



A Note on Kasar Devi Temple in Almora , Uttarakhand

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Abstract

Kasar Devi, a place in Almora, Uttarakhand sits high at an altitude of 2,116 metres above sea-level. This second-century temple, adorned on a hill-rock, 8km from Almora, overlooking the town of Almora, the snowy heights beyond, is a famous Hindu shrine, dedicated to the goddess – Kasar Devi, the local deity. In 1890s, Vivekananda came to this temple for meditation. Kasar Devi Temple is a popular pilgrimage destination in the vicinity of Almora. Oriental and Occidental-irrespective of all devotees visit the temple, a serene and enchanting spot and seek spirituality and enjoy its quiet atmosphere and spellbinding view of the surrounding Himalayas including Almora Valley.

Key Words: Almora Kasar Devi Temple, Uttarakhand

Introduction

Kasar Devi Temple, a place in Almora, Uttarakhand - surrounded by Himalayan Forest - verdant pine and deodar forests, is an ancient shrine dedicated to Goddess Parvati - Durga Avatar - an avatar of the Goddess Shakti. Creation of the world itself depends on the existence of a woman, who was consequently created for the purpose. Yes, there are unique powers in the temple of Goddess Durga. About 10 kilometres from Almora town, this temple of Mata has a special significance.



Kasar Devi Temple, located on the Bageshwar Highway in Almora in the village called “Kasar”, is situated on the top of the Kashyapa Hill. “Goddess Katyayani”, one of the eight forms of Goddess Durga, is worshipped here. Thousands of believers come every year to seek blessings from the Devi. The temple structure dates back to the 2nd century CE. The part of the mountains within the temple is still present in the lion form.

Durga is highly eulogized by the sages, as a source of strength to the world. She is regarded as a protector of the weak people who could not succumb to the power of enemy.

According to our Puranas, both man and woman were originated from the Ardhanarishwara [Skanda Purana] form of Shiva, woman from the Nari (woman) half. It suggests the divine origin of the women. Skanda Purana assigns to women a position of honour and dignity both in the family and in the society [Skanda Purana]

According to the Puranas (most probably Bhagavat Purana) from Hindu literature, to kill Shumbha and Nishumbha, Devi Parvati in the form of Kaushiki appeared and killed them. An inscription on a stone boulder says that the temple was constructed by a King named Rudrak. A temple by a name of Rudreshwar was also constructed as another inscription of 6th-7th century records. The place is known for its serenity and attracts devotees from across the globe.

The rock at the back of the temple with inscriptions in Brahmi script will attract any archaeology enthusiast. India is home to 33 million goddesses, where religion resides in the particles, but the debate between religion and science is also old. It is rarely seen when science goes ahead and bowed in front of religion, but this miracle happened in Almora, Uttarakhand. Science went ahead and bowed his head in front of Durga.

The entire area is surrounded by a unique aura of Mysticism and Spiritualism which are always unique identity of India. Historically, India is known for rich tradition, spiritualism and mysticism. One can experience both spirituality and solitude in abundance even in Kasar Devi. The earth is surrounded by rings which are filled with high energy protons. The solar wind has its impact on the energy belt of Kasar Devi. It is probably the only temple in India that also has a meditation room.



Kasar Devi, the holy abode came into prominence when the great spiritual leader Swami Vivekananda visited this place in 1890. In the same year he walked from Nainital to Almora. In Hindu religious thought, all forces can be turned to spiritual development. The special thing is that Swami Vivekananda, founder of Ramakrishna Monastery and Ramakrishna Mission, really absorbed in this place, made [Lectures from Colombo to Almora] visits to Almora after the demise of his Guru Sri Ramakrishna, travelled throughout India and taught Vedanta. It is said that he spent several days meditating in a cave on a hill close to the Kasar Devi Temple.

Vivekananda is said to have performed the most severe forms of meditation in a solitary cave of this mountain. Kasar Devi became famous after his visit. This Temple is not only an action oriented but it is also the priority of the flush, meditation and peace. He mentioned the healing powers of the beauty elaborately after which it became recognized and popular with people all around the world. The meditational and religious practices that were performed by him have been elaborately mentioned. Devotees, who have visited here, claim that the place has magical powers to calm people. Their inner alternative ego finds solace here. They feel here a deep sense of serenity, uplifting energy and ease. Clearly with the beautiful Himalayan view, this place can be made better as meditation centre which should make its own position in the world. And what do the devotees learn here? Renunciation! The only one eternal theme the Himalayas always teach to humanity: Sarvavastubhayan vitambhoobinrinam vairagyamev abhayam [Lectures from Colombo to Almora]

“Everything in this life is fraught with fear. It is renunciation alone that makes one fearless - Swami ji realized in the land of renunciation : “.....if these Himalayas are taken away from the history of religious India, there will be very little left behind.” It is said that at Kakrihat on Koshi river about 22 km from Almora, Vivekananda had realized a special knowledge, rather, it was his experience which he described : “.....hereunder this banyan tree one of the greatest problems of my life has been solved.” And what was that realization? That experience? It was his “wonderful vision about the oneness of the microcosm and the macrocosm.” [VIVEKANANDA A Biography in Pictures]



It is also notable that in 1916, Swami Shivananda and Swami Turiyananda, the two Brother-monks of Swami Vivekananda, established a centre on the Bright End Corner in Almora, which is today known as Ramakrishna Kutir.

The deep sense of serenity, the tranquility that the devotees experience at Kasar Devi temple complex which has been visited by many personalities of the counter-culture like Vivekananda who performed most severe forms of spiritual practice in a solitary cave of this mountain, Alfred Sorensen (Sunyata Baba) Lama Anagarika Govinda, Bob Dylan, George Harrison, Cat Stevens, Western Buddhist Robert Thurman and the writer D. H. Lawrence were among Famous Personalities who spent two summers here. Notable classical dance maestro Uday Shankar, too, practised here in Almora with his troupe. In 1938, compelled by his love for Kumaon, Uday Shankar set up his dance academy, The Uday Shankar Indian Cultural Centre in the neighbouring Simtola hill. During his extended stay here from 1936 to 1942, he experimented and invented a unique dance form, a blend of Indian classical and the famous local ballet - Kumaoni Ramlila [thebetterindia.com].

There is a serene spot to visit with great views of the Himalaya Mountain, surrounded by thick green forest consisting of thick Cedar, Oak, Pine and Rhododendron trees. The calmness exuberant at Kasar Devi is only superseded by the imposing panoramic view of the valleys, rivers and hamlets that surround the village/area. The enormous geomagnetic field here seems to have caused special rejuvenation for people who have meditated here. It is believed that due to geomagnetic field in the region, it is a more peaceful and tranquil environment.

Also known as Crank's Ridge on the Hippie Hill, the area around the Kasar Devi Temple has always melting pot of art, spiritualism and poetry. Crank's Ridge or Hippie Hill around the temple was made legendary in the 1960s by American psychologist and writer Timothy Leary who wrote much of his psychedelic experience here [Almora Kasar Devi Temple].

Just before the Kasar Devi Gate, a pink-painted snake-like crack in a big rock by the road is noticed. Many local myths are associated with it. Two stone lions greet you at the entrance to the main temple. A cave-like rock houses the shrine of Kasar Devi. The sanctum sanctorum of the goddess is found inside a cave amidst the huge



rocks. Kasar Devi temple, once, a small stone structure in the Nagara style is now, at present, a combination of Hindu and Buddhist structure. Devotees need to pass a stone slab path which takes to the main temple. The main temple has a huge tower with a conical dome on its top. This is a circular structure having a porch with pillared verandah on the outer side.

The Temple consists of two different groups of temples—one dedicated to the Devi and the other to Shivji and Bhairava. The main temple has a monolithic flame which keeps on burning for 24 hours over the years. The main shrine of the Devi is inside a cave-like formation. The main Deity is placed in the centre of the temple structure. Inside the cave is an Akhand Jyoti (an everlasting flame that has never died down) which has been kept aflame for 24 hours for many years. It has also a Dhuni (Havan Kund present inside the temple) where a wood log burns for 24 hours. It is believed that this ash of Dhuni is very powerful. The devotees believe that this ash can help cure many illness, including mental health issues.

Kasar Devi, away from all the hustle and bustle of a city, is not just for the religious affairs but also for the spellbinding views of the Himalayan Peaks and the valleys it offers. Breath-taking views of sunset and sunrise can be witnessed from this place. It is an ideal place to do Yoga and Meditation. The atmosphere here is so calm and serene and surrounded by lush greenery and snow-covered mountains make it one of the best places for spiritual awakening. A small hike-up to the edge of the hill near Sri Sarada Math will give people the unmatched views of the entire valley and the snow-capped mountains.

The American clinical psychologist Timothy Leary [Timothy Leary] who was fired from Harvard University for promoting the usage of psilocybin, a form of psychedelic drug to graduate students, visited Kasar Devi as he firmly believed that the hilltop had some form of special cosmic energy. Energy has been known to be the key reason behind the medicinal powers of Kasar Devi.

The majestic air that seeps into the valley has also been visited by one of the greatest minds of the West, Ernst Lothar Hoffmann, later known as Lama Anagarika Govinda. He was a Buddhist Monk and an annotator of Buddhist inscription. He



and his wife Li Gotami, an Indian poet and writer stayed at Evanz-Wentz's house in Kasar Devi for a brief period. Walter Evantz-Wentz, an American anthropologist, a preacher of Tibetan Buddhism, also stayed in Kasar Devi for some time.

Conclusion: Kasar Devi Fair, a large fair, held at the Kasar Devi Temple on the occasion of Kartik Purnima in the Hindu Calendar, corresponds to November and December every year.

Note

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