

From Archaeology to Heritage Management: A Study of the Early Mediaeval Temple of Bhima Devi

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Abstract

Archaeology and Heritage Management are often understood to be related but distinct disciplines, however, in recent years, the conservation, management and preservation of archaeological sites and objects have also been incorporated into archaeological studies. While the theoretical definition of archaeology has undergone several revisions, there is still a significant divide between practical archaeology—which remains limited to excavation and exploration in several countries, and heritage management—which is still understood to be a bureaucratic activity, sometimes undertaken by private stakeholders. This is particularly true for countries like India, where, as a consequence of this divide, archaeological activity and heritage management take place without consideration for each other and a large number of excavations are carried out without proper post-excavation management plans on the one hand, and conservation and management plan for sites created without consulting archaeologists, on the other. This paper examines how a comprehensive plan can be developed when Heritage Management and Archaeology are brought together using the case study of Bhima Devi Temple in North Haryana, India.

Heritage Management and Archaeology: A Need for Integration

Heritage Management and Archaeology need to be further integrated. This is especially the case in a country like India, where the initial heritage documentation and conservation work were part of a colonial project of institutionalised preservation and the cataloguing of people, customs, flora, fauna, and architectural monuments of the subcontinent (Cohn 1996).

The first visual archive of India was produced by Colin Mackenzie, who conducted the Great Mysore Survey between 1799 to 1809 (Mackenzie and Wilson 1882; Wolffhardt 2017). Similar surveys in the succeeding years, conducted throughout the entire length and breadth of the subcontinent, led to the creation of an archive of monuments, where the colonial powers had surveyed and documented “everything of importance”, thus implying that “if a site or a piece of architecture fell outside the purview of the surveys, [it] probably lacked in architectural merit” (Rajgopalan 2016: 3). An almost identical version of this colonial archive was later adopted by the Archaeological Survey of India following the Indian Independence in 1947, and therefore these same flaws of the survey were reproduced by failing to incorporate sites outside of the pre-existing list. Thus, with the exception of freshly excavated sites (mostly concerned with the Indus Valley Civilisation) a large number of monuments and ruins have not been designated as protected heritage sites.

This applies to both the case study in question, but also others (e.g., after windthrow, or as a by-product of construction and road-building activities), like the Akbarabadi Mosque in Delhi (discovered in 2012), the Mughal *Caravanserais* of Amanat Khan in Punjab and Gharaunda in Haryana, and the lesser Buddhist monuments (excluding the SGL-5 Stupa) of the Sanghol region in Punjab. In all of these cases, while the sites have been excavated, no heritage plans have been brought into effect by the local bodies, relevant governments, or the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI). Sites like Sanghol are managed entirely by the ASI and lie isolated, cut off from both tourist inflow and even proper maintenance funds. Meanwhile, those like Bhima Devi Temple are managed entirely by local members of the State

Tourism Department, with no archaeological involvement. This apparent miscommunication between the ASI and the State Tourism Department has occurred because Heritage Management and Archaeology are viewed as two distinct and mutually exclusive areas. The general trend seems to be that whoever arrives at a site first, controls its management and development.

Consequently, despite the historic and cultural value of these sites, the role of these monuments, and their affective /emotive value for the local populations (see Ahmed 2004) have not been realised, thus resulting in public apathy and indifference towards these structures. If the existing physical heritage archives were revised and updated to take all of these newly discovered sites into account, this very public apathy and indifference could be reconverted into a resource for both archaeologists, in the form of public archaeology initiatives, and for heritage managers, in the form of local stakeholders. The following sections will discuss how this can be done for the site of Bhima Devi Temple in particular and other such monuments in general, thereby highlighting that the need of the hour is to integrate Archaeology with Heritage Management, not just for India but everywhere else in the world where similar problems exist or may arise in the future due to the separation of Archaeology from Heritage Management.

Introduction to the Site of Bhima Devi Temple

This paper uses the case study of the ruins of Bhima Devi Temple, located in the town of Pinjore in North Haryana, approximately 269km to the north of the national capital, New Delhi (see Fig.1). The site is attributed to the Gurjara Pratihara Dynasty, one of the first four patrilineal clans of the Rajputs (Bhandarkar 1904) and is dated to between the eighth and eleventh centuries CE. This site was chosen for this paper because it embodies the problems mentioned in the previous sections.

Discovered after a windthrow in the 1970s, this site was briefly excavated for a single season, where its chronology was established, after which it was closed (Thapar 1979). The site finds no mention in the colonial surveys of Alexander Cunningham's (1882) archaeological reports of Pinjore Region, presumably

because it remained unexcavated at the time. Following its rediscovery, it received only a passing mention in the *Indian Archaeology Review of 1974–75*, thus remaining almost absent from the archives and public memory.

It was in the early 2000s when the Haryana Tourism Department undertook a project at the site. This, however, was done without seeking any archaeological involvement and despite the efforts, the site failed to garner sufficient footfall, attracting neither scholarly attention nor touristic inflow. It remained largely unknown, although it is located in close proximity to a Late Mediaeval Mughal fortress, a popular tourism and recreational site. Archaeological activity and research on the site were almost non-existent and it was only in 2017 that the site was studied in relation to other such temples of the Gurjara Pratiharas, as well as with respect to its architecture and iconography. This work was conducted by Speaking Archaeologically, an archaeological education group, with which the author was directly involved and whose reports were published in the *Speaking Archaeologically Journal Volume III Issue 1* in January 2020.

It is worth mentioning here, especially in relation to the various factors that influence state-led preservation projects in India, that the architecture of the Gurjara Pratiharas has been largely neglected both in the archaeological historiography and archival records. The reason is simply that their period of rule was understood to be the era of decline equivalent to the European Dark Ages by several proponents of the Indian feudalism hypotheses (Sharma 1987; Todd 1829), an assertion that is more historiographical than historic in actual fact (Mukhia 1999). As a result, Pratihara architecture has seldom been documented and has not received the required archaeological attention. However, far from being stagnant, the politics of the Rajputs was fraught with the necessity to establish a new political identity as well as the authority to rule (cf. Sahu 1994, 2001, 2004). Temples, therefore, served multiple roles: as banking institutes, aiding travellers along the Silk Route (Thakur and Mehta 2020); as instruments for negotiating identity and power (Gautam 2020); and as places of religious and spiritual importance (Gray 2016).

Despite this, temples of the Gurjara-Pratihara, including the site in

question, face significant issues such as the absence of proper conservation and management plans for the site (cf. Gautam and Sharma 2020). Due to this, there is no effective promotion of the site and compounded with the absence of literature on Pratihara architectural legacy, the site fails to target even 1% of the touristic inflow that the adjoining Mughal fortress receives.

The Archaeological Relevance of the Bhima Devi Temple

Given that the study holds the official archival records responsible for failing to incorporate archaeological importance of sites discovered after Indian Independence, it would be incomplete if the archaeological relevance of the site in question is left unaddressed. Rajgopalan's (2016) book on the historic values of built heritage discusses that both the historic significance of an archaeological monument and the public reaction it invokes is affected majorly by the importance it is accorded in the existing archives. Thus, the attitude of all sections of the society, including modern bureaucracy, local stakeholders, archaeologists, conservators, and general visitors are broadly defined and influenced by the connection of ideas and values that a community at large associates with the site. In the case of sites discovered after Indian independence, this connection has been limited to popular sites and highly publicised excavations which have captured the attention of archaeologists, conservators, and heritage managers alike. These include the sites of the Old Fort in Delhi, Sanauli (a Bronze Age site in Uttar Pradesh, India, located at 29°14'46"N 77°21'03"E) and Rakhigarhi (an Indus Valley site, dating to 2600-1900 BCE, located in Hisar district of Haryana), and UNESCO World Heritage Sites like the Taj Mahal or the Temples of Hampi and Khajuraho. The archaeological relevance of most sites, however, is overshadowed by the popular monuments. That being said, this is no gauge of the actual relevance of sites and often the neglected sites have strong historical linkages, which, if given proper attention, can shed light on several aspects of history and dispelling myths or faulty historiographical assumptions, such as the Feudalism Debate mentioned above.

The fieldwork conducted by the team of Speaking Archaeologically on the site of Bhima Devi Temple from October 2017 to December 2019 revealed

that, historically, the temple of Bhima Devi lay on an important trade route of Early Mediaeval times, connecting the site to a larger trade nexus of the Silk Roads (Lahiri 1992). Its proximity to the river Ghaggar-Hakra, as well as the presence of at least three other sites along the same route—all of which are presently in ruins—show that the temples were relevant as both religious centres and important landmarks of trade (Frankopan 2015). Several textual sources from Ancient India elaborate on places of worship, notably Buddhist *viharas* and Hindu and Jain temples, being deliberately commissioned along trade routes, where they could serve the triple purpose of pilgrimage, rest houses for travellers as well as the precursors of banking systems for trading caravans (*Arthashastra*, Verses 7.12–7.27, in Kautilya 1987). This assertion is now proven to be true by the archaeological explorations of several scholars (Blackburn 2015; Boppearachchi 2014; Frankopan 2015; Sharma 2010).

In the larger study conducted by *Speaking Archaeologically*, Gurjara Pratihara temples were documented and marked against all prominent trade routes, and it was observed that the location of temples was largely governed by their proximity to river and land trade channels (Thakur and Mehta 2020). All twelve temple sites studied for the Speaking Archaeologically Project, including Bhima Devi Temple, were located along an old inland route, even though most of the ancient trade routes of the Indian mainland have been incorporated into modern-day roads in India (Sanyal 2012). These temple sites formed a part of a larger chain of temples, commissioned by the Gurjara Pratiharas, both for the sake of economic mobility and for negotiating their identity in newly conquered territories (cf. Gautam and Thakur 2019). Fig.2 shows the location of these sites along NH1A. However, due to the lack of communication between archaeologists and heritage managers, the historical significance of the site and its location is not common knowledge.

Apart from its economic and political significance, the site of Bhima Devi is also relevant as a specimen of the art and iconography of the Pratihara Period (Ali 1987). Architecturally, it was built on a *Panchayatana Nagara* style floor plan (Fig.3) and can be structurally understood as the prototype of the Lakshmana Temple in Khajuraho (although much smaller in proportions), with five shrines arranged in a quincunx layout (Fig.4). Stylistically, it belongs

to Stage IV of the five stages of Hindu Temples and Phase II of the temple styles of the Gurjara Pratiharas (Ali 1987; Gautam 2020). Therefore, the significance of the site cannot be overlooked with respect to its location, art or its implications on similar temples from a later period.

Despite this, there is a paucity of literature on the site, with the exception of the papers published by *Speaking Archaeologically*. The lack of proper provision for its management and upkeep has resulted in its relative obscurity not only in the archaeological circles but also among active stakeholders of the heritage industry. Therefore, the next section will highlight some of the threats the site faces due to the absence of a proper management plan; and will list suggestions that can effectively solve these problems for archaeologists and heritage industry alike.

Problem Areas at the Site of Bhima Devi Temple

The site of Bhima Devi Temple lies only 650 metres to the west of the Yadavindra Gardens, which is a prominent tourist site under the protection of the State Tourism Department of the Government of Haryana. Despite being in such close proximity to this site, the difference in the state of both monuments cannot be more pronounced. One reason for this is the absence of proper signage leading to the site of Bhima Devi. Although several boards dot the National Highway 22, talking about the presence and the supposed mythical origins of the temple, there are no signs within the complex that lead to the site and museum complex of Bhima Devi itself. Another factor that contributes to its relative obscurity is the marked absence of the temple in almost all the archaeological sources on the Gurjara Pratihara history and architecture. Despite being identified in the 1970s, the site was never incorporated into popular literature, its excavation records and site reports exist nowhere, and most locals view the site in relation to oral traditions and myths but have no knowledge of the archaeological interpretation of the site. This shows the failure of dissemination of archaeological knowledge and engagement with the site's local communities; thus widening the chasm between Archaeology and Heritage Management.

Upon reaching the site through a partially open gate, it is observed that the land levels, on which the ruins are located, clearly hint at the presence of unexcavated features, which can no longer be uncovered because of the trees that were planted on top of the mounds as a part of the beautification project by the State Government of Haryana in early 2000s (cf. Gautam and Sharma 2020). Therefore, the following problem areas and threats can be observed at the site:

Truncation of Context

Although the floor plan of the main shrine is now visible, two of the four subsidiary shrines are lost to truncation of context (Fig.3). Of these, only the subsidiary shrine, labelled as 2 in the diagram, can still be seen. A pathway constructed for visitors truncates shrine 1, while a tree has been planted in place of shrine 4. A modern shack has been built upon shrine 3, thus hampering the future scope of not just a re-excavation of the site but also the possibility of its reconstruction using the measurement systems applied in Ancient Indian Temple architecture (Gautam and Sharma 2020; Mehta and Thakur 2020; Thakur 2019). From these observations, it is clear that if archaeological expertise had been used before the beautification project was implemented, more features could have been salvaged, thus vastly altering the way the site appears today.

Encroachment on the Site

While working on the site, the problem of encroachment of the site from the northern end was recorded. It was observed that no proper buffer zone exists between the site and the private residential structures of Pinjore town, which renders the site vulnerable to future encroachments and destruction.

Lack of Conservational Measures

It is worth mentioning that despite the four small halls that qualify as the site museum, most sculptures from the site have been left in the open without any conservation measures or protection against environmental damage.

This has rendered prone to biodeterioration some of the most prominent structures, such as the architectural column depicting Varuna and Ishana (Fig.5a and 5b), the *sukansa* reliefs, which are crucial to reconstruction of the size of the sanctum of the shrines.

The structure and sculptures in Bhima Devi Complex are made of grey-black sandstone, which, on account of its sedimentary nature and petrophysical properties, serves as an ideal host for biofilms, thus making the monument prone to microbial damage (Sabbioni and Zappia, 1992). It was observed that several structures on the site are already subject to biofouling and increased bioerosion on account of the actions of epilithic and endolithic micro and macro-organisms (cf. Bartoli et al. 2014; Bartoli et al. 2016). In the case of the Mahakala Sukansa (Fig.6), for example, it was noted that the sculpture was prone to seasonal biopatina and formation of lichen mats.

Similarly, damage on account of exposure to rain and sun also compounds the problem of longevity of these sculptures (see Fig.7), especially since the porous nature of sandstone makes it an ideal substrate for accumulation of salts (Thomachot 2000).

Apart from these obvious examples of lack of conservational measures, several sculptures have been dumped in a pile on the site, notably inside the shack atop Subsidiary Shrine 3, where the damp and dust, as well as the humidity and proximity to a stream, make the sculptures in storage even more vulnerable. Thus, despite the beautification of the site, practical measures to ensure the longevity of the artefacts recovered from the site and their adequate storage have not been taken into proper consideration.

Since its establishment in 1861, the ASI has been the nation's chief archaeological authority, controlling excavations, the preservation of monuments and the maintenance of related archives in India (Rajgopalan 2016). Thus, the importance that a site receives in terms of its maintenance, repair and upkeep is derived directly from the significance it is accorded by the archaeological bureaucrats of the ASI.

If the site does not receive the attention of the ASI, which is often the case when it comes to serendipitously discovered monuments, the site and its maintenance is left to the local authorities, state tourism departments, and heritage managers working privately outside the ambit of the ASI. More often than not, this results in absolute neglect of the site since it is assumed to be 'not important enough'. As a result, such a site is neither studied with respect to its archaeological relevance, nor recorded or documented properly for future research. Also, the public indifference to such sites increases and consequently, there is an escalation of issues like vandalism, littering and theft.

The case of Bhima Devi Temple is similar although its condition is relatively better when compared to other such sites in Haryana. Since the site was never officially reopened by the ASI after 1970 and was never revisited by any ASI officials, as per the local sources interviewed during the course of the fieldwork, the State Tourism Department has installed one of its own officials as the *de facto* curator-cum-manager for the site. While tree plantation, construction of four halls to house sculptures and toilets and pavements have been installed on the site, the proper conservation of the artefacts, re-excavation of the unexplored mounds and creation of an appropriate inventory for the sculptures have not been taken into account.

The Heritage Management Plan for the Site of Bhima Devi Temple and Some Solutions

Since the lack of archaeological foresight in heritage management has reduced the temple to a mere park, a new archaeology-based Heritage Management Plan needs to be created to bridge the gap of miscommunication between the archaeological stakeholders and heritage managers. This need becomes more pronounced in light of the threats delineated in the previous section and so, this section shall discuss the broad guidelines for the new plan, which although framed in light of the Bhima Devi Temple, can also be employed to other such sites that face similar problems. A Heritage Management Plan refers to a document that defines the heritage value of a site and chalks out proper policies for its management (Catalogue NE63, Natural England 2008). In the case of Bhima Devi Temple, such a plan is necessary

in order to ensure cost-effective solutions for long term management and maintenance of the site with the help of the local as well as professional stakeholders. Following are the immediate needs of the site that ought to be covered in an effective Heritage Management Plan:

1. Factoring in archaeotourism as a part of the site management;
2. Gauging the carrying capacity of the site for tourism as well as restoration activities;
3. Determining the role and level of involvement of public stakeholders in the conservation and management of the site;
4. Demarcation of buffer zones to the site to ensure longevity and prevent future encroachment of the site.

Several countries across the world are opting for archaeotourism. Archaeotourism refers to tourism undertaken with the purpose of carrying out archaeological activities and generating interest in heritage, archaeology, and conservation (Comer 2012). Foreign specialists are invited with the aim of promoting archaeological and conservational activities on sites that need professional and technical expertise (Baram 2008). While the scope of archaeotourism with respect to the site has already been discussed in a previous study (cf. Gautam and Sharma 2020), incorporating archaeotourism in the management plan would ensure effective management of the site, as well as its inclusion in archaeological and conservation studies.

As discussed above, several sculptural and architectural remains on site are housed in the open and suffer from immediate threat on account of natural and anthropogenic factors. Also, there are several unexcavated features on the site. By incorporating archaeotourism as a part of the site's management plan, its access can be limited to professionals for a determined period each year and archaeological activities can be undertaken in order to promote research and scientific conservation on site. Such programmes may also be extended to locals under public archaeology initiatives and hands-on internships, thus making them active participants in the research and maintenance of the site.

A related requirement, therefore, is determining the carrying capacity

of the site, with due respect to public facilities such as ease of access, toilets and provision of food and drinking water (Millar 1989). While the site has provisions for toilets, other public facilities can be availed from the tourist facilities just outside the temple complex. Regulations, however, need to be imposed on the number of people on-site to ensure safety and monitor damage to the site on account of footfall.

To do this, a Heritage Cell needs to be created for the site, composed of archaeologists, conservators, and heritage managers, so that sensitive and vulnerable areas within the site are duly mapped and protected from vandalism and other conservational threats. The Heritage Cell will also be crucial in enabling public and local involvement with the site as it can organise and supervise programmes targeted at contextualising the site for the local people (Mason 2002). While conducting fieldwork on Bhima Devi, it was observed that the local inhabitants of Pinjore were indifferent to the site. However, repeated visits by the archaeological team of *Speaking Archaeologically* generated significant curiosity and interest among the locals. The Heritage Cell can expand upon this interest by organising heritage walks for the locals in tandem with the State Archaeology and Tourism departments, thereby increasing the local stakeholders of the site. These stakeholders can further get involved with basic cleanliness, general conservation, day-to-day security, and promotion of the site. The most important role of the Heritage Cell, however, would be the demarcation of a buffer zone for the site. As mentioned in the previous section, the site is currently encroached upon by modern housing settlements. Thus, a buffer zone needs to be created for the site to ensure that further encroachment is curbed, and the northern part of the temple ruins is not completely lost.

Had the site of Bhima Devi Temple not been developed at all, its potential as a possible heritage destination would have been severely affected. However, the site has been taken over by the State Archaeology Department of Haryana, which has spent significant amounts of money in its beautification. Hence a proper Heritage Management Plan that factors in archaeotourism can be developed as a way forward. As stated above, archaeotourism can significantly reduce the state's cost on the maintenance and conservation of the site. Also,

archaeological professionals from different areas of expertise can help in more effective documentation of the site. The fieldwork conducted by *Speaking Archaeologically* already established that, with the help of 3D remodelling and the combined expertise of conservators, modern architects, and traditional temple planners (*sthapatis*), it is possible to ascertain the original height and layout of the temple (cf. Mehta and Thakur 2020). The knowledge of the traditional measurement systems, such as the *Ayadhi* and the *Talamana*, followed in the original architectural plan of the temple, can help reconstruct a model of the temple, which would be beneficial for the visitors in order to properly understand the site. Such models have been made for similar structures elsewhere and have been found to be effective for scientific monitoring and planning restoration work with respect to the site in question (Brunetaud et al. 2012).

Furthermore, given that the nearby complex of the Yadavindra Gardens already benefits from heritage tourism, a similar plan for Bhima Devi would increase the overall heritage value of the town of Pinjore. This would also increase employment in tourism, as well as the resultant income from such activities. At present, the rate of unemployment in Haryana is 27% and services like tourism and hospitality account for less than a 15% share of the state's economic sectors (Economic Survey of Haryana 2020–21). The pandemic has further affected prospects of tourism. Therefore, there is an immediate need to boost the existing economic system of the state; and heritage sites, like Bhima Devi, can be crucial in achieving this, owing to their central location and connectivity.

Conclusion

From the discussion above two points become clear:

1. The archives and official histories have a large role to play in the interpretation of monuments and the public sentiments towards it (cf. Bauer-Clapp and Kirakosian 2017);
2. The absence of communication between the present caretakers of the site and archaeologists led to lopsided management of the site.

Where the sites are exclusively managed by archaeological bureaucrats of the ASI (such as Ropar, Sanghol among others), the site itself receives little to no attention from the public; and where the site is entirely controlled by heritage managers and local bodies, the site, despite the presence of public utilities and embellishments, remains ignored, prone to deterioration and damage on account of both natural and anthropogenic factors. Thus, an effective site response, (including research, conservation, local participation, and public interest in preservation) is only observed where archaeologists and heritage managers come together and work in tandem with each other, such as in the case of the Mughal Monuments of Taj Mahal, the Red Fort, the Temples of Hampi, Khajuraho and Konark and the Qutb Minar and Mehrauli Archaeological Park of Delhi. It is these sites that attract more professional attention and better conservation as opposed to the sites that find neither mention in the colonial archives nor have been added there yet.

To assert that the temples of the Gurjara Pratiharas, of which the Bhima Devi Temple Complex is a part, are 'less worthy' or historically irrelevant can be proven wrong with archaeological evidence. When studied in relation to data retrieved from the study of Numismatics, Epigraphy, Early Mediaeval trade and economy, political legacy, and memoirs, it is clear that sites such as Bhima Devi are testimonies to the thriving art, trade and political diversities of the time. The significance of the site in question, with respect to the implications it will have for education and dissemination of historical knowledge about the Gurjara Pratiharas, is far reaching, especially since the temple is linked to other sister sites, forming a nexus along an old trade route, similar to the Khajuraho Set of Temples in Madhya Pradesh. The site is crucial for not just archaeologists but local and regional historians, scholars of Early Mediaeval history as well as art historians and sculptors. Thus, a proper Heritage Management Plan that develops the site into more than just a garden with archaeological ruins, can boost the existing value of the area as a heritage site.

The site, therefore, is at once educationally significant, archaeologically relevant, and historically important. Developing it with the help of heritage managers and archaeologists working together in tandem would cater to

future archaeological investigation on the site and in the area around; enable its effective conservation and increase the overall longevity of the site in terms of maintenance, while effectively involving the locals in its protection, promotion, and security. Such a plan would be useful to other sites that face the same neglect. It would help archaeology, in countries like India, thrive as a scientific and holistic discipline. Thus, archaeology, in these countries, would no longer be controlled in its functioning by institutionalised preservation that originated in the colonial period and is still being carried forward in major parts of the country without many updates and inclusive growth.

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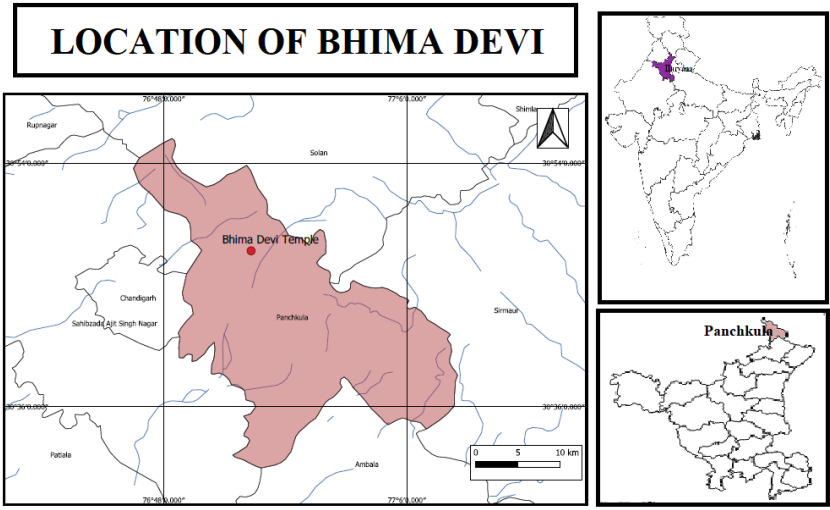


Fig. 1: Location of Bhima Devi Temple in Haryana and with respect to the map of India.

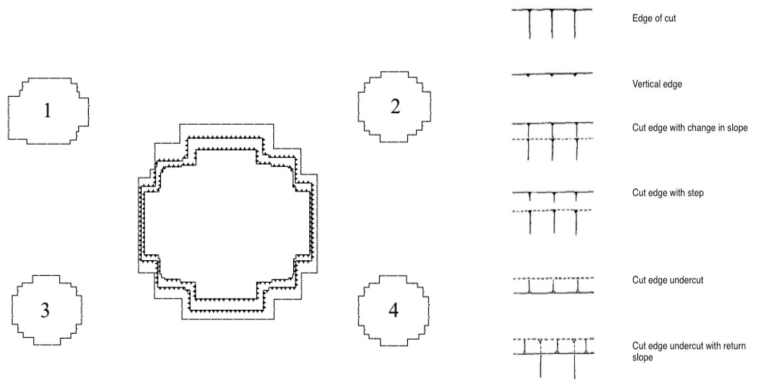


Fig. 2: The Site Plan of Bhima Devi showing truncation of context and limit of excavation with key.

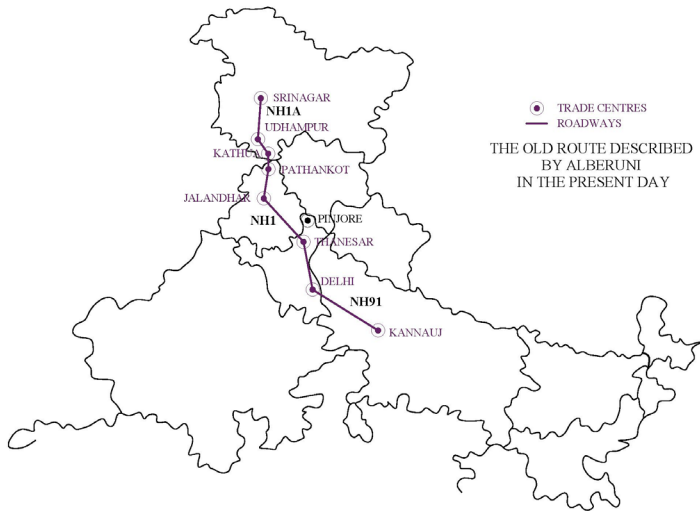


Fig. 3: Map showing the Major Temples of the Gurjara-Pratiharas with respect to the Old Trade Route described by Alberuni (Sachau 1910).

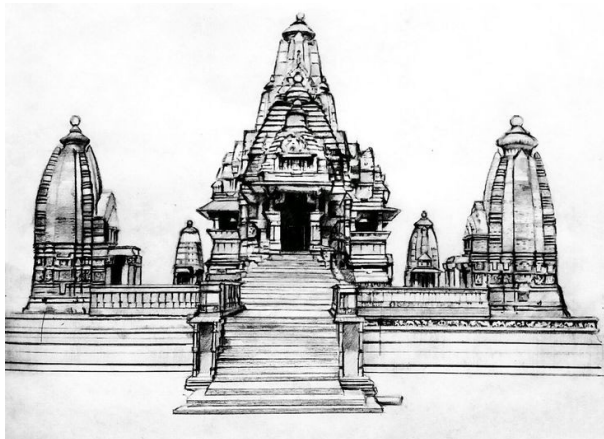


Fig. 4: Artistic Reconstruction of the Bhima Devi Temple Complex (based on the floor plan).



Fig. 5a and 5b: Architectural Column depicting Varuna and Ishana.



Fig. 6: The Mahakala Sukansa with moss growth and bird droppings.

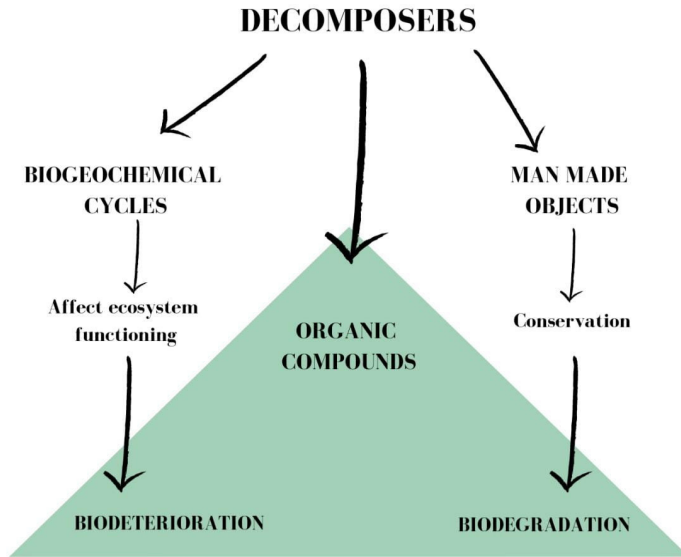


Fig. 7: Diagram showing Decomposition on Built Monuments.