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During the editorial discussion of this issue of Maharashtra Unlimited, we were delighted to realise the fact that Maharashtra has not only produced great leaders but has also been the Karma-Bhoomi of several, including Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhi-Teerth is one such place to learn about the life of Gandhiji and this issue is a tribute to the world leader whose birth anniversary falls this month. And the beauty is that there are still living legends in Maharashtra who are an inspiration to the world. Sindhutai Sapkal is one such legend and tomorrow the world may not believe that such a lady ever walked on this earth. It was a heart-warming experience for the editorial team in putting together a special feature about her. Maai tula salaam!

We have introduced Bollywood tour packages, but not many know that the cradle of some of the greatest actors and artists is in a small nest-size but big school of dramatics, Prithvi Theatre at Juhu. This lovely cozy place has a charm, energy and history which every art-lover can experience. Many sung and unsung legends of theatres, owe much to Prithvi Theatre and in this edition we try to relive the Prithvi charm.

With the monsoons on their way out slowly the rural landscape of Maharashtra is wearing myriad shades of green and hence, I would recommend this as the right time to visit the hill station of Mahabaleshwar and the UNESCO World Natural Heritage Site of Radhanagari, among other such destinations.

This issue brings a special feature on Samarth Darshan, a museum created for Shri Swami Ramdas, a revered saint. The enthusiasts of heritage and history can also drive down to Gadchiroli and caves of Takali Dokeshwar for discovering many pages from history unknown till now. Or just revisit your childhood by immersing into the world of toys of Bhatukali. For those with a sweet tooth, this festive season, we have in this issue recipes for different kinds of ladoos. There is a lot more as you dwell into this issue of Maharashtra Unlimited with every unique piece of fact and beliefs of Maharashtra.

We also feature the Jain temple at Nemgiri as a religious attraction. For the bold hearted one could experience the newly launched hot air balloon in Lonavala or hit the beaches at Guhagar for an invigorating break.

Valsa Nair Singh, IAS
Managing Director, MTDC
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A region with a rich legacy of many rulers, Gadchiroli has huge tracts of unspoiled forests as well as temples and forts with an interesting past. Ashok Singh Thakur and Sonali Sachin Jahagirdar take a tour of the region to point out the place you definitely should visit.
A Region of Archaeological Attractions

Gadchiroli

Text and Photographs © Ashok Singh Thakur

The author is the Convener, Chandrapur Chapter, INTACH and can be reached on ashoksinght@yahoo.com
Maharashtra is rich with tourist and archaeological spots and Gadchiroli district of the state is no exception to this. Situated on the northeastern edge of Maharashtra and sharing its borders with Andhra Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, the district is remote, tribal, backward and Naxal-affected. The district is, however, full of places of tourist interest as well as interesting archaeological sites that attract visitors from far and wide.

History
Gadchiroli district was formed on August 26, 1982 with the bifurcation of the then Chandrapur district. In the past Gadchiroli and Sironcha were tehsils. Spread over 14,412 square kilometers, historical records state that the area was ruled by the Rashtrakut dynasty a long time ago followed by the reigns of the Chalukyas, the Yadavs of Devgiri and the Parmars. It then passed into the hands of the Gonds who ruled the region for several years. In the 13th century King Khandkya Ballarshah founded Chandrapur and shifted his capital from Sirpur to Chandrapur. In the same period the Chandrapur region came under the rule of the Marathas. In 1853, the region came under the influence of the Berars and the impact of the British. The Gadchiroli tehsil was formed in 1905 with the transfer of assets of Chandrapur, which led to the establishment of Bramhapauri.

Temple Towns
Gifted with natural beauty and heritage locations, Gadchiroli district was also ruled by the Mana Nagvansh dynasty. Nearly 90 per cent of the temples from the district are dedicated to Lord Shiva, constructed during the rule of the Parmars in the 11th and 12th century. From an archaeological point of view, the most beautiful and the oldest temple is that of Markanda in the Chamorshi tehsil of the district, located about 11 kilometers from Chamorshi, 45 kilometers from Gadchiroli and 73 kilometers from Chandrapur. There
King Kurum Prahod in 9 BCE.

Vairagadh was under the influence of the Yadav dynasty during the 13th and 14th century and this rule was followed by that of the Gonds, Bahamanis and Mughals. The ‘Aain-e-Akbari of Abul Fazal mentions Vairagad, stating that there was a diamond mine in the village which was frequently attacked by those who ruled the region.

The Bhandareshwar Mandir outside Vairagadh is known for its architectural uniqueness, being square-shaped; which is why it is also referred to as the Choukoni Mandir. The temple has a sculpture of Maithun on its north, south and west with the idols of Harihar, Vishnu and Shiva on the walls. The tower portion of the temple is octagonal and constructed in a Dravidian style. Yet another temple that attracts both the faithful and the tourists is the Thanegaon Mandir at a distance of 6 kilometers from Armori and 40 kilometers from Gadchiroli. Constructed on were 20 temples on the premises, situated on the Wainganga river bank, four of which continue to be in a good condition. These are the temples of Markanda Rishi, Yamadharma, Mrikanda Rishi and Shankara.

The Jod Deul at Amgaon Mahal in Chamorshi tehsil is a place of attraction, also known as the temple of Lord Mahadev. It is at a distance of 10 kilometers from Chamorshi and about 45 kilometers from Gadchiroli. The Rurhi Mandir of Vairagad is another place of interest. Located in the Armori tehsil at the confluence of the rivers Khojragadi and Satnala, it lies about 12 kilometers from Armori and 35 kilometers from Gadchiroli. Vairagadh also finds mention in ‘Mahabharat’ as one of the big towns of King Virat. It is here that the Pandavas are believed to have stayed during their exile. In the year 2 BCE, the Kalinga Emperor Kharvel from Odisha attacked Vairagadh and married princess Ghushita, an epitaph of which is found in Odisha. The region was also ruled by Mana Nagvanshi’s
the bank of a pond, the temple has fortifications and the tower portion was constructed in the Nagar style. Similar is the structure of the Armori Mandir, located about 24 kilometers from Gadchiroli.

Forts Too
There are three forts in Gadchiroli district - Vairagadh Fort in Armori tehsil constructed in the 9th century by Mana Nagvanshi’s King Kurum Prahod, Surjagadh Fort in Bhamragadh tehsil constructed by Mana’s King Shaja Surjaha and the Tippagadh Fort in Dhanora tehsil constructed by a Gond ruler.

Other Excursions
Besides the above, you must make it a point to visit the Glory of Alapalli where one finds tall and huge trees of teak and other varieties. The new Chaprula Sanctuary is also worth a visit for its flora and fauna. It is made all the more interesting because of the long drive on a good road. Also, the internationally known Lok Biradari Project can be visited at Hemaikasa in Sironcha tehsil. It is run by Padmashree Dr. Prakash Amte and Mandakini Amte. The SEARCH project run by Dr. Abhay Bang and Dr. Rani Bang, winners of the Maharashtra Bhushan Award, is also an eye-opener for the wonderful work being carried out to take care of the health problems of the tribals who live in this region. Also, keep a lookout for the Giant Squirrel (Shekru), the state emblem of Maharashtra, which is found only at Konsari and Chaprula in Gadchiroli district.

Fast Facts
Until the reorganisation of states on the basis of language, this area fell under the Central Provinces till 1956 and was subsequently included in the Bombay Estate. When Maharashtra was formed in 1960, Chandrapur district was included and this eventually led to the formation of the Gadchiroli district in 1982. As per government records, the district has nearly 76 per cent of land under forest cover. According to the 2011 Census, the population of Gadchiroli district was 10,72,942 which included 5,41,328 men and 5,31,614 women. The population of the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe people is 1,20,745 and 4,15,306 and the percentage is 11.25 and 38.17 respectively. The literacy of the district is at 66.03 per cent. The district is known for its large produce of bamboo and tendu leaves.

Besides this, there are crops of tur, wheat, jowar and soybean. Most of the people are dependent on agriculture and allied businesses. The other major produce is of silk and Armori has one of the biggest silk centres of the district. There is only one industry in the district - a paper mill of BILT at Ashsti in Chamorshi tehsil. Most of the towns in the district are connected with good roads constructed by the Border Road Organisation (BRO). However, the internal villages still do not have proper connectivity and the railway network is only of 18 kilometers with this facility available at Desaiganj. Languages spoken in the region are Gondi, Madia, Marathi, Hindi, Telugu, Bengali and Chhattisgarhi.
While in search of a good trekking experience along with enjoying the adventurous thrill of staying overnight in a cave, Pra. Ke. Ghanekar chooses to go to Harischandragad in Ahmednagar district, which not only provides him with a wonderful overall experience but makes him believe that there existed sound logic in the existence of caves and temples in the vicinity of a fort during those ancient times.
If ever you have wanted to enjoy a good trek, the simplest thing to do would be to put Harishchandragad on your map of favourite destinations. Rightfully known as a trekkers’ paradise, Harishchandragad, which lies in the Ahmednagar district, also stands out for its caves and the fort that stands tall and mighty. Located on a remote hilltop and a plateau, it has on offer beautifully carved temple and caves that make for a perfect night shelter. And of all the caves, the most majestic one that also draws the faithful in huge numbers is the one named Kedareshwar which has a huge \textit{Shivalinga} in the centre surrounded by ice-cold water. It is by wading through this chest-high, almost freezing water that you can experience the thrill of circumambulation or \textit{pradakshina} of the \textit{Shivalinga}.

**The Fort**

The hill fort has a history that can be linked with that of Malshej Ghat, which played a significant role in guarding and controlling the surrounding region. Believed to be quite ancient, remnants of Mesolithic man have been discovered here. The various caves surrounding the fort were probably carved out in the 11th century.

As has been gleaned from what remains of the original construction, there existed diverse cultures in this region. For instance, the carvings on the temples of Nageshwar (in Khireshwar village), in the Harishchandreshwar Temple, and in the cave of Kedareshwar indicate that the fort belongs to the medieval
period since it is related to Shaiva, Shakta or Naath sects. Later the fort was under the control of the Mughals. The Marathas captured it in 1747.

This fort commands a sprawling terrain and on a clear day you would be able to see Nakta, Aajoba, Ratangad, Karabh Pass, Malshej Ghat, Nane Ghat, Bhairavgad, Kunjargad, Baleshwar, Kaladgad and the peak of Kalasubai. One of the attractions at the fort is Kokankada - a concave cliff facing west. In the evening the setting sun illuminates the precipitous cliff and the breathtaking view of the surrounding region. But the most unusual thing about Kokankada is that you might be fortunate enough to witness a circular rainbow called Indravajra. With the advent of monsoon, the clouds rising above the cliff have small water droplets and if by chance you happen to be standing at the edge of the cliff with the sun behind you, your shadow would be reflected on the cloud. You would also witness a circular rainbow around the head in the shadow. This phenomenon was first experienced by Colonel Sykes in 1840, a reference to which was made in the District Gazetteer.

**Caves and Temples**

The caves in this area can be divided into two groups. They are situated either around the slope of Taramati Shikhar or are in the vicinity of the Harishchandreshwar Mandir. Of these rock-cut caves, mention must be made...
of Ganesh Lene and Kedareshwar Lene which are certainly worth a visit. A 30 feet deep natural cave is on the northwestern side of the fort, to the right of KokanKada. Many other caves are still said to remain undiscovered. In a cave near the Taramati Shikhar is a very beautifully carved idol of Lord Ganesh.

Of the important temples, you must definitely visit the Nageshwar Temple near Khireshwar. It is unique for the many diverse artistic works sculpted and carved on its walls, including the ceiling. The main attraction of the carvings here is the 1.5-meter long sculpture of Lord Vishnu in the sleeping posture, popularly known as ‘Sheshshayi Vishnu’ in Marathi. It is considered rare and there are many legends associated with it.

Another temple you must visit is the Harishchandreshwar Temple which serves as a fine example of the art of carving sculptures out of stones – a quintessential practice that prevailed in ancient India. It is about 16 meters high from its base. Around this temple are a few caves and ancient water tanks. The river Mangal Ganga is said to originate from one of the tanks located close to the temple. There are three main caves near the temple with the cisterns nearby providing drinking water.

A short distance away is another temple called Kashitirtha, the most amazing aspect about it being that it has been carved out of a single huge rock. There are entrances from all four sides and on the main entrance are sculptures of faces, said to be the guards of the temple. On the left side of the entrance is a Devnagri inscription about a saint, Yogiraj Changdev. A sage of much wisdom, he stayed here in 13th -14th century for meditation and created the text ‘Tattwasar’, which clearly mentions this place.

Around the Fort

The thick forest cover on the slopes leading to the fort has a wide variety of flora and fauna, including some rare medicinal plants. In addition to some wild edible plants, ferns and orchids are plentiful too. This forest is home to a variety of insects, spiders, butterflies and birds. There is a huge water tank constructed near the Harishchandreshwar Mandir, known as Sarvateertha. On its northern side
Kedareshwar Mahadev cave temple, Harishchandragad

Karttikeya on peacock

Nataraja, Nageshwar Temple, Khireshwar

Shivalinga on wall, Kedareshwar Mahadev cave temple

Brahma on swan, Nageshwar temple at Khireshwar

Veergal at Nageshwar temple at Khireshwar
Distance from Mumbai: 200 kms

How to reach:
From Pune district you can go up to Khubi, which is a small hamlet on the road of the Otur - Malshej Ghat. From there you can go to Khireshwar village through which a footpath leads to Tolarkhind and the fort. If travelling from Ahmednagar district, take the road to Kotul, Kothale and Pachnai. From here, a gradual ascent leads to the top of the fort. For arrangements to be made at the fort, contact Kundalik Bharmal on 9689054960.

Excursions:
The Harishchandragad - Kalasubai Sanctuary is home to many wild animals. Also, if you love visiting forts, there are many around Harishchandragad, including Bhairavgad, Kalaligad, Kunjargad and Ratangad. Trekkers also make a beeline to Malshej Ghat, Nane Ghat and Sadade Ghat with places like Katrabaichi Khind, Ajoba and Phophasandi some of the other attractions for those who like to rough it out. A small ancient temple at Khireshwar is also worth visiting.

Are 14 niches which once upon a time accommodated Vishnu’s idols of different types. Now of course there is no trace of them. A beautifully carved idol of Lord Narasinha which was once installed in the fort has been shifted to the Ahmednagar Historical Museum.

Trekking Routes
There are several routes you could choose from to reach the fort, the most thrilling being from Tolarkhind. If you take the path from Pachnai, it would lead you through dense forest. A lesser known approach is from Khireshwar - Rajharchi Wat which traverses the Nedhe. The most difficult approach is via Bhavani Nala or Makad Nal. You could also opt to start from the base villages of Kohne, Kothale or Lavhale and climb up via Ganesh Dharechi Wat, Raj Dindichi Wat or Vetal Sondechi Wat. The height to which you would have to climb is 1,424 meters.
The challenge of scaling the mighty Kokankada was successfully achieved by Milind Pathak on December 6, 1988. Before that attempt, in 1985 climbers from Mumbai IIT climbed Kokankada but that did not include the ferocious overhang of the cliff. In the last few years many mountaineers have been successful in rapelling from the top to the bottom of the cliff. On December 31, 2002, Sanjay Karandikar, Amey Apte and Prathamesh Mehendale from Nisarg Giribhraman Sanstha of Kalyan reached the top of the fort using mountain terrain bikes.
Deepak Tilak
Photographs © Lokmanya Tilak Museum, Shreekant Agashe
Photo Courtesy: Lokmanya Tilak Museum, Kesari Maratha Trust, Pune

Adapted from
Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak – Maker of Modern India by Dr. Deepak Tilak

Deepak Tilak is the Great-Grand Son of Lokmanya Tilak.
He is the Vice-Chancellor Of Tilak Maharashtra Vidyapeeth.

“Swaraj is my birthright and I shall have it” – these words by Lokmanya Tilak inspired millions of Indians. One of the first leaders of the Indian freedom movement, he was called the “Maker of Modern India” by Gandhiji. We know about his crucial part in shaping India; little is known about other roles he played in life which made him a multi-faceted person.
The Early Days:
Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak was born on 23rd July 1856 at Ratnagari. His family hailed from Chikhalgaon (Dapoli) in the Konkan region of Maharashtra. His father was an eminent Sanskrit teacher who rose to the position of Assistant Deputy Educational Inspector. After finishing his schooling, Tilak joined the Deccan College in Pune for his B.A, where he studied Mathematics, English and Sanskrit, graduating in 1876.

After graduation he took up law and passed his LLB degree in 1879. It was during his college years that he became friends with like minded individuals like Gopal Ganesh Agarkar and Daji Abaji Khare who were concerned about the issues facing the country.

An Educator:
Agarkar and Tilak realised that education was a key factor in the freedom struggle. Tilak’s first accomplishment in this regard was the establishment of the New English School with Agarkar on 1st January 1880. Tilak was also instrumental in the establishment of the Deccan Education Society which started the Fergusson College on 2nd January 1885. It was inaugurated by William Wordsworth. Both proved to be very successful institutions.

A Journalist:
Tilak and Agarkar were aware that the task of conveying ideas, ideals and information to the people and mobilising public opinion required a different medium. Thus were born the newspapers, “Mahratta” in English on 2nd January 1881 edited by Tilak and “Kesari” on 4th January 1881 edited by Agarkar.

Tilak had to start from scratch right from preparing the “Devanagri” font, the dies of which he got made in England. By the end of 1892 “Kesari” had the highest circulation among the vernacular newspapers in the country.

“Kesari” has been witness to Indian history that spanned 3 centuries. It is not merely a Marathi newspaper, but a 126 year record of the political, economic, social and cultural revival of the whole nation.
A Community Builder:

For achieving his life's mission of Swaraj, Tilak was determined to unify the people. He knew that the religious nature of the Indian people would have to be harnessed. The revival of the old Ganesh festival and giving it a public platform was a masterstroke on the part of Tilak since the stated British policy at that time was not to interfere with any religious activity.

He encouraged Muslims to participate in it just as Hindus in Pune participated in the Muharram processions. Even though the British tried to create discord, they failed due to the efforts of intelligent leaders on both sides. In fact, Muslim musicians happily played in the Ganesh festival processions and there were no instances of any serious conflicts.

Tilak also started the Shivajayanti festival to foster a nationalistic spirit and to rally the people behind a national hero. He utilized the medium of the Kirtan, Mela, folk song, dance and other performances to carry the message of independence to the common man.

An Intellectual:

Among Tilak’s widespread interests were ancient Indian history, Sanskrit and astronomy. He had mastered the Vedas and the Upanishads.

He wrote a book called “The Orion”, published in 1893 where he tried to fix the period of Vedas using the movement of constellations. He wrote a sequel to this titled “The Arctic Home in the Vedas” which theorized that the original habitat of the Aryan race was in the North Pole. Swami Shraddhanand says, “He had the courage to stand up for the antiquity of the Vedas against European scholars whom no Indian had dared to give lessons in research work before.”

He also wrote a book on Vedic chronology - the Shuddha Pachang - accurate almanac, by refining existing approximations. It was accepted totally by other learned men. Tilak’s commentary on the Shrimad Bhagwad Gita, “Geeta Rahasya” is an example of his independent thinking and philosophical bent of mind. The book is a lucid interpretation in a language easily understood.

A Lawyer; A Prisoner:

During a span of around 33 years from 1887 to 1920, Tilak underwent imprisonment for about 8 years. He fought 5 court battles in around 25 years. On one occasion Tilak pleaded his own case, exhibiting his mas-
tery over law. Tilak did not practise law for a living even though he was an expert. At one time he ran law classes in order to cover the losses of Kesari.

From 1908 Tilak was arrested for the alleged crime of sedition when the Kesari revealed the shameful performance of the Government in the famine (1896) and plague (1897). At the trial it was clear that the goal was not to see that justice was served but to ensure that he was pronounced guilty and sent to prison. After the decision of the court, Tilak said “In spite of the verdict of the jury, I maintain that I am innocent. There are higher powers that rule the Province. It may be the will of the Province that the cause I represent may prosper by my suffering rather than me remaining free.”

Tilak lived in complete isolation for nearly six years in Mandalay jail in soul killing conditions. But he rose above the dismal surroundings and converted the dreary hours into one long tapasya, the consummation of which manifested itself in the creation of the “Geeta Rahasya”.

The research essays he wrote during his imprisonment impressed Max Mueller so much that he asked Queen Victoria to commute his sentence.

A Lobbyist in London:
Tilak went to London to attend to a court case and was there for 13 months. He established good relations with the Labour Party. He contributed 2000 pounds to their fund, which was gratefully acknowledged with an assurance that they would do what was in their power to enable India to obtain Swaraj. Being in England also presented the opportunity of being able to use its own newspapers to enlighten the people about the situation in India.

An Entrepreneur:
While motivating people to practice Swadeshi and Boycott imported goods, he started enterprises like Swadeshi Bank, a chain of Bombay Swadeshi Stores, Paisa Fund glass factory – the first cooperative factory. He started a spinning mill in Latur to provide a livelihood to the farmers of the drought prone region.

A Sportsperson:
Tilak performed a variety of exercises such as push ups, squats, surya namaskars. He knew wrestling, fencing and traditional martial arts. Proficient in swimming, he could float for hours together. His physical fitness saw him through the hardships of prison.

The Last Journey:
In early July 1920 Tilak contracted malaria when in Poona and went to Bombay for treatment. The best medical remedies could not help him. At 12.40 am on 1st August 1920, Lokmanya Tilak breathed his last. Gandhiji was one of the pall bearers at his funeral. Several thousand people gathered at Chowpatty where he was cremated.

Tilak is an example of how much a man of vision, determination and courage can achieve in his lifetime. To quote Rabindranath Tagore, “Tilak’s idea of the fulfilment of India’s destiny was vast, and therefore it had ample room even for a dreamer of dreams, even for a music maker.” And as Saint Nihal Singh said, “India without Tilak might still be crawling upon her belly with her forehead in the dust and a petition in her hand”.

Article edited by Tania Kamath.
A Fabric Favoured by Royalty

Himroo

Faisal Ahmed Quraishi  |  Photographs © Faisal Ahmed Quraishi, Asim Khan

The author is an activist in the research, development and promotion of the traditional art of ‘Himroo’ and can be reached on elamorescoigo@gmail.com

Handwoven ‘Himroo’ material is a traditional Aurangabad speciality. Himroo may be woven with silk, wool, cotton or jari (silver golden thread). Traditionally, it was only woven in cotton (warp) and silk (weft). It was a cheaper alternative for ‘kimkhab’, the more lavish brocade of silk and gold thread woven for royalty in 14th century. The weaves incorporate plain lines woven in different patterns - geometrical designs, designs inspired by nature, floral motifs, motifs from the paintings of Ajanta Caves, carvings from Ellora Caves, Bibi ka Maqbara and Taj Mahal, among others, informs Faisal Ahmed Quraishi.
The word ‘Himroo’ originated from the Persian word ‘hum-ruh’ which means similar. Made from cotton and silk, it has its origin in an ancient style of weaving known as *jamevar* in Kashmir and was introduced to the Deccan by Muhammad bin Tughlak when he shifted his capital from Delhi to Daulatabad in 14th century for the region’s warmer climate. Along with him came many weavers who settled in Aurangabad. During the migration back to Delhi, several weavers chose to stay back, having found the conditions in the Deccan very favourable for making Himroo.

**Royal Patronage**

A luxurious extra weft-figured fabric with a cotton base and a silk or art silk weave, Himroo is ideal for rich stoles and furnishing material. The designs are geometrical, hexagonal and of fruits like pomegranate, pineapple or flowers like rose, Ajanta lotus, jasmine, flowering creepers, etc. There are running designs formed with leaves and stems which interlock sometimes to form intricate patterns. Himroo uses Persian design and is very characteristic and distinctive in appearance. According to historians, it originated in Persia. During the regime of Malik Amber when Aurangabad was found in 1610, many weavers were attracted to Aurangabad.

In fact, during the rule of Aurangzeb and other Mughals, Aurangabad became a capital for the handicraft industry and the art of Himroo prospered due to the patronage of the royal family. Shawls and other products like coats, jackets, bed-sheets, pillow cases, curtains and furnishing material were woven from Himroo. During the time of the Nizams of Hyderabad, sherwanis were made from Himroo fabrics and these achieved such popularity that they soon became an intrinsic part of the wedding attire of a groom.

**Weaving Process**

The process involves two workers; a weaver and an assistant sitting across the loom, who work at interlacing the weft yard with the wrap yarns at right angles. Himroo is made on a throw shuttle loom using cotton warp and silk in the weft. Before the weaving commences, the designs are decided upon and worked with multiple looms. The weaving is carried out with the interlacing of weft yarn with the wrap. The weaver is the one who weaves its different coloured threads to make fabrics while the assistant is required to pull the strings of the loom.

The design has to be decided at the outset since two kinds of thread are mixed. The equipment includes an elaborate pit loom, a throw shuttle, wooden plough for holding threads, hook for holding up threads, wrap and weft bobbins as well as spinning wheels for the yarns. The loom is rested on four vertical poles, one at each corner, with a wooden frame above. The warp threads are wound on a beam which is fixed on a wooden frame slightly above the ground, on the far side of the weaver, about six feet away. The warp threads are first passed through a network of threads, called *jala*, suspended from the...
framework of the loom and then through four heddles, held in position by strings which are tied to four bamboos above.

The bamboos holding the heddles in position are, at the other end, connected to four bamboo pedals at the feet of the weaver by means of separate strings. The pedals are kept in a slanting position. Thus when the weaver presses a particular pedal with his foot, the heddle connected to the pedal is lifted up and this creates the required shed. Between the weaver and the nearest heddle is the reed through which the warp threads are passed, after which they are wound around the weaver’s beam which is fixed on a wooden frame near the weaver, about six inches from the ground. Himroo weaving is a complex process and time consuming, and depending on the threads used and the intricacy of the motifs, it could take up to 20 days to weave a 2 meter shawl.

**Mishru (Mashroo)**

When Himroo started to gain popularity, another sister fabric was born, which too became a raging hit. The material used was known as ‘Mashroo’ and a new and distinct technique was used in its manufacture. This technique was similar to the one employed in tie dyeing. The warp was tied on bhoori...
patr (leaves) which resist colour during the initial vegetable dye bath, and the tied portions were left white on a dark-coloured background. The fabric has a glossy surface with a coloured background. The real gloss is imparted by a substance called kunda which is applied just before the article is sold.

The Mashroo weaving process is done by weaving the silk for warp while cotton is woven for weft. Once the weaving of the warp and weft is completed, it is dyed by the local dyers. Normally one set of the thread reel is dyed at a time. The fabric is washed, folded and beaten with wooden bars when it is still wet. This is done to show the warp thread clearly. The fabric is given its glazing with a paste made out of wheat flour, applied to the folds. It is again beaten and pressed with hands. Now the fabric is ready and at this final stage embroidery work, prints and jari are added. Mashroo garnered a lot of attention at one stage though it isn’t as visible or in demand now. The difference between Himroo and Mashroo is that Himroo has a cotton warp and silk weft while Mashroo has silk warp and cotton, gold or silk thread.

Rich Legacy

Himroo is also a sort of Deccani distortion of the Urdu word that means ‘alike’. This can be explained by the fact that Dakhani was the spoken language of the Deccan till 17th century. Amir Khusro, the great Persian poet, in his brilliant work ‘Nihayat ul Kamal’ has dedicated one full chapter, ‘Jama e Devgiri’ to the fabrics of Daulatabad. He writes, “How can I describe adequately the fine quality of the cloth? Had it not been so, the hard-hearted planet Mars would have skinned the moon and brought it to the end of the month.” What the poet meant was that the devgiri cloths were so fine and thin that even if the moon was skinned it would have not been finer.

He continues, “Even a hundred yards of such fine cloth can be made to pass through the eye of the needle, and yet it is of such fine and strong pierce.” It may be said to compare favourably with a drop of water that would seem to trickle down in a ray of the sun, he says elsewhere. That is because it is so transparent and light that it would look as if the wearer had not worn any fabric but had covered his or her body with water.
Current Status

Over the years, Himroo has lost its charm and now is a dying art of weaving on the verge of decline. In Aurangabad there are very few families which still continue to weave Himroo in a traditional way on Paga looms. One can find such weaving actually happening in the older part of the city near Zaffer Gate. Being practiced in Aurangabad since 1891 but now seeming to be on its last leg, the Qurashi family must be given credit for having attempted to revive the art of Himroo and Mashroo in their weaving center and cottage industry. Presently they have 50 handlooms of Himroo in working order - a rare sight indeed!
Nothing can match the relaxing feeling of digging your feet into the soft sands of a beach and gazing for long at the highs and lows of the waves riding in from the sea to crash on the shore. And the enjoyment gets an additional bonus from the tranquility that a place like Guhagar offers, not to forget the Konkani meals. Fish lovers of course will find themselves in seventh heaven with the wide variety that this region puts on the plate, says Ashutosh Bapat.
Almost all the places on the coastline of Maharashtra are indeed very beautiful, calm, and serene in nature. The entire region is called Konkan – the word itself immediately conjuring images of picturesque villages, ancient temples, coconut and betel trees, and clean and white sandy sea shores. And Guhagar, a part of this region, has it all. In fact, it is the gem of Ratnagiri district. Located between the river Vasishthi and the Jaygad creek, Guhagar is a tiny town on the Konkan coast with a beautiful secluded beach, making it a perfect getaway destination.

It has a beach fringed with shady Suru trees and heritage temples like those of Vyadeshvar and Durga Devi. What also attracts tourists here is the quintessential Konkani cuisine. A road parallel to the seashore runs through the town with tiny houses built alongside that typically have a courtyard outside, decorated with various rangoli patterns. Vyadeshvar, an ancient Shiva temple, is located right in the centre of the town which is roughly divided into two parts - the khalcha pat (lower town) and varcha pat (upper town) with the temple in the middle.

Guhagar is also known for tropical fruits like Alphonso mango, coconut, betel nut, cashew and jackfruit. Due to the ferry boat that plies from Dabhol to Anjanvel, Guhagar now is well connected with Dapoli to its north. In the south, a ferry service from Hedavi to Jaygad connects it with Ratnagiri taluka. For the tourist, there is nothing to beat the sight of the setting sun from the beach and such is this attraction that the local authorities have constructed a pavilion type structure on the beach to witness this mesmerising scene.

Guhagar, incidentally, has had a strong connection with the Peshwas. Anandibai, wife of the uncle of Madhavrao Peshwa, Raghobada, had her maternal residence here. She was from the Oak family who stayed in a village called Kotulak, 15 kilometers from the town.

**Vyadeshwar Mandir**

This Shiva temple constructed in stone is the main pilgrimage center at Guhagar. Lord Vyadeshwar is the family deity of many of the Chitpavan Brahmin families. The temple is a Shiva Panchayatan with four temples dedicated to the sun, Vishnu, Durga and Ganesh on the same premises. A huge image of Nandi made out of reddish white stone has been installed in front of the sabha mandap of the temple.

**Durga Devi Mandir**

This recently renovated temple is set in a very beautiful location. Lotus flowers float in the water tank on its premises and the image of the goddess, Durga, is wrapped with layers of
finely woven clothes and garlands. A spacious *sabha mandap* and circumambulation path enables devotees to perform their rituals in a peaceful manner. The trust has constructed a lodging facility on the premises to help the faithful prolong their visit.

**Upharata Ganapati**

The word *upharata* can roughly be translated as ‘non-traditional’. The deity resident here i.e. Lord Ganesh faces west in contrast to the god always facing east. The legend is that Lord Ganesh had turned west to look at the sea at a time when the village was threatened with a monstrous typhoon building up in the ocean, thus saving the villagers from this natural calamity. It is the family deity of the Khare community. The idol is in white stone with a *parashu* and a *trishula* in Lord Ganesh’s hands. The trunk is drawn towards the left and a snake is shown wound around his belly.

**Around Guhagar**

Guhagar is ideal to plan several other sorties to places of equal beauty. Some of these include:

*Velneshwar:* Just 15 kilometers from Guhagar, it has a splendid beach and a Shiva temple. The route is through Modkaghar which is 5 kilometers from Guhagar.
Distance from Mumbai: 280 kms

How to reach:
The road goes via Chiplun. From Pune the distance is 260 kilometers via Chiplun and 220 kilometers if you take the route via Dapoli.

Where to stay:
Guhagar provides lots of accommodation facilities. Home stays and cottages constructed in the courtyards of old houses are available too. The Neelambari Beach Resort run by the Parchure family is the best option amongst all. It has rooms facing the seashore. Tel.: 02359-240652, 9423048350, 9960878123. Website: www.neelambari-beachresort.com. There are other facilities such as Hotel Kautiya (02359-240203) and Sagar Lodge (9420152272) as well as the MTDC resort at Velaneshwar which is about 15 kilometers from Guhagar. The Vyadeshwar Temple Trust and the Durga Devi Temple Trust offer economical accommodation facility on the temple premises.

What to Eat:
There are several small restaurants that offer typical Konkani cuisine with fresh fish of many kinds.

Hedavi: This small village is famous for its Ganesh temple, located atop a small hill. The idol here has 10 arms and is therefore called Dashabhuj Ganesh. A motorable road goes right up to the temple and there are steps too for those who may want to go on foot. The Hedavi beach is also famous for its bamanghal - a natural gorge created on the shore. Roaring water entering this gorge during high tide and forms a tall cascade of up to 20 feet. It’s a natural formation that has to be seen to be believed.

Jaygad: Just 9 kilometers ahead of Hedavi is a village called Tavasal which has a jetty to cross the river Shastri. A ferry ride leads to the historical Jaygad fort which offers a breathtaking view of the bay and the Arabian Sea. Although in ruins, the outer wall and ramparts of the fort are still in a good condition and adding to the majesty of the place is a lighthouse which you can see from the inside between 3 to 5 pm. It’s an ideal location for photography. The ancient temple of Karhateshwar and the scenic seashore are just 4 kilometers from Jaygad. A huge power plant has been constructed at Jaygad by the Jindal Group which can be seen from the other side of the creek. In the vicinity of the plant is a Ganesh temple.

Dabhol: About 15 kilometers north of Guhagar on the south bank of river Vasishthi is a village called Anjanvel which became famous for the controversial Enron gas and power project. On the opposite side of the river is the historical town of Dabhol that can be reached via a ferry which also transports vehicles. From here, Dapoli is just 28 kilometers away. The ferry helps avoid a long road journey and heavy traffic on the Mumbai-Goa highway.
Diwali at Times Square
The Power of Faith

Nemgiri

Viraj Shah | Photographs © Digambar Jaina Atishaykshetra, Nemgiri, Jintur

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One of the most often visited ‘kshetra’ by Jaina pilgrims is that of the Digambar Jaina Atishayakshetra at Nemgiri which is famous for its ‘miraculous’ image of Parshvanath, believed to stay suspended in air at least 3 inches above the pedestal, thus allowing a piece of cloth to pass between the icon and pedestal. Even otherwise, the many other icons found here are objects of deep faith and reverence among those who visit to seek blessings and pay their respects.
Since time immemorial, humans have considered various natural features such as water, trees, forests and mountains to be sacred due to their dependence on these elements for their survival. Often, these very elements, triggering feelings of awe and mystery are overpowering factors in creating the idea that these features are holy, are instrumental in the consecration of a place as sacred. Among many such places, a Jaina sacred destination is usually called kshetra. These are Siddhakshetras, places from where the tirthankaras or monks are believed to have attained nirvana; Kalyanakakshetras, places associated with the kalyanakas of tirthankara, other than the nirvana, like conception, birth, renunciation and liberation; and Atishayakshetras, places, where the icon, the temple or the place display magical or extraordinary elements.

One such Jaina kshetra is Nemgiri near the town of Jintur in Parbhani district of Marathwada region of Maharashtra. This kshetra is called Atishayakshetra as it is famous for the colossus of Parshvanatha, which is believed to be suspended in air. A Legend has it that in the ancient past this huge icon used to be completely hanging in air and over time has come down to rest on only ‘one point’ at the base, leaving a narrow space between the pedestal and the icon. And that is why the icon is called ‘Antariksha Parshvanatha’. Such a fantastic idea apart, the site atop the picturesque hill, about 3 kilometers from Jintur, is a well-known Jaina pilgrimage centre.

The hill, locally known as Nemgiri along with its neighbouring hill Chandragiri, forms a part of the Jintur range, which in turn is an extension of the Ajanta range. Both these hills are deemed sacred by the Digambara Jainas and carry temples, footprints of prominent monks, and other architectural features. However, the focus of worship is the medieval colossal icons of Jinas and Bahubali along with a few other icons on Nemgiri.

Icons: Objects of Veneration

These icons are installed in so-called ‘caves’, which are actually interconnected rooms built in a fort-like structure. Each of these caves is a plain, square room with a narrow entrance. In the absence of much architectural embellishment and any typical features it is difficult to determine the age of these structures as the rooms have obviously been renovated in the recent past with marble flooring, painting and modern facilities. It is believed that the present structure was built about 100 years ago. However, the icons definitely date back to the medieval period as revealed by stylis-
tic features and inscriptions engraved on the pedestals of some of these icons.

The cave known as Nandishvara houses a chaumukha in the centre of the room. The chaumukha is framed by ornamental pilasters, decorative arch and domed roof. It depicts a standing figure of Jina on each face with srivatsa, shaven head and single chhatra above the head. The chaumukha might have been carved of the rock in situ, but with modern renovations it is impossible to determine. The room opposite houses a few icons and two padukas or footprints. Two of the large icons appear to be carved in situ, while the rest are loose icons. The icons depict a ‘Panchatrithika’ with Adinatha as mulanayaka, seated figure of Jina and a chauvisi consisting of 24 tirthankaras.

There are traces of inscription on the pedestal of the seated Jina, but difficult to read. The rest of the five rooms carry colossal icons of Jinas and Bahubali. The larger-than-life tirthankara icons, with heights ranging from 4 to 7 feet are carved of black granite. These are shown seated in padmasana and dhyana mudra with diamond-shaped or roundish srivatsa on chest and hair shown in dots. One of these is the 22nd tirthankara, Neminatha, as evident from his lanchhana conch carved on the pedestal, while the 23rd tirthankara, Parshvanatha, can be identified by an elaborate nine-hooded snake above his head. The other two icons are of Adinatha and Shantinatha. The pedestals of Neminatha and so-called Shantinatha icons are quite elaborate with depictions of many male and female devotees, elaborately dressed and paying obeisance to the Jina with hands in anjali mudra. The Neminatha icon carries...
an inscription on the pedestal dated to Shaka 1532 (1610 CE) that records the donation of the icon by one Nema Sanghvi of Bagherwal community and mentions Shantu Sanghvi, Antu Sanghvi and Vir Sanghvi, who were relatives of Nema Sanghvi. The eight devotee figures shown on the pedestal may represent the donors mentioned in the inscription. Apparently, the site gained its name after this icon and probably the donor. The inscription on the Parshvanatha is also dated to the same year and records the donor as Antu Sethi, brother of Nema Sanghvi. The standing figure of Bahubali is shown covered with creepers and snakes emerging from behind his shoulders.

On Chandragiri hill, there is a large room with four pillars and two icons on the back wall. Of these, one is a chaussi while the other depicts a standing figure of a Jina. The chaussi represents three standing figures of Jinas with a single chhatra, srivatsa and shaven head. The central figure is attended by elephants in the attitude of paying homage. These are surrounded by smaller figures of seated and standing Jinas. The pedestal of this image carries an inscription dated to Samvat 1665 (1608 CE) that refers to the town of Jayatur (Jintur) and Vardhamanatirthankara Chaityalaya (temple of Mahavira).

Obviously, the present temple was dedicated to Mahavira. The icons on both these hills have apparently been painted and ‘re-touched’ in modern times, thus making it difficult to determine their stylistic features. But the figures are short, stout and muscular with broad noses, smiling faces and simplistic features. In recent times, the Jains have also built a Mahavira temple and dharmashala on Nemgiri as the site has gained popularity as a pilgrim centre.
Jainism in Marathwada

Jainism was a popular sect in the Marathwada region. Ukhald in Parbhani district, where a large number of Jaina icons have been found, was an important Jaina centre. The site continued to be a stronghold of the sect from the 13th to the 18th century. It was visited by Muni Silavijaya in the 18th century CE. The other important centres of this region in the pre-14th century period were Aurangabad, Daulatabad, Ter, Kachner and Kandhar. These centres continued to hold significance till the 18th century CE. Ter is mentioned by Ratnasa in the Jaina Marathi text, ‘Jambusvami Charitra’ (completed 1688 CE) as ‘Jaina Tirtha’. Aurangabad and Daulatabad developed as separate pithas or seats of Bhattarakas.

The rich merchants from Gujarat built temples in Daulatabad, while the famous Acharya Hiravijaya was sent here for further studies in his young age. Kandhar had emerged as an important centre by the 13th century as there existed an ‘Anvaya’ named after this place, mentioned in 1215 CE inscription from Mehkar. Kachner became more popular in the later period. Chimna Pandit (17th century CE) mentions that a jatra used to be held in Kachner on every full moon day of Kartik and a mahabhishek was performed.

A few centres developed in the post-14th century period. Of these, Kunthalgiri and Shiradshahapur are foremost. Shiradshahapur is referred to by Jinasagar (1724 CE). Jintur gained more importance from the 14th – 15th century CE. It became a centre of the Bagherval community. In the 17th century, the Bagherval community was very strong at Jintur as evident from the inscriptions on the icons at Nemgiri. This community is still present at Jintur, some of whom belong to the Trust in charge of Nemagiri tirtha.

Today hundreds of devotees throng to the site to worship the icons and to pay obeisance to these holy hills believed to be rendered sacred by the visit of the famous Acharya Bhadrabahu with Emperor Chandragupta Maurya and numerous monks. However, it is the ‘miraculous’ image of Parshvanatha which is believed to stay suspended in air at least 3 inches above the pedestal, that attracts most pilgrims and proves that the power of faith defies reason any day.
Weekend full of Caves, Temples and a Fort

Pohale-Jyotiba-Panhala

Text and Photographs © Yogesh Parbhudesai

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If a quick weekend getaway is on your mind and you would also like to have a taste of the quintessential Kolhapuri cuisine, chart out a plan to visit the triad of Pohale-Jyotiba-Panhala. Located close to one another, these spots are ideal for getting in touch with nature, exploring ancient monuments, forts and temples, and getting into a new bio-rhythm with long walks on trekking trails.
Weekend Getaway

Inner part of Konkan Darwaja
Most tourists who set out to visit Pohale, Jyotiba and Panhala usually begin this lap from Kolhapur, a city blessed with magnificent temples, and more importantly for the presence of Goddess Mahalakshmi. Founded by Chhatrapati Tarabai, this princely state flourished under the reign of the Chatrapatis of Kolhapur, especially under the legendary Rajarshi Shahu Chhatrapati Maharaj and Rajaram Chhatrapati Maharaj who set a vision and laid the foundation of modern Kolhapur. The temple dedicated to Ambabai or Mahalakshmi attracts pilgrims in huge numbers throughout the year and there is a strong belief that after one worships Lord Balaji at Tirupati, offering prayer to Goddess Mahalakshmi is essential to complete the pilgrimage.

First Stop: Pohale

The caves of Pohale surrounded by pure nature situated at the foot of the Jyotiba hill are a sight for sore eyes. Located about 7 kilometers away from Kolhapur on the way to Jyotiba-Panhala these caves belong to Hinayana Buddhism and are hewn in the 2nd - 3rd century of the Christian era. Locally they are known as the Pandav-Leni. The caves consist of a chaitya hall and a vihara having 18 cells along with four individual cells situated in the line of the chaitya and vihara. Beside the chaitya hall at the end of the cliff are two water tanks. The stupa is carved in the same stone of the cave and has been damaged in the course of time. A shivlinga is installed in front of the stupa.

These caves are being taken care of by the Archaeological Survey of India and are currently in a phase of restoration. Since there is no hotel or any other accommodation facility near the site, even though it is of religious and historical importance and draws tourists from afar, one must necessarily move on. No misconduct or anthropogenic impact is allowed. The post-monsoon season is the best time to visit these caves. Note that the road to these caves is rough and goes through villages like Vadanage, Pohale, etc. One can see the sign-boards leading to the caves at appropriate points.

Second Stop: Jyotiba

The shrine of Jyotiba can be reached either from Pohale or by the regular road to Jyotiba on the way to Panhala. The Jyotiba or Kedar-
Jyotibha is revered by a great number of devotees from Maharashtra, Goa and Karnataka. He is also called the ‘Dakhancha Rajah’; the king of the Deccan. The temple to Jyotiba was built in 18th century by Ranoji Shinde. Up to 13th century the Jyotiba shrine was under the control of the Nathpanthi ascetics. Since the site is strictly religious, there are many bhakta nivas built on the hill-top. There are 12 jyotirlingas near the hilly area of Jyotiba and some devotees perform the pilgrimage to all these 12 lingas. Besides the religious centre, the area is abundant with natural beauty and is frequently visited.

An annual fair of Jyotiba takes place on the full moon night of the Hindu months of Chaitra and Vaishakha. During special occasions as well as otherwise, gulal, a magenta-coloured powder, is sprinkled everywhere and devotees apply it on their forehead too, crying out ‘Jyotibachya navane changbhale’ in admiration of the lord. The Jyotiba shrine and the Mahalakshmi shrine are under the management of the Pashchim Maharashtra Devasthanam. Therefore, one needs to seek permission to take photographs of Jyotiba. However, photography outside the
A Bastion of Andhar Baaw

sanctum is permitted. There are many water sources on the hill-top of Jyotiba and all have some or the other auspicious significance.

Besides the main shrine of Kedarnatha alias Jyotiba there are two main shrines of his companion goddesses viz. Yamai and Chopardai or Charpatambika. The traditions and rituals practiced at this shrine are quite interesting and worth studying. It is strongly believed that Lord Jyotiba is the companion of Shri Mahalakshmi, the resident deity of Kolhapur, and this is promoted through treatises like ‘Karaveer Mahatmya’ and ‘Shri Kedar Vijaya.’

For accommodation purposes, a resort by MTDC is located just a few minutes away from the Jyotiba shrine. Since the fort of Panhala is quite close to the Jyotiba shrine, one can put up at the MTDC resort at Panhala too and then might visit this shrine by any private or rental vehicle.

Third Stop: Panhala

The fort of Panhala occupies a prime place in the history of Maharashtra and is also a favourite destination as a hill station. Built by the Shilahara dynasty of Kolhapur in 12th century, the fort passed into the hands of the Yadavas of Devgiri, Bahamani, Adilshahi and subsequently the Marathas. Shivaji Maharaj spent many days on this fort which was under the dominance of the Marathas until the 17th and mid-18th century. Queen Tarabai was the founder of the Panhala throne of Karvir alias Kolhapur princely state. The fort has witnessed great many upheavals and battles and is located around 20 kilometers from Kolhapur. An interesting view from Panhala is that of the pass that connects the rest of Maharashtra with its coastal areas.

There are many a remains of the fort which are now being looked after by the Archaeological Survey of India. The fort can be visited during any season but what makes it more compelling, mysterious and exciting is the fog and the dense greenery that sprouts up during the monsoon. There are hotels aplenty in Panhala and you can enjoy here the typical Kolhapuri cuisine. While entering Panhala you will come across the mausoleum...
of Vir Shiva Kashid whose statue is at the entrance of the fort. Walk along the opposite side of this statue and you will reach the Parashar cavern which possibly could have been a Buddhist cave.

Further, at the summit of the roads is the statue of Bajiprabhu Deshpande. From there a road leads to the three-storied andharbaw (the dark well) and Teen Darwaja and Konkan Darwaja along with their fortifications. The other leads to the Saja Koti which was built by Ibrahim Adil Shah to watch over the lower regions. Then the third road leads to Someshwar or Somale Tank which has a mention in the medieval treatise ‘Karveer Mahatmyam’. In the centre of the fort is situated the Amberkhana or granaries, three in number built in typical Bijapur style. Apart from these, the Naykinicha Saja (place of the courtesan), Dharm koti, Wagh Darwaja and Rajdindi are worth visiting.

Along with these beautiful medieval architectural specimens, there is a monument dedicated to Sambhaji Raja and temples of Ambabai, Mahakali, Someshwar along with mausoleums of Jijabai, Sambhaji Raja II’s wife, Ramchandra Pant Amatya and Moropant, the famous Marathi poet.

**Back to Kolhapur**

If you do return to Kolhapur before making the return journey home, do indulge in some shopping, especially the famous Kolhapuri thali with its spicy rassa, try out the Kolhapuri misal too.

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**Distance from Mumbai: 390 kms**

**How to reach:**

**By Air:** Kolhapur has the domestic airport but the air-service has been stopped for a while. But private planes can land.

**By Rail:** The Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj Terminus is connected to major cities. Miraj, at one hour distance from Kolhapur is a major junction.

**By Road:** Regular bus services are there to Kolhapur. Kolhapur is linked to the Pune-Bengaluru highway.

**Where to stay:**

There are several hotels in Kolhapur having varied range of packages. Besides one can lodge in the MTDC resorts on Panhala and Jyotiba as well.

**What to Eat:**

Kolhapur of course is famous for its non-veg dishes however, Kolhapuri batate-vada, Misal and Shabu-khichadi are among the vegetarian snacks one might taste. Non-veg eaters may ask for mutton-pickle.
A fifteen metre white high minaret stands out against the thorny scrub vegetation of northern Maharashtra. Locals talk about the old days, when the minaret stood proudly with its twin. When one minaret was pushed, the people at the top of the minaret could sense a gentle swaying. And curiously enough, the top of the other minaret used to sway too. The twin minarets of Farkande, near Jalgaon, were famous for swinging together. However, only one of the two original minarets has stood the test of time, the other having collapsed in 1991.
Close view of Swinging Minarets of Farkande
Farkande is a small village near the Erandol tehsil, 32 km from the city of Jalgaon. Situated on the banks of the rivers Anjani and Utavali, Farkande is home to monuments dating back to the medieval era such as the Parola Darwaja, Bhadgaon Darwaja and the Delhi Darwaja. The Delhi Darwaja, which is on the northern side of the village is still in good condition.

The mosque at Farkande was built on the banks of the Utavali river by Chand Momin roughly 400 years ago during the reign of the Farooqi dynasty. The Farooqi dynasty reigned from its seat in Asirgad, now known as Burhanpur, which is today in Madhya Pradesh. Khandesh or the present day northern part of Maharashtra – Dhule, Nandurbar, Jalgaon and their bordering areas in Madhya Pradesh was ruled by the Farooqi dynasty from 1382 to 1601. During their regime, the Farooqi rulers built various structures of note in the Khandesh region such as the Shahi Mahal, Aahu Khana, Biwi ki Masjid and tombs for various rulers of the Farooqi dynasty.

Built on a rock platform, the mosque at Farkande has three domes and the famous twin swinging minarets, of which only one still stands. The entrance to the mosque is 10 feet high and rounded. There is a large water tank – 17 feet long and 6 feet deep for devotees to wash in before offering prayers. As you enter the gate, you get a clear view of the swinging minarets. The minarets are on the eastern side of the mosque. Each minaret was originally 15 metres high (approximately 45 feet) and was divided into 4 parts.

The base of the surviving minaret is 5 feet high. There are 3 floors above it, each floor being square, and lit by 4 windows. The topmost floor however, is octagonal and narrower than the floors below. The top of the minaret can be reached through the entrance gate and 42 steps to the top. It is capped by an umbrella shaped dome standing on 4 upright columns. The dome is decorated by a sunflower moulding.

Since red sandstone and marble were not available for constructing the minars, bricks, mortar and lime stone were used for the construction. The bricks used are fairly large in size. The mosque and minarets, thus, are not ornate but have a simply white glow. Unfortunately, one of the two swinging minarets collapsed on March 21st 1991.

Behind these minars we can see a mosque with three domes, which also has wide veran-
to protect devotees from the harsh sun of the Khandesh. There is a prayer wall facing which people offer their prayers. Of the three domes, the central one is the largest, being 10 feet high and 29 feet in diameter. The other two domes are smaller, at a height of 7 feet with a diameter of 22 feet each.

We can see a ‘Khankah’ too, in the mosque premises. ‘Khankah’ means the resting place of Sufi saints. There are two spacious rooms that are 30 feet by 18 feet which are decorated with ‘mehrab’ architecture still standing in good condition.

There is a large stable with space for 11 horses at the mosque. Farkande was an important trading centre in the mediaeval era and it frequently swarmed with traders and buyers. The stable is still well maintained and there is a step well adjoining it that was used to provision travellers and their mounts when they stopped by the mosque.

The swinging minarets of Farkande are an example of the lesser known wonders scattered across Maharashtra. One hopes that we can work against the ravages of time to prevent these marvels from collapsing and being lost forever.

Excursions:
The UNESCO World Heritage site of Ajanta is a mere 91 km from Farkande.
The waterfall at Manudevi, and the temple adjoining are local places of veneration. People flock to see the 60 feet high waterfall during the monsoon.
The Unapdev hot water springs at the foothills of the Satpura range are also famous. However it is quite remote and it takes a while to get there.

Distance from Mumbai: 370 kms
How to reach:
By Air: The nearest airport is at Aurangabad. Aurangabad is 152 km from Farkande.
By Rail: The closest major rail junction is at Jalgaon. There are smaller local stations roughly 10-15 kilometres from Farkande.
By Road: Jalgaon is well connected to all cities of Maharashtra by road.
Where to stay:
Farkande is a very small place – most travellers prefer to stay in Jalgaon where you can choose between government rest houses and hotels.
At the Crossroads

Sindhutai Sapakal

Kalyani Sardesai | Photographs © Bal Sanmati Niketan

The author has been a reporter with various national dailies with over 14 years of experience. Currently, she works as a freelance journalist, apart from working on her first book and teaching creative communication.

Sindhutai Sapakal believes that though much has been done, civil society needs to get involved in the lives and welfare of the children much more.

Recovering from a recent surgery, noted humanitarian and social activist Sindhutai Sapakal is, nevertheless upbeat about the road ahead. Things are tight at the Sanmati Bal Niketan, and her other ashrams, but she is hopeful, that as usual, sensitive citizens will lend a helping hand.
Sindhutai aka Mai is feeling stronger today. The last few months have been tough on her and her children, following a surgery and bed rest for lumps in the throat and chest (which, thankfully, have been proved non-malignant)—and she is positive, that this time too, they will overcome.

Despite the visible weight loss, the spark in the eyes—and the humour in her speech—are intact, as she sips on a cup of tea and invites you to do the same. The trademark pink saree is slightly crumpled, but colourful as ever. “I have seen enough darkness in life. The colour pink is cheerful and life-affirming, and I love it,” she says—probably for the nth time—in response to a query as to why she always sports the same shade.

Finances are tight, given that her prime source of income—her riveting public speeches appealing to civil society groups, corporate, students and professionals to make donations—have not been possible due to her health. “But I am feeling a lot better today. My children and the doctors have been on my case every day,” she smiles. “But yes, it’s time they looked to the future. I’m not going to be here forever. What’s that they say about saplings blossoming to their full potential only when the shade of the big protective tree is no more there to shield them from the sun?”

So how will they manage after their mai, considering that her speeches and goodwill are the mainstay of the various organizations she has set up?

“Why won’t they?” she counters. “Didn’t I manage to set up all of this from zero? Unlike me, the children I have raised are educated and well-informed; besides, people are aware of all the values that the ashrams have stood for over the last 35 odd years, be it raising orphans, sheltering needy women and protecting cattle.”

Born in poverty; elevated by will

Her 65 year old life has been narrated before, but continues to inspire. The Sindhutai story was scripted in the Navargaon (forest) village of Wardha, when this daughter of an impoverished farmer Abhiman Sathe learnt about life and struggle first-hand.

Unwanted by her mother, but loved by her father little Chindhi (or rag as she was called) was an intelligent, inquisitive child with a strong sense of right and wrong, despite her circumstances.

Married off at 9 to a 30-year-old man, she bore him three sons in quick succession. “It was a tough life, but I tried to read every chance I got. Books were frowned upon, and I had been forced to discontinue my education, but nothing quenched my thirst to know more,” she reminiscences.

The turning point in her life was dramatic enough: she protested the shady dealings of the village strongman who got villagers to collect dried cow dung for him—and sold it off—without paying the villagers. This came to the notice of the district collector, and he supported the villagers.

Furious at the audacity of this ‘mere’ woman, the strongman pressurized her husband to abandon the heavily pregnant Sindhutai.

What followed thereafter is a testimony to both—the evil that men wreak upon each other, as well as the sheer will of the human spirit to survive.

She was just 20 at the time.

Unwanted

“I gave birth in a cow-shed. One cow protected me by shooing the others away, even as my labour cramps started in earnest. The pain was unbearable, I thought I would die. But I managed to give birth to a baby girl. Unaided by anyone else, I had no choice but to cut the umbilical cord with a sharp edged stone,” she says.

Managing to get to her feet, she walked to her mother’s home, but was turned away. “My father—who used to dote on me—was no more
by then. For her part, mother wanted nothing to do with me. Instead, she told me to go ahead and die on the railway tracks,” says Sindhutai.

Shattered, she decided to do just that.

“But something held me back. I couldn’t put a finger on it—but it was there within me, alive and throbbing.”

She would experience that ‘something’ several times over—in the course of her gut-wrenching struggle.

While there was no human voice to restore her faith, nature—and its many mysteries encouraged her. “It would strike me: how come a tree, despite being cut, continues to provide shelter to my baby and me?! So why could I—a human being—not do the same?”

Begging by day along the railway tracks—and hiding by the night in the nearby crematorium grounds—it was a grim existence. “I was concerned about being assaulted. I was young, and female. I knew that the shanshan bhoomi was safe. The dead did not scare me. The living did,” she states baldly. “There would be owls and insects making eerie sounds; never before had I been so alone. But then, something or the other would reassure me. It could be the fire from the burning pyres, or just the fact that despite being out in the wilderness, no creature hurt me. It is in these little things that I saw God,” she narrates.

The railway trains took her into unchartered territory, even as she begged and sang bhajans
There is no bitterness towards anyone. “My life has been written by destiny. If people had not set their back on me, would I have grown so much, or have reached out to so many? In fact, I am grateful to them.”

Little fazes her, not even the fact that she had to give her daughter Mamata away to the upkeep of the Shrimant Dagdusheth Halwai trust. “There was a fear within me that I would be partial to her. And to remove that possibility, I gave her away.”

By and large, that turned out to be the making of Mamata. Armed with a masters’ in social work, her daughter has now joined Mai’s cause. Working out a long-term revenue model for upkeep of Sindhutai’s world, Mamata has no complaints of being denied a ‘normal’ childhood. “My mother is special. She had work to do,” is all she will say. “She could have made life hard for me, you know,” muses Sindhutai. “But she proved to be unusually mature and large-hearted. That is such a mercy!”

Mamata Sapkal and her team are working on a revenue model for the future.

The children of the ashram are brought up in a loving but disciplined environment.

for the passengers. From the Vidarbha to Marathwada to Hyderabad-Secundarabad, Sindhutai’s new life brought never-before experiences. “I began to realise that there were so many unwanted children along the tracks who needed a mother. My own mother had discarded me; it was a wound that would not heal.”

She decided to give what she had not received; it gave her a purpose. “I would beg for their upkeep, and feed them. Blessed with a good voice, I would go to functions and plead with them to be allowed to sing a bhajan.”

Initially, her unkempt appearance would draw the stares, but some kind person would allow her to do so. That day, Sindhutai and her children would eat well.

Slowly, her fame grew, as did the number of children in her care. Word got around about this good woman who was Mai to so many, and in 1984, ten years after the birth of her daughter, she registered her first trust in Chikhaldhara.

From strength to strength, with positivity.

In a journey spanning 35 years, Sindhutai’s various homes have educated and raised as many as 1042 children—and still counting. Besides this, she has set up a trust to look after abandoned cows.

That’s not all. Mai also has over 207 sons-in-law and 45 daughters-in-law. Initially, the children used to be abandoned at her doorstep, but now, thanks to the government resolutions, they are routed through the Child Welfare Committee. But homeless woman continue to come to her, and find employment and protection.

Her strategy is simple: she makes public speeches on various platforms, and appeals to people to all walks of life to open their hearts to her children.

“There’s is my biggest achievement. My network of people. Human beings need each other, and have an innate capacity to do good.”
Postcard Moments unlimited

Ellora

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

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Resonating With The Presence of Shiva

Siddha Dhaknath

Shrikant Pradhan  |  Photographs © Sachin Naik, Shrikant Pradhan

The author is an Artist, Art historian and Archaeologist and can be reached on chitrakarshriikant@gmail.com

Rock-cut excavations are aplenty in Maharashtra and most of them offer interesting insights into the traditions of a medieval period. Among these, the cave temple of Siddha Dhaknath at Takli Dhokeshwar is worth a visit for its iconic group of sculptures as also for the scenic ambience that surrounds it.
There are a number of rock-cut excavations located in Maharashtra. Among these, some excavations date back to before two centuries of the Common Era, whereas others are from a few centuries later. Some groups of caves are famous for their painted surfaces such as those found at the Ajanta group of caves and some for their sculptural art like the caves of Ellora. All these caves reflect the many religious, iconic, philosophic traditions of ancient India. In Maharashtra, a majority of the caves are dedicated to the Brahmancial, Buddhist and Jaina faiths, and their sects. One can easily identify their religious or cultic inclinations through their delicately carved architectural elements, icons, motifs, symbols, etc.

Apart from the larger cave clusters like those at Ajanta and Ellora, there are a number of isolated caves - alone or in small groups that are also dedicated to these three faiths: the Brahmancial, Buddhist and Jaina faiths. These are profusely carved with decorative pillars, verandahs, ceilings, figures of celestial beings, images of gods and goddesses, auspicious symbols or motifs, etc. Known for their splendid art and scenic locations, one among such small, isolated but important rock-cut architecture is the large cave shrine with pillars, sanctum and sculptures at Takli Dhokeshwar. Located in Parner taluka of the Ahmednagar district, the cave temple is dedicated to ‘Siddha Dhaknath’, the medieval name of Shiva-Mahadeva.

The cave, locally known as Takli Dhokeswar because of the nearby villages of Takli and Dhoki, has a resident deity known as Takli Dhokeshwara, the lord of Takli and Dhoki. The village of Dhoki is 19 kilometers north of Parner city and is well-connected by road from Ahmednagar. It is located 43 kilometers to the west of Ahmednagar city. Sangamner, Rahuri and Shirur are some of the nearby towns from where one can reach Takli Dhokeshwar.

**The Cave Shrine**

The cave shrine is situated in the middle of a small horizontal hillock, rising from a stony
plateau. The temple is excavated in solid rock, having pillars and a central shrine with the Shivalinga and wide Pradakshanapatha. The cave is connected with a narrow pathway from the main road beginning at its foothills and is linked with a stairway. There is a beautiful gently rising, somewhat zigzag flight of stone steps leading to the cave where a huge medieval fort wall encloses the entire cave complex. This fortified structure is treated as the ‘fort of god’. While climbing up the steps you may notice a few small temples or samsadhis and a number of inscribed stones fixed among the steps. These are ‘votives’ or offering step-stones representing the donation of a step by a certain devotee.

The step-inscriptions have the name of the lord Siddha Dhaknath and also the name of the donor. Most of these inscribed stepping-stones indicate the late medieval and even modern period donations and are important historic evidences to understand the local history of such monuments. The stairway ends at the huge fortification wall which surrounds the cave complex. The fort-like structure has a beautiful arched entrance, known as ‘Mahadwara’. The simplified but attractive form of the Mahadwara is decorated with a ‘Sharabha’ figure. This is a mythical animal with a single form which is composed of different animals. It is a motif common to Maharashtra, used as an architectural adornment in the medieval period and associated with the entrances of forts, temples and city gates. After passing through the Mahadwara and climbing a few steps, you will come across an open porch with a deepmala and the horizontally carved attractive rock-cut Saptamatrika panel is being explained to visitors
Distance from Mumbai: 211 kms

How to reach:

**By Air:** The closest airport is at Pune, 112 km away.

**By Rail:** The nearest major junction is Ahmednagar station, at a distance of 42 km from Takli Dhokeshwar. The nearest major junction is Ahmednagar station, at a distance of 42 km from Takli Dhokeshwar.

**By Road:** From Ahmednagar, drive west for about 45 minutes on Maharashtra State Highway 2, or NH 222 till you reach Takli Dhokeshwar. From Pune, head north-east via Ranjangaon and Shirur. From Mumbai, drive eastwards on MSH 2 towards Ahmednagar.

**Excursions:**

- The famous natural rock formations of Nighoj are 32 km from Takli Dhokeshwar.
- The model village of Ralegan Siddhi is also 31 km from Takli Dhokeshwar.

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The entrance to the sanctum temple of Dhaknath.

The entrance to the cave has two massive pillars and pilasters at both the ends. This is a large-pillared open verandah with beautifully carved porch pillars which are square in form at the base but octagonal and fluted above. Floral festoons, beaded bands, lotus medallions and the portrayal of celestial beings in the intervals of the pendants adorn the pillars. The capitals of these pillars are simplified, forming a ghatapallava type with a rounded lotus motif. The pilasters are also remarkable for their decorations, the upper portions of which are embellished with winged lions. These are placed in a band in opposite direction to each other with a kirtimukha in the middle. Above this embellishment is a half medallion of the gavaksha type depicting an affectionate seated couple. The portrayal also has a male companion with a drinking bowl, together forming a picture of pure bliss.

About 15 feet inside the cave through a pillared porch, you come across another pair of pillars on a raised step-like projection. These are similar in ornamentation as the other pillars and together the four pillars form mandapa type of structure. Adjoining the central shrine is the designated place of Shiva’s vehicle, Nandi, the divine bull. As is the tradition, Nandi is seated, facing the Shivalinga. Evident from the partial remains of the sculpture of the river goddess Yamuna outside the pillared façade, there were once two elegant sculptures of the river goddesses Ganga and Yamuna.

**Grandeur of Goddesses**

Here Yamuna is in high relief, standing on her mount, a tortoise. She is shown holding a lotus in her left hand while her right hand is in a hanging position; probably resting on the Yaksha who is shown standing close to her. The goddess, standing under a mango tree, is surrounded by flying gandharvas and celestial divinities. The tree is leaden with mangoes and a monkey is depicted playing on the branches. Although the sculpture below the waist and up to the ankles has been damaged, her grandeur remains untouched, reflected through her regal bearing.

Yamuna’s face is round with eyes that project a high level of serenity. She is shown with a rounded hair arrangement adorn

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with a mukuta (crown), pearl strings, garlands, flowers, ear ornaments and a lalatika on her forehead. Many ornaments adorn her frame, such as a necklace or muktavali, angad i.e. armlet in her left hand, kataka which is a bangle-like rounded stem of lotus, anguliyaka i.e. a ring, manimekhala which is a beaded waist band, etc.

While approaching the main inner shrine, a large horizontal panel on the south wall attracts the eye. It depicts almost life-sized figures of matruka murtis, i.e. mother goddesses. They are placed in a group and represent the feminine aspects of individual gods like Bramha, Vishnu, Mahesh, Varaha, Kumara, Indra, and others. The matrakas are portrayed seated under the foliage of five trees, each of them with a child in her lap, and are with their heraldry or vahanas like a bull, a peacock, an eagle, an elephant etc. Brahma, Maheshwari, Kaumari, Vaishnavi, Varahi, Indrani are also a part of this group. As usual Ganesha is shown in the last position with sweet laddus in front of him while Shiva is with his Nandi. An adjoining panel depicts Kala while a common sculpture of Gajalakshmi is placed on the architrave of the inner pillars.

The Inner Shrine
The main inner shrine is dedicated to Siddha Dhaknath, probably a medieval name of the deity. It is rock-cut with a door in front and has an uneven circular path behind it. This is to enable circumambulation or pradakshina of the deity. On each side of the front door are colossal images of dwarapalas or doorkeepers. With matted hair and a nimbus behind their heads, they are depicted holding lotus flowers. The countenance projected here is that of benevolence. Bedecked with various ornaments, they have over their heads the flying vidyadhars. The sanctum has a simple multifold door frame and its central space has a rock-cut Shivalinga with a platform. The linga is the main object of worship and known as Siddha Dhaknath. To its north is a small chapel dedicated to Shiva as the divine dancer Nataraja. It has two decorative pillars at the front and on the back wall is a large sculpture of Nataraja with eight hands, each holding different attributes, with his legs sculptured in a dancing poise.

In the main cave are located a number of fragmentary sculptures, probably collected from nearby places. Among these are the sculptures of Vishnu, Bhairava and Devi as well as many Shivalingas. A series of veergals or memorial stones are also installed in these sculptures in memory of war martyrs. Outside the main cave temple are some excavations such as recesses with large water cisterns are seen. Further up is a small cave with cells. All in all, the cave complex, created in 7th - 8th century CE, offers myriad perspectives about how they were structured thus providing for a mesmerising study along with being a destination of tourist interest.
Nestled in Juhu in Mumbai, Prithvi Theatre is much more than just another venue for staging plays or musical performances. It not only has a rich history of how the dream of actor Prithviraj Kapoor finally came true but is also a magnet of attraction for established theatre stalwarts, struggling newcomers and a deeply appreciative audience who consider the stage as sacred space. Ranadeep Bhattacharyya and Judhajit Bagchi therefore peep behind the curtains to know what exactly gives Prithvi Theatre its aesthetic flavour and how it has managed to keep the flag of live performances fluttering high.
Performing Arts
Mumbaikars have a special privilege as compared to people living in any other metros of India. And that is they can choose to watch a play at any day of the year. This is thanks in no small measure to Prithvi Theatre, which has been a catalyst for a vibrant theatre culture in India since its inception in 1978. Set in Juhu, the heart of Mumbai's suburbs, the theatre with its open-air cafe is a warm, inviting space, a relaxed hangout, and a vital breathing environment in the otherwise bustling city of Mumbai.

Today, Prithvi Theatre has performances from Tuesday to Sunday every week (being closed only on Monday for maintenance and technical rehearsal), with over 550 shows a year and an average audience attendance of 80 per cent. There are plays primarily in Hindi, English, Marathi, Gujarati and Urdu. A subsidiary of the Shri Prithviraj Kapoor Memorial Trust & Research Foundation, it was set up in 1975 in memory of actor Prithviraj Kapoor to promote professional theatre, Hindi theatre primarily, by providing and managing a well-equipped theatre space at very reasonable costs, with all technical facilities. It is a completely non-profit entity depending on the patronage of individuals and corporates committed to the development of the performing and fine arts.

A Journey Begins
On January 15, 1944, Prithviraj Kapoor, a leading film star then, at the peak of his career decided to pursue his long cherished passion for theatre by formally establishing Prithvi Theatres at Dhuru Hall in Dadar. The entire Kapoor clan graced the occasion and as Deepa Gehlot, the author of ‘The Prithviwallahs’ aptly puts it, “Nobody could have known then that this moment was to mark the beginning of many undying friendships and loyal relationships, of bonhomie and outstanding careers, and of a nomadic way of life that would be as tough as it would be fulfilling.”

Prithvi Theatres’ first play, the magnum opus ‘Shakuntala’ with Raj Kapoor as the stage manager and Shammi Kapoor and Shashi Kapoor playing smaller roles, premiered at the Royal Opera Theatre in 1945 to great reviews. After ‘Shakuntala’, Prithviraj Kapoor made it a point that all the plays henceforth would be original narratives born out of the times so that people would be treated to socially relevant theatre; a culture that was non-existent till then. So followed a long list of plays written by stalwarts like Anand and Ramesh Saigal, Lalchand Bismil, etc. which immediately struck a chord with the audiences.

For example, ‘Deewar’ (1946) used the metaphor of a joint family to celebrate the idea of undivided India and was a warning to a nation under the looming threat of Partition; ‘Pathan’ (1947) clarified the common misconception of Pathans as either gatekeepers or loan sharks, and simultaneously underlined Hindu-Muslim harmony; ‘Ghaddar’ (1948) underlined the bitter irony faced by Indian Muslims in the post-partition era; ‘Ahooti’ (1949), set in refugee camps, set out to address the enormity of the human tragedy that
the Partition spawned; ‘Kalakar’ (1951) pitted the fast developing urban against idyllic rural life in a subtle plea against destructive development; ‘Paisa’ (1953) responded to the rampant commercialisation of the times; and ‘Kisaan’ (1956) focused on the feudal hierarchy still prevalent in Indian villages even after independence.

This was theatre history in the making as stars were born and legends created. Uzra Mumtaz, her sister Zohra Sehgal, Prithviraj’s cousins Premnath and Rajindranath, Sajjan, Mohan Sehgal, L V Prasad and the young Kapoor – Raj, Shammi and Shashi - made sterling appearances on the Prithvi stage. The acting style then was very different from the high-emotion exaggerated melodrama of the commercial theatre prevalent at that time. It was a more naturalistic style that Prithviraj Kapoor was perhaps inspired by from the Hollywood films that he avidly watched. Shombhu Mitra reminisces in his book ‘Prithviraj o Natyamanch’ that as a result of Prithvi Theatres, a fresh new tradition of acting developed where when one listens to the actors one feels the lines are being thought of and spoken then and there and not part of a pre-written script.

Geoffrey Kendal, who along with his wife Laura and daughter Jennifer (who later got married to Shashi Kapoor), ran his English theatre company ‘Shakespeareana’ in the 1950s rightly said that Prithviraj Kapoor’s greatest contribution was pioneering a professional Hindustani theatre in the form of Prithvi Theatres, a fresh new tradition of acting developed where when one listens to the actors one feels the lines are being thought of and spoken then and there and not part of a pre-written script.

Over the next 16 years, his repertory toured the entire length and breadth of the country, taking Hindi theatre to the common man’s doorstep, giving one remarkable performance after another - a total of 2,662 performances over 5,982 days in 112 places! Founded by a man who believed theatre was worship, and who would lose his voice while perfecting his art, Prithvi Theatres ultimately closed down in May 1960 when Prithviraj Kapoor fell ill.

**The Early Foundation**

Since in all its functional years Prithvi Theatres never had a physical base - a theatre with good acoustics, backstage arrangements, proper lighting and make-up rooms, it was Prithviraj Kapoor’s dream that he would have a small theatre property of his own some day. It would be almost like having a ‘home’ for his repertory theatre company. In 1962, he leased two plots of land in the then quaint Janki Kutir area in Juhu from the owner Ram Krishna Bajaj for 10 years. On one plot he built a small homely cottage for himself which till then consisted of small travelling folk theatre groups and some Parsi theatre where people engaged in theatre as a hobby and not as a profession.

Prithviraj Kapoor was like the old-time British English actor-managers who nurtured theatre as a father figure, even at times investing his remuneration from films into keeping the theatre going. He played the lead in every single show, which meant an average of a show every third day for him. The company travelled third-class and this included Prithviraj himself, even during the years when he was entitled to air or first-class travel as a nominated Member of Parliament.

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Prithviraj Kapoor was like the old-time British English actor-managers who nurtured theatre as a father figure, even at times investing his remuneration from films into keeping the theatre going. He played the lead in every single show, which meant an average of a show every third day for him. The company travelled third-class and this included Prithviraj himself, even during the years when he was entitled to air or first-class travel as a nominated Member of Parliament.

Over the next 16 years, his repertory toured the entire length and breadth of the country, taking Hindi theatre to the common man’s doorstep, giving one remarkable performance after another - a total of 2,662 performances over 5,982 days in 112 places! Founded by a man who believed theatre was worship, and who would lose his voice while perfecting his art, Prithvi Theatres ultimately closed down in May 1960 when Prithviraj Kapoor fell ill.

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His youngest son Shashi and daughter-in-law Jennifer, both having worked in theatre from childhood, shared a deep passion for the medium, and a great respect for Prithviraj’s dream for building a permanent theatre venue. Hence, they bought the two plots at Janki Kutir and set up the Prithviraj Kapoor Memorial Trust in 1974 with a vision of promoting the performing arts. Shashi Kapoor with the help of his film industry friends started raising funds for the Prithvi Trust to help in the building of the theatre. Those were the days when stars came together for a cause and not for money. So, along with Amitabh Bachchan, Rekha, Randhir Kapoor, Shekar Kapur, Shabana Azmi, Mohammed Rafi, Hemant Kumar and Sulakshana Pandit, he performed at a ‘Star Nite’ event in Siliguri in West Bengal and was able to raise funds for the Prithvi Theatres’ project.

Shashi Kapoor was at the busiest phase of his film career at that time and hence he gave the entire responsibility of realising his father’s dream to his wife Jennifer and asked her to nurture the project as her own baby. There could have been no better person to carry on this responsibility. Kunal Kapoor, Shashi Kapoor’s eldest son, who now looks after the events of Prithvi Theatre, says, “My parents wanted to build a professional theatre in such a way that it would attract and encourage people to get involved with theatre; a space where the intimate and compelling actor-audience relationship could be rediscovered. For my mother, Prithvi Theatre was her fourth child. She not only created it but nursed it as well.”

To give Prithvi Theatre a professional touch, Ved Segan, a young enthusiastic architect who had just finished designing actress Raakhee’s home, came on board. He was sent on a tour of theatres across Europe to get a better understanding of the function the space was supposed to serve. Ved returned and worked closely with Jennifer to construct the building and succeeded in creating a charmingly intimate space with a pervasive feel of theatre. When it was finally ready, the 225-seater Prithvi Theatre, with its octagonal thrust stage – a stage that jutted out into the audience with seating on three sides - had perfect acoustics.

The Curtains Open

On November 5, 1978, Prithvi Theatre hosted its first play, G P Deshpande’s ‘Uddh-
wastha Dharmashala’, directed by Om Puri. The travelling theatre company of Prithviraj Kapoor was reborn as Prithvi Theatre, the building that today has become a landmark in Mumbai. Over the years, the passion that drove Prithviraj Kapoor continues to inspire one hallmark performance after another from actors and directors like Naseeruddin Shah, Nadira Zaheer Babbar, Feroz Khan, Dinesh Thakur, Makarand Deshpande and many young enthusiasts.

However, the initial years were by no means easy. Due to the growth and popularity of Hindi cinema there were few that appreciated Hindi theatre - audiences had to be wooed and cajoled to watch plays. It was in fact Jennifer Kapoor and her manager Dar- amsey Merchant’s support to the groups that was responsible for the eventual success of Prithvi Theatre. Tickets were sold at a rate the audience could afford. At the same time, it provided professional assistance and up-to date technical facilities to performing companies, charging a rent of only Re 1 per ticket sold. In this way it managed to nurture and promote a number of young theatre companies like ‘Majma’ formed by NSD students, ‘Theatre Aparna’ of Sunil Shanbag, ‘Motley’ of Naseeruddin Shah, ‘Ansh’ of Makarand Deshpande, etc.

Eventually Prithvi Theatre became a nest- ing place for struggling actors hoping to be discovered by filmmakers. Directors like Shyam Benegal and Govind Nihalani picked a lot of actors from the Prithvi stage. While Naseeruddin Shah bagged his seminal comic role in ‘Jaane Bhi Do Yaaron’ from Kundan Shah, Mahesh Bhatt offered Anupam Kher his debut role as an old man in ‘Saaransh’ after watching his play ‘Desire under the Elms’.

“Even today, every actor dreams to perform at least once in Prithvi Theatre,” notes Kunal Kapoor.

In the beginning Prithvi Theatre did not have a café. It was around 1981 that Prahlad Kakkar, who went on to become India’s ace ad filmmaker, offered to run Prithvi Café on the lines of the Joe Allen chain of theatre restaurants in Broadway and London. The café with its Irish coffee and nice music was an instant hit and eventually it became quite a fashion for celebrities like Neena Gupta to cook and serve at the café. As actor Ila Arun puts it, soon Prithvi seemed like a ‘home’ where one could just hang around and seep oneself into the creative energy.
The beauty of Prithvi Theatre, right from its inception, has been that it has always made itself available to the artist community to come and share their ideas. Like a true host the founders have opened Prithvi’s doors to the people with a passion for theatre, who now carry the onus of sustaining it on their shoulders with equal passion and zeal. As for instance, artist Tyeb Mehta and his wife Saki- na came ahead and opened a small art gallery in Prithvi’s foyer along with a bookshop way back in 1980. Though it was closed after he shifted to Shanti Niketan, the bookshop was revived again in the 1990s when Sanjana Kapoor took charge of Prithvi Theatre.

Further, Jennifer Kapoor organised the first Prithvi Theatre Festival in 1983 with the help of Feroz Khan and Kunal Kapoor. Since then the Festival has become an annual calendar event for theatre enthusiasts across India, celebrating theatre in all its myriad forms – local, national and international while exploring new idioms, old traditions, new forms, cross-currents and presenting quality performances at multiple venues and cities.

**Keeping It Going**

After the sad demise of Jennifer Kapoor in 1984, it was rumoured that Prithvi Theatre would close down but the persistent attitude of Kunal Kapoor, Feroz Khan and Sanjana Kapoor has till date efficiently kept the ‘show on’ at Prithvi. Over the years, the activities have expanded to include Prithvi Players, an in-house production company; Little Prithvi Players, a concentration of theatre activities for children; and Prithvi Gallery, a unique exhibition space for contemporary art that seeks to generate a wider awareness and appreciation for the fine arts.

Mandira Bahl, whose photography exhibition ‘The Magic of Prithvi’ was recently held in the Prithvi Gallery feels that people like her who really love Prithvi have become a part of a cult, which is Prithvi. Be it an actor, artist, writer or just any other person, everyone does contribute to the growth and development of Prithvi through their work or sheer love for the theatre. In its endeavour to promote and develop professional performing arts, Prithvi Theatre has been consistently mobilising and extending its resources to programmes every month that contribute to the development of various disciplines involved in theatre. The spectrum of these events are as diverse as out of academic discussions like ‘Chai and Why’...
in association with TIFR (Tata Institute of Fundamental Research) to film screenings partnered with Vikap and Alliance Francaise or the renowned Thespo to promote youth theatre on Prithvi’s stage. After all, great theatre is about challenging how we think and encouraging us to fantasize about a world we aspire to live in.
Vox Populi

Zakir Hussain, Musician
I consider myself a Prithviwallah. An artist always looks for a venue which allows him or her to be especially intimate with the audience to be able to feel their heartbeat. The acoustics of Prithvi make the entire musical performance an intimate exchange as it happens between two close friends. I thank god that Jennifer thought of this place. It should be nurtured, supported and replicated in other cities of India.

Nadira Babbar, Theatre Actor & Director
Prithvi is like a second home to me. The most beautiful thing about Prithvi is that it has a feel and a texture where culture lives. It's so strange that all the big theatres that we have in Mumbai and elsewhere with the capacity to accommodate 2,000 to 15,000 people have not been able to create as many fantastic theatre people, theatre groups, actors and enthusiasts as Prithvi Theatre has done.

Sunil Shanbag, Actor, Playwright and Director
Prithvi is home turf for us. I have been part of Prithvi’s history in a sense of been here, lived here and done most of my productions here. Even today when I design a production, quite unconsciously I design it for Prithvi!

Naseeruddin Shah, Actor & Founder of Motley Theatre Company
The great thing about Prithvi is it has made theatre-going a habit for people and that is something we badly need. Prithvi has more than done its bit in creating and sustaining theatre awareness and theatre activities by youngsters who don’t get a platform elsewhere. There has been tremendous amount of encouragement right from Jennifer and Shashi Kapoor in the initial days to Sanjana and Kunal at present. May the spirit continue forever!

Nandita Das, Actor
Prithvi is like a Mecca in the city for anybody who wants to get stimulated in the mind, wants to meet interesting people, wants to be touched by something or just wants to let their hair down! Anybody who has an iota of anything that is artistic, aesthetic, or soulful would want to come here.

Makrand Deshpande, Actor, Playwright and Director
I would say that I am a complete product of Prithvi Theatre.

Ratna Pathak Shah, Actor
Prithvi is a theatre that is tiny and intimate - a theatre meant for actors to try out things and do new things. The bottomline is that Prithvi is interested in encouraging the entire paraphernalia of theatre, pushing the boundaries of what is possible in theatre.

Getting There

Prithvi Theatre is centrally located in the heart of the Mumbai suburbs in Juhu and is very well connected with rail and road network.

By Air: Mumbai Chhatrapati International Airport is just 20 minutes away from Prithvi Theatre.

By Rail: The nearest railhead on the Mumbai Suburban Western Line is Ville Parle from which buses and auto rickshaws regularly ply to Juhu. If you are travelling from the eastern suburbs of Mumbai, then you can take the Ghatkopar-Versova Metro and get down at DN Nagar Station and from there take a bus or auto to Prithvi Theatre.

By Road: Prithvi Theatre is right near Tulip Star Hotel in Juhu. BEST Buses plying to Juhu, Versova, Oshiwara and Goregaon West from across the city have their respective stops near Prithvi Theatre.
**Prithvi Planner**

There are no seat numbers assigned in Prithvi Theatre. These are on a first-come-first-serve basis. It’s better to reach 15 minutes prior to the play and stand in the queue to get better seats. Prithvi Theatre was built on the principle of deep respect for the performance as the sacred space. So mind it, there is no entry after the third bell. There is no parking inside Janki Kutir. There is a pay and park facility opposite Mahesh Lunch Home.

Plan which play you want to see in advance from ‘PT Notes’, Prithvi’s monthly newsletter, a brainchild of its editor Ramu Ramanathan. This gives a detailed list of the plays and events at Prithvi for the entire month. You can either collect a copy of the same from Prithvi itself or just download the online version from www.prithvitheatre.org.

Experience the best live music performance at The Memorial Concert on February 28 every year. There is a historic legacy behind this concert. Jennifer Kapoor loved classical music and her cherished dream of having Zakir Hussain perform at Prithvi Theatre was posthumously fulfilled as part of the 2nd Prithvi Festival in 1985 when Ustad Zakir Hussain and Pandit Shivkumar Sharma performed to a spellbound audience on February 28, which coincidentally happened to be Jennifer’s birthday. Since then Ustad Zakir Hussain has kept his ‘date’ with Prithvi Theatre by personally designing magical evenings of musical encounters at Prithvi on this date every year. Over the years, these evenings have included an amazing line-up of musical legends and young aspiring musicians, both national and international, from genres ranging from classical, fusion, and jazz to folk music.

In the months of April, May and June, ‘Summer Time at Prithvi’ focuses on children so that they can participate in various theatre activities during their vacation. This is open for children from age three onward. Plays for children are programmed at 11 am and 3 pm every day of the week. Prithvi Theatre is not only famous for its plays, the bookstore with its classic collection, or for the famous cutting ‘chai’ and Irish coffee but also as a place of perfect blend of pure Indian culture and tradition with modern facets. So if you are visiting for the first time, please keep an evening reserved for experiencing the magic of Prithvi.

**Beyond the Play**

Hang out at the Prithvi Café. This is like the archetype French Café of the Renaissance times! The only difference being it’s an open air cafe hugged by gorgeous trees, bamboo and plants. Especially known for it’s Irish Coffee, cutting ‘chai’ and brownies, you will find here children taking part in Prithvi workshops to college students to theatre professionals, musicians, artists, actors, strugglers and industry stalwarts; either engaged in discussions or having a light moment against a backdrop of flute being played by a regular visitor who has been charming his unknown audiences for almost a decade now. Even on Mondays when the theatre is closed for maintenance and technical rehearsals, the café remains open.

While you are here, do browse through the unique collection of books at the Prithvi Book Shop. There is also a small curated stock of DVDs of world cinema classics and rare documentaries. In addition to a lot of poetry books and plays in various Indian languages, there is a second-hand section that sells rare gems at extremely cheap rates.
Tradition in Toys

Bhatukali

Tania Kamath
Photographs © Shreekant Agashe, Sunil Gokarn, Prutha Kulkarni

The author enjoys writing, teaching Yoga and is a mentor for English language learners.

At first glance, the Bhatukali may look nothing more than just a toy set of utensils for small girls to play with. Yes, they are, but they are much more too with most of the items in a huge set being actually functional too. In addition to that, the Bhatukali is an ancient lineage that harks back to a quintessential Maharashtrian way of living and culture. And it is precisely this that Vilas Karandikar, an enthusiastic curator of the Bhatukali, aims to preserve and pass on. The satisfaction is derived from the fact that each of the exhibitions that he puts up for his Bhatukali attracts hundreds of young girls, mothers and even grandmothers to make a connection.
Have you somehow arrived in Lilliput land? That’s what you feel when you see the scaled down, realistic models of household and kitchen articles from an era gone by. There are miniature women who are pounding flour, drawing water from the well and doing other household activities. As you watch on, fascinated, Vilas Karandikar, the zealous curator of these articles, jumps in to explain what it is all about.

“Bhatukali is the collective name given to these articles. I call them Aajichi Bhatukali (grandmother’s toy vessels). This is because these articles are more than just miniature vessels. They are repositories of tradition - a way of life that existed for centuries.”

Vilas has exhibited extensively in Maharashtra, in several states across the country, and even abroad. Recently, he was invited to Philadelphia, US by the Brihanmaharashtra Mandal. He encourages kids to play Bhatukali and usually reserves a table of articles for them at exhibitions. Even today, though he is pushing 70 years, he can spend hours playing Bhatukali with his granddaughter.

Though volunteers help around exhibition time with maintenance and cleaning, storing the pieces along with mounting expenses is becoming a challenge. Even so, he does not want to get into selling his Bhatukali. If people want a set, he starts collecting pieces rather than getting them made. It could take a couple of years to gather the 80 pieces that make a set.

What is Bhatukali?

Around 400 – 500 years ago, Bhatukali was devised as a method of getting young girls to learn home management rituals and traditions through play. Even boys participated enthusiastically in some of the games. Though Bhatukali existed in some form across the country, it seems that it evolved to a greater degree in Maharashtra.

Contact Information

Aajichi Bhatukali is available for display and/or play for birthday parties, munj(thread ceremony), and other social gatherings.

Website: www.bhatukali.com. Tel.: 020-24480279/9921074974. E-mail: mail@bhatukali.com.
Thanks to this one man dedicating his life to preserving the customs enshrined in Bhatukali, we are able to make sense of our roots and how we have evolved as a society. Vilas himself has become a storehouse of information and history since old timers open up and share stories of the game or traditions around it when they meet him. One wishes there was a way to capture this cultural wealth for posterity and for the benefit of generations to come.

An Ancient Lineage

Bhatukali is found in ‘Jnaneshwari’ written by the 13th century Marathi saint-poet Jnaneshwar. The word Bhatukali also finds mention in an 1857 dictionary compiled by J.J. Molesworth.
Vilas Karandikar

The fervour for these toys began very casually. In 1990, on the lookout for bronze rivets at the local market to fix an old swing, Vilas came across a bag of Bhatukali that someone had sold for scrap. Fond memories of childhood games with Bhatukali drew him to buy the entire bag. Soon he was scouting marketplaces like Tambat Ali and Juna Bazaar in Pune. A spark had been lit, and a hobby soon became a vocation. In 2002, he left his job to focus completely on his beloved Bhatukali.

When anyone pointed out that he did not have a certain vessel, he would not rest till he had found that particular piece. Today he confidently challenges any one to name a vessel that is missing from his collection. One can imagine that this is no mean task because while today’s household has around 40 – 50 types of utensils, a few hundred years ago, the average Maharashtrian household had around 200 types of kitchen articles!

For the Love of Bhatukali – A Snapshot

A collection of 3,000 pieces over 25 years in copper, bronze, silver, stone, wood, clay.

The entire collection is handmade. The first exhibition had 168 pieces.

Over 262 exhibitions held so far.

Every exhibition inaugurated by making chakli on Bhatukali chakli sorya.

Recognised by Limca Book of Records.

Appreciated by the Guinness Book of World Records.

Over 30,000 comments in guest book.

- **Thakki**, the wooden doll, is more than 600 years old. It has been referred to in the ‘Jinaneshwari’ from the 13th century. Dolls’ marriages were an important part of the games children played. Sawantwadi was the center for handcrafted wooden dolls and toys. Even today this is the place where you still find artisans who make wooden toys.

- Few know that the vessel used to serve ghee in has a name – **Shakuntala Bhande**. An 80-year-old woman shared with Vilas how the vessel got its name. Earlier, everyone ate according to the pangat system where the head of the family, the yajman, sat in the centre. There was a system for serving food. The kids would serve the salt, lemon, chutney, water. The youngest daughter-in-law served the rice. The older daughter-in-law served the varan (lentils). The gruhalakshmi would serve the ghee.

- After this, the head of the house would declare, “Aata shubh shakun jhalela aahein, mahnoon sarvanni bhojan aarambh karaava.” The vessel soon came to be known as ‘Shakuntla Bhande’!

- Royal children usually played with **Silver Bhatukali**. When Vilas decided that he wanted a silver set, it took two years and 1.25 kg of silver to get it. The workmanship involved was tremendous and difficult to source. The collection of 125 silver objects includes articles used for puja.
There was a specific type of pulley to draw water from each kind of water source. The day began with the father drawing water, heating it in a bamba. The mother lit the stove after her bath. She drew a rangoli around the stove and performed a puja in front of it. This helped to keep mosquitoes under control.

The pieces are realistic and are as functional as can be. The tiny taps, stoves, mechanical parts actually work. Chapatis have been made on the Bhatukali tawa and chool.

Over the last few years, Vilas began collecting games from the yesteryears like saripat, viti-dandu, ganjifa - a game based on the avatars of Vishnu. There is a bhawra that sounds like an aeroplane while spinning. It is fascinating to watch another bhawra that changes colour from red to green as it spins.

Amti has a tendency to trickle down (oghalane) while eating. Ogharale. The spoon helps to scoop the runny amti liquid and serve it. Hence the name!

As he travelled to other countries, Vilas expanded his collection with miniatures from around the world. From Pakistan, a surma kadi; Singap-ore, scorpion spoons; Thailand, an armchair; Taiwan, a set of gold foil playing cards; Germany, a sewing machine.

Vilas has even tried his hand at fashioning a wooden Bhatukali. This wooden ice-cream pot was created by him. Traditionally, the village artisan made sets of wooden Bhatukali.

Who said four burners are a new invention? Magan Chool, this innovative stove uses the heat generated by the wood fire to light three burners and the fourth hole allows the smoke to escape.

Kathwat is a specific utensil to make bhakris. The unique design allowed women who wore nauwaari saris to sit with their legs astride the utensil. Each foot was placed on the extension on either side of the vessel. This made it convenient to knead the dough and flatten it into bhakaris.

Milk and milk products were kept in a special cupboard with ventilation from three sides of netted doors. They were sometimes also kept in cool storage spaces carved out of the thick walls.

Rangol, this tool was filled with rangoli powder and decorative patterns were drawn around the pangat arrangement around each sitting place. Nowadays readymade decorative pieces of pearls etc. are placed around the pangat arrangement.

Sorya, these chakli makers actually can twist out chaklis. Every exhibition is inaugurated by churning out chaklis from these.

The shape of this tong resembles the beak of a parrot and so it is known as parrot chimta.
At any mention of some of the best hill-stations in India, the name of Mahabaleshwar is sure to crop up for the simple fact that it continues to offer to the tourist breathtaking views of hills and valleys carpeted in green along with a 'natural' ambience and invigorating weather – all of it coming together to drive away your city blues. Adding to this charming beauty of Mahabaleshwar is the adjoining hill-station of Panchgani, not to forget Tapola which is known as mini Kashmir. Mahabaleshwar is also home to strawberries, an indulgence you will relish and will want to repeat time and again. Khursheed Dinshaw takes you through a tour of these lovely hill-stations located so close to Pune and Mumbai.
For any person living in Mumbai or Pune or any of these cities’ suburbs, a quick weekend break would mean either going to Matheran or the twin hill-stations of Mahabaleshwar and Panchgani. All these destinations offer what is now becoming a rarity – the enjoyment of experiencing nature at its best; taking off on long walks through thickly wooded areas; watching the sun come up or go down in all its golden majesty; and feeling rejuvenated because of its unspoiled lovely weather. Of these, Mahabaleshwar attracts the maximum number of visitors for its scenic beauty and pleasant climate, not to forget its quaint narrow bazaar with its small curio shops and restaurants. Moreover, there is simple yet complete joy in being amidst dense forests on either side as you head to one of its 14 landscape viewing points.

The Points
Hunter’s Point was a popular hunting spot while Lodwick Point offers amazing views of the forest, the Fitzgerald Ghat and Pratapgadh Fort. Elphinstone Point was formally announced by Dr. James Murray in 1830.
It has been named after Sir Mountstuart Elphinstone, the well-known governor of the Bombay Presidency. The view of the cliffs from this point is breathtaking and you could spend hours just absorbing the sheer magnitude of what nature creates on her own.

Another popular viewing point is Wilson Point especially for its sunrise and sunset. It is named after Sir Leslie Wilson and is the highest point of Mahabaleshwar, providing a lovely view of dense forests as far as the eye can see. Wilson Point, during World War II, happened to be a base for the Royal Air Force. During the rule of the British, it was known as Sindola Hill.

Before you reach Kate’s Point, try the echo of your voice at Echo Point. From Kate’s Point one gets a panoramic view of the Western Ghats, river Krishna and Dhom Dam. The point gets its name from Kate, the daughter of Sir James Malcolm. So fascinated was she with the natural beauty of this place that she would often spend long hours just looking at her surroundings. Close to Kate’s Point is Needle Hole Point from which one gets to view a hole in a rock which can either resemble the threading hole end of a needle or an elephant head complete with ears and an elongated trunk depending on how you view it.

Arthur’s Seat is named after Sir Arthur Mallet who would sit here and stare at river Savitri. It is believed that he sat at this point and mourned the passing away of his wife and kids who lost their lives while they were being ferried on this river. Mallet was the son of Sir Charles Mallet, the first resident at the Peshwa’s court in Pune.
Around Mahableshwar

Boating can be enjoyed on the Venna Lake which also has the Pratap Singh Garden located next to it. The garden has a glass house where a number of cactus plants are on display. The Panchganga Temple is of special significance here as the origin of the rivers Krishna, Koyna, Savitri, Venna and Gayatri is inside the temple. This is established through five openings in the temple’s front wall that represent the rivers. Mahabaleshwar has eight pilgrimage sites, of which the Brahma Teerth and Vishnu Teerth are inside this temple. In the month of Shravan and on the occasion of Maha Shivratri, devotees flock to the temple.

It is said that this temple to honour river Krishna was first built by Chandra Rao More who was the ruler of Jaoli. He was an influential Maratha nobleman in the service of the king of Bijapur who ruled over India during the early 17th century. The temple was enlarged by Chhatrapti Shivaji Maharaj and Jijabai who believed that it was very sacred. In the 18th century Panchganga Mandir was damaged because of heavy rains but was rebuilt by a wealthy banker from Satara, Parashram Ramchandra Angal. It was subsequently renovated by the chief of Jamkhindi in 1875 at a cost of Rs 15,000. The temple is made out of black trap and faces east. The water from the mouth of the cow or gomukh falls into a cistern. In its vicinity is another temple, dedicated to Mahadev.

It is during the monsoon that Mahabaleshwar truly comes alive, especially so due to its three main waterfalls. While the waterfall at Lingmala is a major attraction, tourists also head to the Dhobi Waterfall that gets its name from being a popular place for washing clothes. Chinaman Waterfall gets its name from the Chinese prisoners of war during the rule of the British. These prisoners used the area to grow vegetables.

A monument that is of colonial importance but is hardly visited by tourists is the Beckwith Monument. It is 4,558 feet above sea level and is a simple and rather plain obelisk structure of about 30 feet in height. This monument is dedicated to the memory of Lieutenant General Sir T. Sidney Beckwith, Commander-in-Chief of the Bombay Army and Provisional Governor of Bombay. Immediately after Beckwith became governor, he went to Mahabaleshwar with his private secretary, Major Thomas Powell, to recoup from the ill health that he had been suffering from. He died there suddenly on January 15, 1831 at the age of 60 and his remains have been buried here.

The bee-keeping centre is another must visit for its live demonstration of how honey is made along with information on the benefits of honey. The equipment used to make honey is also on display. One can buy here good quality pure honey which the centre guarantees will not crystallize provided it is not kept in the fridge. They also sell honey-centered chocolates. Other than strawberries, carrots and red turnips, Mahabaleshwar is well-known for its chana. The traditional flavour is the salted black chana but the innovative chanawallahs have come up with lemon, masala, pudina, garlic, chaat, tomato, chole masala and jeera flavours as well.

The reason why the chana of this hill station is relished lies in the climate of Mahabaleshwar which favours the crispiness and size of the chana that is comparatively bigger than the normally available chana. The procedure of roasting the chana is also unique, adding...
to its flavour. A coal-fired bhatti at 400-500 degrees Celsius temperature is used for roasting the chana which are constantly stirred with sea sand so as to impart them that typical flavour. Mahabaleshwar is also known for its leather chappals.

**Panchgani**

From Mahabaleshwar one can head to Panchgani which is famous for its Table Land, the second-highest plateau in Asia. On Table Land is located Devil’s Kitchen, which finds a mention in Hindu mythology. It is believed that the Pandavas used to cook here while they were in exile. Some of the other noteworthy sites on Table Land include Pandav Feet, One Tree Point, Shooting Point which had been a favourite with Bollywood filmmakers, Ganesh Visarjan Lake and Gliding Point. Parsi Point and Sydney Point provide splendid views of the valley and the river Krishna. Panchgani is also famous as an education center with as many as 45 boarding schools, six of which are over a century old.

To be able to really enjoy strawberry in its fruit, juice or any other form, head to Mapro Garden, located near Panchgani. Nurtured by the Vora family for the past 50 years, guests can relish here fruit jams, crushes, syrups, dessert toppings, chocolates and fruit pulp candy. Mapro also has an ice-cream parlour and restaurant which uses ingredients from their organic farm. The Falero brand of pulpy fruit chews and the Mazaana brand of chocolates are other products that can be bought at Mapro. Visitors can also take a tour of its chocolate making factory.

And if you want to add to the fun of Mahabaleshwar and Panchgani, visit Tapola which is located in the backwater region at the confluence of the rivers Koyna, Solshi and Kandhati. Tapola is known as mini Kashmir because of its scenic beauty and makes for a pleasant picnic spot with a boating facility to add to the experience.

**MTDC Resorts, Mahabaleshwar**

Tourists visiting Mahabaleshwar can experience the old world charm of this hill station thanks to the MTDC’s newly refurbished heritage resort. The original structure was built 134 years ago in 1880 CE and has recently been restored to its original glory. Each of the heritage suites have been refurbished with modern interiors complete with LCD televisions and exquisite furniture to lend the suites a touch of grandeur. Paintings for each of these rooms were specially commissioned.

There are 125 rooms in total, of which 25 are heritage suites. Among the heritage suites, the writer’s suite is particularly charming having been designed with a small library included in it. It also has a well equipped cozy writer’s corner with a desk and easy chairs. This suite, along with a couple of others is also disabled friendly for physically challenged guests.

Says Dr. Jagdish Patil, Managing Director of the MTDC, “Sprucing up of the heritage hotel, at Mahabaleshwar, to provide accommodations for a range of tourists from across the globe and from within the country, highlights our constant effort to enhance tourists’ comfort across Maharashtra.”

So the next time you visit Mahabaleshwar, step back in time and luxuriate in the experience of staying at the MTDC heritage resort.
Keeping Gandhian Values Alive

Gandhi Teerth

Text and Photographs © Gandhi Teerth

The principles that Mahatma Gandhi advocated are as true today as they were when he fought for the country’s independence through his belief in non-violence. And these are best reflected and propagated by Gandhi Teerth in Jalgaon which attracts people from far and wide not only as a treasure house of information and insights but also for its scenic setting and tranquil ambience.
Renowned scientist Albert Einstein had this to say about Mahatma Gandhi: “Generations to come will scarce believe that such a one as this, ever in flesh and blood walked upon this earth.” How true! Only a genius can appreciate another so well. And just like that it took another genius to create something everlasting to acknowledge and appreciate the outstanding work done by the Father of the Nation. The credit for building Gandhi Teerth in Maharashtra must go to Padmashree Dr. Bhavarlal H. Jain, whose vision created this outstanding tribute to the life and work of Mahatma Gandhi. Dr. Jain had long dreamt of building something substantial in order to “preserve for posterity the profound legacy of Gandhiji’s life, thought and work.” It aims to carry forward the legacy of Gandhiji’s philosophy as solutions to contemporary issues facing the world today, and give the generation ahead the opportunity not just to learn about but to actually experience living the Gandhian way.

This exalted vision of Dr. Jain, fondly called Bhau, took a physical shape in the form of Gandhi Teerth in just 16 months! Located at Jalgaon, Gandhi Teerth is far from an ordinary monument. Apart from a statue and gardens, it hosts a museum and research school on Gandhiji’s work. The museum contains a vast collection of literature by Gandhiji himself as well as on him. It hopes to reintegrate Gandhian thought and values in present day society by keeping his legacy alive and promoting his philosophy in both thought and action.

Gandhi Teerth or Gandhi Research Foundation (GRF) was dedicated to humanity by the then president of India, Pratibha Devi Singh Patil, on March 25, 2012 in the presence of such eminent personalities as Justice C S Dharmadhikari, chairman of GRF, and members of the advisory board, Dr. Raghunath Mashelkar and Dr. Anil Kakodkar. GRF is set within a beautifully landscaped garden and mango groves on the top of the picturesque immaculately landscaped and pollution-free Jain Hills, spread over 650 acres. Close to the world-famous caves of Ajanta (55 kms) and Ellora (140 kms), it has wonderful biodiversity with a wide range of flora and fauna that includes over 90 species of birds, including peacock and langoors.
Treasuring a Rich Legacy

The magnificent 81,000 square feet edifice of Gandhi Teerth has been built to exacting sustainability norms and awarded a 5-star GRIHA rating while being on the track to receive the LEED Platinum status, which will make it one of the few projects in India to attain the highest recognition in both the LEED and GRIHA rating systems. This is estimated to last for at least 300 years!

The monumental museum has more than 30 sections equipped with an amalgamation of modern technologies such as touch screen, bioscope, digital books, 3-D mapping and animation. A guided audio tour is available in three languages – Marathi, Hindi and English. Other languages are to be added soon. An auditorium and an amphitheater both accommodating 250 persons are equipped with world-class facilities. There is also a souvenir shop selling books, *khadi* clothes and handmade gift items.

The Academic Wing

GRF’s Gandhi Teerth International Research Institute (GIRI), which is affiliated to Gujarat Vidyapeeth founded by Gandhiji himself and the North Maharashtra & Cytes University of Mexico, offers certificate, diploma, undergraduate and postgraduate courses as well as M.Phil, Ph.D and further research facilities to propagate the importance and relevance of Gandhian thinking in resolving contemporary issues. GRF provides quality accommodation to students in eco-friendly houses and will soon embark on a placement programme for its students. Though GRF’s Multidimensional Rural Development Program, the Jalgaon-based Jain Irrigation Systems Limited adopts small villages and trains villagers in soil-water conservation and management. They also promote artisans, farmers and tribals to attain agricultural progress and self-reliance.

A Wonderful Experience

There are many ‘do it yourself’ activities you can indulge in such as spinning a charkha or weaving a khaddar cloth. You can also relish authentic Khandeshi meals comprising *bharit bhaakri*, *dal baati*, *thecha*, *sev bhaaji*, etc. in natural rustic surroundings. And sit back against a setting sun to enjoy a programme of Khandeshi music immortal poetry of the legendary Bahinabai.

Some of the facilities available include a food court, a souvenir shop and a book shop as well as tourist attractions such as joy rides on horses and camels, bullock cart rides and boating. Comfortable accommodation is available on the GRF premises at reasonable cost. Prior intimation is necessary to reserve the rooms and avail of meals. The best period to visit is from August to February.
Distance from Mumbai: 412 kms

How to reach:

By Air: Closest airport is Aurangabad. Aurangabad to Jalgaon by road via Ajanta Caves - 157 km.

By Rail: 60 Trains from various cities halt at Jalgaon.

By Road: Jalgaon connected to main highways. N.H.No. 6 from Mumbai

Where to stay:

Gandhi Teerth has its own facility and several hotels are available in Jalgaon City.

What to eat:

Enjoy Khandeshi specialities like Bharit-Bhaakri, Thecha, Shev bhaaji etc.

Contact:

Gandhi Teerth, Jain Hills, Jalgaon-425001
Tel: +91 257 2264939, +91 9409555357, +91-9422776708
E-Mail: info@gandhifoundation.net ; Website: www.gandhifoundation.net
Open everyday from 9:30am to 6:00pm, Except Monday.

For those who are interested in getting in-depth information about Gandhiji’s life, thought and work, the following are available at Gandhi Teerth:

Collection of more than 5,000 periodicals edited and published by Gandhiji.

Collection and preservation of the literature authored by and articles used by Gandhiji.

Diaries written by Mahadevbhai and Manuben.

Collection of 125 speeches of Gandhiji in his own voice.

Collection of 85 films (including actual footage filmed in his lifetime) on Gandhiji’s life.

Collection of almost everything written about Gandhiji, including the first edition of the books authored by him.

An extension library containing 9,000 books written on the various aspects of Gandhi’s life.

Photo archives containing 5,000 photographs on Gandhiji, 4,250 photographs on Vinobaji Bhave and 15,000 images of different events and personalities related to Gandhi and the Swaraj Movement.

Postage stamps of 119 countries on Gandhiji.

1.9 lakh digital pages containing correspondence and documents related to Gandhiji.

Do it yourself:

Spin a Charkha

Weave a Khaddar cloth

Enjoy authentic Khandeshi foods such as: Bharit-Bhaakri, Dal-Baati, Thecha, Sev-Bhaaji etc. in natural rustic surroundings under the open sky

Harvest fruits in an orchard, farm in a field ... and in the introspective mood of setting sun get mesmerised by Khandeshi Music & Dance and immortal poetry of great Bahinabai.
Eco Tourism

To compliment and carry forward the timeless legacy of Gandhiji, GRF arranges for agro tourism over 650 acres of lush green habitat at Jain Hills which showcase:

- Research and development of farmlands with modern technologies.
- Live demonstrations of land, water and soil management systems.
- Watershed management.
- Practical aspects of micro-irrigation.
- Aspects of renewable energy such as bio-gas, bio-electricity, bio-fertilisers and solar energy.
- More than 100 acres of mango orchards with ultra-high density plantation of the Alphonso breed.
- Tissue cultures of pomegranates.

Some of the other programmes and visits that can be arranged with prior intimation and limited to groups of 50-100 people include:

- Bio-agro technology and tissue culture park at Takarkheda.
- World’s largest tissue culture centre of bananas.
- Onion and vegetable dehydration processing facility.
- Fruit processing and canning of mango, banana, papaya, guava, pomegranate, tomato, etc.
- Sustainable living and use of renewable energy with an 8.5 MV solar power plant.
- Manufacturing of solar photo voltaic panels and other solar appliances.
- Study of a bio-gas power plant.
- A field trip to see the rich flora and fauna of Jain Hills that includes 150 varieties of trees numbering approximately 1,16,221, 91 species of birds, 20 types of mammals, and 30 species of insects and reptiles.
There is nothing to beat the thrill that you can derive out of walking along a pathway in a dense forest while anticipating the sighting of wild animals in their natural habitat or absorbing the fantastic and myriad range of colours that the area’s flora may have to offer. To be able to absorb such a wonderful experience, you must head toward the Radhanagari Wildlife Sanctuary in Kolhapur district which offers all this and more, suggests G. Saiprakash.
Tourism in wilderness areas has turned out to be one of the major economic activities globally in the last quarter of the 20th century. The direct economic benefits occurring out of such activity help the local community earn a livelihood. The custodians of these areas, the conservationists, and tourists too have of late realised that one cannot expect to protect such areas at the expense of the local populace; rather they should be involved in such measures, and should also be adequately compensated economically in the exercise. Eco-tourism is one of those beneficial activities that involve responsible travel to natural areas that conserve the environment and also help improve the well-being of local people.

Wildlife tourism requires a multi-disciplinary approach to ensure that appropriate planning and execution is adopted to minimise any harmful impact on the environment. Nature tourism is based on the use of natural resources in a relatively undeveloped state, including scenery, topography, water features, vegetation, and wildlife. Tourism in protected areas aims at creating awareness among tourists, the general public and even the local villagers of the importance of the conservation of biodiversity.

**Vast Expanse of Flora and Fauna**

The Radhanagari Wildlife Sanctuary notified by the Government of Maharashtra in 1985 is one of several such places popular amongst nature lovers. Known as the Dajipur Sanctuary, the area in and around this place was actually the private shooting block of the erstwhile Maharaja of Kolhapur. Post the country’s independence from the rule of the British it was notified as the first wildlife sanctuary in the state of Maharashtra in 1958. Further realisation of the ecological importance of the area led to the notification of the Radhanagari Wildlife Sanctuary in 1985.

The area of this sanctuary extends over 351.16 square kilometers and is nestled in a hotspot of biodiversity, the Western Ghats. Along with Chandoli National Park, Koyana Wildlife Sanctuary and Kaas plateau, the Radhanagari Wildlife sanctuary forms the Maharashtra cluster of the World Heritage Site-Serial Nomination in Maharashtra leg of the Western Ghats.

The aesthetic and recreational value of the area attracts a large number of wildlife enthusiasts. The Indian Bison or the Gaur is the flagship species of this sanctuary and its other notable fauna include the tiger, leopard, sloth bear, Giant Squirrel, mouse deer, barking deer, and so on. The topographical variations of the diverse habitat support varied plant diversity. Dans and Sadas are the unique habitats in this wildlife sanctuary. The dense evergreen and semi-evergreen patches of forests constitute the ‘climatic climax’ of vegetation known locally as ‘Dans’ or ‘Rai’. Rai and devarai refer to patches of forests that are traditionally protected by local villagers.
and are of cultural and religious importance.

Numerous streams, perennial and seasonal, that are scattered all over drain into the catchments of two dams constructed on the rivers Bhogavati (Radhanagari Dam) and river Dudhganga (Kallamwadi Dam). These two reservoirs and their surrounding forests constitute prime habitat for the animals, birds, insects and reptiles found in this sanctuary. The vegetation found here is principally of the southern tropical semi-evergreen and the west coast semi-evergreen forest type with a mix of the southern tropical moist mixed deciduous forests and the west coast tropical evergreen forests.

The principal species of flora found in the area include Jamun, Mango, Anjani, Hirda, Surangi, Phanasi, Karvi, Nana, Beheda, Umba, Asana, Kumbhi, Kunkum, Bibla, Karavand, etc. In addition to these, many species of conservation importance, listed in the ‘Red Data’ book of the IUCN, are present in the area. The sanctuary is home to a variety of wild fauna, including 47 species of mammals, 59 species of reptiles, 20 species of amphibians, 264 species of birds and 66 species of butterflies. The area also plays host to many an endemically threatened flora and fauna. The forests are contiguous to the protected areas of Goa and Karnataka and constitute an important corridor for wildlife movement including tigers from the Sahyadri Tiger Reserve.

The climate is moderate with mean rainfall averaging 2,500 mm with a maximum recorded rainfall of 5,000 mm. During Summers the mean temperature ranges between 30 to 35 and the minimum during winter ranges between 9 to 16 degrees Celsius. The spots frequented by the tourists include the Rajarshi Shahu Sagar and Garden, Laxmi Sagar, Ugvai Devi, Mahadev Mandir, Shivgad, Zunjuche Pani, Hadkechisari, Laxmi Talav, Kondan Darshan, Savarai Sada, Kalamma Mandir, Iderganj Pathar and the nature information centres at Dajipur and Radhanagari.

**Trekkers’ Favourite**

The single road traversing from Dajipur to the Savarai Sada takes the visitors across a cross-section of the lovely landscapes, enabling the visitor to appreciate the ecological significance of the area and its natural beauty. Also, for the enthusiastic and energetic visitor, trek routes offer a test of physical endurance and at the same time provide a deep insight into the typical forests of the area. The trek routes of the Radhanagari Wildlife Sanctuary include Raksai Mandir to Rajapur, Farale-Surangi Gate to Dajipur, Thakya cha Wada to Manbet-Borbet, Ugvai Devi to Phonda Ghat Point, Phonda Ghat Point to Shivgad, Zunjuche Pani to Hadakechi Sari, Wagache Pani to Laxmi Point, Laxmi Point to Jalwache Pani, and other routes. The trekkers need to take due authorisation and must be accompanied by a local guide, usually a member of the nearby VEDC (Village Eco Development Committee) at a fee prescribed by the park authority.
Distance from Mumbai: 465 kms

How to reach:
- **By Air:** The nearest airport is Pune.
- **By Rail:** The nearest railway station is Kolhapur.
- **By Road:** Connected by ST Buses from Kolhapur.

Where to stay:
- VEDC run tents, Forest Rest House at Dajipur, Irrigation Rest House at Radhangari and Kallamwadi.

What to Eat:
One can enjoy the local Kolhapuri cuisine.

**Administrative Aspects**

The management of the wildlife sanctuary is carried out as per the guidelines laid down by the government and encompasses separate plans for management of the core, buffer, development and improvement zones as well as eco-tourism. The eco-tourism activity is largely done by involving the local villagers through the formation of VEDCs under the umbrella of participatory management. The villagers are trained as per the necessity to manage the area in the manner expected. The best season to visit the sanctuary is from November to May.

The recently created facility at Olwan (Thakyache Wada) by the Forest Department is being managed by the local VEDC where tourists enjoy typical jungle atmosphere in the area, are provided local vegetarian cuisine and also introduce outsiders to local customs and culture. Efforts are on to enhance the visitor’s stay arrangements and provide means for access into the permitted areas of the protected area. For more information, visit www.kolhapur-wildlife.org which showcases the picturesque Radhanagari Wildlife Sanctuary along with the other protected areas.
Deriving Guidance From Ramdas Swami
Samarth Darshan
Ashutosh Bapat | Photographs © Sachin Naik, Samarth Darshan

The author is an avid trekker and history enthusiast and can be reached on ashutosh.treks@gmail.com
At the foothills of Sajjangad is a unique museum that recreates the many interesting moments from the life of Samarth Ramdas Swami who during his times exhorted the youth to follow the ideals of Lord Hanuman and build up both moral and physical courage to challenge the ills that plagued Indian society during those days. Ashutosh Bapat visits Samarth Darshan to know more about this unique structure and dwell upon what the saint had to say.
Can something that was taught or propagated in society 350 years ago still be relevant enough to stir thought and action, as also curiosity? Indeed, it can and this is amply demonstrated by the number of people who go to the base of Sajjangad near Satara to visit the Samarth Darshan Museum. Pains-takingly created, it makes for a historic site and a must-see institution of sorts that helps visitors understand the life and work of one of Maharashtra’s most influential saints, Samarth Ramdas Swami. It is at Sajjangad that the saint resided for some time and eventually breathed his last, and the museum is more like a theme park constructed on an area of 8,000 square feet in 2012 by one of his followers, Arun Godbole, a tax consultant and film producer by profession. Godbole had for many years nursed a passion to bring Samarth Ramdas Swami’s work and life into the limelight and it was this zeal that led him to use the audio-visual medium to put this across to a maximum number of people.

**Crystallizing A Dream**

Once the idea took roots, Godbole started working on its realisation on a war footing. The first challenge was the space required at Sajjangad which fortunately was tackled by Dnyaneshwar (Bhai) Wangade, the founder of the Dnyanashri Technical Institute at Satara, who offered 2 acres of land on the premises of this institute at the foothills of Sajjangad to construct Godbole’s mega project. Sanjay Dabke offered technical support while the funds came from Guardian Holidays in Pune. Meanwhile, important tips were offered by Rajeev Jahnapurkar and Atul Matavadekar, a well-known art director. Renowned historian Babasaheb Purandare played a vital role in detailing the plan of the theme park while lighting was managed by Rahul Dikshit and photography by Vijayendra Patil.

The construction of this project started in October 2012 after a *bhoomi puja* was performed at the hands of Babasaheb Purandare, Mohan Buva and Marutibuva Ramdasi, ardent disciples of Ramdas Swami. To help visitors understand the life, philosophies and teachings of Ramdas Swami, cut-outs and life-sized statues were first erected at the site. This helped demonstrate some of the main events and places in the saint’s life, including his home, birth, childhood, marriage, running away from home, penance at Takali, erection of the images of Maruti, construction of Hanuman’s statue at Badrinath in the Himalayas, his return to Maharashtra, residence at Chaphal, the writing of Dasbodh, etc.

In the museum is an exclusive section spread over 4,000 square feet that highlights the 11 Marutis that Ramdas Swami had constructed. This project comprises statues made out of fiber glass that are so intricately carved that they look life-like. There are maps for
those who would like to visit all these Marutis. Adding to this theme park is the attraction of a 150-seat auditorium which screens a documentary film on Samarth Ramdas Swami. What also makes this museum special is that young people from the nearby villages of Gajavadi and Parali have been trained to render all the information to the visitors. One of the most prominent landmarks in this area now is the huge statue of Hanuman which was unveiled on February 8, 2014.

About Samarth Ramdas Swami

As Narayan, the younger son of Suryaji Thosar, heard the rhymes “Shubh Mangal Savdhhan” at his own marriage ceremony which he was reluctantly attending, he fled from the function and began to continuously run toward an endless direction. He thereafter never thought of his town, his home, his family and friends. He had already made up his mind then to dedicate his life to the immense bhakti of Prabhu Ramchandra, his idol. After penance of almost 12 years at Takali near Nashik, he crisscrossed the country, observing the lifestyle of the people, their culture, and their social status. Also, he experienced that society depends much on fate and providence. And so Narayan changed to Ramdas and further evolved into Samarth Ramdas Swami in due course of time.

Samarth Ramdas Swami then returned to Maharashtra, his own land, and dedicated the rest of his life to the service of society. He took enormous efforts in strengthening the youth and made them capable enough to fight against the injustices that prevailed at that time. He established temples in several villages in the service of Lord Hanuman to convey the importance of exercise to the youth and also taught them to get together and fight the enemy. He thus performed the role of a warrior. Also, his contribution in the field of literature was significant with ‘Dasbodh’ and ‘Manache Shlok’ continuing to retain a unique position even today. In fact, the way he lived his life began to acquire legendary proportions – instilling courage and moral values among those who followed him.
Ever wondered what does a bird feel and see when it takes to the skies and watches the ground beneath it pass by? In fact, it is this perennial desire among humans to fly that led to the birth of the airplane. Since then there have evolved various other modes of air-borne transport, both for travel and joy, which have given us the same pleasure as what must be experienced by those with wings. And one of these is the hot air balloon, made so famous by movies like ‘Around the World in 80 Days’, Police Academy 4’, ‘Master of the World’, ‘Congo’, and so on. Even the mere sight of a hot air balloon sends a tingle down the spine for the kind of adventure that it represents.

Imagine then taking off in a hot air balloon at an early hour in the morning and then absorbing a truly picturesque and breathtaking vista of green fields; tiny hamlets with smoke curling upwards through the rough-hewn chimneys or chullahs of the huts; people going about their work; small and big roads snaking their way through the hills and into the towns; patchy clouds drifting alongside or below you; the sun peeping out in the horizon and ready for yet another day of warming up the earth; a river or two reflecting the images of the sky; boats moving languidly in the shallow waters or anchored near the river banks.....and much more. All this is no longer limited to the movies. It’s an experience you can avail of with ease thanks to hot air ballooning now becoming one of the most sought after thrills in Maharashtra.
A Professional Service

Sky Waltz is the first company in India to be licensed by the Ministry of Civil Aviation to operate hot air balloons on a commercial basis throughout India. Operating as part of E-Factor Adventure Tourism, the company has been offering this facility in Rajasthan and also at many other locations throughout India since 2008 and has had over 15,000 passengers experience the unique adventure of a hot air balloon flight. It has now brought this to Lonavala in Maharashtra in association with Rainbow Riders and since its launch in October 2013 the company claims to already have had more than 700 guests enjoy the ride.

Operating under international standards of safety and security, Sky Waltz has been recognised with the prestigious ‘Most Innovative Tourism Product Award’, presented as part of the Indian government’s national tourism awards. “One of our proudest moments here was when Vijaypat Singhania (73) of the Raymond Group, who is a world record holder of the hot air balloon for reaching a height of 69,852 feet, came on board with us on January 11, 2014. He was very happy with our operations and confirmed the activity to be very safe and as per international standards,” informs a spokesperson of Sky Waltz. Interestingly, the hot air balloon experience is now no longer limited to those seeking a quick adrenaline rush. It is becoming increasing popular as a ‘gift’ experience; a tethering activity for schools and wedding functions; creating advertising opportunities; and corporate engagement programs.

The best part about a hot air balloon safari is that you get a 360-degree panoramic view of the entire landscape around, beneath and above you. There’s no need to book a window ticket! Also, an experienced pilot knows exactly how to turn the balloon in various directions so that you have a fascinating view of all the sides. The main flying season is from mid-September to end of March and the safari is usually conducted within two hours of dawn and about two hours before dusk since the wind conditions are most stable then. The safari is safe for all but those with major ailments or who have undergone recent surgeries may do well to take their doctor’s advice.

The Package

Sky Waltz offers the facility of pick up and drop from the client’s chosen place in Mumbai or Pune or from a common point in Kamshet or Lonavala. This is followed by a short safety briefing given by the pilot along with tea/coffee and light refreshments served at the launch site. The participants can, in the meanwhile, watch the balloon being inflated and the crew testing the wind speed and direction. The duration of the flight is normally of 60 minutes given a plus or minus range of 15 minutes depending on the weather conditions. Post
the flight and successful landing of the balloon, a First Flight Certificate is given to the participant who may also wish to spend some time in the village where the balloon has landed to interact with the locals and take pictures, etc. Customised breakfast packages and other F&B services can be requested at an additional cost. The onboard service includes packaged drinking water. The cost per safari is Rs 12,000 for adults and Rs 6,000 for children between 5 and 12 years of age.

**Know Your Balloon**

It was on November 21, 1783, in Paris that the first untethered manned flight was undertaken by Jean-François Pilatre de Rozier and François Laurent d’Arlandes in a hot air balloon created on December 14, 1782 by the Montgolfier brothers. A hot air balloon consists of a bag called the envelope that is capable of containing heated air. Suspended beneath is a gondola or wicker basket (in some long-distance or high-altitude balloons, a capsule), which carries passengers and usually a source of heat, in most cases an open flame.

The heated air inside the envelope makes it buoyant since it has a lower density than the relatively cold air outside the envelope. As with all aircraft, hot air balloons cannot fly beyond the atmosphere. Unlike gas balloons, the envelope does not have to be sealed at the bottom since the air near the bottom of the envelope is at the same pressure as the air surrounding it. For modern sport balloons the envelope is generally made from nylon fabric and the inlet of the balloon (closest to the burner flame) is made from fire resistant material such as Nomex.

**Distance from Mumbai:**

130 kms

**How to reach:**

**By Air:** Mumbai & Pune are the nearest airports.

**By Rail:** The closest Railway station is Lonavala.

**Timing:**

6am to 8.30am

The activity takes about 2.30 to 3 hrs from start to end

Those interested can plan the activity during weekdays and also reach office in time without having to take a half day or wait for the weekend to arrive.

**Contact Details**

Mr. Harshad Padwal,  
Sales & Marketing Executive, Sky Waltz,  
Tel: +91 9822988800  
Email: goballooning.mh@skywaltz.com ; harshad.skywaltz@gmail.com
A shower of wonderful memories

It’s the monsoon, and Maharashtra is calling. Refresh your senses in the company of your loved ones as you soak up the endless greenery, and enjoy special moments in pure, natural environs. Get drenched in new experiences, come and be showered with magical memories that will stay forever fresh in your heart.

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*Distances mentioned are approximate.
A peep into any Maharashtrian kitchen and one can be sure to find some kinds of ladoos stored on the kitchen shelf. Ladoos are ball shaped sweetmeats having great mythological significance and prepared as an offering in all rituals.

Sweet for every occasion

Ladoos

Radhika Ghate
Photographs © Prutha Kulkarni

The author is a catering and hospitality consultant and can be reached at radhika_gole@hotmail.com
Ladoos are an integral part of Maharashtrian cuisine and there are special ones for every occasion. Again, like all indigenous preparations, the ingredients used are associated with the local and seasonal produce. This tasty popular nutritional craver also scores a point over other sweetmeats due to its long shelf life. Most of the ladoos can be stored up to 15 days without refrigeration, though eating them when freshly rolled is an out of the world experience. While mothers try to hide the 15 day stock of ladoos from children, they often find an empty container on the second or third day. No matter wherever she hides the ladoos, the notorious ones find them.

One may find similar or common ingredients in many ladoos. The proportion of the ingredients and cooking style gives each ladoo its distinct taste and texture. Castor (powder) sugar, sugar syrup or jaggery are the sweetening agents and ghee (clarified butter) the fattening agent used in most ladoos. In the age of ready to eat food, a variety of ladoos are still regularly rolled in Maharashtrian households throughout the year. Here is an insight of what ladoos have in store for us.

**Ladoos for health**

These ladoos are prepared in homes as a nutritional mid meal snack. Ladoos are ideal combination of protein or carbohydrates (base ingredient), ghee (clarified butter) and sugar or jaggery (energy).

1. Paushtik ladoo: Paushtik meaning nutritious, this ladoo is made with a combination of source ingredients like poha (pressed rice), dry coconut, peanuts, til (sesame seeds), kharik (dry dates). Eating one ladoo is equivalent to the nutrition provided by a complete meal.

2. Kanik ladoo: These are made with whole wheat flour, ghee and sugar. Variations can be made by adding khus-khus (poppy seeds), fried poha or crushed dry fruits.

3. Methi ladoo: This ladoo has a unique taste of methi (fenugreek) seed powder which is added to whole wheat flour, dinka (gum resin), kharik (dry dates), khus khus (poppy seeds).

4. Moong ladoo: Similar to Kanik ladoo this ladoo is made from moong flour, ghee and sugar.

5. Rava ladoo: The most common and popular ladoo, this one is tricky to prepare. To get the perfect softness, one has to get the consistency of the sugar syrup right. Rava ladoo is made with semolina (rawa/ sooji), sugar
syrup and flavoured with cardamom and raisins. Sometimes fresh grated coconut is also added. However, this reduces the shelf life as the coconut can turn rancid fast.

**Quick Fix Ladoos**

These are made from everyday ingredients found in the kitchen or even with leftovers.

1. **Shengdana (peanut) ladoo** - This ladoo is made with coarse peanut powder, ghee and jaggery or sugar and is a great energy booster.

2. **Policha ladoo** - Best preparation to finish those left over chapatis. Ladoos made by rolling a mixture of crushed or ground chapatis and sugar/jaggery. Please note!!! These ladoos are not as tasty if made with fresh chapatis.

3. **Churmura ladoo** - Children’s favourite, this crunchy hard ladoo is made with puffed rice and special jaggery.

4. **Churma ladoo** - A variant of wheat flour ladoo or a close relative of policha ladoo, here fried or roasted pieces of flat wheat dough are fried, crushed, mixed with jaggery and rolled into ladoos.

**Ladoos for new moms**

Traditionally, special ladoos are prepared for nursing mothers keeping in mind her nutritional and body requirements post delivery. These tasty ladoos can be termed as a complete dose of natural nutrients. Once made the entire family enjoys these specialties.

1. **Dinka (Gum Resin) ladoo** - This ladoo is made with dinka as the principal ingredient, which is combined with dry coconut, khus khus (poppy seeds), kharik (dry dates), sugar or jaggery. There are two variants of this ladoo. One where the dinka is puffed up by pouring ghee over it or second where the dinka is deep fried in ghee.

2. **Haleev (Common Cres) ladoo** - Ladoos are made with a mixture of haleev seeds, fresh coconut and jaggery.

**Ladoos for festive occasions**

1. **Motichur ladoo** - Soft to semi soft, these ladoos are mostly made commercially due to complex preparation. Gram flour batter
droplets are deep fried in ghee, soaked in sugar syrup and then rolled.

2. Boondi ladoo: Similar to motichur ladoo, the only difference in the taste is due to difference in the texture owing to the size of the droplets. These ladoos are semi hard to hard. It is a tradition to display humongous size boondi or motichur ladoos as a part of wedding display (rukhwat).

3. Besan ladoo: Even though besan ladoos are must on festive days they are regularly made at home. These ladoos are rich and heavy, made by roasting coarse gram flour in pure ghee and adding castor sugar. Flavored with cardamom and raisins, these ladoos are soft and just melt in the mouth.

4. Rava Besan ladoo: Combination of rava (semolina) and coarse besan (gram flour) the preparation is similar to rava ladoo using sugar syrup. This ladoo has a great significance as an offering on the thirteenth day ritual of a deceased person.

5. Til (sesame) ladoo: These are small ladoos made especially for Sankranti festival in the month of January. Til ladoos are made with til (sesame seeds) and sugar/jaggery or combination of both. There are two variations - one is hard and in the second variety peanut powder is added which makes them soft.

6. Ladoos for fast: Like all other occasions specific ladoos made with Rajgira and Sabudana are eaten on the days of fasts in Maharashtra.

7. Rajgira (Amaranth) ladoo: These crunchy ladoos are a combination of rajgira and special jaggery with a hint of peanuts. An ideal supplement to fight anemia, these ladoos are hardly made at home and are available in every grocery store.

8. Sabudana (Sago) ladoo: Very rarely prepared these ladoos are made with sabudana.
**Some recipes**

**Haleev Ladoo**

**Ingredients:**
- Haleev seeds (Common Cres): 25 grams
- Fresh coconut (grated): 1 big
- Sugar: ¼ cup
- Jaggery (grated): ½ cup
- Ghee (Clarified Butter): 1½ teaspoons

**Method:**
Mix the haleev seeds and fresh grated coconut. Keep aside for 4-5 hours. Add the sugar and the grated jaggery and mix well. Lightly cook the mixture on medium heat (in a thick bottom vessel) stirring continuously. The jaggery and sugar will first melt and then the mixture will begin to thicken. Add the ghee, mix well and remove from the gas. Cool the mixture and roll into medium sized round balls.

**Shelf life:** 2-3 days without refrigeration

**Kankeche (Whole wheat flour) Ladoo**

**Ingredients:**
- Whole wheat flour: 3 cups
- Powdered Sugar: 2½ cups
- Ghee (Clarified Butter): 1 cup
- Grated dry coconut: 100 grams
- Poha (pressed rice): 25 grams
- Khus-khus (poppy seeds): 25 grams
- Elaichi (cardamom) powder of 5-6 pods

**Method:**
Lightly roast the grated coconut and khus khus separately in a kadhai. Remove and keep aside. Heat the ghee in the kadhai and fry the poha till they puff up. Drain and keep aside. Coarsely pound the roasted coconut, khus khus and the poha. On medium heat, sauté the whole wheat flour in the same ghee. When the colour of the flour changes to light pink remove the mixture from fire. Add castor sugar, crushed coconut, khus khus, poha and cardamom powder. Once the mixture cools a little, mix well and roll into even sized round ball.

**Shelf life:** 15-20 days without refrigeration

**Rava Ladoo**

**Ingredients:**
- Rava (semolina): 2 cups
- Ghee (Clarified Butter): ¼ cup
- Sugar: 1¼ cups
- Water: 2 cups
- Elaichi (Cardamom) powder of 6-8 pods
- Bedana (Golden raisins): 15-20 nos
- Badam (Almond): 8-10 nos

**Method:**
Soak the almonds in warm water for some time. Peel and cut into thin slices. Melt the ghee in a kadhai and roast the rava on medium flame till it changes colour to light pink. Remove and keep aside. In a thick bottom vessel make sugar syrup (with sugar and water) till it forms two string consistency. Remove from gas. Add the roasted rava, mix well and set aside for 3-4 hours. Once the rava soaks in all the syrup, add cardamom powder. Mix and roll into even size round balls. Garnish by pressing one raisin and an almond slice on each ladoo.

**Shelf life:** 8-10 days without refrigeration

**Note:**
Saffron powder can also be added along with cardamom powder.

**Variation:** Rava ladoos can be made by adding fresh coconut which adds to the taste and gives a soft texture. However the shelf life for the same is 2-3 days without refrigeration. Add ½ cup fresh grated coconut just before the semolina changes colour. Roast for 2-3 mins and follow the same procedure as above.

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**Chhota Bheem**

The nutritional value of ladoos in our culture is highlighted in the latest popular Indian animated series Chhota Bheem. Like Popeye pops spinach, the principal character Bheem gulps down a few tun tun mausis (auntly) ladoos to regain his strength before performing a feat of valour.

**LADDOO KHAO
ENERGY DAO**

Dinka is gum resin of the plant Acacia Arebica (Babool). It helps maintain natural oil balance in the body and is a very good source of easily digestible salts. Strengthens the discs between the spines and lubricates the joints (especially those women that undergo pressure during labour).

Haleev or Common cress (Lepidium Sativum): The seeds of this plant are used. Haleev is a good source of micronutrients like iodine, iron, phosphates and potash. All these are essential especially post delivery to revive the blood loss and relieve the lower abdominal pain. It also helps relieve constipation during post delivery period. Increases the amount of breast milk and provides all the micronutrients to the new born through mother’s milk.

Methi or Fenugreek: Contains essential oils, alkaline salts, Phosphates, Lecithin and Nucleo albumin. It has effects equivalent to Cod Liver Oil. Methi acts as an appetizer and reduces digestion problem. Helps to contract the uterus and reduces oedema during post delivery period.

Dinka, haleev and methi together are a good source of natural nutrients and when mixed with jaggery (iron source) is the ideal substitute for synthetic nutritional supplements. Powder of these mixed with milk is a good food supplement for diabetics.

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**Saffron powder can also be added along with cardamom powder.**
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Landmark achievements follow as MTDC goes global, with first office in Japan

Mumbai: In a path breaking move to develop bilateral relations with developed countries, and for promotion of tourism in Maharashtra state, the Government of Maharashtra along with Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation (MTDC) has opened its first office at Tokyo in Japan.

Wakayama Prefecture has provided MTDC about 80 square feet of its office space to promote Maharashtra tourism in Japan. The office space was inaugurated by Honorable State Minister for Cultural Affairs Sanjay Deotale on June 27. Present on the occasion were Shri Sumit Mullick, Additional Chief Secretary, Dr Jagdish Patil, Managing Director of MTDC and Shailendra Borse, executive engineer of MTDC.

Apart from the office space the delegation was also able to achieve landmark meetings and decisions which would enable both Maharashtra and Wakayama Prefecture to further relations through tourism and business opportunities.

The landmark development comes in the backdrop of many visits, and Memorandum of Understandings (MOU’s) signed, undertaken by delegations from Maharashtra as well as Wakayama Prefecture of Japan.

In October 2013 Honorable Chief Minister of Maharashtra Prithviraj Chavan signed MoU with the Hon. Governor of Wakayama Prefecture, in Mumbai, and subsequent visits were undertaken by officials from both states to identify commonalities and fields which would be mutually beneficial.

It was identified that the relationship was crucial to obtain financial assistance from Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) for Phase-III development of Ajanta-Ellora caves, signing of MoU between Ajanta Visitor Center and Wakayama World Heritage Center to boost tourism bilaterally and also to conserve these heritage sites, exchange of office space between MTDC and Wakayama Tourism.

It also looked at the possibilities of erection of a statue of Bharat Ratna Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar, a pioneer, to spread Buddhism in Maharashtra, at the World Heritage Center of Koyasan in Wakayama, to identify and develop tourist attractions like hot water springs and fish markets which widely exist in both states.

On identification of the fields that could promote bilateral relationship between India and Japan, and also between Maharashtra and Wakayama Prefecture of Japan, a delegation of Maharashtra government visited Japan in June 2014 to develop both sustainable business and tourism opportunities between the two states.

Landmark Achievements:

1. On 22nd June, a visit was arranged to Shirahama, a tourist destination in Wakayama known for its hot water springs, fish market and Plum wine producing factory. The delegation also visited tourist information center in Shirahama and had meeting with their local tourism stakeholders to understand nature of their destination tourism management and help effective promotion of Maharashtra tourism in Shirahama. This inspired MTDC to develop its fish markets, hot water springs to tourist destinations.

2. On 24th June, a meeting Honorable Governor, Mr Yoshinobu Nisaka, was held and a MoU was signed between Ajanta Visitor Center and Wakayama World Heritage Center. Present on the occasion were Mr Hiroyoshi Noda, Director General Planning and Mr Yoji Fujimoto, Director General, Commerce - Industry - Tourism – labour of Wakayama Prefecture Government The MoU was signed by Dr Jagdish Patil, Managing Director, MTDC and Mr. Yoji Fujimoto. Also during this meeting, MTDC announced that it would make office space available for Wakayama Tourism Board in Aurangabad.

3. On 25th June, the delegation held a meeting at the headquarters temple of Koyasan with Mr Keikan Yoshii, Managing Director and his team, and a place for erection of Bharatratna Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar statue was identified. The decision was taken keeping in consideration the highest footfall of visitors in Koyasan.

4. On 26th June a meeting was held with Mr Arai Toru, Director General, Japan International Cooperation agency (JICA) and his team at Chyoda-Ku in Tokyo, and discussions were held to sanction Phase III development of Ajanta-Ellora caves, and of other major tourism projects in the state of Maharashtra.

5. On 27th June, the delegation met Mr Mikio Aoki, Director of Trade policy, Ministry of economy, trade and Industry, Japan Government in Tokyo. Issues related to investment in Tourism sector in the state of Maharashtra were discussed at length.

6. On 27th June the first international office of MTDC was inaugurated at the auspicious hands of Hon. Minister, Shri. Sanjay Deotale.
Marbat Festival

MTDC participated extensively in the Marbat Festival held in Nagpur on the 24th of August. This festival is held in order to symbolically help society get rid of all social evils.

Errata:
In our previous issue of Maharashtra Unlimited (Vol.3, Issue 3-2014), in the article on Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus ‘A Legacy That Defines Mumbai’, the acknowledgement of Chief PRO, Central Railway for ‘Picture Courtesy’ was inadvertently missed out. We regret this lapse on our part.

We hereby extend our gratitude to the officials of the Central Railway for their generous support and cooperation.
A Ganesh Darshan tour organized by the MTDC was inaugurated on the 3rd of September 2014 at the hands of Shri Satish Soni joint Jt MD, MTDC in the presence of Smt. Kishori Gadre, GM, MTDC and other dignitaries. The tour received tremendous response from domestic and foreign tourists.

MTDC resort at Harihareshwar

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Maharashtra gets its first Seaplane

MTDC and MEHAIR start amphibian plane services from Mumbai to boost tourism

Mumbai, 24th February, 2014: The Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation (MTDC) and Maritime Energy Heli Air Services Pvt Ltd (MEHAIR) launched the first seaplane service of Maharashtra in Mumbai today. The amphibian planes will eventually connect Mumbai with tourist destinations adjacent to suitable water bodies even though there are no runways at these destinations.

In the first phase of its operations in Maharashtra, the services will be launched to destinations like Aamby Valley lake, Mula Dam (Meherabad/Shirdi), Pawna Dam (Lonavla), Varasgaon Dam (Lavasa) and Dhoom Dam (Panchgani/Mahabaleshwar). Fliers can book seats on http://www.mehair.in

The service was launched by Hon’ble Minister (Tourism) Shri Chhagan Chandrakant Bhujbal and present dignitaries during the event included, Shri Ranjit Kamble, State Minister for Tourism, Government of Maharashtra, Mr Sumit Mullick, Additional Chief Secretary, Government of Maharashtra, Dr Jagdish Patil, Managing Director, MTDC, Mr Satish Soni, Joint Managing Director, MTDC and Mr. Siddharth Verma, Director and Co-Founder MEHAIR and Mr. Vivek Kumar, CEO Aamby Valley City.

Shri Bhujbal said, "This is one more feather in the cap of Maharashtra Tourism. We are constantly offering best and innovative services and concepts to boost tourism in the state. The Seaplane service will add a lot to the tourism sector and help unlock immense potentials."

Similarly, Shri Kamble said that it was the need of the hour to have such a service. "We have to keep up our pace with the global tourism standards. Maharashtra Tourism has been moving aggressively in the directions of making the state as one of the most favoured destinations in the country."

The amphibian plane service will be priced to suit all pockets as it will be for the mass market and not for a premium niche. MTDC has partnered with MEHAIR to extend its support and engulf the vast vision and encumbrance of this venture.

Dr Patil, said, “These services will boost tourism greatly. Seaplanes will turn vacation destinations into weekend destinations. The fatigue and expenditure involved in reaching your destination will also come down drastically.”

Speaking on the occasion Mr. Vivek Kumar said, “Seaplane services will add to the attraction of the Aamby Valley and will cater to the resident and property owners within Aamby Valley by offering a quick, economical and exciting mode of transport from Mumbai” MEHAIR plans to soon have a full-fledged commuter service from Juhu to Nariman Point which is the star attraction and is much awaited by the people jostling with the heavy traffic of Mumbai.” The first flight is being flagged off to the tourist destination of Aamby Valley which becomes the first seaplane destination in the mainland of India.

The seaplane service is being launched in Maharashtra with a Cessna 206 Amphibian and another Cessna 208 Amphibian aircraft will be inducted soon and these two models can accommodate 4 to 9 passengers respectively. “We want to charge our customer affordable rates. A journey from Juhu to Nariman Point could cost Rs 800 in a radio cab, and take at least an hour. We plan to charge an inaugural price of Rs. 750 for our service, which will complete the journey in less than ten minutes. This venture was only possible with the tremendous support from the MTDC” Siddharth Verma said.

For more details log onto: www.mehair.in, write to info@mehair.in or call: +91 – 22 – 2617 2929 / 2616 6646
MTDC celebrates World Tourism Day 2014

Mumbai 27th September 2014: Tourists arriving in Mumbai had a pleasant surprise as they discovered officials of MTDC traditionally welcoming them with roses and tying traditional Maharashtrian turbans in the early morning hours of Saturday at the domestic and international airports, CST, Dadar railway stations and at MTDC counters across the city. Informative literature on Maharashtra Tourism were also distributed.

Valsa Nair- Singh, Secretary- Tourism, GOM and Managing Director, MTDC, said, “This was a small but very significant step towards showing our care for hospitality. It was also a message to the stakeholders of tourism industry from auto and taxi drivers to host communities that we must treat our tourists with respect, honesty and strive to make their stay special in our state.”

This year the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) had themed the celebration on “Tourism and Community Development” and the official celebration took place in Mexico. In accordance to the theme the tourism body had organised a ‘think tank’ seminar on “Community based tourism in Maharashtra: prospects, progress and promises” on the World Tourism Day 2014”. It featured experience sharing and success stories on Community based Tourism across the state of Maharashtra said Jt.MD. Shri Satish Soni.

The speakers included: Shri. Popatrao Pawar of Hirave Baazar in Ahemadnagar district, Shrimati Vandana Muley of Gandhi Teerth of Jalgoan, Assistant conservator of forest Shri. Arvind Bhosale on community participation on eco tourism initiative in forest areas, Deputy General Manager of the organisation, Shri. Chandrashekhar Jaiswal.

The seminar was witnessed by the Mahabraman beneficiaries and other stakeholders who have rendered unique experiences to the visitor and safeguarded community livelihood and Community Development through Tourism.

Valsa Nair- Singh said “Maharashtra had attracted many international & domestic tourists due to its rich cultural heritage & diversity rising from cave architecture to pristine beaches. We are aggressive in putting forth Maharashtra and its tourist products across the globe by planning and strategising our activities. We hold our trust in the diverse people of our majestic state and without the host community tourism would not function. On this day of 27th September, we reiterate our stand “Tourism for Community Development”. Tourism has the power to change economies, trigger development, give better livelihood & employment for people and also protect our cultural and natural heritage”.

Many an initiative of community development have been taken up by MTDC whether it is drivers’ training, capacity building of stakeholders, craft training on hospitality, tour guide training, empowering local folks for entrepreneurship through Home stays, B&B and Mahabraman schemes.
Driver’s Training Programme

Tourism industry in Maharashtra has a tremendous potential for growth. Though the tourists are visiting the state, it is mandatory that we provide a favourable environment so that they feel the need to explore and stay in Maharashtra. Their good experience will serve as added value in the promotion of the state, as they recommend the state as an ideal holiday and exploration destination to their friends and colleagues. The kind of hospitality offered, interaction with inhabitants here and the ease of access to destinations should make them completely feel at home even though in foreign land. Hence there is a huge opportunity as well as a large untapped market that can be made a potential market by making the tourists aware of various destinations in Maharashtra and establish the state as a tourist friendly state.

MTDC thus took up this opportunity to upgrade the skills of the unorganised sector and started with a bang by training 5,000 drivers of the Mumbai region which is visited by a large percentage tourists. MTDC is trying to adopt innovative and flexible ways to impart the training so that the training quality and quantity both will be effective.

Highlights of the Training

- It is a demand driven short term training workshop based on Modular Employable Skills.
- Flexible delivery mechanism.
- Programme has been designed to meet demands of various target groups in the sector.
- Training will be provided by skilled trainers with practical industry experience.
- Optimum utilization of existing Government infrastructure for the delivery of the knowledge to make it cost effective.

Nature of training:
Giving training in Hospitality and Customer Handling to the commercial drivers will empower the unemployed, school drop-outs, and even existing Drivers especially in the informal sector with specific skills. The Training will cover basic technical skills, its application and source of employment availability, etc.

Training Techniques:
- Class Room Lectures.
- Demonstrations.
- Simulations.
- Case studies.
- Exercises.
- Role plays.
- Practical Experience/Interaction.
- Films.
- Practice.
- Audio Clips.

Course Module:
Training for Drivers: 1 day (11 am – 04 pm / 5hrs.)
- Importance of Tourism, Sense of Pride about City.
- Information about Tourist Destinations & Monuments within and nearby the City.
- Manners & Etiquettes.
- Customer handling and Behaviour Skills.
- Spoken English.
- Pleasant and Informative assistance to the tourists.

Batch Size: 30 per programme

The training programme is absolutely free of cost for all taxi drivers’ as a value add on to upgrade themselves in the market.

Here by the tourism department invites you to avail of this facility and for further information please contact Mr Mahesh Barve on 8793491182.
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