



# 7<sup>th</sup> Century Hawan Kund (Fire Altar) of 13 hast (166.38 cubic feet) capacity at Jageshwar Temple in Kumaon Range of Himalaya

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**Abstract.** From Vedic times to even modern times, Yagya is an essential part of social and spiritual life in India. All kinds of worship in temples have Yagya as an essential portion. This was true even in the medieval time of India. Jageshwar Dham is a place 34 kilometers away from Almora, in the Kumaon Range of Himalaya in Uttarakhand state of India containing 125 big and small temples and 174 sculptures, dating back to circa 7<sup>th</sup> century and having Shiva as the main deity of the temple complex. Among them, 100 temples are dedicated to Lord Shiva; the oldest of them are Jageshwar Temple and Maha-Mrityunjaya Temple. The temple complex contains Hawan Kund which is still being used by temple Brahmins. There was much of literature describing the construction time of Jageshwar Dham, however, no direct literature was available to find the specific time of the construction of Hawan Kund in the temple complex. The present study attempted to analyze Hawan Kund's structure, construction, and ritualistic details in order to find its importance and probable time of construction. The study inferred that Scriptural, traditional, and archeological facts of Hawan Kund at Jageshwar temple indeed revealed its importance in Shiva worship and maintaining spiritual ambiance. Besides the strong utilization of Hawan Kund in temple ancient traditions and rituals, the study also found that Hawan Kund was Thirteen Hast (hand as a unit) large, where 13 is the number of Shiva worship. Also, the Ishan (north-east) direction of Hawan Kund's position with respect to Mrityunjaya temple indicated the following of proper scriptural protocol for Shiva worship indicating well-thought construction by original builders. Thus, though there was no direct literature available to find the specific time of the construction of Hawan Kund in the temple complex, it was clear that the Hawan Kund of Jageshwar temple was associated strongly with the temple's main deity worship. Hence, the existence of Hawan Kund had to be to that of the Jageshwar and Maha Mrityunjaya temple i.e. circa the 7<sup>th</sup> century.

**Keywords.** Jageshwar, Fire altar, Hawan Kund, Shaivism, Kumaon, Himalaya

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## Introduction

Yagya is central to Indian culture rituals and spirituality. From Vedic times to even modern times, Yagya is an essential part of social life where all important events of life from birth to death accompany the performance of some form of Yagya. All kinds of worship in temples have Yagya as an essential portion. This was true even in the medieval time of India.

One such place having traditional worship for the past 2 millennium is Jageshwar. Jageshwar is a place 34 kilometers away from Almora, in the Kumaon Range of Himalaya in Uttarakhand state of India, situated at 1870 meters from sea level. The place has a temple complex known as Jageshwar Dham, surrounded in a narrow valley by large-sized plants of Cedar Deodars and a small stream of river Jata Ganga. Jageshwar Dham temple complex contains 125 big and small temples and 174 sculptures, dating back to circa the 7<sup>th</sup> century, along with over 25 inscriptions on the walls and pillars of the temple (Figure 1, top left). Among 125 temples, the cluster has more than 100 stone temples, dedicated specifically to Lord Shiva (Figure 1, top left) [1, 2].

The Jageshwar cluster of the temple includes the Jagannath Temple, Maha Mrityunjaya Temple, Kedarnath Temple, Navadurga Temple, and a temple of navagrahas. Among them, the shrines of Jageshwar, Mrityunjaya, and Pushtidevi draw attention to their sculptures. The complex has been named after the Jageshwar Temple, dedicated to Lord Shiva. The area was also the center of Lakulisha Shaivism, where Lakulisha was considered the last of the twenty-eight incarnations of Lord Shiva, mentioned in the Puranas. Many scholars opinioned this temple among the 12 Jyotirlingams of Shiva [2]. As being considered one of the twelve original Jyotirlingams, for pilgrims, it was the customary stoppage of worship on route to the Kailash Mansarovar trip traditionally [1].

In addition, the heritage site of the temple complex contains Hawan Kund (Figure 1, bottom). The present study attempted to describe Hawan Kund's structure and construction with

respect to the temple complex, and its traditional, ritualistic, and spiritual importance in the society since circa the 7<sup>th</sup> century.

## Origin of Jageshwar Dham and Shaiva worship

Kumaon Himalayan Mountain range has been habited for more than 1500 BCE with the different dynasty of kings ruled in turn such as Pauravas, Kushanas, Kunindas, Guptas, Pratihara, Katyuris, Raikas, Palas, Chands, Parmars or Panwars, Sikhs, and the British. Among them, first major dynasty of Kunindas (2nd century BCE) were followers of Shaivism. Later due to presence of Adi Shankaracharya (circa 7<sup>th</sup> – 8th century) in Garhwal and Kumaon, the worship of Shiavism is restored, which is seen even today at Jageshwar Dham in form of Shiva worship, Hawan, traditions, festivals-fairs, etc. [1, 3].

Jageshwar Dham is a heritage site being protected under the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) since 1915 (Figure 1, top right). Hawan Kund originally marked by ASI as a part of the temples' cluster (Figure 2) is situated in front of the Mrityunjaya Temple of Jageshar Dham. ASI estimated the site 2,500 years old belonging to post-Gupta and pre-medieval eras [1, 2]. The temple place, being of religious and spiritual importance, was mostly renovated and built by the Katyuri dynasty kings. Recently, a 1st-century-old red sandstone pillar with engraved humans and spiritual figures has also been discovered [2], indicating renovation by later kings, as dated back to Katyuri dynasty kings. Jageshwar temple and Mrityunjaya Temple structure is dating back to the 7<sup>th</sup> to 13th centuries old, where the oldest deity of worship is lord Shiva [1].

## Festival month of Shiva worship

Jageshwar is known for the grand fair of 'Shravan Mela' comes in the month of Shravan – a month is known for shiva worship usually in the month of July and August. Another grand fair is held during Shivratri, an auspicious festival of Shiva worship [4].





Figure 1: Jageshwar Dham, cluster of temples in Uttarakhand State of India, near Almora city (top left), Archaeological Survey of India plaque at Jageshwar Dham (top right), and Hawan Kund at Jageshwar temple still in traditional use (bottom).





SNO.	NAME	S. NO.	NAME
1	JAGESHWAR TEMPLE	7	HAWANKUND
2	MIRIYUNJAYA TEMPLE	8	LAKULISHA TEMPLE
3	PUSHTLDEVI TEMPLE	9	TANDESHWAR TEMPLE
4	BHOGSHALA A	10	KEDARNATH TEMPLE
5	BHAIRAV TEMPLE	11	NAV DURGA TEMPLE
6	BHOGSHALA E	12	KAMAL KUND

Figure 2: Site map of Jageshdhwari Dham marked by Archeological Survey of India, Government of India.

These fairs indicate the religious tradition of Shiva worship at Jageshwar in the Kumaon range of the Himalayas coming through centuries-old tradition. The centuries-old tradition of Shiva Mela indicates Shiva as the principle deity of worship at Jageshwar Dham.

### Hawan Kund part of rituals and traditions at Jageshwar Dham

The Jageshwar Temple complex has a group of temples, which are traditionally worshipped in a particular order [5]. In this order of worship, Hawan Kund of the temple complex is an essential component. It is said after having a ritual bath at the Brahm Kund, a devotee visits temples in sequences as follows - Jyotirlingam, followed by Dakshin Mukhi Hanuman, Neelkanth Temple, Surya Temple, Navgraha Temple, Pushti Mata Temple, Mrityunjaya Temple, Hawan Kunda, Lakulisha Temple, Tarkeshwar Temple, Kedarnath Temple, and Navdurga Temple. After this, the devotee once again visits Jyotirlingam, then Batuk Bhairav Temple, and Kuber Temple. Summarily, the inclusion of Hawan Kund in the order of worship traditionally practiced for a long time indicated its ancient importance. Based on this fact, it can

be inferred that Hawan Kund at the temple complex played a certain role in the social-spiritual traditions and rituals since the time of temple constructions [5].

### Hawan Kund specifically constructed for Shiva worship

#### Perspective with Japa and offerings

The ritual worship at the Jageshwar temple still offered today (2022 A.D.) includes Mrityunjaya Jaap as the top listed in the list of Temple management [5] hints at ancient usage of Mrityunjaya Mantra recitation specifically at the Jageshwar Dham. In addition, Mrityunjaya Mantra fire sacrifices are also being continuously offered at the temple Hawan Kund since ancient time. In the traditional worship in Indian culture - Sanatana Dharma, Japa (mantra recitation), and Yagya (Hawan, fire sacrifices) together complete a spiritual-religious process. Mantra recitation is always followed by fire offerings. Usually, the number of fire sacrifices in Hawan is 10th of the total number of Mantra chanted [6]. Thus, it can be inferred that Hawan Kund at Jageshwar Dham is an important part of the main deity worship of the temple.

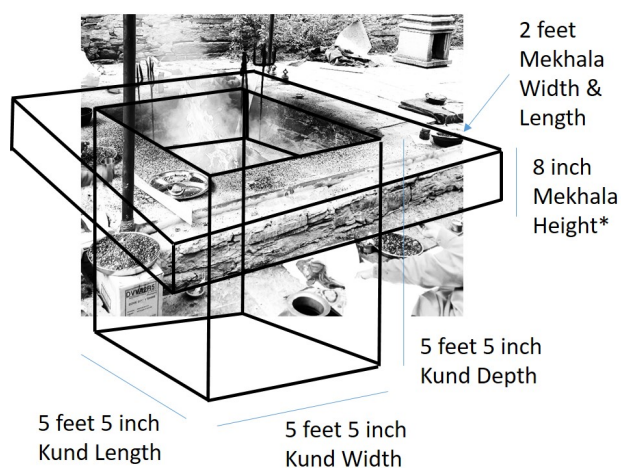


Figure 3: Dimensions of the Hawan Kund at Jageshwar Dham. \*Height of the mekhala is measured from the renovated stone surface of the temple ground.



### Perspective with Structure

In addition to the facts of traditional worship of Shiva and continued usage of Hawan Kund with Mrityunjaya Japa, the structure of the Kund also reflected its usage specifically for Shiva worship.

The Hawan Kund is 5 feet 5-inch square-shaped Kund (Chatushkon Kund) (Figure 3). It has 5 feet 5-inch length, width, and depth. The depth was told by the old priest at the complex as 5 to 6 feet. The author himself has measured the sides as 5 feet and 5 inches and the Kund is in a square shape; here the depth is assumed as 5 feet 5 inch (Figure 3).

Considering 5 feet 5-inch sides and depth, the scriptural unit is calculated as follows. • 5 feet 5 inch (side of cube) = 65 inch = 165.1 cm = 165.1 cm / 1.9\* = 86.89 = 86 angul 7 yava • The square Kund with a side of 86 angul 7 yava can be around 13 Hast (hand as an ancient unit)

Hawan Kund which is calculated as follows. •  $86.89 \text{ angul} = 86.89 * 86.89 = 7549.87 \text{ square angul} = 7549.87 / 576 * \text{Hast} = 13.10 = 13 \text{ Hast}, 2 \text{ angul}, 3 \text{ yava}$

Here the Hawan Kund scriptural calculation comes to around 13 Hast but not exact 13 Hast. This fine difference is obvious as Kund construction calculations are dependent on the Angul of the host or prime priest height (Purusha). Here, near value 1.9 cm for 1 angul was used to calculate the size of the Kund as per scripture [7, 8].

Summarily, the Hawan Kund is 13 Hast capacity as per scriptural calculations for Kund constructions. It is interesting to note that as per Indian scripture, the number 13 is the number of Shiva, as Trayodashi i.e. 13th day of the fortnight is considered for worshipping lord Shiva [9]. The Hawan Kund at Jageshwar Dham has dimensions pointing towards Shiva worship.



Figure 4: Images of Mekhala of Hawan Kund at Jageshwar Dham. Top image left two arrows showed inside of Mekhala and the right two arrows showed Khat (Hawan Kund pit) separated from Mekhala.



Figure 5: Hawan Kund Mekhala and ground. Top image left arrow showed stone like structure, right arrow showed present mekhala structure; bottom image showed renovated stone ground.



### *Mekhala of Hawan Kund*

There is only one mekhala (step-like structure of Kund) of Hawan Kund at Jageshwar Temple. One old priest aged 80 at the temple provided the information that to their best knowledge there was only one mekhala that existed in the Hawan Kund, however, there was a stone mandap for Hawan Kund and there used to be a wooded boundary. These all indicated thoroughly made Hawan Kund with proper scriptural instructions where the original builder had proper scriptural knowledge for the same. Also, as per the inputs from the younger priest at the temple, the mekhala was damaged and they had renovated it which could be reflected in Figure 4 where the outer side of mekhala had uneven layers i.e., one layer one side of mekhala and three-layer on another side of mekhala.

### **Perspective with structure direction**

Association of the Hawan Kund at Jageshwar temple in Shiva worship is also reflected in the scriptural fact of the direction of Hawan Kund with respect to Maha Mrityunjaya Temple at Jageshwar Dham. The Hawan Kund structure is situated towards Ishan (north-east) direction of Mrityunjaya temple. In scripture Ishan's (north-east) direction is direction belongs to lord Shiva [10], indicating a direct association of Hawan Kund to Shiva worship.

### **Conclusion**

Scriptural, traditional, and archeological facts of Hawan Kund at Jageshwar temple indeed revealed its importance in Shiva worship and maintaining spiritual ambiance at the temple. The above mentioned facts showed Hawan Kund's structure, rituals, and location all strongly associated to Shiva worship hints that its presence is an essential part of Shiva worship of the main deity temple Jageshwar and Mrityunjaya temple dating back to circa 7<sup>th</sup> century. Summarily, i) the presence of Hawan Kund in original documentation by the Archeological Survey of India indicated its ancient presence, ii) its utility in the temple traditions and rituals of the order of worship indicated Hawan

Kund's importance since ancient times, iii) predominance of offerings of Mrityunjaya Mantra in Hawan Kund indicated its strong association of main deity worship since ancient time, iv) 13 Hast structure of Hawan Kund indicated scriptural relation with Shiva worship indicating well-thought construction by original builders, v) Ishan (north-east) direction of Hawan Kund position with respect to Mrityunjaya temple indicated following of proper scriptural protocol for Shiva worship. Thus, though there was no direct literature available to find the specific time of the construction of Hawan Kund in the temple complex, it was clear that the Hawan Kund of Jageshwar temple was associated strongly with the temple's main deity worship. Hence, the existence of Hawan Kund had to be to that of the Jageshwar and Maha Mrityunjaya temple i.e. circa 7<sup>th</sup> century.

**Compliance with ethical standards** Not required.

**Conflict of interest** The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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