

Temples of North Maharashtra (Part II)

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In an article in this Journal, in 2006-2007, some temples of north Maharashtra (from Ahmadnagar and Nasik districts) were discussed.¹ The present article, as a continuation, showcases temples, *sattras*, centres of learning and monasteries from two more districts of north Maharashtra, Jalgaon and Dhule.

Five of the temples, the Śiva temple at Dīghī, Bhavānī Temple and the Maheśvara temple at Paṭaṇe, Mudhā devī and Kṛṣṇa temples at Vāghalī are from district Jalgaon. Three temples (numbered 1,2,5) and the monastery at Balasāṇe are from district Dhule.

Jalgaon and Dhule are part of 'Khāndesh', an area that was under the Yādavas and their feudatories in medieval times. There are quite a few temples and monasteries, hinting at prosperity and respect for religion and learning in those times. These are, at present in a sadly ruined state.² The temples were documented by Henry Cousens in early 20th century. In 1947, Dr. A.V. Naik³ published his studies listing the temples chronologically and describing them in greater detail. Surprisingly, amongst the temples near Chalisagaon, (Jalgaon district), temple of Śambhu at Dīghī, was not listed by Cousens, but described by Dr. Naik. The present paper therefore starts with the temple at Dīghī.

The temple of Śambhu, Dīghī (1150-1200 C.E.)⁴

The east facing temple is small, devoid of any external ornamentation⁵. It has only sculptures of Bhairava and Mahākālī on either side of the entrance and consists of a shrine, a hall and a porch in front. Between the hall and shrine is an antechamber. Though small, the temple has many features that are noteworthy such as beautiful *karotaka* ceilings of the hall and the porch.

The ceiling of the porch, a trabeate dome, is finely carved, reminiscent of the smaller domes in Vimla Sāh temple Mount Abu.

The domed ceiling of the hall has four sets of three pillars, twelve pillars in all. Each set consists of a corner pillar and two pillars arranged so that they support the massive octagonal frame on which the dome rests.

The eight pillars, each support a cross shaped capital. Atop one arm of the cross and also supporting the frame is a square block with a deity carved on its face. The eight deities, starting at the entrance and moving clock-wise are, Vaiṣṇavī, Nāga/Nāgī?, Vārāhī, (*āyudha: khadga and cakra; a clearly seen mahiṣa vāhana*), Devī?, Gaṇeśa, Garuḍa, Kubera; the last image is lost (A.V. Naik had listed it as 'headless Devī')

The antechamber (*antarāla*) ceiling (*samatala vitāna*) has a pleasant surprise in the form of a flying *vidyādhara* with a garland, occupying the centre of a large lotus. A band of *hamsas* (with crests; likely peacocks?) runs around the four sides.

Āi Bhavānī temple, Paṭaṇe (1150-1200 C.E.)

At Paṭaṇe, near Chalisagaon, an old abraded stone slab bearing an inscription is kept in the Āaī Bhavānī temple. It records the grant, in Ś. 1128 (1206 C.E.)⁶ by brothers Soīdeva and Hemādīdeva of the Nikumbha family. They were feudatories of the Yādavas and ruled over the country of 1600 villages. The grant was in favour of Cāṅgadeva's college (*maṭha* in the inscription, 'college' in the translation by Kielhorn). Cāṅgadeva was the grandson of the great mathematician, astronomer, and astrologer Bhāskarācārya. The college was endowed with land and other resources and was founded to study *Siddhāntaśiromaṇi* and other works of Bhāskrācārya. Photo shows where the college is assumed to have been, on the bank of the Titūra river, flanked by Arjun trees, in the scenic hills near the Bhavānī Temple at Paṭaṇe.

A point to note is the invocatory verses of this inscription

ॐ नमो गणाधिपतये

सिद्धं दिवाकरसुधाकरभूमिपुत्रश्वेतांशुपुत्रगुरुशुक्रशनि.... (letters lost)

.....संरक्षणानि गगनेचरचारवो वः

It is only fitting that a donation to the *maṭha* which taught, among other things. Astronomy and Astrology, should seek the blessings of the planets. Unfortunately, we cannot be sure if Rāhu and Ketu were mentioned since some of the letters are lost.

In the inscription, this invocation is followed by a *praśasti* of Bhāskarācārya and only then of the Yādavas, the overlords and then the Nikumbhas, the feudatories-reflecting the great respect that Bhāskarācārya was accorded even after death.

For comparison, another inscription, found in the Maheśvara temple, also at Paṭaṇe, and by the same Nikumbha family, but dated about 60 years before the *maṭha* inscription can be read.⁷ It is by the father (Vovaṇa) and grandfather (Indrarāja) of brothers Soīdeva and Hemādīdeva, the donors of the *maṭha* grant. The invocation at the beginning of this Maheśvara temple inscription praises Śiva in the usual way.

Maheśvara Temple, Paṭaṇe (1100-1150 C.E.)

In the temple of Maheśvara (Fig. 12.1-2) Paṭaṇe, an inscribed slab of Govaṇa of the Nikumbha family, records the consecration of a temple of Śiva in Ś. 1073 (1151C.E.). *Madana dahana harmsjain*. It was started by Indrarājā. Govaṇa, his son, finished it after Indrarājā's death. Soideva and Hemādideva mentioned in the grant at Āī Bhavānī temple, represent later generations of the same family

'Mudhai Devī' Temples (1150-1200 C.E.), Vāghalī

Vāghalī, also near Chalisagaon, has two small temples that stand in mute testimony to the changing fortunes of Gods. The temple known at present as Mudhai Devī temple was clearly a sun temple when built. The main *bhadra* has Sūrya (Fig. 12.3). Additional evidence of the temple being originally dedicated to Sūrya is the lintel with Sūrya and broken sculptures of the same God embedded helter-skelter in the new walls of the temple (Fig. 12.4).

The *lalāṭabimba* on the *garbhagrha* door has a small image of Sūrya in the centre. The top part of the lintel has nine *rathikās*. Though it is difficult to identify the other figures in them, the eighth one shows only a large head, and could represent Rāhu and thus the lintel could represent the *nava-grahas*.

The broken sculpture seen above and enlarged here, leaves one wondering about the identity of the person portrayed. A *sarpa-hāra* worn by the man hints at Śaiva affiliation possibly Bhairava (Fig. 12.5).

It is interesting to note that though it is Sūrya temple, the north *bhadra* has Mahākālī and south *bhadra* has Gaṇeśa, could it have been a temple of Mārtaṇḍa-Bhairava?⁸

The antiquity of Sūrya Worship in this area is confirmed by an inscription found in March 1984 at Mehūṇa, also in Jalgaon district.⁹ The inscription refers to an older Sun temple (Ugrāditya) built by Haihaya dynasty king Śubhakaṇṭhā, son of Pratikāṇṭhā. It had received a grant from his overlord Chālukya king Vikramāditya I, also known as Satyāśraya (reign 654 C.E. to 681 C.E.). This dates the temple to that era. The temple must have collapsed subsequently and the inscription describes how a later King Narasiṃghadeva, of Cālukya lineage, was saddened by seeing the ruins again and again so he rebuilt it and gave a grant to the priest.

In short, a Sun temple built in the 7th century C.E. was already in ruins by beginning of ninth century C.E. was rebuilt in the first quarter of ninth century C.E. and sad to say, no signs of either temples remain at present!

The inscription is very poetically written. It notes the sadness of the king Narasiṃghadeva on seeing the ruins of the older Sun temple.



Fig.12.1: General View, Maheśvara Temple, Paṭane



Fig.12.2: Adhiṣṭhāna, Maheśvara Temple, Paṭane



Fig.12.3: Sūrya on the main bhadra, Mudhai Devī Temple, Vāgahli



Fig.12.4: Sūrya images, Mudhāi Devī Temple, Vāgahlī

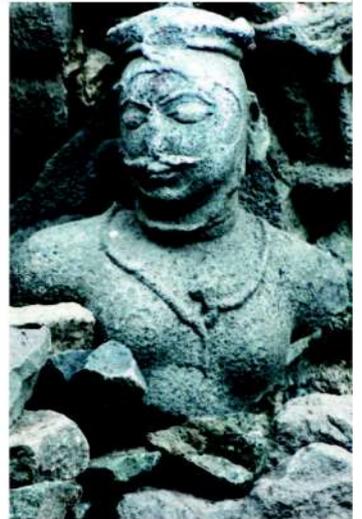


Fig.12.5: Bhairava (?), Mudhāi Devī Temple, Vāgahlī



Fig.12.6: Temple 1, C.E. 1050-1100, Balasāṅe

बदरीनदीतटाश्रिततपोवनालंकृते पुरे सवितुः

येनाकारीहगृहमुग्रादित्याभिधानस्य ॥ 17

कालेन शीर्ष्णपतिताखिलकुड्यमूलमुत्सन्नमंडपशिखं प्रतिमावशेषं

शून्यं विशालतरभक्तियुतेन राज्ञा धर्मैकतानमनसा सततं विलोक्य ॥ 18

He therefore, started rebuilding it (on a day corresponding to 16.2.807 C.E.) The inscription goes on to describe the beautiful temple erected by the king in the same place, completed during the reign of Rashtrakuta Govinda III (793-814 C.E.). The description of the structure is vivid and eulogises 'the Viśvakarmā like skills of *sthapati* Nāruka'

तेनेदमत्र निजबिम्बमिवाम्बराग्रे लग्ने विमानिव भूरिलसत्पताकं

भास्वत्युपासितशिखाशतशोभि शुभ्रं भानोरकारि भुवनं भुवनाधिपस्य ॥ 19

यन्निर्गतमुरुशिखरं भित्त्वेवमहीमहीशमहितस्य

शेषस्य फणामंडलमंडकमणिमंडितं भाति ॥ 20

सर्वावयवाभरणैरलंकृतं पार्थिवः स वपुरस्य

हेममयमिव चकार स्फुरदुरुरत्रैरहिमरश्मेः ॥ 21

स्थपतिर्विश्वकर्म्मैव कर्मनिर्माणनैपुणं

आविश्चकार मतिमानुपाध्यायोत्र नारुकः ॥ 22

It also records the gift of a village to Prabhākarabhaṭṭa, *pramukhamahājana*, on a day corresponding to 26.8.825 C.E. (*Mahāparvaṇi*, *Sūryavāra*), during the reign of Rashtrakuta King Amoghavarsha (814-880 C.E.)

Temple of 'Kṛṣṇa' (Siddheśanātha), Vāghalī (1069 C.E.)

Another instance of what may be considered changed allegiance, the temple of 'Kṛṣṇa' at Vāghalī was originally the temple of Siddheśanātha. Very little of the original temple is left. There are, however, three slabs with inscription embedded in the wall. One of them records the erection of a temple of Śiva (Siddheśanātha) with a well attached to it, by Govindarājā and his wife. Other grants record donations to the temple and the charitable institute by Govindā and also by the illustrious king Seūṇa on the occasion of a solar eclipse corresponding to 21 July, 1069 C.E. The hall with the embedded slabs and a few pillars is all that seems to be left of the original temple. The ceiling of the hall has a beautiful roundel showing Kṛṣṇa with *gopīs*. The author has suggested elsewhere that such a panel was perhaps the signature panel of the Yādavas since they claimed to be descendants of Kṛṣṇa from Dvaraka. Such ceiling panels were found even in temples of Śiva built during their reign before they became the 'Yādavas of Devagiri.'¹⁰

Temples at Balasāṇe

At Balasāṇe, near Sākri, in Dhule district, there are two groups of temples and a



Fig.12.7: Floral component of Jañghā, Temple 1, Balasāne



Fig.12.8: Temple 2, Balasāne

monastery that is simple but important because it has an inscription across its doorway. Three of the temples (numbered 1,2,3 by Cousens) are on the south-east of village, four to the east of the village with the monastery to the north-east of this group.

Temple 1 (1050-1100 C.E.), Balasāṇe

Temple 1, (Fig. 12.6) a west facing triple shrine temple,¹¹ is very ornate both inside and outside. The *Śikhara* is clearly a *bhūmija* variety. The dilapidated state inadvertently shows the upper storey of the *Śikhara*.¹² It is hollow and has a lintel like structure above either a door or a window.

The ornamentation of the *jaṅghā* has a large floral component (Fig. 12.7). Some of the floral designs tally with those described in '*Śilpa-Prakāśa*' such as the *Gurṁphanā* pattern. *Gurṁphanā* is prescribed to cover a long rectangular space (a swirling vine pattern; within the circles created by the vines, animals like tiger, elephant, birds etc. are inscribed).

This *Gurṁphanā* pattern is illustrated with some panels on the *jaṅghā* of temple 1 at Balsāṇe. The interior is equally ornate.

Temple 2 (1150-1200 C.E.), Balasāṇe

Temple no 2, (Fig. 12.8), only a shell now, has lost the roofs of the hall as well as the shrine. Even then, it makes an impact on the viewer.

Temple 5 (1150-1200 C.E.), Balasāṇe

Amongst the second group of temples at Balasāṇe, the north facing multi-shrine temple (temple 5) is an enigma. Its interior is very dark. Its plan with ten small shrines in the main hall and two more in the entrance hall suggests the possibility of *daśāvātāra* temple.

However, it is difficult to decipher the plan of the *devakoṣṭhas* from the lintels, as there is a lintel with forms of Śiva and another one with Devī.

An inscribed Varāha lying in the yard and broken horseman (possibly Kalki), at present placed in the main shrine add some credence to the *avatāras* being in the sub-shrines.

Maṭha at Balasāṇe

The *maṭha* (monastery) in a short distance from the temples has an inscription right across its lintel. The five line inscription records rebuilding of the *maṭha* by Pandit Shri Mahālūka, on the banks of the Kesara at Balsāṇa in Ś 1106 (1184 C.E.) indicating that it may originally have been built in eleventh century.¹³ The river is now known as Burāi.

The inside of the *matha* is plain, four central pillars must have supported a roof. At each end of the now destroyed verandah were two small cell-shrines.

In conclusion, the temple at Dīghī has a beautiful ceiling in the hall (photos being published here may be for the first time). Paṭaṇe has inscriptions about a place of learning run by Bhāskarācārya's grandson, Cāṅgadeva. It specifies that works of Bhāskarācārya like *Siddhāntaśiromaṇi* were taught there. Temple 5 at Balasāṇe has a hall with twelve sub-shrines, the lintels of the sub-shrines are intriguing. An inscription about a Sūrya temple found in 1984 referring to a Sūrya temple of 7th century C.E. shows the continuity of Sūrya worship in this region.

References and Notes

1. K.D. Kanitkar, *Jñāna-Pravāha, Bulletin*, No. 10, 2006-2007, pp. 133-139.
2. In a sense of *dějá vu*, the sadness felt by 9th century local king on seeing the ruined 7th century Sun temple is very eloquently carved in a stone inscription discussed later in this article.
3. Henry Cousens, *Mediaeval Temples of the Dakhan*; A.V. Naik, *New Indian Antiquary*, July-Dec, 1947. New light shed by inscriptions and modern photography affords one a deeper insight in the history of religious thought, hence this study.
4. Chronology based on style, quoted from A.V. Naik, *ibid.*
5. A.V.Naik suggested that substituting standard geometric patterns on the outside walls reduced the expense and skill required in making figure sculptures. A.P.Jamkhedkar attributes it to the architectural type selected: *śuddha jaṅghā* may not include sculptured figures. This is seen in many temples built in 12th century.
6. Prof. F. Kielhorn, *Epigraphia Indica* Volume 1, inscription 39, pp. 338-346.
7. G.Bühler, *Indian Antiquary*, Vol. VIII, pp. 39-42.
8. Many temples in Maharashtra have Gaṇeśa on the *jaṅghā*. Very few show Gaṇeśa on the *bhadra*. Tahakari (triple shrine devī temple) and Ambarnath have Gaṇeśa on the *antarāla*, not on the *bhadra*; The combination of Sūrya and Śiva Temple at Chittorgarh' *Kalādarpaṇa : The Mirror of Indian Art*, Essays in Memory of Shri Krishnadeva, page 91; Ed. Devangana Desai, Arundhati Banerji.
K. Mankodi, 'To what god shall we render homage in the temple at Modhera', *Prajñādhara : Essays in honour of Gauriswar Bhattacharya*.
9. V.B.Kolte, *Mahārāṣṭrātīla kāhi Tāmrapaṭa va Śilālekha*, p. 222; in the foreword, Ajay Mitra Shastri notes some important points of this inscription "mentions Haihaya dynasty in Maharashtra; ...the name of one king is 'Maharashtra'.
10. K.D.Kanitkar, *Journal of Asiatic Society of Mumbai*, Vol. 82, 2008-2009, pp. 45-54.
11. According to A.V. Naik, perhaps the earliest known triple shrine temple in the Deccan.
12. A.V. Naik notes that the walls of the shrine are 8 feet thick and the width of the shrine is 25 feet.
13. Henry Cousens, *ibid.*, p. 26, pl. 22, plan of *Matha*.