

The Historic Landscape & Typologies of Ancient Structures at Ambala Tank, Ramtek, Maharashtra

AkshayRevekar^{1,a)*} and Shivani Sharma^{2,b)}

¹Symbiosis School of Planning, Architecture, and Design, Nagpur, Symbiosis International (Deemed University), Pune, Maharashtra, India

²Conservation Architect, Achintya Studio, Nagpur, Maharashtra, India

^{a)}Corresponding author:
akshay.revekar@sspad.edu.in

Abstract

Ambala, a small settlement located near the town of Ramtek, is known for its landscape. The landscape of Ambala comprises an ensemble of the physical and human environment with tangible and intangible qualities is paid from Ramtek due to the geographical setting. The historical settlement of Ambala has a water tank surrounded by the typology of Ghats, temples, Chhatris, Kunds, Gate, etc. The ensemble is the center of human interaction through a medium of various ritualistic activities and performances. The development in the region of Ramtek began in the 5th century A.D. by the "Vakataka Dynasty" and continued till the 18th century A.D. ruled by the "Bhonsala Dynasty". The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) recommend the Historic Urban Landscape, defined as the urban area understood as a historical layering of cultural values and its geographical setting. The fieldwork involved a reconnaissance survey investigating the settlement and built structures within a km radius at Ambala tank, Ramtek. The basic methodology adopted was a reconnaissance survey that included the documentation work of sculptures and various built installations situated around the Ambala tank. The paper investigates the Ambala tank's historical landscape and contextual study in Ramtek, Maharashtra, India. The context of the study would include topography, natural features, built environment, land use, spatial organization, open spaces, practices and values, tangible and intangible dimensions of the heritage.

Keywords

Ancient Structures, Historic Landscape, Intangible, Rituals, Tangible, Typology.

Imprint

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INTRODUCTION

Ramtek is a beautiful town comprising 22,310 people (Census of India, 2020). The most dominant landscape feature in the beautiful city is critical architectural structures, hills, natural water bodies, etc. The socio-cultural landmarks and street networks are dictated by the form and presence of several hills & lakes. Ramtek is known as a place to a historical temple of Lord Ram built during the Vakataka period. The people believe that Ramtek was the place where Rama (The Hindu God) rested with his wife Sita (The Hindu Goddess) and brother Lakshman (The Hindu God). This place is also known for its relation with the great Sanskrit poet and playwright Kalidas. There are numerous religious activities and rituals are performed in Ramtek every year, on the auspicious occasion of Ramnavami, mainly inside the Rama temple complex [1].

Town Profile

Context and Setting

The town Ramtek (210.28°N, 790.28°E) is located around 45 kilometers away from the northeast direction of Nagpur (Maharashtra). The uninterrupted historical development has been examined through archaeological monuments from the fourth century A.D. to the present day in Ramtek (Bekker, 1989). Historical Development of Ramtek shows organic growth of the settlements with a variety of cultural and religious activities. Ramtek counts as an important heritage site in the Vidarbha Region [2]. The town setting is rich in natural resources with forest, water bodies, black cotton soil, etc. Jain settlement is one of the oldest settlements observed in this region in the Mourya period (Narad et al., 2019). Ambala Lake and Ramgiri hill have played a significant role in the evolution of their contemporary form and character. Most of the people of Ramtek town are engaged in agricultural and allied activities. The Figure 1 maps showcase the

regional setting, context, and geographical location of the city. Figure 2 and Figure 3 shows the Maharashtra state surrounding in natural features.

Historical Evolution of Ambala Tank

Figure 4 shows the Location of Ramtek in the Nagpur District of Eastern Vidarbha. It is believed that the lake was shaped after the battle between Hindu God

Vishnu in his Narasimha avatar and Hiranyakashyap (Hindu Demon). After murdering the evil presence and tossed him with such power, it molded a giant pit at the lower regions of Ramtek temple, known as Ambala Lake (Dange, 2017). Another story of the lake is that once a Suryavansi Rajput king named Amba reached the spot of the present tank. While hunting, he took water from a spring and washed his face and

Source: Survey of India, Department of Science & Technology.

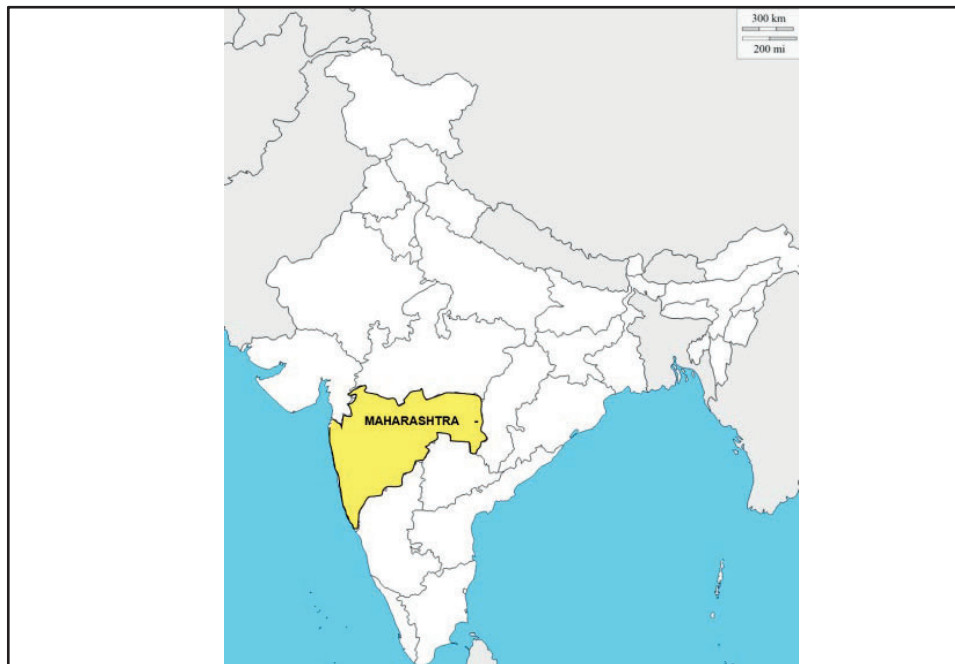


FIGURE 1.Geographical location of Maharashtra State on the map of India.

Source: Survey of India, Department of Science & Technology.

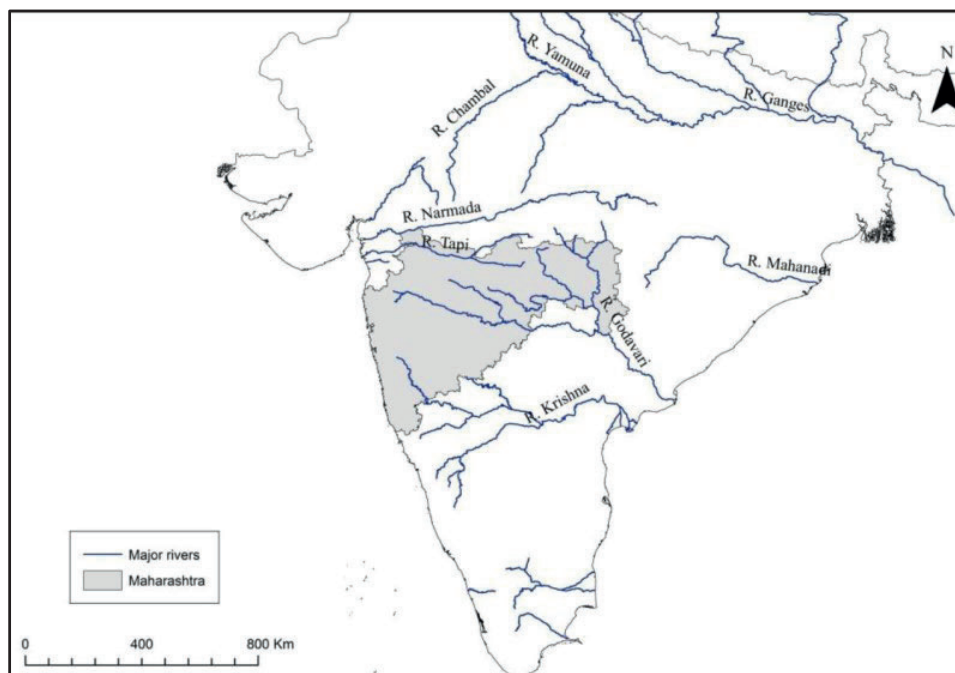


FIGURE 2.Maharashtra state with its surrounding natural features.

Source: Survey of India, Department of Science & Technology.

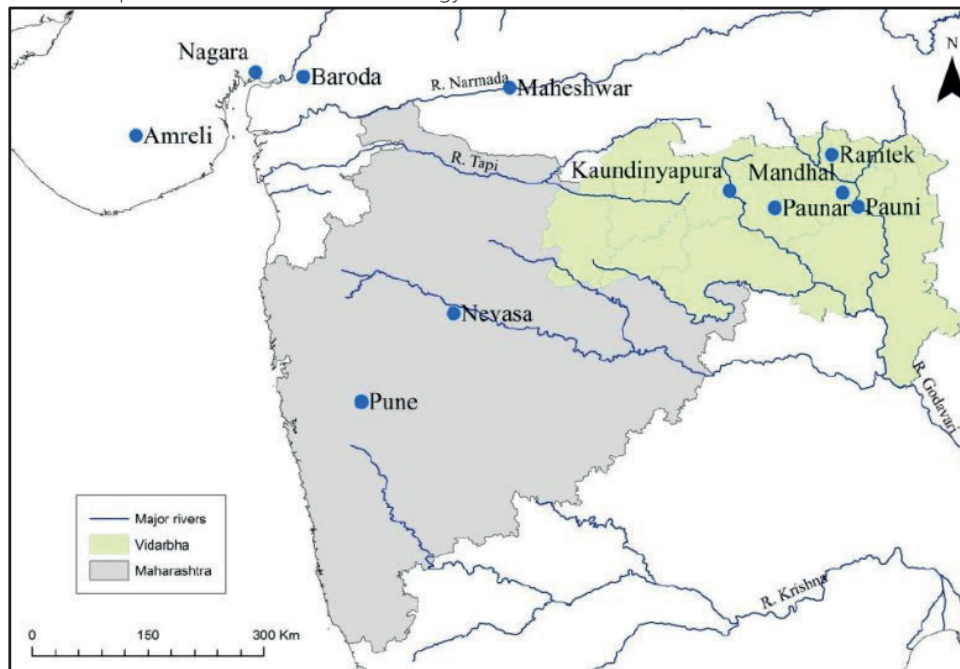


FIGURE 3. The location of Vidarbha inside the state of Maharashtra.

Source: Survey of India, Department of Science & Technology

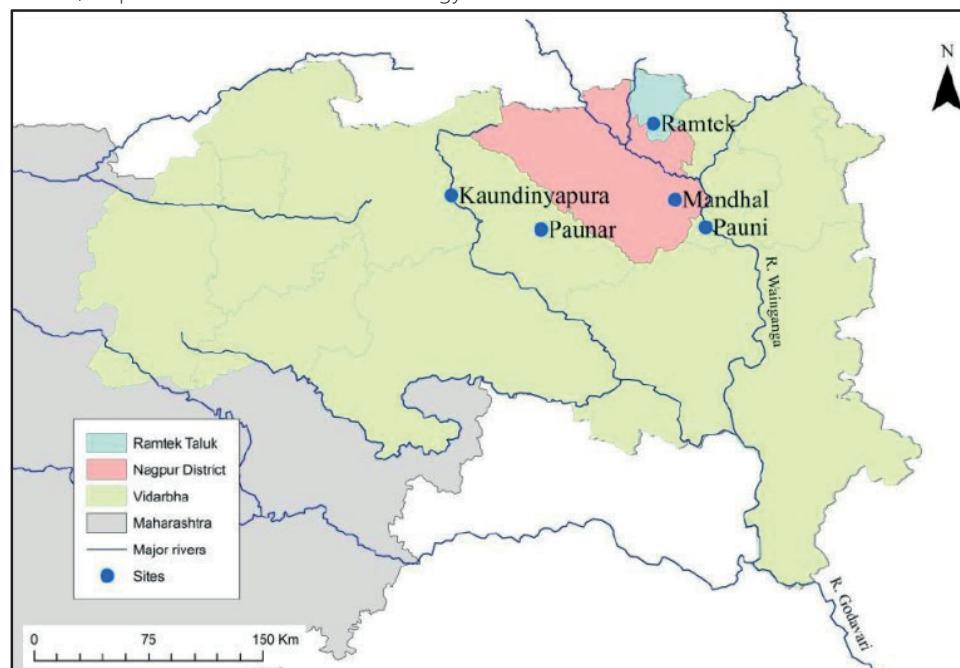


FIGURE 4. Location of Ramtek in the Nagpur District of Eastern Vidarbha

hands with it [3]. He found himself cured of leprosy disease. He, therefore, excavated the spring and brought water from Ganga. For this reason, people used to throw the ashes of the dead into the tank, whose water is as sacred as that of the Ganga (Maharashtra State Government of India, 2005) (Dange, 2017). The development of Ambala had been done by King Ambarish around the 14th century A.D.; hence it bears his name.

Figure 5 shows the Ambala tank, lined with steps and stone revetments throughout, has an array of temples on its banks. The appearance of the historic landscape in the morning, when the sun reflects on the tank with hills, is stunning. Among the temples, one is dedicated to the sun called the sun temple [4]. The peaceful environment of Ambala reflects an emotional state of pilgrims engaged in religious activities, including rituals of burial, bathing rituals, immersion of

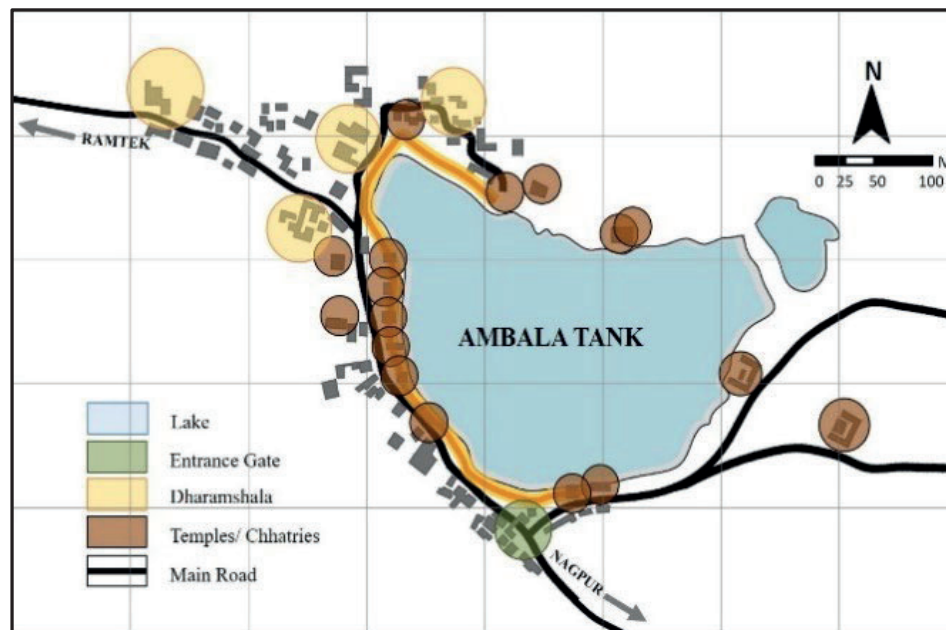


FIGURE 5. Map indicating the listing of typologies of ancient structures around the Ambala tank. Drawing courtesy: Author, 2019.

ashes into the holy waters; Pind Daan, etc. take place at tank premise. Mahadev (Lord Shiva) rules this small valley with several Shiv temples built around Ambala Lake as offerings to the God of Death.

TPOLOGY AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ANCIENT STRUCTURES

The period of the Vakatakakingdom is often counted as a classical era, which has produced distinctive and progressive monuments. Ramtek holds a lot of mythological significance [5]. Investigating ancient structures and monuments encourages our comprehension of the more immaterial parts of the Vakataka time of religion and belief system. Great architecture and sculptural artistry can likewise be characteristic of the flourishing kingdom of a realm, support, and religion, just as dynamic endeavours by systems to legitimize their position over the landscape. The listing of various ancient historic structures is carried out in this architectural documentation process [6]. The listed significant architectural forms and structures found in Ramtek town and the Ambala lake are mentioned in the table 2 below. The modest scale of temples around the small lake surrounded by lush green hills has a lasting impact on pilgrims and visitors (Maharashtra State Government of India, 2005). Table 2 shows the Inventory table with drawings of typologies of ancient structures at Ambala tank, and shown in Figure 6, Figure 7, Figure 8 and Figure 9.

Ghats and the Kunds

The pilgrimage places may be considered a seashore, river, lake, Kunds, or Ghats. Settlement boundaries are also defined by riverside Ghats that existed in the town or city. The physical transition from land to water has mythological and symbolical significance, representing rituals and spiritual activities on the edges (Kamble&Chundeli, 2016). The Kunds are formed in an organic pattern and gradually developed into several steps with a platform directed towards the water body [7]. At the Ghats of Ambala, there is one main road along with Ghat running parallel to the lake. In the premise of the Ambala tank, the ghats and kinds act as a human interface for nature and human beings connected by ritualistic activities. To immerse the ashes of the dead, a particular part of the tank on the east has been set aside, and a ghat has been built, known as Dasakriya Ghat (Dange, 2017).

Temples

Most temples and sculptures are related to the dominant Hindu "Brahmanical" tradition, with evidence of Shiva and Vishnu affiliation. There is various evidence relating to the diligence of local shrines found near-religious landscape (Kawathekar et al., 2016). The entire place seems to merge with its natural setting. Several types of temple designs are on view at Ambala, and the resulting diversity in form & detail of temples is unified by consistency in their scale and or-

TABLE 1

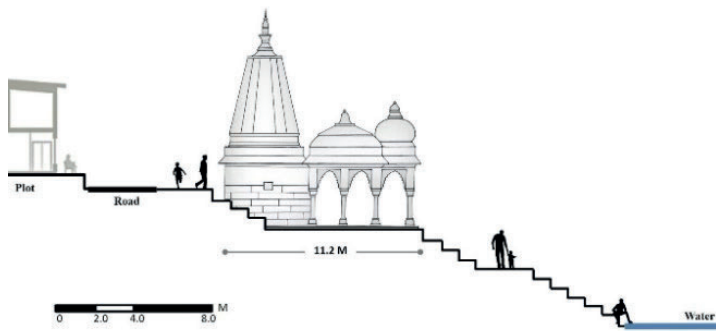
Listing of typologies of ancient structures at Ambala tank

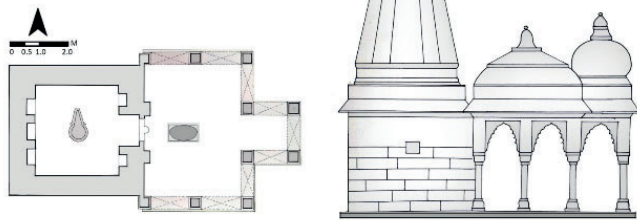
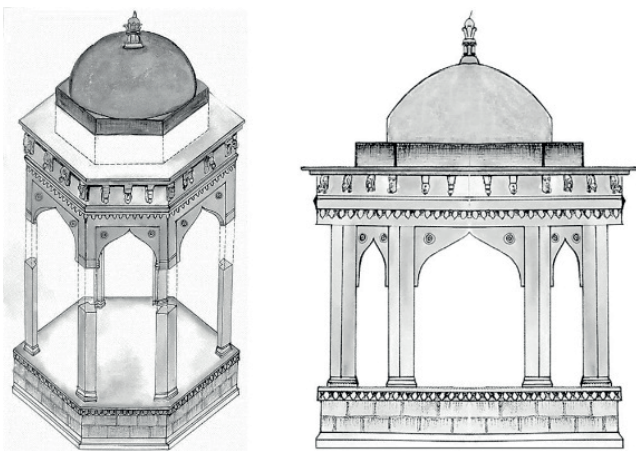
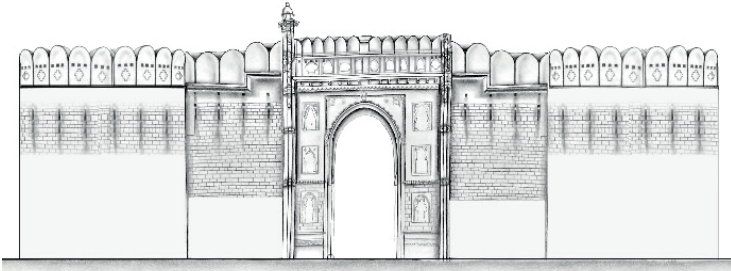
S.N.	Name of Structure	Symbolism of Structure	Present Status	Period	Geotag location (Latitude/Longitude)
1	MahadeoMandir 1	Shiva Temple	Good	17 th – 18 th C	21.391921, 79.344923
2	MahadeoMandir 2	Shiva Temple	Partially Ruined	17 th – 18 th C	21.391817, 79.344924
3	MahadeoMandir 3	Shiva Temple	Partially Ruined	17 th – 18 th C	21.391712, 79.344960
4	Shiva Mandir 1	Shiva Temple	Partially Ruined	17 th – 18 th C	21.392032, 79.344908
5	Shiva Mandir 2	Shiva Temple	Partially Ruined	17 th – 18 th C	21.392171, 79.344915
6	Shiva Mandir 3	Shiva Temple	Partially Ruined	17 th – 18 th C	21.392297, 79.344951
7	Surya Mandir	Sun Temple	Good	17 th – 18 th C	21.392600, 79.344924
8	PanchmukhiMahadeo	Shiva Temple	Partially Ruined	17 th – 18 th C	21.392624, 79.344980
9	Ganesh Mandir	Ganesha Temple	Good	17 th – 18 th C	21.392817, 79.344517
10	PanchShikhariMandir	Shiva Temple	Partially Ruined	17 th – 18 th C	21.393348, 79.346537
11	HariharMandir	Shiva Temple	Partially Ruined	17 th – 18 th C	21.394079, 79.345259
12	Renuka Mata Mandir	Renuka	Partially Ruined	17 th – 18 th C	21.391668, 79.348707
13	JaggannathMandir	Jaggannath Temple	Good	17 th – 18 th C	21.391623, 79.348868
14	BhutaleshwarMandir	Shiva Temple	Partially Ruined	17 th – 18 th C	21.390494, 79.346671
15	Dagdi Mahal	Samadhi	Partially Ruined	17 th – 18 th C	21.392936, 79.347495
16	Rani Bai Samadhi	Samadhi	Partially Ruined	18 th – 19 th C	21.392650, 79.344946
17	Chhatra 1	Samadhi	Partially Ruined	18 th – 19 th C	21.390757, 79.345761
18	Chhatra 2	Samadhi	Partially Ruined	18 th – 19 th C	21.390885, 79.345639
19	Chhatra 3	Samadhi	Partially Ruined	18 th – 19 th C	21.391424, 79.344988
20	Chhatra 4	Samadhi	Partially Ruined	18 th – 19 th C	21.393154, 79.346836
21	Chhatra 5	Samadhi	Partially Ruined	18 th – 19 th C	21.392936, 79.347806
22	Laxminarayan Mandir	Vishnu Temple	Good	17 th – 18 th C	21.394562, 79.342432
23	Kashi Darwaza	Entrance Gate	Good	17 th – 18 th C	21.390089, 79.346341

Source: Author, (Kamble&Chundeli, 2016), (Kawathekar et al., 2016), (Maharashtra State Government of India, 2005), (Google Maps, 2020).

TABLE 2

Inventory table with drawings of typologies of ancient structures at Ambala tank

S.N.	Typology	Architectural Drawings	Architectural Feature
1	Ghat	 <p>FIGURE 6.Site section of Ambala Ghat. Drawing courtesy: Author, 2019</p>	A place for rituals and spiritual activities on the edges with the physical transition from land to water.

S.N.	Typology	Architectural Drawings	Architectural Feature
2	Temple	 <p>FIGURE 7. Drawings of Shiva Temple. Drawing courtesy: Author, 2019</p>	A place of worship. Shiva and Vishnu temples are found majorly around the Ambala lake.
3	Chhatri	 <p>FIGURE 8. Drawings of Chhatri. Drawing courtesy: Author, 2019</p>	An ancient typology of the built structure represents Samadhi.
4	Gate	 <p>FIGURE 9. Elevation of Kashi Darwaza at Ambala Lake. Drawing courtesy: Author, 2019</p>	The entrance door is a part of a fortification.

Source: Author, 2019

ganization. Ambala is indeed a rare example of waterfront development of such exquisite quality. Shri Ram Mandir complex on the Ramgiri hill is linked to the Ambala lake in the valley below with a series of steps descending from the mountain, this link being both physical and symbolic [8]. Narasimha Temples surround the banks of the Ambala lake, and boat rides can be enjoyed to visit these temples. Most of the temples (eight in numbers) along the ghats of the Ambala tank are dedicated to Lord Shiva. The other temples belong to Surya (one in number) and Vishnu (three in num-

bers). The primary activity along the ghats and Kunds of the Ambala tank involves submerging the ashes of the dead and associated rituals with death. Due to this association of activities majority of the temples are dedicated to Lord Shiva. The development period around the Ambala lake is between the mid-18th and 19th centuries (Kamble&Chundeli,2016). The architectural characteristics of the temples along the ghats can be understood based on their spatial planning, design and form, material, and ornamentation [9]. The temples around the Ambala tank are built before oth-

er temples of Ramtek and show a similarity to Islamic features in their plan and use of elements. The temples have a central mandapa supported by four columns and bays projecting outside on three sides. The mandapa is supported by columns and arches and has a large dome above the roof. Unlike the other temples built by Bhonsle of Nagpur, the temples at Ambala are underdeveloped.

Chhatries

The Chhatri is an ancient typology of a built structure that represents Samadhi. A total of five Chhatries existed around the Ambala lake created by the Gond and Bhonsala Dynasty. The plan of all the Chhatries are typical and having Islamic features such as a circular dome with the pointed arches standing on eight or six columns. Figure no. 08 showing drawings of the Chhatries situated on Ambala Tank. As the tank is dedicated to performing rituals after death, traces of the same can be seen in the structures around the tank [10]. There are Samadhies and chhatris, which are burial places dedicated to prominent individuals of the respective era. The designs are similar to the Bhonsala burial chhatris in Nagpur but underdeveloped in terms of their architecture. The Chhatris are supported by columns and arches and adorned by a circular dome roof above.

Entrance gate

The entrance gate is also known as Kashi Darwaza. During the 18th century, the gate and a road running along the lake were established by Bhonsle King as a fortification. The gate has been built from sandstone, brick, and lime, having an area of around 140.80 sq. M. It has two bastions on both sides of the Circular Archway facing towards the Southern side of the lake. It is the most significant historic structure on the premises of Ambala Tank. It has a circular arched opening leading to the circumambulatory path around the tank.

RITUALS AND FESTIVALS AT AMBALA TANK

The Ambala tank is used for various ritual activities, i.e., Pitru Pooja, PindDaan, etc. One important festival of Kartik Purnima occurs 15 days after the Indian festival Diwali. The Kartik fair is also set up during the same time at Ramtek. A large, densely packed crowd of devotees visit the Ambala tank to take a holy shower before rising to the Ram Mandir (Kamble&Chundeli, 2016).

Another important festival is the Sharad Purnima, which is celebrated during the month of August-September. The circulation and movement pattern of people remains the same as the Kartik Purnima festival. Then another day-to-day activity is done by people here is PindDaan. This ritual offers to pay respect to one's predecessors; thus, it is done consistently throughout the year. The central place where the PindDaan ritual is used is the Asthi Visarjan Kund; hence the ritual shower is also done on the Ghats. The battery for leprosy cure happens during the "Amavas," for example, the new moon days of the year. After the holy bath, visitors go to the Laxmi Narayan temple and worship Vishnu (Kamble&Chundeli, 2016).

OBSERVATIONS AND DISCUSSIONS

Figure 10 shows the Ambala tank is used for various temple rituals, bathing, fishing, washing, etc. The water body is also getting polluted due to the drained of few drain outlets from the settlement. The urban local body should initiate the task of cleanliness and maintenance. Public-Private Participation is one solution identified with the strategic plan to involve the urban local body, the local public, and the improvement trust for water conservation management from Ambala tank (Kawathekar&Sanyal, 2016). There is an



FIGURE 10. Pitru Pooja ritual activity on the Ghats. Photo courtesy: Author, Date: 25/11/2019

excellent scope of waterfront development with recreational activities, including boating, water sports, etc. The Ambala lake is bound at the edges with concrete steps and can be a decent spot to spend early morning and evening. Located away from the chaos of life, the lake is tranquil and is a fantastic spot to relax, slow down and get rid of all anxieties of this material world.

CONCLUSION

Restoration and preservation of ancient monuments is an environmentally friendly technique. The Archaeological Survey of India and local authorities play an essential role in it. The old structures attract tourists, especially those who love to experience the “spirit” of the city, which is explored through architecture. Tourism could be one of the best options to boost the economic prosperity of the town. Due to poor maintenance and lack of public awareness, the place is losing its significance and value. An awareness campaign towards conservation and promotion of cultural tourism for this ancient historic place could be worked out with the support from Ramtek Nager Parishad. To make the environment sustainable, it should be restricted to throw eatables, ritual waste, and other pollutants into the water tank. By involving the local public, some maintenance activities should plan for the long-run sustainability of the culture and heritage.

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Conflict

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