

Processional theatre of Nanda Devi: A comparative study of Regional, fictional and Pan Indian Narratives

Pushpa

Research Scholar

Department of English

H.N.B Garhwal University

Srinagar Garhwal, Uttarakhand India

Abstract

Nanda Devi known and venerated by different names as Gaura, Sati, Bhagwati, Chandika, Durga, Uma, Parvati, Shakti. In the Uttarakhand state she is venerated as a beloved daughter as well as a loving sister. Her propitiation is done through different festivals i.e., annual, six yearly and twelve yearly. The twelve yearly festival i.e., Nanda Raj Jat is recognized and prominent on world level. As in a Processional theatre the artists move from one location to other location, in the same way the procession of Nanda Devi in different festivals moves from one location to other location. The palanquin of Nanda Devi moves along with the pilgrims and accomplish a long distance of hundreds mile. The present paper is an attempt to explore the fictional, regional and pan Indian narratives of Nanda Devi along with a comparative study of different narratives. The narratives vary from one place to other.

Key words:

Bhagwati Nanda: A goddess worshipped and revered in the holy land of uttarakhand

Jagar :Songs

Procession- A group of pilgrims

Anand: Blissfulness

Ressasau: A village in Uttarakhand state.

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 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".¹ Mythological tales said that once Daksha Prajapati (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".ⁱⁱ

Regional and fictional Narratives

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".ⁱⁱⁱ 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 rever, adoration to Nanda Devi.

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 Rissasau. 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 Rissasau, 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 Yashodhval 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 Jasdhol 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.^{iv}

Thereafter, king Yashodhval systematically commenced Raj jaat yatra along with his pregnant wife Balampha, son Jadeel and daughter Jadeeli. He also took some dancers with him. Golden

palanquins were prepared for carrying the royal family on the yatra. After facing a lot of difficulties in the long and tiresome journey the procession reached vaan village. All the luxurious things and females were prohibited in the yatra from the station known as 'vaan'. But as it is said that females are stubborn, queen Balampha importuned to accomplish the yatra with the king. Now Yashodhaval along with the procession and pregnant wife reached 'Niralidhar'. After getting order of king Yashodhaval the dancers started dancing here at Niralidhar to entertain the pilgrims. Nanda got annoyed with the dancers at once transformed them into stones. From that very period 'Niralidhar' comes to known as 'Patarnachauniya'.

The procession proceeds further and reached a desolate and uninhabited place on a mountain called 'Baguabasa'. Queen Balampha had labour pains and she delivered in Gangtoli cave. As a result, Nanda casts her wrath on the procession. All the pilgrims along with king and queen were buried under the snow storm.

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.

Pan Indian Narratives

The accumulation of legends in Shrimad Devibhagwat varies from one narrative to other narrative. The first narrative is pertinent to the demons Madhu and Ketabh. In the ancient time, there was nothing except the water. The whole cosmos have drowned in water. Lord Vishnu was sleeping on his bed, dormant and have lost in his own dreamland. At once in his deep slumber two demons-Madhu and Ketabh, born out of the scum of his ear. Transformed into huge bodies with the passage of time, the demons think- "who is our creator? Why we born? Where would to go?" Ketabh replied- "Dear brother Madhu! Bhagwati Shakti is our creator as she is the creator of the universe. She is omnipotent and never dwindles as the world dwindles with the passage of time." The two demons were eager to know the mystery of the universe. They commenced tapasya and as the year passes they accomplished thousand years. After arduous tapa of thousand years Bhagwati shakti pleased with them. Shakti prophesied- "Demons! I am pleased with your arduous tapa. What do you want?" the demons replied- "we want death in pursuance of our own desire." Devi declared- "Tathastu(As you wish)! No one can kill you until you want."

Drowned in the stream of arrogance, the two brothers now begin assassination of other creatures. At last, the two demons run to kill Brahma ji. To save his life Brahma ji takes refuge at Vishnulok. As lord Vishnu was in deep slumber Brahma ji pondered the question of what he should have to do to open his eyes. After pondering a while Brahma ji decides to venerate Bhagwati shakti as lord Vishnu was dominated by Bhagwati Yognidra. Thereafter Brahma ji venerates Bhagwati Yognidra. He urges- "Devi! You are the creator of this universe. You are the merely

origin of souls. Nidra (dormancy) is in your possession. You are the merely governing power. Bhagwati! Protect my life and liberate lord Vishnu from the shackles of dormancy.”

At once lord Vishnu aroused from his deep slumber as Bhagwati Yognidra made him free from the fetters of dormancy. Lord Vishnu asks- “Brahma ji! Why are you here? Looking distressed.” Brahma ji replies- “O lord Vishnu! Two hazardous demons-Madhu and Ketabh, born out of your ear’s scum made an effort to kill me. Please save my life, kill the demons.” Lord Vishnu assured Brahma ji that he will certainly kill the demons.

Afterwards the combat between lord Vishnu and Madhu-Ketabh has been sustained for many years. Accomplishing five thousand years lord Vishnu thinks- “Although I have accomplished five thousand years the demons are not exhausted yet. What to do? Where should I go?” After pondering on many questions lord Vishnu comes to know that the two hazardous demons are protected with Bhagwati Shakti’s boon. They will die merely by their own desire. Hence lord Vishnu venerates Bhagwati Shakti. He urges- “Assent me to kill the demons. I am not dexterous enough, though requisite is the assassination of the demons.” Bhagwati Shakti grins and reply- “O lord Vishnu! Go and fight again. Now the two demons will be enamored of me. Kill them when they will be in the shackles of erroneousness.”

Again lord Vishnu reached the battle field and begin his efforts to defeat the demons. As the demons are enamored of Bhagwati shakti, they ordain lord Vishnu to reveal his desire. Lord Vishnu express his desire- “if you are pleased with me, give me the boon to kill you.” Infatuatedly the monsters think that it would be impossible to kill them as there was water everywhere. They said- “You would be able to kill us in a desiccated place. Detect the place and kill us.” Thereafter lord Vishnu simultaneously envisaged the desiccated place and means of death. Took a sudden verdict plunk down the head of the demons on his thigh and assassinate the demons. Thus Bhagwati Shakti took lord Vishnu as means of assassination of the demons-Madhu and Ketabh.

The other narrative is pertinent to King Mahisasur. In the very ancient time there was a king named Mahisasur. He was the son of great potentate Rambh. Effected by bodily mortification of Mahisasur Brahma ji told him that he will not be killed by any male but by a female. Thus he got the boon of victory. He battled with deities and defeated them. All deities became upset and reached Brahmloka to solve their problem. Brahma ji took the deities to Shivloka and in the end they all reached Vishnuloka. God Vishnu advised them to use their own potencies to make a new female potency. At first light full rays from the body of Vishnu ji detached and mingled with the light full rays detached from other deities’ body. Therefore, all these illuminative rays made a new structure i.e. the structure of a Devi. Devi is known by the name Bhagwati Jagdamba. Then bhagwati Jagdamba battled with Mahisasur and defeated him, killed him in the battle field with her powerful gyre.

The other narrative in Devi Bhagwat is about Sumbh and Nishumbh. In the ancient time there were two demon brothers in Hades. They came from Hades to earth and did yogsadhna for ten thousand years near Pushkar. In the end Bhrahma ji reached there to give them boon of victory.

Brahma ji said-“I am happy with your Yogsadhna.....tell me Sumbh-Nishumbh what u want?” They replied that they want to become immortal. But Brahma ji said- “No one is immortal in this world. Everyone has to die one day.” The two demons thought for a while and again urged – “Give us the boon to kill by a female not by a male” Brahma ji replied-“Tathastu (it will be) “ Therefore, the two demons battled with Deities and Indra Devta run away to save his life. The heaven is now governed and administered by Sumbh demon. The demon ruled for one thousand years. Deities went near Guru Brihaspati and asked for solution. Guru Brihaspati suggested them to worship Bhagwati Jagdamba (Parvati). Deities worshiped Bhagwati Jagdamba and she appears herself in front of the deities and consoles them that she will kill the demons. Then Devi battled with the demons and killed Chand-Mund, Dhumralochan, Raktabeej and at last Sumbh and Nishumbh. The other narrative explores Paravti as Goddess Durga on account of killing a demon named Durgam.^v

Conclusion

Thus the pan Indian narratives compiled in Devi Bhagwat as well as in Durga Saptasati delineate HER as ‘Shakti’. She is known as the creator of the universe. She took birth whenever the deities were persecuted by the demons. Dr. Shiv Prasad Naithani says-“Devi Bhagwat Puran has been derived from Rigveda. There is a mention in Rigveda that the Devi is omnipresent. With the passage of time, the goddess was declared as ‘Mahashakti’ and was established as one of the ‘Tridevis’ (tri-Goddesses)-Mahalakshmi, Mahasarswati and Mahakali. In Durga Saptasati the goddess is regarded as the source of compassion, peace, fostering, satisfaction and wisdom in all the living beings.”^{vi}

On the contrary the folk narratives of Uttarakhand Himalaya explore HER as a loving daughter and sister. She is cared and venerated as a daughter. The twelve yearly festival i.e., Nanda Raj Jat celebrates her journey from her natal place to her sasural (husband’s home). She has to departure from her natal place as a daughter.

ⁱ Oakley, E.S. *Holy Himalaya: The Religion, Traditions and Scenery of a Himalayn province(Kumaun and Garhwal)*, General books; Memphis, Tennessee, USA pub;ishers, 2010, Pg.111-112.

ⁱⁱ Aitken, Bill, *The Nanda Devi Affair*, Penguin Books India, 1994, Pg.166

ⁱⁱⁱ Benjwal Ramakant, *Nanda Devi: The Goddess of Uttarakhand*, Winsar Publisher-Dehradun, 2013, Pg.21

^{iv} Pokhariyal Ramesh, *Himalayn Mahakumbh Nanda Raj Jat*, Winsar Publisher-Dehradun,2008, Pg 53-59

^v Poddar Hanuman Prasad, *Shrimad DeviBhagwat*, Gitapress Gorakhpur, 2009. Pg 31-373

^{vi} Benjwal Ramakant, *Nanda Devi: The Goddess of Uttarakhand*, Winsar Publisher-Dehradun, 2013, Pg.31