popularity.

SIGNIFICANCE AND PURPOSE:

Rural and tribal crafts in India remain strong because they serve important social, ritualistic, ceremonial, and cultural purposes. It's important to understand that what we consider 'art' in urban areas may not be viewed the same way by folk regions. For these communities, their crafts carry profound social, cultural, ritualistic, ceremonial, and symbolic meanings. Masks, for example, are often deeply connected to ceremonies with religious and social importance, such as funerary customs, fertility rites, or healing rituals. In some cases, masks are used in festive celebrations, dramatic performances, or to transfer folk knowledge from one generation to the next, passing down beliefs and traditions. They are also employed in reenactments of mythological events. Additionally, in certain regions, masks serve as protective devices in warfare. In tribal societies worldwide, each mask typically represents a deity, ancestral

spirit, totem, mythological figure, event, person, animal, or bird. So, these artifacts are much more than mere decorations; they carry significant significance for tribal communities (Thakur M. R., 1997).

This folk theater tradition in Kullu is not merely two or four centuries old. The divine beings are an integral part of Kullu's society. Thus, as ancient as the community itself, so is its deity-worship tradition—and consequently, its theatrical heritage. This tradition has been passed down through generations, embodying the spirit of folk culture. Another key aspect of Kullu's folk dramas is that their purpose is not solely entertainment. They are also instructional and ethical, playing a major role in shaping a devout and morally adept society (मौलूराम ठाकुर, 2012). Fagli is also one such folk celebration that act as a vehicle for the preservation of oral traditions, local myths, beliefs and rituals.

- **Agricultural renewal:**

The people of Kullu are primarily farmers. During the farming season, they are so engrossed in work that they do not even prefer to spend time on cooking, cleaning utensils, or preparing meals. There is a saying: "आऊ महीना शाढ़, चार मठिगले सत्तू रे मार, कोर्म कमोणा ध्याड़," (मौलूराम ठाकुर, 2012) which means, "The month of Ashadh has arrived, eat four large pieces of satttu and work all day." However, as soon as winter begins and valley is covered in the snow blanket and the people are free from farming duties, Kullu's people indulge themselves in art and entertainment to keep them busy, like sewing, weaving, handicraft and many other activities, among which, festivals and folk theater holds a special place. After the region spends 2-3 months in winter slumber, Fagli is celebrated to break the lethargy of the season and welcome spring with renewed energy and enthusiasm.

In the Banjar Valley of Kullu District, the Fagli festival has been celebrated since ancient times with the purpose of welcoming the spring season and seeking protection from the local deity for the upcoming crops and year. This festival marks the awakening of Vishnu-Narayan, the deity worshipped in the region, and the community prays for his renewed protection as the new season begins.

- **Protecting Against Negative Energies:**

According to local beliefs, the winter months of December, January and known as Posh Mahina are called 'Kala Mahina' in which the Gods rest or return to Devlok. There they do their annual ceremony in which the joys and sorrows of the coming year are shared among the gods (Rakhs-Khel (folk drama) of Kullu region, 2023). The Kala Mahina is considered as a season when the evil energies are believed to be most active. For this reason, many folk dramas and fairs with similar characteristics are organized during these days. These are known as Rakhs-Khel, i.e. games of demons. In these, obscene songs and obscene performances were showcased. The Kullu and Kinnaur regions of Himachal Pradesh are famous for this. On these occasions, apart from the traditional dance of the demons, such rituals are also performed which keep the memory of the demon king and the stories of victory of the gods over the demons safe and popular till date. People believe that before the human society flourished in this area, there was a reign of ghosts, spirits, demons, and monsters. To establish human society, the deities here had to struggle greatly to destroy them. Ultimately, when the demons were completely annihilated, the practice of these obscene plays began in bitter memory of their cruel and harsh atrocities. There were also many spirits and demons who had received permission from the deities to visit here at least

once a year in their illusory form, and when the gods return back to Devlok in Posh Mahina, these spirits take over the valley. Fagli is celebrated to overcome these Asuri Shakti (evil forces) as the Gods return in the month of Phagun. To scare off these evil spirits, people dress up in menacing costumes, attempting to appear more terrifying than the spirits themselves. If this tactic fails, they resort to using insults and abusive language, believing that Rakshasas (demons) cannot tolerate such abuse and will eventually flee.



Figure 2. *Performers dancing in circle around the deity while wearing ceremonial masks. Source: Photo taken by the author on February 14, 2024, in Chehni Kothi, Banjar Valley, Himachal Pradesh, India.*

- **Preservation of Folklore:**

Folklore is the way a community's means of expressing its culture, history and custom. The word "Folk" means a group of people, whereas "lore" means the knowledge and culture passed down from generation to generation across time. Folklore can be divided into three categories: material folklore, which includes handicrafts, items and tools; verbal folklore, which includes folktales, folk songs, stories, sayings, etc; and customary folklore, which includes the ways and practices of doing things (Propp, 1984). In the context of Fagli festival, folklore places a central role in preserving the traditions, stories and belief of the local communities. It combines material folklore like handmade costumes and wooden masks with verbal folklore of folk songs and stories, which are then coupled with the ritual and practices of customary folklore.

FOLKTALES AND MYTHOLOGICAL CONTEXT:

The festival's origins are unclear because they are not documented in any written records and over time its roots have become obscure. But it can be traced back to ancient rituals designed to honor deities and secure their blessings for agricultural prosperity. However, its essence is preserved through rituals and folktales pass down over centuries.

In a local folklore narrated by a local named Sushil from Chehni Kothi, Kullu, the Fagli festival is deeply intertwined with the story of a Devi who was once the *pathrani* (chief queen) of the deity Laxmi-Narayan, revered in the region. According to tradition, a wife was expected to eat only after her husband. However, the Devi, tired of waiting, decided to prepare badi³ for herself. She intended to eat it before her husband's return, hoping that he would not notice.

³ A simple local dish made from flour, water, and sugar. This dish was commonly consumed by pregnant women in the region to build strength.

Unfortunately, as she was eating, her husband, Laxmi-Narayan, arrived and caught her in the act. This breach of traditional customs provoked the deity's wrath, and he cursed her to be reincarnated in the Kalyuga (current age) with a grotesque form (kuroop), a mixture of human and demon, with an abnormally enlarged or disfigured breast area and a never-ending, grotesquely long tongue, which people would try in vain to cut but never succeed in doing so. This demon came to be known locally as "Banchuie," a name derived from "Ban," meaning forest, and "Chuie," referring to breast.

When Banchuie was reborn on earth in the Kalyuga, she began to live with a rakshasi pravity (demonic nature). However, Laxmi-Narayan, recognizing that she still possessed half-divine qualities, advised her to change her ways and work for the benefit of the people, suggesting that she could even be worshipped but she refused and began terrifying locals. To frighten her, people began celebrating Fagli.

The village of Dhaugi, in the Kullu region, where Laxmi-Narayan is believed to have first descended, became the initial site for the celebration of this festival. During Fagli, one person from each of the village's 60 families gathers together wearing masks, holding twigs and fire torch in their hands and performs a dance, culminating in the use of abusive language to scare off Banchuie. However, these tactics did not frighten Banchuie due to her dual nature as half-devi, half-rakshasi. Instead, she would choose one of the mask-bearers each year as her prey, instilling fear among the locals. Desperate for protection, the villagers sought help from Laxmi-Narayan, who arrived accompanied by another deity, represented by an iron stick known locally as "Grishnu" or Gatotgach. He ordered Grishnu to use his power to expel Banchuie from the region. Grishnu thrust his crowbar(sabbal) into the rock where she resided, hurling her into a river stream. Despite this, her terror persisted, and she continued to claim the life of one mask-bearer

each year during the festival. In response, Laxmi-Narayan devised a plan to protect the villagers. He instructed them to create a special mask dedicated solely to him and to perform a ritual of pranpratistha (infusion of life) for it. This mask was to be worn by the lead performer during the festival. He promised that whenever Banchuie approached to claim her victim, he would possess the person wearing the mask and drive her away. Since then, no mask-bearer has been harmed during the Fagli festival, and the tradition continues to be upheld across generations.

A similar story appears in the Bhavishya Purana, which states that during the reign of the protector king Prithu, a demoness named Thandha inflicted suffering on infants and began to eat them one by one. Then, according to the remedies suggested by sage Vasistha, on the full moon of Phalguna, all the boys gathered wood, twigs, and grass, lit a fire, and performed circumambulation while using abusive language and obscene behavior. At that time, the demoness Thandha fled from there (मौलूराम ठाकुर, 2012).

RITUALS AND CELEBRATION:

- **Celebration of Return:**

In many villages across Kullu, the Fagli festival takes place from early February to March. However, in each village where it is celebrated, the festivities typically last for 3-4 days. The festival marks its beginning from the temple of the deity. During Kala Mahina, all temple kapat (doors) are closed, symbolizing the Gods' deep meditation or departure to Devlok which are reopened to commemorate the deity's awakening or return. During this ceremony, all the gods recount their history, including where and how they god were born. In case he came from outside, how did he get here and what route did he take? What events happened on the way. What circumstances did he face after coming here. Where did he fight

which demon, messenger, monster or evil spirits. How they were suppressed and with what difficulty happiness, peace and prosperity were established in this region. This description is called 'Bharaya' (मौलूराम ठाकुर, 2012). The events which are mentioned orally in Bharaya are dramatically performed by these performers during the festival. The Deity then got out from the temple and ceremoniously sat in the middle of the village's common religious ground, surrounded by the people. Then the selected 5-6 performers dressed in grass-thatched clothes and masks appear before the gathered community. They begin dancing in circle around the deity as a mark of respect and joy as shown in Figure 1 and Figure 2. At every place, the masked characters are selected beforehand chosen using a chit system to ensure fairness and uphold the festival's communal spirit. They should be healthy and strong enough so that they can perform the act of jumping, running around skillfully.



Figure 3 Performers forming symbolic gestures during the Fagli dance. Source: Photo taken by the author on February 15, 2024, in Chehni Kothi, Banjar Valley, Himachal Pradesh, India.

- **Symbolic Performances:**

After completing a full circle, the performers move to a smaller adjacent ground to enact unique humorous and entertaining performances by jumping and dancing energetically. They add humor by using abusive language, making sexual gestures as depicted in Figure 3 or wrestling one another. This part of the performance is restricted to male viewers only. These performances are performed to scare away evil spirits, or perhaps the humor and mockery is used to lift the human spirit's and combat the negativity and gloom of winter. Then one by one these performers return from the smaller ground to the main ground. Each performer comes forward, embodies a specific form or character, completes a circle around the deity and then returns back to the small ground.

The performance begins with one performer coming forward as a male figure. After him, another performer comes as a female figure. Next, the two performers return together, showing the reunion of Purusha and Prakriti. Then, three performers arrive, with two taking on the roles of animals while the third, acting as a human, symbolizing the domestication of animals by society. Finally, all five performers appear together. One leads the group, scattering seeds as they move, while the next three, in the formation of oxen or bulls, represent the plowing of fields. The last performer walks behind them, guiding the plowing process. This act narrates the origins of life and the deity's role in shaping the world. Once all five performers gather in the main ground, they remove their masks and place them before the deity submitting their masked identity and ego to the divine will. The performers are then honored with floral crowns.

- **Community Dance**

After honoring the performers, the entire village, including the deity, joins the performers in a traditional dance as can be seen in Figure 4. Hand in hand, they move in a circle, singing traditional songs filled with humor and abuses. During the festival, performers are believed to be possessed by the spirits, enhancing the energy of the dances with music and atmosphere. Therefore, the Gur⁴ of the deity is always ready and if someone jumps and dances too much, he calms him down. The Dance involves completing seven full rounds, creating a lively and joyous atmosphere. The same rituals are performed for three consecutive days in different villages. Each village has its unique mask designs that reflect the artisans' distinct styles.



Figure 4 Deity Dances with Fagli Performers and Villagers. *Photo captured by the author on 13 February 2024, in Chehni Kothi, Banjar Valley, Himachal Pradesh, India*

⁴ The representative of the deity through whom the deity communicates (Pahari-Hindi Shabdkosh, 1989)

- **Songs and Abuses:**

A unique tradition during the Fagli festival involves locals exchanging insults and abusive language, which might seem strange to outsiders. However, the locals explain that this ritual has a specific purpose: it allows people to release the frustrations and stress that have built up during the long winter months. The deity is believed to permit this behavior during the festival so that spring can be welcomed with joy and a lighter spirit. The abusive language is incorporated into traditional songs, which have evolved melodically over time when paired up with rhythmic sound and beats of *Dhol*⁵, *Nagara*⁶ *Karnal*⁷ and *Narsingha*⁸. The songs sung during Fagli often contain sexual remarks and plenty of abuses, rooted in the belief that while the Nirlep Devtas (pure deities) are unaffected by such language due to their detached nature on the other hand, the Rakshasas are bound by stricter customs and cannot endure insults, prompting them to leave the place. To those unfamiliar with the local language, these songs might sound like harmless tunes with beautiful melodies, masking the deeper, more expressive content that serves as an emotional outlet for the community. In addition to the exchange of abusive or sexual remarks, selected performers at the Fagli festival also engage in sexual performances that are exclusively attended by males, with females barred from these ceremonies.

⁵ Double-sided drum

⁶ Traditional Indian kettledrum.

⁷ A traditional large, straight brass trumpet, over a meter long.

⁸ S-shaped metal trumpet also known as Ransingha

ARTISTRY:



Figure 5 Mask bearer wearing a grass-thatched, draped with a Kulluvi Pattu shawl.. Source: Photo captured by the author on 14 February 2024, in Bihar Village, Banjar Valley, Himachal Pradesh, India

In the traditional Fagli festival of Kullu, masks play a significant role. In Kullu region, the mask is called Khepra (खेपरा⁹). When masks are used in Haran or Swang dramas, they are called Mala-ra-Khepara. In Saraj region, they are called Mandiala (मौलूराम ठाकुर, 2012) and other regions called Dhalyare, and Reeshe (SHARMA, 2022). These masks serve as a form of disguise, worn over or in front of the face during the dance to conceal the identity of the person wearing them and to portray a different character. The performers use centuries old Kheparas preserved in every temple for the ceremony. The specialty of masks is to be terrifying and strange. Even if the mask is shown laughing, it still creates fear. Usually it has the same appearance as that of a messenger, ghost or demon whom the god has killed in the past.

⁹ खेपरा – मुखौटा (Pahari-Hindi Shabdkosh, 1989)

- **Process of Making Fagli Masks:**

The process of making a Fagli mask begins with the selection of wood. The choice of materials is often influenced by the availability of resources in the Banjar Valley, where trees are abundant. Where walnut wood and Khardu tree wood is typically chosen due to its durability. Kharshu wood is more durable and lasts longer than any other wood. The locals refer to 'Kharshu' as '*Pathar Boota*' i.e. stone tree. It is believed that if this wood is not burned, it will remain as safe as stone. After selecting the wood, the carving process starts using simple tools like chisels, hammers, and knives. This stage involves creating distinct anthropomorphic features like elongated eyes, long noses, and boxed teeth, somewhere resembling the Mokras (deities) of Himachal Pradesh (Supertramp, 2019). To wear these masks during the Fagli dance, holes are provided through which ropes or threads can be passed. This allows the masks to be secured to frames during processions or directly to the dancers' heads. Once carved, the mask undergoes polishing and smoothing to prepare it for painting and decoration. Patterns are painted on the mask's cheeks and around its eyes, followed by adding decorative elements like feathers, flowers, and other accessories. Goat and sheep hair are often used to craft features like mustaches and hair, giving the mask a lifelike appearance. Male masks often include carved moustaches (Figure 7), while female masks may have earrings, carved tiaras, and pendant, adding intricate details to the masks and marked as a unity between man and his natural environment. Finally, the mask is blessed by the local deities, infusing it with spiritual significance, and is then used in ceremonial performances. The masks are typically worn along with a grass-thatched costume called Cholu, covered with a Kulluvi Shawl called Pattu as shown in Figure 5, completing the traditional attire for the dance. The costume is mainly have a special grass called '*Royal*'.

Fagli masks are usually larger than other types of Himalayan masks and are characterized by exquisite carvings by the traditional artist. Each mask carries a powerful and mysterious emotion of the craftsman who designed and worked on the mask. There is such freedom taken in the designs of these masks that you won't find any mask similar to another (Supertramp, 2019).



Figure 6 Male Fagli mask from Chehni Kothi. Source: Photo captured by the author on 15 February 2024, in Chehni Kothi, Banjar Valley, Himachal Pradesh, India



Figure 7 Male Fagli mask from Beendi. Source: Photo captured by the author on 14 February 2024, in Beendi Village, Banjar Valley, Himachal Pradesh, India

During research, it was noted that masks from different villages like Cheni Kothi and Bendi had distinct designs. The masks from the Chehni Kothi tend to be more vibrant, colorful, with stylized patterns drawn on the cheeks and around the eyes and heavily ornamented. Pigments in orange, white, and red are applied to carved strips on the forehead, adding vibrancy to the masks (figure 7). While Bendi masks (Figure 6) are simpler, with smaller forehead, a long-pointed nose, and beards painted rather than created with materials. These variations highlight the rich diversity of local craftsmanship.

CHALLENGES:

The Fagli faces several challenges that threaten its continuity. The festival is predominantly male-oriented, and most activities are performed and celebrated by men. Women are often seen sitting on rooftops or balconies to maintain a specific distance from the events reflecting gender biases. Furthermore, the caste system also influences participation, with specific roles assigned to different castes. Another significant challenge lies in the limited documentation and academic study of the festival. The lack of written records and literature makes it difficult for researchers to analyze its origins and evolution comprehensively. Additionally, locals often hesitate to discuss the festival due to its perceived vulgarity and the belief that openly talking about it might invoke bad luck or even a curse from the deity.

CONCLUSION:

Through the lens of this research, it becomes evident that Fagli is more than a celebratory event, it embodies a living philosophy deeply rooted with the belief and practices of the community. It symbolizes the triumph of good over evil, where evil often metaphorically representing the lethargy and stagnation of the harsh winter month, while good heralds the arrival of spring and renewal. The act of wearing masks during the festival is not merely a performative tradition but a profound ritual of transformation, offering the participants a sense of liberation from their everyday identities and societal constraints, allowing them to embody roles or emotions that might not be socially permissible otherwise. It also serves as a living canvas for oral traditions, preserving cultural folklores and storytelling. By understanding and preserving such indigenous practices, we not only honour cultural heritage but also enrich our understanding of human creativity. Additionally, these traditions hold immense potential for promoting sustainable tourism, which can uplift the living conditions of the community while ensuring the authenticity and continuity of their customs.

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