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NANDA RAJ JAT IN UTTARAKHAND HIMALAYA: COMMENCEMENT WITH ANNUAL KURUR JAT, AFFINED NARRATIVES AND SIGNIFICANCE

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ABSTRACT

Nanda Devi, also known by the name Gaura, Parvati, Bhagwati, Ambika, is the most revered and sacred deity in Uttarakhand state. Different festivals and Jats organized every year to pay love and devotion to Nanda devi. At present innumerable devotees from different states and countries take part in jats and festivals. The present paper is an attempt to explore the world famous twelve yearly festival Nanda Raj-Jat. It comprises the myths, rituals, narratives affined to Nanda Devi Raj Jat. Describes the Annual KururJat, its significance and conclude with the significance of Nanda Raj Jat

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Nanda Devi: a short Introduction

Nanda Devi is the most reverend and venerated deity in Uttarakhand. Her propitiation is done in so many forms. She is known as Gaura, Uma, Bhagwati, Parvati, Ambika, Hemwati. She is the consort of Lord Shiva. Sherman Oakley in his book '*Holy Himalaya: The Religion, Traditions and Scenery of a Himalayn province (Kumaun and Garhwal)*' says-"Nanda Devi is a favourite goddess in Kumaun". Mythological tales said that once DakshaPrajapati (father of Parvati) organized a religious function and invited sages and all deities except Lord Shiva. Parvati asked for permission but did not get permission to attend the function. But she obdurately went to attend the function at which she has to face bad comments about Lord Shiva. As a result, Devi jumped into the havankund. Lord Shiva came there and took her body on his shoulders. He started journey with the body of Devi and the operating system of this universe disrupted. Shivji became delirious and now it had become necessary to separate her body from Lord Shiva. Different parts of her body fell at different places, each one of

which came to be known, later as 'Shakti Peeths'. Parvati again took birth from the womb of Mainawati (wife of sage Hemant in Rissasau) as Nanda Devi and married to Lord Shiva. Bill Aitken in his book '*The Nanda Devi Affair*' says-'Although Nanda Devi is the wife of Lord Shiva and not immediately recognizable as Lakshmi, the consort of Vishnu.'

The inhabitants of Garhwal and Kumaun deify Nanda Devi as daughter and sister. According to Dr. Shuiv Prasad Naithani- "In Garhwal and Kumaun the name Nanda for Uma Parvati is more in Practice". The folktales and folklores explore her as daughter. She is the family deity of the descendents of the erstwhile kings of Garhwal and Kumaun. She is loved, reverend and venerated as daughter. Nanda Raj Jat is perhaps the result of this endearment, reverence and adoration. Annual Jats and twelve yearly Raj jat celebrates to pay revere, adoration to Nanda Devi.

Different Narratives in Garhwal and Kumaun

There are so many narratives about Nanda

Devi in Uttarakhand. These narratives are varying from one place to another. Narratives of Nauti Nanda Devi temple are quite different from the narratives of Almora Nanda Devi temple. One of the famous narratives of Nanda Devi at Nauti temple is about Hemant Rishi, the father of Nanda Devi. Nanda Bhagwati is the daughter of Hemant Rishi who lived at Ressayau. Hemant Rishi is looking for an ideal husband for Bhagwati Nanda but Bhagwati Nanda wants to marry Shiv Shankar who lives in Kailash Himalaya. Nanda, being rigid, marry with Shiv Shankar and move towards her husband's home at Kailasha. She lives in Kailasha but after some time she commemorates her natal place Ressayau, her parents and friends. She thinks again and again and she wants to go there to meet her parents and friends.

The other narrative of Nauti Nanda Devi temple reveals a quite different fact that Maa Nanda is the daughter of King Bhanupratap of Chandpurgarhi. She has a sister named Balampha. Once, Nanda Devi saw a strange dream about her sister Balampha and brother-in-law king Jasdhola. Then she makes a desire to visit her sister in Kannauj. She moves towards the kingdom of Kannauj. She meets queen Balampha there and for checking her sister queen Balampha's love for her, Devi puts a demand in front of her sister. This demand is about the kingdom of Kannauj. Queen Balampha refuses Devi's demand and replies that she cannot give her kingdom and she can wish for anything else. Suddenly, Nanda Devi becomes invisible. Then the kingdom of Kannauj was dissipated by the curse of her sister Nanda Devi. After demonstration of the fact that Nanda Devi's curse was fallen upon the kingdom of Kannauj queen Balampha and king Jasdhola asks a priest for remedy and solution. The priest suggests that they have to go in a trip to Nanda Devi and then only this curse will be dissolved.

One of the famous narratives in Kumaun is that Nanda Devi was the sister of King Bharti Chand (king from Chand dynasty). Once she was walking outside with her friends and suddenly a buffalo came there and she ran away from there with friends. She hides behind banana leaf. But again destiny plays a pivotal role and a goat came there

and ate the banana leaf. Buffalo devoured the little goddess Nanda Devi and the nature became diabolic. Then Chand Raja started the Nanda annual festival for the peace of his sister's soul.

Annual Jats and Annual Festival

In respect of Maa Nanda different kinds of festival, fairs and jats have been organizing for many years. It is said that Maa Nanda herself appeared and took existence in the festival and jats blessed the people with her boon. In Garhwal region annual jats have been organizing for many years. As per folk lore, Mainawati (wife of sage Hemant Rishi) had seven daughters. The youngest one was Nanda. She was married to Lord Shankar. Twelve years had left yet her parents had not cared for her. In fury she called her father and her tears fell down on earth. As a result, a heavy gale of curse fell upon the land of Hemant Rishi. He asked Narad Muni and he suggested paying a visit to Nanda in Kailash and persuading her. From that time Annual Nanda Jat has been celebrating every year to pay love, adoration and revere to Nanda Devi. Twelve yearly Nanda Raj Jat is organized after the invitation of Annual KururJat.

Kurur annual jat held every year in the month of Bhado (August-Sep). Incomputable devotees take part in this sanctified jat of belief. Expert local artisans prepare Chantolis (parasols) and baskets. Bamboo baskets are for keeping gifts for Nanda Devi and Chantolis are for priests. They keep together the parasols in the procession. Before the commencement of the jatyatra religious rituals are performed at Kurur Nanda Devi shrine. The gold statues (Devi Pratima) of Kurur temple taken out of the temple to carry in the jatyatra. Various delicious foods offered to the deities. The jagariyas invoke devi and devi'spashwas start dancing on the melodious music of dhol-damaun. The devotees start chanting 'Nanda Maaki jai', 'Bhagwatiki jai' and other slogans to pay revere and supplication to Nanda Devi. The procession moves from Kurur and journey starts. The palanquin of Devi passes through Charbang, Dhargaav, Ghat, Fali and reaches Ushtoli village for night halt. Next morning it passes through Bhenti, Bungi, Dungri, Suna, Chepro, Lwani, Mundoli and reaches vaan for night halt. The whole night Jagar recitation goes on with chanting of mantras

and slogans on melodious music of dhol-damaun. Latudevta (brother of nandadevi) commands the jat from Vaan to escort nandadevi. The jat takes night halt at gairolipatal and then departs for VediniKund. After the accomplishment of religious rituals (tarpanetc) in VediniKund the procession returns to Baank village. Next morning it moves through Lwani, Purna, Gwaldam, Talwari, Thala and finally reaches Devrara. Devrara is a beautiful alluring village situated on the left bank of Pindar River. Devi resides at Devrara village for six months and in the month of January departs with procession, religious rituals and melodious music of dholdamaun for Kurur village.

In many festivals of Nanda Devi, there is also a festival i.e. 'Nanda-Ashtmi' which is celebrated every year in the month of Bhado (Aug-Sep). It is celebrated in Almora district of Uttarakhand. It is said that Nanda Devi was the sister of King Bharti Chand (king from Chand dynasty). Once she was walking outside with her friends and suddenly a buffalo came there and she ran away from there with friends. She hides behind banana leaf. But again destiny plays a pivotal role and a goat came there and ate the banana leaf. Buffalo devoured the little goddess Nanda Devi and the nature became diabolic. Then Chand Raja started this festival for the peace of his sister's soul.

Except all the myths there are so many traditions and rituals which have been celebrating for many years during the sacred festival of Nanda Ashtmi. First of all the process of making portrait of Nanda Devi is started by the priest with mantras. There are two portraits one of Nanda devi and the second of Sunandadevi (also called Gaura). For making the portraits on Panchamitithi, in a beatific moment the priest and the organizer of Nanda devi annual festival choose a local person's garden and send an invitation to the banana tree. With conch's sound, dholdamaun and mantras the priest throw akshta (rice) on banana trees. The priest chooses two banana trees to which the akshta sticks. Then the selected banana trees are worshiped by the priest with mantras. After that a red and a white cloth have stented by the priest to those two banana trees. In the ancient times a buffalo and a goat is also sacrificed in the precincts of the goddess's

temple. The first blow is struck with a khukri (knife) by the descendent of the Almora Rajas (Kings), and then the animal is dispatched. But now the sacrifice has been stopped for many years.

There is a sacred tradition of 'Jagar' in Nanda devi annual festival. 'Jagar' started in the precincts of Nanda devi's temple from panchamitithi and enjoyed and runs constantly till the end of Nanda devi annual festival. On saptamitithi at dawn a monumental and gigantic journey is organized to bring banana trees to the temple. In this sacred and traditional journey red coloured flag put in the front side and a white coloured flag put in the back side. This flag is called 'Nishan' in local language. After reaching Nanda Devi temple the two banana trees are placed in temple by the priest. The trees placed straight in the temple and worshiped by the priest. Then a process of making portraits of Nanda Devi and Sunanda Devi is started with the fragments of banana trees. The fragments are shaped as Nanda Devi Mountain. Then the mountain shaped Nanda Devi portraits are tied with Kumauni local cloth and colours and established by the priest in Nanda Devi temple. Bamboo sticks, white-yellow and pink cloths are used for making portraits. Silver eyes are also used for the decoration of Nanda Devi's portraits. After all decoration work the scattered fragments of banana trees takes live and wonderful images of Nanda Devi and Sunanda Devi. On ashtmitithi women in their traditional dress entered in the temple and worshiped Maa Nanda devi. There is a huge crowd of people who came for the darshna of Nanda devi. Ashtmi celebrated with KanyaPujan, Shakti Paath and religious ceremony. Nanda jagar is celebrated at the night time with great eagerness, enthusiasm and blith spirit. At present time different kinds of traditional dances by the local community of Kumaun and Garhwalsach as 'Hudka dance', 'Chanchri dance' and 'Choliya dance' have also became the part of Nanda devi annual festival.

Twelve yearly Festival: Nanda Raj Jaat

Raj Jaat is a religious, spiritual and adventurous royal itineration of Uttarakhand Himalaya. It held in every twelve years covers 280 km distance with night halts at 17 places on route. It takes 19 days to accomplish. Raj jaat 'Raja kiJaat', as per the meaning in the ancient time the royal

journey was organized by Garhwal kings and hence it started calling 'Raj Jaat' or 'Raja ki Jaat'. . Willaim S. Sax in his book 'The blurb of mountain goddess' says:

Every few decades, thousands of Hindu villagers in the Central Himalaya of North India carry their regional goddess Nanda Devi in a bridal palanquin to her husband Shiva's home in the snows. A ritual dramatization of the post marital journey of married women from their natal villages to those of their husbands, this pilgrimage leads the travelers over the Himalayan ice-fields, past a show bound lake surrounded by human bones.

As per the historical facts, king Bhanupratap was the king of ChandpurGarhi (Chamoli) and a great devotee of ShriBadrinathji. He had a Shriyantra to talk to deities and he was known as 'BoldaBadri'. Once Badrinathji told BoldaBadri to marry his daughter to king Kanakpal. He followed the order and after the marriage Kanakpal became the king of ChandpurGarhi. King Kanakpal also settled his brothers near ChandpurGarhi and that territory is today known as Kansua village. The Royal Kunwars reside in this Kansua village that plays a pivotal role in Raj Jaatyatra.

King Kanakpal settled his Rajguru (Mentor) near Nauti village and later on, he and his descendents known as Nautiyals. In 18th century the third king of ChandpurGarhiPuranpal made the Shriyantra underground after accomplishing religious rituals at Nauti village. King Puranpal gave the right of veneration of Shriyantra to Nautiyal Brahmins. From that time Nanda is considered as the Ishtdhyani (daughter) of Nautiyals. The Shriyantra is worshiped during the journey of Raj Jaatyatra.

At first the schedule of Raj Jaat declares and the Kunwars of Kansua reach nauti village one day before the commencement of the Raj Jaatyatra with colourfulChhantolis (parasols) four horned Ram. The four horned Ram born nearby KansuaKunwar's village. The whole journey is commanded by the four horned Ram. As per the folk lore, this four horned ram is very well acquaint with the route of Raj Jaatyatra and he has some excerpt of Nanda

Devi's power. Except the doli, chhantoli and four horned ram innumerable nishans of deities also take part in Raj jaatYatra. These Nishans are made of wooden or iron sticks, sheeted with colourful cloths. The journey starts with the sonorous music of Dhol-Damaun, Thal-Kansal. Thousands of deities manifest themselves in various forms. The most alluring dances Jhoda, Chanchari attracts the pilgrims. The innumerable pilgrims departure from Nauti to send Nanda Devi to her in law's home. The procession moves to Ida-Badhani. After accomplishing traditional and religious rituals there, it returns Nauti the next day. Nauti is known for an established Shriyantra. The journey proceeds to Kansua village next morning. A fair is organized during the night and other neighboring villages join the Raj Jaat here and revere Nanda Devi. Next morning the procession moves towards Sem village and on the way to Sem the procession reaches ChandpurGarhi. The Doli (Palanquin) rests here for some hours and a fair is organized here to pay rever to Nanda Devi. At the evening time, the Doli reaches Sem village. During the night halt at every station emotive Nanda Jagars (songs) sing by the villagers makes the devotees maudlin. After a night halt at Sem village, next day the palanquin of Nanda Devi moves to Koti village to meet her Dharma BhaiLatu dev.

After meeting her brother Devi moves to Bhagoti village. This is the last village in the maternal territory of Nanda Devi. Now the procession with jubilation reaches Kulsari village. Kulsari is the entrance gate to Devi's sasural region. Here is an old temple of Nanda Devi for many years and an underground Shriyantra. This marvelous Shriyantra is taken out for traditional and religious rituals on the occasion of Raj Jaat.

Therefore, the procession moves through Chapdyun, Nandkeshri, FaldiyaGaon, Mundoli and reaches Vaan village. At Nandkeshari the Dolis of Kurur and Kumaun region join the procession. Vaan is the last village on the journey of Raj Jaat. Latudev is the Dharma bhai of Nanda Devi. Now the procession is escorted by LatuDevta. From Vaan the nishan (ensign) of LatuDevta leads the Raj Jaat along with the four horned Ram.

Now the procession moves through Rankidhar, Gairolipatal, PatarNachauniya, ShilaSamundra and at last reaches Homkund. As per folk lore, Rankidhar is a place where goddess Nanda killed the demon Mahisasur. PatarNachauniya, as folk lore reveals, is a place where King Jasdhwal (king of Kannauj) organized a performance of dancing girls and the dancing girls turned into stones by the curse of goddess Nanda. Homkund is a place where Nanda Devi's farewell lachrymously organizes after accomplishing traditional and religious rituals. The four horned ram is also worshipped along with the dolis and chhantolis. After that the ram loaded with gifts for goddess Nanda directed towards Kailash (her husband's home). Therefore, the procession makes its return journey.

Conclusion

Hence, Nanda Raj Jat is a festival which commingles two different cultures i.e. the culture of Garhwal region and the culture of Kumaun region. One side, there is an atmosphere of gladness while on the other side there is an atmosphere of flatness due to the farewell of Nanda Devi. At present, this journey very well recognized on world level. Innumerable tourists came here to take part in this marvelous journey. Nanda blessed them with her boon and benediction.

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