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# Ritual Participation, Cultural Belonging and Perceived Psychosocial Well-Being in the Garhwal Himalaya: A Community Study of Paatbeeda Dali Kauthig

Deepak Dobhal[1*], Manish Kumar Jaisal[2], Rajendra Singh Negi[3]

[1*] Research Scholar, Department of Journalism & Mass Communication, ITM University, Gwalior, India
[2]Assistant Professor, Department of Journalism & Mass Communication ITM University Gwalior, India, mjaisal2@gmail.com ( Orchid ID- 0009-0003-2938-1724 )
[3]Associate Professor, Department of Applied & Interdisciplinary Studies, Shri Guru Ram Rai University, Dehradun, Uttarakhand, India (Orchid ID- 0009-0005-0798-3817)

**ABSTRACT**

Background: Community rituals in the Central Himalaya bring together religious practice, landscape, kinship and people dispersed by migration. Their perceived psychosocial significance remains poorly documented. Objective: To examine reported experiences of mental peace, social connection and ritual memory associated with the 2023 Paatbeeda Dali Kauthig at Kweeli, and to contextualise these responses through the first author's field engagement beginning in 2023. Methods: An exploratory, observational community study combined contextual field observations and photographic documentation from 2023 with an anonymous, retrospective questionnaire collected in October 2026. Fifty electronic records were received; 45 contained affirmative research consent and were eligible for analysis. Frequencies and item-specific percentages were calculated. Results: Among 44 respondents answering the mental-peace question, 42 (95.5%) described a positive effect. Forty-four of 45 (97.8%) reported feeling very good when meeting family or relatives, and 42 of 45 (93.3%) recalled happiness or peace lasting for a considerable time after returning home. Six of 45 (13.3%) reported discomfort or could not recall whether discomfort occurred, including five who identified crowding or personal/social reasons. Conclusions: Within this self-selected sample, Paatbeeda was remembered as a valued setting for devotion, reunion and perceived well-being. These descriptive, retrospective reports do not demonstrate clinical benefit or causal mental-health effects.

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Garhwal Himalaya; Nanda Devi; community ritual; cultural heritage; social connectedness; perceived well-being; migration

## 1. Introduction

In the Garhwal Himalaya, ritual life is situated within networks of deity devotion, local ecological knowledge, intergenerational obligation and movement between mountain settlements and distant workplaces. The relationship between sacred performance and well-being cannot be reduced to a question of therapeutic efficacy. A ritual can also provide a recognisable occasion for return, shared attention, collective participation and renewed familiarity with place. These experiences matter especially in communities whose members work away from their home villages.

Research on Garhwali sound and performance has described the mobility of local cultural forms and their role in evoking place across distance (Fiol, 2018), while photographic ethnography of goddess worship in Rudraprayag documents the intimacy of devotional relations in lived village settings (Gairola and Ranganathan, 2023). Work on ritual performance and public representation further cautions against treating village practice as merely staged folklore (Polit, 2013). Building on these perspectives, the present paper considers the Paatbeeda Dali Kauthig as a culturally specific social event, rather than as a standardised medical intervention.

The research questions were: (1) how did consenting participants retrospectively describe the event and its relationship to perceived mental peace; (2) what roles did devotion and family reunion occupy in these descriptions; and (3) how might the first author's sustained contact with the community help interpret the event in the context of migration and ritual memory?

**CONTACT** Deepak Dobhal: journodeepak@gmail.com

## 2. Cultural and environmental setting

The 2023 Paatbeeda Dali Kauthig was held in the setting of the Maa Nanda Devi temple at Kweeli village, Rudraprayag district, Uttarakhand. The celebration was locally described as returning after approximately 17 years. A decorated ritual tree or pole, collective worship, musical and performative activity, and gatherings across village and kinship networks formed part of the occasion. The mountain landscape is not treated here as a pharmacological resource; rather, it constitutes the lived ecological and cultural setting in which community traditions are sustained.

Photographs taken during the event show a raised decorated ritual structure, large gatherings, movement through the temple precinct, and community interaction. The supplied local souvenir pages discuss Nanda Devi through the idiom of daughterhood, kinship and farewell, providing a locally situated account of ritual meaning. The souvenir's title, editor, publisher and August 2023 publication date are identified from its supplied title and imprint pages; it is used as a locally produced primary source rather than independent historical verification. Claims about the precise age and frequency of the tradition should therefore be read as local accounts.

The first author reports that many attendees had migrated for work to metropolitan centres, including Delhi and Mumbai. The event brought some of them back temporarily, after which they returned to employment and ordinary responsibilities. Subsequent encounters suggested that the ritual remained a meaningful reference point for some people. These are field-based interpretive observations, not independently measured migration statistics or systematic longitudinal outcome assessments.

## 3. Materials and methods

### 3.1 Design and positionality

This exploratory observational study began with the first author's participation and field engagement during the August 2023 celebration and continued through informal community contact. The structured questionnaire was administered retrospectively in October 2026. Deepak Dobhal was an insider-participant observer who personally attended and photographed the event. His access provided cultural familiarity while also introducing potential interpretive and recruitment bias. The other authors contributed to conceptual framing, literature engagement, analysis and writing. No controlled intervention, clinical assessment or prospective pre/post measurement was undertaken.

### 3.2 Recruitment, consent and dataset

The questionnaire was distributed within village and relatives' networks to individuals described by the field researcher as having attended the 2023 event. Sampling was non-probability, network-based and voluntary. The exported CSV contains 50 submission records; 45 explicitly selected the anonymous research-consent option and were included. Five without affirmative recorded consent were excluded from all analysis. Attendance was reported by the recruiting researcher but was not independently validated through an item in the exported questionnaire. Responses were anonymous as represented in the consent statement. One eligible respondent skipped the mental-peace item; therefore that item has n=44, while other analysed substantive items have n=45.

### 3.3 Instrument and analysis

The Hindi-language questionnaire asked about reason for attendance, event experience, mental peace, reunion with relatives, discomfort, comparison with ordinary days, the meaning of peace, post-event feelings, perceived generalisability and intention to attend again. The exported instrument used single-choice categorical responses, rather than a validated psychiatric or quality-of-life scale. Descriptive counts and percentages were calculated using the non-missing denominator for each item. No inferential testing was attempted because of the sampling method and small subgroup sizes. The survey is a retrospective snapshot collected roughly three years after the event, not a longitudinal panel.

### 3.4 Documentary photographs and ethics

Three photographs selected from the first author's field documentation illustrate the event setting and collective participation; they are not evidence of psychological outcomes. The authors confirm that the necessary permissions for publication of the included photographs were obtained. Survey participation was voluntary and only affirmative-consent responses were analysed.

# 4. Results

### 4.1 Respondent characteristics

| Characteristic | Response | n / valid (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Age | 35–44 | 13/45 (28.9%) |
| Age | 45–54 | 13/45 (28.9%) |
| Age | 25–34 | 10/45 (22.2%) |
| Age | 18–24 | 6/45 (13.3%) |
| Age | 55–64 | 2/45 (4.4%) |
| Age | 65 या अधिक | 1/45 (2.2%) |
| Gender | पुरुष | 29/45 (64.4%) |
| Gender | महिला | 15/45 (33.3%) |
| Gender | बताना नहीं चाहते | 1/45 (2.2%) |

Among 45 consenting participants, 29 identified as men, 15 as women and one preferred not to disclose gender. Twenty-six were aged 35–54 years. The sample cannot be assumed to represent the age, gender or migration distribution of all attendees.

### 4.2 Reasons, perceived mental peace and reunion

### 4.2 Reason for attendance (valid n=45)

| Original Hindi response category | Count | Percent of valid |
|---|---|---|
| मां नंदा देवी के प्रति श्रद्धा के कारण | 32 | 71.1% |
| गाँव की परंपरा में भाग लेने | 12 | 26.7% |
| अन्य कारण | 1 | 2.2% |

### 4.3 Experience during the event (valid n=45)

| Original Hindi response category | Count | Percent of valid |
|---|---|---|
| बहुत सकारात्मक असर पड़ा | 43 | 95.6% |
| कह नहीं सकता/सकती | 2 | 4.4% |

### 4.4 Effect on mental peace (valid n=44)

| Original Hindi response category | Count | Percent of valid |
|---|---|---|
| बहुत सकारात्मक असर पड़ा | 40 | 90.9% |
| थोड़ा सकारात्मक असर पड़ा | 2 | 4.5% |
| कह नहीं सकता/सकती | 2 | 4.5% |

Forty of 44 selected “very positive effect”, two selected “somewhat positive effect”, and two could not say. The resulting 42/44 positive responses refer to self-reported mental peace, not a clinically assessed outcome.

### 4.5 Meeting relatives (valid n=45)

| Original Hindi response category | Count | Percent of valid |
|---|---|---|
| बहुत अच्छा लगा | 44 | 97.8% |
| कोई खास फर्क नहीं पड़ा | 1 | 2.2% |

### .6 Discomfort (valid n=45)

| Original Hindi response category | Count | Percent of valid |
|---|---|---|
| नहीं, बिल्कुल नहीं | 39 | 86.7% |
| हाँ, भीड़ के कारण | 3 | 6.7% |
| हाँ, किसी सामाजिक या व्यक्तिगत कारण से | 2 | 4.4% |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| याद नहीं | 1 | 2.2% |

A minority reported discomfort: three respondents attributed it to crowding and two to social/personal reasons; one could not remember. The inclusion of these responses is important because an exclusively celebratory account would obscure variation in experience.

**4.7 Comparison with ordinary days (valid n=45)**

| Original Hindi response category | Count | Percent of valid |
|---|---|---|
| बहुत अधिक आनंददायक | 35 | 77.8% |
| तुलना नहीं कर सकता/सकती | 5 | 11.1% |
| कुछ अधिक आनंददायक | 4 | 8.9% |
| लगभग समान | 1 | 2.2% |

**4.8 Meaning of mental peace (valid n=45)**

| Original Hindi response category | Count | Percent of valid |
|---|---|---|
| देवी के प्रति श्रद्धा से सुकून मिलना | 17 | 37.8% |
| मन में खुशी और संतोष होना | 13 | 28.9% |
| परिवार और समाज से जुड़ाव महसूस होना | 8 | 17.8% |
| चिंता और तनाव कम होना | 6 | 13.3% |
| अन्य अर्थ | 1 | 2.2% |

**4.9 Feelings after returning home (valid n=45)**

| Original Hindi response category | Count | Percent of valid |
|---|---|---|
| काफी समय तक खुशी या शांति बनी रही | 42 | 93.3% |
| थकान या तनाव महसूस हुआ | 1 | 2.2% |
| कुछ समय तक अच्छा लगा | 1 | 2.2% |
| अब ठीक से याद नहीं | 1 | 2.2% |

The category “happiness or peace remained for a considerable time” is a recalled subjective assessment. It does not establish duration in days, months or years, and should not be treated as measured longitudinal persistence.

**4.10 Whether everyone benefits (valid n=45)**

| Original Hindi response category | Count | Percent of valid |
|---|---|---|
| हाँ, अधिकांश लोगों को | 25 | 55.6% |
| हर व्यक्ति का अनुभव अलग होता है | 17 | 37.8% |
| कुछ लोगों को मिलती है | 1 | 2.2% |
| कह नहीं सकता/सकती | 1 | 2.2% |
| नहीं, जरूरी नहीं | 1 | 2.2% |

**4.11 Willingness to attend again (valid n=45)**

| Original Hindi response category | Count | Percent of valid |
|---|---|---|
| निश्चित रूप से | 43 | 95.6% |
| शायद हाँ | 1 | 2.2% |
| निश्चित नहीं | 1 | 2.2% |

## 5. Field observations and photographic documentation

The first author's participation in 2023 provided direct observation of an event in which religious action, social gathering and return migration were visibly intertwined. The ritual's temporal concentration contrasts with the continuing relevance attributed to it during later informal encounters. Several contacts reportedly spoke of the celebration as an unusually important, perhaps unrepeatable, experience in their lifetimes. Without contemporaneous interview transcripts or systematic follow-up records, these statements are used to inform interpretation rather than to generate participant quotations, numerical prevalence estimates or formal longitudinal themes.



Figure 1. Decorated ritual structure and participants within the Himalayan landscape during the 2023 Paatbeeda Dali Kauthig (field photograph supplied by Deepak Dobhal).



Figure 2. Ritual activity and communal gathering in the temple precinct during the 2023 event (field photograph supplied by Deepak Dobhal).



Figure 3. Community presence and the spatial setting of the celebration (field photograph supplied by Deepak Dobhal).

## 6. Discussion

### 6.1 Devotion, social connectedness and perceived well-being

The distribution of questionnaire responses suggests that participants commonly remembered the event in positive terms. Yet the meaning of "mental peace" was not uniform: respondents associated it with devotion, happiness and satisfaction, family and community belonging, or reduced worry. This heterogeneity argues against interpreting the response as a single psychological mechanism. It also helps explain why the questionnaire's near-universal reports of enjoyable reunion should not be conflated with treatment efficacy.

### 6.2 Migration, place and ritual memory

The event's apparent importance to returning migrants is consistent with scholarship on Garhwali expressive culture and the emotional significance of place across distance (Fiol, 2018). A gathering may create a temporary social concentration of people whose ordinary lives unfold elsewhere. The first author's post-2023 encounters suggest that remembered participation can remain salient after return migration, but the present survey does not quantify participants' place of residence, migration histories or subsequent contacts. Migration therefore remains a grounded contextual interpretation rather than a tested statistical predictor.

### 6.3 Implications for natural resources and human health

The study is relevant to the wider relationship between Himalayan cultural landscapes, intangible heritage and perceived human well-being. The ritual depends on a place-based relationship with the mountain environment, a shared sacred site and communal stewardship of traditions. Nevertheless, no medicinal plant, natural product, nutritional exposure or physiological endpoint was evaluated. Its relevance to a natural-resources-and-health journal lies in culturally embedded understandings of health within a lived landscape, and journal editors may reasonably determine that the paper is outside a more biomedical or natural-product-focused remit.

### 6.4 Alternative explanations and adverse experience

Self-selection, pre-existing devotion, reunion with loved ones, and favourable recall could all contribute to positive responses. The survey does not distinguish their independent contributions. Some participants reported crowding or personal discomfort, and a small number were uncertain about the psychological effect. These minority experiences are integral to interpretation. The findings describe how a particular respondent group remembered an event; they do not establish that attending the ritual caused an improvement relative to not attending.

## 7. Strengths and limitations

Strengths include a clearly identified local event, sustained first-author field engagement since 2023, documentary photographs, voluntary survey participation, and transparent item-level denominators. The study uses a voluntary, network-recruited sample rather than a representative sample of all attendees. Accounts collected after the 2023 event may be affected by recall and social desirability biases. Attendance was not independently validated by a separate questionnaire item, and one participant did not answer the mental-peace question. No validated clinical well-being scale, baseline comparison, control group, or systematically measured longitudinal outcomes were available. Accordingly, the findings describe participants' perceived experiences and enduring ritual associations, not clinical treatment effects or causal changes in mental health.

## 8. Conclusion

In a network-recruited sample of 45 consenting respondents who were described as participants in the 2023 Paatbeeda Dali Kauthig, recalled experiences were predominantly positive. Devotion, family reunion and belonging emerged as salient dimensions of reported mental peace. Field engagement since 2023 suggests that the event also offers a meaningful occasion for people living away from their home village to renew ties with place and community. These findings support further culturally sensitive research on ritual participation and perceived psychosocial well-being, while providing no evidence that the ritual is a clinically effective psychiatric treatment.

## 9. Declarations

Research ethics and permissions: Participation in the questionnaire was voluntary, and only responses with recorded affirmative research consent were analysed. The authors confirm that permissions required for the included documentary photographs and field materials have been obtained. No claim of institutional ethics committee approval or exemption is made in this manuscript.

Consent to participate: Forty-five of the 50 submitted records contained affirmative research consent and were included in analysis; the remaining five were excluded.

Consent for publication: The authors confirm that publication permissions for the included documentary photographs have been obtained.

Conflict of interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Funding: No funding information was reported.

Data availability: The response-level CSV is held by the research team. A de-identified dataset may be made available subject to participant consent, privacy considerations and institutional policy.

Author contributions: Deepak Dobhal: conceptualisation, field investigation from 2023, event photography, community engagement, recruitment, data collection, contextual interpretation and writing. Manish Kumar Jaisal: theoretical framework, literature review, methodological interpretation, manuscript drafting and critical revision. Rajendra Singh Negi: interdisciplinary framework, literature synthesis, interpretation and critical revision.

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