

## RELIGIOUS SITES IN AMRAVATI: A CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

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### ABSTRACT

*Amravati district in Maharashtra is rich in socio-religious heritage and community centers, with a blend of ancient temples, Islamic shrines, and a number of Jain temples in and around the district. Notable places such as the temples of Amba Devi and Ekvira Devi emerge as important centers of religious worship related to the 'Shakta' sect. In the mid-13th century, the Mahanubhav devotees and the Mahanubhav Ashram served as religious as well as sociological centers for the Mahanubhav sect. Significant structures were also built during this era, showcasing impressive engineering skills and architectural brilliance. This region is also known as part of the Vidarbha region in the western Indian state of Maharashtra.*

**KEYWORDS:** Shrines, Amravati, Temples, Community centers, Vidarbha.

### INTRODUCTION

Amravati, situated in the Vidarbha region of Maharashtra, is a city steeped in rich socio-religious heritage and historical significance. In 1950, it was part of the Central Provinces and Berar, and in 1960, it was merged into Maharashtra. The city's name is believed to be derived from the ancient Ambadevi Temple, dedicated to the Goddess Amba. It was formerly known as Umravati. According to local legends, this is the place where Rukhmini, the consort of Lord Krishna, is said to have visited the temple before eloping with him, adding mythological depth to the city's narrative.

The first Muslim invasion took place in 1294 A.D. when Sultan Alauddin Khilji conquered the region of Devgiri. He crossed the Satpura hills and halted at Ellichpur for two days. Since that period, the Amravati district came under Muslim influence. The Jama Masjid has served as a key spiritual center for the respective community since then. Thus, Amravati district reflects a sociological legacy where religious traditions continue to shape the cultural landscape. Some significant temples in this district with historical value are as follows:

#### **Ekvira Devi Temple, Amravati**

This temple is dedicated to Goddess Ekvira, an incarnation of Shakti. It holds a special place in the hearts of devotees, especially during the Navratri festival. Shri Ekvira Devi Temple, located near Shri Ambadevi Temple in

Amravati, is a significant pilgrimage site with deep historical and cultural roots. The temple's origins trace back to around 1660 CE and are attributed to Shri Janardan Swami, a revered saint of the region.

According to local legends, Shri Janardan Swami, a devout follower of Goddess Amba, faced challenges crossing a flooded stream to reach the Ekvira Devi Temple. In response to his devotion, Goddess Amba manifested as Ekvira Devi and directed him to establish her shrine at the site where an arrow struck the ground, marking the temple's location. Both deities are considered sisters.

The entrance gate of Ekvira Devi Temple is on the western side. The temple complex still displays the *samadhi* (tomb) of Janardan Swami. There is also a well where Swamiji used to perform his penance. The temple complex is bordered by a large stone wall with several decorative arches. The main *mandap* is a 24-pillared structure adorned with beautiful paintings on the walls. At the center lies the *garbhagriha*, where the idol of Ekvira Devi is worshipped daily. The main idol is made of silver, and the platform on which the goddess sits is also silver-coated. The temple building features a conical structure at the top resembling a pagoda, with the cone made of gold.

### **Ambadevi Temple, Amravati**

Shri Ambadevi Sansthan in Amravati is famous across the country. Every year, a grand *yatra* is held during the Navratri festival. The Ambadevi Temple is said to be the oldest temple in Amravati. The statue of Ambadevi is self-facing and seated. It appears that the original temple was very ancient, and the current structure was built atop the older one.

According to a 1870 record by the Sanzeties of the Hyderabad Assigned District State, the temple was built thousands of years ago. At the time of the 1928 settlement and during the preparation of the revenue (*nazul*) records, this history was acknowledged.

A popular legend associated with the temple relates to Rukmini, the sister of King Rukmin from the Mahabharata era. She wanted to marry Lord Krishna but was already betrothed to Shishupala, the king of Chedi. She is believed to have visited this temple before eloping with Krishna.

The current idol of Goddess Ambadevi is a self-manifested (*Swayambhu*) black basalt stone statue, seated in a lotus posture with serene features. The temple becomes especially vibrant during the Navratri festival, celebrated with great grandeur. The nine-day event includes cultural programs, devotional music, and a grand fair. Devotees also partake in *bhog* (community meals) and experience the festive atmosphere. The temple is beautifully illuminated, and special rituals are conducted throughout the festival.

### **Jama Masjid, Amravati**

Jama Masjid Markaz is a prominent mosque located in the heart of Amravati, Maharashtra. Situated near Sabanpura Mosque and Maheshwari Bhawan, it serves as a central place of worship for the Sunni Muslim community in the region. The mosque is located approximately 1 km east of the Amravati Railway Station and about 3.5 km southwest of the New Amravati Railway Station.

The mosque's central dome is particularly attractive, flanked by two smaller domes on either side. The front of the mosque features 11 arches. In front of the mosque is a spacious ground with a large water tank used for ablutions before prayer. Many Muslim devotees come here to offer prayers, especially during *rozās* (fasts) observed during the month of Ramadan.

### **Shri Parshvanath Digambar Jain Temple**

This temple is located in Budhwara, Amravati. The basement houses an idol of Chandraprabhu Bhagwan. The temple is dedicated to Parshvanath, the 23rd Tirthankara in Jainism, and is a prominent religious site for Jains in the region.

Known for its exquisite architecture, the temple blends traditional Jain aesthetics with modern design elements. It provides a serene space for worship, reflection, and community engagement. The intricately carved idol of Lord Parshvanath serves as the focal point for devotees. The peaceful ambiance and well-maintained premises make it an important spiritual center.

In addition to daily worship, the temple also hosts various religious events, discourses, and gatherings, playing a vital role in the spiritual and cultural life of the Jain community in Amravati.

### **Sikh Gurudwara, Amravati**

A prominent Sikh place of worship known as Gurudwara Sahib is located in Rajapeth, Amravati. This Gurudwara serves as a central hub for the Sikh community in the region, offering a space for spiritual reflection, community gatherings, and social service.

The *langar* (community kitchen) serves free meals to all visitors, embodying the Sikh principles of equality and selfless service. The Gurudwara is known for its active involvement in community welfare, including health camps and educational support programs. It plays a vital role in promoting the values of Sikhism and serves as a beacon of spirituality and service in Amravati.

### **Parsi Anjuman Daremeher, Amravati**

The Badnera Amravati Parsi Anjuman Daremeher, located on Station Road in Badnera—a town near Amravati—is an important Zoroastrian fire temple (*Agiary*). Consecrated on December 21, 1889 (Roz Khordad, Mah Tir, 1258 A.Y.), it serves as a spiritual center for the Parsi community in the region.

The temple is classified as an *Adarian*, meaning it houses a sacred fire consecrated from a single pure source. The fire is maintained with great care and is central to Zoroastrian religious rituals. As per tradition, access to the inner sanctum is restricted to Zoroastrians. The temple's rituals and design uphold the core tenets of Zoroastrian worship, emphasizing sanctity, cleanliness, and reverence for the sacred flame.

The Parsi community gathers here during major festivals, and worship is conducted according to ancient traditions.

## ISKCON Temple, Amravati

The **ISKCON Temple** in Amravati is a center dedicated to the teachings of Lord Krishna, promoting spiritual growth through Bhakti Yoga. As part of the global ISKCON movement founded by A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, the temple offers regular services such as **kirtan** (devotional singing) and teachings from the **Bhagavad Gita**. It provides a peaceful space for devotees to connect with the divine and experience inner tranquility.

The temple is known for celebrating key festivals like **Janmashtami** and **Radhashtami**, which draw large gatherings of devotees. It also runs a **langar** (community kitchen), providing free meals to all, embodying the core values of selfless service and equality. Beyond worship, ISKCON Amravati is involved in social initiatives, including educational programs, health camps, and charity work, making it an integral part of the local community. The temple actively promotes the message of compassion, respect for all living beings, and the importance of living a righteous life.

Since its establishment, the ISKCON Temple in Amravati has become a focal point for the spiritual and cultural lives of many devotees in the region, fostering a sense of community, peace, and devotion.

## CONCLUSION

Amravati district, with its diverse array of religious sites, is a remarkable example of spiritual and cultural harmony. From ancient Hindu temples and historic mosques to serene Jain temples, charitable Gurudwaras, and sacred fire temples of the Parsis, the region reflects India's deep-rooted tradition of religious plurality. Each religious place not only serves as a center of worship but also as a symbol of community identity, historical continuity, and cultural pride.

These sacred institutions continue to contribute significantly to the region's social fabric by nurturing values such as faith, service, compassion, and unity. In an era marked by increasing cultural and religious divides, Amravati stands as a living model of coexistence and mutual respect.

Preserving these heritage sites, promoting their historical significance, and encouraging interfaith dialogue are essential for sustaining this rich legacy. The religious diversity of Amravati not only makes it spiritually significant but also culturally resilient and socially inclusive.

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