ADVENTURE PARAGLIDING

Shrines
Mt. Mary

Sanctuary
Phansad

Jain Caves
Mangi Tungi

Vol. 1 | Oct - Dec 2012 | INR 150
It's a jungle out here. Literally. As you spot a tiger, a question stealthily creeps to mind, “If he decided to take revenge for our deeds, wouldn't you become part of the extinct species too?” Such fearsome thoughts aside, Tadoba welcomes you with ancient tribals in this Tiger reserve. Not that calling it a Tiger reserve matters to sloth bears, hyenas, wild dogs, wild boars, porcupines and the like. These wild species aren't the only ones who give no regard to names—as is proven by the gaur, sambar, nilgai, barking deer, four-horned antelopes and over 113 bird species you'll spot here. Welcome to Maharashtra, an experience that's truly unforgettable.
In this issue

Adventure – Paragliding 4
Beach - Velas 12
Travel Circuit – Ahmednagar District 22
Personalities – Savitribai Phule 34
Caves – Jain Caves at Mangi Tungi 40
Museums – Nagpur Museum 48
Shrines – Mt. St. Mary’s church, Mumbai 56
Achievement – Medical Tourism 62
In the Hills – Malshej Ghat 64
Performing Arts – Kirtan 72
Sanctuary – Phansad 78
Literature – Jnaaneshwari 88
Fort – Kandhar 98
Lake – Dhamapur 102
Cuisine – Karanji, Chakli, Chirota 110
Festival – Maharashtrian Navaratri 114
If you have always envied the birds for being able to soar in the skies, here’s how you can do it too. Learn paragliding to be able to experience the thrill of free flying or just sign up for a ‘tandem flight’ with any of the paragliding schools in Maharashtra, suggests Abhay Ghanekar.
Spread Your Wings… and Fly!

Paragliding

Abhay Ghanekar | Photographs © Rahul Rao

New Developments

Technology is making advances every single day. Thus it should come as no surprise that paragliding is also benefitting from technological advances. A new kind of reserve parachute has just been launched. Known as the ‘acro-base system’, this parachute is designed for faster deployment. Thus, the fall in altitude is reduced greatly. This adds immensely to the safety of a pilot in need.
Take a walk down memory lane. Remember the time when a makeshift superhero cape had you convinced it would make you fly! Think back to the carefree afternoons which you spent with outstretched arms, conducting your own private flight sessions. Free flying, in fact, has been man’s oldest dream and paragliding is the path of fulfillment towards that dream. Now you can experience the joy of flying like a bird, in its purest and safest form. Paragliding is a gift of wings - a taste of the freedom of your spirit and a countless beautiful different things to different people.

There is nothing to beat the indescribable sensation of floating like a bird over a pristine countryside. No wonder paragliding has stirred up such passion worldwide.

Is Paragliding For Me?
Everyone who has ever dreamt of flying free must experience paragliding at least once in a lifetime. There are two ways of enjoying paragliding. The first and the easiest is to opt for a ‘tandem flight’. Here all that one needs to do is to sit in the harness and enjoy flying while the expert pilot takes care of all the hassles.
of flying safely. You can enjoy the flight, the view, the thrill and the adrenaline rush. If you are a courageous one, the pilot may show you some acrobatic maneuvers before you touch down. You can even take photos during your flight – your first flying experience deserves a place on your Facebook profile, doesn’t it?

The other way is to learn this art of flying. And for this you need time, patience and the die-hard will to fly. There is no age limit to this adventure sport but it is recommended that you possess the maturity required to respect the risks involved. Since the equipment relies on human and wind power, it is important to respect the equipment and the wind conditions. Paragliding is more about finesse than fitness, more about skill than strength. Thus, being physically and mentally alert and prepared is of great importance. Despite this fact, there are some health checks you must run yourself through before taking up paragliding as an adventure sport.

For example:

- Are you able to jog and run without losing breath?
- Are you able to walk up the hill with ease?
- Are you diagnosed with any heart ailments or asthma or epilepsy? Then you better give up all ideas of paragliding. It is simply not safe!
- Are you blessed with a peripheral sense of vision, distance and judgement?
- Are you aware of the risks involved?
- Do you possess the ability to take reasonable decisions?
- Do you have the patience to wait for ideal weather conditions? No instant gratification here!
- And above all, do you have the will to fly?

The last point plays a great role in making you mentally prepared for a stint in paragliding. To state my own example, I had always feared heights. But I was determined to com-
bat this phobia and hence made up my mind to take up this adventure sport. The first time I was lifted off the ground by the wind currents, extreme fear filled up my mind. But willpower led me to open my eyes and discover a whole new meaning of feeling ‘on top of the world’. The supreme joy I felt at that moment is impossible to describe. The word awesome has no meaning until you fly. To know you are in charge of your own destiny and yet to be humbled by the fact that you are at the wind’s mercy. To reach heights that even birds dream of. To view the world from a bird’s point of view and fall in love with nature’s creations - paragliding offers all that and more.

How Safe Is It?
A majority of people are reluctant to try this adventure sport since a lot of news about paragliding accidents keeps doing the rounds. What is hardly ever highlighted is that thousands of pilots, beginners, amateurs are learning and flying every day, safely, under experts’ supervision. Since the equipment consists of negligible machinery, it is very rare to find cases of accidents due to defective equipment. Usually, accidents occur when the pilot gets too sure of himself and decides to challenge his or her limits without enough expertise. Another reason is choosing equipment that requires higher skill-sets than what one possesses. Thus, personal judge-
ment and possessing the right attitude are of utmost importance. It goes without saying that if you follow the instructions of your instructor while learning, it is very safe to try your hand at this art of flying. Paragliding is as safe as the pilot in command. It is as safe as you want it to be.

What’s The Equipment Like?
The equipment necessary for this adventure sport fits itself in a backpack that can easily be carried by you to the take-off point. The entire kit weighs less than 15 kilograms. It consists of a harness, carabiners, the canopy/ wing and a reserve parachute. Radios and helmets are additional accessories necessary for your safety. When you go to a flying school, they provide the equipment that suits you. You need not purchase the equipment until you have completed training courses like P1 and P2. No special attire is required, but it is recommended you wear full-length pants and shoes with good ankle support.

Can Paragliding Be Done Atop Any Hill?
The answer is ‘No’. There are specific locations identified as ideal spots for paragliding. When the wind direction is exactly perpendicular to the hill, the location may be called an ideal setting. In case of Maharashtra, paragliding is fast gaining popularity. It saw its origin in the fourth decade of the past century but the increased safety in the gliders brought this adventure sport into limelight during the recent years. Kamshet, near Pune, is one of the most sought-after spots for paragliding. Paragliders from all over the world converge here to enjoy the flight, the adrenaline rush. The area expands enormously, thus providing smooth sailing in the air.

How Does Paragliding Work?
The kit is carried by the pilot to the launch site. The wind direction and its consistency are checked before take-off. In case of doubtful weather conditions, it is recommended to stay on ground and wait for the wind to stabilize. Once the wind conditions are ideal for take-off, the pilot is seated in the harness and connected to the glider. The paraglider itself is constructed of rip-stop nylon, from which the pilot is suspended by sturdy Kevlar/Dynema lines. These may look fragile but possess immense weight-holding capacity. All paragliders are shock and load-tested for safety. The pilot can choose the sitting inclination for maximum comfort as desired.

Once the equipment is in place, you can inflate it in zero wind, stabilize it overhead with a touch of the brakes, launch it at a steady trot, and yet it will also fly forward in quite a strong breeze. It turns with a gentle pull on a single handle, or will fly straight, with a little more than an occasional shift of your shoulders. It is far easier to handle a paraglider in the air than on the ground. Gliders are classified according to the weight of the pilot and level of proficiency. While training, you start off with shorter flights, trying to master the take-off and landing technique. As you progress, you will be able to soar to great heights. Average recreational pilots, using thermal and ridge lift, easily stay up for 2 to 3 hours or more, can soar to altitudes of up to 15,000 feet and travel cross-country for great distances.

Is Paragliding the same as Hang Gliding?
Paragliding is often confused with hang gliding. Paragliders are non-powered aircraft weighing around 6 to 8 kgs, and can be carried in a backpack to any ‘flyable’ site. A paraglider is made of rip-stop nylon cloth (reinforced and polyurethane-coated to make it non-porous) with no rigid parts whatsoever. It is inflated and maintained purely by the movement of air across its surface. The pilot sits below the wing, in a harness that is connected to the wing by suspension lines. The pilot steers by pulling one of two lines, known as brake lines.

Hang gliders too are non-powered aircraft but weighing more and being bulkier they need two people to carry them. They are fixed-wing aircraft and take more time to rig up and dismantle and are physically more demanding while training. Being bulky they cannot be carried by one person or put into the boot of a car but need to be strapped on to the roof of a vehicle. The pilot lies in a prone position and maneuvers with the help of a bar that he holds on to during the flight. Hang gliders have more speed than paragliders and being rigid can consequently take off in stronger wind conditions.

Is it the same as Parasailing or Parachuting?
The answer again is ‘No’. Parasailing is what you do on a beach or on plain ground in a modified round parachute tied to a boat or a jeep. You get dragged around like a sack of There are two ways of enjoying paragliding. The first and the easiest is to opt for a ‘tandem flight’. Here all that one needs to do is to sit in the harness and enjoy flying while the expert pilot takes care of all the hassles of flying safely. You can enjoy the flight, the view, the thrill and the adrenaline rush.
potatoes. You are not in control, very unlike a pilot. (If you really want to offend a paragliding pilot, try referring to their sport as ‘parasailing’!). On the other hand, parachutes are designed only to descend, to be deployed during free-fall from an airplane and to then descend to the ground. By contrast, paraglider pilots launch from gentle hillsides with their gliders already opened for flight. If the glider isn’t flying properly, the launch can be aborted before leaving the ground. Since paragliders do not have to withstand the stresses of free-fall deployment, they are much lighter and aerodynamic and are designed to go up rather than down.

Is Paragliding a Recreational Activity?

There can be no other hobby that provides such perfect relaxation as paragliding. The ultimate bliss enjoyed in the skies amidst the clouds is a perfect unwind. Training schools also offer joyrides for those not interested in taking up paragliding professionally. In such cases, you get to fly tandem (a professional pilot flies the glider and you sit in front of him). This is ideal if you want to experience paragliding without any intentions of pursuing it further.

How do I Choose a Good Training School?

It is always advisable to first talk to the chief flying instructor to clear all your doubts regarding flying, safety and the risks involved in this sport. This dialogue will also give you a fair idea of what to expect. Additionally:

- When selecting a school for paragliding instruction, first make sure that the school is registered with the FAI (Federation Aeronautic International) or APPI International (Association of Professional Pilots & Instructors, Switzerland).
- Make sure the instructors have international pilot licenses issued by APPI International or FAI.
- Make sure the instructors have relevant qualifications and ample experience.
- Find out the instructor to student ratio for each class.
- Check the safety record of the school and of the instructors.
- Also, check the number of students the school has taught till date and how many have gone on to receive licenses and certifications per year.
- A good school is one that offers wider range of courses, right from basic to the most advanced level training. P1, P2, certification courses, progression courses, specialized clinics for cross-country (XC), SIV (security in-flight) to acrobatic training are a few of the courses offered by APPI-validated and certified schools.
Paragliding Training Schools
Here are a few of the reputed training schools near Pune and Mumbai.

TEMPLE PILOTS, KAMSHET:
Temple Pilots is a five star, certified, registered and operating school with APPI International. With over 40 years of combined experience of its core team, they have been able to put themselves among the best paragliding schools today. In addition, Temple Pilots has step-by-step structured plans and programs for pilots of all levels. They have one of the largest teams amongst paragliding schools worldwide with nine instructors, thereby maintaining an excellent instructor to student ratio. This not only gives you quality training but also high safety standards. With their 100 per cent safety record and professional standards of training, Temple Pilots is the only school recognised by the Aeroclub of India as an associate member of the IPF (Indian Parachuting Federation). Temple Pilots also offers professional and recognized courses for instructors and tandem pilots.

- Website: www.templepilots.com.
- Services Offered: Courses, tandem flights, expeditions.
- Manager: Avi Malik (10135).
- Qualifications: APPI instructor, SIV instructor, XC instructor, tandem instructor, master instructor, APPI fly guide.

I would personally recommend this training school since I have trained with them. The instructor to student ratio is almost 1:1 and occasionally 1:2. In both cases, you are convinced the instructor is totally tuned to your flight progress.

FLY NIRVANA, KAMSHET:
Fly Nirvana Paragliding School has been in operation at Kamshet since 1997. It is a three star, certified flying school by the APPI. They offer courses, tandem flights and expeditions and also enable interested individuals to hire equipment. Their program focus is on spreading the message of having fun and enjoying adventure in the outdoors in a safe, sustainable and eco-friendly manner. Their main interests are in exploring, discovering and documenting the flying possibilities of the Sahyadris and the adjoining ranges so as to popularize the area as a paragliding destination worldwide. They also aim to popularize the sport amongst the people of the adjoining cities i.e. Pune, Mumbai, etc.

- Website: www.flynirvana.com.
- Services offered: courses, tandem flights, expeditions, hiring equipment.
- Manager: Sanjay M Rao (10767).
- Qualifications: APPI instructor, SIV instructor, XC instructor, tandem instructor.

INDUS PARAGLIDING, MUMBAI:
Indus Paragliding is a two star certified school by the APPI. They are located at Karla on the Old Mumbai-Pune highway. They possess ample indoor and outdoor training area within the premise, thus providing a good atmosphere for basic ground training, theory sessions and interactive video sessions.

Website: www.indusparagliding.in.
Services offered: Courses, tandem flights, expeditions, hiring.
Manager: Sanjay Pendurkar (10503).
Qualifications: APPI instructor.

SPACE APPLE:
Space Apple is based at Virar. It is a two star certified club by the APPI and offers basic, intermediate and advanced courses in paragliding.

- Website: www.paraglidingmumbai.com.
- Services offered: Courses, tandem flights, hiring, repairing of equipment.
- Manager: Samson D'Silva (11143).
- Qualifications: APPI instructor.

Travel Tips
It goes without saying that if you follow the instructions of your instructor while learning, it is very safe to try your hand at this art of flying. Paragliding is as safe as the pilot in command. It is as safe as you want it to be.

For more information
The source of above information and more information about other flying schools and flight sites in India may be found on the website: www.appifly.org.
The sight of turtle hatchlings just out of their nests and making their ponderous way to the Arabian Sea can be an exhilarating sight indeed. Don’t just watch this in documentary films, rather head out to Velas in Ratnagiri to see the spectacle unfold in real life, suggests Samir Madhani.

Journeying to the Arabian Sea

Velas

Samir Madhani, Gaurav Issar | Photographs © Samir Madhani
Distance from Mumbai: 220 Km

Reaching There

From Mumbai:
One can drive to Velas by taking NH-17, which is Mumbai – Goa highway. Upon reaching Goregaon turn right to go to Velas. ST bus service between Velas and Mumbai is available.

Excursions:
Turtle festival, in which one can see the Olive ridley turtles taking their finals steps on land to start their voyage. One can also take a ferry to go to Harihareshwar.

Beach
Living in our manmade concrete jungles, the sight of something as commonplace as birds nesting has become a rarity. And amazing sights such as a turtle hatchling emerging from its nest to make its way laboriously over the sand to the sea are virtually restricted to television documentaries. However, witnessing such a phenomenon in person is an awe-inspiring experience in itself. And it’s not too difficult to do so anymore! All you have to do is visit Velas, a remote village in the Mandangad taluka of Ratnagiri district. But make sure that you coincide your visit with the Turtle Festival, a celebration of nature’s wonder in which baby turtles of the Olive Ridley are released into the sea by the volunteers of the Sahyadri Nisarga Mitra.

Like a precious jewel, Velas is protected by mountains on its three sides and a beautiful shoreline on the fourth quadrant. This of
course makes it a perfect getaway but not just to relax but also to come close to understanding the ecological diversity of the Konkan region. And also understand how it is more important than ever for the locals to retain their customs and traditional way of life so as to continue to preserve nature in its pristine form. Incidentally, Velas also holds historical significance as the birthplace and hometown of Nana Phadnavis, an influential minister and statesman of the Maratha Empire during the Peshwa administration in Pune. A village of farmers, Velas’ economy thrives on the cultivation of rice, coconuts, beetle nut (supari),
With the marine turtle conservation movement in Maharashtra gaining strength in recent years, there has now been a serious attempt to ensure that the message of turtle conservation reaches a wider audience and that the local community becomes a stakeholder in this process. That primarily is the reason why Velas has now been thrown open to the curious and the conservationists. The ideal time to visit Velas is when the Olive Ridley turtle hatchlings emerge from the golden sand, wasting no time as they follow the scent of moisture in the air and begin their seemingly never-ending voyage to the Arabian Sea. This is after the mother turtles have come ashore under the cover of darkness about 45-55 days ahead to lay their clutches of eggs. The Olive Ridley has one of the most extraordinary nesting habits in the world. Large groups of turtles gather offshore and then all at once they come ashore to lay their eggs. This mass arrival and mass nesting is known as ‘Arribada’. However, it was the loss of nesting habitats, poaching of eggs and death due to accidental catch in fishing nets that finally led the concerned authorities to sit up and take notice so that the Olive Ridleys was attributed the ‘endangered’ status under Schedule I species in the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972. Since then, there has been a continuous effort to save the Olive Ridleys, one such being the project started by the Sahyadri Nisarga Mitra (SNM) in 2001. To begin with, the SNM took all the villagers in confidence in order to conserve the turtles on a mass scale and this has not only led to a huge success of the programme but has also helped create additional income for the locals who arrange home stays for the visitors. The SNM and Kasav Mitra Mandal (KMM), a local body, now organise the Turtle Festival each year during the period of February – March. Since the past nine years, the NGO has successfully implemented the project in 36 villages across the coast of Maharashtra, protecting 681 nests and releasing more than 30,465 hatchlings into the sea. This year, the Department of Forests has provided financial and logistical support to the NGO, further strengthening the marine turtle conservation movement in the state. There is a lot of hard work that goes into the festival and it begins with the volunteers keeping a close watch for freshly laid nests by the female turtles – easy to spot because of the trails left behind on the sand by the female turtle. A female turtle digs a pit generally about two feet deep and then lays its eggs. That done, it covers the pit with sand and returns to the sea. The volunteers then dig the nests and carefully transfer the eggs to man-made pits called hatcheries. This is a protected area and a strict vigil is kept by the volunteers and the locals. After the incubation period, the hatchlings emerge at any time of the day from their nests, but are released into the sea by volunteers at specific times i.e. at 0700 and 1615 hours because at these times the sand temperature is very conducive for the hatchlings to undertake their...
slow dash to the sea.

Apart from this unique sight, Velas also has more to offer. You could visit places such as Bankot, Kelshi, Dapoli, Diveagar, Shrivardhan, Harihareshwar, Guhagar and many more. Of these, Bankot is a small fishing village that offers a view of Himmatgadh, also called as the Bankot Quila. Guhagar has several pristine beaches, including Hedvi and Velneshwar, and also the temple of Dashabhuja (10 hands) Ganpati. Dapoli, Diveagar, Shrivardhan, etc are not only well known for their beaches but also the typical Konkani cuisine they serve.

The turtle festival is normally held during the time the hatchlings continue to emerge from their nests. To book your accommodation, refer to the list of the Kasav Mitra Mandal web site. These members provide home stays and can be contacted directly over the phone. Accommodation facilities are available at reasonable rates. These charges include dormitory-style accommodation, simple vegetarian lunch and dinner, breakfast and tea thrice a day. Mattresses or carpets (satranjis) are available with most of the members. Separate rooms are also available, details of which can be found on the website. While at Velas, make it a point to visit the Marine Turtle Knowledge & Information Centre as well as the Marine Turtle Research and Conservation Centre to learn more about sea turtles.
Turtle Facts

The male turtles never return to land and the female turtles return only to lay eggs, travelling over 3,000 kms from the feeding to breeding grounds.

Interestingly, the female turtle hatchlings, when they reach maturity, return to the same shore to lay their eggs. Studies speculate that the turtle hatchlings on emerging from the nest store the coordinates of that shore in the form of its electromagnetic field intensity.

Unlike the tortoise, a marine turtle cannot retract its head into the shell. This leaves it without any defense mechanism.

Only 1 per cent of the turtle hatchlings reach adulthood.

They serve to keep the ocean bed clean.

Travel Tips

1. Time of the turtle festival is 19th Feb. till the time hatchlings continue to emerge, which generally goes on for a month.
2. There are no eateries in Velas, so one should carry chips, cold drinks etc…
3. If you are driving to Velas in your own vehicle, make sure you have fuelled up your vehicle because there are no petrol pumps in Velas.

What to eat

One cannot miss the Konkani food that the villagers serve.

Where to stay

1. In Velas local home stays is the way to stay put.
2. There is a MTDC resort in Harihareshwar, where one can stay put and visit Velas.

Turtle festival: The Olive ridley turtle hatchlings are released in the sea at 0715hrs and at 1800hrs.
The Bastions of History

Ahmednagar

Kumar Mangwani | Photographs © Kumar Mangwani, Yogesh Kardile

The most common assumption made about Ahmednagar district is that it is a drought-prone arid region with scattered industrial hubs. However, as Kumar Mangwani points out, it has much more to offer by way of Mughal era’s forts and tombs, places of pilgrimage, a sanctuary for blackbucks and the showcasing of India’s military might, among other spots of historical, mythological and environmental interest.
Distance from Mumbai: 270 Km

Reaching There
From Mumbai: The most convenient way is by bus via Pune or via Chakan. Regular Shivneri and other private Volvo buses ply between Pune and Aurangabad.
By Air: Nearest airport is Aurangabad (114 kms), however Pune is also about the same distance and is better connected with other cities across India.
By Rail: Ahmednagar is on the main Pune Delhi line but frequency is limited.

Excursions:
The Rehekuri Blackbuck sanctuary is located a short distance out of Ahmednagar. Shirdi and Meherabad are popular sites of pilgrimage.
Just as every historical town in India flourishes in retellings of its conspiratorial past, Ahmednagar too comes about as replete with exhaustive accounts of plot after feudal plot - the core of bitter scheming being the covetous fort on the city’s outskirts. The city itself might not offer much by way of sights, however stray off the course a little and you will find that its surroundings are dotted with monuments recalling a bygone era - most of which are influenced by the Mughal period.

**Overlaps of Time**

The foundation of Ahmednagar was laid unassumingly in 1494 when turning headwinds to seek revenge, Malik Ahmad, who by then had assumed his father’s title ‘Ahmad Nizam-ul-Mulk Bahari’ upon his assassination, shifted his capital from Junnar to the left bank of Sina River to be within striking distance of his enemies at Daulatabad. Calling the city ‘Ahmadnagar’ after his own name Malik Ahmad, the future founder of Nizam Shahi built a garden of victory - the Bagh Nizam. And to conclude his triumph, when he finally razed the Bahamanis of Daulatabad in 1499, the Bagh Nizam was decorously mud-walled into a fortified bastion at the very place of the present day Ahmednagar fort.

With the Nizam Shahi rule thus established, Ahmednagar became their stronghold. In the intervening period that followed, most of Ahmednagar’s pleasure monuments were founded by the successive Nizam Shahs. They prospered, but not without the plunders of every history, for about 150 years. Besieged by constant wars with neighbours, the third Nizam Shah ascending Ahmednagar in 1553 CE decidedly fortified the mud walls of his grandfather’s edificial Bagh Nizam - employing Portuguese skills to fashion a mile-long peripheral moat. The later Mughals envied the fortified refuge of the Nizams and to se-
cure a foothold in the Deccan it became imperative that the fort be taken over.

In 1636, Shah Jahan’s army marched in from the north, spelling the end of the dynastic Nizam Shahi and establishing Ahmednagar as a strong Mughal rule. The great Maratha king, Shivaji, realizing the threat of the Mughals stormed the now famous fort twice in 1657 and 1665. It was only after Shivaji’s death in 1680 that Aurangzeb, the last of the great Mughal emperors, entered the Deccan and held reign till his death in 1707. Although Aurangzeb was buried in a mausoleum near Aurangabad, a small tomb at Alamgir, the cantonment precincts of Ahmednagar, marks the place where his mortal remains were bathed before proceeding to Aurangabad. Alamgir’s library houses some rare and antiquated Qurans, believed to have been written by the last emperor himself.

Aurangzeb’s death had already marked the end of Mughal flourish and in 1759 the Peshwas of Poona took over the fort. After the defeat of Maratha Confederacy in the third Anglo-Maratha war in 1818 and with most of the Peshwa’s domains annexed to the British in India, Ahmednagar district was created, which remained a central part of the Bombay Presidency. The British later were to house Jawaharlal Nehru and other stalwarts of India’s freedom struggle on this premise and it was in the confines of the fort cells that Nehru wrote the ‘Discovery of India’. The legendary fort’s ruffled history finally calmed down when on August 15, 1947 the tricolour was unfurled over the ramparts of one of the most impregnable forts in India.

The Monuments
Salabat Khan’s tomb is perhaps the most popular of the Nizam Shahi monuments but is often mistakenly addressed as Chand Bibi Mahal. Perched on a hill named Shah Dongar, about 10 kms outside the city, the open verandahs along this octagonal structure offers fine views of the rolling countryside. Visible from afar, the three floors rise nearly 75 feet
high, accessed by narrow staircases squeezed between thick stone walls. The broad arched openings on the upper two floors have projecting balconies on floral stone brackets. Salabat Khan II, a minister with Nizam Murtuza Shah, himself ordered this tomb to be built, where he lies buried in the dim basement next to his first wife.

About 3 kms southeast of the city centre and rising within a once man-made lake is Faria Bagh, the pleasure palace built by the second Nizam, Burhan Shah. Octagonal in plan, the ruins rise up two floors with a domical roof over the central hall. The remains of the peeling stucco facades are punctured with arched cutouts, creating an intriguing drama of light and shadow within its interiors. The octagonal pit in the central hall, overlooked by arched galleries, suggests this might have been a bathing tank. In the days of yore, the formidable palace surrounded with a garden laid out in the Charbagh style would have been an envious possession of the Nizams.

Closer to Bhingar, Ahmednagar’s cantonment, and often overlooked due to ignored surroundings is the Damdi Masjid. Built

Ahmednagar’s primary claim to pilgrimage fame comes from Shirdi, about 80 kms away. This abode of Sai Baba, over time, has become an important pilgrimage for both Hindus and Muslims enduring the endless queues for a quick glance of the saintly figure who encouraged tolerance of multiple faiths.
in 1568 in the exemplary Deccan style with intricate stone carvings, this single-storey structure has an impressive façade of three arches supported on carved piers. Notable in its intricacy are the stone cut-outs of the trefoil parapet topped with finials. The odd sounding name comes from ‘damdis’ - the then currency of smallest denomination humbly contributed to build this mosque.

Saintly Visitations
Ahmednagar’s primary claim to pilgrimage fame comes from Shirdi, about 80 kms away. This abode of Sai Baba, over time, has become an important pilgrimage for both Hindus and Muslims enduring the endless queues for a quick glance of the saintly figure who encouraged tolerance of multiple faiths. The main temple houses Sai Baba’s samadhi while his guru’s tomb is located by the Neem tree, the Gurusthan. The devout throng in large numbers on Thursdays when Baba’s image is brought out from the temple. His personal effects too are exhibited in the temple complex. Once an insignificant village, Shirdi has mushroomed into a populated town busy with bazaars and hotels.

Another temple populated by the pilgrims and a stopover often combined with Shirdi is Shani Shingnapur located about 35 kms from Ahmednagar. Here, Saturn, one of the most feared astrological planets is personified as Shanidev and worshipped with amazing devotion where pilgrims offer ‘tailabhisheka’ (anointing the embodied stone with offerings of oil) to the self-manifested stone pillar. Shingnapur’s unique aspect is that the village houses have no doors or locks. “The temple precincts are blessed by God Shani and anyone trying to steal will have to face the guardian deity’s wrath,” claim the residents.
The Ahmednagar district landscape
It was at Meherabad, the retreat pilgrimage about 9 kms outside Ahmednagar where Avatar Meher Baba spent many months in seclusion. His universal message of “I have come not to teach but to awaken” attracts devoted followers who feel his presence inside the small stone room where the last remains are laid to rest. His prayers are sung every evening, rendered with soulful music.

Accounting for more such saintly interventions, it is said that Sant Jnaaneshwar narrated Jnaaneshwari - the Marathi commentary of the Bhagavad Gita - at Newasa. His elder brother Nivruttinath, who was his Guru too, along with his other siblings, was present at that occasion. The commentary was written down by Sachchidanandbaba, the Kulkarni of Newasa. The Jnaaneshwar temple and the Mohiniraj temple are the most famous pilgrimage centers in the town today. However the antiquity of this small town goes back to the Stone Age. The archaeological excavations carried out at Newase revealed the continuous habitation from the Stone Age to the Muslim Maratha period. The cultural sequence of this site has been reconstructed in the Museum of Archaeology, Deccan College, Pune. In more recent times, Anand Rishiji Maharaj received his initiation at Ahmednagar at the age of thirteen and thereby committing himself to his spiritual pursuits of love and non-violence and a deep-rooted service for all humanity. His sacred relics are preserved in a monument called as Anand Dham in the city of Ahmednagar.

**Unearthing The Past**

Ahmednagar district’s vastness is replete with historical sites, many associated with mythology. Lord Ram is believed to have visited Agasti Rishi Ashram on the banks of Pravara River near Akole where he was offered the legendary arrow with which he killed Ravan. The town of Akole is also famous for the two architectural marvels viz. the Siddheshwar temple (12th – 13th century CE) and the Gangadhareshwar temple (1782 CE). Not very far is the Jagdamba or Bhavani temple at Tahakari which is adorned with exquisite sculptures of surasundaris (the divine beauties). This temple is unique as it has...
Vol. 1, October-December 2012
MAHARASHTRA UNLIMITED

three *garbhagrihas* (sanctums) and a common hall. It was constructed in the 10th – 11th centuries CE. At Jorwe, along the Pravara, archaeological unearthing has revealed the 3,500-year-old Deccan Chalcolithic culture which once thrived over almost entire Maharashtra. The archaeological excavations carried out at this place revealed the life and culture of the early farmers of the Deccan. Takali Dhokeshwar makes for a good day visit to see the 5th century cave temples and so does Nighoj, a geographical wonderland with natural potholes like craters along the riverside.

**Ahmednagar Today**

Ahmednagar, now more synonymous with Nagar, is the bustling capital of the largest district of Maharashtra by the same name occupying an area more than 17,000 sq km. The city has a large daily influx of rural folks visiting the wholesale bazaars and thrives as an important centre for sugar and milk, with as many as 19 sugar factories spread across the district. Of its rural produce, and particularly if you happen to travel in the months between December and February, make sure not to miss the famous ‘hurda’. In the adjoining stretches of farmlands, the hot roasted *jawari* grain fresh from the cobs with dollops of curds and a generous sprinkling of garlic chutney has become associated with the sociable ‘hurda’ party. Sugarcane juice twisted out of grinding wheels is a godsend in the awfully hot summer months. For the street-food craver the staple *vada-pav* can be sated at Manik Chowk, topped over with creamy hot milk sizzling under the sodium night lamps at the Kapad bazaar, which is, but more famous for *Basta*, the comprehensive purchase of cloth during the wedding seasons.

**Military Honours**

With a strong presence of the Indian Armored Corps and Mechanized Infantry and a former Indian base of the British Army’s Royal Tank Corps, Ahmednagar houses the second-largest display of military tanks in the world. Inaugurated in 1994, the open air museum not only displays the Indian military might used during wars but also flaunts the Patton and the Chaffee, captured during the 1965 Pakistan war. One of the earliest, the British Mark I nicknamed the Big Willie, used in World War I and the armored car, Schwerer Panzersphahwagen, complete with a Nazi Swastika, are among the notable exhibits. For military buffs, there is an impressive exhibit of other armored mammoths - the Canadian Fox, the British A-9, the Soviet T-54 and even a Rolls Royce. Another muse-
um in the heart of the city has a notable collection of rare coins and ancient manuscripts including a 66-metre long horoscope and an 1816 map of India printed in London.

Quick Getaways

Nighoj, a small village on the Deccan Plateau is the perfect one day getaway to relieve stress. Believed to be the largest potholes of Asia, these natural wonders along the gorge of the Kukdi river near Nighoj are a real treat to the eye.

And for a quick glimpse of the wild, take the road out towards Shirur taking directions for Malthan village and on to Morachi Chin-choli (tamarind groves) - the haven for more than a thousand wild peacocks in their natural habitat. The villagers here are protective and possessive about these feathered birds which they relate to a local deity and thus setting a fine example of the man-animal harmony. Not to be missed is the local cuisine of zunka-bhakar at Mayur Bagh and the fiery misal-pav along the highway. On Nagar’s other side is a deciduous setting for the endangered blackbuck, the Rehekuri Blackbuck.

The author is a travel writer.
sanctuary - a modest scrubland spread over 2 sq kms. A conservation initiative by the forest department, it is now home to about 2,000 blackbucks, locally known as ‘kalvit’. The other grassland fauna includes the Indian fox and the chinkaras.

The neighborhood abounds in many local temples; notable amongst them is the cave temple of Daryabai at Wadgaon Darya, often visited as a tourist spot flourishing in natural beauty where the statue of the goddess is believed to be self manifested. More importantly the stalactites and stalagmites (the calcium drippings from the rock). The Jagdamba temple at Rashin is believed to be the avatar of Renuka Mata. A wonderful architecture at this place is the leaning Deepamal. The temple complex also houses numerous hero and Sati stones.

The district’s list of tourist attractions doesn’t end here - Pedgaon, a small village on the Rashin Shrigonda road consists of the ruins of Bahadurgad Fort also called as Dharamveergad. Here locals regale with legendary stories of how Shivaji captured the fort after deceiving its commander, Bahadur Khan. Within the fortifications, the exquisite stone carvings of the Laxmi Narayan temple and Baleshwar Shiva temple merit a visit. Bhandardara Dam and the misty backdrops of the nearby Randha falls showcased in many Bollywood sequences makes for a worthy outing. Overlooking this touristy dam is Ratangad, perched high over Ratanwadi village. The Amruteshwar temple (11th 12th century CE) stands proudly as a testimony of the fascinating architecture of this land. With a natural cavity called as ‘Nedhe’ (eye of the needle) it is an obvious choice for trekkers along with Harishchandragad, the hill fort of yore where avid achievers scramble onto its overhanging rock, Konkan Kada for its breathtaking views. The highest peak in Maharashtra at 5400 feet, the Kalsubai is also located in Nagpur district.

So, with such a kitty of abundances Ahmednagar is never shy of drawing crowds all year round.

Travel Tips

1. Try planning your trip during winters to experience the hurda.
2. Ranjangaon, one of the Ashtavinayak temples is a good spot to take a break on your journey.

What to eat
Lassi - Ice cream of Dwarka Singh at Navi peth.
Don’t miss out on the street food in old Ahmednagar area.

Where to stay
Nearest MTDC resorts are at Bhandardara and Shirdi. The town itself has hotels and guesthouses.
A great social leader and a visionary who thought far ahead of her times, Savitribai Phule was a trailblazer and beacon of light who opened the doors for women’s education in the country. She refused to accept the dogmas imposed by the society of that time, and her ceaseless striving helped women come out of the gloomy darkness of eternal despair and find their own identities.
doomed to being married at the age of seven or eight to a husband well past his prime so that she would soon be a widow, sometimes within a year of her marriage. The sati tradition was nothing but forceful, and glorified, suicide by the widow who would have to enter the burning pyre alive. When this tradition was abolished by the then Governor General of Bengal, Lord William Bentinck, in 1829, widows were subjected to other type of sufferings. They were considered as sinners who could not remarry. Their heads were forcibly shaven off, thus making them look ugly. A widow did not have the right to live a dignified life. She was burdened with all the household chores and could also fall prey to the lust of men in the family. Yet, it was her who would be the ‘fallen’ one and if pregnant, suicide was the only option because the man would never admit his ‘failing’.

On May 1, 1852, Jyotiba Phule started the first ever school for untouchables – not only in Maharashtra but in the whole of India. Savitribai was made the headmistress of this school.

It is common enough nowadays to see women holding topmost positions in almost every sphere, be it industry, politics, sports, cinema, arts, etc. In India we have had a woman prime minister as well as a woman president. In the corporate circles, it raises no eyebrows to find women being the CEOs of companies. However, turn the clock back to more than a century ago and the scenario was totally different. The role of a woman was confined to the house and the hearth. So then how did the change happen? It can be traced to the momentous work done by many reformers, chief among them being Savitribai Phule who just could not bear to see the plight of women and took it upon herself to usher in a change.

Pioneer in the field of women’s education that she was, Savitribai Phule deserves to be called a flame of revolution – ‘kranti jyoti’ – the honorific she is described with in Marathi. During her time the entire country was enslaved to a dogmatic way of life that caused women to suffer the most. They were
inviting the apocalypse’ prevailed. A woman’s raison d’être was nothing but looking after the kitchen and the children. Jyotiba Phule, a foremost social reformer of that period, was utterly dissatisfied with this situation and resolved to change the women’s status. It was his wife Savitribai who gave him full and active support in his fight for the cause of women.

The Early Years
The Phules started their social work in Pune, a city known then for upholding its dogmatic social customs. Extraordinary moral courage, tremendous tolerance, great willpower and perseverance were the qualities that helped Savitribai to overcome the many difficulties to reach her goal. Born in Naigaon, a small village in Satara district, Savitribai was the only daughter of Khandoji Patil who also had three sons. An able village chieftain, he handled his feudal and administrative responsibilities well. He was a known philanthropist.

Savitribai, the only daughter, was the apple of his eye. She was courageous, clever and never tolerated any injustice. As a child she once killed a big cobra who was about to attack the eggs in a bird’s nest.

Her marriage to Jyotiba Phule in 1840 set her fate in a noble direction. Pune was to become her battlefield for the cause of social reforms. In 1848 Jyotiba started the first ever school for girls in the country at Bhide wada in Pune, Maharashtra. While there were a few who appreciated his initiative and volunteered to help him, Jyotiba mostly encountered strong opposition and isolation. All kinds of tactics were tried to dissuade him from continuing his school for girls, but in vain. Phule’s determination was far stronger than those of the opponents. There came a time when there was no teacher ready to teach in the girls’ school. Jyotiba took this as an opportunity to train his own wife Savitri who not only completed her studies in Marathi and English, but also went on to become the first woman teacher in that school.

Overcoming All Odds
Her path too was difficult and literally full of thorns. She was stoned on her way to school, cow dung was thrown at her, and verbal abuse was at its worst. She replied by saying, “I consider all this as flowers. I am doing my duty. May god forgive you.” Savitribai’s caring attitude and her teaching skills attracted an increasing number of students. In 1851, another school for girls was started in the large house of Annasaheb Chiplunkar. Two more schools were started in two other localities of Rasta Peth and Wetal Peth. Soon the number of girls’ schools went up to 18.

On May 1, 1852, Jyotiba Phule started the first ever school for untouchables – not only in Maharashtra but in the whole of India. Savitribai was made the headmistress of this school. She was helped by two other women teachers, Fatmabi Shaikh and Sagunabai. The ‘Poona Observer’ in its issue dated May 29, 1852 praised the initiative. The tradition-bound orthodox people could not take these steps lightly. The Phules had to vacate their...
house in just one set of clothes. But they were not undeterred in their mission. Savitribai stitched clothes and quilts to make ends meet. This she did not mind for she always supported Jyotiba’s novel ideas.

An Inspiring Partner

One day Jyotiba started giving the untouchables free access to his water reservoir. He also established the Satyashodhak Samaj that believed in equality among people as all are children of God. Such initiatives even caused threat to his life. Two young men were sent to kill him. But Jyotiba and Savitribai convinced them of the importance of their task at hand. So much so that the two young men apologised and even became their disciples. Jyotiba also started a publication called Deenbandhu to raise a voice against the plight of high-caste women. The practices of compulsory balding and the overall demeaning of widows were criticized. He appealed to the barbers not to accept assignments to shave the heads of widows. They agreed and proclaimed a strike.

On January 28, 1853, Jyotiba set up a home against infanticide in the premises of his neighbour Usman Shaikh. It was announced that any pregnant widow would get help to deliver in secrecy. Many needy women could thus survive this bad patch and also avoid killing their newborn. About 100 women availed of this facility. Jyotiba and Savitribai adopted one such child born to a widow called Kashibai. They named the child Yashwant and brought him up very well. Savitribai had in fact suggested to Jyotiba to have a second wife because she could not conceive. But Jyotiba refused and chose to adopt a child. He also created a platform for women who could gather and speak up. It was open to women of all castes and religions. Jyotiba’s contribution to society was finally recognised and he was honoured with the appellation ‘mahatma’ on May 11, 1888.

Life After Jyotiba

Jyotiba and Savitribai thus made for a unique modern couple in India, well ahead of their time. Savitribai followed her husband’s path, yet without conviction it was not possible to face the adversities. She continued the task of Jyotiba after his death on November 27, 1890.
and proved to be an equally able activist. She became the president of the Satyashodhak Samaj. She also published Jyotiba’s speeches in four volumes. Her own poems were published in two collections titled ‘Kaavya Phule’ and ‘Bavankashi Subodh Ratnakar’. This collection of poems is an account of the slave-like life of the oppressed castes and the importance of Jyotiba’s work. This work does have a tone of love for her husband, but moreover it shows an understanding of his revolutionary deeds and humility and devotion towards him.

Verses such as the one reproduced here show her clarity of thought and conviction about education as the only way to attain the level of human beings:

‘No knowledge, no education
Neither any such inclination
Useth not intellect
How then be human calleth?’

In 1892, the series of lectures she gave in the princely state of Baroda was a reflection of her independent thinking. She appealed to the masses to overcome laziness, start industries and educate themselves. Her letters to Jyotiba reveal her own self. In one such letter she mentioned the dialogue she had had with her mother and brother who were against their social work. This dialogue is an example of her argumentative skills with which she defended their stand. She underlines the contradiction in people’s readiness to befriend the cobras on the day of Nag Panchami or to caress the cattle regularly but their aversion to befriend the oppressed class.

She tells her mother that her son-in-law does not just go on pilgrimages chanting God’s name but that he actually does God’s duty of caring for the people. She further says that helping her husband in this work gives her tremendous joy and satisfaction. Savitribai was thus not just Jyotiba’s wife but his intellectual companion too. This courageous woman died in the plague epidemic of 1897. March 10, 1897 therefore will be remembered for the colossal loss to the cause of women.

A memorial for Savitribai Phule is under construction for the Pune Municipal Corporation at the Phule Peth. A muted elegance underlies the architecture of the building, the purpose of which is to express progressive ideas and exemplary living – a true reflection of Savitribai’s personality which was a subtle mix of tradition and modernity.
The Jaina caves on the hills of Mangi-Tungi are revered not only because of the often heard stories of miracles but also because they offer an insight into the Jaina community’s lineage of Tirthankaras says Viraj Shah.
Pilgrimage to the Peaks

Jain Caves at Mangi Tungi

Viraj Shah | Photographs © Ashutosh Bapat, Viraj Shah

Distance from Mumbai: 290 kms

Getting there:
The best way to reach Mangi-Tungi is by road, via Nasik, Satana and Taharabad. The nearest highway is State Highway 7. There are regular bus services from Taharabad to Mangi-Tungi.

Excursions:
Salher and Mulher forts
Situated in the picturesque Selbari range of Western Ghats are the twin hills of Mangi-Tungi, famous for medieval Jaina caves and icons carved on the rock face. The hills are located in the Nashik district, along the western border of Satana taluka. The site can be easily reached from Taharabad in Satana taluka via Malegaon.

**Hills And Caves**

Mangi and Tungi are the highest hills of Nashik district, Mangi reaching up to a height of 1,326 metres and Tungi reaching up to 1,323 metres. The hills are connected by a narrow ridge and have peaks of the most peculiar shapes. The Mangi peak is around 68 metres high with a diameter of 48 metres at the base and is square-shaped, while the Tungi peak is around 97 metres high with a diameter of 39 metres at the base and is conical-shaped. Both these peaks have completely bare and perpendicular surfaces that are very distinct in the landscape.

It is not just the peculiar shape of the peaks that is so remarkable about these hills. The most unique feature is the existence of a few Jaina caves and hundreds of Jaina icons carved on the rock face of the peaks. These caves and icons were cut over a long period during the 9th to 15th century CE. There are two Jaina caves at a height of around 150 metres on the southern face of Mangi hill containing about 80 icons. Climbing up the hill, one reaches the base of the Mangi peak. Surrounding this peak, there are five caves and around 135 icons carved directly on the rock face. Crossing the narrow, connecting ridge between the peaks, one reaches the base of Tungi peak, which has two caves and eight icons on the rock face.

The lower caves in the Mangi hill are locally known as Shri Suddhabuddhamuniraj Gupha and are distinctly visible with their white-washed fronts and simple *shikharas* carved in rock. Architecturally these caves are not very decorative. They have a rough verandah or hall and a shrine. Of late the floors and walls of these ancient caves have been tiled by the modern-day Jaina community. Though architecturally crude and simple, these caves display a wealth of icons. The walls are covered with the rock-cut icons of Jaina deities.
such as tirthankaras and yaksha-yakshi like Sarvanubuti-Ambika, Chakreshvari (the yakshi of the first Tirthankara), Rshabhanatha and Sarasvati, revered as deified speech of Tirthankara in Jainism. There are also large panels of scenes depicting Kamatha’s attack on Parshvanatha, the 23rd tirthankara and the penance of Bahubali, son of the first Tirthankara Rshabhanatha.

Leaving these caves behind, one can climb up to the peaks by a flight of stairs constructed by the Jaina community in recent times. The ascent is a little steep and strenuous, but is worth the effort. The caves on the peaks are

Ideally one should reach the peaks before the break of dawn and when the first rays of sun fall on the peaks and the rows of icons, the sight is truly breathtaking. With the ranges of Western Ghats and rivers Mosam and Panjra flowing nearby, the view from the top is amazing, surely a lifetime experience.
nothing but plain rooms with crude pillars, built in some cases for supporting the roof. Two of the caves at Mangi peaks appear to be mere natural caverns that have been extended a little. These caves are now known as Mahavira Gupha, Balabhadraswami Gupha, Sri Adinatha Gupha, Santinatha Gupha and Parsvanatha Gupha.

The icons inside the caves and on the rock face mainly consist of rows and rows of Jina figures along with a large number of figures of monks and some devotees. There is a very narrow and precarious path around these peaks that one needs to follow to see the icons on the rock face. Now a parapet wall has been constructed around the peaks for safety. Most caves and icons are cut on the northern and eastern faces of both the peaks that receive sunlight at daybreak. Ideally one should reach the peaks before the break of dawn and when the first rays of sun fall on the peaks and the rows of icons, the sight is truly breathtaking. With the ranges of Western Ghats and rivers Mosam and Panjra flowing nearby, the view from the top is amazing, surely a lifetime experience.

Most of the Jina figures are simple sculptures. They are mostly without thrones or attendants and are depicted either seated in *padmasana* or standing in *kayotsarga* mudra with triple *chhatras* above the head, diamond-shaped *shrivatsa* on the chest and halo. They are shown with long ears and shaven heads. Only in some cases, a simple throne and small figures of *chauri*-bearers are shown. The *lanchhana* or distinguishing mark of the Jina is shown only in a few cases. One of the finest such sculptures is a panel of five Jinas, standing on double lotus, at Tunsgi. These Jinas are Rishabhanatha with bull, Mallinatha with vase, Neminatha with conch, Parshvanatha with snake and Mahavira with lion.

The monks are depicted standing in *kayotsarga* mudra with brooms and *kamandalu* (eating vessels), shown under the hands or holding *akshamala* (rosaries) in a few cases.
It is not just the peculiar shape of the peaks that is so remarkable about these hills. The most unique feature is the existence of a few Jaina caves and hundreds of Jaina icons carved on the rock face of the peaks.
These figures are shown nude with clean-shaven heads, long ears and shrivatsa on chest at times. In some cases, small, seated figures of the Jina are shown above their heads and padukas are carved in front. A number of monk figures on Mangi peak carry label inscriptions in Devanagari, recording the names of monks. It appears that some of the figures are meant to represent actual monks, popular acharyas or revered monks, who either visited the site or achieved liberation here. The association of hills with meditation and penance appears to have attached sanctity to these hills.

**Significance**

These hills have been a popular and prominent Digambara Jaina tirtha, at least since the 12th-13th century CE. It is famously known as a Siddhakshetra, where legendary beings and 99 crore Jaina Munis are believed to have achieved nirvana. The site is mentioned in various Sanskrit and Marathi texts on tirthas such as Nirvanabhakti, Tirthacanakhandrika of Gunabhadra (circa 1575 CE), Jambusvami Charitra (completed in 1688 CE) and Tirthamala of Muni Shilavijaya (17th century). The site was visited by pilgrims from far-off places along with other famous Jaina tirthas such as Girnar and Satrunjaya in Gujarat and Pavapuri and Hastinapur in north India. It continues to be a significant tirtha till today, though the architectural activity came to end around 15th century CE and was renewed only in the 19th century CE.

Most of the temples added at the base of the hills and the renovations of the caves are carried out by the modern-day Jaina community. At the base of Mangi hill, there are two Jaina temples and a manastambha. The Jainas have also built a dharmashala or lodge for accommodating the pilgrims. There are two relatively modern structures on the connecting ridge of the peaks. The structures are placed on a high platform and are covered with perforated screens on three sides with domical shikharas. Each of these houses a pair of padukas or footprints. Near these structures is a pit called ‘Krishna Kunda’ where, as the legend goes, Vasudeva Krishna was cremated by his brother Baladeva. The site is now called ‘Samedshikhara of South’, after the famous Jaina pilgrimage site of Samedshikhara in Bihar.
Visit The Forts Too
In the area around these hills, there are about 15 forts. The famous fort of Mulher is about 8 kms south of these hills. The fort was the seat of Rathod kings from late 13th century CE. Tawarikh-e-Ferozeshahi, written in 1340 CE, mentions that Salher and Mulher forts were ruled by the king Mandeva. To the east of Mangi-Tungi hills is the Selbari pass, through which runs the road from Pimpalner to Satana and Nashik. Further east are situated the Hindabari pass and the Thermal fort, while near the eastern extremity of this range is situated the Galna fort, commanding a pass route from south to north.

Travel Tips
Start climbing the hill at dawn
Carry enough water and food along as nothing much is available on the hills. Beware of monkeys.

Where to stay
At the bottom of Mangi Tungi there is a Digambar Jain Siddhkshetra, which provides nice accommodation at an affordable cost. They have 47 attached rooms, 35 non attached rooms, 5 dormitories and 4 guest houses. Boarding facility is also available.
For old age people or physically disabled Doli facility is available to go to Mangi Tungi caves. The rate for Doli as on date is Rs.20 per Kg. of weight of a person.
Varshik Mela is performed every year for 3 days from Kartik sh 13 to kartik sh. 15.

Rows of seated Tirthankaras with triple chhatura
Valuing the Past

Nagpur Museum

Chandrashekhar Gupta | Photographs © Rajesh Joshi
Courtesy - Directorate of Archaeology and Museums, Govt. of Maharashtra
Museum

Distance from Mumbai: 845 Km

Reaching There
From Mumbai:
By Air: There are several daily flights to Nagpur airport from Mumbai and Pune.
By Train: Nagpur’s train station is well connected, the overnight Vidarbha Express shuttles between Mumbai and Nagpur.
By Road: MSRTC buses ply regularly between Nagpur and major cities, including Jalgaon and Hyderabad.

Excursions:
Spend a day visiting the temples of Ramtek, about 40 km away from Nagpur.
Soak in the ambience of the Sevagram Ashram where Mahatma Gandhi and other leaders stayed during the freedom struggle.
A few hours away, but definitely worth the visit is the Tadoba-Andhari wildlife reserve.
The older the museum the more treasured it becomes. This certainly makes Nagpur’s Central Museum priceless. Established in 1862, it has now entered its 150th anniversary celebration year. Not merely a historically important heritage building, the value of the museum lies in the huge number of antiquities housed here, representing significant cultural trends over the years. Due to the passage of time, the cultural backdrop has been totally lost and the trails in the form of exhibits preserved in this museum are the only witnesses that reveal the cultural grandeur of their past.

During the second half of the 19th century, the British had been well-settled in central India and had formed the Central Provinces Commissionary with Nagpore (as it was then known) as the headquarters. They were very interested in the history and culture of the region for obvious reasons, for after all the rulers must have good knowledge of their subjects for a smooth reign. An antiquarian society of the central provinces was founded in Nagpur, the activities of which paved a path to the idea of establishing a museum.

History

It was the officiating chief commissioner of Nagpur who convened a committee on October 27, 1862 for considering a plan to set up the museum and a public library. Present among the other officials was Reverend Stephen Hislop, missionary clergyman of the Free Church of Scotland Mission at Nagpur. Together they considered the site for the building, exhibits, library, structure, etc. A spacious hall admeasuring 70 x 25 sq feet in length and width and 20 feet in height, with a 10 feet verandah all around, costing Rs 7,000 was planned and executed in 1863 under the chief commissionership of Richard Temple. The name given to the museum was Central
Museum probably because of its location in the central province. Subsequently though it came to be known as the Kendriya Sangrahalaya and Madhyavarti Sangrahala in Hindi and Marathi respectively.

Locally the museum is popularly known as Ajaba Bangala or Ajayabaghara. The reason for this is found in an account by one of the early archaeologists, Rivette Carnac, in his book ‘Many Memories Of Life In India And Abroad’, quoted in ‘Satabda Kaumudi – Centenary Volume’ of the museum in 1964 on page number 180. A special durbar (public meeting or function) was announced at Nagpore inviting all the district officers, native chiefs and land holders for the reception of all that was ‘marvellous and rare’ in their possession for the enrichment of the museum.

Carnac states, “The durbar to which all the leading people of the province had been invited was opened with much state and ceremony in the great hall of the residency. Sir Richard Temple, seated on a red velvet chair placed on the dais, commenced to explain the object of the assembly in an impressive speech in the vernacular, and dwelt on the desirability of all bringing in what was uncommon and rare and repeated the word ‘rare’. An old chief from a wild part of the province, who was seated in the first row, suddenly held up his hand as does a school boy in class, and shouted out ‘Yes, Lord, this is rare.’ The old fellow then held up a goat that had been endowed with a fifth leg.”

Thus in the mind of common and simple men, the museum was the house of marvellous and rare things and this led to its renaming as Ajaba Bangala or Ajayabaghara. The museum was controlled and funded by different government departments from time to time. Up to 1869-70 it was funded by the Nagpur Municipality. Then in 1870-71 some additions were affected by the Public Works Department and the museum became a provincial property. The museum occupied what is now the western wing of the building while the library was housed in the eastern wing.

Musical balls, public meetings, examinations and theatrical performances were held in the Public Room. Initially, the curators in the museum were appointed on an honorary basis and many scholars such as Pt. Basant Ram, Pt. Hiranand Shastri, Pt. Natesan Aiyer and R B Hiralal worked hard to collect, study, display and publish the exhibits in the mu-

- Stuffed tigers
- Bhonsla Manuscript
- Great Indian Bustard
The museum, the earlier contents being of archaeological and ethnological interest along with a collection of minerals. R J D Graham was the last honorary curator. He retired in 1916 and was succeeded by E A D’Abreu who worked under him as assistant curator in 1911. He reorganised the natural history section and published a good number of informative booklets. After the merger of Vidarbha with Maharashtra in 1960, the museum has now come under the Department of Archaeology and Museums.

**The Collection**
The collection in the museum is mainly provincial, coming from places in present day Madhya Pradesh, Chattisgarh, Vidarbha and some parts of western Maharashtra. These are antiquities mainly in the form of sculptures and sati memorials recovered from smugglers as well as those obtained from explorations, excavations, donations, etc. The objects range right from the archaic periods up to late British times. A representative collection of fossils, minerals, pre and proto-historic metal tools, pottery, beads, coins, inscriptions, ethno-anthropological articles, sculptures, architectural pieces, manuscripts, paintings, etc are housed in the museum. The museum is spread across 11 galleries with a thematic scheme for each.
**Natural History:** Representative birds, trophies of animals having horns/antlers, reptiles, fish, invertebrates, etc from the region and abroad are displayed here. The most worthy exhibit is the Great Indian Bustard and the white crow.

**Mammals & Primates:** Tiger, bison, panther, neelgai, sambhar, chital, kālavit, four-horned antelope, sonkutre (wild dog), langur, etc are displayed in this section.

**Reptiles, Fish & Invertebrates:** Indian crocodiles, monitor lizards, pythons, poisonous and non-poisonous snakes etc are exhibited in this gallery. The natural habitat of some of them is quite attractive.

**Vākātaka Dynasty Treasures:** Vākātakas were senior contemporaries of the imperial Guptas. Originating in Vindhyas they shifted to the Deccan and established two of their branches in northern and southern Vidarbha with their capitals at Nandivardhana (present Nagardhan near Ramtek, Nagpur district) and Vatsagulma (modern Washim). Explorations and excavations have yielded a good number of antiquities belonging to the Vākātakas in the form of copper plates, coins, sculptures, bronze items, etc. Hisseborala, Washim stone inscriptions of Devasena mentioning Sudarsan Tadāka, Pārvati from Patur, Hamalapuri-Nagardhan Buddha bronze sculptures, etc are the most significant antiquities of this period. (around 5th century CE)
Stone Sculptures: This gallery displays sculptures sourced from Dhuandhar, Jabalpur and Madhya Pradesh that comprise the Sātavāhanas and Gandharva panels. The panels showing bas-reliefs in Gandhar style are from Peshawar, now in Pakistan. They depict the Pancha Dhyani Buddhas, donation of Jetavana, Dharma Chakra Pravartana and the birth of Buddha, etc. The Dhuandhar Mātrikā (bearing an inscription) and the male figure (Virabhadra form of Siva) represent one of the earliest forms of the Saptamātrikā group. Besides, a good number of sculptures here are from the famous Deotek slab bearing inscriptions of two periods viz. Mauryan and Vākātaka.

Arms & Armour: In this gallery, weapons of different ages including palaeolithic proto-historic, medieval Mughal, Maratha, British and tribal are on display. The armour is of the British times. Gungeria and Ireland copper hoard tools are the pride collection of the museum. In the Gungeria hoard silver-minted primitive money in the form of a bull's head and dish are the earliest evidence of their kind.

Archaeology: This section is quite rich in quantity as well as quality. A number of antiquities from the Chalcolithic sites of Saraswati–Indus and Kaundinyapura excavations, megalithic sarcophagus, stone and copper plate inscriptions, coins of different ages and metals, etc make for an interesting collection. A unique cylindrical seal of gold and semi-precious stones bearing uniform legend and figure representation as found in the hilly region around Nagpur reflects cultural contacts between Babylonia and India, especially in Vidarbha during the Iron Age in circa 2000 BC when iron users dwelt in these regions.

Tribal Ethnology: The tribal gallery is enriched with a diorama and objects used variously by the tribes of central India. The objects worth mentioning are the representations of their gods and goddesses, one-pan balance, boomerang, tinder and tobacco boxes, etc.

Art & Paintings: The art gallery displays old (Mughal, Rajput, Bhonsla) as well as modern painters of reputation. Local as well as other artistes’ paintings are here.

Nagpur Tercentenary: Nagpur was made the capital of the Gond kingdom in 1702 CE by Bakht Buland Shah. This was celebrated
Serving A Useful Purpose

The Central Museum Nagpur proved to be of immense help to India’s foremost industrialist Mr Dorabji Tata in locating iron ore deposits in the Durg district (part of present day Chhattisgarh), the then central provinces and the Berar state which ultimately resulted in establishing the Iron & Steel works at Sakehi (now Jamshedpur).

In this connection, an interesting anecdote is being quoted here: At this stage one of those chance incidents which make or mar all great enterprises stirred their energies afresh. Mr Dorabji Tata went to Nagpur to see Sir Benjamin Robertson, then the chief secretary of the Central Provinces Administration, to inform him about the conclusion they had arrived at. The chief secretary happened to be out, so he drifted rather aimlessly into the museum opposite the Secretariat to await his return.

There he came across a geological map of the central provinces, printed in colours. He noticed that the Durg district near Raipur, about 140 miles from the Chanda area, was coloured very darkly in a hue which was meant to indicate large deposits of iron. He called Mr Weld, who had accompanied him, to look at the map. Mr Weld recollected that he had seen some mention of the district in the reports of a geological survey. In a case in the museum, they found a specimen of very good iron ore from the Durg area that made Mr Tata remark, ‘Let no one say after this that museums in India serve no useful purpose.’

Geology & Pre-History: In this proposed gallery, geological evidences in the form of mineral flora and fauna will be displayed, the evidence of which is with the museum. A rare dinosaur bone will make for a significant exhibit.
A Mother’s Call to the Devoted

Mount Mary

Fleur D’Souza
Photographs © Madhura & Anand Katti

Fleur D’Souza reiterates the history of how Mount Mary’s Basilica at Bandra, Mumbai, came to be built and the iconic status it has for people of all faiths.
For a little over a century, north Mumbai’s western skyline as viewed from the Mahim causeway was unmistakably dominated by the twin-spired belfries of Mount Mary’s Basilica at Bandra, Mumbai’s toniest suburb. Today, another city icon, the cobwebby Bandra-Worli sea link frames the setting sun. However, irrespective of what towers over and against the structure of the Basilica, the faithful still come here in huge numbers to seek the blessings of Our Lady of the Mount.

Called Mot Mauli (Mot is perhaps a corruption of the word Monte in Portuguese meaning hill and Mauli is mother – literally the mother of the hill) in Marathi, the Basilica has its doors open for anyone who wants to walk in, a testament to the multi-culturalism of the city of Mumbai. Interestingly, with Sitladevi venerated just across at Mahim along with Prabhadevi, Mahalaxmi, Shantadevi, Mumbadevi and Lilavati, Mumbai’s devotion to the mother has a long tradition.

The present stone-clad church, completed more than a century ago in 1904, is the third in a series of structures that catered to the growing popularity of the devotion to Mother Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ. An early report in Portuguese refers to the structure on the hill built around 1566 which went by the name of Hermitage. The urban jungle may be in existence now, but 450 years ago, the dense overgrowth and the small mud structure served the black-robed Jesuit priests as a hermitage for private prayer and devotions and next to it perhaps their first residence.

A wooden statue brought from Portugal and installed on the altar has the statue of the child Jesus on the arm. In around 1640, with the building of the Castella da Aguada or the small fortified structure at Land’s End guarding the entrance to the Bandra creek where the ships stopped to refill water stocks, a chapel came up to replace the small mud hermitage and it served the garrison stationed at the Aguada.

Pilgrimage Site
A Jesuit report of 1669 tells us that once a week the parish priest from St. Andrew’s trudged up the hill to Nossa Senhora do Monte to hold prayer services “for the people who flock there in great numbers out of devotion to their holy Mother” and that the feast was celebrated on September 8 which is the ‘birthday’ of Mary. This is the first reference we have to the idea that the place had begun to be recognised as a place of pilgrimage.
One hundred years later the chapel was deserted as war and political turmoil caused the roof to be torched, the priests to leave and the statue of the Mother to be taken away to a safer place across the water in St. Michael's Church at Mahim. Mount Mary's chapel was re-built in 1761 and the statue now made its way back up the hill in an ornamented cart with great ceremony as the feast on September 8 was joyously celebrated. In 1879, H Bomjonjee Jeejibhoy built a flight of steps on the northern side of the hill. In 1882, a portico came to be added to the front of the building but by the end of the century it was resolved that only a new church would accommodate the growing numbers who made their way to the top of the hill to venerate the Lady of the Mount every September.

Shapoorji N Chadabhoy, an architect, designed the new chapel with the work beginning in 1902 and getting completed in 1904. The style is neo-gothic and the new altar reflects the style. Seven steps in white marble peaked by three niches lead the eye of the pilgrim or visitor to the Mother and child Jesus, the wooden statue now crowned and resplendent with a white and gold veil that flows down to the topmost marble step. Unlike most icons of Mother Mary this one has the child on the right arm. The murals in the nave depict scenes from the life of Mary.

The chapel on the hill became a Basilica in 1954 and on the road opposite another landmark was built in the same year. An oratory (much featured in Bollywood films and frequented by the stars) dedicated to Our Lady of Fatima arose too. A sight that strikes the visitor just outside the Basilica are stalls selling votive candles and wax objects of many shapes: babies, legs, hands, etc offered to the Mother both in petition and in thanksgiving.

On the eastern side of the hill, a flight of stairs with broad landings leading to the back of the church has now become the space that during the eight days of the feast is popularly known as the Bandra Fair. The present flight of stairs was built in 1924 but a 1911 account records inscriptions along the sides that may now be hidden from view. Just as in Kanheri, pious donors made the journey of the pilgrim easier by having steps constructed.

Interestingly, the names reveal the devotion and generosity of people of many faiths: the fourth flight, for example, was built in October 1830 by Sorabji, a Parsi of ‘Bandora’, the fifth flight was constructed by Antonio Luis of Bandora in December 1930, the seventh flight was paid for by Natalie, the pious widow of John Souza of Bombay, the eighth flight was constructed by Gonvarzi Shet and an employee of the government bank on December 10, 1938 and the 16th flight and the one above it was paid for in December 1813 by Zaa de Alexio Gomes, an inhabitant of Bombay.

The Bandra Fair

The Bandra Fair is a typical Indian mela: colour, crowds, and commotion! Shops line the broad steps that go down the hill. Food stalls, wooden toy sellers and balloon vendors crowd the space and you will even find a photo studio as in the days before digital cameras when families took their annual pictures against dramatic backgrounds. Jugglers, magicians, beggars and gymnasts mill about as pilgrims, especially the children and the teenagers, make their way to the tumbling boxes and the amusement park’s favourite – the giant wheel that offers a bird’s eye view of the excitement below.

Pirate raids, plagues and war - the church on the hill has witnessed it all. The first feast to celebrate the rebuilding of the church was held on September 8, 1761 and till today this momentous day is the harbinger of much joy with the festivities before and after it long remembered by over 50,000 pilgrims.
An Ode To Our Lady Of The Mount

Stella Maris, shine bright star,
The hope of souls distressed,
We fly to thee from near and far,
Sweet haven of our request.

Take us, O Mother, by the hand,
These pilgrims faint and weak,
And guide our footsteps to that land,
The eternal home we seek.
Maharashtra’s Medical Tourism
Radiating Perfect Health

Dr. Rajeev Chaudhary
Photographs © Ruby Hall Clinic

Maharashtra is undoubtedly a scenic state, its beauty enhanced by its long coastline. As such, western Maharashtra, and in particular the Konkan region, have turned into the most popular destinations. This has also been due to the rapid creation of infrastructure at all the prime tourist spots along the coast and elsewhere. But amidst this, what has been largely ignored is that Maharashtra is also high on the list of medical tourism. Mumbai, for instance, has been traditionally a very popular medical centre in India, attracting not only people from within the country but from abroad as well. In fact, so renowned is Mumbai for its healthcare facilities that it has been a hotspot for visitors from the Middle East and African countries for some time now.

So what exactly is medical tourism? It is a term coined for tourists who go to different places or countries for medical or surgical treatment from their home state or home country. This is not tourism in the strictest sense but it does involve travel and the availability of the right kind of facilities – in this case, good hospitals, diagnostic centres, medical experts, and so on. For many of those who come from more developed countries, India is a place where medical facilities can be availed of at very economical prices. In some cases, people come here because advanced medical treatment is not available in their home state.

What has helped along the way is that the Government of India has encouraged the private healthcare sector to grow by providing various incentives. Today, we have ‘corporate’ hospitals which are comparable to any of the largest hospitals in developed countries. And Indian doctors are known for their high standards of knowledge, skills and devotion to patients. In return for the high level of professionalism provided by the Indian healthcare specialists, the government gains through foreign exchange, which once again helps develop the sector further.

In fact, today medical tourism is placed in the same league as that of other growing sectors such as information technology or automotive and according to the government’s estimates there is a high probability of the turnover of the medical tourism sector matching that of, say, the IT industry. Looked at from a larger perspective, medical tourism is not a standalone beneficiary. It, in turn, helps associated sectors like aviation and hospitality to grow too.

Additionally, medical tourism overlaps with conventional tourism in the sense that patients and those who accompany him or her also take time off to visit various other tourist destinations within easy reach. For example, there have been cases when a person and his family members, post treatment in Mumbai, have taken time off to visit Pune, Aurangabad, Mahabaleshwar, etc. The spin-offs from medical tourism are therefore immensely profitable.

Like any other service industry, medical tourism too depends on maintaining very high standards and absolute professionalism. What works in favour of India is that there is the availability of English-speaking paramedics and other staff in medicare institutions which puts visitors at ease. Additionally, visitors coming from abroad do not face too many visa complications. Meanwhile, over the years some of the bigger hospitals in India have created a niche for themselves and now their brand identity is enough to attract people from across the world.

A point to be considered here is that the growth of medical tourism is directly related to the development of other infrastructure such as transportation within a city and between cities, good roads, a wide range of hotels and restaurants, etc. It also involves providing both basic and advanced academic training centres across the country to produce the finest breed of doctors and paramedics as also other educational inputs to create a line of administrators and hospital management experts.

Incidentally, though the potential for medical tourism is huge in India, the country faces stiff competition from Singapore and Thailand which have the advantage of better developed infrastructure for tourism. “We try to compensate this disadvantage by our low cost of treatment for any illness as well as excellent medical care standards with highly experienced consultant doctors and supporting nursing and other staff,” opines an industry expert. An additional boost can come from a

While medical tourism is gaining in strength across the country, Maharashtra has been at the forefront with the availability of large-sized hospitals, state-of-the-art diagnosis and treatment equipment and highly experienced doctors and supporting medical staff says Rajeev Chaudhary.
collective awareness of how to treat visitors coming from across the state or outside the country.

A question often asked is why do people from developed countries come to India for treatment? The reason is that healthcare facilities in countries like the U.S. or the UK are exorbitant and almost out of reach for those who do not have adequate insurance cover. There also are long waiting lists so that those in urgent need of treatment would rather air-dash to India and get treated rather than let the condition deteriorate. In some cases, advanced medical treatment in India is up to 70 per cent less expensive than in the developed countries.

Additionally, what makes India a favoured destination is the availability of alternative forms of therapies such as ayurveda, yoga, meditation, therapeutic massages, and so on. India is also an exotic tourist destination offering everything from beaches, mountains, cosmopolitan cities, quiet villages and pilgrimages to suit every palate. Rich in history and culture, India has proved to be an oasis in the modern world, providing complete health and well-being supported by the latest in technology. And in this scenario, Maharashtra is an integral and important part of the medical tourism industry’s growth story.

Ruby Hall Clinic Gets National Award For Medical Tourism

Vindicating the fact that Maharashtra is emerging as a top-notch destination for medical tourism, Pune-based Ruby Hall Clinic was awarded for the best medical tourism facility in India at the hands of Smt Pratibhatai Patil when she was the president of India. This award was conferred by the Ministry of Tourism on February 29, 2012 at Vigyan Bhavan, New Delhi. Subodh Kant Sahai, Minister of Tourism, Government of India presided over the function while Sultan Ahmed, Minister of State for Tourism, Government of India was the guest of honour.

Responding to the accolade, Bomi Bhote, CEO, Ruby Hall Clinic, said, “This is a very proud moment for Ruby Hall Clinic and Pune as there were more than 50 top hospitals in competition from all over India. To our achievement, we are not only the first Indian hospital to perform complex cardiac surgeries in Lagos, Nigeria but have also carried out more than 50 bone marrow transplants, over 100 kidney transplants and 100 cardiac surgeries on foreign patients.”

According to Bhote, what makes the achievement more valuable is that Pune is still a Tier-II city and does not have an international airport. “Despite that we had more than 600 foreign patients for treatment during the last year coming from countries like the UK, Iraq, Iran, Oman, Bahrain, Nigeria, Kenya and Ethiopia,” Bhote added. Ruby Hall Clinic’s medical tourism department was started in 2009 with facilities like video conferencing, airport pick-up and drop, air ambulance, interpreter services, visa assistance, currency exchange, free internet browsing, mobile / SIM card services, sightseeing tours, country-specific special food and diet, etc.
The best place to enjoy the monsoon showers and feast your sights on a verdant landscape shouldered by the majestic ranges of the Sahyadris is undoubtedly the Malshej Ghat, recommends P. K. Ghanekar.

Prancing in the Rain

Malshej Ghat

P. K. Ghanekar | Photographs © Atul Kajale, Manjiri Bhalerao.
In the Hills

Distance from Mumbai: 164 Km

Reaching There
From Mumbai:
By Air: Nearest airport is Mumbai.
By Rail: Nearest railhead is Kalyan.

Excursions:
A visit to fort Shivneri is also possible. For those looking for a short trek, the Thtdi waterfall is highly recommended.
Pouring rain, looming clouds, foggy hills and lush green carpets all around. What an irresistible invitation to pack off to the Sahyadri ranges! Each year, as soon as the monsoon magic spreads all across the Western Ghats, the areas around Mumbai, Pune and Ahmednagar witness fleets of vehicles rushing towards the gushing waterfalls at Malshej Ghat. This is a picturesque area heavily blessed with the abundance of nature that the monsoon helps to sprout. From June to October, the region is surrounded by misty hills, placid mountain lakes and cool fragrant forests. Mist swirls up from the valley and envelopes the tourist resort of MTDC while the clouds unfurl and the waterfalls cascade down the hill with sprays of water drenching those around it.

Malshej Ghat is known as a rain traveller’s abode - a picturesque mountain pass descending to the Konkan from the Desh.
scending to the Konkan from the Desh. It is about 154 kms northwest of Pune, 164 kms from Mumbai and 85 kms from Kalyan in Thane district. Here, the Sahyadri ranges are a unique geographical feature of Maharashtra, dominating and influencing the environment, nature, history, economics and ecology of the state. It is a trekker’s paradise and the topography of the Sahyadri comprising of extremely rugged and rocky hills with its innumerable forts, temples and rock-cut caves are the primary attractions. The tranquil surroundings in these remote places are an experience designed to fulfill every trekker’s desire for relaxation, rejuvenation and recovery.

The first showers in June begin to transform the forest ground. Hitherto dried up streams and ponds begin to team with aquatic life afresh. A wide range of flora begins to ap-

Waterfall en-route
pear almost immediately after these initial spells of rain and earth that was dry just a few months earlier is transformed into a lush green carpet. This transformation is the visual reassurance of the circle of life, with water and earth in synchronisation here, enabling the eco-system to regenerate every monsoon. The wildlife in the region gains a new lease on life, starting a new season of survival. In fact, many have reported the sighting of a leopard while various species of snakes are common enough.

**Getting There**
Moving from Pune towards Nashik, you will come across Narayangaon and then reach

---

The author is environmentalist, historian, writer, nature lover and an avid trekker.
Alephata, where you can take a breather with a steaming hot cup of tea or coffee or even opt for a sumptuous meal before you proceed further towards Malshej Ghat. Even as you drive on the winding road towards the pristine ghat, there will be opportunities to pause along the way and absorb the rolling landscape and feel the surge of non-polluted air rushing through your body. For those interested in ornithology, the drive will also offer a chance to observe many birds flitting through the skies and camping on the mud flats.

The one bird that you must especially watch out for is the flamingo \textit{(Phoenicopterus roseus)}. These are migratory birds and the large flocks are usually seen congregating near the Rann of Kutch in Gujarat. It is therefore a privilege to have some of them come to the Malshej Ghat area. A peculiar characteristic of the flamingo is its beak, with which it scoops up fish and other food from the marshy bed of ponds and streams. It then churns up the muddy contents inside its large beak to separate the food. Crustaceans and other nutrients are ingested while the mud is filtered and thrown out.

Prior to reaching the Malshej Ghat you will arrive at the massive and awesome Naneghat which has a natural dyke with two huge mountain blocks on both sides and a walking pathway made of crude steps of stone. This was an ancient trade route between Kalyan and Junnar and offers a breathtaking panorama of the majestic and curvaceous Sahyadri ranges. The history of Naneghat can be traced to the period when the Satavahana kings ruled from Pratishthana (now Paithan) in Marathwada, almost 2,000 years ago. At that time Europeans traded in a variety of goods which included wine and cut glasses and Naneghat was a non-motorable pass for traders to walk through.

The view from here is simply amazing. To the north is the towering peak of Kalsubai while to the south is Bhimashankar, another place of tourist and religious significance. To the northeast is Harishchandragad and to the northwest is Mahuli across the Konkan plains with its cleft-shattered pinnacles. To the southwest behind Siddhagad you can see Matheran and the pinnacles of Shri Malang. At Naneghat, the inscriptions, steps, rock-cut caves and cisterns show that this route was a favoured one as far back as the first century BCE. Of course if trekking isn’t your style, you can visit the temple of Ozar where Lord Ganesh is worshipped in his incarnation of Vighneshwar, the one who helps remove the obstacles or go to Lenyadri known for its Girijatmak temple of Ganesh. For this one has to climb about 300 steps.

All in all Malshej has something to offer for everyone and is an amazing place to take a breather in the hectic pace of 21st century life.

\textbf{Where to stay}  
Malshej Ghat’s MTDC resort offers solitude and peace for those wanting to explore nature and the series of waterfalls that come into being during the monsoon. Away from the chaotic urbanization of city life, Malshej Ghat offers breathtaking visuals, especially when the rains are in full form. However, there are not many places where you can have a proper meal and it is therefore advisable to carry water and food along.

\textbf{Travel Tips}  
Avoid weekends and public holidays because of the huge rush of revelers from Mumbai and Pune. Be careful of landslides. Take protective wear for the rains.
Devotion in Performance

Kirtan

Aruna Dhere and Varsha Gajendragadkar highlight the salient aspects of the Kirtan, a unique traditional practice in Maharashtra that intersperses hymns sung in praise of god with social messages, witty banter and music to not only show the audience the right path to a meaningful life but also entertain.
Performing Arts

Naradiya Kirtan
As the night gets darker and the hour approaches nine, people rush along the three roads leading to a small temple in the heart of the town. Just beside the shady canopy of the Peepal tree, the Hanuman temple is bursting with an eager audience. There are people everywhere - on the steps of small shops, windows and balconies – all waiting in anticipation. A murmur runs through the crowd like a wave: “He’s here”…. “Buva is here”. All eyes get focused towards the centre with rapt attention. Kirtankar Buva, clad in a simple white dhoti and kurta, faces the crowd, accompanied by his musicians. He first pays respect to the deity and smiles at the gathering, following which he commences his discourse with a chant of ‘Ram…Ram Sitaram’. The crowd too joins in the holy chant that is enhanced with the reverberation of rhythmic clapping.

The holy chant reaches its crescendo as Buva begins a melodious rendition of padas (verses) included in the mangalcharan, or the first part of the kirtan. By the time he reaches the nirupan (elaboration and comment on the central theme of a kirtan) and tells in depth the stories from the Puranas, the audience is spellbound by the soft and enchanting voice of Buva and the melodious rhythm of the mridangam.

But the much-awaited part of the kirtan starts towards the end of the discourse. The children are curious to know which story will be told by Buva. The story commences and the crowd loses track of time and sleep. They are forced back into reality only when Buva stops his discourse around midnight. Back home, lying on the bed, the melodious notes and words keep echoing in the mind.

This unforgettable experience of the kirtan in that unassuming temple continued to lure me from my ninth year till the age of 20. Through the years, these memories have remained fresh in my mind. Our house was situated in the midst of small shrines and temples. Every year the festivals of Ramnavmi and Hanuman Jayanti were celebrated and many kirtankars were invited. I consider myself fortunate that I could listen to the discourse of some of the leading kirtankars of the time. The Peepal tree near the temple, the assembly of a delightful crowd and the religious songs - all are etched as pleasant memories in my mind. Today I realise that the whole experience gave me, at a tender age, a close glimpse of the great impact of our homegrown, traditional methods of mass communication. However, at that time I was unaware of the profound impact of the kirtan on those who heard it.

**Religious and Social Significance**

Till the end of the 19th century, the temples and its courtyards were the centres of religious and social activities in Indian villages and towns. The tradition of the kirtans inculcated the staunch belief in the bhakti (devo-
tion) of the almighty God. That is the reason why the *kirtan* is known as a devotional play. Through the *kirtans* the gods were praised and religious values were conveyed to people. *Kirtans* were also used as a tool against the British during the struggle for independence in India. The popular nationalist *kirtans* inspired the masses to rise against the British and challenge their rule. Such *kirtans* were traditional in structure but the content was full of nationalistic spirit and fervour.

If we go into the past few centuries, the real popularity and the influence of *kirtan* and its tradition among the masses can be measured more precisely. In absence of any other medium of mass communication, this tradition became a potent channel of infotainment and social reform.

Smt Rohini Joshi, performing at Narad Mandir, Pune

Rashtriya Kirtankar Charudatta Aphale
The traditional form of the kirtan is of two distinct types while the nationalistic kirtan is considered the most modern form. Vyasik kirtan and Naradiya kirtan are the two distinct styles. Warkari and Ramdasi kirtans too are known to have distinct styles and objectives as their names suggest. The kirtankars were also accompanied by aides or musicians.

**Method and Style**

In those days kirtankars used to narrate tales from the Puranas in a sitting position. Sometime later, kirtans were performed standing up and the use of musical instruments like tal, mridangam and veena became popular. The Naradiya kirtan, named after its founder, sage Narad Muni, is considered to be the oldest and the purest form of the kirtan. Sage Vyasa is believed to be the father of the Vyasik kirtan. This form is close to the kirtans of recent times which are full of music and instruments. Its roots can be traced to the stories from Puranas in ancient times.

The kirtan would commence by reading different scriptures and pothies. The poorvarang (the first half of a kirtan) and the uttararang (the latter half of the kirtan) are the two parts in which Naradiya kirtan is divided. The kirtankar starts his discourse with mangalcharan, comprising musical verses praising god. This is followed by a verse with religious and moral messages. The kirtankar then explains the basic thought or the message in the verse in a simple and entertaining way. The deep philosophy of the Vedas is very easily woven into musical verses so that it is easily understood by the audience.

An interval follows, when the kirtankar is garlanded and felicitated. After the short break the kirtan re-commences and proceeds into the uttararang or the last part. This is the most-awaited section in which the audience is entertained and informed about various aspects of life through stories from the Ramayana, Mahabharata and Bhagwat Puranas. A skillful and knowledgeable kirtankar inserts personal anecdotes and playful banter while narrating the stories and conveys the moral of the story in a very lucid language. The last part of the kirtan is the aarti or a prayer in which everyone participates. This is the basic and traditional method of kirtan followed for centuries in Indian towns and villages. This performing art may not be quite popular today, but its impact lies in its ability to entertain and educate the masses without any unnecessary frills.

**Maharashtrian Legacy**

The kirtan is an art in itself. To reach the top of his profession a kirtankar must be well-acquainted with many fine arts like music, literature and dramatics. Fine oratory, a keen sense of witty humour and knowledge of poetry too are the necessary prerequisites for a successful performance. Therefore it can be said that the kirtan is an amalgamation of many arts together. Scholars say that this art seems to have originated and flourished in Maharashtra and must have spread up to Banaras in North India and up to Tamil Nadu towards the south. Hari katha and katha kalkshepam are the forms of kirtan in other states of India.
Maharashtra is a land of poet saints who had recognised the positive impact of the art of kirtan on the masses and classes centuries ago. Sant Namdev, for example, used the medium of kirtan very effectively in spreading the message of bhakti in true Warkari tradition when he sang ‘Nachu kirtanache rangi dnyanadeep lau jagi’ (“Let us dance in kirtan and light the lamp of knowledge”). The saints associated with the Warkari tradition did away with the complicated technicalities of the kirtan like the poorvarang and uttarrang and gave this art the spontaneity of heartfelt love for Lord Vitthal. Chanting the name of Vitthal, warkaris in their thousands, congregate as one entity at the banks of river Chandrabhaga in Pandharpur, year after year.

If we go into the past few centuries, the real popularity and the influence of kirtan and its tradition among the masses can be measured more precisely. In absence of any other medium of mass communication, this tradition became a potent channel of infotainment and social reform. The kirtans popularised by saints like Tukaram and Namdev were taken further by another of their contemporaries, Sant Ramdas. He gave a new term for the kirtan - Karuna kirtan - which means a discourse full of empathy and affection. He has written extensively on this topic and has found this tradition to be an effective tool in spreading the message of true religion in the state of Maharashtra. His comments on this subject can be a topic of study.

The rich tradition of kirtan in the villages of Maharashtra not only laid the foundation of the Marathi culture but also shaped the approach of the masses towards various arts. A large section of an audience was created which could distinctly differentiate between excellence and mediocrity. By fusing religious values and the traditional wisdom, this performing art contributed in the social awakening process. Later, during the struggle for independence, leaders like Lokamanya Tilak encouraged kirtans in order to take the struggle to the masses. Many thinkers and social reformers moved away from the very orthodox and stagnant religious practices to establish various religious sects like the Prarthana Samaj. The tradition of the kirtan had played a very significant role in changing their approach towards religion.

There is no doubt that this rich tradition has been somewhat marginalised in the age of electronic mass media and commercialisation. But recently there have been efforts to rejuvenate this art with positive results. Some committed kirtankars are teaching this art to packed classrooms. In cities and towns kirtans are being conducted in halls and temples with full audiences. The new generation of kirtankars now talks about the various ills of society and the stress of modern lifestyle. Therefore, despite many apprehensions, this art has not only survived but is gaining strength. There is a hope that this tradition will pass the test of time and thrive in the future.
All Things Wild and Wonderful

Phansad Sanctuary

Anirudh Chaoji
Photographs © Monish Dave, Pallavi Ghaskadbi, Anirudh Chaoji

The Phansad Wildlife Sanctuary, located about 152 kms from Mumbai, may not have glamorous beasts such as the lions, tigers or elephants to feast your sights on but it certainly stands out for its wide variety of birds, insects, deer and of course the leopard, says Anirudh Chaoji.
Distance from Mumbai: -152 kms

Getting there:
By Rail – Roha on Konkan railway – 30 kms
By Road Nearest Bus Stand is Alibag at 50-km from the Sanctuary. Roha Bus Stand is about 30 kms away

Excursions:
The magnificent sea fort of Janjira is worth a visit. Also stop by the Birla Mandir. For a more relaxed time, unwind at Kashid beach.
A few years ago, driving from Murud to Roha, I was watching with fascination a white-bellied sea eagle pick up a sea snake and fly to its nest perched on a tall seaside tree. From where I was observing, it appeared that the eagle was carrying a ‘ready to eat’ meal for its fledglings in the nest. After a little while the regal bird with its contrasting black and white attire effortlessly floated for another sortie into its aerial kingdom. It soared, turned and banked gracefully and soon was flying overhead. Suddenly, it changed course and seemed to be in some kind of a hurry as it flapped briskly and flew in a direction away from the sea. The attention-seeker soon appeared on the stage. It was another bird of prey that had violated the sea eagles’ airspace, forcing an immediate response.

The airborne intruder was soon identified as a crested serpent eagle, a handsome predator bird of the jungles. However, the smaller intruder soon changed course and left the scene, keeping in line with the jungle rule - might is right... so why fight! But what seemed rather strange was the fact that these

Butterflies like the blue mormone, blue oakleaf, commander, jezebel, blue bottle, map, nawab, tawny rajah and yam add spectacular colours to the greens of Phansad.
two eagles, one ruling over the shores and the other over the woods, were actually sharing a common hunting ground. The mystery was soon solved as I drove into the Phansad Wildlife Sanctuary. This wildlife heaven seems to rise from the Arabian Sea into the neighbouring hills and a thick forest clothed these hillsides to provide refuge to a multitude of life forms. No wonder, the two eagles thus found suitable habitats for themselves.

Then and Now
During the days of the erstwhile maharajas and nawabs, there were forested areas reserved as royal hunting grounds. It was here that wildlife was protected so that the rich and the noble could enjoy the privileges of ‘shikar’. Today, many of these hunting grounds, including Bharatpur and Ranthambore, have continued as some of our finest wildlife habitats. In the same vein, Phansad too was maintained as an exclusive hunting domain for the Siddhi Nawabs of the Janjira state. The nawabs over many dynasties had hand-reared this forest to ensure that the web of life sustained well for sufficient hunt-worthy animals. They created a large number of permanent waterholes called ‘gans’ in the forest. These waterholes, such as the Chikhal gan, Phansadchi gan, Sarawatchi gan and others, sustained a plethora of prey species and hence a strong predator base too.

The Nawabs had succeeded in providing excellent protection for the Phansad forest in line with their reputation. Their sea fort of Janjira in the Arabian Sea off the coast of Mu-
Diversity of Phansad that adds colour
Flies too are beautiful

Orange tip basking

Praying mantis

Bee with its pollen sacks full
rud was amongst the very few forts that were never captured – neither the Mughals nor the Marathas and not even the Portuguese or the English could overrun this Siddhi bastion in all its 350 years of existence. Its solid 40-feet tall walls have been facing regular battering by the waves without yielding even an inch to the sea, let alone the enemies.

Post independence, the Siddhis lost control over the area and soon it became ‘free for all’ in the Phansad forest. Animals were hunted and trees were taken away by all and sundry. This was also the time that witnessed the rise of an illicit charcoal trade and selective tree-felling which led to further destruction of this forest. It was in only in the year 1986 when the Maharashtra government declared an area of 52 square kms as a wildlife sanctuary that the fate changed for this beautiful wilderness area. Slowly the scars of damage started to heal and now many years later, a unique forest has been restored here with a resemblance to the bio-diverse Western Ghat eco-system.

Amazing Biodiversity

The southern moist deciduous forest here has many evergreen trees in abundance too. One such tree called the ‘Garcinia talbotti’, known as the Phansada in local dialect, gives this forest its name. The Phansad Wildlife Sanctuary, like most other hillside forests that face a regular onslaught of wind, has predominantly medium-sized trees. However, in the low-lying areas around the water bodies and streams, where the adverse impact of the saline winds is not too strong, taller trees
abound. Till date, over 700 floral species have been recorded here.

The locals have found a number of these trees to have a significant economic importance too. Terminalia paniculata, locally known as ‘kindal’, is an important source of timber and so is teak (Tectona grandis). Anjani (Mecycylon umbellatum), also called ironwood, is a significant tree which has shown a distinct ability to take over disturbed habitats. White siris (Albizia procera), a fast growing species, has shown preference for the moist areas. To a layman, wood is wood – what is the difference? Well, it would be interesting to know that the locals use wood from more than five to six tree species to build a bullock cart! Wood is selected to be light in weight, yet give it the necessary strength and at the same time withstand the changing weather conditions. Ever thought about it?

Locals have also been depending on the forest for animal meat. While wild boar, hare and deer species are regularly consumed elsewhere, it is interesting to note that civet cat, mongoose, porcupine, monitor lizard and a number of birds like the jungle fowl, dove, green pigeon as also crabs, stream fish and crustaceans are also regularly used as food. The rock python is also taken here for its fat and medicinal oil. These carnivorous habits indeed put pressure on the forest, more so for the fact that the forest is surrounded by many villages. The small village of Supegaon, close to the entrance of the sanctuary, was actually maintained by the nizams to warrant the necessary logistical support for their hunting activities. Villagers in turn depended on the forest for their basic needs, thereby putting tremendous pressure on the natural resources.

However, with the revival of the forest, many locals are of the opinion that the forest species have in fact started to encroach into the open plateau grasslands. Referred to as the ‘mal’, some of the prominent plateaus here are the Chakacha mal, Navabacha mal, Bhadavyacha mal, Ghunyacha mal, Palanichi mal and Gadagicha Maal. These plateaus are devoid of soil cover and are actually basalt outcrops. Many of the plant species that survive the harsh conditions here are insectivorous and are able to get nitrogen from the small insects captured. A spectacular monsoon flowering of insectivorous ‘utricularia’ and ‘drosera’ is found in varying abundance along with clumps of ‘senecios’ and ‘balsams’.

**Animal Sightings**

Early mornings or late evenings are the best times to watch the herbivores grazing on the short grasses on the plateaus. Sambar, barking deer, mouse deer and wild boar are the most prominent ungulates here. Interestingly, this forest never had a population of...
spotted deer. The Nizams had introduced a number of these handsome animals as a prey species for the leopards. With such a strong prey base, it is little wonder that the apex predator, the leopard, has established itself well. Many nature-loving tourists have been lucky to be blessed with its sightings on an evening drive. But beyond the predator and the prey species, this forest is more popular among the nature lovers for its rich diversity of small mammals like the giant squirrel, butterflies, birds, amphibians and reptiles.

Butterflies like the blue mormone, blue oakleaf, commander, jezebel, blue bottle, map, nawab, tawny rajah and yam add spectacular colours to the greens of Phansad. My own memories of Phansad are associated with the sightings of such impressive butterflies as the map butterfly showing off its patterns similar to a map and the blue oak leaf butterfly that merges so well with the leaf litter till it decides to fly – showing off its brilliant blue colours.

Birds, on the other hand, add awesome music to the silence of the forest that is otherwise punctuated only by the calling of crickets and cicadas. The birding season is announced by the arrival of long telephoto lenses. When an interesting bird is seen, the burst of the shutters far exceeds the calls of all the cicadas put together. Amongst the avian beauties here, I personally am in love with the Paradise Flycatcher chasing tiny insects among the low-lying branches. Others like the oriole, pitta, shama, green pigeon, fairy blue bird and racquet-tailed drongo always make me follow them for miles and miles and the haunting calls of the Jerdon’s nightjars and the owls have added the mystery element. The Malabar pied hornbill probably has added the biggest glamour to this enchanting forest.

In the recent past, a number of nature lovers with interests varying from frogs to snakes have been flocking to the various water bodies of Phansad. The search for the lost amphibians has brought eminent scientists and students alike to the ‘gans’. Working on all fours, these naturalists display tremendous excitement on finding a little amphibian, much to the amusement of the local guides. Meanwhile, the pressure on this forest today is mainly in the form of fuel wood collection. Locals cut trees and lop branches to meet their requirement. Encroachment of land for agriculture though is not a major issue for the forest department.

**Farming Foibles**

Earlier, the nizams permitted local communities to undertake ‘slash and burn’ agriculture. A family would clear a patch of forest to take up nachani (ragi) and varai crops one after the other. However, since such forest lands are not too productive, the family shifted to another location to return to the original site a few years later. Earlier, with lower populations and larger lands, the return to the original site would take around seven to eight
The locals make offerings to Shaila Devi before and post harvest – thanking her for blessing their crops. In the past, when faith was strong, the villagers would actually seek permission of the goddess before cutting a tree or lopping its branches. Faith is now receding and tree cutting is regularly seen around the erstwhile ‘devrais’. Moreover, personal demands too have grown. Earlier wood was only required for repair of homes and preparing agricultural implements. Now, the wood sold in the market fetches the family an income without making any investments. However, despite these pressures, Phansad shows hope in an otherwise rapidly deteriorating landscape everywhere else.

Outside the forest limits, the locals take up rain-fed paddy cultivation. For this too they lop trees from within the sanctuary area, to be dried during the hot months on the plots being prepared for paddy sowing. Before monsoons the biomass is burned and the ash is spread over the plot as manure. Based on the rain god’s whims and fancies, paddy seed are selected to be sown. Halwa is an early-bearing variety while Garwa is the late-bearing variety. With the onset of rains, ploughing and seeding is completed. After the saplings have grown for around 20 days, they are ready for transplanting. The paddy crop is then ready for harvesting by November. The harvested paddy is stored in a very interesting bamboo basket called ‘kanagi’.

Another practice that seems to be losing ground is Devrai, the conservation of forest patches in the name of a goddess. In the past, the fear of her wrath had ensured that people did not vandalize and destroy the forests. People believed that cutting a tree would mean sure death and cutting branches would bring injury or loss of limbs. So much so that they did not even collect dry wood from the forest floor. Any person with a little scientific temper would understand that the dry and decomposing life forms played a role in providing nutrients to the forest ecosystem. The presiding goddess here is Shaila Devi, whose violent nature is well-known, and has thus helped protect small patches of forests.

The locals make offerings to Shaila Devi before and post harvest – thanking her for blessing their crops. In the past, when faith was strong, the villagers would actually seek permission of the goddess before cutting a tree or lopping its branches. Faith is now receding and tree cutting is regularly seen around the erstwhile ‘devrais’. Moreover, personal demands too have grown. Earlier wood was only required for repair of homes and preparing agricultural implements. Now, the wood sold in the market fetches the family an income without making any investments. However, despite these pressures, Phansad shows hope in an otherwise rapidly deteriorating landscape everywhere else.

Outside the forest limits, the locals take up rain-fed paddy cultivation. For this too they lop trees from within the sanctuary area, to be dried during the hot months on the plots being prepared for paddy sowing. Before monsoons the biomass is burned and the ash is spread over the plot as manure. Based on the rain god’s whims and fancies, paddy seed are selected to be sown. Halwa is an early-bearing variety while Garwa is the late-bearing variety. With the onset of rains, ploughing and seeding is completed. After the saplings have grown for around 20 days, they are ready for transplanting. The paddy crop is then ready for harvesting by November. The harvested paddy is stored in a very interesting bamboo basket called ‘kanagi’.

Another practice that seems to be losing ground is Devrai, the conservation of forest patches in the name of a goddess. In the past, the fear of her wrath had ensured that people did not vandalize and destroy the forests. People believed that cutting a tree would mean sure death and cutting branches would bring injury or loss of limbs. So much so that they did not even collect dry wood from the forest floor. Any person with a little scientific temper would understand that the dry and decomposing life forms played a role in providing nutrients to the forest ecosystem. The presiding goddess here is Shaila Devi, whose violent nature is well-known, and has thus helped protect small patches of forests.
A Spiritual Epic

Jnaaneshwari

G B Deglurkar | Photographs © Sachin Naik, Sanket Patil, Eknath Bawane

Shri Jnaaneshwara’s poetic commentary on the Bhagawad Geeta has been a source of guiding light that shows man the way ahead in a spiritual exploration. G B Deglurkar helps discover the virtues of life and the meaning of existence as explained in this spiritual epic.

The Bhawaartha Deepikaa of Shri Jnaaneshwara is popularly known as Jnaaneshwari. It is a commentary on the Bhagwad Geeta, one of the parts of the Prasthaana Trayi, the other two being the Upanishads and Brahmasutra. The Jnaaneshwari is a philosophical poem, a spiritual epic. It is a literary gem in the Marathi language. Few theological works show the flight of imagination that Jnaaneshwara exhibits in his Jnaaneshwari. In the exposition of philosophical problems, the analogy he employs is the most characteristic method ever applied.

The implicit wide world experience is remarkable, especially considering the very young age when this work was composed. How did
the author acquire such vast experience of the world? He tackled every problem related to philosophy very mellifluously and penetratingly, and that too full of the fervour of spiritual experience. That is why every reader of the Jnaaneshwari admits unhesitatingly its unique place in literature and regards it as one of the greatest works in the Marathi language ever written.

**Early Life**

A miracle happened in 13th century Maharashtra. A teenager commented in Marathi upon the Bhagwad Geeta, a text in Sanskrit, and rightly claimed that his Marathi was so lucid as to out-taste even ambrosia in sweetness. A female saint called Janabai, a contemporary of Jnaaneshwara, stated that Jnaaneshwara, the author, was born in Shaaliwaahana Shaka and so forth.
1193 (1271 C.E.). Jnaanadeva, his two brothers and a sister, Muktaabaai, were the off-springs of a mendicant-turned-householder. Hence, they, along with their father Viththalpant and mother Rukminibaai, were excommunicated by the orthodox society prevalent then. Later on, the Brahmins refused to perform the thread ceremony of these outcaste brothers. In brief, the early part of the life of these children was a tortuous ordeal.

Even after the deaths of their parents, as a repercussion of banishment, the social persecution remained unabated. The four children therefore decided to go to Paithana, an orthodox centre in those days, to obtain a certificate of ‘shuddhi’ in 1287 C.E. There, having tested the spiritual learning and intelligence of these children, the Brahmins gave them the required certificate of purification.

**Spiritual Lineage**

The spiritual lineage of these great souls can be traced to Aadinaatha (Shiva) to Matsyen-dranaatha who infused the power of spreading spiritual knowledge to Gorakhnaatha. This spiritual secret then descended to Gahininaatha who in turn communicated it to Nivrittinaatha. He initiated Jnaaneshwara. In this way he became a staunch shishya (disciple) of the celebrated guru. Jnaaneshwara, along with his brothers and sister, returned from Paithana and reached Newasa, on the way to Alandi. Here as per the desire of his elder brother and Guru Nivrittinaatha, he commented on the Bhagawad Geeta which was taken down by Sacchidaanandababa who, serving as an amanuensis, had been saved from a dangerous illness by Jnaaneshwara with his spiritual powers.

This episode in the life of Jnaaneshwara took place in the temple of Mohiniraja situated on the southern bank of the river Godawari. Jnaaneshwara used a pillar in the temple as a back rest while commenting on the Bhagawad Geeta, which is now recognised as the ‘Paisachaa Khaamba’, installed in the sanctum of a newly constructed temple at Newasa. This momentous event proved as a landmark and a turning point in the history of the Marathi language as well as Maharashtra. It revolutionized the domain of the language, spiritualism and philosophy. Even then, remarkably enough, Jnaanashwara did not take any credit for the composition. Instead, being a devout disciple, he attributed it to his guru’s grace. This act mirrored his greatness.

*Jnaaneshwari* is the work of an enlightened soul and a gifted poet. This masterpiece is an example of exquisite poetry. The content of the *Jnaaneshwari* revolves mainly around three themes i.e. metaphysics, ethics and mysticism.
The Aim

The very purpose of the Jnaaneshwari is to let people of all castes and creeds know the Brahmavidyaa which advocates oneness of the universal 'aatman' (soul) and the universe. And since there is no other better work than the Bhagwad Geeta which he considered as a prince among literary works dealing with Brahmavidyaa, he decided to follow it. The Brahmavidyaa, which is the raison d’être of the Upanishads, was described by Jnaaneshwara explicitly in the Marathi language to enable all to enjoy perpetual happiness. He earnestly wanted to cater to those familiar with Marathi the knowledge of the Brahmavidyaa, which had so far been confined to Sanskrit.

Though the Bhagwad Geeta discusses both the aspects i.e. the manifest and unmanifest of Parabrahma and the pravritti and nivritti (active and inactive) phases of the Vedic dharma, it gives preference to manifest as against...
unmanifest and pravritti than nivritti. And it indicates that accepting either karmayoga (action), bhaktiyoga (devotion) or jnaanayoga (knowledge) as per one’s own capability leads to achieving knowledge of the self (aatmajnaana) and after achieving knowledge (brahmaajnaana) the action taken becomes non-action (akarma). The Bhagawad Geeta is a perfect instrument to convince people of the unity of paramaatmaa and aatmaa. And that the difference between man and man, man and the universe and the universe and beyond the universe is out of ignorance.

This can be eradicated when one gets the insight that Brahma is all pervasive and there is no other work than the Bhagwad Geeta which synthesizes knowledge, action and devotion, and hence Jnaaneshwara has composed 9,000 ‘ovis’ (verses) to explain the philosophy expounded in the Bhagawad Geeta, its prototype, in Marathi. The same philosophy forms the basis of the Bhaagawata Dharma. He wants people to have conscience and knowledge of the self. They should get rid of fear and sorrow, should enjoy Brahmaananda and shed selfishness and perform duties as an offering to god. His commentary would have been dry in the absence of the interesting side of exposition and the great wealth of material that he employs for the description of philosophy.

Realising the Radiance
The animate and inanimate universe is nothing but an effulgence of the paramaatmaa. If this is understood then the realisation that the universe is the supreme spirit dawns upon us. It is ignorance to think of any difference between the two - just as there is no difference between clay and earthenware, cotton and cloth, fire and its flames. Jnaaneshwara follows non-dualism. According to its author, the universe is the effulgence of the universal aatman. Otherwise how can one differentiate between the sea and its waves, the sun and its splendour? This, in brief, is the concept of Chidwilaasawaada of Jnaaneshwara.

The Content
The Jnaaneshwari is the work of an enlightened soul and a gifted poet. This masterpiece is an example of exquisite poetry. The content of the Jnaaneshwari revolves mainly around three themes i.e. metaphysics, ethics and mysticism. While dealing with the metaphysical aspect Jnaaneshwara reverts from time to time to the description of the prakriti (nature or matter) and the purusha (spirit). He follows the Bhagwad Geeta in expounding the relation of these two. The purusha is the eternal spectator and prakriti the uniform actor. This is explained by quoting various examples as per his style of dealing with the statement.
Jnaaneshwara has composed 9,000 ‘ovis’ (verses) to explain the philosophy expounded in the Bhagavad Geeta, its prototype, in Marathi. The same philosophy forms the basis of the Bhagavadwata Dharma. He wants people to have conscience and knowledge of the self.
A couple of examples will help the reader to understand it easily: (1) A piece of iron moves simply because it is in the vicinity of a magnet, though this magnet itself does not suffer action and (2) A lamp placed in a corner is the cause neither of any action nor of inaction. Similarly, the purusha is the eternal spectator, while the beings follow their own course. Jnaaneshwara exhibits it by means of a variety of images. The purusha, he further states, is synonymous of existence, the prakriti of action.

In a similar way, he follows the Bhagawad Geeta in dealing with the kshara (mutable), the akshara (immutable) and the paramaatman, the being that transcends both. Agreed, it is somewhat hard to understand the distinction between the immutable and the transcendent being and yet Jnaaneshwara, closely following the Bhagwad Geeta, makes it easy to understand the distinction between the two.

Jnaaneshwara speaks of a doctrine of transmigration which is linked closely with the analysis of man’s psychological qualities such as the saattvika, the raajas and the taamasa. More important and exciting are the descriptions of Lord Krishna’s great transfiguration as the universal aatman (vishwarupa) or the cosmic form and the great skill of Jnaaneshwara in commenting upon it. He dwells upon this in an excellent and mind-blowing way and brings into relief the vision of the universal aatman. The vishwarupa is visible only by intuitive vision and not by physical means.

When it comes to moral teachings, Jnaaneshwara not only talks about some virtues but also produces a catalogue of these. The author makes a very acute and accurate analysis of the various moral virtues. This remarkable originality in this regard is to be seen in Chapter XIII where he enumerates the virtues of a truly spiritual life. Humility, unpretentiousness, harmlessness, sufferance, devotion to guru, purity, non-egoism, non-attachment, etc are some of them. He speaks elaborately and employs many images to bring home the particular significance of the virtue under consideration. He was the greatest moral philosopher as he employed a figurative method for the description of virtues. Jnaaneshwara comes out in his true spirit in Chapter IX when he describes the nature of the Almighty.

He states, “The Supreme Self is formless, inactive, beyond the qualities, all-pervasive, unmanifest and non-dual. But people ascribe form to the formless, action to the inactive, qualities to the one without qualities and a location to the all-pervasive. They attribute manifestation to the unmanifest. Moreover, they ascribe feet hands, ears, eyes, lineage and habitation to Him. In fact, He does not possess any of these. And again though He could see the universal aatman personally.

For the marvellous description of this unique transfiguration of the lord, awestricken Arjuna, his intimacy with the lord, the graphic presentation of the event, eradication of the despondency of Arjuna, and emboldening him to fight, one has to go into the original writings of Jnaaneshwara which is enriched by the profuse use of similes, metaphors and illustrations.

The author is an expert on temple architecture and iconography. He is the President of Deccan College Post-Graduate and Research Institute, Pune.
is without clothing and ornaments, they put these on Him. They make Him who is self-made. For Him, who is without a second, they create a second. These and other human qualities which they attribute to Him are themselves embodiment of ignorance. Such is their false knowledge.”

Thus the doctrine of Jnaaneshwara is different from the qualified monism, dualism and pure non-dualism (vishistadwaita) which held that the Supreme Self possesses auspicious attributes. In this regard the philosophy of Jnaaneshwara is close to the monism of Aadi Shankara. In the last Chapter named Moksha-Samnyasayoga, a resume of every chapter is taken. It is in a way the Jnaaneshwari in a miniature form. Surprisingly, his keen observation of the Kailasa at Ellora is revealed when he uses it as a metaphor the way he built chapters of the Jnaaneshwari one after another.

Apart from the other topics, two passages are of importance here. One suggests the high esteem in which he holds Lord Krishna and the other reveals his benevolent attitude towards society despite the fact that it troubled and harassed him and his two brothers and sister. This is very remarkable of his never-to-be-seen sainthood and sthitapradnya.

In one of these passages he says that victory is always with him who is befriended by god and that god’s nature is victory itself. He quotes, to stress his point, Sanjaya’s reply to Dhritarashtra who unhesitatingly told him that victory must lie with the side where Lord Krishna was.

In fact, Krishna is victory. The 78th stanza of the Bhagavad Geeta runs like this: “Where there is Krishna, the lord of yoga and where there is Partha, the archer, there is assured fortune, as also victory, prosperity and statesmanship - such is my considered view.” This is what Sanjaya tells Dhritarashtra in a magnificent and thrilling dialogue.

The second famous passage constitutes a prayer known as the Pasayadana with which the Jnaanashwari is concluded. In this Jnaanashwara expresses his longing to obtain the grace of god. “Now may the lord of the universe be pleased with the literary sacrifice of mine and grant me this grace. May the wicked shed their crookedness and become inclined towards increasing love for good. May all beings develop friendship for one another. May the darkness in the form of sin in the world disappear and let the sun of true religion rise in the universe.”

“May the concourse of saints who shower auspiciousness on the universe appear and visit incessantly all beings on this earth. They are like moving gardens of wish-fulfilling trees and the abodes of satiate philosophers’ jewels. They are the speaking oceans of ambrosia. They are like spotless moons or suns without tormenting heat. May all of the three worlds be endowed with all happiness and have the desire to worship perpetually to the primeval being (Brahman). Let all those who follow the teachings of this work have victory in the seen as well as the unseen.” Hearing these words the lord of the universe said, “I grant you this grace” at which Jnaaneshwara became happy.

Divinity Forever

Literally hundreds of editions and millions of copies of the Jnaaneshwari have been published so far and the publication has been going on uninterrupted to this day. More than that, thousands of warkaris celebrate its reading sessions every year in social gatherings organised especially for this. Many learned authorities deliver discourses based on the Jnaaneshwari throughout the year. Some of the warkaris have learnt it by heart and can recite it without any help of the text. The Jnaaneshwari mesmerizes one and all.

Allegorically he states,

“Where there is the moon, there is the moonlight
Ambika is to be along with Shambhu (Shiva)
Where there is goodness there is friendship
Where there is Lord Krishna, there is Lakshmi.”

Newasa
The Kandhar Fort, which was a seat of political power during the Rashtrakuta rule in 9th century CE, commands a special place in the history of Maharashtra, says Prabhakar Deo

In India, heritage structures in the form of forts go back to the Rigvedic Age. Although no Rigvedic fort structures have yet been found, the Rigvedic Rucha refers to fortified cities. Megasthenes, a Greek ambassador in the Mauryan court, referred to a fort in Pataliputra. Ajatshatru is said to have built a fort on the confluence of the Ganga and the Son. The Bhuvaneshwar excavation unearthed fort antiques of the 3rd BCE found near Shisupalgarh. Kautilya’s Arthashastra contains a chapter on forts and clearly confirms that fort building was an important activity in ancient India. Kautilya mentions four types of forts. Oudak was a ‘jaldurga’ (sea fort), Parvat was a ‘giridurg’ (hill fort), Dhanwan was a ‘bhuikot’ (built on flat land) and Ohedurg was a forest encampment.

The most ancient giridurg of Maharashtra are located on the trade routes passing through the Sahyadri ranges. These forts were built during the Satavahana period and initially were the encampment centers and protection camps for the Sarthavaha, the trading guilds engaged in Indo-Roman trade. The ‘bhuikot’ forts were built during the Satavahana period as the capital and sub-capitals. This practice seems to have continued in the succeeding generations. The post Satavahana period is marked by the rise of political powers like Vakatakas, Chalukyas, Rashtrakutas, Kakatiyas and Yadavas in Maharashtra. The capital cities and metropolitan headquarters of these ruling powers were located mostly in the Godavari river valley. City encampments and forts were built by these ruling dynasties and some of them have been retained as our ancient built heritages.

The Kandhar Fort

The Kandhar Fort is one such ancient built heritage erected along with its capital encampment at Kandharpurvar by the Rashtrakuta rulers. The antiquity of the town goes back to 4th century CE. A Maddepad inscrip-
tion mentions the town as Kandarpur and in subsequent years it becomes Kandharpur. Rashtrakuta ruler Krishna I established a sub-headquarters at Kandharpur and the encampment became a historic city. Krishna I shifted his capital to Kandharpur in the later half of the 8th century CE and the succeeding Rashtrakuta rulers used the epithet ‘Kandharpurvaradhiswar’ in certain copper plate inscriptions. The 10th century inscription of Kandhar describes the complete layout of a capital city and makes an indirect reference to a ‘durg’, which is the Kandhar Fort. This inscription, now broken in parts, is written on three sides of a pillar. It was discovered in 1950 by Dr Bhattacharya and Dr Sirkar. There must have been a detailed description of Kandhar fort in the missing part of the said inscription. The inscription is in Sanskrit and written in the Devanagari script. It describes the 10th century Kandhar and records that there was a royal palace with ‘yakshadwar’ and ‘maker torana’, ‘sarvakasrya mandap’, and so on. This built heritage referred to in the inscription must have been located in the fortified area. There was ‘gurjarapanni hat-
tika’ outside the fort in the common market. Also, ‘agnisthitika’, ‘jaladronyo’ and about ten temples located in different directions have also been referred to in the said inscription. A water reservoir called Jagattung Sagar was created in this capital city which is still live and is the most ancient water storage of Maharashtra. The remnants of the water supply system of the 10th century Kandhar are visible at different sites around the fort.

Description

The Kandhar Fort, a footprint of the ancient capital, is preserved at Kandharpurvar, a Rashtrakuta capital, presently known as Kandhar, a taluka headquarters located 55 kms from Nanded. The fort was constructed at a strategic point on the banks of the river Manyad. There are natural hillocks on the north, south and western side and the Manyad flows from the east. Thus the fort is protected from all sides. It is constructed on a plain top and spread over 24 acres of land. The entire area is encircled by a strong fortification wall which is still intact. There is a wide ditch called ‘khandak’ measuring 4.26 metres in depth and 30.40 metres in width. It is normally filled with water but goes dry in exceptional cases.

Along with some natural springs, the ditch also gets its water supply from Jagattung Sagar. The fortification wall is 12 metres in height. There are two fortifications around the area and the only gate is the Jinsi Gate, covered with a ‘jinvaha’, a false wall. The second one is the Machali Gate on the first fortification. There is a ‘parkot’ and the actual royal palace area. There are 18 ‘buruj’ (watch towers) in the first fortification.

The Kandhar Fort had been a seat of political power initially during the Rashtrakuta rule in the 9th century CE. Unfortunately, the Rashtrakuta buildings have turned into debris. Some of the structures have been modified during the last few centuries. There are a number of medieval structures in the fort. These structures, although dilapidated, give an idea of a pompous luxurious life of the royal families. The second fortification wall of the fort contains 17 ‘buruj’ whereas there are 18 in the first. One can have a beautiful panoramic view of the fort from the top of these ‘buruj’. Mahakaliburuj, Dhanaburuj, Shahburuj, Ibrahimiburuj and Balahissarburuj, are worth seeing.

These were rebuilt during the medieval period which is evident from the Arabic and Persian inscriptions on the fortification and ‘buruj’ wall. Shahburuj is the highest and measures 16.70 metres in height. The Rangeen Darwaja along the side of this ‘buruj’ is equally significant as Raja Bagswar Gate and is an isolated medieval structure in the fort area. It seems to have been rebuilt by Mo-
hammad Tughlaq. The stone sculptures of ‘shankha’ and ‘chakra’ on the construction wall retain the memory of the ancient structure.

**Lal Mahal And Darbar Mahal**

Amongst the palatial medieval structures in the fort are the Lal Mahal and Darbar Mahal buildings. The former is built on a huge platform, measuring 26.20 x 18.50 metres. A beautiful water tank with fountains and the surrounding garden remnants suggest the royalty experienced by the medieval Sultans. Ambar Khana and Sheesh Mahal are amongst the few other heritage structures in the fort. The Sheesh Mahal is a double-storied building probably constructed at the same site where the Rashtrakuta Royal Palace existed. A wall showing beautiful glass work and a few other structures still remain at the site. There are remnants of a bathroom with hot and cold water storage facilities. The Sheesh Mahal appears to be the Rani Mahal of the Tughlaq and Bahamani sultans.

Besides these medieval structures, there is some stone debris indicating ancient structural remains. The Rashtrakuta sculptures of this ancient capital, spread over the Kandharpur, have been collected here in the fort and are displayed in the open courtyard. Amongst these ancient sculptures, the most noteworthy are the remains of a huge ‘yaksha vastupurush’, sculpture of a man measuring 60 feet in height. Scattered parts of this huge sculpture are preserved in this fort. The foundation of this huge ‘vastupurush’ was found in the excavation carried out by the Government of Maharashtra in 1980.

To sum up, the Kandhar Fort is the only ancient fort, rather ‘bhuikot’, in Maharashtra with its fortification walls intact. Another ancient fort is Devgiri near Aurangabad, but it is a hill fort. A huge treasure of the Rashtrakuta sculptures and structural remnants are found scattered in Kandharpur. The Rashtrakuta rulers who created the world famous Kailas cave temples of Ellora lived in this capital city. They left behind their footprints in the form of structures, sculptures, epigraphic records and the Jagattung Sagar.
Ambarish Khare provides an account of a small village in the Konkan area which finds a mention in most of the tourist literature because of its lake that is perhaps the biggest of its kind in the region. That apart, Dhamapur gives you that essential cut-off from urban chaos.
Tranquillity by the Lakeside

Dhamapur

Ambarish Khare
Photographs © Meghaneel Watve

Distance from Mumbai: 500 Km

Reaching There
From Mumbai:
By Rail: Kudal is the nearest railway station.

By Road: Take the Mumbai-Goa Highway NH 4 till Kudal. From Kudal switch to the State Highway no 119 i.e. Kudal-Malvan via Nerurpar, which passes through Dhamapur.

Excursions:
While going to Dhamapur from Kudal, a newly built bridge on the river Karli is a good place to stop for a while. It offers a pleasant view of the expanse of this river. There are also some temples in the village Kalse that you can reach after crossing the river Karli. Some of the other famous spots in the Malvan district include the Deobag, Chivla, Achara and Tarkarli beaches, Anganewadi, Kasartaka and Tondavali – all situated within a distance of approximately 15 to 40 kms.
Dhamapur (17°15' North, 73°35' East) is a small village situated in Malvan taluka, district Sindhudurg. Rich in natural beauty, this place has still remained more or less untouched by the forces of urbanism and maintains its countryside feel due to a calm and quiet atmosphere. Small houses built in Konkani style, courtyards polished with cow dung and the backyards plush with coconut and betelnut trees give Dhamapur its quintessential coastal tranquillity. The nearest railway station is approximately 13 kilometres away at Kudal, which is also situated on the Mumbai – Goa National Highway No 4. From Kudal one can reach the village Dhamapur by travelling on the Kudal – Malvan (via Nerurpar) State Highway No 119 which passes through the village.

One can see the entrance of the famous temple of Bhagavati situated on the left on a high mound after crossing the village. The temple hides a large natural lake, famous for its crystal clear waters, which can be seen only after going through the temple to the other side. The temple and the lake are very popular with local pilgrims who visit the place often during various religious ceremonies. The lake measures about 125 acres in area and is one of the largest natural lakes in Konkan.

**Myth, History and Traditions**

The name Dhamapur is said to have evolved from the Sanskrit word ‘Dharmapura’. This famous village is also associated with P L Deshpande, one of the stalwarts in the field of Marathi literature. The home of his father-
in-law still stands in the village. An ample description of the village is thus found in the books penned by Sunita Deshpande and Madhu Magesh Karnik.

According to local folklore, the lake was built around 300 years ago by damming a stream. The idol of the goddess Bhagavati was then shifted to a higher level of the dam. Legends speak about how for important ceremonies such as marriages, the people of the village would go to the goddess Bhagavati and ask for ornaments of gold. An earthen vessel with flower garlands would be immersed in the stream and it would supposedly return with gold ornaments. The villagers would return the ornaments after the ceremony. Once, however, a person did not return the ornaments and this dishonesty angered the goddess so much that she stopped providing for this need of the villagers.

The trustees of the temple at present are of the Desai family who have been residing in the village for more than four centuries. The family history goes back to the 16th century. It is believed that an ancestor named Nagesh Desai came to this place in 1531 CE and built the temple.

Adjacent to the temple of Bhagavati are the temples of Saateri, Narayana and Brahma manadeva. There are some other temples in the village such as those of Ravalnath, Bhaavai, and others. There is also a Shiva-Ganesh temple near the village. Dhamapur’s strong links to the past have been proven by
Picturssque neighbourhood of the temple.
the discovery of ancient hero stones and sati stones, along with images of deities, indicating that Dhamapur has been here since the Shilahara period.

What draws many visitors to Dhamapur is the annual fair of goddess Bhagavati that is held during the Vaasantika Navaraatri festival (from Gudi Padwa to Ram Navami) in the month of Chaitra (March-April) every year. The ‘tarangas’ (posts having the hands and face of a deity) are placed in many temples across the Konkan region and these are held by the dancers who take them out in a procession by waving them up and down and to and fro while circumambulating around the temple. Such ‘tarangas’ are also placed in the Bhagavati temple, but they are not taken outside from here. Instead, there is a palkhi (palanquin) of the goddess which is taken outside for darshan during the procession. Another procession takes place during the Shaaradiya Navaratri, coinciding with the celebrations at the temples of Ravalnath and Bhaavaidevi.

The author is Asst. Professor of Sanskrit, Tilak Maharashtra Vidyapeeth, Pune
Accommodation
The lake resort of MTDC (Lishan) situated on the road to the forest department after crossing the village is a unique place to stay. Built in the chatuhshaala style, this facility provides a closed courtyard in between the cottages and a spectacular view of the lake on the other side. Some of the hotels in the village like Green View (lodging and boarding) and Nisargachhaayaa (lunch) also provide delicious local Konkani cuisine. Brave souls may also opt to wander into the forest on the banks of the lake which covers about 68 hectares of land. The forest department of Sindhudurg, on request, arranges for a machan (tree house) or tent. It also organises nature walks through its Nisarga Paryatana Kendra. Proper lighting and pathways in the jungle have been arranged for the same. A facility for boating on the lake has also been started recently, unavailable though during the monsoon.

Approximate Distances from Kudal – Dhamapur: 13 kms.
Malvan – Dhamapur: 15 kms.

Special acknowledgement: S L Desai, Dhamapur.

Travel Tips
Keep a first aid kit while travelling.
Do not swim in the lake.
Try coinciding your visit with the Vasantika Navratri festival around March-April.

What to eat
Don’t miss tasting local culinary specialities such as solkadi, patola, modak, tavashache vade, tikhale, filled bangda and pomfret, sungtache saar, tsryahe saar, roasted kolambi, surmai and fried bombil, etc. Many food items such as Malvani khaaje, fried jackfruit chips (talalele gare), kokam and jamun squash, cashew serbet, fanaspoli and ambapoli can be purchased at most of the general stores.
There’s no Diwali without Pharaal

How can the festival of lights be complete without a plate of chivda, chakli, ladoos, anarse, shankarpali and so on? Read on to find out what makes the Diwali pharaal so special with tips by Radhika Ghate on how you can make it on your own.

‘Amchya kade pharaalala ya’ (come to our house for the special delicacies) is a common invite given to each other during Diwali. Just as gingerbread and pudding announce the arrival of Christmas, pharaal heralds in Diwali. Come October–November, the whole of India gets into a festive mood. Every state has its own mythological, religious and social traditions and festivities to celebrate Diwali – celebrating the victory of good over evil or the harvest and prosperity. A few days before Diwali, the festival of lights, begins, the main shopping areas of a city begin to be lit up. Stores are also filled with families not just looking for dresses and accessories but also the right choice of items that must go into the preparation of the pharaal.

Pharaal includes a variety of long-lasting traditional savories and sweets. The process begins a month or fortnight before the festival, initiated with the selective buying of ingredients as well as sorting the grains and milling the flour, followed by the actual preparation of the goodies and storing them in an out-of-the-reach way in an effort to keep them away from pecking family members till the grand day of the festival’s commencement. After an early morning oil bath (abhyangasnan) and a burst of crackers on Dhanatrayodashi, the first day, these delicacies come out, to be attacked with relish till the last day of the festival. The woman of the house takes pride in displaying her month-long efforts by offering these goodies to friends and relatives, each showcasing unique mastery and specialty.

While in modern times it has become a single-woman kitchen, traditionally this activity of making pharaal used to be the collective effort of 5-6 ladies in the house. Catering to 40-50 members of the joint family with all Delicacies courtesy - Shrama - Sahakar Mahila Sangh, Narayan Peth, Pune

Radhika Ghate | Photographs © Sachin Naik

MAHARASHTRA UNLIMITED | Vol. 1, October-December 2012
the specialties, while handling other household chores, required an amazing level of dexterity. In a perfect display of management practices and theories, pharaal preparation would be a well-planned and coordinated activity with each lady member having her own share of duties.

Even as the daughters-in-law managed the kitchen along with eligible daughters, young girls under training had to help with petty errands like fetching, pounding, milling, grinding and storing. Not to be left out would be the veteran elderly lady in a nine-yard saree sitting in the verandah of the wada chopping dry fruits to precision and authoritatively providing tips and tricks of the trade to give the team a cutting-edge over the other households. Unfortunately, with the decline of this family system and the rise of nuclear families, pharaal today has become the sole responsibility of the home maker in the house. As such, this has also led to the availability of readymade pharaal.

Elements of Pharaal

Though every part in Maharashtra will have their own additional authentic specialties and styles of preparation, here are some common and popular ones from the platter.

Tongue Tingling Munchies

Chivda: A variety of chivdas are made by frying or sautéing different types of pressed rice (pohas) or puffed rice (murmura) tempered with mustard seed, curry leaves and turmeric, spiced with red chilli powder or green chil-
lies and enhanced with other ingredients like dry coconut, peanuts, cashew, raisins, etc.

Shev: Mildly spiced crispy thin noodles like chips made from spiced gram flour.

Chakli: Most popular and a must in Diwali pharal, this coil-shaped fried savory is made with mildly spiced mixed flour of various grains and lentils in Maharashtra and rice flour in South India.

Kadboli: Drop-shaped spiced fried savory made with mixed flour from various grains and lentils, best eaten with homemade white butter.

For A Sweet Tooth

Ladoo: Sweet round balls made in assorted variety.

Rava Ladoo: Made with semolina and sugar syrup, flavored with cardamom, raisins and sometimes freshly grated coconut.

Besan Ladoo: Rich and heavy, it is made with gram flour in pure ghee and castor sugar and flavored with cardamom and raisins.

Motichoor Ladoo: Made on a commercial basis using ghee, deep fried gram flour and sugar syrup.

Karanji: Boat-shaped fried sweet resembling Chinese momos. The outer covering is made of refined flour stuffed with fresh coconut or dry coconut and sugar mixture. Its shelf life is lesser if it is made with fresh coconut.

Satori: Flat and round, it is similar to a karanji but shallow-fried with the stuffing made of khawa (mawa), sugar and cardamom.

Anarse: Fried flat crispy sweet made of rice flour and jaggery sprinkled with poppy seeds.

Chirota: Similar to a puff pastry but fried. It has perfectly mastered thin layers made with refined flour and ghee. Sprinkled with castor sugar or dipped in sugar syrup, this light puff almost melts in the mouth.

Shankarpali: Crispy, diamond-shaped fried tidbits made with refined flour and sugar. It is very popular among children.

Special Traditional Equipment

Sorya: Conventionally made out of wood, it is now available in brass or stainless steel and is used to pipe out the chakli and shev with the use of a suitable metal plate.

Katan: A metal cutter with a circular blade on one end and a spoon or decorative design on the other end which is used while making karanji (to trim the edge) and shankarpali (to cut the diamond shapes). Available in brass or steel, this blade resembles a miniature pizza cutter.

Chakali

Ingredients for 40-45 Medium Chaklis:

Flour (bhajani):
Raw rice 2 cups
Split Bengal Gram (chana dal) 1 ½ cups
Split Green Gram (moog dal) 1 cup
Split Black Gram (udad dal) ½ cup
Coriander seeds 1 ½ tablespoon
Cumin seeds 1 ½ tablespoon

(Flour can be stored in a dry airtight container over a month and used as required).

Other ingredients as per taste:
Salt
Red chilli powder
Turmeric
Asafoetida (hing)
Oil for frying
Water equal to the quantity of flour
Ajwain (owa) 1 teaspoon, optional
Sesame seeds (til) 1 ½ tablespoon, optional

Method:
For making the flour mix, lightly roast all the dry ingredients and grind together. Add ajwain, sesame seeds. Boil water and add salt, red chilli powder, turmeric, asafoetida and oil (1/2 cup) to it. Add flour to water mixture, mix and knead well. Heat oil for frying. With the help of the mould (sorya), pipe the dough in coil shapes (as seen in the picture) on to greased plastic sheet. Carefully fry in the hot oil on a medium flame till crisp. Drain oil, cool and store in airtight container.
Karanji

Ingredients for Covering (Paari):
- Refined flour (maida) 1 cup
- Fine semolina (rawa) ½ cup
- Milk / water
- Pinch of salt
- Ghee or oil 4 teaspoons
- Ghee for frying

Ingredients for Stuffing (Saaran):
- One fresh coconut medium size, grated
- Sugar 250 gms
- Cardamom powder ¼ tsp or to flavour

Method:
Stuffing: Mix grated coconut and sugar and cook the mixture lightly till an even mixture is formed. Remove from stove. Add the cardamom powder, mix and keep aside to cool.

Covering: Mix semolina, refined flour, salt and pour hot oil/ ghee over it. Knead to a hard dough using milk or water and set aside for one hour. Knead again, divide into small balls. Roll each one to flat even rounds like pooris (2.5-3” diameter). Place spoonful stuffing in the centre and fold half part of the cover over the mixture to make a semi-circle. Seal the open edges by pressing them together. Give an even finish by trimming the sealed edges using the special cutter (katan). Heat ghee and fry on medium flame till the colour of the cover changes lightly. Remove, drain and cool. Store each one carefully to avoid breaking.

Anarse

Ingredients for 14-15 Pieces:
- Rice 2 cups
- Jaggery (gud) = weight of rice
- Clarified butter (pure ghee) 4 teaspoons
- Poppy seeds 50 gms
- Ghee for frying

Method:
For dough: Soak rice for three days. Drain the water on the third day. Dry the rice by spreading on cloth. Grind to a fine powder while slightly wet and sieve. Mix and pound or knead the flour, grated jaggery and ghee together to make soft dough. Divide into balls and store in closed container for 4-5 days. The dough is ready and can be stored for many days and used as and when required.

To make anarse, divide the dough into small equal-sized balls. On a greased plastic sheet, make poori like flat rounds (2.5” diameter) by patting the balls lightly. Evenly sprinkle poppy seeds on top of each and pat lightly. Heat ghee and fry on slow flame till they swell and turn golden brown. Remove, drain excess ghee and store in an airtight container after cooling.

Tip
Ready chakli flour (bhajani) and anarse dough (peeth) are now available in grocery stores in big cities.
The Navaratri festival is celebrated all over the country on a grand scale. However, each state has a different style of celebrating this triumph of good over evil. In Maharashtra it is a time when the rapid pace of life takes a break to pay tribute to the many forces that govern us as also an opportunity to build up camaraderie and positivism, says Varsha Gajendragadkar.
Invoking the Mother Goddess
The Navaratri
Varsha Gajendragadkar | Photographs © Milind Dhere
There are some events which are not merely festivals. They are sometimes occasions to rediscover our traditions, our beliefs and roots. The Navaratra festival is certainly one such occasion. Next to Diwali, it is the most joyously celebrated festival in the state. Devoted to the worship of 'Shakti' (energy or power) or the Mother Goddess, it is celebrated in almost all parts of India but with greater fervour and zeal in western states like Maharashtra and Gujarat apart from West Bengal.

The word Navaratra literally means nine nights. In Sanskrit, nava means nine and ratra means nights. Actually there are five Navaratas observed in India - Vasant Navaratra in the lunar month of Chaitra, Gupt Navaratra in the month of Ashadh, Sharad Navaratra in the month of Ashwin and Paush and Magh Navaratras in the Paush and Magh months respectively. Of these, Sharad or Shaaradiya Navaratra is an occasion for the most vibrant celebration in Maharashtra. It begins on the first and ends on the tenth day of the waxing moon in
Actually there are five Navaratras observed in India - Vasant Navaratra in the lunar month of Chaitra, Gupt Navaratra in the month of Ashadh, Sharad Navaratra in the month of Ashwin and Paush and Magh Navaratras in the Paush and Magh months respectively. Of these, Sharad or Shaaradiya Navaratra is an occasion for the most vibrant celebration in Maharashtra.
The month of Ashwin (September/October).

During these nine nights and ten days, various forms of the goddess are worshipped. And the tenth day, which is referred to as Vijayadashmi or Dassera, is the culmination of the Navaratra festival. The entire state comes alive with a festive feel during these ten days. Navaratra is a combination of many themes, with the most common being that of victory of good over evil.

According to a legend in the Puranas, the mighty demon Mahishasura vanquished the gods and their king Indra. The desperate gods then approached Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, who promised to help destroy the megalomaniac demon. The three combined their energy and gave rise to Shakti. All the gods prayed to the divine Mother Goddess - Durga - to save them from the evil one. Equipped with lethal weapons and riding a ferocious lion, Durga, in all her awesome majesty, subjugated the evil one in a fearful battle which lasted for nine days and nine nights. The tenth day on which the goddess killed Mahishasura is celebrated as Vijayadashmi or Dassera.

It is also believed that the tenth day symbolizes the great victory of Lord Rama over Lanka after killing the demon Ravana - again a triumph of noble over malevolent.

Navaratra is divided into sets of three days to adore three different aspects of the supreme goddess. For the first three days the goddess is worshipped as a spiritual force called Durga, also known as Kali, in order to destroy all impurities and ill-effects. For the next three days it is the worship of Laxmi, the goddess of wealth who is considered to have the power of bestowing on her devotees inexhaustible wealth. The final set of three days is spent in the adoration of the goddess of wisdom, Saraswati. In order to have all-round success in life, believers seek the blessings of all three aspects of the divine femininity.

On the eighth day, which is known as Ashtami, pre-pubescent girls - who are considered as embodiments of the Mother Goddess - are worshipped. This is known as Kanya Poojan. The ninth day is known as Khande Navami. It is celebrated with the worship of implements used in daily life such as books, pens, computers, agricultural tools, machinery, kitchen tools, vehicles, etc. The effort to see divine in the tools and objects one uses in daily life is central to this celebration.

Nowadays, the public celebration of Navaratra is on the rise. Huge idols of Durga emblazoned with flow- ers are installed in pavilions. Various cultural programs are organised that attract a large audience. On the ninth day, processions are taken out to add gaiety to the atmosphere.

It is customary to visit significant temples of the goddess during Navaratra. Maharashtra is home to well-known temples of goddesses such as Mahalaxmi at Kolhapur, Bhavani at Tuljapur, Renuka at Mahur, Saptashrungi at...
Vani, Yogeshwari at Ambejogai, etc. Chatuhshrungi and Jogeshwari temples from Pune are also widely known. A singularly traditional feature of the Navaratra festival in Maharashtra is Bhondla, a group dance of girls. It resembles the Garba and Dandiya folk dances of Gujarat. Bhondlas are organised for all the nine days during the evenings. Girls move in a circle around the figure of an elephant, usually drawn on a wooden board or the ground through the intricate patterns of rangoli. Young girls are found busy attending Bhondlas from house to house. They sing a variety of traditional songs at the end of which delicious snacks are served to all the participants.

The scholars opine that Bhondla is basically a ritual to invoke the rain god so as to yield a bountiful harvest. Even the ritual of ghatasthapana indicates that it is related to the fertility of the land and thus has its origin in an agrarian society. The beginning of spring and the beginning of autumn, when Vasant and Shaaradiya Navaratra are celebrated, are two very important junctions of climatic and solar influence. These two periods are considered as sacred opportunities for the worship of the Mother Goddess. This again highlights the link of this festival with soil fertility. It is a kind of thanksgiving ceremony of farmers who wish to express their deep gratitude towards Mother Earth.

Vijayadashami, the tenth day, is specially dedicated to Saraswati, the goddess of knowledge. This day is considered auspicious for initiating children into reading and writing. Many teachers and schools start teaching kindergarten children from this day onwards. Navaratra is a festival that combines spiritual, cultural and frivolous activities for almost a fortnight, creating a genuine feeling of bonhomie and warmth. Our modern-day culture, especially in urban areas, has evolved over time to reflect busier lives in an increasingly crowded world. As such, festivals like Navaratra still offer that interim when time slows down and life tunes itself anew with that old symphony which was simpler, yet melodious.

Celebrating the Power of Women

Navaratra is probably the only Indian festival which celebrates a woman in all her roles. The supreme importance of women and their significant contribution in maintaining peace and order in the cosmos are facts acknowledged through this festival. Navaratra is celebrated in almost all Maharashtrian communities. During this vowed religious observance, women install an earthen or brass pot (ghatasthapana) at a sanctified place at home. It is decorated with kumkum and marigold flowers. The pot consists of wet soil with germinated seeds, which together symbolize the Universe. A lamp is kept lit near the pot for nine days. The uninterrupted lit lamp is the medium through which is worshipped the radiant Adishakti or Mother Goddess. There is a ritual of observing fasts during the festival which involve certain restrictions regarding food choices for those who fast. The women have to follow a strictly vegetarian diet and cannot eat whole grains like wheat and rice. There are daily prayers and the entire family participates in the same. Devi Mahatmya, Shree Sookta and other texts invoking the goddess who conquered the demons are cited.
Crossword (Coastal Special) - Yazad Dotivala

Across
1 & 22 Festival which celebrates the bond between a brother & his sister (6,7)
3 Ramzan for one, Bakri for another (3)
8 Goddess venerated during the Thimithi festival (6)
11 Mumbai area famous for it’s Ganesh idols (7)
12 First day of 7 Down (9)
14 The last day of 27 Down festivities (8)
20 See 28 Down
21 4 Down is celebrated during this month of the Hindu calendar (6)
22 See 1
23 29 Across celebrates the onset of this season (6)
26 & 2 Down Flowers offered to Ganpati (5 & 6)
29 & 30 Festival associated with kite flying (5,9)
31 7 Down is celebrated on the new moon day which marks the beginning of this month (6)
33 The first day of the Hindu New Year (4,5)
34 His effigy is burnt as part of 4 Down celebrations (6)

Down
2 See 26 Across
4 During this festival Ram & Durga are worshipped (8)
5 Goddess worshipped during Gauri Pujan (7)
6 The last day of 7 Down (4-4)
7 One of the biggest festivals of India (6)
9 These historic caves are the venue of an annual festival showcasing music and dance artists (6)
10 Maharashtrian dessert served during Holi (5,4)
13 Sesame candy exchanged during 29 Across (6)
15 1 Across is celebrated on the first full moon day of this month (7)
16 Maharashtrian festival in the honour of the Snake God (3,8)
17 7 Down is known as the festival of lights (6)
18 See 27
19 Sweet distributed during 27 Down (5)
24 Harvest festival of Maharashtra (4)
25 1 Across is also called ___ Poornima (6)
27 & 18 Gokul Ashtami, 28 Dn & 20 Ac
32 27 Down is celebrated over the course of ___ days (3)

Hello Gauri
Welcome! So glad you could make it home for Gauri
Me too! I’m completely in celebration mode you know!
I’m sure you are. Which is why I have boxes of fireworks waiting for you!

Travel Toon

Tejas Modak
Pune’s finest residence, Gateway Towers 1. Marvelled by the world’s finest crystal brand, Swarovski.

Amanora, Pune’s 400 acre premium township, strategically located in the rapidly developing eastern corridor of Hadapsar, now has another reason to sparkle. Its latest creation, Gateway Towers 1, is the first residential project in the world to be marvelled by the renowned crystal brand Swarovski. Designed by international architects, the project boasts of a futuristic design and comes with interiors designed by the Swarovski team and adorned with breathtaking crystal fixtures. What’s more, apart from being Pune’s most luxurious residence, Gateway Towers 1 will also be Pune’s tallest towers upon completion. India’s most iconic residential structure is here. Now get ready for a more amazing future.

2 BHK ultra-luxurious apartments to 5 BHK exclusive penthouses, ₹1 crore onwards.
For appointments call Alisha on 97670 12345.

Amanora Park Town: Hadapsar–Kharadi Bypass, Near Mundhwa Flyover, Hadapsar,
Pune 411 028 • Tel: 91–20–3041 0000 • info@amanora.com • www.amanora.com
Dreaming of a new home or car?

Fulfill your dreams with Union Bank Home and Car Loans.

Festival Offer
Interest rates slashed
No processing charges*

• Interest rates as low as 10.50% p.a.
• Long repayment tenure of 25 years

• Interest rate - 10.95% p.a.
• Long repayment tenure of 7 years

Online loan application facility available

*Offer valid till 26-01-2013

Toll Free No.: 1800 222244 | www.unionbankofindia.co.in