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PRASAD Cities





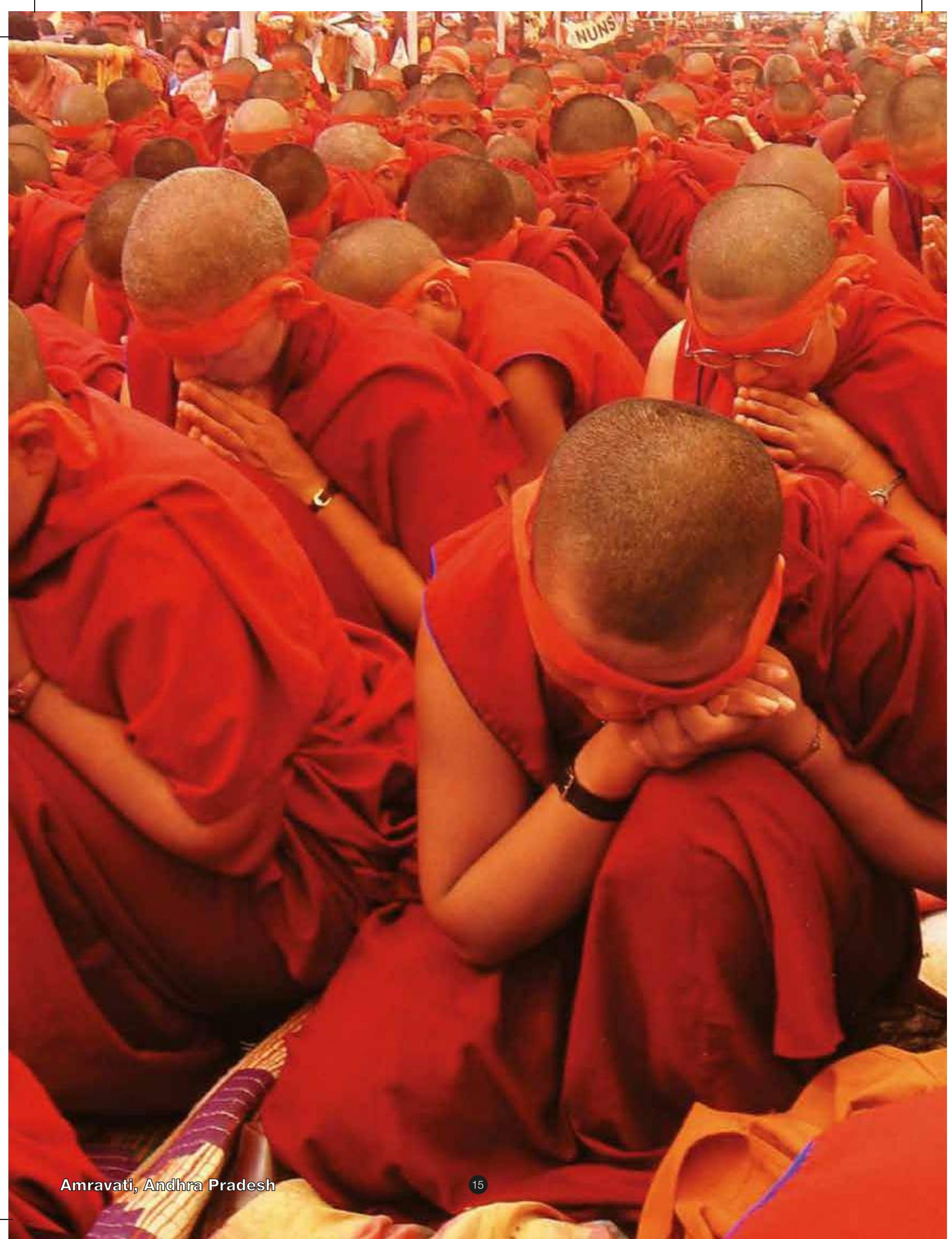


Ajmer, formerly written Ajmere, is a city (and the administrative headquarters) in Ajmer district in India's western State of Rajasthan. Surrounded by the Aravalli Mountains, Ajmer, also known as Ajaymeru/Ajaimeur (meaning the Invincible Hill), was founded by Ajaipal Chauhan (who established The Chauhan Dynasty) in the seventh century. The city was also ruled by the legendary Prithviraj Chauhan, the last Hindu king of Delhi.

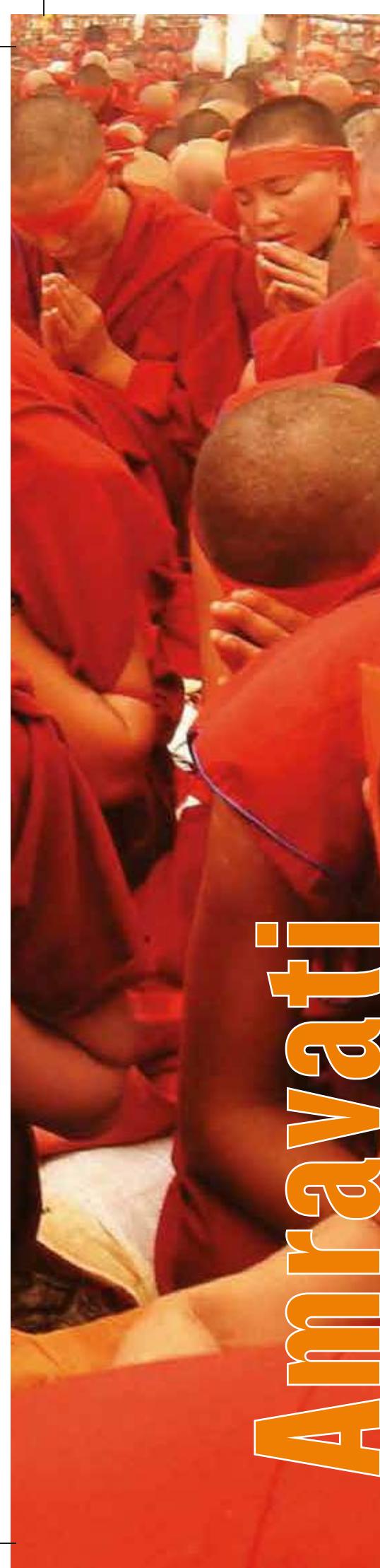
Ajmer, the city where the Dargah of the Great Sufi Saint Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti stands, is a sacred centre of pilgrimage. Hallowed by the memories of the great seer, Ajmer has earned the epithet of "Madinatul Hind or the Madina of India". Each year, the devotees of all sects and faiths congregate here from all parts of the world on the occasion of the annual festival of Urs to pay their obeisance to seek the Saint's blessings for fulfilment of wishes. Thus, the festival presents a unique picture of harmony and universal brotherhood.

Ajmer is a centre of culture and education. It is famous for its rich Indo-Islamic, Royal Rajasthani, Indo-Saracenic and Jain styles of architecture. The city is home to the prestigious Mayo College and King George Military School, both set up by the British. In addition, the city's built heritage includes Nasiyan (Red) Temple, Salemabad (Nimark Peeth), Taragarh Fort, Adhai-Din Ka-Jhopra (a religious structure), Ana Sagar (an artificial lake), the museum (Magazine, once the royal residence of Emperor Akbar of Mughal dynasty). Ajmer is also the base for visiting Pushkar (11 km), the abode of Lord Brahma and a sacred town of Hindus, lying to its west with a temple and a picturesque lake.

In days gone by, the artists of this area did carving on wood and ivory, made vases and goblets, incised and embossed work on brass and blue pottery (few specimen of their craftsmanship: antimony boxes having ivory and appliqué work, ivory comb, necklace and knife, wooden dharau and pen holder, marble plates, stone grinder and some specimen of blue pottery have been put on display in the gallery).



Amravati, Andhra Pradesh



Amravati

Amravati is a city located in Guntur district in India's south-eastern State of Andhra Pradesh. The city is also known as Punyakshetra or Amareswaram or Dharanikota or Dhanyakatakam. It was also the capital of Satavahanas, the first great Andhra kings, who ruled from the 2nd century BC to the 3rd century AD, after the downfall of Maurya empire. The recorded history of Amravati is from 2nd century BC.

Amravati is considered sacred because of three things: the Krishna River; 'Sthalamahatyam', an important 'Kshetra'; and, the 'Sri Mahalinga Murthy'. In addition, according to Vajrayana traditional sources, the Buddha preached at Dharanikota and conducted Kalachakra ceremony, which would take the antiquity of Amaravati back to 500 BC.

The city's built heritage includes the famous Amareswara temple (dedicated to Lord Shiva, present in the form of a 15ft high white marble Shiva Lingam), Mahachaitya (The Great Stupa, built around the 2nd century, with intricate carvings that depict the life and teachings of Lord Buddha), Buddhist sculptures and slabs with Buddhist inscriptions.



The Golden Temple, Amritsar, Punjab



Amritsar

Amritsar is a city in north-western India and the administrative headquarters of Amritsar district in the State of Punjab. The city lies about 25 km east of the border with Pakistan and is a major commercial, cultural and transportation centre. It is also the centre of Sikhism and the site of the Sikhs' principal place of worship.

Amritsar, literally a Pool of Nectar, derives its name from Amrit Sarovar, the holy tank that surrounds the fabulous Harmandir Sahib or Golden Temple (the most revered shrine of Sikhs). The city was founded by Guru Ram Das Ji, the fourth Sikh Guru, in the year 1577, under the instructions of Guru Amar Das Ji, the third Guru of the Sikhs. The early name of the city was Chak Guru. Before its establishment, the area under the city was a part of the vast area covered under Indus Valley Civilization.

Besides the Golden Temple, Amritsar city is home to many sites of historic, spiritual and cultural significance, like Durgiana Temple, Wagah Border, Jallianwala Bagh, Ram Bagh, Jama Masjid Khairuddin to name a few. In addition, the city is famous for its woollens, carpets and blankets, kites, juttis, cut-glass work, bangles and embroidered stuff.

The city of Amritsar is a dazzling showcase of composite culture and secular heritage. It has a proud past, a glorious present and a promising future. The essential spirit of the city is found not only in its gurudwaras & temples, mosques & churches, takias & khankahs but also in its theatres & galleries, parks & gardens, archives & libraries, art & architecture, museums & memorials, havelis & forts, fairs & festivals, vibrant folk dances & scintillating taans, narrow lanes & winding alleys, parlours & boutiques, clubs & pubs, traditional bustling markets & lip-smacking cuisine.

A city of historic walls and impressive gateways, Amritsar gained importance under the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, one of the most resplendent figures in Sikh history. The city lies on the Grand Trunk Road, Asia's one of the oldest and longest major roads connecting Eastern & Western parts of Indian subcontinent, built by King Sher Shah Suri in the year 1539.



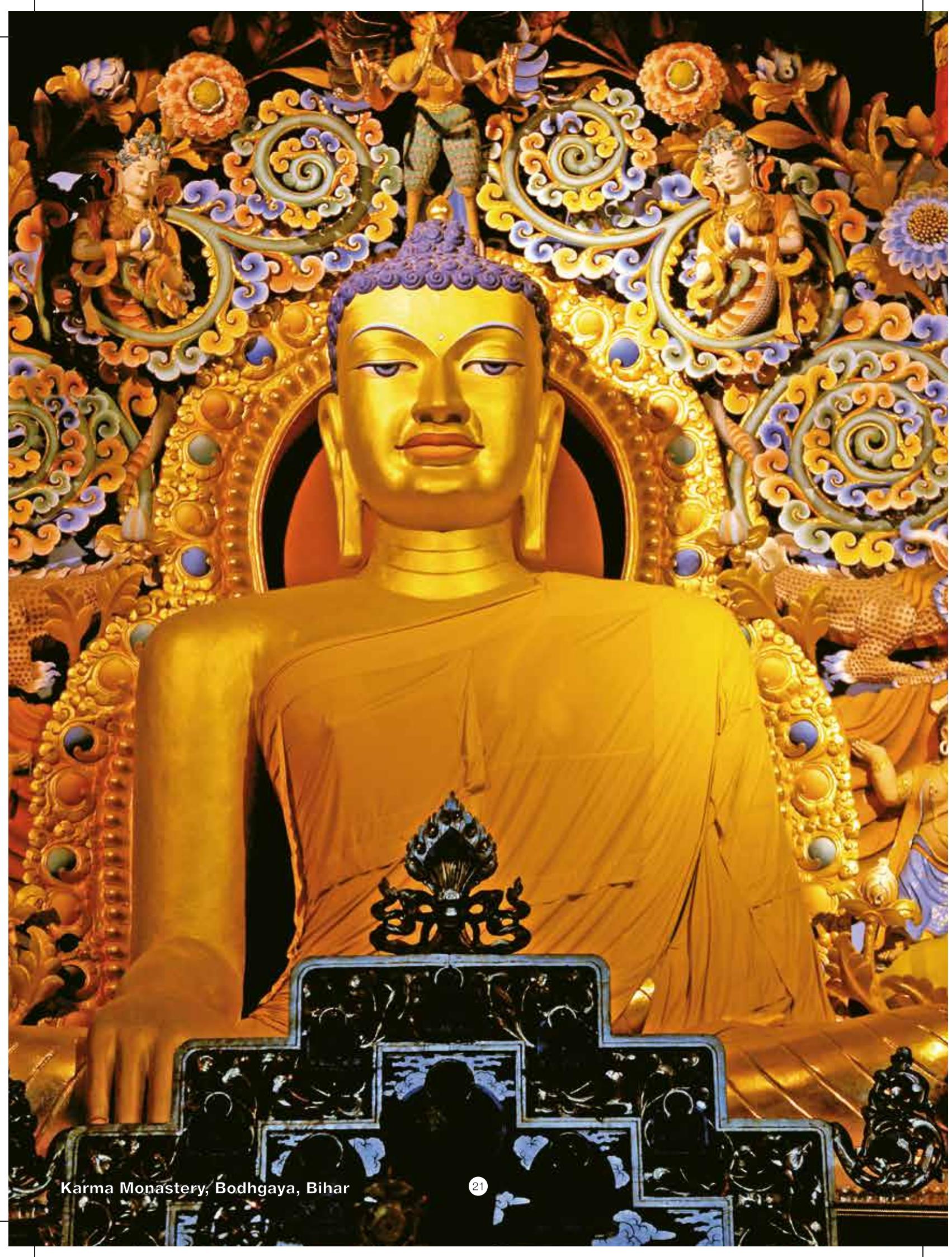
Hindu Temple at Dwarka Beach, Dwarka, Gujarat

Dwarka

Dwarka is a city located in Devbhoomi Dwarka district in India's western State of Gujarat. The city is one of the foremost four sacred Hindu pilgrimage sites (Chardham), and is one of the seven most ancient religious cities in the country. Dwarka is often identified with the Dwarka Kingdom, the ancient kingdom of Lord Krishna, and is believed to have been the first capital of Gujarat. The city is centred around Dwarkadheesh Temple (dedicated to Lord Krishna), which was built around 200 BC and was enlarged in the 17th century.

The city finds its mention in Indian epic literature in Mahabharata and Skanda Purana, and also in the copper inscription dated 574 AD. Before its establishment, the area under the city was a part of the vast area covered during Indus Valley Civilization.

Recent findings indicate that these stories of ancient Dwarka have a historical basis. Thirty copper coins, a foundation of boulders, old structures including a circular one and pottery samples dating back around 1500 BC were excavated. The recent underwater study on the coastal water of Dwarka conducted by the Archaeological Survey of India reveals the existence of a city dated to the 2nd millennium BC. The search for the lost city revealed a township that was built in six sectors along the banks of a river. They have also found a well-fortified township of Dwarka, that extended more than half a mile from the shore. The foundation of boulders, on which the city's walls were erected, proves that the land was reclaimed from the sea. The general layout of the city of Dwarka described in ancient texts corresponds with that of the submerged city discovered by the Marine Archaeology Unit (MAU).



Karma Monastery, Bodhgaya, Bihar



Gaya is a city in eastern India and the administrative headquarters of Gaya district in the State of Bihar. The city is located on the banks of the River Falgu and is in close proximity to famous Buddhist pilgrimage centre of Bodhgaya, the place where Lord Buddha attained enlightenment. The town is of ancient historical significance and finds mention in texts dating back to 600 BC. It was projected to the world by Bimbisara the Fifth of the Shishunaga dynasty who lived and ruled around 519 BC. Besides, Gaya finds mention in the great epics of Ramayana and Mahabharata.

Gaya is an important place of Hindu tourism for 'pind-daan' and sees a huge influx of visitors for the month long 'Pitra Paksh' mela annually. Gaya has 54 sites for 'pind-daan' including the Brahma Kund, Ram Kund, Uttarmanas, Brahma Sarovar, Rukmani Sarovar, Sita Kund, etc.

The city has several important heritage sites like the Vishnupad Temple, Mangla Gauri Temple, Pretshila Temple and Ramshila Temple. The Brahmayoni Hill is an important pilgrimage for Buddhists, while the largest mosque in Bihar, the Jama Masjid, is also located in Gaya. The city's natural heritage includes Pretshila Hill, Muchalinda Lake, to name a few.

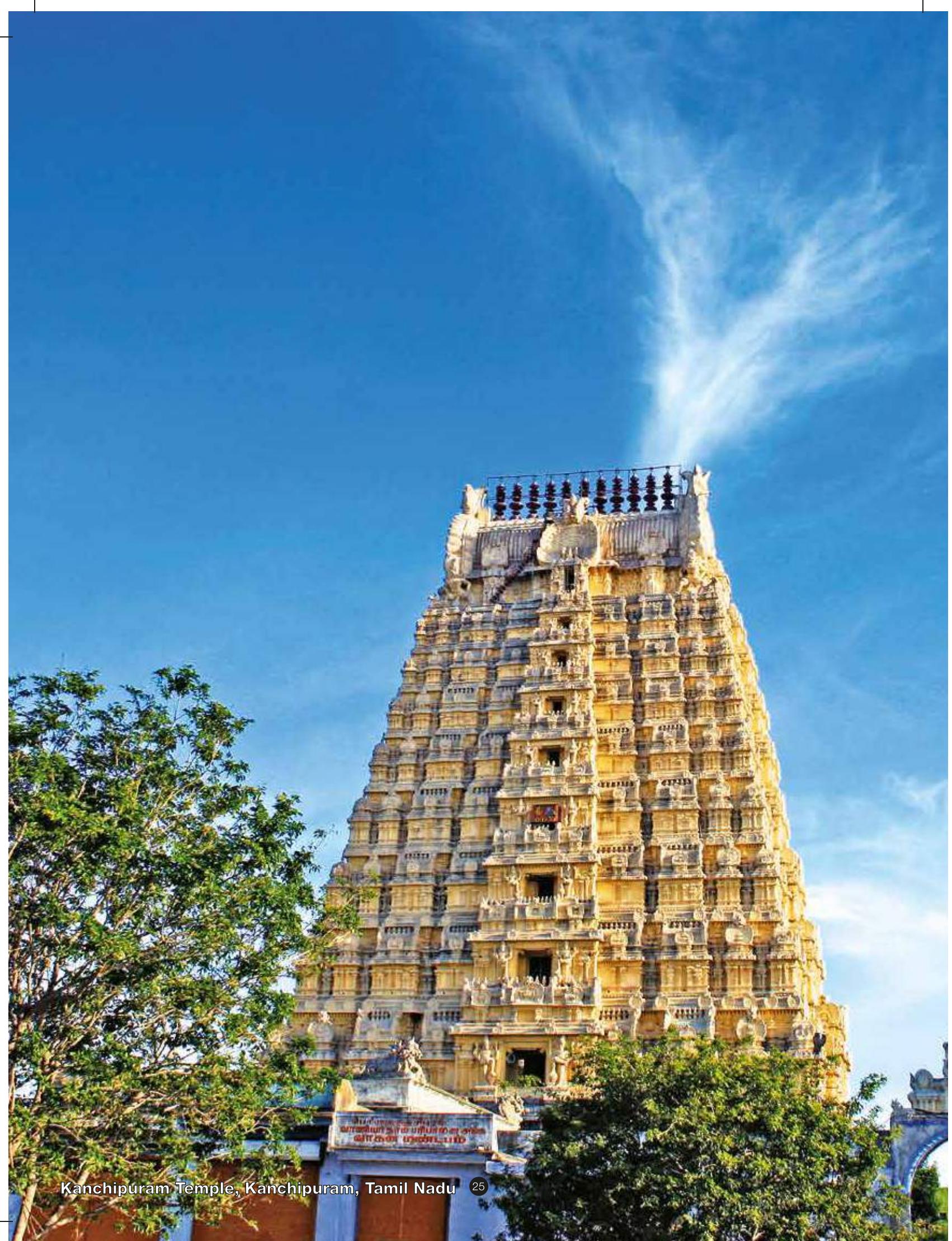


Kamakhya Temple, Guwahati, Assam

Kamakhya

Kamakhya Temple is an ancient seat of tantric and shakti cults of Hinduism and it is the most important shrine of Assam. This temple, situated on the hilltop of Nilachal Hills, overlooking river Brahmaputra, is 8km away from the railway station of Guwahati. This shrine is also mentioned in the inscription of Allahabad pillar of Samudragupta. This Temple is amongst the 51 Shakti Peethas related to the cult of Sati, and remains one of the most important Shakta temples and Hindu pilgrimage sites in the world.

This is one of the most important centre for Tantra worship hence this temple attracts thousands of Tantra devotees in an annual festival known as the Ambubachi Mela. Another annual celebration is the Manasha Puja. Durga Puja is also celebrated annually at Kamakhya during Navaratri in the autumn. This five-day festival attracts many visitors.



Kanchipuram Temple, Kanchipuram, Tamil Nadu

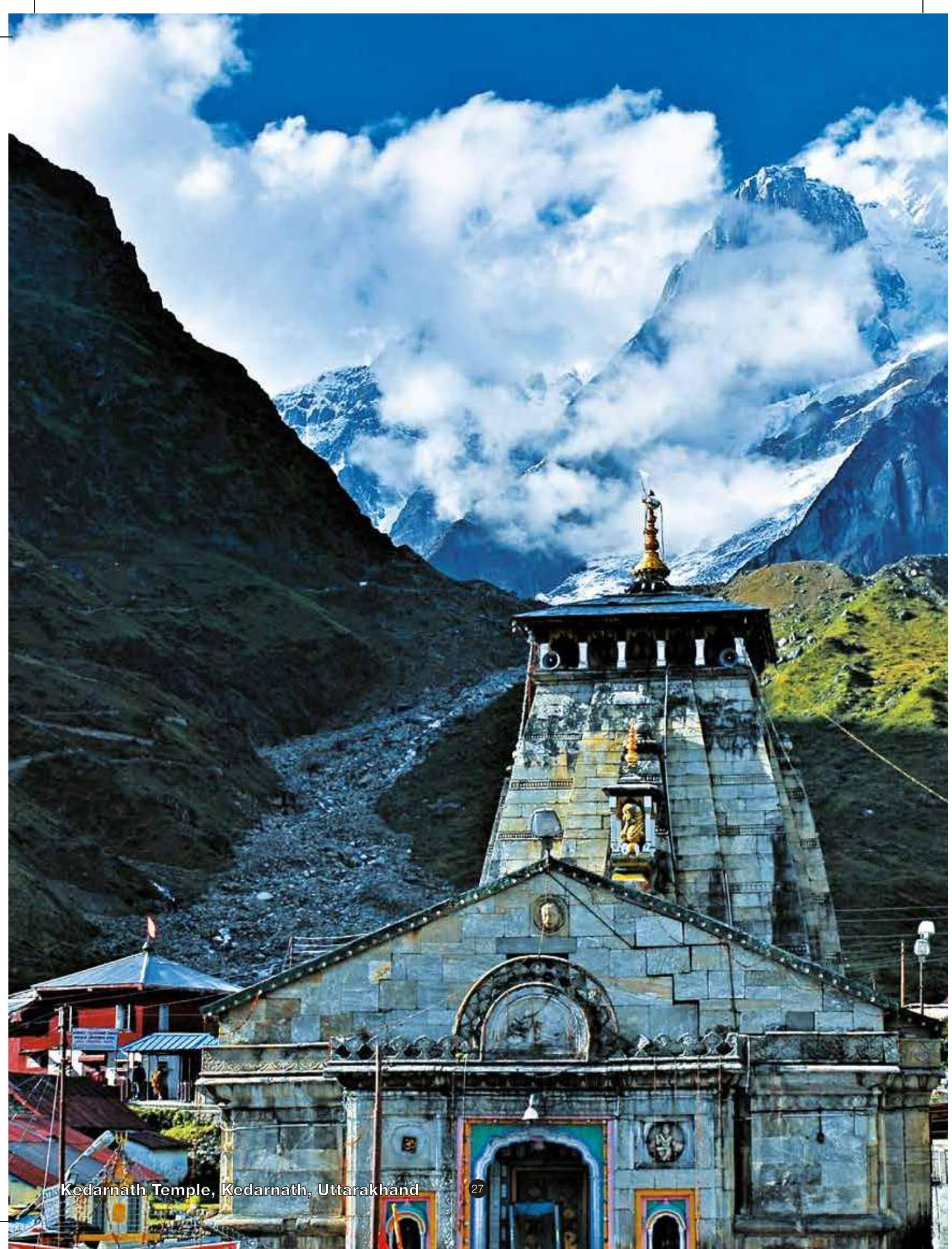
Kanchipuram

Kanchipuram city is situated in the Southern India and is also the administrative headquarters of the district of Kanchipuram in the State of Tamil Nadu. It was locally referred to as Kachi or Kachipedu.

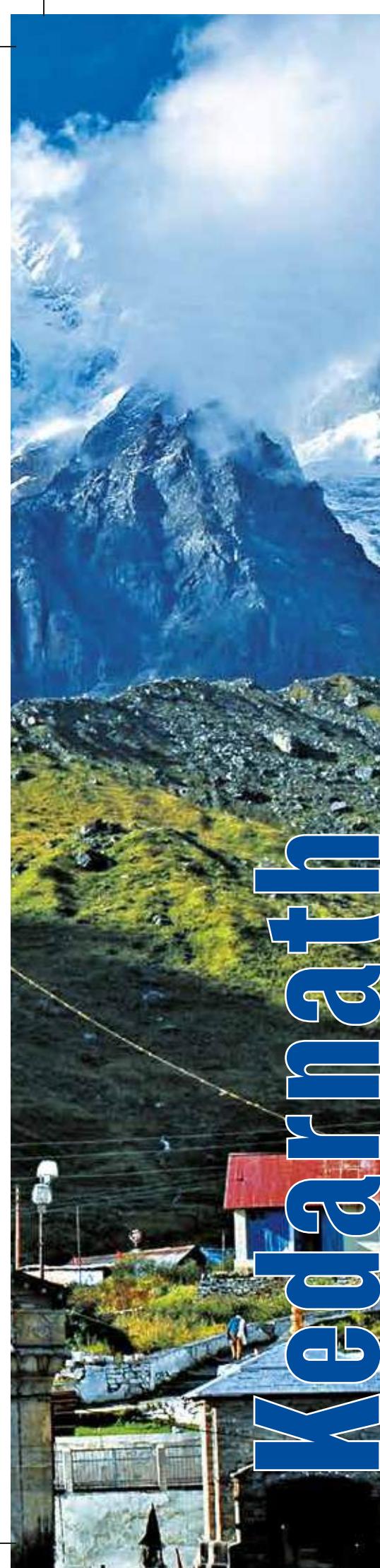
Located on the banks of the Vegavathy river, Kanchipuram has been ruled by the Pallavas, the Medieval Cholas, the Later Cholas, the Later Pandiyas, the Vijayanagar Empire, the Carnatic kingdom, and the British.

Kanchipuram is a spectacular temple city, known as ‘city of thousand temples’. It is one of the seven sacred cities (as per Hindu mythology) to reach final attainment. The city was also a religious centre of advanced education for Jainism and Buddhism between the 1st and 5th centuries. The city's built heritage includes the Kailasanathar Temple, Vaikunta Perumal Temple, Varadharaja Perumal Temple, Ekambareswarar Temple (having one of the tallest temple towers in India), Kamakshi Amman Temple and Kumarakottam Temple. It is the headquarters of the Kanchi Matha, founded by the Hindu saint Adi Sankaracharya, and popular as one of the four dhams of Hinduism. The city is also known for its culture and civilization.

Apart from its temples, this small town is also known for its thriving handloom industry. The city is popular for its renowned crafted world-famous silk sarees and the main profession of the people is weaving silk sarees. As a result, Kanchipuram is also known as Silk City. The silk weavers of Kanchi settled more than 400 years ago and have given it an enviable reputation as the producer of the best silk sarees in the country.



Kedarnath Temple, Kedarnath, Uttarakhand



Kedarnath

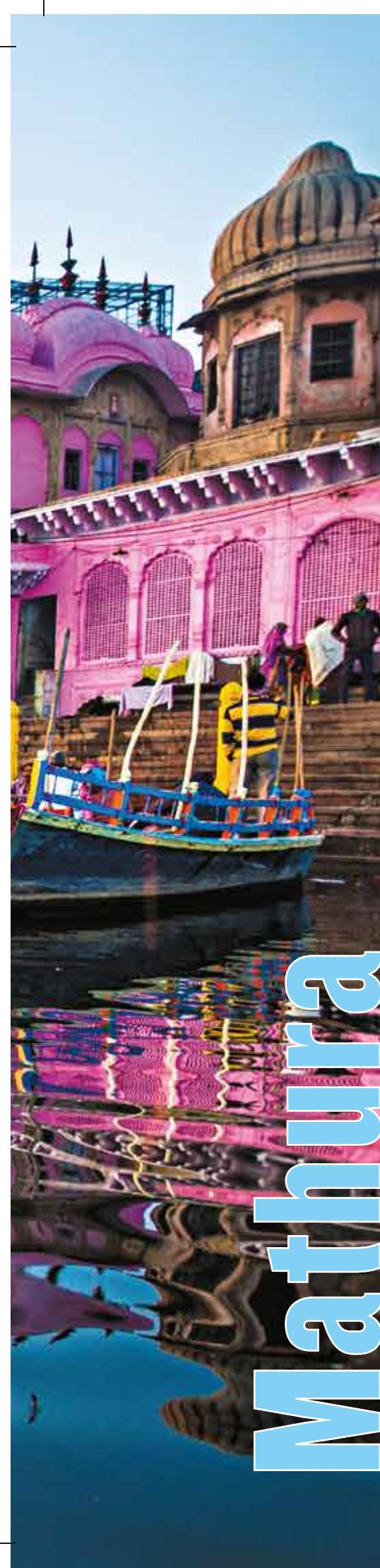
The holy city of Kedarnath is situated 3,581 metres above sea level, on the banks of the river Mandakini. Amidst the spectacular mountain ranges of the Garhwal Himalaya stands one of the twelve 'Jyotirlingas' of Kedar or Lord Shiva. The Kedarnath shrine is dedicated to Lord Shiva, the destroyer. The origin of the revered temple can be found in the great epic Mahabharata. According to legend, the Pandavas sought the blessing of Lord Shiva to atone their sins after the battle of Mahabharata. Lord Shiva eluded them repeatedly and while fleeing took refuge at Kedarnath in the form of a bull. On being followed he dived into the ground, leaving behind his hump on the surface. This conical protrusion is worshipped as the idol in this shrine. The remaining portions of Lord Shiva are worshipped at four places – the arms (bahu) at Tungnath, mouth (mukha) at Rudranath, naval (nabhi) at Madma-heshwar and hair (jata) at Kalpeshwar. Together with Kedarnath, these places are known as the Panch Kedar.

The Kedarnath Temple built in 8th century AD by Adi Guru Shankara-charya, lies adjacent to the site of an ancient temple built by Pandavas. The walls of the exquisitely architectured temple are embellished with figures of deities and scenes from mythology. The temple has a conical Lingam - the main idol, a statue of Nandi – the celestial bull, a 'garbha griha' for worship and a 'mandap' for assemblies of pilgrims and visitors. The temple is believed to be more than 1,000 years old. Behind the Kedarnath Temple is the Shankaracharya Samadhi, where lies the Samadhi or the final resting place of Adi Guru Shankaracharya. It is believed, after establishing the four Dhams in India, he went for his Samadhi at an early age of 32 years.

Other holy places in Kedarnath are; Vasuki Tal, a picturesque lake, 4,135 metres, above sea level which is encircled by lofty mountains and offers a commanding view of the Chaukhamba peaks; Gandhisarovar, a small lake from where Yudhishtira, the eldest of the Pandavas, is believed to have departed to heaven. The floating ice on the sparkling waters of the lake is a fascinating sight. Sonprayag, where the Sone Ganga and Mandakini rivers confluence.



Mathura, Uttar Pradesh



Mathura is a city in northern India and the administrative headquarters of Mathura district in the State of Uttar Pradesh. Widely known as birth place of Lord Krishna (one of the most worshipped Hindu gods), the city is located on the western bank of river Yamuna and is revered a lot by Hindus. Politically, the city has remained under Mauryas, Sungas, Kushanas, Lohidas, Mughals, Jats, Marathas, Britishers, to name a few, before becoming part of the Indian mainland.

For about 3,000 years, it was the hub of culture and civilization and economic activities, as it was located at the junction of important trade routes. It became a centre of three cultures: Indian, Indo-Scythian and Hellenistic. Held in sanctity by the Buddhists, Jains and Brahmanical faith alike, it has a long and chequered history. Besides having extensive archaeological remains, the city was visited by the famous Chinese traveller Hiuen Tsang and also received a mention from Ptolemy, the great Egyptian writer.

Of all the sacred places in India, none enjoys a greater popularity than the holy city of Mathura, the capital of Braj. For nine months in the year, festival upon festival follows in rapid succession and the ghats and temples are daily thronged by thousands of pilgrims. Around 36 annual fairs are held.

Dozens of ghats line the Yamuna as it flows through the city. Some places of cultural and religious significance in the city are Keshav Dev Temple (Shri Krishna Janma Bhoomi), Dwaradish, Vishram Ghat (bank of River Yamuna), Shri Jagannath Temple, Bhuteshwar Mathura, Prem Mandir, Vrindavan Mathura Museum, Birla Mandir, Naam Yog Sadhana Mandir (Baba Jai Gurudev Temple), Banke Bihari Temple and Iskcon Temple.

The great school of sculpture known as Mathura School of Art flourished here for 1,200 years. Such prolific creativity and gushing devotion to novel art forms and experiment in sculptures and clay figurines as found in this school are rare in the annals of Indian art history. A survey of this glorious School of Art can be made in the Government Museum, Mathura. In addition, practices like Sanjhee (the colourful art of decorating the ground with flowers), Raaslis and Rasiya (the tradition of folk-songs that describe the love of the divine couple Radha and Krishna), Charkula (a traditional folk dance of the Braj, where a woman balances a column of deepikas on her head and dances to the accompaniment of Rasiya songs by the menfolk), describe its culture the best.



Rath Yatra, Puri, Odisha

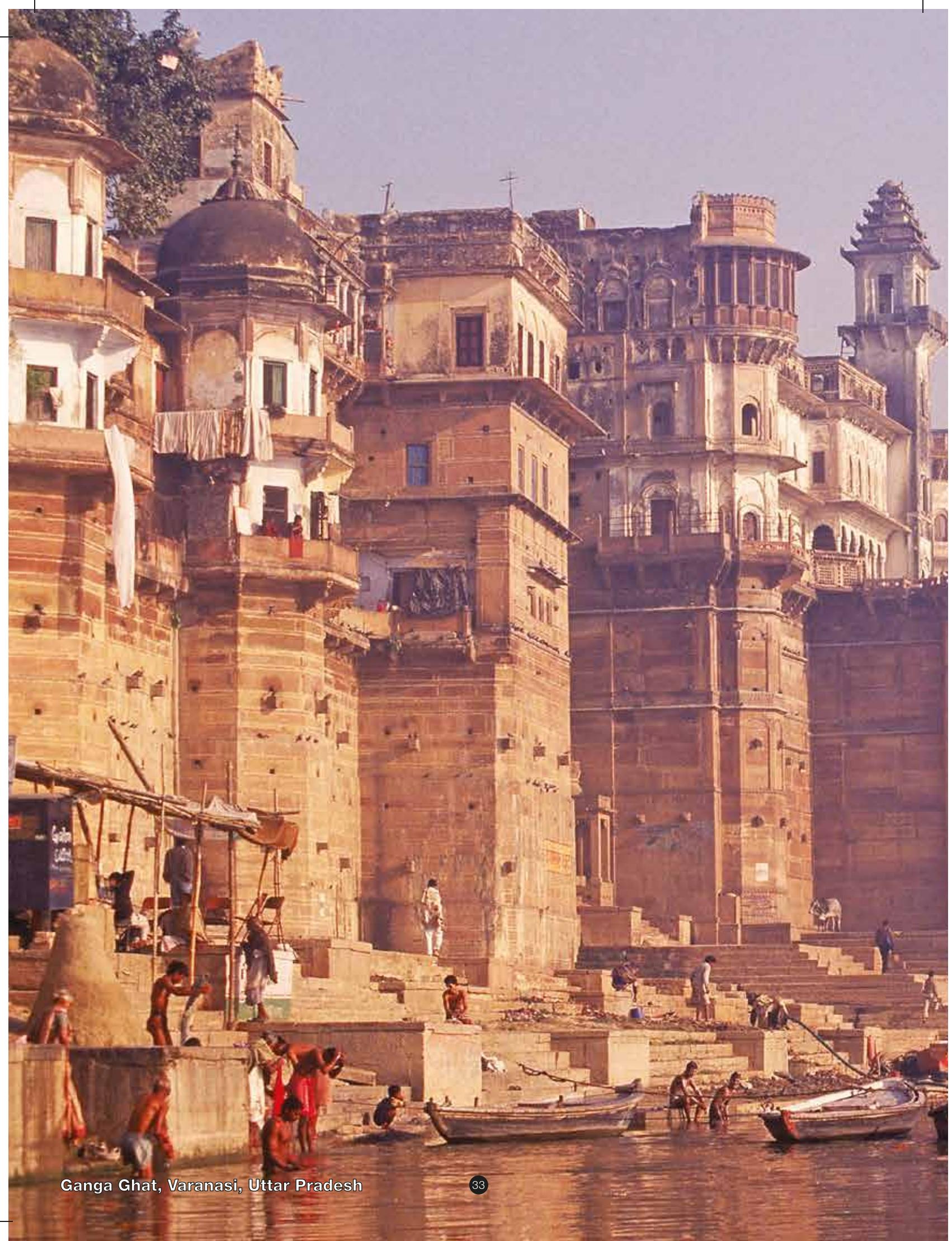


The coastal town, Puri, situated at a distance of about 60 km south of State capital Bhubaneswar, is the epicentre of Hinduism that revolves around the Hindu deity "Lord Jagannath", enshrined in a grand Kalinjan Temple of the 12th century. It is the headquarters of the district of Puri, in India's eastern state of Odisha. It is a celebrated religious centre of the Hindus, as one of the five sacred Khetras of Odisha. Adi Sankaracharya (9th century AD), the great proponent of the Aditva Vada, sanctified the place by establishing a monastery called Gobardhan Matha, as one of the four Dhams of Hinduism.

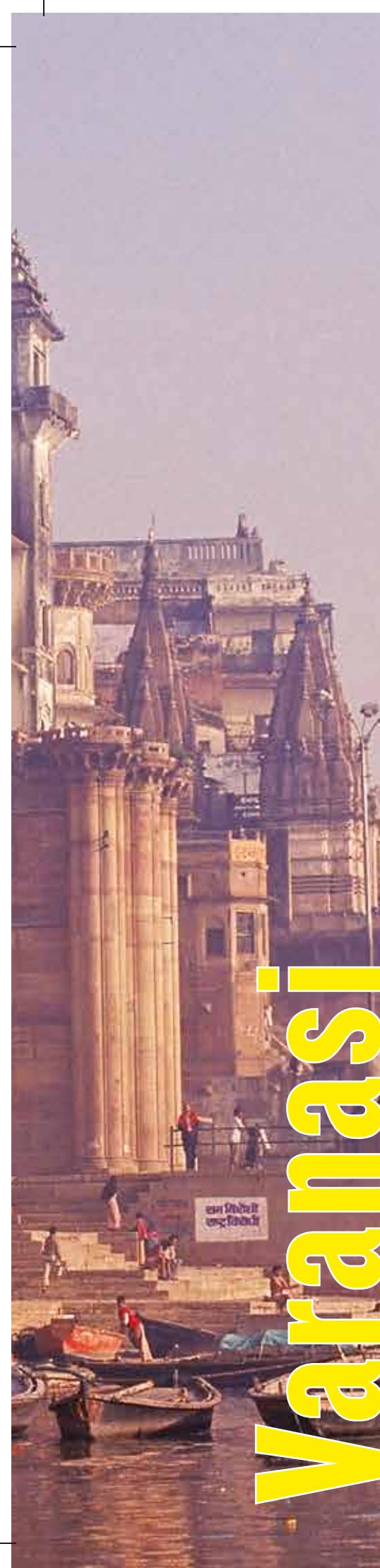
Subsequently, several saints and philosophers, like Ramanuja (12th century AD), Madhavatirtha (13th century AD), Naraharitirtha, Sankaradeva, Nanak, Kabir, Chaitanya, Ballav Bhatta, Ramachandra Puri, Paramananda Puri visited and further sanctified the place through their preachings and left their imprints in the monasteries and ashramas that they established. Recorded history reveals that from the time of the Somavamsis (11th century AD), all ruling dynasties have extended liberal patronage for the growth and development of this area.

Puri comes into prominence every year during the car festival (Rath Yatra), when three chariots carry Lord Jagannath and his sister, Subhadra, and brother Balabhadra, from their great temple through the Grand Road to the Gundicha Temple for about 9 days. Puri is equally known for its tanks which is believed to contain water of immortality. Another important community institution in Puri is the Jaga Gharas and Akhadas in each Sahi (nuclear settlements), where martial art, physical exercises and gymnastics are practised regularly.

The built heritage in the city includes temples, monasteries (mathas), burial temples (gurvayatana), tanks, ashramas, jagaghara, secular buildings, cremation ground, gosala (cow sheds) and mandapas. The city's natural heritage includes its sunny beach, which is one of the finest in the world. The cultural heritage of Odisha is reflected in vibrant art forms, like tie-and-dye textile or applique work, sand art, terracotta, lacquer or brassware, filigree ornaments or patta (palm leaf), painting of gods, soap stone, sea-shell, horn work, wood carvings and solapith work to name few.



Ganga Ghat, Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh



Varanasi

Varanasi city is situated in the north India and is also the administrative headquarters of the district of Varanasi in the State of Uttar Pradesh. The city is situated on Western Bank of River Ganga. Throughout its history, the city has been known by a number of names: Anandvana (the forest of bliss); Kashi (the city of light); Banaras (a name derived from rivers Varuna and Asi that flow into Ganga), Benares and finally Varanasi. For a brief period, city was also named Mohammadabad by the Mughal King, Aurangazeb. It is regarded as holy by Hindus, Buddhists and Jains and is one of the oldest continually inhabited cities in the world. To the Hindus, the city of Benares is the holiest place in the world, a sacred city and a place of pilgrimage.

Varanasi has been a centre of learning, enlightenment, culture and civilization for more than 3,000 years. The city was located on the old trade route and was also mentioned by famous Chinese traveller Xuan-Zang. The culture of Varanasi is closely associated with River Ganga and the river's religious importance. People often refer to Varanasi as the city of temples, the holy city of India, the religious capital of India, the city of learning and culture capital of India.

The city was birthplace of the famous Benares Gharana form of Indian Classical music. The city was home to many prominent Indian philosophers, poets, writers and musicians, like Kabir, Ravi Dass, Munshi Prem Chand et al, to name a few. Tulsidas wrote his Ramacharitamanas here, while Gautam Budha gave his first sermon at Sarnath (near Kashi). Ayurveda is also said to have originated here.

The built heritage of the city comprises of numerous ghats on the bank of River Ganga (used for various purposes like bathing, rituals, cremating dead bodies et al); numerous temples (the most famous amongst which is Kashi Vishwanath, dedicated to Lord Shiva); the old city (marked by crowded narrow lanes flanked by road-side shops and scores of temples); palaces, stupas. Historically, Varanasi has been famous for muslin, silk fabrics and its art of silk weaving, perfumes, ivory works and sculpture, textiles such as hand-woven carpets and handicrafts, brassware, copperware, glass bangles, wood and clay toys, musical instruments and exquisite gold jewellery.



Velankanni Church, Nagapattinam, Tamil Nadu

Vellankanni

Vellankanni, also known as Vailankanni, is a city located in Nagapattinam district in India's southern State of Tamil Nadu. It lies on the Coromandel Coast of the Bay of Bengal. The town is home to country's one of the biggest Catholic pilgrimage centres, dedicated to Our Lady of Good Health, origin of which can be traced back to the 16th century. Built in the Gothic style, the church was modified by Portuguese and then further expanded later on due to the influx of pilgrims.