MAHARASHTRA

unl i m i t e d

Volume 2 | Oct - Dec 2013 | INR 150

Markandi Temple

Takli Haji Pot Holes
It takes a leader to run a nation

India’s most preferred lubricant brand

- India’s largest selling lubricants with 30% market share
- With 700 grades & 1500 formulations, SERVO® provides complete lubrication solutions in the Automotive, Industrial and Marine sectors
- SERVO® lubricants conform to global performance standards including those of American Petroleum Institute (API), Japanese Automotive Standards Organisation (JASO) and the US Military Specifications (MIL)
- SERVO® is marketed across 40,000 bazaar counters & nearly 23,000 IOC Petrol stations across the country, supported by over 400 SERVO® stockists.
In this issue

Shrine – Shirdi 04
Beach – Harihareshwar 10
Feature – Vajreshwari, Unkeshwar hot springs 16
Museums – Siddhagiri Village Museum, Kolhapur 22
Architecture – Markandi Temple, Gadchiroli 28
Travel Circuit – Sindhudurg 36
Sports – Wrestling 42
Caves – Ellora (Jaina) 48
Sanctuary – Melghat 54
Festival – Tripuri Pournima 60
Photo Feature – The Aga Khan Palace 64
Hills – Mhaismal 70
Arts & Crafts – Kolhapuri Chappals 76
Fort – Korlai 82
Personality – Bharat Ratna MM Dr. P. V. Kane 88
Performing Arts – Dashavtar 90
Service – Mohan Thuse Netra Rugnalay 96
Offbeat – Takali Haji Potholes 100
Food – Diwali Pharal 106
Events 112
Irrespective of caste, community or creed, the temple at Shirdi dedicated to one of India’s most popular saints, Saibaba, keeps its doors open for all. And it is here that the devotees not only request Saibaba to answer their prayers but also experience a deep sense of tranquility that removes one from the chaos of everyday existence, say Anand and Madhura Katti.

Where Faith Beckons One and All

Shirdi

Anand and Madhura Katti
Photographs © Anand Katti & Shri Saibaba Sansthan Trust, Shirdi
India’s long spiritual traditions mean that it is often seen as a land of deep faith and places of pilgrimage. A mass phenomenon for believers, a pilgrimage is also interesting for non-believers for the insights it offers into the human mind. In modern times, the development of transport and infrastructure means that a greater number of people can visit such places. And one among the most frequented and popular is Shirdi, a small rural town in Rahata taluka in Ahmednagar district of Maharashtra, which is the chosen home of Sai Baba. Shirdi’s uniqueness lies in the fact that it does not adhere to any religion and stands out as a centre of faith and humanity.

Shirdi is where the holy soul of Shri Satchidanand Sadguru Sainath Maharaj—affectionately known as ‘Saibaba’ rests today. The mysterious fakir (wanderer) came to this village in his teens and lived in Shirdi for more than 60 years. He was knowledgeable; had no desire for worldly objects; and was gifted with the ability to present the many facets of god to human consciousness. He was also a master yogi and is said to have demonstrated his skill upon many occasions. His simple ascetic life and high virtues drew devotees during his lifetime and continues to do so till date.

Initially, Saibaba stayed on the outskirts of the village of Shirdi under a Neem tree for four to five years. This spot, called Gurusthan, as also Dwarkamai where he later shifted to stay in an abandoned mosque and Lendi Baug where he grew plants, have now become places where pilgrims congregate to pray and ask for blessings. At Dwarkamai, there’s just a garlanded wall with no image or photograph of any deity. Essentially, a visit to Shirdi relives the values that Saibaba propagated to get closer to god. He embodied all
religions and preached the universal religion of love and compassion. And for the huge number of devotees who come here, this is the lesson they take back home.

According to Shri. Mohan Yadav, Public Relations Officer, Shri Saibaba Sansthan Trust (Shirdi), an average of 70,000-75,000 devotees and tourists come to Shirdi each day. “The number of visitors crosses a lakh on Thursdays, Sundays and holidays. The Sansthan has provided 2,500 rooms of varied capacity (from two beds to big dormitories) for accommodation. Up to 40,000 subsidised, hygienic, good quality meals are served every day at the ISO-certified Prasadalaya,” he adds. Shirdi is now a quintessential pilgrim town with every activity revolving around Sai Baba – including the commerce that revolves around shops selling flowers, garlands, coconuts, sweets, memorabilia and basic necessities for pilgrims. Visitors will find here a slow and simple pace of life that connects with a sense of peace.

**The Temple Complex**

Samadhi Mandir, the final resting place of Saibaba, is a sacred place. The edifice of this main Mandir (temple) was constructed by an ardent devotee Shri Gopalrao Butti of Nagpur. It is therefore also known as ‘Butti Wadi’. The temple is built of stones and the *samadhi* inside and the statue of Saibaba just behind it is of white marble. The front of the temple has an assembly hall that can accommodate 600 devotees. Surrounding the hall are showcases displaying things used by Saibaba. Pictures depicting his life are showcased on the first floor. The temple complex is spread over 200 square meters and has provisions for drinking water; a bookshop selling posters and publications related to Saibaba; and a *prasad* outlet to cater to the
devotees. A separate prayer hall is provided near the temple for quiet meditation. A newly created waterfall at Lendi Baug adds to the tranquil nature of the place and the small pond nearby has beautiful lotuses.

The Daily Rituals in the Saibaba Samadhi Mandir

Rituals here follow a routine that assumes his presence at the place. Morning activities begin before dawn with ‘Bhoopali’, wake-up song for Saibaba. Trains, buses and cars bringing visitors from different places across the country start arriving by 3 am. People have just about enough time to freshen up, bathe and join the queue that is already formed by those waiting overnight to get a darshan. In keeping with Saibaba’s vows of simplicity and modesty, a visit here doesn’t warrant any offerings. Someone keen on an offering can even do so with a rose, said to be Saibaba’s favourite. Some people carry garlands that are returned after being offered at the idol. The Bhoopali is performed at 4.15 am followed by a morning aarti (Kakad Aarti) at 4.30. The idol of Saibaba is given a holy bath at 5.05 and darshan starts at 5.40 am onwards. Mid-day aarti is performed at noon and Dhoop Aarti at sunset. The night aarti called Shej Aarti, starts at 10.30 and ends at 11.00 pm. Saibaba’s statue is then wrapped with a shawl and a mosquito curtain downed to put him to sleep. Apart from this, the Abhishek Pooja is performed at 7 am & 9 am at the Abhishek Hall. Satyanarayan pooja is performed from 7 am to 9 am and from 11 am & 1 pm.

Beyond The Complex

The Khandoba Temple on the main street of the town is a quiet place to spend a few minutes on the stone benches under its trees. It is significant as being the place where the saint was addressed as ‘Sai’ for the first time by the temple priest. Digambar Jain Kach Mandir on Kankuri Road is another attraction in
Shirdi. You will also find here many vendors selling guavas and raisins. An additional way to enjoy the beauty of the place is to walk or cycle to the outskirts of the town to see the many fruit and rose gardens. Inevitably though, the increasing number of visitors has also led to widespread construction of hotels and residential complexes. And now to make it even more accessible, an airport is being constructed at Kakdi, 14 km southwest of Shirdi, which should be ready in 18 months. It will even host a helipad.

Facilities Provided by The Shri Sai Baba Sansthan Trust (Shirdi)

This is the governing and administrative body of Shri Sai Baba’s Samadhi Temple and all other temples on the premises and is also engaged in the development of Shirdi. The Trust manages the day-to-day activities at the temple as also provides various facilities like accommodation, meals at economical rates, refreshments and railway reservations. Effective 15th August 2013 every person standing in the queue for darshan is being given a packet of laddu free of charge. As part of its social projects the Trust runs a girls’ school and an English medium school. Shri Sai Baba used to give ‘UDI’ (Holy ashes) to cure ailing patients. The noble task of treating sick people is being continued by the Sansthan’s Board of Trustees through the medium of the Shri Sai Baba Super Speciality Hospital and the Shri Sainath Hospital. They also run a blood bank, the Industrial Training Institute (ITI), and drinking water supply facility.

The Trust has provided washrooms with hot and cold water for bathing for day visitors. Apart from this the Sansthan also provides accommodation in its three complexes namely Sai Baba Bhaktaniwas with (500 rooms), The Saiprasad Bhaktaniwas with 165 rooms, and Dvaravati Bhaktaniwas with 320 rooms with 80 air-conditioned rooms, at a reasonable price.

Shri Sai Prasadalya run by the Trust serves prasad (meals) to 30,000-35,000 devotees on a normal day and up to 70,000 – 80,000 during festivals /holidays. The prasadalya has a big hall that can accommodate 3,500 devotees at a time for meals. A nominal cost of Rs 10 per adult & Rs.5 per child is charged per meal.

SaiTech Project, the Information and Technology Department run by the Sansthan helps deliver quality services to Sai Devotees in India and abroad.

A reverse osmosis plant managed by the Trust has the capacity to supply 2,500 liters of purified water per hour. As many as 73 solar dishes of 16 square meters’ in dimension generate 4,200 kg of steam each day for utility works. The Trust also publishes literature and pictures of Sai Baba. There is no entry fee at the temple. Recently, online booking services have been made available for a fee for darshan at a particular time, without having to go through the queue.

Bookings for darshan and accommodation can be made on www.online.sai.org.in.

Excursions: Visit Shani Singapur

Shani Singapur, a small town located an hour and a half’s journey from Shirdi, is a fascinating town for its unique character. The doors and windows of the houses, shops, and even banking establishments, have no shutters. The local deity Shani, the son of Surya, is said to have taken upon the responsibility of safeguarding the residents and their belongings. The fear of getting punished by the powerful god is enough to keep burglars away. It may sound unbelievable but even a modern house will not have a door at its main entrance nor will its various rooms. The only barriers that put up are to prevent dogs, rodents, etc. from entering the house or shop. It is said that Shani has the power to help a person get rid of his or her miseries. Privately-owned jeeps at Shirdi offer half-day trips to Singapur. The trip also includes a brief halt at the Renuka Mata Mandir where local artisans have skillfully decorated the wall and roof of the temple interiors with stained glass art motifs.
Echoes unlimited

Tuck your soul away, in this nature’s velvet coat, indulge in the blissful sanctity of peace. Or simply pamper your eye sight to the charming landscapes. With reasons unlimited, it’s only fair to say one trip is just not enough.
Where Gods Reside

Harihareshwar

Ashutosh Bapat | Photographs © Dhanashree Bapat, Samir Madhani

If you are fed up of being burdened by the pressures of urban life and wish to take a couple of days off to not only enjoy the sight of the sea and clear sands of the beach, Harihareshwar is the place to head for. In this quintessentially Konkani ambience, you will also be able to connect with your spiritual self, says Ashutosh Bapat.
A coastal strip with long stretches of clean, sandy beaches, overflowing lakes, dense forests, old temples, and fresh seaside villages – all this and much more put together makes for the charm of the Konkan region in Maharashtra. Not surprisingly, in this age of commercialisation and urban chaos, there are very few places where one can find serenity; Harihareshwar being one of them. It is a treat for those looking for a tranquil retreat and a beach holiday.

A beautiful winding road shaded by the over-arching canopies of banyan trees takes us to Harihareshwar. The holy river Savitri which originates at Mahabaleshwar merges with the Arabian Sea at Harihareshwar. This river is the dividing line between the Raigad and Ratnagiri districts. Harihareshwar is situated on the north bank and on the south bank is the village Bankot in the Ratnagiri district. A fort, Himmatgad, stands at Bankot and you can cross this channel on a ferry boat.
Temple of the Peshwas

Situated at the southern most point of Raigad district, Harihareshwar’s ancient temple is often referred to as ‘Dakshin Kashi’ or ‘Kashi of the South’ and is dedicated to Lord Shiva. The village itself is referred to as ‘devghar’ meaning the house of god. Soft sands, a gentle breeze and inviting waters make Harihareshwar irresistible to beach lovers. It has two unspoiled and pristine beaches; one to the north and the other to the south of the temple. Harihareshwar is popular as a day’s excursion for many who wish to spend the day surrounded by nature, away from the stress of city life. Four hills stand beyond the shores of the village, each named after the gods - Harihareshwar, Harshinachal, Brahmadri and Pushpadri.

Harihareshwar Temple was built in the late medieval period with the deities of Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva and Parvati in the form of ‘linga’. It is the ‘kuladaivat’ or clan deity of the Peshwas, the prime ministers of the great Maratha Empire. Hence the Peshwas contributed a lot to this temple, including...
the construction of a charitable rest-house for the devotees who visit the temple. It was even renovated completely in 1723 by Bajirao Peshwa I after having been almost destroyed in a fire. Besides the main temple, there are two temples of Lord Kalbhairav and Goddess Yogeshwari. It’s interesting that the image of
Mesmerising Natural Beauty

The beauty of this place truly strikes the mind when you navigate the path around the temple. Almost a kilometer long, it goes through a thick forest, alternating between going up and downhill. The then king of Jawali, Chandrarao More, had steep steps cut out of a huge rock on the way to Shuklateerth, one of the many holy spots around the temple. Going down the steps, you reach a huge rocky platform at sea level which forms a natural traverse along the water line.

The constant force of the waves has caused the rock to erode in a shape that resembles a honeycomb, also resulting in the formation of a few caves. During full tide, the platform is completely submerged under water and the temple’s circumambulatory path cannot be taken. During low tide though, walking along the path allows for a striking view of the Arabian Sea and the temple at the same time.

Kalbhairav, a manifestation of Shiva, in this temple faces north. The image of Kalabhairav is almost invariably shown facing south. It’s customary to pay tribute first to Kalbhairav, then to Lord Shiva, and again to Kalbhairav.

Since the time it was built, many notable personalities have visited it to pray as also make a monetary contribution or support the construction of various structures in the vicinity of the temple. This includes Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, Ramdas Swami, Kanhoji Angre, Ramabai Saiheb Peshwe, and others.
So when the urge to get away strikes again, don’t head for the run-of-the-mill places congested with other holiday-makers. Retreat in peace to the old-world charms of Harihareshwar, and let the Arabian Sea wash away your worries.

**Helpful Tips**

Do not walk on the seaside rocks without making note of the timings of the tides. During high tide this area is fully covered with sea water and hence inaccessible. If you are near the rocks during high tide, the waves could drag you into the sea as the rocks become slippery and can be very dangerous. Remember that the locals know their area the best and therefore take their advice before heading out to the path.

There are some holy places along the seashore. They are Gayatri Teerth, Shool Teerth, Chakra Teerth, Naag Teerth, Goutam Teerth, Pandav Teerth, Brahma Teerth, Vishnu Teerth, etc. People come here to perform the last rituals of the deceased given the sanctity of these places.

The village of Harihareshwar is very calm, clean and fringed with coconut and betel nut trees. Typical Konkani fragrances spread through the village. The locals are helpful and accommodating and home stays are popular here. Almost every other house provides a simple home stay and one can enjoy traditional home-made Konkani food. A typical Konkani meal consists of vegetables, chapatis, a curry, rice, and of course fish based on what the catch of the day is.

**Excursions:**

Harihareshwar – Shreevardhan – Diveagar now make for a golden triangle in the Konkan tourist circuit. You can stay at any of the places and visit the others over two days. Having your own vehicle is the most convenient option. Alternatively, autorickshaws can be hired for local sightseeing. State transport buses ply between these places, but the frequency is quite low.

**Shreevardhan:**

Known as the town of the Peshwas, the prime ministers of the Maratha Empire, Shreevardhan is just 20 km away from Harihareshwar. The statue of Lord Vishnu in the Lakshminarayan Temple is worth visiting. The Jeevaneshwar Temple built with wooden carved pillars brought here from the Peshwas’ ancestral residence is another important site. The images of birds, tree leaves, snakes and mongoose are beautifully carved on the pillars. The betel nut produced here, called ‘Shreevardhan Rotha’ is very famous. In fact, the most amazing thing in this village is the plantation of betel nut trees with almost every courtyard housing them. These are called ‘wadis’.

**Diveagar:**

This is another beautiful seasohore and calm village just 36 km away from Harihareshwar. The road towards Diveagar goes along the seashore and the drive simply takes your breath away. In this village, an image of Roopnarayan belonging to 13th century C.E. from the Shilahara dynasty is a ‘must see’. The carvings dating from that period in the reconstructed temple are marvellous. Madagad Fort is a big draw for trekkers.

**Distance from Mumbai:** 200 kms

**How to reach:**

**By Air:** The nearest airport is at Mumbai.

**By Rail:** The nearest railway station is Mangaon on the Konkan railway route, 60 km away.

**By Road:** If driving down, take the Mumbai Goa National Highway 17 via Pen till Mangaon. At Mangaon, turn west on to State Highway 97 till you reach Harihareshwar.

**Where to stay:**

**MTDC Resort**

This is located right on the beach and provides a choice of rooms between cottages and deluxe tents. Air-conditioned rooms are also available. It is advisable to book in advance with MTDC because the resort is very popular during holidays and weekends. It has a restaurant on site which serves a variety of cuisines. Tel.: 02147-226036. For adventurers, boating and water scooters are available at Harihareshwar. Contact Mr. Imran Satwilkar on 9822506085, 9869173027.
The state of Maharashtra has a number of natural hot water springs which trace back their origins to thousands of years.

We explore here the ones at Vajreshwari near Mumbai and those at Kinwat, Unkeshwar.

The Land of Pilgrimage and Natural Spas!

Vajreshwari

Text and Photographs © Judhajit Bagchi and Ranadeep Bhattacharya
Craving for a break from the crowded city life of Mumbai? And all you can afford for this is just a day from your busy schedule? Then worry not and head straightaway to the quaint temple town of Vajreshwari at just two hours drive from Mumbai, where several hot springs await to rejuvenate you with their natural spas!

The trip to Vajreshwari is very enthralling. Heading from Mumbai, as soon as you take right from the Mumbai- Ahmedabad Highway to Vajreshwari Road, the scenery gradually changes to lush green paddy fields and water bodies soothing the eyes. And as the road winds itself through the green forests, the enthusiastic birdwatcher and photographer can spot varieties of small birds humming along the way. Together with Ganeshpuri and Akloli, the small town of Vajreshwari with its several temples and over 21 hot springs scattered within a radius of 5 kms, offers its tourists a great mix of pilgrimage and relaxation.

Vajreshwari Temple

Nestled in the foothills of Mandagiri hillock, the intricately stone-carved Vajreshwari temple is located at the very entrance of the town and welcomes one with the imposing Dipamala (tower of lights) and several flower shops around it. At first glance, the temple looks exactly like a fort with fifty-two steps leading to the main entrance. On ascent one can spot the golden tortoise (Worshipped by the people as Kurma, the tortoise incarnation of Vishnu) carved on one of the steps. From atop one can see the breathtaking view of the entire countryside. The Nagarkhana or drum house at the very entrance of the temple is built exactly similar to the Bassein fort entrance. The similarity is explained through an old painting hanging on the wall inside the temple itself. In the year 1739, Chimaji Appa, the younger brother and military commander of Peshwa Bajirao I, had set camp around the Vadvali and Akloli region on his way to capture the invincible Fort of Vasai held by the Portuguese for over three years. During this period he prayed to goddess Vajreshwari to help him conquer the fort with a promise to build a temple in her honour if he won the battle. It is believed that the goddess appeared in his dream and gave him advice on how to conquer the fort as a result of which Chimaji Appa was actually able to defeat the Portuguese. Hence, keeping his promise he ordered his governor Shankar Phadke to build Goddess Vajreshwari a temple in the replica of the Bassein fort. Since then people believe that the famed goddess fulfills one’s wishes if they genuinely pray to her.

Proceeding inside the dimly-lit main sanctum, one can behold the saffron idols of Goddess Vajreshwari in the centre with Kalika Devi (the local village goddess) and Renuka Devi (Lord Parshurama’s mother) on her either side clad in colourful saris. The divine sight is bound to mesmerize you! A walk around the temple premise would reveal other smaller shrines of Kapileshwar Mahadeva (Shiva), Datta, Hanuman and other saints of Giri Gosavi sect along with a huge stage where locals celebrate Navratri and Ram
Navami with great pomp and show. The Vajreshwari temple is a must visit for travellers as the sweet smells of incense, flower offerings and the serene hill in the backdrop create an ambience of tranquility and pure bliss that is definitely not to be missed.

Akloli Kund

Just about a kilometer on the narrow road left of the Vajreshwari temple across the scenic bridge over the Tansa River would take one to Akloli Kund, famous for its hot springs created as a result of the area’s volcanic past. There is a famous old Shiva Mandir on the left of the road easily identified by the various garlands and religious artifacts shops crowded around the temple. Around this Shiva Mandir there are at least seven hot springs, with three of the springs (locally referred to as Ram, Sita and Lakshman) right in front of the temple.

What to buy:

There are some really interesting metal and stone cut jewelry shops near the Nityanand Temple in Ganeshpuri. Check out natural stone garlands. Don’t forget to bargain!

If interested in buying metal art objects and idols (both Indian and Tibetan) then do visit the Nityanand Gift Shop right opposite to the Gurudev Siddha Peeth for an awesome range of collection.

Tips:

Definitely experience the hot spring bath. It will be an experience of a lifetime.

Do check the water temperature by dipping your feet into the hot spring first. Sometimes the water may be too hot and may create burns.

If you are visiting the Vajreshwari Temple and want to pay for any offerings, do ask and check for the official rate lists for all services as decided by the Shri Mata Vajreshwari Devi Shrine Board. Be careful of touts.

It is not permitted to carry your cameras inside the Gurudev Siddha Peeth at Ganeshpuri and also inside the temple area at Vajreshwari.

The Nityanand Museum is closed from 1:30 pm to 3:30 pm every day. So plan your visit accordingly.

Photography enthusiasts and bird lovers watch out for rare birds along the Vajreshwari Road.

Smoke rising from the hot water springs, Akloli Kund

Lord Siddhvinayak Shrine, inside Shiva Mandir, Akloli

What to buy:

There are some really interesting metal and stone cut jewelry shops near the Nityanand Temple in Ganeshpuri. Check out natural stone garlands. Don’t forget to bargain!

If interested in buying metal art objects and idols (both Indian and Tibetan) then do visit the Nityanand Gift Shop right opposite to the Gurudev Siddha Peeth for an awesome range of collection.

Tips:

Definitely experience the hot spring bath. It will be an experience of a lifetime.

Do check the water temperature by dipping your feet into the hot spring first. Sometimes the water may be too hot and may create burns.

If you are visiting the Vajreshwari Temple and want to pay for any offerings, do ask and check for the official rate lists for all services as decided by the Shri Mata Vajreshwari Devi Shrine Board. Be careful of touts.

It is not permitted to carry your cameras inside the Gurudev Siddha Peeth at Ganeshpuri and also inside the temple area at Vajreshwari.

The Nityanand Museum is closed from 1:30 pm to 3:30 pm every day. So plan your visit accordingly.

Photography enthusiasts and bird lovers watch out for rare birds along the Vajreshwari Road.

Smoke rising from the hot water springs, Akloli Kund

Lord Siddhvinayak Shrine, inside Shiva Mandir, Akloli

What to buy:

There are some really interesting metal and stone cut jewelry shops near the Nityanand Temple in Ganeshpuri. Check out natural stone garlands. Don’t forget to bargain!

If interested in buying metal art objects and idols (both Indian and Tibetan) then do visit the Nityanand Gift Shop right opposite to the Gurudev Siddha Peeth for an awesome range of collection.

Tips:

Definitely experience the hot spring bath. It will be an experience of a lifetime.

Do check the water temperature by dipping your feet into the hot spring first. Sometimes the water may be too hot and may create burns.

If you are visiting the Vajreshwari Temple and want to pay for any offerings, do ask and check for the official rate lists for all services as decided by the Shri Mata Vajreshwari Devi Shrine Board. Be careful of touts.

It is not permitted to carry your cameras inside the Gurudev Siddha Peeth at Ganeshpuri and also inside the temple area at Vajreshwari.

The Nityanand Museum is closed from 1:30 pm to 3:30 pm every day. So plan your visit accordingly.

Photography enthusiasts and bird lovers watch out for rare birds along the Vajreshwari Road.
with varying temperature of hot water running through them. Keep all your apprehensions behind and take a refreshing dip into the bubbling springs according to your tolerance level. You can spot several children and adults both enjoying themselves in the hot springs that are said to be rich in sulphur content healing many skin ailments. You can also visit the quaint Shiva Mandir, which apart from Lord Shiva’s Shrine houses many other beautiful deities. In the quiet ambience of the temple, divinity seems to come naturally to all. There is also a Sai Baba temple and a small room with Bhagwan Nityanand’s foot impressions on either side of the Kund (water tank) that’s worth a visit.

If you crave for a more natural setting for your hot spring experience, you may proceed a couple of yards back on a muddy lane towards the Tansa river where there are four tiled-hot spring structures of various sizes. There are also hot spring tanks right in the middle of the Tansa River, which is accessible by foot only during low tides! The adventurous spirits can even swim through the river and reach this vantage point to have a beautiful view of the Vajreshwari Temple in the backdrop of the hills. Small makeshift tents around these springs offer changing rooms for a nominal sum of money, especially for women. Soaking your feet in the hot water while overlooking the river is really a worthwhile experience.

**Ganeshpuri**

At about two kilometers away from Vajreshwari Temple, lies Ganeshpuri- the small town famous for the Gurudev Siddha Peeth, Nityanandan Mandir and another set of hot springs. Gurudev Siddha Peeth was built as an ashram by Swami Muktananda in the memory of his Guru Bhagwan Nityanand, the loin clothed saint who lead a simple life in Ganeshpuri in the service of people. The ashram and its spiritual centre are quite popular among foreigners who come to spend time to meditate here. The ashram has very tight security and photography is not allowed.

Little further down the road is the Bhagwan Nityanand Mandir, a granite and marble structure temple which mainly devotees visit to meditate. The temple complex also houses the museum of Bhagwan Nityanand and his disciple Swami Muktananda where one gets to know the story of the life of these great souls who walked on earth. Inside the premises of the temple are the samadhis of Bhagwan Nityanand and Bhimeshwar Ganesh. The atmosphere here is serene and the experience is divine. Also inside this temple complex is a small shrine dedicated to Lord Shiva where one can offer puja. Just outside the temple are three hot springs that are comparatively cleaner and less crowded than the ones in Akloli Kund. Maintained by the Nityanand Temple authorities, these hot springs of varying temperature are surrounded by proper changing rooms where women and men can conveniently change their clothes before and after their hot bath.

**Distance from Mumbai:** 80 kms

**How to reach:**

- **By Air:** Nearest airport is Chatrapati Shivaji International Airport Mumbai, which is at a distance of 80 km away from Vajreshwari.
- **By Rail:** Nearest Rail head from the eastern suburbs of Mumbai is Thane Station. Thane is around 34 kms from Vajreshwari while the nearest rail station from the western suburbs of Mumbai is Vasai Road Station.
- **By Road:** ST buses from Thane, Virar and Nalasopara also go to Vajreshwari and Akloli, famous for its cluster of hot springs. Drivig by car, it takes around 2 hrs to reach Vajreshwari. From the western suburbs of Mumbai take the Western Express Highway to Dahisar Check Naka; National Highway No. 8 to ShirSad and then the State Highway to Vajreshwari. From the eastern suburbs take the Eastern Express Highway till Mulund Check Naka and then Nask Road to Bhivandi Bypass Toll and from Bhivandi Junction to Vajreshwari.

**What to eat:**

Foodie? Then definitely stop by Hotel Kerala Kunn Bhuwan for a rice and chicken thali at exceptionally cheap rates.

Have a glass of local sugar cane juice to rejuvenate yourself while travelling from one location to the other.

Try out eating joints at Ganeshpuri for authentic South Indian home-made food.

**Where to stay:**

1. Pavan Resorts (originally MTDC rented to Pavan Resorts), Opposite Akloli hot springs. Tel: 02522-261371
2. Tansa Resort, Akloli Kund. Tel: 02522-261436

![Panoramic View of the Mandagiri Hills and the Tansa River in Vajreshwari](image-url)
Legend talks about the mighty Dandakaranya forest that is believed to have covered most of central India. It is believed to have included the Goda-Tapi and Penganga river valleys. Archaeological explorations and findings confirm that the area has been inhabited since the Neolithic age. According to the Ramayana, lord Ram wandered through the Dandakaranya visiting the ashrams of various sages and fighting demons. These sages and their ashrams have been immortalised through epics and folklore, eventually being inscribed by later rulers. One such inscription talks about Ram’s stay at Panchawati, and references to this continue to be found in Rashtrakuta, Chalukya and Yadav inscriptions. Twelfth and thirteenth century Yadav inscriptions talk about the noted Sharbhang Rishi’s ashram, and mention the hot water springs of Unkeshwar.

The hot water springs are located in the Penganga river valley at a distance of 46 km to the north of Kinwat, a taluka, with a town of the same name as its headquarters, in the Nanded district. Kinwat is known for being a thickly forested region, famous for its teakwood forests and has a beautiful landscape. It is also the original home to various tribal groups such as the Gonds, Rajgonds, Andhas, Pradhans, Bhils, Kolams and Koyas. The Sahastrokund waterfall is another major tourist attraction near the hot water springs.

**Epigraphical Evidence**

A Devnagari epigraph dated 1280 CE located at Unkeshwar refers to a legend cherishing the memory of Sharbhang Rishi’s ashram and lord Ram’s visit to the ashram in the Treta yuga, the second of the four ages of mankind according to mythology. The hot water spring located at the site is said to have been created by Ram in the said ashram. The inscription basically records the construction of a temple and probably repairs of the water spring.

On the same site, Matapurnivasi Kanvashakhi, Kundinya Gotri, Saraunayak Suta, Meghadeo constructed a Sakalprasad and a temple. The inscription records the details of the grants from the various villages in the neighborhood of the place, given to the temple and the hot water spring.
The present temple structure was built in the Yadav era in the form of a Shiva temple. Sarbhang Rishi’s paduka and sculptures of Ram, Laxman and Sita in the neighbourhood of the water spring pay tribute to the story behind the creation of the hot water spring.

The naturally occurring hot water springs have been channeled into tanks, most likely to have been built in the 13th century C.E. There are natural hot water springs at the bottom of these tanks. And in certain cases, there is an outlet that is the source of the hot water in the neighbouring tanks.

The temperature of the water is a constant 42.20 °C (180 Fahrenheit) and contains a good percentage of phosphorus (gandhak). The hot water spring tanks are 3.65 meters in depth and are rectangular in size. Hundreds of people visit this hot water spring and bathe in it as they believe that bathing in the spring is beneficial for one’s health. Bathing in the spring waters is also believed to help cure skin ailments.

A visit to the springs thus is a blend of medical tourism, ayurveda and a trip through time, surrounded by beautiful wilderness.

---

**Feature**

**Distance from Mumbai: 722 kms**

**How to reach:**

**By Air:** The nearest airport is at Nagpur, 200 km away

**By Rail:** Kinwat railway station is the nearest railhead. However the closest junction is at Nanded, 119 km away

**By Road:** From Nagpur, take National Highway 7. Turn off towards Kinwat at Pandharkawada.

From Nanded, Unkeshwar is 166 km via NH 204.

**Where to stay:**

Mahur, 40 km from Unkeshwar offers different options for accommodation.

**Excursions:**

The temples of Mahur, 40 km away, are well known, especially for the festival honouring the Goddess Renuka.

The teak forests of Kinwat are a treat to explore.

The famous Tadoba-Andhari tiger reserve is a three hour drive from Unkeshwar.

Nagpur, the second capital of Maharashtra is a vibrant city with plenty of sights to see, and is famous for its oranges in winter.
Bringing a Traditional Village to Life

The Siddhagiri Gramjivan Museum

Yogesh Prabhudesai
Photographs © Yogesh Prabhudesai
Courtesy: Siddhagiri Gramjivan Museum

Unique in many ways, the Siddhagiri Gramjivan Museum near Kolhapur offers a fascinating insight into the Bara Balutedar system as was practiced in certain villages of Maharashtra till a few decades ago along with introducing visitors to our ancient mythological, royal and prodigal personalities through their life-size sculptures, says Yogesh Prabhudesai.

While most museums are content to merely display artefacts from the past, the Siddhagiri Gramjivan Museum near Kolhapur goes a step further. A visit to the museum is like taking a walk through the past as you come face to face with the life-size recreations of a traditional Marathi village under the ‘Bara Balutedar’ system. Founded and managed by the Siddhagiri Gurukul Trust, the museum’s unique display is believed to be one of Mahatma Gandhi’s wishes brought to reality. It is the brainchild of the late His Holiness Shri Muppin Kadsiddheshwar Swami and his disciple, the 27th authority at present, His Holiness Shri Adrushya Kadsiddheshwar Swami of the Kaneri Math.
Rama and Lakshmana’s arrival at Shabar’s hut
Kadsiddhewara is an individual Shaiva sect which is quite similar to that of the Veer-Shaiva.

The Museum’s History

Shri Kadsiddhewar, who was born and enlightened in Karnataka, founded the Shaiva Kadsiddha cult, and eventually settled down on a majestic hill. The monastery, or ‘math’, was established on this hill and patronised by the local royal families. It eventually came to be known as the ‘Siddhagiri Math’, giri meaning hill. Since it is situated near Kaneri, it is also popularly known as ‘Kaneri Math’.

The Siddhagiri monastery has been lead by 26 swamis so far, all of whom lived within the monastery and guided their disciples across Maharashtra, Goa, and Karnataka. Within the math, there are two temples dating back to 15th century CE and a meditation chamber open to visitors. The late Shri Muppin Kadsiddhewar Swami, in addition to running the math, tried to incorporate social service and started a hospital for the needy in the
Tiger attack during Panini’s discourse

Adi Shankara’s debate with Mandan Mishra and Sharada

The paediatrician Kashyapa

Vishnu Sharma narrating the Panchatantra
The monastery, or ‘math’, was established on this hill and patronised by the local royal families. It eventually came to be known as the ‘Siddhagiri Math’, giri meaning hill.

The Trust acquired 13.5 acres within the vicinity of the math to construct the museum in 2007. In order that the village look authentic, the swami appealed to the villagers nearby to donate any traditional household objects that might be of use for this display of monumental proportions. Eighteen sculptors were invited, mainly from Karnataka, with their

dual purpose – showcasing traditional Indian village life and the lives of ancient thinkers as well as raising funds for the various charitable projects undertaken by the math.

In order to provide medical care at subsidised rates, the hospital not only needed to be completed, but had to also gear up to meet the recurring expenses for its daily management and staff salaries. The present swami felt that building a museum open to the public would provide a source of income to the hospital, ensuring that the poor can be helped at affordable rates. Thus, the museum serves a

The author is a graphic designer and researcher in ancient Indian art and architecture and can be reached at prabhudesai12@gmail.com

Waiting for the tiffin

Buffalo ride

Pilgrims relaxing under the banyan tree

Fanning grains

Masons moving rock

Picking tamarind

Ploughing

area. However, he passed away before his vision could be completed and the work was carried on by his successor, the 27th swami.
assistants to work on creating an authentic replica. In 2008, a new section was added, containing sculptures depicting scenes from the lives of great ancient Indian thinkers and philosophers. The latest addition, still under development, is called ‘Utsav’ and should be completed in the near future.

Exploring the Museum

The first section we enter is the cave, which contains the ‘Prachin Pratibhavant’ or ancient thinkers’ exhibits, with sculptures of many known personalities from mythology and history such as sages and poets like Patanjali, Panini, Vyas, Narad Muni, Valmiki, etc. Then there are ancient innovators and scientists such as Bhagirath, Nagarjun, Aryabhhatt, Varahamihir, Kanad Maharshi, etc. as also kings and administrators like Bharat, Harshvardhan, Gargi, Janak, Eklavya, Bharat Muni, the founder of Bharatnatyam, and others. Having walked past the cave, we are led to the farming section where different agricultural activities are displayed, including a tableau of boys playing and pulling pranks.

Further on, we are introduced to a traditional self-sufficient village where craftsmen sustain one another. This display helps the viewer understand the Bara Balutedar system that was found in rural India, under which every village had a variety of craftsmen to meet its needs. The sculptors’ meticulous attention to detail makes this a genuine pleasure to look at, creating the impression that we are watching a movie rather than looking at sculptures.

The last and the newest section is based on the theme of celebrations and hence aptly titled ‘Utsav’. It has on display a typical bazaar held during a festival with various sculpted figures denoting the joyous spirit associated with any occasion that calls for celebration. Such is the reality infused in the sculptures that you would want to step in and become a part of the festivities. Once again, the wealth of detail is captivating – right down to a man holding a torn cap in his mouth while pulling a chariot!

Other Facilities

For tourists, there are restaurants on the premises of the museum that offer good quality food. There is a beautiful play-garden especially landscaped for children that also offers mini-train rides. Devotees can benefit from a dharamshala built to accommodate pilgrims. Near the museum, the monastery runs a dairy where cows and buffalos are nurtured. The math also produces jaggery which is sold along with other products made locally.

Travel Tips

Photography is strictly prohibited at the museum. However, you may carry a note-book as there is a lot of information you’d like to jot down.

Distance from Mumbai: 389 kms

How to reach:

By Air: The nearest airport is at Belgaum, 115 km away.

By Rail: The nearest railway junction is Kolhapur with Kaneri about 10 km away.

By Road: From Kolhapur, several municipal and state transport buses run to Kaneri. The nearest stop is called Kaneri MIDC. If you are driving down, Kaneri is located off the Pune-Bangalore Highway. Turn off at Gokul Shirgaon MIDC or Kaneri MIDC.

Where to stay:

The MTDC Green Valley Resort at Amboli is a two-hour drive from Kaneri. Kolhapur offers several lodging and boarding options to suit a variety of budgets.

Excursions:

The well-known Dakshin Kashi Mahalaxmi Temple is a must-see when visiting Kolhapur. For a quieter getaway, the picturesque Amboli Ghat is a tranquil retreat, 113 km away. The Koppeleshwara Temple at Khidrapur is 52 km from Kaneri via the Kagal MIDC Road.
With their unique art motifs that are unparalleled in the region of Vidarbha, the group of temples of Markandi that lie a little more than 200 km from Nagpur are a fascinating representation of Shaiva leanings and evoke an ambience of a time gone by when gods and goddesses from the texts of mythology ruled supreme, writes G. B. Deglurkar.
Isolated and not much attended to they may be, but the group of temples of Markandi or Markanda Deva in Gadchiroli district of Vidarbha is renowned creations which can justifiably claim artistic ancestry of the Khajuraho school. Out of the 20 odd temples, big or small, only four of them are in a tolerably good condition, providing a glimpse of their artistic wealth. For the scholars, connoisseurs and laymen they certainly stand as an embodiment of the finest traditions of sculptural and architectural art of Vidarbha vis-a-vis Maharashtra.

The village Markandi has acquired the name probably after the main temple of Shiva at the site, known as Markanda Deva or Markandi. Markandi lies about 216 km southeast of Nagpur. The group of temples here is situated on the eastern periphery of the village. It has acquired sanctity over the years as it stands on the bank of the perennial and holy river Wainaganga. The main temple in the group is assigned to Markanda Rishi. The Puranas also refer to Markandeya, the son of Mrikanda, to whom another temple in the complex is dedicated. Markandeya is referred to in several of the Puranas. It is stated that he was very famous and long lived, and had practiced severe penance to get the favour of Shiva.

Both the Puranic account and the religious association of these temples suggest strong Shaiva leanings and even the sculptures, as will be discussed later, are prominently Shaivite, depicting various aspects and forms of Shiva and the goddesses of the Shaiva pantheon. The Shiva element, even in the syncretistic icons, is emphasized.

**Historical Background**

Long back British archaeologist Alexander Cunningham noticed 24 temples in the complex but in 1924-25 the Archaeological Survey of India could record only 20 shrines which lamentably suggest decadence. They were of different sizes and in various stages of preservation but all are sculptured in greater or less degree. At present, four temples, viz Markanda Rishi, Yamadharma, Mrikanda Rishi and Shankara temple, are still well preserved. Of these, the main temple which attracts the attention of devotees as well as tourists and connoisseurs of art is described here.

In plan, the temple is simple with **ardhamandapas** (porches), **gudhamandapa** (closed hall), **antarala** (vestibule) and **garbhagriha** (sanctum) forming the components of the entire set-up. It was thus a cruciform design. The **ardhamandapa** to the south and north have fallen down but can be conjectured on the basis of their plinths which have remained. In front of its eastern doorway is Nandimandapa. The temple in question is the **nirandhara** type having only one cross arm and thus appears simpler in plan. The **nirandhara** temples do not have an internal ambulatory passage round the sanctum as against the Sandhara temples which do so.

The Sabhamandapa being closed is a **gudhamandapa**. It has raised **rangashila** of unusual height in the centre approachable by a flight of steps to the cardinal directions. The

Markandeya Temple

Group of temples

Vrukshika

Architecture
principal pillars, the enclosing walls and the roof were renovated by the Gond Rajas of the region. Hence nothing can be said about the original style. At many a place in the hall are seen the sculptures inserted at random. Now it has a flat roof, but probably originally it had concentric diminishing rings, from the centre of the topmost ring of which hung a pendant.

Pillars
The pillars in the hall supporting the ceiling are not very elaborately carved. They are rather thick and square on plan. The basement has various horizontal mouldings some of which are rather deep. The rectangular part of the shaft is devoid of any sculpture. Above this are some octagonal zones engirdling the middle part of the shaft. The square member above is plain, above which is a circular part with amalaka and padma members. The abacus is circular and is surmounted by a cross-shaped bracket.

Vestibule and Sanctum
The vestibule here is almost rectangular on plan. In the lateral walls of it, several stray sculptures have been pinned in, some of which are of a much later date and have no bearing whatsoever with the shrine which contains the Shivalinga. The antarala (ante-chamber) leads to the shrine which is sunken and reached by a descent of few steps. In the centre of the sanctum is a Shivalinga, now known as Markandeshwara.

Exterior
Unlike any of the temples not only in Vidarbha but also in Maharashtra, the exterior of this temple is full of lavishly carved sculptures. It is at once luxurious and dignified. It has human sculptures modelled with rhythm and grace, and the images of gods and goddesses representing interesting aspects in iconography as far as the images in Maharashtra are concerned. The exterior has as usual three parts; adhishthana (base), mandovara including jangha (exterior wall) and the shikhara (tower).

Adhishthana or Base:
The exterior of the temple begins with the base on which the religious structure stands. Some part of the base is seen, buried underground. The first visible moulding of it is the padma (cyma reversa) above which is a kani (astragal) moulding which is deeply projected and has a decorated band in relief. Then comes a zone which has a scroll design above which is an Upana moulding which is very remarkable because of the vrikshika figure which it carries on its every face. These figures of vrikshikas or apsaras are shown standing languidly below a mango tree and thus make the basement of the temple at once unique and charming. Then comes the
vertical panel decorated with a pile of chaitya arch motif placed intermittently. These are crossed by a horizontal band containing rhomboidal rosette. These vertical bends join the Upana with the moulding above, which can be called a Kumuda moulding. Above this is again cyma reverse moulding with toothed or saw-like drop projections.

**Mandovara or Exterior Wall:**
The most delightful portion of the temple is the jangha part of the mandovara which is embellished by three bands or registers of sculptures numbering not less than 409, depicting a bewildering array of different forms of Shiva, the surasundaris, dikpalas, a few erotic sculptures and a wide variety of vyalas or shardulas as also tapasa. Some of the icons of gods are in projected niches with borders, whereas the vyalas are invariably set in recesses. The mithunas and the apsaras are on projections.

**Shikhara or Tower:**
Originally the sanctum sanctorum, the closed half and the porches were surmounted by the towers. The one on the shrine was a curvilinear rekha deul and the others the pida deuls or pyramidal towers which can be called samvarana. The central projecting turret bands of the main tower dominate the entire scheme. The roof on the antechamber is known as shukanasa, which is rather intact. The shukanasa is an elaborately and profusely carved piece. The carvaria is combined with human and animal motifs. The top of the decorative friezes is a trefoil decoration with a circular panel in the centre where in a human head is empanelled.

The central panel on the façade of the shukanasa below the hamsavari contains the figure of Uma-Maheshwara. These panels are flanked by shikhartkas. The entire piece is superb and delightful. As stated above, the images of Shiva here are predominant. Among these are seen sthanakamurtis (standing icons), asanamurtis (seated icons) of Shiva.
killing Andhakasura, Bhairava, etc. Of the remaining dozens of images the noteworthy are Brahmeshanajanaroanarka (syncretic icon of Brahma, Shiva, Vishnu and Surya) Chatushpada Vilakshana Sadashiva, Saraswati, Nrittya Ganesha, etc. These all are dealt with below.

**Brahmeshanajanardanarka**

This one is sculpted on the west face of the jangha. It is a beautiful composite icon standing in samabhanga. It has eight arms-holding padma and akshamala in the extant right hands and it appears that in the third there was a trishula. In the left hand are seen a padma, a ladle, a chakra and kamandalu. The icon is flanked by smaller figures holding a pen and a palm leaf, which are of Danda and Pingala, respectively.

On its lower part are seen seven horses being drawn by Aruna with reins in his left hand and a whip in the right. At his back is seen Mahashweta with her right hand in abhayamudra. From the attributes, horses and Aruna, the charioteer it becomes clear that the icon combines the attributes of Brahma, Shiva, Vishnu and Surya. Barring a couple of such icons from other parts of Maharashtra, these type of images are very rare. The icon under discussion is artistically perfect. It is attractive and dignified.
Chatuspada Vilakshana
Sadashiva

This one is indeed a unique icon located on the south face of the Markanda Rishi temple. It shows features of Shiva as Sadashiva with three visible heads and eight hands, two of which suggest the existence of a fourth head at the rear. It is strikingly interesting to note that the figure has four legs, thus earning it the term *vilakshana*. In fact the showing of more than two legs is rather unusual.

Here, Sadashiva is shown seated in *padmasana* with wide staring eyes. The upper right hand holds a *damaru*; the middle one a *trishula*; the third placed on the right lap contains a *bijapuraka*; whereas the fourth is folded and settles in front of the chest covering a vertically beaded rosary placed over the palm of one of the left hands. The three left hands contain, from top downwards, a *pothi* (book), *khatvanga* and *ghata* (pot). The fourth, described above, is folded and supports a vertically beaded rosary. Of the four legs, two are engaged in *padmasna* and the remaining two, creating an enigma in the minds of the spectators, are firmly planted on the pedestal whereas the icon is shown seated on an *asana*.

The importance and uniqueness of this image...
lies in the fact that it embodies the Shaiva Siddhanta which was very popular from 10th century CE to 13th century CE. His heads represent Prithivi, Aap, Tej, Vayu and Akash and the four legs suggest Charya, Kriya, Yoga and Jnana - the four principles on which Shaiva Siddhanta was based. Here the lower two denote Charya and Kriya and the folded two legs present Yoga and Jnana. The image which stands for a certain philosophy can be designated as Bimba Brahma i.e. the image which takes one to salvation or realisation. Hence the image under discussion is ultimate in the development process of iconography.

**Sarasvati**

She is represented on the north face of the jangha and is shown seated. She has six arms with a lotus flower in her upper right; rosary in her lower right; the third right playing upon the veena; the upper left holding the veena; the middle left with a manuscript; and the lower right having a bijapuraka fruit. She is seen wearing all her usual ornaments of which the armlets are noteworthy. The peacock, her mount, is shown in a shallow niche below her. This is one of the most graceful and attractive images to be found here.

**Nrittya Ganesha**

This type of image depicting Ganesha engaged in dance is not rare but the one at Mar-
By Air:
Nearest airport is Nagpur.

By Rail:
The nearest railway station is at Chandrapur, 80 km from Gadchiroli.

By Road:
From Mumbai, its a long drive east via Nashik, Aurangabad, Jalna, Yavatmal and Chandrapur before finally reaching the town of Markanda.

From Nagpur, Markanda is a pleasant three and a half hour drive via the Nagbhig-Nagpur highway.

Where to stay:
There is a dharmashala for pilgrims at Markanda. Gadchiroli has government rest houses, and Nagpur offers a variety of options for accommodation.

Excursions:
BBinagunda on the border of Maharashtra and Chhattisgarh is a hidden gem, completely unknown to most tourists. It is worth visiting for its beautiful waterfall Indra’s Falls surrounded by hills and forests and is 4 hours from Markanda, and surrounded by hills and forests and is 4 hours from Markanda.

No visitor to Markanda should miss out on the opportunity to see the magnificent Tadoba-Andhari tiger reserve in nearby Chandrapur, a mere 70 km away.

95 km north east of Gadchiroli is the little hill town of Tippagad, at a height of 2000 feet above sea level. Its ancient fort commanding a view over a lush green valley and the shimmering Tipagadi river is another hidden gem in this tranquil corner of Maharashtra.

Thanks are due to the artists at Markandi who have enlivened almost all the surasundaris described in the Shilpa-Prakasha. These are Dalamalika, Padmagandha, Darpana, Vinyasa, Putravallabha, Shatrumardini, Shubhahagamini, to name a few. Having seen the excellence and rare quality of architecture, sculptural beauty, enticing surasundaris, and the uniqueness of some of the icons it can be unhesitatingly said that there cannot be two opinions that the Markandeshwara temple remains unexcelled so far as the Vidarbha region is concerned and hence deserves to be termed the ‘Devalaya Chakravarti’ i.e. the emperor of the temples of Vidarbha.

Surasundaris
The story of this magnificent religious edifice would remain incomplete sans the description of a set of surasundaris which are profusely carved on the projections of the registers. They are portrayed to express common human moods, suggesting the norms to be followed by the devotees while going to the temple. They are there not just to decorate the walls of temple and to attract people even though artistically speaking they are enchanting lyrics of modelled beauty and in lovely attitudes and postures.

They are there with some specific purpose. Since the religious structures gradually became the centre of all cultural activities of the community it has become the onus of the temples to promulgate among the devotees ethical values which would propel them towards moksha (final release). The surasundaris with their various moods, attributes, and cognizance prepare them to discard desire, lust, temptation and passion, and became virtuous so that they can accrue punya which leads them to salvation.

Thanks are due to the artists at Markandi who have enlivened almost all the surasundaris described in the Shilpa-Prakasha. These are Dalamalika, Padmagandha, Darpana, Vinyasa, Putravallabha, Shatrumardini, Shubhahagamini, to name a few. Having seen the excellence and rare quality of architecture, sculptural beauty, enticing surasundaris, and the uniqueness of some of the icons it can be unhesitatingly said that there cannot be two opinions that the Markandeshwara temple remains unexcelled so far as the Vidarbha region is concerned and hence deserves to be termed the ‘Devalaya Chakravarti’ i.e. the emperor of the temples of Vidarbha.

Surasundaris
The story of this magnificent religious edifice would remain incomplete sans the description of a set of surasundaris which are profusely carved on the projections of the registers. They are portrayed to express common human moods, suggesting the norms to be followed by the devotees while going to the temple. They are there not just to decorate the walls of temple and to attract people even though artistically speaking they are enchanting lyrics of modelled beauty and in lovely attitudes and postures.

They are there with some specific purpose. Since the religious structures gradually became the centre of all cultural activities of the community it has become the onus of the temples to promulgate among the devotees ethical values which would propel them towards moksha (final release). The surasundaris with their various moods, attributes, and cognizance prepare them to discard desire, lust, temptation and passion, and became virtuous so that they can accrue punya which leads them to salvation.

Thanks are due to the artists at Markandi who have enlivened almost all the surasundaris described in the Shilpa-Prakasha. These are Dalamalika, Padmagandha, Darpana, Vinyasa, Putravallabha, Shatrumardini, Shubhahagamini, to name a few. Having seen the excellence and rare quality of architecture, sculptural beauty, enticing surasundaris, and the uniqueness of some of the icons it can be unhesitatingly said that there cannot be two opinions that the Markandeshwara temple remains unexcelled so far as the Vidarbha region is concerned and hence deserves to be termed the ‘Devalaya Chakravarti’ i.e. the emperor of the temples of Vidarbha.

Surasundaris
The story of this magnificent religious edifice would remain incomplete sans the description of a set of surasundaris which are profusely carved on the projections of the registers. They are portrayed to express common human moods, suggesting the norms to be followed by the devotees while going to the temple. They are there not just to decorate the walls of temple and to attract people even though artistically speaking they are enchanting lyrics of modelled beauty and in lovely attitudes and postures.

They are there with some specific purpose. Since the religious structures gradually became the centre of all cultural activities of the community it has become the onus of the temples to promulgate among the devotees ethical values which would propel them towards moksha (final release). The surasundaris with their various moods, attributes, and cognizance prepare them to discard desire, lust, temptation and passion, and became virtuous so that they can accrue punya which leads them to salvation.

Thanks are due to the artists at Markandi who have enlivened almost all the surasundaris described in the Shilpa-Prakasha. These are Dalamalika, Padmagandha, Darpana, Vinyasa, Putravallabha, Shatrumardini, Shubhahagamini, to name a few. Having seen the excellence and rare quality of architecture, sculptural beauty, enticing surasundaris, and the uniqueness of some of the icons it can be unhesitatingly said that there cannot be two opinions that the Markandeshwara temple remains unexcelled so far as the Vidarbha region is concerned and hence deserves to be termed the ‘Devalaya Chakravarti’ i.e. the emperor of the temples of Vidarbha.
Trapped within the chaos that urbanisation imposes upon us, we often forget what it must be to dig our heels into soft sand and stare out at the sea or sense the mystery of the dark woods or meditate to the rhythm of the waves. However, not too far away is the Sindhudurg region which offers the opportunity to communicate with nature in all her resplendent beauty. And that is precisely what P. K. Ghanekar does as he sets off on an exploration of its many beaches and trekking trails.
Alphonso mangoes, Vengurla cashew nuts, a variety of fish and the wooden toys of Sawantwadi: Where does it all come together? At Sindhudurg, that’s where! With an infinite bounty of the sea, the sun, and white sandy beaches, Sindhudurg has a timeless appeal. And it’s a place that beckons tourists time and again. In fact, it is like you can never have enough of this paradise on earth.

Sindhudurg was created out of the old Ratnagiri district on May 1, 1981 and was officially selected as a tourist district by the Government of Maharashtra. Untouched by industrialization, this area has many things to offer - striking forts, spectacular ghats, unique temples, lovely beaches, many lighthouses and cascading waterfalls, in addition to the Amboli area which is rich in biodiversity.

Travelling either by rail or road is equally scenic. The ghat sections have slow ascents through mountains draped with virgin forests, intertwined trees, a dense thicket of
undergrowth, blades of grass, plants desperately clinging on to life from crags and crevasses of black rock. You are in the company of singing streams and roaring waterfalls. The Sahyadris in the monsoons are charming. The dew-spangled meadows stretch to eternity around us, flush with the colours of the monsoon. The air is laden with the delicious fragrance of wet earth, and the hilltops are dotted with forts from a bygone era.

**Forts**

This district’s innumerable forts are formidable sentinels guarding their age-old secrets. The forts on the coastline are strategically aligned at the mouths of rivers on creek inlets and sometimes sprawl on rocky islands enclosed by the foam-flecked waves of the sea.

**Sindhudurg** is a fort built on a low island about 2 km from the shore. It was the coastal capital of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj. It is less striking but more extensive than other island forts. The fortifications consist of a 4 km rampart with 42 bastions and contain 45 toilets for the sentries working on the fort. The enclosure is a vast space of about 20 hectares of land. Once the area was full of buildings, but now there is nothing left except for a few small temples dedicated to Mahadev, Bhavani and Jari Mari.

An interesting feature here is that in one of the temples Shivaji is worshipped as Shri Shivarajeshwar. The idol is in stone, with a head cover of silver and a mask of gold. An old sword believed to have been used by Shivaji is also placed in the same temple. The fort’s most prized relics are the foot and hand imprints of Shivaji Maharaj in a slab of dry lime on one of the turrets above the entrance.

Besides the main fort, Padmagad is another small island fort nearby and there are two small forts on the main land called Rajkot and Sarjekot.

The fort of **Vijaydurg** lies on the Waghotan estuary, some 30 km north of Devgad. **Vi-**
Jaydurg literally means ‘the fort of victory’. This massive fort overlooks the sea with sand spilling over the bus stand behind. Only after climbing the fort and circumambulating it does one get an idea of the massive inroad the sea has made into the land, and the strategic importance of the fort. The fort was prudently strengthened by Shivaji with a triple line of walls and numerous towers. The beach sprawls to the left of the fort, secluded in its shadow, inspiring awe and admiration.

Vijaydurg is 425 km from Mumbai with the road breaking away from the Mumbai-Goa highway at Talere. Pombhurle is on the way, which is the birth place of ‘Darpankar’ Balshastri Jambhekar who is said to be the father of the Marathi newspaper world. The old residence of Anandrao Dhulap at Vijaydurg with beautiful Maratha paintings is worth a visit. A temple of Rameshwar at Girye is another interesting sight. An old dock dating from the era of Kanhoji Angre is at Girye.

There are more than 20 forts in Sindhudurg district. Devgad, Ramgad, Nivti, Kharepatan, Manohar-Mansantoshgad are a few of the forts worth visiting.

**Beaches**

There are several beaches in Sindhudurg district. These coconut-fringed beaches are unspoiled and isolated, reinvigorating all those who come here. For most, Maharashtra’s Konkan is synonymous with Malvan, which itself is a small town practically hidden by tall palms. The ‘Dashavatar’ and ‘Khel’, two of the most popular folk arts of Maharashtra, originate from here. The old town of Malvan lies on what was once an inner island and is now a part of the mainland. It has a long, flat and sandy beach.

**Tarkarli**, a little beyond Malvan, is a serene interlude and offers an escape from humdrum for beach lovers. In fact, Tarkarli is one of the finest beaches in the country. The crystal clear blue-green water teems with marine life and you will be struck by the amazing clarity of the water which washes that stretch of the coastline.

**Amboli Hill Station**

After the opening of the Parpoli (or Amboli) ghat, Amboli was developed as a hill station by the British political agent Col. Westrap. With an average of nearly 7,000 mm of rainfall a year from June to October, Amboli is said to be the wettest place in Maharashtra. Here one glimpses the ruggedly sculpted Sahyadris and the mist-shrouded Konkan plains below. Wooded hills still untouched by
man’s destructive axe and a secluded hamlet add to Amboli’s allure. The woods brimming with wild flowers, insects, butterflies and birds are a special attraction. In the monsoons and just after the monsoons, insectivorous plants Utricularia and Drosera can be spotted at Amboli.

Early morning walks at Amboli are highly rewarding. A green barbeti kutroo call stalks us, while the bird itself remains infuriatingly elusive. An Indian robin serenades us in honeyed tones. In the summer one can taste juicy wild jamuns and see the white Capparis moonii flowers and long spiny inflorescences of Moulava spicata. The real pleasure lies in discovering out-of-the-way trekking trails by instinct. Perfectly camouflaged Malabar crested larks and starlings, red vented bulbuls, and red wattle lapwings can be seen by lucky nature lovers. A word of warning: Be sure to carry enough eatables, drinking water and a cap if you intend to go for a long walk during the day.

Amboli’s rich biodiversity and more than 90 bird species score well with the botanists and nature lovers. Amruta (Mapia foetida) emits a terrible smell; the plant hirda is used for its medicinal properties; shikekai forms an important ingredient of traditional shampoo, and so on. Amboli is also home to the rare karvi which flowers after every seven years and will bloom next in 2015. Close to Amboli village one can find a ghostly broken down building, enclosed partially by a wall and concealed by trees. Upon closer inspection, one realises that it is the palace of Khemraj Sawant Bhosale, the erstwhile ruler of Sawantwadi.

One can explore meandering paths from Amboli or can stick to the tarmac road that eventually reaches Mahadevgad - 2 km from the market - from where one can watch the sunset and get stunning views of the mountain ranges. But be alert at all times as this area is also home to bears. Not far from the market place, about 5 km along the mountain side, at the end of a winding road we come to a rather dilapidated bridge. Another 10 minutes’ walk away, enveloped by the fragrance of trees in a full bloom, one reaches the source of the river Hiranyakeshi, around which a temple of the same name is built. The river originates from the mouth of a cave, and exploring it is a thrill in itself.

To visit Kavalesad, 8 km from the market, one needs a vehicle. The plateau is carpeted lush green in the monsoons with wild flowers, but brown with burnt grass during summers. Lucky bird watchers will be able to see the Malabar pied hornbill bird. Gnetum and royal fern Osmunda are rare plants which can be found after a search. A roaring waterfall can be seen from the rim of a cliff. Yet another waterfall, Nagartar, makes for an enchanting destination. During the monsoons, people head to Amboli to see the roaring and cascading waterfalls in the ghat section. A prominent fall cascades into a basaltic rift and the thundering cataract forms a hung cloud of spray which drenches people in its vicinity. It’s a feast for the senses as you let nature’s glory sweep over you.

**Trekking in Sindhudurg**

Wherever there are mountains there are bound to be trekkers, rock climbers, and na-
tire lovers. The Sahyadri crest line and its branches lure trekkers from across the state. Unlike Himalayan treks, not much preparation is needed for day treks in the Sahyadris. A backpack full of food, a change of clothes, a first-aid kit, a camera and binoculars are all you need to conquer these peaks. Extensive maps and literature are available for trekkers in this region.

**Beaches**
The other beaches in the Sindhudurg region are:
- Devbag: 10 km from Malvan
- Tarkarli: 6 km from Malvan
- Chivalyachi Vela: 1 km from Malvan
- Achrachand: 20 km from Malvan
- Tonadvil: 18 km from Malvan
- Arvili: 15 km from Vengurla
- Bhogve: 23 km from Vengurla
- Nivti: 28 km from Vengurla
- Velagar: 20 km from Vengurla
- Shiroda: 25 km from Vengurla
- Kundura: 6 km from Vengurla
- Khavne: 15 km from Vengurla
- Sagareswar: 2 km from Vengurla
- Sangarteerth: 22 km from Vengurla
- Vijaaydurg: 1.5 km from Vijaaydurg town
- Puralikothe: 8 km from Vijaaydurg
- Mithbav: 47 km from Vijaaydurg
- Kunkeshwar: 40 km from Vijaaydurg

**Excursions:**
A visit to Nerur near Sawantwadi will take you to a creek similar to the backwaters of Kerala. The temple at Valaval is dedicated to Aniruddha Vishnu, unique in the temple world because of its extensive wooden carvings. The Surya and Vishnu idols at Kharepatan are a ‘must see’ when visiting Sindhudurg. A unique temple dedicated to Brahma requires special mention. At Parule we come across another sun temple. The newly built temple of Suvana Ganesh (Ganesh of gold) at Malvan is also worth a visit. At Kunkavale, the temple of the local goddess is impressive with its beautifully carved icon.

At Akeri in the temple of Rameshwar you can see a monolithic bed carved from a single stone. Mangav, which is nearby, has ornate wood carvings adorning the temple of Yakshini. The temple of Vimaleshwar at Vada near Devgad has lifesize elephants carved outside the cave temple. Kunkeshwar has a scenic beach, an impressive large temple and an ancient cave with many carved human faces. At Kot Kanite, 30 km from Devgad and 15 km from Kunkeshwar, one can see an inscription of the great Maratha admiral, Kanhoji Angre, in a temple of Bhagavati which dates back to 1725 CE. In the same village you will come across many small and medium-sized utensils carved in talc chlorite schist stones, unique because such rocks are available only at Mirawadi nearby.

Umadyacho Mahadev near Kasarde is another natural wonder. Just in front of the Shiv temple, an interrupted bubbling action is seen from the floor of the river bed. At Math Budruk in Malvan taluka, the Bombadeshwar temple is home to a similar phenomenon, but at a smaller scale. Such unique natural wonders must be added to a tourist’s itinerary.

**Distance from Mumbai:** 495 kms

**How to reach:**

**By Air:** Nearest airport is at Dabolim in Goa which is 32 km from Sawantwadi.

**By Rail:** Nearest railway station is Kudal and Kanakavali which are 32 km from Malvan.

**By Road:** The Mumbai-Goa road leads you right through the heart of Sindhudurg. The pace of the drive is more than made up for by the views you get.

From Pune, the drive is a bit quicker via Kolhapur, where you should turn onto the Edapally-Panvel highway towards Sindhudurg.

**What to Eat:**
Sindhudurg dist is famous for its typical Malvani food, necessarily consists of rice, curry, fish and Kombol vade prepared in traditional Konkani spices and flavour.

**Where to stay:**
Lodging and boarding facilities are available all over the district. Of special mention are the MTDC resorts at Tarkarli and Amboli.
Maharashtra has a long-standing tradition of wrestling with many of the state’s leading wrestlers having done the country proud with their participation and victory in Olympic Games. The article throws light on what makes wrestling such a disciplined sport and also focuses on the little known facet of how the wrestling pit is prepared.
In a routine that has remained unchanged for hundreds of years, wrestlers in akharas across Maharashtra wake up at the crack of dawn. A glass of milk, and then they are ready to begin warming up for their morning exercises. Wrestling is one of the world’s oldest sports, and all ancient civilisations bear references to it. In fact, it is one of the few disciplines to survive from the ancient Olympic Games in Greece thousands of years ago, till the present day. It comes as no surprise then, that within the domain of wrestling, the ancient merges with the modern.

One of the traditional sports of Maharashtra, wrestling retains its popularity even today, especially in the rural hinterland. Parents often send their boys to the talim and take pride in their achievements. Life in a talim or akhara is austere and disciplined. It is modeled on the gurukul tradition, where students live at the school itself, and are self-sufficient. Each wrestler cooks his own meals and is responsible for himself.

Fighting For Glory
Wrestling in Maharashtra

Ulka Athale
Text courtesy: Vilas Kathure, Maharashtra Rajya Kustigir Parishad
Photographs © Sachin Naik
The oldest existing akharas in Maharashtra date back to the era of Shahu Maharaj. The talims served two main purposes – training boys in fitness and strength, as well as preparing them for warfare. The martial arts, of which wrestling is one, were often taught there. The Gulshe Talim in Pune, and the Shahupuri Talim and Motibaug Talim in Kolhapur are some of the oldest existing talims in the state.

Global Recognition
The most prestigious mud wrestling competitions held nationally are the Hind Kesari, Rustom-e-Hind and Maan Bharat tournaments. In Maharashtra, the Rajyastariya Kushti Spardha is unique for featuring both mud wrestling and mat wrestling in every weight category.

Mat wrestling too, is now increasingly gaining hold. In this type of wrestling, bouts take place on a standard size wrestling mat, whose dimensions are determined by the Federation Internationale des Luttes Associees or International Federation of Associated Wrestling Styles (FILA), the world’s governing body on wrestling. International competitions are governed by the rules set by the FILA, including the Olympic Games and other championships.

Maharashtra also has a proud tradition of wrestlers representing India in international
Sixty one years ago, Khashaba Jadhav (1926-1984) from Kolhapur brought home India’s first ever individual medal by winning the bronze in wrestling at the 1952 Helsinki Olympics. Several wrestlers from Maharashtra have gone on to represent India at the Olympics after Khashaba Jadhav, notable among them being Maruti Mane, Harishchandra Birajdar, Maruti Adkar and Ganpat Andalkar. In more recent times, Indian wrestling came to global prominence once again with wrestlers Sushil Kumar and Yogeshwar Dutt bagging medals in the 2012 London Olympic Games. Sushil Kumar won the silver medal in the Men’s Freestyle 66 kg category and Yogeshwar Dutt picked up the bronze in the Men’s Freestyle 60 kg category.

Preparing the Pit

Traditional wrestling takes place on a specially prepared mud floor. While red mud is used in Maharashtra, other parts of India use soil that is local to their area. The soil is especially prepared using elaborate time-tested methods. First, a deep pit is dug and waterproofed. Nowadays, the hole is lined with cement to make it watertight. In earlier years, it was not that simple. The location of the hole would be chosen with care, keeping in mind the slope of the land and carving out channels to minimise seepage. Red soil would be brought in by bullock cart, which nowadays is transported by trucks. The soil has a consistency similar to clay, and swells when it absorbs water. It is subsequently raked, and then passed through a sieve to remove pebbles and other impurities. This process of moistening, raking and sieving the soil is repeated until the soil is soft and fine.

The next stage in preparing the soil is the purification process. It is essential that the soil is free of any harmful elements so that the wrestlers are not harmed during bouts, as well as to keep their skin undamaged. The fine soil is doused repeatedly with buttermilk and then raked again. This process takes between a week and twelve days. Once it has been softened enough, it is further mixed...
Betel nut trees

The author is a local of Pune, who is passionate about heritage conservation and can be reached at ulka.athale@gmail.com
with powdered turmeric (haldi), which works as a natural disinfectant, and lemon juice is squeezed over it. The prepared soil is then filled in the pit, and flattened with rollers until it is perfectly even. The final touches are added before bouts – the soil is sprinkled generously with rosewater, and is now ready to welcome the wrestlers.

**Challenges Ahead**

However, the international future of wrestling has recently been threatened by various decisions of the International Olympic Committee. The committee attempted to scrap wrestling as an event altogether in the 2016 Rio Olympics, and reinstated it following protests from various bodies. As we go to press, news has come in that it has fortunately been included in the 2020 Tokyo Olympics too. What the future holds for one of the Games’ oldest surviving events, no one knows. In the meantime, one can only admire the young wrestlers who dedicate themselves body and soul to an ancient sport in the face of changing times.

**Eat Like a Wrestler**

That a balanced diet is important for good health is something we all know. Wrestlers in particular need to maintain their strength and muscle tone. High protein food is essential for muscles to recover from the strenuous training sessions. Their diet therefore consists of:

- 5:30 am: A big glass of milk.
- 7 am: Breakfast, most often sheera cooked in clarified butter (ghee).
- 12 noon: Lunch, vegetables, dal and chapatis all cooked in clarified butter.
- Fruits and fruit juices are consumed often during the day, as is milk or lassi. Wrestlers make it a point to eat bananas as they are rich in nutrients and help maintain body weight.
- 6 pm: A very rich thandai made with almonds, cinnamon, cardamom and other spices. Most people mistakenly believe that thandai contains milk; however, the thandai the wrestlers drink gets its milky consistency from the mountain of crushed almonds that go into it!
- 8 pm: A protein heavy dinner consisting of chicken, mutton, eggs and vegetables, and of course, it is all the richer for being cooked in ghee.
After exploring the Hindu and Buddhist caves in our April and July editions, this final part in our trilogy of the Ellora Caves focuses the spotlight on the Jaina caves which reflect through their paintings and sculptures the Jainism philosophy of liberation through a conquest of senses and renunciation says Viraj Shah.

Away from the quintessential bustle of pilgrims and tourists around the famous Buddhist and Brahmanical caves at Ellora lies a cluster of five Jaina caves, right at the northern end of the hill range. These caves, excavated in the 9th century CE, signify the last major phase of religious and artistic activity at Ellora, celebrating the ascetic character of the Jaina sect.
These caves are clustered in five excavations and numbered 30 to 34. Apart from these, there are six more Jaina caves on the opposite face of this hill, which were excavated during the Yadava period in 13th century CE. All of these caves belong to the Digambara sect of Jainism.

**Early Caves**

Cave 30 or Chhota Kailasha is situated a few meters away from the main group of Jaina caves, which can be reached following the road from Brahmanical Cave 21 or 29. This cave, which is tucked away in the thicket of vegetation, is usually missed by the tourists. But it is a fine monolithic structure, carved in imitation of the Brahmanical cave Kailasha,

---

**Tradition of Austerity and Asceticism**

**Jaina Caves at Ellora**

Viraj Shah | Photographs © Viraj Shah, Suhas Asnikar, Manjiri Bhalerao

---

Monolithic, sarvatobhadra shrine in court of Indra Sabha

Meditating Jinas, Upper cave of Jagannatha Sabha
and hence the name. Like Kailasha, it is also a monolithic shrine, excavated in a pit with a rough gopura and executed in Dravida style, but is without nandimandapa, elephants or free-standing pillars. This cave was left unfinished from the outside, while only the interior along with the icons was completed.

Walking towards the main group of Jaina caves from Chhota Kailasha, one reaches another small, unfinished cave numbered 30A. It has a monolithic verandah with beautifully executed pillars and a roughly laid out hall in the centre of which is installed a chaumukha (four-fold icon of Jina). Cave 31 is another small cave with a hall and shrine, outside the main group of caves.

Cave 32 or Indra Sabha is a double-storied cave with a monolithic sarvatobhadra shrine, a manastambha and a free-standing elephant in the court that is enclosed by a prakara wall with a gopura. The lower storey of this cave lies unfinished, while the upper storey consists of a hall and shrine.
upper storey is one of the largest and most elaborate caves with beautiful pillars, large sculptural panels and paintings on its ceiling. There are seven more caves excavated at different heights on the sides of the courtyard, which were added later on, as is clear from their haphazard placement at different levels and different sizes.

Cave 33 or Jagannatha Sabha is also a cluster of a few independent caves, excavated on the three sides of the rock face. This group of caves is not enclosed by any prakara wall, as is the Indra Sabha. Though the cave at the back appears to be double-storied, both the stories are actually independent caves as indicated by different sizes, iconographic programme and style. The last cave of the group, Cave 34, is a small excavation with a verandah, enclosed hall and shrine.

These caves have well-defined verandahs, halls and shrines, while some of the smaller caves have only a hall and shrine. Most of these caves display elaborate and decorative architectural features with minutely carved pillars, ceilings, doorways and facade that are embellished with a range of floral and geometrical motifs, and also a variety of human figures. The upper stories of Indra and Jagannatha Sabha have large figures of imposing doorkeepers outside the caves. The interiors of these caves are covered with beautiful panels of tirthankaras and other subsidiary Jain deities, especially the attendant yakshya-yakshi, Sarvanubhuti-Ambika. The most prominent icons are large panels of the scenes depicting Kamatha’s attack on the 23rd tirthankara, Parsvanatha, and the rigorous penance of the first tirthankara Adinatha’s son, Bahubali.
The sculptures are in very high relief and well proportionate with supple movements and beautiful facial features. The scene depicting Kamatha’s attack on Parsvanatha is executed with energy and vigour, achieved by numerous attackers in various boldly conceived postures and a lot of animation and movement.

Of all the caves at Ellora, the Jaina caves have the largest number of paintings still extant on ceilings and side walls. The traces of paintings in the caves indicate that the entire cave was painted in vibrant colours. The themes of these paintings primarily centre on the depiction of flying celestial beings, always shown amidst the clouds. They are mostly in pairs engaged in various activities such as dancing; playing musical instruments; carry

**Later Caves**

Compared to these early caves, the caves excavated on the same hill but at a higher level and at a much later date are small, plain and crude. A path behind Cave 30A leads up to the top of the hill, where a 5-meter high icon of Parsvanatha is carved on the rock face. Originally the icon was in the open and must have been visible from a distance, but it has now been enclosed in a structure, which was built by the Jaina community from Aurangabad in the 18th century. Below it are three
more caves and a few icons carved on the rock face. The largest of the caves is flanked by the figure of an elephant.

**Conquerors of Senses**

In spite of the display of architectural, plastic and graphic art, the Jaina caves essentially focus on the ascetic tradition of the faith. The apparent monotonous iconographic programme with rows of Jina figures in meditative postures contrast starkly with vibrant and varied iconography of the Brahmanical caves. But the steadfast meditation of Parshvanatha against the attack of evil Kamatha, and of Bahubali against the physical pains, emphasize the virtue of non-violence and non-attachment in Jainism. The focused prominence on the meditating figures of *tirthankaras* in these caves clearly shows the devotees and visitors the path of liberation through a conquest of senses and renunciation.

**Distance from Mumbai: 350 kms**

**How to reach:**

- **By Air:** The nearest airport is Aurangabad, which has daily flights to major Indian cities.
- **By Rail:** Aurangabad railway station is well connected to most cities. The Aurangabad Jan Shatabdi Express is a daily fast train to Mumbai.
- **By Road:** Ellora is about 30 km from Aurangabad. Buses, rickshaws and taxis ply regularly between the two. Aurangabad is on the National Highway 211, and MSRTC runs buses from major cities to Aurangabad.

**Where to stay:**

There are many hotels in and around Aurangabad. MTDC has a tourist lodge, near the Aurangabad railway station. There is also a youth hostel in the city. At Ellora the only place to stay is the Hotel Kallas, offering a variety of accommodation. At Fardapur, just 5 km from the Ajanta Caves is an MTDC-run holiday resort and a Traveller’s Lodge at Ajanta, right beside the entrance to the Caves.
In Search of an Elusive Owlet

Melghat

Text and Photographs © Anirudh Chaoji

With the onset of the monsoon, Anirudh Chaoji took off to the Melghat Tiger Reserve at the border of Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh, not with the typical expectation of sighting tigers and other big beasts but to locate the elusive forest owlet, a bird that has given the slip to many an experienced wildlife enthusiast and expert. That the trip turned out to be a great success is what makes for this interesting account.
It had been raining all over India for close to a week. Here, in the forest of central India, the downpour fortunately meant that our movement was restricted, as was that of the forest creatures - especially the one we were on the lookout for. We had already walked for hours under a drizzle or an occasional shower. Making our way through on a wet forest floor and over an uneven landscape posed a major challenge; often we were down on all fours but were certainly in no mood to give up the search. After a quick break for lunch, we were back on the prowl. This time around, the weather gods decided to help our cause and the sun made a momentary appearance. And just as we were beginning to bask in its warmth, our friend Bhola called us excitedly and pointed to a tree. And there it was – the elusive forest owlet.

This was not just another owl, but an owlet that had been thought to be extinct for almost 113 years. It was only when Pamela Rasmussen, an American ornithologist, went on a rediscovery trip to a few old distribution sites that she finally located one bird in the Satpura foothills in 1997. The forests of Melghat have also since then reported a few of these forest owlets. We too had been on the trail of this mysterious creature instead of the standard mission of trying to photograph Melghat’s tigers.
Bhola, a friend of many years, is a local Korku tribal and an excellent second-generation naturalist, like his father. He was confident of locating the bird in its habitat. However, of the many hours that we spent in searching for the forest owlet, we were lucky enough to feast our eyes on it for just about 20 minutes, reminding us of its elusiveness. The dry deciduous forest of Melghat and its surrounding areas of Vidarbha become leafless in the summer and the little owlet, just about 24 cm in height, resembles a solitary leaf on a branch. We therefore had to look for many ‘such’ leaves before finally locating the bird.

**A Rarity Indeed!**

The first specimen of this bird was collected in December 1872 from Basna, in what is now Madhya Pradesh, by F.R. Blewitt. It was studied and described newly to the science fraternity the next year by Octavian Hume and aptly named the ‘forest owlet’ (*Athene blewitti*) after the collector. Now of course it has been categorised separately and is referred to as *Heteroglaux blewitti*. For almost 113 years, this bird was not observed until Rasmussen’s exploratory work in 1997. Ever since then, a few more birds have been spotted in north Maharashtra and south-eastern Madhya Pradesh. Of these, a few were also reported from the Melghat, Taloda and Toranmal forest ranges. Despite that, the total numbers of this bird is estimated to be less than 250 individuals - making it critically endangered.

Until 1997, the only records of the bird were seven stuffed specimens in the British museum that were collected almost a century ago. There is a peculiar twist to the owl rediscovery story, when one Richard Meinertzhagen managed to steal the specimen from the museum. He then resubmitted it with new labels and false locations. This led to many failed field searches, until Richard’s theft was discovered.

What probably also made things difficult for ornithologists searching for this owlet was its weird diurnal habit. Someone searching for owls would normally have expected night time activity but it is during those hours when it mostly remains inactive. When we saw this bird that late afternoon, it was not just the sighting of the bird that thrilled us, but its remarkable appearance that now remains deeply etched in our minds. The prominent white markings on its moustache and supercilium and the eyebrows give it a rather ‘wise old man’ look. The white belly patches also add to its charm.

As it flew from one tree to the other, the alarmed chirping of smaller birds easily gave away its location. Small birds form a part of its menu, though lizards, skunks and rodents make up the bulk of its menu card. Other than the alarmed chirping of smaller birds, it was difficult to locate this bird as it did not call out too often. However, instead of June, if we had been there in the breeding season of January and February, locating the bird shortly after dusk, when we were walking towards our rooms, something large and white flew over our heads. It was a flying squirrel!
would have been slightly easier as the courtship calls of “ah-owow” would have reminded us that owlet love was in the air.

**Other Sightings**

We came back to the Semadoh forest resthouse, elated at the sighting. Shortly after dusk, when we were walking towards our rooms, something large and white flew over our heads. It was a flying squirrel! Soon our torches and cameras were out. This Indian giant flying squirrel (*Petaurista philIPPen-sis*), a member of the rodent family, had just emerged from its home in the hollow of an ain tree (*Terminalia tomentosa*) to take the fastest route to its favourite food tree by flying.

The front and rear feet of this brown squirrel are joined by a white-coloured extension of skin, giving it almost a kite shape. The fresh new leaves of the bael tree (*Aegle marmelos*), as a result of the recent rains, had become a major attraction with squirrels from all directions flying to this one particular tree. That night, rain fell intermittently with a couple of heavy showers. In the morning, the sight of the swollen river Sipna provided a spectacular sight. Sipna, along with the rivers Dolar, Khandu, Gadga, Khapra and Wan, form the major catchments in this region, draining the precious rainwater into the Tapti and Purna basins. Like many other tiger forests, Melghat also acts like a major natural dam, soaking and percolating rainwater and then releasing it throughout the dry part of the year. Despite heavy rains, such forests do not create floods.

The forest floor and the leaf litter act like a huge sponge retaining the water. The dead material makes running water slow down and the slowing water stop - thereby preventing erosion. Sadly, few people have understood the importance of these tiger forests, as they have been unscrupulously cleared to create lands for agriculture and developmental projects. Korkus, Gonds, Nihals form the scheduled tribes inhabiting Melghat. The Korkus have lived in these forests for generations, harvesting minor forest produce like *tendu* leaves for *beedi* making; *karaya* gum; *mahua* flowers and seeds; and *bibba* fruits, among others. The Korkus have also been assisting the forest department by providing labour for their projects. As recently as in 1973, Korkus were given permanent rights over their lands and have since been practicing subsistence agriculture.
Apart from the dominant teak (Tectona grandis), this deciduous forest also has bamboo (Bambusa Arundinacea – Katang Bans), tendu (Diospyros melanoxylon), mahua (Madhuca indica), dhawda (Anogeissus Latifolia), charoli (Buchanania lanzan), karai (Sterculia Urens), ain (Terminalia tomentosa), salai (Boswelia serata), tiwas (Ougedinia oogeinensis), haldu (Adina Cordifolia), amongst others, most of which are leafless in the summer months.

Bhola soon joined us for the morning trail. We started on the walking trail following the “line clear” calls of an Indian pitta. A rather elusive bird, it has the apt vernacular name of ‘navrang’, justifying its spectacular colours. Soon we spotted the pitta and it appeared to be carrying what looked like a grass strand in its beak. Following its movements, we were able to locate its nest - a ball of grass in the fork of a tree. Without disturbing it too much, we left the place, and soon observed a grey tit taking a dry leaf to its hollow nest in a tree. We later observed a few more birds, which too, taking the advantage of abundant food supply produced by recent rains, had hurriedly started building their nests.

We were also blessed with the sightings of a king parachute tarantula - a huge predatory spider; beautiful red mite that appear out of their summer sleep; a number of moths attracted to illuminated bulbs; a handsome

**About Melghat Tiger Reserve**

Melghat and its neighbouring hill-station of Chikhaldara have a long history. The historic fort of Narnala and Gavilgad bear testimony to fierce battles, including the second Anglo-Maratha war where Col. Arthur Wellesley captured the Gavilgad Fort from the Marathas. Melghat was among the first nine tiger reserves to be notified in 1973-74 under the prestigious Project Tiger launched to revive tiger populations in their natural habitats across India. Melghat, being a true representative of the central Indian highlands, was an obvious choice. Located in the northern part of Amravati district, this is where Maharashtra meets Madhya Pradesh in the south-western Satpura mountain ranges. Initially this tiger reserve was spread over 1,571 square km., encompassing the Gugamal National Park, Melghat Wildlife Sanctuary, and the neighbouring reserve forests. Now the area under the tiger reserve has been further extended to provide protection to 2,029 square km. of rich deciduous forest.
crested serpent eagle waiting for its food to make a move; a gaur family – sometimes wrongly referred to as the Indian bison - walking through a bamboo forest; and also the spectacular sight of hundreds of egrets flying in unison one late evening. We had thoroughly enjoyed our stay in this jewel of the Vidarbha region.

More Than Just Tigers
As against this, many a tourists who come to Melghat return dejected as they are unable to spot the glamorous members of this forest - tiger, leopard, sloth bear or wild dog. Most people don’t understand that the undulating terrain of Melghat is not conducive to sightings. The name Melghat itself suggests a land where ghats meet - a terrain with unending valleys and hills with altitudinal variation between 300 – 1,200 meters.

The difficult terrain and thick undergrowth of lantana weed make sightings extremely difficult. But someone whose agenda is not just sighting the big cats goes back cherishing great experiences of sighting beautiful birds, small mammals, reptiles, and butterflies. One must not forget the spectacular landscape around the river Sipna and also appreciate the lives of the Korku and Gond tribes, who lead a happy and contented life, even in the absence of many basic necessities of urban life. Today, the need of the hour is to retain such areas of wilderness before they are captured for development lest this time we lose our rich wildlife heritage like the forest owlet. We should not forget that extinction means the disappearance of a life and species forever.

Travel Tips
Keep atleast one night or even two for Chikhaldara hill station.
Facilities at Melghat are very basic yet clean and hygienic. Do not expect luxury. The experience of the forest more than compensates for the basic facilities.

Distance from Mumbai: 523 kms

How to reach:
By Air: Nearest Airport – Nagpur about 200 kms
By Rail: Nearest Railway head: Badnera on Mumbai Nagpur route about 80 kms.
By Road: Off the Mumbai Nagpur highway – Nearest town : Paratwada/ Amravati

Where to stay:
Booking through MTDC for the Semadoh guest houses on the banks of Sipna river
From the Forest Department – Wildlife division office at Amravati

Excursions:
Hill station of Chikhaldara
Gavilagad fort
Old and beautiful Forest rest houses : Semadoh/ Dakhana/ Kolhkas Koktu etc.
When the Night Burns Bright

Tripuri Pournima

Varsha Gajendragadkar | Photographs © Sachin Naik, Suhas Asnikar

In the coolness of a November night, the sky and earth vie with each other to achieve a level of brightness that dazzles. While up above the full moon and the stars create a canopy of heavenly illumination, the lamps that burn brightly in homes and temples speak of the faith that brings alive the festival of Tripuri Pournima. Varsha Gajendragadkar spotlights the festival’s mythological significance and how it is observed in Maharashtra
The subdued evening light of November suddenly turns into pitch darkness as night falls. This is no ordinary night though. The sky is lit up by the full moon in all its glory, rendering the smaller stars near invisible with its brightness. The air is pleasantly cool, and thousands of devotees have lit up the night with oil lamps in temples and along river ghats. It is Tripuri Pournima, the 15th lunar day of the month of Kartik according to the Hindu calendar, and the most important festival dedicated to Shiva after Shivratri. It is also known as Kartiki Pournima or Raas Pournima and it marks the victory of Shiva over the demon Tripurasura.

Kartik is considered to be the most sacred month of all the other months of the Hindu year. Fairs and rituals which begin on Prabodhini Ekadashi, the 11th lunar day, in the same month, end on Tripuri Pournima. During this period, devotees refrain from eating meat and stick to various vows like eating only once a day or not plucking fruits and flowers or not cutting the crops, etc. All these rituals end on Tripuri Pournima which is the last day for the Tulsi Vivah or the wedding of Tulsi. In Maharashtra, there is a long tradition of celebrating the wedding of Lord Krishna and Tulsi, a personification of the Tulsi or holy basil plant, also known as Vrinda. On this evening, many households celebrate the rituals of this divine wedding.
Mythology
It is believed that Tripuri Pournima is when Lord Vishnu was reincarnated as Matsya or fish and protected Manu, the first man from the deluge. There is a belief that Lord Krishna and Radha, his beloved, performed raaS, a kind of dance, and Lord Krishna worshipped Radha on this day. This is the reason why Tripuri Pournima is also known as Raas Pournima. The Tripuri Pournima festival also coincides with the Jain festival of light and Guru Nanak’s birthday. It is a very auspicious and religious day for Jains. This is the day of nirvana of Lord Mahavir, the 24th Teerthankar. Jain devotees read holy books and their homes are illuminated in his honour.

A popular legend associated with Tripuri Pournima suggests that Shiva in his form as Tripurantaka (the killer of Tripurasura) killed the demon on this day. The demon Tripurasura had worshipped Lord Brahma and received massive powers from him. Soon, Tripurasura became very arrogant about his unbeatable strength and started harassing people of all the three worlds. He became totally uncontrollable. The gods immediately started praying to Lord Shiva. When he asked them the reason behind the prayers, the gods explained to him the nuisance caused by the demon Tripurasura. He had conquered the whole world and defeated the gods. He had also created three cities in space, which were together called Tripur.

Lord Shiva promised the gods that he would give them relief from the demon. Shiva with his divine powers fought with the demon; destroyed all his cities with a single arrow; and finally vanquished Tripurasura on Kartik Pournima. All the gods were overjoyed by this conquest and they celebrated the day as a festival with illuminations. This day is hence called ‘Dev-Diwali’ or ‘Diwali of the Gods’. To commemorate this great victory, it is customary to illuminate the temples of Lord Shiva on Tripuri Pournima.

One of the legends also indicates that in this fierce battle, Kartikeya (also known as Skanda or Shanmuga), the elder son of Shiva, assisted his father. Kartikeya is also known to be the commander of the gods’ army and hence is referred to as the god of war. Coincidentally, Tripuri Pournima is believed to be the birthday of Kartikeya.

Traditions and Rituals
People take a bath early in the morning and draw beautiful rangolis in front of the main entrances. The Shiva temples get crowded with devotees singing prayers while the loud and rhythmic beating of mridangas and cymbals are heard all day long. On Tripuri Pournima, many believers also take a ritual bath – known as ‘Kartik Snana’ - at a sacred lake or river. It is considered to be one of the most auspicious days to take a holy bath at the Ganges in Varanasi. Similarly, in Maharashtra, devotees gather in large numbers on this day by the rivers Godavari, Krishna and Chandrabhaga. It is believed that on the day of Tripuri Pournima the gods descend to earth and reside in the sacred rivers. There are elaborate ceremonies at the Ganges and other sacred rivers.

There is an old belief that one who bathes in the sacred rivers on this day can also get rid of his or her negative energies and receive blessings from all the gods of the heavens. Annakoota (offering food to deities) is held in temples on this day. Charitable acts such as donating cows, feeding the needy and fasting are some of the religious activities that are prescribed on Tripuri Pournima. The temple premises are brightly lit up through the night with deepmalas or towers of lamps, presenting a feast for the eyes. People place 360 or 720 wicks in temples to attain moksha (freedom from the cycle of birth and death). The number 720 signifies the 360 days and nights of the Hindu calendar.

In Varanasi, the ghats present a mesmerizing spectacle with thousands of earthen lamps with devotional songs. The ghats are illuminated with oil lamps by the thousands, creating a mesmerizing sight every year during Tripuri Pournima.

The author is a noted writer on Indian festivals and traditions and can be reached at varshapune19@gmail.com
burning all along the stream. The same scene is observed at the various ghats in Maharashtra such as the Godavari in Nashik, the Krishna in Vai and the Chandrabhaga in Pandharpur. On this day people gift lamps to priests. Small lamps are also floated in river streams or placed under tulsi, fig and amla trees. The lights floated in the rivers or placed under the trees are believed to provide salvation to fish, insects and birds, which is why this day is also known as 'Kartik Deeparatna' - the jewel of lamps in the month of Kartik.

One may not believe in the legends and the rituals that have been followed for the last several centuries but a glance at the night sky lit up by the full moon and thousands of stars and a glimpse of India with river banks, houses and temples illuminated by an equal number of flickering oil lamps is simply divine.
The Aga Khan Palace

The Aga Khan Palace occupies a prime position in the history of India’s freedom movement for the fact that Mahatma Gandhi, his wife, secretary and others were incarcerated here from 1942. It now serves as the headquarters of the Gandhi National Memorial Society where the making of khadi continues to be a prime activity. Huned Contractor presents a photo-feature on the palace.

Covering a sprawling expanse of 19 acres on the Pune-Ahmednagar Road is the palatial Aga Khan Palace. But though it was built as a majestic palace fit for a king to reside, it is known more as the place where the father of the nation, Mahatma Gandhi, was incarcerated during the time of British rule. The Aga Khan Palace was built by Sultan Muhammed Shah.
The Aga Khan Palace has Italian arches and the building comprises five halls. Now considered a monument of national interest, it was taken over by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) in 2003 and functions as the headquarters of the Gandhi National Memorial Society. It took five years and an estimated budget of Rs 12 lakhs to complete this palace. The area of the ground floor is 1,756 sq meters and that of the first floor is 1,080 sq meters, whereas the second floor has a construction of 445 sq meters. The speciality of this structure is its corridor of 2.5 meters around the entire building. Prince Karim Aga Khan donated this palace to the Gandhi Smarak Samittee in 1972.
The palace is surrounded on all sides by spacious lawns that are maintained by the Parks & Gardens Organisation.

The samadhis of Kasturba Gandhi and Mahadeobhai Desai. One of the biggest setbacks that Mahatma Gandhi faced was the death of Mahadeobhai on August 15, 1942 due to heart attack just five days after they were brought here. It is said that Mahatma Gandhi was by the bedside of his secretary for long hours and kept saying, “If only he would open his eyes and look at me, he won’t go.” But Mahadeobhai never opened his eyes. After his death, the British authorities brought here a lorry full of police constables and Brahmin priests to take away the body for cremation. However, Mahatma Gandhi refused to hand over the body, saying, “How can a father give away the body of his son to strangers?” Finally, the authorities relented and Mahatma Gandhi performed the last rites on the palace premises. Kasturba, who married Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi in 1882, became a political activist fighting for civil rights and Indian independence from the British. She suffered from chronic bronchitis due to complications at birth. In January 1944, she suffered two heart attacks and was confined to her bed much of the time. She later responded to traditional Indian medicine, recovering enough by the second week of February to sit on the verandah in a wheelchair for short periods. However, there was a relapse and she died on February 22, 1944.

One of the most impressive tableaus is that of Mahatma Gandhi leading a protest march against the British. The room housing this also has many photographs of Mahatma Gandhi’s work at the Sewagram, a small village located about 8 kms from Wardha in Maharashtra.
It now serves as an archive of a number of photos and portraits depicting glimpses from the life of Mahatma Gandhi and other personalities of the Indian freedom struggle.

Some of Mahatma Gandhi’s ashes have been laid to rest here.
Mahatma Gandhi stayed in this room with Kasturba Gandhi and the room has been preserved with some of the items used by them such as the charkha, the sandals and other personal belongings. Visitors are not allowed into this room and can only see it through a glass-fronted door.

It is on the ground floor of this majestic building that Mahatma Gandhi and others were given independent rooms to stay in. The second and third floors have been unused and cordoned off for visitors.
Immaculately maintained, the premise houses several administrative blocks and training halls where women empowerment is the core of all the programmes and courses held here.

A view of the various rooms adjacent to each other on the ground floor.

The Gandhi National Memorial Society now offers many services in the Gandhian spirit which include training programmes for house helpers and khadi weavers. There is also a sale outlet near the samadhi which stocks spices, pickles, khadi kurtas, books and souvenirs for visitors to buy.
Even if most tourists prefer to visit Matheran or Mahabaleshwar to get a feel of the salubrious environment offered by these hill-stations, a visit to Mhaismal near Aurangabad can evoke the same feelings, and in fact much more because here nature has remained unspoilt and so has its typical rural atmosphere, says Chandrashekhar S. Jaiswal.
It is now almost the last lap of your journey to the most flocked hill-station of central Maharashtra and revelations already abound. The characteristic change in the surroundings and the aura promise you a respite from the material world. A fresh drizzle has just cast its magic spell on the verdant hue of the meadows, exposing the magnificence of Mhaismal.

Tableaus of medieval cenotaphs line the road and stand out in their mossy shades, reminding you of a great civilization that existed here. These monuments bring out the explorer archaeologist in you to stand and gaze. No sooner have you passed this that you witness a cultural landscape so bizarre that you start losing yourself to the mesmerising charm of the surroundings. Enchanting, rejuvenating and refreshing you with its salubrious surroundings, this hill-station is an obsession difficult to overcome.

**Marathwada’s Jewel**

Mhaismal is a part of the extreme eastern limits of the Sahyadari ranges with its unique
mountain topography. The plateau of the hill-station is spread out evenly on protruding landforms in various directions. The tarmac streaks the plateau in almost two equal halves and runs all throughout to the extreme dead-end north.

About 37 km from the urban centre of Aurangabad and 12 km from the eternal town of Khuldabad is this temperate place of sheer indulgence - an engagement with nature. Records tell us that the temperature has rarely exceeded the 32 degree Celsius mark while the lowest averages to about 7 degree Celsius, making it a year-round destination. However, the real charm of this quaint little place is its monsoon mood. With nature’s bounty at its fullest, it’s an open spa under the sky to the beholder.

Picturesque spaces, verdant valleys, serene atmosphere and sylvan surroundings are the intangible attributes that make Mhaismal one of the most visited hilly terrains of this part of Maharashtra. It’s no wonder then that it is colloquially known as the ‘Mahableshwar of Marathwada’. Marathwada is the provincial division of Maharashtra comprising eight districts, with Aurangabad as its capital.

**Mythological Connection**

Originally Maheshmal to the village folks, meaning hill ranges of Shiva, Mhaismal today is a testimony to the remnants of an ancient Shiva temple. Influenced by this, the area has developed its own mythological folklore. Local legend has it that one day Shiva, in a game of Chaturanga, lost to Parvati. Shiva being a habitual loser, the damsel attendants of Parvati teased him for that. Known for his temper, Shiva left Parvati and headed to the nearby forest. Narad Muni, the solution provider, is said to have located Shiva. He advised Parvati not to disturb Shiva for he was in deep meditation, in what are now...
the Mhaismal ranges. Parvati disguised herself as a tribal woman, Girija, adorned with headgear and ornaments from tip to toe and started serving Shiva.

Emerging from his deep meditation and seeing the beauty of Girija he fell for her charms and asked for her hand in marriage. She retracted, but soon agreed with the condition that Shiva must first take Parvati to the highest level on the Kailasa. On getting an assurance she revealed herself as an embodiment of Parvati. An astonished Shiva adored his wife’s winning over him and lived there along with her for some time. The place of her revelation is the ‘gaondari’, goddess Girija’s old temple adjacent to the village. However, the modern day temple is refurbished out of an old one at the same place. Girija is the mother deity of Marathwada and thousands throng for her blessings during the Chaitra Poornima, when a village fair is held every year. Named after the goddess is the river
Girija that originates from the gaondari temple. Besides the temple of Girija is the source of yet another river, Yelganga, which gave Ellora its ancient name Yelapur.

**Sights and Sounds**

Found on this oasis is its unique flora and fauna, a biodiversity holding much of the repository of the flora of the region. This is in fact nature’s own botanical garden. The abundance of natural places here has attracted several for the very fact that each glance is a tantalizing one. The water bodies; the landforms; the skyline; a wonderful spectrum of colours; the earth; the sunshine; the jungle; the culture; the unique lifestyle of the inhabitants; a mindset of simplicity; the tolerance; a modern tourist ambience; a curious mix of the old and new; all these elements are interwoven into a lovely fabric that sets free the Marco Polo in you.

The British never discovered Mhaismal as it was then under the Hyderabad State, else you could have seen some gothic architecture on the lines of Scottish Highlands here too. Nevertheless, be ready to get dazzled with a few cottages resembling the British countryside. The ‘First House’ of the Printers’ family is one of them.

When it comes to landscapic views, Mhaismal should rank among the best in the state. The main view point overlooks a horizon of over 30 km with neatly laid farms, hamlets and forest patches at regular intervals. This is managed through the efforts of a joint forest management committee. The forest department of Maharashtra has had Mhaismal on its map as an ecotourism destination for long, and has put here on show their best model of the region. As such, scenic sights all around make for a major tourist attraction of this hill-station. Do not miss, in particular, the ones near the gigantic TV tower, offering you a panoramic view of a sub-plateau level dotted with intermittent lakes and ponds.

**Responsible Tourism**

- Visitors are requested not to collect plant, insect or rock specimen.
- Smoking, spitting and littering within the hill station of Mhaismal is strictly prohibited. Please carry back all your litter back in your bag home for safe and easy disposal.
- Please do not go very close to water bodies as they may be deeper than you thought.
- Without the permission of the Forest Department of Maharashtra do not venture into the wilderness.
- Visitors who misbehave with other visitors, especially women tourists will be dealt strictly as per law.
- Do not honk
- Try to park your vehicle at the Girija temple area, and walk all the way up to the Mhaismal viewpoints...let Mhaismal become vehicle free.
- Do not scream, yell, play loud music.....there are others who have come to seek solitude.

*The writer is Senior Manager with Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation and can be reached at shekmin@gmail.com.*

**Beautiful lake around the hills**
Distance from Mumbai: 360 kms
Mhaismal is situated at an altitude of 1,067 meters. On the way are Ellora Caves, Grishneshwar Temple and Devgiri Fort.

How to reach:
By Air: The nearest airport is at Aurangabad.
By Rail: The nearest railway station is at Aurangabad.
By Road: Mhaismal is located at a distance of 37 Kms from Aurangabad, 262 Kms from Pune, 587 Kms each from Nagpur and Hyderabad, 362 Kms from Solapur.

Where to stay:
There are a few lodgings at Mhaismal and also some bed and breakfast. Most visitors prefer to stay at Aurangabad. Aurangabad caters to all classes of visitors and has an array of star category and budget accommodations along with economical lodging. MTDC has a Holiday resort in Aurangabad, which can be booked by dialing 0240 2331513 or reserving online on www.maharashtra tourism.gov.in

When to go:
Best time to visit is July to January. Monsoon is typically the best. However it’s a year round destination.

What to eat:
Mhaismal caters to all classes of visitors and has a few eateries. MTDC has a restaurant in Ellora (15 kms), which can be booked by dialing 02437 24441.

A Lot to Explore
Forest trails and walks have recently gained popularity with visitors choosing to take the road less travelled. Rivulets, streams, wildflower beds, dancing butterflies, brooks, water cascades all contribute to the heavenly charm here. Lakes strew the terrain of Mhaismal and though water-sports are not allowed, tourists do indulge in waterfront fun and frolic by losing themselves to the waves which obliterate the occupational stress in them. Meanwhile, the watchtowers, forest lodges and modern-day accommodation are all set to welcome you.

A newly built temple of Lord Balaji mimicking the one at Tirumala draws the faithful. On the other hand, the settlement of the hamlet of Mhaismal is a rich display of traditional Indian village life and a stroll around is very much recommended. Placed suitably on a mound the village is one of the least populated in the region, making it more rural in flavour than most hill-stations. Snaky roads uplift you to this bewildering nature’s workshop ready to metamorphose you. Once upgraded, a walk into the clouds would then become an experience of a lifetime. With some more sustainable practices and ecotourism, Mhaismal is sure to join the league of Matheran and Mahabaleshwar. So, indulge yourself! Let the magic of nature work on you. In short, get Mhaismalised!

Excursions:
- UNESCO World Heritage site of Ellora is 15 kms from Mhaismal.
- Khuldabad - the medieval town, famed for Emperor Aurangzeb’s tomb and Bhadra Maruti temple is 12 kms enroute to Aurangabad.
- Grishneshwar temple, the last of the twelve Jyotirlingas is 16 kms from Mhaismal.
- Gautala, Wild life Sanctuary is 48 kms from Mhaismal, with a rich biodiverse forest.
- Pitalkhora, some of the earliest Buddhist caves in Maharashtra, are located 51 Kms away.
Kolhapur is a city that beckons people for various reasons. Some visit it to pray at its many temples; some halt here en route to Goa; some use it as a base to explore Panhala; and some are attracted to it for its fine cuisine. Invariably though, most of them buy Kolhapuri chappals when they go out shopping. Khursheed Dinshaw therefore takes us to Kolhapur to find out what makes these chappals a global brand.
If Kolhapur in Maharashtra is synonymous with the fiery ‘tamda rassa’ (red curry), ‘pan-dhara rassa’ (white curry) and the ‘sukka’ (dry) mutton as also its wrestlers, the temple of Mahalaxmi and the fort at Panhala, the chappals made here are quite on the top of the list too. In fact, Kolhapuri chappals, as they are known, immediately conjure up an image of either dainty or masculine chappals made out of light or dark brown leather with or without a little tuft of red near the toe. As they say, there is no mistaking a Kolhapuri chappal, such being its unique identity. Thanks to the expansion of the trade and the famous footwear being an Indian product for export, the four historic styles in chappals that were named after the place of origin of their production namely Kurundwadi, Kapashi, Meharban and Kolhapuri are all made in Kolhapur. Here, the Shivaji Market has a lane known as Chappal Galli, where both traditional as well as contemporary designs are marketed.

**Nothing Beats Leather**

A long time ago, when footwear wasn’t fussy and design was a response to utility, the now well-known Kolhapuri chappals made
Men are responsible for 55 per cent of the workmanship, while women of course account for the remainder. Intricate and delicate work, like leather stitching on upper straps, weaving, making leather plaits (three 1 mm plaits entwined into a single one) and ornament fixing, is done by the latter.

from fibre or tissue, including cloth that has elasticity, has an adverse effect on the body. Rubber footwear has led to eye and orthopaedic problems,” opines Vijay Kadam who is a fourth-generation Kolhapuri chappal maker and runs Kolhapur’s oldest chappal centre, Adarsh Charmudayog Centre. He also mentions that this craft is no longer a strictly hereditary privilege; any one keen and with potential can be taught Kolhapuri chappal making from scratch in approximately three years.

Evolving from the basic features of a simple wooden base and toe (similar to that worn by sadhus), they went on to become footwear with a hard leather sole that would bend a bit with use, helping the farmer to walk in muddy areas with the two braided straps at the big and small toes holding the chappal in place. Those for kings had a softer sole and a lot of decorative work on them.

It did not stop there but went on to respond to the needs of wearers, innovating along the way and involving a number of skilled workers, with expertise being passed on traditionally through generations. Men are responsible for 55 per cent of the workmanship, while women of course account for the remainder. Intricate and delicate work, like leather stitching on upper straps, weaving, making leather plaits (three 1 mm plaits entwined into a single one) and ornament fixing, is done by the latter. Leather from a buffalo is used for the sole and from a bullock to create the in-sole. The latter is also used to create lightweight chappals. In fact, sheepskin is often used for the belt and lining.

An Intricate Craft
There are two categories of workmen involved in the manufacturing process - tanners and cobbler, both inter-dependent on each other. Tanners take raw hides from the villagers after the natural death of cattle like buffaloes and bullocks. These hides are then soaked in a tank of water and calcium carbonate (chuna), shaved by hand and cleaned with curved knives before sending them to be tanned with water and vegetable tan, which is extracted from the bark of babool and hirda seeds. The hirda seeds that give the dominant golden colour to the chappals are today partially ground in a mechanical grinder, whereas formerly they were ground by hand. Organic tan is known to be good for the human body. Apart from cooling the feet, it is also non-allergic and durable.

The process of tanning is laborious and involves the hide being stitched with long
leaves, the flesh side inwards, and the bottom closed with a rope. Vertically hung bags are filled with this tanning liquid and the lower half is immersed in a long and narrow pit that collects the water and tanning liquid that drains out from the bags. This mixture of tanning liquid and water is reused by pumping it through a plastic pipe. For around a month they are kept this way, turning them upside down and filling them again with tanning liquid so that the entire bag gets tanned uniformly. A leather bucket is used, as a metal one will affect the chemistry causing the leather to develop dark patches. After drying, the finishing touches include cleaning the flesh side so that the tanned leather has an even thickness.

A modern tannery uses rotating drums; oil sprayers; and polishing and sanding wheels. However, since the machines are not highly developed, a lot of manual labour is still involved. Once the hide has been cleaned and tanned, skilled cobblers take over. They use a variety of tools such as knives (including half-moon ones), awls, stamps, waxes, brushes, eyelets and thread. The tools that are made of steel are dangerously sharp so new apprentices are taught how to use them for a minimum of six months before they actually start working. Only after working for practically two years on the template, thickness of the leather, craftsmanship, fitting, shaping, upper finishing, making and colouring of the entire finished product, is the apprentice accepted as skilled.

Assembly Line Process
For chappal making, skilled workers sit in a line on the floor with their legs folded in a lotus position, their work table comprising a thick stone or wooden slab, resembling a human assembly line. The first worker draws the sole patterns on the hide and cuts them using his half-moon knife. The upper sole has side flaps for fixing the top straps, while the bottom sole is normally shaped. This is passed on to the next worker who sticks the top and bottom soles, beating the two parts with a country hammer. The heel is attached by placing pieces of goatskin between the bottom sole and the hard leather of the base of the heel.

When stitching, an awl dipped in oil is used to make small cuts along the edges. String made from thin goatskin (or durable hide from the tail) is passed through these cuts. This then leads to the next step – stamping, which is done between two lines drawn with a compass inside the stitching. The chappals are oiled to increase their strength and coolness. Though castor oil is the best for this process, any vegetable oil that makes the chappal stiff (with the exception of coconut oil) is used.

In the next step, cuts are made in the side flaps and upper sole to attach the big toe and main support strap. If the chappal model has one or two braided strips coming from the upper straps into the gaps between the big and small toes, then extra cuts are made. The last worker stamps the borders and the number of the size, and makes finishing cuts around the soles. Some chappals are allowed to retain their natural dark brown leather colour whilst others are dyed yellow or red with a brush and water-soluble powders.
providing convenience and protection. The hollow soles of these chappals are filled with vinchu seed, giving them a crackling sound with every step and they are normally used to scare away snakes and scorpions in the fields. Around 70 seeds are used in a single shetkari chappal and it is oiled with groundnut oil. Then there are chappals made for local use, which last for about 10 months. Their standard design consists of a single toe strap. The thickness of the sole is 4-6 mm. Some chappals are made with a double strap too. Others are made for walking on carpets. These are extremely soft, with a thin sole and have been inspired by the Kolhapuri chappals worn by queens while they walked on their palace carpets. Chappals weighing 100 grams are known as ‘bed to bath’ chappals, while those weighing 3 kg are used by farmers and wrestlers.

Cottage Industry
Kolhapuri chappal making is a cottage industry where the family works together; small kids play with the chappals using them as an alternative to toys. Once an order that includes the quantity, design and size is given to them, the men and women of the house start work on their individual area of expertise. They work in the comfort of their home with flexible working hours. One lady puts it aptly, “After dinner I can again sit and make some leather plaits.”

Delicate work like decorating the upper straps with zari (gold cord) strips and gota (pompoms); braiding the leather to make an eight-strand flat braided strip and the usual three veni (plait) braid; using different punches to cut flower designs; using stamps to carve fine lines; and making eyelets is done by the women. To cater to changing needs, chappals now have softer soles and the upper and lower side flaps are machine-stitched using white plastic thread. However, not a single iron nail is used in the entire manufacturing process of these chappals.

A Wide Portfolio
The basic design of the chappal has one belt and one toe and its speciality is the side cover. Today, around 85 designs of this chappal are available. Shetkari chappals, which cater to farmers, are heavy, with some of them producing a crackling sound, while others are extra thick and with added support. A few of their designs are made in the form of sandals, providing convenience and protection. The hollow soles of these chappals are filled with vinchu seed, giving them a crackling sound with every step and they are normally used to scare away snakes and scorpions in the fields. Around 70 seeds are used in a single shetkari chappal and it is oiled with groundnut oil.

Then there are chappals made for local use, which last for about 10 months. Their standard design consists of a single toe strap. The thickness of the sole is 4-6 mm. Some chappals are made with a double strap too. Others are made for walking on carpets. These are extremely soft, with a thin sole and have been inspired by the Kolhapuri chappals worn by queens while they walked on their palace carpets. Chappals weighing 100 grams are known as ‘bed to bath’ chappals, while those weighing 3 kg are used by farmers and wrestlers.

Present Day Challenges
Though the demand for the Kolhapuri chappals has increased, the supply of leather has reduced. Previously only cattle were used to plough the fields. But with mechanisation, animals have been replaced by tractors, thus leading to a drop in the supply of raw hides. “Even though finished leather goods are not exported outside India, processed leather, which is tanned, is. This is also affecting our business because if our raw material, in the form of leather, is not top quality, then naturally the finished products are not top-class either. It becomes difficult and costly to cater to foreign standards as our material, quality and technical expertise suffers. By modernising this craft, its hastkala (beautiful handwork) would disappear,” says Vijay Kadam woefully.

The author is a freelance lifestyle journalist whose forte is feature writing with a focus on travel, people, health, trends, culture, food and heritage and can be reached at khursheeddinshaw@hotmail.com
Sandcastles unlimited

Sriwardhan

With 720 km of coastal line, the majestic blue sea and the white sands, this is what you would call nature’s art. With unlimited reasons like these, it’s only fair to say one trip is just not enough.
The fortification of ‘O Morro de Chaul’

Korlai Fort

Mayur Thakare  |  Photographs © Mayur Thakare, Suhas Asnikar

In times past, forts served as bastions of war with strongly pitched armies on either side of its mammoth walls. Today, they serve as not only destinations of tourist interest but also as links to history. Mayur Thakare provides here an account of the fort of Korlai which was witness to aggression from a lineage of rulers.
A fortification that stretches for more than half a km length on top of a hillock with sea on three sides, an enclosing high parapet wall with 305 battlements for guns, 8 bastions and 4 entrances and a curious blend of local and Portuguese architecture. Surely, that’s interesting statistics for any monument - in this case, a fort in Maharashtra. Korlai Fort is a Nizamshahi-Portuguese fortification in the town of Korlai. The fort was built on a rocky ridge, ‘O Morro de Chaul’. In its heyday, the fort protected the Revdanda creek while also guarding its age old companion on the opposite side of the Kundalika river - Revdanda fort. Though the fort owes its origin primarily to the Ahmednagar Sultanate, vestiges of the Portuguese occupation are manifested in the distinct dialect of the Korlai villages’ inhabitants which is a Portuguese Creole.

The History

It was the year 1556. Emperor Burhan Nizam Shah I, who had granted the Portuguese a site on the shores of river Kundalika at Revdanda (presently in Alibag taluka, Raigad) breathed his last. With his death ended an era marked with fragile relations, swinging from friendship to hostility, between the Portuguese and the Ahmednagar Sultanate. Francisco Barreto, the then Portuguese governor, worried about new political developments after the accession of Hussain Nizam Shah I, decided to fortify the rocky ridge called ‘O Morro de Chaul’ just protruding in the north opposite the Revdanda Fort to secure the mouth of the creek and also the city. The Portuguese sent a delegation with a proposal to fortify Morro to Hussain Nizam Shah, who was furious with the mere thought of the Portuguese fortifying the ridge, which could undermine his authority to levy tax on maritime merchandise in the only international port under his dominion. He also saw this as a direct challenge to his suzerainty.
Needless to say, this proposal did not go down well in Ahmednagar. In a fit of rage, according to Portuguese chroniclers, the emperor ordered the arrest of the Portuguese ambassador and sent his general, Fateh Khan, with a body of able engineers and a large troop to strengthen the Korlai ridge as soon as possible, with instructions not to harass the Portuguese at Revdanda Fort and those who were settled in the city of Chaul. Once the news reached Revdanda, Garcia Rodrigues de Tavora, the governor of Chaul, asked the Portuguese viceroy to send reinforcements, who first sent a fleet under Alvaro Peres Souto Maior and later personally reached the battlefield with 4,000 troops. Not a single day passed without the Sultanate workers and soldiers deployed at Korlai for its fortification facing a lethal volley of shells and bullets fired by the Portuguese from the Revdanda Fort, creek, and the sea surrounding the Korlai ridge. Despite such strong opposition, a good portion of the fortification work was completed by then.

The Nizamshahi emperor had to contend with more than just the Portuguese, as he had problems with the Bijapur Sultanate as well as the Mughals. Thus, he soon wanted peace on the Portuguese front, which he made by announcing his friendship with the king of Portugal through his courtiers, and that he would not revoke the grants that his predecessor had bestowed on the Portuguese at Revdanda. Thus, both sides came to be on favourable terms, the most important being to leave the Korlai ridge as it was without any intervention.

However, peace did not last for long. By 1570-71, the grand alliance of the Ahmednagar and Bijapur Sultanate with the naval assistance of Samorin of Calicut was up against the Portuguese. This time, the Nizamshahi emperor, Murtaza Nizam Shah I, himself took command of the battle front and descended at Chaul to attack the Portuguese fort at Revdanda with an army of 1,50,000 men, supported by powerful artillery, according to Portuguese sources. The siege and attack on Revdanda Fort continued for eight months, but without success owing to the Ahmednagar Sultanate’s undisciplined military tactics, lack of siege equipment, factions in its own camps, and the growing rivalry with the Bijapur Sultanate. Once again, peace was concluded in July, 1571 between the Portuguese and the Ahmednagar Sultanate. It was this brute assault on Revdanda that prompted the Portuguese to fortify the city and take adequate measures for its protection.

Once again, peace was not fully restored. As the days passed, the Ahmednagar Sultanate increased its presence on Korlai ridge and in the process fortified it and garrisoned it with a large number of troops. It also became their port centre from where they traded. Obviously, from such an advantageous position,
they often shot at sea traffic that entered the river Kundalika and on the Revdanda Fort, greatly troubling the Portuguese. By 1594, the situation was much worse with both parties baying for each other’s blood. To add fuel to the fire, troops of the Ahmednagar Sultanate raised havoc in the town and village of the Portuguese’s Province of the North by their constant raids and tried to besiege Revdanda Fort.

**Portuguese Interlude**

To move towards a decisive victory, Alvaro de Abranches, the Portuguese captain of the Revdanda Fort, crossed the river with troops in small boats and attacked the Morro Fort on September 2, 1594. After much bloodshed, the Portuguese were able to take control of the fort. The Nizamshahi commander of Morro Fort, Farhad Khan, was imprisoned by the Portuguese. Barring some parts of the fort, the Portuguese demolished most of the fortifications. The victory over Morro Fort was one of the last significant achievements in the Portuguese-controlled Province of the North. Such was its importance that according to some sources, the Portuguese government bestowed a right to select an ‘ouvidor’ (judge/magistrate) of choice upon the residents of Chaul for their immense bravery shown in the attack.

Once under Portuguese control, the Korlai ridge was not subjected to major construction activities till 1646 when some attacks from regional powers forced them to begin fortifying the ridge. On the instructions of the then Portuguese viceroy, D. Felipe Mascarenhas, work started in the year 1646 when Fernao Miranda Henriques was the captain of Chaul. The work took until the year 1680 to complete, when Morro Fort was under the captaincy of Christorao d’Abreu d’Azevedo.

The overall project consisted of joining by wall the older Nizamshahi works like the sea bastion and the main fortification at the highest point of the ridge called Tower of Resistance and extending it further south. This southern portion was a part of a Portuguese castle which consisted of a chapel, the captain’s residence, magazines, and other auxiliary structures. The fortification was tuned according to the levels of the ridge and thus was stretched for a distance of approximately 862 meters north to south with an average width of 28 meters. Architecturally, it was a curious blend of the regional and Portuguese style as it was an extended version of the original Nizamshahi fortification.

**Later Years**

In 1634, 50 soldiers headed by a captain and assisted by one constable were deployed at Morro Fort. It was amply supplied with guns too. As per a 1635 entry, the Holy Cross bastion was provided with five cannons, 20 soldiers, and two bombardiers. Besides this troop especially reserved for Morro, one detachment of soldiers was sent daily from Revdanda Fort. The garrison had a boat driven by seven rowers. Being located at a strategic location commanding the entrance of river Kundalika, Morro Fort exerted great influence in regulating sea traffic and safeguarding Revdanda Fort. Even in 1635, one of the ammunition stores at Morro Fort was reserved especially for Revdanda. The Por-
tuguese state used to spend about Serafins 3,426 and Reis 20 a year for the maintenance of the fort, payment of troops, provisions, etc. Till 1739, no war of special importance took place at Morro Fort except a short, unsuccessful siege and attack by the Maratha king Sambhaji during his expedition against the Portuguese in 1683-84.

**Maratha Control**

In 1739, the Portuguese’ Province of the North was lost to the Marathas headed by Chimaji Appa, the younger brother of Peshwa Bajirao I. The Portuguese had only Diu, Daman, Revdanda and Morro in their control. Unable to retain such large fortifications, the Portuguese offered them to the Siddis and the British, who also did not want to garrison them for lack of resources. The British, being the negotiators for talks between the Portuguese and the Marathas, offered Revdanda and Morro to the Peshwa with the hope of retaining their friendship and to get concessions in articles of the treaty they hoped to sign. After much deliberation, the treaty was concluded with the Peshwas on September 18, 1740, at Pune.

The eleventh article of the treaty sealed the fate of Revdanda and Morro. It was decided that when the Maratha forces left Cuncolim and Aaslon in Goa, the forts of Revdanda and Morro would be handed over to Maratha forces with their cannons and ammunition. Till then, British forces had to guard Revdanda and Morro while the Maratha forces stayed at St. John Fields on the outskirts of Revdanda Fort. The overall procedure was under the watch of Captain James Inchbird. As decided, the Marathas handed over Cuncolim and Aaslon to the Portuguese on November 25, 1740 while the forts of Revdanda and Morro passed to the Marathas on December 19, 1740.

During the Maratha control of Korlai Fort, no significant architectural activities were undertaken except the construction of some small temples inside the fort and re-naming of the bastions. The bastions of Korlai Fort were renamed Pushti, Ganesh, Paschim, Devi, Chauburji and Pan during this time. In 1818, after the downfall of the Maratha state, the British became the masters of this fort.

**The Layout**

The fort had eight bastions and four entrances. Inside, the architectural arrangement was unique with the fortification being compartmentalized into eight quarters of irregular size, each with its own arched entrance built in European style with steps and equipped with guns. Thus befitting the inscriptions it displayed during the Nizamshahi period boasting of its invincibility, the Portuguese defense arrangements made a bitter fight necessary in every quarter of the fort if anyone wanted to win it. No doubt, seeing the ge-

The author would like to thank the Archaeological Survey of India, Mumbai Circle

The author is Circle Officer, Competent Authority Office (Archaeological Survey of India, Mumbai Circle), Ministry of Culture, Government of India. Contact details: St. George Fort, St. George Hospital Campus, Near C.S.T, Mumbai - 400 022.

Author can be reached at meluhha_kemet@yahoo.co.in
The geographical location and space of the fort, one wonders whether the same arrangements were kept during the Nizamshahi period. Each bastion had a parapet wall one-and-half meters high, and most were named after Christian saints such as Holy Cross, Knight, Sam Thiago, Sam Francisco Xavier, Sam Pedro, Sam Ignacio, Sam Phillippe, and others. There were water reservoirs inside the fort.

The highest portion of the fort had the residence of the captain, ammunition stores, storages, and a chapel. This chapel, dedicated to Our Lady of Good Voyages, administered by Franciscans in 1636 consisted of an altar made of stone and mortar with the nave being covered by a straw-thatched roof and walls made of bamboo mats and palm leaves. In a later period, the whole chapel was turned into a magnificent stone-arched building showing typical characteristics of Province of the North religious structures. Mass was performed in the chapel on every Sunday and holiday. The chapel became the major landmark of Morro, as British traveller A. Hamilton wrote, in 1744, that one can know about Chaul Moar by the white church built on it which can be seen from five to six leagues’ distance from the sea. Apart from Hamilton, French traveller M. de Thevenot visited Chaul in January 1666 and he mentions Korlai as ‘Morro dil Ciual’. Italian traveller Dr. John Francis Gemelli Careri, who was in Chaul on February 22, 1695, refers to Korlai as ‘El Morro’ in his writing.

Visiting Korlai

Korlai village is at a distance of 25 kms from Alibag. State transport buses and private six-seater rickshaws regularly run from Alibag to Korlai. A good motorable road from Alibag en route to Murud takes a visitor to Korlai, where the fort still stands in its full majesty. The remains of the fort are well preserved, carrying signatures of Nizamshahi, Portuguese and Maratha periods. Visitors can climb up to the fort in about 20 minutes via steps from two sides - the east and the west. The western approach starts from a modern lighthouse. The eastern approach has a good view of the river Kundalika and the Revdanda Fort. The arched entrance on the east side resembles the regional Deccan-style flanked by a circular bastion. This entrance has a worn-out coat of arms on it.

Steps inside lead to the highest point of the fort where remains of a chapel dedicated to Our Lady of Good Voyages and the residence of the captain are situated. Going further south, at the back of the chapel are the remains of the castle-cum-fortification which display Portuguese inscriptions at its entrance. Further south leads to twin bastions which mark the end of fortifications and presents a pleasant view of Korlai village. The entire southern premise is strewn with cannons which guarded the fort once upon a time. While going northward, visitors can see another inscription at its entrance which tells about the commencement of fortification and its completion.

The inscription displays a coat of arms with a shield, the Portuguese stars in the centre and seven castles around. One inscribed slab lies on the ground in this section of the fort. In the next quarter, one can see Maratha period temples and underground water tanks. From here onwards, visitors go through five sections of the fort, each provided by a European-styled arched entrance. Till the last section, i.e. the Holy Cross Bastion, fortifications follow the contours of the ridge. The quarters of the garrison are also in this section. There are two ways out from this section - to the east which takes us to a jetty and to the west to the seaside.

Though former days of war, diplomacy and fame are gone, the blue Arabian Sea laps at its feet with a quiet village at its back harkening the glories of past. The village still carries the identity of its Portuguese past where the native Christian population speaks Portuguese Creole, known as Korlai Portuguese Creole. This Creole is a curious mixture of Marathi and Portuguese words. A lighthouse at the foot of Korlai Fort is a delight to visit. There is another Church, Mount Carmel, at the outskirts of the village. This church has some ancient Portuguese relics which might have been taken away from the chapel in the fort. Other places of tourist interest near the Korlai Fort are Revdanda Fort, Chaul and Alibag.

Excursions:

- The beautiful beach of Kashid is only 12.5 kms from Korlai.
- The famous sea fort of Janjira is 30 km to the south of Korlai, near Murud.
- The Karnala Bird Sanctuary is roughly 70 km away, towards Panvel.
An Indologist Par Excellence

Bharat Ratna MM Dr. P. V. Kane

Dr. Ambarish Khare | Photographs © Sachin Naik
Courtesy: Dr. Shantaram Kane, Sharda Paranjpe, Vijaya Kale, Vijay Rikame, The Asiatic Society of Mumbai

It is not often that one comes across stories of people who have had a strong vision and mission guiding their entire life. Dr. Pandurang Vaman Kane is one such person who never let his interest in research fade the slightest. Born in a village called Pedhem near Chipilun in the Ratnagiri district of Maharashtra on May 7, 1880, he completed his schooling at Dapoli in S.P.G. Mission’s English School. Born in a priestly family, he was well-acquainted with Sanskrit right from his childhood. He had learnt by rote the 400 verses of the famous Sanskrit thesaurus, ‘Naamalingaasrama’ or ‘Amarakosha’, when he was just 12 years old. He passed his matriculation examination in 1897 and then proceeded to join Wilson College, Bombay. Completing his B.A with Sanskrit, he was awarded the illustrious Bhau Daji Prize. He also went on to get a degree in Law with a first class in 1902, followed by M.A in Sanskrit and English in 1903.

Due to the urgent domestic need of earning money he took on a job as an assistant teacher in the government high school of Ratnagiri in 1904. Further, he received the coveted Mandlik Gold Medal of Bombay University for his essay on Aryan manners and morals depicted in the ‘Ramayana’ and the ‘Mahabharata’, submitted in 1905. He was rewarded with the same medal again in 1906 for his essay on the history of Alamkara literature. At around this time, he requested for a transfer to the Elphinstone High School and started teaching there from 1907. He continued his studies in law, thereby procuring a second LL.B. in 1908. In 1909, he was appointed Professor of Sanskrit in the Elphinstone College.

From Academics to Law

A career in academics was what seemed destined for Dr. Kane. He, however, resigned from the job soon, opting instead for a practice in law on the Appellate side (a court to which appeals are made on points of law resulting from the judgment of a lower court) of the High Court of Bombay. In the meantime, he published two books, ‘Gadyaavali’ and ‘Sahityadaprpana’ in the following two years. In 1911, he registered himself as Vakil of the High Court and also obtained a post-graduation degree in law, specializing in Hindu and Mohammedan Law in the same year. While concentrating on his blossoming practice as a lawyer, he managed to deliver six Wilson Philological Lectures on Sanskrit, Prakrit and allied languages in the Bombay University during the next three years. The University then appointed him as a Springel Research Scholar in 1915.

While engaged with his studies, he worked on the Ancient Geography of Maharashtra and from 1917 to 1928 offered his services to the Government Law College as Professor of Law. He soon received fame from the Bar as well as the Bench as an eminent and promising lawyer working in Hindu Law. The judiciary recognised him especially for his interpretations of the original law texts in Sanskrit. However, this full-fledged career in law could not restrict Kane from his pursuits in Indology. He used to visit the library of the
Dr. Kane was also appointed the president to his research in Dharmashastra. After two years, however, Dr. Kane declined to assume the post of the Vice Chancellor in 1947. State, B. G. Kher, persuaded Dr. Kane to assist or any of today's modern publishing assistants, stenographers, documentation assistants or any of today's modern publishing technology.

**Abiding Interest in Indology**

On the request of the renowned Orientalist Sylvain Levi of France, Dr. Kane brought out, in 1923, the second edition of the ‘Sahityadarpana’ – an introduction dealing with Sanskrit poetics in a thesis of 177 pages. This was enlarged to 423 pages in 1951 and was subsequently published as a separate volume in 1961. Dr. Kane’s research of the Dharmastraha, now considered as his magnum opus, actually began in 1911 while editing the ‘Vyavahaaramayukha’ on the advice of Prof. S. R. Bhandarkar, one of the general editors of the Bombay Government Sanskrit Series. This edition, published in 1926, brought him the reputation of an authority in the field of textual criticism. The first volume of ‘History of Dharmastraha’ was published in 1930. The initial objective was to publish the work in two volumes but this later led to a colossal series of five volumes.

Led by a brief historical account in the first volume, the second one published in 1941 covered topics like Varna, ashrama system and Samskaras. The third volume in 1947 dealt with Rajadharma, Vyavahara and Sadachara. Dr. Kane was 67 years old at that time. The fourth volume published in 1953 took into account all the works and manuscripts related to the Dharmastraha. The final volume appeared in two parts: first in 1959 and the second in 1962. He had by then crossed the 82nd year of his life. It is important to note here that all the work done over the years was without having the support of research assistants, stenographers, documentation assistants or any of today’s modern publishing technology.

**Accolades Aplenty**

Over the course of his career, Dr. Kane received many honours because of his monumental work and research in ancient Indian culture. He was a Fellow of the University of Bombay from 1919 to 1928; was awarded the Campbell Memorial Gold Medal in 1941 by the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society and also as served as its Vice President. He was conferred the prestigious title of ‘Mahamahopadhyaya’ by the British Government and Honorary D.Litt. by Allahabad University in 1942. The then Chief Minister of Bombay State, B. G. Kher, persuaded Dr. Kane to assume the post of the Vice Chancellor in 1947. After two years, however, Dr. Kane declined to continue so that he could devote more time to his research in Dharmastraha.

Dr. Kane was also appointed the president of the All India Oriental Conference held in Nagpur in 1946 and the Indian History Congress at Waltair in 1953. He was a member of a delegation sent in 1948 by the Government of India to the International Congress of Orientalists held in Paris. He also led the delegation of this Congress held in Istanbul in 1951 and a session at Cambridge in 1954. In 1951, Prof. B. C. Law instituted the Mahamahopadhyaya P. V. Kane Gold Medal at the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society. The London School of Oriental and African Studies offered him his honorary fellowship in 1952. The Sahitya Akademi awarded this eminent research scholar a prize for his fourth volume of ‘History of Dharmastraha’ in 1958.

The president of India nominated Dr. Kane as a member of the Rajya Sabha in 1953 and 1958. He was also granted a certificate of merit and annuity on August 15, 1958. Dr. Kane was then appointed as National Professor of Indology in 1959. He received the Bharat Ratna, the highest civilian award conferred by the Government of India, in 1963. It should be noted that he is the only awardee from the state of Maharashtra to receive this honour for his academic contribution. Further, Dr. Kane was associated with many institutions such as Marathi Granth Sangrahlaya, Bombay as the vice president of the Niyamak Mandal; Marathi Sanshodhan Mandal as its chairman; Pune’s Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute as its founder-member; Lonavala’s Dharma Nirnay Mandal as a member; and Prajna Pathashala in Wai as a member. Dr. Kane was a strong protagonist of the codification of Hindu Law with a rational approach. As the chairman of the Brahman Sabha, he allowed the untouchables to participate in the Ganesh festival of the Sabha, thereby attracting the ire of many of its orthodox members.

**An Inspiring Figure**

Dr. Kane was lucky enough to achieve three-fold triumph: an active academic career (ranging over seven decades); recognition with prizes and awards; and a long life. He passed away at the age of 92 on April 18, 1972. This stalwart and distinguished academician of Sanskrit and Indology had to his credit 19 books and monographs, 66 articles, and 34 review articles. His literary output measures over 15,000 printed pages. His contributions are marked by an extensive sweep of his research interest and activity in the domains of Mimamsa, Dharmastraha, Indian astronomy and astrology, Sanskrit poetics, and the Indian jurisprudence. His highly revered contribution to Indology; consistent devotion to Sanskrit learning; and his philosophy of simple living with high thoughts will surely make his life a source of unending inspiration to generations of young Sanskritists and indologists.
When the Gods Get on to the Stage

Dashavatara

Ashutosh Bapat | Photographs © Dhanashree Bapat

A popular form of folk theatre of the Konkan, Dashavatar is unique in many ways apart from the fact that a performance can continue throughout the night and the roles of women characters are still being played by male actors, says Ashutosh Bapat
As the monsoon eases its downpour, the season of festivals kicks in. Ganeshotsav, Navratri and Diwali are all in queue one after the other. Meanwhile, even as the farmers of Sindhudurg are busy harvesting their rice crops, their excitement grows day by day with the anticipation of the arrival of their favourite folk tradition - the Dashavatar! This is the most popular art form in the southern Konkan region, especially in Malvan, Kudal, Sawantwadi, Vengurla and Devgad talukas as well as in some parts of north Goa.

**What is Dashavatar?**
Dashavatar is a popular traditional theatre form with a history of hundreds of years as practiced by the common man in Sindhudurg district. It is the story of the ten reincarnations of Lord Vishnu. All performances of the Dashavatar are based on the story of the theft of the Vedas by the demon Shankhasur. To save them, Vishnu comes forth in the form of Matsya and frees the Vedas from the clutches of the demon. The battle between Vishnu and Shankhasur is performed in the play and
the inevitable defeat of the demon provides a guaranteed happy ending. This ritual of the dance-drama of the Dashavatara is held mainly in temple premises during festive occasions like a jatra (village fair usually celebrating a deity).

A performance consists of a first part or purv rang and the second part called uttar rang. The enactments usually start late at night and continue till the morning. Nowadays, a modified three-hour long play has also been introduced, although many people still refuse to accept the shortened performance.

A normal performance hardly uses any sets or props; most of the times a single wooden bench in the middle of the stage is sufficient. Only three musicians are needed - a harmonium player, a percussionist on the tabla or mridanga and the zanj or cymbal player. The musicians sit by the stage and the performance can begin without much ado.

**The Performance**

The play begins with the sutradhar (the anchor) coming on stage and invoking a prayer to Lord Ganesh, following which Ganesh arrives with his consorts Riddhi and Siddhi,
each personifying prosperity and spiritual powers respectively. The sutradhar is followed by a Brahmin priest who also prays to Lord Ganesh. After this invocation, Ganesh showers his blessings and leaves the stage.

Then the sutradhar starts narrating the story to the audience and one by one the characters appear on stage as the story unfolds. All throughout, the sutradhar keeps narrating new developments to the audience. The introduction continues for about an hour and is known as akhyan. Then the main part of the play starts. The play itself consists of stories and episodes drawn from the epics and mythology.

These plays are normally loud, and given their rustic settings, it’s not unusual for the actors to have to shout out their dialogues. No performance is complete without a particularly dramatic bout of acting, especially during the battle scenes. Many popular mythological stories like the Abhimanyu Vadh, Hidimba and Bheem, and others are performed. The audience is particularly appreciative of stories from the Puranas, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata.

The unique feature of the Dashavatar is that there is no written script to this play. The owner of the group narrates the story to
are huge sets built to show this. Normally by dawn, the demon Shankhasur is killed and the play ends. The Dashavatar always has a happy ending; a sad ending going against the happy nature of the Konkani locals.

Unique Features

One of the interesting details about the Dashavatar is that the actors get their own costumes and do their own make-up. Every actor has his own metal box in which all the necessary make-up and costumes are kept. Once instructions are received from the director about which role a particular actor has to perform, the actor prepares accordingly. The stock characters in the play are usually of Brahma, Vishnu, Saraswati, Arjun, Bheema, Hidimba, the demon Shankhasur, etc.

Curiously enough, in a Dashavatar, female characters are played by male actors. The make-up and costumes are so honed to perfection that it is impossible to tell that the actor playing Saraswati or Subhadra is a male. Furthermore, these actors would never have had the good fortune of learning the basics from any acting school nor do they receive any special training. They are mainly agricultural labourers. Initially, the Balutedars in the village system used to perform in the Dashavatar. They were called devali.

Dashavatar is very similar to the Yakshagana performed in the coastal areas of Karnataka.

Historical Legacy

There are eight or nine Dashavatar performing groups in the Konkan region such as those of Naik Mochem-adkar, Valavalkar, Chendavankar, and others. The credit for introducing the Dashavatar in the Konkan goes to the pioneer Shyamji Naik Kale who brought it to the region in 1728 C.E. It is said that he brought this art from Karnataka and the first show of Dashavatar was held in the temple of Mahakali at Advare, in the Ratnagiri district. Even today, the sutradhar pays a tribute to Naik Kale by remembering him and inviting him to attend the performance.

Literary evidence of the Dashavatar is found in the ‘Dasbodh’, composed by the saint Ramdas. He says: “Khelata netake dashavatari, tethe yeti sunder nari, netra moditi kalakusari, pari avaghe dhatingana.” (Dasbodh 6-8-11). This can be loosely translated as: “In the play of Dashavatar, one can see the characters of beautiful women performing gracefully, but actually they are men.” With this evidence we can say that the art of Dashavatar was present in Konkan in 17th century, but it might have been forgotten or abandoned, and Naik Kale might have rejuvenated it in the early 18th century.
The themes and presentation are very similar in both performances. In Yakshagana, the emphasis is on dance and music, while in Dashavatara the stress is on dialogues and acting. In the earlier days, the actors in the play would carry their metal boxes containing their costumes and make-up and walk to the next village for a fresh performance. Nowadays, the government has lent the Dashavatara groups a hand by providing them with mini buses, thus enhancing their mobility.

**Keeping the Art Alive**

Many people have contributed a lot in popularizing this folk art, including Rajabhai Ajgaonkar, Dhondi Mahankar, Gangaram Mestry, Baba Palav, and many more. Tushar Naik Mochemadkar of the current generation is also leading the way in making changes to this art without disturbing its unique structure. Shri Babi Nalang, a noted actor of Dashavatara, has won an award from the government for his performance and contribution towards this folk art.

In this era of cinema, television and the internet as high-end forms of entertainment, it is indeed reassuring to find the magic of the Dashavatara continuing to influence the minds of the locals in south Konkan. Though there are new trends in this art such as a performance of limited duration or emergence of different stories, the art form still has strong support from the locals across the region.
From Darkness to Light
Mohan Thuse Netra Rugnalaya and Research Institute
Dr. Sandeep Dole | Photographs © Dr. Manohar Dole Medical Foundation

The taluka of Junnar in the northern part of Pune district is known for its lush green hills, rolling fields, vineyards and forests. At the same time, it being quite distant from the city meant that the locals, especially the people living in its more remote hillsides, had difficulty in procuring medical services. In particular, large swathes of the rural population suffer from ailments related to eyesight, many of which are easily curable with the right treatment. The problem was not so much the treatment itself but access to that treatment. With this in mind, Dr. Manohar Dole founded the Mohan Thuse Netra Rugnalaya and Research Institute in Narayangaon in 1982.

The Journey So Far
Dr. Dole aimed to provide total eye-care treatment free of cost to the poor local and
tribal populace. The hospital was started in a small old house, where the doctors started to treat patients without charging them any professional fees. Over the years, public-spirited individuals and organisations came forward and contributed to the hospital. In addition to this, the state government then allocated a plot of land, where the hospital currently stands. The hospital not only treats patients within its premises, but also conducts diagnostic eye camps within a 100 kilometre radius, to include hilly and tribal regions across eight tehsils of Ahmednagar, Pune, and Thane districts. Its ambulance transports patients detected with cataracts to the hospital for their operations. Till date, the hospital has conducted a staggering 1,00,000-plus surgeries successfully.

Thanks to several generous donations, the hospital now has a spacious built-up area of over 25,000 square feet. It has three operation theatres, eight special rooms, a general ward, a laboratory, a computer room, and the latest surgical equipment including a phaco-emulsification machine and green laser. The charitable 80-bed hospital provides free services to all sections of society irrespective of caste, creed or religion. The sheer volume of patients treated and operations carried out is mind-boggling. Courtesy of the Mohan Thuse Netra Rugnalaya and Research Institute, over 12 lakh patients have been examined, out of whom 1,10,000 patients were operated upon. Approximately more than 1,00,000 of these operations were cataract surgeries, and over 90 per cent of the operations were carried out completely free, including transport to the hospital and back; accommodation
with food; and the actual cost of the surgeries, treatment and medication.

New Horizons

In 2005, the Atharva Netralaya and Hi-Tech Laser Centre was established, equipped with world-class diagnostic and curative facilities such as a Fundus camera, White Star Signature® phacoemulsification and green laser, among others, to treat cataracts and other eye diseases. This unit alone has helped examine over 10,000 patients and operate upon 2,468 patients with no cost burden to the patient. Another initiative has been the eye bank, Madhav Netra Pedhi, set up in 2009 for the removal, storage and subsequent transplantation of healthy corneas to patients in need. We continually host awareness programmes to encourage eye donations through our regular eye camps. The camps spread awareness and answer queries regarding eye donations. A government-recognised eye bank, we work round-the-clock to restore sight to the visually impaired. Over 250 eyeballs have been...

The author is the Medical Director of the Mohan Thuse Netra Rugnalaya and Research Institute, as well as a trustee on its board.

Contact: Dr. Sandeep Dole, Tel.: 9860226058 / 9552227777, E-mail: sandeepdole@yahoo.co.in, Website: www.ruralvisioncare.com.
collected and 68 keratoplasty surgeries carried out totally free.

In addition to the eye bank, the blood storage centre also works round-the-clock. Once again, this is a government-recognised facility that conducts blood donation camps in villages, schools and colleges to collect blood and then provides transfusions to patients in need. Over 9,000 blood bags have been issued at concessional rates. In order to reach the greatest number of patients possible, our mobile eye clinic, the Vinayak Shripad Raiguru Mobile Eye Clinic, provides door-to-door services and treats patients on the spot. Travelling across eight talukas, the mobile clinic has examined over 60,000 patients and provided them with sophisticated treatment even in the remotest of this rural hinterland.

Further, the organisation looks beyond simply treating patients. It is important for people to be trained to look after their own needs. With this in mind, we provide a completely free two-year ophthalmic nursing course. Every year 25 girls from poor families graduate as qualified ophthalmic nurses through the Dr Shakuntal Mirashi Ophthalmic Nursing Course, and hence can also be self-sufficient for the rest of their lives. In addition to this, a cataract surgery training centre and phacoemulsification training centre provides specialised training to graduate surgeons under the guidance of senior surgeons. Over 200 doctors have benefited from this training.

Distance from Mumbai: 389 kms

How to reach:

By Air: The nearest airport is at Pune
By Rail: Pune Railway Station is the closest major rail junction.
By Road: Narayangaon is about 77 km north of Pune on the National Highway 50, i.e., the Pune-Nashik highway. From Mumbai, one can take several routes to Narayangaon – via the Mumbai-Pune expressway, the Mumbai-Nashik expressway or the Kalyan-Ahmednagar highway. It is about 3 and a half hours from Mumbai and about 130 km south of Nashik.

Where to stay:

For a picturesque getaway, try out the MTDC Malshej Ghat Resort.

There are plenty of accommodation options to suit all budgets in Pune.

Excursions:

Shivneri Fort, the birthplace of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj is 16 km west of Narayangaon.

Check out the Chateau Indage vineyards 4 km north of Narayangaon.

Two of the Ashtavinayak Ganpati shrines are located close-by. Lenyadri is 17 km north-west of Narayangaon and Ozar is 9 km to the north.

The scenic Malshej Ghat is 40 km to the north-west of Narayangaon.
It is not everyday that we get an opportunity to get this close to nature’s marvels, but Takali haji presents us with one that we shouldn’t miss, suggests Samir Madhani.

A great trekking getaway, a perfect family picnic and an exhibition of three-dimensional art that will help you understand what nature can accomplish.
As you reach Takali Haji, not only the massive gorge, but also water potholes, which are formed in the rock bed of the river - Kukdi, will enthral you. These huge pot like shapes in the rock formation here are also known as Kund. What makes Takali Haji a must visit is that these water potholes are believed to be the largest natural potholes in Asia according to geologists, and if this is not enough a reason for you to explore these potholes, then here is one for you, these potholes have also earned a mention in Guiness Book of World records!

These water potholes are spread over a gorge that is only ½ a km long, yet one will take hours to explore these gorgeous potholes, admiring the details that the river has been carving on the rocks that form the riverbed. As these potholes captivate your attention, you would realize that each pothole is unique in its own way. These potholes form a very complex maze of tunnels, which amuses us and compels us to wonder that how did this marvel even come into existence and for that matter how much time did the river take to shape or polish these formations! Yes, river currents play a very vital role to formulate these potholes, river brings along the pebbles or smaller rocks, which get locked in the cracks contained by the basalt rock riverbed. The water current churns these pebbles and the pot shaped hollows called Kund are formed. It is imperative to acknowledge that this is an ever-changing landscape and what we see today has evolved over thousands of years. One needs to watch out for the depth of these potholes, a few of them are really deep and carry strong water currents!

Takali Haji and neighboring village, Nighoj share gratitude for Malganga Devi, and hold Malganga temple high in their eyes. The locals believe that these potholes were created by the footmarks of Malganga Devi’s horse.

Annually on ‘Chaitra Ashtaami’, people from both these villages and a million devotees gather around this holy place to witness a miracle that leaves all spellbound. An earthen pot emerges from the ‘Chief Well’, which is located in Nighoj, and this pot is then put on display and immersed back into the well after a grand procession, which takes place on the third day.

The local bodies have developed a hanging bridge over this gorge, from where the visitors can enjoy a spectacular view of this site. The Government declared Takali Haji a Religious and Tourist site in 2003. The local body is developing an information center that educates tourists about the site and plans to refurbish the rest house for devotees and tourists.
Distance from Mumbai: 240 kms

How to reach:
Drive on the Nagar road to get to Shirur and then approach Takali Haji or Nighoj, asking directions for Water potholes / Kund (Local term).
Distance from Pune: 90 Km.

Where to stay:
No Hotels in Takali Haji, but visitors may approach locals and have their stay arranged. Also generally Water potholes can be treated as a one day outing / picnic.

What to carry:
Sunglasses, extremely comfortable trekking shoes, and hats/caps.

Suggestions:
Watch your step - These rocks are extremely slippery, especially just after a rain shower. A few potholes are very deep and water current is generally strong, so please do not jump or get too close to water.

Best time to visit:
In order to explore potholes, one should plan a trip in winters or even better summers, because this is when the water level is at its lowest, exhibiting the beauty of these formations more prominently. Also to see the miracle that has been mentioned above match your trip to Chaitra Ashtaami.

The author is an avid traveller and a travel photographer and can be reached at madhanisamir@gmail.com
Postcard Moments unlimited
Ellora

This is not simply architecture it’s a heritage that is born out of culture. It’s prestige that’s born out of age. This is the language in which artist once spoke. With unlimited reasons like these, it’s only fair to say one trip is just not enough.

www.maharashtratourism.gov.in | Toll Free No: 1800 - 229930
Unfortunately, in the present day ‘rush hour’ type of living, even one of the biggest festivals of the Hindu calendar viz. Diwali is more often than not reduced to just celebrations with no time for observing the traditional rituals spread over five days. Therefore, while we focused on the making of ‘pharal’ last year, this time we have also put the spotlight on the religious and social significance of each of the days of Diwali as traditionally celebrated in Maharashtra, so that the piety behind it is not lost amidst its quintessential ambience of fun and frolic.

More Than Just Firecrackers, Feasts and Fun

Diwali Pharal

Radhika Ghate | Photographs © Sachin Naik, Prutha Kulkarni
According to the Hindu calendar, the holy period of four months (Chaturmas) begins with Ashadhi Ekadashi (fourth month) and ends with Kartiki Ekadashi (eighth month). After a series of fasts, penances and other rituals, the time has come for Diwali to make its illuminated presence. This festival of lights falls in the months of Ashwin and Kartik and is one of the most popular occasions of the year. The celebratory atmosphere is helped by the retreat of the monsoon, that have left the earth lush green, and the markets full of fresh produce. There is also the onset of a winter chill that adds joy to the overall atmosphere of gaiety and happiness all around.

Diwali sets in with Vasubaras (12th day of the lunar fortnight in the month of Ashwin) when the cow, which is considered sacred, is worshipped along with the calf. Dhanteras or Dhanatrayodashi (13th day) is considered auspicious for the arrival of wealth and it is on this day that gold, silver, money and trading books are worshipped. An offering of coriander seeds and jaggery is made to mark this ritual. The following four days comprise the main Diwali, featuring a variety of colourful akash kandils (lanterns) hanging outside every house; family get-togethers, distribution of special sweets; purchase of new clothes; and the sharing of gifts and love.

Narakchaturdashi is the first day when the entire family gets up early before dawn, has an oil and hot water bath along with a scented herbal mixture called Utne (Abhyangsnana). The women of the house light the oil lamps, known in local parlance as ‘pantyas’. This is also the day that marks the beginning of Diwali’s sound and light show with the firecrackers lighting up the skies in a spectrum of colours while the young ones shatter the air with a variety of firecracker-bombs. All this continues till the last day of the festival.

The next day i.e. Amavasya (no moon day) is auspicious for worshipping Lakshmi, the
goddess of wealth. The ceremony is called Lakshmi poojan during which gold, silver and money are worshipped in homes. For the business community, this is the day when the new books of accounts are anointed though no financial transactions are carried out till the next day when the new lunar cycle begins. It is the first day of the Kartik month and is called Balipratipada or Diwali Padwa. It is also a day considered auspicious to buy gold. In the olden days, women would wait for this particular day to receive gifts of gold and it was thus called ‘Stree Dhan’. Now of course it is not the occasion but the volatile price of gold that influences the purchase.

The following day is Bhaubij, a day to foster strong bonds between brothers and sisters. The former shower their love and blessings with gifts and a vow to protect and stand by their sisters at all times. Though for most people this is the last day of Diwali, the festival actually ends with Tulshivivah (marriage of the sacred plant Tulshi). In recent times though, the focus of celebrating Diwali has shifted to socializing and family bonding with lesser emphasis on observing the rituals. During the earlier days, however, Diwali being the biggest festival of all, preparations would begin much in advance considering that not everything was bought off a shop shelf. And one among such preparations was that of the pharal without which no Diwali can be complete.

**Diwalicha Pharal**

**KADBOLI**

Teardrop-shaped tangy savoury prepared with flour of various grains and lentils, and fried. Kadbolis taste best when served with homemade white butter or curd.

**For Flour (bhajani)**

**Ingredients:**
- Raw rice - 4 cups
- Horse gram (harbara) – 1 cup
- Milo (jowar) – 1 cup
- Millet (bajara) – 1 cup
- Whole black lentil (whole urad) – 1 cup
- Wheat (gahu) – 1 cup
- Coriander seeds - ½ cup
Method:
Wash and thoroughly dry all ingredients except coriander seeds. For making the flour, lightly roast all the ingredients and grind them together. Flour can be stored in a dry airtight container for a month and used as required.

For Kadboli

Ingredients:
- Flour (bhajani) – 6 cups
- Water = to flour
- Oil - ½ cup
- Ajwain (owa) - 1 teaspoon optional
- Sesame seeds (til) – 1½ tablespoon (optional)

To taste: salt, red chili powder, turmeric - ½ teaspoon, Asafetida (hing) - ½ teaspoon

Oil for frying

Method:
Take the flour in a mixing bowl. Add ajwain and sesame seeds. Heat ½ cup oil and pour over flour. Boil ¾th of the water and add salt, red chili powder, turmeric and asafetida. Add this water to the flour, mix and knead well to soft dough. Use remaining water while kneading if required. Heat the oil for frying. Grease a wooden board or a plastic sheet and roll the dough into long strips. Further, cut them into small 2-3 inch strips and join the end of each strip giving them the shape of a droplet (as seen in the photograph). Carefully fry a few kadbolis at a time in the hot oil on a medium flame till crisp. Drain the oil, cool and store in airtight container. Its shelf life is about 15-20 days. Ready kadboli flour (bhajani) is now available in grocery stores.

CHIVDA

A variety of chivdas are made by frying or sautéing different types of pressed rice (po-has) or puffed rice (murmura). Chivda is usually tempered with mustard seed, curry leaves and turmeric, spiced with red chili powder or green chilies and enhanced with other ingredients like dry coconut, peanuts, cashew, raisins, etc. Amongst all the variations, pressed rice chivda is traditionally prepared for Diwali.

For Chivda

Ingredients:
- Flattened rice (bhajke pohe) – 500 gms
- Horse gram (Pandharpur dal) – 100 gms
- Dry coconut (thin slices) – 125 gms
- Peanuts (roasted) – 100 gms
- Sesame seeds (til) – ¾ tablespoon
- Green chillies - 2-3 nos chopped
- Curry leaves - 10-12
- Coriander powder (dhania powder) - 1 tablespoon
- Cumin powder (jeera powder) - ½ tablespoon
- Red chili powder - ¼ tablespoon or to taste
- Sugar - ½ tablespoon
- Salt to taste

For Tempering

Ingredients:
- Oil - ½ cup
- Mustard seeds (mohri) - 1 teaspoon
- Asafetida (hing) - ¼ teaspoon
- Turmeric powder (haldi) - ½ teaspoon

Method:
Heat oil in a large vessel (preferably kadhai) and make a tempering with mustard seeds and asafetida. Add green chilies and curry
leaves and fry till crisp. Add sliced coconut, peanuts and sesame seeds and sauté till they turn red. Add horse gram and turmeric powder followed by flattened rice, red chili powder, coriander and cumin powder, salt and sugar. Keep on low flame, mix well and sauté for 8-10 minutes. Cool and store in airtight containers. Its shelf life is about 15-20 days. Dry fruits like raisins and cashew nut can be added to make the chivda richer.

CHIROTA

Similar to a puff pastry but fried, a chirota has perfectly mastered thin layers. Made with refined flour and ghee/oil and sprinkled with castor sugar, this light puff almost melts in the mouth. Frying a chirota requires mastered skill. Another variation of chirota dipped in sugar syrup (pakatla chirota) is also popular and easy to store.

Ingredients:
Refined flour (maida) - 250 grams
Rice flour - 1 tablespoon
Baking soda - ¼ teaspoon
Pinch of salt
Oil - ¾ cup
Water for dough
Oil for frying
Powdered sugar (for sprinkling)

Method:
Sieve all dry ingredients (refined flour, rice flour, baking soda and salt) together. Heat ½ cup oil and pour over the sieved flour. Add water and knead to tight dough. Rest the dough for 10-15 minutes. Heat the remaining ¼ cup oil. Divide the dough into medium-sized balls. Roll each ball into thin even flat rounds like chapattis using rice flour. Evenly apply a thin layer of hot oil on the top surface of the chapatti. Place second chapatti on top of the first and fold into a tight roll. Lightly press the roll to make it flat and cut into 1 inch equal pieces. Keeping the cut side facing upward, lightly roll each piece to a 2 inch x 2 inch square using a rolling pin. Heat oil and deep fry each square separately on a medium flame, lightly tossing oil on it, till it puffs into several layers. Drain excess oil and cool on paper. Sprinkle powdered sugar and serve. Its shelf life is 10-15 days.

SHEV

Mildly-spiced crispy thin noodles like chips made from gram flour and spice.

Ingredients:
Bengal gram flour (besan) – 4 cups
Baking powder - ½ teaspoon
Asafoetida (hing) - ⅔ teaspoon
Ajwain (owa) 1 teaspoon to taste
Salt
Red chilli powder
Water to knead flour
Oil for frying

Method:
Pound ajwain and asafoetida together. Sieve the gram flour. Add salt, baking powder, red chilli powder, pounded ajwain and asafoetida to the flour. Mix in water as required and knead a soft dough. Heat oil for deep frying. With the help of the special shev mould, pipe the dough (like shredding) directly into hot oil. Carefully fry on a medium flame till crisp. Drain the oil, cool and store in airtight container. Its shelf life is 15-20 days.
**Mythological Significance**

Along with the agrarian importance of the Diwali festival that celebrates the *kharif* harvest and marks the conquest of good over evil, there is an interesting mythological story associated with every occasion over its five-day period.

**Narakchaturdashi:** It is believed that this day marks the celebration of Lord Krishna (eighth incarnation of Lord Vishnu) killing a demon named Narasasoor, thus relieving the world of his tortures and bringing back peace and sanctity.

**Lakshmipoojan:** Demon king Bali had used his powers to keep Lakshmi (goddess of wealth) along with others in his captivity. Lord Vishnu in the form of Vaman rescued Lakshmi from Bali. From that day on Lakshmi is worshipped on this day, believed to be residing in the form of wealth and prosperity in every household.

**Balipratipada:** On pleading for forgiveness, Vaman bestowed one boon on the demon king Bali before sending him to *paataal* (neither heaven nor hell), which was that he would be remembered and worshipped by all on this day of the month of Kartik.

**Tulshivivah:** A marital knot is tied between Tulshi (sacred and medicinal plant; also considered a symbol of Lakshmi and adored by Lord Vishnu) and Lord Krishna on this day. This holy tie marks the beginning of the auspicious marriage season.
Officials from Maharashtra Tourism. Shri Prithviraj Chavan said, “The Tourist Information Centres were one of the ambitious projects of Maharashtra Tourism. These World Heritage Sites are also major attractions for foreign tourists and hence, it was required to create world class facilities here. The project was funded by Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) through the Union Tourism ministry and the plan was implemented by MTDC under the able guidance of the State Tourism department.”

The ancient caves depicting cultures of Buddhism, Hinduism and Jainism have been restored and now attract tourists in large numbers. The objective of the project was to conserve and preserve monuments and natural resources in the Ajanta-Ellora region. The project also endeavoured to improve the infrastructure in order to accommodate increasing number of tourists and enhance their experience by providing world class facilities.

Shri Chhagan Bhujbal said, “Aurangabad is the Tourism Capital of Maharashtra with rich history, heritage and monuments. Maharashtra Tourism, Archaeological Survey of India and Aurangabad Municipal Corporation have undertaken various conservation, development and beautification projects in Aurangabad. These information centres will serve as the one-stop location for all information, history and importance of these destinations for tourists.”

He further stated, “MTDC has about 254 Hectors of land adjacent to Ajanta caves and about 34 Hectors of land adjacent to Ellora caves. Considering the importance of these heritage sites from the tourism point of view, MTDC intends to develop world class tourist infrastructure to provide impetus to the tourism activity in the region around Ajanta and Ellora Caves.”

Mr Kiyoshi Asako, Consul-General, Consulate - General
of Japan, said, “I am very happy that our official development assistance is contributing to the World Heritage Site to maintain and develop the world heritage sites at Ajanta and Ellora. I am especially very happy to attend the inauguration ceremony of Ajanta and Ellora Visitor centres. I hope that these centres will help many visitors from inside and outside of India.”

Shri Ranjit Kamble said, “When we say Maharashtra Unlimited, it truly captures the imagination of these two small but significantly ideal words. Maharashtra ranks among top states in all spheres and it has now also become a prominent state promoting tourism globally.”

Ajanta Visitor Centre (Part-1) is spread in 17,936 square metres. The replicas of four main caves (No. 1, 2, 16 and 17) have been created here using stimulated stone technology to give shape of the stone, colouring, carving etc... The centre also houses an auditorium for audio-visual presentations, a library, a cafeteria, an amphitheatre and ample parking space.

Similarly, Ellora Visitor Centre has been erected in 12,090 square meters with facilities for audio-visual information about the caves, library, cafeteria, parking and shopping area. A real life replica of Kailasha Temple of 1/10 size has been created here. With the various development phases, the total investment under AEDP is pegged at Rs 380 crore.

Maharashtra Tourism is confident of translating these investments into long term assets which would not only attract revenues from foreign tourists and investments in the future but also a steady stream of foreign exchange earnings for India.
Maharashtra mesmerizes Manhattan

Maharashtra Tourism’s Diwali fest. Dhol-Tasha and Lavani wins millions of hearts of visitors at the Times Square, New York on Sunday the 22nd of September.

Spectators wondered if they were in Manhattan or Maharashtra when the folk artists took centre stage at Times Square in New York and instantly about more than 35 lakh people fell to the charms of the Lavani dance and beats of the Dhol-Tasha on Sunday when the Maharashtra Tourism’s promotional event started with a mega success.

Tourists and visitors from all over the world who visited Times Square on Sunday left with more of Maharashtra than USA as they seemed to enjoy the colours of Kolhapuri turbans and saris of the Lavani performers straight from the interiors of Maharashtra. The crowd went gaga over the saffron turbans and queued up to get one for them. Similarly, the pointed moustache masks were another crowd-puller. Maharashtra – pride of India, printed on Gandhi caps, was the slogan people caught upon when they were distributed to the public. The mesmerized tourists present at times square spent the entire day watching the show.

While the musical instruments like the Tutari and the Dhol-Tasha set the tempo right in the beginning to make New Yorkers dance to their tunes, the sensuous Lavani dances left the audience’s eyes glued to the performances. Groups like Sangharsh and Sankalp promoted the Govinda festival by forming human pyramids. Music maestro Shankar Mahadevan also created a sensation through his voice and musical troupe which has also worked in the TV commercial of Maharashtra Tourism.

Honourable Tourism Minister, Shree Chhagan Bhubal acknowledged the efforts of Maharashtra tourism and other stakeholders involved in this event. Indians, from various parts of USA and Canada, were gathered in a large number here. Even the heart-throb of Indian movie lovers Ranbir Kapoor who was present at the show along with his father Rishi Kapoor could not hold his excitement and went up to the stage to congratulate Maharashtra Tourism for its achievement. His father Rishi Kapoor said, “I am proud to be a part of Maharashtra.”

Maharashtra Mandals from across the parts of USA, Canada and Mexico and high-networth Indian professionals from medical and legal fraternities visited the show in big numbers. The event was publicized on digital, TV, radio and the print media in USA. The concert had also displayed an orchestrated laser light show and fireworks on big screens. The Cultural Festival included Indian food, dance, Diya/ Rangoli painting, Indian arts and crafts, fashion show, photo booths with ethnic outfits, celebrity Autograph/Photo Booth, Dahi Handi, Mallkhamb and a lot more.
On the occasion of Janmashtami this year, MTDC organised a “Govinda festival”, on the 28th & 29th of August, 2013. Legend has it that as a child, Lord Krishna and his friends would go around their village, make human pyramids and break pots hung in the houses to steal curds and butter filled in them. This tradition is still carried forward and celebrated with tremendous enthusiasm in the state of Maharashtra, with the ‘Dahi Handi’.

This year, MTDC, with an objective of showcasing this festival specially to international tourists, flagged it off from the ‘Gateway of India’. About 250 Govindas participated forming human pyramids in an enthralling display of courage and Maharashtrian culture. Shri Chhagan Bhujbal, Honourable Minister of Tourism, Government
of Maharashtra, Shri Jayant Patil, Honourable Cabinet Minister of Rural Development, Government of Maharashtra, Shri Sachin Ahir, Honourable Minister of Housing, Government of Maharashtra, Shri Jitendra Awhad, MLA, Smt. Annie Shekhar, MLA, Mr. Jayant Kumar Banthia, Chief Secretary, Government of Maharashtra, Mr. Sumit Mullik, Principal Secretary (Tourism), Mr. Domingo Silos, Consul General, Spain and senior MTDC officials were present at the occasion.

A large number of international tourists joined the local ‘Govindas’ in the formation of the pyramids. Appropriate security arrangements were made by the competent authorities to ensure peace and safety of the tourists.

A tie up with hotels and airport authorities as well as an extensive campaign to create awareness by erecting hoardings and displaying banners on BEST buses and a campaign on the radio extensively promoted the event. At the airport, handis filled with chocolates, gold-coloured headbands and brochures were distributed. In a bid to promote the State and its cultural activities in the international tourism market, MTDC facilitated the visit of tourists from the airport and different hotels to six prominent Dahi Handi locations in Mumbai city. Luxury Volvo buses along with the open-deck Neelambari bus that is MTDC’s pride were arranged for this purpose.

The “Govinda festival” turned out to be a mega event which encouraged participation of hundreds of youngsters, both domestic and international.
Nagpur keeps alive its unique Marbat Festival

Come August and the entire city of Nagpur comes alive to commemorate the much awaited ‘Marbat Festival’ a unique phenomenon which is celebrated only in Nagpur and can be compared to the Ganeshotsav Festival in Maharashtra. The Festival brings out the zeal and fervor of the entire city and is observed through organizing of various events such as dramas, dance and music.

If one is planning a visit to the Nagpur district, then ensure that you do not miss the Marbat Festival. In fact it is just the right occasion to view the rich culture, heritage and lifestyle of the people of Nagpur. The main reason for observing the festival of Marbat is to defend the city from the attack and temptations of the evil spirits. The devotees pray to their Gods to grant them salvation and seek protection from all evil forces.

Festivals play a major role in promoting tourism and hence MTDC supported the Marbat festival in a big way this year to try and reach their target audience by creating awareness about the tourism potential of the State.

Marbat is counted as one of the most important festivals in Nagpur marking an end to wicked forces and is considered the start of a fresh, peaceful and successful life. During this festival, people build huge statues which represent evil spirits and have them paraded throughout the city. They eventually assemble the statues in a large area and set them alight in the presence of the citizens. The burning symbolizes the destruction of evil and is considered an end to evil forces.

The entire festivities are something one cannot miss and even prior to the start of the festival, the sheer excitement towards the preparations can be felt throughout the city. Women involve themselves in decorating their houses, the streets, neighborhoods etc and a lot of attention is given to the preparation of special dishes. The men folk involve themselves in collection of funds for organizing various events. They also oversee the timely construction of statues of evil spirits, ensuring everything is in accordance with the festival norms. The city also witnesses shopping activities in full swing as men and women order ornaments, clothes and accessories to commemorate the event.
MTDC participated in the 16th convention of the Bruhan Maharashtra Mandal of North America, Inc. (BMM) held at Rhode Island, USA from the 5th to the 7th of July 2013. BMM was established in 1981, and is one of the oldest national Indo-American organizations in North America. It is an organization of people of Maharashtrian origin in North America, and was formed to preserve and propagate the cultural heritage of Maharashtra, to maintain the identity of people of Maharashtrian origin, and to provide a forum for Maharashtrian literary, cultural, educational, social, and charitable interactions among its members. BMM is one of the largest Indo-American organizations serving close to 1,00,000 Marathi speaking people residing in North America. BMM has 48 registered chapters throughout North America and each of them is registered as a non-profit organization. BMM holds a biennial national convention to bring Maharashtrian people in North America together and thereby promote Maharashtrian culture, art, music, and tradition in one big event. In addition, it promotes overall Indian culture among its members and audiences. It also provides its members the opportunity to interact, discuss issues of common interest, and provide a forum to display their artistic talent. Furthermore, BMM also promotes charity and charitable causes with the help of these conventions.
Various types of accommodation are available at all these resorts.
Welcome to the temple of life. Welcome to Amanora Park Town. Situated in the rapidly developing, IT hub of Pune, it is India’s first, fully integrated and sustainable township, spread across 400 acres. Its efficient construction management systems make it a green, eco-friendly haven planned around the comfort and convenience of its citizens. Amanora Park Town is India’s first digital township and offers a lifestyle at par with the best in the world, with a variety of iconic structures such as Aspire Towers, Future Towers, Gateway Towers and others. Become a citizen and enjoy the blessings in this futuristic temple of life.

For more information call Kiran on +91 97670 12345 or write to lalita.pawar@amanora.com

Global lifestyle features • World-class Planning by International Architects • Complete Civic Utilities • 12 lac sq.ft. European style Mall • Central Green • Lake • Amanora Club • World’s first Temple of Environment • Schools • Hospital • Amphitheatre • Digital Campus • 24x7 Water & Electricity Supply

Multiple avenues at Amanora Park Town • Gateway Towers I: 2 BHK Ultra-luxurious Apartments to 5 BHK Penthouses ₹1 crore onwards • Aspire Towers I-12: 2 BHK Lifestyle Apartments ₹80 lacs onwards & Ready-possession 4 BHK Royal Apartments ₹2.3 crores onwards • Future Towers: 1 to 5 BHK Apartments ₹50 lacs onwards • Sweet Water Villas: Exclusive Regal Villas ₹7.5 crores onwards* • Amanora Chambers: ‘A Grade’ Scalable Offices ₹70 lacs onwards. Amanora Park Town, Amanora – Magarpatta Road, Pune – 411 028
UMobile makes banking quick and easy!

- Banking App for mobile phones and tablets
- Secure, convenient and instant IMPS (Immediate Payment Service)
  - Transfer up to ₹2,00,000 instantly
  - Mobile to Account / Mobile to Mobile Funds Transfer
- Instant Mobile Recharge
- Bill Payments, Air & Movie Ticketing
- Cheque Book Request, Stop Payment Facility
- ‘Hotlist’ card and many more