

Pilgrim Centres Of India

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PILGRIM CENTRES OF INDIA

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PILGRIM CENTRES OF INDIA

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- (4) Illustrated Weekly of India, 24th December, 1972.
- (5) Tenth Agama Silpa Vyasa. Bharatha-Folk-Lore Festival Sadas, Madurai.



EDITORIAL

PILGRIM CENTRES OF INDIA



Pilgrimage in India is a great and glorious tradition. The Aitareya Brahmana has it that "happiness is not for him who does not travel". Pilgrimage invests travel with sublime meaning and purpose. Apart from the obvious fact that it is one of the modes of worship for the men of faith, deepening and strengthening the religious sentiment, it is also an "expression of love for the Motherland" and "expands the geographical consciousness" of the Pilgrim. It provides an incentive, if not inspiration, for those that are unaccustomed or un-prepared for travel to emerge from their narrow isolation and "grow beyond fetters of time and space," sharing in a fuller life of understanding, tolerance and common brotherhood. Pilgrimage, it is said, is a potential nation-builder, an effective means of national and cultural integration, capable of transforming the self-centred individual into a lover of man-kind no less than a devotee of God. It would also serve as a means for the sublimation of the "wander-lust" of man, giving it a direction in a spiritual dimension. "Travel maketh a man perfect," said Bacon; but it was not aimless wandering that the essayist meant by travel. Pilgrimages in India always included sacred

spots hallowed by tradition, shrines on mountain-tops, selected areas for purificatory baths in perennial rivers and at confluences of waters, cave-temples and temples in celebrated cities, renowned no less for their historical associations than for their epic memories, broadly classified as Sthalas, Tirthas and Kshetras. These sacred spots have an "aura" of their own, and its impact is felt by every earnest Pilgrim. The rarified atmosphere in them is evidently charged with super-natural power generated by the intensity of "tapas" and the strong, subtle vibrations of spiritual thoughts of Saints and Sages, who are believed to have lived and moved in and around the spots. If, as the Philosopher Radhakrishnan points out, "tapas" implies a "gathering-up of all dispersed energies" and their consolidated concentration in a "persistent endeavour to dwell in the Divine and develop a transfigured life," everyone of these Sthalas or Tirthas is rich in such associations with Tapasvins and their thoughts, even if we left out of account the legendary and mythological memories.

To the believer and the traditionalist, Tirthas and Kshetras are abodes of the Divine, chosen spots of specific or special

manifestation of Divinity ; and any good deed done in their vicinity, any act of personal or religious duty discharged acquires additional merit and grows in significance, - whether it is in the nature of a sacrificial oblation, ritualistic worship to an Ishta Devata, offerings in Shraddha to ancestors, or even as an ordinary act of charity (dana). The scriptures declare that through "Yajna, dana, tapas and fasting" one could purify one's mind and heart and render oneself fit for the descent of Grace and the dawn of Jnana. Pilgrim Centres are thus focussing points of light and power.

We have in this issue of our Vivekananda Kendra Patrika collected and presented material relating to the several Pilgrim Centres of India, scattered all over the land, far and near, from the confluence of seas at Kanyakumari in the southern most extremity to the heights of the Himalayan ranges bordering on the north, - " Nature's Cathedrals, where aspiring humanity may worship all that is pure and sublime in Nature's creation". We do not claim that the picture is complete or the presentation is exhaustive. We have, however, attempted to make it as representative as possible. The Pilgrim Centres described here are not confined to any particular faith, religious persuasion or sect or sub-sect, and our treatment attempts at no special emphasis on the significance of any particular region or area, which has not already loomed large in human memory through the impact of tradition or history. On the other hand, we have very briefly touched on a few less- known or even "obscure" spots in the land, sanctified by

some association or other, ancient or recent, but remaining unnoticed owing to extraneous factors.

Our survey, though just a bird's eye-view, comprehends besides Hindu Shrines and Tirthas, including Jain Temples, Buddhist Viharas, as also a few Ashrams of more recent origin, like the head-quarters of Sri Ramakrishna Mission and Math, Sri Chaitanya Math, Aurobindo Ashram, Sivananda Ashram, Shirdi of Sai Baba etc. We have throughout striven to high-light the idea that Mother India is one integral whole, - spiritually and culturally no less than geographically.

Going on a Pilgrimage may appear superfluous and a futile adventure from the highest spiritual point of view, that is to say from the stand-point of one who has been able to discover the Divine in the depths of his own heart, which thus epitomises all the sacred shrines and Tirthas of the outer world. This may not be a valid objection against the common run of devotees undertaking pilgrimage in the outer world, moving from one sanctified spot to another and getting the benefits stored up in each.

It may not be out of place to close with a few relevant extracts from the writings of the well-known German Travel Philosopher, Herman Keyserling: "Benares is holy, a world gone superficial, hardly understands such truths any more".

Before long no one will undertake a pilgrimage, and sooner or later, - only not too soon - religion will stand without its

holy places. How poor will it get in the process!" And Keyserling adds, "it is meaningless to ask whether a place is really holy. If it is regarded as holy for a sufficiently long period, then Divinity takes residence there".

It is profoundly significant that Count Keyserling after advancing an array of arguments in defence of Pilgrimage concludes : "Of course, it would represent the highest pinnacle if men could feel the presence of God every-where, but hardly one out of a million is capable of this".

THE SONG OF INDIA

Heart of mine, awake in this
 holy place of pilgrimage,
 In this Land of India, on the
 shore of vast humanity.
 Here do I stand with
 arms out-stretched to
 salute man divine,
 And sing his praise in many
 a glad-some paean.
 These hills that are rapt in
 deep meditation,
 These plains that clasp their
 rosaries of rivers,
 Here will you find earth that is
 ever-sacred;
 In this Land of India, on the shore

We know not whence and at whose call,
 these myriad streams
 Have come rushing forth to lose
 themselves in this sea -
 Aryan and Non-Aryan, Dravidian
 and Chinese,
 Scythian, Hun, Pathan and Moghul,
 all merged into one body.

Now the West has opened her doors,
 bringing their offerings,
 They will give and take, unite,
 and will not turn away,
 In this Land of India, on the
 shore of vast humanity.
 Come O Aryans, come Non-Aryans,
 Hindu, Mussalman come,
 Come ye Parsees, come O Christians,
 come ye one and all,
 Come Brahmins, let thou be hallowed
 by holding all by hand.
 Come ye all who are shunned,
 wipe out the dishonour,
 Come to the crowning of the Mother,
 fill the sacred bowl
 With water that is sanctified
 by the touch of all
 In this Land of India, on the
 shore of vast humanity.

- RABINDRANATH TAGORE

The Temple on the Rock at the Land's End

of vast humanity.

Eternity Concretised in a Message

THE waters seethed, stormed and surged, now lapping gently and again lashing furiously against rocky mounds that stood cradled in the depths of the ocean. On one of these rocks defying all storms and surges stands a structure dedicated to the memory of an epoch-making event in the life of one of the noblest sons of India. This is the Memorial that has taken shape to commemorate Swami Vivekananda's magnificent vision of a resurgent India. Coming to this land's end, where mingle the "virgin waters" of three mighty oceans, he swam to the rock and sat there wrapped in the fathomless depths of thought that got absorbed into a profound meditation on the horizons of Mother India's future. Here, today, on this very spot stands the mighty structure of a timeless temple, symbolising a message of eternity concretized in a moment of time. So truly natural are its hues that it looks as if the very hand that fashioned the rock in mid-sea was also the one that carved out this exquisite piece of architectural beauty. Its walls blend at once with the colour of the rock and of the sea, and its roof and dome reflect the soft spectral hues of the rosy dawn or as in the hushed hours of sun-set, the muted mellowness of the evening sky. Sometimes it looks like a medieval fortress with battlements and turrets set against Nature's fury with the

calm determination of a confirmed ascetic. At other times it seemed as though the ocean depths had heaved up and gifted this.

Where Today Stands This Monument

Years ago a pair of rocks stood out there, where today stands this monument. On one portion of the main rock is the impression of one tiny foot which is worshipped as the Sri Padam (the Holy Foot) of the Mother who, as a Virgin (Kanya) stood here in a posture of penance to propitiate Lord Siva of the snow capped peaks of Kailas. This spot is now housed in a small shrine called Sri Pada Mandapam. Overlooking this on the same rock is the spacious structure housing a 7½ feet high statue of Swami Vivekananda. It is hard to believe that this has become as much a place of worship as the ancient shrine of Kanya Kumari on the main land, though this was once a little known spot. Twenty years ago these were two deserted rocks unnoticed by many, known to a few, perhaps, but they thought it better to leave it in its obscurity. Now boats fly from and to the main land over a distance of 450 yards.

Men, women and children line up in large numbers from 8 am to 4 p.m. to worship that sacred little foot symbolic of the aspiration of Indian womanhood. They also look up and gaze in wonderment at the lofty Holy figure of the Swamiji, who is the pride of India signifying all that is

noble and pure in man, a man whose heart bled for every suffering fellow man, a pattern of true renunciation. His very pose conveys powerful determination, one of do or die. Work unto death for the teeming poverty-stricken children of Mother India. Yes. Even if it should mean a mighty holocaust. That is what the powerful statue on the polished pedestal seems to urge as exhortation.

Born in Bengal he traversed the length and breadth of India, lived with the lowliest among the low, and mixed freely with kings and generals. His India was, is and will ever be One. The very Mother, the imprint of whose foot on the rock at the land's end epitomised the spirit of penance, had her mind fixed on the Lord who ruled the snowy peaks of Kailas. Her purest aspirations ascended like a sacrificial flame, while Her Lord's blessings came down in a shower of grace on Her. If this does not reveal the integral unity of India, if not of all humanity, what does?

Original Temple and its Reappearance

Legend has it that the original Kanyakumari temple was somewhere in the vicinity of Sri Pada Parai, the hillock sanctified by the foot-print of the Mother, and that the rock itself was a part of the main land. Ravages of time and vagaries of nature demanded their toll and the temple disappeared from its original spot. So we have today the shrine as it re-appeared in the famous temple on the main land at Kanyakumari, drawing people from all over India, far and near, for their worship. Whatever the authenticity of legend and tradition, it is certain that the rock has been venerated

by Shakti worshippers. Saints and Sages are believed to have come and sat in deep meditation on the rock from time immemorial. It was this halo of sanctity around the rock that made Swami Vivekananda, an ardent devotee of the Mother that he was, ride the surging waves and swim across the distance to this sacred, secluded spot. Pining for a vision of Lord Siva, the heart that led him on to the snow-clad eminences of the Himalayas drew Him to the southern-most tip of his Mother Land.

The Prominent Structures on the Rock

The prominent structures on the rock are the Sri Pada Mandapam and Vivekananda Mandapam, besides ancillary structures like reservoirs, power distribution centre, circular pathways, etc. The Sri Pada Mandapam consists of the Sanctum Sanctorum (Garbha Griham), the inner and outer Prakaram and a platform all around. The Vivekananda Mandapam is composed of the Sabha Mantapam, Dhyana Mantapam and the Mukha Mantapam. The entire architectural pattern, particularly the design of the seven Sikharams, is almost a reproduction of Sri Ramakrishna Temple at Belur but with a significant local touch introduced by raising typical Gopuram designs.

The Sri Pada Mandapam is constructed on the traditional style with the three Prakarams, which is significant in that it represents the three states of consciousness (waking, dream and deep sleep). It is only when man transcends all these states that he reaches the innermost core of his being, the sanctum

sanctorum of the spirit. Here the sanctum has the foot-print enclosed in a glass case.

Swamiji's Imposing Statue

Overlooking the Sri Pada is the Vivekananda Mantapam approached by a flight of stairs into an ornate, pillared and polished passage that leads into the hall, the Sabha Mantapam where Swamiji's imposing statue stands with eyes fixed on the sacred foot-print.

Here in hushed silence thousands file past or prostrate full length. They are loath to move on and have to be unwillingly reminded of the presence of others behind them. From here they move on to the Dhyana Mantapam or the Meditation Hall, apparently intended for the contemplatives among the visitors. A hushed serenity rules here. No statue but the universal symbol of Aum inscribed in glass, installed on a highly polished altar arrests the devotee's attention, inviting him to a consummation of all the lofty feelings and sentiments experienced so far, by halting here for a few moments. Time ticks away in such sublime company, and all too soon one is wrenched out into the harsh world of realities by one's own vagrant thoughts. People once more fill the landing to the waiting boat, that is to take them back to the mainland. They no doubt leave behind them a part of their noblest aspirations and take with them the blessings of the Mother and Swamiji in their onward journey through life. This is then the tale of that Rock, which now attracts multitudes inspired or motivated from unfathomed depths of utter humility.

SHORE TEMPLE AT THE LAND'S TIP

Kanyakumari Temple

[The Meeting Place of Sixteen Tirthas]

SHE dons robes of violet, indigo, turquoise-blue, green, slate grey or inky black trimmed with flounces and flounces of foamy lace. These waters bewitch the onlooker with their maiden vagaries and moods. "These waters are virgin", said Gandhiji, "this is no port of call". Standing sentinel-like on these shores, walled and cloistered within its mighty walls is 'the virgin Goddess' - "Kanya Kumari". High, ochre lined walls shut her off from the roar of the ocean and the din and noise of the outside world. Devotees stream in from all parts of India, for no pilgrimage is complete without a trip to this ancient shrine said to be over a thousand years old. Buses packed with eager faces unload an unending stream of pilgrims which wends its way to the water's edge to have a dip where the three oceans meet. Here also is the sacred spot of the confluence of the Matr-Pitr Tirthas. There are in all 16 Tirthas skirting the oceans and the temple precincts. They are Savitri, Gayatri, Saraswathi, Kanya, Brahma, Bhima, Salaba, Vinayaka, Hanuman, Vedavyasa, Dhanushkodi, Vishnu, Matr, Pitr, Arjuna and Sthanu Tirthas, of which four alone are described in the course of this article. The last Tirtha has some connection with the Sthanu-malaya Tirtha of Suchindram. This stream moves on next to the tiny temple of Vighneswara (the Lord who removes

obstacles) that overlooks the Vivekananda Rock. After circumambulating and praying for His grace, the devotees enter the outermost precincts of the main temple and come face to face with the massive Eastern Gate of the temple which remains closed permanently. Behind the closure of this gate lies a tale.

The Story of the Closed Gate

Once upon a time this door stood open, and the narrative says that the precious bright gem set in the nose jewel of the Mother was shedding its lustrous radiance so far and wide that by its sheer effulgence it attracted ships away from their course. Being mistaken for the warning signal of a light-house. A ship once floundered on the hidden rocks. It was thereafter that this door had to be closed to the public. From here the pilgrim turns round the corner to come to the Northern Gate that is open. Stalls hawking worship material flank this gate. Here men are asked to cast off their occidental attire and don the true Indian dhoti and enter the presence of the Mother "shirtless". After completing the outer round and crossing the Navarathri Mantapam, the pilgrims enter the second corridor encircling the shrine. At the entrance is the image of Kala Bhairava, worshipping which the devotees turn left and crossing the Pathala Ganga Tirtha (the well from which the water for worship of the Deity is drawn) and the image of Anjaneya, they reach the Dhwaja Stambha (the flag-mast of temple).

In the Presence of the Kanya

Here is the entrance that leads to the door, from which the sanctum sanctorum can be seen. The next corridor to be circumambulated before finally coming face to face with the Mother accommodates the images of Indra, Vinayaka and Tyaga Sundari. After visits to these, one is ushered directly into the presence of the Kanya, the presiding deity of this shrine. She stands there as a young girl absorbed in Her penance, with a mala (rosary) in her right hand, The image is made of blue stone, and it is said that sage Parasurama had installed it. It is only at the early hour before dawn, when the Abhisheka is performed that one has a glimpse of the real image, for at other times she is seen decked out in all finery.

Legends Woven Round the Very Name

Many are the legends woven round the very name - 'Kanyakumari'. The emperor, Bharata who ruled over India in ancient days, had nine children, eight sons and a daughter. When the time came for his retirement from the daily affairs of life (Vanaprastha) to take to the life of a hermit he divided his kingdom into nine equal portions, of which the southern portion came under the reign of his daughter Kumari, who was an incarnation of the Goddess Kanya, Hence the name Kanyakumari. The region mentioned above extended approximately to 50 miles south of its present situation. Historians say that it was called Limooriya island, and that there was a hillock called Kumari Malai there. Another and more accepted version

is that Pushkarakshi or Punyakasi, the daughter of Mayasura, prayed to invoke the blessings of the Lord of Kailas and His Consort. Pleased by her devotion, the Lord appeared before her in a vision and advised her to stay absorbed in permanent penance at the Land's End, where it is stated, she ultimately attained eternal beatitude, and got merged into the form of the universal Mother. This same Punyakasi was later canonised as Kanyakumari by saints and sages. She now stands there in all the glory of her virgin beauty sanctifying the whole land and blessing all Her devotees. On emerging from the sanctum one enters the second round way encircling the temple where is seen the image of Bala Sundari, very similar to the one seen earlier as Tyaga Sundari. These are considered and worshipped as the devoted companions of the first 'Virgin Goddess'.

Another version that is current is that two Asuras, Baka and Mooka, let loose a reign of terror among the people, including saints and sages. To put an end to this, the sages appealed to Lord Parameswara, who created two 'saktis' out of the supreme Parasakti. These were Kali and Kumari, and with their advent there was an end to the sorrow and suffering of the people. Later Kali went over to Kalighat on the banks of the River Ganga, and Kumari stayed on the shores of the three seas at Land's End, blessing and protecting all who sought her grace.

Re-enacted in History

Even today this event is re-enacted on the Vijayadasami Day, when the deity is taken out in full regalia as a warrior

Goddess mounted on the Uchchaisrava to the nearby village of Mahadanapuram, where the whole drama of confrontation with the asuras is acted out till late in the night. It is then that they open the eastern gate, when after victorious return from battle She is taken for a ceremonial bath at the Kanyatirtha directly below the Eastern gate. This is one of the sacred 'Pancha Nari Tirthas'.

The Rock Memorial

Pilgrims and tourists throng Kanyakumari at all times. Endowed by Nature with rich scenic beauty, and sanctified by Divine Presence and the confluence of three oceans at India's Land's End, the whole area draws crowds from every part of the country and even from distant parts of the world. The sunrise and the sunset at Kanyakumari are phenomenal. Standing on the shore and watching the sunrise one's wondering attention alights on another temple, a little away from the shore on one of the twin rocks in mid-sea. Those interested have facilities to cross that strip of sea and get at the rock, celebrated as the Vivekananda Rock, and at the structure standing on it known as the Vivekananda Rock Memorial.



Suchindram

SUCHINDRAM is abundantly blessed with natural charm. Circled by the graceful sweep of River Paziayar, skirted by lush and luxuriant fields of paddy, dotted by serried ranks of palms, their fronds rustling in the breeze, this could be a veritable pilgrim's paradise. Rising majestically above this is the Tower of the Temple of Suchindram, intricately carved out with plaster figures proportioned to a perfection and executed with exquisite skill.

Structural Blend of Different Periods

The architecture of the Suchindram Temple shows that its structures owe their origin to different periods of history. The Pandyas and Cholas, the Vijayanagar Kings, the Nayaks of Madurai and the rulers of Travancore have all contributed to the richness of its architectural beauty. Gods, Goddesses, animals, birds, natural scenes, and human figures vie with one another for a fitting place on the tower of this House of God. Mural paintings depicting incidents from the Ramayana are confined to the inner walls of the Gopuram (Tower). The Alankara Mantapam has 4 carved pillars fashioned out of a single stone. Two of them contain 33 smaller pillars and the others have 25 pillars each. These pillars emit musical notes when struck and are remarkable for the ingenuity of workmanship reflecting a perfect blend of the art and science of architecture.

Sthanumalaya and the Divine Trinity

This rare shrine dedicated to the Divine Trinity is of Sthanumalayaswami at Suchindram; and it may well be described as the spiritual metropolis of Nanchilnad. The temple's architectural excellence as well as its traditional association with the hoary Kanyakumari shrine attract pilgrims in large numbers throughout the year. Legend links the Goddess Kanyakumari of the Land's End with the Lord Siva abiding at Suchindram.

While the Mother stands at the confluence of the three oceans, the Lord has stationed himself at a distance of eight miles from Her at Suchindram. Here He is called Sthanumalaya Peru mal. An interesting legend has it that a marriage was arranged between Her and Lord Siva, - on an auspicious day at an auspicious moment at Kanyakumari. The Lord, however, failed to arrive at the appointed hour, and the Goddess had to go in search of Him. Meanwhile, the auspicious moment had passed, and she went back to Kanyakumari. That is why she stands at Kanyakumari to this day as the virgin Goddess, and He Himself remains at Suchindram. Tradition also says that the offerings of water, oil, milk and flowers made to Him at Suchindram, reach Kanyakumari through 'an underground passage to a sanctified spot called the Sthanu Tirtham.

Suchindram owes its name also to Indra, the prince among Gods who is said to have been purified of sin through his penance performed here at this shrine, where stands the Trimurthi Mahalinga. The temple is



than one reason. As one travels down to Kanyakumari, this temple by its very location and beauty of the structure draws the pilgrim's attention, and he feels profoundly grateful to providence for this digression. Anjaneya, the devout follower of Lord Sri Rama is

located in a compound, the length of whose Northern wall is 402 ft. In this compound, there are more than 30 shrines. The main temple is that of Sthanurnalaya Perumal. Facing the sanctum of this main temple and on the Eastern side is the famous Swayambhu Linga representing the Trimurthi. Behind this is the Konrai tree. According to the wishes of Sage Atri and his saintly wife Anasuya, the three gods Siva, Brahma and Vishnu appeared in the form of this linga represented respectively by its top, middle and bottom portions.

Gigantic Anjaneya

Lord Hanuman - that paragon of epic devotion and embodiment of true humility. This statue depicts Anjaneya's Viswarupa Darshana as granted to Sita languishing in the Asoka Vana. The image of Hanuman here is about 18 feet high and is believed to be of matchless potency.

Suchindram is as much a place of pilgrimage as any other great temple of India for more

ever ready to grant boons to those who utter His Master's name with true, heartfelt devotion. This imposing form of Hanuman as seen at Suchindram, as a fulfiller of prayers, draws pilgrims from all parts of India. Anjaneya is said to have alighted at a place close by, called Marutha Malai, before He took his legendary leap to Lanka. Here a bit of the hill is believed to have given way and is even, now considered a most appropriate spot for prayer and penance. Many a sadhu and seeker and many who are in quest of the graces of solitude find in this place, a rewarding haven.

- Translated and adapted from Kanyakumari and Other Temples by Parameswaran Pillai.

Rameswaram

The Jyotirlinga of Holy Association

ENSHRINING one of the twelve Jyotir Lingas, associated with the holy memory of Lord Sri Rama, the temple of Rameswaram shines in all its sacred glory attracting to its premises countless pilgrims from all over India. In any mention of pilgrim centres the phrase “Kasi-Rameswaram” is sufficient to indicate the inseparability of these two Siva Kshetras. A pilgrimage to Kasi is considered incomplete unless one visits Rameswaram, as well. Rameswaram is as important a Siva Kshetra in the South as Benares or Kasi is in the North.

Kailas Linked with Rameswaram

The temple of Rameswaram is situated in the island of Rameswaram in Ramnad District of Tamil Nadu. This island rests in Gulf of Mannar, where the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal meet. The temple lies huddled in a palm grove, surrounded by the sea, reflecting divinity in serenity. Considered as the second most holy place in India, next only to Benares, it attracts countless pilgrims from ‘all over India. The crowd that gathers in the temple premises represents the whole of India, and one can see here every colour, costume, caste, creed, cult and dialect that represent the variegated admixture of faiths and cultures that India reflects. The description of India’s borders, “A-Setu Himachalam” puts Rameswaram (where Rama’s Setu or bridge

was built) at the one end and the Himalayas at the other, and the people that live in the holy land between these two defining borders hold Rameswaram and Kailas (Himalayas) as sacred abodes of Lord Shiva by visiting which, they feel their lives would be sanctified and souls uplifted.

The Gandha Madana

Rameswaram, known in the Puranas as Gandha Madana Hill, is the place from where Lord Sri Rama crossed over to Lanka (Ceylon) by erecting a bridge between the two. Having vanquished the tyrant King Ravana, who had kidnapped Sita, Sri Rama established Vibhishana, brother of Ravana on the throne of the Kingdom of Lanka and returned with Sita and others to the Gandha Madana hill. Advised by the Sages to propitiate Lord Shiva by worshipping His Swayambhu Linga on the sacred shores near the Gandha Madana Hill, in order to wash off the sin of slaying a Brahmin, for Ravana was a Brahmin King, a descendant of Pulastya Brahma, Sri Rama sent Hanuman to Kailas to bring the Linga from Shiva Himself. Hanuman went to Kailas, where, as the story goes, he was unable to secure the image and started a penance to please Lord Shiva so that he could get it. Meantime, on the shores near Gandha Madana, Rama and the others waited a long while for Hanuman, and seeing the auspicious moment fixed for consecrating the Linga drawing close, Sita made a Linga out of sand, and Sri Rama consecrated it for worship. When Hanuman returned at last, having pleased Shiva and got the Linga, he saw the one that was already established, and was very much

disappointed. Rama then asked him to remove the Linga that had already been established and replace it with the one he brought. Try as he might, Hanuman could not extract the Linga from the soil, and then Sri Rama established the Linga he brought from Kailas by the side of the first one. This one, known as Sri Kasi Visweswara is to be seen by the side of the original Linga, and it is worshipped first in the temple. The Jyotir Linga consecrated and worshipped by Sri Rama has been called "Rameswar", and Gandha Madana hill has thus acquired the name of Rameswaram. Established on the 10th of Jyeshtha Sukla this Jyotir Linga has made Rameswaram one of the most sacred Kshetras sanctified by its association with Lord Rama.

Sanctity Shines through Architecture

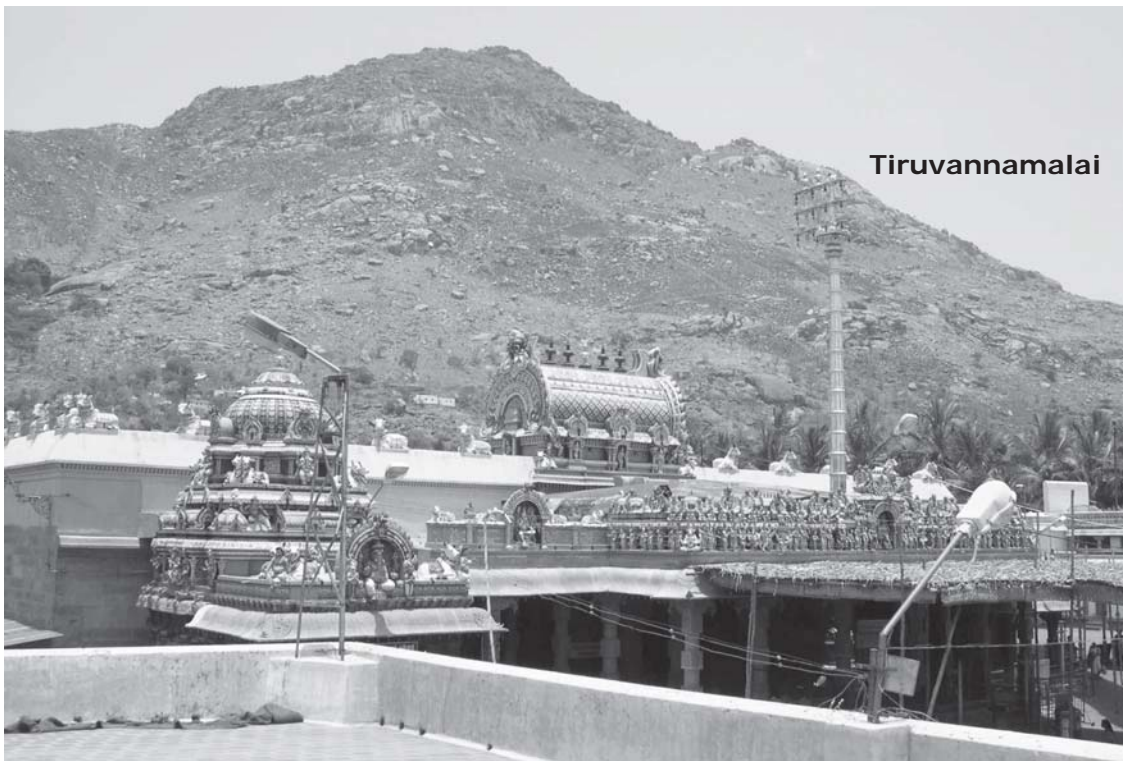
The temple at Rameswaram has acquired fame throughout India for its architectural wealth as much as for its intrinsic sanctity. The famous "Rameswaram Corridor" is the longest corridor in the world. The enclosed temple premises occupy an area of 845 feet by 657 feet. The complete Gopuram on the western side is 78 feet in height. The pillars supporting the corridors are decorated with intricate designs and patterns that reveal the exquisite skill of the architects of the day. The corridors are about 400 feet in length varying from 17 to 21 feet in breadth and are about 30 feet in height. The oceans on the eastern and western side are called Ratnakar and Mahodadhi, and are regarded as highly sacred Tirthas. There are about 24 minor Tirthas in Rameswaram, such as Chakra Tirtha, Amruta Tirtha, Siva Tirtha, Sarva

Tirtha, Koti Tirtha, etc., and pilgrims, clad in wet garments, take a dip in all these Tirthas. One very prominent motive of the pilgrims visiting Rameswaram is the belief that the childless would be blessed with progeny if they visited this place.

About twelve miles from Rameswaram is Dhanushkoti, where the bridge to Lanka has actually been built. Here Sri Rama, after his return from Lanka, is said to have destroyed the bridge between the two countries in response to the request of Vibhishna.

Tirthas as Potent as Yajna

Vyasa, while explaining in his great Epic Mahabharatha the merit of a pilgrimage, says that performance of sacrifices (Yajnas) is an elaborate affair involving heavy expenditure, which only the rich can afford, and it requires a great many other factors, too, to qualify a man to perform it. A man has to have the necessary money, man-power to help, wife to take part in the rituals, priests to perform them etc., to undertake a Yajna. But a visit to the Punya Tirthas is within reach of even the least equipped man and gives him the same "Phalam" or fruit as that of the performance of a Yajna. Thus he advises Dharma Raja to undertake a pilgrimage, and describes the sanctity and excellence of the different Tirthas. Rameswaram is hailed as a great Tirtha enshrining one of the twelve Jyotir Lingas, and the Sage Vyasa advises Dharma Raja to visit this "Punya Tirtha," whose holy waters as well as the grace of the Lord manifest through them would wash away all sins.



The Hill of the Holy Beacon

A SOLITARY hill looms into sight as one enters Tiruvannamalai. This hill with a base of impressive extent and ample girth is shrouded in a veil of mist in the early hours of dawn. It rises like a reddish brown giant in the clear morning light. An isolated upland (so it is to the common man) of red soil and brown rock, barren for the most part with large tracts that are treeless and with masses of stone split into great boulders strewn here and there, Arunachala raises its head in solitary grandeur as an isolated hill, head and shoulders above the irregular chain of hills that girdle the entire landscape.

Arunachala-Ramana

It has an impersonal, impenetrable quality about it. This, perhaps, is why it has come to be recognised as the spiritual centre of the world. The very utterance of the name "Arunachala ", it is said, stirred some slumbering depths in the mind of young Ramana, the Sage of Tiruvannamalai. It was to a cave carved into this structure of sanctity that he repaired in quest of solitude. What caused him to come here? Was it merely the shelter that it afforded from the vicissitudes of the weather? Or was it the lack of light and noise which are major causes of disturbance to a meditative mind? These are only conjectures. Ramana stands out like this strange mountain in all His solitary grandeur

and uniqueness from the jungle of common humanity. Ramana Bhagavan remains mysteriously aloof. The impersonal, inscrutable quality of this sacred mountain got accentuated in this living form of Bhagavan. Yes, it is impossible to talk of Arunachala without mentioning Bhagavan.

Hoary Tradition

The Sage Gautama of hoary tradition is said to have described the greatness of Arunachala to Mother Parvati. He has said that this Arunachala was in the form of a flame in Krita Yuga. That is how it came into being. At one time Brahma and Vishnu had an argument when Lord Siva appeared between them, as a column of fire, whose extent they were unable to gauge. Its luminous immensity made them burst forth into songs of praise and adoration of Siva, who then transformed Himself into a Linga, which now stands as the Arunachala. In the Treta Yuga, it assumed the form of a bejewelled hill; in the Dwapara, it shone with a golden hue; in the Kali, it looks just a mountain.

This hill is believed to be the abode of siddhas and saints even to the present day. There are instances where they made themselves visible to various seekers. Bhagavan whose life was itself an exemplification of the truth of the Vedas, is said to have had the following experience. It was said that a siddha lived under a banyan tree on the hill, but Bhagavan had not heard about it. He only felt at that time that there was something sublime 'attached to the hill. One day, he saw the very large leaf of a banyan tree, dropped at the bottom of a dry waterway. He

wondered at the largeness of the leaf. Sometime later, when he was going up the hill he saw from a distance a large banyan tree growing on a big rock. He drew near after a precipitous climb but his further progress was halted by hornets which stung him. He narrated the incident to devotees who were anxiously awaiting his return. Some days after the event he happened to read about the existence of a Siddha Purusha on the north-eastern peak of the hill.

The Vision of Bhagavan Ramana

Once Bhagavan Ramana narrated this to a group of devotees who had gathered round him. He described to them a vision he once had. He saw that Arunachala was hollow and that in it stood a beautiful town with lakes and gardens. In one of the gardens he saw a big gathering of sadhus and sannyasis. It was a conclave presided over by a sannyasin. He also said that he recognised many familiar faces. When he looked at the person presiding he recognised the person as Himself. Harkening back to the words of Rishi Gautama, who told Mother Parvati, about Arunachala, this is what he says. "Goddess! Hear what the great Siva told me. He said: While I abide gloriously on earth as Arunachala all the Devatas and Munis circumambulate Me. At every step that one takes on the path round Me, all the sins committed by one in one's past lives are expiated."

He continues thus enumerating the glory of Arunachala. "There are thousands of Ashrams of Munis and Siddhas and abodes of Devas around Me. I myself abide here

always in the form of a Siddha worshipped by Devas. Let one imagine a divine abode gloriously existing within Me. What is known as Arunadri is (really) a column of effulgence. This Hill is incomprehensible, being beyond speech and thought. It is unapproachable being a mass of fire. It is absolute, and therefore called supreme. It is also a Hill in the form of a Linga.

The temple of Lord Siva at Arunachala is situated at the foot of the hill. A dusty road leads one to the entrance of the great temple with its rising storeys of carved reliefs. Around the gates and approaches to the temple are shops and stalls set up as temporary or permanent structures. Beside them sit vendors selling images and pictures of the temple and the Deity, as well as other objects like rosaries, sandalwood, vibhuti etc. The gate-way is adorned by a gopuram of carved figures. Behind it there are three such others. These structures dominate the entire landscape of that little township.

The faces of the gopuram are populated by profuse carvings and quaint statues drawn from sacred myths and legends. One perceives the forms of divinities in devout meditation or inter-twined shapes of various forms, indicating the all-inclusive nature of Hinduism. One enters the temple to find oneself in an enormous quadrangle. The vast structure encloses a labyrinth of colonnades, cloisters, galleries, shrines, rooms, corridors covered and uncovered spaces. Moving down, one passes through a long cloister with solid walls and flat, quaintly carved pillars that support a hall. They look like a serried row of flats, carved gigantic stone columns, that stretch out of the semi-gloom prevailing in the temple

at all times, except at the time when there are festivals. On a closer look one finds that each pillar is composed of a single block of stone and even the roof is composed of large pieces of granite. One sees again the sculptor's art here in the carved faces of gods and goddesses, animals familiar and unfamiliar that stare at the onlooker. One passes on across the flag-stones of these pillared galleries and through dark passages lit here and there by small blow lamps whose wicks are sunk in oil, and thus arrive near a central enclosure.

The Tejas Linga and the Beacon on the Hill

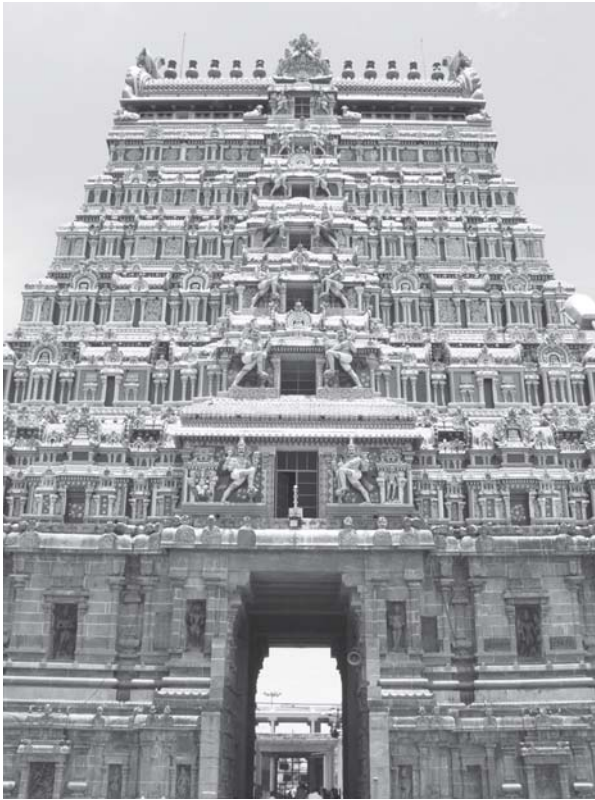
Here are five towers or gopurams which mark out the interior of the temple. These are made of brick. Some more passages, and one is in front of the sanctum, which houses the Tejasa Linga (one of the five Bhuta Lingas). That one is in front of the sanctum sanctorum is confirmed by the sound of the conch and cymbals. Then a light flickers and circles the image, and gloom is dispelled. One can decipher the vague outlines of objects within.

This gloom and silence are characteristic of most days except on a few occasions as in the month of Kartika (Nov.-Dec.), when people from all over the South throng to see the Kartika Deepam. It takes place on a full moon day. This day commemorates an incident in the life of Mother Parvati. The Mother was said to have been performing penance here according to the instructions of Sage Gautama, when a demon called Mahishasura came and disturbed her penance. Young Parvati then

assumed the fierce form of Durga and destroyed the Asura. Later, she discovered that he was a devotee of Siva and that he usually carried a Linga on his head. In expiation of this sin she struck a sword on the hill, and there sprang the Khadga Tirtha. Here, she stood in deep penance till the Lord appeared to Her in the form of an effulgence (Jyoti). It is for this reason that this festival is celebrated at Tiruvannamalai or Arunachala. On this day the priests light a huge beacon on the top of the hill, whose light illumines vast areas for miles around. To have a glimpse of this Beacon on the hill of Arunachala thousands gather here from all parts of India.

-Adapted from Search in Secret India by Paul Brunton with selections from The Mountain Path.





Chidambaram

Compiled by B. RADHAKRISHNA RAO

Puranic Background

There is a fascinating Puranic legend about Chidambaram. Siva once wanted to teach a fitting lesson to the Rishis in Darukavanam, who had gone arrogant on account of their scholarship. Assuming the form of a beggar and accompanied by Vishnu disguised as Mohini, Siva went to Darukavanam. The wives of the Rishis were enamoured at the beauty of the Divine couple, which enraged the Rishis. In a fit of jealousy they tried to destroy the pair. They raised a sacrificial fire, from which emanated a tiger which pounced on Siva. But Siva peeled off

AMONG the five traditional dance halls of Siva, Chidambaram (about 150 miles south of Madras) is the greatest and most ancient. This powerful seat of Saivite cult is held in veneration throughout Tamil Nadu and Ceylon. Chidambaram is also famous as the abode of Akasa Linga, one of the five Pancha Bhuta Lingas.

In ancient days Chidambaram was known by different names such as Tillai, Ponnambalam, Vyagrapuram and Cittrambalam. The Presiding Deity of Chidambaram was the family God of Chola dynasty. Many of the well-known Saivite saints like Appar, Sambandar, Manicka Vasagar, etc. have sung in full praise of Nataraja.

the skin of the tiger and wrapped it round his waist. Then the Rishis set against Siva an "Apasmara Purusha", a malignant dwarf. Siva crushed him effortlessly. At this the Rishis confessed defeat and begged for Siva's pardon. Then began the enthralling, majestic cosmic dance of Siva, which all the gods and Rishis witnessed to the full content of their heart.

Adishesha, the serpent couch of Vishnu, who heard the vivid description of Siva's dance from Vishnu, desired to witness the dance and prayed to Siva to allow him to see the dance. Siva then told him that he would perform the dance before him at Tillai.

Adishesha was born as Patanjali and went to the forest at Tillai where he was joined by Vyagrapada. Both of them began to worship Siva, and when the time came for

Siva to perform the dance before his devotees, the guardian Deity of the place Bhadra Kali would not allow him. Thereupon, they entered into an agreement, according to which both Siva and Kali should participate in the dance contest, and the winner could get the right of the place.

The Defeat of Kali

Siva performed the Ananda Tandava (dance of bliss) before his devotees, and defeated Kali and came into possession of Tillai. Sprawling over an area of 32 acres, the 2,000 years old temple of Nataraja stands on an alluvial plain between two rivers. Though no granite is to be found within a radius of fifty miles of the temple, the temple is built entirely of magnificent blocks of dressed granite.

The Temple Style

In front of the temple, which faces east, stands a nine-storeyed Gopuram built by King Kulottunga. This Gopuram is exquisitely decorated with incidents and episodes from Puranas, and may rightly be regarded as characteristic of the later Chola style. The inner wall of the temple has four elaborately sculptured Gopurams, two of which contain the resplendent representation of the 108 poses taught in Natya Shastra (science of dance).

The Five Halls

Within the walls of the temple there are five Sabhas or Halls, the most outstanding among them being Raja Sabha (Royal Hall), where triumphant Chola Kings used to hold

victory processions. The spectacular Nritta Sabha (hall of dance) represents a celestial chariot with finely carved horses and wheels. The Kanaka Sabha (golden hall), where Lord Siva entered into a dancing bout with the fierce goddess Kali, enshrines the majestic idol of Nataraja. Kanaka Sabha, the roof of which is covered with golden plates as the very name indicates, is "the most precious piece of workmanship in sculpture."

The thousand pillared hall near the eastern entrance, where the celebrated Saivite poet Sekkizhar first recited his epic "Periyapuram", represents Chola art at its best.

The Nataraja Symbolism

The esoteric significance of Nataraja deserves to be properly understood. The drum in the right hand of Nataraja symbolises that He is the saviour and protector of the world. The skin wrapped 'around his waist signifies the annihilation of Aham (ego). The right leg trampling the malignant dwarf represents the destruction of Maya or illusion.

Behind the image of Nataraja, separated from it by a veil is Akasa Linga, the celebrated "secret" of Chidambaram.

The Tiruvasi of Prabha Mandala (the glorious orb of the Sun), beautifully decorated with strings of golden leaves, stands in front of Nataraja. The door steps are silver plated and bear an embossed representation of Patanjali and Vyagrapada.

Besides the temple of Nataraja there are shrines dedicated to Ganesha, Vishnu and Parvati. In the Govindaraja temple built by Krishna Devaraya, a fine image of reclining

Vishnu is found. The temple of Sivakami-amma situated to the east of the 1000 pillared hall near the Siva Ganga tank has a remarkable porch. The deity of Ganesha at Chidambaram is considered to be the largest figure of that God in the whole of India.

Brihadishwara Temple at Tanjore

B. RADHAKRISHNA RAO

The Culture of Kaveri

RIVER Kaveri, which has been fostering the culture and civilisation of Tamil Nadu from the very dawn of history, is being venerated as the Mother by the people of the South. Situated prominently in the delta of Kaveri, about 30 miles from the town of Kumbakonam is Tanjore, which is famed for the magnificent shrine of Brihadishwara built by the illustrious Chola Emperor, Raja Raja Chola. It is a fitting monument to the power, prestige and splendid architectural imagination of the Cholas, who flourished between the tenth and the fourteenth centuries.

Tradition has it that the place was named after a demon called Tanjan, who after giving a fight to Vishnu, sustained grievous

injuries, and at the time of his death requested Vishnu to name the place after him, which was readily granted.

Cholas as Great Temple-Builders

Tanjore was annexed by the great Chola King, Vijaya Raja Chola in 850 from the hands of Mutharaya chiefs, and was made the capital of the Chola Empire. As great temple builders and valiant conquerors, Cholas have left their imperishable mark in the history of Tanjore. It was during the spell of Raja Raja Chola, that the fame, glory and greatness of Tanjore reached its pinnacle. The Empire extended up to the shores of Ganga in the north and to the island of Sri Lanka in the south. The temple of Brihadishwara is considered "by far the grandest in India", and is a grand testimony to the marvellous engineering skill of Chola architects. It is situated in the southern half of the small fort at Tanjore.

Legend and History

Traditions and legends about the origin of the temple have been enumerated in Brihadishwara Purana, which forms a part of Bavishyottara Purana. A local legend has it that once the Chola King, Raja Raja was suffering from a virulent type of leprosy. His spiritual preceptor suggested that he could get rid of the disease by building a temple to Lord Siva, in which a Linga brought from Narmada was to be installed. Accordingly, Raja Raja Chola proceeded to Narmada and brought the Linga. It is said that after the Linga was taken out of the water, it began to increase in size and therefore it came to be called Brihadishwara

(" Brihat" meaning "big"). It took nearly twelve years to complete the construction of this tallest temple in South India. After the Linga of Brihadishwara was consecrated, a grand Kumbhabhishekam was performed, after which the King had a bath in the tank and was cured of his black leprosy, and he shone in lustre, white like moon.

The style of architecture used in the construction of Brihadishwara temple resembles the style employed in constructing the great Linga Raja temple of Bhubaneswara. Built on the spoils of conquest, the shrine is an eloquent tribute to the martial achievements of the Chola Rulers.

Colossal Structure of the Vimana

The imposing, colossal structure of the Vimana of the temple with its 14 storeys, rising to a height of 269 feet, dominates the lush landscape all around. The sight of the Vimana with small pillars, petty balconies and beautiful images carved around is striking.

The stone crowning the crest of the Vimana below the spherical shaped stupa is a monolithic block estimated to weigh 80 tons. This stone was moved into position by means of an inclined plane starting at Sara Pallam village situated 4 miles to the south. The Vimana is called "Dakshinameru" on account of the sculptural depiction on it of Siva in the company of Parvati bearing a striking resemblance to the Puranic description of Siva seated with Parvati presiding over the Mount of Meru.

Facing east the temple consists of two courts, with the main shrine standing at

the western end of the inner court measuring 500 ft. x 250 ft. The portals of the temple are guarded by huge Dwara Palakas. Radiating lustre and purity all around in the sanctum stands the colossal Linga of Brihadishwara. The fascinating features of this biggest Linga in India are the beauty of the Tilak mark and radiance of its white garment. It is about 27 feet in height and 7 feet in length. The Linga is known by various names like Peruvudayar, Adavalan and Dakshina Meru Vitankan.

The sight of the massive monolithic Nandi guarding the portals of the inner shrine is awe-inspiring. This second largest image of the Bull in the country measures 12 feet' in height and 19 feet in length. It is said that this Nandi was growing imperceptibly day by day, and in order to halt its growth a nail was driven in its back, which is seen even today.

The figures of the Sun and the Moon carved on either side of the inner doorway to the Maha Mantapam and those of Lakshmi and Saraswathi on the outside are captivating for their sheer beauty. Besides the presiding Deity, there are in the temple 252 Lingas. Near the main temple there is an elegant shrine dedicated to Subrahmanya, which is considered "a perfect gem of carved stone-work, the tooling of the stone in the most elaborate patterns remaining as clear as the day it left the sculptor's hands." It was built by the Nayak Rulers.

The Goddess of the temple is Brihannayaki, and her shrine is located between Nandi Mantapa and the main sanctum. It is said to have been constructed by a Pandyan King in the 13th century. In the court of the temple there are images of Ganesha, Nataraja and Chandeshwara.



The figure of Nataraja is considered to be one of the best in south India. In the outer corridor of the temple there stands an array of deities, among which the idol of Jalahareshwar besmeared with sandal paste is most charming.

The motifs of the sculpture in the temple are borrowed not only from the Saivite theme but also from Vaishnavite and Buddhistic mythologies. In the circumambulatory corridor a number of fresco-paintings of the Chola period similar to those at Ajanta were found some fifteen years back. They are well preserved under a thick layer of plasters used by later dynasties to cover the wall. The Siva Ganga Tank in the heart of Tanjore with its sweet, soothing water always attracts a large

number of visitors and pilgrims.

The festival of Krittika, coming off in the month of Kartikai is celebrated here with great eclat. However, the annual festival of the temple falls in the month of Vaishaka when the drama of Rajarajeshwar is staged.

The Sri Aurobindo Ashram at Pondicherry

PROF. MANOJ DAS

Pondicherry of Yore

THE most ancient Pondicherry lives in legends. One of these legends links the place with the advent of the great sage Agastya to the South. As is well-known, Agastya was obliged to undertake the southward journey in order to check the Mount Vindhya from rising too high and obstructing the passage of the Sun. Agastya being his Guru, Vindhya bowed to him. While blessing him, Agastya instructed

the mountain to keep his head down till he returned from the South. But Agastya never returned. The South became the land of his spiritual and social activities. Folk-lore and myths attribute to him many a brave and noble deeds. There are two or three places in the South claiming to have been associated with Agastya.

Probably, Agastya had lived at all these places, at different times. But Pondicherry was traditionally a seat of learning and Vedic culture. Such a tradition must have developed from the presence of a great Rishi in a remote past, surrounded by seekers and disciples. While legends trace the origin of the tradition to the presence of Agastya, Prof. Jouveau-Dubreui, the French archaeologist, once said that he had reasons to believe that the Ashram of Agastya was situated on the very spot where stands today the main building of Sri Aurobindo Ashram.

One of the oldest deities worshipped at Pondicherry is Vedapuriswara. The deity,

Lord Siva, was the presiding spirit of Veda Puri by which name the present Pondicherry was once known. An inscription found near the Vedapurishwara temple introduces the deity also as Agastiswara, the Lord of Agastya. The tradition of Vedic studies in and around Pondicherry is affirmed by inscriptions found on another temple, Tiruvandar Koil, near Pondicherry. Significant, too, are several sculptures and inscriptions found at Bahoor, close to Pondicherry. The "Bahoor Plates" speak of a Vidyasthana - a Sanskrit University - which was there in the 9th century and probably from an earlier period. The University hummed with prolific creative activities and scholastic studies.

This University belonged to the Pallava period. Several temples had been built around Pondicherry during the 10th and 11th centuries by the Chola Kings. This mystic spirit of Pondicherry has found a grand resurrection in the present century. In education, culture and social developments a new era has set in with the merger of this erstwhile French Colony with the independent Motherland. "Pondicherry has always been a connecting link between Europe and India," said Prof. Jouveau-Dubreuil who was devoted to archaeological explorations in and around the city.

It has now been well established that the place had a Roman settlement about 2000 years ago. Excavations of Arikamedu, near

Ariyan Kuppam, at the outskirts of the present city, have shown the remains of a Roman ware-house and an Emporium. Several items of historical interest including Roman lamps have been found too.

The Advent of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother

The French ruled Pondicherry from 1816 to 1954, for a period of 138 years. It was towards the close of this foreign rule that Pondicherry assumed the present greatness and became a pilgrim centre of the world of today. To be more precise, this new era in the life of Pondicherry began on 4th April, 1910, with Sri Aurobindo setting foot on this soil.

The first son of Mother India to claim openly unconditional freedom for her, Sri Aurobindo, in 1910, was at the zenith of his political renown when he suddenly disappeared from the scene. He had already spelt out the political programme which went strong till India won independence: Non-co-operation, Passive Resistance, Swadeshi, Boycott and National Education. In his seer vision he now saw India's independence as certain.

The Government of British India was most anxious to deport Sri Aurobindo, for, according to the Governor of Bengal and the Governor General of India, he was, "the most dangerous man" in the whole country. Accordingly they issued a warrant for a so-called seditious article in the *Karma Yogi*, a paper edited by Sri Aurobindo.

But by then, guided by an *adesh* - Sri Aurobindo had already left for Chander Nagore, a French pocket on the Ganges, not far from Calcutta. After a few days'

stay there, he was led, under 'a similar *adesh*, to Pondicherry, where he arrived on the 4th of April, 1910.

Pondicherry, in 1910, was a far cry from what it is today. Only two or three persons possessed cars and the Governor of this "French India" was not one of these fortunate few. He was seen moving about in a hand-pulled rickshaw.

The town had only one three-storeyed building which belonged to Shankar Chetty. Sri Aurobindo was accommodated on the top floor of this house. Sri Aurobindo lived in an austere way, with a few devotees around him, during the first phase of his stay at Pondicherry. There was no Ashram then. The Ashram, in fact, developed when the Mother came over to Pondicherry. Born in France, the Mother, from her childhood, was conscious of her spiritual mission on earth. When she met Sri Aurobindo in 1914 on a visit to Pondicherry, she instantly knew that the vision and mission of both were the same.

The Mother finally came over to Pondicherry in 1920. Ever since she has been there. The Ashram grew up in a most spontaneous way. As the Ashramites put it - as the Mother came, the children gathered around her. In 1926, for reasons spiritual, it became necessary for Sri Aurobindo to go into complete seclusion. Since then the Mother became the sole guide, the inspiration and the source of all love and light which sustain the Ashram and which reach innumerable people all over the world. The world, evidently, is showing a greater interest in Sri Aurobindo's vision day by day.

Sri Aurobindo visualised a new destiny for man. He believed in evolution but with a

difference. The process of evolution was mechanical, unconscious, till man evolved. But now, Sri Aurobindo says, in order that a more sublime race can evolve out of man, man should consciously aspire for that.

The Vision of Sri Aurobindo

Let us look at it a bit more closely. There was a time when all was Matter - vast expanse of lifeless Matter. As millions of years passed, Mother Earth perhaps felt quite bored. Then life burst out of Matter. What a rich manifestation of life was there! Innumerable types of planets cropped up. They were so different from dead Matter. Green and beautiful, they grew up and up as though looking for more and more light. Millions of years passed. It was time for some new Manifestation. This time, out of life came a spark of Mind. With this new element Nature carried on her experiment in a large scale, bringing forth thousands of kinds of animals.

But it was a very elementary quality of Mind which was there in the animals. The working of the Mind in them was instinctive. Now the Mind developed further, rather it revolutionised itself. There appeared Man, the full being of the Mind. Sri Aurobindo foresaw the next phase of this evolutionary process. The process had not ended with the coming of Man. Mind, the cardinal quality of Man, must be surpassed. Out of Mental man will evolve the Supra mental being.

Sri Aurobindo knew that he was destined to pave the way for the advent of the era of the Super Mind. It required a mighty effort, Yoga of tremendous concentration. Pondicherry was the place chosen where

he carried on this most unusual spiritual exploration.

The Ashram

Sri Aurobindo Ashram, with over 1,500 inmates excluding the students of the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, hums with activities. It is not to reject life, but to make it more beautiful and godly is the goal. "An eternal perfection is moulding us into its own image," says Sri Aurobindo. Man, for the most part unconsciously though, is striving to reflect that image of perfection in his own being, maturing through many a struggle, experiences happy and sad, and through sublime inspirations of rare moments. When man is conscious of this process at work, naturally his progress becomes rapid. There is no facet of life, no sphere of work, which cannot be covered by a spiritual attitude and which cannot serve as a spring board for a higher life.

All the inmates of the Ashram work, but they do not do so with the purpose of meeting their personal needs. Work is a part of their Sadhana. Besides, work is body's best prayer to the Divine, the Mother has said. There are agricultural lands, industries, Printing Presses and many other institutions to provide an opportunity to the inmates to work with such an attitude.

No racial bar or religious creed has any place in the Ashram life. All that matters is the faith in the Supreme's Grace and an inspiration to spiritualise life. Among the inmates of the Ashram there are people from almost every part of the world. The life of these seekers of truth are marked

by an inner discipline and aspiration. Although there are a few external rules to govern their life, accent is laid on the inner development.

Four times a year Mother used to give darshan to the people - on the 21st of February (Her Birth Day), the 24th of April (the day She finally came to Pondichery), the 15th of August (Sri Aurobindo's Birth Day) and the 24th November (the day of a great spiritual realisation in the askesis of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother). Now that the Mother has left Her body, collective meditation takes place on these days, along with a visit to Sri Aurobindo's Room.

The Centre of Education

The Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education is a part of the Ashram. Here care is taken to see that the pupils develop all aspects of their personality and learn for the joy of learning and become daring in their quest for truth. Emphasis is given on the peculiar requirement of each individual pupil. No examination in the conventional sense of the term is conducted. The focus is on the child's free choice of subjects. There are nearly two hundred teachers for about seven hundred pupils.

The International Centre of Education makes an effort at imparting integral education. Circumstance is created and provisions are made for the child to be trained in all the parts of his being, physical, mental, vital (relating to the life forces, emotions, impulses etc.) and psychic. Great importance is given to physical education. The department of physical education is a dynamic section of the Ashram, where

experts try to achieve a synthesis between the eastern and the western methods of exercises and gymnastics.

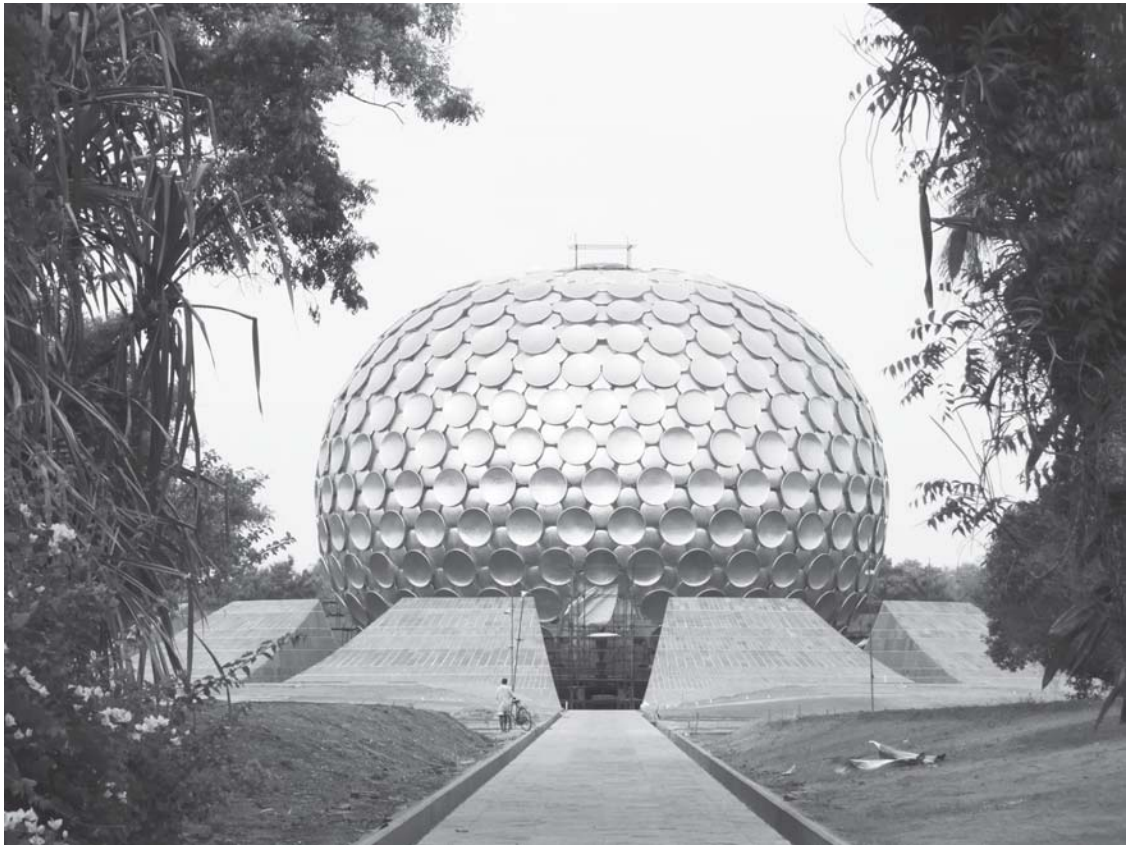
Auroville

On the 28th of February, 1968, a boy and a girl representing each country of the world poured handfuls of earth from the various countries into a huge concrete lotus-bud a few miles away from the Ashram. That was the ceremony marking the foundation of Auroville. Auroville is situated at the outskirts of Pondicherry, on the Bay of Bengal, with lands belonging to both Pondicherry and Tamil Nadu.

The term Auroville, while it means the City of Dawn, also denotes its dedication to Sri Aurobindo, whose vision of the evolution of man and of human unity the city intends to manifest.

"There should be somewhere upon earth a place that no nation can claim as the sole property, a place where all human beings of good will, sincere in their aspiration, could live freely as citizens of the world, obeying one single authority, that of the Supreme Truth, a place of peace, concord, harmony, where all fighting instinct of man would be used exclusively to conquer the causes of his sufferings and miseries, to surmount his weakness and ignorance, to triumph over his limitations and incapacities; a place where the needs of the spirit and the care for progress would get over the satisfaction of desires, passions, the seeking for material pleasures and enjoyment. ..."

This had been written by the Mother more than half a century ago. After her dream had been realised to a considerable degree in the Ashram, she thought that time had



come for expanding the scope of the experiment, and in 1964, at the World Conference of Sri Aurobindo Society, the idea of Auroville was given to the delegates.

The launching of Auroville was an adventure in no uncertain sense of the term. All that the pioneers were able to say was, there is enough good will in the world - let us dedicate ourselves to work out the vision and let us see!

The progress of Auroville has been steady. In order to appreciate the progress one of course should remember that it is not simply building up a township, it is in fact, building up man. Participating in the building of Auroville are about 200 youths from various countries of the world. Then, there are

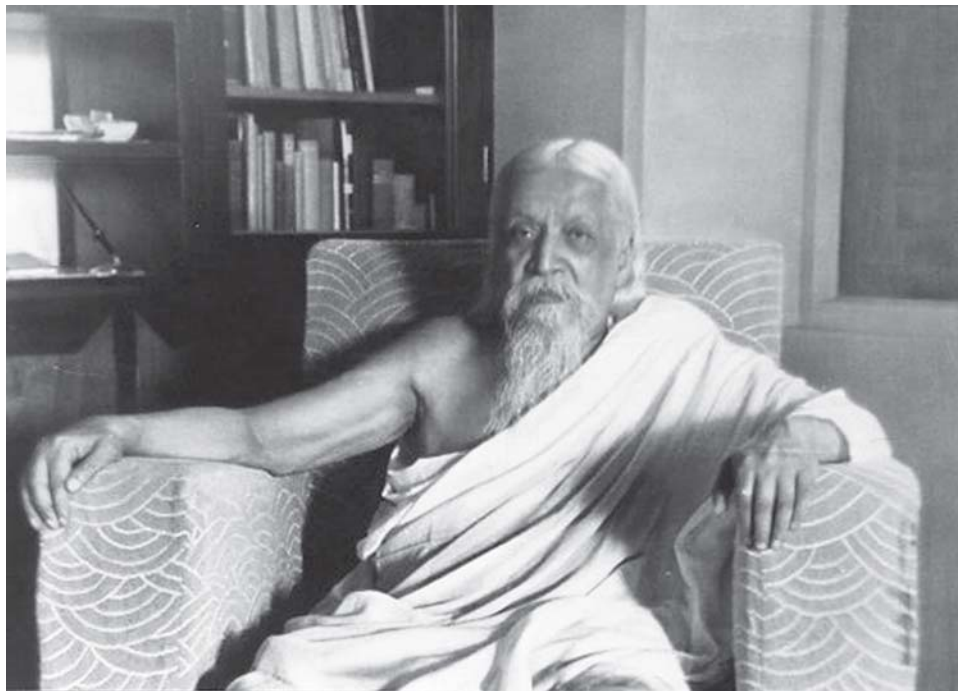
engineers and architects and experts of various sorts. But all are conscious that they are required to mould and change themselves, first of all in order to be Aurovillians. It will be a place where there will be no exploitation, no private property, although there will be complete individual freedom of thought and cultural pursuit. Each inhabitant will contribute to the life of the community according to his capacity and inspiration.

The township will have four Zones: Union Zone, with international pavilions, congress halls, etc., Cultural Zone, with school, theatre, studies, stadiums etc., Work Zone, with industries, laboratories, administrative offices etc. and Residential Zone, with homes and super-markets etc.

It will accommodate 50,000 residents, the optimum population for harmonious urban development. Gardens will form a dominant feature of the city which will have a concentric architectural design.

At the moment Auroville possesses about 2,000 acres of land. Most of them lay

barren for ages. Under the intense care of the Aurovillians a great part of the area has proved highly productive. The UNESCO General Conference commended Auroville calling upon its member-states to participate in the project.



In response several countries have offered to build their pavilions there.

A huge structure approaching completion is *Bharat Nivas* or the Indian Pavilion, which will exhibit the variety of true Indian culture. Another impressive building is *Matri Mandir*, a centre for meditation.

Youths from many countries look upon Auroville as a symbol of new hope and new civilisation. Even at this initial stage it *is* already an example to show that man can get over his racial, religious and cultural limitations and live harmoniously and work together when he is inspired by the call of a great tomorrow. Sri Aurobindo left His

body on 5th December, 1950. His Collaborator in the Supramental Yoga, the Mother, carried on His work. Innumerable people looked upon Her as the Divine Mother and found in Her the sure source of strength and light.

The Mother left Her body on 17th November, 1973. But the guiding force of the Master and the Mother is most concretely present and can be felt by all who look forward to a spiritual future. Pondicherry continues to attract, more and more, day by day, the attention of the seekers from all over the world. At the physical level, streams of people pay their homage to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother at their flower-bedecked Samadhi inside the main building of the Ashram.

Kaveri

The Stream of Overflowing Devotion and Rippling Music

THE name of Kaveri brings at once to the mind the vision of a coy and blushing maiden. River Kaveri justifies the vision. She is a picture of beauty and grace, utterly feminine in her moods, now gentle and sweet, now terrible and roaring, playful and coy, sweet 'and serene. Thus she flows, the beauteous bride in her graceful meandering gait, bedecked with flowers that her devotees sprinkle from either banks, to the accompaniment of the music of cuckoos and rustling leaves, a devotional child washing the feet of the Lords on her way, seeking their blessing as she joins her Lord, the sea. As Raja Rajeswari, the Divine Mother of her children, the devotees on her banks, she blesses them all with her grace.

Situated on the banks of this silvery stream is the temple of Sri Thyagarajaswami, one of the seven celebrated centres of the Deity in Tamil Nadu, where devotees pour in large numbers to have a glimpse of their beloved Lord.

Kamalalayam

This ancient and magnificent shrine is also known as "Poonga Koil" or "Kamalalayam" because of the large tank situated to its west, which abounds in lotus flowers. The birth of the temple is attributed to Muchukunda, the Chola King, who after defeating the demons at the request of Indra, worshipped Lord Siva, beseeching Him to appear. Siva, pleased with his deep

devotion, graced him with a vision of His form, and directed him to build a temple on the banks of Kaveri, at Tiruvarur. Muchukunda built the temple according to the Lord's decree, with the help of Viswakarma, the architect of the Gods. Unable to find a suitable image to preside at the sanctum, Muchukunda requested Indra to give him the image of Sri Thyagarajaswami that was in his possession. Indra, unwilling to part with the lovely image, yet unable to refuse Muchukunda, placed it in a row with six other images of similar excellence. But Muchukunda rightly chose the Thyagaraja image, guided by the inner grace of Lord Siva, and brought it to Tiruvarur and consecrated it in the temple, where Thyagarajaswami is worshipped in great devotion, to this day.

The Raja Gopuram, the main turret, rises majestically to the towering height of 846 feet, magnificent and beautiful, decked with lovely idols. This Gopuram is made entirely of brick and mortar. The Devaranya Mantapam in the temple abounds in beautiful paintings.

The Nandi in this temple is carved with a human form, decked with a snake (Nagabharana), matted locks and a crescent moon. The Navagrahas or the presiding deities of the nine planets, are placed in a row facing the Deity, contrary to the traditional arrangement found in other temples.

Siva and Vishnu

Though Lord Siva as Thyagarajaswami is the presiding Deity of this temple, the Utsava Murthy, the Deity taken in

procession is considered to be "Upasana Murthy" of Lord Vishnu, on whose breath the former is believed to have danced. There are a number of tanks in and around the temple, but "Kamalalayam", situated to the west of the temple, brimming with beautiful lotus flowers, is the most important one 'among them, and is considered to be the biggest tank in South India.

The Chola King's Dedication

The Chola Kings have ruled over this area for a very long time. An incident is narrated that during the reign of Manu Chola who, was the embodiment of virtue and justice, his son once ran the Chariot over a young calf, which died. The mother of the calf, mooing in distress, sought justice from the King, and he, to render justice, ran a Chariot himself, over his son. The Gods, pleased with his unswerving dedication to justice, gave life to the calf as well as his son. This episode, narrated beautifully in Silappadikaram and Periya Puranam, is depicted on the temple walls, in beautiful paintings. Tiruvarur, the abode of Sri Thyagarajaswami, is associated with Music, from time immemorial. From the Musical Saint Sundara Murthi Nayanar to the Music Trinity of South India, viz., Syama Sastri, Muthuswami Dikshitar and Thyagaraja, the town had been the proud permeator of a long line of great Musicians.

The Devotee and the Deity Thyagaraja

Thyagaraja - born in this place of vibrant music, where Kaveri flows in lilting tunes, cuckoos singing accompaniment on her

banks, and the trees rustle in step and where the atmosphere is charged with Music, -developed into a deep devotee of the Lord and of Music. His Music is an inseparable mixture of devotion, lyric and rhythm, and his life is one long pilgrimage dedicated to the Lord. Graced with the benevolent glance of Sri Thyagarajaswami, infused by an unfathomable depth of devotion, he sang his songs in a trance-like state, where the Lord alone existed, where the trivial sufferings, sorrows and pleasures of the mortal world could not penetrate. No wonder, that this place which bore such a great son, and which houses such a Divine presence, draws to its bosom lakhs of devotees. The Lord is inseparable from art-forms. So is it difficult to analyse the devotion of the pilgrims that pour into this place and to establish where love of Lord ends and love of Music starts, or vice versa.

"If Tiruvarur, his birth place, was an ancient Kshetra, renowned alike for its traditions, Saints, Devotees and Musicians, Tiruvayyaru or Pancha Nada, was a place of no less sanctity and tradition of learning and spirituality. If the land of five rivers in the North proved a fertile soil for the creative output of Vedic Rishis, this land of the five rivers in the South was not less productive of poets, philosophers, saints and musicians. Born at Tiruvarur, Thyagaraja was brought up on the sacred soil of the Pancha Nada Kshetra, Tiruvayyaru."

His songs-liltingly lyrical, deeply devotional and melodiously" musical (with Bhakti, Bhava and Raga blended)-exhort the human mind to seek the Lord. When he undertook a pilgrimage in the later part of his life

extending from Tirupathi in the North to Srirangam in the South, he sang in entranced devotion all his way exuberantly praising the presiding deities of all the temples he visited. These songs tell one of the true purpose of a pilgrimage, coming right from the heart of a man who suffered, yet remained unaffected by the sufferings, seeing and seeking only the Lord. In Tirupathi, when Thyagaraja entered the sanctum, it was just the time of the mid-noon offering for the Lord and the curtain was drawn. Standing before the curtain that hid the Lord's image from his sight, he sings his song, and the curtain promptly withdraws.

This true spirit of pilgrimage is in all those lakhs of devotees who pour into Tiruvarur and Tiruvayyaru with no earthly desires, no mundane motive behind the pilgrimage. They come to see Thyagaraja, the Deity and Thyagaraja, the Devotee, who have now become one, to stand on the earth that echoes Music, to feel the air that is alive with the blended fragrance of divinity and devotion, where Art, Music, Culture and Philosophy blend in the vibrant notes of "AUM" and become one with Divinity. At Tiruvottiyur he sang to Tripura Sundari, consort of the presiding deity, Thyagaraja-swami:

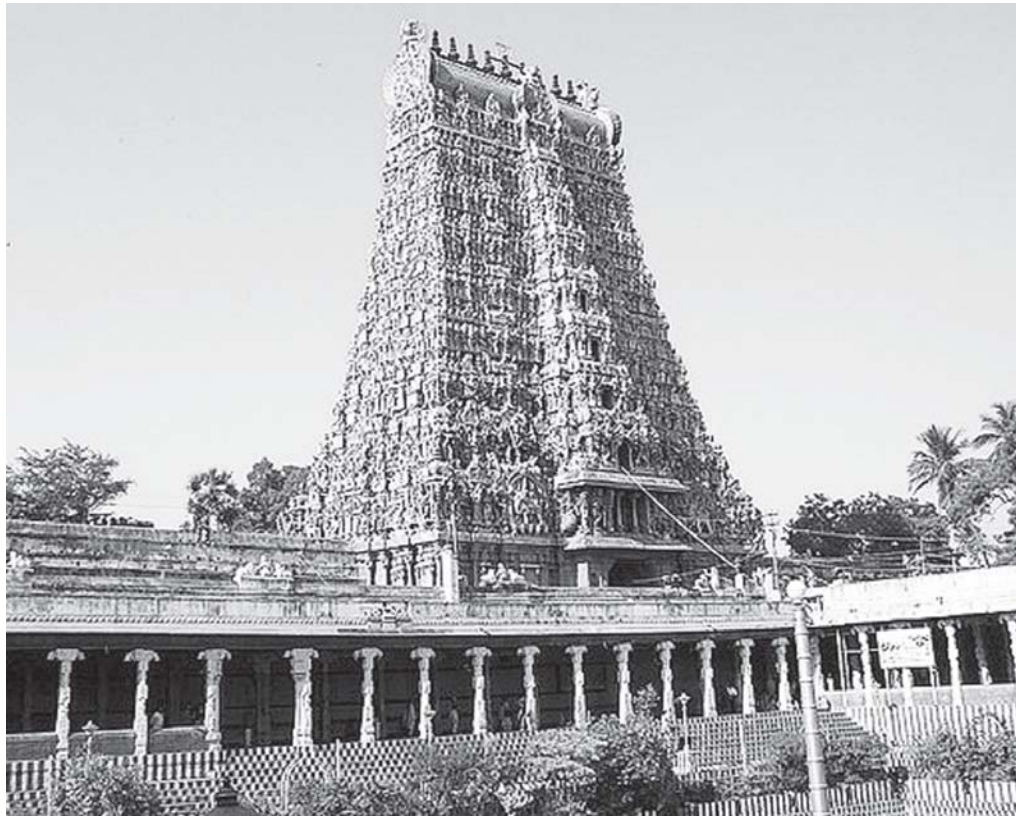
"Oh, my Mother, I have today achieved the purpose of life in that I have feasted my eyes with your Darsan and stand in the position of a poverty-stricken man coming by wealth, and of withering crops suddenly getting water."

- Reproduced from: *The Spiritual Heritage of Thyagaraja*, article "Tiruvarur" by Sri Deepak Kamath.

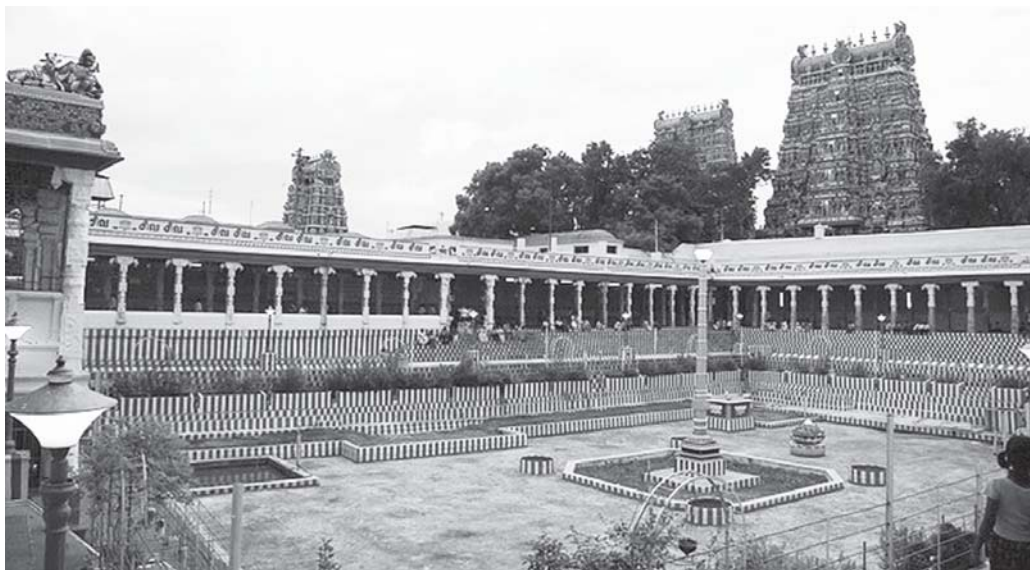
Madurai - The Temple that Houses the Mother

The Concept of the Supreme as Mother MAN is basically an idoliser. This instinct of his resulted in the necessary creation of symbols. The primitive man, more than his modern, more sophisticated brethren, felt strongly the presence of the Divine power, as he was most natural in His feelings and reacted easily. From his simple nature and his simple mind that reacted strongly to circumstances evolved the numerous deities in their numerous forms and moods. When he as sober and peaceful, he created his God as an embodiment of sobriety. What he was angry, or frightened there came out of his anger the, Ugra aspect of Gods. But through all these moods, he always felt the presence of the omnipotent, and the awareness has lent the quality of divinity to all his concepts.

In Shakti he idolised his mother. To this primitive child, she was the all-powerful one, and embodiment of a soul nourishing love side by side with all-consuming wrath. And she is the mother, whose wrath neither disgusted him nor frightened him; it only held him spell-bound in a mixture of feeling comprised of awe, respect, devotion and total submission. Her wrath did not give him false emotions of insecurity. It assured him, on the other hand, of her omnipresence and the fact that she cared. So he put his concept into shape, as stated, to remind his brothers and sisters of her presence, her love, grace and wrath.



The towering Grand Gopurams of Madurai Meenakshi temple



Incarnation of Shakti

The temple of Goddess Meenakshi in Madurai is a remarkable example that shaped itself out of the myriad emotions of the human mind and the resultant concepts. Mother Meenakshi, though an incarnation of Shakti (who is essentially the Goddess of fury), is conceived as Mother in her loving mood, and the image, carved out of black stone, signified all that is graceful, benevolent and beautiful. Her wide large eyes, comparable to those of a fish (from which she derives the name Meenakshi) bestows her grace and love upon her devotees and feeds their souls, much like the mother fish which feeds its young with its glance alone. In the famous hymn to Mahadevi she is revered as the Eswari, the highest being, then as Ganga, Saraswati, Lakshmi ; and it is said that she dwells in all beings of the world in the form of peace, power, beauty, reason, memory, professional competence, abundance, mercy, humility, hunger, sleep, faith and consciousness, and it is added that she also dwells in each creature in the form of error.

Halasya Purana

The Kshetra of Madura is famous through the Puranas as Halasya Kshetra. A merchant called Dhananjaya, on his way to the capital saw in a forest a Swayarnbhu Linga being worshipped by Indra. The King was informed of this, and that night in his dream, Shiva as Sundareswara, dripping honey (Madhura) from his matted locks, appeared before him. When he went to the spot to claim the Linga for consecration

in a temple, the King found a serpent of enormous size, lying coiled up around the spot. The area bound by the serpent (Halasya) has become the area of Madhura (Madurai) town, and the place where the serpent's head and tail met was chosen for the sacred spot for the temple to be built. Goddess Meenakshi Devi is believed to have been born as the daughter of the Pandya King, and Shiva as Sundareswara, married her.

Usually, Lord Nataraja dances balancing himself on his left leg, but at Velliambalam in Madurai Nataraja dances balancing on the right leg, and it is believed that he did so in order to please his devotee, King Raja Sekhara Pandya. One of the famous Shakti peethas, Madurai enshrines Mother Meenakshi to whose feet flock devotees from all corners of the country. Single-minded devotees have felt the exhilarating presence of Mother Meenakshi in the atmosphere.

Guided Tour of the Temple

The temple buildings occupy an area of 830 feet by 730 feet. The central shrines are those of Meenakshi and her spouse Sundareswara. On the massive outer walls stand the four gopurams or towers, the tallest of which is the South Gopuram which is 1609" high the visitor enters by the Ashta Sakthi Mantaparn, the Mudali Mantapam which is the Eastern gate. Passing through the Mudali Mantapam, one sees flanking monoliths carved with great spirit. From there can be seen the Potramarai Tank, which is surrounded by a pillared colonnade from where there is a fine view of the golden roofs of the two great inner shrines. The

walls of the colonnade carry paintings which depict the super-human deeds performed by Siva.

From Pavilion to Pavilion

After ablutions in the tank, the worshipper proceeds to a pavilion, the "Yali Mantapam" (named after gargoyle-like carved stone pillars which support the roof). This is also called Kili Mantapam or Parrot Pavilion because of votive offerings of parrots in cases which are hung from the ceiling. This Pavilion leads to the Meenakshi shrine, where the Image of the Presiding Deity has inspired some of the most beautiful and moving Tamil poetry. After worship at the shrine, we pass through a gate surmounted by Nadukkattu or the middle gopuram. A mammoth idol of Ganesha greets us on the way to the shrine of Sundareswara.

Then there are Pavilions, where on festive occasions, decorated images are installed and great congregations gather to worship and to listen to sacred music or religious discourses.

Around the flag-staff is the Kambattadi Mantapam, which is one of the greatest triumphs of cultural skill. The elaborate carvings here evoke wonder and admiration. East of this Pavilion is the Viravasantaraya Mantapam built early in the seventeenth century by Muthuveerappa. To the South is the Kalyana Mantapam renovated in recent times by the Nagarathars.

The Thousand-pillared Mantapam lies to the North and Fergusson, the historian of Indian architecture, calls it "the wonder of the place" and says of the sculptures there that they "surpass those of any other hall

I have seen." This hall dates from the middle of the sixteenth century.

Thirumala Nayak's outstanding work on the temple is the Pudu Mantapam. The rectangular porch is 333 feet by 105 feet and has a roof of granite supported by four parallel rows of 124 sculptured stone pillars, each 20 feet high and no one pillar duplicating the design of another.

The Unfinished Raja Gopuram

Coming out of the temple through the East gate we see it surmounted by the Raya Gopuram, a magnificent structure that was not completed. The lowest storey of this tower occupies more than twice the space covered by any other gopuram and the sculptured figures are cut deeper and are richer in design. The door-posts are monoliths 50 feet high and 3 feet square carved with exquisite scrolls of foliage. Had all the storeys been built on the same scale and design, this would have been the most magnificent temple tower in all India.

Koodal Alagar Temple

The Koodal Alagar Temple is as old as Madurai itself and claims greater antiquity than Madurai's famous Meenakshi Temple. It is in the heart of the city, two furlongs from the railway station and the central bus stand. At this shrine the Lord Vishnu is depicted in three forms, Ninra Thirukolam (Standing), Amarnatha Thirukolam (Sitting) and Kidantha Thirukolam (Resting). This is a rare phenomenon which makes the temple distinctive.

The word Koodal implies a conjunction of things or an assembly. Lord Vishnu is known

as Koodal Alagar, Alagar meaning beauty. It is said that the warrior Oomadurai sought sanctuary inside this temple when he was chased by his enemies. His pursuers then attacked the temple. Several round shots in the outer wall of the temple are said to support this story.

The temple has been acclaimed as a great shrine by the Alvars and is reckoned as important among the hundred and eight Tirupathis. The central shrine is unfinished. One of the interesting features of this temple is the pierced granite windows which light the passage round the shrine, each different and delicately designed. They are miracles of the stone mason's art and provide for light and air in an ingenious and beautiful way.

Mariamman Teppakulam

The Teppakulam is in the south-east of Madurai City. It is almost a perfect square, 1,100 feet by 950 feet. Tirumala Nayak built the granite step leading down to the tank, and the small but extremely elegant shrine is in the centre of the tank.

In January-February a colourful "float-festival" is held here to synchronise with the birth anniversary of Tirumala Nayak. The deities Meenakshi and Sundareswarr are placed in a gaily decorated float, illuminated with hundreds of lamps and taken round the tank to the sound of traditional music.

Extracted from :- *Know Madurai-T.v.S.*

Palani

SUBRAHMANYA or Lord Muruga is the deity beloved of the people of South India, especially Tamil Nadu and Kerala ; and Palani, the abode of Lord Muruga is greatly revered by all. A pilgrimage to this place is considered as a "must" by every family and many make an offering of the hair of their crown to the God here as they do at Tirupathi.

Bala Subrahmanya

One of the six important abodes of Lord Muruga, Palani enshrines Him as Bala Subrahmanya, the child Muruga. The legend relating to the origin of the shrine says that once Lord Siva and Parvathi found a rare fruit, which they showed to Ganesha and Muruga, mentioning it as the prize to be won by him who came first completing a round of the Universe. Muruga at once set out on his peacock, while Ganesha stayed back, performing a "pradakshina" or circumambulation round his parents. He explained that such a movement around the "Adi Dampatis" in whom the entire Universe rests was equivalent to going round the Universe. Pleased with his wit, the parents gave away the prize to Ganesha.

When Muruga returned and found what happened, he got angry as is natural with a child who is deprived of a prize and went away to Siva Giri, which was near Palani, *Idumban's Feat* The great Sage Agastya who prayed to Lord Siva and got the divine

couple to take 'abode on the two hills, Siva Giri and Sakti Giri, took their leave to remove the hills to his own abode at Podikai hills. He directed his disciple Idumban to carry the two mountains on a Kavadi (two baskets hung on ropes on either side of a stick) to Podikai hills, and Idumban rested on his way to Podikai hill at Palani, and it was here that Lord Muruga came and stationed himself on Siva Giri. Lord Siva appeased him by saying that as Muruga Himself was the Fruit, there is no need for him to aspire for any other fruit.

When Idumban lifted the Kavadi after his rest he found the basket with Siva Giri heavier and, upon enquiry found Subramanya on top: whom he challenged. Lord Muruga killed him, but later, upon the entreaties of Idumban's wife and Sage Agastya He restored him back to life. Idumban prayed to the Lord begging His forgiveness and requested to be allowed to stay at the door step of Muruga's abode as guard. This legend is depicted at the Sakti Hill temple where Idumban is seen praying to Lord Muruga.

The Palani temple is situated on the Palani hill-top, at a height of 450 feet. The temple is not famous for architectural or archaeological value, but the shrine is revered for its great sanctity and the deity for his healing grace.

Miraculous Powers of the Deity

The image looks as if made of wax and it is believed to be an alloy of nine different substances. The proportions in which these are mixed remains unknown, but any substance that comes into contact with the image is believed to acquire miraculous

healing powers. The deity is bathed daily in different substances, such as Gingelly oil, Rice powder, Turmeric powder, Panchamrutam - which includes honey and milk, tender cocoanut water or any fruit juice, Rose water, sandal paste and Vibhuti. All these substances offered in Abhishekam are received back as the Lord's prasadam having super normal curative powers. The material of the image looks corroded and it is believed that in the ancient times the



Siddha Vaidyas of the area scraped off from it the substance of their medicines.

A tunnel is seen at the shrine of Nava Durga in the south west corridor in the inner quadrangle. Near this is the shrine of Sage Bhoga, who is believed to have made the image of Lord Muruga. The tunnel in the sanctum of the Nava Durga temple is believed to be the one, into which the Sage

retired after he had completed the image and never returned. This tunnel is believed to lead into the sanctum of Dandayadhapani as Lord Muruga is known at Palani.

Palani Panchamrutam

The main ingredient used for Abhisheka is Panchamrutam, made of plantains, ghee, honey, cane jaggery and sugar candy. Though such perishables as plantains are added, the panchamrutam does not get putrified and can be preserved for years. This quality is said to be acquired by the Panchamrutam by its coming into contact with the body of the icon.

A noteworthy feature of the shrine here is that it is sacred not only to the Hindus, but also to the Muslims. The Muslims worship Muruga in this temple as "Palani Baba," and offer prayers to Him in the corridor at the back of the temple.

Harmonising Two Faiths

Thus stands this shrine of Muruga harmonising two faiths and establishing the supremacy of the Divine as the one Power. Muruga is thus the beloved Lord of grace who relieves all kinds of sufferings and sorrows of devotees. Pilgrims from all over South India and even from other parts pour into this sacred town to worship "Dandhayudhapani" and get their lives sanctified.

Courtesy :-Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan : *Immortal India*.

Kanchi: The Golden City Of Temples

The City's Central Importance

KANCHI stands foremost among the seven Sacred Cities of India. The great Kalidasa has spoken of this city as the best among cities.

*"Pushpeshu Jaaji , Purusheshu Vishnu
Nadeeshu Ganga, Nagareshu Kanchi"*

The great Vaishnava Acharya Vedanta Desika (1268-1370) has called it the "City Incomparable". With its hoary tradition of culture, philosophy, music and fine arts, Kanchi is indeed a rich treasure-house of monumental art.

Ancient literature and inscriptions refer to the city by various names as Kanchi, Kancheepuram, Kancheepuri, etc. It is also known as "Satya Vrata Kshetram", a place dedicated to the "vow of truth". The most popular name, however, is Kancheepuram. Tamil Saints have called it Kachchi in their numerous works.

Ancient Glory

Famous through the ages, this ancient city has been a great seat of learning, and the birth- place of many renowned saints, devotees, artists, politicians, musicians, philosophers and savants. Chanakya, the great king-maker and author of the *Arthashastra*, and Sri Syama Sastri, one of the three great architects of Carnatic Music, were both born here. Indeed, the land of Kanchi, called Tondaiman Mandalam, contains the source -springs of devotion,

piety, integrity, righteousness, valour, hard work, and such other excellences as revealed in ancient Tamil works. The annals of India pay a high tribute to the ancient glory of this city. The Tondaimans, the Pallavas, the Cholas, the rulers of Vijayanagar have played a significant role in the growth and development of this region.

The history of Kanchi can be traced back to several centuries before the advent of the Christian era. The place finds its name in Patanjali's *Maha Bhashya*, written in the 2nd century B.C. *Manimekalai*, a famous Tamil classic, and *Perum-panatrupadai*, a great Tamil poetical work, vividly describe the city as it was at the beginning of the Christian era. Tondaiman Ilanthiraiyan, the hero of *Perum-panatrupadai*, was ruling over Kanchi during the 2nd century A.D. He was himself a great poet, and had extended his patronage and hospitality to a large number of poets and bards. *Perumpanatrupadai* refers to the Vishnu temple at Thiruvehka, now known as Sri Yathokthakari Swami temple. It was at the time of Tondaiman Ilanthiraiyan that a big irrigation lake was constructed at his wish at a place 14 miles north-east of Kanchi. The lake and the adjacent village are called Tenneri. A Pallava epigraph refers to the lake as 'Thiraiyaneri', meaning Thiraiyan's lake.

BUDDHISM

Yuan Chang, the great Buddhist scholar from China, visited the city and has recorded that Buddhism in the city was as old as Buddha himself. There is clear evidence to show that Buddhism took deep roots in Kanchi about the 1st century A.D. Its influence began to decline in Kanchi

and in South India generally, when there was a great awakening among the Hindus under the leadership of the Vaishnavite Alvars, Acharyas and Saivaite Nayanmars. The lack of royal patronage for Buddhism under the Pallavas, Cholas and the Vijayanagar Kings greatly undermined the vitality and popularity of this religion. However, sporadic groups preaching the principles of Buddha-a Dharma continued to be active till the end of the 13th century A.D. During the 7th century A.D. there were a few Buddhist, Viharas in the city. Bhikkhus held discourses in these Viharas, which were visited by Buddhists from other countries. Kanchi is proud of producing Dignaga, Bodhi Dharma and Dharmapala, who set high standards in the study of Buddhist learning. Acharya Dignaga also served the Nalanda University with distinction. He was well-versed in Mahayana and Hinayana systems, and wrote many standard works which are admired by the Chinese and the Japanese even today.

The Chinese respect Bodhidharma as the founder of the Dhyana system of Buddhist philosophy, which is known in Japan as the Zen system, and he is greatly revered there. Dharmapala also belonged to Kanchi. He abandoned worldly life in his youth and became a great teacher at Nalanda. He is the author of many works on Buddhist logic and metaphysics.

JAINISM

Tirupparuthikunram, a suburb of Kanchi, lying on the southern banks of the Vegavati, has long been known as Jaina-Kanchi. (The place is at the south-west



corner of the city, and is about 2 ½ miles from the Railway station). The place has become a strong-hold of the Jains of the Digambara sect. This religion did not enjoy royal patronage or public support; but the followers of Jainism were strong and determined in their faith, and their descendants still live in this locality. The Jains while propagating their religion, made notable contributions to literature and philosophy, in general. Mallisena Vamana Suri, who lived at about the beginning of the 14th century, was greatly revered by all the Jains in Tiruparuthikunram. Mallisena's great disciple, Pushpasena proved a worthy disciple of his master, and he has also given of his best to enrich the literature of his period. His influence with Irugappa, the great Minister of Vijayanagar, resulted in some renovations and new

structures to the Jain temples of Kanchi. Sri Akalanga Jina Guru is said to have defeated the Buddhists in a discourse here, and laid the foundations for Jainism on a firm basis.

VAISHNAVISM AND SAIVISM

Kanchi is regarded as one of the three most important centres of Vaishnavism: Srirangam, Thirumalai (Tirupathi) and Kancheepuram, commonly called in Tamil as "Koil", "Tirumalai" and "Perumal Koil" respectively.

Some include also Thirunarayanapuram in Mysore as the fourth Vaishnava centre, and pay homage to Kancheepuram as one of the four big Vaishnava centres. From wherever he is, every devout Vaishnava

prays to the presiding Lords of these places, three times a day.

Saint Poigai Alvar, the first of the first three Alvars, was born here. The great Vaishnavite teacher and reformer, Sri Ramanuja, who was born in Sriperumbudur nearby, spent his early years in Kanchi, and had his early education here and offered his worship at the feet of Lord Varadaraja. The fourth of the twelve Alvars - Sri Thirumazhisai Alvar lived here for a considerable period and his devotion to the Lord at Thiruvehka (Sri Yathokthakari) was so great that the Lord as "Bhakta Paradheena" - implicitly did what the Alvar requested him to do and so earned the name "Yathokthakari". Sri Alavandar, one of the greatest of the Sri Vaishnava Acharyas, stayed here, dedicating himself to service at the feet of Sri Varadaraja. Some are of the opinion that the very first ten stanzas of Saint Nammalvar, the foremost of the Alvars, refer to Lord Sri Varadaraja of this place. Again it was here that Saint Thirumangai Alvar, the last of the Alvar, got a divine treasure to enable him to continue his daily poor-feeding.

The hymn of the Alvars (Divya Prabandham)

In praise of the presiding deities here are an eternal source of inspiration to all. This is the place where the great devotee Sri Thirukkachi Nambi, an elder contemporary of Sri Ramanuja, spent his life in the service of Lord Varadaraja and learnt the six great principles of Visishtadvaita Philosophy directly from Lord Varadaraja Himself. Numerous other saints and devotees like Sri Thatha Desikan, Sri Nadadur Ammal, and

the founder of Sri Ahobilam Mutt, have lived here for study and devotion. Sri Manavala Mamunigal, another great Acharya from Srirangam, had also visited this place. Parimel Azhagar, the immortal commentator of *Thirukkural*, was the son of an Archaka of the Ulagalandar Temple here.

Nayanmars - devotees of Lord Siva - have praised the Lord here in their beautiful hymns, called *Tevarams*. Sri Sundara Murthi Nayanar regained his sight here. It was here that Saint Pattinathadigal poured out his divine songs in praise of Lord Ekarnbaranatha. Sri Tirukkurippu Thondar and Sakya Nayanar attained their salvation here. Kanchi is very important to Saivites as one of the first of the five most leading Saivite centres, the Prithivi Kshetram. The hymns of Sri Thirunavukkarasar, Sri Thirugnana Sambandar and Sri Pattinathadigal praise the Lord here in a superb manner.

It was here that Srimat Adisankaracharya established the Kamakoti Peetham. Manimekalai, the heroine of one of the five epics of Tamil, sought salvation here through her service to humanity.

The great Tamil works, *Sri Skanda Puranam* and *Kanchi Puranam* were composed and recited first here. Sri Thyagaraja also has sung about Lord Varadaraja and Goddess Kamakshi Devi. This is also the birth-place of the great famous historian, Chanakya (also called Kautilya) of the Maurya Empire.

THE TEMPLES OF KANCHI

Famous as one of the *Saptapuris* or seven sacred cities of India, Kanchipuram is the dream-city for the pilgrim and the artist alike, where temples abound, and their presiding deities provide solace to thirsting hearts and pilgrims from all faiths; and art-lovers find that they have here a veritable feast of sculpture awaiting them.

Sri Varadaraja Swami Temple

This temple is the most famous of the eighteen Tirupathis praised by the Alvars, where the presiding deity is Sri Varadaraja Swami, the Lord who blessed Sri Thirukkachi Nambi with the celebrated "six words" proding a gist of the Visishtadvaita Philosophy. This temple, a grand and imposing edifice with its main entrance on the western side, crowned by a towering gopuram, is a marvel of architectural beauty. On the eastern side there is another gopuram, more imposing and majestic than its western counterpart. There are three shrines

for worship in this temple, that of the presiding deity (Lord Varadaraja) on *Hasti Giri* (elephant hill), Lord Yoga-Narasimha in a cave below Hasti Giri and Sri Perun Devi Thayar, the consort of Lord Varadaraja.

There are five *prakaras* or circumambulating paths going around the temple, surrounded finally by a very high compound wall, the whole construction occupying an area of about 23 acres. Within the first *prakara* is found a mantapam of 100 pillars, decorated with beautiful architectural designs. The circular jointless rings forming a chain carved out of a single stone are marvellous as a rare sculptural feat. The temple tank, called the Ananta Tirtham is on the north side of this mantapam. Lord Sri Attigiri



Varadaraja lies immersed in the waters of this tank, and is taken out once in a generation to be worshipped by the devotees. Within this *prakara* are a number of shrines for the Alvars and a large flower-garden with a varied number of sweet-scented flowering plants.

Ascending twenty-four steps to reach Hasti Giri, one comes upon the sanctum of Lord Varadaraja. The image in the sanctum is facing west looking upon the entire town with His benevolent gaze caressing His devotees and showering His blessings upon them. The *Brahmotsavam* and *Garudotsavam* are the chief festivals performed in this temple, drawing lakhs of pilgrims from all over India.

An account of the genesis of the shrine can be spotted in the *Brahmanda Purana*. Brahma, the Creator, having incurred some mental pollution, stopped his work of creation and started a penance on the banks of the holy river Ganges. An *Asareeravani* (bodiless voice), instructed him to perform 1,000 *yajnas* (sacrifices), to overcome the pollution. Since the performance of 1,000 *yajnas* could not be completed in his life-time Brahma chose the *Satya Vratha Kshetram*, where one *yajna* performed would be equivalent to 1,000 *yajnas*. Brahma's consort, Saraswathi was angry with him at the time, it is said, and with a view to frustrating the purpose of the *yajna*, tried to flood the area by taking shape as River Vegavathi and flowing through the region. Brahma prayed to Lord Vishnu to save the situation, upon which Vishnu came down in the form of 'Yathokta Kari Perumal', and laid himself across the path of the river, flat and nude, thus arresting its course.

When Brahma concluded his yaga, Vishnu emerged in the form of Sri Varadaraja, and stayed on in that spot to bless his devotees for many Yugas to come, upon the request of Brahma, and on this spot He is worshipped to this day as Varadaraja Swami.

In the month of Thai (January) *Palaya Seevaram Parivettai* with the floating festival in the temple tank is observed.

On important days of every month thereafter, like Masi Makham, Panguni Uttiram, Chithrai, Vaisakha Pournami, Ani Garuda Utsavam, Thiru Adi Pooram, Avani Pournami, Krishna Jayanti (September), Mahalaya Amavasya, up to Vijaya Dasami (October), Iyppasi Mulam, Deepavali, and Karthigai in November and Pagal Pathu (the ten diurnal) and Ra-pathu (the ten nocturnal) festivals (December), are all observed on a grand scale with pomp and ceremony, attracting large number of pilgrims.

Sri Yathokthakari Temple

The *Sthala Purana* of the temple is the same account as that relating to Sri Varadaraja Swami. At the conclusion of the Yagam performed by Brahma, it is said that the Lord, who appeared as Yathokthakari in the beginning of the Yaga to arrest Vegavathi, appeared from the Homa as Sri Deva Raja Perumal. Thus the twin temples of Sri Yathokthakari and Sri Deva Raja Perumal have come to stay at Kanchi. The legend accounting for the name Yathokthakari (one who did as was bidden) - "Sanna Vannam Seith a Perumal" - is a popular one among the folks of Kanchi.

During the service of Thirumazhisai Alvar in the temple, there was a devotee by name Kanikkannan, who was very much attached to him. Kanikkannan was a great poet, and an old lady who was a dancer at the court during her youth was devoted to him. Kanikkannan one day prayed to the Lord, pleasing him with beautiful songs, and beseeched him to endow her with youth again so as to enable her to serve the Lord fittingly and for long in the temple. The Lord, accordingly rejuvenated her, and this news reached the King. The King requested Kanikkannan to do the same for him, which he refused. Infuriated, the King ordered him to leave Kanchi. When Kanikkannan left Kanchi, Thirumazhisai Alvar could not bear the absence of his devotee, and yet could not bring himself to follow him, leaving his Lord in the shrine. So he prayed to the Lord, asking him to go along with him to join Kanikkannan, and as the Lord followed, the three of them left Kanchi. Devoid of the Lord's illuminating presence, Kanchi became dark and gloomy, whereupon the King realised his folly and approached the divine party, resting on the outskirts of the city, begged Kanikkannan to forgive and return to Kanchi and bring back the light that was the Lord. Thereupon, Saint Thirumazhisai Alvar altered his earlier prayer to the Lord, begging him to return to Kanchi, which he did. Thus, as the Lord did all that his devotee bade him do, he came to be known as Yathokthakari Perumal or the God that did His devotee's bidding. In the month of Thai, in the birth constellation of Thirumazhisai Alvar, a festival is celebrated taking the Lord to the spot where the holy party had rested on the outskirts, and the image of the Lord in the temple, lying with

his head to the south, in reversed position, reminds people of this legend. Though this temple does not enjoy an all-India reputation as Tirupati or Srirangam does, no pilgrim visiting Kanchi would consider his pilgrimage complete without visiting this temple, which stands on the road between the Railway station and the shrine of Sri Varadaraja.

The same *Sthala Purana* about Brahma and his Yaga is the background for yet another temple in Kanchi - the Vilakkoli Temple. Lord Vishnu removed all the obstacles that Saraswati tried to create to stall the yaga. Once, she made the place of the yaga pitch-dark and the Lord then appeared as a lustrous beam of light illuminating the place and also teaching Saraswati that there could be no darkness where the Omnipotent Light illumined the world. Thus the Lord here came to be known as Deepa Prakasa Swami, and the temple as "Vilakkoli" Temple.

Sri Satyavrateswara Temple

This temple is in Satyavrateswara village, four furlongs from Kanchi, now known as Thirukkali Medu. One of the Indras, called Sivi, fed up with the heavenly pleasures, wanted to attain Mukti by performing penance. On the advice of Brihaspathi, the Guru of the Devas, he came down to Kanchi situated on earth and having gone to Satyavratam, had a bath in the holy tank on a Wednesday, and performed penance, concentrating on Lord Satyavrateswara and attained liberation when the Lord appeared before him and blessed him. The image of Lord Dakshinamurthi, also found in this temple, is a unique one. He is found

on a peetha with his right leg on Musalaka (demon) and his left leg crossed over the right leg, showing 'Mudra' and 'Sarpa' in his right hand and 'Chuvadi' and 'Agni' in his left hand. Above the Lord is a Banyan tree and below, at his feet, are seated a number of saints along with Nandi.

Sri Ashta Bhujam Temple

When Brahma was performing a Yajna, the Asuras came and disturbed him, and on Brahma's prayer Vishnu came and drove them away. The Asuras begged Shiva for his support, and he came in the form of a Sarabha, an animal with eight feet. To defeat Shiva in this form, Lord Vishnu came down armed with eight hands, holding chakra, sword, lotus and arrow on the right and bow, conch, shield and "gada" on the left. In the same temple also is found the image of Lord Vishnu in Varaha form, unusual anywhere, with the face of a boar, one foot touching the floor, and the other resting on the hoods of two serpents (male and female) with Bhudevi seated on his lap, with his left hand around her waist and holding her feet with the other. This temple is situated just a few yards on the south of Sri Yathokthakari temple.

Sri Chitra Gupta Temple

The temple is situated east of Rettai (Double) mantapam of Big Kanchi, and it is the only known South Indian temple dedicated to this Deity, who is believed to assist Yama (the God of death) in dispensing justice to the humans after their death, by recording their good and evil deeds.

The Kailasanathar Temple

The Kailasanathar temple of Kanchipuram is believed to have been built in the first half of the 8th century, during the reign of King Raja Simha of Pallava dynasty. This temple is also, therefore, known by the name *Raja Simheswara Griham*, though it is popularly known only as Kailasanathar temple. The temple is built entirely of sandstone, with smaller temples flanking the main temple. Near the entrance to the main temple is Mahendreswara Temple - named in honour of King Mahendra Varma. On crossing this, one faces the main temple, steps on south leading to the entrance. In the sanctum is a "Linga" sculptured from 16 slabs. Around the temple runs a compound wall, into which are carved 58 small shrines, containing images of various deities, mainly of Lord Vishnu, Brahma and Somaskanda. The basement of the "garbha-griha" in the Kailasanathar temple is of granite and the super-structure is of sandstone. The garbha griha is surmounted by a pyramidal tower known as Vimana rising in tiers to a height of 50 feet. There is a huge prismatic Linga in the sanctum installed by Mahendra Varma.

Sthala Purana

There were three mighty Asuras, who were great devotees of Lord Shiva. These Asuras were causing endless trouble to the Devas, who were unable to accomplish anything, as the Asuras were devotees of Shiva and hence were very powerful. So they prayed to Lord Vishnu.

Vishnu, 'aware of Shiva's fondness for his devotees, evolved a plan to destroy the

Asuras through Shiva himself. Thus, he created the Adi Buddha and through him and Narada, initiated a new school of thought attempting to expose the drawbacks of Vedas and Vedic philosophy. This was taught to the Asuras, who, along with some others turned Buddhists and started preaching against Shiva. Shiva, who was infuriated, destroyed them. Narada and Adi Buddha felt that they had committed a sin by misleading the Asuras and so went on a pilgrimage visiting sacred places to ward off this sin. When they reached Kanchi, they felt that they were actually getting rid of the effects of their sin, and out of gratitude and joy, built a temple for Lord Shiva and worshipped him, who blessed them with salvation. Ever since then, the temple came to be known as Kailasanathar temple, and gained greatly in importance as a centre of worship equivalent to the original shrine of Kailasanatha of Mount Kailas. Maha Sivaratri is celebrated here with great enthusiasm.

Sri Vaikuntha Perumal Temple

Situated very near the railway station is this temple, noted for its architectural grandeur, built by those royal lovers of 'art, the Pallavas. When the Pallava King worshipped Sri Kailasanathar by providing the Deity with a ritual bath in sweet-scented sandal-water, which streamed out of the temple as a brook on the sacred day of Maha Sivaratri, he was blessed with a son devoted to Lord Vishnu. (The sacred books say that such worship on the day of Maha Sivaratri, blesses one with the gift of a righteous son devoted to Lord Vishnu).

This son, Parameswara Varma, when he grew up and succeeded to the throne had the Vaikuntha Perumal temple constructed as Lord Vishnu's abode on earth. It is remarkable that the two temples, Kailasanathar temple and Vaikuntha Perumal temple are found side by side, thus making the spot sacred for both Saivites and Vaishnavites alike. At par with the Kailasanath temple in Mount Kailas this Kailasanathar temple in Kanchi is a spot of great sanctity, and it is regarded as the mundane counterpart of the Lord's Heavenly abode.

Sri Ulagalandar Temple

Among the 18 Vishnu shrines in Greater Kanchipuram, five are located in the important temple of Sri Ulagalandar. This temple is located west of Sri Vaikuntha Perumal temple and east of Sri Kamakshi Amman temple. The five Lords in these temples are, Sri Ulagalandar, Sri Karakaththan, Oorakathan, Neerakaththan and Karvanaththan.

On the auspicious day of Vaikuntha Ekadasi, the Deities from the temples of Pandavaduthar, Pachai Vannar, Pavala Vannar, Ulagalandar, Vaikuntha Perumal and Deepa Prakasar are taken round in a procession through the main streets known as Raja-Veedhi of Kanchi, and hundreds of devotees gather near the Gangai-Kondan-Mantapam for divine darshan.

Sri Kamakshi Amman Temple

The four holy shrines of Kanchi viz; Punya Kottam, Rudra Kottam, Kama Kottam, and Kumara Kottam are of great religious

importance to devotees all over, the presiding Deities in these shrines being Lord Varada Raja, Lord Ekambara Nathar, Sri Kamakshi Amman and Sri Subrahmanya Swami, respectively.

The Kanchi Kamakshi Peetham is one of the 51 major Shakthi peethas of India. It is also mentioned as one of the three most important Shakthi shrines - those of Kanchi Kamakshi, Madurai Meenakshi and Kasi Visalakshi. Kamakshi Amman is also referred to as Para-Sakthi, having the three goddesses Lakshmi, Saraswathi and Parvathi as her eyes and she bestows her gracious looks on her devotees and blesses them with happiness and salvation.

It is stated in the sacred books that recitation of the Lalitha Sahasra Nama in the precincts of the shrine confers on a woman-devotee the blessing of being a life-long "Sumangali". It is also believed that, among those who undertake this recitation, those whose past 'karma' is too strong an obstacle have the experience of being constantly interrupted by something or other and prevented from completing the Sahasra-Nama.

This temple is at the heart of big Kanchipuram, surrounded by the four Raja streets. The temple has four entrances, but the eastern entrance is treated as the main entrance. The sanctum sanctorum faces south-east in the middle of the Gayatri Mantapam. The Deity is in the Padmasana posture with four hands, and is worshipped as Sri Raja Rajeswari Devi. She is also worshipped as Lalitha (the delicate one) and Kameswari (the destroyer of all desires).

Sri Devi is said to have made her appearance through the great concavity

called "Bilakasa" to save the Devas from the Asuras.

Tradition says that there was a delightful grove of champaka-trees around the Gayatri Mantapam. The Devas used to gather on these trees having assumed the form of parrots in order to worship the Devi. The Kama Koti Peetham is enshrined in the Sri Chakra just in front of Sri Devi and all Pujas and prayers are offered to the Sri Chakra. It is said that Sri Devi after giving protection to the Devas enshrined herself in the Sri Chakra in *Sookshma* (subtle) form. The Peetha of Sri Chakra is worshipped by great sages.

The Icon of Swarna Kamakshi was of pure gold and it was removed to Tanjore for safety in 1767 during the Muslim invasion. This Icon was not returned afterwards; the shrine of Swarna Kamakshi still exists in the temple, but without the Icon, and devotees and people of the city greatly regret its absence, even today. The present Sri Sankaracharya of Kama Koti Peetham has established a golden feet pedestal of Swarna Kamakshi.

The "Pillar of Victory" in the temple premises is said to have been erected by the Devas, to show their gratitude to Sri Devi for the destruction of Bhandakasura, who was buried in the ground, upon which the pillar now stands.

Sri Adi Sankara, born in Kaladi, travelled all over India, reviving the Hindu dharma and establishing Shakthi Peethams in Sringeri, Dwaraka, Badrinath and Puri. At last, he came to Kanchi, regained Kamakshi temple from the Buddhists, and renovated the temple, establishing the Kama Koti Peetham and the Sri Chakram. It is said that he made Kama Koti the fifth Peetha; and took

his last journey to Kailasa through the “Bilakasa” or the great concavity, and thus came to be known as Sri Sankaracharya of Kamakoti Peetha.

There is a separate shrine for Sri Sankaracharya within the Prakaram and the first homage is paid here before beginning any festival. Sri Sankara Jayanti is observed with great devotion during April, when verses are chanted from Soundarya Lahari in praise of Sri Devi.

Just in front of Sri Sankara’s shrine is the shrine of Durvasa, the great saint who was the first to have witnessed the appearance of the Devi through the Bilakasa. The great sage has composed the famous “Sowbhagya Chintarnani”, based on which the Puja and other worships are carried on. The shrine of Sri Kasi Viswanatha, perhaps as a counterpart of the original temple in Kasi, is found here within the third “prakara” of the temple.

The Pancha Ganga

The sacred tank in the temple is known as Pancha Ganga. When Bhandarakasura was to be buried, a pit was dug, but another Asura took form and fell on the Devas, and when the Devas tried to kill him, new Asuras were taking shape from every drop of blood that came from his wounds. To arrest this, Lord Shiva sent two of his Pramatha-ganas to drink up the blood completely, after which no new Asuras could take form; and thus the Devas were saved. But the “ganas” lost their divine quality due to the drinking of the Asura blood, and they became brutal and started harassing the Devas. Lord Vishnu took pity on them and taking the postures of standing, sitting and sleeping,

blessed them to remove the pollution. A temple in three storeys with Vishnu in the three postures is to be seen by the side of the tank. The two “ganas” realising their fall, regretted their misdeeds, upon which it is said Lord Shiva sent five torrents of the Ganga from his head to wash off their sins. This flow formed a tank, and came to be known as Pancha Ganga.

The annual festival in the month of “Masi” or Kumbham, the Panguni Uttiram Day in the following month and the star “Pooram” in the month of Iyppasi (Oct-Nov.), which is the birth-star of Sri Devi, are the important festivals performed with great eclat.

Sri Kumara Kottam Temple

Tradition says that once when Lord Brahma himself was unable to explain the meaning of the Pranava ‘AUM’ Lord Muruga relieved him of his duties and took on the responsibility of creation. Thereupon, Lord Shiva deputed Nandi to go and beseech Muruga to release Brahma, which however he refused. He established a shrine for Shiva and performed penance here. The Kumara Kottam temple, built on this spot, for Lord Muruga is located in Big Kanchipuram, west of Kamakshi temple. There are also two more shrines here, one for Lord Vishnu and another for Palani Andavar.

Sri Ekambaranathar Temple

Of the five famous Lingas - Prithvi, Apah, Jyotir, Vayu and Akasa – Ekambaranathar temple contains one, that is the *Prithvi Linga*. Some trace the origin of the name

of Ekambaranathar to a single Mango tree found in the temple premises.

This temple has five prakaras and a thousand pillar Mantapam, of which only 616 are in evidence today, the rest having decayed. The compound wall, believed to be constructed by Krishna Devaraya in 1509 A.D., contains many Hindu, Buddhist and Jain idols.

Sthala Purana: When Lord Shiva married Parvati on Mount Kailas in the Himalayas, all the Devas, Rishis and others gathered there to witness the great event. Owing to the weight of all those people the Universe began to tilt towards Kailasa and Lord Shiva asked the sage Agastya to go to Kanchi in the South and restore the balance. But Agastya was reluctant to go at the risk of missing the pleasure of witnessing the Divine couple's wedding and so Shiva promised to re-enact the marriage for the delight of Agastya at Kanchi.

The marriage declared on the Uthiram day of Panguni, is an important festival in the temple celebrated with great pomp and splendour and this place like

Kailasa in the Himalayas, where the Divine marriage originally is said to have taken place (Shiva and Parvathi are called the Adi Dampatis, the first couple) is considered to be of great sanctity and religious importance.

There is a very old mango tree in the temple, worshipped by all with great

reverence. It has four main branches, believed to represent the four Vedas. The fruits on the four branches each have a different taste and even the leaves are different. In the Prakara around the mango tree there stands a Linga, which is



composed of 108 small Lingas, and there is also another composed of 10,008 smaller Lingas.

There is a Vishnu temple in the premises of this Shiva temple, the presiding Deity being known as Neela Thingal Thundaththan. Every year thousands of

pilgrims gather here for the festivals and worship the Lord and receive His blessings. "Maha Sivarathri" and "Panguni Uttiram" are the two most important festivals celebrated in this temple.

Thirupparuthikundram Temple

Thirupparuthikundram, in the suburbs of Kanchi, lying on the southern bank of Vegavathi, is known as Jina Kanchi or Jaina Kanchi. This place was a stronghold of the Jains of Digambara sect, whose descendants live there to this day. The Jains have made notable contributions to literature and philosophy. Mallisena Vamana Suri, who lived about the beginning of the 14th century, is greatly revered by the Jains of Thirupparuthi-kundram, and his disciple Pushpasena has contributed richly to contemporary Jain literature. His influence *with* Irugappa, the great minister of the Vijayanagaram Kings, has resulted in a few new structures added to the Jain temple in Kanchi. The Vijayanagar rulers were noted for their patronage of other religions, in addition to their great love for Saivaite and Vaishnavaites temples. Right from the time of Bukkaraya to Ramaraya, all the rulers patronised Jainism and made grants to Jains and their temples.

The followers of Jainism were men of wisdom and made common cause with others in social, educational and ethical aspects of life. Hence they were able not only to earn royal patronage but also to save their religion from probable extinction as a result of assaults from other religious sects. Also, Jain religious literature has references to many Hindu mythological characters such as Rama, Krishna and

Balarama and they have absorbed into their tradition stories from Hindu mythologies and adopted characters like Krishna and Balarama, Devaki and Rohini, representing them as Tirthankaras. Thus Jain temples are well patronised and they exist side by side with the Hindu temples at Kanchi.

The Jain temples at Thirupparuthikundram are among the oldest in the district. The older of the two shrines is dedicated to the eighth Tirthankara by name Chandraprabha and the other built at a later date to Vardhamana, popularly known as Mahavira and locally called Trilokyanatha. These temples are of great religious importance and of historical interest because of the clear inscriptions on the walls and paintings that give a vivid picture of the times.

The Chandraprabha Temple

This temple lies to the north of the larger main temple, and is situated in the corner of a garden. It is similar to Kailasanathar Temple, Vaikunthaperumal Temple, Sri Muktheswar Temple and Mathangeswar Temple, in architectural pattern, and it is probable that it was built by the Pallavas, probably during the reign of Parameswara Varma. Pallava inscriptions are found in the temple premises. The main shrine is situated at a height of 12 ft. from the ground. The Jains of the locality call it Ervanasthalam or Malaiyanar Koil.

The sanctuary contains a big image of Chandraprabha, another of Kanthunatha (17th Tirthankara) made of white marble and yet another of Vardhamana. The images are carved in the Paryanka Asana posture.

Nothing is yet known of the shrine on the ground floor or why it remains closed.

Sannadhis of these sages in Agirimedu, about 100 yards from the main temple.

The Vardhamana Temple

Adjacent to the Chandraprabha Temple and a little to the south of it is the Vardhamana Temple, the bigger of the two. Several Tirthankaras are enshrined and worshipped in this temple, the chief of them being Vardhamana (24th Tirthankara). The beautiful architecture of the temple, particularly the sculptures in the cloistered court which surround it and the colouring of the paintings which adorn the ceiling, point out the fact that the temple was built at the peak of the Chola Empire's glory. The shrine of Vardhamana is at the centre and is held dear and sacred by the Jains. There are also images of Pushpadanta (9th Tirthankara) Dharmadevi, the Yakshi of Neminatha (22nd Tirthankara). To the left is a cluster of three shrines dedicated to Padma-prabhu, Vasupriya and Parswanatha (6th, 12th and 23rd Tirthankaras respectively).

The main shrine of Vardhamana appears to be of recent origin. It is probable that the ancient and original shrine, built of sandstone like the Kailasanathar Temple, became dilapidated and had been reconstructed at a later date. The Jains believe that the Kamakshi Temple was originally a Jain temple dedicated to Dharmadevi. The earliest inscriptions in the temple point to the reign of Kulottunga Chola 1. Jaina Kanchi had also been a seat of some great sages like Akalanga, Chandra-kirti, Ananta Virya Vamana, Mallisena Vamana Suri and Pushpasena. There are "Bali Peethams" over the

Sri Kachchapeswarar Temple

This temple is situated between Sri Vaikuntha Perumal Temple and Sri Kailasanathar Temple in Big Kancheepuram, in the western part of the city. The main entrance faces north but the sanctum faces east. There is a sacred tank inside the temple. The temple construction shows a blend of the Vijayanagar and Chola styles of architecture.

The *Sthala Puranam* states that Vishnu took the form of a turtle to serve as base for Mount Mandara, with which the Devas and Asuras churned the sea for the divine nectar. At the end of the event, however, Vishnu in the form of "Kachchapa" became proud and started disturbing the seas. The Devas prayed to Shiva who appeared here as a Jyotir Linga and calmed Vishnu, who thereafter worshipped him. A beautiful carving is seen in the temple depicting Lord Vishnu worshipping the Jyotir Linga. Since Shiva appeared here as Jyotir Linga, this place is considered as sacred as Kasi (Benares) and is revered as the abode of Lord Shiva on earth. Kancheepuram is a home of culture, art, learning, philosophy, music and religion. Rightly then was this "golden city" patronised and successively improved upon by the Kings of the Pallava, Chola and Vijayanagar dynasties.



Adyar the Flaming Centre

A. KANNAN

ADYAR is the International headquarters of the Theosophical Society and has been the focus of attention of many aspirants from all over the world. Inspired by the motto, "There is no Religion higher than Truth" Adyar has radiated Love and Brotherhood, which motivated many pioneering reform movements in India and abroad. Trans-Himalayan Rishis have blessed the Theosophical movement and the Adyar centre, and guided the activities of its founders, leaders and many other disciples. Adyar has been called a "Flaming Centre," which name is particularly applied here to the Estate of about 250 acres of peaceful and hallowed land, situated between the Adyar River and the Coromandel Coast. The following account is drawn from, many writers, who have given their testimony of love and veneration during the last 91 years since the establishment of this Estate. In Adyar there is a source of spiritual power, which floods the world through every National Section and Branch of the Theosophical Society and its individual Members. Here the feet of the Rishis, the spiritual founders of the Society, have actually trodden. These and other facts are recorded in the history of the Theosophical Society. Here is a great and powerful thought-form of Theosophical inspiration and tradition, built and added on by a succession of devoted members who have lived and worked here.

Adyar Estate is one of the loveliest places of the world. It commands the beauty of sea and river, island and sand-bar, the loveliness of palm grove and pine wood. No one who, on the beach on an evening, has watched the sun-set in flaming gold and rose behind the Casuarinas, will ever forget Adyar. Very many birds frequent the woods at Adyar and a number of species of plants of particular interest to botanists are found growing here.

The Banyan Tree

The Banyan tree, under whose wide-spreading leafy roof, 3,000 people have often been comfortably seated at the Annual Conferences, is a big attraction for hundreds of tourists who daily visit the Estate. The central trunk is in reality a vast collection of trunks, many of which have grown together so that it is impossible to penetrate among them. In the case of a tree so vast and so old as this (variously estimated from 200 to 500 years), the Divine Life manifesting through it acquires a distinct personality.

History of the Great Hall

Col. H. S. Olcott, a retired American Army Officer renowned for his uprightness and honesty and Madame H.P. Blavatsky, a Russian woman of great occult powers and deep understanding of the ancient wisdom,

came to India to establish the Theosophical Society with its Headquarters at Adyar. On May 31, 1882, they inspected a property known as Huddleston's Gardens situated on the Adyar River. H. P. Blavatsky remarked, "Master wants this purchased". The central building is known as the Headquarters building and its most striking feature is the Great Hall which attracts the attention of innumerable visitors. It forms a veritable universal shrine, since its walls are decorated with symbols representing eighteen different religions, in addition to Free Masonry and of course, Theosophy. There are also two representations of the Goddess of Wisdom, one a plaque of Minerva over the entrance to the former Reading Room and the other over the door to the former library, of Saraswathi, her Indian equivalent. At Conventions and other important meetings in the Hall the chanting of the "Prayers of the Religions" begins the day. This was originated in 1925 at the suggestion of J. Krishnamurthi. On the south side of the Hall we see the statues of the Founders by the Sculptor, Govinda Pillai.

The symbols in this Hall represent the living religions on the north side, while those on the south, those that exist no longer. Here we see four bas-reliefs representing Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, Christianity and Buddhism and above a series of symbols enclosed in circles: Hinduism by Sri Krishna with His flute and the Sacred Cow; Sikhism by Hari the Indwelling Name; Zoroastrianism by the First Great Zarathustra; Taoism by Lao-Tsze; Confucianism by the character "Tien" ... Heaven or Serene Righteousness; Islam with design and a verse from the Koran and Shintoism by the Gate of the

Gods. On the south side, Mitra by the Seven Rayed Sun of Justice; Orpheus founder of the Greek Mysteries by Divine Harmony; Osiris the Light of Lights and others including Free Masonry, Baha'ullah, Judaism, Christianity, Jainism and Buddhism also suitably represented. Theosophy or Divine Wisdom with its motto, "There is no Religion higher than Truth" also in Sanskrit. The Great Hall has a wonderful air of spaciousness and peace.

Shrines of Different Faiths

The Bharat Samaj Temple is located in the Estate, and it is a place of worship based on the essential rites and ceremonies of the Hindu Faith. The deity is represented by the sacred flame, and the worshippers congregate their daily at 6 a.m. to pray according to a prescribed ritual comprising of selected vedic hymns. No differences of caste, creed, colour, race or sex are observed. Close by are situated the Liberal Catholic Church and the Zoroastrian Fire Temple. In other parts of the Estate are 'also the Buddha Temple, and the Mosque which was modelled after the Pearl Mosque at Delhi. This multi-faith atmosphere at Adyar is unique, for it offers the opportunity best suited to each in his search for Truth and Wisdom. The Ritual of the Mystic Star is performed once a month in the Great Hall. The service is dedicated to the Great Teachers of World Religions, each striking a specific keynote, all of them together forming the syllables of a Sacred Word. Both young and old participate in the Ritual and dedicate their skills and knowledge in the service of the Mystic Star.

The Adyar Library

The Adyar Library and Research Centre was established by the President-Founder, Col. H. S. Olcott in 1886. It is one of the pioneering institutions in Asia for the revival and preservation of oriental Literature and the promotion of the second object of The Theosophical Society, which is the study of comparative religion, philosophy, and science. From the very outset the Library represented all the different religions, and its very first publications for which the Colonel himself was responsible, were catechisms on different religions and schools of thought. Through his enthusiasm the library grew rapidly. Its collections now include a great number of books, Eastern and Western, which are rare and out of print, many being first editions and covering a variety of subjects. Every major language of the world is represented including Sanskrit, Pali, Hindi, Tamil, and other Indian languages; Chinese, Japanese, Tibetan, Greek, Latin, French, German, Italian, Spanish, Dutch, Russian, etc., besides English.

A complete set of xylographs on hand-made bark paper of the Tibetan *Kanjur* and *Tanjore* adds to the great value of the library. Many of these are translations into Tibetan from the original Sanskrit and the library has re-translated into Sanskrit a few of these such as three works on the Mahayana or the Northern School of Buddhism. The most beautiful of the *Tripitakas* or "The Three Baskets" is a set of illuminated paper manuscripts in gold with delicate Chinese brush work. An ancient Islamic manuscript some 600 years old, Buddhist manuscripts from Burma,

beautifully ornamented in red lacquer and gold with glossy black lettering containing monastic rules and written in ancient Burmese ritualistic script, etc. are some of the others worth mentioning. The collection is unique in the sense that although there are several larger collections in other libraries, in and outside India, the speciality is in the variety of material in the religions, philosophies, and culture of the world.

Many important works have been published in the Adyar Library Series, which has so far exceeded 100 volumes. Since 1937 the library is also publishing a research bulletin, *Brahma-vidya*, a magazine held in high esteem by indologists throughout the world. Drawn by its highly prized collections of books and manuscripts, many research fellows come to Adyar to utilize the library for their studies. The new building of the library is equipped with air-conditioned rooms for storage of manuscripts and rare books, micro-filming facilities for reproducing various rare books and other material, besides spacious reading rooms and offices. Stack rooms can hold about a quarter million books and facilities are available for hand lamination of records to preserve them for posterity.

Theosophy and the Theosophical Society

Visitors to the Adyar Estate are directed to the Information Officer who has introductory literature on Theosophy and the Theosophical Society. In an adjoining building is housed the Theosophical Publishing House. It contains the publications of the world-wide organization, whose members have deeply thought over

the truths of the Ancient Wisdom. Here is found the monumental work, *The Secret Doctrine* by H. P. Blavatsky in which she has treated exhaustively the essential truths of all religions, sciences and philosophies from time immemorial so as to present a synthesis for the modern world. Religion is studied without dogma and superstition; science and philosophy without materialism. Each branch of human knowledge and experience is considered for its deeper significance to the spiritual good of mankind, so that man may learn to live in loving kindness to all beings, which is Universal Brotherhood. Various subjects of an occult nature are found treated with much insight and prudence.

The idealism, which Adyar bodies forth, is represented by a group of the Theosophical workers from many lands, representing all the World Faiths, who toil to make of all the Nations and of the Religions one indivisible whole. To build bridges between people and people by proclaiming the power of the ideal of Brotherhood, to build bridges between faith and faith, between science and religion, between work and art, by stating to a modern world the old, old truths of the Divine wisdom; this is Adyar's work day by day. Through lectures, congresses, books, magazines, worship at many shrines and temples, Adyar tries to live the gospel of a Unity of the human spirit. A Theosophical leader has observed:

"Ever since 1882, a great brooding Thought of those Elder Brothers who are the true Founders of the Society, those Great Ones who have come to the threshold of Liberation, but renounced that splendour, in order that they may toil to bring our sad earth a little nearer heaven. Adyar is their

cup through which a blessing is being poured upon the world, night and day".

To live in Adyar is as good as to visit many countries; our prejudices and conventions are chipped away, and we learn to recognise the One Life in some of its many forms.

Great movements have begun in Adyar, and have spread far and wide. To Adyar came two great pioneers, H. P. Blavatsky and H. S. Olcott, disciples of the great Indian Rishis, Maurya and Kuthumi. Our grateful thoughts turn lovingly to them as we carry on their ever-widening work.

The Star Movement had here its birth in Krishnaji's First Initiation and early training. Here began the Home Rule Movement for the freedom of India, prepared for by the Madras lectures of Dr. Annie Besant, "Wake up, India" inspired by the Rishi Agastya, who ceaselessly watched over His great charge, India. Also the earlier movement for the National Congress was begun by delegates to the Theosophical Convention of 1884.

Kalakshetra Theosophical Schools

The great inspiration that sustained the Theosophical movement at Adyar, also gave rise to the renaissance movement in Art which is carried forward by Smt. Rukmini Devi, the Founder-Director of Kalakshetra. Herein are preserved in their purity the artistic traditions of India. Several artists graduate from this world-famous institutions every year, and its headquarters is situated 3 kilometers from Adyar at the sea-side Estate of Tiruvanmiyur. Col. Olcott founded the Olcott Harijan Free Schools, which afford the much-needed opportunity

of education for this under-privileged class of people. The Besant Theosophical High School is run on Theosophical lines of education for boys and girls, and there are no similar institutions elsewhere in India.

Great Leaders

Dr. Annie Besant stands out unique as a leader with a great love for India, which made her work extraneously for her gaining political freedom, which she expected India will use for playing her role as a great spiritual leader among Nations. Theosophy is the spiritual heritage of mankind, and the undying religion and culture of India, Sanatana Dharma, is so eminently suited to carry the torch of spirituality to mankind as a whole. In this great message delivered to India and through India to the whole world she was successively assisted by J. Krishnamurthi, C.W. Leadbeater, G.S. Arundale, C. Jinarajadasa and N. Sri Ram. And today, we are fortunate in having the same tradition of leaders in Geoffrey Hodson, James S. Perkins, Radha S. Burnier, I.K. Taimni and G. S. Coats, the International President of the Society. So the flame of Adyar never dies so long as there is the spiritual aspiration present in any human soul. And it is our sacred task to imbibe the spirit of Adyar in all its aspects, physical, devotional, intellectual and spiritual.



The Six Abodes of Muruga

KARTIKEYA or Muruga is the embodiment of strength. His very birth was designed to defeat the demoniacal powers rampant in a world torn by discord. He is the Commander-in-Chief of God's forces formed to fight and vanquish evil. The epics and other sources depict him as a great integrator among the Divinities. He is the son of Siva and Sakti, brother of Ganesa, nephew of Vishnu and also son-in-law of Indra. He is hailed as the God of valour, the wielder of the lance (Vel), the champion of the lowly and the great lover of his devotees. In him flow the two streams of grace and strength. By invoking him one calls down the might of his father, Siva's penance and the grace of Sakti, his mother.

The advent of Kumara has been celebrated by the poet Kalidasa in his *Kumara Sambhava* and Panini's *Vyakarana Sutra*. *Sri Tattva Nidhi* speaks of his forms as Gangeya, Guha, Shanmukha, Visakha and Kartikeya. Kumara is a Rig Vedic divinity affirming the immensity and the variety of Reality. The Puranas give the biographical details, and Skanda is extolled as Deva Senapati. In *Chandogya Upanishad*, Skanda is referred to as the Supreme Being. Sanat Kumara taught Sage Narada how to overcome ignorance and attain wisdom. "The way that leads to light or wisdom points to Skanda". Sanat Kumara, the child eternal, who taught Brahmayidya is declared to be none else than Skanda by reputed Sanskrit scholars. The concept of

Kumara-Muruga as revealed in the literature and language of the Tamils is very clear in the works of *Tolkappiam* and *Pari Padal*. In the southern tradition of Hindus, Muruga connotes ever-lasting youth, divinity and beauty. In the collection of *Ettutogai* and *Pathu Patu* of the Tamil Sangam Literature, there are many lyrics devoted to Muruga. The poem of Saint Nakkirar, a renowned poet of the third Sangam era, entitled *Thiru Murugatrupadai* is a magnificent piece of work.

In this idyll the author conveys in exquisitely rhythmic lines the fascinating abodes of Muruga with their natural setting and sublime craftsmanship. The central idea of this poem is the grand vision of Muruga to his devotees who had sought him in the sanctuaries of love, his six temples, as the goal of their lives.

In these temples there is a subtle mingling of the traditional Vedic form of worship with that of the indigenous spontaneous type, a fusion of the Celestial and Terrestrial spheres, an affirmation of doctrinal and ritual approaches, as well as a rejection of the power that wealth wields and the exclusion that cloistered authority demands. It is from this that we understand that Kartikeya is, indeed, the One in whose presence "sceptre and crown must tumble down and in the dust be made equal." He is an abiding example of Loka Samgraha, the sovereign way of universal love, love that embraces all living beings.

Lord Muruga has his abode in six sacrosanct shrines, five of which have specific locations, while *Kunrutoradal* has no particular shrine. Symbolically his six faces find their resting place in each of the six abodes. Devotees of Muruga undertake a

pilgrimage and worship him in (1) Tirupparakunram, (2) Tirucheeralavai (Tiruchendur), (3) Tiruvavinankudi, (4) Tiruverakam, (5) Kunrutoradal and (6) Pazhamuthir Cholai. An attempt to describe these centres has perforce to draw inspiration from Tamil literary sources. These reveal indissoluble links between the religious thoughts, practices and monuments of the Tamils from remote times as indicated in the many references from the First to the Third Academy of Letters, and made them remember their Patron Deity Muruga, Velan and Arumuga in the ebb and flow of their lives. They worshipped him in the secret recesses of their hearts, in their silent solitudes, individually. They worshipped him in large congregations on special festival days and seasons.

These abodes are specially consecrated to the worship of Muruga who chose these cities as his citadels. Tradition says that these were encampments during his war against Asuric forces. The warrior-hero Muruga had six operational centres, where he gathered his forces and launched his attack against the inimical hordes of the Asuras and having conquered these mighty forces he returned with his victorious hosts to celebrate in each of these abodes the sacrificial victory.

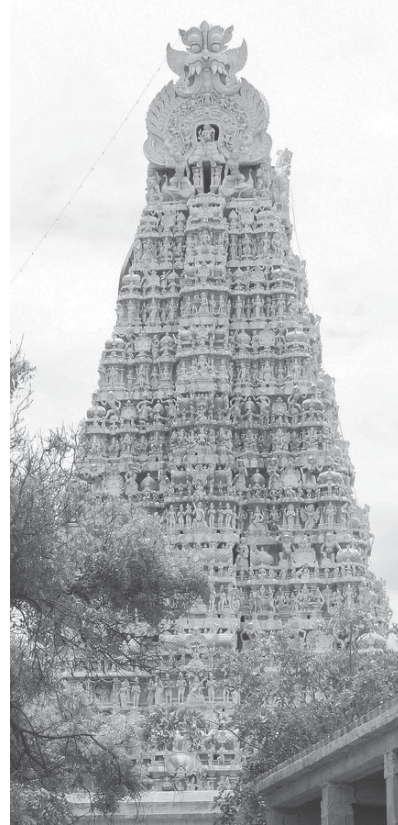
Tirupparankundram

Among such hilly abodes of Muruga, *Tirupparankunram* stands out as a sanctuary of great beauty, some six miles to the south-west of Madurai, the once famed capital of the Pandya Kings. It is 1,050 feet above sea-level. It is also called Tiruparangiri, Kandarnatanam, Kanda Malai,

Salya Giri, Paran Kunram. The Muslims call this mount as Sikkanthar, and have erected a mosque on top of the hill. The traditional belief is that Muruga was married to Indra's daughter Devayani here after his victory over Sura Padman. Here too, he is said to have saved Nakkirar and his 999 companions, from captivity and death. Muruga is honoured here by the special name of Kandaswamy and Shanmuganathan. The temple is on the northern side of the hill and is of great architectural beauty. There is a Peacock Hall here leading to the Asthana Mantapam. This is supported by two rows of pillars, sixteen pillars surrounded by fifty pillars skilfully delineating the legendary glory of Muruga. The gopuram is 150 feet high and inside the temple is the Kalyana Mantapam skirted by the sacred pool and temple gardens. The sanctum sanctorum is carved out of a rock and besides Muruga's well-chiselled form there can be seen the images of Karpaga Vinayaka, Satya Giri Natha, Durga Devi and Vishnu. No immersion ceremony is conducted in this sanctum except to the Lance (Vel). The shrine is dedicated to the element Earth (Prithvi).

Tirucheeralavai

Tirucheeralavai or Tiruchendur is in the Tirunelveli district, 35 miles from the town. It is said that it is from here that he launched his onslaught in the last phase of his war against the Asura called Sura Padman, who had assumed the form of an upturned mango tree in mid-ocean. Here the sanctum faces the sea and the roaring waves beat against it ceaselessly.



Tolkappiar m a k e s reference to this coastal shrine swept by the billows as "Murugan Thimpuna Alaivay". On the eastern part of the temple he is mounted on an elephant with Shanmukha and twelve outstretched arms, that declare his are the m i g h t y

Lance (Vel) that pierces the gloom of ignorance depicted as Asuric forces and such other deadly tools. His five faces betoken the acts of Creation, Protection, Dissolution, Involution and Bestowal of Grace.

His sixth aspect is the communion in silence. Tiruchendur enjoys immense popularity among all classes of worshippers of Muruga as a shrine dedicated to the element Water. After his crushing victory over Sura Padman, the Asura, Muruga returned to this place in the form of a young child and performed a Swapuja. He is said to have cleaned his Vel in the Skanda Pushkarini - (a well of fresh water, close to the sea and very near the shrine). To this day, it is considered to be a spring

having the potency of healing several ailments. It is now called "Nalikinaru", and never dries up even in times of dreadful drought. The sanctum has the image of Bala Subrahmanya with four hands and one face. The two lower hands are raised in blessing; the upper ones hold the rosary and flowers. Adi Sankara has sung the glory of this abode in his famous work called *Subrahmanya Bhujanga Stotra*.

Tiruvavinankudi

Tiruvavinankudi or Palani is a town in Madurai district. It is well known as one of the six temples of Muruga. It is about 1,068 feet above sea-level. Avinan Kudi was the capital of the historic chieftains, who belonged to the Avinar clan. They were devotees of Muruga. A poet called Aviyar perhaps belonged to Avinankudi or Aviyar clan. This proves that Avinankudi was a centre of learning and also had a temple dedicated to Lord Muruga. Here he is known as Dandayudha Pani or the deity that holds the Danda weapon in his hand. The temple is on top of a hill and the road around has several mantapams containing peacocks (the mount of Lord Subrahmanya). An interesting episode is associated with this temple. It is said that Sage Agasthya created two hills called Siva Giri and Edumban Malai. After performing penance here Agasthya went to Kailas. On his return he asked one of his attendants to carry these two hills on either side of a pole (to form a kavadi) and carry it on his shoulder. This attendant found that Siva Giri outweighed Edumban Malai. So to equalise it he tied two heavy stones; still, they could not be balanced. On scrutiny

he found that Lord Subrahmanya was seated on Siva Giri. He came to this hill under a peculiar circumstance. Siva had two sons, Subrahmanya and Ganesa. One day Lord Siva and Mother Parvathi called them and said that one who could circumambulate the universe would be suitably rewarded with a celestial fruit. Muruga set out on his peacock to go round the universe, whereas Ganesa had only a little rat for a mount. The latter paused for a while and made a complete "pradakshina" or circumambulation of His parents and claimed the fruit. When asked for an explanation the divine son retorted by saying that His entire universe was centered in His own parents. Lord Subrahmanya after his triumphant total trip round the Universe found his brother already in possession of the prize and he then came away in anger and established himself, as Dandayudhapani, as a perfect ascetic, on Siva Giri. When Edumban enquired into the cause for his being on top of the hill, the Lord slew him, but on the request of the Sage brought him back to life. Since Edumban was carrying the Kavadi at that time this practice still prevails. Usually, milk is carried on the kavadi and offered in ablution over the deity in fulfilment of vows. The older temple whose praises have been sung by the great Tamil poets is at Tiruvavinangudi, and the other is at Siva Giri. People have immense faith in the power of this deity. As in Tirupati, rigorous vows are undertaken, and pilgrims visit this temple in large numbers at all times of the year. Marriages, initiations, upanayanam, naming ceremony are all conducted here in hundreds, day after day.

Thiruverakam or Swami Malai

The deity here is exclusively worshipped by the Brahmacharis called "antanars" who have gone through strict discipline of a course of study Vedas. They were found to be extremely pious, always chanting the six sacred letters in a gentle voice. Muruga abides here as Kumara Guru, the Preceptor of the twice-born antanars, who worship Him with the incantation of the six letters: "Saravana Bhava".

Swami Malai is near Kumbakonam. There is a railway station on the main line from Madras to Tiruchirappalli. Here Lord Subrahmanya is known as Swaminatha. It is said that Subrahmanya whispered the Pranava Mantra into Lord Siva's ears. As this incident took place in this sacred place, it came to be known as Swami Malai and the deity is called Swaminatha. It is in keeping with the legend that the shrine of Subrahmanya is built on the hill and Siva stands below at the foot of the hill. There are three beautiful gopurams on the temple. The gopuram on the southern side is the biggest of all. There are three vestibules surrounding the sanctum. To reach the shrine one has to ascend 60 steps. The pilgrims offer in worship coconut, flowers, fruits, etc. at the first step and then go up and worship at the top. At the summit, there is a shrine dedicated to Vinayaka. Tradition says that once a blind man came here to pray to Lord Muruga and got back his sight when he worshipped Vinayaka, first. He has since then been known as "Netra Vinayaka". There are many smaller shrines here dedicated to Agastya, Lakshmi, Saraswathi, Visalakshi and other deities. In one corner a shrine of Lord Subrahmanya

has been seen with Devayani alone. Here the pilgrim sees the white elephant Airavata, instead of his usual peacock. The temple is an ancient one and it is said to have been here as early as the second century B.C.

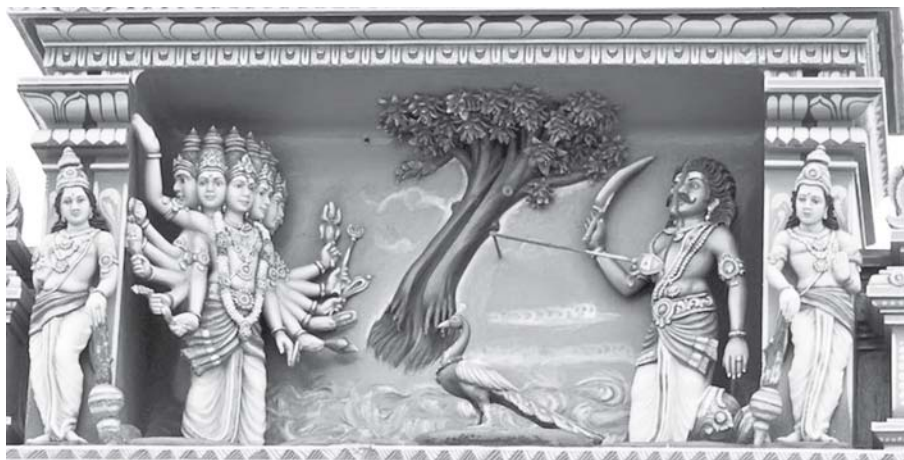
The day of Krittika is very important, and thousands of people worship the Lord on this day every month. The main festivals are Brahmotsavam and Skanda Shashti. Here also the pilgrims carry Kavadi and go in large groups.

Kunrutoradal

There was no special temple. The place of worship was called Virikkalam. It may have been the house of some devotee and the worship was intended for the welfare of the family. The shrine might have been situated in the meeting place of villages. This worship is performed by the hill tribes called Kuravas and takes the form of a dance called Veriyadal. These tribes consider Lord Muruga as their guardian deity, who is directly concerned with the welfare of the tribe. This dance of rapture, they say, is occasioned by a trance into which the devotees of Muruga are thrown. The main devotee is armed with a spear and dressed in red garments and smeared all over with red sandal-paste. The tribal dance performed to the beat of deer skin drum, the sound of which echoes through the hills.

These dances are performed in praise of God Muruga by these simple folk to ward off calamities anticipated through ill omens. Then it is called Veriyadal. When it is intended for prosperity and preservation of peace it is called Kuruvai Koothu. There

is exuberance of vigour and intense devotion in this form of worship by the unsophisticated people of the village parts. By their fervent piety untutored in Vedic forms of worship they call down the grace



of Muruga, their Lord and Patron.

Situated at a height of about 500 feet in a plateau on the Western Ghats, seven miles north west of Coimbatore amidst lush vegetation and salubrious climate, Maruthamalai Hills dedicated to Lord Muruga (Dandayudhapani) may be aptly called the-Second Palani.

The Maruthamalai Hill shrine of Muruga is classified under Kunrathoradal, one of the six main abodes of the God. The word Maruthachalapathy or Maruthamalai Andavan means Master of the hills, that abound in Marutha trees. The Lord has assumed the appellation, Maruthachalapathy after the association of the words, Marutham, Achalam and Pathy, signifying the Marutha tree, the hills and the Master, respectively.

As we approach the foothills, at a little distance from it, we are greeted by the deity Ganesa. It is significant to note that the deity is not a chiselled one but a self-created or self-manifest one (*Swayambhu*). The flight of steps causes hardly any strain; rather the climb is light and exhilarating as one goes up the neatly carved steps, gazing round the luxuriant

growth of vegetation and breathing the refreshing cool breeze wafted over the herbs on the hills. A recently laid, good motorable road up to the hill-top serves as a boon to physically-weak devotees who 'are eager to visit the temple. The shrine of Edumban is located almost in the middle of the steps. The image of the deity is carved on a huge round rock in the posture of carrying a Kavadi. On the top of the hills, Lord Muruga reigns supreme with all His splendour! The shrine is not a big one. The sanctum sanctorum and the Ardhamantapam are comparatively small. The idol made of granite is about four feet in height, facing the east with the right hand holding Dhandayudham (rod), the left hand placed on the hip and a spear (Vel) placed across. The image bears a close resemblance to the deity at Palani, and one feels as though he is worshipping the Lord over there!

The front mantapam is wide enough to accommodate a fairly large number of devotees. The presiding deity is flanked by Sivalingam and Ambika to the left and to the right respectively in the outer prakara, The Marudha Thirtham and the Pambatti Suna are holy springs on the hills,

and a dip in them is said to a cure for a number of diseases, as they contain medicinal properties. One can also come across the ancient hill tribes of this region, who have their strange, small but sturdy dwellings improvised out of sticks, roots and barks. With their curious customs and manners, they attract the attention of sociologists and anthropologists.

The most important festival associated with the presiding deity is Krittigai, celebrated every month. Thousands of devotees throng the temple on this occasion. Thanks to the pious efforts of a film producer, the whole path from foot hills to the top is well electrified.

The annual festival of Padi Viza also attracts a large number of devotees. The hoary past of the temple is traced in ancient works.

Peria Puranam lists the three neighbouring hills of Vellingiri, Nili and Maruthamalai as the very manifestations of Lord Siva, Parvathi and Muruga respectively and the three hills together as the very symbol of Somaskanda. A pilgrimage to the holy hills of Maruthamalai is an uplifting experience.

Pazhamuthir Cholai

Pazhamuthir Cholai is a tiny shrine about twenty three kilometers north-east of the city of Madurai. The *Skanda Puranam* refers to this place as being sacred to both Vishnu and Skanda. Saints Nakkirar and Arunagirinathar have composed songs about this hill as sacred to Muruga, in their immortal works *Tirumurugatru Padai* and *Tiruppugazh*; Nakkirar refers to Pazhamuthir Cholai as one of the Favourite resorts of Lord Muruga. A ghat-road leads to this

shrine surrounded by shrubs and trees. It is situated up the hill at a short distance. It is a small shrine accessible after going through almost unfrequented paths. This hill has many holy Tirthas held in great veneration by pilgrims-the Noopura Ganga, Hanumar Theertham and Garuda Theertham are also found here. Set in almost an unnoticeable place, this shrine is not visited by as many pilgrims as the other large Alagar Koil dedicated to Lord Vishnu. The sanctum has for its image the sacred lance of Lord Muruga. The very fact that Vaishnavites and Saivites gather at the same place and are even at times surrounded by the same walls would show the essential unity of all Hindu sects, each being a path distinct from the others, but all leading to the same goal.

Skanda is connected with the Krittikas, who brought him up. Skanda has, therefore, connection with the constellation Krittika. In South India the worship of Subrahmanya is particularly held auspicious in the month of Kartikai (Nov.-Dec.), and specially when the moon is located in the Krittika constellation. People all over the country collect in great numbers in the Subrahmanya temples of South India and offer their prayers or take fresh vows.

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Vadalur as a Place of Pilgrimage

OORANADIGAL

The Peripheries of the Town's Importance

VADALUR is a town in Tamilnadu in the Cuddalore Taluk of the South Arcot District. It has a population well over 5,000 and is a Town Panchayat going under the name of Parvathipuram Panchayat. It lies 8 kilometres to the east of Neyveli (of lignite mines fame) on the Vruddhachalam-Cuddalore road. It is a railway station on the Vruddhachalam-Cuddalore Branch line of the Southern Railway. It is 30 kilometres to the north-west of the celebrated pilgrimage centre, Chidambaram of Nataraja fame. It is served by frequent buses from Vruddhachalam, Cuddalore, Chidambaram and Neyveli. Vadalur is essentially an agricultural town, but it is getting rapidly industrialised. There are at present two important industrial units - The Seshasayee Insulators Ltd., and Neyveli Ceramics and Refractories Ltd. The availability of the special kind of clay needed for the manufacture of ceramic articles makes this place a very desirable one for the establishment of industries connected with that raw material.

The Centre of Its Significance

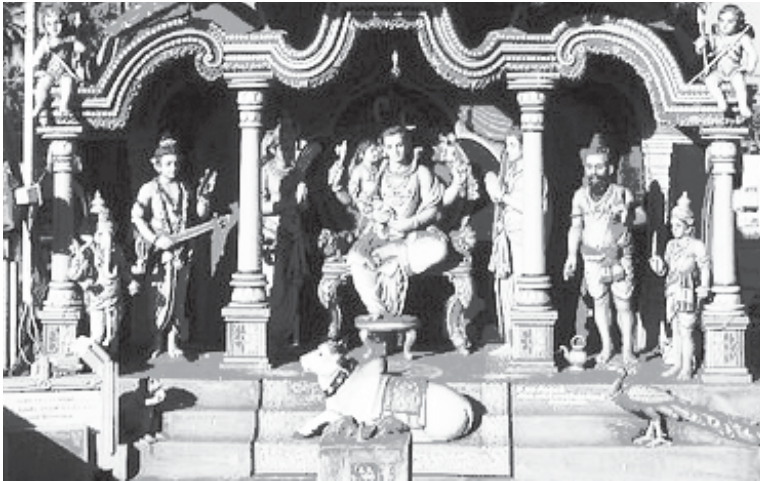
But Vadalur does not gain its importance from these factors. It gains its importance from the fact that Ramalinga Swamigal, the great mystic, poet, philosopher, scholar, saint and revolutionary reformer of the 19th

century spent the last few years of his life in this place. In his 35th year he migrated to Vadalur and lived for the next sixteen years of his life in Vadalur and its vicinity. He was born at Maruthur, a village about 11 kilometres to the south-east of Vadalur. He attained *siddhi* on the 30th of January 1874 at the village of Mettukuppam, which lies 4 kilometres to the south-west of Vadalur. The Centenary of his *siddhi* falls on the 30th of January 1974. The date of his attaining *siddhi* falls in the ten-day period of the celebrations, on the 6th February 1974 in the asterism of Paush falling on the full-moon day in the month of Paush.

Ramalinga Swami's Songs of Grace

Ramalinga Swamigal is the author of a *magnum opus*, a work spreading over 43 years of his fifty-one years of life, a poetic work of great mystic significance, a faithful record of his spiritual experience from year to year, from stage to stage of his spiritual life, a work of 5,818 stanzas. Besides this he has written many prose works of great significance. His great work is called *The Thiruarupaa-s-Poems of the holy grace of the Lord*. From this work it is possible to cull his creed which may be formulated as follows : There is but one God.

He should be worshipped in the form of Light. Petty deities are not to be worshipped. Sacrifices of living creatures



in the hundred and more years. The poor are fed three times a day. It is remarkable that this institution has no endowment of money or lands; yet its granary has been filled, day in and day out, for over a century by the people themselves, many of them being mere tenants of landlords.

should not be made in their names. Discrimination between man and man should not be made on grounds of caste and creed. Killing of creatures and eating of flesh should be eschewed. The life of every creature should be held as dear as one's own. Everything should be considered with an universal outlook. Assuaging the hunger of the poor is, indeed, the key to heaven.

Creed of Compassion

These are the keystones of his life and teachings. He called this creed, "the Universal Pure and Righteous Path (to God)". He established in 1865 an association called, "Samarasa Suddha Sanmaarga Sangam" for the propagation of this creed. His main principle in life was compassion towards all living creatures. He was the embodiment of compassion to all creatures. The "Samarasa Suddha Sanmaarga Satya Dharma Saalai" was the institution which he established in 1867 for assuaging the hunger of the poor. The fire he lit up on that day has never gone out through all these years. It has cooked food for millions of people and served them

The Light in the Sanctum of the Shrine

While the above arrangement was made to assuage the physical hunger of the people, Ramalinga Swamigal established the "Satyagnana Sabha" to assuage the spiritual hunger of the people. This Sabha - an imposing octagonal, copper roofed structure of architectural grandeur was founded on 25th January 1872. It has also seen its Century. The Godhead is worshipped here in the form of a flame of light. Again, this light lit by the Swamigal on the inauguration day a century ago has been burning unintermittently since that day in the last century. The light is in the sanctum-sanctorum behind a sheet of glass. The light and the sheet of glass are hidden behind seven screens of velvet cloth in the following colours beginning with the curtain of the farthest sheet of glass: (1)Black, (2) Blue, (3) Green, (4) Red, (5)Golden Yellow, (6) White, (7) A blend of all colours. The darsan of the Jyothi - the light - is given to the devotees on the day of the asterism of Paush each month. In months other than the month of Paush (January-February) only six curtains are

withdrawn, the curtain which is a blend of all colours and half in size not being withdrawn. In Paush, however, all the curtains are withdrawn and the Jyothi behind the sheet of glass may be seen in all its original splendour.

The Veiled Light Within

The philosophy behind the curtains and the light is that man should see the light within himself and be redeemed. The seven screens are curtains of maya, which hide the light that is God in the heart of man from his own vision. The significance of the external light and the curtains is that man should remove the veiling curtains of maya in his soul and should see the light that shines as God within him. Our Swamigal had this vision of God within himself. He established the Gnana Sabha, so that all mankind may see God within itself just as he himself did.

The "Siddhi-Valaakam"

The place where the Swamigal attained his Siddhi is called "Siddhivalaakam". This building is situated in the village of Mettukuppam which lies 4 kilometres to the south- west of Vadalur. The light which the Swamigal had worshipped in his days has never gone out and can still be seen burning brightly day and night. The devotees have taken care to see that it does not go out. To think that this has gone on for over a century fills us with amazement and pride. It is in this structure that the Swamigal entered a room on the night of the 30th January 1874 and locked

himself in forever. He did not come out of that room again. The room was opened by the Police and the Collector of the District within a few days of his entering the room and no trace of him could be found. He has disappeared from the physical vision of man.

The Sanmarga Sangam, the Satya Dharmasalai, the Satya Gnana Sabha - all three are situated in their own grounds of 80 acres. These institutions and the Siddhivalaakam at Mettukuppam are under the management of a Board of Trustees appointed by the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments (Administration) Department of the Government of Tamilnadu.

Annual Festivals

Thai-poosam on the full-moon day of the month of Thai (January-February) when the asterism of Paush is in the ascendancy. This is the largest festival of the year when more than two lakhs of devotees gather. The Anniversary of the Inauguration of the Satya Dharmasalai on the 11 th of the month of Vaikasi (first week of May). Birthday of Ramalinga Swamigal in the month of Purattasi (September-October) in the asterism of Chitrai. Flag Day - 7th of Aippasi (October- November) at Siddhivalaakam. Besides these, monthly festivals are celebrated on the asterism of Paush when about five thousand people congregate to have darshan of the Jyothi.



Kumbakonam City of Hoary Shrines

B. RADHAKRISHNA RAO

STUDDDED with innumerable lofty shrines dedicated to the various deities of Hindu pantheon, Kumbakonam is one of the most ancient sacred cities of South India. Situated at a distance of 194 miles from Madras, it is the head- quarters of the Kumbakonam Taluk in Tanjore District. Kaveri river, which is the very life of Kumbakonam, flows past down the town. Set amidst the ravishing beauty of smiling paddy fields, lush-green plantain groves and extensive betel vines, Kumbakonam has managed to preserve a great deal of its old world charm.

Legends in Plenty

In *Skanda Purana*, Kumbakonam has been compared with other 38 celebrated holy spots like Rameswaram, Tirupathi, Kasi etc. During the 7th century the Cholas exercised their sway over Kumbakonam. Among the array of shrines found at Kumbakonam, the one dedicated to Brahma is the most outstanding one, for in the whole of India the temples dedicated to Brahma are very few and rare. Of the score of temples dedicated to Vishnu, Sarangapani shrine is important both from the point of sculptural exuberance and legendary importance. This temple has been accorded the third place of importance among the Vishnu temples. There is an interesting legend attached to Sri Sarangapani Temple, otherwise called Aravamudhan Koil. Brahma and Surya once received from Vishnu as gift two fine

chariots, which passed on to the descendents. In this way the chariot of Surya came in possession of Rama, a descendent of Surya Vamsha (solar dynasty).

Rama handed over this chariot to Vibhishana while returning to Lanka. On the way Vibhishana left the chariot on the Kaveri bank to attend to his rituals. When he came back, he found to his wonder that the chariot had got firmly stuck to the place. Vibhishana prayed to the Lord, but was told that the chariot would stay there as Sage Bhrigu had asked this boon of the Lord. Further, Bhrigu, who had earlier offended the Lord but later performed severe penance, as an atonement offered the hand of his daughter in marriage to Vishnu. Vishnu readily consented to the offer and settled down at Kumbakonam.

Temple of Sarangapani

The 147 ft. high gopuram consisting of 12 storeys of Sarangapani Temple is the tallest in Kumbakonam and was renovated some three years back. Figures representing episodes from the Puranas adorn this majestic gopuram. The ceiling of the temple is well painted.

This temple is unique in that it has two entrances; one on the southern side and the other on the northern side. During "Dakshinayana" devotees are required to enter the shrine through the southern gate and hence it is also known as "Entrance of "Dakshinayana". During "Uttarayana" devotees have to enter the shrine through the northern entrance, and for that reason it is called "Entrance of Uttarayana". The legend connected with the two entrances

provided to the temple says that once two divine beings did rigorous penance to attain eternal bliss. Having been pleased with their devotion, Lord Vishnu manifested before them and directed them to go to Kumbakonam and stand at the two entrances of his shrine. They did as instructed by the Lord and had their desires fulfilled.

The floating festival of this temple is celebrated on a grand scale in the month of Masi. The Pontamaraikulam - the golden lotus tank is just outside the temple. This picturesque tank sprawling over an area of 360 ft. by 285 ft. contains a beautiful 16 pillared mantapam. There are two big cars in the temple, of which one is the third largest in the district. There is also a silver car in which Lord Sarangapani is taken out in procession on occasions like Vaikuntha Ekadasi.

Temple of Kumbheshwara

The temple of Adi Kumbheshwara after which the town is named is one of the most sacred "Saivite" shrines in the country. Here Shiva Linga is in the shape of a Kumbha (pot), beneath which stand an idol of Nataraja.

The legend about the origin of this temple which Sekkizhar has narrated in his *Periyapuranam* runs thus: Lord Brahma who got upset at the time of the deluge over the completion of the work of creation approached Shiva and sought his guidance in this regard. There upon, Shiva handed over to Brahma, the Sristhi-Bija, the seed of creation with the advice that it should be kept in a pot made of ambrosia and mud. Brahma did as advised and decorated

the pot with thread, coconut, mango leaves and Kusha grass. The pot was placed on Mount Meru, so that it may not be carried away by the powerful currents of water at the time of the deluge. But when the deluge ravaged the earth, the pot was carried by the swift currents of the water. When the tides subsided, the Kumbha (pot) reached Kumbakonam in the south. Shiva taking the form of a hunter shot an arrow at the Kumbha (pot), as a result of which the Kumbha broke into pieces. Out of the broken Kumbha emerged ambrosia, which got spilled over an area of ten miles. This Amrita stagnated at two places, one of which became the Mahamagam Tirtha and the other became the Pontamaraikulam. Lord Shiva made a Linga out of the broken pieces of the Kumbha and installed it at Kumbakonam. The temple of Adi Kumbheshwara is situated in the heart of the city. It occupies an area of 18,900 sq. ft. Its magnificent 128 ft. tall gopuram can be viewed from a very long distance.

There are four *prakarams* to the temple, in which rows of shops, houses, shrines dedicated to various deities are found. On the banks of the temple is a shrine of Vinayaka, the presiding deity of which is probably called "Ayira Karumbu Vinayaka" ("Ayiram" means thousand and "Karumbu" means sugarcane).

Nageshwara Shrine

The famous Nageshwara Temple here is constructed in such a way that the rays of the sun enter into the sanctum through the openings of the gopuram three times a year. The rays of the sun fall directly on the image of Nageshwaraswami, which is

considered as the worship of the deity by sun. The temple also contains a separate shrine for sun. A beautiful image of Nataraja is the cynosure of all eyes at this temple. It is said that the Lord danced in joy when Venugopala (Krishna) played on the flute. This temple was built by Pallavas.

Architectural Beauty of Rameswara Temple

However, the brightest gem of architectural marvel at Kumbakonam is Rameswaraswami Temple built by Nayak rulers. The temple boasts of many splendid figures of great workmanship. In the sanctum, the idols of Rama, Lakshmana and Sita along with Bharata and Satrughna doing Chamaraseva captivates the devotees. Hanuman is depicted as playing on the Veena. The walls of the temple are replete with rows and rows of resplendent figures telling the story of Ramayana. The Mahalinga Temple dedicated to Lord Shiva lies 6 miles to the north of Kumbakonam. A huge and attractive Nandi measuring 17 ft. long and 11 ft. high stands in front of the Linga. The sight of the Nandi is sure to endure forever in the minds of the visitors.

Temple of Chakrapani

In the Chakrapani temple, Vishnu, who appeared in the form of Chakra (discus) to subdue the arrogance of Surya is enshrined. The temple is situated near a cremation ground. The burning ghat is called Chakrapani Turai.

Mahamagam Tank

The Mahamagam Tank, which is famous for the Mahamagam festival celebrated once in 12 years is a fine reservoir of water surrounded by beautiful mantapams. The Mahamagam festival is analogous to the Kumbhamela of Prayag.

There is a belief that Mahamagam Tank contains a number of other Tirthas in the form of wells. Sri Appar in his prayer has referred to the presence of Godavari in the tank. In the month of Magha a colourful festival is held here during which the image of Lord Kumbeshwara is taken to the tank for Avabrithasnana (holy dip). The Mahamagam festival celebrated once in 12 years attracts lakhs of devotees from all over the country. The exact time when this festival takes place is the conjunction of the moon with Makha Nakshatra and Jupiter, on the full-moon day of Magha. The legendary belief is that on this occasion all the important Tirthas of India enter this tank. By taking bath in this tank on that day one acquires the merit of having bathed in all the sacred rivers: Ganga, Yamuna, Saraswathi, Godavari, Narmada, Sindhu, Kaveri and Krishna. On the northern bank of this tank is the shrine of Kasi Viswanatha, where the nine Kannikas and seven Holy Rivers are said to have offered worship. Kumbakonam is also the seat of Kanchi Kamakoti Peetham, presided over by His Holiness Sankaracharya of Kamakoti.



SRI RAMANASRAMAM

Abode of the Maharshi

SRI RAMANASRAMAM, the abode of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi, is a well-known spiritual centre of India attracting seekers from all parts of the world. Now, there are so many spiritual centres in India that not only the foreign tourist but even the Indian devotee may well be excused for wondering which one to visit. However, it is not simply a question of duplication; each one has its own specific character, so that while one meets the need of one person, another provides a haven to someone else.

Not for Transient Benefits

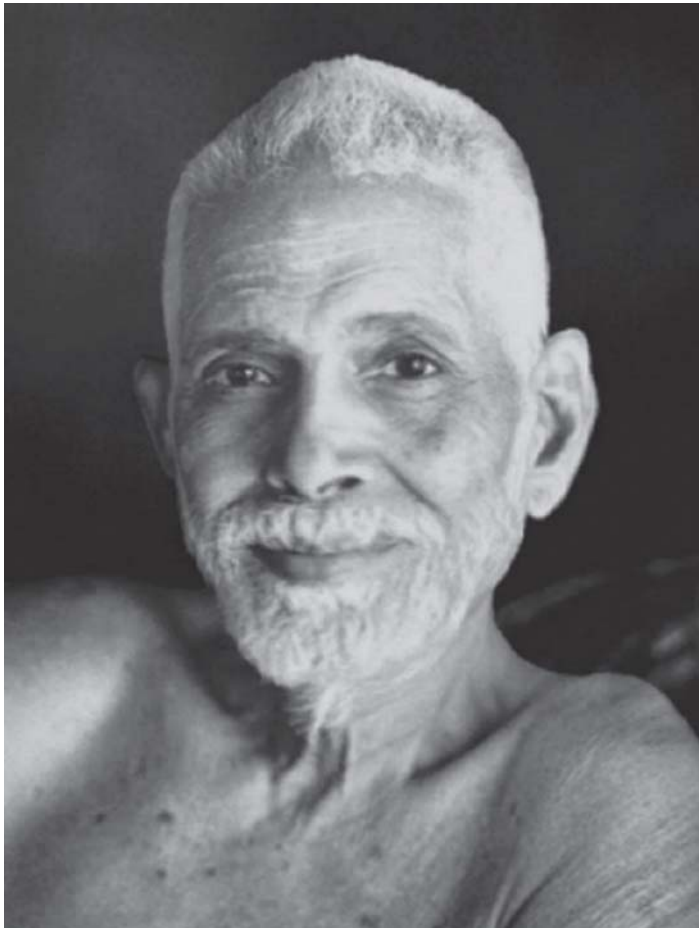
There are places where people go to pray for a son or a job, to win a lawsuit or get through an examination or obtain release from sickness or misfortune. There are also places where people go in the hope of developing supernatural powers, obtaining visions of the deity, reading men's thoughts, curing sickness and for forth. Sri Ramana Maharshi did not encourage such aspirations. It is not to say that no such prayers are ever answered at Srii Ramanasramam. It should, however, be emphasised that the Maharshi did not approve of such motives in those who came to him. Rather be tried to awaken in them the realisation that they were not the suffering body but the eternally blissful Self

and thereby to give them serenity even in misfortune.

All this implies that Ramanasramam is not a place visited by large crowds in search of transient gains. Rather, it is for the serious aspirant, who has understood that Liberation is the supreme goal and who seeks the grace and support of the Master to guide him on his way. *The Beacon of Tiruvannamalai*, Arunachala or Tiruvannamalai, where Ramanasramam is situated, is a medium-sized South Indian town, 120 miles south- west of Madras. There is no very convenient railway connection but there are good roads, and the journey by bus takes less than five hours. The prefix 'Tiru' means 'blessed' or 'auspicious', "Malai" means 'mountain' and 'Anna' implies 'supreme', so that the name signifies 'The auspicious, supreme mountain'. It is an ancient town with a large and splendid temple. There are certain yearly festivals, when it is crowded with pilgrims from all over South India. Especially is this so at Karthigai Deepam, falling usually in November. On this occasion a beacon of clarified butter contributed by devotees and pilgrims is lit at sunset on the summit of the mountain and burns the whole night, often indeed for one or two following days, too.

Revival of a Forgotten Path

Although associated with the most direct and central spiritual path, Tiruvannamalai



is far from being the most famous of India's holy places, perhaps because of the very fact that it is associated with this path. For the most direct path can never be the most popular. It is more austere than some other paths and accessible rather for the intrepid few than for the many. Indeed, the method of Self Enquiry, which Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi exemplified and advocated, had almost gone out of use in recent centuries. More emotional methods suited the times better. It was the Maharshi who brought it back into use and made it accessible to modern men through his grace and guidance. He changed it in doing so,

making it no longer a path for the silent recluse but one to be followed by householders and business or professional men living an outwardly earthly, modern life. By restoring the direct path he restored Tiruvannamalai also to its ancient eminence. It is a place now where those who seek will find. The Maharshi attained Self Realisation through a spontaneous act of Self Enquiry, while still a lad of seventeen. He left home and set out as a Sadhu for Tiruvannamalai and he spent the rest of his life there. He later wrote hymns speaking of the mountain itself as a divine manifestation. At the time of his Maha Nirvana, a bright star was actually seen travelling slowly across the sky and sinking into the peak of the holy mountain. Since then, Visitors here have felt even more than before the

mystery and spiritual power of Arunachala-Ramana.

The Story of the Maharshi's Advent

In Tiruvannamalai the Maharshi lived in many places on the Hill. When he and his followers were at Skandasramam his mother renounced the world and joined them. There she began to cook for the little group, whereas previously they had taken only what was given in charity by the pious, some of them daily going into town to beg.

The Mother died in 1922, attaining Liberation at the moment of death, through

persistent effort, fortified by concentrated grace of the Maharshi. As tradition demands in the case of a Liberated Being, the body was not cremated, but buried. No burial is allowed on the sacred mountain, so she was buried at its foot, at the southernmost point, where a cemetery already existed. It was less than half an hour's walk from Skandasramam and the Maharshi used to come there daily. Then one day he stayed on. It was here that SRI RAMANASRAMAM arose.

The Meditation Hall with Ramana's Presence

The hub of the Asramam is of course the old meditation hall where devotees sat with the Maharshi. There was a couch there where he sat in the day time and slept at night. He never left the Asramam except for his daily walk on the mountain, morning and evening. Devotees used to sit before him on the floor, men at one side of the hall, women at the other. People sat in meditation there while the Maharshi watched over them, guiding them in silence far more powerful than words. There was no rigidity about it, no rule that everyone should meditate. Some told him their personal troubles or tragedies, and his very gaze brought them consolation. New-comers who had not yet understood his teachings asked doctrinal questions, which he would answer in detail. Some simply sat and gazed, feasting their eyes upon him. There was an informal attitude, as of a large family.

After the Maha Nirvana

All this suddenly changed in 1950, when the Maharshi attained Maha Nirvana. It seemed for a while that the Asramam might come to an end or survive only as a relic. Indeed, never had the atmosphere been more vibrant with the Maharshi's presence. Such Grace was there that those who stayed could not even feel sad. There was nothing to grieve about, no loss, no privation. More and more people felt this. Devotees who had left came back. The flow of visitors started again. It was recalled that the Maharshi had given many indications of his continued presence. In approving a Will that was drawn up he stated that this Asramam was to remain a Spiritual Centre.

The Path and the Guru

The Maharshi taught the path of Self Enquiry - 'Who am I?' This is not investigating the mind, conscious or sub-conscious, but seeking the Self underlying the mind. Therefore he said: "There can be no answer to the question; whatever answer the mind gives must be wrong". The answer comes as an awakening of pure consciousness, a current of awareness in the heart. Maharshi often said: "There are two ways; ask yourself 'Who am I?' or submit".

A visitor once asked whether the contact with the Guru would continue after the dissolution of his physical body, and he replied : "The Guru is not the physical form, so contact will remain even after his physical form vanishes." If it be asked how he can guide individuals or perform any

function after having become One with the Absolute, the answer is: in the first place he has not become one with the Absolute but simply realised his pre-existing and eternal Oneness.

In the second place, he had already realised this Oneness while wearing the body and was universal, then as he is now. He himself told us that death makes no difference to the *Jnani*. The formless path which the Maharshi prescribed compensates for the modern difficulty in finding adequate guidance within the forms of any religion; similarly, the invisible Guru compensates for the modern difficulty in finding a fully potent living Guru on earth.

Universal in Appeal

Another result of the formless essential nature of the Maharshi's path is the large proportion of foreigners both among the visitors and the resident devotees. There is no need to be a Hindu to follow it. Anyone, whatever religion he professes, whether he professes any formal religion or not, can practise Self Enquiry or can worship and submit. Therefore, the Maharshi never expected any of his devotees to change from one religion to another. Christians, Muslims, Jews, Buddhists and Parsis came to him, as well as Hindus. Some continued to practise the forms of their religions, others not; it was up to them.

The Uniqueness of the Shrine and the Centre

To come to the special significance of Tiruvannamalai or Arunachala as a spiritual centre again: It is not by accident that

the Maharshi made it his home. For Arunachala is said in the puranas to be the heart of the universe and spiritually it signifies the most central path, Self Enquiry, leading to the Heart, the Self.

The presence of the Maharshi and his potent grace are felt by an increasing number of devotees. Many or most of those who come, both from India and abroad, are new people, who never saw the Maharshi in his lifetime but have been drawn to him in various ways since then. The conclusion, then, is that if you are a ritualist or strict formalist, if you crave material boons, if you seek visions or powers, there are other places better suited to you than Sri Ramanasramam. But if you have understood the ultimate spiritual goal of Liberation and seek Grace and Guidance on the great path, you will find it at Sri Ramanasramam. An important characteristic of Sri Ramanasramam is that there is a minimum of ritual and organisation. People go and sit silent in meditation before the Maharshi's shrine or in the hall where he sat for so many years with his devotees. They walk round Sacred Arunachala Hill or sit in their rooms. They visit or talk. They arrange to take their meals at the Asramam or prepare their own food, as they choose. There is scarcely any other discipline. The Vedas are chanted in front of the shrine, morning and evening, as they used to be in the Maharshi's presence in his life-time, but even for this the attendance is not compulsory.

- From Arthur Osborne's Writings



Srirangam-The Abode of Lord Ranganatha

B. RADHAKRISHNA RAO

Nature Smiles on Srirangam

Endowed with abundant natural beauty, the island of Srirangam is situated between the two tributaries of the Kaveri river, three miles to the north of Tiruchirapalli. The celebrated shrine of Sri Ranganatha, foremost in its sanctity and importance among all the Vaishnavite shrines of the South, stands majestically in the heart of this picturesque island. This shrine of great repute and antiquity attracts thousands of devotees drawn from the various parts of the country throughout the year. What Chidambaram is to the Saivites, Srirangam is to the Vaishnavites.

The Shrine of Ranganatha

The huge temple dedicated to Lord Ranganatha here is surrounded by seven enclosures (Saptaprakara) inside which the major portion of this flourishing town is located. The outermost enclosure measures more than 1000 yards by 800 yards. The fourth enclosure, measuring 412 yards by



283, contains the famous thousand-pillared mantapam, from where the temple precincts begin. In the three outermost enclosures, there are shops and houses. The great annual festival of Vaikuntha Ekadasi is celebrated in the thousand-pillared mantapam.

Known as 'Villai' Gopuram, the one facing east is richly decorated with splendid sculptural figures. The Vimana of the temple constructed in the shape of "Om-kara" is a fascinating feature. The idol of Ranganatha, the presiding deity of the place, depicts the Lord lying recumbent

on the serpentine couch. Near his feet are the idols of his consorts. Bhudevi and Neela Devi. The idol of Ranganatha is believed to have been worshipped by Sri Rama himself.

Legendary Origins

Legend has it that Sri Ranganatha as installed at Srirangam was worshipped in heaven by Brahma. The great king Ikshvaku brought this idol to Ayodhya and worshipped it there. Hence, Ranganatha became the titular deity of Ikshvaku dynasty. Sri Rama, the noble scion of Ikshvaku lineage, inherited it. After he returned from Lanka and was crowned, Vibhishana who came along with him wanted to go back to Lanka. Sri Rama gave Vibhishana this idol of Ranganatha, with the warning that the idol should not be placed on the ground under any circumstances. As Vibhishana failed to carry out the warning of Sri Rama and placed the image at Srirangam, it got stuck up there. Since then, tradition says, Ranganatha has stayed at Srirangam. The idols of Nathamuni, Yamunacharya and Ramanujacharya are also found inside the sanctum. On the wall of the temple are engraved stirring events from the Ramayana, Mahabharata and the Puranas. The collection of jewels owned by this temple is unique and includes some fine pieces, notable for their craftsmanship.

Association with Saints

Srirangam is associated with some of the greatest Vaishnavite Saints like Ramanuja, Alavandar, Andal, Vedanta Desika, etc. All of them have glorified the sanctity of

Srirangam through their exquisite compositions of great poetic excellence. Tradition associates the "Kamba Mandapam" in front of the sanctum with the great Tamil Poet Kamban. It is here that he released his Ramayana to the masses.

The temple was generously patronised by almost all the Hindu ruling dynasties of South India. The idol of Ranganatha escaped the ire of the Muslim Commander, Malik Kafur, who invaded the South, for the image had been removed to Tirupathi by the devotees. The sanctity of Srirangam is enhanced by the Kaveri and its tributary, the Coleroon; these two encircle the sacred place of Sri Rangam, which thus shines forth as a sacred island. A bath here is considered highly beneficial, when the Sun and Jupiter are in Libra.

Vaikuntha Ekadasi according to one of the Legends

The main festival of Srirangam is Vaikuntha Ekadasi celebrated every year during the month of December-January, when pilgrims from all parts of the country throng in lakhs.

The idol of Ranganatha is brought out of the sanctum through a gateway known as "Paramapada Vasal", (The Gateway to Vaikuntha) and taken out in a colourful procession. The legend about the origin of the celebration of Vaikuntha Ekadasi incorporated in Padma Purana is as follows: Once Vishnu, disgusted with the attack of the tyrant Mura, ran to Badrinath and slept in a small cave called "Simhavati". He asked Yogamaya to guard the entrance of the cave. Mura, who was following Vishnu

came to the entrance of the cave. Then Yogamaya created Ekadasi Devi, who instantly destroyed Mura. Being pleased with Ekadasi Devi, Vishnu conferred on her the ability to destroy the sins of those who observed the Ekadasi.

The Jambukeshwar Shrine

About a mile to the east of the Ranganatha Temple is a remarkable shrine dedicated to Lord Shiva. Surpassing the Ranganatha Temple in its architectural grandeur, the Jambukeshwar Temple is the abode of one of the five elemental Lingas. The Linga is surrounded on all sides by water and is installed under a Jambu tree.



Ananthasayanam

B. RADHAKRISHNA RAO

TRIVANDRUM, the Capital of Kerala, situated to the extreme south of the Indian Peninsula, is one of the seven great Pilgrim Centres of Parasurama Kshetra, and is famous for its hoary shrine of Anantha Padmanabha. The imposing temple of Anantha Padmanabha here with its soaring lofty towers visible from miles afar, is a great landmark of Trivandrum. The name "Trivandrum" is a distorted form of "Thiru-Ananthapuram", meaning the abode of Anantha - the sacred snake-couch of Vishnu.

Ananthasayanam is also counted among the 108 Tirupathis venerated by Sri Vaishnavas. Many great Vaishnavite-apostles, like Ramanujacharya and Yamunacharya, are stated to have visited the temple and composed many verses in eulogy of Anantha Padmanabha Swami - the presiding deity of Trivandrum. The venerable sage Parasurama is believed to have built the temple of Anantha Padmanabha. In "Skanda Purana", Trivandrum is ranked with other

30 important holy places like Rameswaram, Gokarna, Kumbakonam, etc. The "Padmapurana" refers to the temple of Ananthasayana, where the Lord Vishnu is in his "Yoganidra", absorbed in mystic contemplation. Padmapurana also glorifies Trivandrum by comparing it with other renowned "Vishnu Tirthas", like Tirupathi and Mathura.

The legend about the origin of the temple says that the place, where to-day stands the shrine of Anantha Padmanabha Swami, was covered with dense forest called "Ananthavanam". Near Ananthavanam there lived a lowly couple, who were eking out their livelihood by ploughing the field. One day while working in the field, the wife of this man came across a child of divine beauty. She immediately took the child to her custody, and fed it from her breast. Afterwards she placed the child under the shade of a tree, where to her consternation, she found a Cobra protecting the child from the fury of the mid-day sun. Realising that the child is no other than the incarnation of Vishnu, the couple offered milk and gruel to the child in a coconut shell. Coming to know of this incident, the pious ruler of Travancore rushed to the spot, and had a temple built at this place. Another version regarding the origin of the temple says that here a naughty child used to disturb Sri Bilwamangala Swami from his pooja to Saligrama. One day, in a fit of rage, Bilwamangala slapped the child, and the child disappeared. When Bilwamangala came to know that the child was none other than Vishnu, he repented and went in search of the Lord. After an arduous search, Bilwamangala reached the holiest

Ananthavanam, where he found Vishnu in his colossal form lying on the thousand hooded snake under a tree. It is said that the figure of Vishnu was about 3 miles long. At the request of Bilwamangala the Lord shrunk himself into a smaller form. It is further stated that a wooden image of Vishnu was prepared from a fallen tree at Ananthavanam and was then enshrined in a temple.

The temple of Anantha Padmanabha belongs to the last phase of Dravidian style. The entrance Gopuram is a fine specimen of Dravidian style with a curious pagoda effect at its top. This seven storied Gopuram, made entirely of wood is lavishly embellished with exuberant sculptural work. The Gopuram of the temple is somewhat squattish and tails fully to convey the magnificent dignity of the other well-known Gopurams of the Tamilnadu temples.

In the main courtyard, there stands an attractive Mantapam called "Kulashekara Mantapam", which is supported by as many as 365 pillars abounding in intricate floral designs. The corridor of the temple is also replete with sculptural works of remarkable grandeur. A Dwajastambha, originally made of teak-wood and subsequently enveloped in golden plates by the Rulers of Travancore, is located in front of the sanctum. The Navarathri Mantapam of the temple is an exquisite lithic translation of traditional wooden structure of Kerala.

The shrine of Ananthasayanam resembles a typical Nepali temple in many respects. The location of the sanctum, the execution as well as the style of the Mantapam bear testimony to the imprints of Nepali style. The colossal image of the presiding deity

depicts the Lord reclining on serpent couch. The sanctum, where the majestic and colossal Anantha Padmanabha Swami reclining on the thousand-hooded Adishesha is enshrined, is divided into three

other deities like Sridevi, Bhudevi, Niladevi and lesser divinities and sages. There are a number of cells in the temple wherein various other deities, like Narasimha, Subrahmanya, Ganapathy are enshrined.



According to tradition the temple is at least

3000 years old. It is said that 4000 masons, 6000 carpenters and 1000 elephants toiled with devotion to erect this magnificent temple.

Every day in the afternoon, rice is being offered to the Lord in a golden bowl shaped like a coconut shell in commemoration of the offering of the food to Lord in a coconut shell by the lowly couple. Poojas are offered to Lord three times a day. One can enter the temple wearing only Dhoties, and no shirts or upper covering.

The most important festival celebrated here is

compartments. One can have a full view of the Lord only by doing obeisance at all the three compartments into which the sanctum is divided. In the first compartment is seen the massive hood of Adishesha and the tranquil face of the Lord, while in the middle compartment is seen the body of the Lord with his navel from which emanates a lotus containing Brahma, the four- faced creator of the worlds. The third compartment gives a view of the Lord's redeeming and sanctifying feet. The Presiding Deity is flanked on all sides by

"Kodiyetram" falling in the month of Meenam (March-April). On the ninth day of the festival the Maharaja takes part in a huge procession. He goes for a hunt and in a mock-hunt he shoots arrows at three coconuts.

The Maharajas of Travancore have been ruling their territory as Padmanabhadasa - the servant of the Lord Padmanabha. This title is their distinctive royal insignia.



Sivagiri

P. PARAMESWARAN

SIVAGIRI is a pilgrim centre, where the ancient and the modern, the spiritual and the material, stand happily wed-locked.

Hallowed by Associations

'Sivagiri' has the unique distinction of being a pilgrim centre, whose history is not shrouded in vague mythology or age-old legends. It is one of the most recent centres of pilgrimage, owing its sanctity and appeal to the great Saint and religious reformer of Kerala, Sri Narayana Guru (1854-1928). Devotees and disciples of the Guru began to throng to this beautiful spot, hallowed by his long associations, from the 1st of January, 1928. Even though 'Sivagiri' as a pilgrim centre is of recent origin, it lies in close proximity to another holy place of country-wide fame Varkala Janardhanam. Janardhanam is renowned as Dakshina Kasi, and attracts a large number of pilgrims from all over the country.

It is referred to, even in very ancient Puranas, as a highly sanctified pilgrim centre. The proximity of both these, makes them almost inseparable, and pilgrims coming from far and near have the advantage of offering their worship in both the places. **Sri Narayana Guru and SNDP Yogam**, Sivagiri lies very near Varkala railway station, situated at a distance of over 20 miles at the Sarada Mandir from Trivandrum, mid-way between Trivandrum and Quilon.

As was stated earlier, the importance of 'Sivagiri is solely due to its association with Sri Narayana Guru, who was born in the Ezhava Community, a very important and influential Caste among the Hindus of Kerala, who were treated by the Savarna Hindus as untouchables - even unapproachable - for a long time, and whom the great Guru emancipated from the miserable condition, and led forward to a position of great eminence in the socio-political as well as economic life of Kerala. He, along with his chief followers like Maha Kavi Kumaran Asan, who is also one of the foremost poets of Kerala and Dr. Palpu, both of whom drew inspiration from Swami Vivekananda as well, organised the Ezhava community under the name, 'Sanatana Dharma Paripalana Yogam'. The Yogam played a vital part, in purging the society of many a social evil and superstition and moulded it into a modern enlightened community.

The Guru came to Varkala, for the first time in the year 1924, during the course of his incessant wanderings. The place charmed him. He found it pre-eminently suited to be his spiritual head-quarters. His world famous disciple, Sri Nataraja Guru, describes the place in the following words.

Varkala : Aspects of Sublime Beauty

Varkala was not a populous place. The blackened rocks that cut into the greenness of the slopping hills, looked hard

and unyielding. The seekers after ease and pleasure had, therefore, deserted this place and lived nearer the sea-coast where the abundance of fish, moisture and fertility favoured the proliferation of human life. Away from the competition and strife of daily life the Guru sat on the hill top, removed from the highways of business. To him the neglected spot had its aspects of sublime beauty. Hidden behind the apparently unchanging fixity of the rocks the meditative eyes of the Guru could see



the principle of change and becoming. The ancient breezes that rose far away on the ocean's breast, greeted him where he sat. The star-lit nights were rich with distant murmur of the waves.

At the foot of the barren rocks, hidden amongst the growth of fern, crystal springs perennially formed themselves into gurgling streams. The virgin beauty of the spot could not be discovered by the vulgar eyes of hate or greed. To the Guru, as he himself used to say, it was the 'Punya Bhoomi' (Holy Land), where the signs of human pettiness and greed were not in evidence.

Temples and Schools

Naturally drawn to this godly place of rare beauty, the Guru made this his abode and centre of activity. He called it 'Sivagiri' the mountain of Lord Siva. At first, he erected a Siva temple at that place, and later still, a most beautiful shrine of "Sarada" was consecrated. Besides this, the Guru also started two schools, one with English and another with Sanskrit as medium at Sivagiri. These facts go to show unmistakably the great importance attached by the Guru to Sivagiri, which he considered as the centre of his spiritual radiation.

It was at this sacred spot of enviable natural scenery that both Maha-Kavi Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi came to pay their respects to Sri Narayana Guru the years 1923 and 1925 respectively.

Perennial Springs

So, it was but natural that the disciples of the Guru thronged to this place in large numbers. The high medicinal quality of the crystal clear water perennially rushing out from the numerous springs on the sides of the hills lent it an additional attraction. It had already become an unofficial pilgrim centre, long before it was declared as such by the Guru. It was at the express desire of some of his prominent devotees that the Guru prescribed and laid down in detail the mode as well as the aim and objects of the pilgrimage to this place. From 1928 January onwards, every year, it began to

attract ever bigger crowds from all over Kerala and even from outside.

The Guru was personally present on the occasion of the first pilgrimage, but later in the same year he entered into Maha Samadhi. From that time onwards, the attraction of Sivagiri began to be more deeply felt.

Purity: Pancha Suddhi

Pilgrims, who came to Sivagiri wear yellow garments, and sport yellow flags and also yellow banners on which are depicted the Guru's immortal teachings. The Guru, in his own native, simple style, had indicated to his devotees that the yellow colour was traditionally sacred, since it was associated with the lives of Bhagavan Krishna and Buddha and that it would be appropriate to the occasion. He prescribed January 1st, which falls on 16th or 17th of the Malayalam month, Dhanu, as the date on which the pilgrims should converge on Sivagiri. It broadly coincides with the famous Sabari Mala pilgrim season. It is now one of the most colourful festivals of Kerala.

Compared to the discipline usually associated with other pilgrimages, Sivagiri pilgrims observe ten days of "Vrata" and follow the "Pancha Shuddhi" of Sri Buddha - Purity of body, food, mind, speech and action, because other long and hard disciplines are difficult to be observed by masses of men. He was extremely particular that the occasion should not be one of extravagance or ostentation. Cleanliness and frugality are to be the key-note for the pilgrimage. Pilgrims, the Guru

instructed, should chant devotional songs on their way.

Sense of Purpose

"There should be definite aims before the pilgrims", the Guru insisted, and enumerated eight of them as follows: Education, cleanliness, devotion to God, organisation, agriculture, trade, crafts and technical training. The occasion should be made use



of for holding classes on these topics. Persons well-versed in these subjects should be invited to give talks, and people should be trained to listen to them in a disciplined and attentive manner. They should be persuaded to put into practice whatever they are told. We should succeed in this. Then, the country and the people will prosper. This must be the main objective before, Sivagiri pilgrimage.

Spiritual Blended with Material

These instructions from the Guru show that he wanted to combine spiritual with material benefit. He strongly cautioned against huge masses of people, aimlessly wandering, squandering valuable money, which could be better utilised for really useful purposes; he wanted Sivagiri pilgrimage to be an occasion for positive and constructive training of men. While inculcating piety and devotion to God, it should also help them to become enlightened and responsible members of the society.

Pilgrimage to Sivagiri was simultaneously to be a pilgrimage for a better and a more prosperous life. True to the Guru's teaching, Sivagiri pilgrimages have ever since been memorable occasions for both spiritual and material upliftment. Lectures on religious and secular subjects, educative exhibitions and other useful items are inseparable parts of the pilgrimage.

The one thing that will stand out more prominently than anything else before a person who goes to Sivagiri, whether during normal days or during the pilgrimage seasons, is the remarkable cleanliness which is so evident there. Everyone of the large number of temples consecrated by the Guru, is a model for cleanliness, but the 'Sarada Mandir' at Sivagiri is the one par excellence. It is really the embodiment of the Guru's ideas of how a modern place of worship ought to be.

Its grandeur must be seen to be believed.



Pilgrimage to Sabari Mala

B. RADHAKRISHNA RAO

As the season for the pilgrimage to Sabari Mala commences, the atmosphere in the whole of Kerala reverberates with the shouts of "Swamiyae-Saranam-Ayyappa". One can see the myriads of devotees of Lord Ayyappa, clad in black garments and their forehead besmeared- with sacred ash, chanting this hymn in obeisance to Lord Ayyappa in every nook and corner of Kerala during December and January. Known as "Ayyappas", the most cherished desire of these pilgrims is to get to Sabari Mala, the highly venerated shrine of the season.

The most striking feature of the shrine situated at Sabari Mala is that it is kept open only during December and January. Girls and young women are strictly prohibited from undertaking a pilgrimage to Sabari Mala. The three important festivals celebrated at Sabari Mala are "Mandala Pooja", "Makara Vilakku " and "Vishu".

That more than two million pilgrims thronged this hill shrine during last year (1972-1973) is an unmistakable pointer to the phenomenal popularity registered by the "Ayyappa Cult" during the last decade. Pilgrims come to Sabari Mala not only from the various parts of India but also from far away continents like America and Australia.

Holy Sabari Malai

The shrine dedicated to Ayyappa, otherwise known as "Dharma Shastha", the Lord of

Verities, is set amidst the exhilarating scenery of Sabari Hills spread over Central Kerala. Situated at a distance of 40 miles from Kottayam, the Sabari Hills abound in thick jungles infested with ferocious beasts.

The temple is built on top of a mound about 20 feet in height and is spread over an area of nearly half an acre. This most important centre of Hindu pilgrimage in Kerala has been from ancient times a great source of inspiration and focus of faith for innumerable devotees of Lord Ayyappa.

How does the place come to be called Sabari Mala? There is a legend in this regard. In the days of yore, the great Sage Matanga had his Ashram here. A tribal woman by name Sabari was cleaning the Ashram every day without his knowing it. One day Matanga saw Sabari cleaning his Ashram. Being pleased with her service, he allowed her to live in a hut situated near his Ashram. Further, he prophesied that Lord Rama

would grant "Darsana" to her in her last days. Accordingly, Rama came to the place of Sabari and blessed her. Since Sabari attained salvation here the hill came to be called Sabari Mala ("Mala" in Malayalam meaning "hill").

Advent of Ayyappa

Sri Ayyappa is considered to be the son of Hari-Hara. The mythological anecdote about the manifestation of Ayyappa says: Hari,

Lord Vishnu, assumed the form of a Mohini (enchantress) at the time of the distribution of the nectar that was drawn from the churning of the milky ocean. The Divine Mohini distributed all the nectar to the Gods, depriving the demons of a share, as they stood stupefied by the superficial feminine charms of her form.

Hara, Lord Shiva, witnessing the bewitching form of Mohini, yielded to its fascinations. The offspring of his union with Mohini was a male child of celestial charm. Tying a golden bell round the child's neck, Shiva

left the child to the care of the Gods in the thick of the forest.

At this juncture, Rajasekhara, the Ruler of Pandalam, in the heart of Kerala, happened to pass by. The issueless King was overjoyed to come across a child of divine beauty. He took the child to the palace and named the child "Manikantha" on account of its having a bell round the neck.

Manikantha blossomed into a handsome and talented youth. Meanwhile, the queen also gave birth to a male child. When the time came to appoint an heir-apparent to the throne, the King decided to crown Manikantha and asked his Diwan to make necessary arrangements for the coronation. The Queen, who wanted her own son to be crowned was greatly upset, when she came to know that Manikantha was chosen for coronation.

The jealous Queen in league with the Diwan hatched a conspiracy to get rid of



Manikantha. One day the Queen feigned illness and moaned as if in great pain of physical excruciation.

The royal physician (as instructed by the Diwan) prescribed a dose of leopard's milk as the remedy for the Queen's illness. But who was to secure the leopard's milk? Manikantha came forward and promised to bring a cupful of leopard's milk. While Manikantha departed to the forest on his mission, the Queen was overjoyed with the thought that he would never return. While wending his way through the forest, Manikantha came across a fierce-looking demoness, Mahishi (she-buffalo). In a bloody battle that ensued, Manikantha slew her and thus fulfilled the purpose of his incarnation.

To the consternation of all, Manikantha returned before long to the Kingdom riding on a tiger followed by a procession of leopards. Everyone, including the Queen, realised that Manikantha was none other than the supremely divine being. The Queen apologised and begged for pardon. Manikantha then declared that the object of his incarnation had been achieved. After advising the King to erect a shrine for him and also instructing him on the nature of the austerities to be performed by devotees before undertaking a pilgrimage to the shrine, he disappeared. Accordingly the King built a temple in which the idol of Ayyappa was enshrined by Parasurama (the Rama of the battle axe) on the auspicious day of Makara Sankramana. Thus this sacred spot and shrine became the centre of Hari Hara devotion.

The Austerities

The pilgrimage to Sabari Mala is uniquely exalting in many ways, the most outstanding aspect of it being its levelling up or equalising effect. A set of austerities usually described as "Vrata" has to be strictly observed for a period of 41 days preceding the day of pilgrimage by those who intend to visit Sabari Mala. The observance of the "Vrata" commences from the first day of the Malayalam month, Vrischika, with the wearing of rosary in the precincts of a temple. This practice of wearing rosary called "Maaladharana" betokens the pilgrim's determination or resolve to adhere strictly to vows prescribed.

From then onwards he should refrain from indulging in the pleasures of the senses and keep himself away from sensual thoughts. As Lord Ayyappa is considered to be a bachelor at Sabari Mala, the pilgrim should observe celibacy. He should dress himself in black or blue garments, grow a beard and keep his hair untrimmed. This creates a feeling of oneness among the pilgrims, besides marking them off as a class by themselves for their distinctive austerity.

The pilgrim, who has adopted the "Vrata," may partake only simple and pure food and ought to abstain from taking flesh and intoxicating drinks. His life should be regulated by ablutions and prayers at dawn and dusk. He should get up early in the morning and visit a temple. In short, all his activities should be attuned to a divine purpose and bent towards acquiring divine grace.

Whenever two such pilgrims meet, they greet each other with "Swamiyae Sharanam" (Oh Lord Ayyappa, prostrations to thee). On one of the 41 days of the period of austerities the "Ayyappa Vilakku" is performed accompanied by colourful rituals and religious processions. The austerities observed by the pilgrims are symbolic of self-surrender and renunciation required for the great journey of the soul to the "Supreme Being."

The Arduous Trek

The most important of the preliminaries for this unique pilgrimage is the preparation of "Iru Mudi Kattu" (bundle with two compartments). It may be recalled here that Lord Ayyappa carried with him a similar bundle at the time of his forest mission when he undertook to fetch leopard's milk. The front portion of the bundle is filled with the offerings to the Lord, which include a ghee-filled coconut. The hind portion contains the personal requisites like eatables required during the pilgrimage. The filling up and tying of Iru Mudi is done at a special ceremony called "Kettunera".

The esoteric significance of "Irumudi" is that it symbolises the victory of the spirit over matter. While the front part of this bundle represents the Jiva, the rear portion stands for the man's "Prarabdha Karma" and his worldly desires.

By the time the pilgrims reach the shrine of Ayyappa, the rear portion of the bundle becomes emptied. This is symbolic of Prarabdha Karma becoming worked off or exhausted. Now what remains with the pilgrims is the ghee-filled coconut along with other offerings.

While the pouring of ghee over the idol of Ayyappa symbolises the merger of the individual soul with the universal soul, the throwing of the coconut into the fire symbolises the death of the material body. Though there are a number of routes leading to Sabari Mala, the one via Erumeli, which is the longest and the most arduous, is however preferred by the pilgrims, for it is believed that the Lord trekked this path when he went in search of leopard's milk. Pilgrims reach Erimali by bus or car and from here they have to walk bare-foot for a distance of 45 miles.

The long, hazardous trek from Erumeli takes the pilgrims across the formidable mountain ranges and through dense jungles infested with wild animals, before they enter this holiest of holy hill shrine. The journey is thrilling and adventurous all through.

The pilgrims have to cross huge mountains, namely Azutha, Kari Mala and Neeli Mala; on their way. For the most part the track is rugged and tortuous; big boulders, wild creepers and roots of the giant trees encumber it at a number of points.

This strenuous trek through mountains and forests is an adventure of no mean order. The cacophonous cries of the wild beasts freely roaming in the jungles of Sabari hills send a chill down one's spine. Elephants move about here in herds and the pilgrim's course crosses their trails from time to time. The ascent of the mountain ranges is tedious and dangerous, the descent is even more perilous; a single faltering step can lead to disaster. The tedium of the journey vanishes in no time as one communes here with splendid natural beauty. Looking around, one beholds here a magnificent

panorama of verdant valleys, lofty mountain peaks and deep gorges.

Leaving behind the Azutha mountain the pilgrims start their ascent of Kari Mala which literally means "the abode of elephants". Right on top of this mountain is a water spring, which makes the place suitable for a day's camp.

The most remarkable feature of the "Ayyappa Cult" is that a feeling of fraternity manifests itself spontaneously among the pilgrims at the camping sites. It is really a fascinating sight to see the pilgrims belonging to various castes and social strata's, helping one another in arranging the camps and preparing food, chanting all the while hymns in praise of Lord Ayyappa.

After a strenuous descent of Karimala, the pilgrims reach the long awaited Pampa, the banks of which abound in sceneries of heavenly beauty. The very sight of this sacred river thrills them and makes them forget their fatigue. A dip in the limpid waters of Pampa banishes their fatigue and instantly revivifies their flagged spirits.

The banks of Pampa are considered sacred, as it was here that Ayyappa manifested himself as Manikantha. Dawn and sunset here are marvellous phenomena, a sight fit for the gods to see. The camp on the banks of this river constitutes the most enjoyable part of the journey. Under the canopy of star studded night sky, pilgrims sleep soundly without any fear whatsoever of the blood-thirsty beasts that may be lurking in the darkness. The Lord's name becomes their sole protective armour. After climbing the stupendous Neelimala, in comparison with the other two, Azutha and Karimala, can rightly be called the emperor

of mountains, pilgrims reach the out-skirts of Sabarimala.

The sight of the temple fills the pilgrims heart with immense ecstasies. The cries of "Swamiyae Saranam Ayyappa" rend the atmosphere as they approach the sacred eighteen steps leading up to the shrine. Perhaps, nowhere else have the steps leading to a temple been given such great significance as those in Sabari shrine. These steps are said to represent the various Indriyas (senses), and Gunas (qualities) of man. As the pilgrims climb the sacred 18 steps, which symbolise the 18 elements, the souls transcend these within the body, in order to reveal the resplendence which hitherto had been enveloped by layers of Maya (illusion).

Pilgrims slowly climb these venerated steps, one by one, striking a coconut against the steps that correspond to the number of their visits. After mounting the 18 steps, they behold the glorious sight of Lord Ayyappa, which fills their heart with overflowing joy. On top, in front of the eighteenth step, camphor can be seen burning throughout the day and night during these days. A strange phenomenon which the pilgrims witness here on the auspicious day of "Makara Sankranti" is the appearance of a star-like celestial light of indescribable splendour on the northern corner of the horizon. Known as "Makara Jyothi", this inexplicable miracle lasts for half an hour. It is generally believed that the Lord comes down to Sabari Mala on this day to bless his devotees.



CHOTTANIKKARA

The Village and the Temple

IN the village of Chottanikara in Kerala is one of the few Maha Devi temples consecrated by Bhargava Rama in different corners of Bharat for the protection of the country. Many are the mysterious anecdotes connected with the great temple, where hundreds of devotees daily come to worship seeking solace for all their afflictions from the Devi who is known by different names such as Gowri, Saraswathi, Lakshmi and Durga. The village is situated four miles from Tirupunitura in Kerala.

The Stone that Bled

Where now stands the temple, stood a dark and dense forest in the days of the forgotten past. It was said that one day a woman who went to the forest to cut grass, sharpened her scythe on a stone, when suddenly gushed out, to the bewilderment and terror of the poor woman, blood out of the stone. The frightened woman shrieked aloud. The men who lived nearby, hearing the shrieks, ran to the spot, where they saw what had happened. They at once informed the leading men of the place, who visited the spot. They were all convinced that there was a deity there. They soon constructed a temple and conducted "archanas" and "naivedyas". That is now the famous and popular Chottanikara temple. Edattu Namboodiri was the Poojari (priest), who first performed pooja to the deity. As he could

not get any bronze vessel to conduct the "naivedya", he managed it in a coconut shell. The antique temple belonged to 7.5 gramams, of whom the celebrated Kakkasseri Bhattathiri who had defeated the great scholar, Uddanda Sastri was one. Kakkasseri performed Bhajanas in the temple.

Haunted Women Relieved

One can come across a number of haunted women in the temple, who come there for Bhajanas in the firm belief that the Devi will disentangle them. The haunted women stand before the Devi dancing when the door is closed for noon "naivedyas", and when the door opens they feel that they are all directed to approach the Bhadra Kali deity in the Kizha Kavu temple standing in the eastern part of the eastern tank. The Bhadra Kali controls the ghosts, who haunt them. If "Yantram" (charm) filled with the soil taken from the pedestal of Bhadra Kali is worn, they would be free from the haunt of ghosts.

The "Guruthi" Antidote

Offering of "Guruthi" to Bhadra Kali is an excellent antidote to ward off the attack of ghosts. Guruthi is a solution prepared out of turmeric and lime water, which looks exactly like blood. Many women dance and shriek when Guruthi is offered.

The annual festival of the temple takes place for nine days in the month of Kumbham (February 15th to March 15th). On all the nine days the Arattu ceremony (ablution of the deity) is conducted in all

the four tanks unlike in other temples, where it is performed only on the last day. *The Swamiar's Vision* The popular belief is that Villu-Mangalath Swamiar pays his visit on one of the days of the celebrations on the Makham day, when the Swamiar is received with due rites. The story is that the Swamiar took his bath in the southern tank and started to worship the Devi. He saw in his mental vision that Devi's lock of hair was lying on the ground. The Swamiar went kneeling in order to avoid treading on the Devi's lock of hair. On the Makham day more people gather than on any other day.

Fantastic are one's experiences inside the temple. A fervent devotee, who stands before the Devi offering prayers feels the throbbing of his heart with ecstasy as if he is enjoying celestial bliss. The mystery of this is something, the depth of which no human being can fathom. It is said that many devotees have been magically rescued from grave calamities that had befallen them and their families.

Police Officer's Personal Testimony

One Police Circle Inspector of Kerala who is a zealous devotee of Chottanikara temple says that any affliction befalling humanity would be warded off and his wish fulfilled, if he approached the Devi with due devotion. Of this power of the Devi he was convinced from his own personal experience.

-By courtesy of Bhavan's Journal from the issue dated August 5, 1962.



Kaladi

B. RADHAKRISHNA RAO

The Panorama of Shankara's Achievements

THE very mention of the word "Kaladi" brings before our mind's eye the fascinating panorama of Sri Shankara's achievements, who, taking birth at a crucial turning point of India's history reinstated the pristine glory of Hinduism by vanquishing decadent Buddhism and warding off its influence on the social and spiritual life of the people. When Adi Shankara appeared on the Indian scene, the nation was perilously hanging on the brink of degradation, owing to the spiritual bankruptcy, religious anarchy and social strife that were so common.

Sri Shankara re-kindled the lamp of India's wisdom and culture lighted up by the Divine sense of ancient sages, seers, saints and selfless thinkers, which re-vitalised Hinduism and set it again on the path of progress. By establishing four monasteries at the four strategic quarters of the country, Shankara showed that the people of India were bound together in the indissoluble bonds of "common heritage, common values, common ideas and common culture".

Birth and Early Sannyasa

Kaladi is a quiet village on the banks of the gently flowing pellucid Poorna river in the heart of picturesque Kerala. In Kaladi, there lived a pious Namboodiri couple, Shiva Guru

and Aryamba, who were childless for a long time. They prayed to Vadakka Natha, the presiding deity of Trichur for a son, and as a result of Divine grace, to them was born Adi Shankara in the year 788 A.D. Sri Shankara was an infant prodigy, and by the time he was eight he mastered the teachings of Vedic and Upanishadic lore. Determined as he was to become a Sannyasin, he was able to play a trick on his Mother. He created a fantasy of having been caught by a crocodile, when he went to the river to have his bath. Then the boy Shankara claimed if she would give permission to him to become a Sannyasin, the crocodile would leave him alone. The Mother gave her consent reluctantly. The crocodile released Shankara and went away as mysteriously as it had come.

The Preceptor Govinda Pada and Shankara's Digvijaya

Walking out of Kerala, the young ascetic Shankara travelled northwards and reached the banks of Narmada, where he met the venerated Preceptor, Govinda Pada. Sri Shankara, who was fascinated by the vast erudition of Govinda Pada, at once accepted him as his Guru. From here begins Shankara's unique, religious expeditions and philosophical conquests. This celebrated Apostle of Advaita travelled all over India and defeated the adherents of several other schools in open debate, and by the sheer power of his towering intellect combated all the evils of the religious and social life, besetting the nation, as a whole.

The four Peethas established by Shankara

Shankara established four "Peethas" in the four cardinal points of the country, two at Dwaraka and Puri on the sea-shore and one each on the banks of Alaka Nanda in the snow-swathed divine Himalayas and of the Tunga flowing gently amidst the picturesque western ghats. The vast expanse of the sea, the towering mountain ranges and the meandering whispers of the soft-flowing rivers, abutting scenes of Sylvan beauty are the choice spots of Shankara. Scenes of absorbing beauty dispel mundane thoughts and radiate spiritual waves.

After dispelling the decadent forces against spiritual revival and re-establishing the supremacy of Hinduism, Shankara left his mortal coil at the young age of 32. Within a short span of 32 years he was able to acquire, achieve and establish a new era in the cultural history of India. From Badri and Kedar to Kanya Kumari and Rameswaram, numerous temples and other institutions proclaim the great service rendered by Shankara to Hinduism.

Kaladi with Its Original Halo Restored

Kaladi, which is full of the halo of Shankara's birth- after a period of neglect, has again come into its own. It was Sri Narasimha Bharati of Sringeri Sharada Peetha, who decided to unfold the hidden glories of Kaladi and through his endeavours were discovered the place of birth of Shankara, the place of cremation of the body of his Mother and other places associated with the life of Sri Shankara at

Kaladi. Sri Narasimha Bharati, a spiritual genius of very high order, built the twin temple of Sarada and Shankara and a memorial over the Samadhi of Aryamba at Kaladi, which had since become a place of pilgrimage, a seat of traditional learning and a centre of spiritual illumination worthy of the great Master.

The Munificence of Rulers and Dewans

A former Dewan of Mysore State and a Maharaja of erstwhile Travancore State rendered magnificent assistance to the noble endeavour of building the twin temples of Sarada and Shankara. The Jagadguru Narasimha Bharathi, who left Sringeri in February 1907 on a tour of the southern districts reached Kaladi a few days before the consecration of the temples. The consecration of the shrines was done on February 21, 1910 on a scale so lavish that it still lingers in the minds of thousands of people who had the privilege of witnessing it.

The Fascinating Set-up of the Shrines

The two shrines, facing south are stellate, the spire rising like a terraced cone. The Vimana of the Sarada temple is of Ashtapadma form (eight-angled) representing the eight petals of Hridaya Kamala, while that of the Shankara temple is of Sodasa Kona form (sixteen-angled) corresponding to the sixteen Kalas of Divinity. Around the Vimana of the Sarada temple are niches in angles for the Mathrika Devis. Shankara is enshrined in his Dakshina Murthy aspect. Such profound mystic concepts that are embedded in the

teachings of the Upanishads have gone into the furnishing of these two structures, which reflect the self-realization of the great Sachidananda Narasimha Bharati.

Sringeri Jagadguru's Interest

In 1927, Jagadguru Sri Chandra Sekhara Bharati visited Kaladi in the course of his South Indian tour and celebrated Shankara Jayanthi there. He constructed a street of houses (Agrahara) at Kaladi for accommodating the priests of the temple. One Vidya Tirtha Swamigal paid frequent visits to Kaladi, and improved the same to a very great extent. In 1970 the whole temple was completely renovated and a research centre with all the amenities was built. To the north of the Shankara shrine is the temple of Krishna, a typical Kerala structure wood and with gabled roofs. This temple known to have been erected by Shankara from Kaladi is the shrine of Katyayani Bhagavati, the presiding deity of which was the tutelary deity of Shankara's family.

Dr. Rajendra Prasad, the first President of India, after visiting Kaladi observed: "Kaladi is a place of historic importance and it is only in the fitness of things, that, now that we are free, every effort should be made to revive its old glory and re-establish the place which it ought to have in our National life."



KODUNGALLUR

Kodungallur, situated at about the centre of Kerala on the sea-coast, is reputed to have been the most well-known port on the west coast of India during the days of ancient "Hellenic Civilization". She was then known as Port Muziris (derived from the Sanskrit word maricha meaning pepper). Her glory continued unbroken for a long time and it is widely believed that under the name Vanchi, she subsequently became famous as the capital city of Kerala, during the days of Peru mal rule. Later on, she became involved in the fights and battles between the chieftains of Kerala, which became more and more destructive with the advent of the Portuguese and subsequently of the Dutch.

Gradually, Cranganore began to lose her ancient glory and prosperity and got herself relegated to the modest position of a small town-ship that she now is. With all these vicissitudes Kodungallur is now a place of worship for people of all religions irrespective of cast and creed.

The Temple and Its Festivals

The temple of the Goddess is built on an extensive plot of level ground sufficiently spacious to accommodate the large concourse of devotees, who gather there for the annual "Bharani festival", which usually is celebrated in March-April every year. The whole of Kodungallur is a sandy region and the site at the temple is no exception. The rain-washed white sand

covering the temple compound and glistening in the sun lends an air of purity and simple charm to the place. The old Peepal and banyan trees, standing like sentinels all around the temple buildings, give a touch of majestic antiquity to the picture, while the surrounding green lawns and the extensive gardens full of coconut palms and interspersed with areca nut, jack-fruit, mango, tamarind and other trees, make up indeed an enchanting sight. The main temple building and the subsidiary structures are constructed in a very simple, old style, with, of course, the usual beautified carvings on the granite pillars and the wooden ceiling. The roofs are of copper-plates and the floor paved with granite slabs. The simplicity, purity and beauty of the environments strike us as a fitting back-ground, when we set our eyes on the majestic and beautiful life-size image of the Goddess decked in gold and installed in the sanctum sanctorum. The serried ranks of devotees, hailing from far-flung places, bow low before this image with half-closed eyes, full of devotion and respectfully calling her out by name. To them she is no mere image but a living reality presiding over the destinies of all.

Facilities for Travel

With added facilities for travel, the Cranganore Bhagavati temple is attracting more and more devotees, day by day. The place is almost equi-distant from Trichur and Ernakulam on the Southern Railway system. Most of the intending pilgrims from the North and East alight at Trichur and reach Cranganore by bus or by car within an hour. Those from the South get down

at Ernakulam and travel to Cranganore by bus or by car or by motor-boat. When any form of epidemic is raging or after an attack of small-pox or any such serious disease, the devotees generally consider it desirable and necessary to visit this temple and propitiate the Goddess.

Origins of the Shrine Legendary

The origin of the Cranganore Bhagavati temple is shrouded in antiquity. Tradition has it that Parasurama, who is reputed to have reclaimed the whole of Kerala from the ocean, built this temple also and installed the Goddess in it for the protection and prosperity of the people.

Some would have us believe that this temple was once a Buddhist Vihar, and that it ceased to be such and became a temple only after Adi Sankaracharya (whose birth-place, Kaladi is in the neighbourhood) established his spiritual domain all over India. Whatever be the basis for these differing views, there is no gainsaying the fact that the Bhagavati temple at Cranganore is one of the most ancient and important Devi temples of India. Regarding the nature of the deity installed, there is a variety of traditions and beliefs.

The Sealed-room of the Temple and Its Mystic Power

In the temple there are three separate sacred places of worship (one of which is a small room hermetically closed from public view), which endow the popular mind with deep awe and reverence. Still others believe that its power is derived from the Sree Chakram that was originally installed

here. Whatever the explanation, almost all devotees regard the presiding deity as the gracious Divine Mother and address her as such with love and affection and in respectful terms, and it is their unshaken belief that she showers her blessings on everyone of her true devotees.

The Cranganore Bhagavati temple is one of the richest temples in Kerala. It owns extensive plots of coconut gardens and paddy fields yielding a large income. Besides these, the offerings of gold, red-silk, pepper, turmeric, goats and money aggregate to a considerable amount every year. A good portion of this is now utilised for the maintenance of poorer temples and for kindred purposes.

Opinion among the devotees of this temple is almost unanimous now that in diverting such funds for other purposes, the needs and interests of this temple should not be over-looked.

Daily Routine of Worship

The daily worship in this temple begins at 3 a.m. and the last worship ends at 8 p.m. The Thalapoli (celebrated in January) and the Bharani (celebrated in March-April) are the most well-known festivals of this place. Of these the Thalapoli which is celebrated all four consecutive days when the image of the Goddess is taken out in a grand procession, both during day and night, with a guard of honour provided by richly caprisoned elephants, with all the usual paraphernalia and a tumultuous riot of sound and illuminations provided by innumerable drums and pipes, pop-guns and fire-works and attended by thousands

of devotees in gala dress, is a spectacle worth-witnessing.

The Bharani festival, though less colourful, is considered to be more important from a spiritual point of view, and it usually attracts larger crowds of people and pilgrims not only from all parts of Kerala but also from other distant places. The most important item of worship during this festival is performed on the Aswati day, when the three oldest members of the three Adigal families conduct a special and secret worship in the sanctum sanctorum for a continuous period of three hours. The "prasadam" distributed after this worship is considered by the devotees to be a sovereign remedy for all physical, mental and spiritual ills. In former days, fowls in their thousands used to be sacrificed in front of the temple, during the days of the Bharani festival. Now it is prohibited by statute and hence discontinued. Instead, the fowls intended for sacrifice are now offered to the deity as live creatures.

From time immemorial Devi worship has been in vogue throughout Kerala, as women folk are given an honoured place in society. Even today there is practically no village in Kerala which has not a Devi shrine. But this place of pride and precedence is readily given to the Cranganore Devi or Bhagavati who consequently attracts the largest number a devotees and pilgrims in the religion. That life and teachings of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa have given a fillip to Devi worship, and this has given a greater impetus to the flow of pilgrims to the Kodungallur temple.



Guruvayur: Kerala's Sacred Abode of Lord Krishna

B. RADHAKRISHNA RAO

Setting on Earth with a Celestial Legend

GURUVAYUR, located at a distance of 17 miles from the busy town of Trichur in Central Kerala, is one of the most prominent pilgrim-centres of India, renowned for its celebrated shrine of Lord Krishna. There is an unceasing flow of thousands of devotees drawn from the various parts of the country into this sacred abode of Lord Krishna almost all the year round. There are more imposing religious structures in our country, but the divine aura and mystic halo pervading the atmosphere of this simple shrine at once captivates the devotees and takes them to the sublime heights of purest spiritual ecstasy. Countless are the reports of 'divine intervention' and 'miraculous cure' effected by divine grace at Guruvayur.

Situated amidst the most inspiring, enchanting scenic settings, surrounded on all sides by tall grown coconut palms and lush green vegetation, the temple both by its architectural uniqueness and geographical setting symbolises the co-existence of the blend of perfect interior poise existing together with equally poised exterior activity, of solitude in society; of the very idea of Man and his own integral perfection, all inclusive, yet all negating. The comely image of Sri Krishna consecrated at Guruvayur is known to have

been worshipped by Brahma in the beginning. This divinely resplendent idol was subsequently handed over by Brahma to pious Kasyapa couple, believed to be reborn in their third regeneration in the persons of Devaki and Vasudeva, who by divine grace were lucky enough to come in possession of this image of matchless

excellence and installed it in a shrine at Dwaraka, and eventually Sri Krishna, himself an Avatar worshipped it.

A legend has it that Lord Krishna on the eve of his departure heavenward after completing his earthly mission visualised the ultimate destruction of his clan and his city Dwaraka by a deluge that was to ensue. Then the Lord enjoined his dear disciple Uddhava to take charge of this sacred idol and entrust it to sage Brihaspathi, the preceptor of Gods, so

that the idol might be installed with the help of Vayu - the wind god, in a fitting place for the benefit of humanity. Uddhava in implicit obedience of Lord's wish took the possession of the idol and later handing it over to Sage Brihaspathi informed him of the wish of Lord Krishna.

Brihaspathi taking charge of this image set out on a pilgrimage in search of a sacred

spot, where the idol could be installed. At last he espied a beautiful place with a fine crystal lotus tank in the midst of rich foliage of coconut palm on the western coast, which at once struck him as the ideal place for consecrating the idol, nature around displayed all her magnificence, purity and uncorrupt beauty.



He seemed to invite Lord Vishnu to take his permanent abode and provide fulfilment for her. All of a sudden, Brihaspathi felt his body gently fanned by a caressing breeze that carried with it a rare aroma, and he knew that it was Vayu. The joy of Guru and Vayu knew no bounds when they came to know that the place is the sacred abode of Mukkanna (Lord Siva). So, with all ceremonial worship the hoary idol was consummated in all its effulgence and

glory, and the holy abode where the idol came to be installed and consecrated was thereafter known as Gurupavanoor or Guruvayur.

A mythological anecdote enshrined in Mahabharatha says that once King Janamejaya desired to wreak vengeance on the serpent worlds, as his father died of serpent bite. In order to fulfill his desire,

Janamejaya performed the "Sarpa Yajna", in which a large number of serpents got killed. As a result of the sin accrued by the killing of many serpents he fell a prey to a virulent type of leprosy. All attempts of cure proved futile, and at last on the advice of sage Dattatreya, he performed a long penance standing before the deity of Guruvayur that cured him of the affliction of leprosy.

Record of Tradition and History

Tradition says that one Pandyan ruler constructed the temple for the deity. According to his horoscope the king was destined to die of snake-bite. The pensive king went on a pilgrimage to spend the last days of his life in sacred places. He at last reached Guruvayur, where he lost himself in the meditation of Guruvayurappa, the presiding deity. After sometime he found that the day predicted for his snake-bite had already passed. When he queried the astrologer, the king found to his utter amazement that he was stung by a cobra but by the grace of Guruvayurappa the snake-bite had not its fatal effect. Being moved by the grace of Guruvayurappa, the king lost no time in erecting a shrine for Guruvayurappa.

During the stormy days of the invasion of Malabar by Tippu, the idol of Guruvayurappa was removed to Ambalapuzha Sri Krishna Kshetra, a well-known sacred place dedicated to Sri Krishna in Travancore. After the hasty retreat of the iconoclast Tippu, the idol was brought back to Guruvayur. The graceful smiling idol of Lord Guruvayurappa, holding a discus and a conch in the right and left upper

arms and a lotus and a mace in the right and left lower arms is captivating beyond description.

Facing east, the temple is surrounded by strong walls with two imposing Gopurams. Attracting one's attention is a big granite slab (Belikall) dedicated to Vayu and Guru. Near it is a golden flag-staff (Dwaja-stambha). In a richly and artistically decorated pandal near the eastern Gopuram, the pictures of famous devotees are found, a fine painting of the late "Padmanabha" - a noble elephant of the temple.

The Shrine

A spacious courtyard called the "Koothampalam", where "Koothu" a special type of dance peculiar to Kerala is held during "Mandalam" and "Vaishaka" season, is situated at the north-eastern corners of the panda!. Nearby a tiny shrine dedicated to Shastha -the son of Hari and Hara. Outside the main outer-wall is a small temple of Goddess Durga, who is known as Edathidatu Kavil Bhagavathi. There is also a sub-shrine dedicated to Vinayaka.

Festivals

The mode of worship at Guruvayur was and still continues to be one laid down by Sri Sankaracharya, the greatest exponent and exemplar of Advaita Vedanta.

Guruvayur Ekadasi which falls in the month of Karthika is a very important day connected with this temple, when tens of thousands visit this shrine to have a glimpse of the deity. It is also commonly believed that Sri Krishna divulged the

secrets of the sacred Gita to Arjuna on this auspicious day. During the Mandalam festival, which starts from the first of Vrischika and last for 41 days, there will be a terrible rush of devotees to Guruvayur. Kalashabishekam is a special feature on the concluding day of the mandalam.

To have darshan of the Lord during the Vaishaka festival is considered highly auspicious. Luxuriant feastings, grand processions and lavish illuminations are special features of this festival lasting for ten days. On this occasion there is also a grand elephant race. The name of Narayana Bhattathri, the celebrated author of Narayaneeyam, a garland of soul-stirring hymns in eulogy of Lord Krishna, is closely associated with the temple. It is said that Narayana Bhattathri was afflicted with severe rheumatism, and in order to get rid of the ailment he worshipped Lord Krishna at Guruvayur. Every day he composed one dasak or ten slokas in praise of Lord's glory. In this way he composed more than 1000 slokas in praise of the merciful Lord Guruvayurappa, which are collectively known as "Narayaneeyam". This distilled essence of the Bhagavata has been hailed as one of the radiant gems in the diadem of devotional poetry. It is the firm belief of the devotee that the chanting of Narayaneeyam with un-wavering devotion before the presiding deity of Guruvayur can free one from otherwise incurable ailments. The sacred shrine at Guruvayur, where dwells the self-manifested four-armed Vishnu, the supreme embodiment of graciousness and godliness, and its blessed surroundings, echo but one hymn, "Glory ever be to the most high Lord".

Udupi Tradition, Antiquity, History And Culture

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Tradition BASED on the *Sthalapurana* and on the *Rajatapithapura-mahatmyam (Udupi Kshetra Mahatmyam)*, the following summary may be drawn, which happens to be the popular account of the sanctity and significance of Udupi.

The name, *Udupi* is derived from the two terms *udu* plus *pa* which mean the lord of the star, the moon. The allusion is this: In great antiquity, the moon sat in meditation of Lord Siva at *Abjyaranya* (The precincts of *Abjyaranya* are still preserved in the campus of the Poornaprajna College, UDUPI) to get himself absolved of a curse that fell on him. Lord Siva was ultimately pleased with his devotion and appearing before him, blessed him. As this place happens to be the sacred spot where Lord Siva appeared in response to the devoted meditation of *Udupa* i.e., the moon, it subsequently came to be called *Udupi*. The temple of Chandramaulisvara (Chandresvara) is accordingly pointed to as the shrine erected in dedication to Lord Siva, who is accepted to be in *Svayambhu* form in sacred memory of his glorious appearance. Udupi is situated in Sivalli. In regard to the name Sivalli, there is a traditional account, which may briefly be stated as follows. Long ago this strip of land was ruled by a king known as Ramabhoja Raja. Being instructed by Sri Parasurama, the king

decided to perform *Ashvamedha* sacrifice. Preliminary to the performance of this sacrifice, he had to plough the area where the sacrifice was to be performed.

Unfortunately, a serpent was killed in the act of ploughing. In order to absolve himself of the curse that fell on him, he caused to be made a pedestal out of silver with the representation of four serpents, and worshipped Sri Parasurama who appeared in the form of a *linga* on that pedestal. Hence, the place came to be known as *Siva-belli* and later Sivalli.

Sri Anantesvara temple, accordingly, is shown as the shrine that is dedicated to Lord Vishnu, who appeared in the form of *linga*. The king Ramabhoja also caused four Sakti temples and four Subrahmanya temples to be erected in the four corners of Sivalli. The Sakti temples are - Puttur, Kannarpadi, Bailur and Kadiyali Durgaparamesvari temples. The Subrahmanya temples are located in Tangodu, Mangodu, Aritodu and Muchilkodu, in the vicinity of Udupi.

Now the traditional account in respect of the famous Sri Krishna temple in Udupi may briefly be stated. Sri Madhvacharya (the exponent of *Dvaita Siddhanta*)-A. D. 1238-1317—was seated in meditation near Malpe on a particular occasion, when he came to know of the distress to which a ship in the sea was subject. Immediately, he waved his saffron cloth informing the Captain of the ship of the nearness of the shore and its safety. The Captain after reaching the shore paid his homage to the saint, and in gratitude requested the saint to choose anything he wanted from the ship. The Acharya's choice was three huge lumps of clay. In the course of their transit to Udupi,

one fell at Odabhandesvara, and there was in it the idol of Balarama.

A temple there was erected in honour of this deity. The second lump of clay had in it the famous Krishna idol and this idol was installed at Udupi. In the course of being conveyed to Udupi, the Acharya happened to halt at Adi-Udupi for some time, whence he proceeded to Udupi (Adi-Udupi is just a mile and a half to the west of the Sri Krishna temple) ; and the third idol was of Janardana which came to be installed at Yermal, 14 miles to the south of Udupi. This miracle is still part of the faith of devotees. It is universally believed that the idol of Sri Krishna came from Dwaraka. A tradition that is still part of the unfailing belief amongst the people is the turning of the direction of Sri Krishna idol from east to west on account of the devotion of Kanakadasa, a Vaishnava saint of Karnataka. Kanaka kundi is referred to as the window through which Kanakadasa secured vision of the Lord.

Antiquity

Neither the precise antiquity of the name *Udupi* nor its derivation is clearly known to us on historical basis, inspite of its renown. There is a maze of controversy on this issue.

It looks as though it is connected with *Udupa*, meaning serpent. It is most thought-provoking that in no earlier record or literature the name *Udupi* secures any mention. Instead, the names *Sivalli* and *Rajatapithapura* occur. Inscriptions from Udyavara (Udayapura according to historical records), a suburb of Udupi, assignable to the 9th century A. D. refer

to the *Brahmapura* (abode of Brahmins) of Sivalli, Sivavalli and to the *Thousand of Sivalli*. In a recently discovered copper-plate epigraph, assignable to circa 8th C. A. D. (this is considered to be the earliest Kannada copper-plate in Karnataka) from the Durgaparamesvari temple, Belmannu, there is the mention of Sivalli. In the *Sankara-vijaya* (a work of the 9th-10th centuries A.D.), Udupi is mentioned as Rajatapithapura. It is still a mystery how and why the name Udupi does not occur in early literatures, may be that this name is of late origin or that it was unimportant in early times. Topographically, in historical times,



Udupi was a restricted enclave belonging to the village of Sivalli, although today it is the name given to the town of Udupi as well as to the whole of the *Taluk*.

There may not be much doubt that Sivalli was one of the earliest centres of Vedic culture in the District of South Kanara. Since Udayapura was a political centre of considerable repute under the sovereignty of the Alupas, supposedly even from the early centuries of the Christian Era, we may surmise that its suburb, Udupi (Sivalli) must have been a region of cultural diffusion.

The Anantesvara Temple

The most attractive historical survival at Udupi is the temple of Anantesvara, and in architectural style it may conveniently be assigned to the 8th century A. D. if not to an earlier date. Its beauty and elegance have been spoiled because of settlements and business concerns all around the temple. It is possible that the name Sivalli

is derived from Lord Siva, the presiding deity of this temple, suggesting the unmistakable influence of Saivism in Udupi as far back as 8th century A. D. The central shrine (*garbha-griha*) is a massive one, and a remarkable and majestic *linga* is installed at the centre. The doorway of the *garbha-griha* leads out to the *mukhamantapa* by a flight of steps. This *mantapa* has a ceiling raised over twelve pillars and is rectangular in shape with four sets of corner stones. The pillars are huge and are cubical, octagonal and sixteen-fluted from the bottom upwards. The capitals are quite ordinary. Around the *garbhagriha* and

leading out from the *mukha-mantapa*, there is a circumambulatory passage, which is absolutely dark. Outside this first circumambulation and the porch (*mukha-mantapa*) is another passage. In between these two passages are well-worked basement-cornices, upon which a finely dressed stone wall stands, relieved by pilasters, niches and perforated screens. Good workmanship is shown by caves above the superstructure of stone. The roof of the aforesaid apartments and that of the second porch are covered with five courses of overlapping horizontal, slanting stone slabs, encircling the apsidal form of the structure. This is viewed as a marvel by archaeologists. Coming out of the first porch is another in front. The platform of the entire structure is covered by stone masonry, which is a later addition.

To the south-west of the *pradhana-pradakshina-patha* is a sub shrine which accommodates an early sculpture of Sasta. In front of the temple, there is a huge pedestal, known as *pradhana balipitha*. The sculptural style and details of this pedestal suggest to us that it too may belong to the 8th-9th centuries A. D. The stone pillar of considerable height standing in front of it bearing the reliefs of Aditya, Nandikesvara, a hamsa and a bhakta, seems to belong to a much later date (Circa 14th A.D.).

The temple is copper-clad, as is commonly found in major temples all over the District. The architectural style of the temple speaks of its antiquity going back at least to the 8th-9th centuries A.D. The temple of Anantesvara is indeed a magnificent structure that merits recognition in Karnataka. There is a wrong notion among

the people of Udupi that it must have been a *based* long time ago and later converted to Siva temple. There is absolutely no truth in this view-point. On inscriptional basis, the deity of this temple is known as Mahadeva, and it is yet a mystery how the deity came to be called Anantesvara. This may have been of later origin. One thing seems certain, the name Sivalli may have been derived from Siva. The deity of this temple and the structure of the temple bear ample claim to be assigned to the 8th century A. D. in chronology.

The Temple of Chandramaulisvara

This shrine is erected in front of the Anantesvara shrine, and may be ascribable to the 10th century A. D. There is no good reason to believe, as is surmised, that this shrine too was a *basadi* later converted into a Siva temple. It is clear from the elevation of the temple that the location was a lake formerly. The two bronze images of Siva, used as *balidevatas*, one in the Anantesvara and the other in the Chandramaulisvara temple are fine specimens of Chalukyan and Chola bronzes.

Culture: The Krishna Cult

It is very well known that Udupi is a centre of Vedic culture and it established Vaishnavism at an early date. Although it is difficult to say when precisely Vaishnavism started here, it may well be said that during Sri Sankara's time (8th-9th centuries A.D.), a branch of Vaishnavism i.e., the Krishna cult was propagated here. The work of *Sri Sankaravijaya* bears clear testimony to this

fact. We may recall to our memory, in this connection, that *Sri Hastamalaka*, a direct disciple of Sri Sankara, seemed to have installed an image of Lord Krishna at Rajatapithapura. This image is still found in the Sri Krishna shrine, and this sculpture may be taken as one of the earliest stone images of Krishna in Southern India.

Unfortunately, this fact is hardly known by people, nor is any attempt made to help people understand it. The image of Lord Krishna, which is being worshipped by the eight *Dvaita Matha Svamijis* of Udupi, is also a very early sculpture at least of the 7th-8th C. A. D. The story is that this image came from Dwaraka and was installed by the great Madhva philosopher, *Sri Ananda Tirtha* (1238-1317 A. D.). The sculptural features of this image of Lord Krishna conform to those of the north (danda in the right hand and *Karpura hikka sutra* in the left) and therefore, it can fairly be accepted as having been brought from Dwaraka.

Sri Madhvacharya's Dvaita Siddhanta may be reckoned as one of the most significant contributions to philosophy. Lord Krishna's worship in *Sri Krishna* shrine is being undertaken in a unique manner, by the eight *Svamijis* of the eight *mathas*, perhaps the like of which can scarcely have a parallel elsewhere. (Sode and Sirur, Adamar and Palimar, Krishnapura and Kaniyur, and Pejavar and Puttige are the eight *mathas*). Each *Swamiji* worships Lord Krishna for a period of two years, and this is known as *puja pariyayam*.

Another sculpture that helps the determination of antiquity is that of Mahishamardini of Kadiyali. This is a very neat and fascinating sculptural piece

assignable to the 9th century A. D. Carved out of a kind of black marble this full figure of Mahishamardini, without *prabhavali*, is a very vigorous one and dignified in demeanour. Mahisha's helplessness is clearly shown in his being pierced by the trident, whose prongs are held upwards. Udupi has had unmistakable claims to recognition as a great cultural centre for the past 1300 years and more.

Pajaka Kshetra - a Great Spiritual Centre

The history of Udupi is integrally connected with a small but great centre of spiritual importance, known as *Pajaka-Kshetra*. This little known locality is part of the *Kunjaru grama* of the Udupi Taluk and is locally known as Pajeyi in the Tulu language. Kunjaru, located at a distance of 7 miles to the north-east of Udupi, has been renowned for the worship of Durga-devi in the Mahishasuramardini form and is accepted as one of the earliest centres of Sakti worship in the District of South Kanara.

The temple of Durga-devi is situated on the top of a hill (referred to in the *Sumadhva-vijya* as Vimana-giri) about 450 feet above sea-level and commands a captivating view of the surrounding regions to a distance of 5-8 miles. The hill top is accessible through four routes in four directions. The temple structure, as seen today, is modern being the result of renovation. This temple used to be visited by the great Acharya *Sri Anandatirtha*. The Parasurama temple is situated in front of the Durga shrine on a rock of middle size.

Just half-a-mile from the Devi temple is the historic *Pajaka-Kshetra*. It was the birth-place of *Sri Madhvacharya*, the exponent of the *Dvaita* school of philosophy. He was an illustrious *Vaishnava Siddantha Partishthapanacharya* of the 13th C. A. D. It is disappointing to find that such a great place of spiritual inspiration should be left neglected without any attention to the proper preservation of the antique monument here. Indeed, *Pajaka-Kshetra* has claims for as much greatness as Udupi itself. The architectural significance of the *matha* here is not worthy of any special mention. But the icons that are preserved and worshipped in this place are a perennial source of spiritual experience.

The deity-Sri Vasudeva

An icon of its sculptural feature is rarely found elsewhere in the District. It is 25 cm. in height and is cast in bronze. It is supposed to have been worshipped by the father of the great Acharya, *Sri Madhyageha Bhatta* (Naduvantillaya). On the three coils of a five-hooded serpent, the Lord is seated with the right leg hanging down and the left leg folded and made to rest upon the serpent. In the back right and left hands *chakra* and *sankha* are held and in the front right and left hands there are the *gada* and the *padma*. These accessories are held in the *prayoga* form. The iconographic features of this image are undoubtedly ancient and the image may be traced to the period between the 10th and the 11th centuries A. D. Perhaps, *Sri Madhvacharya* was named *Vasudeva*, because his father was a great and devout worshipper of *Vasudeva*.

Sri Madhvacharya

In a separate shrine is installed the stone image of *Sri Acharya* which is about one foot in height and is carved out of black marble. This image is supposed to have been brought by *Sri Sode Vadiraja Swami* from Bhadri in North India. This may be regarded as the real and the best representation of the Acharya in sculpture. The icon is two-handed, the right one being in the instruction pose and the left holding a book. *Kamandalu* is placed on the left side. On the *prabhavali* to the right there is shown the relief of *danda* appearing like an axe.

Temples in the Vicinity of Udupi, Bearing Cultural Influence

The Durga temple of Putturu is situated at a distance of a mile and a half to the north of the *Sri Krishna* temple and is dedicated to the Mahishamardini form of Durga. But the most interesting aspect of this place of worship is that Durga is worshipped in the *linga* form. It is six feet in circumference and is an irregular stone. The *balidevata* bronze suggests that the divinity is to be treated as Mahishamardini. The Bailuru Mahishasuramardini temple, although renovated, may be assigned to the 12th A. D. The stone image is about 3 feet in height and is a relief figure with interesting iconographic features. Kannarpadi, a suburb of Udupi to the south, is known for the Jaya-Durga form of Durga-devi and the *mulasthanas* Sculpture is ascribable to circa 11th C.A.D.

Recently, Ambalapadi situated 20 miles to the West of Udupi, has established its fame

for Sakti worship. The religious history of this place goes back to circa 10th A. D. In the Janardana temple here, South Kanara District has one of the best maintained places of worship. The subsidiary deity is Kali or Jaya-durga. The image is made of wood and is of life-size. It is ascribable to circa 14-15th C.A.D. Ambalapadi was the seat of a medieval chieftaincy called Nidambura bidu.

Tradition links inseparably Odabhandesvara with Udupi, in religious worship. The popularly known Balarama temple at Odabhandesvara is none other than the temple dedicated to Skanda. The present mulasthana icon (circa 14th C.A.D.) is three feet in height and two-handed, with *padma* in the right hand and the left being at *katisthana*. The earlier icon was mutilated and deposited in the bank. The *balidevata* icon is a peculiar figure. The temple is situated on the beach and a visit to this place is refreshing and spiritualizing.

Mention has to be made of a small shrine at Kakkunje, Sivalli, which is dedicated to Lord Janardana. The *garbha-griha* is renovated while the *prakara* is in ruins. The Janardana icon in this shrine is 22ft. high, stylistically and iconographically it may be accepted as the earliest icon of the kind in Karnataka. It is ascribable to circa 6th C. A. D. and symbolizes the early Vedic culture at Sivalli.

Another place of spiritual importance and natural beauty is Indrali, a mile and a half to the East of Udupi proper. Durga-devi is worshipped here in the form of *linga*, and she presents the Lakshmi form of Durga. Pilgrims and devotees will profit considerably by visiting the Siva temple at Bennanje and the Sankara-narayana

temple at Kadavuru as they were sanctified by Sri Acharya's visit during his childhood days. UDUPI is thus a synonym for ancient Brahminical culture and celebrated Krishna Cult.

A few Facts for Ready Reference

UDUPI may have claims to be the earliest centre of Sri Krishna Cult in South India. The Anantesvara temple, Udupi, is one of the major monuments of Karnataka.

The Chandresvara temple is the first to have its annual celebration (*Utsavam*) in the District (*Kartika bahula amavasyai*).

The change in the turn of Sri Krishna worship every two years amongst the Madhva pontiffs is known as *pariyayam*. The *makara sankramana* day witnesses the drawing of the three Chariots, which is a religious function of great importance.

It is common practice to visit the three temples - the Anantesvara, the Chandresvara and the Krishna temples whenever one happens to be at Udupi.

From the religious point of view, it is also desirable to visit Odabhandesvara and Kunjaru in order to complete the pilgrimage to Udupi. Madhva *sarovaram* (tank) is considered to have borne four names, namely, Ananda Tirtha, Varuna Tirtha, Chandrapushkarani and Maha Tirtha.

The practice of arranging timber (fuel) in the form of an enchanting Chariot is unique at Sri Krishna *Matha*. This is for use during the *pariyayam*.



Srirangapatna

B. RADHAKRISHNA RAO

Situation

SITUATED at the western end of an island formed by the two branches of Kaveri, Srirangapatna is one of the famous Vaishnavite sacred places of Karnataka. On the Mysore- Bangalore road, it is 78 miles from Bangalore. It is also the headquarters of the taluk of the same name.

Sanctity

The islands of Srirangapatna, Sivasamudra and Srirangam are three holy places popularly known as 'Adiranga', 'Madhya Ranga' and 'Anta Ranga', also called "Paschima Ranga", being in the west in relation to Sivasamudra and Srirangam. This little island measuring 3 miles in length from east to west was the capital of the rulers of Mysore. During the reign of Chikka Devaraja it acquired great eminence. Legend claims for Srirangapatna a hoary past taking its antiquity back to the days of the revered sage, Gautama. It is said that Gautama who had his *ashrama* to the northwest of the island worshipped here Lord Ranganatha. This locality is now famous as "Gautama Kshetra" where the river divided into two.

The Penance of Kaveri

In "Kaveri Mahatmyam" there is an anecdote, which says that here Kaveri

performed penance to please Ranganatha. Being propitiated, Ranganatha gave darsan to her, and at her request stayed at Srirangapatna. Subsequently, Kaveri stood transformed as a stone image at His foot.

Blend of History and Tradition

All the shrines and temples in Srirangapatna are located inside a magnificent but dilapidated fort built in 1454 by Timmana, a chieftain of Nagamangala. This fort was considered to be the most formidable and second strongest in India. Washed on two sides by gentle Kaveri, it has several gates, the principal gate being the elephant gate on the southern side. The celebrated Vaishnavite saint Ramanuja came to Mysore seeking the shelter and patronage of King Vishnuvardhana from the persecution of the Chola emperor Karikalan in the year 1099 and made Srirangapatna as his abode for many years.

Genius of Dravidian Style

The imposing Ranganatha temple at Srirangapatna epitomises the genius of Dravidian style. It seems to have been constructed in three phases. One of the biggest of its kind in Karnataka, historical evidences fix the antiquity of this temple at about 1200 A.D. The several granite pillars, the sanctum, the sakanasi etc. bear the mark of Hoysala style, while the Navaranga pillars epitomise the glory of Vijayanagar style. The materials used for the construction of pillared courtyard were of Hoysala period. The beautiful towers at Mahadwara and Garbagriha are constructed in Vijayanagara style.

Some of the images of Hindu pantheon enshrined in the temple show a meticulous and superb workmanship, and they belong both to Hoysala and Vijayanagara periods. The presiding deity or Moola Vighraha depicts Lord Vishnu reclining on the five hooded Adishesha. Unlike as in Srirangam, there is neither a lotus springing from the navel of the deity nor are found the images of Sridevi and Bhudevi. But the figures of Kaveri holding a lotus in her hand and that of sage Gautama are seen installed by the side of Ranganatha.

Festivals

The two pillars found in front of the temple are called "Chaturvimshati" on account of their containing figures representing 24 aspects of Lord Vishnu. In the second Prakara are enshrined the figures of Alvars and also a splendid representation of Vishnu Chakra (discus). The Car festival falling in the month of Magha attracts thousands of Hindus from various parts of the state. On the occasion of Vaikunta Ekadasi pious Hindus throng the place to take a bath in the river and worship at the shrines.

Other Shrines

Besides the Ranganatha temple there are numerous other shrines dedicated to Vishnu, among which the Lakshmi Narasimha shrine is worth mentioning. This temple was built by King Kantirava Narasa Raja Wadegar. The image of Lakshmi Narasimha, an attractive piece of exquisite beauty, is of Hoysala period. There is also a fine idol of "Ambegalu Krishna" - crawling on his knees and hands.

Although a powerful seat of Vaishnavism there is no dearth of Shiva temples in Srirangapatna. Among the Shiva shrines of Srirangapatna, the massive Gangadareshwara temple is most prominent. Built in Vijayanagar style It dates back to the 16th century. The Utsava Vighraha is the copper-made handsome looking image of Dakshinamurthi. In the Navaranga, to the right of the inner entrance are enshrined the figures of Vinayaka, Subrahmanya, Sapthika Narayana and Chandreshwara.

Here one can notice two figures of Subrahmanya, the big one seated on peacock and the smaller standing on the coils of a serpent, sheltered by its ten hoods. The temples of Kamma and Ankamma at Srirangapatna are being administered by goldsmiths. In Kamma temple the presiding deity is a big Shivalinga called Kammeshwara flanked by the images of Kali and Lakshmi-narayana to the left and right. There are also subshrines dedicated to Ramanuja, Nammalwar and Vishvakshena. In the sanctum of Ankamma temple is seen a ferocious looking image of Bhairava accompanied by Kali and Ganapathi. The Jain Basadi dedicated to the first Tirthanakara Adinatha, in which are enshrined figures of all the 24 Tirthasankaras, stands as a mute witness to the brief but glorious Jain spell of Karnataka.



Gomateshwara of Dharmasthala

B. RADHAKRISHNA RAO

Religious Zeal and Devotion in Sculpture

THE State of Karnataka abounding as it is in marvellous monolithic monuments, that recall the achievements of an age past, is the veritable abode of sculptural excellence and religious fervour. These monuments epitomise the religious zeal and devotional piety that marked the works of the sculptors of mediaeval Karnataka.

Of the immense monolithic statues of India the majority and the biggest ones are found in Karnataka, and among them the great monuments of Gomateshwara - a Jain apostle - are most outstanding. Otherwise known as Bahubali, the titanic image of Gomateshwara in nude stands as the embodiment of "naked truth" and unadorned beauty. The monoliths of Gomateshwara are an eloquent testimony to the splendid Jain spell in Karnataka.

The Sixth Statue of Gomateshwara

There have already been five great statues of Gomateshwara in Karnataka, which takes us back by a thousand years to the age of Ganga Kings, under whose benevolent patronage Jainism flourished all over the region. With the addition of Dharmasthala Gomateshwara the number of monoliths have risen to six. Jainism, which was

popular in North India, entered Karnataka in the 7th century during the reign of Rashtrakutas and reached its zenith of power during the Ganga spell of Karnataka. The contribution of Jains to the growth of Kannada literature and evolution of sculpture in the state was immense. The first acknowledged father of Kannada poetry was a Jain, Adikavi Pampa, who flourished during the reign of Chalukya emperor Arikesari. A bible of Kannada speaking Jains, Adipurana, was composed by Pampa, and it centres round the life and achievements of Gomateshwara who is also popular as Bahubali. Rich in poetic imagery and literary charm, this *magnum opus* of Pampa describes in vivid language the acts of sacrifice of Gomateshwara.

What it Symbolises

The person whom the statues of Gomateshwara symbolises was, according to tradition, the younger of the two brothers, who fought a duel over the question of succession to their father's Kingdom, won the fight, but generously made over the Kingship to his defeated brother. It is such a man of strength and saintliness that the sculptor has endeavoured to depict in the statue of Gomateshwara that stands nude. Sravanabelgola, a living centre of Jain culture and religion, contains the biggest of the Gomateshwara images. Wedged in between the two hills of Chandragiri and Indragiri, which rise abruptly from an otherwise flat plain, the situation of Sravanabelgola is both prominent and picturesque. Standing majestically atop the hill Indragiri, the gigantic statue of

Gomateshwara can be seen from a distance of 25 Kms carved out of a single stone, this 17-metre-high gentle colossus, is by and far the grandest of medieval Indian art. It was built in 983 A. D. under the orders of Chamundaraya, the Chief Minister of the renowned Ganga King Rachamalla.

The Periodical Abhisheka

A spectacular festival connected with this image of Gomateshwara, which occurs once in 12 years, when the heavenly planets reach a particular conjunction, is "Mahamasthabhisheka", the head anointing ceremony. A wooden scaffolding running the full height of the 17-metre-high monolithic statue of Gomateshwara is built at the back. To the chanting of the sacred texts, priests climb up the scaffolding and pour thousands of pots of water, milk, honey, ghee, saffron, silver and gold coins. The cascade of spectral colours flows down on the serene compassionate face and body, bathing it in an aura of heavenly splendour. Thousands of pilgrims from all over India gather at Sravanabelgola on that occasion to offer their prayers and worship.

South Canara - A Grand Meeting-place of Hindu and Jain Religions

The South Canara district of Karnataka, the emerald landscape of which is dotted with towering Hindu temples and solemn Jain shrines, is one of the very few existing pockets of Jaina influence in the state. A principal pilgrim centre of the district, Sri Dharmasthala, is renowned throughout India for its ancient temple of Manjunatha. Surrounded by a picturesque fringe of hills,

fields and areca and coconut gardens, the sacred Dharmasthala attracts a flood of pilgrims almost all round the year.

Jaina Patronage to Siva Temple

A sacred Shaivite shrine at Dharmasthala is under the aegis of an aristocratic Jain family called "Heggadaes", and on that account Dharmasthala is held in veneration by Jains, too. The former trustee of the temple, Sri Ratnavarma Heggadae, prompted by divine intuition, conceived the idea of installing a statue of Gomateshwara at Dharmasthala.

The present view and appearance of Dharmasthala, which we see today with all its splendour and grandeur, is entirely of his master plan and achievement. He has rightly been called the "architect of modern Dharmasthala". But as the fate would have it, he did not live long to see the completion of the work of carving out the monolith of Gomateshwara, which was initiated during his reign at Dharmasthala. While performing "Kalashabhisheka" to the Gomateshwara of Karkala in the year 1963, Heggadae had divine inspiration to install one such image of Jain saint at Dharmasthala.

But owing to the reasons beyond his control, he was not able to carry out the will immediately. After consulting suitable persons, he assigned the task of carving out the statue of Gomateshwara to Ranjala Gopala Shenoy, a sculptor endowed with clarity of vision and incisiveness of imagination.

Marvel of the Twentieth Century

The saga of carving out the titanic statue of Gomateshwara out of a monolithic block of stone, and its transportation to a place at a distance of 40 miles was as much fascinating as the shifting of Pyramids during the construction of the Aswan Dam in Egypt. Ranjala Gopala Shenoy, who has imbibed the sculptural spirit of medieval Karnataka, was the moving spirit behind this unique venture. A recipient of Padma Vibhushan, Ranjala Gopala Shenoy though past 70, worked with a vigour and verve of the youth of 17. The work of carving out Gomateshwara had to be carried out at Karkala, situated 40 miles to the south of Dharmsthala in the whole of S.Canara the appropriate Sila for carving out such a stupendous statue is found only at Karkala. Before carving out this gigantic monolith, Shenoy prepared out of a small stone an exact miniature replica of it. Nearly 100 sculptors worked with immense patience under the meticulous supervision of Shenoy to carve the statue of Gomateshwara out of the 90 ft. long granite stone.

It took nearly six years to complete the work of carving out Gomateshwara; the work was started in 1967 and got completed in the beginning of 1973. The total expenditure incurred for the work was more than Rs. One lakh. The height of the statue from top to toe is 39 ft. Its total weight is 170 tons. Below the foot is a lotus seat with a height of 10 ft. The chest of Gomateshwara measures 14' and the face 6'. The body of the statue is exquisite, embellished with floral designs and figures of elephants and horses. At least five-lakh

people visited the statue, while it was being carved out.

The Marathon Journey

The Herculean task of transporting this massive statue from Dharmsthala to Karkala posed a serious challenge to the engineering and technological skill of twentieth century. A specially built trolley was brought all the way from Bombay for the purpose of transportation. Consisting of 64 wheels, this trolley was also aided by bulldozers and cranes in its task. Before transporting the monolith of Gomateshwara, a huge pillar weighing more than 40 tons was carried by this trolley as an experimental rehearsal. The journey of Gomateshwara started in the last week of February, and it took more than 20 days to cover a distance of 80 Kms.

On the way to the trolley's journey from Karkala to Dharmasthala, four bridges had to be constructed and at a number of places roads had either to be built or widened. Accompanied by pompous religious ceremonies and regal splendour, the trolley carrying Gomateshwara made a move on Feb. 28th. Rousing reception to Gomateshwara was accorded at various places enroute the trolley's journey. Lakhs of people witnessed this unique event in the history of Karnataka. By the time the trolley reached Venur, a distance of 25 miles from Karkala, 60 of its wheels were depleted. Overcoming all the obstacles the trolley reached Dharmasthala on the 19th of March 1973.

The Gomateshwara statue now lies at the "Bahubali Vihar" atop the hill near the gateway of Dharmasthala. The installation

and "Mahamasthabhisheka" will take place where the Jains all over the country will be celebrating the anniversary of [1974] Mahavira. The marathon journey of this monolith from Karkala to Dharmasthala will go down as a momentous event not only in the history of Karnataka but also in the history of India.

Sri Dharmasthala Kshetra

B. RADHAKRISHNA RAO

Situation and Tradition

FAMOUS as the Benaras of the South, Sri Dharmasthala Kshetra, located 40 miles to the north of Mangalore, epitomises the true spirit of the cultural and spiritual co-existence, for which Parasurama Kshetra has been so well-known from very ancient times. The reputed Saivite shrine of Lord Manjunatha which is here under the trusteeship of a Jain family called 'Heggadaes', has as its priests Sri Vaishnavas belonging to the Madhva lineage. Dharmasthala is also being held in veneration by Christians and Muslims. who come here in large numbers for amelioration of their ailments.

Surrounded by a fringe of enchanting hills abounding in gorgeous greenery, at Dharmasthala nature seems to have exhausted all her talents for landscaping. At a distance of one mile from Dharmasthala the sacred river Netravathi winds her

serpentine course. The location of the temple against the backdrop of areca and coconut gardens is extremely captivating. That in Dharmasthala many complicated civil disputes between the people are amicably settled in the presence of the Heggadae is in itself a sterling tribute to the faith reposed by the people in Heggade. In fact, Heggadae is considered as an "alter ego of Manjunatha" - the presiding deity of Dharmasthala. At Dharmasthala literates and illiterates, rich and poor, are accorded equal welcome with no scope for differentiation or discrimination.

How did Manjunatha come to be installed at Dharmasthala and how did the Jains become the hereditary trustees of the temple? There is an interesting local legend told in this connection.

Jain-Hindu Harmony

Some five centuries ago, there lived a Jain family of Birmanna Pergadae in the residence called "Nelyadi veedu". Birmanna Pergadae was a chieftain and was very philanthropic. Near "Nelyadi veedu" there stood a Basadi founded and worshipped by 'Nelyadi veedu' ("Basadi" is a place of Jain worship).

One day the guardian angels of Dharma took human forms and came to "Nelyadi Veedu" with a pompous procession of horses and elephants. Birmanna Pergadae extended warm welcome to these strange visitors. The angels were so much moved by the welcome they had at "Nelyadi Veedu", that they asked Pergadae to dedicate "Nelyadi Veedu" to them. Further, blessing Pergadae and assuring him of unbounded wealth, the angels departed. It was only then that Pergadae realised

that they were not mortals but divine visitors. As instructed, he offered the “Nelyadi Veedu” to Dharma Daivas and began to propitiate the deities.

Birmanna’s Dream

After sometime the divinities appeared to Birmanna Pergadae in dream and said thus: “We are powerful Daivas, we are Kalrahu, Kumaraswamy, Kalaki and Kanyakumari. You must build separate shrines for us at places pointed out by us. You must hold festivals at appointed times. You must choose for us two mediums of noble birth so that we may speak our will through them. Our commands will be carried out by our vassal Annappa. You must appoint four worthy persons, to help you and see that the rituals are strictly observed. We shall reward you and your posterity with health, wealth and longevity so long as you worship us with faith and devotion. We shall spread your glory far and wide and get you abundance of offerings. Therefore, see that charity is extended to all equally at all times. We shall back your wishes with support, your word with fulfilment, and crown all your efforts with success. Should you act against this behest, you shall suffer. Don’t be afraid, we will protect you, be peaceful.”

Birth of the Shrine

As per the fiat of the divine beings who appeared in their effulgent glory, Birmanna Pergadae lost no time in constructing a shrine for Dharmadaivas. He held Utsava (festival) and Nadavali as instructed. He invited Brahmins for festive offerings. But Brahmins refused to turn up, unless Gods

were also propitiated along with Dharmadaivas. While Birmanna Pergadae was lost in agony, the Dharmadaivas directed their vassal Annappa to bring the Linga of Manjunatha from Kadri near Mangalore. Accordingly Annappa hurried to Kadri and brought the Linga which was installed in the spot opposite to the shrine of Dharmadaivas. Pergadae built a temple for Manjunatha, where the Linga was consecrated by Annappa.

Abode of Bounteous Charity

The place came to be called Dharmasthala on account of the abundant charities of the Heggadaes. Even today, at Dharmasthala bounty knows no bounds. It is said that the nomenclature “Dharmasthala” was given by Sri Vadiraja of Sode Mutt in Udupi, who visited Dharmasthala during the trusteeship of Devaraja Heggadae. The Heggadae extended a red carpet welcome to the learned Swamiji and begged him to accept the “Bhiksha”. But Swamiji declined the offer of Bhiksha on the plea that “Bhiksha” cannot be accepted at a place where the Linga has been installed by a Daiva.

Rededication

Thereupon Heggadae requested Swamiji to reconsecrate the Linga, to which the Swamiji readily agreed. With the ample assistance of Heggadae, Vadiraja performed the consecration of the Linga. Further, being pleased with the charities of the place, Swamiji named the place, “Dharmasthala”.

Services of Kumarayya Heggade

Kumarayya Heggadae, who ascended the Pitha of Dharmasthala in the year 1190 was a man of great renown. During his reign Dharmasthala witnessed remarkable and violent political fluctuations. Kumarayya Heggadae with the assistance of the British captured the huge stone fortress at Jamalabad, ten miles off Dharmasthala from the hands of that iconoclastic ruler Tippu, and thus saved the thousands of Hindus from being converted into Islam at gun point.

Chandayya Heggade

During the reign of Chandayya Heggadae who ascended the gaddi in 1830, Dharmasthala underwent innumerable changes. He built the inner portion of the temple, increased the charity and philanthropy, and extended the fame of the place. All the Heggadaes who succeeded Chandayya Heggadae strove incessantly and tirelessly to improve the temple and extend the fame of the place.



Modern Amenities

Sri Ratnavarma Heggadae, who became the trustee of the temple in the year 1955, made this Kshetra a beautiful place with all the modern amenities. The colossal monolithic Gomateswara, now lying at the "Bahubali Vihar" atop the hill in

Dharmasthala, is his idea, though he did not live long enough to see his dream realised. During his period he conducted 13 annual sessions of Sarva Dharma Sammelana on a lavish scale, of which the silver jubilee celebrations in the year 1957 was a unique one, when the Governors of three states participated in the three day function. The present trustee is the youthful Virendra Heggadae, who is very pious, noble and simple. Though he is in his early twenties, he possesses the discrimination, wisdom and forbearance of his elders.

Spirit of Charity Continuing

Thousands of devotees who flock to Dharmasthala everyday are provided with free food and free shelter for a period of three days - a splendid testimony to the spirit of charity exhibited by the Heggadaes. It is believed that if one prays at Dharmasthala with devotion and faith, one can have any wish fulfilled. It is a matter of common experience to see people possessed by evil spirits, victims of wickedness, or dire misfortune come to the Kshetra with piety and devotion, and go back with relief.

In the morning "Paramanna Pooja" "Panchamrita Abhisheka", "Vedaparayana", etc. are held in the shrine of Manjunathaswami. In the afternoon hundreds of people witness the "Mahapuja of Manjunathaswami". To go inside the inner enclosure, one must have taken a bath and be bare-bodied above the waist.

A number of colourful festivals are celebrated here almost all round the year. In the month of Kartika "Kartika Laksha

Deepotsava" lasting for five days, is held with great verve and colour. Every year on the day of "Mesha Sankramana" a great Jatra (fair) accompanied by Dwajarojana and pooja for Dharmadaivas, and Rathotsava (car festival) of Manjunathaswami are held. Sivarathri is also celebrated here with splendid fervour.

The most unique festival of Dharmasthala is what is called "Mahanadavali". What does Nadavali mean? It is a conventional way of propagating Dharma observed down the centuries. During Nadavali, Gods and celestial divinities are propitiated with elaborate rituals. The last Nadavali was celebrated in 1952, after a lapse of 42 years.



Pilgrimage Around Mysore Compiled Feature

The Land and the People

OCCUPYING a central position in the south of the Deccan plateau, the State of Mysore, as it was of old, would reveal a peculiar character of its own which marks it out from the surrounding region of Madras and Bombay in more respects than one.

The mountain ranges of the west, clothed in dense forests, have added a distinctiveness to this part of the State, which contrasts strongly with the life and scenery that obtain on the plains and river valleys. There is, therefore, a delicately varying picturesqueness in the scenic aspect of the region which the traveller can hardly fail to notice as he moves along from one end to the other.

Generally speaking, Mysore State is a series of uplands with an average height of over two thousand feet above sea level. In summer, it enjoys a languorous warmth and a bracing chillness in winter. Dotted here and there by hills which rise to moderate heights, the plains are generally relieved of their prosaic evenness, and made to acquire thereby a much needed variation in the general pattern of colour and vegetation. But the contribution of at least some of these hills to the history of the land has been none the less significant. In days gone by, people built fortresses on their tops and thereby converted them into

scenes of bitter strife, remembered still through many a tale and song.

Mysore is as much a land of rivers as it is a land of mountains and hills. Its great river-system consists chiefly of the Kaveri in the south, the Tungabhadra in the north, and the two Pennars and Palars on the east, which, together with other minor streams, account for a total length of more than 1,600 miles, irrigating millions of acres. Most of these rivers find their way to the Bay of Bengal.

The western and south-western parts of Mysore are covered by dense forests which in a great measure retain their primeval character. Perhaps, the most alluring aspect of the forests of Mysore is its waterfalls, acknowledged as some of the loveliest in the world. While their contribution to the enrichment of scenic beauty is indisputable, their value as an important source of the economic prosperity of the region is inestimable.

The life and activities of such great men of Indian history as Chandra Gupta Maurya (contemporary of Alexander the Great) who, having become a Jain, renounced his worldly empire and retired to the solitude of the Sravana Bela Gola hills; his grandson, Asoka the Great, whose stone-edicts in the Chitradurg District still echo his appeal made over twenty-two centuries ago for tolerance and good-will among man-kind; Sankaracharya, the saint-prodigy of the 8th century who taught that "Brahman" was the only ultimate reality and that self-realisation was the only means of salvation; Ramanujacharya, the great social reformer and philosopher of the 11th century who sought refuge in Mysore from the persecution of the Chola King; Basava who

came a century later denouncing caste and preaching the unity of God and the brotherhood of man; Madhva who preached the duality of God and Soul - these and countless other men of lesser eminence have all left their imprint upon the character of the people. The traveller will also find that the people of this region, whether of the towns and cities or of the villages, are warm-hearted and hospitable. Where religion and customs are concerned, they are conservative.

The Nandi Hills

With Bangalore as his base, the pilgrim has a good many places of interest round about, which he should visit. Thirty seven miles from Bangalore are the Nandi Hills, a small but well-known summer-resort. A motor ride to this place is in itself very enjoyable. It is situated at a moderate height of 4,850 feet above sea level, marking the termination of a hill range of which it is the highest point. The fairly extensive plateau of late developed into an ideal summer-resort. Nandi is celebrated in legend and history.

Originally, it was known as Nandagiri when it was under the rule of the Gangas. It was then a centre of Jain pilgrimage. A Jain inscription upon the hill and a tank in ruins (called Sravana Tirtha) at the foot of the hill towards the South are the only remnants of the glory of those days. This Nandagiri became Nandigiri during 11th century, when it came under the control of the Cholas. The Yoganandiswara temple atop the hill is said to have been constructed in the 11th century and the Bhoganandiswara temple at the foot of the

hill in the 9th century. Chola inscriptions of the 11th century found in the temple of Bhoganandiswara testify to this effect. The Veerabhadra temple situated outside the fort to the north of the hill appears to have been built before the 14th century. In the Yoganandiswara temple daily worship of the Lord takes place. During Mahasivaratri, there is the car festival of Bhoganandiswara. Those who visit the fair almost invariably take the Darshan of Yoganandiswara at the top, too.

The image of Nandi in this temple is very beautiful. Lord Shiva is in a state of deep meditation and Nandi (the Bull-mount of Siva) is keeping watch over him lest he should be disturbed, and on the face of Nandi is sculptured a beautiful expression of vigilance, humility and loyalty. Besides these, there are temples dedicated to Anjaneya and Veerabhadra.

On the hill, to the west, is a lake called Amrita Sarovara (The Lake of nectar) and it is a beautiful construction with steps provided to it from all the four directions. The water of the lake is crystal-clear, sweet and wholesome.

Nandigiri is the pride of Mysore because it is the result of a joint handiwork of Nature and Man. Nature has endowed the place with exquisite beauty, and Man has shown his zeal co-operating with Nature.

The Chamundi Hills

The Chamundi Hills have been developed into one of the beauty spots adjoining the city with an elegant park on its top, and its broad, winding drive running to a length of about six miles to the temple. The temple of Chamundi is an imposing structure and

its neighbourhood is very attractive. The huge reclining bull, carved out of an enormous monolith, lies half-way up the hill and is worth a visit. From the top of the Hill, a view of the city in the night is an enchanting spectacle.

After the Goddess killed Mahishasura, She settled on the Chamundi Hill and became the presiding deity of the land surrounding the hill. Inscriptions available indicate that even at the time of Asoka, Karnataka was known by the name 'Mahisha Mandala'. The influence of Chamundeswari on Jainism is manifested in the form of Vasantika Devi of the Jains. Her representation resembles that of Sri Chamundeswari. The Chamundi Hill is 3489 feet above the sea level. In addition to the temple of Chamundeswari at its top, it has also the Mahabaleswara temple built by Hoysala Vishnuvardhana.

The renovation of the temple was undertaken in 1827 by Sri Mummudi Krishnaraja Wodeyar, the then king of Mysore. He also got constructed the tall 'gopuram' on the temple. He also donated to the temple 'the golden lion' for the procession of the Goddess. A necklace made of 30 gold stars adorning the idol testifies to his devotion and munificence.

The gigantic stone bull (Nandi) on the hill is a wonderful piece of sculpture. Nearly sixteen feet high, the sitting bull is a monolithic figure of imposing beauty. It was carved in 1659 at the instance of Dodda Devaraja Wodeyar, the king of Mysore at that time. Simultaneously, one thousand steps were cut on the hill-side to enable devotees to climb to the top of the hill.

Rarely does any visitor to Mysore return without paying respects to Sri Chamundeswari. She is the presiding deity

of the people of Karnatak and the kings of Mysore. Karnatak has been, from times immemorial, an ardent worshipper of strength. Standing in evidence are the temples of Shakti spattered over the length and breadth of the state. Some important centres of Shakti worship in the state are Sannati in Gulbarga district (Chandala Parameswari), Savadatti (Ellamma), Badami (Baba-shankari), Sirsi in North Karnataka (Marikamba), Mangalore (Mangalamba), Kolluru (Mukambika), Mysore (Chamundeswari) and Kolar (Kolamma). The Navaratri Utsav at Mysore, the festivities in connection with Sri Chamundeswari and parades of the armed forces are the specialities of Karnataka.

The worship of Chamundeswari connotes the worship of the Mother in the form of Shakti. The birthday of Sri Chamundeswari is to be celebrated on Ashadha Krishna Shashti. Devotees in thousands gather on the hill-top to offer their grateful homage and worship to the Goddess who manifested in Herself the strength of all the Gods and Goddesses and rid the world of a demon tyrant. They look at the awe-inspiring Mother and feel gratified. Thrilled by the flow of Divine strength that the mere sight of the Great Omnipotent Mother sets up in their body and soul, the visitors return with a feeling of immense satisfaction.

Sivasamudram

Seventeen miles from Somnathpur on the same direct road lies Sivasamudram, literally "the ocean of Siva", a name that sounds appropriate to this little-frequented island-town formed by two branches of the River Kaveri. Situated on the border of the

two States formerly known as Madras and Mysore, this island-town is a grand meeting place of nature's charms and man's achievements. Its huge hydro-electric station was the first enterprise of its kind in India.

A continuous range of hills and valleys clothed in thick green forests breaks the terrain into a series of highlands that disappear into the horizon like so many soft violet waves. Savage beasts of the jungle roam about in unfettered freedom. Thundering water-falls break the stillness of the region and add an awesome grandeur to its virgin beauty. Down below in the gorge, the white walls of the generating stations shimmer in the light of the Sun.

The island itself is a small one, three miles long and a mile wide. Except for its small village and its two fine temples the region is thickly wooded. Since these forests are maintained as a game-reserve, shooting is forbidden, and this has helped the region to retain its primeval character.

The twin water-falls - Gagan Chukki and Bara Chukki - are the most alluring spots near the island. The river splits itself into two streams, of which the western one has been harnessed for electricity. They call it Gagan Chukki, meaning "the fall from heaven".

The Gagan Chukki has a peculiar beauty of its own. Rushing precipitately over the face of a huge abyss, the water of the Kaveri hurtles into the pool below to a depth of 300 feet. The eastern cataract, called the Bara Chukki, presents an even more thrilling sight. The volume of water discharged by it is very much greater and the surrounding scenic beauty more pleasing to the eye.

The grandeur with which nature has generously endowed this island is rivalled by its colourful background of history. Many deeds of courage and acts of jealousy and hate were enacted in its beautiful environs. There are two huge temples of Siva and Vishnu which stand on the island, the only witnesses to all that happened here as recorded in history or known to tradition.

Other Spots Near-by

Fifteen miles from Sivasamudram lies the ancient city of *Talkad*, now buried deep in piles of sand carried in by river Kaveri. While its numerous monuments lie buried from the sight of man, the beautiful temple of Kirti Narayana, built in 1117 A.D., has been cleared of its sandy cover.

From Talkad to *Tirumakudlu* and *Narasipur*, which are situated at the confluence of the rivers Kaveri and Kapini, it is fifteen miles. The road is flanked by smiling paddy fields which stretch far into the horizon like a vast green carpet. Tirumakudlu contains an ancient temple of Siva and is a small pilgrimage centre.

From there again the traveller may proceed to *Nanjangud*, a beautiful modern town on the other side of the river Kapini. With its large banana plantations and fruit gardens, a softly flowing river by its side and quiet retreats, the town of Nanjangud has a peculiar gentleness.

The three-day car festival of the deity of the Nanjundesvar temple, which comes off at the end of March every year, is the chief attraction of the place.

Somnathpur

At Somnathpur, the Hoysala temple, next only in importance to the masterpieces at Belur and Halebid, is the chief centre of interest. Built in 1268 A.D. by Commander Soma, an officer under the Hoysala King, this temple is a fully developed specimen of the school of architecture to which this ruling dynasty gave its name.

This triple-shrine pot-stone structure planned in modest proportions has been raised on a star-shaped plan. Right round its exterior walls an amazing variety of sculptures depicting the epic stories have been chiselled in bold relief in the finest style of the time.

The most unique aspects of this monument are the ceiling panels in the main hall, each one of which has been moulded in an independent way. Large fragments of stone chiselled to their minutest details in advance have been pieced together to constitute these complicated patterns.

Of the three shrines round the central hall two cells contain remarkable examples of plastic art in the life-size statues of gods.

Tonnur and Melkote

The insignificant looking village of Tonnur (known as Vadava Giri in its days of prosperity), lying close to the Pearl Lake, was an ancient military outpost. In 1099, a little after England was over-run by the Normans, Ramanuja, a great thinker and reformer, came here seeking the shelter and patronage of King Vishnu Vardhana from the persecution of his neighbour Karikala, the Chola Emperor.

From Tonnur, the forgotten frontier fortress of ancient times, to Melkote, the living centre of Hindu pilgrimage, is half-an-hour's drive. A small, peaceful and neat looking town perched on the Yadu Giri Hill, Melkote is a place where the past still lives in the present.

Its cobbled pathways, very much as they were 900 years ago; the beautiful Kalyani pond by whose side Ramanuja discovered the buried image of Narayana; the 500 year-old colossal Gopala Raya gate-way, marvellous though unfinished; its crumbling fort-walls draped in the foliage and blossoms of wild creepers; the mountain spring Vedapushkarani ; inscribed and sculptured tablets of stone recording deeds of chivalry and sacrifice, - these and a hundred other relics of events, recent and remote, echo the voice of a thousand years of history. The reformer-saint Ramanuja stayed here for over twelve years, preaching his philosophy and organising new institutions of learning and worship. The greatest pageant of the year at Melkote is the "Vaira Mudi" in the month of March, when the processional idol is decorated with a diamond crown, an endowment by a Hoysala king 700 years ago. This crown is reputed to contain precious stones of inestimable value.

Belur and Halebid

The road from Hassan to Belur, a distance of 22 miles, passes through delightful scenic surroundings. Belur's situation is indeed very picturesque, surrounded as it is, by a rich and luxuriant tropical scenery. A flourishing capital of the Hoysala empire 800 years ago, the chief interest of this

modern town is its ancient temple dedicated to Chenna Kesava or the "handsome Kesava". The Chenna Kesava temple of Belur is one of which Abdur Razak, the famous Muslim visitor from Iran in 1433, said that he dared not attempt any description, lest he should be accused of exaggeration. The Hoysala King Vishnu Vardhana constructed this temple in 1117 A.D. Unassuming from a distance, the Chenna Kesava temple reveals itself in all its beauty as the visitor approaches it at close quarters.

The main structure, which is star-shaped, is a homogeneous architectural unit raised on a platform. Its three door-ways on the east, north and south are master-pieces of craftsmanship. The low railing on which the outer wall of the temple has been raised is subjected to an amazing variety of carvings which rise one upon another in well defined horizontal lines. It is rather difficult to describe the infinite patience and skill with which the sculptors have fashioned the intricate details of the scroll work, the niches, the elephants, the miniature turrets and human figures and gods.

A singularly beautiful aspect of this monument is its thirty-eight figure-brackets that decorate the capitals of the pillars supporting the caves of the temple. For sheer beauty of form, delicacy of workmanship and perfection of finish they have few parallels in the country. The subjects are all secular, and mostly feminine. They have been chiselled in the most graceful and charming poses ever conceived by any artist.

The interior of the building is unrivalled by any other monument of this school for the

profusion of skills lavished on the pillars, ceilings, doorways, and the bracket-figures. The stone image of Chenna Kesava in the sanctum of this temple and the *Kappe Chenniga Raya* idol in an adjoining shrine within the same compound are two of the finest examples of plastic art in mediaeval India.

From Belur to Halebid, the metropolis of the Hoysala Kingdom, is hardly a 10 mile drive through a picturesque and delightful tract. Of the many great buildings of this ancient city, only a few have survived the Muslim invasion of 1310 A.D. Of these, the most imposing monument is the Hoysaleswara temple, dedicated to Lord Siva.

Commenced a decade later than the Belur temple by Vishnu Vardhana, this temple, the biggest of all Hoysala monuments, was left uncompleted after 80 years of labour. The most magnificent part of the temple is its outer walls, which have been covered over, almost every inch of space, with friezes of an amazing variety. "All that is wild in human faith or warm in feeling is found portrayed on these walls". The amount of skilled labour lavished on the depiction of elephants, cavalry, mythical beasts and birds, its scroll work of infinite beauty and variety of design, sculptural representation of familiar epic stories and the big panels of gods and goddesses of the Hindu pantheon running right across the walls, are things for which it is hard to find parallels elsewhere.



SRINGERI

The Setting

Renowned for the leading monastery established by Adi Shankara, the lion of Vedanta, about 70 miles from the coffee-rich Chikmagalur, nestles the pretty little town of Sringeri. The river Tunga, which is justly famous for its limpid waters, meanders tortuously down the town. Situated in the plateau of the western ghats popularly called "Malanad", surrounded by a fringe of imposing hills, which rise like the galleries of huge amphitheatre, the sacred town of Sringeri casts an ineffable spell on the visitors.

The Name

The place derived the appellation of "Sringeri" from "Sranga giri", a hill lying to the south of the town, where the immortal sage Rishyasringa had his abode. Sri Shankara, the august founder of Sringeri Mutt, who combined in himself the supreme realisation of Vedantic truth with the most pragmatic knowledge of human welfare, recognised that the progress and greatness of Sanatana Dharma hinges upon the revival of Vedanta philosophy embedded in Upanishads, as well as on the reorganisation of the monastic set-up in



India, which is the fittest conduit for the flow of the elixir of Vedanta containing as it does the sublime spiritual realisation of the ancient seers. With that end in view he established four monasteries at the four strategic cardinal points of the country. All these different monasteries are associated with different divinities, Tirthas, Vedas, Acharyas, Sampradayas, Mahavakyas and titles.

Reminiscences of History

After dealing a severe blow to the decadent Buddhism and resurrecting the crest-fallen Hinduism, Shankara came to Sringeri, where he was awe-struck to witness the strange

spectacle of a cobra spreading out its hood over a toad that was having labour pain, its natural prey, to protect it from the scorching heat of the mid-day sun. Considering this place to be free from animosity, Shankara chose the place to set-up his monastery.

The uncorrupt, splendid natural beauty coupled with the calm tranquillity prevailing there might have also induced Shankara to establish the mutt at Sringeri. Indeed, a more charming spot can hardly be found in the whole of Mysore plateau which abounds in numerous natural scenes. The high peaks of the Western ghats, silhouetting against the sky in all directions, the dense forest full of tropical vegetation, the warbling birds and the solitude that reign all around conjure up the irresistible vision of the hermitage of the hoary sages. Besides the Mutt, Shankara also erected a temple wherein he enshrined the image of Sharada Devi brought from Kashmir. He installed a Sri-Chakra in front of her and prayed her to remain at Sringeri forever. The temple was reconstructed some ninety years back, as the old temple was in a dilapidated condition. During Navarathri special poojas and prayers are held for this deity and it is one of the most important festivals of Sringeri.

The First Head of the Mutt

Sureshwaracharya, the immediate disciple of Shankara, was appointed as the first head of the monastery. Ever since Sureshwaracharya, a luminous uninterrupted succession of Acharyas of profound knowledge, great piety and

immense devotion have adorned the glorious peetha.

The present [1974] pontiff of Sringeri, Sri H. H. Jagadguru Abhinava Vidya Tirtha, is a man of versatile scholarship and great sanctity. His claim to reverence is admitted by all Hindus. Radiating spiritual aura and benign influence on the suffering humanity ever since its inception, Sringeri Mutt has continued to be a foundation of bliss and wisdom.

The Role of the Mutt as Protector of Dharma

The role played by the monastery in protecting Hindu Dharma from the barbaric onslaughts of Islam was magnificent. The illustrious Vidyaranya swami who ascended the Peetha in 1331 inspired the valiant brothers, Hukka and Bukka to build the Vijayanagar empire that formed the bulwark of Hinduism in south against the Moghul attack.

Though Sringeri contains more than a dozen temples, the finest and most magnificent among them is Vidyashankara temple built by Vidyaranya swami with the assistance of Vijayanagara rulers. This temple is one of the finest structures constructed during the 300 years of Vijayanagara empire. In Vidyashankara temple we see the remarkable blend of the Hoysala and Chalukyan styles.

The Temple: its Sculpture

Built wholly in granite, the outer walls of the temple abound in sculptural works of rare beauty, depicting the very many incidents from Puranas. In the Navaranga,

there are 12 pillars, each representing the 12 symbols of the zodiac, and when the sun passes from one house of zodiac to another the rays fall directly upon the respective pillars. There are two splendidly carved idols of Dwarapalakas standing near the doorway. The figures of Surya and Chandra Mandala found on the outer walls reveal the influence of North Indian style.

The Shrine, Library and Endowment

The Janardanaswami shrine situated near the Vidya Shankara temple houses the tall wooden image of Adi Shankara. On the other side of the river Tunga is "Narasimha Vanam", where stands the samadhi of late Chandrasekara Saraswathi. On the day of Shankara Jayanthi a big congregation of religious scholars is held here, in which scholars hailing from various parts of the country participate.

The library of the Mutt contains a large number of books on a wide spectrum of subjects like Advaita philosophy, logic, astrology, mathematics, ritualism and archaeology.

The rulers of Vijayanagara dynasty endowed lands on the Mutt and made it "Samasthana". After the collapse of Vijayanagara, Venkatappa Nayaka patronised the Mutt with lavish donations. It was subsequently supported by the rulers of various Maratha dynasties, such as Peshwas, Gaekwads, Holkars, etc. That Hyder and Tipu held the Mutt in great veneration is clearly evidenced by nearly 130 records in possession of the archaeology department of Mysore circle.



Hampi, the Capital of old-time Vijayanagar

On the banks of the turbulent Tungabhadra, about nine miles from the town of Hospet in Bellary District there stands, amidst splendid isolation and solitude of wild nature, Hampi - once a flourishing and fabulous capital city of glorious Vijayanagar that saved Hindus in the South from the onslaughts of Muslim invasion. Hampi today wears a grim and desolate look with its awe-inspiring ruins and magnificent dilapidated shrines scattered over an area of 9 sq. miles. Kishkinda, the scene of many dramatic episodes described in the Ramayana, is believed to be in the proximity of Hampi. Anegundi on the north bank of Tungabhadra is identified as ancient Kishkinda. About two miles from here is the celebrated Pampa Sarovar, about which there is abundant reference in the Ramayana. Near Pampa Sarovar is the Anjani hill, where Anjaneya was born.

The Story of Kishkinda

The Vanara king, Vali and his younger brother, Sugriva were ruling the territory of Kishkinda in Puranic days. Though they were on cordial terms, a misunderstanding developed between them and they fell out. Vali not only expelled Sugriva, but also forcibly captured his wife Ruma. Sugriva along with Hanuman sought refuge in the woods of Rishyamukha Hill, where Vali could not enter owing to a dreadful curse of sage

Matanga. Even now people point to a nearby hill as Rishyamukha.

Sri Rama and Lakshmana, while in the course of their search for Sita, who had been carried away by the tyrant king Ravana, entered Rishyamukha. When Hanuman approached Lakshmana and asked the reason for their coming to Rishyamukha, Lakshmana replied that they were out in search of Sita. Hanuman requested them to secure the friendship of Sugriva.

Sri Rama's Pact with Sugriva

Rama entered into a pact of friendship with Sugriva, after Sugriva showed Rama the jewels of Sita thrown down by her. Rama made Sugriva the King of Kishkinda after killing Vali. The place where Vali was cremated is pointed out by people of the locality near Nimbapuram. About 60 miles from Kishkinda is the birth place of Sabari. The various boulders of stones near about the place are stated to be remnants of the huge stones collected by Hanuman for the building of the "Setu" across the sea.

The Puranas Refer to Hampi

Hampi was famous from very ancient times as the great seat of Virupaksha or Pampapathi - the tutelary deity of Vijayanagara Dynasty. Padmapurana has classified Virupaksha with such celebrated Kshetras as Benares, Badri, Prayag etc, after a visit to which one has a shave and observes a fast. While most of the temples and religious edifices of breath-taking beauty were mercilessly devastated by the plundering Muslim army after the tragic fall of Vijayanagar in the bloody battle of

Talikota in the year 1565, Virupaksha temple miraculously escaped pillage. The celebrated Portuguese traveller, Domingo Pais, who visited Vijayanagar during the reign of Krishnadevaraya, has left a graphic account of this temple in his jottings.

Inscriptions Throw Light

The temple standing intact has preserved its ancient glory and splendour. Built in the typical Chalukyan style this temple abounds in splendid inscriptions that enlighten us about its history. The Rangamantapa and eastern gateway of this temple was built by Krishnadevaraya. The majestic eastern gopuram of the temple has 11 storeys and is known as Gali Gopuram ("Gali" in Kannada for "air").

The presiding deity is a huge monolithic Linga which is always decorated with Moustache. The Vijayanagara Empire had shown as a resplendent sun of glorious Hindu Renaissance for a period of 300 years showering peace, plenty and prosperity all over the South. The much suppressed and long suffering Hindus began to breathe a fresh air of freedom under Vijayanagar empire, which stood as a mighty bulwark against the plundering Muslim hordes. Vijayanagara Rulers contributed enormously to the revival of Hindu Dharma and Hindu culture.

Vijayanagar - Legend and History

Vijayanagara empire was founded in 1336 by Harihara and Bukka under the inspiration of Vidyaranya Swami of Sringeri Mutt. They made Pampapathi or Virupaksha their patron deity and family God.



city flourished with showers of gold and diamonds.

The first ruler of Vijayanagar was Harihara. During his regime Vijayanagar came into prominence as Dakshina Kasi and Virupaksha as one of the "Divya Kshetras" of Bharata.

Bukka, who succeeded

There is an interesting story attributed to Vidyaranya Swami, who was known as Madhava in his pre-monastic days. Though he was a profound scholar, dire poverty remained his constant companion. In order to do away with poverty and gain wealth, he performed Mahalakshmi Yaga for a period of 12 years. But Lakshmi never appeared before him.

Being dejected and disappointed, he renounced the mundane world and became a Sannyasin. The moment he took to monastic life Lakshmi appeared before him and insisted on his expressing his desire. Though as a recluse he never required any wealth, at the insistence of Lakshmi he requested her to grant the boon that whenever he desired there should be a shower of gold and diamonds. Lakshmi granted his wish. It is said that when Vijayanagara Empire came into being, the

Harihara, became famous as a tolerant and enlightened ruler.

Krishnadevaraya's Illustrious Reign

It was during the reign of Krishnadevaraya that the power and glory of Vijayanagar ascended to its zenith. He extended his empire from Cuttack to Salsette, to the extreme south and to western islands in the Indian Ocean. He patronised art and culture. It was the short-sighted policy of Ramaraya that spelled the disastrous doom of the glorious Vijayanagara empire. On January 23, 1665, the combined army of the Muslim states of Bijapur, Bidar, Golconda and Ahmednagar launched an attack on Vijayanagar and in a bloody battle that was fought in the village of Rakka-satangadi Ramaraya was killed. The triumphant Muslim army indulged in a

systematic and ruthless destruction of the fabulous architectural wealth of Vijayanagar.

A Vast Open-air Museum

Today Hampi with its magnificent ruins and relics littered over an area of 9 sq. miles is described as "Vast open air museum of the Hindu monuments in the Dravidian style of architecture".

The most striking and largest temple among the ruins of Hampi is Pattabhirama Temple, which, with its soaring lofty towers, dominates the surrounding flat landscape. It was built by Achyutaraya. At a distance of a mile from here is Malayavana Hill. Also called Saptika Shikha, it was the place where Sri Rama stayed for about four months after his alliance with Sugreeva.

The shrine standing here enshrines a captivating monolithic image of Raghunatha.

Malayavana - Shrines of Hazara Rama and Narasimha

Near Malayavana hill is located the Vijaya Vittala temple built by Krishnadevaraya. This temple is considered to be "the masterpiece of the empire's work in art". In the court of this splendid temple there is a magnificent massive stone chariot. The Mantapas of the temple speak volumes for the dexterity and skill of the south Indian sculptures. The stone pillars supporting the Mantapam, described as "musical pillars", produce the seven notes of the music when tapped.

Hazra Rama temple is next worth visiting. The walls of this temple are resplendent

with brilliant sculptural works depicting various scenes from the Ramayana.

The cynosure of the pilgrim's eye in Hampi is a colossal monolithic statue of Narasimha with a canopy of Sesha Naga. Originally, Lakshmi was also there. This awe-inspiring image was also damaged by Muslim invaders. To the north of the Narasimha icon is the Krishnaswami temple built by Krishnadevaraya. North of it stands the Ganesha Shrine and a group of Jain temples called Hemakuta. About half a mile to the north-east of Pampapathi temple is Chakratirtha and Rishyamukha hill. Near Chakratirtha are found huge rock-hewn images of Rama, Lakshmana, Sita and Hanuman.



Melkote

B. RADHAKRISHNA RAO

"Aum Namō Narayana" AT A distance of 30 miles from Mysore City, on the Mysore-Bangalore road, one can see a beautiful cluster of irregular hills dotted with magnificent temple towers dominating the landscape for miles around. That is Melkote, - the celebrated sacred spot of Sri Vaishnavas in Karnataka.

Yadugiri's fame: Ramanuja's Choice

The rows of hills stretching to a length of 3 miles from east to west has been famous from very ancient times as Yadu Giri or Yadu Salla. It is said that a mere desire to visit Yadu Giri fetches as much benefit as an actual visit does. In his prayer, Ramanuja has accorded to Melkote a place of importance along with three Vaishnavite religious centres, Tirupathi, Srirangam and Kanchi.

Melkote's fame extended to faraway places after Ramanuja chose it as his abode for stay of a period of twelve years. Being unable to withstand the persecution meted out on Srivaishnavas by the Chola Emperor Kulothunga, Ramanuja along with his followers came fleeing along the Kaveri bank and reached the province of Tonnur ruled over by a Jain King called Bittideva. Ramanuja was soon befriended by Bittideva. It is said that Bittideva renounced Jainism and adopted Vaishnavism after Ramanuja cured the mysterious disease of his daughter.

The sacred white clay

Meanwhile, Ramanuja, got upset at the exhaustion of "Tirumannu" or sacred white clay used by Sri Vaishnavas for making marks on the fore-head. He had a dream that there was abundant supply of Tirumannu at nearby Yadusaila. With the help of Bittideva, Ramanuja spotted out the place and got the much needed Tirumannu.

At Yadusaila Ramanuja also had a dream, in which he saw the form of Lord Narayana buried deep beneath the ground on the hill. He soon discovered the deity, consecrated it, built a temple, and also made necessary arrangements for conducting the daily pooja according to a set pattern. Ramanuja also established here the Yathiraja Mutt, and renamed the place as "Thirunarayanapuram".

The processional deity and the legend of chelvapillai

The processional deity or Utsava Vighraha of the Thirunarayana temple is known by different names like Selva Pillai, Ramapriya, Yathiraja-Kumara etc. When Ramanuja came to know that the image of Ramapriya had been taken away by the Sultan of Delhi, he rushed to Delhi and requested the Sultan to hand it back to him. The Sultan is said to have told Ramanuja that he was free to take the idol if it responded to his call. Accordingly, Ramanuja called it in endearing terms as Chelvapillai and Chelva Narayana, and lo! the idol came running to Ramanuja and sat on his lap. Varanandini, the daughter of Sultan, whose dear playmate this image was, being unable to bear the

separation from Ramapriya, followed Ramanuja. On reaching Melkote, Varanandini stood transformed into an idol at the feet of the Lord. Even today pooja is offered to the idol of Varanandini as Bhudevi, - one of the divine consorts of the Lord. While returning to Melkote along with the idol, at a number of places, the Panchamas (out-castes) extended assistance to Ramanuja and out of gratitude to them Ramanuja permitted them to enter the temple and called them "Thirukkulathars", those of the sacred community. Even today the car festival of Thirunarayana on the occasion of "Vairamudi Utsava" is conducted by "Thirukkulathars".

The imposing shrine of Thirunarayana here is square in plane. In the Navaranga of the temple idols of Sampigai Alvar, Nathamuni and Alavandar are found. A beautiful statue of Ramanuja stands nearby the sanctuary dedicated to Yadugiriyamma, the consort of Thirunarayana. Worship in the temple is not considered complete unless offerings are made to Ramanuja.

Ramanuja breathes life into his icon

The statue of Ramanuja is believed to have been installed by himself. After the death of Karikala, Ramanuja decided to leave Melkote for Srirangam. Ramanuja's decision to leave Melkote plunged the local Sri Vaishnavas into grief. Thereupon, Ramanuja had an icon of himself sculptured and it is said that by embracing the statue he gave it life. He advised his followers to look up to the statue, whenever they needed solace of any kind.

In the temple there is also a sub-shrine of Sudarshana Alvar (Vishnu's Discus). Right at the entrance to the sanctum there are two arresting figures of Dwara-palakas, The " Stalavriksha" of the place is an ancient Badri tree, and on account of the Badri tree Melkote came to be known as Badrikashrama of the South.

The attack by Moghuls

The dawn of the 14th century witnessed a colossal and reckless destruction of the splendid sculptural wealth of Karnataka by the invading Moghul army. The Moghuls, who divested and plundered Belur and Halebedu, attacked Tonnur. When the ruler of Tonnur went fleeing to Melkote, the Moghul army pursued him to Melkote and did considerable damage to the temple.

The Royal gift of a crown of gems

It is Thimmanna Nayaka, a chieftain of Nagamangala, who rebuilt the temple and restored its ancient splendour and glory. He also presented a number of gold ornaments to the deity. The rulers of Mysore also patronised the temple with lavish endowments. Raja Wadayar of Mysore handed over to the temple the over-lordship of fifty villages. He also presented many invaluable gold ornaments to the Lord. Krishna Raja Wadayar, who succeeded Raja Wadayar, not only improved the temple to a great extent but also presented a gem-studded crown called "Krishna Raja Mudi" to the deity.

Tippu and Hyder, too are said to have presented many articles in gold to the Lord. The Vairamudi, a diamond-studded Crown,

believed to have been presented by Garuda to Cheluvanarayanawami is an invaluable ornament. During the "Vairamudi Utsava" the Lord is adorned with this resplendent Crown. Though Melkote was not originally counted among the 108 Divya Desas (divine abodes) venerated by Srivaishnavas, Ramanuja ordained that Melkote should be included in the list and this was duly followed.

The Temple and the Tirthas

The Yoga Narasimha temple at Melkote crowns the hill like a diadem. A fine flight of 360 steps leads the shrine. Devotees can be seen climbing the steps by striking cocoanuts against the steps. The Lord Narasimha is seen seated in Yogasana. This idol is said to have been consecrated by Prahlada himself. In Melkote there are eight holy Tirthas.

They are Vaikunta Ganga, Narayana, Palasha, Parashara, Vedapushkarani, Partha, Padma and Kalyani Pushkarani. It is said that every year in the month of Phalguna, Ganga manifested in Kalyani Pushkarani, - Vedapushkarani is believed to have created by the sweat of Varaha-Vishnu incarnate as bear. In the month of Kartika a festival is celebrated here when the deity of Cheluvanarayana is taken to Kalyani Pushkarani for Avabrithasnanam. (holy-dip). On the banks of Vedapushkarani Sage Dattatreya is stated to have delivered Vedic teachings to his disciples.

The six sacred spots found in and around Melkote are: Seetharanaya, Jnana-swatha, Takshaka Kshetra, Varahakshetra, Narasimha Kshetra and Thirunarayana Kshetra. At Varahakshetra there is a shrine

of the Lord in the form of Varaha, where a beautiful idol of Varaha with Bhudevi sitting on his lap has been installed. Vairamudi, the festival par excellence at Melkote, is a splendid spectacle, of gorgeous rituals and gala car processions. This festival coming off every year in the first week of April attracts thousands of people from all over the State. The star attraction of Vairamudi is the car-procession of Cheluvanarayana bedecked with Vairamudi, the divine crown of celestial splendour.



Manthralaya

K. R. RAGHOTHAMA RAO

FAR from the madding crowd cradled in the midst of a tranquil atmosphere of splendid isolation and religious solitude, on the banks of a swift-flowing, turbulent and yet sacred river Tungabhadra, lies a small hamlet popularly known as 'Manthralaya' where thousands of pilgrims all over India and occasionally from foreign countries also throng in thousands every day.

Manthralaya can be reached by bus either from the Manthralaya Road railway station on the Bombay-Madras rail road or from Adoni in Kurnool district. In the first case, it will be about twenty minutes journey and in the latter case about an hour and more. Unlike many other places of pilgrimage, this centre of religious attraction is neither situated in any fertile delta with green grassy lawns nor is it densely populated. On the contrary, it is located in the dry and barren tract of 'Rayalaseema' (ceded districts) with its scorching heat.

The born-Bhakta, the Brindavana Guru *The presiding deity and the Dvaita Pontiff*, Manthralaya', taking its name from the presiding deity of the place "Manchala Devi", happens to be the abode of Shri Raghavendra Swami, one of the greatest pontiffs of the , Dvaita philosophy as enunciated by Shri Ananda Tirtha, more popularly known as the great Madhwa-charya. It is here that the great Guru Raghavendra made his Brindavana Pravesa in the year Virodhi-Kritu (1671 A. D.).

The Brindavana itself is singularly different from similar such monuments in that, while all of them have been raised after the life-time of the sacred souls, in whose memory they have been constructed, the Brindavana of Shri Raghavendra was built in his own very life time. What is more astounding is that even the very stone slab used in the memorial was ordained by Swamiji to be brought from a particular place called Madhavara. Legend goes that this stone was sanctified by the Lotus feet of Lord Ramachandra Murthy when he rested on it, during his long wanderings in the dangerously dense forests of 'Dandakaranya, in search of his divine consort Shri Sita Devi.

Kalpakavriksha of the Brindavana

No less important is the very spot, where the Brindavana stands majestically. Tradition goes to say that the Lord of Manthralaya was in his first birth the illustrious child-devotee , Prahlada "whose faith and devotion made Mahavishnu, the Lord of the Lords, take the 'Narasimha Avatara'. It was exactly on the very spot, where the Brindavana stands that Prahlada

had performed his 'Yajna'. Shri Raghavendra made his Brindavana-pravesa, singing the only song composed by him in the great Raga of 'Bhairavi'. It is the popular belief that his divine stay in the Brindavana will be for a total period of seven hundred years. He will continue to be the 'Kalpakavriksha' and 'Kamadhenu' on earth, showering the bounty of his benediction on all those that surrender to him completely. Innumerable are the instances where he has showered his choicest blessings on his devotees, without any caste or creed differences.

Venkanna Bhatta is the pre-monastic name of Shri Raghavendra. He came from a God-fearing pious Brahmin family of eminent Veena Vidwans, who had adorned the Royal Court of the illustrious King Shri Krishna Devaraya. After the fall of the Vijayanagar Empire, when the family itself had to face bad days, they came to settle down on the banks of river Kaveri.

Venkanna Bhatta's early life

A child of precocity, the Swamiji demonstrated that he was an embodiment of the unfathomable knowledge of Hari, when as he was taught the first alphabet "AUM", he questioned his father and Guru Shri Thimmanna Bhatta how the infinite, all pervading Lord could be connoted or denoted by a small sound "AUM ".

In accordance with the tradition and custom, all the religious ceremonies including his Upanayanam were performed at the appropriate time. Venkanna Bhatta had his early education at Madura, under his brother-in-law, Shri Lakshmi Narasimhachar. Shri Lakshmi Narasimhachar, being a learned scholar in Sanskrit and

Vedic lore, imparted to his student a fund of knowledge in logic, grammar and philosophy. Incidentally, Venkanna attained high proficiency in the hereditary art of music and reciting Vedas.

Stepping into youth, with a charming personality and with a solemnity set on his face, as though to indicate that the face was the index of the mind, Shri Raghavendra was drawn into the bondage of marriage. He was married to a virtuous maid known as Saraswathi, who from then, was all eager to watch for the needs of her husband and cater to them.

The genius is manifested

Even after the marriage, Venkanna wanted to further his studies. He, therefore, approached Shri Sudheendra Tirtha, the then reigning pontiff of Kumbakonam Mutt, which had by then earned the reputation of a great centre of learning. He learnt "Sudha" and won the appreciation of his Guru for evincing keen interest in the subject. He proved to be a Eka-santa-grahi by writing a commentary on "Sudha" even as he was learning it. His Guru accidentally discovered this trait of his disciple and recognising the genius in him, conferred on him the title of "Parimalacharya".

In tune with the custom of those days of enlightenment and knowledge, when all the learned scholars travelled through the length and breadth of the country to exchange views on religion, Shri Sudheendra also, accompanied by his retinue including Venkanna, was on a religious tour. Then, he came across a Dravid Saint, who expressed his desire to have a debate on Vyakarana and

Mahabhashya. Since Venkanna had mastered these subjects, Shri Sudheendra had no hesitation in entrusting to him the responsibility of meeting the challenge. Venkanna, undaunted by the fame of his opponent, also exercised all his knowledge and power in rhetoric to out-wit him in a matter of moments. Pleased at his disciple's excellent performance, his Guru immediately conferred on him the title of "Mahabhashyacharya".

Many were such occasions, when this Brindavana Guru had made his opponents retreat and established his superiority in knowledge and learning by holding the assembly spell-bound through the clarity of his diction.

The house-holder

On his return from the tour, Venkanna had to fulfil his obligations as a Grihastha, and as time passed, he was blessed with a baby boy. Still, his married life was not a pleasant one. The proverbial poverty of Kuchela of "Dwaparayuga" had fallen on him and was haunting him wherever he went. Even day to day existence was very difficult. To add to it, students were thronging to him for acquiring knowledge, as his fame as a master in Vedic lore had spread far and wide. According to the then prevalent Gurukula system, the preceptors were expected to look after their disciples and arrange to fulfil their needs during their stay with the Gurus.

During these days of want and suffering neither did the Guru permit his mind to wander away from Him, nor did his virtuous, better half fail in her devoted attention and duties to her husband.

The miracle of Agni and Varuna Suktas

Once, unable to bear the pangs of hunger and suffering faced by his dear wife and the darling son, for days together, Venkanna decided to attend, anticipating bountiful gifts, a dinner arranged by the village head of Bhuvana Giri to all Brahmins. When, however, he stepped into the house of the host, an attendant of the house, mistaking this good looking scholar with a well built body to be an ordinary visitor, entrusted to him the task of making sandal paste for distribution to the guests after food. It so happened that Guru Raghavendra, while preparing the paste was then chanting 'Agnisukta' as a part of his daily recitations of Vedas, and hence when the paste was applied by the guests lo! there were cries of pain and suffering. It was not difficult for the kind and sympathetic Guru to realise what had happened. In a matter of minutes he relieved the sufferings of those who had applied to themselves the sandal paste prepared by him, by invoking Varuna by, "Varuna Sukta ". Needless to state that the host not only realised the grievous injustice done to the learned scholar and apologised for his inadvertence but also richly rewarded him with many a gift.

Raghavendra's mission

Time had come for Guru Raghavendra to carry out the mission of his life. It was also ripe for the suffering Venkanna to be transformed into Great Raghavendra, the reliever of sufferings. He was, therefore, called upon by his Guru Shri Sudheendra to give up Grihasthrama and take up the

reigns of the Math, which included the daily performance of Puja to "Moola Rama" enshrined in the Math and worshipped by Madhvacharya in his two previous births as Hanuman and Bheema. However, Shri Raghavendra was unable to withdraw himself from the bondage of Grihasthrama, until Goddess Saraswathi ordained him in a dream to do so, as he was to become the guardian angel of the entire world and not just be a selfish family head.

On an auspicious day, Venkanna Bhatta was installed as the pontifical head of Kumbakonam Math which was under the patronage of King Raghunatha of Tanjore, who undertook the entire responsibility of conducting all the religious rituals attached to the transfer of power. He was named as Guru Raghavendra.

Many are the miracles with which the name of Guru Raja Shri Raghavendra is associated. One such during his life time relates to the manner in which he acquired Manthralaya.

More miracles

During one of his usual 'Desa Sancharas' (wanderings) to propagate the ideals of Dvaita philosophy, Lord Raghavendra came across a boy with his own name, Venkanna but with no higher education. For reasons best known to him, he assured the boy of his help in times of need and distress. Venkanna, without the rudiments of learning, was one day presented with a message addressed to the Nawab of Adoni, and was asked to read it, failing which he was threatened with grave consequences. Immediately Venkanna prayed to Lord Raghavendra for help and as luck would



have it, he found himself capable of reading the Urdu Script, in which the message was written. What is more, the message contained such happy news of his army's victory in a battle that it earned for him a

permanent place in the Palace and by his personal efforts he slowly rose up to the position of the Diwan of Adoni.

So when Lord Raghavendra visited Adoni Diwan Venkanna had arranged befitting reception to the sage in which he had requested Masud Khan, the Nawab of Adoni, also to participate. Masud Khan visited the 'Yogi' with unworthy motives and presented him a non-vegetarian dish neatly covered in a silk cloth. However, it was not difficult for the great yogi to perceive what was happening. He sprinkled water in the process of offering it as "Neivedya" to the Lord, and (Lo and behold !) all that the Nawab had offered had changed into delicious fruits and flowers with reddish colour. The Nawab realised his folly, begged to be pardoned and offered to give away villages of the choice of the Guru as *inam*. Lord Raghavendra wanted only Manthralaya, as it was his chosen domain of worship, where he had as Prahlada previously performed 'Yajna' and where he wanted to stay in the Brindavana. The village thus passed on to the hands of a brahmin Guru from that of a Muslim Fakir, to whom it had earlier been presented.

The other miracle, with a gazetted record, and performed after the Jagad Guru's Brindavana-pravesa is linked with no other than the great Sir Thomas Munroe, an officer of the East India Company.

Sir Thomas Munroe's experiences

The British rule in India decided to revoke *inams* granted earlier to various persons and institutions. When, however, the Math authorities submitted a petition as to why the *inam* should be retained and not taken away, Sir Thomas Munroe was deputed to decide the issue after an on the spot enquiry. Accordingly, Sir Thomas came to the village, and he went towards the Math bare-footed and without his hat on in due deference to the sanctity of the place and as a mark of his personal respect to the unseen but living Guru Sarwabhowma.

To his utter astonishment, he saw a brilliant figure clad in a "Sannyasi's attire emerging from the Brindavana, though invisible to the others. The sage himself advocated the cause of the Math and convinced Sir Thomas as to how the endowment was irrevocable. Sir Thomas had no hesitation in quashing the proposal to revoke the endowment. None present at that time there knew what was happening, and all were surprised why Sir Thomas was talking apparently to himself. The sage was visible and audible only to Sir Thomas Munroe.

The above details were recorded in the Madras District Gazetteer by W. Francis Esq., ICS (Reprint 1916 by Superintendent Govt. Press, Madras) chapter XV, Adoni Tq., Page No. 213.

These and several other untold miracles were performed in response to the exigencies of time and situation and not with a desire to exhibit the Guru's supernatural powers.

The contributions of Lord Raghavendra to Sanskrit Literature are very great. Apart from independent works on *Gita*, *Brahma*

Sutra and *Upanishads*, he has composed many lucid commentaries on the three Vedas and on the works of Sri Madhwacharya.

Predictions proving true

Once three learned astrologers after a perusal of the Guruji's horoscope predicted independently three different versions of the life period of the Guru on earth as 100 years, 300 years and 700 years. Guruji himself accepted all the three predictions and explained that 100 years indicate the life-time, 300 years the period when his writings would be read and understood, and 700 years the period of his Brindavana stay. Thus this sacred Lord of Manthralaya is still staying with us, though in an invisible form, and attends to the need of all those that surrender to him.

-Homage by "GURU DASA".

The Seven Sacred Hills of Tirupati 'SATYA'

NATURE in her glory, splendour, and charm, greets the pilgrims who pour into this mountain abode of Lord Venkateswara. The Tirupati Hills and valleys, in hues of green and indigo, dotted with splashes of bright colours where wild flowers abound, warmly welcome the travel-weary pilgrim. God cannot but be present at such a spot of magnificent beauty, and sanctity. It is no exaggeration to call this place 'Bhooloka-Vaikuntham', the abode of the Heavenly Lord on earth even as Mathura and Brindavan are of Krishna.

Situated in the Chittoor District of Andhra Pradesh this pilgrim centre attracts millions of pilgrims from all corners of India. Known as Venkatachalapathi and Venkatesa Perumal to South Indians, Venkata Ramanamoorthy and Edukondalavadu (the deity of the Seven Hills) to the people of Andhra Pradesh and Balaji to those in Northern India, He is the Deity resorted to by one and all without distinction, and to His feet devotees rush in millions, throughout the year. This pilgrim centre, which, about forty-years ago could be approached only after an arduous journey, is today easily accessible to millions of devotees seeking solace and cure, whatever their ailments, whatever their desires and aspirations,

thanks to the facilities for travel and stay provided by the Devasthanam authorities. Tirupati town is at the foot of a chain of hills that are a part of the Eastern Ghats. The sacred spot, on which the temple of Lord Venkateswara stands, is 2,800 feet above the sea-level and is known in Tamil as Tirumalai or the Holy Hill (Tiru-Holy, Malai-Hill). This holy place is considered as marking the northern boundary of the Tamil speaking country, of which the southern limit is Kanya Kumari or Cape Comorin. To stand in the Sanctum Sanctorum and look upon the deity, while the darshan lasts, even if it may be only for a few seconds, would send a thrill up one's spine, the hairs standing on end and



a strange current of indescribable potency blended with ineffable delight passes through the body. The long, tiresome journey, the hours of waiting in the queue and the resultant weariness are washed away when one is ushered into the Sanctum. One feels cool, refreshed, peaceful, the worries forgotten and the mind concentrating on the Lord's name. It is as if, with His gaze the Lord bathes one in a shower of grace and cleanses his body and mind of all sufferings.

The Management of the Devasthanam and its income were taken over by the government, and a statutory body with 11 members and an executive was appointed in 1951 under the HR & C E Act. A road running to 11 miles with 56 hair-pin bends, constructed in 1942, meanders through the chain of hills flanked on either side by towering hills and deep valleys resplendent in natural scenic beauty. Many enthusiastic visitors to the shrine still undertake the journey up-hill on foot, not merely to fulfil a vow, but to drink in the beauty of the Lord's seat, and also because it gives a feeling of elation to trek up the mountains, to stand in the sacred presence of the Lord.

Accommodation and Transport

Tirupati is now well connected by bus service to many southern cities and to all the major district headquarters of Andhra Pradesh and by rail to all parts of India. Up-hill there are 450 cottages and guest-houses and 305 tenements run by the Devasthanam authorities, besides other choultries easily accommodating 8000 persons. Downhill there are Choultries with 260 rooms and 400 tenements, apart from a number of hotels and private lodging houses in the now improved township, and yet the pouring number of Pilgrims is sometimes too large to accommodate. The constant rush and increasing number of pilgrims has necessitated the lay-out of yet another bus-route up-hill, at an estimated expense of Rs. 52 lakhs. This road has only 6 hair-pin bends as against the 56 on the other, and runs over a distance of eleven miles, circling all but

one of the seven hills. On days when the number of pilgrims is comparatively small, an estimated 6000 people visit the shrine, while on crowded days (above 270 days in the year) the number reaches up to 20,000. During special religious festivals like the Brahmotsvam and on the New Year's day the inflow of pilgrims reaches the staggering figure of 2,00,000. The authorities are faced with problems concerning accommodation and transport of the pilgrims, as well as with that of providing minimum convenience for huge numbers of devotees standing in long queues for hours on end, and filing past in unending line for Darshanam. They have reduced the hours for special and paid Darshanams, even though it means a fall in revenue, to allot more time for the people standing in the queue for free or Dharma Darshanam. Quicker movement- arrangements in the temple premises would mean alteration of its structure, and this would provoke opposition from orthodox organisations as well as devotees in general. The last ritual of the night is performed only after the last man waiting in the queue for the Dharma Darshanam has had his turn.

Rituals

The day starts before dawn, as early as 3 A.M., with the reverberant notes of the Suprabhatam filling the air, and beseeching the Lord to wake up and bestow His blessings on the millions thirsting for a look of Him. From 3.30 A.M. to 5.30 A.M., is *Viswaroopa Darsanam*, when devotees queue up for a free darshan. An hour from then, 5.30 to 6.30, is the performance of the *Thomala Seva* (the Lord wearing his

usual attire and bedecked in flowers). From 6.30 A.M. to 8.00 A.M. is the Sahasranama Archana (chanting of 1008 names of the Lord) followed by food offerings.

The Sarvadarshanam (free universal entry) starts again at 9.00 A.M. and continues till mid-night with short breaks for cleaning up the sanctum and performing two Ashtottarams (chanting of 108 names) and food offerings at noon and in the evening. During the morning Pujas, hymns from the Vedas (Sanskrit) and selections from Divya Prabandhas (Tamil) are chanted. (After the Thomala Seva, the Utsava Deity (or the Divine form that is taken out in procession around the shrine) holds a daily durbar, when the almanac for the day and the statement of Account relating to the previous day's Hundi collections are announced in Telugu.

For the food offering (Prasadam) rice-preparations like Tamarind rice, curd rice, sweet rice and rice with green gram, pepper and ghee are made. A part of the offerings goes to the Mirasis (the persons performing different rites and tasks in the temple routine) and the rest, belonging to the Devasthanam, is distributed to the devotees. Only after all the devotees had darshan and the last man had left, which may be at 10.30 P.M. or even later depending on the crowd, the *Ekantha Seva*, during which the Lord is put to sleep, is performed. (On a charge of Rs. 4/- per head, devotees are admitted to the sanctum to witness this Ekantha Seva ritual).

Apart from these rituals which are performed every day, there are special rituals on particular days of the week and on festive occasions.

On Tuesdays and Wednesdays Sahasrakalasabhishekam, the ritual of bathing the Lord connected by a thread to the five *Utsava Murtis*, (Bhoga Srinivasa, Visvak Sena, Malayappa, Sri Devi and Bhudevi) with water from 1008 pots is performed. (A devotee wishing this *Sahasrakalasabhishekam* to be performed in his name has to pay Rs. 2,000).

On these days another ritual, called *Thirupavada*, offering six bags of Puliyodarai is performed. (A fee of Rs. 2,500/- is charged for this offering to be made in the name of a particular devotee). On Thursdays the Lord is divested of all the jewels including the glittering stone-set mark on the fore-head, and his full countenance is revealed to all in this state till seven in the evening. Then he is decked from head to foot in flowers.

This ritual known as *Poolangi Seva* is a feast to the eyes of the devotees. Adorned exclusively in flowers provided by the pure bounty of Nature the Lord exudes the fragrance of a rare serenity and charm bewitching to the beholder. The Abhishekam is performed on Fridays between 7.00 A.M. to 9.00 A.M. He thereafter appears bedecked in his jewellery between 3.00 P.M. and 4.00 P.M. in Alankara Seva; and then the Dharma Darshana starts again after 4.00 P.M. (About 2000 persons are admitted at a charge of Re. 1/- per head to witness the Abhishekam).

During the month of Marga Sira (Dec.-Jan.) in the early mornings the Tiruppavai of Andal is sung instead of Suprabhatam, and during this month the Lord is worshipped only with Bilvadalas, the tender leaves of Vilva tree, which is regarded as the favourite of Lord Shiva. It is evident from

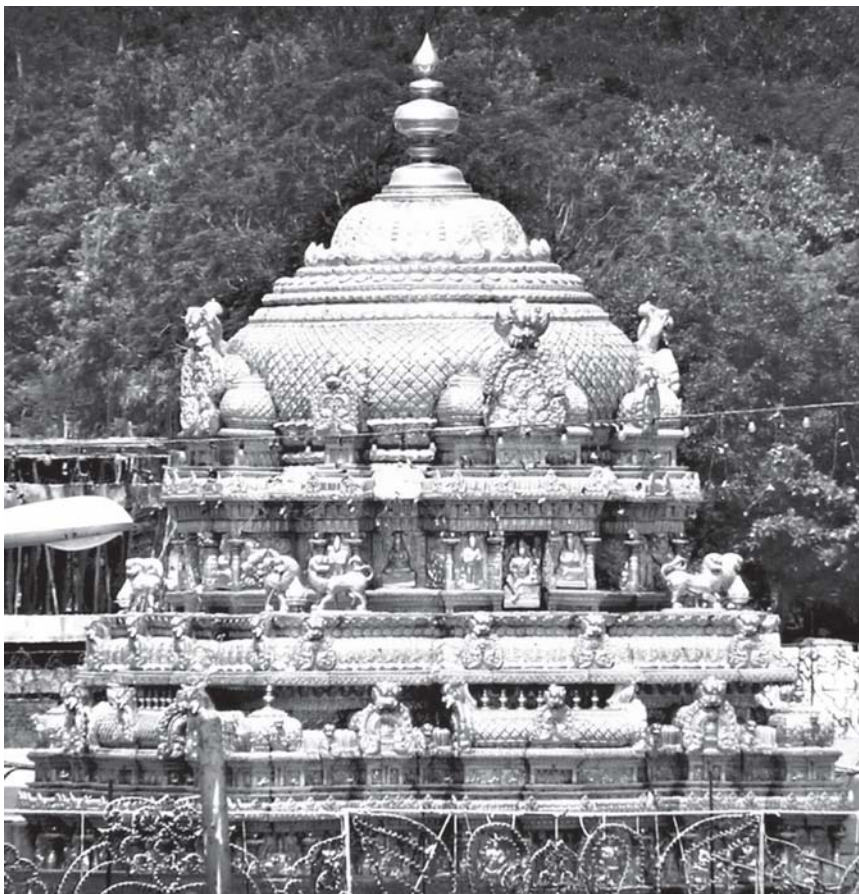
this and similar particulars that the Deity here is worshipped both in *Saivite* and *Vaishnavite* manners, thus ruling out all sectarian clashes.

The Kalyanam (performance of the marriage of Venkateswara and Padmavathy Devi) at Rs. 700/- per group of 12 persons with a maximum of 30 groups, the *Brahmotsavam*, *Vimanotsvam*, and *Paniyara Utsavam* are also performed in a separate hall for devotees who pay for the ceremony. (It

may be relevant to mention that the imposition of fees in a graded scale for the several items serves among other things to regulate the crowd).

Other Temples in Tirupati

Seven miles from Tirupati town is *Alamelu Mangapuram*, where a temple for Padmavathi as Alamelu Mangai is constructed. It is said that the temple was built around 826 A.D. for both Srinivasa and Padmavathi, as the temple on the hill was then inaccessible to devotees, and around 960 A.D. during the time of the Acharya-devotees Alavandar and Tirumalainambi, Venkatachalapathi was



again restored to his original temple on the hill. Sri Ramanuja was mainly responsible for enlarging the temple structure and reorganising the scheme of worship according to the pattern of a Poojavidhi.

An amusing story is told of Padmavathi being left alone in the temple at Tiruchanur, while the Lord had gone away to his abode up in the hills. When she came with her husband, as is the vogue, she had brought all the necessary articles, utensils and accessories. But upon their arrival at Tirupati, in the foot-hills, the Lord found that she had omitted to bring "curry leaves" (Kariveppilai) and appearing irate for the omission. He left His consort at Tiruchanur and went up alone, though condescending

to come down once in a week (on Fridays) and visit her, in response to her entreaties. To this day, no one can find a single curry leaf tree surviving in and around Tiruchanur. She is decked out daily with flowers and ornaments like a bride, and Kumkuma pooja is the most important ritual performed in this temple.

Married women consider it an auspicious rite to perform kumkum pooja in their name, wishing for the longevity of their husbands. Down the hills in Tirupati town is the temple of *Govindaraja Swami*. Sri Ramanuja brought the image of Govindaraja from Chidambaram and erected a temple for Him here. The deity is seen in a reclining posture on Ananta or the mighty serpent. According to one legend He is stated to have stationed Himself there to measure out the money that pours into Tirupati Hundi and collect it as interest on the amount lent at the time of the marriage of Lord Venkateswara.

As is found in all south Indian temples, the Pushkarini or the temple tank is on the side near the main entrance. It is believed a bath in the Pushkarini washes away one's sins. *Papanasam*, a water-fall a few miles away from the main temple, also on the hills is celebrated for its purificatory potency, washing away the sins of bathers and even curing diseases. Water from Papanasam is brought daily by Mirasis for *Abhishekam* in the temple.

"Mirasis" are priests whose privilege it is to perform the different rites in the temple routine, like cleaning the sanctum, preparing garlands, bringing water for abhishekam, preparing food for offerings, etc. These are held as hereditary rights by the Mirasis for generations. They perform

the rites on a honorary basis, receiving just a share in the gifts, food offerings, etc. Four Mirasis, on a year's round in turns, make garlands and get ready the flowers for worship, flowers collected from the 25 acre farm maintained by the temple authorities.

The Archakas are also Mirasis, Among the Archakas, there are both Jeeyers as well as others. There are Mirasis to fetch water from Papanasam, playing the Nadaswaram, lighting the lamps and performing other duties.

Tallapaka Anantacharya, who sings the Lord to sleep at Ekanta Seva, also a Mirasi, is a direct descendant of the illustrious saint Annamacharya of the 15th century. The preparation of the food offerings, and other items of Prasadams, falls to another *Mirasi* of four *gamekas*. Provisions worth Rs. 40,000 are bought daily by the peishkar, about 40 tons of fire-wood is consumed weekly, and 15,000 mud-pots are used per month for preparing the food offering. The rice for the preparation called *dosai* is pounded by huge pestles operated by a sea-saw mechanism, with six men stamping up and down the lever arms.



Sri Kalahasti

Barely twenty miles from Tirupathi is Kalahasti, a place of great sanctity, famous as Kailasagiri, the abode of Lord Siva on Earth. Kalahasti houses one of the “Pancha Bhuta Lingas”, namely the “Vayu Linga”. The other four represent the other elements, viz. Prithvi, Appu, Tejas and Akasa. The lamp inside the sanctum keeps flickering in spite of the lack of any circulation of air there, and stands as a confirmation of the belief that the Linga is a Vayu Linga. The Linga is white in colour and considered to be a Swayambhu or self-manifest Linga not carved out by human hands.

The spider, the serpent and the elephant

This Kshetra is very ancient in its repute of sanctity, and it is found mentioned in the Skanda Purana. There are many legends connected with its origin, among which the popular legend is about the Spider (Sri), serpent (Kala) and the elephant (Hasti), from which this holy centre seems to have derived its name, Sri Kalahasti. It is said that in Krita Yuga, an elephant, a cobra and a spider worshipped the Swayambhu Linga that existed in this forest, under a Vilva tree. The spider used to weave a web over the Linga to prevent the leaves of trees falling over it. The elephant used to perform Abhisheka by bringing water in its trunk and spurring it over the Linga, and the serpent used to spread its hood over the Linga and protect it from the sun. The serpent was unaware of the spider and the elephant worshipping the Lord, and

one day noticing the Abhisheka Teertham and Vilva leaves, realised that some other beings were also there. Afraid that these may cause trouble to the Lord, he entwined himself round the Linga, determined to protect it against any possible danger. When the elephant came with the usual Abhisheka Teertham, the furious serpent got into its trunk. Unable to bear the pain, the elephant smashed its trunk over the Linga, crushing both the serpent and the spider to death, itself dying from the poisonous sting of the serpent on the spot. Lord Siva, pleased with the intensity of their devotion granted salvation to all the three.

The devotee who sacrificed his eyes

Another great Siva Bhakta, who has been sung about in many a literary work and who enriched the sanctity of this Kshetra with his boundless devotion, is Timma or Kannappa, an illiterate tribal hunter of the forest. He was greatly devoted to the Lord and worshipped Him in his own simple, rustic fashion, offering a part of the meat he got by hunting every day before Him. A brahmin priest, who was also greatly devoted to the Lord, was deeply grieved by the appearance of raw flesh and bones in the sacred presence, and prayed and begged the Lord to enlighten him as to why He accepted these instead of punishing the person who offered such things. The Lord at last appeared, and asked him to stay behind the Vilva tree the next day and see what would traverse. At the usual hour when Timmappa came, he was bewildered to see tears flowing incessantly from one of the eyes of the Lord. Thinking that something went wrong

with His eye, Kannappa took his hunting knife, and unhesitatingly scooped out his own eye and placed it in the place of the Lord's eye. The tears at once stopped, but started flowing again from the other one.

Timmappa, with unswerving devotion and love for the Lord, decided to offer his remaining eye to the Lord, but was hard put to determine the location where he should offer his substitute eye, for once he removed his other eye he would be totally blind. So he marked the position of the eye of the Lord by placing his left foot on it, and taking up the knife, was about to scoop out his eye, when Lord Siva appeared before him. Both the priest and Timmappa prostrated before the Lord, and sung his praises in great devotion, entranced by the awe-inspiring presence, and the Lord granted salvation to them both. Timmappa was from then on known as Kannappa, signifying that he was "the one who gave his eyes to the Lord". The Lord, pleased with his great devotion, also ordained that he shall remain by His side for all time to come. In the temple at Kalahasti, the image of Kannappa is to be seen by the side of the Lord, and offerings are first made to him and then only to the Lord. There is also a separate temple on top of the hill, dedicated to Kannappa.

A chip of the great Mount Meru

The hill where Kalahasti is located is known as Mount Meru, though it is geographically situated far from Mount Meru. It is said that once, due to an altercation between Adishesha (the king of serpents) and Vayu (the presiding deity of winds) three blocks

fell off Mount Meru at three different places, one of them being Kalahasti. Hence the association of Kalahasti with Mount Meru. It is also known as Kailasa Giri, the earthly abode of Lord Siva and is comparable to Mount Kailas in the Himalayas in its sanctity and sacred association with Lord Siva.

Patala Vinayaka

Kalahasti has two hills on either side of it, the one on the North with a temple of Durgamba and the one on the south with a temple of Kannabeswara on top of it. Sri Kalahastiswara temple is situated west of the Kalahasti hill. The temple has two huge and imposing entrance Gopurams and in the second courtyard of the temple is found an underground cell, about thirty feet below the level of the temple, where Lord Ganapathi is worshipped as Patala Vinayaka.

Out of legend into history

The origin of the temple dates back to Puranic times, as it is mentioned in Skanda Purana, when Arjuna is said to have visited this temple and worshipped Sri Kalahastiswaraswami. The historical evidence of its origin is found in the works of Nakkeerar, a celebrated Tamil Poet of the Third century. His description of Kalahasti as Southern Kailas, (Dakshina Kailasa), rendered in exquisite poetry, gives a detailed account of this Kshetra.

The present temple is believed to have been built by the Pallava Kings and Tondaiman Chakravarti at a later date. The Chola Kings renovated it and constructed the main temple.

The great 'Gali Gopuram' was built by Kulottunga Chola in the 11th century, and the outer prakaras and the four Gopuras at the four entrances were later added by Veera Narasimha Yadavaraya, in the 12th century A. D. The Mandapams inside were built and improved upon by Krishna Devaraya of the Vijayanagar dynasty, and an inscription shows that the hundred pillared Mandapam was built by Krishnadevaraya in 1516 A.D.

Other shrines and sacred spots

The main temple premises begin with the Gali Gopuram, close to which is a temple dedicated to Kasi Viswanatha and Mother Annapurana, making this place as holy as the abode of Siva on the River Ganges. Upon entering the *prakara*, one comes to a temple dedicated to Bala Ganapathi, after which one sees the underground shrine of Patala Vinayaka.

The two wells in the temple premises are called Surya Pushkarini and Chandra Pushkarini, adjacent to which is the temple dedicated to the Sun God. There are temples dedicated to Lord Subrahmanya and "Sadyo Mukti Ganapathy", situated close to the western gate.

The main gate of the temple faces south, and from this it can be deduced that Lord Siva in this temple is worshipped as Dakshinamurthy. The presiding deity in the sanctum faces west and is in the shape of an elephant trunk, with tusks on either side and a spider below. Viewed from above

the Linga resembles the five hoods of a serpent. Just before the main shrine of Sri Kalahastiswara is the idol of Kannappa, the great devotee of the Lord here. Sage Kannappa who was a tribal hunter' is an example of the power of devotion that lies hidden in an ignorant and simple mind, He is greatly praised by the later generations and is immortalised in the works of great scholars and poets, and Sri Sankaracharya

who established the four Sankara Peethas has also sung the praises of Sage Kannappa in his Sivananda Lahari.

The river Suvarna Mukhi takes a northerly course at Kalahasti, its waters almost washing the western wall of the temple. The images and bronze figures in the temples are very ancient and very beautiful. The temple architecture, polished and perfected by three great dynasties,

Pallava, Chola and Vijayanagar, represents the best of these. The temple stands amidst picturesque surroundings, reflected in the crystal waters of Suvarna Mukhi, shining like a gem throwing off brilliant rays of the glory of the Pallava, Chola and Vijayanagar Kings. Owing to its great sanctity, considered as the abode of Lord Siva on earth, this centre draws great numbers of pilgrims from all over India, and is one of the famous pilgrim centres of India.

-Material drawn from Immortal India.



Some Select Shrines of the Andhra Region

Sri Sailam

SRI SAILAM, the abode of Lord Mallikarjunaswami, is situated in the thick forests of Nalla Mala hills in Kurnool district. Situated in the midst of deep ravines and steep hills, this shrine shines in Divine brilliance on the southern bank of the sacred Krishna River drawing to its bosom countless devotees from all over the country.

Famous as Sri Sailam or Sri Parvatam, this shrine is sacred to the Hindus and Buddhists alike. The name of Sri Sailam rings hoary in the "Sankalpas" repeated at ritual baths. A mention of this Pilgrim Centre as a great "Punya Tirtha" is to be found in the Puranas and other ancient books.

The legend of the Cow and the Linga

It is said that in very ancient times, a Princess by name Chandravathi, daughter of the King of Chandra Gupta Patnam, had taken up residence in this Sri Saila forest due to a domestic calamity, and lived a life of isolation and austerity, forsaking all the royal comforts. She had with her only a herdsman and a few cows whose milk, along with wild fruits, was the only means of sustenance for her. She happened to notice that one of the cows, a black one, was not yielding any milk. The herdsman was directed to observe it carefully and keep a watch over it, and he reported that the cow was going to a secluded spot in the depths of the forest and showering all its

milk on a black stone Linga of Lord Siva, thus emptying herself by the time she returned to be milked. The Princess went the next day and saw the occurrence herself, and that night Lord Siva appeared in her dream, telling her that the Linga in the forest is a manifestation of Himself, and directed her to build a temple at the spot, consecrating the Linga as Sri Mallikarjunaswami.

And of the Chenchu bride

Another legend connected with the origin of the Linga here states that once Lord Siva came down to the Sri Saila forests to hunt, and there fell in love with a beautiful tribal girl belonging to the tribe of "Chenchus". Thus he stayed on in this forest to please his tribal wife. A bass relief in the temple beautifully depicts this story in detail, and the Chenchus, to this day have free entry into the temple and are even allowed to go into the sanctum. On the day of Maha Sivaratri, these Chenchus go inside the sanctum and perform Abhishekam and Pooja, independent of the priests. This is in fact the only temple, where devotees, irrespective of caste, creed or sex, are allowed directly into the sanctum, where they themselves may perform the Abhisheka or Pooja rituals.

The area in which the temple is built hardly measures 500 feet by 600 feet, and the main temple is comparatively a small structure, built of stone. It is surrounded by a number of small shrines, with the shrine of Bhramaramba on the west of the main temple. Goddess Bhramaramba is considered to be an incarnation of Kali, and this shrine of Sri Sailam is one of the

eighteen most important Shakti shrines in India.

The sanctum and its environs

The sanctum, enshrining Lord Mallikarjuna, is a small, cell-like structure, with a small pillared-porch attached in front of it. The Mukha Mantapa in front of the main temple is an exquisitely carved pillared hall, reflecting the glory of the Vijayanagar Kings. The most valuable and sacred object in the temple besides the Swayambhu Linga is the bronze image of Nataraja, which is a piece of exquisite craftsmanship and shines with such Divine beauty and grace that devotees stand in front of it entranced in an inexpressible thrill. Between the main shrine and the eastern gate-way of the courtyard are two more exquisitely carved Mantapas, one of which contains the Nandi. On the northern side of the temple, under a Vata Vriksha is another small temple, enshrining Lord Mallikarjuna. The Linga in this temple is considered to be the original Linga, upon which the black cow of Chandravathi was showering its milk. An interesting feature of all the temples, be it in north or south, is the presence of a Sthala Vriksha, an ancient tree rooted to the spot and sanctifying it, and in all the legends mentioned the original deity is found worshipped under a tree, and a temple gets built on the spot later on. On the northern side of the pillared Mukha Mantapa is another small shrine containing a carved stone Linga called the Sahasra Linga. The main Linga is divided into twenty five facets, each of them having a representation of forty Lingas, making a thousand Lingas, in all. The three hooded

cobra is carved as entwined round the breast of the Linga and is mounted on a beautiful pedestal.

Bass-reliefs and Buddhist influence

One important feature of the Sri Sailam temple is the innumerable number of bass reliefs found here, which make up a museum and a library, as well. These bass reliefs are a symbolic representation of the legends connected with the temple, and deal with these in great detail and serve the purpose of a carefully assembled record of facts.

Buddhism has prevailed to a great measure in the Krishna Delta of Andhra Pradesh, and its influence can be traced in the architecture of the temples in this locale, as well as in the catholicity of rituals and worship observed in some of these temples. Sri Parvatam as a sacred centre has been described both by Fahian and Hieuntsang in their works as a Buddhist centre in the Nagarjuna Konda range.

Thus Sri Sailam stands as a very important Kshetra not only for Andhra Pradesh, but for the whole of India, enshrining one of the twelve Jyotir Lingas, and visited by great numbers of devotees from all over India. It is very ancient in its tradition and sanctity, and is referred to in the Mahabharata and the Puranas. This is believed to be the hill upon which Lord Siva had danced in ecstasy, and where Nandi himself performed a penance and had been graced with the darshan of the Divine couple.

"Upon this Sri Parvatam stays Lord Siva with his consort Parvathi, immersed in the delights of the Divine dance, worshipped

by Brahma and the other Gods, and a dip in the holy waters purifies one and washes him of his sins, liberating his entire line of relatives and granting salvation".

Sri Adi Sankara, who visited and resided at Sri Sailam for some time, also composed beautiful verses praising Lord Mallikarjuna in his Sivananda Lahari, and on Bhramaramba in Bhramarambashtakam.

Ahobilam

The temple of Lord Narasimha at Ahobilam is famous for its sacred associations, and attracts a large number of pilgrims both from the south as well as from the north. Believed to be the actual spot where Vishnu in his incarnation of Narasimha appeared from a pillar and killed the tyrant king Hiranyakasipu, this holy kshetra is a pilgrim centre of great importance.

Even historically, this kshetra is of very ancient origin, and inscriptions here show that the great Vikramaditya of the western Chalukya Kings of Kalyan (1076-1106 A.D.) worshipped the Moola Virat of this temple. It is said that when Lord Vishnu emerged from the pillar as Narasimha, terrible in his divine fury to behold, the gods and goddesses from the heavens sang his praise declaring Narasimha as the Supreme Lord, and from their expression of astonishment is the name, " Ahobilam" derived.

Nava Narasimhas

The hill track leading to the main temple meanders through picturesque valleys. Through the length of the six miles of this track there are shrines dedicated to the

Nava Narasimhas, the Lord Narasimha in the nine aspects of his super nature.

At the foot of the hill is the shrine of Prahlada Varada Narasimha, the Lord blessing Prahlada, having shed his anger after the destructive role of his divine purpose. A mile and a half from this shrine is Chatravata Narasimha, who is found under a peepal tree, surrounded by thorny bushes. Further on the way are the shrines of Karanja Narasimha and Yogananda Narasimha. It is believed that Lord Narasimha, after killing Hiranya, took Prahlada as his disciple and taught him Yoga Asanas. Hence he is found here in Yoga posture and is known as Yogananda Narasimha.

Upper Ahobilam is a plateau 2,800 feet above sea level. The two crests are called Veda Giri and Garuda Giri, through which river Bhava Nasani flows. The river divides itself into two and joins Penna and Kumudavati. This river is considered as an Antar Vahini, an underground stream during a part of its course. On the southern slope of the hill the Lord is worshipped as Ugra Narasimha, in his terrible aspect. The temple is a magnificent one with a huge Gopuram and Mantapa.

Very near this is the shrine of Guha Narasimha, at the entrance of which is found a huge stone pillar, believed to be the one from which the Lord emerged to kill Hiranya. A furlong or two from this shrine is the shrine of Lord Krodha Narasimha, where He is worshipped in the form of a boar. Two miles from here is the shrine of Malola Narasimha, where the Lord, having shed his fury, is seen in a sublimely tranquil form as Santa Moorthy, delighting himself with his consort Lakshmi. Higher up is the

shrine of Jwala Narasimha, and this spot is considered to be the one, where the Lord at the height of his fury, tore the entrails of Hiranya, and nearby is the temple of Pavana Narasimha. Thus on this sacred hill, all the nine aspects of the Lord, in the form of nine Narasimhas are manifested for the devotee's worship.

The Lord in the upper Ahobilam shrine is considered Swayambhu or self-manifest. There are a number of holy Tirthas around this shrine, the most important of which is Rakta Kundam, whose waters are red. It is believed that the Lord, after killing Hiranya Kasipu, washed his hands in this tank.

Ahobilam is also associated with the Chenchus, (hill tribes of the area), and it is believed that when Lord Vishnu took the form of Narasimha and came down here, Lakshmi, unable to bear the separation incarnated herself as a tribal girl, Chencheta. It is with her that Lord Narasimha fell in love and got married to her and they stayed on in Ahobilam thereafter, bewitched by its scenic beauty. This love lore of Lord Narasimha and Chencheta is the theme of many beautiful poems, folk songs and dance dramas current in Telugu Literature.

In a famous Narasimha Anushtup, the nine forms of Narasimha are described, and this Anushtup is adopted for being etched before charging any Yantra with divine power. The Upanishads, the Divya Prabandhas and the Gita, all proclaim the greatness of the Narasimha Mantra, and of the Narasimha Kshetras. Ahobilam is considered the most sacred among them.

Narasimhas of Yadgiri

Yada Giri or Yada Giri Gutta is another centre dedicated to Lord Narasimha. This town is situated in Nalgonda district, and the shrine here is becoming increasingly popular. The deity here is believed to be a "Pratyaksha Deivam", like that of Tirupathi and Annavaram.

Yada Giri or Yadgiri derives its name from a Sage called Yad Rishi, who sat here in deep tapasya in the heart of the forest region, intent on having a vision of the Lord as Jwala Narasimha.

So deep was his devotion and so one-pointed his concentration that the Lord at last appeared before him, and, upon his entreaties, granted him the delight of a vision of His in his three glorious aspects, as Jwala Narasimha, Ganda-bheranda Ananda Narasimha and Yogananda Narasimha. But Yad Rishi, unable to content himself with only a fleeting glance of these glorious forms beseeched the lord to stay there forever. The Lord responded graciously to this appeal and took his permanent abode on this hill. Thus this place came to be known as Yad Giri.

In course of time this place turned into a dense forest and became inaccessible to people. Once, an officer in a village near the foot-hills was graced with a glimpse of the Lord in his dream, and was appraised of the presence of the three icons in the forest. He went to the spot indicated in the dream the next morning with some villagers and found the images there under a huge rock, which they resuscitated and consecrated in a shrine, arranging for regular worship and rituals to be performed.

The temple is situated on top of a hill 300 feet high. Very near the entrance of the temple is a shrine for Hanuman, and just beneath the Hanuman image is a deep crevice in the rock of about 10 inches in width and 60 square feet in area. This gap is believed to be the spot where Lord arasimha appeared to Yad Rishi as Gandabherunda Ananda Narasimha.

The main shrine is built around what is actually a cave, which serves as the sanctum. This cave is about 30 feet in length and 12 feet in width, cut into a hill. At the end of this cave are the other two forms of Lord Narasimha. An icon of the Lord is considered as Jwala Narasimhaswami, and it is believed that to this day a divine serpent visits their place and moves about the image. On the rock opposite to this is the icon of the Lord in the aspect of deep meditation, worshipped as Yogananda Narasimha.

There is a Chakra on top of the temple Vimana, which is considered to be of mystic value and power. This Chakra shines with a divine glow in darkness, and sometimes turns on its own accord, though it is not possible to turn it by any human effort. The ceiling of the main shrine is filled with votive offerings in the form of coconuts, full and unbroken, which remain fresh for months together.

Lord Narasimha of Mangala Giri

Mangala Giri is a shrine situated on top of a small hill, a few miles away from Bezwada or Vijayawada, an important railway junction in Andhra Pradesh. The hill is a part of the Eastern Ghats and is in the shape of an elephant. The hill is considered

as "Mangala Mayam" or holy and auspicious, and hence the name Mangala Giri. A mention of this holy hill is found in the Brahma Vaivarta Purana and the origin of the presiding Deity, "Panakala Narasimhaswami" is traced to Krita Yuga in the legend (Sthala Purana) concerning the temple. It is said that in Krita Yuga, a King by name Pariyatra begot a son called Hrusva Sringi, who had a number of deformities.

To get rid of his deformities Hrusva Sringi came to this place and began a penance to propitiate Lord Vishnu. His father, who resented his son deserting the Royal pleasures and losing himself in spiritual contemplation, came over and tried to call him back home. Unable to thwart his father's efforts Hrusva Sringi turned himself into an elephant, later becoming this hill Mangala Giri, and entreated the Lord to make this his abode. The Lord, pleased with the depth of the devotion that made him offer his own body for His seat, came down and made the hill His abode.

Panakam offering

It is said that the offerings made to the Lord were Honey in the Krita Yuga, Ghee in Dwapara, Milk in Treta Yuga, and Jaggery water (panakam) now in Kali Yuga. From this form of worship the presiding deity here has come to be known as "Panakala Narasimha Swami", and jaggery water continues to be the offering to the Lord now, the Kali Yuga age. A very interesting and mysterious feature of this shrine which endows this pilgrim centre with a vivid, ocular demonstration of the presence of Divinity is that the Deity accepts precisely half the quantity of the "Panakam" or

jaggery water offered and gorgles out the other half as "Prasadam". Down Hill, vessels of various sizes containing the sweet liquid are offered for varying prices, which the devotees buy and carry up the hill or have them carried if the size of the vessels is too big. But whatever the size of the vessel, when the liquid is poured into the mouth of the Lord's form as carved into the trunk of a tree around which a mantapam is built, the Lord accepts only half and returns the rest. The Mantapa is covered with a thick coat of jaggery as the water constantly pours out on it and dries, and yet not a single ant is found anywhere near it !

These features have made this a pilgrim centre of great popularity. This is one of the eight great Kshetras of India and is visited by a large number of pilgrims from all corners of the country.

Vijayawada Goddess Kanaka Durga

Vijayawada or Vijayavada, as mentioned in some ancient scripts, houses a famous shrine of Shakti in the form of Kanaka Durga. Though the image is believed to be self manifested, the temple itself appears to have been of recent origin. Situated on top of the Kanaka Durga Hill, Goddess Kanaka Durga is considered a Pratyaksha Deivam, the impact of whose presence is felt by the way the Divine fulfils the desires of her devotees and wards off their troubles. Like Tirupathi and Annavaram, this shrine is also a famous pilgrim centre in the Andhra region and devotees pour in, in large numbers to fulfil their vows.

Vijayeswara and Malleswara shrines

Besides the Kanaka Durga temple, the shrines of Vijayeswara and Malleswara are also held sacred for their association with the Mahabharata. In the range of the hills surrounding the Kanaka Durga hill, there is a hill called Indra Kila, which is the famous hill mentioned in the Mahabharata, on top of which Arjuna performed penance to Lord Siva. During his stay on the hill, Arjuna once hit a wild boar, and when he went to the place where the boar fell he found to his surprise, two arrows sticking out from its side. A tribal hunter, who also arrived on the scene just then, claimed that he hit it first. From arguments the claimants came to blows, fighting with each other, and Arjuna little realised that the tribal hunter was none other than Lord Siva. Finding the hunter to be too powerful for him to cope with, Arjuna prepared a Linga with the earth and worshipped it then and there in order to acquire additional strength and power from Siva. When he saw the flowers offered to the Linga being showered automatically on the hunter, Arjuna realised that the hunter was none other than the Lord, and offering Him his obeisance prayed for his grace. The Lord appearing in all the glory of his real form granted the mighty weapon, the famous Pasupatastra to Arjuna and blessed him. The Linga in the sanctum is believed to have been consecrated at this spot within a temple by Arjuna, and hence it is considered a doubly sacred one. It is said that in the Saka year 117 a King by name Madhava Varma ruled here. He was an incarnation of righteousness and justice. Once his son accidentally killed the child of a poor woman, who complained to

the King of the incident in great distress. The king immediately ordered his own son to be hanged in order to meet the ends of justice. Lord Siva as Mallikeswara, pleased by the King's upright sense of justice, appeared before him, and brought back to life both the Prince and the child. Thus is Lord Mallikeswara worshipped here.

Simhachalam

Another famous Narasimha Kshetra in Andhra Pradesh is Simhachalam near Vizag city, which attracts a large number of pilgrims who pour in to fulfil the vows made to the Lord, whose help they sought in times of distress. Like Tirupathi, this is another centre where devotees make a votive offering of their hair.

The legend in connection with the temple states that Prahlada, the great child-devotee of the Lord, was thrown here into the sea by his father who also turned the hill on him so that he may be crushed to death. Lord Vishnu came to Prahlada's rescue, enabling him to escape by tilting the mountain slightly, and it is said Prahlada constructed this shrine here to commemorate the Lord's act of grace. The presiding Deity is Lord Vishnu in his incarnation of Narasimha. The icon is covered with a thick paste of sandal throughout the year, since Lord Narasimha is considered an Ugra Devata. Once in a year, on the day of the star Vaisakha in May, the coat of sandal wood is removed and a fresh coating applied. This ritual, called "Chandanotsavam" attracts a large number of pilgrims.



Shrines on the Banks of Godavari

THE river Godavari meanders through the State of Andhra Pradesh, enriching the soil and the lives of the people on her banks with her sacred waters. Like a mother she deludes them when she is angry, and yet feeds them to the full. Godavari is a river of sanctity, one of the famous Tirthas mentioned in the Puranas. Her entire course is glorified and sanctified by the presence of holy places on either bank.

Bhadrachalam

Bhadrachalam, situated on the banks of this sacred river is one of the most famous Rama Kshetras of our land. Ramayana, known as the "Adi Kavya", is not a mere myth, but scripture itself to the Hindus. Rama is the deity dear and beloved to our hearts, as an embodiment of justice and righteousness and termed as "Santa Murthy" and "Karunamaya Murthy" as opposed to the quality of "Ugra" (Anger) found in so many other deities. And it is the sacred association of Bhadrachalam with God Rama, which has made it the famous Tirtha as it is.

It is said that once the Lord Sri Ramachandra, during his fourteen years sojourn in the forests, took rest on this hill, Bhadra Giri. She rested them with her cool fragrant breezes, refreshed them with her fruits and crystal waters and

entertained them with her beautiful sights thrilling with the sweet notes of birds. Rama, pleased by her attentions gave her the boon that she would become and remain famous through all the ages. He asked her to take birth as the son of Meru, on the banks of river Gautami. This son of Meru was known as Bhadra and he performed a great penance for Lord Vishnu. The heat emanating from Bhadra's passionate penance started scorching the three worlds and the Rishis and Suras approached Vishnu, begging him to appease Bhadra. Vishnu came down to appear before Bhadra in such a hurry that he picked up his Sankha and Chakra from left to right, against the norm. The image of Lord Rama in Bhadrachalam is seen holding the Sankha and Chakra in this manner. Another explanation given to this unusual placing of Sankha-Chakra is that after Vishnu defeated all the Asuras, he no longer considered the Chakra as of supreme importance and hence shifted its position. The Lord in the sanctum of the Bhadrachalam temple is known as Vaikuntha Rama and Ramanarayana. It is said that the stone on which Bhadra stood and performed penance has been carved into the images in the sanctum. Lord Rama's image here is a unique one as it has four arms and is seen holding Sankha Chakras in addition to bow and arrow. He has Sita to his left and Lakshmana to his right, and stands gracefully in the middle, bestowing his kind, benevolent gaze upon his devotees. The images are extremely beautiful sculptures with rare delicacy of workmanship. Sri Rama's image represents an exceedingly handsome person, with a fine physique, holding the Dhanus and Bana

and standing in the Tribhanga (Triangular, or with three bends) posture as different from the normal Samabhang posture. Sita is on his left, also in Tribhanga attitude, holding a lotus in one hand and the other hand showing "Katya-valambita Mudra".

This is one of those temples, where devotees are captivated by the sheer beauty of the icon of the Lord. The beauty of the image itself does not appear to be the result of mere sculptural excellence, but a beauty infused with an original divinity, and spells out a magical charm that ties down the devotees hearts to Bhadrachalam even after they have left the place.

The temple itself is a sturdy construction that does not display any great architectural splendour. The main Sikhara is surrounded by 24 statuettes and the entire temple is enclosed by a compound wall said to be constructed by Saint Ramdas. The temple also does not claim any Sthalapurana showing that it was constructed originally by some rishi or divine being. In fact, this is a temple that claims the fact of Manushya Pratishta, or being consecrated by a human being, and the local legends trace the birth of this temple to a mendicant who came here from Ayodhya and stayed on the small hillock that overlooks the beautiful Godavari. It is stated that it was he who carved the images and consecrated them in a small temple on the hillock. But today Bhadrachalam is one of the most famous Ramakshetras, comparable to Ayodhya and Rameswaram in sanctity, and attracts a great number of pilgrims from all over India despite its inaccessibility.

Bhadrachalam is also popular for its association with the two great Ramabhaktas, Saint Ramdas and Saint Kabir. It is the one temple that has constantly been the recipient of Muslim patronage.

Ramadas, the Bhakta

Ramdas, whose original name was Gopanna was a Tahasildar in the court of Tanashah, the last nawab of the Kutub Shahi line. He once spent six lakhs of rupees from the State Revenue on the construction and

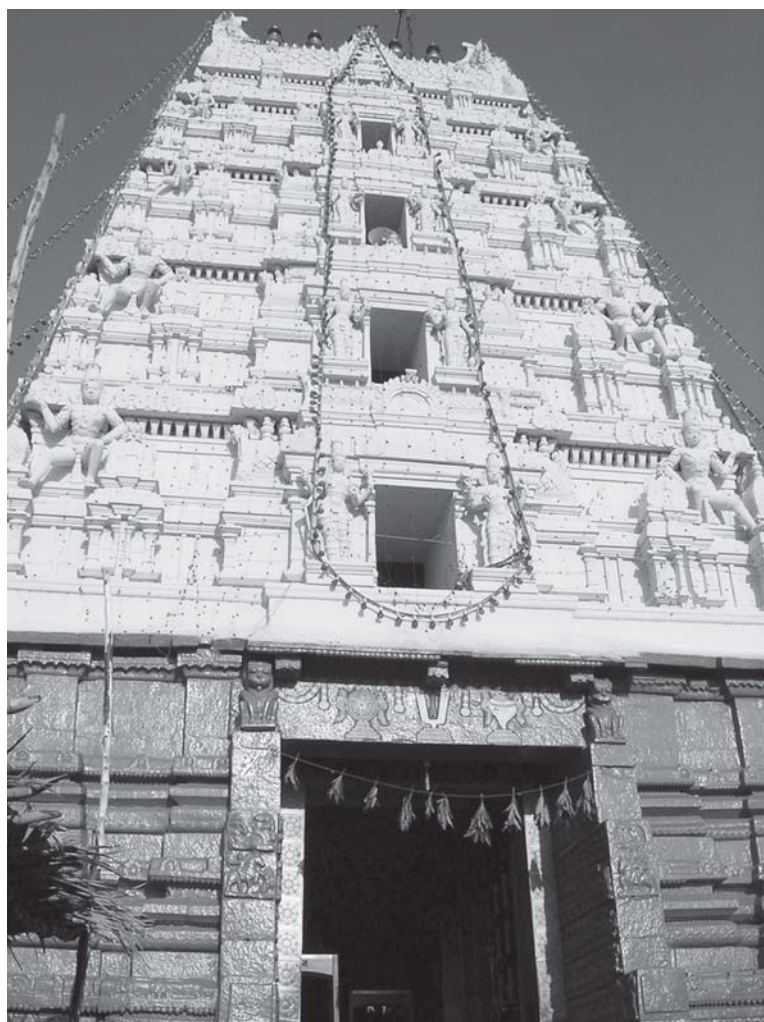
renovation work of the Ramalayam. He was imprisoned by Tanashah for misappropriation and was in jail for twelve years. During these arduous years, Ramadas never gave up his Lord, and spent all his time in singing of Him, thus oblivious of the external suffering he was subjected to. It is said that after twelve years, Lord Rama himself came to Tanasha, in the form of a young lad, and He and Lakshmana paid 6 lakhs in the form of gold coins tied in six bags and took a receipt from Tanasha, thus releasing Ramdas from his debt to the State. When

Tanasha realised that it was the Lord Himself who paid the money to release his devotee, he was overwhelmed. He then released Ramadas from jail and honoured

him and allowed him to carry on his devotional work for the rest of his life. Tanasha himself patronised the temple and bestowed great deal of money and gifts on it and also had gold coins resembling the ones Sri Rama gave him minted for circulation.

Kabirdas

It is said that originally the idol of Rama lay hidden, in the forests of Bhadrachalam, and one Dammakka dreamt of the presence of the Lord, and going to the place next morning found the idols. She had a temple erected there and consecrated the idols.



Sometime later, Ramdas, then known as Gopanna, paid a visit to his uncle Akkanna employed at the court of Tanasha, and went to the Bhadrachalam temple. At that time Kabirdas, the great Muslim saint, also paid a visit to the temple, but was denied entry to the sanctum. He was greatly distressed over this, and the deity in the sanctum suddenly disappeared. Gopanna who was watching this realised that barriers of caste and religion do not exist in the realm of the Almighty and that He loves all His children alike and thus cannot stand anyone of them being in distress. He then and there became a disciple of Saint Kabir and pleaded with the priest to let Kabir enter the temple. When Kabir entered the sanctum the images re-appeared. Gopanna thereafter became a great follower of Kabir and took the name of Ramadas, servant of Lord Rama.

After Ramadas, his successor by name Timu Lakshmi Narasimha Rao carried on the religious work and had a temple for Sri Ranganathaswami built on the banks of Godavari. This temple was completed when a merchant brought two lakhs and gave the money for its construction work, and it is also closely associated with Tanashah. This temple was under the supervision of the Asaf Shahi dynasty which granted an allowance for its maintenance, and the temple was the recipient of Rs. 20,000 from the treasury of the Nizam of Hyderabad. Thus has this temple been the true abode of the Lord who is beyond all the meaningless bars of caste and creed and religion, patronized by the Muslim kings and worshipped by countless devotees from all corners. It stands on the slightly elevated hillock of Bhadrageeri, its forty steps

descending down to Godavari. Her waves lap upon the shores, as though she was washing the feet of the Lord in devotion. The journey to the temple leaves one under the magic spell of Lord Rama, whose abode here is reached through a narrow path trekking through the Dandakaranya forest which had been His abode during his exile. The soil and surroundings vibrate with the divine presence of the Lord who once rested on the lap of the earth here, and the pilgrims who pass through this forest are infused with an inexplicable thrill as they walk upon the very soil which had been trodden on by the tender feet of Rama and Sita.

Annaram

The temple of Sri Satya Narayana Swamy on the banks of river Godavari is a pilgrim centre of growing importance. The temple itself is of recent origin and does not show any association with any ancient legend. But Annaram town is becoming more and more important because of the popularity of Sri Satyanarayanawamy, the presiding deity of the temple here, who like Lord Venkateswara of Tirupathi is believed to offer relief to the devotees in their distress if they pray and undertake oaths. Annaram is indeed considered a second Tirupathi in Andhra Pradesh.

The temple stands on a small hill, and the distance from the foot hill to the temple on top is about half a mile. The sacred river Pampa is flowing by this hill and pilgrims take a dip in this river before going up to the temple. There is a "Yantra" established in this temple, the like of which is not found anywhere else in India. Based on Tripad

Vibhuti Narayana Upanishad, which is a part of the Devarshi Sakha of the Atharva Veda, the Yantra is consecrated in the lower part of the sanctum while the Mula Vighras are consecrated in the upper part. The Garbha Griha or sanctum has four entrances and in the centre of it is a Tripeetha. On top of these tripeethas, over the Meru portion, the Beejakshara of the yantra is etched in the stone.

At the apex which forms the Bindu a monolithic pillar is constructed and on top of this pillar are the Mula Vighras, with the icon of the Lord in the centre and a Siva Linga to the left and the goddess to the right. The images are very gracefully carved and display great beauty.

The main temple is constructed in the form of a chariot with four wheels in the four corners. Agni Purana states that the Akriti (appearance or outline) of any temple is the manifestation of Prakriti (Nature.) The entire Silpa Sastra is based on the principle that the architecture and sculpture of a temple, the construction of the walls as well as the Vimana should be such that the devotee, when he enters the temple, should be reminded of the universe and nature with the deity in the sanctum as the nucleus of it all, the supreme spirit from which all other things emerge. Accordingly, the chariot shaped temple at Annavaram represents the seven worlds beneath and the seven worlds above the lord at the centre in the Garbhalaya.

Large numbers of devotees pour into this sacred centre to fulfil their vows, the most important of them being the performance of the Satyanarayana Vratam, in the premises of the temple. A huge Vrata Sala is constructed by the Devasthanam to

facilitate the performance of the Vratam by a number of people simultaneously. Like Tirupathi, this place has ample arrangements for the comfort of the pilgrims and the annual revenue is constantly on the increase, owing to the growing popularity of this shrine.

Draksharama - the Yajna Vatika of Daksha

The temple at Draksharama in East Godavari district is dedicated to Lord Shiva as Bhimeswaraswami. Draksharama is a corrupt form of Daksharama, or the Yajna Vatika where Dakshaprajapati performed his Yajna. The sthala puranas here state that Dakshayani, daughter of Daksha married Lord Shiva against her father's wish and Daksha ignored them when he performed the Yajna. Dakshayani was distressed and furious at her father's treatment, yet could not suppress her desire to go and witness so famous a Yajna. Hence she attended it uninvited, which added to the pride of Daksha who, thinking that his Yajna attracted the spouse of lord Shiva Himself despite the lack of invitation. He ignored Dakshayani completely, blinded by this pride, and Dakshayani sacrificed herself in the Homa Kundam, unable to bear the insult. Lord Shiva burned with anger when he heard it, and from the sweat on his body was born Veerabhadra, who destroyed Daksha and avenged the death of Dakshayani. On this Yajna Vatika was later constructed a temple consecrated to Lord Shiva. To this day no Yajna or sacrificial rite is performed on the soil of Draksharama or around it for fear of rousing Lord Shiva's anger.

Another legend associated with the sanctity of the temple states that Kumara Swami, designated by Lord Shiva to destroy the evil power of Taraka, broke the Linga that Taraka carried in his throat, thereby destroying his power and ultimately killed Taraka. Pieces of the Linga thus broken by Kumara fell at different places making all these places highly sacred. These places are the five aramas, Draksharama, Amararama (Amravati) Bheemarama (Bheemavaram in Kakinada dt.), Kumararama (Kotipalle), and Ksheerarama (Palakollu).

Historical analysis, however, leads us to guess that this temple was originally a Baudha Chaitya later converted for Hindu worship. The Mula Virat as in the case of Amareswara is considered to be an Ayaka Sthambha. Many Architectural details of the temple can be traced to Buddhist style of sculpture. The Ayaka Stambhas are a characteristic of the Andhra style Chaityas. and historical evidence shows that Buddhism flourished in these parts of Andhra, with universities at Amaravati and Nagarjuna Konda. It is probable then that these Chaityas, when Buddhism declined, have been claimed for worship by the Hindus and converted into Hindu temples. The sanctity of the place, however, will always retain its supreme glory, no matter how to be differences concocted by human mind interpret it, and both as a Buddhist Chaitya and a Shiva temple the glory of Draksharama will always be the light divine to all devotees. The temple is a blend of the Chola and Chalukya architecture reflecting the glory of both by the wealth of sculptural beauty. The Vimana over the main Garbha Griha with its horizontal motif,

and with an octagonal type is a good specimen of the Dravidian type of architecture. The western Gopura rises to seven stories and is a piece of great beauty, that throws out the rays of Chola glory from its core. Draksharama is perhaps the one and only temple, too, where we find a clue to the way ancient architecture had been planned and executed. Here is found a small temple, carved out of a single stone, which is a perfect replica of the main temple. This small temple must have served as the model for the construction of the main temple.

The blend of the Hindu and the Muslim

This place is sacred to people of all religions. There is a tomb here of the Muslim saint Saiyad Shah Bhazi Aulia, with a mosque attached to it. This saint is said to have lived about 500 years ago in Arabia, and came to Draksharama while undertaking a pilgrimage. He and his disciples were hungry, and slaughtered the temple bull and ate it. A dispute ensued between the Hindus of the place and the Muslim saint, and the head of the local Saivite mutt was called to challenge the Muslim Saint. A Shiva Linga was thrown into the tank and the two were asked to bring it out by the pull of their devotion. Upon this, the Muslim saint prayed with such depth and sincerity to the All Powerful that Shiva was greatly pleased and acceded to this request. Thereafter the Muslim Saint occupied the Mutt with his disciples and lived in Draksharama, converting the Mutt into a mosque. His descendants are said to be still living at Draksharama.

This religious place, formerly called Taksha Tapovanam, or Taksha Vatika, said to be founded by Veda Vyasa, is an important centre of great sanctity in the Godavari tract of Andhra. The temple is a standing specimen of a catholic admixture of many schools of temple architecture. In the wealth of its epigraphical details and the divine glory of this place Draksharama is perhaps unrivalled in these parts, glorified as Dakshina Kasi or Benaras of the South.

Kotipalle

Kotipalle in the East Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh is situated on the banks of Godavari at the point where she meets the sea. The temple here is dedicated to Sri Someswaraswamy and his consort Rajarajeswari Devi. This Tirtham is considered very sacred and from time immemorial it is believed that a bath at this spot is a cure for diseases of all kinds particularly those pertaining to the skin. Time and again we find mention in the Puranas and scriptures where someone afflicted with leprosy or some other disease of the kind being advised by the sages to take a dip in the sacred Godavari at Kotithirtham and pray to the Lord Siddheswara there to be rid of their sins and the diseases. One such story is told of the King Sudharka, whose queen once performed a great Vrata in honour of Goddess Lakshmi in the month of Aswayuja. All the Sumangalis of his kingdom attended this function and the king and queen bestowed valuable gifts upon them and received their blessings. The king was attracted towards one of the ladies and made overtures to her.

She was the wife of his own Guru, and a very pious woman. Since even to entertain an evil intent towards one's Gurupatni is a very great offence, the king fell a victim immediately to the result of such a sin, and contracted a horrible disease of the skin. He realised his folly and prayed to Lord Vishnu who appeared before him and directed him to bathe in the waters of Godavari at Kotithirtham and pray to Lord Siddheswara there. The King, upon performing this, was cured of his disease. Such is the sanctity of mother Godavari and Lord Someswara here, and to this day the sufferer and the devoted alike pour into this punya Tirtham to wash away their sins and sufferings. This place is also called Kumararama, one of the five aramas, where the pieces of the Shivalinga broken by Lord Kumaraswamy during his fight with Taraka fell, thus making this place a very ancient and sacred Kshetra.

Kotipalle thus is an ancient Kshetra of great value and its temples are also very ancient. Cradled in the lap of mother Nature at her very best, Kotipalle is situated amidst exquisitely beautiful surroundings and attracts large numbers of people to its bosom, both due to its sanctity and its beauty. Mahasivaratri is celebrated in great splendour here and on this day large numbers of pilgrims pour in to take a dip in the river Godavari and worship Lord Someswara and thus sanctify their lives.

-Material drawn from Temples and legends of Andhra



The Undying Glory of an Undying City

Satya

Amaravati

THE "Amar" city, that knows no death, was the glorious capital of the Satavahana Kings, where Buddhism and Hinduism flourished in harmonious co-existence. The Satavahana kings with their great love of art, have made this capital of theirs, then known as Dhanyakota, a treasure house of fine arts. The wealth of art and sculpture has endeared this city to the hearts of many poets who immortalised her in their poems.

The temple that has made Amaravati a pilgrim centre today is the temple of Amareswara.

The legend related to the inception of the Linga in the sanctum refers to the evil power called Tarakasura. He was a very powerful one to deal with, being a Siva Bhakta and having a Linga in his throat. Hence Indra prayed to Lord Shiva himself, begging him to destroy Taraka who was harassing the three worlds. Lord Shiva sent his son Kumara to destroy the Linga in the throat of Tarakasura. Pieces of the Linga fell at different spots, the biggest on the banks of river Krishna, where it began to grow. Indra and other Deva Ganas came down to this place and worshipped this Linga, thus making this place a second Amaravati, capital of Indra. Four other pieces fell respectively at Bheemarama in Bhimavaram, Ksheerarama in Palakollu in West Godavari, Draksharama and

Kumararama (Kotipalle) in East Godavari Dt., and these five places have since then been considered sacred as the abodes of Lord Siva. The temple is situated in beautiful surroundings on the banks of River Krishna, at a point where it takes a north-south course, while the main river follows an east-to-west course. The architecture of the temple is Dravidian in style, and inside the Garbha Griha is a tall Linga of 15 ft. carved out of marble. It is believed that the temple was originally a Buddhist shrine and several parts of the temple stand proof to this conviction where Buddhist architecture is highly noticeable. The Mulavirat is a 15 ft. high Linga in Marble, resembling the Akaya stambha of Buddhist temples. The foundation is laid in typically Buddhist design and in marble. In the sanctum, above the deity, is found a large medallion carved out in the shape of a lotus and is carved in the characteristic pattern of Buddhist sculpture. The temple of Amareswara and Amravati are very ancient and a description of these is found in the Skanda Purana.

Both a Hindu and Buddhist Centre

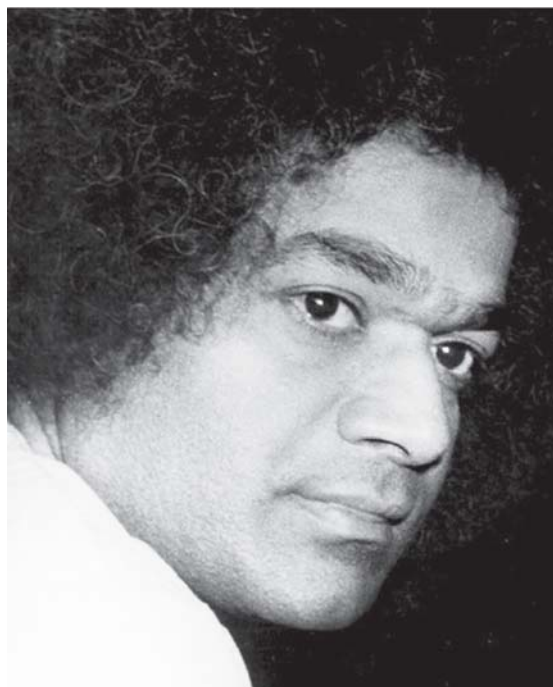
This place is popular in its sanctity as both a Hindu pilgrim centre as well as a Buddhist centre. A university is believed to have been established here by the Buddhist monks and excavations here and in Nagarjuna Konda have revealed ruins of what must have been a great city revealing dominant features of Buddhist architecture and Stupas. The university was comparable to Nalanda and Kasi in its wealth of knowledge, much the same as the place itself is comparable to Benaras as the abode

of Lord Siva. A dip in the River Krishna here is as meritorious as a dip in the Ganges. The main festival here is the Maha Sivaratri festival and to witness this pilgrims pour in from all corners in large numbers. The beauty of sculpture here has established a tradition by itself, and the workmanship of the sculptures depicting scenes from the life of the Buddha here is unexcelled.



The Miracle Sage of Prasanti Nilayam

In the village of Puttaparti in the district of Anantapur Satya Sai Baba has established the "Abode of Supreme Peace". It is said that some seven hundred people live there permanently, breathing the never failing atmosphere of sublime Peace, while hundreds of seekers, devotees and visitors keep constantly arriving and leaving. Putta Parti has become a veritable centre of pilgrimage.



When Satya Sai Baba is on the scene, all eyes are turned on him, all attention focussed on what he says and does, as he gently moves among the devotees, giving a word of comfort and hope here, showing a gesture of reassurance there and waving now and then some Divine "Prasadam" into being by a miracle out of nowhere, as it were.

Satya Sai Baba is not just a Sage demonstrating his Divinity merely through miracles. He is not only a friend and guide but a Philosopher as well. He has a message to deliver. His teachings are part of that Sanatana Dharma, the Eternal Religion which has been the pride of India's timeless glory and her inheritance through scripture, epic and legend.

Says Sri Satya Sai Baba : "The vehicle of human life is drawn on two wheels by the senses, which are driven by Buddhi, with Viveka and Vairagya as the reins, the two

wheels being Kala Chakra and the Karma Chakra. The spokes of the wheel are the rules of Dharma bound by the rim of Prema. The Self is the Rider and he will not come to harm if the axle is Satya and the goal is Shanti."

Linga with many grotesque depressions. As the Linga is made of sacred Saligrama stones, it is held in veneration by Vaishnavas, too. All the devotees are at liberty to touch the Linga to the satisfaction of their heart. A massive monolithic Nandi is found kneeling before the Linga.

Mahanandi

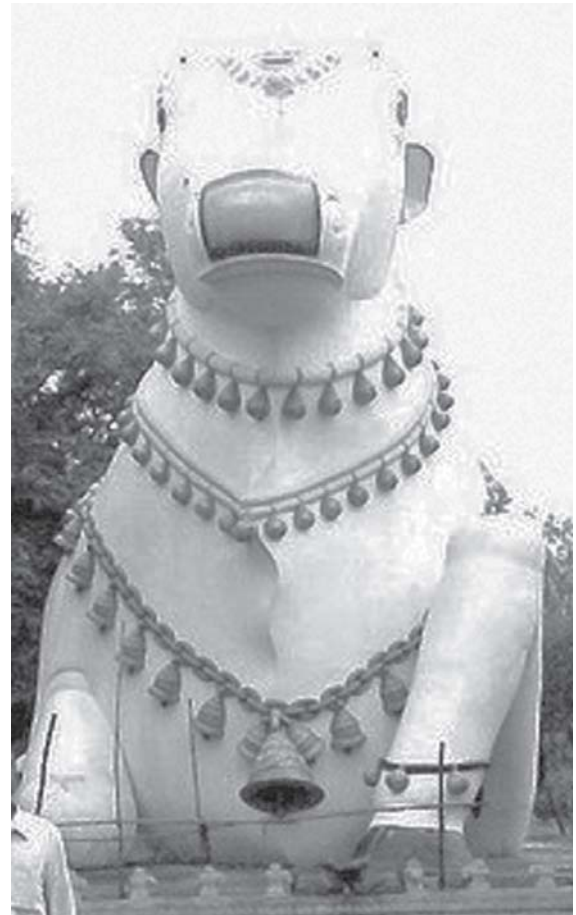
B. RADHAKRISHNA RAO

Setting

CLOTHED in the scenic splendour of extensive ever-green jungles, the Nallamalai ranges in the Deccan plateau across the Kurnool District, presents an exhilarating sight. Cradled in a tranquil atmosphere, Nallamalai range abounds in many sacred spots like Ahobilam, Srisailam and Tirupati. Served by a number of Tirthas and sanctified by the presence of all the nine aspects of Nandi "Mahanandi" is a holy place dedicated to Lord Shiva-situated in the Nallamalai ranges. Lying in a natural gorge of gorgeous beauty, Mahanandi is ten miles from Nandyal.

Style of Temple

Standing at the foot of a hill, the Shiva Shrine here embodies the fascinating aspects of Nagari style. On account of its having a soaring spire, it looks like a Jain temple from far away. The Vimana of the temple is known to have been erected by a Rasasiddha (Alchemist) from Kashmir. The presiding deity of *Mahanandi* is a colossal



Legendary Background

The legend about the origin of the shrine says that once Nanda, the ruler of Navanandi territory in which *Mahanandi* is situated, wanted to perform Abhishekam in milk to his tutelary deity. So he had herds of cows brought from various places.

A black cow among a herd used to give large quantity of milk, but in course of time it was discovered that it was yielding less and less milk. The curious cowherds with the intention of knowing the reason for diminishing supply of milk followed the cow to the forest.

They found that - standing right over an ant hill, the cow was pouring its milk into an ant hill, where Sri Krishna in the form of a child used to give Darshan to the cow. The cowherds appraised the king of this strange happening. The king realised that the child is none other than the lord. Next day the king also followed the cow to the forest and with the desire of getting the Darsana of Lord, he sat there in meditation. As usual, the child accepted the offering of the cow. Meanwhile, the king in utter consternation trampled upon some leaves, which disturbed the cow, making it tread the ant-hill. Soon the child disappeared and the impression of the cow's hoof was left on the ant-hill.

Feeling that he had committed a sin against God, the king prayed for pardon. The lord, pleased with the devotion of the King, had the ant hill transformed into a Linga. The two signs found on the Linga are said to be the imprint of cow's hoof.

Royal Patronage

The Vijayanagaram rulers used to patronise the temple with generous donations. During the 17th and 18th centuries Mahanandi was a part of Kurnool Circars, over which the Nawab of Kurnool exercised his sway. During Shivaratri festival, the Nawab used to grant lavish sums of money from his treasury towards the expenditure of the celebration.

The Five Sacred Springs

The Tirthas flowing in and around the temple are well known for their curative powers. The main Tirtha is seen flowing in front of the temple. The depth of the water is always kept at 5 feet so that the pilgrims can have an easy dip. There are five springs, from out of which the Tirtha is supplied with water. They are known as Sri Sailadhara, Narasimhadhara, Daivodhinidhara, Nandithirtha and Kailasa Tirtha. As Nandi conducted here his severe penance and pleased Lord Shiva, who converted Nandi into his vehicle, the place came to be called Mahanandi. Most of the temples dedicated to Nandi found here were constructed by the rulers of Nanda dynasty. The image of the Goddess is enshrined by the side of the main shrine with a Sri Chakra in front of her, said to have been installed by Adi Shankara.

The Nine Lingas

Within the radius of ten miles of Mahanandi there are as many as nine temples, all of which are dedicated to Nandi in his nine aspects. The nine Nandis are: (1) Padma Nandi (2) Naga Nandi (3) Vinayaka Nandi (4) Garuda Nandi (5) Brahma Nandi (6) Surya Nandi (7) Vishnu Nandi (8) Soma Nandi and (9) Shiva Nandi. As in the other shrines of Shiva, "Shivaratri" is the most important festival of Mahanandi. Most of the pilgrims who throng Srisaillam on the occasion of Shivaratri do not fail to visit Mahanandi.

By Courtesy of B. Radhakrishna Rao,



Sri Kurmam

SRI Kurmam, situated in the Srikakulam district of Andhra Pradesh enshrines Lord Vishnu in "Kurma Avatara" (Kurma means tortoise). This ancient temple in this village is regarded as a very sacred one and of rare distinction, as it is one of the few temples that enshrine Lord Vishnu in Kurma Avatara. The temple displays a Chola style of architecture and one can infer that the original temple, having suffered the ravages of time, had to be renovated several times, the latest of the renovations being in the Chola period. The temple has a beautiful, pillared Mandapam, carved with great skill. Some of the granite sculptures in the temple display an extra-ordinary degree of sculptural skill and beauty. The prakara of the temple, however, reveals a different architectural style, and hence, must belong to a later date.



Arasa Villi

Man's first idea of God must have been inspired by a sense of awe at the mysterious powers of nature. He was afraid of these powers, for the way in which they manifested themselves was beyond his comprehension and control. This deep sense of awe made him worship the powers of nature and natural phenomena. Thus, worship of the Sun and Moon had been a common feature of the early religious life of man. To this day there exist relics of the oldest ways of religion and worship in the Sun temples of India. Arasa Villi, very close to Srikakulam in Andhra

Pradesh is one of the few places where a shrine had been built and dedicated to the Sun God. The deity as Surya Narayana Murthy, is worshipped by a large number of devotees who pour into this township. Legends take the temple's origins to Vedic times, narrating the story of Indra's fall from the Celestial region and the vision he had of Surya Narayana, which provided him the inspiration to establish a shrine dedicated to the Sun God.

The icon of Lord Surya Narayana in the sanctum is an exceedingly beautiful one. Carved out of black granite, the Lord is depicted as riding (with a Lotus in each hand), his mighty chariot drawn by the seven horses, which were driven by his legless charioteer, Anoora. This image conforms to the principles of Viswa Karma Silpa as laid down in the Agama Sastra. On the side of the Lord are his three consorts, Usha, Padmini and Ahalya and at the base are the Sages Sanaka and Sananda.

This temple is one of the very few important shrines dedicated to the Sun God and it attracts a large number of pilgrims. The worship of the Sun God is undertaken by suffering humanity seeking relief from afflictions of body and mind. A very recent occurrence at Arasa Villi confirms this belief. A young man of twenty from a village in Godavari district was suffering from leprosy which covered his body with ugly sores. He went to Kasi, having decided to end his life by falling into the sacred Ganges. A pious man who met him there advised him to go to Arasa Villi, and worship the Sun God with single minded devotion for a period of forty days. The young man accordingly came to Arasa Villi and worshipped Sri

Surya. Narayana Murthy, as advised. After a bath in the temple tank, he would circumambulate the shrine one hundred and eight times every day. At the completion of the forty days' period of un-interrupted worship, he was cured of his disease, and he returned to his native village where he got married and became the father of a family. He visits the Sun temple every year, and worships the Lord, with his heart filled with gratitude and devotion.

The Buddhists worship the Sun God in the form of Marichi. Marichi is depicted with three faces, symbolising the three parts of the day, namely, morning, noon and evening. He is seen riding a chariot drawn by seven boars, driven by a Goddess without legs. This representation of Marichi bears a striking resemblance to the representation of the Sun God in the Puranas. Sun temples are thus sacred spots for Buddhist pilgrims, as well.

The Puranas proclaim the Sun God as the unitary representation of the Divine Trinity, Shiva, Vishnu and Brahma, thus proclaiming the oneness of the basis of creation. Aditya Hridayam sings His praise as the Lord who is the Trinity : And before this supreme manifestation, in whom man's earliest religious consciousness saw all super-natural powers concentrated, no sin, no suffering could survive or persist. To this luminous form visibly ablaze man prayed and got himself cleansed and purified in body and mind.

Lepakshi

Lepakshi is a name that spells beauty of sculpture; Like Ajanta, Ellora, Khajuraho

and Konarak, Lepakshi is a treasure-house, into which sculptural artists probe and find rare specimens of the beauty of ancient workmanship. While it satisfies the yearnings of the art-world with its rich sculptures and paintings, Lepakshi also pacifies the spiritual hunger of the devotees who flock here on account of the sanctity of its shrines.

One of the hundred and eight outstanding Siva Kshetras, Lepakshi is doubly sanctified by its association with the great sage Agastya, who is said to have established the shrine of Papanaseswara.

The temple stands as a testimony to the basic unity of the Divine manifestations, enshrining Lord Shiva, Veera Bhadra, Vishnu and Mother Durga within the same premises. The present temple, by the style of its architecture, sculpture and paintings, could be dated back to Krishna Devaraya's times. The paintings and sculptures beautifully depict several instances and anecdotes drawn from the epics and the Vedas. The Artha-Mantapa depicts Lord Shiva in his many aspects such as Linga Bhava, Natya Murthy, Dakshina Murthy, Chandikeswara, Bhikshatana Murthy, etc. Other legends, like that of Markandeya, are also depicted here. No wonder, this temple, with such sacred associations and hoary traditions continues to draw large crowds of pilgrims season after season.

Alampur

Situated on the sacred soil that adjoins the confluence of the holy rivers Krishna and Tungabadra is Alampur, where stand the rare shrines of the "Nava Brahmas". Brahma, the originator and Creator of the

Universe, is worshipped here in his *nine* aspects, as Bala Brahma, Kumara Brahma, Arka Brahma, Veera Brahma, Viswa Brahma, Taraka Brahma, Garuda Brahma, Swarga Brahma, and Padma Brahma. It is said that Brahma performed a mighty penance here lasting thousands of years and Lord Siva pleased with it, conferred on him the power and privilege of Creation. Shrines dedicated to Brahma are rare in India, and as such Alampur stands out in prominence amidst the pilgrim centres of India. The sacred confluence of Tungabhadra and Krishna the Raja Rajeswara Tirtha, are some of the other sacred spots at Alampur, which find mention in Puraanas. The temples here reflect the Odisha type of architecture in their outward appearance, but reveal the western-Indian pattern in some of the sculptures within. Like Lepakshi, this place, too is rich in its specimens of architecture and sculpture.



GOA

GOA with its vast coconut and mango groves, fringing paddy-fields and lagoons, a bracing freshness and an ever-green aspect to the land, justifies its ancient name Gomantak derived from "Gomant" which in Sanskrit means cool.

Besides its scenic beauty, Goa also abounds in man-made wonders, magnificent temples, grim fortresses and archaic rock-hewn caves.

The shrines of Goa, particularly, bear testimony to the architectural skill, artistic imagination and religious spirit of the forbears of the Goan people.

The Mangeshi and Shanta Durga Temples, to name a few, draw thousands of pilgrims from Bombay, Mysore, Mangalore and even and as such Alampur stands out in prominence amidst the pilgrim centres of India. The sacred confluence of Tungabadra and Krishna the Raja Rajeswara Tirtha, Ganika Siddheswara, Papa Vinasana Tirtha are some of the other sacred spots at Alampur, which find mention in Puranas. The temples here reflect the Orissa-type of architecture in their outward appearance, but reveal the western-India pattern in some of the sculptures within. Like Lepakshi, this place too, is rich in its specimens of architecture and sculpture. The famed temple at Tambdi Surla belongs to the same architectural school to which we owe Belur and Halebid. The Sri Sapta Koteswar, the deity of the ancient Kadamna rulers of Goa, the Temple at Narve, later renovated by no less a person than Shivaji, afford a vivid glimpse into the remote past.

Goan folk-lore is very rich in tradition, pageantry and cultural significance. Goa has two picturesque waterfalls, viz. Dudh Sagar and Arvalem. There is a legend that Pandava brothers with Draupadi stayed near these waterfalls. There are very many lakes like the Kadamba, Kamba and Mayem found scattered here and there around and about Goa.

Two other well-known spots

SHANTA DURGA OF GOA

Shanta Durga was originally in Tirhut (Mithila): Legend has it that Sage Parasurama had invited some Priests from Tirhut to aid him in his Yagna. These pious men had brought the image of Shanta Durga (their Goddess) along with them and installed Her at Kaivalyapur. This place is also known as Kavle Gram. The Temple is extensive and pilgrims come in an unending stream from all over Maharashtra and Mysore to worship here.

THE MAHADEVA OF MANGESH

Mangesh Mahadeva is housed in an extensive temple. It is said that it is a Swayambhu and that the Lord manifested Himself as a Linga in answer to the fervent prayers of an ardent devotee. Mother Durga had once prayed here and it is said that the Lord assumed the form of a ferocious animal. Frightened by its appearance the Mother wanted to cry out: *Girisa mam Pahi*. Instead the words that came out were Mangesh. Therefore the temple is called Mangesa Temple. Large crowds throng to this temple on Sivaratri day.



Pilgrimage Centres In Maharashtra

L. K. GATNE

THERE can be diverse opinions on the religion as a social force, but the fact cannot be denied that religion has been a way of life in this Indian subcontinent for ages. Hinduism, which is a major religion in this country pervades all walks of life - private and public. It has not only laid down the procedures and rituals to be followed at the various facets of individual life but has also laid down the doctrines of social morality. By and large, same is the impact of all other religions that thrive in India peacefully together.

Pilgrimage as a Pious Duty

Among the duties enjoined in the Hindu scriptures, pilgrimage to holy places occupies a high place. The importance of pilgrimage is well illustrated by such Sanskrit stanzas.

Hindu mind has always longed for pilgrimage of "Chardham" - the four holy places situated in four corners of the country. The great hardship people underwent in visiting these far flung places in those days, when travel was tedious and full of hazards, is not easy to imagine today, when one can go from place to place quickly and comfortably. For those who could not undertake pilgrimage to holy places in distant lands, there were other smaller pilgrim centres situated in the region itself. The evolution of the idea of pilgrimage or

pilgrim centres can be traced to Hindu mythology. Almost all the holy places have acquired their sacrosanct character by virtue of their having been the location of some incident or the other in the lives of saints or Godly men. There are numerous places along the entire length and breadth of the country that are said to be associated with the lives of Sri Rama and Sri Krishna - the two most important of the ten incarnations of God. Similarly in Hindu philosophy rivers are considered very sacred and are held in high esteem as 'Lokamatas' or mother angels. Most of the sacred places are thus situated on the banks of rivers.

Maharashtra - Dotted all over with Sacred Spots

No wonder that every region of this great land is dotted with pilgrim places, Maharashtra, is no exception to this. The State possesses a rich religious and spiritual heritage. Places of pilgrimage are scattered all over the State. It may be easier to count the stars in the sky or the grains of sands but not the temples. It is difficult to cover all of them in the span of this article. Every holy place has a different story to tell and a different message to give but let us be contented with an informative survey of a few representative ones.

Nasik

Nasik possesses an all India importance as a pilgrimage place. Just as every Hindu makes it a point to visit, Banaras or Kashi in his life time, similar is the case with Nasik. Nasik is visited by a large number of people

from all parts of the country throughout the year. Nasik is situated on the banks of River Godavari. That part of the city which is situated on the north bank of the river is known as Panchavati and that on the south bank as Nasik City. Sri Rama spent the major part of his exile here. According to Hindu legend, Surpanakha (sister of Ravana) lost her nose or 'Nasika' while trying to persuade Lakshmana to marry her. Thus the place is called Nasik.

The city has seen the rise and fall of a number of dynasties such as Andrabhratya, Abhir, Chalukya, Rathod, Shaka, Yadav Bahamani etc.

Nasik, though full of religious and historical places, is not lost merely in the memories

of the old glory but is also keeping pace with the modern times. In the last decade a gigantic industrial complex has sprung up around Nasik. The Sinhastha Fair as also the Kumbha Mela is held at Nasik every 12th year. On this occasion, lakhs of people come here to have a holy dip in the Godavari river.

Kala Ram Mandir, Kapaleshwar Temple, Sundar Narayan Temple, Naroshanker Temple, Sita Gumph, Rama Kund, Mahatma Gandhi Memorial, Gangapur earthen dam, Topavana, Takali and Pandavleni are places worth visiting in and around Nasik. Nasik is 184 Km. from Bombay by Road.

It is easy to reach by rail and road. Nasik Road is the railway station on the Bombay-



Bhusaval main line of Central Railway and Nasik City is 9 Km. away from the railway station. Buses ply from the station to city regularly throughout the day. Besides hotels, there are a number of Dharmashalas or Sanatoria at Nasik where pilgrims can halt.

Pandharpur

Situated on the banks of river Bhima, Pandharpur is the spiritual capital of Maharashtra. The river is popularly known as Chandrabhaga at Pandharpur because of its crescent like course at this place. On account of the Pandurang or Vitthal Temple, Pandharpur is considered as the "Vaikunth" or the abode of Sri Vishnu on earth. Pandharpur is the birth place of "Varkari" movement which is based on "Bhakti" cult and which has dominated the life of rural Maharashtra. Varkari is to visit Pandharpur twice a year on "Ashadh" and "Kartik" Shuddha Ekadashi. Over two or three lakh people from all over Maharashtra congregate here for the "Ashadi Ekadashi" fair. Darshan of Sri Pandurang and a holy dip in the river Bhima are the main rituals of the pilgrimage.

The Pandurang Temple is very ancient and provides a unique specimen of architecture. Built in Hemadpanti style the temple is quite expansive, its precincts being 105 metres in length and 51 metres in width. It has eight gates. The main gate is known as "Namdeo Darwaja". On its opposite side is the Samadhi of Saint Chokhoba. After entering the main gate is the step of Saint Namdeo or "Namdevachi Payri". While ascending the steps to the temple devotees do not let their footsteps touch this step as it is held sacred. There is a

bust size brass statue of Saint Namdeo installed on the step. The sand stone image of Sri Vitthal is about a metre in height and stands on a stone spout which is locally known as a brick, with the two hands resting on the waist.

The Marathi saint-poets have sung innumerable devotional songs in praise of their be-loved Vithoba. Other places visited by devotees are "Grand Stambha" in the main temple itself, temple of Goddess Rukmini and temple of Pundalik on the bank of river Chandra-bhaga.

Pandharpur is 74 Km, from Sholapur and 204 Km. from Poona by road. S.T. buses ply from Poona, Bombay, Sholapur and other important places to Pandharpur. It is also a railway station on Kurduwadi-Miraj branch of South Central Railway.

Alandi

A small place near Poona on the banks of river Indrayani, Alandi also popularly called "Devachi Alandi" has acquired fame as a sacred place on account of the association of Saint Dhyaneswar who attained samadhi here at the young age of 21 years, seven centuries ago. Alandi is also mentioned in the "Puranas" as "Siddhakshetra" and "Alaka" and was celebrated as a "Shivapeeth" before the period of Saint Dhyaneswar. Since Dhyaneswar himself belonged to *Natha Sampradaya* who are worshippers of God Shiva, Alandi even today is a "Shivapeeth". Besides the Samadhi of Saint Dhyaneswar which is in the main temple in the large precincts surrounded by stone walls, there are other spots such as Siddheswar Temple, "Aajan" tree, "Suvama Pimpal", Samadhi

of Kesarinath, etc. The temple has four gates on four sides, the one on the north side being the main gate or "Mahadwar". Some devotees stay at Alandi for longer period and do at least one reading of "Dhyaneshwari", the immortal Marathi commentary on Geeta by Saint Dhyaneswar. Groups of devotees can be seen engaged in reading the book around the "Aajan" tree.

Paithan

This is a very important place of pilgrimage in Marathwada region of Maharashtra, This small town situated on the banks of river Godavari has become a famous pilgrim centre on account of its association with Saint Eknath, the author of Eknathi Bhagwat and many other popular forms of composition in Marathi such as songs, "Bharud", "Gaul-an" etc. River Godavari with its extensive bed here takes a serpentine course rounding up the town on three sides and adds to the charm of the landscape. Paithan was a seat of learning in olden times and a centre of religious authority. Even Saint Dhyaneswar had to go to Paithan in an effort to obtain "Shuddhipatra" from the religious heads which would have entitled him and his brother for the sacred thread ceremony. The two Nath Temples - one at the Samadhi of the Saint on the bank of the river and the other at the house where he lived are important landmarks of Paithan. The other places worth a visit are Nagnath Datta Mandir, Jain Mandir, Teertha Kumbh, Shirdan Kesari Math, etc. A big fair is held on Nath Shashthi on Phalgun Vad.6. Paithan is 60 Km. from Aurangabad and

regular buses ply between Aurangabad and Paithan.

Dehu

Dehu is a small village in Poona district situated on the banks of River Indrayani. It is 15 Km. from Alandi. It is the birth place of the renowned saint-poet Saint Tukaram.

The devotional composition known as 'Abhangas' of Tukaram have a pride place in Marathi literature. A legend has it that the adversaries of Saint Tukaram sank his Abhangas in the Indrayani river, but to their surprise Tukaram regained them as they came floating up on the surface of the water after seven days of severe penance by the Saint.

Besides Tukaram Temple other important places at Dehu are : birth place of Tukaram, Indrayani Ghat, Indrayani Doh (deep pond of water), Bhandara Hill (6 Km.), etc. A fair is held on "Tukaram Beej" on Falgun Vad. 2 - the day on which Tukaram went bodily to Vaikuntha; Dehu is 34 Km. from Poona and regular buses ply to Dehu from Poona and Alandi. Dehu Road is a railway station on Bombay-Poona main line and the village is 3 Km. from the station.

Ramtek

This is a hallowed place of pilgrimage near Nagpur. Legend has it that Sri Ram had halted here for a while, during the period of his exile and hence the name "Ramtek" of this town. On the top of a small hill are the temples of Sri Ram and Lakshman. The peculiarity of this place is that there is a separate Lakshman temple and the images

of Sri Ram, Sita and Lakshman are not installed in the same temple as is universally found in Ram temples. Besides these, there are Dhumreshwar, Kapatram, Narasimha, Varaha and Bhogaram temples. The hill "Ramgiri" is referred to by the Sanskrit poet Kalidas in his immortal classic "Meghdoota". He is believed to have been inspired to write this great work by the bewitching scenic beauty of this spot. An impressive memorial to the great poet has recently been constructed here.

On the hill there is an expansive lake Ramasagar with picturesque scenery all around. At the foot of the hill there is a sacred tank Ambala where the devotees take a holy dip before proceeding to the temples for "Darshan".

Ramtek 42 Km. from Nagpur is a railway station on South Eastern Railway, regular buses also ply from Nagpur to Ramtek.

Jyotirlingas

Out of the twelve Jyotirlingas in India, as many as five are located in Maharashtra. Information about Trimbakeshwar near Nasik is given elsewhere. The other places of Jyotirlingas are:

Bhimashankar : 95 Km. from Poona. The beautiful Shiva temple was built by Nana Phadnavis, the eminent statesman of the Peshwas. Bhimashankar is endowed with beautiful scenery.

Ghrishneswar or Ghushmeswar : 1.5 Km. from the world famous Ellora Caves in Aurangabad district. The Shiva temple is imposing and bears beautiful Carvings.

Aundha Nagnath : 64 Km. from Nanded. This is supposed to be the first Jyotirlinga. The temple has exquisite carvings.

Parli Vajjnath : 120 Km. from Nanded.

The temple was renovated by Rani Ahalyabai Holkar in the 17th Century.

Note on Ganesh Worship in Maharashtra

Ganesh is known as "Mangal-murti"- the auspicious deity. It is a common custom to worship and pray to this son of Shiva and Parvati when undertaking any important work.

Although practically every town and village of Maharashtra would have at least one temple of Ganesh, the places most famous as centres of Ganesh worship are the Ashta-Vinayaks. There is the "Siddhivinayak" at Siddhatek.

Pali in the Kolaba district has the "Ballal-Vinayak". Not far off from this Pali is another member of this Ashta-Vinayak clan. This is the Varad-Vinayak at Mahd. This is a very small village and the temple is also small. At Ozar in the Junnar taluka is *Vighneswar the fourth* of the Ashta-Vinayaks. This place is some six miles from Junnar.

Some three miles from Junnar in the surrounding hills is the *Girijatmaka of Lenyadri*. Ranjangaon on the Poona-Ahmednagar road has the shrine of Ganesh known as Ganapathi.

Then comes Theur, a place on the Mula-Mutha river and the nearest approach is from the Loni station, on the Poona-Dhond section. The Ganesh at this kshetra is known as *Chintamani*. Moraya Gosavi who was mainly responsible in making Chinchwad important is given below.

The distance of this temple from Poona is not more than forty miles, but now for the

pilgrim the sun has come right over the head, indicating that it was nearly five hours since the bus has left Poona.

The entire architectural scheme is quite simple. It is built on a platform some fifteen feet in height. On the street level in front of the temple is a big cell housing a giant stone image of a mouse, the vahan of Ganesh. The mouse is seated on his hind legs, happily munching a modak held in the forelegs. A broad flight of steps leads to the first stage of the raised platform. Here is another image of Nandi.

There is a famous shrine of Bhuleshvar near Yavat, some ten miles from Morgaon. The people from this Yavat had placed an order with a craftsman from some other village to carve an image of Nandi to place it before the Shivaling in that temple. On completion it was being transported to Bhuleshvar and the route passed through Morgaon. As soon as the cart in which the image was being carried came in front of this shrine, it broke down, dumping the image on the ground. All attempts to lift it were thwarted and ultimately the priests decided to chisel it down to a more manageable size. This brought forth a strong remonstrance from Nandi who warned one of the priests that he would not budge from his position as he wanted to be near Mayureshvar. A small structure was later on built to shelter it.

The main gate, a wide pointed arch surmounted by a Nagarkhana opens on a spacious courtyard in the middle of which stands the shrine. Immediately inside the gateway are two dipmalas, one on each side. Next is the Sabhamantap, a spacious rectangular hall built in the typical Maratha style. Adjoining this Sabhamantap towards

the east is a small square room known as the *shej-ghar* or bed-room of the deity.

The southernmost part of the entire complex is the Garbhagriha. The present image is a giant one of the "Swayambhu" type, rather of crude craftsmanship. According to textual references, the Ganesh image has four arms, and three eyes. He holds the *pasha* and the *amkusha* in the upper arms while the lower right rests on the knee and the lower left holds a modak. On his left is Siddhi, on the right Buddhi. In front are the "Mushaka" and "Mayur". A tale told by the local elders states that the present image was established at this spot by the Pandavas, Shri Krishna and Vyasa when they had come to this kshetra for pilgrimage.

In the Sabhamantap is a Ganesh image and a pair of brass images of Lakshmi-Narayan, of obvious South Indian craftsmanship. The Ganesh image in this mantap is known as Ballal-Vinayak or Kapil. In the eight corners of the courtyard are eight images of Ganesh described by the Mudgal Purana, They are Vakratunda, Ballal, Heranba, Vighnesh, Bhalachandra, Chintamani, Siddhivinayak and Maha-Ganapathi. The famous saint Tukaram visited this sacred shrine. Similarly Swami Ramdas had also visited the shrine. Of the bigger festivals at the kshetra, four are worth special mention. The first is Vijayadasami, then the fourth day - practically on the first four days of the first half of the month of Bhadrapad and also of Magha and the Somavati Amavasya - new-moon days falling on Mondays. The Bhadrapad Chaturthi is the Ganesh Chaturthi and is celebrated everywhere in Maharashtra. Here it is observed with great pomp and festivity. Devotees of Ganesh

from all over Maharashtra gather here. Amongst the most prominent visitors is the Ganesh or Shri Mangalamurti of Chinchwad, that is brought here by the Devas, the care-takers of that kshetra. In addition to ceremonial worship, processions etc., bhajans, kirtans, pravachans etc. constitute the main items of the celebrations. The Vijayadasami - the tenth day of the month of Ashvin, is celebrated most enthusiastically. All those whose original home was Morgaon make it a point to attend this function. The Kshetra of Morgaon is important not only as one of the Ashtavinayakas but also as the chief centre of what is known as the Ganesh Sampradaya.

Nanded

Nanded, the district headquarters of Nanded district, is a pilgrim centre of the Sikhs. Guru Govind Singh, the last Guru of the Sikhs, lived here in his last days and his sacred ashes are buried in the famous Huzur Sahib Sach Khand Gurudwara. Situated on the banks of the river Godavari, Nanded has many Hindu temples, as well.

Bahubali

An important pilgrimage centre of Jains, Bahubali is 11 km. from Hatkanangale in Kolhapur district. There are two temples belonging to the two sects of Jain religion. The temple of Shwetambar Jains is atop a hill, while at the foot of the hill is the temple of Digambar Jains. In the later temple is a giant idol of Shri Bahubali, the son of Bhagwan Adinath, the first Tirthankara.

Haji Malang

The Dargah of Malang Baba is situated on the Malang-gad hills near village Wadi which is 15 km. from Kalyan in Thana district. A fair is held in the month of Magha in honour of Saint Malang Baba or Haji Abdul Rehman, an Arab missionary. Though the fair is in honour of a Muslim Saint, its duration is determined by Hindu Calendar. It commences from Magha Sud 12 and ends on Magba Vad 2. The principal day of the fair is Magha Sud 15. The total congregation is estimated to be about two lakhs of people. Nearly eighty thousand of them attend on the full-moon day alone. Though the religious aspect was predominant in pilgrimage to holy places in olden times, it had also a social and national significance. In the course of pilgrimage people of different regions knew each other better. In a vast country like India with diversities of language, customs, costumes, traditions etc., pilgrimage has been a great integrating force and has helped to stress the underlying unity of the Indian people, as a nation. The need for national integration is all the greater today.

It is, therefore, a happy augury that travelling for pilgrimage has received an impetus in recent times. There is no doubt that this encouraging trend will continue in the years to come and further strengthen the unity of the Indian people.

With the phenomenon of more and more people undertaking tours to the pilgrimage centres, an evident need for providing the necessary supplies and services at those places has arisen. Simple but decent and clean accommodation has to be made available; basic amenities such as water,

electricity, toilets have to be provided; and certain picnicking facilities such as parks and gardens, canteen etc., also have to be created. With the growing awareness of tourism, private entrepreneurs and voluntary institutions are coming forward in this direction. Of course, Government too has its own responsibility in this sphere. The Directorate of Tourism, Government of Maharashtra has already realised the social and economic importance of this kind of domestic tourism and has started taking steps for providing necessary infrastructure at some of the identified places of pilgrimage.

The Varkaris

No account of the Vitthal of Pandharpur could be complete without a sketch of the Varkari Panth and the great Palanquin processions from various places in Maharashtra to Pandharpur. The Varkaris and the Vitthal cannot be separated. To anybody who knows something of the cultural history of the region, the mention of the name of the one automatically reminds of the other. The Varkari is a picturesque figure. Although when moving about in his routine daily life he does not make himself conspicuous through any special dress or sectarian symbols, the Varkari when he moves out for his vari or trip to Pandharpur does have a peculiar aspect.



Who is a Varkari? The word vari means a trip or pilgrimage to Pandharpur during the Ashadh and Kartik months. One who undertakes this vari is a Varkari. Literally speaking, the meaning of the word vari is a thing or a feature recurring at fixed intervals. Unlike visitors, the Varkari is bound to attend Ekadashi fairs of these two months every year.

He would take care to fulfil this duty most faithfully. On reaching Pandharpur, a snana in the Chandra Bhaga, the darshan of Pundalik and above all the darshan of Vitthal are the chief rites, if they can be called as

such, that he is to perform. The Vithoba is the sole object of his devotion, of his Bhakti. The Varkaris, although apart from the rest of society, do not renounce the material aspects of day to day life. And although their philosophy teaches them to dissociate mentally from the material world, it does not advise renunciation as such and hence they continue to live in society and pursue their professions as the rest of the people. They come from all castes and classes. Their separate identity is never emphasised to such a degree as to mar the basic unity of Hindu Society.

-Courtesy: Bhavan's Publication, Temples and Legends of Maharashtra, by M. S. Mate.



Shirdi of Sri Sai Baba

T. KESAVA RAO

Shirdi - Its Location

SHIRDI is a small hamlet, ten miles from Kopergaon railway station on the Dhond- Manmad railway line, and forms part of the Ahmednagar District of Maharashtra, Kopergaon being the taluk headquarters. The nearest post office linking Shirdi is at Rahata, Shirdi could also be reached by bus from Manmad railway junction, the distance being about forty miles. Usually, devotees alight at Kopergaon station and then proceed to Shirdi. They have to cross the river Godavari before reaching Shirdi, the Godavari river being the main source of supply of water to Shirdi and nearby places. As one approaches Shirdi, even from a distance, the shining dome or *Kalasa* of Sri Sai Baba's main *Mandir* would arrest one's attention. This sight would immediately recall to the pilgrim's mind the many supernormal acts performed by the Master, while in mortal coil, for the emancipation of the suffering and the needy. Both by precept and by practice, Sri Sai Baba had laid down a solid basis for a universal religion binding different classes of people by love and mutual tolerance. Under this ever-expanding banner of love and service, Shirdi today shines as a symbol of the unity of all religions, sanctified by the holy presence of the Divine Master, who though unseen to the human eye, still continues His divine mission of promoting and fostering universal brotherhood amongst different classes and



creeds of people, from his Tomb. Shirdi has thus become a holy centre for all Sai devotees who throng to this place for obtaining all kinds of benefits, temporal and spiritual, through holy associations of the Master.

Shirdi was a small hamlet at that time, of mud-houses, many being poor agriculturists belonging both to the Hindu and Muslim communities. The village Chavadi was the only building that could be boasted of. There was of course a Datta temple and a Khandoba and a Hanuman temple, as well as a Mosque. The villagers were ignorant and susceptible to the superstitions and pulls of the major communities.

Sri Sai Baba's Advent

Sri Sai Baba entered Shirdi as a lad of sixteen. He was tall, well-built, and

handsome, but was clad as a Fakir. He never stayed at any place but was wandering in the fields and woods, helping the sick by administering herbs, and took nothing in return for his services. The villagers thought that here was a mad Fakir and a few used even to make fun of him. But Sri Sai Baba never bothered about these insults and pinpricks. Perhaps, the then situation at Shirdi with all its attendant pulls of many kinds made Shirdi an ideal place for him to embark on his Divine Mission, - the grand mission of infusing love into all and bringing about on a large, national scale mutual harmony and understanding and particularly the promotion of Hindu-Muslim unity.

This work became very prominent since 1886, when Sri Sai Baba returned to his body after three days of his having left it, against all presumption that he was dead, after his body had been zealously guarded by his closest and most ardent devotee, Mahlsapathy. Sri Sai Baba utilised his vast powers (as the Divine messenger) solely for the benefit of mankind and for the re-establishment of righteousness or Dharma. The deeds of this great Avatar could be seen from a study of his acts and the places he frequented 'at Shirdi.

Khandoba Temple

The first place which Sri Sai Baba attempted to live in was the Khandoba Temple, where the worship was carried on by a pious and orthodox Hindu, Sri Mahisapathy. Baba was attracted by the quiet and secluded spot of this temple, which was in the outskirts of the village. Though Mahisapathy was very courteous

and kind to Baba, he could not but object to Baba's stay - a Muslim Fakir staying at a Hindu temple! However, Sri Sai Baba, finding his objection to be natural, did not persist in his intention but simply said, "God is one for Hindus and Muslims, and for all. But as you object to my entry, I shall go." But later on, the same Mahlsapathy became the first and most ardent devotee and worshipper of Baba, who did visit the Khandoba Temple many times thereafter. Mahlsapathy esteemed Baba for his purity and non-attachment and soon perceived the Divinity in Baba and became the pioneer of Sai Puja and Sai Movement. In fact, by his affectionate welcome he gave to Baba, "Ava Sai", he became Sai Baba and this was the nucleus - the banyan-seed as it were, - for the vast expansion and growth of the Sai Mission. Mahlsapathy's case is an excellent instance of the impact of Baba's way of unifying religion and creeds successfully.



The Neem Tree that Yielded Sweet Leaves

The next important place of visit at Shirdi is the first resting place of Baba under the shade of the Neem tree at the place now known as the Gurusthan, behind the main Samadhi Mandir. Sri Sai Baba used to stay underneath this tree using such shelter as this could afford. The significance of his staying there lies in that the leaves of this neem tree taste sweet, in as much as that very place marks the samadhi containing the relics of the Guru of Sri Sai Baba in his former life. To-day there is a neat marble construction around this tree, and devotees pray here and meditate on their Guru.

Baba Shifts to the Mosque

Sri Sai Baba could not long stay under this tree, for this could not afford shelter from either the hot sun or the heavy downpour of rain or the other rigours of climate. So, Baba moved on and chose the Mosque for his stay.

The Mosque was, however, in a dilapidated condition, but Sri Sai Baba preferred this place for obvious reasons ensuring an austere and very simple living. Among the villagers, Mahlsapathy and the village Karnam were his close associates drawn to him by "rinanubandha" (bonds of a former life). Sri Sai Baba used to go about asking for alms only from few houses, and whatever was given was shared by him amongst his companions. All his possessions consisted of a brick given to him by his Gurudev, Venkusa, which he used as his pillow and some rugs, which were used as clothes making up his bed. For a long time,

he never permitted Sri Mahlsapathy and other devotees even to put up rafters for covering up the portion in the Mosque where he was staying. But, however, by relentless entreaties and prayers to Baba, they were able to obtain his approval for just a roof at the Mosque.

The Fire and the Udhi

Sri Sai Baba used to light up a fire before him in the mosque, and he used to chant some inexplicable words known only to him. He used to meet and discuss with all those who came to him at the mosque and also distribute the ashes (Udhi) from the fire as a healing medicine and as his blessings. He used to talk only in parables and his strange sayings and behaviour used to be appropriate answers to the devotees who came to him for help and guidance. He used to declare that once a devotee ascends the steps of the mosque and goes to him, his 'Karma' is over. Sri Sai enjoined on all that everyone should give up three things, namely, their *Tan, Man, Dhan*, (which meant body, mind and wealth) for achieving the highest aim in life-Divine Realisation. Sitting before the sacred fire-the Dhuni-Baba used to control the elements causing rain, heat, etc.-and take upon himself the effects of diseases, etc., from others for securing their welfare. Once he made the rains stop to enable the devotees cross safely the river Godavari; likewise he put out a fire by his command and saved his devotees from its ravages. He once saved a child by dipping his own hands in the Dhuni fire. (Later, it was learnt that at that very instant, a child of a blacksmith, had fallen into the smithy fire and was

miraculously saved) . Like a loving mother, Baba took care of the welfare of the devotees, wherever they may be. So Baba was looked upon by his devotees as the Unfailing Resort and Refuge. Thus, the mosque where he stayed in came to be known as the 'Dwaraka Mayee' the residence of the Divine Mother, ever exercising his protection to all his devotees.

First Miracles of Baba

Here it was (at the Dwaraka Mayee) that Baba performed his first miracle, which opened the eyes of the doubting people of Shirdi to the Divine powers of Sri Sai and his utmost compassion for the eradication of ignorance and prejudice and the uplift of all people. Baba used to light up the earthen lamps at the mosque with the oil collected by him as alms from a few merchants at Shirdi. One day, the merchants decided to have fun at the expense of Baba, and refused to give oil, telling Baba a lie that they had no oil. It was their (malicious) desire to see Baba put to discomfort by this refusal. Baba simply turned back and in the night he cleaned the earthen pots and poured fresh water in them. He cleaned the lamps, removing thereby what little of oil there might have been. He then poured *water* into the lamps. Inserting wicks into those earthen lamps, he lit them up. To the amazement of all, the lamps started burning brightly and they continued to burn throughout the night! The merchants who came to delight and laugh in Baba's discomfort remained there to pray to Him for forgiveness. They were now afraid that they would have to suffer retribution for

their lies. They fell prostrate before Baba's feet and begged for his forgiveness. The All Merciful Baba did not curse them, as they were very much afraid of his might. Instead, He advised them to leave off the habit of uttering lies. He also advised them not to take pleasure at the suffering of others. He also advised them that they should lead an honest and pure life and also practise tolerance and good neighbourliness.

Change of Heart in the Villagers

This act of Baba brought out a change in the outlook of the Shirdi villagers. Now they knew that they were in the presence of a great saint - who could turn water into oil - to whom they could always turn for guidance and protection from all their difficulties and sorrows. From now onwards, they began to respect and love Baba as a child would love its mother. The mosque became their 'Dwaraka Mayee' the Divine never-failing mother who would always stand in eternal care of the devotee-children, wherever they may be, and they looked up to Baba sincerely for all their progress.

Visits from the Distinguished and the High

The news of this miracle spread far and wide. Baba made the village karnam invite the Deputy Collector, Sri N. G. Chandorkar, who was camping at Kopergaon, to visit Baba, his former companion. Sri Chandorkar came to Shirdi after repeated requests. He was very much surprised at the tone of familiarity with which Baba invited him. But

there was an inner force working on him, and Sri Chandorkar was convinced of the Divinity in Baba by the innumerable acts of grace done by Baba for his sake. His visit was soon followed by visits of other great influential men, like Hari Sitaram Dixit, Sri G. S. Khaparde, leading lawyers, Shri M. B. Rege, a Judge of the Indore High Court, Sri Das Ganu Maharaj, and Smt. Radhakrishna Ayi, a highly advanced spiritual aspirant. Baba used to describe Radhakrishna Ayi as mother and she started the worship of Baba with all the paraphernalia associated with the worship at Pandharpur. Not only that, she swept the surroundings of Dwaraka Mayee in the nights, without any disturbance to Baba, so that Baba, the Divine Master, could walk to and fro in clean surroundings. A chariot and a palanquin were obtained for the use of Baba. One day some thieves stole away the silver trappings put in the palanquin. Baba, on being informed of the theft, showed his contempt for all this paraphernalia by asking "Why was not the whole palki stolen?"

The Chavadi - A Sanctified Spot

The next place of interest sanctified by his stay was the Chavadi - a little away from the mosque. This chavadi used to be the resting place for all travellers, who passed Shirdi on their way to Ahmednagar. Baba used to sleep at the chavadi on alternate nights. But he never allowed any woman to stay with him either at the chavadi or in the mosque. He maintained strict celibacy. Whatever presents - money or other offerings - he got, were distributed by him amongst the devotees, who were

with him. He remained a fakir throughout. To mark Baba's stay at the chavadi, even now on Thursdays, Baba's padukas (Sandals) are taken in procession from the Mandir to the chavadi and from the chavadi back to the Mandir, with deep religious fervour and devotion.

Baba's Daily Routine

The daily routine of Baba's life consisted of his waking up early in the morning and going up from the mosque to a garden, where he himself planted some trees and flower-plants. He used to water them and send the flowers to the Datta and Hanuman temples. This is known as the Lendi garden. The lesson to be learnt from this is that everyone should imbibe the great art of service -nursing the tender plants, which symbolised people that needed attention, without expecting anything in return.

The Tiger Ceases to be Fierce

The first miracle of Baba lighting the earthen lamps filled with water was performed, as already described, within the walls at the mosque - Dwaraka Mayee. Now this place has been very neatly reconstructed. Up the steps of the Dwaraka Mayee is a big stone on which are imprinted the feet of Baba. This stone was used by Baba as his seat. It was at this place that a fierce circus-tiger attained mukti, when it was brought before Baba by a circus troupe. The tiger lost all its fierceness at the sight of Baba and perhaps its evil karma was over then. It refused to go back with the circus troupe and fell down dead.

Discourses on Baba

By the soul-stirring discourses of Sri Das Ganu Maharaj, by the influence of a great official like N. G. Chandorkar, and leading Lawyers and Judges, and very wealthy men like Sri Butty of Nagpur, many came to know of the greatness of Baba and paid respectful visits to him. The result was that Shirdi became a pilgrim-centre bringing in a very large number of devotees, day in and day out. Once a grateful devotee, who was blessed with a son, desired to celebrate the event by celebrating the Birthday of Baba, who asked him to do so on Sri Rama Navami Day. From that time onwards, Sri Rama navami Day is being celebrated as Baba's Jayanthi Day, when processions are taken out with great enthusiasm and deep religious fervour, and people are fed freely.

This Urs (festival) is jointly celebrated by Hindus and Muslims and all communities.

Sri Butty another Devotee

Another devotee, Sri Butty, desired to build a wada, and requested Baba's permission therefore. Sri Sai Baba gave his consent and gave personal instructions as to the plan and construction of the building. He remarked that this building would become a temple of love for Radha Krishna. He,

however, ordered a small place to be dug in the centre of the building and to leave it free without any construction. Nobody could at that time fore-see as to what exactly was the purpose behind this instruction. Every morning, on his daily walks, Baba used to go round the construction, and standing on the sides, he used to make certain signs with his hands, chanting some prayer.



The Butty-Wada - the Samadhi Spot

At that time very few could imagine that the place so marked off would become the very place where his mortal remains would be interred and a tomb would be raised thereon. For, exactly at that very place Baba's body was laid to rest, when Baba left his mortal coil on the Vijayadasami Day in 1918. The *Butty wada* thus became the

treasure house of the samadhi of Sri Sai Baba. The tomb is inlaid with marble and to-day regular worship is conducted early in the morning, at noon and at night.

Other Places of Interest

The other places of interest at Shirdi are the small temples for Datta and Hanuman, very near the Chavadi. Baba used to send flowers picked by him personally to the Datta temple. In the early days of his stay

at the mosque, Baba used to dance and sing in praise of the Lord with anklets tied to his feet. At the Dwaraka Mayee, Baba gave darshan as Rama, Krishna, Siva, Hanuman, Ganapathi, in accordance with the wishes of the devotees.

To-day, Shirdi has grown up with all modern facilities, making the visit and stay of the pilgrims a very comfortable one. Big schools and dispensaries have been built. A kalyana mantapam (house for marriages) has also been constructed. Many big rest houses have come up, and Shirdi has become the rallying centre for all classes of devotees, shining forth as the Centre of Universal Religion.

Sakori and Upasani Baba

A narrative of Shirdi would be incomplete without the mention of Sakori, patronised by Sri Upasani Baba, a great disciple of Sri Sai Baba. Sakori is about three miles from Shirdi. Sri Upasani Baba had been blessed and endowed with vast powers by Sri Sai Baba. However, Sri Upasani Baba chalked out a different line with a stress on yajnas and homas which was different from the Bhakti Marga propounded by Baba. Our main reason for referring to Sakori and Upasani Baba is that Sri Upasani also spread the greatness of Sri Sai Baba and was in a great measure responsible for infusing Sai Bhakti into Sri Narasimha Swami, Master and Founder-President of the All India Sai Samaj at Mylapore, Madras, a great lawyer and Sanskrit scholar.

Sri Narasimha Swamji's Association

Sri Narasimha Swami left his home and family and went out in search of the

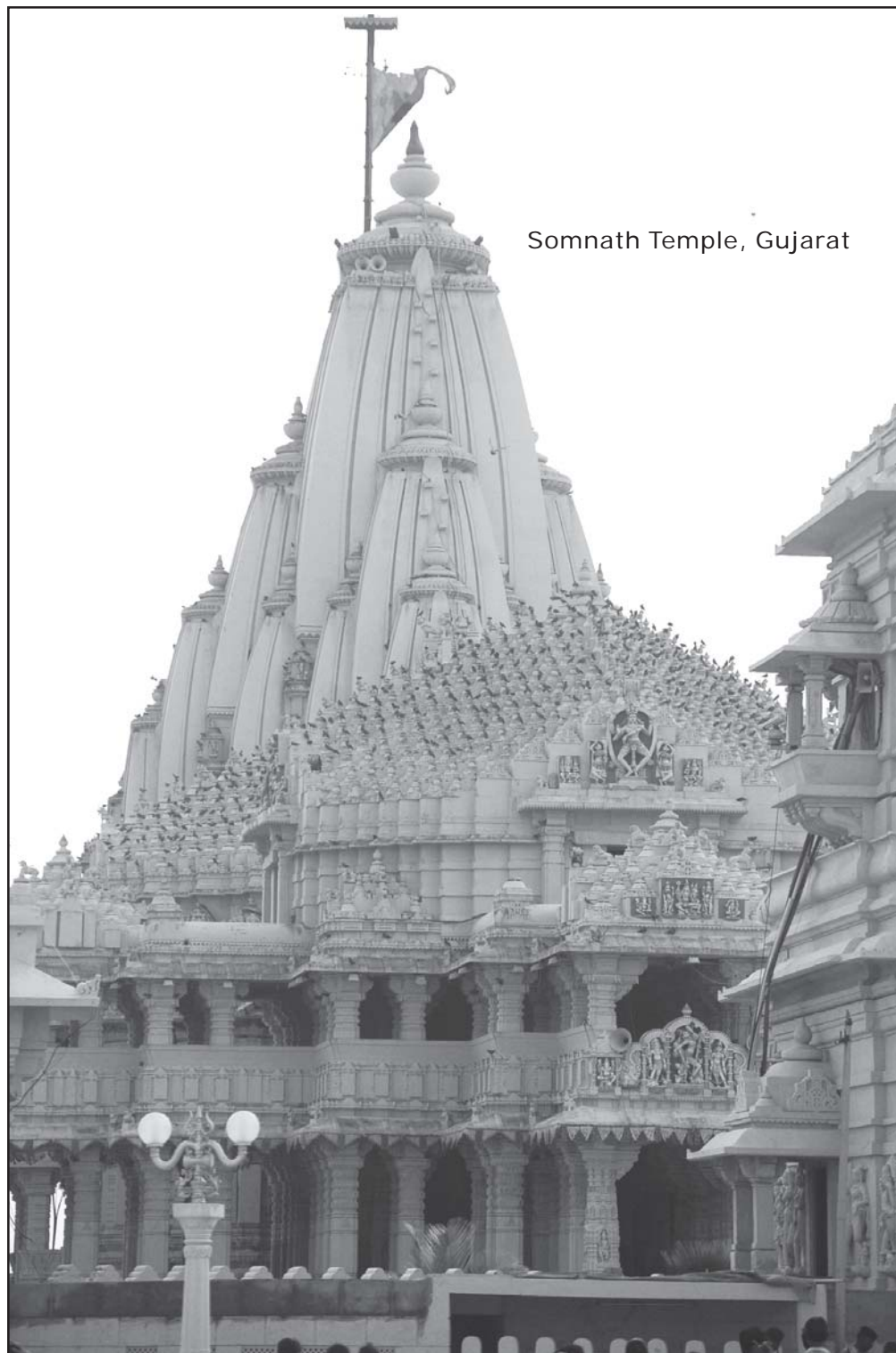
Ultimate. He stayed at the Ramana Ashram in Tiruvannamalai for three years, observing silence. From there he wandered all over the country. At Sakori, he met Sri Upasani who spoke to him of Sri Sai Baba. Drawn by Sri Sai Baba, he went to Shirdi and the moment he went to the Tomb and prayed to Baba, there, in a flash, he realised the Truth when Sri Sai Baba revealed himself and made Sri Narasimha Swamiji his "Ankita" Child.

To-day, if Sri Sai Baba's name is known all over the country, it is mainly due to the efforts of Sri Narasimha Swamiji. Sri Narasimha Swamiji took all pains to collect the material for Sai history and His Teachings and did propagate for years the Divine purpose of the advent of Sri Sai Baba. The All India Sai Samaj was founded by him to carry on the Mission. We, Sai devotees, are ever grateful to Sri Narasimha Swamiji for the signal service he has rendered in this revealing the Divine Master Sri Sai Baba to all of us, not only for our welfare but *also* for the welfare of the whole of mankind and for ushering in a Universal Religion, bringing different classes of people together under the common Banner of Love as exemplified by Sri Sai Baba Himself.

The- Shirdi association with Sri Sai Baba will be of considerable help to the sadhaka in his understanding of the teachings of Sri Sai Baba.

May Sri Sai Baba and His Holiness Sri Narasimha Swamiji shower Divine Blessings on all seekers of truth and enable them to obtain the lord's blessings in a full measure.





Gujarat's Somnath and Dwaraka

WITH a large tract of its territory jutting out into the sea, Gujarat - the land where Gujarati is the main language - is - like a "Balcony on the Arabian Sea".

Besides, Gujarat is associated with some of the greatest sons of India. In the days of yore, as tradition has it, Dwaraka was ruled by Lord Krishna, whose philosophy of dedicated action is summed up in the Bhagavad Gita 'the Song Celestial'. Then there were devotees like Narsi Mehta and reformers like Dayanand Saraswathi, and other saints and reformers, too.

Gujarat is studded with holy places. It is the ambition of every traditional Hindu to visit Dwaraka at least once in his life time. At Somnath, there is a renowned Siva temple which had been repeatedly destroyed and re-built. Moreover, Gujarat has two of the holiest places for the Jains; the temple-crowned hill of *Girnar* near Junagadh and the Satrunjaya Hill near Palitana.

Somnath

The shrine of Somnath in Prabhasa is traditionally as old as creation; it is pre-historic. Prabhasa was a traditionally sacred place even in the days of Dharma, the son of Pandu. The Mahabharata refers to it again and again. It was very well-known to the people and was situated at a holy spot where river Saraswathi flowed into the sea.

Antiquity of the Shrine

The first temple of Somnath was built as early as, if not earlier than, the first century A.D. Six hundred years later, when Dharasena IV ruled over a part of Gujarat, a new temple replaced the old one. But the second temple did not stand for a long time. We do not know whether it was attacked and destroyed by men or whether some natural calamity befell it or some defect in its construction made it short-lived. But the temple became more famous after it was built for the third time, in the ninth century. Festive life thronged around the temple until on a January day in the year 1026, Mahmud of Ghazni struck it with violence. For three days fierce resistance was offered by the people, who did not expect such fierce assault on a temple. Fifty thousand men laid down their lives in a brave effort to save the temple, but the attackers succeeded in plundering and destroying it. However, a new temple was built soon after, which had to be replaced again by a fifth one. This was built by the great scholar-devotee, Bhava Brihaspati, under the patronage of King Kumarapala in the twelfth century.

Determined Efforts to Re-build the Temple Again and Again

For a period of one hundred years the temple became a centre of religious and cultural research. Then Allauddin Khilji sent his general, Asaf Khan, to destroy the grand structure that Bhava Brihaspati had built with such devotion. This happened in the late thirteenth century. The temple was reconstructed again, for the sixth time, by

Mahipal, the King of Junagadh, and the deity was reinstalled by his son in the first half of the fourteenth century.

In the fifteenth century the temple was occupied, not destroyed, by a young Governor of Gujarat, Mahmud Begda, and the deity was removed. But after a few years, Begda's hold slackened and the deity was reinstalled. Then at the beginning of the eighteenth century, there came a more determined attack. Auragazeb ordered Mahammad Azam, to destroy the temple completely. But the temple rose again under the patronage of the celebrated Queen of Indore, Ahalyabai, in the latter half of the eighteenth century. The British, when they came to India, knew what a delicate place the shrine of Somnath occupied in Indian hearts and how much the people had suffered because of all that had happened to the great temple.

However, the Gaekwad of Baroda, who was entrusted with the management of the temple, had not for a long time, the right to repair it. But soon after India achieved independence, in November, 1947, - Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, the Deputy Prime Minister of India, visited the temple. It was the New Year Day of Samvat 2004. Addressing a mammoth gathering in front of the temple, he said: "On this auspicious day of the New Year, we have decided that Somanath should be reconstructed. You, people of Saurashtra, should do your best. This is a holy task in which all should participate."

Jyotirlinga Re-installed

On 11th May, 1951, Vaisaka Shukla Panchami (S.Y.2007), at 9-47 a.m. (I.S.T.)

Rashtrapathi Dr. Rajendra Prasad installed the Jyotir Linga of Lord Somnath in the new temple constructed on the historic spot at Prabhasa Patan, near Veraval in Saurashtra. It was the same spot and over the same Brahma-Sila, where for millennia stood the hoary and sacred Jyotir Linga and shrine of God Siva, the first among the twelve famous Jyotir Lingas, which was held in extreme veneration all over Bharat. Prabhasa is referred to both as Somanatha Pattana and Deva Pattana.

Prabhasa Tirtha - Legendary Origin

This Prabhasa Tirtha is situated on the seashore on the south coast of Saurashtra. The 7th Adhyaya of Prabhasa Khanda gives the legendary origin of this Tirtha. It says that Lord Siva has been present in this Tirtha since eternity, and will remain so eternally. Various Brahmas have come and gone. This is the age of the seventh Brahma called Satananda and Lord Siva is known as Somanatha. Before that, during the regime of the six earlier Brahmas, Lord Siva's abode was at Prabhasa, but Siva was then known by the names of Mrityunjaya, Kalagnirudra, Amritesa, Anamaya, Kritivasas and Bhairavanatha. The eighth Brahma, who is yet to come, will be known as Chaturvaktra and Siva will then be known as Prananaatha.

The Rig Vedic references to Saraswathi make it clear that it started from Plaksha Prasravana in the Himalayas, passed through Marwar, Abu and Gujarat and then met the sea near Prabhasa, Rig Veda (7-95-2) says that the pure river Saraswathi flows from the mountains to the sea.

The deity, which was known to the Vedic

Rishis as Kalagnirudra, was designated as Bhairava at Prabhasa. He is also called Agni-Isana. In different Kalpas, this same deity is known by different names (Prabhasa 4-68-73).

Somnath has five faces (Prabhasa 6-8). This Somnath is the highest deity called Hamsa and Nada (Pr. 6-36). The Kala Bhaivara Linga of Siva at Prabhasa was worshipped by the Moon with great austerity and when the deity was pleased, Moon prayed for divine grace and as an expression of it that the Lord is known by the name of his devotee, as Somnath and that He should be the Kula Devata (the family deity) of all the successive Moons (Pr.7-51).

Prabhasa Khanda (2-82 and 83) describes the Linga of Somnath as follows: "It is a Swayambhu Linga of great powers, as bright as the disc of the Sun, surrounded by a serpent, of the size of the egg of a hen, called the Sparsa Linga and lodged under-ground."

With this another legend is also connected. Sati when insulted by her father Daksha, threw herself into fire and was re-born as Uma, Sati is identified with Soma or Chandra, (Moon), and Siva or Agni with the Sun (the Celestial Agni). On Amavasya day, Sati or the Moon merges or is burnt in the Sun (the Celestial Fire) i.e., Siva and emerges as the new Moon or Uma (See Prabhasa Khanda, Ch. 19). Siva is identified in Satarudriya with the Sun and it is stated that He is red, then slightly red, then tawny and then auspicious as He gradually rises in the sky; and even ignorant cow-herd boys, water-carrying women of the villages and all creatures including cattle can then see Him.

The prosperity of the Somnath temple is described by Mohammedan historians. The garbha griha was lighted by jewelled lamps, and the huge bell was rung with a chain of solid gold of 200 maunds in weight. In the treasure room, there were numerous subsidiary images and equipment of gold, silver and jewels. The temple had 56 pillars all studded with gems. On every eclipse day lacs of pilgrims gathered there.

Risen like the Phoenix

The temple of Somnath has withstood the shocks of time and survived the attacks of destroyers. Aged, infirm, desecrated, it stood when Sardar Patel rescued it from neglect and pledged himself to its reconstruction. As a temple, it had done its work to remind ages of what India's faith had been; it was left only as a symbol of her never to-be-forgotten misfortune. In the dawn of a new era, the temple has risen like the phoenix, from its own ashes.

Dwaraka

The people of Dwaraka hailed Krishna with these words: "In you we have our best leader and guide. We are fortunate that we are in a position to come close to you who are all kindliness, whose face is beaming with radiant affection and smiles, particularly when looking up to your divine height, your very sight is difficult to be had even by Gods".

Situated on the extreme western tip of the Saurashtra Peninsula, Dwaraka is one of the seven most important places of Hindu pilgrimage. Krishna, the eighth incarnation of Vishnu, and revealer of the great Hindu

scripture, the Bhagavad Gita, is said to have come to Okha Mandal (in which district Dwaraka is situated) after his flight from Mathura, which had been attacked by two demon-kings. From Dwaraka, Krishna fought his enemies and regained Mathura. Dwaraka is described in Maha Bharata, Hari Vamsa, Vayu, Vishnu, Bhagavara, Varaha, Skanda and other Puranas. Skanda has forty-four chapters devoted to it.

Krishna killed Kamsa at Mathura. Thereafter, Jara Sandha of Magadha and Kalayavana simultaneously attacked Mathura. Finding that Yadavas were practically besieged on all sides, Krishna decided to come down and construct a strong fort near the sea in Saurashtra and so settled in Dwaraka. This place was not far from the Raivataka Mount.

Dwaraka is viewed as one of the seven holy cities, a visit to which is said to secure liberation. The seven cities are Ayodhya, Mathura, Maya (Haridwar), Kasi, Kanchi, Avantika (Ujjain) and Dwaramati.

The Original Dwaraka and the Modern Town

The original Dwaraka of Krishna's time is described as being twelve Yojanas in circumference in the middle of the sea (perhaps an island) with numerous parks, high palaces, golden domes, big gopuras, spacious terraces, etc. The main attraction of the modern town of Dwaraka is the famous temple of Dwarakadhisha, also called the Triloka Sundara or Jagat temple. The legend says that it was constructed by Vajra Nabha, the grand-son of Krishna, with the help of Visva Karma. It is on the

banks of Gomati. The Sikhar has seven storeys and is 140 feet high. The large Mantapa has five storeys, with a dome supported by sixty pillars. On the outside, the temple has extensive and delicate decoration in stone. It is surrounded by two walls and the space for circumambulation is in between these two walls. In the sanctuary the image of Lord Dwaraka-dhisa stands on a silver-plated Simhasana. The image is of black stone, three feet high, with four arms. Pilgrims go inside, touch the feet of the Lord and place flowers and Tulsi on His feet. In the upper storey, there is an image of Ambaji (Goddess) and in one corner of the Sabha Mantapa there is an image of Bala Devaji. On one side of the main temple there is a separate shrine of Trivikramaji and on the other of Pradyumnaji. There is also the temple of Kuseswara Maha Deva.

On the south of the temple, there is the Bhandar of Sri Ranch-Hodrai or Dwarakadhisa under the control of the Sarada Math of Sri Sankaracharya.

The Sarada Pitha of Sankaracharya

Sri Adi Sankaracharya who is said to have established four Maths at Sringeri, Puri, Badrinath and Dwaraka, at the age of seventeen, invoked at this place Sarada or Saraswathi-incarnate with the Mantra known as Chinta Mani on the first of the dark half of Kartika. On the fifth of the dark half of Kartika, he established the deity (Sarada) and after an Anushtana lasting up to the tenth bright half of Magha, he established the Sarada Peetha at Dwaraka. The story goes that one month before his Mahasamadhi, he established on

this Peetha his disciple Sureshwaracharya, who in his Purvasrama, i.e., before he became a Sannyasin, was the famous Mandana Misra. The Peetha records that till now there have been seventy-six Acharyas of the Sarada Peetha, many of whom were very learned and pious and have contributed largely towards the development of religious life in Western India. The present Sankaracharya is Sri Abhinava Satchidananda Tirtha Swami who became Acharya of the Peetha in Samvat year 2001.

One of the Sankaracharyas at Dwaraka opened a branch of the Peetha at Dakor, where stands also a temple of Ranchhodraiji.

The famous Narasi Mehta, the Saint and illustrious Gujarati poet, was a great devotee of Krishna. Once a pilgrim wanted a Junagadh merchant to accept his money and give him a Hundi on a Dwaraka merchant.

Some people sent him to Narasi in jest. Narasi seriously wrote out a Hundi on Samalshah i.e., God Dwaraka-dhisa Himself. The pilgrim went to Dwaraka, but found no Samalshah. It is said that ultimately the Lord Himself appeared as Samalshah and accepted Narasi's Hundi, paid the pilgrim the required amount and then disappeared.

Visits of Sri Ramanuja and Sri Madhva

Sri Ramanujacharya had come to Dwaraka on a pilgrimage about 1036-50 AD. The various names of the Vyuhas of his Sampradaya and the images of Pradyumna, Aniruddha and other details of worship show the great influence of Sri Ramanuja at Dwaraka. Sri Madhvacharya had also been

to Dwaraka in about 1236-40 AD. The great Saint of Maharashtra, Jnaneshwar, had been here In 1275 AD. and Govindaswami of Bengal in 1491 AD. Sri Vallabhacharya visited Dwaraka three times. Sri Chaitanya and Mira Bai also visited the place. Vitthalesha Goswami, son of Vallabhacharya while on his yatra here, arbitrated between the conflicting claims of Gugali and Aboti Brahmins.

Bet Dwaraka

About twenty miles from Dwaraka in the Bay of Cutch, there is an island called Bet Dwaraka, This is a place of importance to the Vallabha Sampradaya. The Bet contains two main temples-one that of Ranchhodraiji and the other called Sankhoddhara. Sites and buildings are named and identified here as Krishna's palace and places connected with Rukmini.

Regarding Sankhoddhara, the legend is that in the Satya Yuga, the demon Sankha was troubling the sages of this place. The Lord in his incarnation of Matsya (fish) destroyed him. The sages then built the temple of Sankha Narayana. On the way to Bet Dwaraka there is the Gopitalao (or the Lake of the Gopis). The white earth of this lake is called Gopi Chandana, and pilgrims carry it with them for making marks of it on the fore-head, hands and chest.

Near Dwaraka there is another ancient site known as Pindaraka. It is said that Pindas offered to manes and thrown in a lake here swim on the water.



Girnar and Satrunjaya

HARIHAR SINGH

Two Classes of Kshetras

THE Jainas are divided into two broad groups, Digambara and Svetambara and each group has its own Tirthas called Tirtha Kshetras. But the Tirthas under review are regarded to be sacred by both sects. The Digambaras divide their Tirtha Kshetras into two categories, namely the *siddhakshetra*, the place where the Jainas or the other ascetics achieved their Nirvana and the *atisayakshetra*, the place which is sacred for other reasons. Such a type of division is not known to the Svetambaras, for the Vivitha Tirthakalpa, a Svetambara Jaina work of the 14th century A.D. does not make any such division, although it pertains to an extensive account of the Jaina Tirthas distributed all over India.

Girnar

Girnar or Girinar is one of the five sacred hills of the Jainas. It is situated near the town of Junagadh in Gujarat. In the Junagadh inscription of Rudradamana dated 150 A.D. it is referred to as Giri Nagara. It was probably from Giri Nagara that the

present name of Girnar was derived. In the Puranas Girnar is referred to as Ujjayanta, Ujjanta, Udayanta and Durjayanta while in the inscriptions it was called Urjayat. Huien Tsang also makes mention of the mountain Ujjanta, which according to Cunningham is the Pali form of the Sanskrit Ujjayanta. Another name applied for Mount Girnar is Raivata or Raivataka.

Mount Girnar, the highest of the Gujarat hills, rises abruptly from the plains. Composed of diorite and monzonite it rises to a height of about 3,470 feet. The foot zone of the hills is forested and a part of it is occupied by the famous Gir Lion Sanctuary, the only one of its kind in India that has saved the lions from extinction in this part of the world.

Girnar has been regarded as a holy site by the Hindus, the Buddhists and the Jainas alike, since ancient times. According to Girnar Mahatmya, Prabhasa Kshetra and its vicinity on the sea-shore on the south coast of Soratha is the holiest of all the places of Hindu sanctity, but Girnar or Vastrapatha, as it is called, is held holier by some. But to the Jainas Girnar is most sacred, for it is a *Siddha Kshetra*. Among



the five most sacred places of the Jainas, Girnar is also included. The antiquity of this site is traced to the very first Tirthankara, Rsabhanatha. However, it is more famous on account of Neminatha, the twenty-second Tirthankara, than any other Tirthankara. Of the five *Kalyanakas* (auspicious events) that occurred in the life of a Tirthankara, three of Neminatha's, namely *Diksa*, *Kevalainana* and *Nirvana*, took place at this site. Apart from Neminatha, here were liberated Krsna's sons, Sambu Kumara and Pradyumna Kumara, the latter's son Anirudha and seventy two crore and seven hundred Jaina Munis? In another work, however, Sambu and Pradyumna are said to have been liberated from Satrunjaya. Having come to know that it is the *Nirvana Bhumi* of Neminatha, the Pandavas paid a visit to this place and by performing hard austerities here they also obtained salvation.

There are five principal Sikharas, (mountain peaks) at Girnar, namely Ambamata, Gorakhanatha, Oghada, Guru Dattatreya and Kalka. Of these, the highest one is that of Guru Gorakhanatha. Below the *Sikhara* of Ambamata, which is the lowest of the five, is the *tunka* of Neminatha. This *tunka* is reached after an ascent of nearly 2000 steps and is adorned with magnificent Jaina temples which have been the chief attraction of the Jaina pilgrims since ancient days. The oldest among these is that of Neminatha which is considered to be of special merit. It was built by Sajjana, the *dandanayaka* of the Solanki King Jayasimha Siddhraj (1094-1144 A.D). A large number of Jains from distant parts of India arrive here every day to pay obeisance to Neminatha.

Satrunjaya

Satrunjaya, a hill in southern Kathiawar is regarded as the holiest Jaina Tirtha in Gujarat. It is situated beside the town of Palitana, which is thirty-five miles by road from Bhavnagar and one hundred and thirty-four miles from Ahmedabad.

It is called by different names. Dhaneśvarasuri, who wrote a Mahatmya of Satrunjaya, enumerated its one hundred and eight names. In the list are also incorporated the names of Abu and Girnar. This appears to be highly exaggerative, for they are not linked together and stand far apart from each other. This merely seems to be an eulogy of Mt. Satrunjaya. Jinaprabhasuri also furnishes us with a list of twenty one names, five among which were forgotten in course of time.

This sacred mountain rises to a height of nearly 2000 feet from sea level and about 1400 feet from the town of Palitana. Among the five sacred hills of the Jainas Satrunjaya is also included. It is sacred to the memory of Adinatha who is said to have patronised it more than any other place of pilgrimage, visiting it ninety *purvas* of times before his death. Its existence 'as a sacred hill' is traced to long ages before the advent of Adinatha.

About the sanctity of this *Tirtha* Dhaneśvarasuri describes that whatever purity may be obtained in any other artificial places of pilgrimage (Tirth) tours, groves, mountains, etc., by prayers, penances, vows, gifts and study, *ten-fold as much is obtained* in Jaina places of pilgrimage; a hundred fold as much at the *Chaityas* of the *Jambu tree*; a thousand fold as much at the eternal *Dhatuki tree*, at the lovely

Chaityas or *Pushkaradvipa* at Mount Aniana. Yet ten-fold more is acquired at the Nandisvara, Kundaladri, Manushottara Parvata; proportionately *ten thousand* more at the Vaibhara, Sammetadri, Vaitadhya, Meru, Raivata and Ashtapada. Infinitely more, however, is obtained at once by *the mere sight of Satrunjaya*. Mr.A. K. Forbes states that "Satrunjaya is one of the most ancient and most sacred shrines of the Jaina religion. It is described as the first of places of pilgrimage, the bridal half of those who would marry everlasting rest: it is not destined to be destroyed even at the end of the world." As Satrunjaya is a *Siddha Kshetra*, it was also called *Siddhacala*. According to the Prakrit Nirvanakanda (12th-13th century A.D.) here were liberated three sons of Pandu and eight crore Dravida Kings." The Vividha Tirtha Kalpa, on the other hand, reveals that all the five Pandavas were liberated from here. Gautama Kumara having been initiated by Neminatha obtained salvation at this site. Ascetic pundarika performed penances and attained salvation here." Satrunjaya as a sacred Tirtha is famous from time immemorial and it was visited by a large number of accomplished sages such as Rsabhasena and excepting Neminatha by twenty three Jainas from Nabheya to Vardharnana. Satrunjaya is an isolated hill rising gently from the plains into the twin summits linked together by a shallow valley. To ascend this holy mountain there is an arrangement of stairways. There are about two thousand five hundred steps covering a distance of nearly two and a half miles. At present the hill is covered with more than a hundred temples built into the

fortified walls called *tunkas*. The northern summit named Nava tunka consists of nine *tunkas*, of which the Caumukha is the biggest and most imposing. In the saddle are two *tunkas*, the one towards the east is that of Motisaha and the other near the west end is that of Balabhai. Both were built in the 19th century A.D. The southern pinnacle, which is regarded as most sacred, goes by the name of Dadaji or Adisvara Bhagavana *tunka*. This summit is more elaborately adorned with temples. The Adinatha *tunka* in the western end of this peak is the oldest one on the Satrunjaya hill. It is here that pious Jainas concentrated their attention by building 'and re-building shrines and installing images in them. No one knows how often. The repairing work in this place would hardly have ever stopped. Henry Cousins has remarked that about 300 years ago, there could not have been more than two small groups upon the hill, perhaps not a dozen shrines in all, namely that of Caumukha on the northern crest and that of Adisvara Bhagavan on the southern with a few isolated old Hindu shrines appropriated to Jaina worship.

The Svetambaras consider this place to be most sacred of all the sacred places known to them. Pilgrims and vistiors come here to pay homage to Adinatha throughout the year.



VINDHYACHAL

Pilgrimage in the Company of a Devotee

THIS place is about 6.4 km. from Mirzapur. From here roadways link Mirzapur to Vindhyachal. "Why not ride down to the temple? - said my friend who was a Sakti worshipper. His head bent in reverence only in front of temples depicting the form of the Mother. Thus it is that we set out one fine day to the temple of *Vindhyavasini Devi*. The ride was pleasant as at most times we could see the placid flow of River Ganges.

We passed the tiny bustle at the station and then passed through the dust of the Vindhyachal Bazaar, where to the utter annoyance of my friend we lost sight of the River Ganga. The river itself held him charmed, so we hurried through the dust on to the banks of thy cool, clear and silent waters. There at a short distance stood that sanctum, which had beckoned to my friend who lived in Andhra.

Goddess Kaushiki

It stood on an elevated ground. He entered quivering, excited like a child going into the presence of its mother whom he had not seen for a long time. Impatient, lost and entranced he walked ahead till he was right in front of the figure of the Goddess seated on the Lion. Here she is called Kaushiki. Memory stirred up a faint recollection of this name mentioned in the *Durga Sapta Sati* (a book dedicated to the worship of the Mother). Here, in and about

the temple are different forms of the Mother as also that of Lord Siva. As my friend stood in silent communion, we walked around exploring the place. Nearby we found another temple dedicated to Lord Siva with an image of Sri Anjaneya. While we went through all this unemotionally as tourists would do, our friend joined us. He walked like a somnambulist, eyes drawn in, gait unsteady. He pointed to a spot to the north across the Ganges.

Half in joke and half in awe we turned to the spot he indicated. There stood a mounted Linga on the sand. This he told us would be submerged when the river was in spate. Now we proceeded on to Kali Khoh, a place indicated by a guide who was attracted by my friend's devotion. About 3.5 km. from Vindhyavasini there is a small hillock with a shrine on top. Here Mother has her abode in a terrible form as Kali. With her tiny body and over-sized face she is enough to revolt the on-looker. Here, about 125 steps away is a lake called Gerua Talab, the waters of which have an ochre colour. Pilgrims dye their clothes here. To my friend, his Mother is soft and kind at times, angry and deformed at other times. Yet to him his Mother was worshipful. We realised that we had a long way to come up to his state.

Ashtabhuja and the Krishna Legend

About 1.5 km. from here is the temple of Ashtabhuja. Some people call her Saraswathi. At Vindhyavasini the image is called Maha Lakshmi. Thus situated at the apices of a triangle are three temples depicting the three aspects of the Mother: the terrible as Mother Kali, the benign

bestower of wealth as Maha Lakshmi and the giver of knowledge as Saraswathi. In the Dwapara Yuga, the tyrant Kamsa killed all his sister's children for fear of their dethroning him. Of these, the eighth child was the one destined to fulfil this role. Though the eighth child, a male was transferred to Gokul and a baby girl brought in its place, this tyrant was not ready to risk this contingency, so he held the baby by her leg and was about to hit her head on a rock when she escaped out of his grip and came and dwelt here as Ashtabhuja Devi. This is the legend that is woven round this temple.

Echoes of North and South Integrate the Land

To a devotee's mind the most impossible legends are gospel truth. Every bit of it was being absorbed by my friend, who I felt would in the end convert himself into a veritable Bhagavata himself. Now we proceeded from this temple to a cave where we saw another shrine dedicated to Goddess Kali, near about where were tiny chaplets and a large temple, a name-sake of the famous Rameswaram temple of the South. Is this repetition of names a mere coincidence or a thoughtful reminder of the essential unity of India? Nearby stands Ram Gaya, where offerings are given in memory of one's ancestors. This then was our trip to one of the famous centres of Shakti worship, along with one whose life was a perennial flow of devotional love for his Mother, whose form he worshipped regardless of its appearance.

Three Beautiful Holy Centres of the North

HARI MOHANLAL SRIVASTAVA

A rare blend of fervour and tolerance

BUNDEL KHAND, a centre of personal bravery and religious fervour, enjoys the glory of having a number of Pilgrim Centres pertaining to all sects and creeds. The most notable feature is of excellent tolerance being evinced by all normally and particularly on special festive occasions.

Datia between Bombay and Delhi

Three beautiful places of pilgrimage in this district of Northern India deserve special mention. These add to the glory of a tract of ancient heritage, now known as Datia district. Datia (25 degrees, 41 minutes north and 78 degrees, 30 minutes East), the chief town was ruled in early days by Danta Vakra, a Danava King of Karusha. The old records mention that Danta Vakra was killed by Krishna. Datia (980 feet above sea level) stands on the main line of Central Railway from Bombay to Delhi between Jhansi and Gwalior and is 16 miles away from the former. Just a few miles away from Datia towards the East there is a village named Gujarra.

A minor rock-edict of Asoka in this village is an outstanding epigraphical discovery. Mentioning Asoka by his personal name and containing some important inscriptions, it is second to the rock-edict at Maski. This rock edict bears ample testimony to the vital role of this tract during the days of

Jain and Buddhist glory.

Sona Giri's Jain Temples

Sona Giri is the next railway station towards Gwalior only six miles away from Datia. It is a city of Jain temples and is quite famous in the distant parts of the country. Thousands of Jain Pilgrims from all over India visit the place in all seasons of the year. But a five-day Annual Fair just after Holi lends unique importance to this village, which has a rich treasure of "Swarna Giri" meaning a "Mount of Gold". During Mela the Mount attracts more than a lakh of pilgrims of all ages in their gay and gaudy dresses.

The idols at Sona Giri are older than Christ by some centuries, and are a fine piece of sculpture belonging to that glorious age of Jain culture. Muslim aggression forced the people to hide these idols with ingenuity in the depths of the hill. These were taken out some time later when the storm of danger had calmed down. All sorts of temple architecture, the chariot-like, the lotus-like and the spire type with various forms may be noticed here.

There are as many as 77 temples of the Digambar Jains on the hill and 18 are below it. Rays of the Sun, falling on conical prismatic and pyramid-like spires of snow-like temples lend a hue of gold, and the sight is worth enjoying. All the temples are rich with towers and the idols are both in sitting and standing postures. The temples of Chandra Prabhu is of great importance. Close by there is the *Man Stambh*, a great pillar, which seems to touch the sky.

The Sun God at Unas

Unao, a town on the Pahuj about 10 miles from Datia and 6 from Jhansi, is famous for its temple dedicated to the Sun God. Within the temple there is a circular piece of stone, about six inches in diameter, with twenty one triangles engraved on the edge to represent the phases of the sun. The dial with a protective brass cover stands on a terrace of brick. There is a strong belief that the Deity has the power to cure skin diseases of all sorts. Hence sufferers from Leprosy, especially, resort at this Balaji temple, praying for relief. Sunday is a special day for worship. People from the surrounding regions flock to this place during a number of festivals as well.

According to a legend Maharaj Marut performed a Yagna near Varanasi. The stone statue made for the Sun or the God of Fire lay there even after the Yagna. Anaar Singh Seora, a contemporary of Sankaracharya and well versed in Tantric Sciences brought the statue from Kasi and left it on the banks of Pahuj underneath a big peepal tree. After sometime two brothers and a Kachhi had a dream and discovered the statue. In course of time the rulers of Datia State erected a big temple there.



Madhya Pradesh Pilgrim Spots in the Heart of India

Rich in Monuments

MADHYA PRADESH, in the heart of India, pulsates with the stream formed by the union of the old and the new. More than 1,800 monuments, temples, stupas, forts and palaces take the mind back to the distant past. Art, architecture, sculpture, painting, music and literature reached its pitch of excellence here. The stupas of Sanchi with superb stone carvings, the mural paintings of Bagh Caves, the sculpture in Khajuraho are unparalleled in the history of Indian art. India's renowned poet dramatist, Kalidasa and the greatest musician of the North, Tansen, lived in this land. This land is interspersed with mountains that rise up like gentle folds from the plateau and raven by waterways, which run east-west. The main rivers are the Narmada and Tapti, others are the Chambal, Betwa, Son, Mahanadi and Indravati. Most of the rivers being rainfed, become rushing torrents in the monsoon and shrink into mere rivulets in the summer.

Culturally, it was the seat of Imperial Guptas, under whom India entered the Golden Age of Indian History. The finest products of this period were the Buddhist cave temples and Hindu and Jain caves at Udayagiri. Temple building and its perfection seemed to have reached the zenith between the 8th and 12th centuries, when there was a clear transition of architectural forms from the flat roofs to the sphere.

Some of the best specimens of these are the temples at Udaypur, Khajuraho, Gwalior Fort and Gwalior.

UJJAIN

Ujjain can be reached from Bhopal by a 113-mile road, which passes through Sehore and Dewas. Ujjain and Bhopal are also connected by a railway line.

The Kshipra River

The beautiful city of Ujjain, which lies on the banks of the winding Kshipra river, is one of the holiest spots in India. According to legend, it was here that Siva, the God of Destruction, vanquished a tyrant named Tripura. Hundreds of thousands of Hindu pilgrims from all corners of the country visit Ujjain every year and take a bath at the picturesque ghats on the banks of the Kshipra. Once in twelve years the mammoth Kumbh Mela festival is held at Ujjain. The story of its origin is similar to that of Prometheus and other ancient legends concerning the fight between Good and Evil.

In the tussle between the forces of Good and Evil, drops of the divine nectar fell at four different places in India - Ujjain, Hardwar, Allahabad and Nasik. Twelve days in heaven are equivalent to twelve years on the earth and the Kumbh Mela festival is held at each of the four cities in a twelve-year cycle. Once in three years there is a Kumbh Mela in one of these cities. The last Kumbh Mela (festival) in Ujjain took place in 1957 and was attended by more than a million people.

There is a steady stream of pilgrim traffic

to Ujjain throughout the year. Women dressed in bright-coloured saris pray on the banks of the Kshipra, burn incense, and throw into the river coconuts and flowers wrapped in red cloth. They feed lentils to the tortoises floating lazily in the river. Priests help pilgrims in offering prayers to the souls of their ancestors.

The Maha Kali Temple

Next to the bathing ghats ranks in sanctity the Mahakali Temple, which is believed to have been built several centuries ago. Destroyed in the thirteenth century, it was restored in the eighteenth. The principal deity worshipped in the shrine is Siva. One of the twelve holiest of lingas (Jyotirlinga) is found here in its precinct!

Another attractive shrine is the Gopal Mandir in the heart of the market area. Built in 1833, this temple, dedicated to Krishna, boast of a beautiful silver idol of the God and also of impressive doors made of the same metal. The shrine is surmounted by an attractive marble spire.

The Kaliadeh Palace

The Kaliadeh Palace, situated six miles north of the city on a picturesque island between the two arms of the Kshipra river, was formerly used as a pleasure resort by the Sultans of Malwa. It was originally a Hindu temple dedicated to the Sun God. The carved stones of the old buildings have been incorporated in the massive bridge, which spans the western arm of the river. The palace contains interesting kiosks and pavilions. A pleasing feature is a system by which the waters of the river are led

through fancifully shaped conduits into numerous tanks and then allowed to fall over sculptured stone screens.

About four miles from the city on the way to Kaliadeh Palace is the Bhartruhari Cave, the remnant of a temple of Siva of the eleventh century. Near the cave is the site of archaeological excavations, where the remains of ancient Ujjain are being unearthed.

About two miles from the city is a hallowed spot marked by a temple where Lord Krishna, his brother Balram and his friend Sudama received instruction from Shri Sandipani, the celebrated teacher. Two miles from the Ashram is Shri Mangalnath Temple, marking the site of the first meridian for Hindu geographers.

The City of Joy

Mandu, "The City of Joy", is situated on a 2,000 feet high plateau on the crest of the Vindhya Mountain ranges and is encircled on three sides by a deep gorge called the Kakra Koh (winding chasm).

During the autumn, Mandu, clothed in green, with turbulent rivers and torrents rushing down into the encircling ravine, presents a magnificent spectacle. The fertile Nimar plain stretching a thousand feet below the plateau, with winding waterways and smiling green fields, forms a most picturesque back-ground.

From 1401 to 1526, first the Ghoris and then the Khiljis ruled over Malwa, with Mandu as their capital. This period witnessed Mandu's spectacular development as "The City of Joy" under a succession of great builders. The elaborate fortifications, the seven-storeyed tower of

victory, the marble Ashrafi Mahal, the great Jami Mosque, Hoshang Shah's Tomb and the magnificent Jahaz Mahal were built.

The Jama Masjid

The Jama Masjid, designed after the great mosque at Damascus, is the most majestic building at Mandu and is said to be the finest and largest specimen of Afghan architecture extant in India. Completed in 1450, the mosque is 288 feet square, with a huge domed porch projecting from the eastern facade. Stately flights of steps lead to the entrance. The marble jambs and lintel of the door-way are noteworthy for their decoration as are the jali screens on the sides of the interior hall of the porch. Traces of finely coloured borders and panels in glazed tile are still to be found. The roof contains sixty-one domes, three of which are of immense size. The western prayer hall has a large number of arches and pillars supporting the roof and along the western wall are carvings on polished black stone. Facing the mosque are the ruins of Ashraf Mahal (Palace of Gold Mohur), which was originally a school, and later converted into the tomb of its builder, Mahmud Shah (1436-39), whose sarcophagus was placed on a finely carved yellow marble base. The walls were finished with white, yellow and black marble. A "Tower of Victory" was later constructed north-east of the school building to commemorate the ruler's victory over the Rana of Chittor. The seven-storeyed tower is believed to have been 150 feet high. Because of poor workmanship, all the three buildings crumbled, but their ruins are still impressive.

Dai-ka-Mahal

Dai-ka-Mahal in fine natural settings near Sagar Talao is another interesting monument. Near the building on the road is an extremely interesting echo point.

Nilkanth Mahadev Temple

This temple astride a deep gorge commands the best view in Mandu. A small stream which murmurs somewhere at the back of the building is guided into a small pond in the centre of the courtyard, which overlooks the gorge. Here Akbar stayed on his way to the conquest of Khandesh and again on return from there. Appropriately enough, inscribed on the wall here is a warning to those intoxicated with wealth and power.

Omkarji

Omkarji is five miles from the Omkareshwar Road railway station which is on the Indore-Khandwa railway line. From Mandu, Omkareshwar can be reached through Mhow.

Mandhata and the Siva Temples

The holy city of Omkarji, otherwise called Mandhata, boasts of two of the twelve holiest temples dedicated to Siva. Situated on an island, a mile and a half long, in the middle of the sacred Narmada river. Omkarji is split into two by a deep ravine from north to south. Steep hills dot the southern and eastern parts of the island. The swift and deep river is a haunt of crocodiles. The rocks have a tint of green, which blends

beautifully with the dark green foliage and the brown and grey temples which rise in rows. The Birkhala rocks to the east end of the island are of great sanctity. According to tradition, it was considered meritorious to die at this spot and devotees used to cast themselves into the river, until the practice was ended in 1824.

The founder of the holy shrine was one Raja Mandhatri, who claimed descent from the Sun. Mandhatri performed a great sacrifice to Siva on the island which was named after the king.

The great temple of Omkar on the Birkhala rocks is a picturesque building with a courtyard and colonnades supported by massive pillars. The original shrine of Amleswar or Manileswar, which contains the specially holy lingam is on the southern part of the island. The original site was swallowed by the growing jungle. The Peshwa, Baji Rao II of Poona, tried to find and restore the shrine, but could not do so, and built a new temple. The original site was later found and a temple built over it, but Peshwa's shrine retains the name of Manileswar. There is a colossal Nandi (bull) carved in green stone in front of the Gauri Somnath Temple on the precipice on the western part of the island.

Other Spots in Ruins

On the north bank of the Narmada, a short distance from Omkarji, are ruins of temples dedicated to Lord Vishnu and also, some Jain shrines. There is a temple dedicated to Varaha (boar) incarnation of Vishnu, with a fine representation of the boar near the point where the river branches into two. Carved in green stone are twenty-four

figures of Vishnu. In a ravine, farther down the bank, is a huge idol (18 feet long) of the Goddess Chamundi. The ten-armed deity is shown sporting with lion cubs and human skulls. On her chest is a scorpion and at her right a rat. She rests one foot on a prostrate figure.

A big fair is held here on the occasion of the Maha Shivarathri festival in February-March and another on the occasion of Kartik Purnima (full-moon) festival in November.

JABALPUR

One of the most famous scenic spots in India, the Marble Rocks, is located thirteen miles from Jabalpur.

Bhera Ghat

The Marble Rocks, also called the Bhera Ghat, are connected to Jabalpur by a first class road. Four and a half miles from Jabalpur enroute to the Marble Rocks, perched on the crest of a rocky eminence is the Madan Mahal, a fine fortress of the Gond kings. From the top of Madan Mahal can be obtained a panoramic view of Jabalpur.

At Bhera Ghat, the road terminates near the 107 carved stone steps leading to the Chaunsath Yogini temple. This circular cloister contains 81 images of the goddesses attendant on Durga and a few images of Gods. Most of them date back to the 10th century, when they were worshipped in an open-air shrine.

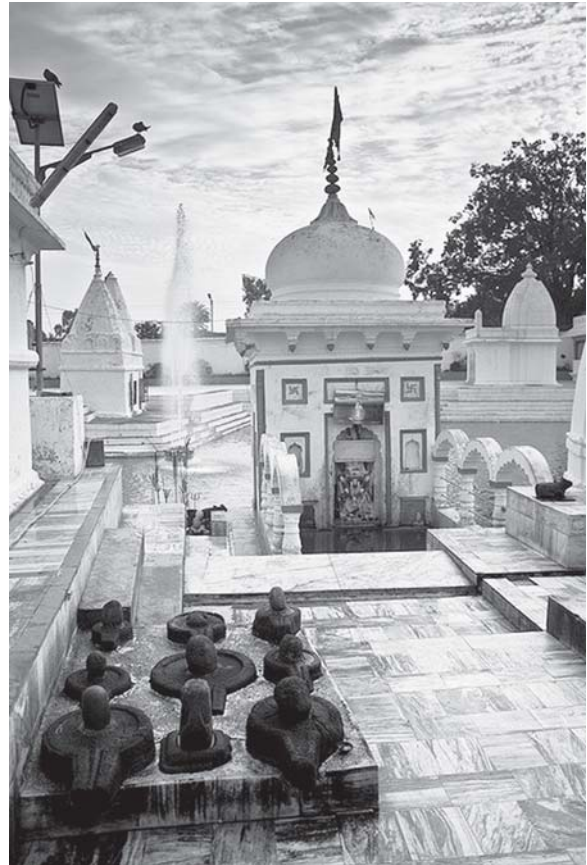
The embarkation point (Panchavati) for a boat trip through the Marble Rocks is reached by climbing down 135 steps. There

is a Government-run boat service, each boat being manned by a pilot and four men to row.

The Torrential Narmada

The one-mile long gorge through which the torrential Narmada river flows is bordered on both sides by brilliantly shining white cliffs of magnesium limestone, which rise up to a height of 105 feet. The view is especially enchanting during the full moon. Near the entrance to the gorge is a point known as Monkey's Leap. Here the cliffs on both sides very nearly reach their highest point. The crystal clear water which reaches to a depth of 150 feet, reflects the gleaming white rocks beautifully. In the distance, an occasional crocodile may be observed dozing. In the recesses of the cliffs are combs of wild bees which are now periodically destroyed.

At a slightly removed distance from the embarkation point (Panchavati) in the middle of the river is a Lingam dedicated to Siva erected by Rani Ahalya Bai of Indore. Just before the Monkey's Leap is reached, on the right side, is a cave said to have been inhabited by the Hindu sage Dattatreya. Near the end of the gorge are two curious formations of rocks known as the Elephant's Feet and Horse's Feet. Here swift streams have cut the limestone into peculiar shapes. The gorge ends in a barrier of rocks, from which the river cascades in a magnificent waterfall. Although the predominant colour of the rocks is white, there are also delicate tints of blue, yellow and pink, which add greatly to the charm of the view. Returning to the embarkation point, the tor climbs the steep staircase



and takes the tree-lined, six-furlong path to the waterfalls. The falls are known as the Dhuandhar or smoke cascade, and are very picturesque. The Narmada is a holy river and there are several Dharmasalas (rest houses) for pilgrims. On the river banks, pilgrims from all parts of India gather to offer prayers.

UDAIGIRI

Of the twenty caves numbered serially, 1-20 belong to the Jain faith. There are a few interesting idols of Jain Pontiffs in cave No. 20. The other caves are all the Hindu faith. The most important cave, No. 5, has on its wall a majestic representation of the

Varaha (boar) incarnation of Vishnu. The legend is that the Earth goddess had been abducted by a tyrant who hid her in the depths of the ocean. Lord Vishnu went down into the sea and rescued her. The gigantic rock-carving shows Vishnu, with the head of a boar and body of a man, arising out of the ocean. With his right tusk he raises the frail figure Prithvi the goddess, while with his left foot tramples on a wicked tyrant. The waters the ocean are represented by wavy lines in the background. At the top, on both of these, are represented Devas and Asuras teaching the event with interest and devotion.

BHOPAL

Twenty-four miles from Bhopal, on the Bhopal-Obedullaganj Road is the famous Siva temple of Bhojpur. This incomplete temple consists of a huge, beautifully carved slabs of purple sandstone joined together without the use of mortar. The temple is Romanesque in grandeur and the visitor is impressed by the holiness of those who conceived it. The Siva Linga in the temple is 7'4" in height and has a radius of 17'4". The polish on the linga is intact.

DHUPGARH

Dhupgarh (4,429 feet), the highest point on the Satpura Range, about 5 miles from Pachmarhi, is the most frequently ascended peak. The first four miles are motorable, and then two bridle paths take the visitor to the dak bungalow which has been built near the top. To the west, Dhupgarh overlooks the Bori Valley and the Betul Hills and the view is particularly magnificent at

sunset and in the early morning before sunrise. Precipitous Chauragarh (4,317 feet), a somewhat arduous ascent, has a rugged and imposing appearance, while the stepped path to its sacred summit is crowned with numerous tridents, the emblems of Mahadeo, deposited in devotion by pilgrims over the centuries. But the finest of the views is that from Mahadeo (4,384 feet), the second largest peak, 6 miles from Pachmarhi. To its one side rise the crags of Chauragarh and to the other the splendid scraps of Dhupgarh. While far below lies the green Denwa Valley backed by the sunny hills and dales of Chhindwara, to the north arc the woods and plateau of Pachmarhi and beyond this the broad level plain of the Narmada, broken only by the hills of Fatehpur and Denwa forests fading away into the shadowy outline of the Vindhya Hills.

MAHOBBA

At Mahoba, there is a holy pool called the Ram Kund, which marks the spot where Chandravarman (Nannukar), the founder of the Chandella Dynasty, died. A stone pillar in front of the Mania Deva Temple has an inscription dating back to the 11th century. Near the Madan Sagar is another stone pillar called the "Alha ki Gilli" or the Staff of Alha, a hero who frequently figures in the songs of Rajput bards.



Khajuraho

The Hey-day of Chandellas' Rule in Central India

KHAJURAHU reached its zenith under the Chandellas, who ruled over Central India from the ninth to the thirteenth centuries. The Chandellas were Hindus belonging to a Rajput clan. They claimed that they were descended from the Moon. The kings of this dynasty were noted for their enterprise in the construction of reservoirs and other utilitarian undertakings.

The Chandellas built the magnificent temples which attract the pilgrim-tourist today. Out of 85, which existed at one time, only 20 now survive. They were built between 950 and 1050 A.D. The first few

rulers of the Chandella Dynasty appear to have been worshippers of Vishnu. The later rulers were devotees of Siva. Shrines dedicated to both these Gods are to be found at Khajuraho. The Chandellas were tolerant towards members of other faiths and some of the notable structures erected at Khajuraho were dedicated to Jain Tirthankaras. A colossal statue of the Buddha was found outside the Ghantai Temple and is now kept in the local museum.

Epigraphic Accounts

Yasovarman (first half of the tenth century) was the first notable monarch of the Chandella Dynasty. A Khajuraho epigraph dated 953-54 A.D. states that Yasovarman conquered the mountain vastness of Kalinjar and defeated his neighbours. He erected a charming, splendid home of



Vishnu which rivals the peaks of the mountain of snow. This temple has been identified with the Lakshmana Temple. Yasovarman's son, Dhanga (950-1008 A.D.) was another famed warrior. According to an inscription, he "obtained an empire" after defeating the Maharaja of Kanauj. An inscription, found at the Visvanatha Temple states that Dhanga erected a shrine "with a spire as white as the autumnal clouds" to house an emerald lingam dedicated to Siva. Vidyadhara, Dhanga's grandson was described by a Muslim chronicler, as the most powerful Indian ruler of his time. In 1022, Mahmud of Ghazni besieged the Kalinjar fortress, "which has no equal in the whole country of Hindustan for strength and impregnability" and defeated Vidyadhara. After this, Khajuraho's importance declined.

An Architectural Synthesis

The shrines at Khajuraho are individual in character and are different from those in any other part of India. Each temple stands on a high and solid masonry terrace. The customary enclosure wall is absent. All the parts of a temple form a compact architectural synthesis. The successive mantapas (assembly halls) leading to the cell, where the main idol is installed, share a common high base and their roofs, which are domical in contour, give the appearance of successive mountain peaks. They culminate in a graceful Sikhara (spire) crowning the cell. 'Sikhara' means 'mountain peak'. It symbolises the mountain abode of the Gods. Is not Siva's abode on the top of Mount Kailasa in the Himalayas?

Surface Decorations : The Khajuraho temples are famed not only for their beauty of outline but also for the lively texture of their surface decoration. Many temples have two or three bands of sculptures running all around the exterior of walls and outside the sanctum. The principal gods and goddesses are portrayed, as also celestial beauties, Mithunas (couples), Nagas (serpents), Sardulas (leogriffs) and Salabhanjikas (women sporting with trees).

Erotic Figures

The visitor will notice that a popular subject is the representation of couples in a variety of erotic poses. Should a temple contain these figures? How is eroticism compatible with Divinity? Several points of view have been urged in explanation. One is that in the context of the omnipresent and the All-Pure, nothing can really be obscene or profane. Human thinking, which sees obscenity in art, can and ought to be sublimated into superior forms and channels. Especially this is possible and necessary in the approaches to temples.

Temples of old were not only store-houses of culture but served also as centres of all-round education, where even the apparently profane acquired a spiritual orientation. May it not be that such sculptures of superficial vulgarity in temple-precincts are conducive to a preparatory cleansing and purging of the mind?

Studded with Temples - East and West

The temples are in three groups. To the west of the Bamitha-Rajnagar Road is situated the best-known group of temples

at Khajuraho. The eastern group lies in close proximity to the Khajuraho village. There is a further group of temples three miles to the south.

It might be convenient for the tourist to commence with the Chaunsat Yogini Temple of the western group. It is believed that the temple was dedicated to the goddess Kali ; " Chaunsat" means 64 and this corresponds with the number of "Yoginis" attending on Kali. The temple is oblong in shape and stands on a masonry terrace 18 feet in height. It is the only shrine at Khajuraho built entirely of granite and also the only one oriented north-east and south-west instead of the usual north and south. The courtyard, which is 103 feet long and 60 feet broad, was surrounded by 65 cells of which only 35 have survived the passage of time. It is presumed that the biggest cell had an image of the goddess Kali, but none has been found. This is believed to be the earliest surviving temple at Khajuraho and is ascribed to Circa 900 A.D.

Six hundred yards to the west of the Chaunsat Yogini Temple is a small shrine dedicated to Siva and known as the Lalguan Mahadeva Temple. The temple is in ruins and the original portico is missing.

The Kandariya Mahadeva Temple

To the north of the Chaunsat Yogini Temple lies the Kandariya Mahadeva Temple, the biggest of the shrines at Khajuraho and the most typical of the local school of 'architecture. This magnificent shrine is 102 ft. 3 in. long, 66 ft. 10 in. wide and 101 ft. 9 in. high. Although four subsidiary temples erected on its corners have perished, the

main shrine is in fine condition and impresses the beholders by its majestic size and the perfect symmetry of features. The shrine is dedicated to Siva.

Hindu Art at its Best

Almost every inch of the surface of its walls boasts of the most vibrant representation of Hindu art at its best. At the entrance is a richly carved torana (archway), decorated with figures of various kinds; musicians playing on different kinds of instruments, terrifying crocodiles, lovers in fond embrace and winged gods and goddesses. The ceilings of the assembly halls and that of the main hall make an unforgettable impression by the richness of their carvings. The concentric overlapping circles of decoration on the ceiling of the main hall form an interesting pattern. The pillars supporting the ceiling have finely carved capitals. Especially noteworthy are the grotesque dwarfs and rampant gryphons. The women in the bracket capitals are very lovely. They have well-shaped figures and their faces reveal a mood of intense emotional feeling.

Beautiful flowers and ascetics performing penance are depicted with equal facility on the lintel and door-jambs of the sanctum. The sacred rivers Ganga (Ganges) and Yamuna (Jamuna) are worshipped by the Hindus and regarded as goddesses. The base of the doorjambs of the main sanctum shows the goddess Ganga standing on a crocodile and the goddess Yamuna on a tortoise, their respective vehicles. Inside the sanctum stands a marble lingam, the symbol of Siva.

The passage which encircles the sanctum

is notable for the elaborately moulded plinth on the outside wall which is decorated with two rows of figures. Each of the eight directions (north, north-east etc.) has a deity presiding over it and these eight gods are portrayed on the lower row.

The outside walls of the sanctum and the transept have a triple belt of images running around them. These show angels, gods and goddesses in their various forms and groups of lovers.

Devi Jagadamba Temple

To the north of Kandariya Temple lies the Devi Jagadamba Temple, which was originally dedicated to Vishnu, but was later mistakenly regarded as a shrine of the goddess Kali. Sometime in the course of history, the original image of Vishnu appears to have been removed and a black painted image of a goddess was substituted. On the way to the Jagadamba Temple is the ruined shrine of Mahadeva. In the portico is a beautiful idol of a leogriffin (a hybrid figure partly lion) playing with a woman.

Bharatji Temple

Chitragupta's or Bharatji's Temple, which lies a short distance to the north of Devi Jagadamba and like most other shrines at Khajuraho faces east, is dedicated to Surya or the Sun God. The temple measures 74 ft. 9 in. by 51 ft. The 5-feet high image of the Sun God in the sanctum is extremely beautiful. The Sun God is shown wearing high boots and driving a chariot drawn by 7 horses. He is also portrayed on the lintel of the door-way. The carvings on the outside are interesting and show hunting

scenes, royal processions, dances by lovely girls and fights between mad elephants. There is an image of Vishnu in the central niche to the south of the sanctum. The Lord is shown with eleven heads. The central head is his own, while the rest represent his ten incarnations.

Viswanatha Temple

The Viswanatha Temple with the Nandi pavilion stands in the most northerly part of the eastern row of temples in the western group. There are two flights of steps, the northern flanked by a pair of lions and the southern by a pair of elephants. The Viswanatha Temple measures 89 ft. 1 in. by 45 ft. 10 in and is similar in plan to the Kandariya Mahadeo Temple. The women in the bracket-capitals are charming. On the outer wall of the corridor surrounding the cellar is an impressive image of Brahma, the Lord of Creation, who has three heads and his wife (now seen with broken legs). There is a fine statue of Siva in the form of an ox on the inner wall of the corridor. Originally, the Lingam enshrined in the sanctum was of emerald. It has been replaced by one of stone.

Figures of Artistic Grace

On the western part of the outside wall of the temple is the graceful figure of a woman holding a bunch of fruits in her right hand and a parrot resting on her left wrist. She has an almost life-like quality. On the southern wall is a woman fondling a child and on the north a woman playing on a flute. An inscription found on the wall of

the temple records that the shrine was built by King Dhanga and dedicated in 1002-03 A.D.

The Nandi pavilion measures 31 ft. 3 in. by 30 ft. 9 in. and faces the Viswanatha shrine. It contains a finely polished gigantic statue of Nandi, the bull on which Siva rides. The bull is 6 ft. in height and 7 ft. 3 in. long.

The Parvati Temple, to the south-west of the Viswanatha shrine, is believed to have been originally dedicated to Vishnu. The original idol is missing. In its place there is now that of the goddess Ganga standing on a crocodile.

Temple with Four Shrines and Decorated Entrance

The Lakshmana (Ramachandra or Chaturbhuja) Temple is dedicated to Vishnu. It measures 98 ft. by 45 ft. 3 in. There are four subordinate shrines on the corners of the terrace. The main sanctum is noteworthy for its highly decorated entrance. The lintel over the entrance shows Lakshmi, the Goddess of Wealth and the wife of Vishnu with Brahma, the Lord of Creation, to her left and Siva, the Lord of Destruction, to her right.

The nine planets are depicted on the frieze above the lintel. On the door-way is a relief illustrating the churning of the ocean by the gods and demons to obtain the divine nectar, which conferred immortality on those who drank it. Although both the gods and the demons co-operated in bringing out the kumbh (pitcher) containing the nectar from its deep resting place at the bottom of the ocean, they fought with one another afterwards. The war ended in victory for the gods. The *kumbhmela*

festival, which occurs in a twelve-year cycle at Ujjain, Nasik, Allahabad and Hardwar, commemorates this war.

Another relief on the door-way shows the ten incarnations of Vishnu. Vishnu assumed human form to rid the world of the wicked and establish the reign of righteousness. Among the incarnations were those of the Fish, the Tortoise, the Boar, the Man-lion, the Dwarf and Trivikrama, Parasurama, Rama (the hero of the epic Ramayana), Krishna (perhaps, the most popular Hindu deity) and of the Buddha. In Kalki, his final incarnation, which is yet to come, Vishnu is to appear riding a white horse with a sword drawn in his hand. All these figures are depicted here.

The idol installed in the sanctum of the Lakshmana Temple has four arms (Chaturbhuja) and three heads, somewhat rare as an icon. The middle head is human, while the side ones are those of Narasimha (man-lion) and Varaha (boar), two incarnations of Vishnu. On the outside are two rows of statues. The elephant frieze on the plinth is remarkable for the boldness of its outline. Other scenes depict fighting, processions, horses and boar-hunting.

Other Temples

The Matangesvara at the shrine to the south of the Lakshmana shrine, is still worshipped. A colossal lingam, 8 feet 4 inches in height and 3 feet 8 inches in diameter, is installed in the sanctum.

The Varaha Temple, situated in front of the Matangesvara Temple, is dedicated to the Boar incarnation of Vishnu. The huge statue of the Boar is 8 feet 9 inches in length and 5 feet 9 inches in height. The

entire body, head and legs of the Boar are carved with multiple figures of the Hindu gods and goddesses. The figure of Prithvi, the Earth Goddess, is broken and only traces of her feet remain on the pedestal. Under the Boar are the remains of a serpent.

The tourist may now proceed to the eastern group of temples which lie in close proximity to Khajuraho village. The group includes three Hindu temples known as the Brahma, Vamana and Javari and three large Jain temples, the Ghantai, Adinatha and Parsvanatha.

A colossal statue of Hanuman is installed in a modern temple about half-way between the western group of temples and Khajuraho village. It bears an inscription dated 922 A.D., the oldest inscription at Khajuraho.

The Brahma Temple, built partly of granite and partly of sandstone, is, dedicated to Brahma, Lord of Creation.

The Vamana Temple is dedicated to Vishnu, who took the incarnation of a dwarf to humble the pride of an arrogant ruler named Bali. The Dwarf begged of Bali, who had challenged the power of the gods, to give him a small gift of land that could be measured out with his three footsteps. Bali proudly laughing granted the request. Then Vishnu assumed the Trivikrama form, whereby his body assumed an immeasurably gigantic size. With one step he covered the whole of the earth. With another he covered the heavens and then asked where he should place his third step. Bali, humbled, pointed to his own head and was thus saved. The temple is noted for two bands of sculptures on the external walls. The Ghantai Temple lies to the South-east

of Khajuraho village. It is now in ruins, but still bears evidence of the great artistic skin of its builders. An eight-armed Jain goddess riding the sacred bird Garuda adorns the entrance. The frieze above the lintel depicts the sixteen dreams of the mother of Mahavira, the last of the Jain Tirthankaras.

Jain Temples

The Parsvanatha Temple, the largest and finest of the Jain temples surviving at Khajuraho is 68 feet 2 inches long and 34 feet 11 inches broad. The sanctum contains an ornamental throne with a carved bull in front. The bull is the emblem of Adinatha, the first of the Jain religious leaders. The modern image of Parsvanatha was installed in 1860. There are excellent sculptures on the outer walls of the sanctum; a woman fondling a child, a woman writing a letter, a little figure extracting a thorn from, her foot, and a woman at her toilet, all of exquisite beauty and on the northern side.

The Adinatha Temple is located immediately to the north of the Parsvanatha Temple and is smaller in size.

The Southern Group, about 3 miles from Khajuraho village, comprises the Duladeo Temple dedicated to Siva and the Chaturbhuja Temple dedicated to Vishnu. The Duladeo Temple has some fine bracket-capitals in its main wall showing women sporting around trees. The Chaturbhuja Temple has a colossal exquisitely carved image of Vishnu.



Abu (Temples of Dilwada)

H. BHISHAM PAL

ABU has been placed on the map, more because of its famous temples of Dilwada than as a hill station. The grandeur of these temples and sculptural skill of the masons remind us of their mastery over the chisel as well as their imagination. There is hardly any portion of roof, gate, torana and sabhamantapa, left without a mark of artistic perfection. In the words of K. M. Munshi, 'the Dilwada temples on Mount Abu were the outstanding productions of the western school in its Jain aspect. They are not monuments of architecture, but are sculptural masterpieces, used to fashion one of the sculptural wonders of the world'. According to inscriptions and historical records, Abu was a centre of the Naga tribe in 600-800 B.C. The Mahabharata refers to the ashram of Saint Vashist at Abu. According to Jain inscriptions, Lord Mahavira also visited this place and blessed the inhabitants. Megasthenes has also referred to Abu and noticed gold and silver mines near Mount Capitalia. The famous temples at Dilwada at Mount Abu are situated about twenty miles from the Abu Road railway station.

Vimal Vasa hi Temple

This temple was constructed by Vimal Shah, Minister of Raja Bhimdeo in 1021 A.D. at a cost of about nineteen crores of rupees at that time. Vimal Vasahi temple built in white

marble, among a group of four temples situated in a cluster, is famous for its rich art and Jain architecture. As regards the construction of this magnificent shrine a legend relates it as follows; once upon a time, the great Jain monk Dharamaghosha Suri came to Chandrawati and at Vimala's request decided to spend the rainy season in this lovely city.

The day to day preachings of the monk led Vimala into deeply religious thoughts.: Vimal ultimately requested the teacher to prescribe to him some act of atonement for the great sins of killing (himsa) and such others committed as part of statecraft. The monk said that no prayaschitta (religious practices for atonement of sins) was prescribed for sins committed knowingly and deliberately. However, since Vimal had sincerely repented for them and asked for atonement, the teacher advised him to undertake repairs at Abu, the holy place of pilgrimage. Vimal decided to follow the advice and undertook the great task.

According to an another legend, the Goddess Ambika was pleased with the deep devotion and virtues of Vimal Shah and asked him to name a boon. Being issueless, Vimal asked for a son to help in the building of a magnificent temple. The goddess told him that only one of his desires could be fulfilled and asked for his preference. The minister was puzzled very much. On the advice of his wife, he asked for the fulfilment of his second desire to perpetuate his name by building the beautiful structure. It is said that Vimal Shah had to pay a very heavy price to get the land for the temple from the Brahmin owners. It is said that he had to pay the gold coins equal to

the area of the land.

The temple site which is 98 feet long and 42 feet wide is surrounded by a lofty wall with 52 cells, each of which contains the image of a Tirthankar. Most of these have now been replaced. In the main shrine is installed a majestic image of Adinath, cast in gold-brass alloy, about 57 inches high.

During later renovations, the stone sculpture of Jina was installed, which exists till today.

The cells are screened by an arcade of carved pillars. A pavilion facing the entrance porch contains a procession of marble elephants, each bearing a statue of Vimal Shah and his family. This Hastishala was constructed by Prithvipal in the year 1147-49 A.D. A statue of Vimal riding a horse is placed near the entrance. Most of the figures which were of the ancestors of Prithvipal are now mutilated.

The temple consists of an open portico and a vestibule formed by a simple grouping of pillars.

The octagonal dome of the shrine is formed by eleven concentric rings containing patterns of endless variety and is upheld by eight carved columns. A series of sixteen brackets of beaming images of the Goddess of Knowledge supports the rings of the dome. The intricately carved railings illustrate incidents from Jain literature and

legends including Satrunjaya Mahatmya. A notable feature of the decoration is the exuberance of detail and effective repetition of the same motif. It is a remarkable example of tireless inventiveness in sculptured decoration. In his book, *Saga of Indian Sculpture*, K. M. Munshi says: "There is a perfection of detail in these



figures and their composition is unique. But, as is usual in Jain temples, the sensual beauty of the human body is toned down in the interests of a rounded stiffness. The rhythm of the lines is exquisite, but vigour is subordinated to refinement." What Percy Brown says of the sculptures of the Abu temples is true of most of the sculptures

of the western school of the period. There is a sense of perfection, but it is a mechanical perfection, with an over-refinement and concentration on details. The decadence of the art of the times made exuberance a geometrical problem, which is substituted for beauty. In the year 1327 A.D., this temple was renovated by two rich men Lull and Bizzar, after it was ransacked by the Muslim invaders.

A visitor can distinctly notice the contrast between decoration and ornamentation on outer parts like navachoki, mantapa and cells in the courtyard and simple architecture of inner sanctum and mantapas in front. Simplicity of the sikharas, in comparison to other contemporary temples of India, leads one to analyse the circumstances which compelled such erections. Destruction of these shrines by invaders and paucity of funds with the renovators seem to be the main reasons behind construction of these parts. Another reason advanced for such low pinnacles is frequent occurrence of earthquakes in Mt. Abu in the past. According to an observer, " ... whatever the cause of the destruction of the earlier pinnacles may be, and whatever their original size, the later repairers could not spend enough, obviously because Muslim invasions and loot had rendered these parts poorer; the cultural and artistic activities had also degenerated due to uncertain social and political conditions- created by successive invasions of internal warfare (between different petty states). Moreover, successive demolitions of these shrines might have led the people to build small temple tops in order that the shrines may not be easily marked out from a distance.

It is noteworthy that the Chaumukha shrine in the group of Dilwada temples, erected in the 15th century A.D., is pretty high, though of an inferior workmanship. But in that age conditions had stabilised a little, and people could erect temples or magnificent, unique architectural specimens like the Chaumukha shrine in Ranakpur at huge costs."

Luna Vasahi Temple

In the year 1230 A.D., Vastupal and his brother Tejpal, ministers of Viradhawala, built another famous temple at Mt. Abu. and installed the image of the twenty-second Tirthankar, Shri Neminathji. It is also said that this shrine was constructed by Tejpal for the spiritual welfare of his wife Anupamadevi and his son Lunasimha. A beautiful big image, made of the black basalt, adorns this magnificent temple. Like Vimal Vasahi temple, it had dome-shaped sabhamantapa with small cells on the right side. The roof of this temple is beautifully engraved with reliefs relating to Jainism. Animate and inanimate objects are so perfectly engraved that one cannot but praise the architect of this temple, Sobhana Dev.

The impact of architectural competence of Kirti Stambh of Chittorgarh is visible in the pillars. The engraving on sabhamantapa roofs and pillars is enchanting and is an example of perfection. Another striking feature of this temple is the pendant of the dome which, according to Fergusson, "hangs from the centre more like a lustre of crystal drops than a solid mass of marble".

The Hastishala or elephant house of this

temple is a structure to be specially mentioned. Each of the ten apartments has got an elephant made of white marble. These are the rare pieces of art, beautifully and proportionately carved and shiningly polished. On each elephant there is one shravak with mahout in front and umbrella-bearer in the back. The figures are all mutilated and have lost their identity. Behind these elephants are the life-size images of the builders and their relatives. The Chaumukhji in black stone stands in the centre.

Pittalhara Temple

Constructed by Bhima Shaha in the 14th century at Abu, the Pittalhara Temple was dedicated to Adinath. The name Pittalhara was perhaps given to the image of Adinath, because it was cast in brass. This idol, weighing 108 maunds and 41 inches high, was prepared by two ministers, Sundara and Gada. They employed the famous artist called Deva, son of Sutradhara Mandana for this purpose. Other images of the Tirthankars, though small in size, adorn the temple. This shrine, consisting of Garbagraha, Guha-mantapa and Navachoki, is not so exuberant in carving and style as Vimalavasahi temple. There are also small cells with shrines, each representing some deity.

Chaumukha Temple

The Chaumukha Temple, known as Kharatara Vasahi Temple, is dedicated to Parshvanath. The erection date of this three-storeyed temple with four-fold

images at each storey, is assessed around 15th century. Built with grey stone, the temple, with its high pinnacle, is the tallest of all the shrines existing at Delwada. There are four mantapas adjoining the sanctum. The outer walls are engraved with deities of the Jain religion. In all there are fifty-seven parikara figures in the temple, besides three Chaumukhas and a sculpture of the Goddess Ambika on the ground floor.

Other Temples

In the south of Dilwada are the ruins of the temples, which reveal the influence of Hinduism. Numerous images of Shankar and an idol of Hanuman are exhibited in this temple of Kumari Kanya (Virgin girl).

Abu has been one of the main centres for the perpetuation of the skill of the Hindu and Jain architects. Besides Delwada, there are other temples of Achleshwar at Achalgarh, about six miles away, where Rana Kumbha of Mewar had sought shelter for some time. The Siva Temple of Orian, an abode of Dattu Briz Ganpati, is the place where Ramanand in the 14th century meditated before launching his reform movement. The temple of Vashist constructed in 1337 A.D. by Mahadev Pardhi is another shrine depicting the artistic skill of Hindu architecture. The image of Paramar, supposed to be that of Indra, is noteworthy.



Pushkar-The Purifier

PUSHKAR is one of the five holiest places of the northern India, the other four being Kurushetra, Gaya, Ganga and the Sangam at Prayag. It is situated in a scenic valley of the Aravali Mountains, 11 km. north-west of Ajmer and is connected by a road, which treks lawn parallel to the Ana Sagar and then crosses over the Nag Parvat.

Ekadasi and Purnima - Special Occasions

Every full-moon draws thousands of Hindus to Pushkar, who come and take a dip in the holy tank, and worship the Lord Brahma and other deities. Another auspicious occasion falls between Vaisakh Shukla Ekadasi and the Purnima, when a fair is also held. But the most important and holy event is during Kartik Shukla between Ekadasi and the full-moon, *when* devotees from all over India converge at this place.

Temple Dedicated to Brahma

Pushkar has been mentioned in the Srishti Chand of the Padma Purana as having been founded by Brahma, the Creator. He once thought of performing a yajna on the earth and looked for a suitable spot. He dropped a lotus from the heaven which fell here and its three petals flew around in different directions. Therefore, there are three Pushkars in this vicinity - the Elder, the Middle and the Younger Pushkar. Pushkar is a place of unquestionable antiquity. It is referred to in the Padma Purana, as the

place where Brahma performed a Yajna. We find references to Pushkar in the Ramayana and the Mahabharata.

Pushkar, incidentally, is perhaps the only place in India where there is a temple dedicated to Brahma, the Creator, one of the Trinity. It is said that, without bathing in the sacred waters of Pushkar, one cannot get the full benefit of visiting the other four principal Hindu places of pilgrimage: Badrinath (in the Himalayas), Puri (in Orissa), Rameswaram (at the southern tip of India) and Dwaraka (in Saurashtra).

Because of that yajna, Pushkar became the holiest place on the face of the earth, and those who went there were absolved of not only their sins but attained salvation.

The Township Turns into a Riot of Colour

In the month of Kartik, a great fair is held at Pushkar. On the occasion of the fair, the township of Pushkar turns into a riot of colour. People from all parts of Rajasthan arrive in their thousands to take a dip in the lake and offer puja in the numerous temples, including the one dedicated to Brahma.

History has recorded that the temples at Pushkar were destroyed by fanatics of an alien faith. But the faith of the people at Pushkar did not diminish in the least, and Gokulchand Parekh, a minister of Daulat Rao Scindia, built a new temple at a cost of Rs. 1.30 lakh on the site where a sacrifice was performed.

A Legendary Explanation

The four-armed life-size icon of Brahma-God of Creation - stands in Mantralaya.

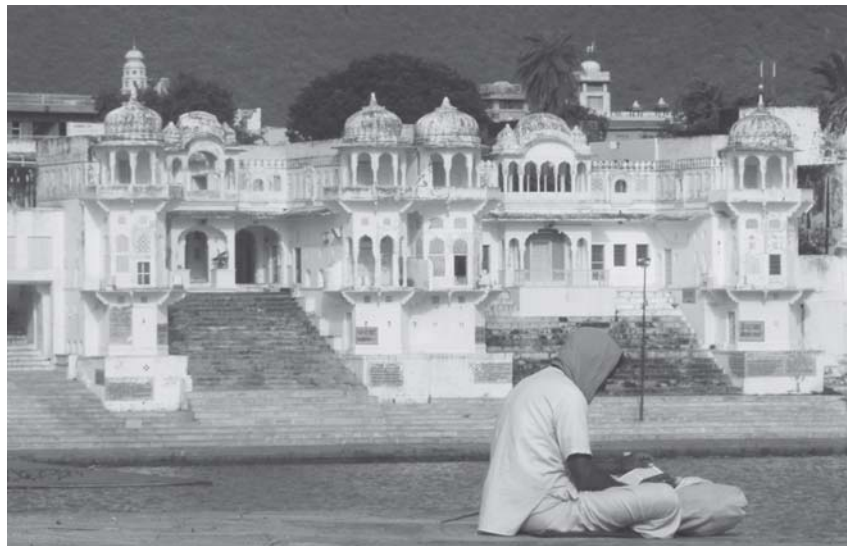
The steps and the floors of the temple are studded with the silver rupees, donated by the worshippers. "It is remarkable" says Kanwar Lal, "that the worship of Brahma who was originally a deity of supreme importance should have almost wholly died out. Why should his worship alone become a phenomenon of such rarity?" A satisfactory argument, however, is that Brahma as the creative force had, of necessity, to lie dormant while the universe passed through the phases of sustenance and protection against the ravages of time, of maintenance till final dissolution. Till the beginning of the next cycle of creation, the gods that really

mattered were, obviously Vishnu the preserver and Shiva the Destroyer. The clash and conflict and, therefore, the issue of human happiness and sorrow, the fate of mankind lay during the intervening period between creation and destruction, with these two deities. The result was that barring an individual here or a group there, who might indulge in his worship for the sake of worship, the rest of mankind could neither be expected to take nor did take any interest in a god, who was, for all practical purposes, defunct. His worship, therefore, came to be limited to this place, Pushkar, which he had chosen to abide in and which thus acquired its legitimate sanctity through the permanence of his

divine presence.

Pushkar's Forgotten Glory Revived

Pushkar had been forgotten for several centuries. It was restored in 1114 Vikram by Nahar Rao Parihar, who had a tank dug there. The Gurjar-Gaur priests were the



people, who dug the tank and their descendents are still known as Pushkarna Brahmans. The tank dried up and got silted in later days and was again cleaned and restored on the suggestion of the President of Indian Republic in 1974. It has been connected through a 32-feet wide - 8 feet deep and a mile-long channel to the feeders, from a hill reservoir nearby, and is now brimming with crystal clear water.

The Pushkar tank is oval in shape and has 52 ghats on the bank around it. Varaha and Brahma are the most important ones. In 1911, the then Queen Mary of England and the present Queen Mother built a Ladies Ghat here. A part of Mahatma Gandhi's last remains were immersed at this

place in 1948, and since then it has been known as the Gandhi Ghat. In the mornings and evenings homage is paid to the deities. Arati is performed. In the evenings earthen lamps are lit and set afloat in the tank and this presents a unique sight. During the Kartika festival, lakhs of people assemble here before the dawn and go round the temples to worship.

Besides the Brahma Temple, which is the only one dedicated wholly to him in the whole world, there are more than 400 shrines and temples in and around Pushkar. This temple was primarily built by Adi Shankaracharya but was pulled down by Aurangzeb in 1705. It was renovated by a pious lady from Jaipur in 1719 and again rebuilt by Gokulchand Parekh, a minister of Daulat Rao Scindia. The other famous shrines are Gaya Kund, where it is said that if a Chaturdashi (shukla paksha) falls on a Tuesday, the sacred Gaya appears here.

Ramavaikunthnath Temple

Among the large imposing temples here is one dedicated to Ramavaikunthnath. It belongs to the Vaishnava sect of Ramanujacharya. The Viman or Gopuram over the inner temple of Ramavaikunthnath was built in accordance with the rules of architecture contained in the scriptures. The image of this temple is at Paramurti. The Viman is built of stone and contains sculptures of 361 deities. In front of the inner temple or nijamandir stands the golden Garuda, the vahan or transport of Vishnu. The outer gopuram built over the principal entrance of the temple is of brick and mortar, which contains elaborate

carvings. This was also built and decorated by South Indian masons brought specially for the purpose.

Mahadev Temple

In praise of the modern temple of Mahadev at Pushkar, Col. Broughton writes - "Of the modern temples, the one dedicated to Mahadev, is by far the most remarkable, for the elegance of its structure and the nature of its ornaments, of all the temples that Pushkar boasts of." It was built by Annaji Scindia of Gwalior. The white marble image has five faces, each one crowned with Jata (matted hair) .

Rangji Temple

Rangji Temple is dedicated to Ramanujite Vaishnava worship. This temple was built in 1844 AD. by Seth Puranmal. Simple in architecture, the walls of the temple are decorated with paintings depicting the various scenes of the life of Lord Krishna. The impact of South Indian architecture is visible in the outer view of the temple. Sikhara is richly carved out with images of gods and goddesses giving it a majestic look blended with religious touches. There are also other temples of Badrinath renovated by Thakur Kherwah in 1800 AD., the temple of Savitri built by the purohit of Maharajah Ajit Singh of Marwar and Behariji's temple constructed by the Maharani of Jaipur in 1835 AD.



Varanasi

Then Relents

Hey! there is something to it after all. It is said that Benares was an established city 1200 years before the Christian era. Paul Brunton, the famous writer says that he went to explore the labyrinth of streets that compose it (not very complimentary!) . Yet, there are other things said about it. It is called Varanasi because Varana and Asi are two rivers, and 'Varanas' is derived from a combination of both, because it is in between. It is said to be the ancient seat of learning and is cosmopolitan in nature. It does not have the "don't-touchisms" practised in other parts of India that is great in this land of so many distinctions. Another thing that I have come to realise is the large-hearted liberalism of Hinduism. Here there is no compulsion.

Benares, the City Eternal

Benares, they say, is the eternal city. Kailas is the abode of Siva and he who gets there is in the very presence of the Lord. The holiest of rivers has its source in Siva's abode. Kailas at its eminence is accessible but to a select few, who have the will and strength to reach up to it, but Benares can be approached by all. The Ganges that has its origin up in the Himalayan abode sweeps down the hill through dense forests in which many saints and sages dwell, and progresses down in its southward course

through sun-burnt plains to Benares, where along its banks is a welter of temple towers, domes and cupolas, all gleaming in the sun. This town (of which we hear) is the focus of all religious thoughts, and this bestows upon it its sanctifying power.

Keyserling's Admiration

A German thinker Count Herman Keyserling says: "It is glorious when the sun rises above the horizon and the faithful on the ghats bend towards the giver of life in their thousands in one single gesture of adoration. The atmosphere of devotion which hangs above the river is incomparable in strength, stronger than any place I have visited."

Indians flock from every part to this holy city. Wealthy or poor they come here to receive blessings. The ailing come to eke out their last days, for death here (they say) will take them straight to the abode of God. However foolish this may appear to a sceptic, the following arguments advanced by a philosopher (and a Westerner at that) may convince us. "Benares," he says, "is holy. A world gone superficial hardly understands such truths any more. Before long no one will undertake a pilgrimage, and sooner or later, only not too soon, religion will stand without its holy places. How poor it will get in the process : It is meaningless to ask whether a place is really holy. If it is regarded as holy for a sufficiently long period then Divinity necessarily takes up residence there. The pilgrim who enters such a place finds it remarkably easy to remain in a reverential mood, and this mood widens him and makes him profound. Of course, it would represent

the highest pinnacle if men could feel the presence of God everywhere, but hardly one out of a million is capable of this."

Ancient Seat of Learning

This wonderful city, which is the ancient seat of learning, is the meeting place of all orders. People from Kashmir to Kanyakumari, from Bengal to Kutch are represented here with all barriers of race, caste, province and language dissolved. It has been the centre of Sanskrit studies, and the Pandits from here are unquestionably acknowledged for their erudition and scholarship. It is also the abode of the one among the twelve Jyotir Lingas found scattered in different parts of India.

Kasi is accessible by all types of vehicles. So Dada will not find it difficult to travel. It is on the Grand Trunk road as such, and buses ply at all times. This is a junction for Northern and north-Western Railways. Just close to the station is the Rajghat bridge that spans the Ganges. Pilgrims usually choose the Manikarnika or Dasa-Asvarnedha Ghat for their bath, as it is situated near the Viswanath temple and Anna Poorna shrine. Buses, taxis and tongas are all available to make movement in Kasi a comfort.

There are many rest-houses, asrams, mutts and private residences that accommodate pilgrims at all times. Now hotels and other Government residences are also there. Besides these, there are a number of charitable institutions here opened and maintained by the rich. These places supply food to the pilgrims free or at nominal rates.

The bathing ghats of Kasi

Kasi has a number of bathing ghats of which five are considered most important (i) Varuna Sangam Ghat (ii) Pancha Ganga Ghat (iii) Mani-Karnika Ghat (iv) Dasaswamedha Ghat (v) Asi Sangam Ghat.

Varuna Sangam Ghat

Varuna - a small rivulet flows in from the west and joins the Ganges at Sangam. Before the Varuna reaches the Sangam one sees two temples, Vasishteswar and Tatiswar devoted to Lord Siva. After a dip in the Ghat one ascends the steps to come to the temple dedicated to Adi Keshava, where there is a dark-hued image of Lord Vishnu who stands there to give darshan to his devotees. In a niche in the wall is an image of Kesavaditya Siva. Nearby are shrines dedicated to Lord Shiva variously called Harihareswar, Vedeswar, Nakshaleswar and Swastadeepeswar. Thus we, see the same Lord called by a number of names. He answers to any name that the devotee chooses.

Pancha Ganga Ghat

It is said that Yamuna, Saraswathi, Kirna and Dhoota Papa meet the Ganges, hence the name Pancha Ganga Ghat. There are a number of shrines here, of which one that is well known is that of Bindu Madhav. It is said that Lord Vishnu revealed Himself to a devotee called Agni Bindu here at this spot, and at his request promised to abide here. Later, this temple was razed to the ground by the iconoclast, Aurangazeb. Pilgrims throng this Ghat in the month of Kartika.

Mani Karnika Ghat

It is also called Vir Tirth. Above this ghat is a lake, Mani Karnika, accessible by descending 21 steps. Just near it is yet another lake called Bhairav Kund. The water of this lake is renewed every eighth day, and through a hidden spring this gets filled. Close by is the Tarakeswar temple (a name-sake of the Tarakeswar Siva temple at Calcutta). Pilgrims bathe here and enter the Vireswar Siva temple for worship.

Dasaaswamedha Ghat

It is said that the Creator Himself did penance and performed sacrifices here. This is considered to be one of the main Ghats of Kasi, and as such pilgrims rush to this place in large numbers. Just close to this Ghat are the temples of Dasaswamedheswar Siva and Sitala Devi. In one shrine there are a number of images, and some of them are Ganga, Saraswathi, Yamuna, Brahma, Vishnu, Siva as well as Narasimha. To the north of this Ghat is a large Siva temple where there is an image of Abhaya Vinayaka. People gather here on Jyeshtha Shukla and Ganga Dassera for worship.

Asi Sangam Ghat

This is the place where the river Asi joins the river Ganga. There is a Jain temple above the Ghat. Kartika Krishna is considered as an auspicious time for worship here.

Smashanes Ghat

Here was a crematorium in the past. There is a temple here dedicated to Siva who is called "Smashaneswara." This place is also called Harishchandra Ghat after Raja Harish Chandra who had for a time to work on the cremation ground during the severe testing period, which he had to go through to prove his devotion to Truth and his virtue of veracity.

Tulasi Ghat

Tulasi Ghat is the place where Goswami Tulasidas had spent his last days and ultimately shuffled off his mortal coil in the year 1680. Here is an image of Anjaneya installed by him.

The famous Viswanath temple, which was the scene of repeated desecration by fanatical invaders, has already been dealt with in the article on the Jyotir Lingas. The domes made of thick sheets of gold that glisten in the sunlight are said to have been endowed by Maharana Ranjit Singh, the famous King of Punjab. In the vestibule of the temple, on one side is the image of Sowbhagya Gowri and Vinayaka on the other. Smaller shrines are there dedicated to the Lord who has taken multitudes of forms to delight his devotees. In and around this temple there are about 150 Lingas. There are also a number of images of Vinayaka in his different aspects as Moda Vinayaka, Pramoda, Sumukh and Gananath Vinayaka.

Jnana Vapi

Jnana Vapi or the Well of Knowledge is

where the image of Viswanath was concealed when the invaders attacked it. Later, it was taken out of the well and installed. It is here that a huge Nandi faces the old temple. In the place where the old shrine once stood there today stands a mosque. Emerging from the Viswanath temple past the Dundiraj Ganesh, there is an image of Saneswar. His face is made of silver and the image is only a bust. In one corner is Akshayavat, which is a peepal tree. The Anna Poorna temple is another place, where pilgrims congregate for worship. Here the Eternal Mother is called Anna Poorna. Her image is cast in brass, and she is seated on a silver throne. Within the shrine itself there are a number of other images. Important among the images is the Yantreswar Linga installed by Sri Bhaskar Rai, incorporating the Sri Yantra which is inscribed on it. "See how much information I have gathered? The rest I will see on going to Kasi".

continuation of his conversation with his brothers and sisters. " Kasi or Varanasi is more than what I have heard about, even more than what I have read. As I saw it in



Sceptic Turns Believer

So the sceptic-turned-believer now decided to follow his old grandfather to Kasi as a devotee. From there he wrote letters in

the early morning light I remembered the poem we had learnt as children: This city now doth like a garment wear The beauty of the morning silent bare. Never did sun more beautifully steep, In his first splendour,

valley, rock or hill ; Ne'er saw I, never felt,
a claim so deep!

The river glideth at its own sweet will:
Dear God ! The very houses seem asleep;
and all that mighty heart is lying still. If I
am to write to you of more places that I
have seen I may fill a volume, but in passing
on I will give you a brief account of a few
other places of interest. One such place
that is of historic as well
as religious importance is:

Kasi Karwat

Near the place where Aurangazeb has built a Mosque is a blind well. In this well is a Linga that was hidden by the priests when the temple was desecrated. The steps leading to the well remain barred at all times. It is opened only on special occasions. Flowers and other things are offered from the top.

The Kalabhairav Temple

The image made of silver is mounted on a throne. There are two other images, one a large form of Maha Vir and the other of Yogeswari Devi.

Then of course there is the *Pisacher Mochan Kund*. This is a place where offerings are made in the name of ancestors. Here on the Ghat there are a number of images. Another strange thing that strikes a person is the repetition of names. Take for instance the *Kurukshetra Tirth*. There is a Kurukshetra in Punjab as

well. If the Kurukshetra of Punjab is inaccessible to people in other States, it is no problem. They create Kasis and Kurukshetras in their own place. Even in the South we hear there is a Kasi called Dakshina Kasi. So here we see a lake called Kurukshetra, which is considered sacred. Thus there are several places here which are of importance to pilgrims. "Dada is



forever bare-footed. He walks slowly and solemnly along, lest he should miss the shrines en route. Many *little* anecdotes he has related to me as we went along. Many more, perhaps, are to come as the days wear on. I am afraid that I who came to scoff have perforce to pause and pray. Thus has Kasi and its inexplicable charm so completely enticed me".



Gaya

A compiled feature

Prayers to the Dead

Ancestor worshippers, spiritualists, animists, polytheists are among the epithets of criticism levelled against Hindus with their practices. In defence of this much misunderstood ancestor-worship the above quotation from the famous English poet Robert Southey will not be out of place. It is natural for man to look back in the still hours of the night when slumber's chains have bound him on the light of days that have gone past. To recall his childhood days and the faces of those that have fallen around is natural to man. This remembrance or recollection acquires a sanctity particularly in the supernaturally charged atmosphere of a temple or holy ground. Thus it is that Hindus remember their dead ancestors on fixed occasions and in specific places to perform certain prescribed rites accompanied by prayers, feeding of the poor, and worship. Remembering on that day "their virtues" and trying to be worthy of them, we forget or try to avoid their lapses and weakness in our lives, - not condemn them, as the poet says. This is what the "Kriyas" or rites and ceremonies signify to the son who goes to Gaya or Prayag to perform them for his ancestors.

A sanskrit sloka extolls Gaya as follows: There is no place in Gaya that is not a Tirthasthana. Gaya is the meeting place of all Tirthas and therefore it is the best among Tirthas.

The Pitru Tirtha

Gaya is called a "Pitru Tirtha". It is said that all parents nurse the pious wish of having a son who will one day go to Gaya and perform the rites for them after their passing away.

Now, where is this Gaya? Gaya is one of the main stations on the Northern Railway. It is possible to travel to Gaya from Calcutta as also from Patna. Direct trains run from these places.

Gaya is a place of pilgrimage for Hindus as well as Buddhists. There are rest houses for travellers, run by some charitable individuals and trusts as also ashrams and Mutts. Conveyances of all sorts are available in Gaya from the modern taxis to the ancient horse carts. This place, like Kasi, Ayodhya and Brindavan, has a number of sacred spots of interest to the pilgrims of which River Phalgu is worth visiting. This river shrinks into a streamlet and dries up in summer, but on digging up the soil one is able to secure pure water. To the east of Gaya is Nagkoot hill and to the south of this river Phalgu is called Mahaana. About 5 Km. to the south of Gaya the Neelaayan River joins the Mahaana, and thereafter it is known as river Saraswathi. This flows past the Temple dedicated to Goddess Saraswathi.

The Place of Rites and Ceremonies

Pilgrims who come here to perform "Kriyas" start by taking a dip in the Phalgu River and later perform the religious rites on its banks. After this, the pilgrim would enter the most famous temple in Gaya called the Vishnupad. Here, on an octagonal altar, are

the foot-prints of the Lord. Outside the temple are two large halls, where lectures are delivered as also religious ceremonies conducted. Lord Vishnu is said to be in His unmanifest form in the River Phalgu, but becomes manifest at Vishnupad for the benefit of his devotees.

The devotees are now asked by the guides to visit *Akshaya Vata*, which is close to a lake called "Brahma-sarovar." Walled off from the rest of the place and surrounded by a cemented platform is this large tree. Within this compound is the Vateswar Temple dedicated to Lord Siva. From here the pilgrims proceed to Uttaramanasa, which has within its surroundings a lake of the same name with a temple dedicated to the sun called Uttara-ark. Near Uttara-ark is a temple called Mowneswar on the north-east corner. After performing the prescribed rituals for the ancestors the pilgrim takes here a vow of silence till he

reaches *Suryakund*.

Suryakund

Suryakund is a few yards away from Vishnupad. The Northern end of it is called



Udichi, central Kankal and the Southern and Dakshin Manas Tirth. A short distance from this temple is a shrine devoted to Suryanarayan also called Dakshinaark. Along the Saraswathi River and away from it is a well called Matanga Vapi. This is accessible through a narrow foot-path. There are four shrines in the vicinity, of which Matangeswar Temple is widely visited by pilgrims. Dharmaranya is in the vicinity of Matanga Vapi. Here is a well into which the remains of the ancestral offerings are thrown. It is said that two Pandava brothers (Yudhishtira and Bhima) had performed penance here prior to performing the rites for their father.

Pindas and Pinda-Kriyas

" Pindas " are offerings made in memory of one's ancestors at a fixed time (i.e. their birth or more commonly death anniversaries) at appointed places. Religion (including the world of the ancestors), plays an important role in the life of the oriental. "Ancestor worship" is not peculiar to Hindus alone. We hear that the Chinese and Japanese also perform special ceremonies or rites in memory of their ancestors. Since this has been a tradition, certain rules have been laid down by the scriptures, and people adhere to them. In course of time superstitions have gathered around this pristine custom and given it a weird and fantastic significance.



According to the Hindus, the ancestors for whom the son is to perform the *pinda kriya*, are defined. They are generally three paternal ancestors and their wives and three maternal ancestors and their wives making twelve immediate ancestors in all.

The Adhikari for the Observances

Before starting on a pilgrimage to Gaya (or any such place) one is advised to go around the crematorium in his town or village. Then after renouncing all vanities, and wearing simple clothes he has to leave his town, prayerfully. Charity, fasting and prayer are among the deeds the son is expected to perform. On coming to the place where he is to perform these rites, as Gaya, for instance, he finishes the rites in seven days. It is interspersed by visits to the temple, feeding of the poor, prayer and fasting, and taking bath in the Ganges.

Besides the anniversaries mentioned, there are special days on which such rites are performed, such as the New Moon day. It is the eldest son of the dead who has to perform these rites. A Sannyasin is exempt from offering Pindas. He should only raise his staff and place it at the feet of the Lord, symbolically acknowledging Him as his all, Father, Mother, Friend and relation. To one who has renounced, the Lord is everything.



Prayag

Along the great high-way of life there are resting places, away from heat and passion, dust and disappointment, - sequestered solitudes under the cool and refreshing shade of modest wisdom, humble, unimposing Rest Houses of peace, or by-ways of blessedness where the weary foot-sore pilgrim finds strength and healing. Along the great highway of life, hurrying and eager to reach some goal, a great multitude passes on. Over-flowing railway carriages, packed vehicles and people of all sorts are pushing on to Prayag.

"Prayag"? Where is it? What is its importance? Why do you all go there? All this crowd and to that one place?" asked the foreign gentleman. "Why" said the Indian, "We Hindus believe in the sanctity of certain places. As to the Christian is Jerusalem or any place connected with Christ, so to the Hindu countless such places are there sacred by association with some saint, or some extraordinary natural phenomenon, which reminds him of the wonders of the Lord's Creation. One such place is Prayag. And Prayag is the meeting place of two great rivers, the Ganga and the Yamuna."

A meeting of two rivers, a hidden spring, a river flowing north, a land's end, all such are reminders to a devotee of his goal and his pilgrimage on Earth. Just when the dark night meets the rising Sun comes the dawn Or when day meets night comes the dusk.

It is an hour of prayer to a religious Hindu. It is called a Sandhi and hence the Sandhya is offered. So here we have the meeting of two great rivers. This is the confluence or the Sangam, and as such a sacred spot, a place of worship. The natural phenomenon is the pointer to a higher Truth, of the Soul's aspiration to reach out to his Creator and finally to become one with Him. This becoming one is, perhaps, signified by the confluence, and as such a place of worship by its sheer suggestiveness.

Prayag, as one will see, is divided into three parts by water to resemble a sacrificial altar (Vedi). Prayag is one of the places where Kumbha Mela takes place once in twelve years, when Jupiter transits Taurus. Other festivals held here are Ratha Saptami, full moon and newmoon days. Sadhus and Sannyasis as you see are many. It is said that penance or any act of sacrifice done here *with the awareness of its inner significance* acquire special importance.

"Why is it called Triveni?" asked the foreigner.

"Here in India, a name has a deep significance. As I told you earlier, this is the place where three rivers meet. The two visible ones are Yamuna and Ganga, and the invisible one is Saraswathi. This third river flows underground and emerges at a place called Pushkar."

"Is it merely the natural setting of the confluence of the rivers that people worship here?

Are there no temples?"

Indian Guide: There is an ancient tree called Akshaya Vata in the fort at Allahabad. Even place.

as the Bodhi tree is worshipped by the Buddhists and Hindus, so also is this tree considered sacred, and worshipped. May be some saint sat under it and since then this is a hallowed spot. Nearby there is also a Linga which people worship. If you watch closely you will see the devotees circumambulating it and in the end they embrace the Linga.

Foreign Visitor: What else do they do here, other than worship (Pooja) and penance?

Indian Guide: As an act of penance or expiation of some sin of omission or commission people shave off their hair. Hair as you know is the object of human vanity. So here they shave it off as an act of sacrifice and humility. Besides this, there is an offering done to the dead ancestors which you may call ancestor worship.

Foreign Visitor: Well! that brings us to a point. Why do you do this meaningless ceremony? People who are dead are no more. Do you think that when you offer anything, they are going to receive them? To me it sounds ridiculous.

Indian Guide: Friend! pause, here you pass your judgement. It is natural for the near and dear ones to remember their relatives who are no more. When remembering them the Hindu does some act of charity, worship and prayer to sanctify their memory on that day. This is called *pinda* or an offering. Even as you of the West endow certain things as charity in memory of those who are no more, we Hindus observe certain rules even in that endowment. As offerings they are made to certain specified Gods, who are believed to convey them to our ancestors, as well. There are many such places where *Pinda Kriyas* are performed - Prayag is one such

Foreign Visitor: You said some time ago that a place becomes a Tirtha (a holy place in your language) because of its association with some saint. Could you name one?

Indian Guide: In the 14th century the famous saint and poet Ramananda was born here. He preached the tenets of devotion to all people regardless of caste, creed, and sex. Among his twelve disciples were a barber, a Mohammedan and several ladies. The famous poet, Saint Kabir was Ramananda's disciple. About 500 years ago Maha Prabhu Sri Chaitanya Deva visited Prayag, twice. Here he performed a historic act of imparting devotion to Sri Rupa Goswami, one of his principal disciples, the deeper teachings of Gaudiya Vaishnavism. The Maha Prabhu stayed at the Beni Madhab temple, near the Dasaswamedh Ghat and sat under a Banyan tree with Sri Rupa for religious discourses. The place is still recognised as Sri Rupa-Sikshasthal, which is visited by the Vaishnavas as a holy spot.

Coming to modern times, we have records of pilgrimage by many celebrated saints like Baba Gambhirnath and Trilinga Swami, who performed penance here. Sri Ramakrishna had a holy dip in the Sangam on his way back from Brindavan. Swami Vivekananda while on a countrywide tour before his departure for America, visited Prayag. There is a beautiful village just on the eastern bank of the Ganga, called Jhusi. Here is a village which is still a favourite haunt of sadhus for 'Tapasya'. Swami Vivekananda stayed at a cave in Jhusi for undisturbed meditation for a couple of days.

Foreign Visitor: Ramananda is of recent ancient relics of the Akshay-Vat. A historic

origin. Do you know of any sage who lived here earlier? Where do you get this information?

Indian Guide: Yes, there are references in the Puranas to sages or rishis who have stayed here and lead a life of seclusion and prayer. The names mentioned in the Ramayana are Bharadwaja and Valmiki.

Foreign Visitor: I thought that these epics were mere imaginary tales written by their authors. How then do you believe them?

Indian Guide: Even in the case of other religions, most of what the followers have, is a record left by ancients. That one by name Moses lived, that the Jews were captives in Egypt and that Moses received the commandments from God - are all on record, it is said. A rationalist or a sceptic may well question all this, as he does the very existence of God. Even though the epics read like mere legends, the cities mentioned there are geographically located and often historically identified. So the devoted believe in the sanctity of these places.

Foreign Visitor: We have now approached Allahabad. Are there other routes by which this place is accessible to the pilgrims?

Indian Guide: Allahabad is the junction where Northern and Central Railways meet. Other approaches are through Naini, Izet Bridge, Allahabad City and Jhusi, but most of the people alight at Allahabad junction. Hence the mingling throng here. Within the city itself, buses ply up to Triveni. Incidentally, the modern city of Allahabad flourished during the reign of Akbar the Great, who built a magnificent fort on the banks of the Jarnuna, this impregnable fort stands almost intact to this day. Inside the fort there are some temples and the

pillar, too, stands there.

Akbar named this city originally as Allahabad, meaning the City of God. The present name is a changed form of the same.

Foreign Visitor: Where do these pilgrims stay? Are there Government Rest Houses? If not, will this not become a place too unhygienic for habitation?

Indian Guide: There are a number of ashrams and rest Houses run by private trusts and individuals. Here pilgrims can avail themselves of cheap boarding and lodging. Besides these, there are hotels and private houses. As for services rendered to pilgrims, the traditional *Pandas* are there. And the Bharat Sevasram Sangh plays a significant role in this respect. The Sangha has a fairly large Ashram here with provision for free accommodation for about 300 pilgrims at a time. About 10,000 families of pilgrims stay at the Ashram in a year at normal times. The Sangha-Sannyasis manage ritualistic services of the pilgrims through their own priests at a moderate cost. The Sangha also looks to other conveniences of the pilgrims.

During the annual Magh Melas and Kumbha and Ardha Kumbha Melas, the Sangha establishes large camps in the Mela area. Here some pilgrims are accommodated, and the Sangha also provides medical relief through Homeo and Allopathic free dispensaries. On peak days of bathing the Sangha organises elaborate volunteer-services for helping the pilgrims.

Besides, the Sangha holds religious discourses every day at the camp and organises vast religious seminars and conventions quite frequently during the

Guide: Now, proceed. Here lies the Bindu

tenure of the Mela for about five weeks.

Foreign Visitor: Could you please tell me if there are other temples of interest to pilgrim here? I would like to see them before I return home.

Indian Guide: Seeing is believing. I think we will take a look at these places ourselves.

Hanuman Temple

Here is the temple dedicated to one of the greatest, if not 'the greatest', of devotees of Lord Sri Rama. The image as you see is a reclining one. When the water in the river rises the image remains immersed. This great devotee was a master of all the six systems of Indian philosophy, and it is said that he relinquished all claim to learning for the love of the mere recitation of the Lord's name. Now let us cross the river. Ah! there is a boat about to move. Let us get into it.

"Is that not a temple lower down there, to the west?"

"Yes, that is the temple, called Manakameswar. It is dedicated to Lord Siva. The boat has stopped. Now let us alight. Besides this, there are other Siva temples near here. One is called Somnath, a namesake of the famous Somnath temple of Saurashtra."

Visitor: What are those groups of people doing over there?

Guide: They are having a dip there. That place is the confluence or the Sangam, and as such it is considered a sacred spot. Others on the shore are performing what you call ancestor worship.

Visitor: Yes; I have understood its significance now. Let us move on.

Madhav temple. There are two approaches to this temple, as you may see. One is from the Sangam and the other is through Someswarnath people. Here abides the Lord whom people chose to call Bindu Madhav. Others are smaller shrines as you can see. Prayag is also a Sakthi Pitha, among the 52 such holy places scattered throughout India. The Deity is 'adored as Lalitha at Prayag. Siva as Bhaba stays here as her guard. A temple in the city area called Alopirnaya temple with no image inside is supposed to be the Sakti Pith.

Visitor: Yes, I find that I have a lot to think about. It seems that every inch of this land is hallowed with sacred memories and idea.

Guide: This is why this place is called the King among the Tirthas, - "Prayag Raj."

Foreign Visitor: On this land what a labyrinth of streets that link temple to temple which in themselves are thickly strewn with shrine and altar! No place of pilgrimage has so many points of worship. And in almost everyone of them Divinity is honoured in some special form or specific aspect.

Indian Guide: Yes, sir! at last, even the sceptic's heart softens, and you have glimpsed the soul of India, which despite all distinctions, is one! One, always as you will see from the crowds, - Indians from different quarters of India gather here as pilgrims. There is but one aim, inspiring all, - one moving spirit, the Lord who is the Father of all, - named and identified in diverse ways, in diverse forms.



Chitrakut

WE were travelling from Lucknow down for the holidays. After a stop at Prayag we boarded the train and were on our way by the Central Railway to Jhansi. In the compartment my little brother roamed around making friends. All at once he bounced back, and said "Leela Didi! they are talking about a place I have learnt about. It is called Chitrakut. Let's get down. I want to see that place." Thus he egged us on with all the impulsive haste of a child. Since we were bound for Jhansi I persuaded him to wait so that we could gather information about the place and the shrines of importance there. In the meantime since he knew about it I asked, "Ravi, how do you know about Chitrakut?"

"Why, we are learning portions of the *Ramayana* in class. In that Chitrakut is mentioned. I thought that it was all a fairy tale, like the story of Goldilocks, Pinocchio and others that I've read about; but just now some of my friends are getting down at Karvi and from there proceeding to the very spot, Chitrakut, which is said to be 24 miles."

Didi : But I want to know how much you have learnt about Chitrakut.

A School Boy's Urge

Ravi : O.K. Chitrakut is a beautiful place, all wooded with thick forests, where there were many wild beasts like lions, tigers and

bears as also monkeys and deer. It was here that Lord Sri Rama came and stayed when he was in exile for 14 year as desired by the scheming Mother Kaikeyi.

Didi : She was not scheming. Certain instances in our life are planned by God and it just happens. Some people become the cause of bringing pain to others. Don't you cause pain to Ma by your silly pranks? Well, is Chitrakut so holy merely because of this?

Ravi : As for my pranks, you don't have to rub it in. Ma knows I am just a kid, and I can't be a sissy like you. Now for Chitrakut, it is said that many sages lived here. I have forgotten. Oh... yes Atri Rishi stayed here near about. There were others also but he is the most important one. I have forgotten the rest.

Didi : Oh! come, let us get down. It is Jhansi.

Epic Assosiations

So here we got down and went to our friends place where we were to spend a few days, but Ravi was so full of Chitrakut that he could not contain himself. He wanted to leave the very next day. In the meantime he went about the way only a child could do : questioning, confirming and contradicting- giving no peace to anyone. Chitrakut had filled his mind. He lived through the days of the *Ramayana* of yore, saw the deep denseness of the forest, the clear water-springs, trees laden with fruits and blooming with forest flowers, a glade with a hut in which an aged bearded man sat amidst others. Yes, he was Atri. Then he remembered Anasuya, the sage's saintly wife.

Mother Sita, Sri Rama and Lakshmana, the two with their half-bare bodies; one tall, dark and handsome, and other fair, armed with bows. The boyish eyes gleamed with a far-away look of intense pride. Envidable is a child's mind. Possessed with one thought he re-lived what the grown-ups would have longed to think of at least for a moment. At times he would jump up from his reverie. Yes; it was time to go. The sands of time ran too slow for this little one's mind that was like quick-sand.

So off we were to Karvi where we alighted and went by bus to Sitapur, and then jogged up and down an uneven road to Chitrakut.

'At last we have come', said Ravi as he stood ready on his feet like an athlete ready to take off. Here we were told that the first place we should visit was Raghav Prayag where if we wished we could take a dip. Ravi was all game. To him it was fun and frolic with a sense of awe that this was a fairy tale come true. He ripped the clothes off his body and was already ankle deep in water before we had decided.

Kamadgiri and the Way-side Shrines

Then we went to *Kamodgiri* a hillock that was densely wooded. It seems that people never venture up here, - like Arunachala, which is a small hillock but is beset with dangers. People did not ascend it for fear. To Ravi it was a challenge not to be turned down. Somehow, we persuaded him and asked him to go around the hill and then find a way up. Along the way there were a number of tiny shrines like Sakshi Gopal, Lakshmi Narayanan and a temple dedicated to Sri Lakshmana.

At the mention of these names, the child's mind bubbled up with anecdotes tucked away in his expansive, little mind. He listened with rapt attention about Tulasi Das who had composed *Ramayana* in Hindi so that all could read it. Many a place is marked with footprints of these great ones. He looked absorbed (our Ravi), and the Lord alone knows what went on in his mind. Suddenly, he came to a flight of steps, at which he paused and asked what they were and where they lead to. Then off he was like an arrow. We panted up, and there he was, pink with excitement, "what fun" he said, "One hundred and fifty steps! Did you count them?" Far from counting we wanted to rest our weary limbs!

Reliving the Old Scenes

Now came a tirade of questions: What? Where? How and why? followed in quick succession. Then he was told that this was the place where Sri Lakshmana used to guard as his brother and Mother Sita rested. "Oh" he said, did he never sleep the whole night? He must have kept on, watching to see that no thieves came to rob his brother.

But then he was told that they were living as Sannyasins in the forest, so there was nothing to rob. So he concluded it was because Lakshmana loved his brother and was frightened that he would be killed by tigers.

For a moment he straightened his gait and held his hand as though he was holding an imaginary bow and started striding around enacting the age old drama.

Suddenly, he saw us descending the 150 steps and he shot down, nay over-shot

us. Now, we were on our way to *Hanumandhara*. To the north of Chitrakut is Koti Thirtha. After reaching it there was a slight ascent.

There were a number of streams and rivers called Pampasar, Bankey Sidh, Saraswathi River and Yarna Tirth. Two other spots here were Siddhashram and Gridrashram or the place where Jatayu sat and did penance.

Jatayu, the Brave Bird

"Jatayu" brought on a flood of recollections, and Ravi remembered the incident of the brave bird who fought Ravana as he carried Sita away. Lost in deep thought he walked beside a waterfall - a tiny cataract called *Hanumandhara*, which falls and collects to form a pool. "Hanuman"! The word was enough, and again the flight to Lanka, his coming back with the hill, all his feats of bravery stood reflected in his eyes, and it fell in incoherent dots and dashes like morse code.

Five Days in Chitrakut

Of the five days given for our stay at Chitrakut, two memorable days had already been exhausted. We had two long tiring days, but not Ravi. He was back in the Epic age re-living what he had heard his teacher say, coloured with his own imagination added to what he had seen. Now, on the third day we started out early. We were to start with *Payasivni* River. On the left bank is a wooded region called Pramodvan. It is enclosed by high walls interspersed by houses here and there. Here are two temples. Along the banks of Payasvini are a number of foot-prints

embossed on marble. It is said that in a lake nearby now called Janaki-Kund, Mother Janaki came for her bath.

There is a marble slab (Sphatika Sila), on which there is a foot-print said to be that of Lord Sri Rama. This is the place where a crow is said to have pecked at Mother Sita as she sat with the Lord's head resting on her lap. These two places did not seem to rouse Ravi's interest. Now came a climb and he was once again a live wire.

About five miles from Sphatika Shila there was a hill on which there was the Ashram of Sage Atri. Here one saw the statues of Anasuya, Dattatreya, Durvasa and the Moon. Ravi's comments were that Anusuya was the saintly lady who was not at all jealous. Dattatreya is Lord Siva. "Vishnu and Brahma came down together and became the saint's son called Dattatreya." Durvasa was an angry saint. Thus he prattled on with his rich associations. Nearby on another hill were many statues of Anjaneya - Ravi's hero and God.

It was wooded and inaccessible. He reconciled himself with the thought that he would become a mountaineer when he grew up and investigate all that he was forbidden to do now.

Gupt Godavari

"Oh I thought Godavari was in the South" said Ravi. "No, you see, South or North, India is one country. Seeing what we might become later (divided and angry) our ancients chose similar names to rivers and places though they were in different directions" said our guide. Here Ravi was excited, as we had to enter a cave that was dark, so we entered the cave with a

torch. About 15 or 16 yards from the mouth of the cave was a spring from which water came out continuously and flowed out and ran down as two streams which collected in a lake. This is called Gupt Godavari. Gupt means secret, hidden. This remark fired Ravi's imagination and elicited his response: "May be through some under-ground tunnel this river flows all the way South and emerges as the Godavari river when she is " Gupt" no more. May be, echoed the guide.

The Waters of the Coronation

Now on the last two days we saw two places, which with vivid mental imagery of this little boy brought before our eyes the entire coronation of Lord Sri Rama. Here was a place called Bharat Koop (well). It was said that the happiest person to welcome Sri Ramachandra after his exile was his brother Bharatha. His joy knew no bounds and he had the waters of all the Tirthas brought to anoint Him on His Coronation. The left over water was poured into this well, as directed by Sage Atri. Now Ravi recollected a picture that adorned his room. The details of it flashed through his mind and he lived it over again and made us live it, as only a child could do. The Lord with Mother Sita on the throne flanked by His brothers and with Anjaneya at the Lord's feet, the Rishis all around and rain of flowers, all flashed and pictured themselves before him and he was lost in deep reverie as he walked along. There appeared, tiny shrine with the images of Sri Rama, Sita ad Lakshmana, It looked as though Ravi's thoughts had frozen into form and there they stood ready for his worship. His starry eyes gazed at them as though

he saw what we could not see. His lips moved and he said, I knew I would see you all. You know I had to fight to come and see you."

Unwillingly he retraced his steps to where I stood. not knowing what to do. His communion was over. He came out and we went to the last place "Rama Sayya ". There on a tone was the imprint of two bodies with the intervening impress of a bow. It is said that his was the place where the Lord and the Mother had sat. Ravi's mind was left behind at Bharat Koop. He walked among Gods, though physically he was with us. At last, he woke up and realised that we were to leave the next day.

A space of four days - packed with experiences and memories - with a glimpse into the profound depths of a child's mind. Suddenly, we realised that there was a milling crowd gathered at the station. People of all types, men, women and children - a babel of voices - mingled to form a strange noise. People dressed in all kinds of apparel spilt *out* of the over-packed compartments on to the platform. They were on the same quest as Ravi was four days ago. These people who thronged and mingled at last became one on the same piece of land, the sacred spot called Chitrakut.



Ayodhya or Saket

PEACE on Earth, goodwill among men, prosperity and plenty, were not Utopian dreams or a remote possibility. It was here in Ayodhya, long ago, that a righteous and noble monarch ruled this land. He was an ideal king, a model among sons, a brother whose foot prints his younger ones yearned to follow. His name was Rama. Even today where auspiciousness, love, purity and prosperity reign, man hearkens back to the hoary past, calls them by a name for which Rama alone is responsible. He left the indelible imprint of "Rama Rajya" in this country, and his subjects handed down to posterity the memory of what we today conceive of as a Heaven on Earth.

Geographically they call it Ayodhya, the ancient capital of the Kings of the Ikshvaku race. Many kings of the august clan adorned the throne of Ayodhya. To the Ikshvaku clan Dasaratha belonged and he was the Ruler of the land, and Rama was his son. It would be well to quote here a few lines from a pen-picture of the great Emperor Asoka provided by Jawaharlal Nehru in his "Discovery of India." "He was a finished model of calm and sweet majesty, of infinite tenderness for all, compassion for all that suffers, and the nation and race which produced such a magnificent type must have deep reserves of wisdom and inner strength."

"This astonishing Ruler, beloved still in India, devoted himself to righteousness and good will and to public work for the betterment

of his subjects. He was no passive spectator of events. He laboured hard for public welfare and declared that he was always ready for reforms. Official reporters kept him informed of his subjects' welfare. At all times and at all places he was always ready to work for the common wealth. Such was the legacy that he left behind and his name is chronicled in letters of gold in the heart of man and as a poem in the pages of history. Such was his greatness. It is even today cited, not as a mere remote possibility but as a living reality.

Ayodhya is about four miles from Faizabad, and it was said to be the ancient capital of Uttar Kosal. A historical account states that the present Ayodhya was built by Vikramaditya. King Vikramaditya had once gone out of the bounds of his Kingdom and roamed about in a densely forested area, near River Sarayu.

When he felt that he was on hallowed ground that had been obliterated by some calamity, he re-built it with many temples, rest houses, tanks and other conveniences for pilgrims. Later on, this city also suffered the same fate as Kasi and Somnath, that came under the ruthless blows of plundering invaders.

Ayodhya is mentioned as the first among the seven sacred cities of India. Here Vaishnava temples mingle with Saivite shrines, with a sparse sprinkling of mosques here and there, that mark the invaders entry and establishment. Ayodhya as the birth place of Lord Sri Ramachandra is sacred to Hindus as a place of pilgrimage. The Jains also claim that the first of the twenty four Tirthankaras was of the Ikshvaku race. Twenty three of the others

also trace their lineage from the same "Solar Clan".

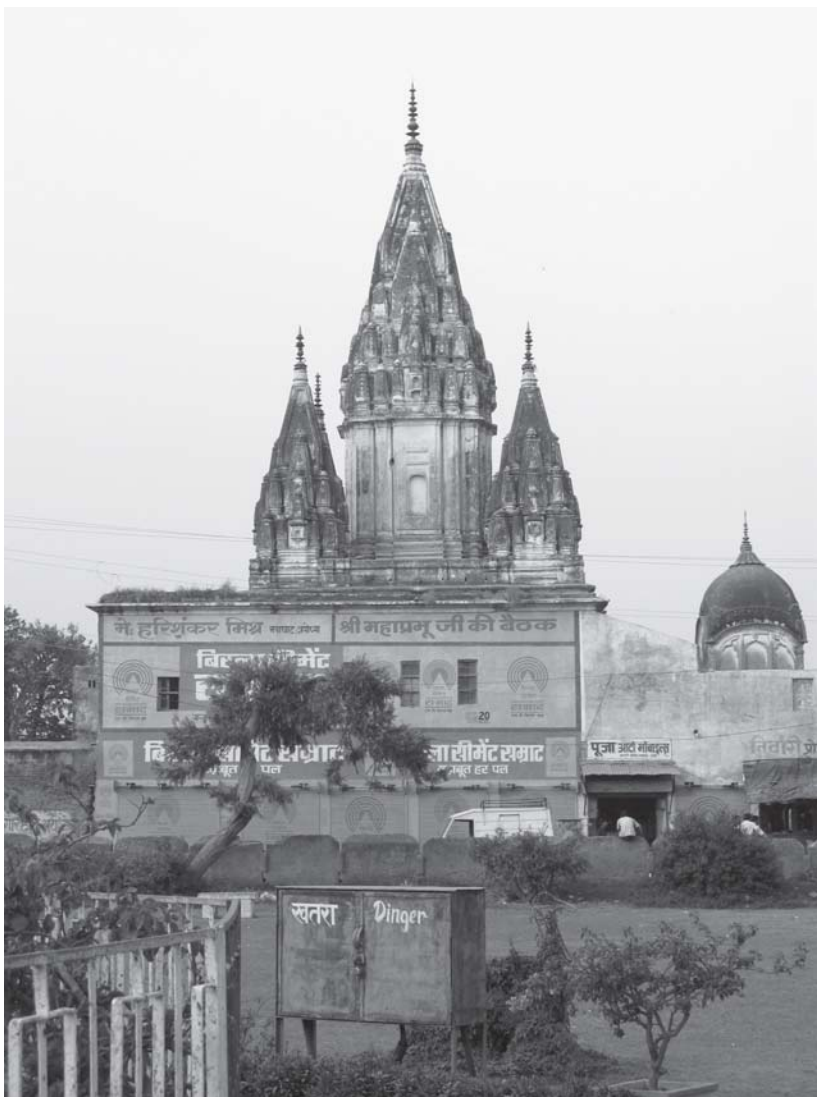
By the time of Buddha, Ayodhya was a comparatively insignificant town, but "Saket" (identified as Ayodhya) is recorded as a flourishing city. Fahien and Hiuen Tsang have both visited Ayodhya, and left an account of the Buddhist Monasteries existing there at that time. Today Ayodhya, like Rishikesh, Hardwar and other places, is a land of ashrams and maths. It stands on the southern bank of river Sarayu. A number of ghats are visible on the banks of this river, as it flowed. Now, Sarayu seems to have changed her course.

As one walks along the course of the river from west to east, one passes Runmochen, Sahasra Dhara, Lakshmar, Swargadwar, Ganga Mahal, Sivala, Jatayu, Ahalya Dhour Hara, Roop Kala, Naya, Janaki and Ram ghats. *Lakshman Ghat* is said

to be the place, from which Sri Lakshmana left the earth for his heavenly abode.

Swargadwar is the place where there is a temple dedicated to Nageswarnath and said to have been established by Kusa. It is by seeing the ruins of this temple that

Vikramaditya resurrected it. Near Nageswarnath temple there is a small alley, where a temple stands dedicated to Lord Sri Rama. This was desecrated by Babar, but the image was saved and later re-



installed at Swargadwar.

On the spot where the above mentioned temple stood, a Mosque was constructed by Babar. In 1885 after a long dispute, the Vairagi Vaishnavites installed some images of the Lord in front of the Mosque, and

later this was settled by constructing a wall. *Kanak Bhavan* is the main temple of Ayodhya. Here on a gold-plated throne are the images of Lord Rama and Sita. This is said to have been the Palace where the Lord and Mother Sita lived. In front of the main images of Lord Sri Rama and Sita there are small images.

These they say are the real ones. Once, long ago, it was said that there was an extensive fort called Ramkot. All that is left of it are remnants of walls scattered here and there, and markedly in four places i.e. Hanuman Garhi, Sugrevatela, Angad-bila, Matt Gajendra. *Hanuman Garhi* is situated at a distance of one mile. There is a small fort here. On climbing sixty steps one comes across a small shrine dedicated to Anjaneya. Here the image is in a sitting position. Close by is another image of this great devotee of the Lord that is always covered with flowers.

What Jerusalem is to the Christian, Mecca to the Mohammedans and Lumbini to the Buddhists, that Ayodhya is to the devotees of Lord Sri Rama. The place where he was born to play out his Divine drama on Earth is today called Janmasthan. On this spot now stands a Mosque erected by Babar after his successful destruction of the original temple. Today there is an image of the Lord and a number of small shrines that have been installed, where there once stood a mighty temple.

Tulsi Chowra is another place of interest here. This is where the saintly Tulsidas wrote out his Rama Charit Manas in a language intelligible to the common man. This year [1974] will mark the 400th anniversary of the birth of this great man who is hailed as one of the great saints of

India.

In and near Ayodhya are a number of temples, tanks and bathing ghats. Some of them are Sonekhar, Surya Kund, etc. Surya Kund is a large tank with a temple in the vicinity dedicated to Surya Narayan. Gupta Ghat is the place, and people come for a bath in the Sarayu, where close by is a temple dedicated to Lord Siva called Nirmalnath Maha Dev.

Ayodhya is said to have been the place where Buddha spent the rainy months. Ayodhya referred to as Saket in Buddhist scriptures is situated to the S. W. of Manparvat where there was a Buddhist Monastery. Now there is a stupa and many Jain Tirthankaras hail from Ayodhya.

Today, Ayodhya is the home of a number of maths and monasteries. All creeds and communities are represented here the ancient seat of an august clan. Temples and turrets, minarets and steeples crowd the entire little town studding the banks of the river Sarayu. New life is coursing slowly and pulsating surely through the town that once fell into the ruthless hands of destroyers and desecrators.



Mathura - Brindavan

A GREAT many people do not believe that Krishna ever existed. Some say that the worship of Krishna grew out of the age old Sun worship. There seem to be several Krishnas. One was mentioned in the Upanishads. Another was a King. Still another was a general. There was one who sported around with the cow-herds of Brindavan. It does not matter much. The fact is, some individual comes who is unique in spirituality. Then all sorts of legends are woven around him. So says Swami Vivekananda.

Sanctified by Divine Associations

Though a Prince, he was born in captivity under the shadow of terror. His parents took him away to Brindavan and brought back a baby girl in his place. His entire play from cradle was one of total self-effacement, a life lived for others. He knew from his childhood who he was and what he came for.

These great ones come, out of their free will and cannot help radiating tremendous spiritual power. "Whenever virtue subsides and irreligion prevails I come down. Again and again I come". Thus he said.

Born at Mathura, brought up at Brindavan he established a Kingdom at Dwaraka. Thus he played out the acts and scenes of his never-to-be forgotten life at Mathura and Brindavan, and these places have been sanctified by the memory of events in his remarkable life.

Pilgrims throng this place to re-capture his

enchanting form, to hear his flute call still resounding in the hills, the dales and the groves of Brindavan, along the banks of river Yamuna. Years ago the love-intoxicated Mira, the Princess of Mewar sought her Giridhar, here, and had glimpses of him under the Kadamba tree on moon-lit nights. He drove her mad by the tinkling of his anklets that lured her. Many Saints have written and sung about Vraj-Desh, the one whose name shines like a bright star. Among them is Surdas the blind poet.

Temple of Dwaraka Dheesh

The temple of Dwaraka Dheesh is the biggest temple here, built in about 1815 A.D. This is maintained by the priests of the Vallabha Order (Sampradaya). Pilgrims are able to have a vision of the Lord from time to time here. The figure of the Lord is in black marble and is about 6 feet in height.

Vishram Ghat

Vishram Ghat is the biggest Ghat where pilgrims come and bathe. It is said that Lord Krishna came and rested here after the destruction of the tyrant Kamsa. The *Arati* in the evening to the river Yamuna is a sight that no pilgrim misses. Just close to this Ghat is the Samadhi of Sri Vallabacharya.

Gatshram Narayan Temple has images of Sri Radha and Lord Krishna. It is situated to the left of the Dwaraka Dheesh temple. *Tulasi Chowra* has the Samadhi of Sri Nath. Close to it is a shrine dedicated to Shatrughna, the brother of Sri Rama.

At *Ramdas Mandi* there is an ancient temple of Ramanatheswar, a Siva temple. At

Bengali Ghat there are four temples run by the Vallabha Order. At a place called *Dhruv bete* there is a foot-print. It is at this place that the Shalagram Sri Sarveswar and Vishveswar are worshipped.

At *Ghavo Ghat* there is a temple dedicated to Sri Radha. To the west of Mathura is a temple of Maha Vidya Devi. Below this is a tank. Close to it is a temple in which there is an icon dedicated to *Pasupathi Maha Dev*. Slightly removed from it is the *Chamunda temple* which is considered to be one of 52 Sakti temples.

On Ekadasi days and on Akshaya Navami, devotees circumambulate the whole town bringing within its ambit all the centres connected with the Lord's play on earth. In this pre-eminently Vaishnava town there are four Siva temples guarding the four quarters of Mathura. These are Bhuteswar in the West, Pippaleswar in the East, Rangeswar in the South, and Gokarneswar in the North.

Sri Ram Mandir

This temple is said to be as old as 1600 A.D.; it existed when Tulsidas visited Mathura. It has the statue of Lord Krishna disguised as Rama.

Lakshmi Narayana Mandir

Lakshmi Narayana Mandir built by Birla Sheth on the road of Mathura and Brindavan is also a famous temple.

Janma Bhumi

This is behind Idgah Mosque on Deeg Darwaza Road. There is a raised platform

which is said to be the birth-place of Lord Krishna. Recently a temple has been built and other buildings are also under construction.

Chamundi Devi

This temple is on the "Parikrama Marg" about two furlongs away from Mathura Brindavan Road.

BRINDAVAN

SRI KRISHNA is formless, supra-personal, immanent as well as of transcendent charm, blissful, of matchless beauty. Fortunate devotees of the Lord, who have seen his enchanting form in their purified heart, describe Him as a personification of infinite beauty and of the colour of clouds. With the ever-fresh garland of wild flowers around his neck, and a luminous girdle around his slender waist, with the celestial notes of his flute the Divine form of Sri Krishna has captivated the heart of many a devotee. The famous Kadamba tree (*Naudia Orientalis*) is his favourite haunt, and the banks of the Jamuna his strolling ground.

Devotees like the Great Master Sri Ramakrishna have in their moments of ecstasy cried out "Oh, Govinda, my life! The mind is Krishna, the Prana is Krishna, Knowledge is Krishna, meditation is Krishna, perception is Krishna, intellect is Krishna. Thou art the Universe and the Universe is in Thee. I am the instrument and Thou art the Operator."

On His pilgrimage to Brindavan it is said that Sri Ramakrishna was in high spirits in this sacred place, rich in countless sweet

memories of Sri Krishna. He visited the places of interest with characteristic emotions.

At the sight of Banki Vihari I was overwhelmed with emotion and ran to embrace him. The very sight of the Kaliya Damam Ghat used to throw me into ecstasy. I would take a stroll in the evening on the sandy beach of the Jamuna, where there were small thatched huts among the Jujube trees. One evening I saw a herd of cows returning from their pasture followed by the cow-herd boys.

They waded the Jamuna. The scene at once suggested Sri Krishna to me, and overwhelmed, I ran crying wildly, Where is Krishna, Oh, where is Krishna.

"I visited the Govardhana Hill. The very sight of it overwhelmed me. I ran to the top, where I stood lost to outward consciousness. On the way to Shyam Kund and Radha Kund I saw the old meadows, trees and plants, birds and deer rich with associations. I could not contain myself. I thought, Oh Krishna everything hallowed by thy association is there, only I can't see Thee." Today this place may have lost all its original glory and splendour. The River Yamuna may not be what it was in the days of Lord Krishna, the Kadamba tree no more and the cow-herd boys may have become factory hands. Still to a devotee Brindavan will be gilded by the divinity which has filled it to capacity.

On the map, Brindavan has been located 6 miles to the North of Mathura. All types of conveyances are available from Mathura to Brindavan - trains, buses and horse-carts bring the pilgrims to this place. Midway between Mathura and Brindavan is the beautiful *Gila Mandir* built by the Birlas,

where the Lord's image- is in the form of Gitacharya, On the wall there are panels on which the entire Gita has been inscribed. There are daily congregations where people meet to sing hymns besides the usual pilgrims from all over India. Round about this place are a number of ashrams, mutts, and rest-houses. *Kaliya Vadh* or *Kaliya Daman* is the spot where the boy Krishna destroyed the mighty serpent who had become a terror to the people. Here is 'an image of the Lord standing on the head of the serpent. Other temples here are those of Yugal Kishore and Madan Kishore.

Advaitvat

Advaitvat is the hallowed spot, where the devotees of Sri Chaitanya Maha Prabhu had performed penance.

Temple of Bankey Bihari

The temple of Bankey Bihari is where the Lord stands in the famous bent posture. It is not possible to get a continuous vision of the deity here. Worship here is peculiar in that the veil covering the sanctum is drawn down from time to time. This is the most famous temple in Brindavan with the greatest number of devotees visiting it at all times. *Gokul* is where the Lord spent his childhood. It is about 6 miles from Mathura. It is situated across the bridge. There are a number of temples built by the Vallabha Order of Monks here.

Madhuvan

About a mile from Gokul is the place where Lord Krishna romped about playing with his

friends. Here is a temple called Nanda Bhavan. On Janmasthami Day, a big fair is held, when people from places near about come here to celebrate the event.

Nandagaon

Nandagaon is accessible to pilgrims by bus. There is a hillock on which stands a temple with the images of Nanda, Yasoda, Sri Krishna, Balaram, Radhika and the cowherd boys with whom the Lord sported around. At the foot of the hill is a lake-spring called Pamari.

Barsana

Barsana or Vrishabhanupur is the place where Sri Radha's father lived. Here is a hill which has four peaks called Morkuti, Mangadh, Vilasgath and Dangadh, where the Lord had spent His time with his beloved devotee Sri Radha. Her devotion is an inexplicable saga. It is said that she incarnated here to show the pangs that a devotee suffers at his separation from the Lord. This is described as Viraha. The Lord was unable to resist it and many a time appeared to appease the agonies that she suffered. There are many temples here, a notable one is a large one dedicated to Sri Radha. Here one finds shrines dedicated to Vrisha Bhanu, the father of Radhika, another to her eight companions (Lalitha, Visakha, Chitra, Indulekha, Champaklata, Rang Devi, Jungavidya and Sudevi). A temple is dedicated to her where there is a large figure of hers supported by Sri Kishori. Here is a tank called Bhanu Pushkar. It is said that Vrisha Bhanu made it. Close to it is the Kirti Kund, a lake named after

the Mother of Sri Radha Kishori.

Govardhan

Govardhan is about 16 miles from Mathura. It can hardly be called a hill; an entire circumambulation of it covers only 14 miles. This is the hill that Lord Krishna held up as an umbrella to protect the people of Brindavan when a storm raged. He held the hill aloft and had all the people sheltered under it. There are people here who prostrate full length all the way around the foot of the hill.

Brindavan has been sanctified by the touch of many saints and sages who had been here to watch the divine sport of the Lord. Thousands of years have rolled past, and thousands of years more may pass without the advent of such a son. The distinguishing aspect by which he was adored and to this day worshipped was his life. His life and conduct were unique. His was the sublime life of Divine Love in all its manifest aspects.

Kunj

Brindavan is famous for its temples. It is also famous for its Kunjs. These Kunjs are said to be playgrounds of Lord Krishna. None can testify to the Truth of the legendary tales associated with them, yet it is true that they represent the most serene spots of the land. The most important Kunjs of the city are:

Sewa Kunj: This Kunj is situated in the heart of the city. It has a high compound wall. From the compound there is one entrance only. The whole area is densely forested and one finds it very difficult to

pass through. A path leads the visitors to the temple. A figure of Sri Radhakrishna is put up there. It is said that the Lord and His consort pay a visit to this place every night. Just near the entrance there is Lalita Kund. It has vast groves with countless monkeys. Nobody is allowed to remain in the Kunj after sun-set.

Nidi Van: This Kunj is situated near the Ghera of Radha Ramanuja Swami. Haridasji used to live here. It is a place of perfect calm. Hutments where the Swamiji lived are yet to be seen. It is said that the statue of Bihariji, which is now in Bankey Bihari temple was found here. It has a Kund called Vishaka Kund. A Samadhi of Swami Haridasji is built here.

Lakshmi Kunj: It is on the banks of River Jamuna and was built by Maharaja of Bharatpur.

Religious Spots of Importance

The city of Brindavan is newly built. It is said that about four to five hundred years ago there were no houses. There were temples scattered here and there, and Sadhus used to live there. Those who had dedicated their lives to worship found suitable spots according to their tastes and lived there. These spots have now become pilgrim spots:

Kali Dah: It is not sure where the old Kali Dah of the times of Lord Krishna exists, but people say that a spot near Raman Reti on the river bank is Kali Dah, It has a number of temples and ashrams.

Vanshibat : It is a spot on the river bank. It has a Banyan tree and a temple with other buildings, where Sadhus live.

Gyan Govidri : It is a spot near the temple

of Lala Babu. It has a large compound surrounded by many temples all around. It is a spot where Uddhavji gave the message of Lord Krishna to the Gopis. It has been the meeting place of saints. Tulsidas, Meera Raskban, Swami Haridas and several others have lived here.

Tatti Sthan : It is situated on the banks of the river near the temple of Kunj Bihari. It is said to be the living place of Moni Baba, an ardent disciple of Swami Haridasji. Several hutments are built for saints who come here from different parts of India.

Rishikul Ashram: It is situated in the compound of Shri Ranji temple. Its object is to teach the young people tenets of Hindu religion. A Sanskrit Patasala and an Ausdhalaya (dispensary) are attached to it.

Gurukul: This is governed by Arya Sangh. It has a school, a boarding house, laboratory, etc. It imparts education to young ones in the light of the principles of the Arya Samaj.

Ramakrishna Seva Ashram: Its object is to serve humanity in distress. It has a general hospital and wards to accommodate in-patients.

Bharat Sevasram Sangh : Near Brindavan railway station, on the main road is situated Bharat Sevasram Sangh. It seeks to restore the ancient spiritual atmosphere of the holy places of pilgrimage and to provide accommodation, as well as help to the pilgrims in the performance of religious rites and also to protect them from the unscrupulous Pandas.

The great Acharya, the founder of the Sangh, with his Divine foresight, realised the evil potentialities hidden in the atmosphere of the holy places of India and

felt the need for urgent reformation. In the year 1924, he introduced the programme, "Thirtha Sanskar ". Through long and strenuous efforts the movement acquired countrywide support from all sections of the people.

Despite vehement opposition and heavy odds, the Sangh workers have been able to create a really spiritual atmosphere in several of these holy places. Their work is as follows :

1. Pilgrims are given free shelter in the Dharmasala for three days.
2. Pilgrims are helped to perform their religious rites at reasonable expenses and are saved from oppression and extortion.
3. Ailing pilgrims are treated free of charge at the charitable dispensaries of the Sangh.
4. Daily bhajans, kirtans, puja, arati, etc. and weekly havan, occasional festivals and anniversary celebrations are held.
5. There are also library facilities and free reading rooms.

There are many Dharma Salas, Kunjs and Ashrams at Brindavan, Visitors have full facilities to reside there.

Ban Maharaj : On Chhatikra Road, there is also a religious University, where Western scholars and visitors come for a study of Sanskrit, the Vedas and Upanishads etc.



Uttarkhand Shrines

The Twin Shrines

THE twin Himalayan shrines of Shri Badrinath Dham and Shri Kedarnath, the holiest among the holy shrines of India, have been a centre of veneration from Vedic times. These ancient seats of Hindu religion and culture have drawn multitudes of devotees from all over India for ages now. The two other sister shrines of Gangotri and Yamnotri in the same Himalayan sector of Holy Uttarkhand are equally sacred and have similarly drawn an endless stream of pilgrims. All these shrines are situated on an average height of ten thousand feet from sea level. They lie buried in deep snow in winter and are open to pilgrims from May to November. The loftiest shrine of Tungnath, as the name indicates, Triyugi Narain, Kalimath, Madh Maheshwar, Rudranath, Kalpeshwar, Jyotirmath and a host of other shrines, too numerous to mention, lie heavily dotted in the holy Uttarakhand.

These seats of ancient renown are situated in the distant and hitherto inaccessible border hills of Uttar Pradesh, in the lap of the mighty Himalayas. Hitherto, however, it did not deter the surging mass of devout humanity from undertaking a journey to these holy places. The more the tribulation, the more the degree of salvation; this was the secret of this holy pilgrimage in ancient times. Such has been the glory of the Mighty Lord of the Himalayas from time immemorial. In fact, it was faith that

sustained them through the perilous nature of the journey and the vagaries of the Himalayan weather and various other handicaps.

Importance of Badrinath

The shrine of Shri Badrinath is important from the point of view of Pilgrims, tourists, historians, scientists and research scholars of ancient art and history. It has been the haunt of Rishis and sages of ancient India, who flocked there to attain Divine knowledge. Many eminent Yogis, poets and authors flocked to this holy land to propitiate the Deity, to obtain salvation and to receive inspiration or draw material from available books. natural scenery coupled with snow-clad mountains, gushing waters of the icy Alak Nanda and beautiful flowers in the rainy season add to the enchantment of the area. There is a



hot- water spring at Badrinath called Tapta Kund, in the icy heights, the temperature of which is found to be 120 degrees Fahrenheit in May. The lofty water-fall of Vasudhara 400 feet high, the glacial lake of Sato Panth, Alaka Puri, the source of Alakananda which rises from the snout of combined glaciers of Bhagirath Kharak and

Sato Panth, the snow-clad world-famed peak of Nilkantha which overlooks the temple, and many others are part of the natural phenomena in that Celestial land, a delight of visitors. This holy land is the birth-place of Ganga, Yamuna, Alak Nanda, Bhagirathi, Saraswathi, Dhauli, Nandakini, Pindar, Mandakini and several other rivers of scriptural fame.

The Hindu Shastras enjoin that no pilgrimage would be complete, unless a pilgrim paid a visit to Badrinath - the lofty abode of Vishnu and a great Ashram of Nara and Narayana. Badrinath has been described in Hindu scriptures as supreme among the places of pilgrimage. Its sanctity

was an article of the deepest faith on the part of the Rishis of the past Yugas. The Rishis of ages gone by, according to Padma Purana, saw Uttara Khand as the most glorious temple of Nature, abounding in invaluable spiritual treasures. The whole of India has been linked with the holy places from ages, behind by the bond of a

highly consecrated faith, which found its natural home in this land. It is a living faith with every Hindu to visit these shrines once in his life-time to elevate himself and enrich his psychic and spiritual acquisitions.

Its Hoary Past

Badrinath has a hoary past. It dates from the Vedic period. Puranas are all praise to this seat. It is common belief that some of the Vedic hymns and the major portions of the Upanishads were first sung in this part of the land called Badarikashram. Tradition points to this place as the abode of all the gods of the Puranas and also as the Penance Grove of all the Maharshis, sages, saints and seers, ancient and modern.

There are several ancient places in Uttara Khand which are equally charged with sanctity. In fact, every rock and pool here is associated with some Hindu legend. Places, where Pandavas are supposed to have performed penances, King Pandu's Ashram at Pandukeshwar, the places where ancient Kings performed various sacrifices and ceremonies have all become places of pilgrimage.

By common tradition the land from Nand Prayag up to Satya-Path (Satopanth), fifteen miles beyond Badrinath, is considered to be Badri Vishal Kshetra. The very name, "Badrikashram" suggests how unique this place is. Another place goes by the name of Ashram. In *Mahabharata*, it is said, that Lord Krishna visited the hermitage of Manu, and the Pandavas in their exile lived for a considerable time in Badrikashram. In their previous incarnation, Arjun as Nara and Krishna as Narayana performed austerities here on the Gandha

Madan mountain. There they were visited by the sage Narada who remained with them for a thousand years. The Grammarian Vararuchi also visited these Himalayas, and by propitiating Maha Deva obtained from him the material for his Paniniya Grammar. Vedas were collected together and divided into four separate parts in Vyas-Guha at Mana, near Badrinath. The various Puranas were also compiled here. According to local folk-lore, Ramachandra also retired for meditation at Deva-Prayag in his old age and a temple was built there in commemoration of his visit. Sage Kanwa had his Ashram or hermitage at Nand-Prayag and it is said that Shakuntala and Dushyant were betrothed there.

Ancient Seat of Philosophies

Five out of the six founders of the various schools of Philosophy started their schools in Uttara-Khand, such as, Kapila in Hardwar; Kashyapa in Badrinath; Gautama on the banks of River Saraswathi, near Badrinath; Garg, the great astronomer, performed his devotions in the Drona Giri mountains and it is perhaps because of this that astronomy is well preserved in this part of country. No wonder, therefore, that a visit to this holy land is considered by the Hindus as marking the fruition of all earthly desires and a means of liberation from the transmigration of the soul. The holy land is known by different names in Hindu scriptures, viz., Deo Bhumi, Brahma Rishi Desh, Panchala Desh, Kedar Khand, Uttara Khand and Badrikashram.

Attracting Foreigners

The Foreigners are also great devotees of this land. Writing in the *Valley of Flowers*, a book about this land, Mr. F. S. Smythe, the world famous mountaineer, says: "That Kumaon and Garhwal should be specially consecrated to the Gods of Indian religious mysticism, is easily understandable. Is there any region of the Himalayas, or even of the world, which would excel this region in beauty and grandeur? Where else are to be found such narrow and precipitous valleys and gorges, such serene vistas of alp, forest, snow-field and peak? This 'Abode of Snow' is rightly the goal of the heat-enervated people of the plains. Never was there a pilgrimage of finer accomplishment. It is the perfect antidote to a static life, and it cannot fail to inspire in the dullest a nobler conception of the Universe".

Mystic Grandeur

About the natural beauty and mystic grandeur of this Himalayan Sector, Dr. T. G. Longstaff, another Westerner, who climbed Mount Trisul (23,369 ft.) in 1907, gives his opinion in the following glowing words: "After six visits to the snows, I still believe that Uttara Khand is the most beautiful country of all High Asia. Neither the primitive immensity of the Kara Korum, the aloof domination of Mount Everest, the softer Caucasian beauties of the Hindu Kush, nor any of the many other regions of Himachal can compare with Uttara Khand. Mountain and valley, forest and alp, birds and animals, butterflies and flowers, all combine to make a sum of delight

unsurpassed elsewhere. The human interest is stronger than in any other mountain region of the world, for these anciently named peaks are written out in the earliest annals of the Indo-Aryan race. They are the home of the Gods. For two hundred million Hindus the shrines of Uttara Khand still secure supreme merit to the devout pilgrim."

With its scenic lure, tree-clad hills, snowcapped peaks, rippling streams, foaming torrents, magnificent water-falls, roaring rivers, gaping gorges and mountain lakes, the holy Uttara Khand is not only a place of Supreme Hindu pilgrimage but it is also a Tourist Paradise. In scenery and climate, this holy land has been compared to Switzerland and Norway at its best.

Pandukeshwar (6,000 ft.): This place is eight miles from Joshimath on Badrinath route. It is named after the Pandavas and has two very old temples dedicated to Yog Badri and another to Vasudeva. These temples were said to have been built by the Pandavas.

Joshi Math (6,107 ft.): It is one of the four monasteries founded by Adi Swami Sankaracharya. The Skanda Purana on Kedar Khand discloses several legends which show this place to be an ancient mythical seat. The modern name of this place is Joshimath. There are several ancient temples here, prominent among them being those of Narasimha. Vasudeva and Nav Durga. Joshi Math is linked with Rishikesh by a 158-mile-long motor road.

Kedamatli (11,759 ft.): It is one of the twelve Jyotir Lingas of Lord Shiva. The holy temple is built on a ridge jutting out at

right angles from the snowy range, below the peak of Maha Panth. The temple is dedicated to Sada Siva, the invisible form of Siva. The Pandavas perished here on the way to Maha Panth. Just behind the temple, is a glacier from where the Mandakini river emerges giving a picturesque



view of what is known as the "Boiling Ocean." There is also a tank known as "Udak Kund" which contains mercury. Kedarnath is ten miles from Son-prayag bus terminus.

Triyugi Narayana (6,000 ft.) The marriage of Shiva and Parvati was said to have been performed here at Agni-Kund, which is one of the five kunds here, and the sacrificial fire has been kept burning all along the subsequent three Yugas and great virtue is ascribed to the ashes of this celestial fire. The other four Kunds are : Brahma Kund, Vishnu Kund, Rudra Kund and Saraswathi Kund, where ablutions and other ceremonies are performed. It is on Gangotri-Kedarnath route.

Gaurikund (7,00 ft.): It is on Guptakashi-Kedarnath route. There are two Kunds (pools of water) for bathing by the side of the icy- cold Mandakini river. The one pool contains extremely hot water and the other extremely cold water. The story of the marriage of the fifty daughters of Mandhatri to the old ascetic Saubhari is current in connection with a temple here.

Ukhimatli (4,300 ft.) It is situated on Kedamath-Chamoli road. It is on the left bank of the Mandakini river. There is a temple of Lord Siva here which has metal images of Siva, Parvati, Mandhata, Aniruddha and Usha, Aniruddha's spouse. Ukha was the daughter of Banasur, and

she was given the name of the place. There are also images of nine Durgas here. It is the winter-seat of the Kedarnath establishment.

Kalimath : It is a sacred place of the blessed Goddess. The principal objects of veneration are : the images of Maha Kali, Maha Lakshmi, Maha Saraswati, Gauri Shankar, Mahadeva and Bhairava. It lies on the left bank of Kali river and is three miles from Guptakashi.

Panch Kedars

Madmaheshwar ; It is fifteen miles from Ka1imath. It is situated at the base of Chaukhamba peaks at an altitude of 11,474 feet. It is one of the Panch-Kedars, The temple is closed during winter when the silver image at Mahadeva is taken out down to Ukhimath. The stone Linga remains permanently in the temple.

Guptakashi (4,850 ft.): It is on Kedarnath route. There are two very old temples, one of Chandra Sekhar Mahadeva and the other of Ardha Narishwar and a sacred tank. Ukhimath is visible from here on the opposite side.

Yamnotri (10,000 ft.): It stands on the western flank of the great peak of Bandar-Poonch which is 20,731 feet above the sea level. The peak is always snow-clad and forms the watershed of Hanuman-Ganga and Tons river. The main temple is dedicated to the Goddess Yamuna and is four miles below the glacier from which the sacred river Yamuna issues. There is a group of hot springs here which are held in

great sanctity, where pilgrims boil rice and potatoes. The valley is highly enchanting.

Uttarkashi (3,800 ft.): Uttarkashi seems to have been a place of great renown from the very beginning of the Epic period. It is identified with the place where a house of the lac and inflammable materials had been built for duping Yudhishtira and his brothers into death, There are many old temples. The temple of Shri Vishwanath is worth visiting. An ancient trident bearing an inscription stands near it. Great antiquity is ascribed to the monument. The temple of Ekadashi Rudra is very beautiful. It is situated on the banks of the Bhagirathi river, and is surrounded by the Varuna and Asi rivers. Lord Viswanath, who, according to tradition, had once said that when his temple at Varanasi lost its importance in Kaliyug, he would reside in Uttarkashi. It is also said that the Kirata and Arjuna duel took place here. These mythological anecdotes impart great importance to this small town. Other temples are: Shakti, Parasuram and Kali. It is on Gangotri route.

Gangotri (10,319 ft.): It stands on the right bank of the Bhagirathi river. It is said that Raja Bhagirath made his stupendous efforts to bring down the Ganges at Srikanth Parbat, near this place, and later the Pandavas are said to have performed the great Deva Yajna, at this place in atonement for the death of their kinsmen in the epic battle of Kurukshetra. The main temple here is of Goddess Bhagirathi.



Rishikesh

Mountain-peaks and Mental Profundities

These are Nature's Cathedrals where aspiring humanity may worship all that is pure and sublime in nature's Creation" so said a British humanist when he described some soaring mountain peaks. This observation fits the Himalayas more truly than any other mountain range. To a man of universal spirit the universe speaks. It has a tongue and voice, which cannot be known or heard save by mystics and sages. It is they who withdrew from the weariness and worries of the world and shifted their gaze from the terrestrial and the temporal to the abiding and the eternal. It is to them that Nature unveils herself and yields the secret of unity that binds all creatures "with a gold chain about the feet of God."

Freed from the strife for existence and away from tumultuous throngs, the mind of these people turned inward and investigated the world within. Their findings yielded in time a rich harvest that abundantly filled the storehouses of philosophy, ethics, theology, science, art and literature. This research was conducted in the secret recesses of caves concealed in the Himalayan ranges. Himalayas are the crown and glory of India. Her grandeur, eminence and achievements take their rise among these rising ranges.

A Celestial Manifestation on Earth: The Himalayas

The Himalayas are not a mountainous group like others; it seems as if some luminous planet had shot out of space and suddenly planted itself upon the green earth, so cosmically great, so unearthly, so out of all relation with manifestation of this planet do they appear. Formation is laid upon formation, flora upon flora and fauna upon fauna. In the fourteen miles from Haridwar to Rishikesh subtropical vegetation gradually changes to Arctic, the realm of elephants is succeeded by that of bears and finally of the snow-leopard. And above this world, the real Hirnavat begins and one thing is certain; if the realm of gods lies anywhere it does lie here. On every side, there is the rich greenery of tropical forests; skirted all round, fold upon fold, by mountain ranges with tiny hat-field terraces that stand out like green frills on the mountain slopes. It is through this that the convoy of bus wend its way to Hrishikesh (Rishikesh).

Tradition and Etymology

According to local tradition the place derives its name from the fact that Rishi gained victory over the tyranny of their senses at this place (Hrishika - Senses, Isa - lord). This place is also called Kulyamraka, land of the bent Mango tree. This name was given to it also according to another tradition, which states that Lord Vishnu appeared to a sage here on the branch of a bent mango tree. Once in these mountainous forests the Mahatmas dwelt, silent, unrecognised supermen who guided

unselfishly the destiny of mankind. They had transcended the limitation of matter. They possess a mortal frame and appear even less than our great men do as far as wealth is concerned. Yet they are more, because they are completely free. Their consciousness embraces the world, they leap from star to star, just as we do from memory to memory. This Himalayan region was the resort of many such saints and sages. One who lived in recent times whose gentle loving spirit has been wafted out into the world at large is the sage of Ananda Kutir commonly called Swami Sivananda. He made service to humanity his aim and the monastery formed by him is here in Rishikesh. It is known as the Forest Academy and is at a place called Muni ki Reti.

This was once the favourite resort of great rishis from as far back in time as is possible for man to remember. The hermitage of the Saptarishis and Rajarishis like Sri Ramachandra and Lakshmana are still to be found here. There is an ancient and famous temple here dedicated to Lord Bharata. Other temples here are Varaha Mandir and Chandreswar Mandir.

The Transformed Rishikesh

Until a few years ago, owing to the inaccessibility of the region and the lack of food supplies, only a few hermits living on whatever nature supplied, and bent on a secluded life, took up their permanent abode here. Now, with the change of times Rishikesh has developed into a township. The place that once resounded with the roaring of tigers and chattering of monkeys now resounds with trumpeting of fast

moving vehicles and is filled with the gases from exhaust tubes. There is a regular bazaar with all available provisions; conveniences like schools, hospitals and large official buildings stand where vegetation once abounded. Besides this, there are also Ashrams where Sadhus are supplied with free meals twice a day. Notable among this is the Kali Kamblivallah Kshetra.

Long, long ago when Rishikesh was still unsung and unheard of, but by these few strange people, there was a place here called Jhati -an island surrounded by the waters of the Ganges and thickly covered by large trees.

Now, that island has almost vanished due to the change in the course of the river. Many Sadhus have stayed here. One such mahatma was Swami Visuddhananda, more familiarly known as Babu Kali Kamblivallah. He came to be known by this peculiar name, because he covered his body always with a black blanket. His was a life of total self-denial. In spite of his greatness he remained a stranger to fame. Suddenly, she pursued him and rained untold wealth at his feet. Wealthy men now placed themselves at the disposal of the poor ascetic, but unmoved, he sat amidst the hoarded wealth, untouched he allowed it to remain, till an idea struck him that he should build dharmasalas that would provide food and shelter for the Sannyasins passing by, thus it is that Kali Kamblivallah Kshetras exist in all places of Uttarakhand. He set an example here as to how a Sadhu who comes by wealth, because of the vasanas carried over from previous lives, should conduct himself.

Lakshman Jhoola and Neelakanth

Three miles to the north-east of Hrishikesh there is a place of pilgrimage called Lakshman Jhoola. It is from here that pilgrims travel on to another spot called Brahmapuri. At Lakshman Jhoola, there is a suspension bridge, below which the Ganges frisks and frolics away in divine child-like glee. Close to this place is the temple of Lord Lakshmana. Lakshman Jhoola marks the limit of Hrishikesh.

After going through the dusty bazaars of Rishikesh, with its traffic jam caused by incoming and outgoing buses, one comes to Mani K/Reti, where the Headquarters of the Divine Life Society stand. A little further and across the Ganges is Swargasram, set against a background of rising mountains with the Ganges flowing past. Here there is a spacious building, the Gita Bhavan, where discourse go on from May to July. Many great Mahatmas like Swami Saradananda, Akhandananda, Palaknidhji, Ramsukhdasji Chakrapaniji have visited and sanctified it.

Seven or eight miles to the east of Hrishikesh is a spot called Neelakant. The way to it lies through thick forests, dark-green with rich foliage of vilva trees. Here are a number of small hermitages, where silent ones come to spend hours of prayer and contemplation.

**The Gateway to Other Heights**

MAY, June and July are months when schools are closed and the sweltering heat of the plains makes life intolerable. Life simmers in a boiling cauldron. It is at such a time that people who are blessed with the means of escape flee to cooler regions. Conveyances are packed to capacity with all sorts of people. Special carriages are attached to trains carrying people to various places, students on excursions, government officials to summer resorts or to their home towns and pilgrims to certain spots in India. A secret India whose spiritual life still exists despite the storms of political agitation that rages all around and hides it. It is still that same India, where man yearns for serenity and peace as he did hundreds of years ago. These pilgrims throng in large numbers on their trip to the holy shrines nestling on the dizzy heights of the Himalayas. Kedar, Badri, Uttar Kasi, Gangotri, are some places in Uttar Khand where people from all over India go at least once in their life time. To reach there they gather at Hardwar, Hardwar doubly sanctified by Siva as well as Vishnu is now a crowded town where the old and the new jostle and compete for prominence. Modern buildings are wedged in between ancient structures of domes and minarets. The ochre flag flutters right in the market place drawing one's attention to some temple that has been elbowed back, by other buildings. It is here that the Ganges sweeps down into

the plains to nourish and fertilise the lush fields that grow on either side of her banks. Here one enters a special world of din and noise, calm and quiet, ancient and ante-deluvian, modern and sophisticated, yet everywhere one breathes the deep, rich air of tradition and sanctity and an aura of something intangible enfolds you.

Ochre-robed anchorites roam around with their time-honoured staff and bowl. Mutts and Ashrams with their tiny spires defy the onward march of time, and stand out defiant and uncompromising as Truth itself. The timeless back-ground, crumbling stone walls, dusty roads and cool freshness of the Ganges water bring a host of associations - legends, traditions, heard long ago from the ancient books of India. Yes, this is Hardwar, the gate-way to the mightier heights, the hostess to millions of people who come here to purify themselves by a dip in the water of the Ganges, or better still a sub-sanctum for those who are to proceed to other places. Though she has become partly modernised, she has been careful not to lose her ancient, traditional purity. The Ganges having originated at Gomukh, trips to Gangotri, leaps and cascades through Uttar Kasi and Rishikesh, and finally steps down from Her eminence here at Hardwar into dignified silence. Therefore she is also known as Gangadwar.

Astrology, the hoary science of the stars, has always had a hold on the people of India. Hardwar becomes the scene of a mass congregation once in twelve years, when the Planet Jupiter posits itself in the Constellation called Aquarius. Milling, jostling crowds of pilgrims come to sanctify their lives here at that time for a festival

called Kumbha Mela. The main Ghat at which people come for the bath is called "Hari Ki Pairi ", so called because it is said to have the imprint of Lord Vishnu's feet on a stone wall. This most sacred bathing Ghat was at one time very small. During Kumbha Mela and other auspicious occasions there is a great rush of pilgrims, who vie with one another to have a bath at the appointed time. A number of people may get crushed to death. The Government has since taken steps and re-built the place to accommodate more people.

Near Hari Ki Pairi is the Gangadwara temple, the biggest and the most important temple here. It is visited by innumerable pilgrims during Mela. The place where the Ganges emerges from the hills is called Gangadwara. South of Gangadwara are a number of temples, Mutts and Ashrams. There is a temple dedicated here to Lord Siva called Sravannath, A mile's drive from Hardwar, past dusty roads through main tree-lined roads and lush fields, and one come to Maya Puri. There are three old temples there of Maya Devi, Bhairava and of Narayana. Among the seven sacred places it is Maya Puri that is mentioned. Jwalapur is four miles from Hardwar. The priests from the temples of Hardwar have their homes here. On the opposite side of the canal there is a stream, which originates as a cataract from the Neel Parvat. This cascade is called Neel Dhara. A part of it has been diverted and made to flow within the confining walls of the canal. Pilgrims have a bath in the refreshing waters of this fall, and then go to the temple of Neeleswar. It is said that a great devotee of Lord Siva who was called Neela did penance to propitiate the Lord, and so to honour him this place is

called Neel Parvat. The temple built here is dedicated to Lord Siva. Seekers often emulate that which great Saints have done before them. So the ground has been trodden on by countless devotees for many years after the great Neela did his penance here.

Lord Dattatreya is said to have performed severe penance at a place called Kusavart Ghat. Before doing so he had placed his bowl, staff, and other things on the banks of the Ganges. The Ganges, as she coursed down, washed these things but was unable to go forward and she went on whirling round and round. After his penance he saw his things caught in the whirlpool. Pleased with the intensity of his devotion, it is said that the Trinity manifested themselves, and asked what they could do for him. At his request that they should remain there they are said to have taken their abode there. Later on, the Ganges was allowed to go on her way.

From Hardwar station, past Hari Ki Pairi, across the bridge that spans the river, lies the way to Bilwakeswar temple. Bilwakeswar hill is across the railway line that runs past it. There are two images here. One is within the sanctum and the other is without. Long ago there was a large Bilwa tree here, under which the image was originally said to have been. It is on this hill that Gouri Kund is situated. On the left of the temple is a shrine dedicated to the Mother. Between these two temples run a streamlet in which the pilgrims take a bath

before worshipping in the temple. These are some of the places of interest in Hardwar.

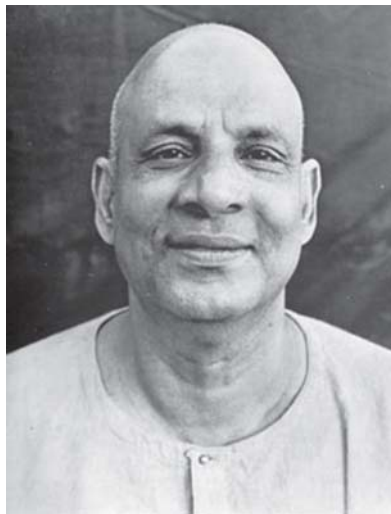
Millions throng Hardwar at all times to have a dip here in the Ganges. People come from all over India and now even people from all over the world are also seen here. In the month of May-July the crowds swell to alarming proportions endangering the safety of the common people. Here one finds every colour, costume and type, from the tanned skins of the Southerners to the bleached ones from Kashmir, brightly turbaned Rajputs with a sprinkling of the sober Sannyasins. Languages and dialects without number resound in the air. Different traditions proclaim themselves from different faces, caste rubs shoulders with out-caste, pride with prejudice and in the fervour all differences are brought to nought. "Jaya Gange", "Hara Hara Gange" goes on. Late in the evening, tiny lamps float on the bosom of Mother Ganges like so many fire-flies caught up in a moving night sky. What strikes one here is that in spite of the extraordinary differences among pilgrims, somehow or other, they seem to be the expression of but one mind. These people gathered here are not all thinkers, whose business is to understand. They are incapable of anticipating a reality behind the natural phenomena of a river or may be its sanctity, but they do actually experience the Divinity in the manifest creation of a hidden Divine Power.



The Forest Academy of Rishikesh

The Sage of Ananda Kutir

WE find our own lives in losing them in the service of others. The more of our lives we give to others the fuller, richer and more rewarding our own lives become". This is an expression of one of the greatest saints, and nowhere was it so explicitly exemplified as in the life of the Sage of Ananda Kutir, commonly called Swami Sivananda Maharaj of Rishikesh. Rishikesh is equated in the popular mind with the Divine Life Society and that in its turn means Swami Sivananda, its founder.



Swami Sivananda's love of man and the desire to serve him made him a doctor of medicine, where like a ministering angel he never spared himself. He poured out all his love and compassion on his suffering brothers and sisters in far off Malaya. Ere long, his country beckoned to him and he could not disregard her call. This was a divine dispensation, that the doctor of the body and mind forsook his career as such and took to a life of renunciation to qualify himself for ministering to man's spiritual needs as well.

Practice of Austerities

He settled down in Rishikesh in 1924,

practised intense austerities and shone as a great Yogin, Sage and Jivan Mukta. Somewhere around 1930 he was gripped by a powerful desire to serve the world. Driven by this desire, Swami Sivananda emerged out of his seclusion in Swargashram, where he was doing sadhana, and entered the cities and towns and mingled with the masses. There was a sparkle in his eyes and fire in his speech. The Sivananda who cast a spell on the vast audience in Sitapur, Lakshimpur, the Sankirtan Samrat, who sang and danced his way into the hearts of tens of thousands in Rawalpindi and Lahore, and threw them into high ecstasy, left no one in doubt about his being a realised soul. When and where he attained the illumination, no one knew.

The Swargashram and Its Vision

In Swargashram itself Swamiji saw a field for service awaiting him. He wanted to serve the Sadhu community, who suffered from physical privation, as well as spiritual starvation for want of proper nourishment from appropriate sources. Swamiji surmised that once the physical and spiritual needs of the Sadhus were taken care of and their confidence won, their energies could be channelised for their own uplift as well as for the public good.

With this end in view he founded the Swargashram Sadhu Sangh, on August 24th, 1933. Even as the bees swarm round

a "full blown bloom", disciples rushed to him from all parts of the country. Thus was born the Sivanandasram in 1932 in its natural sequence. The Divine Life Society came into existence, and it has now branches in all parts of the world. In 1948, Yoga Vedanta Forest Academy was organised for the dissemination of spiritual knowledge and training of Sannyasins in Yoga.

The Divine Life Society

The headquarters of the Divine Life Society, Sivanand Nagar, Rishikesh is a tribute to the oceanic love one servant of God had for His children. The Ashram township stands on the slopes of the Himalayas with Ganges flowing by. It has its own temple, prayer hall, printing press, hospital etc. Above all, here live and work a band of dedicated monks trained by the great Master for the service of humanity.

The Sivananda Ashram

Sivananda Ashram is at a distance of 3 Km. from Rishikesh accessible by taxis. Widest possible dissemination of spiritual knowledge is the primary object of the Divine Life Society. All its activities are turned towards this one aim. Its activities are manifold and concentrated on the campus itself, both spiritual and secular, and are carried on by different departments. Here the pilgrim finds himself in the Viswanath Mandir, which contains the Linga established by Swami Sivananda himself. It has also a shrine with the image of Murali Manohar and other deities, where worship is offered three times a day on special occasions like Sivaratri and

Gokulashtami. Close to the Viswanath temple is Swamiji's Samadhistan. People from all over the world come here in search of that Peace which has taken a permanent abode here. The Ashram has its own Printing Press, from which streams out a perennial flow of spiritual literature. Just facing the Press is the Sivananda Pillar, a neat marble structure on which is inscribed the essence of Swamiji's teachings and a brief life sketch of this great lover of mankind. Nearby is the Bhajan hall, where the chanting of the Lord's name is maintained round the clock. This hall serves as venue for Yoga classes, discourses and night-satsang.

A Monument of the Master's Love

As a monument of the Master's perennial love of mankind stands the Sivananda Charitable Hospital, which caters to the needs of the patients from the neighbourhood and distant villages. The Sivananda Ayurvedic Pharmacy, which was started at his instance, has now grown to enormous dimensions, and its diverse medical products and tonics are popular both in India and abroad.

Thus to the sanctity of this pilgrim centre is added one more feature and one more centre. The Narada Bhakti Sutras say that a Tirtha is reinforced in its sanctity by the presence of a Mahatma. Truly has the suggestion of the Sutra been fulfilled in the sacred place. May the band of selfless monks that he has created increase!



The Mother Mountain at the Peaks

Vaishno Devi Temple in the Himalayan Ranges

THE fleecy snow-clad mountain ranges echo with the melodies of the devotees' songs and chants expressing the glory of the Mother's name in Her Divine presence, as the Pilgrims toil through the ascent and reach Her abode on the high hills. The beauty and bounty of Nature that had always been the pride of Jammu and Kashmir has had an irresistible fascination for the poet, the artist and the simple minded lover of nature from time immemorial. The imposing Himalayan Ranges perpetually vibrate with the sweet silvery sounds of the waterfalls, whispering trees and chirping birds and capture the golden rays of the Sun on their snow-clad peaks, flashing them back like huge diamonds. Little wonder then that these ranges are the chosen abode of Gods and Goddesses. Here, amidst this glorious and breath-taking beauty rises the three-edged peak of the Trikuta hill, the top of which has been chosen by Sri Vaishnav Devi, the virgin Goddess, dear and revered, beloved of an her devotees. Her shrine is in the cave of Trikuta Bhagawati, rising to an awe-inspiring height of 5,300 feet, at the top-most position near the three ridged peak, Trikuta of the Shiwalik range.

The Deity in the Cave

The Deity in the cave, Vaishno Devi, is the Virgin Goddess, seen here riding a lion.

The legend behind the birth of the temple goes to say that a tyrant by name Bhairav, coveted the hand of the virgin and kept on harrasing her, urging her to marry him; she ran away to escape his pestering and took refuge in the cave on top of Trikuta hill, but Bhairav followed her there too, and seeing no other way out, she killed him by directing her gaze, luminous, deadly, charged with the power of her Virtue and Divinity on him. Even after the death of Bhairav the Goddess stayed on in the cave and made it her permanent abode.

Pilgrimage to this cave-temple is an enriching experience. Taken in different laps, and through diverse means of communication, the pilgrimage provides the traveller with profound experiences. After the long and arduous journey, when the Pilgrims stand gazing at the countenance of the Mother, their hearts are filled with deep spiritual satisfaction, providing as it were a balm to their body and soul. Blessed by her vision and refreshed in mind and body, they go back, carrying the feeling of a Divine presence forever with them.

The base-camp of the Pilgrimage to the holy shrine is Katra, -60 Km, North-West of Jammu, linked to the winter capital by bus route. This neat little town enjoys tropical climate, with fairly warm summers and mild winters. Though the Trikuta hills enjoy snowfall, the track leading to the temple is seldom blocked. Adequate arrangements are made for the pilgrims to stay at Katra, and from here they undertake the arduous journey up the mountain, in different stages by foot or on ponies. Pilgrims pour in here from all corners, all the year around, and facilities are constantly being expanded and extended

both in Katra as well as in the camps en-route to meet the growing demands of an increasing number of Pilgrims.

Journey - lap after lap

The journey up the hilly track leading to the shrine is undertaken by foot or on ponies, and the surroundings echo the devotional songs and greetings of 'Jai Matadi' uttered by the entranced pilgrims. The first halt of the journey is at Bal Ganga, where a rivulet streams, tinkling in silvery ripples. The stream is revered by devotees and held highly sacred, as it is said that the Goddess washed her hair in this stream on her way to the cave. The pilgrims take a dip in these holy waters before proceeding further.

"Charan Paduka", the second lap of the journey, has a shrine where the foot-prints of the Mother are preserved and worshipped by the devotees much the same way as the foot- print of the Kanya (Virgin Goddess) is worshipped at Kanyakumari. The third lap is half way between Katra and the cave, believed to have been the original abode of Goddess Vaishnav Devi, known as Adkanwari. Here the Pilgrims can have a break to rest and arrangements for refreshments, board and lodging are provided here for the travel-weary Pilgrims.

Just near the Adkanwari, a narrow tunnel called "Garbha Yoni" is found, considered



to be the "Door to Salvation". Pilgrims who succeed in traversing through this dark and narrow tunnel consider themselves blessed with the grace and the love of the Almighty.

Above Adkanwari is a steep cliff rising up high, called Haathi Matha (Elephant's head). The next lap, Chhanj Chhat, peak (7,215 ft.) is a tiresome climb, and

rest and refreshment arrangements are provided here again to revive the fatigued Pilgrim. Next to this is Bhairav Ghat, in a dense forest, where there is a temple for the tyrant Bhairav. This temple is visited by the Pilgrims only on their way back from the cave temple of the Goddess. After this is Mata Da Bagh (Garden of the Mother) and upon crossing this the Pilgrim reaches the mouth of the cave, the abode of the Goddess. It is the end of his arduous journey and the point of fulfilment of his soul's quest, - a treat to his spiritual hunger. The place is called the Durbar, where again the weary Pilgrim gets a chance to rest as he waits eagerly for his turn to enter the narrow passage to the deep cave. The height of the cave is nowhere more than 5 feet and the Pilgrims wade through Charan Ganga, the knee deep icy cold stream that springs up from the feet of the Goddess, and flows out. Standing, bending slightly on an elevated platform, which could hold not

more than ten or twelve persons in a cluster. Upon this, there are three *Pindis*, or vertical rock-protuberances, under tiny gold canopies and decked with glittering garments and flowers. These three *Pindis* represent the Goddesses, Maha Kali, Maha Lakshmi, and Saraswathi, believed to be the three aspects of Goddess Vaishnav Devi.

Pilgrims offer cocoanuts, flowers, incense, clover, cardamom, Supari, Mauli (red cotton thread) and cash. Some also present the Deity with small silver umbrellas and red muslin dupattas adorned with silver thread-work. They get prasad of cocoanuts and flowers and sometimes small coins, that are treasured as sacred tokens from the Mother's feet.

There is a legend recounting the discovery of the cave. It is said that in ancient times, a King named Raja Ramachandra of Desai, lost his way while on a hunting trip and took refuge in this cave to shelter himself from a storm. In the night he had a vision of the Goddess blessing him, and he thereby came to know of her presence in the cave. He spread the sacred story of the shrine, and it gained popularity and drew devotees from all corners of the country. Thus has the Goddess come to be worshipped by her innumerable devotees from that time on, who steadily keep lining up the difficult track winding through the hills, thirsting for a glimpse of her graceful countenance, eagerly seeking her benevolent gaze and blessing.

**- Courtesy: Mother India, Feb. 4, 1973
(based on article by Shri O. P. Sharma).**



Amarnath A Pilgrimage to Faith

HE paused in his ascent, and looked around. There was a look of stunned wonderment in his eyes.

Ever since they crossed Pahlgam, Girish saw nothing around him but beauty. He was an artist and a poet through and through, and love of beauty charged every cell of his blood. When his friends suggested a trip to Amarnath, he accepted it for his love of beauty and adventure and not for his love of God, for he believed himself to be an atheist.

His close friend Sameer would always say, "You only think you are an atheist. You are really not so. For the matter of that, I don't believe there is anything like atheism at all. We all have God in our blood. For some the presence is felt all along and for some the realisation of the presence comes a little late, and for some it does not come at all. But the presence, is there always. I would say that an atheist is one who is not sensitive to the perception of the Divine, not one who is capable of proving the non-existence of it."

Girish invariably answered to all this with a smile, as though to say "All right. Let me feel that presence. Then, I would believe in the existence". When Sameer started him off on this trip, he made his conditions. "Remember I am coming there for my own reasons, not to prostrate before your non-existent God and nonsensical chantings of Pandas in a language that is almost dead and which most of these pilgrims don't understand anyway".

And now he stood, surrounded by overwhelming beauty. It was nature in all her fresh virgin glory unspoiled by the touch of human passion for regularity and rhyme. She looked like the new born babe with its disproportionate body, yet possessing a beauty which surpasses all the muscle, sinew and figurine beauty perceived in the adult. It was a wild and uncontrollable burst of beauty, and Girish felt more and more stunned as the realisation dawned upon him that he was infinitesimally small to drink in this abundance.

Sameer patted him on his shoulder *Chalen, Girish Bhaiyan?* "If you get rooted every now and then, we won't reach the cave in time to see the full high Linga.

"You have nothing but that in your mind. You and Your God! Why don't you let me halt a while? It is such a sin to walk away when there is so much beauty around you". Sameer smiled. "He is my God all right, Girish! and if I could really own him! I don't think I'd let anyone share him with me. Sometimes I feel like selfishly keeping all his glory and beauty for myself. Oh! leave my beliefs alone. The fact is, once you see that Linga, and if it is late, you might blame me for not showing it to you in its entire beauty. You love beauty, and then why grumble to admire it where it is present? To me this Linga represents Shiva the supreme power. To you, may be, it will represent the Supreme Beauty".

Girish could not but appreciate the reason in it. They trudged along to the next halt at Chandanwari. As he lay in his tent in the night, Girish felt a little restless. Early next morning he woke up amidst a burst of beauty. He was literally reclining on a bed of flowers. Large blue and white anemones

smiled shyly up at him. Where were these flowers the night before? Was he too weary after the trek to notice them, or did they spring up all on a sudden? And wherefrom is all this beauty surging out, gushing forth in a cascade? Who is switching it on? These ravines, glaciers, this endless variety of colour, petal, wing or leaf, this galaxy of stars that twinkled and charmed him the night before have all been there even when man existed only as a proposition, a tiny atom to divide and multiply and take shape after a long time.

And he is digging into the earth and shooting into space, to ascertain the elements of things around him. And yet all these existed before he ever appeared on earth.

They started on their journey further, long after all others had gone far beyond, making up for the loss of time by the speed and energy provided by their youthful body and spirit. The trek was becoming more and more difficult, the huge towering peaks all around looming inaccessible above them. A tremendous climb of thousands of feet of steep mountain track and they encountered the narrow path that meandered zig-zag fashion winding amidst and around mountains. Every step had to be taken with caution, and they picked their way through the wilderness wearily. And when the difficulty of access was too much to cope with, Girish was about to turn to Sameer and mutter a few words about "the named silly idea of a supposedly loving father sitting at such difficult and inaccessible places, making his children suffer", they reached the end of the path atop the mountain, and the remark died at the tip of his tongue. He held his breath as

the magnitude of the beauty that lay before him sunk slowly into his senses. The ground was literally a huge carpet, of edelweiss. As he stood gazing on it he revised in his mind the angry thought that he was just a while ago contemplating. "Oh hell! all the trouble of that climb and even more is worth this beauty. And I feel so because I love beauty. They feel so because they love God. Perhaps, where I see beauty alone, they see God, because they believe in him, and their minds are turned to perceive him!" He remembered the faces of some of the other pilgrims. Some were rustic village folk, while others were educated seekers. There were Fakirs, Sannyasis, some who paraded in nude. Yet, what struck you was not any obscenity in that unclad body, but a sense of wonder at the faith that enabled them to endure the bitter cold with nothing but the skin on them. They gathered in little groups, chattering while they climbed and what a mixture *at* language and faces it was, Girish perceived a sense of oneness among them. After all, man-made differences had to die on a path that led away from human habitation to a world, where nature in her primitive stages flourished and reminded you that here, in her lap you evolved from an ape into a human being; and when that first stage is remembered, the differences that developed later would die.

The road passed on about five hundred feet above Sheshnag, where they camped in a cold damp place, at a height of about 18,000 feet. Surrounding peaks glistened in the moon-shine like huge figures of magnificent personal ties with silver crowns ruling over their flock below from the dizzy heights. Below lay the glacier, open and

frightening in its dark depths, yet somehow imposing in its magnitude and sobriety of silence.

In the morning they proceeded to Pancha Tarani, the five crystal streams that coursed through the dry river bed. Here Girish watched the pilgrims taking their dip in each of the five streams, crossing from one to another in their wet garments. The garments clung to their shivering bodies and they called aloud the Lord's name through their chattering teeth. The closeness of the garments revealed every curve in their bodies. Some were young women, who in any place would wrap themselves shyly, not exposing all their beauty. There were the thin, austere bodies of the Sannyasis, their already scanty clothes reduced to almost nothingness in protection, and there were those who had grotesque ugly figures, every bulge and mass of sagging flesh standing out.

"You!", Girish thought, "if you could kill ego, shame, differences and diffidences by merely making them feel your Presence then I admire You for it, whether I believe in You or not! "

He looked at the snow clad gigantic peaks, and it puzzled him, whether these blue peaks with their snow-covered tops gave birth to the ash-covered blue body of Shiva in the primitive mind, or whether a great personality that surpassed their understanding, and yet was real to them, came to be represented and cherished in these peaks.

A sort of goat-path in almost vertical hill sides, becoming in the ascent on the other side a tiny stair-case in the turf, led them on to the last lap of the journey. A mile before the cave was reached, the ice

ceased and there was a clear stream for the pilgrims to bathe. And then they came upon the cave, huge and spacious like a Cathedral. Inside, in the shadow of a deep niche, stood the ice Linga, standing to its peak height, glistening white, shining like the full moon. Girish stood dumb before this magnificence, recalling his friend's words, "If you are late and miss even a slight part of the beauty, you will blame me for not urging you." This is not mere beauty!

This is glory and magnificence taken shape! Little wonder they all stand in raptured devotion chanting only the Name. And where are the unintelligible chantings of a dead language? Here is a God, a phenomenon of unquestionable, answerless, existence. You toil and traverse insurmountable heights to stand in His presence, and your lips form the chantings that come from your heart's core. The prayer is simple and the happiness glorious. Girish stood staring at the pinnacle of ice which glowed with a strange beauty of shape and symmetry that could not have been shaped by any human effort. The Linga glowed softly before him, blissful in its serene white beauty and he gazed at it, unable to turn away his mind and eyes from it. And he felt suddenly very light in mind, floating like an edelweiss in the air, unburdened of all the turbulent thoughts that weighed upon his sensitive mind.

- Adapted from The Collected Works of Sister Nivedita.



The Abode of Siva In Snowy Peaks

If 'Kanyakumari to Kailas' is an adage, ancient and true, that expresses the essential unity of an India that recognises no barriers within. "Kailas" brings to the mental vision of every devout Hindu the picture of Lord Siva and his consort Uma, the Eternal Mother. Though hard to traverse and beset with innumerable hardships, circumambulation of this inaccessible peak is the consummation of the pious desire of pilgrims from all over India. It is not only worshipped by Hindus and Buddhists but also by the Jains, who call it the Asta Pada mountain.

This peak is about 22,028 feet above sea level. Of all the pilgrim centres in India the trek to Manasarovar - Kailas is the most tedious. The only other place comparable to this "Swargarohan" or Muktinath, that lies beyond Badrinath. Even this journey is completed in a few days. But a pilgrimage to Manasarovar - Kailas demands a stay of about three weeks in Tibet - "the roof of the world" under extreme climatic conditions.

It requires one to traverse almost the entire length of the Himalayas with its unpredictable variations of weather, strong winds, treacherous precipices and insufferable cold, which pose a mighty challenge to man's endurance.

The rarified atmosphere here makes breathing difficult, and hence it is found helpful for one to equip oneself with an oxygen mask.

Pilgrims in their zest for scaling insurmountable heights have from time

immemorial walked along these lonely tracks and left behind certain beaten paths, that others coming after them may follow. Four such paths that lead to Manasarovar - Kailas are (1) from Kashmir to



Laddhak, (2) through Nepal to Muktinath, (3) through Dharma Darreh and (4) through Gangotri. These paths wind their solitary ways through deserted dangers. Hence these paths are meant for the anchorites accustomed to the austere path of renunciation and self-denial, who accept danger and death as normal incidents of their life. Even the traders who inhabit the bordering area cross these regions, mounted on mules, yaks or packhorses. There are three routes that are the ones most readily taken: (1) From Tanakpur on the N. W. Railway by bus to Pithor Garh (in Almorah) and from there on through Lipu by foot. (2) From the same rail route to Khat Gotham, then by bus to Kupot (Almora) , then trek through *Otty* ; Jayanti, Kungri-Bingri Ghats and on to Niti Ghat onwards. (3) By the Northern Railway to Rishikesh and from there by bus to Joshi Mutt, and from there by foot. Pilgrims on any of the above three paths do not require a permit to cross over to Tibet. They do not face any inconvenience as far as guide, transport, shelter and food are concerned.

It is only along the route, which passes through Joshi Mutt, that one has to get the assistance of coolies right to the end. The pilgrimage to Kailas is undertaken between the months of June and August. The journey lasts for a period of 1 t to 2 months covering 400 miles, often confronting formidable peaks and crossing deep chasms. Pilgrims have to cross practically the entire length of the Himalayas leaving behind Garbiang, the last town in the Indian territory. Thus away from the sights and sounds of man's perpetual activity, one goes on for days with the undisturbed companionship of forest and mountain peaks and enter the Tibetan territory, where one comes to Takkalkot, where about 300 Buddhist monks reside.

Again a distance of 34 miles covered by huge mountains, plateau lands down purple mountain faces, weird geological formations reaching towards the sky is traversed and then all at once one comes across two vast lakes, surrounded by mountain-peaks. Viewed from an eminence they look like

two over-sized human eyes. Rising between these two lakes is a prominent hill, which resembles a human nose. Of these one in Manasarovar and the other is Rakshastal. The famous Manasarovar is circular or oval in structure. Its sparkling blue or aquamarine waters fill up a depth of 22 miles. According to some learned sources Manasarovar is among the 51 shakti peethas. Its waters are icy cold, and no life could exist here, but a few swans are found floating on the crystal surface of this lake. To see and hear them is an overwhelming experience of shattering noise and beguiling grace. They drift through rippling waters, haughty and languorous until a single hoot of alarm drives them splashing and struggling across the surface, their necks arched with strain. They sweep into the wind and their flight-quills clatter, as the great wings unfurl and settle into a slow undulating beat. There are two species of swans; one is immaculate white and the other slightly golden. Rakshastal is a very broad lake quadrilateral in shape and rounded off at certain points. At places the arms, that form the quadrilateral stream off to great distances that get lost into the mysterious caverns in the surrounding heights. It is said that Ravana had stood in severe penance in this lake to propitiate the great Lord of Kailas. Indications are there to show that once the waters from Manasarovar left by rivulets to join the Rakshastal. Some foreign writers are of the opinion that Rivers Sarayu and Brahmaputra have their origin here. There is no external evidence available to substantiate this to a casual observer. It is said that the waters of the Manasarovar travel for miles through

underground caverns and cascade down to form the source of these rivers.

The biting cold does not encourage the existence of any type of vegetation except grass and a thorny bush that grows to a height of a foot and a half. Bits of multicoloured crystalline rock are found scattered all round the lakes. Mount Kailas is about 20 miles from this place. One gets an enthralling vision of this magnificent mountain before reaching Manasarovar. Carved, moulded and smoothed into a Linga by celestial hands, Kailas is truly a sight for the gods. Surrounded by a fantasy of spires and steeples, which nature has sculptured with her own hands, it looms large into the vision of the pilgrim drawing out of his exhausted body, travel-weary mind and expectant and anguished heart the cry of "Sambho-Mahadeva". Kailas is, indeed, spectacular in that it is the only black granite structure here that appears to have been miraculously fashioned into a Linga - the immutable, eternal and formless symbol worshipped as Siva. This fantastic structure is set amidst 16 peaks of red sandstone that have lent themselves to the ravages of time. Only fourteen of these are discernible; two have almost been flattened out. Gleaming in its immaculate glory Mount Kailas raises its head high above the surrounding peaks, and it bears a crown of perpetual snow. It stands out as a symbol of ineffable grandeur and sanctity. Like pure and unsullied consciousness it rises above the mundane material planes. Scores of rivers and rivulets course down its sides to water the vast plains below and bring life and animation to the whole area. On the whole this structure looks like a mighty sixteen-

petalled lotus with a snowy prominence dominating its centre.

To the pious concourse that has trudged its way up to this summit, away from the tumult of their daily life, on to the tranquil panorama spreading out before them-Kailas is not merely a geological structure of granite surrounded by sandstone-peaks but a veritable temple, where human aspirations find expression in whole-hearted worship. The infinite potentialities latent in man make him forget the vast stretches that he has left behind, the hazardous risks that he has gambled with. He now stands, a humble devotee in front of this Mighty Lord. A complete circumambulation of Mount Kailas with its surrounding peaks covers a distance of 32 miles and takes 3 days. With unflagging spirit he still goes on and takes a dip in the icy waters of Gowri Kund, which has its source in Kailas. Then alone does he feel that his pilgrimage is complete.

To a devout Hindu Kailas is a symbol of that which is pure and inspiring. It is the one shrine, to which his thoughts turn throughout his quest after Truth. The great saints and sages of India and their seers have been associated with it from hoary times. Even in these days of gathering unbelief man turns to Kailas seeking on its snowy heights the peace and tranquility which no other spot of refuge can provide.



The Pilgrimage Range of Kurukshetra

A Compiled Feature

Traditional Importance

KURUKSHETRA, traditionally known as the matrix of Indian thought, was at one time, the most important centre of Aryan culture and it is believed that it was here that Hindu society and religion took a definite form and shape. The great river Saraswathi perennially flowed through this region. On its banks, Sage Vyasa wrote the immortal epic of Mahabharata. The great Vedas, Upanishads and Puranas originated in this part of the land. Pandavas and Kauravas fought the war of righteousness, and Lord Krishna gave the message of the Gita to the inspired perception of Arjuna no wonder, this place occupies a position of great distinction and commands considerable reverence amongst places of pilgrimage in India.

Kurukshetra derives its name from King Kuru, ancestor of the Kauravas and the Pandavas, between whom the war of Mahabharata was fought. It is regarded as a war between the forces of good and evil in which the Pandavas were victorious. Kuru, after an arduous penance was granted a boon whereby Kurukshetra became a holy land despite continuous ravages of foreign conquerors from the north-west, Kurukshetra continued to retain its sanctity. This holy spot, with the ruined mounds of the mighty historic city of Staneshwar on which exists the pitifully small town of Thanesar, through the ages continued to draw vast numbers of pilgrims

from all over our land, throughout the year and particularly on the occasion of the Solar Eclipse occurring every few years.

Centre of Learning and Culture

Kurukshetra was a great centre of learning and culture, and its University vied in range and academic excellence even with Nalanda. Emperor Harsha who reigned in the seventh century made Sthaneshwar the seat of Western Provinces of his Empire, and it became the centre of Sanskrit learning, literature and philosophy. The remains of the stone temples and other spots found in the villages on the banks of Saraswathi and Ghaggar signify power, prosperity and wealth of the realm. Kurukshetra has also been sanctified by various Gurudwaras dedicated to the memory of the Sikh Gurus who visited this place of pilgrimage.

Lying on the high road to Delhi, the place is located on the path of travellers, pilgrims, marauders as well as conquerors. Right up to the eighteenth century Kurukshetra remained practically a battle field where aspirants to the throne of Delhi tried their luck. Conditions became peaceful after the invasions from the North-West stopped after the establishment of the rule of the Sikh Principalities or Mislis. This was about the year 1765, when Ahmed Shah Durand, frustrated in his design to rule over Punjab, finally retreated to Kabul.

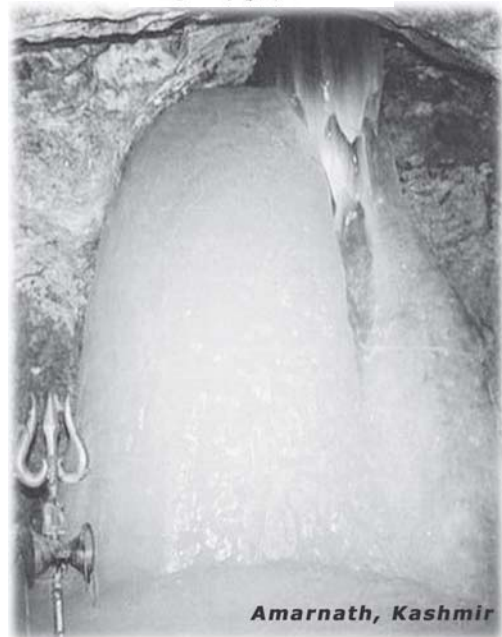
Meeting point of Faiths

The Sikh Rajas who had established their States on this side of Sutlej, such as those of Patiala, Nabha, Jind, Kaithal and Ladwa

established free kitchens for the benefit of the sadhus and pilgrims and endowed the temples and other Holy Places with land and money. Maharaja Ranjit Singh also sent gifts for decorating the temples situated here. It is only in the Post-Independence Era that the famous Gita Mandir (Birla Temple) - a magnificent structure, came to be built.

Kurukshetra presents scenes of intense religious fervour, when lakhs of people from all parts of India representing all shades of Hinduism gather on the occasion of the solar Eclipse and other fairs. According to the Puranas, anybody who takes a bath in the Kurukshetra tanks at the time of the Solar Eclipse acquires immense merit.

It is for the expiation of sins and self-purification that the orthodox, who undertake all sorts of hardships come to have a dip in the holy waters at Kurukshetra on the occasion of the Solar Eclipse.



Pashupathinath

NEPAL is the only independent Hindu Kingdom that lies beyond the frontiers of India. Here one finds an amalgam of what is finest in the Buddhist and Hindu religions. This was the country that mothered one of India's finest sons, who is worshipped by Her people today as an incarnation. He has cast the mantle of His gentle compassion far and wide claiming a following that is scattered all over the globe. His teaching has its root in Hinduism, but it has avoided the curse of "don't touchisms" and the dead-weight of superstitions found in the parent religion. This is also the land that has produced 'Sita' whose very name stands for all that is chaste and pure in womanhood. This is that part of Bharat which has been immortalised in one of the greatest Epics of India as the birth-place of the Sage-King, Janaka, cited as an illustrious example of a perfect Karma Yogin, father of Sita, pattern of India's womanhood.

Some of the highest peaks of the Himalayan range are in Nepal. Dhaval Giri (26,826 ft.), Gonsai Than (26,291 ft.) and Mount Everest (the highest peak) that had posed a challenge to many a mountaineers, is also found here. It has a stunning variety of imposing heights, white-plumed water-falls cascading into rivers and placid lakes.

Nepal has had a separate temple complex although it has been tinged largely with a distinctively Indian touch. The Nepalese architects, like their Indian masters or Tibetan pupils, did not try to unleash their

imagination freely in their works. A special feature of the budding art in Nepal is a mellowed mingling of Buddhist and Hindu ideas and symbols. The great temple of Pashupathinath, on the Bhagmati river, is the famous shrine in Nepal. The temple tower shaped like a Pagoda and has two tiers. The roofs are gilded, and there is a silver plated facade.

The Lord worshipped here has the form of a Linga about three and a half feet high, on which four faces have been carved out. It is said that a tribal chieftain once invaded Nepal in the 13th century; the brooding face of the Lord that he encountered made him flee. Pashupathinath is Nepal's "holy of holies" and binds the Nepalese by a common bond all over the world. Saivism is Nepal's State religion, as the great Pashupathinath is Nepal's presiding Deity. Pashupathinath was once the guardian Deity of the herdsmen. Today he commands the homage of the Kings and Generals of Nepal as well as of the commoners all over India. Pashupathinath's abode in Kathmandu has given it a status akin to Varanasi.

The Bhagmati river flows gently by the temple through a small gorge between two hills. One hill is densely wooded and is called Mrigasthali, because Lord Siva is said to have assumed the form of a deer (Mriga) and roamed these forests. The other hill is called *Kallas*, that is covered mostly by grass.

Flights of steps lead from the gorge to the river, where the devoted come to breathe their last in the hope of securing release by the grace of the Lord Siva. Like the Manikarnika Ghat at Varanasi, this too is a sanctified spot to which people go in order

to shuffle off their mortal coil before "Maheswara", whose "Taraka Mantra" has the power to effect final release of aspiring souls.

Even though it is possible to go to the Pashupathinath at any time of the year, the main festival is held here in February-March (Magh-Krish) on the Sivaratri day. There are two main routes; one is *via* Gorakhpur and the other *via* Muzaffarpur. Pilgrims first arrive at Raksol, from where they proceed to Kathmandu, the capital of Nepal. The city is situated at the confluence of the rivers Bhagmati and Vishnumati, and is about 4500 feet above sea-level. About three miles from Kathmandu is the temple of Pashupathinath.

Pilgrims first have a dip in the river Bhagmati and then proceed to the temple.

People from all over India crowd to this shrine at all times of the year, but specially on the day of Sivaratri. Huge melas are then attended by lakhs of people. There are a number of Dharamashalas, where pilgrims and their relatives are accommodated. Even foreigners come now to worship and meditate in the presence of the great Lord. It is said that once a pious man from Tirhut in north Bihar came to Nepal, during the reign of Pratap Malla. His fervent worship and saintly ways attracted the attention of people around. He is said to have stayed on at Kantipur (Kathmandu) and worshipped at the shrine of Pashupathinath. King Pratap Malla visited him, and accepted him as Guru. This shows that from the earliest of times this shrine had been drawing people from different parts of the country and beyond. Architectural similarities link this place with

far-away temples in Kerala. Historians are of the opinion that the Newars of Nepal and the Nairs of Kerala have a common origin. In the dim past when travel was difficult and pilgrims had to face untold hardships they traversed the length and breadth of India without let or hindrance. These were the unofficial ambassadors that spun the golden thread that runs unseen through the entire multi-racial country of India, welding it into a single fraternity of culture and tradition.

Source: Temples and Legends of Nepal.



Muktinath

MUKTINATH is to Vishnu worshippers as Kailas is to the worshippers of Siva. This shrine, the home of Salagram, situated about 224 Kilometres from Nepal, is accessible by Air, but to those who cannot afford this luxury it is a long and arduous journey through ice-fields, past glaciers and perennial snow. Transport takes one to Bagtung, a place about 55 Kilometres short of Muktinath. Beyond this is the biting cold and bitter stinging winds of the higher altitudes guided by the natives, one has to proceed on foot. About 2 Kilometres from the temple is a rest house.

As the determined pilgrim proceeds along *Daanbhauson* skirting River Gandaki he starts sighting Salagrams, which make their appearance. This river Gandaki has its source in Damodar Kund, but as all along its course one finds the Salagrams it is

considered as the Salagram temple. Here the pilgrim finds Salagram of various sizes, shapes, colours, and identifiable features and accordingly called Hari, Vishnu, Krishna, Ram and Narasimha.

River Gandaki is also called Narayani and Salagrami. The River Narayani that flows through Muktinath has in it seven "geysers" or hot springs, of which one is called Agni Kund. It has its beginning in a mountain. In Muktinath, there are a number of shrines and temples, large and small, as also Rest Houses. Muktinath is considered to be one among the fifty one Sakti Peethas.

Damodar Kund

Damodar Kund lies beyond Mukti Nath at a distance of 20 Km. from it, pathless except for the pilgrims ahead. It is a tedious climb beyond the snow line. After a trek for two long days one sees the spring from which Damodar Kund has its origin. Its waters are clear and sparkling. The people of Nepal believe that there is a powerful Salagram somewhere within the vicinity of Damodar Kund, but due to the unreachable heights at which it is situated pilgrims -are unable to get at it.

The higher the Truth, the more profound and esoteric it is. The diamond is born in the womb of the earth, the pearl in the unfathomable depths of the Ocean. How much less accessible should the diviner symbols be ? Hidden, profound, beyond grasp except for a few struggling, striving seekers of indomitable courage who brave to lofty heights, laugh at death and disaster to reach their goal.



Pilgrim Centres In Tripura

The situation of Tripura

IN the distant past there were two important Pilgrim Centres in the tract now known as the State of Tripura. The first one was situated in southern Tripura at Jolai Bari Pilak about 70 miles south of Agartala, the present capital town, and the second one was in northern Tripura at Kailasahar about 110 miles north-east from Agartala. These two ancient holy places could not stand the ravages of nature and man, and archaeological excavation has also not yet been made to trace out their history, and effective steps to preserve them are yet to be taken. All this has given rise to some contradictory conjectures about their historicity. At present our knowledge about these two hitherto mysterious shrines is very poor.

Past Reflected in Glimpses

At present Jolai Bari Pilak is a fertile paddy land with houses and hamlets here and there built mostly by the Bengali Hindus who migrated here from East Pakistan (now Bangla Desh) . In the past the Buddhist Monks and Chakmas were the dominating people in the vast hilly area, comprising of Arakan, hill tracts of Chittagong, southern Tripura and Noakhali. At the south-western side of Jolai Bari Pilak, a number of shrines stood roughly in a row in east-west direction. The shrines were erected not on a common basement, but on separate

hillocks. The plan, platform, structure, roofing and other superstructures of the shrines are now matters for conjecture. The plinth and the thickness of the brick walls which no longer remain today but were visible even 15 years back, have led to the conjecture that these were single-storeyed structures containing empty space within to place the idols and terra cottas. Kneaded clay served the purpose of cement. All that can be said with an amount of certainty is that it was a holy place of Tantric Buddhism. The discovery of a large number of rock-cut images of Lord Buddha, Durga, Kali, Ganesh, Vishnu, the Lotus feet of Lord Buddha, etc. supports this opinion. This shrine probably dates back to the 7-8th centuries and might have some relation with the Khadag dynasty discovered in an excavate in Bangia Desh.

The Shrine emerges out at a Myth

The shrine built up in northern Tripura is called *Unkoti* which literally means 'one less than a crore'. Numerous wonderful specimens of sculpture are found scattered on either side of the meandering hill-tract, up and below the basin, on the rocky walls of the hill slopes, amidst bushes, some hidden beneath the rich under-growth and others half buried in the ground.

These images of Hindu Deities (e.g. Siva, Durga, Vishnu, Ram, Lakshmana, Ravana, Vrisha (ox) including some of the heroes and deities of Ramayana and Mahabharata bear the silent testimonies of India's past heritage.

About the origin of this *Tirtha* some myths are current among the common people of

the locality. According to one such myth, once Sambhu, the Lord of Kailas accompanied by other gods and goddesses, set out for Varanasi. During the period of the journey when they reached the place now called Unkoti Tirtha, the sun set and the tired gods halted there on condition that if they did not promptly resume the journey very early in the morning before the cock crowed they would be automatically turned into stones. Unfortunately, none but Sambhu got up in time and he alone embarked for Varanasi, leaving the co-travellers to enjoy the slumber at the risk of being turned into stone images. The next morning a cock crowed out from the nearby forest, and as soon as the cry entered their ear, all the sleeping gods except Sambhu were transformed into stone images. Henceforth, this ordinary place had become an important shrine.

A Second Myth and a Third

Another story which explains its origin is that, on the advent of *Kali Yuga*, greed and avarice leave the earth and to take shelter in the Himalayas. They undertook their journey. The remaining portion of the story does not significantly differ from that of the above myth.

There is yet one more lore, which explains its origin in terms of human effort. Once a pious man decided to build here a TirthaKshetra by installing one crore idols of Hindu gods. Accordingly, he employed sculptors, but unfortunately he died before the completion of the task.

The Light of Research

Legends and myths apart, what do the experts say? According to Dr. Niharranjan Ray, Unkoti is a Saiva pilgrimage centre of to be Pala period. The archaeological survey of India remarks: "On the whole, judging by the extant remains at Unakoti, it may be concluded with some certainty that the site has been sacred to the worship of Siva, at least from the 8-9th centuries, if not some centuries earlier." Prof. Jayannath Chaudhuri describes it as an achievement of the Nath Yogis. According to some local scholars, the tribal people living in the surrounding hills constructed it, while a few scholars held the opinion that during the Sena period of Bengal, one minor dynasty, Devas by surname, ruling over Chittagong, Noakhali, Tippera and Sylhet in the 12-13th centuries patronised and financed it. All these must be taken as hypotheses unless and until more positive evidence is forthcoming.

Loneliness, rumbling of spring, deep forest, picturesque hills, chirping of birds, belting of deer, crowing of cock, shade of banyan trees over the speechless images create a supernatural atmosphere, calm and quiet, pleasant and fascinating. To different people, the Unakoti means different things. To the school and college students, it is a beautiful spot for a picnic; to the archaeologists, researchers and scholars it is a mysterious place of historical interest; to the Tripura administrators it is the remnant of ancient glory of Tripura ; it is a Tirtha-Kshetra to the village folks, tribal and Bengali Hindus, who assemble here in thousands once every year on the day of "Poush-sankranti", and take their holy bath.

Through the Medieval and Modern Periods

During the medieval and modern periods in the history of Tripura, the Tipra Kings built, re-built and repaired a large number of temples and tanks in and outside their Kingdom. In the present-day Tripura, there are a large number of temples which are concentrated mainly at three places: Udaipur, Old Agartala and Agartala. Udaipur which is about 33 miles towards south from Agartala has been described by Prof. Dr. Lahiri as the town of temples and tanks. Here stand the temples dedicated to Tripura Sundari (Kali); Hari, Vishnu, Durga, Mahadev and Jagannath. The present condition of these temples is deplorable. Most of these ancient monuments are now "dead", deserted and ruined. At Old Agartala there is the famous temple of 14 deities (Chauddha Devta). At Agartala there are temples for Lakshmi Narayanan, Siva, Jagannath, etc. Out of all these temples, only two temples, namely Tripureswari temple at Udaipur and Chauddha Devta temple at Old Agartala, still attract millions of people, and these two shrines are regarded with awe by the local Hindus of the hills and of the plains as important pilgrim centres.

About the Tripura Sundari temple, Prof. Lahiri writes: "Situated on a low hillock, the temple of Tripura Sundari at Udaipur is regarded by Hindus as one of the Pithastanas. The temple was constructed by Dhanya Manikya in the year 1501-1502 A.D. (1423 Saka era). It underwent some repairs during the reign of Ram Manikya and again in the year 1857-1858) A.D. (1779 Saka era)." (Lahiri, K.: "Temples of

Tripura", *Amrita Bazaar Patrika*, March 12, 1973).

The Temple, the Tank and the Tortoises

This temple is claimed to be one of the 51 *Pith as* mentioned in the *Tantras*. The temple stands on a hillock; around the temple there are a number of *Yatrinivasas* (shelters for pilgrims); down the hillock there is a market place particularly notable for sweet-meat shops; beyond the temple there is a big tank called Dhani Sagar, famous for big and old tortoises, saul and gajar fishes. The pilgrims touch them and offer fried rice, biscuits and nuts. It is reported that when the hour of death draws near, the tortoises come up from water, lie prostrate at the door of the temple and breathe their last.

The temple faces the west; it has two doors: one by the western side and another by the north side of the temple. It is erected on a raised, square-size platform. The sanctum of the temple stands in the middle of the platform; there is an open verandah on the four sides of the temple for circumambulation. The sanctum is square at the outside and circular inside. Four vertical pillars, outwardly circular in shape and tapering upward, stand at the four corners of the walls. On the body of the three sides (north, east and south) of the wall a number of horizontal bands connect the pillars. The convex roof has four corners, which project downward and drain out water. The dome above the roof consists of two big urn-like, decorative structures of unequal shape, the upper one being smaller than the one beneath it has a metallic streamer to fly at the top.

Worship with Appropriate Offerings

To worship the goddess with appropriate offerings and sacrifice of a he-goat throughout the year, Brahmin priests have been appointed and granted lands by the Maharajas of Tripura. About two hundred people daily visit this shrine, pay their homage and get '*asirvad*' from the 'Mother'. But on two famous occasions Siva Chaturdasi and Diwali, the vast area crowded with Pilgrims. On these two sacred dates, this *Pithasthan* attracts millions of pilgrims from all corners of Tripura and from Bangia Desh also; big fairs are held, and the government of Tripura takes special care for the maintenance of law and order. From far off, backward villages infested with wild animals, the Vanavasi Hindus of various communities (e.g. the Tipras, Riangs, Jamatias and the oantias) come here on foot.

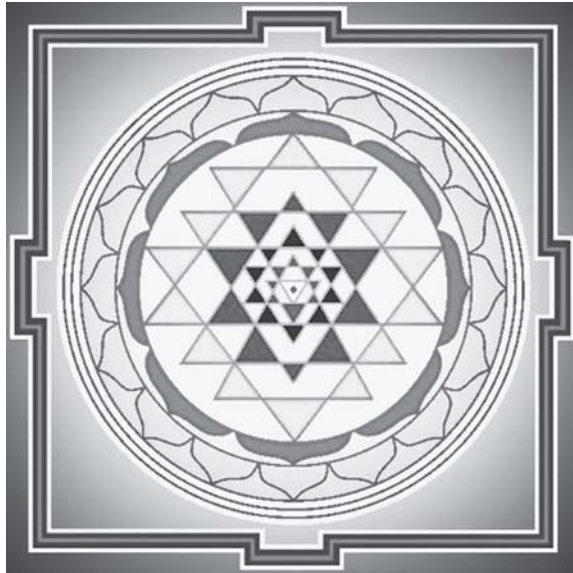
The "Chauddha Devta Bari" attracts millions of pilgrims on a typical but gorgeous occasion called *Kharchi Puja* - a week-long worship held every year starting from Suklaashtami (8th bright moon day) in the month of Ashar (June-July). Here 14 heads made of brass metal are worshipped by the Tipra tribal priests. The national pantheon of the Tipras mainly consists of these 14 gods. Formerly the seat of these deities was at Udaipur.

During the middle of the 18th century, Muslim attacks and invasion from Noakhali under the leadership of Samser Gazi, an upstart but ambitious young Muslim leader, defeated and compelled the then worthless Tipra Kings to escape northward and to shift their capital, from Udaipur to Old Agartala. Along with the capital, the seat

of the 14 gods was shifted.

A Temple of Tribal Gods

The temple faces the west and stands on plain land on the east bank of a big pond; on the northern bank of the pond the palace was built. In the vicinity of the temple, there is a primary school, a bazaar, a



monastery and a yatrinishas. At the outskirts of the temple, villages have grown up. From the architectural standpoint, there is no difference between the Tripureswari temple and the Chaudha Devata temple; but from the ritualistic point of view there are significant differences. The former is a temple of a single goddess (Kali) being officiated by the Brahmins. The latter is a temple of 14 float crèmes being officiated by the tribal priests. This does not, however, mean that these two temples stand poles asunder. In fact, the reverse is true. The characteristic feature of Hinduism having been throughout the ages assimilation and modification rather than

conversion, what continues in connection with the worship of the 14 deities is a sort of blending or synthesis between the tribal and orthodox Hindu rites and rituals. Human sacrifice has been stopped, and some crude tribal practices have been omitted, while still retaining mild practices with which some Vedic rites have been added, sacrifice of a He-goat, offering of cooked food, meat, egg, wine, recitation of myths go with the offerings of fruits, basil leaf, durbha grass, sandal and incense. Tribal priests known as *Contai*, *Naran*, *Badijang* and *Galim* who are otherwise Kshatriyas officiate in the temple, while a Bangalee Brahmin reads out the holy book, *Chandi*; the idea of installing the deities in a temple and worshipping them twice daily seems to have been borrowed from the Brahmins.

Hierarchy of Priests

In this temple an elaborate hierarchy of priests and Sevaks exist; all of them must be males. They are:

Contai : Chief Priest; officiates at the Puja and is in charge of over-all supervision.

Naran : Assists the *contai* and officiates during the absence or illness of the *contai*.

Badiiang : Cooks meat and food offering.

Galim: Sacrifices the animal.

Brahmin: Daily reads out the holy book, *Chandi*.

Tauiya : Prepares oblations for the deities.

Binandia : Looks after the temple, monasteries and temple property.

Mali : Sweeps the temple, washes the dishes.

Professor Chatterjee observes: " The Tipras, like the other Bodo groups had their tribal religion much modified by Hinduism.

But among them, and under the aegis of the ruling house of Tripura, a good deal of their old Pre-Hindu religion and its rituals is preserved, as a part of the State religion" (Chatterjee, S. K. *Kirata Ianakriti*: p. 218; Calcutta; 1950).

Out of the many temples built by the kings of Tripura, *Chaudda devta* temple is the only shrine, where tribal deities in bust-size have been housed and are being worshipped. These deities, both male and female, have two types of names: for the general public they are named after some Brahmanical deities (Hara, Uma, Hari, Ma, Vani, Kumar, Ganapathi, Vidhi, Ksha, Abdhi, Ganga, Sikhi, Kama and Himadri); but they have their separate tribal names known only to the priests. Attempts have, however, been made to collect and expose the secret names.

The late Kailash Chandra Sinha gives (in his *Rajmala*, pp. 24-28) the names of some important deities worshipped by the Tipras including the 14 deities. They are as follows:

Motai Katar, Lampra, Sangrang, Tuima, Mailuma, Khuluma, Buracha, Bani Rao, Motai Kotarma (consort of Motai Katar) and Nakehu Motai (goddess of snakes) Thani Rao, Budirok, Garaiya and Kalaiya.

An Echo in Tribal Names

Prof. Dr. Kartick Lahiri's collection slightly differs from that of Sinha Lahiri (in his *Tripurar Mandir*, p.9) who notes the following names:

Burasa, Lampra, Akhatra, Bikhatra, Sangrama, Thoom Nairog, Banirog, Tuibuk, Kalakshiraja, Kular Bhang Raja, Santhali Raja, Jhubukandanda Raja, Naga Raja, Kala

Sri and Jampira.

The tribal priests maintain strict secrecy. Unless and until they disclose the tribal names of the deities, it may be disappointing to try to collect the corresponding tribal names of the 14 Sanskritised names. Owing to linguistic difference and unusual secrecy maintained by the tribal priests, the Brahmin priests could not properly understand the glory of the tribal deities and the individual differences between them and naturally, their translation is not without error.

Hara, Uma and Hari - in the Centre of Pantheon

Throughout the year only three deities Hara, Uma and Hari are worshipped. The rest of the eleven are put inside a wooden box, and these eleven deities remain 'asleep' there. They are 'awakened' and brought out from the box in the evening of the 7th bright moon day in Ashar. To awaken the deities, the *contai* recites from memory, some mythical hymns. These primitive myths narrate, in the typical tribal fashion and faith, the history and origin of the deities, birth-stories of some sacrificial animals and of the sword. Human sacrifice, considered by them to be the best of all sacrifices, has now been stopped, and a simplified form of it in the shape of sacrifice of human images made of clay, has been substituted.



Assam, the Peerless

Sri B. K. Barua and Sri V. S. Murthy

ASSAM with a great and ancient heritage has contributed richly both to the evolution and enrichment of the civilisation of India. As the Frontier Province of India on the north-east, Assam has a special position and importance. The modern name of the province of Assam is actually of quite recent origin. In the ancient records it was referred to under the names of Lauhitya and Kamarupa. Some Assamese writers hold that when Tibeto-Burmese invaders first migrated into these alluvial plains they were attracted by the abundant natural resources and unlimited food supply before them. It was for this reason they say that the invaders named the country Assam, meaning peerless or unique.

Assam is situated in a strategic position lying close to Bhutan, Tibet, China, Burma and Bangladesh. There are passes through the hills to Bhutan, Tibet, China and Burma. These passes played a conspicuous role in shaping the cultural and economic life of Assam. Geographically, Assam is covered by rivers like Kapili, Dhansiri, Subhansiri, Dikhow, Paglagia and others. The most important of them all and the one that runs through the heart of the State is the river called Brahmaputra or Sri Lauhita. It enters the north-eastern corner of Assam through the Mishmi hills and turning west passes through all the districts of Assam. For generations, the Assamese have had their fields watered with its blessed waters, their whole history and culture being intimately

connected with the Brahmaputra.

Sivsagar

Sivsagar came into prominence under the Ahom rulers. The Ahom rule secured for Assam several centuries of good and strong government. The most notable achievement of the Ahom rule was the political unification of the country which in course of years led to social, cultural and linguistic unity. It also awakened the spirit of oneness among the Assamese.

Ahoms were great builders. They set apart a good portion of the revenue of the State for the construction of the temples, and most of these stand to this day as a monument to their artistic and aesthetic sense, as seekers of light.

The Negriting Temple

The temple at one time possessed vast lands and engaged a number of people in its service. It attracts a number of devotees from all over the State.

The temple of Negriting or Negheriting is situated in Sibsagar district near Assam Trunk Road, some 26 km. from Jorhat and about 22 km. from Golaghat. Built on a hillock this temple is surrounded by tea gardens to the front and to the left. To the right there are wide open spaces extending to the Brahmaputra River. This temple is dedicated to Lord Siva.

It traces its origin to Arya Muni. There is mention of the temple existing here in the Puranic age worshipped by this sage. The sage struck upon the idea of making this place a second Kasi, and collected a number of Lingas for the purpose, and they now

lie buried in a place called Sivatal.

The deity of the temple was discovered by Raja Pratap Singh who enshrined it, but the flood waters of the Brahmaputra damaged it. Therefore, Raja Rajeswar Singh built the present temple on the top of a hill. The *Ahom* rulers called Lord Siva Bar Bopai (the great father) and paid great reverence to the deity. It is said that the King used to take his meal only after receiving the prasad from this temple. This Siva temple is an attractive structure. The sanctum has a Baba Linga. There are a number of niches on the surrounding wall that house exquisite sculptures of Gods and Goddesses. The temple is surrounded on sides by subsidiary shrines dedicated to Lord Ganesha, Surya, Durga, Vishnu. Every shrine has a separate portico attached to it.

The Siv Dol

The Siv Dol is situated on the banks of the Sivsagar tank. It stands on a four-acre ground. The temple belongs to the *dvaikuta* consisting of two; a *garbagriha* and a mantap by replicas called Ura Manjari. There are two more temples, one dedicated to Vishnu and the other to the Devi.

The Devi Dol

The Devi Dol resembles the Siv Dol at Sivsagar. In this temple a tier of gold-plated towers is placed on a solid circular base made of bricks. On the walls of the temple are a number of sculptured panels. In between the panels are niches for images. This place gets crowded with devotees during Sivaratri.

Parasuram Kund

On the north-eastern frontiers of Assam, at its foot-hill, stands a lake which is called Parasuram Kund. Sage Parasurama is said to have performed penance here. It is said that he struck the rock and caused this stream to flow out. This rivulet later on comes down as Brahmaputra. It is called Brahmaputra, because it originates from Brahma Kund. Originally, it streamed out of the Brahma Kund and fell into Lohit Sarovar. From here he brought it down, and the spot where this stream touched the ground is called Parasuram Kund.

-Adapted from Temples and Legends of Assam.



The Ramakrishna Leelasthanas as Pilgrim Centres of Modern India

SWAMI BODHASWARUPANANDA

Introduction

To speak of the Pilgrim Centres of India is to speak of India herself in her entirety; for as Swami Vivekananda put it, "If there is any land on this earth that can claim to be the blessed Punjabhumi, the land to which souls on this earth must come to account for Karma, the land to which every soul that is wending its way Godward must come to attain its last home it is India". It is common knowledge that places associated with the lives and activities of saints and Godmen become places of pilgrimage and spiritual culture. And, which country on earth has been as prolific as India, all through history, in producing saints and Godmen all over her land? Aye, this is her peculiar mission, her *raison d'être*: "To conserve, to preserve, to accumulate, as it were, into a dynamo, all the spiritual energy to pour forth in a deluge on the world whenever circumstances are propitious". So it is that right from the last bit of rock off Kanyakumari in the south to the lofty mountains beyond Kashmir in the north, from Dwaraka in the west to Dimapur in the east, there is not a bit of land in this country that had not been made a Tirtha either by the birth or by the works of some Saint or Godman. Nor is this Tirtha-

making but a feature of her past history only it is a recurring phenomenon in her national life, down to this living present. The numerous new centres of pilgrimage and spiritual culture that have developed in the land in recent times bear testimony to it. Of these new-born pilgrim centres, the few that derive their holiness from the life and activities of Sri Ramakrishna, the prophet of Modern India, form the subject-matter of this article. The places sketched here are: the Holy Kamarpukur, the Kali Temple of Dakshineswar, and the Belur Math - the first mentioned being the birth-place of 'the phenomenon', Sri Ramakrishna; the second being the field of his spiritual sports; and the last mentioned being his legacy to posterity. These Ramakrishna *Leelasthanas* or venues of the divine sports of Ramakrishna, are perhaps the most important ones among the new resorts of spiritual culture in Modern India; for, the personality which imparted holiness to them is one "who was the consummation of two thousand years of the spiritual life of three hundred million people" and whose soul "animates modern India" to quote the words of his French biographer Romain Rolland.

THE HOLY KAMARPUKUR

A bare 137 years ago a native pilgrim of Bengal, walking along the road to Puri from Burdwan and reaching the wayside rest-house at the village of Kamarpukur in the Arambagh Sub-division of Hooghly District, would have left the place after a little rest, without in any way tempted to get into the interior of that village. Today, not to speak of the natives, numerous pilgrims from all parts of the world eagerly look

forward to that day when they could pay a visit to that village, and feel blessed by partaking of the spiritual atmosphere there; for, since the birth of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna there on February 18, 1836, it has become the holiest of the holy places of pilgrimage! So continuous is the stream of pilgrims that pours into this village, that it has had to put up a number of modern buildings in its still ancient-looking environs, to accommodate it all. Thus the village now wear the look of a motley assembly of mansions and mud-huts, providing shelter to the myriad men and women devotees who frequent the place from all over the world.

Kamarpukur is in fact a cluster of three hamlets existing in the shape of a triangle at the junction of the districts of Hooghly, Bankura and Midnapur. One who has become familiar with the supernormal incidents in the biography of Sri Ramakrishna wonders whether there is any spiritual significance in that physical shape of the Master's birthplace; for he may remember Ramakrishna's vision of the Divine Creatrix (*Brahmayoni*) as a luminous triangle giving birth to innumerable worlds every moment. Could it not be construed that through this physical semblance of the Divine Source, Kamarpukur perhaps proclaims, in a special sense, its identity as the Motherland of the Master?

Situated at a distance some sixty miles to the north-west of Calcutta, this pilgrim centre is approachable either by road all through, or partly by rail, and partly by road transport. From Howrah Station one can travel up to Tarakeshwar (30 miles) by electric train and thence to Kamarpukur (28 miles) by bus. This is the shortest and

most popular route, besides which there are two other not-so-short approaches to Kamarpukur from Howrah. They are (1) from Howrah to Burdwan by electric train (60 miles) and thence to Kamarpukur by bus (30 miles), and (2) from Howrah to Vishnupur by train (115 miles) and thence to Kamarpukur by bus (28 miles).

The natural beauty and idyllic calm that pervade this village defy verbal description. Surrounded by extensive, lush green paddy fields, in the autumn it looks like an island floating in a vegetable sea; and in the winter, when the paddy fields are dry, with the dot of the red earth covering the eroded landscape, it wears the look of an oasis in a semi-desert. Agriculture is the main occupation of the villagers, but cottage industries such as the manufacture of cotton cloth by handloom, hookah pipes of ebony, sweetmeats, etc. also thrives as means of livelihood. The villagers are a generally religious folk of a peace-loving nature. Worshippers of different Gods and Goddesses and men of several communities live here in perfect harmony and peace. Numerous religious festivals, such as the worship of goddess Manasa and of Siva in the month of Chaitra (March-April), and of Hari in Vaisakh or Jaishtha, the Durga Puja in Aswin and the Janmotsava of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna in Falgun (February-March), etc. are conducted with great éclat and devotional fervour. Of these festivals, the last mentioned viz. the Janmotsava or Birthday Celebration of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna, of course, occupies the pride of place now.

Places of pilgrim interest in Kamarpukur**(1) Sri Ramakrishna Temple:**

The centre of pilgrim interest and veneration in Kamarpukur is the birth-place of Sri Ramakrishna. On the exact spot of his birth now stands a beautiful stone temple enshrining a marble statue of that modern Incarnation of God. At the time of Sri Ramakrishna's birth there was only a shed here for the husking machine and an open fire-place for boiling the paddy. The likeness of these things, viz. the husking machine, the fire-place, and a lamp suggestive of the environment of his birth, can be seen carved on the wall of the altar in the new temple.

Swami Saradananda, a direct disciple and the biographer of Sri Ramakrishna, records an interesting incident that occurred immediately after the Master's birth and makes the above-mentioned fire-place noteworthy. Chandra Devi, the mother of the Master, gave birth to her Divine Son in the early hours of 1836 in the shed referred to above. Her nurse, Dhani, after attending to the needs of the mother turned her attention towards the newborn babe, and found to her dismay that the child had managed to move away into the open fire-place and lay there besmeared with the ashes! Wondering at this happening and at the infant's not uttering a singly cry in spite of the ashes on its body, Dhani picked the child to find it of the size of not a new-born babe, but a six-months-old infant! The present stone temple was built in 1951 by the Ramakrishna Math authorities and it is maintained by them. The marble image of Sri Ramakrishna in the temple was

installed on May 11, 1951 and since then, has been and is, being worshipped daily. The temple faces the southern direction, and has a Natmandir built in front of it for the devotees to sit and conduct Bhajans, etc. during the worship.

(2) The Temple of Sri Ramakrishna's family deity:

To the right of the Sri Ramakrishna Temple a few yards' away stands a smaller temple facing the east, dedicated to Sri Raghuvir (Sri Rama), the family deity of Sri Ramakrishna. This too was a mud-hut previously. The location and dimensions of the present structure are exactly the same as those of the original mud-hut. Besides the *salagrama* (round stone emblem) of Raghuvir, an earthen jar representing goddess Sita, a Rameswara Siva-linga, an image of a Gopala, and a *Salagrama* of Narayana are kept in this shrine and worshipped every day. (The last two deities were worshipped by the niece of Sri Ramakrishna, and are later additions - they were not there when Sri Ramakrishna had performed worship in this temple.) How the main deity of this temple, the *Salagrama* of Raghuvir, which Sri Ramakrishna himself had worshipped with great devotion for many years after his investiture with the sacred thread at the age of nine, came to be installed there is told in a thrilling story by Swami Saradananda in his monumental work, *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master* (IV Edn. 1970, Pp. 23-24): "One day he (Kshudiram, the father of Sri Ramakrishna) went to another village on business. On his way back he became tired and rested under a tree. The vast, lonely field and a soft, pure breeze brought repose to his troubled mind and tired body. He felt a

strong desire to lie down, and no sooner had he done so than he was overcome with sleep. He then had a dream in which he saw standing before him his chosen Ideal, Bhagavan Sri Ramachandra, in the guise

shortcomings : Take me with you.' Unable to control his feelings at the Lord's unexpected grace, Kshudiram burst into tears. Just then his dream came to an end. When he woke, Kshudiram wondered at the

strange-ness of his dream and thought, 'Ah! If only such good fortune would be mine!' Then suddenly his eyes fell upon the paddy field close by, and at once he recognized it as the very place he had seen in the dream. Out of



of a divine Boy, His body green like the tender blades of Durva grass. Pointing to a particular spot, the Boy said, 'I have been staying here for a long time without food and without anyone to take care of me. Take me to your house: I have a very strong desire that you should serve me'. Kshudirarn was overcome with emotion and said, paying homage to the Lord again and again : O Lord, I am without devotion and am very poor. Service befitting you is not possible in my hut, and I shall lose all grace should there be any flaw in it. So why do you make such a difficult request to me?' At this the Boy Ramachandra comforted him and said graciously, 'Do not be afraid; I shall not take offence at any

curiosity he approached the spot, where he saw a beautiful *Salagrama* stone and a snake with expanded hood guarding it. Eager to possess the stone he hastened towards it. On reaching it he found that the snake had disappeared and that the *Salagrama* was lying at the entrance to its hole. Seeing that the dream had come true, his heart leaped in joy, and he felt no fear of the snake, convinced that he had received God's command. Crying out, 'Glory to Raghuvir!', Kshudirarn took the stone in his hands. He carefully examined the marks on it and, with his knowledge of the Sastras, found it to be a Raghuvir Sila (*Salagrama*). Beside himself with joy and wonder, he returned home, performed the

purificatory ceremony of the *Salagrama* according to the Sastras, and installing it as the family deity, began to worship it daily. Even before he came upon the *Salagrama* in this strange manner Kshudiram had been worshipping Ramachandra, his chosen Deity, every day". This incident happened before the birth of Sri Ramakrishna.

(3) Sri Ramakrishna's Living Room: On the northern side of the Raghuvir Temple, and to the northwest of the Sri Ramakrishna Temple stands a mud-hut facing the south. This was the living room of Son Ramakrishna all through his stay at Kamarpukur. He stayed at Kamarpukur for 16 years at a stretch, from his birth; and thereafter he stayed there at intervals, from his 22nd and 44th year, for about 6 years. This sacred room is now a part of his shrine and is frequented by innumerable devotees who feel purified and spiritually elevated by bowing down on its floor and sitting there even for a fraction of a moment.

To the east of this living room of the Master and at the rear of the Temple is another two- storeyed mud-house, also facing south. The ground floor of this house was in existence as part of the homestead during Sri Ramakrishna's lifetime. The second storey was built, after his passing away, by his nephew Ramlal with the financial help of the Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi. This house is now used as a store room for the shrine. On its eastern side is the parlour where Sri Ramakrishna used to meet his visitors. A road by the northern side of this parental homestead of Sri Ramakrishna divides it from the now famous Yogi's Siva Temple and the recently built guest-houses

for pilgrims. The Yogi's Siva Temple became famous because of the strange association it has with Sri Ramakrishna's birth. Srimati Chandra Devi, the Master's mother, before she had conceived her Divine Son, had a wonderful spiritual experience while standing in front of this temple. It is best expressed in her own words: "On another occasion when I was speaking with Dhani in front of the temple of the Jugis, I suddenly saw a divine effulgence come from the holy image of the great God Siva, fill the temple and rush towards me in waves. Taken by surprise, I was on the point of telling Dhani about it, when all of a sudden the light engulfed me and swiftly entered into my body. Stunned by wonder and fear, I fell down unconscious. Afterwards, when Dhani had helped me to recover, I told her everything. At first she was surprised; then she said, 'You had an epileptic fit '. But I have the feeling that the light has been in my womb ever since, and that I am pregnant !" (*Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master* by Swami Saradananda, IV Edition 1970 p. 36).

Passing from the road, through a gate, which opens into Sri Ramakrishna's homestead at its eastern side and under a mango tree- (This mango tree is an object of great interest and veneration to the devotees of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna, for it was planted by the Master himself when he was a young man. How many thousands of its leaves have not travelled to distant lands, as far as to America, and found an honoured place on the altar of the worship-rooms of devotees! Oh! The potency of holy association!) - one enters the Temple precincts of Sri Ramakrishna. Standing face to face with that spiritually vibrant and

living presence at the sacred spot of the Saviour's birth, who will not melt in devotion and cry out, with that American devotee who wrote the travelogue *A Yankee and the Swamis* (John Yale, 1961 Edn. George Allen & Unwin Ltd., London): "I am here, I can see this with my own eyes. I am blessed forever. I feel a wish to intone a carol to the newborn saviour. It must needs be of my own idiom, my own tradition; that is all I know".

(4) Other Spots Sanctified by His Boyhood association :

All this is about just the birth-place of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna. There are, besides, a number of spots associated with his *Balaleela* or boyhood sport, in and around Kamarpukur, which the pilgrims frequent with great devotion. The more important ones among them are (1) the Haldarpukur Tank (where Sri Ramakrishna as a boy used to play with his friends, splashing water) ; (2) the house of the Lahas (Dharmadas Laha the owner of this house was an intimate friend of the Master's father, Sri Kshudiram; and Gayavishnu, his son, was a bosom friend of young Gadadhar (Sri Ramakrishna's boyhood name). This house is associated with many holy memories of Sri Ramakrishna's early boyhood); (3) the tol (primary school) in front of the Laha's House, where Sri Ramakrishna studied for a time from his 5th year; (4) the two cremation grounds, Budhui Moral situated to the east of the village, and Bhutir Khal to the north-west of Sri Ramakrishna's house. (Sri Ramakrishna used to resort these solitary places to practise contemplation); (5) Manik Raja's mango grove, where Gadadhar with his friends used to play and enact dramas etc;

(6) the choultry or rest-house at the south-east corner of the village on the road to Puri, where young Gadadhar used to visit the itinerant monks and offer some small services to them, thus earning their friendship and affection. It is told that one day the boy Gadadhar after his visit to the monks there returned home dressed in their fashion, at which his mother got alarmed lest her dear son should be taken away from her by the monks. She was pacified only after the monks themselves went to her and assured her there was no such danger; (7) the Temple of the Goddess Visalakshi at Anur, a village situated about two miles to the north of Kamarpukur. (Sri Ramakrishna as a boy of eight had an experience of divine ecstasy, while going with some of the ladies of his neighbourhood to worship the Goddess here. It is said that as Gadadhar was singing the glories of the deity, his body became stiff, tears flowed down his cheeks and he lost outer consciousness. A lady by name Prasanna, the daughter of Dharma Das Laha, surmising that it was all the mystic influence of the Goddess, chanted Her name in the ears of the boy, which brought him back to normal consciousness! ; (8) Jayarambati, the birth-place of the Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi, the Divine consort and first disciple of the Master: situated at the junction of the districts Bankura and Hooghly, this sacred tirtha lies three mile to the west of Kamarpukur. Here was born on 22 December 1853 that Motherhood's Acme' as the daughter of Ramachandra Mukhopadhyaya and Shyama-sundari Dcvi. She married her Divine Husband at Jayarambati at the age of six, and later shared his task of spreading the Divine Message in earth at his

Sahadharmacharini in the *real* sense of the term! In loving memory of that Grace which descended on earth at that point, her devotees have raised a magnificent temple to her. It was completed in 1923 on the Akshaya-tritiya day, and the foundation day has been celebrated there ever since with special Puja and Homa, and devotees in large numbers gather and pay their homage then to this Universal Mother. A pilgrimage to Kamarpukur is not considered complete without a visit to this sacred birth-place of the Holy Mother and the several spots associated with her life there. For want of space we shall not elaborate on the spots here.

Speaking of his Master, Swami Vivekananda had observed: "He (Sri Ramakrishna) had lived in one life the whole cycle of the national religious existence in India". And it will not be incorrect if we call the Kali Temple at Dakshineswar the stage on which the major part of that re-enacting of the spiritual history took place, for since his nineteenth year, except for a few short trips to his native village and a pilgrimage to Benaras and Brindavan, he had practically lived there all through his life in flesh. It was at the precincts of this temple that he experimented on the full spectrum of spiritual life. Beginning with an unaided yet all-consuming quest for God around the year 1856, his spiritual experiment moved through the sixty-four Tantra Sadhanas under the guidance of his woman Guru, Bhairavi Brahmani (c. 1861-1864), the five Vaishnava modes of worship such as the Santa, Dasya, Sakhya, Vatsalya, and Madhura Bhavas, under the Vaishnava ascetic, Jatadhari (c. 1864), the Advaita Sadhana under the tutelage of Totapuri

(c. 1864-65), the practice of Islam (c. 1868), the practice of Christianity (c. 1872), and culminated in the worship of the Shodasi in the person of Sri Sarada Devi, his divine consort (1872). It was here in the Kali temple again, that through coming in contact with the great leaders of thought and prominent men of the time, he gave out his divine call of spiritual resurgence and harmony of religions. Thus, if Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna was the *Avatara Varishtha*, (Divine Incarnation par excellence) as Vivekananda called him, the Bhavatarini Temple at Dakshineswar is the Abode par-excellence of his spiritual presence !

Situated four miles above Calcutta on the eastern bank of the Bhagirathi, this temple, like the Saviour who sanctified it, had a supernormal origin. A wealthy woman by name Rani Rasmani wanted to visit Varanasi as an act of devotion, and she made elaborate arrangements for the journey, when on the night before her departure she had a dream in which Kali, her chosen Ideal, commanded her to build a temple for Her on the Ganges and arrange for Her daily worship there, instead of going to Kasi for the Lord's Darshan. On this being done, She promised, she would manifest Herself there and receive the offerings of devotees. Overjoyed at this shower of abundant Grace from the Deity, the Rani who was a great devotee, cancelled her trip to Kasi, and started the construction of a magnificent temple for the Mother of the Universe, on a plot of land measuring 20 acres, purchased from one Mr. Hastie on the eastern bank of the Ganges at Dakshineswar. It took her eight years to complete the construction. Little did she know then that, through that act, the

unseen hand of a benevolent Destiny was leading her not only to her spiritual fulfilment but also to immortal fame as the provider for the Spiritual Resurgence that was to follow in the history of man! The Providence that prompted the construction of the temple seems to have also decreed that, in keeping with the spirit of the Prophet whose abode it was to become, it should be, in the very structure, a meeting ground of diverse faiths; for, on a land that was partly an old Muslim graveyard, and purchased from a Christian, it stands enshrining the deities of all the three major sects of Hinduism - Sakta, Saiva, and Vaishnava! To that stage, so set in advance by Nature, came Sri Ramakrishna, in 1855 when he was nineteen years old, to play the role of a Prophet of Harmony and Peace! And, accomplishing that task he left to a holy Tirtha, in October 1885 when he shifted to Shyampukur, in the first instance, and thence to the Garden House at Cossipore to close the show and to finally draw the curtain on his earthly performance!

The Shrines and the Sacred Spots in the Temple Garden

The Shrines of Sakti (Bhavatarini), Siva and Sri Krishna (Radhakanta) are laid in a rectangle surrounding a tile-paved courtyard. On the western side of the rectangle, bordering the Ganges, are twelve Shrines dedicated to Siva, broken into two groups of six each by an open portico, which forms the main entrance to the temple court for the visitors coming by boat along the river and landing at the bathing ghat there. This bathing ghat and this

portico are spots of great spiritual association. It was at this bathing ghat that Destiny ordained Totapuri, the great Advaita teacher, to land, and it was at this portico that he first met Sri Ramakrishna for whose initiation into Vedanta Sadhana he was brought to Dakshineswar. It is recorded that Totapuri saw Sri Ramakrishna seated in an abstract mood in the portico. As he looked at the young man's face it impressed him as that of an advanced seeker of Truth, and so he volunteered to initiate him in Advaita Sadhana. Sri Ramakrishna accepted the offer only after consulting his Divine Mother in the Temple and gaining Her consent, and Her assurance that the stranger was the teacher brought by Her specifically for teaching him Advaita. Totapuri on his part did not attach any importance to that assurance of the Mother - until, we suppose, he actually saw ' Her Child ' ascend the height of Advaitic realisation, *Nirvikalpa Samadhi*, at an unbelievably short period. What he himself could achieve only after forty years of hard Sadhana, Sri Ramakrishna achieved in a single day! But for the Divine Will, could it be thus accomplished?

On the opposite side of the portico, in the middle of the courtyard stands the temple of the Divine Mother, Bhavatarini - a large building facing south, with nine domes and spires. The Divine Mother's image in it is made of black basalt, about three feet in height. On a thousand-petalled silver lotus lies the prostrate body of Siva in white marble, and on Siva's breast stands the Mother facing south. In front of Her is a Natmandir, a spacious rectangular hall, whose terrace is supported by stately columns.

As one stands in front of that Shrine, gazing at that gleeful girlish form of the Goddess, memories of Her many sports with Sri Ramakrishna crowd before the mind's eye. When once weary of the life without Her vision, Ramakrishna resolved to cut his throat and snatched the sword that hung on the wall of the shrine, she shot Herself out of that stone image and showed him Her living Presence. She stood before Her beloved son smiling, talking, consoling. Yet when not content with that ocular proof, that importunate Son stretched his hand towards Her nose, She breathed into that hand to give him a tactile proof of Her living presence also. Much to his hearing, she walked jingling her anklets; She ate from his hand; She slept in his bed; She brought him his Gurus; She brought him his disciples; She brought him his suppliers of material needs; She brought him the torchbearers of his spiritual Message to the world ! Ah! the lingering spiritual vibrations that inebriate the visitor to that temple !

To the north of the Kali Temple is another large temple facing west, dedicated to Radhakanta (Radha and Krishna). Sri Ramakrishna, prior to his becoming the Pujari of Kali in the main temple, was employed as Pujari in this temple. There was an interesting incident which led to his appointment there. One day, while the image of Sri Krishna was being taken to the retiring room, the then priest of the temple, Kshetra nath, slipped on the marble floor and fell down. As a result, the leg of the image was broken. This created a great commotion, and the priest was dismissed from service for his carelessness. The question of worshipping the Lord in a broken

image was discussed, and the Pundits who were consulted on the issue gave their opinion in favour of discarding the broken image and installing a new one in its place. When Sri Ramakrishna heard this ruling of the Pundits he ridiculed that decision and opined that the correct solution was to repair the broken leg and continue the worship in the same image.

He asked, "If the son-in-law of the Rani fractured his leg, would she discard him and put another in his stead? Certainly not. Why, then, a different rule here?" The cold reasoning of the scholars could not stand against this reasoning of the heart. The Rani herself was supremely pleased with this very human solution and felt grateful to its propounder. And Sri Ramakrishna himself repaired the injury to the image, with his inborn talent for moulding images of gods, and took up its worship thereafter at the importunate requests of the Rani and her son-in-law.

The Kali Temple, the Natmandir to its front, and the Radhakanta Temple are all enclosed on the north, east and south sides by blocks of rooms opening on to colonnades. These are used as staff-rooms, guest-rooms, kitchens etc.

The rooms at the northwest corner of the courtyard overlooking the Ganges is the most sacred spot in the whole temple garden, for this is the room where Sri Ramakrishna lived. Even today His Holy Presence permeates the atmosphere here like a lingering fragrance, and the devout pilgrims breathe it in, as they enter the room! The room is open to the courtyard colonnade on the one side and to a river-front semi-circular porch on the other. It was through the porch entrance to the

room that Narendra Nath who later became Swami Vivekananda, had entered the Master's room on his first visit to the place! On the north side of the room is another verandah, facing a small circular two-storeyed building, a few yards away in the garden. (This building is the Nahabat, where the most revered Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi lived). Inside the Master's room, except for a recent tile-paving of the floor, every-thing is preserved as it was during Sri Ramakrishna's stay. In the south- west portion of the room are two wooden cots with mattresses. Sri Ramakrishna used to sleep on the bigger cot and sit on the smaller one during the day time.

It was in this room, and sitting on this couch that he talked to his visitors and taught his disciples! It was here he gave out his Gospel which that immortal chronicler, Mahendranath Gupta, assiduously preserved and presented to the world as *Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* in five volumes (This Gospel has been translated into English and published under the title *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, by the Ramakrishna Math, Madras). The walls of the room are decorated with pictures of gods and goddesses. On the bedsteads are kept two pictures of Sri Ramakrishna and these are worshipped daily. Streams of pilgrims pass through the room prostrating before the beds.

A western devotee who made a pilgrimage to the room writes, "As I sat there that first day, thrilled with having actually reached this place whose every inch I already know from the Master's *Gospel*, I thought of how it must have been in the crescendo years of Ramakrishna's life in

the early 1880s. Still of boyish beauty although nearly fifty, he lounged there on the couch, joking, telling funny stories, giving out his message, going in and out at Samadhi. . . . All kinds of people came to Sri Ramakrishna: members of super-orthodox brahmin subcastes - the roost exclusive aristocracies on earth; the progressives who had taken on Western ideas and perhaps even affected a preference for speaking English; businessmen, pundits, Sadhus, poor old widows, pure youngsters barely in their teens; Christians, Moslems, Buddhists, Jains, Sikhs, money- lenders, prostitutes, drunkards. All found something different in the Master, and each discovered there some attractive personification of the Divine that elevated his mind ! "And, he asks in wonder," who are you, Ramakrishna? How could you appear to one individual after another like this, forever different and forever his own preferred Ideal" Indeed, who was Ramakrishna! Who can say?

The Nahabat where the Holy Mother had lived stands in the northwest corner of the temple courtyard and is now a shrine dedicated to her. A little away to the north of the Nahabat is a small bathing ghat known as the Bakultala ghat. This was the ghat which the Holy Mother used for her daily ablutions. It was by way of this ghat again that the Bhairavi Brahmani, the Master's Tantric teacher, first entered the temple garden. Farther north on the river side is the Panchavati, and the large banyan tree. It was under this banyan tree that Sri Ramakrishna had practised meditation himself and taught it to his intimate disciples! It was here that the great Totapuri had taught him the Advaita

Sadhana and helped him attain the acme of spiritual realisation, the *Nirvikalpa Samadhi*! Thus it is a spot of specially hallowed associations to the pilgrims. Then there is the bel tree in the northern extremity of the temple garden where stood the *Panchamundi Asana*, a special seat that Sri Ramakrishna's Tantric teacher Bhairavi had prepared for his Sadhanas in the Tantras !

About three miles to the south of Dakshineswar, on the Baranagore Calcutta road is the famous Cossipore Garden-house, a two-storeyed building with three rooms below and two above. On 11th December, 1885, Sri Ramakrishna shifted to this house, and completing the work that he had commenced at Dakshineswar, viz. setting in motion a spiritual renaissance and organising a band of monks and devotees to carry his Message to countries far and near, cast off his physical vesture on the 16th of August, 1886! At 6 p.m. on that day, his sacred body was brought down to the Cossipore burning ghat where it was consigned to holy fire. The Cossipore Garden House is preserved as a sacred monument, and the room upstairs where he lived and passed away is now a shrine where regular worship is done. It is maintained by the Ramakrishna Math. Every year, on the 1st of January, there is celebrated the *Kalpataru Utsava* commemorating that blessed day in 1886, when the Master had blessed everybody who went to him that afternoon with spiritual awakening. Lakhs of devotees gather there during the day of the celebration and feel blessed by paying their obeisance to the Master and by partaking of the consecrated food.

THE BELUR MATH

On the western bank of the Ganges, almost directly across the river to the Cossipore burning ghat, is the Belur Math, the Headquarters of the Order bearing the Master's name.

The Ramakrishna Order was founded by the Master himself during his last days at Cossipore. In fact, his throat-ailment and his shifting to Cossipore were Destiny's devices to fulfil that divine purpose, for he had already prophesied : "The devotees will be sifted into inner and outer circles towards the end". At Cossipore he actually did this sifting and initiated the all-renouncing young disciples into Sanyasa by giving them the ochre robes and rudraksha beads and by sending them to beg their food by *Madhukari* (the gathering of one's food in small quantities from several houses - a custom with the Hindu monks). He also commissioned his chief apostle, Narendranath (later Swami Vivekananda) to be their leader and to look after them. "I leave them in your care. See that they practise spiritual exercises and do not return home", he had told Narendranath. Thus, on the passing away of the Master, the responsibility of looking after the Brotherhood's welfare and organising it to further the cause of the Master fell squarely on the shoulders of Swami Vivekananda ; and this big responsibility filled him with great care and anxiety, till at last he succeeded in establishing a permanent home for the Brothers - the Belur Math, - and founding there the twin organisations the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, to propagate the Master's Message. In a letter written to a friend in

1890 the Swami pours out his heart's anxiety at not having succeeded till then in establishing that memorial to his Master: "I have already told you at the outset that I am Ramakrishna's slave having laid my body at his feet 'with Til and Tulasi leaves',

I cannot disregard his behest .. Now his behest to me was that I should devote myself to the service of the Order of all-renouncing devotees founded by him, and in this I have to persevere, come what may, being ready to take heaven, hell, salvation, or anything that may happen to me For various reasons, the body of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna had to be consigned to fire. There is no doubt that this act was very blamable. The remains of his ashes are now preserved and if they be properly enshrined somewhere on the bank of the Ganga, I presume we shall be able in some measure to expiate the sin lying on our heads. These sacred remains, his seat, and his picture are every day worshipped in our

Math in proper form What greater regret can there be than this that no memorial could yet be raised in this land of Bengal ?" And at last, after 12 anxious years of waiting he succeeded in raising a fitting

memorial - the Belur Math for his Master and enshrining in it on December 9, 1898 his sacred remains. We have a vivid pen picture of that momentous ceremony of installation at the Belur Math in the *Swamiji's Message to a Disciple*:



"In the morning Swamiji (Swami Vivekananda) had his bath in the Ganga and entered the worship-room. Then he made offerings to the consecrated Paduka of Sri Ramakrishna and fell to meditation".

"Meditation and worship over, preparations were now made for going to the new Math premises. Swamiji himself took on his right shoulder the ashes of Sri Ramakrishna's body preserved in a copper casket, and led the van On his way Swamiji said to the disciple:

"Sri Ramakrishna said to me, 'Wherever you will take me on your shoulders, there will go and stay, be it under a tree or in a hut'. It is therefore that I am myself carrying him on my shoulders to the new Math grounds. Know it for certain that Sri Ramakrishna will keep his seat fixed there, for the welfare of the many for a long time to come". (Pp. 96. 1964 Edn.) On reaching the Math, Swamiji installed the sacred relics in the shrine there and performed the worship by lighting the sacrificial fire. He also cooked Payasa with his own hands and offered it to the Master. He then said to the disciples, "Through the will of Sri Ramakrishna, his Dharmakshetra- sanctified spot - has been established today. A twelve years anxiety is off my head. Do you know what I am thinking of at this moment? This Math will be a centre of learning and spiritual discipline. Householders of virtuous turn like yourselves will build houses on the surrounding land and live there, and Sannyasins, men of renunciation, will live in the centre, while on that plot of the land on the south of the Math, buildings will be erected for English and American disciples to live in." This is the genesis of the Belur Math, the Headquarters of the world-wide Ramakrishna Math and Mission institutions - Sri Ramakrishna's legacy to posterity!

The Belur Math stands on a vast area extending more than a thousand and five

hundred feet along the Ganges. As one approaches it by boat from Dakshineswar side, one sees to his right six striking buildings standing out prominently on its ground. They are the main monastery, the Ramakrishna temple, the Brahmananda temple, the Holy Mother temple, the Vivekananda temple, and the old guest house.

The building towards the northern end of the compound, facing the bathing ghat there, is the main monastery. It is a two-storeyed building. The room at the southern side on the first floor of the building was the room in which Swami Vivekananda had lived and passed away! It is preserved as a sacred memorial to him, with all the furniture and other articles in it kept in their position as on the day of his Mahasamadhi (July 4, 1902). One can see there the big iron cot and the mattress on which Swamiji used to sleep, the small camp cot by its side on which his body was laid in state, the sandals he had used, the turban he had worn, the sticks he had used as a wandering monk, the Tanpura on which he had played etc. Thousands of devotees file past this room through the year paying their homage to these sacred relics of the chief apostle of Sri Ramakrishna.

About three hundred feet to the south of this building stands the temple dedicated to Swami Brahmananda, the spiritual son of Sri Ramakrishna and the first president of the Ramakrishna Math. This temple faces west.

Between the main monastery and the Brahmananda temple could be seen the main temple of Sri Ramakrishna rising long and high behind. It is a remarkable structure

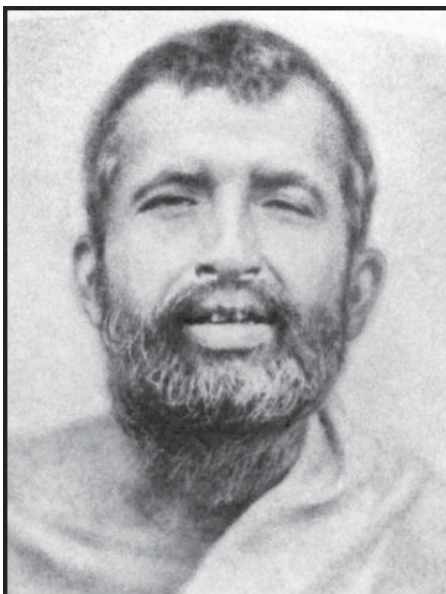
from the point of beauty and grandeur. It was Swami Vivekananda who conceived its unique architectural design and prepared its plan in 1897 with the assistance of his brother-disciple Swami Vijnanananda. But for want of funds its construction had to wait for nearly four decades. It was, at long last, constructed and dedicated on January 14, 1938 by Swami Vijnanananda. There is a vivid description of this temple in the *History of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission* by Swami Gambhirananda (1 Edn. 1957 Pp. 348-349) which is reproduced here: "The temple, facing south, is constructed in pinkish white Chunar stone. The sanctum has a shallow dome 60 feet up, and is connected by a closed vestibule with a prayer hall. As one enters from the south through the gate, presenting a horseshoe facade in the Buddhist style, over which rises superstructure, tier upon tier, somewhat resembling a Gopuram of South India, with a height of 78 feet, one finds oneself in a long nave with an inner vault and balconies on three sides resting on two rows of stately pillars that separate it from the enclosed wings on the east and west - all of which is reminiscent of the caves at Karla. The windows and balconies of this hall and the arches around the sanctum recall the Rajput and Mogul styles of architecture; the pavilions suggest the usual Hindu temple in Bengal ; and the central dome the renaissance type of European architecture. The ground plan of the prayer hall, with the vestibule and shrine placed one behind the other, gives the impression of a Christian cross. The rectangular white altar, curved in the middle like the Damaru (hour-glass shaped drum)

of Shiva, is topped by a huge lotus, also white, in full bloom, all designed by the famous Indian artist Nandalal Bose. The sanctum is roomy, airy and well-lighted, and except for the canopy over the image and the tapestry behind to make the image stand out from the white surroundings, it is practically devoid of any decoration, adding thus to the atmosphere of serenity and austerity befitting the ideal of total renunciation that Shri Ramakrishna, embodied. And yet, 112 feet in height, the temple has about it a modern air of spaciousness that stands in striking contrast with the usual stuffiness of its traditional prototype. It is surmounted by a large dome of exquisite proportions, over which are set an Amalaka (Embotic Myrobalan) and a gold-plated pitcher of metal enclosing a powerful light. Eight other corner domes of small dimensions, but of similar design, placed in two tiers, together with pavilions encircling the main dome add to the picturesqueness of the whole edifice. Around the sanctum is a passage for circumambulation. Over the arches of this passage can be seen the stone representations of the nine planetary deities, as they are found around the shrines in Orissa temples. These, too, are after the design by Nandalal Bose. The prayer hall is 152 feet long, 72 feet wide and 48 feet high; it has also two side doors on the east and west, and eighteen niches in its walls to put statuettes in. The total length of the whole structure is 233 feet from north to south. To the east of the temple is a lawn, beyond which is a narrow road and a line of somewhat uncommon trees; then another lawn up to a protective wall along the Ganges, which flows

southward, washing the feet of three temples dedicated respectively to Swami Brahmananda, the Holy Mother and Swami Vivekananda." On the altar in the sanctum is placed an image of Sri Ramakrishna in Samadhi pose, executed in white Italian marble. This image is worshipped every day in proper form.

Some two hundred feet to the south of the Brahmananda temple is another bathing ghat, facing which stands the temple dedicated to the Holy Mother. The Holy Mother entered into final beatitude on July 21, 1920 at her Calcutta residence. Her sacred body was brought to Belur Math and cremated on that very spot where her temple stands today. This temple was consecrated on December 21, 1921, the birthday of the Holy Mother. Ever since she is worshipped there.

Farther south, yet another hundred yards away is the Vivekananda temple, a two-storeyed building with his Samadhi in the ground floor and a temple of Om in the first floor. Swami Vivekananda's mortal remains were cremated at the same spot where his Samadhi stands today. It is said that the spot was marked out for that purpose by Swamiji himself! Beyond this Swamiji's temple is an enclosure with a memorial column marking the sacred ground, on which were cremated a number of other direct Sannyasin disciples of Sri Ramakrishna.



There is a third bathing ghat in the Belur Math grounds towards the southern end. Beyond this is the old guest house. Besides these above mentioned prominent structures, there are a number of other buildings in the campus, such as dormitories for the monastic inmates, kitchens, dining halls, a Degree College, B. T. College, an industrial school, a post office, a free dispensary, a building for the Headquarters office, a training centre for the probationers, a library, a salesroom for the Mission publications, etc. There is also a farm and a dairy!. Thousands of devotees visit the Math every day. The Birthdays of Sri Ramakrishna, the Holy Mother, Swami Vivekananda, and Swami Brahmananda are celebrated on a large scale. Besides, the Durga Puja, and the birthdays of Buddha, Christ, Sankara and such other Godmen and holy personages are also celebrated every year. Of all these occasions, the occasion of the birthday of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna draws the maximum crowd of devotees, and on that day the Math grounds are verily a sea of human heads with at least four to five lakhs of people participating! And we must know that all this is only the beginning of the Ramakrishna Movement! What the future of it will be is such as to exceed the most extended imagination of the most farseeing of persons.



Tarakeswar

THE Tarakeswar temple dedicated to Lord Siva, 58 km. from Howrah Station, is well known throughout India. The number of pilgrims varies between 1,00,000 and 1,50,000 in Shravan (July-August). Nearly 50,000 pilgrims assemble here to worship at this temple on Sivaratri day. Another occasion for pilgrim congregation is at the time of Gajan Mela in the month of April. This mela lasts for five days.

Pilgrims usually go by train or bus from Howrah to Tarakeswar via Shevadaphuli. Most of the pilgrims make a halt at Lokenath temple and pour the Ganges water first at the feet of Lokenath, who is believed to be the elder brother of Siva of Tarakeswar. It is also said that Lokenath here resides as a Yogi and as such the offerings made here are very meagre. The temple compound is littered with broken fragments of the earthen pitchers.

The traditional form of worship is to pour Ganges water over the beads of Baba Taraknath. At first the pilgrims assemble at Shevadaphuli, 35 km, from Tarakeswar, where at Baidyanath Batimnai Nirath Ghat they bathe and fill two earthen pitchers with the waters of the Ganga. They then suspend the pitchers from the ends of a bamboo pole which is held across their shoulders, and carried. This is called the "Kavadi". The condition is that the pitchers must not touch the ground throughout the journey, which is made barefooted. This

procession of "Kavadis" comprising men and women of all ages walking barefooted is a common sight every Saturday and Sunday. The largest crowd is seen on Sundays. The pilgrims normally pour the Ganges water over Baba Taraknath on Monday mornings, and to avoid being caught in a rush some of them do so even on Saturdays and Sundays.

There are several service and relief camps managed by voluntary philanthropic organisations who serve the pilgrims with food and shelter. The main camps are run by Kasi Viswanath Seva Samiti with the biggest camp at Hamragachi ; it caters to enormous numbers of pilgrims on the occasion of the Shravana Mela. The other organisations are Maheswari Seva Samiti, Nand Kutti, Ram Kutti, the Gota Devi Chowdhury Seva Camp and many others.

A popular legend says that, once upon a time a King called Bharamall lived at Ramnagar, about 5 km. from the present shrine. It is said that the king had a strange dream, in which Baba Taraknath himself appeared and told him to build a temple. It is said that the king endowed his entire wealth on the temple and himself became a sannyasin there. Another sannyasin of the name Mayagiri Dhumrapangiri assembled his disciples here during the month of Chaitra. To commemorate the event of the building of the temple a five-day Bajan Mela is held here every year, the most outstanding feature of which is that the pilgrim has to live like a mendicant and beg for food for the entire duration of his stay there.

What attracts so many pilgrims to this shrine is the popular belief that sincere worship of Baba Taraknath fulfils the wishes

of the devotee. Many stories are told about miraculous cure effected by Baba Taraknath, The blind have been able to see, the deaf have heard, the crippled have actually been put in a position to cross mountains. Thus the miracles are passed by word of mouth from one person to another, and an abiding stream of faithful devotees keeps flowing at all times to this temple.

-Adapted from Illustrated Weekly of 20th July 1973.

Kalighat

KALI - the terrible one, Kali - the tongue of flame, Kali - the face seen in a fire. Kali surrounded by forms of death and destruction, the name by the utterance of which the soul hushes itself. She who is dignified by the glorious name "Mother". She is the Divine and Energy, that fills almost as many as it brings to birth, that fosters strangely by the terrible process of destruction of the unfit.

"Calcutta" is generally derived from Kalighat, where there is a shrine dedicated to Goddess Kali. It is also called Kalipeeetha and thereby hangs a tale, which is a fragment of a page torn out of the biography of Sati - the perfect wife. In life Sati, the perfect wife immolated herself at the dishonour to Her Lord and Master Siva. In this story of Sati, who can miss the significance of the 52 places in which fragment of the smitten body fell? And four fingers of the right foot fell at Kalighat and the tongue fell at Kangra (Jwala Mukhi) in the North Punjab, where it consummated itself as licking tongues of fire from

underneath the ground; and the ear-rings fell at Benares, which is Visalakshi. Who can understand the crowding of associations into these few sentences except the Hindus?"

In this temple, she appears in Her most grotesque form. Decked in a crimson garment with Her unkempt hair streaming waist-length, adorned with a garland of skulls, - she stands and teeming crowds of Her children come to see Her thus! How could man be drawn by this gruesome figure? Sister Nivedita gives the following answer: "I have been hearing of Kali worship all my life in terms not flattering to Kali or Her worshippers; and now that I am in contact with the thing itself, I have a right to stand up and say that if the things I heard as a child were true, at least they were not the whole truth and it is the whole truth that we should insist on having, and secondly, I have the right as an English woman to express public regret for the part which my countrymen and women have played in vilifying a religious idea clear to men and women, as good as they, and to utter a public hope that such vilification may soon end by the growth amongst us all of sheer good will and sympathy. And last of all, I have the right of all first impressions to be heard. We often forget what produces this is just as real as part of the whole as the last. This is true of all goodness and beauty of anything so complex and extended; as an area of religious consciousness it is still more true. A religious idea ought to be judged by all the states, which it produces. We must not ignore either the lowest or the highest apprehension of the symbol. A common acknowledgment of that symbol binds the

man, who now appreciates it in a very rudimentary way, to the Yogi who finds in it the higher manifestation of God, so that we should be careful how we meddle with or pass judgment on, that lower form of worship, save to open out to it the natural path of development by which the saint has gone to his far-reaching vision."

She is seen standing on an inert form which symbolizes the soul inert and unmanifest and Nature the great awakener. To her children she is 'Ma', simply clamouring after their childhood needs. Then she protects those who take refuge in Her. She says to them, "My little child - you need not know much in order to please me, only love me dearly". If in all that happen near and about her there is anything that is terrible, she seals their eyes that they do not perceive it; they find in her - as is the case with all emblem only what their own life and experience leads them to understand.

To the grown man she is 'Ma' alter his need, - 'Ma' who does not protect but makes strong to overcome, who demands the very best that we can give and will be content with nothing else. He shall see the moment of destruction of the universe as the moment of realisation. Life will be a song of ecstasy and thanksgiving that the last-sacrifice (of the animal in us) has been demanded from us.

**-Adapted from Vol. 11, *The Complete Works of Sister Nivedita*,
Immortal India Vol.**



Navadvip

BHAKTI PRAJNAN YATI MAHARAJ

THE scriptures of the Bhakti school assert that according to the desire of a devotee God appears before him in any form. Regarding this as the pivot of their teaching, the Acharyas of the Bengal school of Vaishnavism accepted and established Sri Gauranga as the fullest manifestation of the Supreme Lord. Although manifested in His fullest state in holy Brindavan, God yet felt a sense of incompleteness without entering the secret recesses of Bhakti to take measure of the extent of Bliss enjoyed by Sri Radha through her realisation of God in His most intimate state. So when he appeared as Sri Chaitanya (Radha), he completely covered up his divinity and fulfilled His desire of experiencing the delights of devotion as a true devotee himself. The Vaishnava Acharyas of the Bengal school have placed in our hands this master key, which would unlock the mystery of the incarnation of Sri Chaitanya Maha Prabhu and his "Divya Charitamrutam".

In this incarnation assumed for the specific purpose of spreading Bhakti, it was not the discus, the conch or the mace or any such weapon that was used, but it was the "weapon" of tears (tears of separation or Viraha) that served the Lord's purpose and was employed in worship. The idea of God himself functioning as the ideal devotee, combining divine bliss with the bliss of the Jiva and merging the soul in the Over-Soul playing the role of the devotee and thus reaching novel heights of realisation, revealed for the first time in

the pure vision of the Acharyas of the Gaudiya school, is a special feature of the Vaishnava religion of Bengal.

Sri Mayapur is the holiest place in Bengal, being the birth-place of Sri Chaitanya Maha Prabhu. It is the centre of Sri Navadvip Mandala, 32 miles in circumference and on the eastern bank of the Ganges, hardly 70 miles north of Calcutta. One who goes from Sealdah, should get down at Krishna Nagar Railway Station and thence by a light train to Navadvip-ghat which is a distance of 13 miles. It can also be reached by Howrah-Katwa line by getting down at Navadvipdham station. There is a fine motorable road direct from Calcutta to Sri Mayapur via Krishnanagar. Also there is a regular bus service from Krishnanagar to Mayapur. The present town of Navadvip has come to its importance since about two or three centuries, as the old town at Sri Mayapur was altogether demolished by the depredations of flood water over-running the area every year. The new town has many temples, most of which were erected with old names of the important places of Sri Mayapur to attract pilgrims, who must pay fixed gate charges. Pilgrims and persons interested in Sridham Navadvip should know this history that Sri Mayapur is the old site of Navadvip which is the birth place of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, and that the villages, both to the east and west of Ganges, were only suburbs, within the Navadvip Mandala of 32 miles circumference consisting of nine regions called "Dwipas".

Navadvip is a very ancient city and reported to have been founded in 1063 by one of the Sena Kings of Bengal. In the "Aini-Akbari" it is noted that during the time of

Lakshmana Sen, Nadia was the capital of Bengal.

All ancient biographers of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu mention his birth-place as merely "Navadvipa" but the later writer Narahari Chakraborty describes it in great detail in his "Navadvipa Parikram" and "Bhakti Ratnakar". He has included a large area of Navadvip than that which seems to have been incorporated during the time of the Sena Kings and of Sri Chaitanyas. For instance, Vrindha-vanadas excludes Kulia from Navadvipa between which two places the Bhagirathi flowed (C. Bh. Anta. III: 380). But Narahari Chakraborty brings it within the jurisdiction of Navadvipa (Bhakti Ratnakar, 12, Taranga). With a view to giving an esoteric interpretation to Navadvip, he describes it as the town of the nine islands, by way of comparison with a nine-petalled lotus afloat on the Bhagirathi, each of whose nine islands is believed to represent an aspect of ninefold Bhakti (Navavidha Bhakti). Navadvipa was believed to be the actual conglomeration of nine separate islands, cut up by the Bhagirathi, Jalengai, Bagdevi and Vairav. Nowadays only the two streams of the Bhagirathi and Jalengai flow, the remaining stream having dried up. This island origin of Navadvip as mentioned by Probodhananda Saraswathi of Srirangam (south) in his Navadvipa Satakam, was followed by Sri Narahari Chakraborty at great length. Antardwip, as the name indicates, is the heart of the island town which contains the village of "Sri Mayapur" in which stood the house of Sri Chaitanya, this has been described as the central part of the core and the centre of a circle of eight islands within a circumference of

thirty-two miles.

Thakur Bhakti Vinode, a great savant of the day, who decided to dwell at Sri Vrajananda, particularly at Radhakund with a view to leading a recluse's life entirely devoted to Hari-bhajan, on the eve of his departure was commanded by the celestial voice of Sri Gauri Sunder (Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu) Himself to think: "There is much work to be done in Gaurimandal. That will be done by you. Refrain from going to Vraja- mandal."

What happened next? Thakur himself has narrated in his diary thus "It was at about 10 o'clock at night, while the sky was heavily clouded, that I saw on the banks of the Ganges a palace-like building beautifully illuminated at night. I had a vision in response, to which the next morning I went to that place and saw a high mound densely covered by Tulasi plants. On enquiry the grand old Mohammedan inhabitant of the place informed me that whenever they went for cultivation or even for other purposes something serious happened to them and so they never ventured to go even by the side of the mound. They were aware traditionally that this was the very birth-place of a Hindu God Nimai Prabhu. Thakur Bhakti Vinode was a man of letters; he knew well that his discovery of the birth-place of Lord Gauranga at Sri Mayapur was in tune with the instruction he received from God and he himself had no doubts, yet he knew that the people were normally non-believers and suspected a divine revolution.

He vigorously searched out, from the authoritative books written by the genuine Vaishnavas, and also from numerous government documents, the identity of the

birth-place of Sriman Mahaprabhu with this place (Mayapur). From amongst the most genuine devotee the Thakur received the support of Sri Jagannath Das Babaji, who was then more than a hundred years old and recognised leader of the Vaishnava world. He unhesitatingly declared this place as the site of Sriman Mahaprabhu's birth, to which he frequently paid visits and where he used to dance in ecstasy on the phalguni Purnima day to celebrate the birth of our Lord.

Thakur Bhakti Vinode equipped with sufficient material called for a public meeting on January, 1894, in Krishna Nagar, (Dist. Head quarters). Many historians, archaeologists and men of letters of the country supported the said discovery of Sridham Mayapur as the birth-place of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and forthwith a society was formed under the name of Navadvip Dham Pracharini Sabha. And soon the icons of Sri Gauranga and Vishnupriya were installed in a thatched hut amidst great festivities. But in Thakur's diary we find he kept a note that though to a materialist's eye Navadvip looked like an ordinary place at that time with thatched huts, today by the grace of Sri Gauranga we have palatial buildings bedecked with jewels, very beautiful gardens and gates befitting them and greeting our sight. Behold.

Sri Gauranga and Vishnupriya, are actually standing in the temple. What a divine image! What a divine image! Today, when one visits Sridham Mayapur he finds how Thakur's vision became true.

When Hindu religion was in great danger Lord Sri Chaitanya was born at Sri Mayapur, destined to remove the dark clouds which

had over-shadowed true religious thinking. He brought about a religious upheaval, which put an end to all religious conflicts and suicidal fissiparous tendencies. The benign influence of His philosophy of love, made the whole of India a spiritually united cultural domain. He delivered sinners and forsaken ones; Jagai and Madhai, two vile persons became His ardent devotees. He converted the Muslim Governor Chanda Kazi into a Bhakta and also same Pathan chiefs of the north. Governor Ray, Chief Minister, Sri Sanatan, Finance Minister Sri Rupa, and Sri Raghunatha Das, only son of a zamindar, and several others renounced their all at his

call. Great scholar like Sarvabhouma and Prakashananda acknowledged His divinity. And Prataprudra, the mighty king of Orissa, dedicated his life to him. Sanskrit and Bengali literature during this time received a new impetus 'and soul-enrapturing Kirtana music was organised from one end of the country to the other. The difference between man and man was forgotten and the fundamental unity of human nature and human destiny was stressed.

So by the discovery of Sridham Mayapur, the Holy birth-place of Lord Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu by Thakur Bhakti Vinode was removed the grave error of neglect from the Vaishnava world.

Thakur sang thus: "Knowing Navadvipadhama as a replica of Vrindavana,

I shall dwell in a hut at the loneliest place, in the transcendental grove on the banks of Jahnavi, having sheltered at the feet of the son of Shachi, I shall drink at all times the nectarine Krishna name and shout "Oh Gaura-Nitai ", friends of the fallen; with



tears I shall roam about, shouting, "Oh Goura-Nitai". Within the 32 miles circumference of the Mahadham on both the sides of the banks of Jahnavi, I shall find them under a tree, what a glowing vision, I have had - so saying I shall lose my consciousness; having regained consciousness once again I shall shed tears at their remembrance."

Today Sri Chaitanya Math at Sri Mayapur covers a mile set with beautiful temples, standing in an atmosphere of absorbing silence, meditation and worship, surrounded on all sides by emerald green paddy fields, with the Ganges flowing hard by, far from the maddening crowd's strife and strain. Mayapur is now an enchanted place - the abode of peace. The atmosphere of the

place is charming. The chanting of the holy name of " Hari" day and night transports one to a celestial planes. It is more heavenly than heaven itself.

It is the sacred Vrindaban of Bengal, hallowed, by the dancing steps of the Lord and its air is purified by His noble call to prayer.

What joy it brings to the devout heart. Every particle of dust of this place is holy and inspiring, being hallowed by the sportive performances of Gaursundar. A current of life, a flow of love, the unbounded ocean of joy seemed to show itself and reflect deep satisfaction and thrills of cheer are vibrating everywhere.

The work started by Thakur Bhakti Vinode reached its highest culmination under the inspiring guidance of Srila Bhakti Siddhanta Saraswathi Goswami. Thakur, who founded Sri Chaitanya Math, at Sri Mayapur, as the main centre of preaching, on the 27th of March, 1918 A.D. made it a red letter day in the history of theistic religious revival of this age. In the centre of Sri Chaitanya Math he installed Sri Chaitanya and Sri Radha-Krishna Deities and in the four other chambers separately surrounding the central compartment of the temple for four Vaishnava Acharyas, viz. Sri Ramanuja, Sri Madhva, Sri Vishnuswami and Sri Nimbarka were installed for daily worship thereby creating a democratic catholicity in his approach. From here Srila Saraswathi Thakur broadcast that Sri Chaitanya Math is established to carry the holy gift of the ancient religion and culture preserved in this land and preached by millions of sages from age to age, this message was to be taken to every door step through the medium of discussion study, and research

aim to explain the teaching of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu scientifically. This is the headquarters of Sri Gaudiya Math, initiated here in the mission started by Srila Saraswathi Thakur who was a strict adherent to the principles of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. They practice these principles in their own lives, and as religious men go out on a preaching tour from door to door holding meetings and Bhajan Sankirtans. From here missionaries have been sent to other countries, too. Within a short period of twenty years he preached Gaudiya Vaishnavism throughout India and sent disciples to England, Germany and other parts of Europe and Burma to preach the message of Sri Chaitanya, and established 64 branches under the name of Sri Gaudiya Maths throughout India and abroad and a vast literature flowed through his versatile pen as well as from his disciples. The publications number over 1250 and are in different languages. The vigorous missionary activities of door-to-door preaching by Sannyasis and Brahmacharis of the Math duly spread Sri Chaitanya's Teachings which have a following in every part of India. By this Sri Mayapur has revived its importance as a place of pilgrimage, visited by hundreds of thousands of people every year.

Amidst harsh, arid, shrunken and unfeeling social males of the present age, Sri Mayapur, the holy birth-place of Lord Sri Chaitanya, stands out as the monument of austere striving affirming the glorious memory of that uplifting episode of Sri Gauranga's ministry. that was fearless, tireless and liberal.



Rajgir

RAJGIR is about 35 Km. from Patna and lies in a delightful glade girdled by a semi circle of hills. Located here are a group of hot springs, whose waters have curative properties. It must not be imagined, however, that Rajgir owes its importance merely to the beauty of its surroundings. The Great Buddha, whose life and teachings have moulded human thought and conduct for twenty five centuries, spent the greater part of his life in this region.

Though Buddha was born in Nepal, Buddhism has its origin in Bihar. Jainism has also its association with this place.

Though Rajgir is set amongst beautiful surroundings, its importance does not merely lie in that alone. It was the Metropolis of Magadha. The very word Rajgir is derived from "Raja Griha" meaning "the home of royalty". King Bimbisara extended the frontiers of Magadha and Rajgir assumed an even greater importance. Bimbisara's son, Ajata Satru, brought a portion of the sacred relics of Buddha and enshrined these in a stupa at Rajgir.

Rajgir has also been mentioned in several places in the Puranas. In the Ramayana it is called Vasu Mati; another Purana refers to it as Brihadratha Pura and Giri Vraja by which name it is usually referred to in the Mahabharata. In those days it was surrounded by five hills, Vaibhara, Varaha, Vrishabha, Rishi Giri and Chaityaka, but now they are called Vaibhara, Vipula, Ratna, Chhatha and Saila.

There are a number of hot springs here which are considered sacred. They are situated there on the banks of the small river Saraswathi. Seven of them are situated near the foot of the Vaibhara hill and six near the Vipula. The springs are Ganga, Yamuna, Ananta Rishi, Sapta Rishi, Vyasa Kund, Markandeya Kund, Brahma Kund, and Kasyapa Kund. The others are Sita Kund, Surya Kund, Ganesh Ram Kund, Chandrama, Sringi Rishi Kund.

Besides the hot-springs this place was the home of a number of sages. The names are there even today though the Ashrams have disappeared. Kanva Ashram and Kausika Ashram are found here. Kanva Rishi of Shakuntala fame is said to have stayed here.

How does a hot spring or a geyser, which is of mere geographical importance, becomes a place of importance for pilgrims? The answer to this has been supplied by one great saint of recent times, Swami Tapovanji Maharaj of Uttar Kasi in his book Hima Giri Vihar. "Modern scientists explain away such phenomena as flames rising from rocks of sulphur, but to the common man it is a marvel. The ancient Rishis made use of such uncommon Natural phenomena as a means to draw the mind of worldlings from external things and project it Godward. At the sight of such rare and wonderful sights even atheists come to exclaim, 'Lo! see the glorious divine sport.' That is why as a general rule, in India strikingly strange or arrestingly beautiful spots have been celebrated as Tirthas and the abodes of Gods."

Makhdum Kund

Originally Sringhi Rishi Kund was a place of pilgrimage for the Muslims as well. A Sufi Saint of the name Makhdum Shah Sharifuddin is said to have stayed here and fasted for forty days. His tomb is at Bihar Sharif, about 64 Km. from Patna. His tomb attracts thousands of visitors from all parts of India. The Saint left his body in 1379. A continuous line of disciples have kept his memory alive for almost six centuries.

Maner

A 29 Km. drive to the west from Patna brings the visitor to a place called Maner, the earliest seat of Islamic Culture. The great Sufi Saint, Hazrat Mukhdum Yahya Maneri lived here in the 13th century. As early as the 13th century, Indian poetry, music and architecture began to reflect a synthesis. A number of saints came to prominence, who were revered by Hindus and Muslims alike. Bihar's medieval monument represents a blend of Hindu-Muslim architectural features. The Bari Dargah, which is the most sacred Muslim shrine, reflects the blend. The Bari Dargah is the tomb of the Sufi Saint who left this world in 1282. It is considered to be a very sacred shrine in Bihar.



Lord Jagannath of Puri

Compiled Feature

PURI is a Kshetra (centre) of great religious importance. From time immemorial pilgrims have been visiting this holy place to get a glimpse of Lord Jagannath.

Celebrated Vishnu Kshetra

This pilgrim centre is a celebrated Vishnu Kshetra attracts millions of pilgrims every year, particularly during the annual car festival. Indeed, so famous is this car festival that the expressions "Wheels of Jugger Naut" and "Jugger Naut" have found a permanent place in English vocabulary, and signify a fantastic crushing force.

Indradhymna's quest and the sculptor's unfinished images

According to tradition, Jagannath was originally a tribal God, worshipped by the Savara tribe of Orissa deep in a primeval forest and the image was a beautiful one carved of deep blue saffire. The great King Indradhymna, who heard of this beautiful image, sent out Brahmin emissaries in quest of it and at last, they found it at Puri. Indradhymna came down with a large entourage, but when he reached Puri, somehow the image disappeared. He stayed at Puri and performed a penance to propitiate the Lord, who finally appeared in' his dream and directed him to perform a Yajna, which would enable him to trace the Lord, not in its original form as the saffire image, but in the shape of a huge log, that would come floating towards him

on the waves of the sea, with certain distinctive features marked on it. Indradhyumna did accordingly, and though he found the logs as anticipated he could not get a competent sculptor to carve out the image of the Deity. His persistent prayers brought before him an old Brahmin, who offered to carve out the image on the log, but under strict conditions. The old man was to keep himself locked in a room for 21 days along with the log of wood and no one was to interrupt him during the whole period. But Indradhyumna's impatience got the better of him and he broke open the door a week too soon, only to find that the sculptor had mysteriously disappeared, leaving the images, (three in number) unfinished. The forms of the Lord Jagannath and Bala Bhadra were in complete stumps. While that of Goddess Subhadra was altogether shapeless. That is how they are seen in the sacred shrine at Puri, but the absence of feet and hands and the manifestation of the divine as shapeless are regarded by the pious as an exemplification of the Vedic Truth that the Supreme can accomplish whatever it wills without the aid of organs and instruments. The images were installed as they were and Indradhyumna had not only a magnificent temple built to house them, but also had three huge chariots made, in which he got them conveyed to the temple at Puri.

Buddhist influence in Puri

Puri is believed to have survived an upheaval in basic religious concepts and forms of worship. Originally famous as a holy Hindu Kshetra, it has also passed

through a period of Buddhist influence, and re-emerged in a new pattern of Krishna worship. Characterised by catholicity and free from caste barriers and restriction the deity of Jagannath at Puri is universally accessible for direct, unmediated worship and adoration by all.

The five famous sacred spots at Puri are (1) the Pool of Markandeya, (2) the Banyan tree which is identified with Krishna, (3) Rouhineya or Bala Rama, (4) the sea and (5) the pool of Indradhyumna.

The Pilgrim at the shrine

The scriptures advise the intending pilgrim to visit the Jagannath Kshetra in the month of Jyeshtha, so as to be in the divine presence on the 12th of the bright half of Jyeshtha. One's first duty upon reaching the Kshetra, is to take a bath in the sacred waters of the Markandeya pool and then proceed to the nearby Siva Temple, for the darshan of the Lord there and move on to the Banyan tree that is considered to be Vishnu Himself, to be circumambulated thrice, before going on to the worship of Bala Rama, Sri Krishna and his sister Subadra, successively.

The shrine of Lord Jagannath is surrounded by two compound walls and is constructed on an elevated ground. The present temple is a massive, magnificent construction rising to a height of 65 metres (214 feet), decked with elegant figurines and beautiful ornamental work, and is believed to have been constructed about 800 years ago, during the reign of Ananta Varma Chola Ganga.

Inside the compound wall there are innumerable shrines, from very small ones

carved out in the niches of the wall to large separate ones dedicated to different deities, but in the centre of the main temple stands Lord Jagannath in all his majesty, towering above all other Gods. The main tower of the temple is surmounted by the mystic wheel and flag of Vishnu.

Inside the Garbha Griha or sanctum sanctorum are the three huge wooden images of Jagannath, Bala Bhadra and Subhadra, installed on a high stone pedestal. 1,500 hereditary Pandas perform the daily rituals in elaborate detail, according to the Puja and Alankara Vidhis. The proximate attendants of the Deity are divided into thirty six orders.

The flat kitchens attached to the temple supply food for some 10,000 people daily. The tradition according to which the holy food is served is unique. High and Low, rich and poor, without distinction of caste and creed share the received offerings on the same platter.

A colourful city vibrant with devotional life

Puri is a colourful city, always vibrant with life. Some 62 different festivals are observed during the year, but the most important is the Ratha Yatra or the Car festival. The Ratha Yatra is a glorious and breath-taking sight, the streets are packed with thousands of pilgrims, seeking to get a glimpse of the Lord on this auspicious occasion. The three images are brought out from the temple and are taken through the city in massive wooden chariots, of which Lord Jagannatha's is the biggest and leads the rest, in the line. Tradition has it that on such an occasion he comes out of

the temple to mingle with the common people and to hear and alleviate their sufferings. The chariots are pulled by thick coir ropes and all the pilgrims take part in the pulling, for it is believed that whosoever even touches the rope will be redeemed. The cars are thus taken to "Gundicha Ghar", or the garden house which is about a mile from the main temple, but the procession, moving through the packed path, at times takes as much as 24 hours to reach the destination. After a week's halt at "Gundicha Ghar" the Lord returns to his head-quarters at the temple.

The Chandan Yatra

Another popular festival is the Chandan Yatra. The Deity then is taken out for twenty-one days during mid-summer (April-May) to Narendra Tatak and rowed in beautifully decorated barges and subsequently the images are dipped in a receptacle containing the fragrant sandalwood paste. This ritual is carried out daily for the whole period of twenty-one days, to mark the change of season and provide for a cooling of the weather. Dasarah is another festive season and it is also celebrated with pomp and splendour in the city of Puri. Krishna as Lord of the city of Puri bewitches the hearts of devotees, even as he does at Mathura, Brindavan, Udupi and Pandarpur.

Hallowed by visit of saints

The sanctity of Puri has been further deepened by the visit of great saints who have left their imprint on her soil and Culture. Sri Sankaracharya was among the



carried the message of Bhakti to Bengal and Orissa. Kabirdas taught and spread the spirit of equality among human beings as the children of God, and the idea of universal love breaking all boundaries of caste, creed, or sect. His Ram Bhajans are widely popular in this region, and a monastery dedicated to Kabirdas exists even today at Puri, where pilgrims continue to gather to receive the consecrated rice-water and bread crumbs.

After Kabir, came Shri Chaitanya Maha Prabhu, hailed throughout the land as Vishnu Himself, spent several years of his life of devotion in Orissa. He not only taught but exemplified in himself the Truth that loving devotion

fore-most who visited Puri, and established the Govardhana Peetha there. Ramananda of the 14th century considered a close follower of Sri Ramanuja and Kabirdas the Muslim devotee, who was one of the twelve disciples of Ramananda are said to have

was the path par-excellence to secure a vision of the Lord. Sri Chaitanya lived in the city of Puri and popularised the worship of Lord Jagannath. And Puri reverberates also with the devotional music of - Jaya Deva of Ashtapadi fame.

The Testimony of Sakshi Gopal

About ten miles from Puri is the village of Sakshi Gopal, named after the presiding deity in the temple there. It is said that a pilgrim who visits Puri has to visit this temple as well, as the Lord here is the witness who testifies to the pilgrim having visited Puri. Hence the Lord here is known as Sakshi (witness) Gopal.

By the side of the main temple of Sakshi Gopal is a tank called Chandana Tatak and pilgrims take a bath in this tank before entering the sanctum. Besides the Chandana Tatak, there are two more tanks on either side of the temple called *Syamkund* and *Garbhakund*. The image of Lord Gopal in the sanctum is beautiful beyond description. Close to this shrine there is also another shrine dedicated to Radha, the beloved of Krishna.

The story associated with the origin of the temple has inspired the poets of Orissa and enriched Oriya Literature. It is said that once a rich old Brahmin from a village near Puri undertook a pilgrimage. A young lad joined him on the way and offered to accompany him. Thereafter, throughout the arduous pilgrimage on foot, the young lad served the old man with love. Pleased with the youth's loving care, the old man vowed, in the presence of God, at Brindavan, that he would give his daughter in marriage to the young man just as a token of his admiration at the youth's services. But on their return to the village, the sons of the old man refused to agree to the marriage with one who was obviously penniless and added that the old man's alleged promise had nothing to confirm it by way of witness or proof. The youth who was deeply

devoted to Lord Krishna replied that the Lord himself would bear witness. A Panchayat was held to settle the matter, and when the young man was asked to produce his witness he went to Brindavan and begged of the Lord enshrined there to go to the village and help him get married. The Lord directed him to go back to the village, saying that He would be following him, but that if at any place the young man turned back, that would be the end of his following, for the Lord would stop there and proceed no further. As an assurance, however that the Lord was following he would continue to hear the tinkling of his ankle bells. The story goes that at a place called Phul Alsa, the sound of Krishna's anklets got muffled because of the sandy ground, and the young man felt impelled to turn back to see why it stopped. And then and there, Lord Krishna turned into a statue and got fixed at the spot. When the people and the Panchayat heard of all that had happened they felt they had sufficient evidence to confirm the marriage proposals. It is said that the King of Cuttack once had this image brought to Puri and installed in the precincts of Jagannath Mandir. But strangely enough, after this installation, the offerings made to Jagannath vanished from the place. Guided by this indication, the authorities later transferred the image to this village ten miles away from Puri where a separate shrine was built for him, - Sakshi Gopal. And in his place in Jagannath Mandir, another image, that of Sri Satya Narayana, was consecrated.



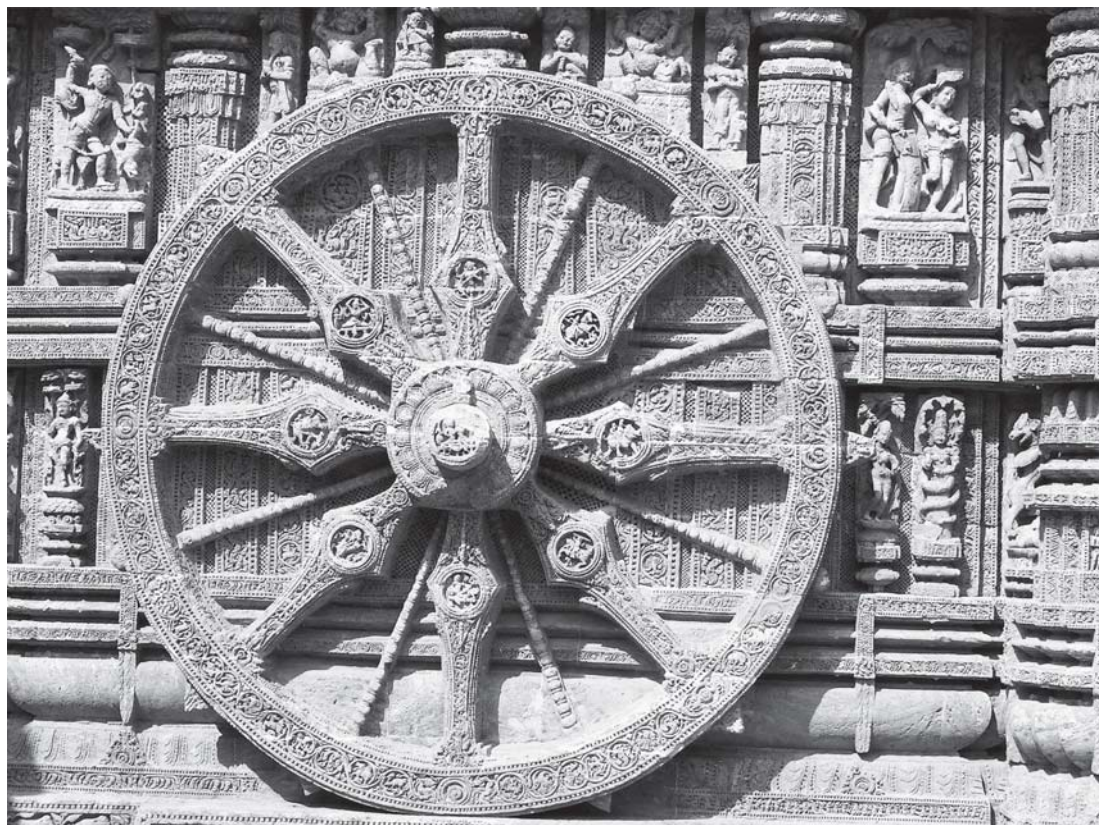
KONARK

The Legend and the Shrine

One of the four principal Kshetras of Orissa, and one of India's most famous Arka-Kshetras (pilgrim centres dedicated to the Sun-God), Konarak or Konaditya is situated twenty one miles north-east of Jagannath Khetra at Puri. This temple is on the banks of river Chandra Bhaga, a branch of the Prachi river. Built in 1278 A.D., this temple is a magnificent piece of architectural beauty, spacious and unique in design.

A devotee called Samba, stricken with an

ugly disease, went to Maitreya Vana and performed penance to propitiate the Sun-God (Surya). It is said that the deity appeared to him and told Samba to repeat the twenty-one names of the Sun-God, and take a bath in river Chandra Bhaga. When Samba took his bath in the river, he found in it an image of the Sun-God as seated in a lotus. He took it out, and installed it on the banks of the river, where a temple was constructed. On worshipping the deity here Samba was cured of the disease with which he had been stricken. Even now, people believe that if a person suffering from a disease like leprosy would worship the Sun-God, enshrined here, with single minded devotion, he would be cured.



Zarathustra

Varaha Mihira, the great astronomer and astrologer of the 6th century, states in his "Brihat Samhita " that the rituals regarding the installation and worship of the Sun-God should be traced to the Magas, who are considered to be the descendants of the Sun-God Himself. The Magas are also regarded as the descendants of Tara Sastra, who is identified with the Avesta prophet Zarathushtra. The Magas are stated to reside -at Saka Dwipa and the Avyanga, a girdle, is part of their costume. Samba, who consecrated the image of the Sun- God in this temple, is said to have brought some of the Magas from Saka Dvipa to carry on the worship at the temple. Scholars believe that these Magas are the Magis of ancient Persia and the girdle (Avyanga) is the Kasti or the Avyoanghen of Avesta.

The association of the Magas with India is very ancient and it is mentioned in Varaha Mihira's works. He describes the Sun-God in his Brihat Samhita and says that his legs are covered up to the knees and he is dressed up in an identifiable style, with a girdle around his waist. The images of Sun-God found in our temples are carved with heavy boots reaching up to the knees, and the girdle has one end hanging down in the Persian fashion.

Numerous are the Sun temples that existed in North India. The story of Samba is also associated with the origin of the Sun temple at Multan.

The Brahma Purana says that one should worship the Sun-God at Konarak particularly on the 7th of the bright half of Magha to achieve fulfilment of one's desires and

attain salvation. It is said that the Sun-God was first visualised by Samba on the 7th day of the bright half of the Magha and therefore a visit to the temple on this date is considered particularly sacred.

The present temple at Konarak is believed to have been constructed during the reign of King Narasimha Deo, who ruled Orissa during the 13th century. Abdul Fuzl who visited the temple writes that the entire revenue of Orissa State for a period of 12 years was spent on the construction of this temple, which is estimated at Rs. 36 crores.

The Magnet that Deflected Ships on Voyage

A huge magnetic stone was believed to have been found on the Sikhara or tower of this temple, which deflected ships passing by this shore away from their course and towards itself and many ships are thus believed to have been wrecked on these shores. It is said that the Muslim crew of a ship invaded the temple and took away the magnet. It was then that this image was removed from this sanctum to Puri.

Konarak's Architectural Excellence

The temple of Konarak is famous for its architectural splendour. According to Sterling, the architecture and sculptures in the temple exhibit a degree of taste, propriety and freedom which would stand comparison with some of our best specimens of Gothic architectural ornaments. The workmanship, too, remains as perfect as if it had first come from the

chisel of the sculptor, owing to the extreme hardness and durability of the stone." The Nava Grahas on the Sikhara are a monumental testimony to the architectural excellence of the day. The temple itself is unique in its plan, a dream of the sculptor given shape in stone.

Carved as a Chariot, it has twenty-four huge wheels of 9 feet 8 inches diameter each and the chariot is shown to be drawn by the seven mighty horses of the Sun's distinctive vehicle. The animals are carved exquisitely, straining visibly under the reins, their muscles taut and poised to break into a gallop.

Hunter describes in great detail the artistic carvings on the temple: "Huge elephants crouch in terror of rampant lions, club men, griffins, warriors on prancing horses, colossal figures of grotesque and varied shapes, stand about in silent stony groups". The intricate ornamental work on the walls of the temple is extremely beautiful. The concentration is, however, on the female form and its beauty. Woman in her many stages of Alankara and in her varied moods, playful, reflective or amorous is carved with a finesse of art and reality of expression that leaves one wondering about the artistic genius of those sculptors. She is everywhere laced into the intricate designs in every niche, melting subtly into the sculptor's pattern and highlighting it much as she does in real life.

A Tale woven into the construction of Konarak

Woven into the history of the construction of Konarak is a tragic tale. A great sculptor by name Maharana had been called from a

remote village of Orissa and appointed the master architect. The construction of the temple was expected to be completed by that period, that is in about 14 years and though the main construction had been completed by that period, the temple itself remained incomplete, as the top stone that was to serve as the Gopura, a huge single stone with the Nava Grahas around it, could not be lifted and placed on top. Months passed and a whole year went by. The King was growing impatient and threatening the sculptor with death, yet Maharana was unable to find a way of lifting the Gopura to the top.

Then one morning as he sat gazing at the fiat top of the temple, trying to think of a solution to the knotty problem, a young lad of about 16, approached him and offered his help to solve the problem. Maharana smiled indulgently at the lad, wondering how a mere slip of a boy could possibly solve such a tricky problem, and asked the lad to speak out. But, to his utter surprise the lad's solution turned out to be a very good one and Maharana immediately organised the labourers to start on the idea. The labourers, working under the boy's guidance, erected a platform sloping upwards to the top and with the help of stout ropes, rolled the round Nava Graha Gopuram to the top, while some tugged from the top and others pushed the circular piece of stone from behind. Thus by evening the Gopuram got installed on the top. It was then that a vicious fear entered the heart of Maharana, that the years of his labour would be eclipsed by the brilliance of the boy and so he killed the boy then and there. Loaded with the treasures bestowed on him by the King, Maharana

returned home after a period of 15 years. He was greeted by his surprised wife, who queried as to where their son was. Maharana was puzzled by his wife's question and asked her to explain. She told him that their son, who was a mere child of one year when Maharana left home, had gone in search of his father to Konark. Realising that the brilliant lad who gave him the solution and whom he killed was his own son, Maharana fell down and died of shock.

Such is the temple of Konarak, into whose past are woven legend, romance and myth. It is famous for its sanctity and its sculptural glory. Facing the sea-shore, washed by the waves, the temple dedicated to the Sun God receives the first rays of the golden sun as he emerges on the horizon. A sacred place, it is the true pilgrim centre where the devotees go to beseech the Lord to alleviate their sufferings and grace them with his mercy.

Bhuvaneswar - The Krittivasa Kshetra

The sacred Krittivasa Kshetra in Utkala is another Tirtha of rare merit. Comparable in its sanctity and antiquity to Benares, it is the abode of Lord Siva as Kritti Vasa one of his chosen abodes on earth, like Mount Kailas in the Himalayas, Kasi or Rameswaram, Mentioned in Brahmanda Purana, its unquestionable antiquity and sanctity have made it a great Siva Kshetra, where millions of pilgrims pour in. The temple in this Kshetra is believed to have been constructed by Yayati Kesari of the famous Kesari Dynasty who shifted his capital there from Jaipur. He started the construction of a magnificent temple for Lord Krittivasa or

Linga Raja and the plan of the construction was too vast to be completed in his time. According to tradition, the temple was completed in 666 A.D. by his grandson Lala Tendu Kesari.

The glory of Bhuvaneswar

Bhuvaneswar is the city of temples in Orissa like Kanchi in Tamil Nadu. In Brahmanda Purana, the Kshetra is depicted as consisting of one crore of Lingas and as sacred as Kasi Kshetra, "Linga Koti Samayuktam Varanasyah Sarnam Subham". Though it does not boast of one crore of Lingas today, Bhuvaneswar abounds in temples, a vast number of them sprinkled in and around the city. Many of them are in a ruined condition today. Of the temples here, the most famous is the Linga Raja temple which attracts countless pilgrims every year from all corners of India. The temple is a magnificent one, extravagantly carved, rich in architectural splendour and enshrines Lord Siva as Kritti Vasas, enjoying a great place of honour among the revered Kshetras.

Traditionally a pilgrimage to Puri is regarded as futile, unless the pilgrim visits first Lord Linga Raja at Bhuvaneswar.

Ekamra Kanan and Bindu Sagar

This place, known also as the Ekamra Kanan, has its name mentioned in the Puranas. It is said that once Lord Siva told Parvathi that the beautiful Ekamra Kanan is his favourite resort and Parvathi came down in the form of a cowherd girl to see the Kanan. When she was roaming about in the Kanan, enchanted by its beauty,

two tyrants, Kritti and Vasa, fell in love with her and asked her to marry him. She laid down the condition that they should first carry her on their shoulders, and so they lifted her on to their shoulders only to be crushed under the unbearable weight of the powerful Goddess. After she had thus crushed and killed the demons Parvathi felt very thirsty and appealed to Lord Siva, to quench her thirst. The Lord immediately caused a lake to be dug there and asked all the sacred rivers, lakes and streams to contribute their mite to the new lake. All the sacred waters except Godavari thus contributed to the lake which came to be known as "Bindu Sagar" (a lake made of drops).

The "Bindu Sagar" is a huge lake measuring 1,400' by 1,100' and a pilgrimage to this Kshetra starts with a bath in this beautiful lake. The Kshetra padi or the head of this centre is considered to be Ananta Vasudeva, whose temple is found on the banks of the lake. A bath in the tank is considered to be in itself highly sanctifying. After having a darshan of Lord Ananta Vasudeva, Ganapathi, Gopalini Devi, Skanda, and Nandi, the pilgrim proceeds to the shrine of Linga Raja, the Lord of the three worlds, Tribhuvanas - known concisely as Bhuvaneswar. Worship of this deity is performed according to the Pooja Vidhi prescribed in Brahmanda Purana. The worship can be performed both by Agama and Vaidika mantras.

It is believed that a pilgrimage to this Kshetra and the worship of the Lord releases one from the burden of all his sins and takes him to Heaven and he is born in the next life as a saintly person, achieving salvation thereafter.

All the temples at Bhubaneswar have a similar plan, a sanctum (the main gopuram topped by the Vimana), and three mantapams, (the Jaga Mohan, Nata Mantapa and Bhoga Mantapa). The architecture of these temples is said to be based on the Indo-Aryan style, though some historians feel that it is highly individualistic and is characteristic of the



architecture belonging to Kalinga itself. The Parasurameswara temple is among the oldest of Orissa temples. The Linga Raja temple is the biggest and occupies an area of 520' by 465'. The temple of Bhagavathi, is situated north-west of the Linga Raja temple within the compound itself. The deity in the sanctum, Sri Linga Raja, is in the form of a huge uncarved granite block, eight feet in diameter and rising eight inches above the floor level. It stands on a rim of black chlorite, the rim of the 'Yoni' tapering to a point towards north. On this rim or 'Yoni' surrounding the Linga are three deep, meandering crevices coming round the Linga meeting at a small patch of cavity at the mouth of the tapering rim. These three crevices are considered to be the three holy rivers, Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswathi, and the cavity to be the point of Triveni Sangam. A thin jet of water constantly flows through these crevices into the cavity which is scooped up by the Pandas and offered as Tirtha to the devotees. The great tower of the main gopuram is 180' in height and is a marvel of architecture. . Carved entirely of red-stone, the whole structure had been erected without the use of 'any mortar. The beauty of the carvings, the human figures and ornamental designs, have made the temple very famous in the world of art. They are the indelible recordings of the great artistic wealth of Orissa and indeed, she is the proud mother, whose gifted sons imparted life to the stone they chiseled.

Other Temples in the Vicinity

In the centre of Bindu Sagar, situated to the north of the temple is "Jala Mandir", a

small mantap where the Lord is brought once a year for a bath and the festival attracts numerous pilgrims. On the eastern bank of Bindu Sagar is a temple called Ananta Vasudeva temple. Brahmeswara temple is a little further down, and Bhaskareswara temple, which is to the north east, is in ruins now.

The temple of Raja Rani is another specimen of architectural excellence. Ferguson calls it "one of the gems of Orissa art". The Sidharanya, to the west of Raja Rani temple, consists of a group of temples of which the important ones are the Mukteswara, Kedareswara, Siddheswara and Parasurameswara temples.

About two miles from Bhuvaneswar temple there is also another small hill called Dhavala Giri, where Buddhist caves are found. It is believed that this is the very spot, where the historic Kalinga war of Asoka had taken place. Moved by the unbearable sight of the massacre in the battle field, it is here that Asoka underwent a change of heart and found solace in Buddhism. This hill is called Aswathama and the vihara on this hill is known by the same "Aswathama Vihara." The Sthala Purana says that once Visveswara, the presiding deity of Kasi got tired of the din and bustle of that Kshetra, where devotees pour in by the thousands, day by day and came down to Ananta Vasudeva on the banks of Bindu Sagar and requested permission to stay there for some time, whereupon Ananta Vasudeva compelled him to stay on permanently and it is on this resting spot chosen by Lord Siva of Kasi that the Raja Rani temple was built.

The Mukteswara temple is a very elegantly carved temple, though smaller in size than

the others. The bass reliefs, the statues and the floral ornamental designs carved in this temple are done exquisitely, showing great intricacy of detail and the "torana" here has been very elaborately and magnificently carved.

Parasurameswara temple is the oldest in this Kshetra whereas, both Siddheswara and Kedareswara temples are also very ancient and built earlier than the Linga Raja Temple.

In the temple of Linga Raja, poojas to the deity are offered as detailed by the Brahmanda Purana. Twenty-two different rituals are observed daily, including the bathing of the deity thrice a day in water, milk and Bhang. The worship is performed both by Agama and Vaidika mantras. From rousing the Lord from sleep early in the morning up to "Sayana" (putting the Lord to bed) each one of these twenty two rituals are observed with great care and performed in elaborate detail.

Like that of the prasad of Lord Jagannath at Puri, the prasad of Linga Raja cannot be rejected. It is considered very sacred and pure and is given to one and all. Before the deity, in the distribution of the prasad, there is no discrimination in terms of caste or creed and no one refuses the prasad offered to him on the ground that it has been touched by some one of a lower caste. On a footing of equality one stands here with an uplifted feeling and elevated heart, in the presence of the omnipotent Lord, Bhuvaneshwara and Linga Raja, who bless and bestow their grace on all alike. They come from all corners, his children, the pilgrims, pouring into the city for a bath in the Ekamra Tirtha feeling that like the Ganges at Kasi, it bestows on them

the boon of Liberation and for a glimpse of the Lord of the worlds - Visveswara at Kasi and Bhuvaneshwara at Bhuvaneshwar.

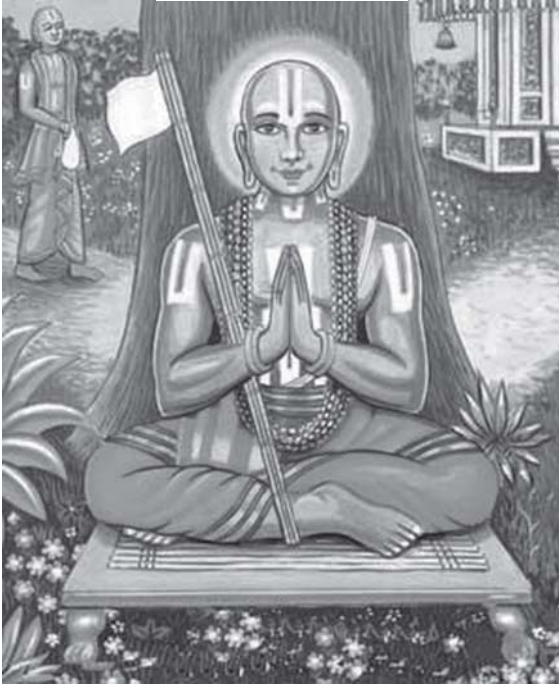
The Caves that echo the Sramana Dharma

Three miles from Bhuvaneshwar is the Khanda Giri with its three caved-in peaks of Khanda Giri, Udaya Giri and Nilgiri, soaring into the blues with caves agape as though searching for the serene beauty of Buddha, and the meditating Mahavira in the fleecy clouds.

There are a total of sixty caves in these hills, forty four of them in Udaya Giri, nineteen in Khanda Giri and three in Nilgiri. The caves in Khanda Giri are mainly of Jain origin, whereas Udaya Giri and Nilgiri caves show Buddhist impact. The inscription in the caves and in the nearby villages particularly in Dhauri - six miles south west of Bhuvaneshwar - speak of the predominance of Buddhism in these areas, when Yayati Kesari shifted his capital to Bhuvaneshwar and started on the construction of the Linga Raja temple. In the village of Dhauri are found the rock edicts of Asoka and an elephant originally designed as an emblem of Buddha, which have survived the rough and tumble of nature for over two thousand years and which stand to this day proclaiming the glory of their Buddhist King and the Ahimsa Dharma of the serene saint - Buddha - that changed the war-thirsty King and ended his bloody battles here on this very soil of Kalinga. The Ranika Nahar, which is believed to be the Palace of the queen, wife of Lalatendu Kesari is on the Udaya Giri peak. This is a very beautifully carved

cave, a treasure house of intrinsic and elegant carvings, elaborate in detail and design. The Swarga Puri cave, the Ganesa Gumpha, the Jaya Vijaya cave, Vaikunta cave, Hathi Gumpha, Pavana Gumpha and Bagh Gumpha all contain ancient sculptures, figures and carvings and carry the aura and glory of the heritage of an ancient culture. In the Khanda Giri caves many carvings exhibit Jainism and its influence, and here there is a huge image of the Digambara Jain Sraman carved in a black stone.

As an abode of Lord Siva, Bhubaneswar ranks with Kasi in the north, while in the abundance of temples and their sculptural beauty and sanctity, it is comparable to Kanchi in the south. Like Kanchi, it boasts of a conglomeration of religions too and was in the ancient days, as it continues to be now a birth place of culture and art.



Sri Ramanuja as a Pilgrim

PROF. M. R. SAMPAT KUMARAN, M.A.

Religion and Pilgrimage

PILGRIMAGE may be nearly as old as religion. Indeed, according to one theory, religion itself has its roots in a peculiar feeling associated with particular places. The prevalence of pilgrimage in almost all religions, major and minor, demonstrates its intimate links with the religious quest. Even religions opposed to idolatry have had to come to terms with the desire for pilgrimage.

The word "pilgrim" seems to have meant originally a traveller and derives ultimately from the Latin word, "Peregrines" meaning a stranger. We even now use the word, "Peregrination" in the sense of wandering about, travelling. In course of time, the pilgrim became a special kind of traveller, one who journeys to places considered sacred or holy. In somewhat similar fashion, the Sanskrit word, "*Yatra*", meaning a journey, has come to denote pilgrimage.

There has been faith in the existence of such places from time immemorial all over the world. Greek Paganism had its holy places, and the Romans followed suit. Christians naturally regarded Jerusalem as sacred and undertook perilous journeys to visit the places associated with the life and activities of the Redeemer. There is a record of a Christian Bishop undertaking a pilgrimage to Palestine in the early years of the third century and the crusades can be regarded as armed pilgrimages. A Semitic tradition of pilgrimage dates back to very

early times. A visit to Mecca is enjoined on all devout followers of Prophet Mohammed and this pilgrimage has been declared to be "the fifth pillar of Islam." To Buddhists, places linked with the life of Buddha, his relics and those of saints are sacred spots. In India of earlier ages, rivers and mountains had acquired sacred associations. In due course, regions called Arya Varta and Brahmarshi Desa came to be specially esteemed. Even at the time of the *Bhagavad Gita*, Kurukshetra was a Dharma Kshetra, a holy plain. Our epics refer to *Tirtha Yatras*, pilgrimages to sacred streams and mountains.

Pilgrimages have been undertaken with a variety of motives which have been analysed by religious teachers and theologians. Among these may be mentioned the securing of supernatural help, getting pardon for sins, offering thanks for favours through making votive offerings or otherwise, performing penance, expiating sin, obeying a sentence passed for an act of transgression and expressing devotion. Most of them are common to all religions, more or less. What may be called the acquisition and storing up of spiritual merit (Punya) is a peculiarly Indian motive. Attempts have been made to explain the sanctity attributed to places of pilgrimage. They derive their sanctity from association with a person or thing already considered holy or sacred. Tombs or Relics of saints or Prophets, shrines where the power of Divinity is specially manifest, places associated with saints, Founders of religion or legends of gods and goddesses, all these have attracted pilgrims.

Pilgrimage in Garuda Purana

Sri Ranga Mahatmya, in the version known as the *Satadhyayi* and claimed to be a part of the *Garuda Purana*, devotes almost one chapter (the 8th) to the theory of pilgrimage. It explains that a temple of Vishnu is the *Punya Kshetra* (holy place) par excellence. Any waters purified by the dust of His feet are sacred. The Lord alone is fully auspicious and holy, and only a thing associated with Him can be sacred. Only the remembrance of the Lord can destroy all sins, and only through contact with Him do things get purified. The Ganga destroys all sins because it flows from the feet of the Lord. The Yamuna, Kaveri and other rivers have become sacred on account of association with the Lord.

Pilgrimage for Salvation

It is believed that pilgrimage may even become the means of salvation. Lokacharya in his *Mumukshu Padi*, in the section devoted to the exposition of the *Charama Sloka* (i.e. *Gita*, XVIII, 66), has an aphorism which explains the term *Dharman* as various means of salvation laid down in the *Sruti* and *Smritis* and enumerates them immediately afterwards: "These are *Karma-and-Bhakti-Yogas*, the knowledge of the mystery of divine incarnation the *Purushottama Vidya* (taught in the *Gita*; XV), residence in a particular (sanctified) place (*Desa Vasa*), chanting the divine names, lighting lamps for the Lord, making garlands for the Lord and other such activities carried out in the belief that they are means of salvation)".

Commenting on this, Vara Vara Muni cites

various authorities to show that each of these is capable of winning salvation. In regard to *Desa Vasa*, he explains it as living in a *Punya Kshetra* (auspicious and holy place) and quotes a line from the *Sri Ranga Mahatmya* : “*Deso Yam Sarva Kama Dhuk*” (Satadhyayi, XI).

Referring to Ananta Sayya, where the Sri Ranga temple came to be built, Vyasa states that “this place can fulfil all desires as a cow yields milk.” Other famous commentators have also earlier used this quotation to point out the potentialities of a *Punya Kshetra*.

Azhwars and Shrines

Furthermore, the hymns of the *Azhwars* and the teachings of the *Sastras* have been understood as pointing out that the Lord has chosen to make Himself manifest in idols and shrines in order to save and redeem.

Commenting on the *Thiruvay Mozhi* (IV. 10.2) where temple in the home city of Nammazhvar has been described as the beloved residence of the Lord. Nambillai suggests that the Lord prefers to dwell in this imperfect world in order to share in the griefs of the creatures. When doubts were raised that such an interpretation might detract from the bliss of the Lord in Heaven, the reply was given that in His incarnation as Rama, He is said to have become exceedingly sorry when men suffered. And this has been counted as an excellence of Rama. (*Ramayana*, II. 2). To share in the griefs of the suffering creatures rebounds to the glory of the Lord and attests His perfection as nothing else can.

Sri Ramanuja's Early Years

Such is the back-ground of sentiment and thought behind Ramanuja's attitude to sacredness. He was born at Sriperumbudur, a village some twenty-five miles from Madras and the house in which he was in was near the local temple. He spent his student days and early youth at Kanchipuram, full of famous shrines. At Madurantakam, not far away he received initiation from Peria Nambi. In the temple there his rage represents him as a householder. The scenery some years ago of certain utensils an underground chamber of the temple suggests that these might have been used in reinitiation of Ramanuja. Later, he made his headquarters at Sri Rangam, which forms the ecclesiastical capital of the Sri Vaishnavas, and where in an island made by river Kaveri dividing and re-uniting in a temple with seven *prakaras*, Sri Ranganatha in *Yogic*

sleep on the Adi Sesha is worshipped. He went to Tirupathi more than once and he visited Kashmir where he is said to have obtained a copy of Bodhayana's *Vritti* on the *Brahmasutras*. Persecution by a Chola. Ruler sent him into voluntary exile in the Hoysala Kingdom, where he discovered the 101 of Narayana in a jungle, consecrated it in a temple and built a settlement all around known as *Tiru Narayana Pura* (near Mysore). He is also said to have undertaken a number of trips to Tirukkottiyur, (near Karaikkudi) to learn from a disciple of Yamunacharya serving there.

His “Bhu-Pradakshina’ The *Guru Parampara* of Pinbazhahiya Perumal Jiyar describes a *Bhu-Pradakshina*, as a

circumambulation of India, undertaken by Ramanuja as a pilgrimage and for the sake of preading his teachings. It is related that after visiting Kumbakonam and other places in the Chola Kingdom, he went to Azhagar hills near Madurai and thence proceeded to Darbha Sayanam (in Ramnad District) where Rama is said to have prayed to the God of the Seas for permission to build a bridge to Lanka.

On the way to the famous temples in Kerala, Ramanuja passed through Tirukkurungudi where the Lord was graciously pleased to act as his disciple and reached Tiruvan Parisaram, near Nagercoil, which must have attracted him as the home of Nammazhvar's Mother. His itinerary next took him to Tiruvattar and Trivandrum and from there to ten other temples celebrated in the poems of Nammazhvar and Kulasekhara.

Worship in Kerala Shrines

There is a tradition that explains why the Vishnu temples in Kerala still observe forms of worship different from those of the *Vaikha-nasa* and *Pancha Ratra Agamas* favoured by Ramanuja. It is said that during his visit to Kerala he felt convinced that the Lord wished to be worshipped in that particular way in that country and therefore took no steps to change the rituals.

Along the West Coast to North India

From Malabar, it is narrated, Ramanuja proceeded along the Western Coast to Southern India. The list of the places he visited there includes Dwaraka, Pushkara, the Sarada Pitha of Kashmir, Naimisaranya,

Ayodhya, Deva Prayag if that is the place known to the Azhwars as "Kandam", Badrikasrama, Salagrama, Gokula, Brindavana, Mathura, Govardhana Hill, Varanasi and Purushottama Kshetra (Puri). Of these, except Pushkara, Sarada Pitha, Varanasi and Puri, all have been sung by the Azhvars. Pushkara and Puri have long been famous in Epic and Purana.

At the Sarada Pitha, Ramanuja's commentary on the Brahma-Sutras is said to have been praised by the Goddess Saraswathi herself, who gave it the name of *Sri Bhashya*. His visit to Varanasi suggests that he was not so indifferent to this great centre of pilgrimage and to the Ganga flowing there as his followers later tended to become. In his manual of daily worship called the *Nitya*, he enjoins meditation on the Ganga as is using from the lotus feet of the Lord. At Puri he is stated to have founded a Mutt.

Return Homeward through Andhra

Setting out homewards, he worshipped at Sri Kurma and Simachala, where traditions of his visit survive. Passing through Ahobila, now in Andhra Pradesh, he reached Tirupathi. This was his second visit, the first having been paid many years earlier, when he learnt the hidden teachings of the *Ramayana* from his maternal uncle who was a disciple of Yamunacharya and engaged in service to Srinivasa in the temple. Now he found Tirupathi in a crisis as a result of a claim recently put forward by Sivas to the effect that the deity in the temple was none other than Siva. Ramanuja is said to have resolved the dispute by leaving it to the deity to choose

between the insignia of Vishnu and Siva both of which were to be left in the *sanctum sanctorum* one night. This was done, the choice was made and the identity of the deity as Vishnu was demonstrated. Tradition as recorded in *Tirumalai Orhuhu* refers to many reforms in the administration of the temple and changes in ritual carried out by Ramanuja. *From Tiru Narayanapuram and Tirupathi* He is also believed to have paid a third visit to Tirupathi in the winter of his life, after his return to Sri Rangam from Tiru Narayanapuram. It was at this time that he consecrated the temple of Govinda Raja at the foot of the Tirumalai Hills. This was done as the shrine of Govinda Raja at Chidambaram, which is inside the famous temple of Nataraja, roused the fanaticism of a Saiva Ruler on the Chola throne and he had the image thrown into the sea. The *Utsava* (or processional) idol was taken over to Tirupathi where it remained for some time, until Ramanuja consecrated a shrine for Govinda Raja in the Parthaarathy temple there.

On his way back to Sri Rangam, Ramanuja passed through Kancheepuram, Triplicane (in Madras City), where his father is said to have performed a sacrifice and prayed to Parthasarathy at the local temple for the birth of a son, Tirunir Malai which is a small hillock near Madras, Madurantakam, Tiruvanindrapuram near Cuddalore sung by Tiru Mangai Azhvar and later associated with Vedanta Desika and Viranarayana Pura where Natha Muni, the grandfather of Yamunacharya, had lived and laboured.

Azhagar Hill and Sri Villiputtur

Among other trips undertaken by him at various times may be mentioned one to Azhagar Hills and Sri Villiputtur about which traditions have been handed down. Andal in her *Nachichiyar Tirumozhi*, (IX.6) refers to her having promised the Lord as worshipped at Azhagar Hills with huge quantities of butter and sweets. While expounding the verse at Sri Rangam, Ramanuja felt on one occasion that he must fulfil Andal's express desire. And so he set forth to Azhagar's shrine and offered all that had been promised by Andal. Then he sought the blessings of Andal at Sri Villiputtur here she was born and where she is worshipped as the Lord's bride in a temple. Tradition says that under the inspiration of the Goddess, the priest of the temple hailed Ramanuja as her elder brother from Sri Rangam.

Renovation of Shrines

During the period of exile in the Hoysala Kingdom already referred to, Ramanuja not merely built Tiru Narayanapuram, he also renovated Tondanur nearby, where, in a *Mantapam* he vanquished the then dominant Jainas in debate. At Padma Giri also he is said to have established his position against the Jainas. On the way to Tondanur he and his disciples spent a day or two in the village of Salagrama, the tank which is still considered holy as having changed the minds and heart those opposed to him in religion and philosophy. Hoysala history suggests that Ramanuja took a leading part in building the temple Belur which is regarded as a masterpiece

in Indian architecture and the rich sculptures are among the most beautiful in the world.

During the period of his exile he travelled North and obtained from somewhere the occasional idol of Sampat Kumara, now stalled in the Narayana temple at Tirunarayanapuram. According to tradition, it was gained from a Moslem Sultan at Delhi. That is impossible, as Delhi was under Hindu rule till the last decade of the 12th century when Mohammed Ghori became the first Moslem King to reign there. But the idol must have been brought after a long and perilous gurney, as it is said that a bodyguard of Panchamas helped him during the journey and for the sake of their services, he permitted entry of Panchamas into the temple at Melkote for three days in the year, a custom rich continued to be observed all through centuries. We can only suppose that it was brought from somewhere in north India and that after Delhi came under Moslem writers living then supposed that in Ramanuja's time too that must have been the case.

Asetu Himachalam

Ramanuja passed away at Srirangam full of honour. The date of his death is given as 1137 by tradition, "Dharma Nashtah" which, interpreted according to the *Kata-Payadi*, gives the Saka year corresponding to this date. The extent of his influence during his life and its persistence for centuries afterwards indicate that he must have travelled extensively. Local traditions in many places far from one another connect him intimately with their temples. The old phrase, "*Asetu-himachalam*", set

out the limits of the ideal pilgrimage from the Setu in the south to the Himalayas in the north. Ramanuja appears to have covered this at least once, if not more times.

Pilgrimage inspired by devotion and spirit of service

It is worthy of note that Ramanuja's tours, as much as his writings, effected revolutionary changes in the people's minds and hearts. What he taught was something new in the context of his times, though he claimed to be following only in the footsteps of ancient and venerable sages. The spirit of devotion to God flowering forth in service to the people inspired his mission: it was the revolutionary leaven that affected the transformation. His spirit flowed into all those who came into contact with him directly or indirectly. The religion of *Bhakti* which spread all over India during the middle ages, liberalised tradition and reformed society, was the magnificent response to his life-long labours. Ramananda who was held in esteem by Kabir was a South Indian Vaishnava belonging to the school of Ramanuja. Through him and Kabir, Ramanuja has links even with Guru Nanak.

Pilgrimage a unifying force

The tradition of pilgrimage and of spreading religious and philosophical teachings through wandering teachers and ascetics has kept India together through the ages and infused a deep sense of unity among diverse races and creeds. India is holy to all, and its sacred places often lending

sanctity to natural beauty and grandeur, educate the spirit through stimulating the appreciation of Nature and fostering devotion to God. A parallel can be found in the development of a sense of European unity through the concept of Christendom in the day when wandering Monks and pilgrims brought the peoples of various countries together.

There is a danger now that the bitter national struggles in Europe which rose up as the institution of pilgrimage fell on evil days may find their counter-parts in India. Already, the cry is sometimes heard, though not heeded, that Tamil pilgrims, for example, must make their offerings only in their State and not waste their money in temples belonging to other States. To Ramanuja, as to all our great teachers confining God to one Linguistic area would have seemed sacrilegious, if not ridiculous. And the continuing though weakened tradition of pilgrimage keeps alive not merely the unity of Indian Culture, but also the spirit of its history and the memory of its splendours and glories.

Behind the daily prayer in the Vaishnava temples of the South, that Ramanuja's dispensation should spread in all directions as it seeks the welfare of all, may lie a dim memory and appreciation of his extensive pilgrimages all over India.



Pilgrimage In Tamil Nadu

A.SUBRAMANIAN, M.A.

TIRTHA is a place of Pilgrimage usually situated on the banks of sacred rivers. Tamilnadu is a land of Temples and most of them are centres of pilgrimage. In this article an attempt is made to trace the origin and development of pilgrimage centres in this region.

Aim and kinds of pilgrimage

Pilgrimage contributes to the unification of Indian culture with a steady circulation of the moral elite in the population of the Indian sub-continent. Sex or colour, will cease to condition and economic inequality disappear in *Tirtha Yatra* (Pilgrimage).

When a tirtha is recommended, it followed by specifying the fruit of a visit to it. It is said that in some respects pilgrimage even transcends sacrifice.

Every tirtha is a sanctuary. Arthasastra maintains that a pilgrim could not be traced at pilgrim-centres. Puranas and other sacred writings are replete with descriptions of sacred rivers and towns. They contain Tirtha, Sthala and Kshetramahatmyas.

There were basically two types of pilgrim centres: (a) permanently holy places and (b) places which become holy on special occasions, such as rare astronomical conjunctions. Based on their origin, they are of four types.

1. Daiva : Places associated with Brahma, Vishnu or Siva.
2. Asura: e.g., Gaya.
3. Arsha: Places associated with great sages.

4. Manushya: Centres which were built by rulers of the Solar and Lunar races.

In the case of temples, another line of distinction may be suggested. viz: Temples which were constructed at a place that was already flourishing and town which expanded with a temple as their nucleus.

Origin of Pilgrimage in Tamilnadu

In Tamilnadu the concept of pilgrimage can be traced at least to the Sangam period. Earliest inhabitants of this region practised naturalistic polytheism. When the common people could not imagine various forms of God mentally, icons were made. Conservation and worship of these icons gave rise to erection of places of worship.

The megalithic period (say, from about 500 B.C.) marks the beginning of temples over the mortal remains of the dead King or Chief. Thus the Adityesvara Temple at Tondamanad was erected by Parantaka Chola I (CA.D. 907- 947) and the temple of Arinjigai Isvara was constructed by Rajaraja Chola I (C 985-1014 AD) at Melpadi for his father, who died at Amur. Thus burial places were celebrated as places of worship, and all the members of the royal family visited them regularly and made liberal grants for offerings in the name of the deceased person. When Kings and other royal personages did this their subjects had to tow the line with them. Political conquests and cultural contacts brought people from different regions together. Thus these

temples became pilgrim centres.

Some idea of the religious history of Tamilnadu is necessary to understand this concept. Sangam period saw the divisions of the country on the basis of local geography. Each of these divisions (like



Kurinji, Mullai, Marudam, Neydal, Palai) had a chief duty and the inhabitants were constantly visiting the places where these images were installed and worshipped.

Round about third century B.C. people were bound by the caste system and those born in lower strata of society could not worship God directly. Further, most of the scriptures were in Sanskrit or other languages unknown to the common man. Hence there

was a big gap between the Vedic religion and religious ideas of the common man. Understanding the troubled conditions monks of the heterodox sects, like Buddhism and Jainism, contacted the masses by giving them food, medicine and education. They wrote in the language of the masses and simplified methods of worship. A layman could worship God with marked freedom and intimacy. For a few centuries these sects reigned the Tamil country.

Towards the beginning of the seventh century A.D. we see the emergence of a movement popularly known as the Bhakti cult. The Alvars and the Nayanmars, realising their past failure to move with the common man, started visiting all sacred shrines in this region. Their pilgrimage to holy places far and near has contributed much to the religious literature in Tamil. Propagators of the Bhakti cult defeated monks in disputes and resurrected the Hindu faith in the minds of the people. Internal schism and gradual degradation of personal discipline also contributed to the slow but systematic decline of the heterodox sects.

Pilgrim Centres in the State

Sacred places belonging to various religious beliefs are found in Tamilnadu, and their antiquity in most cases can be traced back to the medieval times. Let us take the Hindu temple, first. These temples were public institutions representing the collective energy of the state, rather than monuments for any king's personal glorification. Devotional hymns sung by Alvars and Nayanmars speak of several

types of temples, such as Ilankoyil, Madakkoyil, Manikkoyil etc. The most reliable evidence about how medieval temples served as pilgrim centres come from inscriptions that are found on the walls of shrines and circumambulatory paths of the temples. They record duplicate copies of endowments made by kings and pious individuals. There was also a custom to engrave the same record in different places for fear of destruction. A critical study of these lithic records enables us to have a clear picture of the status that the medieval temple occupied in the social and religious life. The temple was not only a place of worship, but served in the cultural and ethical uplift of the masses in many ways.

We understand that even in times of war they were not affected. On the other hand, the invading Kings made gifts to the temple. Thus when Rajaraja Chola I invaded Polamanura in Sri Lanka, he changed its name as Jananathamangalam and constructed temples there and also at Rajarajapuram (presently called as Mahatti): Kings often instituted festivals in their names and made elaborate provision to meet the expenses. Inscriptions found in the Brihadeesvara Temple at Tanjore speak of 34 festival days every year including those of TIRUKKADIYAM, TIRU KARTHIGAI and SANKARANTI. Rajaraja Chola I is given the title *Pandita Chola* for having arranged the various affairs of this temple with marked clarity.



TWO LITTLE KNOWN TEMPLES

**Kailasanatha Temple at Thara
Mangalam (Salem Dt) and
Venkatachalapathy Temple,
Krishnapuram (Tirunelveli Dt)
M. A. MURUGESAN, M.A., B.L.**

Thara Mangalam is a village 15 K.M. from Omalur, which is on the trunk road from Vellore to Salem. It is too big for a village and too small for a town. Krishnapuram is on the Tirunelveli- Tiruchendur road and is about 15 K.M. from Tirunelveli. It is a very small village and gives almost a deserted appearance. Both these places can be reached by road only.

There is a traditional saying in Tamil, which means that the stone works in the temples at Thara Mangalam and another temple at Thadi Kombu (which is also very famous for its architectural beauty) are far beyond any criticism even by the highest skilled artisans. Both these temples are very famous for their archaeological and architectural importance. Every piece of work is a story or a poem by itself. The words in any language can hardly bring out their beauty. Kailasa Nathar Temple at Thara Mangalam is comparatively bigger than Venkatachalapathy Temple at Krishnapuram. The former is a Siva Temple, while the latter is a Vishnu Temple. Both these temples are built with hard granite stones. But the stones appear to have yielded to the skill of the artisan more like a plastic medium than as hard flint. Kailasanathar Temple at Thara Mangalam

is said to have been built by one Ketti Mudali, whereas Venkatachalapathy Temple at Krishnapuram is said to have been constructed by Mayilerum Perumal Mudaliar and Daiva Chillai Mudaliar. The former temple must belong to Pallava School. The latter belongs to Naik School. It is not easy to fix the age of these two temples. It is a matter for the archaeologists and historians to decide the point. The most captivating feature of the temple at Thara Mangalam is its splendour and luxury, whereas the temple at Krishnapuram abounds in details and narrations.

The stone "Yalis" are the first and foremost features in Kailasa Nathar temple at Thara Mangalam. We see stone "Yalis" at the top of several gigantic stone-pillars, with their mouths wide open. In idle the mouths we see the rolling stone balls; in some there are single stone balls, in some there are two stone balls and in some there are even three. The stone balls roll on the tongue of the "Yalis". Where there are two balls, they roll inside the mouth and serve as two bulging eye-balls; where there are three the third just rolls on the tongue. It passes one's comprehension how these balls were carved out to such perfection and made to roll inside the mouths of the figures falling out. In order to clear any doubt from the minds of the visitors that some balls could have been put into the mouths of the "Yalis", the artisans have indicated even the process of making these balls. In some pillars, the process is shown in stages.

Near the entrance, in the first prakaram, seven full pieces of stones are placed in such a way as to make a full temple with a gopuram. The stones are so selected and

arranged as to give the full shape of a temple with a gopuram. The Raja Gopuram is constructed in the shape of a temple car. There is a stone piece in the Raja Gopuram, copper in colour, completely different from the other stones used in temple. Even on a very hot day of summer, it is cold and soothing to feel. It does not radiate any heat. It is a matter for the research scholars to find out how these stones are not getting hot or radiate any heat. It is also not known where such stones are available.

Many other pieces of architectural beauties are found all over the prakarams of this temple. At one place, a beautiful "Rishipatni" with a very modern hair-do is feeding her parrot. The parrot is actually picking the fruit in the hands of the Rishipathni, with its beak. Every part of the parrot and the Rishi-pathni, is carved out to perfection. The grace of the carving arrests the eyes of the visitors. The other usual pieces like Rathi, Manmathan, etc. found in other temples are also found in this temple, but with a marked distinction. At one place, the fight between Vali and Sugriva is chiselled out. At a distance, Sri Rama is standing behind a tree, to take an aim at Vali. The pieces are so arranged and carved out that from the place where Sri Rama stands, Vali is visible, but from the place where Vali stands, Sri Rama is not visible.

In one of the Sannidhis there is a stone roof where we see a group stick dance (Kolattam) of the girls. Several girls are standing in different rows, almost in all conceivable poses, to play the game - some standing straight, some bending, some turning, some sitting, some raising their

hands, etc. It is a matter to be seen and enjoyed and very difficult to describe in words. In another place, a group of parrots are sitting in rows on several lotus flowers. Thus I can go on describing the figures one after another without end. I can boldly say that such a perfection in stone work is not seen in any other temple in South India.

There is a small Bhadrakali Amman temple near the main temple. In front of the Kali Amman temple, there is an octagonal-shaped tank. The parapet around this tank is so constructed as to form a circular ring and that if a small stone piece is struck with force, it goes on circulating close to the wall till its velocity is exhausted. There is a small secret chamber wherein there is a secret passage leading to a distant place. Till now it is a mystery and no one has found out where it leads. The whole conception and theme of this temple is really marvellous. Very little is known of its architectural excellence to the outside world. I hope a time will come when the archaeologists and research scholars would throng to this place to study and unravel the mystery surrounding this temple.

It is also worthy to know that this place is very close to another famous place known as Kanjanmalai, where many Siddhas are said to be present. Whether the Siddhas are there or not, there is a Siddheswara at the foot of the hills showering His blessings on all the visitors. This small hill possesses perennial springs with medicinal value. It is also a wonder how these springs preserve their purity despite pollution. The Salem Iron and Steel Plant Project is taking shape near this hill.

Coming to the other temple (Sri

Venkatachalapathy temple) at Krishnapuram in Tirunelveli district, the entire treasure of art is found in two mantapams. The first mantapam is known as Kalyana Mantapam and the other is Aranga Mantapam. In the Kalyana Mantapam there are six wonderful pillars. Each one narrates a complete story. In one of the pillars an apsara is dancing. In another pillar a gypsy (Kuratti) is carrying away a young prince on her shoulders while the queen is trying to wean away the prince. The king on his horse comes in search of his son and the horse tramples on a warrior. The queen consults another gypsy to know whether her son would return and the gypsy reads the palm of the queen and replies that he would not and the queen's fate is sealed. On the other pillars too there are similar stories depicted. Coming to the Arangapatnam, it is a big one, which should have served as an auditorium for dancing and music purposes. There are 14 pillars, 7 on the southern side and 7 on the northern side. In the 4th and the 6th pillars, big Yalies are carved out. In three other pillars wonderful figures are chiselled out. Among these, the most impressive one is Veerabhadrar. He is awe-striking with a frightening face and protruding canine teeth. Lengthy moustache, side-burns extending upto the chins, broad nose, broad chest are some of the main features of Veerabhadrar. Added to these, he is wearing a garland woven with skulls. Every part of the body of this figure tells that the shilpy who chiselled them out should have been an excellent student of anatomy and physiology as well.



Nayanmars and Saivite Centres of Pilgrimage

N. MURUGESA MUDALIAR

THE spiritual Ministry of Tamil Saints consisted in going around the country and singing the praises of the Lord in the Company of the followers of the faith. This was very natural. They firmly established the Agamic way of worship as the path of Jnana and Mukti. It was in opposition to the Godless ritualism of the Mimamsakas and the heterodoxy of the Bauddhas. Vedic religion faced a crisis and it remained ill-defined notwithstanding the magnificent Truths of its Jnana Pada. There have been too many Gods, too much of meaningless ritualism, too much of priest-craft and too many divisions of the people. There was no common altar for worship or initiation, no common bond between brothers of the same faith and no consciousness of the manifest grace of the Supreme God in things great and small. Even the Upanishads did not speak of the transcendence and immanence of Brahman in one voice. The teachers of religion were engaged in rituals for the King or at best in disputations over religious texts. The crude criterion for anyone to call himself an *athika* was only to accept the so-called samskaras or the amorphous varnasrama. It was a time of de-generation, an age of superstition, an era of disbelief. It was an all-round phenomenon. Jainism and Buddhism too were no more exalted and they too had de-generated. There were

no *Rishis* or *Munis* on the scene. The fetishes of Yagas and Yajnas were the only features of Hinduism and a morbid social system which divided and sub-divided people as the decree of Karma or of Divine justice lost the spirit of religion.

II

Spiritual re-generation had to clear two obstacles, to fight the heterodox religions and purify the Orthodox. Both the Vedas and Agamas are the word of God. Both had Karma (or Kriya) pada and Jnana pada as guide lines for the followers of the faith. But there was a large difference. The Agamas were definitely monotheistic. They regarded the world as real and they ordained specific rules for worship which were minimum, and above all they postulated the Grace of God as the be-all and end-all of existence to free oneself from *samsara* and thus placed a strong emphasis on Bhakti. The epi-centres for the new wave of the Agamas to sweep the country were Kasi in the North and the land to the South of the Vindhya. But the coming defeat of the degenerating Buddhism and Jainism was instrumental only in the South, both on the Metaphysical front and the Theological front. In this, southern Saivism and Vaishnavism played a great part.

III

It was at this period of time (6th to 8th centuries A.D.) that there were born here a galaxy of Saints who were not content with their self-salvation but rose to be dynamic teachers to lead the people not by mystifying religion or multiplying un-essentials. There were doubtless Saivite Saints before the period known to history apart from legends and myths but the four,

who came on the scene now, were called *Samayacharyas*. They are Saint Sambandar, Saint Appar, Saint Sundara Murthy and Saint Manickavachagar. The lives of the first three and their itineraries were sung by Saint Sekkilar (XIII century), the hagiologist, in his Periya Puranam and of the last by Katavul-Mamunivar (XVI century) in Thiruvathvuradigal Puranam. Sekkilar speaks of the god-men sung by him as those who spurned Mukti for themselves but spent their lives in loving worship, so that the world may be elevated. The fore-most among them is Saint Sambandar, the boy Saint, whose divinity was celebrated by Adi Sankara in Soundarya Lahari. Of him Sekkilar pointedly speaks as the one who was born to resuscitate the Vedic faith in order to make the Saiva way shine, so that mankind may continue to progress. The lives of all the Saints were lived only to establish the Truth and they went about from place to place visiting many shrines in the company of devotees, called in Tamil "Adiyars" or "Thondars", and sang the praises of Siva. There were many miracles in their lives, but they were not the important fact, but their hymns sung in a language of the people which spoke of the love of God as the only thing to be established on earth. These four Acharyas are usually spoken of as having typified the four-fold path to reach God, viz., Charya, Kriya, Yoga and Jnana. These have very special connotations and the first two particularly are related to bodily and sacramental services in worship. Thus the temples became the focal points for the interpretation of faith in the most accessible and appealing of all forms of spiritual

discipline and endeavour.

IV

Saivism conceived of God 'as *Rupa, Arupa* and *Rupaarupa*.

The symbol of Siva is the linga, represented by the Linga. In the Siva Maha Purana the Lord affirmed that it is most meritorious for one to worship him as a Linga. The attribute of a Saivite is to worship the Linga wearing *Bhasma* and *Rudraksha* and uttering his sacred "Pancaksara-nama", "Namasivaya". Anyone who worshipped the Linga with water and leaves or flowers and offered himself to the Supreme attains the highest Jnana, which helps one to be not troubled by the fetters of *Anava, Karma* and *Maya* (viz. the ego, the fruits of action and the bond of the world of tattvas) and to attain Mukti or union with God in this very life. The appeal was thus clear and not confusing. Saint Sambandar's life is spoken of as the establishment of the glory of *tiruneeru*, as the sign of God's love. There is an old text which says that without these teachers, this Truth would have been extinguished.

In Madurai, Sambandar vanquished the Jainas and brought back the Pandyan King to the Siva fold by curing him of his illness with Vibhuti and putting the testament of his faith to the ordeals of fire and water. The sacred text survived and the whole of Pandya Nadu was rescued from the darkness of heterodoxy. Other Nayanmars also went about the country singing hymns, and of these the woman-saint Karaikkal Ammaiyar was the foremost and earliest. The hymns of the Nayanmars constitute a grand Liturgy unmatched in their beauty and sublimity.

V

Thus the temples became the centres for congregational worship. The three aspects of the temple are (1) Murthi (2) Sthala and (3) Tirtha i.e. (1) the particular aspect of God remembered in association (2) the particular sacredness of the place like the birth-place of an Adiyar and (3) the sacred river or tank. Murthi is the most important for the concentration on the Murthiman and the other two are adjuncts. Going to the temple or bathing in some sacred water is not enjoined in Saivism as a mere prayaschitta for sins committed. These Sthalas are also later associated with some tree called Sthala Vriksha.

The rules for the formation of the temple and installation of the various deities installed were laid down in Agamas and in the subsidiary Silapa-Sastras. Saiva Theology has been stated in such clearness in the Agamas themselves that it is known to everyone that one should do Atmartha Puja regarding oneself as the Koil (or the abode) of God, and his "unmai" (or consciousness) as God Himself. It is enjoined that the worship at the temples is for *Parartha*. There is the reason why the Saints sojourned from temple to temple and exhorted their adherents to worship the Lord wherever He is enshrined.

VI

The temples sung by the four Samayacharyas in their hymns are called "Padal-Petra-Sthalas". Though they are more consecrated by the fact, other temples are not of less merit, provided they are consecrated according to the Agamas. (There is the story of the Saint who worshipped a post to which the calf is tied as the Linga, and attained salvation. These

cases are exceptional for the highly evolved souls and not the rule). Even the Jivan Muktas while they continue to live in the world are enjoined to look upon the Thirukkoil or Alaya as Siva Himself. The 12th Surra of Siva Jnana Bodham of Saint Manicka Deva enjoins one to worship the sacred habit of Siva's devotees and the shrines of Siva, regarding them as the Supreme Lord Himself.

VII

Thus one of the fundamental doctrines of Saivism is to regard Siva's symbol enshrined in temples and Siva's devotees as Siva Himself and to worship them in love. The Nishkala is seen in the shrines as Sakala. The visible form of the Linga is like the spark of fire from the wood, one with it but also different. Thus the *Swarupa* is worshipped through the *tatastha*. Thus in the Saiva concept the temple is not merely a place of worship and rituals but the representation of a highly metaphysical concept of God and the only way of realising oneness (*ananyatva*) with Him is through Love and worship.

The very plan of the temple is symbolic of this. At the entrance is the Gopuram which by the representation on them symbolises the *prapancha* which is seen (animate and inanimate, devas and men, etc.). It is the *Sthula-Linga*. Crossing the entrance one approaches the *Bali-Pitha*, where one has to cast away all impurities and make a mental sacrifice. There one approaches the *Dvajasthamba*, where one raises his consciousness to the most elevated level possible. Then he approaches the *Nandi*, which looks steadfastly at the Lord and is in eternal union with Him.

He too becomes one-pointed in his thought,

and enters into communication with the Lord. Then in circumambulating the sanctum sanctorum he meditates on the various acts of Grace of the Lord. Then coming before the presence of the supreme (*Sukshma Linga*) he gives himself up in love to Him, and becomes one with Him.

VIII

Apart from this meditative aspect of temple worship, the adherents of the faith are enjoined to do bodily service of the temple like cleaning the temple, lighting, providing flowers, etc. These are all acts described as *Siva-Punya* or *Pati-Punya*, in contradistinction from acts like charity to the poor, building chatrams, all of which are called *Pasu-Punya*. Thus one, whether he is a house-holder or ascetic, is not required to get away from the world of men into forests or mountains for meditation. Siva-Puja is itself looked upon as "tavam" (or tapas). If Saivites go on pilgrimage to various other temples of Siva wherever they are, it is more to meditate on the special graces of Siva associated with those places and on the lives and sources of the Lord's servants who hallowed the place. It is to set an example in this respect that the Samayacharyas visited the shrines of Siva, far and near, and mingled with kindred souls in those places. The temples also became the centres not only for the spiritual life of the people, but also for their aesthetic and cultural life like art sculpture, music, dance, etc. Thus a visit to these temples is a source of spiritual peace and aesthetic enjoyment. More than these, it brings one into the company of good souls who flock to those temples.

IX

The Nayanmars sang Hymns in praise of the Lord in the various shrines. They also held that even to remember or utter the names of the places or names of the deities is meritorious. So they sang Hymns called *Kshetra Kovais* mentioning the names of all the sacred places. Sambandar, Appar and Sundaramurthi have each sung these garlands of names and learned men have filled them as "Koyiltiram" (in Tamil) meaning the "Praise of the Lord's abodes." Manickavachagar has mentioned the names of many sacred places in his "Kirtitiruahaval" forming part of his Tiruvachagam. Later Tamil Saints called "Tiru-isai-p-pa-singers" have also sung of many sacred places.

X

The shrines consecrated by the Tamil Saints are as previously mentioned called "Padal Petra-Sthalas". They are not confined only to Tamil Nadu but also beyond its limits. Besides those for which hymns or "Pathakarns" (dyad of verses) as they are called, are specially dedicated, many "Sthalas" are alluded to it in their own other hymns. Some are sacred as Saiva sacred places even though there are no special hymns. The Padal- Petra-Sthalas are specially meritorious, as they are special liturgies sung by the Nayanmars, which a devotee can sing or meditate upon. The classification of these Kshetras are as follows:

Vada Nadu: (31 in number) which eludes Kailas, Kedar, Omkar, Somnath, Sri Saila, etc.

Tondai Nadu : (32 in number) which includes Kalahasti, Tiruvalankadu, Tiru-Kachi-ekambam, Thiru Mullaivayil, Tiruvotiyur, Thiru Mayilai, Thiruvanmiyur,

Thirukkalu-kunram, etc.

Nadu Nadu: (22 in number) which includes Tiruvannamalai, Thiruppadurai Puliyur, Thiruvennai Nallur, Thirumudhu Kunram, Thirunavalur, Thiruvathegai Veerattanam, Tirutturaiyur, etc.

Chota Nadu : I (63 in number north of Kaveri) Thirukoil (Chidambaram), Tiruppullirukku-Velur (Vaidiswaran Koil), Sirkali, Tiruppaa-nandal, Thiruvaaiyaru, Thiruvanaikkaval, etc.

Chola Nadu: II (160 in number south of the Kaveri). Tiruchirappalli, Tiruvalam Chuli, Thirukkudanthai, Thirunageswaram, Thiruvavaduthurai, Thiruvazhunthur, Thirumayiladuthurai (Mayuram), Thirukkadavur, Thirutharumapuram (Dharmapuram), Thirunallaru, Thiruvizhimizhalai, Thiruppugalur, Thiruehchangattangundi, Thirunagairkaronam, Thiruvarur, Thiruvalivalam, Thirukkollili, Thiruvairnur, Thirumarai-kkadu (Vedaranyam), Thirupperundurai, etc.

Pandya Nadu : (14 in number) which includes Thirupputhur, Thirupparangiri, Thiruvalavai (Madurai), Thiru Rameswaram (Rameswaram), Thiru-uttarakosa Mangai, Thirunelveli, Thirukkuttralam, etc.

Kongu Nadu: (7 in number) Thirukanivar (Karu), ThiruppandiKodumudi, Thirunava (Bhava), Thirupukkoliyur (Avinasi).

Malai Nadu : (Malabar) (3 in number). Thiruvanchaikkalam, Suchindram, Kanya Kumari.

Tuluva Nadu : (1 in number) Thiru Gokarnam.

Izha Nadu: (Ceylon) (2 in number) Thirukkonamalai and Thirukkatheswaram.

XI

Some of these Sthalas are celebrated in other respects also, as representing the pancha-bhutas, ashta murthas, etc.

(I) *Pancha Bhuta Sthalas* are:

- (1) Prithivi - Kancheepuram or Tiruvarur.
- (2) Apaha - Thiruvanaikkaval.
- (3) Agni - Thiruvannamalai.
- (4) Vayu - Thirukkalahasti.
- (5) Akasa - Chidambaram.

(II) *Pancha Sabhas*: (Dance halls of Siva):

- (1) Ratna Sabhai - Thiruvallankadu.
- (2) Kanaka Sabha - Chidambaram.
- (3) Rajatha Sabha - Madurai,
- (4) Tamra Sabha - Tirunelveli.
- (5) Chitra Sabha - Tirukkuttralam.

(III) *Ashta attahasa Sthalas*: (8 acts of puissance of Siva)

- (1) Thirukanduyur - Brahma beheaded.
- (2) Thirukkovalur - Antahasura killed.
- (3) Thiruvathigai - Tripura burnt.
- (4) Thiruppariyalur - Daksha Beheaded.
- (5) Thiruvir-kudi - Jalantra quelled.
- (6) Vazhuvur - Elephant flayed.
- (7) Thirukkadavur - Yama restrained.
- (8) Thirukkurukkai - Manmatha was burnt.

(IV) *Saptha vitanka Sthalas*: (7 places of beautiful aspects of Siva seen usually as Thyagaraja)

- (1) Thiruvarur - Veedhi vitankar sabha dance.
- (2) Thirunallar - aga vitankar unrnatta dance.
- (3) Thirunagai-k-karonam - Sudara vitankar Paravara tharanga dance.
- (4) Thirukkarayil - Adhi vitankar kukkuta dance.
- (5) Thirukkolili - A vani vitankar Brunga dance.
- (6) Thiruvaimur - eela vitankar Kamala dance.
- (7) Thirumaraikkadu - Bhuvani vitankar Hasta padha dance.

(V) *Saptha Sthana Sthalas*: (7 places meritorious for sacred bath)

- (1) Thiruvaiyaru.
- (2) Thiruppazhanam.
- (3) Thiruchchotrutturai.
- (4) Thiruvadikkudi.
- (5) Thirukkantiyur.
- (6) Thiruppunturutti.
- (7) Thiruneithanam.

(VI) Places considered as of equal merit to *Kasi* :

- (1) Thiruvankadu.
- (2) Thiruvaiyaru.
- (3) Thirumayladuturai.
- (4) Thiruvitaimarudur.
- (5) Thiruchadaikkadu.
- (6) Thiruvanchiyarn.
- (7) Thiru-mudu-kunram.

(VII) Places which confer *Mukti* :

- (1) Thiruvarur - by being born there.
- (2) Kanchipuram - by residence there.
- (3) Thiruvannamalai - by mere thinking of the place.
- (4) Thirukudukunram - by dying there.

(VIII) Places considered as *Bhuloka Kailasa*:

- (1) Thirukkalahasti.
- (2) Thiruchchirappalli.
- (3) Thirukonamalai.

IX. There are "Sthalas" sacred specially for (i) Devi, (ii) Ganapathi and (iii) Muruga.

X. There are some "Sthalas" which are Siva-Vishnu complexes. (Vishnu shines inside the Siva temple as the principal deity), like Rameswaram, Kanchi, Bhavani, etc. In most temples there will be sculpture in stone or images in bronze representing

some of the 28 Murthis of Siva, like Chandrasekharar, Kalyana Sundarar, Bikshitangar, etc. There will always be Somaskanda, Siva and Uma with child Skanda, which represent Satchidananda aspect of Siva.

XII

It is not possible, for want of space, in a limited article to describe the beauties of even the most important temples of Siva, their historic evolution, their architectural beauty, their iconographic splendour, the legends, Myths and even real events connected with them, their principal festivals, etc. which would interest a pilgrim, devotee or student of ancient monuments. Unfortunately, *Sthala puranas* connected with these places would be purely mythological accounts; tourist ides would give information about superficial fact of interest like distance from Railway stations, etc., archaeological and epigraphical ports only about the history of the evolution of the temples, etc., and the inscriptions on the walls and the special features of the sculptures and icons of the temples. There is no single book which will afford all these information. Even if they give some of these particulars, they may omit the beautiful hymns sung by the Samayacharyas and other saints these place, which are the most important. Some orthodox "Sthala-Manjaris" would elude hymns, but they would not contain English translations of them so as to bring out the lofty thoughts contained in them.

These Tamil hymns are sung as part of the ritual at Shodasopachara at the two, three, four or six services in the daily Puja in the temples. These chants are considered as equal in authority and merit to the chanting

of the Vedas. There is a separate hall in the big temples for chanting these hymns. They are also sung by groups Goshtis in processions of the deities. The ymns are set to pattu (raga) and Kattalai assonance meanings). If the hymns are sung with a knowledge of their meaning, they have sublime effect both on the singer and the hearers, and they will establish an intimate and loving relationship with the Lord.

XIII

The hymns sung by Sambandar, Appar and Sundara Murthy (386, 311, 100 respectively) are called Devaram. Of the total of 797,748 are Sthalapadikams i.e., pertaining to specific shrines and the rest are general hymns. St. Manickavachagar's hymns total 51 and the number of stanzas total 658. Such a large body of litany is found nowhere else in religious literature except in the Nalayira Divya Prabandhams of Vaishnava Azhwars.

The greatest spiritual legacy of Saivism (and of Vaishnavism) is the large number of magnificent temples and the holy literature connected with them. The worship in these shrines are according to Agamas, and later manuals called *Paddhatis*. The hymns are sung even today in these temples as part of the worship. Visit to these holy shrines is meritorious. Saint Appar has sung "Verily this human birth is to be desired to see the lovely form of Dancing Siva in Tillai". That sums up the joy of visiting these temples.



They bear the Imprint of the Lotus Feet of Lord Buddha

IT is a characteristic of India that every great and outstanding thought or doctrine has somewhere or other a place devoted to its propagation and tradition. Each myth, epic or historical event is associated with places that survived through generations and have retained the fragrance of their pristine association. While the myths and epics associate numerous temple cities with gods and goddesses and make them pilgrim centres of sanctity, historical events like the birth and visits of great saints leave a few others fragrant with the memory of the association with those great souls. Cities where great philosophers, sages and saints have been born, or lived, become holy places because of their association with these great souls. Such holy places come to be regarded as pilgrim centres, where men of piety and faith visit, not for the sake of any vows or for relief of any kind from suffering, but just to set foot on and breathe the atmosphere of the holy land that begot such noble children. It gives them a feeling of soul-upliftment to stand on that holy earth looking at the monuments, recalling those sublime lives. Of the holy places revered thus are the cities that have been blessed by the birth and visits of Sakya Muni - Gautama the Buddha, whose enlightenment brought the light of wisdom not only to India but to humanity as a whole. Legends have grown

around the advent of Buddha and the incidents of his life, suggesting the play of the supernatural and the miraculous. These miracles add charm to the greatness of a soul that loved humanity and suffered and sacrificed for the relief of all those who were suffering and needed succour. Apart from miracles, there is also a historical account.

About the sixth century B.C., was born Siddhartha to Mayadevi and Suddhodana, King and Queen of Kapilavastu, a state at the foot of the Himalayas. The handsome little prince who was later to become a great world-teacher setting the pattern for renunciation and service and transforming the religious outlook of the people of India, was born at Lumbini, a village near Kapilavastu, around the year 566 B.C. The sages prophesied that the babe would become the conqueror of the world, or a Buddha - the emperor of the spiritual world. The father, King Suddhodana, brought up the prince in an atmosphere of luxury, where no mortal suffering showed itself, in order to prevent his son from becoming a monk. However, Destiny decided otherwise, and Prince Siddhartha had to move out of his cloistered isolation and witness incidents of suffering through disease, death, and old age that are the lot of every human being. He realised the emptiness of wordly pleasures and was profoundly concerned about finding a way out of the sorrow-ridden existence. Determined to discover the cause of it all, he sat and meditated, deeply and for long. And when he emerged from the depths of his meditation, he had made up his mind to renounce life and go out in quest of a solution to the most fundamental of human problems. For his

part, he was firm in his resolution to abandon all the delights, that a princely life of luxury offered him. Accordingly, on that night of destiny in his twenty-ninth year, leaving his young wife and little son behind, Siddhartha marched out of his royal home and wandered away into the wide world. With but one 'aim ruling the whole of his mind and heart, he went from place to place as a homeless ascetic, seeking light at every turn and asking for instruction from every religious teacher. At *Uruvila*, near Gaya, he practised the most rigid austerities, subjecting his body to severe tests, - only to realise that these helped in no way to achieve his goal. He moved away and wandered again; and at *Niranjana*, he took his seat under a pipal tree after a bath and fell into deep meditation. And there, under that Pipal tree he did succeed in achieving his aim. Light dawned on him. Truth flashed illumining his mind and the world with the radiance of a celestial light. That was the great moment of the *Bodhi*. And the tree under which he sat at the hour of the great awakening becoming the *Bodhi* tree. Thereafter he came to be known as *Buddha*, the Enlightened One, Tathagata (the one that attained Truth) and Sakyamuni (the sage of the Sakya clan). He proceeded from Niranjana to Isipatana (Sarnath) near Benares, where he shared the fruit of his penance with the five monks who were his followers during his earlier wanderings. For full forty-five years he wandered spreading his gospel to one and all, till at last, at the age of eighty he attained his Nirvana at

Kusinagara, Modern Kasia in the Gorakhpur district.

By the followers of Buddhism and also by those of other religions who revere this great sage, *eight* places are held sacred, and to these spots a pilgrimage is undertaken. The first *four* of these eight places are the places *where the four important events of Buddha's life* took place, viz., the Birth at *Lumbini*, attainment of Supreme knowledge at Bodhgaya, the first proclamation of the Law at the *Deer Park at Isipatana (Saranath)* and the Mahaparinirvana or the attainment of the Mahasamadhi at *Kusinagara*. The other four places of veneration are the places, where Buddha is said to have performed the four miracles.

Lumbini

Lumbini, where the Blessed one was born comes foremost in the line of sacred places that are sanctified by their association with the Buddha. Lumbinigrāma, situated twelve miles from Kapilavastu, is on the path from Kapilavastu to Devadaha, Queen Maya's parental town. Desiring to see her parents



Queen Maya set out to Devadaha during the last stages of her pregnancy, but was forced to stop in the grove at Lumbini on the way owing to the imminence of the event that was to take place. There, under the cool shade of a Sala tree, which bent its branches to envelope her in its cool, fragrant shade, she stood, holding on to one of the branches, and delivered a beautiful and divine looking baby, in standing position. The child was received by the Gods, including the guardians of the quarters and from their hands by men. From Lumbini, the boy was brought to Kapilavastu, where the sages studied the thirty-two auspicious marks on his body and his horoscope, and declared that he would either become the conqueror of the world or a Buddha, an enlightened sage.

Lumbini has been identified with Rummindevi, about one mile north of Paderia and two miles north of Bhagwanpur in the Nepalese Tahsil of that name, which is situated to the north of the Basti district of Uttar Pradesh.

Lying cradled in the beauteous arms of nature, at the foot of the Himalayan terrace, Lumbini is a picturesque spot where the pilgrim feels thrilled as he realises that he is standing on the holy soil that received the Blessed One. Emperor Ashoka visited this place, after the Kalinga war, he felt that stained with the blood of the lakhs that died on his account, he could be washed and purified only on this soil, which received the most compassionate of souls. Here stands the monolithic pillar erected by that emperor, commemorating his visit.

The inscription on the pillar shows that it is erected exactly on that sacred spot

where Siddhartha was born. A shrine stands nearby, with a carving describing the nativity of the scene. The place, with its imperishable sanctity, stands there to this day, attracting numerous pilgrims. The Chinese pilgrims visited this place in the bygone days and have left an account of the many establishments that flourished here. Many of these lay buried under the earth as the ruins of a once glorious civilization. But the fragrance of the sacred association, the memory of the birth of the Blessed one, lingers fresh in the air and fills the atmosphere, making Lumbini a place of glory and sanctity.

Bodhgaya : The Dawn of Wisdom and Light upon 'the world'

This site of Samma Sambuddh is Uruvila near Gaya. The light of wisdom illumined the doubt-shadowed mind of Siddhartha and from there it emanated, spreading far and wide. Because of this sacred association, Gaya came to be known as Buddha Gaya or Bodh Gaya, and became an important place of pilgrimage and a place of great sanctity for the Buddhists. The place was known as Sambodhi in ancient days, as may be seen from the inscriptions of Ashoka. To the Buddhists, the place is sacred as Mahabodhi.

Bodh Gaya is considered to be the cradle of Buddhism on account of this event in the life of Buddha. For the devout Buddhist no place is of greater sanctity or importance. The holy spot of enlightenment, the sacred Tree and the Vajrasana or the diamond seat on which Buddha sat and meditated are all preserved with reverence and loving care and Bodh

Gaya attracts pilgrims from far and near, not only from India but also from countries outside India. Holy shrines and sacred monuments were erected all around the sacred spot and the Chinese Pilgrim Hieun Tsang gives a vivid account of his visit to them and of the splendour with which the city flourished in those days. The present Bodhi tree is an offspring of the original tree and is preserved with great care. The present shrine, the imposing Mahabodhi temple, was in ruins, and has been renovated at considerable expense.

Ashoka is believed to have erected the great shrine on the holy spot of enlightenment and it is perhaps this shrine which is frequently represented in early Buddhist art. No remains of the shrine erected by Ashoka have survived and the stately structure that is now seen is a later-day construction. The temple has a ballustrated galley surrounding the Bodhi tree, which perhaps had originally been a carving of wood now translated into stone. The temple has been renovated and restored so many times that it is difficult to determine what its original plan or form was. From the description of Hiuen Tsang, it appears however that the temple bearing its present form and size had already existed in the 7th century B.C. The present shrine at Bodh Gaya is a prototype of the Mahabodhi temple in Burma.

The Mahabodhi temple at Bodh Gaya consists of a pyramidal tower surmounted by a stupa, complete with the 'harmika' with a fluted amalawa-like lower member and with angle amalakas at the corners demarcating the different stages in the ascent of the tower. It stands at an imposing height of 165 feet, proclaiming

the Glory of the Buddha to the world. The porch that forms the entrance to the temple is on the eastern side and appears to be a later addition. Each of the four sides of the tower present several tiers and niches, while the front face has a tall lancet opening for the admission of light into the sanctum. From the base of the tower rises a turret with four corners, each of which has a miniature replica of the main spire. Rising to an imposing height, standing in glorious beauty against the serene background of the blue sky, this majestic shrine dominates the landscape for miles around and attracts pilgrims from all corners of the world.

The beautiful gilded image of the Buddha in the shrine, is in the earth-touching attitude which signifies enlightenment. On the northern side of the temple is a narrow elevated platform known as the Chankama. Described as the jewel shrine, this spot is supposed to be the place where the Buddha, after attaining enlightenment, walked to and fro and in deep meditation for a week. There are sculptured ornaments representing the miraculous blossoms, which are supposed to have sprung up under His feet as He walked about in meditation. On the western side of the temple stands the Bodhi tree, with a red sandstone underneath it representing the Vajrasana. The original Mahabodhi temple, sketched in the Buddhist relics is shown enclosing the entire area of the holy spot, together with the Bodhi tree. The present shrine, with its lofty tower, necessitated in the process of construction its shifting to the east of the holy spot and hence they are now placed at the back of the temple.

Among the innumerable remains of the earlier constructions, the most important ones, are the stone parts of a railing, which appears to be a part of the original shrine. These railings represent two periods of construction, the earlier being the second century B.C. and the later the Gupta period. Very near the Mahabodhi shrine are the seven sacred sites, dear to the devotees being identified with those where the Lord is said to have passed the seven tranquil weeks in the blissful state of his Buddhahood.

Saranath - The Land Mark in the History of Religion

If Lumbini is the birth place of Buddha, *Saranath*. (*Isipatana*) is the birth place of Buddhism, for it was here he first spoke out his gospel, distributing the fruits of his enlightenment to the spiritually hungry. It was here he first proclaimed the law and the Eightfold Path. This incident is metaphorically referred to as setting the wheel of Law into motion or Dharma Chakraparivartana.

Though very little is known historically of the Deer Park and Isipatana, the place acquired celebrity from the time of Asoka, as did several other spots. Various mementos and stupas have been erected here by Asoka, whose remains are still to be seen. It was a flourishing and prosperous park with no less than 1500 monks and nuns residing in the various Ashramas. Hiuen Tsang describes numerous edifices of this place in his work and of such edifices, the most important ones are a magnificent temple enshrining a life-size brass image of the Buddha represented in

the act of turning the wheel of the law (Dhamma Chakrapravartana) and a stupa and a stone-pillar erected by Ashoka.

Many shrines and stupas have been added later, along with renovation of the earlier ones. The latest of these constructions is the temple of the Wheel of Law erected by Umaradevi, one of the Queens of King Govinlachandra of Kanauj. Soon after its construction the place was destroyed, perhaps by the armies of Muhammad Ghori. Such damages used to be repaired immediately by pious devotees, but with the fall of Buddhism in India, the shrines and establishments came to be neglected, and what remain to-day are the ruins of an erstwhile glory of a great religion.

As one approaches the site from Benares, the first land-mark to attract the eye is the hankhandi, a lofty mound of brickwork mounted by an octagonal stupa. This is believed to be standing on the sacred spot, where Buddha on his way to Isipatana met his five earlier companions who became the first followers of His philosophy and faith. The octagonal tower at the top is a later day construction by Akbar put up in order to The Deer Park, with its temple and stupas in the centre and surrounded by monasteries, which had once been a flourishing strong-hold of Buddhism, is a sorry sight of ruins now.

The Dhamek Stupa, rising upto a height of 150 feet, is the only definite structure that stands amidst all the rubble and ruin.

The Asoka stupa, described by Hiuen Tsang, may be identified with the ruins of a large brick stupa. Jagat Singh, Diwan of Raja Chait Singh dismantled this stupa to use its bricks in the construction of a market in Banaras in 1794. Relics exhumed

on this occasion are responsible for bringing this holy place out into light again from the oblivion into which it had fallen. The structure as it now stands is the result of successive additions, the innermost core belonging probably to the period of Asoka. The site of this stupa probably marks the spot where Buddha first proclaimed the law. To the north of this stand the broken stump of an Asoka Pillar and to the east arc seen, the remains of a temple designed as the Main Shrine, which might have been the magnificent shrine described by Hiuen Tsang. Around the main shrine is a paved court with an approach from the east. Upon this site are found innumerable remains of stupas -and shrines, the remnants of pious benefactors. On the north and south are found relics of monasteries, all of which are of the same pattern, residential cells arranged in a row on the four sides of an open quadrangle.

Among the ruins of *Saranath* the most imposing one is the Dhamek Stupa which stands majestic even in its battered state, rising to a towering height of 143 feet. A massive block, it is built of stone in the lower half and brick at the upper, and is of a cylindrical shape.

The Mulagandhakuti Vihara erected by the Mahabhoji society 'at Bodh Gaya houses certain Buddhist relics discovered at Taxila. The anniversary of the Vihara takes place on the full-moon day of November, which draws large number of pilgrims, monks and lay devotees from all over the world. The most important feature of the festival is the procession in which the *holy* relics, the most authentic remains of Lord Buddha, are taken round.

Sarnath is also a sacred place for the Jains,

who look upon it as the scene of the ascetic practices and death of Sri Amsanatha, the eleventh Jaina Tirthankara. A temple built in recent times, situated near the Dhamek Stupa is dedicated to this saint.

The antiquities so far discovered at Sarnath consisting of beautiful sculptures and ornamental carvings represent Buddhist Religion and cover a period of approximately 1,500 years from the third century B.C. to the Twelfth century A.D.

Saranath represents 'a landmark in the intellectual and spiritual history of India, marking the birth of a religion that succeeded in liquidating a great deal of superstition and ritualism prevalent in India in those days. It continues to attract large numbers of pilgrims from all over the world, and though its monuments are in ruins the Law that the Master proclaimed and the piety he inspired still endure and the sacred memories of the Blessed one still thrill those who stand on the spot where he stood and preached.

Kusinagara

Kusinagara, the modern Kasia in the Gorakhpur district, is held sacred of its association with the Buddha, for it was here that the Master, in his eighteenth year, passed into the great Nirvana. Under the cool shade of a grove of sala trees, he lay, resting peacefully in the bliss of the Infinite, and recognising the approach of the moment of Eternity, closed his eyes to the world.

Kusinagara thenceforward became an important pilgrim centre, where shrines and monasteries sprang up and pilgrims flocked

in great numbers. But much earlier than the other the shrines and monasteries here came to be abandoned and the glorious city of the past was buried in ruins.

The identity of the place, however, is undeniably established when recent excavations revealed inscriptions relating to Mahaparinirvana - Chaitya. An important edifice, which still remains here is the Matha Kunwar Ka Kat, which enshrines the Buddha in recumbent posture in the state of Nirvana. The image was found in broken fragments and was skilfully pieced together and restored to its original form. There is also a mound, locally known as Ramabhar, which probably represents the great stupa which stood on the holy spot where the Blessed one was cremated, and his relics were divided into eight equal parts to be preserved at different sites.

Though in ruins, Kusinagara nevertheless attracts vast numbers of pilgrims, who visit it with no object but to call at a holy spot full of memories of the Master having attained the Mahaparinirvana. Across the fields and up and down the streets and amid the ruins, echoes the silent voice of the Buddha to this day and hour, and those last soft-spoken words of his and that message of deep compassion, which was distinctively his own are heard whispered by the gentle breeze that blows around the devoted souls who stand in sober silence on this sacred soil.

The cities that witnessed the miracles

Next to the sacred spots already enumerated come four more centres, - the spots where the master is said to have performed his four miracles.

Sravasti : The greatest of these miracles was performed at Sravasti to confound the heretic Tirthika Teachers. According to the Buddhist accounts, this starts off with a number of supernatural incidents, such as the sun and moon shining together in the sky, fire and water emanating alternately from the upper and lower parts of the Master's body, and the Buddha's own appearance in multiple representations of himself. This, the great miracle is the favourite theme of many a Buddhist work of art. The earlier representations are elaborate; and the later representations are much briefer, eliminating all the minor episodes, and depicting only the last incident showing the Buddha in the centre in attitude of preaching, surrounded by small effigies all around.

Sravasti was an important seat of Buddhism even during the days of Buddha, and it was here that the famous Jetavana with its large monastery existed. A merchant named Anathapinda is believed to have bought the garden of the prince Jeta and had a large monastery built there to receive the Lord who was to visit the city. Buddha graced him by accepting his gift, which he subsequently left for occupation by his numerous disciples. In later days, many Buddhist shrines and monasteries came up here and the city flourished as one of the most important centres of Buddhism.

On the borders of Gonda and Bahraich districts of Uttar Pradesh are the remains of Saheth Maheth with which Sravasti is identified. At Saheth were excavated several inscriptions referring to Jetavana thus establishing its identity. Saheth-Maheth are two distinctly separate sites,

of which the larger one, Maheth, occupying an area of 400 acres, is identified with Sravasti city proper. Saheth, where the ruins stretch over an area of 35 acres, is identified with the monastery at Jetavana which was in a garden about a quarter of a mile away from Sravasti. One of the earliest Stupas excavated seems to belong to the third century and this stupa contained some bone relics, probably of the Master himself. Sanctified by its association with the lord, Sravasti flourished as an important centre of pilgrimage for the Buddhists for a very time and sadly enough, fell into ruins with the fall of Buddhism in the country.

Sankasya : Sankasya is the site where Buddha performed his second miracle of descending from the Tryastimsa (the Heaven of the Thirty-three Gods), where he went to preach His faith to His Mother and other Gods. This miracle is believed to have followed soon after the Great Miracle, as it was the tradition of the earlier Buddhas to proceed to the heaven of the Thirty-three Gods after performing their greatest miracles. According to Buddhist legends the Lord came down by a triple ladder built by Visvakarma accompanied by the Gods, Brahma and Sankara, and the event is the favourite theme of many a Buddhist carving and painting. On account of these sacred associations Sankasya, identified with the modern Sankisa, or Sanisa Basantpur in Uttar Pradesh, came to be an important place of pilgrimage. Shrines, stupas and monasteries adorned the place in the days when Buddhism flourished there.

Rajagriha and Vaisali

Rajagriha was the powerful capital of the Kingdom of Magadha. The city was held sacred by the Buddhists for several reasons. It was sanctified by the numerous visits that the master paid the city. Again it was in this city that Devadatta, the wicked cousin of the master made several attempts to end the life of the Buddha. It was here He performed the miracle of taming an infuriated elephant that was set on him to end his life. Also, it was here that the first council (Sangiti) of the Buddhists was held, in the cave of Sattapanni (Saptapurni) of the Vaibhara hill. The Vinaya and the Dhamma were rehearsed in this Council and were fixed with the assistance of Upali and Anamala. The principal points of the creed and discipline were thus agreed upon and the stability of the new religion was thus assured here. Rajagriha is hence held sacred by the Buddhists, not only because of its association with the Blessed one, but also because of the great part it played in the growth and spread of Buddhism.

The ruins at Rajgir, in the Patna district of Bihar, are considered to be the ruins of the shrines and monasteries that flourished in the ancient Rajagriha.

Rajgir - the ancient Rajagriha (the house of kings) - was a magnificent city where Buddhism flourished, patronized by the kings and the rich. A quarter of a mile behind the present town the hills spread out in a circle, and on their top lie the ruins of the ancient city of glory.

"There can be few places so old as Rajgir, about which so much is definitely known, and so much safely to be inferred. It was

about the year 590 B.C. that there came along the road leading into the valley yonder, one whose very form was radiant with feeling and thought that lifted him above the common world into that consciousness that makes history."

Rajagriha was a glorious city that was famous throughout the country and was known by more than one name; Girivraja (city surrounded by hills), Vasumati (derived from the mystical king Vasu Uparichara), Barhadrathapura (from Brihadratha, the father of Jarasantha and founder of the Brihadratha dynasty of Magadha Kings), and Kusagrapura - these, are some of the names by which the city flourished in the days of yore.

The remains of the ancient city are found here and there. A large terrace with a group of cells at the back in a semi-circular form of the rock on the northern bend in the Vaibhara hill is identified with the site of the first council. On the eastern slope of the Vaibhara hill is a structure locally known as Jarasantha Ki Baithak, with irregular cells at the sides. This structure has been identified with the residence of Pippala, mentioned in some of the Buddhist texts. Some Pali texts describes the Pippala cave as the residence of Mahakasyapa, the organiser of the first council. On the southern side of the Vaibhara is the famous cave known as Sane Bhandar. The interior of this cave is polished, not carved. In it stand the remains of a stupa that can be said be the earliest ever found, " Here Buddha might have rested or meditated or taught."

Rajagriha was also an active centre of Jainism in the ancient times, as it now is. In spite of the Buddhist relics being few

and far between, the identity of Rajagriha is established beyond doubt, and the association of the city with the Buddha and the history of Buddhism are sufficient to inspire a pilgrimage to this sacred and beautiful place in the hills.

Vaisali : Vaisali, capital of the Lichchavi Kings, witnessed the last of the four miracles performed by Buddha. He is said to have visited this city thrice and during one of these visits a band of monkeys came to him and reverently offered a pot of honey. It was also here that the second Buddhist council. a little over a hundred years after the nirvana of the Buddha took place. Again, it was here that the Lord announced his approaching Nirvana, and a stupa is believed to have been erected by the citizens of Vaisali over part of the relics of the Lord's body.

Being the birthplace of Mahavira, Vaisali is also equally important to the Jains. The city of Vaisali is identified with the ruins of Raj Bisal-Ka-Garh at Basarh and the adjoining regions. The pilgrims, Fa-hien and Hiuen Tsang visited Vaisali. They have described it as a glorious city with so many sacred shrines and monuments that it would be impossible to attempt to give a detailed description of all of them.

There is a 22 feet tall monolithic pillar of highly polished sandstone surmounted by a bell shaped capital, that supports a lion on a square abacus, at Kolhna, two miles to the north-west of Raja Bisal-Ka-Garh, This can be identified with one of the Ashoka pillars near Vaisali mentioned by Hiuen Tsang. Nearby, to the south is a small tank called "Ramkund," believed to be the "Markata Hrada," the one dug out by a

band of monkeys for Buddha. To the north-west of this is a ruined mound, about 15 feet high and sixty-five feet in diameter at the base, believed to be the relic of the Ashoka Pillar (stupa) mentioned by Hiuen Tsang. On the summit of this stands a small temple of recent origin, enshrining a medieval Buddha.

It is to this city, they say, "He came, in a passion of pity a veritable storm of compassion had broken loose within him."

" Across these fields and up and down these streets, now ruined, or within the massive cathedral cave of Sone Bhandar, there echo to this hour the immortal reverberations of Buddha's voice."

Ajanta and Ellora

Like the curves and columns of some great organ runs the line of stone arches and columnades along the hill-side that faces sunrise in the glen of Ajantha. Twenty-six caves there are in all, making one long level line, over-hung by the rounded ridge of dark blue stone that was undoubtedly chipped into shape and bareness long, long ago to emphasize that balanced uniformity which gives this ancient abbey so much of its solemnity and beauty.

In the state of Hyderabad, in a narrow gorge, amidst the breath-taking beauty of nature's cascading glory, lie the marvellous caves of Ajantha, presenting a magnificent gallery of Buddhist Art and an admirable record of the history of Buddhism. Five of these twenty-six caves are Chaityas or shrines and the remainder are viharas (Monasteries) chiselled into rock in its own abode in the lap of nature; the walls, pillars and ceilings of these caves are adorned

with exquisite sculptures and paintings that are the unwritten record of the history of Buddhist Art stretching over a period of 800 years. No ancient remains in India exhibit such excellent combination of architecture, sculpture and painting. The stupendous caves of Ellora are carved in the scarp of a rocky plateau.

Caves of Ellora

While the caves of Ajanta record the history of Buddhist Art and Religion the caves of Ellora present remarkable memorials of three great Religions, Buddhism, Hinduism and Jainism. The famous Kailasa temple, a vast, carved monolith Linga, with its colossal size, massive pillars, columnades, galleries and beautifully painted ceilings, huge sculptures and intricate ornamentation are chiselled out of the rock in its original state and situated into a vertical structure, is a marvel in the world of Art.

Dating from the later centuries of pre-Christian era the caves of Ajanta constitute a complete record of monuments of this type. Everywhere even on the votive Chaitya, appear figures of Buddha, the worshipful one standing or seated, superbly carved in bold relief.

Imperishable paintings 'Of Ajanta

But the form of Art that has really made it famous is painting. The paintings at Ajanta are studied by Art students from all over the world and the colours used in these paintings, all derived from natural resources, are a wonder mixture that have survived the ravages of time and retained their

freshness to this day. They portray the Jataka stories and incidents in the life of Buddha in great detail. Some of the paintings are portraits of Buddha and Bodhi Sattvas and also of Hindu Gods and Goddesses. The Ajanta paintings are of outstanding significance to the history of Asia and Asian Art. The whole course of Art in Eastern Asia is bound up with the history of Buddhism in its successive phases. The student of Art finds himself constantly referring to Ajanta as the one great-monument of painting created by Buddhist faith and fervour in the land which gave birth to the religion and its great founder. There is a glow of religious impulse behind the creation of these paintings, a quality which, perhaps, is the reason behind the imperishability of the paintings.

Twelve caves along the ridge, among the Ellora range of caves are Buddhistic in theme and form. The monastic caves and the Chaityas resemble those of Ajanta, only slightly varying in form. The "Tin Thal", the two storeyed monasteries are the most important among the Ellora caves.

Sculptures of Ellora

In contrast with Ajanta, which is famous for its paintings, Ellora displays a great wealth in sculptures, massive, beautiful images executed with superb skill. These sculptures chiefly portray Buddha and Bodhi Sattvas. The Hindu and Jain Caves also contain beautiful sculptures of deities and Tirthankaras.

Nalanda

The spread of Buddhism has brought about the establishment of Visva Vidyalyas

(Universities) in India. These Universities were established in different parts, the most famous among them being Nalanda. Nalanda was known throughout the Buddhist world of the time for its learned teachers and the names of its Acharyas, Sva Bhadra, Santa Rakshita and Asita Dipankara, shining luminaries in a galaxy of many more, conjure up a vision of the supreme eminence of the Nalanda Visva Vidyalya throughout its glorious history. Buddha himself is believed to have visited this site and hence is this place held sacred to His memory.

Even in its ruins, the site of Nalanda, with some of the stupas standing out majestically amidst the rubble, speaks out all its past glory of ancient Buddhist monasteries.

Sanchi-stupas

The stupa was held extremely sacred by the Buddhists as a monumental relic and it was considered to represent the Blessed One, before the introduction of his image in sculpture. As such, the stupa was regarded an object of worship and devotion and in this votive aspect, it was known as Chaitya and was set up in separate structures called the Chaitya halls which are actually Buddhist shrines.

Sanchi is the sight of the most extensive relics of Buddhist structures, the majority of which are stupas. The earliest of Sanchi remains date back to Ashoka and the city might have been erected by him during his campaign for the spread of Buddhism. The Great stupa with its base of 100 feet in diameter and its imposing dome of nearly 50 feet in height has made Sanchi a name

famous among cities of Buddhist relics. Another stupa identical in design and situated north-east of the great stupa, revealed sacred relics of *Sari Putta* and *Maha Moggalana*, the two famous disciples of the Blessed One, recently brought back from London for consecration in a new shrine at Sanchi.

A great number of Stupas are also found at other places, surrounding Sanchi, such as Sonari, Satdhara, Bhojpur, etc., which leads to the inference that these places were once centres of pilgrimage for followers of the Faith.

The chief fascination of Sanchi is the large number of Great Stupas which are visited both for their sanctity and artistic value. The large number of monasteries indicate that Buddhism flourished here in its days of glory and splendour, housing large numbers of Monks and nuns. Many of the ruins have been carefully and imaginatively restored to their old form, providing the recent visitors a chance to peep back into the glorious past, which witnessed the birth of the Blessed One and the spread of the Light of Wisdom.

**-Material drawn from a paper by
VEN. N. JINA RATANA, and Buddhist
Shrines in India, Govt. of India
Publications Department.**



Jain Pilgrim Centres A brief resume

THE supreme aim of all religions is to teach men how to live, and the learning and living are religion itself.

The cleansing of the human heart and the building up of a blameless life are among the underlying, enduring factors of every religion. That which is vital to every religion is the pursuit of the ideal of goodness. Other things are superficial accretions.

Beholding perfect goodness in a person the world would look upon him as divine. As he practises virtue and not merely preach it, he is revered as a saint. In him, perfect goodness as conceived by man stands revealed. The very ground that he treads on becomes holy and the very place he has chosen for his abode becomes a pilgrim centre. 'All that he touches gets sanctified'.

Such are the spots associated with the great Mahavira, the first known prophet of Jainism and the line of true disciples who took up the torch blazed by him. The luminous trail of exemplary teachers are known as Tirthankaras, 'In the lives of all the great teachers we see a manifestation of that universal truth, the majesty and splendour of which is as yet dimly comprehended by mankind. It is to the elevating lives and inspiring words of these mighty teachers that the eyes of hungering and thirsting world are turned for guidance.' As seekers they keep moving from one to another of these sacred spots, places hallowed by their presence in the past. There are twenty-four Tirthankaras and the several places associated with them are

the Tirthas. Ayodhya, sacred to the Hindus by its being the birth-place of Sri Rama is also considered a pilgrim centre for the Jains. The first of the Tirthankaras has claimed lineage from the Ikshavaku race. It is said that four others were also born there. There is actually a Jain temple on the banks of the Sarayu.

Sravasthi is today called Sahet-Mahet. It is 216 Km. from Balrampur. This is the land that gave Jainism its fourth Tirthankara, Sambhavnathji.

Kaushambi : Between Allahabad and Kannur on the Northern Railway is a station called Bharwari. About 32 Km. from here is a hillock called Prabas. Here is a temple dedicated to the sixth Tirthankara, Padmaprabha. It is said that he was born at Kaushamb and had performed penance on this hillock and finally received enlightenment at this spot.

Varanasi : On the banks of the Ganga is a temple dedicated to Suparswanath and Bhelpur is a place hallowed as the place of Parswanath's birth. Here also there is a temple marking out the spot for pilgrims to visit.

Simhapur is now called Sarnath. Just near the stupa is a beautiful Jain temple and Dharmasala, where Sreyannath is said to have graced the world by his birth.

Chandrapur : There stands a shrine on the banks of the Ganges in a village called Chandravathi, *Ratnapuri*, *Kampil* and *Sowripur* are different places where several Tirthankaras lived and practised penance.

Hastinapur has a large temple about 22 miles from Meerut. The second Tirthankara, Bhagavan Rishaba had received his first alms here. The itinerary of any Jain pilgrim

includes places where the Jinas attained liberation and became siddhas. There are five such places :

Mt. Kailas, Sammeta and Mangi-Tungi are cave temples revered because they have served as a place from where countless monks have attained Moksha. In this category falls *Muktagiri*. Situated among the abundant flora, the hill has a wall along the base with a gate. A pathway winds its way up a number of temples on the slopes of the hill side. On the full-moon day in Kartik there is a big festival at this Tirtha.

Near Muktagiri is the Tirth of *Santariksha Parshvanatha*, which defied the law of gravitation, for here stands an image that once stood suspended in mid-air. It has now descended closer to the ground, but it still stands above the ground.

Some Jain Tirthas are known as Atishaya Kshetras as they have some miraculous event associated with them. One such place in Rajasthan is where an image was discovered by a cobbler in a miraculous manner. A temple has been built here, and to this day, the descendants of the cobbler pay for its upkeep.

Shitalnatli temple at Calcutta built by Rai Bahadur Badridas is dedicated to the tenth Tirthankar. The garden at this shrine is one of the beauty spots of Calcutta. It is at Pavapuri that Mahavira attained Nirvana. This village is 15 Km. away from Bihar Serif. The white marble temples here exude the fragrance of pure peace. One temple that deserves special mention is Damosaran Mandir signifying the holy site, where Mahavira is believed to have preached to his disciples. Every year at the time of Deepavali, this village becomes the venue

of a big congregation.

Parasvanath hill or Sammet Shikar which rises steeply from the plains of Dhanbad is another holy place of the Jains. It derives its name from Tirthankara Parasnath, who attained Nirvana here. The most important temple is the one dedicated to Parasnath. The black marble image of Sri Parasnath seated cross-legged is beautifully sculptured. The hill itself is a place of pilgrimage to devout Jains from all over India. The Santhals also worship the hill as a deity.

Rajgir is famous for its hot springs. This was once the capital of Magadha over which Bimbisara and Ajatasatru had ruled. It is girdled by five hills and hence called Panchsailapur. There are a number of Jain temples here on all the five hills. There is a Jain temple near Nalanda, the famous Buddhist centre of learning.

Khandagiri is in Orissa. About 8 Km. west of Bhubaneswar are two hillocks, Khandagiri and Udaygiri. There are a number of ancient caves on these rocks interspersed here and there by well-built temples. These temples date back to B.C. 40.

In one of the caves at Udaygiri there are inscriptions by a Jain King of Kalinga called Kharavel. From time immemorial this had been a place of penance for Jain Sadhaks. There are five groups of Jain sculptures dating back to the fifteenth century and consisting principally of some of the 24 Tirthankaras and Jain Pontiffs on the rock walls of the Fort. Of these, the group situated in the Urwahi Valley and the south-east group situated near the north-west corner of the King George Park are interesting. The largest of the sculptures is a standing image of Adinath, the first

Jain Pontiff, which one sees on the left about half way down the slope while descending by the Urwahi Road. The colossus is 57 feet in height. Its foot is nine feet long. It was carved in 1440 during the reign of Dongsar Singh. The south-east group contains twenty-one colossal statues, several of which have screen walls in front as at Ellora. The rock sculptures of Gwalior are unsurpassed in North India for their immense dimensions.

The Parsvanatha temple, the largest and the finest of the Jain temples surviving at Khajuraho, is 68 feet 2 inches long and 34 feet 10 inches broad. The sanctum contains an ornamental throne with a carved bull in front. The bull is the emblem of Adinatha, the first of the Jain religious leaders. The modern image of Parsvanatha was installed in 1860. There are excellent sculptures on the outer walls of the sanctum - a woman fondling a child, a woman writing a letter, a little figure extracting a thorn from her foot, and a woman at her toilet - all these on the northern side.

The Adinatha Temple is located immediately to the north of the Parsvanatha Temple and is smaller in size. The south-east bank of the Madras Sagar is dominated by a hill on which are 324 images of the Tirthankaras or Jain Pontiffs hewn out of rock.

The most interesting building in the city is the Kanch Mandir, a shrine of the Digambar sect of Jains. The walls, roof and floor of the Kanch Mahal are lavishly inlaid with mother-of-pearl, glass and multi-coloured beads. On the walls are hung graphic paintings illustrating all the terrible punishments meted out in the next world on those guilty of various sins. There are

exquisitely carved silver tablets in front of the sanctum on which is installed one huge black marble idol and two white idols of the Jain Tirthankaras, Chandraprabhu, Shantinath and Adinath. The pillars in the hall are beautifully decorated with red, green, blue and orange beads. Enormous crystal chandeliers are suspended from the roof. Reflections of light on the walls and the shining pillar produce an indescribably beautiful effect. The upper storey, which is similarly ornamented, has in its sanctum three bronze images of the same Tirthankaras placed in the middle of a pair of mirrors which show hundreds of reflections of the idols stretching almost to infinity. The silver-doored temple is kept open between 10 a.m. and 5 p.m. for those who do not belong to the Jain faith.

In Gujarat, the most famous temple outside Ahmedabad's Delhi Gate is Hathising temple, which faintly resembles the Dilwara temples of Vastupala and Tejapala at Mount Abu. Built of white marble, it has 53 domes with pointed *Shikaras* (towers). Figures of the 24 Jain Tirthankaras are sculptured on the building.

On a cliff, about 152 m. (500 ft.) below the summit, is the famous temple city of the Jains. The biggest temple is that of Neminath, built in the 12th century. A fine view of the temple can be obtained from above. Standing in a quadrangular courtyard (59 x 40 m or 195 x 130 ft.), the temple is surrounded by pillared cloisters containing over 70 cells. The *Mantap* is 213 m. (43ft) square with a colonnade of 22 pillars forming aisles. Neminath, to whom this temple is dedicated, was the 22nd Jain Tirthankara and his image in black is adorned with massive jewellery. In this

temple is also a statue of Parsvanath, from the chin of which water drips constantly. On the 16 temples, the triple temple built in 1177 by Tejapala and Vastupala (who also built the celebrated Dilwara temples at Mount Abu) has an image of the 19th Tirthankara, Mallinath.

Ranakpur : Situated six miles from Sadri and ninety-five miles from Udaipur, Ranakpur is famous for its group of Jain temples, a treasure-house of art and architecture. Set in the picturesque surroundings of the Aravalli ranges, it presents the blending of religious 'architecture with that of nature's scenic splendour. Thousands of devotees as well as tourists visit this place, for it is an important place of pilgrimage of the Jain Panchatirtha, of this region.

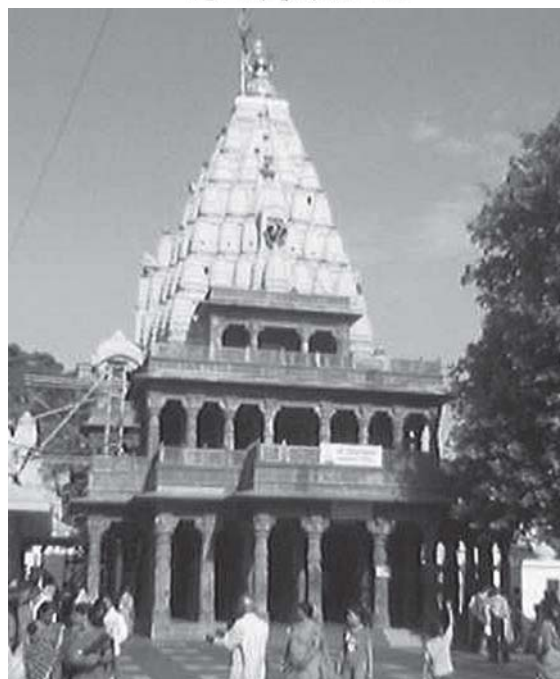
The Chou-mukha (four-faced) temple, also called 'Trailoka Deepak' at the time of its foundation, is the main temple of the group. The temple was constructed by Dharma Shah, who was encouraged by the warrior-administrator and great builder Rana Kumbha of Mewar in the year 1439 A.D. The Rana not only have an impetus but also contributed financially to the building of the temple, for Ranakpur was a part of the mewa territory during his reign. An inscription on a pillar states that Deepak, the builder of this temple, did so at the behest of a devotee of the "Araata" named Dharanka. The temple greatly revered by devotees is one of the five holy places of the Jains. Other four pilgrim centres are Mushala, Mahavir, Nadolgram and Verkana. A quadruple image of Lord Adinath adorns the inner temple, which is open on all the four sides. It is three storied and

constructed on a huge basement of forty-eight thousand sq. feet. The temple has four subsidiary shrines and eighty domes supported by 400 columns. There are 24 mantapas and 44 spires imparting majesty and sublimity to the whole structural mass of the temple. Five large domes on sanctuaries add to its grandeur, where the play of light and shade present a fascinating spectacle. The walls of the shrines lead to their seclusion from the main temple and give them a distinctive look. The structure of the temple is marvellous and every nook and corner of the pillars and the sabha mantapa are engraved with images. Though built in the 15th century, it gives the appearance of a newly built temple.

On stepping inside the main shrine, one feels absorbed in the devotional atmosphere pervading around. One is amazed to see the massive structure, standing in perfect condition on 1,444 pillars for the last five hundred years. Another characteristic of the temple is the erotic carvings on its exterior parts conveying the principles of Jainism with the intention of creating aversion to such ideas. The exuberance and splendour of these shrines have attracted critics and they have praised them eloquently. In the words of Ferguson - "I know of no other building in India, of the same class, that leaves as pleasing an impression, or affords so many hints for the graceful arrangement of columns in an interior". According to Klaus Fischer, "the principal impression, conveyed by this temple is the variety and multiplicity of its part, yet all are well proportioned and uniformly disposed within the scheme. Then there is this contrast of the pointed

shrines with vivid domes, each signifying the position of some chapel hall of the columns interrupted at intervals by open courts, each compartment ceiled with carvings of a most intricate character, and the whole illuminated by either direct or by reflected light which is thrown from the pavement or pillar and from pillar to screen to penetrate, in to all parts".

In spite of its secluded location and protection, provided by the natural hill, the temple could not escape all the iconoclastic fury of Aurangzeb. It is said that Aurangzeb, though marching in a great hurry on this route, purposefully stopped for some time to mark his presence in this shrine by mutilating and defacing the beautiful pieces of sculptural architecture. Architects are now busy mending this loss with a view to restoring its structural grandeur and sculptural dexterity.



The Linga and its loci

Siva" means auspiciousness. This, being a quality, has no form. To a devotee all forms are Siva's forms; all are pervaded by the "Linga" of Siva. Just as some minds focus easily when they gaze into a crystal, so does the mind attain one-pointedness when it concentrates on a Linga, says Swami Sivananda, the sage of Ananda Kutir. This is actually a breaking away from the concrete and material to the abstract and spiritual.

The devotees of Siva say that they use the Linga as the "emblem" of the Great Unknown, the symbol that reminds souls of the "Unknown Deity" presiding over the entire Universe. It has been said that Siva first manifested Himself as a huge column of fire, and that the Gods Brahma and Vishnu attempted to discover the top and bottom extremities of this column but failed in their effort. From this failure arose the phrase "the unknown Deity", the Lingam pointing upwards in the pillar of fire, whose height none could gauge. Thus, if there is any truth in the claim that the "alayas" (temples) are only sacrificial grounds in a higher sense, then the sacred fire must be the Siva Linga. Linga, therefore, is only the outward symbol of the formless being. Lord Siva who is the indivisible, all-pervading, eternal, auspicious, ever-pure immortal essence of this vast universe is also the Soul seated in the Chamber of one's heart as the indweller, innermost soul or Atman.

A Siva Linga consists of 3 parts, the lowest

or the Brahma Peetha, the Middle or Vishnu Peetha and the uppermost or Siva Peetha. Some Lingas are called Swayambhus and others are Narmadeshwars. There are five Bhuta Lingas and twelve Jyotirlingas. The five Bhuta Lingas are (i) Kalahastishwar, (ii) Jambukeshwar (iii) Arunachaleswar (iv) Ekambareswar and (v) Chidambareswar. The Jyotirlingas are (a) Kedarnath (b) Kasi Viswanath (c) Somnath (d) Baijnath (e) Rameswar (f) Ghushineswar (g) Bhima Shanker (h) Maha Kala (i) Mallikarjuna (j) Amaleswar (k) Nageswar and (1) Tryambakeswar. Besides this, the temple of Lord Mahalinga at Tiruvadaimardur, known also as Madhyarjuna, is regarded as one of the greatest Siva Temples of the South India.

Panchabhuta Lingas

Thiruvannamalai: Lord Siva assumed the form of a hill at Tiruvannamalai. Here he quelled the pride of the other gods, who were quarrelling as to their relative greatness. Arunachaleswar is a Tejo Linga and represents the Agni (Fire) Tattwa of Pancha Bhutas (five elements).

This place is famous for its festival of lights (Kartigai Deepam) which occurs every year in the month of Kartikai, on the day when the full moon falls in the Kartikai or Krittika nakshetram. The lighting takes place at about 5—5-30 p.m. A big hollow in a rock is filled with ghee, oil and camphor, a big wick is put in the ghee and lighted. The lighting is seen even at a distance of 16 miles. The light would burn continuously for 3 months. A veil is put round the light at the top of the hill. When the priests from the Siva temple bring His image

outside, it is an indication that the Star Kartika has risen. Then Bana (fire work) is sent towards the light on the hill. The man who is in charge of the lighting at the hill removes the veil at once, it is then that the crowds of pilgrims below have a vision of this light. A chorus of voices go up in a unanimous call of "Harahara". The esoteric idea is that he who sees this light of lights that is burning eternally in the Chambers of one's heart through constant meditation attains immortality. This external symbol is the outer indication of a hidden truth. Tiruvannamalai is now a hallowed spot for people all over the world, because of its being the place where Ramana Bhagavan lived and attained Mahasamadhi.

Chidambaram

Lord Siva is worshipped in Chidambaram as a formless presence, Akasa Linga. Shiva is also worshipped here as Nataraja. "Arudradarsana", one of the important festivals of South India is celebrated every year at Chidambaram in the month of Margasirsha. The five corridors of a Siva temple represent the five "Koshas" of the body. Darsanopanishad says that Chidambaram is in the centre of the heart. The Hall of thousand pillars represents the "Sahasrara" or the 1000 petalled lotus on the crown of the head. In Tiruchitrambalam or "Mahasabha" there are five peethams dedicated to Brahma, Vishnu, Rudra, Maheswara and Sadasiva. The five letters of the Panchakshara (Namasivaya) form the five steps. The veil represents the ignorance of Avidya. The 96 windows represent the 96 tattvas, the four golden pillars —the 4 vedas, and the 28 wooden

pillars indicates the Agamas. The space that is within the pillars is the Chidakasa. Lord Nataraja has His seat on the Pranavapeetam.

There are nine Kalasas (or domes) on the tower. These are the 9 saktis. The sixty four wooden supports in the tower represent 64 vidyas or kalas. The twenty-one thousand six-hundred copper plates coated with gold represent 21,600 breaths of man.

Adjacent to the Kanaka sabha is a temple dedicated to Govinda Raja (Vishnu). This shows that Shiva and Vishnu are essentially one. Such temples gather unto themselves a sanctity by the association of the temple with some saints. One whose name flashes through the mind with the mere mention of Chidambaram temple is that of Nandanar, the saint for whom Lord Siva performed so many miracles and even had the temple doors flung open to the lowly and the humble.

Kalahasti

The Siva Linga of Kalahasti is one of the five supreme Lingas representing one of the five great elements. The Vayu (air) Linga is said to be installed in this temple. In proof of the above, it can be seen that in the Garbhagriha of the temple there is a light which to this day flickers even though there is no hole for the air to enter it. The Linga here is said to have been worshipped in ancient days by a spider, a snake and an elephant. The spider spun a web and clothed the Lord, the snake adorned the Lord with its gem and the Elephant washed the Linga with water. Like the little squirrel who contributed his might

towards the building up of the Setu bridge so also did these denizens of the forest worship the Lord. Pleased by this worshipful service the Lord is said to have granted them Moksha. The image of these three devotees of the Lord is still found embossed on the Linga. The River Swarna Mukhi washes the entire western wall of the temple, Kalahasti is also hallowed by its association with the great sage Kannapa whose story is a byword for all-consuming devotion. He is said to have given up his eyes as an offering to the Lord. Untutored in the ways of the orthodox rituals he offered whatever his profession made him fit for. He was a hunter. So his sacrifice consisted of the animals and birds he had shot.

The Lord accepts the love offering of a pure heart, whatever the thing offered. He looks to the heart and not at the thing given. Kalahasti is surrounded by two hills, the one in the north has a temple dedicated to Goddess Durga and the other in the south has a shrine of Kannabeswarar. The temple of Kalahastiswara is to the west of the hill of the same name. In the second court of the temple is underground cell where Lord Ganapathi is worshipped as Patala Vinayaka. This shrine is 30 feet below the surface and said to mark the level of the river. In the third century B.C. four great Tamil Saivite saints Sambandar, Appar, Manikkavachagar and Sundaramurthi have visited Kalahasti and have sung about the Lord here. Rama Linga Swami and Pattinathar have also sung about Kalahastiswar. Adi Sankara, the great religious reformer, has sung about Sri Kannappa Nayanar in his Sivananda Lahari. The temple was built at the foot of

Kailasagiri by the Pallava Kings and later by Tondaiman Chakravarti. The Chola Kings renovated and built the main temple. The Main entrance of the Temple is at "Galigopuram". Close to it is the shrine dedicated to Kasi Viswanatha (and Annapurna). This great temple in the south echoes the name of the Great Kasi Viswanath at Varanasi. Siva is the same Lord, in the north as well as the south and the land that worships Him is also the same, only the devotees claim distinctions of place, province, caste and community. He, the mighty Lord, is above all distinctions. The main shrine is that of Kalahastiswara, the entrance of which is flanked by his humble devotee Kannapa. It is this Linga, whose curiously shaped pedestal resembles the trunk of an elephant with tusks on either side, a spider embossed below and shaded by the hood of a serpent, which seems to pay a tribute even to His "animal" children. When the Lord who finds no distinction between animal and man, between low and high how could He countenance the multifarious divisions that tear mankind apart into numerous factions?

Sri Ekamreswar

Sri Ekamreswar temple at Kanchi contains the celebrated Prithivi (earth) Linga, another of the famous five lingas, which has its abode in Kanchi on the banks of the river Kamba (now called Vegavati). Some trace the origin of the name Ekamreswara to the presence of a single huge mango tree found in the temple. The temple has a thousand pillared hall and five vestibules. This temple was built by Sri Krishna Devaraya. Within its walls are found

images of Buddhist, Jaina and Hindu origins. There is a very old mango tree standing in the temple premises, and it is worshipped by all to this day with great veneration. It has four branches, and each branch bears fruits with different tastes. There is a popular belief that if a barren woman eats the fruit of this tree she is blessed with progeny. On the altar, around the tree, is a linga surrounded by 108 small lingas. Here one finds images of the Sixty-three Nayanmars. There are two tanks near the temple called Kambanadi and Sivaganga. A Vishnu temple is also found in the compound of this great temple. Tirumangai Alwar has sung hymns in praise on this Lord. This temple is visited by Saivites all over South India. Vows are taken to Ekamranatha at moments of sorrow and also in celebration of events. Every year thousands of pilgrims gather here for festivals to worship Lord Ekamranathar. The festivals celebrated here are Thaipusam, Mahasivarathri, Adi Karthigai and Navaratri.

Sri Jambukeswara Temple

The above temple in Thiruvanaikaval near Tiruchirapalli is of great antiquity and stated to have been in existence from the first century B.C. According to tradition it was built by a Chola ruler. The legend relating to the construction of the shrine is: In the Mount Kailas, Mother Parvathi, once requested Her Lord to explain how penance could be reconciled with pleasure. The Lord asked Her' to go to earth and undertake penance and that He would appear before her there and clear her doubt. Accordingly Parvathi, assuming human form, came down to the earth. She came to the "Gaja

Lingam" under the shade of a Jambu tree and commenced Her worship. It is said that an elephant and a spider, also began to worship the Linga. Every day the spider would weave a web of canopy over the Lingam to prevent the dried leaves of the Jambu tree from falling on it. The elephant would bring water in its trunk and bathe the Lingam. The latter, finding that the web woven by the spider was a hindrance to his giving the bath would tear it away. Day after day this was repeated. The spider would weave its web and the elephant would destroy it. This infuriated the spider, which then entered the elephant's trunk and stung it on a vital spot in its head. The elephant died and in that very process the spider too fell dead.

The Lord was pleased by the Mother's penance, so He appeared in a vision and cleared Her doubt. He also released the elephant and spider from their curse. It is on this spot that the Chola ruler constructed a temple for Sri Jambukeswara and His consort Sri Akilandeswari (as Lord Siva and Mother Parvati are known here), the presiding deities of the temple. It covers an area of over 18 acres. The 'Apa' (water) Lingam here is a Swayambhu, and is surrounded by water, which is a novel feature of this temple. This water is pumped out twice or thrice a day. Saints like Thirugnana Sambandar, Appar, Manickavasagar and Sundaramoorthy have visited this temple and composed devotional songs, in praise of the deity. There are 154 stone inscriptions relating to Chola, Pandya, Hoysala and Madurai Naik rulers period.

The following are the regular annual festivals of the temple: Vasantha

Uthsavam, Adi Pooram, Thai Theppam, Brahmothsavam in March, Car festival and Panchapraharam in April. Of these the Panchapraharam is the main one, which attracts about 5,000 to 6,000 devotees. Hereditary Brahmin priests who called Pandithars and who own houses and lands, offer four poojas daily. In the Mid-day pooja, the priest, dressed as female, performs pooja. The significance is that the Mother Herself worships the Lord.

The following story relating to this temple is of interest: A Chola ruler who had his headquarters at Woriyur used to go to the temple with his wife to worship the Lord and Devi. One day, he felt while worshipping at the shrine that the necklace that his wife was then wearing would better adorn the Lord's form. Subsequently, while on their way to the temple, both the king and queen took a bath in the River Kaveri when the latter's necklace slipped from her neck and fell into the river. Thinking that the necklace had been lost, they arrived at the temple. It was then the hour of Abishekam and water had been fetched from the Kaveri. When the water was poured on the Lingam, the necklace dropped from the pot on the Lord's head and the king's wish was thus fulfilled.

The Jyotirlingas

The perfect Sage sees his own self in everything. He roams around experiencing the Divine Presence everywhere and at all times. To one who is thus living inwardly in

this constant God experience, every incident, every creature around is but a reflection of that Beloved One. To Chaitanya Maha Prabhu, the deep blue colour of the Ocean was but a reminder of the Lord's infinite play on earth.



To Sri Ramakrishna, the entire universe was filled by His Divine Mother and Her infinite Love. Many such examples may be cited from Saints all over the world. To them the trees, the singing birds, the roar of the wild animals, the silence of the jungle, the blue dome that forms the sky, the rising Sun, the Crescent moon, the dancing peacocks, all whisper messages profound

but inaudible to the common man. Such a saint beholds the Divine Vision even in lifeless stones. To him they are hallowed spots to be trodden on softly, silently and prayerfully. It may be a Shaligram or a Linga. Thus these Saints go about treading gently on the bosom of Mother earth. No wonder then that it is said that the orphaned earth rejoices at the advent of these Saintly ones.

These Saints have sensed God everywhere, in all things. And they have marked specially a few select spots on the earth, so that others - far less evolved or enlightened — could get glimpses of the Divine presence at least in those centres. Such spots are marked out by them for their association with some Divine form, with some sacred memory hallowed by myth and legend or scriptural utterance. To this group belong the Jyotirlingas, that are twelve in number and scattered along the length and breadth of India. These silent sages have chartered the path that a pilgrim may take, reminding us again and again of the same Divine presence in all places. It is the Divine that extends far beyond boundaries and quickens the rich diversity of forms by its universal immanence.

These Lingas are Swayambhu, self made. To a skeptic, this may sound to be preposterous exaggeration or a mere superstition. Whatever that may be, whether the Lord has brought it into being or whether the forces of nature have eroded and weathered it into that smooth structure that we call the Linga — it has, to the true devotee, a message profoundly significant and powerful in its inspiration. These Lingas are found in Saurashtra as

Somnath, in Sri Sailam as Mallikarjuna, in Ujjain as Sri Maha Kala, and as Omkareswara on the snow-capped Himalaya. He has established himself at Kedarnath. At Dakini, he is Bhima Sankar, and at Varanasi He is Viswanath. On the banks of the Godavari He is Tryambakeswara, He is Vaidyanath at Chita Bhumi. In the sylvan glades of Daruka forest He is Sri Nageswar.

Varanasi

The Eternal City of Siva, immortalised in the scriptures and sung by poets of devotion, is found between the two rivers, Varana and Asi. Viswanath is the presiding deity here. The primeval Jyotir Linga is believed to have been there from the very beginning of time. Mention of it is found in the puranas. The Visweswara temple was desecrated by successive foreign invaders only to be re-installed. It fell a victim to the iconoclast maniacs who ravaged the temples of India from time to time. The see-saw of destruction and restoration continued till it was finally razed to the ground by Sikandar Lodi in 1494, who banned further re-construction. For seventy long years Benaras (Varanasi) had no temple. Unprecedented drought and epidemics swept over the city claiming innumerable lives regardless of faith. At that time there lived a saintly man called Narayana Bhatta, to whom these afflicted people (even Muslims) went for relief. Narayana Bhatta is said to have told the Muslim Ruler that all these pestilential suffering that had befallen the people was due to the absence of the Visweswara temple, and that the ban on the re-

construction of the temple should be lifted. So in or about 1569 the temple was rebuilt. The present shrine was constructed by Rani Ahalya Bai after a further onslaught on it by Aurangzeb in A.D. 1669. It is said that the water at the Lord's feet has the power to cure all diseases. Near the temple there is a "Jnana-Vapi" (Well of Knowledge), into which the deity is supposed to have taken refuge at the time of the temple's desecration. The Linga is housed in the Sri Viswanath temple. It has certain special features, of which the pedestal at the base of the Linga is arresting in its shape. Unlike the usual circular structure it is four-sided and hence has no outlet for water. The Nandi in front has its face turned in the direction where the old temple stood. Here millions come to worship and several choose to spend their last moments there.

Rameswaram

Rameswaram is in the State of Tamil Nadu in the district of Ramnad. It is almost an island, off the shores of which the Arabian Sea meets the Bay of Bengal. It derives its name from Lord Sri Rama, the King of Ayodhya, who is said to have worshipped Iswara (Siva) after destroying Ravana. His enemy, Ravana was a Brahmin by birth and a great devotee of Siva. In expiation of the sin of Brahmahatya (or the killing of the Brahmin) the Lord wanted to worship Lord Siva, and so he asked his devotee Hanuman to go to Kailas and get straight from the Lord Siva Himself a Linga for his worship. It is said that Hanuman was unable to return in time and so Mother Sita herself fashioned a Linga out of sand and it was established here and the Lord worshipped

it. Later Hanuman returned with the Linga from Kailas only to find that a Linga had already been found and installed. So to console Him the Lord had Hanuman's Linga also installed along side and decreed that its worship should precede that of the Linga established by himself. Sri Rama's action here reveals two divine excellences: firstly, his magnanimity in recognising virtue even in an adversary whom he had perforce to fight while upholding Dharma and in commemorating it fittingly; and secondly his supreme forgiveness in overlooking Hanuman's delay by accommodating a second Linga in the scheme of worship. The Linga at Rameswaram is considered to be one of the oldest Lingas. It is reckoned among the twelve Jyotir Lingas. Even to this day devotees bring water from the Ganges to bathe the Linga here, — thus linking once again the North with South.

Ujjain

Ujjain in Madhya Pradesh was the capital of Malwa. The country was also called Avanti. In Ujjain the most famous spot is the temple of Lord Maha Kala. It is one of the 12 Jyotir Lingas. The temple stands near a lake, and has five storeys, one of which is underground. The way leading to the sanctuary is dark and lamps are kept constantly burning and it is only here that Bilva leaves and flowers received as Prasad after an offering may be reoffered. (Siva Purana Ch. 1, 42). The legend connected with this temple concerns a pious and devout Brahmin living in Avanti. A tyrant of the name Dushana, residing near Ratna Mala Hill, started harassing the people, who ran in desperation to this pious man. This

man performed severe penance, and as a result the Lord appeared as Maha Kala and destroyed the tyrant. The Lord then, complying with the devotees' request to abide there permanently so that worship may continue, stayed on in the form of Maha Kala Jyotir Linga. Skanda Purana describes this area as the Maha Kala Vana. Agni Purana calls it the best of Tirthas.

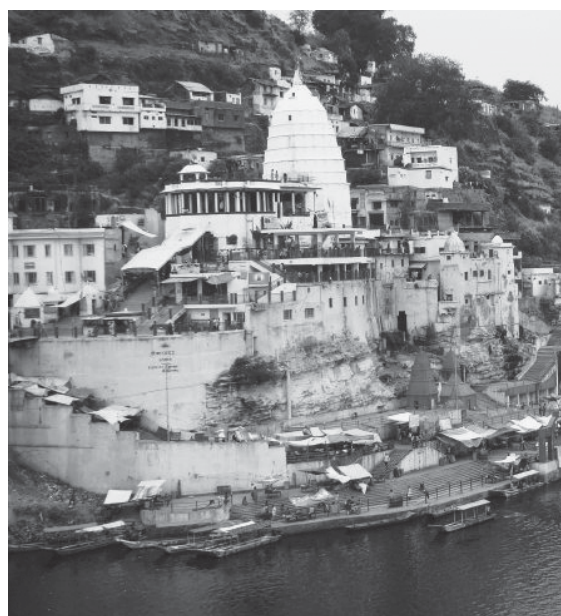
Kedarnath

Scriptures declare that Kedar is one of the fore-most shrines, whose waters anoint Maha Deva. The Siva Linga of Kedarnath is massive and probably the biggest. It is a grey series of rocks. This is one of the Jyotir Lingas. In this shrine the pilgrims themselves do the Abhishekam and perform Pujas. The story goes that Nara and Narayana acclaimed as incarnations of Vishnu were engaged in tapas, and they used to mould a Linga every day out of the earth for worship. Pleased with their devotion Siva appeared before them and expressed his willingness to grant them a boon. They requested him to stay at Kedar in the form of a Jyotir Linga. The Lord granted them their prayer and accordingly He stands there as a Linga to this day, worshipped by devotees from all over the world. The well-kept and attractive temple stands on a ridge, which juts out at right angles from below the snowy peak. It is known as Mahapanth. It is built on the same style as the temples of North are built. The sanctum is extremely dark, and so lamps are kept burning all the time. Pilgrims pour ghee into the lamps, and also anoint the Linga with it. There are many lakes behind the temple where people offer

oblations to ancestors.

Omkareswar and Amaleswar

This place is in the province of Malwa, on the banks of river Narmada. From Ujjain, Omkareswar is about 89 miles. At this place the Narmada branches out enclosing an elevated hilly structure, which is called Mandhata or Sivapuri mountain. One tributary flows through the north and the other through the south of the hill. Of these, the south flowing river is more important. One has to cross the river by boat. It is on the Mandhata mountain that the Omkareswar temple is built. It is stated that a devoted king called Mandhata worshipped the Lord and performed penance here. The Linga here is not in a depression nor is it below the tower. Water is found surrounding the Linga at all times. Some people consider it to be of the nature of the Pranava. In earlier days it is said that people plunged down from the



mountain in order to die at this sacred spot. On Kartika Purnima day there is a great gathering of pilgrims who come to worship here. People bathe in the Narmada and worship the Lord. On Mondays the Linga is covered with a five faceted mask and taken out in procession. Amalleshwar is found on the southern bank of the armada. So Omkareshwar split, to form Amalleshwar where Omkareshwar was the Jyotirlinga and the other was the Parthiva Linga.

Tryambakeswar: This place is about 20 miles south-west of Nasik. The present temple was built by Peshwa Balaji Bajiras on the site of the older shrine. In the sanctum sanctorum of this temple is a small depression full of water and in this water stands the Swyambhu Linga. From an apparent crack on the top of the Linga water constantly flows down. The Linga is covered by a golden



mask with five faces carved on it. The Patala Kanda of the Padma Purana contain a chapter on Tryambaka Mahatmya. A legend connected with Tryambakeswara is that Lord Siva was once cursed by Brahma, the Creator, and made to descend from his heavenly abode and come to the earth below. So He came down as Tryambakeswara. Festivals are held in the month of Kartika on the full moon day.

Somnath: The famous Somnath shrine had been the target of attack of many invaders

and was reinstated and the Linga reinstalled on the 11 th of May, 1951 (Vaisakha Sukla Panchami). It still stands on the same spot and over the same rock (Brahma sila) where from the most ancient times stood the Jyotir Linga of God Siva. This Tirtha is on the south coast of Saurashtra. It is said that the moon-god worshipped Lord Siva observing severe austerity and when the Lord was pleased, he wished to name the

deity of the shrine Somnath. Somnath is thus connected with 'Soma' or Moon. A legend says that the Moon established here the first shrine of Lord Siva. The prosperity of Somnath temple is described by Muslim historians. Water is said to have been brought daily from the Ganges and flowers from Kashmir for purposes of ablution

and worship. The temple has an endowment of 10,000 villages or its maintenance. On the day of eclipse multitudes of pilgrims gather here. Its assets are regarded fabulous. Today, it stands as a dim reminder of a glorious past, a past chapter of grandeur that came under the relentless blows of iconoclastic maniacs.

Mallikarjuna : Mallikarjuna temple is in Sri Sailam. It is one of the twelve Jyotir Lingas. Sri Sailam is situated in the hilly forest area of Nandi Kotkur Taluq of Kurnool district.



Sri Sailam is described as “the Kailas of the South”, and a tributary of River Krishna that flows through this area is known as Patala Ganga. This temple of Mallikarjuna Siva on the top of Sri Sailam overlooks the Patala Ganga. A local legend has it that there was once a princess called Chandravati, who, due to a calamity at home ran away, and took to living incognito in Sri Sailam among some cow-herds. One of the cows, it was found, yielded no milk. The Princess had a dream, in which she saw Lord Siva in the form of a Linga, with the cow draining her milk over the Linga. She was thus inspired to worship him daily with Jasmine (Mallika) flowers and hence this Linga was called Mallikarjuna. The legend is engraved on a Panel on the courtyard wall. There is another legend connected with the spot which says that Lord Siva came here as a hunter and married a beautiful girl of the “Chenchu” tribe. The Chenchus believe themselves to be self-appointed guardians of this Mallikarjuna shrine. They drag the car of

the Lord on festive occasions. On account of this association with Chenchus Mallikarjuna is also called “Chenchu Mallayya.”

Vaidyanath or Deogarh, which has another of the Jyotir Lingas, is in the Santal Parganas. Deogarh is a railway station surrounded by Jungle to the North East by dandaka hill in West and Trikuta Parvata in East and South. Siva Purana says that Ravana cut down nine of his heads and offered them in penance to Lord Siva. The Lord appeared before Him and his heads were restored as if by the miraculous surgery of a Super Human Vaidya. Hence the name, Vaidyanath. There is also a legend current here which says that the priests who originally worshipped the Linga became subsequently neglectful. One Baiju (a cow herd) became angry for some profound reason, and resolved that he would give a good beating to the Linga daily. He resolutely carried out the vow. One day, however, he was so tired that he forgot his ritual and sat down for his meal. On suddenly remembering his vow of a daily offering of blows to the Linga he got up and dealt a heavy blow in fulfilment of the day's quota. As soon as the blow fell on the Linga, the Lord appeared out of the Linga and congratulated the cow herd stating that while all the priests had forgotten him, Baiju remembered him even though it was just to strike him. The Lord in appreciation named the temple after the strange devotee Baidnath.

The temple is situated in a big compound walled around like a fort. The top of the Linga does still appear to be slightly broken. Pilgrims bathe in the Siva Ganga lake situated to the North of the temple and

worship Lord Siva at the shrine. Many pilgrims bring water from far off Gangotri in the months of Magha and Phalgun to bathe the Linga. Close to the temple, too, there is a well whose waters are supposed to have healing properties.

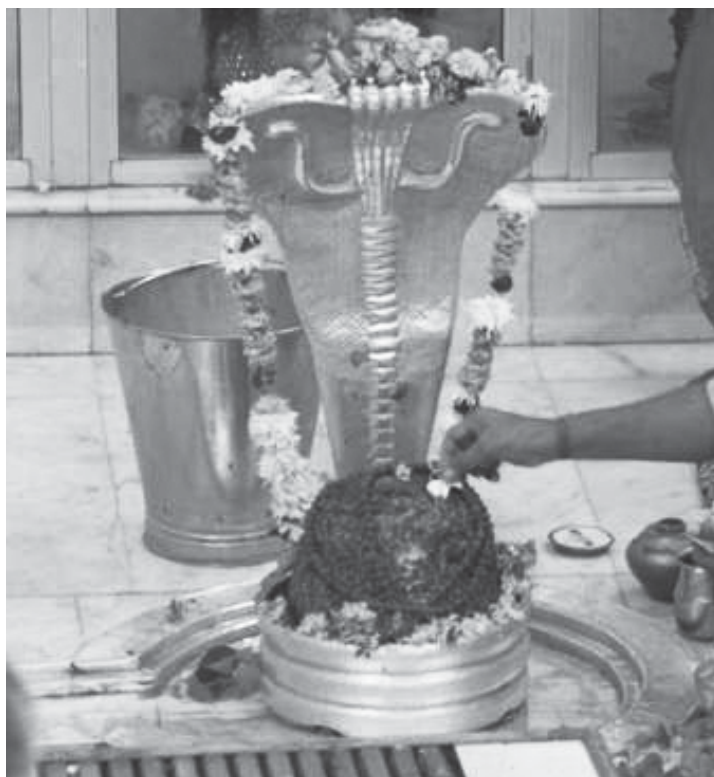
Bhima Sankar: This temple is situated in the village of Bhava Giri about 30 mile. N.W. of Khed in Poona. The place is also the source of River Bhima. It is said that Lord Siva destroyed the tyrant called Tripurasura who was spreading misery among residents of the locality. There stands a Linga today. It is said that water constantly oozes out of this Linga. The Maha Sivarathri attracts hundreds of pilgrims here from the surrounding villages and towns. Water supply is plentiful and the natural setting enchanting. The temple and its surroundings display the rugged beauty of the Sahyadris

and their dense jungle.

Ghushmeshwar : About 66 miles from Manmad is a station called Daulatabad. About 12 miles from this place is a village called Verill. Buses ply from Daulatabad (or Aurangabad) to this place. The tower at Daulatabad is towards the south of Gushmeswar and situated on a hill. On this hill is the Dhareswar Linga, as also the samadhi of Sri Janardhan Maharaj the Guru of Sri Eknath. From there one has a beautiful view of the Ellora cave. Some people consider the Ghushmeswar Linga to be the Kailas temple among the Ellora caves. Between the Sri Gushmeswar temple of Lord Siva and the Deva Giri fort are a number of lakes called Surya Kund and Siva Kund. Here we find the Pataleswar and Suryeshwar shrines. This is a very ancient spot. Now coming to Gushmeswar and the

traditionally accepted version of its presence it is said that there was a pious and devoted couple whose one woe was that they were childless. The wife, Sudeha came to know of her husband's unhappiness owing to the lack of progeny, and she compelled the husband to marry her own sister Sudharma, so that he may have a child through her. In due course Sundharma bore him a son, who grew up to manhood and a young maiden was chosen for his wife. For many years, these two sisters lived happily under the same roof.

Sudharma was a pious devotee of Lord Siva. It was her practice to fashion a Linga out of sand, worship it and then later on



immerse it in the lake. This she did daily. On their horizon of unclouded happiness there appeared the demon of jealousy. Sudeha now planned to kill the son of Sudharma, by whose marriage she felt that she ceased to have her place in the house. One night she stole into the boy's room and murdered him in cold blood. In the morning when the young wife discovered

of His devotee.

He appeared and wished to put an end to the evil woman who had caused the death on her son. Sudharma pleaded for her and asked the Lord to pardon her. Doubly pleased, the Lord asked her to name a boon. She replied that the Lord should remain there always, so that this would be a blessing to all. Thus it is that he assumed the form of a Jyotir Linga and is there even today known as Ghushmeswar.

Nageshwar: Like Omkareswar, Nageswar is also in two places. The better known one is on the way from Dwaraka to Bet Dwaraka. It is said that once a pious man called Supriya was attacked by an evil natured man called Daruka. Supriya and his friends were imprisoned, but even there this devotee's mind continued to cling to the feet of his Lord. It is said that the Lord manifested Himself there to protect His devotee, and there He stands to this



the death of her husband she was plunged in grief. Sudharma was as usual oblivious of all, as she was deeply absorbed in worship. After worship she took the Linga to be immersed in the lake, on having finished the work she became aware of her son's prostrate form at her feet. He said, "Ma, I was dead and I have been re-born". Deep in the worship of the Lord she was not touched either by the sorrow of his death or by the joy of his resurrection. The Lord was so pleased that He was unable to keep Himself hidden from the eyes

day as the Jyotir Linga. It is at the Lord's command that this place came to be called Nageswar.

There is another Nageswar Linga in Hyderabad, but from the account given in Siva Purana the former seems to be the authentic one.

**Source: Tirtha Ank (Hindi),
Gorakhpur Publication.**

