

Some Medieval Temples of North Maharashtra

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This article presents some features of a few lesser known medieval temples of North Maharashtra in the 'Yādava' country¹. The predecessors of the Yādavas of Devagiri ruled as vassals of the Raṣtrakūṭas of Mānyakheta and Cālukyas of Kalyāṇī, over an area comprising roughly Khandesh, Nasik and Ahmednagar districts, for more than 300 years. According to the 'Vratākhaṇḍa' of Hemādri, these chiefs were descendants of Yādavas of Mathura and later (from Krishna's time) of Dvārāvātīpura, modern Dwārakā. They used the hereditary title 'Dvārāvati-puravaradhiśvara' and 'Viṣṇuvaṃśodbhava'.

The term 'Yādava' is used here as an umbrella that includes not only the temples built by Yādava rulers but also the feudatory families under them.² (The architectural movement of the Yādava period is contemporaneous with the Later Cālukyan movement in the South and the Solāṅkī movement in the North.³)

Affluence and prosperity were essential precursors to art activity; it usually flourished near urban centres or important trading centres engaged in internal as well as overseas trade. Royal patronage was essential in nurturing it. Judging by art activity, Yādavas must have been moderately prosperous in this period and the dynasty was appreciative of creative arts.

These temples are in and around Nasik, and include the twin temples of Vaṭeśvara Mahādeva and Viṣṇu at Dhodambe (11th century C.E.)⁴, the temple of Bhavānī at Tahakari (beginning of 12th century C.E.)⁵, Mavādeva temple at Jhodge (middle of 12th century C.E.)⁶, Bhadrahari (Viṣṇu) and Lakṣmī temples at Methi (12th century C.E.)⁷ and Jogeśvara (Śiva) temple at Devlane (end of 12th / beginning of 13th century C.E.)⁸. Most temples are small, yet each one has some interesting elements such as :

- ♦ panels with motifs of Kṛṣṇa with *gopīs* or Veṅugopāla
- ♦ multiple shrined or twin temples
- ♦ difference in ornateness in different parts of the same temple
- ♦ depictions of figures/scenes giving a glimpse of local lore.

The claim of the Yādavas as descendants of Kṛṣṇa can explain the panels showing Kṛṣṇa as Veṅugopāla in many temples.

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The temple of Jogeśvara at Devlane is a triple shrined Śiva temple. The ceiling of the *mukha-maṇḍapa* has a beautiful circular panel of Kṛṣṇa with *gopīs*.⁹ Inside the main hall are niches (*devakoṣṭha*), decorated with images of deities above. Most of them are Śaivite but here too, there is one image of Veṅugopāla.

The Mahādeva temple at Jhodge has Śiva as Yogīśvara on the central panel of the face of the *antarāla*, below which is Śiva in *tāṇḍava*, flanked by Veṅugopāla¹⁰ on one side and probably Brahmā on the other (only the goose is left). Here again, in the trinity of Brahmā, Maheśa and Viṣṇu, Viṣṇu is represented as Veṅugopāla.

The temple of Viṣṇu at Dhodambe has a *Kāliya-mardana* panel on the ceiling (*fig. 1*) and eight *Kṛṣṇa-līlā* scenes above the eight pilasters of the hall. Varāha and Narasiṃha are on the *bhadras* outside.

A.P.Jamkhedkar mentions a *mūrti* of 'Muralīdhara with *gopī*' in the margika of the Mādhaveśvara temple (a two shrined temple- Lakṣmī-Mādhava in one shrine and Śivaliṅga in the other) at Ganjibhore, Ahmednagar district.¹¹

The so called 'Kṛṣṇa' temple at Vāghli (East Khandesh), according to A.V. Naik¹² has an inscription built in the wall inside, which shows that the original temple was dedicated to Śiva as 'Siddheśānātha' or 'Siddheśvara'. Built in 1069 CE by Govindarāja (and his wife) a Maurya feudatory of 'Mahāmaṇḍalanātha Seuna of the Yādavas', it had a charitable '*Sattra*' (feeding hall) and a well attached to it. Not much of the original structure remains. Naik mentions a remarkable piece of sculpture on the otherwise plain ceiling, presenting in bold relief, Kṛṣṇa and the *gopīs*, much like that at Devlane.

One can speculate that the ceiling panels of Kṛṣṇa and *gopīs* found even in Śiva temples in Yādava country is tantamount to the seal of the Yādava dynasty¹³ and usually appear in the ceilings of the outer hall. The second notable feature is that these temples are either twin temples (two adjacent temples) or are multiple shrined temples, converted from an original single shrined temple.

The Mahādeva and Viṣṇu temples at Dhodambe are 'twin' in the sense that they are built on the same plinth.

The Bhavānī temple at Tahakari is built as a triple shrined temple and the side shrines have images of Devī, like the Mahalakṣmī temple at Kolhapur. The Mahādeva temple at Jhodge, originally single shrined, has two side shrines added to it at a later date.

The Bhadrahari and Lakṣmī temples at Methi are twin temples (side by side). In addition, each has two *deva-koṣṭhas* in the *antarāla*; Lakṣmī temple has figures of

Sarasvatī and another Devī in them whereas Bhadrahari temple has Varāha and Narasimha figures.

The Jogeśvara temple at Devlane is again a triple shrined temple, with the subsidiary shrines probably added later. The additions were not a conciliatory gesture towards worshippers of other deities as the image at present in one of the additional shrines is that of Umā-Maheśvara. (A part of the image in the other shrine is extant but cannot be identified).

In the case of the later additions, viz. at Jhodge and Devlane, these are plain on the outside (to avoid attracting attention of iconoclasts?). This forms a third interesting feature of these temples - difference in ornateness of the same temple in different parts. The temple at Devlane for example has a very ornate front porch and inner hall (with a Kṛṣṇa-Gopī ceiling panel), ornate *makaras* as *vārimukha* (fig. 2) (three, corresponding to the three shrines), a pretty *haṁsa-thara* in the *pīṭha*, but the back walls are totally plain. The main Jhodge temple, on the other hand, is very ornate but the outside walls of the additional shrines are very plain (fig. 3).

The last feature discussed here is the non-iconic sculptures which show interesting legendary and historical scenes. According to Prabhakar Deo¹⁴, hills and jungles of the north fenced the entire Deccani plateau off, from the Indo-gangetic plane and tended to constitute a world by itself. Naturally the whole region tends to provide indigenous trends of its distinct social, cultural and ethnic traits. Sculptured panels illustrate local lores and help us know about the environment.

The Jogeśvara temple at Devlane has hunting scenes above the four pillars of the hall. In one, a horseback rider is hunting wild boar with a spear whereas another uses a bow and an arrow (fig. 4), (One can note the details of the stirrups, saddle etc.), On the remaining two pillars are carved an elephant throwing a horseback rider off his mount and an elephant trampling a prone figure.

Hunting of wild boar in the jungles to the north must have been a royal pastime and elephants were construed as symbols of royal riches. Elephants were prized possessions of kings and valuable in wars. This may have been the reason for depicting them. The army of Yādava Kṛṣṇa (1247-1261 C.E.), grandson of Yādava Singhaṇa II, had Jahlana, a trusted minister of the king, as a leader of the elephant phalanx¹⁵.

The Vaṭeśvara Mahādeva temple at Dhodambe is very unusual in the sense that the outside wall (except the Dikpālas) is decorated almost exclusively with female figures. Women are portrayed riding elephants, horses and even a large bird and seem

to be hunting wild boar or fighting a war using a variety of weapons. The trees in the background are also different.

It may also be noted that one of the loose sculptures at Tahakari Bhavānī temple portrays Vārāhi with a raised sword (*fig. 5*).

The faces of the projections on the exterior of the temple of Bhavānī at Thakari¹⁶ are plain but the recesses are decorated with very demure damsels in different postures (*fig. 6*). In addition to the '*Darpaṇā*', '*Putravallabhā*', that one sees on many temples, Ratī is also portrayed with a sugarcane bow and arrow. She has an attendant at her feet, perhaps putting *āltā*, on Ratī's sole. Another damsel (*vivastrajaghanā*) appears nude and trying to shake a scorpion out of her clothes. There is a curiously dressed woman wearing a long open coat and an unusual headgear. She is shown standing on an animal.

Notes and References

1. R.C.Majumdar Gen Ed, *The History and Culture of the Indian People*, p 185, p 196.
2. A.S.Pathak Ed, *Maharashtra State Gazetteer (marathi), Itihas, Prachin Kal*, Volume I, p 438. page 415 Maheśvar temple at Patne, bears an inscription dated S 1073=1153 C.E. stating that Indrarāja of the Nikumbha Vaṃśa. started the construction of the temple. After his death, it was completed by Govaṇa (son) and Śridevi (his mother).
3. O.P.Verma, *The Yādavas and their Times*, p. 334.
4. A.P.Jamkhedkar, *Maharashtra State Gazetteer (Marathi), Itihas, Prachin Kal*, Vol I, part II *Sthapatya ani Kala*, p 146.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 172
6. *Ibid.*, p. 164
7. *Ibid.*, p. 208
8. *Ibid.*, p. 216
9. Henry Cousens, *Mediaeval Temples of the Dakhan*, plate LXV
10. *Ibid.*, plate LVI
11. A.P.Jamkhedkar, *Ibid.*, p. 187
12. A.V.Naik, *New Indian Antiquary*, July-Dec. 1947, page 231.
13. Like the Varāha panel in Lādckhan, a symbol of the Cālukyās.
14. Prabhakar Deo, *Temples of Marathwada*, p. 4
15. *Ibid.*, p. 11
16. Tahakari temple: triple shrined, main faces of outside projection plain but salilantara has *surasundaris*. Temple faces north, by the Adhal river; must have been a temple complex since smaller shrines were noticed during cleaning up of silt; scattered loose sculptures, mostly female, including Vārāhi mentioned above. The east *kapili* has a standing Gaṇeśa flanked by attendants, 'padmagandha', on true right, 'letter writer' on true left; west has Bhairava. There is an inscription on a pillar by the steps leading to the river bank.



Fig. 1 : Kāliya-mardana, ceiling of Viṣṇu Temple, Dhodambe



Fig. 2 : Nakara-Praṇāla



Fig. 3 : Jhodge Temple



Fig. 4 : Pedaster Showing hunting scene



Fig. 5 : Vārāhī, Bhavānī Temple, Tahakarī



Fig. 6 : Apsarases, Bhavānī Temple, Tahakarī