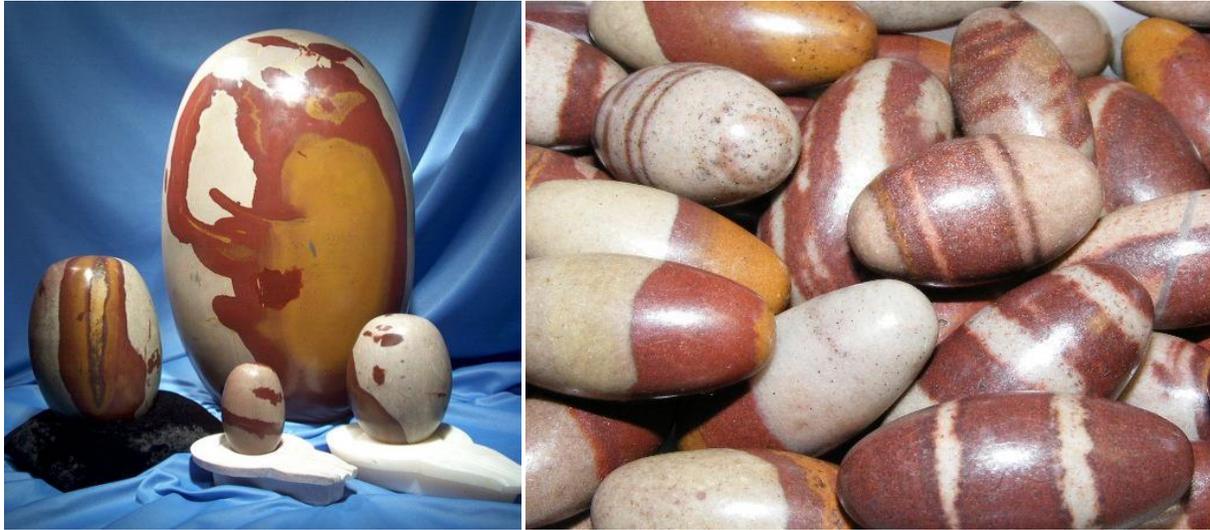


BANA LINGAM



Ganga Gita ca Gayatri Govindeti catushtayam |
Catur-gakara-samyukte punar-janma Na vidyate ||

That which starts with the syllable "ga" means emerging forth and being constantly present. As the verse goes, Ganga, Gita, Gayatri and Govinda are constants. In fact the very meaning of Linga in the Agama context signifies "ling" which means to destroy and "ga" which is to emerge. Bana Lingas emerge as natural Swayambhuva Shiva Lingas. These are found only in the Narmada river bed at Onkar Mandhata and are very sacred stones as they contain the very form and energy of Lord Shiva similar to Jyothir Lingas.

Bana Lingam is an iconic symbol of worship, based on either the scriptures or cultural traditions among the Hindus, particularly of the Shaivaites and Smartha Brahmins. Stones are ancient and connote divinity. It is a smooth ellipsoid stone. Bana linga is also called the Swayambhu Linga in Sanskrit meaning; "Self-existent mark or sign of God", as it is discovered in nature and not carved by human hands. Bana Lingam and Sphatika Lingam are two forms of Shiva lingam, kept for worship in homes, respectively of brownish black and white colours. Worshipping Bana Lingas, be in colour, shape and size are beneficial. (Salagrama Kosha)

The Shiva Lingas that are formed in the Narmada River contain Crypto Crystalline Quartz (masses made up of either fibrous or granular aggregates of tiny, microscopic Quartz Crystals) and a Gemstone material called Chalcedony (with an iron oxide and goethite inclusion) along with Basalt and Agate. This unique composition coupled with elliptical shape has a precise resonance in alignment with our Energy Centers or Chakras and are used for thousands of years as Divine Energy Generators for Cleansing, Healing and for Meditation.

The Siddhanta Sekhara (an astronomical work by Sripati in 1039 A.D.) reveals that the Bana Lingas have already been worshiped by deities and contain the impress of their worship visible in the marks on the Lingas: Lotus mark (Padma) reveals it was worshipped by Brahma. Mark of a parasol (Chhatra) indicates Indra. Mark of two heads (Siro-Yugma) indicates Agni. Three steps (Pada) mark indicates it was Yama. Mark of a mace (Gada) indicates Isana. Shiva Mark of a water vessel (Kalasha) indicates Varuna. A banner mark (Dhwaja) indicates the energy of Vayu.

It is said that mainly there are nine types of Bana lingas -

- (a) Swayambhu - honey coloured with two dark rings
- (b) Mrityunjaya - variegated colours with marks resembling spear and coils of matted hair
- (c) Nilakantha - elongated and white coloured with a black spot
- (d) Trilochana - white coloured with eye-like marks
- (e) Kalagni Rudhra - lustrous and dark, stout with matted-hair like marks
- (f) Tripurari - honey coloured with white marks resembling the sacrificial chord across and with lotus at the base
- (g) Isana - clear crystal with the top twany brown and marks of a trident
- (h) Ardhanariswara - white coloured on one side and red coloured on the other side
- (i) Maha Kala - slightly red in hue, shining, stout and longish in shape

Tantric lingams, also called Bana linga, can only be found at the bottom of the Narmada River in India. Considered one of the seven holy rivers, the Narmada and the lingams found there have been considered sacred objects for thousands of years. The forms of Linga can vary in detail from a simple roller shape roughly cylindrical Bana linga to the stone carved with a thousand facets (Sahasralinga) or of light relief in several human figures (Mukhalinga). The Linga in the temple is in stone.

“Lord Shiva is really formless. He has no form of his own and yet all forms are His forms. All forms are pervaded by Lord Shiva. Every form is the form or Linga of Lord Shiva. A Shiva Linga consists of three parts, the lowest of which is the Brahma-Pitha, the middle one, the Vishnu-Pitha and the uppermost one, the Shiva-Pitha. Some are Svayambhu-lingas, some are Narmadesvaras. There are twelve Jyotir lingas and five Pancha Bhuta Lingas in India.” (Lord Shiva and His Worship by Swami Sivananda)

“The linga is also looked upon as the visible form of Mantra, that is, of sound before it has become word, of sound forms and of words. The ontology of the cosmos together with that of man's mind and body inheres in the concrete shape of the Shiva linga. Descending from its apex in the four directions of space to its bottom, the linga, in a complex system of analogical categories, is understood symbolically as the embodiment of the five elements (ether or space, air, fire, water, and earth), the five sense data (sound, touch, form, taste, and smell), and the five sense faculties (hearing, feeling, seeing, tasting, and smelling). Analogous to the categories of the physical world and of sentiency, higher categories comprising mentation and transcendence have, in ontological order, their symbol in the linga, the principles of essence (*Purusa*) and substance (*Prakrti*), universal intellect (*Buddhi*), personality (*Ahankara*), and mind (*Manas*). Of these and further categories comprising the entire realms of existence and transcendence, the linga is the pivot.”(Manifestations of Shiva by Stella Kramrisch)

“For many centuries Bana lingas were considered objects of veneration for Tantrics, or learned Sages. According to Tantric traditions, the lingam represented the unification of male and female energies; or expressed differently, as opposite energies united. In this regard, the body of the lingam represented male energy, characterized as knowledge; and the markings symbolized female energy, characterized as wisdom. You might say Tantric lingams illustrate the idea of harmony through duality; but they have more than symbolic value. Talented Tantric healers know how to cleanse and harness the Tantric lingam's energy for the purposes of removing blockages in the human nervous system, cleansing the subtle bodies such as the human aura, and amplifying positive energy

both within and around the human body. In short, the Tantric lingam is nothing less than a potent tool used to cleanse negativity and increase positivity to bring about an enlightened state.” (Lost in the Depths – Tantric Lingams from the Narmada River by Misaki Imagawa Edited by Glen Joffe)



Bana linga that was recovered from Saraswati River in mid 1600s (Sri Kashiswar Bhairav Temple, Andul)



Giant lingams ranging in size from 8 to 11 feet in length Madya Pradesh, India; Photo credit: Glen Joffe

The Bana Lingam is a most Sacred Symbol and **‘Divine Energy Tool’**, both in the ancient and in this modern world and it comes with the loftiest frequency of vibrations (compared to any stone on Earth) and appears from only one place on the entire Planet of Earth - in the cradles of Holy River Narmada. The Bana Lingas are Swayambhu Shiva Lingas that have taken shape in the Sacred Narmada River, in the Central Western part of India. This is why the Bana Lingams are also known as the Narmada Bana Lingas or Narmadeshwar Shiva Lingas. What Shaligram are to Vishnu, that the Bana-lingas or Narmada linga are to Shiva: sacred and self-manifest representations. According to Yajnavalkya-Samhita, the bana-lingas obtained in the river Narmada are the very forms of Shiva assumed by the God at the request of Banasura; they are therefore the holiest of objects.

The Narmada River where the Bana linga stones are found has been mentioned by the Ramayana, the Mahabharata and Puranas refer to it frequently. The Rewa Khand of Vayu Purana and the Rewa Khand of Skanda Purana are entirely devoted to the story of the birth and the importance of the Narmada River. It is said to have sprung from the body of Lord Shiva. It was created in the form of a lovely damsel who enamored Gods and hence named by the Lord as Narmada – delight giving. It is, therefore, often called Shankari, i.e., daughter of Lord Shankar (Shiva). All the pebbles rolling on its bed are said to take the shape of His emblem with the saying *Narmada Ke Kanker utte Shankra*, which means that ‘pebble stones of Narmada gets a personified form of Shiva’. These Lingam shaped stones, called Bana linga are sought after for daily worship by the Hindus. The Banna linga, as a divine anionic symbol for worship, is held in reverence by the Shaivaites and Smartha Brahmins, to the same extent as the Shalagrama- Shilais held in reverence by the Vaishnavaites.

Bana linga is a part of the fivefold family of deities known as Panchayatana. The five Hindu deities Shiva, Vishnu, Devi, Surya and Ganesh are the embodiment of 5 bhutas/tatwas worshipped in formless stones, which are obtained from the 5 rivers as indicated in the table below. Panchayatana form of worship is said to have been introduced by Adi Shankaracharya, the 8th century A.D, Hindu philosopher, to enable a person to worship his Ishta Devata (adored or desired deity), to address each sectarian form of worship and thus bring about tolerance among all sects. Depending on the tradition followed by Smarta households, one of these deities is kept in the centre facing East direction and the other four are arranged in four corners surrounding it, all the deities are worshipped with equal fervor and devotion.

(Compiled by Chaman Lal Gadoo)