

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Four Gadhegals Discovered in District Raigad, Maharashtra

Kurush F Dalal\*, Siddharth Kale\* and Rajesh Poojari†

This article deals with the discovery of four new 'gadhegals, three from Diveagar and one from Deokhol, that were found during the explorations done in conjunction with and ancillary to the archaeological excavations being carried out at Chandore in May 2012.

## Introduction

The Centre for Extra-Mural Studies, University of Mumbai (CEMS) and the India Study Centre Trust, Mumbai (INSTUCEN) carried out a small excavation at the Medieval Temple complex at Chandore (18° 09' 52" N; 73° 11' 02" S), District Raigad (Dalal 2012, Dalal 2013). The site yielded a number of temple plinths, a rock-cut tank, and a number of sculptural members of the Northern Shilahara (752–1265 AD) style, and later periods.

Explorations in the region yielded a large number of stylistically coeval sites/locations based upon the Art Historical attributes of the various sculptural members discovered by the various exploration teams associated with the excavations.

In May 2012 a survey team made up of the authors explored the sites of Borli-Panchatan (18° 7' 13.01"N; 73° 1' 51.48"E), Diveagar (18° 10' 54.92"N; 72° 59' 11.40"E) and Deokhol (18° 10' 7.20"N 73° 0' 35.10"E) (**Fig 1**). These explorations were carried out on the invitation of Shri Liladhar Khot and Shri Sudhakar Patil of Borli-Panchatan who had visited the Chandore excavations upon seeing the news in the local dailies.

Explorations at these three sites coupled with subsequent explorations at Indravan, Govele, Nivachiwadi, Nalephodi and other locations brought to light a large number of Hero-stones, Sati-stones, commemorative plaques and other sculptural fragments. The explorations also yielded a number of Shilahara period sculptures and fragments thereof; chiefly Gajalaxmi images and Nandi images.

Amongst these hitherto well known, though little studied sculptural objects the team recorded four stylistically similar *gadhegals*.



**Fig 1:** Map showing locations of Diveagar and Deokhol.

## Gadhegals

The gadhegal is a sculptural phenomenon that has been reported to the best of our knowledge only from Maharashtra (Dhere 1990: 111–34) and Goa (Tulpule 1963) with a single addition from Gujarat (van der Geer 2008: 256). It is essentially a large, flat, rectangular stone plaque/stele (found embedded in the ground) more often than not bearing an inscription in *devanagari* script upon it.

Gadhegals are assigned to a period beginning with the reign of the Shilahara dynasty (Tulpule 1963; Mirashi 1977: 167–68, Plate LXXIII and 127–30, 3 LV) and ending with the Adilshahi (Nazim 1935: 9–11), 1012 AD to 1651 AD. These dates are exact dates as seen on the earliest and latest inscriptions known (to date).

\* Centre of Archaeology, Centre for Extra-Mural Studies, University of Mumbai  
kurushdalal@gmail.com, siddharthkale1230@yahoo.co.in

† Deccan College, Pune  
rap\_poojari@hotmail.com

Gadhegals are dressed flat rectangular stelae with only one worked face. The other face is always blank. The worked area can be generally divided into three distinct zones/panels. The top (first) panel, which may or may not be capped by a *kalasha* (almost) always bears the sun (circle) and moon (crescent) symbols commonly seen upon hero-stones, sati-stones and boundary markers. The central panel is either (rarely) blank or has an inscription in low relief engraved upon it. The lowermost (third) panel has a sculptural depiction of a crouched human figure (in some instances clearly female whilst indistinct in others) being forced into sexual congress with a donkey.

It is from this third panel that the name of this type of stone marker is derived (*gadhe*=donkey and *gal*=stone). According to Prof. Arvind P Jamkhedkar the etymology of the term is *gadhe* (donkey) and *gaal* (swear word/term of abuse), ie Donkey-curse, VV Mirashi (197) also uses the same term. It is from this second translation that Mirashi derives the English equivalent 'ass curse stone'.

In cases of those with long inscriptions the central panel may be much larger/longer than the other two panels. Some Gadhegals do not follow this pattern whilst others have the image the header and the text all mixed up. Whilst most are crudely finished some of these gadhegals have been painstakingly shaped and finished into well defined steles (as is seen in the case of the two Gadhegals at Tuljapur, Dist. Osmanabad, Maharashtra).

The top panel delivers a pictographic message that the grant/edict (given usually in panel 2) is valid as long as the sun and moon prevail, in other words eternal or perpetual validity. The second panel usually has an inscription or is rarely left blank. The bulk of the deciphered examples are land grants. The third/lower panel usually has a low to medium relief sculpture depicting a human figure (either on its back or crouching on its belly) with an equid figure, with erect phallus, above it. The equid's phallus is positioned in a manner suggestive of anal intercourse. In some cases the ears of the equid make its identification as a donkey obvious whereas in others it is difficult.

Gadhegals are thus essentially boundary markers or charter stones with a very clear description of the punishment that is the fate of those violating the grant, order, border or rules granted thereby or written therein.

As far as the specific nature of the ass-curse depiction/description is concerned Dhare (1990: 126–128) is essentially of the opinion that the depiction is a term of abuse linked with the identification of the female figure as a symbolic representation of the mother i.e. mother earth and the donkey as the *vahana* of Sitaladevi (the goddess of pestilence and plague) and therefore a bringer of barrenness to the mother/earth. The authors of this article, whilst not completely disagreeing with Dhare, feel that the effectiveness of the punishment would be far more threatening and a greater deterrent in its purely physical sense than in an abstract divine curse-like manner as alluded to by Dhare.

The only other writer who has written at any length on gadhegals is Tulpule. In his magnum opus '*Pracheen*

*Marathi Koriv Lekh'* he has described and listed all the known variations of the wording of the 'ass-curse' in an inscriptional context. He has also listed all the sub-types of the ass curse as well as the other types of curses mentioned in inscriptions in Marathi (Tulpule 1963).

Amongst the three paneled gadhegals the three sub-types vis-à-vis the curse/punishment are:

- i. with inscriptional description and sculptural depiction,
- ii. only with sculptural depiction
- iii. only with inscriptional description (Tulpule 1963: 58).

The four gadhegals mentioned in this paper are of type 2 where the curse/punishment is not referred to in the inscription but only via a sculptural depiction. Type 2 is the most commonly seen type, type 1 less common and type 3 rare. Most gadhegals are inscribed in devanagiri. There are two known exceptions where there is Arabic inscriptional evidence. The first is seen in the grounds of the Satara Museum and is of type 2 whilst the second is from Dabhol (Nazim 1935: 9–11). The Dabhol example is bi-lingual (Devanagiri and Arabic) and of type 3 (Subsequent perusal of the Dabhol Gadhegal has revealed that it originally had a sculptural depiction which at some point in the past has been physically removed [Wirkud 2013: 61–3; Plate 25]). The Dabhol gadhegal is also the only one which is inscribed on both faces.

There is thus a very small corpus of literature available on these stones even though many researchers appear to be familiar with their existence. A number of these stones bear very important Shilahara Period inscriptions and whilst these inscriptions have been recorded, deciphered and published, very rarely have the authors categorically described their context and the sculpture associated with the inscription. Most are casually referred to in passing as ass-curse stones. One of the most famous of these is the gadhegal from Akshi (Mirashi 1977: 167–68; Plate LXXIII) (**Fig 1**) which according to Tulpule (1963: 139–44) bears the earliest Marathi inscription found in Maharashtra dated by him to 1012 AD. Whilst the stone can still be seen at its original location at Akshi village near Alibaug the inscription has almost completely weathered away and is no longer legible.

Many of the Gadhegals are presently either ignored complete or worshipped as alternative deities often of lesser significance. The Pimpalvadi Gadhegal in Girgaum, Mumbai is presently worshipped as the local *gramadevata* (village protector diety). The Varsoli Gadhegal (near Alibaug, District Raigad, Maharashtra) is worshipped as *Mhasoba* (a common guardian diety) and was supposedly the place of annual animal sacrifices (H Wirkud pers. comm.).

Thus whilst these steles are part and parcel of the religious landscape none are referred to in original context by the autochthonous peoples, mostly they are ignored and left alone out of ignorance/fear (as seen by the authors at Diveagar), worshipped as alternative deities (eg.



Pimpalvadi and Varsoli) or placed alongside other stele and memorials as seen at Deokhol.

### The Gadhegals from Diveagar and Deokhol

The four gadhegals which are the focus of this article were discovered by the team from the sites of Diveagar and Deokhol. There are three almost identical specimens from Diveagar and a slightly different though stylistically similar one from Deokhol. Diveagar is a stabilized sand dune on the coast of Maharashtra, siltation in the last 50 odd years has resulted in this one time island now becoming almost a permanently land-linked part of the mainland.

The gadhegals at Diveagar were shown to us by Mr Bapat, a local land owner and a second generation history buff. The first was on his land and existed as a boundary marker till it was hacked to bits by a BSNL linesman, four years ago, to help steady a new telephone pole. Today only the lower panel depicting the curse is extant (**Fig 2**). The panel consists of an inset rectangle with a human figure (head to left) lying on its back and with an equid with erect phallus standing above it. The fragment was covered in clay and moss and was difficult to photograph clearly.

The second gadhegal from Diveagar lies at the boundary of the orchard owned by Mr Kulkarni and the newly renovated *Sundar-Narayan* Temple complex at Diveagar. This gadhegal is much weathered and broken. It is represented by two large conjoining fragments. The upper fragment has the top right corner missing whereas the lower fragment has the lower right corner missing (**Fig 3**). The upper panel consists of a rectangular inset in which a raised crescent is seen in the extant left half. The central panel is worn and a few random letters of the original inscription are barely visible. The lower panel is once again a squarish rectangular inset box in which is seen a human sprawled on its back with an equid with erect phallus standing over it. The depiction of the curse is identical to that seen in the first gadhegal.

The third gadhegal was found in the orchard of Mr Joshi (**Fig 4**). This Gadhegal is complete and bears a short inscription in low relief on its central panel. The top of the gadhegal has a distinct kalasha surmounting an inset rectangle in which are seen the crescent to the left and the circle to the right. The lower panel is almost identical to those seen on the first and second gadhegals. It depicts a distinctively female figure with an equid with erect phallus standing above her. This depiction too is almost identical to gadhegals 1 & 2.

The central panel/flat portion is inscribed in low relief with a Marathi inscription in the *nagari* script. The Stone is supposed to have been found whilst digging and has been first reported by M G Dikshit and subsequently elaborated upon by Mirashi (1977: 172–3) who describes it as an ass-curse stone with a 10 line nagari inscription and he gives Dikshit's translation. He further goes on to say that the stones whereabouts are unknown. The CEMS-INSTUCEN team is thus responsible for rediscovering this lost inscription.



**Fig 2:** Diveagar 1 (Bapat's House).



**Fig 3:** Diveagar 2 (Kulkarni's Wadi).

The inscription deals with a grant of land to one Ram Mandalik and a house to one Ganapati Nayak. The grant is issued in the name of the Shilahara ruler Anantadeva (III) and is dated to the 8<sup>th</sup> day of the Hindu month of *Ashaada*, in the *Saka Samvat* year 1176 (approx 9<sup>th</sup> July 1254 AD). The other very important fact mentioned in





**Fig 4:** Diveagar 3 (Joshi's House).

the inscription is the original name of Diveagar (*Dipakagrama*) as the location of the grants.

The fourth gadhegal (**Fig 5**) is from the site of Deokhol which lies in the nearby hills about 7 km south of Diveagar (just off the Borli-Shrivardhan Rd) and next to the modern village of Borla. Deokhol as the name suggests lies in a *khol* – a bowl in the hills and has an ancient water tank and numerous exquisite sculptures and sculptural members of the Shilahara period. The Deokhol gadhegal is presently placed under a long shed alongside numerous memorial stones and sculptural fragments.

The gadhegal from Deokhol has an upper panel almost identical to the third gadhegal from Diveagar. The only difference is that the Deokhol gadhegal is slightly larger and the slab has a rounded top as opposed to the flat top seen at Diveagar (see **Fig 4**). The central panel is not flush with the lower edge of the upper and the upper edge of the lower, but is slightly recessed. The panel is completely devoid of any inscription. The main difference though is in the bottom panel where the image of the human and the equid face right as opposed to the three examples from Diveagar which face left. Further the human is crouched face down and the equid is shown engaging in sex with the human from a posterior direction.



**Fig 5:** Deokhol.

### Conclusion

On the basis of extant data it would be correct to say that the tradition of making and establishing Gadhegals was prevalent at Diveagar and in its surroundings. Gadhegals 1, 2 and 3 from Diveagar appear to be identical.

Sadly only one has survived in its entirety and with a legible inscription. The postures and positions of both the human and equid figures is almost a carbon copy and the other unique factor is the crescent being shown on

the left of the top panel (in No. 2 & 3 as No. 1 did not have that portion extant) and not the right as is seen in all other known instances. The first author has seen gadhegals from Tuljapur, Akshi, Pimpalvadi, Sangameshwar and a number of examples at the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastusanghralaya (formerly the Prince of Wales Museum of Western India), Mumbai. All of these gadhegals have a circle depicting the sun on the left of the top panel/zone and a crescent depicting the moon on the right hand side of the circle. This same pattern of circle on left and crescent on right is also seen on almost all hero-stones, sati-stones and other boundary markers but the position of the circle is almost always on the right and that of the crescent on the left. The literal wording in inscriptions though mentions the moon first and the sun later (*aa Chandra surya virajate*).

This remarkable coincidence further strengthens the probability that these three were made simultaneously and by the same artisans and that they may in fact be part of a single set that defined the borders of the area mentioned in the land grant in the inscription seen on Gadhegal No. 3.

Gadhegal No. 4 from Deokhol is surprisingly similar in the execution of the upper panel with gadhegal No. 3, with the exception that the circle is to the left and the crescent is to the right. Gadhegal No. 4 also differs in its execution of the recessed central panel and the positions, postures and direction of the human and equid figures in the lower panel. The figures face right and the human is shown crouching on its stomach. The orientation is uncommon (as in most of the examples the figures are facing left) but not unknown. The position of the human and equid figures is in fact of the more commonly seen variety.

Even though the fourth example is different from the others the style of the workmanship and the general treatment of the concept appears to be very similar, implying that this gadhegal was in all probability coeval to the others considering the proximity of Deokhol to Diveagar and the common Shilahara background.

Gadhegals are incredibly enigmatic though explicit (and to some repulsive) markers of the Early Medieval period in Western India. The precise date of 1254 AD gives us a specific timeline for the three stylistically identical Gadhegals from Diveagar (and also in all probability for the one from Deokhol) and thereby a specific date for Northern Shilahara sovereignty over Diveagar and the adjoining region. It also ascertains the length of the Northern Shilahara empire by establishing their dominion this far south. This along with the date of 1012 AD seen on the Akshi Gadhegal and the clear association of the Shilahara sovereigns with these Gadhegals clearly shows this tradition was a popular, continuing, living tradition under the Shilahara rulers for at least 240 years.

Apart from the explicitly depicted warning/probable punishment Gadhegals almost always bear inscriptions of great import to historians and archaeologists working

to reconstruct the cultural geography and history of the Early Medieval period and thus deserve much more scholarly attention than they have received to date. Here's hoping this article sets the ball rolling.

This article is the first in a series of articles based on explorations ancillary to the excavations being currently carried out at the site of Chandore, jointly by the CEMS and INSTUCEN.

### Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank Ms Mugdha Karnik, the Director of CEMS and Mr Dhananjay Karnik, Founder Trustee INSTUCEN for making the explorations and excavations possible; we would also like to thank Mr Samuel Nazareth, Managing Trustee INSTUCEN for lending us his vehicle to facilitate our work and helping us in many other ways; many thanks are also due to Shri Liladhar Nana Khot and Shri Sudhakar Jagganath Patil of Borli-Panchatan who showed us around their bailiwick; thanks are also due to Mr Uday Bapat of Diveagar who showed us all the monuments and sculptural fragments scattered all over the island; and finally to Mr and Mrs Joshi of Diveagar for their hospitality and a transcript of the inscription (originally made by Shri Ganesh Bapat father of Shri Uday Bapat's father) from the gadhegal on their property. We would also like to acknowledge the help of Prof AP Jamkhedkar, Dr Prachi Moghe and Dr Suraj Pandit who helped with clues, references and constructive criticism.

### References

- Dalal, Kurush F.** 2012 A Short Note on the Explorations at the site of Chandhore, District Raigad, Maharashtra. *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Mumbai*, Volume 84 (2010–11 New Series): 133–36
- Dalal, Kurush F.** 2013 A Preliminary Report on the First Season of Excavations at Chandore, Tal. Mangaon, District Raigad, Maharashtra (2012). *Journal of the Asiatic Society, Mumbai*, Volume 85 (2011–12 New Series): 236–45
- Dhere, R. C.** 1990 *Lok Sahitya-Shodh ani Sameeksha* (in Marathi), Shrividya: Pune
- Mirashi, V. V.** 1977 *Inscriptions of the Silaharas* (Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum Vol VI). Archaeological Survey of India: New Delhi
- Nazim, M.** 1935 *An inscription from Dabhol*. in Yazdani, G (Ed.) *Epigraphia Indo-Moslemica* (1933–34) (pp. 9–11). Manager of Publications (GOI): Delhi
- Tulpule, S. G.** 1963 *Pracheen Marathi Koriv Lekh* (in Marathi), University of Pune: Pune
- Van der Geer, Alexandra Anna Enrica** 2008 *Animals in Stone: Indian Mammals Sculptured Through Time*. Brill Academic Publishers: Leiden. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/ej.9789004168190.i-462>
- Wirkud, Harshada D.** 2013 *Study of Gadhegals from Maharashtra* (Unpublished Post-Grad Diploma Thesis), Pune: Deccan college



**How to cite this article:** Dalal, K F, Kale, S and Poojari, R 2015 Four Gadhegals Discovered in District Raigad, Maharashtra. *Ancient Asia*, 6: 1, pp. 1-6, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5334/aa.12320>

**Published:** 19 January 2015

**Copyright:** © 2015 The Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Unported License (CC-BY 3.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited. See <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/>.



*Ancient Asia* is a peer-reviewed open access journal published by Ubiquity Press.

OPEN ACCESS 