

Gavaksha and Pipal-leaf Motifs Hallmarks of Bhumija Temples

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Malwa is seen as the homeland of 'Bhumija' mode of temple architecture. However, this mode was equally prominent in North Western Maharashtra. Yadava rulers were as fond of Bhumija mode as the Parmaras.¹ Factually, Ambarnath Temple, built by Silaharas of North Konkana is the oldest dated Bhumija temple in Maharashtra (CE 1035-1060).²

The Bhumija mode of temples flourished between 11th and 13th centuries in present day Maharashtra. Unfortunately, many temples in Maharashtra have lost their spires.³ In the absence of any remnants in situ or loose fragments lying around, it is difficult to speculate on the type of the original spire of the temple.

Adam Hardy has analyzed in detail Bhumija temples from an architect's point of view.⁴ He has identified two motifs that he points out as deliberately chosen by the architects/guilds of architects of medieval times, to be the 'Hallmarks' of Bhumija temples.⁵ Hardy asserts that "it is not usually realized, since it has lost its spire, but the Chenna Keshava temple at Belur (CE 1117) built by Hoysala Vishnuvardhan, a feudatory of Chalukyas of Kalyani is of Bhumija mode".⁶ He also classifies the Vaishnava temple at Anwa⁷ near Aurangabad as Bhumija based on these motifs.

Thus, these motifs, identified by Hardy as hallmarks of Bhumija temples provide a valuable tool to identify the mode of lost spires in temples of Maharashtra.

In his book *The Temple Architecture of India*, in the chapter on 'Temple Design' Hardy notes that "there is no better hallmark of style, no better indication

of time and place than the *gavaksha*." He considers *gavakshas* in Indian temple architecture as the detail closest to calligraphy (etymologically, he traces 'style' to the pen or 'stylus') and in effect, considers the *gavaksha* as 'signature' of the guild that constructed the temple, the hallmark.⁸

Art Historian Ackerman notes that 'style' is an indispensable historical tool, more essential to the history of Art than any other historical discipline.⁹ He also notes that "sometimes an inspired patronage does more than the artist to motivate a style. The patron proves to be a creative individual who deserves to be called an artist".¹⁰ This description fits perfectly with King Bhoja Paramara of Malwa and the Bhumija style of temple architecture associated with him.¹¹

The medieval text on Architecture, *Samaranganasutradhara* is attributed to Bhoja and it clearly defines the Bhumija style. Adam Hardy's book *Theory and Practice of Temple Architecture in Medieval India* subtitled 'Bhoja's *Samaranganasutradhara* and the Bhojpur Line Drawings'¹² is a critical analysis of temple architecture in medieval India in general and of Bhumija style in particular.

In this book, Hardy illustrates theory with selected verses from *Samaranganasutradhara*. He has analyzed the relevant chapters in terms of their approach, language (terminology) and regional stylistic affiliation of the architecture they discuss. Chapter 65 in the *Samaranganasutradhara* deals with Bhumija temples. According to Hardy, the chapter stands out for its coherence and complexity. It does not refer to any venerated older texts for this form. Hardy surmises that Bhumija form did not evolve gradually, but appears to have been invented or drawn forth all at once. The text and the built-form were contemporaneous.

Hardy further notes that some stylistic peculiarities of Bhumija mode seem to have been deliberately chosen over standard forms and made into hallmarks.¹³ The architects specialized in this mode seem to have been determined to maintain a distinctive style. They chose a lesser motif for the *gavaksha*, (Fig.1a) by passing the more common ones. Another stylistic hallmark of this tradition is the 'Pipal-leaf' or 'moonstone' motif (Fig.2a). Though not strictly a *gavaksha*, the motif belongs to the same family.¹⁴ It is used extensively on the pillar-waist in Bhumija

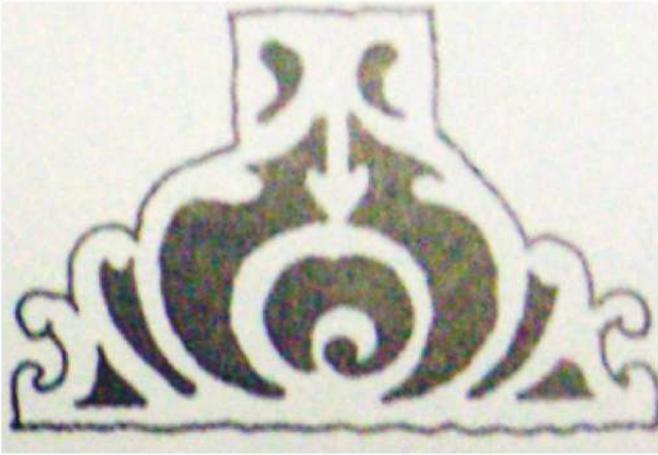


Fig.1a : *Gavaksha* motif, Hardy



Fig.1b : On *adhishthana* at Ambarnath



Fig.2a : *Pipal-leaf* motif, Hardy



Fig.2b : Ambarnath



Fig.3a : Six-armed Vishnu, Ambarnath



Fig.3b : Brahma and Mahesh, Ambarnath

temples and also as a miniature niche pediment. Hardy states that "the Pipal-leaf motif (Fig.2a) on the waists and chests of pillars and pilasters proclaims Bhumija identity".

Since Ambarnath Temple is the oldest dated Bhumija temple in Maharashtra (CE 1035-1060), the Hallmark motifs on its different parts are compared with illustrations in Hardy's books. This motif is ubiquitous on all temple parts. It appears not only on pillars and pilasters but on the spire as well. There is a reason for this. The Bhumija spire of Ambarnath temple is not the standard form that uses rows and columns of miniature *shikharas*. It has rows and columns of *Kuta-stambhas* instead. Since the *stambhas* bear the motif on their waists and chests, it was natural that it appear on the *stambha* component of the *Kuta-stambhas* on the *shikhara* too. What is interesting is the presence of the motif on *kuta* components, both on the Bhumija *shikhara* as well as the *ghanta* part of the *ghanta-samvaranashikhara* on the *mandapa*. Figures below illustrate the various locations both inside and outside the Ambarnath temple where the motif appears.

Ambarnath Temple has beautiful friezes of miniature sculptures (images about 10 inches high) at a height of more than 13 feet inside the *mandapa* (hall). Each of these images has the Hallmark miniature niche pediment. Four such images are illustrated - Fig.3a : Six-armed Vishnu on Garuda from a frieze lining the *antaralasangavalitana*, east face; Fig.3b : Brahma and Mahesh, north face; Fig.4a : Vishnu as Shridhara, (p-c-g-s), from a frieze on north outer side of the *Karotaka* ceiling consisting of *vyuhantara* forms of Vishnu and Fig.4b : A *Shaivite* deity, Rudra(?) from the inner east frieze lining the *Karotaka* ceiling.

Pediment above image of Karttikeya on *jangha* (outside wall) (Fig.5a), in the *salilantara* between *surasundaris* (Fig.5b) and pediment of an empty shrine in the *adhishthana* (Fig.6) bear the hallmarks.

Pillar waists and pediments on pillars bear the motifs (Figs.7a-7b). Additionally, since the *dravida-karma* spire has *kuta-stambhas* instead of replicas of spires, these components are also replete with these motifs (Figs.7c-7d).



Fig.4a : Vishnu as Shridhara & Fig.4b : A Shaivite deity, Ambarnath



Miniature niche pediments : Fig.5a (above Karttikeya), Fig.5b (in the *sailantara*), Fig.6 (above empty niche on *adhishtana*)



Fig.7a: On Pillar-pediments Fig.7b: Pillar-waists & pediments

Fig.7c : On *kutas*

Fig.7d : On *stambhas*

Pipal-leaf motif amongst known Bhumija temples in Maharashtra

Similarly, these motifs are documented amongst known Bhumija temples in Maharashtra (Bhumija spires or parts still extant). There are many such temples: Anjaneri (Figs.17a-17b,18), Balsane - Temple-1 (Figs.8a-8c,9a-9b), Gondeshvar (Figs.10a-10b), Kokamthan, Jhodge (Figs.11-13), Ratanwadi (Figs.14a-14b, 15-16), Velapur, Jabreshvar at Phaltan, Harihareshvar at Kudalasangam, Kukadeshvar, to name a few. Use of the motif in a few of these temples is illustrated below:



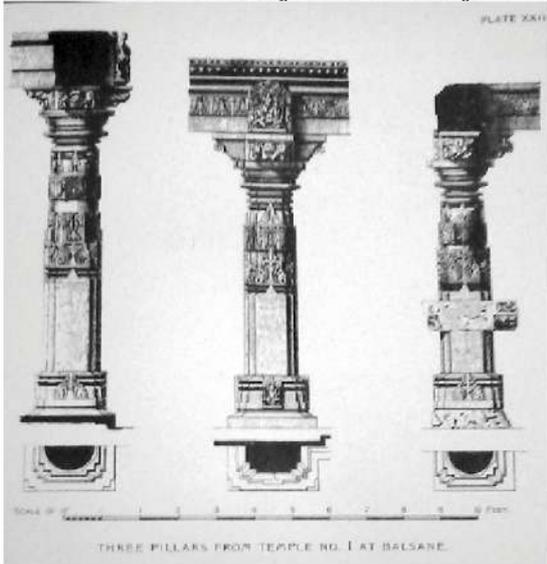
Fig.8a : On the *stambha* component on the spire



Fig.8b : Enlarged



Fig.8c : On inside pillars



Figs.9a,9b : Designs noted by Cousens on pillars and *dvarashakha* of Temple-1 at Balsane



Fig.10a : Pipal-leaf, *jangha* of *garbhagriha*



Fig.10b : Dwarf outer wall of *kakshasana*



Fig.11 : *Shikhara-pratikritis*, Manakeshvar



Fig.12 : Design in rows varies



Fig.13 : Jangha



Fig.14a : On porch pillars



Fig.14b : Pillars in the mandapa



Fig.15 : On shikhara-pratikritis on bhumis



Fig.16 : On the lata (gavaksha)



Figs.17a,17b : As miniature pediments



Fig.18 : On pillar-waist

1. Temple-1 at Balsane (~CE 1050-1100)

Temple-1 at Balsane¹⁵ is *tri-garbha*, with the main shrine dedicated to Shiva and the other two to Vishnu and Devi, respectively.¹⁶ The Pipal-leaf motif appears on *mandapa* pillars and *dvarashakhas*. The spire of Temple-1 at Balsane has the more traditional *bhumi* components in the Bhumija *shikhara*. *Shikhara-pratikritis* bear the hallmark *gavaksha* design, yet the *stambhas* carry the Pipal-leaf motif (Figs.10a-10b).

2. Gondeshvar at Sinnar (~CE 1100-1150)

At the Gondeshvar Temple at Sinnar,¹⁷ the Pipal-leaf design is ubiquitous but shape is more jaded than free form. It appears on pillars, *kakshasana* platform, pediments on *jangha* and porch pillars, but not on the spire, where *shikhara-pratikritis* have the hallmark *gavaksha* design.

3. Manakeshvar at Jhodge (CE 1160)

The spire of Manakeshvar temple at Jhodge¹⁸ is replete with the Pipal-leaf motif on every *shikhara-pratikriti*; the design also appears on *mandapa* pillars and *dvarashakha*.

4. Amriteshvar at Ratanwadi

Next, the motif was searched on Bhumija temple of Amriteshvar at Ratanwadi.¹⁹ It was found very artistically and consistently chiseled on the porch-pillars, half-pillars in the *mandapa*, on *shikhara-pratikritis* on *bhumis* of *shikhara* and on the *lata* (*gavaksha-jala*).

5. Vaishnava Bhumija Temple, Anjaneri

Each one of the above temples, with extant Bhumija *shikhara*, bears the Pipal-leaf motif. These examples lend further support to Hardy's observation that the Pipal-leaf motif was a deliberately chosen hallmark of the Bhumija style.

Temples with Lost Spires

By corollary, if the Pipal-leaf motif is seen on a temple that has lost its spire, it could be inferred that the temple originally had a Bhumija

shikhara though it is no longer there. The survey then looks for these motifs for identifying temples in Maharashtra without extant spires as having been Bhumija originally.

The motif was found on the following temples that have lost their spire: Daityasoodan at Lonar (Figs.19a-19b) and Yajnesvar by the lake in the Lonar crater (Figs.20a-20b), Vishnu Temple at Methi (Fig.21), Balsane Temple-4 (Figs.22a-22b), Balsane Temple-2 (Fig.23), Anwa Shiva (Vishnu) Temple (Figs.24-26), Kedareshvar at Dharmapuri (Beed) (Figs.27-28), Adinath Basadi at Khidrapur (Figs.29-30), Lakshmi-Narayana and Mallikarjun temples at Pedgaon,



Figs.19a,19b : Daityasoodan at Lonar



Fig.20a : Yajnesvar in Lonar crater (Photo: Amar Reddy)



Fig.20b : Enlarged

Siddheshvar at Akole (Ahmadnagar), Bhavani Temple at Tahakari, Bhuleshvar Temple at Yavat, Pangaon Vitthal Mandir.²⁰ It is not possible to include photographs of all these temples but these clearly show the presence of the motif.



Fig.21 : Vishnu Temple, Methi



Figs.22a,22b : Jangha wall & peetha, Balsane Temple-4 sanctum



Fig.23 : Balsane Temple-2 pillars



Fig.24 : Motif on half pillars



Fig.25 : Miniature pediment for *lalata-bimba*



Fig.26 : Gavaksha motif, *adhishthana*



Fig.27 : Niche pediment on *jangha* and Fig.28 : On a loose sculpture panel, both at Kedareshvar, Dharmapuri

Shiva Mandir at Anwa

Hardy has already classified the *Vaishnava* temple at Anwa as being Bhumija on the basis of pillars in the hall.²¹ The photos below (Figs.24-26) highlight the use of *gavoaksha* motif on the *adhishthana* and as miniature niche pediment on the *lalata-bimba* in the same temple.

Kedareshvar Temple at Dharmapuri (Beed)

At Adinath Jaina Basadi at Khidrapur, the motif is seen on the *jangha* wall and as miniature niche pediment (Figs.29-30).

At Kolhapur, loose sculptures are lying in the compound of the proposed Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj Museum. A very delicately carved part of a *dvarashakha*, bears this motif (Figs.31-33). Images of *Jina* on the same prove that it once belonged to a *Jaina basadi*.

One can thus logically assume that the original spire of the above mentioned (at present spire-less) temples was of Bhumija style.

In the process, one sees that architectural style is independent of religious sects. It is seen on Shaiva, Vaishnava and Jaina temples.

One also sees that architectural style is independent of dynasties. Temples in Bhumija style are known to have been built by Paramaras,²² Shilaharas,²³



Fig.29 : On *jangha* wall and Fig.30 : As miniature pediment at Adinath Basadi, Khidrapur



Figs.31,32 : Two views of a loose fragment carved part of a *dvarashakha*



Fig.33 : Motif on pillar-waist, enlarged

Maurya feudatories of Yadavas²⁴ and even Vikramaditya VI (reign CE 1078-1127)²⁵ Chalukya of Kalyani.

One can see the one-upmanship at play amongst the devotees, trying to change the main deity enshrined (usurping the shrine in the name of the God, though iconography clearly indicates otherwise). Shaiva shrine turned into Krishna shrine,²⁶ Vaishnava turned into Shaiva,²⁷ Surya shrine turned into Devi shrine.²⁸ Kedareshvar would indicate a Shaiva affiliation but inscription calls it temple of Narayana.²⁹

A map (Fig.34) shows the distribution of Bhumija temples in Maharashtra considered for this essay.

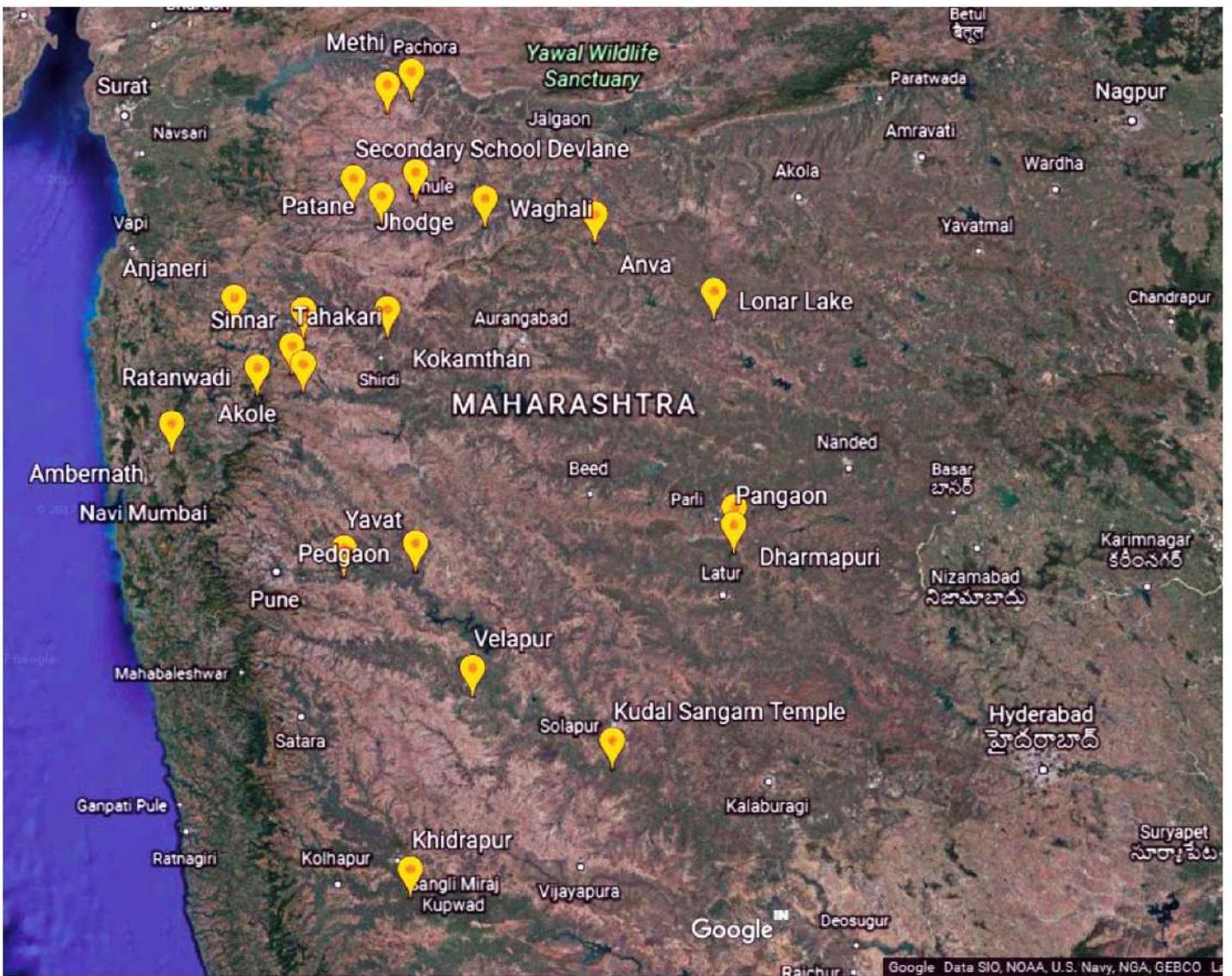


Fig.34 : Distribution of Bhumija temples considered in this essay

One possible explanation of the Bhumija style appearing at Amabarnath (CE 1035-1060) and at Bhojpur (M.P.) almost simultaneously can be surmised from the following inscriptions: Inscriptions of Bhoja Paramara³⁰ claiming 'Konkana Vijaya Parva', 'Konkana Grahana Parva' describe the battles Bhoja fought with enemies to the southwest. The route the armies may have followed can explain the spread of Bhumija style in Maharashtra (Fig.35).

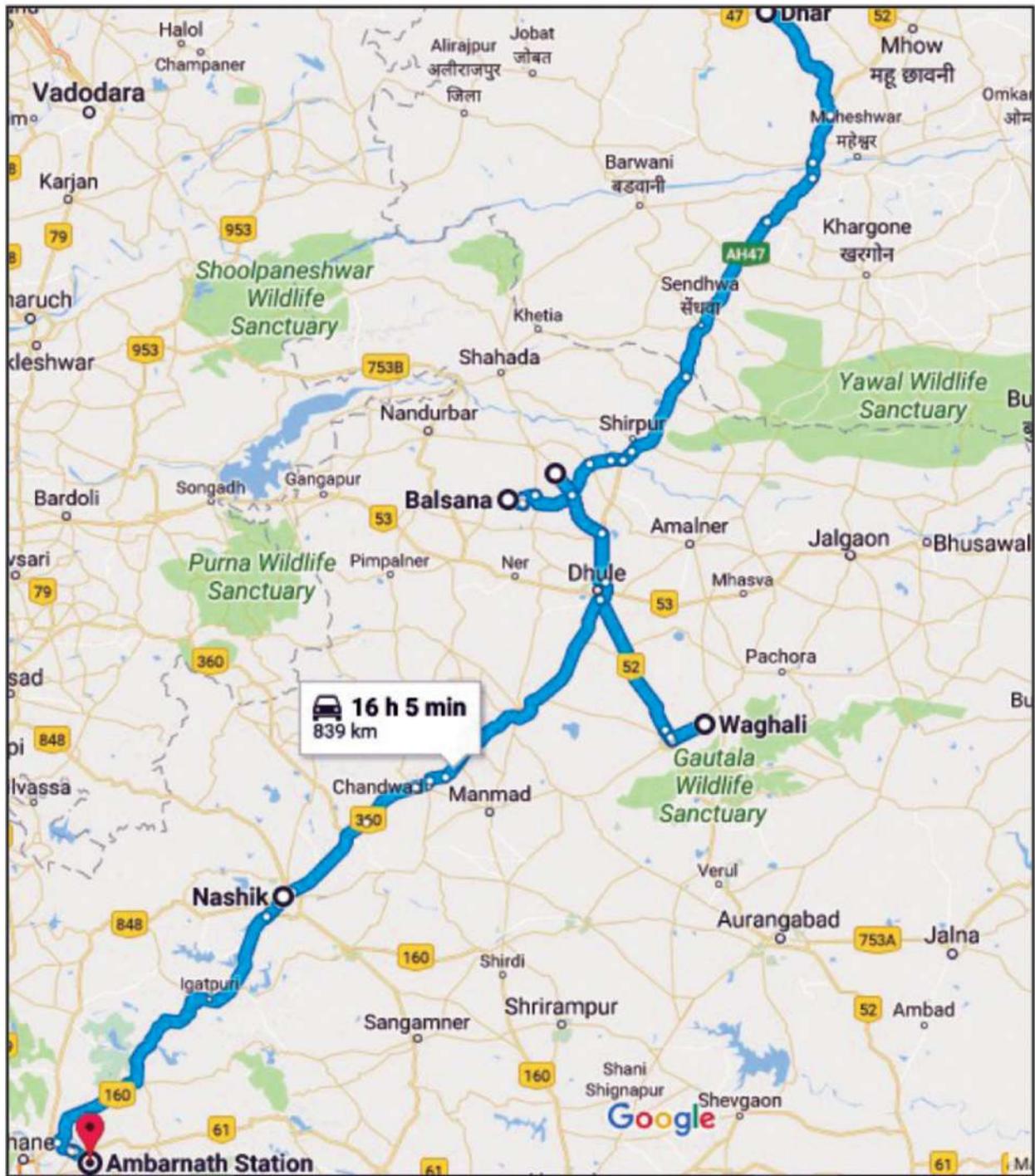


Fig.35 : Possible route of Bhoja's army

It could be that itinerant artists travelled where work was available. Their loyalty was only to their guild, not to their king nor to their gods (work is worship?).

In a second essay,³¹ the motif, or rather, the absence of it on parts within a temple, is used to help identify later additions/modifications to the original structure.

Acknowledgements

The author wishes to thank the ASI for permission to photograph inside the monuments, to Prashant More, Anil Daware and Amar Reddy for photographing the friezes 13 feet above floor level, in total darkness and in suffocating heat at Ambarnath.

References & Notes

1. Yadavas may have carried this preference for 'Bhumija' with them in their southern march towards Kalyani and beyond; see Harihareshvar temple at Kudala Sangam in Solapur district. Kumud Kanitkar, 'A unique dvigarbha temple at Kudala-Sangama, Dist. Solapur, Maharashtra', *Journal of Asiatic Society of Mumbai*, Vol.82, 2008.
2. The inscription in the Ambarnath temple mentions Mummuni (youngest of the three brothers Chhittaraja, Nagajuna and Mummuni, each in turn ascended the throne). It dates to CE 1060 but states "महामण्डलेश्वरश्रीमच्छि(च्छ)त्तराजदेवस्य भवनं स(स)पादितम्", ascribing the structure to Chhittaraja. Chhittaraja's available inscriptions affirm his reign CE 1024-1034. So CE 1034-1060 can be considered the period during which the temple was under construction. Shilaharas were initially feudatories of Rashtrakutas but after the fall of Rashtrakutas, Shilaharas remained a small but independent dynasty.
3. A.P. Jamkhedkar, in his seminal book on the temples of Maharashtra (*Maharashtra State Gazetteer, Volume I Part 2, Maharashtra Itihas, Prachin kal, Sthapatya ani kala*, Ed. A.S. Pathak, 2002) stresses that the *shikhara* is the identity of a temple. Hardy has provided a tool to identify lost spires on the basis of the presence of this motif.
4. This paper is based on two books written by Adam Hardy and one edited by him:
Adam Hardy, *Theory and Practice of Temple Architecture in Medieval India: Bhoja's*

- Samaranganasutradhara and the Bhojpur Line Drawings*, Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, New Delhi and Dev Publishers and Distributors, New Delhi, 2015;
- Adam Hardy, *The Temple Architecture of India*, John Wiley and Sons, Great Britain, 2007;
- The Temple in South Asia*, Ed. Adam Hardy, The British Association for South Asian Studies, The British Academy, London, 2007.
5. Bhumija appears in hitherto unknown styles indicating that there were guilds that were Bhumija specialists.
 6. Adam Hardy, *The Temple Architecture of India*, p.189.
 7. *Ibid.*, p.155, fig.14.11.
 8. *Ibid.*, p.151, ". . . in the Deccan, roundels (on pillars) metamorphosed into *gavakshas* and into 'moonstone' or 'pipal-leaf' motifs".
 9. James S. Ackerman and Rhys Carpenter, *Art and Archaeology*, Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1963, p.165.
 10. *Ibid.*, p.176.
 11. In Hardy's view, Paramaras of Malwa were ambitious and in order to stand out from other contemporary dynasties, chose Bhumija as their preferred mode for their three royal temples, Udayeshvar at Udaypur, M.P. and the two unfinished temples, Bijamandal at Vidisha and Bhoja's temple at Bhojpur.
 12. Adam Hardy, *Theory and Practice of Temple Architecture in Medieval India: Bhoja's Samaranganasutradhara and the Bhojpur Line Drawings*, Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, New Delhi and Dev Publishers and Distributors, New Delhi, 2015, p.14, fig.1.8f.
 13. *Ibid.*, p.8.
 14. Adam Hardy, 'Parts and Wholes: The Story of the Gavaksha', *The Temple in South Asia*, Ed. Adam Hardy, British Association for South Asian Studies, The British Academy, London, 2007, p.63-82.
 15. CE 1050-1100 - A.V. Naik.
 16. Temple-2 at Balsane is discussed separately in the other essay.
 17. CE 1100-1150 - A.V. Naik.
 18. Mahadeva (Jhodge) ~ CE 1160 - A.V. Naik.
 19. CE 1200-1250 - A.V. Naik, 13th century - A.P. Jamkhedkar.
 20. There must be many more temples in this category. Only those temples visited and photographed by the author are included here (except Yajnesvar in Lonar crater, photo courtesy: Amar Reddy).

21. Adam Hardy, *The temple architecture of India*, ref.7, p.155, fig.14.11.
22. Udayeshvar at Udyapur, M.P., CE 1080.
23. Amarnath at Ambarnath, CE 1035-1060.
24. Shiva mandir (converted to Krishna mandir) at Vaghli, has an inscription embedded in the wall. It was built by Govindaraj of Maurya Dynasty, feudatory of Yadava Senachandra II. Inscription records grants given to it in CE 1069.
25. Chetan Shankar Sali, 'Newly Discovered Inscriptions from Ambulge in Nanded District and Dharmapuri in Beed District', *Journal of Asiatic Society Mumbai*, Vol.84, p.61; Asiatic Society of Mumbai, Town Hall, Mumbai, 2012. The inscription under discussion is a part of sculpture adorning the southern wall of the *garbhagriha*, where a lady is shown writing on a stone block. The script of the inscription is Kannada (*Hale*) and the language is Sanskrit. Translation: 'Climbing with zeal, the temple of Narayana, comparable to the mountain of Gods (i.e. Meru), (this lady) wrote with affection, the series of exceptional epithets of Vikramank, singing his glory in manifold ways, on the shining *phalaka* (situated) on the top of the temple, so that it may last as long as the Moon, the Sun and the Sky last'. There are two important points in this inscription, the one that it says that the temple is of Narayana, i.e. of Vishnu, and second it mentions Vikramank, i.e. Kalyani Chalukya King Vikramaditya VI (reign CE 1078-1127).
26. Vaghli Krishna Mandir.
27. G.B. Deglurkar, 'अन्वा येथील शिवमंदिर - एक पुनर्विचार', विदर्भ संशोधन मंडळ वार्षिक, 1973, pp.147-151; also Vishnu on *Lalatabimba*.
28. Mudhaidevi at Vaghli was undoubtedly a Surya shrine originally.
29. Chetan Shankar Sali, *op.cit.*, '..Climbing with zeal, the temple of Narayana..' is at present called 'Kedareshvar'.
30. H.V. Trivedi, Ed. *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, Vol.VII, Part 2, *Inscriptions of Paramaras*, p.41, No.18: Kalvan Copperplate of Yashovarman, a vassal of Bhoja (undated). The *prashasti* of Bhoja refers to his victory over Konkana *adhipati*; p.35, Betma Copperplate of Bhoja (CE 1020) refers to *Konkana Vijaya Grahana Parva*; p.39, Banswada Copperplate refers to *Konkana Vijaya Parva*.
31. Submitted for publication to Deccan College, Pune.