



Sculpted heritage

Located very close to the Indo-Pak border, the Barmer district in Rajasthan is not a quintessential tourist destination. It is, however, the site of the magnificent Kiradu temples, whose minutely sculpted pillars and walls offer a glimpse of India's rich heritage endowed with music, dance and architecture.

Photographs: SANJEEV NAYYAR
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Around 43 km from Barmer, Rajasthan, lies the Hathma village—home of the enchanting Kiradu temples. Estimated to have been built around the 11th and 12th century AD, the site consisted of about a dozen temples of which only five, one Vishnu temple and four Shiva temples, are in a semi-conserved condition today.

Reminiscent of the Maru-Pratihara style of architecture, the temples comprise elements such as elaborate sanctums and myriad sculptures that depict everyday life, temple-building scenes, erotica and mythological incidents. The Vishnu temple consists of an octagonal *rangamandapa* or dancing hall that is bordered by eight pillars. The sculptures in this temple include those of Lord Vishnu riding Garuda, dancing *apsaras* and *gandharvas*, and *digpals* or the guardians of the four directions.



Five pillars on either side of the entrance framing the doorway of the Sameshwar Temple, Kiradu, Rajasthan



Clockwise from below: A close-up of soldiers at war (top) and female figures in a music recital (below) on the pillar in the main sanctum; The outer wall showcasing Pancha-Ganesha (top) and dance and music (below); Temple wall beautified with *apsaras* and erotica
Facing page: The *Rangamandapa* pillars of the Vishnu Temple



The Someshwar Temple, dedicated to Lord Shiva, is the largest amongst the five temples of the site and consists of a shrine, an antechamber, a hall and a porch. The roof of the *Sabhamandapa* or the main *mandap* rests on eight pillars that are engraved with decorative motifs. The carvings of the Someshwar Temple as well as another small Shiva temple present scenes from the Ramayana, the churning of the ocean and the *Rasa Lila*.

Apart from gaining insight into a rich, yet largely untapped history, visitors will also be happy to notice that the temples are

undergoing restoration. You can spend a considerable amount of time learning and absorbing what this ancient site has to offer, and if you are lucky, you will even spot some peacocks on your way back to Barmer!

About the photographer

Sanjeev Nayyar is a travel photojournalist and founder of www.esamskriti.com, a website dedicated to Indian culture. Apart from his interest in sites of beauty and art, he is also an occasional writer on national affairs.

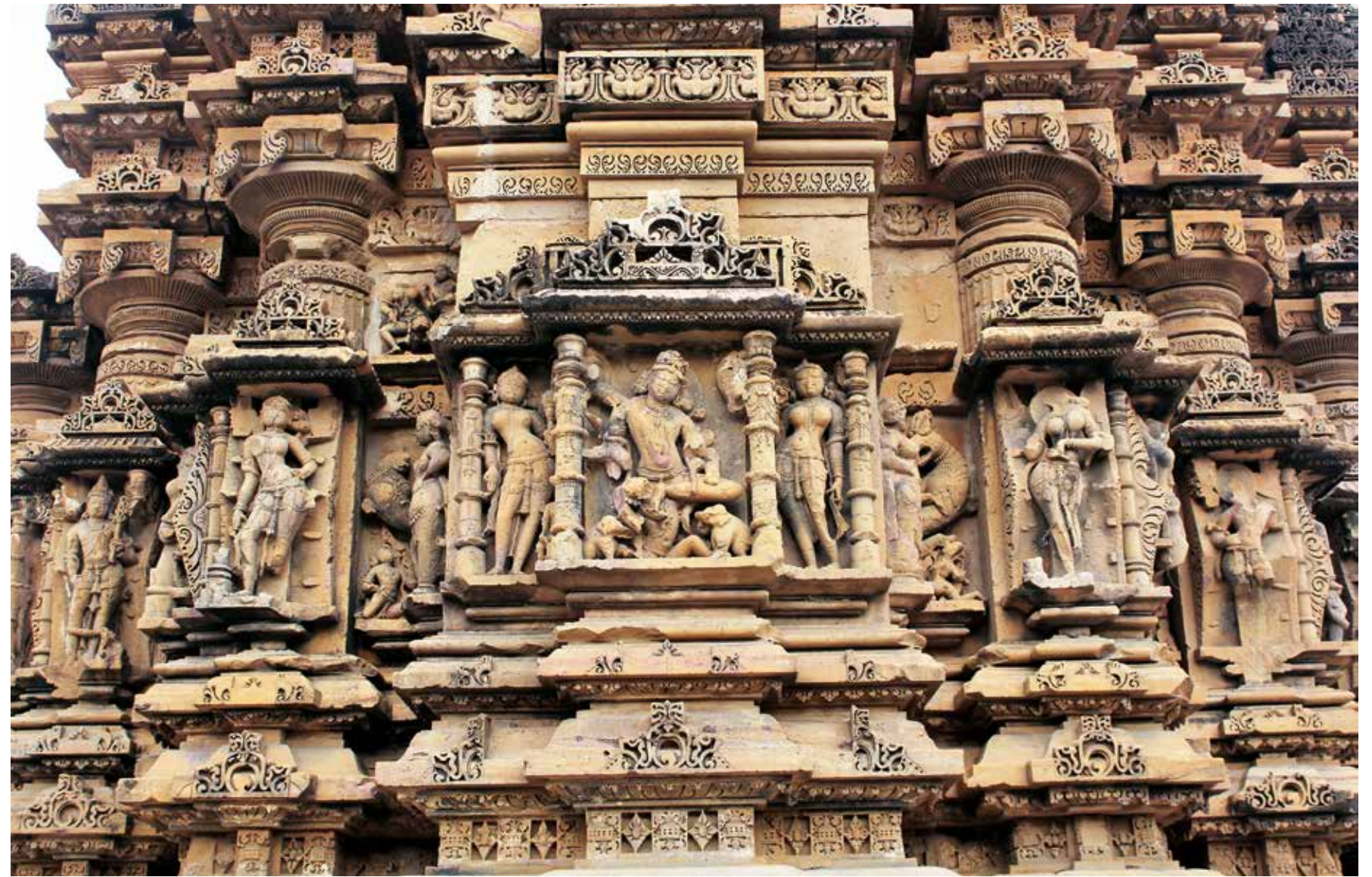




Right: The *Rangamandapa* pillars replete with miniature figures

Below: The sculpture of Vaikuntha Vishnu in the central niche of the west *mandovar* of the Vishnu Temple (estimated to be built in the 10th century) flanked by divine figures

Facing page: A sculpture portraying Shiva killing the demon Andhak at the Vishnu Temple





The Rangamandapa pillar
with a gata-pallava motif

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