

A memorable trip to Chataidhura – an offbeat destination in Darjeeling on the occasion of Maha Shivaratri 2024

I went to Chataidhura (6,956 ft.) – a hilly village in Ghoom Pahar Forest area of Darjeeling on 7th March 2024 to observe Maha Shivaratri of 8-9 March 2024. There is a temple of Lord Shiva in that village. As winter left Siliguri (and the plain areas of Darjeeling district) in the end of February, I took one light woollen sweater only in the trip. I thought there won't be much cold in Darjeeling hills these days. I reached Ghoom at around 7 at the evening. I was waiting for public transport service (shared vehicle) to reach the village, which located around 4.5 kms away from Ghoom towards left. It was terribly cold and the area was covered by clouds or mist. There were no public vehicles. One family was returning from Darjeeling town to Sukhia Pokhari with their private vehicle. They took me in their vehicle. They said that they recognised me as outsider and as vehicles under public transport do not run in that route at evening, they decided to help me.

I reached the village with them. But it was fully covered by cloud and terribly cold. There were not phone networks at that time. I could not contact homestay manager. Then the gentleman with me started shouting with the name of the homestay. One lady came out from her home in dark and assisted me (even carried my language) to reach the destination! I offered some money to the gentleman, but he refused to accept it. So, it was one hitchhiking for me!

Homestay manager took me to the nearby Shiva temple – preparation was going on. It was just a stone's throw from the homestay. Also, I was taken to the kitchen of the temple, where four persons were actively involved in making 'sel roti' as prasadam for the visitors on 8th March. Shiva stutis were being played in loud speakers. The ambience was excellent.



Chataidhura Shiva Mandir



Chataidhura Shiva Mandir kitchen

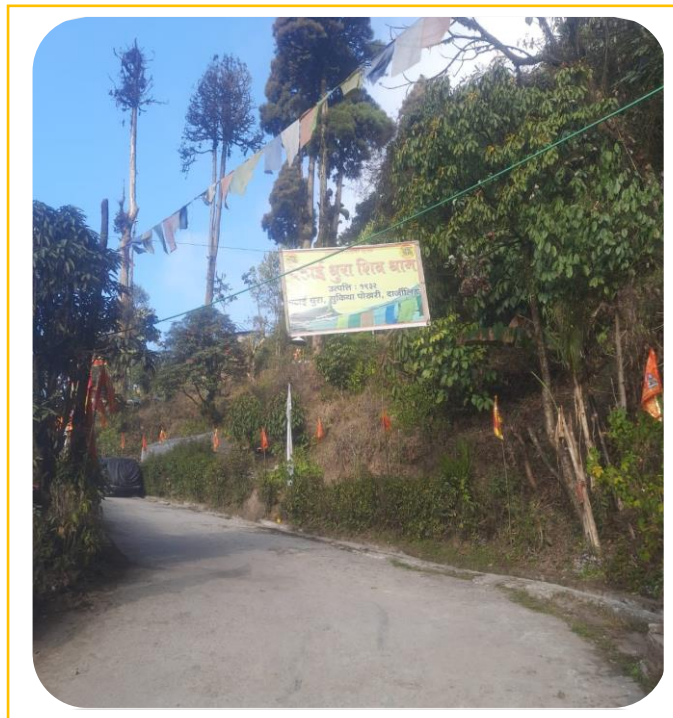
I came back to my room in the homestay and did dinner with some fruits, soaked kabuli chana and ground nut and roti-sabji, which I carried with me from home. Nowadays, I take food twice only. Once in the morning – in between 9-10 am, and for the second time, in between 8-9 at evening. The menu is similar – in the morning in place of roti, just a cup of cooked rice. Also, at home, with these, I take dal (liquid dal or dal vada) and milk twice. For the rest of the day and/or night, I breath air and drink water, as required (with the exception of some herbs and one prescribed drug and a cup of black tea with two crackers in the morning). I am fine. I am well aware that solar flare is going on with its peak in mid-2024. On the spiritual side, I hope that my present lifestyle will help me to align my body-mind-spirit with the extra energy that is coming down from the Sun.

Temperature at Chataidhura on 7th & 8th March evening and morning respectively

The only problem at Chataidhura was that of temperature, which was coming down gradually at evening. I was not well prepared with heavy winter cloths. At around 10 pm, I took a screenshot of my mobile phone, which was showing a temperature of 6 degree Celsius. I woke up at 5.45 am and took screenshot again. It was 3 degree Celsius at that time and the same continued till 6.15 am.

After taking bath, I visited the temple for my rituals at 7.30 am. In true sense, I did not perform any usual rituals. I enter into the temple complex with a small pack of incense sticks. I ignited the sticks, offered my pronam to Lord Shiva and put those sticks in a pot outside the temple. The priest was playing damaru and reciting mantra at times. On the North-Western side of the temple hall, one lady-priest, was playing damaru in one hand and a ghanta in the other and reciting Tara Mantra (as I guessed) in Tibetan style probably. I enjoyed everything. I stayed there till 10.15 am. In between I took my food (as I brought) and a cup of milk (provided by the homestay). With time, visitors started coming. Gradually, the temple complex became crowded. Hot milk-tea was being served on the road – in front of the entrance of the temple (I did not take). There were enough seating arrangements. In between 9-9.30 am, a group of people (came from outside the village) chanted some portions from Shiva Purana (or Veda) with Vedic accent. It was mind-blowing! Maha Mrityunjay Mantra and Shiva stutis were being played in loud speakers for rest of the time. My heart was full of joy. I felt that the bliss I sought from this visit, was obtained. Also, it was not possible for me to tolerate the cold. I thought the situation will change gradually. But it was windy and cloudy. Day temperature increased to 8 degree Celsius only at around 10 am.

By that time, sel roti and aloo dum were being served as prasadam. My host lady was engaged in that with others. It was a very well-organised event. Also, the village is very neat and clean. I took my tiffin box and took some sel rotis (not aloo dum) for home and conveyed her that I would like to leave. I checked out by 10.30 am and left the village. I returned home using public transport services by 1.30 pm on 8th March with the intention of observing rest of the Maha Shivaratri 2024 at home only. The trip will be memorable for me for ever!



Road to Chataidhura Shiva Mandir