

# Lord of Kedara: A Unique Sculpture from Uttarakhand Himalaya

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Il presente articolo analizza quattro interessanti sculture brahmàniche recentemente scoperte in una remota area del Garhwal Himalaya nord-occidentale (Uttarakhand, India). Tra queste un'immagine terio-antropomorfa a testa di bufalo itifallica, un reperto unico nel suo genere. La stele non si conforma a nessuno stile iconografico noto e tradisce la presenza di un'arte locale che combina diverse tradizioni antiche. La raffigurazione di Śiva come bufalo è conosciuta come “Kedāra / Kedāranātha” nei testi purāṇici e nelle tradizioni himalayane dell'Uttarakhand e del Nepal. Pertanto, gli attributi śaiviti della scultura a testa di bufalo sono facili da spiegare, anche se provengono da diverse tradizioni non sempre facili da individuare.

## INTRODUCTION

Uttarakhand Himalaya (India) consists of two traditional divisions, Kedārahāṇḍa and Mānasakhāṇḍa, named after two *sthala-purāṇa*-s bearing these names, i.e. the *Kedārahāṇḍam* (Bhaṭṭācārya 1906; Nautiyāl 1994) and the *Mānasakhāṇḍam* (Pāṇḍeya 1989). Interestingly, both names are associated with water. Thus, *kedāra* means “a field or meadow, especially one under water” (Monier-Williams 1899: 309), and *mānasa* refers to the famous lake Mānasarovara in Tibet. It may be noted that Kedārahāṇḍa corresponds roughly to the erstwhile pre-British Garhwal chiefdom and Mānasakhāṇḍa includes the former principalities of Kumaon (Uttarakhand, India) and adjoining Doti (Far West Nepal).

This article discusses the discovery of a unique sculpture found in a natural cave dedicated to Mahādeva, where a few other Brahmanical sculptures were also noticed. A dilapidated platform in the cave partly rests on a ruined wooden frame supported by a heap of rubble and the remnants of dressed stone masonry originally set in a series of wooden frames on the side of a steep hill in the village of Dewal in Northwestern Garhwal (Uttarakhand District, Uttarakhand, India) (Fig. 1).<sup>1</sup> This style of masonry work is widespread in this area prone to earthquakes (Fig. 2). The cave is situated some 400 m from the village and is totally abandoned, along with the sculptures referred to. The villagers offer their routine prayers at a temple of Śiva called Chāḍreśvara Mahādeva situated in the village itself; the object of worship is a *mohrā* (metal facade/mask).<sup>2</sup> However, the area just to

<sup>1</sup> It is hazardous to explore deeper into the cave without adequate safety measures; for now it can be accessed only by means of an unfastened wooden log which needs to be held upright manually. Without help from local persons the cave is almost inaccessible to outsiders.

<sup>2</sup> Access to the temple is restricted and photography is prohibited. Information about the *moharā* installed there is based on the oral account of a villager.