Part: ONE

Temples of North-West India

Somanath, Dwaraka, Mathura, Amritsar, Kurukshetra, Mt. Abu, Ambaji, Pushkar, Vaishno Devi, Amarnath.

By
Prof. K. K. Moorthy

Introduction
by
Advocate Sri I L N Sastry,
Chairman, Experts Committee, TTD Board, TIRUPATI.

Message Publications, Tirupati.
K. K. Moorthy was born in a hamlet of Kolar District, Karnataka, bordering on Chittoor Dt., Andhra Pradesh ... had his Primary School education at Mulakalacheruvu, Chittoor Dt. studied in Madanapalli, Andhra Pradesh till graduation ... a product of Beseant Thososophical School and College ... gradu-uated from Madras University in 1952.

Entered Govt. Service in 1951 ... worked as clerk in Registration Department for a year and a half ... Joined as Graduate Asst. in Dt. Board High School in 1952 ... worked for three years at Puttur and Piler ... underwent B. Ed. training at govt. Training College in Kurnool in 1955-56 ... joined as trained teacher at Kuppam ... obtained two Masterate Degrees in the sister disciplines of Literature—English and History from Banaras Hindu University in 1961 and 1965 ... worked as Special Asst. for 4 years at Z. P. M. P. Higher Secondary School, Chittoor.

Left for Tamil Nadu College service in 1966... worked as Lecturer at G.T.N. Arts College, Dindigul from 1966 till retirement in 1984 ... did Research on Byron as part time Resea-rch Scholar ... submitted thesis for Ph. D. Degree to Madurai - Kamaraj University, Madurai ... worked as Prof. and Head of the Department of English at Adhiparasakthi Engineering College, Melmaruvathur, Tamil Nadu ... worked in the Publication Department of T T D , Tirupati.

Has been contributing articles, Poems, essays, stories etc. to several periodicals both in English and Telugu under different pen names ... authored about thirty books in English and Telugu ...

(Vide Wrapper 3)
Part: ONE

Temples of North-West India

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Title Page art: Sri Chandra sekhar,
Saptagiri, T T D.

Price: Rs. 30-00
"Thou art O Lord of lords! formless, nameless and abodeless
By giving forms and names installed you in temples peerless
Forgive my sin of making Nil into Full" thus spake Sankara once
The shrines thus emerged, brought him interplanetary eminence

Pious as I'm, visited them all to drink in Thy Sobha with eyes
And was agog on hearing thy myriad sports from the priests wise
Regaining senses, I essayed anon to share that delight infinite
To fellowmen lost in mundane activities for salvation definite

But found my grasp meagre and power of narration ineffective
Cann't visualise an iota of Thy Viswarupa in diction effective
Hence my Lord Balaji! fill in that void of my modest ambition
With compassion for due inspiration and happy consummation
P. S. Gajapathy, M.A.,
Tourism Officer,
Regional Office, Tirupati,

The book — The Abodes of Gods - Part : One, Temples of North-west India, by Prof. K.K. Moorthy, makes an earnest attempt at steering the pilgrim’s mind to the temples — “the veritable open-air museums treasuring up both man-made marvels and God-created wondrous beauties of infinite varieties.” He has presented many salient features of the holy temples, which the pilgrim desires to know, and for which alone he goes on a pilgrimage to them, under sections such as, Uniqueness, Antiquity and Historicity. They capture the imagination of pilgrim and awaken his curiosity to visit and enjoy the sight of different manifestations and incarnations of God. He successfully roused the interest by focusing light on the history of the place, and reasons its selection. Mode of reaching the place of pilgrimage and facilities available for stay are given for the pilgrim’s benefit, and they are very useful. He has brought out elaborately in 'yatra and its paramartha' many desirable traits of pilgrims and hints for successful yatra. They are very valuable and informative. He deals with here and there the beauties of Nature, which the pilgrim sees on his way.

The twin objectives of the book—catering to the religious yearning and aesthetic longing of pilgrims are very well portrayed and effectively narrated in fine prose. Hence, it satisfies spiritualists and Nature lovers. His pragmatic approach is novel, and presentation highly interesting. So, it affords a delightful reading to all--religionists, tourists, etc. I wish many more such good books from this erudite scholar, and await eagerly to peruse them for profit and pleasure.

(Sd) P.S. Gajapathy.
FOREWORD

I.L.N. Sastry, B.Com., B.L., CAIIB., Advocate  
Member: T.T. Devasthanams Board,  
CHAIRMAN: EXPERTS' COMMITTEE ON T.T.D. Publications

Lord Sri Krishna blessed the devotee to worship any God in whatever form, with faith and devotion and He would reflect in that faith

So the choice is wide open to the dedicated devotee, and thus the personification of implicit faith and divinity is manifest in different temples. The God is one, infinite, indestructible, omnipresent, omnipotent, and is here, there and everywhere. Millions of people of Hindu faith living in different parts of India, had adored the sanctity of that Invisible, but yet visible to the purified and sagely eyes. And the temples are abodes of such innumerable Gods and Goddesses. The discerning devotee worships each and every God, in the manner prescribed and he perceives the same replica in every idol that is installed in a temple. Each temple has got its own history and background, and some of idols therein are 'Swayambhus' such as Lord Sri Venkateswara of Tirumala.

Prof. K.K. Murthy, has dwelt at length the uniqueness of each temple, and its antiquity and the festivals that are being celebrated in the intervening periods. He had also indicated the various routes to reach the temple for the benefit of pilgrims. He stressed the need to observe some rituals before undertaking pilgrimage and during its course also. It is gratifying that Prof. K.K. Moorthy chose to write about the abodes of Gods spread over throughout the breadth and length of India. This book is first of its kind in the series. Apart from books of perennial and ethical values, he also showed keen interest in research work and as well in literature. Thus he wrote many short stories and Novels in Telugu
and also on Byron in English and found himself famous. In fact there are number of books to his credit both in English and Telugu. The author had the humble beginning after completion of graduation but his quest for learning is enormous and this led him to acquire Master’s Degrees from Banaras Hindu University, through hard work and perseverance and finally had become Professor and Head of Department of English in a College in Tamil Nadu. Thus he reached the heights in academic career and simultaneously developed ardent love and involvement in multifarious religious activities.

So when the reader goes through the pages of this venture, he would be carried away to the temples, and he is immersed in the vivid description and he must be having lasting impression about the serenity, calmness, concentration and meditation. The following sentence in these pages is a clear manifestation of the author’s deep devotion and constant endeavour in realisation of self. “Mental peace and spiritual solace automatically envelop the entire being and make the yatri sin proof” such is his firm conviction and mature belief.

Visit to the temples invigorates the inner dynamism of one’s own self and this ultimately leads to humility, forgiveness, tolerance and shedding of egoism. One should expect eternal bliss, since prayer is the clarion call to different Gods in varied forms.

Camp at Tirupathi, 4-10-1989. (Sd.) I.L.N. Sastry 4-10-1989.
PROLOGUE

Temple, temple, temple, and temple; everywhere and anywhere can be seen in our Punya Bharat right from the high snow-capped Himalayan peaks, down to the salt-soaked shores of Kanyakumari, and Dwarka to Kamakshipur across. Just look up --- a temple tower piercing into the glimmering blue sky greets your eyes; or bend your head from any mount, the fluttering of a saffron-dyed temple banner assails your ears; stretch your gaze along any river bank, a concourse of pilgrims draped almost in wet outfit hurrying to temples gleam into your sight. How then about the case of concrete jungles, and idyllic rural areas? Surprise overwhelms you now; for, either in street corners, or at cross roads, or under trees, or near ponds, or along highways, or pathless forests, mini-temples enshining a wide variety of adorable divinities of all denominations of every major religion meet your eye and bend your head in veneration, provided you have well developed theistic instincts, say in sound condition, of course. Justifiably they justify thereby, the omnipresence of the Omnipotent Lord. In icon form to the naked eye, but to the inner eye, the concrete, living, all-observing ever succouring omnicompassionate Infinite Power worthy to be adored with flower or sacrifices. In extreme cases only. Does this not then appear that the sacred mother Earth, out of infinite compassion has thrown up in certain places, some of her priceless gems for the benefit for her own dear children?

Well, found hither or thither, called by any name, worshipped with paraphernalia or without --- bahypuja or manasapuja, they all represent, rather stand for one, yes and the same universal truth that there is one Power Supreme, the
recognition of which alone makes the birth fruitful, living enjoyable and God's creation purposeful. And it is the duty indispen-sable on the part of every sentiment being to accept the almightiness of the most HIGH and offer unconditional total surrender, that alone marks the cessation of the wretched so journ in this mundane world, and the inauguration of upward journey culminating in Sayujya.

These ancient temples — abodes of gods were built in the days of yore by mighty emperors, ruling princes, amatya sekharas, Navakotinarayanas, Dharma Pravaktas, feudatory chiefs, tribal heads for the sole purpose of spreading Bhakti cult among the masses and classes both. As the motive behind such august enterprise being lofty and ennobling, it earned an ever lasting name to the builders, besides reaping divine grace' The practice is given a fresh lease of life from time to time. In every Yuga too. Hence the presence of countless temples throughout the length and breadth of Akhanda Bharata Khandā.

In modern times too through the western impact robbed much of our ageless spiritual treasure, humanism and theism are installing the representations of them. Abolute power in shrines of new models and diverse patterns, infusing into them modern spirit and western trends. In this century, a class of new builders have stepped into the arena and started building temples to spread bhakti, and spiritualise the core of decadent human nature due to ill digestion of several cultures into which man is thrown by force of circumstances. Many parts of India have been blessed with the construction of several kinds of shrines, although this noble task is sadly neglected by the ruling class. The industrial magnates and commercial houses have taken up this sacred work with a zeal seem for surpassing the bygone builders. Many imposing structures have sprung up in all most all parts of India. Among the infinite number of temples built by religious institutions-charitable Trusts and philanthropic organisations, the shrines built by mighy Birla House are a class in themselves. They are different and occupy a conspicuous place among such similar one's due to the charac-
teristic Birla aroma — a speciality, which is inimitable and unsurpassable in any point of time. "By any" if affixed, it sticks hard and can't be erased even. The Viswanath Mandir in the Banaras Hindu University Campus Banaras, Lakshmi Narayan temple in Delhi, Sri Krishna Mandir in Mathura, Birla Mandir in Jaipur, Rajaji temple in Hyderabad etc., exemplify their matchless contribution to temple culture of modern India. The contributions made by Baba Kali Kamlia Trust, Ramakrishna Math and a host of other similar ones deserve reverent mention. And visit-worthy as matter of fact.

Our scriptures embody thousands of reference enjoining mankind to visit temples for a multiplicity of reasons. The sight of the deities in their enchanting forms and postures, installed in ancient or modern shrines certainly has such a chastening influence, that even the atheist or iconoclast can turn the search light inwards to find out, where he and his black nature stand provided he frequents them that in fact invariably makes him conscious of the right course of action to be pursued. Further, their sculpture grandeur and architectural excellence touch at his aesthetic sense and bring in a change too. In some cases. Listening to hymns, chants and the like makes him oblivious of his base impulses for a while atleast. In many as a matter of fact. Meeting of persons of varied cultures promotes mutual understanding etc. Hence the advocacy of pilgrimage by every religion. (Vide-Yatra And Its Paramartha for a Comprehensive Picture).

May be due to predominance of theistic impulses a little more in me I developed a passion for visiting temples, since school days, and that inborn mania is allowed to continue unabated despite the impact of western culture thrust upon me by the profession chosen and the post held for about 35 years. As irony would have it, infatuation grew faster than my age and made me spin round, as it were, almost all the reputed temples in India. I toured in all the states, except those lying to the prologue east of West Bengal, and stayed couple of days in everyone of them; and months in several place like Banaras,
Calcutta, Madurai etc. To cap it, as it were, for five years now in Tirupathi—the holiest of holies, where Suprabhatam wakes up and charges the entire atmosphere with Bhagavannama that fuels the souls to sustain till going to bed. Additionally, my living in Tamil Nadu—the veritable temple state for two decades enabled me grabbing the opportunity of visiting every great hoary temple for dozens of times.

And I looked out for means to occupy my retired void, I found the glory of temples and religion beckoning me to taking up for pleasure and propagation. Indeed, its absorbing interest, accelerated my evolving devotion and took me on viewless wings of imagination for preparation. As if a bolt from blue, my fifth-day-yatra to North India, in Yatra Special in 1987 supplied me enough fuel for further flights and whetted my appetite. So I plunged into this holy work head long with a special format of my own—writing from the view point of pilgrims than tourists, i.e., laying stress on the sacredness of place, and necessity of its selection—the legends forming the core to the characteristic glory of each temple. So, everyone of the sections begins with Uniqueness, followed by Antiquity, and then Historicity before giving detailed accounts of temples, deities, festivals, traditions etc.

I endeavoured sincerely to focus light on the glory of each visit-worthy place, as learnt from sthalagnas, of course leaning heavily on guides, booklets, folders and books dealing with them. Consciously, nay deliberately, I side-trackked the cultural marvels and architectural excellences. Pilgrims normally care more for divinity hovering over the shetra than enjouying the aesthetic appeal of shrines. My experience fortified this; for, the yatris at the famous Dilwara Temples were hurrying to visit other shrines, despite the honest attempt by the guide at eulogising the sculptural skill, which in my opinion, even Viswakarm, the celestial sculptor too stands mute and thinks that he could have done his job better, had he visited them earlier. Even at I. alebid too, my co-yatris behaved similarly and dragged me out, when my eyes were glued to the ceiling, exhibiting the unsurpassable craftsmanship of the sculptors.
Hence my preference for the divinity of the place than the artistry of the stone-cutters. There may be among my readers, one or two prototypes of Sir John Marshal, Col. Todd, or Ananda Kumara Swamy, who could see each piece with microscopic eyes for days to doing research later; for such gems, I am too small. I crave their indulgences for not rising to their level.

Now comes the part of redemption of my indebtedness. Of the many, who deserve space here, the sublime figure of Sri I L N Sastry, B Com., B L, CAIIB, the far-famed High court Advocate and Chairman of Experts Committee on T.T.D publications, flashes first across my mind meriting reverential mention. He is an eminent writer among advocates and a humanist advocate among writers, and hence his tenure witnessed a bumper harvest of rarities, and blessed the book lovers with may a ripe, delicious fruit. As his unbiased selection met with tacit approval of the Committee members; it was a Golden period for writers; and I am one of the beneficiaries. My inadequate diction satisfies in offering obeisance, and it is akin to a slender strand to the moon, as the adage goes. For his masterly FOREWORD, I bow to him again. Shri K. Subba Rao, M. A. Editor, SAPTAGIRI is instrumental in getting my type-script reach the concerned, though submitted late and his help at every stage is highly commendable. Albeit, my debt is above compensation, I express my veneration to him now. I owe my gratitude to Sri Gajapathi Raju, M. A. Regional Officer, Dept. of Tourism, Tirupati for giving opinion fine and folders many. And to my children, Kavitha & Kiran for all, from start to finish. And my thanks to the proprietor Ramana Printers, for giving a pretty shape to my composition despite limited resources at command, particularly to efficient Sri T. Indrasenudu & Sri Balaram.

I offer my prostrations to MOTHER Parasakti, whose boundless compassion descended in the form of characters on my paper, now adorning your hands

And soulful gratitude to Shri Balaji, Mathridayanivasa for enabling my pen-craft to lighting up your way to the temples to avail the darsan of His aparupadivyamobha in myriad manifestations. Expecting an early receipt of your soul-lifting experiences, I remain. please do.

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PLATES 26
YATRA AND ITS PARAMARTHA

MAN AND HIS PLACE

Man is created in the image of God, so sacred and adorable; he is the crown of creation, hence superior and deserves adulation; and he is a rational being, therefore held in awe-some admiration.

Adoration and adulation do him good, and to the society he lives in, but the awe-some admiration he enjoys, is the cause of all the woe and suffering found everywhere in the world. In surfeit. And at all times too.

Why? The study assumes inexplicable proportions, as it has a tendency to grow with meteoric speed horizontally and vertically before conception takes concrete shape. Deeper the probe, greater the mystery that confronts researchers; but strenuous churning throws up one invaluable gem acceptable as truth indisputable, and fact immutably all-correct measured by any yard stick. It is MIND.

MIND AND ITS MARVELS

It is a marvellous gift blessed by the Omnibenevolent Lord, akin to gold coin dropped into head by that kind God. Its obverse is bright and sweet to look at. The bright part illuminates the world by its sharp elevating thought; and the sweet part shows readiness to cooperate, coordinate and coalesce even. So an asset desirable, and mate reliable. Enabling man for escalation, it fills the world with concord and ethereal bliss. Its reverse, oh horrible! It is dark, damnably mischievous and maliciously pernicious. It has a strong streak of vanity and revels at its own monkeying. Its bloated egotism knows no law, nor cares for any authority here or above. It believes blindly 'MIGHT is RIGHT', and relies on using muscle power,
deluding itself that it brings eternal victory. And lo! over all. Hence confrontation begins. Clash gives rise to an infinite number of sins, like coveting, intruding, seizing, killing, cheating, oppressing etc. Whether committed wantonly or otherwise, they make existence miserable. Mostly the innocent fall prey to sins, in acts of self-defence, or while safe-guarding the Dharma of the land.

For expiation of sins, and liberation of souls from the cycle of births and deaths, our Scriptures have spelt out several ways and means with many an ennobling episode and elevating experience. Time and again. And what is more, both in and out of context too. Their zeal to lift man deserves commendation. Every attempt deliberately made in this direction brings out vividly, how man can reach heaven—his legitimate home. If the ways envisaged are followed sincerely, and injunctions implemented implicitly, man can become Godman and win a coveted place in the pantheon after death, and eviable following while living. They encompass every man regardless of age, caste, colour, creed, profession, religion and region he lives in.

PILGRIMAGE — ITS IMPORTANCE:

Among the many suggested as means, pilgrimage—yatra to holy places, sanctified by the association of gods and godmen takes pride of place, and it has manifold blessings and multifarious gains. These spiritual havens scattered all over our India abound in gigantic structures raised in memory of divinities and dedicated men. They bear the marks of the highest ingenuity of man in realms of art and architecture. Seeing the deities enshrined, and the works of art embellishing them is deemed as an act of papanivarana according to the sacred books. In addition to enjoying the benefits of dipping in sacred rivers, circumambulating the deities, sipping the punya thirhas, the pilgrims establishes ties with fellowmen of diverse faiths and customs etc., living in different parts of India. If the yatra is made to those parts in the true spirit enunciated, it transforms the base into divine, the change—its aftermath, even if it is changed a little due to
either passage of time, or fickleness of mind, its memory lingers longer and supplies enough fuel to sustain and retain its divine aroma till death.

ADVANTAGES:

It brings diverse creeds, cultures and climes breaking through a wide variety of traditions, customs, habits, styles, dialects, dresses, fashions movements etc. face to face and enables closer observation and critical comparison. When minds meet, hearts unite, and hands clasp, genuine sentiments flow freely and abundantly only to merge in the ocean of love, making diversity melt into omnipresent air. The rapport established on mutual understanding, and reciprocal appreciation forges them into an unbroken and unidentifiable unity, declaring thereby the essential oneness underlying humanity. Sure, the bonds of fragrance that entwine the distinctly different strands make mankind from into a garland fit to adorn the feet of the Creator.

Secondly, it unfolds the rich and varigated land scapes, gorgeous verdure and splendid sylvan scenes to feast the eyes, thrill the frame and elevate the souls. The magnificence of high peaks, low dales, vast plains, narrow paths, gurgling founts, surging waters, leaping quadrupeds, wheeling birds, pathless woods, wishpering bushes, and dreary deserts alternating in quick succession give their delightful company through out the journey. Besides succeeding in relieving the tedium of endless journey with their intrinsic loveliness and external colour, they lift one to live in peace with himself first, man next, and finally with nature around. The pilgrim unconsciously gets cleansed of all dross and gross and emerges a changed man after the yatra.

PILGRIM CENTRES:

India, as hailed by many is a veritable open-air museum treasuring up both man-made marvels and God-created wondrous beauties of infinite variety. It is the abode of illustrious rulers, dauntless warriors, peerless humanists, selfless saviours,
celebrated preacheres, renowned philosophers, and exemplary leaders of interplanetary eminence. Even the celestials yearned to be born here and they descended again & again to demonstrate the sacredness of the soil and sanctity of the atmosphere. The places of their birth, living, wandering and death yet retain some flavour in the from of monuments and memorials scattered all over the land. Moreover, Godmen—the humanist sages embedding bhagavadamsas sanctified the whole of Jambudvipa by moving from place to place settling down finally at various places to make themselves accessible to all classes of people. Being the repository of knowledge, custodians of Dharma and hoary culture—they guided mankind by their sane preachings and immortal writings. Realising their superhuman powers, rulers willingly and whole-heartedly sought their counsels and made them kulgurus for consultations and ministrations. Nothing went amiss, nor did calamities overtake the country during the reign of such illustrious rulers, or benevolent dictators in some cases.

When the sages became institutions in course of time, by virtue of wielding both the temporal and spiritual powers, they took upon themselves the task of installing deities in gigantic temples, built at their behest by mighty rulers. Along with temples, the place of their habitation and association became centres of pilgrimage with the passage of time, and people, particularly the erring and sinning think them as a MUST to expiate their commissions and omissions.

And such places are many, and scattered all over our Punya Bharat from Amarnath in Kashmir to Kanyakumari in Tamilnadu and Dwaraka in Gujarat Kamaskipur in Assam. The places of pilgrimage thus came into existence are of two types; one—Swayambutha—self manifested and n mirmitha—built by theists. Another classification divides them in to Daiva—Gods Asura—Demons, Arshaka—Sages and Manusha—men. And they are foundin the three worlds—heaven, earth and patala.

MERITS:

A visit to the sacred spots on earth indeed enables one to
reap several benefits like bath in sacred rivers or lakes in and around these places; darsan of the presiding deities, offering of tarpana and pinda; gifting of sacred objects, listening to discourses; observing certain austerities, and performing yagas. These acts destroy the sins committed singly or collectively. Evil designs and wicked acts even in their incubation stage too get nipped in the bud. Mental peace and spiritual solace automatically envelope the entire being and make the yatri sin-proof, as a matter of fact. The spirit of the yatra, and mode of performing, if properly understood and followed, it releases one from the bonds of prarabdha karma, besides conferring praya-schitta for the disastrous consequences of intentional, or thoughtless actions committed. Scriptures embody several instances of great people including the incarnated Gods too undertaking yatras to expiate sins, like Brahmahatyas and Rajahatyas. For instance, Balarama, the elder brother of Sri Krishna undertook Parikramana—going round the whole of Bharata Varsha, dipping in sacred thirthas and sipping holy thirtha in every kshetra for killing Romaharakshana. Likewise Parasurama too went round Bharata Varsha at the instance of his father Jamadagni as Praya-schitta for killing Sahatrarjuna etc. In addition, Dharmaja was advised Parikramana to gain mental peace, and was relieved of the burden of soka weighing down on him after Kurukshetra war. Vidura made yatra to all the sacred places without any desire, but, to feast his eyes, mind and soul with the beauty of Nature and sanctity of thirthas and kshetras. Why, even sages and acharyas went round to learn much of people, and the grandeur of Brahma’s marvellous creation. Was not Mahatma, the modern mahayogi benefitted by his Bharat Darsan yatra on his return from Africa?

ELIGIBILITY:

Restrictions of any kind, like class, caste, age, sex, region do not come in the way of undertaking yatra. It is prescribed for all the four castes—varnas and stages of life asramas. But certain conditions are laid down in certain categories, like grihastis taking their spouses along with them invariably. Besides
if they happened to keep Agnihotri—sacred fire in their houses, they should necessarily carry it with them, and due rituals have to be offered at all the places of their visit.

MODE OF YATRA:

A journey to yatreṣṭhala should normrily be performed by walking. Scriptures recount several merits of the journey on foot. The performer — yatri gets the merit of penance, if he goes to places by walking. Conveyance obliterates certain percentage of merit — he loses half of his merit, if he presses into service any mode of transport, and if he uses foot-wear and umbrella, he loses further. If he utilises yatra for carrying on business, or undertakes with trade motives, he loses three-fourths of the merit. Above all, if he receives gifts, either at the starting point, or during the journey, he loses all the merit — he becomes a spiritual bankrupt. But exceptions do operate here also. Physically unwell, or handicapped persons are barred from the operation of the injunctions cited.

AUSTERITIES:

The yatri should observe many disciplinary rules while on yatra. He should strictly observe austerities during his approach to the place, i.e., he must reach it with proper bhava—devotional sentiment. His faith and conviction alone shower enviable merits. During the journey, he should have absolute control over mind, feet, hands, eyes, and finally soul. He should observe the vow of fast, or atleast eat one meal a day. Intoxicants, frivolous comments, denegrating discussions, hypocritical attitude are to be totally eliminated, rather rooted out. He should keep himself fully abreast of the glory and historicity of the place to be visited before hand. If possible, should jot down in his memorandum details of the importance of several niches and subsidiary shrines to be seen in that place, and its neighbourhood.

To cap it all, to whatever caste the yatri belongs, he
should abjure unctahility, why his sectarianism too, for the purpose of reaping full merits of yatra. Man made distinctions in caste, customs and the like should be nullified completely throughout the journey. Amicability, adjustability, nobility, placability, amiability, endurance and art of giving than receiving, should spill at every step of yatra to make life enjoyable and yatra successful. Reason: he invariably comes into contact with several kinds of people of myriad differences in acts and thought; and their life too is as sacred and praise-worthy as his life. So, the touch-me-not policy does him harm than help.

PLACES TO BE VISITED:

Yatra includes both thirthas—sacred places situated on the banks of sacred rivers or lakes or seas, and kshetras—holy spots at other places, situated on mounts, in caves, amidst sequestered bowers, or underground. Normally temples are built in holy spots surrounded by lovely spectacles of Nature. The sages responsible for, caused them built amidst calm, quiet picturesque Nature, where tranquility prevails and enables their japa, tapa and sankirthana activities carried on without interrudent. They not only lived there, but are abiding in spirit even to this moment, will remain eternally. Accordingly, mighty rulers and celebrated pravaktas built marvellous temples, utilising the unparalleled skills of sculptors and architects. Their sheer visual appeal cast irresistible charm both on commoners and connoisseurs alike. Moreover, the sages, only after studying the nature of localities alone caused them built for several deities, in accordance with the powers of the presiding deities. The temples thus built are mainly dedicated to Siva, Vishnu and Sakti. Other adorable personages too are venerated in several places. Srimad Bhagavatha embodies a list of sacred mounts and holy rivers dotted with numerous shrines on their banks. And at the confluencees and sources of rivers too. The list is too long, yet deserves mention. Among the mountains, the following are visit-worthy, nay indispensable for gaining merit.

They are: Malaya, Mangalaprastrha, Mainaka, Trikuta, Rishabha.

The list of rivers begin with Chandravasa, followed by Tamraparni, Avatoda, Kritamala, Vaihayasi, Kaveri, Veni, Payasvini, Sarkaravarta, Krishna, Venya, Bhimarthi, Godavari Nirvindya, Payoshri, Tapi, Reva, Surasa, Narmada, Charman-vati, Sindhu, Andha, Tunga, Sona, Mahanadi, Vedasrimiti, Rishikulya, Trisma, Kausiki, Mandakini, Yamuna, Saraswati, Drishadvati, Gomati, Sarayu, Rodhaswtai, Saptavathi, Sush-oma, Satadru, Chandrabhaga, Marudvridha, Vitasta, Asikni and end with Visva. To be precise, every inch our Bharata khanda exudes divinity and ensures eternal bliss. The waters of the sacred rivers have several uses, and confer countless merits. They are used for naivedya, abhishcka, medicine, cleansing, washing and removing invisible spirits and sins. They purify man, besides being indispensable for living. According to puranas, the waters of Saraswathi purify man after a bath of three days; of Yamuna after seven days; of Ganga instantly; of Narmada on mere sight, but of Tapi by mere remembering.

HOW TO BEGIN?

Kasi khandan explains elaborately the procedure to be followed for starting yatra. Before starting, the yatri should observe fast at his residence after offering prayers to Ganesh first, and ancestors next, followed by salutations to learned brahmins and saintly people. He should perform several rituals at the close of fast with Parana. Among the many austerities, Satsang and Sankirtha take precedence. He must take vows to abstaining from using alcoholic drinks and narcotics till he returns. On reaching home, again he must offer prayers as done in the beginning. Before starting and after returning, he has to make a Pradakshina of his village, or town.
WHAT TO OBSERVE DURING YATRA:

On reaching the destination, mundana—tonsorial operation—offering of hair is recommended to every yatri. After the shave, he should observe fast. With regard to ladies, whose husbands are alive, mundana is to be interpreted as cutting of braid of hair by two finger-breadths. This special concession is granted to all classes and castes of people too. This mundana, besides removing sins, makes one feel shedding of ego, and recognising the omnipotence of God. After that comes holy bath—when the yatri bathes in a sacred thirtha, the merit goes not only to the bathed, but to the mother, father, wife, brother, sister, friend and preceptor also. It is also mentioned that whomsoever, the bather remembers at the time of bath, one eigth of the merit goes to him too. For total effect, it is prescribed that the bather should prepare a small image of the beneficiary with darbha grass and dip it into the thirtha. This would give the beneficiary the intended merit in full. While taking bath, one should face the sun, if it is kshetra, and the direction of the downward flow of river, if it is thirtha. Tarpana follows the bath.

Secondly, performing sraddha to manes is a must. Normally, sraddha must be performed at one's own house, and offering it in the house of others is strictly prohibited; but as thirthas belong to nobody, they can be performed here with due rituals. They confer supplementary benefits due to sanctity pervading there. While performing sraddha, one is forbidden to offer arghya and making avahana. Further, nishiddhakala—improper time need not be taken into account—given any importance. Giving gifts comes next. People who could afford can offer dana several types of gift to the learned brahmins and priests, like godana—gifting of cow, Swarnadana—gold, Vastradana—dhoties, and sarees, Bhudana—lard, and Navadanya—grain etc. Needless to state, offering of prayers with several rituals to the deities is given pricrity over all the rest. It is clearly stated that yatri should scrupulously avoid receiving any gift from any one during the whole period of yatra. If he accepts, it tantamounts to selling all the merit accrued due
to yatra. Sastras are vehement on this aspect, but emphatic in saying that giving gifts at Kasi, Kurukshetra, Gaya and Amarikantaka are allowed, and one shakes off his poverty, if he gives here, but accepting any at these places, one purchases poverty.

This ideal injunctions are meant for ideal yatra, and the ideal yatri impliments them to make life ideal and yatra successful. Some exceptions do operate in every injunction to easing rigidity and make yatra purposeful. Of course, these are for commoners in particular, who are steeped in materialism, and living amidst tantalising mundane objects. For highly eloved soul, if he properly, and soulfully bathes and dips himself into the water of self control, he needs no performance of any yatra. He could wash away all his impurities -- mental or spiritual with mere steadfast faith and single minded devotion; for, he knows, Ged does not dwell atop mountains, or in well built temples. He is Consciousness and Bliss incarnate, and is seen in one's own heart, where there is proper bhava. Such mental make up is worthy of craving and attaining, till then yatras should go on, and yatris must pass through all the ordeals prescribed by our adorable Maiharshis in their immortal works.
SECTION I

SOMANATH

UNIQUENESS;

Perhaps, no other temple in the history of our Akh- and Bharat, or rather in the history of mankind, has been the target of attack and destruction, plunder and pillage; arson and annihilation by iconoclasts and alien expansionists as that of Somanath of Prabhas Pattana, situated on the Southern coast of Sourastra, in the province of Sorath, now known as Junagadh in the state of Gujarat. Its history is bristled with an unending series of savage plunders and countless acts of barbarous vandalism, dating from the advent of Mohammad Gazani in 1026 and ending with its handing over to Indian Union on 9.11.1947 by Sir Shanavaz Bhutto, the Diwan of Junagadh. Records reveal that as many as 13 times, the temple was subjected to brutal attacks of Mlechchas. The tale of its defence is packed with indescribable pathos and unimaginable horrors. Although the spirit of religiosity rose up to unprecedented heights, it could not prevent and save the pious innocent beings mercilessly butchered; the old and infirm brutally trampled; children and disabled ruthlessly crushed and women openly raped and humiliated, besides converted, or carried to use as slaves, or turn into prostitutes. And the town was ransacked—its precious movables were razed and mutilated beyond recognition.

Sure, the blood-stained hand of the iconoclasts can never regain its original colour, even if it is washed with the waters of all the oceans. Such incalculable harm was perpetrated on Hindus deliberately and systematically over nine long centuries. Even though the temple was brought to the ground level as many as 13 times, ironically, every time even before the fire was put out, or crashing sound hushed, it was rebuilt and renovated with innumerable additions that enhanced

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its glory. The immortal Linga started emerging the very next moment of the iconoclasts turning their backs on it, demonstrating to the world that the spirit of Hinduism is irrepressible, invincible and inexhaustible. Every time, either a local chief, or a distant theist emperor came forward with redoubled ardour and manifold resources to rebuild it in a way better, and design supreme.

Is it not then akin to Phoenix, the mythological bird that burns itself after living a full century on funeral pile, only to rise from the ashes, young and energetic to live another cycle? Does this not again divulge the truth that Hinduism is apratihata, apurva, ajeya, ananta, anadi, and its glorious career is ajaramara?

It is believed that celebrated Rishis and divine sages entered the Linga, and it was worshipped in different kalpas by different names. To the Vedic Rishis, it was Kalagnirudra, and later it was called by many names such as, Bairavanatha, Panchamukha Siva, Mrityunjaya, Amritesa, Krittivasas and Hansa Nanda in the periods followed. According to legends, Lord Siva has been present in this thirtha, since the beginning and ll remain so for ever. This accounts for the emergence and existence of Lord Somanath from the dawn of creation and is worshipped by humanity with an ardour unique, and picy exemplary.

SOURCES:

Almost all Puranas, particularly Vamana Purana, Kurma Purana, Skanda purana, Garuda Purana, Padma Purana, Vishnu Purana, Bhavishya Purana, and Matsya Purana; Bhagavatas like Devi Bhagavata and Srimad Bhagavata, together with the Mahabharata enshrine elaborate accounts of this, and each seems vying with the other in eulogising the glory of this kshetra. It is dedicated to Lord Siva, but in this selfsame kshetra many sports of Yadavas with Sri Krishna as the protagonist are played. Of all, the Skanda Purana in its Prabhasa Khanda has dealt at length, highlighting many miracles and
mysteries of this place. Besides including its topography, geology, flora and fauna, it narrates the story of installation of the Adi jyotirlinga vividly. The Mahabharata in Salya Parva embodies an interesting account of the penance of Soma, the Moon god and and installation of Linga by Brahma.

ANTIQUITY:

The story begins with the solemnisation of marriage of Soma with 27 lovely daughters of Daksha Prajapati. Rohini the buxom beauty of the charming bevy held greater hold on Soma. Smitten by savati matsara, the sorrowing 26 complained to the father about their miserable lot. Daksha in the capacity of father-in-law chastised him. Soma assured equal attention to all and would give no occasion for future discontentment, but only to break it the next moment. Thereupon, Daksha cursed him to lose his lustre and be like a block of dull black stone. Though Soma lost his lustre, it did not diminish infatuation for Rohini. This was too much for Daksha; upset by this, he bade the deadly Rajyakshma disease enter his body and reduce his vigour and vitality. It worked. Caught in its grip, he grew thinner and paler day by day; and it had disastrous effect on vegetation. It started withering, bringing in its wake slow death to plants, birds, beasts and people. Finding the calamity, the compassionate Rishis prayed to Daksha for immediate solution. Soma too implored for forgiveness, but he regretted saying that he was incapable of undoing the done. He then advised Soma to worship Maheswar at a spot, where the river Saraswati meets the sea.

As advised Soma forthwith descended at Prabhas pattana where Saraswati meets the sea and worshipped Sparsa Linga of Somanath of the size of an egg. And did penance for 4000 years. Pleased with Soma’s austerity and penance, Sadasiva appearing said that he could not remove the effects of curse totally, but would lift it partially. According to it, he would wane for a fortnight and wax during the rest of the month. As Soma regained Prabha-lustre at this place it was called Prabhasa pattana. Soma then made a humble supplica-
tion that the Lord must be called by the name of his devotee Soma—the Moon. Hence, Somanath. Further, He should be his Kuladevata. And so Maheswar is called Somanath since then. Soon Soma was advised and initiated by Brahma Himself to erect a shrine for Siva. In addition, Brahma then cleft open the earth and lifted a shining Swayambhu Linga of the size of egg covered with honey and darbha grass with a Brahmasila over it. The Linga thus taken out was installed by Brahma himself.

Several other anecdotes to bring out the outstanding sanctity and glory of this Kshetra. It is here Dadhichi made on exemplary sacrifice; and it is much quoted and oft repeated. Once it appears that gods entrusted their weapons to Dadhichi for safety, with a promise to collect them at a fixed date, but did not. Dadhichi, deciding to repair to Himalaynas for penance found it difficult to carry them. So he drank their essence by converting them into liquid. Later, when Devendra came for arms to fight against demons, Dadhichi suggested to kill him and use his bones as arms. Devendra did as bid. Learning the tragic death of his father, Pishpalad, the true son did penance and got Badabanala agni to take revenge on gods. Gods in order to save themselves took recourse to a strategy. In accordance with it, Saraswati would carry that Kalagni to hand over to him. As planned, she deposited it in the sea before giving it to him near Prabhasa Fattana. The strategy was carried out and it saved the gods.

Many of the episodes relating to the lives of Yadavas and Pandavas, particularly that of Sri Krishna, Subhadra, Balarama, Arjuna and other principal characters took place here in Dwaparayuga. The entire Yadava Community along with Sri Krishna breathed their last due to the curse of Durvasa on the shore of Prabhasa Thirtha. A small yet sacred shrine stands at Viraval perpetuating the holy spot of Sri Krishna’s nityana. Moreover, Lakulisa considered to be the avatara of Siva, visited this place after entering another man’s body through parakaya pravesham and performed penance. He settled
down here and taught sastras to a choice group of students and became a great Siddha. It is said that he, who prays to the image of Lakulisa here on the Karthika Pounami is promised of abundant wealth for seven births. Realising the holiness hovering over here, Agasthya preferred the celebration of his marriage with Lopamudra here. Yudhistira, during his yatra performed pujas here, fasting completely for 12 days with Droupadi. Here one can see five sakaras—Saraswati river, Soma graha, Samudra, Swayambhu Linga and Soma i.e. Lord Siva with Uma, His consort. Many Siddhas adept in the Pasupata yoga flourished in the past here.

HISTORICITY;

There is a great deal of authentic information, besides literary works about the glory of this place and it is preserved in the archives. Recent excavation too have shed enough light testifying to the uniqueness of this place from time immemorial. Travellers accounts, imperial edicts, Nawabs farmanas embody the supremacy of this place. During the Pre-Vedic period, the present Somanath was called Nagrapur and it established trade relations with Gulf countries. It is recorded that Surya vamsiya Aryas landed here first and they named it Bhaskara Thirtha, but the Chandra Vamsiya Aryas who followed them called it Som Thirtha, and it is from them the present name is derived. Copious evidence available in records focuses light on its predominance, both as a seat of learning and commercial centre, during the pre-Mahabharata period, when gods used to descend here for sojourns; for, it was a seat of higher learning. Intellectual giants and immortal Rishis living in parnasalas practised yoga and taught the Vedas to the students. And so their kurtis were reverberating with Veda ghosha. It carved a niche in specialising Khili Sukta of Rig Veda and Parishistha in Yajur Veda.

During the Mahabharatha period, it was on this punya bhoomi many a historic event took place—visiting of it times numberless by the Yadavas community with their kith and kin on auspicious occasions, why, they met their death here only.
In the post-Yadava period, due to the spread of Buddhism many changes altered the conditions, yet the cult of Saivism could not be suppressed. When Chandra Gupta Mourya was in throne, he revived the Vedic cult and installed the first Jotirlinga in the temple and its prominence spread to four corners. The Sungas, Sakas and Guptas, who succeeded them later continued the practice and patronised with rich donations and renovations.

The trouble from the Mlechchas started in 770, when Jummid, the Arab General defeated the emperor Sailaditya. Considerable damage was done, but the Hindu kings ruling then and later withstood the challenge and maintained the pristine purity of the shrine and its traditions. The darkest period of the temple’s agonising history began with entering of Mahammad Gazani in 1026 A.D. His inhuman religious bigotry caused incalculable damage to the temple and its worshippers. He emptied vials of hatred and intolerance on the innocent civilians and mute gods in such demonic way that history cannot show such similar raids. He flung open the hell gates and the paisachika krityas that followed cannot be clothed in any language decent. Blood reddened the entire soil, and smoke covered the sky. The fabulous booty—the inestimable wealth of the temple was carried by twenty thousand camels and thirty thousand horses. The sacred Linga was smashed to pieces and the vaults overflowing with rare jewels were emptied. The loss can be expressed only in astronomical figures.

But the irrepressible religious fervour of Hinduism soared higher than the invincible Islamic ardour, and soon Somanath appeared anew, and lured the reverent due to the Herculean efforts of the then ruling princes and emperors, particularly that of Malwa, Gujrát, Ajmir and Junagadh. Many far-off emperors visited the temple and endowed it in such grandiose manner that the great temple of the great Lord witnessed greater glory and showered on the devotees the bliss greatest. Again in 1293, Allauddin Khilji carried away all the accumulated wealth by defeating the king. Repetition of misery-conv-
tering the helpless into Islam, carrying the women-folk for sale and nefarious purposes, ravaging the temple, looting of its property and the like, occurred with greater ferocity, but rebuilding was undertaken at once. Again Mohammad Tuglak in 1345; Feroz in 1367; Zafar Khan in 1395; 1402; 1406; Ahmad Shah in 1411 and Mahammad Begda in 1452, plundered it, but every time the vitality of Hinduism used to reassert itself sooner than the plunder. Unfortunately it tasted the wrath of D’Casto, the Portugese Admiral in 1547. Like the Muslim conqueror, he spared neither the temple nor the mosques. The worst of it, he carried many inscriptions with him. It also witnessed Moghul bigotry during the reign of Aurangzeb in 1658 and 1704.

After these devastating onslufts, permanent structures rose in 1788 under the aegis of Maharani Ahalyabai Holkar of Indore, whose lavish donations inaugurated a new spocch in the temple renovation task. The temple was built again over the old spot called Sankalyeswar, a new Linga was installed. Many philanthropists and theists endowed it lavishly to raise its glory to the apex. After Independence, the indefatigable efforts of sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, restored it to its former divinity and reputation through a Trust. With the installation of a new Jyotirlinga by the then president Rajendra Babu in 1951, it reached its culmination to the satisfaction of millions of devotees living throughout the length and breadth of the world. Finally, with the erection of Digvijay Dwar by Rama-mata Gulab Kunvera in 1970 and getting it declared by Bhagavan Sri Satya Sai Baba, the temple’s flag started fluttering, broadcasting, as it was its glorious indomitable spirit to the celestials.

THE TEMPLE

The present temple with its imposing exeterior adorned with marvellous sculpture and a grand Sabha Mantap in front, and a huge Sikhara atop measuring 155 feet in height casts a spell on pilgrims even from miles afar. It faces East and has a lovely garden to its right extending up to the high compound wall acting as dyke along the Arabian sea. Pilgrims enter through the Digvijaya Dwar, a piece of architectural
beauty that detains them longer with its majesty and decor. The Jyotirlinga installed on the Brahmasila is about 4 feet in height and affords a royal banquet to the eye with its sandal paste decoration, which is a novelty here. Imbibing its beauteous splendour, the devotees close their eyes for a while, when Somanath of the ancient times installed by Brahma flashes across their minds and recounts His former glory. There were 1000 priests in His service attending to severa activities round the clock. During its heyday, the temple was beautified with invaluable golden ornaments, and the Garbha griha was lighted by jewelled lamps; and a grand bell was rung during the harati with a chain cf solid gold of 250 maund in weight. It had hundreds of giant sized vaults stuffed with rare jewels, and the pillars inside were studded with gems. No wonder, it ignited the lust and greed in the heart of unscrupulous Mlechchas, who raided it again and again.

FESTIVALS:

There are many festivals celebrated through the year, dear to Siva. Among them, the Somanath Mela held in the middle of Karthik is very popular and important. Besides, the months of Chitra and Badrapada have special attraction, when Pitru shradda and Narayana Bali shraddha are offered. The Brahmins of this place are Ved pathis, and an authority on Yajurveda; and offer poojas in a unique way.

EXISTING TEMPLES OF INTEREST:

Besides the main temple, there are several others of great importance laying in a radius of 10 kms and a few far off. The following deserve visiting by all.

DAITYASUDAN MAHAVISHNU:

This shrine was built in the last century, and the idol of Mahavishnu is quite impressive. When the main temple was destroyed, this rare idol was preserved under earth at a place called ChaKra thirtha. As the story goes, Lord Maha
Vishnu appeared before the ardent devotees—Umasankar Desai and Vishamber Bhatt in dream and directed them to disinter and build a shrine for him. They did. It is located in the Main Bazar.

SOMANATHJI MANDIR:

This is an under ground temple built in 1784 by Maha Rani Ahalyabai of Holkar of Indore. Finding the main shrine desecrated and deserted, she built it and installed the idol of Parvati in one corner. It is extremely beautiful and receiving poojas along with her Lord, Maheswar.

VIRAVAL:

This is an up-coming industrial town humming with Pilgrims always. It is the last rail head for Somanath. There is a temple dedicated to Sri Krishna. The idol painted multi-colours feasts the eye and it is perpetuating the sacred spot of Krishna’s demise. Hence visitation by all.

THE VARAH DEVAL:

It belongs to pre-chalukyan period and possesess grand idols of Siva, Vishnu, Surya, Ganga and Jamuna. It is on the bank of Triveni.

DRONESWAR:

This is situated near the village Dron and dedicated to Droneswar Mahadeo. Here, water falls on the Linga always through a cow’s head. Hence attraction.

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**CONVEYANCE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AIR PORT</th>
<th>Jamnagar--Indian Airlines flights connect it to the rest of India:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RAIL HEAD</td>
<td>Viraval---6 kms to Somanath. Taxis, Tongas, Autos, buses, are available at all hours.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BUS ROUTE</td>
<td>State Transport Bus Routes from every city and town converge here, Private companies operate all kinds of buses including places of itinerary interest in list on route.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACCOMMODATION</td>
<td>Dharamsalas provide utensils for cooking and there are Modern Lodges with all amenities also. The Zilla parishad and the Somanath rest houses are very near to the temple and are cheap comparatively.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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SECTION II

DWARAKA
The Earthly Abode of Lord Krishna

UNIQUENESS:

That Nandavanam of Yadunandana; that earthly Vaikuntha of Bhagavathothamas; that terrestrial capital of Sri Manasaranya during His short sojourn in the martyrloka; that make shift stage of Natana Sutradhari for enacting Jagannataka; that meeting place of celestials with terrestrials for embarking on the Dharmaoddharana deals; that seat of the highest Judicature of Dwapara yuga; that Divyarama from which the Yadava blossoms wafted inexhaustible sweet fragrance; that veritable Concert Hall where from the liquid notes of mellifluous Venunada flowed down to lull the world, time and again; that divya thirtha which is luring every brand of Vaishnava sampradaya down the ages; that eternal pulpet specialised in teaching the crafty statecraft to the craftier aspirants by the craftiest Rajatantragna; that immaculate Pemapita standing on which the Jaganmohanakara revealed the multi-dimensional forms of amara Prema to love-lorn Gopikas of myriad tastes, goes by the name of Dwarka. In the past and present too. It is situated on the sacred banks of river Gomati flowing in the North Western part of the then Sourashtra now called Gujarat. That entire region is split up into five parts and called Pancha Dwarakas-Krishna Dwarka; Rukmini Dwarka; Okha Dwarka; Beti-Dwarka and Dwarka submerged.

ANTIQUITY:

The glory of that Punyadhama of Sri krishna, the eighth incarnation of Sri Mahavishnu is elaborately described in many scriptures like the Mahabharata, Harivamsa, Vayu purana; Vishnu purana; Varaha purana and Skanda purana, besides the Mahabhagavatha that recreates almost all the awe-inspiring episodes of Srikrishna the protagonist of the divine Shrikrishna, who is personally responsible for building and expanding this holy city in the Dwapara Age, driven by dire necessity of shielding of Yada-
va community from the onslaughts of Jarasanda and Kavalyana the arch born enemies of the divine personages.

ORIGIN:

Its origin dates back to the time of Revatha, the great grand son of Manu, the immortal Law-giver. It is recorded that Revatha was the ruler of Anartha with Kusasthali as his capital. According to the legendary account, Revatha desired to get his daughter Revathi married off to a deserving prince of exemplary character and military prowess of his times. When his trials met with failures, he went straight to Brahma loka for advice and blessings from Vidhatha Himself. Delighted at his approach Brahma told that many centuries had passed in the Bhooloka by the time their conversation came to a close; yet He tendered advice that Revathi should be married to Balarama, the elder brother of Sri krishna in the light of the changed conditions. The divine injunction was implemented implicitly. This is the first reference to Dwaraka, which was then called Dwaramati, the other name for Kusasthali, the capital of the kingdom Anartha ruled by Raivatha.

Another reference is to an earlier episode—the death of Kamsa at the hands of Sri krishna. Jarasandha, the king of Magadha along with Kavalayana, the formidable foes of Yadava community and particularly, of Sri krishna, besieging Mathura was perpetrating on the Yadavas atrocious crimes without end. Sri krishna then decided to build an impregnable fort in the midst of sea, contiguous to Sourastra, the safest gion then, and take the entire Yadava community there. He commissioned the divine architect Viswakarma to build a city of unparalleled opulence and inimitable excellence in all. When the Sea-god was invoked for space, he at once provided a twelve yejan dry land enjoying ideal conditions for luxurious living. Seeing the city coming up in beauty indescribable and decided to make it, as one far surpassing any city built so far in the Universe, the Astadikpalakas and Devendra bestowed on it an infinite number of invaluable gifts, like the Parijata tree; Devasabhambatap; divine horses; navanidhis etc., to the com-
fort of the citizens. Then came down there for permanent settlement the entire Yadavarace from Mathura, Brindavan, Gokulam etc. It is here, according to one legend that Sri Mahavishnu killed Sankausr, a demon and transformed his wife Tulasi into a basil plant, the leaves of which are widely used and highly praised for their sacredness.

This Puranic account from then grows eloquent; exuberant; pedantic and hyperbolic-all to ignite the dormant bhakti instincts in the readers with a view to make them proud of their birth in the land of spirit, and to mould their life in such a way to become specimens for all times to come. So far, so good. But now comes the controversy regarding its location— Where did it lie? Was it in an island, or far off from it! Orientalists Indologists, Sanathanists and Research scholars have wrangled their heads over his knotty problem for long, each advancing his own finding and corroborating it with evidence, only to be refuted by others; for, according to puranas that magnificent city of Dwaraka was sunk after the dimise of Sri Krishna. Scholars like Dey, Altekar, Pargiter and Pusalkar opine that the modern town of Dwaraka is built on the original site of Dwaraka as described in the scriptures.

This is stoutly refuted by Durgasankar Sastry and Bhattasali. Some identified it with modern Junagadh which was called Girinagar then. A few say it to be Mannargudi, a town located in Madurai district, down south, in Tamil Nadu; yet others account for it Mabhavpur, lying between Purbundar and Miyani. A place called Khed Dwaraka in Marward is also brought into controversy. Finally, the holy town of Dwaraka situated on the bank of Gomati in the Okhama mandal region of the Western part of modern Gujarat is popularly identified with the original Dwaraka. Any how, Dwaraka, wherever it be is included in the list of seven most important holy places of pilgrimage and visiting of which is a must for every ardent Hindu to get liberated him self/herself from the cycle of births and deaths.

HISTORICITY:

During the Golden age of GuptaS, the self-same Dwaraka
is found uttered and mentioned with utmost veneration as a pilgrim centre; and it was luring all classes of people throughout the year. It was deemed as a thirtha of great spiritual significance and several references were made in the cultural and literary circles of those golden days. In the Solanki age, renovation and expansion activities were undertaken with great fervour both by pious public and enlightened rulers.

The rulers of Gurjaradesa and Rajasthan made numerous endowments from time to time and strove for the uninterrupted influx of pilgrims by catering to their needs, and also spending lavishly for the maintenance and continuance of traditional pujas in and out of seasons. Literature abounds evidence in abundance of this magnificent temple patronised and visited by the Pallavas, Maitrakas, Chavadas and Chalukyas.

THE PRESENT TEMPLE:

The Dwarakanath Mandir lies on the bank of Gomati, precisely at the point of its confluence with the sea. It is 50 metre high and the highest of its kind in India. Tradition records of its being built in a single night. The tall tapering spires are supported by 60 columns and the exterior is embellished with rich sculpture. It is built on an elevated spacious ground with flights of stairs on all sides and surrounded by two high walls with adequate space between them for circumambulation. Its grandeur is heightened by its tall majestic, seven storyed tower, measuring about 140 feet in height. It is a landmark imbued with spirituality by its saffron flag atop fluttering always and is visible to people far off, say some 20 miles even. This magnificent tower rises over the large Mandap of five storeys and a huge dome supported by sixty pillars inside. On the outer side, it is beautified with sculptural; adornments of rare craftsmanship that attract both theists and tourists. Around the sanctum sanctorum there are many mini-shrines dedicated to Trivikram, Pradyumna and Kuseswara Mahadeo. Pilgrims normally visit everyone of them before entering the main Mandir. Tha Sarada Peetha
established by his Holiness Jagadguru Sankaracharya lies next to Trivikram shrine and it is receiving equal and undivided attention, though Saivate traditions are followed here. As a matter of fact it has become an integral part of the Dwarakadish shrine, thereby emphasising the essential harmony prevailing in this divya thirtha. There is a small Durga shrine near the entrance lying far below the ground level and appearing, as if it is Patala Durga. The broad stairs provided enable the devotees to reach the feet of the Jaganmatha for offering prayers and receiving her blessings, and frankly speaking its oddity of location draws even ryone to Her feet without exception.

THE ARCHAMURTHY:

The beautiful black granite statue of Sri krishna, popularly known as Ranchhodrai is installed on a silver plated simhasan. The image of Dwarakadish measures about three feet in height. The Lord revealing Himself with four arms in standing posture casts an irresistible charm on the devotees and detains them longer. The enchantment of the Lord enchanced by the floral decoration and dazzling jewellery sends thrills in the spines of the devotees and makes them oblivious of this world. His hypnotising splendour in the characteristic North Indian embellishments haunts the bhaktas for years, and prepares their minds for further visits. Indeed the infinite charms of that dark hued God defy description: they are to be seen and imbibed than enumerated and explained. No wonder, for shere eyeful darsan of this sublime beauty, even the highly evolved souls like seers saints, sages and sadhus paid several visits to this shrine; yet their spiritual thirst was not quenched, as it were. Here is an illustration that fortifies this truth. Over 2000 generations worshipped this Lord, ever since its construction and it became a cradle of countless legends.

It is recorded that a devotee by name Bodhano, living in Dakor developed irrepressible fascination for the sight of that Jaganmohanakara, and he paid periodical visits times countless. With the passage of time it went higher and higher, but with the decrease of vital powers due to advancing old age and
infirmity, he found it humanly impossible to withstand the rigour of the journey. Finding his predicament of passing restless days and sleepless nights, the Omnicompassionate Lord suggested him in dream to procure that image, some how. And instal it in his own house. Accordingly, the pious devotee ventured to dismantle it one night and succeeded in it miraculously well. But unfortunately he was apprehended by the priests on his way home, who knew it at the nick of the movement. Scenting the avarice of the earth and earthy priests, he showed his willingness to give gold in exchange, equal to the weight of the image.

The greedy brahmins readily agreed to the deal. But lo! when the image was weighed in the balance, the Lord reduced Himself to such an insignificant weight that He weighed equal to the weight of the nose ring of Bodhana’s wife. To the awe-struck greedy priests, there heard then aereal voice chastising for descending to that nefarious level and directing them to run post-haste to instal another statue in the temple. They did. How fortunate was Bodhana! This event is said to have occurred in 1159. Realising its significance and to make Dakor another pilgrim centre, one of the Sankaracharyas open a branch of the Peeta at Dakor. Ardent theists visit Dakor to feast their eyes with the beauty of the original image of Jaganmohanakara and offer Pujas with unbounbed zeal. Dakor thus perpetuates the memory of Bodhana and hence became a place of pilgrimage.

While at Dwaraka, the devotees have to suffer three things, viz., (1) Danda - paying several kinds of taxes from the point of bathing to the sopt, wherefrom the theists feast their eyes with the darasan of the Lord; (2) Munda - tonsorial operation as an indispensable rite for every theist; (3) Dam-receiving impressions of disc and conch on hands and temples with red-hot iron casts. These were the practices, of course, existed in the bygone days and every pious visitor was willingly subjecting himself to these tortures with smiles, but visitors in modern times have conveniently relegated them for personal comforts, branding them as blind beliefs.
Keeping this in view, the Prince of Gaikwar abolished taxes in 1943 A. D.; but a few ultra orthodox theists are still holding on to those rituals.

Another interesting tradition relates to the observance of five Gakaras in this holy city. They are: 1. Gomati—bath in the sacred river Gomati; 2. Gomaya—bathing with gomaya—cow-dung smeared all over the body; 3. Godana—gifting of a cow to a deserving brahmin; 4. Gopichandana—bearing the marks of gopichandana on forehead, arms etc; 5. Gopinath darsan—filling the eyes with the lovely image of Sri Krishna. It is said that the darsan of the Dwarakanath is so meritorious and it is equal to performing many types of sacrifices and emptying bags of Dakshina to the brahmins. Skanda Purana which devoted 44 chapters glorifying this thirtha exhorts that the darsan of Lord Sri Krishna is a sanctifying that every Hindu worth the description should unfailingly avail it; and one may afford to bypass the darsan of the deities at equally important and holy places like Kasi, Kurukshetra, Prabhasa etc. but not here. It is equal to that of the darsan of gods at all the sacred places in India.

PLACES OF ITINERARY INTEREST:

The pilgrims avail the darsan of the lovely face, beaming with radiant smile of Dwarakadish atleast at three places, besides the main Mandir, viz., 1. Okha Dwaraka, 2. Beti Dwaraka, and 3. Rukmini Dwaraka.

BETI DWARAKA:

It is situated in an island in the bay of Cutch, and is 20 miles off the main temple. There is a motorable road upto Okha Dwaraka, and from here pilgrims go by boats. There are mechanised boats run by several companies and they charge one rupee per head for ferring across a distance of 8 kms. It is quite pleasant, and all enjoy the voyage. The town authorities collect tax from every pilgrim. There are two temples dedicated to Sri Krishna, and in both of them
Vallabha Sampradaya is observed. There are many old, dilapidated palatial buildings identified as Sri Krishna’s residential quarters and palaces of his astamahishis. The image in the second one is that of Sankhodhara.

According to legend, there was a dreadful demon living in this region in Satya yuga and was torturing the sages and saints in several ways. In response to the soulful prayers of the afflicted, Lord Mahavishnu killed him in his Matsya rupa and relieved His bhaktas from the demon once for all. The grateful sages built a temple here and worshipped Him, and that temple lies next to the Krishna Mandir. Its antiquity and the beauty of the image draws the devotees invariably ever. In Okha itself there is a shrine dedicated to Sri Krishna, but it is not given due importance as the other two in the island. Pilgrims in their zeal for boat travel bypass this shrine.

RUKMINI DWARAKA:

It is situated at a distance of 3 kms. from Dwaraka and lies on the way to Beti Dwaraka. It is a pretty shrine built in red stone. It casts an irresistible charm both by its size and sculpture adorning the outer side. The images of Rukmini with Her Lord Sri Krishna are captivating by their ethereal beauty and decoration. Pilgrims unfailingly visit this and worship with great fervour.

PINDATARA:

This is another place of immense spiritual importance. It is the place for pindápradhana, by the theists in particular. The peculiarity of this place is that the pindas when thrown into the lake after due rituals float and swim as found in other places. Hence it goes by the name Pindataraka. This place is associated with another event that brought havoc to the Yadava community. It is said that Samba, the son of Sri Krishna born through Jambavati was playing practical jokes on each and everyone, regardless of persons’ status, age, mood, sex, place etc. Once when Durvasa visited Dwaraka, Samba visited him with his like minds dressed as pregnant woman and asked him to name the sex of the baby to be born in a mocking manner. Unable to stomach the indecent joke Durvasa cursed him anon saying that the would be child would become responsible for the annihilation of the entire community. Certainly the curse ran its course. This disastrous event took place here,
GOPITALAO;
It's a beautiful big lake situated on the way to Beti Dwarka. The earth of this lake is white in colour and is called Gopichandana. Pilgrims carry it home for making marks of it on forehead, and chest. There are several festivals celebrated with great gusto throughout the year. Among them Bhima Ekadasi, Janmastami and Hindu Utsav deserve special mention. The entire town is seen at its best, when joyous ceremonies go on till the auspicious hour of his birth in the night.

ACCOMMODATION:

Being an ancient pilgrimage centre attracting devout religionists since time immemorial, there are innumerable lodging facilities like Choultry and Dharmasalas, in addition to star category lodging houses. Besides, several religious Maths provide accommodation, supplying utensils for cooking too. Almost all sects of Hindu religion have their own branches, carrying on humanitarian activities, besides disseminating spiritual knowledge.

Every religious leader and pravakta of great eminence paid visits several times during their lives and built big Maths both for staying and catering to the needs of their followers visiting them. Renowned Mahaprabhchakras and pithadhapatis like Ramanuja, Madhavacharya, Jnaneswar, Vittalacharya, Govindaswari, Chaitanya, Mirabai, Vallabhacharya paid visits more than once and established pithas and Mathas, which are still continuing their spiritual work with extraordinary zeal due to them.

On top of it, the sprawling town of Dwarka is in the list of summer resorts. As mercury never goes beyond 86 deg. due to the impact of delightful sea breeze, people from far and near throng here during the season and camp for weeks. Hence it has emerged as a reputed tourist centre, besides being a place of pilgrimage of unique spiritual significance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AIR PORT:</th>
<th>Jamnagar- 148 Kms IA Flights connect it to Delhi, Ahmadabad</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RAIL HEAD</td>
<td>Dwarka connects Jamnagar, Rajkot, Ahmadabad etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>BUS ROUTE</td>
<td>State Transport buses from Ahmadabad Jamnagar, Porbandar are available. Private Companies too ply buses of all types from above places.</td>
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UNIQUENESS:

Mathura—the very word drips honey; and it does, as it should be; for, it is derived from madhu, that stands for sweetness. But look, here an ancient city called Mathura poured down an unending stream of unadulterated, thick, pure, sweet milk that created hillocks of butter and pools of milk with creamy bunds amidst lovely sylvan scenes, embellished with petty green bushes, over grown with wiry creepers, bearing multicolored fragrant flowers, to making an appropriate setting to revealing the asana chaturya in playing boyhood sports by that Nandakishor that virtually seduced him into becoming that immortal Navaneethachor—the haughty naughty, mischief-loving, butter-stealing kid, whose infectious antics and rollicking humour drew the celestials down to participate in them wholeheartedly. It is this selfsame Mathura Mandala comprising Gokulam, & Brindavan that reverberated with the mellifluous strains of the divine flute of Sri Krishna that taught majestic prancing to peacocks, witnessing of which spectacle cows drank in that ganamritha with outstretched ears, while mankind sank in the ocean of joy at the sight of the mother Earth marking time, oblivious of time sense. And it is this very same Vrajabhumi that was sanctified by the Rasalila of that Gopikavallabh with the ravishing belles of Repalli, when Natture in surfeit of that rich feast stood motionless, till the crowing of wise cocks heralding the onsets of Brahma muhurth.

It is this punyabhumi about which puranas expound that any type of sin committed in any place gets purged off in a thirtha, but one committed in a thirtha sticks hard, whereas the sin committed in Mathura is destroyed in Mathura itself. Sure, there can’t be any residue clinging to body to be accumulated with age due to interest growing to enormous proportions. What a
boon! And how sacred!! It is this kshetra and its presiding deity that Vaishnava cult raised them to Himalayan heights with statements such as: There is one scripture, that is Bhagavadgita; there is one Acharya that is Sri Krishna; there is one mantra, that is Krishna mantra; the most sacred chant of all there is one kshetra that is Mathura; there is one God, that is Krishnaparamatma; and finally there is one duty, that is seva-worshipping of HIM. Furthermore, there is a belief that the word Mathura, whose principal letters, M, U & A, represent the three components of the mystic syllable, A U M, the chief cause of creation, and as such, it is holding out another attraction for the orthodox Hindus; for, they interpret that the three letters stand for the divinities of the Hindu Trinity—Brahma, Vishnu and Maheswar. With such deification by every school of Vaishnavism, the place became the Bhooloka Vaiikuntha for all devout Hindus, and so, an unceasing stream of pilgrims found round the year.

An infinite number of divyalilas imbued with inexplicable mystery said to have occurred in this thirtha kshetra are enshrined in several genres of literatures of all languages in India and abroad, and in fact each felt honoured in eulogising the glorious anecdotes of Sri Krishna, from childhood days to the historic day of that greatest exodus to Dwarka, built in the midst of sea to be screened from the nefarious manoeuvres of Jarasandha, the arch enemy of the Yadava community.

SOURCES:

There is no dearth of evidence to visualise Sri Krishna's miraculous sports played on this holy land, covering 20 yojanas in measure during its heyday. Almost all scriptures right from the Vedas, like the Rigveda, Upanishads like, Chandogya, epics like Mahabharatha, devotional treatises, like Bhagavatha, Harivamsa and Mathura Mahatmya, Puranas, like, Varha and Padma, philosophical works like Vistadvaita: Buddhist canonical works like Mahamiddesa and Chilaniddesa and travel accounts of Fa-hien and Hiium-Tsang embody hundreds of the sublime descriptions of the glory of this divyadhama. On the top of it,
Sankirthanacharyas and poet-saint-musicians, like Jayadeva, Chaitanya, vidyapati, Chandidas, Narsi Mehta, Mira, Nabhatji, Nimbarka, Jiva Haridas, Raghunathdas, Rupa and Sanatana, Gopala Bhatta and Raghunathabatta and Vallabhacharya poured out their hearts in millions of sweet verses of sublime poetry, filling in several book stacks in the religious libraries. Srimad Bhagavatha takes precedence over all such Bhakti sahitya. Leisure and research may offer many more.

ANTIQUITY:

Its story opens in Treta yuga with Madhu on the throne as the monarch of Mathura, then called Madhuvam. He was a power-intoxicated autocrat. To quench his thirst for expansion by Digvijaya yatra, he sent his son Lavana to Ayodhya to annex it, ruled then by Sri Rama, the son of Dasaratha. With a view to teaching him a lesson on humility, when challenged the invincibility of the Solar dynasty, Sri Rama sent Satrughna, the least known, yet the most valorous to the war front. It was a child’s play for Satrughna to subdue Lavana’s impudent arrogance. On killing both father and son, he founded the city and named it Madhura, perhaps, in memory of the dead king. Many deities of the Solar dynasty ruled it for centuries, and then it came under the Yadavas during the time of Ugrasena, the father of Rama, the wicked.

Kamsa was virtually a formidable demon by name Kalanemi in human form. He was a great dictator and relied more on muscle power than the spiritual; and in tune with his inner venomous nature-rakshasa svabhava, he usurped the throne, on hearing from the Akasavani that his sister’s eighth son would kill him. To prove the falsity of the aerial voice and to establish his invincible power, he forthwith imprisoned his sister Devaki along with Vasudeva, her husband, setting aside all the reasonable pleas. Later, he put to sword ruthlessly one after another, six children of the imprisoned couple. In accordance with the divine plan, the seventh embryo was transferred to Rohini the first wife of Vasudeva, and the son thus born was named
Sankarshana—Balarama, due to the fact of extraction and transferance of embryo. The eighth child—the future Purna Purushothama was exchanged soon after birth with Yasoda’s daughter called Yogamaya, who miraculously flew into air and became Durga, when Kamsa raised his sword to kill in the routine way. Before melting into air, she predicated that his Yama escaping from the prison was brought up safe elsewhere. From then began a series of futile trails of Kamsa, and he left no means unattempted to kill Krishna, his target.

Failing to destroy his foe through detestable means, like sending demoness disguised as Putana, a comely woman and demons in dreadful forms like bull, wheel etc., he invited his nephews-Krishna and Balarama to Mathura, preparing ground for their death. But Krishna out-witted him in every one of his evil designs and finally killed him in the open court itself. Releasing at once his grandfather from prison, he installed him as king of Mathura. People heaved a sigh of relief at long last. Anon he went to Prison and pleased his parents with the death news of Kamsa at his hands. All ended well, and so they left for their home. But the joy of the people was short-lived, for Jarasandha, the brother-in-law of Kamsa, a potential enemy of Yadavas started wreaking vengeance by subjecting them to insurmountable grief. To relieve them from his perpetual onslaughts, Krishna built the city of Dwarka in the Arabian sea and took them with him for permanent settlement.

HISTORICITY:

Many celebrated monarchs ruled Mathura from time to time after the Mayura emperors. During the time of Kanishka, Mathura acquired the status of a rival capital and enjoyed imperial patronage in the realms of fine arts. The Sungas and Guptas that followed glorified the city with many buildings, & it enjoyed imperial patronage. Many philanthropists and Matadhipathis, besides princes have been building hundreds of shrines over the sites, associated with Krishna’s palaces, and places held dear to him. The belief that he was the incarnation
of Lord Mahavishnu gave impetus to the orthodox Hindus to display their sadbhakti through the construction of gigantic temples with imposing towers, bathing ghats with strong embankments and Dharmasalas for lodging the ever increasing influx of the Pilgrims. Moreover, with Vaishnavism reaching the zenith, illustrious pravaktas and affluent bhaktas established their schools and strove to uplift the common people through service activities, with Mathura as principal kendra. Buildings of several types sprang from every sacred spot, and in consequence the city is crowded more with shrines and Dharmasalas than dwelling and commercial establishments. And so, very site dear to Yadavas in general and Krishna in particular is now seen with a monument, emitting spiritual aroma, and is casting an irresistible attraction to theists & tourists. Devout Hindus visit each spot with utmost veneration and offer pujas, and donations too for charitable purposes in certain temples.

Normally pilgrims start visiting the shrines after taking bath in the sacred waters of Yamuna. Like the Ganges, Yamuna too has many ghats, and they are reputed both for offering pindas and taking bath to purge off all the dross and gross sticking to bodies since birth. The waters of Yamuna are imbued with especial sanctity that a sip of a spoonful is equal to that of a dip in the Gangas. Among the many, the following deserve visitation.

**VISRAM GHAT:**

The story goes that once Yama the god of Death paid a visit to his sister, Yamuna. It was Karthika sukla dvitia. Affectionate Yamuna pleased him with several kinds of delicious dishes of special kind. Over-powered by the treatment and superfine food, he gave her the boon that anyone who takes bath on that auspicious day called Yamadvitia, thereafter in the river Yamuna would be relieved of going to Yamaloka, despite multiple unforgivable sins committed in the past. Becoming sin-proof, they go straight to heaven. What a merit! And how magnanimous is that god of Death!! So visiting is a
MUST and bathing, an indispensable necessity.

DHRUVA GHAT:

According to legend, Dhruva, the first son of Uttanapada, born through Suneethi was insulted by his step-mother Surichi, when he as about to sit on the lap of his father. Advised by Narada, he did severe penance, and when Sri Mahavishnu gave darsan, over-whelmed by the aparupa soundarya, he became mute. The all-compassionate God, then touched his cheek with His conch, the embodiment of the Vedas. Regaining the faculty of speech, Dhruva sang in praise of the Lord with such incomparable exuberance that he was given the highest, permanent place among the stars. That event is supposed to have taken place here, and so held sacred.

VISTRANTI GHAT:

This is sanctified by Krishna’s taking rest after killing kamsa. On completing His jagadharana karya, he preferred this spot for its coolness and serenity. He rested there long. Orthodox Hindus besides taking bath in this, offer pindas to their manes.

YOGA GHAT:

It is said that Kamsa dashed to ground the daughter of Nanda, the Yogamaya here, when Vasudeva showed the female baby as his eighth child, as directed by the aerial voice. Escaping from his hands by flying into the air, Yogamaya predicted that his killer was brought up in the vicinity and he could not escape death from him. She then became Durga and terrorised him by numeaus ways. Pilgrims worship the image of Durga installed in a shrieue after a bath.

DWARAKADISH. TEMPLE:

After bath at any one of the ghats, pilgrims proceed straight to Dwarakadish temple first. It is the principal shrine
and it was built in 1814, by Seth Gokul Das, who served the prince of Gwalior as cashier. The idols of Sri Krishna about 3 feet in height is installed on a raised dias. It is quite alluring. The North Indian adornment, adding colour and grace, cast a spell on the devotees. One peculiar feature observed here is that bhaktas, in addition to uttering the Lord’s name loudly, throw coins of all denominations into the enclosure, where priests stand. The priests are Goswamis of kakrauli and are enjoying hereditary rights. They conduct prayer services with a zeal and sincerity that deserves emulation. Vallabha Sampradaya is followed in all the activities. The festivals, like the Jhoola and Janmastami are celebrated every year with great pomp and show, and they attract lakshas of bhaktas who participate in them with great gusto.

BIRLA MANDIR:

It is situated on the Mathura -Brindavan Road and was built by Shri Bal Dro Dasji Birla in 1945. The imposing life-size idol of Krishna made of white marble with Sudarsan in the right and conch in the left is quite enchanting. Kirtana programmes are given here top priority. The court-yard in front of the garbha griha is quite spacious and can hold hundreds of bhaktas to participate in the community singing. The paneled walls narrate many lilas of boy Krishna and Gopikaramana Their colour and craftsmanship drive home bhaktibhava effectively. To the left of the temple there is a shrine illustrating the episode of Govardhanagiri and the idol is extremely enchanting. The walls are inscribed with the text of Bhagavadgita, and the temple complex serves the visitors in multifarious ways, like selling Puja materials, portraits and snacks. The Dharma-sala lies opposite, and is equipped with modern amenities.

THE PAGAL BABA TEMPLE;

It is located on the way to Mathura. It is built with the lavish donations of the devout and pious public by an ardent saint called pagal Baba of Gyan Gudri.
Many commercial magnets and industrialists have donated lavishly to making it a glorious place of worship and to attract both tourists and theists.

**THF KESAVDEO TEMPLE ;**

This sacred shrine unfortunately became the target of Muslim bigots during the raids of Mahamud Gazni in 1017, and again it was destroyed by Sikander Lodi and Aurangzeb. Though it was razed to the ground, it was built anew by the devout Hindus soon after its destruction. Does this not establish the fact that bigotry can never suppress the invincible religious spirit of Hindus?

**KRISHNA JANMA BHUMI ;**

It is on the way to Govardhan from Mathura. It houses the famous, prison cell, where Krishna was born. Aurangzeb the fanatic destroyed it and built a mosque on it. Later, devout Hindus built a temple on a grand scale with a complex in front. This complex caters to the tourists and bhaktas in several ways, like offering medical, food and lodging facilities. An International Guest House with star category arrangements is providing to the affluent people, and cheap accommodation to the common man. It is said that the throne of Kansa was found buried underneath it, and it is preserved as a relic. Many community singing programmes are conducted regularly, and so huge crowds.

**GAYTRI TAPOBHUM ;**

This famous shrine is very near to the Krishna Janmabhumi. The image of Gayatri Mata made of white marble seems exuding 'matrubhava' and so wrings veneration. The temple complex houses a printing press, and is striving for spiritual regeneration and propagation by its printing programmes, like running a periodical and publishing of religious books. It was founded by a learned Sanskrit scholar named Acharya Sri Rama Sharma. It is a visit-worthy place for spiritual solace.
SRI RANGANATHJI TEMPLE:

As Mathura became the centre of Vaishnavism, many votaries from all over our Pavitra Bharat settled down and built temples to carry on religious activities. One such shrine existing is the Ranganathji mandir constructed by the Chettiar of Chettinadu, down South. This is the only temple that resembles the south Indian models in everything, say designing of tower Vimanam, images of the deities including the ritualistic prayer services. Its vastness and sculptural elegance please the eye and soul equally well. Ramanuja sampradaya is followed in all activities.

NIKUNJA VAN:

Mathura is famous for visit-worthy vanas and parks. Among them, Nikunja Van has a story of its own to lure pilgrims. It is also called Seva Nikunj. A pretty pond encircled by green bushes and trees with a shrine in the front feasts the eyes. It was the favourite resort of Krishna and Radha for their amusing sports. No one is allowed to stay here for the night, and if ventures, he/she either dies, or goes mad. Hence the restriction, and that is an additional attraction for pilgrims.

GOKULAM:

It is located across the river Yamuna. It is this Punyabhumi that witnessed the multiplicity of Balakrishna’s indescribable sports that kept heaven agog even. In fact, there passed no day then, when some miracle or the other was shown by that Jagannataka Sutradhari to the denizens of that pujya dharani. Starting from killing of Putua, followed by crushing of Sakatasura, smashing of Vrishabhasura, humbling of kalia, blind folding of Brahma, showing of 14 worlds in the mouth, to liberating Gandharvas interspersed with butter stealing pranks and many more divyalilas are said to have taken place here. As every inch of this place exudes divinity, many temples were built to perpetuate the spots. They breathe in grace and breathe out bliss, so they are to be visited indispensably by ardent theists, and tourists even.
BRINDAVAN:

It is 10 kms off Mathura, and it was once a thick forest overgrown with basil trees, and so the name Brindavan. Its fertile virgin soil, rich vegetation and gurgling waters attracted the Gopas, when calamities visited them, while at Gokul. And so they migrated to this place. Many of the adult sports of Sri krishna, like Rasalila, Chiraharn occurred here. Scores of shrines of supreme architectural grandeur are built from time to time since then. Among them, Sri Rangaji Shah Bihai, Radha Vallabh, Govinda Dev, Gopinath, Ma'danmohan and Jugal kishor temples are deservedly famous. This place is preferred by the retired personnel, and so grey haired gentry greet the visiting people everywhere. Its climate and cool waters together with devotional atmosphere hold such grip on them, that they desire to retire from this mundane world from this sacred spot for ever. A laudable and exemplary ambition indeed.

GOVARDHAN MOUNT;

It lies at a short distance of 10 kms from Brindavan. It lures all, for the awe-inspiring episode of lifting the Govardhan Hill by Sri Krishna with his left hand and holding it on the little finger to protect Gopas and their cattle, when Deven dra sent a terrible rain-storm to punish them for dishonouring him. People undertake perambulation of this sacred Hill for salvation. It is a holy spot worthy of visitation. The Vas Vihar festival celebrated every year includes this place for Yatra, lasting for a week. After this, pilgrims go back to Mathura again.

CONVEYANCE

AIR PORT: Agra is the nearest Air port connecting it by IA flights from all the important cities.

RAIL WAYS: It is a Junction on N E Rly, links with all places by Express Trains

ROAD WAYS: U P R T C Operates buses from almost all important towns and cities. Dept of Tourism and Private companies ply several kinds of buses with sight seeing places en route
AMRITSAR
The citadel of Sikhism

UNIQUENESS:

Mention Amritsar, there goes up smoke and down falls a body; visualise its topography, pools blood and piles of the dead greet your eyes; nearer you go, surer is the sight of corpses rising from the debris gleam into your view; walk in the precincts, you feel scorching eyes running over your physical frame from behind the window shades; approach the portal, liveried men looking daggers scan you from head to foot; enter into it, security men stationed at every vantage point with hardly 100 feet between them scrutinise you with magnifying eyes, as it were, proceed towards the bridge leading to the sanctum, scores of bearded, broad shouldered, hefty, man mountains with metal detectors subject you to gruesome investigation for fire arms. If you manage to pass through the mouth of hell enduring all the ordeals, you are admitted into the Gurudwara, where surprise of surprises awaits you, rather bemuses your senses, since you see neither a statue, nor a design of any divinity, anywhere in the Garbhagriha called Darbar Sahib, considered to be the central citadel of Sikhism and source of perennial inspiration for millions of a militant community living all over globe, but united to from into a single entity, with a mode of life characterised by martial spirit and a commendable code of conduct.

Your peering look at long, last lights, upon the Guru Granth Sahib—the principal sacred Sikh scripture placed on the dais in the middle of the chamber, deemed to be the Bible of the Sikh community, enshrining in its bosom the Invisible Lord in the form of letters, whose attributes and deeds it sings through hymns and psalms, yes the very same repository of holy
Songs of Sikh Gurus, along with those of eminent Hindu and Muslim sages, seers, saints, prophets and hermits, composed in the spoken idiom of the people for whom it is intended by the compassionate Gurus, who willingly laid down their lives at the altar of service, inspired by the lofty ideals of devotion to God and dedication to the upliftment of fellow men through valour and sacrifice; verily the self same scripture embodying those adorable twin aspirations that propelled them into the founding of a religion, whose cosmopolitan character, catholicity of outlook, universality of disposition admits neither dogmatism, nor sectarianism, but breathes in humanism and breathes out fraternity. In ideal state only. "How divine is the book and what veneration is shown by its votaries!" escape from the lips of every visitor unconsciously then. There begins then the enquiry about buliding of this outstanding, incomparable temple, the crest jewel of Sikhim and of temples too.

THE GURUDWARA:

The Golden Temple, locally popular as Har Mandir is situated in the middle of a tank called Amritsar, meaning thereby, the pool of immortal life. This sar-tank is more or less square shaped, measuring about 475 feet each side. This charming tank is surrounded by white marble pathway with a causeway, leading across the crystal clear waters to the Mandir. The reflection of the golden temple built in white marble with gilded domes shimmering in the still waters of the pool, and its sparkling cleanliness, and eye filling splendour flashing in the sun is itself a sight that lifts the soul, filling it with an intense mood of devotion. It has crystal white marble steps on four sides to enabling the visitors to perform ablutions before entering the sanctum. A small bridge with two gilded lamps at the entrance connects the Gurudwara with the embankment. The Takta Akhal Sahib holding the relics of the Gurus, such as swords etc., lies to the north-west with a huge dome gilded with gold. There are two pillars known as Ram Garhia Minars to the east of the dome adding ethereal grace to the building. On the roof of the temple lies a small but tastefully decorated chamber, Shis Mahal.
where the Gurus used to sit. The entire building—interior and exterior is covered with gilded sheets and on them inscribed verses from the Granth Sahib in Punjabi script. No other temple in India, it is said, used as much gold as this for construction. Except this, there is nothing that pleases the eye, nor gladdens the heart. Does this not look strange that a place of worship bereft of the object of worship is holding such tight grip over crores of a militant community?

THE HOLY BOOK:

But stranger is the fact that the holy scripture—Guru Granth Sahib is followed to every letter by crores of Sikhs living throughout the length and breadth of the world. The irrepresible yearning to visit the Golden Temple to be blessed with an eyeeful sight of the Granth Sahib, the holiest of holies for soulful solace; irresistible passion for listening to it with rapt attention; infinite zeal to assimilate its spirit; inexhaustible striving to translate its ideals into action, and finally the unshakable conviction to abide by its precepts is something phenomenal and it is this word of Guru that is binding people of diverse castes, professions, creeds, classes, regions, languages and ways of life into a well-knit homogeneous community. What a marvel!

What then is that mighty word, and who is its author? Explanation is rewarding, nay, a necessity now. It is enshrined in the Adi Granth, and fell from the lips of Nanak, the Adi Guru of Sikhism. His concept of the Supreme Being—"The one Omakar is that whose name is ‘Truth’; it is the Creator; it is the spirit without fear, without emty. It has a timeless form, which is not produced from the womb. This true one existed in the beginning—even before the beginning of time. The true one existed. Oh Nanak, will always to be." Will not ‘marvel’ shrink at the sight of this mighty marvel? In terms of its impact!

For, the very sight of devotees in their hundreds chanting hymns with utmost veneration in consonance with the priests sitting before the open book of the holy scripture very wel
testifies to the fact of the potency of the word. In full life! The sight of the congregation absorbed in chanting, lifts the souls of the visitors and transports them to regions of bliss. Neither the newness of the language, nor novelty of chanting stands in the way of communion of the visitors' souls, with the all compassionate Divinity hovering over the shrine. Even atheists and non-conformists too, I am sure, find themselves oblivious of environs, and inspire themselves to get sunk in the ocean of bliss; for there is no religious symbol, nor theistic representation found or referred to here that may likely bar their soulful involvement, unconsciously even. Further, as the verses inscribed resemble some artistic designs, they command not any willful physical or religious inhibition. When the atmosphere gets charged with mellifluous tunes of the hymns and Gurubani, it enkindles devotion and awakens the awareness of man's insignificance against God’s omnipotence. The religious ecstasy thus roused besides conferring indescribable mental peace, makes one feel that he is elevated to heaven, being freed from cares and anxieties. What is heaven after all, if not an abode, inspiring noblest thoughts, highest aspirations and purest actions in human breast? All this elevated, inexplicable ethereal bliss flows from a book if spoken in terms of components, is nothing but some sheets made of pulp with some letters on it printed and brought under covers! How fantastically few can claim the honour of binding a community of people noted for their vibrating heroism, together with exemplary vivacity, and flawless spirituality as this.

But the strangest fact that enthralls the visitors is the history of this unique book composed by venerable Gurus. Incidentally, the origin of the book is the origin of the rise and fall of Gurus of a type supreme; for they are Gurus with difference. They are ten in number. The concept of Gurudevobhava and his word is holier and mightier than Almighty itself is nowhere seen and honoured as in Sikhism, and at no time the Guru-singh kinship i.e., Preceptor-discipleship has assumed such significance as in Sikhism, although the holy Gurus, contrary to their profession enjoined on their sishyas to converting agamas into
arsenal and substituted swords for rosaries. The history of Sikhism from nadir to zenith reads like a saga and exemplifies that militancy is the only answer to any religious fanaticism, in any country, or at any point of time, for that matter.

THE ORIGIN OF AMRISTAR;

The origin of the Golden Temple dates back to the days of Nanak, a pious Hindu, who became the Founder-Guru of Sikhism. Punjab, during his times was passing through a turbulent phase in the history of India. Religious unrest due to the direct impact of Muslim rule reached the climax and there was insecurity to Hindus everywhere. Muslim bigotry was systematically divesting Hinduism of its glory—chastity was outraged, and integrity fried in the open streets. When conditions went beyond endurance, the humanist Nanak toured several places in and out of his state with a view to solving. Returning enlightened, he inferred, rightly too, that religious revival alone ensures safety and saves Hinduism from effacement and extinction. As a first step towards this, he tried to harmonise the religious sects by evolving a new devotional system, proclaiming that his sishyas—sings are the children of God and they are not ascetics, but a band of servants with arms, rallying under one banner for the defence of their Dharma. And this became the nucleus of his magnum opus—Adi Granth. History justified his laudable ambition and adored it. The second Guru by name Angada invented the Gurumukhi alphabet and it was accepted as the best script for the Sikh literature. Then came Amar Das, who unified the followers with the institution of common kitchen, called Langar. As it abolished the caste system among the followers, it brought in a major change in the character of Sikh community. Solidarity at the grass root level was achieved by this far-sighted measure. Credit goes to fourth Guru Ramdas, who founded the city of Amritsar, and it was known by the name Chak then. The famous temple in the midst of a big lake was his innovation. Grateful community named Amritsar as Ramdas pur after him. He is also responsible for establishing Sikh congregations.
throughout the country with Amritsar as the Mecca. Guru Arjun Singh, the fifth in the line compiled the Adigranth—the core of the present Granth Sahib and virtually became the secular and spiritual head of the Sikhs by necessity, but it roused animosity in Jehangir, the ruling Moghul emperor.

With the accession of Hargovind as the sixth Guru, their history took a new turn. Urged by the prevailing unrest, he actually carried two swords—piri and Miri representing his powers over the two worlds—the combination of the Deg and Tegh-kettle to supply food and sword to smite the opponent. Hari Rai who succeeded him fought battles against Aurangzed, the zealot and transformed the Sikhism into a militant church. The eighth was a boy aged five, left nothing, since his rule lasted for three years only. Teg Bahadur, the next in line was executed by the Moghul Emperor in 1675 A.D. And then came Guru Govind Singh, the tenth and the last, but the most powerful and celebrated and was reverentially called the Soldier-saint. He introduced several far-sighted reforms that changed the psychology of the community. He introduced Khalsa anew from baptism and insisted on every Sikh to observe this. For, after pahul, he becomes a dwija—twice born, ready for kirthinash loss of fame; kulansh—loss of family Dhaarmansh—loss of orthodox life; karmanash—loss of ego-centric avocation in preference to devotion to Guru and to Sikhism.

This indeed brought in a tremendous change and prepared the community for ultimate victory through arms only. He is also responsible for ordaining Sikhs to have five things, the indispensible five Ks, the symbols of diksha—dedication According to it, every Singh must necessarily wear Kacha—short drawers; put on kara—an iron ring on the right arm; keep kripan sword; keep long hair; kesh and a kang—comb. Verily, it imbued them with a spirit of oneness and unbreakable commonness. This instantly ushered in the growth of a homogenous and fully armoured class, ready for defending their own ageless Dharma.

His valorous life was emulated by both Sikhs and Hindus with equal fervour, and with the support of his saint soldiers, he emancipated the people from the shackles of religious bigotry.
and political bondage. He waged relentless wars against the Moghuls and broke successfully the spell of their invincibility many a time, but was assassinated in 1708 by treacherous means. Even after that his followers continued their militancy with such matchless valour and peerless tenacity that only resulted in emerging themselves as the fittest successors to the glorious saint soldier-ruler community. Further more, it is said that this place has been venerated from time immemorial for its association with epic personages - Sita the ideal consort of Sri Rama who lived here during her banishment, and sage Valmiki, the Adi kavi who composed the Ramayana.

The thread of further narration by the guide of the Sikhs and the uniqueness of the Golden Temple was snapped by the Yatra Organiser, who hastened the party to the Jalianwala Bagh Monument for sight seeing.

JALIANWALA BAGH MONUMENT:

This national monument of supreme historic significance lies in the heart of city and it is very near, say a quarter mile off the Golden Temple. It recalls the monumental folly perpetrated by the British rulers- on the ruled the innocent peace-loving citizens of Amritsar, and it was in April, 1919. It was then a sprawling garden commonly used for public meetings. This spot where on that fateful day thousands of harmless citizens of all age groups and sexes were shot at ruthlessly by the cruel British officer by name Dyer is held very sacred now, and every tourist and pilgrim crave for a visit during their visit to the city. Though it is now closed on all sides by tall buildings and business establishments, its curiosity as a monument is on the increase. On entering into garden, a tall inverted U shaped column erected on an elevated platform greets our sight, and wrings our homaga by its unforgettable past. There are huge halls, whose walls are adorned with the paintings of the scenes of that gruesome event, the sight of which draws tears, and listening to the narration hastens all to the poignant memorial Free India gave to the martyrs erected on a grand pedestal to offering obeisance. With heavy hearts and
torn-stained eyes, the visitors are hurried to the Durga temple a visit worthy, nay a must for every pilgrim to this city.

DURGA TEMPLE:

It lies at about 2 kms from the Golden Temple. The very first thing that stuns the visitors is its striking resemblance to the Golden Temple. This Hindu shrine is of recent construction and like the Golden Temple is surrounded by water on all sides. The lake is equally big in size, but one plus point it boasts is that there are many minishrines on the embankments around the main temple. The statues of almost all the principal gods adorning the Hindu pantheon, like Siva, Gouri, Sarada, Lakshmi, Hanuma, Sri Rama, Krishna. Vinayaka etc., are installed on beautifully made pedastals. They appear extremely attractive and enkindle devotion by their enormous sizes and artistic adornments. There are many Dhamasalas in front of the temple for the stay of the visitors for days, if desired. Poor feeding and community singing, are conducted periodically. A visit purges one of his sins, since almost all the adorable deities are assembled in one spacious campus.

BABA ATAL RAI TOWER:

The story goes that Atal Rai, son of Har Govind, the sixth Guru, a nine year old boy performed a miracle of restoring to life a close dead friend. As it was against the Sikh tradition, he immolated himself, when chastised, and later was given the title of Baba. A fitting memorial—an octagonal nine-storied tower representing his nine year life was built by the grateful people. The inner walls are decorated with frescoes depicting the life of Nanak. A worth seeing place lying near the Mandir. Devout Public miss not this memorial.

<table>
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<th>CONVEYANCE</th>
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<tr>
<td>AIR WAYS : Udaipur--The nearest Airport</td>
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<tr>
<td>ROADWAYS : There is a well-developed network of good roads to reach every important place in India and Pakistan, since it is just 29 km from the Wagah border.</td>
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<tr>
<td>RAILWAYS : It is a Junction connecting all major towns and cities in India</td>
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SECTION V

KURUKSHETRA
The land of Dharma

UNIQUENESS:

Scarcely can one come across any Hindu living here or abroad, who hasn’t either heard, or uttered the sacred word ‘Kurukshetra’ at least once in his life time. Kurukshetra, the land of king Kuru is known by various names, like Brahmavrata, Veda bhoomi, Dharmakshetra etc. Tradition ascribes it to the seat of Vidhatha - the Creator of the world, and it is from here the first civilisation sprouted, and was rocked and nourished before shooting up into the cultural frument to remain as the pole star for other cultures to flourish, either by partial imitation, or total absorption of its indomitable eternal spirit. It was the Ratna Garbha that gave birth to immortal rishis and deathless emperors, who moulded the Aryan culture and spread it to the four corners of the world. It was the heart that throbbbed with ennobling aspirations of mankind, and the veritable hub around which heroic exploits and dharmic prabodhas spun hand in hand and enjoyed their heyday. It was here Bhagavadgita, the song celestial and the Testament of Humanity was propounded, and its Dharma gosha started echoing throughout the world down the ages.

It is this Dharma bhoomi that filled many a glittering chapter of sacred scriptures, like the Rigveda, Upanishads, Puranas, Bhagavadgita and Mahabharatha. From time immemorial it has been the sangrama ranga, where historic battles were fought in defence of Dharma that changed the course of history, and gave a new turn to the lives of teeming millions inhabiting this divya khetra. Besides Puranic glory, historical eminence too is emanating from every inch of this Punya bhoomi.

Hence, for the Sanatanist, it’s his life-breath, their soul; religionist, his mind; moralist, a light house; codifier, a
treasure trove; seeker, the gateway to heaven; spiritual bankrupt, a font; mumuksha, a crazy pilgrim centre; Indologist, a research lab; and cultured man, a temple. Its very mention exhilarates the spiritualist; energises the lily-livered; rejuvenates, the crest fallen; ignites the virtuous; armours the ashikas; and consoles the oppressed.

Every devotee's abode reverberates with its glory in the pre-dawn hour during the recitation of Gita beginning with Dharmakshetra - Kurukshetra, when his heroic heart resounds with the zooming arrows and clanking of cymbals; and awakens his fertile mind to the thoughts of eternal messages preached, and acted, perpetual peace sought and got by manavothamas aided and abetted by Parashothama and His retinue.

NAME AND DERIVATION:

Puranas recount that King Kuru, lured by the sacredness of the soil, drenched by the crystal clear waters of Saraswati selected it for cultivating the eight fold virtues, and to distribute the harvest to mankind living all over the globe. Accordingly, one fine morn he drove his golden chariot right up to the bank and made a plough utilising the gold of the soil. When ploughing with the Yama's buffalo and Maheswara's Nandi, he borrowed, on ardent supplication, Devendra appeared on the scene and asked him, what he was doing and spell out his real intention. Kuru expressed his purpose of raising the most coveted eight fold virtues - austerity, purity, chastity, truth, kindness, forgiveness, yoga and continence. Puzzled at its oddity, he asked as to where such seeds could be got. Kuru replied that he was in possession of them in plenty, Sceptical Devendra departed with a hysterical laughter, reflecting the impossibility of the attempt.

In the course of his tireless ploughing the lonely furrow, Mahavishnu revealed Himself before and questioned him as Devendra did before. Elated at his pious wish, He volunteered, to sow the seed, if given. Forthwith, Kuru stretched out his right hand and solicited him to cut it into thousand pieces with
His Sudarsan Chakra, and sow. While demanded for some more for the remaining field, he offered his left hand, followed by legs, one after another. Finding some more area yet to be sown, he gave his head with a gleam of contentment in his luminous eyes. Pleased with his unparalleled humanism, Lord Vishnu asked him to name two boons that can be granted on the spot. At this juncture, Devendra descended again and showed his willingness to extend any thing he was in need of. Overwhelmed, Kuru begged for two boons; one—the land should ever remain sacred, and it should be called after him; two—anyone who dies here should go to heaven, irrespective of his sins and virtues. They were granted, and hence the sanctity pervading the entire kshetra, comprising about a hundred miles in area; and as requested it came to be known as Kurukshetra thence forward.

HOARY PAST:

The rulers that reigned after him, and from time to time imbibed that spirit and raised the reputation of the land to the jealousy of the celestials. Illustrious mahaviras, avatara purushas, divya tapasvis, tatva pracharakas, peethadhipatis, sastrakaras etc., of interplanetary eminence strove to keep aloft, its banner of Dharma ever fluttering and never flagging, even during the alien conquests, threatening the very existence of the people. During the Mahabharata period, the descendants of king Kuru—Kauravas and Pandavas raised its reputation to the pinnacle, by making the celestials share their joys and woes. Wonder of wonders! Neither the bigotry of the alien rulers, nor the dictatorial high-handedness of some of the Indian rulers holding diametrically opposite views, suppressed the irrepressible spirit of that mateless Mahapurusha king Kuru.

HISTORICITY:

Its colourful history can be gleaned from a glimpse of the history of India starting from the imperial Mauryas, followed by Guptas, Vardhamanas, and ending with a petty ruler called Anandapala, during whose time Mahamud Gazani began
his conquests, with torch in one hand and sword in the other. The material wealth of Sthaneswar, the capital was carried off to Gazani and by acts of Vandalism and the spiritual wealth - the holy tanks and sacred shrines was converted into dust. As the shadow of the crescent grew thicker and wider, it swallowed bit after bit of the sacred sanct land, for the protection of which Dadhichi, heartily gave his vertebra. All sank into oblivion, except some invincible structures now in ruins, yet ready to narrate their hoary past.

The long succession of Muslim zealots, though humbled the mighty potentates, they did not dry up the spirit of Dharma; for, Marathas and Sikhs who rose to power later waged endless wars to keep the torch of Dharma ever burning bright, by burning themselves at stake at it. With the advent of Briti- shers, it passed into their hands in 1850 at the death of the widow of the last king by name Fateh Singh.

PLACES OF INTEREST

This sacred kshetra abounds in several worth-seeing spots of different kinds, like evergreen forests, gurgling rivulets blue water tanks, big shrines, Gurudwaras, Masjids and architectural marvels. According to Vamana Purana this land is made more sacred by nine divine rivers flowing ever then. They are the Saraswathi, Drishadvati, Hiranwati, Vaitaranji, Madhuvana, Kousaki, Vasu Apaga and Ganga Mandakini. The ravages of ages left but one still flowing, and that is Saraswathi, and that too only in the rainy season. The traces of other rivers are hard to recognise. In addition to the, rivers, there were seven forests that served the land and the people in multitudinous ways, like sheltering the recluses, suppling fuel and medicinal herbs, besides luring the black clouds to pour down their rich contents. The Mahabharata and Vamana purana make several references to their fame under different contexts. They are mentioned as the Kamyakavana, Aditivana, Vyasavana, Phalakivana, Suryavana, Madhuvana and Sitavana. Further this divya kshetra is guarded by four Yakshas; named Arantjink, Taranjak Kapil and Machakruk. They are stationed at the four corners
and are ever vigilant to keep the welfare of the people.

Moreover, there were many tanks with well maintained bathing ghats for the convenience of pilgrims and citizens. Only a few have survived, standing against the onslaughts of the elements over the yugas, passed by. With additions to depth and width, they look modern, but not. On the banks of every tank, or in vicinity, there stands a shrine of great fame relating incredible stories; no matter whether it is in ruins or renovated. Strange it is to learn that during its heyday Kurukshetra was square in shape and measured ten thousand miles in area; hundred miles each side. Puranas relate that every visitor is entitled to go to heaven, if he takes bath once in tanks; visits temples; dwells a few days; or dies here. Nay, even by mere uttering its sacred name, one acquires punya. Scriptures embody another interesting factor that any gift given here grows thirteen times a day, and this goes on for thirteen days continuously. How strange! As the kshetra is studded with an infinite number of temples and thirthas, the visitor is taken to only a few supposed to be holy in every respect.

BRAHMASAR:

Its local name is kurukshetra tank and it is the biggest amongst the existing-ones. No sooner does the pilgrim arrive, his supreme concern is to visit this first, and reach the spot where Gitopadesa was given next. Its enormous dimensions and unearthly power keep the visitor agog. It is 3860 ft. in length and 2860 ft. in breadth. During its heyday, it had flights of steps on all four sides and had two islands - one in the middle and the other near the steps; and they where connected by bridges for the benefit of pilgrims to avail darsan of deities installed in temples therein. These little islets were throbbing with the arodhana activities of the godmen, who dwelt there in temples and dhamasalas and every inch of the land was soaked with Bhagavannamas and the pitch of every syllable of sankirthana was reverbera-
ting. Always and it was heard for miles afar. Alas! it fell to the fanaticism of Aurangzeb, who caused the conversion of the bigger islet into a military post stationing armed soldiers in charge of collecting the abominable tax - Jazia from every ardent pilgrim. The ruthless zealot charged one rupee for a pot of water and five rupees for a dip. The remorseless official punished the tax evaders with severe sentences and shooting in some cases too.

Realising its ever growing popularity, the British Government undertook renovation work in 1850, and since then many more face-lifting programmes on gigantic scale have been embarked upon by the munificence of humanitarain theists. Now it is under the care of Haryana Government. On the Northern bank of this, there are scores of worth-seeing mandirs and dhamasalas. The hub of life is centred round this at present. Famous modern places of worship, like Gita Mandir of Birla, Vyasa Gudiya Math, Baba Kali Kamliwala shrine are deservedly famous, both for maintenance and architectural excellences. Almost all the Sikh Gurus paid several visits to this place, and caused many buildings dedicated to gods and godmen, and hence the existence of many Gurudwirases and temples.

SANNIHIT TANK:

Though comparatively small, it has many special features. The story goes that all the thirthas assemble here on the day of Amavasya, and if one performs sraddha here on the Solar eclipse day, he acquires the fruit of one thousand Aswamedha yagas. It is the permanent abode of Lord Maha Vishnu. On one side, the idols of Dhrusva Narayan, Hanuman and Durga are installed and they are worshipped with great ardour. On the other side of the tank, there is a temple dedicated to Sri Lakshmi Narayan. The famous Kali Kamalika shrine affiliated to Rishikesh Math lies on the southern side. In the other, adjoining to Dhamasala, the status of Lord Krishna and Arjuna in the act of preaching-listening posture are installed,
and they are the cynosure of irresistible attraction for visitors of all types.

STHANESWAR TANK:

It is situated in front of Sthaneswar Siva shrine. According to tradition, it is here that the Pandavas worshipped Maheswar before going to war and got victory with His blessings. Its waters are said to have magical powers of curing leprosy. Hence the thronging of the victims of that dreadful disease in large numbers throughout the year.

BHISHMA KUND:

It is about 5 Kms. off the Kurushetra tank. The famous episode of quenching the thirst of Bhishma Pitamaha, while lying on the bed of arrows is attributed to this. The epic relates that Bhishma felt thirsty while on the ampa sayya, and asked for water. Thereupon, Duryodhana ordered the attendant to bring water in a gold vessel, but Bhishma refused on the ground that he no more had any connection with the mortal world. When helplessness gathered dark clouds around his brows, Arjuna, the savyasaachi pierced the earth with his mighty arrow. There gushed out then patatalaganga, like the fountain at the turn of the knob. It quenched the Pitamahas thirst, curbed the hollow imperial power of Duryodhana, and occasioned the exhibition of supremacy of Arjuna. And as it is associated with the last days of Bhishma, and his Dharmopadesa, so there is unusual craze for visiting by all types of people.

KAMALNABHI THIRTHA:

This sacred tank is associated with a great epic episode like many others. According to tradition, Brahma was born here out of a lotus sprouting from the navel of Lord Mahavishnu. A visit fulfills the dual purpose of visiting both the Creator and the Protector. Pilgrims worship the deities after bath in the tank.

JYOTISAR TANK:

It is one of the big tanks attracting people for special purposes. Here is a banyan tree believed to be of 5000 years old, and pilgrims who throng during the Solar eclipse day.
necessarily visit this to see, and offer prayers, reciting scriptures for gaining punya. Renovation work gave priority to making provision for accommodation to the pilgrims visiting on special occasions. It lies at a distance of 8 kms from the Railway station.

AMIN:

It is a protected monument lying at a distance of 3 kms from the station of the same name. It is the modern name of Abhimanyu, the valorous son of Arjuna, who brought undying fame to the youth by his apurva bahubala and yuddha kousalya. It is here the Padmavyuha tragedy took place and there is a big mound now perpetuating the memory of that heroism. Scholars and pilgrims visit this with equal fervour round the year.

BEHOMA:

Its ancient name was Prithu dakh, meaning thereby the pool of Prithu. It is said that king Prithu made oblations and observances to his father here. People gather here for ‘Pinda dan’ everyday in hundreds, and on special occasions like Chitra Amavas, Asu Amavas and Kartik Pournami the congregation swells to enormous size exceeding tens of thousands. Yamana purana recounts that Rajareshi Viswamitra got enlightenment here. Scriptures enjoins a visit to it for purging of sins and gaining illumination.

YAYATI THRITHA;

Tradition ascribes this to king Yayati, who performed sacrifice of every type here, and the story goes that the water in the tank was changed into dugdh, ghrit and madhu-milk, ghee and honey alternately soon after the final one.

KAITHAL THRITHA;

It is a corrupt form of the word Kapisthal. It is recorded that Hanuman was born here. In the month of Shravan, a big fair is held attracting lakhs, for offering special poojas to Lord Hanuman and also performing religious rites.

RAM HRIDAYA:

It is famous for several temples, tanks and dharma
salas built in recent times. It is said that Parasuram performed sacrifices here, and so holds grip on the religionists.

SARPA DAMAN:

Its story too is quite interesting to hear, and offer prayers also. Janamejaya performed here a big Yagna to destroy snakes and relieve the people of their fear. To ward off snake menace and the disasters of bite, people throng here and offer prayers.

VARAH TIRTHA:

It is situated near the Jind railway station. Puranas embody the fact that Maha Vishnu appeared here as Varah to save the earth from diabolical treachery of Hiranyaksha.

HAVELI BABA SHRAVANNATH:

It is built in the form of fortress. Baba Shравannathji, a great sadhu and preceptor built it in the seventeenth century. It contains the marble statues of Lord Sri Krishna and the five Pandava brothers along with Bhishma Pitamaha. The oddity of its origin wrings veneration. It is said that once the famous sadhu Lachman Giri visited it and asked the inmates to supply milk. The sishyas, out of respect for the sadhu poured milk into his begging bowl, but how much and how long. The bowl could not be filled, however, much they tried. When the miracle reached the preceptor, he himself came and started pouring from his kamandal. Despite an endless flow of milk seen by all, the bowl refused to touch the brim, nor the kamandal found emptied. The miracle went on for some time, when the the Baba and the Sadhu recognised each other's supernatural powers. On recognition, they embraced each other. As it is sanctified thus, it is attracting people of all types.

APAGA THIRTHA:

It was once a holy stream lying between the rivers
Saraswati and Drishadwati. And it is now reduced to a small tank lying on south side of Kurukshetra University campus. It is equated with Gaya in many respects, and it is said that a dip in it confers the same merit as that of Gaya when bathed. So people visit it for bath.

Amongst several other worth-seeing places, the following deserve visiting both for offering prayers and feasting the eyes with lovely modern structures. Kapil Thirtha, Prusti Thirtha, Deva Thirtha, Vapa Thirtha, Mahadev Thirtha and Soma Karthik Thirtha are but a few in the long list. All these need not necessarily testify to the fact that only Hindu temples and their religion alone are found dominating in this kshetra. Its religious tolerance and catholic outlook can be seen in the existence of scores of Gurudwaras, Masjids and Churches built side by side or in isolation. And they are visited by thousands throughout the year and enjoying equal attention and attraction by public and government.

Mention must be made of the Mousoleum of Shaik Chelli, an important centre of Muslim pilgrimage, and it is attracting pilgrims like any Hindu temple round the year. As the Sikhs recognised and respected the eternal truths of Hinduism, they visited this place and donated, besides building Gurudwaras and Dharmasalas for their convenience. Needless to emphasise that this punyakshetra is a meeting ground of the major religions, and it is striving its best to foster unity amidst the endless diversity.

Though occupied a conspicuous place as a cradle of civilizations, is not free from the sweep of the iron hand of time due to passage of long Yugas, much of its wealth and worth is found in tattered rags on last dregs of existence. Finding the architectural splendour and sculptural marvels lying scattered and buried; the Rishivatikas and dhyanmankirs over-grown with herbs and shrubs; the adored idols mutilated and abandoned; bathing ghats silted up; and dharmasalas in dilapidated condition, the Departments of Archaeology and Indian History of Universities like Kurukshetra and Delhi have undertaken excavation and renovation works for resurrection of its glory and publish to the world, the sacredness of its soil. The labours of scholars and scientists have already shed light on hitherto desolate mounds like Amin and Danlapur. The indefatigable work of the spade and crowbar have discovered the idol of Seshasaya moorthy of Lord Vishnu at Faridkot. And sure many more of inestimable worth will rise from the desolate wilderness soon.
UNIQUENESS

A mere mention of ABU, serves a rare sumptuous fare to the eye and soul of every ardent devotee. It's a crest jewel set in the isolated emerald plateau of Rajasthan, luring all nationalities of the world round the year, as a visit-worthy place of supreme spiritual significance.

Its luxuriant vegetation, exuberant scenic beauty and vibrant climate cast an irresistible charm on both sight-seers and god-seekers alike. More on the affluent as a matter of fact. As the summit opens out into a spacious charming valley, the range of its splendour is wide and it breaks through several outlets, like the fantastically shaped rocks, sparkling streams, zigzag roads together with its flora and fauna. The artistically formed granite rocks rising above the eyecatching greenery lifts the minds, fills the hearts' and thrills the bodies of every type of visitor. The exquisitely carved incomparable Dilwara temples, spiritually elevating ancient Hindu shrines, and imposing princely mansions embodying architectural excellences justify to its special red dot marked on the religious map of India, as one of the worth-seeing sights of our sacred land, and an ideal summer resort for a reverie at on attituded of 1220 metres.

ANTIQUITY

Mythological evidence found in abundance stands in proof of the unearthly glory of this hill, forming a part of the Aravalli range of mountains. Its antiquity bearing the vestiges of the visitation and habitation of the celebrities dates from Satya yuga, when cosmic beings walked on this soil along with humans gaily. The Vanaparva of Mahabharata contains many references to it and it was called Arbuda Thirtha, named
after Arbuda, the son of Himalaya. It narrates that once Uttanka obtained a pair of Karnabharanas ear rings from Saudasa's wife, for presenting them to Ahalya, the wife of his guru Gautham, in token of his veneration. To his misfortune they were carried off to the nether world by Taksha, the king of snakes. With a view to wrest the lost, he dug a big hole atop this hill to reach the place of the stealer. And that wide chasm was left uncovered later.

By accident, Nandini, the sacred cow of Vasistha fell into it. When efforts to extricate it met with failure, Vasistha sought the help of Himalaya to lift the cow and to fill up that deep fissure. But the later declined on the ground that the place was uninhabitable. Thereupon, Vasistha promised to make the spot and the country adjacent,pure and habitation-worthy. Pleased with it, Himalaya sent his son Arbuda on this work. At the behest of his father Arbuda closed the hole, and hence it was called the Arbuda kshetra. Vasistha built an asram with a temple of Maheswar in it and it is now called the Achaleswar shrine. He caused a big fire-pit made in his hermitage for his nithya naimithika rituals. It is believed that the four Rajaput clans -- Agnikula Kshatriyas emerged from this sacrificial pit, who ruled the present Rajasthan and its surrounding countries for centuries with an enviable record of unparalleled glory and valour, among the rulers of our sacred land. Vishnu Purana also embodies a certain amount of proof of the glorious past of this hill.

HISTORICITY

Enigma seems peeing at the reader of the history of Rajasthan, for the prime reason that there is a free mixing of fable with facts. It has been a haven for all religious preachers from time immemorial, and concrete evidence of their living and preaching is available in plenty. Many major religions seem to have vied with one another to establish their respective monasteries for the propagation of their dharma, and dedication of shrines to their istadevathas. Jains, Sakthas, Vaishn-
avites and Saivites built many marvellous temples to perpetuate their fame and carry on their service activities, and they stand to relate many of their selfless ministrations. But definite data of the rulers begins with the Paramaras, one of the four clans of Rajputs, who made Abu as their capital, and from that period gradually its importance rose to the pinnacle, despite many rulers succeeded them. Many sturdy hands held the sceptre and wielded power from here for centuries. In 1845 it was brought under the British sway and continued as the head quarters of the British Government Political agent of Rajasthan. After Independence, it was restored to Rajasthan in 1956, and since then, it is slowly gaining its immortal glory and luring all classes of people from within and without.

CONVEYANCE:

Abu is accessible by bus or train. For the train journey, Abu Road is the last station and from here, it is approached by a motorable road of about 29 kms. Tourist buses and Government Transport vehicles can be engaged from Ahmedabad, Ambaji and Abu Road, and are available at all hours. The journey by bus is the pleasantest, and its joys are unlimited. The traveller can't but gape and gaze all along the Ghat section on the serpentine road, along the side of deep chasm fringed with greenery of the primeval forests. As the bus meanders through the zigzag road amidst the majestic hills tapering from gorgeous and panoramic vistas into the azure sky, the traveller feels wafted to the ethereal zones and enjoys a bliss of rare kind. The thrills he experiences throughout at the unrolling of the intrinsic loveliness of nature can not be clothed in the inadequate language, yet he locks them up in his memory to cherish them for ever. Once, when he reaches and alights, he feels greater things are in store to greet him on the basis of the spiritual sanctity hovering over there.

SIGHT SEEING ITENERARY:

As Abu abounds in abundant divine splendour and Nature's grandeur, the sight-seer comes across many a shrine
or object of wonder at every step, and on close scrutiny, they turn out to be masterpieces of medieval period. Besides temples, grotesquely shaped rocks and vast sheets of blue water lakes arrest his attention and detain him longer, narrating their strange yet credible tales. Though the visitor may not find time to listen to all, or see every exotic beauty, some important items deserve his visit and attention. And they bind him, making speechless and motionless by their uniqueness in one aspect or the other. Let us visit the temples first.

ARBUDA DEVI TEMPLE

It is a cave temple chiselled out of a huge rock lying to the North Civil Station. Arbuda Devi is the tutelary goddess of Abu, installed in a small but sanctified place, forming out of a cleft on one side of the hill. An ascent of 400 steps through a shady mango grove leads to this, and it attracts locals more. But the visitor is lured to a pond called Doodh Baoli, which narrates a strange story. Tradition relates that it was a step well of pure milk for the exclusive use of gods and sages in the days of yore. The water being milky white, it gives sanction to the belief and hence attraction.

GAU MUKH AND VASISTHA ASRAM

Gau Mukh temple is one among the ancient temples. It is situated on an elevated place with a small tank in the fore. It is always full with pure water, which falls through a cow’s mouth carved out of granite. A little farther ahead below lies the famous Vasistha Asram, the immortal sage of the epic age. The statues of muni Vasistha with Rama and Lakshmana on either side and Arundhati in the front are installed in the middle of the courtyard. A marble statue of Nandini is put up outside the asram and they stand to testify to the truth of the legend that Abu owes its glory to Vasistha, and is associated with the celestials. And it is from this asram’s sacrificial fire-pit, the Agnikula Kshatriyas emerged. Legend lurcs the pilgrims and bends their heads before the divinities. There is pond here bearing the name of Naga Thirtha proclaiming to the world of
its miraculous power of fertility. A dip in it relieves one of the curse of barenness. Barenness is believed to be the effect of sarpa sapa, for having killed snakes in the previous birth. A bath in this offsets that dosha; for, it is in this place alone Uttanka obtained Karnabharanas from the serpent king. It is considered very sacred, and so the thronging of the childless persons throughout the year.

SHRI RAGHUNATHJI TEMPLE:

This famous temple lies opposite the Gandhi Park. Its imposing size and huge proportions with modern facilities and latest trends for lodging etc, lends a special charm to the locality and it is one of the pre-eminent places of worship. The idols of Sri Raghunathji--Sri Rama is said to have been installed by the celebrated Hindu saint Sri Ramanada, who lived in the fourteenth century. His footprints are carved on Guru Sikhar, another place of interest. As it affords accommodation to hundreds of tourists, its importance is on the increase.

ACHALESWAR MAHADEV TEMPLE:

It is dedicated to Lord Siva and is situated 8 kms. off the Dilwara group. Its unprecedented attraction and popularity are due to the fact that it treasures up an emblem of the toe of Lord Siva. Just below the emblem, there is a small hole that tells a story interesting. According to legends, the hole connects the earth to the Patal loka. It appears that one Paramara King by name Dhara varsha, a doubting Thomas by nature disbelieved the truth. Not being satisfied with it, he decided to disprove the popular belief so ordered water to be poured down hole with a view to falsifying the age old fable current in his time. For six long months, hundreds of workmen unceasingly poured down water into it, but in vain. The thirst of the hole seems inextinguishable and so there were no signs of water reaching the brim. Poor Dharma varsha retreated and regretted. Alas! his foolhardiness ended with a terrible curse on him by the Lord Achaleswar. With this, his dynasty
come to an abrupt end.

Adjoining the temple, there is a water tank known as Mandakini kund, supposed to have been ever overflowing with ghee meant for the use of the sages. According to the story, some three wicked demons deciding to steal the ghee, went disguised as buffaloes. Unluckily for them, their evil design reached the ears of Adipal, a valorous Paramara king, who killed them simultaneously with a single shot of his potent arrow. To commororate this superb feat and humanist action, a statue of the king with three buffaloes is set up here. Hence the craze for a visit by the theists in particular.

KANYAKUMARI AND BALAM RASIA TEMPLE:

These twin temples lie a little farther to the Dilwara temples. They enshrine the idols of modern lovers, whose romantic story turned tragic by the nefarious designs of one dot ing mother. The inscription dated 1443 A.D. bears testimony that Kanyakumari was the lovely daughter of a Chieftain of Abu. This angel enkindled love in a sage by name Balam Rasia; he proposed. Though the proposal was agreeable to the father, the unwilling mother tried to frustrate it by strategem. She set the sage the difficult task of laying twelve different approach roads to Abu in a single night as a precondition for winning the hand of her daughter, before the crowing of cock, at it. Balam accepted the challenge and set to work zealously; but fate set at nought his attempt. Seeing the work nearing completion before the time fixed even, the mother feigned the crowing of cock. Wickedness triumphed. Knowing the truth later, Balam threw a magic spell in ungovernable rage, which transformed both the mother and daughter into stones at once. This historical episode is corroborated by ample evidence in records. Grateful people erected shrines and installed statues in the twin temples. Thus came into existence these shrines and are beckoning attention from one and all.

THE DILWARA TEMPLES

This temples group, the greatest draw of Abu consisting of five priceless master pieces in marble white is deemed as the
greatest all-time wonder of the world. This inestimable connoisseur’s treasure, the second of which the world has not produced so far, nor likely the feature may ever succeed in making a prototype at least even, is dedicated to Sri Adinath, the first Tirthankara of Jains. Of the five, the two Vimal Vasahi and Tejpal are deservedly famous for their exquisite, breath-taking, craftsmanship of the medieval times.

The Vimal Vasahi was built by one of the ministers of Bhim Dev, belonging to Porwal Jain community, the first Solanki ruler of Gujarat in 1031 A.D. Each temple has its subsidiary shrines and stand within its own enclosed quadrangle. They are built entirely of white marble, and far surpass the world famous Halebidu temples of Hoysala rulers, in workmanship and finish. The Vimal Vasahi is enclosed in an oblong courtyard surrounded by a high wall with 52 cells, each enshrining the image of a Tirthankar. The main shrine has a dome—a pyramidal roof, a vestibule and an open portico. The image Sri Adinath in sitting posture is installed on an elevated dias in the sanctum. The portico has 48 pillars with long beams stretching from pillar to pillar and they are relieved by serpentine struts of white marble. The dome lying outside is octagonal in shape. It is formed by eleven concentric rings and decorated with finely carved figures of both human and animals in procession, and they are supported by eight superbly sculptured columns. The circular rings rest on sixteen brackets bearing images of learning, called here by the name of Mahavidya Devi.

Each of 52 cells enshrining one Tirthankar is equally alluring and befitting to the grandeur of main shrine. The portico and the roof contain elaborate reliefs illustrating from Jain and Hindu mythologies. Herein lies the catholicity of Hinduism, and that accounts for the unprecedented popularity of these superb master pieces. Despite the monotonous repetition of the same motif for each of the 52 cells, the art of plastic decoration exuding from every pore of the sculptured piece beckons million looks. There is a small shrine dedicated to Ambica, the Guardian Goddess of Vimal Shah, the peerless
prince among the builders of temples of the world. Another
worth seeing place, the guide shows is the Hathisala, or Elephant
Room housing the statues of huge elephants wrought in white
marble and fittingly caparisoned -- a grand spectacle that recalls
to the memory, the Iravatham of Devendra. It also houses the
life-size statues of Vimal Shah, the builder with the members
of his family. Ironically, the entrance leading to the rare world
of enchantment is quite unimpressive and does not herald the
luxurious banquet, the interior readily serves to every visitor,
nor does any tower piercing into the blue skies to lure the
viewers from distance. The sober exterior belies the wealth of
interior ornamentation. Its uniqueness does not end there, but
begins with the mysterious genesis of its construction.

According to the legend, the builder Vimal Shah const-
structed 360 temples and dedicated them all to the 23rd Tirthan-
kar by name Parsvanath at Kumbharia, about 3 kms off Ambaji
a shrine as popular as Tirupati Balaji temple for Gujaratis.
And Ambica was his house-hold deity and the Guardian Goddess
of Gujaratis. At a particular ceremonial ritual, Ambica was
displeased and ordered him to fly for life. Apprehending formi-
dable consequences, he plunged into the crypt of Ambaji
temple and emerged unscathed at Abu running all along the
subterranean passage. Ambica's anger was appeased only
when he destroyed all but 5 of 360 temples. Later, when Her
anger was subsided, she advised him in dream to build a temple
at Dilwara and dedicate it to the first Tirthankar, Sri Adinath.
Though delighted, he had to please an impud ic Paramara
ruler in whose domain Abu lay then. In addition, the king
was a sectarian, averse to Jainism. Knowing the greed—the
Achilles heel of the king, a pretentious theist, he offered to
cover the ground he needed for building the temple with silver
coins. It was a temptation too powerful and irresistible for
the lewd king to withstand. The offer got royal sanction,
and soon thousands of persons-technical and non-technical
immersed in the divine task of construction, consuming billions
and millions of rupees for getting the present shape—a master
piece in stone making even Viswakarma, the celestial architect
gape and gaze and leave the precincts with heavy heart, muttering, 'I could have designed the heavenly mansions better, if I had seen this group before I started.'

TEJPAL TEMPLE

Another superb specimen of sculptural art lying adjacent is called Tejpal Mandir, built in 1231 by two brothers, called Vastupal and Tejpal, the ministers under Raja Vira Dhavala, an illustrious ruler of Gujarat. Though it shares many characteristic features of the Vimal Vashi's temple, it reveals a greater degree of craftsmanship and technical progress. The most remarkable feature of the temple that strikes the eye of the viewers is the marble pendant that adorns the dome of the porch. It is hanging from the ceiling like a cluster of lotuses semi-open, whose cups are so finely wrought that they appear to be almost transparent. In the principal cell is installed the image of Neminath the 22nd Jain Tirthankar. The courtyard contains 48 cells, each housing a Tirthankar. The elephant Gallery akin to one in Vimal Vasahi temple is embellished with a screen noted for its pierced stone trellises of unsurpassing beauty. This patron deserves unqualified praise for inextinguishable passion for perfection; for, he promised to the carvers rewards in silver and gold equal to the weight of marble filings. And he did.

KHARTAR VASIHI TEMPLE

This is located outside the compound; but its glory and history are all the more great and awe-inspiring, rather undreamt of by any in the world. It evokes instant homage to the divine sculptors, whose dedication is second to none but to itself, for they were no mere hired manual labourers, but belong to the divine community of artisans. They were as inspired as the patrons. In token of their matchless devotion, they built a temple of their own, using the discarded material. In their leisure at it. What a dedication! Neither human ear has heard, nor the eye witnessed such devotion, and the like of which
never exists anywhere in any world, nor in any age. What is more, those rare specimen dedicated that three storeyed marve-
llous temple to their Guru by name Khatargacha, and so it is
known as Khatargacha temple, or artisan temple.

The other two were built by Bhimshah and the specia-
ality lies in the fact that the idol of, Pitalhar temple was made of
brass and weighs 4000 kgs. Besides feastings the eyes and souls
of the devotees thus, the present day Jain philanthropists in
charge of maintaining this group are catering to the visiting
pilgrims by giving free accommodation etc.

Among others of itinerant interest drawing pious pilg-
rims and joyous sight-seers, mention must be made of Nakklake,
an enchanting artificial sheet of blue water of idyllic beauty
with tiny man-made islets inside, scattered artistically and surro-
unded by temples and stately palatical architectural beauties.
The palm trees jutting above the surface of water against the
backdrop of the picturesque hills lends a romantic air to the
entire environs, It has a small pier supplying boats and laun-
ches for cruising. The spectacle of ethereal chams that mellow-
as it were, with the setting sun in the dusk keep the visitor,s
speechless.

Yet, it has something more to fascinate and lift them
to higher planes. According to the legend, it was dug by gods
with their nails—nakh. Hence the name. It appears that once
gods were in terrible dread of a cruel demon, who caused the
stopping of all sacrificial rites by his overbearing acts. The
distressed gods sought the help of Brahma, who counselled them
to take refuge at the holy Abu and undergo austerities to tide
over the calamity. They at once field to Abu and to screen
themselves from the diabolical trickeries of their foe, they dug
a pit with their nails during their sojourn there. Thus came
into existence this lake, which by its multifarious potentialities
acquired a name for special attraction and intrest to the visitors.
SUNSET POINT

It lies at about a kilometre and a half from the busy bazaar. Here for the convenience and luxury the viewers, rows of seats and a beautiful platform are arranged to watch the spectacle of the setting sun in all his glory. The visitors experience thrills of several kinds at the gradual transforming of the sun into a huge ball of fire simultaneously painting the azure sky before sinking into the unknown depths. A sight indeed! There are many other places of great charm and special significance, like Palanpur Point, Byley's walk, Devangan, Anadhra Point etc., but limitation of space is resorting to a stop. The tantalising view of crimson colours of dusk, kissing the plains lush green on the horizon captivates the spectators for long.

BRAHMA KUMARIS VISWA VIDYALAYA:

The visit will be incomplete and pleasures robbed, if a passing reference at least is not made to one unique spiritual organisation—the Prajapita Brahma Kumaris Ishwariya Viswa Vidyalaya, housed in Pandava Bhavan located on Subash Marg. It is the Head Quarters of the world famous international organisation striving for the moral and spiritual upliftment of mankind, through 500 cdd service centres in India and hundreds of similar ones in foreign countries, such as U.K., Germany, Canada, Australia, Guyana, Mauritius, Hongkong, Trinidad, Zambia, Nigeria etc. This imposing, grand edifice situated amidst the Nature’s bounteous greenery stands as model of modern architectural marvel and lifts the hearts of the visitors with its vast exterior charmingly decorated with symbols, and a clock atop, serving as crest jewel as it were, to it. It houses the main office and Conference Hall. The artistically furnished Hall with sophisticated audiovisual equipment and multicoloured giant size illustrations adorning the immaculate white walls and well-kept corridors together with its spick & span greeting the eye transport the visitor to the veritable Brahma Loka for a while and brings him back to this mundane world purged of all the gross and dross sticking on to his body. With such inexhaustibly irresistible loveliness, s. p. rb rare bliss ethereal emanating
from every frame of its construction, it impresses everyone that it is fit to be the apex office of interplanetary organisation even. Scores of white garbed cheerful personnel in charge of several ennobling tasks wring veneration by their indefatigable individual attention paying to every visitor. Their spotless white attire and serene visages, beaming with inner satisfaction, born of their wholehearted commitment to divine ministrations speak volumes of the infectious humanism they are treasuring up to share out to those yearning minds and starving souls. Though the rich spiritual nectar exuding from their mouths is nothing new nor extra-ordinary, the method of their approach and presentation make the listeners awe-stuck and spell bound throughout. The nucleus and locus of their central message is nothing more, nor superior to the quintessence of the all-adorable Hinduism, but con i. g as it is from Sir d, and put in exotic bottles with eye-catching wrappers, it enthrals anyone and demands recognition. Indeed their infinite zeal and inexhaustible divine inspiration for taking mankind to a better world of bliss deserve mute submission and whole-hearted veneration by every man endowed with sagacity and compassionate outlook.

Abounding in a wide variety of such rich marvellous pieces of eternal interest, Mount Abu welcomes the visitors round the year and elevates them to higher regions for bliss and contentment. Sure, no hill resort holds such inherent potentialities, nor likely challenge comparison to this in any aspect, as a matter fact. It is second to none but to it self. A visit is a must and a single experience beckons many a recurrence! On and again!!

ACCOMMODATION

It is a Summer Resort and a pilgrimage centre for ages. Many Dharmasalas and Modern hotels are there catering boarding and lodging facilities at all hours.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONVEYANCE FOR KURUKSHETRA</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>AIR PORT</strong>: New Delhi is the Nearest Air port.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>RAIL HEAD</strong>: It is the Rail head on the N &amp; Rly between Bombay and Delhi.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bus Route</strong>: From Delhi and other principal cities all types of vehicles are available round the clock.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Accommodation</strong>: Being a well developed town ship, it provides Lodging and boarding facilities in dharmasalas etc.</td>
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UNIQUENESS:

Among the most ancient Saktipeethas extant in the state of Gujarat, Ambika of Arasur, occupies a place enviable and has a history unrivalled. She is popularly known throughout Gujarat and Maharashtra as Ambaji, and is as famous as Tirupati Balaji to ardent devotees living in India and abroad. Though there are two more Saktipeethas—one at Chunaval called goddess Bala, and the other at Pavgadh called Kali, they pale into significance before this goddess, worshipped by lacs of devotees belonging all castes and religions. Its catholicity is evidenced by countless worshippers belonging to other religions, like Muslims, Parsis, Jains, Buddhists, besides millions of Hindus of all castes and classes. This place is sanctified by the presence of Mother Sakti’s left breast that fell on Mahavishnu’s cutting the dead body of Sati with His Sudarsana Chakra when carried by RudraShankar, on her burning herself in the sacrificial fire, due to unbearable humiliation heaped upon her by none but her own father Dhakshha.

It is this Goddess whose grace enabled Rukmini to secure Krishna as her Pati. It is here on this punyabhumi tonsorial operation for Sri Krishna, the eighth incarnation of God was made with all due fervour. It is here the vanquished King Suratha did penance to regain his kingdom and obtained it with Mother’s grace. And it is this Ambika in her fierce aspect that punished the greatest builder Vimalshah for not acknowledging her glory. It is this Goddess that fulfilled the desire of Rana Pratap in coming out unscathed from Idargadh, when besieged by the formidable Moghul emperor Akbar. It
is in vicinity of this, the holy river Saraswati rises near Arbuda Parvatha, an integral part of Aravalli range deemed more ancient that the Himalayas. It is adjacent to the world renowned temple dedicated to Eswar, known as Koteswar Mahadev.

As irony would have it, here there is neither idol, nor painting of any kind of the holy MOTHER, but only a yantra is installed and it is given the appearance of the goddess with the help of shimmering dress and floral decoration. The consummate artistry of the priests—the Nagar Brahmans makes the yantra appear as the veritable all-graceful, all-adorable, all-loving MOTHER Sakti that joins the palms of ardent devotees at its very sight. Obeisance to this conventional practice that it has become primarily responsible to bringing lacs of devotees through out the year and making a house hold and much venerated deity, even by the incarnated like the Almighty God Sri Krishna. For every Gujarati, she is the Pratyaksha daivam and is answering to every call round the clock. Mighty rulers and renowned saint-singers are drawn towards her feet, since time immemorial and that made this holy kshetra one of the most visit worthy shrines both by Sakteyas and bhaktas of every sect and brand.

SOURCES:

This famous shrine and the glory of the MOTHER have adorned several pages of our scriptures and occupied a covetable place in every form of literature as it. The copiousness of literary evidence testifies to the uniqueness of this all-compassionate MOTHER drawing on kneels several religions. And Puranas like Kalikapurana, Skandapurana, Saraswatiapurana, Markandeyapurana, and sacred treatises like Devigita, Devibhagavatha, Tantrachudamani, Rasamala, Tirihakalpataru, Viramitrodaya, Tirthaparakasa, Bhagavatha, Mahabharata, Anandagarbha, besides Rigveda have eulogised the mightiest of this MOTHER and her glory. Every book worthy of mention advocating Sakti cult has given considerable place to this Saktipeetha.
ANTIQUITY:

The origin of this holy shrine takes us to the Vedic age, precisely to the time of Daksha, father of Sati, the inseparable spouse of Mahadev. Devibhagavata embodies an elaborate account of Daksha's despicably unpardonable act of inviting all the adorable personages—mukkotidevathas except Mahadev—his own son-in-law, though he is one of the legitimate recipients of yagnaphala. Sakti, wringing consent from relentless Mahadev, visited her father performing a great yagna on a scale superbly grand and ardour commendable. Daksha's unpardonable temper went to the extreme of insulting Sati in the presence of venerable gods and Maharishis. Unable to bear the fire of dishonour, Sati burnt herself in the sacrificial fire. Learning it, Mahadev sent anon his emissary for the destruction whole yaga; and when his ungovernable rage reached the zenith, he started the all-destructive Tandava-nritya with corpse of Sati on his shoulders. Sure, it would end in mahapralaya. Fearing the obnoxiously unending disastrous consequences Lord Mahavishnu cut the corpse of Sati with his powerful Sudarsana chakra into several pieces. And falling into different places, they turned into stones. When Mahadeva's rage cooled down, he turned them into Saktipeethas of unique significance. The left breast of Sati fell at Arasam or Arasur; and that spot later was sanctified by building a shrine and installing a yantra. And this came to be worshipped as Ambika.

Due to abundant grace showered on the ardent devotees, this MOTHER became very popular throughout the length and breadth of Bharat Khand. And since then bhaktas in numbers countless are worshipping her passionately for crossing the samsarasagara. The Nagar Brahmins who installed the yantra and started propagating Sakti cult are being patronised by rulers from time to time. Endowments are made for the continuance of regular prayer service with elaborate rituals due to them. Many, ranging from ascetics to hedonists of all major religions have become worshippers of this Jagajanani, and as
their desires are fulfilled, popularity is gaining ascendancy over other Saktipeethas established elsewhere. Here are a few legends that cemented the faith of worshippers in her Omnicompasion. As the stories have left concrete proofs, they have fortified the faith of the sceptics and atheists too.

RANA PRATAP'S EPISODE;

The matchless valour and inimitable tenacity of Rana Pratap, the Rajput prince ruling Idargadh is well known, and he was immortalised by his contemporaries for his relentless opposition to Akbar, his sworn enemy. During his self-exile, he decided to see his Rani in the palace, but knew it was humanly impossible to hoodwink the Moghul army besieging the fort and was watching his movements with such vigilance that none but miracle could enable him to accomplish his wish. The brave prince started his secret visit on a dark night. As fortune departing from him, wooed the Moghuls, misfortune appeared in the form of heavy down pour and barred his way with a flooded river. His nocturnal venture thus further dispirited him. But his strong resolve sought refuge at the feet of Ambika, the compassionate MOTHER. Praying devoutly to Ambaji with a pledge to place his pet sword at Her feet, he embarked upon his venture. Would the all-merciful MOTHER, ever let her devotee down? Never! Outwitting the strict vigilance Officers and his contingent, he went into the fort, met his Rani, spent time with her and returned, as planned. Unscathed at it. Attributing his success to the MOTHER'S grace, he placed his life-saving sword at the fact of MOTHER. That great sword thus offered by the mighty Rajput Prince is now in the temple, and held in high esteem as a relic of a warrior prince, who offered it in token of his devotion and recognition of her powers.

VIMALSHAH'S EPISODE:

The famous Vimal shah of Sourastra, a minister under Solanki rulers was a devotee and builder of unparalleled renown.
Gujarat history shows that no single individual had built so great a number of shrines and such masterpieces at it, as he did. The Dilwara temple on Mount Abu, his immortal contribution to religion is standing now as a sweet poem in white marble that makes even the divine architect Viswakarma confess his inability to come nearer to it in sculptural marvels. It is recorded that his passion for building was monumental and it was appeased only when he completed 360 temples—all of unique excellence and unheard of beauty. As his unquenchable thirst for Jainism was so great that he built 360 Jain temples alone at Kumbaria, only 3 miles off the Ambaji shrine. When his hopeless zeal reached the apex, he discarded Ambika and at a particular festival, he incurred her wrath in not acknowledging her grace. Soon the universal MOTHER asserted and saw him bite the dust—she destroyed 355 out of 360 temples of great wonder. Apprehending danger to his life, Vimalshah jumped into the crypt of Ambaji temple and ran all through the underground passage till he emerged on the Mount Abu. She regretted when she returned to normalcy, and she advised him in dream to build one temple on Abu and dedicate it to Adinath, the illustrious Jain. Thus came into existence, Dilwara shrine, the incomparable stone temple and the all-time wonder in the realm of sculpture. Needless to say, all but due to the grace of Ambaji. Is not Her fearful aspect too be reckoned with?

THE COWHERD'S EPISODE:

At a distance of 5 kms. from the temple, there is a hill by name Gabbar. It is believed that its inner chamber is frequented by Ambaji for rest and recreation. There she sits on a swing and enjoys listening to songs. Once a cowherd boy entered all on a sudden and asked wages for tending her cow along with his own. He said that as it got mixed up with his cows unnoticed, and tended it for days. Out of compassion for the innocent boy, she gave barley instead of coins. Disappointed urchin threw them away in utter despair on coming out of
the portal. When he leisurely examined one of them that got stuck up to the cloth into which he received, he learnt that they were made of gold. Anon he ran to collect those scattered but could find none, nor even that Supreme Goddess who gave him. Although he was disappointed twice, it brings out the MOTHER’S boundless mercy for her children.

HISTORICITY:

There are many inscriptions that narrate numerous endowments made to this outstanding shrine by mighty rulers either at her behest or by her grace. And they date back to 8th century A.D. Credit goes to Gujarat for having nurtured Pasupata cult of Lakulisa, the supposed incarnation of Lord Siva, born at Kayavaroah in about the 2nd century A.D. He was responsible for establishing his Pasupata Math at Somnath. As worship of Sakti being closely connected with that of Siva, there is abundant scope for the former to reach all corners of the world soon. Story goes that Siddaraja Jaysimha installed 1,000 Siva lingas around Sahasralinga lake, which he filled with the waters of river Saraswati, in addition to establishing of 108 peethas with Goddess Harsiddha in the centre, which is another name for Ambaji. Though Sakti is worshipped in countless aspects and names like Lalita, Bala, Tulja, Sri kula and Ambika in Gujarat, the worship of Ambaji takes precedence over others.

This worship was popularised by Nagar Brahmins, who enjoyed political ascendency in 8th century A.D. It is said that the present temple was built by them then. The Nagar Brahmins as records corroborate worshipped Ambaji in an especial manner worthy of emulation. They took out special sanghas in Sravan and Bhadrapad, the most auspicious months for the MOTHER and celebrated festivals in grandiose manner that brought them honour and recognition. Their present position and prestige are entirely due to the ardour they displayed then, and it is still continuing. The rulers that succeeded them ruling the Danta territory, as it was called then, accelerated it with fitting endowments and building activities. Many of the ksh-
atraps, Vallabhi and solanki kings were Saivas, and endeavoured
their best to propagate Sakti and Pasupata cults with equal ferv
our. So it is no wonder that for four centuries from 10th to 14th
Gujarat became the strong hold of Siva and Sakti cults.
The temples of Somanath and Ambaji stand as the exemplary hold
they had over both mass and class of bygone days.
THE TEMPLE:
The present temple lies on the terrace of a building of
unusual dimensions. Renovation is undertaken and there are
proofs to show that a shrine of architectural marvel would soon
emerge making the devotees gape at its beauty and glory on
completion. The entire space now is littering, as it were, with
building materials that there is no adequate space even for
forming queues to reach the feet of the MOTHER. Yet, the
unending influx of devout pilgrims and ardent worshippers
standing in long rows, speak volumes of compassionate fasci-
nation Ambaji has on her devotees. The Gujarati type of
making up the deity with colourful flowers etc., bends the head
of every visitor invariably. There are many types of prayer
services to the deity, but the one offered at 12 noon is of great
significance. There is great craze on the part of the visitors
to avail this spectacular ritual — aratī and they wait for hours in
the enclosed terrace. In the evenings, Durga Saptasati is
chanted with unbounded fervour. For preparing naivedya and
prasada only ghee is used, and celibacy is strictly observed here.
Impurity of any kind, or irreverence of unrecognisable type too
is said to enrage the Goddess. So, utmost devotion seems
surring from both visages and demeanour of the visitors, whose
number crosses several thousands every day. The Navaratri
of Asvin and Chaitra are sacred to the Goddess, and during
these holy days, many types of devotional activities like singing
garbas, performing Bhavias, establishing of Kumbhas take
place, when the entire devout Gujarati people participate lustily.
Together with these, on the full and new moon Astami days
of every month, several kinds of special Pujas are offered to
the MOTHER. So, every day is a special day, rather every
every moment an auspicious moment in this holy shrine, which is only
to be seen and enjoyed then clothed in words. The other
object of worship here is Lord Ganesh. His huge size and
shape attract one and all, and in fact, he is worshipped first on
reaching the temple. The innumerable garlands and unquench-
able camphor flames before him testify to the devotion, the
people are extending to this, Vigna Vinayaka, the first son of
Mother Sati called Ambaji here.
UNIQUENESS:

Pushkar is the only earthly abode extant of the Creator-Brahma, visited by millions of devotees year after year, since time immemorial. This is a Tirtha Kshetra, and in particular Brahma Kshetra, deemed to be the most holiest spot, either for Brahmopasana to fulfilling the earth desires, or for Brahmalokaprapati. This has several other unique plus points that raise the glory of this divya kshetra to the envy of other kshetras dedicated to other gods of similar significance. Starting from the Vedas down to sthalapuranas, many treatises enshrine unaccountable anecdotes concerning the greatness of this place, due to association of divinities like Brahma, and venerable sages like Viswamitra etc., hence pride of place goes to this holy place. Mahabharata says, “Just as Krishna Paramatma is deemed first, deserving the first place of honour among men and gods, so is Pushkar among the thirthas.” The waters of this thirta are imbued with divinity that sins committed from birth onwards, either due to ignorance, or under instigation of ego are said to be destroyed by a mere single bath; and what is more, any type of incurable skin disease gets cured by a single sip.

It witnessed the wedding of Brahma with Gayatri, while the first wife Savitri was still alive; it is here Viswamitra sacrificed his tapasakfi to creating Swarga for Trisanku; it is the self same spot that bears witness to his amorous life with the heavenly damsel Menaka; it is here Brahma killed Vajranabha, the formidable Yama to children with mere dropping of lotus; it is here the first Vanamahostav was held in honour of
Brahma by Vanadevata for accepting permanent settlement here; it is in this Punya thirtha, Rama, Lakshmana and Sita had their ceremonial bath; it is here King Parikshit performed Sarpayag; it is from here the sacred Gayatri mahamantra came from Viswamitra; it is this place that changed Viswamitra from Rajarshi into Brahmarshi; it is this place that saw the misfortune of Brahma’s losing his fifth head at the hands of Maheswar and also his legitimate high place among the Trinity; and his worship forbidden too. By and large, it is this sacred spot that witnessed the glorious rise and nefarious fall of Brahma, the first among the Trio, together, with Viswamitra’s fluctuating fortunes.

SOURCES:

Sacred scriptures right from the Vedas to the local histories, recount an infinite number of sports of the Lord Creator, and also Maharshi Viswamitra elaborately. Particular references are made in the Rig Veda, Aitareya Brahmana; Markandeya and Padma puranas; Sthalamahatmyas together with Mogili Parnamas and Rajput Princop Tamrapratras. They visualise its importance from the past to the modern times, some with exact dates and facts.

ANTIQUITY:

As it is predominantly a Brahma Kshetra covering Brahmana’s life from the first visit to revelation of awe-inspiring sports, appropriate beginning starts with his Bhupradakshna. Padma Purana embodies an elaborate account about this. It appears that when he was going round the world chanced to visit this eye-filling and soul-lifting divyarama, now lying adjacent to Pushkar. And it recreated before his mental eye the apurva sobha of Nandanavana. Enraptured by the luxuriant foliage and bounteous growth of multi-coloured sweet-scented flowers and overhanging delicious fruits—all seemed bent upon offering, as it were, sumptuous banquet to his eye and
soul; and Nature dancing to the tunes of merifluous music of carefree birds, he became totally oblivious of the surroundings. Realising him to be Brahma, Vanadevatha regaled him with the intrinsic charms and dulcet melody of her flora and fauna at the height of their gorgeous beauty. In that mood of inebriety, Pitamaha asked the Vanadevatha to name any boon to be granted to her on the spot. Devout Vanadevatha modestly solicited him to stay there with them for ever; for, dwelling of such august divinity amidst them would itself a fortune non-pareil, and wishes reach consummation even before they were baptised. Contented Vidhatha said ‘Thadastu’. The infinite ecstatic joy of the Nature manifested itself there in sumptuous colour and symphonic sweet music from every inch, as evidenced by showers of flowers, and falling of ripe fruits at his feet. It was a veritable Vanamahotsava never occurred in the past, nor would repetition be possible in any tense of time. Then Brahma made this spot as his earthly abode. He remained there for centuries, when beatitude reigned supreme to the utmost gratification of Vanadevatha.

One day there emanated from his mansion ear-splitting sounds, all ran inside to find out the reason, and to their surprise, learnt that it was due to the falling of lotus from his hand, which he was invariably holding since his settlement here. Brahma then narrated the story of one dreadful demon by name Vajranabha, who was causing incalculable harm to the children and whom he killed with his lotus chanted and chartered. The place where the lotus fell came to be known as the Pushkar Thirtha. The Pushkar-chanted lotus soon after killing the awful demon rehounded at three places, at every one of them water gushed forth from the earth. These three places are lying within a circuit of 6 Km & they go by the names of Jyesta Madhyama, and the Kanishtha Pushkar. In each of them the images of Brahma, Vishnu and Maheswar were installed respectively and are worshipped since then.

Once Brahma decided to perform a sacrifice at Jyestha.
According to tradition, the performer’s wife should sit beside him at Yagnavedika, but Savitri, his wife delayed her arrival in reaching the altar at the auspicious moment, and that moment should not be slipped by. So Brahma asked Devendra to secure for him a fitting spouse to meet that exigency. Procuring a Gopakanya, Devendra threw her into the mouth of the Cow, for purification. On her coming out reborn, she was named Gayatri. Anon, marrying her, Brahma completed the yaga in scheduled time. Just at this moment Savitri came and finding Gayatri beside her Lord, she dumped a volley of curses, though met with counters fittingly, she left for penance hurling the most potent and awful curse on Brahma that he would never be worshipped anywhere; and it came true. This accounts for the absence of temples for Brahma elsewhere. But grateful devotees have been holding fairs and festivals here annually in a grandiose manner. And Karthik Pournami sees their exuberance and religious fervour reaching the pinnacle. Millions of devotees congregate on this Punyathithi here to offer their prayers. Moreover, when the religious fanaticism of Moghul kings demolished old shrines, the theist Rajput princes and philanthropic public renovated and rebuilt them with additions that only bears testimony to their achanchala bhakti in Bramha.

This place also witnessed some other misfortunes of Brahma. Another legend brings out Brahma’s inglorious act that registers his further fall. It begins with a dispute between Brahma and Vishnu for supremacy. When the argument reached the climax, suddenly there appeared a column of bright light between the two and both inferred rightly too that it was Siva. Listening to two sides, Siva then asked them to find out the lower and upper ends of that luminous column. Vishnu taking the form of boar, started digging the ground to reach the lower end, but could not; returning confessed his inability. But Brahma, who went up on his mount the Swan lied on his return unashamedly, fabricating evidence with the aid of a Ketaki that was falling from the top. Siva on insisting him to give out the truth, he confused and learning it his deprived him
of his worship in temples with a terrible curse. Thus he los,
his honour due to his position in the Trinity also. Later
Brahma performed severe penance on the Gandamadana
parvatha for expiation of sin. Soon his worship was restored
and regular and due honour was accorded. Pacified, Siva
solicited his services as Charoiteer during his killing of loka-
bhainkara Tripura, when Vishnu turned himself into an arrow,
with which Tripura was done to death. Again on some
other occasion star-crossed, he fell out with Siva. Exasperated,
Siva plucked out one of his five heads with his sharp nail.
When tempers returned to normalcy, Siva, realising the gravity
of sin—Brahmahatya, made Bhupradakshana dipping in sacred
waters and sipping thirtha in every shrine and with kapala
skull bowl in his hands; and only in Kasi his kapala disappeared
in token of dissolution of sin. The present Kapala Thirtha
stands in proof of this incident and also publishes to the world
that Brahma had five heads prior to this ill-fated anecdote.
Though they left some dark spots on his adorable form and
immaculate career, he is venerated as the first created and
also the Creator of world. Moreover, he imparted Brahma
Vidya to sage Atharvan and the highest knowledge to Narada.
In addition to this, he claims the discipleship of Devendra and
Virochana an eminent celestial denizen. Apart from this,
almost all the theories of world creation are attributed to him.
He is called the Pitamaha, and Puranas and Upanishads
eulogised him as the highest Brahman endowed with several
powers. He created the worlds after the great Pralaya and it
is from him the Vedas emerged and also many mahamantras.
Hence the first place among the Trio. The three-gunas-Rajas,
Sattva and Tamas are represented by the Trimurti-Brahma,
Vishnu and Rudra, and as such he stands for Rajasaguna
Prayers are offered first to him both by asuras and suras too.

As most of his sports are revealed on this sacred soil,
it is given the highest honour, and being the only Brahma
Kshetra, unprecedented glory attends to it. Hence the emphasis
by the sage Pulastya that Pushkar is the first and foremost
among the thirthas, and he ends his long narration to Pitamaha Bhisma that thirthas begin with Pushkar. A dip is indispensable, and only the fortunate avail this rare opportunity. Above all, it is said by eminent authorities on numerous occasions that bathing in other thirthas like Ganges, Prayaga etc., or pilgrimage to four Dhamas—Badari, Puri, Dwarka and Rameswar does not confer merit, or expiate sins, unless Pushkar is visited for sacred bath. After a visit and dip in Pushkar alone one is found awakened by welcome speeches of heavenly damsels in the vimana carrying him to heaven. Hence the fittest appellation—Pushkar Raj i.e., the king of Thirthas, which it acquired by the presence of Brahma there eternally as promised to the Vanadevatha on his first visit, and is honourably kept up by him.

VISWAMITRA’S EPISODE:

Balašanda of Ramayana brings out vividly sage Viswamitra’s life with all the ups and downs occurred on this divya-bhumi. His career starts here with selection of this place exuding sublimity for doing penance, which he ultimately made his permanent settlement. While he was carrying on his meditation and spiritual activities, king Trisanku driven out of heaven for entering in physical form approached him for fulfillment of his long-cherished ambition of going to heaven in his mortal frame and living with the same among the gods. Utilising his tapas-sakti, he created a new heaven for Trisanku; alas! it exposed the vulnerability of heaven’s power. A clear case of his spectacular victory! Heaven then made a compromise with him by assuring Trisanku a fit place in heaven. On another occasion, Sunahps-pa an unfortunate muni balaka unwilling to be sacrificed at a yaga by Ambaśisha, whose sacrificial cow was stolen by Indra sought Viswamitra’s compassionate assistance to save his life. Pitying him, he asked every one of his sons to substitute for Sunahps-pa. On refusal, he cursed them and by giving two special gathas to Indra, he saved the saranagatha. This is yet another colourful feather in his cap.
Now begins the fluctuations of fortune in his life. He started penance for brahmarishi padavi. Devendra fearing harm to his position, sent Menaka, the ravishing piece of beauty among the celestial dancers for disturbing his tapas. Her external dazzle and internal lust scored victory over the airy tapas; he lost poise, and drank in the transient glamour for a decade, which ended with the birth of Sakuntala. Realising the commission, he started again. This time Rambha, the top beauty noted for irresistible glamour tried at the instance of Devendra, but could not make any dent. So she went with curses to add to her discomfiture. When his tenacity, sat atop the Everest, Brahma descending, made him Brahmarnshi, but no effect. Adamant Viswamitra wanted Vasistha, the most competent authority to declare and acknowledge him as such. Vasistha, when pressurised by gods, rescinding his previous animosity, pronounced as aspired, and they lived amicably thereafter. A great achievement indeed!

Another notable event in his life was his acquisition of skill mastery over Sasarpri Vidya, which he learned from Maharshi Jamadagni. "This mahavidya is suffused with special powers and blesses the possessor with extra-ordinary mental brilliance and enables him to compose the best and highest forms of literature like verse etc. On acquisition, Viswamitra gave out the Gayatri mahamantra, considered to be the quintessence of the Vedas. Such all-potent chants normally originate from the intuition of one divya tapasvi, who possess the highest Brahmavarchas and spiritual brilliance of rare kind. This sacred and potent chant which came from him after years of penance, is memorised and recited by millions of orthodox Hindus thenceforward. All these monumental victories were achieved by him only when he dwelt on this punya dharitri. The holiness of the soil complemented abundantly and made him an illustrious sage among the renowned sages and seers. Above all, the divine damsel-Menaka delivered Sakuntala during her liaison with him, who in turn presented the greatest and most valorous prince, whose exploits and victories in every realm of human activity brought indelible glory and inexhaustible repu-
ation to the sub-continent and it was called after him —
Bharata Khanda.

THE TEMPLE:

The ancient shrines of unparalleled spiritual opulence
were destroyed by Moghul Emperors, particularly Aurangzeb,
the religious zealot of low breed, but were renovated and rebuilt
by Rajput princes, whose magnanimous patronage of art and
architecture is now beckoning the attention of the visitors
through sculptural marvels in every temple worthy to be visited.
Amongst the existing many, the temples of Badrinarayana,
Varahaji, Atmeswar Mahadeo and Savitri, besides Brahma
shrine are of great importance. The present temple of Brahma
was built by one great philanthropist and thiest called Gokul
Chand Parekh who served as Minister under Scindhia in 1809.
The Varahaji temple was rebuilt by Arnoja in 1120-50, but
repaired by Sagar, the brother of Rana Pratap of Chittoo.
And when it tasted the wrath of Jahangir and Aurangzeb,
Maharaja Jaising II of Jaipur renovated and made many addi-
tions. Badrinath temple likewise was rebuilt by the Thakur of
Kharva of Ajmir in 1809. The Atmeswar Mahadeo shrine was
renovated by Goomanti Rao in 1809. A purohit of great name,
who worked under Ajit Singh of Marwar rebuilt Savitri temple
in 1687. In addition to these ancient ones renovated, there it
one modern temple called Rangaji temple built by Ramanuja
Vaishnavas, and it attracts all types of visitors.

THE BRAHMA TEMPLE:

It is the star attraction among the existing ones, and
visitors, both ardent thiests and aesthetes visit this invariably
after a dip in the Pushkar. The image of Brahma feasts the
eyes of the visitors with its huge dimensions and rich floral
decorations. His consorts Savitri and Gayatri heighten his
grandeur by taking positions on either side of Chaturmukha-
Brahma. The idol of Sanakasanandanas are installed near the
dome and they bring veneration by virtue of their position and
divinity they attained. The month of Kartik witnesses the
glory of Lord by performance of several kinds of special pujas
and eye-filling decorations. Lakhs of persons of every breed
visit and offer prayers to this august divinity, deeming him
as Prajapati—the Creator of worlds and also father of both
Suras and Asuras, besides creating the Vedas—the repositories
of all knowledge. A visit eincaptates, and a prayer yields instant bliss.

THE GHATS:

Pushkar is the sacrificial altar of Prajapati, and many others of every class performed yâghes here from time to time. The Pushkar lake has several famous ghats associated with the great deeds of the denizens of celestial and terrestrial worlds. Of them, Brahma Ghat, Gaug, Kapalamochana Ghat, Badi Ghat and Swarup Ghat are famous and lure pilgrims by their inherent sanctity and anecdotes odd.

THE SWARUP GHAT:

It is one of the important Ghats, and its strange history draws pilgrims in huge numbers. Every visitor invariably takes bath here. It is said that one prince by name Narahar Rao visited this, when he was on his hunting expedition. Attracted by the crystal clear water, he took a little of it in his hands to drink. And lo! the white spots--marks of leprosy soon disappeared. With a mere touch alone! And a permanent cure at it. Immediately, he ordered a big ghat with strong and broad embankment to be added to facilitate the visitors for safe and easy bath in this Pushkar. Since then it is believed to be a boon to lepers, and others suffering from skin diseases. Huge numbers greet the sight throughout the year.

The other ghats too have their own odd yet sacred kinship with some celebrity of the other, and so thronging of people during their visits is observed from dawn to dusk. These ghats are famous for other purposes also. Many pilgrims visit only to performing sâdâhas on these ghats, believing that every performance yields inexhaustible merit. Even meditation or chanting of Brahma's name sitting on any one of the ghats is assured of countless merits and infinite bliss; for the Vanajpara of the Mahabharata elaborates its sanctity, and antiquity in such glowing terms that a mere sight of this august thirtha--Pushkar ensures Kaivalya; it ends the narration with: “Everything was pure in Krita Age; in Treta, Pushkar became sacred; in Dwapara, Kurukshetra; and in the Kali, Ganga became sacred.”
MATA VAISHNODEVI MANDIR

The Goddess of Trikuta parvat

LOCATION:

‘Himalayas’, etymologically means—abodes of snow—manchu mandirs—regions abound in ice. Its denotation ends there, giving place to connotation—opening a vista of the spectacle of memorable past encompassing almost all segments of Hindu life. So it means many things to Indians in particular. They are the Bhagavannilayas, the heartland of gods; rishivatikamayas—retreats of sage—seers nadimulas—sources of rivers; Oashadi khanis—fertile grounds of medicinal plants; tapobhoomis—places of meditation etc., since time immemorial. They are the integral part of Hindu culture, and it is impossible to imagine the place of our glorious India minus them. The unparalleled cultural eminence that our Pumya Bharat proudly boasts, rather rightfully claims emanates only from these splendidly awe—some; immaculately pure; spotlessly lusturous white, highest mountains piercing into high heaven, as it were, to display its indescribable charm, manifested in the captivating majesty of lofty ice-capped peaks, lovely vast serene lakes, evergreen colourful deep, valleys—the Nature’s bounteous ethereal beauty in its pristine form, the very sight, or remembrance brings in a wisp of cool, fragrant mountain breeze that lifts the soul, exhilarates the physical frame and consoles the afflicted.

Moreover, this mighty mountain with its lengthiest range and highest peaks too has occupied a covetable place in geography by gaining ascendency over other similars, existing in other continents like the Alps in Europe, the Andes in South America, the Appalachian in North America etc. Historically,
religiously, commercially and strategically too, its position is 
unique and enviable. By virtue of possessing several untrodden 
peaks, it is during many nationals to try their best physical 
might in the realms of mountaineering and trekking. Ales 
their number is significantly smallest. With regard to the 
spiritual attraction it holds in store--it is immeasurably infinite. 
And it is inexhaustible, in every aspect. It is evidenced by the 
ever increasing influx of pilgrims and tourists round the year. 
The ancient shrines of universal veneration, like the much-
hallowed Kedarnath, Badarinath, Gangotri and Yamunotri and 
Amarnath have indeed brought undying fame to the country, 
and evergreen laurels to our culture. Due to the association 
with the august Trio, each of them has carved out a 
spectacular niche in the literature and religion and so held 
in the highest esteem since yugas. But, they are dedicated to 
Sri Maha Vishnu, Lord Maheshwar and river Goddesses, whereas 
Mata Vaishnodevi Mandir, enshrined in the Himalayan foot 
hills, precisely in the cave of Tribhuta mountain lying in the 
state of Jammu Tawi, is dedicated to the MOTHER goddess 
in her three manifestations of Maha Saraswati, Maha Lakshmi 
and Maha Kali. A rarity! A visit-worthy spot!! On any count!!!

Yatra to the MOTHER'S lotus feet is an arduous feat, 
calling forth one's stamina and patience. It is a test of endur-
arance; faith in movement, and devotion on all fours; for it is 
to be covered not by any automobile, but by trekking a long 
distance of 14 kms interspersed by creeping in a cave and wading 
through water. Yet, deemed most sacred and visit worthy.
Hasn't wisdom affirmed--harder the journey, greater the merit-
more difficult is the route, holier the shrine becomes? Sure, 
sugar tastes sweeter after biting the green chilli? Inspite of 
the hardships of walking, wading, creeping, millions of devotees 
of all castes and creeds, sexes and age-groups, and in and out 
of the season are visiting this most sacred shrine, either for 
soliciting favours, or thanks giving for the benefit enjoyed. 
This indeed is the sure index of its popularity and fame. Among 
the visiting devotees, people of Kashmir, Jammu Tawi, Haryana, 
Punjab and Rajasthan form the majority. Whoever they are

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whatever they are; from wherever they come, one can see the tremendous spirit of camaraderie as soon as they join the concourse of pilgrims at Katra, the base of the pilgrimage, as it were, and move along the entire route uttering "Jai Mata di" that reverbrate in the high hills and low valleys; undoubtedly waking up the inanimate too.

A little back-ground—the origin of this cave temple is all the more important at this stage. A glance arms one with faith that itself takes him on its viewless wings.

'ORIGIN:

The origin is steeped in antique traditional past. Scriptural evidence is too scanty, nor history embodies accounts worthy of mention. Though inscriptionsal proof eludes the grasp, sculptural evidence establishes the exact time, if applied. Any way, the story handed down from mouth to mouth is enough to draw the devotee to the feet of the MOTHER, since it is imbued with divine mysticism, with concrete proof on the walls of the cave.

It begins—Vaishnodevi was a creature of gods, sent to combat evil, and establish Dharma in the world, and as such she was different from every person in and around her home in the Trikut region, in the dim past. From infancy she had taken fancy for Sri Rama's ideals and developed devotion of a rare kind. Her dedication to Sri Rama grew faster than her age. When time came, she resolved to be celibate, and living for the cause of spiritual progress. Her spiritual maturity brought many admirers and reverent followers. Alas! it brought her 'Yamapasa' too. That veritable yamapasa darted from the lustful eyes of Bhairon, a powerful demon king of that region. Captivated by her ravishing beauty, he proposed matrimony. When it was turned down, he asserted himself and assumed demonic form to accomplish his lusty commerce by any means. Fearing adverse consequences, she fled to forests, but that rakshasadhama followed her every hill and dale, plain
and water across the Himalayas. At long last, she entered a dark, narrow cave for safety. A safe resort, for sure respite, she thought, but ere long she heard the diabolic peals of laughter and fiendish approach of Bhairon. Unable to contain herself, she emerged as an avenging angel, assuming her Bhadrakali-swarupa. And fell on him with all her might, like a mountain on rat. Poor Bhairon was crushed to death.

After the asura samhara, she made this dark cave her permanent home. And lived ever after carefree, enjoying the divine serenity hovering over, helping the meditation uninterrupted. But decided to lifting her children by conferring boons, and relieving from the clutches of grief. And last'y releasing from the cycle of births and deaths. So, one night stood in her compassionate form, in dream, before a picius brahmin and revealed her pious intention. And also the fact of her taking seat in Trikut Parvat. The devout brahmin saw then in a flesh three rock out images of the Goddesses, Kali, Lakshmi, and Saraswathi on the walls of a cave. He determined forth with to locate that cave, whose walls are embossed with the images of those adorable Goddess for prayers. He started his quest taking his daughter with him. They wandered days and nights, non-stop for days peering at the walls of every cave. Their long indefatiguable search at last took them to an area untread by humans so far. When continued till the end of a slope, they found suddenly a brilliant light in front—an unusual radiance at that place, and at that hour, miraculously at it. They proceeded in that direction like the three Wisemen of East journeying to Bathalhem at the birth of Jesus, the compassionate. Moreover, they found behind them terrifying darkness threatening to swallow them at once en masse if retreat made. Their onward march ended inside a cave.

And lo! the brahmin saw the self-same rock out images of the goddess of the wall. Destination reached. Relief greeted, Joy overflowed. Just then, he heard an aerial voice, “My dear son, you have come to the right spot. This is my seat and I have been living here since ages. Be you my deputy
to announcing to the world about my presence here and resolve
to come to the rescue of my bhaktas if approached with pure
devotion, pure heart and pious intention. And I will emancipate
them from the shackles of punarjanma". She vanished anon.
He obeyed the divine injunction at once, and became her first
priest. He thus made his life memorably useful by serving the
bhaktakoti, conducting regular pujas, and communicating the
MOTHER'S message. After him many officiated as priests,
and the sports of the MOTHER in relieving the deserving through
miracles went on and on with the passage of time, the glory of
the cave and the bounteous blessings of the Mother spread far
and wide, till the MOTHER became one of the pre-eminent of
Godesses and the temple as the much-sought after one in North
Western parts of India.

The munificent showering of blessings on her devotees
is so timeless and certain that soon she became the household
deity in the Himalayan region. As she withholds nothing, nor
denies anything to the devotee at any time, or in any place, none
returns depressed, or hope-lost. For everything, like passing
examination, improving business, celebrating marriage, securing
job, curing disease, obtaining mental peace, seeking conjugal
harmony and the like, people approach her, worship her, she
tears of joy when prayers are answered, and cry for hurling them
across the ocean of worries gnawing at their vitals. Their
tearful appeals are heard, and dispensed with in accordance with
their merits. The fruitful results enjoyed are making the suppli-
cants visit year after year with unbounded joy, and utmost
devotion. A visit showers instant results. Now remains the
means of approach to her holy feet.

THE JOURNEY:

The holy shrine is located in Trikut Parvat of Himalayas in the state of Jammu Tawi. It lies at a distance of 64
kms. from the City of Jammu, housing one of the unique
temples of the world. The famous Raghunath temple is the
crest jewel of the city, to the precise, a dazzling diamond in
the diadem adorning the Bharata Mata. Besides the huge Śiva lingas made of Saligram and crystal, the temple houses Sahastrā Kotilingas in nearly ten huge halls. The very concept of Sahastra Koti lingas in one place defies description. It is a wonder of wonders. No where one can see, or here such marvel. It is only to be seen than read. The images of Raghunath, Ganapati etc., are worthy of adoration. A visit is a must to every theists. After visiting it, people coming from all parts --- foreign or Indian travel to Katra lying at a distance 20 kms in buses or taxis.

Katra is a beautiful township well developed to catering to the everflowing pilgrim community. There are two visit-worthy temples --- Kalika temple and Chintamani and they attract all. Some prefer staying here for the night. As it serves, more or less as the base for further journey of 14 kms to the shrine, everything the yatris require, like ponies for riding, porters for carrying luggage, snack pockets for the journey, woolen outfit for warmth, beside canvass shoes, torches, walking sticks, rain coats for careful journey and Puja materials are available. In addition, the Department of Tourism issues passes for darsan; for, ‘admission by pass’ is strictly followed in the temple. This pass is to be tendered at Banaganga to making prior arrangements for easy admision into the Garbhagriha.

The ennobling tenets of casteless oneness, and all are equal before the MOTHER are quite apparent and come to life at the beginning of the trek, here at Karta itself. Hundreds of yatris start from here almost everyday with red banners in their hands hoisted jauntily, and uttering ‘Jai Mata di’ --- glory of the MOTHER, wrapped themselves fully in woolen clothes. Throughout the trek commencing spirit of unity exists, and the yatris make brief stops at several places for visiting temples held dear to the MOTHER. And the entire route is dotted with many such visit-worthy shrines. They also indicate the route taken by Vaishnodevi, when chased by that dreadful demon. At Hasali, there is the famous temple Bhumika, where
that pious brahmin lived, and to whom the Mother appeared first. They halt for a while. Again they continue from Darshani Darwaza, the holy place deemed very dear to the Mother. Here free meal to every pilgrim is given and it is called Langar. In the community feeding — all are equal, and given uniform treatment in serving food etc. Yatris in their onward and return journeys too get here free and sumptuous meal. Next comes Banaganga — a small stream created by the MOTHER for bathing purpose. After dip, they visit Charan Paduka shrine. It is here the MOTHER halted for a while to see whether that danawa was still pursuing. Her foot prints embossed on stone are worshipped here. So halt-worthy. Next halt is at Adhukunwari, where Vaishnodevi meditated in a cave to escaping from the Bhaiyon. At the end, she used her Trisul to gorging a new route for her father march. Though this is a narrow passage, some pilgrims go crawling, despite having another way to reach the BHAWAN — the main shrine —- the destination after an arduous journey of 14 kms. covered in about 6 hours.

THE BHAWAN:

It is situated at 5300 feet MSL. A sacred spot! A sure resort of beatitude!! They journey's end!!! Before entering, yatris have to wade through a small stream, called Charan Ganga. The place where the image is installed and worshipped is small, but well illuminated. The hall infront is spacious enough to accommodate hundreds of pilgrims. Yatris are admitted in lines well regulated. The long unending queues of yatris jostling and chanting greet the MOTHER at long last seated on a high pedestal well decorated. The beautiful image of the MOTHER in floral decoration feasts the eyes, but for a fleeting second, like the darsan of Sri Balaji at Tirumala, where several kinds of hardships faced during the days of journey and thousands of rupees spent on everything end in a split second. Though the darsan ends in a flash, in that flash, itself the MOTHER sees the supplicant from top to toe, and knows what he requires and when it has to be granted. After offering
prayers with breaking of coconuts, the yatris move slowly kissing the damp chiselled walls, desiring to partaking the divinity embedded in all parts of that holiest of holy place. The yatris as they emerge hail the MOTHER with faces wreathed in smiles, hearts going heaven wards and souls overflowing with inexplicable bliss. And with red-scavers over their heads — a practice observed here by every pilgrim. Another object of adoration is the Siva Lingam embedded into the cave wall, facing the MOTHER'S image. Paying obeisance to Lord Maheswar, they finally come out.

Coming out of the main mandir, Pilgrim go about visiting Shiv Gooh, where beautiful lingam is installed at the end of the cave. Next to it lies Ram Mandir. After that, they visit Rasayan Goof, housing the images of several adorable deities. The Bhairon temple is the last which everyone goes; for, it is ordained by the divine MOTHER that a visit is a MUST to all. Now begins the return journey.

As the entire route is well lighted all long, many prefer the journey in the night that lessens the fatigue by avoiding exposure to intensity of hot sun. Adequate drinking water supply is available throughout, and many way-side tea stalls provide hot cups of tea and relishable snacks at reasonable rates. Puja materials are made available around the Bhavan in several shops. In three places — Katra, Adhkunwari and Vaishnodevi accommodation is available in well furnished rooms, both in Tourist Bungalows and Dharmasalas. Dormitory accommodation too is provided. So staying poses no problem, nor is food; since the well maintained stalls on the way are catering to the needs of the yatris both night or day and at several places at it.
SECTION X

AMARNATH

The Waxing and Waning Sivalinga of Amarnath

UNIQUENESS:

The waxing and waning snow-linga of Amarnath, considered to be one of the twelve jyothirlingas is a wonder of wonders of our Punya Bharat, luring several thousands of Pilgrims every year, in the months of Sravana and Bhadrapada. This nature-made linga is imbued with such mystery and sanctity that it is exercising an irresistible fascination over ardent Sai-vates in particular and theists in general, since time immemorial. According to tradition, it is here Maheswar, the all-benevolent Lord distributed amrit - nectar to Mukkoti devathas to making them immortal and immune against the danavakrityas of asuras. And they in grateful devotion named him Amarnath. It is here, on one full noon night, Lord Maheswar explained to Parvathi the secrets of creation together with attainment of Moksha. And it is this sacred spot that witnessed the metamorphosis of Uma Maheswar into doves, when His narration of secret was over-heard by his birthyas. It is this place that is giving darsan of Uma Maheswar and Ganapathi in the form of ice. It is this holy kshetra, where Muslims enjoy more or less equal status with Brahmans in sharing the offerings and also distributing Prasadam. It is to this holy shrine H.H. Sankaracharya of Sarada Peeth of Kashmir leads a procession on foot every year in the month of Sravana from Srinagar. It is this Kshetra that traces the origin of several monuments made by philanthropic rules of Kashmir. And it is this thirtha kshetra that tests the endurance of pilgrims during the holy trek of 48 kms taking almost one full week. It is to this yatra alone that the State Government is evincing utmost interest in arranging every amenity, like food, accommodation, transport medical, post and telegraph, police etc., to the pilgrims.
from the starting point to the Sannidhi and back to Pahalgam, the scenic tourist resort and the place from where normally the journey on foot begins by tourists and pilgrims. And finally it is this kshetra that gives darsan of the Adi-dampatas in the form of pigeons—a standing reality of the divinity enshrined in linga to the believers of every ‘ism’ in theistic word.

ANTIQUITY:

In the beginning, according to tradition, Kashmir valley was a lake, called Sati-saras, named after Parvathi, the consort of Lord Maheswar. Theis was the habitat of dreadful demons, the sworn enemies of humans. Their existence was a perennial threat to people living nearby, as they were cannibals and delighted at the suffering of human beings. Pitying their misery, Kasyapa, the great humanist sage destroyed the entire race along with their king Jalodbhava. Later, he converted this place of Himavan, the father of Parvathi into a land and named it Kashmir Mandal. In course of time, many shrines of great spiritual significance were built by kings of Kashmir both for Siva and Vishnu. As their number increased rapidly, they covered almost all the space, and many thirthas were discovered to the extent that there is not an inch space that is not dedicated either to Vishnu or Siva. Amarnath, the sacred thirtha kshetra dedicated to Lord Maheswar tops the list and lies at a distance of about 100 kms to the north-east of Srinagar, the capital of Kashmir. And it is made popular by the theist kings of Kashmir by their humanist ministrations. Kalhan’s master-piece Raja-Tarangani, the veritable treasure house of the history of Kashmir kings and their rule deals with the origin of Amarnath in detail, and throws light on the yatra to that Himalayan abode of Lord Maheswar.

The story begins in the dim past with Gonanda I on the throne of Kashmir, a contemporary of Jarasandha the close associate of Kamsa of Mathura. As we move with the chronicle, we learn that Damodara, son of Gonanda I was killed
by Yadavas. His wife Yasomoti, the then pregnant queen was preferred by Sri Krishna, Yadhukulabhuan to rule kingdom till here Progeny came to age, since the land of the kashmir is Parvathi incarnate, and the ruler of that country is the ansa, or particle of Siva, and so Krishna was against annexing it. Many historical personages succeeded and monumental constructions were left behind as relics. Among them the Seshanaga lake occupies a pre-eminent place. The famous Seshanaga lying between Chandavadi and Wavjan was constructed by Susrayasa Naga and the glory of this Naga is elaborately described in the Raja - Tarangani of Kalhana. This ruler of eminence had two beautiful aughters named Iravathi and Chandralekha. Due to evil machinations of a bogus Sadhu, he encountered many problems. Knowing the helplessness of the noble king, a brahmin by name Visakha came to his rescue and relieved him of his anxieties with his atomic powers. Susrayasa gave his handsome daughter Chandralekha to Visakha in marriage out of gratitude.

The beautiful couple lived a memorably happy life in the capital of Kinneragrama ruled by king Nara, an infamous king who brought shame to his illustrious father, King Vibhishna II by his laxity of morals and frivolous behaviour. Due to misfortune, one day a horse entered the compound of Chandralekha and ate away her grains spread out in sunlight. In her attempt to drive away the stray house sse patted on its back, and it left a golden imprint of her hand on horse's back. The oddity of the incident soon spread through out the capital. Learning it, king Nara set his net and used all means to secure her for satisfying his carnality. He descended even to the nefarious level of asking her husband to part with her for quenching his kamadaha, but failed. In his hopeless passion for her, he decided to besiege the house, but the couple escaped before his atrocious plan was launched. Chandralekha, with her husband Vishaka sought refuge in Susravasa Naga, her father. Flying into rage, he burnt the entire city of Nara and finally killed him. When
remorse held him in tight grip, he started building lakes and laying roads connecting shrines with towns for the comforts of people; in expiation of sin committed. Among the many Seshanaga lake on the way to Amarnath and Jamatri Saras are still standing, proclaiming his glory in its rise and fall.

HISTORICITY:

The Raja-Tarangani embodies countless instances of Kings, patronage and adherence to Saivism. The Kashmir Saivism has a distinct flavour, and it differs from the Saivism propounded by celebrated pravaktas like Sankaracharya, and it has a special name — Trika Mata. It is classified into three parts - Agama Sastra, Spanda Sasta, and Pratyabhijna. They are of superior origin and teach dualistic doctrine, and as such they are opposed to idealistic monism explained in Siva Sutras said to have been revealed by Siva himself, Distinguished prophets and theists became votaries of this sect and eminent writers and commentators like Vasugupta, Somananda, etc., wrote monumental works exemplifying their findings. They emphasised the basic principle that “the Highest Light is eternal and imperishable and it is of the nature of the Pranava Mantra — AUM throbbing in the heart of everyone” All these treatises eulogise Lord Maheswar’s Ominicompasion, who in his waxing-waning from is giving darshan in the cave, besides appearing in the form of pigeons to the devotees on their visit to this holy thirtha-kshetra.

SOUKCES:

Hoary scriptures, particularly works dealing with Sai-vism embody a great corpus of literature shedding much light on the divinity of this thirtha kshetra. Chronicles like kalhana’s Raja-Tarangahi and Abdul Fazl’s Aini-i-Akbari, philosophical works like Utpala’s Isvara Prathyabhijna, Sivasutras, Paratrinshika, Tantrasara, Tantraloka, Madhva’s Sarvadarsana Sangraha, Bhatta’s H. usumajali and Nilamata - purana and Harvijaya bear ample testimony to the sacredness of this holy
shrine and illustrate the lives of those who were blessed by Maheswar.

THE HOLY TREK:

To reach this Lord of Kailas revealing Himself in ice from, an arduous journey of 46 kms has to be made, and it is by foot, and foot, alone. No mode of transport can come to the rescue of the ardent bhaktas, though modern science boasts of reaching the moon with its infinite number of inventions and discoveries. So, the annual traditional padayatra to Amarnath cave is the touch stone of theist's devotion to Lord Maheswar. It begins on the fifth of the bright half of Sravana every year, with H.H. Sankaracharyya of Saradapeeth in forefront with all fervous and fanfare as evidenced by carrying of a big silver stick called Danda with Lord Siva's Standard, followed by hundreds of sadhus Nagas, Mahants, Saints, Viragis, Sanyasins of every brand along with devotees coming from all parts of Akhand Bharat. They start from Srinagar and this sublime yatra is given all assistance by the state and is taken care of by the Dharmarath Department of Kashmir State. The Department provides all help through several of its departments like police, medical, etc., and its special officers accompany it throughout.

The 'Sangh, as the pilgrims of the party are called, starts from Srinagar and trek a distance of 13 kms. On the first day, and camp at Pamparchi overnight. Avantipur is the second stop that lies at a distance of 13 kms. The third one is Bribihara. From here the party passes Via Anant Nag, Gautama Nag and arrive at Mattan, a corrupt form of Mataand it is a Surya Kshetra of great renown. The party is given ceremonial welcome here. The celebrated Surya shrine lying on lofty plateau commanding excellent scenic splendour entralls the pilgrims and wrings veneration by its architectural marvel and spiritual aroma. And it is styled as, "the architectural lion of Kashmir", as it is famous for graceful colonnade of 84 columns, artistic carvings and beautiful arches. It is king Lalitaditya's contribution to art and
architecture. Enjoying its beauty and peoples' hospitality it again starts and reaches Asihmukam. The local muslim shrine of great fame here also receives Pilgrims' veneration. The Muslims of this place and the nearby Batkut village are held in high esteem and they are given one third of the cash offerings of the Amarnath temple. They are highly religious and are very friendly to Hindus. Their Catholocity and humanism are primarily responsible for peaceful journey to Amarnath, for, it is by their labour alone roads are laid out and tents are pitched up for pilgrims comfort. They are patronised by kings from time to time, when clearance of jungles and laying of roads to Amarnath Cave are undertaken. With inimitable religious fervour, they help the pilgrims in several ways. In fact, they seem to have been totally oblivious of their religion, for they implement the highly laudable adage - Service to man is devotion to God. But for them, the darsan of Maheswar would have been an imagina£on than a reality. Almost all kings received their selfless service and rewarded them fittingly. From here the Sangh reaches Pahalgam and is joined by several other tourists and pilgrims, who reach it by buses or other automobiles. For going further up, some engage Dandis, Kandis or Poinies. The distances of 46 kms. from here is covered in 4 days with comparative ease and grace, since the government looks after scrupulously in providing essential amenities enroute. For the night stay it helps in pitching up sheds, Sarais, resthouses, tents, besides keeping depots for the supply of rations and fuel. It arranges for ponies and labourers etc., during the annual pilgrimage every year, if prior intimation is made. During non season period, pilgrims have to make their own arrangements.

From here to Amarnath cave there are 4 main stops. The first is at Chandanvadi, the second at Wavjan, the next at Panchatarni and the final one at Amarnath cave - the sacred Sannidhi of Maheswar.

The first stop - Chandanwari lying at 10 kms. Dis-
tance from Pahalgam is a Minivalley girdled by tall mountain peaks with the famous Seshnag stream rising through it perennially. And it boasts of its marvellous snow bridge. It is a picnic spot visited by people throughout the year. From here one can see the lovely sights of snow capped mountains and silvery streams leaping down to flow gurgling always. The confluence of Asthan Marg stream and Seshnag is visible from here. The forest ends here, and ascent of Pishu Ghati begins. Legend records that it was called Peshna mount representing the heap of bones of demons who were crushed down by gods with the help of Maheswar. It is an enchanting sight that lives in memory for years. Then the party passing via zozipal reaches Seshnag lying at a height of 11,730 feet. This emerald lake which remains covered till June is a worthy sight. It is about 500 feet below the road there lies in the icy cap of the Kohenhor the famous glaciar. It is fed by the waters of melted snow from several glaciers. The Seshnag river starts from here and flows in beautiful cascades. It is said that it is a deep as Patala, and the resort of Seshnaga. Crossing this, the party arrives at wavjan, the second halt of the marathon trek.

From here up to Mahagunus pass, the party has to ascend to reach Panchatarni, the third halt lying at a height of it 11105 feet. The gorgeous scenery at every stage of trek relieves the boredom and fatigue of the troublesome trekking. The party then starts descending to proceed down a very steep and continuous descent. This halt has picturesque camping ground and provides all the needed amenities. It is here the pilgrims deposit their extra luggage as done in clock rooms and start towards the cave lying a 6 km distance. After this onerous trek, the party reaches Amara-vathi stream flowing with crystal clear ice cold water, just outside the cave. Every one takes a dip in it with great jubilation and feel emancipated at having reached the Siva Sannidhi and also covering the long distance by foot. Now remains the darsan of the all — merciful Maheswar.
THE CAVE AND THE SNOW LINGA:

On the auspicious Sravana Purnima day, the party after purging of their impurities sticking to body, mind and soul in the river Amaravathi also called Amaraganga enters the cave to greet its eyes with the holy snow image of Siva linga. This sacred cave is about 150 feet high and 90 feet broad. The walls are moist and appear to have been made of gypsum. The ceiling is leaky except for a small area. There are two holes in the northern wall from which snow white water drops trickle down and form into ice as soon as they fall. Of the two, one hole is slightly bigger and right below it is the huge Sivalinga measuring about 3 yards in height formed by the snow water dripping from the roof. To the right of Linga, there is another formation of Snow linga and it is called the image of Parvathi, and to the left is Ganesh’s image formed likewise. The devout pilgrims offer obeisance to the snow images with all due fervour. Several types of prayer services and rituals are performed with the aid of priests.

Though the cave faces south and there is no chance of Sun’s rays falling directly on the snow image, the image waxes and wanes along with the waxing and waning of moon. Is it not a marvel to be seen and admired? Does not this act justify the truth of Lord’s inscrutability. Would science offer any palpable solution? Can labs with round the clock investigation disprove the hand of divinity behind this mysterious phenomenon? Will this not throw a challenge to the ingenuity to untie the knot? Nothing but soulful prostrations pleases the devout pilgrim at the very sight of Siva linga, and mention of its waxing and waning with moon regardless of his allegiance to secular or scientific faith.

This rare phenomenon has been highly applauded by even other religions and they recorded it with inexplicable joy. The famous An-i-Akbari of Abul Fazl embodies this rare phenomenon with great gusto. It says in vol II Page
360 - "Amarnath is considered a shrine of great sanctity. When the new moon rises, from her throne of rays, a bubble as it were of ice is formed in the cave which daily increases little by little for fifteen days till it is somewhat higher than two yards, of the measure of yard determined by His Majesty; With the waning of moon the image likewise begins to decrease, till no trace of it remains when the moon disappears". Needless to prolong that every national who visits it, expresses his infinite joy in such terms, they bear testimony to his acceptance of the divinity presiding in the cave. There is on the left, a small cave inside Amarnath, from which a white substance resembling chalk is dug out and given to the visitors as Vibhuti of Amarnath. And this Prasadam is distributed by Mohammadans of Batkut village whose share in making the journey enjoyable during halts at several places and service at every step are beyond description. Distribution of p.asadam by Muslims in a Hindu shrine is very odd, and can be deemed a rarity of rarities. Yet, it is going on since centuries. This practice is rooted in a strange myth. Once, as the story goes, a Muslim shepherded by name Buta Malik was given a sack of coal by a sadhu out of love for his pious living. When opened it in the house that night he found it to be gold. Overjoyed Muslim went to the spot to thank him for the fortune given. But he found a cave and when he went inside, he found the snow-linga. He started worshipping it with great fervour, thinking that Siva alone conferred that favour. And others followed him for bliss and fortune. In course of time it became a place of pilgrimage. As it was discovered and popularised by him, has descendants are given a percentage of donations even to day. The pilgrims carry with them the white substance deposited on the bank of Amarganga, for they believe that by smearing it on their bodies, it protects them from severe cold and other skin diseases. They named it Amara Vibhuti. During their stay lasting for hours, they observe white pigeons flying about and then bow to them considering as Siva and Parvathi in the form of birds, ever since their conversation was over heard by their servants.
After bath, darsan and prayer to the Snow-image of Maheswar in this ageless Amarnath cave, the party makes return journey with soul filled with Maheswar's image; mind, exultant at the fulfilment of adorable desire of visiting a shrine atop the Himalayas; eyes, feasted with an unusual auspicious sight; ears, ringing with the sounds of Harhar Mahadev; hearts, overflowing with devotional emotions; hands full of Amara Vibhuthi and legs moving swiftly, to reach home for distributing the prasadam to kith and kin, who eagerly await the happy return.

CONVEYANCE

Railways : Jammu Tawi - The Junction connects major cities and towns by Express and Passenger trains.

Roadways : Srinagar is the base for Padayatra - the holy trek by H.H. Sankaracharya to the cave. Normally tourists and pilgrims start from Pahalgam, reaching it by Buses and taxis.

Air ways : Srinagar is the Airport connected by Indian Air lines flights from Delhi, Chandigar etc.

Trekking : From pahalgam to cave - 46 kms - 5 days yartra - up and down. Ponies, labourers, and dandis are available at Pahalgam - rations are supplied at halting places Tarpalin sheets - tents can be hired.

Essentials : Woolen outfit, gumboots, raincoats, walking sticks, thermos flask, tents, tinned food - a MUST. Week's supply of provisions and commodities eases the journey. On the way at several places ration shops, tea bunks and restaurants provide snacks food at fixed rates.

MATA VAISHNODEVI MANDIR

Rail head : Jammu Tawi junction - the important trains originate and culminate here. It can be reached from any point Jammu Tawi is the base.

Road ways : From Jammu Tawi, buses or taxis go up to Katna - 50 kms off - the rest 13.5 kms by walk to the cave.

Airways : Jammu Tawi Airport - Indian Airlines flights connect Jammu Tawi with New Delhi- Chandigar Srinagar etc.

Essential : As for Amarnath.
In the general scheme of God's creation, good
and bad do exist side by side, nay they rather co-habit
always. They can't be seperated, nor seperation does good
to any. Hence the observance of devils, where gods dwell.
To exemplify this, perhaps, you great printer's devils, while
trying to avail the darshan of the adorable gods. If you
observe apostrophes at the bottom of words; commas in the
places of semi-colons; hyphens in the places of dashes, they
are excusable and you can bear them, but you can't put up
with formidable ones, whose presence is just confound the
comprehension. Such inexcusables are listed to ease tension
Although I tried to minimise them, I could not due to inadequate
material the press has. Albert Tirupathi progressed in dasa-disas,
it lags behind in printing. Hence my solicitation of your Pardon.

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LORD, KRISHNA, OF DWARAKA
THE GOLDEN TEMPLE AMRITSAR

BABA ATAL RAI TOWER
SRI RAGHUNATHJI TEMPLES GROUP--
ENSHRING SAHASTRAKOTILINGAS JAMMU--TAWI
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The Abodes of Gods
Part: TWO
Temples of North-East India
Kedarnath, Badarinath, Gangotri & Yamunotri, Rishikesh,
Haridwar, Prayag, Gaya, Ayodhya, Kasi, Bhuvaneswar,
Konark & Jagannath.

The Abodes of Gods
Part: THREE
Temples of Tamil Nadu
About 15 Major temples
from Chidambaram to Kanyakumari

The Abodes of Gods
Part: FOUR
Alayas of Andhra pradesh
About 15 Major Shrines
from Simhachalam to Tirupati.
Part: ONE

Temples of North-West India

Somanath, Dwaraka, Mathura, Amritsar, Kurukshetra, Mt. Abu, Ambaji, Pushkar, Vaishno Devi, Amarnath.

By
Prof. K. K. Moorthy

Introduction
by
Advocate Sri I L N Sastry,
Chairman, Experts Committee, T T D Board, TIRUPATI.

Message Publications, Tirupati.
K. K. Moorthy was born in a hamlet of Kolar District, Karnataka, bordering on Chittoor Dt., Andhra Pradesh. ... had his Primary School education at Mulakalacheruvu, Chittoor Dt. studied in Madanapalli, Andhra Pradesh till graduation. ... a product of Beseant Theosophical School and College. ... graduated from Madras University in 1952.

Entered Govt. Service in 1951. ... worked as clerk in Registration Department for a year and a half. ... Joined as Graduate Asst. in Dt. Board High School in 1952. ... worked for three years at Puttur and Piler. ... underwent B. Ed. training at govt. Training College in Kurnool in 1955-56. ... joined as trained teacher at Kuppam. ... obtained two Masterate Degrees in the sister disciplines of Literature—English and History from Banaras Hindu University in 1961 and 1965. ... worked as Special Asst. for 4 years at Z. P. M. P. Higher Secondary School, Chittoor.

Left for Tamil Nadu College service in 1966. ... worked as Lecturer at G.T.N. Arts College, Dindigul from 1966 till retirement in 1984. ... did Research on Byron as part time Research Scholar. ... submitted thesis for Ph. D. Degree to Madurai - Kamaraj University, Madurai. ... worked as Prof. and Head of the Department of English at Adhiparasakthi Engineering College, Melmaruvathur, Tamil Nadu. ... worked in the Publication Department of T T D, Tirupati.

Has been contributing articles, Poems, essays, stories etc. to several periodicals both in English and Telugu under different pen names. ... authored about thirty books in English and Telugu.

(Vide Wrapper 3)
Part: ONE

Temples of North-West India

By
Prof. K. K. Moorthy,
M.A. (Eng), M.A. (Hist), B.Ed., R M P.,
Prof. of English (Retd.),
Tirupati-517 507.

Published with the Financial assistance of T T D Tirupati
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TIRUPATI-517 501.

Title Page art: Sri Chandra sekhar,
Saptagiri, T T D.

Price:  Rs. 30-00
INVOCATION

"Thou art O Lord of lords! formless, nameless and abodeless
By giving forms and names installed you in temples peerless
Forgive my sin of making Nil into Full" thus spake Sankara once
The shrines thus emerged, brought him interplanetary eminence

Pious as I'm, visited them all to drink in Thy Sobha with eyes
And was agog on hearing thy myriad sports from the priests wise
Regaining senses, I essayed anon to share that delight infinite
To fellowmen lost in mundane activities for salvation definite

But found my grasp meagre and power of narration ineffective
Cann't visualise an iota of Thy Viswarupa in diction effective
Hence my Lord Balaji! fill in that void of my modest ambition
With compassion for due inspiration and happy consummation
The book — The Abodes of Gods - Part : One, Temples of North-west India, by Prof. K.K. Moorthy, makes an earnest attempt at steering the pilgrim’s mind to the temples — “the veritable open-air museums treasuring up both man-made marvels and God-created wondrous beauties of infinite varieties.” He has presented many salient features of the holy temples, which the pilgrim desires to know, and for which alone he goes on a pilgrimage to them, under sections such as, Uniqueness, Antiquity and Historicity. They capture the imagination of pilgrim and awaken his curiosity to visit and enjoy the sight of different manifestations and incarnations of God. He successfully roused the interest by focusing light on the history of the place, and reasons its selection. Mode of reaching the place of pilgrimage and facilities available for stay are given for the pilgrim’s benefit, and they are very useful. He has brought out elaborately in “yatra and its paramartha “many desirable traits of pilgrims and hints for successful yatra. They are very valuable and informative. He deals with here and there the beauties of Nature, which the pilgrim sees on his way.

The twin objectives of the book—catering to the religious yearning and aesthetic longing of pilgrims are very well portrayed and effectively narrated in fine prose. Hence, it satisfies spiritualists and Nature lovers. His pragmatic approach is novel, and presentation highly interesting. So, it affords a delightful reading to all—relegionists, tourists, etc. I wish many more such good books from this erudite scholar, and await eagerly to peruse them for profit and pleasure.

(Sd) P.S. Gajapathy.
FOREWORD

I.L.N. Sastry, B.Com., B.L., CAIIB.,
Advocate
Member: T.T. Devasthanams Board,
CHAIRMAN: EXPERTS' COMMITTEE ON T.T.D. Publications

Lord Sri Krishna blessed the devotee to worship any
God in whatever form, with faith and devotion
and He would reflect in that faith

So the choice is wide open to the dedicated devotee,
and thus the personification of implicit faith and divinity is
manifest in different temples. The God is one, infinite, inde-
structible, omnipresent, omnipotent, and is here, there and eve-
rywhere. Millions of people of Hindu faith living in different
parts of India, had adored the sanctity of that Invisible, but
yet visible to the purified and sagely eyes. And the temples are
abodes of such innumerable Gods and Goddesses. The disce-
ning devotee worships each and every God, in the manner
prescribed and he perceives the same replica in every idol that
is installed in a temple. Each temple has got its own history
and background, and some of idols therein are 'Swayambhus'
such as Lord Sri Venkateswara of Tirumala.

Prof. K.K. Murthy, has dwelt at length the uniqueness
of each temple, and its antiquity and the festivals that are
being celebrated in the intervening periods. He had also indi-
cated the various routes to reach the temple for the benefit of
pilgrims. He stressed the need to observe some rituals before
undertaking pilgrimage and during its course also. It is gra-
tifying that Prof. K.K. Moorthy chose to write about the
abodes of Gods spread over throughout the breadth and
length of India. This book is first of its kind in the series.
Apart from books of perennial and ethical values, he also
showed keen interest in research work and as well in literatu-
re. Thus he wrote many short stories and Novels in Telugu
and also on Byron in English and found himself famous. In fact there are number of books to his credit both in English and Telugu. The author had the humble beginning after completion of graduation but his quest for learning is enormous and this led him to acquire Master's Degrees from Banaras Hindu University, through hard work and perseverance and finally had become Professor and Head of Department of English in a College in Tamil Nadu. Thus he reached the heights in academic career and simultaneously developed ardent love and involvement in multifarious religious activities.

So when the reader goes through the pages of this venture, he would be carried away to the temples, and he is immersed in the vivid description and he must be having lasting impression about the serenity, calmness, concentration and meditation. The following sentence in these pages is a clear manifestation of the author's deep devotion and constant endeavour in realisation of self. "Mental peace and spiritual solace automatically envelop the entire being and make the yatri sin proof" such is his firm conviction and mature belief.

Visit to the temples invigorates the inner dynamism of one's own self and this ultimately leads to humility, forgiveness, tolerance and shedding of egoism. One should expect eternal bliss, since prayer is the clarion call to different Gods in varied forms.

Camp at Tirupathi, 4-10-1989. (Sd.) I.L.N. Sastry 4-10-1989.
PROLOGUE

Temples temples temples, and temples; everywhere and anywhere can be seen in our Punya Bharat right from the high snow-capped Himalayan peaks, down to the salt-soaked shores of Kanyakumari, and Dwaraka to Kamakshipur across. Just look up --- a temple tower piercing into the glimmering blue sky greets your eyes: or bend your head from any mount, the fluttering of a saffron-dyed temple banner assaile your ears; stretch your gaze along any river bank, a concourse of pilgrims draped almost in wet outfit hurrying to temples gleam into your sight. How then about the case of concrete jungles, and idyllic rural areas? Surprise over whelms you now; for, either in street corners, or at cross roads, or under trees, or near ponds, or along highways, or pathless forests, mini-temples enshining a wide variety of adorable divinities of all denominations of every major religion meet your eye and bend your head in veneration, provided you have well developed theistic instincts, say in sound condition, of course. Justifiably they justify thereby, the omnipresence of the Omnipotent Lord. In icon form to the naked eye, but to the inner eye, the concrete, living, all-observing ever succouring omnicompassionate Infinite Power worthy to be adored with flower or sacrifices. In extreme cases only. Does this not then appear that the sacred mother Earth, out of infinite compassion has thrown up in certain places, some of her priceless gems for the benefit for her own dear children?

Well, found hither or thither, called by any name, worshipped with paraphernalia or without --- bahiyapuja or manasapuja, they all represent, rather stand for one, yes and the same universal truth that there is one Power Supreme, the
recognition of which alone makes the birth fruitful, living enjoyable and God’s creation purposeful. And it is the duty indispensable on the part of every sentiment being to accept the almightiness of the most HIGH and offer unconditional total surrender, that alone marks the cessation of the wretched so journ in this mundane world, and the inauguration of upward journey culminating in Sayujya.

These ancient temples — abodes of gods were built in the days of yore by mighty emperors, ruling princes, amatya sekharas, Navakotinarayanas, Dharma Pravaktas, feudatory chiefs, tribal heads for the sole purpose of spreading Bhakti cult among the masses and classes both. As the motive behind such august enterprise being lofty and ennobling, it earned an ever lasting name to the builders, besides reaping divine grace. The practice is given a fresh lease of life from time to time. In every Yuga too. Hence the presence of countless temples throughout the length and breadth of Akhand Bharata Khaanda.

In modern times too through the western impact robbed much of our ageless spiritual treasure, humanism and theism are installing the representations of them. Abolute power in shrines of new models and diverse patterns, infusing into them modern spirit and western trends. In this century, a class of new builders have stepped into the arena and started building temples to spread bhakti, and spiritualise the core of decadent human nature due to ill digestion of several cultures into which man is thrown by force of circumstances. Many parts of India have been blessed with the construction of several kinds of shrines, although this noble task is sadly neglected by the ruling class. The industrial magnates and commercial houses have taken up this sacred work with a zeal seem for surpassing the bygone builders. Many imposing structures have sprung up in all most all parts of India. Among the infinite number of temples built by religious institutions-charitable Trusts and philanthropic organisations, the shrines built by mightly Birla House are a class in themselves. They are different and occupy a conspicuous place among such similar one’s due to the charac-
teristic Birla aroma --- a speciality, which is inimitable and unsurpassable in any point of time. "By any" if affixed, it sticks hard and cannot be erased even. The Viswanath Mandir in the Banaras Hindu University Campus Banaras, Lakshmi Narayan temple in Delhi, Sri Krishna Mandir in Mathura, Birla Mandir in Jaipur, Rajaji temple in Hyderabad etc., exemplify their matchless contribution to temple culture of modern India. The contributions made by Baba Kali Kamlia Trust, Ramakrishna Math and a host of other similar ones deserve reverent mention. And visit-worthy as matter of fact.

Our scriptures embody thousands of reference enjoining mankind to visit temples for a multiplicity of reasons. The sight of the deities in their enchanting forms and postures, installed in ancient or modern shrines certainly has such a chastening influence, that even the atheist or iconoclast can turn the search light inwards to find out, where he and his black nature stand provided he frequents them that in fact invariably makes him conscious of the right course of action to be pursued. Further, their sculpture grandeur and architectural excellence touch at his aesthetic sense and bring in a change too. In some cases. Listening to hymns, chants and the like makes him oblivious of his base impulses for a while at least. In many as a matter of fact. Meeting of persons of varied cultures promotes mutual understanding etc. Hence the advocacy of pilgrimage by every religion. (Vide-Yatra And Its Paramartha for a Comprehensive Picture).

May be due to predominance of theistic impulses a little more in me I developed a passion for visiting temples, since school days, and that inborn mania is allowed to continue unabated despite the impact of western culture thrust upon me by the profession chosen and the post held for about 35 years. As irony would have it, infatuation grew faster than my age and made me spin round, as it were, almost all the reputed temples in India. I toured in all the states, except those lying to the prologue east of West Bengal, and stayed couple of days in everyone of them; and months in several places like Banaras,
Calcutta, Madurai etc. To cap it, as it were, for five years now in Tirupathi --- the holiest of holies, where Suprabhatam wakes up and charges the entire atmosphere with Bhagavannama that fuels the souls to sustain till going to bed. Additionally, my living in Tamil Nadu---the veritable temple state for two decades enabled me grabbing the opportunity of visiting every great hoary temple for dozens of times.

And I looked out for means to occupy my retired void, I found the glory of temples and religion beckoning me to taking up for pleasure and propagation. Indeed, its absorbing interest, accelerated my evolving devotion and took me on viewless wings of imagination for preparation. As if a bolt from blue, my fifth-day-yatra to North India, in Yatra Special in 1987 supplied me enough fuel for further flights and whetted my appetitite. So I plunged into this holy work head long with a special format of my own --- writing from the view point of pilgrims than tourists, i.e., laying stress on the sacredness of place, and necessity of its selection --- the legends forming the core to the characteristic glory of each temple. So, everyone of the sections begins with Uniqueness, followed by Antiquity, and then Historicity before giving detailed accounts of temples, deities, festivals, traditions etc.

I endeavoured sincerely to focus light on the glory of each visit-worthy place, as learnt from sthalagnas, of course leaning heavily on guides, booklets, folders and books dealing with them. Consciously, nay deliberately, I side-trackked the sculptural marvels and architectural excellences. Pilgrims normally care more for divinity hovering over the shetra thanenjoying the aesthetic appeal of shrines. My experience fortified this; for, the yatris at the famous Dilwara Temples were hurrying to visit other shrines, despite the honest attempt by the guide at eulogising the sculptural skill, which in my opinion, even Viswakarmavan, the celestial sculptor too stands mute and thinks that he could have done his job better, had he visited them earlier. Even at Lalebidtoo, my co-yatris behaved similarly and dragged me out, when my eyes were glued to the ceiling, exhibiting the unsurpassable craftsmanship of the sculptors.
Hence my preference for the divinity of the place than the artistry of the stone-cutters. There may be among my readers, one or two prototypes of Sir John Marshal, Col. Todd, or Ananda Kumara Swamy, who could see each piece with microscopic eyes for days to doing research later; for such gems, I am too small. I crave their indulgences for not rising to their level.

Now comes the part of redemption of my indebtedness. Of the many, who deserve space here, the sublime figure of Sri I L N Sastry, B Com., B L., CAIIB, the far-famed High court Advocate and Chairman of Experts Committee on T.T.D publications, flashes first across my mind meriting reverential mention. He is an eminent writer among advocates and a humanist advocate among writers, and hence his tenure witnessed a bumper harvest of rarities, and blessed the book lovers with may a ripe, delicious fruit. As his unbiased selection met with tacit approval of the Committee members; it was a Golden period for writers; and I am one of the beneficiaries. My inadequate diction satisfies in offering obeisance, and it is akin to a slender strand to the moon, as the adage goes. For his masterly FOREWORD, I bow to him again. Shri K. Subba Rao, M. A. Editor, ŠAPTAGIRI is instrumental in getting my type-script reach the concerned, though submitted late and his help at every stage is highly commendable. Albeit, my debt is above compensation, I express my veneration to him now. I owe my gratitude to Sri Gajapathi Raju, M. A. Regional Officer, Dept. of Tourism, Tirupati for giving opinion fine and folders many. And to my children, Kavitha & Kiran for all, from start to finish. And my thanks to the proprietor Ramana Printers, for giving a pretty shape to my composition despite limited resources at command, particularly to efficient Sri T. Indrasenudu & Sri Balaram.

I offer my prostrations to MOTHER Parasakti, whose boundless compassion descended in the form of characters on my paper, now adorning your hands.

And soulful gratitude to Shri Balaji, Mathridayanivasa for enabling my pen-craft to lighting up your way to the temples to avail the darsan of His aparupadivysohba in myriad manifestations. Expecting an early receipt of your soul-lifting experiences, I remain. please do.
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YATRA AND ITS PARAMARTHA

MAN AND HIS PLACE

Man is created in the image of God, so sacred and adorable; he is the crown of creation, hence superior and deserves adulation; and he is a rational being, therefore held in awe-some admiration.

Adoration and adulation do him good, and to the society he lives in, but the awe-some admiration he enjoys, is the cause of all the woe and suffering found everywhere in the world. In surfiet. And at all times too.

Why? The study assumes inexplicable proportions, as it has a tendency to grow with meteoric speed horizontally and vertically before conception takes concrete shape. Deeper the probe, greater the mystery that confronts researchers; but strenuous churning throws up one invaluable gem acceptable as truth indisputable, and fact immutably all-correct measured by any yard stick. It is MIND.

MIND AND ITS MARVELS

It is a marvellous gift blessed by the Omnibenevolent Lord, akin to gold coin dropped into head by that kind God. Its obverse is bright and sweet to look at. The bright part illuminates the world by its sharp elevating thought; and the sweet part shows readiness to cooperate, coordinate and coalesce even. So an asset desirable, and mate reliable. Enabling man for escalation, it fills the world with concord and ethereal bliss. Its reverse, oh horrible! It is dark, damnably mischievous and maliciously pernicious. It has a strong streak of vanity and revels at its own monkeying. Its bloated egotism knows no law, nor cares for any authority here or above. It believes blindly 'MIGHT is RIGHT', and relies on using muscle power,
deluding itself that it brings eternal victory. And lo! over all. Hence confrontation begins. Clash gives rise to an infinite number of sins, like coveting, intruding, seizing, killing, cheating, oppressing etc. Whether committed wantonly or otherwise, they make existence miserable. Mostly the innocent fall prey to sins, in acts of self-defence, or while safe-guarding the Dharma of the land.

For expiation of sins, and liberation of souls from the cycle of births and deaths, our Scriptures have spelt out several ways and means with many an ennobling episode and elevating experience. Time and again. And what is more, both in and out of context too. Their zeal to lift man deserves commendation. Every attempt deliberately made in this direction brings out vividly, how man can reach heaven—his legitimate home. If the ways envisaged are followed sincerely, and injunctions implemented implicitly, man can become Godman and win a coveted place in the pantheon after death, and eviable following while living. They encompass every man regardless of age, caste, colour, creed, profession, religion and region he lives in.

PILGRIMAGE — ITS IMPORTANCE:

Among the many suggested as means, pilgrimage—yatra to holy places, sanctified by the association of gods and godmen takes pride of place, and it has manifold blessings and multifarious gains. These spiritual havens scattered all over our India abound in gigantic structures raised in memory of divinities and dedicated men. They bear the marks of the highest ingenuity of man in realms of art and architecture. Seeing the deities enshrined, and the works of art embellishing them is deemed as an act of papanivarana according to the sacred books. In addition to enjoying the benefits of dipping in sacred rivers, circumambulating the deities, sipping the punya thirthas, the pilgrims establishes ties with fellowmen of diverse faiths and customs etc., living in different parts of India. If the yatra is made to those parts in the true spirit enunciated, it transforms the base into divine, the change—its aftermath, even if it is changed a little due to
either passage of time, or fickleness of mind, its memory lingers longer and supplies enough fuel to sustain and retain its divine aroma till death.

ADVANTAGES:

It brings diverse creeds, cultures and climes breaking through a wide variety of traditions, customs, habits, styles, dialects, dresses, fashions movements etc. face to face and enables closer observation and critical comparison. When minds meet, hearts unite, and hands clasp, genuine sentiments flow freely and abundantly only to merge in the ocean of love, making diversity melt into omnipresent air. The rapport established on mutual understanding, and reciprocal appreciation forges them into an unbroken and unidentifiable unity, declaring thereby the essential oneness underlying humanity. Sure, the bonds of fragrance that entwine the distinctly different strands make mankind from into a garland fit to adorn the feet of the Creator.

Secondly, it unfolds the rich and variegated land scapes, gorgeous verdure and splendid sylvan scenes to feast the eyes, thrill the frames and elevate the souls. The magnificence of high peaks, low dales, vast plains, narrow paths, gurgling founts, surging waters, leaping quadrupeds, wheeling birds, path less woods, wishpering bushes, and dreary deserts alternating in quick succession give their delightful company through out the journey. Besides succeeding in relieving the tedium of endless journey with their intrinsic loveliness and external colour, they lift one to live in peace with himself first, man next, and finally with nature around. The pilgrim unconsciously gets cleansed of all dross and gross and emerges a changed man after the yatra.

PILGRIM CENTRES:

India, as hailed by many is a veritable open-air museum treasuring up both man-made marvels and God-created wondrous beauties of infinite variety. It is the abode of illustrious rulers, dauntless warriors, peerless humanists, selfless saviours,
celebrated preacheres, renowned philosophers, and exemplary leaders of interplanetary eminence. Even the celestials yearned to be born here and they descended again & again to demonstrate the sacredness of the soil and sanctity of the atmosphere. The places of their birth, living, wandering and death yet retain some flavour in the from of monuments and memorials scattered all over the land. Moreover, Godmen—the humanist sages embodying bhagavadamsas sanctified the whole of Jambudvipa by moving from place to place settling down finally at various places to make themselves accessible to all classes of people. Being the reposit oreis of knowledge, custodians of Dharma and hoary culture—they guided mankind by their sane preachings and immortal writings. Realising their superhuman powers, rulers willingly and whole-heartedly sought their counsels and made them kulagurus for consultations and ministrations. Nothing went amiss, nor did calamities over take the country during the reign of such illustrious rulers, or benevolent dictators in some cases.

When the sages became institutions in course of time, by virtue of wielding both the temporal and spiritual powers, they took upon themselves the task of installing deities in gigantic temples, built at their behest by mighty rulers. Along with temples, the place of their habitation and association became centres of pilgrimage with the passage of time, and people, particularly the erring and sinning think them as a MUST to expiate their commissions and omissions.

And such places are many, and scattered all over our Punya Bharat from Amarnath in Kashmir to Kanyakumari in Tamilnadu and Dwaraka in Gujarat Kamaskipur in Assam. The places of pilgrimage thus came into existence are of two types; one—Swayambutha—self manifested and nirmitha—built by theists. Another classification divides them in to Daiva—Gods Asura—Demons, Arshaka—Sages and Manusha—men. And they are foundin the three worlds—heaven, earth and patala.

MERITS:

A visit to the sacred spots on earth indeed enables one to
reap several benefits like bath in sacred rivers or lakes in and around these places; darsan of the presiding deities, offering of tarpana and pinda; gifting of sacred objects, listening to discourses; observing certain ascetics, and performing yagas. These acts destroy the sins committed singly or collectively. Evil designs and wicked acts even in their incubation stage too get nipped in the bud. Mental peace and spiritual solace automatically envelope the entire being and make the yatri sin-proof, as a matter of fact. The spirit of the yatra, and mode of performing, if properly understood and followed, it releases one from the bonds of prarabdha karma, besides conferring prayashchitta for the disastrous consequences of intentional, or thoughtless actions committed. Scriptures embody several instances of great people including the incarnated Gods too undertaking yatras to expiate sins, like Brahmahatyas and Rajahatyas. For instance, Balarama, the elder brother of Sri Krishna undertook Parikramana—going round the whole of Bharata Varsha, dipping in sacred thirhas and sipping holy thirha in every kshetra for killing Romaharshana. Likewise Parasurama too went round Bharata Varsha at the instance of his father Jamadagni as Prayashchitta for killing Sahatrarjuna etc. In addition, Dharmaja was advised Parikramana to gain mental peace, and was relieved of the burden of soka weighing down on him after Kurukshetra war. Vidura made yatra to all the sacred places without any desire, but, to feast his eyes, mind and soul with the beauty of Nature and sanctity of thirthas and kshetras. Why, even sages and acharyas went round to learn much of people, and the grandeur of Brahma’s marvellous creation. Was not Mahatma, the modern mahayogi benefitted by his Bharat Darsan yatra on his return from Africa?

ELIGIBILITY:

Restrictions of any kind, like class, caste, age, sex, region do not come in the way of undertaking yatra. It is prescribed for all the four castes—varnas and stages of life asramas. But certain conditions are laid down in certain categories, like grihastis taking their spouses along with them invariably. Besides
if they happened to keep Agnihotri—sacred fire in their houses, they should necessarily carry it with them, and due rituals have to be offered at all the places of their visit.

MODE OF YATRA:

A journey to yatresthala should normrily be performed by walking. Scriptures recount several merits of the journey on foot. The performer -- yatri gets the merit of penance, if he goes to places by walking. Conveyance obliterates certain percentage of merit -- he loses half of his merit, if he presses into service any mode of transport, and if he uses foot-wear and umbrella, he loses further. If he utilises yatra for carrying on business, or undertakes with trade motives, he loses three-fourths of the merit. Above all, if he receives gifts, either at the starting point, or during the journey, he loses all the merit -- he becomes a spiritual bankrupt. But exceptions do operate here also. Physically unwell, or handicapped persons are barred from the operation of the injunctions cited.

AUSTERITIES:

The yatri should observe many disciplinary rules while on yatra. He should strictly observe austerities during his approach to the place, i.e., he must reach it with proper bhava—devotional sentiment. His faith and conviction alone shower enviable merits. During the journey, he should have absolute control over mind, feet, hands, eyes, and finally soul. He should observe the vow of fast, or atleast eat one meal a day. Intoxicants, frivolous comments, denegrating discussions, hypocritical attitude are to be totally eliminated, rather rooted out. He should keep himself fully abreast of the glory and historicity of the place to be visited beforehand. If possible, should jot down in his memorandum details of the importance of several niches and subsidiary shrines to be seen in that place, and its neighbourhood.

To cap it all, to whatever caste the yatri belongs, he
should abjure untouchability, why his sectarianism too, for the purpose of reaping full merits of yatra. Man made distinctions in caste, customs and the like should be nullified completely throughout the journey. Amicability, adjustability, nobility, placability, amiability, endurance and art of giving than receiving, should spill at every step of yatra to make life enjoyable and yatra successful. Reason: he invariably comes into contact with several kinds of people of myriad differences in acts and thought; and their life too is as sacred and praise-worthy as his life. So, the touch-me-not policy does him harm than help.

PLACES TO BE VISITED:

Yatra includes both thirthas—sacred places situated on the banks of sacred rivers or lakes or seas, and kshetras—holy spots at other places, situated on mounts, in caves, amidst sequestered bowers, or underground. Normally temples are built in holy spots surrounded by lovely spectacles of Nature. The sages responsible for, caused them built amidst calm, quiet picturesque Nature, where tranquility prevails and enables their japa, tapa and sankirtana activities carried on without interruption. They not only lived there, but are abiding in spirit even to this moment, will remain eternally. Accordingly, mighty rulers and celebrated pravaktas built marvellous temples, utilising the unparalleled skills of sculptors and architects. Their sheer visual appeal cast irresistible charm both on commoners and connoisseurs alike. Moreover, the sages, only after studying the nature of localities alone caused them built for several deities, in accordance with the powers of the presiding deities. The temples thus built are mainly dedicated to Siva, Vishnu and Sakti. Other adorable personages too are venerated in several places. Srimad Bhagavatha embodies a list of sacred mounts and holy rivers dotted with numerous shrines on their banks. And at the confluence and sources of rivers too. The list is too long, yet deserves mention. Among the mountains, the following are visit-worthy, nay indispensable for gaining merit.

They are: Malaya, Mangalaprastha, Mainaka, Trikuta, Rishabha.

The list of rivers begin with Chandravasa, followed by Tamraparni, Avatoda, Kritamala, Vaihayasi, Kaveri, Veni, Payasvini, Sarkaravarta, Krishna, Venya, Bhimarthi, Godavari Nirvindya, Payoshri, Tapi, Reva, Surasa, Narmada, Charman-vati, Sindhu, Andha, Tunga, Sona, Mahanadi, Vedasrimiti, Rishikulya, Trisma, Kausiki, Mandakini, Yamuna, Saraswati, Drishadvati, Gomati, Sarayu, Rodhaswtai, Saptavathi, Sush-oma, Satadru, Chandrabhaga, Marudvridha, Vitasta, Asikni and end with Visva. To be precise, every inch our Bharata kha-nda exudes divinity and ensures eternal bliss. The waters of the sacred rivers have several uses, and confer countless merits. They are used for naivedya, abhishcka, medicine, clea-nsing, washing and removing invisible spirits and sins. They purify man, besides being indispensable for living. According to puranas, the waters of Saraswathi purify man after a bath of three days; of Yamuna after seven days; of Ganga instantly; of Narmada on mere sight, but of Tapi by mere remembering.

HOW TO BEGIN?

Kasi khandā explains elaborately the procedure to be followed for starting yatra. Before starting, the yatri should observe fast at his residence after offering prayers to Ganesha first, and ancestors next, followed by salutations to learned brahmins and saintly people. He should perform several rituals at the close of fast with Parana. Among the many austerities, Satsang and Sankirtha take precedence. He must take vows to abstaining from using alcoholic drinks and narcotics till he retu-rns. On reaching home, again he must offer prayers as done in the beginning. Before starting and after returning, he has to make a Pradakshīna of his village, or town.
WHAT TO OBSERVE DURING YATRA:

On reaching the destination, mundana—tonsorial operation—offering of hair is recommended to every yatri. After the shave, he should observe fast. With regard to ladies, whose husbands are alive, mundana is to be interpreted as cutting of braid of hair by two finger-breadths. This special concession is granted to all classes and castes of people too. This mundana, besides removing sins, makes one feel shedding of ego, and recognising the omnipotence of God. After that comes holy bath—when the yatri bathes in a sacred thirtha, the merit goes not only to the bathed, but to the mother, father, wife, brother, sister, friend and preceptor also. It is also mentioned that whomever, the bather remembers at the time of bath, one eighth of the merit goes to him too. For total effect, it is prescribed that the bather should prepare a small image of the beneficiary with darbha grass and dip it into the thirtha. This would give the beneficiary the intended merit in full. While taking bath, one should face the sun, if it is kshetra, and the direction of the downward flow of river, if it is thirtha. Tarpana follows the bath.

Secondly, performing sraddha to manes is a must. Normally, sraddha must be performed at one's own house, and offering it in the house of others is strictly prohibited; but as thirthas belong to nobody, they can be performed here with due rituals. They confer supplementary benefits due to sanctity pervading there. While performing sraddha, one is forbidden to offer arghya and making avahana. Further, nishiddhakala—improper time need not be taken into account — given any importance. Giving gifts comes next. People who could afford can offer dana several types of gift to the learned brahmins and priests, like godana — gifting of cow, Swarnadana — gold, Vastradana — dhoties, and sarees, Bhudana — lard, and Navadanya — grain etc. Needless to state, offering of prayers with several rituals to the deities is given priority over all the rest. It is clearly stated that yatri should scrupulously avoid receiving any gift from any one during the whole period of yatra. If he accepts, it tantamounts to selling all the merit accrued due
to yatra. Sastras are vehement on this aspect, but emphatic in saying that giving gifts at Kasi, Kurukshetra, Gaya and Amarikantaka are allowed, and one shakes off his poverty, if he gives here, but accepting any at these places, one purchases poverty.

This ideal injunctions are meant for ideal yatra, and the ideal yatriimpliments them to make life ideal and yatra successful. Some exceptions do operate in every injunction to easing rigidity and make yatra purposeful. Of course, these are for commoners in particular, who are steeped in materialism, and living amidst tantalising mundane objects. For highly eloved soul, if he properly, and soulfully bathes and dips himself into the water of self control, he needs no performance of any yatra. He could wash away all his impurities -- mental or spiritual with mere steadfast faith and single minded devotion; for, he knows, Ged does not dwell atop mountains, or in well built temples. He is Consciousness and Bliss incarnate, and is seen in one’s own heart, where there is proper bhava. Such mental make up is worthy of craving and attaining, till then yatras should go on, and yatris must pass through all the ordeals prescribed by our adorable Maharshis in their immortal works.
SECTION I

SOMANATH

UNIQUENESS;

Perhaps, no other temple in the history of our Akhand Bharat, or rather in the history of mankind, has been the target of attack and destruction, plunder and pillage; arson and annihilation by iconoclasts and alien expansionists as that of Somanath of Prabhas Pattana, situated on the Southern coast of Saurastra, in the province of Sora, now known as Junagadh in the state of Gujarat. Its history is bristled with an unending series of savage plunders and countless acts of barbarous vandalism, dating from the advent of Mohammad Gazani in 1026 and ending with its handing over to Indian Union on 9.11.1947 by Sir Shanavaz Bhattu, the Diwan of Junagadh. Records reveal that as many as 13 times, the temple was subjected to brutal attacks of Mlechchas. The tale of its defence is packed with indescribable pathos and unimaginable horrors. Although the spirit of religiosity rose up to unprecedented heights, it could not prevent and save the pious innocent beings mercilessly butchered; the old and infirm brutally trampled; children and disabled ruthlessly crushed and women openly raped and humiliated, besides converted, or carried to use as slaves, or turn into prostitutes. And the town was ransacked—its precious movables were razed and mutilated beyond recognition.

Sure, the blood-stained hand of the iconoclasts can never regain its original colour, even if it is washed with the waters of all the oceans. Such incalculable harm was perpetrated on Hindus deliberately and systematically over nine long centuries. Even though the temple was brought to the ground level as many as 13 times, ironically, every time even before the fire was put out, or crashing sound hushed, it was rebuilt and renovated with innumerable additions that enhanced
its glory. The immortal Linga started emerging the very next moment of the iconoclasts turning their backs on it, demonstrating to the world that the spirit of Hinduism is irrepressible, invincible and inexhaustible. Every time, either a local chief, or a distant theist emperor came forward with redoubled ardent and manifold resources to rebuild it in a way better, and design supreme.

Is it not then akin to Phoenix, the mythological bird that burns itself after living a full century on funeral pile, only to rise from the ashes, young and energetic to live another cycle? Does this not again divulge the truth that Hinduism is apratihata, apurva, ajeya, ananta, anadi, and its glorious career is ajaramara?

It is believed that celebrated Rishis and divine sages entered the Linga, and it was worshipped in different kalpas by different names. To the Vedic Rishis, it was Kalagnirudra, and later it was called by many names such as, Bairavana, Panchamukha Siva, Mrityunjaya, Amritesa, Krittivasas and Hansa Nanda in the periods followed. According to legends, Lord Siva has been present in this thirtha, since the beginning and will remain so forever. This accounts for the emergence and existence of Lord Somanath from the dawn of creation and is worshipped by humanity with an ardour unique, and pietasy exemplary.

SOURCES:

Almost all Puranas, particularly Yamana Purana, Kurma Purana, Skanda purana, Garuda Purana, Padma Purana, Vishnu Purana, Bhavishya Purana, and Matsya Purana; Bhagavatas like Devi Bhagavata and Srimad Bhagavata, together with the Mahabharata enshrine elaborate accounts of this, and each seems vying with the other in eulogising the glory of this kshetra. It is dedicated to Lord Siva, but in this selfsame kshetra many sports of Yadavas with Sri Krishna as the protagonist are played. Of all, the Skanda Purana in its Prabhasa Khanda has dealt at length, highlighting many miracles and
mysteries of this place. Besides including its topography, geology, flora and fauna, it narrates the story of installation of the Adi jyotirlinga vividly. The Mahabharata in Salya Parva embodies an interesting account of the penance of Soma, the Moon god and and installation of Linga by Brahma.

ANTIOQUITY:

The story begins with the solemnisation of marriage of Soma with 27 lovely daughters of Daksha Prajapati. Rohini the buxom beauty of the charming bevy held greater hold on Soma. Smitten by savati matsara, the sorrowing 27 complained to the father about their miserable lot. Daksha in the capacity of father-in-law chastised him. Soma assured equal attention to all and would give no occasion for future discontent, but only to break it the next moment. Thereupon, Daksha cursed him to lose his lustre and be like a block of dull black stone. Though Soma lost his lustre, it did not diminish infatuation for Rohini. This was too much for Daksha; upset by this, he bade the deadly Rajyakshma disease enter his body and reduce his vigour and vitality. It worked. Caught in its grip, he grew thinner and paler day by day; and it had disastrous effect on vegetation. It started withering, bringing in its wake slow death to plants, birds, beasts and people. Finding the calamity, the compassionate Rishis prayed to Daksha for immediate solution. Soma too implored for forgiveness, but he regretted saying that he was incapable of undoing the done. He then advised Soma to worship Maheswar at a spot, where the river Saraswati meets the sea.

As advised Soma forthwith descended at Prabhasa pattana where Saraswati meets the sea and worshipped Sparsa Linga of Somanath of the size of an egg. And did penance for 4000 years. Pleased with Soma's austerity and penance, Sadasiva appearing said that he could not remove the effects of curse totally, but would lift it partially. According to it, he would wane for a fortnight and wax during the rest of the month. As Soma regained Prabha-lustre at this place it was called Prabhasa pattana. Soma then made a humble supplica-
tion that the Lord must be called by the name of his devotee Soma—the Moon. Hence, Somanath. Further, He should be his Kuladevata. And so Maheswar is called Somanath since then. Soon Soma was advised and initiated by Brahma Himself to erect a shrine for Siva. In addition, Brahma then cleft open the earth and lifted a shining Swayambhu Linga of the size of egg covered with honey and darbha grass with a Brahma masila over it. The Linga thus taken out was installed by Brahma himself.

Several other anecdotes to bring out the outstanding sanctity and glory of this Kshetra. It is here Dadhichi made on exemplary sacrifice; and it is much quoted and oft repeated. Once it appears that gods entrusted their weapons to Dadhichi for safety, with a promise to collect them at a fixed date, but did not. Dadhichi, deciding to repair to Himalayas for penance found it difficult to carry them. So he drank their essence by converting them into liquid. Later, when Devendra came for arms to fight against demons, Dadhichi suggested to kill him and use his bones as arms. Devendra did as bid. Learning the tragic death of his father, Pishpalad, the true son did penance and got Badabanala agni to take revenge on gods. Gods in order to save themselves took recourse to a strategy. In accordance with it, Saraswati would carry that Kalagni to hand over to him. As planned, she deposited it in the sea before giving it to him near Prabhasa Pattana. The strategy was carried out and it saved the gods.

Many of the episodes relating to the lives of Yadavas and Pandavas, particularly that of Sri Krishna, Subhadra, Balarama, Arjuna and other principal characters took place here in Dwaparayuga. The entire Yadava Community along with Sri Krishna breathed their last due to the curse of Durvāsa on the shore of Prabhasa Thirtha. A small yet sacred shrine stands at Viraval perpetuating the holy spot of Sri Krishna’s niryana. Moreover, Lakulisa considered to be the avatara of Siva, visited this place after entering another man’s body through parakaya pravesam and performed penance. He settled
down here and taught sastras to a choice group of students and became a great Siddha. It is said that he, who prays to the image of Lakulisa here on the Karthika Pournami is promised of abundant wealth for seven births. Realising the holiness hovering over here, Agasthya preferred the celebration of his marriage with Lopamudra here. Yudhistira, during his yatra performed pujas here, fasting completely for 12 days with Droupadi. Here one can see five sakaras—Saraswati river, Soma graha, Samudra, Swayambhu Linga and Soma i.e. Lord Siva with Uma, His consort. Many Siddhas adept in the Pasupata yoga flourished in the past here.

HISTORICITY;

There is a great deal of authentic information, besides literary works about the glory of this place and it is preserved in the archives. Recent excavation too have shed enough light testifying to the uniqueness of this place from time immemorial. Travellers accounts, imperial edicts, Nawabs farmanas embody the supremacy of this place. During the Pre-Vedic period, the present Somnath was called Nagrapur and it established trade relations with Gulf countries. It is recorded that Surya vamsiya Aryas landed here first and they named it Bhaskara Thirtha, but the Chandra Vamshiya Aryas who followed them called it Som Thirtha, and it is from them the present name is derived. Copious evidence available in records focuses light on its predominance, both as a seat of learning and commercial centre, during the pre-Mahabharata period, when gods used to descend here for sojourns; for, it was a seat of higher learning. Intellectual giants and immortal Rishis living in parnasalas practised yoga and taught the Vedas to the students. And so their kutirs were reverberating with Veda ghosha. It carved a niche in specialising Khili Sukta of Rig Veda and Parishistha in Yajur Veda.

During the Mahabharatha period, it was on this punya bhoomi many a historic event took place—visiting of it times numberless by the Yadavas community with their kith and kin on auspicious occasions, why, they met their death here only.
In the post-Yadava period, due to the spread of Buddhism many changes altered the conditions, yet the cult of Saivism could not be suppressed. When Chandra Gupta Mourya was in throne, he revived the Vedic cult and installed the first Jotirlinga in the temple and its prominence spread to four corners. The Sungas, Sakas and Guptas, who succeeded them later continued the practice and patronised with rich donations and renovations.

The trouble from the Mlechchas started in 770, when Jummid, the Arab General defeated the emperor Sailaditya. Considerable damage was done, but the Hindu kings ruling then and later withstood the challenge and maintained the pristine purity of the shrine and its traditions. The darkest period of the temple’s agonising history began with entering of Mahammad Gazani in 1026 A.D. His inhuman religious bigotry caused incalculable damage to the temple and its worshippers. He emptied vials of hatred and intolerance on the innocent civilians and mute gods in such demonic way that history cannot show such similiar raids. He flung open the hell gates and the paisachika krityas that followed cannot be clothed in any language decent. Blood reddened the entire soil, and smoke covered the sky. The fabulous booty—the inestimable wealth of the temple was carried by twenty thousand camels and thirty thousand horses. The sacred Linga was smashed to pieces and the vaults overfowing with rare jewels were emptied. The loss can be expressed only in astronomical figures.

But the irrepressible religious fervour of Hinduism soared higher than the invincible Islamic ardour, and soon Somanath appeared anew, and lured the reverent due to the Herculean efforts of the then ruling princes and emperors, particularly that of Malwa, Gujarat, Ajmir and Junagadh. Many far-off emperors visited the temple and endowed it in such grandiose manner that the great temple of the great Lord witnessed greater glory and showered on the devotees the bliss greatest. Again in 1293, Allauddin Khilji carried away all the accumulated wealth by defeating the king. Repetition of misery-conv-
tering the helpless into Islam, carrying the women-folk for sale and nefarious purposes, ravaging the temple, looting of its property and the like, occurred with greater ferocity, but rebuilding was undertaken at once. Again Mohammad Tuglak in 1345; Feroz in 1367; Zafer Khan in 1395; 1402; 1406; Ahmad Shah in 1411 and Mahammad Begda in 1452, plundered it, but every time the vitality of Hinduism used to reassert itself sooner than the plunder. Unfortunately it tasted the wrath of D’Casto, the Portugese Admiral in 1547. Like the Muslim conqueror, he spared neither the temple nor the mosques. The worst of it, he carried many inscriptions with him. It also witnessed Moghul bigotry during the reign of Aurangazeb in 1658 and 1704.

After these devastating onslights, permanent structures rose in 1788 under the aegis of Maharani Ahalyabai Holkar of Indore, whose lavish donations inaugurated a new spire in the temple renovation task. The temple was built again over the old spot called Sankalyeswar, a new Linga was installed. Many philanthropists and theists endowed it lavishly to raise its glory to the apex. After Independence, the indefatigable efforts of sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, restored it to its former divinity and reputation through a Trust. With the installation of a new Jyotirlinga by the then president Rajendra Babu in 1951, it reached its culmination to the satisfaction of millions of devotees living throughout the length and breadth of the world. Finally, with the erection of Digvijay Dwar by Rajamata Gulab Kunvera in 1970 and getting it declared by Bhagavn Sri Satya Sai Baba, the temple’s flag started fluttering, broadcasting, as it were its glorious indomitable spirit to the celestials.

THE TEMPLE

The present temple with its imposing exterior adorned with marvellous sculpture and a grand Sabha Mantap in front, and a huge Sikhara atop measuring 155 feet in height casts a spell on pilgrims even from miles afar. It faces East and has a lovely garden to its right extending up to the high compound wall acting as dyke along the Arabian sea. Pilgrims enter through the Digvijaya Dwar, apiece of architectural
beauty that detains them longer with its majesty and decor.
The Jyotirlinga installed on the Brahmasila is about 4 feet
in height and affords a royal banquet to the eye with its
sandal paste decoration, which is a novelty here. Imbibing
its beauteous splendour, the devotees close their eyes for a while,
when Somanath of the ancient times installed by Brahma
flashes across their minds and recounts His former glory.
There were 1000 priests in His service attending to several
activities round the clock. During its heyday, the temple
was beautified with invaluable golden ornaments, and the
Garbha griha was lighted by jewelled lamps; and a grand bell
was rung during the harati with a chain of solid gold of 250
maund in weight. It had hundreds of giant sized vaults stuffed
with rare jewels, and the pillars inside were studded with
gems. No wonder, it ignited the lust and greed in the hearst
of unscrupulous Mlechchhas, who raided it again and again.

FESTIVALS:

There are many festivals celebrated throughout the year,
dear to Siva. Among them, the Somanath Mela held in the
middle of Karthik is very popular and important. Besides,
the months of Chitra and Badrapada have special attraction,
when Pitrushrada and Narayana Bali shraddha are offered.
The Brahmans of this place are Ved pathis, and an authority
on Yajurveda; and offer poojas in a unique way.

EXISTING TEMPLES OF INTEREST:

Besides the main temple, there are several others of
great importance laying in a radius of 10 kms and a few
far off. The following deserve visiting by all.

DAITYASUDAN MAHAVISHNU:

This shrine was built in the last century, and the idol
of Mahavishnu is quite impressive. When the main temple
was destroyed, this rare idol was preserved under earth at a
place called ChaKra thirtha. As the story goes, Lord Maha
Vishnu appeared before the ardent devotees—Umasankar Desai and Vishamber Bhatt in dream and directed them to disinter and build a shrine for him. They did. It is located in the Main Bazar.

SOMANATHJI MANDIR:

This is an under ground temple built in 1784 by Maha Rani Ahalyabai of Holkar of Indore. Finding the main shrine desecrated and deserted, she built it and installed the idol of Parvati in one corner. It is extremely beautiful and receiving poojas along with her Lord, Maheswar.

VIRAVAL:

This is an up-coming industrial town humming with Pilgrims always. It is the last rail head for Somanath. There is a temple dedicated to Sri Krishna. The idol painted multi-colours feasts the eye and it is perpetuating the sacred spot of Krishna’s demise. Hence visitation by all.

THE VARAH DEVAL;

It belongs to pre-chalukyan period and possesses grand idols of Siva, Vishnu, Surya, Ganga and Jamuna. It is on the bank of Triveni.

DRONESWAR:

This is situated near the village Dron and dedicated to Droneswar Mahadeo. Here, water falls on the Linga always through a cow’s head. Hence attraction.

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CONVEYANCE

AIR PORT: Jamnagar—Indian Airlines flights connect it to the rest of India.

RAIL HEAD: Viraval—6 kms to Somanath. Taxis, Tongas, Autos, buses, are available at all hours.

BUS ROUTE: State Transport Bus Routes from every city and town converge here, Private companies operate all kinds of buses including places of itinerary interest in list on route.

ACOMMODATION: Dharmasalas provide utensils for cooking and there are Modern Lodges with all amenities also. The Zilla parishad and the Somanath rest houses are very near to the temple and are cheap comparatively.

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DWARAKA
The Earthly Abode of Lord Krishna

UNIQUENESS:

That Nandanavana of Yadunandana; that earthly Vaikuntha of Bhagavathothamas; that terrestrial capital of Srimanarayan; during His short sojourn in the martyrloka; that make shift stage of Natana Sutradhari for enacting Jagannataka; that meeting place of celestials with terrestrials for embarking on the Dharmoddharana deals; that seat of the highest Judicature of Dwaparáyuga; that Divyarama from which the Yadava blossoms wafted inexhaustible sweet fragrance; that veritable Concert Hall where from the liquid notes of mellifluous Venunada flowed down to lull the world, time and again; that divya thirtha which is luring every brand of Vaishnava sampradaya down the ages; that eternal pulpet specialised in teaching the crafty statecraft to the craftier aspirants by the craftiest Rajatantragra; that immaculate Pemapita standing on which the Jaganmohanakara revealed the multi-dimensional forms of amara Prema to love-lorn Gopikas of myraid tastes, goes by the name of Dwarka. In the past and present too. It is situated on the sacred banks of river Gomati flowing in the North Western part of the then Sourashtra now called Gujarat. That entire region is split up into five parts and called Pancha Dwarakas-Krishna Dwarka; Rukmini Dwarka; Okha Dwarka; Beti-Dwarka and Dwarka submerged.

ANTIQUITY:

The glory of that Punyadhama of Sri krishna, the eighth incarnation of Sri Mahavishnu is elaborately described in many scriptures like the Mahabharata, Harivamsa, Vayu purana; Vishnu purana; Varaha purana and Skanda purana, besides the Mahabhagavatha that recreates almost all the awe-inspiring episodes of Srikrishna the protagonist of the divine sthāna, who is personally responsible for building and expanding this holy city in the Dwapara Age, driven by dire necessity of shielding of Yada-
va community from the onslaughts of Jarasanda and Kavalyana the arch born enemies of the divine personages.

ORIGIN:

Its origin dates back to the time of Revatha, the great grand son of Manu, the immortal Law-giver. It is recorded that Revatha was the ruler of Anartha with Kusasthali as his capital. According to the legendary account, Revatha desired to get his daughter Revathi married off to a deserving prince of exemplary character and military prowess of his times. When his trials met with failures, he went straight to Brahma for advice and blessings from Vidhatha Himself. Delighted at his approach Brahma told that many centuries had passed in the Brahma by the time their conversation came to a close; yet He tendered advice that Revathi should be married to Balarama, the elder brother of Sri krishna in the light of the changed conditions. The divine injunction was implemented implicitly. This is the first reference to Dwaraka, which was then called Dwaramati, the other name for Kusasthali, the capital of the kingdom Anartha ruled by Raivatha.

Another reference is to an earlier episode—the death of Kamsa at the hands of Sri krishna. Jarasandha, the king of Magadha along with Kavalayana, the formidable foes of Yadava community and particularly, of Sri krishna, besieging Mathura was perpetrating on the Yadavas atrocious crimes without end. Sri krishna then decided to build an impregnable fort in the midst of sea, contiguous to Sourastra, the safest region then, and take the entire Yadava community there. He commissioned the divine architect Viswakarma to build a city of unparalleled opulence and inimitable excellence in all. When the Sea-god was invoked for space, he at once provided a twelve yejan dry land enjoying ideal conditions for luxurious living: Seeing the city coming up in beauty indescribable and decided to make it, as one far surpassing any city built so far in the Universe, the Astadikpalakas and Deverdra bestowed on it an infinite number of invaluable gifts, like the Parijata tree; Devasabhamantap; divine horses; navanidhis etc., to the com-
fort of the citizens. Then came down there for permanent settlement the entire Yadavarece from Mathura, Brindavan, Gokulam etc. It is here, according to one legend that Sri Mahavishnu killed Sankaur, a demon and transformed his wife Tulasi into a basil plant, the leaves of which are widely used and highly praised for their sacredness.

This Pouranic account from then grows eloquent; exuberant; pedantic and hyperbolic—all to ignite the dormant bhakti instincts in the readers with a view to make them proud of their birth in the land of spirit, and to mould their life in such a way to become specimens for all times to come. So far, so good. But now comes the controversy regarding its location— Where did it lie? Was it in an island, or far off from it! Orientalists, Indologists, Sanathanists and Research scholars have wrangled their heads over this knotty problem for long, each advancing his own finding and corroborating it with evidence, only to be refuted by others; for, according to puranas that magnificent city of Dwaraka was sunk after the dimise of Sri Krishna. Scholars like Dey, Altekar, Pargiter and Pusalkar opine that the modern town of Dwaraka is built on the original site of Dwaraka as described in the scriptures.

This is stoutly refuted by Durgasankar Sastry and Bhattasali. Some identified it with modern Junagadh which was called Girinagar then. A few say it to be Mannargudi, a town located in Madurai district, down south, in Tamil Nadu; yet others account for it Mabhavpur, lying between Purbundar and Miyani. A place called Khed Dwaraka in Marwad is also brought into controversy. Finally, the holy town of Dwaraka situated on the bank of Gomati in the Okhama mandal region of the Western part of modern Gujarat is popularly identified with the original Dwaraka. Any how, Dwaraka, wherever it be is included in the list of seven most important holy places of pilgrimage and visiting of which is a must for every ardent Hindu to get liberated him/ herself from the cycle of births and deaths.

HISTORICITY:

During the Golden age of Cuptas, the self-same Dwaraka
is found uttered and mentioned with utmost veneration as a pilgrim centre; and it was luring all classes of people throughout the year. It was deemed as a thirtha of great spiritual significance and several references were made in the cultural and literary circles of those golden days. In the Solanki age, renovation and expansion activities were undertaken with great fervour both by pious public and enlightened rulers.

The rulers of Gurjaradesa and Rajasthan made numerous endowments from time to time and strove for the uninterrupted influx of pilgrims by catering to their needs, and also spending lavishly for the maintenance and continuance of traditional pujas in and out of seasons. Literature abounds evidence in abundance of this magnificent temple patronised and visited by the pallavas, Maitrakas, Chavadas and Chalukyas.

THE PRESENT TEMPLE:

The Dwarakanath Mandir lies on the bank of Gomati, precisely at the point of its confluence with the sea. It is 50 metre high and the highest of its kind in India. Tradition records of its being built in a single night. The tall tapering spires are supported by 60 columns and the exterior is embellished with rich sculpture. It is built on an elevated spacious ground with flights of stairs on all sides and surrounded by two high walls with adequate space between them for circumambulation. Its grandeur is heightened by its tall majestic, seven storyed tower, measuring about 140 feet in height. It is a landmark imbued with spirituality by its saffron flag atop fluttering always and is visible to people far off, say some 20 miles even. This magnificent tower rises over the large Mandap of five storeys and a huge dome supported by sixty pillars inside. On the outer side, it is beautified with sculptural; adornments of rare craftsmanship that attract both theists and tourists. Around the sanctum sanctorum there are many mmini-shrines dedicated to Trivikram, Pradyumna and Kuseswara Mahadeo. Pilgrims normally visit everyone of them before entering the main Mandir. The Sarada Peetha

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established by his Holiness Jagadguru Sankaracharya lies next to Trivikram shrine and it is receiving equal and undivided attention, though Saivate traditions are followed here. As a matter of fact it has become an integral part of the Dwarakadish shrine, thereby emphasising the essential harmony prevailing in this divya thitha. There is a small Durga shrine near the entrance lying far below the ground level and appearing, as if it is Patala Durga. The broad stairs provided enable the devotees to reach the feet of the Jaganmatha for offering prayers and receiving her blessings, and frankly speaking its oddity of location draws eve ryone to Her feet without exception.

THE ARCHAMURTHY:

The beautiful black granite statue of Sri krishna, popularly known as Ranchhodrai is installed on a silver plated simhasan. The image of Dwarakadish measures about three feet in height. The Lord revealing Himself with four arms in standing posture casts an irresistible charm on the devotees and detains them longer. The enchantment of the Lord enchanted by the floral decoration and dazzling jewellery sends thrills in the spines of the devotees and makes them oblivious of this world. His hypnotising splendour in the characteristic North Indian embellishments haunts the bhaktas for years, and prepares their minds for further visits. Indeed the infinite charms of that dark hued God defy description: they are to be seen and imbibed than enumerated and explained. No wonder, for shere eyeful darsan of this sublime beauty, even the highly evolved souls like seers saints, sages and sadhus paid several visits to this shrine; yet their spiritual thirst was not quenched, as it were. Here is an illustration that fortifies this truth. Over 2000 generations worshipped this Lord, ever since its construction and it became a cradle of countless legends.

It is recorded that a devotee by name Bodhano, living in Dakor developed irrepressible fascination for the sight of that Jaganmohanakara, and he paid periodical visits times countless. With the passage of time it went higher and higher, but with the decrease of vital powers due to advancing old age and
infirmity, he found it humanly impossible to withstand the rigour of the journey. Finding his predicament of passing restless days and sleepless nights, the Omnicompassionate Lord suggested him in dream to procure that image, some how. And instal it in his own house. Accordingly, the pious devotee ventured to dismantle it one night and succeeded in it miraculously well. But unfortunately he was apprehended by the priests on his way home, who knew it at the nick of the movement. Scenting the avarice of the earth and earthy priests, he showed his willingness to give gold in exchange, equal to the weight of the image.

The greedy brahmins readily agreed to the deal. But lo! when the image was weighed in the balance, the Lord reduced Himself to such an insignificant weight that He weighed equal to the weight of the nose ring of Bodhana's wife. To the awe-struck greedy priests, there heard then aeral voice chastising for descending to that nefarious level and directing them to run post-haste to instal another statue in the temple. They did. How fortunate was Bodhana! This event is said to have occurred in 1159. Realising its significance and to make Dakor another pilgrim centre, one of the Sankaracharyas open a branch of the Peeta at Dakor. Ardent theists visit Dakor to feast their eyes with the beauty of the original image of Jaganmohanakara and offer Pujas with unbounbed zeal. Dakor thus perpetuates the memory of Bodhana and hence became a place of pilgrimage.

While at Dwaraka, the devotees have to suffer three things, viz., (1) Danda - paying several kinds of taxes from the point of bathing to the sopt, wherefrom the theists feast their eyes with the darasan of the Lord; (2) Munda - tonsorial operation as an indispensable rite for every theist; (3) Dam-receiving impressions of disc and conch on hands and temples with red-hot iron casts. These were the practices, of course, existed in the bygone days and every pious visitor was willingly subjecting himself to these tortures with smiles, but visitors in modern times have conveniently relegated them for personal comforts, branding them as blind beliefs.
Keeping this in view, the Prince of Gaikwar abolished taxes in 1943 A. D.; but a few ultra orthodox theists are still holding on to those rituals.

Another interesting tradition relates to the observance of five Gakaras in this holy city. They are: 1. Gomati—bath in the sacred river Gomati; 2. Gomaya—bathing with gomaya—cow-dung smeared all over the body; 3. Godana—gifting of a cow to a deserving brahmin; 4. Gopichandana—bearing the marks of gopichandana on forehead, arms etc; 5. Gopinath darsan—filling the eyes with the lovely image of Sri krishna. It is said that the darsan of the Dwarkanath is so meritorious and it is equal to performing many types of sacrifices and emptying bags of Dakshina to the brahmins. Skanda Purana which devoted 44 chapters glorifying this thirtha exhorts that the darsan of Lord Sri krishna is a sanctifying that every Hindu worth the description should unfailingly avail it; and one may afford to bypass the darsan of the deities at equally important and holy places like Kasi, Kurukhetra, Prabhasa etc. but not here. It is equal to that of the darsan of gods at all the sacred places in India.

PLACES OF ITINERARY INTEREST:

The pilgrims avail the darsan of the lovely face, beaming with radiant smile of Dwarkadish atleast at three places, besides the main Mandir, viz., 1. Okha Dwarka, 2. Beti Dwarka, and 3. Rukmini Dwarka.

BETI DWARAKA:

It is situated in an island in the bay of Cutch, and is 20 miles off the main temple. There is a motorable road upto Okha Dwarka, and from here pilgrims go by boats. There are mechanised boats run by several companies and they charge one rupee per head for ferring across a distance of 8 kms. It is quite pleasant, and all enjoy the voyage. The town authorities collect tax from every pilgrim. There are two temples dedicated to Sri krishna, and in both of them.
Vallabha Sampradaya is observed. There are many old, dilapidated palatial buildings identified as Sri Krishna's residential quarters and palaces of his astamahishis. The image in the second one is that of Sankhodhara.

According to legend, there was a dreadful demon living in this region in Satya yuga and was torturing the sages and saints in several ways. In response to the soulful prayers of the afflicted, Lord Mahavishnu killed him in his Matsya rupa and relieved His bhaktas from the demon once for all. The grateful sages built a temple here and worshipped Him, and that temple lies next to the Krishna Mandir. Its antiquity and the beauty of the image draws the devotees invariably ever. In Okha itself there is a shrine dedicated to Sri Krishna, but it is not given due importance as the other two in the island. Pilgrims in their zeal for boat travel bypass this shrine.

RUKMINI DWARAKA:

It is situated at a distance of 3 kms. from Dwaraka and lies on the way to Beti Dwaraka. It is a pretty shrine built in red stone. It casts an irresistible charm both by its size and sculpture adorning the outer side. The images of Rukmini with Her Lord Sri Krishna are captivating by their ethereal beauty and decoration. Pilgrims unfailingly visit this and worship with great fervour.

PINDATARA:

This is another place of immense spiritual importance. It is the place for pindapradhāna, by the theists in particular. The peculiarity of this place is that the pindas when thrown into the lake after due rituals float and swim than sinking as found in other places. Hence it goes by the name Pindatara. This place is associated with another event that brought havoc to the Yadava community. It is said that Samba, the son of Sri Krishna born through Jambavati was playing practical jokes on each and everyone, regardless of persons' status, age, mood, sex, place etc. Once when Durvasa visited Dwaraka, Samba visited him with his like minds dressed as pregnant woman and asked him to name the sex of the baby to be born in a mocking manner. Unable to stomach the indecent joke Durvasa cursed him anon saying that the would be child would become responsible for the annihilation of the entire community. Certainly the curse ran its course. This disastrous event took place here,
Gopitalao;
It's a beautiful big lake situated on the way to Beti Dwarka. The earth of this lake is white in colour and is called Gopichandana. Pilgrims carry it home for making marks of it on forehead, and chest. There are several festivals celebrated with great gusto throughout the year. Among them Bhisma Ekadasi, Janmashtami and Hindu Utsav deserve special mention. The entire town is seen at its best, when joyous ceremonies go on till the auspicious hour of his is birth in the night.

ACCOMMODATION:
Being an ancient pilgrimage centre attracting devout religionists since time immemorial, there are innumerable lodging facilities like Choultries and Dharm ashalas, in addition to star category lodging houses. Besides, several religious Maths provide accommodation, supplying utensils for cooking too. Almost all sects of Hindu religion have their own branches, carrying out humanitarian activities, besides disseminating spiritual knowledge.

Every religious leader and pravakta of great eminence paid visits several times during their lives and built big Maths both for staying and catering to the needs of their followers visiting them. Renowned Mahapracharakas and pithadhipatis like Ramanuja, Madhavacharya, Jnaneswar, Vittalacharya, Govindaswarji, Chaitanya, Mirabai, Vallabhacharya paid visits more than once and established pithas and Mathas, which are still continuing their spiritual work with extraordinary zeal due to them.

On top of it, the sprawling town of Dwarka is in the list of summer resorts. As mercury never goes beyond 86 deg. due to the impact of delightful sea breeze, people from far and near throng here during the season and camp for weeks. Hence it has emerged as a reputed tourist centre, besides being a place of pilgrimage of unique spiritual significance.

| AIR PORT | Jamnagar- 148 Kms | Flights connect it to Delhi, Ahmadabad |
| RAIL HEAD | Dwarka connects Jamnagar, Rajkot, Ahmadabad etc, |
| BUS ROUTE | State Transport buses from Ahmadabad Jamnagar, Porbandar are available. Private Companies too ply buses of all types from above places. |
UNIQUENESS:

Mathura—the very word drips honey; and it does, as it should be; for, it is derived from madhu, that stands for sweetness. But look, here an ancient city called Mathura poured down an unending stream of unadulterated, thick, pure, sweet milk that created hillocks of butter and pools of milk with creamy bunds amidst lovely sylvan scenes, embellished with petty green bushes, over grown with wiry creepers, bearing multicolored fragrant flowers, to making an appropriate setting to revealing the asamana chaturya in playing boyhood sports by that Nandakishor that virtually seduced him into becoming that immortal Navaneethachor—the haughty naughty, mischief-loving, butter-stealing kid, whose infectious antics and rollicking humour drew the celestialts down to participate in them whole-heartedly. It is this selfsame Mathura Mandala comprising Gokulam, & Brindavan that reverberated with the mellifluous strains of the divine flute of Sri Krishna that taught majestic prancing to peacocks, witnessing of which spectacle cows drank in that ganamritha with outstretched ears, while mankind sank in the ocean of joy at the sight of the mother Earth marking time, oblivious of time sense. And it is this very same Vrajabhumi that was sanctified by the Rasalila of that Gopikavallabh with the ravishing belles of Repalli, when Natture in surfeit of that rich feast stood motionless, till the crowing of wise cocks heralding the onsets of Brahma muhurth.

It is this punyabhumi about which puranas expound that any type of sin committed in any place gets purged off in a thirtha, but one committed in a thirtha sticks hard, whereas the sin committed in Mathura is destroyed in Mathura itself. Sure, there can’t be any residue clinging to body to be accumulated with age due to interest growing to enormous proportions. What a
boon! And how sacred!! It is this kshetra and its presiding deity that Vaishnava cult raised them to Himalayan heights with statements such as: There is one scripture, that is Bhagavadgita; there is one Acharya that is Sri Krishna; there is one mantra, that is Krishna mantra; the most sacred chant of all there is one kshetra that is Mathura; there is one God, that is Krishnaparamatma; and finally there is one duty, that is seva-worshipping of HIM. Furthermore, there is a belief that the word Mathura, whose principal letters, M, U & A, represent the three components of the mystic syllable, A U M, the chief cause of creation, and as such, it is holding out another attraction for the orthodox Hindus; for, they interpret that the three letters stand for the divinities of the Hindu Trinity—Brahma, Vishnu and Maheswar. With such deification by every school of Vaishnavism, the place became the Bhooloka Vaikuntha for all devout Hindus, and so, an unceasing stream of pilgrims found round the year.

An infinite number of divyalilas imbued with inexplicable mystery said to have occurred in this thirtha kshetra are enshrined in several genres of literatures of all languages in India and abroad, and in fact each felt honoured in eulogising the glorious anecdotes of Sri Krishna, from childhood days to the historic day of that greatest exodus to Dwarka, built in the midst of sea to be screened from the nefarious manoeuvres of Jarasandha, the arch enemy of the Yadava community.

SOURCES:

There is no dearth of evidence to visualise Sri Krishna's miraculous sports played on this holy land, covering 20 yojanas in measure during its heyday. Almost all scriptures right from he Vedas, like the Rigveda, Upanishads like, Chandogya, epics like Mahabharatha, devotional treatises, like Bhagavatha, Hari-vamsa and Mathura Mahatmya, Puranas, like, Varha and Padma, philosophical works like Vistadvaita: Buddhist canonical works like Mahaniddesa and Chillaniddesa and travel accounts of Fa-hien arid Hieum-Tsang embody hundreds of the sublime descriptions of the glory of this divyadhama. On the top of it,
Sankirthanacharyas and poet-saint-musicians, like Jayadeva, Chaitanya, vidyapati, Chandidas, Narsi Mehta, Mira, Nabhaiji, Nimarka, Jiva Haridas, Raghunathdas, Rupa and Sanatana, Gopala Bhatta and Raghunathabatta and Vallabhacharya poured out their hearts in millions of sweet verses of sublime poetry, filling in several book stacks in the religious libraries. Srimad Bhagavatha takes precedence over all such Bhakti sahitya. Leisure and research may offer many more.

ANTIQUITY:

Its story opens in Treta yuga with Madhu on the throne as the monarch of Mathura, then called Madhuvan. He was a power-intoxicated autocrat. To quench his thirst for expansion by Digvijaya yatra, he sent his son Lavana to Ayodhya to annex it, ruled then by Sri Rama, the son of Dasaratha. With a view to teaching him a lesson on humility, when challenged the invincibility of the Solar dynasty, Sri Rama sent Satrukhna, the least known, yet the most valorous to to the war front. It was a child's play for Satrukhna to subdue Lavana's impudent arrogance. On killing both father and son, he founded the city and named it Mathura, perhaps, in memory of the dead king. Many deputies of the Solar dynasty ruled it for centuries, and then it came under the Yadavas during the time of Ugrasena, the father of Rama, the wicked.

Kamsa was virtually a fiendish demon by name Kalanemi in human form. He was a great dictator and relied more on muscle power than the spiritual; and in tune with his inner venomous nature - rakshasa swabhava, he usurped the throne, on hearing from the Akasavani that his sister's eighth son would kill him. To prove the falsity of the aerial voice and to establish his invincible power, he forthwith imprisoned his sister Devaki along with Vasudeva, her husband, setting aside all the reasonable pleas. Later, he put to sword ruthlessly one after another, six children of the imprisoned couple. In accordance with the divine plan, the seventh embryo was transferred to Rohini the first wife of Vasudeva, and the son thus born was named
Sankarshana—Balarama, due to the fact of extraction and transference of embryo. The eighth child—the future Purna Purushothama was exchanged soon after birth with Yasoda's daughter called Yogamaya, who miraculously flew into air and became Durga, when Kamsa raised his sword to kill in the routine way. Before melting into air, she predicated that his Yama escaping from the prison was brought up safe elsewhere. From then began a series of futile trails of Kamsa, and he left no means unattempted to kill Krishna, his target.

Failing to destroy his foe through detestable means, like sending demoness disguised as Putana, a comely woman and demons in dreadful forms like bull, wheel etc., he invited his nephews-Krishna and Balarama to Mathura, preparing ground for their death. But Krishna out-witted him in every one of his evil designs and finally killed him in the open court itself. Releasing at once his grandfather from prison, he installed him as king of Mathura. People heaved a sigh of relief at long last. Anon he went to Prison and pleased his parents with the death news of Kamsa at his hands. All ended well, and so they left for their home. But the joy of the people was short-lived, for Jarasandha, the brother-in-law of Kamsa, a potential enemy of Yadavas started wreaking vengeance by subjecting them to insurmountable grief. To relieve them from his perpetual onslaughts, Krishna built the city of Dwarka in the Arabian sea and took them with him for permanent settlement.

HISTORICITY:

Many celebrated monarchs ruled Mathura from time to time after the Mayura emperors. During the time of Kanishka, Mathura acquired the status of a rival capital and enjoyed imperial patronage in the realms of fine arts. The Sungas and Guptas that followed glorified the city with many buildings, & it enjoyed imperial patronage. Many philanthropists and Matadhipathis, besides princes have been building hundreds of shrines over the sites, associated with Krishna's palaces, and places held dear to him. The belief that he was the incarnation
of Lord Mahavishnu gave impetus to the orthodox Hindus to display their sâdhbhakti through the construction of gigantic temples with imposing towers, bathing ghats with strong embankments and Dharmasalas for lodging the ever increasing influx of the Pilgrims. Moreover, with Vaishnavism reaching the zenith, illustrious pravaktas and affluent bhaktas established their schools and strove to uplift the common people through service activities, with Mathura as principal kendra. Buildings of several types sprang from every sacred spot, and in consequence the city is crowded more with shrines and Dharmasalas than dwelling and commercial establishments. And so, very site dear to Yadavas in general and Krishna in particular is now seen with a monument, emitting spiritual aroma, and is casting an irresistible attraction to theists & tourists. Devout Hindus visit each spot with utmost veneration and offer pujas, and donations too for charitable purposes in certain temples.

Normally pilgrims start visiting the shrines after taking bath in the sacred waters of Yamuna. Like the Ganges, Yamuna too has many ghats, and they are reputed both for offering pindâs and taking bath to purge off all the dross and gross sticking to bodies since birth. The waters of Yamuna are imbued with especial sanctity that a sip of a spoonful is equal to that of a dip in the Ganges. Among the many, the following deserve visitation.

VISRAM GHAT:

The story goes that once Yama the god of Death paid a visit to his sister, Yamuna. It was Karthika sukla dvitia. Affectionate Yamuna pleased him with several kinds of delicious dishes of special kind. Over-powered by the treatment and superfine food, he gave her the boon that anyone who takes bath on that auspicious day called Yamadvitia, thereafter in the river Yamuna would be relieved of going to Yamaloka, despite multiple unforgivable sins committed in the past. Becoming sin-proof, they go straight to heaven. What a merit! And how magnanimous is that god of Death!! So visiting is a
MUST and bathing, an indispensable necessity.

DHRUVA GHAT:

According to legend, Dhruva, the first son of Uttanapada, born through Suneethi was insulted by his step-mother Surichi, when he as about to sit on the lap of his father. Advised by Narada, he did severe penance, and when Sri Maha-viahnu gave darsan, over-whelmed by the aparupa soundarya, he became mute. The all-compassionate God, then touched his cheek with His conch, the embodiment of the Vedas. Regaining the faculty of speech, Dhruva sang in praise of the Lord, with such incomparable exuberance that he was given the highest, permanent place among the stars. That event is supposed to have taken place here, and so held sacred.

VISTRANTI GHAT:

This is sanctified by Krishna’s taking rest after killing kamsa. On completing His jagadoharana karya, he preferred this spot for its coolness and serenity. He rested there long. Orthodox Hindus besides taking bath in this, offer pindas to their manes.

YOGA GHAT:

It is said that Kamsa dashed to ground the daughter of Nanda, the Yogamaya here, when Vasudeva showed the female baby as his eighth child, as directed by the aerial voice. Escaping from his hands by flying into the air, Yogamaya predicted that his killer was brought up in the vicinity and he could not escape death from him. She then became Durga and terrorised him by numeous ways. Pilgrims worship the image of Durga installed in a shriue after a bath.

DWARAKADISH. TEMPLE:

After bath at any one of the ghats, pilgrims proceed straight to Dwarakadish temple first. It is the principal shrine
and it was built in 1814, by Seth Gokul Das, who served the prince of Gwalior as cashier. The idols of Sri Krishna about 3 feet in height is installed on a raised dias. It is quite alluring. The North Indian adornment, adding colour and grace, cast a spell on the devotees. One peculiar feature observed here is that bhaktas, in addition to uttering the Lord’s name loudly, throw coins of all denominations into the enclosure, where priests stand. The priests are Goswamis of kakrauli and are enjoying hereditary rights. They conduct prayer services with a zeal and sincerity that deserves emulation. Vallabha Sampradaya is followed in all the activities. The festivals, like the Jhoola and Janmastami are celebrated every year with great pomp and show, and they attract lakshms of bhaktas who participate in them with great gusto.

BIRLA MANDIR:

It is situated on the Mathura -Brindavan Road and was built by Shri Bal Dro Dasji Birla in 1945. The imposing life-size idol of Krishna made of white marble with Sudarsan in the right and conch in the left is quite enchanting. Kirthana programmes are given here top priority. The court-yard in front of the garbha griha is quite spacious and can hold hundreds of bhaktas to participate in the community singing. The paneled walls narrate many lilas of boy Krishna and Gopikaramana. Their colour and craftsmanship drive home bhaktibhava effectively. To the left of the temple there is a shrine illustrating the episode of Govardhanagiri and the idol is extremely enchanting. The walls are inscribed with the text of Bhagavadgita, and the temple complex serves the visitors in multifarious ways, like selling Puja materials, portraits and snacks. The Dharmasala lies opposite, and is equipped with modern amenities.

THE PAGAL BABA TEMPLE:

It is located on the way to Mathura. It is built with the lavish donations of the devout and pious public by an ardent saint called pagal Baba of Gyan Gudri.
Many commercial magnets and industrialists have donated lavishly to making it a glorious place of worship and to attract both tourists and theists.

**THF KESAVDEO TEMPLE**;

This sacred shrine unfortunately became the target of Muslim bigots during the raids of Mahamud Gazni in 1017, and again it was destroyed by Sikandar Lodi and Aurangzeb. Though it was razed to the ground, it was built anew by the devout Hindus soon after its destruction. Does this not establish the fact that bigotry can never suppress the invincible religious spirit of Hindus?

**KRISHNA JANMA BHUMI**;

It is on the way to Govardhan from Mathura. It houses the famous, prison cell, where Krishna was born. Aurangzeb the fanatic destroyed it and built a mosque on it. Later, devout Hindus built a temple on a grand scale with a complex in front. This complex caters to the tourists and bhaktas in several ways, like offering medical, food and lodging facilities. An International Guest House with star category arrangements is providing to the affluent people, and cheap accommodation to the common man. It is said that the throne of Kansa was found buried underneath it, and it is preserved as a relic. Many community singing programmes are conducted regularly, and so huge crowds.

**GAYTRI TAPOBHUM**;

This famous shrine is very near to the Krishna Janmabhumi. The image of Gayatri Matrika made of white marble seems exuding 'matrubhava' and so wrings venation. The temple complex houses a printing press, and is striving for spiritual regeneration and propagation by its printing programmes, like running a periodical and publishing of religious books. It was founded by a learned Sanskrit scholar named Acharya Sri Rama Sharma. It is a visit-worthy place for spiritual solace.
SRI RANGANATHJI TEMPLE:

As Mathura became the centre of Vaishnavism, many votaries from all over our Pavitra Bharat settled down and built temples to carry on religious activities. One such shrine existing is the Ranganathji mandir constructed by the Chettiar of Chettinadu, down South. This is the only temple that resembles the south Indian models in everything, say designing of tower Vimanam, images of the deities including the ritualistic prayer services. Its vastness and sculptural elegance please the eye and soul equally well. Ramanuja sampradaya is followed in all activities.

NIKUNJA VAN:

Mathura is famous for visit-worthy vanas and parks. Among them, Nikunja Van has a story of its own to lure pilgrims. It is also called Seva Nikunj. A pretty pond encircled by green bushes and trees with a shrine in the front feasts the eyes. It was the favourite resort of Krishna and Radha for their amusing sports. No one is allowed to stay here for the night, and if ventures, he/she either dies, or goes mad. Hence the restriction, and that is an additional attraction for pilgrims.

GOKULAM:

It is located across the river Yamuna. It is this Punyabhumi that witnessed the multiplicity of Balakrishna's indescribable sports that kept heaven agog even. In fact, there passed no day then, when some miracle or the other was shown by that Jagannataka Sutradhari to the denizens of that pujya dharani. Starting from killing of Putaua, followed by crushing of Sakatasura, smashing of Vrishabhasura, humbling of kalia, blind folding of Brahma, showing of 14 worlds in the mouth, to liberating Gandharvas interspersed with butter stealing pranks and many more divyalilas are said to have taken place here. As every inch of this place exudes divinity, many temples were built to perpetuate the spots. They breathe in grace and breathe out bliss, so they are to be visited indispensably by ardent theists, and tourists even.
BRINDAVAN:

It is 10 kms off Mathura, and it was once a thick forest overgrown with basil trees, and so the name Brindavan. Its fertile virgin soil, rich vegetation and gurgling waters attracted the Gopas, when calamities visited them, while at Gokul. And so they migrated to this place. Many of the adult sports of Sri Krishna, like Rasalila, Chiraharn occurred here. Scores of shrines of supreme architectural grandeur are built from time to time since then. Among them, Sri Rangaji Shah Bihai, Radha Vallabhi, Govinda Dev, Gopinath, Madanmohan and Jagdish wishor temples are deservedly famous. This place is preferred by the retired personnel, and so grey haired gentry greet the visiting people everywhere. Its climate and cool waters together with devotional atmosphere hold such grip on them, that they desire to retire from this mundane world from this sacred spot forever. A laudable and exemplary ambition indeed.

GOVARDHAN MOUNT;

It lies at a short distance of 10 kms from Brindavan. It lures all for the awe-inspiring episode of lifting the Govardhan Hill by Sri Krishna with his left hand and holding it on the little finger to protect Gopas and their cattle, when Devendra sent a terrible rain-storm to punish them for dishonouring him. People undertake perambulation of this sacred Hill for salvation. It is a holy spot worthy of visitation. The Vana Vihar festival celebrated every year includes this place for Yatra, lasting for a week. After this, pilgrims go back to Mathura again.

| CONVAYANCE |
| AIR PORT | Agra is the nearest airport connecting it by A flights from all the important cities. |
| RAIL WAYS | It is a Junction on N E Rly, links with all places by Express Trains |
| ROAD WAYS | U P R T C Operates buses from almost all important towns and cities Dept of Tourism and Private companies ply several kinds of buses with sightseeing places en route |

49 B
UNIQUENESS:

Mention Amritsar, there goes up smoke and down falls a body; visualise its topography, pools of blood and piles of the dead greet your eyes; nearer you go, surer is the sight of corpses rising from the debris gleam into your view; walk in the precincts, you feel scorching eyes running over your physical frame from behind the window shades; approach the portal, liveried men looking daggers scan you from head to foot; enter into it, security men stationed at every vantage point with hardly 100 feet between them scrutinise you with magnifying eyes, as it were, proceed towards the bridge leading to the sanctum, scores of bearded, broad-shouldered, hefty, man mountains, with metal detectors subject you to gruesome investigation for firearms. If you manage to pass through the mouth of hell enduring all the ordeals, you are admitted into the Guruwara, where surprise of surprises awaits you. Rather beweep your senses, since you see neither a statue, nor a design of any divinity anywhere in the Garbhagriha called Darbar Sahib, considered to be the central citadel of Sikhism and source of perennial inspiration for millions of a militant community living all over globe, but united to from into a single entity, with a mode of life characterised by martial spirit and a commendable code of conduct.

Your peering look at long last lights upon the Guru Granth Sahib—the principal single sacred Sikh scripture placed on the dais in the middle of the chamber, deemed to be the Bible of the Sikh community, enshrining in its bosom the Invisible Lord, in the form of letters, whose attributes and deeds it sings through hymns and psalms, yes the very same repository of holy
Songs of Sikh Gurus, along with those of eminent Hindu and Muslim sages, seers, saints, prophets and hermits, composed in the spoken idiom of the people for whom it is intended by the compassionate Gurus, who willingly laid down their lives at the altar of service, inspired by the lofty ideals of devotion to God and dedication to the upliftment of fellow men through valour and sacrifice; verily the self same scripture embodying those adorable twin aspirations that propelled them into the founding of a religion, whose cosmopolitan character, catholocity of outlook, universality of deisposition admits neither dogmatism, nor sectarianism, but breathes in humanism and breathes out fraternity. In ideal state only. “How divine is the book and what veneration is shown by its votaries!” escape from the lips of every visitor unconsciously then. There begins then the enquiry about buliding of this outstanding, incomparable temple, the crest jewel of Sikhism and of temples too.

THE GURUDWARA:

The Golden Temple, locally popular as Har Mandir is situated in the middle of a tank called Amritsar, meaning thereby, the pool of immortal life. This sar-tank is more or less square shaped, measuring about 475 feet each side. This charming tank is surrounded by white marble pathway with a causeway, leading across the crystal clear waters to the Mandir. The reflection of the golden temple built in white marble with gilded domes shimmering in the still waters of the pool, and its sparkling cleanliness, and eye filling splendour flashing in the sun itself a sight that lifts the soul, filling it with an intense mood of devotion. It has crystal white marble steps on four sides, enabling the visitors to perform ablutions before entering the sanctum. A small bridge with two gilded lamps at the entrance connects the Gurudwara with the embankment. The Takta Akhal Sahib holding the relics of the Gurus, such as swords etc., lies to the north-west with a huge dome gilded with gold. There are two pillars known as Ram Garhia Minars to the east of the dome adding ethereal grace to the building. On the roof of the temple lies a small but tastefully decorated chamber, Shis Mahal.
where the Gurus used to sit. The entire building—interior and exterior is covered with gilded sheets and on them inscribed verses from the Granth Sahib in Punjabi script. No other temple in India, it is said, used as much gold as this for construction. Except this, there is nothing that pleases the eye, nor gladdens the heart. Does this not look strange that a place of worship bereft of the object of worship is holding such tight grip over crores of a militant community?

THE HOLY BOOK:

But stranger is the fact that the holy scripture—Guru Granth Sahib is followed to every letter by crores of Sikhs living throughout the length and breadth of the world. The irrepressible yearning to visit the Golden Temple to be blessed with an eyeeful sight of the Granth Sahib, the holiest of holies for soulful solace; irresistible passion for listening to it with rapt attention; infinite zeal to assimilate its spirit; inexhaustible striving to translate its ideals into action, and finally the unshakable conviction to abide by its tenets is something phenomenal and it is this word of Guru that is binding people of diverse castes, professions, creeds, classes, regions, languages and ways of life into a well-knit homogenous community. What a marvel!

What then is that mighty word, and who is its author? Explanation is rewarding, nay, a necessity now. It is enshrined in the Adi Granth, and fell from the lips of Nanak, the Adi Guru of Sikhism. His concept of the Supreme Being—“The one Omakar is that whose name is Truth; it is the Creator; it is the spirit without fear, without envy. It has a timeless form, which is not produced from the womb. This true one existed in the beginning—even before the beginning of time. The true one existed. Oh Nanak, will always to be.” Will not ‘marvel’ shrink at the sight of this mighty marvel? In terms of its impact!

For, the very sight of devotees in their hundreds chanting hymns with utmost veneration in consonance with the priests sitting before the open books of the holy scripture very wel
trestfies to the fact of the potencay of the word. In full life! The sight of the congregation absorbed in chanting, lifts the souls of the visitors and transports them to regions of bliss. Neither the newness of the language, nor novelty of chanting stands in the way of communion of the visitors' souls, with the all compassionate Divinity hovering over the shrine. Even atheists and non-conformists too, I am sure, find themselves oblivious of environs, and inspire themselves to get sunk in the ocean of bliss; for there is no religious symbol, nor theistic representation found or referred to here that may likely bar their soulful involvement, unconsciously even. Further, as the verses inscribed resemble some artistic designs, they command not any wilful physical or religious inhibition. When the atmosphere gets charged with mellifluous tunes of the hymns and Gurubani, it enkindles devotion and awakens the awareness of man's insignificance against God's omnipotence. The religious ecstasy thus roused besides conferring indescribable mental peace, makes one feel that he is elevated to heaven, being freed from cares and anxieties. What is heaven after all, if not an abode, inspiring noblest thoughts, highest aspirations and purest actions in human breast? All this elevated, inexplicable ethereal bliss flows from a book if spoken in terms of components, is nothing but some sheets made of pulp with some letters on it printed and brought under covers. How fantastic! Very few can claim the honour of binding a community of people noted for their vibrating heroism, together with exemplary, vivacity, and flawless spirituality as this.

But the strangest fact that enthralls the visitors is the history of this unique book composed by venerable Gurus. Incidentally, the origin of the book is the origin of the rise and fall of Gurus of a type supreme; for they are Gurus with difference. They are ten in number. The concept of Guru devotional and his word is holier and mightier than Almighty itself is nowhere seen and honoured as in Sikhism, and at no time the Guru-singh kinship i.e., Preceptor-discipleship has assumed such significance as in Sikhism, although the holy Gurus, contrary to their profession enjoined on their sishyas to converting asramas into
arsenal and substituted swords for rosaries. The history of Sikhism from nadir to zenith reads like a saga and exemplifies that militancy is the only answer to any religious fanaticism, in any country, or at any point of time, for that matter.

THE ORIGIN OF AMRISTAR;

The origin of the Golden Temple dates back to the days of Nanak, a pious Hindu, who became the Founder-Guru of Sikhism. Punjab, during his times was passing through a turbulent phase in the history of India. Religious unrest due to the direct impact of Muslim rule reached the climax and there was insecurity to Hindus everywhere. Muslim bigotry was systematically divesting Hinduism of its glory—chastity was outraged, and integrity fried in the open streets. When conditions went beyond endurance, the humanist Nanak toured several places in and out of his state with a view to solving. Returning enlightened, he inferred, rightly too, that religious revival alone ensures safety and saves Hinduism from effacement and extinction. As a first step towards this, he tried to harmonise the religious sects by evolving a new devotional system, proclaiming that hisishyas—singhs are the children of God and they are not ascetics, but a band of servants with arms, rallying under one banner for the defence of their Dharma. And this became the nucleus of his magnum opus—Adi Granth. History justified his laudable ambition and adored it. The second Guru by name Angada invented the Gurumukhi alphabet and it was accepted as the best script for the Sikh literature. Then came Amar Das, who unified the followers with the institution of common kitchen, called Langar. As it abolished the caste system among the followers, it brought in a major change in the character of Sikh community. Solidarity at the grass root level was achieved by this far-sighted measure. Credit goes to fourth Guru Ramdas, who founded the city of Amritsar, and it was known by the name Chak then. The famous temple in the midst of a big lake was his innovation. Grateful community named Amritsar as Ramdaspur after him. He is also responsible for establishing Sikh congregations.
throughout the country with Amritsar as the Mecca. Guru Arjun Singh, the fifth in the line compiled the Adigranth—the core of the present Granth Sahib and virtually became the secular and spiritual head of the Sikhs by necessity, but it roused animosity in Jehangir, the ruling Moghul emperor.

With the accession of Hargovind as the sixth Guru, their history took a new turn. Urged by the prevailing unrest, he actually carried two swords-piri and Miri representing his powers over the two worlds—the combination of the Deg and Tegh-kettle to supply food and sword to smite the opponent. Hari Rai who succeeded him fought battles against Aurangzed, the zealot and transformed the Sikhism into a militant church. The eighth was a boy aged five, left nothing, since his rule lasted for three years only. Teg Bahadur, the next in line was executed by the Moghul Emperor in 1675 A.D. And then came Guru Govind Singh, the tenth and the last, but the most powerful and celebrated and was reverentially called the Soldier-saint. He introduced several far-sighted reforms that changed the psychology of the community. He introduced Khalsa-anew from of baptism and insisted on every Sikh to observe this. For, after pahul, he becomes a dwija—twice born, ready for kirthinash loss of fame; kulanash-loss of family Dharma—loss of orthodox life; karmanash loss of ego-centric avocation in preference to devotion to Guru and to Sikhism.

This indeed brought in a tremendous change and prepared the community for ultimate victory through arms only. He is also responsible for ordaining Sikhs to have five things, the indispensable five Ks, the symbols of diksha-dedication According to it, every Singh must necessarily wear Kacha—short drawers; put on kara—an iron ring on the right arm; keep kripan sword; keep long hair; kesh and a kang—comb. Verily, it imbued them with a spirit of oneness and unbreakable commonness. This instantly ushered in the growth of a homogenous and fully armoured class, ready for defending their own ageless Dharma.

His valorous life was emulated by both Sikhs and Hindus with equal fervour, and with the support of his saint soldiers, he emancipated the people from the shackles of religious bigotry
and political bondage. He waged relentless wars against the Moghuls and broke successfully the spell of their invincibility many a time, but was assassinated in 1708 by treacherous means. Even after that his followers continued their militancy with such matchless valour and peerless tenacity that only resulted in emerging themselves as the fittest successors to the glorious saint soldier-ruler community. Further more, it is said that this place has been venerated from time immemorial for its association with epic personages—Sita the ideal consort of Sri Rama who lived here during her banishment, and sage Valmiki, the Adi kavi who composed the Ramayana.

The thread of further narration by the guide of the Sikhs and the uniqueness of the Golden Temple was snapped by the Yatra Organiser, who hastened the party to the Jalianwala Bagh Monument for sight seeing.

JALIANWALA BAGH MONUMENT:

This national monument of supreme historic significance lies in the heart of city and it is very near, say a quarter mile off the Golden Temple. It recalls the monumental folly perpetrated by the British rulers on the ruled the innocent peace-loving citizens of Amritsar, and it was in April 1919. It was then a sprawling garden commonly used for public meetings. This spot where on that fateful day thousands of harmless citizens of all age groups and sexes were shot at ruthlessly by the cruel British officer by name Dyer is held very sacred now, and every tourist and pilgrim crave for a visit during their visit to the city. Though it is now closed on all sides by tall buildings and business establishments, its curiosity as a monument is on the increase. On entering into garden, a tall inverted U-shaped column erected on an elevated platform greets our sight, and wrings our homaga by its unforgettable past. There are huge halls, whose walls are adorned with the paintings of the scenes of that gruesome event, the sight of which draws tears, and listening to the narration hastens all to the poignant memorial. Free India gave to the martyrs erected on a grand pedestal to offering obeisance. With heavy hearts and
tear-stained eyes, the visitors are hurried to the Durga temple a visit worthy, nay a must for every pilgrim to this city.

DURGA TEMPLE:

It lies at about 2 kms from the Golden Temple. The very first thing that stuns the visitors is its striking resemblance to the Golden Temple. This Hindu shrine is of recent construction and like the Golden Temple is surrounded by water on all sides. The lake is equally big in size, but one plus point it boasts is that there are many minishrines on the embankments around the main temple. The statues of almost all the principal gods adorning the Hindu pantheon, like Siva, Gouri, Sarada, Lakshmi, Hanuma, Sri Rama, Krishna. Vinayaka etc., are installed on beautifully made pedestals. They appear extremely attractive and enkindle devotion by their enormous sizes and artistic adornments. There are many Dhamasalas in front of the temple for the stay of the visitors for days, if desired. Poor feeding and community singing, are conducted periodically. A visit purges one of his sins, since almost all the adorable deities are assembled in one spacious campus.

BABA ATAL RAI TOWER:

The story goes that Atal Rai, son of Har Govind, the sixth Guru, a nine year old boy performed a miracle of restoring to life a close dead friend. As it was against the Sikh tradition, he immolated himself, when chastised, and later was given the title of BABA. A fitting memorial—an octagonal nine-storeyed tower representing his nine year life was built by the grateful people. The inner walls are decorated with frescos depicting the life of Nanak. A worth seeing place lying near the Mandir. Devout Public miss not this memorial.

<table>
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<th>CONVEYANCE</th>
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<tr>
<td>AIR WAYS : Udaipur—The nearest Air port</td>
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<tr>
<td>ROADWAYS: There is a well-developed network of good roads to reach every important place in India and Pakistan, since it is just 29 km from the Wagah border.</td>
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<tr>
<td>RAILWAYS : It is a Junction connecting all major towns and cities in India</td>
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UNIQUENESS:

Scarcely can one come across any Hindu living here or abroad, who hasn’t either heard, or uttered the sacred word ‘Kurukshetra’ at least once in his life time. Kurukshetra, the land of king Kuru is known by various names, like Brahma-vrata, Veda bhoomi, Dharmakshetra etc. Tradition ascribes it to the seat of Vidhatha - the Creator of the world, and it is from here the first civilisation sprouted, and was rocked and nourished before shooting up into the cultural frnament to remain as the pole star for other cultures to flourish, either by partial imitation, or total absorption of its indomitable eternal spirit. It was the Ratna Garbha that gave birth to immortal rishis and deathless emperors, who moulded the Aryan culture and spread it to the four corners of the world. It was the heart that throbbed with ennobling aspirations of mankind, and the veritable hub around which heroic exploits and dharma prabodhas spun hand in hand and enjoyed their heyday. It was here Bhagavadgita the song celestial and the Testament of Humanity was propounded, and its Dharma gosha started echoing throughout the world down the ages.

It is this Dharmabhoomi that filled many a glittering chapter of sacred scriptures, like the Rigveda, Upanishads, Puranas, Bhagavadgita and Mahabharatha. From time immemorial it has been the sangrama ranga, where historic battles were fought in defence of Dharma that changed the course of history, and gave a new turn to the lives of teeming millions inhabiting this divya khetra. Besides Puranic glory, historical eminence too is emanating from every inch of this Punya bhoomi.

Hence for the Sanatani, it is his life breath, his soul; religionist, his mind; moralist, a light house; codifier, a
treasure trove; seeker, the gateway to heaven; spiritual bankrupt, a font; mumuksha, a crazy pilgrim centre; Indologist, a research lab; and cultured man, a temple. Its very mention exhilarates the spiritualist; energises the lily-livered; rejuvenates, the crest fallen; ignites the virtuous; armours the ashtikas; and consoles the oppressed.

Every devotee’s abode reverberates with its glory in the pre-dawn hour during the recitation of Gita beginning with Dharmakshetra - Kurukshetra, when his heroic heart resounds with the zooming arrows and clanking of cymbals; and awakens his fertile mind to the thoughts of eternal messages preached, and acted, perpetual peace sought and got by manavothamas aided and abetted by Parushothama and His retinue.

NAME AND DERIVATION:

Puranas recoup that King Kuru, lured by the sacredness of the soil, drenched by the crystal clear waters of Saraswati selected it for cultivating the eight fold virtues, and to distribute the harvest to mankind living all over the globe. Accordingly, one fine morn he drove his golden chariot right up to the bank and made a plough utilising the gold of the soil. When ploughing with the Yama’s bhufalo and Maheswara’s Nandi, he borrowed, on ardent supplication, Devendra appeared on the scene and asked him, what he was doing and spell out his real intention. Kuru expressed his purpose of raising the most covetable eight fold virtues - austerity, purity, chastity, truth, kindness, forgiveness, yoga and continence. Puzzled at its oddity, he asked as to where such seeds could be got. Kuru replied that he was in possession of them in plenty, Sceptical Devendra departed with a hysterical laughter, reflecting the impossibility of the attempt.

In the course of his tireless ploughing the lonely furrow, Mahavishnu revealed Himself before and questioned him as Devendra did before. Elated at his pious wish, He volunteered, to sow the seed, if given. Forthwith, Kuru stretched out his right hand and solicited him to cut it into thousand pieces with
His Sudarsan Chakra, and sow. While demanded for some more for the remaining field, he offered his left hand, followed by legs, one after another. Finding some more area yet to be sown, he gave his head with a gleam of contentment in his luminous eyes. Pleased with his unparalleled humanism, Lord Vishnu asked him to name two boons that can be granted on the spot. At this juncture, Devendra descended again and showed his willingness to extend anything he was in need of. Overwhelmed, Kuru begged for two boons; one-the land should ever remain sacred, and it should be called after him; two - anyone who dies here should go to heaven, irrespective of his sins and virtues. They were granted, and hence the sanctity pervading the entire kshetra, comprising about a hundred miles in area; and as requested it came to be known as Kurukshetra thence forward.

HOARY PAST:

The rulers that reigned after him, and from time to time imbibed that spirit and raised the reputation of the land to the jealousy of the celestials. Illustrious mahaviras, avatara purushas, divya tapasvis, tatva pracharakas, peethadhipatis, sastrakaras etc., of interplanetary eminence strove to keep aloft, its banner of Dharma ever fluttering and never flagging, even during the alien conquests, threatening the very existence of the the people. During the Mahabharata period, the descendants of king Kuru - Kauravas and Pândavas raised its reputation to the pinnacle, by making the celestials share their joys and woes. Wonder of wonders! Neither the bigotry of the alien rulers, nor the dictatorial highhandedness of some of the Indian rulers holding diametrically opposite views, suppressed the irrepressible spirit of that mateless Mahapurusha king Kuru.

HISTORICITY:

Its colourful history can be gleaned from a glimpse of the history of India starting from the imperial Mauryas, followed by Guptas, Vardhamanasa, and ending with a petty ruler called Anandapala, during whose time Mahamud Gazani began
his conquests, with torch in one hand and sword in the other. The material wealth of Sthaneswar, the capital was carried off to Gazani and by acts of Vandalism and the spiritual wealth - the holy tanks and sacred shrines was converted into dust. As the shadow of the crescent grew thicker and wider, it swallowed bit by bit of the sacred sanct 'land, for the protection of which Da-dhichi, heartily gave his vertebra. All sank into oblivion, except some invincible structures now in ruins, yet ready to narrate their hoary past.

The long succession of Muslim zealots, though humbled the mighty potentates, they did not dry up the spirit of Dharma; for, Marathas and Sikhs who rose to power later waged endless wars to keep the torch of Dharma ever burning bright, by burning themselves at stake at it. With the advent of Briti-shers, it passed into their hands in 1850 at the death of the widow of the last king by name Fateh Singh.

PLACES OF INTEREST

This sacred kshetra abounds in several worth-seeing spots of different kinds, like evergreen forests, gurgling rivulets, blue water tanks, big shrines, Gurudwaras, Masjids and architectural marvels. According to Vamana Purana this land is made more sacred by nine divine rivers flowing ever then. They are the Saraswathi, Drishadayati, Hiranwati, Vaitaranji, Madhu-shvaya, Kousaki, Vasu Apaga and Ganga Mandakini. The ravages of ages left but one still flowing, and that is Saraswathi, and that too only in the rainy season. The traces of other rivers are hard to recognise. In addition to the rivers, there were seven forests that served the land and the people in multitudinous ways, like sheltering the recluses, supplying fuel and medicinal herbs, besides luring the black clouds to pour down their rich contents. The Mahabharata and Vamana purana make several references to their fame under different contexts. They are mentioned as the Kamyakavana, Aditivana, Vyasavana, Phalakivana, Suryavana, Madhuvana and Sitavana. Further this divya kshetra is guarded by four Yakshas; named Arantjink, Taranjâk Kapil and Machakruk. They are stationed at the four corners
and are ever vigilant to keep the welfare of the people.

Moreover, there were many tanks with well maintained bathing ghats for the convenience of pilgrims and citizens. Only a few have survived, standing against the onslaughts of the elements over the yugas, passed by. With additions to depth and width, they look modern, but not. On the banks of every tank, or in vicinity, there stands a shrine of great fame relating incredible stories; no matter whether it is in ruins or renovated. Strange it is to learn that during its heyday Kurukshetra was square in shape and measured ten thousand miles in area; hundred miles each side. Puranas relate that every visitor is entitled to go to heaven, if he takes bath once in tanks; visits temples; dwells a few days; or dies here. Nay, even by mere uttering its sacred name, one acquires punya. Scriptures embody another interesting factor that any gift given here grows thirteen times a day, and this goes on for thirteen days continuously. How strange! As the kshetra is studded with an infinite number of temples and thirthas, the visitor is taken to only a few supposed to be holy in every respect.

BRAHMASAR :

Its local name is kurukshetra tank and it is the biggest amongst the existing-ones. No sooner does the pilgrim arrivcel, his supreme concern is to visit this first, and reach the spot where Gitopadesa was given next. Its enormous dimensions and unearthly power keep the visitor agog. It is 3860 ft. in length and 2860 ft. in breadth. During its heyday, it had flights of steps on all four sides and had two islands - one in the middle and the other near the steps; and they where connected by bridges for the benefit of pilgrims to avail darsan of deities installed in temples therein. These little islets were throbbing with the aṭrādhana activities of the godmen, who dwelt there in temples and dharmaśalas and every inch of the land was soaked with Bhagavannamās and the pitch of every syllable of sankirthana was reverbera-
ting. Always and it was heard for miles afar. Alas! it fell to the fanaticism of Aurangzeb, who caused the conversion of the bigger islet into a military post stationing armed soldiers in charge of collecting the abominable tax - Jazia from every ardent pilgrim. The ruthless zealot charged one rupee for a pot of water and five rupees for a dip. The remorseless official punished the tax evaders with severe sentences and shooting in some cases too.

Realising its ever growing popularity, the British Government undertook renovation work in 1850, and since then many more face-lifting programmes on gigantic scale have been embarked upon by the munificence of humanitarain theists. Now it is under the care of Haryana Government. On the Northern bank of this, there are scores of worth-seeing maandirs and dhammasalas. The hub of life is centred round this at present. Famous modern places of worship, like Gita Maandir of Birla, Vyasa Gudia Math, Baba Kali Kamliwala shrine are deservedly famous, both for maintenance and architectural excellences. Almost all the Sikh Gurus paid several visits to this place, and caused many buildings dedicated to gods and godmen, and hence the existence of many Gurudwiras and temples.

SANNIHIT TANK:

Though comparatively small, it has many special features. The story goes that all the thirthas assemble here on the day of Amavasya, and if one performs sraddha here on the Solar eclipse day, he acquires the fruit of one thousand Aswamedha yagas. It is the permanent abode of Lord Maha Vishnu. On one side, the idols of Dhruta Narayan, Hanuman and Durga are installed and they are worshipped with great ardour. On the other side of the tank, there is temple dedicated to Sri Lakshmi Narayan. The famous Kali Kamalia shrine affiliated to Rishikesh Math lies on the southern side. In the other, adjoining to Dhammasala, the status of Lord Krishna and Arjuna in the act of preaching-listening posture are installed.
and they are the cynosure of irresistible attraction for visitors of all types.

**STHANESWAR TANK:**

It is situated in front of Sthaneswar Siva shrine. According to tradition, it is here that the Pandavas worshipped Maheswar before going to war and got victory with His blessings. Its waters are said to have magical powers of curing leprosy. Hence the thronging of the victims of that dreadful disease in large numbers throughout the year.

**BHISHMA KUND:**

It is about 5 Kms. off the Kurushetra tank. The famous episode of quenching the thirst of Bhishma Pitamah, while lying on the bed of arrows is attributed to this. The epic relates that Bhishma felt thirsty while on the ampa sayya, and asked for water. Thereupon, Duryodhana ordered the attendant to bring water in a gold vessel, but Bhishma refused on the ground that he no more had any connection with the mortal world. When helplessness gathered dark clouds around his brows, Arjuna, the savyasachi pierced the earth with his mighty arrow. There gushed out then pattalaganga, like the fountain at the turn of the knob. It quenched the Pitamahas thirst, curbed the hollow imperial power of Duryodhana, and occasioned the exhibition of supremacy of Arjuna. And as it is associated with the last days of Bhishma, and his Dharmopadesa, so there is unusual craze for visiting by all types of people.

**KAMALNABHI THIRTHA:**

This sacred tank is associated with a great epic episode like many others. According to tradition, Brahma was born here out of a lotus sprouting from the navel of Lord Mahavishnu. A visit fulfills the dual purpose of visiting both the Creator and the Protector. Pilgrims worship the deities after bath in the tank.

**JYOTISAR TANK:**

It is one of the big tanks attracting people for special purposes. Here is a banyan tree believed to be of 5000 years old, and pilgrims who throng during the Solar eclipse day.
necessarily visit this to see, and offer prayers, reciting scriptures for gaining punya. Renovation work gave priority to making provision for accommodation to the pilgrims visiting on special occasions. It lies at a distance of 8 kms from the Railway station.

AMIN:

It is a protected monument lying at a distance of 3 kms from the station of the same name. It is the modern name of Abhimanyu, the valorous son of Arjuna, who brought undying fame to the youth by his apurva bahubala and yuddha kousalya. It is here the Padmavyuha tragedy took place and there is a big mound now perpetuating the memory of that heroism. Scholars and pilgrims visit this with equal fervour round the year.

BEHIND:

Its ancient name was Prithu daku, meaning thereby the pool of Prithu. It is said that king Prithu made oblations and obsequies to his father here. People gather here for ‘Priyada dan’ everyday in hundreds, and on special occasions like Chitra Amavas, Asu Amavas and Kartik Pournami the congregation swells to enormous size exceeding tens of thousands. Yamana purana recounts that Rajarshi Viswamitra got enlightenment here. Scriptures enjoin a visit to it for purging of sins and gaining illumination.

YAYATI THRITHA:

Tradition ascribes this to king Yayati, who performed sacrifice of every type here, and the story goes that the water in the tank was changed into dudh, ghrit and madhu-milk, ghee and honey alternately soon after the final one.

KAITHAL THRITHA:

It is a corrupt form of the word Kapisthal. It is recorded that Hanuman was born here. In the month of Shravan, a big fair is held attracting lakhs, for offering special poojas to Lord Hanuman and also performing religious rites.

RAM HRIDAYA:

It is famous for several temples, tanks and dharma
salas built in recent times. It is said that Parasuram performed sacrifices here, and so holds grip on the religionists.

SARPA DAMAN:

Its story too is quite interesting to hear, and offer prayers also. Janamejaya performed here a big Yagna to destroy snakes and relieve the people of their fear. To ward off snake menace and the disasters of bite, people throng here and offer prayers.

VARAH TIRTHA:

It is situated near the Jind railway station. Puranas embody the fact that Maha Vishnu appeared here as Varah to save the earth from diabolical treachery of Hiranyaksha.

HAVELI BABA SHRAVANNATH:

It is built in the form of fortress. Baba Shravannathji, a great sadhu and preceptor built it in the seventeenth century. It contains the marble statues of Lord Sri Krishna and the five Pandava brothers along with Bhishma Pitamaha. The oddity of its origin wrings veneration. It is said that once the famous sadhu Lachman Giri visited it and asked the inmates to supply milk. The sishyas, out of respect for the sadhu poured milk into his begging bowl, but how much and how long. The bowl could not be filled, however much they tried. When the miracle reached the preceptor, he himself came and started pouring from his kamandal. Despite an endless flow of milk seen by all, the bowl refused to touch the brim, nor the kamandal found emptied. The miracle went on for some time, when the the Baba and the Sadhu recognised each other's supernatural powers. On recognition, they embraced each other. As it is sanctified thus, it is attracting people of all types.

APAGA THIRTHA:

It was once a holy stream lying between the rivers
Saraswati and Drishadwati. And it is now reduced to a small tank lying on south side of Kurukshetra University campus. It is equated with Gaya in many respects, and it is said that a dip in it confers the same merit as that of Gaya when bathed. So people visit it for bath.

Amongst several other worth-seeing places, the folowing deserve visiting both for offering prayers and feasting the eyes with lovely modern structures. Kapil Thirtha, Prusti Thirtha, Deva Thirtha, Yapa Thirtha, Mahadev Thirtha and Soma Karthik Thirtha are but a few in the long list. All these need not necessarily testify to the fact that only Hindu temples and their religion alone are found dominating in this kshetra. Its religious tolerance and catholic outlook can be seen in the existence of scores of Gurudwaras, Masjids and Churches built side by side or in isolation. And they are visited by thousands throughout the year and enjoying equal attention and attraction by public and government.

Mention must be made of the Mousoleum of Shaik Chelli, an important centre of Muslim pilgrimage, and it is attracting pilgrims like any Hindu temple round the year. As the Sikhs recognised and respected the eternal truths of Hinduism, they visited this place and donated besides building Gurudwaras and Dharmashalas for their convenience. Needless to emphasize that this purnakshetra is a meeting ground of the major religions, and it is striving its best to foster unity amidst the endless diversity.

Though occupied a conspicuous place as a cradle of civilizations, is not free from the sweep of the iron hand of time due to passage of long Yugas, much of its wealth and worth is found in tattered rags on last dregs of existence. Finding the architectural splendour and sculptural marvels lying scattered and buried; the Rishivatikas and dhyanmandirs over-grown with herbs and shrubs; the adored idols mutilated and abandoned, bathing ghats silted up; and dharmashalas in dilapidated condition, the Departments of Archaeology and Indian History of Universities like Kurukshetra and Delhi have undertaken excavation and renovation works for resurrection of its glory and publish to the world, the sacredness of its soil. The labours of scholars and scientists have already shed light on hitherto desolate mounds like Amin and Danlapur. The indefatigable work of the spade and crowbar have discovered the idol of Seshasaya moorthy of Lord Vishnu at Faridkot. And sure many more of inestimable worth will rise from the desolate wilderness soon.
UNIQUENESS

A mere mention of ABU, serves a rare sumptuous fare to the eye and soul of every ardent devotee. It's a crest jewel set in the isolated emerald plateau of Rajasthan, luring all nationalities of the world round the year, as a visit-worthy place of supreme spiritual significance.

Its luxuriant vegetation, exuberant scenic beauty and vibrant climate cast an irresistible charm on both sight-seers and god-seekers alike. More on the affluent as a matter of fact. As the summit opens out into a spacious charming valley, the range of its splendour is wide and it breaks through several outlets, like the fantastically shaped rocks, sparkling streams, zigzag roads together with its flora and fauna. The artistically formed granite rocks rising above the eyecatching greenery lifts the minds, fills the hearts and thrills the bodies of every type of visitor. The exquisitely carved incomparable Dilwara temples, spiritually elevating ancient Hindu shrines, and imposing princely mansions embodying architectural excellences justify to its special red dot marked on the religious map of India, as one of the worth-seeing sights of our sacred land, and an ideal summer resort for a reverie at on attituded of 1220 metres.

ANTIQUITY

Mythological evidence found in abundance stands in proof of the unearthly glory of this hill, forming a part of the Aravalli range of mountains. Its antiquity bearing the vestiges of the visitation and habitation of the celebrities dates from Satya yuga, when cosmic beings walked on this soil along with humans gaily. The Vanaparva of Mahabharata contains many references to it and it was called Arbuda Thirtha, named
after Arbuda, the son of Himalaya. It narrates that once Uttanka obtained a pair of Karnabharanas ear rings from Saudasa's wife, for presenting them to Ahalya, the wife of his guru Gautham, in token of his veneration. To his misfortune they were carried off to the nether world by Taksha, the king of snakes. With a view to wrest the lost, he dug a big hole atop this hill to reach the place of the stealer. And that wide chasm was left uncovered later.

By accident, Nandini, the sacred cow of Vasistha fell into it. When efforts to extricate it met with failure, Vasistha sought the help of Himalaya to lift the cow and to fill up that deep fissure. But the later declined on the ground that the place was uninhabitable. Thereupon, Vasistha promised to make the spot and the country adjacent pure and habitation-worthy. Pleased with it, Himalaya sent his son Arbuda on this work. At the behest of his father Arbuda closed the hole, and hence it was called the Arbuda kshetra. Vasistha built an asram with a temple of Maheswar in it and it is now called the Achaleswar shrine. He caused a big fire-pit made in his hermitage for his nithya naimithika rituals. It is believed that the four Rajaput clans -- Agnikula Kshatriyas emerged from this sacrificial pit, who ruled the present Rajasthan and its surrounding countries for centuries with an enviable record of unparalleled glory and valour, among the rulers of our sacred land. Vishnu Purana also embodies a certain amount of proof of the glorious past of this hill.

HISTORICITY

Enigma seems peeing at the reader of the history of Rajasthan, for the prime reason that there is a free mixing of fable with facts. It has been a haven for all religious preachers from time immemorial, and concrete evidence of their living and preaching is available in plenty. Many major religions seem to have vied with one another to establish their respective monasteries for the propagation of their dharma, and dedication of shrines to their istadevathas. Jains, Sakthas, Vaishn-
avites and Saivites built many marvellous temples to perpetuate their fame and carry on their service activities, and they stand to relate many of their selfless ministrations. But definite data of the rulers begins with the Paramaras, one of the four clans of Rajputs, who made Abu as their capital, and from that period gradually its importance rose to the pinnacle, despite many rulers succeeded them. Many sturdy hands held the sceptre and wielded power from here for centuries. In 1845 it was brought under the British sway and continued as the head quarters of the British Government Political agent of Rajasthan. After Independence, it was restored to Rajasthan in 1956, and since then, it is slowly gaining its immortal glory and luring all classes of people from within and without.

CONVEYANCE:

Abu is accessible by bus or train. For the train journey, Abu Road is the last station and from here, it is approached by a motorable road of about 29 kms. Tourist buses and Government Transport vehicles can be engaged from Ahmedabad, Ambaji and Abu Road, and are available at all hours. The journey by bus is the pleasantest, and its joys are unlimited. The traveller can't but gape and gaze all along the Ghat section on the serpentine road, along the side of deep chasm fringed with greenery of the primeval forests. As the bus meanders through the zigzag road amidst the majestic hills tapering from gorgeous and panoramic vistas into the azure sky, the traveller feels wafted to the ethereal zones and enjoys a bliss of rare kind. The thrills he experiences throughout at the unrolling of the intrinsic loveliness of nature can not be clothed in the inadequate language, yet he locks them up in his memory to cherish them for ever. Once, when he reaches and alights, he feels greater things are in store to greet him on the basis of the spiritual sanctity hovering over there.

SIGHT SEEING ITENERARY:

As Abu abounds in abundant divine splendour and Nature's grandeur, the sight-seer comes across many a shrine

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or object of wonder at every step, and on close scrutiny, they turn out to be master pieces of medieval period. Besides temples, grotesquely shaped rocks and vast sheets of blue water lakes arrest his attention and detain him longer, narrating their strange yet credible tales. Though the visitor may not find time to listen to all, or see every exotic beauty, some important items deserve his visit and attention. And they bind him, making speechless and motionless by their uniqueness in one aspect or the other. Let us visit the temples first.

ARBUDA DEVI TEMPLE

It is a cave temple chesilled out of a huge rock lying to the North Civil Station. Arbuda Devi is the tutelary goddess of Abu, installed in a small but sanctified place, forming out of a cleft on one side of the hill. An ascent of 400 steps through a shady mango grove leads to this, and it attracts locals more. But the visitor is lured to a pond called Doodh Baoli, which narrates a strange story. Tradition relates that it was a step well of pure milk for the exclusive use of gods and sages in the days of yore. The water being milky white, it gives sanction to the belief and hence attraction.

GAU MUKH AND VASISTHA ASRAM

Gau Mukh temple is one among the ancient temples. It is situated on an elevated place with a small tank in the fore. It is always full with pure water, which falls through a cow’s mouth carved out of granite. A little farther ahead below lies the famous Vasistha Asram, the immortal sage of the epic age. The statues of muni Vasistha with Rama and Lakshmana on either side and Arundhati in the front are installed in the middle of the courtyard. A marble statue of Nandini is put up outside the asram and they stand to testify to the truth of the legend that Abu owes its glory to Vasistha, and is associated with the celestials. And it is from this asram’s sacrificial fire-pit, the Agnikula Kshatriyas emerged. Legend lurcs the pilgrims and bends their heads before the divinities. There is pond here bearing the name of Naga Thirtha proclaiming to the world of
its miraculous power of fertility. A dip in it relieves one of the curse of barrenness. Barenness is believed to be the effect of sarpa sapa, for having killed snakes in the previous birth. A bath in this offsets that dosha; for, it is in this place alone Uttanka obtained Karnabharanas from the serpent king. It is considered very sacred, and so the thronging of the childless persons throughout the year.

SHRI RAGHUNATHJI TEMPLE:

This famous temple lies opposite the Gandhi Park. Its imposing size and huge proportions with modern facilities and latest trends for lodging etc, lends a special charm to the locality and it is one of the pre-eminent places of worship. The idols of Sri Raghunathji--Sri Rama is said to have been installed by the celebrated Hindu saint Sri Ramanada, who lived in the fourteenth century. His footprints are carved on Guru Sikhar, another place of interest. As it affords accommodation to hundreds of tourists, its importance is on the increase.

ACHALESWAR MAHADEV TEMPLE:

It is dedicated to Lord Siva and is situated 8 kms. off the Dilwara group. Its unprecedented attraction and popularity are due to the fact that it treasures up an emblem of the toe of Lord Siva. Just below the emblem, there is a small hole that tells a story interesting. According to legends, the hole connects the earth to the Patal loka. It appears that one Paramara King by name Dhara varsha, a doubting Thomas by nature disbelieved the truth. Not being satisfied with it, he decided to disprove the popular belief so ordered water to be poured down hole with a view to falsifying the age old fable current in his time. For six long months, hundreds of workmen uneasingly poured down water into it, but in vain. The thirst of the hole seems inextinguishable and so there were no signs of water reaching the brim. Poor Dharma varsha retreated and regretted. Alas! his foolhardiness ended with a terrible curse on him by the Lord Achaleswar. With this, his dynasty

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come to an abrupt end.

Adjoining the temple, there is a water tank known as Mandakini kund, supposed to have been ever overflowing with ghee meant for the use of the sages. According to the story, some three wicked demons deciding to steal the ghee, went disguised as buffaloes. Unluckily for them, their evil design reached the ears of Adipal, a valorous Paramara king, who killed them simultaneously with a single shot of his potent arrow. To commemorate this superb feat and humanist action, a statue of the king with three buffaloes is set up here. Hence the craze for a visit by the theists in particular.

KANYAKUMARI AND BALAM RASIA TEMPLE:

These twin temples lie a little farther to the Dilwara temples. They enshrine the idols of modern lovers, whose romantic story turned tragic by the nefarious designs of one dotting mother. The inscription dated 1443 A.D. bears testimony that Kanyakumari was the lovely daughter of a Chieftain of Abu. This angel enkindled love in a sage by name Balam Rasia; he proposed. Though the proposal was agreeable to the father, the unwilling mother tried to frustrate it by strategem. She set the sage the difficult task of laying twelve different approach roads to Abu in a single night as a precondition for winning the hand of her daughter, before the crowing of cock, at it. Balam accepted the challenge and set to work zealously; but fate set at nought his attempt. Seeing the work nearing completion before the time fixed even, the mother feigned the crowing of cock. Wickedness triumphed. Knowing the truth later, Balam threw a magic spell in ungovernable rage, which transformed both the mother and daughter into stones at once. This historical episode is corroborated by ample evidence in records. Grateful people erected shrines and installed statues in the twin temples. Thus came into existence these shrines and are beckoning attention from one and all.

THE DILWARA TEMPLES

This temples group, the greatest draw of Abu consisting of five priceless master pieces in marble white is deemed as the
greatest all-time wonder of the world. This inestimable connoisseur's treasure, the second of which the world has not produced so far, nor likely the feature may ever succeed in making a prototype at least even, is dedicated to Sri Adinath, the first Tirthankara of Jains. Of the five, the two Vimal Vasahi and Tejpal are deservedly famous for their exquisite, breath-taking craftsmanship of the medieval times.

The Vimal Vasahi was built by one of the ministers of Bhim Dev, belonging to Porwal Jain community, the first Solanki ruler of Gujarat in 1031 A.D. Each temple has its subsidiary shrines and stand within its own enclosed quadrangle. They are built entirely of white marble, and far surpass the world famous Halebidu temples of Hoyasala rulers, in workmanship and finish. The Vimal Vasahi is enclosed in an oblong courtyard surrounded by a high wall with 52 cells, each enshrining the image of a Tirthankar. The main shrine has a dome—a pyramidal roof, a vestibule and an open portico. The image Sri Adinath in sitting posture is installed on an elevated dias in the sanctum. The portico has 48 pillars with long beams stretching from pillar to pillar and they are relieved by serpentine struts of white marble. The dome lying outside is octagonal in shape. It is formed by eleven concentric rings and decorated with finely carved figures of both humans and animals in procession, and they are supported by eight superbly sculptured columns. The circular rings rest on sixteen brackets bearing images of learning, called here by the name of Mahavidya Devi.

Each of 52 cells enshrining one Thirthankar is equally alluring and befitting to the grandeur of main shrine. The portico and the roof contain elaborate reliefs illustrating from Jain and Hindu mythologies. Herein lies the catholicity of Hinduism, and that accounts for the unprecedented popularity of these superb master pieces. Despite the monotonous repetition of the same motif for each of the 52 cells, the art of plastic decoration exuding from every pore of the sculptured piece beckons million looks. There is a small shrine dedicated to Ambica, the Guardian Goddess of Vimal Shah, the peerless
prince among the builders of temples of the world. Another
desirable place is the Hathisala, or Elephant
Room housing the statues of huge elephants wrought in white
marble and fittingly caparisoned — a grand spectacle that recalls
to the memory, the Iravatham of Devendra. It also houses the
life-size statues of Vimal Shah, the builder with the members
of his family. Ironically, the entrance leading to the rare world
of enchantment is quite unimpressive and does not herald the
luxurious banquet, the interior readily serves to every visitor,
nor does any tower piercing into the blue skies to lure the
viewers from distance. The sober exterior belies the wealth of
interior ornamentation. Its uniqueness does not end there, but
begins with the mysterious genesis of its construction.

According to the legend, the builder Vimal Shah const-
structed 360 temples and dedicated them all to the 23rd Tirthan-
kar by name Parsvanath at Kumbharia, about 3 kms off Ambaji
a shrine as popular as Tirupati Balaji temple for Gujaratis.
And Ambica was his house-hold deity and the Guardian Goddess
of Gujaratis. At a particular ceremonial ritual, Ambica was
displeased and ordered him to fly for life. Apprehending formi-
dable consequences, he plunged into the crypt of Ambaji
temple and emerged unscathed at Abu running all along the
subterranean passage. Ambica’s anger was appeased only
when he destroyed all but 5 of 360 temples. Later, when He’s
anger was subsided, she advised him in dream to build a temple
at Dilwara and dedicate it to the first Tirthankar, Sri Adinath.
Though delighted, he had to please an impudent Paramara
ruler in whose domain Abu lay then. In addition, the king
was a sectarian, averse to Jainism. Knowing the greed—the
Achilles heel of the king, a pretentious theist, he offered to
cover the ground he needed for building the temple with silver
coins. It was a temptation too powerful and irresistible for
the lewd king to withstand. The offer got royal sanction,
and soon thousands of persons-technical and non-technical
immersed in the divine task of construction, consuming billions
and millions of rupees for getting the present shape—a master
piece in stone making even Viswakarma, the celestial architect

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gape and gaze and leave the precincts with heavy heart, muttering, ‘I could have designed the heavenly mansions better, if I had seen this group before I started.‘

TEJPAL TEMPLE

Another superb specimen of sculptural art lying adjacent is called Tejpal Mandir, built in 1231 by two brothers, called Vastupal and Tejpal, the ministers under Raja Vira Dhavala, an illustrious ruler of Gujarat. Though it shares many characteristic features of the Vimal Vashi’s temple, it reveals a greater degree of craftsmanship and technical progress. The most remarkable feature of the temple that strikes the eye of the viewers is the marble pendant that adorns the dome of the porch. It is hanging from the ceiling like a cluster of lotuses semi-open, whose cups are so finely wrought that they appear to be almost transparent. In the principal cell is installed the image of Neminath the 22nd Jain Tirthankar. The courtyard contains 48 cells, each housing a Tirthankar. The elephant Gallery akin to one in Vimal Vasahi temple is embellished with a screen noted for its pierced stone trellises of unsurpassing beauty. This patron deserves unqualified praise for inextinguishable passion for perfection; for, he promised to the carvers rewards in silver and gold equal to the weight of marble filings. And he did.

KHARTAR VASIHI TEMPLE

This is located outside the compound; but its glory and history are all the more great and awe-inspiring, rather undreamt of by any in the world. It evokes instant homage to the divine sculptors, whose dedication is second to none but to itself, for they were no mere hired manual labourers, but belong to the divine community of artisans. They were as inspired as the patrons. In token of their matchless devotion, they built a temple of their own, using the discarded material. In their leisure at it. What a dedication! Neither human ear has heard, nor the eye witnessed such devotion, and the like of which

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never exists anywhere in any world, nor in any age. What is more, those rare specimen dedicated that three storeyed marvellous temple to their Guru by name Khatargacha, and so it is known as Khatargacha temple, or artisan temple.

The other two were built by Bhimshah and the speciality lies in the fact that the idol of Pitalhar temple was made of brass and weighs 4000 kgs. Besides feastings the eyes and souls of the devotees thus, the present day Jain philanthropists in charge of maintaining this group are catering to the visiting pilgrims by giving free accommodation etc.

Among others of itinerant interest drawing pious pilgrims and joyous sight-seers, mention must be made of Nakkilake, an enchanting artificial sheet of blue water of idyllic beauty with tiny man-made islets inside, scattered artistically and surrounded by temples and stately palatical architectural beauties. The palm trees jutting above the surface of water against the backdrop of the picturesque hills lends a romantic air to the entire environs. It has a small pier supplying boats and launches for cruising. The spectacle of ethereal chams that mellow-as it were, with the setting sun in the dusk keep the visitor's speechless.

Yet, it has something more to fascinate and lift them to higher planes. According to the legend, it was dug by gods with their nails—nakh. Hence the name. It appears that once gods were in terrible dread of a cruel demon, who caused the stopping of all sacrificial rites by his overbearing acts. The distressed gods sought the help of Brahma, who counselled them to take refuge at the holy Abu and undergo austerities to tide over the calamity. They at once field to Abu and to screen themselves from the diabolical trickeries of their foe, they dug a pit with their nails during their sojourn there. Thus came into existence this lake, which by its multifarious potentialities acquired a name for special attraction and intrest to the visitors.

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It lies at about a kilometre and a half from the busy bazaar. Here for the convenience and luxury the viewers, rows of seats and a beautiful platform are arranged to watch the spectacle of the setting sun in all his glory. The visitors experience thrills of several kinds at the gradual transforming of the sun into a huge ball of fire simultaneously painting the azure sky before sinking into the unknown depths. A sight indeed! There are many other places of great charm and special significance, like Palanpur Point, Byley's walk, Devangan, Anadhra Point etc., but limitation of space is resorting to a stop. The tantalising view of crimson colours of dusk, kissing the plains lush green on the horizon captivates the spectators for long.

BRAHMA KUMARIS VISWA VIDYALAYA:

The visit will be incomplete and pleasures robbed, if a passing reference at least is not made to one unique spiritual organisation—the Prajapita Brahma Kumaris Ishwariya Viswa Vidyalaya, housed in Pandava Bhavan located on Subash Marg. It is the Head Quarters of the world famous international organisation striving for the moral and spiritual upliftment of mankind, through 500 cdd service centres in India and hundreds of similar ones in foreign countries, such as U.K., Germany, Canada, Australia, Guyana, Mauritius, Hongkong, Trinidad, Zambia, Nigeria etc. This imposing, grand edifice situated amidst the Nature's bounteous greenery stands as model of modern architectural marvel and lifts the hearts of the visitors with its vast exterior charmingly decorated with symbols, and a clock atop, serving as crest jewel as it were, to it. It houses the main office and Conference Hall. The artistically furnished Hall with sophisticated audiovisual equipment and multicoloured giant size illustrations adorning the immaculate white walls and well-kept corridors together with its spick & span greeting the eye transport the visitor to the veritable Brahma Loka for a while and brings him back to this mundane world purged of all the gross and dross sticking on to his body. With such inexhaustibly irresistible loveliness, s.p.rb. rare bliss ethereal emanating
from every frame of its construction, it impresses everyone that it is fit to be the apex office of interplanetary organisation even. Scores of white garbed cheerful personnel in charge of several ennobling tasks wring veneration by their indefatigable individual attention paying to every visitor. Their spotless white attire and serene visages, beaming with inner satisfaction, born of their wholehearted commitment to divine ministrations speak volumes of the infectious humanism they are treasuring up to share out to those yearning minds and starving souls. Though the rich spiritual nectar exuding from their mouths is nothing new nor extra-ordinary, the method of their approach and presentation make the listeners awe-stuck and spell bound throughout. The nucleus and locus of their central message is nothing more, nor superior to the quintessence of the all-adorable Hinduism, but con i. g as it is from Sir d, and put in exotic bottles with eye-catching wrappers, it enthralls anyone and demands recognition. Indeed their infinite zeal and inexhaustible divine inspiration for taking mankind to a better world of bliss deserve mute submission and whole-hearted veneration by every man endowed with sagacity and compassionate out look.

Abounding in a wide variety of such rich marvellous pieces of eternal interest, Mount Abu welcomes the visitors round the year and elevates them to higher regions for bliss and contentment. Sure, no hill resort holds such inherent potentialities, nor likely challenge comparison to this in any aspect, as a matter fact. It is second to none but to it self. A visit is a must and a single experience beckons many a recurrence! On and again!!

ACCOMMODATION

It is a Summer Resort and a pilgrimage centre for ages. Many Dharmasalas and Modern hotels are there catering boarding and lodging facilities at all hours.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>CONVEYANCE FOR KURUKSHETRA</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AIR PORT : New Delhi is the Nearest Air port.</td>
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<tr>
<td>RAIL HEAD : It is the Rail head on the N &amp; Rly between Bombay and Delhi.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bus Route : From Delhi and other principal cities all types of vehicles are available round the clock.</td>
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<td>Acommodation : Being a well developed town ship, it provides Lodging and boarding facilities in dharmasalas etc.</td>
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79
AMBaji
The Renowned Sakti Peetha of Gujarat

UNIQUENESS:

Among the most ancient Saktipeethas extant in the state of Gujarat, Ambika of Arasur, occupies a place enviable and has a history unrivalled. She is popularly known throughout Gujarat and Maharastra as Ambaji, and is as famous as Tirupati Balaji to ardent devotees living in India and abroad. Though there are two more Saktipeethas—one at Chunaval called goddess Bala, and the other at Pavgadh called Kali, they pale into significance before this goddess, worshipped by lacs of devotees belonging all castes and religions. Its catholicity is evidenced by countless worshippers belonging to other religions, like Muslims, Parsis, Jains, Buddhists, besides millions of Hindus of all castes and classes. This place is sanctified by the presence of Mother Sakti’s left breast that fell on Mahavishnu’s cutting the dead body of Sati with His Sudarsana Chakra when carried by RudraShankar, on her burning herself in the sacrificial fire, due to unbearable humiliation heaped upon her by none but her own father Dhaksha.

It is this Goddess whose grace enabled Rukmini to secure Krishna as her Pati. It is here on this punyabhumi tonsorial operation for Sri Krishna, the eighth incarnation of God was made with all due fervour. It is here the vanquished King Suratha did penance to regain his kingdom and obtained it with Mother’s grace. And it is this Ambika in her fierce aspect that punished the greatest builder Vimalshah for not acknowledging her glory. It is this Goddess that fulfilled the desire of Rana Pratap in coming out unscathed from Idargadh, when besieged by the formidable Moghul emperor Akbar. It
is in vicinity of this, the holy river Saraswati rises near Arbuda Parvatha, an integral part of Aravalli range deemed more ancient than the Himalayas. It is adjacent to the world renowned temple dedicated to Eswar, known as Koteswar Mahadev.

As irony would have it, here there is neither idol, nor painting of any kind of the holy MOTHER, but only a yantra is installed and it is given the appearance of the goddess with the help of shimmering dress and floral decoration. The consummate artistry of the priests—the Nagar Brahmanas makes the yantra appear as the veritable all-graceful, all-adorable, all-loving MOTHER Sakti that joins the palms of ardent devotees at its very sight. Obeisance to this conventional practice that it has become primarily responsible to bringing lacs of devotees through out the year and making a house hold and much-venerated deity, even by the incarnated like the Almighty God Sri Krishna. For every Gujarati, she is the Pratyaksha daivam and is answering to every call round the clock. Mighty rulers and renowned saint-singers are drawn towards her feet, since time immemorial and that made this holy kshetra one of the most visit worthy shrines both by Sakteyas and bhaktas of every sect and brand.

**SOURCES:**

This famous shrine and the glory of the MOTHER have adorned several pages of our scriptures and occupied a covetable place in every form of literature as it. The copiousness of literary evidence testifies to the uniqueness of this all-compassionate MOTHER drawing on kneels several religions. And Puranas like Kalikapurana, Skandapurana, Saraswati-purana, Markandeyapurana, and sacred treatises like Devigita, Devibhagavatha, Tantrachudamani, Rasamala, Tirihakalpataru, Viramitrodaya, Tirthaparakasa, Bhagavatha, Mahabharata, Anandagarbha, besides Rigveda have eulogised the mightiest might of this MOTHER and her glory. Every book worthy of mention advocating Sakti cult has given considerable place to this Saktipeetha.

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ANTIQUITY:

The origin of this holy shrine takes us to the Vedic age, precisely to the time of Daksha, father of Sati, the inseparable spouse of Mahadev. Devibhagavata embodies an elaborate account of Daksha's despicably unpardonable act of inviting all the adorable personages—mukkotidevathas except Mahadev—his own son-in-law, though he is one of the legitimate recipients of yagnaphala. Sakti, wringing consent from relentless Mahadev, visited her father performing a great yagna on a scale superbly grand and ardour commendable. Daksha's unpardonable temper went to the extreme of insulting Sati in the presence of venerable gods and Maharishis. Unable to bear the fire of dishonour, Sati burnt herself in the sacrificial fire. Learning it, Mahadev sent anon his emissary for the destruction whole yaga; and when his ungovernable rage reached the zienth, he started the all-destructive Tandava-nytya with corpse of Sati on his shoulders. Sure, it would end in mahaprâlaya. Fearing the obnoxiously unending disastrous consequences Lord Mahâvishnu cut the corpse of Sati with his powerful Sudârsana chakra into several pieces. And falling into different places, they turned into stones. When Mahadeva's rage cooled down, he turned them into Saktipeethas of unique significance. The left breast of Sati fell at Arasam or Arasur; and that spot later was sanctified by building a shrine and installing a yantra. And this came to be worshipped as Ambika.

Due to abundant grace showered on the ardent devotees, this MOTHER became very popular throughout the length and breadth of Bharat Khand. And since then bhaktas in numbers countless are worshipping her passionately for crossing the samsarasagara. The Nagar Brahmins who installed the yantra and started propagating Sakti cult are being patronised by rulers from time to time. Endowments are made for the continuance of regular prayer service with elaborate rituals due to them. Many, ranging from ascetics to hedonists of all major religions have become worshippers of this Jagajanani, and as
their desires are fulfilled, popularity is gaining ascendancy over other Saktipeethas established elsewhere. Here are a few legends that cemented the faith of worshippers in her Omnicompassion. As the stories have left concrete proofs, they have fortified the faith of the sceptics and atheists too.

RANA PRATAP'S EPISODE;

The matchless valour and inimitable tenacity of Rana Pratap, the Rajput prince ruling Idargadh is well known, and he was immortalised by his contemporaries for his relentless opposition to Akbar, his sworn enemy. During his self-exile, he decided to see his Rani in the palace, but knew it was humanly impossible to hoodwink the Moghul army besieging the fort and was watching his movements with such vigilance that none but miracle could enable him to accomplish his wish. The brave prince started his secret visit on a dark night. As fortune departing from him, wooed the Moghuls, misfortune appeared in the form of heavy down pour and barred his way with a flooded river. His nocturnal venture thus further dispirited him. But his strong resolve sought refuge at the feet of Ambika, the compassionate MOTHER. Praying devoutly to Ambaji with a pledge to place his pet sword at Her feet, he embarked upon his venture. Would the all-merciful MOTHER, ever let her devotee down? Never! Outwitting the strict vigilance Officers and his contingent, he went into the fort, met his Rani, spent time with her and returned, as planned. Unscathed at it. Attributing his success to the MOTHER'S grace, he placed his life-saving sword at the fact of MOTHER. That great sword thus offered by the mighty Rajput Prince is now in the temple, and held in high esteem as a relic of a warrior prince, who offered it in token of his devotion and recognition of her powers.

VIMALSHAH'S EPISODE:

The famous Vimal shah of Sourashtra, a minister under Solanki rulers was a devotee and builder of unparalleled renown.
Gujarat history shows that no single individual had built so great a number of shrines and such masterpieces at it, as he did. The Dilwara temple on Mount Abu, his immortal contribution to religion is standing now as a sweet poem in white marble that makes even the divine architect Viswakarma confess his inability to come nearer to it in sculptural marvels. It is recorded that his passion for building was monumental and it was appeased only when he completed 360 temples—all of unique excellence and unheard of beauty. As his unquenchable thirst for Jainism was so great that he built 360 Jain temples alone at Kumbaria, only 3 miles off the Ambaji shrine. When his hopeless zeal reached the apex, he discarded Ambika and at a particular festival, he incurred her wrath in not acknowledging her grace. Soon the universal MOTHER asserted and saw him bite the dust—she destroyed 355 out of 360 temples of great wonder. Apprehending danger to his life, Vimalshah jumped into the crypt of Ambaji temple and ran all through the underground passage till he emerged on the Mount Abu. She regretted. when she returned to normalcy, and she advised him in dream to build one temple on Abu and dedicate it to Adinath, the illustrious Jain. Thus came into existence, Dilwara shrine, the incomparable stonework temple and the all-time wonder in the realm of sculpture. Needless to say, all but due to the grace of Ambaji. Is not Her fearful aspect too be reckoned with?

THE COWHERD’S EPISODE:

At a distance of 5 kms. from the temple, there is a hill by name Gabbar. It is believed that its inner chamber is frequented by Ambaji for rest and recreation. There she sits on a swing and enjoys listening to songs. Once a cowherd boy entered all on a sudden and asked wages for tending her cow along with his own. He said that as it got mixed up with his cows unnoticed, and tended it for days. Out of compassion for the innocent boy, she gave barley instead of coins. Disappointed urchin threw them away in utter despair on coming out of
the portal. When he leisurely examined one of them that got stuck up to the cloth into which he received, he learnt that they were made of gold. Anon he ran to collect those scattered but could find none, nor even that Supreme Goddess who gave him. Although he was disappointed twice, it brings out the MOTHER’S boundless mercy for her children.

HISTORICITY:

There are many inscriptions that narrate numerous endowments made to this outstanding shrine by mighty rulers either at her behest or by her grace. And they date back to 8th century A.D. Credit goes to Gujarat for having nurtured Pasupata cult of Lakulisa, the supposed incarnation of Lord Siva, born at Kayavarohha in about the 2nd century A.D. He was responsible for establishing his Pasupata Math at Somanath. As worship of Sakti being closely connected with that of Siva, there is abundant scope for the former to reach all corners of the world soon. Story goes that Siddaraja Jaysimha installed 1,000 Siva lingas around Sahasralinga lake, which he filled with the waters of river Saraswati, in addition to establishing of 108 peethas with Goddess Harsiddha in the centre, which is another name for Ambaji. Though Sakti is worshipped in countless aspects and names like Lalita, Bala, Tulja, Sri kula and Ambika in Gujarat, the worship of Ambaji takes precedence over others.

This worship was popularised by Nagar Brahmins, who enjoyed political ascendancy in 8th century A.D. It is said that the present temple was built by them then. The Nagar Brahmins as records corroborate worshipped Ambaji in an especial manner worthy of emulation. They took out special sanghas in Sravan and Bhadrapad, the most auspicious months for the MOTHER and celebrated festivals in grandiose manner that brought them honour and recognition. Their present position and prestige are entirely due to the ardour they displayed then, and it is still continuing. The rulers that succeeded them ruling the Danta territory, as it was called then, accelerated it with fitting endowments and building activities. Many of the ksh-
atrpa, Vallabi and solanki kings were Saivas, and endeavoured their best to propagate Sakti and Pasupata cults with equal fervour. So it is no wonder that for four centuries from 10th to 14th Gujarat became the strong hold of Siva and Sakti cults. The temples of Somanath and Ambaji stand as the exemplary hold they had over both mass and class of bygone days.

THE TEMPLE:

The present temple lies on the terrace of a building of unusual dimensions. Renovation is undertaken and there are proofs to show that a shrine of architectural marvel would soon emerge making the devotees gape at its beauty and glory on completion. The entire space now is littering, as it were, with building materials that there is no adequate space even for forming queues to reach the feet of the MOTHER. Yet, the unending influx of devout pilgrims and ardent worshippers standing in long rows, speak volumes of compassionate fascination Ambaji has on her devotees. The Gujarati type of making up the deity with colourful flowers etc., bends the head of every visitor invariably. There are many types of prayer services to the deity, but the one offered at 12 noon is of great significance. There is great craze on the part of the visitors to avail this spectacular ritual—arati and they wait for hours in the enclosed terrace. In the evenings, Durga Saptasati is chanted with unbounded fervour. For preparing naivedya and prasada only ghee is used, and celibacy is strictly observed here. Impurity of any kind, or irreverence of unrecognisable type too is said to enrage the Goddess. So, utmost devotion seems surging from both visages and demeanour of the visitors, whose number crosses several thousands every day. The Navartras of Asvin and Chaitra are sacred to the Goddess, and during these holy days, many types of devotional activities like singing garbas, performing Bhavias, establishing of Kumbhas take place, when the entire devout Gujarati people participate lustily. Together with these, on the full and new moon Astami days of every month, several kinds of special Pujas are offered to the MOTHER. So, every day is a special day, rather every moment an auspicious moment in this holy shrine, which is only to be seen and enjoyed then clothed in words. The other object of worship here is Lord Ganesh. His huge size and shape attract one and all, and in fact, he is worshipped first on reaching the temple. The innumerable garlands and unquenchable camphor flames before him testify to the devotion, the people are extending to this, Vigna Vinayaka, the first son of Mother Sati called Ambaji here.
SECTION VIII

PUSHKAR--RAJ
The Only Earthly Abode of Brahma

UNIQUENESS:

Pushkar is the only earthly abode extant of the Creator-Brahma, visited by millions of devotees year after year, since time immemorial. This is a Tirtha Kshetra, and in particular Brahma Kshetra, deemed to be the most holiest spot, either for Brahmopasana to fulfilling the earth desires, or for Brahma loka prapti. This has several other unique plus points that raise the glory of this divya kshetra to the envy of other kshetras dedicated to other gods of similar significance. Starting from the Vedas down to sthalapuranas, many treatises enshrine unaccountable anecdotes concerning the greatness of this place, due to association of divinities like Brahma, and venerable sages like Viswamitra etc., hence pride of place goes to this holy place. Mahabharata says, “Just as Krishna Paramatma is deemed first, deserving the first place of honour among men and gods, so is Pushkar among the thirthas.” The waters of this thirtha are imbued with divinity that sins committed from birth onwards, either due to ignorance, or under instigation of ego are said to be destroyed by a mere single bath; and what is more, any type of incurable skin disease gets cured by a single sip.

It witnessed the wedding of Brahma with Gayatri, while the first wife Savitri was still alive; it is here Viswamitra sacrificed his tapasakti to creating Swarga for Trisanku; it is the very same spot that bears witness to his amorous life with the heavenly damsel Menaka; it is here Brahma killed Vajranabha, the formidable Yama to children with mere dropping of lotus; it is here the first Vanamahostav was held in honour of
Brahma by Vanadevata for accepting permanent settlement here; it is in this Punya thirtha, Rama, Lakshmana and Sita had their ceremonial bath; it is here King Parikshit performed Sarpayag; it is from here the sacred Gayatri mahamantra came from Viswamitra; it is this place that changed Viswamitra from Rajarshi into Brahmarchi; it is this place that saw the misfortune of Brahma’s losing his fifth head at the hands of Maheshwar and also his legitimate high place among the Trinity; and his worship forbidden too. By and large, it is this sacred spot that witnessed the glorious rise and nefarious fall of Brahma, the first among the Trio, together, with Viswamitra’s fluctuating fortunes.

SOURCES:

Sacred scriptures right from the Vedas to the local histories, recount an infinite number of sports of the Lord Creator, and also Maharshi Viswamitra elaborately. Particular references are made in the Rig Veda, Aitareya Brahmana; Markandeya and Padma puranas; Sthalamahatmyas together with Moghul Farmanas and Rajput Prinçes' tamrapatras. They visualise its importance from dim past to the modern times, some with exact dates and facts.

ANTIQUITY:

As it is predominantly a Brahma Kshetra covering Brahma’s life from the first visit to revelation of awe-inspiring sports, appropriate beginning starts with his Bhupradakshna. Padma Purana embodies an elaborate account about this. It appears that when he was going round the world chanced to visit this eye-filling and soul-lifting divyarama, now lying adjacent to Pushkar. And it recreated before his mental eye the apurva sobha of Nandanvana. Enraptured by the luxuriant foliage and bounteous growth of multi-coloured sweet-scented flowers and overhanging delicious fruits—all seemed bent upon offering, as it were, sumptuous banquet to his eye and
soul; and Nature dancing to the tunes of meriflous music of carefree birds, he became totally oblivious of the surroundings. Realising him to be Brahma, Vanadevatha regaled him with the intrinsic charms and dulcet melody of her flora and fauna at the height of their gorgeous beauty. In that mood of inebriety, Pitamaha asked the Vanadevatha to name any boon to be granted to her on the spot. Devout Vanadevatha modestly solicited him to stay there with them for ever; for, dwelling of such august divinity amidst them would itself a fortune non-pariel, and wishes reach consummation even before they were baptised. Contented Vidhatha said 'Thadastu'. The infinite ecstatic joy of the Nature manifested itself there in sumptuous colour and symphonic sweet music from every inch, as evidenced by showers of flowers, and falling of ripe fruits at his feet. It was a veritable Vanamahotsava never occured in the past, nor would repetition be possible in any tense of time. Then Brahma made this spot as his earthly abode. He remained there for centuries, when beatitude reigned supreme to the utmost gratification of Vanadevatha.

One day there emanated from his mansion ear-splitting sounds, all ran inside to find out the reason, and to their surprise, learnt that it was due to the falling of lotus from his hand, which he was invariably holding since his settlement here. Brahma then narrated the story of one dreadful demon by name Vajranabha, who was causing incalculable harm to the children and whom he killed with his lotus chanted and chartered. The place where the lotus fell came to be known as the Pushkar Thirtha. The Pushkar-chanted lotus soon after killing the awful demon rebounded at three places, at every one of them water gashed forth from the earth. These three places are lying within a circuit of 6 Km & they go by the names of Jyesta Madhyama, and the Kanishtha Pushkar. In each of them the images of Brahma, Vishnu and Maheswar were installed respectively and are worshipped since then.

Once Brahma decided to perform a sacrifice at Jyestha.
According to tradition, the performer's wife should sit beside him at Yagnavedika, but Savitri, his wife delayed her arrival in reaching the altar at the auspicious moment, and that moment should not be slipped by. So Brahma asked Devendra to secure for him a fitting spouse to meet that exigency. Procuring a Gopakanya, Devendra threw her into the mouth of the Cow, for purification. On her coming out reborn, she was named Gayatri. Anon, marrying her, Brahma completed the yaga in scheduled time. Just at this moment Savitri came and finding Gayatri beside her Lord, she dumped a volley of curses, though met with counters fittingly, she left for penance hurling the most potent and awful curse on Brahma that he would never be worshipped anywhere; and it came true. This accounts for the absence of temples for Brahma elsewhere. But grateful devotees have been holding fairs and festivities here annually in a grandiose manner. And Karthik Pournami sees their exuberance and religious fervour reaching the pinnacle. Millions of devotees congregate on this Punyathithi here to offer their prayers. Moreover, when the religious fanaticism of Moghul kings demolished old shrines, the theist Rajput princes and philanthropic public renovated and rebuilt them with additions that only bears testimony to their achanthala bhakti in Bramha.

This place also witnessed some other misfortunes of Brahma. Another legend brings out Brahma's inglorious act that registers his further fall. It begins with a dispute between Brahma and Vishnu for supremacy. When the argument reached the climax, suddenly there appeared a column of bright light between the two and both inferred rightly too that it was Siva. Listening to two sides, Siva then asked them to find out the lower and upper ends of that luminous column. Vishnu taking the form of boar, started digging the ground to reach the lower end, but could not; returning confessed his inability. But Brahma, who went up on his mount the Swan lied on his return unashamedly, fabricating evidence with the aid of a Ketaki that was falling from the top. Siva on insisting him to give out the truth, he confused and learning it his deprived him
of his worship in temples with a terrible curse. Thus he los, his honour due to his position in the Trinity also. Later Brahma performed severe penance on the Gandamadana parvatha for expiation of sin. Soon his worship was restored and regular and due honour was accorded. Pacified, Siva solicited his services as Charoiteer during his killing of lokabhainkara Tripura, when Vishnu turned himself into an arrow, with which Tripura was done to death. Again on some other occasion star-crossed, he fell out with Siva. Exasperated, Siva plucked out one of his five heads with his sharp nail. When tempers returned to normalcy, Siva, realising the gravity of sin—Brahmahatya, made Bhupradakshana dipping in sacred waters and sipping thirtha in every shrine and with kapala skull bowl in his hands; and only in Kasi his kapala disappeared in token of dissolution of sin. The present Kapala Thirtha stands in proof of this incident and also publishes to the world that Brahma had five heads prior to this ill-fated anecdote. Though they left some dark spots on his adorable form and immaculate career, he is venerated as the first created and also the Creator of world. Moreover, he imparted Brahma Vidya to sage Atharvan and the highest knowledge to Narada. In addition to this, he claims the discipleship of Devendra and Virochana an eminent celestial denizen. Apart from this, almost all the theories of world creation are attributed to him. He is called the Pitamaha, and Puranas and Upanishads eulogised him as the highest Brahman endowed with several powers. He created the worlds after the great Pralaya and it is from him the Vedas emerged and also many mahamantras. Hence the first place among the Trio. The three-gunas-Rajas, Sattva and Tamas are represented by the Trimurti-Brahma, Vishnu and Rudra, and as such he stands for Rajasaguna Prayers are offered first to him both by asuras and suras too.

As most of his sports are revealed on this sacred soil, it is given the highest honour, and being the only Brahma Kshetra, unprecedented glory attends to it. Hence the emphasis by the sage Pulastya that Pushkar is the first and foremost
among the thirthas, and he ends his long narration to Pitamahā Bhīṣma that thirthas begin with Pushkār. A dip is indispensible, and only the fortunate avail this rare opportunity. Above all, it is said by eminent authorities on numerous occasions that bathing in other thirthas like Ganges, Prayāga etc., or pilgrimage to four Dhamas—Badarī, Puri, Dwāraka and Rameshwar does not confer merit, or expiate sins, unless Pushkār is visited for sacred bath. After a visit and dip in Pushkār alone one is found awakened by welcome speeches of heavenly damsels in the vimāna carrying him to heaven. Hence the fittest appellation—Pushkār Rāj i.e., the king of Thirthas, which it acquired by the presence of Brahmā there eternally as promised to the Vanadvētha on his first visit, and is honourably kept up by him.

VISWAMITRA’S EPISODE:

Balaṅkanda of Rāmāyana brings out vividly sage Visva-mitra’s life with all the ups and downs occurred on this divya-bhumi. His career starts here with selection of this place exuding sublimity for doing penance, which he ultimately made his permanent settlement. While he was carrying on his meditation and spiritual activities, King Trisāṅkṣu driven out of heaven for entering in physical form approached him for fulfilment of his long-cherished ambition of going to heaven in his mottled frame and living with the same among the gods. Utilising his tapas-sakti, he created a new heaven for Trisāṅkṣu; alas! it exposed the vulnerability of heaven’s power. A clear case of his spectacular victory! Heaven then made a compromise with him by assuring Trisāṅkṣu a fit place in heaven. On another occasion, Sunahpsepa an unfortunate muni balaka unwilling to be sacrificed at a yaga by Ambaṅiṣha, whose sacrificial cow was stolen by Indra sought Viswa-mitra’s compassionate assistance to save his life. Pitying him, he asked every one of his sons to substitute for Sunahpsepa. On refusal, he cursed them and by giving two special gathas to Indra, he saved the saranagatha. This is yet another colourful feather in his cap.
Now begins the fluctuations of fortune in his life. He started penance for brahmarishi padavi. Devendra fearing harm to his position, sent Menaka, the ravishing piece of beauty among the celestial dancers for disturbing his tapas. Her external dazzle and internal lust scored victory over the airy tapas; he lost poise, and drank in the transient glamour for a decade, which ended with the birth of Sakuntala. Realising the commission, he started again. This time Rambha, the top beauty noted for irresistible glamour tried at the instance of Devendra, but could not make any dent. So she went with curses to add to her discomfiture. When his tenacity, sat atop the Everest, Brahma descending, made him Brahmarchi, but no effect. Adamant Viswamitra wanted Vasistha, the most competent authority to declare and acknowledge him as such. Vasistha, when pressurised by gods, rescinding his previous animosity, pronounced as aspired, and they lived amicably thereafter. A great achievement indeed!

Another notable event in his life was his acquisition of skill mastery over Sasarpuri Vidya, which he learned from Maharshi Jamadagni. This mahavidya is suffused with special powers and blesses the possessor with extra-ordinary mental brilliance and enables him to compose the best and highest forms of literature like verse etc. On acquisition, Viswamitra gave out the Gayatri mahamantra, considered to be the quintessence of the Vedas. Such all-potent chants normally originate from the intuition of one divya tapasvi, who possess the highest Brahma varchas and spiritual brilliance of rare kind. This sacred and potent chant which came from him after years of penance, is memorised and recited by millions of orthodox Hindus thenceforward. All these monumental victories were achieved by him only when he dwelt on this punya dharitri. The holiness of the soil complemented abundantly and made him an illustrious sage among the renowned sages and seers. Above all, the divine damsel-Menaka delivered Sakuntala during her liaison with him, who in turn presented the greatest and most valorous prince, whose exploits and victories in every realm of human activity brought indelible glory and inexhaustible repu-
ation to the sub-continent and it was called after him --- Bharata Khanda.

THE TEMPLE:

The ancient shrines of unparalleled spiritual opulence were destroyed by Moghul Emperors, particularly Aurangzeb, the religious zealot of low breed, but were renovated and rebuilt by Rajput princes, whose magnanimous patronage of art and architecture is now beckoning the attention of the visitors through sculptural marvels in every temple worthy to be visited. Amongst the existing many, the temples of Badrinarayana, Varahaji, Atmeswar Mahadeo and Savitri, besides Brahma shrine are of great importance. The present temple of Brahma was built by one great philanthropist and thiest called Gokul Chand Parekh who served as Minister under Scindhia in 1809. The Varahaji temple was rebuilt by Arnoja in 1120-50, but repaired by Sagar, the brother of Rana Pratap of Chittoor. And when it tasted the wrath of Jahangir and Aurangzeb, Maharaja Jaising II of Jaipur renovated and made many additions. Badrinath temple likewise was rebuilt by the Thakur of Kharva of Ajmir in 1800. The Atmeswar Mahadeo shrine was renovated by Goomanti Rao in 1809. A purohit of great name, who worked under Ajit Singh of Marwar rebuilt Savitri temple in 1687. In addition to these ancient ones renovated, there is one modern temple called Rangaji temple built by Ramanuja Vaishnavas, and it attracts all types of visitors.

THE BRAHMA TEMPLE:

It is the star attraction among the existing ones, and visitors, both ardent thiests and aesthetes visit this invariably after a dip in the Pushkar. The image of Brahma feasts the eyes of the visitors with its huge dimensions and rich floral decorations. His consorts Savitri and Gayatri heighten his grandeur by taking positions on either side of Chaturmukha-Brahma. The idol of Sanakasanandanaś are installed near the dome and they bring veneration by virtue of their position and divinity they attained. The month of Kartikh witnesses the glory of Lord by performance of several kinds of special pujas and eye-filling decorations. Lakhs of persons of every breed visit and offer prayers to this august divinity, deeming him as Prajapati—the Creator of worlds and also father of both Suras and Asuras, besides creating the Vedas—the repositories
of all knowledge. A visit anticipates, and a prayer yields instant bliss.

THE GHATS:

Pushkar is the sacrificial altar of Prajapati, and many others of every class performed yajñas here from time to time. The Pushkar lake has several famous ghats associated with the great deeds of the deities of celestial and terrestrial worlds. Of them, Brahma Ghat, Gaught, Kapalamchana Ghat, Bdari Ghat and Swarup Ghat are famous and lure pilgrims by their inherent sanctity and anecdotes odd.

THE SWARUP GHAT:

It is one of the important Ghats, and its strange history draws pilgrims in huge numbers. Every visitor invariably takes bath here. It is said that one prince by name Narahar Rao visited this, when he was on his hunting expedition. Attracted by the crystal clear water, he took a little of it in his hands to drink. And lo! the white spots—marks of leprosy—soon disappeared. With a mere touch alone! And a permanent cure at it. Immediately, he ordered a big ghat with strong and broad embankment to be added to facilitate the visitors for safe and easy bath in this Pushkar. Since then it is believed to be a boon to lepers, and others suffering from skin diseases. Huge numbers greet the sight throughout the year.

The other ghats too have their own odd, yet sacred kinship with some celebrity of the other, and so thronging of people during their visits is observed from dawn to dusk. These ghats are famous for other purposes also. Many pilgrims visit only to performing sāddhas on these ghats, believing that every performance yields inexhaustible merit. Even meditation or chanting of Brahma's name sitting on any one of the ghats is accused of countless merits and infinite bliss; for the Vanaparva of the Mahabharata elaborates its sanctity, and antiquity in such glowing terms that a mere sight of this august thirtha—Pushkar ensures Kaivalya; it ends the narration with: “Everything was pure in Krita Age; in Treta, Pushkar became sacred; in Dwapara, Kurukshetra; and in the Kali, Ganga became sacred.”

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MATA VAISHNODEVI MANDIR
The Goddess of Trikuta parvat

LOCATION:

'Himalayas', etymologically means—abodes of snow—manchu mandirs—regions abound in ice. Its denotation ends there, giving place to connotation—opening a vista of the spectacle of memorable past encompassing almost all segments of Hindu life. So it means many things to Indians in particular. They are the Bhagavannilayas, the heartland of gods; rishivatikamayas—retreats of sage—seers nadimulas—sources of rivers; Oashadi khanis- fertile grounds of medicinal plants; tapobhoomis—places of meditation etc., since time immemorial. They are the integral part of Hindu culture, and it is impossible to imagine the place of our glorious India minus them. The unparalleled cultural eminence that our Punya Bharat proudly boasts, rather rightfully claims emanates only from these splendidly awe—some; immaculately pure; spotlessly luminous white, highest mountains piercing into high heaven, as it were, to display its indescribable charm, manifested in the captivating majesty of lofty ice-capped peaks, lovely vast serene lakes, evergreen colourful deep, valleys—the Nature's bounteous ethereal beauty in its pristine form, the very sight, or remembrance brings in a wisp of cool, fragrant mountain breeze that lifts the soul, exalts the physical frame and consoles the afflicted.

Moreover, this mighty mountain with its lengthiest range and highest peaks too has occupied a covetable place in geography by gaining ascendency over other similars, existing in other continents like the Alps in Europe, the Andes in South America, the Appalachian in North America etc. Historically,
religiously, commercially and strategically too, its position is unique and enviable. By virtue of possessing several untrodden peaks, it is during many national holidays to try their best physical might in the realms of mountaineering and trekking. Also their number is significantly smallest. With regard to the spiritual attraction it holds in store— it is immeasurably infinite. And it is inexhaustible, in every aspect. It is evidenced by the ever increasing influx of pilgrims and tourists round the year. The ancient shrines of universal veneration, like the much-hallowed Kedarnath, Badarinath, Gangotri and Yamunotri and Amarnath have indeed brought undying fame to the country, and evergreen laurels to our culture. Due to the association with the august Trio, each of them has carved out a spectacular niche in the literature and religion and so held in the highest esteem since yugas. But, they are dedicated to Sri Maha Vishnu, Lord Maheswar and river Goddesses, whereas Mata Vaishnodevi Mandir, enshrined in the Himalayan foothills, precisely in the cave of Trikuta mountain lying in the state of Jammu Tawi, is dedicated to the MOTHER goddess in her three manifestations of Maha Saraswati, Maha Lakshmi and Maha Kali. A rarity! A visit-worthy spot!! On any count!!

Yatra to the MOTHER’S lotus feet is an arduous feat, calling forth one’s stamina and patience. It is a test of endurance, faith in movement, and devotion on all fours; for it is to be covered not by any automobile, but by trekking a long distance of 14 kms. interspersed by creeping in a cave and wading through water. yet, deemed most sacred and visit worthy. Hasn’t wisdom affirmed—harder the journey, greater the merit? More difficult is the route, holier the shrine becomes? Sure sugar tastes sweeter after biting the green chilli? Inspite of the hardships of walking, wading, creeping, millions of devotees of all castes and creeds, sexes and age-groups, and in and out of the season are visiting this most sacred shrine, either for soliciting favours, or thanks giving for the benefit enjoyed. This indeed is the sure index of its popularity and fame. Among the visiting devotees, people of Kashmir, Jammu Tawi, Haryana, Punjab and Rajasthan form the majority. Whoever they are
whatever they are; from wherever they come, one can see the tremendous spirit of camaraderie as soon as they join the concourse of pilgrims at Katra, the base of the pilgrimage, as it were, and move along the entire route uttering “Jai Mata di” that reverbrate in the high hills and low valleys; undoubtedly waking up the inanimate too.

A little back-ground—the origin of this cave temple is all the more important at this stage. A glance arms one with faith that itself takes him on its viewless wings.

'ORIGIN:

The origin is steeped in antique traditional past. Scriptural evidence is too scanty, nor history embodies accounts worthy of mention. Though inscriptive proof eludes the grasp, sculptural evidence establishes the exact time, if applied. Any way, the story handed down from mouth to mouth is enough to draw the devotee to the feet of the MOTHER, since it is imbued with divine mysticism, with concrete proof on the walls of the cave.

It begins—Vaishnodevi was a creature of gods, sent to combat evil, and establish Dharma in the world, and as such she was different from every person in and around her home in the Trikut region, in the dim past. From infancy she had taken fancy for Sri Rama’s ideals and developed devotion of a rare kind. Her dedication to Sri Rama grew faster than her age. When time came, she resolved to be celibate, and living for the cause of spiritual progress. Her spiritual maturity brought many admirers and reverent followers. Alas! it brought her ‘Yamapasa’ too. That veritable yamapasa darted from the lustful eyes of Bhairon, a powerful demon king of that region. Captivated by her ravishing beauty, he proposed matrimony. When it was turned down, he asserted himself and assumed demonic form to accomplish his lusty commerce by any means. Fearing adverse consequences, she fled to forests, but that rakshasadharma followed her every hill and dale, plain
and water across the Himalayas. At long last, she entered a dark, narrow cave for safety. A safe resort, for sure respite, she thought, but ere long she heard the diabolic peals of laughter and fiendish approach of Bhairon. Unable to contain herself, she emerged as an avenging angel, assuming her Bhadrakali-swarupa. And fell on him with all her might, like a mountain on rat. Poor Bhairon was crushed to death.

After the asura samhara, she made this dark cave her permanent home. And lived ever after carefree, enjoying the divine serenity hovering over, helping the meditation uninterrup-
ted. But decided to lifting her children by conferring boons, and relieving from the clutches of grief. And last'y releasing from the cycle of births and deaths. So, one night stood in her compassionate form, in dream, before a picus brahmin and revealed her pious intention. And also the fact of her taking seat in Trikut Parvat. The devout brahmin saw then in a flesh three rock out images of the Goddesses, Kali, Lakshmi, and Saraswathi on the walls of a cave. He determined forth with to locate that cave, whose walls are embossed with the images of those adorable Goddess for prayers. He started his quest taking his daughter with him. They wandered days and nights, non-stop for days peering at the walls of every cave. Their long indefatiguable search at last took them to an area untread by humans so far. When continued till the end of a slope, they found suddenly a brilliant light in-front—an unusual radiance at that place, and at that hour, miraculously at it. They proceeded in that direction like the three Wisemen of East journeying to Bathalhem at the birth of Jesus, the compassionate. Moreover, they found behind them terrifying darkness threatening to swallow them at once en masse if retreat made. Their onward march ended inside a cave.

And lo! the brahmin saw the self-same rock out images of the goddess of the wall. Destination reached. Relief greeted, Joy overflowed. Just then, he heard an aerial voice, “My dear son, you have come to the right spot. This is my seat and I have been living here since ages. Be you my deputy
to announcing to the world about my presence here and resolve to come to the rescue of my bhaktas if approached with pure devotion, pure heart and pious intention. And I will emancipate them from the shackles of punarjanma”. She vanished anon. He obeyed the divine injunction at once, and became her first priest. He thus made his life memorably useful by serving the bhaktakoti, conducting regular pujas, and communicating the MOTHER’S message. After him many officiated as priests, and the sports of the MOTHER in relieving the deserving through miracles went on and on with the passage of time, the glory of the cave and the bounteous blessings of the Mother spread far and wide, till the MOTHER became one of the pre-eminent of Goddesses and the temple as the much-sought after one in North Western parts of India.

The munificent showering of blessings on her devotees is so timeless and certain that soon she became the household deity in the Himalayan region. As she withholds nothing, nor denies anything to the devotee at any time, or in any place, none returns depressed, or hope-lost. For everything, like passing examination, improving business, celebrating marriage, securing job, curing disease, obtaining mental peace, seeking conjugal harmony and the like, people approach her, worship her, she tears of joy when prayers are answered, and cry for hurling them across the ocean of worries gnawing at their vitals. Their tearful appeals are heard, and dispensed with in accordance with their merits. The fruitful results enjoyed are making the suppliants visit year after year with unbounded joy, and utmost devotion. A visit showers instant results. Now remains the means of approach to her holy feet.

THE JOURNEY:

The holy shrine is located in Trikut Parvat of Himalayas in the state of Jammu Tawi. It lies at a distance of 64 kms. from the City of Jammu, housing one of the unique temples of the world. The famous Raghunath temple is the crest jewel of the city, to the precise, a dazzling diamond in
the diadem adorning the Bharata Mata. Besides the huge Śiva lingas made of Saligram and crystal, the temple houses Sahastrā Kotilingas in nearly ten huge halls. The very concept of Sahastra Koti lingas in one place defies description. It is a wonder of wonders. No where one can see, or here such marvel. It is only to be seen than read. The images of Raghunath, Ganapati etc., are worthy of adoration. A visit is a must to every theists. After visiting it, people coming from all parts -- foreign or Indian travel to Katra lying at a distance 20 kms in buses or taxis.

Katra is a beautiful township well developed to catering to the everflowing pilgrim community. There are two visit-worthy temples -- Kalika temple and Chintamanani and they attract all. Some prefer staying here for the night. As it serves, more or less as the base for further journey of 14 kms to the shrine, everything the yatris require, like ponies for riding, porters for carrying luggage, snack pockets for the journey, woolen outfit for warmth, beside canvass shoes, torches, walking sticks, rain coats for careful journey and Puja materials are available. In addition, the Department of Tourism issues passes for darsan; for, ‘admission by pass’ is strictly followed in the temple. This pass is to be tendered at Banaganga to making prior arrangements for easy admission into the Garbhagriha.

The ennobling tenets of casteless oneness, and all are equal before the MOTHER are quite apparent and come to life at the beginning of the trek, here at Karta itself. Hundreds of yatris start from here almost everyday with red banners in their hands hoisted jauntily, and uttering ‘Jai Mata di’ -- glory of the MOTHER, wrapped themselves fully in woolen clothes. Throughout the trek commencing spirit of unity exists, and the yatris make brief stops at several places for visiting temples held dear to the MOTHER. And the entire route is dotted with many such visit-worthy shrines. They also indicate the route taken by Vaishnodevi, when chased by that dreadful demon. At Hasali, there is the famous temple Bhumika, where
that pious brahmin lived, and to whom the Mother appeared first. They halt for a while. Again they continue from Darshani Darwaza, the holy place deemed very dear to the Mother. Here free meal to every pilgrim is given and it is called Langar. In the community feeding --- all are equal, and given uniform treatment in serving food etc. Yatris in their onward and return journeys too get here free and sumptuous meal. Next comes Banaganga --- a small stream created by the MOTHER for bathing purpose. After dip, they visit Charan Paduka shrine. It is here the MOTHER halted for a while to see whether that danawa was still pursuing. Her foot prints embossed on stone are worshipped here. So halt-worthy. Next halt is at Adhukunwari, where Vaishnodevi meditated in a cave to escaping from the Bhairon. At the end, she used her Trisul to gorging a new route for her father march. Though this is a narrow passage, some pilgrims go crawling, despite having another way to reach the BHAWAN --- the main shrine --- the destination after an arduous journey of 14 kms. covered in about 6 hours.

THE BHAWAN :

It is situated at 5300 feet MSL. A sacred spot ! A sure resort of beatitude ! ! ! They journey’s end. ! ! ! Before entering, yatris have to wade through a small stream, called Charan Ganga. The place where the image is installed and worshipped is small, but well illuminated. The hall infront is spacious enough to accomodate hundreds of pilgrims. Yatris are admitted in lines well regulated. The long unending queues of yatris jostling and chanting greet the MOTHER at long last seated on a high pedestal well decorated. The beautiful image of the MOTHER in floral decoration feast the eyes, but for a fleeting second, like the darsan of Sri Balaji at Tirumala, where several kinds of hardships faced during the days of journey and thousands of rupees spent on everything end in a split second. Though the darsan ends in a flash, in that flash, itself the MOTHER sees the supplicant from top to toe, and knows what he requires and when it has to be granted. After offering
prayers with breaking of coconuts, the yatris move slowly kissing the damp chiselled walls, desiring to partaking the divinity embedded in all parts of that holiest of holy place. The yatris as they emerge hail the MOTHER with faces wreathed in smiles, hearts going heaven wards and souls overflowing with inexplicable bliss. And with red-scavers over their heads — a practice observed here by every pilgrim. Another object of adoration is the Siva Lingam embedded into the cave wall, facing the MOTHER'S image. Paying obeisance to LordMaheswar, they finally come out.

Coming out of the main mandir, Pilgrim go about visiting Shiv Gooh, where beautiful lingam is installed at the end of the cave. Next to it lies Ram Mandir. After that, they visit Rasayan Goof, housing the images of several adorable deities. The Bhairon temple is the last which everyone goes; for, it is ordained by the divine MOTHER that a visit is a MUST to all. Now begins the return journey.

As the entire route is well lighted all long, many prefer the journey in the night that lessens the fatigue by avoiding exposure to intensity of hot sun. Adequate drinking water supply is available throughout, and many way-side tea stalls provide hot cups of tea and relishable snacks at reasonable rates. Puja materials are made available around the Bhavan in several shops. In three places — Katra, Adhkunwari and Vaishnodevi accommodation is available in well furnished rooms, both in Tourist Bungalows and Dharmashalas. Dormitory accommodation too is provided. So staying poses no problem, nor is food; since the well maintained stalls on the way are catering to the needs of the yatris both night or day and at several places at it.
SECTION X

AMARNATH

The Waxing and Waning Sivalinga of Amarnath

UNIQUENESS:

The waxing and waning snow-linga of Amarnath, considered to be one of the twelve jyothirlingas is a wonder of wonders of our Punya Bharat, luring several thousands of Pilgrims every year, in the months of Sravana and Bhadrapada. This nature-made linga is imbued with such mystery and sanctity that it is exercising an irresistible fascination over ardent Sai-vates in particular and theists in general, since time immemorial. According to tradition, it is here Maheswar, the all-benevolent Lord distributed amrit - nectar to Mukkoti devathas to making them immortal and immune against the danavakrityas of asuras. And they in grateful devotion named him Amarnath. It is here, on one full noon night; Lord Maheswar explained to Parvathi the secrets of creation together with attainment of Moksha. And it is this sacred spot that witnessed the metamorphosis of Uma Maheswar into doves, when His narration of secret was over-heard by his birthyas. It is this place that is giving darshan of Uma Maheswar and Ganapathi in the form of ice. It is this holy kshetra, where Muslims enjoy more or less equal status with Brahmins in sharing the offerings and also distributing Prasadam. It is to this holy shrine H.H. Sankaracharya of Sarada Peeth of Kashmir leads a procession on foot every year in the month of Sravana from Srinagar. It is this Kshetra that traces the origin of several monuments made by philanthropic rules of kashmir. And it is this thirtha kshetra that tests the endurance of pilgrims during the holy trek of 48 kms taking almost one 'Full' week. It is to this yatra alone that the State Government is evincing utmost interest in arranging every amenity, like food, accommodation, transport medical, post and telegraph, police etc., to the pilgrims.
from the starting point to the Sannidhi and back to Pahalgam, the scenic tourist resort and the place from where normally the journey on foot begins by tourists and pilgrims. And finally it is this kshetra that gives darshan of the Adi-dampatras in the form of pigeons-a standing reality of the divinity enshrined in linga to the believers of every ‘ism’ in theistic word.

ANTIQUITY:

In the beginning, according to tradition, Kashmir valley was a lake, called Sati-saras, named after Parvathi, the consort of Lord Maheswar. Theis was the habitat of dreadful demons, the sworn enemies of humans. Their existence was a perennial threat to people living nearby, as they were cannibals and delighted at the suffering of human beings. Pitying their misery, Kasyapa, the great humanist sage destroyed the entire race along with their king Jalodbhava. Later, he converted this place of Himavan, the father of Parvathi into a land and named it Kashmir Mandal. In course of time, many shrines of great spiritual significance were built by kings of Kashmir both for Siva and Vishnu. As their number increased rapidly, they covered almost all the space, and many thirthas were discovered to the extent that there is not an inch space that is not dedicated either to Vishnu or Siva. Amarnath, the sacred thirtha kshetra dedicated to Lord Maheswar tops the list and lies at a distance of about 100 kms to the north-east of Srinagar, the capital of Kashmir. And it is made popular by the theist kings of Kashmir by their humanist ministrations. Kalhan’s master-piece Raja - Tarangani, the veritable treasure house of the history of Kashmir kings and their rule deals with the origin of Amarnath in detail, and throws light on the yatra to that Himalayan abode of Lord Maheswar.

The story begins in the dim past with Gonanda I on the throne of Kashmir, a contemporary of Jarasandha the close associate of Kamsa of Mathura. As we move with the chronicle, we learn that Damodara, son of Gonanda I was killed
by Yadavas. His wife Yasomoti, the then pregnant queen was preferred by Sri Krishna, Yadhukulabhushan to rule kingdom till here Progeny came to age, since the land of the kashmir is Parvathi incarnate, and the ruler of that country is the amsa. or particle of Siva, and so Krishna was against annexing it. Many historical personages succeeded and monumental constructions were left behind as relics. Among them the Seshanaga lake occupies a pre-eminent place. The famous Seshanaga lying between Chandavadi and Wavjan was constructed by Susrayasa Naga and the glory of this Naga is elaborately described in the Raja - Tarangani of Kalhana. This ruler of eminence had two beautiful aughters named Iravathi and Chandralekha. Due to evil machinations of a bogus Sadhu, he encountered many problems. Knowing the helplessness of the noble king, a brahmin by name Visakha came to his rescue and relieved him of his anxieties with his atomic powers. Susrayasa gave his handsome daughter Chandralekha to Visakha in marriage out of gratitude.

The beautiful couple lived a memorably happy life in the capital of Kinneragrama ruled by king Nara, an infamous king who brought shame to his illustrious father, King Vibhishrna II by his laxity of morals and frivolous behaviour. Due to misfortune, one day a horse entered the compound of Chandralekha and ate away her grains spread out in sunlight. In her attempt to drive away the stray house sse patted on its back, and it left a golden imprint of her hand on horse's back. The oddity of the incident soon spread through out the capital. Learning it, king Nara set his net and used all means to secure her for satisfying his carnality. He descended even to the nefarions level of asking her husband to part with her for quenching his kamadaha, but failed. In his hopeless passion for her, he decided to besiege the house, but the couple escaped before his atrocious plan was launched. Chandralekha with her husband Vishaka sought refuge in Susrayasa Naga, her father. Flying into rage, he burnt the entire city of Nara and finally killed him. When
remorse held him in tight grip, he started building lakes and laying roads connecting shrines with towns for the comforts of people; in expiation of sin committed. Among the many Seshanaga lake on the way to Amarnath and Jamatri Saras are still standing, proclaiming his glory in its rise and fall.

HISTORICITY:

The Raja-Tarangani embodies countless instances of Kings, patronage and adherence to Saivism. The kashmir Saivism has a distinct flavour, and it differs from the Saivism propounded by celebrated pravaktas like Sankaracharya, and it has a special name -- Trika Mata. It is classified into three parts - Agama Sastra, Spanda Sasta, and Pratyabhijna. They are of superior origin and teach dualistic doctrine, and as such they are opposed to idealistic monism explained in Siva Sutras said to have been revealed by Siva himself, Distinguished prophets and theists became votaries of this sect and eminent writers and commentators like Vasugupta, Somananda, etc., wrote monumental works exemplifying their findings. They emphasised the basic principle that "the Highest Light is eternal and imperishable and it is of the nature of the Pranava Mantra -- AUM throbbing in the heart of everyone." All these treatises eulogise Lord Maheswar's Ominicompassion, who in his waxing-waning from is giving darshan in the cave, besides appearing in the form of pigeons to the devotees on their visit to this holy thirtha-kshetra.

SOUKCES:

Hoary scriptures, particularly works dealing with Saivism embody a great corpus of literature shedding much light on the divinity of this thirtha kshetra. Chronicles like kalhana's Raja-Tarangahi and Abdul Fazl's Aini-i-Akbari, philosophical works like Utpala's Isvara Prathyabhijna, Sivasutras, Paratrinshika, Tantrasara, Tantraloka, Madhva's Sarvadarsana Sangraha, Bhatta's bhuma majali and Nilamata-purana and Harvijaya bear ample testimony to the sacredness of this holy
shrined and illustrate the lives of those who were blessed by Maheswar.

THE HOLY TREK:

To reach this Lord of Kailas revealing Himself in ice from, an arduous journey of 46 kms has to be made, and it is by foot, and foot, alone. No mode of transport can come to the rescue of the ardent bhaktas, though modern science boasts of reaching the moon with its infinite number of inventions and discoveries. So, the annual traditional padayatra to Amarnath cave is the touch stone of theist’s devotion to Lord Maheswar. It begins on the fifth of the bright half of Sravana every year, with H.H. Sankaracharya of Sarada Peeth in front with all fervous and fanfare as evidenced by carrying of a big silver stick called Danda with Lord Siva’s Standard, followed by hundreds of sadhus Nagas, Mahants, Saints, Viragis, Sanyasins of every brand along with devotees coming from all parts of Akhand Bharat. They start from Srinagar and this sublime yatra is given all assistance by the state and is taken care of by the Dharmarth Department of Kashmir State. The Department provides all help through several of its departments like police, medical, etc., and its special officers accompany it throughout.

The “Sangh, as the pilgrims of the party are called, starts from Srinagar and the distance is 13 kms. On the first day, and camp at Pampaur overnight. Avantipura is the second stop that lies at a distance of 13 kms. The third one is Bribihara. From here the party passes Via Anant Nag, Gautama Nag and arrive atMattan, a corrupt form of Mattan. It is a Surya Kshetra of great renown. The party is given ceremonial welcome here. The celebrated Surya shrine lying on lofty plateau commanding excellent scenic splendour enthralls the pilgrims and wrings veneration by its architectural marvel and spiritual aroma. And it is styled as, “the architectural lion of Kashmir”, as it is famous for graceful colonnade of 84 columns, artistic carvings and beautiful arches. It is king Lalitaditya’s contribution to art and
architecture. Enjoying its beauty and peoples' hospitality it again starts and reaches Asihmukam. The local muslim shrine of great fame here also receives Pilgrims' veneration. The Muslims of this place and the nearby Batkut village are held in high esteem and they are given one third of the cash offerings of the Amarnath temple. They are highly religious and are very friendly to Hindus. Their Catholocity and humanism are primarily responsible for peaceful journey to Amarnath, for, it is by their labour alone roads are laid out and tents are pitched up for pilgrims comfort. They are patronised by kings from time to time, when clearance of jungles and laying of roads to Amarnath Cave are undertaken. With inimitable religious fervour, they help the pilgrims in several ways. In fact, they seem to have been totally oblivious of their religion, for they implement the highly laudable adage - Service to man is devotion to God. But for them, the darsan of Maheswar would have been an imagination than a reality. Almost all kings received their selfless service and rewarded them fittingly. From here the Sangh reaches Pahalgam and is joined by several other tourists and pilgrims, who reach it by buses or other automobiles. For going further up, some engage Dandis, Kandis or Poines. The distances of 46 kms. from here is covered in 4 days with comparative ease and grace, since the government looks after scrupulously in providing essential amenities enroute. For the night stay it helps in pitching up sheds, Sarais, resthouses, tents, besides keeping depots for the supply of rations and fuel. It arranges for ponies and labourers etc., during the annual pilgrimage every year, if prior intimation is made. During non season period, pilgrims have to make their own arrangements.

From here to Amarnath cave there are 4 main stops. The first is at Chandanvadi, the second at Wavjan, the next at Panchatarni and the final one at Amarnath cave - the sacred Sannidhi of Maheswar.

The first stop - Chandanwari lying at 10 kms. Dis-
tance from Pahalgam is a Minivalley girdled by tall mountain peaks with the famous Seshnag stream rising through it perennially. And it boasts of its marvellous snow bridge. It is a picnic spot visited by people throughout the year. From here one can see the lovely sights of snow acpped mountains and silvery streams leaping down to flow gurgling always. The confluence of Asthan Marg stream and Seshnag is visible from here. The forest ends here, and ascent of Pishu Ghati begins. Legend records that it was called Peshna mount representing the heap of bones of demons who were crushed down by gods with the help of Maheswar. It is an enchanting sight that lives in memory for years. Then the party passing via zozipal reaches Seshnag lying at a height of 11,730 feet. This emerald lake which remains covered till June is a worthy sight. It is about 500 feet below the road there lies in the icy cap of the Kohenhorr the famous glaciar. It is fed by the waters of melted snow from several glaciers. The Seshnag river starts from here and flows in beautiful cascades. It is said that it is a deep as Patala, and the resort of Seshnaga. Crossing this, the party arrives at wavjan, the second halt of the marathon trek.

From here up to Mahagunus pass, the party has to ascend to reach Panchatarni, the third halt lying at a height of 11105 feet. The gorgeous scenery at every stage of trek relieves the boredom and fatigue of the troublesome trekking. The party then starts descending to proceed down a very steep and continuous descent. This halt has picturesque camping ground and provides all the needed amenities. It is here the pilgrims deposit their extra luggage as done in clock rooms and start towards the cave lying a 6 km3 distance. After this onerous trek, the party reaches Amara-vathi stream flowing with crystal clear ice cold water, just outside the cave. Every one takes a dip in it with great jubilation and feel emancipated at having reached the Siva Sannidhi and also covering the long distance by foot. Now remains the darsan of the all — merciful Maheswar.
THE CAVE AND THE SNOW LINGA:

On the auspicious Sravana Purnima day, the party after purging of their impurities sticking to body, mind and soul in the river Amaravathi also called Amaraganga enters the cave to greet its eyes with the holy snow image of Siva linga. This sacred cave is about 150 feet high and 90 feet broad. The walls are moist and appear to have been made of gypsum. The ceiling is leaky except for a small area. There are two holes in the northern wall from which snow white water drops trickle down and form into ice as soon as they fall. Of the two, one hole is slightly bigger and right below it is the huge Sivalinga measuring about 3 yards in height formed by the snow water dripping from the roof. To the right of Linga, there is another formation of Snow linga and it is called the image of Parvathi, and to the left is Ganesh’s image formed likewise. The devout pilgrims offer obeisance to the snow images with all due fervour. Several types of prayer services and rituals are performed with the aid of priests.

Though the cave faces south and there is no chance of Sun’s rays falling directly on the snow image, the image waxes and wanes along with the waxing and waning of moon. Is it not a marvel to be seen and admired? Does not this act justify the truth of Lord’s inscrutability. Would science offer any palpable solution? Can labs with round the clock investigation disprove the hand of divinity behind this mysterious phenomenon? Will this not throw a challenge to the ingenuity to untie the knot? Nothing but soulful prostrations pleases the devout pilgrim at the very sight of Siva linga, and mention of its waxing and waning with moon regardless of his allegiance to secular or scientific faith.

This rare phenomenon has been highly applauded by even other religions and they recorded it with inexplicable joy. The famous An-i-Akbari of Abul Fazl embodies this rare phenomenon with great gusto. It says in vol II Page
“Amarnath is considered a shrine of great sanctity. When the new moon rises, from her throne of rays, a bubble as it were of ice is formed in the cave which daily increases little by little for fifteen days till it is somewhat higher than two yards, of the measure of yard determined by His Majesty; With the waning of moon the image likewise begins to decrease, till no trace of it remains when the moon disappears”. Needless to prolong that every national who visits it, expresses his infinite joy in such terms, they bear testimony to his acceptance of the divinity presiding in the cave. There is on the left, a small cave inside Amarnath, from which a white substance resembling chalk is dug out and given to the visitors as Vibhuti of Amarnath. And this Prasadam is distributed by Mohammadans of Batkut village whose share in making the journey enjoyable during halts at several places and service at every step are beyond description. Distribution of p.asadam by Muslims in a Hindu shrine is very odd, and can be deemed a rarity of rarities. Yet, it is going on since centuries. This practice is rooted in a strange myth. Once, as the story goes, a Muslim shepherded by name Buta Malik was given a sack of coal by a sadhu out of love for his pious living. When opened it in the house that night he found it to be gold. Over joyed Muslim went to the spot to thank him for the fortune given. But he found a cave and when he went inside, he found the snowlinga. He started worshipping it with great fervour, thinking that Siva alone conferred that favour. And others followed him for bliss and fortune. In course of time it became a place of pilgrimage. As it was discovered and popularised by him, his descendants are given a percentage of donations even to day. The pilgrims carry with them the white substance deposited on the bank of Amarganga, for they believe that by smearing it on their bodies, it protects them from severe cold and other skin diseases. They named it Amara Vibhuti. During their stay lasting for hours, they observe white pigeons flying about and then bow to them considering as Siva and Parvathi in the form of birds, ever since their conversation was over heard by their servants.
After bath, darsan and prayer to the Snow-image of Maheswar in this ageless Amarnath cave, the party makes return journey with soul filled with Maheswar's image; mind, exultant at the fulfilment of adorable desire of visiting a shrine atop the Himalayas; eyes, feasted with an unusual auspicious sight; ears, ringing with the sounds of Harhar Mahadev; hearts, overflowing with devotional emotions; hands full of Amara Vibhuthi and legs moving swiftly, to reach home for distributing the prasadam to kith and kin, who eagerly await the happy return.

CONVEYANCE

Railways: Jammu Tawi - The Junction connects major cities and towns by Express and Passenger trains.

Roadways: Srinagar is the base for Padayatra - the holy trek by H.H. Sankaracharya to the cave. Normally tourists and pilgrims start from Pahalgam, reaching it by Buses and taxis.

Air ways: Srinagar is the Airport connected by Indian Air lines flights from Delhi, Chandigar etc.

Trekking: From pahalgam to cave - 46 kms - 5 days' yatra - up and down. Ponies, labourers, and dandis are available at Pahalgam - rations are supplied at halting places Tarpalin sheets - tents can be hired.

Essentials: Woolen outfit, gumboots, raincoats, walking sticks, thermos flask, tents, tinned food - a MUST. Week's supply of provisions and commodities eases the journey. On the way at several places ration shops, tea bunks and restaurants provide snacks food at fixed rates.

MATA VAISHNODEVI MANDIR

Rail head: Jammu Tawi junction - the important trains originate and culminate here. It can be reached from any point Jammu Tawi is the base.

Road ways: From Jammu Tawi, buses or taxis go up to Katna - 50 kms off - the rest 13.5 kms by walk to the cave.

Airways: Jammu Tawi Airport - Indian Airlincs flights connect Jammu Tawi with New Delhi- Chandigar Srinagar etc.

Essential: As for Amarnath.
ERRATTA

In the general scheme of God's creation, good and bad do exist side by side, nay they rather co-habit always. They can’t be separated, nor separation does good to any. Hence the observance of devils, where gods dwell. To exemplify this, perhaps, you great printer’s devils, while trying to avail the darshan of the adorable gods. If you observe apostrophes at the bottom of words; commas in the places of semi-colons; hyphens in the places of dashes, they are excusable and you can bear them, but you can’t put up with formidable ones, whose presence irk and confound the comprehension. Such inexcusables are listed to ease tension. Although I tried to minimise them, I could not due to inadequate material the press has. Albert Tirupathi progressed in casa-disas, it lags behind in printing. Hence my solicitation of your Pardon.

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LORD, KRISHNA, OF DWARAKA
KOTEESWARA MAHADEVA TEMPLE

AMBAJI MATA
THE GOLDEN TEMPLE AMRITSAR

BABA ATAL RAI TOWER
KURUKSHETRA TEMPLES
SRI RAGHUNATHJI TEMPLES GROUP--
ENSHRING SAHASTRAKOTILINGAS JAMMU--TAWI
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