



# Siddha Baba Temple, Bareilly (Uttar Pradesh): An Archaeological Reappraisal of Twin Quadrangular Lingas

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## Abstract

The *Siddha Baba Temple* of Bareilly presents an extraordinary archaeological conundrum. Its twin quadrangular *Shivlingas*, carved from a single block of red sandstone, exhibit technical precision yet primitive craftsmanship. When contextualized against early *linga* typologies—from Gudimallam in Andhra Pradesh to Ahichchhatra in Uttar Pradesh—the Siddha Baba carvings reveal morphological and stylistic anomalies that challenge established chronologies of Saivite iconography.

The study synthesizes archaeological observation, geomorphological mapping, and cultural tradition to propose that Siddha Baba represents an **intermediate, experimental phase** of sacred stone carving—situated between natural rock cults and the architectural temple cults of the Gupta era.

**Keywords:** Siddha Baba Temple, Twin Quadrangular Lingas, Early Shaivism, Linga Iconography, Bareilly Archaeology, Sacred Stone Worship, Protohistoric Ritual Traditions, North Indian Archaeology.

## 1. Introduction

The worship of the *linga* is among the oldest and most enduring ritual practices of the Indian subcontinent. From the proto-historic fertility symbols of the Indus Valley (Possehl, 2002) [1] to the sophisticated *Shivalingas* of Gupta art, this symbol encapsulates the philosophical continuum of form and formlessness (*Sagun–Nirgun*).

However, archaeological discoveries such as the Gudimallam Linga (1st–2nd century BCE), the Bhita and Ahichchhatra lingas (2nd century CE onward), and the Badami and Elephanta examples (6th century CE) reveal a **progressive formalization** of this icon. In contrast, the *Siddha Baba* lingas of Bareilly, executed on a single red sandstone boulder with striking geometric austerity, appear to **belong to a much earlier stratum of cult practice**, where symbolic form was only beginning to emerge from natural stone worship.

This paper, therefore, attempts to locate the *Siddha Baba* carvings within that early trajectory—drawing upon prior archaeological research, stylistic comparison, and field-based evidence.

## 2. Review of Prior Scholarship: Early Shivlinga Discoveries in India

### 2.1 The Gudimallam Linga (Andhra Pradesh)

Discovered near Tirupati, the Gudimallam Linga (now preserved in situ at the Parasurameswara Temple) is widely regarded as one of the earliest known *lingas* with anthropomorphic features. Carved from a single stone block and bearing a standing male figure on its frontal surface, it is generally dated between the 1st century BCE and the early Satavahana period (Sivaramamurti, 1974) [2]. The monument is often interpreted as an important early example in the transition from aniconic to anthropomorphic Shaiva representation.

### 2.2 Bhita and Kaushambi Lingas (Uttar Pradesh)

Excavations at Bhita and Kaushambi conducted by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI, 1958–60) revealed simple sandstone *lingas* lacking elaborate pedestals and polished finishing [3]. These specimens are frequently associated with pre-Gupta or early historic Shaiva traditions. Their comparatively simple workmanship and limited architectural context invite comparison with the Bareilly carvings in terms of surface treatment and non-monumental execution.

### 2.3 Ahichchhatra Excavations (Bareilly District)

Ahichchhatra, situated approximately 25 km from the Siddha Baba site, yielded several red sandstone *lingas* associated with Gupta-period religious activity (ASI, 1963–65) [4]. Unlike the Siddha Baba carvings, the Ahichchhatra examples are generally cylindrical, polished, and integrated into structural shrine architecture. This regional contrast may indicate differing stages of ritual formalization and lithic craftsmanship within the broader development of Shaiva worship traditions in northern India.

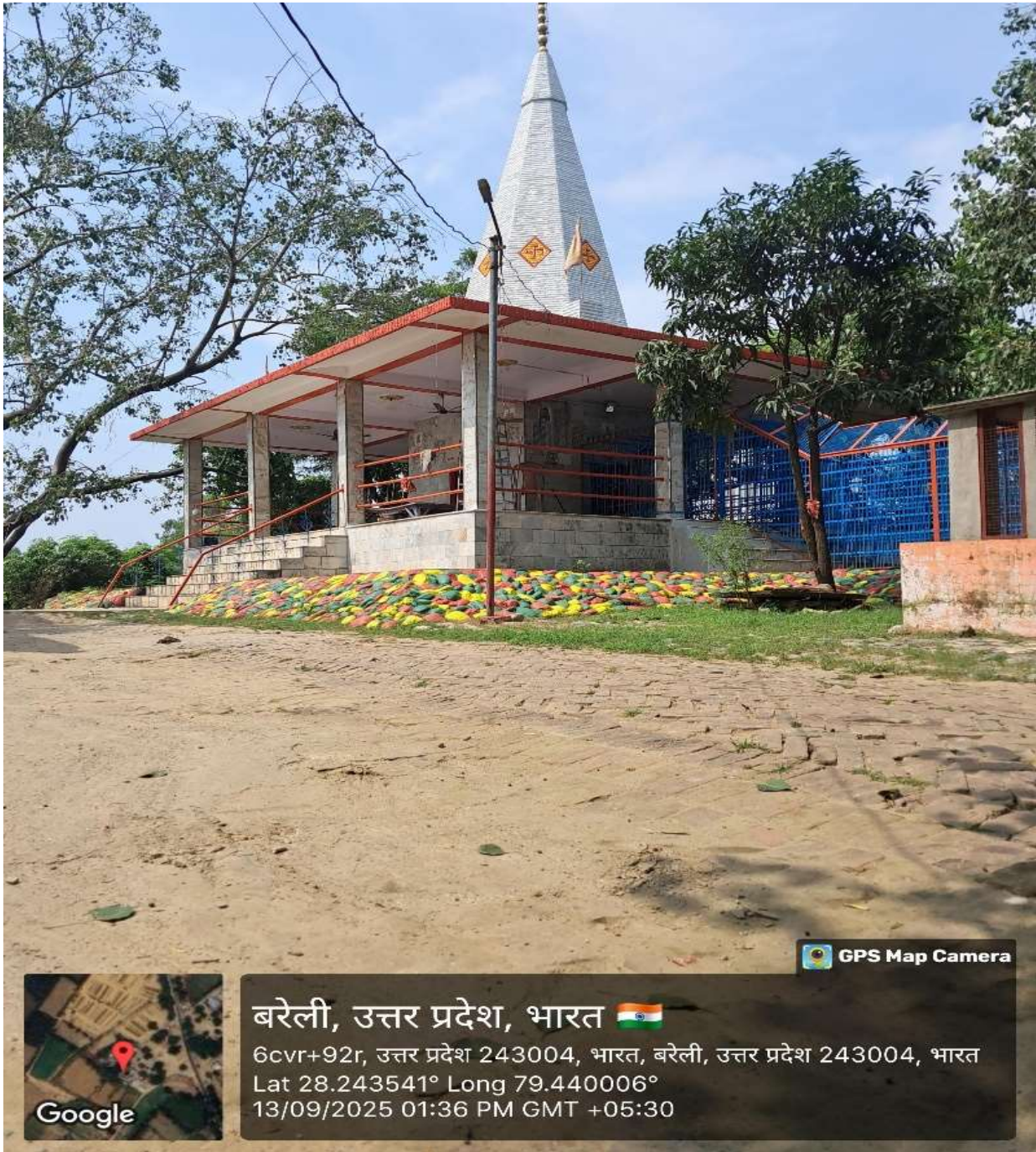
### 2.4 Comparative Context

Later rock-cut traditions at Badami and Elephanta (6th century CE onward) demonstrate the increasing ritual and architectural formalization of the *linga* cult in peninsular India (Soundara Rajan, 1981) [5]. In comparison, the Siddha Baba carvings—consisting of two adjoining quadrangular forms carved upon a single sandstone monolith—appear comparatively uncommon within the presently surveyed corpus of North Indian Shaiva lithic remains. Their combined configuration, rough surface treatment, and non-canonical form warrant further archaeological and typological investigation.

## 3. Site Description and Topographical Context

The Siddha Baba Temple stands upon a prominent earthen mound along Bukhar Road, Bareilly (U.P.), at a distance of roughly **1.6 km from the paleo-channel of the Ramganga River**, confirmed through ISRO Bhuvan satellite mapping (2025) [6].

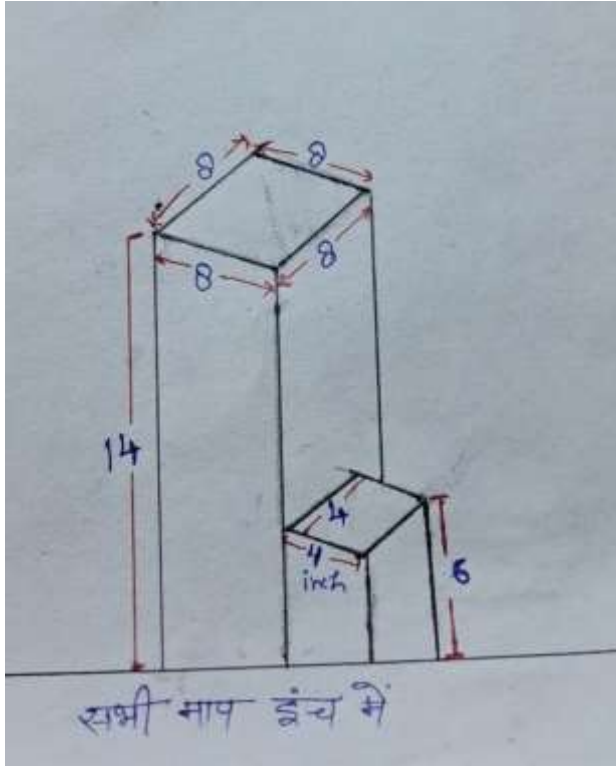
Such elevated locations near old riverbeds are consistent with **prehistoric settlement patterns** and often coincide with early ritual activity zones. The site's commanding position also supports the hypothesis that it once functioned as an open-air cultic center, later enclosed within a modern brick mandapa.



#### 4. Morphological and Technical Description

Feature	Larger Linga	Smaller Linga	Remarks
Length	14 inches	6 inches	Proportionate scaling
Breadth	8 inches	4 inches	Equal aspect ratio
Orientation	Toward ancient Ramganga channel	NE (24°)	Intentional dual orientation
Material	Red Sandstone	Same monolith	Locally sourced
Tool Marks	Chisel & Hammer	Chisel & Hammer	Unfinished surfaces
Texture	Rough, unpolished	Same	Indicates early hand-tool phase

The quadrangular form—rather than cylindrical—is of paramount importance. In *linga typology*, the **circular form symbolizes the cosmic cycle**, while the **square form represents stability and earth principle (Prithvi-tattva)** (Kramrisch, 1946) [7]. The Bareilly pair, being *square-based and unpolished*, likely corresponds to a **pre-canonical stage**, when such symbolism was in formative development.





## 5. Stylistic and Comparative Analysis

The twin *lingas* of Siddha Baba differ from all catalogued specimens in three major ways:

### 1. Form:

Most early *lingas* are cylindrical; here, both are **quadrangular**, a shape rarely encountered outside pre-Gupta rudimentary carvings.

### 2. Execution:

The carving lacks symmetry and polish but displays **mathematical proportionality**, implying a deliberate sacred geometry rather than crude workmanship.

### 3. Dual Carving on One Stone:

No parallel exists in the corpus of Indian *lingas* where **two deities share a single matrix**, except perhaps in multi-faced (*mukhalingas*) examples, which are conceptually different (Sivaramamurti, 1974) [2].

From an archaeological standpoint, these anomalies suggest that the Bareilly carvings may **predate the ritual canonization** of the *linga*'s form during the early Gupta period (4th–6th century CE).

## 6. Symbolism and Ritual Context

In proto-historic India, sacred stones and fertility symbols often existed in **paired configurations**—male and female, active and passive, creator and preserver. The Siddha Baba *lingas* may therefore represent an early visualization of **dual cosmic principles** rather than two separate deities.

This hypothesis is strengthened by the site's orientation toward the ancient river (Ramganga), a sacred motif associated with fertility, rejuvenation, and cyclical rebirth. In several early agrarian cults (Possehl, 2002) [1], rivers were treated as the living essence of divine energy, and ritual stones near their banks marked the transition from nature worship to deity worship.

Thus, Siddha Baba stands as a **transitional locus** between landscape veneration and formal Saiva theology.

## 7. Ethnohistoric Continuity

Local oral narratives attribute the shrine to *Gopal Baba*, a saint said to have meditated here a millennium ago. Such traditions, though historically unverifiable, perform an important cultural function—they **preserve the sanctity of ancient sites** through successive reinterpretations.

Many prehistoric cultic stones across India (e.g., in Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, and Chhattisgarh) have survived solely because local communities re-identified them as manifestations of Hindu deities (Ray, 2019) [8]. The Siddha Baba shrine, thus, exemplifies **sacral continuity through cultural re-inscription**.

## 8. Archaeological Significance and Future Research

The site's integrity and untouched monolith make it a potential key reference for understanding the early evolution of **North Indian lithic sacred art**. To establish a definitive chronology, the following interdisciplinary studies are proposed:

- **Petrography and Mineral Composition Analysis** of the sandstone to ascertain its provenance.
- **Microscopic Tool-Mark Analysis** to determine the nature and period of implements used.
- **Sedimentology and Soil Stratigraphy** of the surrounding mound to identify occupational layers.
- **Carbon Dating and Optically Stimulated Luminescence (OSL)** tests on adjacent sediments.
- **Ground-Penetrating Radar (GPR)** survey for sub-surface architectural traces.
- **Ethnographic documentation** of ritual continuity and oral memory.

Such investigations could either confirm its prehistoric origins or identify a protohistoric transition phase between the Mesolithic and early historic periods.

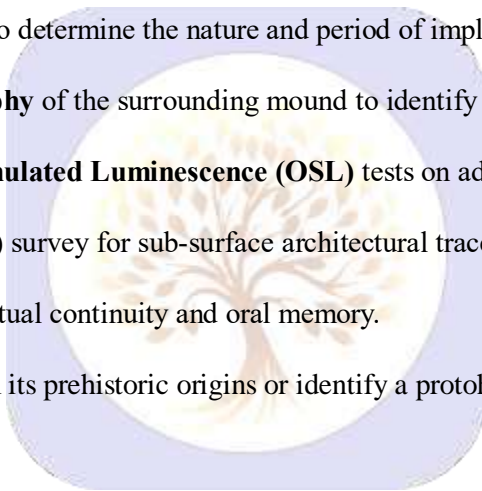
## 9. Limitations of the Present Study

The present study is preliminary and primarily based upon field observation, morphological comparison, local oral traditions, and topographical assessment of the Siddha Baba site at Bareilly. While the unusual quadrangular twin-linga configuration and associated archaeological features may indicate the possibility of considerable antiquity, no definitive chronological conclusion can presently be established in the absence of systematic scientific investigation.

At this stage, the hypothesis regarding the possible early or protohistoric character of the carvings should therefore be regarded as a **primary observational proposition**, rather than a conclusive archaeological determination. The suggestion that the site may represent one of the earlier surviving forms of non-canonical linga worship remains provisional and requires verification through institutional research.

The study is limited by the absence of:

- controlled excavation,
- stratigraphic analysis,
- petrographic examination,
- microscopic tool-mark study,
- radiometric or OSL dating,



- and formal documentation by recognized archaeological agencies.

Accordingly, the present paper seeks not to assert a final historical claim, but to draw scholarly attention toward a potentially significant sacred lithic site whose features warrant detailed multidisciplinary investigation under the supervision of organizations such as the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), state archaeology departments, or university-based research institutions.

Until such investigations are undertaken, all chronological interpretations presented herein must be treated as tentative and subject to future revision in light of scientific evidence.

## 10. Conclusion

The *Siddha Baba Temple* represents far more than a local devotional site—it is a material witness to the dawn of sacred geometry in Indian ritual thought. Its double quadrangular lingas, chiseled from a single block, stand at a conceptual crossroads: between nature and artifice, between landscape and temple, between the anonymous hand of a primitive carver and the formalized symbolism of later Hindu art.

While prudence dictates avoiding exaggerated claims, it is difficult to overlook the site’s potentially significant implications. Should scientific tests corroborate its antiquity, *Siddha Baba* may emerge as one of the earliest archaeological testimonies to dual-linga worship—a form hitherto unknown in the typological canon of Indian archaeology.

The present study, therefore, advocates its urgent conservation and formal survey under the aegis of the Archaeological Survey of India, for this modest mound on Bareilly’s Bukhar Road may yet contribute substantially to our understanding of early Indian sacred art. Furthermore, the present surface exposure may not represent the complete archaeological context of the monolith, and the possibility of additional buried structural or lithic features beneath the mound cannot presently be excluded.



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