

Field Survey

Jageshwar Dham

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Jageshwar Dham(1870m), about 18 miles/ 34 km from Almora, via Bade-China and Panwanaula, believed to be the abode of twelve Jyotirlingas, is situated in densely wooded beautiful narrow Jataganga valley, surrounded by dense forest of magnificent deodar monarchs. A small stream flows nearby and there are a few houses and several *dharamsalas*. It is an ancient place and has a good spiritual vibration.



Two *dwarapalas* (door guardians) at the Entrance of Jageshwar Dham

From 7th century onwards, there was a great temple building activity under the Katyuri Kings, who rivalled the Chalukyas in the South. During the 8th and the 9th centuries, Kumaon was passing through a deep cultural and religious fervour and a group of shrines were put up, to Lakulisa, Nataraja and the Goddess Durga.

The complex consisting of 124 temples and hundreds of images, is famous not merely for its exquisite craftsmanship but also for its Swayambhu Linga named *Nagesh Darukabane*. Most Hindus believe that Jageshwar is the place of Nagesh, 8th among the *Dwadasha Jyotirlingas* (the twelve resplendent lingas of Shiva established by Vishnu) which is stated to exist in the forest of Deodar or *Daruka*.

Jageshwar, believed to carry the *Nagesh Jyotirlinga* dedicated to Shiva, is one of the most important religious pilgrimage town in Kumaon, literally temple city which comprises cluster of 124/125 large and small stone temples, dating 9th and 13th century AD. Many temples now, preserved by Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), include Dandeshwar Temple, Jageshwar Temple, Kuber Temple, Mrityunjaya Temple, Nanda Devi Navagrah Temple, a Pyramidal shrine, a Surya Temple, besides a host of smaller temples and broken idols which received rude shocks from the hands of Mohammedan invaders. Mrityunjaya Temple is the oldest temple and Dandeshwar Temple is the biggest shrine. The architecture of this temple is worth giving close examination as the Jageshwar Shiva Temple carries archaeological importance.

Jageshwar was once the centre of Lakulisa Shaivism. Origin and history of Lakulisa, the 28th Avatara of Shiva (with a wooden stick), traverse back to Gujarat region of current India. The resemblance between Kumaoni language and Gujarati language probably hints at the fact that the followers of the Lakulisa settled at Jageshwar.

The Lakulisa and Nataraja temples, built in 8th century, are also 10.5 metres feet high. Though square with plain and simple plinth, they have broad and horizontal moulding all along the Sikhara or roof. There are some fine specimens of sculptures here. The Sukanasa or the frontal pediment is elaborately carved with Lakulisa flanked by his disciples and the Nataraja Shiva in his dancing feet. Unique in the art, history of Kumaon, the representation of the two sculptures brings out the religious fervour of the age.

The statute of Lakulisa, meaning the Lord with staff or mace or club or stick; is back at Jageshwar after almost 50 years. Lakulisa has been stated to have born in Gujarat and propagated Shaivism. The resemblance in Kumaoni and Gujarati are actually an indication of Lakulisa and his disciples visiting and influencing people and culture of not only Jageshwar but entire Kumaon region.

There is no definite dating of the construction of Jageshwar group of temples. History tells that during the 4th and 5th centuries AD, when the Gupta emperors held sway, the Kumaon hills were being governed by an independent dynasty of Katyuri Kings. They selected the site for building temples. The temples originally constructed during the Gupta period were renovated by the rule of the Chand dynasty in the 7th century AD. Numerous temples were constructed or restored during the Gurjara Pratihara era and also in the 15th and 16th centuries.

According to ASI, Jageshwar group of temples belong to the post-Gupta and pre-medieval eras and are estimated to be about 450 years old. These temples range in the period from the 8th century (early Katyuri dynasty) to the 18th century (Chand dynasty). The temples were renovated during the reign of Katyuri King Shalivahandeva. There is an inscription of Malla Kings on the main temple premises indicating their devotion to Jageshwar. The Katyuri Kings also donated villages to the temple priests for its maintenance. The Chand Kings of Kumaon were also the patrons of the Jageshwar temples.



Shiva

The temple architecture belongs to the simple *Nagara* style, which has tall curvilinear spire *sikhara* surmounted by an *amalaka* (capstone) and a *kalasa* crown the square sanctum sanctorum, entrance to which is through a carved doorway. Most of the temples enshrine stone lingam. Impressive stone sculptures of various deities are seen around the altar. The pilgrimage of Jageshwar was considered as sacred as Badrinath and Kedarnath. It is believed that Adi Shankaracharya visited Jageshwar, renovated and re-established many temples before leaving for Kedarnath.

Jageshwar Mahadev: The main temple is of 'Jageshwar Mahadev' 'Bal Jageshwar' dedicated to 'Child Shiva'. There is also a temple, dedicated to Vridh Jageshwar, or 'Old Shiva' situated nearby. It is believed that Lord Shiva came here for meditation and when women of the village came to know of this, all the women of the village, flocked in to have his glance and the men got infuriated and came to know who has captivated their women. So to control the situation, Shiva converted into a child, therefore he is still worshipped in his child form here. At the entrance of the Jageshwar temple, two *dwarapalas* (door guardians) are there in the form of *Nandi* and *Skandi* with all the armaments. This temple is west facing. This sanctum sanctorum of the temple of Shivalinga is divided into two parts.

The larger one depicts Shiva and smaller one is his consort Parvati. An *Akhand Jyoti* (an immortal flame) keeps on flickering here since time immemorial. Shivalinga is accompanied by two *Ashtadhatu* statues of Chand Kings Deepchand and Tripalchand in the standing posture behind the Shivalinga.

Sri Mahamrityunjaya Mahadev: this is the largest and oldest temple of Shiva in the Jageshwar complex. In the eastern facing temple, Shiva is worshipped as the saviour from death. This unique linga has an eye shaped opening. Pilgrims here, recite the Mahamrityunjaya Mantra which is fruitful, auspicious and powerful method of self-realisation, removal of evil effects and from all kinds of fears, illness and negativity as it is said that every wish is fulfilled here, but it should be with pure conscience. The *Mahamrityunjaya* Mantra is attested in the *Sukla Yajurveda Sanhita* III 60.

Dandeshwar Shiva Temple: It is very old among Jageshwar group of temples and is in a dilapidated condition. It is situated slightly upstream from Jageshwar temple

complex. The stone lingam is natural rock and unlike the lingams of the Jageshwar complex, is not carved.

Vinayak Kshetra: This place is, at a distance of 200 metres from Artol village from where temples of Jageshwar start. It is also called Mobshyadhan temple. This place lies between Jhanker Saim Temple, Vridh Jageshwar Temple and Koteswar Temple.

Sri Briddha (Vridh Jageshwar or Budh Jageshwar): For splendid Himalayan view and an ancient temple dedicated to Shiva, situated on the top of a ridge, it can be approached by 1.5 km uphill trek route from Jageshwar or 8 km drive on Kuccha road from Punuanaula which is 8 km from Jageshwar. Visitors may come to the main road again at Dhaul-Chhina. It is the source of Jata Ganga river. This temple is situated three km north to Jageshwar. It is contemporary to Jageshwar group of temples.

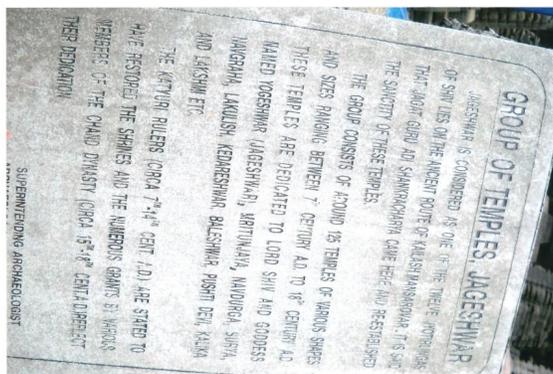
Jhanker Saim Mahadev: This temple is situated in the south of Jageshwar. The legend tells that during the *Tapasya* by Shiva, Demons obstruct His penance. The God Jhanker "Saim" come into being as *Trinetra* and send his "Ganas" to kill the Demons. It is believed that Saim will come to Kot Linga temple premises to save humanity and Jageshwar in Kalyuga.

According to a folklore, Sati, Shiva's better half went to her father's place uninvited where Daksha Prajapati, Sati's father performed sacrifice near Kankhal. Unable to stand her own as well as her husband's insult, Sati burnt herself down owing anger. Shiva came to know about it from Kailash and disturbed Daksha's sacrifice and killed all besmearing his body with the ash of pyre Kali started performing penance at Jhanker Saim surrounded with the forest of *Devdaru* and lying in the mountain Jageshwar.

Kot Linga Mahadev: Kot Linga is situated at the "Sangam" of Jata Ganga and Saim Ganga rivers. As per the local folklore, the Kot Linga was originally selected as a place by Shiva for meditation. The folklore in the region around Jageshwar tells us a gripping story about building the main temple near Kot Linga temple complex. Shiva selected this place to be his abode. This place is around 2km walk from the main temple complex of Jageshwar. A small mountainous trek leads to this place. Currently this place has ruins of an Old Shiva Temple.

Adi Shankaracharya tried to build the main temple at Kot Linga but to avail as Saim wanted Kot Linga to be specifically reserved for the meditation of Shiva. Old ruins of a temple structure can be found near Kot Linga. Local people still believe that Saim or Lakulisa, the Lord with a stick shall come and build the real Jageshwar temple near Kot Linga and thus save the mankind from adversities of Kalyuga.

Pushti Devi Temple is also called Pushti Mata Temple - the Durga Temple. This temple of Goddess Devi enshrines the full *murti* of goddesses. The temple is situated in the Jageshwar main premises. Pushti Devi Temple built in the 9th Century A. D. is comparatively small in size ranging from 8 to 9 metres, rectangular with two massive square pillars at the entrance and pilaster all around the wall portion. On top of the wagon shaped roof, are two flanking squatted lions facing the cardinal points.



Inscriptions

Inscriptions: Over 25 inscriptions of different periods are present at Jageshwar. They are inscribed on the walls and pillars of the Jageshwar temples. Most of these belong to the period between the 7th century and 10th century AD. The dialect of inscriptions is Sanskrit and Brahmi. These are studied by D. C. Sarkar in *Epigraphica Indica*.

We pray to Lord Shiva, the All-Seeing One, three-eyed, who bears grace of all pervading divine fragrance and enricher of all kinds of powers and vigour by His enormous prosperous bestowals. May He release me from the grip of premature untimely death, but not from immortality like pumpkin or watermelon separates after ripening from its vine.

Fairs are held on *Shivaratri* and on the full moon day of the month of *Vaisakha* and also in the month of 'Savan' (July-August).

Two streams of Nandini and Surabhi flow down the hills and meet near the sacred spot. Dense grove of Cedar trees, perpetual verdure and sweet murmur of the rivulets give peculiar charm and sanctity to this place. Jageshwar, apart from its countryside, also offer imposing view of Hiriya Sikhar (2200m.). The place is frequented by both religious as well as nature lover tourists.

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