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## Nanda Devi Annual Festival in Uttarakhand: Enactment of Jubilation, Myths and Tradition

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**Abstract:**

*Bhagwati Nanda, mythlogically and traditionally worshiped as a manifestation of goddess gaura (Parvati) wife of lord Shiva. She is the only folk goddess who enjoys equal regard and recognition in perhaps every part of Uttarakhand and Himalaya. Loved, venerated and invoked as a divine daughter of the Himalaya. Nanda is often looked as a protector of Himalayan people, well being and prosperity. This paper is an attempt to describe the myths, rituals and traditions in Nanda Devi annual festival which is celebrated every year by the people of Uttarakhand. The paper consists a lot of narratives about why it is celebrated and also describes different types of rituals and traditions which are celebrated during the festival time such as group- dance, religious ceremony, shakti path etc. It concludes with an answer to the question that why this sacred festival has become monumental and epochal.*

**Keywords:**

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

*Jagar: Invocation Songs*

*Shakti Paath: Invocation of goddess with Mantras.*

*Dhol-Damaun: Drum*

*Akshat: Plain rice*

Uttarakhand, a land of divine powers, known for its incommensurable culture, rituals and traditions. So many deities are worshiped here from the very ancient time. Bhagwati Nanda is one of the favourite goddesses of Uttarakhand. Nanda devi is worshiped in Uttarakhand in so many forms. She is worshiped as mother, sister and daughter. Sherman Oakley in his book '*Holy Himalaya: The Religion, Traditions and Scenery of a Himalayan province (Kumaun and Garhwal)*' says- "Nanda Devi is a favourite goddess in Kumaun".

In respect of Maa Nanda different kinds of festival and fairs have been organized for many years. It is said that Maa Nanda herself appeared and took existence in the festival and blessed the people with her boon. In so many festivals of Nanda Devi, there is a festival i.e. c 'Nanda-Ashtmi' which is celebrated every year in the month of Bhado (Aus- Sep). It is celebrated in Almora district of Uttarakhand. Sherman E. Oakley in his book '*Holy Himalaya: The Religion, Traditions and scenery of a Himalayan Province* says: "Nanda Ashtmi is celebrated in the month of Bhado (Aug-Sep). It is an occasion of great rejoicing"

It is evident from the history that Nanda Devi Annual festival 'Nanda Ashtmi' has been celebrating from the dynasty of King Baj Bahadur Chand. His dynasty was in existence from 1638 to 1678, Badridat Pandey in his book '*Kumaon History*' says that once king Baj Bahadur Chand has won the fort of Bandhangarh and then takes Nanda Devi's portrait and established it in Malla palace Almora, from that time Nanda Utsav have been celebrating every year in Almora. Now the main question which disrupt the peace our mind is that why this festival has been celebrating for many years? There are so many myths regarding the worship and celebration of Nanda Devi. 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.

In some places it is also said that Nanda Devi was the daughter of Nandu Mahar in Dwapar yuga. She born at the same moment as lord Krishna was born. King Vasudeva took his son Krishna to Nandu mahar and rescinds his daughter Nanda. When Vashudeva reached the jail Kansa, a malevolent king beat him. Kansa tried a lot to touch and beat Nandu mahar's daughter Nanda. But he failed every time. Then Nanda became disappear and suddenly over jump to the mountain and said in a boisterous voice- "O foolish person! You do not know me...your enemy has been born". After some time that mountain has become famous with the name Nanda Devi mountain and Nanda Devi's deify has started.

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 Sunanda devi (also called Gaura). For making the portraits on Panchami tithi, 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, dhol damaun 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 stinted 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 pnachmai tithi and enjoyed and runs constantly till the end of Nanda devi annual festival. On saptami tithi at dawn a monumental and gigantic journey is organized to bring banana trees to the temple. In this sacred and traditional journey on 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 ashtmi tithi 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 Kanya Pujan, 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 Garhwal sach as 'Hudka dance', 'Chanchri dance' and 'Choliya dance' have also became the part of Nanda devi annual festival.

Hence, it can be said that Nanda Devi annual festival is a festival of mirth, traditions, cultures, love and fraternity. It besieged around different cultures, different peoples and different traditions with love and purity. It bounds so many cultures and traditions together. It bounds so many people together with the chain of love, faith and worship.

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