

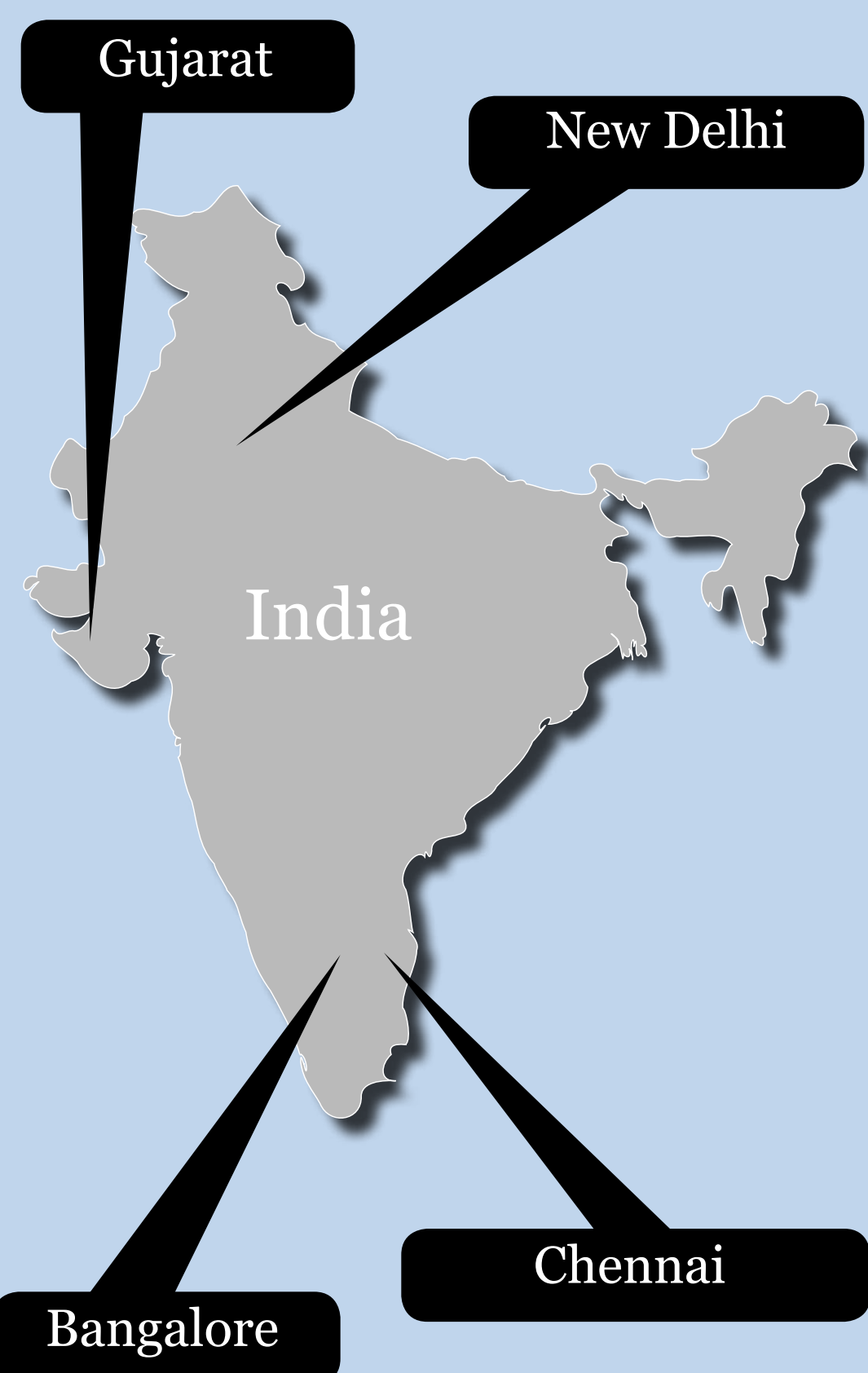


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FEAR. There was no greater inspiration for studying ancient and modern Indian temples than fear. When I went to India in six years ago, I noticed a significant change in the social and spiritual culture of the nation. From my experiences, people were less traditional, turning more liberal, and accepting “western” social norms. With this fear that my culture- an integral part of who I am today- was disappearing, I embarked to research how temples were using technology and design to preserve Indian culture and to assess the effectiveness of such methods.

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I left the United States with the hope of finding that my fear was unjustified and my previous experience in India was an exception to reality. The first part of my journey took me to South India where I studied the design of ancient Indian temples. As I travelled from



Chennai, to Mysore, to Bangalore, to Hassan, to Trivandrum, and Mahabalipuram, I became enchanted by the detailed carvings depicting hundreds of deities at each temple. More importantly, I was fascinated about how the temples were such an integral part of the local communities. Each day, thousands of locals and tourist would visit these 800 to 1000 year old temples. Many of these temples were historical sites as well as spiritual sites; however the most important thing at these temples was that families were coming to visit them together. I felt a deep sigh of relief when I saw one father pointing to an idol of Shiva and explaining the significance of it to his son. Such a sight provided evidence that temples served as a medium in which one generation could educate and inform another generation about Indian culture and history. As I travelled all across South India, such sights became more and more common. After travelling over 2000 kilometers via plane, bus, auto rikshaw, boat, I left South India with a little peace of mind.



Thereafter, I went to Delhi to study modern temples. Delhi, commonly known for its skyscrapers and posh lifestyle, is the city I will always remember as the city that restored peace in my heart. In Delhi, I stayed one week at Akshardham, a Hindu temple complex opened in 2005. When I first walked through the gates of Akshardham, I immediately fell in love. I was so awed by the size of the structure, the carvings, and the idols, that the building immediately put me in a state of peace. Unlike any other temple I visited till this point, Delhi Akshardham integrated technology and culture like no other. The use of technology simply promoted the learning of Indian culture in a fun and appealing manner. The IMAX theater coupled with a boat ride takes visitors through 10,000 years of India’s history and accomplishments in a matter of minutes. As I observed people walking through the cultural mega-complex, I saw parents pointing to idols and telling their children stories of the idols. In the gardens, I saw children

walked around looking up to the idols of India’s freedom fighters, ancient scholars, historical icons. Children, teenagers, and adults were absorbing Indian culture through teaching mediums not present in ancient temples. Robotics, IMAX, and large scale sculptures were all used to educate the visitors of the temple. Not only Delhi Akshardham incorporates such mediums to promote cultural education, other temples such as the Iskon Temple of Delhi, and the Lotus Temple also used such mediums. At each of the three temples, the visitor’s interaction with the temple occurred on a much deeper level than people’s interaction with the ancient temples.

I left Delhi without the fear which I entered the project with. Even though I had an entire part of my project left to complete, I felt like modern temples were effectively using technology to promote cultural learning. I next travelled to Gujarat to finish my Burch Project and conduct my honors thesis research. Years ago, I had a formidable experience that inspired me to pursue a career as an attorney. However, years removed from the event, I was uncertain if law was still my passion. As I travelled throughout Gujarat, I talked with folks about legal problems, issues of gender inequality, gender role stereotyping, economic and social inequality, and corruption. As I travelled through villages and engaged in such discussions, I realized that there was a need for legal reform and advocacy for the poor more than ever before. Minority and children’s rights in India go unenforced and seeing such underprivileged and abused persons helped me realize that India still needs lawyers to defend the vulnerable. Today, I come back with the hope of being a lawyer defending and protecting the vulnerable and being their source of empowerment.

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