

Celestial Impact: A Cultural Narrative of Lonar Crater through Architectural Forms

विद्या वाचस्पति की
उपाधि की अपेक्षाओं की आंशिक पूर्ति में प्रस्तुत शोध प्रबंध

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CERTIFICATE

Certified that the work incorporated in the thesis entitled **“Celestial Impact: A Cultural Narrative of Lonar Crater through Architectural Forms”** submitted by **Swapna Joshi** (Reg. no. 20173567) was carried out by the candidate, under my supervision. The work presented here or part of it has not been included in any other thesis submitted previously for the award of any degree or diploma from any other University or institution.



Date: 14th October, 2023

Dr Pushkar Sohoni

(Thesis supervisor)

DECLARATION

I declare that this written submission solely represents my original ideas reflected in my own words and where others' ideas are included, I have adequately cited and referenced the original sources. I also declare that I have adhered to the principles of academic honesty, integrity and transparency and have not misrepresented or fabricated or falsified any idea/data/fact/source in my submission. I understand that violation of the above will warrant disciplinary action by the Institute and may also evoke penal action from the sources that have not been properly cited or from whom proper permission has not been taken when necessary.

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Abstract

Natural landscapes like lakes, rivers, hills, mountain ranges, valleys, or forest covers, often contain within them a sacred geography. The sacrality is result of the appropriation and comprehension of such a landscape by the people inhabiting it. Furthermore, such spaces engender comprehensive built environments. This research examines the making of a sacred landscape of a unique geographical occurrence, the Lonar crater. The geological feature is a 1.8 km wide (rim to rim) terrestrial impact crater formed in the basalt rocks of the Deccan Traps, caused by a meteorite collision during the Pleistocene Epoch. The contiguous area of the crater has about seventeen locations, comprising temples, *maṭhas* (monasteries) and *bāravas* (stepped water tanks), either as stand-alone buildings or multi-structure complexes. This extant architecture at Lonar is the primary source for understanding the medieval settlement of the site (from the eleventh through the nineteenth centuries CE), and delineates the formation and proliferation of the crater's religious identity. This research considers the built environment primarily as material culture and situates it within the larger landscape of the Lonar *tīrtha* (literally, a point of crossing over, but commonly understood as a place of pilgrimage or a sacred centre). It is an archaeological study, considering the architectural forms as artefacts of the medieval period and employs art historical perspectives to the built environment for a nuanced study of its characteristics. A historical enquiry into a landscape like Lonar with architecture as the point of departure, can be effective in understanding the *longue durée* settlement of a site. Such a site study accentuates the continuum within the form and fabric of the architectural forms and highlights the development of a regional idiom in the built environment.

Note on Transliteration

The names of historic dynasties and places, the names of temples, texts, and Marathi words have all been transliterated into the Roman script using the Library of Congress system for Marathi. For example, (यादव) Yādava, (वऱ्हाड) Varhāḍa, (मोर) Mora, (लीळाचरित्र) *Līlācaritra*, (धार) *dhāra* have been transliterated as shown. Some of the words that have been borrowed directly from Sanskrit, such as the moulding bands of temples, have used the Library of Congress system for Sanskrit. An example is the (कूटस्तंभ) *kūṭastambha*.

Modern place names, such as Buldhana, have not been romanised because the spellings are standardised in administrative documents and the district gazetteers. Also, authors' names have not been transliterated from Devanagari or the Perso-Arabic script, but standard forms in English have been used so that the bibliography is easier to follow. For example, V.V. Mirashi could have been romanised as Vā Vī Mirāṣī in keeping with the original Marathi title page for the book *Vākāṭaka nṛpati ānī tyāncā kāḷa*, but works by the same author might be separated in the bibliography. Therefore, English standard spellings for authors' names have been used. Names with Perso-Arabic roots such as Ala-uddin Khilji have been spelt with their common spellings.

Words directly used from non-English languages have been italicised, as also the titles of all published texts. The Library of Congress romanisation system for Marathi and Sanskrit is provided below.

Transliteration rules prescribed by the Library of Congress, for Marathi and Sanskrit are given below

Sanskrit and Prakrit (in Devanagari script)

When Sanskrit is written in another script, the corresponding letters in that script are transliterated according to this table.

Vowels and Dipthongs (see Note 1)

अ	a	ऋ	ṛ
आ	ā	ॠ	ṝ
इ	i	ए	e
ई	ī	ऐ	ai
उ	u	ओ	o
ऊ	ū	औ	au
ऋ	ṛ		

Consonants (see Note 2)

Gutturals	Palatals	Cerebrals	Dentals
क ka	च ca	ट ṭa	त ta
ख kha	छ cha	ठ ṭha	थ tha
ग ga	ज ja	ड ḍa	द da
घ gha	झ jha	ढ ḍha	ध dha
ङ ṅa	ञ ña	ण ṇa	न na
Labials	Semivowels	Sibilants	Aspirate
प pa	य ya	श śa	ह ha
फ pha	र ra	ष ṣa	
ब ba	ल la	स sa	
भ bha	ळ ḷa		
म ma	व va		

Anusvāra (see Note 3)

ं ṁ

Anunāsika

ँ ṃ

Upadhmāñīya

ॡ ḥ

Visarga

ः ḥ

Avagraha (see Note 4)

ˆ ' (apostrophe)

Jihvāmūliya

) (ḥ

Marathi

Vowels and Diphthongs (see Note 1)

Traditional Style	New style	Romanization
अ	अ	a
आ	आ	ā
इ	अि	i
ई	अी	ī
उ	अु	u
ऊ	अू	ū
ऋ	अृ	r̥
ॠ	अृ	r̄
ऌ		l̥
ॡ	अे	e
ए	अै	ê
ऐ	अै	ai
ओ	ओ	o
औ	औ	ô
औ	औ	au

Consonants (see Note 2)

Gutturals		Palatals		Cerebrals		Dentals	
क	ka	च	ca	ट	ṭa	त	ta
ख	kha	छ	cha	ठ	ṭha	थ	tha
ग	ga	ज	ja	ड	ḍa	द	da
घ	gha	झ	jha	ढ	ḍha	ध	dha
ङ	ṅa	ञ	ña	ण	ṇa	न	na
Labials		Semivowels		Sibilants		Aspirate	
प	pa	य	ya	श	śa	ह	ha
फ	pha	र	ra	ष	sha		
ब	ba	ल	la	स	sa		
भ	bha	ळ	ḷa				
म	ma	व	va				

Anusvāra (see Note 3)

ं

Visarga

ः

ḥ

Avagraha (see Note 4)

ः

' (apostrophe)

Notes for Sanskrit

1. Only the vowel forms that appear at the beginning of a syllable are listed; the forms used for vowels following a consonant can be found in grammars; no distinction between the two is made in transliteration.
2. The vowel a is implicit after all consonants and consonant clusters and is supplied in transliteration, with the following exceptions:
 - a) when another vowel is indicated by its appropriate sign; and
 - b) when the absence of any vowel is indicated by the subscript sign (◌◌) called halanta or virāma.
3. Exception: Anusvāra is transliterated by:
 - a) ṁ before gutturals,
 - b) ñ before palatals,
 - c) ṇ before cerebrals,
 - d) n before dentals, and
 - e) m before labials.
4. When doubled, avagraha is transliterated by two apostrophes (' ').

Notes for Marathi

1. Only the vowel forms that appear at the beginning of a syllable are listed; the forms used for vowels following a consonant can be found in grammars; no distinction between the two is made in transliteration.
2. The vowel a is implicit after all consonants and consonant clusters and is supplied in transliteration, with the following exceptions:
 - a) when another vowel is indicated by its appropriate sign; and
 - b) when the absence of any vowel is indicated by the subscript sign (◌◌) called halanta or virāma.
3. Exception: Anusvāra is transliterated by:
 - a) ṁ before gutturals,
 - b) ñ before palatals,
 - c) ṇ before cerebrals,
 - d) n before dentals, and
 - e) m before labials.In other circumstances it is transliterated by a tilde (~) over the vowel.
4. When doubled, avagraha is transliterated by two apostrophes (' ').

Chapter 1

Introduction and Overview

1.1 Integrated Environment: Natural and Man-made Landscape at the Lonar Crater

Sacred spaces are often associated with natural landscapes such as lakes and rivers, hills and mountain ranges, valleys and forest covers, among other landscapes. A comprehensive built environment, in the form of temples, monasteries, and water tanks, which interacts and integrates with the natural places, is constructed within these sacred spaces. This dissertation examines the religious architecture situated within a unique geological occurrence – the terrestrial impact crater of Lonar. It is a site-contextualized study of the built environment, which is embedded within the natural landscape of the crater. The central entity of this site, Lonar crater, is a complex phenomenon. The physical landscape is made up of different geographical features and has undergone several changes over the centuries. The existence of the meteorite crater has fuelled the creation and sustenance of the sacred landscape. Furthermore, these natural and sacred factors have led to the development of a comprehensive and continuously evolving built environment. The stories of the formation of the crater have translated into both tangible and intangible forms. The landscape is fundamental for the pilgrimage circuit that is specifically centred around the crater, as well as an essential central theme in oral narratives that emphasise the crater's existence. This significance is further manifested through tangible figural sculptures on temples. Thus, the crater is a palimpsest of landscapes of different types: religious, architectural, political, natural. Hence the term, Lonar crater landscape has been used in the present research, which adheres to the different identities that Lonar comprises. This landscape is vast, where change is the only constant. Two major celestial impacts shape the history of Lonar: one is the meteorite impact, and the other is the religious impact of Viṣṇu killing the demon Lavaṇāsūra. To put it simply, both these led to the creation of the crater, that etched it in history, but the process is convoluted.

In order to delve into the dynamics of the crater, this study builds on a question: how, when, and why does a place transform into a *tīrtha*? This draws from the original question, “How, when, and why did the Jageshwar Valley develop into a great *tīrtha* (sacred centre)?” put forth by Nachiket Chanchani through his study on the temples of Jageshwar Valley in Himachal Pradesh.¹ Chanchani posits this question specifically with regard to the temples in the Himalayan valley. The present research extends this question to subsume any sacred environment superimposed upon a place or a physical entity. The context of the Lonar crater as a place exhibiting a nature-culture continuum provides us with a key idea for exploring the formation of the sacred landscape from the vantage of its architectural forms.²

The extant architecture of Lonar is the primary source, the only surviving material evidence, for understanding the *longue-durée* medieval settlement of the site. The medieval period at Lonar is characterised by the proliferation of the religious landscape. This is evident from the crater being a locus of continuous temple building activity from the eleventh through the nineteenth centuries CE, when religious architecture was created, appropriated, and re-built for multiple religious affiliations, in different political scenarios, and varied patronage.

A necessary deviation here would be to understand our position in denoting the period of material evidence in Lonar as the medieval period. The subject of periodisation has been a constant question of study and debate in the academic realm of Indian history. The tripartite division of historical periods as ancient, medieval and modern, often implicitly linked to religious and political conditions, is certainly

¹ In this article Nachiket Chanchani discusses the Jageshwar valley in Himachal Pradesh in order to understand the sustained practices, architectural and religious, that prevailed in the valley from tenth century CE onwards, as evinced through the numerous lithic edifices at the site. Here, the word *tīrtha* is translated as meaning a sacred centre. In the sheer absence of epigraphical evidence, the built environment of the Jageshwar valley becomes a vital source to understand the cultural narrative of the landscape. This study informs the present research not only in terms of framing the central question but also aids in formulating the larger narratives. The emphasis on material evidence to study the evolution of a sacred centre befits as a conceptual framework for the present study. For more information see, Nachiket Chanchani, “The Jageshwar Valley, Where Death Is Conquered,” *Archives of Asian Art* 63, No. 2 (2013):133-154.

² The word continuum has been used specifically to denote a reciprocal relationship between the natural and cultural factors at Lonar which keeps it going, evolving and changing over time.

problematic.³ Further, scholars have also proposed periodic labels like early medieval, late medieval and early modern, which are formulated taking into consideration state formation processes, and political and economic structures.⁴ Doing away with the period labels is neither an easy task nor are alternatives available to denote broader historical periods. In this light, the time-frame that concerns the present study, from the tenth century CE upto nineteenth century CE conforms a commonly accepted understanding of the medieval period. Sub phases like early medieval, late medieval and early modern, often used in historic studies also would find place in this time frame. With a view to denote a broad historic period to help the reader engage with the study, this study prefers to stick with the term ‘medieval period’ for this period. As far as possible, specific dates or centuries for concerned historical events are used.

There are about thirty-four structures in the form of stand-alone buildings and complexes that comprise temples, *maṭhas*, and *bāravas*, situated within the contiguous area of the Lonar crater. This research examines Lonar through these religious structures by assessing their locations, architectural language, and inter- and intra-site connections between the constructions. More than the aesthetic merit, the presence of the structures at specific locations in the crater remains germane to the study. Before delving into the material culture of the crater, it is necessary to know the origins, history, and historiography of the crater in the realm of natural sciences and mythology. They will provide the geophysical and cultural context to understand the architecture.

1.2 Origin of the Lonar Crater: Scientific Theories and Mythical Stories

Scientific Theories of Origin of the Lonar Crater

The Lonar crater (N 19°58'35" and E 76°30'30") is a 1.8 kilometre wide (rim to rim) and 135 metre deep, terrestrial impact crater, formed in the basalt rocks of the Deccan Traps (**Fig. 1.1**). It is one of the five hypervelocity meteoritic impact craters where the

³ Daud Ali, “The Historiography of the Medieval in South Asia,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 22, no. 1 (2012): 7–12.

⁴ B.D. Chattopadhyaya, *The Making of Early Medieval India*, 2nd ed. (Oxford University Press, 2012), 53–96.

target rocks are basalt.⁵ One of the youngest and the best-preserved impact structures, it is situated in the modern Buldhana district in Maharashtra state, surrounded by an eponymous village settlement. Lonar crater has the third largest saltwater lake in the world and it is a notified national geo-heritage monument.⁶ Few studies have argued that Ambar Lake which is to the north of Lonar lake was also created during the collision event.⁷ However, there is no consensus on it yet among scholars. Recent studies also shed light on the possibility of yet another smaller depression caused by the meteor impact. This is called the Gagan Lake which is situated to the north-west of the Lonar lake.⁸

Scholars in the natural sciences have worked on various aspects of Lonar, geological phenomenon, alkaline properties, flora and fauna, and several other facets.⁹ Through methods like fission track dating and thermoluminescence dating, the formation age of the crater is identified to be in the Pleistocene epoch, that is, about 52,000 years ago before present.¹⁰ The crater is said to have formed because a meteorite collided with the earth's surface at an estimated velocity of eighteen kilometres per second, which created a near-circular depression at the spot and

⁵ K. Fredrickson, A. Dube, D.J. Milton, M.S. Balasundram, "Lonar lake, India: An impact crater in basalt," *Science* 180, 4088 (1973): 862-864.

⁶ "Geological Survey of India (GSI), Ministry of Mines, Government of India - Geo Tourism - Home", accessed 3 April 2024, https://web.archive.org/web/20170712055947/http://www.portal.gsi.gov.in/portal/page?_pageid=127,529542&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL.

⁷ S. Master, "Evidence for an Impact Origin of the Ambar Lake Structure: A Smaller Companion Crater to the Lonar Impact Crater, Maharashtra, India," *Meteoritics and Planetary Science Supplement* 34 (1 July 1999): A78.

⁸ Atul Jethe, "A Geomorphic Evidence for an Impact Origin of the Gagan Crater: A Smaller Companion Crater to the Ambar and Lonar Impact Crater of Maharashtra, India," *International Journal of Food Science and Nutrition* 2 (10 May 2012): 124-32, <https://doi.org/10.28933/ijfnr>.

⁹ D. Sengupta, N. Bhandari and S. Watanabe. "Formation Age of Lonar Meteor Crater, India". *Revista de Fisica Aplicada e Instrumentacao* 12, No. 1 (1997): 1-2; Goro Komatsu et al., "Drainage systems of Lonar Crater, India: Contributions to Lonar Lake hydrology and Crater Degradation," *Planetary and Space Science* 95 (2013): 45-55; Sushma Prasad et al., "Prolonged monsoon droughts and links to Indo-Pacific Warm Pool: A Holocene Record from Lonar Lake, Central India," *Earth and Planetary Science Letters* 391 (2014): 171-182; R.F. Fudali et al., "Morphology of Lonar Crater, India: Comparisons and Implications," *The moon and the planets*, no. 23 (1980): 493-515.

¹⁰ D. Sengupta and N. Bhandari, "Formation Age of the Lonar Crater," 1-2.

overthrew a huge number of rocks.¹¹ This dispersal forms the ejecta blanket of the crater, which encircles a certain distance along the periphery of the depression.¹² The rim of the crater rises approximately twenty to thirty metres above the central depression of the crater. This depression contains a lake which is highly saline and alkaline at the same time. In the year 2020, owing to the higher salinity and presence of biomass of halophilic archaea microbes, this lake water had turned pink instead of the bluish-green colour that normally characterises it.¹³

The slope of the crater, from the rim to the saltwater lake, is a forest reserve area with a unique recorded biodiversity of 237 plant species, 57 bird species and an equally exciting variety of reptiles, mammals, snakes, bats and colourful butterflies.¹⁴ The geomorphology and the unique hydrology of the crater have also been a subject of study to understand other planetary bodies, especially Mars.¹⁵ Prior to the knowledge of the Lonar crater being the result of a meteorite impact, it was misunderstood as the outcome of a volcanic eruption, especially because the crater is in the volcanic basalt plateau.¹⁶ In the late twentieth century CE, when direct evidence of shocked materials such as maskelynite and the presence of impact glass was found at Lonar, the theory of its creation due to a meteorite impact was well-received among scholars.¹⁷

¹¹ D.H. Tambekar, A.L. Pawar and M.N. Dudhane, “Lonar lake Water: Past and Present,” *Nature Environment and Pollution Technology* 9, no. 2 (2010): 217.

¹² The ejecta blanket consists of various basalt fragments and the formation is undulating. A.C. Maloof has studied the extent of the ejecta blanket of the crater. It is estimated to be spread up to 1340 metre from the rim of the crater. For more information on the extent and characteristics of the ejecta blanket, refer to A.C. Maloof et al., “Geology of the Lonar crater, India,” *Geological Society of India* 122, 1-2 (2010): 112-114.

¹³ Press Trust of India, “Why did Lonar Lake Turn Pink? Experts say ‘Haloarchaea’ Microbes Could be the Reason,” *The Economic Times*, July 22, 2020, <https://tinyurl.com/bde2r955>.

¹⁴ Mohan Jha, “A Preliminary Study of Ecosystems and Biodiversity in Lonar Crater,” *The Indian Forester* no. 129 (2003); Raju D. Jadhav and Harishchandra B. Mali, “Scenario behind the Water Color Changed from Green to Pink/Red of Lonar Crater Lake, Maharashtra, India,” *International Journal of Advance Research, Ideas and Innovations in Technology* 6, no. 4 (2020): 643–50.

¹⁵ Goro Komatsu et al., “Drainage systems of Lonar crater,” 45.

¹⁶ Saranya R. Chandran et al., “A compendium of the best-preserved terrestrial hypervelocity impact crater in a basaltic terrain: the Lonar, India,” *Earth Science Reviews* (2023), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.earscirev.2023.104508>.

¹⁷ R.F. Fudali et al., “Morphology of Lonar crater, India: comparisons and implications,” 508-513.

Noteworthy geographical features of the crater, which are especially important for the present research, are the freshwater springs that flow from the hill slopes that surround the saltwater lake of the crater. The main perennial feeder stream into the crater lake is known as the Dhāra Tīrtha (also locally known as the Gāyamukha Tīrtha), which flows from the north-eastern side of the crater. Another perennial spring, known as Sitā Nahāṇi (or Sitā Nhānī), drains into the lake about fifty metres further below the Dhāra Tīrtha from the same north-eastern incision. Streams also flow near the Pāpahareśvara temple and the Rāmagayā temple, but these streams are active only during the monsoon season or sometimes after the monsoons if there has been substantial rainfall. In the year 2022, five active streams were noted feeding into the saltwater lake, leading to a substantial increase in the water level of the lake (**Fig. 1.2 and Fig. 1.3**).

Mythical Stories of Origin of the Lonar Crater

The Lonar crater, locally also known as the Loṇāra *sarovara*, is regarded as Viṣṇugayā, the sacred place where Viṣṇu resides after he vanquished the notorious demon Lavaṇāsūra and reinstated peace and harmony. This is a compelling origin myth, a story that appropriated the geological occurrence and existence of the crater as an outcome of cosmic creation. Through this mythical narrative, not only is the formation of the crater explained, but also incorporates all the other geographical features of the area. A detailed version of this story comes from the *Loṇāra Māhātmya*, (also known as the *Virajakṣetra Māhātmya*), a *sthala māhātmya* which is datable to the nineteenth century CE based on philology. The text is in the Marathi language and Devanāgarī script, purportedly based on a Sanskrit text by the same name, attributed to one Saccidāśrama Svāmī who resided in Lonar through the middle of the nineteenth century CE.¹⁸ For instance, Y.M. Kale suggested that the Marathi text is a copy of the Sanskrit text.¹⁹ The Sanskrit text of this *sthala māhātmya* could not be located, and hence, the text from the Marathi document has been used. It is said that the Sanskrit text of *Loṇāra Māhātmya* was a part of the *Skanda Purāṇa*,

¹⁸ “*Virajakṣetra Mahātmya urfa Loṇāra Mahātmya*,” (Pune: Dattaprasarak Publications, Tryambak Narayana Pande, 1892).

¹⁹ Y.M. Kale’s writings are from the early twentieth century, just a few decades removed from Saccidāśrama Svāmī’s residence in Lonar, making it a reliable source of information for the existence of versions of the *māhātmya*. For reference, Yadava Madhava Kale, *Loṇāra Varṇana* (Satara: Sahastrakara Press, 1903).

however, it has not been found in any of the chapters of any *khaṇḍa* of the *Purāṇa*. A few scholars have also referred to a separate Sanskrit manuscript, but any such text was not found in the course of the study.²⁰



Fig. 1.1: Satellite imagery of the Lonar crater

²⁰ Chetankumar Vyas, *World Heritage-World Famous Lonar: A Historical Study* (Unpublished PhD diss., Marathwada University, 2008).



Fig. 1.2: View of the Lonar crater in 2023 from the south side of the crater, when the water of the saltwater lake had exponentially increased



Fig. 1.3: View of the Lonar crater in 2017-18, from the shore of the salt water lake when the lake water has reduced and the forest slopes are dry

1.3 Written Records about Lonar

The nineteenth century CE *sthala mātmya*, discussed in the preceding section, is the latest mythological record of the Lonar crater. Otherwise, historic references to Lonar in epigraphical records and literary texts are available from the twelfth century CE.

The earliest textual reference is an inscription dating to 1146 CE, presently found in the Bhadranāga temple at Bhadravati (ancient Bhāndaka). The inscription mentions the restoration of this temple and installation of the icon of Nārāyaṇa.²¹ Importantly, this installation was carried out in consultation with, and under the guidance of, ‘*adhiṣṭhāte*’ Gopinath Pandit of Lonar-Mehkar.²² This reference to Lonar in the inscription hints at vital factors that can aid in understanding the contemporary religious background at Lonar. Foremost, it substantiates that Lonar was a well-established Vaiṣṇava centre at least from the tenth century CE onwards. The sacrality of Lonar was authoritatively widespread, as religious heads here were consulted before conducting acts like installation or consecration of temples. This also confirms the claim of the Puranic sources about the identity of Lonar as Viṣṇugayā. Another important aspect of this inscription is that the site had acquired the name Lonar early in history and thus was associated with the production of salt.²³ The conjoined mention of Lonar-Mehkar implies that both these towns, though discrete today, held a common identity as a significant Vaiṣṇava cluster.

Chronologically, the next textual references that mention Lonar are from the Mahānubhāva literature written in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries CE. These texts provide the only strong literary evidence about the patronage and sectarian affiliations of the built heritage. The *Līlācaritra* mentions Lonar as a place of pilgrimage that should be visited by people to cleanse any impurities. The *līlās* also describe Cakradhara Svāmī’s (the founder of the Mahānubhāva *sampradāya*) visit to Lonar, his stay near Daityasūdana temple, the *tīrthayātrā* of Boṇebāi (a disciple of Cakradhara Svāmī) and most importantly, his meeting with the Yādava King Kṛṣṇadeva

²¹ S.G. Tulpule ed., *Prācina Marāṭhi Koriva Lekha* (Pune: Pune University Press, 1963), 37-42.

²² Mehkar is a town in the Buldhana district of Maharashtra state, situated at a distance of only fifteen kilometres from Lonar. For the reference of the inscription, See, Tulpule ed., *Prācina Marāṭhi Koriva Lekha*, 42.

²³ Lonar comes from the words ‘*loṇa*’ or ‘*lavaṇa*’, which means salt. See footnote 10 in Chapter 4.

(Kānhardeva) (1247-1261 CE).²⁴ This is the only instance where Cakradhara is described meeting any Yādava ruler. The text further tells us that temples like Kumāreśvara and Kamaḷajā were restored with the donation received from the king, suggesting that the structures mentioned in the *Līlācaritra* existed at least about fifty years before this incident took place. Another Mahānubhāva text, the *Sthānapothī*, also describes several locations in Lonar, along with the orientation and approach to many of the structures. In addition to the temples from *Līlācaritra*, important references from the *Sthānapothī* are regarding a fortification wall and three entrances to Lonar town; they also mention that the residence of the person in charge of the Dhāra Tīrtha was located close to the site. Kavī Narendra's *Rukmiṇī Svayamvara*, a *kāvya* composed towards the end of the thirteenth century CE, compared the reduced flow of the *dhāra* stream at Lonar during the summer season as an analogy to the situation of Rukmiṇī.²⁵ The recurrence of the *dhāra* being a perennial stream, much reduced during the summers, has been consistent since at least the thirteenth century CE. Abul Fazl's *Ain-i-Akbari*, a Mughal sixteenth-century CE document provides information on salt production and soap manufacturing in Lonar. It also gives a brief account of Lonar as a *tīrtha* and people's perceptions about it.²⁶

Several inscriptions reported from Lonar, all badly eroded and fragmentary, can be used to derive cursory information. The most important four inscriptions are: one on a slab kept in the Tripuruṣācā Maṭha in the Daityasūdāna temple complex, second on a pillar fragment in the Pāpahareśvara temple complex, third on a *kakṣāsana* fragment in the remains of the Yajñeśvara temple complex, and the last one on the pilaster of the *mukhamanḍapa* of the Rāmagayā temple. Previously, attempts were made by scholars like Shripad Chitale and Sudhakar Bugdane to decipher the inscriptions, but their present condition does not allow a re-reading.²⁷ Apart from these, there are numerous

²⁴ For the particular *līlā* 39 that describes this meeting between Cakradhara and the Yādava king, See S.G. Tulpule ed., *Līlācaritra Ekāṅka*, (Suvichar Prakashan mandal, 1964), 22-23, 63. For the regnal years of Yādava King Kṛṣṇadeva, refer to, R.S. Sharma and K.M. Shrimali eds., *Comprehensive history of India Volume four Part 1 (AD 985-1206)* (New Delhi: People's Publishing house, 1957), 91.

²⁵ V.B. Kolte ed., *Kavī Narendrakṛt Rukmiṇī Svayamvara* (Malkapur (Varhad): Arun Prakashan, 1940), 13-14, 59.

²⁶ Abul Fazl Allami, *The Ain-i-Akbari Volume II*. trans. Colonel H.S. Jarret (Calcutta: The Asiatic Society of Bengal 1891), 287-88.

²⁷ Sudhakar Bugdane, *Lonara Darśana* (Lonar: Shyamala Sudhakar Bugdane, fifth edition, 2014), 48.

one-line inscriptions on the paving and thresholds, of the Dhāra Tīrtha temple complex and Rāmagayā temple, respectively (**Fig. A.7**).²⁸ Accompanied by relief sketches of human figures, these could be donatory or votive inscriptions recording the patronage given to these temples. Paleographically, most inscriptions can be dated to the twelfth or thirteenth centuries CE, and are written in the Devanagari script and early Marathi language. The built environment of Lonar clearly received consistent patronage and the need to record it was felt by the patrons is evident from the epigraphical record.

1.4 Previous Studies

Through the nineteenth century CE, the Lonar crater appears in several travel accounts and reports of the Geological Survey of India. These accounts are focused on the Deccan basaltic plateau and its formations, in which Lonar is often mentioned as a unique geographical phenomenon. One of the earliest descriptions of Lonar has been provided in 1823 CE by Cornet J.E. Alexander, who described the saltwater lake and the wilderness of the crater area as a probable volcanic eruption, during his travels through the “wooded district of Berar.”²⁹ A.B. Orlebar’s article published in 1839 CE was about the geography around the lake, the ravines and the water flows, and observations of the trap rock, but he made only a passing reference to the probable meteoric impact as the reason behind creation of the crater.³⁰ John G. Malcolmson also referenced Lonar in his essay on the understanding of the Deccan basaltic rock and its characteristics in 1840.³¹ A descriptive reference of the lake comes from the account of W.H. Bradley. His account is significant for observations about the salt extraction and utilisation process at Lonar in the mid-nineteenth century CE.³²

The administrative report by the Hyderabad Resident Charles B. Saunders for 1869-70 is also interesting as it provides cursory details of the trade, geology and

²⁸ Refer to Appendix for details of these inscriptions.

²⁹ J.E. Alexander, “Notice in regard to the Saline Lake of Loonar, situated in Berar, East Indies, in Lat. 19° 10’ N., and Long. 75° 3’ E.,” *The Edinburgh Philosophical Journal*, XI (1824): 308-11.

³⁰ A.B. Orlebar, “Note on the Lake Loonar,” *Transactions of the Bombay Geographical Society*, 2 (1839): 35.

³¹ John G. Malcolmson, “On the fossils of the Eastern Portion of the Great Basaltic district of India,” *Transactions of the Geological Society of London V -second series* (1840): 537-575.

³² W.H. Bradley, ‘Notice of a Native Carbonate of Soda Found in the Territory of the Nizam, India’, *American Journal of Pharmacy* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia College of Pharmacy and Science., 1853): 350–51.

archaeological remains from not only Lonar but several places within Berar.³³ In the year 1870, A.C. Lyall provided a description of the crater. He recorded the mythical story of the crater, described the visuals of the crater and the architecture in Lonar also caught his attention.

“The view of the Lonar lake is very striking. It is formed by a ridge of hills about four hundred feet high, and is perfectly circular. Its bottom is bordered by regular rings of palms, tamarinds, babul, and apple trees; and the sides are well wooded. In some places there are old temples, and ruins of other monuments; and there is an ample spring of sweet water, running from a crevice in the southern ridge, with a beautiful temple at the fountain-head.”³⁴

All these accounts may not provide substantial information regarding the architecture in Lonar but they certainly speak about the geography of the area and the settlement of Lonar through the nineteenth century CE. They also highlighted the historic routes taken by British officers connecting north India with the Deccan, often traversed through the hilly regions of Buldhana.

The first important account pertaining to the material culture at Lonar came from the work of Major Robert Gill in the late nineteenth century CE in which he wrote about temples and other remains in Lonar along with the architectural remains at Mehkar, Kothali, Sirpur, Satgaon and Amdapur.³⁵ A very interesting fact about Lonar from his report is that the Daityasūdāna temple was partially buried until twenty years before his visit, and had been recently unearthed revealing the sculptures on the temple walls. Further, he also mentioned the sale of commodities procured from the Lonar crater: ‘dalla’(salt), ‘bhuski’(earth) and ‘papri’(crystallized deposit). All of these goods were mostly collected from the edges of the crater, while salt was

³³ Charles B. Saunders, *Administration Report by the Resident at Hyderabad Including a report on the administration of the Hyderabad assigned districts for the year 1869-70* (Hyderabad: Printed at the Residency Press, 1870), 2, 97, 175-179.

³⁴ A.C. Lyall, *Gazetteer for the Haidarabad assigned districts, commonly called Berar* (Bombay: Education Society's Press, Byculla, 1870), 169-170.

³⁵ Major Robert Gill, “Notes on Hemadpanthi temples of West Berar,” in *Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, ed. The Honorary Secretariats (Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1873), 66-72

procured from the centre of the lake.³⁶ These commodities earned a good price at the local markets.

Henry Cousens, wrote about the Daityasūdāna temple in Lonar as “the best surviving example of old medieval temples in Berar.” In total, he reported seventeen temples, dividing the description in two sections: one which consists of only the Vaiṣṇava shrine of Daityasūdāna temple, and the other in which the rest of the temples are under the category of Lonar crater temples. On the west doorway of temple no. 12 (probably the temple called Rāmagayā), Cousens reported an inscription that read ‘Vāsugī’, a mason name which is also found in an inscription from Mehkar.³⁷ However, it is unclear whether Cousens was talking of the inscription on the left door jamb of the western doorway, or the inscription on the threshold. A.V. Naik’s article has also discussed the Daityasūdāna temple as one of the best of the extant examples of the late medieval architecture in Berar.³⁸ O.P. Verma, whose work elaborated on the socio-cultural and political career of the Yādava dynasty, classified the Daityasūdāna temple in Lonar as a Yādava monument, comparing it with other contemporary temple structures built during the Yādava suzerainty.³⁹ G.B. Deglurkar mentioned Lonar as an important complex of temples, many of them concentrated around the crater, but noted that the most ornate and perhaps the earliest temple was the Daityasūdāna.⁴⁰

R.C. Agrawal in *Archaeological Remains of Western India* gave a historical timeline of Lonar, from the early historical remains of the Sātavāhana dynasty to the late medieval period, as evinced through surface exploration. No other such study of the archaeological record of Lonar has been undertaken. Agrawal studied the Buldhana district and covered all those monuments, sculptures and ancient sites that had not been previously studied. Agrawal approached the study with an aim that, “The study of these antiquarian remains has provided for first time the chronology of

³⁶ Major Robert Gill, “Notes on Hemadpanthi temples of West Berar,” 69.

³⁷ Henry Cousens, *Medieval Temple of the Dakhan*. Archaeological Survey of India, New Imperial series, volume number 68, (Calcutta: Central Publication Branch, 1998), 72.

³⁸ A.V. Naik, “Structural Architecture of the Deccan,” in *New Indian Antiquary*, eds. S. M. Katre and P. K. Gode, IX, nos.7-12 (Bombay: Karnatak Publishing House, 1947), 187-329.

³⁹ Verma Omkar Prasad, *Yādavas and their times* (Nagpur: Vidarbha Samshodhan Mandal, 1970), 347-48.

⁴⁰ G.B. Deglurkar, *Temple Architecture and Sculpture of Maharashtra* (Pune: Aparant, 2019), 161-163.

the antiquarian vestiges in Buldhana district and has also brought to light pre-Shivaji Maratha remains hitherto unknown.”⁴¹ His book was the first work to document all temples in Lonar, provided the ground plans of some of the temples, and also discussed the icons and decorative elements in the temples.⁴² Vaishali Welankar’s iconographic study to understand the sectarian trends and changing patterns in Vaiṣṇavism upto fourteenth century CE studied the various icons of Viṣṇu within the Daityasūdāna temple.⁴³ Rhutvij Apte explored the sacred geography of Lonar which attempts to look at the landscape and the sanctity attributed to the geographical phenomenon, mythological explanations to it, literary evidences of the place and archaeological evidences in the form of temples and sculptural imagery.⁴⁴ Among other scholarship on Lonar, it is important to note the contributions of Y.M. Kale, Prakashchandra Vyas, Sudhakar Bugdane, Shripad Chitale, Suresh Mapari and Chetankumar Vyas, who have all collated information on geography, mythology, history and archaeology of Lonar.⁴⁵

Critical Assessment of Sources

The current status of research areas pertaining to Lonar is skewed towards natural sciences which have extensively looked at the antiquity of the crater, geology, , lake water alkalinity and salinity, flora and fauna in the region around the crater, drainage systems, and hydrology of the crater. They construct an elaborate picture of the formation of the lake and its evolution as a natural occurrence from the Pleistocene epoch to the present times. However, in contrast to this, there are fewer studies about the historical characteristics of the crater, the religious landscape, and the built environment. The intention of many of these studies is to revive the mythological and

⁴¹ R.C. Agrawal, *Archaeological Remains in Western India* (New Delhi: Agam Kala Prakashan, 1989), 46-48.

⁴² Agrawal, 47-49.

⁴³ Vaishali Welankar, *Vaiṣṇavism*, two volumes, (New Delhi: Agam Kala Prakasan, 2003).

⁴⁴ Rhutvij Apte, “Sacred Geography of Kṣetra Viraja (Lonar), Buldhana, Maharashtra,” (Unpublished Masters diss., Deccan College Post Graduate and Research Institute, 2016).

⁴⁵ Kale, *Loṇāra Varṇana*; Prakashchandra Vyas. *Sarvāṅga Paricaya: Jagaprasiddha Vivara Loṇāra*, (Latur: Sanskruti Prakashan, 2000); Sudhakar Bugdane, *Lonar: The Unique Indian Meteorite Crater in Basaltic Rock (2nd Edition)*, (Buldana: Mrs. Shamal Sudhakar Bugdane, 2011); Chetankumar Vyas, “World Heritage-World Famous Lonar: A Historical Study,” (Unpublished PhD diss., Marathwada University, 2008); Suresh Mapari, *Aitihāsika Loṇāra prācīna te ādhunika* (Amravati: We are Publication, 2021).

religious importance of Lonar. A larger corpus of previous studies solely discusses the Daityasūdāna temple, eliminating all other structures from the possibility of being indices of the cultural historical landscape of Lonar.

The processes of additions, dilapidation of structures, and the constantly changing religious landscape has not been discussed through previous studies pertaining to the site. Śaiva, Śākta, Jaina, Nātha, and Mahānubhāva religious traditions are represented in the architectural productions of Lonar, but these have previously not been discussed at great length.

1.5 Research Problem

While expounding upon the research problem that provides the necessary framework for the present research, certain larger questions pertaining to the architectural studies of Maharashtra deserve a refurbished treatment. The scholarly works pertaining to temple architecture in this region have mostly been spatially restricted to the present-day administrative boundaries of the Maharashtra state. Previous studies carried out by scholars like Henry Cousens, A.V. Naik, G.B. Deglurkar, A.P. Jamkhedkar, Prabhakar Deo, among a few others, are excellent in providing inventories of several extant structures, along with elaborate plans and elevations of individual structures, all datable between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries CE.⁴⁶ However, they focus less on the constructional processes, artistic transmissions, eclectic nature of the architectural vocabulary, and the use of architectural patterns and motifs as surface decorations. They either focus on sub-regional mapping of structures or are limited to the description of individual structures. The selection of the buildings is mostly based on the scale of the monument. The immediate cultural, physical, and social context in which the architecture was created, is missing from these studies. Furthermore, temples with plain exterior walls and crude masonry are often excluded. Gerard Foekema's work is noteworthy as he takes cognisance of temples from southern Maharashtra as being in continuum with the Cālukyan heartland of Karnataka; he also discusses the surface decoration of architectural components as integral to their built

⁴⁶ Cousens, *Medieval Temple of the Dakhan*; Naik, "Structural Architecture of the Deccan,"; Deglurkar, *Temple Architecture and Sculpture of Maharashtra*; A.P. Jamkhedkar, *Mahārāṣṭra Rājya Gazetteer -Maharashtra: Itihāsa- Prācīna Kāḷa Sthāpatya va Kalā* (Mumbai: Darshanika Vibhag, Sanskrutik Karyavibhag, Maharashtra Shasan, 2002); Prabhakar Deo. *The Temples of Marathawada, India* (Jaipur: Publication scheme, 1993).

fabric.⁴⁷ The present research does not claim to resolve all these issues, but attempts to improve upon earlier scholarship.

Another issue with previous studies is that temples are dated to before the thirteenth century CE, a time bracket ascribed to the advent of ‘foreign’ rulers. This imposition stems from one major event, the defeat of the Yādava King Rāmacandra Deva in around 1296 CE by Ala-uddin Khilji. There is a general consensus that temple construction came to a halt after this conquest. Another issue is the misnomer applied to the architecture from the Yādava era. Many of these temples are labelled ‘*hemāḍapanthī*’, after Hemāḍapanta or Hemādri, the minister of the last ruling Yādava monarchs. Any dry-stone masonry structure which does not use mortar in construction, is therefore regionally understood as a *hemāḍapanthī* temple. In addition to this, the use of bricks which is seen rampantly in the *śikharas* of many temples built in the Bhūmija mode in Maharashtra is categorised as a practice adopted from Islamic rulers. The architecture of the thirteenth through eighteenth centuries CE is considered to be missing, between the two political dynasties of that ruled in the region of modern Maharashtra - the Yādavas of Devagīrī and the Marāṭhās. Instead, the architectural evidence needs to be used to reconstruct our knowledge of the social processes, state formation, and regional histories.

These existing issues in the historiography of architecture in medieval Maharashtra require a new approach. In that light the re-building, re-construction, and appropriation of buildings at Lonar will be considered. A study of the architectural forms at Lonar will allow an analysis of the multiple layers of habitation, and a continuum in building. This will challenge the linear narratives of the development of the site and prove useful to formulate a new paradigm of architectural and settlement history in Maharashtra in general, and Lonar in particular.

1.6 Material Culture at Lonar

The study area for the present research is confined to the area in and around the Lonar crater. This is a deliberate choice for several reasons. It is rare, though not uncommon, to find diversity in the architectural production within a small region like Lonar. Yet,

⁴⁷ Gerard Foekema, *Architecture decorated with Architecture: Later Medieval Temples of Karanataka 1000-1300 AD* (India: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 2003).

there is a discernible continuity in the processes of construction, and in religious identities. Therefore, the richness of the material remains on the site is a result of the diversity of form, and continuity of practices.

The present study takes into consideration all the structures that are spatially dispersed at various locations within the Lonar crater. Thus, it comprises multiple geographical areas – the shores of the saltwater lake, the forest cover surrounding the lake, the rim of the crater at the top of the hill slopes, and the ejecta blanket surrounding the rim (this includes the present-day village settlement around of Lonar village) (**Fig. 1.4**). The built environment is superimposed on these natural settings, which means that individual physical features like fresh water springs, hill slopes, wilderness, and the saltwater lake are either directly part of, or are closely associated with, the man-made structures. Across these geographical areas, there are eighteen locations at which structures datable through the medieval period have been built. The four groups constituting all the extant structures within Lonar are:

1. Structures in the current Lonar town (this forms part of the ejecta blanket of the crater).
2. Structures that situated along the rim of the crater.
3. Structures on hill slopes surrounding Lonar lake.
4. Structures that are situated on the circumference of the Lonar lake.

A detailed discussion on the nature of this categorisation and the structures that are a part of each category shall be dealt with in chapter 3 of this dissertation.

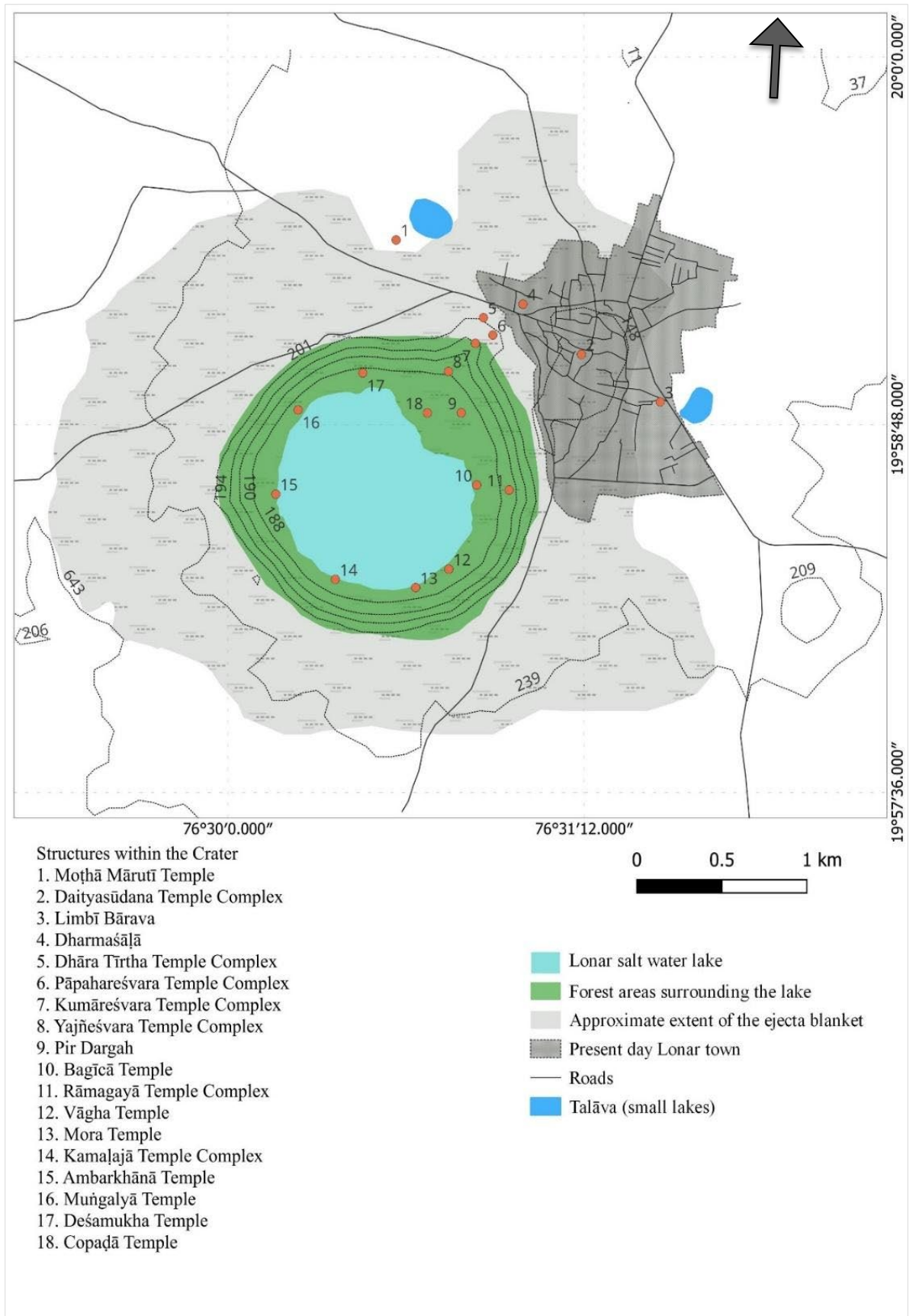


Fig. 1.4 The Lonar crater with its all-physical units, location of extant structures and adjoining present day Lonar town

1.7 Objectives and Methodology

Aims and Objectives

With reference to the above-mentioned study area, the research broadly has two objectives: to map the built environment confined to Lonar, and to contextualize the structures within the natural landscape and the religious systems of Lonar crater. The research attempts a nuanced understanding of Lonar through its religious architecture, with the objective of situating the temples in the realm of architectural history. The following goals are central to this work:

- To map the architecture of Lonar with a motive to deduce patterns in the architectural languages.
- To analyse the characteristic features of all extant architecture, including broken architectural members, and sculptural fragments – to understand the mode, style and idioms prevalent in the Lonar architecture. (Mode – transregional, style – a rather complex term in temple architectural practice, pertains to region, which adopts a mode and executes it in certain way, and idiom – something that emerges from within a style).⁴⁸
- To derive the inter and intra-site comparable elements within these structures.
- To understand the evolution of a regional idiom.
- To comprehend the religious systems of the Lonar crater through the architectural forms and figural sculptures that adorn the temples.
- To establish a comprehensive history of Lonar while situating the built environment in its architectural – artistic – social – political – religious – physical ‘contexts’.

The analysis of the stylistic features of the architectural buildings is one of the primary objectives of the study. The research argues that structures, mainly temples generally understood as ‘late temples or plain crude temples’, are central to reconstruct social processes, state formation, and regional histories, especially from the thirteenth through eighteenth centuries CE.⁴⁹ Rather than focussing on the absence

⁴⁸ The meanings and usage of the different terms related to the architectural classification have been discussed in Chapter 2 in the section that deals with the architectural history of the region containing Lonar.

⁴⁹ Cousens, *Medieval Temples of Dakhan*, 72-73.

of ornamentation, a focus on the presence of the temples is required. A detailed study of these buildings helps in understanding the architectural vocabulary, and the peculiar characteristics and forms allow an insight into the development of temple architecture.

Apart from temples, the two categories of architectural buildings that dominate the Lonar landscape are *maṭha* and *bārava*. Classic examples of such architectural programmes are found in Lonar. The *maṭha* structures in Maharashtra are not elaborate monastic establishments like the *maṭha* structures from Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh patronised by regional cultic traditions. The *maṭhas* in Maharashtra are simple in their architecture and similar plans are employed for most of these structures. The examples in Lonar, with comparanda from different regions of Maharashtra, and coupled with the religious practices that prevailed in these regions it is possible to have an overview of *maṭhas* in Maharashtra.

The material culture of the medieval period in Maharashtra has remained understudied for the constructional processes. As the architecture became unornamented over time, it was relegated to a secondary status as compared to the ornate architecture of earlier periods.

The sacred landscape of Lonar is defined by Vaiṣṇava presence through time. Starting with the Daityasūdāna temple built in twelfth century CE, Rāmāgayā temple built after sometime after fourteenth century CE, Bal Viṣṇu temple at Dhāra Tīrtha built in eighteenth century CE, several temples affiliated to Vaiṣṇava sect have been prominent in Lonar. The architecture and choice of iconography also reflect other sectarian practices that prevailed in Lonar. The *tīrtha* since its early times also had a Śaiva-Śākta influence, as evident from the Kamaḷajā and Yajñeśvara temples - two temples that can be dated to the twelfth or thirteenth centuries CE.⁵⁰

Research Methodology

In order to address the above-mentioned objectives, the present research was undertaken with the primary methodology of archaeological survey methods and art-historical inquiries for the architectural buildings. The data collection of literary texts

⁵⁰ The present structure of Kamaḷajā is datable to a later period, but material traces and some literary references provide room to believe that there used to be a temple in the middle of thirteenth century CE. The reasons for this shall surface in the ensuing chapters.

that mention Lonar, was another essential arena through which the information substantiating the material cultural record has been collated.

For the primary data collection, several field trips were conducted specifically to Lonar as well as to temples sites within the immediate vicinity of Lonar and from the neighbouring districts of Hingoli, Washim, Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar (formerly Aurangabad), Jalna and Akola, along with Nasik, Dhule, Jalgaon districts have been surveyed. Especially, a survey of the temple sites in the southern region of Buldhana district, which is to the south of the Ajanta hill ranges and forms part of the Painganga river basin (a tributary of Wardha originating in the Ajanta range) that meanders through central Buldhana district.

A comprehensive study of the architectural articulation of all the extant structures has been carried out. This includes thorough photo documentation, making ground plans of all extant structures, and a comparative analysis with other sites that were contemporary to Lonar. An attempt has been made to map all the scattered architectural and sculptural remains along with the built structures, using geo-spatial mapping techniques. This has aided in visualizing the intersection of the geophysical surroundings with the architecture.

The primary literature which has been referred for this study includes texts pertaining to the history of this region; like the *Loṇāra Māhātmya* as well as other literary texts like the *Padma Purāṇa*, *Ain-i-Akbari* and travelogues of British officers who traversed through Berar have been taken into consideration. Another principal source of primary textual material are the published inscriptions that mention Lonar, and a few others that are important in understanding the history of the region. The scanty information available from the supplementary epigraphical evidence is useful in speculating the cultic affiliations and patronage patterns of the buildings.

1.8 Plan of the dissertation

This dissertation has five chapters. The first chapter provides an overview of the Lonar crater, a physiological description of the crater and an introduction to the study area. The scope of inquiry for the present research and a summary of the main argument are also part of the chapter. Chapter 2 discusses the historical background of the medieval period, in order to understand the formation and continuities in the sacred landscape of Lonar. It broadly takes into consideration the contemporary

political, religious, and architectural trends in the region surrounding Lonar that shaped the site. Chapter 3 enumerates all the extant architecture of Lonar. It takes into consideration all the structures, that are spatially dispersed at various locations within the ambit of the Lonar crater. For the first section of the chapter the nature is individualistic, dealing with the architectural morphology of every extant structure in the Lonar landscape. Chapter 4 focusses on contextualizing the architecture of Lonar within the crater landscape and in turn situating Lonar in wider historical narratives. It attempts to unfold how the structures operate in the religious paradigm of the crater. The aim is to understand the architecture of Lonar in its entirety, and hence to uncover meanings beyond their form and fabric. Chapter 5 connects the dots among the specific conclusions derived from earlier chapters and discusses the *longue durée* settlement of Lonar.

Chapter 2

Historical Background

The corpus of inscriptional and textual sources about Lonar is fragmentary, and does not provide a lot of information to reconstruct the history of the site. However, to study the medieval architecture at Lonar, the religious and political history is essential. This chapter presents an overview of the political and religious conditions of the region under study. Further, the chapter also delineates the architectural trends prevalent in the period. Since the concerned period spans several centuries, we shall restrict the discussion of political and religious traditions to the immediate region containing Lonar. Wherever applicable, the discussion will expand to adjacent regions like Khānadeśa, Marāṭhavāḍā or larger regions.

Foremost, it is imperative to understand the administrative boundaries and geography of the region.

2.1 Geography of the Region

Lonar is situated in the Buldhana district in the north-central part of Maharashtra (**Fig. 2.1**). Bounded by Hingoli and Jalna districts to the south, Jalgaon district, Amravati district and the state of Madhya Pradesh on the north, Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar (Aurangabad) district to the west and Washim and Akola districts on the east, Lonar is strategically located at the crossroads of historically vibrant cultural zones. These modern districts form parts of Khānadeśa, Marāṭhavāḍā and Vidarbha cultural zones, proximal to the regions of Malwa on the north and the Andhra-Telangana region on the north-east. In this way, the location is strategic and important in many ways.

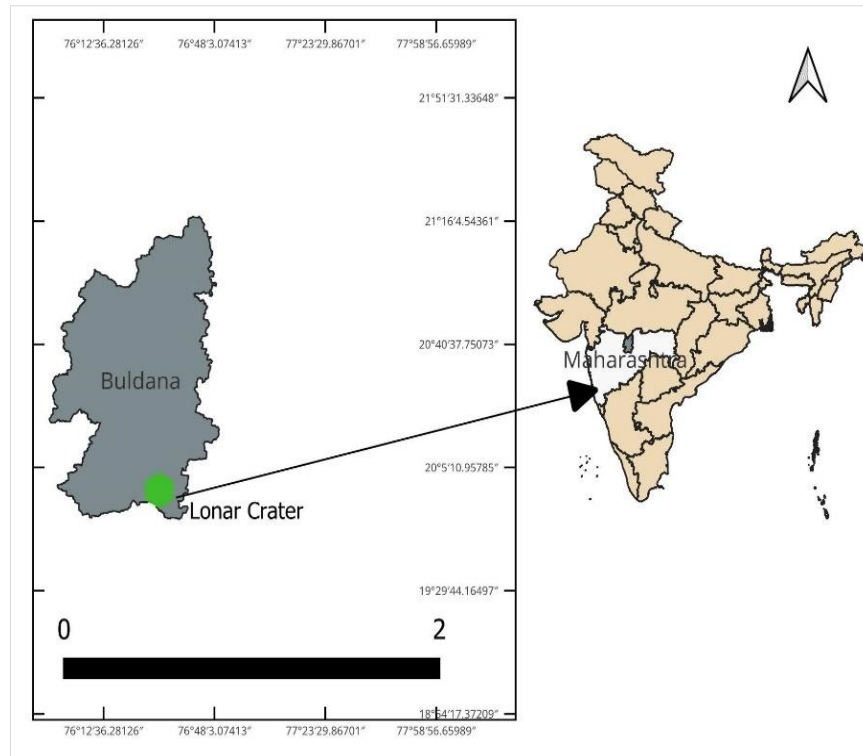


Fig. 2.1: Location of Lonar crater in the Buldhana district of Maharashtra

Vidarbha or Varhāḍa, a socio-political and historical region, is characterised by a terrain of dense hilly tracts in its northern areas, and plains in the eastern and southern areas. For locating Lonar, its positionality within Varhāḍa constitutes a large part of its history. Hence, the discussion related to the historical development takes cognisance of the Varhāḍa region. After the sixteenth century CE Vidarbha or Varhāḍa was subsumed into the *subah* (Mughal province) of Berar.

Topographically, the Vidarbha region is bounded by the Satpuda (Satpura) mountain ranges on the north, Ajanta Mountain ranges to the south and is contained in the drainage basins of Tapi, Purna, Wardha and Wainganga rivers. The modern Buldhana district has two natural sub-divisions known as the Balaghat and Payanghat.¹ The southern part of Buldhana district is watered by the Painganga and Khadak-Purna River (also sometimes known as Katepurna). Both flow at quite a distance from Lonar, to its north and south respectively (**Fig. 2.2**). Lonar is at the

¹A.E. Nelson ed., *Central Provinces District Gazetteers, Buldhana District Volume A Descriptive* (Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1910), 2-3.

southernmost boundary of this region. Buldhana district was the passage connecting the north India to south India, from Malwa to Deccan.²

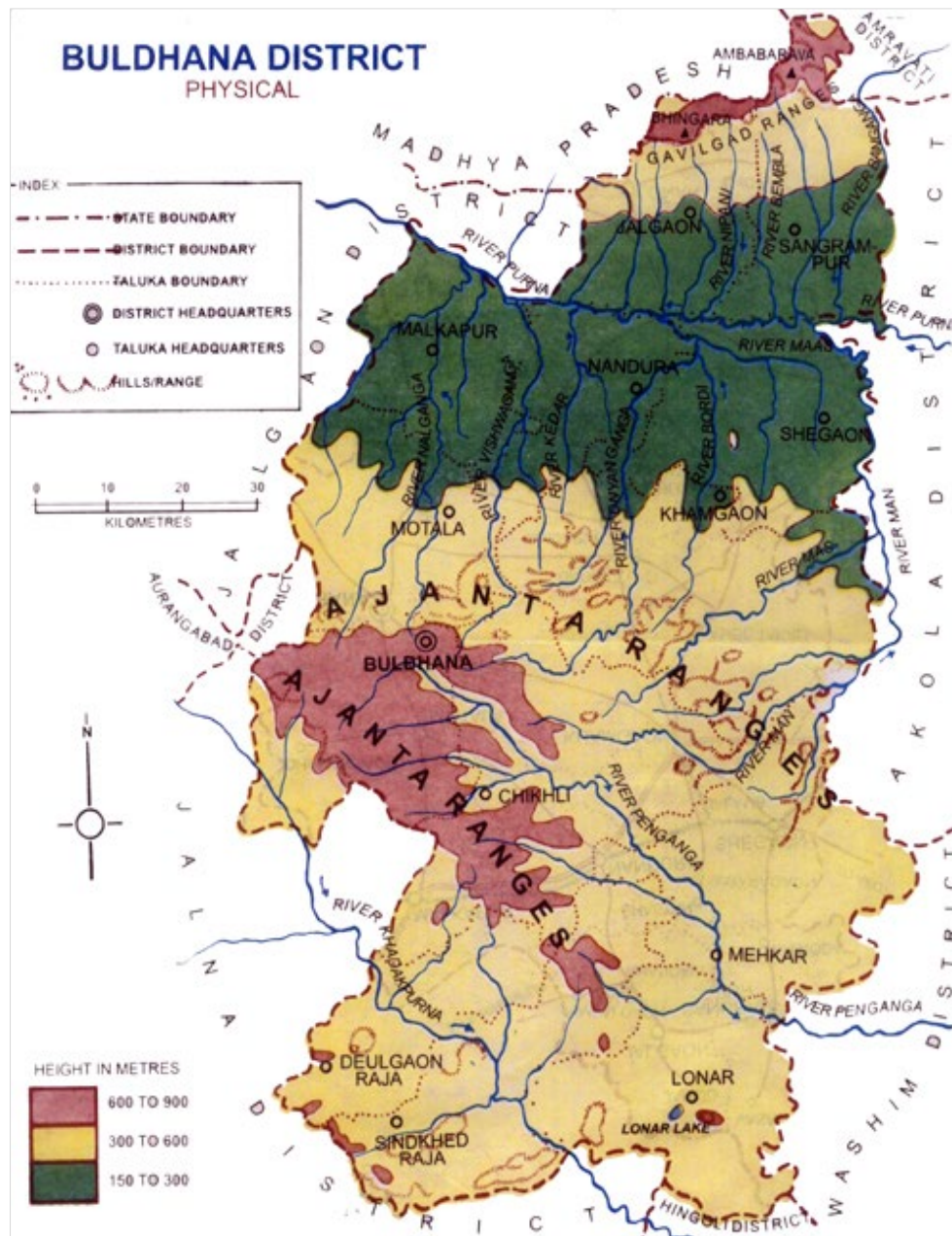


Fig. 2.2: Physical map of Buldhana district³

² H.K. Sherwani, P.M. Joshi eds., *History of Medieval Deccan (1295-1724) Volume I (Political and Military Aspects)*, (Hyderabad: The Andhra Pradesh Govt Text book press, 1973), 7, 26.

³ "Buldhana Zilla Parishad," Buldhana Mahapanchayat, accessed October 13, 2023, http://www.buldhana.zilla.parishad.gov.in/hidden//asset_publisher/LS3ttbDaHxJp/content/बलडाणा-जिल%80%8Dहयाच-नकाश/1744150.

This study refers to Maharashtra which indicates the modern state established in 1960. However, it broadly also means a linguistic region formulated from approximately the tenth to fourteenth centuries CE. In this period, references to Maharashtra as a region are found in the Mahānubhāva literature, coeval with the rule of the Yādava dynasty.⁴ In the literary works of the Mahānubhāvas, Maharashtra has been differentiated from the Andhra Pradesh-Telangana region.⁵ The maximum period of Cakradhara's *ekāṅka bhramaṇa kāḷa* (literally meaning the period of his solitary travel) was spent in the region which is today known as Vidarbha or Berar and the places he visited are understood to have existed in Maharashtra. Bina Sengar and Laurie Hovell Mcmillin, while locating the issues of space and place in western India, argue that "[w]hether we engage in a historical-geographical understanding of the Deccan, Western India or Central India, Maharashtra remains central to all these regions."⁶ Maharashtra, as a region, therefore, has always had a linguistic, political, historical, and cultural cohesiveness.⁷ Even though the administrative unit of Maharashtra today might not have been the same in the period between the tenth and fourteenth centuries CE, there was certainly a regional consciousness.⁸

Hence, the present study prefers using Maharashtra as a nomenclature for the region in which Lonar is situated. Since, Lonar is situated on the boundaries of Marāṭhavāḍā and Vidarbha, the political histories of those regions are also important, a larger region broadly referring to these geographies have been taken into consideration.

2.2 Political History of the Region

⁴ Christian Lee Novetzke, *The Quotidian Revolution: Vernacularization, Religion, and the Premodern Public Sphere in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 2.

⁵ S.G. Tulpule ed., *Līlacaritra Ekāṅka* (Nagpur: Suvichar Prakashan Mandal, 1964), 1-61.

⁶ Bina Sengar and Laurie Hovell McMillin, eds., *Spaces and Places in Western India: Formations and Delineations* (Taylor & Francis, 2019), 6.

⁷ Viraj Shah, *A Study of Temples of Medieval Maharashtra (11th to 14th centuries CE): A Socio-Economic Approach* (New Delhi: Report submitted to the Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR) for Post-Doctoral Fellowship (PDF), 2009), 7-12.

⁸ Novetzke, *The Quotidian Revolution*, 39.

References to Vidarbha as a political region are found in texts like the *Brāhmaṇas* and the *Mahābhārata*, and in later Puranic texts, where it is mentioned as one of the important *janapadas*. Ghulam Yazdani, while tracing the early history of Vidarbha, mentions that “[o]f the cities traditionally associated with Vidarbha the earliest according to the testimony of the *Harivaṃśa* was Vidarbha on the southern slopes of the Vindhya, here apparently the Gawilgarh hills.”⁹ These Puranic references to Vidarbha and later political territorial limits differ only slightly. While the texts provide useful insights to understand the physical landscape of Maharashtra, it is the historical records from later periods that expound the political history of the region.

The dynastic history of Maharashtra begins with the Sātavāhanas, the first local rulers of the region, who controlled Maharashtra and northern Karnataka with Paithan as their capital. The chronology and dates of the Sātavāhanas have been controversial, though the accepted duration of their rule is from the second century BCE to the second century CE. After the fall of the Sātavāhana Empire, several small kingdoms appeared in different parts and important among them were the Abhiras ruling in north Maharashtra.¹⁰

From the third to sixth century CE, the prominent ruling dynasty in the region of Vidarbha, were the Vākātakas.¹¹ Not much is known about their suzerainty over Lonar, but the extent of their kingdoms mentioned through inscriptions suggests that they ruled parts of the Vidarbha region. One of the branches of the Vākātakas had its stronghold in Washim, which is to the east of the modern Buldhana district and thus in close proximity to Lonar. Also, the rule of the Vākātakas brought several socio-political changes in this region. Hence, a little introduction to the history of the dynasty would be relevant to this research.

Contemporary with the Gupta dynasty ruling in the northern regions of India, the Vākātakas constitute one of the most important political powers after the fall of the Sātavāhanas. The earliest known ruler of the Vākātakas is Vindhyaśakti I, who

⁹ H. Raychaudhari, “Geography of the Deccan,” in *The Early History of the Deccan volume I parts I-VI*, ed. G. Yazdani (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), 24.

¹⁰ H.S. Thosar, ‘The Abhiras in Indian History’, *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 51 (1990), 56–65.

¹¹ V.V. Mirashi, *Vākātika Nṛpati Ānī Tyāncā Kāla* (Nagpur: Registrar Nagpur Vishvavidyalaya, 1957), 1.

carved out a principality approximate region straddling the modern state of Madhya Pradesh, and Vidarbha, in the latter half of the third century CE.¹² He was succeeded by Pravarasena I, expanded his kingdom beyond his father and predecessor's principality, to include parts of northern Maharashtra as well as modern Telangana. As suggested by A.S. Altekar, a larger part of Deccan was politically unified under his rule.¹³ During the rule of his immediate successors, the Vākāṭakas were divided into two groups or branches.

One of them was the Nandīvardhana branch that was centred around Ramagiri, identified with modern Ramtek, Nagardhana, Mandhal region. The Vatsagulma branch that ruled from modern Washim.¹⁴ Towards the end of the fourth century CE, the Nandīvardhana branch, also referred to as the eastern Vākāṭakas, was ruled by Rudrasena I and his wife Prabhāvatīgupta, the daughter of Candragupta I of the Gupta dynasty. This matrimonial alliance between the Vākāṭakas and Guptas ushered in new religious and cultural activities, where Vaiṣṇavism was practised and patronised in the otherwise predominantly Śaivite rule of the Vākāṭakas.¹⁵ The construction of Kevala Narasimha and Rudra Narasimha temples in modern Ramtek, during the rule of Prabhāvatīgupta as the dowager queen of the Vākāṭakas in the early fifth century CE, and worship of Viṣṇu evident through inscriptions, testify the Vaiṣṇava presence at Ramtek. Hans T. Bakker argues that, during this period, the Vākāṭaka rulers conspicuously brought forth acculturation of the tribal deities like Narasimha and Varāha into the mainstream (state) religion.¹⁶ This shift in the religious paradigms had repercussions not only on the sub-regional level but also laid foundations for the flourishing of Vaiṣṇava religious traditions in the later centuries. During the rule of

¹² A.S. Altekar, "The History of Vākāṭakas," in *The Early History of the Deccan volume I parts I-VI*, ed. G. Yazdani (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), 157-159.

¹³ Altekar, 160-161.

¹⁴ Hans T. Bakker, *The Vākāṭakas: Essay in Hindu Iconology* (Groningen: Egbertforsten, 1997), 10-14.

¹⁵ Hans T. Bakker, *Holy Ground Where Art and Text Meet: Studies in the Cultural History of India* (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2019), 154-155.

¹⁶ Bakker's comment is based on A. Eschmann's observations about the acculturation of lion deities in Odisha that were worshipped in caves and originally had their religious centres atop hills. Bakker argues that a similar policy was adopted by the Vākāṭaka rulers to gain the confidence of the people from their territory. For reference, Bakker, *Holy Ground Where Art and Text Meet*, 154-156.

Prabhāvatīgupta, and also her son and successor Pravarsena II, the Vākāṭaka kingdom extended roughly over the regions of the modern state of Madhya Pradesh, most of Vidarbha and parts of north-western Maharashtra.¹⁷

The collateral Vatsagulma branch was ruling over certain parts of modern Maharashtra state under the suzerainty of Pravarsena II.¹⁸ They ruled over a large part of north-western and western Maharashtra with their base at modern Washim.¹⁹ Their hey-day was during the fifth century CE when they came into contact and conflict with the contemporaries like Traikūṭakas of Northern Konkan, Kadambas of Kuntala, and Viṣṇukunḍins of Andhra. The illustrious history of this branch of the Vākāṭakas can be accounted for during the rule of Hariṣeṇa, who ruled towards the sixth century CE.²⁰ Sarvasena, son and successor of Pravarsena, was the first ruler of the Vatsagulma Vākāṭakas. Next in succession was Vindhyaśena (referred to as Vindhyaśakti in the Ajanta cave no. 17 inscription), who was at war with small rulers from the Aśmāka and Kuntala historic regions, corresponding with present-day north and western Maharashtra respectively. The Washim copper-plate grant mentions that Vindhyaśena donated Nāndīkaḍa (modern Nanded), which is in the Marāṭhavāḍā region, based on which V.V. Mirashi argued that Vatsagulma Vākāṭakas had southern Varhāḍa and modern Telangana state under their control.²¹ The last known ruler of this dynasty was Hariṣeṇa, who brought in a large territory under his rule, which included parts of Malwa, Dakṣiṇa Kosala, Gujarat and north-western and southern Maharashtra.²²

After the downfall of the Vākāṭakas, the centre of power shifted to prominent political dynasties such as the Cālukyas of Badami, Kalacurīs, and the Rāṣṭrakūṭas of Malkhed. The Kalacurīs ruled from Malwa but also extended their sway over parts of northern Maharashtra.²³ The early Rāṣṭrakūṭas were feudatories of the Badami Cālukyas, and later carved out their principality in Achalpur, in rom Amravati district

¹⁷ Altekar, "The History of Vākāṭakas," 179.

¹⁸ As per Altekar, both branches had a ruler by the name Pravarsena. See, Altekar, 179-180.

¹⁹ Mirashi, *Vākāṭaka Nṛpati Ānī Tyāncā Kāḷa*, 55

²⁰ Altekar, "The History of Vākāṭakas," 187-188.

²¹ Mirashi, *Vākāṭaka Nṛpati Ānī Tyāncā Kāḷa*, 325-340.

²² Mirashi, 59-61.

²³ Shah, *A Study of Temples of Medieval Maharashtra (11th to 14th centuries CE)*, 15.

in eastern Maharashtra, during the middle of the seventh century CE.²⁴ The capital of the Rāṣṭrakūṭas was eventually at Lattalūra, modern Latur. Later, during the rule of Dantidurga, the capital plausibly shifted to somewhere near modern Ellora. All these places of possession of the Rāṣṭrakūṭas hint towards their strong political presence in the macro-region containing Lonar.

The next political dynasties important with respect to our study area are the Paramāras of Vidarbha and the Cālukyas of Kalyāṇa.²⁵ Both these were contemporaries in the early eleventh century CE, occupying the western and eastern parts of Vidarbha. In recent years, coinage and inscriptional records have brought to light Paramāra rulers in Vidarbha. Paramara Jagaddeva began as the feudatory of the Kalyāṇa Cālukya Vikramāditya VI but later declared independence. He established his capital in modern Chandrapur district of Maharashtra.²⁶ A very interesting reference to the Paramāras is from the twelfth century CE inscription found in the Nāganātha temple at Bhāndaka (modern Bhadravati), that records the installation of the statue of Nārāyaṇa and restoration carried out to the temple of Bhadrānāga. As per the reading of this inscription by S.G. Tulpule, the inscription is dated to śaka 1068, 1146 CE.²⁷ In this inscription, the name of the suggested ruler is read by Tulpule as *dharmāce rāye pavāra* and understood as Paramāra.²⁸ M.G. Dikshit's reading of this

²⁴ Altekar, "The History of Vākātakas," 250-251.

²⁵ Based on the inscriptional evidence, Amol Bankar in his essay has showed the emergence of a separate line of the Paramāras who ruled significantly in the region of Vidarbha. As stated by Bankar and Somkuwar, the Deccan Paramāra Kingdom comprised of modern Buldhana, Akola, Amravati, Nagpur, Wardha, Yeotmal and Chandrapur districts of Vidarbha as also Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar, Parbhani, Beed and Dharashiva districts of Marāṭhavāḍā and also parts of Warangal. For reference, Amol N. Bankar and Rajesh K. Somkuwar, "The Paramāras of Vidarbha: A Study Through Literary, Epigraphic and Numismatic Sources," *The Journal of Numismatic Society, London 200*, (2009): 1-64.

²⁶ Bankar provides evidence of Dharmapuri inscription and Karadkhed inscription of Cālukya Someshvara III, Cālukyas and Paramāras stating the rebellion of Jagaddeva Paramāra against his Cālukyan overlord and consolidated power. Bankar and Somkuwar, "The Paramāras of Vidarbha," 2-3.

²⁷ Prior to Tulpule, Cunningham in his report of the Archaeological Survey of India and Raibahadur Hiralal in his book on the inscriptions of C.P. & Berar have read the date as 1386 CE, which was refuted by Tulpule. For reference, S.G. Tulpule ed., *Prācin Marāṭhi Korīva Lekha* (Pune: Pune University Press, 1963), 37.

²⁸ Tulpule suggests that this could be someone of the Paramāras of Malwa, but does not go into any details of the ruler. Tulpule, *Prācin Marāṭhi Korīva Lekha*, 39.

inscription includes the name of a certain Jagaddeva. Amol Bankar and Rajesh Somkuwar find palaeographical similarities between the inscriptions of Jagaddeva Paramāra, like the Jainad inscription, and the Bhāndaka inscription. Based on it, the scholars suggest that if the reading is considered reliable, the Bhāndaka inscription was issued during the reign of Paramāras, may be Jagaddeva in particular.²⁹ To further this, in the context of the present study, it is important to note that for the installation of the Nārāyaṇa statue, the officiating priests were called from Lonar-Mehkar.

The next dynasty important for discussion would be the Cālukyas, who had their main seat of power in Kalyāṇa in lower Deccan, present-day Karnataka, but they ruled over Maharashtra as well in the tenth-eleventh centuries CE. The most relevant reference to the rule of the Cālukyas pertaining to our study comes from the Ganeshwadi inscription of the Bhīmanātha of 1099 CE.³⁰ This inscription was issued during the reign of Cālukya ruler Vikramāditya VI by his Mahāpradhāna and Senāpati Bhīmanātha. The inscription is in two parts. The first part writes about the patronisation of temples dedicated to Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Śiva on the banks of *Bhīmasamudra sarovara*, a tank which was also probably built by him in present-day Hippalgaon in Nilanga taluka of Latur district.³¹ For the upkeep and religious practices of the temple, the grant was entrusted to Tatpuruṣa Paṇḍita, who belonged to the lineage of Kālāmukha and Lākulīśa sect.³² The second part of the inscription is eulogy of Bhīmanātha or Bhīmadeva (he has been called various names in different inscriptions), which lists the donatory works that he carried out. The most important structure patronised by Bhīmanātha with respect to the present study is the construction of a *śālā*, that is a *maṇḍapa*, named Bhīmavikrama in Meghaṅkara, which is the present-day Mehkar in Buldhana district. Bhīmanātha is also ascribed with the installation of icons of Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Maheśa at Mehkar, most likely in this *śālā*.³³ For the upkeep of this *maṇḍapa*, a village named Pipparikheta, identified with

²⁹ Bankar and Somkuwar, “The Paramāras of Vidarbha,” 1-64.

³⁰ V.B. Kolte, *Mahārāṣṭrātila Kāhi Tāmrapaṭa va Śilālekha* (Mumbai: Maharashtra Rajya Sahitya aani Sanskruti Mandal, 1987), 123-146.

³¹ Kolte, *Mahārāṣṭrātila Kāhi Tāmrapaṭa va Śilālekha*, 128.

³² Shah, *A Study of Temples of Medieval Maharashtra (11th to 14th centuries CE)*, 137.

³³ Kolte, *Mahārāṣṭrātila Kāhi Tāmrapaṭa va Śilālekha*, 130-132.

modern Pimparkhed in Buldhana district was assigned, situated at a distance of twenty-five kilometres from Mehkar. The other places mentioned in this eulogy, like Nanded, Latur, Nilanga, Buldhana among others, proves that the Cālukyas had their dominance in parts of eastern and northern Maharashtra during the eleventh centuries CE.³⁴ Since the inscription particularly talks about the donation at Mehkar, the region of Lonar also must have been under their suzerainty. Whether the Cālukyas patronized religious architecture in Lonar cannot be substantiated through any inscriptional record as of today. However, the stylistic similarity of Yajñeśvara temple in Lonar with the eleventh and twelfth centuries CE temples, suggests building activity in Lonar during this period. The rule of Cālukyas was succeeded by the Kalacurī King Bijjala in the late twelfth century CE and it is during the similar time that Yādavas, under the leadership of Bhillama V proclaimed independence.³⁵

The Yādavas were dominant in Vidarbha and northern Maharashtra through the thirteenth century CE. The visit of Yādava Kṛṣṇa Deva in the thirteenth century CE to Lonar, makes it imperative to understand the political trajectory of the Yādavas in greater detail. Two phases can be seen in the political history of the Yādavas, first as feudatories in their earlier stages with Sinnar as their capital from circa ninth to twelfth centuries CE and the later second phase as independent dynastic rulers with Devagiri as their capital from the twelfth to early fourteenth centuries CE. The earlier epigraphs like Bassein copper-plate of the dynasty trace their genealogy from Dr̥ḍhaprahāra who is said to have arrived from Dvārāvātī to Deccan and established himself at Candrādityapūra or modern Chandor in Nashik district.³⁶ During the reign of his successor Seunacandra, assumed the title of Mahāmaṇḍaleśvara and established the city of Seunapura in his name and from here on Yādavas had a substantial political seat from Srinagar(modern Sinnar).³⁷ Little is known about the successors of Seunacandra I, namely Dhāḍiyappa, Bhillama I, Śrirājā, Vaḍḍiga. The only contemporary evidence to Vaḍḍiga's reign is the Sangamner copper-plate grant which

³⁴ S.B. Deo, *Mahārāṣṭrā va Gove śilālekha Tāmrāpāṭānchi Varṇanatmaka Samdarbha Sūcī* (Mumbai: Maharashtra Rajya Sahitya aani Sanskruti Mandal, 1984), 138.

³⁵ Brahmanand Deshpande, *Devagiri Yādava* (Pune: Aprant Prakashan, 2013), 66.

³⁶ O.P. Verma, *The Yādavas And Their Times* (Nagpur: Vidarbha Samshodhan Mandal, 1970), 12-13.

³⁷ Deshpande, *Devagiri Yādava*, 25.

states the name of the Rāṣṭrakūṭas as the sovereign overlord of the Yādavas. The important succession was that of Bhillama II which heralded a new epoch in the Yādava rule. During his regime, in the late tenth and early eleventh centuries CE, he shifted from the Rāṣṭrakūṭas to the Kalyāṇa Cālukyas as feudatories.³⁸ In the middle of twelfth century CE, Yādava ruler named a Mallugī, took advantage of the tussle between his overlord Cālukya Tailapa III and the Kalacurī Bijjala, and extended his kingdom into Varhāḍa, where he is known to have captured Paṇakheṭa (identified as modern Palkhed in the Akola district).³⁹ However, Mallugī seems to have remained loyal to Tailapa III.

This instability in the Cālukya kingdom continued till 1186-87 C.E. Taking advantage of this, the grandson and successor of Mallugī, Bhillama V overthrew their rule and declared himself as an independent ruler.⁴⁰ Thus, Bhillama V was the one who shifted the capital of the Yādavas from Sinnar to Devagirī (modern Daulatabad in Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar district), which then remained as a main political seat of the Yādavas till fourteenth century CE. During his period, the Yādava rule extended over the territories of Malwa and Lata region, that is southern Gujarat.⁴¹ His son and successor Jaitugī fought the Kākatīyas in Telangana defeating their two prominent rulers Rudra and Gaṇapati.⁴²

Yādava Siṅghaṇa II appears from 1200 C.E. onwards as one of the illustrious leaders. Having taken part in campaigns against the Kākatīyas with his father and predecessor, Siṅghaṇa II led an expansive political career. Also, he led campaigns in Deccan, in present-day Karnataka which are indicated by an inscription dated to 1202 CE at Sudi in Dharwar district. He put down many smaller powers like Kadambas of Goa, the Śilāhāras of Kolhapur, and the Raṭṭas of Sāvādatti(Saundatti) and then wars happened with the Hoysaḷas, Kākatīyas and the Gurjaras. He led expedition in the North against the Paramāras, during the early thirteenth century CE, and annexed

³⁸ Verma, *The Yādavas And Their Times*, 22-28.

³⁹ A.S. Altekar, "The Coinage of the Deccan," *The Early History of the Deccan, parts VII- XI*, ed. G. Yazdani (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), 519.

⁴⁰ Deshpande, *Devagirīce Yādava*, 86.

⁴¹ Altekar, "The Coinage of the Deccan," 523.

⁴² Deshpande, *Devagirīce Yādava*, 76-78.

Mandu to the Yādava territory.⁴³ The advent of the Yādavas in northern Maharashtra is attested by the Amdapur inscription of 1211 CE which records the construction of a *torana* in the temple at ‘Ambadapura’ by Bhaideva during the reign of Yādava King Siṅghaṇa II.⁴⁴ Siṅghaṇa’s trusted general Kholeśvara was the governor of an extensive part of Yādava Kingdom that included the regions of Varhāḍa, Khānadeśa as well as some parts of Madhya Pradesh. He was succeeded by Kṛṣṇadeva (sometimes known as Kānharadeva from on literary records). He led conquests mainly with the Paramāra rulers, Jaitugīdeva and Devapāla as well as the rulers of Gujarat. Kṛṣṇadeva’s inscriptions are found in several places in Khānadeśa and Vidarbha, for instance, inscription on the *maṭha* in Balsane in Dhule district, the triple-shrine temple at Nandagaon Khānadeśavara in Amravati district and inscriptions from Markandi in Gadchiroli district.⁴⁵ Kṛṣṇadeva is known to having met Cakradhara Svāmī, the proponent of Mahānubhāva sect, near Dhāra Tīrtha in Lonar.⁴⁶ Here the king patronised restorations of Kamaḷajā and Kumāreśvara temples.

Kṛṣṇa was succeeded by Mahādeva, who was involved in conquests against the Śilāhāras of Konkan, Kākatīyas of Warangal and the Hoyasaḷas of Dvārasamudra. With the support of able ministers, Mahādeva ruled over a large part of Maharashtra until 1271 CE.⁴⁷ Mahadeva’s queen, Vaijayi, is said to have built a Vaijanatha temple at Paithan (ancient Pratiṣṭhāṇa).⁴⁸ He was succeeded by Āmaṇadeva, but soon was overthrown in a coup by Rāmacandradeva, the son and rightful heir of the Yādava dynasty. During his reign, Rāmacandradeva Yādava undertook territorial expansions to the north-eastern region. During his conquests, he claimed to have built a temple in Varanasi which was dedicated to Śāraṅgadharā.⁴⁹ The decline of the Yādava dynasty began with the advent of Ala-uddin Khilji in the last decade of the thirteenth century CE. Taking advantage of the Yādava army being away from the capital, Ala-

⁴³ Verma, *The Yādavas And Their Times*, 78.

⁴⁴ V.V. Mirashi, “Two inscriptions from Berar,” in *Epigraphia Indica and Record of the Archaeological Survey of India 21*, ed., Hirananda Sastri (Delhi: Manager of Publications, published under the authority of the Government of India, 1931-32), 127-128.

⁴⁵ Deshpande, *Devagirīce Yādava*, 102-107.

⁴⁶ S.G. Tulpule, *Līlācaritra Ekāṅka* (Pune: Suvichar Prakashan Mandal, 1964), 22-23.

⁴⁷ R.N. Sharma and K.M. Shrimali eds., *A comprehensive history of India Volume four Part 1 (AD 985-1206)*, New Delhi: People’s Publishing House, 1987), 149-151.

⁴⁸ Sharma and Shrimali eds., *A comprehensive history of India*, 151.

⁴⁹ Deshpande, *Devagirīce Yādava*, 121.

uddin Khilji marched towards Devagiri via the route connecting Rajamahendravaram in Andhra Pradesh, Achalpur and Lasur in modern Amravati district.⁵⁰ The Yādava dynasty under Rāmacandradeva was defeated and had to commit a large annual tribute, which continued until the early fourteenth century CE.⁵¹ Though the suzerainty of the Yādavas received a severe setback by the end of the thirteenth century C.E, they continued to rule through the first decade of the fourteenth century C.E, as feudatory chiefs of the Khiljis or sometimes staging resistance to the Khiljis. In the early fourteenth century C.E, approximately 1309 CE, Malik Kafur was summoned by Ala-uddin to march towards Deccan and to stage an attack on Warangal, the seat of Kākatīya rulers. His route involved large parts of Varhāḍa like the modern Chandrapur district; he crossed the Painganga river to move southwards.⁵² In the next two-three years, by 1311-12 CE, the Khiljis, under the able leadership of Malik Kafur managed to subjugate all the three ruling powers of Deccan – Yādavas, Kākatīyas and Hoyasaḷas.

The rule of the Khiljis was followed by Tughlaqs, during which the capital of Sultanate rule was shifted from Delhi to Daulatabad (Devagiri). Buldhana district and parts of modern north-east Maharashtra were thus in the vicinity of the new capital. Later, under the Bahamani kingdom, Berar was an important province.⁵³ The Bahamanis were engaged in war with the Vijayanagara kingdom around the late fourteenth century, when local chiefs in places like Buldhana rebelled against the rulers with the support of the deputy Governor of Daulatabad, Bahram Khan Mazandarani.⁵⁴ In the early fifteenth century CE, a battle ensued between the ruler of Khānadeśa and the Bahamani ruler, in which the local chief of Berar rebelled against

⁵⁰ The exact route taken by Ala-uddin Khilji between Ellichpur and Lasur is unknown. Sherwani suggests that Khiljis must have traversed through the same route undertaken by Cakradhar Svāmī while roaming around in this area. For reference, see H. K. Sherwani, P. M. Joshi eds., *History of Medieval Deccan*, 34.

⁵¹ A.S. Altekar, “Yādavas of Seundadesha,” in *The Early History of Deccan, parts VII-XI*, ed. G. Yazdani (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), 553.

⁵² Sherwani and Joshi, *History of Medieval Deccan (1295-1724)*, 45.

⁵³ Nelson, *Central Provinces District Gazetteers*, 27.

⁵⁴ The Gazetteer mentions the name of a Maratha officer, Kondba Deo, involved in this rebellion. It is possible that several such local chiefs were ruling different parts of the Bahamani kingdom, and the modern district of Buldhana, as part of the territory, had no different story. Nelson, *Central Provinces District Gazetteers*, 27.

their Governor, Khan-i-Jahan. The then Bahamani ruler Ala-uddin Ahmad Shah sent the governor of Daulatabad to suppress the rebellion. The travel route of the governor, Khalaf Hasan Basri, went from Daulatabad to Mehkar in Buldhana and further to Balapur and Ellichpur in the northern Buldhana district. During this period of the Bahamani rule, the region of Buldhana, with Burhanpur in the north and Daulatabad in the south, saw several tumultuous political situations and warfare.⁵⁵ The routes of armies often passed through the Buldhana district, crossing the Wardha, Wainganga and Painganga rivers. In about 1471 CE, the governorship of Berar was in the hands of Fateh-ullah Imad-ul-Mulk, within which the region surrounding Berar was under the aegis of Khudawand Khan.

By 1480 CE, as per the advice of minister Mahmud Gawan, the then Bahamani king Muhammad III re-divided the kingdom into different provinces, which resulted in the division of Berar into two provinces. Several inscriptions of Fateh-ullah Imad-ul-Mulk have been found from Narnala, Mehkar, Gawilgad, and Akola, all from the modern Buldhana district. The inscription at Mehkar becomes particularly important for the present study. Dated to 1488 CE, the inscription contains verses of the Quran, which is found on the walled gateway remains near the Painganga River. This inscription testifies to the suzerainty of Fateh-ullah Imad ul-mulk towards the end of the fifteenth century in the walled city of Mehkar.⁵⁶ Soon after, he declared independence to form the Imad Shahi kingdom. However, the rule was short-lived as he passed in the early sixteenth century CE.⁵⁷ The successive fall of the Bahamani kingdom and the annexation of Berar into the kingdom of Ahmadnagar, rather than the annexation of the Imad Shahi kingdom by Murtaza Nizam Shah, involved a period of continuous warfare in the region containing present-day Buldhana district. The battles between the Nizamshahi rulers and Mughals took place in this region near places like Rohinkhed, Deulghat, and Sakharkherda, among others.⁵⁸ During these times, the Mughal prince Murad resided

⁵⁵ Sherwani and Joshi, *History of Medieval Deccan*, 170-175.

⁵⁶ E. Denison Ross ed., *Epigraphia Moslemica* (Calcutta: Office of the Superintendent of Government Printing, 1907-1908), 20.

⁵⁷ Sherwani and Joshi, *History of Medieval Deccan*, 277-286.

⁵⁸ Yadhava Madhav Kale, *Varhāḍacā Itihāsa*, 2nd edition (Kolhapur: Paras Publications, 2021), 99-104.

at Shahpur near the Balapur fort and continued to rule over the Berar from this seat.⁵⁹ Towards the end of the sixteenth century, Malik Ambar ruled over the entire Berar, in which Mehkar constituted one of the important *subahs*. In the account provided by Abul Fazl in *Ain-i-Akbari*, the production of saltpetre, soap, and glass from Lonar has been mentioned as having earned considerable state revenue.⁶⁰ The text also mentions that the *zamindari* of Lonar was with a certain Waila and Sarkath, both belonging to the Rajput tribe.⁶¹ In the early seventeenth century CE, Malik Ambar, while on a military expedition to capture Balapur, camped at Mehkar for about three months.⁶² During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries CE, when the Nizam Shahs and Mughals were constantly engaged in warfare, two strong local rulers held several parts of Vidarbha: Jādhavarāva of Sindkhed and Udājīrāma Deśamukha of Mahur. Earlier with the Nizam Shahs and later with the Mughals, these two local chiefs and their officials had control over Berar. The route from the Delhi to Daulatabad could be traversed through Buldhana crossing various locations like Rajur Ghat, Rohinkhed Ghat, Jaipur Kothali Ghat, Purna Painganga river basins. This area therefore witnessed constant military action. and so on, the geographical area comprising Buldhana witnessed constant action. The rule of Jādhavarāva was from his fief at Sindkhed, situated in modern Buldhana district, to the south-east of Lonar. The other important branches of his family ruled over Deulgaon Raja, Kingaon Raja, Adgaon Raja, Mehuna Raja, all mostly in southern part of Buldhana district.⁶³ Around the same time, that is circa 1570 CE onwards, the region extending from Mahur in modern Nanded district upto Washim district, was the principality with Rāje Udājīrāma Deśamukha. Both these locals must have been instrumental in patronizing architecture in Berar during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries CE. Further, in the seventeenth-eighteenth centuries CE, the political presence of Marāṭhā Peśavās, Bhonsles of Nagpur and the Asaf Jahs (Nizams of Hyderabad), continued. Around

⁵⁹ Kale, *Varhāḍacā Itihāsa*, 103.

⁶⁰ Nelson, *Central Provinces District Gazetteers*, 39; Abul Fazl Allami, *The Ain-i-Akbari Volume II*. trans. Colonel H. S. Jarret (Calcutta: The Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1891), 230-231.

⁶¹ Nelson, *Central Provinces District Gazetteers*, 39.

⁶² Kale, *Varhāḍacā Itihāsa*, 107.

⁶³ A.C. Lyall, *Gazetteer for the Haidarabad Assigned Districts, commonly called Berar* (Bombay: Education Society's Press, Byculla, 1870), 118-119

1752 CE, the areas under Mehkar *samsthāna*, an administrative unit similar to the *sarkar* or *subah* during the Mughal rule, were with the Khaṇḍerāva Kāśī Nyāyādhīśa.⁶⁴ Modern Chikhali and Mehkar talukas along with neighbouring areas, such Amdapur, Deulghat, Dhad, Chandol, Mehkar, Risod, Shirpur, Lonar, Malkapur were a part of the Nizams territory.⁶⁵ Until the early nineteenth century, the Bhonsles family of Nagpur and the Śinde rulers of Gwalior held their sway in Berar, especially the modern parts comprising Mehkar, Chikhali, and Amdapur.⁶⁶ They were also involved in warfare with English. From the early 1800s up to 1853, the Nizam Shahs single-handedly ruled over most of Berar, following which the region was ceded to the East India Company as part of the liquidation of the debt owed by Nizam Shah. The region was divided into two parts, East Berar and West Berar, Budhana being the headquarters of the latter.⁶⁷

This overview of the history of Berar, Vidarbha, and northern Maharashtra, covering a long span of over 1400 years, was not meant to be comprehensive. The attempt is to provide a background of the political history of the region that contains Lonar. Though the immediate region surrounding Lonar is not in many accounts, the overall political changes and upheavals in the region certainly affected the study area of the present dissertation. While taking account of the religious architecture of Lonar in the subsequent chapter, this political account would create a comprehensive background.

2.3 Architectural History of Structural Temples in Maharashtra

Religious architecture in the period before the fourteenth century CE predominantly consists of temples. Tanks and stepwells have been studied mostly as ancillary structures in temple complexes, hence, this section deals with the architectural history of structural temples. Architectural taxonomies of Indian temples have been studied by several authors to understand the morphology of these structures better.

⁶⁴ Kale, *Varhāḍacā Itihāsa*, 14.

⁶⁵ Kale, 146.

⁶⁶ G. Michell and M. Zebrowski, 'Architecture and Art of the Deccan Sultanates,' in *The New Cambridge History of India*, vol. I:7 (Cambridge University Press, 1999), 21.

⁶⁷ Lyall, *Gazetteer for the Haidarabad Assigned Districts*, 128-134.

Adam Hardy defined the two broad systems of temple architecture, Nāgara and Drāviḍa, as languages which are made up of distinct kits of architectural parts.⁶⁸ These broad languages can comprise distinct modes. Hardy defines mode as “recognisable in a range of characteristic overall shapes which may entail distinct ways of combining the architectural components.”⁶⁹ Thus, Bhūmija, Śekharī, and Latina become modes. Style is a complex and convoluted term which can have regional associations and include the treatment of buildings irrespective of their mode.⁷⁰ For M.A. Dhaky, the temples in the region of Gujarat and Rajasthan, appearing from the eleventh century CE, showed that Maru-Gurjara is a style which evolves within the Śekharī mode.⁷¹ The definition of mode is more inclusive from the readings of Phillip Wagoner. He defines mode on the basis of the articulation of the temple exterior.⁷² In his work on the temple at Bithu, Meister defined idiom as something that “represents local traditions rooted in the work of local artisans, traditions which endure even as political authority shifts or declines”.⁷³

Taking into consideration the arguments put forth by various scholars, this study employs the terms ‘mode’ and ‘idiom’ in lieu of the definitions presented above to define the typology, appearance, and overall fabric of the temple. Thus, it uses the term ‘mode’ for Bhūmija. The term ‘idiom’ has been used to describe idiosyncratic temple forms, which emerge from within a mode, adhere to a style on a regional level, and contribute to a language on a larger scale. The architectural morphology is peculiar to a time period, sub-region and work of local artisans.

⁶⁸ Adam Hardy, “Indian Temple Typologies,” in *Glimpses of Indian History and Art Reflections on the Past, Perspectives for the Future. Proceedings of the International Congress Rome*, eds. Tiziana Lorenzetti and Fabio Scialpi (Rome: Sapienza Università Editrice, 2012), 105.

⁶⁹ Hardy, “Indian Temple Typologies,” 105.

⁷⁰ Tamara I. Sears, “Following River Routes and Artistic Transmissions in Medieval Central India,” *Ars Orientalis* 45 (2015): 53.

⁷¹ M.A. Dhaky, “The Genesis and Development of Maru-Gurjara Temple Architecture,” in *Studies in Indian Temple Architecture*, ed. Pramod Chandra (New Delhi: American Institute of Indian Studies, 1975), 114-165.

⁷² Phillip B. Wagoner, “Modal Marking of Temple Types in Kakatiya Andhra: Towards a Theory of Decorum for Indian Temple Architecture,” ed. David Shulman, *Syllables of Sky: Studies in South Indian Civilization in Honour of Velcheru Narayana Rao* (1995): 432-435.

⁷³ Michael W. Meister, “Bithu: Individuality and Idiom,” *Ars Orientalis* 13, (1982): 169-186.

Prior to the eleventh century CE, the extant examples of free-standing temples are sporadic, limited to the few examples unearthed from the excavations at Paithan, some from eastern Maharashtra or Vidarbha region, at sites like Ramtek, Mansar, Mandhal, Nāgara and temples at Ter in Dharashiva district in Marāṭhavāḍā region of Maharashtra. In these early examples, the use of both brick and stone as a building material for temples is commonly seen. The excavations at Paithan, in the Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar district, conducted in the year 1937, 1966 and 1998 revealed “two remarkably well preserved Early Hindu brick temples which were located in the midst of an extensive early historic and early medieval town of regional significance that was located in the middle of the Godavari valley.”⁷⁴ In the 1937 excavations undertaken by Yusuf Seyed revealed two temples constructed of bricks, rectangular on plan and divided into three compartments, were partially excavated, dated between a long duration of 300 BCE to 100 CE by the 1966 excavations.⁷⁵ According to the detailed excavations of 1998, the two temples were built entirely of fired bricks and silt without lime mortar. The foundations of these temples were in stone. Five phases have been identified in the construction of these temples, variously dated between the fifth and eighth century CE, in which the later phases involve rebuilding and alteration.⁷⁶ Both the temples consist of a square *garbhagrha* and a rectangular *maṇḍapa*, but there is no information available about their roofing structures or cultic affiliations. Some of the features of the plinth of these temples have been compared to the temples in the Vākāṭaka territory.⁷⁷ Two early brick temples are also found at Parinche and Harani in the Pune district, dated to the seventh century CE, of which the temple at Parinche is a *triratha* temple while the one at Harini was likely apsidal on plan. Built out of moulded bricks and mud cement as the binding material, both

⁷⁴ Derek Kennet, J. Varaprasad Rao, M. Kasturi Bai. *Excavations at Paithan, Maharashtra* (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2020), 5. doi.org/10.1515/9783110653540-201.

⁷⁵ M.S. Mate, “Early Structural Temples of the Deccan,” *Bulletin of the Deccan College Post Graduate and Research Institute* 53, (1993), 243-44.

⁷⁶ Kennet, Rao, Bai, *Excavations at Paithan, Maharashtra*, 56-60.

⁷⁷ Kennet, Rao, Bai, *Excavations at Paithan, Maharashtra*, 60-61.

these villages are mentioned in the inscription of Cālukya King Vinayāditya, dated circa 687 CE.⁷⁸

Pertinent to the current discussion are the temples datable to the Vākāṭaka period, circa the fourth-fifth century CE, as best known earliest surviving examples in the proximity of Lonar. The remains of huge brick temples were unearthed at Mansar, near Nagardhan, the capital of the Vākāṭakas, Nagara near Gondia and at Bhola hudki and Bongi Hudki in Mandhal, all in the eastern part of Maharashtra.⁷⁹ Built on a raised plinth, the temples exhibit prominent wall and plinth projections, and recesses. Both brick temples have been speculated to be Śaiva shrines based on the sculptural fragments in the vicinity. Belonging to the same period are temples at Ramtek, namely the Trivikrama, Varāha, Kevala Narasimha, Rudra Narasimha and Bhogarāma temples. Of these, the Varāha temple is an open air *maṇḍapa* built in stone to enshrine the theriomorphic Varāha form. The Kevala Narasimha, Trivikrama and Bhogarāma temples are from the same period.⁸⁰ Though the original temples belong to the Vākāṭaka period, there is a layer of rebuilding which can be ascribed to the Yādava period. The Rudra Narasimha and Kevala Narasimha temples are identical in plan, consisting of *maṇḍapa* and a *garbhagrha*, provided with a *pradakṣiṇāpatha*. The temples are built on a raised plinth, ornamented with *vedikā* designs on the exterior walls. The *garbhagrha* of both these temples enshrine images of Kevala Narasimha

⁷⁸ K.R. Kapre, “Archaeology of the Ancient Place-Names in the Deccan,” (Unpublished PhD diss., University of Poona, 1967), 205-07; Mate, “Early Structural Temples of the Deccan,” 244-45.

⁷⁹ Arvind Jamkhedkar, *Purāsañcaya Bhāga 1* (Pune: Aparanta, 2016), 27-31. In addition to these temples, G. B. Deglurkar has also mentioned similar temples excavated at Mulachera in Gadchiroli district of Maharashtra. For reference, see G.B. Deglurkar, *Temple Architecture and Sculpture of Maharashtra* (Pune: Aparanta, 2019), 40-41.

⁸⁰ Deglurkar, *Temple Architecture and Sculpture of Maharashtra*, 46; Bakker, *The Vākāṭakas*, 30.

seated in *ardhaparyāṅkāśana*.⁸¹ The Bhogarāma temple has two parallel *garbhagrhas* that enshrine Vaiṣṇava deities.⁸²

Examples of early temples are also found in Ter in the Dharashiv district. The Trivikrama temple here is dated variously between the third century CE and the eighth century CE.⁸³ Built on an apsidal plan which resembles Buddhist *caityas*, this temple has been a mark of comparison for the remains of the temple at Harani in the Pune district. Also in Ter, noteworthy are the Uttareśvara and Kāleśvara temples, datable to the sixth century CE and eight-ninth centuries CE, respectively.⁸⁴ These early temples are also significant because they follow the Drāviḍa architectural language, which has few examples in Maharashtra.

Sporadic examples of temples built between the seventh and tenth centuries CE have been reported from Bhatala in Chandrapur district, and one example is known from epigraphical evidence at Mehuna in Jalgaon district. The temple at Bhatala is *pañcaratha* on plan, of considerable interest for the miniature tower built in Nāgara and Drāviḍa styles. Based on inscriptional detail only, the Sun temple at Mehuna is datable to the late seventh century CE, built by Pratikanta of the Haihaya dynasty.⁸⁵

From the eleventh century CE onwards, a large number of temples were built in stone. Most of them patronized by various dynasties and feudatory chiefs, merchants, traders among others have been reported from various parts of Maharashtra.⁸⁶ Pthe

⁸¹ There are several other temples in Ramtek reported by A.P. Jamkhedkar in his book, but these temples are datable to the medieval periods and hence have not been added here in the discussion on early temples. Another important temple from Ramtek is the Devi Mandir which possesses a *śāla śikhara* of the Valabhi kind which is not often seen in this time period and region. See A.P. Jamkhedkar, *Maharashtra: Itihāsa- Prācīna Kāḷa Sthāpatya va Kalā: Prārambhika aitihāsika kāḷa te yādava kāḷa* (Mumbai: Barshnik Vibhag, Sanskrutik Karya Vibhag, Maharashtra Sashan, 2002), 133-134.

⁸² Bakker, *The Vākātakas*, 30.

⁸³ Jamkhedkar, *Sthāpatya va Kalā*, 121.

⁸⁴ Jamkhedkar, *Sthāpatya va Kalā*, 121.

⁸⁵ Deglurkar, *Temple Architecture and Sculpture of Maharashtra*, 48-49.

⁸⁶ Viraj Shah, in her report on the study of temples of Medieval Maharashtra, has extensively studied the nature of temple building, the patronage patterns and religious trends pertaining to them. This study is focused on the time period ranging from the eleventh to the fourteenth century CE and is based on a corpus of 255 inscriptions. For this detailed study, refer to Shah, *A Study of Temples of Medieval Maharashtra (11th to 14th centuries CE)*.

temples built between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries CE, in particular have been built in different languages, modes and styles. Among the extant temples, those built in the Bhūmija mode outnumber the temples built in other modes. Nevertheless, varied modes show representation here, namely Latina, Śekharī, Vesara or Karṇāṭa Drāviḍa. For instance, in a place like Sinnar, within the contiguous area, the Āyeśvara temple is built in Karṇāṭa Drāviḍa or Vesara mode, Mukteśvara temple is built in the Bhūmija mode, and Gondeśvara and Viṭṭhaleśvara temples are built in the Latina mode. A closer view of the region of Vidarbha, closer to the present study area of the dissertation, also exhibits myriad architectural languages, modes and morphology. For instance, the Yamadharma temple at Markandi in Gadchiroli district, temple at Lohara in Yavatmal district, and the Bhavānī (Aṣṭabhujā Devī) temple at Bhadravati in Chandrapur district are built in the Latina-Nāgara mode. Sākeśvara temple at Sakegaon, Viṣṇu temple at Satgaon Bhusari in Buldhana, Khaṇḍeśvara temple at Nandgaon Khānadeśavar in Amravati, Maheśvara temple at Pimpri Kalaga in Yavatmal district are all built in Bhūmija mode. the Kamleśvarī temple at Kinhiraja is built in the Karṇāṭa Drāviḍa or Vesara mode. The Balāḷadevī temple at Amdapur is built in Drāviḍa language. These are some of the several examples of the extant temples which close to the study area.

The most noteworthy characteristic of the temples that are part of the region of Maharashtra is their eclecticism, which appears to be an outcome of shared boundaries with different regions like Gujarat, Malwa, Karnataka, and Telangana. It has already been discussed at the onset of this chapter that the term Maharashtra used in the present study stems out of convenience and the growing regional consciousness of Marathi-speaking lands from thirteenth century CE onwards. The temple architectural traditions are certainly trans-regional. For instance, the Śiva temple at Ambarnatha, situated in the Konkan cultural region of Maharashtra, shows affinity with the Gujarat temple styles of the eleventh century CE. The Ambegan temple in Nasik district has shared characteristics with the regions of Malwa and Gujarat and yet exhibits certain idiomatic expressions specific to the sub-region.

Another important aspect to be taken into consideration while understanding the nature of temple architecture in Maharashtra is the rule of different dynasties in different sub-regions. Though one dynasty does not conform to one architectural

language for temple building, the modes and styles of a sub-region are certainly influenced by the dynastic sovereignty in that region. For instance, the regions under Yādava power from the thirteenth century onwards seem to have consciously chosen the Bhūmija mode of architecture. Since the examples of Bhūmija mode are rampantly found in Maharashtra, particularly in Lonar, an overview of the mode is deemed necessary.

The Bhūmija mode of temple architecture proliferated from the eleventh century CE onwards, mostly in the modern-day states of Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh, with examples also found in Karnataka, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Chhattisgarh and Telangana. There is a general consensus among scholars that Malwa (part of it corresponds to the modern-day state of Madhya Pradesh), ruled by the Paramāras (tenth to thirteenth century CE),⁸⁷ is the homeland of the Bhūmija mode since some of the earliest datable temples come from this region.⁸⁸ M.A. Dhaky, while making a similar point, observes that “the Bhūmija is the form which, if not originated, at least perfected and very favoured in the Mālava country...”.⁸⁹ Scholars have argued about a century earlier existence of this mode through the examples of the Mahāvīra temple at Sewari in Rajasthan, the Mahāvīra temple at Ghanerao in Rajasthan, some of the temples in the Bhūtanātha temple complex at Ashapuri in Madhya Pradesh, Rāmalīngeśvara temple at Nandikandi in Telangana and miniature shrine models from the Kāśīviśveśvara temple at Lakkundi and Siddheśvara temple at Haveri in Karnataka.⁹⁰ Such a vast geographical spread of the mode is noteworthy. Based on epigraphical evidence two earliest and securely dated Bhūmija temples are the Udayeśvara temple at Udayapur in Madhya Pradesh (c. 1080 CE) and Śiva temple at

⁸⁷ Doria Tichit, “The Udayeśvara Temple, Udayapur: Architecture and Iconography of an 11th Century Temple in Central India,” (Unpublished PhD diss., Cardiff University, 2010), 13-31.

⁸⁸ Krishna Deva, “Bhumija Temples,” in *Studies in Indian Temple Architecture*, ed. Pramod Chandra (New Delhi: American Institute of Indian Studies, 1975), 91; Adam Hardy, *Ashapuri: Resurrecting a Medieval Temple Site*, in *Art, Icon and Architecture in South Asia, Essays in Honour of Dr. Devangana Desai*, Vol. II, eds., Anila Verghese and Anna L. Dallapiccola (New Delhi: Aryan Books International, 2015), 334-48, 336.

⁸⁹ M.A. Dhaky, *The Indian Temple Forms in Karṇāṭa Inscriptions and Architecture* (Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1977), 18.

⁹⁰ Deva, “Bhumija Temples,” 93; Dhaky, *The Indian Temple Forms in Karṇāṭa Inscriptions and Architecture*, 12, 19; Hardy, *Ashapuri: Resurrecting a Medieval Temple Site*, 334-48.

Ambarnath in Maharashtra (1060 CE). Most of these early temple *śikhara*s were built in stone, until temples from present day Maharashtra, datable to the thirteenth – fourteenth century CE, where Bhūmija *śikhara*s have been realised in brick. The Bhūmija temples in Malwa are more akin to stellate ground plan while Bhūmija temples in Maharashtra tend to follow orthogonal plans. The trajectory of Bhūmija mode in Maharashtra region is vital for the present study as even though extant *śikhara* remains have not survived in Lonar, based on the cursory remains and study of ground plans, the Yajñeśvara and Daityasūdāna temple are likely to have adorned Bhūmija *śikhara*s.

The early presence of a Bhūmija mode temple construction at Ambarnath in 1060 CE was patronized by the Śilāhāras of North Konkan. Later it became the characteristic temple architectural mode in the present-day Maharashtra, from the eleventh to the fourteenth century CE, coterminous to the rule of the Yādavas of Devagiri. The architectural morphology of Bhūmija temples in Maharashtra is varied with regard to the material used for construction, ground plans, as well as the aedicular components of the *śikhara*. Each of these factors need a nuanced discussion, which falls out of the purview of the present dissertation. However, a cursory understanding of all the factors is deemed necessary to complete the picture of the variegated nature of Bhūmija temples in Maharashtra.

To begin with, it is important to note that in contrast to the Bhūmija temples from Madhya Pradesh, an orthogonal ground plan is a preferred choice in Maharashtra. However, temples with stellate plans are not entirely absent. Some of the examples of stellate Bhūmija temples include the Mahādeva temple at Ambegan (District Nasik) and Jagadambā Devī temple at Kokamthan (District Ahmednagar). Variation is also seen in terms of the material used for the construction of the *śikhara*. The use of brick for construction of the *śikhara* is quite widespread in this region, especially in later periods. Some of the examples of the Bhūmija temples having stone *śikhara*s include Śiva temple at Ambarnath in Thane district, temple no. 1 at Balsane and, Māṇkeśvara temple at Jhodge in Dhule district, Viṣṇu temple at Anjaneri and Gondeśvara temple at Sinnar in Nashik district, Viṣṇu temple at Satgaon Bhusari and Sākeśvara temple at Satgaon in Buldhana district, Amṛteśvara temple at Ratanvadi in Ahmednagar district, among others. Dhāreśvara temple at Dharasur in Parbhani

district, Jagadambā temple at Tahakari in Ahmednagar District, Jabareśvara temple at Phaltan in Satara District, Lakṣmī temple at Jagaji in Dharashiva District, Jagadambā Devī temple at Kokamthan and Somaliṅga temple at Gursale in Satara District. These temples are some of the noteworthy examples of brick-built Bhūmija śikharas.

2.4 Religious Traditions Prevalent in the Region under Study

The religious landscape of Lonar show a multi-faith nature with representations of Vaiṣṇava, Śaiva, and Jaina religious traditions and the Nātha and Mahānubhāva sects. The cultic affiliations of temples, icons, and references from contemporary textual records are tools that aid in creating a backdrop for the prevailing religious conditions. This section shall largely focus on the region-specific examples to shed light on the religious traditions.

Generally speaking, in the period succeeding the ninth and tenth centuries CE, one can see a shift in the religious practices from *śrauta* to *smārta-purāṇic* ways of worship like *dāna*, *yātra*, and *vrata*, among others. The Vedic rituals were on the decline, and the *smārta-purāṇic* traditions governed by the principals of *bhakti* traditions were on the ascendance.⁹¹ *Tīrthas* and *Tīrthayātrās* were part and parcel of the everyday life of the laity and the common people. Cakradhara and Boṇebāi decided to visit Lonar on account of Somavāri (Somavati Amāvasya, which is a no-moon day that falls on a Monday)⁹². Puranic accounts often provide a long list of *tīrthas* that one should visit at least once. Often, these also prescribe a travel route connecting the *tīrthas*. The treatise *Caturavarga Cintāmaṇī*, written by the Yādava minister Hemādri, also provides accounts of these practices.⁹³

Temples dedicated to Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava worship are in abundance, but Śākta worship was also prevalent. Some of the finest examples in Maharashtra show that the Śiva temple at Ambarnath in Thane district, Goṇdeśvara temple at Sinnar in Nashik district, Māheśvara temple at Patne in Dhule district are dedicated to Śiva. Closer to the study area, temples at Dhotra Nandai, Jaipur Kothali, Sakegaon in Buldhana

⁹¹ Vaishali Welankar, *Vaiṣṇavism- An Iconographic Study* (Delhi: Agam Kala Prakashan, 2009), 12.

⁹² S.G. Tulpule ed., *Līlācaritra Ekāṅka* (Pune: Suvichar Prakashan Mandal, 1964), 22, 35, 63, 74.

⁹³ Novetzke, *The Quotidian Revolution*, 65.

district, Aundha Nagnath, and Aral Dhareshvara in Hingoli district are Śaiva shrines. In Lonar, the Yajñeśvara temple is a Śaiva shrine. Varud in Amravati district has temples dedicated to Śiva that are datable to the tenth-eleventh centuries CE based on the inscriptional evidence of a certain king named Kedāra.⁹⁴ A noteworthy example is the inscription of 1047 CE from the temple at Tadkhel in the Nanded district, which has a reference to grants given to a Vāgheśvara Paṇḍita of the Kālamukha sect during the Kalyāṇa Cālukya rule.⁹⁵ In this regard, it is imperative to take note of Aundha Nagnath. A growing scholarly consensus suggests that Aundha Nagnath in Parbhani district might be the same as *Āmardaka kṣetra* referenced in various inscriptions and texts, a significant foregrounding centre for Śaiva-Siddhānta tradition.⁹⁶

Mahur in the Nanded district has been an important centre of goddess worship; the cult of Reṇukā prevalent here is significant. References to goddess worship are found in the extant temples as well, and a few inferences can be drawn out from epigraphical evidence. Balāḷadevī temple at Amdapur in Buldhana and the Kamaḷajā temple in Lonar are two important *śākta* centres in this region where the main *garbhagr̥ha* deity is an aniconic form of the goddess. A significant reference is obtained from the 1128 CE inscription of Yādava Melugīdeva from Dhabadev in Dhule district that mentions the construction of a temple for the Konḍaivva goddess.⁹⁷ An eleventh-century CE inscription from Bhadravati mentions the construction of a temple for Caṇḍikā Devī.⁹⁸

Examples of temples dedicated to Viṣṇu occupy a larger percentage in the region. Within Lonar itself, Daityasūdana, Ambarkhānā, Vāgha, Mora, Rāmagaya are temples of Vaiṣṇava affiliation. In addition to this, Mehkar, an important town in proximity to Lonar, was an important Vaiṣṇava centre. Though the temples of Mehkar

⁹⁴ Shah, *A Study of Temples of Medieval Maharashtra (11th to 14th centuries CE)*, 27.

⁹⁵ S. Ritti and G.C. Shelke, eds., *Inscriptions from Nanded District* (Yashwant Mahavidyalaya, 1968), 215–16.

⁹⁶ Alexis Sanderson, 'The Impact of Inscriptions on the Interpretation of Early Śaiva Literature', *Indo-Iranian Journal* 56 (2013): 236, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15728536-13560308>.

⁹⁷ Shah, *A Study of Temples of Medieval Maharashtra (11th to 14th centuries CE)*, 40; S.G. Tulpule ed., *Prācin marāṭhi korīva lekha*, 341–343.

⁹⁸ Pradeep Meshram, Priyadarshi Khobragade, and Shrikant Ganvir, *Bhadrāvati Purātattiya Vaibhav* (Nagpur: Sanket Prakashan, 2004), 14.

have been built recently, the much older Śāraṅgadhara Bālājī and Narasimha icons confirm the strong historic Vaiṣṇava presence here. There are three important centres of Bālājī Veṅkaṭeśa, a Vaiṣṇava deity, in this region: Mehkar and Deulgaon Raja in Buldhana district and Washim in Washim district. Śrī Veṅkaṭeśa is a folk deity primarily associated with the Chenchu tribe of Andhra Pradesh (rather the Telugu speaking region), with their main centre of worship being Tirumallai.⁹⁹ R.C. Dhere points out that this Veṅkaṭeśa is the family deity (*kuladeva*) of several families in Vidarbha. Reṇukā accompanies Veṅkaṭeśa as the female counterpart of the family deity (*kulasvāminī*). He further argues that this could be because of migrations that happened from the Andhra region to Maharashtra.¹⁰⁰

The temple at Barshi Takli in the Akola district has inscriptional evidence which refers to the patronisation of a Viṣṇu temple.¹⁰¹ Apart from this, Viṣṇu temples are also found in Chandol, Satgaon Bhusari, and Umradi in the Buldhana district, and Aundha Nagnath in the Hingoli district. Interestingly, all three locations have temples dedicated to Narasimha, of which Aundha Nagnath has a small shrine with Kevala Narasimha icon in the premises of the main temple and the Umradi has a Vidaraṇa Narasimha in the *garbhagrha*. Welankar points out that the occurrence of the icons of three *avatāras*, namely, Bhūvaraha, Vidaraṇa Narasimha, and Trivikrama, surpasses other forms.¹⁰² Narasimha worship in Vidarbha can be traced to the Vākāṭaka period when temples dedicated to the Kevala Narasimha were patronised. These Narasimha cultic practices were widespread in the fifth-sixth centuries CE, as is evident from the small Narasimha icons which Bakkar proposes must be used for domestic altars.¹⁰³ Further, starting from the ninth century CE, several Narasimha *garbhagrha* deities are found at Rajapur Hingoli in Hingoli, Gaurala in Chandrapur district, Mehkar in Buldhana district, Nanded in Nanded district, Paithan in Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar district among several others. The ancient Bhāṇḍaka region, modern Bhadravati in Chandrapur district, was a significant Vaiṣṇava centre. Apart from Narasimha,

⁹⁹ R.C. Dhere, *Śrī Veṅkaṭeśa āṇi Śrī Kālahastīśvara* (Pune: Padmagandha Prakashan, 2019), 19-20.

¹⁰⁰ Dhere, *Śrī Veṅkaṭeśa āṇi Śrī Kālahastīśvara*, 224-28.

¹⁰¹ Mirashi, "Two inscriptions from Berar," 129.

¹⁰² Welankar, *Vaiṣṇavism*, 423.

¹⁰³ Bakker, *Holy Ground: Where Art Meets Text*, 155.

Gaurala also has early images of Varāha and Trivikrama.¹⁰⁴ An eleventh-century CE inscription specifies worship of the Nārāyaṇa form of Viṣṇu in a temple.¹⁰⁵ Images of Śeṣāśyī Viṣṇu are found near *bārava* adjacent to the Nīlakaṇṭheśvara temple at Sindkhed Raja, Mallikārajuna temple at Parada Darade and Narasimha temple at Umrad in Buldhana district. Remarkably, no remains of the Śeṣāśyī Viṣṇu were reported from Lonar. At predominant Viṣṇu centres like Ramtek, Welankar argues that the Rāma cult supplanted the Kevala Narasimha cult of the Vākāṭaka period, during the period of the Yādavas.¹⁰⁶ Overall, Viṣṇu worship in different forms was widespread during at least the eleventh to fourteenth centuries CE.

Examples of *trikūṭa* temples dedicated to different sets of deities, like Brahmā, Śiva and Viṣṇu, and/or Śiva, Viṣṇu and Goddess have been found. For instance, the temple at Nandgaon Khānadeśawar in Amravati district and temple no. 1 at Balsane in Dhule district are *trikūṭa* shrines. The Nandgaon Khānadeśawar temple has a shrine for Narasimha, Śiva and the goddess. Noteworthy examples are the joint pedestals found at Lonar and Charthana in the Parbhani district for Brahmā, Śiva and Viṣṇu, which indicate the presence of a single shrine dedicated to all three deities. The Hottul inscription of 1101 CE refers to a donation given for Tripuruṣadeva.¹⁰⁷ Here, it has to be reiterated that the Hippalgaon (Ganeshwadi) inscription of Bhīmanātha from 1099 CE refers to the donation granted for a temple dedicated to Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Śiva.¹⁰⁸ This is the same inscription which talks about the construction of a *maṭha* at Mehkar.

The history of Jaina religious traditions in Maharashtra can be traced back to the rock-cut caves of western Maharashtra, but the religion flourished post-tenth century CE.¹⁰⁹ Several dynasties like Rāṣṭrakūṭas, Cālukyas, Yādavas patronised Jaina religion. The Digambara Jaina sub-sect, as well as the followers of the Śvetāmbara sect, were prevalent in the Vidarbha region, Maharashtra. Relevant to the present study is the composition of *Vasudevahiṇḍī*, a text written in the fourth/fifth century

¹⁰⁴ Meshram, Khobragade, and Ganvir, *Bhadrāvati Purātattiya Vaibhav*, 10–12.

¹⁰⁵ Meshram, Khobragade, and Ganvir, 12.

¹⁰⁶ Welankar, *Vaiṣṇavism*, 425–37.

¹⁰⁷ Shah, *A Study of Temples of Medieval Maharashtra (11th to 14th centuries CE)*, 119.

¹⁰⁸ Kolte, *Mahārāṣṭrātila Kāhi Tāmrāpaṭa va śilālekha*, 123–146.

¹⁰⁹ Viraj Shah, “Jainism in Maharashtra: History and Development,” in *Kevala-Bodhi-Buddhist and Jaina History of the Deccan*, (2003): 244.

CE. This text refers to the regions of Maharashtra, coterminous with Vatsagulma, which can be identified with the Amravati district.¹¹⁰ Another very important Jaina text written during the Yādava period is *Vividhatīrthakalpa*, which implies the prominent existence of the Jaina religion during the eleventh through fourteenth centuries CE. In the region of Vidarbha, Sirpur and Karanja were important Jaina centres.¹¹¹ As listed by Rai Bahadur Hiralal, Karanja temples have huge manuscript collection, a large corpus of which constitutes Jaina manuscripts.¹¹²

Kandhāra, the Rāṣṭrakūṭa stronghold, also emerged as a Jaina centre by the thirteenth century CE.¹¹³ Jaina historical remains in the form of temple remains, sculptures, bronzes, and *caumukhas*, variously datable from the eighth to seventeenth centuries CE, have been found at Ranjana Khinkini in Akola district, Kharosa caves at Nilanga in Latur district, Ramalinga Mudgad in Latur district, Aundha Nagnath in Hingoli district, Bhadravati in Chandrapur district, Ardhapur in Nanded district, Satgaon Bhusari, Sultanpur in Buldhana district and several others.¹¹⁴ The sculptures found at Mehkar, Aundha Nagnath, and Satgaon Bhusari have been inscribed, and all contain dates from the early thirteenth century CE.¹¹⁵ A Jaina *kīrtistambha* and temple, and sculptural remains are found at Charthana in Parbhani district. On the basis of the comparative study, Viraj Shah has dated the two *caumukhas* kept in the Daityasūdāna temple in Lonar to the tenth-eleventh century CE.¹¹⁶

The Nātha *sampradāya* had its stronghold in almost all of the Maharashtra region after the tenth-eleventh centuries CE.¹¹⁷ In a recent extensive study, Vijay Sarde has reported several Nātha images from different parts of Maharashtra.¹¹⁸ Some

¹¹⁰ Shah, "Jainism in Maharashtra," 244.

¹¹¹ Shah, "Jainism in Maharashtra" 259.

¹¹² Rai Bahadur Hiralal, *Catalogue of Sanskrit and Prakrit Manuscripts in the Central Provinces and Berar*, (Nagpur: Government Press, 1926), 3.

¹¹³ A. Pathak, *Kille Kandhāra va Rāṣṭrakūṭa kālīna Śīlpavaibhav* (Pune: Mervan Technologies, 2018), 68-71.

¹¹⁴ Shah, "Jainism in Maharashtra" 244-54.

¹¹⁵ Shah, 250.

¹¹⁶ Shah, 245.

¹¹⁷ Viraj Shah, "An Unusual Nāthapanthi Cave at Anjaneri, Maharashtra," *Bulletin of the Deccan College Post-Graduate and Research Institute* 60/61, (2000-2001), 361-62.

¹¹⁸ Vijay Sarde, *The Archaeology of the Nātha Sampradāya in Western India, 12th to 15th Century*, 1st ed. (London: Routledge India, 2023), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003379362>.

of these images have been discovered in and around Lonar. These hint towards a strong Nātha presence in the region between the tenth to fourteenth centuries CE. These include Putalā *bārava* in Sindkhed Raja, Khurācī Āī temple at Charthana, Daityasūdāna and Bagīcā temples at Lonar. The Vārakarī tradition was associated with the Nātha *siddhas* as well as several Nātha *siddhas* are mentioned in the Mahānubhāva literature. The Nātha and Mahānubhāva sectarian traditions constitute a direct part of Lonar's history.

Mahānubhāva *samparadāya* which took root and flourished in the twelfth-thirteenth centuries CE in Maharashtra, is one of the most important religious sects in the context of Lonar. The progenitor of the sect was Cakradhara Svāmī, who is said to have hailed originally from Gujarat as Harapāladeva who later transformed into Cakradhara.¹¹⁹ The sect believes in the devotion towards *pañca* Kṛṣṇa or five Kṛṣṇas, which include the two deities Kṛṣṇa and Dattātreyā, and three figures from the sect Cakradhara, Guṇḍam, Rāuḷa and Cāṅgdeva Rāuḷa. The area of their active presence were the regions of Vidarbha, Marāṭhavāḍā and some parts of Khānadeśa, that is, north and northwestern Maharashtra mainly. The important centre of Mahānubhāvas, Riddhapur is situated in Amravati in northern Maharashtra. The regional consciousness of the Mahānubhāvas restricted their pilgrimage to the geographical boundary of Maharashtra, and the literature that the sect produced comprises the earliest written texts in Marathi. The route of travel of Cakradhara Svāmī and his disciples become an important source of study to understand the contemporary travel routes and connectivity between regions. For example, after having assumed the soul of Cāṅgdeva Rāuḷa, Harapāladeva from Gujarat wished to go to Ramtek for pilgrimage.¹²⁰ This informs us about a route connecting Gujarat to northern Maharashtra. Later, Cakradhara travelled to several places in Vidarbha before reaching Paithan in the Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar district.¹²¹ The references to important *tīrthas*, temples, sacred places, and deities, as well as the geographical description of places, sketches of different people, and all kinds of information, become available from the Mahānubhāva literature.

¹¹⁹ Tulpule, *Līlacaritra Ekāṅka*, līlā no. 5, 2.

¹²⁰ Tulpule, *Līlacaritra Ekāṅka*, 20.

¹²¹ Tulpule, 20-22.

2.5 Summary

The above overview is a glimpse of the political, religious, and architectural history of the larger region that contains Lonar. It is impossible to condense the historical information and background from the area under study and the time frame under consideration. However, outlining this history provides a framework through which one can look at the material evidence at Lonar. While Lonar flourished as an important *tīrtha*, the larger centres and surrounding sacred places certainly contributed to its evolution.

Chapter 3

Built Environment of Lonar: Salient Features and Distinct Characteristics

The extant built environment of Lonar, confined to the contiguous area of the crater landscape, constitutes mainly religious architecture and has survived in the form of temples, *maṭhas* and *bāravas*. All structures are spatially dispersed in multiple geographical areas of the crater, which can be broadly classified into four zones, namely, the periphery of the saltwater lake, forest cover on the crater hill slopes, the rim of the crater atop hill slopes and present-day Lonar village (this partially overlaps with the ejecta blanket of the Lonar crater).¹ The built environment is overlaid on the physical landscape, meaning that, apart from being part of the entire geographical feature of the Lonar crater, the structures are closely associated with at least one of the individual physical features that are part of the crater. For instance, Rāmagayā and Pāpahareśvara temple complexes are built around a freshwater spring, whereas the Daityasūdana temple complex is built on an elevated area, a little away from the crater depression. However, since the village settlement wherein the temple lies is part of the ejecta blanket of the crater, Daityasūdana is also physically associated with the crater.

Extant religious architecture is reported from eighteen locations dispersed throughout the crater. In addition to the structures at these locations, loose sculptures or architectural fragments are scattered throughout the current village settlement or nearby farmlands. Temporally, all these structures can be placed within the time bracket of the eleventh to eighteenth centuries CE, a rationale for which shall follow in succeeding sections of the chapter.

¹ Due to the seasonal fluctuations in the water level of Lonar Lake, the periphery of the lake often merges with the wilderness, minimalising the distinction between the two geographical areas. Yet, in the categorisation, they have been designated differently as during the scanty rainfall years, they are completely separate, which certainly affects the state of preservation of the structures on the periphery of the lake.

To facilitate our understanding of the built environment, the following chapter begins with a categorisation of the architecture from Lonar, which is purely aligned with the physical geography of the crater. Through this categorisation, the chapter enumerates architectural details of all structures found at the eighteen locations. All the structures have been discussed for their ground plan, elevational details like wall scheme, patterns of ornamentation and iconographic schemes along with the *śikhara* remain, pillar typology, and details of the interior walls, pillars, and doorways – as and where applicable. Through this approach, the motive is to document and analyse the diagnostic details of all the structures, understand the architectural vocabulary of the structures in entirety and discern overall patterns in Lonar architecture. With a focus on the structural form of the built fabric, the discussion of the architecture would aid in analysing the spatial-temporal distribution of building activity in the crater landscape. Building upon these discussions, the chapter presents a chronology within the edifices to reconstruct a historical timeline of the cultural landscape of the crater.

3.1 Categorisation of the Built Environment at Lonar

Temples constitute the largest percentage of the built environment of Lonar, others being *maṭhas* and *bāravas*. Though fewer in number, the latter play an essential role in forming the sacred space in the Lonar landscape. As stated above, all the extant structures, dispersed at eighteen locations, have been categorised under four groups, defined by the geographical location within the crater. The following chart explains this categorisation (**Fig. 3.1**).

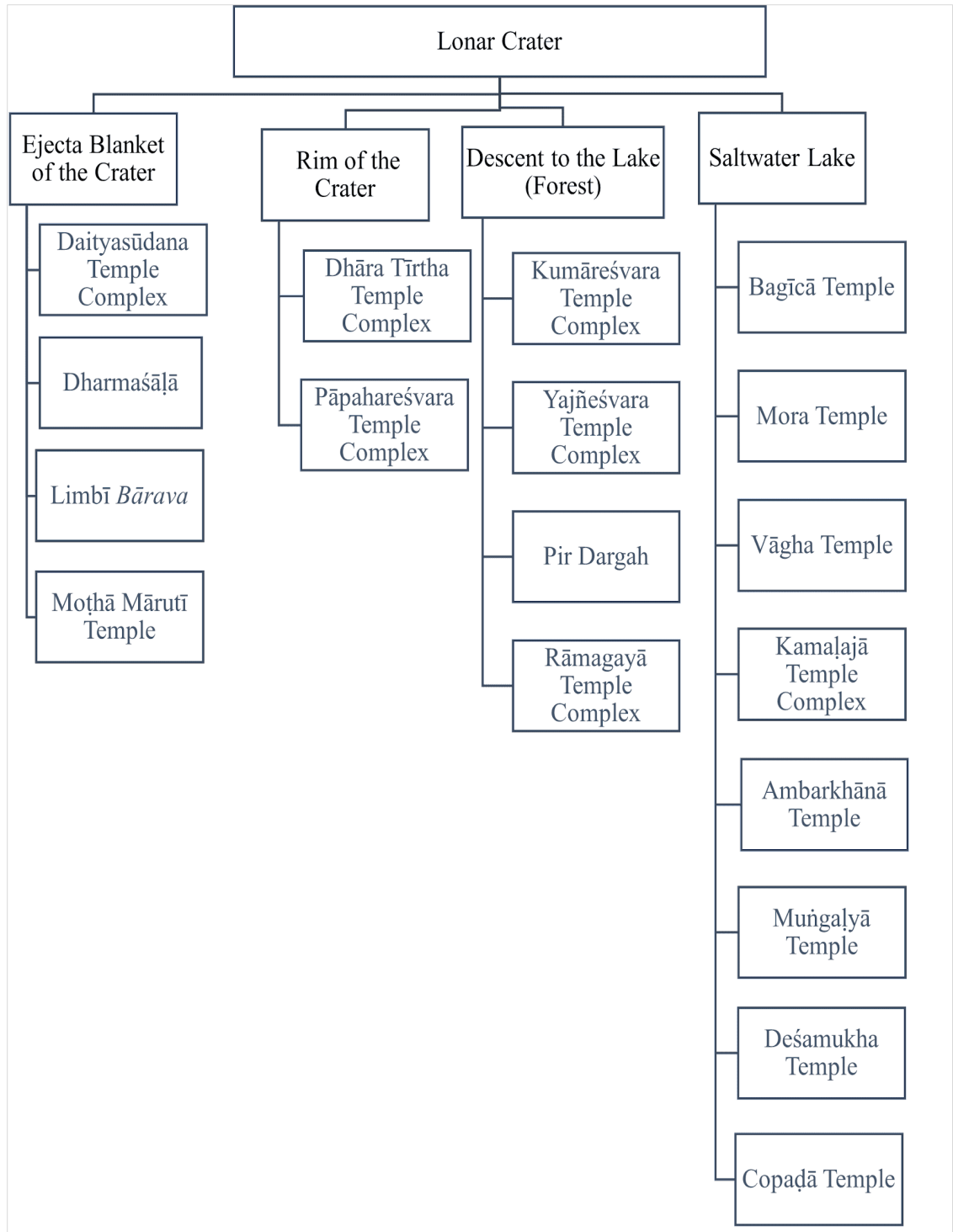


Fig. 3.1: Spatial distribution of the built environment in the Lonar crater

The flowchart on the previous page explains the categorisation of the built environment in Lonar. The criteria for the categorisation are neither based on architectural typology nor the chronology of temples. The categorisation is aligned with the spatial distribution of the built environment in the natural settings of the crater. The crater, with the saltwater lake as its centre, is the nexus of all the socio-religious processes in Lonar. Hence, the physical connectivity of every structure with the crater needs to be considered. The formation of religious buildings results from the reciprocal relationship between the physical settings and cultural narratives of the crater. Therefore, it is necessary that the structures be mapped spatially with regard to the crater environs. Furthermore, specifically, the distance of the structures from the saltwater lake becomes a vital point of consideration because the water level fluctuations of the saltwater lake significantly impact the stone fabric of temples. For instance, temples along the north-western fringe of the saltwater lake are the most affected by the accumulation of salt layers on the stone fabric. Currently, none of these temples are accessible owing to an exponential increase in the lake water level. However, even when they were accessible in drought years, the deposition of salt layers on the stone surface eroded the carved details. Thus, what gets preserved is directly proportional to the lake water levels and the overall ecosystem of the crater.

Apart from the criteria chosen for the categorisation, another important point to note here is the labels used for the locations of the built heritage. A specific categorisation exists between labels for single structures and multi-structure complexes. Thus, a single location can contain one or more structures of one or more types. Several locations comprising the built heritage in Lonar consists of a cluster of two or more structures, that is, a group or a conglomeration of temples, along with *bāravas* and/or *maṭhas*. At locations where there is more than one structure, it has been labelled as a temple complex after the prominent temple building at the location, for instance, the Rāmagayā temple complex and Daityasūdāna temple complex. There are also stand-alone structures in several locations.

3.2 Documentation Methodology

The process of primary documentation adopted for every structure has been defined by two factors: the state of preservation of the structure or the complex and the effect of drastic environmental changes on the structures. For instance, the Yajñeśvara temple situated along the descent of the crater is in a ruinous condition, which has caused problems in recording an accurate ground plan of the structure. However, in 2019-20, the Archaeological Survey of India laid down the debris of the architectural fragments, which then aided in conjecturing the original design and construction of the temple. Thus, as part of the field documentation, all the scattered architectural fragments were documented along with the extant structure, which helped in deducing the original design of the temple.

Conversely, the description and documentation of temples along the north-western fringe of the crater, namely, Copadā, Muṅgalyā, Deśamukha and Ambarakhānā, as well as the Bagīcā temple along the western periphery of the lake, relies only on the fieldwork conducted in December 2018. Since then, some of these temples have been submerged due to increased levels of lake water, and some are covered under vegetation. Additionally, even when last documented, the temples were in a dilapidated condition. Hence, the sketch ground plans of all these structures describe only their extant architectural details. Through the architectural fragments strewn in the premises of all the structures, a conjectural spatial layout has been indicated in the respective ground plans. Wherever a particular element is completely lost, for instance, the extended plinth of the Muṅgalyā temple, it has been conjecturally indicated in the ground plan. The ground plans of a few temples were available in the works of previous scholars like R.C. Agrawal, Henry Cousens and C.P. Vyas, albeit with some errors.² Considering these plans as the base, new measurements were taken as part of the documentation carried out for this project, which helped to rectify the errors in existing plans and to add missing elements.

² R.C. Agrawal, *Archaeological Remains in Western India*, (Delhi: Agam Kala Prakashan, 1989), 95, 97, 101; Henry Cousens, *Medieval Temples of the Dakhan*, (New Delhi: Director General Archaeological Survey of India, 1998), Plate CI; Chetankumar Vyas, “*World Heritage-World Famous Lonar: A Historical Study*” (Unpublished PhD Diss., Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Marathwada University, 2008), 455.

A definitive point to discuss at the onset would be the later interpolations in the structure. We have only considered the historic phases of construction until 1950 as part of the documentation. Whenever a change to the original fabric is discussed the haphazard, incongruous, and recent restorations by the Archaeological Survey of India are not considered. The historic additions or alterations that are recorded indicate a deliberate and conscious re-use of the architectural spaces in the centuries after they were originally built.

3.3 Architecture of Lonar

Structures Situated in the Current Lonar Town

There are two temple complexes within the present-day village limits; first is the Daityasūdāna temple, nearly at the centre of the current village settlement, and the second is the Moṭhā Mārutī temple, situated a short distance away from the village, to the north-east of the crater depression. Apart from these temples, Limbī Bārava - a stepwell, and Dharmaśālā - which must have been used as a rest house or *maṭha*, are other two important structures in the village premises. We shall now enumerate the details of these four structures.

1. Daityasūdāna Temple Complex

- Location

The Daityasūdāna temple complex is situated to the north-east of the crater atop a suspected archaeological mound higher than the surrounding village. The lane on the south-eastern side of the temple leads to the Limbī Bārava, while on the north-eastern side of the temple are remains of a *Vāḍā*, datable to the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries CE. A modern Jaina temple is north of Daityasūdāna temple, and the Jama Masjid is further down the same road. The latest additions in the neighbourhood of Daityasūdāna temple include residential houses and a school abutting the eastern and northern compound walls of the temple complex. Because of these later additions, the temple complex is now situated amidst a bustling settlement and is slightly distanced from the saltwater lake.

- General Description of the Daityasūdāna Temple Complex

The complex comprises the Daityasūdāna temple (henceforth called as main temple in this section), Tripuruṣācā Maṭha,³ traces of three small temples (subsidiary shrines), plinth remains of a *maṇḍapa* (probably a *vāhana maṇḍapa*), *samādhī* of Saccidāśrama Svāmī and remains of an entrance gateway. All of these are enclosed within a *prākāra* wall, the remains of which encircle the complex on the northern, southern and western sides (**Fig. 3.2**). These structures do not belong to the same period of construction.

The Daityasūdāna temple complex has undergone significant changes since its construction. This includes restorations to the main temple fabric, addition of new structures or ancillary shrines, alterations to the existing structures, and complete dilapidation of some original edifices. To speculate about the dilapidated structures of the complex, several architectural members like pillar shafts and bases, *bhadrāpīṭha*, broken pieces of the *varaṇḍikā* mouldings, archway remains, and capstones strewn within the complex premises have been of immense use.

The Daityasūdāna temple complex is one of the most celebrated and studied temples from Lonar. Hence, it is of utmost importance to take an overview of all the previous studies before we delve into a nuanced architectural description of the Daityasūdāna temple complex. Earlier studies on Lonar, as a site in general or studies centred on the discussion on temples in particular, have conspicuously focused on the Daityasūdāna temple.⁴ The main reasons for this almost undivided attention could be the fairly well-preserved state of the temple, its grandeur with respect to scale, employment of sculpture and ornament on the temple body, all of which are a rare find in other temples from Lonar. Furthermore, the scholarly discussions have been skewed towards the main temple structure and do not take into consideration other

³ In present times, the *maṭha* is also called as Brahmā or Garuḍa Temple. But because it has been observed that the nomenclature of the temple keeps changing, in the present thesis henceforth, the temple has been labelled as the Tripuruṣācā maṭha. This is the oldest known nomenclature of the temple.

⁴ See descriptions of the Daityasūdāna temple in the works of the following authors. G.B. Deglurkar, *Temple Architecture and Sculpture of Maharashtra* (Pune: Aparant, 2019); O.P. Verma, *Yādavas and their times* (Nagpur: Vidarbha Samshodhan Mandal, 1970); A.P. Jamkhedkar, *Maharāṣṭra Rājya Gazetteer Maharāṣṭra: Itihās Prācin Kāl Sthāpatya va Kalā* (Mumbai: Darshanika Vibhag, 2007).

small structures and architectural remnants, whereas the present study identifies the need to map the temple complex premises in its entirety.

One of the earliest authors to discuss Daityasūdāna temple was Major Robert Gill, as part of his report of the tour conducted in the region of Berar.⁵ Gill remarked that around the 1850s, the temple was partially buried (whether deliberately buried or buried in debris is unclear from the writing).⁶ Later, during his tour of Berar, approximately twenty years later the incident of buried temple that Gill recalled that the temple was unearthed to reveal the sculptures on the walls of the temple.⁷ In the photograph provided by Gill, one can notice a heap of mud up to the level of the plinth of the east-facing *mukhamāṇḍapa* of the temple.⁸ The second half of the late nineteenth century CE is also the period when Saccidāśrama, who resided in Lonar, is credited to have unearthed many temples and icons including the temple of Daityasūdāna.⁹ Yadava Madhav Kale, one of the first historians based out of Lonar to write about the site, has discussed the temple of Daityasūdāna as one of the most important sites in Lonar, apart from the Dhāra Tīrtha and the crater itself. He regarded it as one of the few known monuments in this region stylised like the Cālukyan temples, dated it to at least a thousand years ago, and observed the ground plan consisting of two circular components connected at the centre by a passage.¹⁰ Further, he also compared the style and construction of the Daityasūdāna temple with the Nāgaṇātha temple at Aundha Naganath.¹¹ Kale also provided vital information that

⁵ Major Robert Gill, “Notes on Hemadpanthi temples of West Berar,” in *Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, ed. The Honorary Secretaries (Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1873), 66-72.

⁶ Since Gill is pointing to this incident from the past, it is likely that he is presenting the account as per the information gathered from the people of Lonar.

⁷ Gill, “Notes on Hemadpanthi temples of West Berar,” 70.

⁸ Robert Gill, “Photograph of the Great Temple at Lonar, Buldhana district, Maharashtra from the Allardyce Collections,” British Library, accessed October 13 2023, https://explore.bl.uk/primo_library/libweb/action/dlSearch.do?query=any,contains,Lonar&vid=BLVU1&institution=BL&search_scope=LSCOP-WEBSITE&tab=website_tab.

⁹ Yadava Madhav Kale, *Loṇāra Varṇana*, (Satara: Sahasrakar, 1903); S.B. Bugdane, *Loṇāra Darśana*, (Lonar: Shreeram offset, 2014). It is said that when Saccidāśrama Svāmī began residing in Lonar, he found that Daityasūdāna temple was buried, purportedly to be saved from the invasion of the Muslim invaders. Svāmī dug out the temple and restored it to former glory.

¹⁰ Kale, *Loṇāra Varṇana*, 12.

¹¹ Kale, 13.

two villages were assigned for the upkeep of the Daityasūdāna temple during the Nizam of Hyderabad's rule. This was later discontinued during the colonial rule.¹²

Another interesting account about the temple comes from the writings of Henry Cousens. He remarked about Daityasūdāna temple as “the best surviving example of old medieval temples in Berar.”¹³ Cousens commented that “the building seems never to have been finished, the roof and some parts of the top of the walls with the top of the three doorways of the hall, not having been completed.”¹⁴ He further substantiated his argument by noting an absence of scattered architectural members in the vicinity of the temple. Cousens's observations about the incomplete construction of the temple certainly are not true. He might have speculated this because a reconstruction or restoration from the historical period in another material, in this case, brick, is generally not seen in the contemporary period temples from the regions of Maharashtra.¹⁵ However, the remnant pilasters in the *maṇḍapa* of the temple, the broken shafts of pillars in the temple premises and the bases of the pillars on the *mukhamaṇḍapas* clearly indicate that the temple was originally completed in stone. A layer of brick construction has been added onto the existing stone masonry in the twentieth century CE.

A.V. Naik considered Daityasūdāna temple as “the best of the extant examples of the late medieval architecture in Berar.”¹⁶ Naik argued that the temple was dedicated to Sūrya, as the west-facing *bhadra* projection of the temple contains a two-armed Sūrya image.¹⁷ O.P. Verma wrote about Daityasūdāna as a “Yādava

¹² Kale, *Loṇāra Varṇana*, 12-13. Names of the villages or the chiefs have not been provided in the text. But this is the only text that mentions certain patronage received by the temple for its upkeep.

¹³ Henry Cousens, *Medieval Temples of the Dakhan*. (Calcutta: Central Publication Branch, 1998), 72.

¹⁴ Cousens, *Medieval Temples of the Dakhan*, 70-72.

¹⁵ This is not to say that the temples in Maharashtra are in pristine condition or that historic conservations/preservations are unknown. Temple buildings with multi-layered histories are a common occurrence. However, the structures that Cousens has visited and analysed in his work exhibit minimal layers of reconstruction, especially in different construction materials other than stone.

¹⁶ A.V. Naik, “Structural Architecture of the Deccan,” in *New Indian Antiquary*, eds. S.M. Katre and P.K. Gode, IX, nos.7-12 (Bombay: Karnatak Publishing House, 1947) 187-329.

¹⁷ A.V. Naik, “Structural Architecture of the Deccan,” 299, 302.

monument” while comparing it with other contemporary temple structures.¹⁸ G.B. Deglurkar noted that Daityasūdāna temple, “best of the extant temples of the late mediaeval period in Vidarbha.”¹⁹ Drawing from Cousens, he also commented that *maṇḍapa* of temple, originally built in stone, remained incomplete, which was later finished using coarse brickwork. Based on the Sūrya image in the principal *bhadra*, he suggested that the original dedication of the temple must have been to Sūrya.²⁰ In this regard, observations put forth by Vaishali Welankar need to be taken into consideration. Welankar has studied various icons of Viṣṇu on the *jaṅghā* of the Daityasūdāna temple. Based on her study, she argued that “on the basis of the iconography of the interior of this temple it seems that the temple might have been dedicated originally to Viṣṇu, but the iconography of the exterior of the temple does not indicate so, and therefore the original dedication of this temple remains an unresolved question.”²¹ The discussion on the affiliation of the religious affiliation of the Daityasūdāna temple shall follow in the succeeding chapter of the present study.

Kumud Kanitkar has hypothesised that the Daityasūdāna temple must have adorned a Bhūmija *śikhara*, which is now lost. Her hypothesis is based on *pipal* leaf and *gavākṣa* motifs on the temple body, like pillar and pilaster shafts and pediments on the walls. Adam Hardy suggested these two peculiar motifs as hallmarks of the Bhūmija mode.²² Doria Tichit, in her thesis on the Udayeśvara temple at Udayapur in Madhya Pradesh, discussed various Bhūmija monuments from modern-day states of Maharashtra, Gujarat, Malwa and Rajasthan; Daityasūdāna is one temple under

¹⁸ Verma, *Yādavas and their times*, 347.

¹⁹ Deglurkar, *Temple Architecture and Sculpture of Maharashtra*, 161.

²⁰ Deglurkar, 162.

²¹ Vaishali Welankar, *Vaishnavism: An Iconographic Study* (Delhi: Agam Kala Prakashan, 2009) 75.

²² Kumud Kanitkar. “Gavaksha and Pipal Leaf Motifs: Hallmarks of Bhumija Temples.” In *Pratnaratnam Essays in Honour of Dr. Arvind Prabhakar Jamkhedkar*, eds. Suraj A Pandit, Manjiri Bhalerao, Ambarish Khare (Pune: Samvidya Institute of Cultural Studies, 2019), 237-53. The arguments presented in this article by Kanitkar are based on Adam Hardy’s seminal work on the *gavākṣas* as hallmarks of distinguishing the Bhūmija mode of temple architecture. For reference, see Adam Hardy, *The Temple Architecture of India* (Wiley, 2007); Adam Hardy and Mattia Salvini, *Theory and Practice of Temple Architecture in Medieval India: Bhoja’s Samarāṅgaṇasūtradhāra and the Bhojpur Line Drawings* (Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, 2015).

discussion in her survey, and it is important to note that she dates the temple to the late thirteenth century CE.²³

▪ The Main (Daityasūdāna) Temple: Exterior

The foremost striking features of the temple are its scale and the profusion of figural sculptures on the exterior walls of the temple, which sets it apart from all other temple buildings in Lonar. The temple comprises a *garbhagr̥ha*, *antarāḷa* and a *gūḍhamanḍapa*, which is connected to three *mukhamanḍapas* to its eastern, northern and southern sides. Except for the plinths with traces of the pillar positions that must have supported its roof, nothing of the superstructures of the *mukhamanḍapa* has survived. Both the *garbhagr̥ha* and the *sabhāmanḍapa* are stellate in plan, which is one of the most distinctive characteristics of the temple (**Fig. 3.3**). The *garbhagr̥ha* is *saptaratha* in plan, the *bhadrās*, principal projections of each side of the *manḍovara*, are flanked by *pratirathas*, *pratibhadrās* and *karnās* on their sides. Placed at right-angle, the *bhadrās* are projected to appear like miniature porches, thus creating deep *devakoṣṭhas* at the *jaṅghā* level of the temple elevation.²⁴ A similar kind of porch-like treatment to the *bhadrās* is also seen in the Gondeśvara temple at Sinnar in the Nashik district of Maharashtra. Each *bhadra* has two minor offsets, that can be called as *pratibhadrās* and *upabhadrās*, that diminish in scale compared to the central projection and are placed before the wider *pratiratha* projection. Such kind of multi-offset treatment pattern to the *bhadra* is also seen in several temples in Lonar, for instance, the Kamaḷajā and Rāmagayā temples. This offset treatment makes the *bhadra* appear more projected than usual. These *bhadra* projections are topped by *samvaraṇa* roofs, which must have punctured the original *manḍapa śikhara* in three cardinal directions.

The elevation of the temple mainly consists of a *pīṭha*, *vedibandha*, *jaṅghā*, *varaṇḍikā*, and most likely a *śikhara* atop it, which is lost today (**Fig. 3.4**). Among the mouldings of the *pīṭha*, the lowermost visible moulding along the eastern elevation of

²³ Doria Tichit, “*The Udayesvara Temple, Udayapur: Architecture and Iconography of an 11th Century Temple in Central India*” (PhD diss., Welsh School of Architecture, Cardiff University, 2010).

²⁴ Both Cousens and Deglurkar have observed the unusual projected feature of the *bhadrās*. For their detailed descriptions see, Deglurkar, *Temple Architecture and Sculpture of Maharashtra*, 161; Cousens, *Medieval Temples of the Dakhan*, 69.

the temple is a *bhiṭṭa*. It is partially buried on the western elevation of the temple. The basal mouldings, from bottom to top, are in the following order - *jāḍyakumbha*, *karṇaka*, *hamsa paṭṭikā*, a *paṭṭikā* with scrolls and *grāsapaṭṭī*. The *jāḍyakumbha* is decorated with diamond motifs on the vertical face, the curved *kapotālī* moulding has floral designs and the protruding *karṇaka* is adorned with geometric designs. In addition to this, the *pīṭha* of the three *mukhamaṇḍapas* have a *narathara* moulding that, along with human figures, has occasional depictions of erotic panels and yogic figures. Important to note here is that the *narathara* moulding is specific only to the *pīṭha* of the three *mukhamaṇḍapas* and does not continue along the *maṇḍapa*, *kapilī* or *garbhagr̥ha*. Above the *grāsapaṭṭī*, the *pīṭha* is then followed by the *vedibandha* mouldings. The sequence of the *vedibandha* mouldings is the same along *maṇḍapa* and the *garbhagr̥ha*. From bottom to top, these consist of the following mouldings - *khūra* with intricate geometric carvings, a slender *kaṇi*, a wide elaborate *kumbha*, *kalaśa* and *kapotālī*, (uppermost *kapotālī* mouldings act as the *mañcikā* below the *jaṅghā*), all separated from each other by narrow and shallow recesses or *antarpātras*. The *kumbha* moulding is broad and divided into two parts, each with a shallow square niche at its centre decorated with diamond motifs, scrolls, lotus buds and a few figural sculptures. The lower half of the *kumbha* has scroll patterns flanking the central niche and *gagāraka* on the upper horizontal border, and the upper half has semi-circular or half-moon designs, including the moulding of the *bhadra* projection. Above this *kumbha* are the *kalaśa* and *kapotālī* mouldings, both bereft of any ornamentation. Further up, the *kapotālī* joins the mouldings of the *jaṅghā* (**Fig. 3.5**).

The vertical architectural articulation of the *jaṅghā* is notable, in which each recess and projection of the temple is articulated like a pilaster. On the *kapotālī* rests the pillar base, formed of two mouldings modelled similar to the *kapotālī* and conjoined with a square niche on its frontal side. The main portion of the *jaṅghā*, including all recesses and projections, has figure sculptures carved on a pedestal. There is a band of *kīrtimukhas*, followed by a slightly offset *mālāsthāna* above these sculptures. Above, the *jaṅghā* follows the *udgama* portion of the temple, which also has figural sculptures framed in square niches. This is capped by a *ghaṭa* like in a pillar or a pilaster surmounted by a *phalaka*, on which rests a prominently protruding eave with *yogī* figures depicted in varied yogic postures. Such figures on the protruding eave mouldings are also seen in the Rāmagayā temple along the crater

slope in Lonar. Other examples of this eave patterns are the Jogeśvara temple at Devalane and Maṇakeśvara temple at Jhodage, both in the Nashik district of Maharashtra.

Daityasūdana temple *jaṅghā* is one of the most ornate temple wall fabrics in Lonar, profusely covered with sculptures on each side of all its projections and recesses (**Fig. 3.6**). However, as Cousens has also remarked, the workmanship of the icons carved on the exterior wall is of a poor quality, which has often hampered the anatomy of the sculptures.²⁵ Hasty building might have led to mismatched ornamentation patterns on the wall mouldings. But the choice of icons carved on this *jaṅghā* is unique in certain ways. Delving into the nuanced description of every icon on the wall is outside the purview of the present research, however, it is imperative to know the overall iconographic scheme employed here.²⁶ The principal *bhadrās* of the *garbhagrha* house the figures of Sūrya, Narasimha and an unidentified Goddess in the west, north and south facing *devakoṣṭhas* respectively.

The figural sculptures on the *jaṅghā* do not follow a set or standardised pattern on each side, but they are certainly inclined towards depicting icons from the Vaiṣṇava pantheon. This includes *vyūhas* of Viṣṇu, Lakṣmī Viṣṇu icons, sculptural panels portraying *daityāri* Viṣṇu, *avatāras* of Viṣṇu – Varāha, Paraśurāma, Vamāna, Kṛṣṇa, Rāma, Balarāma (in the order of their appearance along the *pradakṣiṇā patha* of the temple). Icons of Narasimha and Varāha are several in number.²⁷ Depiction of Kṛṣṇa *līla* panels, located predominantly on the north-east and south-east facing *jaṅghā* portions of the *maṇḍapa* of the temple, include panels portraying the birth of Kṛṣṇa, where Nanda is shown carrying newborn Kṛṣṇa to Gokūḷa, Pūtanāvadha, Govardhanadhārī Kṛṣṇa, and Muralīdhara Kṛṣṇa. Episodes from Ramāyaṇa like the Vālī Sugrīva fight and Rāma-Lakṣmaṇa-Sītā have also been carved. The north-western quadrant of the *garbhagrha* has the icons of Śiva, Viṣṇu and Brahmā carved in a sequence. The broad spectrum of divinities carved on the *jaṅghā* also includes the

²⁵ Cousens, *Medieval Temples of Dakhan*, 69-70.

²⁶ See Fig. A.8 in the Appendix of this dissertation for the placement of the imagery on the Daityasūdana temple *jaṅghā*.

²⁷ There are approximately five icons of Narasimha and Varāha each on the Daityasūdana temple *jaṅghā*. A detailed discussion concerning the frequency of these icons from not only Daityasūdana temple but all other temples from Lonar shall follow in the fourth chapter.

depiction of male deities Tripurānataka Śiva, Bhairava, Gaṇeśa and female deities like Sarasvatī, Mahiśasuramardinī, Cāmuṇḍā among others. Depictions of deities are equally complimented and supported by *mithuna-maithuna* figures, Sūrasundarīs, *nartakī* and ascetics. *Mithuna-maithuna* figures are not only in the *salilāntaras* of the *jaṅghā* but also occupy prominent positions on the main temple projections. This conspicuous location of *maithunas* is a noteworthy feature.

The main *śikhara* of the temple has not survived. No material clues are found for its conjectural reconstruction. Apart from the base mouldings that usually constitute the base of the *śikhara*, none of the aedicular components have survived. Based on the ground plan and the elevation, it is likely that the temple must have possessed a *śikhara* belonging to the Bhūmija mode of temple architecture. It is also likely that instead of stone, such a *śikhara* was materialised in moulded bricks layered with stucco. In the previous chapter, it has been discussed that several examples of brick *śikharas* in the Bhūmija mode were common in Maharashtra during the twelfth to fourteenth centuries CE. However, in the case of Daityasūdāna, nothing can be said conclusively in the absence of any material trace hinting towards the original form of the *śikhara*. The current roof of the temple has been heavily altered.

Like the brickwork on the entrance doorways, the northern side entrance of the *maṇḍapa* has remains of a *nagārakhānā* type of structure atop it. Currently, the remains of this archway are best preserved above the north-facing *maṇḍapa* of the temple, facing the entrance gateway in the *prākāra* of the temple complex. In the northern wall of the *maṇḍapa* from the internal side, a staircase was added later, probably with the intention to provide access to the upper storey of the temple. Such kind of remains are not seen on the other two gateways. This raises the question of whether the northern entrance was purposely modified during later times to make it the principal entrance. Interestingly, a little further from this *maṇḍapa*, we find the remains of the gateway added sometime during the sixteenth - seventeenth centuries CE to the temple complex. The restorations to the *maṇḍapa* of the main temple and alterations in the complex can be speculated to be one phase of re-building or re-occupation for the temple complex.

- The Main (Daityasūdāna) Temple: Interior

The interiors of the *maṇḍapa* of the temple were renovated or re-built with brickwork a few centuries after the original construction of the temple (**Fig. 3.8**). The corbelling of the *maṇḍapa* ceilings has been replaced by brickwork to create a domical ceiling along the aisles and the nave of the *maṇḍapa* (**Fig. 3.9**). This pattern of brickwork is seen in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries CE when the region was under Sultanate rule, and Islamic architectural practices were widespread. R.C. Agrawal argues that the style of construction and the size of the brick used in Daityasūdāna temple is similar to the brick size used in the restoration of Nīlakaṇṭheśvara temple at Sindkhed Raja in Buldhana district.²⁸ Further, he also suggests that *Jādhavas* of Sindkhed might have been instrumental in the renovation of the *maṇḍapa* of Daityasūdāna temple.²⁹

There are remnants of stone pilasters of the *maṇḍapa* along the walls, which must have been architectural members of the original construction.³⁰ The four central pillars of the *catuskī* that might have supported the central nave are probably now encased in the brick piers or might have been replaced during the brick renovations (**Fig. 3.8**). The elevated platform on which the pillars must have stood remains in a crude and renovated form. The typology of the pilasters from the *maṇḍapa* provides a hint of the pillar typology of the four central pillars. Broken pieces of similar pillars lie in the premises of the temple. These remnants likely constituted the pillars of the three *mukhamaṇḍapas*, as well as pillars of the *vāhana maṇḍapa*, a plinth of which remains in front of the east-facing *maṇḍapa* of the temple. On the other hand, the original stone masonry interiors of the *antarāḷa* and the *garbhagrha* have survived, which are contemporary to the exterior stone fabric of the temple. The triangular cornerstones of the corbelled ceiling of the *antarāḷa* have sculpture panels. These include – Daityasūdāna Lavaṇāsūra *vadha*, Muralīdhara Kṛṣṇa, Narasimha killing Hiranyakaśipu and Viṣṇu killing a demon.³¹ These four panels certainly hint at the

²⁸ R.C. Agrawal, *Archaeological Remains in Western India* (Delhi: Agam Kala Prakashan, 1989), 166-170.

²⁹ Agrawal, *Archaeological Remains in Western India*, 170.

³⁰ Agrawal also agrees that the extant pilasters must have part of the original *maṇḍapa* based on which he speculates that the *maṇḍapa* might have a domical or circular ceiling, 166. See Fig. 3.2 for the original position of the pilasters in the temple *maṇḍapa*.

³¹ Vaishali Welankar has identified the panel as Kṛṣṇa engaged in a fight. See, Welankar, *Vaishnavism*, 75-76.

possibility of the temple being a monument dedicated to the Vaiṣṇava sect. The presiding deity in the *garbhagrha* is also an image of Daityasūdana standing upright on the demon that he vanquished, the Lavaṇāsūra. However, it is said that this icon was not the original object of worship, and even stylistically, it is not contemporary to the temple. Purportedly, the present sculpture was donated by the Bhonsles of Nagpur.³² Though, this patronage cannot be corroborated based on any literary evidence, the pattern of the sculpture and the painting on the niche surrounding the sculpture, it can be conjectured that the icon does belong to seventeenth - eighteenth centuries CE. The large pedestal on which this sculpture stands today, seems older, contemporary to the original construction of the temple. Depiction of a small icon of Garuḍa on this pedestal and the mouldings of the pedestal indicates that the original must also have been a large and one belonging to Vaiṣṇava pantheon.

- Tripuruṣācā Maṭha

The Tripuruṣācā Maṭha is situated to the southeast of the main temple (Fig. 3.7). Locally known as the Brahmā temple or the Garuḍa temple, the architecture of this *maṭha* is stylistically similar to a commonly found typology of *maṭhas* in Maharashtra, datable to the twelfth - thirteenth centuries CE. Within the site of Lonar it draws parallels with the ground plan of the Reṇukā temple in the Dhāra Tīrtha complex and the probable shrine within the plan of the Dhāramaśālā at Lonar. *Maṭhas* similar to this plan are also found at Balsane in Dhule district, Charthana in Parbhani district and Sinnar in Nasik district, among others.³³ A recurring type of plan highlights a conscious choice of adopting a specific architectural program for building a *maṭha*, especially during the early medieval periods of Maharashtra region.

The spatial layout of the Tripuruṣācā Maṭha consists of two components; a rectangular *mukhamandapa* and a square *mandapa-cum-garbhagrha* (Fig. 3.2). The

³² During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries CE, Bhonsles of Nagpur had their sway over the region of Central Provinces and Berar. For reference, Zahiruddin Malik, 'Side Lights on the Administrative System of the Bhonsle State of Nagpur (1740-1772)', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 36 (1975): 310–20. But details of donation of the sculpture from the court is not available. It is also possible that under the Bhonsle administration, the local chief donated the sculpture, but the name of the royal court stayed in public memory.

³³ Arunchandra Pathak, "Madhyayugīna Maṭhasthāpatya," in *Marāṭhavāḍa: Eka Śodha*, (Dombivali: Sumeru Prakashan, 2009) 89-112.

mukhamaṇḍapa is semi open, with pillars on the entrance side and a small entrance with an ornate *dvāraśākhā* leads into the pillared *maṇḍapa*-cum-*garbhagrha* (**Fig. 3.10**). The exterior walls of the *maṭha* are devoid of any ornamentation. The back side of the *maṭha* is flushed with the *prākāra* of the Daityasūdāna temple complex. Both the pillars in the *mukhamaṇḍapa* and the *maṇḍapa* are square in plan, occasionally with geometric designs on the square slabs on the pillar shafts. At the rear end of the *maṇḍapa*, there is a pedestal for three icons, where at present stand the icons of Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Garuḍa (**Fig. 3.11**). However, the Garuḍa icon seems to have been placed here later. The original dedication and placement of the icons on the pedestal can be speculated based on the *vāhanas* on this pedestal. From left to right, the frontons of the pedestal have a *hamsa* below the image of Brahmā, Garuḍa below the image of Viṣṇu and Nandī below the image of Garuḍa. An icon of Śiva must have been at the third location on the pedestal. A.P. Jamkhedkar has argued that the Garuḍa image placed on the pedestal could have been originally inside the *vāhana maṇḍapa* which is in front of the Daityasūdāna temple.³⁴

▪ Other Structural Remains in the Complex

Apart from the extant structures discussed above, the Daityasūdāna temple complex has several architectural remains strewn on its premises. To the north-west of the main temple, one can find traces of two temples or small shrines (**Fig. 3.2**). The ground plans of these temples have been conjecturally reconstructed based on the outline of the foundation stones. (**Fig. 3.12**) Amongst these, Temple A seems to have a ground plan comprising a *garbhagrha*, *antarāḷa*, *maṇḍapa* and fronted by a *mukhamaṇḍapa*. The traces of the outer wall of the temple, reminiscent of the northern plinth of the temple, suggest it to be a *pañcaratha* in plan with a *sabhāmaṇḍapa* having four pillars at its centre, surrounded by rectangular aisles on all four sides. The remnant pillar base is similar in scale to the pillar in the *maṭha* from the Daityasūdāna temple complex. Based on the evidence of all these remains, it can be surmised that Temple A was a single shrine temple structure of a modest scale. Since no remains of the superstructure are found in the complex, it is difficult to estimate the form of the temple in its entirety. But most certainly, it was a *pañcaratha*

³⁴ A.P. Jamkhedkar, *Mahārāṣṭra Rājya Gazetteer Itihāsa- Prācīna Kāla Sthāpatya va Kalā*. (Mumbai: Darshanika Vibhag, Sanskrutik Karyavibhag, Maharashtra Shasan, 2002), 217.

temple built in stone, and the *śikhara* might be in stone or brick. To speculate about the period based on the discernible features, the cursory information deducible from the remains would place its construction in a broad time frame sometime between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries CE. This would imply that the Temple A structure was built later than but was near contemporary to the main Daityasūdāna temple.

Further to the south, adjacent to Temple A, there are traces of another temple, labelled as Temple B in the ground plan (Fig. 3.2, 3.12). It appears smaller than Temple A, consisting of only a *garbhagrha* and a *maṇḍapa*. Apart from demarcating the layout of the temple based on faint traces, it is nearly impossible to ascertain its plausible original form. Similarly, traces of a structure are also seen to the north-east of the temple, near the north *prākāra* of the complex. However, overgrown vegetation has erased any remains of the structure. All these structural remains indicate that the complex did not comprise only the Daityasūdāna temple; rather, at least two or three smaller shrines surrounded the central edifice.

A continuous building activity in the Daityasūdāna temple complex can also be speculated based on the traces of several pillar fragments and other architectural remains. The pillar fragments can be tentatively divided into three types, one of which resembles the typology of the pilasters of the Daityasūdāna temple. This variety has multi-sided shafts with icons on lower portions of the pillars. The other two types are likely to be *rucaka* type of pillars. To the south-west of Daityasūdāna temple, amongst the debris of the fallen *prākāra* of the complex, one of the pillar bases has a depiction of the icon of Matsyendranātha. The figure is eroded, however, it can be identified based on the fish depicted below the sitting figure. Similarly, to the west of Daityasūdāna temple as well there are a bunch of remains, amongst which one of the pillar bases depicts a fish, but again the human figure is eroded. Based on this, the lost figure can be identified as Matsyendranātha. In addition to these earlier unreported icons, Vijay Sarde has previously reported a Matsyendranātha figure from the *kumbha* on the northwestern *karṇa* of the *garbhagrha* of the Daityasūdāna temple.³⁵ The

³⁵ Vijay Sarde, “Archaeological Investigations of the Natha Sampradaya in Maharashtra (c. 12th to 15th century CE”. (PhD diss., Deccan College PGRI, 2019), 151. He has also reported a Matsyendranātha figure from a pillar of the *maṇḍapa* of the Bagīcā temple. For a discussion on the presence of all these Matsyendranātha figures within the Daityasūdāna temple, refer to Chapter 4, section 4.6.

remains to the south of the Daityasūdāna temple also comprise an interesting *bhadrapīṭha* with depiction of the *vāhanas*, Nandī and Garuḍa, one below the other. Most certainly, there was a sculpture of Harīhara on this *bhadrapīṭha*. Fragments of a torso near this pedestal and a broken bust in the north-eastern corner of the temple all plausibly belong to a Harīhara sculpture that might have stood on this pedestal. Carved in the round, this must have been placed in a *garbhagrha*, most likely in a subsidiary shrine within the Daityasūdāna temple complex. Even though the hands of the sculpture are broken, the *mukūṭa* fragment and the *samabhaṅga* posture indicate it to be a harīhara sculpture (Fig. 3.13).

▪ Period of Construction

Based on the visual comparison and stylistic analysis of all the extant architectural remains (preserved and dilapidated), two broad phases of building activity can be distinguished within this complex. The main temple, Tripuruṣācā Maṭha, the *vāhana maṇḍapa* plinth and ruins of the side shrines to the north of the main temple, all plausibly date from the early or mid-thirteenth century CE. Through the Archaeological Survey of India explorations conducted here during the year 2019-20, few steps were located behind the *samādhī mandira* of Saccidāśrama Svāmī. C.P. Vyas provides a conjectural drawing suggesting the location of the *bārava*.³⁶ Though there is scope to conjecture the location of the *bārava*, nothing can be said conclusively until further excavations are undertaken at the very location. The later additions to the temple interiors and the doorways of the temple, as well as the *prākāra* wall remains and the gateway remains to the north of the temple, can be considered a phase second of construction in this complex. The *samādhī* of Saccidāśrama Svāmī is the latest construction within the Daityasūdāna complex.

Based on the architectural details of this temple, the construction of Daityasūdāna can be dated to the middle of the thirteenth century CE. There is no other extant temple construction in the Lonar village which can be dated to this period. Within the Lonar settlement, the only other near contemporary structures to this temple are the Limbī Bārava and Dhāramaśālā.

³⁶ Chetankumar Vyas, “*World Heritage-World Famous Lonar: A Historical Study*,” (Unpublished PhD Diss., Marathawada University, 2008), 455.

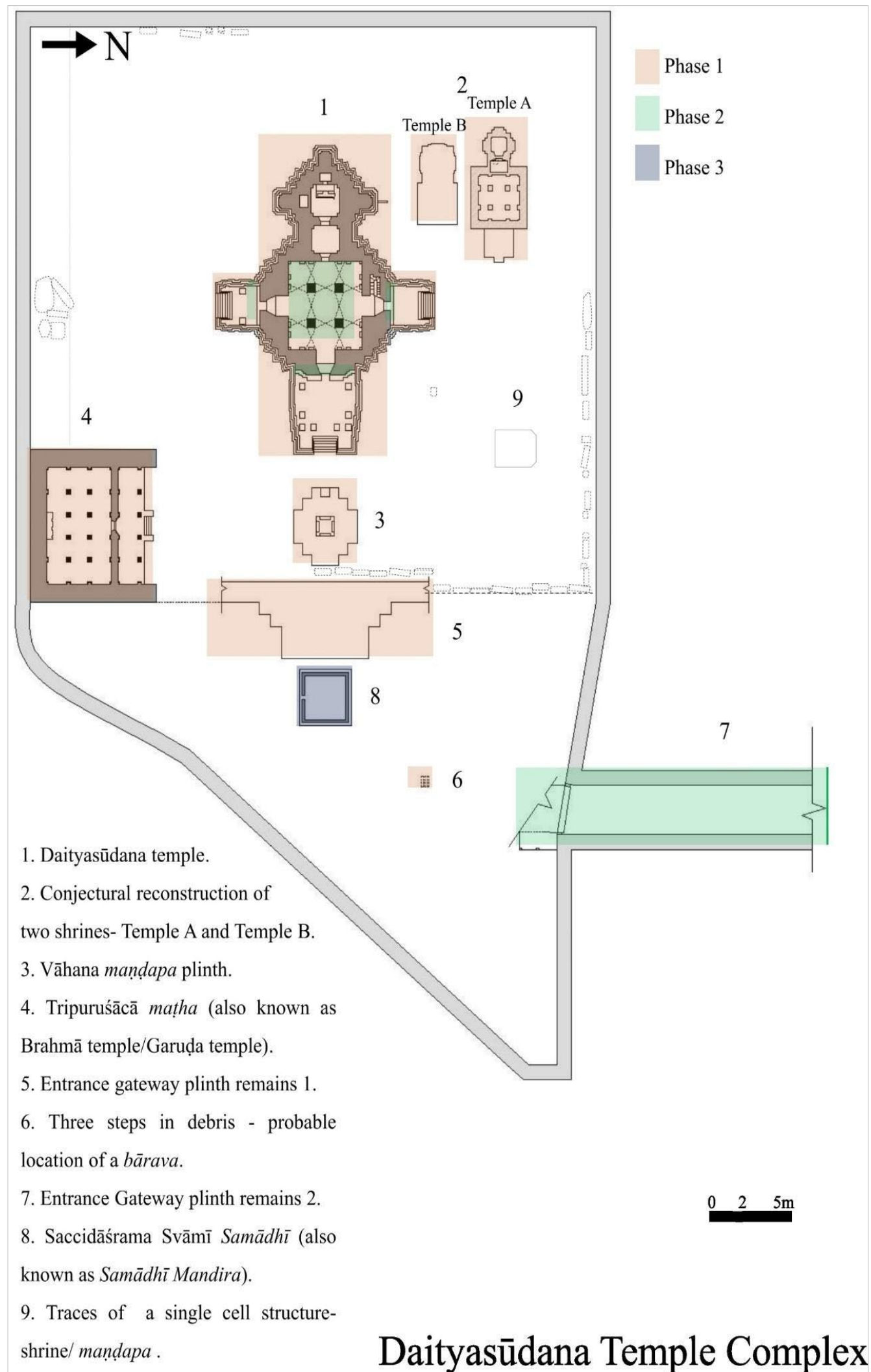


Fig. 3.2: Ground plan of the Daityasūdana temple complex

Note:

This plan shows all the extant structures in the Daityasūdana temple Complex, namely, the Daityasūdana temple, Tripuruṣācā *maṭha*, *vāhana maṇḍapa* and Saccidāśrama Svāmī *samādhī mandira*. Of these, the plan of the main temple and the *vāhana maṇḍapa* have been reproduced here from the plan provided by Henry Cousens.³⁷ The pillar remains in the *maṇḍapa* and *mukhamāṇḍapa* of the temple have been added as part of the present study. The plan of the Tripuruṣācā *maṭha* has also been made anew. Also, the conjectural reconstruction of the small shrines in the complex, entrance gateways (old and new), the *kuṇḍa* and other architectural fragments have been placed as per their find spot as documented during the fieldwork carried out as part of the present study between 2018-20.

³⁷ Cousens, *Medieval Temples of Dakhan*, 69-70.

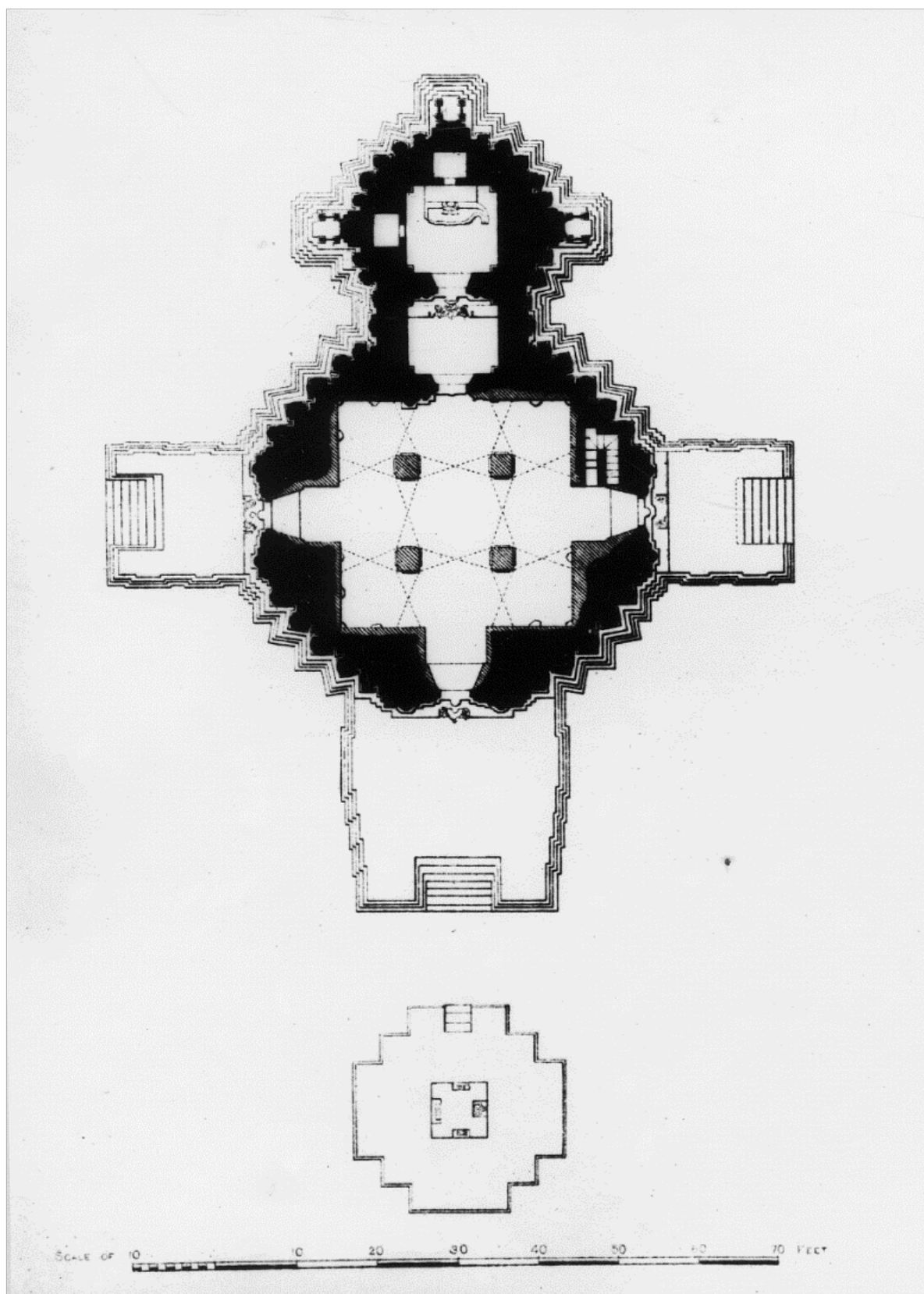


Fig. 3.3: Ground plan of Daityasūdāna temple with the *vāhana maṇḍapa* plan (After Cousens 1998) Photo: American Institute of Indian Studies



Fig. 3.4: South-facing elevation of the Daityasūdana temple



Fig. 3.5: View of the west and north-facing elevation of the Daityasūdana temple



Fig. 3.6: The south-facing *jaṅghā* of the Daityasūdana temple



Fig. 3.7: Photo from the west side of Daityasūdana temple complex, (L-R)
Daityasūdana temple, *Samādhī*, Tripuruṣācā maṭha



Fig. 3.8: Interior of Daityasūdana temple



Fig. 3.9: The brick ceiling of the *maṇḍapa* of Daityasūdana temple



Fig. 3.10: Front view of the Tripuruṣācā maṭha



Fig. 3.11: Pedestal with Images of Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Garuḍa in the interior of the Tripuruṣācā Maṭha



Fig. 3.12: Traces of Temple A and Temple B to the northwest of the Daityasūdāna temple. (For location of the temple remains, refer to Fig. 3.2)



Fig. 3.13: Remains of the *mukuta* of a sculpture and a *bhadrapitha* with Garuḍa and Nandī

2. Moṭhā Mārutī (or Sleeping Hanumāna) Temple

- Location

The temple is near the Ambar Lake, slightly away from the current village settlement amidst farmlands. It is located on the Sarafa Bazaar Road that runs parallel to the road leading to the entrance of the Dhāra Tīrtha temple complex.

- General Description of the Temple Complex

One of the prominent tourist attractions in Lonar, the Moṭhā Mārutī temple is famously known for the life-size image of Hanumāna in a supine posture, hence has also acquired the name Jhopalelā Mārutī, literally meaning sleeping Hanumāna temple. It is also referred to as Cumbakīya Hanumāna, probably as it is made up of the basaltic rock of the crater that has magnetic properties.

The temple premises are hereditarily under the private ownership of the Kanitkar family, granted to them by a certain Marāṭhā chief, most likely belonging to the Sarakaṭe Deśamukha who ruled in the Lonar-Dusarbid region during the early nineteenth century CE.³⁸ The current generation of the Kanitkar family resides in Lonar. The right to perform *pūjā* at the Dhāra Tīrtha on the first day of the Navrātri festival is with the Kanitkar family.

There is an interesting tale regarding the migration of this family to Lonar. In the late nineteenth or early twentieth century CE, a person from this family travelled to Lonar from the Konkan coast of Maharashtra. Due to the travel, he was bruised and appeared like a beggar; hence, during a ritual, when he sat in the same row as Brahmins to eat food in a temple, the group disregarded him, considering him from a lower caste. But as he began reciting hymns that usually only Brahmin folk are well-versed with, people realised that he belonged to the upper castes and gave him the deserved respect. When asked why he visited Lonar, he said that in his dream, God requested him to come for rescue. As indicated by the Lord, he came to Lonar and began searching for the sculpture of God in the barren forest lands near the Ambar Lake. After a strenuous search of many days, he located an abandoned Hanumāna sculpture. Then, a temple to house the Hanumāna was built at the find spot.

³⁸ Atharva Kanitkar, Personal Communication, 3 January 2023.

Eventually, the entire Kanitkar family migrated to Lonar to safeguard the deity and look after the upkeep of the temple.

A *prākāra* wall bounds the temple premises, the remnant of which has survived on the eastern side with an entrance gateway aligned to the main entrance of the temple. Inside this compound, the temple is situated in the northwestern corner, while the land abutting it is under farming. On the eastern side of the temple, there is a dilapidated structure, a *vāḍā*, which was once the residence of the Kanitkar family. A well is in front of it, one of the few potable water sources for the nearby settlement. Today, the residential *vāḍā* is not under use as the family has shifted their residence to the Lonar village.

▪ Architectural Description

The main Hanumāna shrine is situated in the north-eastern corner, and the *maṇḍapa* to the south of the temple premises are the earliest constructions at this site (Fig. 3.14). Renovations have been carried out to the interiors of the *maṇḍapa* situated west of the temple.

The plinth of the original Hanumāna shrine and the plinth of the exterior of the temple are built in stone masonry. At the same time, the superstructures were constructed from brick, plastered in lime and repainted several times during the later period (Fig. 3.15). The entrance doorway to the *maṇḍapa* of the temple is also fashioned like an archway or a *nagārakhānā* like a doorway. This *maṇḍapa* is an enclosed space, square in plan and leads into the *garbhagrha* from its western side (Fig. 3.16). The north side of the *garbhagrha* opens into another enclosed *maṇḍapa*. Thus, the two *maṇḍapas* are attached to the main temple at right angles, while at the centre is a skylit quadrangular area consisting of a Nandī pedestal. The spatial layout of the temple has evolved from a single quadrangular structure to an elaborate multi-hall space. The main shrine has a semi-circular *śikhara* with a bulbous onion dome. Entrance archways facing the south have some intricate brick layout, a frieze of flowers above the arch, decorative blind windows and a protruding cornice band. The main *garbhagrha* has the icon of Hanumāna lying supine. Underneath the enshrined Hanumāna sculpture is a rectangular slab with a sculpture laid horizontally (it appears as if Hanumāna is trampling the deity). The sculpture looks like a *sūrasundarī* but is heavily smeared with vermillion, which makes its identification difficult (Fig. 3.17).

The open area in front of the eastern entrance has several pillar bases and capital fragments, which must have been part of the earlier structure at the location (**Fig. 3.18**). Among loose fragments, the open courtyard to the south of the *garbhagr̥ha* has a canopy structure with a *Śivaliṅga*, two Nandī, a sculpture anointed with vermillion and pillar fragments (**Fig. 3.19**). These are some of the remains in the temple premises that pre-date the present temple structure.

- Period of Construction

The architecture of the temple dates to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries CE, thus constituting one of the latest temple constructions in Lonar. Not much building activity has been seen in Lonar since the construction of this temple. The near contemporary structural activity of this period is the Viṣṇu temple in the Dhāra Tīrtha, stylistically dated to the later Marāṭhā - Peśavā period. More than new temple building, this period in Lonar is characterised by re-use and reconstruction of existing built spaces. In this regard, the Moṭhā Mārutī temple is a significant marker. Architecturally the temple is not noteworthy for the present study. However, it is an important site to understand the settlement pattern of Lonar.

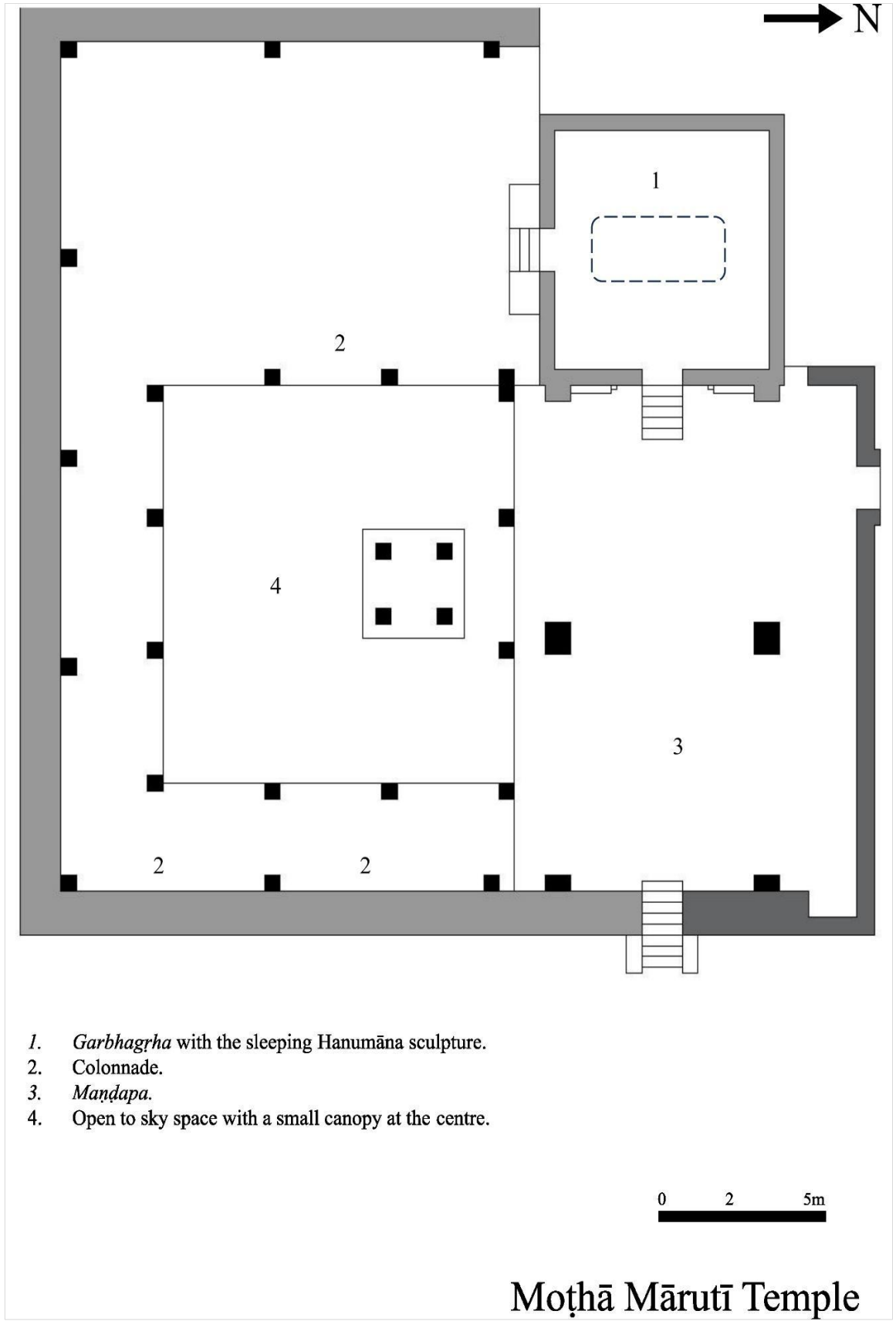


Fig. 3.14: Ground plan of Moṭhā Mārutī temple



Fig. 3.15: Entrance façade of Moṭhā Mārutī temple



Fig. 3.16: *Manḍapa* and entrance of the *garbhagrha* of the Moṭhā Mārutī temple



Fig. 3.17: Hanumāna sculpture with another sculpture in the *garbhagrha* of the Moṭhā Mārutī temple



Fig. 3.18: Fragments of pillar base and capitals near the eastern entrance of the Moṭhā Mārutī temple



Fig. 3.19: *Śivaliṅga* inside the Moṭhā Mārutī temple

3. Limbī Bārava

- Location

The Limbī Bārava is situated east of the Lonar crater, as part of the present village settlement, abutting the Lonar-Risod road. On the other side of this road is the Leṇḍī *talāva*.

- General Description

A stand-alone structure, this *bārava* is one of the most ornate surviving stepwells from Lonar (the only other known singular *bārava* is situated amidst an agricultural field near the Moṭhā Mārutī temple). As first documented in the year 2017, the *bārava* was in a ruinous condition. Later, from 2019 to 2022, it was entirely flooded with rainwater, leading to further dilapidation of the stone fabric. As per the information provided by locals, until a few decades ago, Limbī Bārava was one of the very few potable sources of water for the village settlement. Currently, the fluctuating water levels and plausible damage to the aquifer of the *bārava* have led to the discontinuation of water usage.

- Architectural Description

The architectural program of the Limbī Bārava follows the patterns of *bārava* architecture commonly employed during the Yādava era.³⁹ A square stepped tank, it has entrances on its three sides and a shrine on the fourth side (**Fig. 3.20**). The first landing after the stepped entrances, must have had a covered colonnade, discernible from the equidistant pillar bases on the floor and corresponding pilasters embedded in the back wall (**Fig. 3.21**). The pillars of this colonnade and the roof are lost completely. The bays created by the pillar divisions have shallow *devakoṣṭhas* in the walls. The first tread of the stepped tank after the colonnade has rectangular pedestals at regular intervals. The plinths of these pedestals have diamond motifs. The pedestals would have centred the bays of the colonnade in its original design. The rest of the steps leading to the reservoir have a small landing, one after an interval of five steps each, a typical feature seen in many *bārava* structures.

³⁹ Arunchandra Pathak, *Mahārāṣṭrātil Bārava Sthāpatya āni pārampārik jalavyavasthāpan* (Pune: Aparant, 2017), 118-119.

Oriented to the west, the *bārava* shrine consists of a square *garbhagr̥ha* cum *maṇḍapa* and a protruding *mukhamāṇḍapa* intersecting the colonnade (**Fig. 3.22**). The two pillars of the shrine and the pilasters of the colonnade are alike. Square in plan, the rectangular shafts have small square panels which are plain in the pilasters but has *kirtīmukhas*. The *garbhagr̥ha* cum *maṇḍapa* has two very interesting fragments; one is an architectural fragment that might be a pedestal or a *bhadrapiṭha*, and another is in-situ sculptural fragment, probably from the *jaṅghā* of some temple body. The original location of both these fragments is not known, however, speculating from its size and scale, it is unlikely that the fragments were transported to the Limbī Bārava. The architectural fragment has a groove (probably to affix the sculpture) and a water chute, or a *praṇāla* on its upper surface. Based on this, the fragment can be identified as a pedestal designed for a horizontal sculpture. The two ends of the pedestal have curved brackets suspended from a round moulding.

On the frontal side is a frieze of nine sculptures, an unusual group that has not been seen together quite often. The centre of the frieze has a three-faced Brahmā icon sitting on a low *pīṭha*. On either side, the Brahmā is flanked by four icons, each sitting on a *pīṭha* and in a *namaskāra mudrā*; however, since the pedestal is heavily weathered, it is difficult to identify all other eight icons satisfactorily. Speculatory identifications can be made for some of the icons based on their *āyudhas* and *vāhanas*. The first icon to the left of Brahmā is probably Indra on his mount elephant, and the last in the same row is probably Kubera holding a *nakula* bag. Conjecturing from this, it can be said that the two icons between Indra and Kubera are *dikpālas*. Similarly, among the icons to the right of Brahmā, the last two icons are possibly Kārtikeya on *mayūra vāhana*, and the last icon to the extreme right is Gaṇeśa. Even in this row, the remaining two icons cannot be identified (**Fig. 3.24**). Though the number of the icons (eight icons, four on each side) indicates that they could be *dikpālas*, at the same time, the presence of Brahmā at the centre of the frieze cannot be justified. Nevertheless, until further noticeable clues, the closest identification of the panel can be the possibility of the depiction of *dikpālas*. Pathak refers to this pedestal as *adhiṣṭhāna paṭṭa* while mentioning that there is a depiction of *dikpālas* on the front

face but does not identify the images individually.⁴⁰ Until references to similar pedestals are found, this specimen in the Limbī Bārava awaits identification.

The *mukhamaṇḍapa* of the shrine stands on four pillars, with dwarf *kakṣāsana* walls on its three sides. The *vedikā* and the *kakṣāsana* of the *mukhamaṇḍapa* are ornamented with geometric patterns and foliage. The pillars support a trabeated ceiling, with most likely a pyramidal *śikhara* atop it. A stone fragment of a *ghaṇṭā samvaraṇā śikhara* is lying next to the superstructure of the shrine. Sometime later, probably during the period when several structures in Lonar were renovated or restored, the *śikhara* of Limbī Bārava was also reconstructed in brick.

▪ Period of Construction

The structure is a classic example of a *bārava* architectural typology, typically seen throughout the Yādava period and beyond. Similar *bāravas*, often smaller in size but following the same ground plan, are found at places like Charthana in the Parbhani district, Helas in Jalna district, and Loni Bhapkar in the Pune district of Maharashtra, among several others. A semi-open colonnade similar to the Limbī Bārava is also seen in the *bārava* adjacent to the Gokuleśvara temple at Charthana in Parbhani district. A similar feature like the pedestals along the steps of the Limbī Bārava is also seen in the *bārava* in front of the Rāmaliṅga temple at Gursale in Satara district. The shrine, oriented to the west, is very similar to shrines on the *bārava* at Loni Bhapkar. Based on the stylistic similarities between these *bāravas*, the Limbī Bārava can be dated to middle to late twelfth century CE. Pathak has also dated it to the twelfth century CE.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Pathak, *Mahārāṣṭrātil Bārava Sthāpatya*, 46.

⁴¹ Pathak, 119.

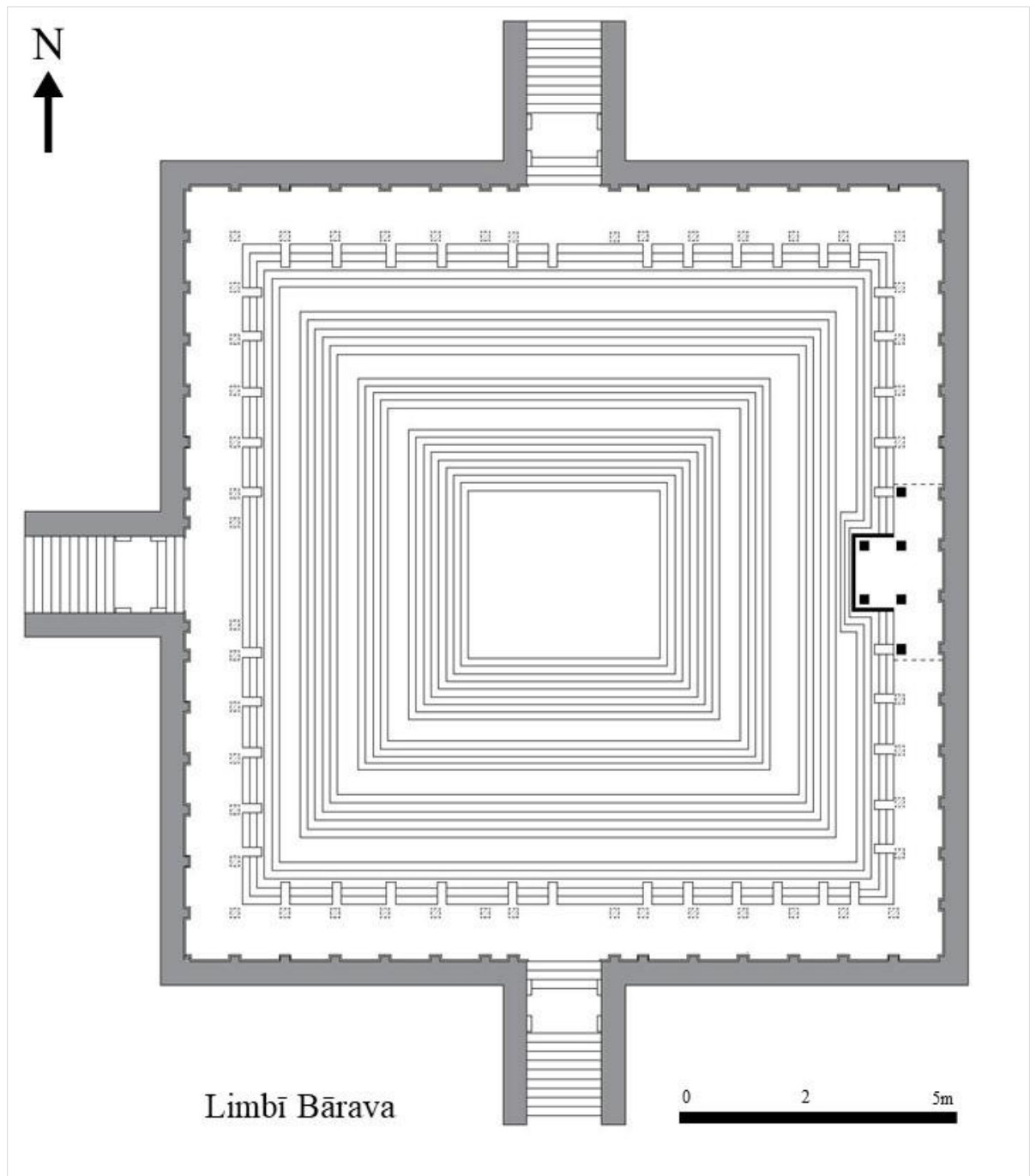


Fig. 3.20: Ground Plan of the Limbī Bārava

Note: The pillar positions of the colonnade are drawn here based on the traces of the pillar base along the edge.



Fig. 3.21: Limbī Bārava (photograph dated 2018)



Fig. 3.22: Shrine along the Eastern Colonnade of Limbī Bārava



Fig. 3.23: Ruined Limbī *Bārava* (photograph dated January 2023)



Gaṇeśa? Kārttikeya? ____? ____? Bramhā Indra? ____? ____? Kubera?

Fig. 3.24: Frontal face of the pedestal in the shrine of Limbī Bārava.

4. Dharmasālā

- Location

Dharmasālā, also locally known as *annachatra* (literally meaning a place that provides food to everyone), is situated to the northeast of the crater. It is just a little away from the Dhāra Tīrtha. Today, the premises of the Dharmasālā are demarcated by the fencing wall laid by the Archaeological Survey of India and can be accessed from the southern side. The structure is likely to be a *maṭha*, a rest house, probably built for the pilgrims who came to Lonar, especially pilgrims who came to bathe in the sacred water of the Dhāra Tīrtha. Camouflaged by the residential structures surrounding it, the Dharmasālā has lost connect with the Dhāra Tīrtha. Villagers have accredited the construction of the structure to Ahilyābāi Hoḷakara, ruler of the Hoḷakara of Indore, in the eighteenth century CE. But no literary evidence corroborates patronage of such kind. Based on its architectural style, the structure is datable somewhere between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries CE, showing its contemporaneity to several edifices within Lonar.

- Architectural Description

The Dharmasālā mainly consists of two units, a semi-open long colonnade and an enclosed structure likely to have served as a shrine or residence of religious pontiffs (**Fig. 3.25**). The structure is in a dilapidated condition; however, the remnants provide a fair idea of the architectural layout of the plan. The architecture of this *maṭha* is very simplistic in character and mostly functional in nature. Both the colonnade and the enclosed shrine structure stand on a raised plinth which is meter in height, comprising four masonry mouldings that are equidistantly offset from each other. The topmost moulding is protruding than the lower mouldings but it has only partially survived. On this plinth are rows of pillars that support a trabeated ceiling. Atop these ceiling must have been the *śikhara*s.

The remnants of the *śikhara*s demarcate the bays of the colonnade. Surmising from the stones of the *śikhara*, it can be conjectured that the colonnade had tiered *śikhara*s like *phāmsaṇā* mode (pyramidical *śikhara* variety). In the last few decades, the colonnade has been haphazardly enclosed from the southern side (**Fig. 3.26**). A stone wall has been constructed with the original pillars incongruously embedded into

the wall. It is possible that, the original construction of the colonnade was designed as an open pillared hall, accessible from both the northern and southern sides. The east-facing portions of the colonnade are in ruins, but the edge must have had a row of pillars. Similarly, the eastern end of the colonnade is also dilapidated, failing which it is difficult to ascertain whether originally the colonnade and the enclosed structure were connected. On the interiors, the colonnade has fourteen rows of four pillars each (**Fig. 3.27**). The pillars are square in section, devoid of any ornamentation, except for the *nāga* designs on the pillar capitals. In design, the pillars stylistically match the pillars from Rāmagayā temple, Reṇukā temple and Narasimha temple in the Dhāra Tīrtha complex.

With its opening oriented to the east, the shrine like structure can be entered through an elongated *verandah* with a *mukhamaṇḍapa* attached at its centre, of which only the plinth survives (**Fig. 3.28**). The entrance is demarcated by a simple *dvāraśākhā* comprising minimal ornamentations like *stambha śākhā* diamond motifs on the *uttarāṅga*, *lalāṭa* and *udumbara*. Through this *verandah*, one enters a *maṇḍapa*, which is four bays in width and five bays in depth, where each bay measures approximately two meters. It is difficult to comment on the usage of this enclosed space since there is no shrine or object of worship inside it. To the south of this *maṇḍapa*, there is the smaller enclosed chamber, possibly used for private residence. The south-facing walls of this structure were also haphazardly reconstructed later.

The exterior pillars on the ruined plinth of the shrine have some unique motifs, single characters which are lightly engraved on the stone surface of the pillar. These peculiarly placed motifs could be mason marks of the masons who were working on the construction of the Dhārmasālā. Similar incisions in low relief have also been noticed on the stone courses of the ceiling of the Dhārmasālā at Mehkar. However, within Lonar, such marks have not been documented from other structures. In all probability, these marks on the Lonar Dhārmasālā are not casual etchings but rather deliberate engravings of the masons.

▪ Period of Construction

For a better understanding of the typology and architectural details of the structure from Lonar, several other *maṭha* structures, within and outside Lonar, need to be

taken into consideration. The size and scale of the Lonar Dhārmaśālā are not found quite often. However, the spatial out, architectural patterns and details are stylistically similar to other *maṭha* structures found in Maharashtra. Based on the relative dating with other *maṭha* structures from Maharashtra, the construction of the Dhārmaśālā at Lonar can be placed sometime during the thirteenth - fourteenth centuries CE. A detailed discussion on this shall follow in the sections towards the end of this chapter.

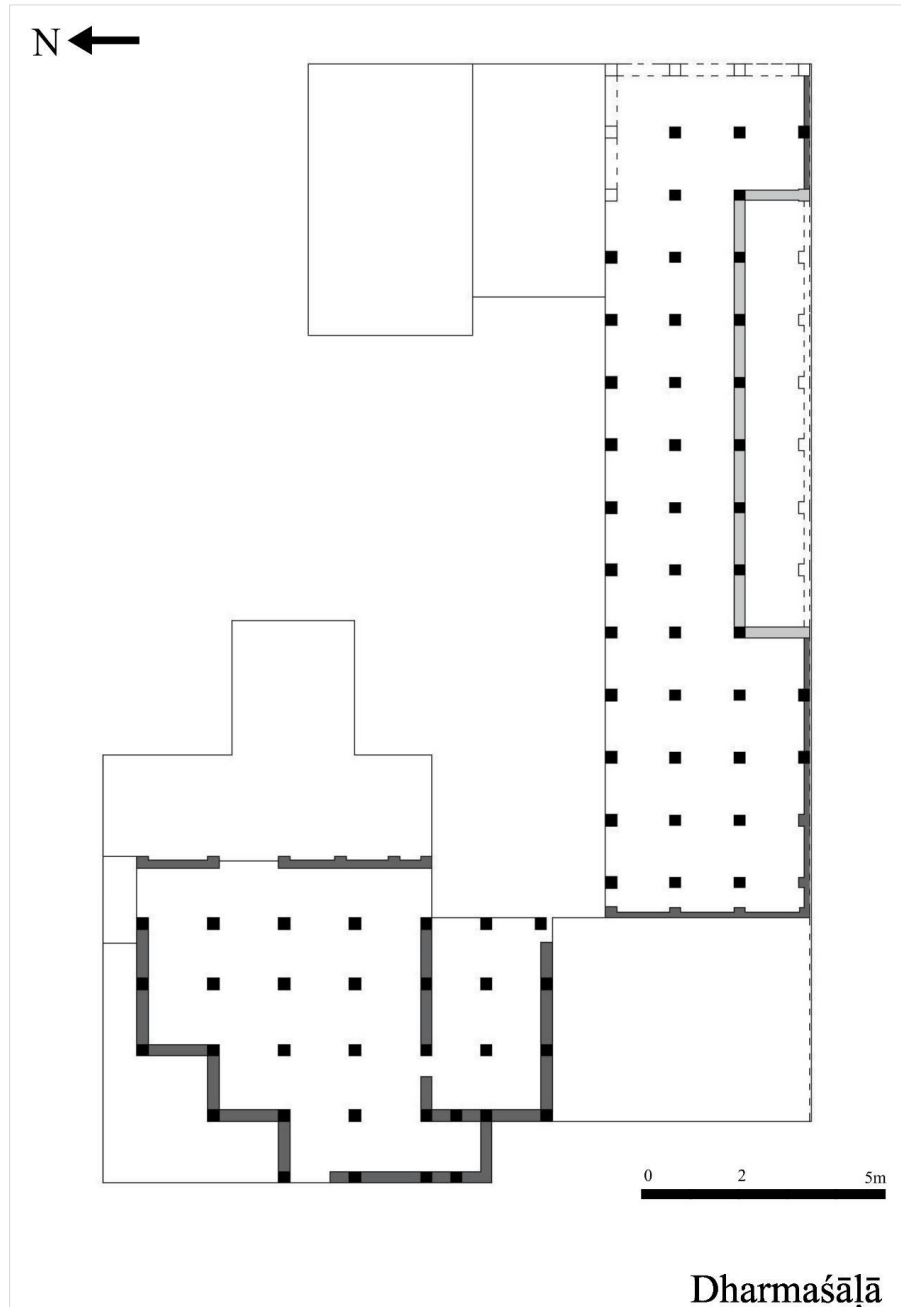


Fig. 3.25: Ground plan of Dhāramaśālā

Note: In this plan the dark grey colour hatch indicates the original wall of the structure and the lighter grey colour indicated the later added wall. The dotted sections of the walls denote a conjectural reconstruction of the wall based on its remnant portions.



Fig. 3.26: Southern colonnade of the Dhārmasālā



Fig. 3.27: Interior of the southern colonnade of the Dhārmasālā



Fig. 3.28: East-facing enclosed *maṭha* like structure in the Dhārmasālā

Structures Situated on the Rim of the Crater

This is the second category, which takes into consideration the temples along the upper rim of the crater, comprising the Dhāra Tīrtha Complex and the Pāpahareśvara temple Complex.

1. Dhāra Tīrtha Temple Complex⁴²

- Location

The temple complex is situated at the apex of the north-eastern incision to the crater. The complex is primarily centred around the perennial stream *dhāra*, and functions as an entry to the saltwater lake.

- General Description of the Temple Complex

It is the only complex with multiple structures in one location, a place which has been used regularly throughout the history of Lonar. The Dhāra Tīrtha complex consists of temples, *kuṇḍas*, *maṭha* and *samādhīs*, as well as scattered sculptural remains and architectural members that must have been part of the complex. There are two main *kuṇḍas* in this complex, one at the centre from where the main *dhāra* stream flows (henceforth called *kuṇḍa* no.1) and the other to its east (henceforth called *kuṇḍa* no. 2). Both these *kuṇḍas* are on a lower level (labelled as level 1) accompanied by an arcade on all four sides of the water stream, and the upper level (labelled as level 2) has all other structures from the complex. These levels or terraces are joined by steps from their north-eastern and south-eastern side (**Fig. 3.29** and **Fig. 3.30**).

- Central Shrine of Dhāra Tīrtha: Viṣṇu Temple

On level 2, just above the small rectangular structure of the Dhāra stream, there is a Viṣṇu temple built sometime during the eighteenth - nineteenth centuries CE. It is a small square shrine without any projections or offsets on the exterior wall. The exterior walls of the temple are plain stone masonry, except for minimal ornamentation to the doorframe. (**Fig. 3.31**) The temple has a two-tiered *śikhara*,

⁴² A significant part of the section on the Dhāra Tīrtha temple is reproduced here from an article published by the author. For reference - Swapna Joshi, 'Integrated Environment: The Sacred Landscape of Dhār Tīrtha in the Vicinity of Lonar Crater', *Heritage: Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies in Archaeology*, Volume 9 : 841-856., 1 January 2021.

containing niches designed as rectangular *chatrīs*, with a bulbous onion dome as its finial and four simulations of the same dome along the edge of the second tier. The second tier diminishes in size than the first. Each tier comprises five aediculae, arranged as the projections of a temple wall, meaning the central aedicule projects the most and the other four flanking projections offset each other. The relief niches on the aediculae contain sculptures of ascetics. The *garbhagrha* of the temple has a sculpture of Viṣṇu killing a demon.⁴³ There is also a modern six-handed sculpture of Durgā seated on a lion. Minor changes in the period after its construction, like paints, retouched masonry joints, and incongruously added architectural members, are found in this temple.

Adjoining this central shrine, on its lateral sides, are two arcuated divisions each, on the same plinth as the temple. To the left of this Viṣṇu temple, further along the western side of the complex, there is another small shrine that belongs to the same period as the main temple and follows a similar architectural language. Y.M. Kale writes about a Candramaouleśvara temple north-west of the Bāla Viṣṇu temple at Dhāra Tīrtha, which the Nāgapūrakara Cīṭanisa built.⁴⁴ He further adds that the Nāgapūrakara Cīṭanisa built several temples within Dhāra.

Further, along the western side of the complex, there is another small shrine followed by dilapidated spaces that must have had an arcade, as suggested by the remnants of the plinth, side walls, arch design and niches in the back wall. It was probably a long colonnade that once joined the arcade currently abutting the Viṣṇu temple.

- Eastern side of Dhāra Tīrtha complex (Fig. 3.29)

Along the eastern edge of the Dhāra complex, there are three large structures with few other small shrines, sculptural fragments and *samādhīs*. All these religious constructions are on the left as one enters Dhāra Tīrtha. From north to south, it consists of many temple buildings. Narasimha temple, Gaṇeśa shrine, and Reṇukā

⁴³ This sculpture can be particularly identified as Daityasūdāna in the form of Viṣṇu killing the demon Lavaṇāsūra, as per the legend of Lonar. Viṣṇu's posture, stance and how he is shown killing the demon this identification. A detailed discussion of this sculpture follows in the next chapter. See Chapter 4 Section 4.4 on the visual embodiment of the Daityasūdāna myth.

⁴⁴ Yadava Madhav Kale, *Loṇāra Varṇana*, (Satara: Sahasrakar, 1903), 8.

temple are set above *kuṇḍa* no. 2. At a slight distance from these are Mahādeva temple, Kārtikasvāmī shrine, and another Śiva shrine. Further away is a small cluster of two temples and two *samādhīs*. The temples listed here have varied elements that must be explained in detail. This side of Dhāra is a heterogeneous space that has been periodically occupied and refurbished, as evident from its architecture. Hence, attempting a nuanced study of every structure and deconstruct the overall space is necessary.

i. Narasimha temple

The Narasimha temple is a single shrine consisting of *garbhagrha*, *antarāla*, *gūḍhamāṇḍapa* and a rectangular porch like *mukhamāṇḍapa*. It has a lateral wing on the west, added later, as is evident from its crude masonry. The *garbhagrha* enshrines a four-handed sculpture of Viḍarāṇa Narasimha standing on a pedestal. Since the sculpture is eroded and the attributes are lost, it is identifiable only based on the body posture of the deity slaying the demon Hiraṇyakaśipu. The *dvāraśākhā* of the *garbhagrha* has three *rathikās* (which are primarily female deities) on the *uttarāṅga*, in which two elephants flank the central *rathikā*. Except for a *stambha śākhā*, the other components of the *dvāraśākhā* are bereft of any ornamentation.

The *maṇḍapa* of the temple, separated from the *garbhagrha* via an *antarāla*, is rectangular in plan with four central pillars and four pilasters. The typology of the four centre pillars is as follows – a rectangular block at its base, followed by a rectangular shaft, decorative floral bands, a square block with icons, a *laśuna* member with a *nāsī*, *kaṇī*, *ghaṭa* mouldings and finally, the capital with *nāga* motifs. Pillar 6, on the right in front of the entrance, has the icon of Brahmā, Bhairava, and probably Viṣṇu on the vertical rectangular shaft.⁴⁵ Most of these icons have lost their attributes and have paint layers. The *dvāraśākhā* through which one enters this *maṇḍapa* is an elaborate *triśākhā* variety consisting of a *stambhaśākhā* and *patraśākhā* designs. Noteworthy are the sculptures on the inner side of the horizontal lintel. It has three sculptures, which can roughly be identified as Brahmā, Śivā and Viṣṇu, from the right

⁴⁵ Refer to Fig. A.10 in the Appendix.

to the left side of the lintel slab, respectively.⁴⁶ This style of *dvāraśākhā* ornamentation is peculiar to the temple in Lonar. The *pedyā* has Vaiṣṇava *dvārapāla*.

The *mukhamanḍapa* of the temple also has two pillars, typologically similar to the pillars of the *gūḍhamanḍapa* with Narasimha, Bhūvarāha and Viṣṇu images on the rectangular members of the shaft. The prominence of Vaiṣṇava imagery in the temple shows it was dedicated to Viṣṇu. However, it is difficult to ascertain if it was originally built for the Narasimha form. Looking at the pillar typology, architectural layout and sculptures, it can be speculated that this temple was built in the thirteenth century CE.

Next to this temple is a small niche with a Gaṇeśa icon, which appears to have been haphazardly incorporated here. According to the original plan of the complex, there could have been a space between the Narasimha and Reṇukā temples. This is also evident from the exterior walls and roof of both these temples, which are markedly different in their stone courses, pointing and overall masonry as compared to the interiors of the temples.

ii. Reṇukā Temple

The Reṇukā temple comprises in plan a rectangular *mukhamanḍapa* followed by a *manḍapa*. The rectangular *manḍapa* has four pillars in the centre. The west-facing wall of the *manḍapa* has a bunch of loose sculptures that include a Nandi, Sūrya, and fragment of a Viṣṇu sculpture, along with a hero stone and a pedestal that has a female figure on its front side. The original locations of any of these fragments are not known. Apart from the Sūrya on the *janḡhā* of the Daityasūdāna temple, this one in the Reṇukā temple is the only other Sūrya image found in Lonar. These loose fragments might have been found near the temple complex and placed here later. It is difficult to comment if anything of this constituted the enshrining deity of the Reṇukā temple because the fragments are arbitrary.

The pillars of the *mukhamanḍapa* and the *manḍapa*, *devakoṣṭhas* in the side wall of the *mukhamanḍapa*, and its *dvāraśākhā* are stylistically similar to Narasimha

⁴⁶ Instead of Brahmā, it could also be a goddess, and Śivā could be Naṭeśa. The erosion and paint layers are making it difficult to identify the sculptures. The image on the *lalāṭa bimba* is probably a Gaṇeśa.

temple. Thus, it can be said that both these contemporary structures are, in all probability, the earliest extant structures within the Dhāra conglomerate. Another important feature of Reṇukā temple is that it is also a Vaiṣṇava affiliated structure, deducible from the narrative panels on pillars. These sculptures are on the small square slabs in the upper half of the pillar. Pillars in the *mukhamaṇḍapa* have panels depicting *samudramanthana*, Vāmana-Trivikrama, two fighting scenes and two erotic panels. Four pillars in the *maṇḍapa* have Kṛṣṇa *līlā* (childhood stories of Kṛṣṇa) and Rāmāyaṇa panels, some of the episodes being Govardhanadhārī Kṛṣṇa, *dadhimanthana* (churning butter), Mārīca *vadha*, Vālī *vadha* and Hanumāna meeting Sītā in *Aśokavāṭikā*.⁴⁷ In order to understand the religious affiliation of the Reṇukā temple and the function of the structure, a nuanced iconographic enquiry of all these episodic narratives, however, it has not been dealt with in the present research.

On the speculative grounds, it can be surmised from the ground plan of this structure that Reṇukā temple was probably designed and functioned as a *maṭha*. The ground plan matches the Tripuruṣācā *maṭha* near Daityasūdāna temple in Lonar, *maṭha* from Gokuleśvara temple complex in Charthana, *maṭha* in front of temple no.5 at Balsane in Dhule district, *maṭha* in the Gondeśvara temple complex at Sinnar and many others. Also, the position of Reṇukā temple, abutting *kuṇḍa* no. 2, could have been suitable for ritualistic purposes. It may have served as a resting place for ascetics and pilgrims, similar to the arcade on the western edge of the Dhāra Tīrtha complex must have been in later times.

iii. Other temples along the eastern fringe of the Dhāra Tīrtha complex

As aforementioned, there are three temples, at a short distance from the Narasimha-Reṇukā temple cluster. The Śiva and Kārtikasvāmī temples are small square shrines with a plain stone masonry wall, domical ceilings and slender finials on their roofs. Built somewhere in the eighteenth-nineteenth centuries CE, these structures have been renovated in recent decades. The stone courses used in the exterior masonry walls match the masonry of the façades of other structures within Dhāra Tīrtha. This shows that renovations to many structures in the Dhāra Tīrtha temple complex constitute one

⁴⁷ Refer to Fig. A.9 in the Appendix for the sequence of the panels on the pillars of the Reṇukā temple.

phase of restoration, which was probably undertaken sometime in the last 200-300 years. The Mahādeva temple to the south of the Śiva temple also has two phases of rework seen through its exterior wall masonry. The trabeated interiors of the temple and pillar typology are roughly coeval with the late Yādava period. It might be a construction of the late thirteenth or fourteenth century CE, but the walls of this temple were added later, which is also evident from the crude filler walls in the temple interiors that do not match the stone surfaces of the pillars. In plan, this temple consists of a *garbhagrha*, *antarāla* and a *maṇḍapa*, but the incongruous wall additions make it clear that this might not have been the original layout of the temple. In the back wall of its *garbhagrha*, there is a pillar embedded in the crude wall made of stone and brick. The most notable feature of this temple is the lintel, currently placed on its entrance doorway, but certainly has been reused here from a different structure or belongs to the earlier temple that stood in place of Mahādeva temple. On the inner horizontal face of the cantilever of this lintel, there is a small two-handed icon of Kevala Narasimha having a leonine face, sitting in *mahārājalīlāsana* and holding a *cakra* in his right hand. It is rare to find this depiction on a lintel. The essence and context of this image concerning the Lonar sacred landscape will be discussed in Chapter 4. In the extreme south of this eastern fringe on a hillock, there are two more temples and a *samādhī* of Rāma Dhunī Bābā, albeit in ruinous conditions. One of these Śiva temples, called the Haṭakeśvara Mahādeva temple, has an ornate *dvāraśākhā* but plain, unmatched and crude masonry walls. Though not much of the stylistic nuances or the architectural details have survived the structures, the ruins testify to the presence of well-designed and elaborate structures belonging to at least the thirteenth or fourteenth century CE.

▪ Period of Construction

The Dhāra Tīrtha is the only temple complex in Lonar that exhibits structural activity from the twelfth up to the eighteenth century CE. The two prominent phases of building activity that can be gleaned at Dhāra Tīrtha are the first stylistically datable to the twelfth-thirteenth centuries CE and the second phase to the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries CE. However, except for these phases, the complex was a living shrine frequently visited by people for the perennial stream. It has been an ever-evolving architectural palimpsest.

Since the complex is the most prominent entry to descent to the Lonar Lake, it was probably put under use, and hence, it has always been renovated and restored. Alongside, owing to the sacredness accorded to the perennial *dhāra* stream, the temple complex has consistently received patronage for building temples, *maṭhas* and *bārava*. This can also be surmised from the numerous inscriptions that mostly record the name of the donor pilgrims who contributed to the change and continuity in the architecture of the Dhāra Tīrtha.

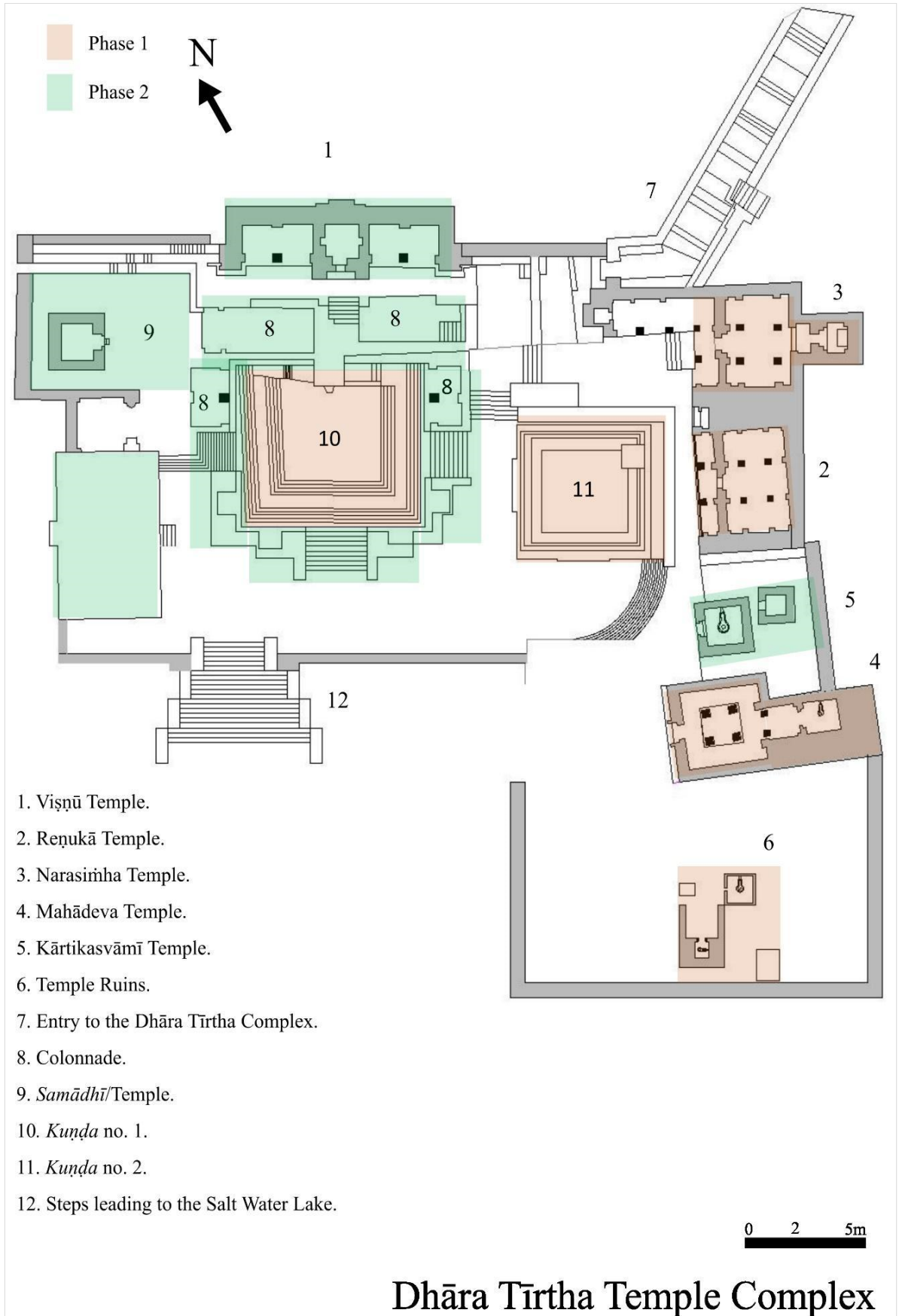


Fig. 3.29: Ground Plan of Dhāra Tīrtha temple complex



Fig. 3.30: Central Shrine- Viṣṇu temple above the perennial *dhāra* surrounded by a colonnade



Fig. 3.31: View of the Dhāra Tīrtha from the western side, the saltwater lake is to the south

2. Pāpahareśvara Temple Complex

- Location

The Pāpahareśvara temple complex is situated to the east of the Dhāra Tīrtha, while the saltwater lake lies to its west. It can be accessed through a small passage next to the remains of the Haṭakeśvara Mahādeva Temple and the *samādhī* of Rāma Dhunī Bābā situated at the southeastern end of the Dhāra Tīrtha complex. The location of Pāpahareśvara is slightly isolated, and the water stream here is not perennial. This might be a reason for fewer people to visit this complex as compared to Dhāra Tīrtha.

- General Description of the temple complex

A partially preserved temple, a *bārava* and a free standing open *maṇḍapa*⁴⁸ are the extant architectural remains in the form of sculptures, sati stone, in this complex (**Fig. 3.32 and Fig. 3.33**). Based on comparisons in their style and form, the construction of the temple structure analysed based on its sporadic remains, is removed by at least a century from the construction of the open *maṇḍapa* and the *bārava*. The sporadic remains are traces of plinth remains of the *sabhāmaṇḍapa* of the temple and faint evidence of the original plan of the *garbhagrha* of the temple. At least two phases of building activity are discernible within this complex; the first phase constitutes the construction of the original temple (which is now lost), the open *maṇḍapa* and the *bārava*; the second phase corresponds to the building of the extant temple structure.

- Architectural Description: Exterior of the temple

The present temple, of which only the *garbhagrha* and partially the *antarāḷa* survive, appears to be a later period construction, which was built using architectural members of an earlier temple from the same location. For instance, the *dvāraśākhā* of the *garbhagrha* appears to be re-used. The *garbhagrha* is built in crude stone masonry, reinforced probably during the restoration works conducted by the Archaeological Survey of India. It is an orthogonal (stepped diamond) *pañcaratha* plan, where the *bhadra* is flanked by a *pratibhadra* and *karṇa* projections. The plinth of the temple has plain mouldings without any ornamentation, equidistantly offset. Four in number,

⁴⁸ This structure is locally known as *chatrī*, but has been labelled as open *maṇḍapa* to avoid repetition with the *sabhāmaṇḍapa* attached to the temple.

the mouldings are reminiscent of the classical mouldings – *khura*, *kumbha*, *kalaśa kapotālī*, generally forming the temple plinths of the contemporary periods.

At the *jaṅghā* level, the *bhadra* has empty *devakoṣṭhas*, consisting of two slender pilasters, a rectangular pedestal and a simple tiered miniature *śikhara*, resembling the *phāmsaṇā* mode. These miniature *śikharas* have a decorative motif of a plain semi-circle at its centre with half petals at either corner of the stone course. Similar designs, but in an inverted fashion, are used for the base of the *devakoṣṭha*. Barring this minimal ornamentation, all projections of the *jaṅghā* are plain. The wall scheme does not contain any *salilāntaras*.

Above the *jaṅghā*, there is a band moulding, slightly offset from the wall surface, which runs all along the three sides of *maṇḍovara* exterior walls. This band is reminiscent of the *varaṇḍikā* kind of moulding, which usually conjoins a *maṇḍovara* with the *śikhara* of the temple. Unfortunately, there are no clues for even a conjectural reconstruction of the *śikhara* of this temple, neither on the temple body nor in the premises of the complex.

The *maṇḍovara* is attached to a partially preserved *kapilī*. A broken wall along the north elevation of the temple is a useful remnant to understand the original extent of the *kapilī*. These further connect to the *sabhāmaṇḍapa*, of which only traces of the foundation have survived (**Fig. 3.34**). Conjecturing from the faint demarcations of the layout of the *sabhāmaṇḍapa*, a tentative reconstruction of its original plan has been attempted here. In all probability, it seems to have been a semi-open *maṇḍapa*, where one side is attached to the *garbhagrha*, and the other three are punctuated with entrances. There are two possible ground plans with this layout; either the *maṇḍapa* would have had dwarf walls with a *kakṣāsana*, like in the Rāmagayā temple or Yajñeśvara temple and the second possibility is that it had entire walls punctured with entrances, similar to plans of the *maṇḍapa* of Kamaḷajā, Deśamukha, Mahādeva temple in the Rāmagayā temple complex among others. In both instances, the *maṇḍapa* certainly had an elevated square *raṅgaśīlā* at the centre, with four pillars standing on its corners with equal intercolumniation, which supported beams of the trabeated structure. The remaining pillar positions, forming the aisles of the *maṇḍapa*, have been deduced based on the extant pillar bases, extant in their original location. The east-facing entrance must have led into the free-standing open *maṇḍapa*, the

north-facing entrance must have overlooked the bārava, and the south-facing entrance must have overlooked the crater.

- Architectural Description: Interior of the temple

The interiors of the *antarāḷa* and the *garbhagrha* of the temple are both plain. The *garbhagrha* contains a Śivaliṅga as the presiding deity. A broken pedestal is kept flushed to the back wall of the *garbhagrha* with a loose fragment of a *nāga* sculpture kept on it. It can be a fragment found in the vicinity of the temple and later placed here.

The north, south and west walls of the *garbhagrha* have narrow transepts. Near the northern wall of the *antarāḷa*, there is a pillar fragment with a two-line inscription on it. The inscription has been noted in few previous studies.⁴⁹ But it has always been referred to as an illegible inscription. Based on palaeography, this inscription could be dated to the twelfth - thirteenth centuries CE; however, erosion of the stone has made it difficult to decipher.⁵⁰ The inscription could probably have been from a similar period as the first phase of construction at the Pāpahareśvara temple. The *dvāraśākhā* of the *garbhagrha* with intricate *stambha śākhā* carvings, *mandāraka* and a *uttarāṅga* is likely to have been reused from an earlier monument. These do not stylistically affiliate to the other extant architectural members of the temple.

- Free Standing Open *Maṇḍapa* (Fig. 3.35)

The *maṇḍapa* has a high plinth composed of four intricately carved mouldings, the lowermost of which is a *khūra*, in between are two *kaṇis*, and the uppermost is a *kapotālī* moulding. The plinth side facing the temple has four steps to reach the *maṇḍapa*. All risers of the steps have elongated diamonds and half-moon motifs. The sides of these steps have ornate *vyāla* sculptures. The other three sides of the *maṇḍapa* plinth have an ornate panel at the centre. These panels consist of five *kūṭastambha* motifs interlaced with recesses comprised of diamond motifs. Among the five, three *kūṭastambhas* have Bhūmija *śikhara kūṭas* and the two of the smaller *kūṭastambhas* have round *kūṭas* made up of horizontal tiers like a *phāmsaṇā śikhara*

⁴⁹ Bugdane, *Loṇāra Darśana*; Suresh Madhavrao Mapari, *Aitihāsika Loṇāra (Prācina te Ādhunika)* (Amravati: We Are Publications, 2021), 68.

⁵⁰ Refer to Appendix for the details of the inscription.

but with *madhyalatā* motif. The details of the *kūṭastambha* motifs, like the *madhyalatā*, *sūrasenaka*, *āmalaka*, *stupi*, *bhūmis* of the *kūṭas* indicate that the artisans who made these temples had a profound knowledge of the various *śikhara* forms. Also, in the absence of actual *śikharas* in the temple, these miniatures inform us about the probable *śikhara* varieties employed in the temples of Lonar.

The pillars of this open *maṇḍapa* are one of the highly ornate pillars in Lonar. These pillars do not have any icons on their shafts, but the intricate geometric carvings and animal motifs are certainly the outcome of good workmanship. The pillars possess, from bottom to top, a square base, rectangular shafts with ridges, bands of *kīrtimukhas* and geometric patterns, inverted *kalaśa* moulding, *lāśuṇa* mouldings, a slender *kaṇṭi* moulding and all of these topped by a four sides capital. The four pillars on the corners of the *mandapa* support a highly ornate and embellished *vitāna*. Decorative cusps are arranged in concentric circles of diminishing heights. The *vitāna* is stylistically similar to the concentric ceiling of the *mandapa* of Yajñeśvara temple. The *śikhara* of the *mandapa* has not survived except for a band moulding along the southern elevation of the temple.

▪ *Bārava*

The *bārava* is to the north of the temple, accessible from the original *maṇḍapa* of the temple. Square in plan, with entrances on three sides and a dilapidated shrine on the fourth side, the *bārava* is stylistically similar to *kuṇḍas* in the Dhāra Tīrtha complex and also shares affinity with the Limbī Bārava.

The northern elevation of the *bārava* is partially broken, which must have been initially comprised of a two-tiered structure with a small shrine at the centre of the upper tier. On the lower tier, at the same position as the shrine, there is an opening which leads into an enclosed rectangular space. The use of this area is not known certainly, but it could have been used for meditation practices. Few locals recount stories about the Pāpahareśvara temple being the locus of ascetic practices.⁵¹ The shrine overlooks the water tank; below it is the protruding pedestal from where the freshwater spring flows. Along the western edge of the *bārava* one finds a heaped

⁵¹ As per stories narrated by villagers, the enclosed rectangular chamber inside the *bārava* of the Pāpahareśvara temple complex was used by ascetics for their penance.

wall consisting of several fragments of architectural members like, lintels, *devakoṣṭhas* and pillar fragments.

- Other Remains in the Complex

Apart from the extant structures, several architectural fragments are strewn around the complex; notable among these are a loose life-size sculpture, a loose pedestal of a Jaina deity and a sati stone. The loose sculpture is a headless figure, probably of a Jaina tirthankara, conjectured from peculiar posture. Seated in a *padmāsana*, the sculpture is probably placed on a small pedestal, now buried in the overgrown debris. The original location of the sculpture is not known; however, the current spot is certainly not its location. Though its bust is lost, a carving of the coiled loose hair is visible on the shoulders of the sculptures. The presence of this sculpture indicates the presence of a Jaina shrine in Lonar, and it would not be too farfetched to speculate that the Pāpahareśvara temple complex location could be that site. The little isolated location of the complex from the more profane spaces of the Dhāra Tīrtha, the chamber in the *bārava* shrine of Pāpahareśvara and the presence of a pedestal probably of a Jaina deity bolster this hypothesis. Fallen in the northeastern corner of the *bārava*, the pedestal is heavily eroded, but the depiction of lion figures, commonly found on the pedestal of Jaina Tīrthankara icons, are visible (**Fig. 3.36**). Such types of Jaina Tīrthankara carved in the round as well as pedestal are also found in the Anjaneri group of temples in Nasik district and Viṣṇu temple at Satgaon Bhusari in Buldhana district.

A fragmented Satī stone is another noteworthy remnant from this temple complex.⁵² Lonar does not possess many hero-stone and Satī stones, the one found in the Pāpahareśvara temple being the only one, making the rare find a vital artefact.

- Period of Construction

The Pāpahareśvara temple complex certainly has two distinct phases of building activity, of which the first phase is datable to at least the twelfth century CE. The exquisite pillar typology, architectural style and details of the *chatrī*, like the pillar typology, ceiling pattern and decorative motifs, are the markers that place the

⁵² Refer to Fig. A.24 in the Appendix.

beginning of building activity at this location to at least the middle of the twelfth century CE. The pillars of this *chatrī* are directly comparable in style to the pillars of the *mukhamanḍapa* of the Yajñeśvara temple and the pillar-pilasters remnants from the *gūḍhamanḍapa* of the Daityasūdāna temple complex.

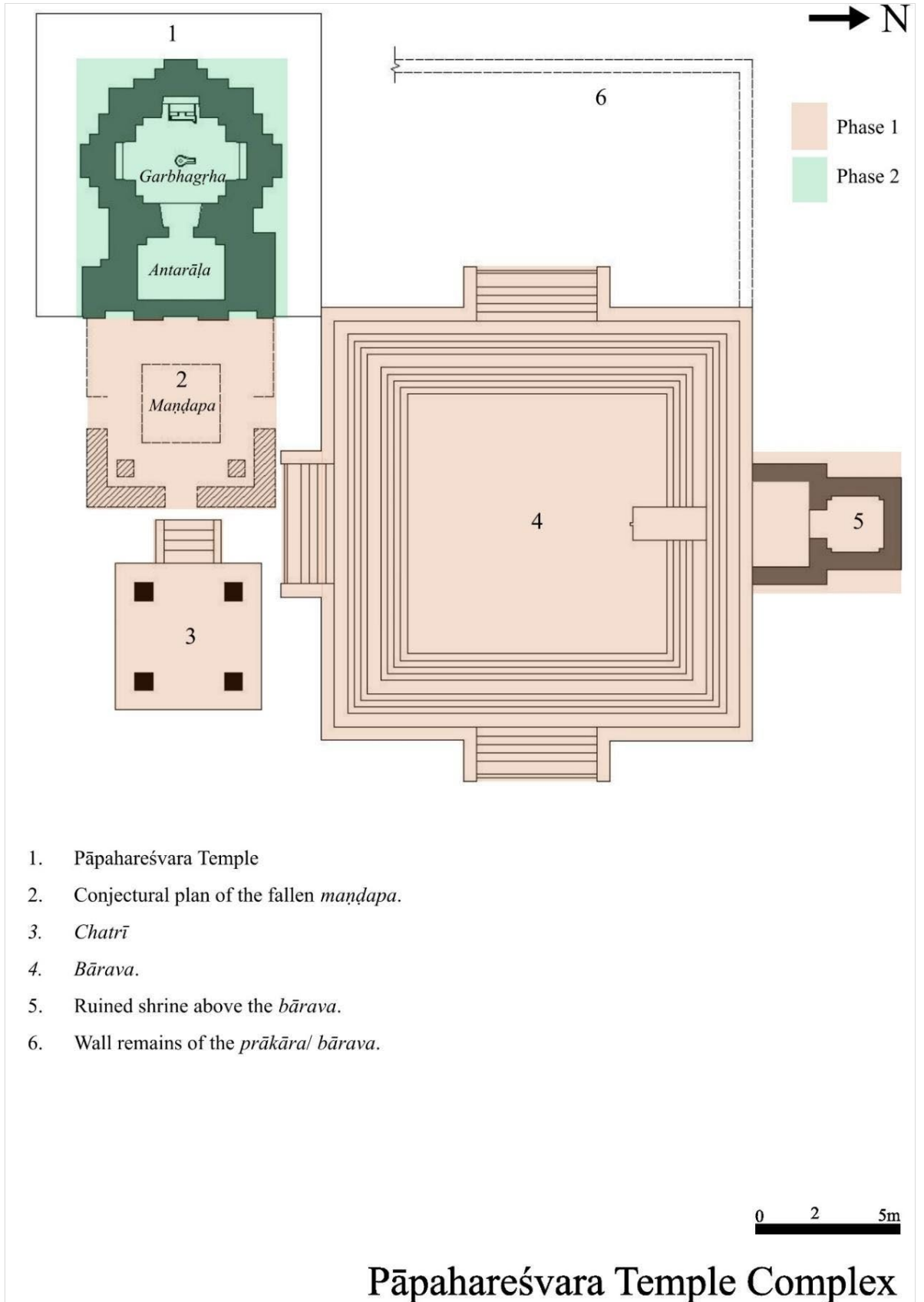


Fig. 3.32: Ground plan of Pāpahareśvara temple complex



Fig. 3.33: View from the north of the Pāpahareśvara temple complex



Fig. 3.34: Pāpahareśvara temple with the traces of the *maṇḍapa*



Fig. 3.35: *chatrī* in the Pāpahareśvara temple complex with plinth details of the *kūṭastambha* motifs



Fig. 3.36: Pedestal of a Jain sculpture

Structures along the hill slopes in the forest reserve, midway from the rim to the saltwater lake

The second category of the built environment in Lonar includes structures along the hill slopes, in the forest reserve, and midway from the rim to the saltwater lake. The Kumāreśvara Temple Complex, Yajñeśvara Temple, Rāmagayā temple and some structural remains seen near the Pir Dargah are four locations that fall under this category.

1. Kumāreśvara Temple Complex

- Location

The temple complex is situated at a lower elevation than the Dhāra Tīrtha complex, midway to the saltwater lake along the same route that further leads to the Yajñeśvara temple complex. The temple is easily visible and accessible from the Dhāra Tīrtha complex as well. Y.M. Kale suggests that there was an alternative route to reach this temple, which was probably enroute the Pāpahareśvara Temple Complex.⁵³ The *garbhagṛha* enshrines a Śivaliṅga.

- General Description of the Temple Complex

The entire temple complex has incongruous additions and restorations, making it challenging to speculate about the elevational details of the main temple, *bārava* and the entrance gateway. It is only based on the interior of the temple as well as the few traces of the *bārava*, the flooring of a small shrine and *devakoṣṭha*, which aid in understanding the original design of the complex. In the *Līlācaritra*, it is mentioned that after Yādava Kānharadeva offered *āsūnci vākhārī* to Cakradhara but the latter refused to accept it.⁵⁴ Later, it was utilised for the restoration of the compound wall of Kumāreśvara temple.⁵⁵ This indicates that a structure named Kumāreśvara temple

⁵³ Kale, *Loṇāra Varṇana*, 23.

⁵⁴ *Āsu* was a type of currency during the Yādava period. As per the meaning in the old Marathi to English dictionary, it is a gold coin of a specific value. For reference, S.G. Tulpule and Anne Feldhaus. *A Dictionary of Old Marathi*. (Mumbai: Popular Prakashan, 1999), 74.

⁵⁵ As per the *līlā* given in Tulpule's work, it is unclear who exactly undertook the restoration. For reference, see S.G. Tulpule, ed. *Līlācaritra Ekāṅka* (Pune: Suvichar Prakashan Mandal, 1964), 22, 46, 63. According to the *līlā* from the *Līlācaritra* edited by Narendramuni

existed during Cakradhara Svāmī's visit to Lonar and must have been constructed atleast a few decades before this incident took place. Another Mahānubhāva text that refers to the Kumāreśvara temple is *Sthānapothī*. This text mentions that the temple faces east and has three *mukhamāṇḍapas* and Gaṇeśa shrine.⁵⁶ Both these texts aid in conjecturing a probable date for the construction of Kumāreśvara temple and its original architectural layout, both facets that are only cursorily discernible from the extant material evidence of the temple.

▪ Architectural Description: Exterior of the temple

The temple is oriented to the east. At present, the plan consists of a *garbhagrha*, *antarāḷa* and a *gūḍhamāṇḍapa* (**Fig. 3.37**). The exterior walls of the *gūḍhamāṇḍapa* and the *maṇḍovara* have been incongruously reconstructed at many later moments, which has subtracted all the original mouldings of the *vedibandha* and the *jaṅghā*. Excessive addition to the stone masonry has also ruined the elevation of the temple walls and the *śikhara* of the temple. The *gūḍhamāṇḍapa* is the only element which has survived in its near to original design from the exterior and the interior. The walls of the *maṇḍapa* are plain, devoid of any ornamentation except for the *dvāraśākhās* of the three entrances. It is also possible that each of the three entrances of the *maṇḍapa* had *mukhamāṇḍapas* attached to them (**Fig. 3.47**). However, the overgrown debris surrounding the temple has made it difficult to access the *mukhamāṇḍapas* as well as the plinth mouldings of the temple.

Ankulnerkar, Cakradhara (referred to as Gosāvī) leaves after denying the money, after which the people decide to use it for restoration of the temple. In her translation of the *līlā*, Anne Feldhaus says, 'The Gosavi abandoned the money and left. People there kept watch on the money. After the Gosavi had left, they used it to build a compound wall for the Kumareshvar temple'. Narendramuni Ankulnerkar (ed.). *Śrī Mhāimabhaṭa sankalita Līlācaritra second edition*. (Nagpur: Akhil Bharatiya Mahānubhāva Mahamandal, 2019), 33; Anne Feldhaus, ed. and trans, *Mhaimbhat God at Play, Volume 1* (Cambridge, Massachusetts; London, England: Murty Classical Library of India Harvard University Press, 2024), 80–81.

⁵⁶ It is referred to as 'Gaṇeśaache Saje' in the text which has been defined as *maṇḍapa* or small shrine. For reference, V. B. Kolte, *Sthānapothī*, (Malkapur: Arun Prakashan, n.d), 11-12.

- Architectural Description: Interior of the temple

Though in fairly preserved condition, the interiors of the temple have not completely escaped the renovations or restorations that were undertaken in the recent past. Since there are no structural changes or additions to the temple interiors, the temple plan has remained intact. The *maṇḍapa* of the temple is square in plan, consisting of a quadrangle supported by four pillars, standing on an elevated platform at the centre. The quadrangle is surrounded by rectangular aisles on all sides, of which the western side leads to the *antarāḷa*. None of the *maṇḍapa* pillars are original, but they are restored later using the original fragments. The base and capital belong to the original pillar, but the shafts are haphazardly re-used fragments. The capital of the south-eastern pillar in the *maṇḍapa* has a fragment with a *maithuna* sculpture on its north face, flanked by a *mithuna* figures on its right and a female figure on its left. The same pillar has a Gaṇeśa figure on the south face. These pillar fragments are similar to the pilasters of the *antarāḷa*, all of which are likely to be part of the original plan.

The rectangular *antarāḷa* is in pristine condition. Perforated motif band over the beams, trabeated ceiling with lotus medallion, large *kīrtimukha* motifs and *devakoṣṭha* on the walls are the markers of the original form and style of the temple. The *garbhagrha* is entered through an ornate *dvāraśākhā* which is the most exquisite element and undamaged portion in the entire temple. It has a Gaṇeśa figure on the *lalāṭabimba* and a male seated figure along with a row of deities in *rathikās* on the *uttarāṅga*.

- Entrance Porch to the Temple

The ruinous entrance porch is situated in between the temple and the *bārava* remains, specifically in front of the northern entrance of the temple *gūḍhamaṇḍapa* (**Fig. 3.48**). There is a passage connecting the *gūḍhamaṇḍapa dvāraśākhā* and the gateway, but there are no traces of any superstructure in this passage. It is possible that the passage was added at a later time. The walls of the entrance gateway have fallen, and a rubble stone masonry was added later. A similar kind of masonry is also seen added above the *kakṣāsana* or the dwarf *maṇḍapa* walls of the Rāmagayā temple.

The original design of the entrance porch is difficult to speculate because of these incongruous additions. Based on the traceable remains of the plinth, pillar positions

and the lintel- beam framework, a sketch plan can be made. The gateway has a flight of steps on the northern side which lead to a square enclosure flanked on by two lateral wings on its east and west. Another square porch faces the temple. There are no remains of steps of the southern side of the entrance gateway.

- *Bārava* remains

Few stray finds that presumably belong to a *bārava* which has now fallen are a *devakoṣṭha*, remains of a small shrine and an open platform which has lost its superstructure. A freshwater spring, locally known as the Sitā Nhāṇī flows underneath this platform ⁵⁷(Fig. 3.49). The ruined evidence of the *devakoṣṭha*, indicates the presence of a *bārava* or a *kuṇḍa*, similar to the *bārava* in the Pāpahareśvara temple complex.

- Period of Construction

As aforementioned, the incongruous additions on the exterior wall of the temple make it extremely difficult to place a date for its construction. Since the exterior holds no clue of the original temple fabric, it is only based on the interiors that a conjectural period of construction can be assigned to it. The *maṇḍapa* plan is similar to the Rāmagayā and Pāpahareśvara temples, and the pillar and minor detailing of ornamentation bear similarity with the Daityasūdāna temple. These features, coupled with the textual evidence available from the Mahānubhava texts, indicate that the first phase of building in this temple certainly can be placed in the thirteenth century CE.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ The name derives from the belief that Sita came to bathe in this *kuṇḍa*. See, Budgane, *Loṇāra Darśana*, 38; Vyas, *Sarvāṅga Paricaya: Jagaprasiddha Vivara Loṇāra*, 71.

⁵⁸ The Mahānubhāva texts here refer to *Līlācaritra* and *Sthānapothī*. Compilation of both these texts is datable to the thirteenth - fourteenth centuries CE.

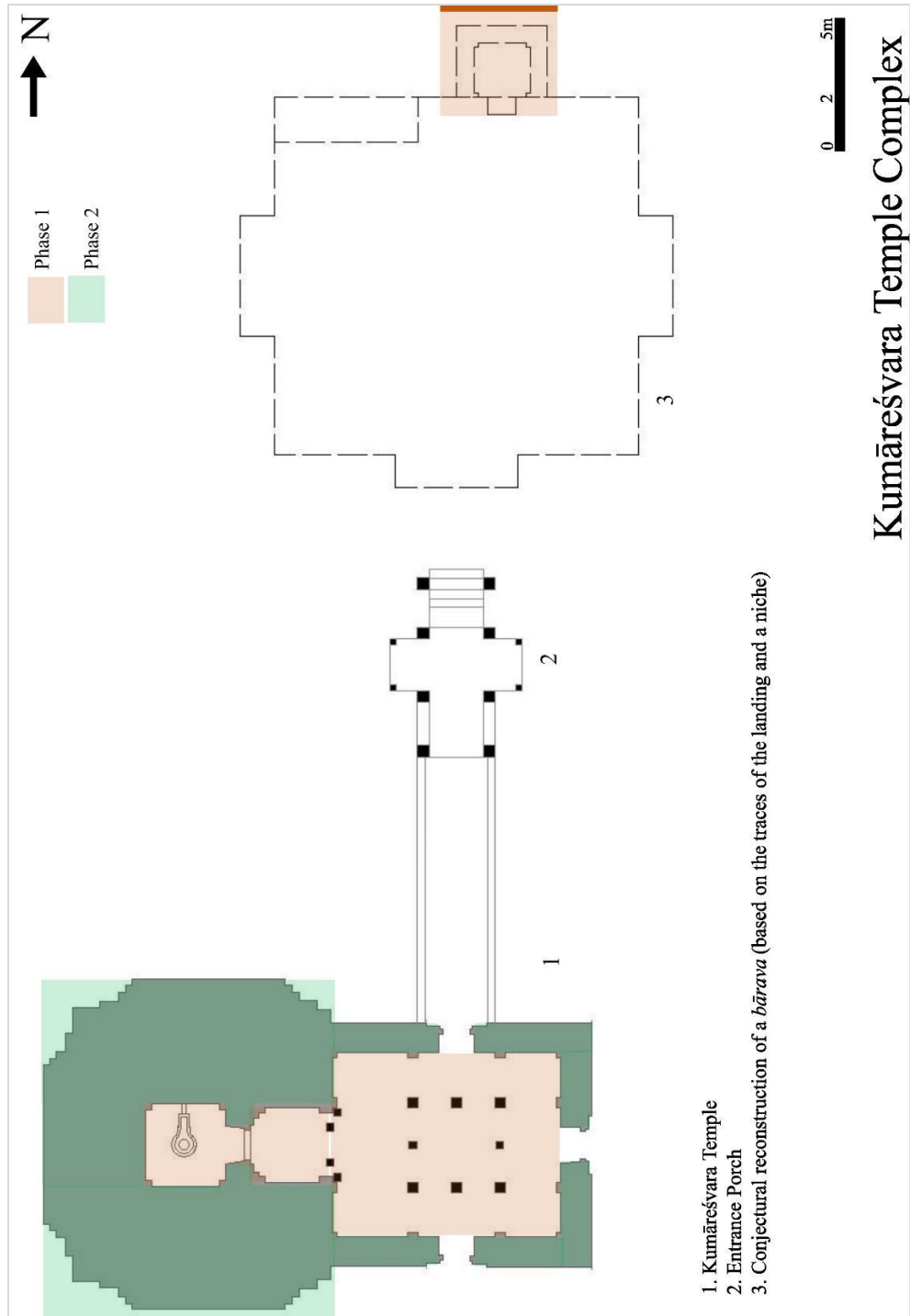


Fig. 3.37: Ground plan of Kumāreśvara temple complex

Note: The location and extent of the *bārava*, locally known as Sitā Nhāñī, have been speculated in this plan based on the remains of the small *devakoṣṭha* and the freshwater spring. The actual size and shape of the *bārava* is not known. It is possible that the entrance gateway was connected to the *bārava*, but it is difficult to understand the layout with the restorations in the complex.



Fig. 3.38: Kumāreśvara temple – View from the north



Fig. 3.39: View of the east-facing *maṇḍapa* of the Kumāreśvara temple



Fig. 3.40: Entrance porch in the Kumāreśvara temple complex



Fig. 3.41: Sitā Nhāñī, traces of a *bārava* in front of the Kumāreśvara temple

2. Yajñeśvara Temple Complex

- Location

The temple complex is situated to the south of Dhāra Tīrtha temple and Kumāreśvara temple complexes amidst the vegetation on the hill slopes of the crater. Throughout the last decade, the road that passes from the north of this temple has been the principal route to the saltwater lake, thus making the temple an important node in the travel route. Since the temple is situated on a slightly higher elevation, the water stream flows alongside it but does not hamper the accessibility to the temple.

- General Description of the Temple Complex

Three major elements in this temple complex deserve a detailed discussion: The Yajñeśvara temple, an unknown ruined plinth and the numerous architectural members that give a fair idea about the original construction of the temple (**Fig. 3.42 and 3.43**). The main temple and the plinth of an unknown structure were confined within a *prākāra*, traces of which can be seen to the south-west of the temple, along the path that descends from the Kumāreśvara temple complex. The Yajñeśvara temple is also known as *Śukrācāryācī Vedaśālā*, a name that it acquired out of the belief that the temple premises were a centre of ascetic practices.⁵⁹ It is also believed that there was a *yajñakuṇḍa* near the Yajñeśvara temple, and the ash produced from the various rituals performed here is found on a nearby mound.

A hillock before the temple is identified as *bhasma ṭekaḍī* because of the ash-coloured soil, believed to be the *bhasma* produced from the numerous *yajñas* performed at this location. Nearby this hillock, one can also find some architectural fragments and a plausible retaining wall like structure. Amongst these fragments, foundation stones of structures and probable remains of pilasters of a temple can be seen.

⁵⁹ Bugdane, *Loṇāra Darśana*, 37; Suresh Mapari, *Aitihāsika Loṇāra (Prācina te Ādhunika)*, 60; Prakashchandra Vyas, *Sarvāṅga Paricaya: Jagaprasiddha Vivara Loṇāra* (Latur: Sanskruti Prakashan, 2000), 99-100.

- Architectural Description: Exterior of the Temple

In plan, the Yajñeśvara temple consists of a *garbhagrha*, *antarāla* and a *sabhāmaṇḍapa* connected to three *mukhamaṇḍapas* (Fig. 3.42). Though the superstructure of the temple is in a dilapidated condition, the plan aids in conjecturing the original design of the temple (Fig. 3.44). The later period restorations carried out in brick, especially along the exterior walls of *maṇḍovara* and *kapilī*, are made above the foundation of this ground plan (Fig. 3.45). The walls have been partly reconstructed in brick and partly re-arranged using the original architectural members of the structure (Fig. 3.46). However, neither the original stone fabric nor the later brickwork has survived today completely. There are no traces of brick masonry in the *maṇḍapa* of the temple.

The stone base moulding has survived along the west-facing elevation of the temple. The brick walls of the later period, approximately half a metre in height, are extant in the south-facing elevation of the temple (Fig. 3.46). It is known from these remains that the main shrine was *pañcaratha* in plan, consisting of a central projected *bhadra* flanked by a *pratiratha* and *karṇa* projections on each side. Other basal mouldings, like the *kumbha* and *kalaśa* of the *vedibandha* are also found in the strewn fragments. One of the *kumbha* mouldings is in situ near the south *mukhamaṇḍapa*, thus making it easier to compare and align with the similar fragments from the scattered remains along the temple (Fig. 3.47). The *kumbha* moulding is bereft of sculptures but has a diamond motif band at the centre. These basal moulding fragments also reveal that *salilāntaras* separated the projections of the wall. This is an important point to note because, as we shall see further through our discussion, temple typologies with *salilāntaras* are not a common phenomenon among the temples of Lonar.

Certain insights about the *jaṅghā* of the temple, the overall wall scheme, decoration and ornamentation pattern can be drawn from the dispersed architectural remains. Specifically, large stone fragments with *kūṭastambha* pilaster motifs and figural sculptures can be conjectured as part of the wall (Fig. 3.49). However, among the fragments, remains of the *sabhāmaṇḍapa*, basal mouldings and *sikhara* fragments are more than the remains of the *maṇḍovara*.

The southern elevation of the temple is survived with few *kakṣāsana* fragments. Similarly, several *kakṣāsana* fragments – *vedikā* of miniature *śikhara*s on pillars interspersed with figures like *mithuna*, *maithuna* and musicians, vertical *kakṣāsana* seatback with foliage patterns and figures placed in a circle at the centre – are found in the scattered remains in the temple vicinity. On one such *vedikā* fragment of the *kakṣāsana*, there is a one-liner inscription in Sanskrit, which can be paleographically dated to the twelfth- thirteenth centuries CE.⁶⁰ Interestingly, among the fragments atop the *maṇḍapa* of the temple and those scattered on the ground, are remains of the original *śikhara* of the temple (**Fig. 3.48 – 3.52**). Most of these remains belong to a *samvaraṇā śikhara* variety that must have adorned the *maṇḍapa* of the temple. Pedestals with small *ghaṇṭikās* on them and grooves to fit in the upper tier are visible on several portions of the *śikhara*. Two portions of *gavākṣa* are most certainly from the *śukanāsa* of the main *śikhara*. (**Fig. 3.54**) These are the only remains of a stone Bhūmija *śikhara* in the entire extant architecture at Lonar.

▪ Interior of the Temple

The most ornate and fairly well-preserved components in the interior of this temple are firstly the pillars at the entrance of the east-facing *mukhamaṇḍapa* and secondly, the ceiling of the *maṇḍapa*. Pillars like these must have been at the entrance of all the *mukhamaṇḍapas*. The typology is comparable to the pillar fragments found in the Daityasūdāna temple complex and the pillars of the *chatrī* in the Pāpahareśvara temple complex. The *sabhāmaṇḍapa* has a circular elevated platform at the centre surrounded by pillars. Since the plan of the temple is based on achieving the ceiling dome from the rectangular trabeated system, the pillars are vital components. Some of these pillars were added later to support the cracked beams, but the pillar capitals and the ceiling made out of concentric circles belong to the original fabric of the temple. The pillar capitals have depictions of *dikpālas*.⁶¹ The corbel stones have a frieze of musicians and battle scenes. The rectangular stone courses exactly above the pillar capitals have depictions of *saptamātrkā*s.

⁶⁰ Refer to Appendix for the details of the inscription, Fig. A.4.

⁶¹ Refer Fig. A.11 in the Appendix.

The dominant pillar typology in the *maṇḍapa* is square in plan, where the lower shaft is rectangular and plain without any ornamentation, and the upper shaft is cylindrical in shape with a prominent band of *kīrtimukhas* at the centre. The *kaṇi* and *ghaṭa* moulding above this shaft portion is plain. The pillar capital has *nāga* figures at the centre of each of the four faces curved capital portion.

- Other Structures in the Complex

Various broken pillars, pillar capitals, and architectural fragments are lying on the plinth that could have belonged to the original stone construction of the temple or the superstructure on this stone plinth. Approximately a meter in height, the plinth comprises plain stone masonry with slightly offset rectangular moulding, which mirrors the top of the plinth and the bottom of the plinth. It is plausible that the plinth initially belonged to a semi-open archway or one adjacent to the main temple.

- Period of Construction

In this conjectural reconstruction of the Yajñeśvara temple, the Viṣṇu temple at Satgaon Bhusari in the Buldhana district is a vital clue. The two temples are stylistically comparable for their ground plans, basal mouldings, wall treatment, design of the interior spaces and *śikhara* fragments. The *kakṣāsana* remains found near Yajñeśvara temple are similar to the temple at Satgaon bhusari. The earliest period of construction, speculated from the *śikhara* fragments, the ground plan of the temple, and two pillars at the east facing *mukhamaṇḍapa* of the temple, can be ascribed to the twelfth century CE. Furthermore, Yajñeśvara temple plausibly predates the Daityasūdāna temple at Lonar by a few years at the least. The finesse in the fragments of Yajñeśvara temple hints towards its once exquisite form.

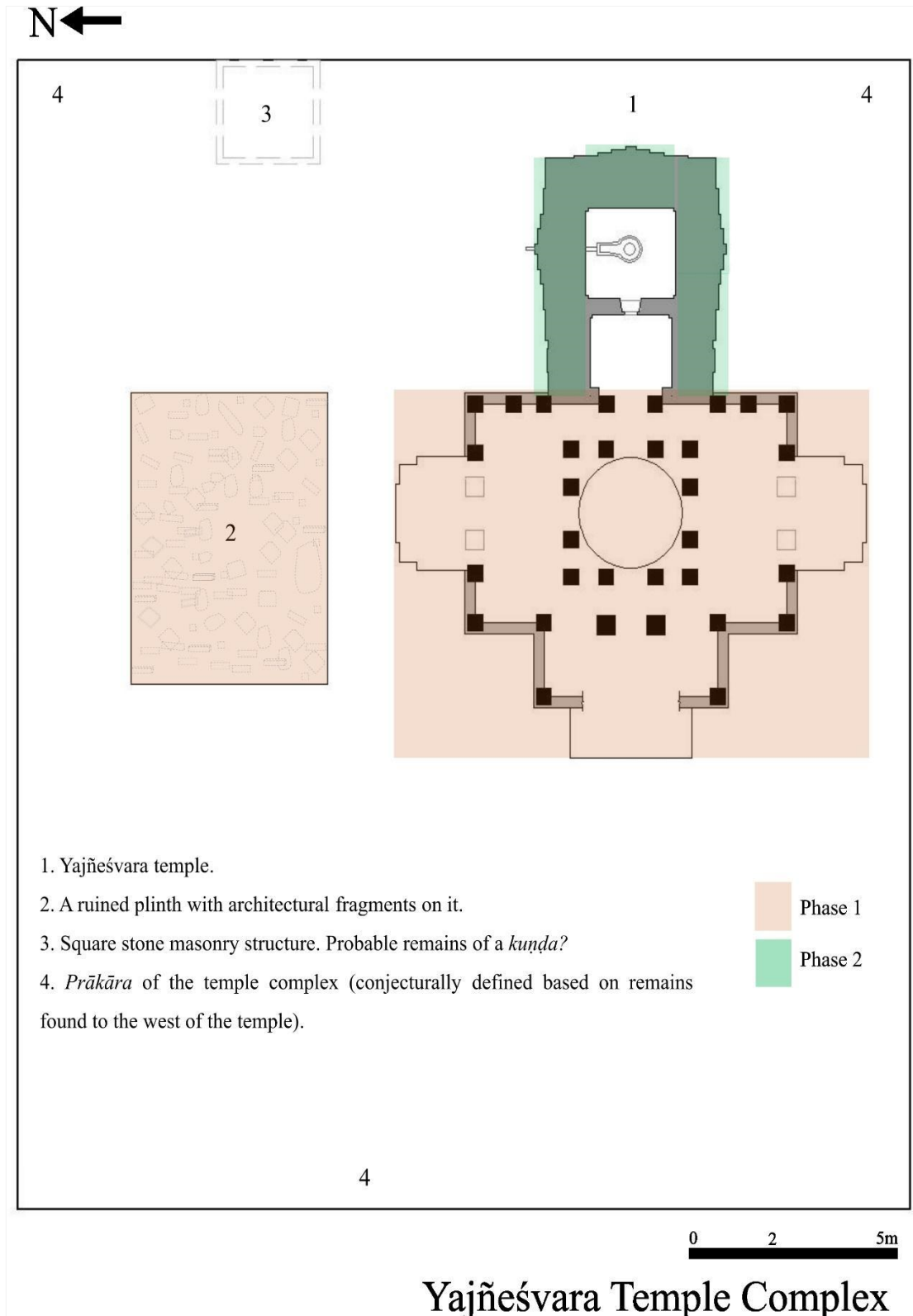


Fig. 3.42: Ground plan of Yajñeśvara temple complex

Note: The architectural members drawn on the plinth surface are only indicative of the several such remains scattered all around the temple complex.



Fig. 3.43: Yajñeśvara temple complex – View from the north



Fig. 3.44: East-facing elevation of the Yajñeśvara temple complex



Fig. 3.45: Fallen exterior walls of the Yajñeśvara temple with only the interior *garbhagrha* pillars remaining



Fig. 3.46: Exterior walls of the shrine reconstructed in brick on the original stone plinth



Fig. 3.47: Extant portion of the basal mouldings at the south *mukhamandapa* of the temple



Fig. 3.48: Extant portions of the *śikhara* and the *chajjā*, haphazardly arranged on the *mandapa*



Fig. 3.49: *Kūṭastambha* motif



Fig. 3.50: *Kakṣāsana* fragment



Fig. 3.51: Broken *śikhara* fragment



Fig. 3.52: *Gavākṣa* fragment



Fig. 3.53: Fragments of the *samvaraṇā* roof

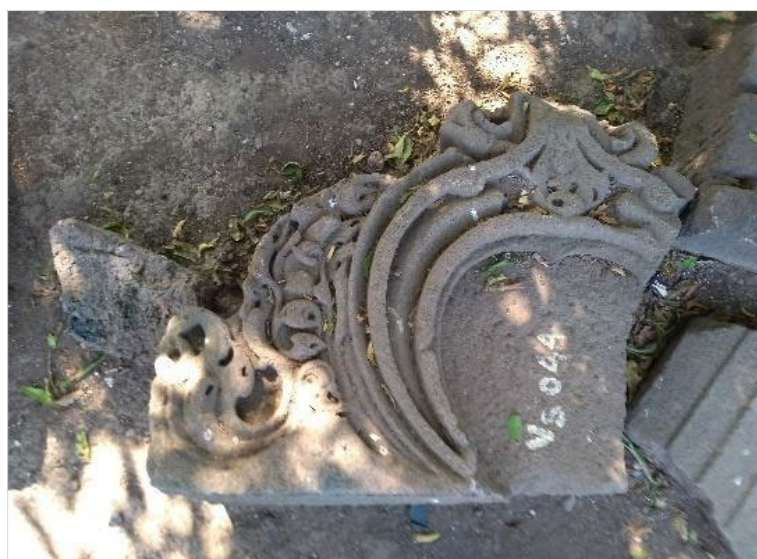


Fig. 3.54: Remnant of a *gavākṣa* of the *śukanāsa* of the *śikhara*

3. Rāmagayā Temple Complex

- Location

The Rāmagayā temple complex is situated on the mid-landing to the saltwater lake, south-east of the Dhāra Tīrtha complex. It is located above the eastern slope from the Bagīcā temple reachable via an approach road from a higher elevation; both the Yajñeśvara temple complex and the Rāmagayā temple complex are located at a similar elevation in the crater. The temple complex was also accessible from the Lonar Mantha road which runs past the MTDC resort. However, this path has been fenced in recent years by the Forest Department. The access to the temple complex now is largely governed by the seasonal changes in the landscape. In the recent years, owing to water influx and increase in wilderness, the approach road to the temple complex slightly changes.

- General Description of the Temple Complex

The complex comprises Rāmagayā temple, Mahādeva temple, a small Hanumāna shrine and a *kuṇḍa* ⁶² (Fig. 3.55). This *kuṇḍa* has a natural water spring eponymous with the name of the temple. In recent years, the debris from the *kuṇḍa* was cleared, which facilitated a renewed flow of the stream. It is believed that Rāma visited this temple and bathed in the *kuṇḍa* during his pilgrimage to Lonar. The temple enshrines a standing two-armed figure that is revered as Rāma. For pilgrims, the Rāmagayā temple is one of the important nodes in the pilgrimage route that connects Dhara and Kamalaja.

- Architectural Description: Rāmagayā Temple

The Rāmagayā temple consists in plan of a *garbhagrha*, *antarāḷa*, and a *sabhāmaṇḍapa* with *mukhamaṇḍapas* to its west, north and south sides (Fig. 3.56). The principal ingress of the temple faces west. The exterior of the temple is not austere. The structure stands on a raised plinth; however, it is now buried under overgrown debris. Currently, only two basal mouldings are visible which are made up

⁶² Locally this temple is called as the Gaṇeśa temple, which some villagers say has come from the broken Gaṇeśa sculpture in the *antarāḷa* of the temple, but there is no consensus over it. However, R. C. Agrawal has addressed it as Mahādeva temple, and hence the same name has been used here as well. See, Agrawal, *Archaeological Remains in Western India*, 88.

of plain stone courses that same in height, slightly offset from each other. It is likely that there were at least two more mouldings of the *vedibandha*, similar in shape and form to the two visible mouldings, but are now buried. The *vedibandha* is followed by the *janḡhā* of the temple, which follows a wall scheme of a central *bhadra* flanked by two *pratibhadras*, intermediate *pratirathas* and *karṇa* projections at the corners. The temple is *saptaratha* in plan. The projections of the wall are in low relief. Furthermore, the projections are not separated by *salilantarās*, which is a noteworthy feature.

All wall projections are devoid of ornamentation, except for some minor decorations on the *bhadra* projections of the *garbhagr̥ha*. The *bhadra* has a *devakoṣṭha* at the centre of the frontal projected face. The *devakoṣṭhas* are deep, empty niches with pilaster motifs on their two vertical sides that support the cantilevered roof. This small roof has a decorative *jālaka* pattern above it, which is usually seen in many of the early Marāṭhā or Mughal period architecture. The ornate pilaster motifs of the *devakoṣṭhas*, on their rectangular blocks on the shafts, have depictions of leonine figures that appear like Kevala Narasimha and Vāmana on the north and south facing elevations respectively. Such depictions are unusual, although not uncommon in the Rāmagayā temple. The *śikhara* of the temple is lost. Based on the *śikhara* remains of the Mahādeva temple, it is certain that Rāmagayā temple also must have possessed a brick bhūmija *śikhara* of similar typology.

In tandem with the exterior, the surface treatment of the interior walls and pillars has minimal ornamentation. The *sabhāmaṇḍapa* has a quadrangle at its centre, supported by four pillars built on a raised platform and having a trabeated ceiling above. The pillars and pilasters of the temple are akin to a dominant typology found in Lonar where the pillars are square in plan with plain shafts in the lower half and rectangular blocks with a small *kaṇī* moulding in the upper half. The northwestern pillar of the *sabhāmaṇḍapa* has an interesting engraving, probably a hero memorial or a *Satī* memorial, where a woman is shown riding on horseback with open hair. These kinds of Sati memorials are not native to the region around Lonar, they were common in Rajasthan during the fifteenth - sixteenth centuries CE. This aspect needs warrants further studies to understand stylistic influences of the temple.

The *sabhāmaṇḍapa* has *kakṣāsana* along the north-west and south-west dwarf walls. Unlike the fragments found in the Yajñeśvara temple, the *kakṣāsanas* here are straight and bereft of ornamentation. Through the twentieth century CE, this semi-open *sabhāmaṇḍapa* walls were temporarily closed.⁶³ Among all the plain interiors, the only decorative element in the temple is the *dvāraśākhā* of the *garbhagrha* which has depictions of Narasimha, Vāmana, Bhūvarāha in the *rathikas* interspersed with elephant motifs. Likewise, the *dvāraśākhā* of the south-facing *mūkhamaṇḍapa* has a Murlīdhara Kṛṣṇa on the lintel.

▪ Architectural Description: Mahādeva temple

Situated to the north of the Ramagaya temple, the Mahādeva temple stands overlooking a stepped *kuṇḍa*. The west-facing ingress of the temple is in a ruinous condition, but in the original layout, this main entrance to the temple must have led directly to the *kuṇḍa*.

The Mahādeva temple is *pañcaratha* shrine and differs in the wall treatment, projections and ornamentation stylistically from the Rāmagayā temple in the same complex. The projected *bhadra* with elaborate *upabhadras*, flanked by equal projections of *pratiratha* and *karṇa* projections, *vedibandha* mouldings and the wall treatment, draws similarity to several other temples in Lonar like the Vāgha, Ambarkhānā and Muṅḡalyā temples. The *maṇḍapa* of Mahādeva temple is in a ruinous state; the walls are partially broken from the exterior while all the interior structure, pillars and the beam with the ceiling above it have fallen down (**Fig. 3.58**). The *maṇḍapa* follows the plan of Yajñeśvara and Kamaḷajā temple, wherein there is an elevated platform at the centre, and the ceiling is made up of concentric rings diminishing in height to form the dome. Thus, though both Rāmagayā and Mahādeva temples constitute part of one temple complex, these are not the same in plan and the exterior treatment of the *maṇḍapa*; they differ slightly in their form and designs.

The temple has survived a few remnants of its *bhūmija śikhara* on its east facing elevation. These brick *śikhara* remains are the most vital remnant section of Mahādeva temple. One tier of *bhūmi* aedicula is composed of moulded bricks and

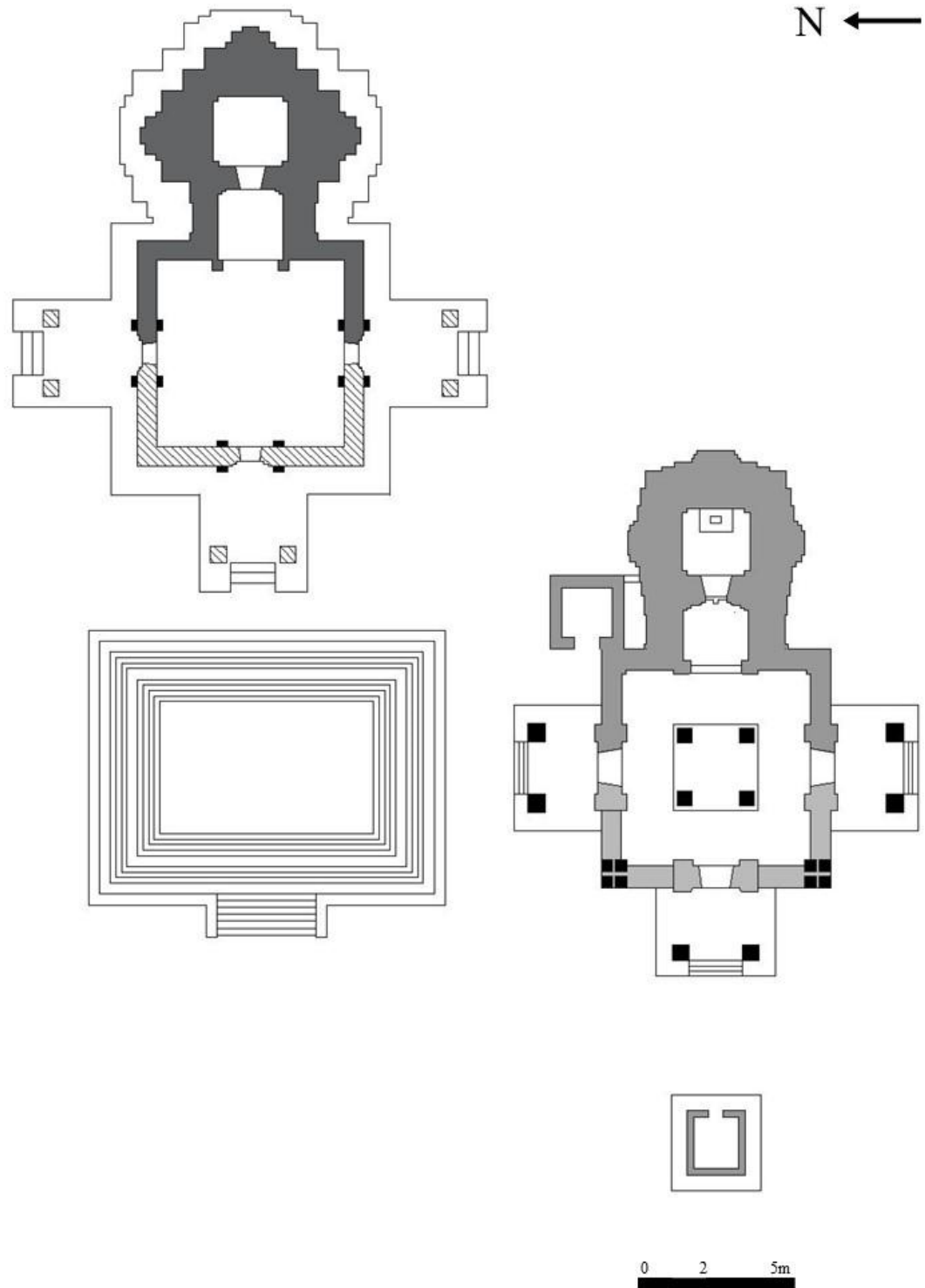
⁶³ This is seen in the archival photographs from the collections of American Institute of Advanced studies and the British Library collection.

stucco. The *madhyalatā* of the *śikhara* is lost, however, *śukanāsa* at the base of this *latā* is intact. The brick built *śukanāsa* is shaped like a niche with a motif of *kūṭastambha* comprising a pyramidical *kūṭa*. It is this evidence that provides a strong instance to understand and comprehend the typology of the *śikharas* of most temples along the Lonar lake periphery, like Vāgha, Mora, Ambarakhānā, Kamaḷajā, Muṅgalyā, Deśamukha and Rāmagayā temples.

- Period of Construction

As demonstrated above, the Mahādeva and Rāmagayā temples appear to be contemporary construction with regards to their ground plan and elevation; however, such is not the case. The ground plan, wall scheme and basal mouldings and the pillar typology of Mahādeva temple draw affinity to Vāgha, Mora, Ambarakhānā, Kamaḷajā, Muṅgalyā, Deśamukha temples. In contrast, the lack of projections in the wall scheme and absence of distinguished basal mouldings of the Rāmagayā temple indicate it to be a later period construction. Thus, Mahādeva temple can be satisfactorily evaluated as an earlier period construction than the Rāmagayā temple. To speculate a time period based on stylistic comparisons, the Mahadeva temple can be placed in the thirteenth-fourteenth century CE and the Rāmagayā temple, a little removed from the latter, can be placed in the late fourteenth or even early fifteenth century CE.

Furthermore, the remains of the brick *śikhara* atop the Mahādeva temple are comparable to the brick *śikhara* remains of Mallikārjuna temple at Loni Bhapkar temple in Pune district, Kātreśvara temple at Katar Khatav in Satara district, Ardhanārī Naṭeśvara temple at Velapur in Solapur district among many others. All these temples can be stylistically dated to the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries CE. Drawing from the same, the temples with stylistic affinities in Lonar can also be placed in this time bracket.



Rāmagayā Temple Complex

Fig. 3.55: Ground plan of Rāmagayā temple complex

Note: In this plan, the plan of Rāmagayā temple has been reproduced here as per the drawing provided by R.C.Agrawal.⁶⁴ Plan of the *kuṇḍa*, Mahādeva Temple and small Hanumāna shrine in front of the Rāmagayā temple have been made as per the documentation conducted as part of the present study. Since the *maṇḍapa* walls of Gaṇeśa temple are partially fallen, it has been indicated with a different hatch pattern.



Fig. 3.56: South-facing elevation of the Rāmagayā temple with Hanumāna shrine to its east



Fig. 3.57: Mahādeva temple and Rāmagayā temple overlooking the *kuṇḍa*

⁶⁴ Agrawal, *Archaeological Remains in Western India*. 87.



Fig. 3.58: Interior of the Mahādeva temple from the Rāmagayā temple complex

Structures Situated on the Circumference of the Lonar Saltwater Lake

The largest concentration of temples in Lonar is found along the periphery of the saltwater lake. Starting from the eastern side, if one circumambulates the lake, the temples in order would be Bagicā, Vāgha, Mora, Kamaḷajā, Muṅgaḷyā, Deśamukha and Copḍā. The two temples, Bagicā and Copḍā, flank north eastern incision of the Dhāra Tīrtha valley. In the descriptive analysis that follows in the succeeding sections, temples are discussed in groups based on their state of preservation and stylistic similarities. Bagicā temple deserves a separate discussion for its architectural peculiarities. The architectural details of all the temples shall be enumerated following the *pradakṣiṇā patha* of Lonar lake.

1. Bagicā temple

- Location

This temple is situated on the shore of Lonar Lake to the east of the Dhāra Tīrtha. This side of the lake has been inaccessible since 2020, owing to the exponential increase in lake water.

- General Description of the Temple

In the year 2007 and subsequent years, the area around the Bagicā temple, at the foothills of Dhāra, was utilised as agricultural land. The vicinity of the temple always had a concentrated vegetation cover compared to the north-western side of the lake shore. As per the information provided by locals, the area around the temple was in line with Orchards. Hence, the temple has acquired the name Bagicā (garden). It is single shrine temple without traces of ancillary structures surrounding it.

- Architectural Description: Exterior of the Temple

In plan, the temple consists of a *garbhagr̥ha*, *antarāḷa*, and a *sabhāmaṇḍapa* with three entrance porches on the north, east and west sides (**Fig. 3.59**). The *garbhagr̥ha* and *antarāḷa* are fairly preserved, but other components are dilapidated with scattered lintels and pillar fragments. The *garbhagr̥ha* is a *saptaratha*, stellate on the plan, and the *maṇḍapa* must have been square without any major offsets, punctured with three *mukhamāṇḍapas* (**Fig. 3.60**). The principal entrance of the temple is oriented to the north.

The entire temple is built on a raised plinth, mostly in a disturbed and dilapidated state, built in plain stone masonry and devoid of figural ornamentation. The basal mouldings of the *vedibandha* are not as pronounced as they are usually in contemporary period structures, for instance, the Daityasūdāna temple. But from the bottom, a *khūra* and a *kumbha* moulding can be identified clearly. The *kumbha* moulding of the temple has a diamond motif design in low relief and a *maṇibandha* at its centre. This is followed by a stone course band, slightly offset from the *vedibandha*, which continues into the *jaṅghā*. All the *pratibhadra*, *pratiratha* and *karṇa* projections additionally have three offsets on their corners. The principal projections or three *bhadras* of the temple set at a right angle in three cardinal directions project more than its adjoining *rathas* of the *garbhagrha*. This wall scheme creates a significant light and shadow effect on the temple exterior.

The *jaṅghā* of the temple is defined by a slight inward offset from the *vedibandha* mouldings, unlike a protruding *kapotālī* or *maṇcikā*. The entire *jaṅghā* is bereft of any sculptures or ornamentation except for *devakoṣṭhas* on the *bhadra*. These *devakoṣṭhas* are in low relief, composed of two ornate pilasters supporting a pedestal and the finial of similar design, just mirrored to each other. Between the *jaṅghā* and the cornice are two plain band mouldings that run all along the exterior of the *garbhagrha* walls.

The mouldings at the cornice band of the temple are supported by brackets that resemble pillar capitals. The *varaṇḍikā* (cornice level) consists of two *kapotālī* mouldings that are separated by *antarapatra*. The topmost moulding of the cornice level projected outwards has small figures of ascetics on their horizontal faces, only some of which have survived. This pattern of sculpting ascetics above the *varaṇḍikā* mouldings seems to be a common practice in thirteenth-century CE temples from Maharashtra. Within Lonar, such a depiction of ascetics is found at the cornice level of Rāmagayā and Daityasūdāna temples.

The temple must have had a *śikhara* above this *varaṇḍikā* mouldings, but no traces of it have remained today. Presently, the top of it is plastered (**Fig. 3.61**).

- Architectural Description: Interior of the temple

The *maṇḍapa* must have had a raised platform at the centre, of which four pillars are still extant in their original position. Since it was a semi-open *maṇḍapa*, it had dwarf walls with equidistantly intersected pillars. These dwarf walls must have had *kakṣāsana*, which is evident from the sockets in the horizontal slabs meant for seating and also the scattered remains of the blocks of stone seat backs.

The roof of the *maṇḍapa* has collapsed entirely, but based on the arrangement of the pillars, it can be speculated that it would have a central trabeated ceiling supported by four central pillars. Two of these pillars on the east side of the *maṇḍapa* have survived. On three sides of the *maṇḍapa*, it would have rectangular aisles like in Daityasūdāna temple, Gondeśvara at Sinnar, Viṣṇu temple at Satgaon Bhusari. The trabeated ceiling of the aisle is partially preserved in the western quadrant of the *maṇḍapa*. The beams of the *maṇḍapa* have low-relief floral medallions.

The pillars in the *sabhāmaṇḍapa* are all of the same type consisting of, from bottom to top, a pedestal with a triangular design at the centre, a plain rectangular shaft, an octagonal component with geometric designs like diamonds, circles and others, a square block with icons and panels, a cylindrical block, a *kaṇi* moulding, *pūrṇaghaṭa* and four-sided capital. This pillar typology has been replicated in many temples within Lonar.

There is a Gaṇeśa, Goddess (unidentified) and Kārtikeya icons on the two pillars supporting the beam that separates *antarāḷa* and the *sabhāmaṇḍapa*.

Pūtanāvadha and Yamalārjuna are the two Kṛṣṇa *līlā* panels identified from the two pillars from the centre of the *sabhāmaṇḍapa*. The figure of Matsyendranātha from the south-east of the *catuṣkī* pillars is a notable icon amongst Bagīcā temple pillar icons. Other panels from the half pillars on the dwarf pillars and the remaining panels from the centre pillars include fighting/hunting of man-elephant combat, man-lion/ *vyāla* fight scenes, and musicians/dancers.⁶⁵

Three fallen pillar fragments from the *maṇḍapa* are west of the temple. On one of the pillar fragments, there is a panel where a figure on the left is hunting with a

⁶⁵ See Fig. A.12 in the Appendix section

bow, a tree is shown at the centre, and two figures are seen on the right side of the panel. All these panels are eroded because they are submerged in water.

The *antarāḷa* of the temple has *devakoṣṭhas* on its two lateral walls. The *dvāraśākhā* of the *garbhagr̥ha* is simply designed with only a *stambhaśākhā*, icons of musicians on the *uttarāṅga* and projecting *kapotālī* mouldings instead of *rathikās* above the lintel. The *lalāṭabimba* has a Gaṇeśa icon at the centre. Based on the pedestal with Garuḍa image on it, this temple could have been dedicated to Viṣṇu. Today, the temple is not under use; there is no object of worship in the *garbhagr̥ha* but a loose pedestal.

- Period of Construction

The temple is unique for its ground and elevation. The *saptaratha* stellate plan of the temple sets it apart from all the other temples along the periphery of the saltwater lake. The basal mouldings of the structure and the proportionate division of the *jaṅghā* are stylistically akin to a temple like Daityasūdāna. The mouldings are reminiscent of the classical moulding patterns. Even if the Bagicā temple is austere, the treatment of its architectural members is different. One of the reasons for this could be patronage of the temple. The period of construction of the temple also contributes to a certain architectural morphology. The minute architectural details, the plan of the *garbhagr̥ha* and the *maṇḍapa* coupled with the pillar typology, suggest a time frame of fourteenth century CE for the temple.

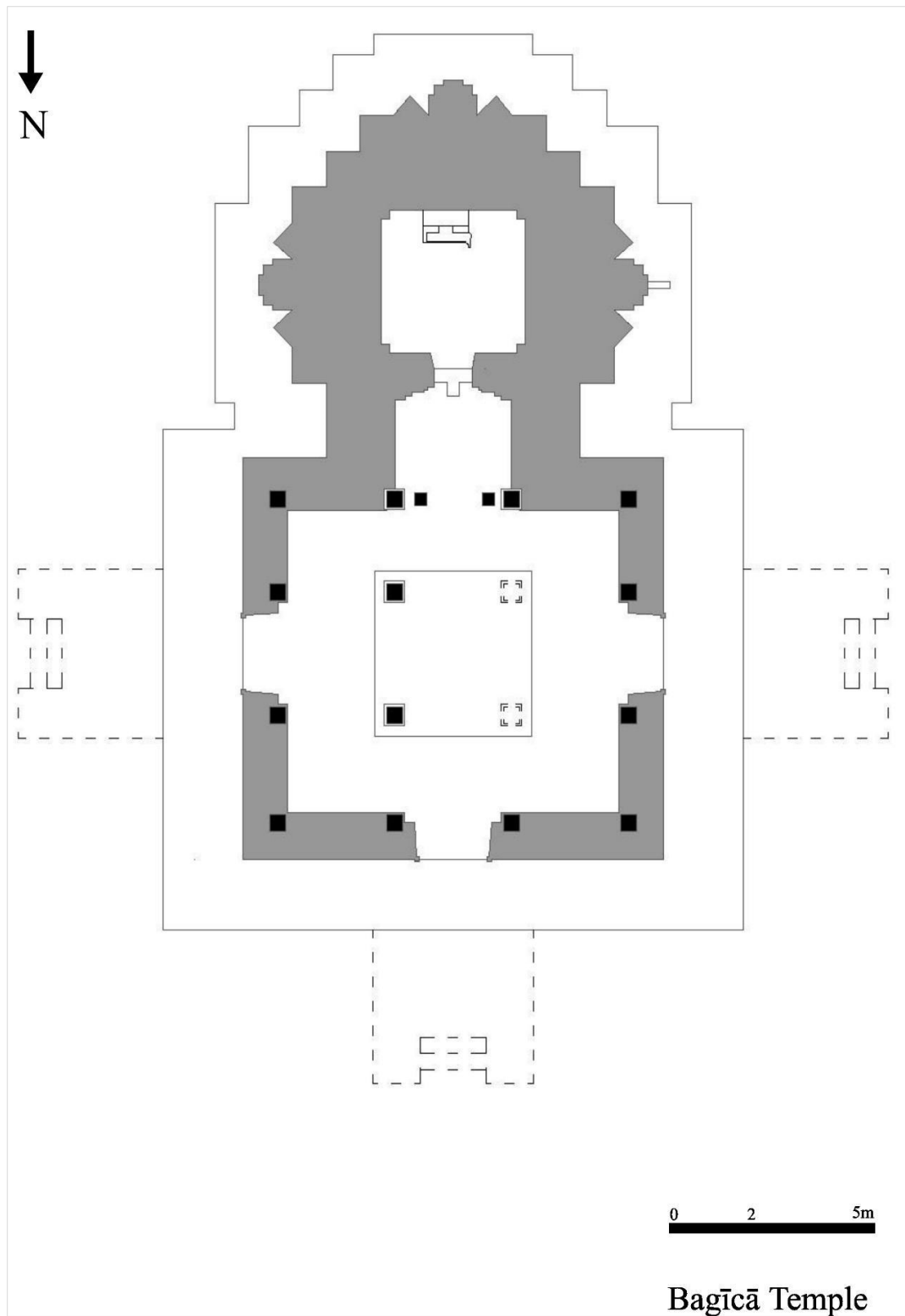


Fig. 3.59: Ground plan of Bagīcā temple



Fig. 3.60: General view of the Bagīcā temple



Fig. 3.61: South-facing elevation of the Bagīcā temple

2. Kamaḷajā Devī temple

- Location

Situated along the southern side of the crater, this temple is at a strategic location on the opposite end of the Dhāra Tīrtha temple. Dhāra and Kamaḷajā are on two ends of the same axis that cuts across the saltwater lake.

- General Description of the Temple Complex

The Kamaḷajā Devī temple complex constitutes of the main Devī temple, a well that is known as the *Sasu-sunechi vihir*, a *dīpamālā* and another small shrine in its premises (**Fig. 3.62 and Fig. 3.63**). The main temple has undergone several renovations since its building while the adjacent shrine, situated to the south-west of the complex, is in an extremely ruinous condition. Kamaḷajā Devī is the patron deity of Lonar. The temple witnesses an annual fair during the Navarātrī festival. Besides, it is most visited temple by pilgrims all throughout the year.

- Architectural Description: Exterior of the Temple

The main temple consists of a *garbhagrha*, *antarāḷa*, followed by a *sabhāmaṇḍapa* with three *mukhamaṇḍapas* in plan (**Fig. 3.62**). This similar kind of temple plan is also found in the Mora, Vāgha, Daityasūdāna and Rāmagayā temples of Lonar, albeit the Kamaḷajā temple plan is peculiar in one aspect. The principal ingress of the temple faces north. The *garbhagrha* has an orthogonal plan but has an unusual and exceptional element. It is *pañcaratha* on the west and east elevation, but the south-facing elevation has two *bhadra* projections. This is because on the interiors, the *garbhagrha* is rectangular, and to incorporate this change, the exterior wall is divided into two *bhadra* projections separated by *salilānatara*. The presence of two *bhadra* projections corresponds to the rectangular *garbhagrha* of the temple. It is a good example of how the interior and exterior of any temple structure are related. A change in the interiors may also affect the arrangement of the temple fabric in the exteriors. Except for this *bhadra* element, the architectural vocabulary of this temple shares an affinity with several temples along the periphery of Lonar saltwater lake.

The *bhadra* projections on the temple walls are the only decorative patterns on the wall surface. Each *bhadra* is ornamented with a niche having a *phāmsanā śikhara*

consisting of three tiers of diminishing heights. Otherwise, the temple has plain exteriors with sporadic decorations of plain band mouldings and niches.

The *maṇḍapa* adjoining this *garbhagrha* is square in plan and punctured with *mukhamaṇḍapas* in the north, east and west directions. The superstructures of these *mukhamaṇḍapas* are lost, only the plinths are intact. The *śikhara* of the temple is camouflaged in the renovations, except for traces of a few *bhūmis* (tiers) made out of brick in the southwestern corner. Since the wall has two *bhadras*, the *śikhara* has two *latās*, with a recess in between and a crude niche at its best (**Fig. 3.64**).

- Architectural Description: Interior of the Temple

As aforementioned, *garbhagrha* is not square but rectangular, which makes it fit for a Devī shrine or any reclining icon as the principal object of worship. The rectangular *garbhagrha* is known for the design of Devī temple or sleeping Viṣṇu figures. All the interior pillars have been haphazardly re-arranged (**Fig. 3.66**). They probably have been incongruously reused here from another existing temple when this one was renovated. The pillar bases with pipal leaf motifs have been re-used as capitals. These bases are probably of some older ornate pillars. Similar pipal leaf motifs are also crowning the *rathikās* on the *uttarāṅga*.

- Period of Construction

The problem in definitively dating this temple is that there are multiple layers of reconstruction. The earliest structural remains in this complex date to the early to mid of the thirteenth centuries CE. However, following the original construction, there are at least two stages of restoration, one of which is likely to have taken place about a century later and next in the seventeenth – eighteenth centuries CE. These are conjectural time frames that can be discerned from the exterior of the temple fabric and the pillar typologies.

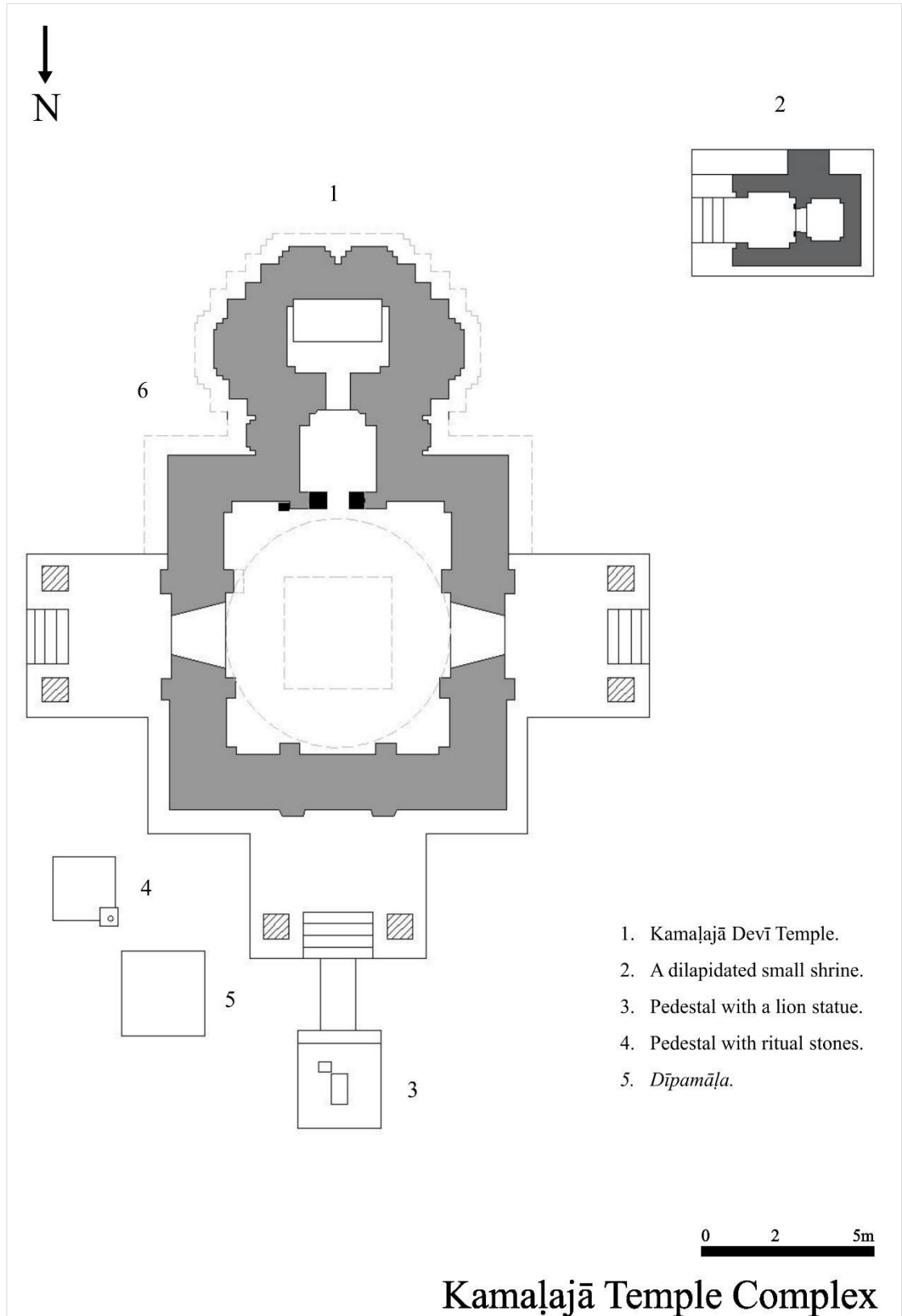


Fig. 3.62: Ground plan of Kamaḷajā temple complex



Fig. 3.63: Aerial view of the Kamaḷajā temple complex



Fig. 3.64: East-facing elevation of
Kamaḷajā temple



Fig. 3.65: Ruined shrine in the
Kamaḷajā temple complex



Fig. 3.66: *Maṇḍapa* of the Kamaḷajā temple

3. Vāgha and Mora Temple

- Location

The Vāgha and Mora temples are located along the south-eastern circumference of the saltwater lake. Except for a few lost architectural components, both temples are reasonably well preserved compared to the temples on the northern circumference of the lake. These temples are being discussed here together because of the similarities in their architectural vocabulary. Although the form and fabric of many of the temples along the lake are comparable, particularly the Vāgha and Mora temples have visibly striking similarities, with minimal differences in their layout. Further, among the two, the Mora temple is in a significantly dilapidated state than the Vāgha temple. Hence, analysing the Mora temple along with the Vāgha temple makes it easier to speculate the elements of the original construction of the former.

- General Description of the Temples

The temples must have been built as singular structures, as traces of any ancillary structures are not seen in their vicinity. The Vāgha temple is oriented towards the north and the Mora Temple is oriented towards the east. The temples stand on a raised plinth, which is built in plain stone masonry capped with an offset moulding fashioned like an inverted *kapotālī* and interspersed with floral motifs. The lower end of the extended plinth has a plain stone course offset from the central masonry. The plinth of the Mora temple has only survived along the *garbhagrha*, but the remnant portions convey that it must have been identical to the Vāgha temple. In plan, both these temples consist of a *garbhagrha* and *antarāḷa* followed by a *gūḍhamaṇḍapa* having entrances on three sides (**Fig. 3.67 and Fig. 3.68**). The *garbhagrha* of these temples are orthogonal in plan, and the *maṇḍapa* is square. In Vāgha temple, two of the *mukhamaṇḍapas* have survived, while only the plinth of the third has survived. In Mora temple, the two *mukhamaṇḍapas* have entirely collapsed, except for the traces of their plinth. Conjecturing from the strewn pillar and lintel fragments as also other architectural members, the Mora temple plan must have had *mukhamaṇḍapas* attached to its *gūḍhamaṇḍapa*, similar to the Vāgha temple plan.

- Architectural Description: Exterior of the Temples

The *vedibandha* of the temples is composed of four equal sized plain mouldings, devoid of any ornamentation. This is followed by a plain *jaṅghā* with projections that consist of the central compound *bhadra* made up of a plain surface projection flanked by two narrow mouldings, followed by two equal sized projections or *pratirathas* and then *karṇa* mouldings which are slightly wide than the *pratirathas* but narrower than the central projection (**Fig. 3.62**). A notable feature of the *jaṅghā* of these temples is that the wall scheme does not contain any recesses between the projections. One of the plausible reasons for this could be that projections were meant to be plain, bereft of any ornamentation or figural sculpture. Hence, the depth of the projections and the interplay of the recesses and the projections may not be necessary to the architecture. The upper portion of the *jaṅghā* has two horizontal band mouldings that equidistantly placed on the wall surface and run all along the wall of the *garbhagrha*. These mouldings are reminiscent of the *kapotālī* mouldings that formed the *varaṇḍikā* below the *śikhara*, eleventh – twelfth century CE temples. Having said that, plain band mouldings instead of *kapotālī* are one of the characteristic features of temples datable to the fourteenth century CE and onwards. The topmost moulding is formed like a *kapotālī*, acts like a *chajjā*, and in design it mirrors the top moulding of the extended plinth of the same temple structure. Above this is another moulding formed of rectangular stone blocks, which is likely to have been the base of the *śikhara* of the temples. Both the Vāgha and Mora temples have lost their original *śikharas*, which are likely to have been built in brick in the Bhūmija mode. This can be speculated based on the brick remains seen on the *maṇḍapa* of the Vāgha temple as well as the fallen pieces of bricks lying in the vicinity of this temple. The size of these bricks and the bricks found in the construction of Daityasūdāna temple are similar in size. The form of these lost *śikharas* can be conjectured from the one *bhūmi* and lower part of the *latā* remnant that have survived atop the Gaṇeśa temple in the Rāmagayā temple complex and the Kamaḷajā Temple.

- Architectural Description: Interior of the Temples

The *maṇḍapa* of the temples have four pillars at the centre, that stand on a slightly elevated platform, and they support a trabeated ceiling. These pillars are square in plan, with a plain rectangular shaft and a carved octagonal portion in the lower half,

while the upper half consists of a square portion with figural sculptures on its four sides, followed by a circular member with triangular patterns on its frontals, continuing into a flat circular edged *kañi* moulding, further topped by a *ghaṭa* shaped member and finally has a four-sided capital. The pillar ornamentation might slightly change but the form, the number of its constituent parts and their shapes are reoccurring patterns in temples of Lonar, especially the temples built along the Lonar salt water lake. Most pillars in the Vāgha and Mora temples are heavily weathered. Their typology described here is also based on the evidence of scattered portions of different pillars. The themes of the figural sculptures carved on the square members of these pillars is not recognizable in most cases. Among the *maṇḍapa* pillars of the Vāgha temple, the panels which can be identified include an elephant figure, probably a crude depiction of the Yamalārjuna scene and two ascetics involved in some ritual. It is difficult to ascertain the religious affiliation of the temple based on these iconographic panels, but the overall themes aligning towards asceticism, eroticism, episodes from the epics, are in lieu with the iconographic programmes found in other temples as also the dominance of Vaiṣṇavism in the ambit of the Lonar crater.

Except for the minimal ornamentation as part of the pillars, the *maṇḍapa* walls and ceiling are plain. The centre stones of the trabeated ceilings have lotus medallion. The beam at the entrance of the *antarāḷa* is supported by two pillars, similar is design as the *catuṣkī* pillars but smaller is size. The *antarāḷa* walls are also plain. The *dvāraśākhā* of the doorway leading into the *garbhagrha* is the other decorated surface amongst the interiors of the temple. It is of the *pañcaśākhā* variety consisting of *vyāla*, *patra*, *stambha* and *mithuna śākhās*. The *uttarāṅga* has five rectangular projections, with diamond motifs on it, reminiscent of the *rathikhās* or simulations of temple forms that are often depicted on the *dvāraśākhā*. These projections are interspersed with chequered pattern on the stone surface having elephant head figures above it. The *lalāṭabimba* of the *dvāraśākhā* has an image of Gaṇeśa. The *pedyā* portion of the *udumbara* has depictions of Vaiṣṇava *dvārapālas* corresponding to the *stambhaśākhā*, identified based on their *āyudhas*, *karaṇḍa mukūṭa*, and Garuḍa image kneeling on the corners of the images. Along with these, the other figures on the *pedyā* are probably the Gaṅgā-Yamunā, *caurī* bearers, but insect and bat infestation on the stone surface has made it difficult to deduce the details of the icons.

The *garbhagr̥ha* is not at a very lower level than otherwise floor level of this temple. The square *garbhagr̥ha* must have had a small pedestal attached to its back wall. The upper portion of this pedestal is broken, but the lower moulding of the plinth has survived. Even though it cannot be certainly said about the religious affiliation of the temple, the setting of the *garbhagr̥ha*, crude iconography does hint towards a Vaiṣṇava affiliation of the temple.

- Period of Construction

The plan and elevation of Vāgha and Mora temples have striking similarities with the Mahādeva temple in the Rāmagayā temple complex as well as Ambarakhānā, Muṅgalyā, Copāḍā and Deśamukha temples. As also, this typology of temples is seen in temples from Charthana in Parbhani district, Helas in Jalna district, Dhotra Nandai, Jaipur Kothali, Sultanpur in Buldhana district. In the sheer absence of inscriptional records, it is difficult to assign a date to these temples. Based on the scanty references (a detailed discussion on this shall follow in the concluding section of this chapter), the construction of the Vāgha and Mora temples can be placed sometime between the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries CE.

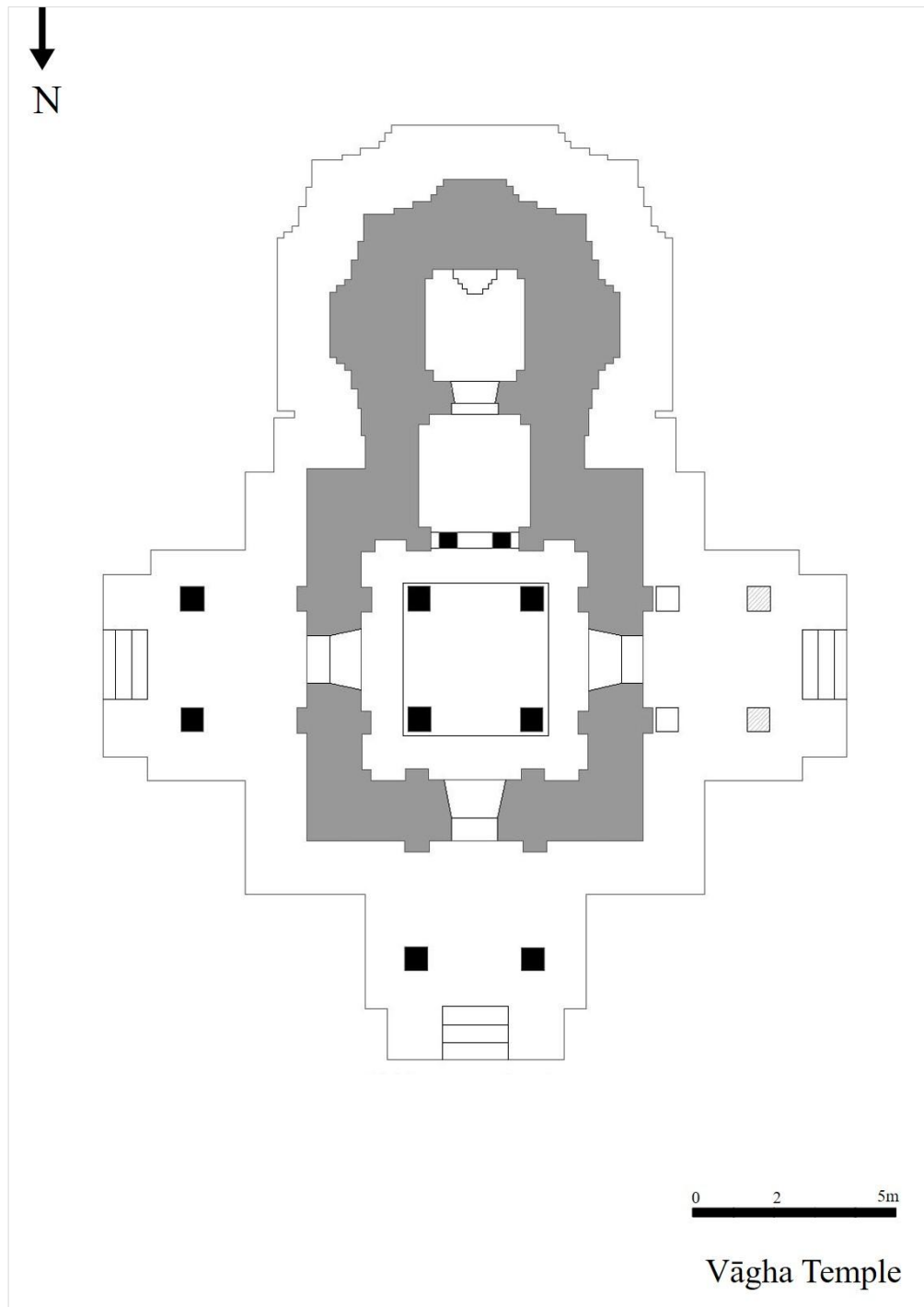


Fig. 3.67: Ground plan of Vāgha temple

Note: The plan has been produced here taking reference of the plan provided by Agrawal, coupled with the documentation carried out during the present study. Few rectifications in measurements of the temple exterior walls as well as the extended plinth has been added.

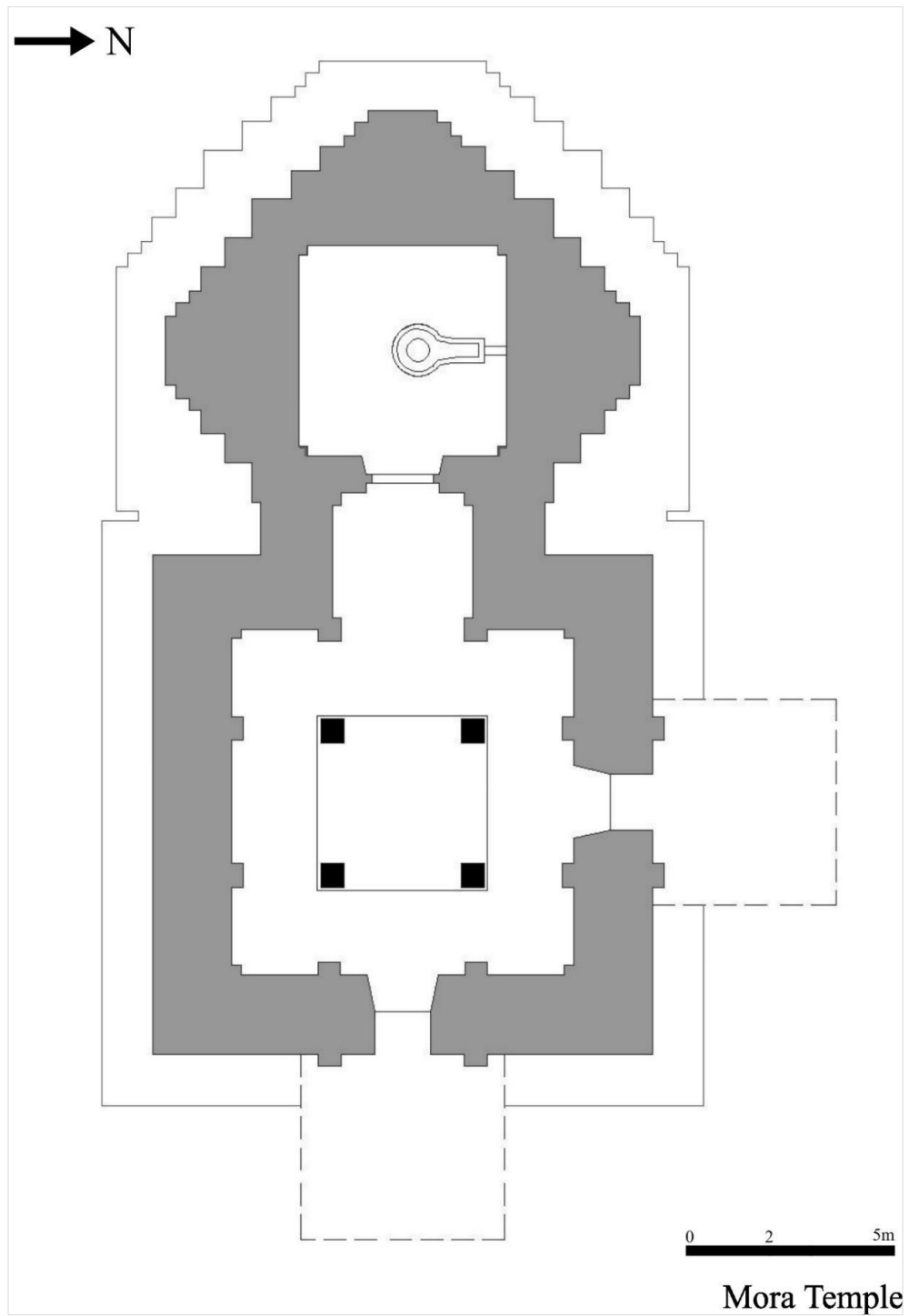


Fig. 3.68: Ground plan of Mora temple

Note: This plan has been reproduced here after the plan provided by R.C. Agrawal wherein the missing details of the *mukhamandapas* have been incorporated.



Fig. 3.69: West-facing elevation of Mora temple



Fig. 3.70: East-facing elevation of Mora temple



Fig. 3.71: West-facing elevation of Mora temple

4. Ambarakhānā, Deśamukha, Muṅgalyā, Copaḍā Temples

- Location

The Copaḍā, Muṅgalyā, Deśamukha and Ambarakhānā temples, in the order as they are listed here, are situated along the north-western fringe of the saltwater lake, along the stretch that spans between the Dhāra Tīrtha temple complex and the Kamaḷajā temple complex. Thus they dominate half circumference of the lake. The four temples are not equidistant from each other; Copaḍā and Deśamukha temples are near the north-eastern incision of the crater, and Muṅgalyā and Ambarakhānā are a little farther away towards the south. After the Ambarakhānā temple, there is a patch of about half a kilometre without any construction until the Kamaḷajā temple.

The names of Copaḍā and Deśamukha temples are after the owners who had agricultural lands near these temples. Through the past decades, the farming activity on the periphery of the lake has been shifted to the village to prevent damage to the lake because of human activity. Since the year 2020, with the water level of the saltwater lake increased, all four temples have entirely submerged in the water, owing to which the northwestern fringe of the Lonar lake is inaccessible.

- General Description of the Temples

The reason behind describing all four temples under one section is the striking similarity in their architectural layout.

Before being completely submerged, the fluctuations in the lake water levels severely affected these temples, evident from the white cast on the surface of the temple fabric. The Copaḍā temple, in addition to being submerged in the lake water, was already camouflaged in the overgrown vegetation by early 2020. Many of the architectural members of the Muṅgalyā, Deśamukha and Ambarakhānā temples were scattered on the shore of saltwater Lake. The architectural descriptions and ground plans provided here are as they were last documented during the years 2017-18. At this time, amongst these four, the best preserved was the Ambarakhānā temple. All temples are oriented to the east. The Ambarakhānā temple is said to have been dedicated to the Sun; the *garbhagr̥ha dvāraśakhā* has *vaiṣṇava dvārapālas*; however, presently, it enshrines a Śivaliṅga. Likewise, the other three temples also house a Śivaliṅga, but the traces of their original affiliation are eroded. Owing to the ruinous

condition, the architectural layout, details, ground plan, elevational details of the temples have to be discerned only by comparing the temple remains. The ground plans produced here are also a product of the remains mapped on-site coupled, which have been conjecturally reproduced wherever missing.

To understand the similarities in their architecture, it is imperative to glean the architectural details of all the temples. Through this exercise, we can also enumerate upon the select differences in the four temples and thus understand the building patterns.

▪ Architectural Description of the Temples

All four temples are single shrines consisting of a *garbhagr̥ha*, *antarāḷa*, followed by a *sabhāmaṇḍapa*, which leads into a *mukhamaṇḍapa*. They are constructed on a raised plinth which runs parallel to the temple exterior walls. Ambarakhānā temple is *saptaratha* on the plan (**Fig. 3.74**), similar to the Mora temple, while the Copadā (**Fig. 3.72**) Muṅgalyā (**Fig. 3.73**) and Deśamukha (**Fig. 3.75**) temples are *pañcaratha* on the plan.

The wall scheme of the *jaṅghā* of temple has a plain masonry *bhadra* with two *upabhadras*, flanked on either side by a *pratibhadra* and *karṇa* projection. Ambarakhānā temple has an additional projection between the *pratibhadra* and *karṇa*, making it a *saptaratha* plan. All of these wall projections do not possess any recesses in between them. This conscious choice of eliminating the *salilāntaras* or recesses is a dominant feature of several temples in Lonar. It is likely to have affected the arrangement of the *śikhara* over the temple walls. The *sabhāmaṇḍapas* of all the temples have entrances on three sides, which are likely to have been connected to *mukhamaṇḍapas* but except for few stone courses of the plinth, nothing of these *mukhamaṇḍapas* has survived (**Fig. 3.78, 3.79, 3.81**). In terms of ornamentation, these temples resemble the Mora, Vāgha, Kamaḷajā temple situated along the periphery of the Lonar lake. Decorative floral motifs on the extended plinth, an offset plain stone course band on the exterior walls, decently ornate *dvāraśākhās* of the *mukhamaṇḍapas* and the *garbhagr̥ha*, figural sculptures confined to the square blocks in the pillars and the *uttarāṅga* of the *garbhagr̥ha dvāraśākhā* is the minimal ornamentation in all these temples.

The temple is placed on a raised plinth, that has a profile in which the topmost and lower moulding mirror each other separated from each other by a plain stone course moulding. The projections of this raised plinth run parallel to the *vedibandha* mouldings of the temple. This pattern of the raised plinth is same in all temples listed in this category (**Fig. 3.76, 3.78**).

- Period of Construction

Based on the ground plans and overall architectural morphology, the temples can be dated approximately to the fourteenth -fifteenth centuries CE. This dating is conjectural because no epigraphical evidence substantiates it. Nonetheless, the late dating of the temples is not just against their non- austere temple treatment. It is based on the building conventions that become common in temple typologies in the contemporary period. A detailed discussion of the rationale for their specific dating shall follow in the ensuing chapters.

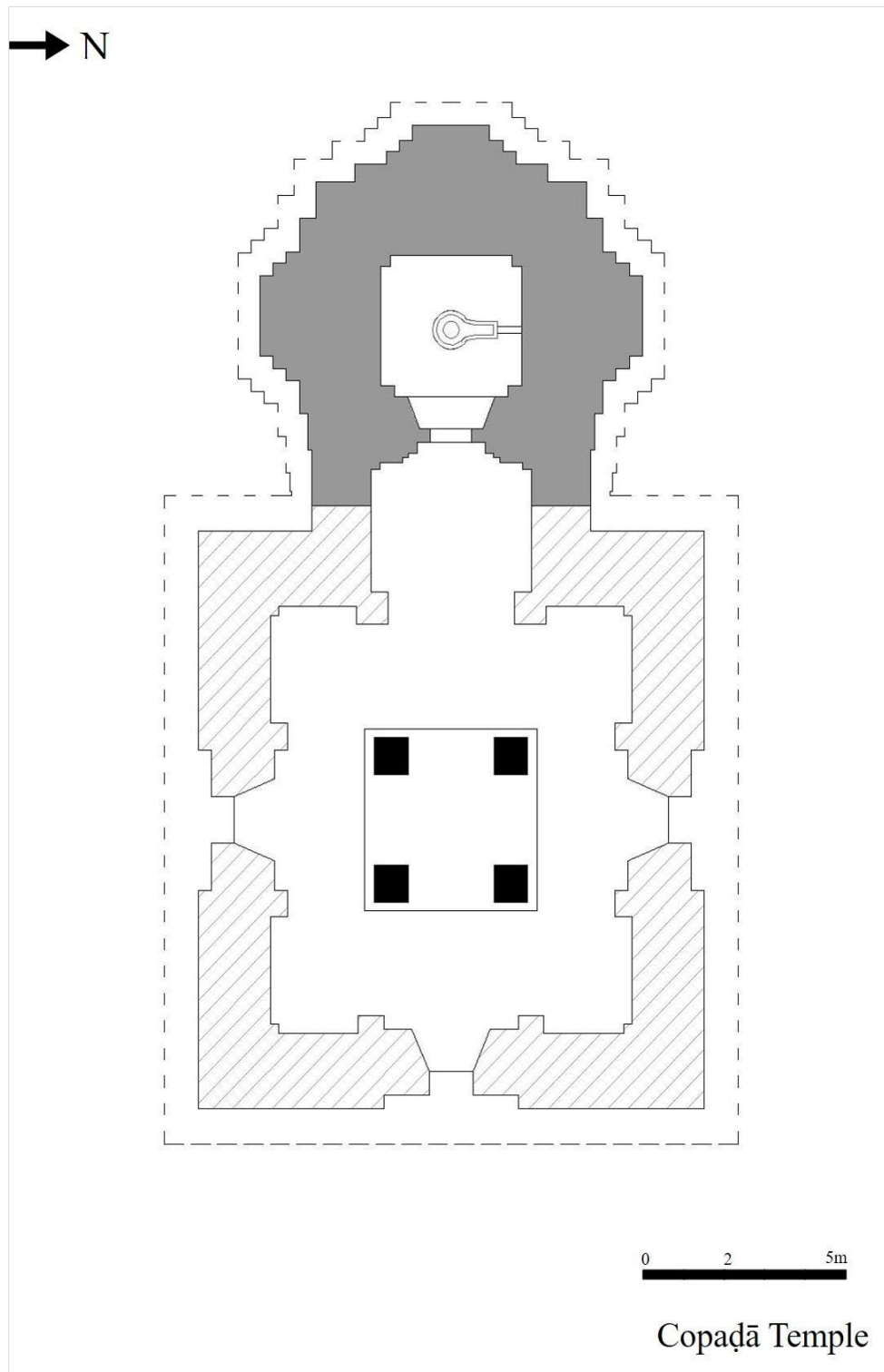


Fig. 3.72: Ground plan of Copaḍā temple

Note: This plan has been reproduced here from the work of R.C. Agrawal.⁶⁶ Addition of the extended plinth has been done as part of the present work.

⁶⁶ Agrawal, *Archaeological Remains in Western India*, 101.

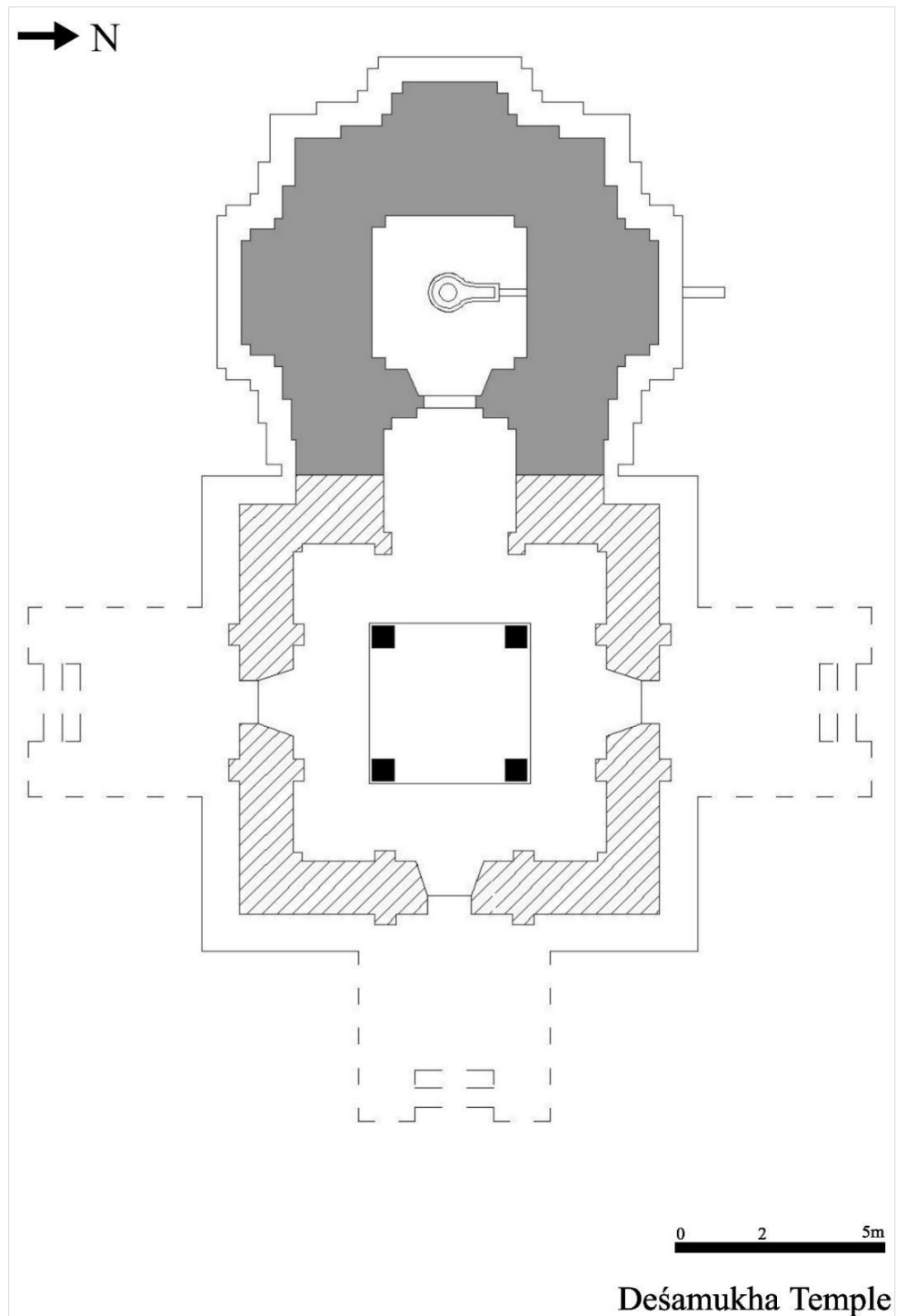


Fig. 3.73: Ground plan of Deśamukha temple

Note: This plan has been made based on the preliminary documentation undertaken in the year 2018-19. Since the temple is submerged under the Lonar lake water since the year 2020, it has been difficult to document it in details.

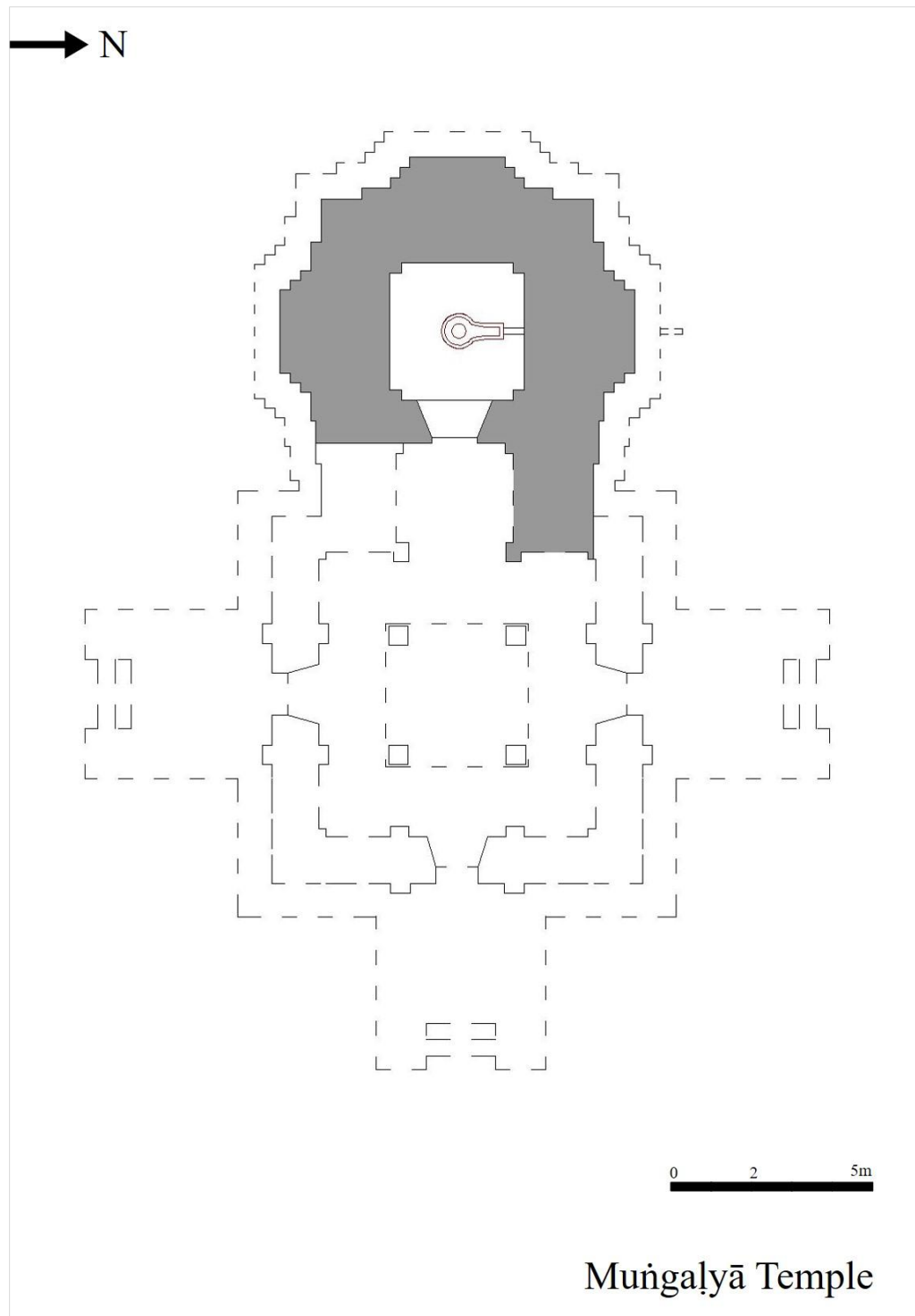


Fig. 3.74: Ground plan of Muṅgaḷyā temple

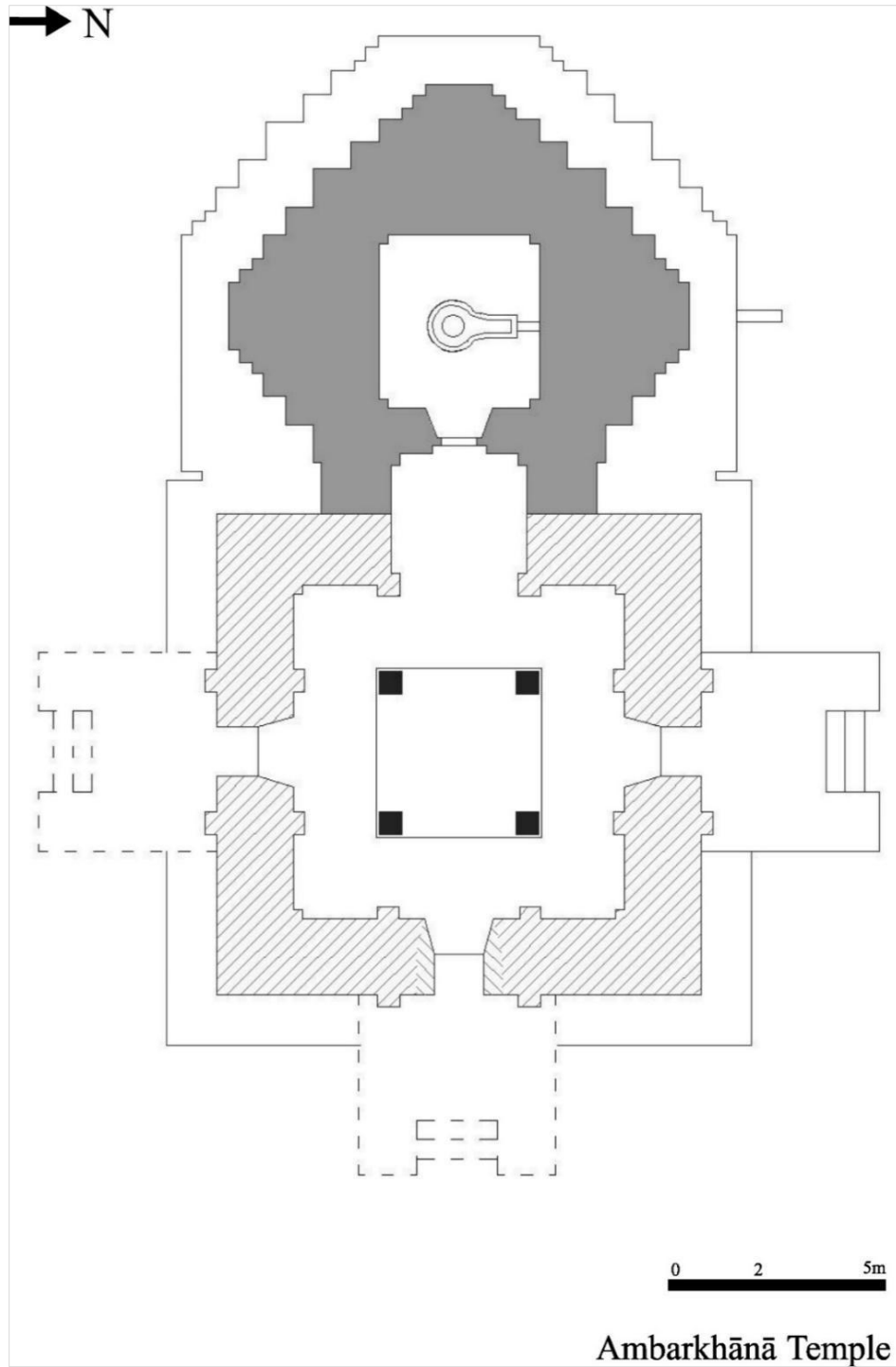


Fig. 3.75: Ground plan of Ambarakhānā temple

Note: The plan of this temple has been made based on the documentation conducted in the year 2018-19. At this point, the temple was in fairly better condition in comparison to all Muṅgaḷyā, Deśamukha and Copaḍā temples. The east and south facing porches of the temple have fallen, which have been indicated in the drawing as a dotted line.



Fig. 3.76: West-elevation of Copadā Temple



Fig. 3.77: South-elevation of Copadā temple – *Maṇḍapa* and extended plinth are in dilapidated state



Fig. 3.78: South-elevation of Deśamukha temple



Fig. 3.79: South-elevation of Muṅgalyā temple



Fig. 3.80: East-elevation of Ambarakhānā temple



Fig. 3.81: *Maṇḍapa* of Ambarakhānā temple

3.4 Architectural Patterns and Emerging Idioms: Temples, *Maṭhas* and *Bāravas*

The preceding sections of the chapter focussed on an extensive discussion of the diagnostic details of the built environment of Lonar. Starting with evaluating the spatial distribution of the architecture in the Lonar crater, a nuanced description of all the structures followed. In the succeeding section, we shall discuss the architectural buildings in Lonar with respect to their functional type – temples, *maṭhas* and *bāravas* (or *kuṇḍas*). All three types are linked with each other, as being part of the temple complexes. But at the same time, there is a distinct architectural language which is used in the construction of all three types. Hence, while it is important to study them as part of the temple complexes as one unit, it is also necessary to study them individually, purely based on their functional typology.

By focussing on the functional typology, the motive is to understand patterns and the regional idioms, as discernible from the study of architectural forms in Lonar. Furthermore, the section would also look at the concentration of each of these types in different geographical zones of the crater. Towards the end, we shall aim at drawing a tentative chronology amongst all the architectural forms to reconstruct a historical timeline of the site. To begin with, the first sub-section shall focus on the architectural patterns of the temple buildings of Lonar.

Temples in Lonar

Temple structures are not restricted to certain geographical zones of the Lonar crater, rather, they are dispersed all over the landscape. The temples are constructed in different size and scale, follow varied ground plans and elevational schemes. There are also temple structures that have seen re-use, restoration and reconstructions in the centuries following their building. We shall now analyse different elements in a temple to understand the commonalities, differences and alterations in the entire temple architecture of Lonar. Such an analysis of architectural forms shall aid in analysing the choice of styles employed within Lonar and speculating about the patrons involved in the construction.

- Ground plans and Elevational Details of Temples

Based on the differences in their architectural morphology as evident from the ground plans and elevation schemes, there are two types among the temples - Type 1 and Type 2. These types are not water tight compartments, rather distinguished based on their markedly distinct visual appearance. Yet, the categories are deemed necessary to understand the architectural vocabulary of the temples. At the same time, it should be noted that there are temples in Lonar that do not conform to either of the categories.⁶⁷

Type 1 category temples have either stellate or orthogonal plans but a definitive use of *salilāntaras* in the wall scheme. In contrast to this, Type 2 category temples have orthogonal plans and a conspicuous absence of *salilāntaras* in the wall scheme.

Two major temples which can be categorised as Type 1 are Daityasūdāna and Bagīcā. In Bagīcā temple only the *garbhagrha* has a *saptaratha* stellate plan, whereas Daityasūdāna temple both the *garbhagrha* and the *maṇḍapa* have a stellate plan. Additionally, based on the plan, both these temples are likely to have had *śikhara* of the Bhūmija mode, which have not survived. All other extant temples in Lonar are orthogonal in plan. This is an interesting point to note because it has been noticed that most Bhūmija temples from Maharashtra with stellate plans have lesser representation. To name a few known examples would be – Śiva temple at Kokamthan in Ahmednagar district, Khaṇḍeśvarī temple at Nandgaon Khandeshwar in Amravati district, Mahādeva temple at Ambegan in Nashik district, Maheśavara temple at Pimpri Kalaga are few examples of stellate temple plans where the Bhūmija *śikharas* have survived. Another important aspect to note is that Bagīcā and Daityasūdāna temples belong to different time periods. The construction of Daityasūdāna can be placed in mid of thirteenth century CE and that of Bagīcā can be placed late thirteenth or even early fourteenth century CE. The Bagīcā temple is a rare

⁶⁷ For instance, the Moṭhā Māruti temple and the temples in the Dhāra Tīrtha Complex do not conform to any of the above category vis a vis architectural pattern. While Moṭhā Māruti Temple, constructed only in the nineteenth century CE, follows an entirely different ground plan, temples in the Dhāra complex are fitted into the larger architectural layout scheme for the complex. Owing to which, the facets of these temples like basal mouldings and wall treatment are not necessarily visible.

example of a late-early medieval temple construction which uses stellate plan. The third temple that fits into this category is Yajñeśvara temple. It is not stellate in plan but the original wall scheme, discernible from *kumbha* moulding and *jaṅghā* fragments, certainly consisted of *salilāntaras*. Since the second category temple structures omit the *salilāntaras* completely, Yajñeśvara temple fits the first category.

Temples in the Type 2 category consist of a *garbhagrha*, *antarāḷa* and *sabhāmaṇḍapa* or *gūḍhamāṇḍapa* with *mukhamāṇḍapas* connected to its three sides. The *garbhagrha* of most temples are orthogonal - *pañcaratha* or *saptaratha* – in plan. Thus, the wall scheme of the temple runs either as *karṇa-pratiratha-bhadra-pratiratha-karṇa* for a *pañcaratha* plan or *karṇa-pratiratha-pratiratha-bhadra-pratiratha-karṇa* for a *saptaratha* plan. In both variations, the *bhadra* projection has two small offsets, *upabhadras*, flanking a wider projection.

An exception to both the above described categories would be the plan of Kamaḷajā Temple. As discussed earlier, this temple has a rectangular *garbhagrha*, both from the interior and exterior, which is reflective in the ground plan and elevation of the temple with an addition of a recess or *salilāntara* between two *bhadra* projections. The introduction of such an element to the plan is not only a peculiar example found in Lonar but also not seen commonly seen in the eleventh to fourteenth century CE temples from the region of Maharashtra. However, in terms of the wall treatment, basal mouldings, spatial layout and overall architectural details, Kamaḷajā temple adheres to the temple structures from the Type 2 category.

The choice of ground plans for temples of Lonar is certainly not binding to the sectarian affiliation. For instance, the Ambarakhānā temple originally must have had a Vaiṣṇava affiliation, the Gaṇeśa Temple from the Rāmagayā temple complex is a Śaiva shrine and Kamaḷajā temple is of a Śākta affiliation. Irrespective of these different affiliations, all these three temples have a similar architectural vocabulary. A comment can be made on the choice of stylistic modality with respect to the location of temples and chronological progression of Lonar. Temples that fit into Type 2 category are proximal to the salt water lake, embedded in the crater landscape and possess a very similar architectural vocabulary. The building of the Type 2 category temples can be placed in the late thirteenth or fourteenth centuries CE. There is a spurt in temple building activity in the crater during this time period. The temples are

simple and largely functional in nature. Likewise, based on the stray evidence of *shikhara* remain, Bhūmija mode seems to be the sought-after choice amongst the type 1 category temples. The Pāpahareśvara and Kumāreśvara temples have been deliberately left out of the above discussions, as both these structures have been incongruously renovated and re-arranged at a later time than their original construction. Although there is evidence in the form of architectural fragments like pillars, *maṇḍapa* walls, plinths, to speculate that these temples were constructed at an earlier date, most probably on orthogonal plans, nothing can be said conclusively in absence of the correct remains that can support such a claim.

All temples in Lonar stand on a raised platform, irrespective of time period that they belong to. The *vedibandha* consists of four mouldings, distinguishable into *khūra*, *kumbha*, *kalaśa*, *kapotāli* in the Daityasūdana and Yajñeśvara temple but in temple like Rāmagayā, Kamaḷajā, Vāgha and Mora among others, the number of mouldings remains four but there are plain bands offset from each other without any character.

- Pillar typologies

There are three pillar typologies in the pillars from the temples in Lonar. First would be the ornate pillar fragments found in the Daityasūdana temple complex (**Fig. 3.83**), pillars of the *chattrī* in the Pāpahareśvara temple complex (**Fig. 3.82**) and the pillars of the *mukhamaṇḍapa* in the Yajñeśvara temple complex (**Fig. 3.82**) These would classify into one category based on the section of the pillars and their motifs. Second category would be pillars in Reṇūkā, Narasimha, Yajñeśvara *maṇḍapa* pillars, Limbī Bārava. The third category, very slightly different from the second category, would constitute the pillars from Rāmagayā, Muṅgaḷyā, Vāgha, Mora, Ambarakhānā temples and Dharmaśālā (**Fig. 3.84**). There is a deviant type of cylindrical pillar variety which is found only in the Yajñeśvara temple *maṇḍapa* (**Fig. 3.85**). The lower shaft of the pillar is square in section but the upper section is circular in section. This cylindrical shaft has a band of *kīrtimukhas*.

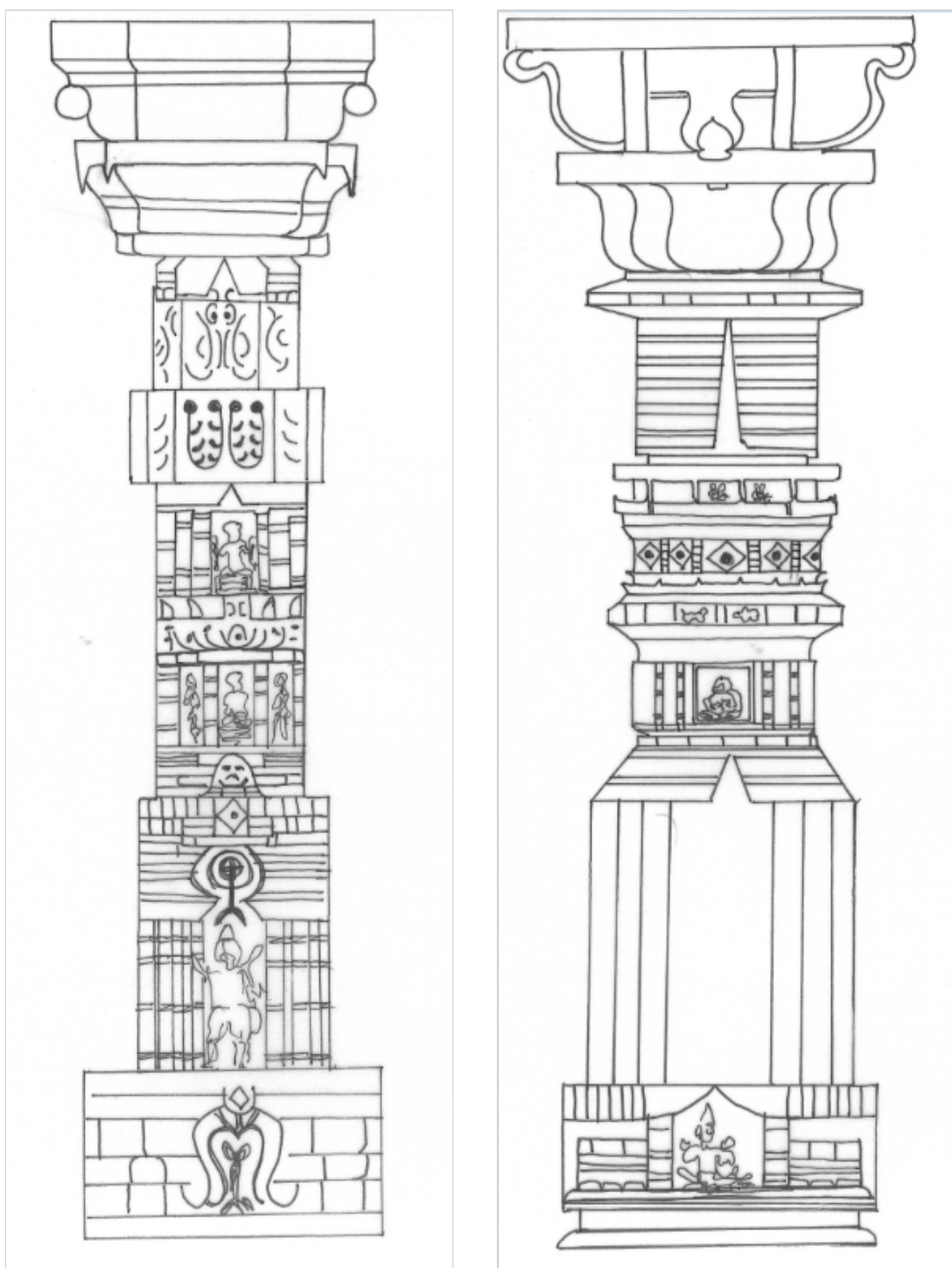


Fig. 3.82 Sketches of pillar from Yajñeśvara and Pāpahareśvara temple respectively fitting into the Typology 1

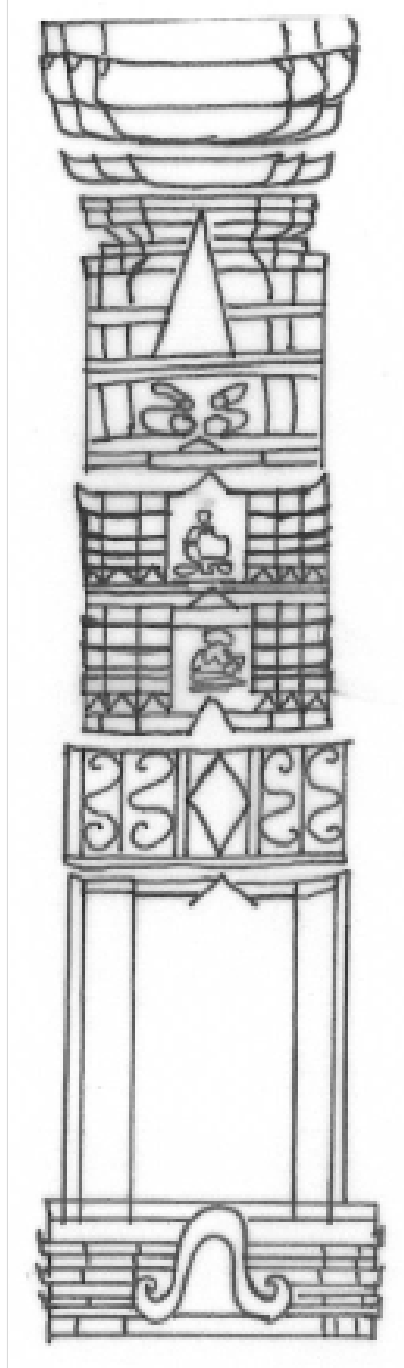


Fig. 3.83: A reconstructed sketch of the pillar fragments from the Daityasūdāna temple, these would have been the *maṇḍapa* pillars in the temple. These can also be placed in Typology 1

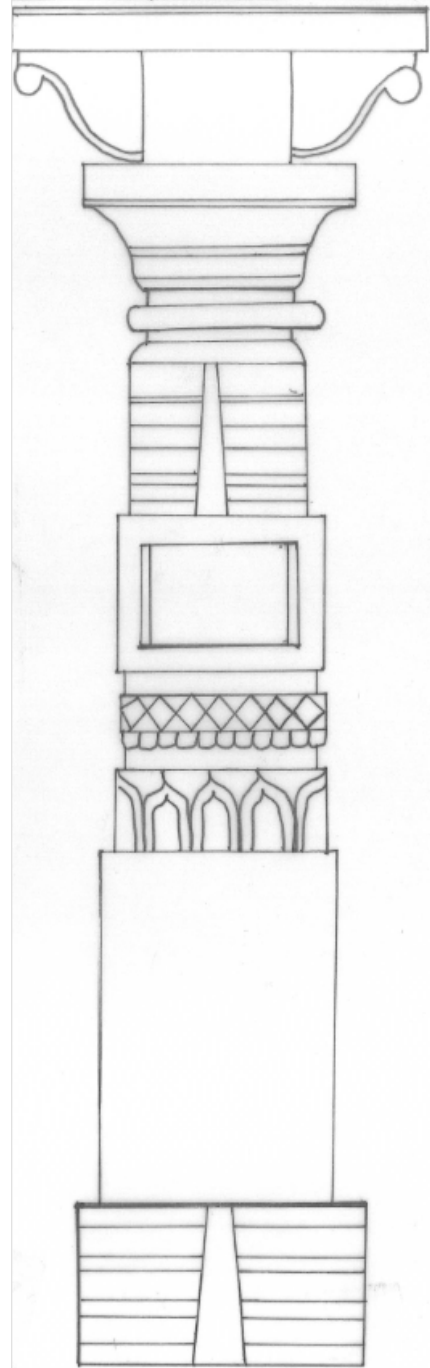


Fig. 3.84: Sketch of pillars from Reṇukā temple, representative of pillar Typology 2

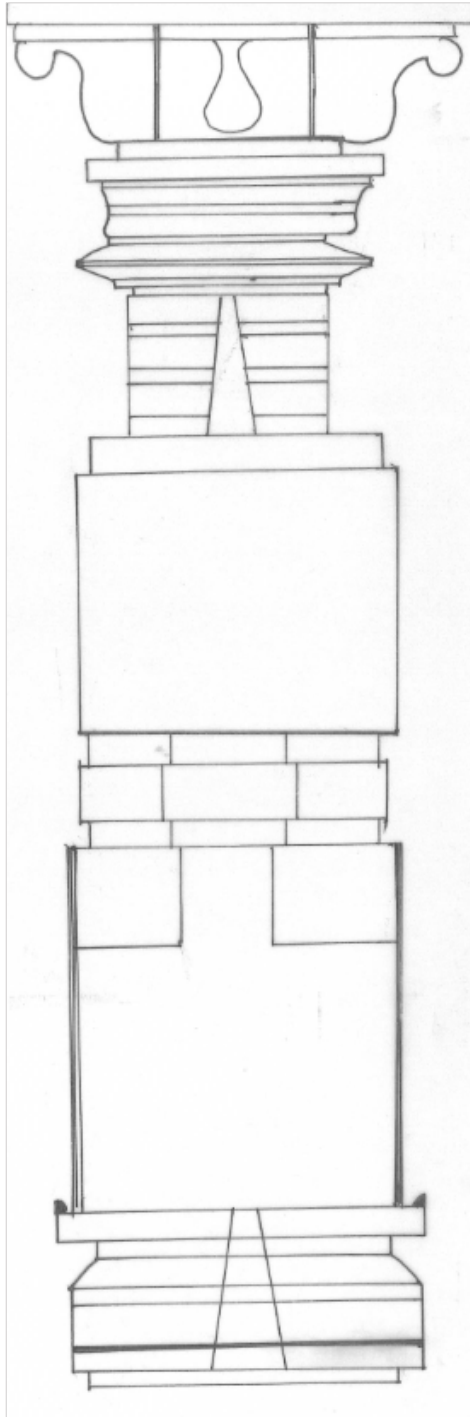


Fig. 3.85: Sketch of pillar from Rāmagayā temple representative of pillar Typology 3

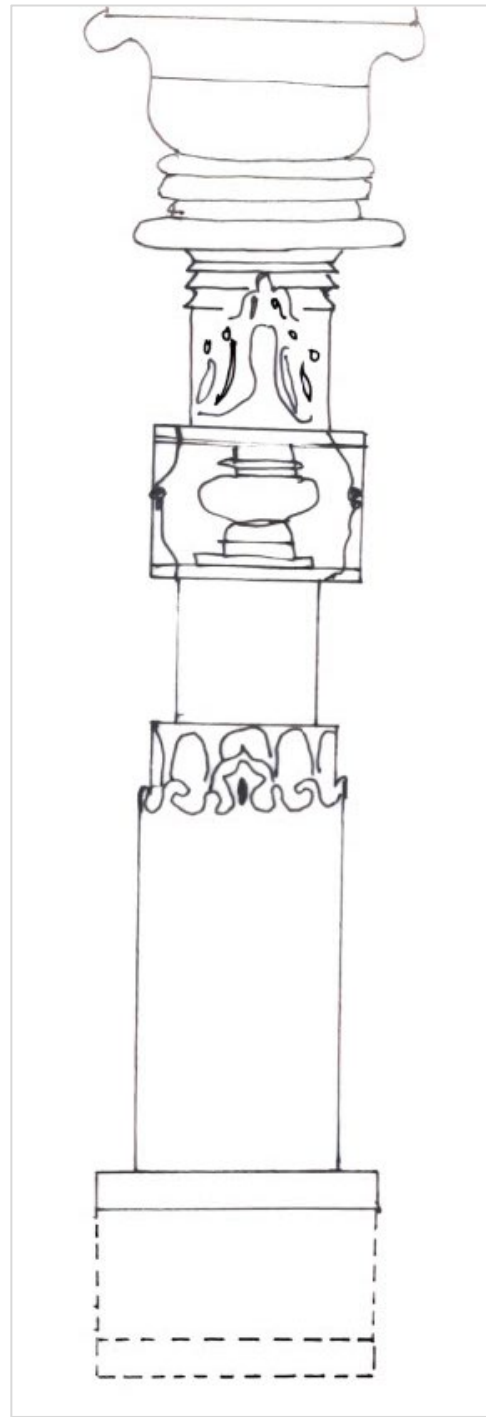


Fig. 3.86: Pillar variety from Yajñeśvara temple *mandapa*

- Ornamentation Patterns

Except for Daityasūdāna temple, most of the temple do not possess figural sculptures on portion of the *maṇḍovara*. The sculptures are restricted to components like *chajjā*, square members of pillars, *dvāraśākhā* of the *maṇḍapa* and *devakoṣṭhas* on the *jaṅghā*; for instance, the Rāmagayā temple has deities on the *uttarāṅga* of the *dvāraśākhā* of the *maṇḍapa* and the Reṇukā temple and Bagīcā temple *maṇḍapa* pillars have sculptural depictions. The *dvāraśākhās* of temples from Lonar and their *vedibandha*, *jaṅghā* and extended plinths have minimal ornamentations, mostly geometric patterns only or foliage motifs.⁶⁸

Yajñeśvara temple could have possessed sculptures on the exterior wall but reminiscent among the fragmentary remains of the temple are sculptures on the *kakṣāsana* walls only. From the remains of *kūṭastambha* motif, usually employed in the *salilāntaras* of the *jaṅghā*, it can be said that probably the ornamentation of this temple was based more on the usage of architectural motifs than images of deities, demi-gods or ascetics. Depiction of ascetics on the *chajjā* of the temples seem to be a common practice in several temples of Lonar, like Daityasūdāna, Rāmagayā, Bagīcā. With these patterns, the temples of Lonar show affinity to several temples in the nearby region as well as different regions of Maharashtra. Temples at Parāda Darade, Kothali, Dhotra Nandai in Buldhana district, Helas and Charthana in Parbhani district are some of the examples with similar architectural morphology.

Dvāraśākhā is a noteworthy feature in all temples. There are two salient features associated with the *dvāraśākhā*, their presence in several temples as the prominent decorative feature in the temple fabric as well as the role played *dvāraśākhās* in portraying the original religious affiliation of the temple structures. Especially when the religious affiliations of the temples have changed over time, these prove to be important markers in indicating the erstwhile affiliation. In temples that are otherwise plain, devoid of any other Figural sculptures or ornamentation patterns, the *garbhagrha* and the *maṇḍapa dvāraśākhās* markedly stand out. Amongst these, the simplest of the temple structures like Muṅgaḷyā temple, Ambarakhānā

⁶⁸ In this section, the discussion pertaining to figural sculptures has been purposely restricted to their role as part of the ornamentation patterns of temples. The symbolism of the icons, their iconographic merit and apparent religious conditions shall be enumerated in Chapter 4.

temple have all the simplest *dvāraśākhās* where everything is omitted on the *uttarāṅga* and the *udumbara* portions, but miniature *śikhara* models, a protruding *chajjā* in the *uttarāṅga* and *stambha śākhā* are prominent. The *dvārapālas* on the *pedyā* of the *dvāraśākhā*, *lalāṭabimba* and the *uttarāṅga* provide an idea about the original affiliation of the temple. Often the original Vaiṣṇava temples, when fallen out of religious practice later, have been converted to Śaiva temples. For instance, the presiding object of worship in the Vāgha temple.

▪ *Śikhara*

None of the temples in Lonar have survived an entire *śikhara*, except for the traces found in Yajñeśvara, Rāmagayā and Kamaḷajā temple (**Fig. 3.88**)⁶⁹. Based on these stray remnant evidence and the similarity in the ground plans of the temple that often govern *śikhara* variety, the preferred *śikhara* mode in Lonar was the Bhūmija mode. Interesting to note is the use of two materials, brick and stone to build the Bhūmija *śikhara*; the Bhūmija *śikhara* remains on the Mahādeva temple are composed of exposed brick and the strewn fragments in the vicinity of Yajñeśvara temple must have been part of a stone Bhūmija *śikhara*. The details of stone this *śikhara* are rather difficult to speculate because no fragment of *bhūmi khaṇḍa* or *kūṭa* of the *śikhara* has survived. Few fragments of the *gavākṣa*, *madhyalatā* found near Yajñeśvara temple are stylistically similar to Bhūmija *śikhara* of Viṣṇu temple at Satgaon bhusari and Sākeśvara temple at Sakegaon. To delineate further minor details, there are not enough clues in the architectural data of Lonar. Details of the brick Bhūmija *śikhara* from temples of Lonar can be understood slightly better owing to the remnant portions of the Bhūmija.

⁶⁹ Refer to Fig. 3.52 – Fig. 3.54 for the pictures of *śikhara* remains in the Yajñeśvara temple.



Fig. 3.87: Remains of *śikhara* on the Kamaḷajā temple



Fig. 3.88: Remains of the Bhūmija *śikhara* from the Mahādeva temple in the Rāmagayā temple complex

▪ Cultic Affiliation of Temples

At present, temples in Lonar dedicated to Śaiva, Śākta and Vaiṣṇava sects. Likewise, historically as well temples dedicated to these three sects, additionally temple dedicated to Jaina sect existed. There are both types of temples, ones where the religious affiliation and the principal object of worship have not changed, as well as there are temples which have undergone drastic change in their religious affiliation. Here, the examples of Daityasūdāna temple and Kamaḷajā temple belong to the first types, where the dedication of the temples has not changed. The presiding deity in the Daityasūdāna temple though not original, reasons for the temple dedicated to Viṣṇu have been laid out beforehand in this chapter. In case of Kamaḷajā temple, the peculiar temple plan design enshrines a *tāṇḍalā* (aniconic form of Goddess), which has not undergone any change since the temple building. Furthermore, Rāmagayā temple presently houses a two-handed icon which is regarded as Rāma, but the original object of worship in the *garbhagrha* could be a Viṣṇu deity. The minimal iconography on the *dvāraśākhā* of the *garbhagrha* and *maṇḍapa* hint towards Vaiṣṇava affiliation of the temple. In contrast to this, in the case of temple like Bagīcā or Ambarakhānā, the imagery on the *dvāraśākhā* of the *garbhagrha* and *maṇḍapa* suggest the original dedication of the temples as Vaiṣṇava. However, currently, the Ambarakhānā temple enshrines a Śivaliṅga, which implies that original Vaiṣṇava shrine later shifted to Śaiva worship.

References from the text *Sthānapothī* need to be referred anew in this context. It has already been established that the text refers to the Kamaḷajā, Daityasūdāna and Kumāreśvara temples. Here, the religious affiliations of the temples, though implied in the names of the temples, have not been explicated, except in connection to Kumāreśvara temple which specifically states that there is a ‘*gaṇeśāce sājē*’ or a shrine dedicated to Gaṇeśa in the temple complex premises.⁷⁰ Additionally, there is also a reference which says that Cakradhara stay was in a *bhairavāce deūḷa*, which suggests that there was a temple dedicated to Śaiva worship where he was resided.

⁷⁰ V.B. Kolte, *Sthānapothī*, 12

Mathas in Lonar

In order to comprehend the nature of *maṭha* structures from Lonar, it is vital to understand the concept of a *maṭha* that prevailed in the medieval period. Two major aspects to take into consideration would be, firstly, the meaning of the term *maṭha* and references to *maṭha* apparent from literary account and inscriptional evidence. Secondly, the different architectural typologies of *maṭhas* in different regions. It needs to be clarified at this juncture itself that, the concept and architectural layout with regard to *maṭha* discussed here are confined to the medieval period.

Maṭha is a structure dedicated to impart the religious practices, served as educational institutions and provided housing shelter to religious practitioners, ascetics or travellers, often patronized by the rulers, local chiefs or traders' guilds.⁷¹ Caleb Simmons calls *maṭha* a “dynamic term and broad institution”.⁷² Such structures are either part of a temple complex or in certain cases a temple might have been built in the premises of a *maṭha*. Probably, the rise of different sectarian traditions, cultic practices and asceticism, saw the need of dedicated structures, often alongside the temple buildings. The usurpation of monastic establishments in the Deccan region in general (particularly in the region of present-day Maharashtra) took root with the spread of Mahānubhāva sect, Liṅgāyata and Vīra Śaiva sect and *bhaktī* cults. The *maṭhas* in north India, from site like Surwaya, Kadwaha, Menal and several others are affiliated to Mattamayūras, a Śaiva Siddhānta sect.⁷³

The Sanskrit term *maṭha* has been often used to refer to an institutionalized monastic complex or religious institution.⁷⁴ Analysing the nature of *maṭha* as a resting

⁷¹ Viraj Shah, “A Study of Temples of Medieval Maharashtra (11th to 14th centuries CE): A Socio-Economic Approach,” (Post-Doctoral Report New Delhi, Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR), 2009, pp. 174-176.

⁷² Caleb Simmons, “Mathas, toward Understanding the Public Religious, Educational, and Political Ascetic Institution in South Asian Religions”, *Religion Compass* 17, no. 9 (September 2023), <https://doi.org/10.1111/rec3.12476>.

⁷³ Tamara Sears, “Saiva Monastic Complexes in Twelfth-Century Rajasthan: The Pasupatas and Cahamanas at Menal,” *South Asian Studies*, 23:1 (2007): 107-126, [10.1080/02666030.2007.9628671](https://doi.org/10.1080/02666030.2007.9628671)

⁷⁴ Specifically talking about the medieval period *maṭhas*, Ranabir Chakravarti has discussed *maṭhas* of Brahmanical cults as centres dedicated to the religious practices and residences of the priestly class. For a detailed discussion, see Ranabir Chakravati, “Monarchs Merchants

place for an ascetic which is similar to assigning a place for a sacred altar or a Gods's abode, Michael Meister concludes that "the altar, house, city, hut and monastery, all participate in one system in India."⁷⁵ He is arguing that *maṭha* is the nomenclature associated with the 'place' that it signified as a resting place for an ascetic which makes it similar to any structures that houses. Angelika Malinar uses the word monasteries or Hindu monasteres and *maṭha* interchangeably, but distinct the a *maṭha* from a *āśrama*, both in terms of their concept and functional usage.⁷⁶ Malinar suggests that there is a romantic imagery associated with a *āśrama*, as a place of residence of an ascetic in dense forest, but any such romanticism is not associated with a *maṭha*. According to her, "a Hindu monastery comprises different functional units such as a place of worship (temple, shrine), rooms for residents and visitors, an assembly hall, a dining area, a kitchen, a library, and so on."⁷⁷ She also argues that some monasteries might be used only as *dharmaśālās*, that is place of residence for travellers, pilgrims or monks.

With respect to the architectural typology, *maṭhas* from the regions of Central India, Karnataka need to be taken into consideration. The Śaiva *maṭhas* from site like Kadwaha or Surwaya in Madhya Pradesh and Menal in Rajasthan are multi storied structures with separate spaces for different activities. The inscriptions found in these *maṭhas* elaborate on their nature of their patronage, cultic traditions and so on.⁷⁸ Several *maṭha* structures from the region of Maharashtra are much smaller on scale and often not inscribed to know the exact sect to which the *maṭha* belonged.

and a *maṭha* in Northern Konkan (c. 900-1053 AD)," *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 27, 2, (1990):189-208.

⁷⁵ Michael W. Meister, "Asceticism and Monasticism as reflected in Indian art," Ed. Austin B. Creel and Vasudha Narayanan *Monastic Life in the Christian and Hindu Traditions A comparative study. Volume 3*, (1990): 236-243.

⁷⁶Angelika Malinar, "Monasteries (Maṭhas)", in *Brill's Encyclopedia of Hinduism Online*, Editor-in-Chief Associate Editors Knut A. Jacobsen, Helene Basu, Angelika Malinar, Vasudha Narayanan. Consulted online on 20 January 2021 http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2212-5019_BEH_COM_9000000018 First published online: 2018.

⁷⁷ Malinar, "Monasteries (Maṭhas)".

⁷⁸ Tamara Sears, "Saiva Monastic Complexes in Twelfth-Century Rajasthan: The Pasupatas and Cahamanas at Menal," *South Asian Studies*, 23:1 (2007): 107-126, DOI: [10.1080/02666030.2007.9628671](https://doi.org/10.1080/02666030.2007.9628671).

In this regard, it is also important to consider the reasons that allow us to qualify certain structures in Maharashtra as *maṭhas* and distinct them from temples.⁷⁹ This is a rather difficult task because there is a dearth of in situ inscriptions in the extant *maṭha* structures or otherwise there is no extant structure that a certain inscription indicates. Moreover, in the textual and inscriptional records contemporary to the Cālukya - Yādava period, use of the word *maṭha* appears interchangeably, for a small temple as well as an individual structure, separate from a temple. The foremost reason for this is found in the examples of few *maṭha* with inscriptions.

The most prominent *maṭha* structure of Lonar is the Dharmaśālā structure. Others notable *maṭha* structure is the Tripuruṣācā Maṭha from the Daityasūdāna temple complex. The Reṇukā temple from the Dhāra Tīrtha temple complex can also be argued to be a *maṭha* based on its ground. An article by A.S. Pathak, where he details out the architectural typology of *maṭhas* is a sole example. Pathak provides an overview of the literary and inscriptional evidence for *maṭhas* and categorically discusses three types of *maṭha* structures from Maharashtra.⁸⁰

Bāravas in Lonar

Bāravas and *kuṇḍas* are the most requisite structures in the Lonar crater architecture, as singular structures as well as part of temple complexes. There are two main characteristics associated with stepwells in general, one is sacredness and the other one is source of portable water. Both these characteristics have led to the creation of several of these structures in Lonar. Many *bāravas* and *kuṇḍas* may not have survived today, but the extant structures certainly portray that both their sacred nature and utilitarian value as fresh water source.

There are three *bāravas* in Lonar – one is the Limbī Bārava situated on the main road, near the Leṇḍī *talāva*, *bārava* from the Pāpahareśvara temple Complex

⁷⁹ Here, *maṭhas* that fit into the time bracket of the eleventh to fourteenth centuries, based on the textual, inscriptional and material evidence, have only been considered. Furthermore, the motive is not to understand the evolution of the concept of *maṭhas* or the nature of sectarian associations with the *maṭhas*. For a discussion on the nature and evolution of *maṭhas* in Maharashtra region, see Pathak, “Madhyayugīna Maṭhasthāpatya,” 89-112.

⁸⁰ Pathak, “Madhyayugīna Maṭhasthāpatya,” 111.

and the *bārava* from the Rāmagayā temple Complex.⁸¹ Apart from these, there are small size *kuṇḍas*, two in the Dhāra Tīrtha temple complex and one single *kuṇḍa* between the Kumāreśvara temple and Yajñeśvara temple complex. Except for the Limbi *bārava*, all other *kuṇḍas* and *bāravas* in Lonar are constructed surrounding a fresh water spring. In fact, at the Dhāra Tīrtha, the perennial stream of Dhāra is the foci of the complex, around which all other structures have been built. Owing to this, a sacrality is associated to it. For instance, the *kuṇḍa* 2 in the Dhāra Tīrtha is often called as the Brahma *kuṇḍa* because it is believed that when Brahmā summoned Gaṅgā to flown down to the earth to cleanse Viṣṇu off the demon Lavaṇāsūra's blood, he places his *kamaṇḍalu* at this location. Similarly, the dilapidated Sītā Nahāṇī, is believed to be the place where Sītā bathed during the pilgrimage undertaken by Rāma and Sītā at Lonar.

The architecture of Limbī Bārava is the quintessential Cālukya -Yādava period *bārava* architecture; built on a square plan with entrances on at least two or three sides, often consisting of a small shrine on one of its sides surrounding by a colonnade on other three sides, the embedded walls having capstones and the back wall having *devakoṣṭhas*. This plan is replicated in different regions during the eleventh to fourteenth centuries CE time bracket. A few examples in the immediate vicinity of Lonar are *bāravas* at Charthana in Parbhani district, Helas in Jalna district, Dhotra Nandai and Sindkhed Raja in Buldhana district among several others. In distant regions as well *bāravas* on similar plans, as part of temple complexes or singular structures, are commonly found. For instance, *bārava* at Ratanwadi in Ahmednagar district, Gursale in Satara district and Kamaḷeśvara *bārava* at Sinnar in Nasik district are a few examples among several *bāravas*.

3.5 Summary

A stylistic analysis of the form and fabric of the corpus of built environment of Lonar highlights a continuous building activity in the crater landscape the eleventh through

⁸¹ Another *bārava* is a part of private land amidst the agricultural fields near the Ambar Lake. There is one more *bārava* near the present-day village of Umbarjhirā, to the north-east of Lonar at a distance of about one kilometre. This *bārava* could not be located during the field work as part of the present research. Locals say that the *bārava* has been filled to facilitate construction at the same location, but for want of more information regarding its present state of preservation, it has been left out of the discussions here.

the eighteenth centuries CE. During this time period, several architectural productions were built and re-built in the contiguous area of the crater. In the absence of inscriptional records containing the historical references for the site, the architecture gives testament of the sustained cultural landscape and settlement. The oldest standing structures at Lonar would include, Yajñeśvara temple, *chatrī* of the Pāpahareśvara temple and Daityasūdana temple complex. As seen in the preceding sections of the chapter, most of these temple sites have been vastly reconstructed at many later moments, but the first construction at each of these temple site can be traced to sometime between the late twelfth and mid thirteenth centuries CE.

If one is to observe the changes in the structural activity during this time period, one shall notice that structures, especially temple buildings have transformed drastically from being conglomerates and complexes to singular structures. The ornamentation patterns switched from figural sculpture on the temple exterior and floral and geometric patterns on mouldings to simplified wall designs, mostly focusing on the stone masonry pattern with simplistic basal mouldings. The pillar typology also changed from intricate multi-faceted components to simple squarish and rectangular members. The features that continued to be employed fairly unchanged are the ground plans of temples over three to four centuries. The simplification of the architectural morphology of temples did not translate into their ground plans much. The foremost reason for this could be patronage. Temple elevations changed due to change in patronage which meant the need for quicker constructions with lesser funds but the ground plans remain fairly unchanged because temples continued to function as socio-religious institutions. The congregation of worshippers, pilgrims, ascetics in temple buildings, made it necessary for them to provide spaces to accommodate this influx.

Another aspect that the analysis of this categorisation gives us is the knowledge of construction activity at each location and which structures were continually reformulated and when. The period late thirteenth century sees the maximum number of temples built, but not many evidence of restorations/ alterations in the built structures could be assigned to this period. Even if there were temples built before thirteenth century CE, like at the location of Kamaḷajā, major restorations to it must have happened during the time period from thirteenth to fifteenth centuries CE. This is also time when salt collection and soap making industries were in vogue

in the region. The sole evidence of Abul Fazl's *Ain-i-Akbari* tells us that by the sixteenth century CE, it was an established industry of the region and hence can be speculated to have started a few decades before that.⁸²

This understanding aids in contesting the commonly held argument that post thirteenth century CE, when Yādavas were not the rulers, and fragmentations occurred, temples probably became small but the number of temples built was consistent as the earlier periods or even proliferated in certain areas. Regional pilgrim centres and their circuits, local cults were germinating as a result of new religions emanating.

⁸² Abul Fazl Allami, *The Ain-i-Akbari Volume II*. trans. Colonel H.S. Jarret (Calcutta: The Asiatic Society of Bengal 1891), 287-88.

Chapter 4

Situating Lonar: Narratives, Visual Traditions and Religious Practices Associated with the Built Environment

4.1 The Lonar Milieu

In chapter three, we discussed the architectural morphology of all the structures in Lonar. Every location with an extant structure has been surveyed and descriptively analysed. Such an analysis serves a dual purpose. Firstly, it highlights the prevalent patterns within the architecture confined to Lonar. Secondly, it allows us to view and contextualise all of the extant material evidence in Lonar within a spatial-temporal bracket. As an outcome of this exercise, it can be convincingly argued that Lonar flourished as an important religious centre and a place of pilgrimage, starting from at least the eleventh century CE and continuing to receive patronage till the nineteenth century CE. During this period of continuous building activity, Lonar witnesses an influx of pilgrims, laity and ascetics all through the year, especially during festivals like Navarātrī, Tripurī Pournimā, Gaṅgā Daśerī and other regional pilgrimages. The tangible spaces circumscribe the sacred geography of Lonar. For a holistic understanding of the evolution of the cultural landscape of the Lonar crater, it is necessary to take into consideration the substratum of religious paradigms. They fuelled the creation and sustenance of the architectural forms for the sacred geography of the crater. By doing this, the effort is to explore the reasons for the choices design and construction of buildings in the physical landscape.

This chapter focuses on contextualising the architecture of Lonar within complex religious traditions of the crater landscape and situating Lonar in wider historical narratives. In other words, the chapter would be central to the religious identity of Lonar and focus on the cultic affiliations prevalent here. However, the motive is not an exhaustive documentation of the religious traditions, but to seek the reasoning for the construction of sacred built spaces in the physical geography of the crater. Hence, the chapter does not focus on amassing data related to religious traditions or icons but rather the discussions are based on select traditions prevalent in Lonar while cursorily taking cognisance of other sectarian traditions.

For this, oral narratives, literary accounts of the crater, figural sculptures on temples, and markers of religious affiliation of the temples, have been taken into consideration. Although the overall site of Lonar as a *tīrtha* has religious valence and heterogeneity in the traditions practised here, a stronghold of Vaiṣṇava is evident at the site, especially from the thirteenth century CE onwards.¹ Literary evidence corroborates the supremacy of Viṣṇu, and figural sculptures adorning the temples are skewed towards — imagery. It appears that after the thirteenth century CE, several temples were affiliated to Vaiṣṇava traditions, in comparison to preceding centuries. Starting from the mythical stories and literary accounts and then gradually dealing with all the Vaiṣṇava features of the site along with their interwoven stories, the idea is to delineate the connection of Lonar with Viṣṇu. An equally significant aspect, integral to the sacred geography of Lonar, is the pilgrimage circuit and routes of travel in the crater environs. The architectural spaces form vital nodes in the circuits and routes traversing the crater; hence, the use or re-use of the built environment or the architectural spaces have also been governed by the alterations or additions to these routes and vice-versa. This aspect shall be discussed in the concluding sections of the present chapter.

To begin with, the first section of the chapter expounds upon the identity of Lonar alias Viṣṇūgayā or Virajakṣetra. This section shall attempt to understand the meanings of the names acquired by the site and how these names evolved with time.

4.2 Lonar, Viraja and Viṣṇūgayā: The Several Nomenclatures

Frequently occurring names of the site through literary records are ‘Lonar’, ‘Viraja’ and ‘Viṣṇūgayā’. The Uttarkhaṇḍa of the *Padma Purāṇa* mentions the tank at ‘Loṇāra’, which is in ‘Viṣṇūgayā’, a place from where people drink water to liberate

¹ A concept of *tīrtha* is simple yet complex. To put it simply, *tīrtha* is a sacred place of religious importance, a place of ‘crossing over’ from the profane to the sacred or mundane to heavenly. However, to understand the formation and meaning of *tīrthas*, it holds deeper meanings. Diana Eck has called *tīrtha* places ‘locative forms of religiousness’ where she says that the particular place which is regarded as a *tīrtha* becomes significant. Alongside, Eck also points out that *tīrthas* need not be defined by size, scale or a certain physical geography. The nature of *tīrthas* is to facilitate a crossing over and mediate between the worshipper and the worshipped, where both facets are limited to tangibility. For further reference, Diana L. Eck, ‘India’s “Tīrthas”: “Crossings” in Sacred Geography’, *History of Religions* 20, no. 4 (1981): 323–44.

themselves from all bondage. The text recalls Lonar as one of the several places where the charioteer Maṇikeśvara, of a certain King Janaśṛtī who lived in Pratiṣṭhāna on the banks of river Godavari visited, while in search of Raikya (regarded by the *Purāṇa* as the teacher of the Vedas). Before heading to Lonar, en route other sacred places, the Puranic account also prescribes a requisite visit to Mehkar, the holy town presided over by the Śāraṅgadhara form of Viṣṇu (situated presently to the north of Lonar on the banks of Painganga river).² It has already been mentioned in Chapter 1 that Mahānubhāva literary texts like *Līlācaritra*, *Sthānapothī* and the contemporary text *Rukmiṇī Svayamvara* have significant references to the site. All these texts predominantly employ the name Lonar for the site.³ However, occasionally, *Līlācaritra* also uses the name ‘Vraja’ for the holy *tīrtha* in Lonar. (this is a derivation probably coming from the word Viraja).⁴ Notably, the twelfth-century CE inscription from Bhāṇḍaka (modern Bhadravati in Chandrapur district of Maharashtra) also uses the nomenclature ‘Lonar’ for this site.⁵ All these references establish that since an early period, the name ‘Lonar’ has prevailed and been in vogue. Other names of the site seem to be relatively infrequent.

Ānanda Rāmāyaṇa, a fifteenth-century CE text, provides the name of a *tīrtha* ‘Virajakṣetra’ that Rāma visited on his northward journey from Devagiri.⁶ During

² The *Padma Purāṇa* Part VIII, *The Sixth chapter: The Story of Raikya* (Delhi: Motilal Banarasidas Pvt Ltd First Edition 1954), 2922-2925.

³ Refer to *līlā* no. 39 and 69 in the *Līlācaritra* when Cakradhara visits Lonar on account of *somavārī* (*somavātī amāvasyā*) along with Boṇebāi. See, S.G. Tulpule ed., *Līlācaritra Ekāṅka* (Pune: Suvichar Prakashan Mandal, 1964), 22, 35, 63, 74. Similarly, *Sthānapothī* addresses the place as Lonar while explaining the different structures and the settlement of the place. See, V.B. Kolte ed., *Sthānapothī* (Malkapur: Arun Prakashan, n.d.) 11-12. In a verse, while explaining the state of Rukmiṇī, the poet compares her to the thin (weak) *dhāra* at Lonar. This explanation of the original verse is available here – See, Suresh Madhavarao Mapari, *Aitihāsika Loṇāra Prācina Te Ādhunika* (Amravati: We Are Publication, 2021), 43. For the verse refer to V.B. Kolte ed., *Kavi Narendrakṛt Rukmiṇī Svayamvara* (Malkapur: Arun Prakashan, 1940), 59.

⁴ Refer to *līlā* no. 415 which says ‘*Loṇārāvaruni jāvo : Vrajece snāna hoila : Sāraṅgadharaṇe darśana hoila : maga śrī prabhuceyā darśana jāvo*. In this *līlā*, Cakradhara is asking Prasanāyaka to visit all these places on his way to meet Śrī Prabhu (who must be Śrī Goviṇḍaprabhū at Rddhapura. For reference, see Narendramuni Ankulnerkar ed., *Śrī Mhāimabhaṭa Saṅkalita Līlācaritra second edition* (Nagpur: Akhil Bharatiya Mahānubhāva Mahamandal, 2019), 196.

⁵ S.G. Tulpule ed., *Prācina Marāṭhī Koriva lekha* (Pune: Pune University Press, 1963), 37.

⁶ Pt. Ramteja Pandeya ed., *Ānandarāmāyaṇam of Śrīmad Vālmiki edited with Jyotsnā Hindi Commentary Yātrākāṇḍa* (Delhi: Chaukahamba Sanskrit Pratishthan, n.d.), 201.

their pilgrimage, Rāma and Sītā bathed in the Payoṣṇī river and then journeyed to the Narmada basin from the Tapi river. Though the text is not clear about the geographical limits of this Virajakṣetra, all of these references certainly place it in the same region constituting the modern Lonar town. The nineteenth-century CE copy of the *Sthala Māhātmya* of Lonar uses both the names Lonar and Virajakṣetra. The distinction between the two is unclear, but as gleaned from the text, the author probably uses Lonar to indicate the town or settlement. While writing about the *tīrtha*, the author indicates by referring to it as Virajakṣetra. Further, the text also says that Lonar is situated in ‘Viṣṇūgayā’, probably indicating that Viṣṇūgayā was a connotation adhering to a larger geographical area, not limited to the crater. Prior to this *Sthala Māhātmya*, the name Viṣṇūgayā is also mentioned in the sixteenth-century CE text of *Ain-i-Akbari* when Abu Fazl wrote about the sanctity of the place; he particularly mentions that “Bramhins call it Bishun gaya”.⁷ This is another apparent distinction between the identity of the contemporary town and the *tīrtha* because the same *Ain-i-Akbari* text calls the place Lonar (the word in the English translation is Lunar) when providing information about the collection of minerals and salt production at the site.⁸

P.V. Kane, in his voluminous work on the history of *Dharmaśāstra*, provides an extensive list of *tīrthas*, which includes “Loṇārakuṇḍa in Viṣṇū-gayā”.⁹ Further, he also writes that “Lonar is a Salt Lake in the Buldhana district of Berar, the fabled den of the giant Loṇāsūra whom Viṣṇū vanquished” and mentions Viraja as the Loṇāradeśa and the lake in Buldhana district in Berar.”¹⁰

Meaning and Significance of the Site Names

Different names adhere to different identities of the same site, meaning that Lonar is the nomenclature more associated with the administrative unit, whereas Viṣṇūgayā or Virajakṣetra are names associated with the representation of the site as a *tīrtha*. This distinction between the nomenclatures of the place appears to be an aftermath of

⁷ Abul Fazl Allami, *The Ain-i-Akbari volume II*. Trans. Colonel H. S. Jarret (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1891), 230.

⁸ Abul Fazl Allami, 230-231.

⁹ P.V. Kane, *List of Tīrthas Offprint from the History of Dharmaśāstra volume IV* (Pune: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1953,) 774, 822.

¹⁰ P.V. Kane, *List of Tīrthas*, 774.

renewed economic activities that were prevalent at the site from the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries CE. In addition to being a significant pilgrimage site, Lonar contributed to the economy of the region through salt production, dye-making and soap-making industries.

Lonar comes from the words ‘*loṇa*’ or ‘*lavaṇa*’, which means salt.¹¹ Interestingly, according to the creation myth narrated in the *Sthala Mahātmya*, the demon whose evacuation led to the creation of Lonar was named Lavaṇāsūra, derived from the affiliation of the site with salt.

‘Viraja’ has several meanings, and its association with purity is noteworthy. The Monier-Williams dictionary provides several meanings of Viraja - free from dust, clean, pure, free from passion, free from menstrual excretion, name of the son of Tvaṣṭrī, a place of pilgrimage, a mountain and so on.¹² Viraja is also one of the names of Viṣṇu mentioned in the list of *Viṣṇusahasranāma*.¹³ Interestingly, the term Virāja also has a strong and complex connection with Viṣṇu. To put it in simple terms, Virāja may be viewed as an epithet of Viṣṇu, which is connected to its characteristic of representing pervasiveness. It is allied to an intrinsic concept of Viṣṇu as the one who rules far and wide.¹⁴

In order to understand the term ‘Viṣṇugayā’ associated with the site of Lonar, it is necessary to briefly understand the significance and conception of Gayā. The most common associations are with the famed places of pilgrimage, Gaya and Bodhgaya, in the modern state of Bihar.¹⁵ These two are distinct sacred places: where one is associated with the Buddhist religious site where Buddha attained enlightenment.; the other is a Hindu pilgrimage place where Viṣṇu’s footprint was

¹¹ The dictionary of old Marathi gives the meaning of the ‘Loṇa’ as salt. For reference, Shankar Gopal Tulpule and Anne Feldhaus, *A Dictionary of Old Marathi* (Mumbai: Popular Prakashan, 1999), 615, https://dsal.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/app/tulpule_query.py?page=615.

¹² Sir Monier Monier Williams, *A Sanskrit-English dictionary: Etymologically and Philologically Arranged with Special Reference to Cognate Indo-European Languages* (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1986), 982.

¹³ Ananta Damodara Athavale ed., *Śriviṣṇusahasranāmastotra second edition* (Pune: Shri Radhadamodara Prathishthana, 1995), 71. Here, the meaning of Viraj is given as the one who is free from all desires.

¹⁴ Jan Gonda, *Aspects of Viṣṇuism* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Pvt Ltd, 1993), 172.

¹⁵ Mathew R. Sayers, “Gaya-Bodhgaya: The Origins of a Pilgrimage complex,” *Religions of South Asia*, 4.1 (2010): 9-25.

imprinted during his cosmic stride or when it was planted on the head of the demon Gayā. As per the story in the *Vāyū Purāṇa*, Gayā was an *asura* who performed austerities to obtain a boon. In order to subdue the demon, Brahmā asked the demon to offer his body as a sacrificial pit. The demon's supine body or sacrificial pit was kept steady by placing a rock.¹⁶ Viṣṇu touched the earth in his famous three strides and pushed the demon into the same pit, leaving behind an imprint of his foot, and the place obtained religious importance after the demon Gayā.¹⁷ This trope of demon-deity conflict, where the deity eventually defeats the demon but also grants a boon to achieve an elevated status at the site, seems to have been repeated and applied to several other places of piety.

As per the *Gayā Māhātmya*, the sacrality of Gayā as a holy *tīrtha* and the place to perform *śrāddha* (ancestral rites) in order to obtain *mokṣa* was created because Viṣṇu vanquished the demon Gayāsūra there.¹⁸ The *Mahābhārata* traces the antiquity of Gayā to the story of a certain Sage Gayā and does not accord the creation of the site after the demon Gayā. The *Mahābhārata* explains the importance of performing a pilgrimage to Gaya and earning merit.¹⁹ The reason for discussing these motifs of the Gaya in Bihar here is their similarity with the myths and motifs that prevail in Lonar. Debjani Paul argues that adapting and appropriating the evolution of Gaya from a pre-eminently Vaiṣṇava sacred centre to a larger *kṣetra* is an attempt to recall the antiquity of the place.²⁰ For instance, Viṣṇu's association with Savitrī is translated to the formation of a Sāvitrī Gayā within the larger centres of Gayā. Likewise, the Virajakṣetra in Jajpur in Orissa is often regarded as Nābhi Gayā.²¹

¹⁶ *The Vayu Purana Part II, first edition* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1960), 910-16

¹⁷ Albertina Nugteren, "Footprints," in *Brill's Encyclopedia of Hinduism Online*, Editor-in-Chief Associate Editors Knut A. Jacobsen, Helene Basu, Angelika Malinar, Vasudha Narayanan. Consulted online on 20 January 2021 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2212-5019_beh_com_1010071175>

¹⁸ Debjani Paul, "Antiquity of the Viṣṇūpada at Gaya Tradition and Archaeology," *East and West*, Vol 35, 1/3 (September 1985): 103-141.

¹⁹ Matthew R. Sayers, "Early Gaya: The Emergence of Tirthasraddha," *Religions of South Asia* 10, no. 1 (17 January 2017): 9–30, <https://doi.org/10.1558/rosa.29635>.

²⁰ Debjani Paul, "Antiquity of the Viṣṇūpada at Gaya Tradition and Archaeology," 104-106

²¹ Umakant Mishra, 'From Viraja Tirtha to "Allegorical" Nabhi Gaya: Exploring the Changing Religious Landscape of Jajpur (Sixth to Fourteenth Centuries CE)', in *Art and History: Texts, Contexts and Visual Representations in Ancient and Early Medieval India*, ed. R. Mahalakshmi (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021), 239–80.

On a regional level as well, there is appropriation of the Gayā trope as we find references to three Gayās - Rudra Gayā, which is in Bijapur; Brahma Gayā, which is in Bihar; and the Viṣṇu Gayā in Lonar. In conjunction with this, a noteworthy reference is found from the *Karavīra Mahātmya*, which states that Kolhāsura, the demon antagonist of the text, was the brother of Lavaṇāsura and Gayāsura.²² Further, the text also has a chapter dedicated to Lonar and Viraja *tīrtha*.²³ There is ambiguity if Gaya is the same as the one in Bihar or whether Lonar is the same Lonar of the present study. However, the existence of the story hints at an association reference certainly hints at the existence of the story and the practice of association of a sacred place with Gayā.

The exact process of the replication of this concept is not known. However, the name Gaya certainly stems from the status accorded originally to the Gaya in Bihar, and its elevated position as a pilgrimage place to perform rituals that liberate ancestors. In this regard, Viṣṇugayā would mean Viṣṇu Gayā, a place revered for Viṣṇu and sacred in nature to liberate earthly souls. The concept of the divine feet that have touched a place, often to slay a notorious demon, is symbolic of the divine presence in that place, which becomes associated with ‘Gayā’, for instance, the Viṣṇupada in Gaya.²⁴ Further, such a place, sacred because of the divine presence and pure to perform rites and attain liberation, is revered as a *tīrtha*.²⁵

4.3 Lonar *Sthala Māhātmya*, *Virajakṣetra Māhātmya*

Given the background of names associated with Lonar we will now unravel the myths associated with Lonar and analyse its significance as it appears through texts, especially the *Sthala Māhātmya*. To begin with, we shall understand the story of Lavaṇāsura, from boon to bane and his defeat at the hands of Viṣṇu in the form of Daityasūdāna.

²² Dajiba Joshirao, *Śrī Karavīra Mahātmya* (Kolhapur: Menal Prakashan, 2017), 422, 449. *Karavīra* is the older name of modern Kolhapur in Maharashtra.

²³ Joshirao, *Śrī Karavīra Mahātmya*, 6, 173.

²⁴ Albertina Nugteren, “Bare Feet and Sacred Ground: “Viṣṇu was Here”,” *Religions* 9, 224 (2018): 1-21.

²⁵ Eck, ‘India’s “Tīrthas”’, 323–35.

Mythical story in *Lonāra Māhātmya*

Even though Lonar has been mentioned in *Padma Purāṇa* and several medieval texts, none of them texts expound on the mythical stories or creation myths of the site. An elaborate creation myth of Lonar comes only in the *Virajakṣetra Māhātmya* or *Lonāra Māhātmya*, a *Sthala Māhātmya* written with the purpose of the glorification of Lonar. It is a late document in the historical timeline of Lonar, first written in the eighteenth century CE in the Marathi language and Devanāgarī script. The central narrative of the *Māhātmya* elucidates the creation of the crater after Viṣṇu manifests in the form of Daityasūdāna to kill the notorious demon Lavaṇāsūra and reinstates peace. In addition to a detailed account of the creation myth, the text also contains stories related to the creation of several holy small *tīrthas* in the natural landscape of Lonar. The text consists of one thousand and sixty-eight verses, divided into eleven *adhyāyas*, following the format of a narrative dialogue between the sage Vyāsa and Skanda (Kārtikeya). As per the colophon, the text claims to be a part of the *Godākhanda* of the *Skanda Purāṇa*; however, it has not been found in any recension of the *Purāṇa* as yet.²⁶ The manuscript begins with an illustration of Viṣṇu (Śeṣaśāyī Viṣṇu).²⁷

The author begins with oblations and prayers to Gaṇeśa, Sarasvatī, Sadguru, Vyāsa Rṣi, among others. Amongst all Rṣis, the author adores Bhāgīratha, as it was owing to his severe penance that the sacred river Gaṅgā ascended on Earth. Further, the author equates river Gaṅgā of Prayag to Bhogāvatī in Viraja (Lonar) and pays

²⁶ This is a usual phenomenon where a certain *Māhātmya* claims to be originally part of a *Purāṇa*, but the *Purāṇa* text does not contain it. Especially in terms of *Skanda Purāṇa*, there have been several interpolations to the text. Most likely, this purported claim must have been made to reiterate the significance and antiquity of the *Māhātmya* text. For more information on the overall type of *Māhātmya* texts and *Purāṇas*, See Linda Wiig, “Māhātmyas: A Preliminary survey (Including a list of Māhātmyas compiled from Aufrecht’s Catalogus Catalogorum),” (Masters diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1981). Jan Gonda studies *tīrthamahātmyas* as treatises on *tīrthas*, which profess to be part of *Purāṇās*; however, the actual texts of the *Purāṇās* often do not contain the *Mahātmyas*. For reference, Gonda Jan, ed., *Medieval Religious Literature in Sanskrit*, vol. 2 Fasc 1, A History of Indian Literature (Otto Harrassowitz, 1977), 277–79.

²⁷ Viṣṇu is shown seated on a five-hooded serpent in the ocean (fishes in the water indicate this), and Lakṣmī is sitting at Viṣṇu’s feet. Standing beside are shown a four-headed figure of Brahmā and attendants. The attire of all in this drawing is Maharashtrian, Viṣṇu is shown wearing *pitāmbara* and Lakṣmī is wearing *nauvārī sārī*.

obeisance to this venerable stream. Next, in a couple of verses, the reader is introduced to the geographical location of the famous town of Lonar.²⁸

Further, the text introduces Lavaṇāsūra, one of the sons of the sage Kaśyapa and his wife Dīti. The text then narrates the story where Lavaṇāsūra performs severe penance to acquire a special boon from Lord Śiva, which guarantees that Lavaṇāsūra would not be killed by any of the gods, demons, semi-divine creatures, humans, animals, birds or by any natural calamities like earthquakes, lightning or thunder. Just when Lavaṇāsūra was joyous to have received such a boon of immortality, a voice from the sky prophesied that he would be ultimately killed due to an assault on his navel by a two/three-year old toddler. Outraged by this prophecy, Lavaṇāsūra began his search to find his nemesis and first went to the Ocean. He alleged that the Ocean has provided shelter to the child who would eventually kill him. Enraged by this allegation, the Ocean cursed Lavaṇāsūra that not only would he be killed as per the prophecy, but after that, his body would disintegrate into salt.²⁹ Having proclaimed this, the Ocean disappeared, and the angry Lavaṇāsūra resumed his journey to find his enemy. He then reached Amarāvati, the abode of the king of gods, Indra. In order to make himself invincible, Lavaṇāsūra wanted to snatch the position of Indra and become the ‘*adhipati*’ (literally meaning Chief, here meaning Chief of Amarāvati). A fierce battle ensued between Indra and Lavaṇāsūra, with Lavaṇāsūra taking over as the king of gods. Following this debacle, Gods began to contemplate over whom they could approach for help. Concerned about the situation, they approached Brahmā to ask if he knew the person who would be able to save the heavenly abode from this deluge. All the gods in heaven felt threatened as Lavaṇāsūra begins misbehaving and

²⁸ ‘*Godāvarīcyā uttaratīrī|| Daśajojane ase durī|| Loṇāra nāme prasiddhanagari|| mahārāṣṭradeśī vikhyāta ase||15|| Viṣṇūgayesi jāhale virajanāma|| pāpagrastāsi auśadhaparama|| te tīrtha jāṇā uttam || je viṣṇu caraṇā pāsoni udbhavle|| 17||*’ These are two verses in the first *adhyāya* of the text that introduce the region. The translation of these lines is as follows - On the northern bank of the Godavari (river), (at a distance of) 10 *yojana* (approximately 120 kilometres away), there is a famous town named Lonar, which is well known in the state of Maharashtra. Viṣṇūgayā acquired the name Viraja. (which) is the ultimate medicine for Sins. Know that this *tīrtha* is the best. (which is) created from the foot of Viṣṇu. For reference, *Virajakṣetra Mahātmya urfa Loṇāra Mahātmya*, by Saccidāśrama Svāmī (Pune: Dattaprasarak Publications, 1892), *adhyāya* 1.

²⁹ The particular verse for this comes in the second *adhyāya* of the text. It goes as follows. ‘*tujha bhaviṣyā pramāṇe mrutyū hoila niradhāra|| āni anantakāli tujhe śarira|| kṣāra hoil jalarupa ||10||*’ For reference, See *Loṇāra Māhātmya*, *adhyāya* 2.

disrupting the cosmic order. Led by Brahmā, they approach Viṣṇu and requested him to save the world from the problematic demon. Viṣṇu assured them that he would take the form of a toddler, defeat Lavaṇāsūra, and restore order in the world.³⁰

Meanwhile, Lavaṇāsūra in Amarāvātī, having acquired the position of Indra, was enjoying all the amenities. Lavaṇāsūra's agents informed him that the Lord of the sea (here used as an epithet for Viṣṇu) had woken from his deep sleep and had assured all Gods that he would take the form of a two/three-year old toddler to vanquish Lavaṇāsūra. At first, the demon was enraged to hear this but was in complete disbelief at the possibility of him being killed by a mere toddler. Having acquired the position of Indra, Lavaṇāsūra assumed himself to be invincible; he set forth on a mission to kill all Gods, including Viṣṇu. Lavaṇāsūra's wife, Padmāvatī, tried to reason with him that Viṣṇu was the Lord of the Lords and that the former could not defeat him, but Lavaṇa dismissed her. Pondering on the situation, Lavaṇa found one solution. He decided to settle in a *vivara* in the Daṇḍakāraṇya (Daṇḍaka forest).³¹ Eventually Viṣṇu appeared on the earth assuming the *avatāra* of a young boy and made his way to the demon's den. To acquire entry into Lavaṇa's residence, Viṣṇu lured the demon's sisters by assuming the form of a young lad. Lavaṇa's sister named Aṣāḍhā fell prey to Viṣṇu's tactic and gave away the location of her brother.

Meanwhile, Lavaṇāsūra was under the impression that he would easily succeed in defeating Viṣṇu. However, when the Lord came forth in his *avatāra*, Lavaṇāsūra's clan deserted him, leaving him at the hands of the Almighty. Viṣṇu, as prophesised, assumes the form of a toddler and using his foot, attacked the demon on his navel and killed him.³² The heavens resounded in celebration following this

³⁰ The particular verse for this goes as – ‘*mhaṇe aikā ho deva samasta|| tumhī nirbhaya rahā suchitra|| Jaisā vajre curṇa hoyā parvata|| taisā mārīna daityā te||78|| Mī bālrūpa dharīna ardharāṇe tyāsī mārena|| aise boluniyā bhagavāna|| Nīmagna jhālā kṣīrasāgarī ||79||* See, *Loṇāra Māhātmya*, *adhyāya* 2.

³¹ This is a reference to the same location where later the Lonar crater is created according to the mythical narrative. Before the crater was formed because of Viṣṇu crushing the demon, there existed a hill at the location which was den of the demon. *Vivara* in Marathi can mean a den, depression or a hole, locally the Lonar crater is often referred as a *vivara*. *maga sahyādrī bhedunī kele vivara || antara nirmīle ramya mandira || vari himādrī samāna śikhara|| balotkanṭhe thevile ||44||*

³² The verse that narrates this is found in the fifth *adhyāya* of the text. *daityācā samaya ālā jāṇonī || deva bālarūpa jāhalā tayesthānī|| trivarṣācī vapu dharonī|| tyā parvatāsī tāḍī*

victory. After this event, Lavaṇāsūra repented his mistake, rose from the ashes, sought atonement, and begged for forgiveness from Viṣṇu for all his misdeeds. He also requested that henceforth Viṣṇu should reside in Lonar and thus make it Viṣṇugayā, a pious place where people shall come to seek his blessings and be released from all kinds of bondage. As part of the atonement, Lavaṇāsūra requested that in order to be of use for all, his body should disintegrate to form salts. Viṣṇu granted the boon to Lavaṇa, because the latter was not a demon anymore as he has transformed into an ardent devotee of Viṣṇu.

The next episode is where the holy river Gaṅgā began flowing from the Dhāra valley, which was later known as Gaṅgā Bhogāvatī. Since Viṣṇu's foot was smeared with the blood of the demon, Brahmā requested Gaṅgā, mentioned in the text as Gaṅgā Pāpanāśinī, to appear at Lonar and help cleanse Viṣṇu foot of the demon's blood.

This is a brief account of the narrative that is expounded in the first five *adhyāyas* of the text. Having established the main story of the creation of Lonar and its greatness as a *tīrtha*, the next five *adhyāyas* of the *Loṇāra Māhātmya* text discuss stories of creation of smaller *tīrthas* within the crater. The Viraja *tīrtha* or Virajakṣetra was then visited by Rāma and Sītā while on their pilgrimage. In Lonar, they are said to have begun their pilgrimage from Audumbara Tīrtha, then went to Agni Tīrtha, Yama Tīrtha, Vāyū Tīrtha, Soma Tīrtha, Bhogāvatī, Kumāreśvara, Saubhāgyavātī Tīrtha, among others. The stories from each of these *adhyāyas* discuss the reasons why 'Raghunandana', i.e., Rāma visits them and provide descriptions about his homage at every *tīrtha*. The eleventh and the last *adhyāya* details a strand of the story in which Rāma is content with his pilgrimage to several *tīrthas* of Viraja. On his return journey he once again pays homage to Gaṅgā Bhogāvatī, that is the Dhāra at the Dhāra Tīrtha. Hereafter, the *adhyāya* talks about the severe penance of a King named Nanda and the greatness of Gaṅgā Bhogāvatī at Lonar. The last verses of this *adhyāya*, verse numbers 93 to 110, provide a summary of all the stories and legends as they are discussed in all the eleven *adhyāyas*.

kopāne||6|| jevhā marmī haṇilī lātha|| tevhāca daityācaa jhālā anta|| maga lokapāla samasta|| samīpa āle lavaṇācyā ||25|| See, Loṇāra Māhātmya, adhyāya 5.

Analysis of the *Loṇāra Māhātmya*

The *Loṇāra Māhātmya* is an exaltation of the greatness of the Lonar crater. While it narrates the mythical origins of the crater, every element from the physical geography finds an explanation in the *Māhātmya*. There are certain interesting mythical references and religious meanings in this narrative – formation of the salt water lake, the peculiar name Lonar derived from *lavaṇa* and the status of Viṣṇūgayā accorded to the site, and the advent of fresh water streams like *dhāra* flowing from the craterous geography. All these elements present an elaborate picture of the adaptation and appropriation of the entire landscape. Thus, for the present research, it becomes necessary to study the authorship, subject matter, form and style of the verses in the text, and also to situate the text in the spatial-temporal backdrop of the crater. There are two broad sections in the text, one is the entire story of Daityasūdāna and Lavaṇāsūra, and second is that of Rāma visiting Lonar. To put it in other words, the first section deals with the creation of the crater and the second section reiterates its greatness as a *tīrtha*.

The manuscript of the *Loṇāra Māhātmya* that has been referred to in the present study was found in the library of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute in Pune.³³ Written in Marathi language and Devanāgarī script, the manuscript was compiled in the early nineteenth century CE. The text is authored by Saccidāśrama Svāmī, a seer who resided in Lonar till early twentieth century CE. As per the account provided by the residents of Lonar, it is said that Saccidāśrama Svāmī was originally not a resident of Lonar, but chose to reside in Lonar when his leg injury was cured by bathing at the pious Dhāra Tīrtha. He is credited with the re-discovery of many temples in Lonar, especially the Daityasūdāna temple which was apparently covered to save it from intruders. During his residence in Lonar, he has written over fifteen texts like *Anubhavasāra*, *Antarānubhava*, *Bhogāvatī Stutī*, along with the text of *Loṇāra Māhātmya*.³⁴

³³ *Virajakṣetra Mahātmya urfa Loṇāra Mahātmya*, by Saccidāśrama Svāmī (Pune: Dattaprasarak Publications, 1892).

³⁴ Sudhakar Bugdane, “*Pūjanīya Sakhārāma Māhārāja Hyance Dikṣā Gurū. Loṇāra Ce Svāmī Saccidāśrama*,” (n.d.), Unpublished.

Architectural Forms and the *Lonāra Māhātmya*

The brief knowledge of the text and its subject matter highlights a central story with characters that shape the religious nature of Lonar and also have an impact on the architectural forms. Chronologically, the compilation of this text is after the construction of most of the architectural productions of Lonar. Yet, it is an important account for studying the material remains and for understanding public perceptions of the crater. It is an account that encapsulates all the stories associated with the different temples, *maṭhas* and *kuṇḍas* of Lonar. Daityasūdāna-Viṣṇu, who vanquished the demon Lavaṇāsūra and settled in Lonar, and Rāma, who performed a pilgrimage at Lonar, become two protagonist characters of the mythical narrative. The popularity of these narratives through the text has led to the exalted positions of the Rāmagayā temple- Sītā Nhānī, Daityasūdāna temple, and the Dhāra Tīrtha temple in the local belief systems. For instance, pilgrims and lay followers especially visit the Sītā Nhānī *kuṇḍa* to take a dip in the spring here because it is believed that Sītā bathed here during her pilgrimage with Lord Rāma. The structures that are not mentioned in the *Lonāra Mahātmya* are the Yajñeśvara temple, Limbī Bārava, Dharmasālā and the temples on the north-western fringe of the crater. Prakashchandra Vyas identifies each of the locations of the temples along the periphery of the lake as an individual *tīrthas*. He also corroborates them with the *Māhātmya* text.³⁵ A plausible explanation for the absence of Copadā, Deśamukha, Muṅgaḷyā and Ambarakhānā temples from the text could be that these structures were seasonally submerged in the saltwater lake and, hence, remained inaccessible for long periods of time. The absence of the Yajñeśvara temple from the text, in spite of being regarded as the *Śukrācāryācī Vedaśālā*, cannot be convincingly explained. The only speculative reasoning for this could be that the Yajñeśvara temple was in a dilapidated condition in the centuries leading to the formulation of the text and had fallen out of worship.

4.4 Characterisation of Daityasūdāna and Lavaṇāsūra

The characteristics and visual imagery of Daityasūdāna and Lavaṇāsūra from the myth explicated in the preceding section have wider linkages to the Vaiṣṇava pantheon. The strand germane to the central theme of this myth is that Viṣṇu descends

³⁵ Prakashchandra Vyas, *Sarvāṅga Paricaya: Jagaprasiddha Vivara Lonāra* (Latur: Sanskruti Prakashana, 2000), 97-98.

on earth and manifests himself as Daityasūdana to save the world from the demon. The *avataric* nature of Viṣṇu as Daityasūdana shares significant characteristics with two canonical Viṣṇu *avatāras* – Narasimha and Vāmana-Trivikrama. It is imperative to delineate shared characteristics between Daityasūdana and Puranic versions of the stories of these two popular Viṣṇu *avatāras*. The anthropomorphic form of Viṣṇu generally appears as the fourth of the ten canonical manifestations, the *daśāvatāras*. The commonly known myth of Narasimha is that the man-lion form of Viṣṇu made an appearance following the disruption caused by the demon Hiranyakaśipu, who had a boon from Brahmā to not being killed by anyone in his abode or outside during day or night or by any weapon. Narasimha circumvents the boon by shattering the assembly of Hiranyakaśipu, placing the demon upon his lap and tearing open the demon's stomach while standing on the threshold. In the early versions of this myth, the story ends after the killing of Hiranyakaśipu and Viṣṇu Narasimha form vanishes.³⁶ In the later version, starting from the *Kurma Purāṇa* and the *Śiva Purāṇa*, Pralhāda, the son of Hiranyakaśipu, is introduced in the story as the ardent devotee of Narasimha. Pralhāda's grandson Bali was also a mighty king who reigned over the world after deceptively acquiring it from Indra, the lord of Gods. This time, Viṣṇu appeared in the form of Vāmana, a dwarf Brahmin, and visited the holy sacrifice place of Bali, where the king honoured the dwarf and offered to grant him anything he wished. Vāmana-Viṣṇu asked for land equivalent to his three steps, which Bali readily accepted. The dwarf expanded to cosmic proportions, striding on the earth, atmosphere, and heaven in three steps and destroyed Bali into the nether world. In this extended form, Viṣṇu is known as the Trivikrama, as he won over all the three worlds.³⁷

From these two myths, the manner in which Viṣṇu kills the demon, ripping the chest of Hiranyakaśipu with bare hands and pushing Bali with his leg into the nether world, find commonalities in the Daityasūdana-Viṣṇu form. Lavaṇāsūra is also shown

³⁶ Deborah Soifer has explicated the early versions of the myth as appearing in several texts like *Mahābhārata*, *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*, *Vāyū Purāṇa* and many others. None of these versions contain the Pralhāda character in their story and the trope of *bhakti* has also not flourished to its full glory. The main trait of the *avataric* concept of Viṣṇu, which is to transcend to earth to reinstate peace and harmony disrupted by a demonic figure, is upheld. For a detailed description of the different versions of the Narasimha myth, See Deborah A. Soifer, *The Myths of Narasimha and Vāmana: Two Avatars in Cosmological Perspective* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 1-4, 73-107.

³⁷ Soifer, 134-137.

to have performed austerities and acquired a boon of immortality. The tropes of not using a weapon to kill the demon and using the toe (or half leg) to crush the demon are central to the character of Daityasūdāna. Like the raised foot of Trivikrama and the toe he used to crush the demon, in the story of Daityasūdāna as well, the foot of Viṣṇu is given prime importance.

Further, according to the version of the *Loṇāra Māhātmya* text, Viṣṇu takes the form of a child entering the den of Lavaṇāsūra. These similarities with the Viṣṇu *avatāras* are useful to understand the conception of the Daityasūdāna form which is unique to Lonar. So far, there is no Puranic version of Daityasūdāna-Lavaṇāsūra story. The *Skanda Purāṇa* does mention the deity Daityasūdāna as the destroyer of all sins, however, does not provide any specific instance associated with this form or traits of the deity.³⁸ Based on the mythical stories and a cursory analysis of its motifs, it can be speculated that the Daityasūdāna form seems to have been derived from the existing motifs of the Viṣṇu *avatāras* of Narasimha and Vāmana.

The characterisation of Lavaṇāsūra also shares certain traits with the demon like Hiraṇyakaśipu from the Narasimha story, Bali from the Trivikrama story, Maṇi-Malla from the *Mallāri Mahātmya*, Kolhāsūra from the *Karavīra Mahātmya*, among many others. In all these narratives, the demon's character begins with him being mighty, strong and invincible owing to a certain boon. But the misuse of this boon leads to the eventual destruction of the demonic figure. All the sculptures of the Daityasūdāna-Lavaṇāsūra exhibit these traits where the demon's character ends in his defeat. But the story has an extended version in the *Loṇāra Māhātmya*. In the written version, Lavaṇāsūra becomes the 'demon devotee' who not only repents his mistakes but also manages to impress the deity. As argued by Alf Hiltebeitel, the mythologies of demon devotees are "shaped by devotion of *bhakti*, or devotion, in which the gods repeatedly convert their demon adversaries sometimes by defeating them, but more often by killing them (implying the principal of reincarnation) into their devotees."³⁹

³⁸ *The Skanda Purana Part XIX*, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1960), 284.

³⁹ Alf Hiltebeitel, ed., *Criminal Gods and Demon Devotees: Essays on the Guardians of Popular Hinduism* (State University of New York Press, 1989), 1.

Daityasūdana Lavaṇāsūra vadha: Visual Embodiment of a myth

The myth of Lonar, partially justifies the existence of the crater for people. The myth does not contain facts but puts forth a narrative that makes one believe the evolution of the crater, and in this sense, it can be called a ‘living myth’. As argued by Mircea Eliade, “living myth is always connected with a cult, inspiring and justifying a religious behaviour.”⁴⁰ The myth of Lonar has had its own journey, not necessarily linear or teleological. It is expressed in various media: oral history, sculpture, and textual narratives, in that order. The succeeding section shall trace this mythical narrative through the main characters in story of Lonar.

The two principal characters of the *Loṇāra Māhātmya*, Daityasūdana and Lavaṇāsūra, are not introduced in the text directly, but they have a precursor in figural sculptures and also must have had a significant standing in oral narratives of the crater. The visual embodiment of a creation myth of a site, as part of temple buildings, is a unique example found in Lonar. There are three icons and one sculptural panel that can be convincingly interpreted to depict this myth. Among these, two icons and a sculptural panel are a part of the Daityasūdana temple, and one icon is in the Viṣṇu temple of the Dhāra Tīrtha temple complex. Also, the visual depictions of this myth in different time periods, from the thirteenth through the nineteenth centuries CE, shed light on the sustenance of the myth in the landscape for over seven hundred years. The icons and sculptural panel depict the same myth, where Viṣṇu, in the form of Daityasūdana, is triumphant after vanquishing the demon Lavaṇāsūra. All of these icons can be convincingly identified as depicting the myth as the figural sculptures are in lieu of an oral narrative (formulated even before the sculptures were made) and comparable to the story as mentioned in the later *Sthala Māhātmya*, albeit the text differs slightly in certain aspects. There are also slight yet significant differences amongst all the four icons. The vital features of one sculpture, datable to the thirteenth century CE, might not have been similarly replicated in the nineteenth century CE. Thus, on the one hand, the choice of depicting this myth at different times on different buildings shows the pre-eminence of the landscape in Vaiṣṇava worship; on the other hand, the slight changes in these sculptures showcase the changing narrative as part of the public memory yet essentially embedded in Viṣṇu. To understand the interaction

⁴⁰ Mircea Eliade, ‘Cosmogonic Myth and “Sacred History”’, *Religious Studies* 2, no. 2 (1967): 171–83.

of the textual, narrative, and visual imagery present on the temples, it is necessary to consider each of these icons and the sculptural panel in greater detail.

As mentioned earlier, three icons depicting the myth are found in the Daityasūdāna temple, of which one is the presiding deity in the *garbhagrha* of this temple, another is a sculptural panel on the ceiling of the *antarāḷa* and third is on the *jaṅghā* of the temple. Of these, the sculpture on the *antarāḷa* ceiling and the *jaṅghā*, contemporary to the building of the temple, can be dated to the thirteenth century CE whereas the sculpture in the *garbhagrha* has been installed later, most likely in the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries CE. Each sculpture deserves a detailed account of its iconography and the details of the myth that it incorporates.

▪ Panel from the Daityasūdāna Temple (Fig. 4.1)

The elaborate sculptural panel that showcases most elements of the mythical narrative, is the one in the south-west corner of the ceiling of the *antarāḷa* of the Daityasūdāna temple. At the centre of this panel is the depiction of four handed Viṣṇu holding a *gadā* and *cakra* in his lower and upper right hands respectively and *śaṅkha* and *padma* in his upper and lower left hands respectively. Viṣṇu is shown standing on one foot, on the body of male figure, which can be identified as the demon who is being attacked. The other leg of Viṣṇu is raised high and body posture is turned to his right. There is a certain lyricism and ease in Viṣṇu's posture while he is attacking the demon. The demon under Viṣṇu's leg is lying supine with his legs bent at the knees and hands folded in *namaskāra mudrā*, portraying that the demon is begging Viṣṇu to let go of him. To the left of Viṣṇu, there are two female icons, who most likely represent the demon's sisters, begging Viṣṇu for their brother's life.⁴¹ Next to right bent leg of Viṣṇu, there is a male figure in a kneeling position on one knee and hands folded in a *namaskāra mudrā*. It is difficult to interpret this male figure. Based on the hand and leg posture, *namaskāra mudrā* and kneeling down, he could be Garuḍa, Viṣṇu's *vāhana*.

⁴¹ In the sthal *māhātmya* story, there is one sister named Aṣādhā, who is attracted to Viṣṇu, and that is how he finds out about the residence of the demon. For reference, See verse, || *Jo madana rupe aṣādhesī|| mohuni gelā daityācyā gruhāsī|| toca Viṣṇu pruthivisi|| abhaya deyi rasanna mane||4||*, *Loṇāra Māhātmya*, *adhyāya* 5. Likewise, when people of Lonar recount the *Lavaṇāsuraavadha kathā*, it generally involves two sisters of Lavaṇā, namely Aṣādhā and Karhādhā.

To the extreme right of the panel, there is a cow bent on her hind limbs and front limbs stretched ahead. The cow is shown wearing a beaded necklace around her neck, an indication that it is not a general depiction of cow as an animal but there is a certain sacrality accorded to her. The head of the cow is raised upwards and water is shown emerging from the cow's mouth. This could be the symbolic depiction of the Gaṅgā-Bhogāvatī river, commonly known as the *dhāra*, that appeared on the earth at Brahmā's request, to cleanse Viṣṇu. This depiction of the sacred cow and the flowing of the sacred river from the *gomukha* is an uncommon and unusual feature. The depiction is likely to symbolise the holy Gaṅgā that descended the earth and begun flowing at Lonar.

In front of the cow is a four-armed deity, two lower hands near his own ankle and the upper hands holding probably a *śaṅkha* and a *cakra*. The attributes are not very clear, but the anatomical similarity, the *mukūṭa* worn by the deity, suggests that it is Viṣṇu again in a kneeling position with one foot forward. Speculating from all these clues, the right side of the sculptural panel showcases another strand in the same myth wherein the river Gaṅgā is requested to flow on the earth for Viṣṇu to cleanse his toe (and foot) that was stained with the demon's blood. Thus, the sculptural panel encompasses the entire story of the creation of the Lonar crater, recognises the identity of Lonar as Viṣṇugayā. It also provides a mythological perception of the presence of the freshwater spring at the Dhāra Tīrtha, regarded as Gaṅgā Bhogāvatī. In the other three images, this part of the myth seems to have been omitted from the sculptural depiction. These icons only focus on the primary narrative of Viṣṇu killing the demon Lavaṇāsūra.



Fig. 4.1: Daityasūdana-Lavaṇāsūra panel on the *antarāḷa* ceiling of Daityasūdana temple

▪ Icon on the *jaṅghā* of the Daityasūdana Temple (**Fig. 4.2**)

The sculpture on the *jaṅghā* of Daityasūdana temple is almost a derivative of the sculptural panel from the *antarāḷa* of the same temple, barring a few variances. Here, the position of the demon below Viṣṇu's feet is on the opposite side, and the feet of Viṣṇu are on the demon instead of only one foot; one foot is on the navel, and the other is on the chest of the demon. The *āyudhas* of Viṣṇu are similar to the sculptural panel, wherein Viṣṇu is shown holding a *cakra* in their upper right hand and *śaṅkha* in the upper left hand. The lower right-hand *āyudha* is partially broken, but the remnant portion appears to be a *gadā*. The lower left hand of the deity is also broken, making it difficult to speculate if it held any *āyudha*. Additionally, there is a figure in standing posture to the left of Viṣṇu, which is not seen in the sculptural panel from the *antarāḷa* of the Daityasūdana temple. Since it is damaged, it is difficult to identify the figure. However, it is unlikely that the icon represents Garuḍa, the *vāhana* of Viṣṇu, as the posture and stance do not match the iconography of Garuḍa.



Fig. 4.2: Daityasūdana from the *jaṅghā* of Daityasūdana temple

▪ Sculpture in the *Garbhagrha* of Daityasūdana Temple (**Fig. 4.3**)

The Viṣṇu-Daityasūdana icon in the *garbhagrha* of Daityasūdana temple draws iconographic similarities as well as differences with the other two icon and panel from the temple. An important point to note at the outset is that the sculpture under discussion is not contemporaneous to the temple building, rather it must have been installed in the *garbhagrha* sometime through the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries CE. This time frame has been assigned to the icon conjectured only from its style. There is no literary reference to corroborate the installation of this icon. According to local accounts, it is said that the icon was donated to the temple by the Bhonsles of Nagpur after the earlier sculpture in the *garbhagrha* was damaged. The sculpture is placed on a pedestal from an earlier period with a Garuḍa icon in a small niche on its fronton (a rectangular projection on the mouldings of the pedestal), indicating that originally as well there existed a Vaiṣṇava sculpture on this pedestal. The new installed Viṣṇu sculpture on this pedestal, stands under a wooden canopy that rests on

four pillars. This canopy is designed adhering to the Marāṭhā style; consisting of fluted columns, and foliated arches. The frame holding the sculpture and the arches of the wooden canopy have paintings of foliage pattern.

Viṣṇu here is shown holding a *gadā* and *cakra* in his right lower and upper hands respectively, *śaṅkha* in upper left hand, while the left lower is shown made into a fist and is resting on the head of another male figure standing in *samapada* posture and *namaskāra mudrā*. The position of the depiction of such a figure is similar to the figure on the *jaṅghā* of Daityasūdāna temple, but the posture of these small figures in both the sculptures are different. Hence, it is difficult to speculate whether these small figures are indicative of similar depictions. Moreover, the male figure in the Viṣṇu sculpture of the *garbhagrha* could likely be the depiction of a Garuḍa, conjectured from his *namaskāra mudrā* posture and Viṣṇu authoritatively resting his fist on the former's head. Belonging to a later period, the usual kneeling position of Garuḍa might not have been adopted. For our current discussion, important to note is the depiction of the demon below the feet of Viṣṇu. Here Viṣṇu is not shown attacking the demon with his foot (or rather a toe), however, he is shown standing on the demon with both his feet in *samabhaṅga* posture. There is a certain authority, a sense of accomplishment and reign portrayed through the sculpture. The slightly changed iconography could be interpreted based on the time period to which the sculpture belongs. The sculpture, considered to have been made only in the eighteenth century CE, has been made when the creation myth of Lonar would have been well established. Probably, as part of the oral narratives, the element of the myth that Daityasūdāna killed Lavaṇāsūra and then resided in Lonar making it the Viṣṇugayā has taken root. While, the manner in which the demon has been killed is of lesser importance in the narrative, it could also be linked to the story as the *Māhātmya* text, in which after having vanquished Lavaṇa, Viṣṇu was requested to preside over Viraja in the form of Daityasūdāna.



Fig. 4.3: Daityasūdana Viṣṇu icon enshrined in the *garbhagrha* of Daityasūdana temple; Note the Garuḍa icon on the pedestal

- Sculpture from Viṣṇu Temple in Dhāra Tīrtha Complex (**Fig. 4.4**)

The fourth sculpture of Viṣṇu – Daityasūdana presides in the *garbhagrha* of Viṣṇu temple in the Dhāra Tīrtha complex. This sculpture has some commonalities with the earlier discussed three icons and sculptures, but also slightly deviates from them in its certain iconographic features. Fitted in the back wall of the shrine this sculpture is likely to have been shifted here from its original location. The sculpture is eroded and painted over several times, hence all the attributes of Viṣṇu cannot be satisfactorily identified. The deterioration of the stone surface also makes it difficult to date the temple, however, based on the stylistic features it appears to be an early period sculpture. This dating would mean that the sculpture is not contemporary to most of the temples, *kuṇḍas* and *maṭha* structures from the Dhāra Tīrtha. Plausibly, the sculpture belongs to sixteenth or seventeenth centuries CE, making it a visual depiction of Daityasūdana-Lavaṇāsūra from the intermediate period of Lonar historical timeline. The *āyudhas* in Viṣṇu's hands are not absolutely clear, except for the *gadā* in the upper right hand. The other attributes could be *cakra*, near the right knee of Viṣṇu, *padma* and *śaṅkha* in the left hands, but it is difficult to identify them

in the current state of preservation of the sculpture. In this sculpture Viṣṇu is attacking the demon on his navel with one bent knee and other foot is on the chest of the demon. Viṣṇu is shown pushing the demon in the nether world or the subterraneous abode. It is important to note here that according to the description of the text Lonar *Māhātmya*, Viṣṇu-Daityasūdana killed Lavaṇāsūra using *ardhacaraṇa*, literally meaning half leg.⁴² Another significant element in the icon is the depiction of a depression below the demon's body. It is possibly indicative of the depression which is supposed to have occurred because Viṣṇu crushed the demon in the crater. The belief that the act of attack on Lavaṇāsūra led to the formation of the crater and lake depression is also depicted through water ripples or snake coils below the right side of the demon's torso. With respect to the posture of both Viṣṇu and Lavaṇāsūra, the sculpture deviates from the other three sculptures, as it does not represent killing of the demon by Viṣṇu's foot.



Fig. 4.4: Daityasūdana in the Viṣṇu temple in the Dhāra Tīrtha temple complex

⁴² The verse goes as follows – ‘*tuja ardhacaraṇāne mārena.*’ Vyas has translated *ardhacaraṇa* as knee of the deity, which makes the Daityasūdana sculpture from the Dhāra Tīrtha complex a direct influence of the story from the text. Thus, there is enough room to speculate that when the sculpture was made the story existed, rather influenced the sculpture. For reference - Vyas, *Sarvāṅga Paricaya: Jagaprasiddha Vivara Loṇāra*, 65-67.

Comparison between the Mythical Narrative and Sculptural Depiction

The narrative strand shared amongst literature, oral history and figural sculptures is about Viṣṇu being the one who reinstates peace and harmony in the world. The sculptural panel from the *antarāḷa* ceiling of the Daityasūdāna temple predates all the visual and textual expressions of the myth. This panel has been labelled as Daityāri Viṣṇu by Vaishali Welankar.⁴³ She argues that the local myth of Daityasūdāna and Lavaṇāsūra is probably a later interpretation of this pre-existing panel. She mentions this panel along with two Daityāri Viṣṇu icons/sculptures from the *jaṅghā* of Kedāreśvara temple at Dharmapuri in Beed district of Maharashtra.⁴⁴ The main difference between these two Viṣṇu sculptures and the four Daityasūdāna-Lavaṇāsūra sculptures and panel from Lonar is that in the former, Viṣṇu is shown attacking the demon with a mace. The Daityasūdāna form, following the trope of the Narasimha form, does not attack the demon with any weapon, instead, vanquishes the demon by attacking him on the navel. Also, the presence of two females, water flowing from a cow's mouth to wash Viṣṇu's feet are peculiar characteristics of the Daityasūdāna-Viṣṇu. These characteristics set the icons apart from other Daityāri Viṣṇu forms and peculiar to the mythical narrative of Lonar. Infact, the peculiar depiction of Daityasūdāna-Viṣṇu implies that the sculpture was created based a pre-existing myth. Furthermore, the two later period sculptures of Daityasūdāna-Viṣṇu from the *garbhagrha* of Daityasūdāna temple and the Viṣṇu temple in the Dhāra Tīrtha complex suggest that the myth in turn influenced visual depictions. Eventually, the myth was written in the *Loṇāra Māhātmya*. Today, the version of the myth from the text is most common.

Apart from being a form of Viṣṇu, Daityasūdāna, as name of the temple (thus in all probability name of the deity after whom the temple was made) has been associated with Lonar at least from the thirteenth century CE. This can be substantiated based on the evidence found in the two Mahānubhāva texts – *Līlācaritra* and *Sthānapothī*. Both these texts mention the Daityasūdāna temple as a place of

⁴³ Vaishali Welankar, *Vaishnavism an Iconographic Study, Volume I* (Delhi: Agam Kala Prakashan, 2009), 75.

⁴⁴ Welankar, *Vaishnavism Volume I*, 325-326.

residence of Cakradhara Svāmī and Boṇebāi.⁴⁵ Thus, the name Daityasūdana has long been associated with Lonar, through most of the extant material culture at the site.

4.5 Vaiṣṇava Iconography of Lonar

While analysing the creation myth of Lonar, we have already established that Daityasūdana shares affinity with two Viṣṇu *avatāras* — Narasimha and Vāmana-Trivikrama. Going beyond just providing traits to the Daityasūdana-Viṣṇu form, Narasimha and Vāmana-Trivikrama, or perhaps Viṣṇu worship in general is rooted in the region of Lonar, as gleaned from the figural sculptures. To elucidate this, the succeeding sections of the present chapter shall discuss select figural sculptures from the temples of Lonar that create an elaborate picture of the Vaiṣṇava dominance. The placement of these sculptures in the respective temple structures has been discussed earlier.⁴⁶ In this chapter, sculptures shall be discussed based on their religious affiliation, which aids in acquiring the larger picture of the preferred sculptural themes and Puranic stories that consistently re-occur in the history of Lonar. Explaining every icon on the temple structures falls outside the purview of the present discussion. However, it is necessary to understand the overall themes and divisions of wall surfaces in the iconographic programme. The subsequent sections of the chapter enumerate the nature of the Vaiṣṇava icons from temples in Lonar to garner the commonly occurring themes or the recurrent episodes in the figural sculptures. In conjunction with this, the motive is also to understand the iconographic programmes of each of these individual structures.

As discussed earlier, the icons on the exterior of the Daityasūdana temple certainly exhibit a dominance of Vaiṣṇava icons. Likewise, icons and sculptural panels adhering to the Vaiṣṇava pantheon are also found in the Bagīcā temple, Rāmagayā temple, and the Reṇukā, Narasimha and Mahādeva temples of the Dhāra Tīrtha temple complex. Additionally, few broken Viṣṇu sculptures as well as pedestals with Garuḍa icons are found near Kamaḷajā temple, Kumāreśvara temple, and the Mahādeva temple in the Rāmagayā temple complex.

⁴⁵ Tulpule, *Līlācaritra Ekāṅka*, 35, 74; Kolte, *Sthānapothī*, 11-12.

⁴⁶ Refer to Chapter 3 for the temple wise description of icons and refer to Appendix for the placement of icons on individual temples.

We shall begin a theme-wise discussion of icons with the Narasimha sculptures, as these are abundantly found in Lonar temples.

Narasimha Icons from the Temples of Lonar

The depiction of different forms of Narasimha is significantly more in Lonar amongst all the *avatāras* of Viṣṇu. Vidaraṇa, Yoga and Kevala Narasimha — these three forms have been recorded, and Vidaraṇa Narasimha icons outnumber all the others. The Daityasūdana temple *jaṅghā* alone has at least five sculptures identifiable as Vidaraṇa Narasimha (**Fig. 4.5**). Furthermore, the north-facing *bhadra* of the temple also features a prominent icon of Vidaraṇa Narasimha (**Fig. 4.6**). In the absence of *āyudhas*, the identification of the sculptures, particularly those from the *jaṅghā*, relies on their leonine facial features and body postures while defeating the demon Hiranyakaśipu, in unarmed combat. The posture of the deity and the demon vary slightly in every icon. Often, a small image of Garuḍa is depicted at the bottom of the Narasimha sculpture.



Fig. 4.5: Narasimha on the south-facing *jaṅghā* of Daityasūdana temple



Fig. 4.6: Narasimha inside the north-facing *bhadra* of the Daityasūdana temple

A striking sculptural panel of Narasimha comes from the *antarāḷa* ceiling of the temple (Fig. 4.7). This panel, carved on the triangular corbel of the ceiling, exhibits a higher level of sculpting quality compared to any of the figural sculptures on the exterior wall of the temple. The other three corbels have the panels of Daityasūdana-Lavaṇāsūra, one panel possibly depicting a form of Viṣṇu slaying a certain demon and the third panel of Muralīdhara Kṛṣṇa. In this image as well, Narasimha is shown killing the demon Hiraṇyakaśipu in combat, where the deity is holding the demon's arm on the left side and his head with the right arm. Narasimha's right leg is over the demon's body. The upper hands of Narasimha are raised like *abhaya mudrā*, his ferocious bust has a *karaṇḍa mukūṭa*, and below his lower right hand, one can see a *cakra*. Adjacent to Narasimha on the right side is a figure in *namaskāra mudrā*, also wearing a *karaṇḍa mukūṭa*, likely representing Pralhāda as the royal prince and ardent devotee of Narasimha.



Fig. 4.7: Narasimha killing Hiraṇyakaśipu, panel from the *antarāḷa* ceiling of the Daityasūdana temple

Additionally, a sculpture of Yoga Narasimha can be seen on the *udgama* moulding above the *jaṅghā* of the south-facing elevation of the Daityasūdana temple (Fig. 4.8). It is carved on a square protruding block at the centre of the horizontal moulding of the *udgama*. This sculpture, identified by the leonine face of the four-handed deity shown seated in *padmāsana*, appears to hold a *cakra* in the upper right hand but the *āyudha* in the upper left hand is broken. The lower two hands are eroded but suggest a *dharmacakra mudrā*, with the left palm supporting the wrist of the right hand. Two unidentified attendants flank the image.

Yet another notable Narasimha sculpture is also on the same *udgama* moulding on the south elevation of the temple, further from the earlier discussed icon along the *pradakṣiṇā patha* of the temple (Fig. 4.9). Though difficult to classify due to its crude and deformed anatomy, it most likely represents the Kevala Narasimha form. The sculpture shows Narasimha seated on a pedestal with the left leg folded and the right leg hanging down at a right angle by the knee. The feet of both legs are oddly curved, possibly due to an hasty sculpting attempt. With two hands, the right hand holds a round object, likely a *cakra*, while the left-hand palm rests on the left leg knee, a characteristic hand position of Kevala Narasimha sculptures.



Fig. 4.8: Yoga Narasimha on the *udgama* of the south-facing elevation of the Daityasūdana temple



Fig. 4.9: Crude depiction of Kevala Narasimha (?) on *udgama* moulding of the Daityasūdana temple elevation

In the Reṇukā temple in the Dhāra Tīrtha temple complex, a Vidaraṇa Narasimha sculpture can be found on the interior face of the *dvāraśākhā* of the *garbhagrha* cum *maṇḍapa* of the temple. Flanked by Brahmā and Śiva, this depiction suggests that Narasimha here represents Viṣṇu himself in the context of the trinity of Brahmā-Viṣṇu-Śiva (**Fig. 4.10**). This adds significant context to understanding the importance of Narasimha in the Lonar site.



Fig. 4.10: Narasimha from the lintel of the *maṇḍapa* of the Reṇukā temple

The Narasimha temple within the Dhāra Tīrtha complex houses a damaged sculpture of Vidaraṇa Narasimha on the vertical face of the pillar shaft, identifiable based solely on the posture of the sculpture. Additionally, a Vidaraṇa Narasimha sculpture is located in the *garbhagrha* of this temple, although heavily weathered and covered in paint layers, making it difficult to estimate its age accurately. Nevertheless, it likely dates back to the same period as the Daityasūdana sculpture in the Viṣṇu temple within the Dhāra Tīrtha temple complex.

Another noteworthy Narasimha sculpture, albeit fragmented, is a Kevala Narasimha fragment discovered among architectural fragments behind the Mahādeva temple in the Dhāra Tīrtha complex (**Fig. 4.11**). The lower half of the seated sculpture remains intact, displaying characteristic features of a Kevala Narasimha, including the depiction of *āyudhas* such as *gadā*, *śaṅkha*, *padma* on the lotus pedestal and a peculiar sitting posture. This sculpture, likely the presiding deity of a temple's *garbhagrha*, suggests the existence of a shrine dedicated to Narasimha worship in the Dhāra Tīrtha complex or its vicinity.



Fig. 4.11: Fragment of Kevala Narasimha in the Dhāra Tīrtha temple complex

Further evidence of Narasimha sculptures in Lonar is found in the Rāmagayā temple complex. The *uttarāṅga* of the *garbhagrha dvāraśākhā* features images of Narasimha, Vāmana, and Bhūvarāha in the *rathikās* (**Fig. 4.12**). These Narasimha images represent Kevala Narasimha forms, depicted as two-handed deities with prominent leonine facial features, seated posture, and holding a *cakra* in the lower hand (**Fig. 4.13**). Additionally, two small probable Narasimha icons can be seen on the pilaster of *devakoṣṭhas* on the *bhadra* projections of the north-facing and south-facing elevations of the same temple (**Fig. 4.14**). Although small, both these figures have leonine features and postures like Narasimha. These unique depictions in the Rāmagayā temple, datable to the fourteenth to fifteenth centuries, indicate a strong tradition of Vaiṣṇava worship in Lonar during the later periods of temple construction activity.



Fig. 4.12: *Garbhagrha dvārasākhā* of Rāmagayā temple with five *rathikās* on the *uttarāṅga* and Garuḍa on the lintel



Fig. 4.13: Two Kevala Narasimha icons flanking the central *rathikā* on the *uttarāṅga* of the *garbhagrha dvārasākhā* of Rāmagayā temple



Fig. 4.14: Small Narasimha (?) icon (leonine face figure) on the *devakoṣṭha* of *bhadra* projections of the northern and southern elevation of the Rāmagayā temple

Based on the evidence available from Lonar, it can be hypothesised that the usage of the Narasimha form as a motif was a common practice historically. Examples of similar Narasimha icons or icons that have leonine features are found in abundance in the region surrounding Lonar. To name a few, the Śiva temple at Umrad, and Siddheśvara temple at Sultanpur in Buldhana district have these icons on the square members of the pillars. The Sultanpur temple also has Narasimha icons on the pillar capitals. Similarly, Śiva temple No. 1 at Dhotra Nandai in Buldhana district has a Narasimha icon on the *udumbara* of the *maṇḍapa dvāraśākhā*. This practice of depicting Narasimha icons in the non-conventional places of the temple body demands further studies with respect to their iconographic details and sectarian nature.

Significance of Narasimha to the Lonar Landscape

The descriptive discussion in the earlier section about the Narasimha sculptures from Lonar makes it evident that these sculptures pervade the architectural landscape of Lonar. The commonality between the myth of Daityasūdana and the Narasimha form of Viṣṇu has already been discussed in the preceding sections of this chapter. However, the significant Narasimha sculptures on Lonar temples suggest that the association of Narasimha is not limited to sharing tropes with the compelling creation myth of the crater but is allied with the landscape in its own right. By widening the circle of enquiry, it is imperative to explore the genesis, symbological significance and cultic worship of the Narasimha form, with special reference to the region under study. The totemic origin of Narasimha, its early presence as a folk deity of hunter-gatherers of agro-pastoralists, and its association with wilderness, sovereignty, fertility and as a dispeller of evil, darkness and ignorance have been suggested by several authors.⁴⁷ Early leonine sculptures akin to the Narasimha form have been found in the Deccan, especially the region of Andhra Pradesh. Similarly, early leonine figures were found in several places in Maharashtra, like Ter in Dharashiva district, Bhokardhan in Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar district, Mandhal in Nagpur district, and

⁴⁷ M.L.K. Murty, "The God Narasimha in the Folk Religion of Andhra Pradesh South India," *South Asian Studies* 13 (1997); Lavanya Vemsani, "Narasimha, Lord of Transitions, Transformations, and Theatre festivals: God and Evil in Hindu Cosmology, Myth, and Practice," *Journal of Hindu-Christian Studies* 29, 5, (2016); Welankar, *Vaishnavism Volume I*, 261-276.

Paunar in Wardha district.⁴⁸ These are plaques made out of stone, which have been argued to depict fertility symbols like Lajjā Gaurī, Śivaliṅga and bull along with these leonine figures. Vaishali Welankar has argued that the depiction of Lajjā Gaurī with the leonine figures might symbolise the depiction of the altar or earth, as the former has been equated with a lioness in the *Vājasaneyī Samhitā* and *Taittirīya Samhitā*.⁴⁹ It is in these depictions that the genesis of the later mature form of Narasimha can be found. In the process, of what M.L.K. Murty calls the Viṣṇūization of folk cults, Narasimha develops a strong affinity with kingship owing to the acculturation of cultures.⁵⁰ Thus, sculptural depictions of Narasimha have always been practised. Vidaraṇa Narasimha sculptures have been commonly found on temple bodies. For instance, the Vidaraṇa Narasimha sculptures from Maharashtra can be found at Kṛṣṇa temple at Dhodambe, Balsane Temple no. 1 in Nasik district and Kedāreśvara temple at Dharmapuri in Parbhani district of Maharashtra among several other examples.

Welankar establishes the existence of a cult of Kevala Narasimha, prevalent since the fifth century CE with Ramtek at its centre, under the dynastical rule of the Vākāṭakas.⁵¹ A large corpus of Kevala Narasimha icons, datable to a time period post tenth century CE, have been obtained. Hans T. Bakkar observes that during the rule of the Vākāṭakas at Ramtek, the dowager queen Prabhāvatīgupta and her son and successor both patronised Vaishnavism, which is seen in the form of two Narasimha temples on the landscape of Ramtek hill. Bakkar also adds that the Narasimha form was ‘Sanskritised’ by this ruling class, who primarily belonged to the tribal communities that occupied large tracts of the region.⁵²

Against the backdrop of this brief background of the evolution of Narasimha worship, the dominance of Narasimha icons from the temples of Lonar in their varied forms is strikingly significant. There are several factors to be considered here for a holistic understanding of the Lonar site; one is the occurrence of Narasimha as a *daityāri* form of Viṣṇu, along with other *daityāri* forms, especially on the *jaṅghā* of Daityasūdana temple. Also, apart from the northern *bhadra* sculpture, all other *jaṅghā*

⁴⁸ Vaishali Welankar, “The Iconography of Kevala Narasimha: A Reappraisal,” *South Asian Studies* 25, 1 (2009): 113-130, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02666030.2009.9628702>.

⁴⁹ Welankar, 114-117.

⁵⁰ M.L.K. Murty, “The God Narasimha in the Folk Religion of Andhra Pradesh,” 179-180.

⁵¹ Welankar, “The Iconography of Kevala Narasimha,” 117-121.

⁵² Hans T. Bakkar, *Holy Ground: Where Art and Text Meet* (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2019), 154.

sculptures are positioned on the south-eastern quadrant of the temple *jaṅghā* which needs to be noted as a conscious choice of the sculptors. This is the wall section which bears of the sculpture of Daityasūdāna. Secondly, *avatāras* of Viṣṇu like Vāmana, Paraśūrāma, Daityasūdāna, Varāha, Balarāma and Narasimha also appear on this temple *jaṅghā*. Additionally, the Yoga and Kevala forms of Narasimha are part of this temple iconography. The small icons of Narasimha found in the Daityasūdāna temple are noteworthy because the depiction of Narasimha images apart from the temple *jaṅghā*, *devakoṣṭhas*, and pillar shafts have not been systematically documented or studied yet. Rather, examples of Narasimha-like images depicted on non-conventional portions of the temple body, like the *dvāraśākhā*, pillar bases, rectangular blocks of pillar shafts, and pillar capitals, are far from well-understood.

Several such examples have been noted from the temples in the region surrounding Lonar, as well as a few other temples from Maharashtra. Evidence of Narasimha worship from around Lonar in Buldhana is seen at Mehkar, Umrad, Sindkhed, Chandol, and Janori. With respect to the small lintel Narasimha icons found in Rāmagayā temple and Dhāra Tīrtha complex in Lonar, the Vidaraṇa Narasimha on the *uttarāṅga* of the *antarāḷa* of temple no. 5 at Balsane in Dhule district of Maharashtra is comparable. At some places, like the Siddheśvara temple at Sultanpur and Narasimha temple at Umrad in the Buldhana district, there are small Narasimha icons (rather motifs) on the pillars and pillar capitals of the *maṇḍapa*. Mahādeva temple at Dhotra Nandai in Buldhana district has a small Narasimha icon on the *udumbara* of the *dvāraśākhā* of the east-facing *mūkhamaṇḍapa*.

Vāmana – Trivikrama Icons from Lonar

Apart from Narasimha, the Viṣṇu form which is integral to Lonar is the Vāmana-Trivikrama *avatāra*. We have previously discussed the shared characteristics and motifs of the *avataric* nature of Viṣṇu between Trivikrama *avatāra* and the Daityasūdāna-Viṣṇu. Likewise, it is vital to take cognisance of the figural sculptures of this *avatāra* as apparent on the temple walls of Lonar. Compared to Narasimha, the sculptures of this *avatāra* are limited. They are sporadic and do not dominate the iconographic programmes of any temple, but they are significant in understanding the Lonar landscape.

Both the forms, dwarf Vāmana and a panel depicting the entire story of Vāmana-Trivikrama ousting the King Bali, are found in Lonar. The Vāmana sculpture is a *jaṅghā* figure carved on the south-facing *bhadra* projection of the Daityasūdana temple (**Fig. 4.15**). The conspicuously-placed sculpture depicts the dwarf figure with a slight pot belly, a *chatra* above his head, and is shown holding a staff in the right hand and a *kamaṇḍalu* in the left hand.

The Vāmana-Trivikrama panel is on the square member of the *mukhamaṇḍapa* pillar of Reṇukā temple in the Dhāra Tīrtha temple complex (**Fig.4.16**). The panel depicts the mythical story of the *avatāra* through two episodes. The left side of the panel shows dwarf Vāmana standing in front, asking the king for three steps of sacrificial land. The viewer's right side of the panel shows a four-handed figure of Trivikrama with a raised left leg. This raised leg touches the figure of King Bali standing in a forward bending posture, left leg bent at the knee and hands in *namaskāra mudrā*. Below Bali's bent leg is shown a tortoise, indicative of the other world where he is being ousted. The progression of the myth is well-portrayed through the two episodes depicted in this panel.

The other Vāmana icons from Lonar are found in the Rāmagayā temple. One of the Vāmana icons is on the *dvāraśākhā* of the *garbhagrha* of this temple, located in between the *rathikās* of the *uttarāṅga*, like the Narasimha icons (**Fig. 4.17**). One small icon of Vāmana is on the pilaster of the *devakoṣṭha* of the north-facing *bhadra* projection of the temple (**Fig. 4.18**). Both these above-mentioned Vāmana images have been identified based on the dwarfish appearance of the two-handed icon, shown holding a *chatra* in one hand. The joint presence of Vāmana and Narasimha also helps in identifying them as the Viṣṇu *avatāras*.



Fig. 4.15: Vāmana *avatāra* on the south-facing *bhadra* projection of the Daityasūdāna temple



Fig. 4.16: Vāmana-Trivikrama panel on the *mukhamaṇḍapa* pillar of Reṇukā temple



Fig. 4.17: Vāmana in between the *rathikās* on the *uttarāṅga* of the *garbhagrha dvaraśākhā* of the Rāmagayā temple



Fig. 4.18: Vāmana on the *bhadra devakoṣṭha* of Rāmagayā temple

The prominence of Narasimha and Trivikrama is not limited to Lonar, but is also observed in the region of immediate vicinity of Lonar. The vital mention here needs to be made of Mehkar, which is situated to the north-east of Lonar and has been the administrative and political seat through the medieval period.⁵³ Although the extant architectural remains in this town are very scanty at present, through epigraphical and literary references, it is clearly evident that Mehkar was an important religious centre as well. Situated on the banks of the Painganga river, the founding myth of Mehkar is very similar to Lonar, which says that a demon Meghaṅkara performed severe austerities to acquire a semantic boon of immortality. Viṣṇu in the form of Śāraṅgadhara, the one who is the bearer of the Śāraṅga bow, made an appearance to slay the demon and restore the glory of Mehkar. In certain Puranic and Mahānubhāva literary records, the place is called Meghaṅkara, named after the demon.⁵⁴

Among the fragmentary yet significant remains found in Mehkar are two *garbhagr̥ha* deities – Viṣṇu as Śāraṅgadhara (which is locally known as Śāraṅgadhara Bālājī) and a Vidaraṇa Narasimha sculpture. Both these sculptures were accidental discoveries found in the eighteenth and fifteenth century CE, respectively, now enshrined in temples built in approximately the eighteenth-century CE. The presence of these two sculptures defines the religious affiliation of Mehkar. G.B. Deglurkar has identified the Śāraṅgadhara Bālājī image from Mehkar as the Trivikrama *vyūha* of Viṣṇu.⁵⁵

The Vidaraṇa Narasimha sculpture found in Mehkar has stylistic affinity with Narasimha sculptures found at several other locations, for instance, temples at Rajapur-Hingoli, Paithan, Nira-Narsingpura in Maharashtra. All these sculptures have been stylistically dated to periods starting from the ninth century CE. This strong Vaiṣṇava presence in the region surrounding Lonar is noteworthy. An essential mention should be made of the site of Aundha Naganātha, situated in the Hingoli district. Majorly known as a place of Śaiva-Siddhānta tradition, it has been identified

⁵³ The section 2.2 in Chapter 2 of this dissertation sheds light on the strategic location of Mehkar and provides information on different instances through the medieval periods when Mehkar was a military camp, administrative unit and an important trading centre.

⁵⁴ The *Padma Purāṇa* Part VIII, *The Sixth chapter: The story of Raikya*, 2924-25.

⁵⁵ G.B. Deglurkar, *Temple sculpture and Architecture of Maharashtra* (Pune: Aparant, 2019), 339, plate XXVIII.

through inscriptions as Āmardaka *kṣetra* or Āmardaka *maṭha*.⁵⁶ In a small shrine, within the vicinity of the Aundha Naganātha temple, there is a small Kevala Narasimha icon. In addition to this, the *Narasimha Purāṇa*, datable after fifth century CE, with interpolations in the later period, talks about the importance of pilgrimages, incarnations of Viṣṇu, installations and propitiation of Narasimha, and lists the holy places associated with Narasimha.⁵⁷

Significance of Trivikrama and Viṣṇu's Association with other Deities

The myth of Vāmana Trivikrama and Daityasūdana form of Lonar establishes an insignia of 'foot'. The demon being killed by the deity by foot and symbolically the deity's feet later being associated with the place is a trope adopted in Lonar, making the foot an important symbol. In this regard, the three steps of Vāmana-Trivikrama need to be explored in greater detail. Particularly, the strides of Viṣṇu that he takes for Indra, an association which forms in the Vedas, needs to be explored. In the *R̥gveda*, the story says that Indra, as the rain producer god, was aided by Viṣṇu to kill the notorious demon Vṛtra. The strides that Viṣṇu took on behalf of Indra and conquered the world, have been looked upon as the genesis of his Vāmana-Trivikrama *avatāra* as it comes in the *Purāṇas*.⁵⁸ The power assigned to Viṣṇu as a conqueror of the world, is a trait that upholds in his several forms. Kirit Mankodi has argued that the *vajra* in the form of rock in early images of Trivikrama are reminiscent of the relation of Viṣṇu and Indra from the Vedas. The association of Viṣṇu association with fertility and creation is well established and Indra even in puranic sources is the rain God, responsible for getting water on earth. One leading into another, it has led to the formation of this mythological framework that today connects varied aspects of the

⁵⁶ In section 2.4 of Chapter 2, the religious traditions of Aundha Naganātha? have been cursorily discussed. For further reference see, Alexis Sanderson, "The Impact of Inscriptions on the Interpretation of Early Shaiva Literature," *Indo-Iranian Journal* 56, (2013): 211-23.

⁵⁷ In the Chapter 66 and 67 of this text, there is long list of *tīrthas* which includes two names which are significant to our discussion. One is Viraja *tīrtha* on the Pushpabhadra river and Amalaka grama. The text mentions that Viraja *tīrtha* too decays all evils and river Godavari is the supreme everywhere'. The exact locations of these places are not known, but the similarity of the name of Viraja of Lonar site under study is striking as well as the mention of the *tīrtha* along with Godavari river is noteworthy. For reference see, Siddheshwar Jena, *The Narasimha Purana Texts with English Translation and Notes* (Delhi: Nag Publishers, 2009), 648-60.

⁵⁸ Soifer, "The Myths of Narasimha and Vāmana," 113-143.

Lonar crater. Drawing from this we can say that the myth of Viṣṇu in the form of Daityasūdāna slaying the demon Lavaṇāsūra has its germ in several Puranic stories. It might be recapitulated here that Mankodi has noted from the tenth century CE onwards, the Vāmana dwarf form of Viṣṇu was portrayed through sculptures more often than the Trivikrama images.⁵⁹

The feat of the strides taken by Viṣṇu also implies his solar character.⁶⁰ The association of the strides of Viṣṇu is with the sun, comparable to the diffusion of sunlight. Jan Gonda has pointed out that “the general idea underlying the three strides of the god is in all probability the diurnal course of the sun.”⁶¹ This solar character of Viṣṇu becomes particularly important with reference to Lonar because of the debate about the religious affiliation of the Daityasūdāna temple. As previously discussed, the presence of a Sūrya icon in the west-facing of the *bhadra* of the temple has been deduced by some authors that it might be a Sūrya temple earlier. However, the iconographic programme of the temple and the enshrining deity of the *garbhagrha* suggests otherwise. In this background, the presence of Sūrya on the back wall could be looked upon through the strong association of Viṣṇu and Sūrya.

Other Notable Vaiṣṇava Imagery: Viṣṇu Avatāras

Other than the two Viṣṇu *avatāras* discussed in the preceding sections, the Vaiṣṇava stronghold and dominance on the landscape of Lonar is also reflected from the other figural sculptures on the temples. In chapter three, the iconographic programme of Daityasūdāna temple has been descriptively analysed. Congruent to the discussion of the Vaiṣṇava presence of Lonar in the present chapter, it is noteworthy that several sculptures of the Daityasūdāna temple belong to the Vaiṣṇava pantheon. For instance, significant is the presence of the Viṣṇu *avatāras*, Paraśūrāma (**Fig. 4.20**), Balarāma (**Fig. 4.21**), Bhūvarāha (**Fig.4.19**) and Kṛṣṇa. All the *daśāvatāras* are not present in this wall scheme, especially the Matysa and Kūrma *avatāras* who have not been

⁵⁹ Kirit Mankodi, “The Three Strides of Vishnu for His Brother Indra,” in *Cities and Settlements, temples and tanks in the medieval landscape of central India*, ed. Michael Willis, Pankaj Rag, O. P. Misra (Bhopal: Directorate of Archaeology, Archives and Museums Madhya Pradesh, 2014), 208.

⁶⁰ Shrinivas V. Padigar, *Vishnu cult in Karnataka*, (Mysore: Directorate of Archaeology and Museums, 1996), 13-14.

⁶¹ Gonda, *Aspects of Viṣṇuism*, 60-61.

included here; instead, peculiar forms like Paraśūrāma and Balarāma occupy conspicuous positions such as the *bhadra* projections. Similar *daśāvatāra* sculptures are also found in the vicinity of the Mahādeva temple at Parda Darade, situated in Lonar taluka at a distance of about eleven kilometres from the crater.⁶² The temple at Parda Darade has a loose sculpture of Paraśūrāma, Matsya, and Kurma *avatāras*.

At Lonar, the icon of Paraśūrāma is prominent on the *bhadra* projection. The two-armed figure is shown standing in *tribhaṅga* posture and holding a *paraśū* in the right hand and bow in the left hand. Solitary images of Paraśūrāma and Balarāma are rare. Here both these figures are on the *jaṅghā* of Daityasūdana, as *avatāras* of Viṣṇu. In regard to the discussion of Balarāma icons, Welankar has observed that the depiction of Balarāma with a serpent hood is not quite often after the early images, like from Paunar in the Vidarbha region. She remarks that Balarāma in the post tenth century CE appears only as the eighth *avatāra* of Viṣṇu.⁶³



Fig. 4.19: Bhūvarāha



Fig. 4.20: Paraśūrāma

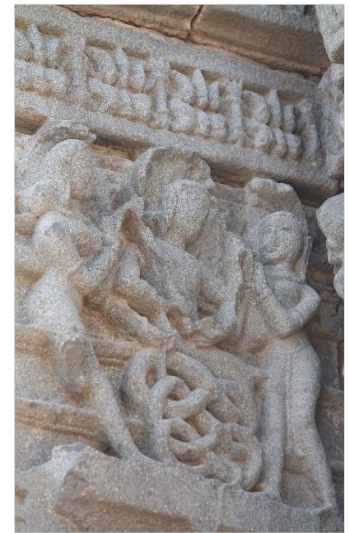


Fig. 4.21 Balarāma

(All from the *jaṅghā* of the Daityasūdana temple)⁶⁴

⁶² Loose *daśāvatāra* sculptures found in the vicinity of the Mahādeva temple at Parda Darade include theriomorphic depictions of Matsya and Kurma *avatāra*. For reference, Deglurkar, *Temple sculpture and Architecture of Maharashtra*, 337.

⁶³ Welankar, *Vaishnavism an iconographic study, Volume I*, 289-90.

⁶⁴ (All from the *jaṅghā* of the Daityasūdana temple) For the exact placement of the icons on the *jaṅghā* of the Daityasūdana temple, refer to Appendix Fig. A.8.

Other Notable Vaiṣṇava Imagery: *Kṛṣṇalīlā* panels

The depiction of the form of Kṛṣṇa and *Kṛṣṇalīlā* panels in Lonar deserve a special mention here. The temple-wise data shows that these sculptures and panels are found not only on the Daityasūdana temple *jaṅghā* but also adorn the square pillar members in the Reṇukā temple in the Dhāra Tīrtha complex (**Fig.4.25 and Fig.4.26**), Vāgha and the Bagīcā temple. Choice of the *Kṛṣṇalīlā* panels in all of Lonar is remarkable as stories like Yamalārjuna, Muralīdhara and Govardhanadhārī Kṛṣṇa, Putanāvadha (**Fig.4.22 and Fig.4.23**) have been repeated several times. Welankar includes all these episodes in the list of “frequently depicted incidents from Krishna saga in Maharashtra.”⁶⁵

In temple structures like Vāgha and Bagīcā, that possess minimal ornamentation let alone inclusion of figural sculptures as part of the temple schemes, the occurrence of these panels is significant. For instance, a crude form of Yamalārjuna story is depicted in the Vāgha temple consisting of a humanized figure in the centre who is attempting to uproot two flanking trees. The rudimentary form conveys the said message of the story, but the choice of its depiction appears to be based on its adoption as motif. In contrast to this, the Reṇukā temple in the Dhāra Tīrtha complex seems to evidently adopt a pattern of sculptures and panels as part of the depictions on the pillars. Furthermore, the elaborate *jaṅghā* sculptures of Muralīdhara (**Fig.4.24**) and Govardhanadhārī Kṛṣṇa are part of the Viṣṇu pantheon, and suggest such a religious affiliation of the site.

⁶⁵ Welankar, *Vaiṣṇavism an iconographic study, Volume I*, 292.



Fig. 4.22: Putanāvadha from the *jaṅghā* of Daityasūdāna temple



Fig. 4.23: Putanāvadha from the *maṇḍapa* pillar of Bagīcā temple

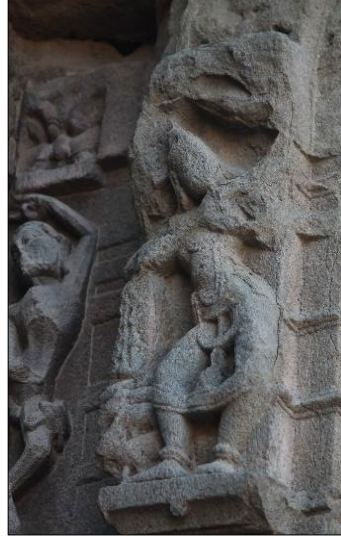


Fig. 4.24 Muralīdhara Kṛṣṇa from the *jaṅghā* of Daityasūdana temple



Fig. 4.25 *Dadhimanthana* Panel from pillar of Reṇukā Temple in Dhāra Tīrtha temple



Fig. 4.26 Muralīdhara Kṛṣṇa panel from the pillar of Reṇukā temple in
Dhāra Tīrtha temple

4.6 Presence of other Sectarian Traditions in Lonar

There is an evident representation of other religious traditions in Lonar. Though few in number the Jaina, Nātha icons found on the temple bodies are noteworthy. The Jaina presence in Lonar has been marked by two *sarvatobhadra* posts, a loose sculpture, a broken pedestal near Pāpahareśvara temple, small Jina figures on the pillar fragments in the Daityasūdana temple complex. The *sarvatobhadra* Jaina posts have been dated to the tenth-eleventh century CE. Jaina figures are not only limited to the Lonar in this region. The two loose Jain sculptures, one reported from Mehkar and other reported from Sindkhed, both are inscribed and have inscriptions belonging to the fourteenth century CE.

Three figures of Matsyendranātha are found from the Daityasūdana temple, of which the image on the *kumbha* has been reported by Vijay Sarde (Fig. 4.29).⁶⁶ Apart from this, two plausible Matsyendranātha figures were found on the pillar fragments in the vicinity of the Daityasūdana temple (Fig.4.30 and Fig.4.31). Sarde has also reported the Matsyendranātha icon on the *maṇḍapa* pillar of Bagīcā temple. In the region, Nātha imagery has been reported from Putalā *bārava* at Sindkhed Raja in Buldhana district, and Khurācī Āī temple at Charthana in Parbhani district, among others.



Fig. 4.27: Jaina *sarvatobhadra* fragment in the Daityasūdana temple complex

⁶⁶ Vijay Sarde, “Archaeological Investigations of the Nātha sampradaya in Maharashtra (c. 12th to 15th century CE),” (Unpublished PhD diss., Deccan college Post graduate & Research Institute (Deemed University), Pune, 2019).



Fig. 4.28: Loose sculpture near the Pāpahareśvara temple complex



Fig. 4.29 Matsyendranātha icon on the *jaṅghā* of the Daityasūdāna temple complex



Fig. 4.30 Broken Matsyendranātha figure on the base of pillar fragment strewn in the Daityasūdāna temple complex, fish motif below the leg of the figure can be seen



Fig. 4.31: Another Matsyendranātha figure (?) – a fish motif can be seen below the human figure seated in a *padmāsana* and *namaskāra mudrā*

4.7 Pilgrimage Circuit of the Lonar Crater

The sanctity of Lonar attracted several pilgrims of various religious faiths, resulting in a pilgrimage circuit, which is tightly woven into the landscape. However, the nature of the pilgrimage route, the prescribed or preferred places on the route, and the changes that it underwent historically, are only cursorily known. Climatic changes and human intervention causing fluctuations in the lake water levels, and the changing forest cover in the Lonar crater, have shaped the cultural landscape *vis-à-vis* the pilgrimage circuit of Lonar. From the discussion in the sections on the mythical stories of Lonar, it is easy to garner that mythology has not singled out a particular location of the crater in its narratives. Architectural forms have paved their way at various locations in the crater. The question to ponder then is, what were the

pilgrimage routes or circuits that operated in this landscape. In the absence of any substantial written records, exploration of evaluating the pilgrimage routes and the access to locations in the crater would be immensely speculative in nature. Having said that, in the succeeding section of the present chapter, we shall attempt in deducing the plausible pilgrimage routes and changes with the motive of comprehending the operation of the temples some of which are even today living shrines. The explorations of the space dynamics shall reveal the changes in the sacred geography of the crater over the period of time.

Līlācaritra provides the earliest and the most essential reference with regard to the pilgrimage and *tīrtha yātrā* of Lonar. During Cakradhara Svāmī's visit to Lonar from Mehkar on the occasion of *somavārī*, Boṇebāi who accompanied him, undertook *aṣṭatīrtha yātrā*.⁶⁷ She seems to have begun this *tīrthayātrā* from the Dhāra Tīrtha temple complex. From other references in the text and based on stylistic connotations, the temples of Kumāreśvara, Yajñeśvara, Pāpahareśvara, and Kamaḷajā Devī must have been present in some form during Cakradhara and Boṇebāi's visit. Thus, her *aṣṭatīrtha yātrā* is likely to have included some or all of these temple sites as well as some other temples or *kuṇḍas* or even natural *tīrthas*. Though we do not have the precise information of the type or the names of sites included in this *yātrā*. However, we can certainly say based on the stylistic ground that the temples along the north-western circumference of the lake were not present during Cakradhara's times, and hence, cannot be part of this pilgrimage route. On the contrary, a comment can be made on the prevalence of the pilgrimage to Lonar on the occasion of *somavatī amāvasyā*. That, it was a common practice among all people including royalty, is known from the *Līlācaritra* in which Yādava King Kṛṣṇadeva also visited Lonar on the occasion of *somavārī*.⁶⁸

In the last hundred years, the route of accessing the temples and sacred spots in the crater, begins from the Dhāra Tīrtha and halts at Kamaḷajā temple, with Kumāreśvara temple, Yajñeśvara temple, Vāgha temple, Mora temple, and the

⁶⁷ Refer to *līlā* no. 69 in the *Līlācaritra* when Cakradhara visits Lonar on account of *somavārī* (*somavatī amāvasyā*) along with Boṇebāi. See, S.G. Tulpule ed., *Līlācaritra Ekāṅka* (Pune: Suvichar Prakashan Mandal, 1964), 35.

⁶⁸ Refer to *līlā* no. 39. See, S.G. Tulpule ed., *Līlācaritra Ekāṅka* (Pune: Suvichar Prakashan Mandal, 1964), 22, 63.

Rāmagayā temple constituting the important nodes enroute this journey. Though this is the most chosen path to descend into the crater, there were some other routes as well which were used to traverse the landscape. Y. M. Kale in the early twentieth century informs that there were approximately three to four access points to descend.⁶⁹ The commonly-known path might have always been the one that leads from Dhāra Tīrtha. Nevertheless, other roads might have led to individual temples. One such route led through the wilderness in the hill slopes behind the Kamaḷajā Temple. Until quite recently, groups of people whose *kuladevī* was Kamaḷajā, came to this temple, and preferred this route over the principal Dhāra Tīrtha route. These groups come from different sub-regions of Marathwada and Vidarbha.

Currently, several people come to Dhāra Tīrtha for different purposes—to cleanse themselves of their sins, to find solace, and as tourists to imbibe the environment of the landscape; young children come here to explore new places. The creation myth that the river appeared on earth to clean Viṣṇu's feet has led to the belief that a dip in the holy water at Dhāra Tīrtha purifies an individual from all his/her dirt, sins, and wrongdoings. Hence, undertaking a pilgrimage here is considered mandatory by many people. Every year, approximately in months from May- to July, the Gaṅgā Daśerī festival is celebrated at the Dhāra Tīrtha. This is a ten-day celebration in which the perennial freshwater stream, locally known as *dhāra* or Gaṅgā Bhogāvatī is revered as the holy river Ganga. During this festival, the honour of offering prayers and performing rituals, are hereditarily conferred upon ten distinctive families, for ten consecutive days. Conventionally, the festival commences after the Kanitkar family of Lonar, who were Jahagirdars with the Nizam, performs rituals on the first day.⁷⁰ During this festival, the footfall of Lonar is approximately ten thousand people every day.

Apart from this, on other fairs and festivals like the Sailani Baba *yātrā* and Sakhārāma Mahārāja *yātrā*, that happen in the nearby villages throughout the year, a dip in the holy Dhāra is considered very important by the pilgrims. The Sailani *yātrā*, locally also known as the *urus*, is a festival held every year in March during the *holikā dahana*. In honour of Sharif Sailani Shah Baba, the festival is celebrated near by the Pimpalgaon Sarai village in Buldhana district. Several pilgrims coming for this yatra

⁶⁹ Yadava Madhav Kale, *Loṇār Varṇana* (Satara: Sahastrakāra Press, 1903), 7.

⁷⁰ Refer to section 2.2 in Chapter 2 for the political historical background.

pay a visit to Lonar. The Sakhārāma Mahārāja *yātrā* is held at Loni in Washim district, during December or January every year. The water from Dhāra of Lonar is carried to this yatra during the festival.

In the month of Śrāvaṇa (August-September), men from nearby towns like Mehkar, Risod, and Palaskhed are sent to get *kāvaḍa* (a practice of carrying water from the holy water source) from the Dhāra Tīrtha in a pot/pitcher made of dried pumpkin for Śiva temples in their towns. Some of these practices have been discontinued due to jurisdictional changes, but people still come to Dhāra Tīrtha to fetch the holy water. Likewise, another significant event at the Lonar crater is the Navarātrī festival (October-November) which is predominantly celebrated at the Kamaḷajā Devī Temple near the Lonar saltwater lake. The nine-day festival invites people from faraway places to visit the *āice deula*, literally meaning ‘mother’s temple’. Owing to this unique nomenclature for the temple, the saltwater lake is also called the ‘*āica taḷa*’, literally meaning mother’s pond or lake.

4.8 Summary

The genesis and the development of the site of Lonar is certainly rooted in Vaiṣṇavism. At the same time, it exhibits characteristics of other religious systems or traditions that suggest the multivalent nature of the site. After presenting all the religious traditions and their translations in built forms, the hypothesis at the beginning of the chapter needs to be recapitulated. It has been suggested at the beginning of this chapter that after the thirteenth century CE, approximately after the building of the Daityasūdāna temple, the Vaiṣṇava leaning of Lonar has been reiterated through different structures. The *Māhātmya* of Lonar also seems to have been written in order to reinstate the glory and emphasize the antiquity of the site. When the significance and popularity of Lonar was increasing as a regional pilgrimage centre, its Vaiṣṇava character seems to have been given an enhanced value. The cosmos of Lonar evolved as a *tīrtha* through a long and complex process. The geological phenomenon appropriated into the sacred landscape is exhibited through the architectural forms.

Chapter 5

Observations and Concluding Remarks

5.1 The Lonar Crater Landscape: Concepts and Methodology

Around 50,000 years ago, a celestial impact reshaped the Earth's surface, giving rise to one of its most captivating geological marvels: the Lonar crater. Nestled within forested slopes and surrounded by freshwater springs, the crater has evolved into a unique landscape that holds sacred significance. While the initial physical impact created the crater, subsequent human interactions and influences have shaped and enriched its sacred geography over time. At this juncture, the physical geography of the crater can certainly be viewed as a 'medium' as proposed by Christopher Tilly. Tilly puts forth a viewpoint of "regarding space as a medium rather than a container for action, something that is involved in the action and cannot exist apart from the events and activities within which it is implicated."¹ In this regard, the Lonar meteorite crater is this 'space as a medium' for the creation and sustenance of a sacred landscape; the crater is integral to a pilgrimage circuit and acts as a central character in the oral narratives that internalise the physical landscape of the crater.² To view the Lonar site through this lens allows us to perceive the crater as a medium itself, which is involved in all the cultural narratives and symbolically translated into architectural forms. A comprehensive set of religious architecture has evolved in the landscape,

¹ Christopher Tilly, *A Phenomenology of Landscape: Paths places and monuments* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1994), 10.

² Referring to the 'crater as a space' allows us to focus on the layered formation of the crater landscape. In a more restricted manner, the concepts of space and place are dichotomous, where place refers to the geographical and physical aspects while space refers to the constructed aspects. However, to look into its details, one should realise that every location has a place and space aspect associated with it. As per context, time frame, and situations, the association of a certain thing, such as a space, place, or both, changes. For instance, the crater is a physical entity and thus qualifies as a place. However, at times of appropriation through myths, the Lonar crater becomes a space germane to the narratives. A detailed discussion on the concepts of space and place, a historiography of their development is presented in the book, *Spaces and Places in Western India*. The book delves into the geographical, historical, and cultural aspects of the western region of India. It explores how spaces are shaped, perceived, and represented in this region, considering natural landscapes and human-built environments. For reference, see, Bina Sengar and Laurie Hovell McMillin, eds., in *Spaces and Places in Western India: Formations and Delineations* (Taylor & Francis, 2019), 1-5.

which serves as the primary material evidence to reconstruct the historical timeline of the site and has been chosen as the vantage point for the present research. Every structure serves a different purpose and is part of a different story in the history of Lonar. Hence the term, Lonar crater landscape, is specifically used in the present research, which implies an all-encompassing natural, sacred, religious, social, and architectural landscape.

This research adopted the methodology of a site-contextualized study to understand the process of the formation of the integrated landscape into an important *tīrtha* throughout the medieval period. The approach is purposefully termed a site-contextualized study instead of a site-centric study because it befits the need to consider the immediate context of the architectural forms. Here, the context is applicable in different perspectives. For the site as a whole, the physical context of the crater boosts the formation of sacred geography. For the built environment alongside the physical context, the socio-political-religious contexts also matter.³ This helps in understanding the reasons behind the existence of all architectural forms.

5.2 Chapters' Summary

Through the preceding four chapters, an attempt was made to investigate the *longue durée* settlement of the Lonar crater. In the introductory Chapter 1, the emphasis was to foreground the contiguous study area, present the previous studies pertaining to the crater and identify question that emerge from the gaps in previous research. The primary research objectives centre around the need to map, analyse, and demonstrate the architectural morphologies of the built environment of Lonar. Furthermore, the objective was to use the architectural spaces as a tool to understand the religious landscape of Lonar. Accordingly, to meet these aims and objectives, the research methodology implemented for the present study was an exhaustive and in-depth primary documentation of the material culture at the site, substantiated by a thorough survey of the secondary resources related to the site. Chapter 2 presents a political, religious and architectural background of the region that contains Lonar, which lies within the modern-day Maharashtra state. This chapter provides a historical

³ Katherine E. Kasdorf, "Forming Dorasamudra: Temples of the Hoysala Capital in context." Unpublished PhD diss., Columbia University, 2013), 35-7.

framework that allows for the contextualisation of the site. The historical survey of the surrounding larger region aids in identifying the paradigms and the shifts that are likely to have affected Lonar.

Chapter 3 deals with the primary material evidence of the extant religious architecture at Lonar that forms the crux of the research. Eighteen locations, distributed in four distinct geographical zones of the crater, comprising about thirty-four extant structures, comprise the primary data. All these structures and the locations containing them have been discussed in detail with the motive of delineating the typologies of the architectural forms. In other words, the chapter entails a typological study of the built environment of Lonar, which puts forth the salient features of all structures. The ensuing Chapter 4 situates Lonar in the mythological narratives and religious traditions that prevailed at the site and attempts a cognisance of the pilgrimage circuit of the site. The iconographic programmes from the temple bodies, as well as the oral and textual narratives, formulate the necessary tools to investigate the immediate context of the built environment. The pilgrimage routes provide information about access to the built forms and their individual historical journey within the contiguous area of the crater.

In this final Chapter 5, vital observations collated as part of the research shall be enumerated. These observations, deduced through the process of understanding the cultural landscape of Lonar in its entirety, bring forth some vital concluding remarks about the crater landscape. These remarks enhance our understanding of the cultural history of the imposing geological phenomenon of the Lonar crater and give impetus to similar enquiries at other sites in varied regions.

5.3 Crater and its Architecture

The contiguous study area of research, which is mentioned in previous discussions, is delimited to the Lonar crater, meaning that it comprises all the geophysical units created during the formation of the crater owing to a meteorite impact. Prima facie, it appears that there are a few temples scattered in the magnificent physical landscape of the crater. Scientific studies pertaining to the crater often refer to its architecture as just another facet which is part of Lonar. However, a nuanced study reveals that the built environment is not scattered anywhere in the crater geography. Rather, these

built forms make vital nodes for reconstructing a historical timeline of Lonar. Alongside temples, other religious structures of Lonar have also accentuated its religious identity and fuelled its importance as a *tīrtha*. Though there have been art historical enquiries of Lonar architecture, the lacuna in the previous studies is that they lack in presenting a holistic picture of the cultural landscape of the crater.

Some of the past scholarship has categorised temples of Lonar into two groups; the first group majorly comprising the Daityasūdāna temple, and the second consisting of all the other crater temples.⁴ This distinction becomes problematic, on at least two levels. First, it singles out the Daityasūdāna temple as a non-crater temple, and homogenises the temples proximal to the saltwater lake under the umbrella term of crater temples. It has been emphasized before in through the present study that the Lonar crater is not restricted to the saltwater lake and the surrounding hilly area only. The crater geography also comprises the current village settlement, which is partially occupying the ejecta blanket of the crater. Furthermore, owing to its association with the creation myth of Lonar, conceptually, Dadityasūdāna is as much of a Lonar crater temple in comparison to any other structure in the crater environs. In addition to this, it has to be borne in mind that the temples proximal to the saltwater lake are far from understood for their heterogeneous architectural typologies. Secondly, the categorisation of Lonar architecture, as available from previous studies, makes use of ornamentation patterns of the temples as a distinguishing factor. Categorically, this exercise alienates the Daityasūdāna temple from other structures in Lonar, owing to the profuse decoration on its temple body. Other temples are generally excluded from studies and treated as non-worthy, plain, crude structures.

In order to address these several issues of the architecture of Lonar, this research strives to give equal weightage to all the structures as artefacts in understanding the history of Lonar. Foremost, the research refutes categorisation based purely on architectural patterns and period of construction. The categorisation adopted in chapter three is based on the spatial distribution of the structures within the

⁴ Henry Cousens, *Medieval Temples of Dakhan*, (New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, 1998), 68-72; A.V. Naik, "Structural Architecture of the Deccan," in *New Indian Antiquary*, eds. S.M. Katre and P.K. Gode, IX, nos.7-12 (Bombay: Karnatak Publishing House, 1947), 299-300, 302.

crater environs, as their locations have a direct bearing on the accessibility and preservation of the structures. All of the extant religious architecture in Lonar was recorded during the course of the study. Though temples constitute a large percentage of the built environment, the *maṭhas* and *bāravas* perform separate functions that accentuate the religious landscape.

5.4 Spatio-temporal Distribution of Religious Architecture

The architectural forms dot the crater landscape at different spatio-temporal levels. Maximum extant temples are surrounding the saltwater lake, namely Kamaḷajā temple complex, Vāgha, Mora, Bagīcā, Copadā, Deśamukha, Muṅgaḷyā, Ambarakhānā temples. Of these, apart from Kamaḷajā, other temples are singular monuments, that is, there exists only one temple at one location. To put it in other words, as one descends towards the crater, large complexes like the Dhāra Tīrtha, with many temples in one place, become rarer, and single temples become common. One of the primary reasons for so many temples encircling the lake could be that the saltwater lake itself was regarded as *nābhi tīrtha*, a nomenclature from the mythical narrative.⁵ Kale, in his book, labels the Lonar Lake as *nābhi tīrtha urf khāryā pāṇyāce sarovara (nābhi tīrtha alias saltwater lake)*.⁶

At this juncture, it is necessary to note a few interesting references from the *Līlācaritra*. When Cakradhara Svāmī met Yādava King Kṛṣṇadeva, according to S.G. Tulpule's reading, Svāmī was residing at *tārā tīrtha*.⁷ On the contrary, *Līlācaritra* versions edited by Narendramuni Ankulnerkar and Anne Feldhaus argue that the meeting between Svāmī and the King happened at Dhāra Tīrtha.⁸ In another incident the place where Cakradhara Svāmī took a halt while Boṇebāi undertook the *aṣṭatīrtha*

⁵ Prakashchandra Vyas, *Sarvāṅga Paricaya: Jagaprasidhha Vivara: Loṇāra* (Latur: Sanskruti Prakashan, 2000), 4. It is believed that Daityasūdāna Viṣṇu attacked the demon Lavaṇāsūra on his navel (literally meaning *nābhi*), and later the demon's body disintegrated to form salts. For further reference see *Loṇāra Māhātmya urfa Vīraja Māhātmya*, by Saccidāśrama Svāmī (Pune: Dattaprasarak Publications, 1892), *adhyāya* 1.

⁶ Yadava Madhava Kale, *Loṇāra Varṇana*. (Satara: Sahastrakāra Press, 1903), 76

⁷ S.G. Tulpule, *Līlācaritra Ekāṅka* (Pune: Suvichar Prakashan Mandal, 1964), 22-23.

⁸ Narendramuni Ankulnerkar (ed.). *Śrī Mhāimabhaṭa sankalita Līlācaritra second edition*. (Nagpur: Akhil Bharatiya Mahānubhāva Mahamandal, 2019), 39; Anne Feldhaus ed. and trans, *Mhaimbhat God at Play, Volume 1* (Cambridge, Massachusetts; London, England: Murty Classical Library of India Harvard University Press, 2024), 80-1.

yātrā is referred to by all as Dhāra Tīrtha.⁹ Both these *līlās* are from the *ekāṅka* (solitary period) of Cakradhara's life, meaning that, these two incidents took place just a few years apart.

Thus, there is some ambiguity about the the identity of *tārā tīrtha*, as it could either be another name for the Dhāra Tīrtha or be a completely separate identity. If the second possibility holds true, in all probability, *tārā tīrtha* is the name for the saltwater lake because its identity as *nābhi tīrtha* is found only in the *mahātmya* text. The saltwater lake is not mentioned in the *Līlācaritra*. It might have so happened that during their first meet when Cakradhara was travelling alone to Lonar, he halted near the lake, while later, when Boṇebāi accompanied him, he sought rest at Dhāra Tīrtha. In both cases, the significance of the saltwater lake is highlighted, which might also be one of the reasons that led to an increased temple-building activity near the shoreline of the lake. This also highlights that the construction and location of the temples are driven by multiple factors.

Within the last decade, most of the temples along the periphery of the saltwater lake have been submerged in the increasing water levels of the lake. This means that, during and after the construction of these temples, the lake waters had receded. Earlier there were agricultural fields in the vicinity of these temples, which also implies that until a decade ago, the temples along the lake could be easily accessed, probably were also under worship and might have been used as places to halt, reside or meditate. As per information provided by locals, during the several *yātrās* happening in Lonar, many ascetics used to reside in these temples until recent times.

Temple buildings certainly outnumber other types of architecture, but *kuṇḍas* are built at the locations of freshwater springs, which were regarded as *tīrthas*. The *kuṇḍas*, which survive today, are mostly part of larger temple complexes. However, the location of these *kuṇḍas*, implicitly the location of freshwater springs, is the reason for the development of elaborate architectural complexes. There are many temple complexes built to harness the sacrality of the freshwater springs. The example

⁹ Here, even Tulpule says, '*maga dhāresī āsana*' (then halts at Dhāra). For reference, Tulpule, *Līlācaritra Ekāṅka*, 35.

that befits this argument is the Dhāra Tīrtha complex, which thrives even today owing to the perennial stream. Additionally, the Rāmagayā temple complex is also a suitable example because it is believed that the location of the temple and *kuṇḍa* is the spot where Rāma, during his pilgrimage, shot an arrow and water gushed forth from the ground. This highlights the significance of the location of the temple or *kuṇḍa* in the wider context of the landscape of Lonar.

After much discussion on the spatial distribution of the religious architecture in the crater environs and its significance, it is essential to comment on the temporal distribution of the architectural forms in the historical timeline of Lonar. As part of Chapter 3 of this dissertation, the time-frame for the material evidence of Lonar which spans from the eleventh to the nineteenth centuries CE. From before and after this time period, no major constructions within Lonar survive. Within this time-frame, the twelfth to fifteenth centuries CE can be identified as the period of proliferation in the history of Lonar. Three broad phases of construction activity are identifiable. The first phase belongs to the eleventh to late thirteenth centuries CE, the second phase spans from the early fourteenth to early or mid-sixteenth centuries CE, and the third phase spans over the late sixteenth to late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries CE. These phases are not water tight compartments

As mentioned above, the three broad phases have been marked based on stylistic comparisons within the site of Lonar and with examples of temple sites from the region. The motive of deducing these phases is to provide a broad time frame for the constructions and take cognisance of the long period under study. The phased development of the architecture and its associated religious patterns show that the site has not been partial to any one location or particular time period. There has been continuous building activity in Lonar, whilst the patterns of architecture, morphologies, and typologies may differ throughout the long span.

5.5 Salient Features of the Architecture

The broad phases identified in the building activity of Lonar, each possess their own salient characteristics. In Chapter 3 of this dissertation, we have covered the diagnostic details of every structure as well as patterns in every typology of

architectural forms. In the present section, we shall recapitulate the salient features according to the broad phases that can be discerned within Lonar architecture.¹⁰

Phase I

The earliest phase of known architectural activity in Lonar, the eleventh to late thirteenth centuries CE, is the most crucial phase in the cultural history of Lonar. The structures datable to this phase are Pāpahareśvara temple, Yajñeśvara temple, Daityasūdāna temple, Kamaḷajā temple, Kumāreśvara temple, the eastern side of Dhāra Tīrtha temple complex and Limbī Bārava. Though the extant fabric of Kamaḷajā and Kumāreśvara temples do not belong to the first phase, the fragmentary remains in the form of pillars, sculptural remains, and pedestals coupled with the literary evidence suggest that the first constructions at the locations of these temple certainly happened sometime during the early to middle of thirteenth century CE.

The dating of the structures belonging to this phase is based on a stylistic comparison with structures from other regions and the written records of Lonar. For instance, to date, the Yajñeśvara temple and the remains of the *chatrī* in the Pāpahareśvara temple complex, the Viṣṇu temple at Satgaon Bhusari can be used for comparison. The pillar typologies, ceiling patterns, ground plans and ornamentation patterns share an affinity with each other. The Viṣṇu temple at Satgaon Bhusari has been dated to the twelfth century CE. Alongside, Yajñeśvara temple draws affinity with many temples of Gujarat from the eleventh -twelfth century CE. The *śikhara* remains found near Yajñeśvara are akin to the *maṇḍapa* remains found in temple no. 4 at Balsane in Dhule district of Maharashtra.

The ground plans of the temples of this phase consists of *garbhagrha*, *antarāḷa*, and square *maṇḍapa* with a central *catuskī* or astylar *maṇḍapas*. For *śikhara*, the plans and elevations of Daityasūdāna and Yajñeśvara certainly suggest that they had the Bhūmija style of *śikhara*. Based on the exterior wall treatments, the extant pillars and other architectural fragments, it can be speculated that figural ornamentation was commonly adopted for surface decoration. In terms of building,

¹⁰ Refer to figure A.25 in the appendix for a table showing the architectural details of only temples at Lonar.

Yajñeśvara and the *chatrī* of Pāpahareśvara temple certainly pre-date Daityasūdāna and Kumāreśvara temple.

Phase II

The second phase is the most interesting phase in the building activity of Lonar. It was during this time period, from the early fourteenth through early to mid-sixteenth centuries CE, that Lonar witnessed a spurt in religious buildings. Several temples located along the periphery of the Lonar saltwater lake belong to this period.

Interestingly, unlike the first phase, the temple buildings belonging to this period have striking stylistic similarities with each other. Orthogonal temples, which are *pañcaratha* or *saptaratha* on plan consisting of a *garbhagrha*, *antarāḷa*, *sabhāmaṇḍapa* connected to *mukhamaṇḍapas* on three sides, built on a raised plinth with plain exterior walls decorated with offset moulding only, simplistic square sectioned pillars and Bhūmija *śikharas* realised in brick. Brick Bhūmija *śikharas* is most noteworthy, different and striking feature of the temples. Such *śikharas* are abundantly found in the region of Maharashtra, especially in the temples built in late thirteenth century CE and beyond. However, the typology of such structures and the vocabulary of *śikharas* is far from well understood. The large corpus of these temple structures awaits thorough documentation and analysis.

The stone fabric masonry of all the temples constituting this phase, has a rough surface finish where the stone courses have relief borders, which are sometimes polished than the inner surface. Approximately ten inches in height, the stone courses are cut out in a peculiar manner where the horizontal stone is connected to the next moulding of the band.

The *bhadra* projections are twice the size of the *karṇa* projections, and the intermediate *pratiratha* projections are smaller than the *karṇas*. The projections are devoid of any figural or geometric decorations. Also, the projections are not separated by *salilāntaras* but are equidistantly recessed from each other, providing the wall scheme with a protruding effect. This protrusion is further accentuated by two *pratibhadra* offsets flanking the *bhadra* projections, making sure that a wider wall surface does not appear austere. The plain treatment of the temples might also make them appear smaller, but that need not be the case. In fact, the overall space that such

a temple occupies is large enough to allow people to conglomerate in its *maṇḍapa*. This is likely to be one of the usages of such temple structures, that is, the temples served as *dharmaśālās* in the sense of its utilitarian values. Particularly in a place like Lonar, where ascetics choose to stay in secluded spaces, away from the more profane religious areas like the Dhāra Tīrtha, these temples situated along the periphery of the saltwater lake and amidst the wilderness of the crater, must have been a sought-after location for the ascetics.

The temples that fit into this above-discussed second phase of Lonar architecture are the Rāmagayā temple complex, Ambarakhānā temple, Muṅgalyā, Deśamukha and Copāḍā temples. Partial renovations done to few temples like Kamaḷajā may also befit this category. However, the characteristics discussed above are not limited to only these temples in Lonar. On the contrary, this specified temple building type emerged as a regional idiom in Maharashtra, starting probably in the late thirteenth century CE. The Gokuleśvara temple at Charthana in Parbhani district, Mahādeva temple at Helas in Jalna district, Cintāmaṇī temple at Jaipur Kothali, Mahādeva temple or temple no 2 and 3 at Dhotra Nandai, Mahādeva temple at Parda Darade, Narasimha temple at Chandol and Siddheśvara temple at Sultanpur in Buldhana district as also Kātreśvara temple at Katar Khatav, Rāmaliṅga temple at Gursale in Satara district are select examples.

Phase III

The third phase, spanning over the late sixteenth to late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries CE, can be looked at as a period of palimpsest within the architectural history of Lonar. This is the period marked by a large number of restorations and reconstructions undertaken within Lonar. For instance, the reconstructions done in brick on the exterior walls of the Yajñeśvara temple and the superstructure of the Daityasūdana temple. The existing temple forms were altered with new material. The alterations in the Daityasūdana temple suggest an alternative use of the temple space. The newly added *prākāra* and gateway inform us that probably the entrance to the temple was changed. These changes are plausibly also indicative of the changes in polity and settlement patterns of Lonar town.

Within the last century or so, many structures in Lonar were probably used as temporary residential spaces. This can be speculated from the late twentieth century CE photographs by British officers, especially of the Tripuruśācā Maṭha in the Daityasūdāna temple complex and the Rāmagayā temple, where one can see the temporary dry stone masonry walls built to enclose the semi-open spaces. On the whole, it can be concluded that through all the medieval time periods, the religious spaces of Lonar were used and re-used, instating its identity as a *tīrtha*, an important pilgrimage centre and essential religious site.

5.6 Religious Traditions of the Lonar crater

The religious context of Lonar is predominantly centred around the worship of Viṣṇu. This is evident in various aspects, such as the attribution of the cosmic creation of the site to Viṣṇu, various names of the site associated with Viṣṇu, and its significance as a *tīrtha*, highlighting Lonar's primary identity as a place of Vaiṣṇava affiliation. This association with Viṣṇu has deep roots in the landscape and appears to have gained prominence from the thirteenth century CE onward. A visual embodiment of the myth of Lonar in a sculpture in the Daityasūdāna temple is evidence of the crystallisation of the mythical story of Lonar's origin and Viṣṇu's key role in it. Sculptural findings, like the *garbhagrha* image of Kevala Narasimha and the potential presence of a Viṣṇu shrine near Dhāra Tīrtha, provide concrete examples of Vaiṣṇava worship practices in the Lonar crater landscape. However, tracing the trajectory of Viṣṇu worship in Lonar beyond the sixteenth to seventeenth century CE becomes a little challenging due to limited historical documentation. It is noted that in the nineteenth century CE, the buried Daityasūdāna temple was discovered, coinciding with the composition of the Marathi text *Loṇāra Māhātmya*, which marked a revival in Lonar's historical significance. Efforts during this period aimed to uncover Lonar's antiquity, reaffirming its status as a centre of Viṣṇu worship. Alongside, early records from the eleventh - twelfth century CE also exhibit a diverse religious landscape in Lonar. Śaiva śākta traditions were prevalent in the landscape; Yajñeśvara and Kamaḷajā temples indicate the coexistence of these traditions. Even as Daityasūdāna Viṣṇu occupied the status of the primary deity of Lonar, at least from the thirteenth century CE onwards, Kamaḷajā Devī is the family deity for people in Lonar. The aniconic

form of the goddess in the *garbhagrha* of the Kamaḷajā Devī temple and its strategic location to the southern end of the saltwater lake, provides a sacred significance.

While tangible remains of Jaina temples in Lonar are scarce, fragments found at sites like the Pāpahareśvara temple and Daityasūdāna temple suggest an active presence of Jaina religious practices. These remnants, possibly dating back to the tenth to eleventh century CE based on stylistic analysis, highlight Lonar's early engagement with Jaina worship, contributing to its diverse religious heritage.

5.7 Settlement Patterns, Pilgrimage Routes

An understanding of the fabric and formation of the built environment of Lonar has been achieved through focussed art historical enquiries as part of the present study. The observations retrieved through the study, presented in this chapter, bring forth some larger questions. Especially in the case of Lonar as a *tīrtha*, it is imperative to ponder on the settlement patterns that it witnessed and the nature of the pilgrimage at this site. While we have emphasised that Lonar witnessed a near to continuous building activity over a period of time within its defined geography, it is also necessary to seek answers to questions of the usage of these architectural spaces, their patronage and overall settlement of Lonar.

Although there are only a few references available to comprehend these aspects, nevertheless it is worth exploring the changes in the settlement through historical periods. This shall in turn be useful to expound upon the socio-economic history of the crater.

As evidenced through literary records, Lonar appears to have held greater significance as a religious centre than a political-administrative unit. It was a place of pilgrimage, religious gatherings, ascetic practices, performing rites and rituals, and seeking solace, however, probably less of a place of permanent residence. The administrative counterpart of it was mostly Mehkar in the Buldhana district. Mehkar is situated on the banks of Painganga river, and was on the route that connected the Deccan to Northern regions. Lonar's proximity to Mehkar is not only geographically but the two places are also connected on a religious landscape. A pilgrimage route that began from Paithan (modern Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar district) and travelled

towards Riddhipur (modern Amravati district), was likely to halt at both Mehkar and Lonar.¹¹

The presence of the crater attracted economic interest from local traders, leading to the settlement of trading communities in Lonar. The production of soap using saltpetre and minerals from Lonar Lake added to its economic activities. Nearby areas like Khamgaon (Buldhana district), Karanja Lad (Washim district), and Mehkar were known for cotton and fabric production, with dyed fabrics brought to Lonar for washing.¹² Historical records such as the *Ain-i-Akbari* mention Lonar as part of the *sarkar* of Mehkar, contributing significantly to the state revenue.¹³ Even today, many Jaina families in Lonar recall their ancestors migrating there for work opportunities and economic prospects.

The *Līlācaritra* is a significant source for understanding the pilgrimage to Lonar. It narrates Boṇebāi's *aṣṭatīrtha yātrā* during Cakradhara Svāmī's visit, likely starting from the Dhāra Tīrtha temple complex.¹⁴ Temples like Kumāreśvara, Yajñeśvara, Pāpahareśvara, and Kamaḷajā Devī were probably part of this pilgrimage. The absence of mention certain temples on the northwestern side suggests they were not built during Cakradhara's time. The narrative also mentions Yādava King Kṛṣṇadeva's pilgrimage to Lonar on *somavārī*, indicating it was a common practice among people, including royalty, during that period.

The information of earlier settlement can be also be cursorily speculated from the references provided in the text *Sthānapothī*. The text explains that the medieval Lonar settlement, here called *nagara* (literally meaning town), had three gateways, and Cakradhara used all these to exit. Further, the text also mentions that there was a '*dhāraakaryāce ghara*', meaning the residence of the person in charge of Dhāra Tīrtha, was situated to the north of the temple complex.¹⁵ This would mean that the

¹¹ Narendramuni Ankulnerkar (ed.). *Śrī Mhāimabhaṭa sankalita Līlācaritra second edition*. (Nagpur: Akhil Bharatiya Mahānubhāva Mahamandal, 2019), 53. In this *līlā* Cakradhara is explaining his disciples the route to be undertaken.

¹² Yadava Madhava Kale, *Loṇāra Varṇana* (Satara: Sahastrakara Press, 1903), 4-7.

¹³ Abul Fazl Allami, *The Ain-i-Akbari Volume II*. trans. Colonel H. S. Jarret (Calcutta: The Asiatic Society of Bengal 1891), 287-88.

¹⁴ S.G. Tulpule ed., *Līlācaritra Ekāṅka* (Pune: Suvichar Prakashan Mandal, 1964), 35.

¹⁵ V.B. Kolte ed., *Sthānapothī* (Malkapur: Arun Prakashan, n.d.), 11-12.

residential place was somewhere between the Dhāra Tīrtha and the Moṭhā Mārutī temple. It is interesting that since the thirteenth century CE, the town was most likely to be fortified, and there was a person appointed as in charge for Dhāra. As per the information provided by the locals, this job of being the authority over the upkeep of Dhāra has been hereditarily entrusted to certain families. They were to look after the maintenance of Dhāra Tīrtha, especially during yearly festivals.

Currently, the village settlement of Lonar is spread to the north-east of the crater, which has also increased exponentially through the last decade owing to the increasing popularity of Lonar among tourists. The most visited structure in present times is the Dhāra Tīrtha complex, mainly because of the popularity of the perennial water stream and also because of the visual glimpse of the crater. The entire expanse of the crater is visible from this location. The Daityasūdāna temple at the centre of the village settlement seems to be the next popular spot among tourists.

5.8 Concluding Remarks

Using the architectural forms as the vantage point, the present study has attempted to delineate the historical timeline of the religious landscape of Lonar. The structural details of the architecture in Lonar and its significance is well-understood but the patronage of these religious buildings is of a highly speculative nature. The people instrumental in patronising the built forms of Lonar are not known. It can be conjectured that these must have included the ruling authorities during the Yādava period, local chiefs, and also pilgrims who made generous contributions to this place of sanctity. A study of the patronage patterns would certainly reduce the gaps in a holistic study of Lonar. This could be a further impetus to better understand the landscape and its architecture. Having said that, religious trends are instrumental to channelise patronise of architectural spaces in Lonar. The integrated landscape of the crater is unique because of its physical geography but the process of formation of the sacred landscape shares affinities with the tropes that are usually associated with *tīrthas*. What happens differently here are the innate experiences of the physical landscape which are the cause of complex stories. They though make use of the usual tropes, but are woven differently and thus narrated differently. A demonic figure transforming into an ardent devotee is a common theme, but in order to comprehend the formation of an inland saltwater lake,

there is an additional strand in the mythical story of Lonar that the demon's body disintegrated to form salt. The verbal and visual embodiment of a creation myth found in Lonar is a rare occurrence.

Lonar is not the only known meteorite impact crater in India. The Ramgarh crater in Rajasthan also has been recently declared as a meteorite impact creation and so is the Dhala crater in Madhya Pradesh. Both these craters are much larger in size as compared to Lonar. But the difference between these two crater formations and Lonar is that the latter has a much defined and confined geography which is conducive for the formation of an elaborate sacred landscape. Ramgarh crater also has religious structures within its geography but the crater itself does not possess a strong religious significance. Lonar crater is a fine example of how geological phenomena are often overlaid with mythological meaning. The architectural evidence allows us to construct a timeline for this human attempt at explaining and comprehending a landscape. Hence the process of formation, rather the gradual transformation, of Lonar into a sacred *tīrtha* is unique. The physical geography can be understood through natural materials and forms, while mythology has been recovered through a literary study of stories and texts associated with the site. The factor that conjoins these two facets is the architectural evidence which comprises man-made artefacts physically recovered on the site. It is therefore of utmost importance to understand the form and fabric of this architecture in its entirety. The identity of Lonar and the intrinsic meanings assigned to its creation lie at the intersection of these three layers, thus transforming a mere geographical place into a cultural and religious space.

Appendix

▪ Epigraphical Record of Lonar

1. Tripuruṣācā Maṭha in the Daityasūdāna Temple Complex.

Present Location: Inside the *mandapa* of the Tripuruṣācā Maṭha. The original location is not known.

Subject Matter: The inscription consists of approximately twenty-nine lines, written on a slab that is 1.24m long and 0.33 m wide. The script is Devanagari. The inscription is not legible to the naked eye. Sudhakar Bugdane provides a reading of this inscription, which he has reproduced from the works of Shripad Chitale. However, this is not a satisfactory reading.

Tentative Date: Palaeographically, the inscription can be dated approximately to the twelfth-thirteenth century CE.

State of Preservation: The slab is in a bad state, and the inscription is eroded. The left half of the inscription is completely lost; however, the right half is faintly visible.



Fig. A.1: Rectangular slab of the inscription in Tripuruṣācā Maṭha

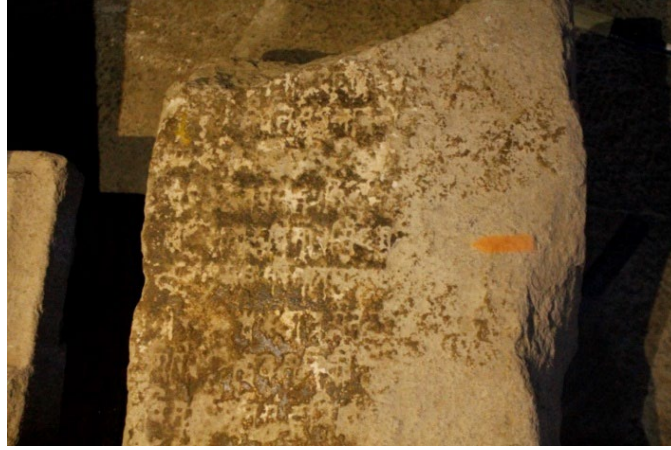


Fig. A.2: A closer view of the lettering of the inscription in the Tripuruṣācā Maṭha

2. Steps of Daityasūdana Temple

Present Location: Steps of the east-facing *mūkhamaṇḍapa* of Daityasūdana temple

Subject Matter: The two-line inscription is illegible at present. The script appears to be Devanagari, based on the cursorily visible incisions. Sudhakar Bugdane, in his book, cites Shripad Chitale, who has read the inscription. According to this reading, the inscription records the visit of Yadava King Kṛṣṇadeva in Śaka 1163 to Lonar. If such is the case, the inscription would belong to the thirteenth century CE. However, the eroded state of the inscription does not warrant any conclusion.

Tentative Date: Not known

State of Preservation: The inscription is barely visible on the stone surface and cannot be deciphered.



Fig. A.3: Inscription from the steps of the east-facing *mūkhamaṇḍapa* of Daityasūdana temple

3. Pillar Fragment in the Pāpahareśvara Temple Complex

Present Location: A loose pillar fragment in the fallen *maṇḍapa* of the Pāpahareśvara Temple.

Subject Matter: The script is Devanagari. The pillar fragment that contains the inscription is partially damaged. Hence, only three lines of the inscription are visible at the moment. The original inscription might have been longer. The inscription has not been deciphered yet.

Tentative Date: Palaeographically, the inscription can be dated to the twelfth/thirteenth century CE. However, this is conjectural since the inscription is undeciphered.

State of Preservation: One corner of the lower fragment is chipped and the surface has faced erosion.



Fig. A.4: Inscription on the pillar fragment in the *maṇḍapa* remains of the Pāpahareśvara temple

4. Inscription on a *kakśāsana* Fragment in the Yajñeśvara Temple Complex

Present Location: The inscription is on a fragment of the *kakśāsana vedikā*, which is at present strewn among the several remains to the north of the Yajñeśvara temple.

Subject Matter: The inscription consists of one word or term, which is made up of approximately seven letters. The lettering of the inscription is well carved, has finesse, and might be the name of an authoritative figure who contributed to the temple construction.

Tentative Date: Twelfth – thirteenth century CE, tentatively based on the palaeography.

State of Preservation: Fairly well preserved.



Fig. A.5: Inscription on a fragment of the *kakśāsana vedikā* in the Yajñeśvara temple complex

5. Inscription from the Rāmagaya Temple

Present Location: On the pilaster flanking the entrance of the west facing *maṇḍapa* of the Rāmagaya temple

Subject Matter: There are four lines in this inscription, probably the names of some donors who were instrumental in the construction of the temple. A cursory reading of the inscription is as follows – The first line probably reads as Sri Rāmacandra, the second line is not clear, the third line reads as Dāsugī, the fourth line reads as Narasā. This word/ name Dāsugī also appears on the threshold of the north facing *maṇḍapa* of the same temple.

Tentative Date: Based on palaeography, the temple can be dated to the thirteenth - fourteenth century CE approximately.

State of Preservation: Fairly well preserved.



Fig. A.6: Inscription on the pilaster of the west facing *maṇḍapa* of the Rāmagaya temple

6. Inscriptions on the floor of the Dhāra Tīrtha and Rāmagaya temple complexes.

Present Location: Floor of the Dhāra Tīrtha temple complex to the east of the *dhāra kuṇḍa*. In the Rāmagaya temple, it is found on the threshold of the north facing *maṇḍapa*.

Subject Matter: The inscriptions appear to be names accompanied by human figures standing with their hands folded in a *namaskāra mudrā*. The script is Devanagari, and the language is Marathi.

Tentative Date: Based on palaeography, the temple can be dated to the thirteenth - fourteenth century CE approximately.

State of Preservation: These inscriptions are often stepped on by commuters since they are on the floor. Some of these inscriptions are eroded, some still fairly legible.



Fig. A.7: Inscriptions along with two handed figures standing in *namaskāra mudrā*, on the floor of the Dhāra Tīrtha and Rāmagaya temple complexes

■ Placement of Icons from Temples in Lonar

Daityasūdāna temple *jaṅghā*

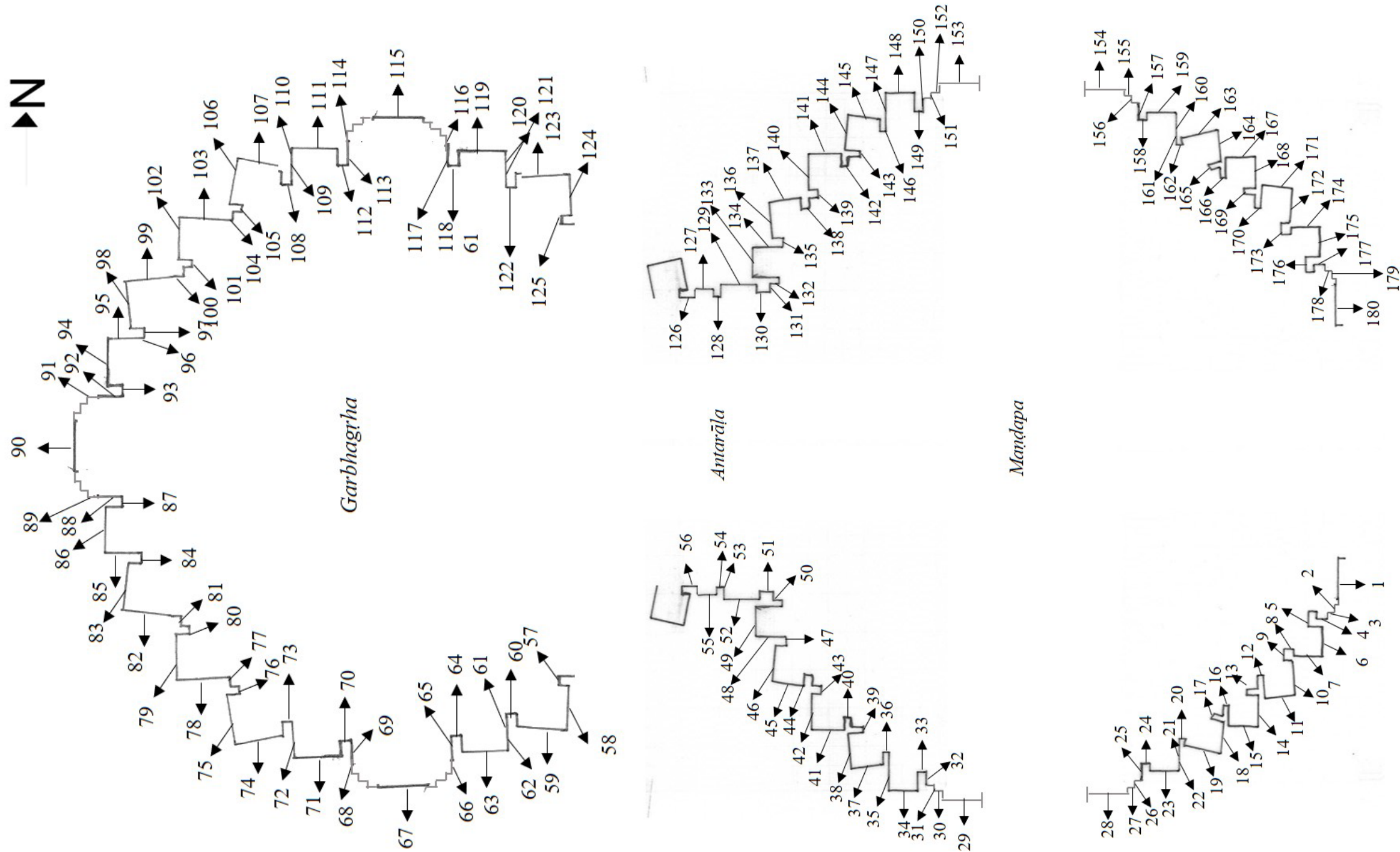


Fig. A.8: Placement of imagery on the *jaṅghā* of the Daityasūdāna temple

List of Icons on the *jaṅghā* of the Daityasūdāna temple

(Note: This list follows the *pradakṣiṇā patha* of the temple hence the icons have been numbered accordingly in Fig. A.8)

1. Sarasvatī
2. Ascetic
3. Female holding a conch
4. Female and Male, unidentified
5. *Maithuna*
6. Two Females, unidentified
7. Narasimha
8. *Maithuna*
9. *Mithuna* / *Maithuna*, Male probably an ascetic
10. 3 figures, unidentified
11. 3 figures, Eroded
12. *Mithuna* / *Maithuna* (?)
13. *Mithuna* / *Maithuna* (?)
14. Narasimha (?)
15. Daityasūdāna Viṣṇu
16. Eroded
17. *Mithuna* / *Maithuna* (?)
18. Mahiṣāsūramardinī (?)
19. A deity attacking a demon, could be Viṣṇu (?)
20. *Mithuna* / *Maithuna* (?)
21. *Maithuna*
22. Composite human figure
23. Two females, unidentified
24. *Mithuna* / *Maithuna*
25. *Mithuna*
26. Female in dancing posture
27. Female in dancing posture (?)
28. Bhairava
29. Bhūvarāha
30. Ascetic

31. Female in dancing posture (?)
32. *Maithuna*, male is an ascetic
33. *Maithuna*
34. *Mithuna*, probably ritualistic, male is an ascetic
35. Saṅghāṭaka¹
36. *Mithuna* / *Maithuna*
37. *Maithuna*
38. Three amorous figures, two of them engaged in *Maithuna*
39. *Mithuna* / *Maithuna*
40. *Mithuna* / *Maithuna*, male is an ascetic
41. Female Deity, unidentified
42. Female in combat with *vyāla* trampling an elephant
43. Eroded
44. Female, Skeletal body, Cāmuṇḍā (?)
45. Unidentified male figure with a ferocious face
46. A Śaiva female deity
47. Male holding sword
48. Male holding animal on his head
49. Composite human figure
50. Vasudeva-Nanda-birth of Kṛṣṇa (?)
51. Displayed Female
52. Male deity, unidentified
53. Ascetic
54. *Cāmarā*
55. Viṣṇū
56. Ascetic
57. *Nṛtya Gaṇeśa*
58. *Sūrasundarī* (?)

¹ Devangana Desai, *Erotic Sculpture of India: A Socio-Cultural Study second edition* (New Delhi: Munishram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd, 1985), 8; Anuja Joshi, “Understanding the Essence and Functionality of ‘Sexual’ Imagery: A Study of Selected Temples from Maharashtra (11th-14th century CE)” (PhD diss., Deccan College Post-Graduate and Research Institute, Pune, 2022), 115.

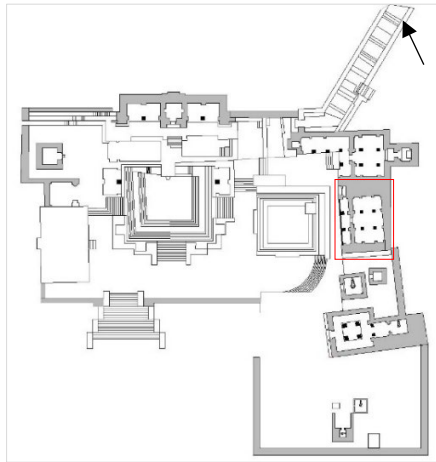
59. Bhairava
60. *Maithuna*
61. Female Dancer
62. Male deity, unidentified
63. Female Dancer
64. Male, unidentified
65. Male in *namaskāra mudrā*
66. *Mithuna*
67. Female deity, unidentified
68. Paraśūrāma
69. Ascetic
70. Displayed Female
71. Śiva
72. Male deity, unidentified
73. *Maithuna*
74. Bhairava
75. Male playing flute
76. Female, unidentified
77. *Putravallabhā*
78. Tripurāntaka (?)
79. Bhūvarāha
80. *Cāmarā*
81. *Darpaṇā*
82. Male figure, unidentified
83. Eroded
84. Female, unidentified
85. Female, unidentified
86. Displayed female, eroded
87. Female, unidentified
88. Displayed female
89. Vāmana
90. Sūrya
91. *Nṛtya Gaṇeśaa*

92. Ascetic
93. Eroded
94. *Darpaṇā*
95. Male deity, unidentified
96. Female, unidentified
97. Female, unidentified
98. Viṣṇu
99. Female holding bow and arrow
100. Ascetic
101. Śiva
102. Viṣṇu
103. Brahmā
104. Eroded
105. Male dancer (?)
106. Male, unidentified
107. Male, unidentified
108. *Mrduṅga Mardalā*
109. Male, unidentified
110. Male-vyāla combat
111. Female dancer (?)
112. Male, unidentified
113. Female, unidentified
114. Bhūvarāha
115. Narasimha
116. Govardhanadhārī Kṛṣṇa
117. Female dancer (?)
118. Ascetic
119. *Darpaṇā* (?)
120. Two females, one of them is displayed
121. Male playing flute
122. Eroded
123. Female figure, unidentified
124. Muralīdhara Kṛṣṇa

125. Male skeletal figure
126. *Putravallabhā*
127. Male holding sword, unidentified
128. Eroded, displayed female (?)
129. Sarasvatī
130. Displayed Female
131. Male, Ascetic (?)
132. Male Musician and Female Dancer
133. Pūtanāvadha
134. Two males in combat
135. *Mṛduṅga Mardalā*
136. Bhairava
137. Female and a child
138. Ascetic
139. Displayed female
140. Viṣṇū, Trivikrama (?)
141. Female dancer
142. *Maithuna*
143. Ascetic
144. Viṣṇū with consort
145. Mahiśāsūramardinī
146. Male and female, unidentified
147. Rāma-Lakṣmaṇa-Sitā (?)
148. Viṣṇū with female attendant
149. *Mithuna* (?)
150. *Mithuna*
151. Female, unidentified
152. Female dancer
153. Narasimha
154. Cāmuṇḍā
155. Bhṛṅgī
156. Displayed female
157. Two males in combat

158. Female, *Cāmarā* (?)
159. Male and female deity, unidentified
160. Female deity, unidentified
161. Displayed female
162. Female dancer
163. Two males in combat
164. Vālī-Sugrīva fight
165. Female dancer
166. Female dancer
167. Male and monkey in combat, Unidentified
168. Two males wrestling (?)
169. Two figures, unidentified
170. *Mithuna*
171. Male and Female, eroded
172. Viṣṇu with consort
173. Female, unidentified
174. Balarāma with two consorts
175. Male figure, broken
176. Eroded
177. *Mithuna* / *Maithuna*
178. Female, unidentified
179. Female, unidentified
180. Gaṇeśa

Placement of Icons: Reṇūkā temple in the Dhāra Tīrtha temple complex



Key Plan of the Dhāra Tīrtha temple complex with the Reṇūkā temple in the eastern side of the complex

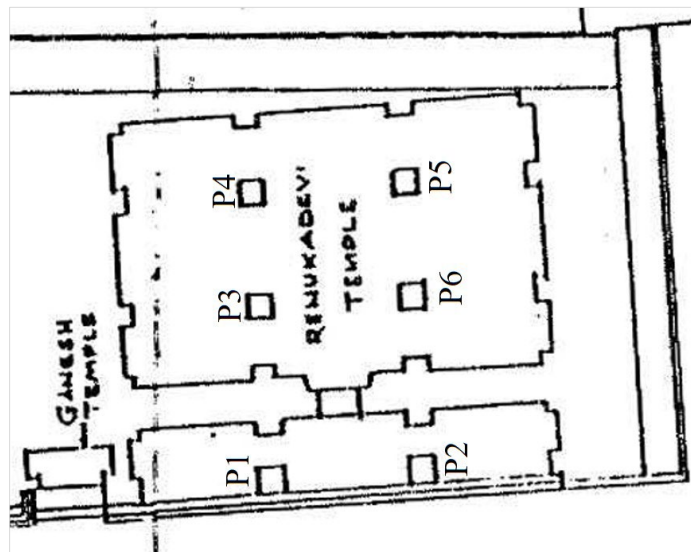


Fig. A.9: Placement of imagery on the pillars of the Reṇūkā temple in the Dhāra Tīrtha temple complex

Note: The labels A, B, C, D for the faces of the pillars follow the sequence of the *pradakṣiṇā patha*

List of Icons from the pillars in the Reṇūkā temple

P1 A Samudramanthana

P1 B Vāmana-Trivikrama

P1 C Man-Elephants fight, battle scene (?)

P1 D Two male figures fighting with bow and arrow, accompanied by two small figures

P2 A *Mithuna/Maithuna*

P2 B Two figures in a forest

P2 C *Maithuna*

P2 D Two male figures fighting with bow and arrow, accompanied by two small figures.

P3 A Two elephants

P3 B Male ascetic figure accompanied by two female attendants

P3 C Unidentified

P3 D Kamsavadha (?)

P4 A Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa meeting Vānarasenā (?)

P4 B Scene from Rāmāyaṇa (?)

P4 C Hanumāna meeting Sītā in Aśokavāṭikā

P4 D Scene from Rāmāyaṇa (?)

P5 A Vālīvadha(?)

P5 B Three figures fighting (epic panel?)

P5 C Mārīcavadha

P5 D Decapitation in a forest

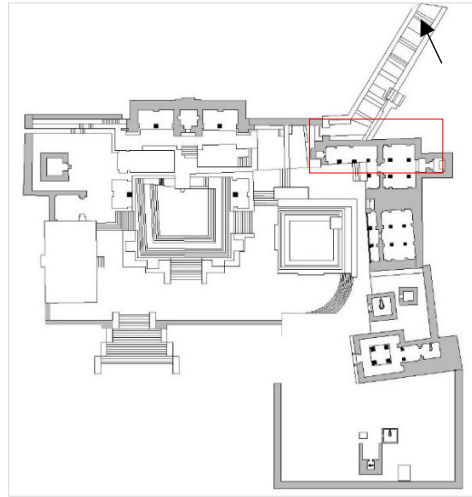
P6 A Govardhanadhārī Kṛṣṇa

P6 B Dhenukāsūravada, Yamalārjuna

P6 C Dadhimanthana

P6 D Muralīdhara Kṛṣṇa

Placement of Icons: Narasimha temple in the Dhāra Tīrtha temple complex



Key Plan of the Dhāra Tīrtha temple complex with the Narasimha temple on the eastern side of the complex

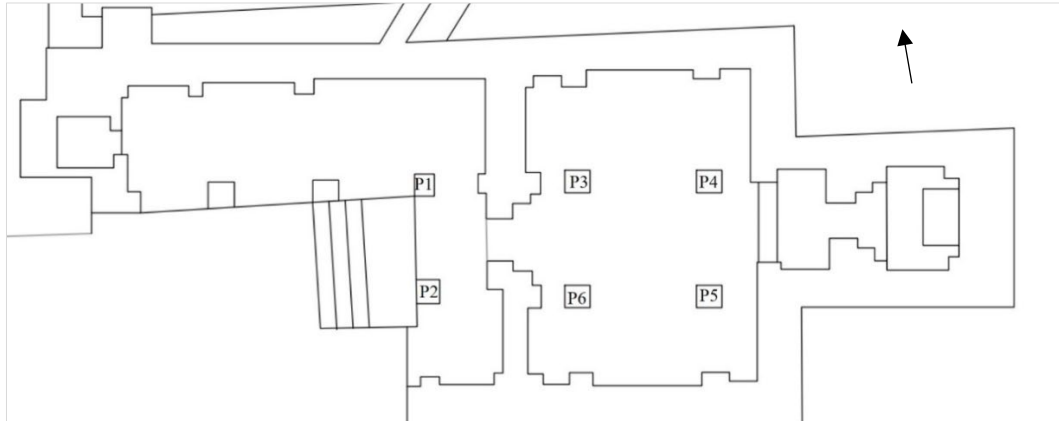


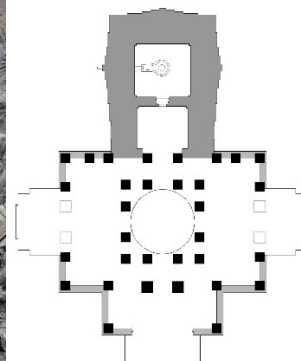
Fig. A.10: Placement of imagery on the pillars of the Narasimha temple

Note: The labels A, B, C, D for the faces of the pillars follow the sequence of the *pradakṣiṇā patha*. (P3, P4, P5 pillars have plain shafts)

List of Icons

P1 A Viṣṇu (?)	P2 A Narasimha	P6 A Brahmā
P1 B Unidentified	P2 B Varāha	P6 B Viṣṇu
P1 C Viṣṇu (?)	P2 C Viṣṇu (?)	P6 C Bhairava
P1 D Unidentified	P2 D Viṣṇu (?)	P6 D Indra (?)

Placement of Icons: Yajñeśvara temple complex



Ceiling of the *maṇḍapa* of Yajñeśvara temple

Key Plan of the Yajñeśvara temple

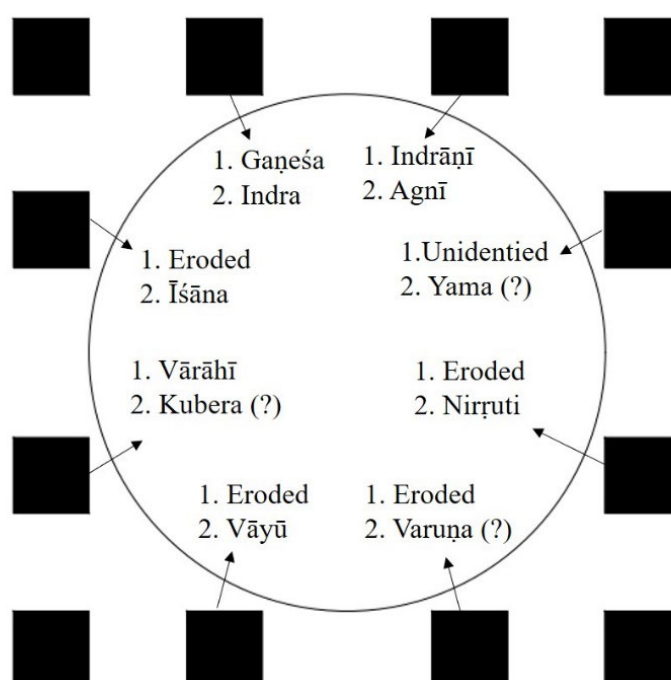


Fig A.11: Placement of the imagery atop pillars of the *maṇḍapa* (as a part of the concentric rings of the ceiling) in the Yajñeśvara temple

▪ **Placement of Icons**

Bagīcā temple

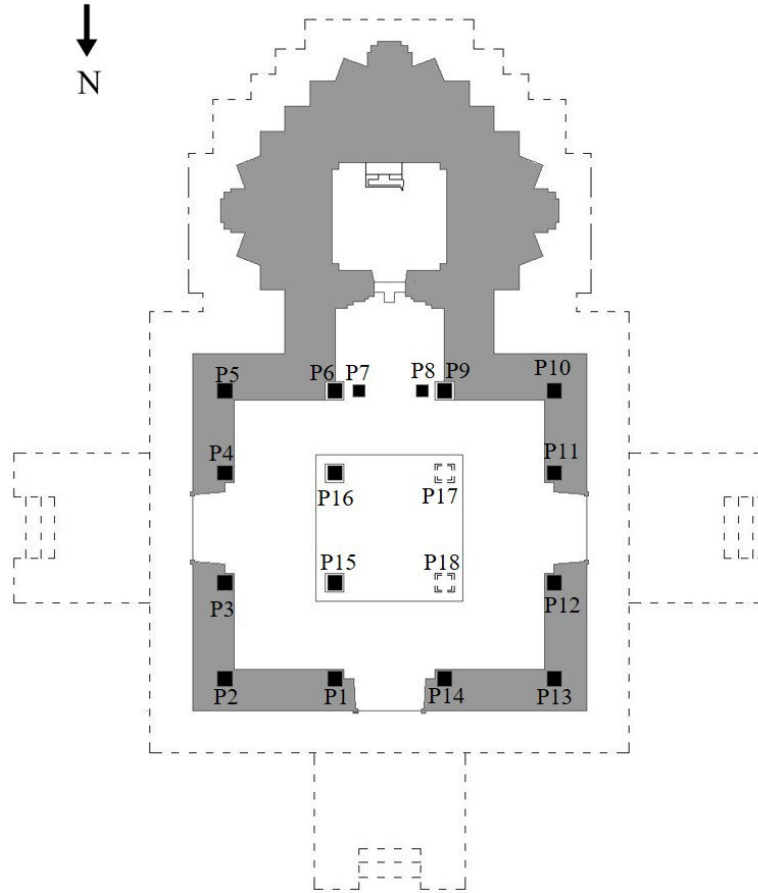


Fig. A.12: Placement of imagery on the pillars of the Bagīcā temple

Note: The labels A, B, C, D for the faces of the pillars follow the sequence of the *pradakṣiṇā patha*

- P1 A Flute players
- P1 B *Kīrtimukha*
- P1 C Ascetic with two attendants
- P1 D Śivaliṅga with *vidyādhara*s
- P2 A Male & Elephant combat
- P2 B Two males fighting (?)
- P2 C Eroded

- P2 D *Hamsa*
- P4 B Male & Elephant (?)
- P5 A Two Elephants
- P5 B Two *Hamsa*
- P5 C Three monkey-faced figures with tails, scene from Rāmāyaṇa (?)
- P5 D *Kīrtimukha*
- P7 A Male seated on a peacock, (Kārtikeya ?)
- P7 B Male-*vyāla* combat
- P7 C Male-monkey combat, (scene from Rāmāyaṇa ?)
- P7 D Composite human figure
- P8 A Goddess, unidentified
- P8 B Gaṇeśa
- P8 C *Kīrtimukha*
- P8 D *Kīrtimukha*
- P13 A *Kīrtimukha*
- P13 B *Kīrtimukha*
- P13 C *Kīrtimukha*
- P13 D *Kīrtimukha*
- P14 A *Kīrtimukha*
- P14 B *Kīrtimukha*
- P14 C *Kīrtimukha*
- P14 D *Kīrtimukha*
- P15 A Male and Elephant combat
- P 15 B Pūtanāvadha
- P15 C Yamalārjuna
- P15 D Three human figures; eroded
- P16 A Dancer and Musicians
- P16 B Male-*vyāla* combat (?)
- P16 C Matsyendranātha & two ascetics
- P16 D Dancers and Musicians

▪ **Miscellaneous Architectural and Sculptural Fragments found in Lonar**
Architectural Remains



Fig. A.13. Remains of a *mandapa* near the Pir Dargah²



Fig. A.14. Pillar fragments near the Mora temple, now submerged in water.



Fig. A.15. Pillar base fragment lying on the roadside near the Daityasūdana temple several such pillar base fragments can be found in the village.

² Refer Fig. 1.4 in chapter 1 for the location of the Pir Dargah



Fig. A.16. Probable remains of *prākāra* wall before the Yajñeśvara temple.



Fig. A.17: Remains of shrine (floor plan of *garbhagrha* or *antarāla* (?))
on the descent crater near the Yajñeśvara temple

Sculptural Fragments



Fig. A.18. Loose sculpture of Sūrya in the Reṇūkā temple of the Dhāra Tīrtha complex



Fig. A.19. Sculptural fragments from the vicinity of a modern temple in the Shivaji Nagar area of Lonar.

Herostones and *Satī* Stones from Lonar



Fig. A.20: Herostone in the vicinity of Daityasūdāna temple complex



Fig. A.21: Hero stone in the Reṇūkā temple of the Dhāra Tīrtha complex



Fig. A.22: Herostone, incongruously added into a masonry wall



Fig. A.23 *Satī* stone near the entrance of the Dhāra Tīrtha temple complex



Fig. A.24: *Satī* stone in the Pāphareśvara temple complex

Fig. A.25: Table showing Architectural Details of Temples at Lonar

	Temple Name	Material of Construction		Ground Plan		Extended Plinth	Basal Mouldings (<i>vedibandha</i>)	Wall scheme (<i>jaṅghā</i>)	<i>Śikhara</i>		Ornamentation Pattern	Location of the temple	Tentative Period of construction
		Original Structure	Later Additions	<i>Garbhagrha</i>	<i>Maṇḍapa</i>				<i>Garbhagrha</i>	<i>Maṇḍapa</i>			
1	Daityasūdana	Stone + Brick(?)	Brick	Stellate	Stellate	7 tiered	<i>Khura, kumbha, kalaśa, kapotālī</i>	K-s-P-s-P-s-B-s-P-s-P-s-K	Not survived (conjecture – Bhūmija)	Samvaraṇā(?)	Figural sculpture	Lonar village/Ejecta blanket of the crater	13 th century CE
2	Pāpahareśvara	Stone	-	Orthogonal - stepped diamond	Stepped, interspersed with <i>mukhamaṇḍapa</i> (conjectural)	NA	Plain offset mouldings	K-P-B-P-K	NA	NA	Plain	Rim of the crater	12 th century CE (original phase of construction)
3	Yajñeśvara	Stone	Brick	Orthogonal - stepped diamond	Stepped, interspersed with <i>mukhamaṇḍapa</i>	NA	<i>Khura, kumbha, kalaśa, kapotālī (?)</i>	K-P-B-P-K / K-s-P-s-B-s-P-s-K	Bhūmija in stone with Latina <i>kūṭas</i> or Drāviḍa <i>kūṭa</i> within <i>kūṭa</i> . Samvaraṇā <i>śikhara</i> over the <i>maṇḍapa</i>	Samvaraṇā(?)	Geometrical designs and few figural sculpture	Descent of the crater	12 th century CE
4	Bagīcā	Stone +Brick	-	Turned square plan	Square with one <i>mukhamaṇḍapa</i>	Horizontal band mouldings with mirrored offsets	Four bands offset mouldings	K-s-P-s-P-s-B-s-P-s-P-s-K	Not survived (conjecture- Bhūmija in brick)	NA	Mostly plain with geometrical designs	Saltwater Lake	14 th century CE

	Temple Name	Material of Construction		Ground Plan		Extended Plinth	Basal Mouldings (<i>vedibandha</i>)	Wall scheme (<i>jaṅghā</i>)	<i>Śikhara</i>		Ornamentation Pattern	Location of the temple	Tentative Period of construction
		Original Structure	Later Additions	<i>Garbhagrha</i>	<i>Maṇḍapa</i>				<i>Garbhagrha</i>	<i>Maṇḍapa</i>			
5	Kumāreśvara	Stone	Stone	Orthogonal	Square	NA	Plain offset mouldings (renovated)	NA	Not survived	NA	Plain	Descent of the crater	13 th century CE (original construction)
6	Rāmagayā	Stone	Stone	Orthogonal - staggered square	Square interspersed with <i>mukhamaṇḍapa</i>	Not seen	No offsets	K-P-P-B-P-P-K	Not survived (conjecture-Bhūmija in brick)	NA	Plain, only on <i>bhadra</i>	Descent of the crater	14 th - 15 th century CE
7	Mahādeva (Rāmagayā temple complex)	Stone	-	Orthogonal - stepped diamond	Square interspersed with <i>mukhamaṇḍapa</i>	Horizontal band mouldings with mirrored offsets	Four bands offset mouldings	K-P-B-P-K	Bhūmija <i>śikhara</i> in brick	Brick ?	Plain with band offsets	Descent of the crater	13 th - 14 th century CE
8	Copaḍā	Stone + Brick (?)	-	Orthogonal - stepped diamond	Square interspersed with <i>mukhamaṇḍapa</i>	Horizontal band mouldings with mirrored offsets	Four bands offset mouldings	K-P-B-P-K	Not survived	NA	Plain with band offsets	Saltwater Lake	14 th - 15 th century CE
9	Deśamukha	Stone + Brick (?)	-	Orthogonal - stepped diamond	Square interspersed with <i>mukhamaṇḍapa</i>	Horizontal band mouldings with mirrored offsets	Four bands offset mouldings	K-P-B-P-K	Not survived	NA	Plain with band offsets	Saltwater Lake	14 th - 15 th century CE
10	Muṅgaḷyā	Stone + Brick (?)	-	Orthogonal - stepped diamond	Square interspersed with <i>mukhamaṇḍapa</i>	Horizontal band mouldings	Four bands offset mouldings	K-P-B-P-K	Not survived	NA	Plain with band offsets	Saltwater Lake	14 th - 15 th century CE

	Temple Name	Material of Construction		Ground Plan		Extended Plinth	Basal Mouldings (<i>vedibandha</i>)	Wall scheme (<i>jaṅghā</i>)	<i>Śikhara</i>		Ornamentation Pattern	Location of the temple	Tentative Period of construction
		Original Structure	Later Additions	<i>Garbhagrha</i>	<i>Maṇḍapa</i>				<i>Garbhagrha</i>	<i>Maṇḍapa</i>			
						with mirrored offsets							
11	Ambarakhānā	Stone + Brick (?)	-	Orthogonal - stepped diamond	Square interspersed with <i>mukhamaṇḍapa</i>	Horizontal band mouldings with mirrored offsets	Four bands offset mouldings	K-P-P-B-P-P-K	Not survived	NA	Plain with band offsets	Saltwater Lake	14 th - 15 th century CE
12	Mora	Stone + Brick (?)	-	Orthogonal - stepped diamond	Square interspersed with two <i>mukhamaṇḍapa</i>	Horizontal band mouldings with mirrored offsets	Four bands offset mouldings	K-P-P-B-P-P-K	Not survived	NA	Plain with band offsets	Saltwater Lake	14 th - 15 th century CE
13	Vāgha	Stone + Brick (?)	-	Orthogonal - stepped diamond	Square interspersed with <i>mukhamaṇḍapa</i>	Horizontal band mouldings with mirrored offsets	Four bands offset mouldings	K-P-P-B-P-P-K	Not survived	Brick?	Plain with band offsets	Saltwater Lake	14 th -15 th century CE
14	Kamaḷajā	Stone + Brick	Brick	Orthogonal – stepped diamond	Square interspersed with <i>mukhamaṇḍapa</i>	Horizontal band mouldings with mirrored offsets	Four bands offset mouldings	K-P-B-s-B-P-K	Bhūmija ? – brick with stucco plaster.	Marāṭhā period cupolas	Plain with band offsets	Saltwater Lake	13 th century CE (original construction, 14 th - 15 th century CE renovation

Note: In the above image, NA = not applicable, B = *bhadra*, P = *pratiratha* or *pratibhadra*, K = *karṇa*, S = *salilāntara*.

This table does not include structures from the Dhāra Tīrtha Temple Complex as the temples have undergone many restorations and there are very little traces to speculate their original forms. Discussions on this can be found in Chapter 3 under the section 3.3.

Glossary of Terms

Abhaya mudrā - Hand gesture for protection

Adhiṣṭhāna - Moulded base of the temple

Āmalaka - “Myrobolan fruit”, ribbed crowning member of a Nāgara temple

Antarapatra - Horizontal recess between two projecting mouldings

Antarāḷa - Vestibule set between *garbhagṛha* and *maṇḍapa*

Ardhaparyāṅkāśana - Seated with one leg hanging from the pedestal

Avatāra - Incarnation / manifestation of a deity

Āyudha - Attribute or weapon of a deity

Bārava - Stepped reservoir (square, rectangular)

Bhadra - Principal projection/central offset of exterior wall of the temple

Bhīṭṭa - plinth moulding below the base of the temple

Bhūmi - Level or storey

Caitya gavākṣa - Horse-shoe shaped dormer window opening

Cakra - Discus

Cāmarā - Flywhisk bearer

Catuṣkī - Space separated by four pillars

Caumukha - Stand-alone pillar usually having carvings on all four sides

Caurī - Flywhisk

Chajjā - Eave

Chatra - Parasol

Chatrī - A semi-open canopy like structure

Daityāri - Deity trampling a demon

Darpaṇā - Damsel holding a mirror

Devakoṣṭha - Niche for a divinity

Dharmacakra mudrā - Hand-gesture of preaching the *dharma*, usually associated with Buddha, hand-gesture showing a rotating wheel

Dikpāla - Guardian of direction

Dīpamāḷa - A structure for lighting numerous lamps

Dharmaśālā - Resting house for travellers

Dvārapāla - Door keeper

Dvāraśākhā - Architrave/frame of a doorway

Gadā - mace
Gagāraka - scout-badge like motif
Gajathara - Band of elephant figures, generally on the plinth of the temple
Garbhagrha - Sanctum sanctorium
Gavākṣa - Dormer window, literally “cow’s eye”, horse-shoe shaped motif
Gavākṣa jāla - Cardinal band consisting a mesh of horse-shoe shaped motifs
Ghaṇṭā - Bell-shaped crowning element
Ghaṭa - Vase, pot
Ghaṭapallava - Vase and foliage pattern
Gomukha - Water chute in the shape of a cow’s mouth
Grāsapaṭṭī- Band showing *kīrtimukhas* in file
Gūḍhamaṇḍapa - Closed hall
Hāra - Balustrade or cloistered parapet in the superstructure of temple
Hamsa - Goose
Hamsapaṭṭikā - Band showing geese in file
Jāḍyakumbha - Lowest moulding in the *pīṭha* resembling the *kumbha*
Jagatī - Plinth, platform, basal moulding of the *adhiṣṭhāna*
Jaṅghā - Portion of the exterior wall of the temple between *vedibandha* and *śikhara*
Jaṭāmukūṭa - Matted hair shaped as a crown
Kakṣāsana - Seat-back
Kalaśa - ‘pot’ or ‘pitcher’, a torus moulding in the base of temple or the finial of the temple
Kamaṇḍalu - Pitcher
Kaṇi - Flat, edge-shaped moulding
Kapāla - Bowl made up of human skull
Kapilī - Exterior walls of the *antarāḷa*
Kapotali - Cyma-eave cornice
Kapotapālikā - Cyma-eave cornice
Karṇa - Corner offset of exterior wall of the temple
Khaḍga - Sword; Large Knife
Khatvāṅga - A staff made up of bone and topped by a skull
Khūra - Cyma Recta moulding in the plinth of the temple
Kīrtimukha - Face of glory usually used as a decorative motif/ Lion face emanating pearl string from the mouth- symbol of wealth and victory

Kuladevī - Tutelary deity
Kumbha - Pitcher-shaped moulding
Kuṇḍa - tank
Kūṭa - Square aedicule, miniature shrine aedicule within a *śikhara*
Kūṭastambha - Miniature śikhara or shrine atop a pillar
Lalāṭabimba- Crest figure, central symbol on door lintel
Laśuna - Vase-shaped shoulder part of a pillar shaft
Latā - Creeper; vertical band in a *śikhara*, usually composed of *gavākṣa*
Latina - Mono-spired form of Nāgara *śikhara*
Madhyalatā - Central vertical band in a *śikhara*
Mahārājājalāsana– Sitting relaxed with one leg folded on the seat and the other kept vertical
Maithuna - A couple in a sexual relationship
Makara - mythical creature usually having crocodile features
Mālāsthāna - Pillar-part below capital decorated with floral festoons
Maṇibandha - Band with diamond motif
Mañcaka - Seat, pedestal, stool
Mañcikā - Dias-like moulding supporting a sculpture
Maṇḍapa - hall (open, semi-open, columnar)
Mandāraka - Projecting central part of a doorsill
Maṇḍovara- Wall
Maṭha - Monastic establishment, Resting house
Mithuna - a couple engaged in pre-coital relationship
Mokṣa - Salvation
Mudrā - Hand-gesture
Mukūṭa - Crown
Mṛduṅga Mardalā- Damsel playing *mṛduṅga*
Mukhamaṇḍapa - front hall, entry hall
Namaskāra mudrā - Hand gesture showing respect or salutation
Nābhi - Navel
Nāga - Cobra or anthropomorphic snake deity
Nagārakhāna - Structure above the entrance for playing the drums, usually seen in medieval civil and defensive architecture
Nandī - Bull, Śiva's mount

Nandī maṇḍapa - pavilion for Śiva's sacred bull
Narathara - Moulding in the temple's base, showing humans engaged in various Activities
Nartaka / Nartaki - Male or female dancer
Nāsī - Gavākṣa
Padma - Lotus
Padmāsana - A type of seating posture
Paṭṭikā - Kampa; rectilinear fillet
Pedyā - Lower blocks of the door-jambs
Phalaka - Abacus
Phāmsanā - Tiered, pyramidal type of śikhara
Pīṭha - Pedestal, platform
Pradakṣiṇā patha - Ambulatory passage
Prākāra - Courtyard
Praṇāla - water chute
Pratibhadra - Offset flanking *bhadra*
Pratikarṇa - Offset flanking the *karṇa*
Pratiratha - Wall-offset flanking *bhadra*
Pūrṇaghaṭa - Vase of plenty, a decorative motif
Putravallabhā - Damsel with a child
Raṅgaśīlā - Raised portion of the floor of a temple hall
Ratha - Projection of offsets in the plan of the temple
Rathikā - Niche
Sabhāmaṇḍapa - open or semi-open type of hall
Salilāntara - Recess in the *jaṅghā*
Samabhaṅga - Standing posture without any flexion
Samādhī - Memorial
Samapada - A stance of legs wherein both the legs are straight
Samvaraṇā - Tiered pyramidal roof-type with bell-shaped members placed in rows at each tier-level
Śaṅkha - conch
Sarvatobhadra - Temple-type with opening on four side or stand-alone pillar with carvings on all four sides
Śekharī - Multi-spined form of Nāgara śikhara

Śikhara - Tower, Spire

Śukanāsa - *Caitya gavākṣa* dormer window on the frontal side of a Bhūmija *śikhara*

Śūrasenaka- Pediment made up of a large *gavākṣa*- window usually placed at the base of the *Latā* in a Bhūmija *śikhara*

Sūrasundarī - Celestial damsel

Tāndaḷā - Featureless, roundish stones under worship representing divinity

Tīrtha - Sacred centre, pilgrimage centres, places of crossing over

Toraṇa - Arch-shaped gateway or miniature gateway pattern atop a niche

Trikūṭa - Temple having three shrines

Udgama - Pediment consisting of *gavākṣas*

Udumbara -Threshold, doorsill

Upabhadra - Minor offset flanking or a part of the *bhadra*

Uttarāṅga - Lintel Portion above the doorway

Vāḍā – A Marathi word for a traditional house with courtyards

Vāhana - mount

Varaṇḍikā - Set of mouldings/cornice band separating the temple wall and the superstructure

Vedibandha - Base mouldings of a temple

Vedikā - Railing portion (of the *kakṣāsana*)

Vyāla - Composite mythical creature usually having a leonine face

Yātrā - Pilgrimage

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