



TWO LESSOR-KNOWN TEMPLES OF THE PUNE DISTRICT OF MAHARASHTRA

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Abstract

This research paper explores two lesser-known temples located in the Pune district of Maharashtra, India, shedding light on their historical and cultural significance. The study adopts a comparative approach to analyze the architectural features, religious practices, and socio-cultural contexts surrounding these temples. Through an interdisciplinary lens, the paper investigates the distinct attributes of each temple, including their unique iconography, rituals, and mythological narratives. By examining the historical background, religious practices, and artistic expressions associated with these temples, this research contributes to the broader understanding of Maharashtra's rich cultural heritage.

Keywords: *Temple architecture, Pune district, Maharashtra, Comparative study, Cultural heritage*

Introduction

Pune district is encircled by the districts of Satara in the south, Ahmednagar in the north and east, Solapur in the southeast, and Raigad in the west, Thane in northwest. Pune district is crossed by many rivers and streams, which take their rise in and near the Sahyadri mountain, and, bounded by the east-stretching spurs, flow east and south across the district. The principal river in the Pune district is the Bhima, a tributary of the Krishna River. It originates from Bhimashankar and moves south-eastward. The Bhima River has several significant tributaries, including the Ghod, Vel, Bhama, Indrayani, Nira, and Mula-Mutha.¹ On the banks of rivers, numerous temples, palaces, and other buildings were erected during the Mediaeval period.



Researchers have so far identified some of the Pune district's oldest structural temples. Henry Cousens conducted the first significant survey in the Deccan area of Maharashtra in the late nineteenth century.² Unfortunately, he has not documented any of the important temples in the Pune district in detail. S.D. Sankalia documented the 12th-13th century temples at Pur and Mankeshwar in the Junnar region of the Pune district in 1941.³

Following that, A.V. Naik (1942 & 1947) provided a thorough description of the Bhuleshwar temple.⁴ Some of the temples received impressive academic work over the course of the subsequent few decades. Scholars such as G.B. Deglurkar (1974 & 2019)⁵, M.S. Mate (1993 & 1998),⁶ P.P. Dandawate & et al. (2004-05)⁷, Siddhi Deshpande (2013)⁸, Amol Bankar (2014)⁹, Vijay Sarde and Abhijit Dandekar (2015)¹⁰, Gopal Joge et al. (2016)¹¹, Kumud Kanitkar (2017 & 2020)¹², Gauri Kate (2017)¹³ etc. have done some notable studies and mainly studied the art and architecture of the temples.

I was able to document some new undocumented temples (2014, 2016, 2017, 2019 & 2023) during my study of mediaeval temples in the Pune region.¹⁴ In light of this, I conducted surveys and explorations at several undocumented mediaeval temples in the Pune district as part of a temple project supported by the Tattva Heritage Foundation. However, in this research paper, I will concentrate on two recently found and undocumented mediaeval temples in the Pune district villages of Shingarwadi and Sangavi. The following is a brief description of these structural temples. The primary goal of this research paper is to draw attention to the art and architectural merits of these temples.

Mahadeva Temple at Shingarwadi (18.898055, 74.292360)

Shingarwadi is a small settlement at the confluence of the Kukadi and local Nālā (*nullah*) at a distance of 69 km from Pune city and 22 km from Shirur. It is rumoured that this settlement was formerly called 'Sṅgārawāḍī'. Perhaps the term was corrupted and given its current name. An old Mahadeva temple that faces east is located on the right bank of the Kukadi River (**Fig. 1**). Within the boundaries of the Ahmednagar district is a village called Gunore on the other side of the river. Only a portion of the original temple's building is still visible today. The temple is slightly tipped due to damage to its base. Even yet, the people are assured that it has been there for a long time.

The *garbhagr̥ha* and *sabhāmaṇḍapa* of the temple are still existing. The façade beam of the *sabhāmaṇḍapa* is engraved with a two-line Devanāgarī inscription and is 210 cm long by 180 cm broad. The text is inscribed on a stone slab that is 200 cm long and 33 cm broad (Fig. 2).

Transcription in Roman:

1. Śrī Manu Nāyaka | Wāi Nāyaka |
2. Īsvaraḡreha Krartavyam̐ |

Modern Transcription:

1. श्री मनु नायक | वाई नायक |
2. ईस्वरग्रेह कर्तव्यं |

Meanings: Śrī Manu Nayak and Wai Nayak have performed the duty of building the house of God, i.e., a temple.

A sculpture of Ganesha is carved at the entrance of the *garbhagr̥ha*. Bricks from the temple's construction and it's the vicinity may still be seen. This specifically demonstrates that bricks were used to build the temple's walls. As a result, the bricks were destroyed quickly, leaving just the temple's stone structure standing today. On the north side of the temple, there is a *praṇālaka* for draining the water intended for the Shivalinga. The *kalaśa* and *amalaka* on the top of the temple *śikhara* still survive in their original form. The magnificent and distinctive hero stones (*vīragaḷas*) are the temple's principal attraction. A total of five hero stones have been placed on the temple premises.

Hero Stone No. 1: Placed on the right side of the *sabhāmaṇḍapa*, next to *ardhastambha*. It is 162 cm high and 85 cm wide. It has a 25 cm depth. There are three main compartments on the hero stone. The lowest part is obscured by erosion. They ought to be two fallen heroes, maybe. They engage in combat with other soldiers in the middle compartment in the next scenario. One of the heroes is riding a horse and facing the enemy army with a sword. About 10 enemy soldiers are marching on these two heroes with spears, swords, and shields. A priest and a Shivalinga are

located in the middle of the top compartment. Two heroes are sitting on lofty pedestals and a Nandi is situated underneath the Shivalinga. Servants are standing behind these two heroes.

The two heroes are seen having garlands bestowed upon them by two apsaras (nymphs) as they soar above their heads. Such flying nymphs are rarely seen on hero stones. Over the right-hand hero's head, a Sevaka or Sevikā is holding a *chatra* (parasol). A sculpture of Ganesha is also shown near the hero. Perhaps the hero was a fervent follower of Ganesha as well. Kumbha is depicted on the uppermost portion of the hero stone (Fig. 3).

Hero Stone No. 2.: This is a *Sarvatobhadra*-type hero stone that is positioned on the left side in front of the *sabhāmaṇḍapa*. Its height is 125 cm and the width of the eastern side is 42 cm. A sculpture of Gajalakshmi is carved on top. The hero is seen using a sword to battle troops in the middle compartment. He is sat in a *maṇḍapa*, or temple, in the lowest compartment.

The hero stone's southern side is 36 cm in breadth. The hero is reclining in meditation in the *maṇḍapa* or temple, which has a *phāmsañā* type *śikhara* in the bottom compartment. He is battling two other troops with a sword and shield in the middle panel. He is depicted in the uppermost compartment sitting on a stool in front of the Shivalinga in a *namaskar mudrā*. A priest is present next to the Shivalinga.

The hero stone's western side is 40 cm in breadth. The hero is depicted laying in the lowest compartment with an unidentified person on this side. The hero and several soldiers engage in combat in the scenario in the middle compartment. The hero is depicted in the uppermost compartment posing in the *Namaskar mudrā* in front of the Shivalinga.

The *Sarvatobhadra* hero stone's northern face measures 35 cm in breadth. A lady is seen in the lowest panel as being engulfed in flames. She is probably going to *satī* with her deceased spouse. The hero battling an enemy brandishing a spear with a dagger in the middle panel. An image of a couple sitting on a raised seat is displayed in the uppermost compartment (Fig. 4).

Hero Stone No. 3: This hero stone is 130 cm tall and 44 cm wide. It is placed near the *ardhastambha* in *sabhāmaṇḍapa*. The hero is resting in the lowest compartment. On the side is also a carving depicting the hero being pulled by two nymphs in a palanquin. The hero is battling eight spear- and shield-wielding enemies in the middle panel. The hero is also holding a spear. The hero is seated in *namaskar mudrā* in front of the Shivalinga in the upper compartment. A Nandi is

carved under the Shivalinga and a priest is standing next to it. The uppermost portion of the hero stone has *Kumbha* engraved onto it (Fig. 5).

Hero Stone No. 4: The corroded hero stone is leaning against the *garbhagrha*'s wall. It is three compartmented and 100 cm high by 38 cm wide. A hero is depicted to perish while engaged in battle with adversaries in one of the compartments.

Hero Stone No. 5: This stone is simple and seems to have been created much later than the previous hero stones. In addition to these hero stones, the temple premises also house an eroded Uma-Maheshvara ālingana image. Before he passed away, a local devotee recently placed attractive metal images of Tara and Hanumana on the temple premises.

Temple of Shambhu Mahadeva at Sangavi

Sangavi is a small village situated on the left bank of the Nira River. It is 14 km from Baramati and 106 km from Pune city. An east-facing temple of Mahadeva (18.057786, 74.484364) is located north of the village and 500 m from the Baramati-Nira Road. This temple appears to have never been documented before. It is expertly constructed atop a tall pavilion. The stairs leading up to the temple are currently made of cement. Recently, a contemporary Dravidian *śikhara* was built atop the temple (Fig. 6). However, the many sculptures on the pillars of the *gudhamaṇḍapa* are what set this temple apart.

Nandīmaṇḍapa/Vāhana maṇḍapa: The total area of the *nandīmaṇḍapa* is 230 cm (l) X 223 cm (b). In the middle of its four pillars is an image of Nandi. The *maṇḍapa* also has an a Shivalinga in front of it.

Gudhamaṇḍapa (440 X 450 cm): The door to the *gudhamaṇḍapa* is plain and has an image of Ganesha on the *lalāṭabimba*. On either side of the doorway, there are two carved pillars. The portion of the *peḍyā* is flat. On either side of the *maṇḍovara*, there are two carvings of Nidhi and Kīrtīmukha. There are a total of four carved pillars in the *gūḍhamaṇḍapa*. The centre of the pillars is carved with a variety of sculptures. *Stambhaśirṣa* displays *nāgabandhas*. All the *vitānas* of the *maṇḍapa* are plain and flat. The pillars are 222 cm tall on average (Fig. 7).

Antarāḷa (227 X 213 cm): The *antarāḷa*, to the temple, is a significant architectural element. the doorway to the *antarāḷa*. The *antarāḷas vitāna* is open for illumination.

Garbhagr̥ha (197 X 197 cm): The simple door of the *garbhagr̥ha* has two *dwārapāla* images. Ganesha is carved on the *lalāṭabimba*. In each of the *garbhagr̥has* four cardinal directions, there are four pilasters. A Shivalinga is installed at the centre (Fig. 8). Near the Shivalinga, a stone pot is set up to hold the *abhiṣeka* water. The *vitāna* of the *garbhagr̥ha* is simple.

The exterior of the temple is plain and does not show any carvings or decorations. Since the *śikhara* has just been rebuilt, it is impossible to determine the its original shape.

Iconographical description

On the pillars of the *gūḍhamaṇḍapa* of the actual temple, several sculptures have been sculpted. To explain the precise placement of the sculptures and panels, the author has given the pillars four numbers. The southern front pillar is referred to among them as No. 1, and the southern rear pillar is referred to among them as No. 2. The third pillar from the back is on the north side. The fourth pillar is the one after it on the north side.

The sculpture descriptions are maintained in the same sequence as a *pradakṣiṇā-patha*. As a result, the order of the eastern side, southern side, western side, and northern side has been maintained. Generally, the portion of the pillar where the sculptures are carved is 31 cm broad and 25 cm high. Of course, there are little variations in the size of the pillars. Some of the sculptures appear mysterious since they are painted in crimson. It is challenging to locate them because of this.

Pillar No. 1.: The eastern portion of pillar number one depicts two warriors brandishing bows and arrows. Most likely, these are Rama and Lakshmana (Fig. 9). The Uma-Maheshvara āliṅgana is located on the south side, while Nandi is located on its left. A devotee in the *namaskar mudrā* is also carved with these figures. A sculpture of Ravana with 10 heads and twenty arms is sculpted on the western side. He is holding several weapons in his hands. With his front hand, he is shown drawing a sword from its sheath (Fig. 10). Images of Mahishamardini and Saraswati are carved on the north side with their corresponding *āyudhas* (Fig. 11).

Pillar No. 2.: To the east of the pillar are two sculptures. On the right, Bhairava is carved, and on the left, either Bhairavi or Chamunda. There is an animal in the Felidae (Pantherine) family standing behind Bhairava. A sculpture of a lady dancer and two *mridaṅga*-players is depicted on the south side (Fig. 12). There are sculptures of Kali (?) and Vaishnavi on the west. A corpse is also shown below Kali. On the north side, carvings of Varahi and Vishnu or Harihara (?) are seen.

Pillar No. 3.: It has a sculpture of Vidarana Narasimha in the eastern portion. Bhakta Prahlad is in *namaskar mudrā* and is standing (Fig. 13). A sculpture of Nritya Bhairava and possibly of Chamunda is to the south. On the western side, a combat scene from the Ramayana is engraved. Rama is most likely perched on Hanumana's shoulders in this image. Three images of Vishnu are most likely located to the north in *sthānaka mudrā* (Fig. 14).

Pillar No. 4.: A man and a lady are shown riding an elephant in the east. Indra and Shachi are most likely shown in the sculpture (Fig. 15). A man and a lady are perched on top of a deer to the south. A person is standing with them. Most likely a Vayu sculpture from the Aṣṭadīpālas. The West has a man and a lady riding a horse. There is a sculpture of Lakshmi-Narayana being raised by Garuda on the north side. A woman is also standing nearby. Additionally, a loose image of Ganesha is kept in the *gūḍhamandapa*.

Every *amāwasyā* (no moon day), The *Pālakhī* (palanquin) with a few masks and deities arrives at the temple. During this period, devotees' worship both Shiva and the Ganesha. Conch, cymbals, and tambourine are played at this point. The same palanquin travels to several other temples across the area until arriving at the Shambhu Mahadeva shrine. A limited group of followers carries the palanquin.

Discussion

Shingarwadi's Mahadeva Temple and the hero stones might both be from the 12th century CE. The letters in the temple's inscription can be used to determine the temple's date. The names of



Yadava monarch Seunadeva and Wāi Nāyaka may be found on an inscription that dates to the 11th or 12th century and was discovered at the Bhairavnatha temple at Deulgaon Raje in the Pune district.

The temple must have been constructed in the 12th century CE, if the reference of Wāi Nāyaka in the Shingarwadi inscription is assumed to be the same as in the Deulgaon Raje inscription. Given the hero Stone's theme, it ought to have sculptures of heroes or officers. Additionally, it may be inferred that conflict must have occurred in this region of the Kukdi River because combat scenes are shown. The first four hero stones appear to have a similar general design to the temple. In addition, the district of Pune seldom has Ganesha and Gajalakshmi motifs on hero stones.

Based on its architectural and artistic style, the temple of Shambhu Mahadeva at Sangvi appears to be from the 14th or 15th century CE. The temple's pillars do not appear proportionate. Devakoṣṭhas don't exist in *gudhamaṇḍapa*. Dwāraśākhas are also very simple. The temple's exterior is likewise simple. All of these characteristics point to the temple's origins in the later period, i.e., c. 14th–15th centuries. Some of the sculptures in the temple were difficult to identify because of the excessive use of colours. The sculptures of the Shambhu Mahadeva temple offer a window into the beliefs of contemporary religion. The Ramayana legends and the veneration of Bhairava, Vishnu, and Ganesha seem to be widespread in the region.

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Fig. 1. General view of the Mahadeva temple, Shingarwadi.



Fig. 2. An Inscription on Mahadeva temple, Shingarwadi



Fig. 3. Hero stone No. 1., Shingarwadi.



Fig. 4. Hero stone No. 2 , Shingarwadi.



Fig. 5. Hero stone No.3. , Shingarwadi



Fig. 6. General view of Shambhu Mahadeva temple, Sangavi.



Fig. 6. General view of Shambhu Mahadeva temple, Sangavi.



Fig. 8. Garbhagrha, Shambhu Mahadeva temple, Sangavi.



Fig. 9. Rama and Lakshmana, Shambhu Mahadeva temple, Sangavi.



Fig. 10. Ravana, Shambhu Mahadev temple, Sangavi



Fig. 11. Mahishamardini and Saraswati, Shambhu Mahadev temple, Sangavi.



Fig. 12. Musicians, Sangavi



Fig. 13. Vidarana Narasimha, Shambhu Mahadeva Temple, Sangavi.



Fig. 14. Vishnu sculptures, Shambhu Mahadeva temple, Sangavi



Fig. 15. Indra and Shachi, Shambhu Mahadeva temple, Sangavi



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