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Dashavatara Temple, Deogarh

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Dashavatara Temple, Deogarh

The Dashavatara Temple at Deogarh is an early Gupta temple of Vishnu. This lesson covers its place, its five-shrine plan, its panels and the exam question that listed it.

At a glance

Four key facts on this topic

01 **Deogarh**Lalitpur, Uttar Pradesh.

02 **Gupta**Early 6th century CE.

03 **Plan**Panchayatana: five shrines.

04 **PYQ**Listed in UPSC Prelims 2026.

Where is the Dashavatara Temple?

1 Where Is It?

1.1 Where is the Dashavatara Temple?

The Dashavatara Temple stands at Deogarh in the Uttar Pradesh district of Lalitpur. It lies in the Betwa river valley.

The Betwa forms the border between Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh in these parts. So the temple sits close to the state line.



The Dashavatara Temple, Deogarh. Photo via Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 4.0.

1.2 Why does the temple matter?

It is one of the earliest structural Vaishnavite temples of central India. Scholars see it as a precursor of the north Indian Nagara style.

Structural means built from laid stone, not cut out of a rock face. That is why this temple is a landmark.

> 8. **Think it through:** Why do exams like early temples? See answer ↓

Quick check 1. True or false: The Dashavatara Temple is in the Lalitpur district of Uttar Pradesh. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Sources: outlooktraveller.com; imp-art.org

When was it built?

2 A Gupta Survivor

2.1 When was it built?

The temple dates to the early 6th century CE. That places it in the Gupta period.

One report calls it one of the few Gupta shrines that still survive in North India. It adds that this may be the only one not rebuilt during a restoration.

2.2 What lies around it?

A forested hill above the site holds many carved Jain icons. They show almost the entire pantheon of Jain divine beings.

Steps lead from the cliffs down to the Betwa. These ghats are called the Nahar Ghati and Raj Ghati. A fort here was built in the 9th century CE by the Pratihara rulers of Kannauj.

9. **Think it through:** Why is a site with many periods useful to know? See answer ↓

Quick check 2. True or false: The Deogarh fort was built in the Gupta period. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

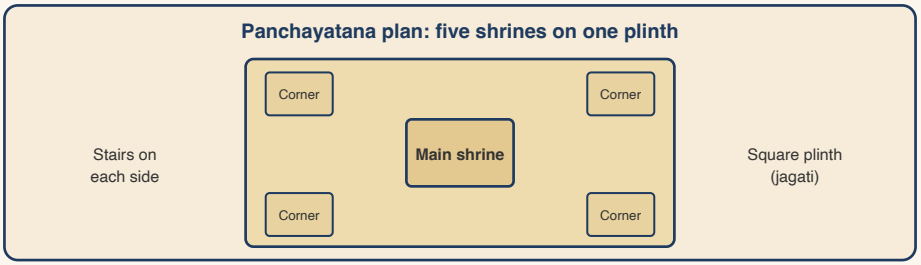
What is its plan?

3 Five-Shrine Plan

3.1 What is the temple plan?

The temple follows the panchayatana scheme of five shrines. One main shrine stands at the centre.

Ruins of four smaller shrines stand at the four corners. This plan shows the temple was once a group, not a single room.



A simple sketch, not to scale. Layout is simplified.

3.2 What does the plinth look like?

The main shrine sits on a square plinth called a jagati. Stairs rise on each side.

The plinth itself carried mouldings and frieze panels. They showed scenes from the Ramayana, Mahabharata and Vishnu Purana.

10. **Think it through:** What does panchayatana mean? See answer ↓

Quick check 3. True or false: The Dashavatara Temple follows the panchayatana scheme of five shrines. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

What tops the main shrine?

4 The Shikhara

4.1 What tops the main shrine?

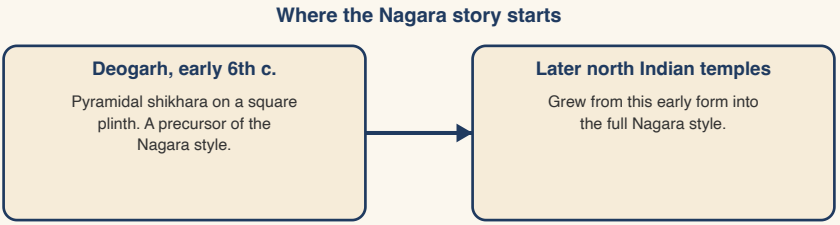
A pyramidal shikhara tops the main shrine. A shikhara is the tower over the sanctum.

It would have been about 40 feet tall when new. Today the tower is damaged, so its full shape must be imagined.

4.2 Why is this called a precursor?

Scholars treat the temple as a precursor to the north Indian Nagara style. Later northern temples grew from forms like this one.

Roof forms with gavakshas, or window motifs, and a repeating pot-and-foliage motif mark the temple as a model of Gupta art.



Memory hook only.

11. **Think it through:** Why say precursor and not Nagara? See answer ↓

Quick check 4. True or false: Scholars call the Dashavatara Temple a precursor to the Nagara style. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Which panels should you know?

5 Vishnu Panels

5.1 What do the walls show?

Each wall of the central shrine bears a different depiction of Vishnu. Each sits in a broad, deep niche inside a carved frame.

Door jambs frame the niches. They carry chaitya windows, lion-headed kirtimukhas and flying celestial figures.

Vishnu panels on the main shrine

Anantasayi	Nara-Narayana	Gajendra Moksha	Doorway relief
Vishnu reclines on the serpent Shesha	Vishnu as two meditating sages	Vishnu rescues an elephant	Vishnu seated on Shesha

Memory hook. Each wall of the central shrine shows a different Vishnu scene.

5.2 Which scenes should you know?

One panel shows Anantasayi Vishnu, reclining on the coils of the serpent Shesha. A lotus from his navel touches Brahma above, and Lakshmi sits at his feet.

Another panel shows Nara and Narayana. A third shows Vishnu rescuing an elephant, in the Gajendra Moksha story.

12. **Think it through:** What would an exam ask about these panels? See answer ↓

Panels to remember

Panel	Scene
Anantasayi	Vishnu reclines on Shesha; Brahma on a lotus above
Nara-Narayana	Vishnu as the sages Nara and Narayana
Gajendra Moksha	Vishnu rescues the elephant

Every panel shows a different form of Vishnu.

Quick check 5. True or false: The Gajendra Moksha panel shows Vishnu rescuing an elephant. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Why is it called Dashavatara?

6 The Name Puzzle

6.1 Why is it called Dashavatara?

Dashavatara means ten avatars of Vishnu. The temple is popularly known by this name because of its relief panels of Vishnu.

The temple is undoubtedly dedicated to Vishnu and his various incarnations.

6.2 Is the name correct?

Some scholars doubt the label. There is no actual Dashavatara panel at the temple, so the name is misleading.

Early writers also called it the Gupta Temple. For the exam, remember Vishnu and the Gupta age, not a count of ten avatars.

> 13. **Think it through:** How do you handle a disputed name? See answer ↓

> **Quick check 6.** True or false: Scholars agree that a Dashavatara panel exists at the temple. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

How was it tested in UPSC?

7 Exam Point of View

7.1 What did UPSC ask?

Item 3 is the Dashavatara Temple. Scholars describe it as a precursor to the Nagara style, with a pyramidal shikhara.

7.2 What should you remember for the exam?

> 14. **Exam angle:** The Dashavatara Temple is a Gupta-period Vishnu temple at Deogarh. It has a pyramidal shikhara and is seen as a precursor of the Nagara style. See answer ↓

Quick check 7. True or false: The Dashavatara Temple is a Gupta-period temple. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Remember this

- **Place:** Deogarh, Lalitpur district, Uttar Pradesh, on the Betwa.
- **Period:** early 6th century CE, Gupta.
- **Plan:** panchayatana, one main shrine and four corner shrines on a square plinth.
- **Style:** pyramidal shikhara; a precursor of the Nagara style.
- **Trap:** no actual Dashavatara panel is found, so the name is debated.

Explain it back: Say where the temple is, which god it honours and why it matters for the Nagara story.

Practice MCQs

1. To which period does the Dashavatara Temple at Deogarh belong?

A. Gupta period

B. Maurya period

C. Chola period

D. Delhi Sultanate period

See answer ↓

2. What is the plan of five shrines used at the Dashavatara Temple called?

A. Chaturmukha

B. Sarvatobhadra

C. Panchayatana

D. Triratha

See answer ↓

3. Which river valley does the Dashavatara Temple lie in?

A. Ken

B. Narmada

C. Betwa

D. Chambal

See answer ↓

4. Which story does the elephant-rescue panel at Deogarh show?

A. Vamana avatara

B. Samudra Manthana

C. Govardhana lifting

D. Gajendra Moksha

See answer ↓

5. What do scholars say about the name Dashavatara for this temple?

A. It lists ten dynasties

B. It may be mistaken as no Dashavatara panel exists

C. It is an inscription title

D. It comes from a fort

See answer ↓

6. What tops the main shrine of the Dashavatara Temple?

A. A flat slab roof

B. A gopuram

C. A pyramidal shikhara

D. A stupa dome

See answer ↓

Answer Key

1. **A.**
   It dates to the early 6th century CE, in the Gupta period.
   ↑ Q1
2. **C.**
   The temple follows the panchayatana scheme, with a main shrine and four corner shrines.
   ↑ Q2
3. **C.**
   It stands at Deogarh in the Betwa river valley, in the Lalitpur district of Uttar Pradesh.
   ↑ Q3
4. **D.**
   A panel shows Vishnu coming to the rescue of an elephant, the Gajendra Moksha story.
   ↑ Q4
5. **B.**
   Some scholars argue that, with no actual Dashavatara panel, the name could have been mistaken.
   ↑ Q5
6. **C.**
   A pyramidal shikhara tops the main shrine. It would have been about 40 feet tall.
   ↑ Q6

Quick-check answers

1. **True.** A travel report places Deogarh in the Uttar Pradesh district of Lalitpur, beside the Betwa. ↑ 1
2. **False.** The fort was built in the 9th century CE by the Pratihara rulers. The temple is the Gupta monument. ↑ 2
3. **True.** Both sources describe a main shrine with ruins of four smaller shrines at the corners. ↑ 3
4. **True.** The reference text says it is considered a precursor to the north Indian Nagara style. ↑ 4

5. **True.** A third panel shows Vishnu coming to the rescue of an elephant. ↑ 5
6. **False.** Some scholars say that, with no actual Dashavatara panel, the name could have been mistaken. ↑ 6
7. **True.** It dates to the early 6th century CE, in the Gupta period. ↑ 7
8. **Think it through.** They show how a style began. A question can ask which temple came first or which style it led to. ↑ 8
9. **Think it through.** It reminds you that Deogarh is not only Gupta. The temple is early, while the fort and Jain shrines came later. ↑ 9
10. **Think it through.** Five shrines laid out together. Remember it as one centre and four corners. ↑ 10
11. **Think it through.** Precursor means an early step toward the style. It is safer wording than calling the temple a full Nagara example. ↑ 11
12. **Think it through.** It may ask which god they honour, or which story the elephant panel tells. Answer: Vishnu, and Gajendra Moksha. ↑ 12
13. **Think it through.** Use the popular name in your answer, and keep the doubt in mind. The key facts are Vishnu, Gupta, Deogarh. ↑ 13
14. **Think it through.** Do not treat all four listed temples as one style. Match each temple to its tower type before you choose a code. ↑ 14

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