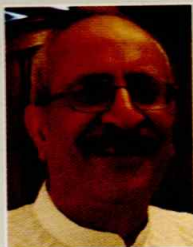




OUR HERITAGE
TEMPLES & SHRINES



Dear Friends,

India has the world's largest number of places of worship. Many of them have centuries of history and legends attached to them. All of them are beautifully decorated with carvings and sculptures. It makes you wonder how they moved huge blocks of stone and placed them at great heights with the primitive tools available at that time.

Selecting the temples for this calendar has been a challenge. So many temples! How could I select only one for each month?

So, the calendar has 12 temples, but the booklet has many more!

The largest temple complex in the world is in Angkor, Cambodia. And they are Hindu temples. Angkor deserves the prominence of the cover page, not only for its size, but also for the exquisite sculptures and carvings that cover every inch. For centuries it was lost, hidden in a forest, sheltered by trees, covered by vines and surrounded by a moat 3 km long.

Besides important places of worship, I have also selected 5 temples which are very unusual. As for the sketches, you can judge for yourself. I can tell you that our artist claimed that he had to get stronger lenses for his spectacles.

Best wishes,

Pradip Burman

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Gautam Partho Roy has done it again! His sketches of India's temples are a form of worship.

The sculptures and carvings of the temples are intricate, and he has captured every detail, down to the last flower on an idol's garland.

The grandeur, beauty and majesty of our temples have been portrayed by a hand guided by love and reverence. He actually went to Cambodia to absorb the atmosphere of the temples of Angkor. He said he needed to get "a feel" of the place. That's dedication!

Every year he uses a different medium. He has used oils, ink, charcoal, poster and water colours.

This year it's ink again. We were wondering if there was a new medium he would find.

Gautam Partho Roy is a Bachelor of Fine Arts from Rabindra Bharti University.

Contact: email : artgautamproy@yahoo.co.in



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OUR HERITAGE TEMPLES & SHRINES

When people think of India, they think of a land of tigers and temples. They are not wrong, at least about the temples.

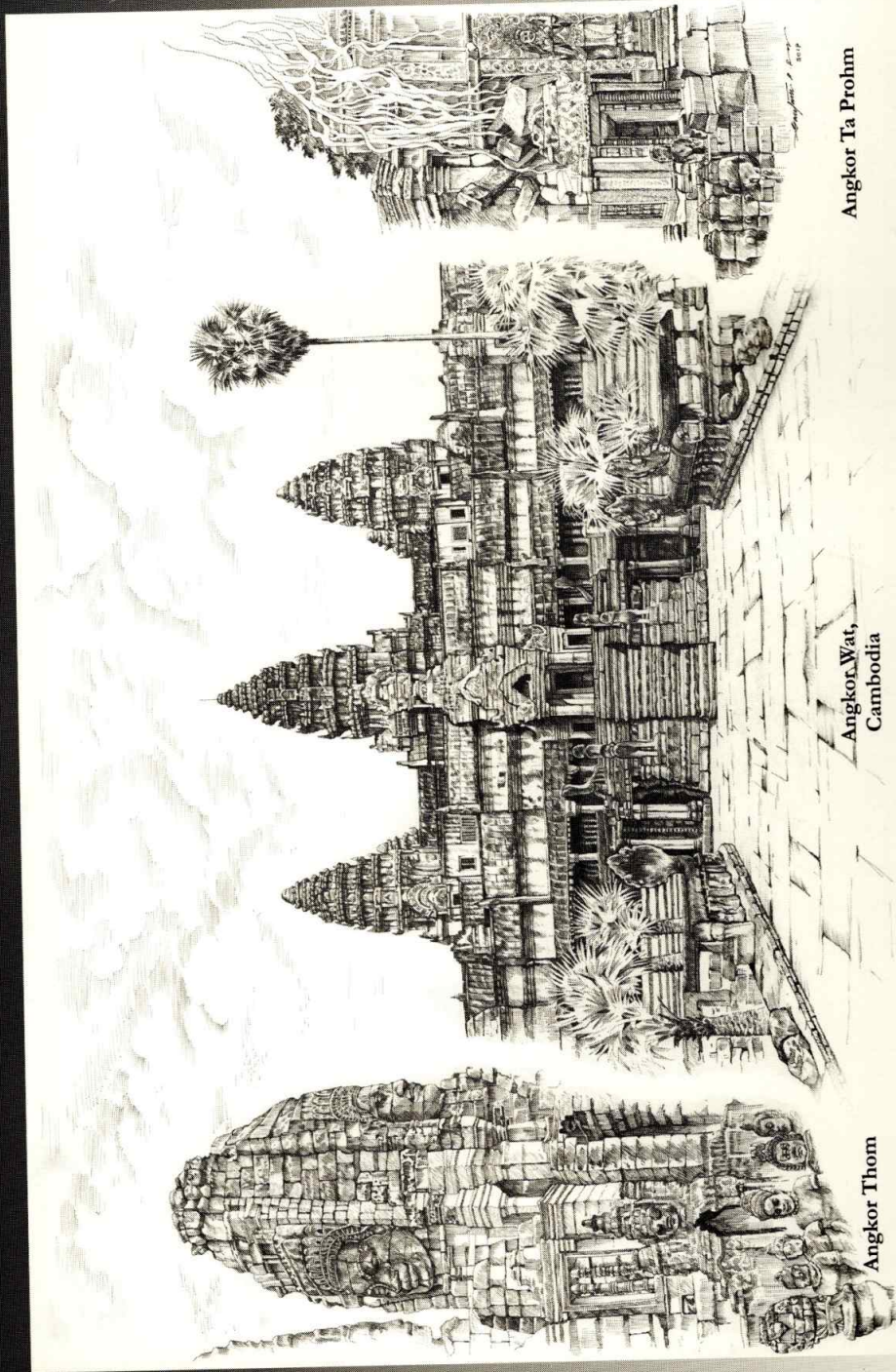
From the snow covered Himalayas to the tip of Cape Comorin, from the sandy wastes of Rajasthan to the verdant forests of the eastern hills, there are temples. On mountains, in valleys, beside rivers and even in the sea. There are monumental temples of marble, stone and gilding, which have survived for thousands of years. Some have been destroyed several times, but were rebuilt every time. More modest brick and cement temples exist in villages and the poorer areas of cities. Millions of homes have a space where their murtis live behind a protecting curtain, waiting till the time for puja. Little places under peepul trees have a metal cut-out of a figure with a red tikka, wearing a garland of six marigolds and, in front, a leaf with a sweetmeat on it.

Our temples are not just places to pray in. They are our history, our heritage, our pride, the glue that binds us together. They have survived war, pillage and destruction. They have been, and still are, the heart and soul of our people.

Anywhere one worships, there is a temple.

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Angkor Ta Prohm

Angkor Wat,
Cambodia

Angkor Thom



Angkor Wat, Cambodia

Deep in the alluvial plains of Cambodia lies the largest temple complex in the world and the largest Hindu temple in the world. Angkor Wat occupies almost 200 hectares. Over a fifteen hundred years ago, the king of the Khmer people, Suryavarman II, built a new city. In the middle of the city, raised on a platform, he built a magnificent temple, Angkor Wat. Other structures were built with light materials, probably bamboo, and did not survive the centuries.

A new city, named Angkor Thom, was built close to the temple. The architectural layout of the temple is an expression of Mt Meru surrounded by the oceans. It is enclosed by a formidable square wall, 8m high and 12km long and encircled by a 190m-wide moat. A bridge, guarded by stone lions on either side, was built across the moat.

Sandstone blocks for the building were quarried from a mountain more than 50km away, and floated down on rafts. The construction of Angkor Wat involved 300,000 workers and 6000 elephants.

The interior has countless carvings and sculptures. The first level of the temple has six bas-reliefs, each is a story carved in stone: The Battle of Kurukshetra; The Battle of Lanka; The Victory of Krishna over the demon Bana; the battle between the Gods and the Demons; The churning of the Sea of Milk and the army of the King.

The walls have carvings picturing the life of the city: women dressing their hair, carrying water jugs, weaving and making baskets. The men are shown taking elephants to the river, practising martial arts, wrestling and hunting. There is no space left un-carved.

Angkor Thom

Located in present-day Cambodia, was the last and most enduring capital city of the Khmer empire. It was established in the late twelfth century by King Jayavarman VII. Angkor Thom means Great City, and 22 temples were built within its walls.

The city walls were surrounded by a moat, enclosing an area of 900 hectares. The four gates into the city are carved with four gigantic faces of Lord Vishnu,

each facing a cardinal point, with a passage through the base. A smaller gate, called the Victory gate, leads straight to the royal palace.

The bridge that crosses the moat to the south gate has an avenue of statues. One side has a row of apsaras, and the other has a row of demons. Each side carries a giant serpent, a seven headed naaga, very similar to the serpent that churns the Sea Of Milk.

Angkor Ta Prohm

The Khmer people usually added a temple to a hospital. Ta Prohm was one of 102 such temples. It is small, but had its own gopura which is now in ruins. There are carvings of roundels enclosing figures. It seems that the deity in the temple was often bathed, because a small channel exists to remove the water.

Now smothered in creepers and vines, Ta Prohm was a Buddhist temple dedicated to the mother of Jayavarman VII, built in the early thirteenth century. It is a temple of towers, closed courtyards and narrow corridors. Many of the corridors are impassable, clogged with jumbled piles of delicately carved stone blocks dislodged by the roots of long-decayed trees. Bas-reliefs on bulging walls are carpeted with lichen, moss and creeping plants, and shrubs sprout from the roofs of monumental porches. Trees, hundreds of years old, tower overhead, their leaves filtering the sunlight and casting a greenish pall over the whole scene.



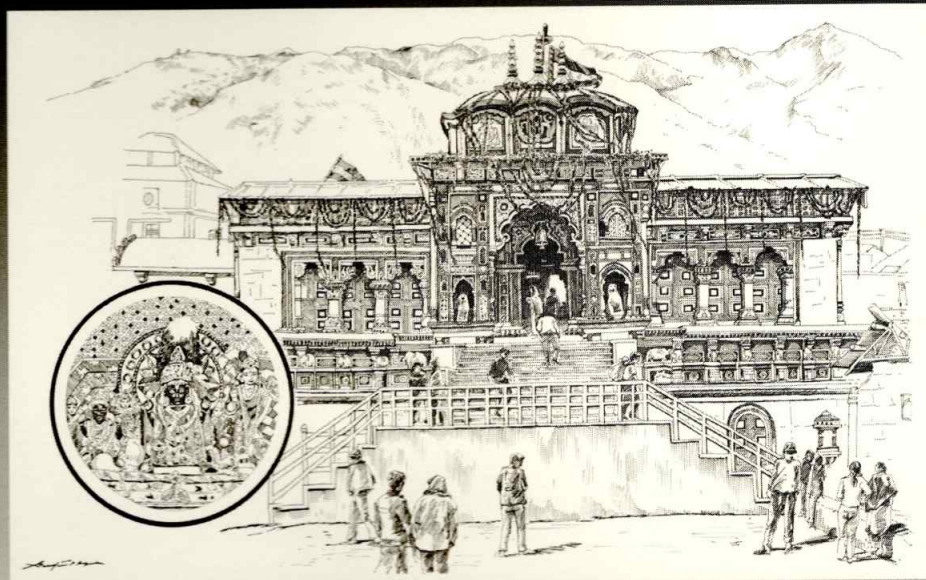
Kashi Vishwanath, Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh

This is one of the most deeply revered temples to Lord Shiva. It has seen continuous worship for about 2,000 years. Billions of devotees would have come here, to this, the oldest living city in the world.

Varanasi is considered the **spiritual capital of India** and is the **holiest of the seven sacred cities** (SaptPuri) of the Hindu and Jain faiths. Hindus believe that if they pass away at Varanasi, they will attain moksha - liberation from the cycle of life and death. In the 6th century BCE, Gautama **Buddha gave his First Sermon at Sarnath, the outskirts of Varanasi.**

The temple is dedicated to **Shiva** as Vishwanath or Vishweshwar, the 'Lord of the Universe'. As the city of Varanasi is also known as Kashi, the temple is popularly known as Kashi Vishwanath Temple. The temple has been reconstructed many times over the centuries. The Moghul Emperor Aurangzeb razed it to the ground and built the GyanVapi mosque on its foundations. In 1780, the **Maratha Queen Ahilya Bai Holkar** of Indore built the current structure. Subsequently, the Sikh ruler Maharaja Ranjit Singh donated gold, which covered two domes of the temple. The Ministry of Culture and Religious Affairs, Government of Uttar Pradesh, gold plated the third dome of the temple in the 20th century.

Over the centuries, the temple has been visited by many illustrious holy men, including AdiShankaracharya, GoswamiTulsidas, Guru Nanak and Swami Vivekananda. It is believed that the merit or the blessings bestowed upon the pilgrim who views the jyotirling at Kashi Vishwanath Temple is equal to that earned by visiting the rest of the 12 jyotirlings, the holiest shrines to Lord Shiva. Thus, a visit to the Kashi Vishwanath Temple is an important step on the path to moksha.



Badrinarayan Temple, Badrinath, Uttarakhand

Dedicated to Lord Vishnu, the temple is at an altitude of over 10,000 feet, in the Garhwal hills, on the banks of the river Alaknanda. It is the **Northern Char Dham**.

The four Dhams are important pilgrimage sites and are deeply revered by Hindus. A visit to the Char Dhams is supposed to be one of the sacred duties in one's life.

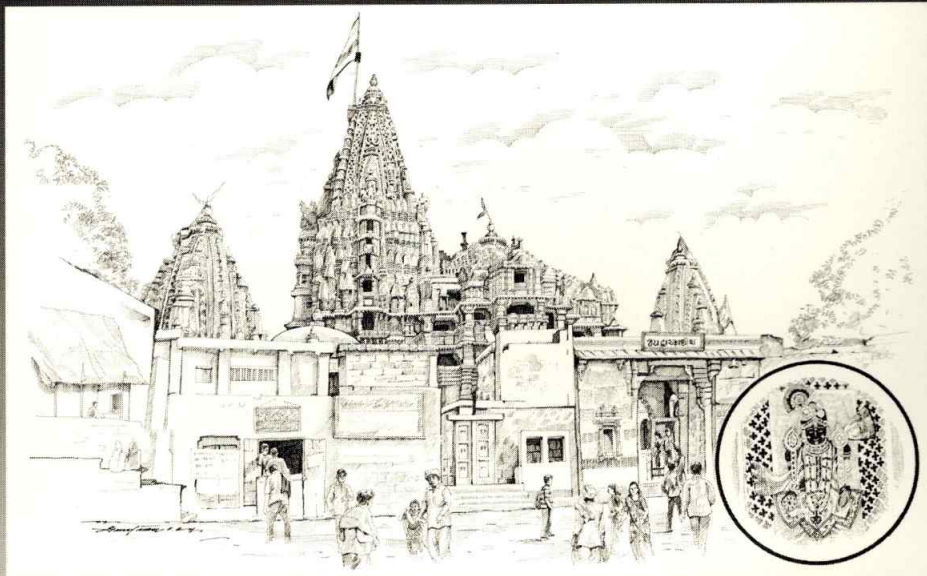
Though the temple is located in the North of India, the **head priest**, or Rawal, is **traditionally a Nambudiri Brahmin**, from the state of Kerala in South India while the Chidambaram Temple, the most important Shiva temple in Tamil Nadu, South India, has Kashmiri priests, from the extreme North of India.

Badrinath became prominent when Lord Vishnu, it was believed, did tapasya or penance there. At that time, the place was full of berry or badri trees, so the place was named Badrika-Van, 'the berry forest'. The deity Lakshmi took the form of a large berry tree to protect him from the rain and sun. For this, Lord Vishnu decreed that people must always take Her name before His. Till this day, Hindus always refer to the divine couple as "Lakshmi-Narayan". The place was called Badrinath, '**the Lord of Berry forest**'. Badrinath was the first of the Char Dhams.

Legend says that the temple was built by the Pandavas, to please Lord Shiva so that he would forgive their sin of killing their cousins. Lord Shiva accepted their penance.

The image of the presiding deity in the temple is a 3.3 feet tall, black stone statue of Lord Vishnu in the form of Badrinarayan. He sits under a berry tree, with a gold canopy over it. The statue is considered by many Hindus to be **one of the eight swayamvyaktakshetras**, (self-manifested statues) of Vishnu.

The Tapt Kund, a group of hot sulphur springs just below the temple, are considered to have medicinal properties. Pilgrims bathe in the springs before visiting the temple.



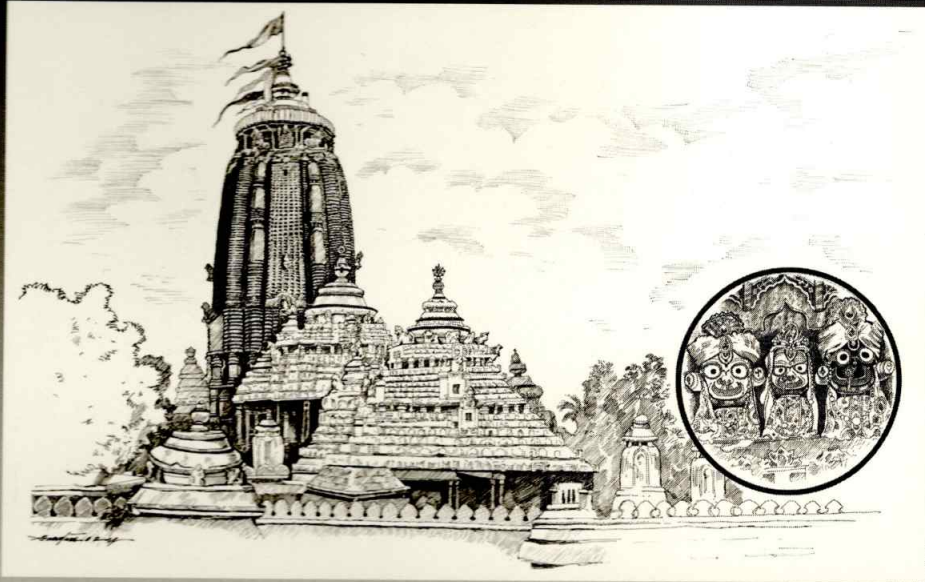
Dwarkadhish, Dwarka, Gujarat

Located on the southern coast of the Gulf of Kutch, Dwarka was a flourishing port and the city was historically referred to as a "golden city". For Hindus, Dwarka is of great significance, as it is the **Western Char Dham**. It is also one of the **Sapt Puris**, or the **seven holy cities of India**: Ayodhya, Mathura, Haridwar, Varanasi, Kanchipuram and Ujjain.

Dwarka's beauty has been described by many poets and writers of ancient India. It is believed to have been the **capital of the kingdom of Lord Krishna**. Dwarka is derived from 'Dwar', a door. As the name suggests, it is believed to be a gateway to spiritual union with the divine. For traders, this port city was the gateway to the mainland of India.

The Dwarkadhish Temple is situated where the river Gomti joins the sea. It is also known as Jagat Mandir (universal shrine) or Trilok Sundar (the most beautiful in the three worlds). The temple may have been originally built around 200 BCE. It was greatly enlarged in the 15th and 16th centuries CE.

It is a glorious structure, seeming to rise from the waters of the Arabian Sea. Its exquisitely carved shikhara, or tower, is 43 meters high. The huge flag, 52 yards (47.5 meters) of cloth, can be seen from 10 kilometers away. There are two gateways: Swarg Dwar (gate to heaven), where pilgrims enter, and Moksha Dwar (gate to liberation), from where pilgrims exit. The interior of the temple is striking in its simplicity, the only exception being the elaborate ornamentation around the shrine of Lord Krishna.



Jagannath Temple, Puri, Orissa

Constructed in the 11th or 12th century CE, the temple is the **Eastern Char Dham** and is dedicated to Lord Krishna, as **Jagannath** or '**Lord of the Universe**'.

In the main shrine, on either side of Lord Jagannath, the figures of his brother, Balabhadra and his sister, Subhadra. Unlike other Hindu temples, the **images here are of wood**. Every twelve or nineteen years, these wooden figures are ceremoniously replaced, carved to create exact replicas, using wood from sacred trees.

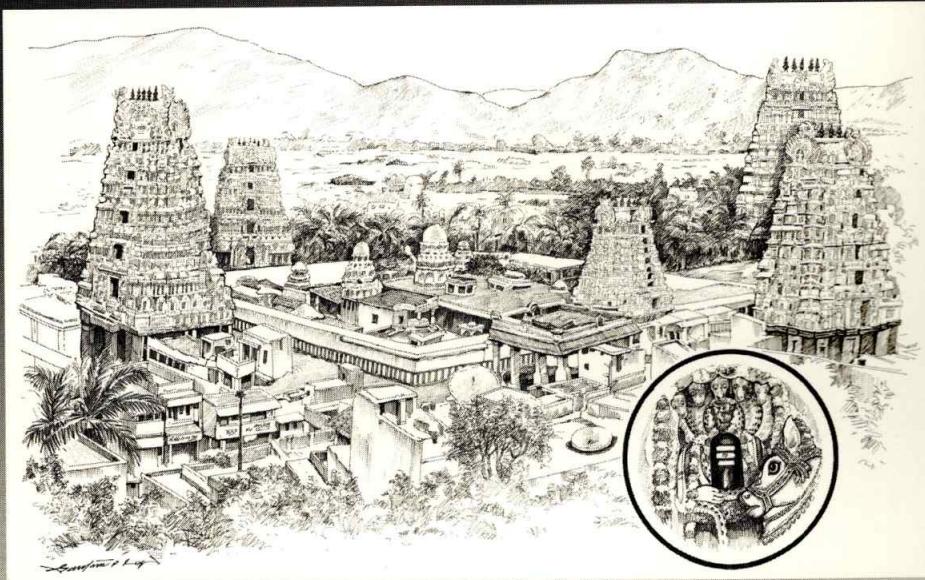
It is most famous for the **great rathayatra**, or annual temple chariot procession, when the deities emerge from the temple to bless their devotees on the streets.

The deities are carried on three huge ornamental chariots. Instead of horses, thousands of pilgrims take turns to pull the ropes which drag the chariots forward. Other pilgrims strew flowers on the road before the chariots. They are taken almost 3 km to the **Gundicha Temple**, for a nine-day visit. The Gundicha Temple stands in the middle of a beautiful garden and is known as the Garden House of Lord Jagannath. A 'Grand Road' has been constructed between the Jagannath Puri Temple and the Gundicha temple for the sole purpose of the rathayatra. It is an unforgettable spectacle.

Many miracles are attributed to this temple.

In coastal areas, the breeze blows from the sea to the land during the day and from the land towards the sea in the evening. It is said that at Puri, the breeze blows in the reverse order; No birds fly over the Jagannath temple; The shadow of the main dome of Jagannath temple is not visible at any time of the day.

In Puri, wherever you stand, the Sudarshana Chakra on top of the temple is always facing you!



Ramanathaswamy Temple, Rameshwaram, Tamil Nadu

Dedicated to Lord Shiva, it is located on the island of Rameshwaram. This is the southern **Char Dham**. It is also one of the twelve Jyotirling temples, which enshrine the Shivalings.

The original temple at this site and its revered **lings** are believed to date back to the time of Lord Rama. The temple was expanded during the 12th century. The gateway tower rises tall against the skies. The style of these imposing gateway towers in Tamil Nadu's temples started in the 11th Century onwards.

By the 16th–17th centuries, the kings of Tamil Nadu spared no effort or expense to create the largest and most magnificent temples. Their grandeur was further enhanced by enclosed corridors. These create a dramatic and impressive effect, as devotees walk through these passages on the way to worship. The temple has approximately one kilometre of corridors, with breadths ranging from 5 to 6 metres. **The ceilings are more than 7 metres high.** Every one of the **several hundred pillars** is elaborately sculpted.

The lings of Ramanathaswamy Temple, are believed to have been worshipped by Lord Rama,

After Sita's rescue from Ravana, Lord Rama and Sita landed here. Seeking atonement for killing Ravana, who was a Brahmin, Rama wanted to pray to Shiva. Hanuman was sent to bring a linga. Meanwhile Sita made a small linga. The one made by Sita is called Ramalingam, the one brought by Hanuman is called Vishwalingam. Lord Rama instructed that the Vishwalingam is to be worshipped before the Ramalingam. Till today, His decree is followed by his devotees.

The Rameshwaram temple is said to be built on the site of the original puja of Lord Rama.



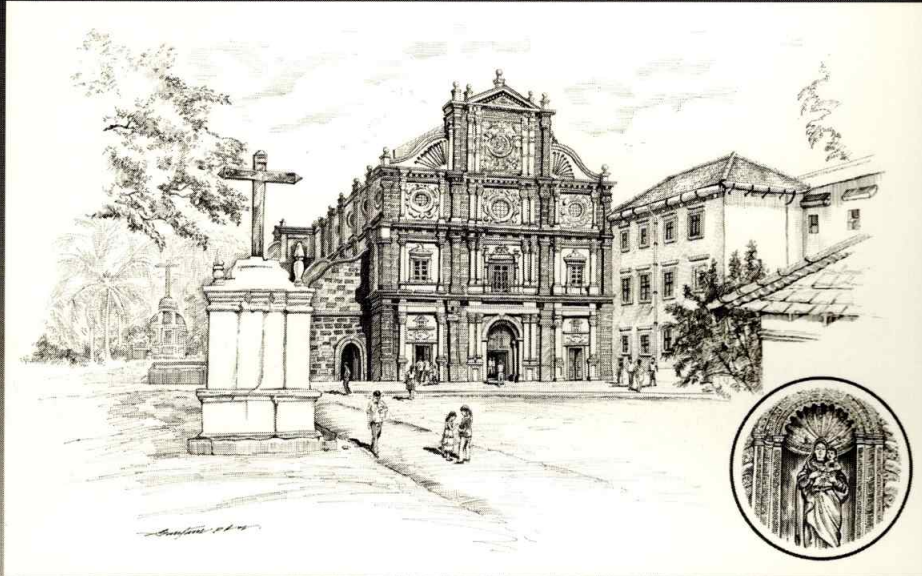
Ajmer Sharif Dargah, Ajmer, Rajasthan

The tomb and shrine of the Sufi saint, **Hazrat Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti** is of the 12th -13th century. The saint is also known as Khawaja Gharibnawaz. It is believed, by people across all faiths, that wishes or boons, prayed for at the tomb of the saint, will be granted. Thousands of visitors come to pay homage to the saint. Prime Ministers of India, Bangladesh and Pakistan have visited the shrine.

The architecture of the complex of several tombs, buildings and courtyards are of the **Mughal period**. Several white marble buildings are arranged around two courtyards. There is a massive entrance gate, donated by the Nizam of Hyderabad.

Mughal **Emperor Akbar is said to have prayed here for a son**. When his wish was fulfilled, he and his queen went on foot every year, from Agra to the tomb. 120 large pillars, called **kosminars**, or 'mile pillars', **were erected at intervals of two miles** (about 3 kilometers) along the entire 370 km route between Agra and Ajmer, to mark the places where the royal pilgrims halted. Their grandson Shah Jehan, went on to build the Akbari Mosque, which houses the tomb of the saint.

The shrine may be entered through the Shah Jehani Gate, also erected by the Emperor Shah Jehan. The next gate is the **Buland Darwaza**, built by Sultan Mahmood Khilji, where the Urs flag is hoisted, marking the beginning of the Urs or death anniversary rituals. The Urs of Moinuddin Chishti is celebrated every year for 6 days, in the seventh month of the Islamic calendar. Besides other festivities on the occasion, there are night-long singing of qawwalis or Sufi devotional songs.



The Basilica of Bom Jesus, Velha Goa, Goa

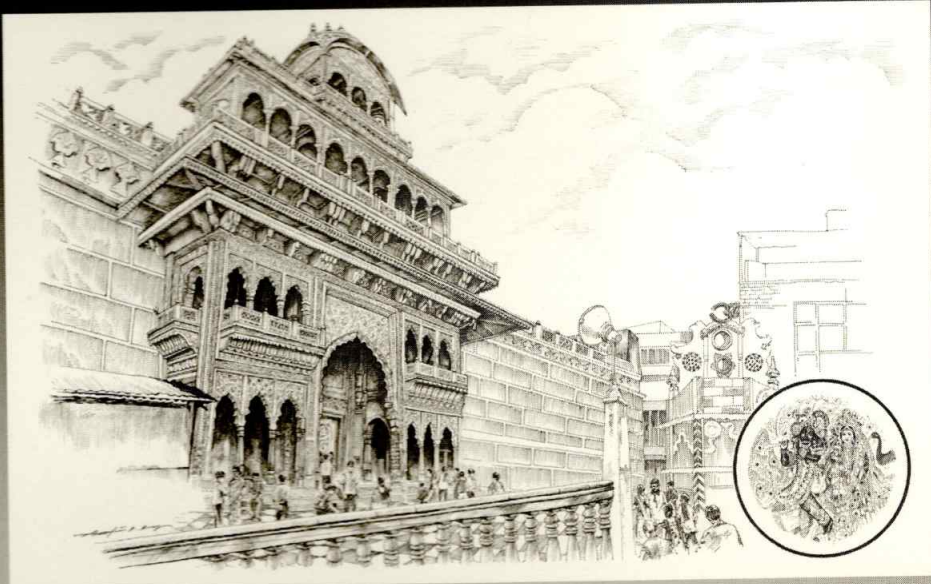
In the early 16th century, at the mouth of the river Mandovi, the Portuguese built the great capital city, a bustling metropolis with a population of over 200,000.

The Portuguese built many magnificent churches, close to each other. In fact, there were so many churches, that letters were written to the King of Portugal by the priests, complaining that, "Their bells and our bells, their choir and our choir, there is cacophony here."

The building of the Basilica was started in 1594 and consecrated in 1605. **St. Francis Xavier** left Portugal to come to India and the Far East. He devoted himself to the welfare of the people and was loved by all. **He died in China** on the 3rd of December 1552. and his disciples brought his body back to Goa. He was canonised on May 12, 1662 and was adopted as the **Patron Saint of Goa**. The church was given the status of 'basilica' because of the deep reverence of the people of Goa have for their saint.

The silver and glass casket containing his body, rests above the altar designed by the 17th-century **Florentine sculptor, Giovanni Battista Foggini**. On the walls around the casket are paintings of scenes from the life of the saint. Once in 10 years, his miraculously intact body is displayed. The last Exposition in 2014 attracted more than 1lakh devotees.

The course of the river shifted and caused the port to be shifted to Panaji, which is now the capital of the state of Goa. The old city is known as Velha (Old) Goa.



Bankey Bihari Mandir, Vrindavan, Uttar Pradesh

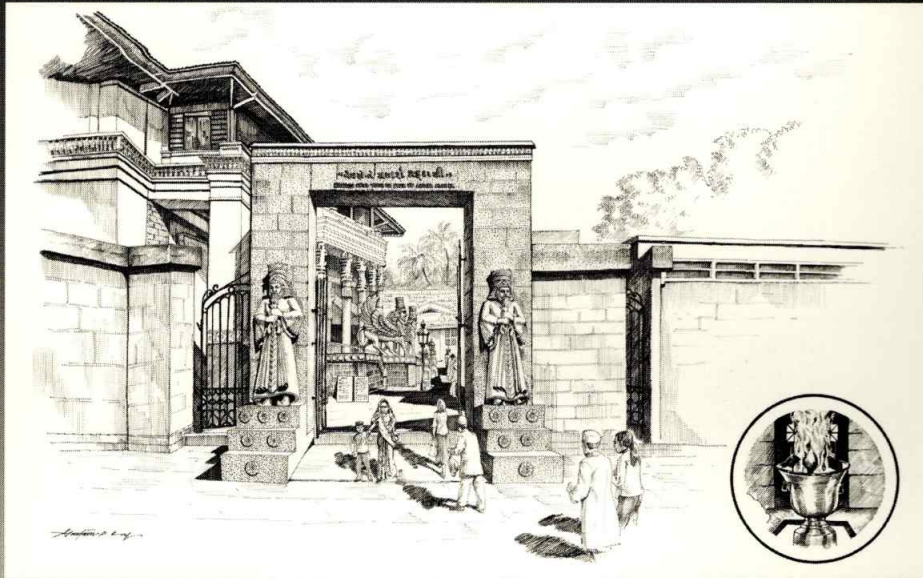
Bankey means one who stands in the tribhanga posture, or 'bent in three places'. 'Bihari' means 'partaker of supreme delight'.

Dedicated to Lord Krishna, the temple was established by **Swami Haridas Goswami**. He was the **teacher of Tansen**, who is still the most famous musician and singer in Indian history and was one of the Nine Jewels at the court of the Moghul Emperor, Akbar.

In 1862 CE, the current temple was constructed in Vrindavan, where Lord Krishna spent his childhood. The architecture of the temple follows the beautiful Rajasthani style. The Goswami mobilised resources for the construction and to this day, Haridas Goswami's descendants are head priests of the temple.

Many myths surround the statue of Lord Krishna installed in this temple. One says that Swami Haridas was visited by Lord Krishna and his consort Radha. Their beauty and the bright light that shone from them was too much for the worshippers. Swami Haridas then begged Him to appear in a way that His people **could see Him without being blinded**. As desired, the Lord left behind a charming black image of Himself, in the tribhanga or 'banke' pose.

Various forms of sewa or service to the deity are offered at different times of the day. **Shringar** (which includes bathing, dressing and adornment with jewellery) and **Rajbhog** (feast) are offered in the forenoon. **Shayan sewa** (shayan means sleep) is offered in the evening. The temple does not have the usual tradition of early morning or **mangala sewa**. Swami Haridas did not favour this, as he wanted his child-like Lord to rest, so he did not disturb His slumber.



Parsi Fire Temple, Udvada, Gujarat

The Parsees are a community of Zoroastrians. They came from the Pars Province in Persia (now Iran), hence are called 'Parsees'.

Their ancient scripture, the Avesta, is in a language which is almost exactly the same as Vedic Sanskrit, except that the script is different. The Zoroastrian priests still study Sanskrit, in preparation for their religious studies.

Parsees are fire worshippers and their Prophet is Zarathushtra. Their faith dates back to antiquity. The remains of an ancient **Fire Temple are in Balkh**, Afghanistan, which pre-dates the 1st century.

After the Arab conquest of Persia, Islam was declared the state religion. Zoroastrians sailed to the coast of Gujarat and sought refuge in the city of Udvada. The local king was reluctant to give them permission to stay, as he felt that his land was already densely populated. This message was given to them symbolically, by sending a vessel of milk, filled to the brim, to indicate that there was no space to accommodate them. The Parsi priest put a handful of sugar into the milk and sent it back, to indicate that they would add sweetness to the land. The king understood the message and gave them permission to stay.

Legend has it that the Parsees carried with them a part of the **holy fire from Persia** and it is believed that this same fire has been burning for thousands of years.

Parsi Fire Temples, called **Agarities**, are mostly in the city of Mumbai. The first Fire Temple was built at Udvada, not very far from where the Parsees landed. The temple became the **Stash Behram** or senior-most Fire Temple.

Only one Fire Temple remains in Yazd province in Iran.



Har Mandir, Golden Temple, Amritsar, Punjab

The site of the Har Mandir was a meditation retreat for wandering mendicants and sages since time immemorial. In the 15th-16th centuries, a saint came to live and meditate by the peaceful lake. His name was Guru Nanak, founder of the Sikh religion. After he passed away, his disciples continued to frequent the site and this became the most sacred shrine of the Sikhs.

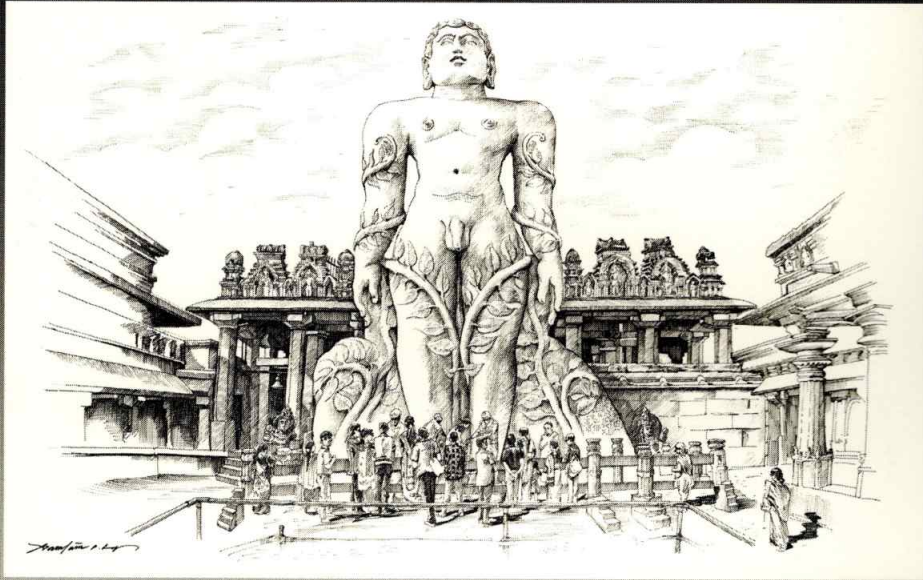
Guru Arjan Dev (5th Guru) decided to build a temple in the centre of the lake and named it Amrit Sarovar, or 'Lake of Nectar'. The objective of the Guru was to combine **both spiritual and temporal aspects**.

True to the pluralistic spirit of Sikh culture, Guru Arjan Dev invited the Muslim saint, Mian Mir, to lay the foundation stone of the temple in 1588 CE. The huge dome and the top storey were later plated with gold, donated by Maharaja Ranjit Singh of Punjab.

The structure, famed for its superb architecture, is built on a level lower than that of its immediate surroundings, symbolising the value of humility. It is open on all four sides, representing entry to all.

An underground spring feeds the sacred lake, in which pilgrims can immerse themselves, as a symbolic cleansing of the soul. There are huge dormitories for pilgrims and dining halls next to the temple complex, where all persons, irrespective of race, religion, or gender, are lodged and fed for free. The scripture is a collection of devotional poems, prayers and hymns composed by the ten Sikh gurus and various Muslim and Hindu saints. These verses are chanted to the exquisite accompaniment of a variety of musical instruments. **The Book is regarded as the last Guru. At night, it is put to bed and is awakened at dawn.**

It is a place of **great beauty and sublime peace**.



Gomateshwara Temple, Shravanabelagola, Karnataka

The monolithic statue of the eighth Tirthanka makes this Temple one of the most important pilgrimage sites for Jains.

Gomateshwara stood for so long in meditation, that creepers and anthills grew around his unmoving body. He is shown standing in the specific position of meditation known as **kayotsarga**. The limbs are held straight and the arms do not touch the body.

In 982 CE, Chamunda Raya, minister of King Rajmalla IV, built an impressive temple, commonly known as Chamunda Raya Basti. The granite temple is in the South Indian style. The minister dedicated a colossal statue of Gomateshwara, also known as Bahubali. The statue is about 60 feet (18 meters) high and is the **largest free-standing monolithic sculpture in the world**.

In the Hindu tradition, deities of all faiths are worshipped. They are treated with reverence and fondness. They are given ritual baths and offered fresh flowers and fruit. The tradition finds its most exuberant expression in the grand **Maha-mastaka-abhishekha** of the colossal Gomateshwara statue, which is held every twelve years. On this occasion, the colossal statue of Bahubali is ritually **bathed with water, milk, ghee and yogurt and showered with flowers, saffron, turmeric and gold coins**. The next ceremony will be held in 2018.



Brahma Temple, Pushkar, Rajasthan

The town of Pushkar overlooks the Pushkar lake. Pushkar is known as 'the rose garden of Rajasthan' and the essence of the Pushkar rose is exported around the world.

The temple is called the **Jagatpita Brahma Mandir**, as Brahma is the creator in the Hindu Trinity. The word Jagatpita means 'Father of the World'. Hindus consider a journey to Pushkar the ultimate pilgrimage that must be undertaken to attain salvation. Final Shraddhas may be done here.

According to legend, Lord Brahma saw a demon harassing people and trying to kill children. He slew the demon with his lotus flower. Petals of the lotus fell on the ground at three places and, where they fell, three lakes were created. **Pushkar is considered the most holy**, because the first petal fell there and created the largest of the three lakes. Brahma threw the pushp (flower) with his kar (hand), thus the place was named Pushkar.

Brahma decided to perform a fire-sacrifice there. His wife, Saraswati did not appear at the designated time. Brahma then married a local Gurjar girl, Gayatri, and conducted the yagya with his new consort sitting beside him.

When Saraswati finally arrived, she found Gayatri sitting in her rightful place. She cursed Brahma that he would **never be worshipped**. She then reduced the scope of the curse, permitting his worship in Pushkar, which has one of the very few temples dedicated to Brahma.

The temple, situated in the middle of the lake, is believed to be 2,000 years old. In the 8th century, the sage, Adi Shankaracharya, renovated the temple. The current 14th-century structure dates from the time of Maharaja Jawat Raj, ruler of Ratlam, who renovated and extended it. The beautiful gates are decorated with the hans or swan motif. The swan is the vehicle of Lord Brahma. The shikara, or tower, is bright red. A closer inspection reveals that the slabs and blocks of stone, used to build the structure, are joined with lead.