

OUR HERITAGE : TEMPLES & SHRINES

17-18

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

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

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

Anywhere one worships, there is a temple.



Dear Friends,

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

Selecting the temples for this calendar has been a challenge. So many temples! How could I select only one for each month? So, the calendar has 12 temples, but the booklet has many more!

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

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

Best wishes,

Pradip Burman

ABOUT THE ARTIST

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

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

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

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

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

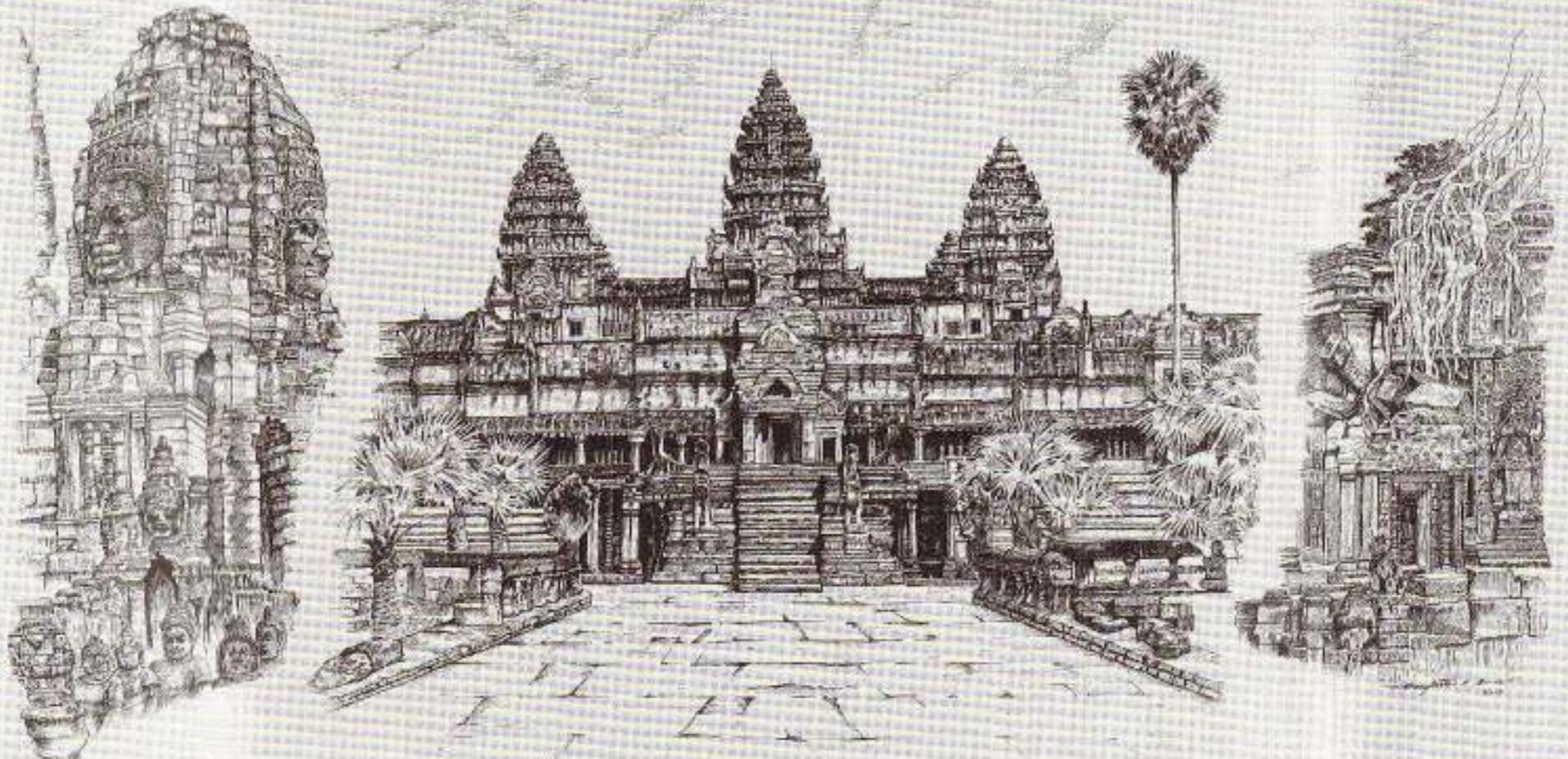
Gautam Partho Roy is a Bachelor of Fine Arts from Rabindra Bharti University.



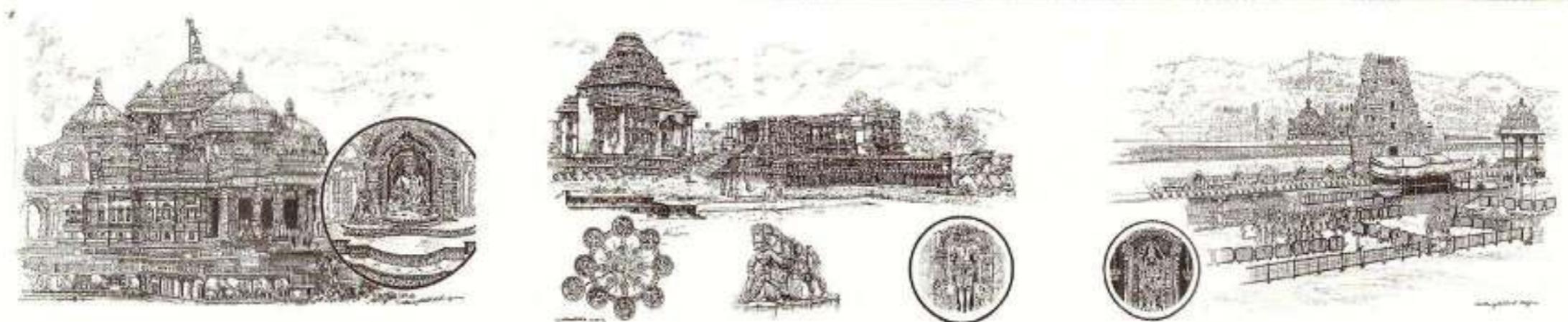
Gautam Partho Roy

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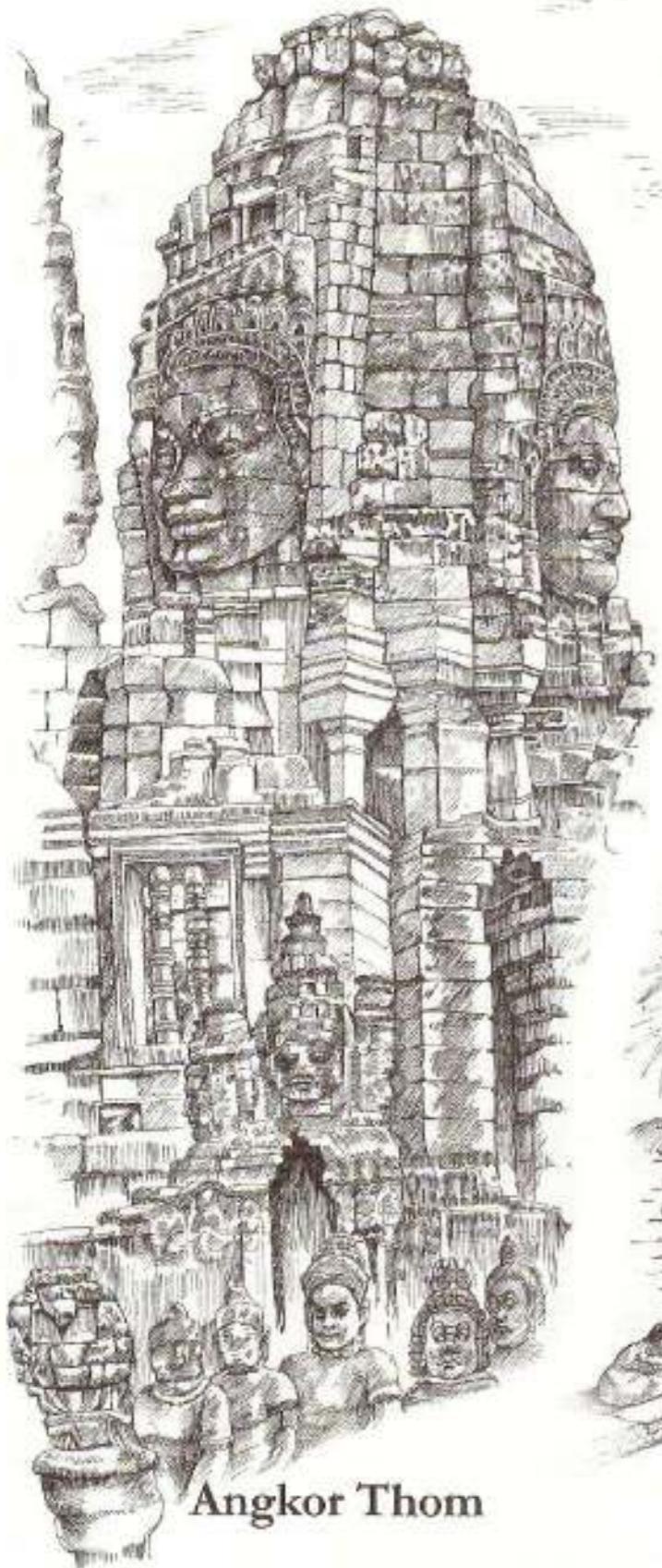
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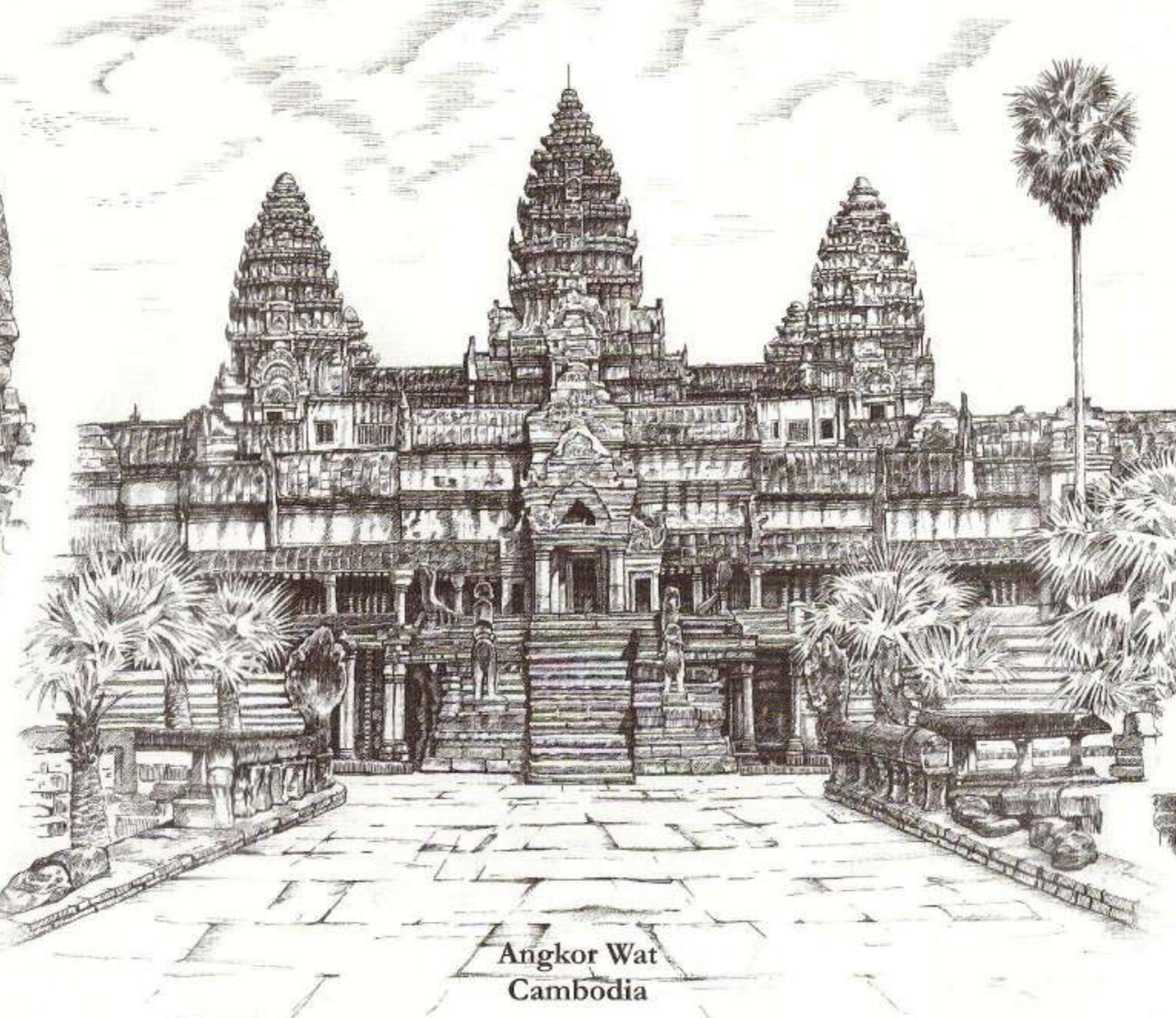
Angkor Thom

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

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

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

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



Angkor Wat
Cambodia

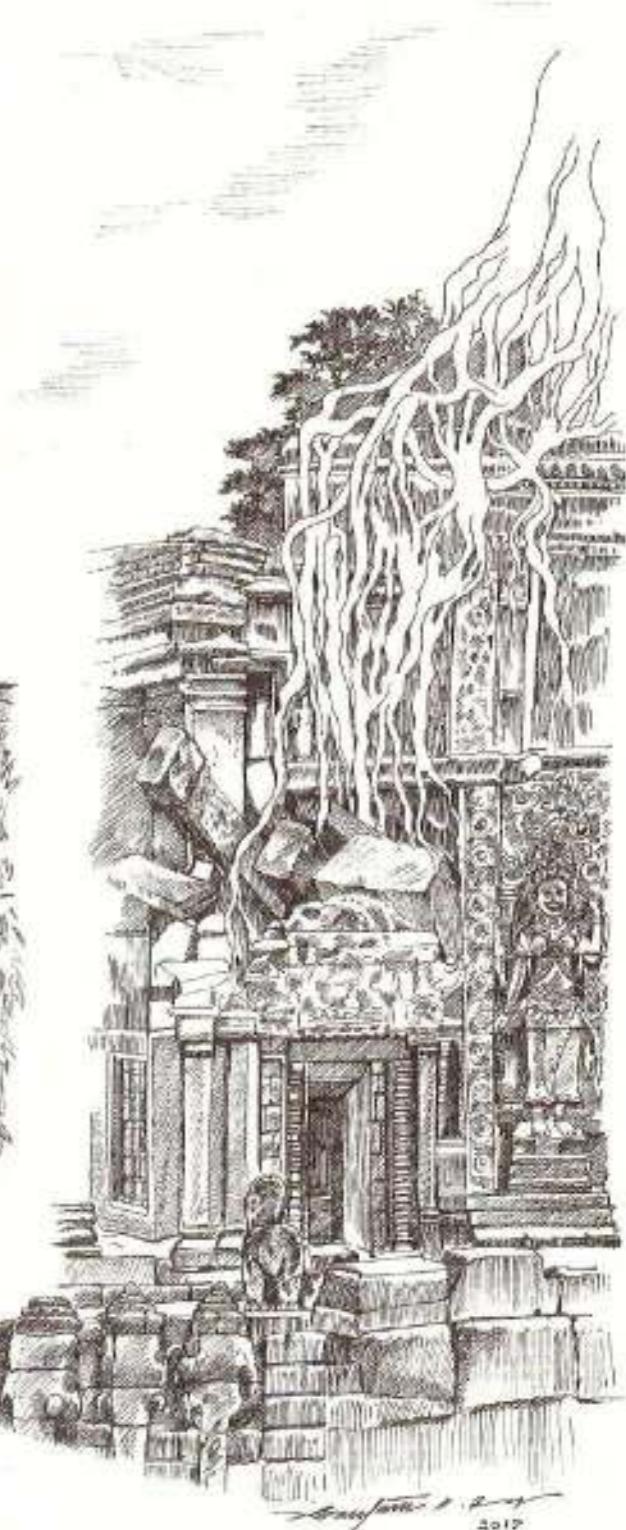
Deep in the alluvial plains of Cambodia lies the largest temple complex in the world and the largest Hindu temple in the world. Angkor Wat occupies almost 200 hectares. Over a fifteen hundred years ago, the king of the Khmer people, Suryavarman II, built a new city. In the middle of the city, raised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

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

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

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

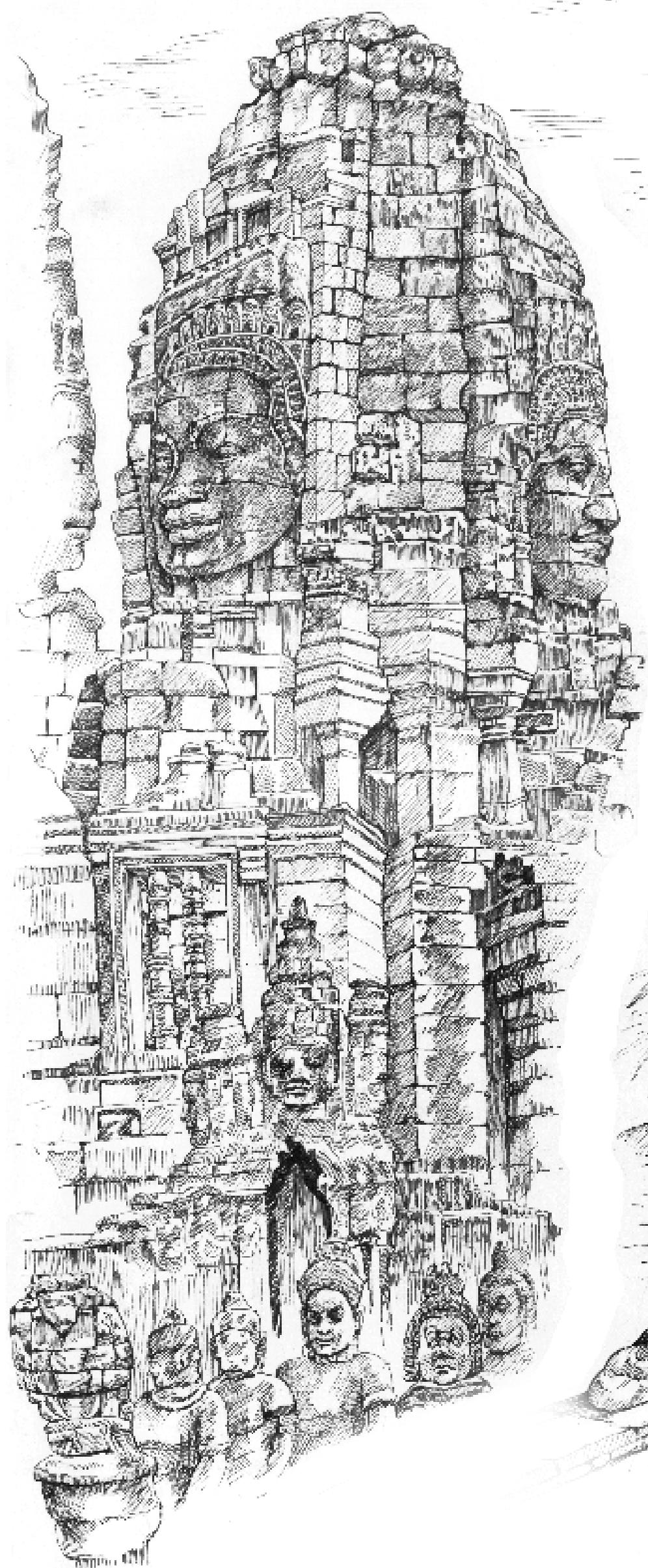
The walls have carvings picturing the life of the city: women dressing their hair, carrying water jugs, weaving and making baskets. The men are shown taking elephants to the river, practising martial arts, wrestling and hunting. There is no space left un-carved.



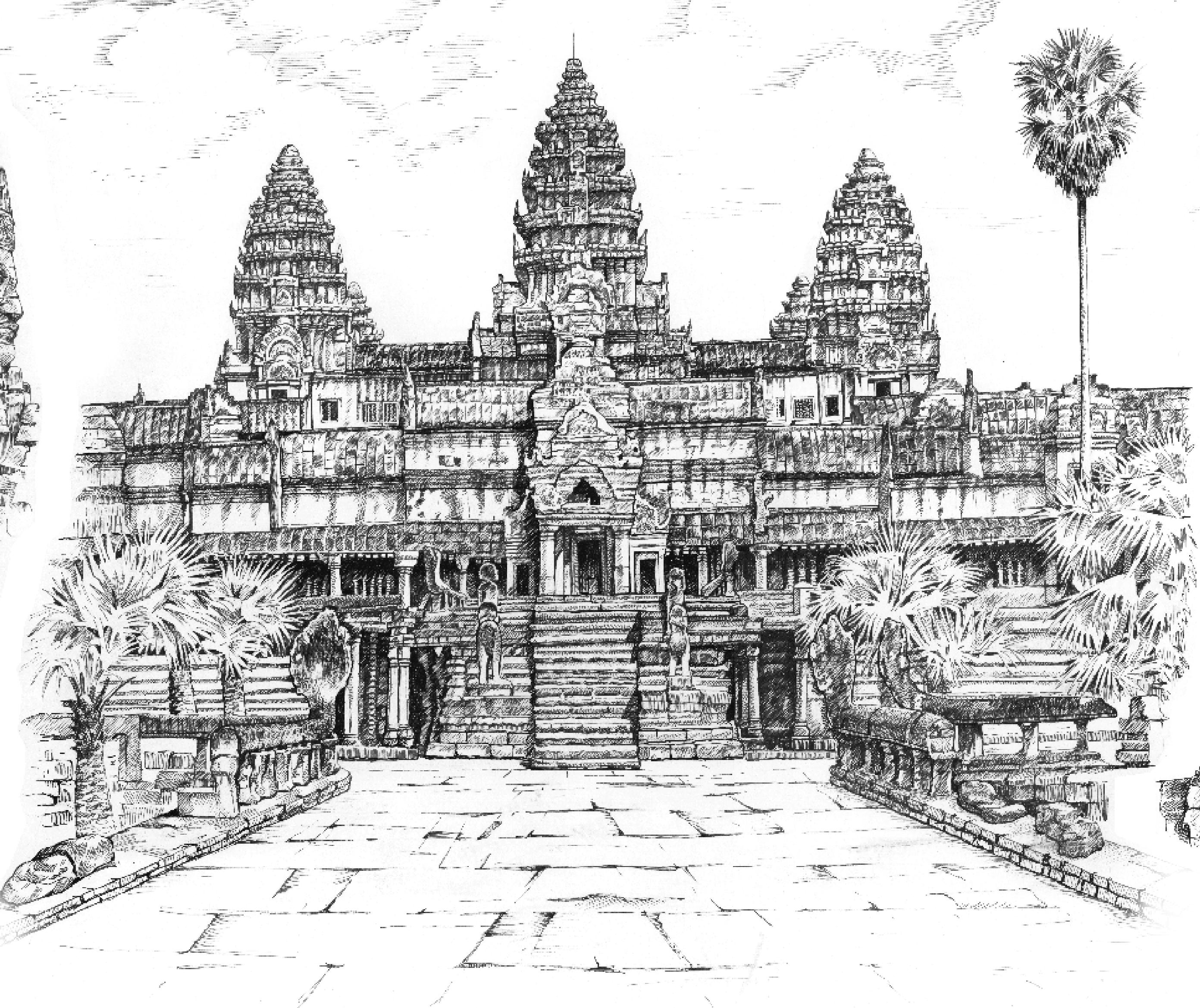
Angkor Ta Prohm

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

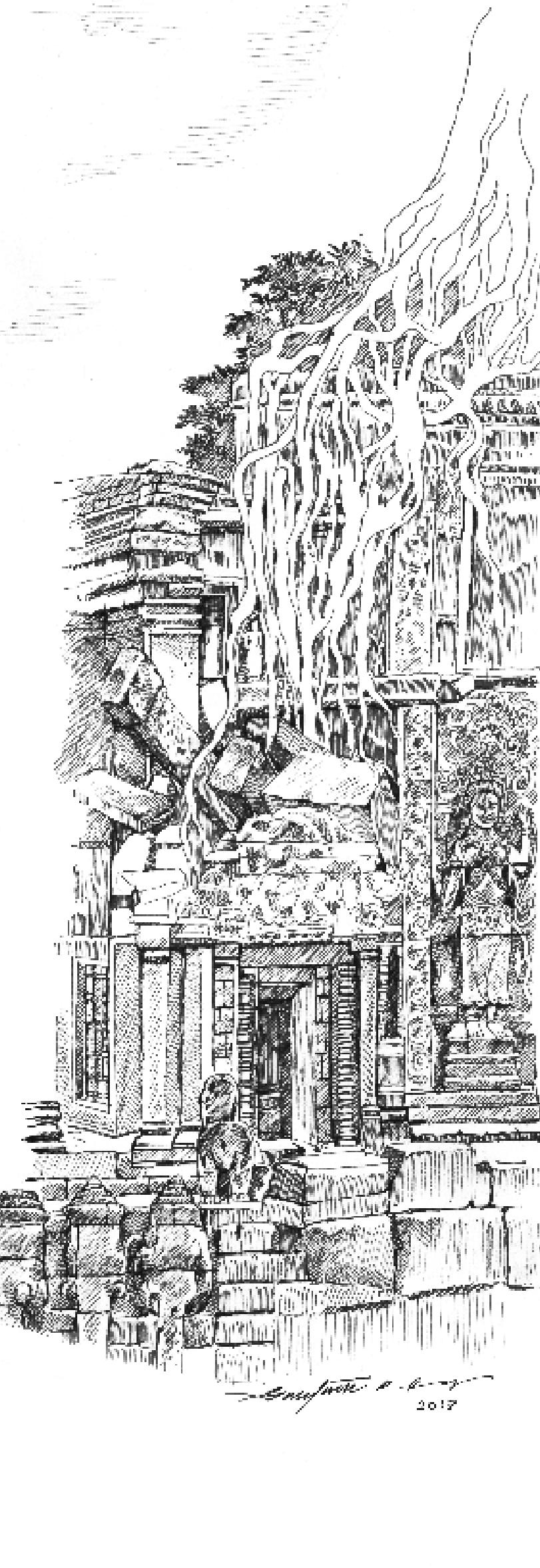
bathed, because a small channel exists to remove the water. Now smothered in creepers and vines, Ta Prohm was a Buddhist temple dedicated to the mother of Jayavarman VII. It is a temple of towers, closed courtyards and narrow corridors. Many of the corridors are impassable, clogged with jumbled piles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



Angkor Thom



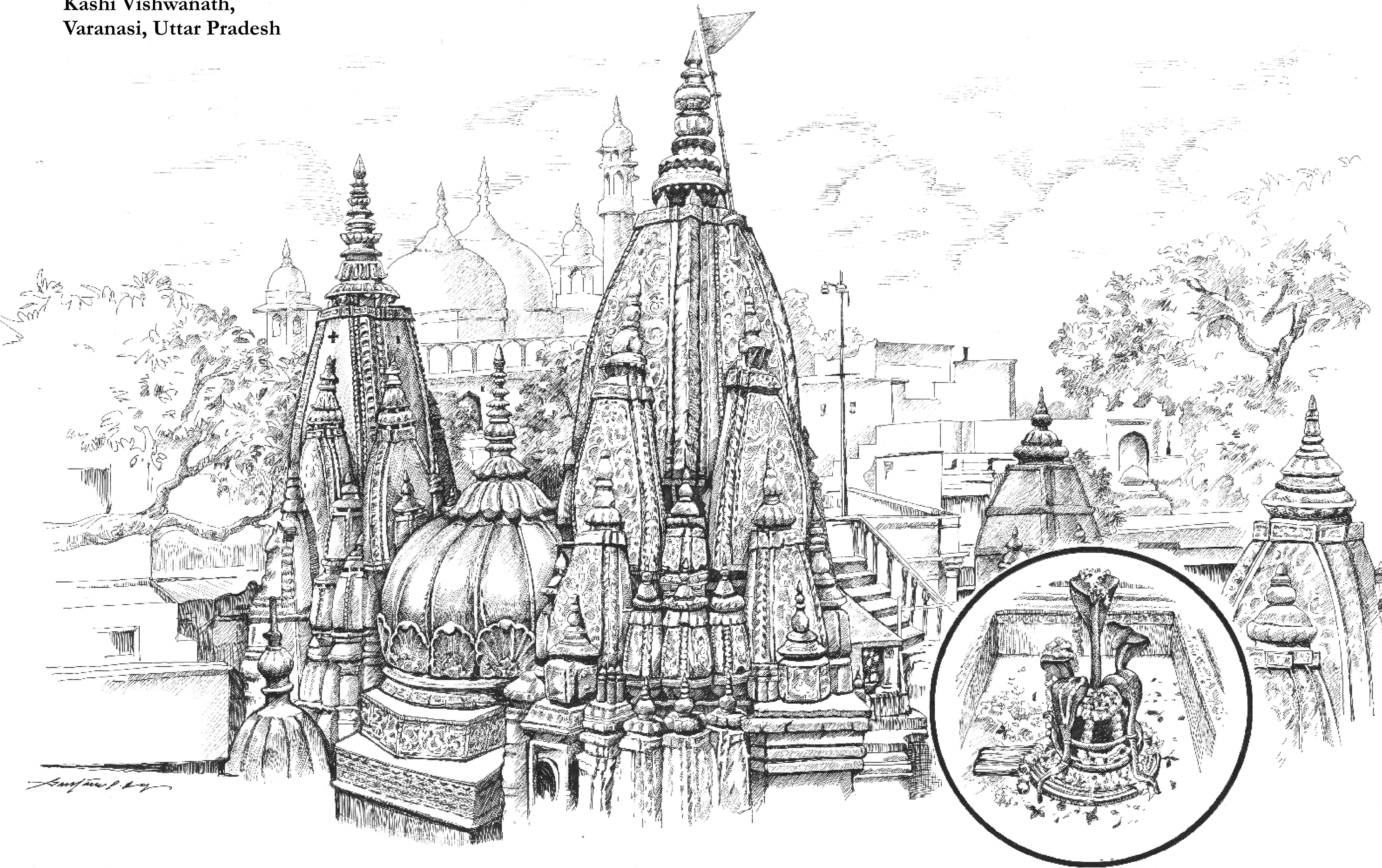
Angkor Wat Cambodia



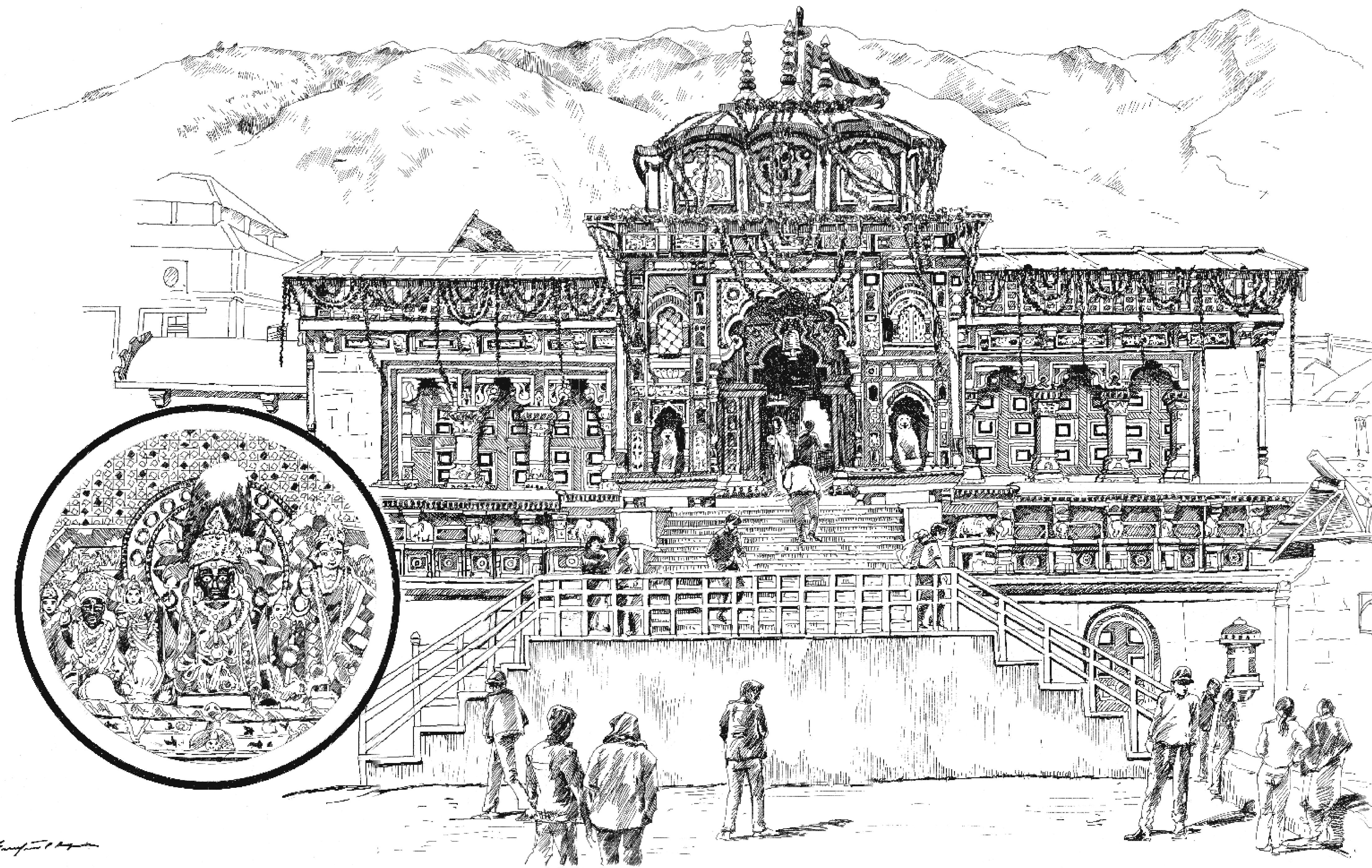
Angkor Ta Prohm

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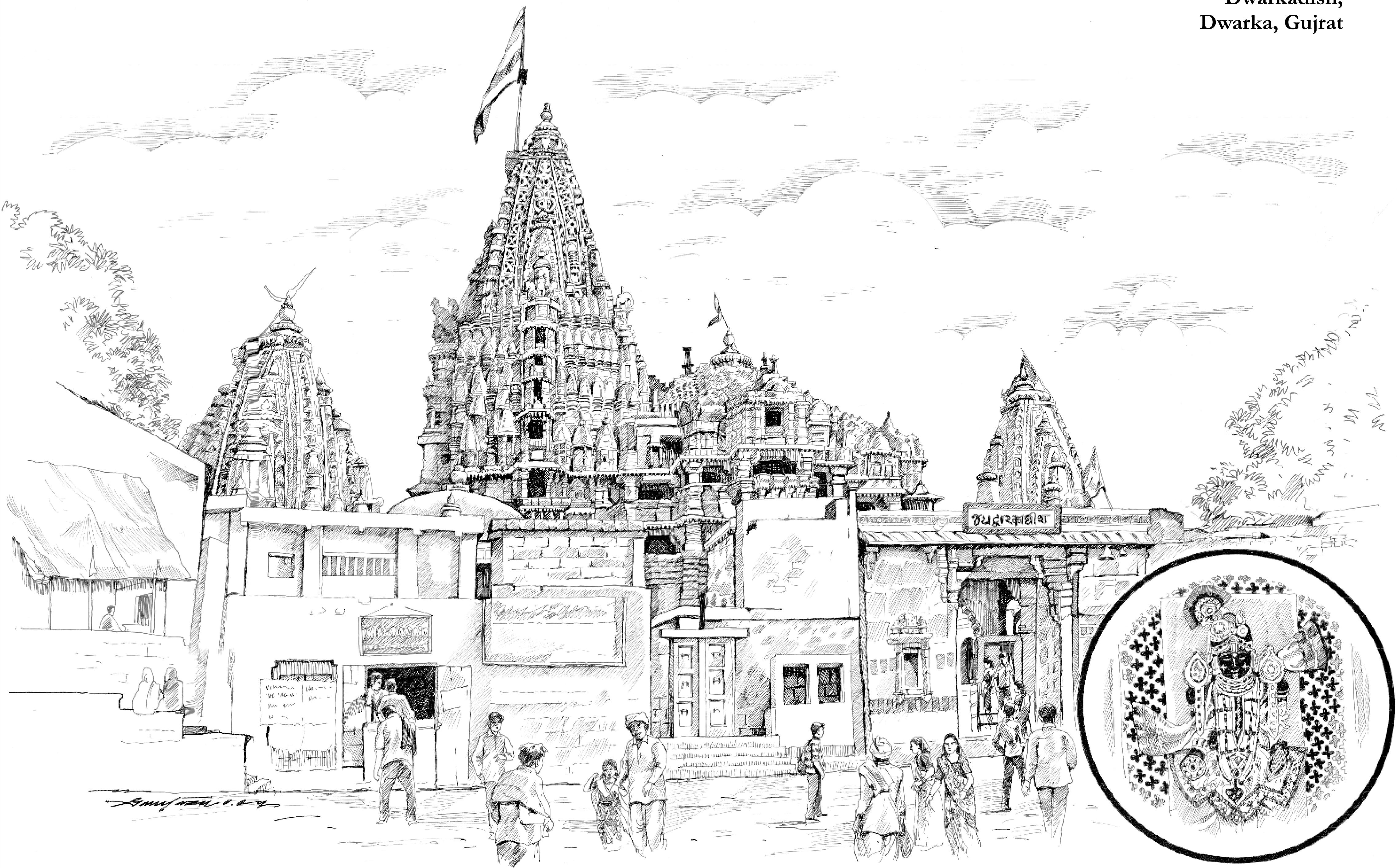
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Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh



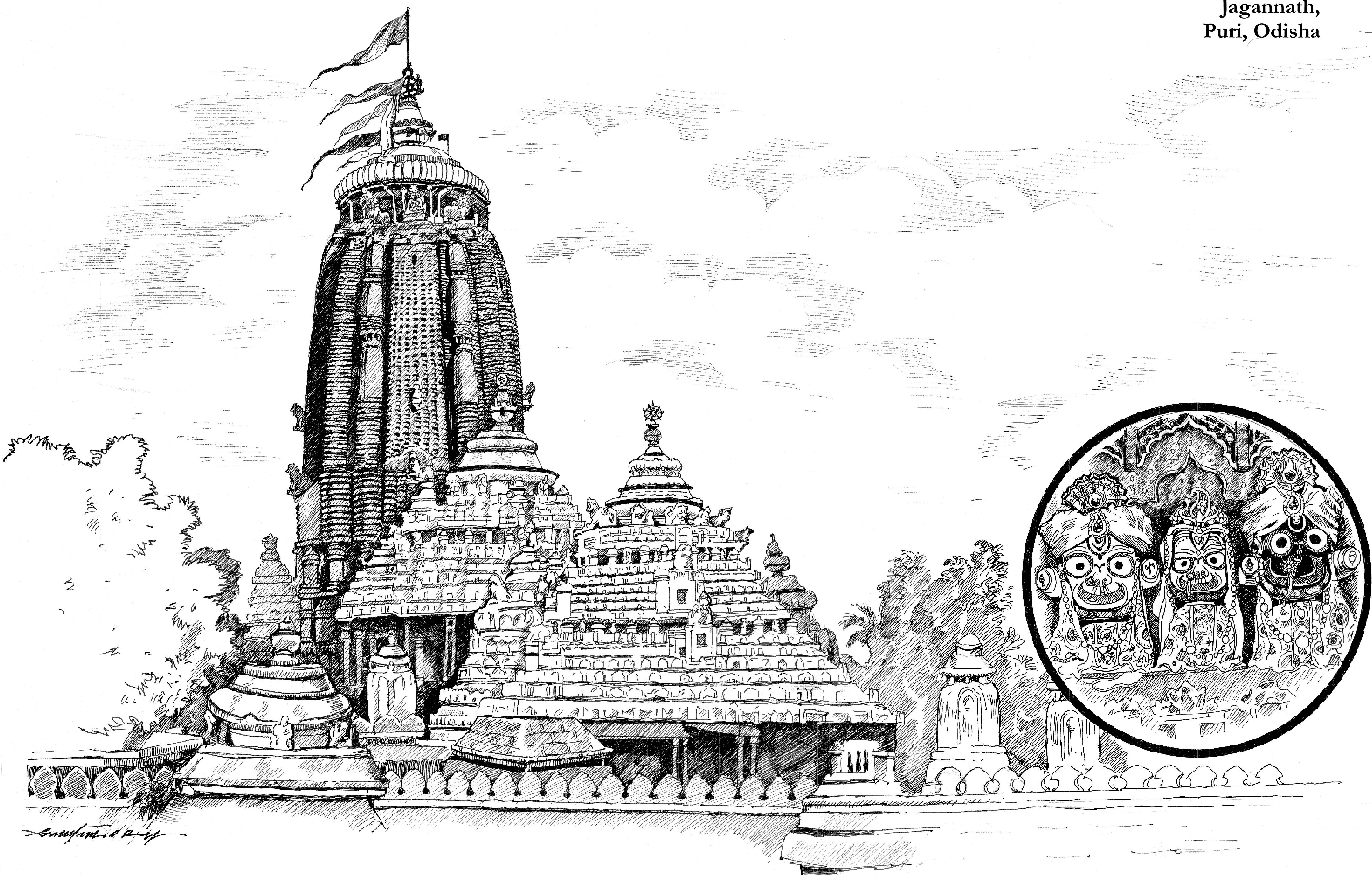
Badrinarayan,
Badrinath, Uttrakhand



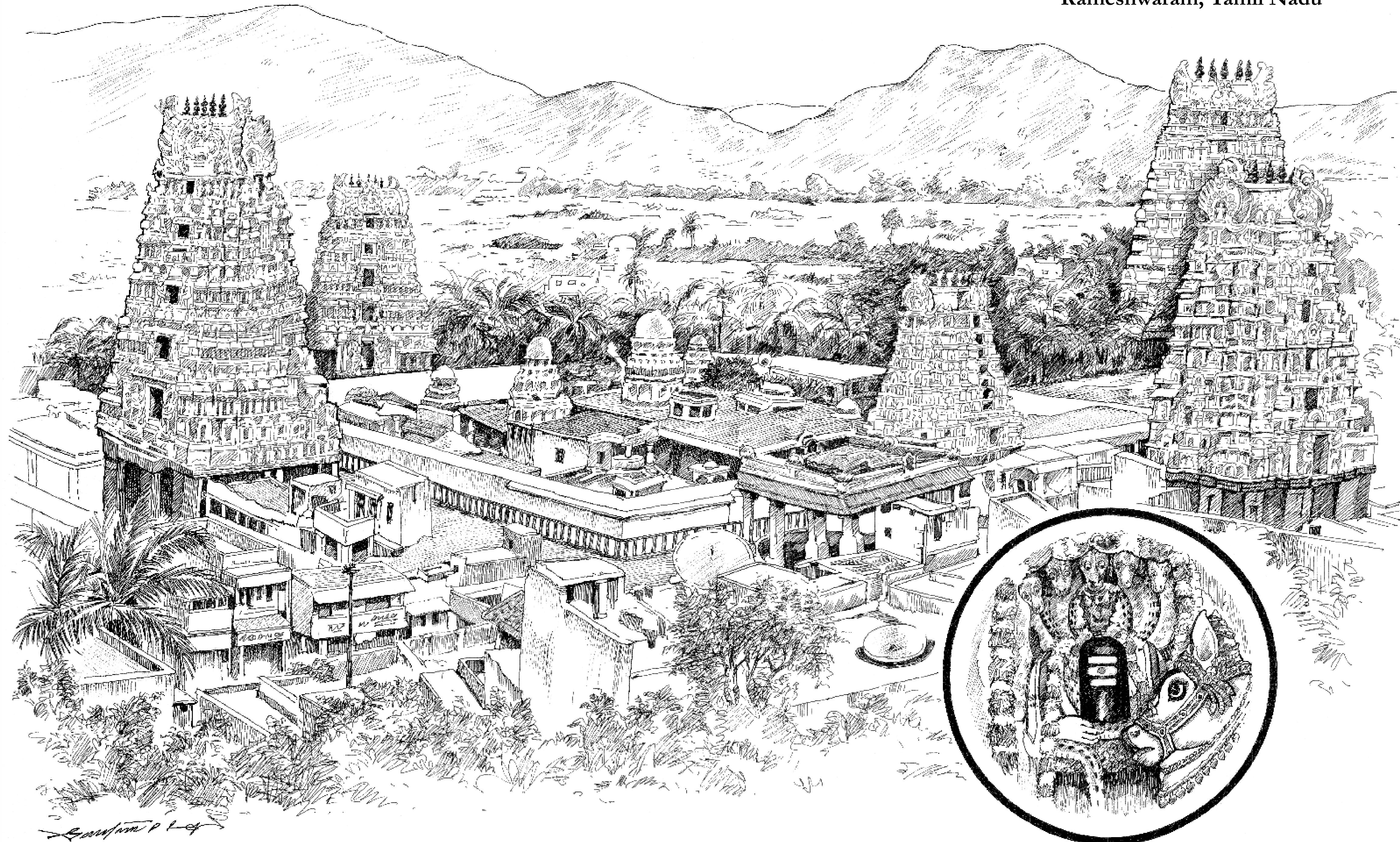
Dwarkadish,
Dwarka, Gujrat



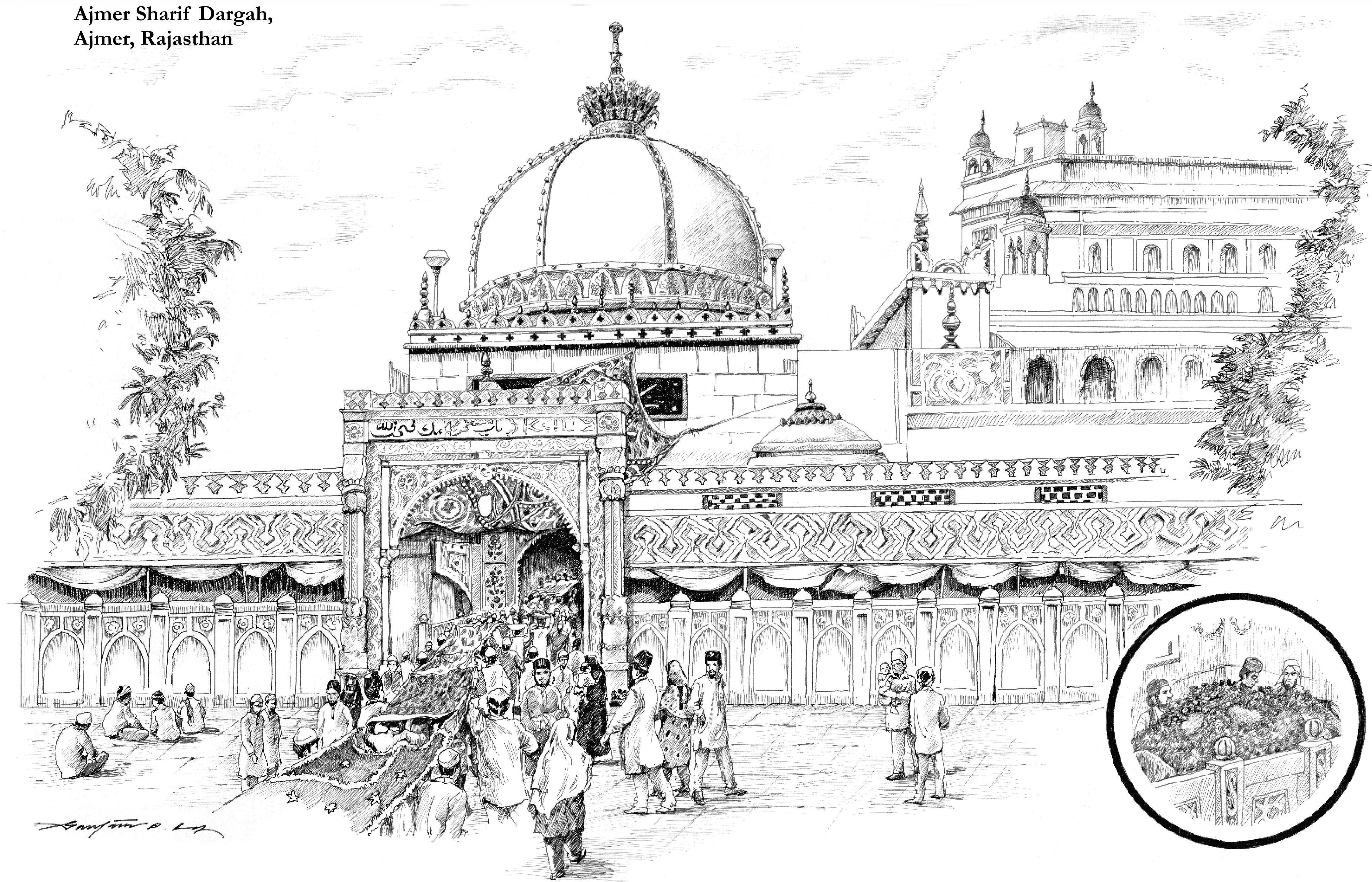
Jagannath,
Puri, Odisha



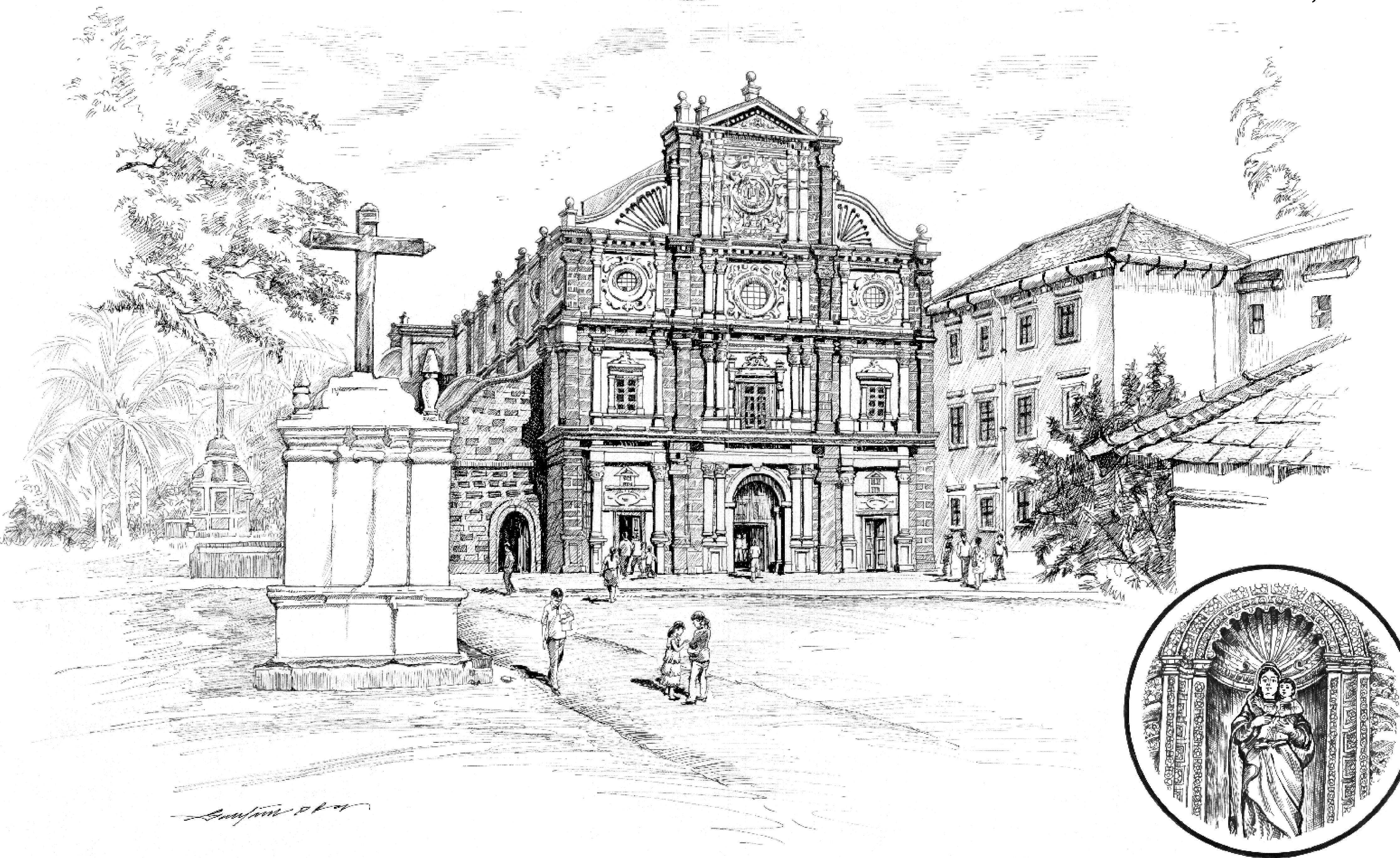
Ramanathaswamy,
Rameshwaram, Tamil Nadu



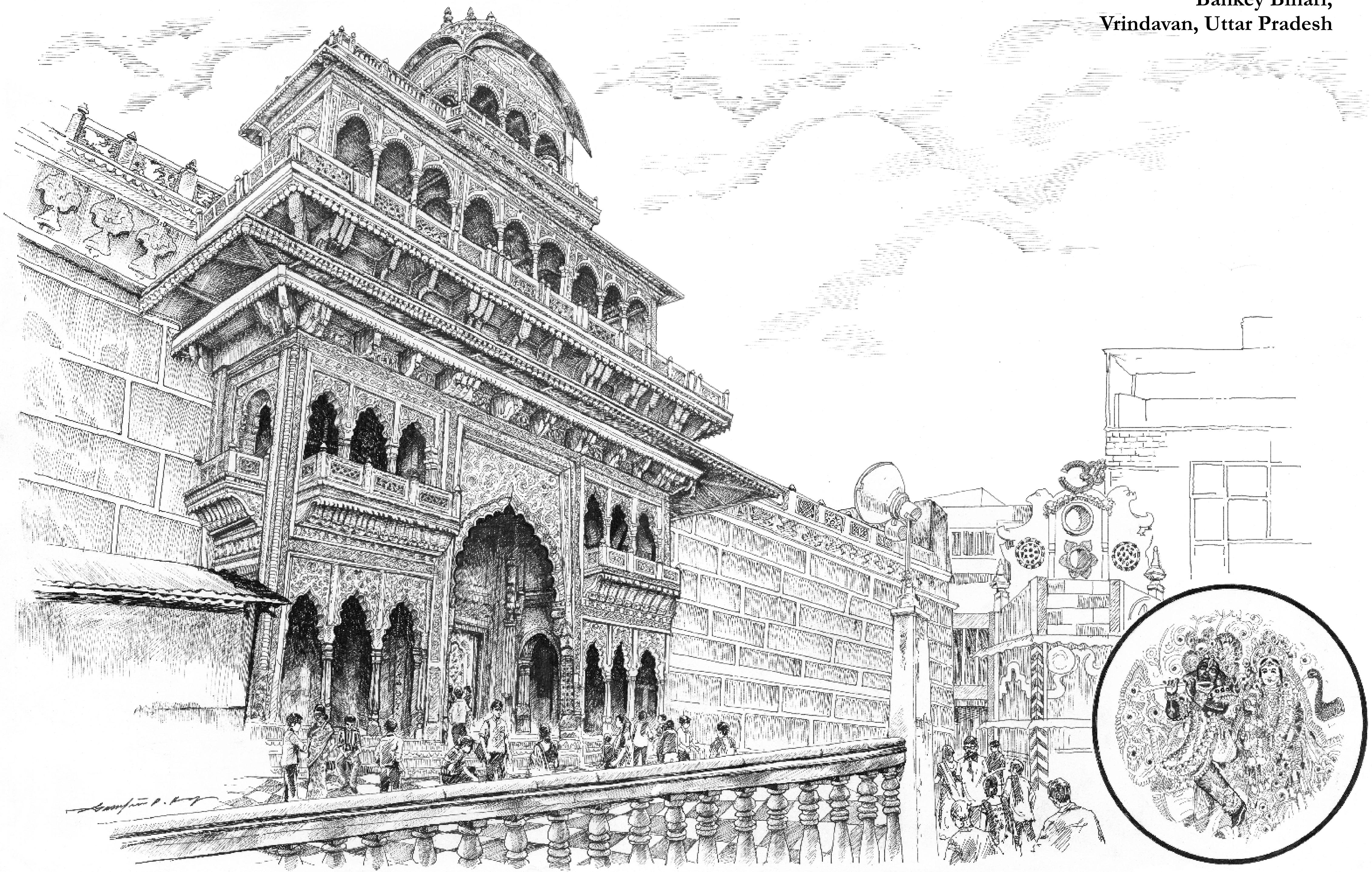
Ajmer Sharif Dargah,
Ajmer, Rajasthan



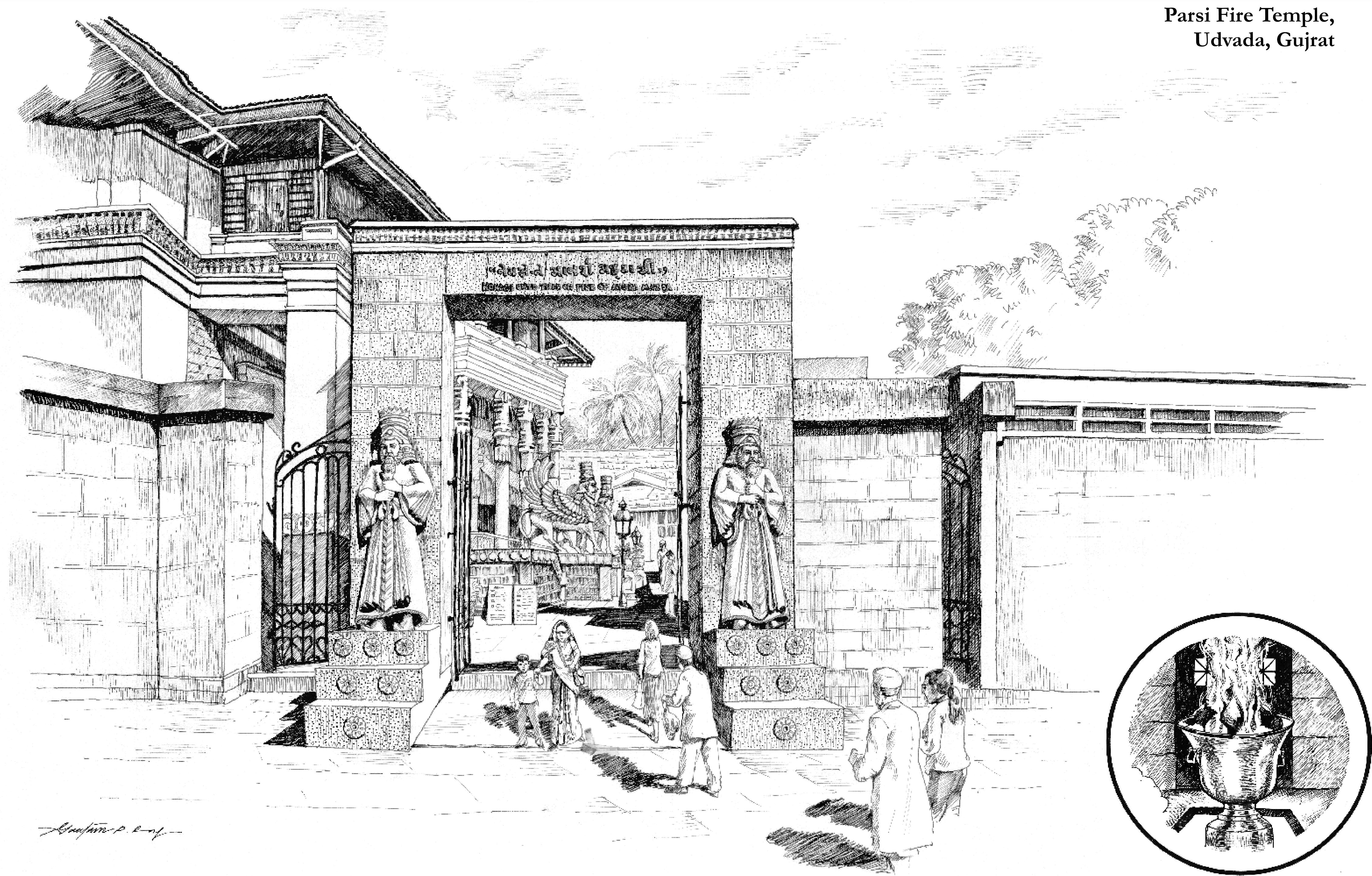
Basilica of Bom Jesus,
Velha Goa, Goa



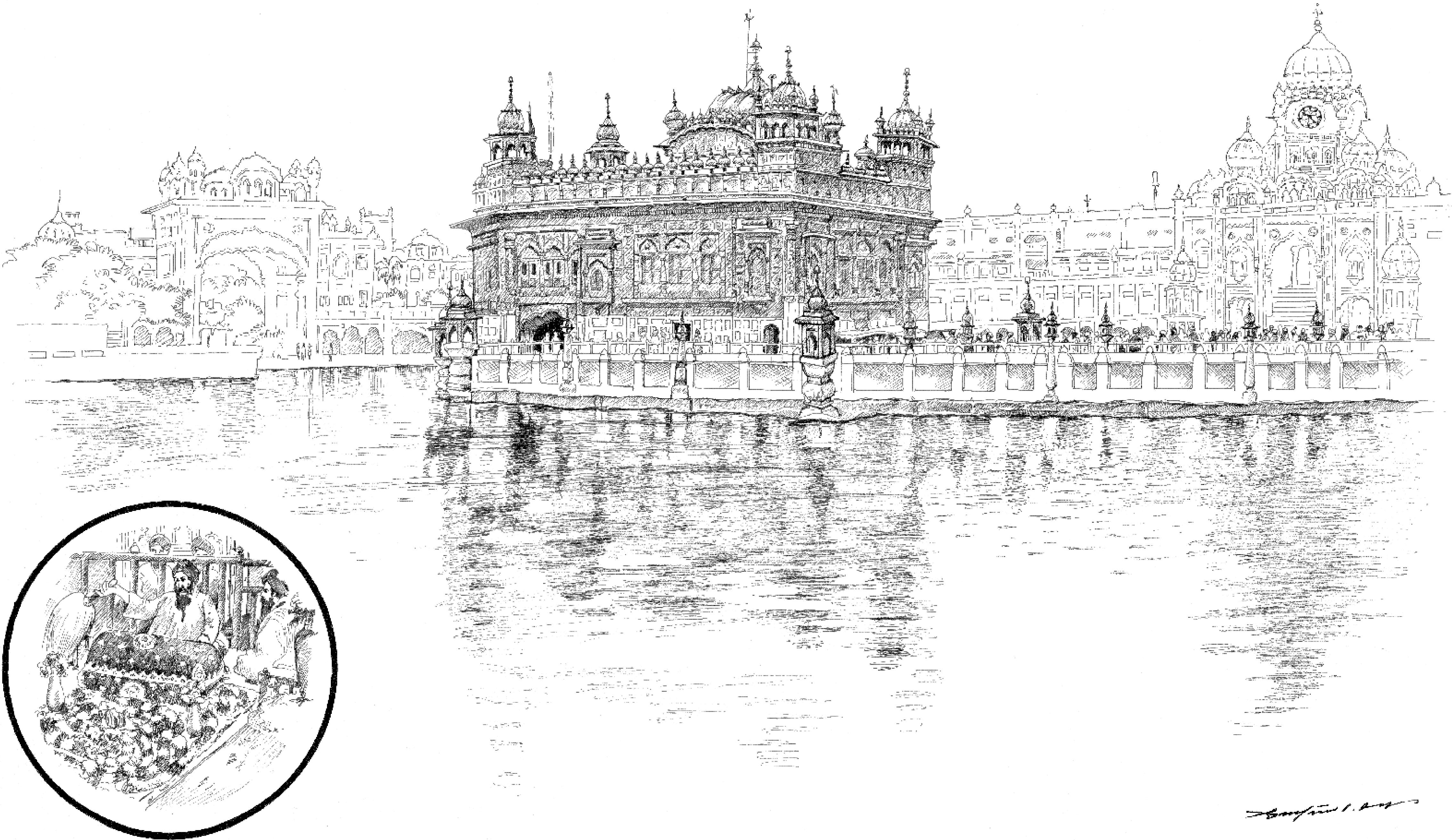
Bankey Bihari,
Vrindavan, Uttar Pradesh



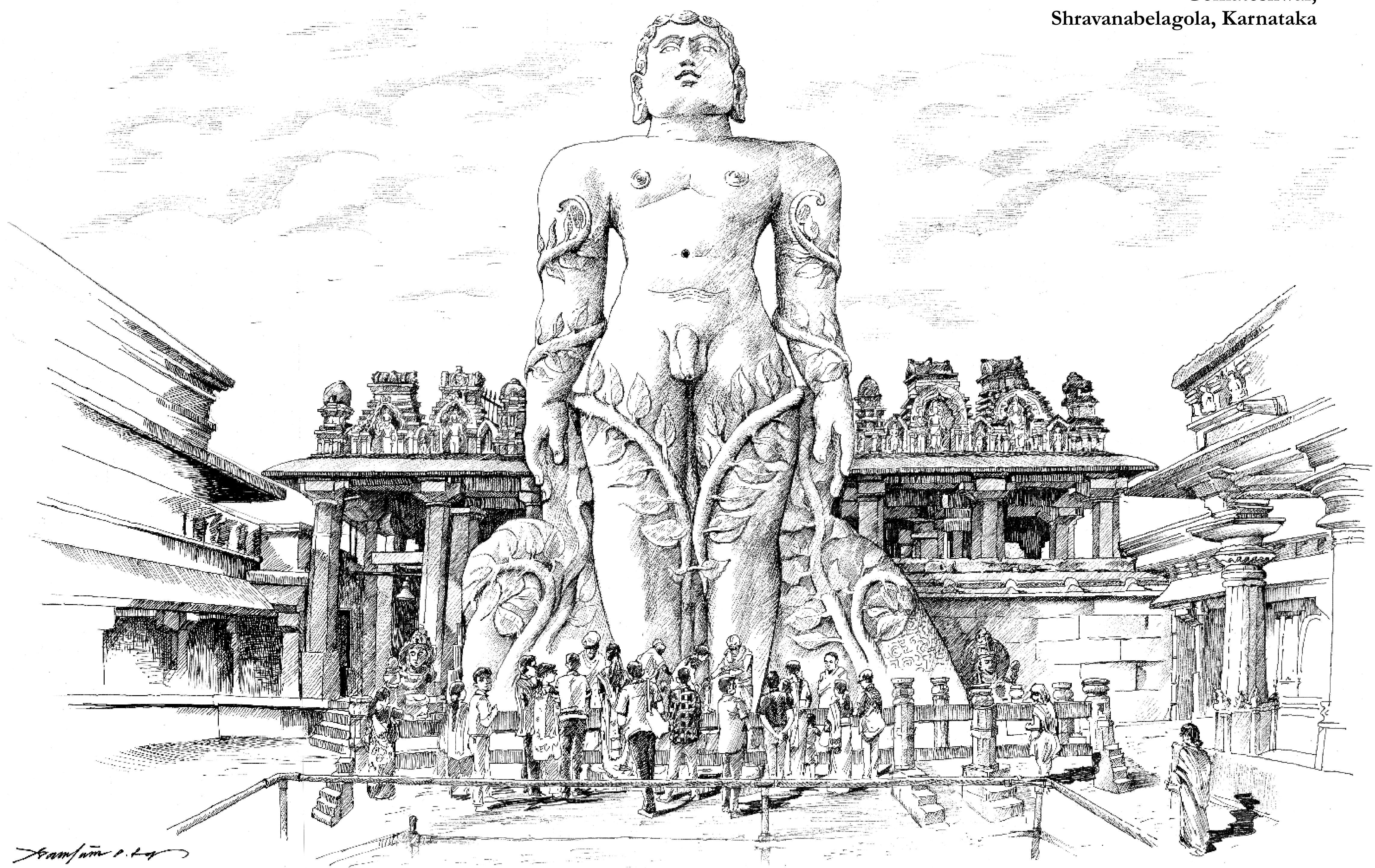
Parsi Fire Temple,
Udvada, Gujrat



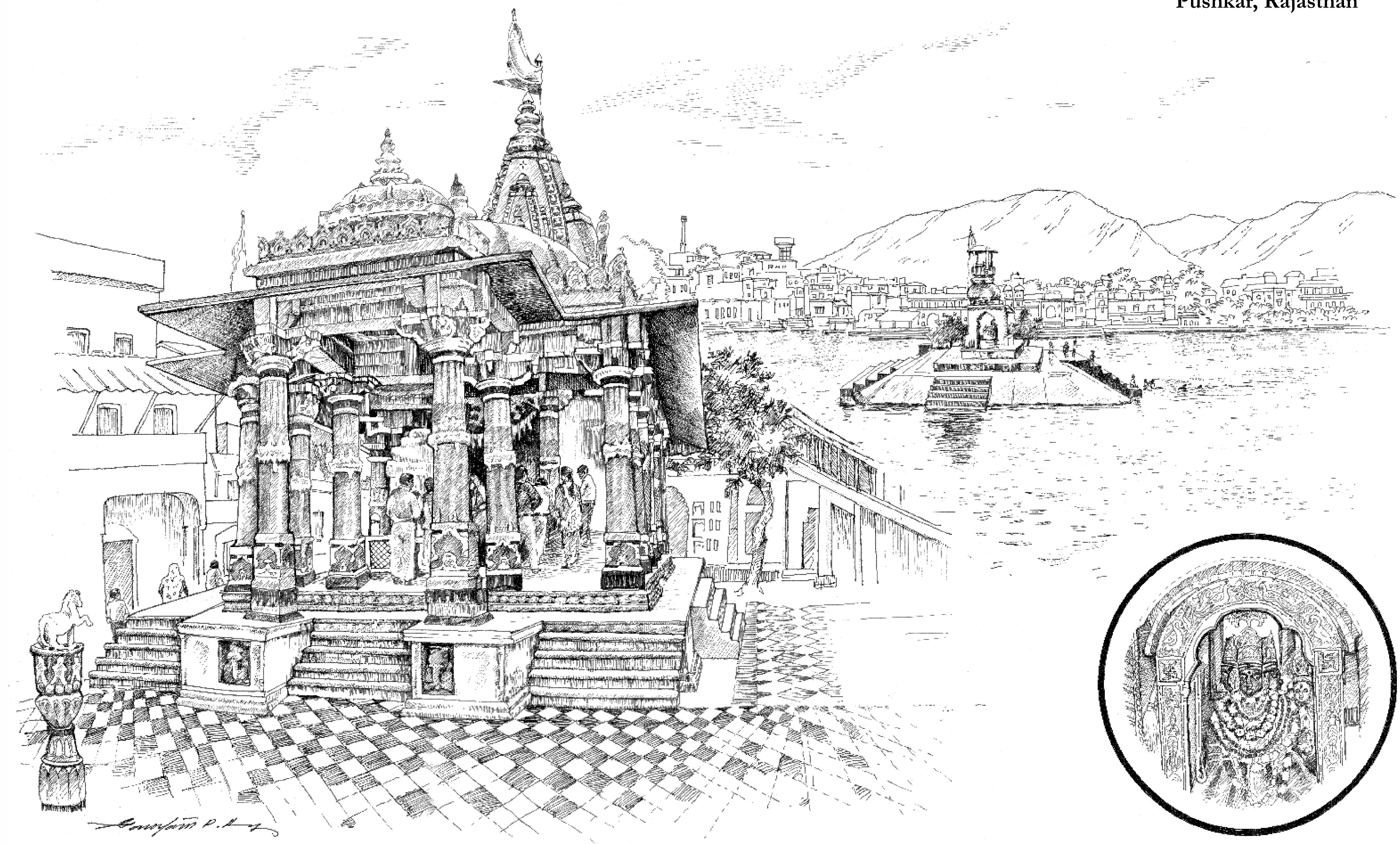
Golden Temple,
Amritsar, Punjab

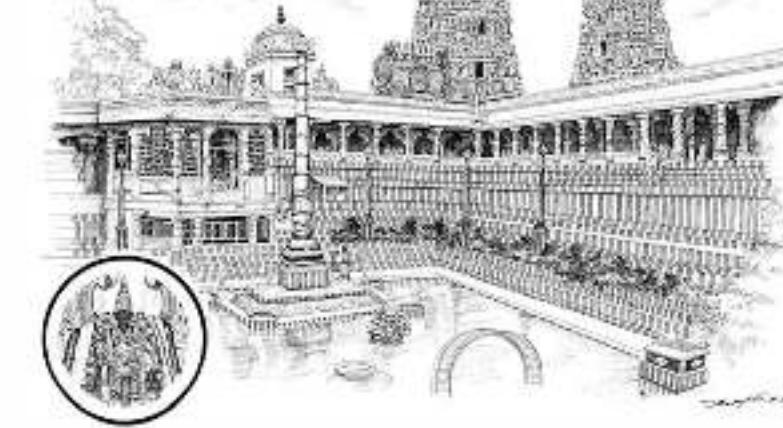
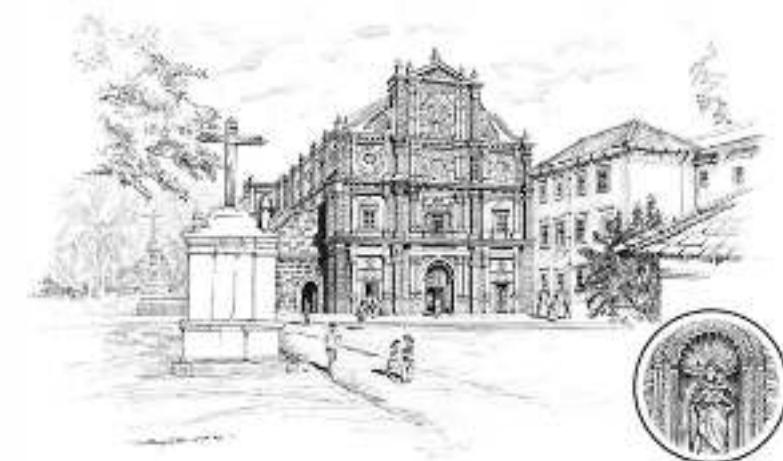
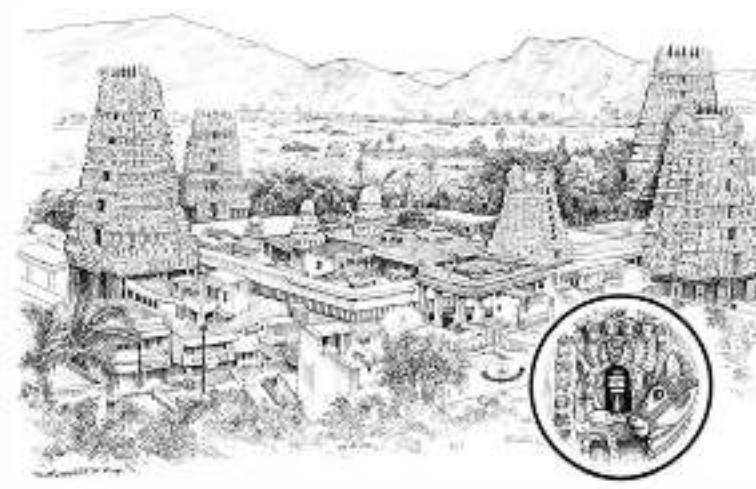
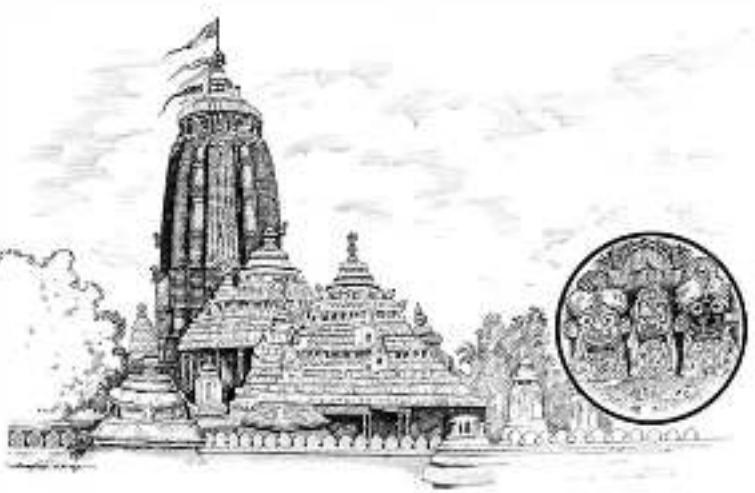
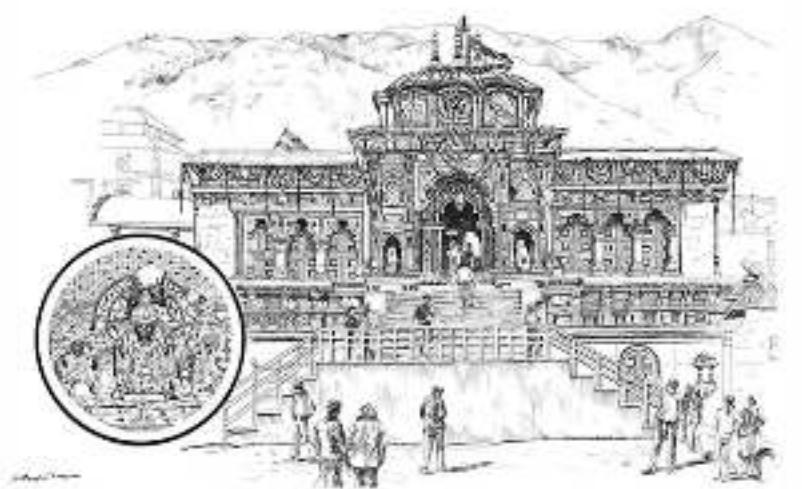


Gomateshwara,
Shravanabelagola, Karnataka

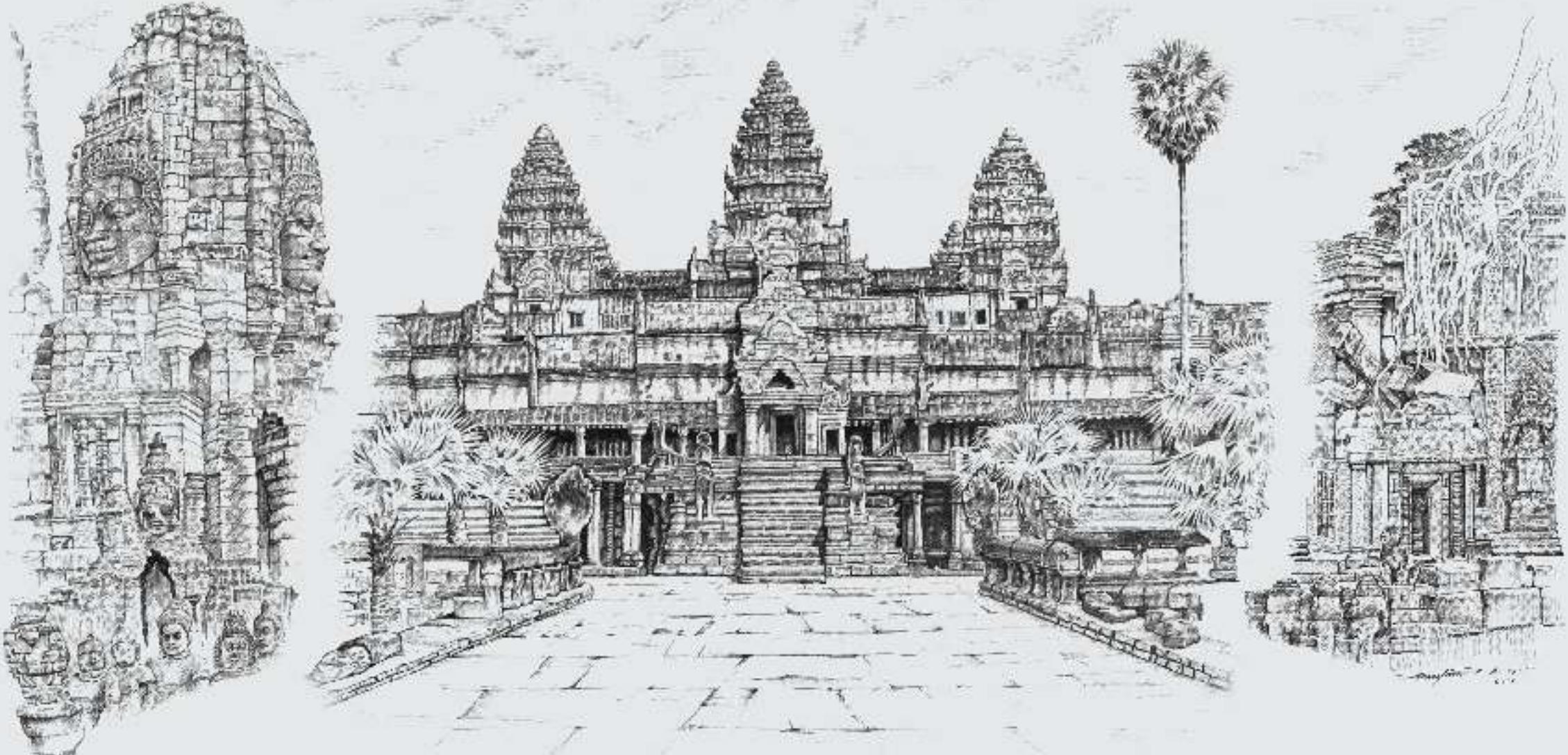


Brahma Temple,
Pushkar, Rajasthan





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