

## A temple where the deity goes hic

This temple in Uttar Pradesh's Sitapur district doesn't have an idol or a priest and devotees don't make floral offering. They offer liquor to the deity -- a saint who lived in the area around 150 years ago and was said to enjoy his drink in the evening and had a knack of clairvoyance and curing people.

Welcome to the Khabees Baba temple situated in a forest area near Sandana town in Sitapur district, some 80 km from Lucknow, where devotees offer liquor to the deity.

According to locals, the temple was built around 150 years ago in memory of a saint named Khabees Baba, who devoted his life worshipping Lord Shiva in Sitapur.

'It is believed that Khabees Baba died in the Sandana forest while worshipping Lord Shiva. So, in order to pay homage to their guru, Baba's disciples constructed the temple at the place where he died,' Shyam Babu Saini, a teacher and resident of Sandana, told IANS.

The temple is popular not only amongst the locals in Sitapur; devotees from different parts of Uttar Pradesh and elsewhere too visit the temple.

'Though devotees visit the temple round-the-year, they throng here in large numbers during the month of Ashadh of the Hindu calendar, especially on the occasion of Guru Purnima,' said Saini.

Locals say Khabees Baba was fond of liquor and whatever he used to say under its influence proved to be true.

'We have been told by our ancestors that a large number of people used to meet Khabees Baba Monday evenings, when he used to get drunk,' said Praveen Kumar, 65, a resident of the Roti Godam area of Sitapur. He visits the temple often.

'People, especially those with chronic health problems, used to come to Khabees Baba. An inebriated Baba used to bless them and their health problems used to be cured,' he added.

The small temple has no idol inside, instead there is a raised platform on which rests two slipper-shaped structures that are taken to symbolise the feet of the saint, locals say.

Devotees coming to the temple offer liquor on these clay structures, while a small portion of liquor around the symbolic feet is collected and distributed as prasad (offering) among the devotees.

There is no priest in the temple and the locals themselves take care of its maintenance, taking turns to do so.

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