

## Vaidyanath Jyothirlingam (BAIJNATH)



### SHIVA LINGAM BAIJNATH TEMPLE

According to a popular legend the Shiva Lingam in Baijnath is Vaidyanath Jyothirlingam. Baijnath is a town at the foothills of Himalayas. Actually it is a town in Kangra District in Himachal Pradesh. Baijnath was originally known as Kirangama but its name changed after the temple was dedicated to Lord Vaidyanath or the Lord of physicians. The present temple of Lord Baijnath was built in 1204 A.D., by two merchants, Ahuka and Manyuka. The temple was built in Nagara style. The temple was renovated by King Sansara Chandra in 1783 A.D. The earthquake of 1905AD that shook the Kangra region caused damage to the temple which was repaired. Now the temple is a protected monument under the Archeological Survey of India. A large number of devotees from all over India visit the temple throughout the year. A five day celebration is held on Maha Shivaratri every year. Makara Sankranti, Vaisaka Poornami, Shravan Mondays are also celebrated on a grand scale.

Bajjnath is a small township in the Dhauladhar range of western Himalayas, 16 km from Palampur in the Kangra District of Himachal Pradesh. Bajjnath is a town at the foothills of Himalaya and is famous for its 13th-century temple dedicated to Shiva as Vaidyanath, 'the Lord of physicians'. The village lies on the Pathankot-Mandi highway, almost midway between Kangra and Mandi. The present name Bajjnath became popular after the name of the temple. According to a popular legend the Shiva Lingam in Bajjnath is Vaidyanath Jyothirlingam, Shiva is worshipped as the 'God of Healing', and this is one of the popular temples in Himachal Pradesh.

The history of the temple itself is given in the two long inscriptions fixed in the walls of the mandapa of the temple. Accordingly that Kiragrama (modern Bajjnath) situated on the bank of the river Binduka was a part of Trigarta (the territory lying between the rivers Ravi and Satluj, roughly represented by districts of Kangra and Jalandhar) under the suzerainty of King Jaya Chandra, the overlord of Jalandhara. Under him a Rajanaka (local chief) Lakshmana Chandra, who was matrimonially related to Jaya Chandra from his mother's side, was ruling over Kiragrama. Genealogy of Lakshmana Chandra is given in these inscriptions.

At Kiragrama resided two brothers, Manyuka and Ahuka, sons of a merchant named Siddha. Their genealogy up to fourth generation is also mentioned in the inscriptions. They out of their devotion to Shiva Vaidyanatha constructed the temple under discussion in Saka 1126 (CE 1204). They also donated a machine for extracting oil, a shop and some land in the village called Navagrama (modern Nauri near Bajjnath) to the temple. The Rajanaka Lakshmana Chandra and his mother also made some donations to the temple in the form of money and land respectively. The inscriptions tell us that a Shiva Linga known as Vaidyanatha already existed on the spot but was without a proper house so the present temple and a porch in its front was constructed. It clearly indicates that a shrine already existed on the spot before the construction of the present temple.

What happened to the shrine in the centuries that followed is not exactly known but it appears to have continued under worship, as there is clear evidence of repairs and renovations from time to time. In the 18th century Sansara Chandra II, the Katoch king of Kangra, carried out extensive repairs and renovations of the temple. The Bajjnath temple has been continuously under worship ever since its construction in 1204 A.D. The two long inscriptions in the porch of the temple indicate that a temple of Shiva existed on the spot even before the present one was constructed.

British Archaeologist Alexander Cunningham noticed an inscription of 1786 in the temple referring to its renovations by King Sansara Chandra. An inscription on the wooden doors of the sanctum of the temple provides the date as Samvat 1840 (AD 1783) that is very near to Cunningham's date. The devastating earthquake that shook the entire region of Kangra on 4 April 1905 also caused damage to the shrine, which has been reported by J. Ph. Vogel and has since been repaired. At present the temple is a protected monument under the Archaeological Survey of India but the performance of worship and rituals are under a local board at Bajjnath with SDM as its chairman. The hereditary priests continue to get a share of the offerings.

The present temple is an example of the early medieval north Indian Temple architecture known as Nagara style of temples. The Svayambhu form of Shiva Linga is enshrined in the sanctum of the temple that has five projections on each side and is

surmounted with a tall curvilinear Shikhara. The entrance to sanctum is through a vestibule that has a large square "Mandapa" in front with two massive balconies one each in north and south. There is a small porch in front of the mandapa hall that rests on four pillars in the front preceded by an idol of "Nandi", the bull, in a small pillared shrine. The whole temple is enclosed by a high wall with entrances in the south and north. The outer walls of the temple have several niches with images of Gods and Goddesses. Numerous images are also fixed or carved in the walls. The outer doorway in the porch as also the inner doorway leading to the sanctum of the temple are also studded with a large number of images of iconographic importance. Some of them are very rare to be found elsewhere.

According to the legend, it is believed that during the Treta Yuga, Ravana in order to have invincible powers worshiped Lord Shiva at the Kailash. In the same process, to please the almighty he offered his ten heads in the havan kund. Influenced by this extraordinary deed of the Ravana, the Lord Shiva not only restored his heads but also bestowed him with powers of invincibility and immortality.

On attaining this incomparable boon, Ravana also requested Lord Shiva to accompany him to Lanka. Shiva consented to the request of Ravana and converted himself into Shiva Linga. Then Lord Shiva asked him to carry the Linga and warned him that he should not place the Shiva Linga down on the ground on his way as Shiva said wherever you will keep me, in this Linga form, I will rest there only, the Linga will be stay there only. Ravana started moving south towards Lanka and reached Baijnath. He was thirsty and saw Lord Ganesha, disguised as a shepherd and asked for water. Lord Ganesha had requested Lord of Water (Varuna) to fill the entire in the small pot of water which he offered to Ravana. On drinking it, Ravana, felt the urge to answer nature's call and handed over the Shiva Linga to Ganesh and went away to get himself relieved. Lord Ganesh put the Linga on the ground and thus the Shiva Linga got established there and the same is in the form of Ardhnarishwar (God in form of Half Male & Half Female). Another version also suggests that while Ravana was descending from the Himalayas with the Shiva Linga, Lord Shiva had awarded him, after years of worship which was supposed to be established at Lanka, which would have blessed him (Ravana) with undefeatable powers, but was not to be placed anywhere during the course of travel, even during resting, Ravana was tricked by one of the Devas (Gods), who posed as a beggar and wanted help from Ravana and promised to hold the Shiva Linga for him while he (Ravana) could fetch some food for the beggar. The Deva posing as beggar placed the Shiva Linga on ground, in absence of Ravana. The Shiva idol or the Shiva Linga at Baijnath temple is the same Shiva Linga which was placed by the Deva after tricking Ravana.

A large number of devotees from all over India visit the temple throughout the year. A five day celebration is held on Maha Shivaratri every year. Makara Sankranti, Vaisaka Poornami, Shravan Mondays are also celebrated on a grand scale.

In the town of Baijnath, Dussehra festival in which traditionally the effigy of the Ravana is consigned to flames, celebrated all over the country, is not celebrated as a mark of respect to the devotion of Ravana towards Lord Shiva.

**(Excerpts from the book Himalayan Hindu Shrines by Chaman Lal Gadoo)**