

## 'Gavākṣa' and 'Pīpal-leaf' Motifs : Hallmarks of Bhūmija Temples (Part II)\*

Kumud Kanitkar

'Gavākṣa' and 'pīpal-leaf' motifs (designs) have been shown by Hardy to be hallmarks of Bhūmija temples. Based on this premise an essay published in the previous issue<sup>1</sup> explored the use of 'Gavākṣa' or 'pīpal-leaf' motif as a tool to study temples in Maharashtra that have lost their spires.

The present essay deals with three temples in which Hardy's hallmark Bhūmija motifs are an integral part of the main temple structure but some parts of the temple lack it. The hypothesis is that these parts which do not bear the 'Bhūmija Motif' were part of later restoration/addition, therefore the 'style' is not consistent.

It must be emphasized that this motif can be used only as additional proof to explain visually noticed differences in style.

Hardy's book *Theory and Practice of Temple Architecture in Medieval India* subtitled *Bhoja's Samarāṅgaṇasūtradhāra and the Bhojpur Line Drawings* is a critical analysis of temple architecture in medieval India in general and of Bhūmija style in particular.<sup>2</sup> In this book, Hardy illustrates theory with selected verses from *Samarāṅgaṇasūtradhāra*. Hardy surmises that Bhūmija 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.

It is in this context that Hardy notes that some stylistic peculiarities of Bhūmija mode seem to have been deliberately chosen over standard forms and made into 'hallmarks'. The architects specialized in this mode seem to have been determined to maintain a distinctive 'style'. They chose a lesser motif for the

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\* Part I of this research article entitled *Gavaksha and Pipal-leaf Motifs : Hallmarks of Bhumija Temples* is published in *Jñāna-Pravāha Research Journal*, No. XXI - 2017-2018 (pages 49-66) - Editor

*gavākṣa* (Fig.1) by-passing the more common ones. Another stylistic hallmark of this tradition is the '*pīpal*-leaf' or 'moonstone' motif (Fig.2).

Hardy states that '*pīpal*-leaf motif (Fig.2) on the 'waists' and 'chests' of pillars and pilasters proclaims Bhūmija identity.

Part I of the essay documented quite a few temples in Maharashtra including (1) those with extant Bhūmija spires, and (2) those with lost spires. Hardy's '*pīpal*-leaf' motif is very much present on 'waists' and 'chests' of the pillars in temples with extant Bhūmija spires, like at Ambarnātha temple (Fig.3), confirming Hardy's statement. It is also present on the 'waists' and 'chests' of pillars in temples with lost spires, like in temple 2 at Balsane, Khandesh (Fig.4), leading to the assumption that these temples originally had Bhūmija spires.

The present essay deals with temples in which Hardy's hallmark Bhūmija motifs are an integral part of the main temple structure but some parts of the temple lack it. Photos showing such discrepancy in pillars at Ambarnātha Śivālaya, Aundha Nāganātha Śivālaya (district Hingoli) and Bhuleśvara Śivālaya (near Yavat) are presented here.

- At Ambarnātha Śivālaya, the free-standing pillars in west and south porches are indistinctly of different style from free-standing pillars in the north porch. This is the only deviation from the norm.
- At Aundha Nāganātha Śivālaya, the *maṇḍovara* of the temple is thought to have been built later than its *adhiṣṭhāna*.<sup>3</sup> This is obvious from the

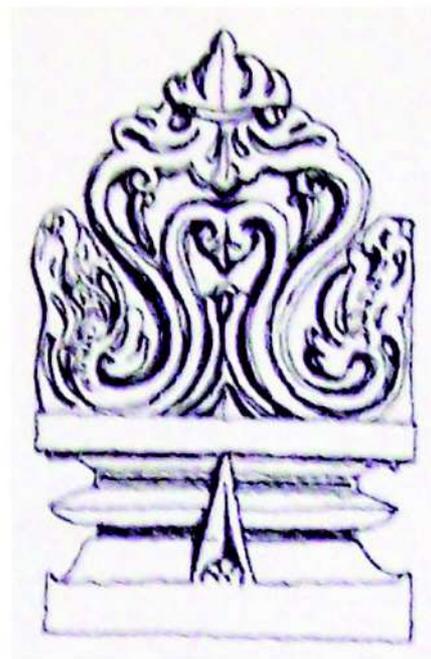


Fig.1



Fig.2



Fig.3



Fig.4

difference in the quality of sculptures on the two parts. Careful observation of the porch pillars shows that these stand on an older base that bears the 'pīpal-leaf' motif. However, the motif is not seen on the 'waist' and 'chest' of the newer massive porch pillars, lending credence to the hypothesis that the *maṇḍovara* of the temple was probably built later than its *adhiṣṭhāna*.

- At Bhuleśvara Śivālaya (near Yāvat), the plan as well as the presence of 'pīpal-leaf' motif on the pillars/pilasters in the *maṇḍapa* (hall) clearly shows that the central Śiva shrine was built in the stellate Bhūmija style and the original spire must have been Bhūmija (*pañca-bhūma* : with five storeys/*pañca-ratha* : with five projections). The design of the pillars in the colonnade confirm that they are not part of the original Śiva shrine, primarily because they lack the Bhūmija motif. The asymmetric distribution of the colonnade pillars reinforces the conclusion that they were added later.

### Ambarnātha Śivālaya

The spire of Ambarnātha Śivālaya (CE 1035-1060) is partly ruined, yet enough remains to clearly show its Bhūmija components.<sup>4</sup> 'Pīpal-leaf' motif is ubiquitous, on mini niche pediments, on *stambha* parts of the *kūṭa-stambha* components of the spire as well as porch pilasters. At odds with the above are the free-standing porch pillars, in two of the three porches.

The temple is west facing so it has three porches, north, west and south. Each porch on each of its side has a quarter-pilaster, a three-quarter pilaster and a free-standing pillar. In the north porch, all these have the same style and bear the 'pīpal-leaf' motif. However, both the west porch and the south porch have the pilasters with 'pīpal-leaf' motif but the free-standing pillars are different.<sup>5</sup> A view of Ambarnātha Śivālaya from south-west (Fig.5) shows that the floor of south and west porches starts above the *adhiṣṭhāna*.

North Porch: photos show East side (Fig.6) and West side (Fig.7) 3/4 pilaster as well as free standing pillar bearing 'pīpal-leaf' motif; both bear two image panels on the 'waist'.

By contrast, free standing pillars in the west and south porch are stylistically different from 3/4 pilasters; these do not bear 'pīpal-leaf' motif and have only one image panel on the 'waist'.

West Porch: photos show North side (Fig.8) and South Side (Fig.9) 1/4 pilaster, 3/4 pilaster and South side (Fig.10) 3/4 pilaster and free-standing pillar.

Note that 1/4 pilaster and 3/4 pilaster bear 'pīpal-leaf' motif on 'waist' but free-standing pillars do not and also have only one image panel on the 'waist' (photos: Amar Reddy).

South Porch: photos showing West side (Fig.11) and East side (Fig.12) 3/4 pilasters and free-standing pillar.

Similarly, the pilasters of the south porch bear the 'pīpal-leaf' motif but free-standing pillars also do not and have only one image panel on the 'waist'.

A possible explanation is offered by the political and social strife between CE 1035-1060, the period in which the temple was constructed. Inscriptions record the death of two of the three young princes of Śilāhāra dynasty in that period, the second of the two princes Nāgārjuna, died in a battle.<sup>6</sup> It is likely that construction was halted till war was over, peace restored, funds garnered a new in order to continue the last unfinished details, probably employing a different guild of architects, leading to different style. This premise, if correct, would indicate a gap of a few decades, which seems consistent with the workmanship of the 'newer' pillars. It agrees with the Ambarnātha inscription, the last line of which reads '... *chittarājadevasya bhavanam sampāditaṁ; sampāda* = completion/accomplishment'. The inscription is of the third prince, the youngest brother Mummuni, who did



Fig.5

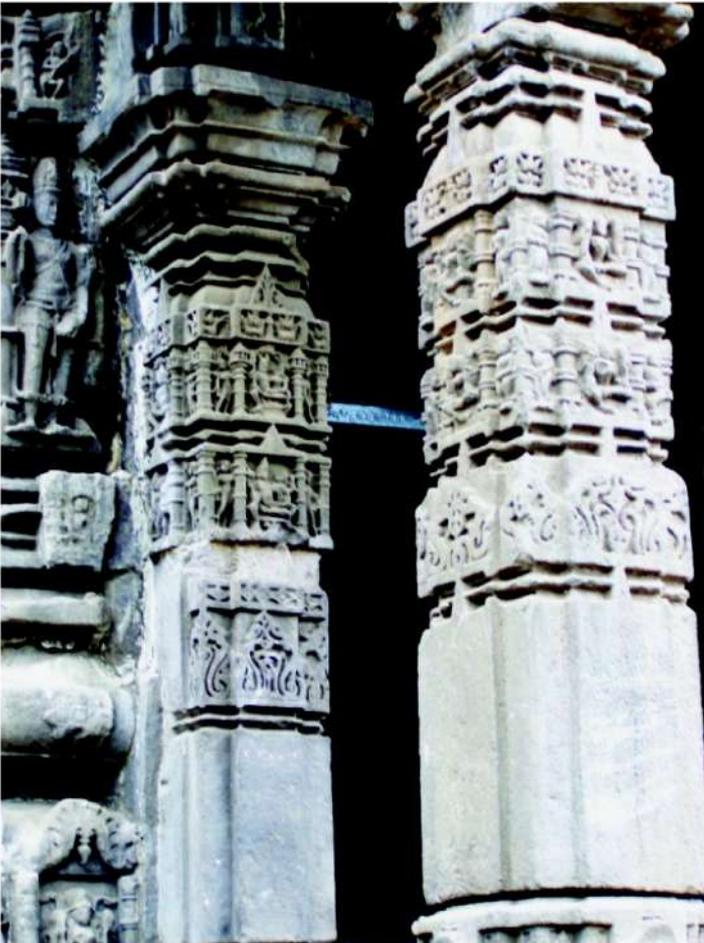


Fig.6



Fig.7



Fig.8

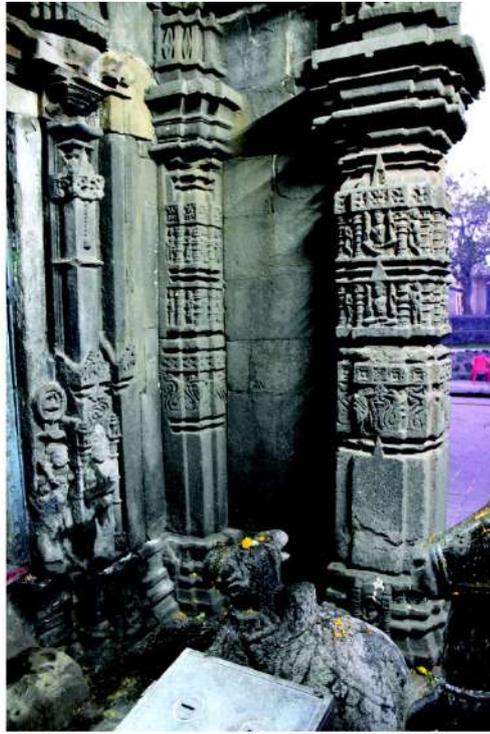


Fig.9



Fig.10



Fig.11

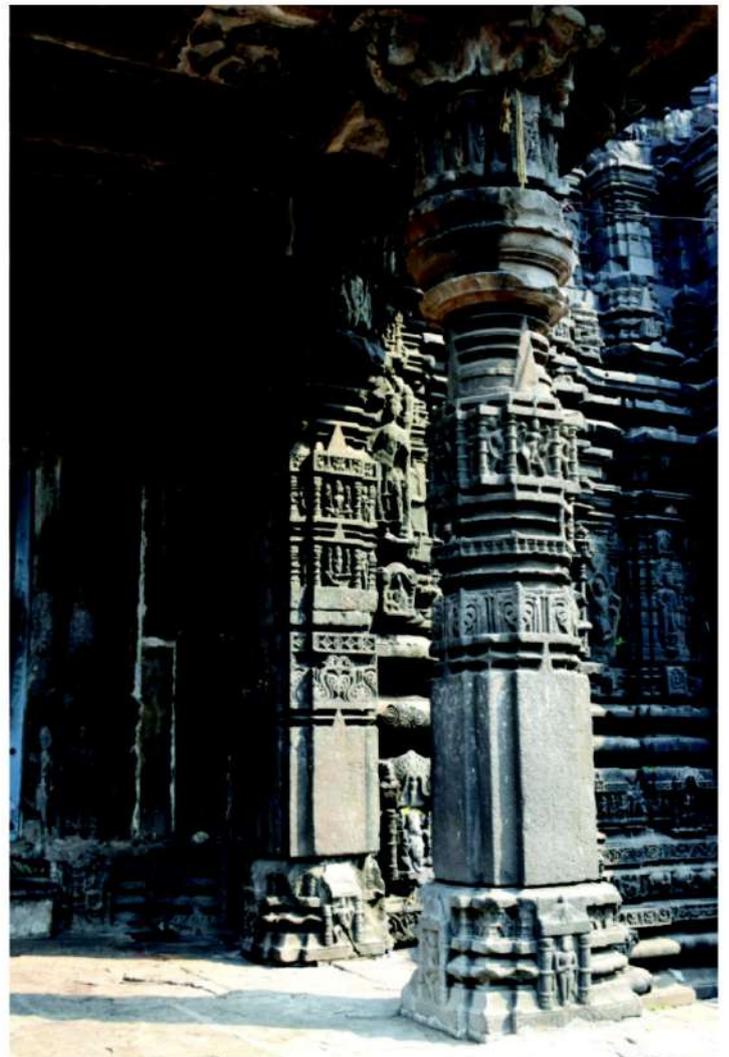


Fig.12

not construct the temple, merely completed it. The instance of the different free-standing porch pillars is the only deviation from the norm. The absence of 'pīpal-leaf' motifs, profusely displayed everywhere else but absent on free-standing pillars in the west and south porch could be the result of later restoration/construction.

### Aundha Nāganātha Śivālaya

As mentioned earlier, the *maṇḍovara* of the temple is thought to have been built later than its *adhiṣṭhāna*. There is obvious difference in the quality of sculptures on the *adhiṣṭhāna* and *maṇḍovara*. The north-west view of the temple (Fig.13) shows the difference in artistic quality of *adhiṣṭhāna* and *maṇḍovara*.

This conjecture finds support in a small remnant of 'pīpal-leaf' motif on a fragment of base, part of the *adhiṣṭhāna*. Photos (Courtesy: Amar Reddy) show the inner side of south porch pillars (Fig.14), cropped and enlarged view (Fig.15) and bottom right motif (Fig.16).

Both the outer side views of south porch pillars (Figs.17 & 18) clearly show newer pillar has no 'pīpal-leaf' motif. Older fragments of the porch pillars which are in continuation of the *adhiṣṭhāna* bear the 'pīpal-leaf' motif. It is not seen on the later massive pillars.

The presence of the motif on part of the older *adhiṣṭhāna* provides strong physical evidence that the *maṇḍovara* and porches were a later addition.



Fig.13



Fig.14



Fig.15

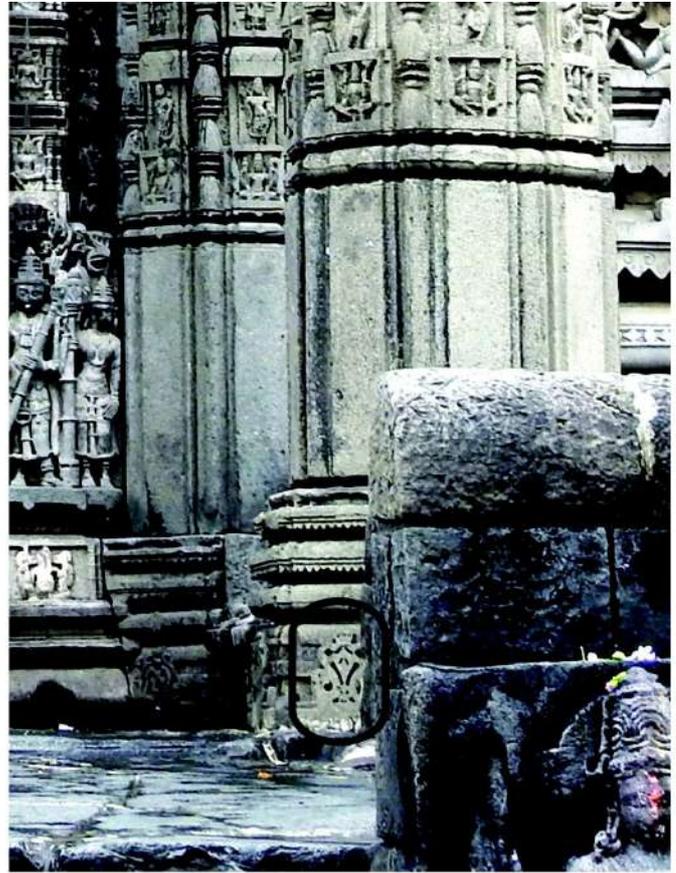


Fig.16



Fig.17



Fig.18

## Bhuleśvara Śivālaya (near Yāvat)

The Bhuleśvara Śivālaya, atop one of the higher east-west spurs of Sahyādris (western Ghats) is located off Pune-Solapur highway near Yāvat. The plan (from drawings prepared by the Archaeological Survey Party of Western India during the months November 1891 to April 1892, Henry Cousens) shows the central Śiva shrine comprising of sanctum, vestibule and hall (Fig.19).

At Bhuleśvara, photo of the free-standing SE pillar in the *maṇḍapa* (Fig.20) as well as the north pilaster in the *antarāla* (Fig.21) clearly show the 'pīpal-leaf' motif.

By contrast, the asymmetric placement of the pillars forming the colonnade (Fig.22), are distinctly different style and do not bear the 'pīpal-leaf' motif, confirming that they are not part of the original Śiva shrine, but that they were added later.

In conclusion, the 'pīpal-leaf' motif provides a very useful way of identifying the guild of architects constructing the older parts of the three temples, namely, the Bhūmija guild. At Ambarnātha Śivālaya, Aundha Nāganātha Śivālaya and Bhuleśvara Śivālaya, absence of the motif in some parts supports the conjecture that these parts were constructed at a later date, by a later guild, one with diminished / different style.

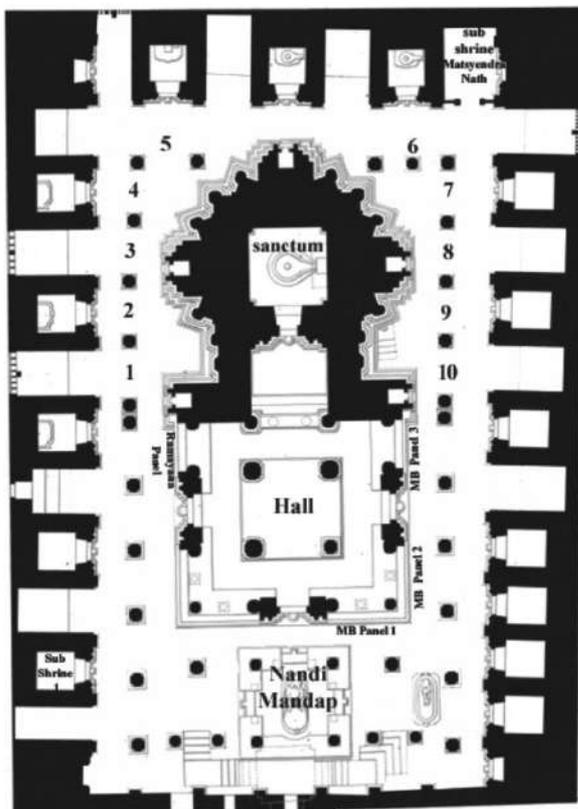


Fig.19



Fig.20

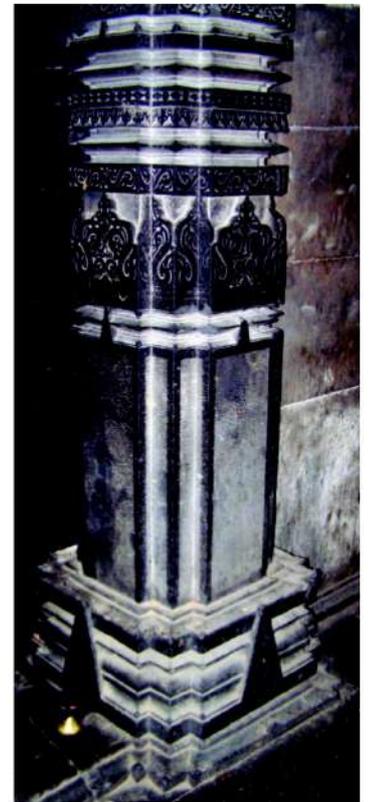


Fig.21

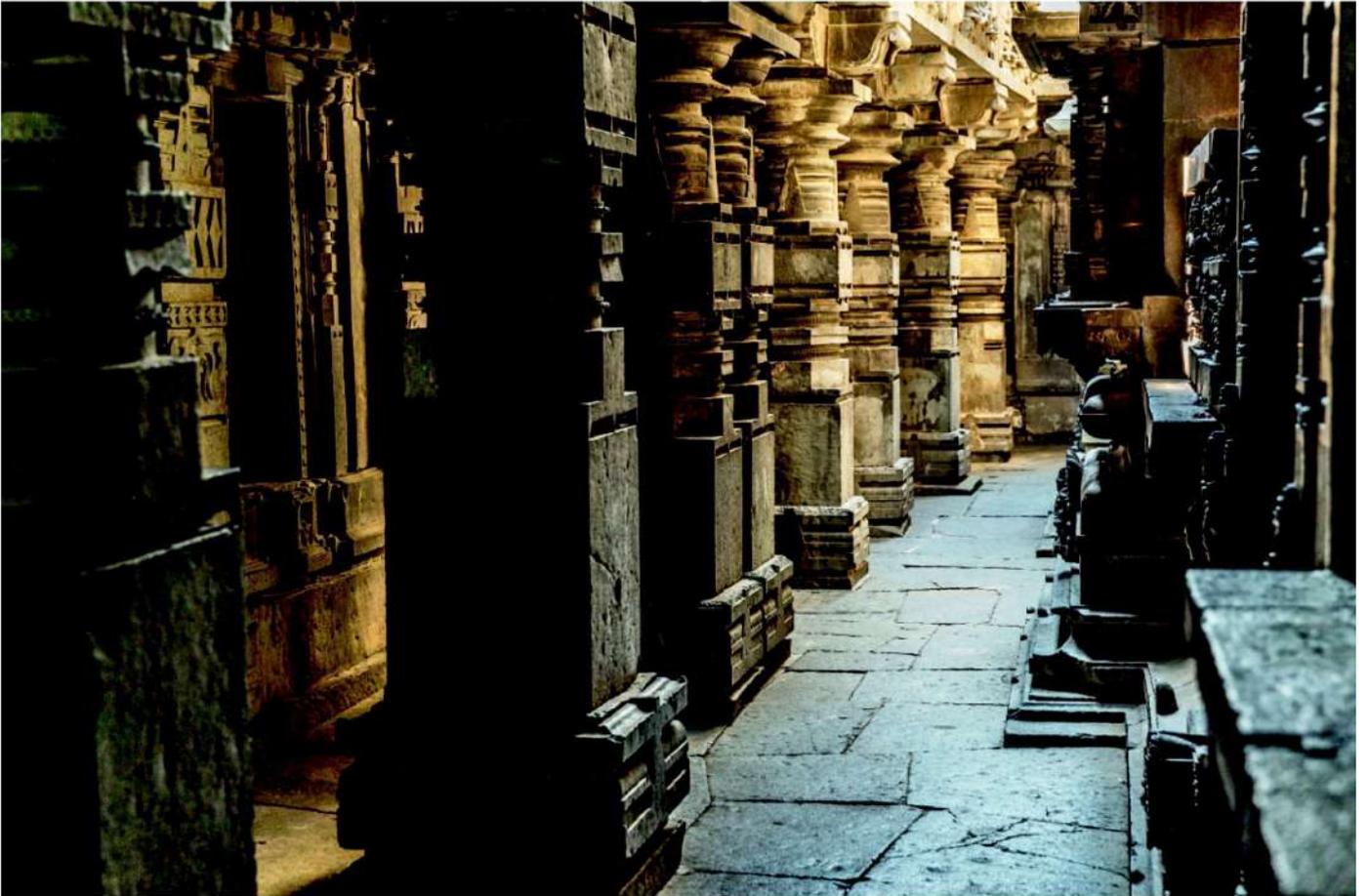


Fig.22

## References & Notes

1. Kumud Dileep Kanitkar, 'Gavaksha and Pipal-leaf Motifs : Hallmarks of Bhumija Temples', *Jñāna-Pravāha Research Journal*, Volume XXI (2017-2018), pp.49-66.
2. 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 Samarāṅgaṇasūtradhāra and the Bhojpur Line Drawings*, Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, New Delhi and Dev Publishers and Distributors, New Delhi, 2015; *The Temple Architecture of India*, John Wiley and Sons, Great Britain, 2007; *The temple in South Asia*, Editor: Adam Hardy, The British Association for South Asian Studies, The British Academy, London, 2007.
3. G.B. Deglurkar, *Temple Architecture and Sculpture of Maharashtra, Nagpur*, Nagpur Vidyapeeth Mudranalaya, 1974.
4. Kumud Kanitkar, *Ambarṇath Śivālaya: A Monograph on the Temple at Ambarṇath*", Dileep Kanitkar, Mumbai, 2013; *Ambarṇath Śivālaya : Prabandhikā : Ambarṇath Yethīla Śivamandira*, Dileep Kanitkar, Mumbai, 2014.
5. This fact has been mentioned in both English and Marathi versions of the book (p.86, pāna 98); speculating on a plausible reason for this (p.51, pāna 56).
6. *Ibid.*

## Acknowledgements

The author gratefully acknowledges permission given by ASI Mumbai Circle and the trustees of Aundha Nāganātha *devasthāna* to photograph at Ambarṇath Śivālaya, Bhuleśvara Śivālaya and Aundha Nāganātha Śivālaya, respectively. The author also wishes to express her thanks to the staff at the sites. All of them were very helpful.

Thanks are due to Amar Reddy who has provided excellent photographs of both sites and helped in many ways.