



Someśvara Temple of Pawas, Ratnagiri District, Maharashtra – A Case Study

RAGHUNATH BOKIL

Lecturer, PTVA's Sathaye College (Autonomous), Dixit Road, Vile Parle (E), Mumbai and Visiting Faculty,
Department of Archaeology, University of Mumbai, 2nd Floor, Health Centre Building, Vidyanaigari Campus,
Kalina, Santacruz (East), Mumbai

Abstract: Konkan region is narrow strip of land between Western Ghats and Arabian Sea. Due to its strategic position and prosperity, it was invaded by various dynasties throughout the history. Owing to its environmental condition it was not possible to construct temples of a size in this region, but there are few exceptions to this. Local artisans and architects started using local material for the construction and came up with one the most unique blend of temple architecture. It consists of its carved wooden pillars and brackets with tiled roof. Depiction of the murals is an addition to the embellishment of the temple. One such temple can be discovered from the Pawas village of Ratnagiri taluka, Maharashtra. The temple is adorned with murals, exquisite wood carvings, etc. This temple is the ideal model to comprehend temple architecture of this region.

Keywords: Temples, Konkan, Architecture, Maratha, Ratnagiri

Received : 14 July 2025

Revised : 20 August 2025

Accepted : 29 August 2025

Published : 30 December 2025

TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Raghunath Bokil (2025). *Someśvara Temple of Pawas, Ratnagiri District, Maharashtra – A Case Study*. *Journal of History and Archaeology*, 1: 2, pp. 91-98.

INTRODUCTION

The Konkan region of Maharashtra has a remarkable historical and cultural background. Owing to its geographical position, it became a crucial part of the maritime trade. Due to its strategic position and prosperous maritime trade, many dynasties went to war over control of this region. Shilaharas were the most prominent rulers of this region. Most of the archaeological remains are attributed to them. Not many structural temples are known from the region of South Konkan. Owing to its geographical and geological location, an entirely new style of temple architecture took place in this region.

TEMPLES IN THE KONKAN REGION

In the region of South Konkan, temples are made with flat tiled roofs with rectangular or square structures supported by multiple beams and pillars. Artisans in this region adapted towards using locally sourced material. This includes wood for beams and pillars, terracotta tiles for the roof and laterite blocks for the structure. These materials were in abundance and were suitable according to

the local environmental conditions. One more noteworthy thing is the independent *Garbhagr̥ha*. The temple featured in this research paper is situated in the Pawas village of Ratnagiri Taluka in the Ratnagiri district of Maharashtra.

***SOMEŚVARA* TEMPLE (16°58'18.78"N 73°21'5.38"E)**

Someśvara temple (Map 1) is situated in the Pawas village of Ratnagiri taluka. It is located approximately 20 kilometres away from Ratnagiri city. Temple is located in the premises of another temple by the name *Navalāī* Temple. *Navalāī* is the *Grāmadevatā* (Village deity) of the Pawas village. *Someśvara* temple is dedicated to *Śiva*. According to the villagers, the temple is at least 400-500 years old.



Map 1: Location

(a) Architecture

The *Someśvara* temple is constructed out of the laterite blocks found in abundance in this region. The entire structure is made up of wooden panels, brackets and beams. The roof is made up of terracotta tiles. Temple comprises *Garbhagr̥ha*, *Mahāmaṇḍapa* and *Kakṣāsana* cum *Sabhāmaṇḍapa*. (Plate 1c) Additionally, there are two more *Maṇḍapa*-type structures constructed on either side of *Mahāmaṇḍapa*. *Maṇḍapas* can be accessed from the outside as well as from the *Mahāmaṇḍapa*.

Garbhagr̥ha is made up of laterite blocks and is an independent structure around which the *Mahāmaṇḍapa* and subsequent structures are constructed. The outer walls of the *Garbhagr̥ha* have murals illustrated on them. (Plate 1b) There is a small shrine dedicated to *Gaṇeśa* in one of the *Mandapas*. *Mahāmaṇḍapa* is made of wooden pillars, brackets and a ceiling. The ceiling of the *Mahāmaṇḍapa* has also been adorned with paintings. Temple premises include *Dīpamālāas*, *Tulaśī vṛṇḍāvana* and Stepwell. Remains of the *Prākāra* can also be observed. The stepwell may have been constructed outside of the *Prākāra*. (Plate 1a)



Plate 1: a) Outer View b) Mahāmaṇḍapa & Garbhagrha c) Sabhāmaṇḍapa cum Kakṣāsana

(b) Wells (Figure 1)

There are two wells located in the vicinity of the temple. One round-shaped well can be seen right next to the entrance. Also, one stepwell can be observed, located right next to the temple but outside the *Prākāra*. This stepwell is made up of locally sourced blocks of laterite rock. This stepwell can be one of a series of stepwells located on the trade route from Ratnagiri to Rajapur. This network of stepwells leading to the Rajapur village from the Ratnagiri city can be used to trace out the approximate trade route during that period. It is one of the most utilised ways to transport goods throughout the southern part of Ratnagiri district.



Figure 1: Wells

(c) *Kāṣṭhaśilpa* (Wooden Carvings)

As stated, earlier temple structures were constructed of wooden beams, pillars and brackets. These brackets and pillars have been decorated with the carvings. These carvings are called *Kāṣṭhaśilpa*. These carvings include a wide variety of themes, patterns and motifs. The most common pattern includes floral and faunal motifs. Various types of animals, including a tiger, a leopard, a deer, and an intertwined cobra. Stories have also been portrayed in the form of narrative panels inspired by *Purāṇic* stories. Most of these panels are in good condition. For better understanding, these panels were classified into three types.

(1) Narrative panels inspired by stories from *Purāṇas* (Plate 2)

The first category includes narrative panels portraying scenes from *Purāṇas*. These include depiction of *Gaṇḍabheruṇḍa*, *Matsyaavatāra*, *Mahiṣāsūramardinī*, *Sarasvatī* and *Anantaśayī Viṣṇu*.

(2) Narrative Panels (Plate 3)

This type includes a wide variety of scenes, such as war, yogis, etc. We have two such depictions of battle. Here in one depiction, two horse riders are facing each other, brandishing their sword and in another, two *Māhūta* are seated on elephants facing each other, on the back of an elephant. There is one particular scene where two ascetics are shown smoking a hookah.

(3) Floral and Faunal Motifs (Plate 4)

This category includes depictions of various flora and fauna. Animals and birds such as tigers, deer, peacock, parrot and snakes are common features. Sometimes, intertwined snakes are also depicted. Other than that, mythical animals such as *Makara* and *Kirtīmukha* are quite common. Different types of flowers, especially lotus, are quite common. Many of the time frames are decorated using vinal patterns.



Plate 2: *Kāṣṭhaśilpa* depicting stories from the *Purāṇas*



Plate 3: Kāṣṭhaśilpa depicting various narrative panels



Plate 4: Kāṣṭhaśilpa depicting flora and fauna

(d) Inscription (Figure 2)

On the outer side of *Sabhāmaṇḍapa*, we have a small inscription. It is carved on a wooden beam of *Sabhāmaṇḍapa*. It only states ‘Śaka 1680’ written in the *Devanāgarī* script and in *Marāṭhī* language. This could only mean one of two things. Either temple was constructed in 1680, which is 1758 CE, or it was renovated in the year 1758 CE. (Bokil, 2025, p. 157). If it were in fact referring to the construction, then it would have been more elaborate and would have mentioned the name of the person who constructed the temple. For this case, it may refer to the renovation of the temple, as it is on the outer side of the *Sabhāmaṇḍapa* wall.

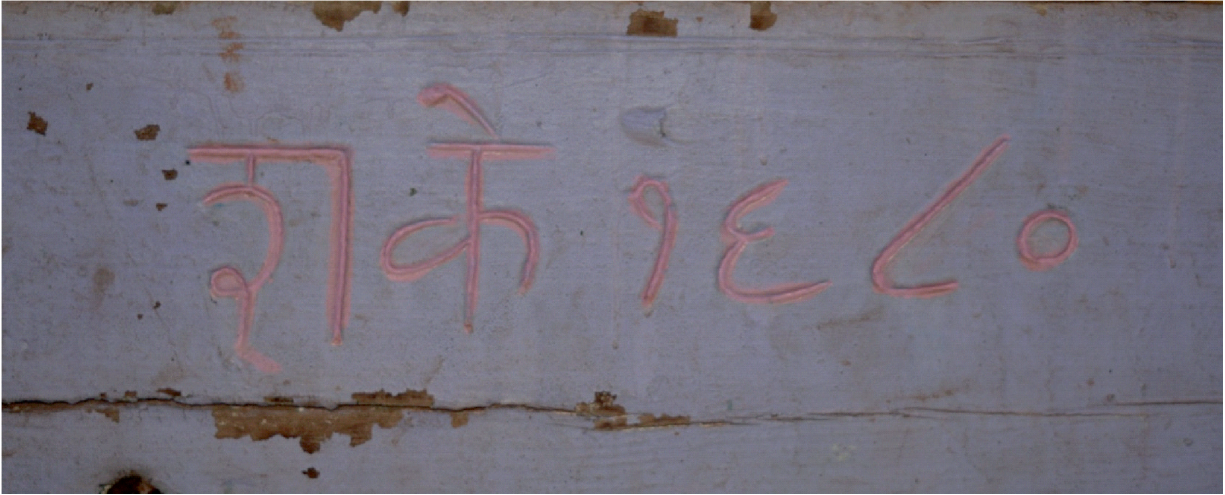


Figure 2: Inscription

(e) Mural Paintings

“It is often said that the Marathas did not develop their independent school or tradition of painting like other schools as the Mughal, the Rajput, and the Kangra valley schools.” (Deshmukh, 1992, p. 2) Despite the fact large number of Murals can be found on the *Wādās* (Official residences of Maratha Nobles) across Maharashtra. As of now, only a couple of sites have been found in South Konkan that display these murals. Such murals have also been found on the walls of the *Someśvara* temple. These murals can be seen on the outer wall of the *Garbhagr̥ha* near the doorway. There are depictions of the *Śivaparivara* and *Kālāntaka* form of Śiva. *Śivaparivara* is illustrated on the left wall, and *Kālāntaka* is illustrated on the right wall facing the *Mahāmaṇḍapa*. Another set of murals can be seen illustrated on the wooden ceiling of *Mahāmaṇḍapa*. These include the depiction of the baby angels.

(i) Śivaparivara (Plate 5a)

The painting on the left side of the wall facing *Mahāmaṇḍapa* depicts Śiva along with *Pārvatī* and *Gaṇeśa*. This panel measures approximately 2.11 ft wide by 2.3 ft long. Śiva is depicted in the *Asana* position. While *Gaṇeśa* and *Pārvatī* are shown seated on his right and left lap, respectively. The face of *Gaṅgā* can be seen depicted on the *Jaṭā* of Śiva. *Pārvatī* can be seen embracing Śiva as her right hand is wrapped around the shoulder of Śiva. *Pārvatī* is depicted wearing *Sārī* (*Nauvari*) and *Colī*. During the Maratha period, *Sārī* and *Colī* were part of traditional attire for women. The depiction of Parvatī, especially with the *Sārī* – *Colī*, has a striking resemblance to the depiction of *Pārvatī* on the

north-facing wall in Nava Rajwada in Satara. (Apte B. K., 1988, p. 39) *Gaṇeśa* is depicted with long curly hair and four arms.

(ii) *Kālāntaka* (Plate 5b)

The painting is located on the right wall of the *Garbhagrha*, facing the *Mahāmaṇḍapa*. It displays the episode of *Kālāntaka*, where *Śiva* is protecting *Mārkaṇḍeya* from *Yama*. This panel is 3.2 ft in width and 2.2 ft in length. *Yama* is depicted seated on *Paumḍraka* (His *Vāhana*, i.e. Buffalo). The figure is in partially damaged condition. *Yama* is depicted with blue skin colour. *Mārkaṇḍeya* can be seen holding the *Śivaliṅga*. These paintings are faded and plastered with white paint.

(iii) Paintings on the ceiling of *Mahāmaṇḍapa* (Plate 5c)

As stated earlier, the ceiling of the *Mahāmaṇḍapa* is made up of wood. This wooden ceiling has been decorated with paintings. The entire ceiling has been painted with sky blue colour; it is suggestive of the sky. In the centre, a small floral pattern has been carved out of wood. In all four corners of the ceiling, a baby angel has been depicted. Intriguingly, these baby angels have depicted playing various instruments usually associated with the Hindu deities. E.g., *Śaṃkha*, *Ḍamarū*, *Tutārī* and a trumpet-like wind instrument. Interestingly, the sound of ‘*Oṃ namaḥ śivāya*’ has been shown coming out of the *Tutārī*. The influence of the British school of painting is evident in these paintings. These paintings could have been painted only after 1798. During this period, Maratha painters came into contact with European artists after the establishment of the art school in Pune in 1798. (Chavan, 1978, p. 37)



Plate 5: Murals a) Śivaparivara b) *Kālāntaka* c) Angels

OBSERVATIONS

The Konkani style of temple architecture completely differs from the rest of Maharashtra and Goa. Temples have a small single-shrined independent *Garbhagr̥ha* with *Śikhara*. Later constructions were built around it. The majority of the time, *Mahāmaṇḍapa* encircles the *Garbhagr̥ha*. *Mahāmaṇḍapa* then directly leads to the *Kakṣāsana* and subsequently opens *Sabhāmaṇḍapa*. If *Kakṣāsana* is absent, then it directly leads to the open *Sabhāmaṇḍapa*. In this case, there is no separate *Kakṣāsana*, but rather an open *Sabhāmaṇḍapa* with seating arrangements parallel to the walls. This could be considered as a composite *Sabhāmaṇḍapa*, as a mixture of *Kakṣāsana* and *Sabhāmaṇḍapa*. There is no superstructure as the roof is constructed using terracotta tiles. Intricately carved *Kāṣṭhaśilpas* can be observed.

These *Kāṣṭhaśilpas* depict various carvings of a wide variety of stories from the Puranas. *Kāṣṭhaśilpas* have been exquisitely carved and decorated. These *Kāṣṭhaśilpas* have been painted by the villagers from time to time; yet they retain their original shape, which is quite remarkable. Additionally, Murals can also be found on the walls of *Garbhagr̥ha* and the ceiling of *Mahāmaṇḍapa*. Here, two different substrates have been used: walls made of laterite and a wooden ceiling. These murals are in good condition and well-preserved, except for the murals on the walls, which have been slightly damaged. Murals share stylistic similarities with the paintings found in the core Maratha region. Depictions of the headgear, hairstyles, ornaments, apparel, and clothing are identical to those found in the Deccan region.

Someśvara temple represents one of the few temples in this region that are still in conformity with the older architectural traditions. This makes it a perfect model to study the temple architecture in this region.

REFERENCES

- Apte, B. K. (1988). *Maratha Wall Paintings (Wai, Menavali, Satara, Pune)*. Mumbai: Maharashtra State Board for Literature and Culture.
- Bokil, R. (2025, November 07). Case study of Marathi inscriptions from the villages of Pavas and Kurdhe, Ratnagiri Taluka, Maharashtra. (P. N. Murthy, Ed.) *Journal of Epigraphical Society of India*, 50(1), 156-160.
- Chavan, K. (1978). *Maratha Murals (Late Medieval Painting of the Deccan: 1650-1850 A.D.)*. Pune: University of Poona.
- Deshmukh, V. (Ed.). (1992). *Maratha Paintings (Vol. 2)*. Marathawada University.