

Of Buddhist origin, the Dharashiv Caves were later converted into monuments of the Jain religion—a reflection on their mix of architecture and design

A History Lover's Guide To Osmanabad

Osmanabad is no stranger to tourists (or should I say pilgrims?) who come in huge numbers to visit the famous Tulja Bhavani Temple in Tuljapur. While the temple is definitely the most visited site here, Osmanabad has quite a few places of historical importance. A couple of years ago, as a student of archaeology at the Centre of Extra Mural Studies, Mumbai University, I travelled to Osmanabad with my professor for a field trip. Part of the Deccan region, Osmanabad has seen kingdoms right from the Satavahana dynasty of ancient India to the early Islamic rulers of the Adil Shahi period. The distinctive style of art and architecture of every period surfaces in its various monuments, each a marvel in itself.

Words SHIRIN MEHROTRA

Our field tour began with stopping at a village gateway—**Hapsingyachi Ves**, built at the entrance of Paranda village, which served as a toll booth. In southern Maharashtra, every large village had an entrance gate which was a clearing house for all sorts of information and for the government to keep an eye on what goods were moving in and out of the village; travellers would stop here and tell tales of distant lands. The economy of most medieval empires was structured around such toll gates. Like most places of historical importance, there's a legend attached to this one too; the most common one being of the thief who lived inside the gate for 40 years.

The Magnificent Land Forts Of Marathwada

The first day of the archaeology trip to Osmanabad was spent at the **Paranda Fort**. The medieval fort is said to have been built around the late 15th century by Mahmud Gawan, the *wazir* of the Bahamani Sultanate. The fort has been under the Bahamanis, Marathas, Mughals and Nizams over a period of time. The fort is surrounded by a moat, and apart from being one of the best defence forts, it houses one of the most magnificent cannons in India which is a sister of the famous Malik-e-Maidan cannon kept in the Bijapur fort.

A short distance away from Paranda, stands another architectural gem of the Bahamani period. **Jamiya Masjid** in Kati Gaon in Tuljapur *taluka* is a 16th century mosque, built in memory of a husband during the regime of Burhan Shah.

A plaque inside the mosque reveals that the foundation stone was laid by the wife of Yakub in Hijri 1012 (Gregorian calendar year 1590). The *mihrab* (that indicates the direction of the Kaaba in Mecca) with its intricate design is undoubtedly the most beautiful part of the mosque. The arches and dome along with the shrine showcase the beauty of Mughal architecture.

While technically not in Osmanabad district, **Ausa Fort** in Latur district is worth a visit for its collection of cannons. Built during the Bahamani period, the square fort is another example of defence architecture during the early Islamic period.

Cave Dwelling

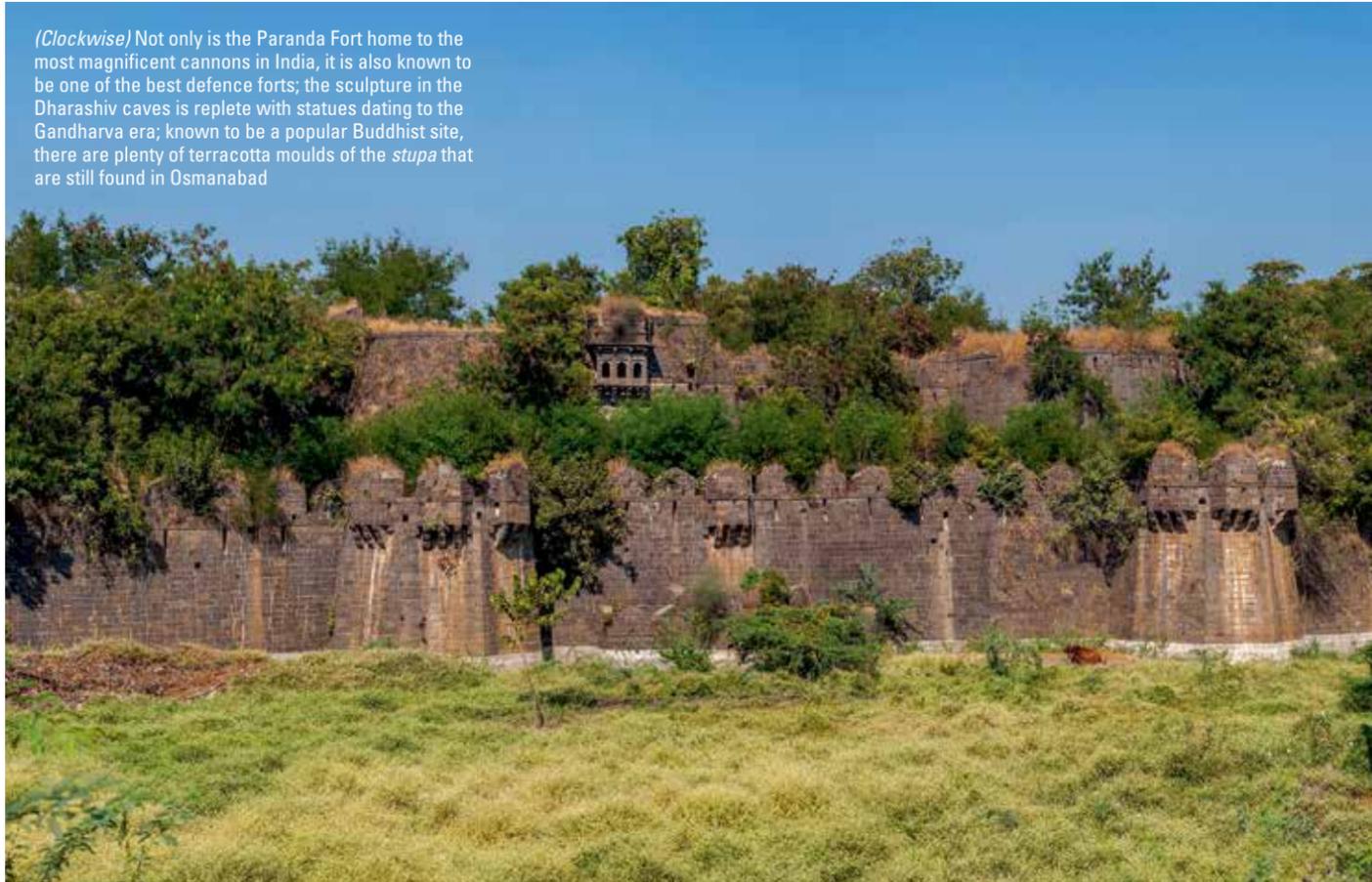
One of the oldest caves of the area, the **Dharashiv Caves** are located 8 km from Osmanabad in the Balaghat mountains. Built in the fifth century BC, these were originally Buddhist caves which were later converted into Jain monuments.

Kharosa Caves—again in Latur district and not Osmanabad—are Buddhist caves built between the sixth to eighth centuries. Cave number three, which depicts both Shaivism and Vaishnavism, is particularly interesting. While it's a Shaivite cave with a *Shivalingam*, the left wall of the cave has Shaivite sculptures and the right one is adorned with Vaishnavite sculptures; the back of the cave has Samudra Manthan on one side and scenes from the *Mahabharata* on the other.

The Village With Links To Pompeii

Just 17 km from the district headquarters of Osmanabad lies this unassuming village which at one point was as important

(Clockwise) Not only is the Paranda Fort home to the most magnificent cannons in India, it is also known to be one of the best defence forts; the sculpture in the Dharashiv caves is replete with statues dating to the Gandharva era; known to be a popular Buddhist site, there are plenty of terracotta moulds of the *stupa* that are still found in Osmanabad



to the economy then as Mumbai is for the present. **Ter**, which is associated with the Satavahana dynasty, was a huge trading centre in the seventh century. Years of research have proven that Ter had trade relations with Rome during ancient times, where textiles, beads and jute were exported. In the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, written by a Greek author, Ter has been mentioned as Tagar.

The village has quite a few sites of historical importance; a stone temple built during the Rashtrakuta period in memory of **Goroba Kaka**, poet and devotee of Vishnu during the Bhakti period. The **Uttreshwar Temple**, a temple of Lord Shiva, is another structure of architectural interest here. The temple collapsed in the 1993 earthquake but has now been restored. The **Trivikrama Temple**, considered to be the oldest standing structure in Maharashtra, dates back to the Satavahana period. The temple was based on the Buddhist apsidal structure (*chaitya-griha* with a *stupa* on one side) and a flat-roofed *mandapa* (a pillared outdoor hall for public rituals) was added later when it was converted to a Hindu temple.

Ter also houses a museum which owes its collection to **Ramalingappa Lamture**, a local merchant who started locating and collecting archaeological finds like figurines, beads, pottery, shell bangles, ivory objects, stone grinders and coins. The collection was taken over by the government in 1978 and is now housed in a private museum which boasts of 20,000 artefacts. The most fascinating find, which sadly is not kept in the museum, is the ivory statue of a female identical to the one found in Pompeii, Italy.

The Impregnable Naldurg

The most magnificent part of our study tour was a trip to **Naldurg**, one of the best land forts in Maharashtra. It is believed that the fort was built during the Kalyani Chalukyan period. It was taken over by the Bahamani in the 14th century. In 1480, when the Bahamani kingdom was divided, the fort came to the Adil Shahi kings of Bijapur. It was Ibrahim Adil Shah II, the king of the Bijapur Sultanate known in history for his love for art, music, poetry and Sanskrit, who strengthened the defences of the fort. He built 114 bastions, each designed and styled differently and strong enough to bear heavy guns.

A river flows through the fort's centre with a dam built on it which is 90 feet high, 275 m long and 31 m wide at the top. The wall of the dam has a palace built called Pani Mahal. A small balcony juts out from the main room that's right in the centre of the two slits from where the water falls when the river overflows. Imagine water falling like a curtain as you sit on the balcony, sipping your morning tea or having an evening drink. This was probably the best luxury back in those days. The fort also houses Rani Mahal, Taylor's House, an elephants' stable, Rang Mahal, a mosque, an armoury and a court building.

And then there is the 100-foot-high Upli Buruj which has a stone turntable and cannons on the top. It's a tiring climb to the top, but once there, it gives a perfect view of the periphery of the fort along with a beautiful sunset. As a grand finale of our exploration, we climbed the bastion for one last lecture of the trip as the sun set in the background. ♦

Built in the Kalyani Chalukyan period, the Naldurg Fort changed many hands, but Ibrahim Adil Shah II gave it its signature defence style, installed 114 bastions and a three-side fortification



NAVIGATOR

GETTING THERE

By Road Osmanabad is 242 km from Aurangabad, 260 km from Pune, 316 km from Hyderabad, 411 km from Mumbai and is connected through Maharashtra State Road Transport Corporation (MSRTC) and private bus services.

By Train Osmanabad is connected to the major cities of Maharashtra by rail.

By Air The nearest airports are at Aurangabad and Pune.

WHERE TO STAY

Osmanabad has plenty of mid-range to higher-range hotels and lodges.

IMPORTANT DATES

1556-1627 Adil Shahi period when Ibrahim Adil Shah II built the magnificent Naldurg.

Seventh century Ter being an important centre for Indo-Roman trade.

1590 The foundation stone of Jamiya Masjid in Kati Gaon, Tuljapur, was laid.

Sixth to eighth centuries Estimated period to which the Kharosa Caves date.

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