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Animal Depictions in Medieval Forts Located in the Deccan and Konkan Regions with Special Reference to Mythical Animals

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Keywords:

Medieval Forts
Animal Depiction
Animal Symbolism
Deccan
Konkan
Mythical Animals
Sharabha

Abstract: Forts are a symbol of protection and military architecture. Some of the major elements of fort architecture include gateways, bastions, merlons, embrasures, ramparts, etc. A few decorative motifs, including a variety of animal symbols, can frequently be found in medieval forts in the Deccan and Konkan regions. This demonstrates the uniqueness of the artwork in the defence architecture of these forts. These symbols are not only found on the gateways of forts but can also be seen on the other structures located inside the fort such as the citadel area, temples, internal gateways, etc. The present paper is an attempt to document some of these animal depictions in addition to dealing with a variety of other aspects related to these animal symbols.

Introduction

Depictions of a variety of animals can be commonly seen on the forts constructed during the medieval period in the Deccan and Konkan regions. The present paper is an attempt to explore and document some of these animal depictions, especially the mythical animals. The study area includes the present states of Maharashtra, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. For this type of documentation, the locations in the fort where the animal images were depicted were identified. The second step was to record the history of these forts, as, many times, these forts were built by one dynasty and later conquered by another, which, several times, led to the reconstruction of these forts. This reconstruction also included the construction of new gateways and the depiction of a variety of new animals. Therefore, in this article, an attempt has also been made to review the time period for placing sculptures of animals and birds on these forts.

ISBN: 978-93-5786-608-8 (E-book); 978-93-5810-902-3 (Print)

Cite as: Joshi, Sachin Vidyadhar (2023) Animal depictions in medieval forts located in the Deccan and Konkan regions with special reference to mythical animals, in *Animals in Archaeology: Integrating Landscapes, Environment and Humans in South Asia* (*A Festschrift for Prof. P.P. Joglekar*) Volume 2 (Pankaj Goyal, Abhayan G.S., and Sharada Channarayapatna Eds.), pp. 635-657. Thiruvananthapuram: Department of Archaeology, University of Kerala.

As the depiction of mythical animals is the main focus of the present paper, some arguments have been put forward as to when and how the sculpture of the mythical animals may have emerged. Specific attempts are being made to study when the images of mythical animals such as *Vyals* and *Sharabhas* started appearing on these forts. Whether there is any connection between these sculptures and religion is also discussed. The article also tries to trace the Sanskrit texts dealing with the mythical animal sculptures, as it is important to understand whether the information given in the Sanskrit texts has anything to do with the mythical animals appearing on the forts or not.

A Brief History of Animal Depictions on Forts

Excavations at the archaeological sites of Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro had yielded evidence of land forts with moats, fortifications, gateways, and bastions (Wheeler 1947). However, the evidence of craftwork on the gateways was not found at any Harappan site. The origin of strongholds in the Deccan goes back 2,000 years. While the evidence of fortifications and gateways was found in the Early Historic period at various archaeological sites such as Pauni, Adam, Ter, etc. in Maharashtra, the remains of motifs and sculptures on gateways were not found in any of the archaeological excavations (Sawant 2009).

Chronologically, during the medieval period, the Chalukya, Rashtrakuta, Shilahara, Kakatiya, and Yadava dynasties built forts in the Deccan and Konkan. The earliest evidence of animal depictions on forts comes from the Warangal Fort, located in the Warangal district of Telangana. It is a perfect example of artistic and architectural excellence and historical richness. This fort was the capital of the Kakatiya dynasty in eastern Deccan. Remains of gateways and fortifications can still be found in Warangal today. Even today, decorative sculptures and motifs can be seen on its gateway. A rectangular-shaped gateway, commonly called the "*Torana*," is constructed inside the Warangal fort. The construction of *Torana* looks similar to the gateway. Each gate has twin pillars with angled brackets and a huge lintel. The gates have intricate carvings of mythical animals and birds with foliated tails. At both ends of the beam or lintel, the head and trunk of an elephant are depicted. A mythical composite animal is depicted on the upper part of the head of the elephant. Two birds (probably peacocks) are illustrated on the upper part of both ends of the lintel or beam. Another mythical animal having the body of a lion is depicted on both the upper ends of the lintel, just beside the peacock sculpture.

Islam forbids the depiction of all living things, particularly humans. Hence, the sculptures during the Islamic period were affected by such restrictions, as they were more exposed to the eye of the public and, being tridimensional, were closer to living bodies. However, we do find exceptions. For instance, the Omayyad and early Abbasid caliphs, the Fatimids, the Seljuqs, and the Safavids of Persia permitted figural relief and even statues, though only in places dissociated from religious worship. Motifs such as heraldic lions, sphinxes, dragons, griffins, eagles, and other birds, etc. are found in Islamic art after the 10th century CE (Goetz 1963). In the Deccan and Konkan regions too, one can find depictions of animals in the form of sculptures during the Islamic period. This might be due to the presence of Hindus in the courts of Muslim rulers.

Animal Depictions in Medieval Forts of the Deccan and Konkan Regions

There are more than 1000 different medieval forts situated in the Deccan and Konkan regions, i.e., in Maharashtra, Karnataka, Telangana, and Andhra Pradesh. Exploration was conducted on some of the forts in this region, and attempts were made to document as much information as possible related to the depiction of animals in the forts visited by the author. A description of some of the animal depictions recorded during the course of exploration has been given below.

Vyala or *Yali*

Vyala, also known as *Yali*, is a mythical animal quite similar to the gargoyle as seen in European architecture or the leogryph as seen in Asian architecture. *Yali* or *Vyala* can be called Indian dragons. *Vyalas* are believed to be more powerful than lions or elephants. *Vyala* images are commonly found on Hindu temples from the 9th century CE onwards in the Deccan and other regions of India. *Vyala* was one of the religious motifs in Indian art and architecture**.** *Vyala* has been widely used in south Indian temple architecture. There are many different types of *Vyalas*, such as the *Nar Vyala* (a lion with a human head), *Mesha Vyala* (a lion with a goat head), *Gaja Vyala* (a lion with an elephant head), *Makara Vyala* (a lion with a crocodile head), *Mahisha Vyala* (a lion with a buffalo head), *Singha Vyala* (a lion), and *Ashwa Vyala* (a lion with a donkey head), etc. Some of the *Vyalas* are also depicted as having parrot heads. Sometimes they have been depicted standing on the back of *Makara*, another mythical creature. *Vyalas* are supposed to be protectors or guards of the temples. The names of forts in the Deccan and Konkan regions having *Vyala* images have been given in Table 1. Below is the description of some of the *Vyala* images in some of the forts.

1. The Vijayanagara Empire's capital was the fortified town of Hampi. Within the fortification, water tanks, temples, and palaces were built. On the pillars of the temple built inside the fortification, *Vyala* or *Yali* images can be seen. *Vyala* here has been shown standing on the hind limbs with its forelegs lifted. Riders have also been depicted on their backs.

2. Similar *Vyala* or *Yali* images can be observed at the Sidhhatavatam Fort constructed by the Vijayanagara Empire in Telangana state near Kadapa. These images are depicted inside the western gateway of the fort on the pillars of guardrooms. Pillars are highly decorated with different human, animal, deities, and composite animal sculptures. For example, an image depicted on the pillars shows *Vyala* and his rider standing on the crocodile or dominating the crocodile (Fig. 1). Images of the lion *Vyala* are also located on the gateway of Sidhhavatam Fort.

3. Gandikota Fort is situated on the bank of the Penna River in Kadapa district, Andhra Pradesh. The fort was originally constructed by the Kaktiya dynasty of Warangal. Then the fort was under the power of the Vijayanagara Empire and the Golconda dynasty, respectively (Brackenbury 1917). Depictions of two *Vyalas* are located just inside the main gateway of the fort, outside the Hanumana temple. Both the *Vyalas* are standing on their hind legs without riders. The *Vyala*'s head resembled that of a lion (Fig. 2). There are a number of *Vyalas* located in the temple built by Vijayanagara Kingdam inside the Gandikota Fort (Fig. 3).

Table 1: Table listing the animals depicted in different forts in the studied region

Sr. No.	Name of the fort	District and State	Animals depicted
1	Shivneri	Pune District, Maharashtra	*Gandabherunda*, *Sharabha*, Elephant, Lion
2	Ahmednagar	Amhednagar District, Maharashtra	*Sharabha*, Deer
3	Ramagiri	Karimnagar District, Telangana	Elephant, *Sharabha*, *Gandabherunda*, Fish, Tortoise, Swan, Sheep, Bull, Crocodile/ Gharial, Stork/Crane
4	Rohida	Pune District, Maharashtra	Fish, Elephant, *Sharabha*
5	Kolaba	Raigad District, Maharashtra	Elephant, Crocodile, Eagle
6	Vetalwadi	Aurangabad District, Maharashtra	Composite elephant, *Sharabha*
7	Visagad or Janjala	Aurangabad District, Maharashtra	*Sharabha*
8	Nimgiri	Pune District, Maharashtra	Elephants with *Lakshmi* (*Gajalakshmi*)
9	Jivdhan	Pune District, Maharashtra	Elephants with *Lakshmi* (*Gajalakshmi*)
10	Gooty	Anantpur District, Andhra Pradesh	Elephants with *Lakshmi* (*Gajalakshmi*)
11	Siddhavatam	Kadapa District, Andhra Pradesh	Elephants with *Lakshmi* (*Gajalakshmi*), *Vyala*
12	Gandikota	Kadapa District, Andhra Pradesh	Elephants with *Lakshmi* (*Gajalakshmi*), Crocodile, Tortoise, Fish, *Vyala*
13	Suvarnadurga	Ratnagiri District, Maharashtra	Tortoise
14	Maangad	Raigad District, Maharashtra	Fish
15	Raygad	Raigad District, Maharashtra	*Sharabha*, Elephant, Peacock
16	Yadgir	Yadgir District, Karnataka	Composite fish
17	Golconda	Hyderabad city, Telangana	*Sharabha*, Peacock
18	Pratapgad	Satara District, Maharashtra	*Sharabha*, Monitor Lizard

(Table 1 Continued…)

(Table 1 Continued…)

Sr. No.	Name of the fort	District and State	Animals depicted
19	Avachitgad	Raigad District, Maharashtra	*Sharabha*
20	Rajgad	Pune District, Maharashtra	Elephant
21	Torana	Pune District , Maharashtra	*Sharabha*
22	Sudhagad	Raigad District, Maharashtra	*Sharabha*, Elephant
23	Janjira	Raigad District, Maharashtra	*Sharabha*, Elephant, Lion
24	Vijapur	Bijapur District, Karnataka	*Sharabha*, Elephant, Lion, Composite lion, Pig
25	Sinhgad	Pune District, Maharashtra	*Sharabha*, Elephant, *Gandabherunda*
26	Shahapur	Yadgir District, Karnataka	Fish, Peacock, Cow, *Gajalakshmi*
27	Karnala	Raigad District, Maharashtra	*Sharabha*
28	Ghosala	Raigad District, Maharashtra	*Sharabha*
29	Arnala	Thane District, Maharashtra	Elephant, *Sharabha*
30	Lohgad	Pune District, Maharashtra	Eagle, *Sharabha*
31	Harnae	Ratnagiri District , Maharashtra	*Gandabherunda*, Elephant
32	Molanganur	Karimnagar District, Telangana	*Sharabha*
33	Solapur Fort	Solapur District, Maharashtra	*Sharabha*, Elephant
34	Naldurg	Osmanabad District, Maharashtra	Composite fish, Elephant, *Sharabha*, *Gandabherunda*
35	Pedgaon	Amhednagar District, Maharashtra	*Vyala* or *Sharabha*
36	Dawadi Nimgad	Pune District, Maharashtra	*Sharabha*, Elephant
37	paranda	Osmanabad District, Maharashtra	*Sharabha*, Elephant

(Table 1 Continued…)

(Table 1 Continued…)

Sr. No.	Name of the fort	District and State	Animals depicted
38	Wafgaon	Pune District, Maharashtra	*Sharabha*
39	Kothaligad or Peth	Raigad District, Maharashtra	*Sharabha*
40	Udgir	Latur District, Maharashtra	*Sharabha*
41	Ajinkyatara	Satara District, Maharashtra	*Sharabha*
42	Panhalgad	Kolhapur District, Maharashtra	*Sharabha*
43	Harishchandragad	Pune District, Maharashtra	Lion
44	Hirakot	Raigad District, Maharashtra	*Sharabha*
45	Gavilgad	Amaravati District, Maharashtra	*Gandabherunda*, *Sharabha*, Elephant, Lion
46	Narnala	Akola District, Maharashtra	*Sharabha*
47	Bidar	Bidar District, Karnataka	*Sharabha*
48	Basavkalyan	Bidar District, Karnataka	*Vyala*



Fig. 1: Depiction of *Vyala* and his rider standing on the crocodile at Sidhhatavatam Fort of Telangana



Fig. 2: Depiction of *Vyala* standing on their hind legs at Gandikota Fort of Andhra Pradesh

The above examples demonstrate that *Vyala* depictions can be found not only on temples but also on forts in medieval Deccan.

Sharabha

Another mythical animal sculpture observed on the gateways of many forts in the Deccan and Konkan regions is *Sharabha (*see Table 1*)*. It is a one-of-a-kind sculpture from Maharashtra's pre-Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaja era. Like *Vyala*, *Sharabha's* sculpture is also a combination of different animals. In this animal, the head is similar to either a lion or some other animal, the body looks like a bull, the feet are duck-like or those of a goat, and the tail resembles those that we see in a tiger. However, as we will see in the sections that follow, there have been some deviations. At some forts, wings have also been depicted in the sculpture of *Sharabha*, e.g., Avachitgad Fort, Raigad District; Shivneri Fort, Pune District; and Arnala Fort, Thane District (Fig. 4). Sometimes *Sharabha* has been depicted holding the elephants in his mouth, feet, and tail, such as at the forts of Raigad and Sudhagad, both in Raigad District (Fig. 5) (Joshi 2011). This sort of depiction indicates the strength of *Sharabha*.

According to Hindu literature, i.e., the *Linga Purana* and *Sharabha Purana*, the *Sharabha* is an incarnation of Lord Shiva. After the assassination of *Hiranyakashapu, Narasimha* threatened people with his aggressive form. People prayed to Lord Shiva to save them from *Narasimha*. Then Shiva took birth in the form of *Sharabha* and terminated *Narasimha* (Shrikant Pradhan and Shilpa Sumant, *personal communication*). This story appears to have originated in the early medieval period in Deccan, during the conflict between Shaivism and Vaishnavism.

The reason behind the depiction of *Sharabha* on the main gateways of the fort was to show the strength and power of that king or dynasty. The depiction of *Sharabha* at the entrance of the fort shows that the king of the fort was as powerful as *Sharabha*. Sculptures of *Sharabhas* are seen on the forts constructed by both Hindu and Muslim rulers. Hence, it is difficult to find out the origin of the use of *Sharabha* in sculptures. Later on, this sculpture is seen on the temples built in the Maratha period, such as Amanayeshwar in Ratnagiri District, Amruteshwar in Pune District, etc. More than 70 percent of *Sharabha* images are seen only on the forts built by Deccani rulers such as Adilshahi, Nijamshahi, Kutbashahi, Baridshahi, and Imadshahi (Table 1). It is important to note here that these kinds of composite animal figures are seen all over the world. Below are descriptions of some of the *Sharabha* images depicted in the forts of the Deccan and Konkan regions.

1. Shivneri Fort: Shivneri Fort is located in Pune District. After having a careful look at the gateway of Shivneri Fort, one can say that it was constructed by the Bahamani kingdom and later repaired by the Nizamshahi dynasty. A figure of *Sharabha* is depicted on both sides of the arch on the second gateway, named *Paravangi Darwaja,* at this fort. In one image, *Sharabha* is holding a lion in his forelegs (Fig. 6). In another image, *Sharabha* is holding or dominating two elephants and a mythical animal called *Gandabherunda* (Fig. 7). The image of *Sharabha* is depicted only on one side (on the east face) of the third gateway at Shivneri Fort. This gateway is also known as *Hatti Darwaja* or Elephant Gate. In this figure, the head of the *Sharabha* looks similar to that of a dinosaur or dragon (see Fig. 6).



Fig. 3: *Vyalas* located in the temple built by Vijaynagara Kingdom inside the Gandikota Fort



Fig. 4: *Sharabha* image with wings at Arnala Fort in Maharashtra



Fig. 5: Depiction of *Sharabha* images at Raigad Fort in Maharashtra



Fig. 6: *Sharabha* holding a lion in his forelegs at Shivneri Fort in Maharashtra



Fig. 7: *Sharabha* holding or dominating two elephants and a mythical animal called *Gandabherunda* at Shivneri Fort in Maharashtra

The seventh gateway of Shivneri Fort, named *Kulapkar Darwaja*, is 5.5 m high. *Sharabha* images are located on both sides of the arch inside the rectangular recess (Fig. 8). In both of these images, *Sharabha* is not holding any animal in his legs (Joshi 2018).

2. Rohida Fort: In the 17th century CE, the Adilshah of Bijapur constructed Rohida or Vichitrgad Fort in Pune District. An inscription was written by the Adilshahi on the last gateway of the fort in Devanagari and Persian script. *Sharabha's* image was depicted on both sides of the arch at the second gateway of the Rohida fort. Out of the two heads of this *Sharabha* sculpture, one looks similar to a crocodile, and the other is that of a monkey (Fig. 9).

3. Sinhgad Fort: Sinhgad fort is about 30 kilometres from Pune, Maharashtra. There are three gateways constructed on the northern slope of the fort. Out of three, the third gateway of the fort was highly decorated with the depiction of flowers and the *Sharabha* image just beside the door frame. This is a monkey-headed *Sharabha*. A deer-headed *Sharabha* is located on the first gateway at Sinhgad fort. A gateway named *Kalyan Darwaja* was constructed by Nana Saheb Peshwa on the southern slope of the Sinhgad fort. Two figures of *Sharabhas* are depicted on both sides of this gateway, and none of these images shows them holding elephants or any other animal.

4. Avachitgad Fort: This fort is located in the Konkan region of Raigad District, Maharashtra. According to local historians, the fort was built by Nizamshah of



Fig. 8: *Sharabha* images located on both sides of the arch inside the rectangular recess at Shivneri Fort in Maharashtra



Fig. 9: *Sharabha* sculptures at Rohida Fort in Maharashtra

Ahmednagar in the 17th century CE. The figure of a bull-headed *Sharabha* is lying near the main gateway of this fort. Here, *Sharabha* consists of four wings, and his claws are similar to those of a goat (Joshi 2011).

5. Ahmednagar Fort: At the close of the 15th century, the Deccan witnessed the establishment of the Nizamshahi dynasty. They constructed various forts in the Deccan and Konkan, Ahmednagar being one among them. The Nizamshahi dynasty's capital was Ahmednagar. On either side of the Ahmednagar Fort's western gateway, known as *Shah Darwaja*, are two *Sharabhas* figures. On either side of the arch, inside the rectangle-shaped recess, elephant-headed *Sharabhas* are shown carrying a deer in their front legs (Fig. 10).

6. Bijapur Fort: Bijapur Fort, located in the Bijapur city of Karnataka, was the capital of the Adilshahi dynasty in the Deccan. It was built by Yusuf Adilshah in the early 16th century. There are eight gateways constructed into the fortification wall (Mate 2005). An interesting sculpture of *Sharabha* is found near the *Fateh Darwaja* at Bijapur. The head of the *Sharabha* is composed of a snake, and its body is that of a lion (Fig. 11).

7. Vetalwadi Fort: Vetalwaadi Fort was under the Bahamani kingdom, and after that, the Nizamshahi and the Mughal Empire. It is located in Aurangabad District, on the geographical boundary of Khandesh and Marathwada. There are some images of *Sharabha* on the northern and western gateways of the Vetalwadi Fort. Two *Sharabha* figures are on both sides of the arch at the western gateway. In both images, the face of *Sharabha* looks similar to that of a dinosaur or a scary animal. His legs resemble those of a goat, and his body resembles that of a lion (Fig. 12). Two sculptures of *Sharabha* have been located on the bastion of the northern gateway. In those images, the head is composed of a mythical animal, and the body is that of a lion.

8. Visagad Fort: Visagad Fort or Janjala Fort, located in Aurangabad District, is just next to Vetalwadi Fort. A highly ornamented *Sharabha* figure has been located on one of the bastions at Visagad Fort. His body, legs, and head are ornamented with different jewellery. The claws of the *Sharabha* look different from other *Sharabhas* (Fig. 13). It has long toes and sharp nails. Similar kinds of claws are seen on the legs of *Sharabha* at the Sinhgad Fort. The dates of both the forts of Visagad and Sinhgad go back to the 15th century CE.

9. Janjira Fort: Janjira Fort in Raigad District is an island fort situated near Danda Rajpuri in the Arabian Sea at the mouth of Mandad Creek. The fort was constructed during the Nizamshahi period on an island in the late 16th century. Varieties of animal figures are depicted on the gateways of the fort. Two images of *Sharabha* holding six elephants by their claws, tails, and mouths are depicted on the upper part of the arch of the main gateway. Another *Sharabha* figure is depicted on the bastion constructed in front of the main gateway. In that image again, *Sharabha* is holding six elephants by the mouth, tail, and claws (Fig. 14). On the exactly opposite pillar, two *Sharabha* images and two elephant images are separately depicted. Figures show that elephants are fighting with each other, and two *Sharabhas* are depicted on the upper frame. There is an



Fig. 10: Elephant-headed *Sharabha* carrying a deer in its front legs at Ahmednagar Fort in Maharashtra



Fig. 11: Depiction of *Sharabha* image at Bijapur Fort in Karnataka



Fig. 12: Depiction of *Sharabha* image at Vetalwaadi Fort in Maharashtra



Fig. 13: Depiction of *Sharabha* image at Visagad Fort in Maharashtra



Fig. 14: *Sharabha* holding six elephants by the mouth, tail, and claws at Janjira Fort in Maharashtra



Fig. 15: Figure of a lion at Janjira Fort in Maharashtra

interesting figure on the Janjira Fort that has not been seen anywhere on the other forts. The lion is depicted on the second main gateway of the Janjira Fort (Joshi 2011). The figure of the lion was carved using Persian characters (Fig. 15).

10. Kothaligad Fort: There are many hill forts constructed in Konkan at the foot of the Sahyadri main range. Geographically, Kothaligad Fort in Raigad District is located on the main land route to Konkan. The last gateway of the fort was excavated from the basalt rock. *Sharabha's* image is depicted on the sidewall of the rock-cut gateway (Joshi 2011).

11. Raigad Fort: Raigad was the capital of the Maratha dynasty, built by Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj between 1670 and 1674 CE. A total of six different images of *Sharabhas* were depicted on the fort at different places. Out of these, two images of *Sharabha* are located on the main gateway of the fort called *Maha Darwaja.* Both images are located beside the arch showing the elephant under the claws of *Sharabha* (see Fig. 5). The *Rajsabha* gateway, also known as *Nagarkhana* in Raigad, has four *Sharabhas*. Images of two *Sharabhas* are depicted on both sides of the arch outside the main gateway of *Nagarkhana* (Fig. 16). The figure of *Sharabha* is similar in both images, but in one image, *Sharabha* is holding two elephants, and in the other image, six elephants with claws and tails are depicted. Figures of two *Sharabhas* are located on the inside of the *Nagarkhana* complex. In this sculpture, the heads of both *Sharabhas* are missing. It was deliberately broken by the Mughals after conquering the fort. *Shrabhas* are holding the elephants by their claws and tails (Joshi 2011).

12. Arnala Fort: After the death of Aurangzeb in the first decade of the 18th century CE, Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaja became the ruler of the Maratha dynasty. Some of the forts were constructed in that era in the Deccan and Konkan regions. Arnala in Thane District is an island fort built by the Marathas during the Vasai campaign against the Portuguese (Kulkarni 2009). A fascinating sculpture of *Sharabha* is observed at the gateway of Arnala Fort. The head portion of the *Sharabha* is shown like a parrot, his body like a lion, with claws like ducks and wings depicted on his body. An ornamented elephant is depicted below the feet of the *Sharabha* at Arnala (see Fig. 4).

13. Lohgad Fort: Lohgad in Pune District is a hill fort reconstructed by *Nana Saheb Peshwa* during the Maratha dynasty. Images of four *Sharabhas* are located on the different gateways of the fort. Two images are depicted on both sides of the arch at the second gateway of the fort. Extremely threatening and aggressive images are shown at that place (Fig. 17). The third gateway of the fort is built on the steep slope of the hill. Both of these *Sharabhas* are not associated with an elephant or other animals.

14. Torana Fort: The Torana Fort was built in the early 16th century CE near Pune by Adilshah of Bijapur. *Sharabha* images in the form of rock engravings are found on the eastern gateway, locally known as *Bhagat Darwaja* (Fig. 18). Two *Sharabha* images are located on both sides of the arch. While the *Sharabha* image on one side is quite similar to the one depicted on the other side, the *Sharabha* image is engraved in basalt on one side. Such types of rock engravings are not commonly seen on other forts.



Fig. 16: *Sharabha* images at Raigad Fort in Maharashtra



Fig. 17: Depiction of an aggressive image of *Sharabha* at Lohgad Fort in Maharashtra



Fig. 18: *Sharabha* images in the form of rock engravings at Torana Fort in Maharashtra

15. Ramagiri Fort: Ramagiri Fort in Pedapalli District is a hill fort in the Karimnagar district of Telangana. The date of construction of the fort is not available, but the fort was under the rule of the Bahamani kingdom in the medieval period and then under the Kutbashahi dynasty. In 1656, Ramgiri was ruled by the Mughal Empire. The outer wall of the second gateway in this fort is partly fallen down, and sculptures are lying on the ground. The eroded sculpture of *Sharabha* is below the first dilapidated arch. The representation of two *Sharabha* images is located on both sides of the third inner arch on the second gateway.

16. Rajgad Fort: Rajgad Fort is located at a distance of 50 kilometres from Pune. *Sharabha* images are seen at Rajgad Fort inside the fortification wall on the western side.

In addition to different forts, the depiction of *Sharabhas* can also be seen in different *Gadhis* (fortified palaces). There were different varieties of fortified palaces present during the late mediaeval period in Maharashtra. Both forts and *Gadhis* have ramparts around them, but their functions and purposes are different (Begde 1982). A couple of examples of some *Gadhis* where the depiction of *Sharabha* images can be seen include the Gaikwad palace (*Gadhi)* at village Dawadi, Pune District, Maharashtra, and the palace built by the Holkars at Wafgaon, Pune District, Maharashtra (Figs. 19 and 20).

Gandabherunda

A double-headed eagle, known locally as *Gandabherunda*, is another mythical animal sculpture found on the gateways of Deccan forts. The *Gandabherunda* is mentioned as a bird in *Panchatantra*. The word *Bherund* means terrific, frightful, and terrible, and the word *Ganda* means a hero in Sanskrit (Apte 1890). The antiquity of a double-headed eagle can be traced in different cultures such as Babylonia, Germany, Russia, Austria, Persia and Ceylon. The earliest representation of *Gandabherunda* in India was seen at Taxila and then at Sanchi (Buchthal 1942). *Gandabherunda* was a title and crest of the Kadamba, Chalukyans, Hoysalas, and Vijayanagara Empire in the early medieval period (Naidu 1998-99). It is also important to note that the *Gandabherunda* sculpture is not only seen on the forts constructed by Hindu dynasties but is also found on the forts built during the sultanate period. Compared to the images of *Vyala* and *Sharabha*, the depiction of *Gandabherunda* is not so common on Deccan forts. However, good numbers of *Gandabherunda* images are seen at medieval sites of the Vijayanagara Empire. The following is a description of some of the *Gandabherunda* images depicted in the forts of the concerned region (also see Table 1).

1. Shivneri Fort: As noted above, *Sharabha* was depicted on the second gateway of the Shivneri Fort constructed by the Deccani sultanate. In the same figure, *Sharabha* is holding two elephants and the mythical two-headed animal *Gandabherunda* in his claws (see Fig. 7).

2. Harnai Fort: A depiction of *Gandabherunda* is observed on the main gateway of Harnai Fort or Gova Fort, located in Ratnagiri District. The image is located at the base of the pillar on the face of the gateway (Fig. 21). In this figure, *Gandabherunda* is holding the elephants in his claws and beak (Joshi 2011).

3. Sinhgad Fort: The tomb of Chhatrapati Rajaram is located at the Sinhgad fort in Pune District. *Gandabherunda's* image is depicted exactly on the backside of the main tomb. The image shows that the *Gandabherunda* has a human body with two hands and an eagle head. This animal is holding snakes in both hands.

4. Ramagiri Fort: Ramagiri Fort has four different gateways built on the way to the top. The figure of *Gandabherunda* is observed near the outer part of the second gateway. The image shows that the ornamented *Gandabherunda* is holding two lions, or *Sharbhas,* in his claws (Fig. 22). The inner arch of the gateway is completely intact today. Many animal sculptures are located on both sides of the arch. *The Gandabherunda* sculpture is located



Fig. 19: Depiction of *Sharabhas* in *Gadhis*



Fig. 20: Depiction of *Sharabhas* in *Gadhis*

on one side of the arch. In this figure, *Gandabherunda* is standing on two crocodiles and holding two lions in his claws. The tail of the lion is on the wings of *Gandabherunda*. The wings and heads of the *Gandabherunda* are broadly depicted (Fig. 23).

5. Naldurg Fort: This fort, located in Osmanabad District of Maharashtra, was built by the Bahamani kingdom. The name of the place was mentioned as *Nalawadi Vishay* at the time of Badami Chalukya (Maharashtra State Gazetteer, Osmanabad District 1972). An image of a different form of *Gandabherunda* is located on the fortification wall at Naldurga Fort. In this figure, the depiction of the double head of *Gandabherunda* is slightly smaller in size as compared to other forts. The figure showed *Gandabherunda* holding four elephants in his claws and beak (Fig. 24).

Elephants

Elephant images can be prominently observed in Hindu as well as Islamic art and architecture at different forts in the Deccan and Konkan. The elephant is a symbol of power and strength. The reason behind the depiction of the elephant was to express the strength of the king and his kingdom. The description of a few of the elephant depictions that were noted in forts in the area in question is provided below.

1. Kolaba Fort: An image of two elephants is observed on the main gateway of the Kolaba Fort, located in Raigad District near Alibaug. Some more sculptures are seen on another gateway of Kolaba Fort, named *Yashwant Darwaja*. The central part of the gate is covered by Ganesha's image, with Ridhi and Sidhi depicted on the left and right sides of Ganesha. The upper panel consists of images of a crocodile, *kirtimukha*, and lotus. Garuda and Hanuman images are depicted on both pillars of the gateway at Alibaug (Joshi 2011).

2. Manikdurg Fort: Manikdurg Fort is located in Mandki village in Maharashtra's Ratnagiri District. It was constructed by the Vijayanagar Empire. The elephant is depicted on the lintel of a water cistern located in the west direction of the fort. The date of the image goes back to approximately the 14th-15th centuries CE (Kadgaonkar et al. 2013).

3. Vetalwadi Fort: An elephant can be seen depicted on the bastion area near the western gateway at Vetalwadi Fort in Maharashtra. This image is different from the ones found on the other forts. It is a composite image of two elephants consisting of a single body and two different heads (Fig. 25).

4. Shivneri Fort: An elephant sculpture can be seen depicted exactly at the centre of the semi-circular arch at the second gateway of Shivneri Fort. The trunk of the elephant is broken in the sculpture.

5. Rohida Fort: Two elephant figures are depicted on the upper part of an inscription, located on the third gateway of the fort, written in Farasi and Devnagari script at Rohida Fort in Maharashtra.



Fig. 21: A depiction of *Gandabherunda* at Harnai Fort in Maharashtra



Fig. 22: Depiction of *Gandabherunda* at Ramagiri Fort in Telangana



Fig. 23: Another depiction of *Gandabherunda* at Ramagiri Fort of Telangana



Fig. 25: A composite image of two elephants consisting of a single body and two different heads at Vetalwadi Fort in Maharashtra



Fig. 24: *Gandabherunda* holding four elephants in his claws and beak at Naldurg Fort of Maharashtra

In addition to the depictions of elephants discussed above, sometimes we also have depictions of elephants with Goddess *Lakshmi*, commonly known as *Gajalakshmi*. The word "*Lakshmi*" signifies the sign of happiness, beauty, luck, the mark of royal power, prosperity, grace, good fortune, and the royal domain. The iconic representation of *Lakshmi* goes back to the 2nd century BCE. The image of *Lakshmi* appears in Maurya, Sunga, Kushana, and Gupta icons. Such icons were found at Kausambi, Ujjayani and Bhita. Elephants are frequently depicted with *Lakshmi* on forts built by the Marathas or captured by the Marathas. The earliest known representation of *Gajalakshmi* is from the Manmodi caves near Junnar in Pune District. The elephant in *Gajalakshmi* represents a symbol of fertility, royal splendour and authority. Some of the forts where we have the depiction of *Gajalakshmi* include Nimgiri Fort, located in Pune District of Maharashtra; Jivdhan Fort, located in Pune District of Maharashtra; Gutti Fort, located in Anantpur District of Andhra Pradesh; Gandikota Fort, located in Kadapa District of Andhra Pradesh; and Siddavatam Fort, located in Kadapa District of Andhra Pradesh (Fig. 26).

Other Animals

A number of other animals can also be seen depicted in the forts of the Deccan and Konkan regions. Some of these depictions will be discussed in this section. An image of a turtle can be seen in Suvarndurg, an island fort located in Ratnagiri District. The turtle image is depicted on the staircase of a concealed gateway built in between the two elongated bastions facing north (Joshi 2011). This type of depiction of the turtle is not found on any of the coastal or island forts on the west coast of Maharashtra. However, a similar depiction of a turtle can be seen at Gandikota Fort, located near the coast of Andhra Pradesh. In this case, the sculpture of the turtle is located at the entrance of the temple inside the fort.

In the Rohida Fort, images of fish can be seen depicted on the face of the third gateway, on both sides of the arch. Mangad, a medieval fort constructed during the 16th century CE, is located in Raigad District. There is a depiction of fish on the arch of a fallen gateway at this fort (Joshi 2011). Shahapur, a medieval fort situated near Yadgir in Karnataka, also has a depiction of fish. Here, two fish with a single head were depicted on the gateway of the southern fortification wall. On the left corner of the same gateway, an image of a cow can also be seen. Due to the erosion of the sculpture, it is difficult to identify the animal, but it might be a cow or cow-calf. The depiction of a fish or aquatic animal on the fort indicates the naval power of that kingdom.

The earliest depiction of a peacock on the fort is seen on the beam of the Torana Fort at Warangal, the capital of the Kaktiya kingdom (Fig. 27). This is the earliest evidence of peacocks depicted on a fort in mediaeval Deccan. Figures of peacocks can also be seen on the main gateway of the Golconda Fort in the Telangana state. An image of a peacock is present at the entrance of the residential complex at Raigad Fort in Maharashtra.

In terms of the representation of animals, the medieval fort of Ramagiri is rich. A total of 43 images have been depicted in this fort. A variety of aquatic and land animal figures can be seen on this fort (Fig. 28). Animal depictions are present on the gateways of this fort. Figures of four elephants, one bull, and a sheep or goat are depicted just behind the arch of the third gateway. On the opposite side, an elephant with a rider, two elephants without a rider, and one bull are depicted. The fourth gateway of the fort is again highly



Fig. 26: Depiction of *Gajalakshmi* at Siddavatam Fort, located in Kadapa District of Andhra Pradesh



Fig. 27: Depiction of a peacock on the Torana Fort



Fig. 28: Depiction of a variety of animals at Ramagiri Fort of Telangana



Fig. 29: Depiction of a variety of animals at Ramagiri Fort of Telangana



Fig. 30: A rare depiction of a snake

decorated with a variety of animal depictions. Nine animals are depicted on both sides of the arch. It is like a mirror image of nine different animals (Fig. 29). Eight animals are depicted on the outer arch, and one animal is on either side of the inner arch. The upper layer features two images of peacocks; the middle layer features elephants, fish, a tortoise, and a stork or crane; and the bottom panel features *Sharabha* holding three elephants in his claws. The same panels and animals are represented on the other side of the arch. An image of a crocodile, or gharial, is located on either side of an inner arch at the fourth gateway at Ramagiri Fort.

A rare depiction of a snake is observed on the residential complex at the hill fort of Raigad (Fig. 30). According to local myth, Naga Shetty was a trader in the 17th century CE, and his shop was located in that complex. Due to this, he depicted the snake image on the front part of the shop.

In Bijapur Fort, a composite figure of two tigers is depicted on both sides of the arch at *Makka Darwaja*. In that image, two lions with a common head are depicted. The most important attraction in Bijapur is a huge cannon named *Malik-e-Maidan*. The cannon is kept on a large bastion named *Sherza* Buruj. The name was given to the bastion due to the depiction of two lions on the wall of the bastion.

Discussion and Conclusion

The depiction of animals and birds such as elephants, peacocks, parrots, horses, swans, etc. can be observed on the Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain religious monuments such as caves and temples in the Deccan and Konkan from the 6th to the 7th century CE, and similar kinds of depictions on the forts from the 9th to the 10th century CE. The images of *Vyalas* or *Yalis* started to appear on the temples constructed in the 9th and 10th centuries CE. Chronologically, the images of these *Vyalas* continued upto the 13th century CE at different forts and temples in the Deccan. After that, except in Vijayanagara territory, the depiction is not seen in the majority of the Deccan. The main reason for this is that during the 13th century CE, Muslims rose to power and conquered a huge area of the Deccan. At the time, Vijaynagar was the sole Hindu empire in Deccan, with *Vyala* representations on its temples and forts.

After the end of the Khilaji and Tughlaq empires, the Bahamani kingdom was established in the Deccan. They ruled the Deccan for 180 years (Kunte 1982). In 1490, the Bahamani kingdom split into five different small dynasties, i.e., Adilshahi, Nizamshahi, Baridshahi, Imadshahi, and Kutbashahi. All of these dynasties or sultanates followed Islam as their religion. Many local Hindu rulers started working under these dynasties in the Deccan. Due to the exchange of ideas, art and architecture, a new Daccani culture developed in this region (Phadake et al. 2001). Hence, a variety of animals, birds, and floral designs look similar in both Hindu and Islamic architecture in the Deccan.

During the Sultanate period in Deccan, the depiction of the fictional character *Sharabha* on forts and temples began in the first quarter of the 15th century CE, e.g., the forts of Golconda, Ahmednagar, Bijapur, etc. Before that time, there was no depiction of *Sharabha* images. For example, we do not find depictions of these mythical animals in forts such as Daulatabad, Gulbarga, Firozabad, Naldurga, and Paranda, which were built during the Bahmani period. More than 70% of *Sharabha* images, located on the forts,

were built during the sultanate period. There could be a number of reasons behind this. Some of these have been explained below.

1. Vyala or *Yali* and *Sharabha* have very similar imagery. While *Vyala*'s body resembles a lion with a different animal's head, *Sharabha*'s body likewise is a combination of different animals. The main distinctions are in the sizes. *Vyalas* are huge, whereas *Sharabhas* are normally smaller. *Vyala* and *Sharabha* are both seen as emblems of prosperity, strength, might, and the annihilation of bad forces. The representation of *Sharbahas* on the fort was inspired by the cultural interchange that happened between Hindus and Muslims in the Deccan. Hindus rose to greater positions in the Adilshahi and Nizamshahi courts, and it is possible that these Hindus suggested to the Sultans the depiction of *Sharabhas* on the forts. They might have urged that, like the temple, *Vyala* be portrayed on the forts as well. As a result, the portrayal of *Vyala* began on the fort, but in a different form, which we now know as *Sharabha*. Later, people began to show elephants and *Gandabherunda* under *Sharabha*'s claws to demonstrate his strength.

2. During the 15th century CE, many African and Abyssinian migrants arrived as slaves on the west coast of India. In Deccan, these were known as Habashi. They rose through the ranks of the Bahamani kingdom's court, as well as the Adilshahi and Nizamshahi dynasties. After seizing the Janjira fort on the west coast, some of them declared their independence. Their migration may have resulted in the carving of fictitious African and Abyssinian animals in the Deccan (Gazetteer of Bombay Presidency, Kolaba 2006). The first decade of the 15th century CE saw more immigration to the Deccan from Persia, Turkey, and Georgia in addition to the Habshis. Other kings were Yusuf Adilshah, a founder of the Adilshahi dynasty from Turkestan, Kuli Kutbashaha, a founder of the Kutbashahi dynasty from Persia, and Amir Kasim Barid, a founder from Georgia of the Baridshahi dynasty. These dynasties were all established in Deccan at the beginning of the 16th century (Kunte 1982). Before these people arrived in Deccan, the idea of mythical creatures or birds already existed everywhere else in the world. Therefore, it is conceivable that the idea of *Sharabha* travelled to the Deccan with the Middle Eastern kings.

3. Sharabha appears in Sanskrit works like the *Sharabh Upashanishad*, the *Linga Purana*, and the tantric text *Akasha Bhairava Kalpama*. According to the *Akasha Bhairava Kalpama*, the concept of *Sharabha* is an adaptation of Hinduism's tantric cult. *Sharabha*, according to this scripture, is another manifestation of Lord Shiva, who defends us, saves us, washes away all kinds of sins, removes difficult mental disorders, keeps us safe from fever, disease, and untimely death, and destroys the enemy. *Akasha Bhairava Kalpama* specifies *Bhadramukha*, which should be engraved in the shape of a fearsome lion on the threshold under each outer door (Sharma 1981). The Tantric sect may have influenced these images on forts in the medieval Deccan, where Islamic control was prevalent. In medieval periods, there were several cases of kings being influenced by Tantric sects (Phadake et al. 2001). For example, Hasan Gangu Bahamani, the founder of the Bahamani dynasty, chose the day of coronation after consulting an astrologer (Kunte 1982). Bahadurkhan was the commander of the Mughal military garrison at Chandvad in the Deccan. During the Ahivantgad fort campaign against the Marathas in 1672, he consulted an astrologer to determine when the fort would be conquered. The founder of Maratha power, Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaja, was a passionately devout man. He was coroneted in 1674 at his Deccan capital Raigad fort. But, after a few days, he again

crowned himself with Tantric sect ceremonies (Deshpande 2002). Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaja, his son, was likewise interested in Tantric cults and their rituals. This demonstrates the influence of Tantric worship, rituals, and symbolism on the Hindu and Muslim kingdoms of the Deccan during the medieval period. The composite animals are first seen on the famed Torana in Warangal Fort between the 10th and 11th centuries CE, and these images could have been depicted under the influence of the Tantric sect. In this manner, the *Sharabha* sculptures might have arrived first on Hindu forts (belonging to Kaktiya, Hoyasala, and Yadava), then on Muslim forts (Deccani Sultanates) with minor variations in shape, and then on forts of succeeding Hindu dynasties.

4. In the 14th and 15th centuries CE, during the Sultanate period, some Hindu temples were reconstructed that had originally been built in the 11th and 12th centuries CE in Deccan. For example, the Palasadeo temple in Pune district's Ujani dam was built in the 12th century CE and reconstructed in the 14th-15th centuries CE. *Sharabha* images are depicted on the *Shikhara* portion of the temple. A total of eight *Sharabhas* are figured in lime mortar on the lower part of the *Shikhara*. It shows that *Sharabhas* were also depicted during the reconstruction of temples.

It is difficult to explain why *Gandabherunda* images are depicted on both Hindu and Islamic forts in the same geographical region and era. Islamic kingdoms governed the Middle East, and they began to use double-headed eagle emblems in Islamic art. Previously, the portrayal of animal and human symbolism was forbidden in the Islamic religion. The migration of these people from the Middle East to South East Asia may have brought double-headed eagle symbols to Deccan.

Forts are, without a doubt, military structures, but the employment of sculptures in them demonstrates rulers' appreciation of art and adornment, as well as the strength of the king who owns the fort and kingdom.

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