



Historical and Mythical Narratives of Dangoli Nanda in Uttarakhand: Legitimization of Power

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Abstract

The write up explores the narrative, history and rituals of Dangoli Nanda Devi of Uttarakhand Himalaya. It also comprises a short exploration of the annual festival celebrated every year in the month of Bhado (August) at Dangoli (Bageshwar) village and a comparative study of Dangoli Nanda jagar with Nauti Nanda Jagar and Almora Nanda Jagar. Dangoli Nanda loved and venerated as the loving sister of Nanda Devi. SHE equally enjoys love, fascination and revere from the public of Uttarakhand Himalaya. There are also stories and instances of miracles and feats executed by Bhagwati Nanda in the everyday life of the people of Dangoli village and adjoining areas. These accounts surely bore the stamp of truth on them. Nanda is for many a chosen deity, isht devta, and for other their beloved chelli (married daughter). In moments of invocation (Aavesh), SHE becomes, at times, a goddess of justice (Nyaya).

Keywords: Pilgrimage, Religion, Holy Place, Folk Lore, Popular Culture

Dangoli Nanda: A short acquaintance

Dangoli nanda is known and revered as the loving sister of Nanda devi. Bhagwati Nanda, myth logically and traditionally worshipped as a manifestation of goddess Gaura (Parvati) wife of Lord Shiva. According to Dr. Shiv Prasad Naithani-“In Garhwal and Kumaun the name Nanda for Uma Parvati is more in Practice.” (Nanda Devi: The Goddess of Uttarakhand, 21). She is the folk goddess of Uttarakhand who enjoys regard and recognition in perhaps every part of Uttarakhand Himalaya. Dangoli is a village situated on the way from Gwaldam to Almora, near to the famous shrine Bejnath. In this village Nanda Devi is worshipped and recognized as ‘Dangoli Nanda’ or ‘Bhramari Devi’ or ‘Kot mayi’. As Oakley proclaims- “The popular religion of India may be said to centre round the persons of Vishnu, Siva, and the Saktis, or female energies of these gods, especially the consort of the latter,



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under the various names of Devi, Kali, Durga, Bhavani, Nanda, etc. Nanda is a very favourite object of worship.” (Holy Himalaya,75)

The temple of Bhramari devi is situated on the top of a hill. This hill area is famous as ‘Ranchula’. As Dr. Shiv Prasad Naithani recognise the temple by saying:- “The kings of Chand Dynasty installed Nanda Devi as Ranchandi in Kotmai and Almora and prior to that the Katyuri rulers (who ruled over whole of Uttarakhand between 800-1200 AD) also worshipped Nanda Devi as their Isht devi and built many temples dedicated to her.” (Nanda Devi : The Goddess of Uttarakhand, 25).

Pilgrims and villagers have to surmount 2-3 Kms stiff walk to reach there. The unique feature of this shrine is that goddess Bhramari devi is facing north and devotees offer prayers from the south direction. Legend corroborates the belief that Adi Guru Shankaracharya made a stay here on the way during his journey to Garhwal region. Dangoli nanda also takes part in twelve yearly Nanda festivals known as Nanda Raj-Jat¹

Different Narratives

The prevalent and plausible name of Nanda devi in Katyur valley² is ‘Bai Gaura’. The people of Dangoli village generally address her as ‘Bai Gaura’. When the scholar personally met Nand Lal ji at Gheti village (a village 10 km far from Dangoli) he addressed Bhagwati Nanda as ‘Bai Gaura’. Multifarious narratives are popular among the people of Dangoli village about Bali Gaura. It is said that in the ancient period the whole Katyur valley was drowned into water. There was a devil named Arun. He was ruling over katyur valley that time. He was consistently discomposing deities. Then deities worshipped Mata Parvati and requested her to kill the devil. As a result, Mata Gaura manifested herself as Bhramari Devi and killed the devil. This narrative can easily be seen in Durga Saptasati Chapter 11:

यदारुणाख्यस्त्रैलोक्ये महाबाधां करिष्यति।।

तदाहं भामरं रूपं कृत्वा असंख्येषट्पदम्।

त्रैलोक्यस्य हितार्थाय वधिष्यामि महासुरम्।।

भामरीति च मां लोकास्तदा स्तोष्यन्ति सर्वतः।

(When the demon Arun will splurge in all three Lokas, I will manifest myself as innumerable six legs Bumble-bee and will kill the demon Arun. I will recognise then as ‘Bhramari devi’ in the world.)

When the scholar met Nand Lal ji (Jagar singer at Gheti village) he narrated a poignant story of Gaura devi (also known as Bhramari devi). In the ancient period, deities were in search of a king who would be able to govern them. Their old king was died. At first, they appointed Indra Devta their king but the kingship of Indra devta soon failed and deities went to Narad muni. Then Narad muni suggested them to visit a place named ‘Kelibagarh’. All deities accompanied Narad muni went to Kelibagarh. There was a yogi named ‘Bal-

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Ishwar'. Deities prayed to him to hold the kingship. Therefore, Bal ishwar became the king of deities and started living in Kailash.

After living alone for a long period in Kailash, the yogi became stagnant and upset. He abandoned the kingship and run away to Kelibagarh. Narad muni accompanied all deities reached Kelibagarh and appeased Bal ishwar³. Then Bal ishwar revealed the fact that he was not happy in Kailash on account of his loneliness. Narad muni coaxed him by saying that he will search a girl for his marriage. Narad muni quested Hemant Rishi's daughter Nanda for marriage of Bal ishwar. With Hemant rishi and Brahma ji's permision Bai Nanda and Bal Ishwar married to each other.

A long period had been passed; one day Bal ishwar told Bai Gaura that he had to go for some significant work out of Kailash. Bai gaura insisted to take her with him. At first, Bal ishwar resisted but after a long argle-bargle Bal ishwar had to take Bai gaura with him. On the way, they found a buffalo, giving birth to a calf. The owner of buffalo did not take home to calf because the male child would not be able to give the benefits of milk and other works. Now, Bai gaura asked Bal ishwar-“Can we take this calf to our Kailash?”. Bal ishwar replied-“No, we cann't.”

ताँबे देखेंछो हो भैंसि को काटो

भैंसि को काटो हो पोछो पलासो

सुण बावा ईश्वरा बोलनी छूँ

मेरी न्हैति कोखा बोलनी छूँ

धरमा पुत्रा बोलनी छूँ॥ (Nanda Jagar, 247-248)

(Gaura saw the calf and gave him love. O Lord! I am childless. We take this calf to home and nourish him as our adopted son.)

Gaura again asked-“Why not we? We haven't a child till now; we will nourish him as our own child.” Bal ishwar asked-“How will you breed him? He will drink only milk. From where your will bring milk for him?” Then Bai Gaura cut her little finger and stream of milk started running from her finger. Then she feed the child. After this astonishment Bal ishwar consented with gaura's decision. They took away the calf with them to Kailash. Kailash now filled with ravishment on account of the entrance of male child. Sweets distributed in Kailash with the information that Bal ishwar and Bai Nanda had now became parents. In naming ceremony the calf named 'Meghasuri'(Mahisasur).

After 4-5 years Meghasuri became a giant demon and started persecution. People censured the king Bal ishwar for the nourishment of Meghasuri. Now Gaura and Bal ishwar decided to keep away Meghasuri from Kailash and commuted his place to Andhapuri. The Giant demon was now living in Andhapuri. One day Narad muni visited the palace of



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Meghasuri and after returning from there went to Kailash. Narad muni met Bai gaura and told that Meghasuri wants to marry her. Gaura astonished to hear this and became upset. Next day Narad muni went to Andhapuri and told Meghasuri that Gaura wants to marry him. In fury and indignation Meghasuri moved towards Kailash. When Bai gaura looked her son Meghasuri on the way to Kailash she put some special food on his way to appease him. But Meghasuri became more violent and reached Kailash. He tried to attack on Gaura. Now, Bal Ishwar frightened after looking at innumerable giants and accompanied Nanda run away from Kailash. They reached a place near Jammuna river. They pierced into Jammuna River. After completing a long distance Bal Ishwar's body drowned into water and he said to Nanda- "Devi! I warned you many times earlier about Mahisasur, but you totally ignored. Now, if you rescue by destiny we will reunite on Trishuli mountain." At once, Bal Ishwar became invisible.

Therefore, Nanda acrimoniously shaped herself as 'Mahakali' and killed more than one lakh demons. But she renounced Mahisasur alive and Mahisasur run away to Andhapuri. After a short passage of time, Mahisasur again went to kill Nanda and was killed in Rankidhar by a lion, born of Nanda's scum. But everything went wrong and meghasuri became more furious and reached Kailash. Meghasuri tried to attack on Gaura and she hit on his horn. His one horn broke down and innumerable giants born at the same moment. Bai gaura mangled the innumerable giants and warned Meghasuri to return back to Andhapuri. But he became more violent and started running behind Bai gaura. She was running consistently because she did not want to kill her own son. At last, after two warnings she killed Meghasuri at Rankidhar and returned back to Kailash.

Most of the elements of this narrative will be familiar to the students of Hindu mythology. As Sax in his books 'Mountain Goddess' after describing the story of Demon Mahisasur and Devi, proclaims- "It has several parallels to the Sanskrit text Devi-Mahatmya, the story of the goddess Durga who defeats three sets of demonic opponents in as many episodes."

Nanda Ashtmi: A three days festival

E.S. Oakley in his book entitled 'Holy Himalaya: the religion, traditions and scenery of a Himalayan province' says- "There are also the representatives of aboriginal cults, such as those of Bhairava and the Pasupati form of Siva in the Himalaya and the innumerable worshippers of Kali or Durga in her various forms, who are called Saktas, or devotees of the Shakti." Every year in the month of Bhado (August) a three days festival celebrated at Kot Bhramari temple Dangoli. In the ancient time when Uttarakhand was ruled over by Chand Dynasty⁴ bhagwati nanda worshipped in a village called 'Jhalmali' (A village situated nearby Kot Bhramari Temple). Generally the festival is of three days. At first an invitation



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has sent to the Jagariyas (singers -who sings bhagwati nanda's songs) of Gheti village. The land is gifted by Chand dynasty to these Jagariyas of Gheti village. They are gifted with land because they are the singers of bhagwati nanda's songs (jagars). Now, it has become a tradition to invite the jagariyas for the three days festival. Jagariyas are invited on panchami tithi(fifth day) and they sing jagars (invocation song) on sasthi and saptmi tithi (sixth and seventh day). Then after devi bhagwati's sculpture is prepared with banana tree. This banana tree is brought from Mawai village. Sculpture formation is known as 'Dikra banana' among the local public of the village.

After the formation of devi's sculpture, devi's jewelry is brought from Devnai village with the melodious music of Dhol-Damaun. Then Devi evinces herself through the body of priest. At present time there are four main priests in the Kot bhramari temple-Chandrashekhar Tripathi ji, Rajendra Prasad Tiwari ji, Umesh Chandra Tiwari ji and Bherav Dutt Tiwari ji. Devi takes incarnation in the body of Pandit Chandrshekhar Tripathi ji and then Devi dances on Astmi tithi.

In the ancient time there was also a tradition of buffalo sacrifice. But in the year 2010 it has prohibited by Government of Uttarakhand. 'Devi Bhog' one of the famous traditions of the festival have also accomplished on ashtami tithi. This devi bhog, made with various types of food, cooked by a cook who came from Mela Dungari village (a village near Kot bhramari temple). After devi bhog the palanquin of devi bhagwati departure for the visit of different villages nearby Kot bhramari temple. There is an immense crowd of worshippers and pilgrims. As Sax in his book 'Mountain Goddess' mentions-"Even in hamlets of only five or ten houses, crowds of up to fifty people would gather within minutes of Nanda's arrival, and this was often cited as evidence of her power." (55)

People come from different villages-Haat, Ram Bheta, Mawai, Gheti, Deunai, Mela Dungari, Kajuli, Jakhed. In the end the palanquin of devi reaches 'devidhara' near Jhala mali village. At last Devi's idol has effused in this devidhara stream.

Legitimization of Power

"Not only was the geographical goal of Nanda devi's pilgrimage conceived to have an intrinsic power, but the central Himalayas themselves-associated for thousands of years in India's literature with famous pilgrimage places and powerful, ascetic renouncers-were said to be a particularly good region for performing efficacious acts such as pilgrimage." (Sax, Mountain Goddess, 54)

Mata Bhagwati is revered and worshipped in both regions-Garhwal and Kumaun. She embellish the two separate regions in one necklace; a necklace of love, purity, and amicableness. The beautiful land of Uttarakhand is governed by her power and astonishments. As Dr, Shiv Prasad Naithani Says- "There is a mention in Rigveda that the



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Devi is omnipresent. She says that-‘I am omnipresent in the skies as well as on the earth. I am the one who lifts and launches the celestial Bow of Lord Rudra (Shiva), destroys the demons and am equally present in the world’s origin, upbringing and destruction’. Later came the era of Aranyak upnishads in which the Devi was addressed by the name of Uma Parvati and Hemwati.” (Nanda Devi : The Goddess of Uttarakhand, 31)

The people of Dangoli village directly sense Bhramari devi’s miracles and power. They believe that all the desires which have rendered before Devi, accomplished soon in a great manner. As E.S.Oakley says-“The divine is only divine because it is powerful, not because it is good.” (Holy Himalaya, 4) After the accomplishment of their desires they pay a visit of devi with gifts; like gong, Chunari etc. Some people also organize a collective banquet (Mahabhoj-Bhandara) in devi’s temple after the accomplishment of their desires. When the scholar met the priest Chandrashekhar Tripathi ji, he explained-“All the desires which have rendered in this Bhramari devi temple with faith and love, soon accomplished in a fruitful manner.”

Then the scholar met a man named Prayag Dutt Joshi ji, who came from Garud (Bageshwar) for organizing a collective banquet (Bhandara) in the Bhramari devi temple. The scholar asked him-“Why are you organizing this collective banquet today?” Then he replied-“Mata Bhramari have fulfilled my desire i.e. the job settlement of my three sons.”

The Jagar singer Nand Lal ji lives at Gheti village, when the scholar met him he also narrated a miracle of his life. He said-“Once in my family a child born and next day of the birth of child I have to visit the Kot bhramari temple for singing jagars. When I reached the temple and started the song (Jagar), I suddenly felt that I became blind and was not able to sing the jagar. This happened due to the curse of Mata Bhramari devi because of the desecration in the family on account of the child birth. Then I apologies before mata bhramari devi and after 15 minutes I recovered. He further said-“Mata bhagwati is the supreme power and my village is governed by her power.”

The scholar too felt the inexplicable power of Mata Bhramari devi. When Nanda Lal ji was narrating the story of Mata Bhramari devi she haven’t lost her concentration for a single moment though the narrative was of one hour. It seemed as she was bounded with a dazing power.

Intertextuality

Various forms of Nanda Devi are plausible and revered in the holy land of Uttarakhand through Jagar and Folk songs. Nanda Jagar of Garhwal region gives a detail delineation of Bhagwati nanda. It proclaims Nanda devi as the daughter of Hemant Rishi and Menawati. Hemant Rishi belonged to Rissasau. Nanda marries to Shiv Shankar and starts living in Kailash. There is not even a single bird with which Nanda can share her feelings.



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She feels alone there. After a long period she is invited by her natal place and the Jagar describes her departure from Kailash to Rissasau. Nanda's deep sense of sorrow and pain reflected in the following Nanda Jagar's lines:

बार व्हेनी पार देवी उदास व्हे गये

किलै दीनी व्हेली माया ऊँचा कैलासा

ये ऊँचा कैलासा मा पंछी भी नी औनी

ये ऊँचा कैलासा मा पंछी भी नी औनी (Nauti Nanda Jagar)

(Many days have been passed, devi have became upset. Why my mother marry me to high Kailasha. Not even a single bird entered in this high Kailasha.)

The Jagar also describes Nanda's curse on the kingdom of King Jasdhwal. When king Jasdhwal (King of Kannauj) and queen Balampha (Nanda's sister) refuse to give a part of their kingdom to Nanda, she requites a curse to the kingdom of Kannauj. As a result, king Jasdhwal organize a 'Jat'⁵ to remove the curse. . As the lines from Nauti Nanda devi Jagar explores:

बतौलू ब्रहमा जी यो दोष जी

तुम्हारा कन्नौज नन्दा जी को दोष

कन्नौज लगे नन्दा जी को दोष जी

नन्दाल द्यो दीनी यो बडो सराप

रणौ घणौ दोष कन्नौज का राज

बतावा ब्रहमा ये दोष जी

कनके मिटौलू यो नन्दा को दोष

बतावा ब्रहमा उपाय जी

तुमुन जाण यो नन्दा जी जात

तब यो दोष मिटलू जी (Tell me Brahmin about this curse. How this curse will remove.

Brahmin please suggests its remedy. You have to go in a trip to Nanda devi then only this curse will be removed).

He takes some dancers with queen Balampha and reached near Rupkund. When the dancers perform dance near Rupkund, Nanda furiously annihilates the whole troop members.

The Jagar of Almora Nanda devi is quite different from Garhwali Nanda Jagar. It addresses Nanda Devi as 'Bali Nanda' who was the daughter of Himalayraj. She married to Bal Ishwar (Shiv Shankar). The Almora Jagar describes bhaggwati nanda in form of 'Mahisasur Mardini'⁶. There is no delineation of Hemant Rishi, Menawati and Rissasau as in Garhwali nanda jagar.

Almora jagar narrates a story that once Bali nanda (daughter of Himalayraj) takes a buffalo's calf with her and nourish him as her own adopted son. He is named Meghasuri (Mahisasur) and after a long passage of time he becomes a giant demon and started



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persecution and sent to Andhapuri by Bali nanda and Bali ishwar. One day Narad muni visits Andhapuri and after returning Kailash informs Bali nanda that Mahisasur wants to marry her. Therefore, Mahisasur with all his warriors attacks on Kailash. Bali nanda furiously annihilates his warriors but abandon Mahisasur as he is her own son. Mahisasur run away to Andhapuri. Time passed and one day Nanda visits a place named Manesh land (near Muradabad) and Mahisasur reaches there to kill her. Nanda run away to Lodhalekh and crosses Chhani, Hat chhina, Garud, Ranchuli, in the end reaches Rankidhar. Now she is badly tired and sits in a place, throw down scum from her head to the land. As a result, a lion takes birth there, and kills Mahisasur.

स्यूनी को हाड़ मयेषो

त्वीलै भीं मजी लफायो हो

सिंगौ को बच्चा भे

खडै बणी गोय । (Almora Nanda Jagar, 308)

(Nanda throw down scum on the land and a lion takes birth)

Nanda jagar of Kot Bhramari is similar to Almora Nanda jagar. The jagar too describes Bhagwati Nanda in form of 'Mahisasur Mardini'. But there is a difference i.e. the narration of Mahisasur's assassination. The jagar enounces that Narad Muni met Gaura and told that Meghasuri wants to marry him. Meghasuri furiously moved towards Kailash. When Gaura looked her son on the way to Kailash she put some special food on his way to appease him. But Meghasuri became more violant and reached Kailash. He tried to attack on Gaura and she hit on his horn. His one horn broke down and innumerable giants born at the same moment. Now, Bal Ishwar frightened after looking at innumerable giants and accompanied Nanda run away from Kaliash. They reached a place near Jammuna river. They pierced into Jammuna river. After completing a long distance Bal Ishwar's body drowned into water and he said to Nanda-"Devi! I warned you many times earlier about Mahisasur, but you totally ignored. Now, if you rescue by destiny we will reunite on Trishuli mountain." At once, Bal Ishwar became invisible.

Therefore, Nanda acrimoniously shaped herself as 'Mahakali' and killed more than one lakh demons. But she renounced Mahisasur alive and he run away to Andhapuri. After a short passage of time, Mahisasur again went to kill Nanda and was killed in Rankidhar by a lion, born of Nanda's scum. Now,

The paper must end with a note that it is apparent that the narration of Bhagwati Nanda in Garhwali Jagar is quite different from the narration in Almora Jagar and though the narration of Bhagwati Nanda's Mahisasur-Mardini form is similar in both Nanda Jagars i.e. Almora Jagar and Kot Bhramari Jagar but the narration of assassination of Mahisasur is slight different.



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End Notes

- ¹ Nanda Raj-Jat- It is a twelve yearly procession which held in the month of Bhado (August). The procession moves as a ritual enactment from Nanda devi's natal home to her sasuraal (husband's home), Kailash.
- ² Katyur Valley-The Katyuri dynasty was founded by Vashudev Katyuri and they ruled over the region known as Kumaon from 800-1100 AD. During their reign they dominated lands of varying extent from the Katyur (modern day Baijnath) valley in Kumaon between 7th and 11th centuries and established their capital at Baijnath in Bageshwar district, which was then known as Katyur valley.
- ³ Bal Ishwar- Lord Shiva addresses as Bal ishwar by the people of Utaarakhand particularly by the people of Dangoli region and adjoining areas.
- ⁴ Chand Dynasty-The Chand Kings were the medieval Rajput who ruled over Kumaon region of Uttarakhand state. They ruled the region after Katuri Kings in 11th century AD and the Kingdom was established by Som Chand.
- ⁵ Jat- A Procession of Pilgrims.
- ⁶ Mahisasur Mardini- A form of Devi who killed the giant demon named Mahisasur.

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