

CHAPTER-3

STUDY AREA

This chapter presents the location and significance of the selected study areas.

The ancient land of India has been blessed with the sacred presence of many exceptional saints and religious and spiritual leaders. Vaishno Devi, the twelve *jyotirlingas*, and the Char Dhams (Dwarka, Puri, Rameswaram, and Badrinath) are among the most popular pilgrim destinations in India (Chandan & Kumar, 2019). The Hindu deity Shiva is devoted all over India (Fleming, 2009a). The *Jyotirlingas*, in particular, are twelve sacred manifestations of Shiva that are believed to have spontaneously emerged, representing divine radiance and power. These sacred sites have played a critical role in the development of Hindu religious practices, serving as focal points for spiritual advancement and pilgrimages.

Historical and scriptural context

The Siva Purana contains the earliest recorded reference to the *Jyotirlingas* (Shastri, 2002). The locations of these sacred sanctuaries are described in this ancient scripture. This description is found in the 42nd chapter of the Satarudrasamhita (Shastri, 2002). The locations of the *Jyotirlingas* are ‘Saurashtra's Somanatha, Mallikarjuna on the mountain of Srisailam, Mahakala in Ujjayini, Amaresvara in Omkara Mandhata, Kedara on the Himalayas, Bhimasankara in the city of Dakini, Visvesara in the city of Varanasi, Tryambaka on the banks of Gautami, Vaidyanatha in the cremation ground, Nagesha in the forest of Daruka, Rameshwara in the Setubandha, and Ghusmesvara in the Sivalaya near the Ellora Caves, Maharashtra’.

However, the scriptures do not precisely locate these *Jyotirlingas* in the current Indian cities. Later works, such as those by Howley (1996), provide more accurate geographical locations of these revered shrines.

1. Sri Somnatha in Saurashtra, Gujarat
2. Sri Mallikarjuna on Srisailam Hill, Kurnool district, Andhra Pradesh
3. Sri Mahakaleswara in Ujjain, Madhya Pradesh
4. Sri Omkareswara on the bank of the Narmada River, Madhya Pradesh

5. Sri Vaidyanatha in Chitabhumi (Deoghar), near Jharkhand
6. Sri Nageswara near Dwarka, Gujarat
7. Sri Viswanatha in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh
8. Sri Bhima Sankara in Mahabaleswara, Maharashtra
9. Sri Rameswara in Rameswaram, Tamil Nadu
10. Sri Trimbakeswara near Nasik, Maharashtra
11. Sri Kedarnatha in the Himalayas, Uttarakhand
12. Sri Ghrisneswara in Sivalaya near the Ellora Caves, Maharashtra

The precise location of numerous *Jyotirlingas* is referenced in subsequent literary works in a variety of contexts, suggesting that they have been in existence for centuries (Nair, 2010). In the Satarudra-Samhita of the Siva Purana tradition, the term *avatara* is used to refer to Shiva's manifestation in the form of *Jyotirlingas* ('lingas of light') (Fleming, 2009a). The *Jyotirlingas* have been the subject of extensive research by scholars, who have emphasised their significance in the unification of India through pilgrimage routes (Feldhaus, 2003; Fleming, 2009b).

Bhardwaj (1983) highlighted the importance of remote and difficult locations, such as Kedarnath, emphasising the sacredness that results from their physical inaccessibility. Bharati (1963) described the temple structures of Kedarnath and Kashi, emphasising their architectural and spiritual magnificence.

The *Jyotirlingas* are still being investigated in recent literature, with an emphasis on their historical, cultural, and spiritual aspects (Feldhaus, 2003; Fleming, 2009a). In the eleventh-century work 'Alberuni's India', Varanasi is referred to as the 'Mekka of the Hindus,' emphasising its unparalleled religious status (Sachau, 2017). In 1998, Eck created a metaphorical map that equates the *Jyotirlingas* with components of Shiva's divine body, thereby symbolising the god's presence throughout the Indian subcontinent (Eck, 1998). On this body-map composite, Shiva's head is located in the Himalayas near Kedarnath, while his feet are situated across peninsular South India near Rameshwaram. The twelve *Jyotirlingas*, or lingas of light, are also indicated. The message that the entire of India is associated with the whole Shiva is obvious, despite the fact that the twelve are not identified with specific portions of the divine body.

Anne Feldhaus (2003) and other academics have identified the unifying effect of pilgrimages on India. The significance of the twelve *Jyotirlingas* in the cultural and spiritual landscape of India was also demonstrated through the mapping of their locations in studies (Feldhaus, 2003; Fleming, 2009a).

The *Jyotirlingas*' and their impact on local communities and tourists have been extensively studied in recent years. Zhuang et al. (2019) examined local tourist impacts in Kashi. Similarly, P.J. et al. (2020) examined the effects of tourism on Varanasi residents qualitatively. Lovelesh et al. (2024) linked Varanasi overtourism to the rise in Kashi Vishwanath Temple. Many researchers have studied Varanasi's spiritual significance (Gesler & Pierce, 2000; Singh & Rana, 2002).

Research has also focused on Kedarnath. Singh et al. (2023) investigated Kedarnath's tourism attractiveness using importance performance analysis. Singh, Jha, et al. (2023) inspired Kedarnath's Sustainable Development Goals discussion. Kaushik and Chakrabarti (2018) examined Uttarakhand travel risks after the Kedarnath incident. Tyagi et al. (2016) evaluated Uttarakhand police service in tourism spots. Sati (2020) focused on facilities in Kedarnath. Patil & Patil (2023) examined Omkareshwar's problems. Nath (2017) examined how religion shaped Baidyanath Deoghar. This shows that academia is advancing *Jyotirlinga* services and amenities. Despite this curiosity, no empirical study has examined service quality. Debasish Batabyal et al. (2023) proposed a Temple Service Quality (TSQ) paradigm for all *Jyotirlingas* without empirical proof.

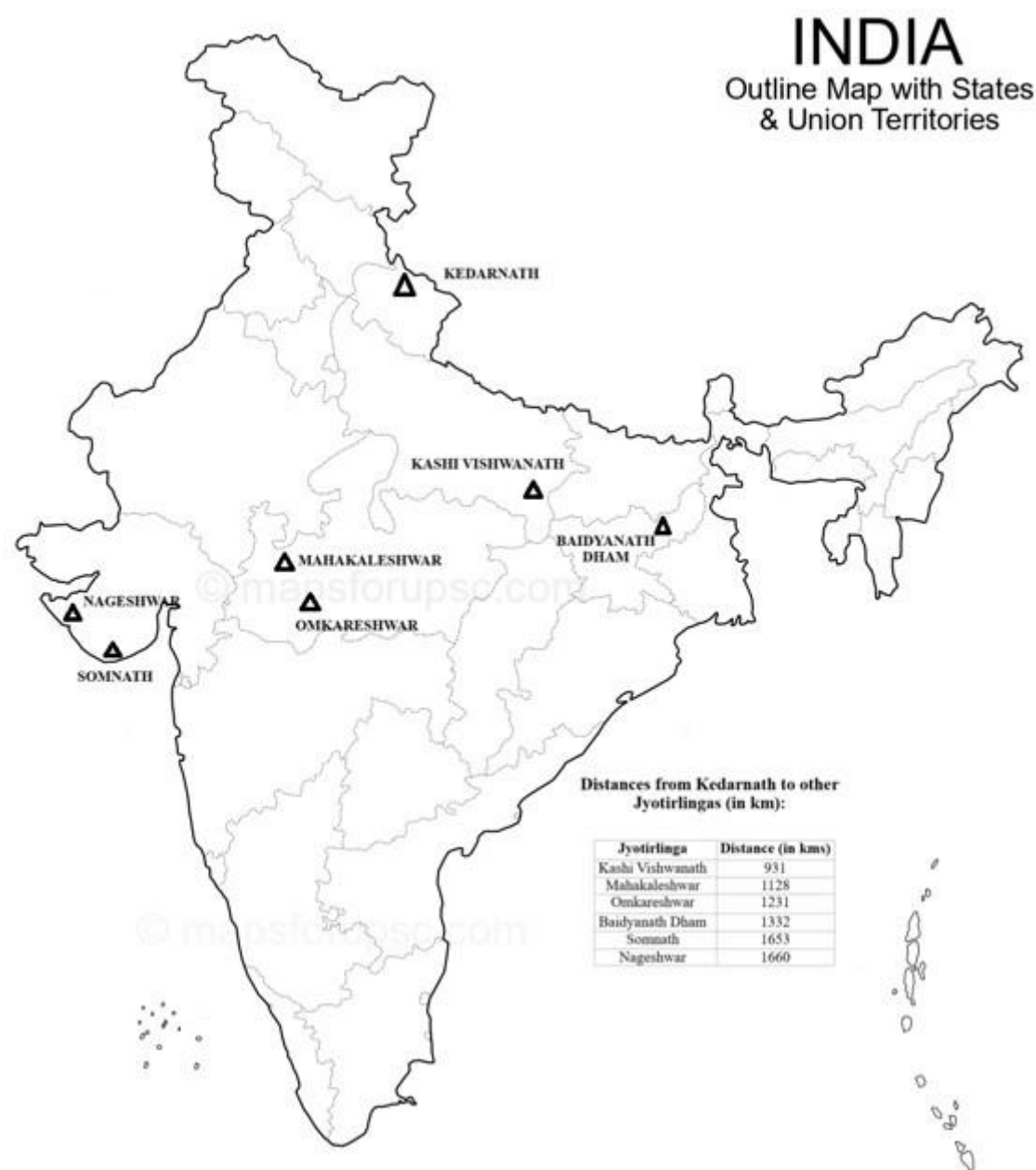
This review makes it evident that researchers are now identifying and addressing major challenges in this area of research. Hence, to improve the overall experience, it is necessary to conduct empirical research that focuses on infrastructure development and improving service quality at these sacred sites. The *Jyotirlingas* are not merely religious symbols; they are embodiments of Shiva's presence and serve as significant cultural and spiritual centres that continue to attract millions of devotees annually.

Given the importance of the *Jyotirlingas* as important Hindu pilgrimage sites and seeing the growing number of people visiting them, it is necessary to assess the quality of the service in order to guarantee a spiritually pleasing experience for the tourists. The *Jyotirlingas* are lasting symbols of the deep spiritual heritage of Hinduism and mark the heavenly presence, power, and influence of Shiva on this earth. *Jyotirlingas* are the centre

of India's religious canvas, inspiring devotion, pilgrimage journeys, and scholarly research.

Out of the twelve *Jyotirlingas*, seven *Jyotirlingas* (Figure 3.1) in the northern part of India have been chosen as the study areas. The seven study areas are Kedarnath, Kashi Vishwanath, Omkareshwar, Mahakaleshwar, Baidyanath Dham, Nageshwar, and Somnath.

Figure 3.1: Study Area



1. Kedarnath

Howley (1996) describes Kedarnath as one of the twelve *Jyotirlingas*, or self-manifest emblems of creation and power in Hinduism (Shastri, 2002). This place, located in the Himalayas, is geographically secluded and difficult to reach, which contributes to its sacred status in Hindu philosophy (Bhardwaj 1983). In literature, Kedarnath is known as Shiva's "*Dham's*" (residence) (Bharati, 1963).

According to history, the Pandavas built the Kedarnath Temple, a major Shiva temple in India, to atone for their wrongdoings during the Kurukshetra War. Following the Mahabharata battle, the Pandavas sought cleansing by approaching Shiva at Kedarnath. (Nair, 2010) Shiva, in the form of a bull, descended into the soil, and the section visible at Kedarnath is only one of five parts of Shiva, the others being found in Tunganath, Madhyameshvar, Rudranath, and Kalpeshvar (Eck 1998). Adi Shankaracharya rebuilt the existing temple in the eighth century. The temple features an unusual linga with three faces, which represents Lord Shiva's rump in his lion form. This linga, which measures around 9 feet in length, 3 feet in width, and 4 feet in height, is accessible to devotees for a variety of rites (Howley, 1996). Kedarnath is notable for its south-facing orientation and the temple priests' tradition of continuing to pray at Okhimath throughout the year. The temple's operating season runs from the first week of May until the last week of October or the first week of November. During this period, the temple is most active (Howley, 1996). The Kedarnath temple, like most ancient temples of the period, is built in the ashlar style, which involves interlocking stone slabs without the use of mortar or cement.

2. Kashi Vishwanath

The Kashi Vishwanath Temple in Varanasi sits on the western bank of the Ganga and is dedicated to Lord Shiva. Here, Lord Shiva is revered as Vishwanatha or Vishweshwara, "Lord of the Universe." Varanasi is called Kashi, hence Kashi Vishwanath Temple. The eleventh century '*Alberuni's India*' regarded Kashi as the 'Hindu Mekka', signifying its importance (Sachau, 2017).

The temple has a complex history. It was built over a millennium ago. Akbar, the Mughal ruler, authorised the first large-scale rebuilding in 1585. Aurangzeb, Akbar's great-grandson, demolished the temple in 1699. The temple fragments were utilised to build a nearby mosque. This temple is called the "Golden Temple" because of its gold spires and domes. Ahalya Bai of Holkar erected it in the 18th century.

The Kashi Vishwanath Temple's beautiful construction is famous worldwide. Columns, beams, and walls have artistic craftsmanship. Only Hindus can enter the walled temple compound. There are several smaller Shiva emblems (lingams) around the main object of worship, a smooth black stone lingam that is 2 feet (0.6 meters) tall, 3 feet (0.9 meters) diameter, and rests on a silver pedestal. Many smaller shrines have additional lingams and goddess figures. Every Mahashivaratri, a large procession from Mahamrityunjaya to Kashi Vishwanath Temples occurs. In the Hindu holy calendar, this event is crucial in marking the marriage of Lord Shiva. The Kashi Vishwanath Temple attracts spiritual seekers from around the world seeking enlightenment and peace.

3. Omkareshwar

Omkareshwar *Jyotirlinga*, a valued Shiva temple atop Omkar Mountain, an island in the midst of the Narmada River, is a place of profound faith for Hindus. It is one of the twelve *Jyotirlinga* temples in the world. Another major temple, Mamleshwar, is located on the Narmada River's south bank. The Dwadash Jyotirling Stotra (Shastri, 2002) cites "*Omkar Mamleshwaram*," implying that the *Jyotirlinga* in Omkareshwar is actually the Mamleshwar temple, also known as Amareshwar. Many tourists regard both temples as equally valued *Jyotirlingas* and visit them because of their near proximity. The Omkareshwar Temple was created in the Peshwa architectural style, with elaborate carvings and stunning towers. The temple is located on the island of Mandhata, which is named after King Mandhata, a mythical person in Hindu mythology who is supposed to have undertaken sacrifice here to obtain Lord Shiva's blessing. Pilgrims undertake the sacred parikrama, which involves circumambulating the island. The entire parikrama is almost 7 kilometres long. Many Hindus consider a pilgrimage complete only after presenting holy water to Omkareshwar. The temple features a magnificent Sabha Mandap (meeting or prayer hall) supported by over 60 massive brown stone pillars, each 14 feet tall and intricately carved with motifs. The temple is five stories tall, with each level dedicated to a different deity.

4. Mahakaleshwar

The original origins of the Mahakaleshwar Temple are unknown, but it is thought to have been built during the pre-historic period. According to the Puranas, Prajapita Brahma founded the temple. According to historical records, in the sixth century BC, King Chanda Pradyota assigned Prince Kumarasena to manage the law and order of the Mahakala

Temple. Ujjain's punch-marked coins from the 4th-3rd centuries BC depict Lord Shiva, highlighting the temple's ancient significance. The Mahakaleshwar Temple is mentioned in various Indian texts, representing its ancient splendour and implication. These studies define the temple as magnificent, with a stone foundation. Before the Gupta dynasty, the temple had no *sikharas* (spires) and a large roof. In the scholarly work of Kalidasa, like Raghuvansam and Meghadutam, he described the beauty of temples.

5. Baidyanath Dham

The Baidyanath temple, situated in the holy town of Deoghar, Jharkhand, faces east and is a plain-tone construction with a pyramidal tower that rises from a square base to a height of 72 feet above ground. To the east of the temple's northern portico is a big basin into which the water and milk presented for offering pours. The lingam is cylindrical in shape, measuring about 5 inches in diameter, and extends about 4 inches from the centre of a big slab of basalt. It is impossible to say how much of the *lingam* is buried. The top is shattered with an uneven surface. There are several porches in the temple. One porch leads to the compartment where the lingam is installed. The second porch is in front, with a series of pillars supported by basalt stones and a bull image in sandstone on the right side. There are bells installed in the ceiling, and pilgrims are meant to pull the bell ropes to signal their approach to the god. The courtyard contains eleven more temples. Pilgrims bring water for offerings from the Ganga's source near Badrinath and Tibet's Manasarovara Lake. Hundreds of pilgrims worship the lingam and lie down on the *verandah's* bare pavement till the next morning, hoping to fulfil a desire or heal an ailment. The pilgrims will rise in the morning, perform their worship, take a mouthful of water from the *vat* (basin), and then lie down, which will last three days and nights. It is stated that if the pilgrim is to be redeemed, he or she will experience a dream. Shravani Mela during Sawan month is the most auspicious celebration in this temple.

6. Nageshwar

A significant religious site in the Jamnagar district of Gujarat, the Nageshwar *Jyotirlinga* Temple is renowned for its large idol of Lord Shiva, which provides a magnificent sight. The temple is situated 17 kilometers from Dwarka city. It is also known as the Darukavana Temple, which is an ancient term for the forest. It is believed that the Pandavas constructed it during their exile. The lingam is crafted from a unique stone

known as Dwarka stone, which is characterized by its minute wheel imprints. It is southward facing temple. The late Shri Gulshan Kumar renovated the Nageshwar temple by donating Rupees five lakhs. After his death, his son Shri Bhushan Kumar supervises the renovation. The temple was designed by Shri Subhash G. Bhoite, a vastu shastra expert architect. The Nageshwar *Jyotirlinga* is a disputed one because many priests claim the one in Maharashtra as another contender for the real *Jyotirlinga*.

7. Somnath

The Somnath temple, on the southern coast of Saurashtra in Gujarat, is a shore temple. It is renowned for its rich history and traditions. It is often referred to as the first *Jyotirlinga*. It is at a distance of five kilometres from Veraval. The temple is also called Dev Patan, Prabhasa Patan, or Patan Somnath. Many kings have destroyed and avoided it throughout history. In 1025 CE it was looted by Mahmood Ghazni, in 1300 CE by Nasrat Khan, and also by Muzaffar Shah and Sultan Ahmed Shah between 1390 and 1530. In 1701, Aurangzeb attacked it repeatedly. Each time the temple was reconstructed. It stands as a symbol of the resilience of the Hindus and a testament to cultural unity. Its built in Kailas Mahameru Prasad style. It has a Garbhgruh, Sabhamandap, and Nrityamandap with a pillar of 155 feet height. It is run by the Somnath Trust, which is dedicated to the preservation and development of this sacrosanct site in recognition of its spiritual significance and rich legacy.

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