

Chapter IV

Folk songs of Uttarakhand: A narrative of mysterious cult of Devi Devta

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Abstract: This chapter explores the deep-rooted belief in Devi-Devtas (gods and goddesses) in Uttarakhand and how these folk narratives shape the cultural identity of the region. Through stories passed down over generations, these deities are worshipped and revered for their influence on people's well-being and justice. The chapter discusses prominent deities like Golu Devta and Nanda Devi, whose tales blend myth and history, and highlights the significance of rituals such as jagars, where the deity's spirit is invoked through music and dance. The belief in these gods remains strong even among those who migrate to urban areas, as people continue to perform rituals and seek divine blessings for protection and prosperity. The oral traditions surrounding these gods not only reflect faith but also serve as a means of preserving Uttarakhand's unique cultural heritage.

Keywords: Devi-Devtas, Uttarakhand Folklore, Jagar Rituals, Golu Devta, Cultural Identity

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When discussing narratives, especially folk tales, we delve into a world filled with mystery. Some stories might appear mythical, while others have tangible connections to everyday experiences. Many of you, having visited Uttarakhand, have witnessed these traditions firsthand, where the local people share these practices deeply rooted in their lives. I want to talk about one integral aspect of their existence—their belief in countless *Devi-Devtas* (gods and goddesses) who hold significant power. These gods are more than just spiritual entities; they are revered, worshipped, and their blessings sought for peace and prosperity.

The faith in these *Devi-Devtas* is not something fleeting or momentary but spans generations. Children are part of every celebration and *puja* (rituals), learning early on to respect and worship these deities. This belief is ingrained in them, teaching them how to approach each god for specific prayers. Even though migration from Uttarakhand has led many to urban, posh cities, the connection to these *Devi-Devtas* remains strong. Most people return to their villages to perform rituals and seek blessings. Whenever someone in the family falls ill or experiences chronic problems that can't be cured in the cities, they believe that the displeasure of a god might be the reason. Thus, they return to their native places to appease the deity with prayers and offerings, believing the deity has control over their lives and well-being. One prominent deity worshipped in the region is *Golu Devta*, also known as *GoyalDevta* in the local language. His largest temple is in *Chitai*. The story behind Golu Devta is fascinating—he was a king with seven wives, but only the seventh wife bore a child. Driven by jealousy, the other wives hid the newborn, replacing him with a stone. The child was placed



in a box and set adrift on the river, where a fisherman found him. The child grew up to be a man of exceptional power, returning to the palace and revealing his true identity to the king. The king accepted him, and Golu Devta became revered for his kindness and strength. His temples, including the famous one in *Gairar*, are sought by people seeking justice and protection against cruelty.

Another important temple is dedicated to *Nanda Devi*, a goddess with an equally captivating tale. According to folklore, she was the daughter of the *Nautiyals* and was married to a king in



Kashipur. She was once attacked by a buffalo while fleeing from danger and took refuge in a banana grove. As a consequence, buffaloes were sacrificed in her temple. Every year, a *yatra* (pilgrimage) begins from her village in *Nauty*,

following a special four-horned goat that is born once every twelve years. The pilgrimage passes through *Roopkund*, a site known for its mysterious skeletons, before ending at the *Nanda Devi* peak.



Similarly, *Jiya Rani* is another deity with a tragic yet powerful story. She was attacked while bathing in the *Gola River* and fled through a secret cave, never to be seen again. A temple was later built where she left her *ghagra* (skirt) spread on a stone, and to this day, her *jagar* (ritual) is performed annually at her temple in *Rani Bagh* on *Makar Sankranti*.

The stories of these gods and goddesses, passed down orally through generations, are not just about faith; they are about cultural identity. Rituals such as *jagars* are performed to invoke these deities. The *jagar* is a night-long ritual where families, including men, women, and children, gather to sing songs and play music to call upon the deity's spirit. One of the key figures in this ritual is the *dangaria*, the person who acts as the medium for the deity. The *dangaria* undergoes a strict fast, abstaining from alcohol and meat, and prepares himself spiritually for the event. When the spirit of the deity enters the *dangaria*, he begins to dance and speak, delivering messages and solutions to the problems of those gathered.

The stories of *Devi-Devtas* are numerous. One more example is *Bhelua Devta*, a lower-caste deity who enters the body of a person and begins cleaning the area where the ritual is performed. Unlike offerings made to other gods, *Bhelua Devta* is given simple food like *khichdi* as *prasad* (offering). This simplicity underscores his humble origins, and yet, like all deities in Uttarakhand, his power is revered.

Throughout Uttarakhand, belief in these *Devi-Devtas* remains strong. Even as people move away from rural areas to urban settings, they maintain a connection to these gods. Temples dedicated to them are found not only in villages but in cities, and rituals are performed both in homes and in temples. This belief system, passed down through stories and traditions, continues to shape the lives of the people from this region. The faith in these gods, their power, and their stories will likely persist, carried by future generations just as they have been by those before them.

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