

SOMNATH JYOTIRLINGA



SOMNATH TEMPLE

Somnath Jyotirlinga is considered to be the first of the 12 Jyotirlingas. The Somnath Temple in Gujarat is situated near Veraval in (Prabhas Kshetra) Kathiawad district. This is a highly revered pilgrimage site in the country. There is a legend related to how this Jyotirlinga came into being. According to the Shiva Purana, the moon was married to 27 daughters of Daksha Prajapati, out of which he loved Rohini the most. Seeing his negligence towards the other wives, Prajapati cursed moon that it would lose all its radiance. A disturbed moon along with Rohini came to Somnath and worshipped the Sparsa Lingam after which he was blessed by Shiva to regain his lost beauty and shine. On his request, Lord Shiva assumed the name Somchandra and resided there eternally. He became famous by the name Somnath.

Someshwar Mahadev Temple is believed to have built out of gold originally by Somraj, the Moon God himself, then rebuilt by Ravana in silver, then by Lord Krishna in Sandal Wood, and then by Bhima (Pandav brothers) in stone. The present Somnath temple is the seventh one reconstructed beyond six repeated destruction by the Muslim invaders.

Archeological evidence shows that there was a temple at Prabhas Kshethra for Lord Somanath around 4th century AD. There were fifty six pillars encrusted with gold and studded with valuable stones like diamonds, emeralds, rubies, pearls, topaz etc., in the temple. There were many more items made of gold. Two thousand ordained priests were serving the Lord every day. There was a huge golden bell with attached golden chain to ring to announce the commencement of prayers.

The Muslim Ruler Mahmud Gazni, Sultan of Ghazna, invaded India with a big army, and ransacked and destroyed the temple in 1025 AD. According to Romila Thappar, 'In 1024 Mahmud raided Gujrat, plundering the Somnath Temple and breaking its Jyotirlinga. He took away booty of 2 million dinars.' The temple was immediately rebuilt by King Bhima of Gujarat and King Bhoja of Malwa. The temple was destroyed again by another invader, Alaf Khan, the general of Allauddin Khilji, in 1300 AD. It was

rebuilt again by King Mahipal. The temple was destroyed again and again in 1390, 1490, 1530 by Muslims, and finally in 1701 by Aurangzeb, a Mughal Muslim ruler of India, who built a mosque at the ruined temple site. The temple was rebuilt again by Queen Ahilyabai Hekar of Gwalior at an adjacent site of the ruined temple in 1783 AD. After Independence in 1947, Sardar Vallabhai Patel, a great leader, and also the First Home Minister, with the help of Dr. K.M. Munshi, another Minister of Food and Civil Supplies in the Nehru cabinet got the temple reconstructed without the involvement of Government Funds by 1951. The new temple was built on Chalukya style or Kailasa Mahameru Prasad style architecture.

(Excerpt from the book Hindu Sanskriti by Chaman Lal Gadoo)

