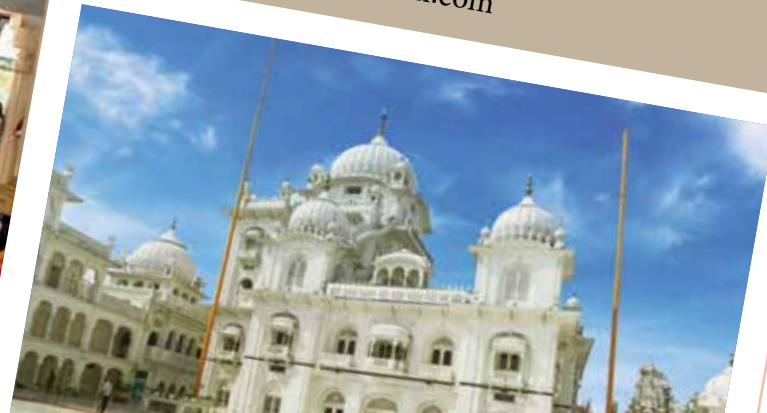


# Religious & Spiritual Circuits

## Nepal & India

[www.nepal-indiatourism.com](http://www.nepal-indiatourism.com)



## Religious & Spiritual Circuits

Nepal & India

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## Disclaimer:

The information has been shared by the experts for each circuit. The workings they have shared are from their own views and knowledge.

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EMBASSY OF NEPAL  
NEW DELHI, INDIA



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# Message



'*Atithi Devo Bhava*' endures as a common value between Nepal and India despite our other differences. This is also the foundation and motto of the professionals involved in the tourism sector.

Tourism reaches into the varied aspects of Nepalese life and its benefits are encompassed by diverse sectors directly and indirectly. It generates employment opportunities, helps in the promotion and conservation of the art and culture and has remained one of the sources of foreign currency, making a significant contribution to the economy.

Nepal and India have been connected through open borders since time immemorial. Bilateral relationships between Nepal and India have always remained unique and exemplary to the world due to free movement without any passport or visa. This relationship has been nurtured by common beliefs and mythologies in terms of cultural, religious and linguistic parameters based on our socio-economic frame including family relationships of our many people. Bi-lateral religious and spiritual tourism is one way to further enhance our connectivity.

I am delighted to mention here that keeping in view this unique relationship, Nepal-India Chamber of Commerce & Industry (NICCI) a 28+ year old, not-for-profit bi-national chamber between the two countries, has created a notable Coffee Table Book on Nepal-India Religious Circuits to make the religious trips of people of both countries better planned, and more meaningful, through outlining the descriptions, beliefs and mythologies about the five religious circuits – Buddhist Circuit, Shiva Shakti Circuit, Ramayana Circuit, Mahabharat Circuit and Sikh Circuit, for which experts on the concerned circuits in both countries have contributed appreciably with photographs and maps to locate the sites in both countries. The dedicated website on the same will enhance mass publicity about the Circuits.

I believe that the initiative will be successful in its objective to promote bilateral religious tourism and bring the people of our two countries closer through the Coffee Table Book and Website. I, on behalf of the Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation, Government of Nepal, would like to congratulate NICCI for bringing about this publication, and the Embassy of India in Kathmandu and the Embassy of Nepal in New Delhi for supporting the initiative. I express my pleasure to support this initiative of NICCI from the Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation, Government of Nepal.

## **Sudan Kirati**

Minister, Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation,  
Government of Nepal

# Message



I am pleased to note that the Nepal India Chamber of Commerce and Industry (NICCI), Kathmandu, has come out with a coffee table book highlighting the religious pilgrimage circuits existing in India and Nepal.

The India Nepal relationship is age-old, time-tested and multidimensional. We are bound by eternal linkages of people-to-people contact, cultural exchanges, kinship ties and deep-rooted economic engagements. While our national aspirations are focused on the future, our ties are based on solid bedrock of history and civilization.

The pilgrimage routes connecting our two countries constitute one of the integral dimensions of this unique relationship. They are living embodiments of stories central to our civilization – the marriage of *Bhagwan Ram and Sita*, the travails of the *Pandavas*, the life-journey of *Bhagwan Gautama Buddha*, the tale of *Shakti-peethas* and the *Udasis of Guru Nanak*.

These sacred circuits, spanning across India and Nepal, are not only central to our civilizational identity, culture and heritage, but also to our daily lives.

It is our endeavor to popularize these circuits among the people of our two countries so that they can not only visit these religious sites but also take pride in their shared cultural heritage.

Towards this objective, I am happy that NICCI, with support from Embassy of India in Kathmandu and Nepal Tourism Board, has come out with a detailed chronicle of five of these circuits, detailing sites associated with Ramayana, Mahabharata, Buddhism, Shiva-Shakti and Guru Nanak.

I would like to congratulate NICCI and all the organizations and experts associated with this endeavor which I am certain will further promote tourism, pilgrimage and deeper people-to-people exchanges between our two countries.

**G. Kishan Reddy**

Minister of Culture, Tourism and  
Development of North Eastern Region  
Government of India

# Messages



**H.E. Dr. Shankar Sharma, Ambassador, Embassy of Nepal, India**

The Embassy of Nepal in New Delhi is delighted to support the initiative and would like to congratulate the President, entire Executive Committee and team of the NICCI Secretariat, the Embassy of India in Kathmandu and Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation of the Government of Nepal for the masterpiece. I am confident that the Coffee Table Book and the dedicated Website will be instrumental in promoting bilateral religious tourism between Nepal and India.



**H.E. Mr. Naveen Srivastava, Ambassador of India to Nepal**

The Nepal India Chamber of Commerce (NICCI) has acted as a bridge between India and Nepal for several years by promoting engagements between businesses, people and policymakers in our two countries. I am happy to note that NICCI in association with Nepal Tourism Board has now come up with a comprehensive chronicle of routes spanning across both our countries related to Ramayana, Mahabharata, life of Lord Buddha, Shiva-Shakti and Guru Nanak reflecting the deep and ever-lasting civilisational heritage and linkages between our peoples. I am confident that this publication would go a long way in promoting greater people-to-people exchanges as well as two-way tourism between our two countries.



**Mrs. Shreejana Rana, President, Nepal India Chamber of Commerce and Industry (NICCI)**

The Nepal-India Chamber of Commerce and Industry (NICCI) hopes to bring the countries together for a new initiative: promoting and enhancing religious and spiritual tourism between Nepal and India while further developing bilateral relations between the two countries. “Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam- a spiritual journey has no boundaries” We are excited to see what the future holds for this area of tourism for both countries.



**Dr. Dhananjay Regmi, CEO, Nepal Tourism Board (NTB)**

Nepal Tourism Board (NTB) is delighted to be associated with the initiative by Nepal India Chamber of Commerce and Industries (NICCI) to promote pilgrimage and spiritual sites of the two countries. It is the intricate thread of culture that has weaved us in close and comprehensive bonds since times immemorial. Our unique friendship is beyond geography and politics, and operates at people to people level with friendships and family ties across the open border.

# Foreword and Acknowledgement

It gives me great pleasure to introduce the “Nepal-India Religious & Spiritual Circuit” as part of an initiative lead by the Nepal-India Chamber of Commerce & Industry (NICCI) in order to develop and enhance bilateral tourism between Nepal and India. NICCI has brought this project to life by connecting and bringing together, on one platform, knowledge from a number of experts.

NICCI has focused on religious tourism and spirituality, which ‘have long been an integral motive for undertaking journeys and [are] usually considered the oldest form of non-economic travel (Jackowski and Smith 1992).’ Especially during times of uncertainty, like the pandemic brought in the last two years, religious and spiritual tourism can bring some faith and hope.

Tourism is vital to the success of the economy and cultural development of countries around the world. It enhances our understanding of different cultures and values and it contributes to enhanced wellbeing of travellers.

Nepal and India have always cherished the deep-rooted friendship between our countries. We have the connectivity of our trade and commerce ties, the connectivity through transport and also the connectivity of our people. NICCI hopes to continue to bring together our countries and facilitate a platform for discussion and action between Nepal and India. One way NICCI has continued to work on further enhancing bi-lateral relations is by promoting and enhancing religious and spiritual tourism between Nepal and India. This project highlights and promotes India and Nepal’s religious ties and illustrates how porous and interlinked our cultures are by creating a visual representation for our viewers.

I would like to take a moment to thank all of the experts who have contributed their work to help make this project come to life. The knowledge products (website and coffee table book) would not have happened without your expertise, contribution and support.

We are eternally grateful for the knowledge, workings and support from all our experts: (1) Dr. Basudev Krishna Shastri and team for their knowledge and expertise in the Shiva Shakti and Ramayan Circuits in Nepal (2) Dr. Hari Prasad Adhikari and Acharya Pandit Tek Narayan Upadhaya and their team for their work on the Shiva Shakti Circuit, India (3) Dr. Ramesh Dhungel for his knowledge and expertise in the Mahabharat Circuit, Nepal, along with a few spiritual inputs from Dr. Pabitra Khadka (4) Ms. Neera Misra for her work

# Foreword and Acknowledgement

on the Mahabharat and Ramayan Circuits, India (5) Mr. Bikram PandE Kaaji, with support from Dr. Ramesh Dhungel for their work on the Buddhist Circuit, Nepal (6) Mr. Deepak Anand for his expertise on the Buddhist Circuit, India (7) Mr. Gyani Gurbakash Singh, Sardar Pritam Singh and Ms. Rupy Singh for their guidance and support on Sikh Circuit, Nepal (8) Mr. Rajinder Singh Chadha and team for his support and contribution to the Sikh Circuit, India.

Furthermore, we are thankful for the support from H.E. Manjeev Singh Puri for letting us use some of his workings from 'Sikhs Heritage of Nepal'. We would also like to thank Sardar Pritam and Ms. Rupy Singh and Ms. Kiran Sandhu for their guidance and support on the Sikh Circuit, Nepal. Mr. Anil Thaman for sharing photos on the Sikh Circuit, Nepal, Mr. Bikram Chandra Majumdar and Mr. Kiran Gothe and team for their hard work in making our vision a reality through the design of the coffee table book and website.

We are also grateful to Mr. Anurag Verma for thoroughly reviewing and editing the workings. We would also like to thank Ms. Bobby Malla, Ms. Palas Joshi and Ms. Sarad Pradhan for their feedback in regards to editing. We would also like to thank Mr. Ram Bahadur Kunwar, Director, Department of Archeology, Government of Nepal along with the Foreign Ministry of Nepal for reviewing the book and providing their input. Additionally, this project would never have been completed without the support from our NICCI Secretariat Team Mr. Saibal Ghosh (VP), Mr. Sunil KC (VP), Mr. KM Singh (Director General). We would like to especially thank Mr. Marshal Rathour (Deputy Director) and Ms. Luja Mathema, NICCI consultant for their tireless work, review and coordination for the project.

We express our gratitude to, The Embassy of India in Nepal, The Embassy of Nepal in India, and the Nepal Tourism Board (NTB) and those sponsors/contributors that supported and believed in this project. All your encouragement and contribution has helped make this project a reality.

**Mrs. Shreejana Rana**

President, Nepal-India Chamber of Commerce and Industry (NICCI)



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Nepal: Dr. Basudev Krishna Shastri



India: Prof. Dr. Hari Prasad Adhikari &  
Acharya Pt. Tek Narayan Upadhyaya

# Shiva-Shakti

शिव एव स्वयं लिङ्गमलिङ्गमेव हि ।  
शिवेन गम्यते शिवो नान्येन गम्यते ॥

'Shakti' means power while 'Peeth' refers to place. *Shakti Peeth* is the place where energy is found and worshipped. These are places believed to be important to Hinduism due to their link to God Shiva. It is believed that every living thing needs power to exist. Without power, there is no existence. Therefore, these *Shakti Peeths* are considered to be of religious and spiritual importance.

## Shiva Shakti Sites in Nepal



Place	Location
Pandav Gufa	Karnali Pradesh
Hrishikesh Temple	Lumbini Pradesh
Gupteshwor Gufa	Gandaki Pradesh
Vyas Cave	Gandaki Pradesh
Mukti Naath Shiv Peeth	Gandaki Pradesh
Damodar Kunda	Gandaki Pradesh
Akash Bhairav	Bagmati Pradesh
Pashupatinath	Bagmati Pradesh
Krishna Mandir	Bagmati Pradesh
Danta Kali Shakti Peeth	Pradesh 1
Pindeshwor Shakti Peeth	Pradesh 1
Kichakbadh Temple	Pradesh 1
Barahakshetra	Pradesh 1
Siddhakali Temple	Pradesh 1
Bhimsen Temple	Pradesh 1
Shiva Dhara, Barun Valley	Pradesh 1
Shabhapokhari	Pradesh 1
Pindeshwor	Bajura & Dailekh

# Shiva-Shakti Sites in Nepal

Top 35 of 64 Shiva-Shakti Sites

Author: Dr. Basudev Krishna Sashtri and Experts

In Nepal, there are many *Shakti Peeths* related to God Shiva and also those related to Goddess Sati Devi (Dantakali, Guheyshwori, Nainadevi,) and Goddess Durga. Additionally, some *Shakti Peeths* are also related to *Swoyambu Shakti Peeth*. As per the Newari language, 'Swoyam means SELF and Bu means BORN or EVOLVED' which means the *Shakti Peeths* in Nepal are known as self-evolved *Shakti Peeths*. These *Shakti Peeths* are locally known in the Newar community in Newari language (Nepal Bhasha) as *Ajima*, which also means not born but self-evolved. These *Shakti Peeths* are considered to be the foundation of beliefs of the people

in Nepal since ancient times based on the practices, *tantras*, myths, festivals being followed for thousands of years. There are several *slokas* (religious verses) in regards to these *Shakti Peeths*, which are also found, described in *Pashupat Puran*, *Swoyambu Puran*, *Himbat Khanda* and *Tantra Granth* (book).

In the Holy Book of the *Skanda Puran* and *Devi Bhagwat Puran* it is said that: "In Sati Devi's grief for God Shiva she walked into the fire. It is believed that God Shiva then found Sati Devi's body. In his despair, he is said to have carried the body of Sati Devi around the world. According to legend, parts

of her body fell to the ground in different places during his journey. These sites are known as *Shakti Peeths*. While there are different accounts on the number of *Shakti Peeths*, the popular belief is that there are 54 such sites based on the belief that *Sati Devi's* body parts had fallen in this particular region.

The areas identified in the Shiva-Shakti circuit include *Swoyambhu Shakti Peeths* in Nepal as well as sites related to *Sati Devi* and God *Shiva*.

'*Jyoti*' is defined as light and it is related to God Shiva and his energy. It is believed that there are 12 main *Jyotirlinga* sites. However,

it is believed there are around 64 sites that are of great importance due to their link with God Shiva's energy. A number of these places are believed to be found in Nepal.

There are approximately 64 *Shiva-Shakti Peeths* in Nepal according to the *Swoyambhu Puran* and other *granthas*. The following 35 sites have been incorporated with descriptions below and a list of the other sites has also been listed.

## *Pathivara Devi*, Annapurna Shakti Peeth, Taplejung, Fungling



### **Location**

Pathivara Devi Temple is located at Phungling Municipality, Ward No. 10 in Taplejung district. This *Shakti Peeth* is located in the higher region of Taplejung and is located approximately 30 kilometres away

from Phungling Bazar and is situated at an altitude of 3,794 metres (12,646 ft), hence this region is comparatively colder.

There is no paved road or way to the shrine which means that accessibility is not easy. The road to the shrine

can only be taken when weather permits. It can only be done with the assistance of a local guide.

### **How to Reach**

In order to reach Pathivara from Kathmandu, you need to travel to Birtamod, Jhapa, which is at

a distance of 615 kilometres east from the city. From Jhapa, the next stop is Ilam, which is 72 kilometers away, and then from Ilam to Phidim it is 74 kilometres, and from Phidim to Phungling it is 76 kilometres, which is a total of 230 kilometres from Jhapa to Phungling. Then 19.4 kilometres from Phungling lies the *Devasthan* Temple. A taxi can then be taken for 13 kilometres ahead of Phungling to reach the lower ground of the hill. Then from the lower ground to mid-ground, also known as the broader ground, it is 3 kilometres uphill, and from the mid-ground one needs to walk for 3 kilometres to reach the Pathivara Temple. Other than this way, 5 kilometres ahead of Phungling, on the way to Pathivara itself lies the Suketar Airport. The plane can be boarded only from Biratnagar.

### **Significance and Local Beliefs**

The hill of Pathivara is said to resemble the image as of a traditional vessel known as '*pathi*', which is used to store grains. Hence the name *pathi* – vessel, and filled – *vara*, *Pathivara*. There is a Dhatu (alloy) statue of Bhagwati at Pathivara hill. There are also

statues of Bhagwati and Ganesh, respectively. Alongside a trishul and bells there are weapons also present which are worshipped.

There are also stone figurines of Shiva, Parvati, Ganesh, Kumar, and Bhairav.

From across the Pathivara hill, 100 metres below there is a shrine where it is believed that Pathivara Devi meditated and where it is believed that the shepherds worshipped the Devi.

To enter the shrine, one must pass a small opening beside a huge rock.

### **Main Festivities and Jatras**

From the day of *Dashain* (which falls in later September to mid-October), *Navaratri Ghatasthapana* till *Vijaya Dashami*, worshippers come to the Bhagwati Devi.

On the day of *Chaitra Navaratra*, *Dashain* (March-April), *Navaratri* (September-October), *Ashtami* (September-October), *Bala Chaturdashi* (November), and *Purnima* (full moon), special gatherings and *melas* are held in the temple area.

...

## *Dantakali Shakti Peeth, Sunsari*

### **Location**

This *Shakti Peeth* is located at Dharan Sub-Metropolitan City, Ward no. 14. The Dantakali Temple is located on the north side of the Bijayapur Hill from the source of the Seti River. The temple has been built in *Gumba* style, and the *Gajur* (topmost object of the shrine/pinnacle) is made of copper.

### **How to Reach**

As Dharan is a sub-metropolitan city, there is easy access of local and private vehicles.

### **Significance and Traditional Beliefs**

The temple houses nine teeth which are enclosed in a box with a silver covering. As the story goes, God Shiva's first wife, Sati's nine teeth were found in the area. Likewise, five teeth among them are considered a symbol of power. When God Shiva was roaming around the Himalayan area carrying Sati Devi in his arms, it is believed the teeth of Sati Devi fell. Only five teeth were considered to be powerful because it represents five elements.



### **Main Festivities and Jatras**

According to the Lunar calander, *Ashtami* is the eighth day of *Navaratra*, the nine nights and on this day a '*puja*' is performed for Dantakali Devi every month. Special *pujas* are organised on this day.

During *Navaratri*, *Dashain* (September/October), *Teej* (August) and during the full moon, special *melas* (festivals) are held as well.

## Pindeshwor Shiva Peeth, Sunsari

### Location

Pindeshwor Mandir is located in Bijayapur of Dharan Sub Metropolitan City, Sunsari. It is 1 kilometre below Budhasubba Temple. There is a natural Shivalinga, which is of a height of four fingers (four *anguls*). Holy chants of God Shiva, also known as *Rudra Path* (Rudra Study), are performed every day and the Shivalinga is worshipped with water from the stream. Simultaneously, other rituals are also often organised.

### How to Reach

Pindeshwor Mandir is only 2 kilometres from Dharan Sub-metropolitan city, hence easily accessible by any transportation.

### Significance and Traditional Beliefs

*Samudra Manthan* is the myth of the origin of 'Amrit'. Amrit is the nectar of immortality, which the Gods and the demons fought over. The Amrit is said to have been kept in a pot known as *Amrit Ghada*.

To protect the Amrit from the devils, the Gods transformed the *Amrit Ghada* into the shape of Shivalinga. The Pindeshwor Mandir is taken as a symbol of the nectar called *Amrit Pinda*. It is where God Shankar, one of the many faces of God Shiva, is worshipped. Every day in the month of 'Shravan' (July/August) worshippers take a bath in the Koshi River near the temple and offer water to the God Pindeshwor.

Devotees of God Shiva, also known as Bol Bom, offer water to Pindeshwor from the Koshi River. It is believed that Gods themselves initiated this ritual. Then to the west of the temple, there is a *Saraswati Kunda*. According to *Rudrakshya Mahatma*, Saraswati Devi dug a *kunda* (pond) to offer water to Mahadev/God Shiva. *Saraswati Kunda* lies in the Himalayas where it is believed God Shiva lived.

Here, a black-stoned Shivalinga has been enclosed inside a copper Shivalinga. It is said that close to



the temple, there is an 'eternal-fire' the blaze is said to have been started by Sri Ram during the *Dhuni* of *Treta Yug* Period. Therefore, devotees illuminate oil lamps throughout the year.

The temple was constructed in 1640 B.S. (1583 A.D.). There is a belief that the water at the temple fulfils the devotees' wishes. Besides the stone statue of Pindeshwor, there are statues of Ganesh, Parvati,

Swami Kartikeya, Bedbyash, Kalvairav, Dakshinkali, and Pashupati. Towards the north of Pindeshwor, there is a famous one-of-a-kind Dantakali Mandir.

### Main Festivities and Jatras

- *Shivaratri* (Feb/March)
- *Shrawan Sankranti* (Mid-July)
- *Makar Sankranti* (Jan 14<sup>th</sup>/15<sup>th</sup>)
- *Teej* (End of August)



## *Siddhakali Bhagwati*, Sankhuwasabha

### **Pilgrimage and Main Attraction**

According to ancient beliefs, the right eye of Sati Devi fell on the grounds of Siddhakali. Then, during Mathvir Singh Thapa's reign, the residents and local authorities constructed the temple. It was built in a two-storied pagoda style. In the main point of the temple there is a small round stone, which is a symbol of Sati Devi, followed by a brass statue of Singha Devi and stone statues of Ganesh alongside Bhairav. In addition, there are a stone-made *Shivalinga*, *Basaha* (Shiva's bull), and Parvati in a nearby temple.

It is believed that this temple aids any eye-related pain and fulfils the visitor's wishes. Since many devotees from other districts visit the place, the local municipality has built proper accommodation facilities.



### **Geographical location**

The temple is located in Chainpur, capital of Sankhuwasabha district. There are other natural and religious attractions close to the temple. It includes the Baleswor Cave, which holds the world's biggest natural *Shivalinga*, followed by Baneshwor hill and temple, Bireshwor Cave, and a natural hot spring, among other jewels of Chainpur.

### **Directions**

This temple is close to the Chainpur market. Hence, local transportation is readily available.

### **Main festivities and Jatras**

Festivities and religious ceremonies are yearly occasions in this temple. In the month of Chaitra of the Hindu calendar, *Shivaratri* is celebrated. Also, *Ashoj Navaratri* and *Shri Ram Navami* are other occasions when worshippers crowd the temple.

Since the area has been gradually developing, transportation has become easy for tourists. In addition, the third-highest mountain, Mount Makalu, is visible from the temple.

*Chinnamesta Bhagwati Sakhadeshwori Shakti Peeth, Saptari*





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### Location

This temple is at Sakhada Village of Chinnamasta Rural Municipality. It is 10 kilometres south of Rajbiraj, the district headquarters. The Bhagwati Devi of this temple is also called Chinnamasta Bhagwati, Sakhada Bhagwati, Sakhandeswori, and Sakhada Mata. However, she is

mainly called *Chinnamasta* because she does not have a head.

The temple is constructed in Nepali architecture. At the centre of the temple, there is a black stoned statue of the *Devi* without a head. Alongside this, there are statues of Dakshinkali, Mahesh Mardini, Chamunda, and Bharavi. Hence,

all of them are collectively called Pancha-bhagini. There are 10 *Maha Vidyas* (supreme knowledge) in *Tantra sashtra*, Chinnamasta is one of them.

### How to reach

One can reach the temple from Rajbiraj. Local vehicles take around

half an hour to get to this *Shakti Peeth*. Rajbiraj can be reached by roadway and airway from Kathmandu. Once in Rajbiraj, local buses or city rickshaws can be easily accessed to the temple.

### Significance & Traditional beliefs

Previously, Chinnamasta was the *panchayat* (panchayat is similar to the present-day court where law and order was maintained). Five people were given the power to provide justice with Goddess Bhagwati as the witness of Sakhada village, and after the reformation of the panchayat system, the Village Development Committee was established under the same name as Bhagwati Chinnamasta.

Sakhadeswori was the main deity of the clan of Simranghad's King Shakral Singh (1275-1303 B.S. or approximately 1218-1246 A.D.). King Shakral Singh abdicated his throne to his son Kumar Hari Singh Dev because of the pressure of his advisors and went to live in the Sakhada area of Saptari.

At that time, Sakhada was a forest area. According to legend, when he was asleep in the woods, Goddess

Bhagwati appeared in his dream and informed him that there was a trishul under his bed and other statues nearby. She directed him to worship those holy objects, leading to his purity and good faith. After waking up, the king did accordingly and found a trishul and statues. So, he established a temple and worshipped Bhagwati for the rest of his life. It is also believed that one should not lie inside the temple's vicinity, and if one does it is considered a supreme sin.

However, when the Gaya Samsudin Tughlaq from Kolkata attacked this land in 1322 and 1349 B.S. (1265-1292 A.D.) the temple was destroyed. It was at that time Bhagwati's head was broken. After which, the statue became Goddess Chinnamasta (*Chinna-broken, Masta-head*).

### **Main festivities and Jatras**

On *Navaratri* during *Dashain* (September/October), a huge mela (fair) is organised. A replica of the head of the Goddess that is made in silver is worshipped. On other days, the head is not adjoined to the statue. In addition, rituals are performed from time to time.

Then on *Ashtami*, and *Navami* of *Chaite Dashain* (April), animal sacrifices (goat, pigeon, chicken) are made. Also, on the day of *Maha Ashtami*, Bhagwati is worshipped in a very ritualistic way. Furthermore, it is believed that the thigh of Sati Devi, God Mahadev's first wife, is located here. In the central part of the temple, there is a water reservoir that is 500 feet (153 metres) deep. It does not dry during extreme drought. The platform is carved with a mystical diagram, also known as '*Shri yantra*'. Around all sides of the pool, walls have been erected upon which the garden of the temple stands.

There is a black stone statue of Bhagwati in the temple, which is the main place where people worship the goddess. However, other figures of Vishnu, Mahadev, Hanuman, and Shani, among other gods-goddesses, are worshiped right after the main Bhagwati Devi has been worshipped. There is a belief that no pilgrimage is complete if one does not visit Chinnamasta. People also bring their newly-bought vehicles to the temple to receive blessings.

There are food and accommodation facilities and also an artificial pond to take a bath.

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## *Raja Devi Shakti Peeth, Dhanusha*

### **Location**

This *Shakti Peeth* is near the Ram Temple in Raja Devi Municipality of Dhanusha district. This *Peeth* was previously made of clay statues that were later enclosed by brass metal.

### **How to reach**

The shrine is close to Janakpurdham, hence, local transportation is readily available.

### **Significance and Local Beliefs**

This Devi is known to be the clan deity of King Janak. She is kept inside a room in the temple. On *Saptami* of *Dashain*, the '*bel*' fruit, and Lotus flower along with offerings of bangles, cloths, saffron as auspicious goods are offered. God Shiva is also worshipped here. The idol of God Shiva is wrapped in a red cloth and then various rituals are performed under the bel tree with traditional music.

Finally, Ram Mandir's prominent priest takes the *Prasad* (holy food offering) of *Ashtami*. The line of devotees on *Ashtami* can measure up to 1 kilometre. During the main festival, *Dashain*, different faces of Bhagwati for nine days are worshiped and only men can enter the vicinity of the temple. Women are allowed to worship through the windows only.

### **Main Festivities & Jatras**

During *Bijayadashami* and *Bibaha Panchami*, the entire vicinity of Janakpur celebrates and worships in the temple.



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## *Sri Ram Janaki Mandir, Dhanusha*

**Location**

Janaki Mandir is located at Janakpurdham Sub-Metropolitan City of Dhanusha district. The temple is located in the centre of the city and holds a unique

touristic significance for Janakpur. This temple has been constructed in Mughal architectural style.

**How to reach**

Different modes of transportation like air and roadways are available

to get to Janakpurdham from all around the country. As it is located within the sub-metropolitan city, vehicles are readily available from Janakpur airport and any bus stop in the region.

**Significance**

According to legend, the famous King Janak ruled the Mithila kingdom during the *Treta yuga*. His daughter was Janaki, also known as Sita. As per legend, Sita married Sri Ram. The temple was constructed in memory of Mata Janaki.





Traditional belief holds that when priest Sukishor Das of Lohada, Madhya Pradesh, came to Mithila during the 17<sup>th</sup> century and rested under a neem tree, a statue of Ram-Janaki appeared out of nowhere. After which, he started worshipping the statue and has become the core element of the temple.

After hearing of the miraculous incident, King Mani Mukunda Sen of Makwanpur came to Mithila in 1684 B.S. (1627 A.D.) bought 1,400 bighas (1,020,600 square feet) of land, and registered it in the name of Ram-Janaki.

It is also said that 900,000 rupees was spent to build the Janaki Mandir at that time and since then Janaki Mandir is also known as a *Naulakkha Mandir*.

There are three statues inside the temple of Ram Janaki. One of them is believed to have been brought from Ayodhya. Furthermore, the main prayers are held in the '*Garbha Griha*' of the temple.

### **Main Festivities and Jatras**

- There is a tradition to visit Ram Janaki Temple after bathing in Ganga Sagar and Dhanush Sagar.
- Ram Navami (April)
- Chaitra Shukla Navami (March/April)
- Ram Janmastami (May)
- Marga Shukla Panchami (December)
- Marga Shukla Panchami (December) the marriage of Ram-Janaki is celebrated.

Also, every year for 15 days, Shradha Bhakti on *Marga Shukla Panchami* (December), of Aradhya Dev is conducted by circling all the corners of the Temple and Mithila territory. This is known as the Parikrama Ritual. This is said to purify all the gods and goddesses of the Mithila region. The Parikrama ritual has three types: Full- Brihat, Medium- Madhya, and Quick-Lagu. The 15 days Parikrama is of Medium; 35 pilgrimages should be completed within 15 days. This starts from the Sanskrit lunar day, which falls during the Mid-

*Fagun Shukla Pratipada-Shukla Purnima* (Feb/March) month of the Nepali calendar. It ends on the *Shukla Purnima* as per the lunar day of Falgun (Feb/March) Nepali month by returning to the Janakpur Dham.

Then Janakpur Dham continuously rotates, starting from the *Krishna Chaturthi* and ending on *Shukla Purnima*, where Janakpur Dham areas are visited. It begins with the worshipping of Siddheswor Mahadev. During the course, individuals following the ritual bathes in the rivers of Dhanusha Dham and other ponds and visits Kameshwor Mahadev, eventually ending in Siddheswor temple.

### **Devotees reach to the ponds that is known as tirthas.**

During this ritual, shoes or slippers are not worn, and oil or soaps are not used. Most importantly, lies are not said.

## *Pashupatinath, Shiv Peeth, Gaushala, Kathmandu*

### **Location**

In the Gaushala Pashupatinath region of Kathmandu Metropolitan City, the purest Hindu shrine of Pashupatinath is located. The area of Pashupatinath extends to 264 hectares of land, and it is considered to be the 'Aradhya Dev of Nepal'.

There are other temples, lakes, stone-water sources, *Devalayas*, pilgrim homes, and more than thousands of *Shivalinga's*. The main temples of Pashupatinath area are: Guheshwori, Gorakhnath, Bishwarupa, Rajrajeshwori, Vatsaleshowri, Bhubaneshwar, Dakshinamurti, Bajreshwori, Bankali, Jaybagishwori, Kirateshwori, Tamreshwori, Bhandareshwori, Chandra Binayak (Chabahil Ganesh), among others.

The Pashupati area was instituted on the World Heritage List in 2036 BS (1979 AD). And for the construction and preservation of the area, Pashupatinath Kosh (Fund) was established in 2044 BS. This temple stands 4500 feet above sea level (1371.6m), and it is constructed in pagoda style. It is two-storied with one door on every four sides, and the pinnacle (gajur) is said to be made of gold. The doors are laminated with silver, and in front of the main entrance, there is a

statue of Mahadev's bull Nandi, 15 feet in height (4.57m).

### **How to reach**

This holy shrine is located in centrally located area of Kathmandu, thus there is no difficulty in transportation. Kathmandu is connected by most of the places of across the country, while the temple is very close to the International Airport. Thus, it is easy and accessible even for the foreign devotees.

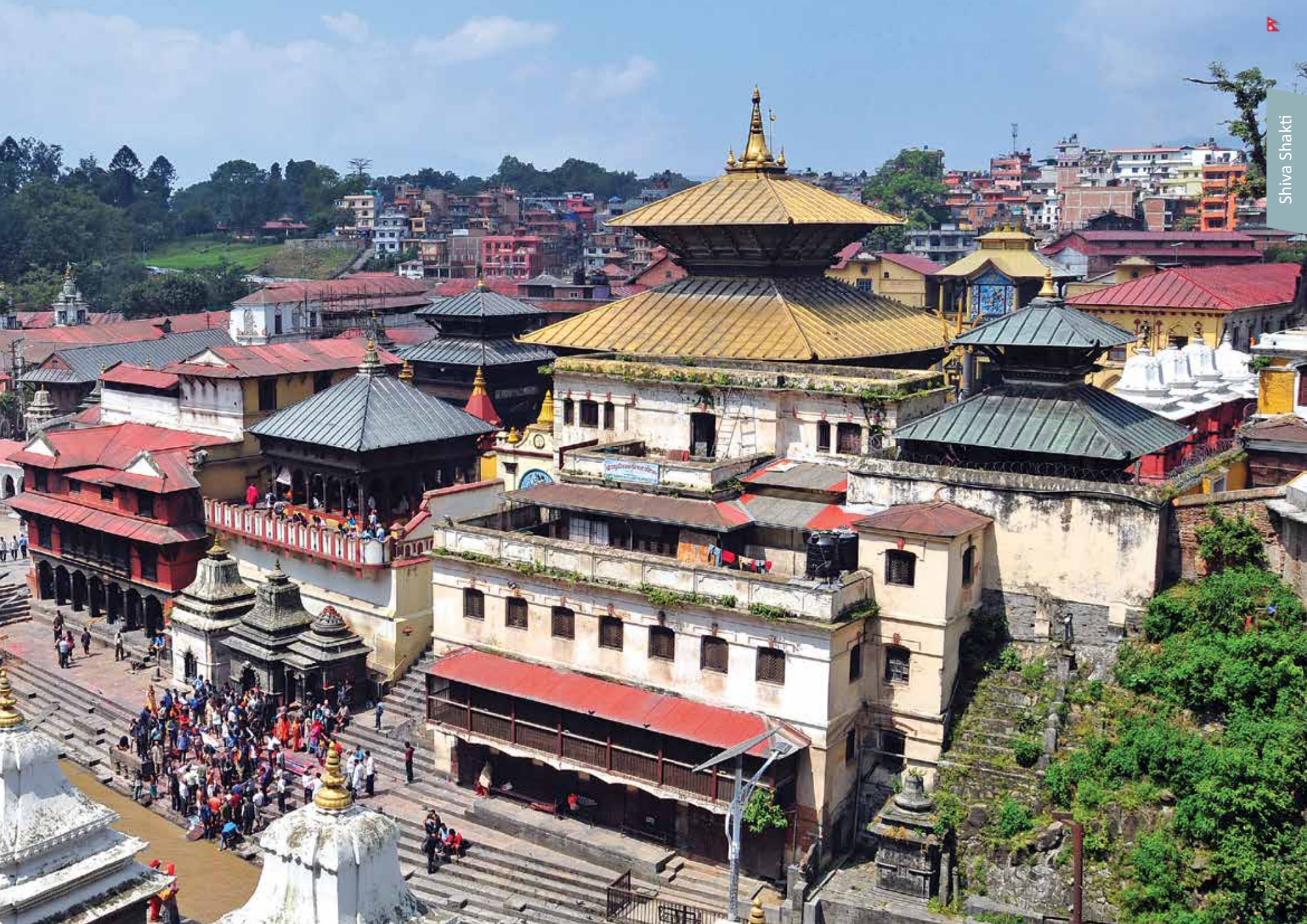
### **Significance and Traditional Beliefs**

Although the exact date of Pashupatinath's origin cannot be traced, it is said to more than two thousand years old. There are many legends and theories behind the belief of the temple. In ancient times, it is said that the '*Sleshmantak forest*' is where God Shiva appeared as a deer. As legend goes, God Shiva stayed in the Sleshmantak and visited God Brahma, Vishnu, and Indra as a light.

At the Temple's North-West side, Devi Parvati is believed to have worshiped the God Shankar another name for God Shiva by offering the water from a nearby pit. She used to bath on the same pit, ate leaves from the nearby trees, and meditated for a long time, after which







God Shankar became contented with her determination and appeared in front of her.

Subsequently, the earliest Nepal civilization, Kiratis, worshiped Shiva as their deity. It is believed that in the *Mahabharata*, Nepal is referred to as *Shiva-Bhumi*, Shiv's Country. Pashupatinath has been written on *Skanda Puran*, *Shiva Puran*, *Varah Puran*, and Kautilya's *Treaties (Arthashastra)*.

पुण्यं पाशुपतं क्षेत्रं गुह्यायाः पीठमुत्तमम् ।  
उभयं सिद्धिदं लोके भुक्तिमुक्ति प्रदायकम् ॥

These Pashupati *Kshetra* and Guheyshwori *Peeth* area are known to be the special ones amongst the other peeths as devotees visit these locations to overcome difficulties and achieve peace and prosperity.

According to Gopal *Vamshavali* (Manuscript), it is believed that when Sleshmantak forest was still intact, a cow named Brahmi was shearing milk on the river bank. When the herders dug up that particular space, they found the light of Pashupatinath, also known as Jyotirlinga. There they were said to establish the Pashupatinath Temple.

Furthermore, a *Shilapatra*, stone-script present in the Pashupatinath Temple, which Jayadev Ditiya wrote in 780 BS (723 AD) mentioned that King Sushupta (Supuspa) Dev constructed the Pashupatinath Temple. His 39th descendant was King Namdev. The present temple was re-constructed during the 17<sup>th</sup> century, 1682 BS (1625 AD), by Bhuptindra Malla and Siddhi Laxmi Malla. There is also a seal in the temple, scripted on a wood panel, which is said to be done by King Jay Malla in 1682 BS.

Traditionally, being cremated in the Pashupatinath Area is said to wash away all the mortal sins, and the dead shall reach the Shiva's world called *Shiv Lok* so there are many cremations that take place at Pashupati Temple area.

#### **Main Festivities and Jatras**

Baishak *Shukla Ashtami*, there will be *Dhanjo Chaitya Jatra*, (may 8,9).

#### **Special festivities**

- *Panchamrit Snan* in Baishak (April/May),
- *Dashhara Parva* in Jestha (May/June),

- *Guru Purnima* in Ashad (June/July),
- *Pavitrahoran* in Shrawan (July/Aug),
- *Baikuntha Chaturdashi* in Kartik (Oct/Nov),
- *Mahapuja and Bala Chaturdashi* in Mangsir (Nov/Dec),
- *Khichadi Bhog* in Poush (Dec/Jan),
- *Chaturdashi Chaya Darshan* in Magh (Jan/Feb),
- *Maha Shivaratri* and *Krishna Chaturdashi* in Falgun (Feb/Mar).

Then from Chaitra *Shukla Purnima* to Baishak *Shukla Purnima*, (April/May) special bathing (*Maha Snan*) to God Shiva is conducted.

Other than that, on Ram *Navami* (April), *Ganga Dashhara*, *Shrawani Purnima* (Aug), Shree Krishna *Janmashtami* (Aug), every Monday of Shrawan month (July/Aug), Rishi Panchami (Aug/Sept), Poush *Shukla Purnima* (Jan) and on *Shukla Chaturdashi* of Kartik month (December) devotees offer holy water, *bel puspa* with *brata* (fasting without having food).

The main festival of Pashupatinath is *Maha Shivaratri*. It is believed that during this period the *Jyotirlinga* is said to have appeared. There is 16-step ritual *puja*, also known as '*Shodashopchar*' of God Shiva, which is conducted during this time.

Then from Chaitra (March/April) *Shukla Purnima* to Baishak (April/May) *Shukla Purnima*, for one month, 125 pot of water is taken to bathe the Pashupati. This is also called offering water and on every *Purnima* (fullmoon), *Maha Snan*, special bathing is done in the evening and special meal prepared by the priests is taken. That meal is known as *Maha Bhog*. While in the month of Kartik (Nov/Dec), *Maha Bhog* is taken on *Chaturdashi*.

On *Shukla Chaturdashi* of Kartik (October/November) month, Buddhist followers conduct *Chaya darshan*. They worship Pashupatinath, believing it to be one of the *Bodhisattva* paths to Buddhism.

## *Guheyswori*, Mrigasthali, Gaushala, Kathmandu

### **Location**

This temple is 1 km East-South of Pashupatinath Temple, on the lower part of the Bagmati River.

### **How to reach**

The shrine is located within the Pashupati area located in the center of Kathmandu. Transportation can be easily found as it is within walking distance from Pashupatinath Temple.

### **Traditional Belief and Significance**

It is believed that the 'hip portion of Sati Devi' fell on the grounds the *peeth* was evolved as Guheyswori Devi *Shakti Peeth*. This is therefore known as the cosmically powerful *Shakti Peeth*. There is said to be '51 *Devi Shakti Peeth* in the world'. Guheyswori is said to be one of them.

According to *Himavat Khanda*, the cave to which Parvati remained hidden was called Guhyeshwori. Then, according to Nepali *Mahatamaya*, a part of Sati Devi fell; hence it became a *Shakti Peeth*. And according to *Meru Tantra*, in the book of *Shivaism*, the hip

portion, also called *Guhya*, of Sati Devi fell to the temple area, hence known as Guhyeshwori. The prominent spot is where the part of Sati was found; hence the site is worshipped by the right hand.

The temple was constructed during the Malla period approximately 16th century. While there is no statue of Guhyeshwori Devi, there is a small opening in the ground, known as *pinda*. This is protected/ enclosed under a gold water pot. And that pot is taken as the symbol of the goddess. So, after the *puja*, the pot is filled with water poured on the head of the worshipper. Next to this there is a Bhairav *pinda* covered in gold where both gods Bhairav and Guhyeshwori are worshipped.

This temple's worship is conducted ceremonially by traditional clans of priests, viz., Bhsitole Bhairavacharya, Kilagal Budhacharya, and Patan Bhairavacharya. The allocated priests take turns taking care of the temple every month. On *Chaturdashi*, they rotate their position. And as the ceremonial



worshipping is ancestral, the priests study the methodology from their predecessor of the clan.

In a mid-Magh (Feb) fish are located on the surface in front of the Bagmati River. The person who can catch the fish is considered a lucky worshipper.

The Newar community worships this temple from *Bam-Marga* itself. And it is believed that before worshipping Pashupatinath, Guhyeshori should be honored; otherwise, the fruit of the act shall be irrelevant.

### **Main Festivities and Jatras**

- Every *Ashtami* (eight day of the lunar calendar)

- *Purnima* (full-moon)
- Chaitra (March/April)
- Ashoj (Sept/Oct) *Navaratri* special rites are performed in the temple.
- Magh *Shukla Navami* (Feb): one water pot is allocated and worshipped for Guhyeshori at Hanuman Taleju Temple. It is then brought to Guhyeshori on a traditional cart. That pot is cherished and kept in the temple for a night and then returned to Taleju the next day. It is considered to be *Tantric* temple found by Pratap Malla. It represents power and opens only during *Dashain*.

## *Baglamukhi Shakti Peeth*, Lalitpur Metropolitan City



### **Location**

This is at Lalitpur Metropolitan City on the southern side of Kumbheshwor Temple of Patan. The god of this temple is also known as Baglamukhi or Pitambaradevi. Inside the temple, there are multiple silver pictures and a statue of Trinetra Devi, who is pulling a monster's tongue.

### **How to reach**

This is in the center point of

the Lalitpur district; hence transportation is readily available from Kathmandu, Lalitpur, and Bhaktapur.

### **Significance and Traditional Beliefs**

According to the legend, during the *Satya Yuga*, an enormous tide was about to commence and kill all the region's birds. Fearing the consequences, Vishnu started meditating on the Tripura Sundari

Goddess. Contended with Vishnu, she appeared near the Haridra Sarovar and emitted a yellow light which eventually stopped the tide. Then Goddess Bagala started preserving the area where the goddess radiated her power.

Furthermore, it is said that praying to the Baglamukhi god shall end the domestic disputes, graha, health, relationship, childbearing problems of the follower. And as Baglamukhi Devi is the spouse of Brihaspati, the temple is especially crowded on Thursday. Baglamukhi is one of the Ten Supreme Knowledge (*Maha Vidya*).

### **Main Festivities and Jatras**

On *Vijaya Dashami* (Sept/Oct), *Navaratri* (Sept/Oct), and *Chaitae Dashain* (April), gatherings happen, while tourists and worshippers come frequent the temple daily.

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## *Dakshinkali Shakti Peeth*, Kathmandu, Pharping

### **Location**

On the Southside of Kathmandu Valley, below the Pharping area, two small rivers called Purnawati and Udwarwati merge on the location of Dakshinkali Temple. It is situated on the Dakshin, South-side of Kathmandu, called Dakshinkali.

From the central city of Ratnapark, it is 30km in the distance. King Pratap Malla constructed it during the 17<sup>th</sup> century. There is no roof over the statue, and Dakshinkali stands on the black stone upon the wall. The goddesses hold Conch Shells Sankha, Wheel Chakra, Mallet Gada, a pit-like object Kunda and Scepter called Abhay. Then towards the west side of the temple, Charhatey (four-handed) Narsimha Bhagwati is located.

### **How to reach**

Local vehicles are easily accessed from Kathmandu. From Ratrapark buspark, Dakshinkali bus can be taken as from Balkhu a road is paved towards Dakshinkali *Mandir*.

### **Significance and Local Beliefs**

It is said that King Pratap Malla was directed in his sleep to construct a temple in Dakshinkali. Previously, it is belived

that only the *Shakti Peeth* of Chamundadevi (who falls under the 64 *Tantric devi/goddess*) was found there. It is believed that King Pratap Malla added statues around the platform. The figures are seven faces of the Rakshika Goddess and 6 of Matrika Goddess (Indrayani, Barahi, Vaishnavi, Kumari, Maheshwari, and Brahmi). All of them are worshiped as symbolic protection of Chamundadevi.

In addition, the daily *puja* of the Kali goddess is conducted as per the traditional ritual. It is said that Dakshinkali protects her worshippers and brings prosperity in childbearing, wealth, case conflicts, job positions. And the devotees offer sweets, incense, red cloth and basil leaves. Above the temple, there is another temple belonging to Dakshinkali's mother.

#### **Main Festivities and Jatras**

Mainly on *Navaratri*, *Vijayadashami* (Sept/Oct) and *Chaite Dashain* (April), special fairs are held and festivities are celebrated.

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## *Budhanilkantha*, Shivapuri, Narayanthan, Kathmandu

#### **Location**

This temple is located 10 km away from Ratnapark and 7 km north of Bagmati and Bishnumati rivers in Kathmandu. It stands on the hill of Shivapuri; there is a small pond on which the enormous statue of Narayan of 22 feet in height, 11 feet in breadth, whose arm is coiled by snakes. This god is lying on the ground upon an 11 headed snake holding Conch Shell *Sankha*, Wheel *Chakra*, Mallet *Gada* and Gem *Pajha* on his four hands.

#### **How to reach**

This is in the center of Kathmandu; hence, local transportation from Chakra path Maharajgunj, Ratnapark, Kalanki can be easily accessed.

#### **Significance and Local Beliefs**

According to traditional belief, one of the Kings of Nepal took extreme measures to visit India's Badrinath and Kedarnath temples. After watching the trouble King went through and being happy with the devotion, the deity himself volunteered to appear as Harihar



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so that his devotees could worship him in Nepal itself.

It is said that this structure of the Hindu deity cannot be found anywhere in the world. Furthermore, according to traditional rituals, the God Vishnu is worshiped by playing the conch shell's sound; however, playing the conch shell in this temple is prohibited for the sake of snakes (*AASTA KUL NAAG*) living in the

temple. God Budhanilkanta is worshipped by the both Hindu and Buddhist devotees as well.

#### **Main festivities and Jatras**

Here daily *pujas* are organized.

Main rituals are followed in the month of *Kartik*, *Baishak*, on the day of *Shree Krishna Ashtami*, and *Ekadashi*, main rituals are followed, while in *Haribodhini*, *Ekadashi*, and *Chaturdashi melas* are organized.

## *Kumbheshwar Mahadev Temple, Patan, Lalitpur*



### **Pilgrim and Main Attraction**

It is said that God Shiva resides in Kailash during the summer and in the Kubheshwor Temple during the winter. It was constructed by Jayasthiti Malla in year 1449 BS (1392 AD). He erected the four walls, sattal (platform), the main housing called devalaya and the pinnacle. After him, Narendra Malla, Purwa Nanda Upadhyaya, and Bhim Shumsher maintained the temple building.

However, King Rana Bahadur Shah became angry with the gods when his young wife suddenly passed away, so he smeared feces over the Shivalinga. After that, the Shivalinga showed signs of infection and spots started appearing on it. Then Kathnath Upadhyaya of Ganabahal applied medicines on the infected area and purified it with chanting, also known as Mantra Science. However, it is also said that the marks of spots are still present on the Shivalinga.

Furthermore, as a symbol of harmonies death, Kumbheshwor god is worshiped, whose glory has been written on *Himvat Khand* in the scriptures of God Shiva. In addition, it is said that Kashyap Rishi meditated in the name of Kumbheshwor god for humans to be created. And on the day of *Janai Purnima*, water, all the way from Gosaikunda, reaches this Temple.

This Temple is near the main road of Shankhamul road, which leads to Patan. It is five-storied and also houses a gold pot known as Swarna Kalash.

### **Direction**

As this Temple is located in the center point of the Lalitpur district, transportation from Kathmandu, Bhaktapur, and Lalitpur are readily available.

### **Main Festivities and Jatras**

On the day of Shrawan *Shukla Purnima*, gatherings happen, while on *Shivaratri*, *Bala Chaturdashi*, *Teej*, Monday of Shrawan month, or Mondays in general, worshippers crowd the Temple to worship the *Shivalinga*.

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## *Bajrayogini Shakti Peeth, Sakhu, Kathmandu*

This Temple is located on the northeast hill of the Kathmandu Valley. It is said that this Temple has been present since ancient times. It is located 4 to 5 km away from Sakhu Market, which takes 30 minutes to reach on foot.

Bajrayogini temple is three-storied in pagoda style. Inside the Temple, there are *Singha Bahini*, *Ugra Tara*, and *Bajrayogini*. It is said that King Devidan of the Kalinga kingdom got liberated by worshipping this goddess. At the same time, Vikram Aditya cooked himself on a pan for Bajrayogini to feed on him. The goddess became happy with his offer, so she honored him, making him an entity, forgiving his debts, and he went on to rule an era which is generously called the Bikram Sambat in the Hindu calendar.

On this Temple, ritualistic ceremonies are conducted daily. From Chaitra Shukla Purnima to Ashtami, huge gatherings happen, and sacrifices are given in front of the Temple.

## *Bhadrakali Shakti Peeth,* Tudikhel, Kathmandu

This Temple is located on the southern side of the *Tudikhel* field, beside *Sahid* Gate. There is no statue allocated as *Bhadrakali*, but only a stone-faced statue is worshiped.

According to the legend, when the area was still farmland, a farmer saw a girl crying in the middle of the field. Thinking that she was hungry, the farmer offered her a *roti*, after which the girl smiled and disappeared and the *roti* turned into gold. This legend of the girl was written in the scriptures of King Gunakam Dev of 3825 *Samvat*. And the king built a temple presuming that the girl was one of the figures of God Vishnu. Later, he also named her *Bhadrakali*.

Then in 520 Newari *Samvat*, Amar Malla established the custom of initiating the '*Rath*' from this Temple on the day of *Preth Chaturdashi*.

To this day, worshippers offer a *roti* plated with turmeric as golden *roti* to *Bhadrakali*. On the day of *Dashain Navaratri*, huge sacrificial worshipping is done.

As this is located near *Sahid* Gate, local transportation is readily available.

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## *Maitidevi Shaktipith,* Kathmandu

This Temple is on the west side of Dhobi Khola Kathmandu, and the location is also called Maitidevi. Local transportations can readily reach this location.

This Temple was constructed in Nepal *Samvat* (Era) 774 and then reconstructed in 832 by King Bhaskar Malla, according to the stone in scriptures of the Temple. Rana Chandra Shumsher replaced the present roof of the Temple.

Inside the Temple, there is a statue of the goddess. On the north side, there is a *Mayur Kunda*, *Brahmana*, and a crematorium locally called *Masanghaat*. This Temple holds the scriptures of the Amshuverma, Malla and Lichhavi period of Nepali civilization.

This Temple also holds a metal statue of *Betal* dating back to the Lichhavi era. It is said that Matri Devi's goddess changed to form Maiti Devi,

and she is known to be the Tantric symbol of Pancha Kumari and Mahalaxmi. Therefore, the priests of this Temple worship the goddess in a tantric ceremony every day. While because she appeared on her own will, she is reasoned to be Maitidevi. It is said that worshipping this goddess shall increase wealth. And when iron touches the goddess, it turns into gold, which is religiously called *Paras-Mani*.

On *Baishak Krishna Chaturdashi* and *Kartik Krishna Chaturdashi*, the *Devi* is taken on a '*Rath*' traditional chariot and then worshiped with tantric rituals at night.

It is said that after visiting Gorkha's Manakamana Temple, Maitidevi should be visited.

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## *Bhaleshwor Mahadev,* Chandragiri, Kathmandu

This Temple is located on the Chandragiri hill of Kathmandu Valley. According to *Himvat Khanda*, Sati Devi's forehead '*Bhal*' fell on the grounds of this Temple; hence it became *Bhaleshwor* Temple. It is also said that visiting this Temple shall fulfill the worshipper's wishes, and their after death shall be in *Shiva Lok*.

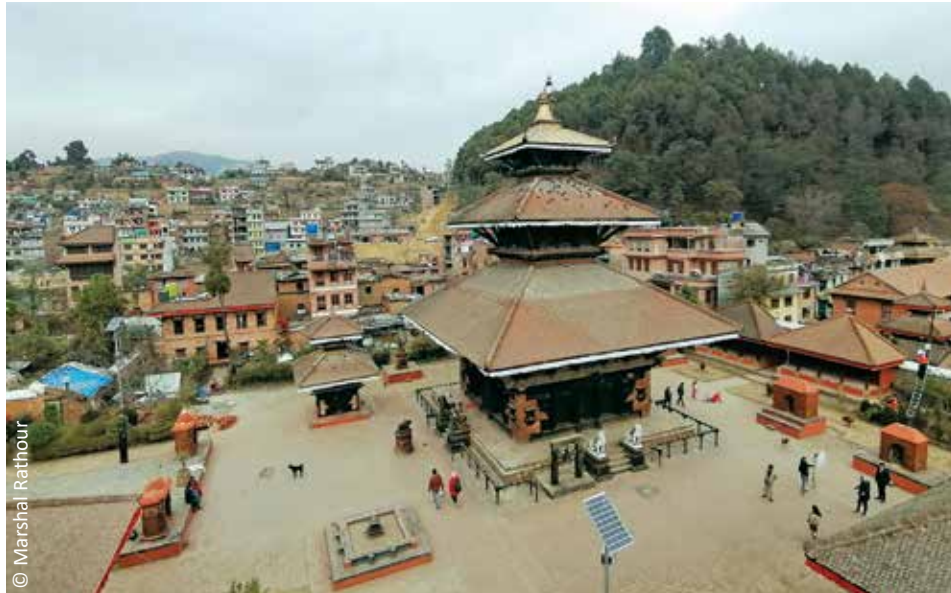
### **Historical Importance**

It is believed that before King Prithivi Narayan Shah unified Nepal, he observed the Kathmandu valley from this hill. Then after determining to conquer Kathmandu, he worshipped at Bhaleshwor Mahadev's Temple and the god fulfilled his wishes.

Following that, after the construction of a cable car in Chandragiri, worshippers have been frequenting this Temple. This Temple is rich with history and also a natural attraction.

There are walking paths available to reach the Temple, while cable-car ascending location can be reached by taking the hill up from Thankot.

## Indreshwor Mahadev, Panauti



© Marshal Rathour

### **Pilgrimage and Main Attraction**

The history behind the Temple originated from ancient times. It is said that when God Indra became jealous of Rishi Gautam's wife Ahalya, he appeared on earth as Rishi Gautam and slept with her. Angered by infidelity, Rishi Gautam cursed his wife to become a stone while cursed Indra to develop thousands of testicles on his body.

After the curse, God Indra sought help with his Guru Brihaspati, who suggested that he meditate for 12

years in the name of *Mukteshwor Mahadev*. So, Indra went on to meditate for 12 years and Mahadev, happy with the confrontation, directed Indra to go on a trip. He also gave him a dried bamboo stick and told him that the moment a bud grows from the stick would be when he shall be free from the curse.

With the faith and patience for the bamboo stick to bud, Indra went on the trip. Then right when he reached nearby the Triveni River, the stick had a small bud

growing on it. And subsequently, the testicles on his body vanished except one on his forehead. Hence, the stone on which the stick started budding became known as the symbol of Vishnu and Mahadev. The area of the Triveni River was initially called the Newari word 'Pa' 'lohan' 'ti', which later became Panauti with the evolvement of the word.

A statue of Mahadev was also made upon the miraculous stone, and it became known as the Mahadev built by Indra, hence called Indreshwor Mahadev.

The exact date when the Temple was constructed cannot be traced. However, according to history, it is said to have been made by Jaya Singh Ram. Therefore, some historians have guessed it to be around the 12 to 13<sup>th</sup> century.

The Temple is in Pagoda style, three stories, and the roof is of Nepali terracotta style called *Jhingati*. Furthermore, the pinnacle is gold-plated. Inside the Temple, there is a four-cornered *Shivalinga*, expected to have been constructed in 13<sup>th</sup> century, which is made up of copper by gold plated.

The hill above the Temple is called *Kunja Parvat*. And nearby the Temple is a Sachi tirtha named after Indra's wife.

### **Geographical Location**

Indreshwor Mahadev is on the junction of three rivers, Roshikhola, Punyawati and Baasdol at Kavrepalanchowk district. It is on the South East side of Panauti Municipality, and it is one of the sixty four *Jyotirlingas* of God Shiva.

### **Direction**

As this is located in the reformed area of Panauti, local transportation can be taken from Panauti Market, while by foot it only takes 15 minutes.

### **Main Festivities and Jatras**

Here every 12 years, *Makar-Mela* is organized. Then on *Bala Chaturdashi*, *Shivaratri* and *Teej* worshippers gather around the Temple. In addition to that, on *Jestha Shukla Purnima*, ceremonial rituals are conducted. Therefore, this Temple holds importance to purity bathing and ceremonial worships.



## *Bhimeshwar Mandir*, Bhimeshwar Municipality, Dolakha

### **Location**

Bhimeshwar Temple is located at Bhimeshwar Municipality of Dolakha district. This temple is situated on the edge of Dolakha Market and is considered a powerful *Shakti Peeth*.

### **How to reach**

This is located 135 kilometers east of Kathmandu. Therefore, transportation from Kathmandu is readily available to Dolakha and subsequently, local vehicles can be accessed to reach the temple.

### **Significance and Belief**

The God of this temple is known as Dolakha Bhimsen or Bhimeshwar Dolakhapati. The natural stoned scripture eludes that this god does not have a head. The temple is constructed in such way that four copper pillars are erected surrounding the scripture from four sides. Upon the pillars, a golden pinnacle is placed on top. A copper water tap has been constructed here. From the copper tap, water is offered for the *Rudri*

*Path*, worship, and *Aarati*. There is no roof above the scripture.

Beside the temple, there are two statues, one of Pandavas mother Kunti and another of Pandavas wife Draupadi.

According to the legend, it is believed that 12 porters traveled to this region. They settled in the area where the temple stands today and started cooking their meal. They are said to have cooked a traditional Nepali meal of *Dhedo* (local item prepared from corn flour in place of rice). The pot on which they were cooking was balancing on black stones. While cooking, the meal (*Dhedo*) on one side of the pot remained raw when the rest was cooked. It is believed that the potter who was making the meal got angry, and hit the stone upon which the raw *Dhedo* was with his spoon. The particular stone is said to have broken into two and started spurting blood and milk.



When this happened the 12 potters gathered and began worshipping the stone. It is also believed that there is a water pit beneath the Bimeshwar scripture, which was made using the broken black stone.

Furthermore, it is believed that before any national crisis, the statue of Bhimeshwar starts to sweat. It is believed that the local ancestors witnessed it before: natural disasters, political upheaval and instability in the country.

### **Main Festivities and Jatras**

It is believed that Bhimeshwar takes three roles throughout the day. The first is Bhimeshwar Mahadev in the morning, the second is of Mahadev Bhairav at midday, and then the third is Hero Yoddha Bhimsen of Pandav brothers in the evening. Therefore, rituals are performed to worship all fronts of this god.

- *Maha Ashtami* (Sept/Oct),
- *Ashwin Shukla Ashtami & Purnima* (Sept/Oct),
- *Chaitra Dashain* (Mar),
- *Chaitra Shukla Astami* (Mar/Apr)
- *Maha Shivaratri* (Feb/Mar)

This city of Bhimeshwor is considered one of the ancient cities of Nepal and the oldest Bhimsen Temple.

Following that, during the rituals, the rice offered to Bhimsen is caressed by hand, pressed by traditional grinder *Dhiki* and not by modern machines. Then only sweet foods are offered, including sugar, ghee, beaten rice, and jaggery. Then, during *Bhima Ekadashi*, *Lakh bati* lights are burned (one hundred thousand lights are burnt once at a time). Some sacrifices are made and then in the name of Mahadev, *Rudri Pujas* are conducted.

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## *Kalinchowk Bhagwati Shakti Peeth, Dolakha*

### **Location**

This Kalinchowk Bhagwati *Mandir* is located in Kalinchowk Municipality of Dolakha District. It lies above 3842 m (12,602 feet) of sea level.

Due to its altitude, it snows during the winter; hence the best time to visit is during summer, from *Chaitra* to *Kartik* (March to October). Here both Hindu and Buddhist followers reach to worship. In addition, beautiful mountain ranges, creeks, patchy civilization, and forest greenery can be observed, making it rich in both natural and touristic importance.

### **How to reach**

To reach Charikot of Dolakha district, long-distance buses are readily available. Then the Kuri village is 15 km from Charikot, and from Kuri village, the temple can be reached by cable car within no time. Some visitors also take

the footpath from Kuri, which ascends the hill.

### **Significance and Traditional belief**

Here there is a small, never-drying water pit which is taken as a symbol of Bhagwati. It is said that the water of this pit comes from Dolakha Bhimeshwor *Mandir*; hence statues of Shiva, Saraswathi, and Ganesh are erected. Animal sacrifices are conducted nearby the hole and not on the pit. Among the three main faces of Bhagwati, Shree Mahakali, Shree Mahalaxmi and Shree Mahasaraswati, Kalinchowk is Shree Mahakali.

The Kalinchowk Pit or Kunda gives rise to four spring sources, the northside is called Tamakoshi, Westside is called Sunkoshi, Eastside is called Sundrawati, and the southside is called Charanawati.

There is a legendary myth about the origin of Kalinchowk Bhagwati. It is said that when the devil caused too much trouble and dismay, Devi appeared on the land to kill the monster. After which, the Devi-civilization called the Devi and celebrated her victory and bravery in the Dolakha district. On the day of *Bala Chaturdashi*, a parabolic object of Kalinchowk Bhagwati is made ritually with local *Baja* (musical Instrument). Then, she is taken inside the Temple, and a *Yagya* is conducted on the Narayanthan, the central area of the temple.

### **Main festivities and Jatras**

On *Janai Purnima*, *Bada Dashain* and *Krishna Ashtami*, a significantly big ceremony with *Dhami* and *Jahkri* priests occurs. Kuri village is called the basecamp of Kalinchowk hill.



## Doleshwor Shiva Peeth, Bhaktapur

### Location

This is another Shiva Peeth located in Bhaktapur. It is also known as Bimaleshwor. It is located 15 km from Kathmandu and stands 1500m above sea level. Here two rivulets of Biman and Sinal meet right where the temple is located. Hence it is also called *Bimalodek* Pilgrim. The *Shivalinga* of the temple is said to have appeared naturally, as above the temple is all forest. The *Shivalinga* is of 7 feet radius in 4 feet height.

### How to reach

From Suryabinayak Temple of Sipadol, Bhaktapur, this temple is 3km to the east. Therefore, local transportation can be easily accessed from Bhaktapur.

### Significance and Traditional Belief

In ancient times, Doleshwor Mahadev was also known as Sipare Mahadev. And this place was previously known as Nikunj Parvat.

It is an important site as it is said to be one of the sixty four *Jyotirlingas* of God Shiva. There are numerous writings on the temple's periphery, which signifies the duration of



this existence. Bhupatindra Malla scripted the stone water tap in the temple entrance in 825 BS (768 AD).

Followed by that, there is also a Trishul weighing around 286kg inscribed with the name of Mandol Singh in 1796 BS (1739 AD). Then on the southern wall of the temple, it is written that on 1764-10-06

BS (1707 AD) Bhuptindra Malla erected the temple walls.

As of the present, Priest from the Jangam clan conducts ceremonial rituals of the temple.

### Main Festivities and Jatras

- Shivaratri (Feb/Mar),
- Bala Chaturdashi (Nov/Dec)

- Teej (Aug).
- Shrawan Sankranti (July 14, 15, 16)
- Makar Sankranti (Jan 15,16, 17)
- Magh Krishna Aushi (Jan/Feb)
- Push Aushi (Dec/Jan)

And according to the legend, the Magh Krishna Aushi is considered a fruitful day to visit this temple.

## *Kusheshwor Mahadev Shiva Peeth, Sunkoshi VDC, Sindhuli*

### **Location**

Kusheshwor Mahadev Temple is located in the intersection of Roshi River and Sunkoshi located in Sunkoshi Village Council in Sindhuli district. This western side of Sindhuli is also the border point of Kavre and Ramechhap districts. Kusheshwor Mahadev is a one-storey temple. The intersection of Roshi River and Sunkoshi is regarded as a Durga-Tirtha. The Shiva Linga is seen some one and half foot above the ground. It also comprises stone idols symbolized as Narayan, Bhagawati and Surya. Dumja is located on the river side in a valley which is surrounded by mountains in all the sides.

### **How to Reach**

The construction of BP Highway has made it easier to travel to and fro to this spot. This shrine is located some 65/70 kilometers from Kathmandu, some 50 kilometers from Dhulikhel, on the way to Khurkot, Ghurmi and Sindhuli from Kathmandu.



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### **Significance of Shrine and Public Belief**

Kusheshwor Mahadev is worshipped after taking a holy bath at Durga-Tirtha. The Shiva Linga is named as *Kusheshwor* as the sage Kushik had worshipped the Shiva Linga, which is just nearby the Kush Mountain. It has been mentioned in the holy Himbat-Khanda that Shiva Linga was erupted after Kusheshwor took a holy bath in this area and meditated in the name of God

Shiva. It is also known as Aadinath. Roshi River is also known as Lilawati. It is believed that taking holy bath in the intersection of Koshi and Lilawati, which is believed to be created by the sweat of a *Supreem Goddess (Maha Devi)*, will fulfill all the wishes.

Towards the end of Dumja plain and Roshi intersection, Roshi flows from the both east and west direction, and sometimes field is swept away by the flood. However, irrespective of the size of flood, it

has never swept away or flooded the temple area. Locals share this as a surprising issue. In “Inscriptions (Abhilekh) of Kusheshwor Mahadev”, it has been mentioned that Kusheshwor Mahadev Temple was protected by Rana Siddhi Malla by constructing a wall in all sides of the temple in 761 BS (704 AD) as per the inscription craved in simple lipi of Nepal Bhasa (language). In the southern belt of outer wall, there is a temple of Uma Maheswor, which is one among the sixty four *Jyotirlingas*.

### **Major Fairs and Festivals**

The inhabitants of Kathmandu Valley Dangol and Maharjan regard Kusheshwor as the main-god. There is a worshipping ceremony everyday. There are special fairs organized during the festivals like Saune Sankranti, Makar Sankranti and Teej among others. There are fairs also during Bala Chaturdashi and Shivarati festivals. The devotees stay awaked whole night by lighting lamps and singing hymns on these occasions. There is a huge crowd of devotees thronging in the shrine during Pushe Aushi as well.

## Bindhyabasini Shakti Peeth, Pokhara



### Location

Bindhyabasini Goddess's Temple is located at a hill top in Mohariya Tole in Pokhara Metropolitan City in Kaski district. While there is easy transportation and road facility to reach the spot, once at the location, one has to climb the ladders to reach the temple. There is an idol of a goddess with octagon shaped form inside the temple, which is constructed in the Asthakonakar and Gammbuj style. There are also idols of God Shiva, Hanuman and Saraswati in the temple. The pinnacle of the temple is made up of copper with the outer layer of gold.

### How to travel

There is no obstacle in reaching

the Bindhyabasini Temple as it is located inside Pokhara Metropolitan City and touched by the wide main road. There are local transportation facilities to reach the temple from different places of Pokhara.

### Significance of Shrine and Public Belief

It is said to be the Bindu Sarovar tirtha of *Swoyambu Shakti Peeth*. It is believed that this temple has been there for thousands of years.

Bindhyabasini is regarded as one among ten *Maha Bidhya* (Supreme knowledge and power is defined by maha bidhya) based in Bindhyachal Mountain. The ten Maha Bidhya includes Kunjika, Chandika,

Bala, Siddhi Laxmi, Saraswati, Annapurna, Gayatri, Parvati, Aparajita and Bindhyabasini.

It is believed that one of the body parts of Sati Devi had fallen in Bindhyachal Mountain in India, and King Siddhi Narayan Shah brought the idol from the same place. Therefore it is believed to have the same power. There is an evidence of establishment of Guthi with 40 muri of soil field. There is a belief that praying Bindhyabasini Goddess will prevent diseases and can alleviate grief.

### Major Festivals and Processions

The shrine hosts special fairs during the festivals like: Makar Sankranti (Dec 14,15,16), Teej (Aug), Saun Sankranti ( July 14/15/16 ) Maha Shivaratri ( Feb/ Mar ), Bala Chaturdashi (Nov/ Dec ), *Vijaya Dashami* Nawaratri (September/October),

The daily *puja* is performed through *Panchopachar*. There is a regular thronging of devotees. Since the temple is located in Pokhara, it is not just important due to its historical and cultural value, but also from the tourism perspective.

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## Taal Barahi, Pokhara

### Location

Fewa Taal (Lake) is located at the centre of Pokhara Metropolitan City. The center of Fewa Lake consists of an island like structure, where Taal Barahi Temple is based. The island has an area of some 3 ropanies 8 aanas of land (as per the local measurement). This place is also known as Ajima. There is a two-storey temple built in Nepali Pagoda style. The temple is believed to be over 300 years old. The temple has a roof of copper with a pinnacle of gold *molamba*. The temple has an idol of Barahi inside. Before the establishment of this idol in the temple, people used to worship a natural stone.

### How to Travel

There is no difficulty on transportation facility to Taal Barahi Temple as it is located within the Pokhara Metropolitan City. There are local transportation facilities from any spot within Pokhara. Since the temple is in the center of the lake, one needs to travel through the local boat. From the lake shore, it takes 5 to 10 minutes to reach the temple through the boat.



### **Significance of Shrine and Public Belief**

There is a story behind the establishment of Taal Barahi Temple, as per which, one night, the goddess disguised as a sage reached a neighboring village and sought lodging. But only an old woman offered her the lodging and also shared the food with her. The next day when the goddess was about to leave, she suggested to the old woman to relocate elsewhere citing that the place will be flooded

soon. It is believed that the next day, there was a huge flood in the area, and the only dry structure was seen in the center point. Thus, it is believed that the goddess appeared at the place where the temple was established to worship her. The current structure of the temple was constructed by the King Mahendra in 2017 BS (1960 AD).

There is a belief that any couple who gets married at this temple would receive marital bliss. It is also believed that worshipping of goddess Barahi will fulfill all the wishes of devotees.

### **Major Festivals and Processions**

The worshipping of goddess takes place in temple every day. There are special fairs during *Dashain* festival including in *Navaratri*, *Vijaya Dashami* (Sept/ October) and *Kojagrat Purnima* (October). Similarly, there are special ceremonies during *Teej* (Aug) as well. Thousands of visitors throng the temple every day.

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## *Manakamana Devi Shakti Peeth, Gorkha*



### **Location**

Manakamana Temple is located in Shahid Laxman Village Council in Gorkha district. The temple is located at an altitude of 4360 ft (1315m) from the sea level. The roof of the two-storey temple is made up of copper. The pinnacle of the temple is made up of gold. Among the five stones, the big stone is the symbol of Manakamana. This temple had a stone laying ceremony during the rule of the Gorkha King Ram Shah.

### **How to Travel**

While there was no cable car facility in the past, one had to walk uphill from Abukhaireni. However, now it can be reached within

12-15 minutes through cable car from Kurintar in Prithvi Highway. Kurintar is located some 104 kilometers away from Kathmandu. Pokhara is 96 kilometers away, while Narayangarh is 40 kilometers away from Kurintar.

### **Significance and Public Belief**

As the legend goes, it is believed that the Queen Lilawati of King Ram Shah was a woman with the divine power. It is believed that she used to talk with the gods and goddesses time and again. The King started launching a search mission as Queen Lilawati and her favorite person Laxman Thapa started disappearing time and again.

One day, he saw his Queen and Lakhan Thapa travelling to the hill side with other gods and goddesses sitting on the lion. As he followed them he saw a golden palace like structure. He could not enter the structure as it was guarded by the lion. As the story goes, the next day, he asked the Queen about what he saw. She answered ominously by saying, “If you hadn’t gone to the place yesterday, you would have become *Chakrabarti* King. Now you will be *Chakrabarti* King”. It is believed that after that incident, the King suddenly fell ill and he died.

As per the tradition at that time known as Sati Pratha, when the husband died, his wife was burned with him. The Queen also agreed. Lakhan Thapa started to grieve for the situation. The Queen is believed to have reassured Lakhan Thapa, “Don’t worry. I will appear near you again in the form of stone. Don’t stop me from dying.” And so she died.

It is believed that where the Manakamana temple is located now, a farmer was ploughing the field when the top of halo stroked with a stone and blood and milk

started to pour from that place. The incident was reported to the palace. Lakhan Thapa visited the site and regarded that stone as a depiction of the dead queen following which Manakamana Goddess was established in the temple and people started worshipping the shrine.

Lakhan Thapa was blessed with the divine power from Gorakhnath. Lakhan Thapa was from Magar Thapa clan. It is believed that the Priests of Manakamana are still his descendants. The stone recovered by the priest in the past is worshipped as a symbol of goddess inside the Manakamana temple.

After closing the doors at 6:30 pm local time, the priest offers flowers, fruits and incense sticks among others to the goddess. This *puja* is known as *Chaa Puja*. After the completion of worshipping inside, flowers and vermilion powder with rice grains are sprinkled in the surrounding of temple, after which the main offering is made to the goddess. This special offering known as Maha Prasad is prepared at the home of priest by mixing rice, salt, vegetable and turmeric

powder and without using the spatula. It is then served in a silver plate and covered by the red piece of cloth. There is a belief that nobody should see or touch this Maha Prasad.

After the offering to the goddess, finally the visitors can worship in the temple. The devotees usually offer incense stick, oil lamp, fruits, flowers, cloth, bangles, beads, mirror, bindi, coconut and animal sacrifices. The temple remains open after the morning *Puja*. There is an everyday ritual of offering rice to the goddess. The everyday *puja* is performed from the tantric method. The morning routine *puja* is based on *Panchopachar*. The visitors can come and worship at any time. After the completion of evening Arati with lighting of oil lamps by the priest and playing of conch shell, the door of the temple is finally closed.

#### **Major Festivals and Processions**

- There is a special *puja* in the temple on Saturdays and Tuesdays
- *Asthami, Nawami* of every months and *Shrawan Sankranti* (July 15, 16)

- *Asthami, Panchami, Chaturdashi, Purnima* (full moon) of every month and *Sankranti* ( one of the 14,15, or 16th of English Month).
- *Barshabardan* twice in a year [*Chaite Dashain* (April/May) and another one in *Dashain* in Asoj (Sept/Oct )]
- Special *puja* offers from *Kartik Shukla Chaturdashi* (Nov) to *Panchami* (Nov) and *Baisakh Suklapakchya* (May to Jestha Asthami (May/June).
- On the day of *Vijaya Dashami*, (Sept/Oct) the flowers and tika brought from Gorakhkali is offered to Manakamana. During worshipping, a specific method is followed as per which Ganesh, Kumari, Manakamana and Bhairav is worshipped in respective manner.
- During 12 *Purnimas* (full moon) in a year, there is a tradition of sacrificing a goat, separate than the regular routine *puja*. This sacrifice is performed inside the temple of goddess Manakamana.



## Mukti Nath Shiva Peeth



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### Location

Muktinath Temple is located at Baarhagau Muktichhetra Village

Council in Mustang district. The Mount Mukti, which is regarded as an origin of Kali Gandaki River,

is located in the same place. The temple stands at an altitude of around 3800 meters from the sea

level and spreads at 76 ropanies of land. The three-storey Muktinath temple is constructed in the pagoda style. The roof of the temple is made up of copper, while the pinnacle of the temple is coated with gold. The west-faced temple has only one entrance gate.

### How to Reach

Muktinath can be reached through Jomsom either through airplane or helicopter from Pokhara in Kaski district. It can also be reached in bus from Beni, district headquarter of Myagdi. The Beni-Jomsom stretch is 80 kilometers while Muktinath is 22 kilometers away from Jomsom. The overall journey can take 7-10 hours. On the way to Jomsom from Beni, there are popular spots like Galeshwar Dham, Tatopani (hot spring), Rupshe Waterfall and the world's deepest Kali Gandaki gorge. It can also be reached through vehicle via Pokhara-Baglung-Myagdi to Beni, and can trek further via Galeshwar-Dana-Tatopani-Tukuche-Marpha and Jomsom. Jomsom is famous for the strong wind, particularly after 12 pm. While travelling to this area, one should not forget winter gears.

### **Significance of Shrine and Public Belief**

The key section of the temple comprises a stone idol of four-faced Vishnu. There is a silver crown on the head of idol. Vishnu is seated on the *Padmasana* position in a fearless mood. There are also idols of Laxmi and Saraswati together, along with the idol of *Garud*.

There is a temple of *Jwala* in the south-western side of the temple, which is believed to be from 700 BS (643 AD) and thousands of years old. There is also a religious residence place near the temple, known as *Dharmashala*. Since it was constructed by Queen Suprabha of Rana Bahadur Shah during the period of 1777 to 1799 BS (1720 to 1742 AD), therefore it is also called as *Ranipauwa*.

In the eastern side, there is a Hansatirtha pond, through which water is supplied to 108 taps to let the devotees take a holy bath. These taps are behind the main temple. There are also two man made ponds, which are regarded as symbol of Vishnu-Kunda.

There is a tradition of taking holy



bath in these 108 taps and then in two ponds to offer prayers to Muktinath. There is a belief that bathing in these taps will free one from all the sins committed from the past life. Among them 8 taps are in the name of gods, while 100 are in the name of people. It is said that there is also a role of god in people committing any sin or mistake, thus the 8 taps have been offered to the gods *Astha Bashu*.

All those 108 taps are constructed from 108 sources.

At the temple location, there is a spot where it is believed that Brahma had performed Yagya in front of the temple. It continuously erupts fire from three small holes, thus people worship it as *Jwaladevi*. From the inside of *Jwaladevi* temple, fire erupts continuously from soil, stone and water.

Muktinath Dham is a sacred place of meditation of Brahma and the place where Vishnu took the form of *Shaligram* stone due to curse of Brinda. *Shaligram*, which is the symbol of God Vishnu, is the major significance of Muktinath. *Shaligram* is worshipped as a symbol of Vishnu, Shiva, Ganesh and Surya. Muktinath is a religious destination not just for Hindus, but also for Buddhists. Buddhists worship it as a

symbol of Buddha. It has an idol of Awalokiteswor, Muktikunda and a monastery.

### **Major Festivals and Processions**

There are special fairs in Muktinath area during the occasions like *Rishi Tarpani* (July/Aug) on the day of *Rakshya Bandhan*, *Ram Nawami* (April) and *Vijaya Dashami* (Sept, October). The devotees also throng during Chaite *Dashain* (April), *Janai Purnima* (Aug) and *Jamare Aushi* (Sept/Oct), *Bala Chaturdashi* (Nov/Dec) *Krishna Asthami* (August).

During *Janai Purnima* (Aug) festival, a Buddhist fair named as Yaartob is organized. A sacred *puja* is conducted by Brahmins every morning and evening in the temple. In Kagbeni, where Kagnadi and Kali Gandaki rivers meet, people pray for their peace in afterlife of deceased family members and make special offerings. There is a tradition of first performing the ritual named Shradhha in Kagbeni and then visiting Muktinath temple.

## *Baglung Kalika Devi*, Baglung



### **Location**

Kalikadevi Temple is located within Baglung Municipality. It is also known as Baglung Bhagwati. The temple is located within a forest nearby the Kaligandaki River in the east and Kothe River in the west. Baglung Devi is also known as Bhagwati Maaisthan. The three-storey temple is constructed in a pagoda style. The roof of the temple is made up of copper while there are two Jhingatis. The pinnacle of the roof has a gold coat. The idol of Bhagwati is established in the central point of the temple.

### **How to Reach**

Baglung Kalikadevi temple is located within a dense forest, in a hill up the Kaligandaki River, some two kilometers away from the Baglung Bazar. The forest is linked with the highway. Since it is nearby the bazaar, it is easy to reach this shrine. There are enough facilities of local transportation. Hundreds of devotees and tourists visit the temple every day. There is a motor able road facility to reach the temple from the highway.

### **Significance of Shrine & Local Beliefs**

There is a belief that the stone idol in the temple should not be seen by anyone except the priest. There is a crown as a symbol of the goddess in the outer side. Some 550 years ago, the ethnic Magars of Nisim asked for the Prince Rajkumar Anand Bam, one among the 8 sons of Rukumi King Jaitun Bam, and made him the King here. His son Dimba Bam, Nag Bam and then Narayan Malla became the king of Parbat. He got married to the daughter of Palpali King Mukunda Sen (1518 to 1553 BS/ 1461 to 1496 AD). King Mukunda Sen married off his daughter to the King of Parbat Narayan Malla.

Upon the request of his daughter, he also sent a worshipped idol of the Goddess Kali as a dowry. The idol was carried out by Khadka family from Palpa, however could not take it further than the intersection of Kathe River and Kali Gandaki due to its heavy weight of the idol. Hearing this, Mukunda Sen realized that he had committed a mistake. He could not take it back as it was a dowry, nor it could be carried out to his daughter's new home.

Meanwhile, in his dream, a goddess appeared and said, “This Saligram area is my shrine, my residence, establish the shrine here i.” The King discussed with his daughter and did accordingly. Since then, the idol has been kept inside the temple, while the symbolic crown is kept outside. The priest of the temple is from Khadka clan.

### **Major Festivals**

There is a ritual worshipping of the goddess every day. The goddess is worshipped through a *tantric* method. There is a special fair organized during the festival *Chaite Dashain* (April). Though animal sacrifices are made throughout the year, it is not practiced during *Bala Chaturdashi* (Nov/Dec), *Krishna Asthami* (August), *Aushi* and *Ekadashi* of every months.

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## *Gorakh Naath Mandir Shiv Peeth, Gorkha*

### **Location**

Gorakhnath Cave is located within Gorkha Municipality. This cave is located in a hill in Pokharithok, some two kilometers away from the district headquarters, nearby the Gorakhkali temple and Gorkha palace. The cave was reshaped and started to be called as Gorakhnath Temple. There is a stone idol of Gorakhnath in a meditative pose inside the cave.

### **How to Reach**

There are easy transportation facilities to reach Gorkha from Pokhara, Kathmandu and Chitwan. It can also be reached through Abukhaireni from Tanahu district. Since the shrine is located within two kilometers from the Gorkha bazaar, there is no any difficulty to reach here. There is a 31-kilomtere pitched road from Abukhaireni to Gorkha Municipality. From Gorkha Municipality, one can reach Gorakhnath temple through 30-40 minute walk or 10 minute ride in a graveled road.

### **Significance of Shrine & Local Belief**

Gorakhnath hosts the priests from Nath community. Gorakhnath is the royal god of Shah dynasty, and it is believed that from this word, the terms Gorkha and Gorkhali were derived. Gorakhnath was regarded as the main god of Shah Kings.

The routine *puja* of Gorakhnath includes lighting a fire in the morning to cook Roti (delicacy made up of rice flour) and offering to the god. Gorakhnath is regarded as one form among the one hundred ten forms of God Mahadev. He is also regarded as a Siddhayogi sage from Nath community. There is a tradition of offering Roti (delicacy made up of rice flour) in every *Purnima*. There is also a non-extinguishable fire spot in the temple. It is believed that the fire which was used to keep the King Prithvi Narayan Shah warm during his childhood and hasn't been extinguished yet.

Besides this, there is also a Kali temple, Gorakhnath cave and Ram

Shah Tree which represents justice near the temple. The tree is named after him as the King used to use the spot to provide justice to his citizens on the need. In a room of a palace, the idol of goddess Kali has been kept. Nobody is allowed to enter into the room except the main priest. There is a ritual of worshipping the god from outside the temple.

Nearby the Gorakhnath cave, the followers of Gorakhnath have continued to light the fire. It is said that the fire lighted by Gorakhnath hasn't been extinguished. Regarding special offering, the devotees offer the barley flour to the priests, who cook the delicacies in the fire and offers to Gorakhnath Baba. And the delicacy is distributed as Prasad to the devotees.

### **Major Festivals**

The special *puja* of Gorakhnath is held during *Shivaratri* (Feb/March) and holy month of Shrawan (July/Aug) among others.

## Swargadwari Shiva Peeth, Pyuthan



© Amrit Bhadgaule

### Location

Swargadwari is a pleasant vicinity located within the Mahabharat Mountain Range in Pyuthan Municipality in Pyuthan district. The shrine which is popular as a religious, historical and tourism spot is located at an altitude of 2122 meters from the sea level. The place spread at 26,000 ropanies or 23.8 hectares of land, is enriched with three different climates. The place is covered in snow during winters, while there is a cold wind

throughout the year as it is located in the higher belt of this region. In the northern side, there is a spectacular range of mountains like Sisne, Dhaulagiri, Nilgiri, Annapurna and Machhapuchhre, while the plain terrain of Dang and Deukhuri can be seen from the southern side.

### How to Reach

Those who want to visit Swargadwari from Kathmandu have to travel through the passenger bus to Liwang of Rolpa.

From a stop called Bhibgri, the 13 kilometer graveled stretch has to be travelled either through private or public vehicle to reach this holy shrine. The other route is through Dang, Ghorahi and Holeri. Those who travel through the eastern part of Nepal should pass through Narayangarh-Butwal-Bhaluwang to reach Pyuthan. After Bhibgri, the journey becomes pleasant due to the panoramic view of mountains and hills. One can even reach Swargadwari through helicopter

as there is a helipad in the Ashram vicinity.

### Significance of Shrine & Local Beliefs

Nepal is known as a holy land of sages and saints. Sages with different names and forms have landed in this sacred land in different ages. The corners, caves and mountains have become sacred due to the meditation and devotion of these sages. In this context, in 1952 BS (1895 AD), Ananta Shree Swargadwari Mahaprabhu organized a grand ceremony called *Akhanda Mahayagya* with a prayer of world peace in this naturally beautiful piece of land. Swargadwari was a land for *Yagya* even in the ancient age. Renowned sages like Bed Vyas had also organized similar Grand *Yagyas* in this place.

It is also believed that the five Pandavs from the holy Mahabharata had also meditated in this place before heading towards heaven. To re-establish the endangered *Yagya* tradition and to maintain the *Vedic Sanatan* principles, Swargadwari hosts various structures like Vedic School, *Gaushala* for the protection

of cows, *Dharmashala* for the visitors, Santa Residence for the sages and saints, *Shivalaya* for worshipping and *Yagyashala* to conduct *Yagyas*. From the ancient time, there is an initiation of *Akhanda Mahayagya*.

### **Major Festivals**

The special fair is organized in various occasions like *Nag Panchami* (July), *Janai Purnima* (Aug), *Fulpati* during *Dashain* (Sept/Oct), *Laxmipuja* in *Tihar* (Oct/Nov) and on birth anniversary of *Khaptad Baba*. Besides, there are also fairs during the festivals like *Shivaratri* (Feb/March), *Bala Chaturdashi* (Nov/Dec), *Shrawane Sankranti* (any one day of July 14, 15,16), *Makar Sankranti* (any one day of Jan 14, 15, 16) among others. On the regular time as well, there is a huge crowd of devotees and tourists from both within and outside the country.

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## *Ruru Kshetra Shiv Peeth.* Palpa, Gulmi

### **Location**

Ruru Kshetra is the meeting point of Palpa, Syangja and Gulmi districts. Ridi is located in the eastern side of Kaligandaki River, in Gulmi district. Near the Ridi Bazaar lies the Rishikesh Temple in Palpa, *Bhrigutbageshwor Cave* in Syangja and *Galfule Cave* and *Devdutta Park* in Gulmi. There is a junction made by Kaligandaki River from the northern side and Ridi River from the western side. The Kaligandaki has divided Syangja and Gulmi, while the Ridi River has separated Palpa and Gulmi.

### **How to Reach**

Ruru Kshetra is some 340 kilometers away from Kathmandu. The distance between Butwal and Palpa is 70 km, while Ruru is located some 14 km away from Tansen, thus there is no obstacle in transportation facility. From Kathmandu, one can travel to Ridi or in Tansen, where jeeps and buses are available.

### **Significance of Shrine & Local Beliefs**

There is a belief that Kaligandaki is named as it is the spot of meditation by sage Gandak Rishi while it is in black Barna (complexion). According to *Baraah Puran*, in the ancient age, a *Brahmin* named Devdutta from *Bhrigu* dynasty started a harsh meditation in the bank of Gandaki.

It is said that the meditation disturbed the space of King of Heaven Indra, thus he sent an angel *Pramlocha* to create obstruction to the sages meditation. However, a baby girl was born from the same sage and the angel. The sage returned to his own meditation pace and achieved the divine Shiva power. The angel left the baby girl and returned back to the heaven.

As legend goes, the baby girl was fed milk and raised by a deer named Ruru, thus the girl was named as Ruru. It is believed that the girl started meditating when God Vishnu appeared and sought to bless her wish. Her wish was for God Vishnu to stay at the

location. It is believed that God Vishnu stayed there during Ruru's lifespan. While after her death, he is believed to have transformed himself into a stone and stayed inside Kaligandaki.

Later, it is believed that *Mani Mukunda Sen* saw a dream and discovered the idol from the womb of earth and established it as a god. There is a tradition of worshipping *Rishikesh* by taking a holy bath in the junction of Ridi and Kaligandaki.

Rishikesh is the main temple in Ruru Kshetra. The temple is constructed in *Gumbaj* style. The current temple structure was built by *Ranadutta Pande* in 1819 BS (1762 AD). Inside the temple, there is a 3 feet 9 inch tall idol of Vishnu and *Garudh* where the idol of Rishikesh, formed in a natural stone comprising *sankha*, *chakra*, *gada* and *padhma*, is located.

Surrounding the main idol are other idols of *Ganga*, *Jamuna*, *Saraswati*, *Laxmi* and *Gayatri*. Besides Rishikesh temple, there is *Bhriguteswor cave*, *Galful cave* where Devdutta sage had meditated, temple of Ruru

Kanya, Gayatri temple, Ramnam Stupa, Mahadev temple and Radha Krishna temple.

### **Major Festivals**

The special fairs are organized during *Harishayani Ekadashi* (July), *Shree Krishna Janmasthanami* (Aug), *Ram Navami* (April), *Maghe Sankranti* (Dec) festival among others. A special celebration of Rishikesh is organized during *Kartik-Sukla Ekdashi* (Oct/Nov). A grand fair is organized during *Haribodhini* (Nov), *Harishayani* (July), *Baisakh-Sankranti* (April), *Kartik Ekadashi* to *Purnima* (Oct/Nov) and during *Maghe Sankranti* (Dec). On *Kartik-Sukla Dwadashi* (Oct/Nov), the Palpali King Mani Mukunda Sen had established the idol of Rishikesh in the temple. Thus, on that particular day, a special chariot is taken out in the memory of Rishikesh and is taken around Ridi Bazaar. Similarly, on the next day of *Haribodhini Ekadashi*, there is a *Khat* procession. Among the four holy *dham*s of Nepal, Pashupatinath in Kathmandu, Barah Kshetra in Sunsari, Mukti Kshetra in Mustang and Ruru Kshetra in Ridi is the one.

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## *Palpa Bhairav*, Palpa, Tansen

### **Location**

Bhairavsthan is located at 7 kilometers from Tansen of Palpa. The same hill is a home to the Bhairav Temple. The pinnacle of the temple is coated with gold, while the doors and windows of the temple are made up of iron. The temple is south-faced. The temple is joined with the palace of Mukunda Sen. It consists of three rooms in the first storey, where the queens of Mukunda Sen used to live. Now, the priests live in the same rooms. Besides, there is also the Asia's biggest trident (*Trishul*). The pinnacle of the temple is coated with gold, while the doors and windows of the temple are made up of iron.

### **How to Reach**

The temple can be reached after 10-15 minutes uphill walk from Bhairavsthan on the way to Ridi from Palpa.

### **Significance of Shrine & Local Beliefs**

Palpa Bhairav is the main deity of Palpali King. The temple is constructed by the Sen dynasty King Mani Mukunda Sen, after he brought the idol of Bhairav from Kaashi.

### **Major Festivals & Processions**

The temple has a routine *Arati Puja* in evening. The priest is from the Nath community. The *Puja* is conducted through *tantric* method. There is a continuous lighting of fire in the temple. There is a separate organizational structure named as *Guthi* for this purpose. There is a separate private forest management for the purpose of burning the woods. There is a ritual of playing a musical instrument known as *Panche Baja* during the Bhairav *Puja* and evening *Arati*. There is a *Guthi* system for the management of routine *puja*. There is a ritual of sacrificing goat, chicken and

buffaloes occasionally, outside Bhairav and Kali temple. There are special *pujas* during *Dashain* (Sept), *Mangsir* (Nov/Dec) and *Baisakh* (April/May). The routine *puja* is held from 12 midnight to 4 am in the morning. The *puja* is performed for Mahankal Bhairav, Batuk Bhairav, Kali and Bhairavi Gan (Ganesh, *Nandi*, *Dhuni*, *Maulo*, Bhairav-*Chakra*). Other gods and goddesses are worshipped after 12 in the afternoon. Besides, a special offering of Roti which is offered on Tuesdays and Saturdays, and the *Dhuni* is burned continuously. It is said that this fire should not be extinguished, or else should be burned again with the help of *Kangada* or *Dullu* fire.

## *Triveni Dhaam Shiv Peeth,* Nawalparasi, Bardaghaat

### **Location**

Triveni Dham is located some 25 kilometers east-southern side from Bardaghat Bazar in West Nawalparasi district. This shrine is also known as Gajendramoksha Dhaam. Triveni Dham touches both Nepal and India as it falls on Chitwan and Nawalparasi in the Nepal side, while touches the Champanagar of Indian State of Bihar. It falls on the western bank of Narayani River and Susta village of Nawalparasi. Tamasha River which flows from the eastern side also gets mixed in the Narayani River. This intersection is called Triveni Dham. This is also a spot where Sapt Gandaki mixes in Narayani and dissolves.

### **How to Reach**

There is no any difficulty of transportation to reach this shrine. Bardaghat falls in Butwal-Narayangadh road section from where the local transportation is easily available for Triveni Dham. It takes less than one hour to reach Triveni Dham from Bardaghat.



© Dinesh Shrestha

### **Significance of Shrine**

Triveni Dham consists of *Shivalaya*, Laxmi Narayan Temple, Bhudevi, Tridevi Temple, *Akhanda Jyoti* among other temples. It is also known as *Gajendramoksha Dham*. According to Barah Puraan,

the *Gajaraj* elephant called God Vishnu to free him from *Graaha*. It is believed that God Vishnu appeared and killed *Graaha* and rescued the elephant and the same has been symbolized in the bank of Narayani River.

Another legend goes, that in the ancient times, there was a King named Indradhumna in Drawid country, and sage Agastya went to meet him. It is believed that the King didn't give a good welcome to the sage as he wasn't aware about the sage's arrival on time. In return, the sage was furious and cursed the King to be born in the womb of elephant. Thus, as a result of the curse, Indradhumna started staying in the bank of Narayani River as an elephant. One day, when the elephant was about to cross the river, it was attacked by the *Graaha*. As legend believes, a demon named Huhu had received a curse from a sage and was transformed into the *Graaha*. He was saved by Vishnu and could transform into a *Gandharva* and could move to heaven. This story is mentioned in the holy Bhaagwat book.

### **Major Festivals**

Triveni Dham hosts special fair during the festivals like *Makar Sankranti* (Dec), *Shrawan Sankranti* (July), *Teej* (Aug), *Bala Chaturdashi* (Nov/Dec), *Shree Krishna Janmasthanmi* (Aug), *Shivaratri* (Feb/March) among others.



## Baijanath Dham Shiva Peeth, Achham

This shrine is located in Mangalsen Municipality in Achham district. This is also an intersection between Badhiganga and Lungrali Rivers.

### Significance of Shrine

There is a two-story temple constructed in pagoda style. The roof and pinnacle of the temple is made up of copper. The Baijanath Shiva Linga is in a covered state inside the temple. This is regarded as a 500-year-old temple. The temple still has the Jalahari which was offered by the country's fifth Prime Minister Chautariya Pushkar Shah in 1881 BS (1824 AD). Since the old temple structure was severely destructed by the 1990 BS (1933 AD) earthquake, a new temple has been constructed.

There are idols of Gorakhnath, Kaal Bhairav and goddess Kali in the temple premise.

The temple also has its own formal structure called as *Guthi*.

### How to Reach

Since Baijanath Dham is located in the district headquarters of Achham itself, there is no difficulty in reaching this temple. There are plenty of local transportation facilities.

### Major Festivals and Processions

During the holy month of Shrawan (July/Aug), devotees offer the water or *Jal* brought from Badhiganga and Lungreli River. There is a special fair organized throughout this monsoon month. A routine *puja* is organized in the temple every day. Besides, there is a special *puja* on the occasion of *Bala Chaturdashi* festival (Nov/Dec) is also celebrated.

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## Ugratara Bhagwati Shakti Peeth, Dadeldhura

### Location of Shrine

Ugratara Bhagwati Temple is located in Amargadhi Municipality in Dadeldhura district. It lies on a hill located at some 6 kilometers north of the district headquarters. The place is known as Pokhara on the way to Baitadi from Dadeldhura. This is a very old temple of a goddess. Once upon a time when the temple was attacked, it was reconstructed by the Doteli King Nag Malla in 16<sup>th</sup> century. The two-storey temple is constructed in pagoda style. The roof of first floor is made up of stone while the second floor is of copper. The upper part of the temple has been decorated with pinnacle and trident. The central home of the temple comprises a goddess idol of *Sangamarmar* spread in the eight forms. This idol was established just before few years. Prior to that, there was a stone as a symbol of the goddess, which is still found there at the same spot.

### How to Reach

The road towards the temple has already been blacktoped. Thus, there is no difficulty in finding a local transport to reach the temple. There are plenty of local transport facilities from Amargadhi Municipality to the temple.

### Significance of Shrine

There is a belief about the origin of Ugratara Bhagwati – blood started to flow from a stone when a local Saud farmer was ploughing the field through yoke in the same place where the temple is located now. Following this, he hardly pressed the bleeding spot on the idol with his food called *Khichdi*. The blood flow came to a halt, and the goddess Ugratara appeared. The very next day, he established the stone as a symbol of goddess and started worshipping it.

Since then, there is a tradition of offering *Khichdi* to the goddess during the special occasions. And till date, the descendants of same Saud serve as priests in the temple. Nearby the goddess temple, there is a small Shiva Parvati temple and Bhairav temple in the lower section. Similarly, there is a wooden structure *Maulo* for animal sacrifices, where buffaloes are sacrificed. There is a tradition of offering sacrifices to the idol of Kali which is located along with Bhagwati. It is also said that coconuts used to be offered here in the past, while there is a place called *Dudhdhari* from where milk used to flow. There is a tradition of worshipping Bhumiraj, Bhumigram and Salleswori before offering prayers to the goddess.

### **Major Festivals**

There is a routine *Puja* in the temple. It is prohibited to enter the central part of the temple except for the main priest. There are special fairs organized during the festivals like Bada *Dashain*,

Chaiti *Dashain*, *Basanta Panchami*, *Saune Sankranti* and *Kartik Sukla Purnima*. Besides, the crowds also through the temple during *Ashwin-Sukla Asthami*. Animal sacrifices are prohibited from before 3 days of the fair. Though buffaloes are sacrificed only during *Maha Asthami*, goats are sacrificed on the regular basis. However, all the sacrifices are prohibited during the Nepali months of Poush, Shrawan and Chaitra.

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## *Shaileshwori Shakti Peeth, Doti*

### **Location of Shrine**

Shaileshwori Temple is located in Silgadhi Bazaar in Dipayal, the district headquarters of Doti. The one-storey temple is constructed in pagoda style. The pinnacle of the temple is coated with gold while the roof is of copper.

### **How to Reach**

There is a blacktopped motorable road till the temple. Since it is located in the central part of Dipayal, there is no any difficulty of transportation to reach the temple.

### **Significance of Shrine**

The temple is located at a hillock. There is a pond named Gauri Kunda below the temple, which is believed to be formed from the sweat of Parvati. It is said that the goddess was overwhelmed with meditation of the gods and granted the wish of prosperity in return of the prayers. Since the goddess had appeared in the form of stone or sheela, the temple is named as

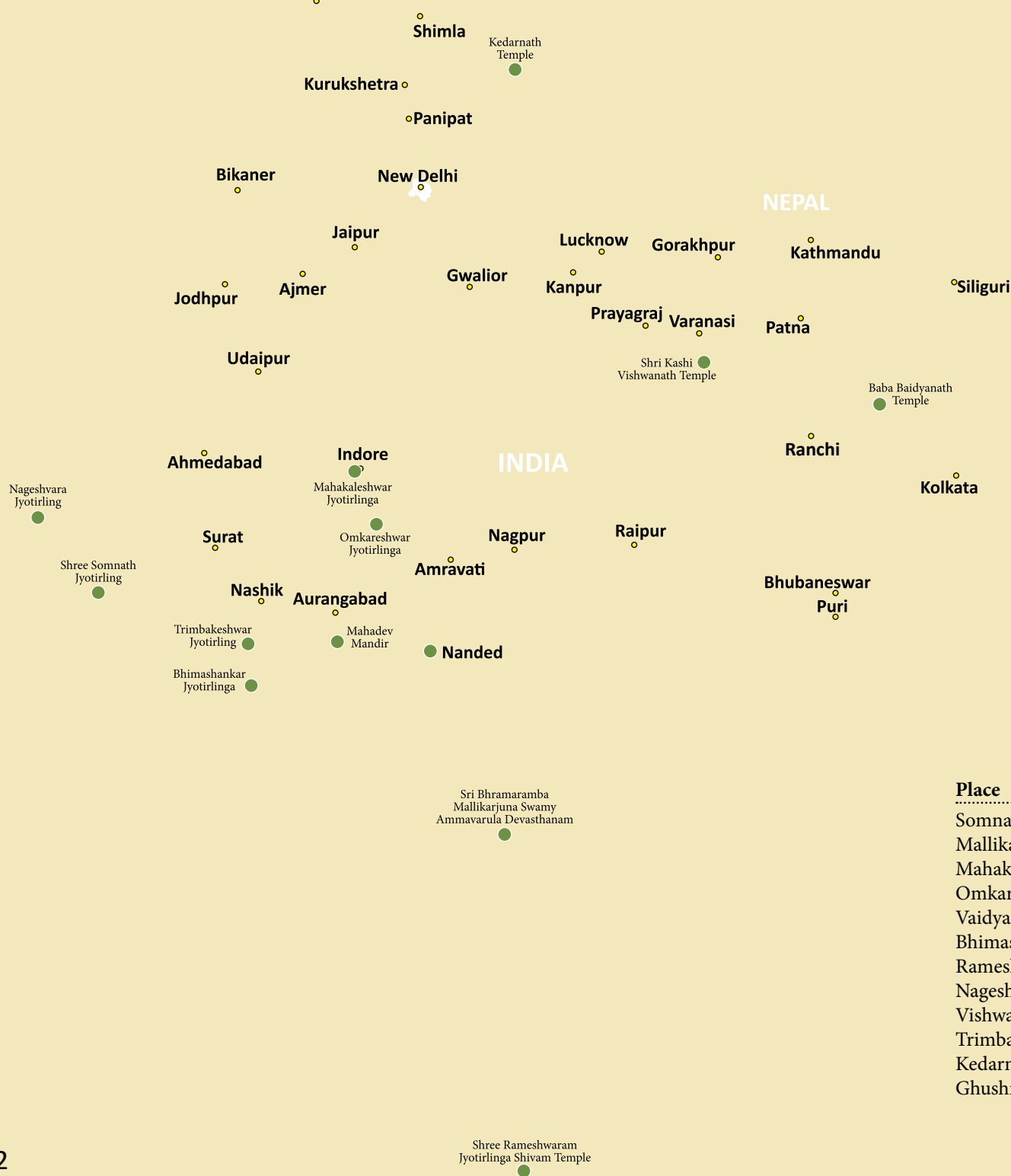
Shaileshwori. It is believed that when the cow farmer tried to discover about the milk-pouring-stone, he found the idol of a goddess and started worshipping.

It is believed that once, God Shiva along with his wife Parvati entered into a forest right after their marriage Brahma along with other gods arrived at the same place to meet God Shiva. Upon seeing the gods, Parvati felt shy and stayed hidden inside the temple. However, the goddess was impressed by the prayers of gods and appeared in front of them. Thus, both Shiva and Parvati are worshipped in the same spot even today. There are 6 *Mandaps* in Shaileshwori, namely *Bhakti Mandap*, *Gyan Mandap*, *Bairagya Mandap*, *Mukti Mandap* and *Siddhi Mandap*. It is believed that those who stay in any one of the Mandaps and chant Om will get prosperity.

## List of the other sites related to Shiva-Shakti Circuits Nepal

1. Shatakshi Dhaam, Jhapa Shiv Shatakshi Municipality,
2. Arjundhara, Jhapa, Shani Arjun Municipality
3. Budhasubba, Sunsari, Dharan Sub Metropolitan City, Bijaypur
4. Haleshi Mahadev, Khotang, Halesi, Tuwachung Municipality
5. Mai pokhari, Ilam
6. Gadhimai, Bara, Gadhimai Municipality, Bariyapur
7. Jaleswor Mahadev, Mahottari, Jaleswor Municipality
8. Palanchowk Bhagwati *Shakti Peeth*, Paanchkhal, Kavrepalanchowk
9. Gosain Kunda, Gosainkunda VDC, Rasuwa District
10. Changu Nraayan Shiv Peeth, Bhaktapur
11. Maula Kalikadevi, Gaidakot Municipality, Nawalpur
12. Devghaat Dhaam Shiv Peeth, Tanahu
13. Galeshwor Dhaam, Myagdi Beni
14. Ishaneshwor Mahadev, Madhya Nepal Municipality, Lamjung
15. Chhaya Kshetra- all , Salyremining parts of Sati- Devi fell (Salyan)
16. Balatripurasundari *Shakti Peeth*, Tripurasundari Municipality, Dolpa
17. Rara Shiv Peeth, Mugu
18. Badimalika, Bajura
19. Mallikarjun Shiv Peeth, Lekam Garkha, Darchula
20. Akala Devi, Syangja
21. Asiteshwor Mahadev, Chisapani
22. Alam Devi, Syangja
23. Kagbeni, Mustang
24. Kalika Bhagwati, Jumla
25. Kali Mandir, Bhitri Gaun, Pyuthan
26. Kankali, Saptari
27. Jal Binayak, Chobhar, Kathmandu
28. Jalpa Devi, Chitlang, Dhankuta
29. Mahakal, Basantpur, Kathmandu
30. Nateshwori Devi, Bajura
31. Nuwakot Bhairab, Nuwakot
32. Bagh Bhairab, Kirtipur
33. Bal Mukteshwor, Beni
34. Sereshwor Mahadev, Rukum
35. Trikhandi Mahadev, Makwanpur
36. Singabahini Bhagwati, Udayapur
37. Syamleshwor Mahadev, Nuwakot
38. Soyambhunath, Kathmandu
39. Ranaujeshwori Bhagwati, Palpa
40. Ramdhuni Mandir, Singhiya, Sunsari
41. Dudhkunda, Solukhumbu
42. Jaleswor Mahadev, Solukhumbu
43. Siddhakali, Sankuwasabha
44. Naradevi Bhagwati *Shakti Peeth*, Naradevi, Kathmandu.
45. Naxal Bhagwati *Shakti Peeth*, Naxal, Kathmandu.
46. Dattatraya Temple, Dattatri, Bhaktapur.

## Shiva Shakti Sites in India



Place	Location
Somnath Jyotirlinga	Gujarat
Mallikarjun Jyotirlinga	Andhra Pradesh
Mahakaleshwar Jyotirlinga	Madhya Pradesh
Omkareshwar Jyotirlinga	Madhya Pradesh
Vaidyanath Jyotirlinga	Madhya Pradesh
Bhimashankar Jyotirlinga	Maharashtra
Rameshwar Jyotirlinga	Tamil Nadu
Nageshwar Jyotirlinga	Gujarat
Vishwanath Jyotirlinga	Uttar Pradesh
Trimbakeshwar Jyotirlinga	Maharashtra
Kedarnath Jyotirlinga	Uttarakhand
Ghushmeshwar Ghrishneshwar Jyotirlinga	Maharashtra

# Twelve Jyotirlingas of India

'Jyotirlingas' are the *Shivalingas* in the 12 places where God Shivaji manifested himself

*Authors: Dr. Hari Prasad Adhikari & Acharya Pandit Tek Narayan Upadhyaya*

1. Somnath *Jyotirlinga* - Saurashtra, Gujarat
2. Mallikarjun *Jyotirlinga* - Srisailem Mountain, Andhra Pradesh
3. Mahakaleshwar *Jyotirlinga* - Ujjain, Madhya Pradesh
4. Omkareshwar *Jyotirlinga* - Narmada river bank, Mandhata mountain, Madhya Pradesh
5. Vaidyanath *Jyotirlinga* - Parli Village, Maharashtra
6. Bhimashankar *Jyotirlinga* - Sahyadri Mountain, Dakini, Maharashtra
7. Rameshwar *Jyotirlinga* - Rameshwaram, Setubandha, Tamil Nadu
8. Nageshwar *Jyotirlinga* - Darukavan, Dwarka, Gujarat
9. Vishwanath *Jyotirlinga* - Kashi, Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh
10. Trimbakeshwar *Jyotirlinga* - Godavari river bank, Maharashtra
11. Kedarnath *Jyotirlinga* - Kedarnath, Uttarakhand
12. Ghushmeshwar - Ghrishneshwar *Jyotirlinga* - Aurangabad, Maharashtra

*Photos: Shared by Ms. Neera Misra*

## 1. *Somnath Jyotirlinga* - Saurashtra, Gujarat

The journey of the 12 *Jyotirlinga* begins from Somnath. The Shivshakti circumambulation or Parikrama path is completed after visiting all the 12 *Jyotirlingas* and Shakti Peethas. The first of the *Jyotirlinga*, Somnath *Jyotirlinga* is located in the port of Veraval in the Saurashtra region of the Indian state of Gujarat.

### **The Glory and beliefs of Somnath**

Firstly, there are a number of legends over time that has been linked to Somnath *Jyotirlinga*. It is believed to have been established by the moon itself. There is a legend that the moon worshiped God Shiva to get rid of a curse imposed on her by Daksha Prajapati, an agent of creation. The moon is also called 'Soma' and that is where the name of this *Jyotirlinga* comes from. History says, the magnificent Somnath temple has witnessed numerous external attacks and looting of precious metal gems and other properties. The *Shivalinga* had also sustained damages during the external attack. The Somnath Temple has been demolished and rebuilt number of times and the present form was built after India's independence.

Somnath is famous for '*pitru shraddha*' an obsequial ceremony marking the death anniversaries of ancestors and the '*Narayanbali puja*' which is performed to appease God Narayan for any unnatural death or '*pitru dosh*' which is a birth defect or a defect that occurs later in one's life. The *Pitru Shraddha* is said to have special significance here in the months of *Chaitra*, *Bhadra* and *Kartik*, which sees thousands of devotees flock the temple. A special fair is also held on the Mahashivaratri day. There is a confluence of Hiran, Kapila and Saraswati rivers and bathing in this Triveni is taken with special importance.

There is also a legend which believes that God Krishna breathed his last here, and, there is a temple dedicated to him. There are also temples of number of Goddess, Ganesh, Bhairav and other deities in Somnath.

### **How to reach Somnath?**

You can visit Somnath by bus, train or air. The Somnath Temple is located at a distance of about 420 kilometres from Ahmedabad. Somnath can be reached by bus from Ahmedabad. India's state transport bus service is available to Somnath from various major cities. You can also visit Somnath by rail. Railway services from nearby cities for Somnath Railway Station are Ahmedabad-Somnath Intercity Express, Rajkot-Somnath Passenger, Porbandar-Somnath Passenger and Okha-Somnath Express. As there are no airports near Somnath temple, one can fly from Ahmedabad, Rajkot, Porbandar and Diu airports in some distant cities and from there bus services to Somnath temple are easily available.

### **When to visit Somnath?**

When visiting Somnath, it is important to get prior information about the weather as it is on the shores of the Arabian Sea and storms and cyclones are expected to often affect the weather. The weather in Somnath is very hot in summer and warm in winter.

During the monsoon season, rain is accompanied by strong winds. The best time to visit Somnath is between the months of *Asoj* and *Chaitra* (Sept-April).





## 2. *Mallikarjun Jyotirlinga* - Srisailam Mountain, Andhra Pradesh

Somnath is followed by Mallikarjun. Mallikarjun *Jyotirlinga* is located on the Srisailam Mountain on the banks of the River Krishna in Andhra Pradesh. It is also referred to as the Kailash of the South.

### **The Glory and beliefs of Mallikarjun**

There is a belief that the sight of the peak of Srisailam alone will destroy sorrows and help one get rid of the cycle of birth and death. It is believed that the sattvic desires of every devotee who reaches Mallikarjun will be fulfilled. Archaeologists say the temple is about 2,000 years old.

There is a legend about Mallikarjun *Jyotirlinga* that God Kartikeya disgruntled with his parents God Shiva and Goddess Parvati came and settled on Krouch Mountain. It is said that Shiva and Parvati came here and appeared as *Jyotirlinga* after God Sage Narad could not take Kartikeya back despite his best efforts.

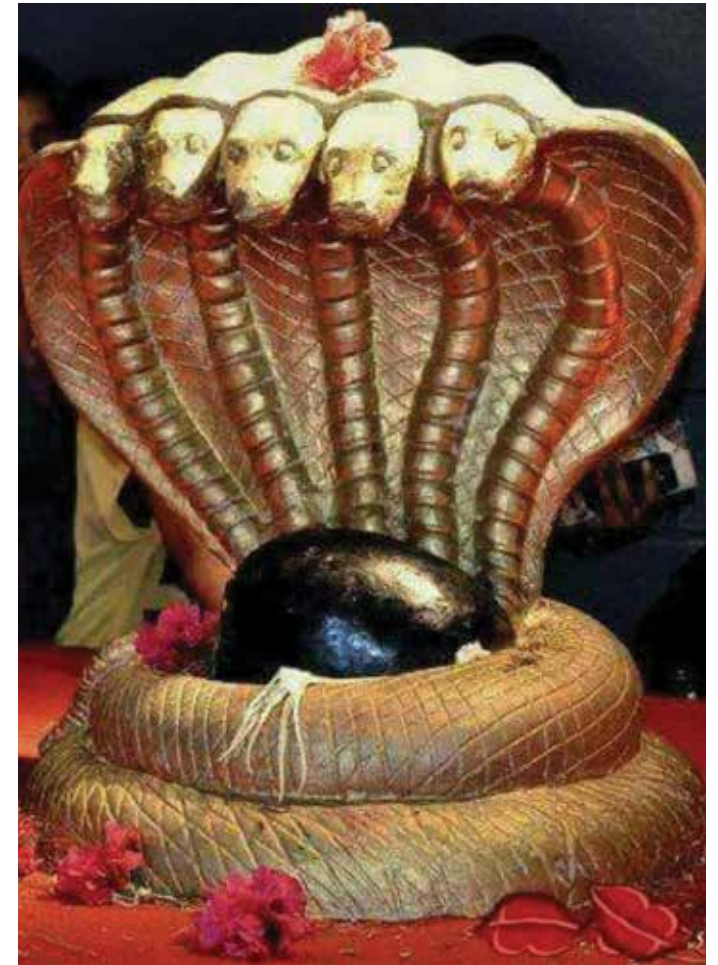
Another legend says, a princess came to this mountain to escape disaster and she started living with the herdsmen. She used to take care of a black cow and someone was secretly milking and stealing the cow's milk every day. One day the princess saw someone milking the cow and ran to catch the thief. But when she approached the cow, there was no one but a *Shivalinga*. The Mallikarjun *Jyotirlinga* temple was then built on the spot.

There is also a Parvati temple here which is known by the name of Goddess Mallika. A special fair is held here on the day of *Mahashivaratri* (Feb/March). The river Krishna, 5 kilometres below Mallikarjun, is famously known as *Patalganga*. Devotees take a bath in the river with utmost importance.

### **How to reach Mallikarjun?**

One can travel by road, train or air. Government and private buses ply regularly from Vijayawada, Tirupati, Anantapur, Hyderabad and Mahbubnagar to Srisailam.

About 200 kilometres from Srisailam is Rajiv Gandhi International Airport in Hyderabad which is the nearest airport to Mallikarjun. Bus services are available from the airport. The nearest railway station is Markapur Railway Station, which is about 100 kilometres from Mallikarjun. Bus services are available from here to Mallikarjun. One will have to take the road through the dense forests while on bus and due to the dense forest, travel is prohibited on the road after 6 p.m. The entrance opens from 6 o'clock in the morning.



### **When to visit Mallikarjun?**

The weather is the most suitable between September and January when the temperature is warm throughout the day.



### 3. *Mahakaleshwar Jyotirlinga* - Ujjain, Madhya Pradesh

The Mahakaleshwar Temple is located in Ujjain, Madhya Pradesh, India.

#### ***The Glory and beliefs of Mahakaleshwar***

Epics and great poets like Kalidasa have well described the grandeur of Mahakaleshwar. As it is the only south-facing Jyotirlinga, Mahakaleshwar has a virtuous significance. It is believed that only by seeing Mahakaleshwar can one attain salvation. There is a legend that God Shiva appeared in the form of Mahakala to protect the Brahmins when the demons started attacking a devotee of Shiva. The Mahakaleshwar temple was destroyed in 1235. Since then, every ruler who has come to rule here has been paying attention to the restoration and decoration of the temple. The temple region is decorated every year and specially before Kumbh Mela. A special fair is organised on Mahashivaratri and on Mondays of the Shravan Mass. Devotees engage in the Bhasma Aarti at Mahakaleshwar with special importance.

During the rule from 1107 to 1728, the Mahakaleshwar temple was rebuilt and the Jyotirlinga was re-established and Kumbhasan festival was started. Later, King Bhoj expanded the temple.

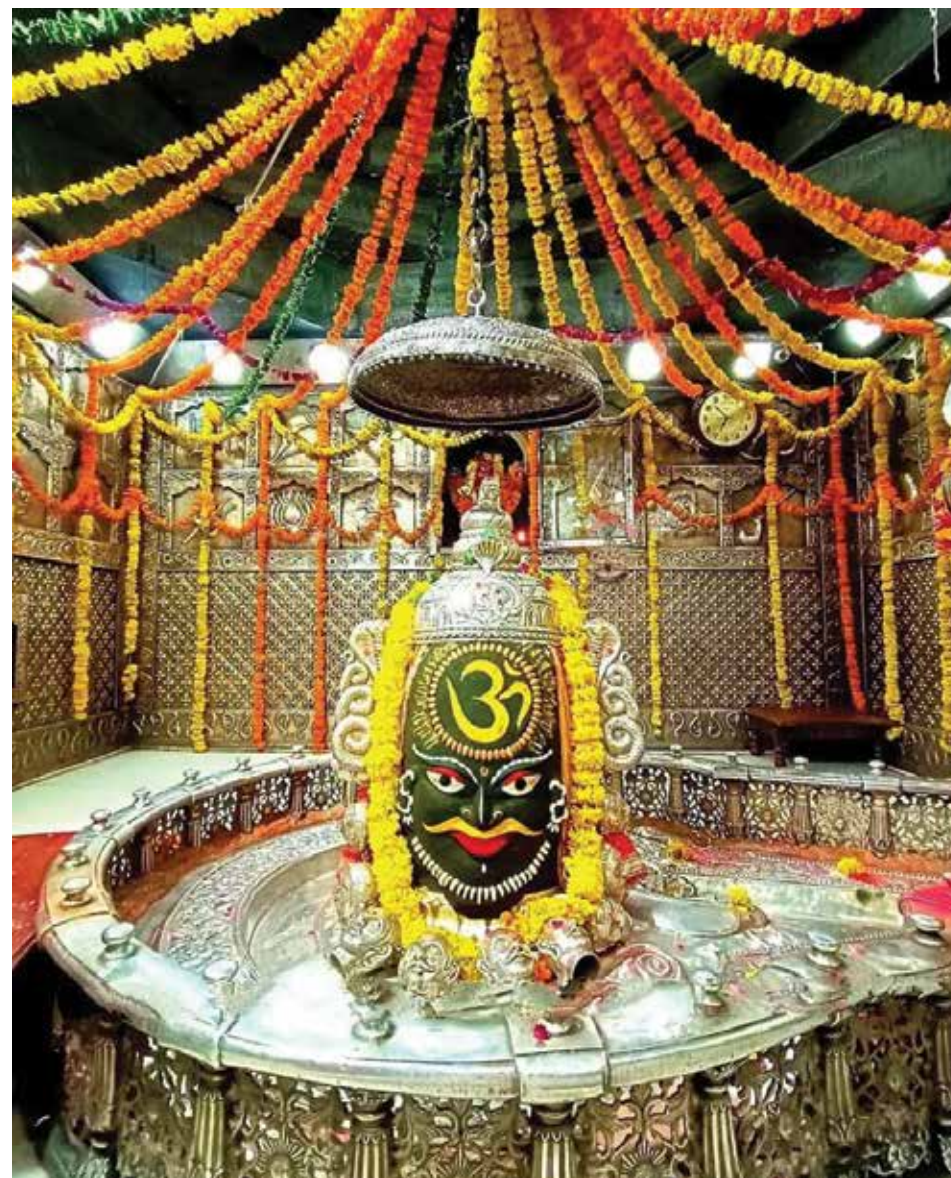
#### ***How to reach Mahakaleshwar?***

Mahakaleshwar can be visited by any of the means of air, rail and road. As there is no airport in Ujjain, one can reach the nearby Indore Airport by air. You can then reach Ujjain by bus or taxi in an hour-and-a-half.

There are direct train services from major cities of India like Delhi, Mumbai and Kolkata to Ujjain. Bus service is also available to Ujjain from major cities of India.

#### ***When to visit Mahakaleshwar?***

Weather of Ujjain Mahakaleshwar Darshan has special significance in the month of *Shravan* (July/ August) and the weather of Ujjain is also favourable in the month of *Shravan*.



#### 4. *Omkareshwar Jyotirlinga* - Narmada river bank, Mandhata Mountain, Madhya Pradesh

Devotees visit Omkareshwar after Mahakaleshwar. Omkareshwar *Jyotirlinga* is located in the Mandhata Hills on the banks of the Narmada River in Madhya Pradesh. Mandhata, on the banks of the River Narmada, is shaped like mountains on an island. There are two temples in the region - Omkareshwar and Mamaleshwar.

Legend has it that when King Mandhata performed great penance on a mountain on the banks of the river Narmada, God Shiva appeared in a state of bliss and transformed into a form of the *Jyotirlinga*. Along with Omkareshwar, the river Narmada also has special significance. There is also Mamaleshwar temple in Omkareshwar pilgrimage area and Mamaleshwar is also considered as *Jyotirlinga*.

Dhanteras Pujan and Abhishek Pujan are of special importance during Diwali. There is a settlement called Bishnupuri on one side of the River Narmada and Mandhata Island on the other side. Mandhata Island can be reached from

Bishnupuri by boat or through bridge. There is an Omkareshwar temple on the same island. All the monasteries here can be visited in a three-day trip. Along with God Shiva, a statue of Parvati is also installed in the Omkareshwar temple. Here lentils are offered to Shivaji. During Shraavan Mass, there is a special crowd of visitors. Devotees however are not allowed to enter during aarti. Apart from the rajpurohit, other devotees are not allowed to watch aarti.

##### ***How to reach Omkareshwar Temple?***

The nearest town from the temple is Indore. Buses or taxis are available from Indore or Khandwa to the temple. Railway services are available from major cities of India to Khandwa railway station. Buses or taxis are available from the station to the temple. The Devi Ahilyabai Holkar International Airport can also be reached by air. There on buses and taxis are available to the temple.



##### ***When to visit Omkareshwar?***

Omkareshwar Temple can be visited all year round. As there are forests and rivers around,

the weather is favourable even in summer. During the rainy season, the environment here is especially pleasant as it is green.

## 5. *Vaidyanath Jyotirlinga* - Devghar, Jharkhand

Vaidyanath *Jyotirlinga* is visited after Omkareshwar. The temple of Vaidyanath *Jyotirlinga* is located at a place called Devghar in Jharkhand, India.

### **The Glory and beliefs of Vaidyanath Jyotirlinga**

Vaidyanath is also known as Siddhapeeth. It is believed that all the desires of the visitors are fulfilled here which is why the *Shivalinga* of Vaidyanath temple is also called Kamana linga.

God Shiva was pleased with Ravana's intense penance offered him a bridegroom. However, in reply, Ravana expressed his desire to take Shiva to Lanka forever instead of a bridegroom. Shiva then gave a conditional gift to Ravana. The condition was that Ravana can carry Shiva in the form of *Shivalinga* to Lanka, however, he should not put him on the ground in between. If he did, the *Shivalinga* would be established in the very spot. It is said that while on his way, Ravana stops to urinate and asks a shepherd to carry the

*Shivalinga*. The shepherd puts it on the ground, unable to carry it and *Shivalinga* was established as *Jyotirlinga* in the spot which became Vaidyanath.

There are two other temples of Vaidyanath *Jyotirlinga*. Vaidyanath Dham exists as Vaidyanath *Jyotirlinga* in Parli village of Maharashtra and Kangra in Himachal Pradesh. The Shraavan Mela is held throughout the month of Shraavan (August/September) in the Vaidyanath temple where Vaidyanath *Jyotirlinga* is located. Devotees carry water on foot from the holy Ganga River or Ganges in Sultanganj about 100 kilometres away and offer it to God Shiva. It is believed that the container filled with water from Ganges should not be placed on the ground. A special fair is also held here on *Mahashivaratri*. *Trishul*, God Shiva's trident can be seen everywhere in Shiva temples but in case of Vaidyanathdham, there are *Panchshul* in temples of Shiva, Parvati and Laxmi Narayan.



Every year, two days before Mahashivaratri (February/March), Panchshul is brought down from these temples for devotees that gather to touch the Panchshul. The Panchshul is worshiped and returned to the temples again.

### **How to reach Vaidyanath Temple?**

Road, rail or air mediums can be used to reach Vaidyanath Temple. Vaidyanath Temple is close to places like Sarava, Sarath, Jarmundi, Chandamari, Dhanwad, etc. Private bus services are available from Jharkhand State Road Transport Corporation and West Bengal State Road Transport

Corporation. Train services are available from New Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Varanasi and other places for the nearest Jasidih railway station from Deoghar. The Lok Nayak Jayaprakash Airport is around 300 kilometres from Vaidhyanath and from there bus service is available to Deoghar.

### **When to visit Vaidhyanath?**

Most visitors go to Vaidhyanath Temple during the special fair held during the Shraavan Mass which falls between August/September. The weather is moderate during monsoon. Likewise, devotees also visit Vaidyanath during *Mahashivaratri* (February/March). The weather remains favourable during the festival. Occasional cyclones and typhoons in the Bay of Bengal also affect the Jharkhand region, so it is advisable to travel with advance information about the weather.

## 6. *Bhimashankar Jyotirlinga* - Sahyadri Mountain, Dakini, Maharashtra



After Vaidyanath *Jyotirlinga*, Bhimashankar *Jyotirlinga* is one of the 12<sup>th</sup> *Jyotirlingas*. Bhimashankar *Jyotirlinga*

is located on the Sahyadri Mountains near the headwaters of the Bhima River near Pune in Maharashtra.

### ***The Glory and beliefs of Bhimashankar Jyotirlinga***

Legends say, a demon named Bhima, worshiped God Shiva while

holding the gods captive. Bhima out of anger during his worship, tried to hit the *Shivalinga* with his sword. God Shiva appeared immediately and destroyed Bhima and established himself as *Jyotirlinga*. The Bhimashankar Temple is a mixture of ancient and modern architectural architecture. On *Mahashivaratri* and *Shivaratri*, there are special fairs and crowds of visitors.

### ***How to reach Bhimashankar Temple?***

Bus service is available from Pune to the temple in Maharashtra. Special bus service is also operated from Pune on *Mahashivaratri* and *Shivaratri*. Likewise, bus services are available from major cities of India to Pune. Bhimashankar can also be reached by rail. Train service is available up to Pune railway station.

### ***When to visit Bhimashankar?***

The best time to visit Bhimashankar is from August to February. It is extremely hot during summer.

## 7. *Rameshwar Jyotirlinga* - Rameshwaram, Setubandha, Tamil Nadu

Rameshwar *Jyotirlinga* is located in Setubandha, Tamil Nadu. Due to the presence of Rameshwar *Jyotirlinga*, the area is also popular as Rameshwaram.

### **The Glory and beliefs of Rameshwar *Jyotirlinga***

Rameshwar is one of the four shrines of glory and public trust. The temple is located on a conch-shaped island surrounded by the Indian Ocean and Bay of Bengal. There is a legend that the *Shivalinga* here was made by *Baluva* out of gratitude when God Rama returned after his victory over Ravana and worshiped God Shiva.

It is said that Shiva, who was pleased with the adoration of God Rama, appeared in the form of light and resided there. Rameshwar is named after the *Shivalinga* made by God Rama. Rameshwar is also called Kashi of the South. The anointing of *Jyotirlinga* by Gangajal has special significance. Holy water is taken from Gangotri in Uttarakhand and offered to Rameshwar *Jyotirlinga*. There is also a belief that worshipping Rameshwar



can help clean off even sins like Brahmahatya which is the act of killing a Brahmin. The Rameshwar temple is said to have been built in the 12<sup>th</sup> century.

### **How to reach Rameshwar *Jyotirlinga*?**

The nearest airport from Rameshwar Temple is Madurai Airport. There are flights from Mumbai, Bangalore and Chennai to the airport. One can also travel by train to Rameshwaram. Rail services are available from Rameshwaram to major cities in India. Rameshwaram can also be reached by road. After reaching the city of Rameshwaram, local means of transportation are available for the temple.

### **When to visit Rameshwar?**

The best time to travel to Rameshwar is between October and March.

## 8. *Nageshwar Jyotirlinga* - Darukavan, Dwarka, Gujarat

Nageshwar *Jyotirlinga* is located in Darukavan, Gujarat. Nageshwar falls near Puri, the gateway to Gujarat.

### **The Glory and beliefs of Nageshwar Jyotirlinga**

Nageshwar is the god of snakes. The god is believed to save devotees from snake poison. It is also believed that only by listening to the story of the origin and greatness of Nageshwar, one can get rid of all sins. Legends say God Shiva, in the form of Nageshwar (body full of serpents), defeated a demon named Daruka and his army to rescue a devotee named Supriya who was imprisoned by the demon.

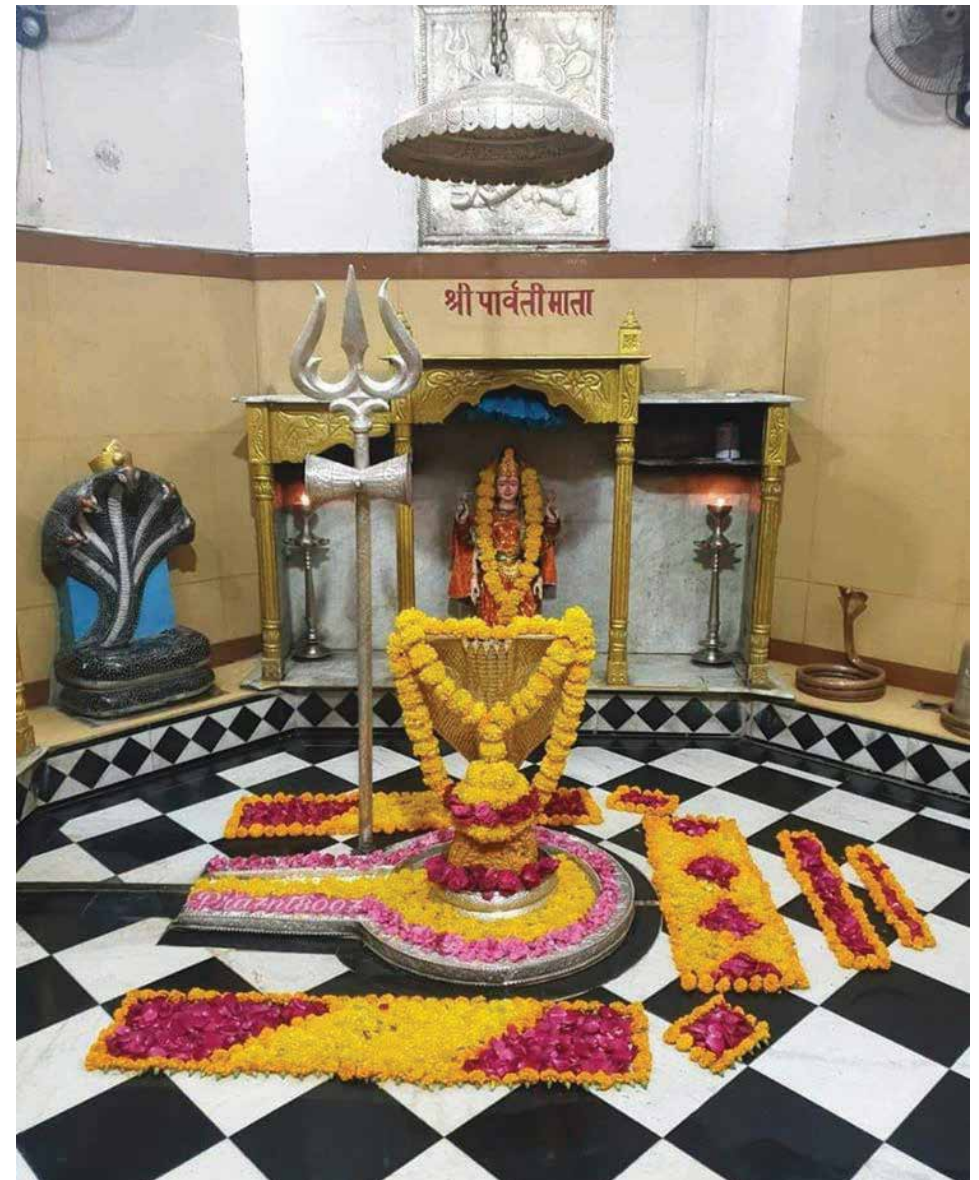
Holy water from the Ganga is anointed on the Shivalinga of Nageshwar. The temple committee provides Ganga water to the devotees for anointing. There is a rule that male devotees going to the sanctum sanctorum for anointing should wear only dhoti (a piece of clothing tied around on the waist and extending to cover the legs).

### **How to reach Nageshwar?**

When visiting Nageshwar temple, one should stay at Dwarika or Okha. From there an auto rickshaw is available to go to the temple. Nageshwar Temple is located at a distance of about 16 kilometres from Dwarka. Jamnagar Airport is the nearest airport. There is a temple at a distance of about 150 kilometres from there. Local transport including bus services is available from the airport. The nearest railway station from the temple is Dwarika when travelling by rail. The Nageshwar Temple can be reached by local vehicles from the station. Nageshwar can also be reached by bus. There is a direct bus service from Ahmedabad or Jamnagar to Nageshwar.

### **When to visit Nageshwar?**

The best time to visit Nageshwar is from October to February.



## 9. *Vishwanath Jyotirlinga* - Kashi, Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh

### **The Glory and beliefs of Vishwanath Jyotirlinga**

The Kashi Vishwanath Temple, situated on the banks of the Ganges, is very famous and special to the Hindus. Those who visit Vishwanath and bathe in the Ganges are believed to attain salvation. During the *Mahashivaratri* festival, there is a special procession to Vishwanath temple at midnight. The present Vishwanath Temple was built in 1780. Earlier, the Vishwanath temple was attacked and vandalised, and rebuilt several times. Devotees believe Vishwanath *Jyotirlinga* will not disappear even if there is an apocalypse. Kashi is also considered to be the place of creation and that one can attain salvation by spending their final days in the place.

### **How to reach Kashi?**

Air, rail or roads are available for Kashi Vishwanath journey. Flights are available from major cities of India to Varanasi. Local transport service is available to reach Vishwanath Temple from the airport. Varanasi is the main hub of the railway. Kashi Vishwanath can be visited by using railways from all the major cities of India. There are also bus services to Varanasi from major Indian cities.

### **When to visit Kashi?**

The weather of Kashi Vishwanath is hot in summer for those who can't stand the heat. Besides, it is better to visit Vishwanath at other times. If it gets foggy in winter, it may affect the flight service for air travellers.



## 10. *Trimbakeshwar Jyotirlinga* - Godavari river bank, Maharashtra

Trimbakeshwar *Jyotirlinga* is located on the banks of Godavari River in Nashik district of Maharashtra.

### **The Glory and beliefs of Trimbakeshwar *Jyotirlinga***

Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh *Tridev* are enthroned in the Trimbakeshwar *Jyotirlinga*, which is the main feature of the *Jyotirlinga* as all the other *Jyotirlingas* only have God Shiva enthroned. The temple is made of black stone. Kalsarpa Shanti, Tripindi Shraddha and Narayan Nagbali worship are performed here. The temple was renovated in the 18th century.

Legend has it that a great sage was falsely accused by some Brahmins of slaughtering cows and as a penance for that Gautam worshipped God Shiva who was pleased and appeared there as Trimbakeshwar *Jyotirlinga*. Trimbakeshwar *Jyotirlinga* is considered to be the giver of all virtues. A special fair is held here on Shivaratri (February/March) and Mondays of the month of

*Shravan* (August/September). Devotees flock here throughout the year for *Kalsarpa Shanti*, *Tripindi Shraddha* and *Narayan Nagbali Puja*. Trimbakeshwar has another special significance as it is also associated with Kumbh Mela.

### ***How to reach Trimbakeshwar?***

Nashik can be reached from major cities of India by air, road and rail. Buses, autorickshaws and taxis are available from Nashik to Trimbakeshwar Temple. There is no regularity in air service to Nashik. Train service is available to Nashik while bus service is available from Nashik to various cities including Mumbai and Pune.

### ***When to visit Trimbakeshwar?***

The best time is from August to February. Summer is very hot.





## 11. *Kedarnath Jyotirlinga* - Kedarnath, Uttarakhand

Kedarnath *Jyotirlinga* is the *jyotirlinga* of the Himalayan region. Kedarnath is located in the state of Uttarakhand. It is one of the four dhams of Uttaranchal.

The temple of Kedarnath is located at an altitude of 3,593 metres. There are other places of pilgrimage in Uttarakhand around the main temple of Kedarnath. Gauri Kund, Sonprayag, Guptakashi, Ukhimath, Panch Kedar etc. are also places of interest.

### **The Glory and beliefs of Kedarnath Jyotirlinga**

There is a legend that God Shiva appeared as Kedarnath *Jyotirlinga* after being pleased with the penance of a sage named Nar and Narayan. The other legend of the origin links to the Pandavas. The Pandavas wanted God Shiva's blessings for the sin of fratricide. But, Shiva left for the Himalayas wanting to avoid the Pandavas. The Pandavas then went in search and reached the Himalayas where Shiva had taken the form of a bull. As legend goes, as he tried to escape, the Pandavas grabbed him by his back and that place was established

as the Kedarnath. It is also believed that at the exact same time, the upper part of Shiva's body appeared in Kathmandu, Nepal, which is established as Pashupatinath, and his arms appeared in Tungnath, face in Rudranath and hair in Kalpeshwar. These five places make the Panch Kedar.

Adi Shankaracharya had renovated the Kedarnath temple. In June 2013, the lake above Kedarnath was flooded and all the structures around the temple were washed away except the main part of the Kedarnath temple that remained. Hindus take Badrinath and Kedarnath in Uttarakhand with utmost importance. Kedarnath, Badrinath, Gangotri and Yamunotri make up the four abodes of the Himalayas. Kedarnath pilgrimage is one of the main pilgrimages of Hindus.

### **How to reach Kedarnath?**

To visit Kedarnath, one has to reach Haridwar first. Transport services including bus and taxi are available from Haridwar and Rishikesh. One will need to walk on foot for 14 kilometres after reaching Gauri



Kund. Horses, palanquins and other services are also available for those unable to travel on foot. One can travel from Haridwar to Kedarnath via Rishikesh, Devprayag, Srinagar, Rudraprayag, Tilbada, Agastyamunikund, Guptakashi, Nala, Fata, Rampur, Sonprayag, Gaurikund, Rambada and Garudchatti. The Uttarakhand state government also operates helicopter services from Agastyamunikund among other places. Transport services can also be reserved from Haridwar and Rishikesh to Kedarnath,

Badrinath, Gangotri and Yamunotri Chardham.

### **When to visit Kedarnath ?**

The Kedarnath temple closes for six months during the winter. When the temple is closed in the winter, the five-faced idol of Kedarnath is brought to Ukhimath and worshiped regularly. Travelling to Kedarnath during winter is challenging due to snowfall. The temple is open only from April to November. Due to the high altitude of the Himalayas, it is still colder in other months.

## 12. Ghushmeshwar Ghrishneshwar Jyotirlinga - Aurangabad

Ghushmeshwar or Ghrishneshwar is in Aurangabad in the Indian state of Maharashtra. The Ghrishneshwar Temple is at a short distance from the main city and is in Verul village which is 11 kilometres from Daulatabad.

### **The Glory and beliefs of Ghushmeshwar or Ghrishneshwar Jyotirlinga**

A Brahmin couple Sudharma and Sudeha who lived near South Devgiri Mountain did not have children. It is believed that Sudharma then married Sudeha's sister Ghushma and brought her home. Ghushma who made *Shivalinga* and worshipped it gave birth to a son.

One day, Sudeha killed Ghushma and Sudharma's young son while he was asleep. However, when Ghushma returned after immersing his son and *Shivalinga*, his son had returned alive. It is believed that, at the request of Ghushma, God Shiva appeared as *Jyotirlinga* for the welfare of the people and remained there. Ghushmeshwar

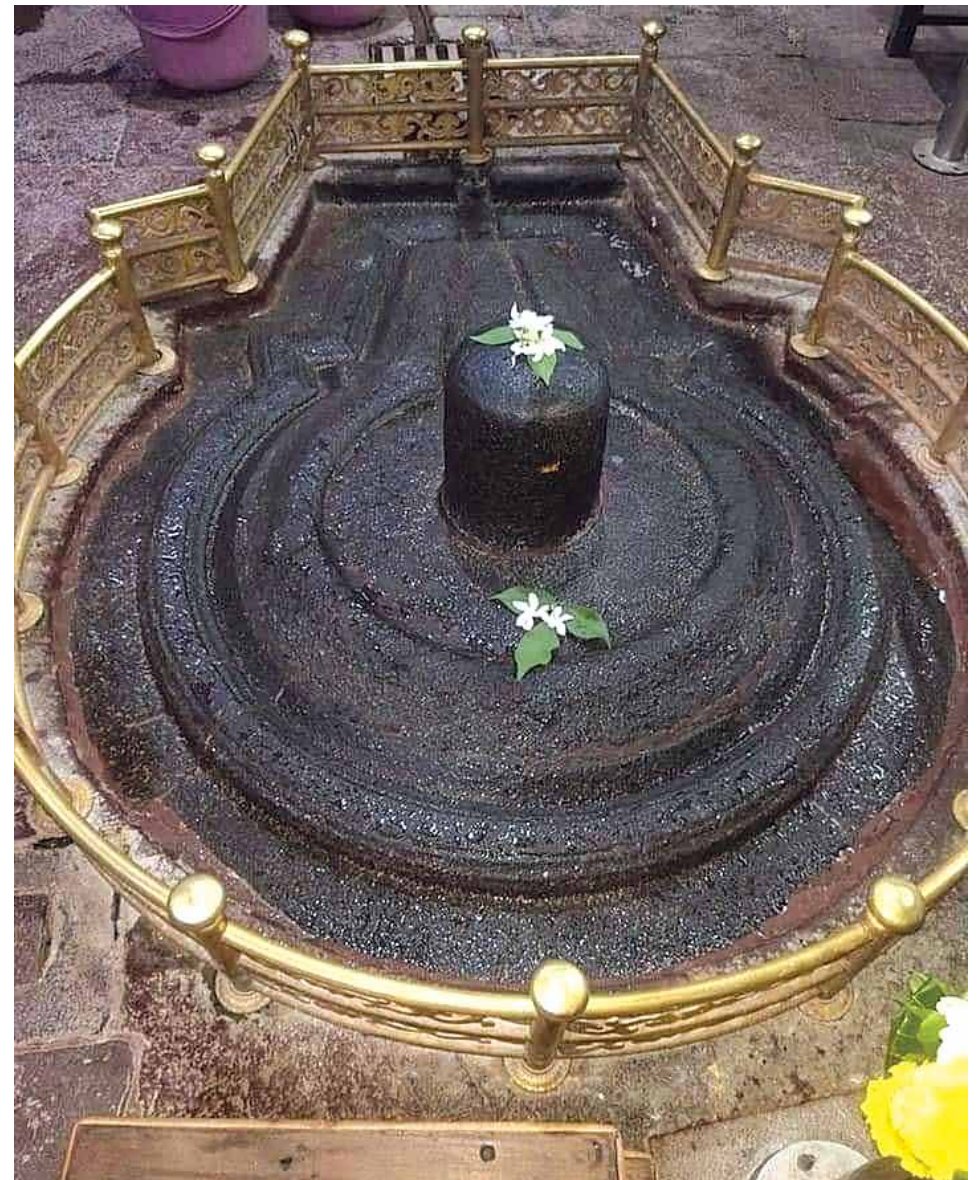
is believed to have been named after Ghushma. It is believed that worshipping *Jyotirlinga* in *Shravan Mass* (August/September) will fulfil a couple's desire to have children. A special fair is held here on the Mondays of *Shravan month* (August/September) and on *Mahashivaratri*.

### **How to reach Ghushmeshwar or Ghrishneshwar Jyotirlinga?**

Daulatabad in the outskirts of Aurangabad in Maharashtra is connected to major cities by railways and roads. The distance from Daulatabad station to the temple is about 20 kilometres. There are various means of transportation for Ghushmeshwar from Aurangabad station as well. From Daulatabad too there are means of transportation to Verul village. Daulatabad also has bus services from major cities of India.

### **When to visit Ghushmeshwar?**

The best time is from August to February. During the summer, the area gets very hot.



# Major Shakti Peethas of India

The place where the Goddess has power is considered as *Shakti Peetha*. Worship is performed in *Shakti Peetha* as Goddess, Parvati or Strishakti. The main *Shakti Peethas* in India are as follows:

## *Dakshineswar Kali Peetha*, Kolkata, West Bengal Shrine

Dakshineswar Kali *Peetha* is located on the banks of the Hooghly River in Calcutta, West Bengal. Swami Ramakrishna Paramahansa was the chief priest in this temple. Here Bhavatarini Kali Mata is worshiped as the main goddess. Apart from the main Kali Mata temple, there are other temples in this *Shakti Peetha*. The main temple was completed in 1855 (AD). One can visit Dakshineswar by air, rail and road. There are local vehicles available from Kolkata.

## *Kalighat Shakti Peetha*, Kolkata Shrine

The Kalighat *Shakti Peetha* in Kolkata, India is famous for the Kali Mata Temple. There is a legend that some toes of Sati Devi's right

foot fell here. There is a legend that some toes of Sati Devi's right foot fell here. There is a huge statue of Goddess Kali adorned by *Naramundamala*. This idol located in *Shakti Peetha* was revered by *Kamadeva Brahmachari*. One can take local vehicles after reaching Kolkata by air, rail or road to reach Kalighat *Shakti Peetha*.

## *Shakambhari Peetha*, Saharanpur Shrine

Shakambhari Devi Temple is located in Saharanpur, Uttar Pradesh. Apart from this, temples of Goddess Shakambhari are also found in other places. The form of Shakambhari Devi is said to be that of the most compassionate and loving goddess. It is believed that worshipping Goddess Shakambhari will give good harvest and inexhaustible fruits. The temple

of Shakambhari Devi also has idols of Shatakshi Devi, Bhima Devi and Bhramari Devi. The temple of Goddess Shakambhari is also located in Panchkoshi Siddhapeetha. After reaching Sarahanpur in Uttar Pradesh, one can go to Shakambhari temple on a bus that is easily available from Delhi, Haridwar, Chandigarh and other places.

## *Kamakhya Shakti Peetha*, Guwahati, Assam Shrine

Kamakhya is one of the prominent names of Goddess or Shakti. *Kamakhya Shakti Peetha* is located in Kamrup, Assam. The Goddess Kamakhya is a *Tantric* goddess. *Tantra* seekers still practice in this temple of Goddess Kamakhya. Kamakhya is also called the goddess of power, procreation and desire. *Mahamudra* (vaginal pool)

of Bhagwati is located here. There is a Kamakhya temple at some distance from Guwahati in Assam. After reaching Guwahati in Assam, one can reach the temple from there via bus or train available from major cities. Air service is also available to Guwahati airport.

## *Vaishnodevi Shakti Peetha*, Trikut Parbat, Jammu and Kashmir Shrine

Vaishnodevi *Shakti Peetha* is located on Trikut *Parbat* in Jammu and Kashmir, India, 12 kilometres from Katara of Jammu. The *Shakti Peetha* is located at an altitude of 5,200 feet. The adorable Goddess Vaishnodevi of this *Shakti Peetha* is also known as Mata Rani and Vaishnavi. Vaishnodevi is one of the most revered sacred places in North India. Millions of pilgrims

visit this *Shakti Peetha* every year. Mahakali, Mahasaraswati and Mahalakshmi are enshrined in the cave and the combined form of the three goddesses is said to be the form of Vaishno Devi. A special fair is held here on *Navratri*. One can visit Vaishnodevi by air, train or road to Jammu. You have to walk from Katara to climb the mountain. Mules, palanquins and electric vehicles are also available for those who cannot walk. Katra is connected by road from Jammu. Katara can be reached by rail. Jammu can be reached by air.

### *Vishalakshi Shakti Peetha, Varanasi Shrine*

Vishalakshi *Shakti Peetha* is located in the famous pilgrimage area of Vanaras. There is Vishalakshi *Shakti Peetha* at Manikarnika Ghat on the banks of the holy Ganga, a short distance from Kashi Vishwanath *Jyotilinga*. There is a legend that the gem of the right ear of Goddess Sati fell here. It is also said that the earring of Bhagwati Sati fell here. The description of Vishalakshi *Shakti Peetha* is found in Kashi. The

Vishalakshi temple is built in the Indian style. It can be reached by air, rail or road.

### *Kalkaji Temple, Delhi Shrine*

Kalkaji Temple is one of the most revered *Shakti Peethas* in Delhi. Shakti is worshiped in this temple as the goddess of time. Kalkaji is also called *Jayanti Peetha* or *Manokamana Siddha Peetha*. The temple is built of black stone symbolising Goddess Kali. This temple was built by the Maratha rulers in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. After reaching Delhi by air, rail or road, one can use local means of transport to reach the Kalkaji Temple.

### *Kamakshi Devi Shakti Peetha, Kanchipuram, Tamil Nadu Shrine*

The temple of Kamakshi Devi is considered as one of the major sacred places of *Devi Shakti*. This temple is located at Sivakanchi in Kanchipuram, Tamil Nadu, India.

The idol of Goddess Kamakshi is in *Padmasana Yogamudra* in the temple and is facing south-east. It is said that Kamakshi was named Kamakshi because of her beautiful eyes. The three eyes of Kamakshi are considered to be the symbol of Tridev. Kamakshi also has Saraswati and Mahalakshmi. One can take a flight to Chennai and then local transport from there to reach Kamakshidevi Temple. Kanchipuram is connected to major cities of India by road and regular bus service is available.

### *Chhinnamastika Shakti Peetha, Rajarappa, Jharkhand Shrine*

There is a *Shakti Peeth* of Chhinnamastika Devi in Ramgarh, Rajarappa of Jharkhand. At the confluence of Bhairavi and Damodar rivers, there is a temple of Chhinnamastika Devi, 28 kilometres away from Ramgarh. The idol of the beheaded goddess is worshiped in this *Shakti Peetha*. The temple has an idol of a goddess holding a sword in one hand and

her own severed head in the other. There is a belief that worshiping in this *Shakti Peetha* will help fulfill all the desires of devotees. Devotees flock to the temple on a full moon and no moon days. Devotees also get married in this *Shakti Peetha*.

There are temples of gods and goddesses around the *Shakti Peetha*, including the temple of God Shiva and the temple of the Sun God. There are hospices, rest houses and guesthouses for those who come to visit this *Shakti Peetha*. The *Shakti Peetha* is easily accessible by road. After reaching Ramgarh in Jharkhand, local means of transportation are available to reach the temple. While traveling by train, the stations are near Ramgarh Station and Ranchi Road Station. From these stations, local means of transportation are available to reach the temple. The nearest airport is Ranchi Airport.

# 51 Shiv Shakti Sites in India

The list of Shakti peethas in India is quite extensive. When planning to visit any of these pilgrimage places, get in touch with Adotrip for the best tour packages. Besides these aforementioned Shakti Peethas, there are many more places where Sati's body parts fell. So here is the list of 51 Shakti Peeths and their location.

S.N.	Temple	Location	Body Part
1	Amarnath Shakti Peeth	Jammu & Kashmir	Throat
2	Attahasa Shakti Phullara	Birbhum District, West Bengal	Lower Lip
3	Devi Bahula	Keturam, West Bengal	Left Arm
4	Bakreshwar Shakti Mahishmardini	Barkeshwar, West Bengal	Glabella
5	Bhairav Parvat Shakti Avanti	Ujjain, Madhya Pradesh	Elbow
6	Bhavanipur Shakti Aparna	Sherpur Village, Bangladesh	Left Anklet
7	Gandaki Chandi	Nepal	Forehead
8	Janasthan Shakti Bhramari	Nashik, Maharashtra	Chin
9	Shakti Kottari	Hinglaj, Pakistan	Top of the head
10	Jayanti Shakti Peeth	Jaintia Hills District, Meghalaya	Left Thigh
11	Shakti Yogeshwari	Khulna District, Bangladesh	Palms & Soles&
12	Jwala Shakti Peeth	Kangra, Himachal Pradesh	Tongue
13	Shakti Kalika	Kalighat, West Bengal	Right Toe
14	Kalmadhav Shakti Kali	Shahdol District, Madhya Pradesh	Left Buttock
15	Shakti Kamakhya	Guwahati, Assam	Genitals
16	Shakti Devi Garbha	Birbhum District, West Bengal	Pelvis
17	Shakti Sravani	Kanyakumari, Tamil Nadu	Spine
18	Shakti Chamundeswari&	Mysuru	Ears
19	Shakti Vimla	Murshidabad District, West Bengal	Crown
20	Kumari Shakti Peeth	Khanakul, West Bengal	Right Shoulder
21	Shakti Bhraamari	Jalpaiguri, West Bengal	Left Leg
22	Shakti Dakshayani	Mansarovar, Tibet	Right Hand
23	Shakti Gayatri	Ajmer, Rajasthan	Wrist

24	Shakti Uma	Mithila, Nepal	Left Shoulder
25	Shakti Indrakshi	Nallur, Sri Lanka	Anklets
26	Shakti Mahashira	Kathmandu, Nepal	Both Knees
27	Shakti Bhawani	Chittagong, Bangladesh	Right Arm
28	Shakti Varahi	Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh	Lower Teeth
29	Shakti Chandrabhaga	Junagarh, Gujarat	Stomach
30	Shakti Lalita	Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh	Finger
31	Shakti Savitri	Kurukshetra, Haryana	Ankle Bone
32	Shakti Shivani	Satna District, Madhya Pradesh	Right Breast
33	Shakti Nandini	Birbhum District, West Bengal	Necklace
34	Kotilingeshwara Shakti Rakini	Andhra Pradesh&	Cheeks
35	Naina Devi	Rupnagar, Himachal Pradesh	Right Eye
36	Shakti Narmada	Amarkantak, Madhya Pradesh	Right Buttock
37	Shakti Sundari	Srisailam, Andhra Pradesh	Right Anklet
38	Shakti Maha-Lakshmi	Jaunpur Village, Bangladesh	Neck
39	Shakti Narayani	Kanyakumari, Tamil Nadu	Upper Teeth
40	Shakti Sugandha	Barisal, Bangladesh	Nose
41	Shakti Tripur Sundar	Udaipur, Tripura	Right Foot
42	Shakti Mangal Chandika	Burdwan District, West Bengal	Right Wrist
43	Shakti Vishalakshi	Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh	Earrings
44	Shakti Kapalini	Medinipur District, West Bengal	Left Ankle
45	Shakti Ambika	Bharatpur District, Rajasthan	Left Toes
46	Shakti Uma	Mathura, Uttar Pradesh	Ringlets of Hair
47	Shakti Tripurmalini	Jalandhar, Punjab	Left Breast
48	Shakti Amba	Gabbar Hill, Gujarat	One part of Heart
49	Shakti Jai Durga	Deogarh, Jharkhand	Second part of Heart
50	Shakti Danteshwari	Bastar, Chhattisgarh	Tooth
51	Shakti Vimla	Jajpur near& Bhubaneswar, Odisha	Navel

<https://www.adotrip.com/blog/shakti-peethas-in-india>



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# Mahabharata Circuit

Both Mahabharata and Ramayana are Historical accounts - Itihasa

History has been defined as *'the study of past events, particularly in human affairs'* and *'The whole series of past events connected with a particular person or thing...'* It means actual accounts of bygone times, the actions of rulers and prominent persons and related events narrated in terms of time, people, space and location.

## Mahabharata related Sites in Nepal



Place	Location
Pandav Gufa	Bajura, Karnali Pradesh
Pandav Gufa	Dailekh, Karnali Pradesh
Hrishikesh Temple	Lumbini Pradesh
Gupateshwor Gufa	Gandaki Pradesh
Vyas Cave	Gandaki Pradesh
Mukti Naath Shiv Peeth	Gandaki Pradesh
Damodar Kunda	Gandaki Pradesh
Akash Bhairav	Bagmati Pradesh
Pashupatinath	Bagmati Pradesh
Krishna Mandir	Bagmati Pradesh

Dolkha Bhimsen	Bagmati Pradesh
Indreshwor	Bagmati Pradesh
Danta Kali Shakti Peeth	Pradesh 1
Pindeshwor Shakti Peeth	Pradesh 1
Kichakbadh Temple	Pradesh 1
Barahakshetra	Pradesh 1
Siddhakali Temple	Pradesh 1
Bhimsen Temple	Pradesh 1
Shiva Dhara, Barun Valley	Pradesh 1
Shavapokhari	Pradesh 1



Mahabharata is one of two leading epics of South Asia. Its pervasive influence from ancient to present day Nepal and India has been traced by history, religious practices and cultures, tangible and intangible heritages, and the belief system of both the countries. The epic of Mahabharata is an orally transmitted (shruti) story compiled in written form over epochs of its continuous oral transmission.

The dating of the actual epic and the stories included in it have not been unanimously confirmed. The Eurocentric rational or objective way of discourse has accepted the calculation of the date of Mahabharata to be around the ninth-tenth century BCE. Relevant archaeologists and historiographers have also floated that the original stories of Mahabharata probably fall between the ninth and early eighth century BCE. However, the final version of the text has been dated as of the fourth century AD or from the time of the early Gupta period. It is also believed that the actual Kurukshetra War took place around the beginning of the ninth century BCE (ref. BB Lal: Mahabharata Archaeology).

The first recitation of the popular mystical story known as *Krishnacharita* (biography of Lord Krishna, one of the principal characters of Mahabharata) has been a basis of tentative dating of the Mahabharata. There is a pervasive belief that this story was recited for the first time by *Rishi* Vaishampayana, one of the principal disciples of *Rishi* Vyasa, to King Janamjeya, the great-grandson of the Pandava Prince Arjuna, at Taksashila. From the description above, about a hundred-year gap can be calculated between the battle of Kurukshetra and the date of the recitation. The continental traditional line of dating of the Mahabharata and other epics and spiritual texts is completely different; and the subjective belief system seems to have played an important role in it. Some scholars believe this epic story is at least 4,000 years old from today.

Be it through the belief system or the historical, literary and archaeological evidences, Nepal's religion and culture cannot be separated from that of India. The issue of the description of the story of Mahabharata has even deeper and pervasive influence in the region. Whether we observe Mahabharata

through the tradition of the stories relating to Yaksha, Nepa, Kirata, Kinnara or the Kimpurusha, Abhira, Asura, Varbarika and Naga races, or we go through the belief system and historical evidences relating to gods, demigods or ashuras including Lord Krishna, Pashupatinatha, Kedaranatha or Rishikeshha, Akashabhairabha, Indra, Living Kumari, Bhimasena/ Bhindya, Kamaru-naaga, Pandava brothers, Vanashura, Ekalavya, Yalamvara, Jitedasti, Ghatotkacha, Narkashura and Bhagadatta, we find proof of direct connection of Mahabharata with Nepal. Similarly, via the belief system linked to the spiritual importance of the Himalayan mountains, high-peaks and deep gorges, sacred valleys, streams, rivers, ponds and lakes, natural rocks, cliffs, caves and caverns, we find many places believed to be sites where the Pandava brothers had visited, walked through or sojourned for the purposes of pilgrimage or sometimes, for hiding. Such places have not only been recognised, named or venerated in memory of the Pandavas, but they have also been recognised and venerated as Hindu and Buddhist pilgrimage centres of high cultural value.

### **Ancient Cultural Geography**

Since the Mahabharata epic predates to the foundation of Nepal as a separate cultural, physical or political entity in the continent, all activities and places described in the main text of Mahabharata cannot be identified separately from the cultural geography of *Jumbudwipa*. The bordered territories of modern Nepal and India also used to be a part of this. However, keeping in mind that in order to understand the history and belief system of the region through the narrow view of the Eurocentric notion of 'modern nation and nationalism', we are bound to enlist each and every aspect of our past through the eyes of separate independent nations. This Eurocentric schooling, in reality, requires a concept of defining the descriptions of the great epics such as Mahabharata and Ramayana via looking through the modern border between Nepal and India. Unlike today though, during those times, the cultural continental understanding of ancient civilisation was inseparable and bound with the strong rope of spiritual and cultural values. In addition, physical geography also shaped the nature of this inseparable cultural reality between Nepal and northern India.

The main war of Mahabharata was fought in a place called Kurukshetra, which lies in today's northern India. However, the warriors and fighters came from various faraway places including today's Terai and Himalayan regions of Nepal. Similarly, several important war related incidents took place either during or after Kurukshetra's main war in numerous places of present day Nepal. The case of Kirata King Yalambar and killing of Kichchak (*Kichchakvada*), Pandava's secret stay in the palace of King Birata, are a few important examples of such places and incidents described in the text of Mahabharata.

### ***Theoretical Issues and Misunderstanding of the Borderless Cultural Linkages***

The Mahabharata and Nepal connection can be clearly observed via two perspectives: subjective and objective. The subjective perspective is guided by the spiritual belief system: deeply and actively working with the sites relating to the stories of Mahabharata and the later development under this belief system. All spiritual pilgrimage sites relating to the Mahabharata fall under this category whether they

are temples, caves, river confluences, mountains, lakes, ponds or natural water springs. Both tangible and intangible heritages linked with the Mahabharata or its characters must also be kept in this account. On the other hand, the objective perspective is guided by the evidential history associated with the archaeological remains and findings of the Mahabharata.

### ***Broader Cultural Geography of the Hindukush Himalaya and the Mahabharata Range***

In course of understanding the general scope of the Mahabharata circuit, the broader concept of the cultural geography of the Hindukush Himalaya and Mahabharata range is also equally important. Nepal shares a central and significant part of the Hindukush Himalaya, and holds the whole range of the Mahabharata. In addition, besides the above mentioned ranges, most of the southern Terai region is considered as an integral part of the Ancient Kingdom of Birata, the court where the Pandava brothers were believed to have lived incognito after gambling away their kingdom to their cousins known as Kaurava.

# *Mahabharata Circuit - Nepal*

Historicity of the Mahabharata and its Connection with Nepal

Author: Dr. Ramesh Dhungel, PhD | Contribution by Dr. Pabitra Khadka

### ***The Four Major Pilgrimage Centres of Nepal and their Linkages with the Mahabharata***

All four dhaamas of Nepal namely Pashupatksheetra, Rurukshetra, Muktikshetra and Barahakshetra are either directly or indirectly linked with the stories of Mahabharata.

### ***Other Locations include***

- Damodarkunda and Damodar Himal
- Karnali Region and Yakghloka, Pandava Gupha Jumla
- Dolakha (sky cave)
- Vyas Gupha, Tanahun
- Pandava Gupha, Bajura
- Pandava Gupha, Dailekh
- Gupteshwor Gupha Parbat, Kushma
- Dolakha Bhimsena Temple, Dolakha

- Panauti Indreshwor and Bhimsena Temple, Panauti, Kavre
- Akash Bhairav Temple, Kathmandu
- Krishna Mandir, Patan
- Bhimsena Temple, Dattatraya, Bhaktapur
- Sabha Pokhari Sankhuwasava, Arun Valley
- Bhimsena and Bhairav Temple, Chainpur, Sankhuwasabha
- Gupha Pokhari, Chainpur, Sankhuwasabha
- Shiv Dhara, Sankhuwasabha
- Hrisikesh, Gulmi
- Kashi: Dantakali, Dharan/Sunsari
- Pindeswor Mahadev, Dharan/Sunsari

While there are many locations considered of importance to the

## AIHOLE INSCRIPTION OF CHALUKYAN KING PULIKESIN II; SAKA-SAMVAT 556.

Archeological excavations have revealed many ancient places, and it is believed that some remains of the ancient city of North Panchala *Rajdhani* Ahichhetra can be found near Ramnagar village in Aonla *tehsil* of Bareilly District and South Panchala *Rajdhani* ancient Kampilya (District Farukhabad) too, both in Uttar Pradesh. Ancient texts give vivid descriptions about Kampilya the place of birth and *swayamvar* of *Maharani* Draupadi.

*Analysis by Prof. Maheshwari Prasad (retd), BHU, Dept of Ancient Indian History, Culture & Archaeology, Inscription Source: Epigraphic Indica, ASI.*



Mahabharata, it is believed that there are 16 Mahajanapadas in current day Bharat, India is linked to the tale of Kurukshetra War, the main ones being: Hastinapura (Merut), Indraprastha (Delhi), Kurukshetra (Haryana), Mathura (Uttar Pradesh), Dwarika (Gujrat), Panchal comprising of Kampilya and Ahichhetra (Uttar Pradesh), Gandhar (Afghanistan), Kashi (Uttar Pradesh) and Magadh (Bihar). Likewise, among the famous places mentioned in the Ramayana, Ayodhya (Uttar Pradesh), Mithila (Bihar), Lanka (Sri Lanka), Ashok Vatika (Sri Lanka) are commonly talked about. This text focuses on the 13 popular locations that are based in Bharat India.

The timeframe of the Mahabharata narrative is *Dwapaar Yug*, which identifies with the life and times of Sri Vasudeva Krishna. As per research conducted by Indain scholoros, of the astronomical data contained in the narration, it is believed that the Kurukshetra War, narrated in the text of Mahabharata, took place around 3067 BCE. The famous Aihole Inscription too gives almost similar date for this war described as “Dharma Yuddha”.

It is believed that some remains of Ahichhetra can be found near Ramnagar village in Aonla *tehsil* of Bareilly District, in Uttar Pradesh.

## *Dashupatshetra* (Mahespura)

Legend relating to Lord Krishna’s activity in the Kathmandu Valley Kirata, Gupta, Pala and Sena rulers’ activities relating to Mahabharata, Ramayana and other Hindu texts

Nepal or Kirata or Kinnara rulers [stories relaed to Bhimasen’s son Ghatotkacha (Ghatotkacha’s mother is a Mongol origin woman)]; Ghatotkacha’s son Valiraja and his son Yalungpa or Yalmva/ Yalamvar; and Akashabhairva and the first Kirata or *Nepa* ruler’s participation of presence in the Mahabharata war of circa 9<sup>th</sup> century BC have made Kathmandu Valley itself in a broad sense, an important place of Mahabharata pilgrimage site. The spiritual and philosophical connection between

the Akashabhairabha and Pandava brother Bhimasena or Bhindya needs to be understood properly in order to understand the concept of the Mahabharata spiritual circuit well.

The main Bhimasena and Krishna temples in Kathmandu Patan and Bhaktapur are all important centres and temples relating to the Mahabharata (*math-mandira* and *tirthas*) including Krishnamandir, Patan; Bhimasena Temple, Bhaktapur and Kathmandu; Panauti; Akashabhairabha.

Therefore they all have to be considered and categorically listed as Mahabharata connections. Even the Buddhist and Hindu *Gonpo*, *Mahakala* or *Mahankala-Bhairabha* and other esoteric or protecting deities such as *Samvaras*, *Vajra-Bhairabhas* etc., fall under the list of broad Mahabharata connections.

### **Legend relating to Lord Krishna's activity in the Kathmandu Valley**

An important legend is the pervasive belief and descriptions connected to the very emergence of human civilisation of the Great Valley of Nepal, Kathmandu Valley, which is credited to Lord Krishna, one of the principal actors of the Mahabharata. The prominent local literary sources of Nepal *Napalamahatmya*, *Pashupatipurana*, *Swasthanivratakatha*, considered to be the part of *Kedarakhanda* of *Skandapurana* and various genealogies and chronicles such as *Gopalarajavamsavali*, *Bhasavamsavalis*, *Devamalavamsavali*, categorically include this legend relating to Lord Krishna's activity in the valley and his repetitive fights with the demonic figure, Banasura. It is

believed that when the demon Banasura blocked the water drain of the great lake Nagahrada, Lord Krishna posed a successful encounter to drain the water out of the lake in order to lay the foundation of the early settlements of the valley and keep it safe for peaceful and prosperous living.

It is important to note that Lord Krishna is worshipped and venerated by founding temples and spiritual centres of Radha-Krishna and Krishna-Balarama in the Great Valley as well as in other parts of Nepal.

### **The Pandava brothers' repentance of their sins of killing their clan-brothers and the story of Pashupatinath and Kedarnath**

The Pandava brothers' repentance of their sins of killing their clan-brothers (*gotrahattya*), and the transformation of Lord *Shiva* or *Mahadeva* (Kedarnath) into the form of a bull or Pashupatinath is another legend related to the Mahabharata. According to this popular fable, the battle of Kurukshetra fought between the Pandava brothers and their cousins, Kaurava, was won by the Pandavas.

However, due to the piety, they felt as a result of the many killings during the battle including the loss of lives of their cousins and clan-brothers, the Pandavas took the decision to renounce their owned kingdom back to Kaurava and depart for the heavenly abode of gods and goddesses in the Himalayan region. They travelled across many mountains and river valleys in order to reach the sacred place of Kedarnath so they could beg for repentance of their sins. It is also believed that they were advised by Lord *Vishwanath* in Kashi to visit *Kedarnath* to receive fresh blessings from Mahadeva to repent for their sins.

However, as Lord *Shiva/Mahadeva* considered their sin to be an inexcusable crime, he took the decision to disappear changing his form into a bull. Nonetheless, after contemplation, Bhimasena, the third brother, was able to recognise the changed form of Mahadeva and thus went after the bull in haste: the Lord successfully managed to escape with his head with Bhima only holding part of the bull. This was a willing move from the Lord as he did not want to see the faces

of the sinners. Henceforth, the body of the bull is considered to be Lord Kedarnath, and the head of Kedar is considered to be Lord Pashupatinath of Kathmandu. In addition to this popular fabled belief system, there is also an intangible human tradition where official priests of Kedarnath bring sacred water in a special water-pot every year, and offer it with special rituals to Lord Pashupatinath. This tradition has been practised from age-old times or from the time of the Mahabharata itself, and is celebrated as a very serious spiritual common culture of the devout *Vedic-Sanatani* Hindus of the Himalayan region.

As it is believed that the Pandava brothers ultimately reached both Kedarnath in Uttaranchal, India, and *Paashupatapura*, commonly known as Pashupati-Devapattana in Nepal, both places have been venerated as Mahabharata pilgrimage sites.

## Rurukshetra (Ridhi)



The connection of Western Nepal's *Rurukshetra (Ridhi)* with the story of Rishiksha of India is an important tradition that is related to the description of the Mahabharata. An important spiritual tradition is one representing the deity Rishiksha with the statue of Krishna-Balarama as the main deity of the Temple of Rishiksha. It must be understood clearly that Rishiksha is believed to be the incarnation

(*awataara*) of Krishna-Balarama, a dominating character of the Mahabharata.

The *Rurukshetra* or *Ridhi* is located at the confluence of Krishna Gandaki and the Ridi Khola in Western Nepal - famous for the Vaishnava pilgrimage linked to the Mahabharata. Other cross references and explanations relating to the *Rurukshetra* can also be found throughout this article.



### **Broader Barahakshetra and the Kaushiki Region**

There are Historical and archaeological places relating to the stories of Mahabharata in the Kaushiki Valley (Koshi region) which include; Barahakshetra, Dharan/Vijaypur/Pindeshwor, Pindeshwor Temple, Vijaypur Dharan, Biratnagar and Jhapa.

Barahakshetra- There are Hindu, Kirata epics/belief system and archaeological objects with references of Mahabharata, Brahmapurana, Varahpurana, Skandapurana.

Dharan/Vijayapur/Pindeshwar- are considered sacred places of

Pandava and Kuvera/Yaksha explained in the Mahabharata. The area is an ancient capital of Kirata Kingdom described in the Mahabharata.

Biratnagar- the story of King Birata described in the Birata-parva of the Mahabharata including wars fought by Arjuna and the recovery of the cattle of the King of Virata - historical remains, Bhediari temples, ponds, palaces, stone-carved tools and household objects.

Jhapa - is also an area of importance with the belief that Arjundhara-Jaleshwar, Kichhkvadh are very important.



### 3a. Kichhakbadh, Jhapa

Kichhakbadh is a spiritual and archaeological site directly connected to the story discussed in the text of the Mahabharata. It is located about 10 kilometres away from Chandragadi, Jhapa. This is the place where the mighty Bhimasena had a fierce battle with Kichhaka, the Chief of Army of King Birata, and eventually killed him with a blow of his favoured weapon, *Gadha*. The fight took place in the palace of King Birata during the disguised shelter of the Pandavas. The Mahabharata Virata-Parva includes a clear discussion of this incident originally caused by Kichhaka's misbehaviour with Draupadi, the wife of the Pandava



brothers. The ruins of ancient monuments with foundations and archaeological artifacts can still be seen at the site of Kichhakbadh. A comparatively recent statue of the killing of Kichchaka by Bhimasena also stands as one of the attractions.

### 3b. Arjundhara Dhaam, Jhapa

*Arjunpokhari* or *Arjundhara* has been turned into a common pilgrimage centre for the *Vedic-Sanatanis*. Whilst it consists of a prominent and attractive temple of Lord *Shiva*, the key Mahabharata spiritual centre is the main water pond and waterspout located in the site. The historic pond has been rebuilt and maintained changing the old or natural shape of the

pond: it is identified as the source of water where Arjuna, one of the Pandava brothers, used his *parjanyastra* to spew out water from the earth in order to save the hundreds of thousands of cattle from King Birata's palace who were seized by the *Kauravas'* army following a brutal attack.

The Mahabharata includes a description of the Pandavas' disguised shelter in King Birata's palace and the attack of the *Kaurava* army against his kingdom during their disguised stay (*guptavasa*). Whilst the Arjundhara Dhaam has been rebuilt in a modern manner, the natural water-source, pond and spout have been well preserved. In addition, the ancient Mahabharata site holds newly-found statues of Arjuna and the cattle.

Besides the abovementioned Mahabharata pilgrimage centres of the *Kaushiki* region of Eastern Nepal, *Krishna-Thumka* near Kakarvitta, *Satasi Dhaam* in Jhiljhile, Jhapa, and Pandabpur in Jhapa are also equally important pilgrimage centres related to the Mahabharata.

### 3c. Bhediyari and King Birata's Palace in Morang

*Bhediyari* is the spiritual and archaeological site of the ancient palace of King Birata, the location of the disguised shelter of the Pandavas, commonly known as *Guptavasa*. The Mahabharata Virata-Parva includes a discussion of their stay in the palace disguised as helpers and entertainers. Via chance and surface findings and trial trench excavations conducted through the Department of Archaeology, Government of Nepal, many archaeological objects and evidences have been found, identified and recorded from this ancient site of the Mahabharata period including: remains of water ponds, building structures, ancient bricks, historic wells, precious stones, *Shivalingas*, historic coins, different kinds of terracotta objects, ancient measurement objects, temple ruins, inscriptions, etc.

### 3d. Varahakshetra and the Great Pilgrimage of the Pandavas' in and around the areas of the Kaushiki (Koshi) River Valley Civilisation

There is a pervasive belief that the Pandava brothers went for a trans-



Himalayan pilgrimage up to the *Yakshdesha*, also known popularly as the Kailasha-Manasarovara region or *Swarga* (ultimate abode of the *Kailashapati* Mahadeva and other gods and goddesses). The question relating to the connection between the Panchapandavas' activities in the Kaushiki River Valley civilisation areas and the Terai of Eastern Nepal is very important for the tracing of the spiritual circuit concerning the Mahabharata.

The Kaushiki River Valley region of Nepal used to be known as one of the most significant peaceful and

popular areas for high meditation (*tapobhumi*) for sages, scholars, yogis and hermits during and prior to the battle of the Mahabharata. The name Koshi or *Kaushiki* itself has connection with the name of Rishi Kushika, whose hermitage is said to be located at the confluence of River Koshi and its tributary. Both the great epics Mahabharata and Ramayana describe the importance of *Varahakshetra* and the *Kokaa-Saptakoshi* confluence as the favoured place for peaceful meditation and hermitage. The Mahabharata *Adi Parva* clearly mentions Sage Vishwamitra's *Ashrama* (72-30) located at the bank of the River *Saptakoshi* near *Varahakshetra*. According to Valmikiya Ramayana, *Rishi* Vashishtha, *Rishi* Vishwmitra also had his hermitage in this spiritual place. It is believed that *Rishi* Ritik's wife and *Rishi* Vishwamitr's sister Satyawati had taken the form of the River Saptakoshi after their untimely deaths. Thus, *Rishi* Vishwamitra took the decision to settle at the bank of the Saptakoshi in loving memory of his sister. It is also possible that *Rishi* Ritik's had his hermitage in the same area.

### 3e. *Adilinga and Pindeshwar Dhama, Dharan in the Kaushiki Valley*

The *Himawatkhanda Purana* describes the presence of Adilinga near the bank of the River Saptakoshi where during the Pandavas' activities in and around the Koshi region or on the way to the Himalayas, Tibet and the *Yakshadesha*, they repeatedly visited, prayed and worshipped the *Adilinga*. The *Adilinga's* name became popular as Pandaveshwora slowly changed into Pindeshwor.

Kaushiki River Valley was amongst the great spiritual pilgrimage routes connecting the Trans-Himalayan part of *Bhotadesha* (Tibet) with the intention of pilgrimage to Kailasha-Manasarovara. The Terai or plain part of the Kaushiki region was one of the highly referred areas of the Mahabharata era. In context of the current political map of Nepal, Mahabharata activities took place in the districts of Morang, Jhapa and Sunsari. The Kaushiki region has also been identified as the area where Bhimasena, the second Pandava brother, fought many fights defeating enemies. The importance and glorification of the Kaushiki



region appears in the *Raghuvamsha* of leading Sanskrit Poet Kalidasa where the River *Sapta-Kaushiki* is identified as *Mahakoshi* and as one of the principal abodes of Lord Shiva. This place has now been identified with the Adilinga or Pindeshwor Dhaama in Dharan, Sunsari.

### 3f. *The Mahabharata and Vishnupaduka of the Saptakoshi and Kokaakoshi confluence in Varahakshetra (Kokaamukh Varahakshetra) in the Kaushiki Valley*

The Mahabharata consists of a clear description of the spiritual

importance of the confluence of the Kokaakoshi and Saptakoshi Rivers (Mahabharata 3/84-158). Special spiritual and cultural importance of the *Vishnupaduka* and the Saptakoshi-Kokaakoshi confluence has been discussed in the Mahabharata and in different *Puranas* including *Varahapurana* (140/1-100), *Brahmapurana* (119/1-140) and *Padmapurana*, *Himavatkhanda of Skandapurana* (all the verses of chapter 34-35). This spiritual destination has been described as the ultimate destination for offering *sharaddha* to deceased ancestors. According to a story discussed in the *Varahapurana*, Lord Vishnu paid a visit to the site to offer *tarpana-shraddha* to deceased ancestors who were not being able to get salvation and thus, opened the path to heaven for them.

It seems that the Pandava brothers while on their way to the Himalayas, *Bhotadesha* and *Yakshadesha* and, upon completion of their victorious and diverse activities in the plain areas and foothills of the Saptakaushiki region, travelled through the Upper Arun and Varun Valleys as well as

many other sacred and beautiful mountain valleys and passes of Nepal. During their journey through the Kaushiki River Valley, they crossed several hills, gorges, jungles, lakes, ponds, settlements and caves in the local areas of the *Kirata* people. Simultaneously, they also visited important pilgrimage centres including Vishnupaduka, Kokah, Varahkshetra, Pindeshwor, Tumling-Mankamanaa, Siddhikalika-Chenpori (Chainpur), Guphapokhari, Sabhapokhari, Shivadhara (of Varun Valley), etc.

#### ***Muktikshetra and the Gandaki Valley Civilisation***

Sacred rivers that originated in the Himalayan regions of Nepal or the Trans-Himalayan parts of the Himalayan region cannot be separated from the notion of the cultural geography of the Mahabharata. It is clear that in most cases, the River Valley civilisation system of the *Kaushiki* (Koshi), Gandaki and Karnali starts from the Trans-Himalayan parts of Nepal and Tibet. Nonetheless, please note that at least through the explanation of hydrological sciences, the sources of many of these river tributaries have been traced to be the glacier

lakes and snowy peaks of the Himalayan region.

The reality is that most of the sacred rivers venerated and worshipped by the *Vedic-Sanatani*'s (Hindus) and the Himalayan people have been the source of spiritual pilgrimage in the region. All the major confluences of these sacred rivers have been important *tirthas* linked either with the descriptions discussed in the epics of Mahabharata and Ramayana, or in various *Puranas* and *Mahatmyas* composed at least around half a millennium to a few millennium years ago. Besides the significant places of spiritual, historical and archaeological importance in the Kaushiki region or in the region of the *Vaisnava* God *Varaha* linked with the Mahabharata, various spiritual centres located in and around the Gandaki or Narayani River Valley civilisation regions are also of equal importance.

The Muktikshetra spiritual region has been very broadly recognised as one of the heavenly abodes of Lord Vishnu/Narayana or Krishna-Damodara. The principal sources of River Krishna Gandaki

is *Damodar Kunda* and Damodar *Himal* (ponds of spiritual or divine water) in the Upper-Eastside of Mustang District. These areas have been identified with the other popular name of Lord Krishna. The source stream and mountain range around *Damodar Kunda* have been identified as the source of the God Shaligrama, a divine stone-form of Lord Vishnu. Subsequently, this is the main reason behind River Krishna Gandaki popularly being known as Shaligrama, the river of Shaligrama, or the river of sacred/divinely purified water. Likewise, another name for River Gandaki, Narayani, is also related to the *Vaisnava* or *Bhagavat Dharma* described in the *Bhagavata-Purana* and this also has a direct link to Lord Krishna and his brother Balarama.

The Temple of *Muktinath/Lokapala* or for Buddhists, *Aryavaloketeshvara* (Phagpa Chenreshig in Tibetan) is the principal spiritual centre in the *Muktikshetra*. The *Damodara Kunda* and River Krishna Gandaki, as well as each and every confluence linked with this sacred river, have been venerated as significant



pilgrimage sites. The entire region between Devghat, Chitwan in the south and the destination of *Damodar Kunda* or *Damodar Himal* in Mustang via *Rurukshetra* - *Ridhi Dhaam*, Myagdibeni in Myagdi district, Modibeni in Parvat, Kagbeni, Muktinath Temple, and the natural springs of flamed-water (known as *Jwala* in Sanskrit, and *Chulamevar* in local Lo dialect or in Tibetan) in Mustang district, are all important pilgrimage places of the *Muktikshetra* (the place of ultimate salvation).

The trail connecting western Tibet through the river valleys of lower and upper Kali Gandaki have also been believed to be the route traversed by the Pandavas on their way to western Tibet and the *Kailasha-Manasarovara* region. It is believed that they travelled through all the tirthas of this river valley including Devaghata, Ridi, Modibeni, Myagdibeni, Galeshwordham, Kagbeni and Muktinath.

The principal deities of the Western Himalayas known as *Badrinath-Kedarnath* in the Uttaranchal Himalayas, and as *Muktinath* in

the Nepal Himalayas, are also connected by a unique historical and cultural relationship. This entire Himalayan region including the *Guge-Purang* or *Taklakot-Taglakhar* (pilgrimage centre of *Khojanath* region), and *Kailash-Manasarovara* areas of both the cis-Himalayan and Trans-Himalayan regions were an integral part of the *Khasa-Yatse* rulers of Nepal. The *Khasa* rulers and their successors, the Kings of Jumla, venerated both deities, *Badrinath* and *Muktinath*, as their main tutelary deities. These rulers were common leaders of the whole Trans-Himalayan Kingdom of *Yatse* (the *Khasadesha*), which included the entire area of Kumaun Garhwal and The Ngari of Western Tibet. Moreover, the *Khasa* rulers used to go on pilgrimage in the *Tapovan* area of *Badrinath*, and in some cases, went to spend the final days of their life there. They were keen to patronise the spiritual centres of this entire Himalayan region, and even the *Khasa* rulers' Royal orders included an invocation with the names of both *Badrinath* and *Muktinath* - "Sri Badarinatho Jayati! Sri Muktinatha Sahayah!" Likewise, King *Krachalla* and *Ashokachalla* of

the *Khasa-Yatse Nagaraja* Dynasty had installed their statues in several important temples of the Western Himalayas including at *Badrinath* and at *Gopeshoar* in Garhwal. A gold-plated bronze statue of King *Asokachalla* with his queen has been kept safely inside the small repository in *Badrinath* Temple, which was identified by the author of this section several years ago during a field visit.

The *Yatse-Khasa* rulers were also known in Sanskrit as *Yaksha* rulers, and their kingdom was known as *Yakshaloka* or *Yaksadesa*. The *Swargarohana-Parva* and the stories related to the difficult spiritual journey undertaken by the Pandavas' in order to return to *swarga* (heaven) has been described at times as the journey carried out through the Karnali River Valleys, and the *Yakshadesha* or *Yakshaloka*, *Gurla*, and *Mandhata* mountain areas in the Western Himalayas.

It is of importance that the connection of the story between *Badrinath*, *Rong-yul* or *Mana* Village, and the destination of *Basudhara* in reference to the trail of the Pandava brothers is also

connected with the popular trail of the *Rurukshetra* in *Ridhi-dhaam* via the *Surakshetra/Kankrevihara* area (present day *Surkhet*), Upper Karnali Valley of Nepal, via *Darchula*, *Khocher* (*Khojarnath* in Nepali), and via *Taglakot* or *Purang*.

*Bhishma-Parva* of the *Mahabharata* describes the *Huna* invaders connection in the northeastern Himalayan region and the fight fought with the local rulers. It is interesting that the *Hunas'* were also known as *Sogpo ar Horpo* in Tibetan. An abundance of evidence was found to describe the recurrent wars fought between the *Yatsepa-Khasa* rulers and the *Sogpo-Horpo* invaders, who used to travel through the Himalayas for trade, regional subjugation and even for looting. Later, these invaders were also commonly known as the *Tartars*.

### ***Spiritual and Archaeological Sites related to the Mahabharata***

Places of spiritual pilgrimage must also be listed as historical, archaeological, and tangible and intangible heritage places.

## *Siddhikalika, Waleshwar-Prakasheshwar,* Sankhuwasabha, Chainpur

*Siddhakalika Peeth of Sankhuwasabha, Chainpur and the story of Dashadikpala's visit*

In *Swasthani vratakatha* of the *Skandhapurana* tells the story relating to the visit of *Dashadikpala* in this pilgrimage centre. Among the *dikpalas* *Udhishthria* and *Dhrishtra* are listed among the *dikpalas*.

Explained in the *Swasthani vratakatha* of *Skandapurana* and important in this context is the historical *Bhimsenasthana* that was venerated and worshipped in its natural form in Chainpur, and two other *Bhimsena* temples that were founded and worshipped especially by the local *Shrestha* and *Mumiukasha-Shrestha* trading communities. The belief system and the practice of keeping statues or paintings of *Yudhishtira*, *Yaksha-Kuvera* etc. as guardians or protectors of different directions (*dikpala*) have also been clearly connected with the traditional influence of the story of the *Mahabharata*.

### **Some locations also include:**

- Hidden valleys (beyuls Himalayan language) and the *Pandava-nhe* (pilgrimage centre) in the *Chukchuwa Valley*, and *Shivadhara* in *Varun Valley*, *Sankhuwasabha*
- *Guphapokhari*, *Sankhuwasabha Chainpur Municipality*, where several ancient caves are still seen. Around this area big stones are clearly seen and believed to be thrown by *Bhimsena*, one of the main characters of the *Mahabhartha*
- *Sabhapokhari Sankhuwasabha* where it is believed the *Pandavas* had attended the divine *sabha*.
- Three *Bhimsensthana* centres/ temples in Chainpur: 1) *Natural Bhimsensthana, Okharbote Dangigaun*, 2) *Bhimsen Temple of Pallo Tol Chainpur* and 3) *Bhimsen Temple and Pillar Statue (Sthambha)*.



- *Bhimsena Temple of Dolakha* and *Bhemeshwar Dhaam* – besides the centres mentioned

above following important historical and natural *Mahabharata* spiritual places are



*Pandava-gupha Jumla*

- Panauti (story relating to Gautam Rishi and Ahilya etc.)
- Shamvalha and Sangrilha/ Aakash-Gupha (sky caves), Dolakha,
- Vyasa-gupha Tanahum (stories relating to Vyasa composing Veda and Mahabharata in Nepal)
- Pandava-gupha Jumla
- Pandava-gupha Bajura
- Pandava-gupha Dailekh
- Gupteshwar-gupha, Parvat, Kushma (natural statue of the Pandavas)

...

also equally important and they should be considered as other important sites:

### *Swargadwari Ashram* Supported by Dr. Pabitra Khadka

Pyuthan's headquarters is 26 kilometres from Khalanga. The Swargadwari Ashram is located on a hill at a height of about 2,122 metres (6,960 ft) in West Swargadwari. *Yajna* has been going on here continuously for 100 years now. There is a pagoda style temple of Lord Shiva.

Swargadwari *Mahaprabhu* built this shrine. There is a cave some distance to the south-east of it. There is *Havankunda* with the idols of *Panchayan deities* (Goddess, Ganesh, Surya, Vishnu, and Shiva) for the purpose of the *yajna*.

There are nine temples with nine passes can be seen from outside.

There is a main bigger pond in the middle of the shrine. There are four other ponds in *Vidisha*, a temple of *Panchayan deity* in four directions. The temple is in the main pond, which is in the middle. The *ashram* has *Yajnashala*, the palace of Swargadwari *Mahaprabhu's Samadhi*, *Gurukul*, *Gaushala*, *Shivalaya*, *Rakhal Maharaja's Samadhi Mandir*, *Mahaprabhu's Tapasthali* Baz tree,

*Siddhasthan* are just located above the *ashram*.

#### **Classical significance**

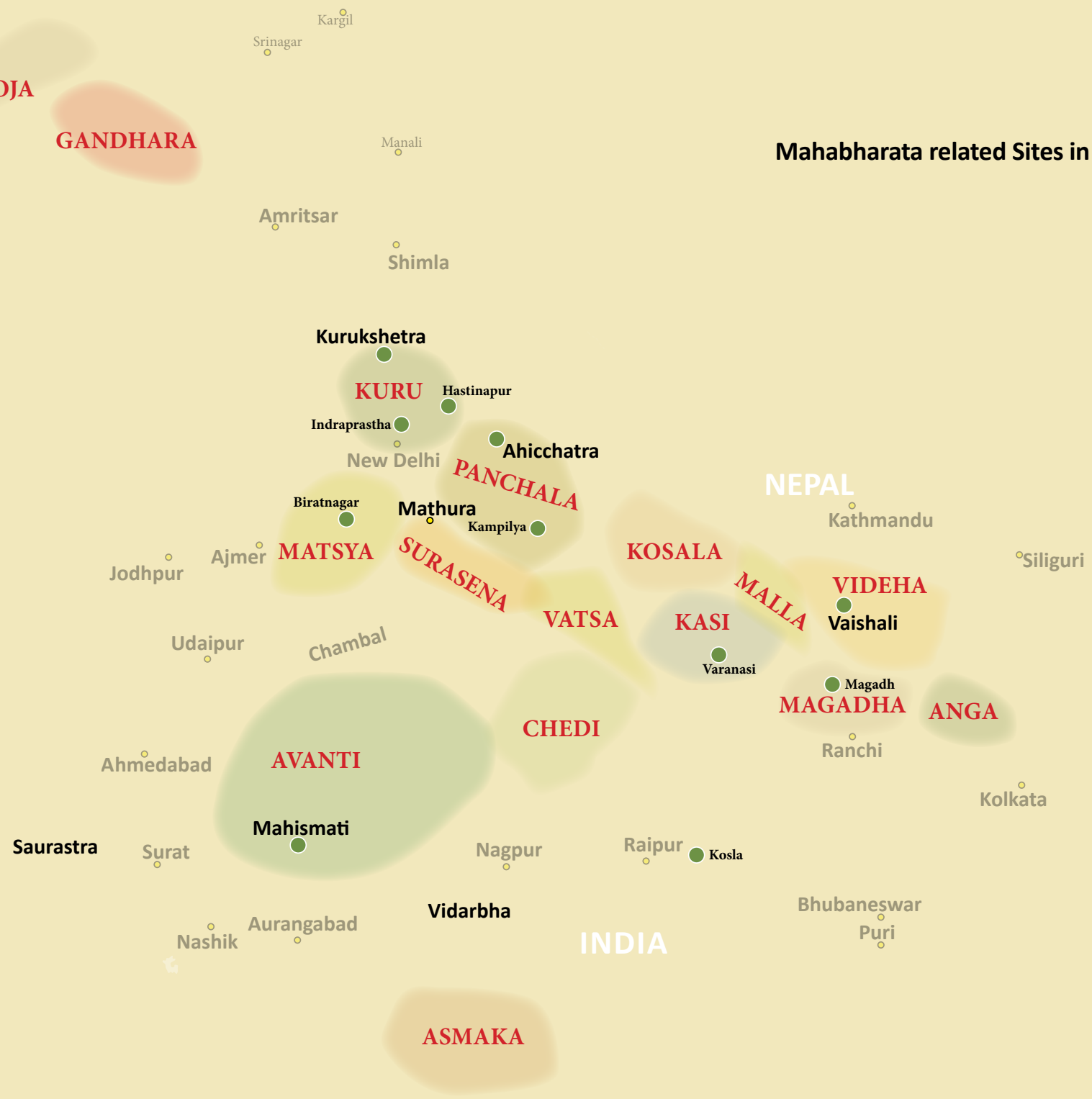
There is a legend that this place is called Swargadwari, since the sages lived in this place in ancient times and went to heaven. There is a belief that the five Pandavas performed *yajna* there and started their spiritual march towards *Sworgalok* through the Himalayas.

#### **Panchadeval of the Pandavas**

The Deval is located at the Dasharathchanda municipality ward no. 1 in the middle of Dewalhat village, Baitadi. There are idols of *Shivalinga* and *Sahasralinga* in the deval and *Shivakunda* is just near by the Panchadeval.

Some believe that the Pandavas built this Panchadeval in one night during their *Banabasa*. While building a wall, only half of it was built due to light. Even though it is called *Panchadeval*, all together seven *devals* are in existence today. There are separate temples for Kunti and Draupadi.

# Mahabharata related Sites in India



Author: Ms. Neera Misra

## Ahichchhatra (of Panchala Mahajanapada)

**Location** - Latitude: 28.3704 & Longitude: 79.1365 of excavated region.

### Significance/ Itihasa – Important Events

It is the capital of Guru Dronacharya's Kingdom of North Panchala Janapada. It is believed that Guru Dronacharya defeated King Drupada of Panchala Mahajanapada with the help of his pupils, the five Pandava brothers Yudhishthira, Bhima, Arjuna, Nakula and Sahadeva. As the belief goes, Guru Dronacharya and King Drupada were friends. But during a time of need when Dronacharya went to his childhood friend Drupada to request for a cow to help his son, he was belittled and denied. Deeply hurt and angry, Guru Dronacharya finds a way forward. He becomes the Guru of the Princes of Kuru Kingdom.

He trains the boys and asks them to give his Guru-Dakshina by bringing him King Drupada. As the tale unfolds, the Pandava

brothers defeat King Drupada and a victorious Guru Dronacharya wins the whole Panchala Kingdom. In fairness, he divides Panchala and returns the southern half to Drupada, which was the area that had Kampilya as its capital.

Additionally, as per local belief, the spirit of Ashwathama, son of Guru Dronacharya still haunts this area. He was said to have been cursed as a punishment by Devi Draupadi after he killed her sons.

### Places of Interest

- Alakhnath Temple
- Bala Temple Bareilly
- Gauri Shankar Mandir
- Tulsi Matth

### Connectivity : Road, Rail, Air

**Air:** Ahichhatra is 60 Km from Satellite Bus Station Bareilly. It is about 200 Km from Indira Gandhi International Airport, New Delhi (Indraprastha).

**Road:** Public bus/Taxies/Autos are available to reach there.

**By train:** The Bareilly Junction is the major Railway centre with the

other being Reoti Bahoda Kheda Railway Station.



Gupta period terracotta Yamuna (above), pair to the Ganga (left)

Gupta terracotta of the personified Ganges, 5th-6th century CE, National Museum, New Delhi.

## Baghpat (part of Kuru Kingdom)

**Location** - Latitude 28.9509 & Longitude 77.2712 of excavated site.

**Ancient Boundaries** – It was a part of the *Kuru Mahajanapada* region of northern India. It was located near Hastinapur.

**Current Boundaries** – Baghpat is located in western Uttar Pradesh, on the east bank of the Yamuna river. It is 40 kilometres (25 mi) northeast of Delhi and 52 kilometres (32 mi) west of Meerut, on the main Delhi–Saharanpur highway.

### Significance/ Itihasa – Important Events

It is believed that this is one of the five regions that Sri Krishna had demanded from Kuru King on behalf of the Pandavas, to avert the war. This place is also known for the **Laksha Griha**, the house of lacs. It is said that this is where Duryodhana and Shakuni build a holiday resort for the Pandava brothers to celebrate the announcement of Yudhisthira as the Yuvaraja of Kuru Mahajanapada.

It is believed that Duryodhana and his uncle Shakuni built it to kill the Pandava brothers. The ‘house of lacs’ was set on fire by their agent but with the wisdom of Vidur, the Pandavas could escape alive through a tunnel, and safely they reached the land of Panchala Mahajanapada.

### Places of Interest

- Gorakhnath Temple
- Gita Vatika
- Vishnu *Mandir*,
- Baba Mahendra Nath,
- Trilok Teerth Dham

### Connectivity - Road, Rail, Air

**Air:** The nearest airport is the Indira Gandhi International Airport in New Delhi, at a distance of 43 km.

**Train:** The nearest Railway station is at Sonipat which is located at a distance of 32kms.

**Road:** National and State highways connect Baghpat via Meerut, Nearest Bus Stand- Baghpat -Meerut Road.

### Baghpat



## *Dwarka* (the Land of Sursena mahajanapada, ancestors of Sri Krishna)

**Location** - Geographical coordinates - 22.23°N 68.97°E of excavated sites.

**Ancient Boundaries** – The area around Gujarat has been the traditional land of the Yadavas, or Yadus. It is believed to have extended upto Okhamadhi in the south and Pinda Taraka. Its area falls in Jamnagar of Gujrat in the Gulf of Kutch.

**Current Boundaries** – The modern city of Dwarka is located in the Jamnagar District of Gujarat, about three hours drive by road. The city lies in the western most part of India, situated at the mouth of the Gulf of Kutch.

### ***Significance/Itihasa- Important Events***

The Dwarka Kingdom is described in the *Bhagavata Purana* as the ancient kingdom of Krishna, and was the first capital of Gujrat. The main festival of Janmashtami is celebrated in *Bhadrapada* (August-September). The city's name literally means gateway. Dwarka has also been referred



### Devbhumi Dwarka



to throughout its history as “Mokshapuri”, “Dwarkamati” and “Dwarkavati”.

The city’s *Dwarkadhish* Temple dedicated to Krishna was originally built around 2,500 years ago, but was rebuilt in 16<sup>th</sup> century. The temple is believed to be one of the four *peethas* (Sanskrit: ‘religious centre’) established by Adi Shankaracharya.

Important locations in Dwarka include Rukmini Devi Temple,

Gomti Ghat and Bet Dwarka. There is also a lighthouse at the land end point of Dwarka.

Dwarka is important for a number of reasons:

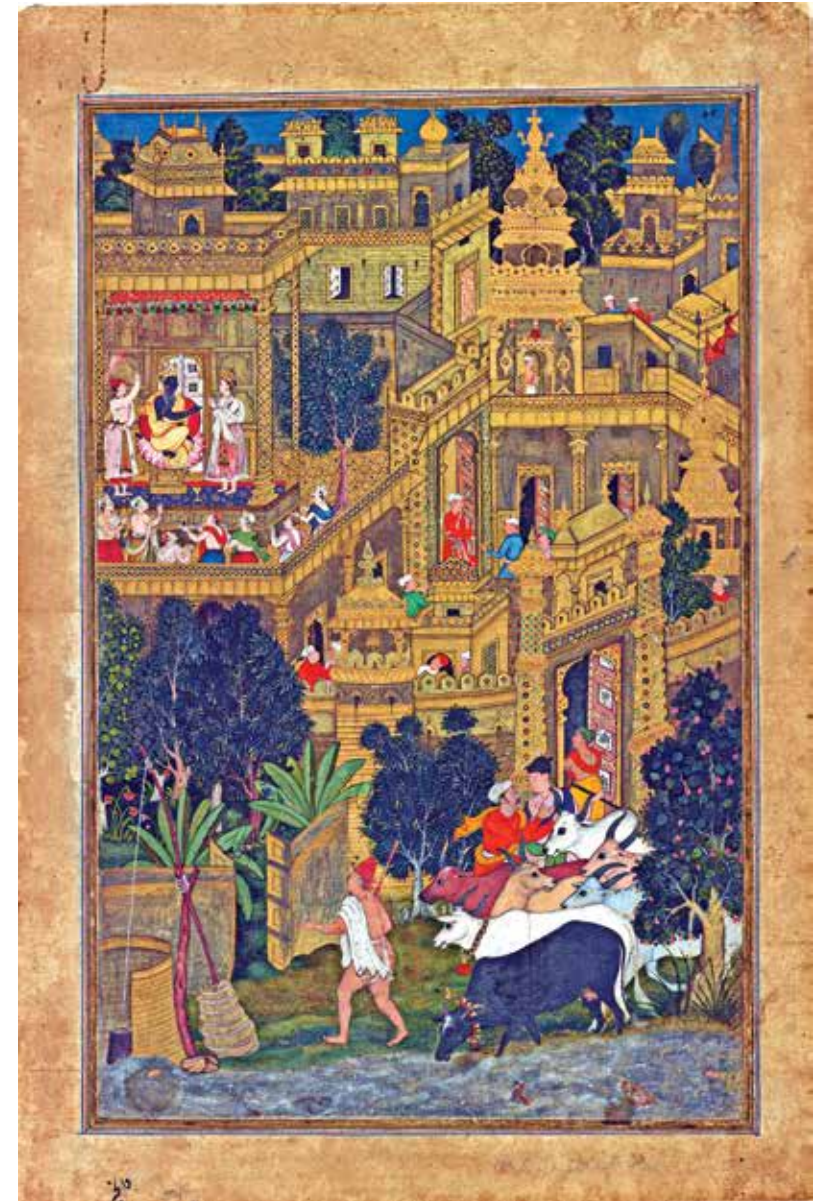
As per the Mahabharata, Sri Krishna and his brother Balarama came from Mathura, to avoid constant conflicts with their cousin Jarasand and had to have re-believed-established the ancient city Dwarka in Gujrat. It is also believed that Princes Rukmini was married to Sri Krishna here.

#### **Other important events that are believed to have taken place here are:**

- Sri Krishna went from here to Hastinapura, as an Envoy of Peace on behalf of the Pandava brothers.
- Arjuna and Duryodhana came to Dwarka to seek Krishna’s support for the war.
- Arjuna and Drapadi visit Dwarka to meet Sri Krishna. They are believed to have stopped at Tarnatar, near Rajkot. An annual festival takes place here where young people try and find their life partners.

#### **Places of Interest**

- Rukmini Devi Temple, Bet Dwarka
- *Dwarkadhish* Temple, Gomati Ghat, Gopi Talav, Dwarka Beach.
- Nageshwar Temple 15 km from main city is one of the 12 *Jyotirlingas*.



*A painting depicting Krishna’s Dwarka, made during Akbar’s reign, from the Smithsonian Institution. (Source: Wikipedia)*





- Harsiddhimata Temple established by King Vikramaditya.
- *Prachin* Dwarka.
- Madhavpur Gher is the place where Rukmini and Krishna got married and has regular celebrations.
- Balka Tirtha is one of the most sacred places as this is where Sri Krishna was struck by a poisonous arrow of a hunter, and left his mortal remains. This place is near Somanth Temple.

**Connectivity - Road, Rail, Air**

**Air:** Jamnagar airport which lies at a distance of 127 km from Dwarka and Porbandar Airport (PBD) that is at a distance of 98 kms from Dwarka.

**Train:** Dwarka has its own rail head which is well-connected with all the major cities of the country.

**Road:** Dwarka is well-connected with the major cities of Gujarat and other cities of the country through national and state highways.

*Krishna Rukmani temple*

## Hastinapur (capital of Kuru Mahajanapada/Kingdom)

**Location** - Latitude 29 degree 09'31.50 degree, Longitude 77 degree 59'19.46" east of excavated site.

**Ancient Boundaries** - The Whole Kuru area originally was Modern Thanesar, Delhi & entire Ganga-Yamuna Doab till Prayaag. The main rivers were Aruna, Ashumati, Hiranvati, Apaya, Kausiki, Sarasvati, Jamuna, Ganga and Drishadvati or Rakshi.

**Current Boundaries** - it is a small town in the Doab region of Uttar Pradesh, around 37 km from Meerut, 100 km from Delhi (*Indraprastha*).

### **Significance/ Itihasa- Important events**

**Kuru Mahajanpada** – Hastinapura, the capital of Kurus is in close proximity to places like Sukratal, Lakshgriya area of Baghpat. Recently in Sanauli which falls in Kuru Mahajanapada area, archaeologists have discovered a copper plated wooden chariot, weapons and the skeleton of a female warrior.

Some of the major events unfolded here that resulted in, what we

know as the *Dharam Yudh* or the *Kurukshetra War*.

It is a place believed to be from where Bharat Kings ruled their empire. This was the land of the Bharatvansh, that clearly laid out the principles that Yuvraj or heir to Kuru throne should be chosen on basis of (a) seniority (b) suitability and (c) capability.

### **Birth of Ganga Putra, Bhisma:**

King Shantanu meets Ganga, the daughter of the Ganga region of Himalayas. He is believed to have proposed for marriage, and she agrees on condition that he will never question her actions. King Shantanu agrees. However, after marriage he is shocked when he sees her drowning their children. King Shantanu finally breaks his silence and questions her when she is taking their eighth child to his death. He stops her from killing his son. It is believed that as per their agreement before marriage she leaves him as he questions her. She takes along the son with the promise that she will bring him back after she has nurtured him into a warrior prince,

befitting the status of Bharatvansh.

Ganga brings back their grown son, to be with his father Shantanu. He is named Devavrata, who impresses all with his prowess. King Shantanu, in consultation with his Ministers and *Sabha Guru*, designates him as *Yuvraja*, with much joy and fanfare.

### **King Shantanu marries second wife, Satyavati, leading to turmoil in Kingship ascendancy:**

It is believed that King Shantanu also falls in love with the daughter of a Fisherman. He proposes marriage but her father insists that Satyavati's sons should be made heirs to Kuru kingdom of Bharatvansh. Shantanu is in dilemma and deep depression. *Yuvraja* Devavrata learns about the dilemma of his father. Devavrata then takes a vow, a *Bhishma Pratigya* of celibacy, to remain unmarried and be loyal to and protect the throne of Hastinapura. This *Pratigya* gives him the immortalized name '*Bhisma*'.

Shantanu and Satyavati have two sons, Chitrangada and Vichitravirya. Chitrangada dies in

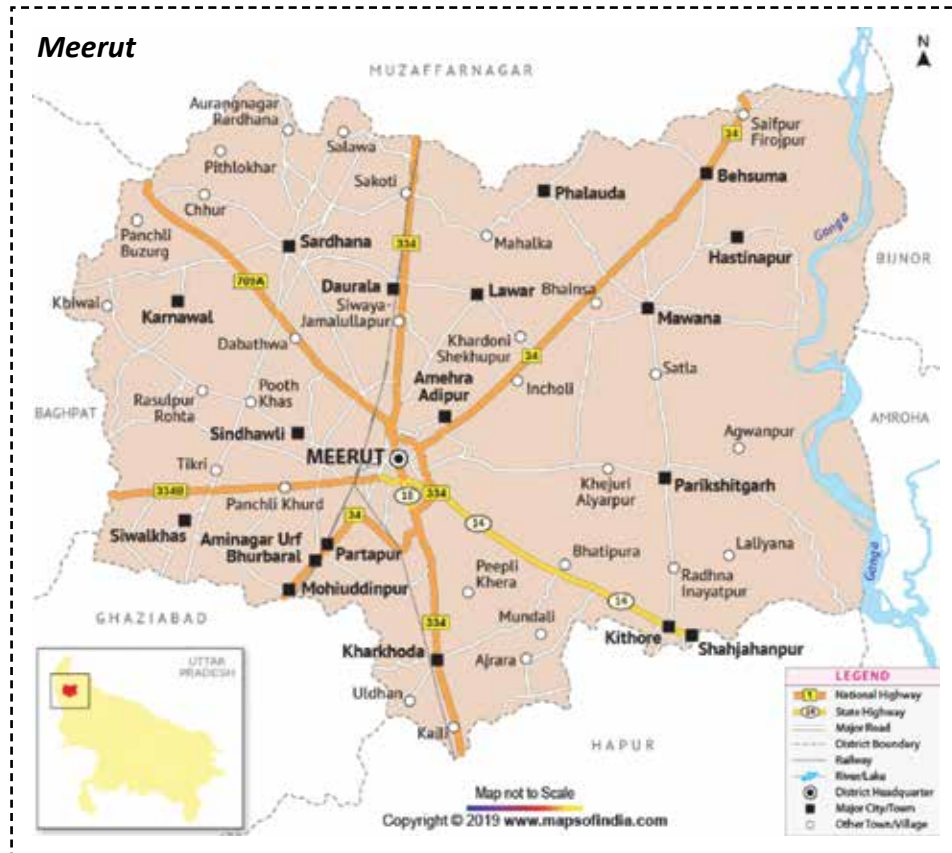
a battle and Vichitravirya becomes the king of Kuru Kingdom.

### **Bhishma rushes to Kashi to bring wives for his step brother**

**Vichitravirya:** Bhisma is angry that Satyavati's son Vichitravirya, was not invited at Swayamvara of Kashi King's daughters- Amba, Ambika and Ambalika. It is believed that he abducts the daughters from Swayamvara ceremony and brings them to be the wife of his step brother Vichitravirya.

Amba, the eldest of King Kashi's three daughters, informs Bhisma that she has already chosen Shailya King as her husband. So she returns to Shailya, but the King refuses to accept an abducted Princess. Upon refusal of the King, Amba returns to Bhisma and want him to marry her. Once again she is refused as he has vowed celibacy. Out of anger Amba curses him with revenge. She is believed to have been reborn as Shikhandi and becomes the cause of his death at the battlefield of Kurukshetra

Ambika and Ambalika were married to Vichitravirya, but he dies childless. Due to this Satyavati



*Jain Jambu Dweep Hastinapur*

asks Bhishma to help get heirs from the widows of Vichitravirya. Once again he declines to break his vow.

Satyawati then asks Bhishma to call Ved Vyasa. He was Satyawati's premarital son from Rishi Parashar. Ambika and Ambalika's union with Vyasa gives birth to two sons, Dhritrashtra and Pandu.

Dhritrashtra was denied Kingship as he was born blind. Pandu becomes King. Dhritrashtra marries Princess Gandhari and has 100 sons, the most known being Duryodhana and Dushashana. Pandu marries Kunti from whom Yudhishtira, Bheema and Arjuna are born, and through Pandu's second wife, Madri, princess of Madra *desh*, Nakula and Shadeva are born. Thus we get famous the 'five Pandavas'.

It is said that Kuru King Pandu dies early, and Dhritrashtra becomes a 'caretaker' King.

As the belief goes, Duryodhana feels he should be *Yuvraja* but there is a competition instead. A competition to assess capability of Yudhishtira and Duryodhana. Yudhishtira wins.

Duryodhana, with his uncle Shakuni, plans the '*Lakshgriha*'; where he burns the palace with Pandava brothers and their mother Kunti. However, Pandavas escape with hidden help of uncle Vidur, reach Panchala.

It is said that Panchala is where they marry Draupadi. The Pandavas gain much strength by their alliance with Panchala



*Mission Failure, Pattachitra, Orissa, Traditional folk, source- Krishna The Enlightened One*

Kingdom. This frightens Dritrashtra as he foresees the end of his son Durodhana by Pandavas.

In order to circumvent this, Dritrashtra invites Yudhishtira and offers him half of Kuru land, comprising five areas including Khandavprastha on Yamuna Banks, others being Tilprastha, Baghprastha, Panprastha and Sonprastha. The Pandavas create their own Kingdom with help of Sri Krishna – naming it Indraprastha.

Duryodhana returns from coronation ceremony of Yudhishtira at Indraprastha. And he wants it for himself. He poisons his father with imaginative tales against Draupadi and Pandavas, and convinces him to invite Yudhishtira to Hastinapura for a game of ‘Dice.’ The Pandavas loses due deceit by Sakuni. And so, Yudhishtira loses Indraprastha, his bothers and Draupadi. They are exiled to a 12 year *Varvaas* and one-year *Agyatvaas*.

When the Pandavas return from their exile and ask for their Kingdom. Duryodhana refuses

to return it. It is said that Sri Krishna comes to Hastinapura as an Envoy of Peace of Pandavas. The terms were clear, either return Indraprastha as per the terms of exile, or war.

Pandavaas with Sri Krishna as their Strategist and Guide, win the Kurukshetra *Dharm War* and Yudhishtira returns as King of Kuru Empire at Hastinapur. After the battle ended, the Pandava brothers abdicated, and Parikshit, son of Abhimanyu, ascended the throne of Hastinapur.

#### **Places of Interest**

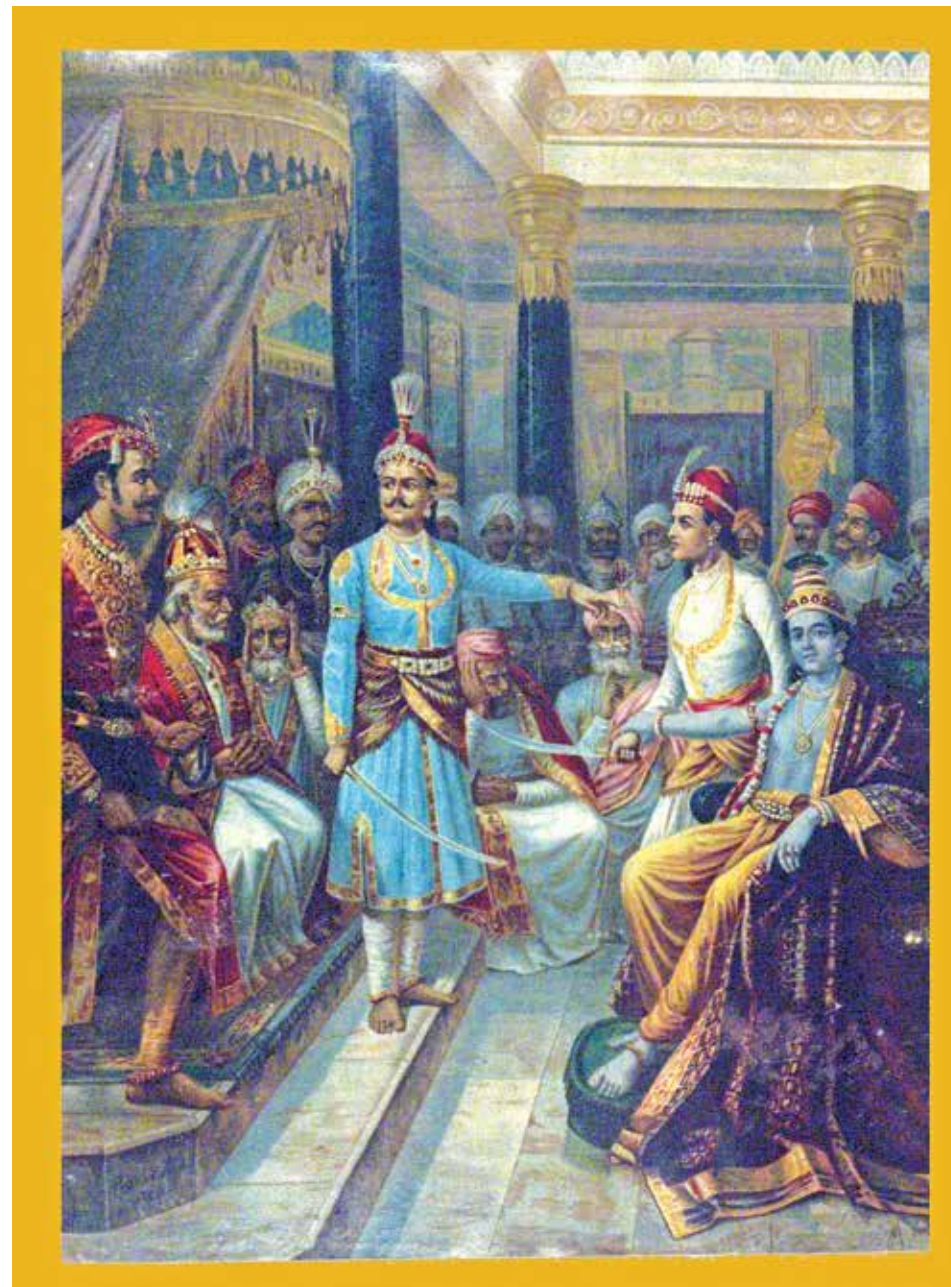
- Jambudweep Jain Tirth
- Bada Digambar Jain Mandir,
- Bhai Dharam Singh Gurdwara

#### **Connectivity - Road, Rail, Air**

**Air:** Nearest Airport is the Indira Gandhi International Airport, Delhi (Indraprastha) about 130.5 KM away.

**Road:** Well connected via national and state highways.

**Train:** The nearest railhead is located at Meerut Cantt in Meerut.



*Shri Krishna as Envoy of Peace at Hastinapura, 19th cent. Ce. Artist- Raja Ravi Verma (courtesy National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi)*

## *Indraprastha* (The divided half of Kuru Kingdom given to Pandu sons)

**Location** - Situated at Longitude 28.6205° N, 77.2500° E Latitude of excavated site.

**Ancient Boundaries:** The Kingdom of Indraprastha comprised of Khandavprastha (capital area Indraprastha), Soniprastha (Sonipat- artisan's area), Tilparasth (Tilpat agriculture area), Panprastha (Panipat traders' area) Baghpat/ Varnavat (Spiritual/ intellectuals area).

**Current Boundaries:** The main city Palace of the Pandavas was at the current Purana Pandav or Indrapatha Qila region, on Mathura road, which was also the heart of the colonial Imperial City region of New Delhi, and also Notified and preserved as Indraprastha District. The larger Indraprastha has merged with the border-states and some parts are part of India's Capital Territory of Delhi. It shares its borders with Haryana and Uttar Pradesh.

### **Significance/ Itihasa- Important Events**

*Mahabharata Itihasa* tells us that this is the place where the Pandavas ruled from for almost 30 generations. The city has been described as '*Swarga Nagari*', a beautiful place, as splendid as *Amrawati*. It is believed to be the first planned capital city with blessing of Sri Krishna and technical help from Maya Danav Vishwakarma, the Naga clan's architect.

During his coronation, Yudhishtira is said to have performed *Yajna* and organizes a *Rajyabhishek* ceremony where he is crowned king in the presence of people of great power and eminence. It is said there were almost 100 kings and great celebrations. Cousin Duryodhana and his uncle Shakuni, were said to have been jealous of the splendor, affluence and respect shown towards Pandavas. So he hatched





a plan to take Indraprastha. It is believed that after the dice game at Hastinapur the Pandavas lose their Indraprastha Kingdom and are exiled for 13 year, but regain it after winning the *Dharam Yuddha* on the battlefield of Kurukshetra.

#### **Places of Interest**

- *Purana Qila*
- *Kunti Mandir* within *Purana Qila*
- Rajghat area where *Rajsuyi Yajna* was organized.
- *Nigambodh Ghat* and *Nili Chhatri Mandir*
- *Yogmaya Temple*, linked to sister of Sri Krishna, and the *Vishnugiri Stambh* of Iron Pillar
- *27 Nakshatra Vidya Mandir*, linked to astronomer Varahamira (now called Qutub complex),
- *Kalka Devi Temple*,
- *Lalkot Fort* of rulers Anangpal,

*Pandavas, south wall of Deogarh Dasvatara Temple, Lalitpur, M.P., 5th cent. CE. (courtesy ASI and Indrajit Bandyopadhyay)*



- Raipithor Garh of Prithviraj Chauhan
- Bhairon Temples
- Bahi Lotus Temple
- National Museum on Janpath Road

**Connectivity - Air, Road, Rail**

Most places interest within Indraprastha are well connected with metro rail, bus and taxi.

**Air** – All International and National Flights touch Indira Gandhi International Airport.

**Road** – Major Highways link this capital area to all States and even internationally.

**Rail** – Well connected by trains to all states main railway stations being New Delhi Railway station, Anand Vihar, Ajmeri gate, Nizamuddin and Cantt Railway stations.

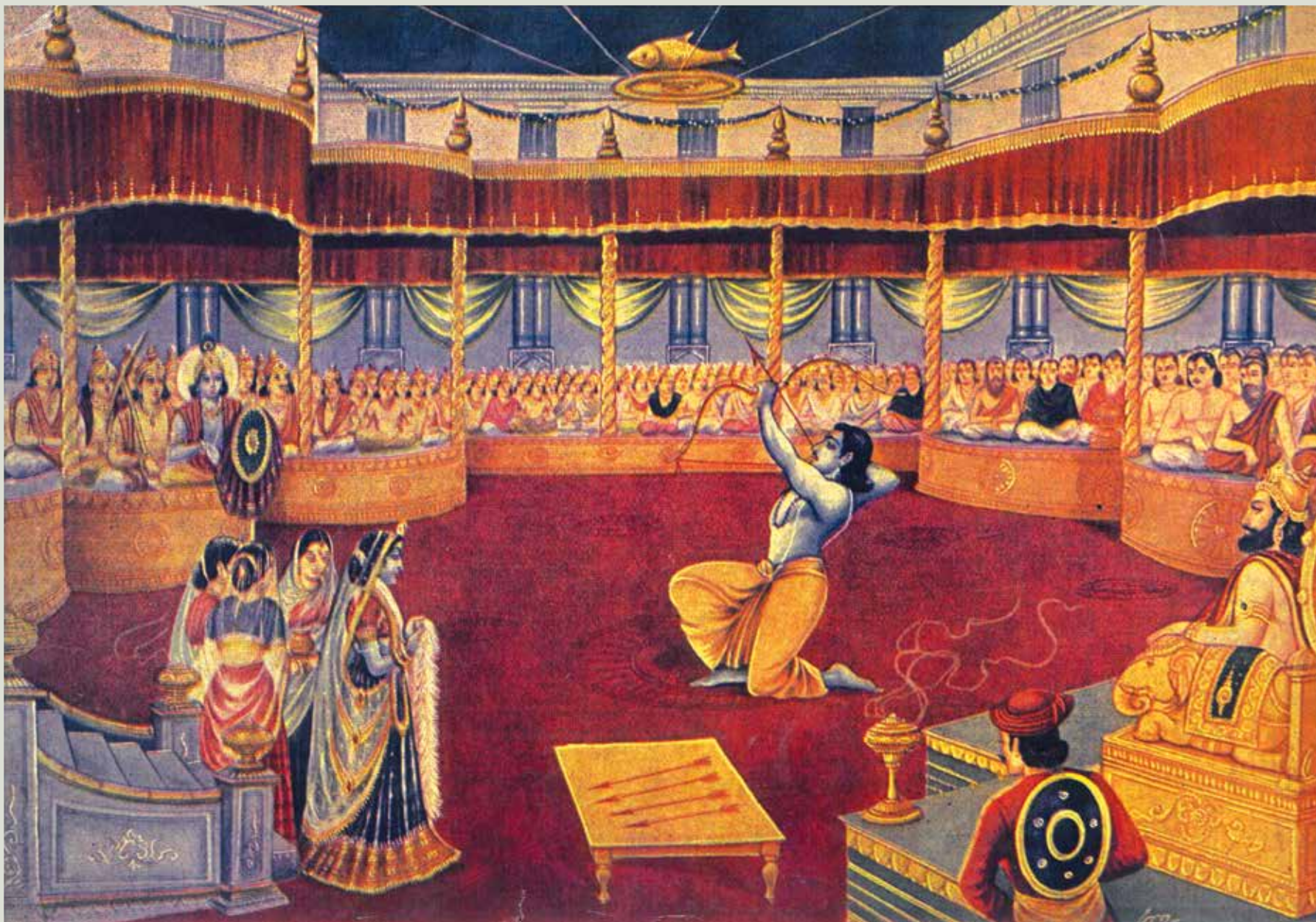
*Kampilya*

**Location** - Kampil is located at 27.62°N 79.28°E as excavated site.

**Ancient Boundaries** - Ancient Vedic time Kampilya was a large prosperous kingdom with *Chakrabarti Rajas*, with boundaries extending from Saket to River Beas in west. After division of Kuru- into Kuru- Panchala, the Panchala Mahajanapada's Capital City Kampilya was spread across a vast area of Panchaladesha comprising almost eight districts. Ancient Kampilya shared boundaries with Saket (Ayodhya) and River Beas (Punjab).

Panchala extended from Himalayas in the north to the river Charmanwati in the south during the period of the Mahabharata *Itihasa* of *Dwapar* era, where Kampilya was the capital of the kingdom. It had Kuru, Surasena and Matsya kingdoms to the west and the forest Naimisha to the east. Later, Panchala was divided into Southern Panchala (ruled by King Drupad) and Northern Panchala (ruled by Guru Drona and then





SWAYAMVAAR AT KAMPILYA- Traditional Painting



*Drupadi Kund  
and the backdrop  
is Kapil Muni ka  
Kutiya established  
by Shatrughana  
(Rama's Brother)*

his son Ashwathama). The Ganges River separated the two Panchalas.

**Current Boundaries-** Tehsil Kaimganj in District Farrukhabad, Uttar Pradesh. It is a nationally protected site under Archaeological Survey of India. It is about 300 km from New Delhi (Indraprastha), 160 km from Kanpur and 250 km from Lucknow, off Etah via Aliganj Road.

**Significance/Itihasa- Important Events**

**Birth of Devi Draupadi**

It is said that Drupad vows revenge after being defeated by Dronacharya's pupils. He performs a year's 'Tapasya' and Yajna for a Yodha son. He is blessed with twins, son Dhrishtadyumna and daughter Draupadi. The Yajna becomes the symbol of the fiery strength, power, purity and strength of Agniputri/Yajnyasenini Draupadi, who is said to be the avatar of Devi Parvati. She is the 'Sakha' of Narayana himself, and is the Narayani who helps him restore Dharma. She becomes the first Maharani of Indraprastha Kingdom. Her valor gives her the



title of 'Yahnasenani' and being Princes of Panchaladesh she is also popular as Panchali.

**Swayamvaar of Draupadi**

It is believed that Draupadi establishes a Shiva Temple and accepts the Padavas as husbands.

**Places of Interest**

- Kapil Muni Tapasya Sthal (Vedic)
- Kampilyavasini Mandir (Vedic)
- Rameshwar Mandir, Draupadi

Kund (Tetra),

- Kalesvar Temple, Kampilyavasini Tempel (Dwapar),
- Geeta Mandir (Sri Krishna)
- Jain Mandir- 13<sup>th</sup> Teerththankara Vimal Kumar & Swatambar and Digambar- 2 Jain Mandirs,
- 40km away in the ancient area of Kampilya (current city Farrukhabad) is Pandabagh Mandir where the Pandavas stayed after fleeing from the Lakshagrah. From here they

went to take part in Swayambar,

- On the banks of the Ganga are the Ashrams of Dhomm Rishi and Durwasa Rishi,
- Moghul Ghats, Ganga Ghats, Zardozi Artisans
- 35 km away is Sankisa, which was also part of King Jank's brother's (Kushwadhai) Kingdom and later the place where Gautam Buddha received knowledge of 'Swarga' that is divine knowledge. Mahadevi Temple is also here. Many countries where there are followers of Buddha have their gush houses here.

**Connectivity - Road, Rail, Air**

**Air:** Nearest Airport is Kanpur (180 Km) or Agra 150 km.

**Railway Station:** Kampilya Station with connection to Kaimganj Tehsil and Farrukhabad Railway Station. Farrukhabad Station is connected to New Delhi via rail and road. Railway station of Kanpur: 180 km.

**Road: Auto & Taxies, Bus**

**Stand:-** Kaimganj: 10km, Kampil.  
**Straight Root:** Kanpur-Achanera Matthura, Bareilly.

## Kashi

**Location** - Latitude: 25.3176 & Longitude: 82.9739, Uttar Pradesh, Varanasi.

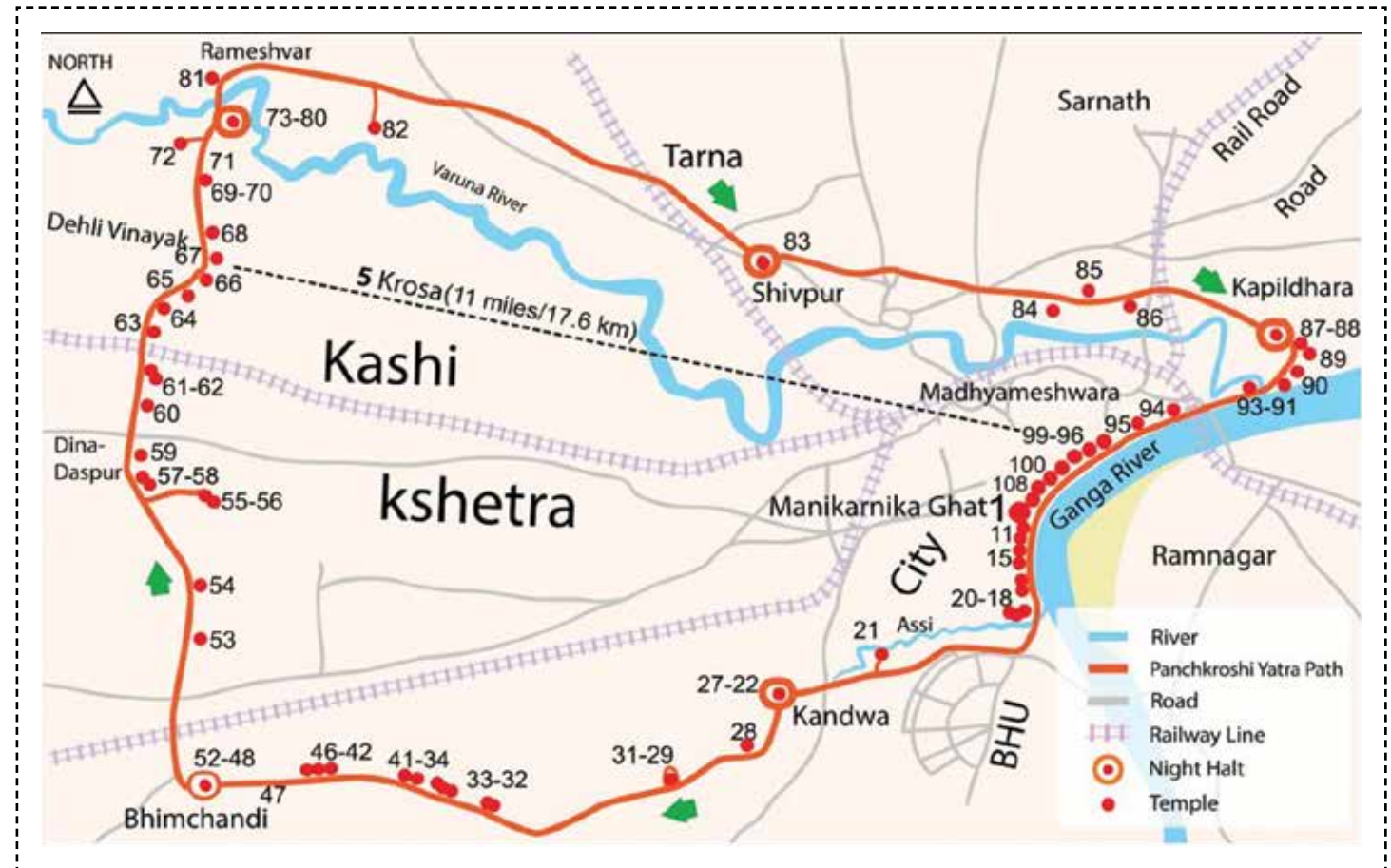
**Ancient Boundaries** - Varanasi is one of the world's oldest continually inhabited cities. Kashi, is associated with a kingdom of the same name during *Dwapara Itihasa* narration in Mahabharata text.

**Current Boundaries** - It is 692 kilometres (430 mi) to the southeast of India's capital New Delhi (Indraprastha), 320 kilometres (200 miles) south-east of the state capital, Lucknow, and 121 kilometres (75 miles) east of Prayagraj, another Hindu pilgrimage site.

Known as Varanasi since 1974, but still widely known as Banaras or Benares and in ancient times as Kashi, is a city on the Ganga river in northern India that has a central place in spiritual pilgrimage, death, and mourning in the Hindu world.

### **Significance/ Itihasa- Important Events**

Varanasi is believed to have been founded by Shiva, one of three



principal deities along with Brahma and Vishnu. It is one of seven holy cities (*Sapta Puri*) which can provide Moksha. Ayodhya, Mathura, Haridwar, Kashi, Kanchi, Avanti and Dwarka are the seven cities known as the givers of liberation.

It is believed that Bhisma Pitamaha forcefully, enters the Swayamvara ceremony of the three daughters, Amba, Ambika and Ambalika of Kashi Naresh. He abducts them to get them married to his step brother Vichitravirya. The Pandavas are said to have visited

the city in search of Shiva to atone for their sin of fratricide war and Brahmanahatya that they had committed during the climactic Kurukshetra War.

Bhima, a son of Pandu, married a Kashi prince Valandhara and their union resulted in the birth of Sarvaga, who later ruled Kashi.

It is also said that, Dhritarashtra's eldest son Duryodhana also married a Kashi prince Bhanumati, who later bore him a son Lakshman Kumara and a daughter Lakshmana.

Today, it is known as the spiritual capital of India. Kashi is famous for the Kashivishwanath Temple of Shiva. It has many prominent ghats like Dashashwamedh Ghat linked to king Dashratha of Ayodhya, Assi Ghat, Dashashwamedh Ghat, Adikeshav Ghat, Tulsi Ghat. Nearby is Sarnath which is linked to Gautam Buddha.

#### Places of Interest

- Vishwanatha Temple,
- Durga temple,
- Sankatmochan Temple,
- Adikeshva temple,
- Temple of Vishnu,
- Ghats of Holy River Ganga,
- Adikeshva Ghat and Kardameshvar Temple (in Kandava village).

- Buddha's Sarnath
- the birth places of Jaina Tirthankaras (Suparshvantha and Parshvanatha),
- Nepali wooden temple, forts of the former ruler of Kashi
- Chet Singh on Ghat Ram Nagar, Bharat Mata Temple,

#### Connectivity - Road, Rail, Air

**Air:** The closest airport to the city is the Lal Bahadur Shastri International Airport in Babatpur.

**Train:** Varanasi city is well connected by railway. Varanasi City station is 2 km away from Kashi station, and Varanasi Junction is around 6 km. Mughalsarai Junction station at 17 km, also Maduadih station around 4 km away.

**Road:** Varanasi has a wide and expansive road network, with frequent private and public buses and other road transport services to all major cities and towns in Uttar Pradesh.

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## Kurukshetra



*Krishna as jagannath revealing cosmic form and the scenes from the Mahabharata, Pattachitra, Orissa*

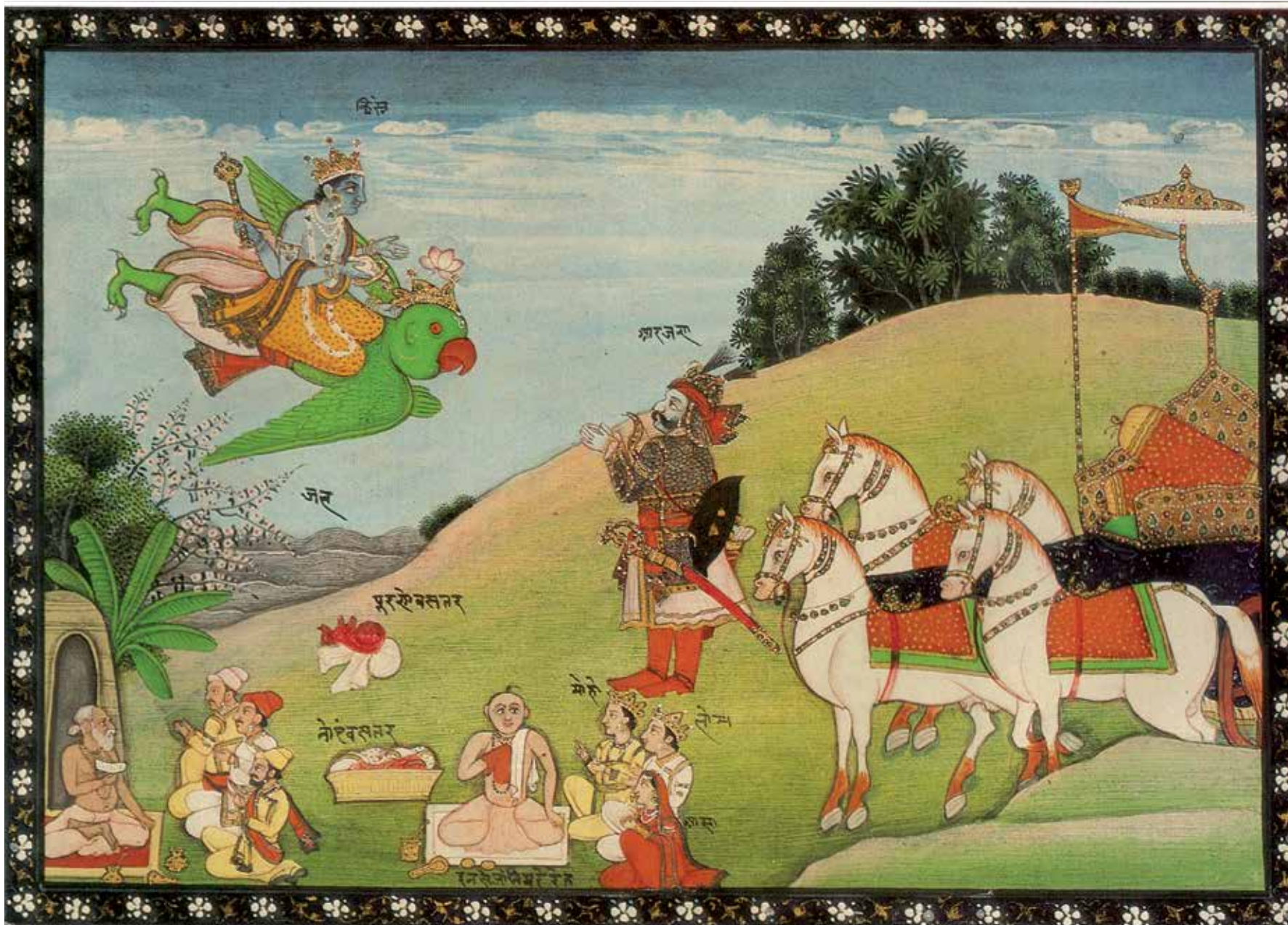
**Location** - Latitude 30.0000° N. and Longitude 76.7500° E. -- (29°58' N; 76°50' E) as excavated site.

**Ancient Boundaries** - Historically in ancient times it was South of Turghna (Srughna/Sugh in Sirhind, Punjab), North of Khandava (Delhi or ancient Indraprastha and Mewat region), East of Meru (desert) and West of Parin.

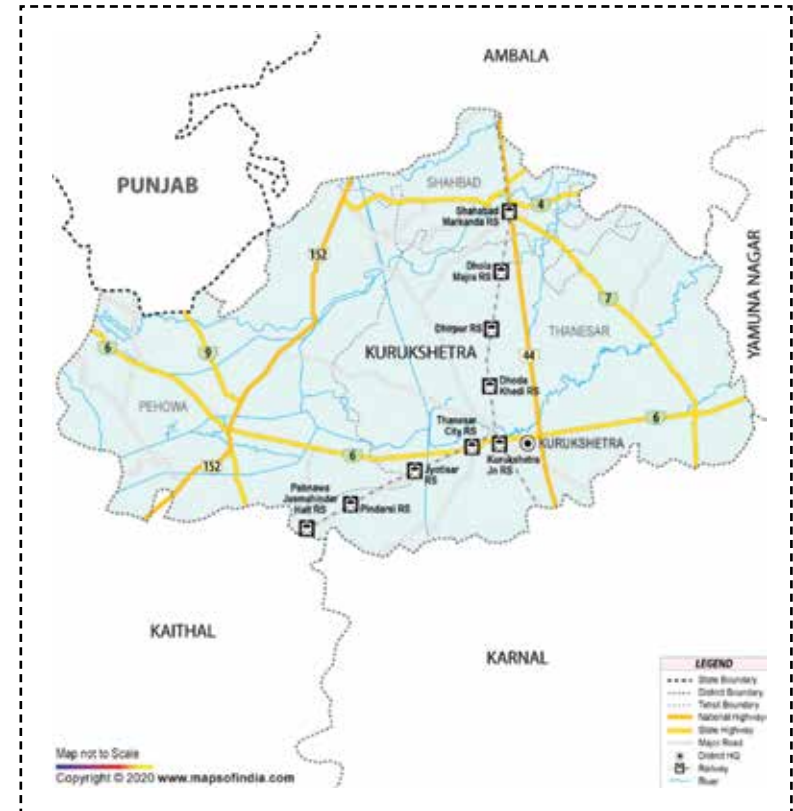
**Current Boundaries** – It is at a distance of around 177 km from Delhi. It is a district in Haryana state of India. At present it shares borders with Delhi (Indraprastha), Punjab and Mewat regions.

#### Significance/Itihasa- Important Events

The Kurukshetra War narrated in the Mahabharata *Itihasa* took place here. According to the *Vamana*



*Krishna explaining Samkhya yoga- the yoga of knowledge to Arjuna, Arki painting, Himanchal Pradesh, c.18<sup>th</sup> cent. AD*



*Purana* text, King Kuru chose land at the banks of the Sarasvati River for embedding spirituality with eight virtues: austere (Tapas), truth (Satya), forgiveness (Kshama), kindness (Daya), purity (Shuddha), charity (Daana), devotion (Yajna), and conduct (Brahmacharya).

Lord Vishnu was impressed with the acts of King Kuru and blessed him with two boons-first, that

this land forever will be known as a Holy Land after his name as Kurukshetra (the land of Kuru); second that anyone dying on this land will go to heaven. The land of Kurukshetra was situated between two rivers-the Sarasvati and the Drishadvati.

***Some important events that are believed to have taken place are:***

- The Srimad Bhagwat Gita *Updesh* was given to Arjun here, to fight for *Dharma* without wavering.
- Sri Krishna revealed his *Vishwaroop* to Arjuna
- This is the battle ground of the *Dharma Yudha*. It was the agricultural land, open fields near river Saraswati.

- It is the place of the famous "*Chakraview*" that engulfed and killed Abhimanyu, the son of Arjuna.
- Draupadi's sons were killed by Ashwatthama.
- Jarasandh was killed by Bheema.
- Bheeshma Pitamah was wounded by Arjuna and lay on the bed of arrows.



*Krishna blowing Panchajanya on the battlefield at Kurukshetra after the fall of Bhishma, Arki painting, Himanchal Pradesh, c.18<sup>th</sup> cent. AD*



- Pandavas gain victory here, establishing *Dharmayaja* at Kuru Kingdom and Bharat.

### Places of Interest

Jyotisar the place where Sri Krishna gave Gita Gyan to Arjuna, Brahma Sarovar Temple, Navagraha and Bhadrakali Temple, Sthaneshwar Mahadev Temple, Bhisma Narkatari Temple, Pandavas' Haveli.

### Connectivity - Road, Rail, Air

**Air:** Kurukshetra does not have its own airport, but through a flight, you can reach **Chandigarh (102 km)** or Delhi (Indraprastha) (160 km).

**Train:** You can easily get regular trains to Kurukshetra from other major cities of the country. Railway Station is Kurukshetra Jn.

**Road:** Local and state run buses connect the city to Delhi (Indraprastha), Chandigarh, Amritsar, Panipat, Ghaziabad, Faridabad, Patiala, Meerut, Jaipur and Ambala.

...

## Magadh

**Ancient Boundaries** - It expanded across today's Bihar and Bengal areas and much of eastern Uttar Pradesh and Orissa. It was bound on the north by River Ganga, on the east by River Champa, on the south by the mountains and on the west by the river Sone.

**Current Boundaries** - The kingdom of the Magadha currently, roughly corresponds to the modern districts of Patna, Jehanabad, Nalanda, Aurangabad, Nawadah and Gaya in southern Bihar, and parts of Bengal in the east.

### Significance/Itihasa- Important Events

Magadha was a large region and one of the sixteen Mahajanapadas, 'Great Kingdoms' of the ancient Itihasa. It is also believed to be of importance to Buddhism and Jainism. Gautama Buddha is also believed to have lived much of his life in the kingdom of Magadha.

It is belived that Kansa, the ruler of Mathura, got Jarasandha's attention. He was Impressed with Kansa's bravery. Jarasandha made Kansa his son-in-law by marrying off his two daughters. It is said that this makes Jarasandha a relative of Krishna.

Krishna is said to have killed Kansa as announced by a divine prophecy. Jarasandha was upset that his daughters were widowed and vowed to kill Krishna. Jarasandha attacked Mathura with an army of 23 Akshohinis, but Krishna and Balarama somehow

### Magadh



managed to defeat the whole army of Jarasandha and his allies. It is said that Jarasandha attacked Mathura 17 times and was defeated by Krishna. Krishna and Balrama shifted kingdom from Mathura to Dwarka due to the constant attacks. Due to this Krishna got an epithet 'Ranchhod' meaning the one that left the battle field. But this was a strategy of Krishna to plan for establishment of Dharma by defeating evil forces, including Jarasandha.

Sahadeva, placed on the throne of Magadha by the Pandavas on the former's death in a duel with the Pandava prince Bhima.

### Places of interest

The ancient kingdom of Magadha is mentioned in the ancient texts Ramayana, Mahabharata and Puranas. It is also heavily mentioned in Jain and Buddhist texts.

### Connectivity – Air, Rail, Road

**Air:** Loknayak Jayaprakash Airport in Patna.

**Rail:** Patna Junction is a major railhead.

**Road:** Patna is well connected by road.

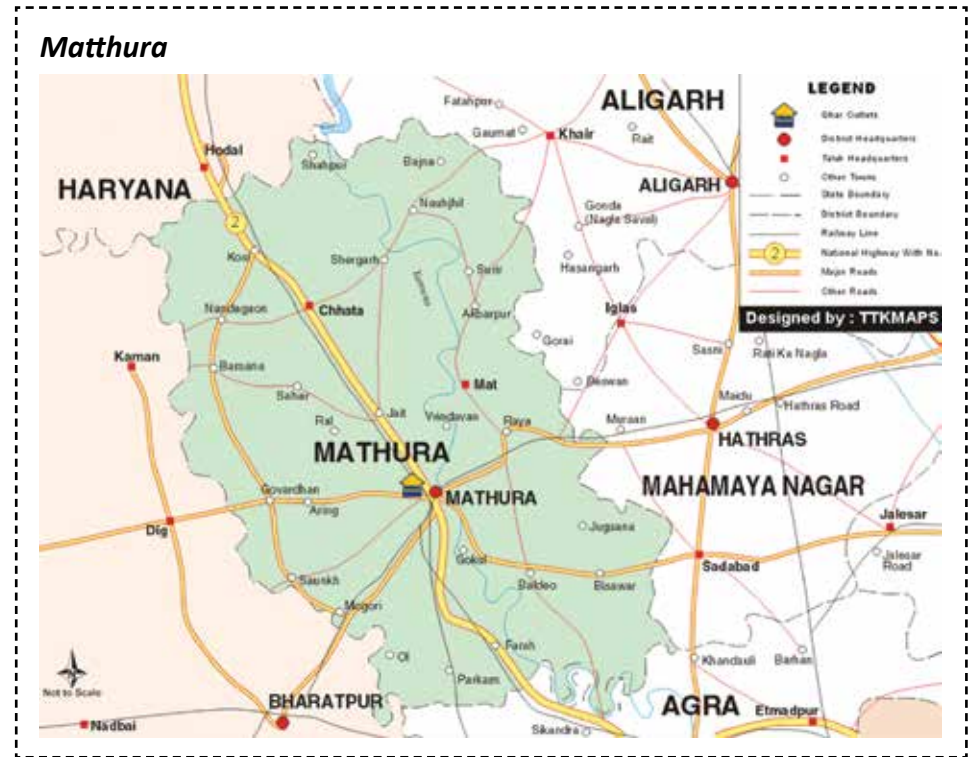
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## Mathura

**Location** - The city of Mathura, in Uttar Pradesh, the nucleus of Brajbhoomi, is located at a distance of 145 km south-east of Delhi (Indraprastha) and 58 km north-west of Agra. Covering an area of about 3,800 sq. km.

**Ancient Boundaries** - Mathura's location was at the cross roads of various trade routes - that went westwards to West Asia and the Roman Empire; northwards, via Taxila, Pushkalavati and Purushapur to Central Asia and the Silk Route and eastwards to China. During the ancient period, Mathura was an economic hub, located at the junction of important caravan routes.

**Current Boundaries** - Divided into two distinct units - the eastern part in the trans- Yamuna tract with places like Gokul, Mahavan, Baldeo, Mat and Bajna and the western side of the Yamuna covering the Mathura region that encompasses Vrindavan, Govardhan, Kusum Sarovar, Barsana and Nandgaon.



### Significance/Itihasa- Important Events

Mathura at the centre of Braj is believed to be the homeland and birthplace of Sri Krishna, who belonged to the Yadu dynasty. He was born to Vasudev and Devaki in prison. Mathura forms one of the most famous parts of the Braj region that were areas of the Sursena Mahajanapada.

### Other important places are Vrindavan, Barsana and Govardhan:

- Vrindavan: It is one of the most sacred places in Vaishnavism. It is believed that this is where Krishna spent most of his childhood days.
- Barsana: Barsana is the home of the goddess Sri Radha, the consort of Krishna.
- Govardhan: Mount Govardhana and Giriraj, is a sacred ancient

site on an 8 km long hill located in the area of Govardhan and Radha Kund. It is the sacred centre of Braj and is identified as a natural form of Krishna (*Govardhana sila*). Sri Krishna is said to have lifted this mountain to give shelter to all inhabitants.

### **Some important events:**

Lord Krishna was born in a prison cell in Mathura. His father Vasudev got him out of Mathura, across the raging River Yamuna and into the house of Nand in Gokul.

- He kills Putna who tried to poison him on instruction of his uncle Kansa.
- He destroyed Kali naga.
- Krishna spent his early childhood here and revealed the first signs of his divinity. His Uncle Kansa's murderous attempts forced Krishna to leave Gokul and move to Nandgaon, a more secure home high up on a hill.
- He kills Kansa.
- Magadh King Jarasandh attacked Mathura many times. Krishna and his brother Balarama managed to counter him. Finally as a strategy Krishna and Balarama shift to Dwarka.
- From here, the adolescent Krishna, the cowherd, would wander into the Vrindavan forests to play with

his friends and his consort Radha. Vrindavan, still a transcendental world, is a place of Krishna's *leela* (play) and an archetypal connection to nature. Each tree in the area speaks, as it were, of the love of the divine couple, wherein Sri Krishna is *Paramatama* and Radha represents *Atma* of the human being.

- Sri Krishna Janmasthan Temple, Dwarkadheesh Temple, Birla Mandir, Govardhan Hill, Radha Kund.

### **Places of interest**

The Mathura art that creates splendid Buddha and related sculptures is showcased at Mathura Museum.

### **Connectivity – Air, Rail, Road**

**Air:** Agra Airport is the nearest airport to Mathura and the major nearest commercial airport of Mathura happens to be Indira Gandhi International Airport, Delhi (*Indraprastha*). Jhevar Airport is coming soon.

**Train:** Mathura Junction is a major railhead on Central and Western Railways.

**Road:** A good network of roadways connect Mathura to Delhi (*Indraprastha*), Agra, Moradabad, Jaipur, Bikaner, Kolkata along with other small towns of UP and nearby states.



*Vasudeva receiving baby Krishna from Devaki, Deogarh temple, C 6th cent. AD, Replica, source- Shri Krishna Museum*

## Panchala

**Location** – Madhya Desha comprising of district of UP and Uttrakhand.

**Ancient Boundaries** - Panchala extended from Himalayas in the north to the river Charmanwati in the south during the period of the Mahabharata Itihasa. It has Mahajanapadas of Kuru, Surasena and Matsya kingdoms to the west and the forest of Naimisha to the east. It occupied territories on the then Ganga banks spreading up to town hall at the district headquarters, tehsil Kainmganj, village areas of Shamshabad, Dhoumpura, Raipur, Patiali, Rudaiyain, Meenpur, Nizamuddinpur, Jhajhota etc.

**Current Boundaries** -Current Districts of Etawah, Shahjahanpur, Brailey, Badaun, Mainpuri, Eta, Farrukhabad and Kanpur. Though

currently most limit it to only two ancient cities of Kampilya and Ahichhetra areas.

### **Significance/ Itihasa - Important Events**

It is said that Drupada the king of Panchala, and his sons, fought for the Pandavas at the *Kurukshetra Dharma Yuddh* as he was their father-in-law and, also wanted to avenge his daughter's insult. He is said to have provided 3 Akshauhini's armies to the Pandavas.

In ancient times Panchala was formed as home to five Vedic tribes, viz. Krivis, Turvasas, Keshins, Shrinjayas and Somakas who merged into one became, under Krivis. Panchala became centre of Vedic learning and culture. It existed from the times of Purus, being a formidable kingdom during *Dwapar* and even till 10<sup>th</sup> century. Several rulers of Indraprastha have origins from Panchala or ancient Kampilya kingdoms.

The Panchala Mahajanapada was formed by multiple *janas* or tribes. King Drupada, whose daughter Draupadi was married to the Pandavas, belonged to the *Somaka* clan.

The *Mahabharata* text mentions that the Panchala country was divided into two territories due to a fight between two childhood Gurukul friends Drupada and Dronacharya: the northern Panchala with its capital at Ahichchhatra, and the southern Panchala with its capital at Kampilya.

- According to Mahabharata the division of the kingdom of Panchala into two was effected by a Treaty entered into by the Brahmin teacher Drona with Drupada the then king of Panchala, after the latter had been defeated by the young Kuru pupils of the former and seized and carried as a captive.
- Drona took northern half of the kingdom which became known by the name of Ahichchhatra or

Uttara Panchala while Drupad continued to rule over the remaining half of his kingdom distinguished as Southern Panchala.

- It was one of the most powerful kingdoms of the Ancient India, closely allied with the Kuru Kingdom. It had become an oligarchic confederacy, considered one of the *solasa* or sixteen *Mahajanapadas* (major states) of the Indian subcontinent. After being absorbed into the Mauryan Empire, Panchala regained its independence until it was annexed by the Gupta Empire.

### **Places of Interest**

- Angadesh,
- Barsana,
- Gikul,
- Vrindavana,
- Lakshagraha Varnavat.

## Shukratal

**Location** - Latitude 29.4876 & Longitude 77.9824, State- Uttar Pradesh, Dist. Muzaffarnagar.

**Ancient Boundaries** - It was within Kuru Mahajanapada.

**Current Boundaries** - It is located in Muzaffar Nagar, situated on the banks of river Ganga, Shukratal is situated at a distance of 30 kms from the district head quarter.

### Significance/ Itihasa- Important Events

- It is believed that King Parikshit, son of Abhimanyu and grandson of Arjuna was cursed for a wrongdoing and that he would be bitten by the snake Takshak within a week.
- A temple was built under the Vat tree located near the location. It is said that Shukdev used to narrate the Bhagwat story while sitting under this tree. This banyan tree is still present here and it is said that the tree never sheds leaves.



- There is also a Yagyashala within the Shukdev temple. Apart from this, a 35-foot high statue of Lord Ganesha is also established here.

### Connectivity - Road, Rail, Air

**Air:** The nearest airport is Jolly Grant, Dehra Dun Airport (DED) Uttarakhand - 98 km away. The second nearest airport is Indira Gandhi International Airport, New

Delhi (Indraprastha), which is 105 km away.

**Train:** Nearest Railway Station: Muzaffarnagar (MOZ) - Distance - 28 km.

**Road:** Roadways & Bus Stand: Muzaffarnagar - Bhopa Pvt. Bus Stand (28 km).

### Places of Interest

- Lord Shankar Temple
- Swami Charandas Temple
- Lord Ram Temple
- Goddess Shakambhari Temple
- Neelkanth Mahadev Temple
- Ganga Temple





*Nepal: Dr. Basudev Krishna Shastri*



*India: Ms. Neera Misra*

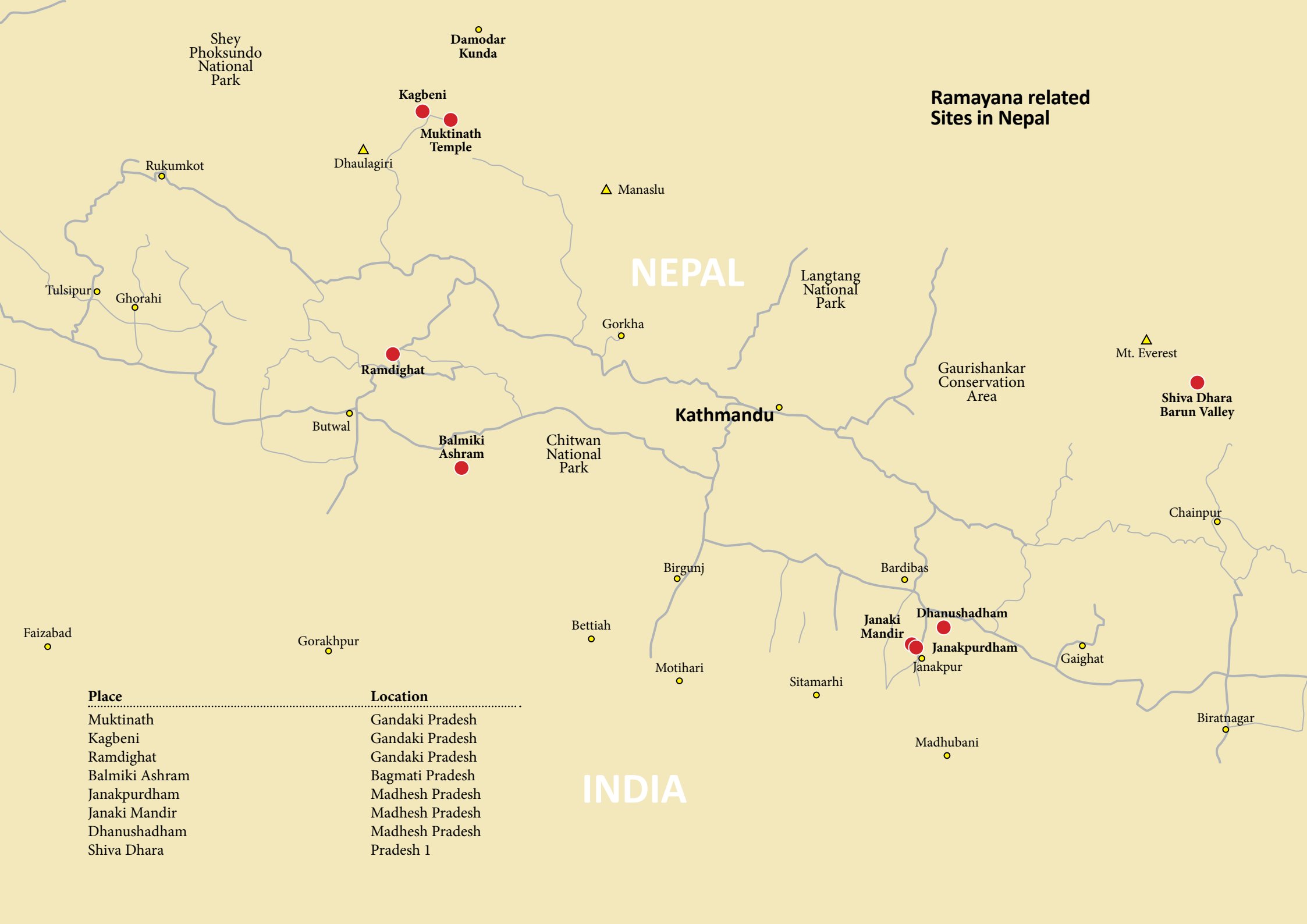
# Ramayana

आदौ रामतपोवनादिगमनं हत्वा मृगं कांचनं  
वैदेहीहरणं जटायुमरणं सुग्रीव संभाषणम् ।

वालीनिर्दलनं समुद्रतरणं लंकापुरीदाहनं  
पश्चाद्रावणकुंभकर्णहननमेतद्धि रामायणम् ॥

॥ एकश्लोकि रामायणं सम्पूर्णम् ॥

Aadau Ram Tapowanadigamanan Hatwa Mrigam Kanchanan,  
Waidehi Haranan Jatayu Maranan Sugriv Sambhashanam.  
Wali Nirdalanan Samudra Taranam Lanka Puri Dahanam,  
Aschadrawan Kumbh Karn Hanan Metaddhi Ramayanam.



## Ramayana related Sites in Nepal

Place	Location
Muktinath	Gandaki Pradesh
Kagbeni	Gandaki Pradesh
Ramdighat	Gandaki Pradesh
Balmiki Ashram	Bagmati Pradesh
Janakpurdham	Madhesh Pradesh
Janaki Mandir	Madhesh Pradesh
Dhanushadham	Madhesh Pradesh
Shiva Dhara	Pradesh 1



# Ramayana Circuit - Nepal

Author: Dr. Basudev Krishna Shastri

There are many religious and mythological stories and discoveries that link various pilgrimage sites of Nepal to the popular 'Ramayana Circuit' of India. These stories are the backdrop for the connections between the circuit and religious tourist destinations of Nepal: Janakpurdham, Dhanush Sagar, Ramsita Vivahmandap, Kagbeni (Kagbhusundi Dham), Valmiki Ashram and Ramadighat, amongst others.

## Janakpurdham

A place of pilgrimage glory and trust

The ancient city of Mithila is considered to be the region ruled by Hindu King Janak. It is famous as the birthplace of his daughter Janaki who is popularly known as Sita. Janakpur region is also the abode of Vedic sages like Ashtavakra, Yajnavalkya and Maitreyi Gargi as per the Upanishad texts; it is also the home of Sri Ram's in-laws.

The magnificent temple of Janaki Mata (Sita) is the main attraction of the region, based on the Ramayana epic. Traditional belief holds that

this is where priest Sukishor Das came during the 17<sup>th</sup> century and rested under the neem tree, the idol of Sri Ram Janaki appeared out of nowhere after which the priest began worshipping the idols of Sri Ram Janaki. Having heard the story, the then King of Makwanpur, Mani Mukunda Sen, travelled there and donated 1,400 bighas (approximately 867 acres) of land in the name of Sri Ram Janaki in the year 1684 B.S. (1627 A.D.).

Subsequently, Janaki Temple is also often referred to as the 'Naulakha Temple', which in Nepalese and Hindi both means nine hundred thousand due to the supposed amount used to build the temple.



© Amrit Bhadgaole

Ramayana

Janakpurdham is also known as the city of 52 huts (*kutis*) and 72 lakes. It is culturally and religiously rich with temples and lakes of various deities in every corner including the Janaki Temple, Ram Temple, Rajdevi Temple, Laxman Temple, Ganga Sagar, Dhanush Sagar and Argaja Sagar. The sound of conch shells and chanting of mantras and

Maithili songs resounding in the temples from the early morning each day leaves devotees and tourists mesmerized. In addition, it is also a place rich in archeological heritage, culture and Mithila art as it is in terms of religious significance.



Janaki Temple by Dinesh Shrestha



## Sri Ram-Janaki's Wedding Pavilion

Sri Ram-Janaki's Wedding Pavilion is adjacent to the Janaki Temple on the north side, where one can observe the Treta Yuga (the second of the four yugas or world ages) wedding of Sri Ram and Sita.

### **Mani Mandap (Bibha Mandap)**

It is believed that in ancient times, Sita, daughter of King Janak of Mithila, and Sri Ram, the son of King Dasharatha of the Kingdom of Ayodhya, got married at the Mani Mandap. In Maithili tradition, it is customary to make a 'madwa', a mound of soil about two meters long and of equal width, to conclude a wedding ceremony.

### **Location**

Janaki Temple is located in Janakpur, sub-metropolis of Dhanusha district of Nepal. As it is located in the centre of Janakpur, this 'Shakti Peeth' is especially noteworthy. A 'Shakti Peeth' is a memorial and spiritual pilgrimage devoted to Goddess Sati of Shakti. Built in Mughal style, Janaki Temple is a holy Hindu shrine considered a masterpiece of art. It is also considered to be the capital of ancient Mithila.

The temple is three-storied and has 60 rooms including the *Sismahal*

(glass room) and the sanctum sanctorum, which are very popular among visitors. The temple is run by a household priest. At the top of the temple are four large and other small towers. Three pairs of idols of Sri Ram and Sita also reside there, one of which was brought from Ayodhya itself.

### **Accessibility**

Janakpur is a sub-metropolis and is an accessible pilgrimage site. There are plenty of transportation services from all over the country including flight options.

### **Major Fairs and Festivals**

There is a popular tradition of bathing in the holy Ganga Sagar and Dhanush Sagar before offering prayers to Sri Ram Janaki. The birthdays of Sri Ram and Sita – *Ram Navami* and *Sita Navami* – and their wedding day, is widely celebrated in the region every year. Devotees also circumambulate the holy land with reverence. It is customary for devotees to

visit Mithila Dham once a year. Devotees also circumambulate the holy land with reverence. It is customary for devotees to visit Mithila Dham once a year. Devotees circumambulate for 15 days in a year to complete their worship.

There are three types of Mithila circumambulation – large, medium and small. The 15-day cycle is the medium circumambulation, which begins from the new moon date of *Magh Shukla* and ends on the 14<sup>th</sup> day of *Fagun Shukla Paksha*. While circumambulating, devotees focus on virtue and do not wear shoes or slippers nor make use of soap or oil. The procession begins by bowing to the Siddheshwor Mahadev. After taking a holy bath in several rivers, devotees visit Kameshwor Mahadev to end the cycle by going to Siddheshwor. A shorter version of the circumambulation can also be done, which concludes in five days.



Bibha Mandap by Dinesh Shrestha



## *Dhanushadham*

In the Ramayana epic, it is said that the Pinak bow was broken by Prince Ram of Ayodhya during Sita's 'Swayamvara', a practice for girls of marriageable age to choose a husband from amongst a list of suitors. The bow split into three sections, one of which fell in Dhanushadham. Visitors who come to Janakpur do not miss visiting Dhanushadham and worshipping *Dhanushkhand*. Mithila philosophical texts say all of one's sins will wash away if they visit the place.

### **General Belief**

The piece of the long *Pinak* bow that fell in Dhanushadham looks like a rock. This piece grows by itself once every three to four years, and as it grows, the wall around the bow rises. Visitors come all year round to pay homage to this piece of the *Pinak* bow: millions of visitors and devotees come to the site on Sundays in January and pray for their wishes to be fulfilled. A load of eggplant is also offered in the Temple of the *Pinak* bow as it is believed that offering an eggplant will fulfil one's desires.

Subsequently, large quantities of decorated eggplants are sold during fairs and festivals.

Similarly, there is also a legend about the hole in the root of the banyan tree in the temple. It is believed that during dry seasons, residents of the region fill the hole by pouring milk to call for rain and help during the harvest; leaving it empty is believed to cause famine.

#### **Other Temples, Establishments and Activities in Dhanushadham**

Within the temple premises, there is a statue of the Hindu god Hanuman; and a little to the south of the temple, there are Ram Janaki temples. There is a hospice and nearby, a small Shiva temple and various other deities have been established.

Various flowering plants including Rudraksha can be seen around Dhanushadham. An annual fair, known as the 'Makar Mela' or 'Capricorn Fair', is also organized that attracts millions of devotees from all across the world.

#### **Accessibility**

Dhanushadham is 18 kilometres northeast from Janakpurdham,

16 kilometres from Muzelia, and 10 kilometres from Dharapani on the East-West Highway. This route is suitable for those coming from the east, west, and north. Janakpur can be reached from Kathmandu by flight and from there, Dhanushadham can be reached by local means of transport.

### *Valmiki Ashram,* **Chitwan**

Valmiki Ashram is an important religious, mythological and historical site located within the Chitwan National Park in Chitwan district. According to legend, Maharshi Valmiki built the ashram, carried his spiritual practice during the *Treta* era and wrote the Valmiki Ramayana in the ashram. Valmiki was a devotee of sage Harihar whose effigy is still in the region. Legend also says that Sita spent the latter part of her life in this very ashram. After Sri Ram's abandonment, Sita gave birth to Luv and Kush, her two sons, under Valmiki's protection. Luv and Kush spent their childhood in the ashram, and Valmiki educated the two.

The ashram holds special significance amongst devotees for several reasons: it has links to the war between Sri Ram and Luv and Kush. Apart from being the birthplace of Luv and Kush, it is where Sita underwent the *Agni Pariksha* and it is also the place where 88,000 sages performed the *havan* (ritual). Moreover, the site has ancient *trishuls* (tridents) and tongs used by Sita, a well from where she bathed, and stones that she used to grind spices with. Likewise, besides the site consisting of a pole where Luv and Kush tied their father Sri Ram's horse to, it is also the place where Valmiki performed sacrifices.

#### **Accessibility**

Around 27 km from Bardaghat on the East-West Highway is Triveni in South Nawalparasi. Valmiki Ashram is located in the forest on the east side of Trivenidham, on the banks of the Narayani and Purnabhadra rivers, in the southwest of Chitwan district in Madi municipality. Once you cross the Narayani River by boat from Trivenidham and walk through the jungle for about half an hour, you will reach the Valmiki Ashram.

However, please note that the ashram cannot be reached via this route during the rainy season. An alternative way to reach the ashram is via the bridge built by India over the Narayani River on the Nepal-India border. Once you cross the bridge, you can use the 7-kilometre route from the Valmiki town of Bihar and walk through the Indian forest to reach the ashram.

### *Ramadighat, Palpa*

Another significant religious site in the Ramayana Circuit in Nepal is Ramadighat located in the middle of Palpa and Syangja districts. As Sri Ram bathed here and lived in the nearby Siddha Cave, the association has further added to the religious and historical significance of the spot.

Additionally, there are other religious sites in both the districts surrounding Ramadighat. As Ramdighat is a market area, it is easily accessible both by public transport and private vehicles.



*Birth of Dashratha's sons*

## Kagbeni, Mustang

'Ka' is for Kali, 'Ga' for Gandaki, and 'Beni' means confluence - Kagbeni is a village north of Jomsom, the headquarters of Mustang district, where Muktinath River, Patalganga and Kali Gandaki meet. It is the confluence of the rivers coming from the holy lake Damodar Kund and Muktinath. Kagbeni is also known as Kali Gandaki, Kagkhola or Muktinath River. Its name is derived from the part in Ramayana where Kagbhusundi, a great devotee of Sri Ram, tells Garuda, the vulture god, the story of philosophy and Ramayana here.

It is believed that *Jatayu*, a demi-god in the form of a vulture, and Kagbhusundi, served their penances in Kagbeni. One can usually witness flocks of crows flying over the village. It is believed that paying religious homage at this confluence will allow the deceased souls to rest in peace. Those who perform the final rites of the deceased at Kagbeni need to ensure they visit Muktinath.

**Muktinath** is three hours by foot from Kagbeni but can also be reached

within an hour by vehicle. Muktinath has a shelter for spiritual pilgrims with free food and lodging facilities.

It is believed that those who bathe in the holy river Kali Gandaki and worship the *Shaligram Shila* (rock) will rid themselves off reincarnations. The presence of and worshipping of the *Shaligram Shila* is believed to provide protection from evil. Anyone who cleanses the *Shaligram* rock with *Panchamrit* 'the drink of gods'; will be free from the materialistic world. Based on Hindu mythology, *Shaligram* is the form of *Mahavishnu*, and *Tulsi* is Goddess Lakshmi.

Therefore, by cleansing the *Shaligram Shila* with the famous and fragrant *Tulsi Manjari* sandalwood, one's desires are believed to be fulfilled. Likewise, there is also a religious belief that anyone who puts a garland of basil on the *Shaligram* rock will have their wishes fulfilled.

Kagbeni is one of the very few sacred places where the *Shaligram* rock is found. The *Shaligram* rock consists of 24 distinctions: 1) Keshav, 2) Madhusudan, 3) Connection,

4) Damodar, 5) Vasudev, 6) Pradyumna, 7) Vishnu, 8) Madhav, 9) Anantamurti, 10) Purushottam, 11) Adhokshaj, 12) Janardhan, 13) Govind, 14) Trivikram, 15) Sridhar, 16) Hrishikesh, 17) Narusinha, 18) Vishyavoni, 19) Vaman, 20) Narayan, 21) Pundarikaksha, 22) Upendra, 23) Hari, and 24) Lord Krishna. As these 24 idols are associated with the 24 *ekadashis*, they are worshipped during the 24 *ekadashis* throughout the year. It is believed that God Vishnu appeared as *Shaligram* in the Gandaki River while God Shiva appeared as Narmadeshwor in the Narmada River.

### Accessibility

To reach Kagbeni, you can start your journey from Pokhara - one of the most popular tourist destinations in Nepal. You can travel to Jomsom via Beni of Pokhara. After a short hike uphill along the banks of the Kali Gandaki River, you will reach Kagbeni. Alternative options are a flight from Pokhara to Jomsom or travelling in your own vehicle to reach Kagbeni via Pokhara.







Ramayana

Kagbeni, Mustang by Amrit Bhadgaonle



### Ramayana related places in India

Place	Location
Ayodhya	Uttar Pradesh
Chitrakut	Madhya Pradesh
Bharadwaj Ashram	Madhya Pradesh
Ramtek	Maharashtra
Panchavati	Maharashtra
Kiskindha	Karnataka
Sahya range	Kerala
Palghat	Kerala
Mahendra Giri	Tamil Nadu
Rameshwaram	Tamil Nadu
Adam's Bridge	Tamil Nadu

# Ramayana Circuit - India

Author: Ms. Neera Misra

In the Ramayana, Sri Ram conducted a journey with the guidance of saints, also known as Rishis. It is said that Rishi Bharadwaj told Sri Ram to go to Chitrakoot where four pupils were sent to guide Sri Ram on his journey. He travels to Rishi Atri's ashram, Viradh's region, Rishi Sharbhanga's ashram. Rishi Sutikshan's ashram. It is believed that as he travels for the next 10 years for the Dandanka travel, it is believed that he is accompanied by Dharmabrat and a number of other saints. On his return, he goes to Rishi Agastya. He then goes to Panchavati where he fights Khar. Even after Sita Maa's abduction, Sri Ram was guided by Rishi Kallol and others. Rishi Augastya even went to Lanka with him.

As described in the *puranas*, Sri Ram had gone on pilgrimage several times. All the places where Sri Ram travelled with Sita after Panchvati are one part of his

pilgrimage. Other places where he is accompanied by Hanuman and Sargreev. From Ayodhya to Panchavati, there are important places on pilgrimage route which is many believed Sri Ram had travelled to before and after exile.

Rivers also pay an important role in the exile route. Tamsa (Mandah), Vedshruti, Gomati, Spandika (Sai), Balukani, Ganga, Yamuna, Mandakini and Tungabhadra are mentioned in the Valmiki Ramayana. Valmiki's *Ashram* was on the banks of Ganga and Tamsa, while Bharadwaj was on the confluence of Ganga and Yamuna. Atri's was on the banks of Manadakini, while Sharbhanga's was also on the banks of the same river, Shabri and Matangas *ashrams* were on the banks of Tungabhadra and Lomash's was near Mahanadi. Sri Ram had met the sages so his route can be determined by the rivers. He travelled across the Yamuna beyond Prayag. Even to

Lanka, his expedition takes him along River Kaveri.

## **Some places on the banks of Narmada which are connected to Sri Ram are:**

From Amarkantak to Baraouch on the North Bank:

- Ramghat near Amarkantak Temple
- Ramghat - 6 km before Dhindori
- Brahmaghat - (*Skand Puran*) district Narsinghpur, Tehsil Kareli on Jabalpur Road
- Ramghat - Jamdagni *Ashram*, Onkareshwar Puvas Dhala Charu Ramghat
- Ramnath Mahadev – Baroda Indravarna Rampur Mangtola
- Ramkund – Ankleshwar

From Barouch to Amarkantak on the South Banks:

- Shukla Teerth - 20 km from Baraouch
- Sita van- 30 km from Onkareshwar Rampur
- Ramghat- 4 km west near Brahmin Ghat
- Ramghat- 30 km from Ramghat Pipria Jabalpur

- Ramghat- Dhindori on both banks

**Hanuman's air route:** It is believed that Hanuman went to the Himalayas to bring *sanjeevani* for Lakshman. He killed Kalnemi on the west of Sultanpur. The place is still called Mahaviran. While returning, Bharat aimed his arrow at him near Ayodhya. Some parts of *sanjeevani* are said to have fallen at Rithad in Vashim district and Ramtek in Maharashtra and Kapatgud in Karanataka.

There are 290 spots that have been discovered and documented are linked to Sri Ram. He is said to have spent 10 years and returned to Sutikshan *Ashram*.

## **Janakpuri Journey of Sri Ram with Rishi Vishvamitra**

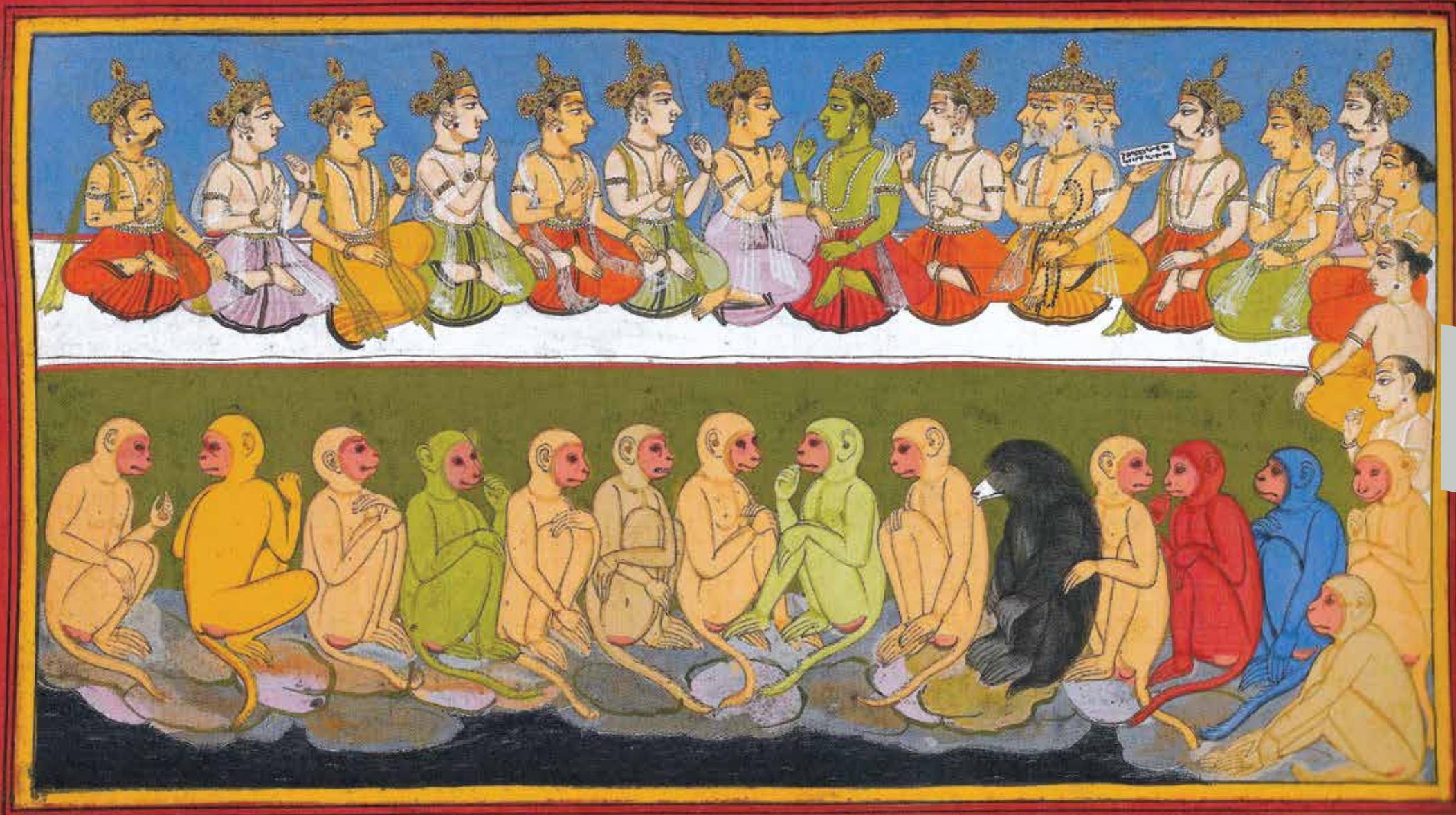
1. Ayodhya ji
2. Place of Yagya
3. Shringi Ashram
4. Bhairav Temple
5. Salona Tal
6. Barduwaria Temple
7. Ram Ghat
8. Shagar Ghat
9. Lakheshwar Diha
10. Ram Ghat

11. Kameshwar Nath
12. Sujayat and Marchi
13. Baroli and Ujiyara
14. Vameshwar Temple
15. Charitra Vana
16. Vishwamitra's Ashram
17. Ramrekha Ghat
18. Rameshwarnath
19. Ahillya Sthal
20. Tringa Ghat
21. Praiv
22. Ramchoura Temple
23. Ahilya Ashram
24. Vishwamitra's Ashram
25. Bag Tadag
26. Girija Temple
27. Bashiya
28. Doodhmati River
29. Janaki Temple
30. Rangabhoomi
31. Dhausha Temple
32. Laxminarayan Temple
33. Mani Mandap
34. Ratna Sagar
35. Vihar Kund
36. Sita Marhi
37. Sita Kund
38. Vedivan
39. Derwan
40. Dohari Ghat
41. Sri Ram Janaki Road

### ***Sri Ram's 14 Years Exile Places***

1. Sri Ram Janam Bhumi
2. Mani Parvat
3. Tamsa That
4. Purva Chakiya
5. Sri Ram Mandir
6. Surya Kund
7. Vedshruti River
8. Gomati River
9. Vadrathi/ Baruthi
10. Dev Ghat
11. Balkuni River
12. Shringverpur
13. Ramaiya
14. Sita Kund
15. Shiv Temple
16. Ram Joita
17. Triveni Sangam
18. Vhardwaj Ashram
19. Akshyvat
20. Yamuna Ghat
21. Sita Rasoi
22. Shiv Mandir
23. Sita Rasoi
24. Sita Pahari
25. Tapas Hanuman Mandir
26. Dashrath Kund
27. Kumardwaya
28. Valmiki Ashram
29. Chitrakoot Darshan
30. Kamad Giri
31. Ramsaiya

32. Kti Teerth
33. Devangna
34. Ram Ghat
35. Mandavya Ashram
36. Bharatkoop
37. Sphatik Shila
38. Gupta Godavari
39. Tathi Ghat
40. Atri Ashram
41. Amravati
42. Viradh Kund
43. Pushkarni
44. Markandeya Ashram
45. Sharbhang Ashram
46. Ashvamuni Ashram
47. Sutikshna Ashram
48. Siddha Hill
49. Sita Rasaoi
50. Ramsel
51. Brihaspati Kund
52. Sutikshna Ashram
53. Agnijivha Ashram
54. Agastya Ashram
55. Ram Janki Mandir
56. Shiv Mandir
57. Ram Ghat
58. Sri Ram Mandir
59. Sita Nahani
60. Ram Laxman Mandir
61. Sutikshana Ashram
62. Saptshringi Devi Mandir
63. Ram Sarovar
64. Markandeya Ashram
65. Ram Mandir
66. Dashratha Ghat
67. Sita Madhi
68. Laxman Panja
69. Sita Lekhani
70. Ram Laxman Rayan
71. Ram Jankaki Mandir
72. Sita bengra
73. Chandan Mitti
74. Lekha Patthar
75. Ram Rekha Dham
76. Ram Mandir (Laxmi Gudi)
77. Ram Payan
78. Laxman Paduka
79. Ram Jharna
80. Sri Ram Tekari Mandir
81. Paisar Ghat
82. Vishram Vat
83. Laxmanaeshvar Mandir
84. Shibari Narayan Mandir
85. Valmiki Ashram
86. Ram Divala
87. Ram Mandir
88. Bageshwar Mandir
89. Shiv Mandir
90. Mandavya Ashram
91. Sargi Nala
92. Rajiv Lochan
93. Kuleshwarnath Mandir
94. Lomash Ashram
95. Rudreshwar



Ramayana

*Sacrifice for the attainment of sons by Dashratha*

- |                                  |                           |                            |                                      |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 96. Ram Laxman Mandir            | 128. Panchaspar           | 160. Ramlinga              | 192. Vir Kodand Ram Mandir           |
| 97. Shringi Ashram               | 129. Nagartas             | 161. Sri Ram Vardayini     | 193. Kalyan Ram Mandir               |
| 98. Shanta Mandir                | 130. Shambhu Mahadev      | 162. Ghat Shila Mandir     | 194. Tapanshan Vinayak Mandir        |
| 99. Rishi Mandal                 | 131. Ramteerth            | 163. Rameshwar             | 195. Navgraha Talab                  |
| 100. Agastya Ashram (Hardibhata) | 132. Sita Nahani          | 164. Ayomukhi Cave         | 196. Darbhshyanam                    |
| 101. Sharbhanga Ashram (Daldali) | 133. Rameshwar Mandir     | 165. Kabandh Ashram        | 197. Setu Avshesh                    |
| 102. Angira Ashram               | 134. Shaneshwar Mandir    | 166. Shabri Ashram         | 198. Vilundi Teerth                  |
| 103. Muchkund Ashram             | 135. Agastya Mandir       | 167. Pampasar              | 199. Lonely Ram Mandir               |
| 104. Karke Ashram                | 136. Rameshwar            | 168. Hanuman Mandir        | 200. Ramjharokha                     |
| 105. Vishnu Mandir               | 137. Agastyeshwar Mandir  | 169. Rishyamook Parvat     | 201. Jata Teerth                     |
| 106. Gadia Mandir                | 138. Panchvati            | 170. Chintamani            | 202. Agni Teerth                     |
| 107. Shiv Mandir                 | 139. Janasthan            | 171. Kishkindha            | 203. Ramnath Mandir                  |
| 108. Rakas Hada                  | 140. Sita Sarowar         | 172. Prasrvan Parvat       | 204. Dhanushkoti                     |
| 109. Raksha Dongri               | 141. Ramsej Parwat        | 173. Sfatik Shila          | 205. Chakrateerth                    |
| 110. Sita Kund                   | 142. Kushavrit Teerth     | 174. Kar Sidheshwar Mandir | 206. Bhadarsha                       |
| 111. Koti Maheshwar              | 143. Ramkund              | 175. Hal Rameshwar         | 207. Ram Kund                        |
| 112. Gupteshwar                  | 144. Sidheswar            | 176. Dasaratha Rameshwar   | 208. Hanuman Bharat Millan<br>Mandir |
| 113. Amma Kund                   | 145. Than                 | 177. Bhairva Mandir        | 209. Bharat Kund                     |
| 114. Dumripada                   | 146. Baneshwar            | 178. Baneshwar Mandir      | 210. Jata Kund                       |
| 115. Mallikeshwar Mandir         | 147. Mrig Vyadheshwar     | 179. Rameshwar             | 211. Dashratha Samadhi               |
| 116. Ramaram Chitmittin Mandir   | 148. Madhyameshwar        | 180. Laxmaneshwar          | 212. Vibhishana Kund                 |
| 117. Saleru Sangam               | 149. Rameshwar            | 181. Kodand Ram Mandir     | 213. Shatrughana Kund                |
| 118. Shabri Godavari Sangam      | 150. Ghateshwar           | 182. Dhanush Koti          | 214. Ram Mund                        |
| 119. Sunder Sita Ram Mandir      | 151. Mukteshwar           | 183. Shiv Mandir           | 215. Sugreev Kund                    |
| 120. Parnshala                   | 152. Sarvateerth          | 184. Sri Ram Mandir        | 216. Hanuman Kund                    |
| 121. Sri Ram Mandir              | 153. Balukeshwar Mandir   | 185. Vishnu Mandir         | 217. Sita Kund                       |
| 122. Skanda Ashram               | 154. Ram Daria            | 186. Ling Shiv Mandir      | 218. Sho Pap Kund                    |
| 123. Sita Mandir                 | 155. Ramling Deva Sthanam | 187. Kodandram Mandir      | 219. Makari Kund                     |
| 124. Sharbhanga Ashram           | 156. Rameshwar            | 188. Shiv Mandir           | 220. Jankora                         |
| 125. Jamdagni Ashram             | 157. Ramkund              | 189. Ram Swami Mandir      | 221. Guptaghat                       |
| 126. Rameshwar                   | 158. Kunthal Giri         | 190. Vedaraneshwar Mandir  |                                      |
| 127. Murdeshwar Mandir           | 159. Yedeshwari           | 191. Rampadan              |                                      |



*Rama Lifting Shiva's Bow*

## *Janakpuri Journey of Sri Ram with Rishi Vishwamitra*

### **1. Ayodhya (Saryu ji), Dashrath ka Mahal, Faizabad (Uttar Pradesh)**



Ayodhya is very important in the Ramayana. It was the capital city of King Dasrath. It was the place from where sage Vishwamitra had taken Sri Ram and Lakshman to save his 'yagna'.

(Ref: Valmiki Ramayana 1/5, 6, all chapters and other references, Sri Ram Charitmanas 1/15/1: 1/34/2, 3: 1/189/1 to 1/207/4: 2/0/1 to 2/187/1 there are many references).

### **2. Makhoda, Place of Yagya, Faizabad (Uttar Pradesh)**

Makhoda was the point where King Dashrath had performed 'Putreshti Yagna' which is a prayer to be blessed with a son, with the help of Shringi Rishi.



(Ref: Valmiki Ramayana 1/8/ to 1/163 whole chapter, Manas 1/188/3/4).

### **3. Sheravaghat (Saryu ji), Shringi Ashram, Faizabad (Uttar Pradesh)**



The ancient Shringi Ashram is located on the banks of River Saryu. This is 3km north of current Mehboob Ganj, near Sherva Ghat. The area is approximately 20 km away from Ayodhya. Many living places of sages are located here. It is believed that sage Vishwamitra had imparted the knowledge of

'Balaa' and 'Atibalaa' to Sri Ram at this ashram. It is also believed that many saints lived in this ashram at that time and it was in one of these ashrams the sage Vishwamitra, Sri Ram, and Lakshman had rested.

(Ref: Valmiki Ramayana 1/22/11 to 24, Manas 1/205 Doha to 1/208/2:1/208/4).

### **4. Karon, Kameshwor Temple, Balia (Uttar Pradesh)**



The Karon, Kameshwor Temple is believed to be where Muni Vishwamitra explained to Sri Ram that this was where Lord Shiva smashed Kamdev into ashes. A temple of Lord Shiva and a pond still exist here. It is believed that Lord Shiva had meditated in this place.

(Ref: Valmiki Ramayana 1/23/9 to 16 Manas 1/205 doha to 1/208/2.)

### **5. Buxar (Gangaji), Vaneshwor Temple, Buxar (Bihar)**



It is believed that Lord Vishnu had worshipped Lord Shiva before he had taken the *Vamanavtaar* (the dwarf incarnation). The *Vamaseshwor Shivlinga* installed by Lord Vishnu is a place of great devotion. Vishwamitra had shown this place to Sri Ram.

(Ref: Valmiki Ramayana 1/29/1 to 12).



**6. Buxar (Ganga ji) Charitra Vana, Buxar (Bihar)**



It is believed that Sri Ram fought his very first battle here. It is said that his persona of a brave warrior came from this event. It is also known as Tadaka Van. As per references of the Ramayana, Tadaka had lived in this forest and she had almost covered the area of about one-and-a-half Yojans. It is believed that this is the place where Sri Ram killed Tadaka, and it is located in Buxar.

(Ref: Valmiki Ramayana 1/24/12 to 32, 1/25-26 whole chapter Manas 1/208/3, 1/205 doha to 1/208/2).

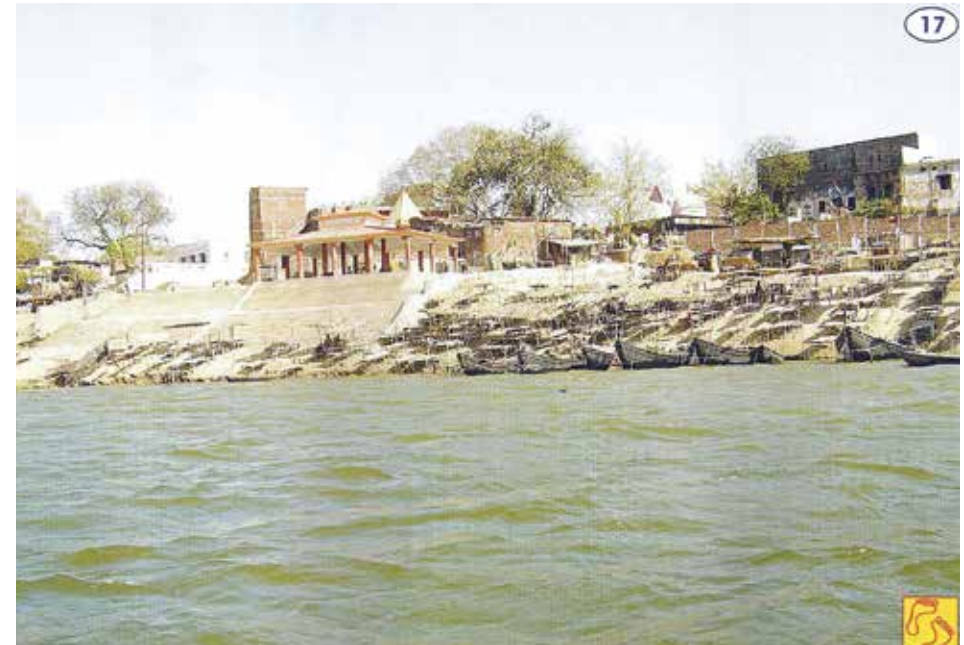
**7. Buxar (Ganga ji), Vishwamitra Ashram, Buxar (Bihar)**



The Vishwamitra Ashram was located in *Tapovan* and also known as *Siddaashram*. The entire area of *Tapovan* is considered to be *Siddhaashram* as there is no standing *ashram* at this location.

(Ref: Valmiki Ramayana 1/29 full chapter Manas 1/209 doha & 1/209/1, 2, 3).

**8. Buxar (Ganga ji), Ramrekha Ghat, Buxar (Bihar)**



It is believed that Sri Ram took a bath at this place after killing Tadaka. It is believed that Sri Ram had visited this place twice. After his coronation, Sri Ram had come to this place to perform a *yagna*. At that time, he had drawn the outlines of *yagna* platform with the tip of an arrow.

(Ref: Valmiki Ramayana 1/30/26 refer it for Ram Rekha Ghat also, Manas 1/209/4 to 5. Refer it for Ram Rekha Ghat).



**9. Aharoli (Ganga), Gautam Ashram, Buxar (Bihar)**

Aharoli village is about 3 km east from Buxar. It is believed that Sri Ram performed the "Ahillya Uddhaar" (setting oneself free from a curse) at this place. According to Ram Charit Manas, Sri Ram performed it after he left Siddhaashram, before crossing River Ganga or River Sonebhadra.

(Ref: Manas 1/209/6 to 1/210/Chhand 4).

**10. Ahiyari (Gautami Ganga), Gautam Ashram, Darbhanga (Bihar)**

As per Valmiki Ramayana the ashram of Gautam muni was located in an orchid of Mithila. Ahillya was there in the form of a stone statue. At present, it is known as Ahiyari. Earlier, a tapovan was here and even now four ashrams located in four directions belonging to Yagnavalk (Jagvan), Shrang (Singiya), Bhrangi (Bhairava) and Gautam Rishi can be located here. People have great respect for this temple and they visit it to receive



the blessings of Ahillya. This is located about 25 km north-west of Darbhanga.

(Ref: Valmiki Ramayana 1/48/11 to 33,1/49/11 to 22).

## Sri Ram's 14 Years Exile Places (Some Places)

### 1. Ayodhya is the birthplace of Sri Ram.

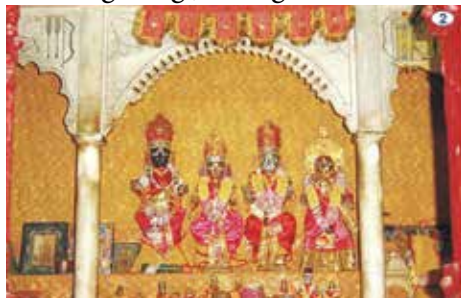


It is believed that Sri Ram began his exile from this place. Important places here include Gaya Vedi Kund, Sita Kund and Janaura (Jankaura).

(Ref: Valmiki Ramayana 2/1 to 44 all full chapters Manas 1/346 doha ro 2/84).

### 2. Ayodhya ji, Mani Parvat, Faizabad (Uttar Pradesh)

It is believed that during the wedding King Janak gifted



the newly-wed couple with breathtaking gems and jewels. Those gems and jewels looked like a hill and that is why this place is called 'Mani Parvat' even today. During the rainy season our most revered Sita and Ram used to come here to enjoy the swings. Even till today there is a tradition of swinging on *Hariyali Teej*.

### 3. Gaura Ghat (Tamsa), Tamsa Tat, Faizabad (Uttar Pradesh)



It is believed that Sri Ram stayed here on the first night of the exile. The present names for Tamsa are Mandah and Mandar, and the particular spot is known as *Gaura Ghat*. *Gaura* word has been twisted from *Gaurav*. It is about 20 km from Ayodhya ji.

(Ref: Valmiki Ramayana 2/46/1 to 17 & 28 Manas 2/84 doha to 2/84/1, 2, 3 & 2/85 doha).

### 4. Sharbhanga, Sharbhanga Ashram, Satna (Uttar Pradesh)



This is where it is believed that Sri Ram had a view of Lord Indra. It is at this place Sharbhanga muni had played host to Sri Ram and thrown himself in the *Yogaagni* (holy fire of Yagna). This huge *ashram* is located in a dense forest, about 13 km from Chitahara station. Other important locations here include the Ram Laxman kund, a hot water stream that emerged from the arrow of Sri Ram, Ashwamukhi Devi's temple, Suryakund, and Doodhmaniakund, among others.

(Ref: Valmiki Ramayana 3/5 full chapter Manas 3/6/4 to 3/8/2).

### 5. Village Silaha, Sutikshana Ashram, Satna (Madhya Pradesh)



The *ashram* of Sutikshan muni is located at a distance of 6 km from Siddha Pahar (mountain). It is connected with a concrete road from Jaitavara station. The *Vigrahas* (idols) of Sri Ram, Lakshman, Sita and Sutikshan muni are located here.

(Ref: Manas 3/6/4 to 3).

### 6. Rakselva, Ramsel, Satna (Madhya Pradesh)

Ramshel is the ancient name of Ledahara hills, which is about 4 km from Sita *Raso*i. People worship the footprints of Sri Ram at this place. As per the road map, Aanand Sagar, Jaimuni, Ramshel, Bal Chona,



Siyavari and Karsara are all located along a straight line.

### **7. Nasik (Godavari), Panchvati, Nasik (Maharashtra)**



This is the place, where five banyan trees (*Vat Vriksh*) have been planted at one place on the banks of River Godavari. As per folklore, this is the same Panchavati from where Ravana had kidnapped Sita.

(Ref: Valmiki Ramayana 3/15, 16, 46, 47, 48 full chapter & 1/49/1 to 22, Manas 3/12/9 to 3/28 doha).

### **8. Shabri Ashram, Surevan, Belgaon (Karnataka)**



Surevan is located near Gunnaga village 14 kms north of Ramdurg. Surevan is the distorted version of world Shabri Van. The plum forests are located near the *ashram*. These plums are very sweet in taste. People worship Shabri Ma by the names of Van Shankari, Aadi Shakti and Shakumbhari.

(Ref: Valmiki Ramayana 3/7 full chaptet. Manas 3/33/3 to 3/36 doha).

### **9. Hanuman Mandir, Hanuman Halli (Tungbhadra), Kopal (Karnataka)**

It is believed that this was the place where Sri Ram and Hanuman met. A temple located on a nearby hill is dedicated to Hanuman's mother Anjana Devi.



(Ref: Valmiki Ramayana 4/3, 4 all chapter Manas 4/0/1, 4/03 to 4/3/3).

### **10. Rishyamook Parvat, Hampi (Tungbhadra), Kopal (Karnataka)**



The place where Ram and Lakshman had a meeting with Sugreeva was at Rishyamook hill in Hampi. At that time, Sugreeva used to live here as he was afraid of Bali. One of the caves called Sugreeva *Gufa* (cave) is located on the hill.

(Ref: Valmiki Ramayana 3/54/1 to 4, 4/2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11 full chapters, 4/12/1 tp 13. Manas 4/01, 4/6/12).

### **11. Chintamani, Anaagundi (Tungbhadra), Billari (Karnataka)**

The river Tungbhadra takes a turn here in the shape of a bow. As per folklore, there was a battle between Bali and Sugreev on one side of the river and Sri Ram shot Bali with an arrow from behind the trees from the other side. The footprints of Sri Ram can be seen here.

(Ref: Valmiki Ramayana 4/12/14 to 42, 4/14 full chapters, 4/15/4 to 4/25/54, Manas 4/6/13 to 4/10/4)

### **12. Prasravan Parvat, Hampi (Tungbhadra), Billari (Karnataka)**



Sri Ram had spent four months during a monsoon on a hill top called Prasravan and after getting information about the whereabouts of Sita he had proceeded for Lanka from this place. One of the peaks of Malyavant hill is called Prasravan and is located 4 km from Hampi. It is believed that this is the only place

where one can find an idol of Sri Ram not holding a bow.

(Ref: Valmiki Ramayana 4/27, 28 full chapter, 4/30/1 to 4/31/15, 4/38/15 to 4/47 full chapter. Manas 4/11/5 to 4/11/5 to 4/18/4, 4/20 doha to 4/22/6).

**13. Karshiddheshwar Mandir, Ramgiri, Chitradurg (Karnataka)**



There is a hill named Ramgiri located 25 km from Hosdurg. Sri Ram had worshipped Lord Shiva at this place while on his way to Lanka. That is why the hill is known as Ramgiri and the temple is called Rameshwar.

(Ref: Valmiki Ramayana 7/4/9 to all chapters onwards. Manas 5/34/4 to 5/34 Chhand 2).

**14. Dhanush Koti, Melkote (Kaveri), Mandia (Karnataka)**



It is believed that the *Vanar Sena* (monkey army) had their refreshments at Melkote. A water resource created by Sri Ram with his arrow. It still exists on a hill in the forest which is located at a distance of 3 km from the city.

(Ref: Valmiki Ramayana full chapters onwards 6/4/9 Manas 5/34/2 to 5/34 chhand 2).

**15. Rampadam, Kodi Karae, Nagapattanam (Tamil Nadu)**



According to folklore, Sri Ram had started the construction of a

bridge from Kodi Karae, but he had to change the location of the bridge due to some reasons. About 7 km away from Vedarayam, the footprints of Sri Ram have been etched on the forest lands.

(Ref: Valmiki Ramayana full chapters onwards 6/4/9 Manas 5/34/2 to 5/34 chhand 2).

**16. Shiv Mandir, Teertand Dhanam, Pamnathpuram (Tamil Nadu)**



This place is located 10 km south of Muttukuda. Sri Ram had worshipped Lord Shiva in Teertananda Dhanam as per the order of Augustya muni. The beautiful pictures of Sri Ram, Lakshman, King Setupati, Rishi Augustya and Lord Shiva are carved in the temple. The Ramarpaad can be seen from a distance of 1 km.

(Ref: Valmiki Ramayana full chapters onwards 6/4/9 manas 5/34/2 to 5/34 chhand 2).

**17. Darbhshyanam, Tripullani, nathpuram (Tamil Nadu)**



After reaching the seashore, Sri Ram meditated for three days by lying on the grass to ask the sea for a passage. He installed the *Shivalinga* at this place, which is considered the *Aadi* (ancient) Rameshwaram. This is the place where the Sea God had appeared before Sri Ram and told him of the style of bridge construction.

(Red: Valmiki Ramayana 6/21 full chapter, 6/22/48 to 87. Manas 5.49/3 to 5/50/4, 5/57 doha 6/1/1/. This reference is also related with the ruins of Setu).



**18. Setu ke Avshesh, Chhedukarai, Ramnathpuram (Tamil Nadu)**

The word *Chhedu* is the distorted version of *Setu* and the Tamil word *Karaei* means corner. The foundation stone of the bridge was laid at this place. The remains of *Setu* can be seen 2 km deep in the sea. These remains could be the pillars of *Setu* as they are 10-11 feet in the sea.

(Ref: Valmiki Ramayana 6/21 full chapter 6/22/48 to 87. Manas 5/49/3 to 5/50/4, 5/57 doha 6/1/1. The same reference is related to the remains of Setu).

**19. Kodandram Mandir, Rameshwaram, Ramnathpuram (Tamil Nadu)**

The word *Kodanda* means bow. An ancient temple located inside the sea has beautiful idols of Sri Ram, Lakshman, Hanuman, Sugreeva, Jamvanta and Vibhishana. This is

the same place where Vibhishana had come under the shelter of Sri Ram and had performed the coronation ceremony.

(Ref: Valmiki Ramayana 6/15, 18, 19 full chapter, 6/123/121 Manas 5/40/5 to 5/49B doha).



.....  
(Reference: *In the Footsteps of Sri Ram* by Dr. Ram Autar)



*Nepal: Mr. Bikram PandE Kajii  
and Experts*



*India: Mr. Deepak Anand*

# Buddhism

॥ न हि वेरेन वेरानि, सम्मन्तीध कुदाचन ।  
अवेरेन च सम्मन्ति, एस धम्मो सनातन ॥

भावार्थ

यस संसारमा वैरभाव राखेर दुस्मनी कहिल्यै शान्त/साम्य हुँदैन ।  
अवैर (मैत्रीभाव) बाट नै दुस्मनीहरु शान्त र साम्य हुन्छन् ।  
यही नै सनातन देखिको नियम वा परिपाटी हो ।

Essence: Hostilities aren't stilled through hostility.  
Hostilities are stilled through non-hostility.  
And this is an unending truth.



Place	Location
Tilaurakot	Lumbini Pradesh
Kudan	Lumbini Pradesh
Devdaha	Lumbini Pradesh
Ramagrama	Lumbini Pradesh
Lumbini Sacred Garden	Lumbini Pradesh
Namobuddha	Bagmati Pradesh
Swayambhu	Bagmati Pradesh
Bodhnath Stupa	Bagmati Pradesh
Kopan Monastery	Bagmati Pradesh

Place	Location
Bodhgaya	Bihar
Rajagriha	Bihar
Vaishali	Bihar
Sarnath	Uttar Pradesh
Shravasti	Uttar Pradesh
Sankashya	Uttar Pradesh
Kushinagara	Uttar Pradesh



# Buddhist Circuit - Nepal

Author: Mr. Bikram PandE KAJI, Dr. Ramesh Dhungel and Experts

There are numerous Buddhist pilgrimage sites scattered across Nepal from the majestic Himalayas to the beautiful Terai.

In the Terai of Nepal we have the most important pilgrimage centre Lumbini, which is located in Rupandehi district. In and around Lumbini and Kapilvastu we have dozens of important pilgrimage and archeological Buddhist sites including Tilaurakot, Niglihawa, Gotihawa, Sagarhawa, Kudan, Ramgram, Sainamaina, Arorakot and Dohani.

In Kathmandu Valley there are Buddhist centres such as Swoyambhu (*Phagpa Shingkon*), *Bauddha* (*Khasti* or *Jyarung Khashor* in Newar and Himalayan Languages accordingly), Chabahil (*Salag-dolag*), Charumati Bihar and Manjushree's place, Hiranyavarna Mahavihara (Golden Temple), Mahabauddha Patan, Four Ashokan Stupas in Patan. There are also important sites such *Ashura* Cave and Monastery is located in Pharping where Buddhist Bajra Guru (saint)

Padmasambhava had meditated and received enlightenment. (Biography of Padmasambhava). Around Kathmandu Valley there are places like Risheshwor (*Chhumig Jyangchhub*) and Namobuddha (*Tagmolujin*).

In the Himalayan region, we have important Buddhist pilgrimage sites such as *Lobogekar* (*Gar Gompa*) in Upper Mustang, and *Guru Shangphug* in Thak Khola, lower Mustang. In the middle region of Mustang, *Chhumig Gyachha* or *Salamevar* (*Muktinath*) is also a very important Buddhist pilgrimage centre.

Besides these places in the western Himalayas, we have a spiritual hidden land commonly known as Beyuls in Himalayan languages, where Guru Padmasambhava meditated and places like Mahamanjushree's spiritual sites.

According to the *Mahaparinirvana Sutra* (the sutra of the Great Demise), in the last discourse of the Buddha (6th BCE), he spoke about the sacredness of certain places associated with his life. These were:

**Lumbini:** The place where he was born;

**Bodhgaya:** The place where he attained enlightenment;

**Sarnath:** The place where he preached his first sermon;

**Kushinagara:** The place where he attained *Mahaparinirvana*.

The Buddha emphasised that devotees should visit and venerate these holy places as a way of purifying their thought, speech and action. In other words, pilgrimage to these holy places would energise the devotees to make progress on following the Buddha's Eightfold Path. It is widely believed today that pilgrimage to these holy places with the correct attitude can help devotees advance on the path of the *Dhamma* (*Dharma*).

In the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE, roughly two centuries after the demise (*Mahaparinirvana*) of the Buddha, the Indian Subcontinent came under the rule of Emperor Ashoka of the Maurya dynasty. After having fought many battles, Ashoka embraced the teachings of Buddha (*Dhamma*).

He dedicated the rest of his life to spreading *Dhamma*. He erected rock edicts bearing inscriptions of *Dhamma*, sent missions to far-off lands to disseminate *Dhamma*, and undertook *Dhamma* pilgrimage to the four sacred places mentioned in *Mahaparinirvana Sutra* and the four places where Buddha performed miracles. Indian Emperor Ashoka is said to have erected a pillar indicating the palace of Buddha's father.

These four places where Buddha performed miracles were:

**Rajagriha:** The place where the Buddha tamed the elephant Nalagiri;

**Vaishali:** The place where a monkey offered honey to the Buddha;

**Shravasti:** The place where the Buddha performed the miracle of pairs; and

**Sankisa:** The place where Buddha descended from Tushita heaven.

The four sacred places and the four places of miracles are together known as *Atthamahathanani* or the Eight Great Places. Pilgrimage to these eight shrines is known as '*Dhamma yatra*' (*Dhamma* expedition) or a pilgrimage of piety. Every Buddhist has a desire to visit has a desire to visit these sites in their lifetime.

## Ancient Kapilvastu

Remains of the Ancient City of Kapilavastu, the Capital of the Kingdom of the Shakyas

Historically, Kapilvastu is believed to be named after Saint Kapil. The Buddha visited Kapilvastu a few times during his life. It is also said that the first nunnery in Buddhist history was established in Kapilvastu by Buddha's stepmother, Mahaprajapati Gautami.

Tilaurakot, Kapilvastu is believed to be where Lord Buddha spent the first 29 years of his life as the crown prince. Chinese Buddhist scholars Faxian (also referred to as Fa-Hien and Xuanzang, also known as Hiuen Tsang), are said to have visited Tialurakot in the 5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries AD. A few renowned archaeologists have also recently identified Tilaurakot as the actual capital of Kapilvastu and the home of King Siddhodhana, father of Prince Siddhartha, who went onto becoming the Buddha.

The royal town of Tilaurakot is about 27 km west of Lumbini and 3 km from Taulihawa. A joint effort by Nepali and Japanese archaeologists uncovered the

town with its elaborate gateway to the west, the twin *stupas* of the Buddha's parents, and King Siddhodhan's palace in and around the Tilaurakot mound. Later British archaeologists also reconfirmed the exact location of the palace.

The Chinese pilgrims Fa-Hien and Hiuen-Tsang who visited Tilaurakot in the 5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries AD mentioned seeing numerous *stupas*, monasteries, and palaces in their travelogues now available in English as well. They noted that they saw Kapilvastu in complete ruins and recounted about deserted cities within Kapilvastu.

There are historical reports that King Virudhaka avenged his father, who had been duped and insulted by the Shakyas. King Virudhaka is said to have avenged his father by massacring the Shakyas and destroying the cities during the last days of Lord Buddha.

Currently, a maternity route is being developed from Lumbini to

Tilaurakot as a tribute to Mother Maya Devi who gave birth to Lord Buddha. Similarly, one of the most important events in the life of Lord Buddha was the *Great Renunciation known as Mahabhinishkramana*. Prince Siddhartha as he was known, left his luxury life in search of truth and peace on the day of *Gurupurnima*, which is known as *Mahabhinishkramana* in Buddhist script. This occasion was revived and celebrated from 2019 as the auspicious day of the great renunciation of the Buddha.

### Accessibility

It takes almost two hours to reach Tilaurakot from Bhairahawa by bus or car and one hour from Lumbini.

### Accommodation

Few hotels accommodate tourists in this area.

## Devdaha

Birth Place of Mother Maya Devi, mother of Siddhartha Gautam

Devdaha is the ancient capital of the Koliya kingdom and is 54 km east of Lumbini across the Rohini River. It is close to the East-West Highway that passes from Narayanghat to Butwal.

It is the maternal hometown of Queen Maya Devi, Prajapati Gautami (Siddhartha's stepmother), and Princess Yashodhara (his consort). Seven years after his Enlightenment, Lord Buddha is believed to have visited Devdaha and ordained followers of Jain Sadhu Nirgrantha Nathputra. There are several other sites around Devdaha including Kumarbarti, Khayardanda, Bairimai/Kanyamai, Bhabanipur/Devidamar, and *Matthagadi* (ancient weapons). On the occasion of Buddha Jayanti, a huge colourful procession takes place from Lumbini to Devdaha.

### Accessibility

It is on the way from Narayanghat to Butwal near Parasi. One can reach there in one hour from Butwal. Similarly, it takes three hours from Narayanghat and two hours from Bhairahawa.



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Buddhism



Devdaha by Manoj Poudel



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## Ramagrama

Ramagrama is a brick mound on the banks of the Jharahi River. It is a seven-meter high brick *stupa* containing one of the *Astha Dhatu* (relics) of Lord Buddha. The King of Ramagrama, the eighth king to obtain the Buddha's relics is said to have built the stupa.

History mentions that Emperor Ashoka wanted to open it to spread 84,000 relics into a number of *stupas*. However, the Dragon King of Ramagrama *stupa* did not permit this. It is the only *stupa* that has remained unearthen since it was buried.

### Accessibility

It is on the way from Parasi to Bhairahawa. It takes one hour to reach there from Parasi which is on the East- West Highway and also from Bhairahawa.

## Lumbini Sacred Garden

Lumbini is the birthplace of Prince Siddhartha Gautam who later became Lord Buddha. It is believed that he took his first seven steps right after birth and uttered an epoch-making message to the suffering humanity. This happened in a beautiful *sal* grove, which is now the focal point of the Lumbini Garden area.

As a tradition that is still prevalent in the Indian subcontinent Maya Devi, the queen of Shakya King Suddhodhana of Kapilvastu, was passing through the Lumbini Garden

area on the way to her father's home in Devdaha for delivery. On the day of '*Vaisakha Poornima*' (Full Moon Day of May 623 B.C.), she had labour pains and took a bath in Pushkarini (the Sacred Pond). Soon after, she took the support of a tree branch and gave birth to Crown Prince Siddhartha.

**The Lumbini Garden** covers an area of three square miles and encompasses three zones. Each zone covers one square mile connected with walkways and a canal and evokes an atmosphere of spirituality,



peace, universal brotherhood, and non-violence consistent with Lord Buddha's message to the world.

Apart from the Maya Devi temple, there are many monasteries belonging to different sects of Buddhism representing various countries present in the monastic zone which is separated by a highway. It is also famous for bird watching, especially cranes and other migratory birds. More than 250 species of birds can be seen near World Peace *Stupa*. The Jagadishpur Tal reservoir is listed as a *RAMSAR* site. It is the best place to watch migratory birds that come from Siberia in the winters.

The Maya Devi Temple is the heart of all monuments at this holy site. The temple complex bears testimony to several phases of construction over the centuries. It was fully restored and reopened in 2003 during the celebration of the 2,547<sup>th</sup> auspicious birth anniversary of Lord Buddha. Inside the temple, there are remains of structures of the early Maya Devi Temple that dates back from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC to the 7<sup>th</sup> century A.D. The upper floor remains open for meditation.

The sculpture at the temple depicts Queen Maya Devi grasping a tree branch with her right hand while giving birth to Siddhartha Gautama, supported by Prajapati Gautami, her sister Prajapati. To the far right are the figures of Brahma and Indra, wearing conical crowns, standing in devotion before the queen to receive the pine child, as narrated by Buddhist literature. At the bottom of the panes is the newly born Prince Siddhartha Gautam with a halo around his head standing upright on a lotus pedestal with two celestial figures receiving him.

Ashokan Pillar erected by Indian Emperor Ashoka around 249 B.C. near Maya Devi Temple is testimony of the exact location of the birthplace of Prince Siddhartha. This testimony has been endorsed by Chinese scholars who visited Lumbini in the 5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D. It was later reconfirmed by various scholars during the course of different periods.

Buddha Jayanti is the biggest festival that is observed in Lumbini.

#### **Accessibility**

There are many options to reach

Lumbini. It takes 35 minutes by flight to reach the newly built Gautam Buddha International Airport from Kathmandu. Lumbini is 20 km away from Bhairahawa, and it takes half an hour to reach there by car or bus. Tourists can enter Bhairahawa through Sunauli from India.

#### **Accommodation**

There are good accommodation facilities around Lumbini Garden ranging from budget to five-star accommodation.

#### **Going around**

Boat service is available from the entrance of the bus park to Eternal Peace Flame on the way to Maya Devi Temple. E-rickshaws can be hired to visit different places within the garden.

#### **Entrance Fee and camera fee**

The entrance fee is applied to all visitors except for residents. There are fees applicable for cameras and video cameras. Shoes are not allowed inside the temple.



## Mayadevi temple

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Temple that dates back from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C. to 7<sup>th</sup> century A.D. The upper floor remains open for meditation.

The sculpture at Maya Devi Temple depicts Queen Maya Devi grasping a tree branch with her right hand while giving birth to Siddhartha Gautama, supported by Queen

and sister Prajapati Gautami, at the time of delivery. To the far right is the figure of Brahma and Indra, wearing conical crowns, standing in devotion before the queen to receive the divine child, as narrated by Buddhist literature. At the bottom of the panes is the newly born Prince Siddhartha Gautam with a halo around his head standing upright on a lotus pedestal with two celestial figures receiving him.

## Kudan

Kudan, which is the ancient site of *Nyigrodharama*, is another important historical site related to Buddha. It is about 6 km (3.5 miles) from Tilaurakot.

It is believed that King Suddhodhana came to Kudan to meet his son after he attained enlightenment. Buddha's son Rahula was ordained here at the age of eight. The ruins of his temporary abode are well preserved in Kudan. Buddha first came to this place on Fagu Purnima. Since last few year, a programme is organised there to celebrate this occasion.

### **Accessibility**

It can be reached in 15 minutes from Tilaurakot.







Tilaurakot by Manoj Poudel

## ***Additional Place of Buddhist Circuit Nepal***

When we talk about Lord Buddha and the sites related to Buddha, we need to understand about the Primordial Buddhas also who were from around the capital of the kingdom of Kapilvastu and Tilaurakot Palace from whom Siddhartha Gautam was inspired to get further knowledge towards enlightenment. There were 4 primordial Buddhas: Kanakamuni, Krakuchhanda, Kashyap and Maitraya.

### *Niglihawa (Niglisagar)*

Niglihawa is identified as the holy place where Kanakamuni Buddha, one of the four Primordial Buddhas, was born. It is about 7 km north-east of Taulihawa. Emperor Ashoka visited the site in 249 B.C. and erected a stone pillar with an inscription on it. The Ashoka inscription engraved on the pillar in *Brahmi* script and *Pali* language attests the fact that Emperor Ashoka visited and expanded the size of the existing Kanakamuni Buddha's *stupa* there. Emperor Ashoka worshiped at the *stupa* and erected a stone pillar to mark the

place of Kanakamuni Buddha on the occasion of the 20<sup>th</sup> year of his coronation. The pillar also bears an inscription, 'Om mani padme hum' and 'Sri Ripu Malla Chiram Jayatu 1234' of King Ripu Malla, Emperor of the *Yatshe (Khasa)* Kingdom which was also inscribed in 1234 *Saka* Era which is A.D. 1312.

### *Gotihawa*

It is believed that Gotihawa is the place of one of the four Primordial Buddhas known as Krakuchhanda. It is located about 5 km south-west of Taulihawa. Gotihawa is identified as the holy native place of Krakuchhanda Buddha. Emperor Ashoka visited the site in 249 B.C. and erected the stone pillar. Ashoka also built a big *stupa*, dedicating to the Krakuchhanda Buddha there. Standing *in-situ* on the original masonry basement foundation, the existing pillar is 3.25 metres high and has a diameter of 83/79 centimetres. The upper part of the pillar bearing an inscription broke off long ago and is still missing. Prominent Chinese travellers Fahsien (399 - 413 A.D.) and Hiuen

Tsang (636 A.D.) mention about the erection of this pillar which originally had a lion installed at the top of the pillar. *There is a stupa in Gotihawa*, which was built by Emperor Ashoka to pay reverence to Krakuchhanda Buddha in 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C. It is estimated that the expansion of the *stupa* was carried out during the era of *Saka* and *Kushana* (end of 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C. to the 2-3 century A.D.). As per the excavation report of researcher Dr. L. A. Waddell, the *stupas* diameter is 22 metres with a *Pradakshinapatha* (circumambulatory path) around it.

There are several ancient potteries, brick structures of *stupas* and monasteries outside modern Gotihawa village area. The site is believed to have started developing in 6th century B.C. At the centre of the present village there is an ancient well, which is still used by the villagers and in the south lies an ancient water tank (pond). A small stone statue with the image of Krakuchhanda Buddha has been installed in a nearby area.

### *Sagarhawa*

Sagarhawa is the forest site where the ruins of an ancient pond were excavated in 1895. Sagarhawa is located about 12 km north of Taulihawa. Archaeologists have identified this site as the 'Palace of the Massacre of the Shakyas' by King Virudhaka the son of Prasenajita of the kingdom of Koshala. The ruins of the ancient site lie on the west and south banks of the large rectangular pond, which is locally known as *Lumbu Sagar* or long pond in then Niglihawa village.

## Namo Buddha

The pilgrimage site of Namo Buddha is about 40 km from Boudhanath Stupa. Located on slightly elevated land, it is a pleasant and out-of-the-way place. The landscape below resembles an eight-petalled lotus, and the sky above has the form of a wheel with nine spokes. In the summertime, southern winds bring coolness; in wintertime, the warm, gentle sun is like the clear and radiant face of youth. The flowers bloom bright and are multi-coloured. In the blue vault of the sky, clouds gently gather and turn all shades of red at daybreak. They are beautiful in wondrous hues that fill the space with their canopies and banners. Like a heap of white silk scarves, mists drift slowly across the hills. From the clouds, the drums of thunder resonate; lightning flashes like a slim dancer's quick movement; and fine showers fall in brightness.

In essence, all the harmonious conditions needed for meditation are present at this sacred site. Merely coming here inspires one's faith; renunciation and weariness with *samsara* naturally arise. As it is said:



"In the supreme place of a solitary mountain retreat, any activity is virtuous." *Namo Buddha* is a place of pilgrimage highly revered by people from across the world.

'*Namo Buddhaya*' means ("I take refuge in the Buddha") The ancient *stupa* has become a special place to seek divine solace through activities such as circumambulation and

making offerings. People come from all corners of the world to visit the site and make traditional offerings of butter lamps, a fresh coat of white paint for the *stupa*, and a pleated cloth that encircles the base of its spire and ripples in the wind.

### **Accessibility**

Namo Buddha can be reached after a three-hour trek either from Dhulikhel or Panauti.

### **Accommodation**

Few hotels accommodate tourists in this place.

## Swayambhu

As per a popular myth, when *Bodisatwo* Manjushree, who hailed from Mount Wutaishan in China but lived in Lhasa, was traveling toward the south via the high ridges of Shivapuri, Kakani, Nagarjun, and Chandragiri of present-day Kathmandu, he saw a constant light radiating from a lotus in the big lake in the valley down below. He felt it was a God, and this God should be given refuge to settle down on Earth. So, Maniushree drained out the lake through what is now known as Chovar Gorge. Then, he created a place for God in the form of present-day Swayambhu *Stupa*, standing above the valley of Kathmandu. He also created a small settlement to look after the *stupa*, and that was the birth of *Newa* history.

Swayambhu is an ancient religious complex on top of a hill in Kathmandu Valley, west of Kathmandu city. It has great mythological history and is a place of day-to-day religious practice. It is probably the most sacred among Buddhist pilgrimage sites. The *stupa* consists of a dome at the base,

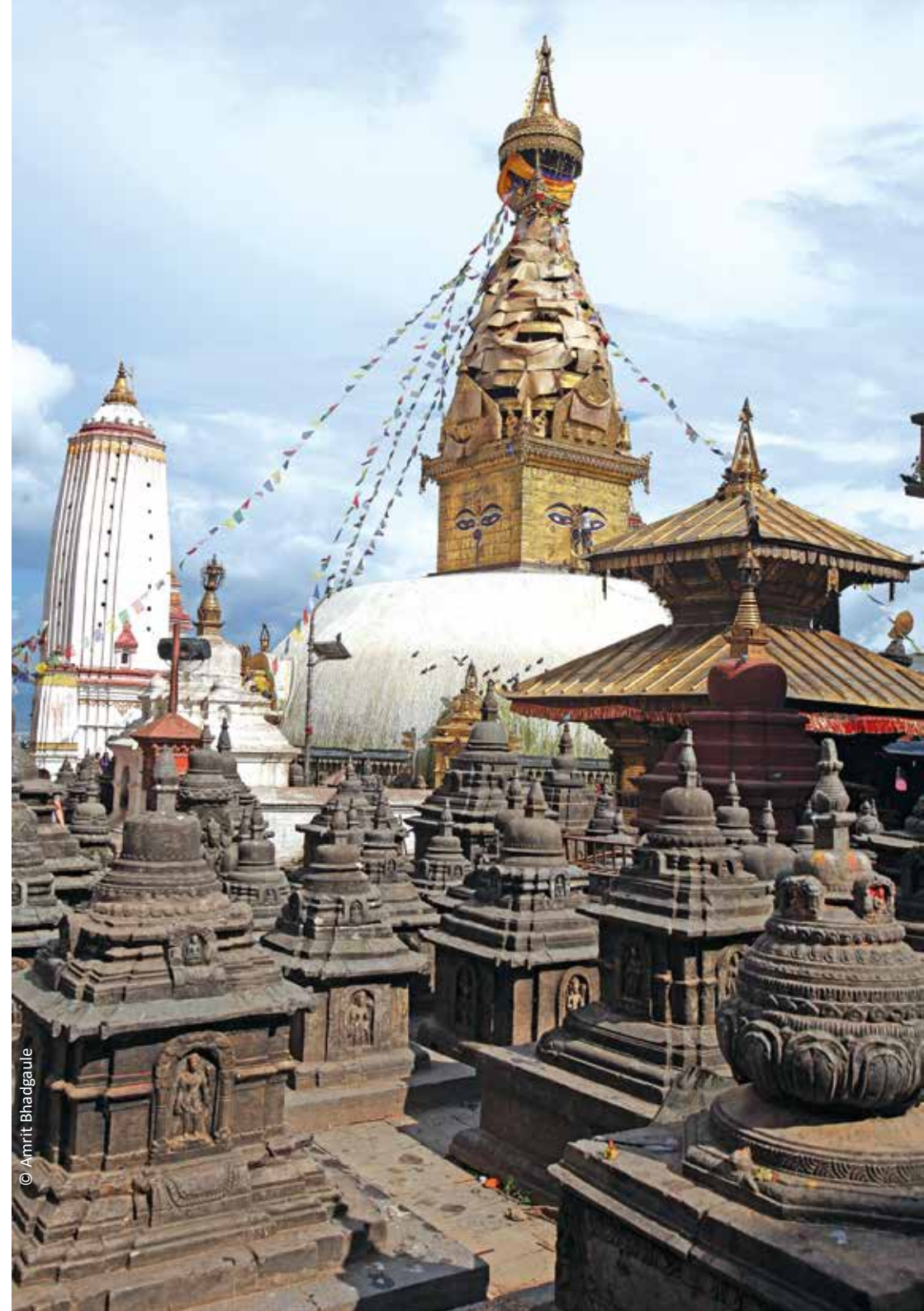
above which is a cubical structure painted with the eyes of Buddha looking in all four directions. There is a pentagonal *toran* present above each of the four sides with statues engraved in them. Behind and above the *toran* there are 13 tiers. Above all the tiers there is a small space above which the *Gajur* is present. The *stupa* has many artifacts inside. It is also a World Heritage Site.

### Accessibility

The stupa complex at Swayambhunath can be reached after a 20-minute walk from Kathmandu city center. There are also public buses and tempos going to the base of the hill. If you go by taxi, there is less ascent needed.

### Entrance Fee

Entrance fee is applicable for non-Nepalese visitors.



## Bouddha Stupa



The Bouddha Stupa is one of the largest stupas in the world and is the centre of Tibetan Buddhism in the valley. It is located 6 km east of the main city centre of Kathmandu. It is also included in the list of UNESCO's World Heritage of mankind monuments. The entry to Bouddhanath Stupa complex is through a gate that leads to a ring of houses whose basements consist of shops and restaurants. The path around the stupa itself is busy with pilgrims circumambulating the stupa and turning prayer wheels with writings of 'Om Mani Padme Hum'. You can also see pilgrims circumambulating the stupa in a

clockwise direction and prostrating along the path.

The stupa itself is said to contain relics of Kashyapa Buddha, who is said to precede the historic Buddha. It appears that the stupa at the site constructed around the 5<sup>th</sup> century was renovated in the 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> century which eventually became the present-day stupa. There is a temple of Harati attached to the north of the stupa. According to Newari legend, Harati or Ajima is the Goddess of smallpox who used to devour children. Buddha persuaded her to give up this habit and she is now protecting the shrine. According to Tibetan legend, the temple is dedicated to Sukhotama Devi who is supposed to have built the stupa.

### Accessibility

There are minibuses and tempos to Bouddhanath from the city centre in Kathmandu. It can also be reached by a taxi ride from Kathmandu's city centre.

### Entrance Fee

Entrance fee is applicable for non-Nepalese visitors

## Himalayan Buddhist Monasteries

There are a number of monasteries associated with all four sects of Himalayan Buddhism such as Kapan Monastery, Bouddha (Ningma), White Monastery, Bouddha (Kargyu), and Sharminuv Monastic Centre in Raniban (Karma Kargyu).

### Kapan Monastery

It is situated in a hillock north of Bouddhanath and is one of the most famous monasteries in Nepal. It belongs to Gelukpa (yellow hat) order of Tibetan Buddhism. There is a huge statue of Tsnokhapa inside the monastery. The Dalai Lama belongs to Gelukpa order. There are courses offered on Tibetan Buddhism and a large number of students from western countries study here. This monastery was established in 1970 by purchasing land owned by a royal preceptor of Nepal. It is believed that he could not have a child and was told by a Sadhu to plant trees if he wanted to be blessed with a son. Hollywood celebrities like Richard Gere and

Steven Seagal are some of its regular visitors. This monastery also runs short- and long-term courses on Buddhism.

### Accessibility

Direct minibuses operate from Kathmandu city centre to the foot of the hill where Kapan is located. It is necessary to climb the hill to reach the monastery. Taxis can go up to the gate of the Kapan monastery complex.

### Accommodation

Few homestays and lodges accommodate visitors there.



*Buddha Park of Swayambhu, Kathmandu*

## India

# Atthamahathanani

Author: Deepak Anand

Supported by Dr. Aparajita Goswami

According to the *Mahaparinirvana Sutra* (the *sutra* of the Great Demise), in the last discourse of the Buddha (6<sup>th</sup> BCE), he spoke about the sacredness of certain places associated with his life. These were: (i) Lumbini: the place where he was born; (ii) Bodhgaya: the place where he attained Enlightenment; (iii) Sarnath: the place where he preached the first sermon; and (iv) Kushinagara: the place where he attained *Mahaparinirvana*.

The Buddha emphasized that devotees should visit and venerate in these holy places as a way of purifying their thought, speech and action. In other words, pilgrimage to the holy places would energize the devotees to make progress on following the Buddha's Eightfold Path. It is widely believed today that pilgrimage to these holy places with the correct attitude can help

devotees advance on the path of the *Dhamma* (*Dharma*). In the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE, roughly two centuries after the demise (*Mahaparinirvana*) of the Buddha, the Indian Subcontinent came under the rule of Emperor Ashoka of the Mauryan Dynasty. After having fought many bloody battles, Ashoka embraced the teachings of Buddha (*Dhamma*). He dedicated the rest of his life to spreading *Dhamma*. He erected rock edicts bearing inscriptions on *Dhamma*, sent missions to far-off lands to disseminate *Dhamma*, and undertook *Dhamma* pilgrimage to the four sacred places mentioned in *Mahaparinirvana Sutra* and the four places where Buddha performed miracles. These four places where Buddha performed miracles were: (i) Rajagriha: the place where the Buddha tamed the elephant

*Nalagiri*; (ii) Vaishali: the place where a monkey offered honey to the Buddha; (iii) Shravasti: the place where the Buddha performed the miracle of pairs; and (iv) Sankisa: the place where Buddha descended from *tushita* heaven. The four sacred places and the four places of miracles are together known as *Atthamahathanani* or the Eight Great Places. Pilgrimage to these eight shrines is known as '*Dhamma yatra*' (*Dhamma expedition*) or a pilgrimage of piety. It is the desire of every Buddhist to visit these sites in their lifetime.

## Bodhgaya

Site of Enlightenment

*Bodh* means wisdom, knowledge, revelation and *Buddha* means the one who has comprehended, perceived and known the truth. Buddha was born as the son of the king of Kapilvastu. He left behind his princely life at the age of 29 and wandered for six years in the northern plains of India in search of truth. After a long and difficult process of meditation, reflection, and self-transformation, Buddha attained enlightenment at the age of 35 on the night of *Vaishaki Purnima* (full-moon day of May) under a *peepal* tree (*Ficus Religiosa*) in what is today known as Bodhgaya.

For the followers of *Dhamma*, Buddha's life is an example of progressing and attaining perfection on the path of *Dhamma*. Pilgrimage to Bodhgaya is seen as the most visible and enduring expression of *Dhamma* practice.

According to Buddhist literature, Emperor Ashoka built a shrine at Bodhgaya at the exact spot where Buddha attained enlightenment.

This place was called *Sambodhi* - the place of Complete Enlightenment. Xuanzang mentions an area of 100 paces around the *Bodhi* tree as *Bodhi-manda* (*bodhi arena*). Currently, the *Mahabodhi* Temple stands at this spot facing the east - the direction in which Buddha sat under the *Bodhi* tree in the final hours before attaining enlightenment.

In ancient times, devotees from far away undertook pilgrimage to Bodhgaya spending months, even years, to reach the place. They returned with objects considered sacred such as the *Bodhi* leaf, votive seal, terracotta impressions of prayer seals, and miniature sculptures. One of the popular souvenirs that pilgrims carried back was a miniature of the *Mahabodhi* Temple. Research suggests that *Mahabodhi* Temple miniatures helped in development of full-scale replicas in many Buddhist countries.

The present-day *Mahabodhi* Temple is 50 metres high. In the sanctum of the temple stands a 5.5-foot tall gilded statue of Buddha in earth-touching-posture (*bhumisparsa mudra*). The *mudra* literally means 'gesture of touching the earth' and portrays the Buddha calling the earth to witness the conquest of *mara* (evil forces). The temple complex is surrounded by a railing made of sandstone (dating from 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE) and granite (dating from 7<sup>th</sup> century CE) and sculpted motifs. Inscriptions on the sandstone railings mention the names of donors. A portion of the railing can be seen at the archaeological museum in Bodhgaya.

In the precinct of the *Mahabodhi* Temple stands the *Bodhi* tree. *Bodhi* means the awakening experience attained by the Buddha under the *peepal* tree. Tradition says that after attaining enlightenment, Buddha spent the next seven days under the *Bodhi* tree experiencing the bliss

of freedom and contemplating the extent of his new understanding. The *Bodhi* tree is thus considered sacred by the followers of *Dhamma*. Buddhist literature mentions that despite people's attempts to destroy the *Bodhi* tree in the complex of *Mahabodhi* Temple, the tree has regenerated each time miraculously. To spread the *Dhamma*, Emperor Ashoka sent saplings of the *Bodhi* tree along with the *Sangha* to Sri Lanka as a symbol of *Dhamma*. For the followers of *Dhamma*, the *Bodhi* tree has a spiritual significance such as no other tree in the world.







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Buddhism

## Sarnath

Site of Buddha's First Teachings

After his enlightenment, Buddha moved around the *Bodhi* tree (Bodhgaya) and devoted himself to his own personal perfection. Buddhist literature tells us that Buddha was reluctant to preach the *Dhamma*, most likely because the finding was so very profound and difficult to grasp. Brahma Sahampati knowing what was passing in the mind of the Buddha appeared before Buddha while he was practicing at *Ajapalanigrodha* (goatherd banyan tree). Brahma Sahampati convinced Buddha that it was necessary for the Buddha to stay in the world and preach the *Dhamma*. Buddha realised that it was not appropriate for him to enter nirvana but to stay on earth to help his fellow men attain nirvana and free themselves from their sufferings.

Having decided to preach his doctrine, Buddha asked himself 'to whom shall I first teach the doctrine?' He thought his previous teachers *Alara Kalama* and *Uddaka Ramaputra* would be ideal but with his divine eyes, he discovered

that both of them had recently died. He then thought of his five former companions (later known as *pancavaggiya* monks) who practiced austerity with him and had left him a few days before he attained enlightenment. He thought they would certainly understand the *Dhamma* and with his divine eyes he saw them at Migadaya, Isipatana (Deer Park, Sarnath).

When the five of them saw Buddha approaching, thinking him still to be the Siddhartha who had forsaken his path of austere practice, they decided not to welcome him. Yet, as the Buddha came closer, they found themselves in voluntarily rising and paying respect. Chaukhandi (square edifice) *stupa* south of Deer Park according to Xuanzang was erected at the place where the *pancavaggiya* monks abandoned the decision to treat the Buddha with disrespect and received him with due respect.

Thereafter, on the full-moon day of *asadha* (June-July), Buddha preached the

*Dhammachakkappavattana Sutta* (the First Turning of the Wheel) to his five former companions and hence set forth in motion the 'Wheel of *Dhamma*'. He taught the middle way that avoids the extremes of pleasure and austerity, the four noble truths and the eightfold path.

Later, Kondanna followed by four other *Pancavaggiya* ascetics asked the Buddha for ordination and were admitted as *bhikkhu* (monk). This marked the completion of the Triple Gem of the Buddha, the *Dhamma* and the *Sangha*. In the next few days many people in the vicinity of Sarnath benefited by learning about the *Dhamma* and many joined Buddha, *Dhamma* and *Sangha*.

Emperor Ashoka visited Sarnath and erected several monuments to mark his pilgrimage including a pillar at the spot where Buddha delivered the *Dhammachakkappavattana Sutta*. The pillar has an inscription that reads, 'Let no one cause a division in the *Sangha*'. It is believed that he issued this *Sanghabhedaka* (cause a schism in the order) Edict

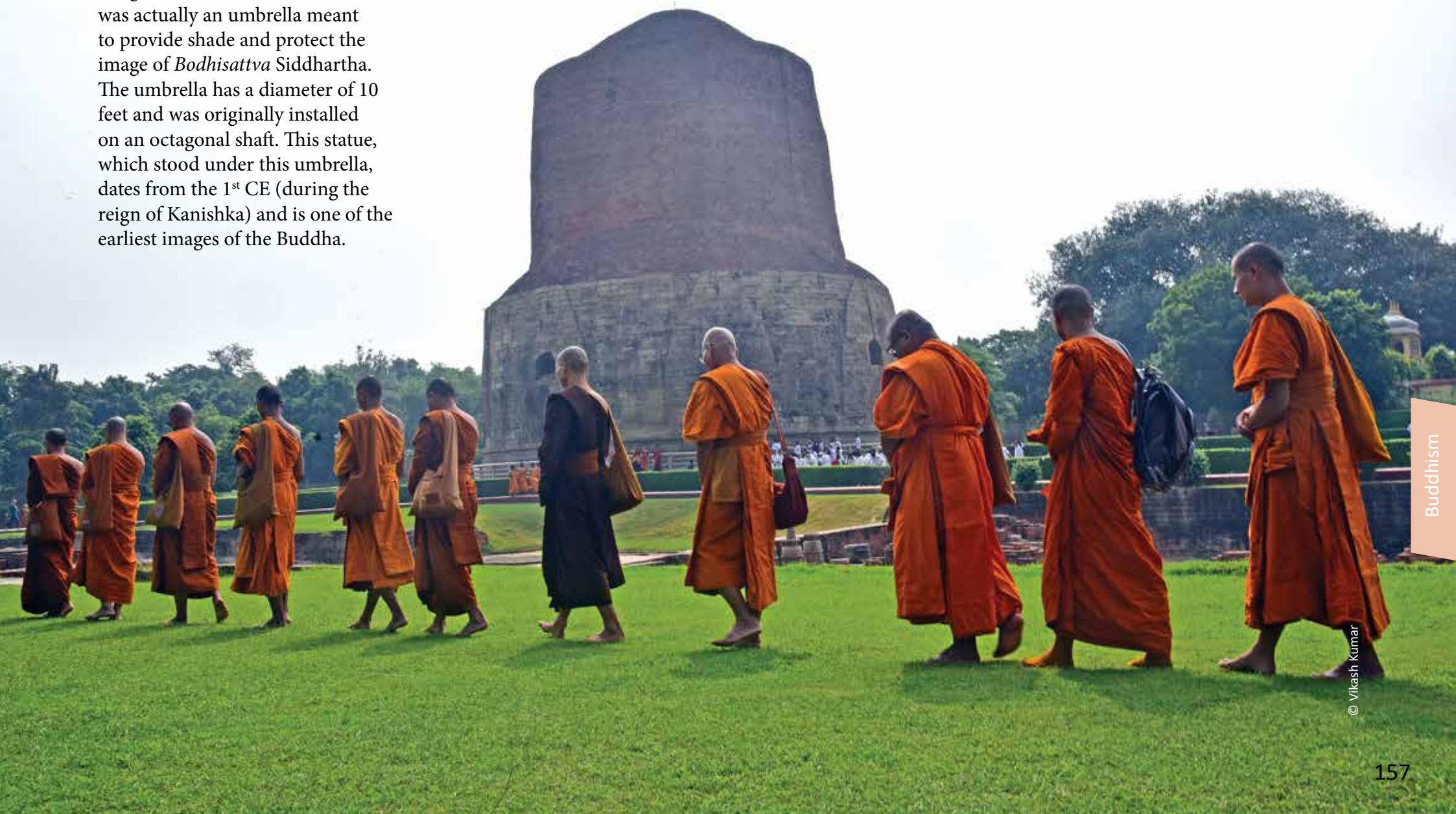
to promote harmony among the various Buddhist schools prevailing in the Indian Subcontinent.

From the time of the Buddha, monastic tradition flourished for over 1,500 years on the site of Deer Park. *Dharmachakra-jina vihara* constructed in 12<sup>th</sup> CE was the last and largest monastery built by Kumara Devi, queen of King Govindachandra (1114-1154 CE), who ruled from Kannauj.

The 7<sup>th</sup> CE Buddhist monk-scholar Xuanzang mentions a number of *stupas* in and near the Deer Park complex commemorating the past lives of the Buddha: one where he was practicing as a *bodhisattva* offered himself as the deer; another where, as a six-tusked elephant, he offered his tusks to a deceitful hunter.

Sarnath Museum houses some of the best artefacts and images of Buddha and Buddhist deities found as a result of exploration and excavation at the Sarnath archaeological site. Its collection includes the Ashokan Pillar with the Lion Capital, which is the national emblem of India, and many other artefacts whose dates

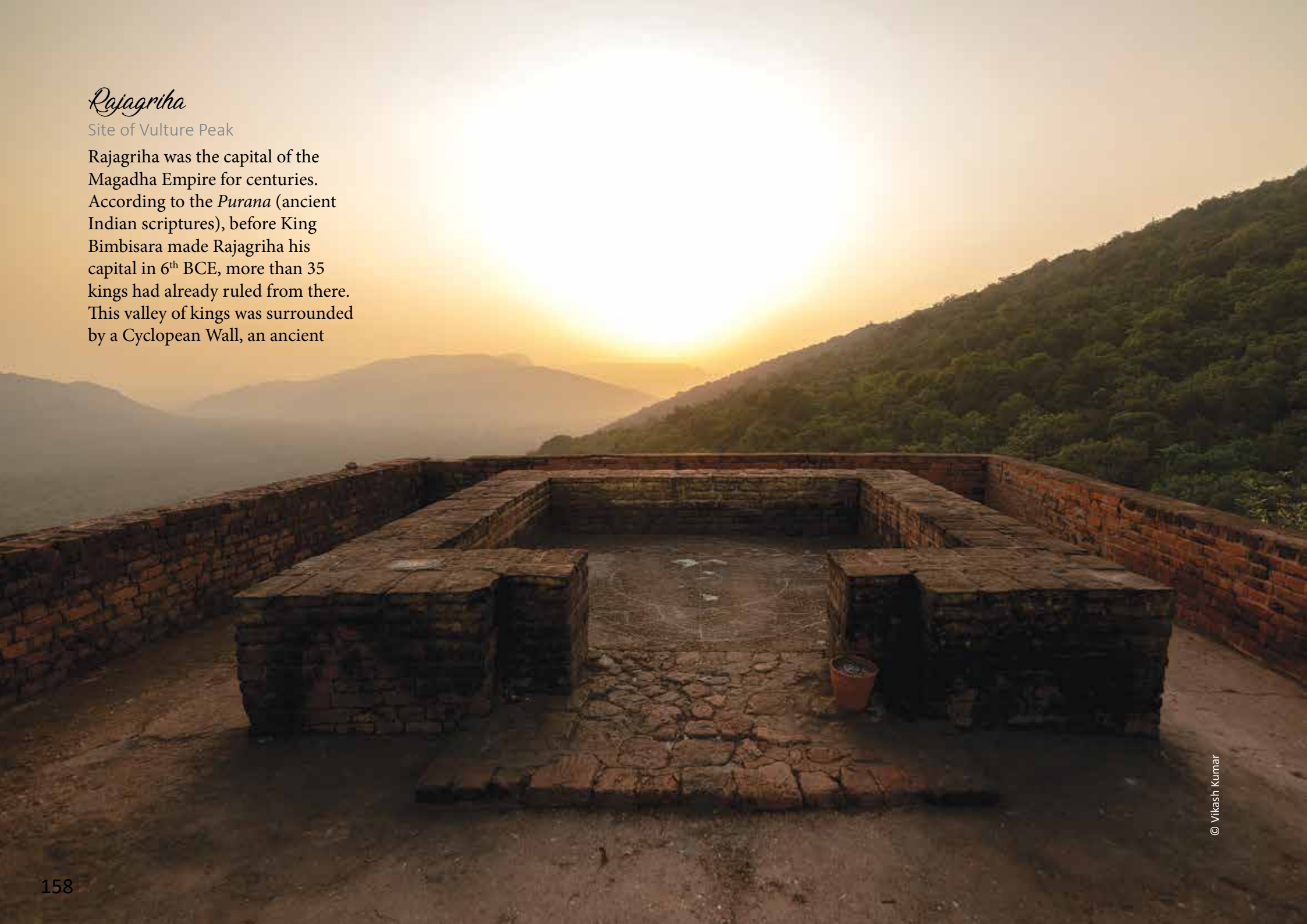
range from 3<sup>rd</sup> BCE to 12<sup>th</sup> CE. One can see a large wheel with concentric circular bands of beautiful auspicious symbols and images. This red sandstone wheel was actually an umbrella meant to provide shade and protect the image of *Bodhisattva* Siddhartha. The umbrella has a diameter of 10 feet and was originally installed on an octagonal shaft. This statue, which stood under this umbrella, dates from the 1<sup>st</sup> CE (during the reign of Kanishka) and is one of the earliest images of the Buddha.



## Rajagriha

Site of Vulture Peak

Rajagriha was the capital of the Magadha Empire for centuries. According to the *Purana* (ancient Indian scriptures), before King Bimbisara made Rajagriha his capital in 6<sup>th</sup> BCE, more than 35 kings had already ruled from there. This valley of kings was surrounded by a Cyclopean Wall, an ancient





fortification of dressed stones, running for 40-48 kilometres along the crest of the hills surrounding Rajagriha.

Since ancient times, Rajagriha has attracted sages, saints, teachers, preachers and spiritual leaders. One such *sramana* (ascetic) who has a deep-rooted association with Rajagriha is Gautama Buddha. Buddha started the spiritual and cultural mission from Rajagriha for the welfare and happiness of society. He spent many years at Rajagriha and spread his teachings there.

Through the centuries, Rajagriha was the heart of inspiration for millions of devotees of Buddha. I-tsing, a 7<sup>th</sup> CE Buddhist monk-scholar from China evidenced this in his writing. He wrote that, 'My real hope and wish is to represent the Griddhakuta (vulture's peak) in the small rooms of my friends, and to build a second Rajagriha City in the divine land of China'.

The *stupas*, *chaityas* and *viharas* in Rajagriha mentioned by Xuanzang are either buried under layers of earth or inhabited by people. This, however, does not diminish

the sanctity of these places or the routes through which they can be reached. To restore these places and routes to their former sacredness, one of the steps can be to revive pilgrimage to these places and routes.

### **Griddhakuta -Vulture's Peak**

During his visits to Rajagriha, Buddha used to stay at Veluvana and after having his only meal for the day, he would pace the path up to Griddhakuta. Buddha was drawn to the solitude of Griddhakuta. It is mentioned that despite *mara's* attempts to frighten Buddha, he visited Griddhakuta on several occasions, sometimes even in the dark or during rain. King Bimbisara was very fond of Buddha and enjoyed his company. He frequently visited Griddhakuta for Buddha's teachings and to discuss matters related to fair governance. His counsel built a wide road from the bottom of the hill to the summit and the present concrete pathway is paved over the old 'Bimbisara Path'. This path has two *stupas*, one to mark the place where King Bimbisara dismounted from his horse and another at the spot where he used to order his ministers

and bodyguards to stay back as he continued alone to the peak of this solitary hill. The most important event associated with Griddhakuta Hill is when the Buddha after his enlightenment set forth the Second Turning of the Wheel of *Dhamma*. The *Prajnaparamita hrdaya Sutra* (The Heart of the Perfection of Understanding) and the *Saddharma-Pundarika Sutra* (Lotus *Sutra*), are considered second turning teachings delivered here. Xuanzang offered prayer at a stupa in Griddhakuta that marked the place where Buddha delivered the Heart *Sutra* for the first time. As mentioned in the *Mahaparinirvana Sutra*; Buddha began his final footsteps to attain *Mahaparinirvana* at Kushinagara from Griddhakuta. In his last sermon to the *Sangha* of Rajagriha and its surroundings, Buddha urged the monks to follow the *Dhamma*. The last teachings of the Buddha delivered here at Griddhakuta are preserved in the *Bhikkhu-aparighaniya Sutta* (Conditions for no decline among the Monks).

## Vaishali

Site where a monkey offered honey to Buddha

In the times of Buddha, Vaishali was the capital of Vaj Republic. Vaj was one of the 16 *Mahajanapadas* (great republics) that existed at the time. Several clans lived in the state of Vaj of which the *Licchavi* and the *Videha* were dominant. The affairs of the state were managed by representatives of the clans. Buddha praised this political arrangement.

In the second year of enlightenment, Buddha received an invitation from the Licchavis to visit Vaishali, which at the time was in the grip of a cholera epidemic and experiencing a great famine. As Buddha stepped foot in Vaj territory, a great thunderstorm arrived bringing much needed rain. The Buddha then imparted the *Ratana Sutta* (Jewel Discourse) to Ananda with the directive that it should be recited within the three walls of the city, with the Licchavi princes accompanying the rounds, in order for the cholera to abate. With the Buddha himself reciting the *Ratana Sutta* to the assembled people and Ananda following

the Buddha's command during the three watches of the night, all of the pestilence of the citizens disappeared. In Buddhist tradition, *Ratana Sutta* is considered to be a *paritta*, which means protection *Sutta*. Centuries have passed and the *Ratana Sutta* still is used in a ritualistic function by followers of the teachings of the Buddha to ward off all sorrows (*sabba dukkha*), ailments (*sabba roga*) and all fears (*sabba bhaya*).

Vaishali is also the site of the miracle of a monkey offering honey to the Buddha. As the story goes, a monkey took the alms bowl from the Buddha and climbed a tree to gather honey. When the bowl was full of the sweet nectar, the monkey offered it to Buddha. A band of monkeys also dug a tank for Buddha, which is called *Markata Hrada* (monkey-tank). Excavations at Vaishali have revealed the remains of the tank. Emperor Ashoka marked the place of the event by erecting a pillar with the lion capital.

After the *Mahaparinirvana* of Buddha, the Licchavis obtained a share of the body relics of Buddha and built a *stupa* to enshrine the relics. According to Xuanzang, Emperor Ashoka later collected most of the relics from the kings and enshrined them in 84,000 *stupas* across the Indian Subcontinent including Vaishali. Based on Xuanzang's descriptions, excavations were undertaken at Vaishali and a casket was discovered containing ashes, a punch-marked coin, two glass beads, a conch and a small thin piece of gold.







## Shravasti

Site of the Miracle of the Pairs

According to Buddhist literature, Shravasti was the capital town of Kosala and one of the six great Indian cities during the lifetime of the Buddha. Buddha first visited Shravasti on the invitation of Anathapindika (born Sudatta), a rich merchant from Shravasti. Anathapindika wished to make an offering of a monastery to Buddha at his hometown Shravasti. According to Buddha's wishes the monastery had to meet certain specifications, neither too far from village, nor too near, accessible to people, secluded from people, fit for meditation. Buddha asked his prominent disciple Sariputta to go along with Anathapindika to assist him find a suitable place meeting the requirements. But the most suitable place was owned by Prince Jeta, the son of King Prasenajit of Kosala, who had no plans to sell. However, when Anathapindika offered to pave every inch of the land with gold, Jeta was quite impressed and accepted the offer. Thus, Buddha and his followers received the Jetavana, capable of

accommodating 10,000 people. Buddha spent 19 rainy seasons at Jetavana and gave many discourses here. Xuanzang saw two pillars, 70-foot high, erected at its gate by Emperor Ashoka.

Anathapindika is considered to be the disciple who was foremost in both generosity and character. Throughout his life, Anathapindika received hundreds of monks at his house for alms daily and regularly sent food, medicines and supplies to the Jetavana monastery. For his contributions to Buddha, *Dhamma* and *Sangha*, a stupa was later erected at the site of his house inside the city.

On the basis of Xuanzang's descriptions, Sir Alexander Cunningham in 1863 identified the ancient remains of Sahet-Mahet as the site of Shravasti. An excavation led by him at Sahet led to the discovery of a colossal standing image of the Buddha, 7 feet 4 inches in height. The head of the image was broken and the image had an inscription reading the

names of the donors of the image and name of the place 'Shravasti'. Excavations by Jean Philippe Vogel (1871-1958) in 1908 led to the discovery of a 12<sup>th</sup> CE copper plate grant of Govinda Chandra of Kannauja. The inscription mentioned *Jetavana Vihara* that further established that Sahet was the correct identification of *Jetavana*. King Prasenajit became a follower, an ardent supporter and regular visitor of Buddha. Ancient remains of Mahet situated east of Sahet (*Jetavana*) have been identified with the ancient city of Shravasti. Inside the city i.e. Mahet, Xuanzang saw a preaching hall built by king Prasenajit near his palace. Xuanzang also saw the remains of a nunnery inside the city, offered to Mahaprajapati Gotami by King Prasenajit.

Angulimala was a ruthless serial killer. His name means 'necklace of fingers'. He had killed 999 people and cut their fingers and made a garland out of those fingers. People of Shravasti were scared of him.

Later, he came in contact with Buddha and was transformed. Xuanzang saw a stupa to mark the place where Angulimala took refuge in the Triple Gem. The ruins of Mahet now have excavated remains of two *stupas*, one of which is believed to be that of Angulimala. His stupa is known as *Pakki Kuti*, while another one, which is believed to be that of Anathapindika, is known as *Kachchi Kuti*.

Buddhist literature has many references of *bhiksunis* (nuns) and *upasikas* (women lay followers) who made contributions to the Buddha, *Dhamma* and *Sangha*. But one name, whose contributions stands tallest of all, is *upasika* Visakha. *Upasika* Visakha offered a large monastery *Migaramatupasada* (Migara's Mother's terraced abode) in the *Purvarama* (eastern park), to the Buddha and the Sangha for their stay and practice. Buddha spent six rainy seasons here. According to Faxian, the monastery of Visakha was 6-7 Li (approximately 2 kilometres) north-east of *Jetavana*.

Circumstantial evidence suggests ancient remains at Kandbahri village could be the remains of the *Purvarama*.

Shravasti is also one of the four places where Buddha performed a miracle. In the seventh year after his enlightenment, on the full moon day of *Asalha* (June-July) at the mango tree Gandamba, near the gate of Shravasti, the Buddha performed 'Twin Miracle (*Yamaka patihariya*). He showed people he could produce a burning flame on the top portion of his body and water at the bottom and vice versa. He also did this on the left and right sides. It is said that he performed miracles and preached sermons for 16 days. At the conclusion of the miracle, Buddha made his way, in three strides, to *Tavatimsa* (Tusita Heaven), there to preach the *Abhidhamma Pitaka* (basket of higher doctrine) to his mother.



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## Sankashya

Site of the Buddha's return from Heaven



Sankashya (also Sankisa, Sankassa) is one of the 'Eight Great Places' of the Buddhist pilgrimage. It was here that Buddha performed the miracle of the 'Descent from the Heavens, accompanied by Indra and Brahma.' According to Buddhist literature, in his seventh year after the enlightenment, on the full moon day of Asalha (in July) the Buddha, following the performance of the 'Twin Miracle' at Shravasti went up to

the *Tavatimsa* (Tushita Heaven) and passed the rainy season retreat teaching *Abhidhamma* to his mother Maya Devi, who had died seven days after Buddha's birth and been reborn as a male god in Tushita heaven. Three months later, at the time of his descent from heaven, a great assembly of kings and people of the eight kingdoms gathered. As Buddha descended, a flight of gold stairs appeared, which he climbed down.

He was accompanied by Brahma on the right and by Indra holding a jewelled umbrella on the left. The descent of the Buddha took place on the day of the *Mahapavarana* festival (marks the end of the 3-month rainy season retreat).

In 1842, Alexander Cunningham identified the village of Sankisa with the place Sankasya mentioned by Faxian and Kapitha by Xuanzang.

Xuanzang saw a 70-foot-high staircase at the spot where Buddha had descended from heaven. On the top of the stairs was a temple with a stone image of the Buddha that according to Faxian was 16 cubit (16 feet) tall. Close to the stairs was a 70-foot-high Ashokan pillar. The Buddha bathed immediately after his descent, and later a bathing house and *stupa* were built to mark that site. *Stupas* were also raised at the spot where he cut his hair and nails and where he entered *Samadhi*. Faxian and Xuanzang tell about the presence of more *stupas* and a

*chankramana* (a raised platform with foot impressions of the Buddha) where the Buddha and the previous Buddhas had walked and sat in meditation. According to Xuanzang, these shrines were enclosed within the walls of a Sammitiya Monastery, which he describes as being excellently ornamental and having many fine images. He adds that hundreds of monks dwelt there along with a community of lay followers.

Cunningham discovered a sandstone Elephant Capital at 400 feet to the north of the Bisari Devi Temple. No excavations have taken place at Sankisa. According to Alexander Cunningham, all the sacred shrines including the Temple of Descent mentioned by both the pilgrims are buried under present village Sankisa.

## *Kushinagara*

Site of the Buddha's *Mahaparinirvana*

As mentioned in the *Mahaparinirvana Sutta*, the last journey of the Buddha to attain *Mahaparinirvana* at Kushinagara began at Griddhakuta, Rajagriha. Moving in stages, the Buddha and Sangha reached Vaishali, where the Buddha announced his impending *parinirvana* to the *sangha*.

Thereafter, Buddha along with accompanying monks and nuns continued travelling making brief stopovers at a series of villages called Bhandagama, Hatthigama, Ambagama, Jambugama where the Buddha continued to give discourses to the accompanying *Sangha*, and he reached Pava. Cunda, an ironsmith lived in Pava and invited the Buddha to a meal, which proved to be his last, as very soon after it the Buddha developed dysentery.



In spite of sickness, Buddha continued moving and he reached the sala grove of the Mallas by the bank of the Hirannavati River in Kushinagar. It is said that on the way between these two places, Buddha had to stop at 25 resting places, so faint and weary was he. He decided this to be his final resting place. There, on the full-moon day of Veshak, at the age of 80, the Buddha passed into *Mahaparinirvana*.

His final words were:

*I exhort you: All compounded things are subject to vanish. Strive with earnestness.*

At the place where Buddha attained Mahaparinirvana, Xuanzang saw a large brick temple with an image of the Buddha lying with his head to the north. Beside the temple was a 200-foot Ashokan *stupa* in ruins and in front of the *stupa* was an Ashokan Pillar on which were recorded the circumstances of the *Mahaparinirvana* of the Buddha. Near the temple of *Mahaparinirvana*, he saw a *stupa* to mark an event associated with *Jataka*. He also saw a *stupa* to mark the visit of *Vajrapani* and another

*stupa* nearby to mark the place where the *devas* worshiped the body of the Buddha for seven days. Close to it was a *stupa* to mark the visit of *Mahamaya*, mother of the Buddha from heaven.

After Buddha's *parinirvana*, his body was carried to *Makutabandhana*, the shrine of the Mallas for cremation. It is said that they were unable to light the funeral pyre until Mahakassap came and paid his respects.

Once word got out that Buddha had passed away and that his relics were in Kushinagara, the surrounding kingdoms all laid claim to the relics. King Ajatashatru of Magadha, the Licchavis, the Shakyas, the Bulayas of Allakappa, the Koliyas of Ramagama, the Brahmins of Vethadipa, and the Mallas of Pava all demanded the relics. Mallas initially denied sharing the relics of the Buddha but with the intervention of Brahmin Drona they agreed to distribute the sacred relics. Then Drona divided the remains of the Buddha among the eight claimants. Drona kept the urn for himself. A little later the

Moriyas of Pipphalavana requested remains so that they too could build a *stupa*, but the remains had already been divided. Instead, they had to be content with embers from the fire. Then each of those who had received relics and also Drona and the Moriyas built a *stupa* so that there were 10 in all.

Xuanzang saw a *stupa* to mark the place where the Buddha was cremated. Close to it was an Ashokan *stupa* to mark the distribution of relics of the Buddha and close to it was an Ashokan Pillar with the story of relic distribution inscribed on it.

H. H. Williams in 1854 was first to propose Kasia to be the site of Kushinagara. At Kasia during the excavation of a large mound A. C. L. Carlleyle found a 20-foot sandstone statue of the reclining Buddha. The sandstone was of mixed colour, mostly of red and clay. The statue had an inscription from Gupta period (4-5<sup>th</sup> CE) reading,

*The religious gift to the great Vihar, of the Lord Haribal. The colossal statue was presented to the first united assembly by Sura'.*

In subsequent excavations at the site of Kasia in 1900's, many inscribed seals reading *of the community of friars at the convent of the blessed Great Decease were discovered.*

The present temple was built by the Indian government in 1956 as part of the Commemoration of the 2,500<sup>th</sup> year of *Mahaparinirvana*. The old temple restored by Carlleyle was too small to accommodate the increasing number of pilgrims visiting it. Inside this temple, one can see the famous Reclining Buddha image lying on its right side with the head to the north.

This *stupa* beside the *Mahaparinirvana* Temple is a restoration of the main *stupa* discovered during excavations by Carlleyle in 1876. When examined to a depth of 4.3 metres, it revealed a copper plate and other objects from the Gupta period. The inscription on the plate in Sanskrit mentioned that the objects were deposited in the *nirvana* *stupa* by the monk Haribala.



*Nepal: Priest Gyani Gurubaksh  
Singh & Experts*



*India: Mr. Rajinder Singh Chadha  
and Experts*

# *Sikhism*

The essence of *Guru Nanak Dev Ji's* teachings.

*“Ek Onkar, Sat Naam, Kartapurakh  
Nirbhau, Nirvair, Akalmurat, Ajooni Sai Bhang,  
Gur Prasaad.”*

*“God is one, God is Truth, God is the Creator  
God is without fear, hatred, God is omnipresent, God is immortal  
Life is God's Gift.”*

# Sikh Circuit Sites - Nepal

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Photos shared by Mr. Anil Thaman

Sikhism is said to be the youngest religion in the world at 552 years old (1469). It is the only religion that celebrates its birthday on *Baisakh 1<sup>st</sup> (April-May Gregorian calendar)*. The founder of Sikhism, *Guru Nanak Dev* (1469-1539), is the first *Guru* of the Sikhs. He is followed by nine other *Gurus* who guided Sikhs with their teachings. The teachings of the 10 Sikh *Gurus* have been compiled in a holy book called '*Guru Granth Sahib*'. In 1708, the tenth *Guru* of the Sikhs, *Guru Gobind Singh*, before shedding his physical form decreed the *Guru Granth Sahib* as the final and perpetual *Guru* of the Sikhs.<sup>1</sup>

The word '*Guru*' comes from Sanskrit, which means teacher, mentor, enlightener and guide. The *Gurus* are considered to be the servants of God, who have

.....  
<sup>1</sup> Mann, Gurinder Singh (2001). The Making of Sikh Scripture. Oxford University Press. pp. 21-25, 123-24. ISBN 978-0-19-513024-9.

come on this planet Earth to enlighten others and spread the message of God and humanity. One of the fundamental teachings of *Guru Nanak Dev* is that 'God is one and all human beings are equal regardless of caste, creed or religion'. This is reflected in the *Guru Granth Sahib*, which upholds the beliefs of all religions with equal respect. The *Guru Granth Sahib* states, '*Awal Allah noor upaya, Kudrat ke sab bande*', which translates to 'First, God created Light, and then with his creative powers, He made all mortal beings'. Sikhism stresses *Kirat Karo*: that is 'honest living' and *Va chhako*, sharing with the needy.

The tenth *Guru*, *Guru Gobind Singh*, officially formed the warrior race (*Khalsa Panth*) on *Baisakh 1<sup>st</sup>*, 1699 at *Anandpur Sahib*, India. Five men were ornamented as the '*Panj Pyaras*' - the five beloved ones - after being asked to take an oath to follow

the rules set by *Guru Gobind Singh* by drinking *amrit* and eating *prasad* prepared with five elements - water, sugar, wheat, ghee and fire - which had been prepared in an iron pot.

## **Sikhism propagates Five Rules/ Directives:**

- *Kesh* (hair) - Never to cut hair;
- *Kangha* (comb) - Keep clean hair and wear a turban on the head like a crown;
- *Kacchera* (long dresses)
- *Karah* (iron bangle) - To protect against superstitions and as protection in the battlefield;
- *Kirpan* (sword) - Used to protect self and others in need.

## **Guru Nanak Dev and his journey to Nepal**

*Guru Nanak Dev* is said to have travelled during his third '*Udasi*' (spiritual sojourn) towards the North, covering *Sumer Parbat*, which is also known as *Kailash Parbat*, Nepal, Sikkim and Tibet in the early years of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. There is much evidence, which indicates that during his third '*Udasi*', between 1575-76, he travelled and meditated at different sites in Nepal, which have today been identified as places of

significance to Sikhism in Nepal. There are archeological records, which indicate the significance of these sites, making them important for Sikh followers and historians.

The six important sites to Sikhism in Nepal are: (1) *Guru Nanak Matth*, *Balaju*, (2) *Gyaneshwor Gyandhara*, (3) *Shoba Bhagwati*, (4) *Udasi Akhada*, *Kalmochan Thapathali* (5) *Bhasmeshwor Guru Nanak Matth*, *Pashupati Complex* and (6) *Gurdwara Guru Nanak Satsang*, *Kupandole*.

Limited written records are available to substantiate about the Sikh history in Nepal and most articles are based on oral recollection of stories, legends and history passed on from generation to generation by *yogis* and *mahants*. However, inscriptions of *Gurmukhi* on archaeological sites as well as artifacts and records of land donation to *Guru Nanak* by King *Jai Jagat Malla* held safely with Nepal Government are among the evidence, which reflect the long connection between Sikhs and Nepalese. Today, all the sites significant to the Sikhs are managed, protected and developed by a Nepalese social cultural institution called *Guthi*.





NEPAL

INDIA

## Sikh Matths in Kathmandu



Place	Location
Guru Nanak Matth	Bagmati Pradesh
Gyaneshwor and Gyandhara	Bagmati Pradesh
Guru Nanak Matth	Bagmati Pradesh
Udasi Akhada	Bagmati Pradesh
Bhameshwor Guru Nanak Matth	Bagmati Pradesh
Gurdwara Guru Nanak Satsang	Bagmati Pradesh

## *Guru Nanak Matth,* Balaju

### **Location**

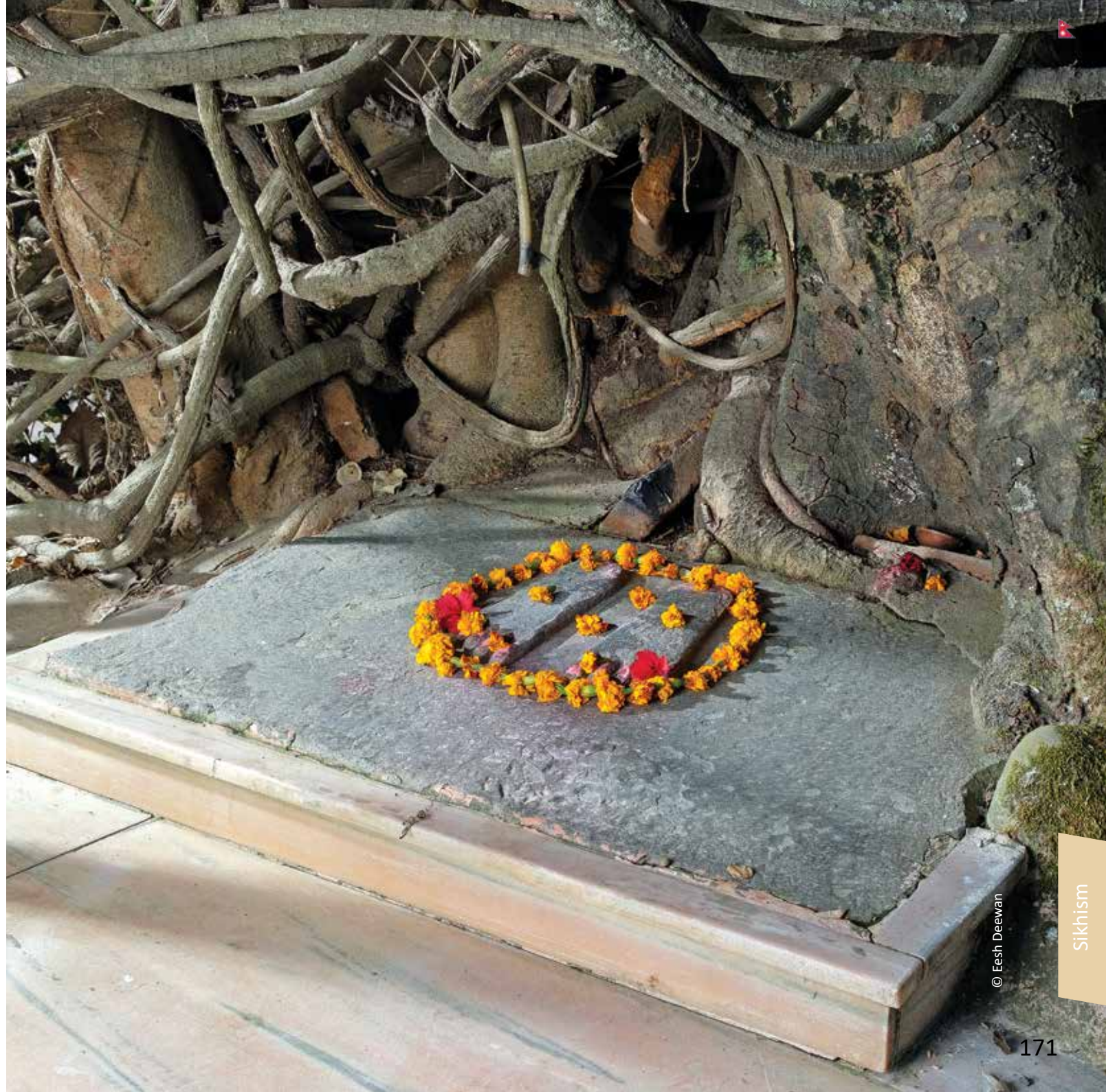
The first *Guru Nanak Matth* in Nepal is located next to Bishnumati Bridge in Naya Bazar in Balaju, Kathmandu.

### **Significance and Belief**

During the third *Udasi* which covered Nepal, *Guru Nanak* is believed to have travelled in search of a company of saints and find a peaceful abode where he could meditate.<sup>2</sup> While travelling, he stayed at the *Matth* after arriving from Saptari before travelling to Chandragiri Hills in around 1574/75.<sup>3</sup> *Guru Nanak* stopped at the banks of Bishnumati River at the *dera* (compound) of Royal *Yogi*, Sidh Hari Daas.<sup>4</sup>

Hari Daas, a devotee of Hindu Gods Vishnu and Hanuman,

- 2 Puri M., Gautam P. and Bhattarai A. (2019) Sikh Heritage of Nepal p.12.
- 3 Guru Nanak Matth Study Report, 2070, Guthi Sansthan, Department of Archeology
- 4 Shah, M.H. (n.d), Taajudin's Diary: An account of a Muslim author who accompanied Guru Nanak from Makkah to Baghdad.



was considered a great *yogi* as he had achieved *riddhis* and *siddhis* (miracle powers). He was in deep meditation at the *Dera* when his meditation was disturbed upon hearing *Bhai Mardana* playing the *rebab* and singing *kirtan* for *Guru Nanak Dev*. Hari Daas wanted to speak to *Guru* but *Guru Nanak* was engrossed in deep devotion. This annoyed Hari Daas, an egoist, as he felt disrespected. When the *Guru* opened his eyes, Hari Daas started showing his miracles to *Guru* by changing his appearance seven times. Then he challenged *Guru* to demonstrate his powers to show his superiority. *Guru Nanak* pointed to the sky and said that only *God* had the power for miracles. The *Guru* shared his beliefs with Hari Daas: “That *God* lies in truth, and one must respect religion, work honestly, share meals, meditate, pray and thank *God*. *God* is the greatest of all and is omnipresent.

*God* gives life to all and that is the nature of *God*’s creation.” Finally, Hari Daas was convinced that the *Guru* was no ordinary human and he fell on *Guru*’s feet seeking forgiveness and requested to become his disciple. The news of *Yogi Hari Daas* becoming a disciple of *Guru Nanak* spread like wildfire in Nepal. There are reports that King Jai Jagat Malla came to visit *Guru Nanak* at the *Matth* in Balaju and thanked him for visiting Nepal, and requested him to stay at the royal palace. At the time, *Guru Nanak* chose to stay at the *dera* for the next 16 months.<sup>5</sup> According to *Nem Muni*, *Mahant* of ‘*Udasi Sri Guru Nanak Matth*’, *Guru Nanak* meditated in the garden under a *peepal* (*Ficus religiosa*) tree and before his departure from Nepal, foot-impressions of the *Guru* were melted into the rock. This place is also known as *Sangat Bari*.

According to the *Guthi Sansthan* report based on historical evidence, during Sambat 877 (Bikram Sambat 1813), King Jai Jagat Malla established a *guthi* of which copper inscriptions have been found whereby 1600 *ropanis* (200 acres) of land in Balaju was given in the name of *Guru Nanak*. Later, King Rana Bahadur Shah is also said to have donated land to *Guru Nanak Matth*, Balaju after he found solace at the *Matth*. The records of the donations in the name of *Guru Nanak* can be found till date in Nepal Government records although the land size has shrunk to around 35 *ropanis*.<sup>6</sup>

In the book ‘Arts and Crafts of Shah Period’ by culture expert Jagadish Chandra Regmi, it is mentioned that King Rana Bahadur, upon his return from Benares brought back *Sadhus* of the *Nanak* sect (between 1857 and 1860 B.S). King Rana Bahadur had arranged for the *Sadhus* of the *Nanak Udasi* to stay at *Nanak Matth*.<sup>7</sup>

*Nanak Matth* in Balaju houses the *hath likhat* (handwritten) *Guru Granth Sahib* on the first floor of *Matth*. This place is of significance for both Sikhs and Hindus. Every day, the *Udasi Mahant Nem Mumi* does the *Singhasan* (morning worship) and *Sukhasan* (evening worship) of the *Guru Granth Sahib*. As the place also holds importance to the *Udasi* sect, two Brahmins daily conduct worship to the five Hindu deities - *Hunuman*, *Bishnupaduka*, 1<sup>st</sup> *Udasi Mahant*’s burial site as well as the Holy Cow and the 33 *Koti Gods* and *Goddesses*.<sup>8</sup>

5 *ibid*, p. 251-252.

6 *Guru Nanak Matth Study Report, 2070, Guthi Sansthan, Department of Archeology.*

7 *ibid*

Mal (also spelled as Malla) dynasty (1201-1769) was established by Ari Mal (Mal in Sanskrit means a wrestler).

8 *ibid*



## *Guru Nanak Matth. Gyaneshwor Mahadev and Gyandhara*

Gyaneshwor Mahadev and Ananda Bhairab Temple are in Gyaneshwor, Kathmandu. These temples are dedicated to Lord Shiva and Bishnu.<sup>9</sup>

It is believed that when *Guru Nanak* reached Gyaneshwor, three sages had been in *samadhi* (deep meditation) inside a cave. After *Guru Nanak* interacted with the sages, they surrendered their physical body and hoped that *Guru Nanak* would appear and give them *mukti* (salvation).<sup>10</sup> This cave is closed to the public now.

At that time Nepal was going through a severe drought. It is believed that when the *Guru* reached this place people were suffering from lack of drinking water and women and children fell on the feet of the *Guru* and begged for his blessings. The *Guru*

pressed his thumb against the face of the hillside and a fountain of water sprung from the hill. For the last five centuries, water has been flowing uninterruptedly and this holy spring is known as *Gyan Dhara* and continues to flow from stone sprout located down the flight of stone stairs behind the temple. Locals and devotees believe that the fountain water is holy and has healing powers. It is believed that all ailments can be healed if one bathes in the holy spring with their clothes on and leaves the clothes at the spring after taking the bath. On hearing about this miracle, King Jai Jagat Malla visited *Guru Nanak* in 1515 B.S. and sought *Guru Nanak's* blessings for all of Nepal.<sup>11</sup>

The *Guru* walked a few steps away from the fountain and sat under a tree in deep meditation for the next six days and six nights. On

the seventh day of his meditation, there was rain all over Nepal. Everyone celebrated in joy as they were saved from a drought. It is believed that King Jai Jagat Malla came to see *Guru Nanak Dev* for the fourth time at this place and thanked him for his blessings on his country. Today, in Gyaneshwor Mahadev and Ananda Bhairab Temple amidst various gods and

goddesses in the compound at the back is a two-storied brick building reminisces of *Guru Nanak*. On the first floor of this brick building in a small room, a *hath likhat* (handwritten) *Guru Granth Sahib* is kept and prayed by the *Udasi mahants*.



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9 Puri M., Gautam P. and Bhattarai A. (2019) Sikh Heritage of Nepal p. 21.

10 Shah, M.H. (n.d), Taajudin's Diary: An account of a Muslim author who accompanied Guru Nanak from Makkah to Baghdad, p. 253.

11 Puri M., Gautam P. and Bhattarai A. (2019) Sikh Heritage of Nepal p. 21.

12 Shah, M.H. (n.d), Taajudin's Diary: An account of a Muslim author who accompanied Guru Nanak from Makkah to Baghdad, p. 254-255.



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## *Guru Nanak Matth,* **Shobha Bhagwati**

Another *Matth* where *Guru Nanak* is said to have meditated is right beside Shobha Bhagwati temple, Dallu on the banks of Bishnumati temple.

Stories, passed down generations, tell that *Guru Nanak* meditated at a location where Singha Durbar presently stands. Later *yogis* who started following the *Udasi* practice of *Guru Nanak* continued their meditation at Singha Durbar. However, at the time of the construction of Singha Durbar these *yogis* were asked to move to a new location. Later they were relocated to Shobha Bhagwati in Dallu.<sup>13</sup>

Priest Gyani *Gurubaksh Singh* shares that at Shobha Bhagwati *Matth*, too, inside a two-storied brick house, you will find the *hath likhat* (handwritten) *Guru Granth Sahib* and the caretaker performs the daily rituals and prayers holding the sanctity of the forgotten *Guru Nanak Matth* at Shobha Bhagwati. In the courtyard of the *Matth* hangs a bell used for worshipping which has *Gurmukhi* inscriptions again symbolising the significance to the Sikhs and historians. On the bell, the main mantra of *Guru Nanak Ek Onkar* is inscribed which means 'there is only one God' and symbolises the importance of the belief in oneness of God and the oneness of humanity.

## *Udasi Akhada*

*Udasi Akhada Prachin Gurdwara Matth* belongs to *Kalmochan Ghat*. It is located on the banks of the Bagmati River in Thapathali. It is believed that *Baba Sri Chand*, the eldest son of *Guru Nanak Dev*, stayed in this *Matth* during his visit to Kathmandu. Even today, the *hath likhat* (handwritten) *Guru Granth Sahib* is placed on the first floor of a wooden planked *Gurdwara*.<sup>14</sup> The current *Mahant* of this *Matth* is *Mahant Pushpadas Udasi*. Inside the *Matth*, on the extreme right hand side near the wall of the *ghat* is a holy water well. On close inspection, one can find the *mool mantra* inscribed in the stone. Priest Gyani *Gurubaksh Singh* shares that 250 to 300 years ago, Maharaja Ranjit Singh had sent around 12,000 Sikh soldiers and their horses to Nepal as part of the alliance with Nepal. At that time, the soldiers stayed at the *Matth* for a brief period of time. If you are lucky, then you might get a glimpse of the hidden treasures placed inside a dark room. In the *Matth*, large vessels used by the Sikh soldiers to cook are still kept under the safeguard of *Mahant Pushpadas Udasi* and the *guthi*.

## *Bhasmeshwor Guru Nanak Matth*

Within the Pashupatinath Temple complex, one of the most religious sites for the Hindus, lies a two-storied building which houses a *hath likhat* (handwritten) *Guru Granth Sahib* on the first floor. This is the *Bhasmeshwor Guru Nanak Matth* and there is evidence that *Guru Nanak* had stayed and meditated at this site when he visited the holy temple of Pashupatinath. This original shrine has each of its wooden pillars engraved with the *Khanda*, the symbol of Sikhism. The place is open to devotees. However, during the earthquake of 2015, the original shrine sustained damages and currently it is being reconstructed.<sup>14</sup>



13 Puri M., Gautam P. and Bhattarai A. (2019) Sikh Heritage of Nepal p. 18.

14 *ibid*, p. 25.





Also, within the Pashupatinath complex, lies another small shrine, known as Raaj Rajeshwari,

named after two Sikh princesses who had been married in Nepal and wanted a place of worship.



Gyani Gurubaksh Singh explains that every morning for the first *puja* done at Pashupatinath, the flowers for the *puja* come from the Raaj Rajeshwari Temple Garden. He added that unless the Bhatta priest uses the flowers from the

garden, the *puja* is not considered complete.<sup>15</sup>

15 Puri M., Gautam P. and Bhattarai A. (2019) Sikh Heritage of Nepal p. 22.



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## Gurdwara Guru Nanak Satsang

Gurdwara Guru Nanak Satsang in Kupondole, Lalitpur is the main body of Sikh community in Nepal and was established in 1976 under the patronage of Sardar Pritam Singh. Sardar Pritam Singh had first arrived in Nepal in 1958 with three trucks from Jammu and Kashmir, India and established the first commercial transportation company in Nepal. He shared during his interview that he brought along with him many Sikh families from India and helped them settle down in different locations in Nepal. The first *gurdwara* was set up in a rented room in New Road. Later, as the Sikh community grew, they felt they needed a proper place of worship in Kathmandu and that resulted in the establishment of *Guru Nanak Satsang*, Kupondole. The large compound of the *gurdwara* houses the main shrine and a *Yatri Niwas* has been constructed to accommodate *yatris* - people coming to Nepal for religious, social and business activities.



Presently, a sacred gathering which is known as *Satsang* is held in *Guru Nanak Satsang* daily. Tourists and devotees who visit the *gurdwara* are offered *langar* (free meal), a tradition that was started over 500 years ago by *Guru Nanak*, as a service to the larger community. People visiting

the *gurdwara* are offered food and shelter while spiritual songs and recitations sung here bring peace to their mind so that their heart can open to the divine. At *Guru Nanak Satsang Gurdwara*, Kupondole, religious programmes are organized every Saturday, on *Gurpurabs* to commemorate the birth anniversary of the *Gurus*

and *Sankranti* (the transmigration of the sun from one zodiac to another). President of the *Gurdwara*-Sardar Pritam Singh says that everyone is welcome to the *gurdwara* regardless of caste, creed and status because Sikhism was founded on the principles of equality.



## Other Gurdwaras in Nepal

Apart from *Guru* Nanak's travels to Nepal, the history and roots of Sikhs in Nepal can also be traced back to the time of Maharani Jind Kaur, wife of Maharaja Ranjit Singh of the Sikh Empire in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>16</sup>

Historical records show that Nepal's Prime Minister Bhimsen Thapa and Maharaja Ranjit Singh forged a secret alliance against the British to oppose the expanding British power. However, the alliance fell apart with the sudden demise of Maharaja Ranjit Singh in 1839. His wife, Maharani Jind Kaur became regent to lead the Sikh kingdom as King Duleep Singh was still an infant. In 1843, Punjab went to war against the British but with Punjab's annexation, the British imprisoned Maharani Jind Kaur in a jail in Varanasi in India. Two years later in 1849, Maharani Jind Kaur managed to escape from the prison disguised as a maid, and travelled with many of her kin and followers to Kathmandu hoping for support from Prime Minister Bhimsen Thapa to uphold the alliance to fight the British together. While travelling to Kathmandu, she was held captive in a prison in Pharping. Upon investigation, it was found that she was the wife of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and was

<sup>16</sup> *ibid*, p. 27.

immediately released. When she reached Kathmandu, she stayed at the residence of Amar Bikram Shah, son of General Chautariya Pushkar Shah, who had been the prime minister of Nepal in 1838-39 and had played an important role in forging the alliance between Punjab and Nepal. However, after a few months of hiding at Amar Bikram Shah's residence, Maharani Jind Kaur approached the then Prime Minister Jung Bahadur Rana seeking his help to reclaim her lost kingdom. Prime Minister Jung Bahadur Rana granted her political asylum against the will of the British. He built a Charburja Durbar in Thapathali for Maharani Jind and constructed a small *gurdwara* within the compound for her to worship because of his deep respect for Maharaja Ranjit Singh. But he did not support her ambitions of going against the British. In fact, her hopes were shattered when Jung Bahadur Rana supported the British during the revolt of 1857.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup> *ibid*, p. 27.

After around 11 years, Maharani Jind Kaur left Kathmandu and travelled back to finally reunite with her son in England. Many Sikhs who had travelled with Maharani Jind stayed back in Sikkhan Pura of Nepalgunj. Since then, many Sikh families settled in three villages - Sikkhan Pura, Bankatuwa and Jamunaha - on the outskirts of Nepalgunj. The Bankatuwa *Gurdwara* in a village called Bankatuwa, is named after the Sikh community's settlement in the forest area. Now, a large *gurdwara* is in the market area of Nepalgunj.

In the southern plains of the Terai region, in Raxaul, the border point between Nepal and India, a small *gurdwara* was first established in Amlaiganj by S. Pritam Singh in the early 1960s. Later, the *Guru Granth Sahib* was shifted to Birgunj where Pritam Singh established a *gurdwara* within the compound of his Birgunj Transport Office-Nepal Public Motor Service, where he had allocated 2 kathas to the *Gurdwara Guru Nanak Satsang*, Birgunj. In 2017, *Gurdwara Guru Nanak Satsang* in Birgunj shifted to a new location and welcomes people

from all castes and creeds and is managed by the Birgunj *Guru Nanak Satsang* Committee.

Likewise, Sardar Pritam Singh has been instrumental in establishing *gurdwaras* in other districts of Nepal including Butwal and Dhangadhi.

### **Conclusion**

The Sikh history in Nepal goes back to *Guru Nanak's* third *Udasi* and to the secret alliances between the Gorkhas and Sikhs to now the small Sikh community, which continues to contribute to the development and progress of Nepal. The historical, cultural and social commonalities between India and Nepal are plenty. Nepal has many religious sites that are of significance to the Sikhs and historians and the aim is to revive the forgotten history of *Guru Nanak*, which has been mentioned in this article.

In Sikhism there is a principle called *Gurbani Vichar*, which means to come to an understanding of the *Guru's* wisdom and revisit *Guru Nanak's* perspective on the world. *Guru Nanak* believed that a

Sikh must always be on a learning path and their ultimate goal should be to have their soul united with God. The aim of this article is to unveil many hidden gems - *Guru Nanak Matths* - that are in Nepal so that Sikh followers can bask in the glory of the *Guru* and continue the path of learning.

### **Disclaimer**

The authors of this article have tried to depict fact based on historical records and interviews with *Mahants* of *Nanak Matths* in Kathmandu - Nem Muni, Mahant Pushpadas Udasi, Priests from the Sikh community in Nepal - Gyani *Gurubaksh Singh* and Sikh leaders in Nepal - Sardar Pritam Singh.

By Sardar Pritam Singh, Priest Gyani Gurubaksh Singh, Mrs. Rupy Singh, Transcribed and Translated by Ms. Sarah Sapsanamma Rai, Edited by Kiran Deep Sandhu.

Thanks to Mr. Anil Thaman for contributing the photographs. Photographs taken by Mr. Eesh Deewan.

Place	Location
Harmandir Sahib	Punjab
Gurdwara Patthar Sahib at Leh	Jammu & Kashmir
Gurdwara Bangla Sahib	Delhi
Gurdwara Sis Ganj Sahib	Delhi
Gurdrara Rakab Ganj Sahib	Delhi
Gurdwara Nanak Piao Sahib	Delhi
Gurdwara Damdama Sahib	Delhi
Gurdwara Banda Singh Bahadur	Delhi
Gurdwara Majnu Tilla Sahib	Delhi
Gurdwara Bala Sahib	Delhi
Gurdwara Moti Bagh Sahib	Delhi
Gurdwara Mata Sundri Sahib	Delhi
Gurdwara, Domegaon	Maharashtra
Sri Akal Takht Sahib	Punjab
Takht Sri Patna Sahib	Bihar
Takht Sri Kesgarh Sahib	Punjab
Takht Sri Hazur Sahib	Maharashtra
Takht Sri Damdama Sahib	Punjab

## Important sites related to Sikhism in India

### *Harmandir Sahib*

(Also known as Golden Temple)

By Dr. Mohinder Singh

Amritsar, the city of the 'Pool of Nectar', stands for the values of eternity, *Satsang* and *Naam-Simran*. It elevates the mortal to the level of the eternal. *Gurbani* brings the experience of eternity alive deep within us. The experience and experienter and the place of experience become one in the process of spiritual seeking.

*Harmandir Sahib* is also known as the *Darbar Sahib*, which means 'sacred audience' or the *Swarna Mandir* (Golden Temple). It was founded in 1588 and has since been a living symbol of spiritual and historical heritage for Sikhs. It is the preeminent spiritual site of Sikhs. There is a belief the immortal nectar of the sacred *sarovar* (pool) surrounds the temple. It was Arjan Dev, the fifth *Guru*, who expanded the *sarovar* of nectar that had been in existence since the time of Ram Das, the fourth *Guru*, and built a concrete structure. The *Guru* built the temple in the centre of the sacred *sarovar* and called it Harmandir, the abode of God. There are four doors, one in each direction, which signifies accessibility to people of all faiths from all four directions irrespective of their beliefs. *Guru Arjan* planned the *Gurdwara* at a level lower than

the city to emphasise humility and the need to efface one's ego before entering the premises to meet the *Guru*. There is only one bridge to access the Golden Temple, which emphasises that the end goal of all human beings is to be one with God.

After the compilation of the *Adi Granth* in 1604, the fifth *Guru* appointed *Baba Budda*, the first *Granthi* of the temple. The Harmandir Sahib has a few unique features:

- **The practice of Kirtan:** It is the only *Gurdwara* where an uninterrupted *Kirtan* (hymns sung to the musical tunes in different ragas) is played by different Ragis (hymn singers) throughout the day. It is also the only Sikh shrine where *Guru Granth* is placed on a cot on the floor and not on a high wooden or cemented pedestal
- The sixth *Guru* built the 'Akal Takht' opposite the main entrance of the 'Darshani Deodi' of Harmandir Sahib to discuss temporal affairs.
- After the daily religious ceremonies, *Guru Granth Sahib*, the holy book of the Sikhs, is taken to a room known as the 'Kotha Sahib' where *Guru Arjan* resided. Every morning the holy *Granth* is taken to the sanctum in a palanquin with a procession of devotees. This practice, which has been followed over the ages, continues till date.



Image by Priscila Prika/Pixabay

Sikhism

## *Gurudwara Pathar Sahib at Leh*

By Mr. Darshan Singh Abbot

Gurdwara Pathar Sahib was established in memory of *Guru Nanak*. It is about 25 miles from Leh, on the Leh-Kargil road. The *Gurdwara* commemorates the visit of *Guru Nanak* to the Ladakh region. Tibetan Buddhists consider *Guru Nanak Dev* as a saint and is revered by the name of *Guru Gompka Maharaj*.

*Guru Nanak* travelled to many places during the 'Udasis' (spiritual sojourns) and it is believed that on his travel back to Punjab via Srinagar, one of the places he halted was in Leh.

There are reports that in the late 1970s during the construction of the Leh-Nimu Road people found a boulder in the middle of the projected road-belt. Even after numerous attempts, they could not remove the boulder with the help of a bulldozer. The driver supposedly had a dream where he was asked not to move the stone.

Initially, when he told the army officers of the area about his dream they were all sceptical. However, after a few Lamas and locals visited the army officers working on the road project and apprised them of the story of Saint Nanak Lama and the unyielding boulder, the army officers understood the significance of the historical site, now known as Gurdwara Pathar Sahib.

The Buddhist Lamas shared with the army officers the story attached to the boulder

(pathar) which has a negative impression of their revered Lama Nanak - it contains a 'hollow imprint of his shoulders and backside'. They shared the story of *Udasis* from 1515-18 when *Guru Nanak* is believed to have travelled to Sikkim, Kashmir, Nepal and Tibet. They further elaborated that according to legend, a demon lived in the area and terrorised the people. They prayed to the Almighty for help and it is said that *Guru Nanak* came to their help. There is a belief that the *Guru* blessed the people with sermons. One morning, when *Guru Nanak* was meditating, a demon in a fit of rage pushed a boulder down from the hilltop with an intention to kill *Guru Nanak*. However, when the boulder touched the *Guru's* body it softened like warm wax and came to a halt on his back.

The demon was taken aback when he saw *Guru Nanak* unhurt. Mad with anger, the demon tried to push the boulder with his right foot. As the stone was still soft like wax, it is believed that his foot got stuck in the stone and his footprint is also believed to be etched in the stone. The demon realised his helplessness against the spiritual power of the great *Guru* and sought forgiveness.

## Historical Gurdwaras in Delhi

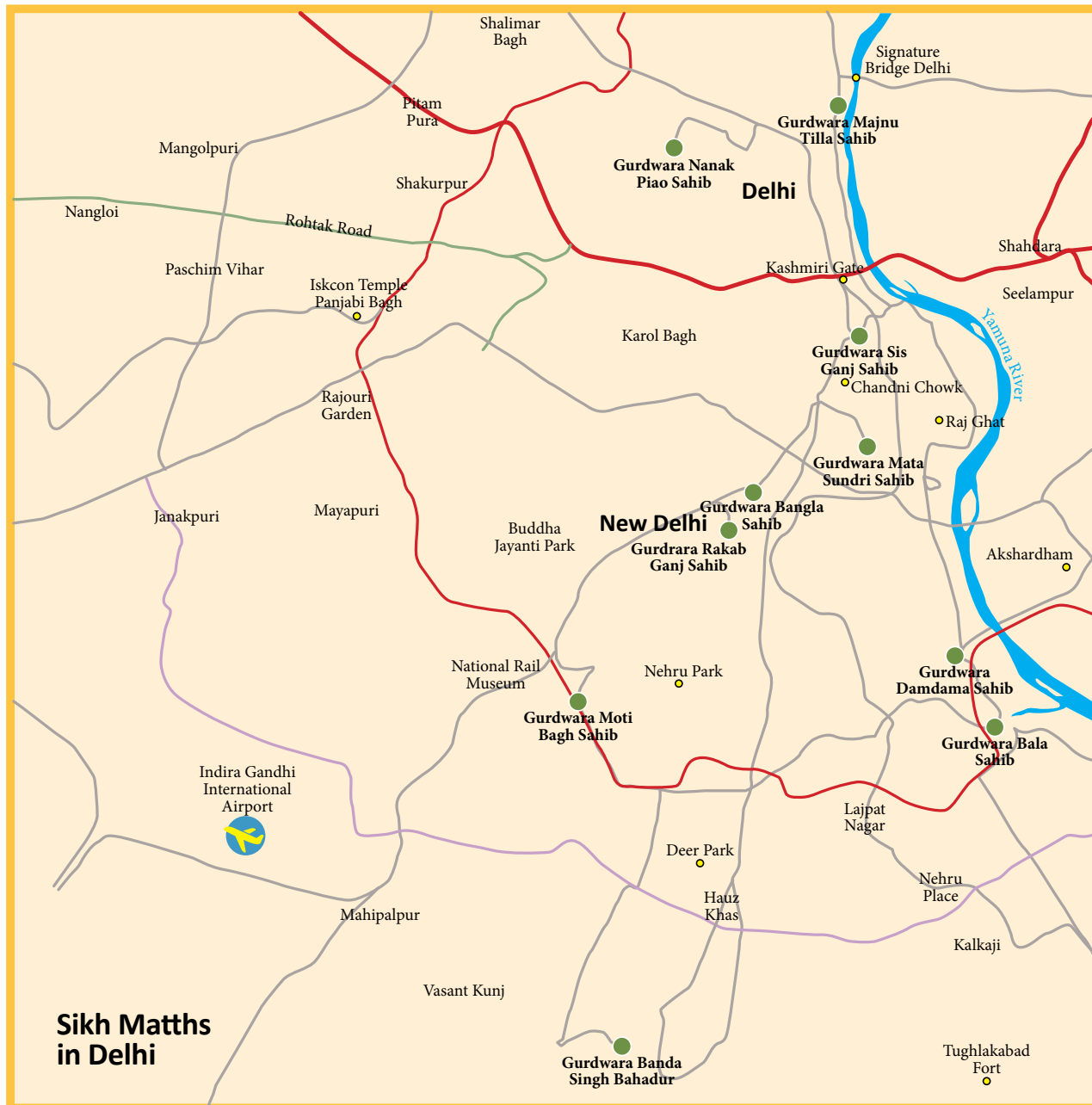
By Mr. Bhagwan Singh

### *Gurdwara Bangla Sahib*

*Gurdwara Bangla Sahib* is one of the most prominent and well-known Sikh *Gurdwaras* in New Delhi. It is located close to the New Delhi General Post Office in Connaught Place, New Delhi. *Gurdwara Bangla Sahib* is associated with *Guru Harkrishan*, the boy prophet who became the eighth *Guru* of the Sikhs in 1661. When *Guru Harkrishan* came to Delhi in 1664, he was received as a royal guest by the *Rajput Raja*, Jai Singh, in a *haveli* (bungalow), which is the present site of *Gurdwara Bangla Sahib*. There is a holy pond called *Sarovar* on the *Gurdwara* premises.

During this period, there was an outbreak of cholera and smallpox in Delhi and *Guru Harkrishan* helped those who were sick and suffering. The *Guru* distributed sanctified water to the poor, sick and ailing, which had a miraculous healing effect on the mind, body and soul. To this day, water sanctified by the 'Word of the Lord' sung all day in the *Gurdwara*, is distributed to those seeking faith healing. Many people are reported to have been healed. Raja Jai Singh dedicated this palace in sacred memory of the *Guru*.





## Gurdwara Sis Ganj Sahib

Gurdwara Sis Ganj Sahib is located opposite Bhai Mati Das Chowk in Chandani Chowk area of Old Delhi near the Red Fort. Gurdwara Sis Ganj Sahib was built at the site where the ninth Guru, Guru Tegh Bahadur, was beheaded on the orders of the Mughal Emperor, Aurangzeb, for refusing to convert to Islam.

Guru Tegh Bahadur was born in the Holy City of Amritsar in April 1621. He was the fifth and youngest son of the sixth Guru, Guru Hargobind. He became the ninth Guru of Sikhs nearly 20 years after his father shed his physical form. He was on a missionary tour in Bengal and Assam when he heard Aurangzeb had issued orders to persecute *Brahmins*. There are reports that 500 *Brahmins* met Guru Tegh Bahadur under the leadership of Pandit Kirpa Ram to seek help.

In 1675, when Aurangzeb reached Delhi, Guru Tegh Bahadur was arrested in Agra and was brought to Delhi. Aurangzeb failed to convince Guru Tegh Bahadur that idolaters should be eliminated although Guru Tegh Bahadur was preaching against idolatry and *Brahminism*, and did not believe in forced conversions. He considered it to be against the basic moral values that he believed in.

People believe that Guru Tegh Bahadur refused to use miracles to save his life. On Aurangzeb's orders, Guru Tegh Bahadur's leading apostles and companions were tortured to death. The Guru was beheaded under a tree at the place where Sis Ganj shrine stands today.

**Sikh Matths  
in Delhi**

## *Gurdwara Rakab Ganj Sahib*

*Gurdwara Rakab Ganj Sahib* is an important historical *Gurdwara* located near Parliament House in New Delhi. The ninth *Guru*, *Guru Tegh Bahadur* was beheaded in Chandani Chowk where today *Gurdwara Sis Ganj Sahib* stands. It is believed that after the beheading of the *Guru* who refused to convert to Islam, there was a storm. In the midst of the storm, a devotee named Lakhi Shah, a government contractor, swiftly removed the lower part of the body from the site without the Mughal guards noticing it and put the body on his cart under bales of cotton. The contractor took the body of the *Guru* to his house in Raisina and set the house on fire. Bhai Lakhi Shah's house where the body was cremated by his family has been transformed into a beautiful historical monument where today *Rakab Ganj Sahib* stands.

Similarly, another man named *Bhai Jaita* picked up the severed head of the *Guru* and took it to Anandpur, where his son *Guru Gobind Singh* cremated it near the place where the *Guru* used to meditate in a cell.

## *Gurdwara Nanak Piao Sahib*

*Gurdwara Nanak Piao Sahib* is Located on G.T. Road near Rana Pratap Bagh in Delhi. It is believed that during his spiritual sojourns to the East, *Guru Nanak* is said to have stopped in a garden in the outskirts of Delhi. He is said to have delivered inspiring sermons on religion and mystical experiences through music and hymns. There are reports that Pandits, Mullas, Yogis and Sanyasis came and debated with him on many religious issues of their interest. The owner of the garden built a shrine to commemorate his visit, which is now known as *Gurdwara Nanak Piao*.

## *Gurdwara Damdama Sahib*

*Gurdwara Damdama Sahib* is located behind Humayun's Tomb, near Nizamuddin in New Delhi. *Guru Gobind Singh*, the tenth and last prophet of the Sikhs, left Punjab for South India on October 21<sup>st</sup>, 1706. When he reached Bhagaur in Raputana in March 1707, He was received by a special envoy from Prince Muazzam, requesting the *Guru* for political and moral support in the prince's battle for succession to the throne with his brother, after the death of Aurangzeb.

*Guru Sahib* met the prince near Humayun's Tomb in 1707, and together they drew up a battle strategy. *Guru Sahib* promised to help the prince if he would punish all those responsible for the treacherous killing of his sons and destroying his army and his city, Anandpur. Later, *Guru Sahib* helped the prince defeat his brother and claim the throne. The place where *Guru Gobind Singh* met Prince Muazzam is where *Gurdwara Damdama Sahib* stands today.

## *Gurdwara Banda Singh Bahadur*

*Gurdwara Banda Singh Bahadur* is situated close to Post Office Mehrauli near Qutab Minar in Delhi. In 1708, when *Guru Gobind Singh* reached Nanded in South India, a miracle-mongering yogi named Madho Das tried to use his occult powers to humble the *Guru* but was unable to do so. He then became a disciple and devoted himself to *Guru Gobind Singh*, and was known as Banda Singh.

Banda Singh is said to have gone to Punjab with others who were skilled in warfare and military administration to chastise those who persecuted the Sikhs and avenge the martyrdom of the young *Sahibzadas* (sons) of *Guru Gobind Singh*. There are reports that *Bhai Mani Singh*, the high priest repulsed the attacks on Amritsar with only 500 Sikhs in April 1709 against the Lahore and Patti armies. However, the emperor arrived with all his forces and Banda Singh was unable to hold Punjab. He retreated to the hills, but kept fighting the might of the Mughals. He was forced to surrender and imprisoned in December 1715. Many companions of Banda Singh were beheaded. Banda Singh was mercilessly tortured along with his three-year-old son. He died on June 9<sup>th</sup>, 1716. This *Gurdwara* commemorates the martyrdom of Banda Singh Bahadur.

## *Gurdwara Majnu Tilla Sahib*

*Gurdwara Majnu Tilla Sahib* is located at Khyber Pass on Ring Road in Delhi. It is believed that on the banks of river Yamuna, there lived in Delhi a Muslim *Sufi Darvesh*, who led the life of a penitent recluse. So lonely and God-intoxicated was he that he was nicknamed Majnu, the mad lover. When he met *Guru Nanak*, he felt that he was in the presence of a prophet, who had imparted to him a new revelation. He felt spiritually exalted and illumined and the 'Light of God' was revealed to him.

*Guru Nanak* had many Muslim disciples in Punjab but Majnu was his first Muslim disciple in Delhi, who not only became a staunch devotee but a great missionary, who converted his Khangah into a shrine of *Guru Nanak*, which continues to be known after his name as *Majnu-ka-Tilla* to this day.

It is also believed that *Guru Gobind Singh* stayed at the *Majnu Tilla* shrine when he visited Delhi. Also, when *Guru Har Rai* sent his son Ram Rai to explain the tenants of Sikhism to Aurangzeb, he stayed at the shrine.

## *Gurdwara Bala Sahib*

*Gurdwara Bala Sahib* is located at Bhagwan Nagar, *Ashram* on Ring Road, Delhi. This *Gurdwara* is associated with the eighth *Guru*, *Guru Harkrishan Sahib*. During his stay in Delhi in 1664, the *Guru* helped many suffering from cholera and smallpox irrespective of their caste, creed or status. In his pursuit to help more he shifted to the banks of River Yamuna. *Guru Harkrishan* spent the last two weeks of his life looking after these people at this location. On March 30<sup>th</sup>, 1664, the *Guru* shed his physical form asking his disciples to seek his successor, whom he addressed as '*Baba Bakale*'. He was cremated at the present site where today *Gurdwara Bala Sahib* stands.

He has long been remembered by the Muslims as *Bala Pir* and by Hindus as *Balmukand*. In the invocation prayer (*Ardas*) written by *Guru Gobind Singh*, the Sikhs recite these words every day: '*Sri Harkrishan dhiaaeey Jis ditthe sabh dukh jaye*'.

*Gurdwara Bala Sahib* is also sacred because Mata Sundri and Mata Sahib Kaur were also cremated here. The *samadhi* of Mata Sahib Kaur, a small marble room, is in the main hall of the *Gurdwara*, whereas that of Mata Sundri is outside the new *Gurdwara* building.

## *Gurdwara Moti Bagh Sahib*

*Gurdwara Moti Bagh Sahib* is located near Dhaula Kuan on Ring Road. *Gurdwara Moti Bagh* is associated with the visit of the tenth *Guru*, *Guru Gobind Singh*, who had come to Delhi on the request of Prince Muazzam, later to become Emperor Bahadur Shah, who sought his help in the battle of succession to the throne of Delhi. This happened in 1707, when the struggle for succession started due to the sudden demise of Emperor Aurangzeb in Deccan. *Bhai Nand Lal*, the great scholar and poet of Persian language and a devotee of *Guru Gobind Singh*, requested him to help Prince Muazzam, the eldest son of Aurangzeb.

*Guru Gobind Singh* is said to have camped here in a colony of cobblers with his army. It is believed that the *Guru* announced his arrival in Delhi by shooting an arrow into the right foot of Emperor Bahadur Shah's chair from a distance of eight miles. Bahadur Shah was sitting in the Red Fort at that time. Seeing an arrow, Bahadur Shah took this as a miracle. Soon another arrow was shot in the left foot with a note that this was not a miracle but skill in archery. The emperor was so impressed with the skill that he immediately acknowledged *Guru's* supremacy.

The *Deohri* (gate) from where *Guru Gobind Singh* shot the arrows has been preserved and *Guru Granth Sahib* has been installed there as a mark of respect to the superb archery skills of the *Guru*. Even now from the top of the *Deohri*, one can see the skyline of Delhi and Red Fort. The Sikhs of Delhi have constructed a new *Gurdwara* building but the old building from where the tenth master shot two arrows to Red Fort, is still intact.

## *Gurdwara Mata Sundri Sahib*

*Gurdwara Mata Sundri Sahib* is situated behind Lok Nayak Jai Prakash Narayan Hospital adjoining Ghalib Urdu Academy on Mata Sundri Lane.

Delhi Sikh *Gurdwara* Management Committee constructed an imposing shrine on the site of the *Haveli* where *Mata Sundri*, wife of *Guru Gobind Singh*, stayed, after the *Guru's* departure for Deccan. According to historical records, *Mata Sundri* and *Mata Sahib Kaur* stayed for many years in Kucha Diwali Singh near Ajmeri Gate. Most of the Sikhs believe that after the passing away of *Guru Gobind Singh* at Nanded in October 1708, she nurtured and guided the *Khalsa* for 40 years after the *Guru's* demise. Sikhs followed her instructions and respected her, looked up to her for guidance. *Mata Sundri Kaur* died in 1747 at the place where the *Gurdwara* now stands.

## *Gurdwara Domegaon Maharashtra*

Domegaon is a village in the outlying Shrirampur *Tehsil* of Ahmednagar district in Maharashtra located on the banks of River Godavari.

Mr. Prithipal Singh shares that 'more than 165 years ago, an old handwritten copy of *Guru Granth Sahib* was brought to be preserved in Domegaon, It is believed that the Sikhs of Shrirampur learnt about it around 65 years ago.

A marble stone on the *Gurdwara* wall has the following inscription: "The construction of *Gurdwarab* by Sri Birdh Baba holy person'. Domegaon was started by a Nanded saint on May 25", 1968. About 150 years ago, a Sikh saint of Punjab, who had a hand-written copied version of *Guru Granth Sahib* kept it in this place in a thatched hut, which has now been converted to a *Gurdwara*. The village is situated on the banks of River Godavari, which often gets flooded since the times of the Birdh Baba. *Guru Granth Sahib* was carried to River Godavari and prayers were offered to Ganga Mai (Godavari) so that the floods would recede. The local people had full faith in *Guru Granth Sahib* and Birdh Baba. The floods abated after the prayers and people were spared from huge losses. This tradition continues to date. For instance, on August 6, 1968, when there was a flood the village people repeated the same thing and there was no damage to the village."

### **How to reach**

Belapur Railway Station is the nearest railway link, about one kilometre from Shrirampur Bus Stand, while Pune Lohegaon Airport is about 110 km from Ahmednagar, is the nearest air link.

## The Five Takhts Seats of Holy Authority

A *Takht* is commonly understood to be a King's throne. However, in the Sikh tradition, the term *Takht* refers to the seat of a holy authority, wherein decisions pertaining to worldly and spiritual matters related to the Sikh faith are taken. During the times of the *Gurus*, spiritual teachings were imparted here and edicts were issued. At present, the 'Five Beloved Ones' who hold the important holy seats of the Sikh way of life in the presence of the *Guru Granth Sahib*, adjudge, give opinions, and issue verdicts to be followed by the concerned on important issues. The decree issued by the 'Five Beloved Ones' is considered as the edict of the *Guru*.

These *Takhts* are now recognized as the seats of spiritual authority of the *Khalsa*. Here, issues pertaining to worldly and spiritual matters are decided upon, whereas, *Gurdwaras* are meant only for worship, meditation, and the singing of religious hymns.

### *The Akal Takht Sahib*

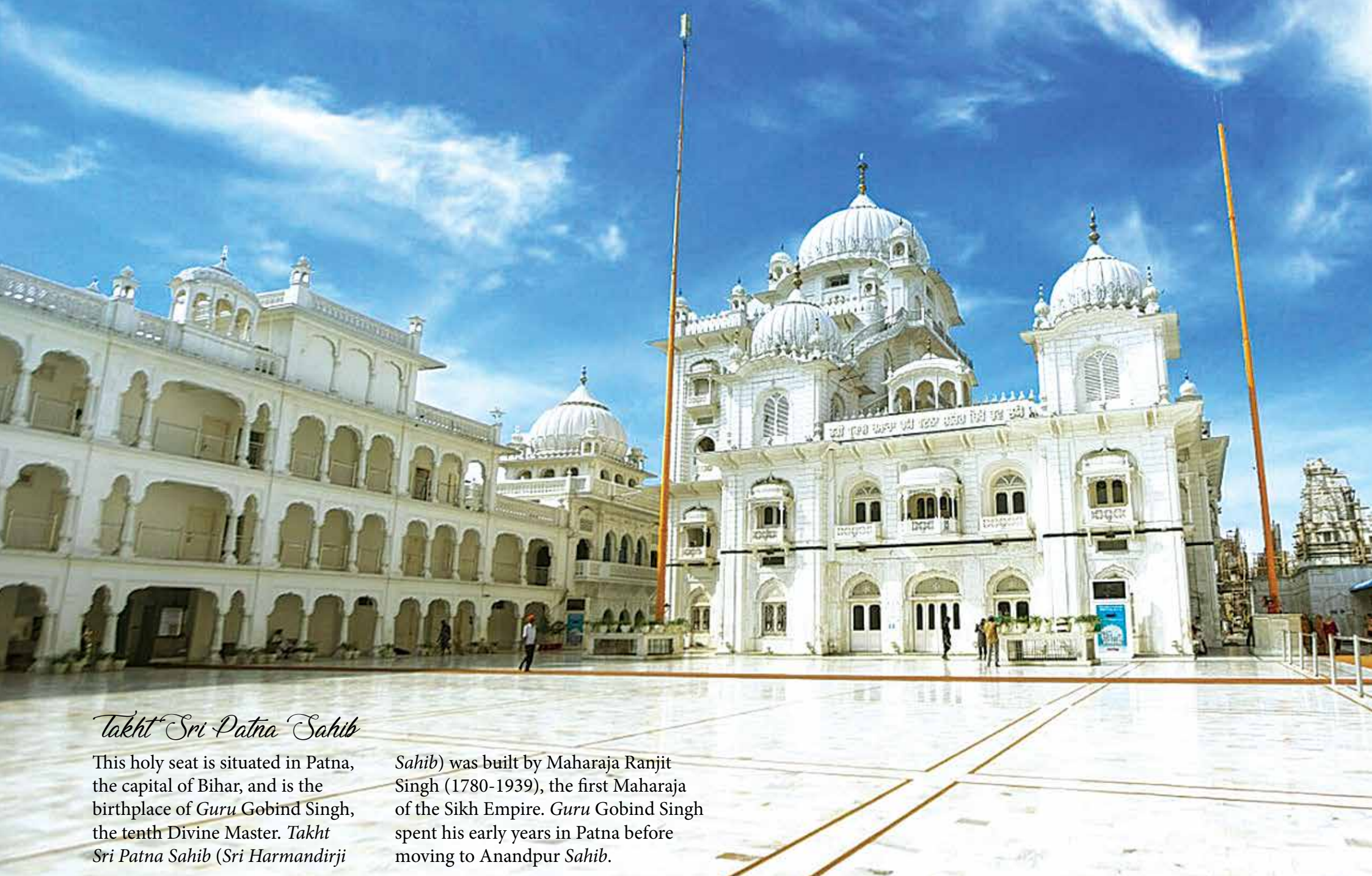


This holy seat is situated in Amritsar in Punjab, India. It was built by *Guru Hargobind*, the sixth *Guru* (Divine Master), who

expounded the version of the worldly and spiritual realms (*Miri Piri*) in 1609. The *Akal Takht* (the seat of the Timeless One) has a

pre-eminent role in the affairs of the Sikh way of life and provides guidance to Sikhs on secular issues viewed from a spiritual perspective. Any edict issued from here is binding on all the Sikhs around the world. Any issue of vital importance to the Sikh faith is deliberated upon by the 'Five Chosen Ones', sitting together at the *Akal Takht* in the presence of the *Guru Granth Sahib*. After studying the issue, according to Sikh way of life, an edict is issued, which may be addressed to an individual or to the Sikh community at large. Those in charge of these *Takhts* are required to tread the Divine Path with love and devotion, eradicating their ego completely, and considering the whole community in their decision-making irrespective of caste, creed, gender or social status.

Photos: Mr. Rajinder Singh Chadha & team



### *Takht Sri Patna Sahib*

This holy seat is situated in Patna, the capital of Bihar, and is the birthplace of *Guru Gobind Singh*, the tenth Divine Master. *Takht Sri Patna Sahib (Sri Harmandirji*

*Sahib)* was built by Maharaja Ranjit Singh (1780-1939), the first Maharaja of the Sikh Empire. *Guru Gobind Singh* spent his early years in Patna before moving to Anandpur *Sahib*.



### *Takht Sri Kesgarh Sahib*

Located in the town of Anandpur Sahib in Punjab, this *Takht* commemorates the *Vaisakhi* of 1699, when *Guru Gobind Singh* founded the *Khalsa Panth* after the '*Panj Pyaras*' - the 'Five Beloved Ones' were asked to drink the priceless gift of *Amrit* (divine nectar). Later, *Guru Gobind Singh* asked the 'Five Beloved Ones' to bless him and make him a true Sikh, a *Khalsa*. It is the place, where *Guru Gobind Singh*, while performing spiritual deeds spread the message of Divine Truth to mankind by shedding ego, and a message of acceptance and harmony irrespective of caste, creed and religion.

## *Takht Sri Hazur Sahib*



It is also known as *Takht Sachkhand Sri Hazur Sahib* and is located in Abchal Nagar, Nanded of Maharashtra. It is the place where *Guru* Gobind Singh merged his mortal body with the five elements of nature and became one with the all-pervading one, i.e., divine.

It was here that before shedding his mortal body, he bestowed the divine authority - *Guruship* on *Guru Granth Sahib*. He decreed that henceforth, all Sikhs, though initially belonging to different castes, creeds and religions, should have faith in the sacred scripture of the *Guru Granth Sahib* as their

Eternal *Guru*, and this has been amply clarified by him in the following verse:

*Aag-e-aa bha-ee Akal kee  
Tab-ei chala-e-o panth.  
Sabh Sikkhan ko hukam h-ei  
Guru maan-e-o Granth.*







## *Takht Sri Damdama Sahib*

Located in Talwandi Sabo, a small town 28 km south-east of Bathinda in Punjab, this *Takht* commemorates the visit of *Guru Gobind Singh* in 1706. After retreating from *Anandpur Sahib*, he rested here for some time, and went on to stay for more than nine months. The phrase ‘*Dam Lena*’ in Punjabi means ‘to rest a while’ hence the name *Damdama Sahib*. His work during his stay here led to the blossoming of the Sikh faith in its full glory. It was here that he recited from his divine memory the entire text of the *Granth Sahib*. The *Guru* blessed this place as *Guru ki Kashi*, i.e., the highest learning place not only in religious or divine wisdom, but also imparting value-based education in all spheres to motivate students to become holy persons and render selfless service to humanity.

During the daily *Diwan*, the *Guru* would elucidate the hymns of the holy scripture and preach to the divinely congregation (*Sangat*), He also set about teaching *Gurmukhi* to the Sikhs and declared, ‘This is the *Guru-Kashi* and will emerge in future as a great centre of learning for value-based education.’

## Supporting partners





