



UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage Ramman: Garhwal, Uttarakhand



The Ramman is a religious festival and ritual theatre of the Garhwal Himalayas. It is annually held at Saloor Dungra village, in the Painkhanda Valley of Chamoli district of Uttarakhand. It is an endangered cultural heritage that is being performed as an offering to the village deity, Bhumiya Devta, in the courtyard of the temple. The Ramman is not replicated or performed at any other site in the Himalayas, being specific to both location and time. Historical accounts of the preexisting tradition have been available since 1911.

Ramman commences either on the 9th or the 11th day after Baisakhi. Throughout this festival rituals are performed, the local epic of Lord Rama is sung and masked dances depicting different aspects of everyday life are enacted. Beginning with the invocation to Ganesh, the remover of obstacles, performances move on to include other deities and characters. Another important aspect of the performance is the singing of the Jagar, a form of musical rendition of local legends. These performances are meant not only to propitiate the deities, but the deities actually appear as the dramatis personae in the performances with specific roles.

The family, where Bhumiya Devta resides for a year has to maintain a strict daily routine. A place in the house is demarcated and consecrated for the deity where the family head performs rituals.

Bhandaris belong to the Kshatriya caste from the Saloor village, and play a specific hereditary role in the festival. Bhandaris have the exclusive right to wear the sacred mask of Narsingh Devta (their main deity) during the performance.

Villagers from Saloor-Dungra are the main bearers of Ramman tradition and the organizers and financiers of the festival. All households from the twin villages offer prayers and perform rituals to the main deities of the Ramman.

History states-

Ramman is an agrarian festival in celebration of ties between man, nature and the divine. Maize and barley seeds, sprouted in ritual pots, are offered to Bhumiya Devta who, in turn, promises prosperity to all, including agricultural yield and forest produce.



Following are the roles allocated to particular people, caste or professional groups from the villages for the performance:

- Performers of Ramman: Talented youth and elders are selected by village heads.
- Priests are from the Brahmin caste that perform temple rituals, prepare and serve *prasada* (food offerings) to the deity.
- *Baaris* are responsible for the organization, including fund collection, worship, etc.
- *Dhaaris* are 10-12 people assisting the *baaris* in organizing the event.
- Gram panchas are heads of the village who assign duties to the *baaris* and *dhaaris*.
- Panchas assess the performance of the *baaris* and elect them for the next year in a review meeting. They also select the residence of the Bhumiya Devta till the next Ramman festival.

Make-up of Artists

The Ramman performance involves use of masks and make-up using sheep's wool, honey, vermilion, wheat flour, oil, turmeric, soot and locally grown plants and vegetables. Masks are made from wood of local trees and this involves lengthy rituals.



... to the accompaniment of flutes and cymbals.

Musical Aspect

Drumming Tradition: The performance revolves around playing of drums by Das drummers from the lowest caste, whose status is elevated during the performance.

Jagar Tradition: *Jagaris* or Bhallas of Rajput caste are professional bards and sing oral epics and legends (Jagars).

Community Feasts

The festival ends with a feast where the *prasada* of the deity is distributed as sacrament.

In the Hindu month, Baisakh (April-May), on the *sankranti* day, Bhumiyal Devta comes out in a procession to the temple. On the second day of the festival, people offer *hariyali* (sprouted barley plants), to the deity, which has ecological reference. Every day, the Bhumiyal Devta takes a round of the village.

The main components of the masked performance are as follows:

Celestial Aspect

Dance of Ganesh-Kalinka (Parvati)

The dance of Sun God: Enactment of creation-myth and birth of Brahma and Ganesh.

Bur Deva (Narad): Rani- Radhika dance.

Bur Deva Raja dances along with Gopi Chand (Sri Krishna) and Rani Radhika (Gopis) on different beats and gestures.

Mwar-Mwarin Dance: The dance shows the travails of the buffalo herders in their hazardous journey through the jungle to the hills. A tiger is shown attacking and injuring the Mwar.

Baniya-Baniyain Nritya (Dance of the Trader-Couple): It shows hardships of the common people. The episode shows robbers attacking and looting the merchant couple.



Performance

The performance then shifts towards the enactment of the local Ramkatha, the core Rama story. Episodes from Rama's life are sung. The dance is performed on 18 different beats yielding a total 324 beats and steps.

The episodes enacted and sung are:

Ram-Lakshman's visit to Janakpur

Sita's Swyamwar

Hanuman Milan (Meeting with Hanuman)

Swarna Mrig Vadh (killing of the Golden deer)

Sita Haran (Abduction of Sita)

Lanka Dahan (Burning of Lanka)

Raj Tilak (Coronation)

There are other dances and episodes like Maal Nritya, Koorjogi and Narsingh Pattar Nritya.

Maal artists are four in number, two red and two white, respectively representing the Gorkhas and the Garhwalis. It is mandatory to have a red Maal from the Kunwar caste of the Rot hamlet, Saloor village, as it is believed that this hamlet supported the Gorkhas. The other three are selected by the Gram Panchas. One white Maal each is chosen from the twin villages and the remaining red Maal comes from village Dungra.



The festival is a source of oral transmission of various components of heritage and is a cultural asset of the region and it has a history of more than hundred years. This is an oral tradition and one has to adopt different mechanisms to preserve and promote this art. There is no school or college or established institution, which teaches this tradition. It still follows the format of the traditional

mode of the local *samajik parampara* (face to face societal transmission). Given its oral character, the responsibility of transmission is shouldered by the community elders. Therefore the preservation of this form requires immediate attention from the community and the State. Some initiative is being taken at the level of local cultural groups, charitable and religious organizations and non-Government Organizations to protect and rejuvenate popular consciousness about this valuable form.

IGNCA for the last two years has been continuously working for the revitalization of this tradition with constant support from the community. Mr. Kushal Singh Bhandari is one the most important representatives of the twin villages. His family has a specific hereditary ritual role in the Ramman. Through his tireless efforts he managed to convince the community, priests and Gram Panchas about the importance of sending this art form to the representative list of UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage and obtain their consent for the same. Gram Panchayat is the elected representative body and their consent represents the consent by the entire community.

Activity-

1. Uttarakhand is known for its colourful costumes. Tell us about the traditional costumes of your community.

Reference- <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/ramman-religious-festival-and-ritual-theatre-of-the-garhwal-himalayas-india-00281>
<https://www.euttarakhand.com/ramman-festival-of-garhwal>