

KEY WORDS:

Sacred Landscape, Pilgrimage, Heritage, Processional Path, Sacred Place, Sacred Markers

Path and Place in Sacred Landscape: An Architectural Expression of Tuljapur's Pilgrimage

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ABSTRACT

The pilgrim paths and sacred places around them carry the essence of sacred landscape of any pilgrimage centre. Their positioning is historically interwoven with surrounding natural elements as seen in Tuljapur, the major 'Shaktipeetha' in Maharashtra. The sacredness of the deity Tuljabhavani is celebrated with the processional paths passing through the sacred groves of surrounding tamarind forest, along the natural streams and undulating plains of the Yamunachal hill. One observes that the halt points along these paths bear distinct type of architectural marker which is very specific to Tuljapur. This paper attempts to identify the significant role of such elements in the formation of sacred landscape of Tuljapur which has lost their importance under the pressure of urbanisation over the time. The study is carried out from regional to town level to discover the crucial contribution of communities and pilgrims from various pilgrimage sites to safeguard the character of place. The paper further brings out the classification of these markers, their arrangements and behavioral patterns such as 'Valli Baithaks', 'Wada verandahs', 'Otta Pathar', etc. In conclusion, the paper highlights that the awareness among the local people for protection of these sacred entities is the need of the hour.

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Introduction

India is a land which shelters the varied typologies of pilgrimage belonging to various regions and religions. Their significant identities differ according to mythological linkages. For instance, Hinduism encompasses associations of pilgrim centres with different gods and goddesses. For instance, we see the *Jyotirlingas* associated with Shiva, *Char Dham*-sacred centers associated with Vishnu and the fourth one with both Vishnu and Shiva, and the *Shaktipeethas* with Goddess Parvati. Tuljapur is one of these *Shaktipeetha*, important for communities in Maharashtra and North Karnataka (Marathi and Kannada speaking respectively) who venerate Tuljabhavani as their 'Kuladevi' or family goddess (Singh, n.d.). It is located on the steep slopes of the Sahyadri range, in the midst of the Yamunachal valley along the stream flowing down to the plateau where the state highway from Aurangabad descends in Solapur plains. The town has derived its name from the Tuljabhavani temple. Initially it was called "Chinchapur" because of the dense tamarind forest cover (tamarind is *chinch* in Marathi). It is 45 km from Solapur in

the South and 25 km from Osmanabad in the North (Dhere, 1995).

This place has historically acted as the pilgrim destination for Marathi and Kannada speaking communities who embark on processions from distant pilgrim centres to Tuljapur through the dense forest groves on the Yamunachal Hill guided by the rivulets or streams (Shinde, 2014). The processions further proceed by means of local sacred paths into the diverse community clusters and finally end at the Tuljabhavani temple while bringing interesting changes in the nature of respective halt places. All these integrated elements contribute towards defining the architectural identity of the place. However, the innate understanding of such spatial arrangement and their eternal continuity is gradually lost among the communities since post independence period and consequently the place has remained religiously significant but without much of its former essence of sacredness. This paper aims to rekindle this important relationship in Tuljapur as the very expression of the settlement by rediscovering and rethinking

about the concept of sacred paths and sacred places from regional to the town level. The scope of the research is limited to the study of historic and mythological concepts of path and places in Tuljapur, the structuring of the elements of the pilgrim paths, their connections and associations with natural features and understanding of diverse range of typologies of existing sacred places and their architectural character.

Mythological Associations

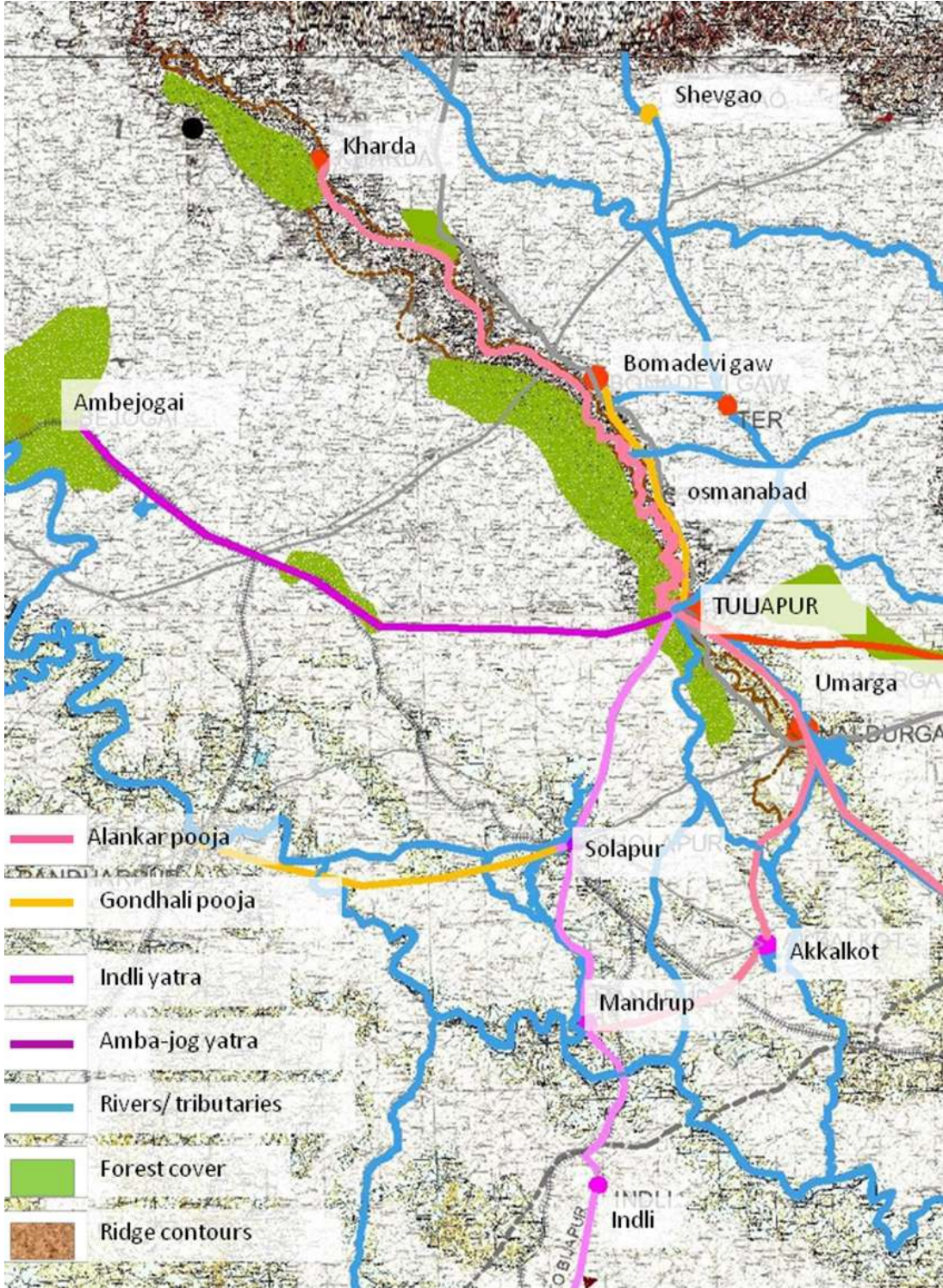
The Sanskrit term ‘*Shaktipeetha*’ is mythologically associated with the appearances of Goddess Parvati. The term *shakti* refers to the Goddess as the embodiment of the principle of energy, while the term *peetha* means a seat. According to the myth, to dissuade Shiva from his unflinching remorse over the death of Parvati, his consort, Vishnu cut up the body into many parts which he scattered all over the land. Each of the places where a body part fell became a *shaktipeetha* in veneration of different forms of *Shakti* and historically became pilgrimage centres (Bharadwaj, 1983; Hari, n.d.). There also emerged many other local myths associated with a particular goddess at respective local *peetha*. Similarly, Tuljapur’s local belief is that Tuljabhavani, the goddess, appeared in order to vanquish the demon Mahishasur on the Yamunachal ridge and during this act, nine parts of her body and ornaments fell at nine spots in Tuljapur. This belief gave rise to the unique idea of ‘*Nav-gunsampannasakshi*’– which is very specific to Tuljapur and forms the basis for pilgrimage here. (Interviews during the field survey carried out by the author in 2012.)

Emergence of Pilgrimage in Tuljapur: Historical Context

According to the local belief described above, ‘*Nav-gunsampannasakshi*’ is the concept of nine sacred spots located in nine different directions within Tuljapur that in turn define the orientations of nine distant pilgrim destinations which are connected to Tuljapur via sacred processional paths. Figure 1 shows the conjectural traces of such sacred paths connecting Tuljapur to other pilgrim destinations. These destinations are Kharda, Bomadevi Gaw, Ter, Shevgao and Ambejogai towards North of Tuljapur and Indli, Mandrup, Akkalkot towards its South.

The processional connectivity came into existence when Tuljabhavani temple was established in the 13th century under the Yadava rule. The temple was built in the Hemadpanthi style (Karve, 1962). Later, supplementary temples or *Muthas* (preaching centres/ pilgrim shelters) got established in Tuljapur. The priests in these *Muthas* started spreading the message of spirituality on their way to pilgrimage and brought the communities from various other destinations to this place. The intermingling of people during the processions lasting over a considerable period of time and conducted on foot, gave rise to the concept of ‘sacred paths’ and also places to pause, rest or halt points along this path that became ‘sacred places’(Chaurasiya, 2014). Historical

Figure 1 (opposite page): Map showing the conjectural routes traced as sacred paths connecting Tuljapur with distant nine pilgrim centers. These sacred paths are limited for regional processions. Map generated by the author with the base maps of the US army and the Russian army obtained from online British Library.



development of this pilgrimage further continues at the town level as well- this is discussed later.

Positioning of Sacred Routes

The study of reference maps (Source: Digital Asian Library) reveals that strategic positioning of sacred paths was dependent on the location of natural features. For instance, towards North, the dense forest groves (denoted with green dot hatch in Figure 1) shelter the pilgrims moving along the undulating plains of the Yamunachal ridge. On the other hand, the South side opens up processional paths to and off the stream/ river beds (denoted with blue color thick lines). The nine destinations described above are centres of pilgrimage dedicated to various deities or saints bringing a variety of devotees to this place. As mentioned above, the orientation of such paths is based on 'Nav-gunsampannasakshi' spots as per mythological associations. The study reveals that these paths were traced in such a way that pilgrims indirectly contributed to the protection of forest, trees, ridge topography, streams etc. and did not engage in any harmful acts out of respect to the sanctity associated with the sacred landscape (Kak, 2002).

Also, interaction with the local communities and readings of archival documents in the local language during the field survey helped in discovering that the halt points along the paths developed their own rituals to be performed by the pilgrims, becoming sacred places in their own right. This interweaving of paths and places imbued with ritual sanctity helped maintain the authenticity of the natural landscape and discouraging any new unwanted intervention (Kate, 1987).

Sacred Relationships between Place, Ritual and Natural Features - The Regional Context

The halt points i.e. the sacred places enhance the character of sacred paths in very unique ways. Architecture has a role in creating these place markers. A photographic study highlights the architectural value of these places with the

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help of three examples in three different areas.

Figure 2 shows the part of processional path named as 'Indli Yatra' (refer Figure 1 for the route map) running along the Bhima river tributary conducted by Kannada speaking communities from Indli in Karnataka to Tuljapur. The associated ritual is to offer prayers to river goddess by sprinkling some amount of water to nearby group of trees. These trees also attain the religious sanctity separately due to performance of ritual known as 'Valli'. Consequently this leads to conservation of the integrated landscape. There is a small 'Hemadpanthi' structure belonging to 13th century, a pillared hall providing shelter for pilgrims on the other side of water body. (All photos are taken during non-procession period).

Figure 3 shows 'Gondhali Pooja', another processional path along the Bhima River



Figure 2: Part of processional path named as 'Indli yatra' (shown in Figure 1) running along the Bhima river tributary. It is conducted by Kannada communities from Indli in Karnataka to Tuljapur.

towards Solapur, showing the arrangement of stones belonging to 18th or 19th century. They are arranged such that devotees can perform 'Jal-Namaskaram' (worshipping of water) which is to be performed while facing water (Dhere, 1995).

Figure 4 is an example of very interesting sacred entity on a path towards Bomadevi Gaw, composed of a platform with staircase leading to the small 'Maratha style' shrine of around 18th century dedicated to god Yamunachal, located on the ridge partially covered with tamarind trees. The platform is dedicated to the custom of worshipping the undulating plains of the ridge by performing a tough Yoga posture on different levels of steps and open platform. These examples indicate linkages and co-relation of pilgrim rituals and sacred places. Similar relationship between sacred path and places can also be observed when the processions enter and pass through the town of Tuljapur. It is analysed in detail in later sections.

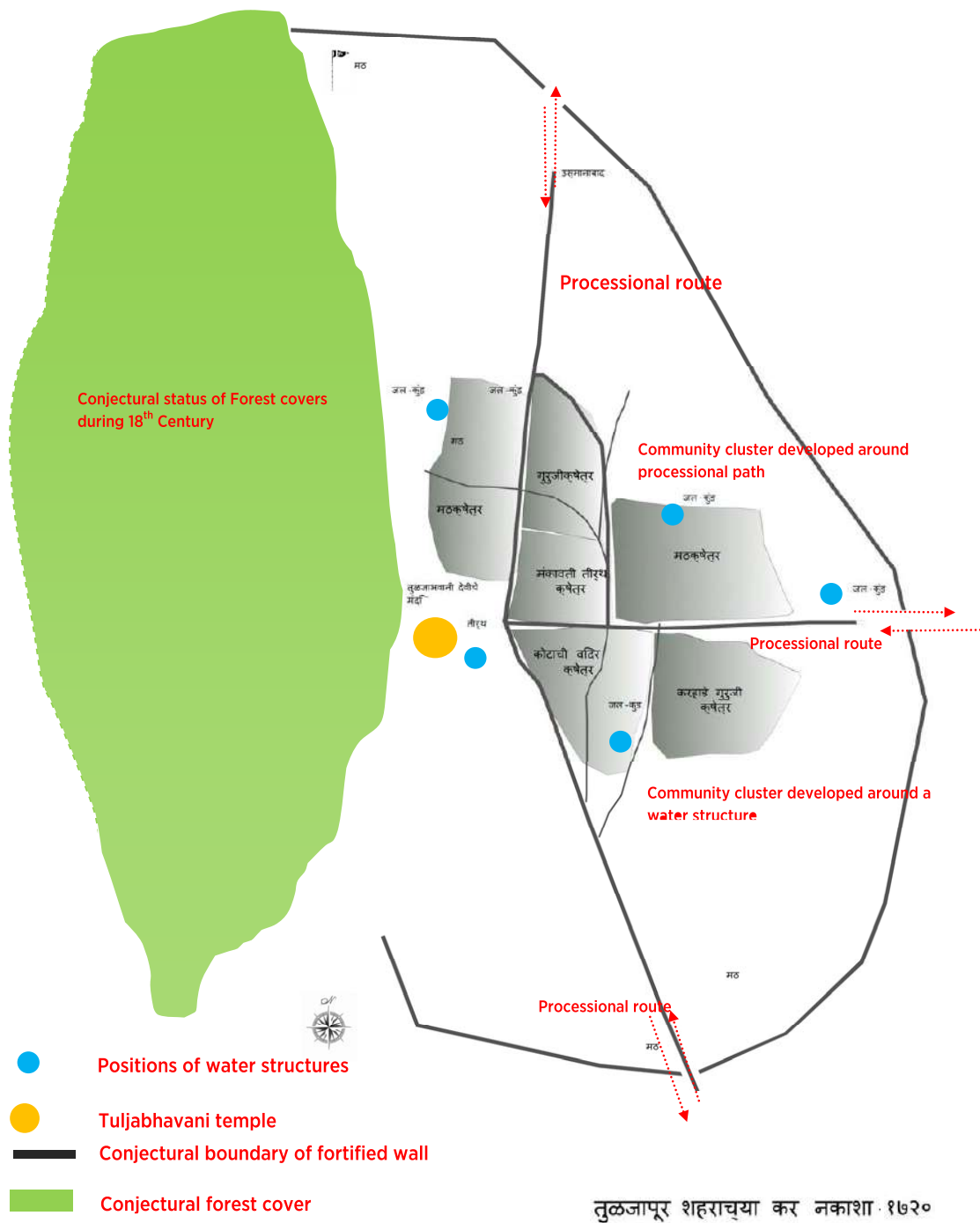


Figure 3: The view of processional path along the river Bhima towards Solapur showing the stone platform built for the purpose of halting and conducting the activity of worshipping water.



Figure 4: Sacred entity composed of a platform with staircase leading to the small Maratha style shrine of god Yamunachal.

Figure 5: Archival Map (1720) (redrawn by author) of fortified Tuljapur unfolding the historic layout of ‘Navgunsampannasakshi’ points and sacred paths running along them through different community clusters. (Source: Dr. Kadam’s unpublished thesis, Tuljapur, British traveler Charles Dyne collection, online British Library)



Pilgrim Town of Tuljapur: a Historical Context

As the processions enter Tuljapur town via regional sacred paths, one observes a series of architectural patterns of sacred places aligned to the streets, off the streets, at the junctions and so on. However, the historical continuity can be defined only by means of identification of their respective architectural styles. For instance, ‘Hemadpanthi’ style of structures suggests the 13th Century time period during the Yadava rule. Typical ‘Maratha’ style suggests Maratha period of late 17th or early 18th century. A blend of both Deccani and Maratha features would imply late 18th and 19th century during the rule of the Nizam of Hyderabad. Such stylistic variations over the time suggest that the pilgrimage prevailed and continued under the patronage of all these rulers and administrators successfully. The place witnessed a period of glory under the rule of Sardar Nimbalkar, an administrator of the Nizam.

An archival map of Tuljapur (Figure 5) shows the conjectural layout of the settlement during 1820, which unfolds the historical positioning of ‘Nav-gunsampannasakshi’, the nine sacred spots, and the organisation of regional and local sacred paths respectively as they may have existed from 13th Century (Karve, 1962). The arrangement of nine points follows the topography of the hill, Tuljabhavani temple reserves itself in the midst of the valley accompanied by the ‘Muthas’ on two opposite ends and water structures positioned in the central axis of temple. As a result, the main processional path (connecting the North side pilgrimage centres such as Bomadevi Gaw and South side pilgrim processions like Indli Yatra

runs along three ‘Sakshi’ (points placed on one axis) and divides the entire plain into two. On the West part, processions connecting other two ‘Sakshi’ points run through sacred groves of forest. On the contrary, the East side being flatter in nature, witnesses a number of processional paths running through historic clusters of Kannada and Marathi communities who started settling here since the 14th Century.

This place is visited by around 15,000 pilgrims annually (Census Data, 2001). Figure 6 (overleaf) shows approximate density of pilgrims experienced every year, conducting processions from different places to Tuljapur during the respective festivals. This also states how long the pilgrims stay during the peak period and non-peak period.

Path and Place in Tuljapur

Here we try to understand how these historic sacred paths belonging to regional and local level relate to the major nine spots and open celebration spaces in Tuljapur. Figure 7 (overleaf) is a map (based on the Development Plan of Tuljapur) showing detailed account of this integrated relationship between path and place where these places further tie up with other adjoining small built spaces finally linking to the processional paths. It also gives the mapping of all the major and small built/open spaces which are identified and studied mainly under the three categories of ‘Valli Baithaks’, ‘Ottas’, and ‘Wada Verandahs’.

Valli Baithaks

Rabindranath Tagore has said, “Trees are the earth’s endless efforts to speak to the listening heavens”. Marathi Warkari saints have spoken

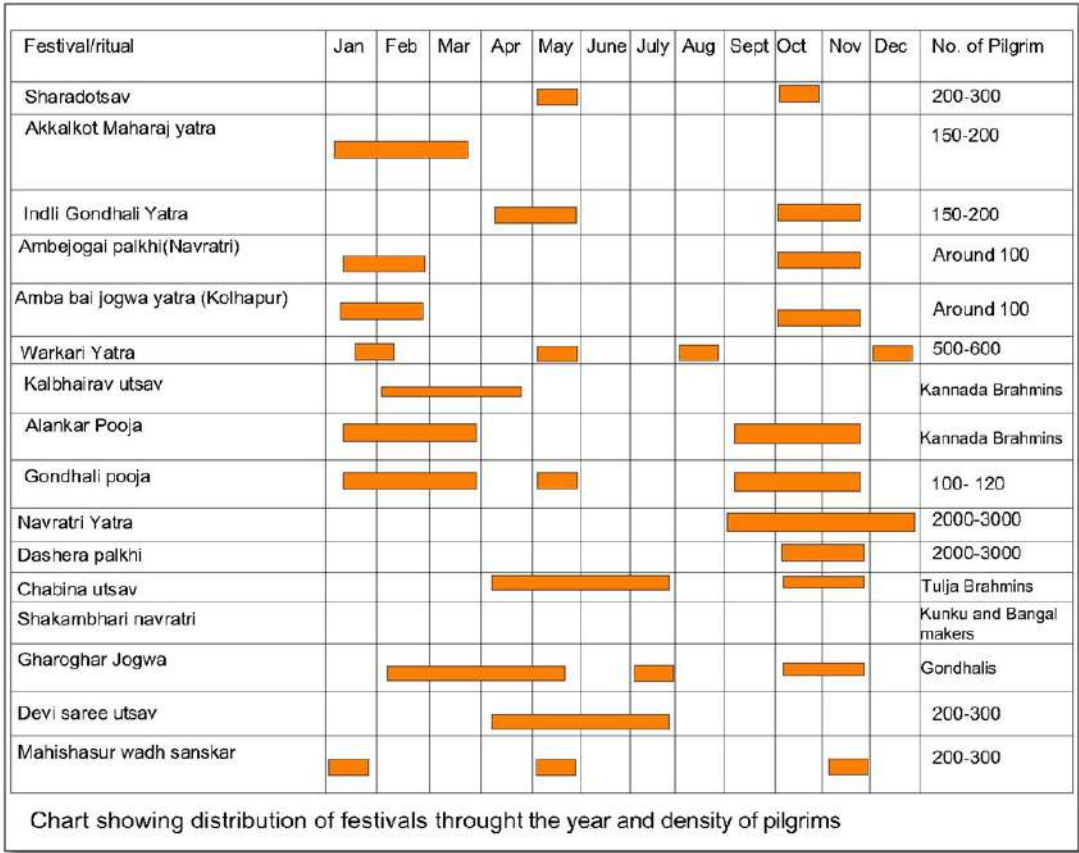


Figure 6: Distribution of Festivals in Tuljapur through the year and average number of pilgrims.

of “nhau maaku ghal ya shariras, unha abhala vallichya sanidhyat”. (Meaning: O mother nature, bring me up under the sky, in the shade of trees.) In nutshell, these quotes and beliefs imply that man is inseparable from nature and nature is the divine spirit. “Valli Baithaks” (sacred platforms below the trees) becomes a sacred place specially meant not only to provide resting points for the pilgrims on foot but also to cater to the balance in micro climate of the particular area. The design is comprised of mainly three components i.e. a tree, a raised/stepped platform and a small shrine. Such

baithaks are strategically placed at every alternate node in the town or at social junctions. The species of trees which were chosen for this purpose stand as sacred trees in the religion, namely ‘Peepal’ (ficus religiosa), Gular (ficus glomerata), Neem (azadirachta indica), Bel (aegle marmelos), Banyan (ficus bengalensis) (Kak, 2002). Each of them bears certain medicinal properties and also help in maintaining the coolness and the freshness of air.

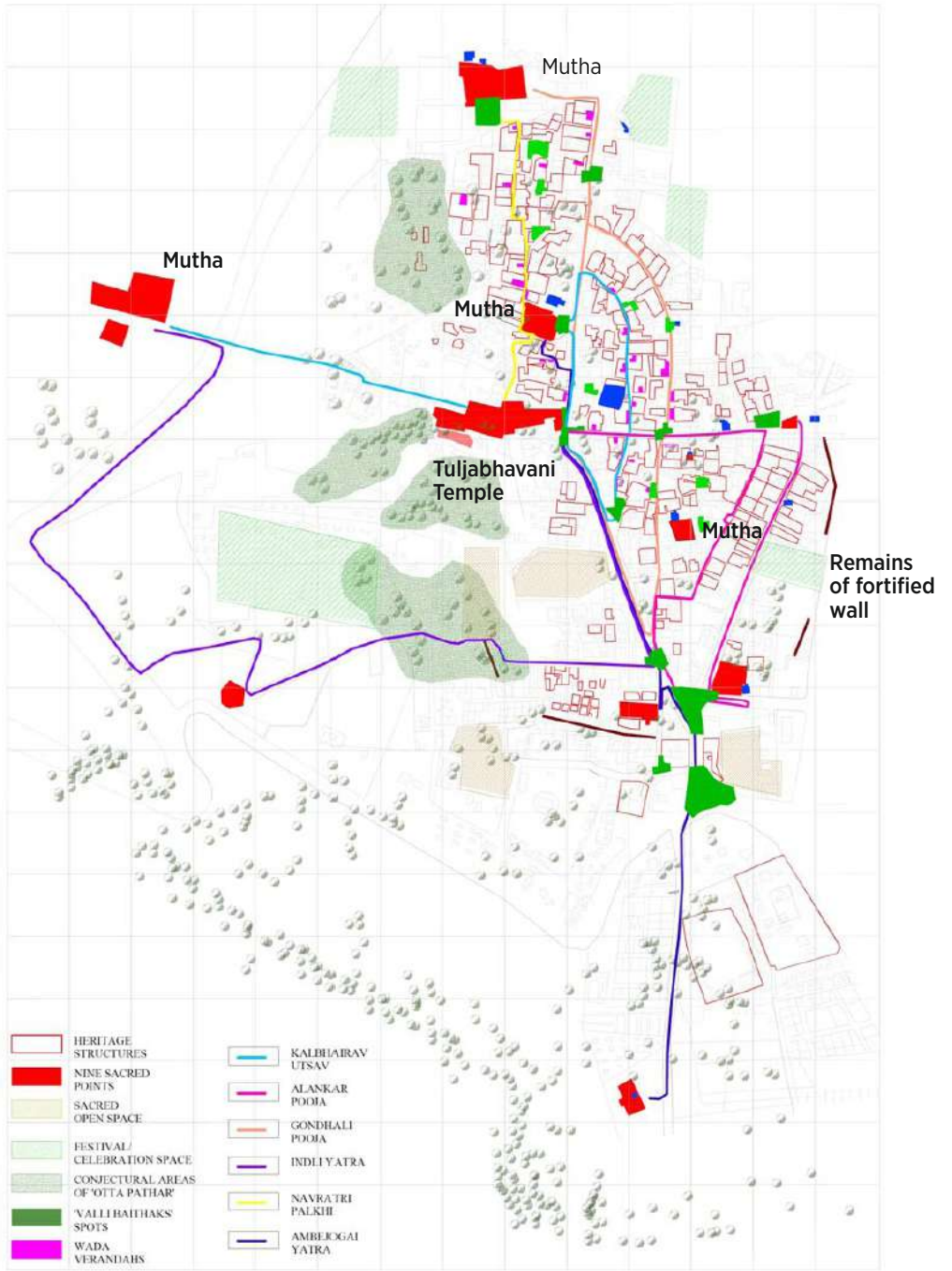


Figure 7: Map showing the sacred paths joining all nine points together through community clusters pertaining to major celebration spaces and various categories of sacred places. (Source: Author)



Figure 8: A 'Valli Baithak' with a Maratha style shrine on raised circular platform below a 'Peepal' tree



Figure 9: 'Valli Baithak' with a square platform, without a shrine.

Figure 8 is an example of a valli baithak that has a small Maratha style shrine on a circular raised stone platform built under a Peepal tree. **Figure 9**, shows a square shaped platform which is stepped and the tree itself stands for religious offerings, there being no separate shrine. Both the examples show the sustainability of these sacred places is dependent on religious associations. On the contrary, **Figure 10** shows small shrines placed on a circular platform that are disrespected by people because of loss of religious significance rendering these spaces as meaningless. Similarly, **Figure 11**, shows an interesting unit comprising of three shrines that used to surround a tree. Over the time, the shrines were abandoned and the place lost its significance. As a result, the tree disappeared as well. This negligence results in loss of belongingness in people.

Wada Verandahs

The second category of sacred places in Tuljapur is 'Wada Verandahs' i.e. the extended raised courts of residential built ups.

The common factor which defines this element is the external open courts that are pulled out to the accessible roads which are nothing but the sacred paths. The size and proportion of the extended platform changes as per the scale of the *Wadas* (Maratha style house). This variation is done to encourage good air circulation for the interiors of the *Wada*. Significantly, they become temporary halting points for the pilgrims (See **Figures 12, 13**).

On the other hand, **Figure 14** shows an interesting anecdote where the historic structure of a *Wada* was recently replaced with a new building but the 'wada verandah' still continues to serve the purpose of social interaction. This clearly shows that social interactive sense is still intact within the communities but the loss in integration of these spaces has brought down their sacred significance.



Figure 10: Disrespect by local people to sacred 'Valli Baithak' because of abandonment.



Figure 11: A group of shrines on a stepped circular platform (acting as a social/religious place) is under dilapidation with no existence of central tree.



Figure 12: 'Wada verandah' in a smaller Wada.



Figure 13: 'Wada verandah' in a larger Wada.



Figure 14: The Wada is demolished and reconstructed but the 'Wada verandah' is still serving the purpose of social interaction and pilgrim resting point.



Figure 15: Conjectural view of historic category of stepped sacred path and place- 'Otta Pathar'

Otta Pathar

'Otta Pathar' is an interesting composition of 'valli baithaks' and stepped verandahs. We can say that out of all the categories, 'otta pathar' is the most remarkable and unique sacred place in Tuljapur. It is comprised of small units of 'valli baithaks' along the two sides of steps leading to the Western gate of Tuljabhavani temple, the gate which used to be the main entrance of the temple in the past (See Figure 16). They are located deep into woods on gentle slope of the valley and historically used to serve as the Western sacred path. (Karve, 1962; Shinde, 2007)

The distinct nature of their composition is very specific to Tuljapur. Figure 17a & 17b shows



Figure 16: The Western gate of Tuljabhavani temple, previously the main gate to enter the temple.

the conjectural sketch developed from the information gleaned from traditional poems in local language and conversations with local communities. The sketch describes how beautifully the placement of tree platforms was achieved at equal intervals in order to successfully accomplish the tough journey towards the temple. Here, the stepped pathway plays a role of both path and place in the sacred landscape. This dense vegetation on the steep side of Tuljapur always helped in controlling the temperature in a hot and dry place. But the unregulated and haphazard construction within these groves resulted into deforestation and degradation of these sacred path and places since post independence period (Refer Figure 17.b).

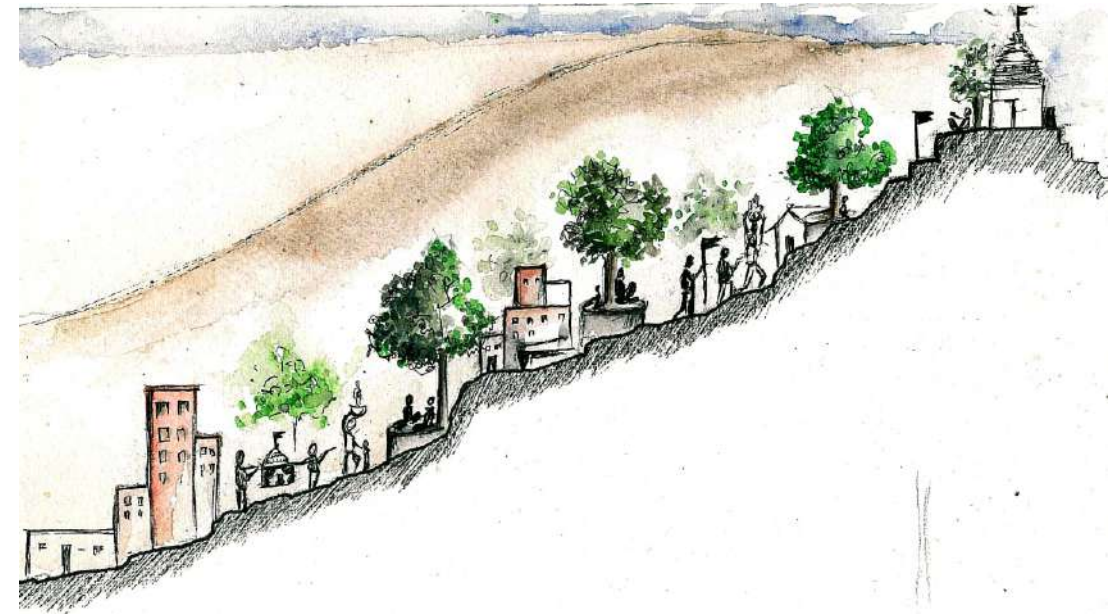


Figure 17a: conceptual section cutting through Tuljapur valley and showing the present new structures around historic 'Otta Pathar'.

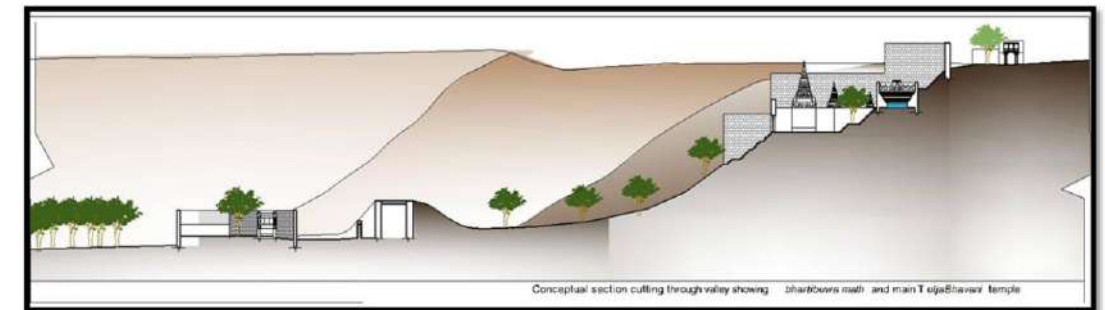


Figure 17b: Conceptual section cutting through Tuljapur valley and showing the present new structures around 'Otta Pathar'.

Conclusions

Sacred landscapes of places of pilgrimage evolve with the integrated architectural spaces and the inherent practices of sacred paths. With this extensive study of Tuljapur’s sacred landscape, one can state that the balanced inter-relationship between path, place and natural features and their eternal existence is the result of sacred rituals performed by the pilgrims and communities. The dissimilar character and diverse range of architectural typologies is developed to serve the sole purpose of pilgrimage. Hence, if this long lasting practice is disturbed at any point, it would bring adverse consequences to all the related elements. And finally, these places would be left in a meaningless condition.

It is not only the question of loss of individual space or architectural character, but the point, one has to take in to account is the exceptional role of these three components in controlling and maintaining the micro climate of entire Tuljapur. Due to haphazard development and people’s desire for modernisation, the awareness of the mythological associations of the past that imbued these elements with sacred importance is gradually being lost, and with that, the paths and places themselves which are either in neglect or abandoned. The pilgrimage remains in its external form but becomes bereft of its essence that existed in a delicate balance of a sacred landscape.

The need of the day is a revival of these places by bringing various communities together and involving them in the process of protection. Although the means of protection can change and not remain limited to sacred associations, the joint efforts of pilgrims and communities

should not be replaced. An active awareness program can help in achieving this combination.

With this extensive study of Tuljapur’s sacred landscape, one can state that the balanced inter-relationship between path, place and natural features and their eternal existence is the result of sacred rituals performed by the pilgrims and communities. The dissimilar character and diverse range of architectural typologies is developed to serve the sole purpose of pilgrimage.

Besides this, since Tuljapur has always served the purpose of pilgrimage and will continue doing the same, hence the architectural quality of new and upcoming pilgrim infrastructure can be controlled by studying and understanding this historic integrated system. The efforts should be taken to retain the value of abandoned and dilapidated structures i.e. sacred places with the collaboration of government bodies like forest department and temple trust by putting them into religious/ contemporary use. Simultaneously, care should be taken in choosing the type of plantation in and around such spaces to enhance the quality of micro climate. In addition to this, the existing plantation should not be disturbed or deforested.

Using geographical perspective, this paper has drawn attention to the hidden potential of significant and integrated physical setting of sacred path and respective places and community participation in its protection. However, in order to formulate necessary set of guidelines and recommendations for directing

new intervention in Tuljapur, further research can be carried out by documenting the place and analyzing its situation statistically. Similarly, the conservation measures can be devised by listing these heritage structures with respect to their qualitative and quantitative analysis. ■

All photographs courtesy the author.

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Glossary

Char Dham - Sacred pilgrim centres in four corners of the country (Badrinath, Dwarka, Puri and Rameshwaram) associated with Vishnu.

Chowk - An open social space, generally a road junction

Hemadpanthi - A typical style of temple architecture which was established and followed under Yadava rule.

Indli Yatra - ‘Indli’ is a pilgrim centre in Karnataka and ‘Yatra’ means procession.

Jal Namaskaram - A ritual offered by pilgrims to please God of water. ‘Jal’ is water and ‘Namaskaram’ is prayers.

Jyotirlinga - Sacred pilgrim centres associated with Shiva across India

Kannada - Spoken language of the state of Karnataka.

Kuladevi - Marathi term, ‘Kula’ means lineage and ‘Devi’ means goddess.

Mahishasur - Mythological demon killed by Goddess Durga. Local myth confer the act on Tuljabhavani, the local goddess.

Marathi - Spoken language of the state of Maaharashtra.

Mutha - A centre for preaching and meditation. Navgunsampannasakshi- ‘Navgun’ means nine values and ‘Sampannasakshi’ means the rewarded points which witnessed great legendary goddess.

Otta Pathar - A combination of ‘Valli Baithak’ and ‘Wada Verandah’

Shaktipeetha - Sacred pilgrim centres across the country associated with Parvati, consort of Shiva. ‘Shakti’ means power and ‘Peetha’ means seat.

Tuljabhavani - One of the several forms of Goddess Parvati, the deity of Tuljapur. Valli- A ritual offered by pilgrims to worship sacred trees.

Valli Baithak - A group of sacred tree and a platform below it with different forms of small shrines.

Wada Verandah - An external open or semi- open platform for social interaction as an extention of a ‘Wada’- traditional Maharashtrian house.

Warkari - A devotional cult formed during 13th century by the ‘lower’ castes whose entry in Hindu temple was forbidden.

Yoga Aasan - A form of meditative pose.

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