



A STUDY OF TOURISM-POTENTIALITY OF DISREGARDED REGIONS WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO MIRAJ

Dr. Niranjan Kulkarni

Assoc. Professor and Head, Dept. of History (UG & PG),
Hon. Shri Annasaheb Dange Arts, Commerce and Science College, Hatkanangale.

ABSTRACT

We are aware that tourism is now becoming a major industry in India and it definitely holds significant position in the process of make-in-India. The state of Maharashtra is also gearing up its speed in this process. However, one must always explore and exploit tourism potential of new and disregarded regions. The town of Miraj is one of such disregarded regions which have best tourism potential. This article explores such tourism potential of Miraj. The study is divided into two parts, one Monuments and Remains in Miraj and second, peculiar activity areas and Festivals in Miraj. The study shows that, along with best communication facilities, Miraj holds a lot of tourist potential which needs urgent attention from the authorities and concerned citizens. The creation and development of tourist information centers and facilities, development of infrastructure and proper dissemination of information are the basic requirements that Miraj lacks of.

KEY WORDS: Tourism-Miraj-Monuments-Water Management System-Sitar Makers-Medical Hub

INTRODUCTION

We are aware that tourism is now becoming a major industry in India and it definitely holds significant position in the process of make-in-India. In India, most of the states are discovering and coming up with various places/events of tourism potential. The state of Maharashtra is also gearing up its speed in this process. However, one must always explore and exploit tourism potential of new and disregarded regions. The town of Miraj is one of such disregarded regions which have best tourism potential. Hence, I have selected the study of the tourism potentiality of Miraj for the present paper. Recently I have completed a project on Miraj, funded by UGC . The present article also shares some results of my study .

The article is divided into two parts, one Monuments and Remains in Miraj and

second, peculiar activity areas and Festivals in Miraj. In the first section we would understand the monuments and remains which have dotted tourist landscape of Miraj along with their present status and tourism potential. In the second section, we would understand some special tourist attraction of Miraj which are peculiar and specifically related to Miraj. In the concluding remarks I would like to summarize the investigation and share some recommendations regarding the development of tourism in Miraj.

STUDY AREA: MIRAJ

Miraj (Dist. Sangli, Maharashtra) is a small town in southern Maharashtra. It is located on the bank of a stream. It is a border town, located on the boundaries of Maharashtra and Karnataka, and on the other side, on the transitional area of western Kokan region to the east. It is a place of railway junction on the Western Railway Line.

Since the times of Shilahara we start getting factual mention of Miraj (AD 1115). It was called as 'Mirinja/Mirinji'. Then, it went under the Yadava rule (AD 1214-15). During that early medieval period, Miraj was famous as a trading center. During medieval times, first Bahamani (AD 1347-1490) and then Adilshahi (AD 1490-1686) selected Miraj as their military outpost. Subsequently Miraj was renamed as Mubarakabad and Murtazabad, respectively. During that period, Muslim Sufi saints, followed by their disciples arrived and settled in Miraj. Miraj witnessed its first urbanization during Adilshahi period. Most of the religious monuments were constructed during the same period. After Adilshahi, Miraj became the southern outpost of Maratha Empire (1600-1818). The Patvardhans were the ruler of the area (AD 1764-1948). After the control of India by British, British transformed the area into princely state; thus, Miraj became Miraj state. In the same period, Christians and Parasis arrived in Miraj. During this period, Miraj witnessed second urbanization. The town was beautified with various kinds of monuments. In 1948, the princely state of Miraj merged into independent India.

Though Miraj has developed in various spheres during recent years; it still has retained its medieval flavor, holding a fusion of local traditional expertise and European influences. Since centuries, Hindus and Muslims, and during 19th century, Christians lived in Miraj in an exemplary harmony.

PART I: MONUMENTS AND REMAINS IN MIRAJ MONUMENTS

In the recent survey and documentation project, I have documented and studied near about 160 monuments, dotted the area of Miraj city. We have various kinds of monuments in the study area, constructed since medieval period up to the merger into independent India (1948). We can categorize these monuments in following sections:

Defense: After renouncing their independence, the Bahamani started the construction of a ground-fort (15th- 18th centuries) at the south-eastern borders of Miraj. The fort was re-constructed and strengthened during Adilshahi period. It bears signs of various battles in which the siege of Miraj (1762-63) was the memorable event in the history of Miraj fort. The Patvardhans, the ruler of princely state of Miraj, too, added some

bastions, strengthened the fort. Besides, they also, along with their palace; constructed various buildings in the fort-area for administrative purpose. Presently, the walls and bastions were destructed and needs immediate attention from the authorities (Plate-1). Nevertheless, the administrative buildings in the fort-area like, underground record-office (presently disregarded) (Plat-2) and durbar hall (presently court) (Plate-3) helps us to understand administrative structure of the state.

Residential: Since, Early Medieval period Miraj grew from a small lane of merchants to the vibrant town. However, during Adilshahi period, we find first urbanization of Miraj. Though, we do not witness any residential structure of that period; since Maratha period up to the merger, we observe residential structures in Miraj. Students/scholars of architecture and art can observe not only a gradual development of architectural style, but also the impacts and exchange of various cultures and traditions. The palace (presently court)(1771) and the Vadas of Harabanna Patvardhan (1751) and Vitthal Building (1917) display beautiful examples of Deccan Wood-work on their facade. (Plat-5) Similar to individual houses, two chawls (Babalibai Chawl (1920) and Vibhute Chawl (1944)) of that period are still accommodated by families.

Public: Presently, we can observe various monuments belonging to the transitional period between Medieval to the rule of British. Hence, we find influence of European architecture on the local buildings. We can visit Town Hall (1874) (Plate-4), magnificent Lakshmi Market with its tower (1932) (Plate-6), market-lines dedicated to special purposes, hospitals (1864) (Plate-7), post office (1880), Prant Office (1880), underground record office (1880), Karbhari Kacheri (early 20th century), Jail and Police line (1880), Bridge (1883), Rest House (1937) (Plate-8), schools, railway station etc.

Religious: Miraj is an old town and its history displays the harmonious relations between Hindus, Muslims, Christians and Parsis too. It holds all forms of Islamic architecture, like, the masjid (mosque), durgah (tomb/tomb building of Sufi saints), maqbara (tomb of officers), Idgah (1586-87) (Plate-9) etc. For example masjid (mosque): Kamabade Mosque (14th c.), Jama Masjid (1506), Kali Masjid (1506), Dongari Masjid (1658), durgah (tomb/tomb building of Sufi saints): Kamabade, Mirasaheb (1491 to 18th c.) (Plate-10), Bara Imam (pre-1579), maqbara (tomb of officers): Baradari (1600) etc. These monuments were constructed mainly during Bahamani to Adilshahi periods. The corbel tables of these monuments indicate influence of Later Chalukyan toranas. During Maratha period also, these monuments were maintained, not only that, they were also renovated and venerated. The Patvardhans hold the durgah of Mirasaheb as the guardian of Miraj. Hence, they renovated and added various parts in the durgah. These monuments, along with the muhallas in which they are standing have retained the same old flavor of the periods in which they were constructed. Hence, while walking through these lanes we can feel as if we are walking through the medieval times. Miraj holds a medieval durgah of Muhammad Mira and Shamana Mira, called as Mirasaheb Durgah. It is worth visiting during the annual festival of Urs.

Besides Muslims, the Hindu temple shows their development from Early Medieval to the medieval period. Like, Ambabai Temple in Brahmanpuri (post-1650), Kashi-vishveshvar (1765) (Plate-12) and Vyankatesh temple (1779) in Dindi Ves area, Madhavaji temple in fort-area (1797), Ganesh temple near Ganesh tank (1801), Datta

temple (1881), Lakshmaneshvar temple complex with step-well and horse stable (1882) etc. The scholars of Maratha history can study these developments. It also has an old church (1885, 1922) (Plate-13) which have retained a huge bell of past. The Christian cemetery (1894) (Plate-14) of Miraj holds people from various periods, like, Manorama Mary Medhavi (1921), the daughter of Pandita Ramabai; Dr. C. E. Vail (1936), J. R. Donaldson etc. Hence, their tomb-stones are now- a- days have become a source of history. It is resting place of missionaries, doctors and various eminent people throughout the history. The town also has the tower of silence (post-1894) of the Parasis (Plate-15).

REMAINS

While walking through Miraj, one can come across to various kinds of architectural remains and art objects. We observe the pillars of Yadava temples, embedded in fortification wall of the fort. Same pillars were also reused in an old temple of Ganesh, built during Maratha period. Then, we find, hero-stones, again embedded in the wall of a temple, called as Tanksal Maruti temple. Some unidentified cenotaphs were located on the south-western boundary of Miraj. Beautiful sculptures are scattered at a village of Bedag, close to Miraj.

Part II: Special tourist locations/activity areas/festivals

Apart from various monuments and scattered remains, best both for students/scholars and a general tourists; there are some special tourist locations and festivals in Miraj which are of special attention.

Water Management System (Plate-16: a, b, c, d): Miraj is located four km away from river Krishna, on a stream. Thus, there is no source of perennial water. During the transitional period, the Patvardhans introduced a peculiar water management system in Miraj . These are called as Juna Aagat (Old Aqueduct) (1866) and Nava Aagat (New Aqueduct) (1911). It was based on the system prevalent in Medieval Ahmednagar, Bijapur, Gokonda and Pune . The low-lying areas beyond the NE borders of Miraj were utilized for the collection of water. It was stored by erecting a huge bund where water was purified through filtration wells. Thus, the water was carried and distributed throughout the town, by underground pipes. To avoid the bubbling and dirt in the flowing water, water-towers were also erected in the intervals. Then, in each section of a town, a small tank was constructed which served as outlet. These were donated by rich families in the town. If we visit Miraj, we can observe the entire process of the system; however, only one or two water tower is remained.

Besides, we find various kinds of living-wells (i.e. water is still used) in Miraj. We have a huge step-well, constructed during Adilshahi period. It is called as 'Haider Bav' (1585). Recently, the water from this well was carried to drought affected Latur. Besides, during Maratha period, various kinds of wells were constructed in various styles, like, wells that of Sanglikar Mala (1799), Miraj-Kolhapur road (1907) etc. A water pavilion of Shaha nursery, called as Khatib-Well containing step well of nine arches is worth visiting. Ganesh Tank (1801) of the town has recently been developing as tourist attraction.

The Sitar-maker lane: Miraj is famous for the sitar-industry. During Adilshahi period, the shikalgars (artisans working in weapons and metal) were invited to reside in Miraj. Then, during Maratha period they changed their occupation to sitar-making. Since, then, Miraj has become famous for the sitar making industry . An old road, connecting fort to northern boundary is dotted with the shops and houses of these sitar-makers alongside the road . They not only make beautiful sitars but also transport them to all over world. This location can be termed as a major spot of ethnographic/ethno music tourism.(Plate-17) We can witness the entire process of sitar-making and learn details of the craft from those hospitable craftsmen. Recently Hon. District Collector, District Sangli have allotted a separate land to these sitar-makers which would, in near future, become a tourist attraction.

Music festivals: Miraj is also a point of attraction regarding cultural tourism. Along with vibrant annual Urs of Mirasaheb Durgah; it holds two music festivals every year. Abdul Quarim Khan, the founder of Kirana style of Hindustani Classical music, spent major part of his life in Miraj. He used to pay homage to the durgah of Mirasaheb. His final resting place is also located in the same campus of the durgah. In his memory, during the annual urs (generally June-July), the music festival is organized for four days in Miraj. Artists from various parts of the country perform their talent without any cost and charges. Like, they are paying their service at the foot of Mirasaheb. It runs through the entire night from 9 pm to 5 am. (Plate-18) Similarly, during the festival of auspicious navaratra (October), a music festival is organized near the temple of Ambabai. It also holds performances from artists, arrived from various parts of the country.

Medical Hub : The dry climate and other communication facilities have created Miraj as a medical hub. During Maratha period, the Patvardhans introduced medical facility in Miraj (1864). However, only after the arrival of Christian missionaries, modern medicines and medical facilities started in Miraj. The credit goes to Dr. William Wanless who, with his compassionate attitude and expertise; laid foundation of Mission Hospital (Wanless Hospital). Although started with modest beginning, Dr. Wanless started various programs and constructed facilities in the area outside of the then Miraj, like, Hospital-1 (1894), Hospital-2 (1906), Hospital-3 (1913), Nursing Hostel (earlier Washington Home: 1912) (Plate-19), Maternity Home (1913), Burn-ward, Boiler Room (1913), Anatomy Building (1923) (Plate-20) etc. Along with the common people, various eminent personalities were also treated in the hospital. Now, it has developed tremendously; nevertheless the campus has retained all the old buildings. We still can visit the campus and observe the development of the hospital at the same time, the evolution of various types of architecture and influences they bore. Besides, we can also visit a Dharmashala (1934-48), created for patients of Wanless hospital. It is located close to Wanless hospital. We can also visit old government hospital which was constructed by local expertise/tradition but bores influences of European architecture style.

The pattern introduced by Dr. Wanless carried and developed further by his successors, in and around the campus. Hence, now we find number of hospitals with various types of specializations in Miraj. It has become a 'Medical Hub', useful not only for other parts of India but also for foreign patients. Thus it is a point of attraction so far

the 'Medical Tourism' is concerned.

Kumathekar Sangrah (Collection): It's a unique kind of place for the scholars to visit. Mr. Mansingrao Kumathekar, a well known local historian, expert in modi script and collector of number of original documents is a must-meet historian in Miraj. Since last 20 years, he has devoted his life for collecting original documents right from 16th c. to the independence. His collection, known as 'Kumathekar Sangrah (Collection)' comprised of 1, 50,000 documents. He is an authority in the history of Miraj; and an hour with him and his collection make our visit worthwhile.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Since Early Medieval period various kinds of monuments were constructed in Miraj by various dynasties. It is worth visiting for the students and scholars of architecture, history and culture, especially, to understand the development of architecture and art, from Early Medieval-Bahamani/Adilshahi-Maratha styles to indigenous influenced by European style.
- The peculiar Water Management System of Miraj is a feast for scholars/students and general public alike. It does have a tourist potential; not only that, it, if bring into use, can solve the present water-problems of Miraj.
- Visits and communication to Sitar-makers would be a point of Ethnographic Tourism. We can feel the tradition of a traditional art at the same time observe and understand the entire process of sitar-making.
- Regarding Music festivals, we can develop Miraj as a point of Cultural Tourism. The stays at Miraj during these days help tourists to understand peculiar culture of Miraj which are devoted to the retention of heritage of Hindustani classical Music.
- The combination of music festival and visit to Sitar-makers lane in action would be fruitful both for cultural and ethnographic tourism.
- The monuments in the campus of Wanless hospital and government hospital are also worth to visit for the students/scholars. The number of medical facilities is a point of attraction regarding Medical Tourism. Besides, visits to the old as well as new hospitals, along with the Dharmashala help us to understand the growth of Miraj into a 'Medical Hub'.
- Various packages for 'Heritage Walk' and 'Combination of Visits' can be developed. A walk in the lanes, close to Durgah provides us a flavor of medieval period. Then, a walk on the main road, connecting northern periphery to Miraj fort helps us to observe, understand and enjoy Hindu and Muslim religious architecture, civil architecture, defense architecture and sitar-makers in-action.
- The surrounding area of Miraj also dotted with various tourist attractions. The fort, Ganesh temple of Sangli helps us to understand Maratha as well as European style of architecture. The Ganesh temple of Tasgaon is only one example in Maharashtra of Gopuram style of south India. The recently discovered and identified Satavahana caves at Giriling mountain range is speedily becoming a tourist attraction. Besides, we can also visit magnificent temple of Khidrapur from Miraj.
- Mr. Mansingrao Kumathekar wishes to house and display his collection. The collection throws ample light on the history of Medieval Miraj. Hence, there is an urgent need to

create a place for his collection where the documents are properly catalogued, secured and displayed which subsequently would be of great help for the students/scholars of Maratha history.

Thus we can see that, along with best communication facilities, Miraj holds a lot of tourist potential which needs urgent attention from the authorities and concerned citizens. The creation and development of tourist information centers and facilities, development of infrastructure and proper dissemination of information are the basic requirements that Miraj lacks of.

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20. Rajarshi Shahu Maharaj of Kolhapur, Ghorapades of Ichalkaranji, etc.
21. The caves were discovered by Mr. Mansing Kumathekar and Mr Gautam Katkar (Jan 2016)

Plates

1. Miraj Fort



2. Underground Record Office



3. Wooden Pillar at Place (Court)



4. Town Hall



5. The word-work on the facade of Harabanna Patwardhan and Vitthal Building



6. Laxmi Market



7. Government Hospital



8. Government Rest Houses



9. Idgah



10. Mirashaeb Durgah



11. Corbel Table of Baradari



12. Kashivishveshvara Temple



13. Miraj Christian Church



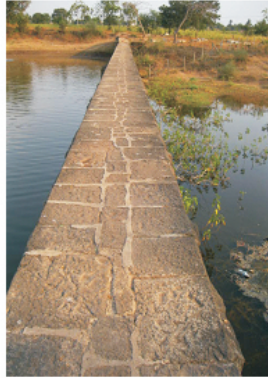
14. Christian Cemetery



15. Parasi Cemetery



16. a. Water Management System: Old Aqueduct: Bund



16. b. Water Tower



16. c. New Aqueduct



16. d. Tanks in Town



17. Sitarmaker



18. Music Festival at Annual urs



19. Nursing Hostel, Wanless Hospital



20. Anatomy Building, Wanless Hospital

