



FIHCR



SOMNATH



brhat

સામનાથ

The Unconquered Soul of Bharat

PROCEEDINGS OF THE SOMNATH NATIONAL SYMPOSIUM 2026

MEDIA PARTNER

સાહિત્ય
Tak

જય સોમનાથ



Copyright & Legal Information

© 2026 Foundation for Indian Historical and Cultural Research (FIHCR). All rights reserved. These proceedings and their contents are the intellectual property of the Foundation for Indian Historical and Cultural Research (FIHCR).

No part of these proceedings may be reprinted, reproduced, or transmitted in any form or by any means - electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise - without prior written permission from FIHCR.

ISBN: 978-81-995222-7-5

Published in India

About the Organisation

The Foundation for Indian Historical and Cultural Research (FIHCR) is a Bengaluru-based non-profit, apolitical organisation dedicated to reviving and promoting India's historical and cultural legacy through research and education.

About This Publication

These are the official proceedings of the Somnath National Symposium, organised by FIHCR. The symposium brought together scholars, historians, and researchers from across India to engage with one of the most significant sites. The views expressed in individual contributions are those of the respective authors and do not necessarily represent the position of FIHCR.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Symposium Summary	1-8
SESSION 1	ANTIQUITY AND ARCHAEOLOGY	
Paper 1	The Eternal Shrine: Civilizational Resilience and the Foreign Gaze at Somnath	10-30
Paper 2	Between Two Desecrations: Remembering Somanātha in the Sanskrit Kāvyas of Western India (12th–13th Centuries)	31-53
Paper 3	Water as a Material: Role of Water in Sustaining the Collective Cultural Identity through the Somnath Built Landscape	54-66
SESSION 2	THE EVENT: DESTRUCTION, RESISTANCE, RECONSTRUCTION	
Paper 4	Recovering Somanātha: ‘Alā al-Dīn Khaljī, Kānhaḍade, and the Afterlife of Desecration in Indic Tradition	68-87
Paper 5	Reading Swayambodha and Shatrubodha in K. M. Munshi’s ‘Jaya Somanath’: A Civilizational Inquiry	88-103
Paper 6	Somnath: The Unbroken Temple - Architecture, Memory, and the Idea of Resilience	104-111
SESSION 3	MODERN INDIA AND SOMNATH	
Paper 7	Reclaiming Civilizational Glory: K. M. Munshi and the Somnath Temple	113-132
Paper 8	Somnath Revival and Sardar Patel	133-141
Paper 9	Somnath: The Eternal Soul of India – From Śaṅkarācārya’s Philosophy to Modern Governance	142-153
SESSION 4	THE FALSEHOOD OF LEFT HISTORIOGRAPHY	
Paper 10	Reconstructing the Left Authorship—On Somnath	155-170
Paper 11	Representation of the Ghaznavid Raid at Somnath in Muslim Sources: A Critique of Contemporary Scholarship	171-194
	The Organisers	195

SYMPOSIUM SUMMARY

The Foundation for Indian Historical and Cultural Research (FIHCR) and Brhat jointly hosted a One-Day National Symposium, titled "Somnath: The Unconquered Soul of Bharat," in the timeless embrace of the sacred *Shree Somnath Temple, Gujarat*, on May 8, 2026. The event was supported by the Shree Somnath Trust. It brought together an esteemed lineup of distinguished scholars, historians, and thinkers.

The symposium commenced with a traditional lamp lighting ceremony accompanied by Vedic Chanting. Among the chief guests and dignitaries were Dr. Neerja Gupta, Vice-Chancellor of Gujarat University; Dr. Anand Ranganathan, scientist, author, and political commentator; Prof. Kapil Kapoor, Padma Bhushan awardee and pioneer in Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS); Shri J.D. Parmar, a trustee of the Shree Somnath Trust; Shri Raghava Krishna, Founder and CEO of Brhat and Dr. Vikram Sampath, acclaimed historian and Founder-Director of FIHCR.

During the inaugural session, Dr Vikram Sampath and Shri Raghava Krishna set the context by highlighting the importance of the Somnath Swabhimani Parv being celebrated this year. They emphasised that the symposium serves as a crucial platform for understanding a complex history that reflects 1,000 years of resistance and resilience, an unbreakable ethos that beautifully mirrors the continuity of the Bharatiya civilisation. The keynote addresses and special speeches further expanded on these foundational themes. Dr Neerja Gupta spoke extensively about the historical consciousness of the region, touching upon the monumental role of figures like K.M. Munshi in rebuilding and reclaiming the civilisational glory of the temple as it stands today. Prof. Kapil Kapoor then shared his deep insights, drawing upon his six decades of academic expertise to ground the discussion firmly in Indian knowledge traditions and civilisational consciousness. Shri J.D. Parmar also addressed the gathering to mark the occasion, detailing the comprehensive history of the sacred temple.



[Watch on YouTube - Somnath: The Unconquered Soul of Bharat | National Symposium](#)



Left-Right : Shri Raghava Krishna, Dr. Vikram Sampath, Shri J.D. Parmar, Dr. Neerja Gupta & Dr. Anand Ranganathan



Dr. Anand Ranganathan



Shri J.D. Parmar



Dr. Neerja A. Gupta



Prof. Kapil Kapoor



Dr. Vikram Sampath



Shri Raghava Krishna

The four thematised academic sessions featured rigorous research papers from a new generation of scholars. The first session, titled 'Antiquity & Archaeology', reflected on Somnath within the larger sacred geography of Bharat – its coastal liminality, its place among the jyotirlingas, and its symbolic recurrence in civilisational storytelling. It was chaired by Dr. Srinivas Jammalamadaka from Brhat. The first speaker, Amogh Vaidya, presented a paper titled 'The Eternal Shrine: Civilizational Resilience and the Foreign Gaze at Somnath' that analysed 11th- to 19th-century accounts by foreign travellers like Al-Biruni, Al-Qazwini, Wassaf and James Tod, to document the Somnath temple as a global nexus of architectural grandeur, advanced engineering, and immense economic power. The second speaker, Alok Kumar, presented his research titled, 'Between Two Desecrations: Remembering Somanātha in the Sanskrit Kāvya of Western India (12th–13th Centuries)'. He shifted the focus from destruction to the enduring continuity of Somnath. By drawing on texts such as Prthvīrājavijaya, Lalitavigraharāja, Śaṅkha-parābhava, Sukṛta-saṅkīrtana, Kīrtikaumudī, and Vasantavilāsa, the paper argued that Somanath remained deeply embedded in both literary imagination and lived religious experience.



Session 1 (Left-Right) : Alok Kumar, Amogh Ravindra Vaidya & Dr. Srinivas Jammalamadaka



Alok Kumar



Amogh Ravindra Vaidya

The second session, titled ‘The Event: Destruction, Resistance, Reconstruction’, chaired by Dr Anand Ranganathan, closely examined the historical trajectory of Somnath across centuries. Speaker Jay Vardhan Singh presented a paper titled ‘Recovering Somanātha: Alā al-Dīn Khaljī, Kānhaḍade, and the Afterlife of Desecration in Indic Tradition’ and argued that the consistent preservation of the Somanātha liṅga's recovery across distinct regional Indic texts proves that temple defence was fundamentally a religious obligation rather than a purely political act. It challenges reductionist, modern historiographical frameworks by demonstrating that religious motivation was the primary driver for both the desecration and the protection of the sacred site. Next speaker, Dr Arjun Anand, presented a paper titled ‘Reading Swayambodha and Shatrubodha in K. M. Munshi’s ‘Jaya Somanath.’ A Civilizational Inquiry’, an insightful analysis of K.M. Munshi's historical fiction novel, Jaya Somanath, using the Swayambodha and Shatrubodha framework as designed by Pankaj Saxena. It argued that while K.M. Munshi’s Jaya Somanath brilliantly expresses Swayambodha through its celebration of Hindu ritual continuity and civilisational resilience, it fails on the Shatrubodha scale by ignoring the specific theological roots of Islamic iconoclasm.



Session 2 (Left-Right) : Dr. Anand Ranganathan, Dr. Arjun Anand & Jay Vardhan Singh



Jay Vardhan Singh



Dr. Arjun Anand

The afternoon sessions commenced with Dr. Anand Ranganathan's powerful keynote address, focusing on the history of destruction, the spirit of resistance, and the crucial necessity of reclaiming temples as a mass movement across Bharat. He remarked that rebuilding the Somnath temple and opening the Ayodhya Ram Mandir were landmark events for our civilisation because they mark the rectification of centuries-old injustices.



The third session, titled 'Modern India and Somnath', chaired by Dr Neerja Gupta, explored Somnath within the intellectual and political landscape of post-Independence India. First, Dr Pinku Jha, Dr Nidhi Shendurnikar, and Dr Neha Raval presented 'Reclaiming Civilizational Glory: K.M. Munshi and the Somnath Temple', highlighting Munshi's monumental role as a modern nationalist whose post-independence reconstruction efforts offered an essential blueprint and vital lessons for contemporary temple reclamation movements. Following this, Parika Jashvantbhai Rathod delivered her paper, 'Somnath Revival and Sardar Patel', which argued that the reconstruction was a profound convergence of political authority and cultural memory directly enabled by Patel's successful integration of princely states like Junagadh. Concluding the session, Dr Somya Nagar presented 'The Jyotirmārg of Bharat: Linking Saṅkarācārya's Advaita Vision to Modern Somnath Governance', illustrating how Adi Shankaracharya's philosophical framework helped Hindus process historical trauma, while introducing a contemporary "Dharma-Sanchalan Model" for sacred space management based on the scientific symbolism of the Baan Stambh.



Session 3 (Left-Right) : Dr. Neerja A. Gupta, Dr. Somya Nagar, Parika Rathod, Dr. Neha Raval & Dr. Pinku Jha



Dr. Pinku Jha



Parika Rathod



Dr. Somya Nagar



Dr. Neha Raval

The fourth session, titled 'The Falsehood of Left Historiography' and chaired by Dr Vikram Sampath, featured a sharp critique of dominant Marxist interpretations and methodological debates in writing medieval Indian history. First, Shreya Shinde presented 'Reconstructing the Left Authorship - On Somnath', which critically analysed how an institutional triad of ICHR, JNU, and NCERT used selective, reductionist frameworks to systematically silence the civilisational narrative of the Ghaznavid raids, contrasting their output with the rigorous revisionist scholarship of Indic historians like R.C. Majumdar and Sita Ram Goel. Following this, Pushkar Raj delivered his paper, 'The Ghaznavid Raid at Somnath in Muslim Sources: A Critique of Marxist Interpretations', which undertook a systematic textual analysis of chronological Muslim sources from Farrukhi Sistani to the Mughal era to dismantle Romila Thapar's economic and political reframing of the 1025 CE raid, thereby restoring the primary religious and ideological dimensions that Marxist historiography has consistently sought to obscure.



Session 4 (Left-Right) : Dr. Vikram Sampath, Shreya Shinde & Pushkar Raj



Shreya Shinde



Pushkar Raj

Delivering a special thematic address, Senior Advocate Shri J. Sai Deepak joined the gathering virtually from Delhi to offer his perspective on civilisational consciousness. He spoke passionately about the legal and cultural duties required to safeguard India's heritage while also emphasising the vital importance of institutions like FIHCR and Brhat in leading this narrative shift.

The symposium effectively demonstrated that Somnath stands as a living metaphor for the continuity of the Bharatiya civilisation, constantly targeted, yet perpetually rising. By addressing everything from 11th-century raids to post-independence political battles and contemporary legal duties, the event successfully linked historical awareness with future responsibility. The event concluded with a renewed collective commitment to pursuing historical truth, ensuring that the resilient and unconquered spirit of Somnath continues to guide the narrative of a resurgent Bharat.



Sr. Adv. J. Sai Deepak



SESSION 1:

ANTIQUITY & ARCHAEOLOGY

Session Chair: Dr. Srinivas Jammalamadaka

In this session speakers reflect on Somnath within the larger sacred geography of Bharat - its coastal liminality, its place among the jyotirlingas, and its recurrence in civilisational storytelling. The discussion examines how sacred sites function as mnemonic anchors through which societies narrate continuity, loss, and renewal across long historical durations.



The Eternal Shrine: Civilizational Resilience and the Foreign Gaze at Somnath

Amogh Ravindra Vaidya
Research Scholar
MIT ADT University, Pune
vaidya.amogh27@gmail.com

Abstract

The Somnath temple is located where the Sarsuti River empties into the sea on the coast of Saurashtra. It served as a hub for both economic and astronomical power. The records of international visitors are used in this study to analyze the temple. It records the location as a symbol of both material and spiritual power. According to these narratives, the temple is an enduring representation of Indian culture.

Al-Biruni offered a thorough examination of the temple in the 11th century. He associated the name Somnath with tidal motions and moon cycles. He documented how the precinct was buried and exposed by the tides. He saw this as an act of cosmic devotion to the god. The logistical networks that transport Ganges water to the coast were brought to light by his investigation.

This evidence demonstrates the temple's extensive influence throughout the northern heartlands. Zakariya-al-Qazwini emphasized the temple as a site of scientific marvel. He talked about the sanctum's structural richness. He described an idol that was maintained in place by mechanical forces while floating. His story points to a society with highly developed engineering capabilities. He described the temple as an exquisite work of art. In the 14th century, Abdullah Wassaf wrote an account about the temple. The primary icon, according to him, is a polished stone that stands seven yards tall. He observed its exquisite craftsmanship and realistic expression. The extent of the temple endowments was recorded by Wassaf.

He talked about pearl and ruby crowns. According to these documents, the temple functioned as the area's central bank. In the 19th century, James Tod documented the architectural

design. He described a huge, high-battlemented, quadrangular court. He talked about the smaller shrines that used to round the main structure. Tod studied the ruins to learn about the Rajput people's past. He saw the remaining domes and columns as evidence of an enduring spirit. These international viewpoints demonstrate how Somnath served as a hub for inquiry around the world.

Its richness and science were noted by the tourists. They recorded its physical form throughout many historical periods. Their testimonies demonstrate how important the temple was to the local economy. These perspectives are used in this work to depict the temple as a representation of perseverance. The documents offer historical proof of a society that endured political upheaval and strife. Somnath continues to be a wonderful example of perseverance in the face of adversity.

Keywords: Excavations, *Jyotirlinga*, Rajput, Somnath temple, *Tirtha*

Introduction

On the southern coast of the Saurashtra peninsula, at Prabhasa Patan, sits the Somnath Temple. This area predates the Himalayas and is a part of the ancient Gondwana landmass. Some of the first human settlements in western India were supported by its stable environment. Movement and trade were made easier by the region's proximity to river and ocean routes. Saurashtra was important from the beginning because archaeological evidence suggests that it acted as a conduit between the Indus Valley Civilization and areas to the northwest.

The early Indus-Saraswati civilization is intimately linked to the cultural history of Prabhasa Patan. This period, which later impacted Shaivite customs, is referred to by academics as "Proto-Indian." A figure known as Pashupati has been discovered during excavations at Mohenjo-daro. It is seen surrounded by animals and sitting in a yogic position. Many people believe that this image is an early depiction of Shiva. Indus seals also feature the recurrent picture of the humped bull, which was eventually connected to Nandi. These results imply that Shaivite concepts predate the official worship of the lingam and have a long and continuous history.

Multiple strata of settlement across time are revealed by excavations at Prabhasa Patan. Lustrous Red Ware was employed by early agricultural societies as early as the third millennium BCE. Later on, the location joined larger networks of trade. While Hellenistic amphorae suggest contact with the Mediterranean region, the presence of Northern Black Polished Ware suggests ties to northern India. Iron artifacts and tools are a reflection of technical advancement. All of the evidence points to the site's transformation from a little community into a significant hub for trade and culture.

The site's geographical significance is intimately related to its theological significance. It is located at a triveni, where three rivers, including the Saraswati, converge. Like Prayaga, these places are revered in Indian culture. This location is linked to the worship of Somnath in texts like the Puranas and the Mahabharata. The place has enduring religious significance because of this connection between the physical environment and literary heritage.

Somanatha at Prabhasa is significant because it serves as a steady ritual hub that is linked to natural cycles. Early customs connected the location to moon phases, which aided in the

control of seasonal customs, agriculture, and calendars. An early attempt to systematically arrange time and renewal is shown in the relationship with the moon. These customs eventually made the location a permanent location where social life and cosmic observation met.

Lunar observation and fertility-based activities are connected to the site's oldest activity. Later on, a more organized Shaivite system included them. With the emergence of Shaivism, devotion was codified through the establishment of temples, the priesthood, and established rituals. This change is marked by Somnath's designation as a Jyotirlinga. It shows a change from regional customs to a more extensive and structured religious network. Instead of being eliminated, earlier customs were incorporated into this more comprehensive structure. Prabhasa's societal role was altered by its development as a pilgrimage site. A community space was created at the tirtha by which a great many communities could come together under one roof. Through their practice of pilgrimage, the people were able to feel a sense of oneness and overcome divisions due to the fact that they were unified through a common religious ceremony. This location was also quite significant to Vaishnavism, specifically due to its association with Krishna. References to the place from the Mahabharata make it clear that the area was associated with people like the Vrishnis and Yadavas, who were likely involved with systems of government. Authority gradually became more centralized, and ideas present in the Arthashastra reinforce this. The emergence of the Somnath temple as an institution is proof of this process, since religion too was used as an instrument of political organization.

Methodological Approach: Use of Foreign Accounts

The main sources for this study will be travelogues of foreigners, which would help overcome the existing lack of historical documentation in case of the Somnath Temple. Indian sources include Puranas and local mahatmyas, according to which the temple was an important center of sacred authority in the context of Hindu theology. They were primarily concerned with devotion, tradition, and theology, but rarely focused on chronology, material reality, and direct observations.

In this study, a civilization-centered approach is applied, regarding Somnath as a symbol of cultural continuity in Indian history. By referring to foreign sources, one can try to support the native traditions through providing external observations regarding wealth, architecture,

and sociocultural organization at the time of their formation. This is also necessary to emphasize that Somnath was not only a religious center but also an institution with its own traditions and values.

One of the biggest problems faced when studying ancient India is lack of a continuous historical record with clear dates. In their writings, foreigners tended to keep strict chronologies and descriptions. Authors such as Al-Biruni and James Tod also paid great attention to this issue. The date is fixed by names like "Sandrokottas" that Greeks gave to the King and other records left by Arab scholars during the 11th century. Such documents give us better understanding of the sequence of events than the conventional texts can do.

The foreign accounts of the site emphasize its economic aspect, and Al-Qazwini gives some details concerning the wealth and treasury of the site as well as its architecture. Such a description gives us a view of the site as a trading center, rather than merely a place for worshipping.

While the local documents concentrate on important events, such as demolition and rebuilding of the complex, foreign documents have information for other times and thus offer continuous coverage of the history of the site. The temple complex is presented in Greek, Persian, and later European sources during different stages of development.

There is another angle which adds further significance to the outsider's perspective. The local cultures do not include any information regarding the routine processes because these activities are considered mundane. However, they are included by the outsiders because they find everything unusual. They make observations about ritual practices, social structures, and architecture.

The current research claims that an objective view of Somnath needs external references along with the insider's point of view. The foreign sources not only add some credibility to the narrative but also ensure less dependence upon the narrative approach. Somnath is viewed as an established organization rather than a place of worship.

Xuanzang—The 17th century account of the Chinese pilgrim Xuanzang provides an early description of Saurashtra as a coastal region shaped by trade and travel. He presents Surashtra

as a large and active territory, measured at about 4,000 *li* in circuit, with its political center near the Mahi River. His record shows a contrast between difficult environmental conditions and strong economic activity. Xuanzang links the region's geography to its commercial life. He notes that the soil had high salt content, which limited agriculture, especially the cultivation of fruits and flowers. As a result, the population relied on maritime trade. Located along the western sea route, the region functioned as an important trading hub. Despite harsh weather and frequent storms, he describes a dense and prosperous population, indicating that trade generated sustained wealth.

His account also highlights religious diversity. He records around fifty Buddhist monasteries with nearly 3,000 monks, mainly associated with the Mahayana tradition. At the same time, he mentions over a hundred temples linked to Brahmanical traditions. This coexistence suggests a plural religious environment, where different traditions operated side by side. Xuanzang also remarks that the people showed limited interest in formal scholarship, which may reflect a society focused on trade and practical activity rather than academic learning.

Al-Biruni—Al-Biruni was born around 970 CE in Khwarizm. He was an astronomer, mathematician, historian, and logician. He later entered the service of Mahmud of Ghazni and travelled to India with him. He spent many years in the region, mainly in Punjab, where he learned Sanskrit. This allowed him to study Hindu philosophy, religion, customs, and beliefs in detail. He died around 1038–1039 CE.

Al-Biruni describes the main icon of Somnath as a stone *lingam*, whose name combines *Soma* (moon) and *Natha* (lord), linking the site to lunar symbolism. He records the destruction of the temple in 1025–1026 CE (AH 416), which provides a clear historical reference point. His account notes that the structure was systematically dismantled. The *lingam* was broken, with parts destroyed and the remainder taken to Ghazni. He also mentions that the temple contained valuable objects, including gold ornaments, jewels, and decorated textiles, which were removed along with the main icon.

Al-Biruni also records the deliberate desacralization of the Somnath icon after its removal to Ghazni. He states that fragments were placed in public settings and used for practical and symbolic purposes. One part was set in the town's hippodrome alongside the idol of Cakrasvamin from Thanesar. Another fragment was placed at the entrance of the main

mosque, where it served as a stone for washing feet. This account shows how political victory was expressed through acts directed at religious symbols.

Beyond the events of the 11th century, Al-Biruni provides evidence for the wider reach of the Somnath tradition. He notes that the worship of the *lingam* existed in many households across Sindh, but Somnath remained the main center of this practice. This suggests a clear hierarchy within the religious network.

He also describes the logistical system linked to the temple. His account mentions the regular transport of water from the Ganges River and flowers from Kashmir to the Saurashtra coast. This indicates an organized system of movement and supply that connected distant regions. It shows that the temple functioned within a large and coordinated network that supported both ritual practice and regional integration.

Al-Biruni records that Somnath was widely believed to have healing powers. The temple's main icon was sought for the treatment of chronic and serious illnesses. This shows that the site functioned as a center of both spiritual and therapeutic appeal, attracting people from different regions.

From these observations, Al-Biruni presents Somnath as a place where religious symbolism, material wealth, and organized networks came together. He treats it as one of the most important religious centers in the medieval Hindu world.

He also describes the geographical position of Somnath as important for maritime activity. According to him, the site served as a key stop for merchants travelling between East Africa and China. This places Somnath within the wider Indian Ocean trade system, where religious and economic functions overlapped.

Al-Biruni further explains the connection between the temple and natural processes. He links the name of the deity, "Lord of the Moon," to the effect of lunar cycles on the sea. He notes that the site lay near the mouth of the Saraswati River and was affected by tides. The rising tide would cover the area, while the receding tide would expose it again. This pattern was interpreted in religious terms as the moon serving the deity.

At the same time, Al-Biruni points out a gap between observation and explanation. He states that scholars in the region could calculate tidal patterns accurately, but did not clearly explain the physical causes behind them. This shows his effort to compare empirical observation with theoretical understanding.

Al-Biruni provides key details on the structure and setting of Somnath. He notes that the fortified complex around the shrine was not ancient but built about a century before his time, around the 10th century. He also links the site to the Yadava tradition, placing it near locations associated with Vasudeva and nearby settlements such as Baroi.

He applies a comparative approach to explain the site's physical setting. He suggests that the emergence of the structure near the sea can be understood in the same way as the formation of the Maldives and Lakshadweep islands, which arise from marine deposits and sand formations. This shows an early attempt to relate local beliefs about the site's origin to observable geological processes.

Al-Biruni also records aspects of the ritual calendar. He notes that the full moon of the month of Shravana was an important fasting day dedicated to Somnath. This reflects a direct link between religious practice and lunar cycles.

Taken together, his work shifts the understanding of Somnath from a purely religious shrine to a more complex institution. He presents it as a place where natural processes, economic activity, and social organization interacted. His description of tidal patterns connects the identity of the deity with the observable effects of the moon on the sea, showing how ritual practice was tied to environmental cycles.

He also highlights the economic and logistical scale of the site. By describing it as a stop on long-distance maritime routes and noting the movement of goods such as water from the Ganges River and flowers from Kashmir, he shows that Somnath operated within a wide network of exchange. This indicates a high level of organization and resource flow across regions. Finally, Al-Biruni provides a clear record of the events of 1025–1026 CE. He describes the dismantling of the temple and the removal of its central icon to Ghazni. At the same time, he notes the continued spread of its religious significance and its reputation for healing. His account shows both disruption and continuity, presenting Somnath as a major

center with lasting influence in the medieval Indian world.

Ibn al-Athir—The 13th century chronicle of Ibn al-Athir provides a political and narrative framework for the Somnath expedition. His account presents the campaign as part of a larger Islamic historical process, portraying Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni as a ruler whose authority was linked to the Abbasid Caliphate. Ibn al-Athir notes that Mahmud formally received the title of Sultan from the Caliph Al-Qadir, which gave his campaigns wider political and religious legitimacy. The chronicle uses symbolic narratives to frame Mahmud's rise. It records a dream of his father, Sabuktigin, in which a tree grows from a house and spreads across the world. This is interpreted as a sign of future expansion. It also mentions a story that an idol temple near Peshawar collapsed at the time of Mahmud's birth. In historical analysis, such accounts function as literary devices that present later events, including the attack on Somnath, as part of a predetermined narrative rather than isolated actions. Ibn al-Athir describes the campaign of 1025 CE as a major stage in Mahmud's expansion into western India. He refers to the attack on Gujarat and its capital Nahrwala. The account states that the Somnath idol was broken into parts and distributed across key centers. Some fragments were taken to Ghazni and placed in important buildings such as the congregational mosque and the royal complex. Other parts were reportedly sent to Mecca and Medina. This distribution is presented as a symbolic act linking the campaign to a wider Islamic world. The chronicle also places the Somnath campaign within a broader pattern of conflict with regional rulers in northwestern India. It mentions earlier encounters with rulers such as Jaipal, whose defeat is described in terms that emphasize political subordination. Literary references, including praise poems by Unsuri, show that these events were quickly incorporated into court literature. Overall, Ibn al-Athir's account combines political detail with narrative framing. It presents the Somnath expedition as both a historical event and a constructed example of royal authority and expansion.

Shihabuddin al-Umari—The 14th century geographical account of Shihabuddin al-Umari, based on the reports of Sheikh Mubarak al-Khambati, provides a broad spatial view of Somnath within the wider Islamic understanding of India. This account shifts attention from the temple itself to a larger idea of India as a vast and connected civilizational unit. Al-Umari describes the Indian subcontinent as an extensive territory, measured through travel time rather than fixed distance. He states that crossing it would take about three years by ordinary journey. This description presents India as a continuous landmass with high population and

dense settlement, rather than a group of isolated regions. The account also places Somnath within a wider geographical framework. Along the north–south axis, the region stretches from Somnath and Sarandib in the south to Ghazna in the north. This positioning identifies Somnath as a key reference point in western India. Along the east–west axis, the land extends from the Bay of Aden to the Great Wall of China. In this framework, Somnath appears as a link between maritime routes and inland networks, connecting regions across Asia. Al-Umari also describes a landscape without empty or uninhabited zones. He notes a continuous spread of towns, each with administrative and religious structures such as mimbars and seats of authority. Villages, markets, and trading centers appear closely connected, indicating a strong internal economy. His statement that no deserted land exists between settlements challenges the idea of a fragmented or sparsely populated medieval India. Instead, it presents a dense and organized space in which Somnath functioned as an active coastal center linked to a wider network.

Al-Qalqashandi—The 14th century encyclopedic work *Subh al-A'sha* by Al-Qalqashandi provides a systematic geographical account of Somnath and the Gujarat coast. It places the region within the medieval system of “Climates,” which classified inhabited lands by latitude and environmental conditions. In this framework, Somnath is located in the “Second Climate,” indicating its specific position in relation to solar patterns and climate zones. Drawing on earlier authorities such as Ibn Said al-Maghribi, Al-Qalqashandi describes the site as well known among travellers and identifies the region as the Land of Lar (Lata).

The account highlights Somnath’s strong maritime position. Unlike ports located deep inside gulfs, Somnath stands on a projecting headland along the Arabian Sea. This made it an accessible and visible point for ships traveling toward the Aden. Its location reduced navigational difficulty and established it as a regular stop on sea routes. The text also notes that the site lies at the mouth of a river flowing from inland highlands, showing a link between sea trade and inland movement of goods and resources. Al-Qalqashandi further places Somnath within a wider economic network along the Gujarat coast. Nearby centers such as Sadan are described as points where major routes converge, indicating a developed land transport system that supported maritime activity. The region is also noted for valuable resources such as costus and bamboo, which were part of wider trade circuits across the Indian Ocean. By including measured distances between locations, the account provides a structured and practical map of the medieval coastline. Overall, this record presents Somnath

not only as a religious site but as a key node within a connected system of trade, geography, and resource movement.

Al-Qazwini—Al-Qazwini describes Somnath as a major coastal city closely linked to the sea. His account focuses on its structure, ritual meaning, and wealth, presenting it as a place where architecture and belief worked together to shape strong impressions on visitors. He records the well-known feature of the central icon, which appeared to stand in the middle of the shrine without visible support. Visitors saw it as suspended in the air, which created a sense of wonder. Although described in symbolic terms, this detail suggests the use of advanced construction methods or careful design that produced this effect. His emphasis on this feature highlights the technical skill associated with the temple.

Al-Qazwini also describes the site as an important spiritual center. He notes large gatherings during lunar eclipses, sometimes involving over one hundred thousand people. These events show the link between ritual activity and celestial timing. He further records beliefs that the site played a role in the journey of the soul after death, where the central icon was seen as part of this process. This presents Somnath as a key religious center with wider doctrinal importance.

The account also highlights the temple's economic strength. Al-Qazwini states that it received revenue from thousands of villages, showing a high level of organized resource control. He confirms the continued transport of water from the Ganges River for ritual use, which indicates a wide network of supply and coordination. Overall, his description presents Somnath as a major institution that combined religious authority, technical knowledge, and economic power within a connected regional system.

Al-Qazwini describes how natural processes shaped the religious meaning of Somnath. He notes that the regular rise and fall of the sea was seen as an act of worship. The movement of the tides was interpreted as the sea itself serving the deity. This idea strengthened the view of the temple as a place where natural forces and religious belief were closely linked. He also gives details about the human and material organization of the temple. Around one thousand Brahmins managed rituals and visitors, while about five hundred performers, including singers and dancers, were attached to the complex. Their support came from the temple's endowments, showing that it functioned as a self-sustaining institution with strong economic

resources.

The architectural description highlights both strength and wealth. The structure stood on fifty-six pillars made of teakwood and covered with lead, a design suited to resist damage from the coastal environment. Inside, the sanctum remained dark but was lit by valuable jeweled lamps. Al-Qazwini also records a large gold chain used to signal time. When shaken, it marked the change of duties among priests, showing a regulated and organized system of worship. He describes the events of 1025 CE (416 AH) as a major conflict at Somnath. He records strong resistance by the defenders, who combined ritual prayer with repeated attempts to repel the attack. The scale of the fighting is reflected in his report of heavy casualties. After the breach, the forces of Mahmud of Ghazni seized large quantities of wealth, including gold, silver, and jeweled objects that had been offered to the temple over time. This account presents the temple as both a religious center and a fortified space with significant resources. Al-Qazwini also includes a detailed explanation of the so-called “floating” idol. He describes an attempt to test whether the image was supported by hidden structures. A spear was passed around it, and no support was found. An explanation was then proposed that the structure above contained magnetic stone, while the idol itself was made of iron. According to this view, the object remained suspended because of a balance of forces. To examine this idea, the upper structure was dismantled. Al-Qazwini notes that as parts of the structure were removed, the balance was disturbed and the idol shifted before falling. This sequence is presented as a direct observation used to explain the phenomenon. This account suggests that medieval observers tried to interpret unusual architectural effects through practical reasoning. It presents Somnath not only as a religious site but also as a place associated with skilled construction and technical knowledge, where visual effects could be understood through physical explanation.

Abdullah Wassaf—Abdullah Wassaf of Shiraz wrote a history that covers events from the Mongol period up to about 1328 CE. His work focuses mainly on the Mongol world but also includes references to India, especially political developments in the south and west. Wassaf begins his account of Gujarat with the rule of Alauddin Khalji. He presents the campaign as an extension of internal stability and state consolidation. The first major target was Khambhat (Kambayat), which he describes as one of the richest and most populated cities in India. This establishes Gujarat as an important economic region, not only a religious center. He provides details about the military forces sent to the region. The campaign was led by Ulugh Khan and

Nusrat Khan. According to Wassaf, the army included about 14,000 cavalry and 20,000 infantry soldiers, referred to as *dakk*. He emphasizes that these commanders were key figures in the administration, showing that the campaign had high priority for the central government. This account helps reconstruct the scale and organization of the Gujarat expedition. It shows that the region, including Somnath, was targeted for both its economic value and its strategic importance within the wider structure of the Delhi Sultanate. Abdullah Wassaf provides an environmental and urban assessment of the Saurashtra coast. He notes the clarity of the air and water and describes the region's buildings and landscape as refined and well developed. This indicates that 14th century observers recognized the area as a prosperous and organized coastal society with a high standard of living. Wassaf explains the campaign in religious terms, presenting it as part of a wider ideological objective. At the same time, his detailed references to the wealth and population of cities such as Khambhat point to a strong economic motive. This dual focus shows that the campaign combined religious justification with material aims. In this context, Somnath appears both as a site of religious importance and as a center of accumulated wealth. By placing the events around 1298 CE, Wassaf provides a clear chronological marker for a later phase of conflict in the region. His account reflects a shift from regional political control to the more centralized authority of the Delhi Sultanate. It shows that Somnath remained a focal point during this transition, linked to both religious practice and state expansion. He also describes the strategy of the campaign. The forces moved quickly across difficult terrain to reach key coastal centers, achieving surprise at major ports. The operation is presented as more than a simple conquest. It involved the disruption of existing economic and social structures, showing the broader impact of imperial expansion on the region.

Abdullah Wassaf records the Gujarat campaign as a large and organized process of extraction. He lists major categories of wealth taken from the region. These include large quantities of gold and silver, along with precious stones such as pearls, diamonds, rubies, and emeralds. He also notes the seizure of silk and cotton textiles, including dyed, stamped, and embroidered cloth, which shows the strength of the local textile industry. In addition, he records the capture of about 20,000 people and thirteen war elephants. This indicates the transfer of both human labor and military resources to the center of power. Wassaf gives a detailed description of the Somnath icon. He states that it was about seven yards high and fixed on a stone base, with a highly polished surface. He describes the workmanship as refined and notes that the figure appeared lifelike, with an expression suggesting movement

or speech. The icon was richly decorated, including a gold crown set with rubies and pearls, and a pearl ornament arranged in a way that enhanced its visual impact. This description shows the artistic quality and material value of the object. He also records the broader effects of the campaign on the sacred landscape. Many temples were abandoned, and images were broken or trampled. He describes severe disruption to the local population, including long-term displacement. This marks a break in the continuity of earlier religious and social structures. The region was then integrated into the system of the Delhi Sultanate, showing a shift toward centralized control.

Wassaf highlights the symbolic actions taken after the conquest. He notes that an offer of ransom for the icon was rejected. Instead, the object was deliberately broken, and its parts were removed. He records that fragments were taken to Delhi and used in the construction of the main congregational mosque. This act turned the remains into a public sign of victory and authority.

He also emphasizes the scale and method of the campaign. The forces moved quickly across difficult terrain, reaching key coastal centers with speed and surprise. The operation targeted not only political control but also the economic and social structure of the region. Trade networks, settlements, and religious institutions were all affected.

Abdullah Wassaf records a notable post-conflict discovery within the ruins of Somnath. He describes a finely worked jasper-colored stone that reflects cross-cultural artistic exchange. The object combined different elements. It showed figures of fighting men along with decorative forms such as globes and lamps, and it also carried marginal verses from the Quran. This mix of figurative carving and Islamic inscription points to an Indo-Islamic style, where local artistic traditions and new influences were brought together.

Wassaf notes that this stone was not destroyed. It was moved and dedicated to the shrine of the Sufi saint Abu Ishaq Ibrahim bin Shahriar. It was placed at the entrance of a large octagonal structure built around 1307 CE. This act shows how material from Somnath was reused and absorbed into new religious and architectural settings under the Delhi Sultanate.

In his closing remarks, Wassaf describes the rule of Alauddin Khalji as one shaped by constant expansion and military activity. He presents the acquisition of wealth and resources

as a key part of governance. This framing explains the large-scale transfer of material from regions such as Gujarat to the political center.

Taken together, his account shows that 14th century Somnath was not only affected by conflict but also became a source of material and artistic influence. Its remains, objects, and styles continued to shape the architecture and political expression of the Delhi Sultanate after the initial campaign.

James Tod—James Tod (1782–1835) came to India in 1799 and later worked with Rajput states under British authority. He recorded regional history in *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan*. Tod refers to the site as Patan-Somnath, also called Deva-Pattan, meaning the city of the deity. He notes its location at a *triveni*, where the Saraswati River, Hiranya, and Vrijini rivers meet. This confirms the long-standing sacred geography of the site. He describes the place as a meeting point of both Hindu and later Islamic historical layers. Tod also provides a technical description of the temple's structure. He classifies it as *Sikra-bund*, meaning a pinnacled form, and states that its design follows the rules of the *Shilpa Shastra*, the traditional system of Hindu architecture. This shifts the focus from narrative accounts to formal architectural analysis. He describes the building material as coarse sandstone but notes the strength of its design and the expressive quality of its sculptures. The entrance is framed by well-finished stone elements, including a polished yellow mineral, possibly the same type of stone noted in earlier records. This suggests continuity in the use of valued materials.

Tod also outlines the internal layout. He records a central *mandapa* about sixteen feet in diameter, supported by strong pillars and surrounded by a portico. This leads into a domed vestibule and then to the inner sanctum. His description provides a clear understanding of the temple's spatial organization and construction logic. He records that at the time of his visit, Somnath was in a neglected state. The structure stood deserted and damaged, even used for ordinary purposes such as shelter for cattle. He uses this condition to trace a longer history of repeated destruction and repair.

Tod notes that the rulers of Anhilwara Patan had restored the temple after the earlier damage caused by Mahmud of Ghazni. However, he states that the later destruction of the spire under Alauddin Khalji had not been repaired. This shows a break in the pattern of restoration and highlights a phase of decline in the monument's structure. At the same time, Tod observes

continued local devotion. In the absence of a formal idol, local cowherds had placed a simple red mark in the sanctum. This act indicates that ritual practice continued at a basic level, even when the main structure was in ruins. It shows that the religious importance of the site remained active among the local population.

Tod also describes the nearby Surya-kunda, a rock-cut reservoir located to the north of the temple. He notes its steep steps and its use as a place for ritual bathing. The site was associated with healing and required specific practices, including repeated bathing and moral discipline. This reflects the long-standing role of the area as a *tirtha*, focused on purification and religious observance. In his broader interpretation, Tod treats the site as a layered historical space. His account shows how different phases of construction, destruction, and reuse shaped the monument over time. This approach presents Somnath as a place where multiple historical periods and cultural influences are preserved within a single setting.

James Tod interprets the remains of Somnath as evidence of a structure that retained traces of its original design even after damage. He argues that the surviving vestibule and fragments allow a partial reconstruction of the earlier form. The core layout and stylistic features remain visible despite later alterations. He describes how the space was modified after conquest. The original temple (*mandira*) was adapted for use as a mosque. This involved the removal of the *shikhara* (pinnacle) and the reuse of existing architectural elements, including the conversion of earlier ritual spaces into areas suited for Islamic worship. These changes show how existing structures were altered rather than fully replaced.

Tod also notes the addition of minarets at the entrance. He identifies these as later constructions introduced by Muslim builders. These vertical elements contrast with the original temple design and mark a visible shift in architectural style. Their presence creates a mixed form, where features from different traditions exist within the same structure. He places the attack on Somnath within a wider historical movement. He describes the campaign of Mahmud of Ghazni as a long-distance military operation that connected regions from Central Asia to the western coast of India. His account reflects a 19th century attempt to understand both the scale of the campaign and its impact on the region.

Tod also comments on the condition of the surviving structure. He describes it as a damaged remnant, where the changes made to the building were intended to remain visible. The reuse

of the site served as a marker of political control rather than an effort at restoration. In his final observations, Tod shifts focus from the single structure to the wider setting. He presents the Somnath area as a planned sacred landscape, where temples, water structures, and routes formed an integrated system. This view shows the site as more than an isolated monument, placing it within a larger spatial and environmental context.

James Tod describes the Somnath complex as a large, planned precinct. He notes an extensive quadrangular court with the main shrine at the center and smaller temples arranged around it as supporting units. This layout shows a clear hierarchy in design, with the central shrine dominating both space and ritual focus. He estimates the scale of the complex through its layout. The distance between the main shrine and nearby water reservoirs exceeds one hundred yards, indicating a wide and dense sacred enclosure. This suggests that the site functioned as a major religious center on the Saurashtra coast.

Tod also identifies reuse of earlier materials in later structures. He studies the Jama Masjid and argues that it incorporated elements from earlier temples. He points to architectural features such as domes and columns that retain Hindu design traits. From this, he concludes that several smaller shrines were dismantled and their materials reused in the construction of the mosque. This shows a process of architectural adaptation rather than complete replacement.

He further comments on the location of Somnath. The temple stood on a projecting rock along the coast, directly exposed to the sea. He notes that the constant movement and sound of the waves shaped the experience of the site, creating a strong visual and sensory setting for ritual activity.

Tod describes the nearby Veraval coast as notable for its curved shoreline and open sea view. He compares it with well-known coastal regions elsewhere, highlighting its visual appeal. The surrounding landscape included both defensive structures along the coast and the distant hills of Mount Girnar.

Edward Law, 1st Earl of Ellenborough entered Ferozepur in December 1842 with a large ceremonial procession that included elephants, camels, and transport wagons. This display accompanied the return of the so-called Somnath gates, brought from Afghanistan by William

Nott. The timing, linked to the death of William McNaughten, shows that the event was framed as a symbolic act of political recovery.

Observers who examined the gates noted their artistic features. The carvings included geometric patterns, arabesque designs, and Kufic inscriptions. These elements point to an Indo-Islamic style rather than a purely earlier Hindu origin. The gates were also damaged, with only part of the original work surviving. To present them in a dignified manner, they were covered with red cloth and decorated with gold, then transported in a ceremonial procession.

The return of the gates led to ritual responses. Local Brahmins performed acts such as placing flowers on them, treating them as sacred objects. This reaction shows that their symbolic value was accepted regardless of questions about origin. Support from Sher Singh, who provided protection and funds, indicates that regional rulers used the event to connect with a broader cultural narrative.

At the same time, reports noted the condition of the actual site at Prabhasa Patan. By 1842, the temple itself retained little of its earlier form and had been altered in previous periods. This contrast highlights a gap between the symbolic importance of the returned object and the physical state of the original location.

Conclusion

The conclusion of this investigation will revert back to the main argument of this research paper. Somnath is much more than a monument from the past. It is an enduring civilization system that has been molded through continuity, struggle, and adaptation. It is important to note that foreign documents have not just acted as mere tools of recording history but rather as an instrument for constructing the arguments in this research. Through these texts, it is evident that the struggles surrounding Somnath are a result of religious intentions as well as materialistic reasons.

The pattern observed in these centuries-old documents indicates one thing—that Somnath was seen as a place of concentrated sacred power. Al-Biruni explains how Somnath is related to the cycles of moon, ritual processes and pilgrimage circuits. Similarly, in the documents of al-Qazwini, Somnath has been portrayed as a place where nature, construction, and religion

come together to give it immense religious significance. Lastly, Wassaf discusses the icons, rituals and offerings found at Somnath through a symbolic point of view. Here too, what is described is not just the wealth found there but reverence and ritual significance.

Meanwhile, the descriptions of conflict serve to show how these campaigns were characterized. Authors like Ibn al-Athir and Wassaf explain the events from a religious perspective. The smashing of the statue, the carrying away of its pieces, and placing them in mosques are presented as intentional actions. They aim at the destruction of religious beliefs rather than possessions. The rejection of any ransom for the statue further illustrates this idea. If the campaigns were aimed merely at material benefits, the matter could have been resolved through negotiations.

This method helps in understanding the history of Somnath Temple more effectively. The emphasis is now on how the acts of plunder were part of a larger pattern of ideological struggle rather than mere acts of plunder. Somnath Temple represents a religious system that is under threat. External documentation supports this assertion by mentioning the physical act of plunder and what comes along with it.

However, this same external source is proof of another reality. This becomes the theme of the research paper, entitled *The Eternal Shrine: Civilizational Resilience and the Foreign Gaze at Somnath*. In spite of being attacked, the site continues to serve its purpose. As reported by Al-Biruni, the lingam worship spreads further away from the temple itself.

Subsequent writings also point to the continuation of the activities such as pilgrimages, rituals, and worship. According to James Tod, even a simple sign takes the place of the idol, which demonstrates that the temple keeps its significance notwithstanding its architectural appearance.

Resilience can be demonstrated in a more tangible and institutional manner too. The temple undergoes reconstructions, reutilizations, or adaptations depending on the time period. The supply network and pilgrimage practices are not interrupted. The temple's position guarantees its continued significance in terms of the trade and movements through the area. Regardless of political power shifts, the temple's functions persist within the framework of the regional infrastructure.

It should be stressed that foreign descriptions provide an additional proof of the theory in question. In fact, they cannot provide a continuous story, but taken into account as separate observations, they still demonstrate persistence in some aspects. For instance, all observers come across their own versions of Somnath; however, some characteristics of the temple appear unchangeable. They include its religious geography, economical significance, and symbolical significance.

But there are also different emphases and limitations among these sources. There are some who pay more attention to money and architecture than to the religious aspect. In Al-Qazwini, the stress is on engineering and grandeur. Wassaf concentrates on the economic and political exploitation of the place. This could possibly give an incomplete picture of what was happening internally in terms of the religion of the site. Others, such as Ibn al-Athir, try to fit all their happenings into ideological frames that are useful politically. But despite all these, the basic picture of Somnath as a major religious institution is always there.

The synthesis of the accounts paints the clear picture that Somnath was a civilization where religion, economy, and politics mingled. The challenges that it has experienced were not random incidents of plundering but rather attacks on its religious institution. However, the case of Somnath demonstrates how civilizations can survive shocks and persist through them without any disruption. Their survival relies on continuity in belief, practice, and culture.

It has been shown that foreign observers, although distant from the situation, could see that the civilization persisted despite the challenges it encountered. Their narratives demonstrate that wealth and worship of Somnath were still ongoing after multiple attacks. Thus, the main conclusion is rather straightforward. The account of Somnath proves to be an example of a resilient civilization surviving through adaptation and persistence. However, the account of foreigners proves that it was ideologically driven conflict.

Bibliography

- Al-Biruni. *Alberuni's India*. Translated by Eduard C. Sachau. Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1888.
- Elliot, H. M., and J. Dowson, eds. *The History of India as Told by Its Own Historians: The Muhammadan Period*. Vol. 1. Kitab Mahal, 1963.

- Elliot, H. M., and J. Dowson, eds. *The History of India as Told by Its Own Historians: The Muhammadan Period*. Vol. 3. Trübner & Co., 1871.
- Elliot, H. M., and J. Dowson, eds. *The History of India as Told by Its Own Historians: The Muhammadan Period*. Vol. 2. Trübner & Co., 1869.
- Munshi, K. M. *Somanatha: The Shrine Eternal*. Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1951.
- Tod, J. *Travels in Western India*. Munshiram Manoharlal, 1839.
- Xuanzang. *Si-Yu-Ki: Buddhist Records of the Western World*. Translated by S. Beal. Trübner & Co., 1884.

Between Two Desecrations: Remembering Somanātha in the Sanskrit *Kāvya*s of Western India (12th–13th Centuries)

Alok Kumar

Chinmaya Vishwa Vidyapeeth

Ernakulam, Kerala

aloksans1512@gmail.com

Introduction

Maḥmūd (r. 998–1030 CE), the ruler of the Ghaznavid empire based at Ghaznī, undertook a series of campaigns against northern India, notably against the Śāhī kings of the northwest, Rājyapāla of the Gurjara-Pratihāra dynasty at Kannauj, and Vidyādhara of the Candella (Chandela) dynasty in Jejakabhukti (Bundelkhand). His march to Somanātha was his second last expedition to India, undertaken in 1025–26 CE.¹ Just a couple of years earlier, in 1022 CE, Bhīma I (c. 1022–1064 CE) had ascended the Caulukya (Solanki) throne.² During his reign, amidst resistance perhaps from a Caulukya feudatory in Surāṣṭra, Maḥmūd desecrated and looted the temple.³

Even so, it was soon rebuilt during Bhīma's reign itself and continued to function as a major sacred centre. This is evident from the Gaṇdevī inscription (Śaka 964, c. 1042 CE) of Ṣaṣṭha II, the Kadamba ruler of the Goa region, who undertook a pilgrimage to Prabhāsa and performed the *tulādāna* ceremony, measuring “himself with gold in front of Someśvara.”⁴ From epigraphical sources and Jaina narratives such as *prabandhas*, we come to know that several royal figures visited and patronised the temple. Thus, we hear that the mother of Jayasimha Siddharāja (c. 1083–1143 CE), during their visit to the temple, induced him to remove the pilgrimage tax. The king also invited Bhāva Bṛhaspati to take charge of Somanātha as priest. Kumārapāla (c. 1143–1172 CE) renovated the dilapidated shrine on a large scale, at Bhāva Bṛhaspati's request, in *Valabhī* year 850 (1170 CE). Bhīmadeva II (c. 1178–1241 CE) added a *maṇḍapa* to the temple. In 1287 CE, Tripurāntaka, the priest of the temple, again renovated it on a large scale.⁵ However, towards the end of the 13th century, in 1298 CE, the temple was once again desecrated during the Gujarat campaign of ‘Alā al-Dīn Khaljī, the Sultān of Delhi of the Khaljī dynasty, led by his generals Ulugh Khān and Nusrat Khān.⁶

Thus, the existing scholarship has demonstrated the continued importance of Somanātha, particularly through epigraphic evidence and Jaina narrative traditions. However, Sanskrit *kāvyas*—despite being contemporary and often rich in detail—have not been systematically examined in this context. When it comes to narrative texts, modern scholarship has mostly focused on the question of the two desecrations, their implications, and their memory. Less attention has been paid to how Sanskrit *kāvyas* reflect the continued functioning of Somanātha as an active sacred centre during the intervening centuries, thus complementing the evidence of inscriptions and Jaina narratives.

For example, Richard H. Davis has written extensively about the growth of Muslim narratives, both contemporary and later, extolling Maḥmūd's act. He compares and contrasts these with the counter-narratives of Hindu and Jaina writers. He shows, for example, how the narrative of resistance to the Khaljī troops in Padmanābha's *Kānhaḍade Prabandha* was “a way to constitute authority” for Kānhaḍade, a Cāhamāna prince, and how Jaina writings such as Merutuṅga's *Prabandhacintāmaṇi* emphasise the prominence of the Jaina faith within the narrative of Somanātha, as Kumārapāla finally converts to Jainism in Somanātha's presence.⁷ He has not included *kāvyas* composed during this period in his study. On a similar line, Romila Thapar, while dealing in detail with Jaina narratives that “demonstrate the might of the Jaina Sangha,” passes over Sanskrit *kāvyas* in only a few lines. She mentions Arisimha's *Sukṛtasāṅkīrtana* and Bālacandra's *Vasantavilāsa* only in passing.⁸ In such a situation, Sanskrit *kāvyas* of this period remain largely understudied. The present paper therefore asks how Sanskrit *kāvyas* of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries represent Somanātha. In doing so, it seeks to bring into clearer focus not only the moment of desecration, but also the intervening centuries during which Somanātha continued to be remembered, visited, and patronised.

For this purpose, I have taken six *kāvyas*: *Lalitavigraharāja*, *Prṭhvīrājavijaya*, *Śaṅkhaaparābhava*, *Sukṛtasāṅkīrtana*, *Kīrtikaumudī*, and *Vasantavilāsa*. All these texts, except *Prṭhvīrājavijaya*, remain untranslated.⁹ These *kāvyas* belong to Gujarat and Rajasthan of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, that is, to the intervening period between the two desecrations of Somanātha. When these texts are studied carefully, a twofold pattern emerges. On the one hand, although composed after Maḥmūd's desecration, they preserve the memory of earlier incidents connected with Somanātha. On the other hand, they also reflect the contemporary experience of Somanātha as a living

sacred centre. Focusing on this continuity, the present paper asks what this twofold representation reveals about patterns of pilgrimage, patronage, and sacred memory, thus complementing the scholarship on continuity based mainly on epigraphy and Jaina narratives.

In the present paper, the term *kāvya* is used in its broad sense to include both long narrative poems (*mahākāvya*) and dramatic compositions (*rūpaka*). This study treats Sanskrit *kāvya* not merely as literary ornamentation but also as a source for cultural and religious history. While acknowledging the highly conventional nature of these texts, along with their hyperbole and poetic imagination, the analysis focuses on recurring patterns that point to lived practices. When read carefully and comparatively, these texts offer valuable insight into how sacred centres such as Somanātha were remembered and experienced in their own time. Thus, the paper shows that *kāvya*, often treated as secondary to inscriptions, preserves a parallel mode of cultural memory that is structurally different but historically significant.

Methodologically, the paper does not treat individual poetic statements as straightforward historical facts. Rather, it reads the six *kāvyas* comparatively, paying attention to recurring motifs, shared patterns, and the contexts in which Somanātha appears. Such repetition across texts composed in different courts and literary circles allows us to glimpse not merely poetic convention, but broader patterns of memory, pilgrimage, and patronage.

This study does not seek to challenge the established view of Somanātha's continued significance. Rather, it seeks to supplement that view by bringing into focus a body of Sanskrit *kāvya* that has remained largely underutilised in this context.

The *Kāvyas* and Their Literary Contexts

The earliest sources taken by me are a play (*nāṭaka*) and a *mahākāvya*, both composed at the Cāhamāna court. The play titled *Lalitavigraharāja* (*The Lovely Vighararāja*) was composed by Somadeva, the court poet of the Cāhamāna ruler Vighararāja IV (c. 1152–1167 CE) of Śākambharī, to commemorate both his romance with the princess Desaladevī and his martial achievements against a certain Turuṣka (Muslim) king. It was inscribed on stone slabs around 1153 CE and recovered in the late 19th century from the present-day Adhāi-din-ka-jhomḍā mosque.¹⁰ In this play, Somanātha is mentioned in the context of pilgrimage and espionage. The other source, the *mahākāvya* titled *Prthvīrājaviṣaya* (*The Victory of Prthvīrāja*), was composed by the court poet Jayānaka to commemorate the victory of his patron Prthvīrāja III

(c. 1177–1191 CE) over Shihāb al-Dīn Muḥammad Ghūrī. Here, Somanātha is mentioned in the context of royal genealogy, which extols the achievements of the king's predecessors.

The remaining four works belong to “the literary circle” of Vastupāla (c. 1220–40 CE), the powerful Jaina minister under the Vaghela rulers Vīradhavalā and Vīśaladeva, a refined patron of Sanskrit learning and a central cultural figure of 13th century western India.¹¹ The composers of all four of these works were patronised by him. *Śaṅkhaaparābhava* (*The Defeat of Śaṅkha*) was composed by Harihara, one of the prominent poets patronised by Vastupāla. He originally belonged to Gauḍa country and is said to have been a descendant of the famous poet Śrīharṣa, the composer of *Naiṣadhīyacarita*.¹² *Śaṅkhaaparābhava* is a one-act play (*vyāyoga*) centred on the battle between Śaṅkha, the son of Sindhurāja, the ruler of Lāṭa, and Vastupāla. In the play, Somanātha is not mentioned in the core narrative, but in the biographical detail of the poet in the prologue.

The remaining three, namely *Sukṛtasaṅkīrtana* (*The Narration of Pious Deeds*) of Arisīmha, *Kīrtikaumudī* (*The Moonlight of Fame*) of Someśvara, and *Vasantavilāsa* (*The Play of Vasanta or Vastupāla*) of Bālacandra, are *mahākāvyas*. These *mahākāvyas* share a common theme: the description of the Cāpotkaṭa and Caulukya dynasties, the rise of Vastupāla to ministership, his pilgrimage to Jaina shrines, and his other pious deeds.¹³ It is important to note that in these three *mahākāvyas*, Somanātha is described within the narrative of Vastupāla's pilgrimage to Jaina shrines on the Śatruñjaya and Raivata(ka) mountains, though without diminishing the significance of Somanātha.

We have considerable information about these three poets. Arisīmha was one of the favourite poets patronised by Vastupāla. B. J. Sandesara opines that he might have been a Jaina, while Chaturvijayaji, in his introduction to *Sukṛtasaṅkīrtana*, notes that he might have had Śaiva inclinations.¹⁴ He was popular and widely read, as his verses are included in anthologies such as *Sūktimuktāvalī* and *Śārṅgadharapaddhati*.¹⁵ Someśvara was the family priest of the Gurjara kings Bhīma II and Lavaṇaprasāda.¹⁶ He was a close friend of Vastupāla and one of the chief poets patronised by him. Apart from *Kīrtikaumudī*, his notable compositions include *Surathotsava*, a *mahākāvya* based on the *Devīmāhātmya* of the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*; *Ullāgarāghava*, a play based on the *Rāmāyaṇa*; *Karṇāmṛtaprapā*, an anthology of didactic verses; and *Rāmaśataka*, a century of hymns on Rāma.¹⁷

Bālacandra gives the most striking details about Somanātha. He was a Jaina monk and a disciple of Haribhadrāsūri. He was patronised by Vastupāla and composed *Vasantavilāsa* after Vastupāla's demise, for the delight of his son Jaitrasimha. His other literary works include the one-act play *Karuṇāvajrāyudha*, based on the Jaina version of the famous episode of Śibi from the *Mahābhārata*.

In *Vasantavilāsa*, Bālacandra places Somanātha within an interesting dream episode in the ninth canto. Once, Dharma appears in the dream of Vastupāla. He speaks of the royal patronage extended to Hindu and Jaina faiths by the former kings of Gujarat and of its subsequent deterioration in the present age. In the Kṛta age, he says, he was a bull with four legs. Now, in the Kali age, only one leg remains. Dharma asks: where will the Jainas, Vaiśeṣikas, Sāṃkhyas, Bauddhas, Naiyāyikas, and Jaiminīyas—the followers of the various *darśanas* (*darśanin*)—go when Dharma is being despised by the evil times (*duryuga*)? After waking up, Vastupāla sets out on pilgrimage in order to restore *dharma*. It is in this context that Somanātha is described in connection with Jaina pilgrimage, and here it receives more detailed treatment than in any of the other *kāvya*s considered in this paper.

<i>Text</i>	<i>Author</i>	<i>Approximate Date</i>	<i>Context</i>
<i>Lalitavigraharāja</i>	Somadeva	1153 CE	Cāhamāna court composition under Vīgraharāja IV
<i>Prthvīrājavijaya</i>	Jayānaka	1191–1193 CE	Cāhamāna court composition under Prthvīrāja III
<i>Śaṅkhaaparābhava</i>	Harihara	1220–1240 CE	Literary circle of Vastupāla, minister of the Vaghela rulers Vīradhavalā and Vīsaladeva
<i>Sukṛtasāṅkīrtana</i>	Arisimha	1222–1231 CE	Literary circle of Vastupāla
<i>Kīrtikaumudī</i>	Someśvara	1232–1240 CE	Literary circle of Vastupāla
<i>Vasantavilāsa</i>	Bālacandra	After 1240 CE	Literary circle of Vastupāla

Remembering Somanātha

A striking feature of these *kāvya*s is the preservation of earlier events and devotional practices, often recalling traditions associated with periods prior to, or within a century of, the Ghaznavid campaign. The continued recollection of such episodes in later *kāvya*s points to a strong transgenerational memory of pilgrimage, royal patronage, and sacred obligation. Thus,

the remembrance of the establishment of almshouses (*annasatra* or *satrāgāra*) on the route to Somanātha, the regular pilgrimages of rulers, the renovation of the temple, and the removal of pilgrimage tax are recurring themes in these *kāvya*s.

Thus, Jayānaka, in his *Pr̥thvīrājaviṣaya*, while giving the genealogy of the predecessors of Pr̥thvīrāja III (c. 1177–1191 CE) and extolling their achievements, remembers that Pr̥thvīrāja I (c. 1105 CE) built an almshouse on the way to Somanātha:

*acchinnaṃ somanāthādhvanyannasatraṃ ca kārayat(n) | idaṃ mokṣārthināṃ bhogaṃ
ānuṣaṅgikam abravīt ||*

“Establishing an uninterrupted almshouse (*annasatra*) on the road to Somanātha, he declared it to be an ancillary enjoyment (*bhoga*) for those who seek liberation (*mokṣa*).”¹⁸ (5.82)

The 15th century commentator Jonarāja explicitly identifies it as the *tīrtha* named Somanātha.¹⁹ Thus, the text preserves the memory of an incident from more than eighty years earlier. This underscores the significance of the temple within the literary imagination of royal obligation. Similarly, in Bālacandra’s *Vasantavilāsa*, Dharma appears in Vastupāla’s dream. He tells how he found a resting place (*saṃśraya*) through the pious act of Jayasimha’s mother, who constructed several almshouses (*satrāgāra*) on the road to Somanātha.

*yayā ca someśapathe yathecchaṃ tīrthādhvanīnopakṛtānnatoyaiḥ |
satrāmanobhirjagato’pi satrāgārairabhigrāhitasamśrayo’ham ||*²⁰

“By her—who, on the road to Someśa, established almshouses supplying food and water to pilgrims as they desired—I, Dharma, together with the minds of the world, was made to find a place of refuge.” (9.24)

Thus, the text, written more than a century after the reign of Jayasimha (c. 1083–1143 CE), remembers the pious act of the king’s mother. This shows that, in literary and royal imagination, support for pilgrimage to Somanātha is closely associated with the restoration of *dharma*.

Coming to the memory of pilgrimage undertaken by kings, Arisimha, in his *Sukṛtasāṅkīrtana*, mentions that Mūlarāja (c. 942–996 CE) made a weekly Monday pilgrimage to Somanātha. The regular pilgrimages of Mūlarāja and Jayasimha are mentioned by Bālacandra as well.²¹ Arisimha writes about Mūlarāja:

*suvyaktabhaktiḥ pratisomavāraṃ yaḥ somanāthaṃ praṇipatya vīraḥ |
tadbhālanetrānalacandrabhābhīrabhāra tejaśca yaśaśca puṣṭam ||*

“He, the hero—whose devotion was clearly manifest—having bowed to Somanātha every Monday (*somavāsara*), bore a radiance and a fame nourished by the lustre of the fire of His forehead-eye and of the moon.” (2.3)

Even if hyperbolic, this passage shows the recognition of Somanātha as a major *tīrtha* worthy of regular pilgrimage, especially by royal figures. The remembrance in a 13th century text of an event belonging to the 10th century points to a strong and enduring cultural memory.

Coming to royal patronage, in Bālacandra’s *Vasantavilāsa*, Dharma says that King Kumārapāla (c. 1143–1172 CE) repaired the temples of Kedāra and Someśvara, which were like the two horns of Dharma in the form of a bull:

*kedārasomeśvarayoratīva śīrṇe viṣāṇe tu vṛṣātmano me | rasāyanīva kṣayarogidehe
gehe punaryauvanatām anaiṣīt ||*²²

“To my abodes at Kedāra and Someśvara—the two horns of me, Dharma the bull, greatly worn away—he restored youth, like an elixir to the body of one afflicted with disease.” (9.28)

Thus, the text, composed after 1240 CE, refers to events nearly a century earlier, during the reign of Kumārapāla. This again shows the strong memory of royal patronage and sacred obligation. The metaphor of Dharma as a bull, with Kedāra and Someśvara as its horns, also underscores the ideological framing of temple repair as a restoration of cosmic order.

Dharma also mentions that Jayasimha’s mother caused the removal of the pilgrimage tax that was collected at a place called Bāhuloḍa on the road to Somanātha.²³

*jagāma ca śrījayasiṃhadevamātā satī sā mayaṇalladevī | matkheldolā kila
somanāthapatho yayā'mocyata bāhuloḍaḥ ||*²⁴

“That virtuous lady Mayaṇalladevī, mother of Śrī Jayasiṃha, has passed away—she who freed Bāhuloḍa, my pleasure-swing, on the road to Somanātha.” (9.23)

This further indicates that memory extended not only to acts of devotion and patronage, but also to administrative interventions that shaped pilgrimage. Coming to literary imagination, Arisiṃha invokes Somanātha in a hyperbolic yet significant praise of Siddharāja Jayasiṃha:

*śrīsomanātho'pi krpaikapātram yaṃ mātṛbhaktyaikaśuciṃ vilokya |
dakṣakratubrahmaśiraśchidādipāpminirmuktam amanyata svam ||*

“Even Śrī Somanātha, seeing him—the sole recipient of His grace, wholly pure through devotion to his mother—deemed himself freed from the waves of sin arising from the sacrifice of Dakṣa and the severing of Brahmā's head.”²⁵ (2.36)

The poet says that Lord Śiva, who purifies others, was himself purified on seeing a king whose devotion to his mother was without limit. This suggests the prominence of Somanātha within the literary imagination of this period.

These examples demonstrate that the *kāvya*s of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries did not merely recall isolated events, but preserved a structured memory and poetic imagination of Somanātha as a site of pilgrimage, royal obligation, and institutional support. Such recollections, spanning several decades to more than a century, indicate the persistence of a shared cultural memory that continued to shape the perception of the site in the 12th and 13th centuries.

Experiencing Somanātha

At the same time, these texts do not merely preserve the memory of the past but also reflect the experience of Somanātha as a living sacred centre in their own time. References to journeys from distant regions such as Gauḍa to Prabhāsa indicate the normalization of long-distance pilgrimage. *Lalitavigraharāja* of Somadeva provides striking evidence of pilgrimage

to Somanātha from far-off regions. In the first act, a traveller introduces himself to the king as Śubhānanda from Tarkkārī, a place renowned for learned *brāhmaṇas*. Following his father's death, and unable to bear the grief, he set out on pilgrimage to the Lord at Prabhāsa:

*taṃ draṣṭuṃ calito'smi viśvabhuvanaprāraṃbharakṣāvyaya-vyāpāraprabhavaṃ
prabhuṃ sumanasām īśaṃ prabhāsasthitam ||*²⁶

“I have now set out to behold Īśa, Lord of the gods, situated in Prabhāsa, who is the source of the creation, preservation, and dissolution of the entire world.”

This definitely refers to Somanātha, for the king explicitly takes the name of Somanātha towards the end of the first act. Śubhānanda travels from Tarkkārī to Prabhāsa via Imṇrapura (Delhi) and Śākambharī (Sambhar in Rajasthan). G. S. Gai has identified Tarkkārī as situated in the Rajshahi region of northwestern Bangladesh and the adjoining region of West Bengal.²⁷ Thus, the distance covered in this pilgrimage is considerable.

In the fourth act of the play, a Turuṣka spy tells two Turuṣka prisoners that he joined a caravan (*sārtha*) going to Lord Someśvara in order to enter the camp of Vighraharāja situated near Vavverā. Daśaratha Sharma identifies this with a small village about six miles from Khetrī in Rajasthan.²⁸ It is interesting to note that the poet's name is Somadeva, and Vighraharāja himself was a devotee of Śiva, as reflected in his devotional play *Harakeli*. In such a setting, even if the characters of Śubhānanda and the spy were imaginative, the play suggests that in popular imagination both long-distance pan-Indian pilgrimage and regional pilgrimage to Somanātha were familiar realities in the 12th century. It also suggests that pilgrims often moved in caravans.

Such pan-Indian pilgrimage is again substantiated by *Śaṅkhaaparābhava* of Harihara. In the prelude, it is said that, in the context of pilgrimage to Śrī Someśvara, Harihara, the head-jewel of Gauḍa country (*gauḍacūḍāmaṇi*), having been impressed by the qualities of Vastupāla, composed the play that is about to be enacted.²⁹ This pilgrimage of Harihara is corroborated by *Prabandhakośa* of Rājaśekhara (1349 CE).³⁰ According to it, Harihara went to worship Someśvara at Devapattana. Because of the similarity of names, he remembered the poet Someśvara at the Vaghela court, became sad on recalling his earlier conduct, uttered two verses addressed to Somanātha (12.11–12), and then left for Kāsī (Kāśi).

These *kāvya*s do not merely describe long-distance pilgrimages, but also large congregations of pilgrims flocking to Somanātha from all over India, bearing all sorts of hardships and discomforts. Thus, pilgrimage was not merely individual, but also collective and large-scale. In *Vasantavilāsa*, Bālacandra gives a striking sketch of the great crowd arriving at Somanātha with poetic fancy:

*nirgacchadāgacchadanekarūpasomeśayātrālasamānalokam | dr̥ṣṭam tad iṣṭam nanu
yena tena prabhūtadeśā'pi vilokitā bhūḥ ||³¹ someśam ārāddhum upāgatena janena
nānāvidhakaṣṭabhājā | vilokya paurīvadanāni tūrṇam yatraiva yātrāphalam āpyate
tat ||*

“One who beheld the throng upon the pilgrimage to Someśa—people of many kinds, arriving and departing in endless forms—has, indeed, seen the whole earth with its many regions. For those who come to worship Someśa, bearing many kinds of hardship, the fruit of the pilgrimage is gained at once there—by beholding the faces of the town’s women.” (11.35–36)

Thus, in the words of the poet, Somanātha was a destination for pilgrims from far and distant lands, and one could see the diversity of many regions in the crowds assembled there.

Finally, we come to the pilgrimage of Vastupāla, which forms a central theme of the three *mahākāvya*s taken here from Vastupāla’s “literary circle.” In *Sukṛtasaukīrtana*, between his visit to the Śatruñjaya and Raivataka mountains, Vastupāla arrives at Devapattana and prostrates before Śiva. This shows Somanātha’s royal significance as a *tīrtha* even within a Jaina pilgrimage framework. Arisimha beautifully describes the western ocean and explicitly mentions Somanātha, evoking the serene environment of the seashore:

*sacivaḥ samaṁ sapadi saṅghajanairatha devapattanam agānnagaram | praṇanāma
kāmajayinam nayanapriyam indulāñchanam ihogramahāḥ ||
vidhumaulimaulividhudhāmabharairiha me bhaviṣyati sadā'bhyudayaḥ | iti pāthasām
amum amutra patiṁ kṛtavāsam aikṣata sa mantripatiḥ || iha
somanāthamukutollasitaiḥ
saridambubhirvidhuvibhābhirapi|satatapravṛddhaviharallaharīnivahadhvanidhvanita*

digvalayam ||

“Then, the minister at once, together with the members of the saṅgha, proceeded to the city of Devapattana; and here he bowed to the moon-crested Lord—conqueror of Kāma, delightful to the eyes. That lord of ministers beheld there the ocean, the lord of waters, who had made that place his abode with the following thought: “Here shall my prosperity ever increase, through the mass of the moon’s radiance upon the head of the moon-crested Śiva.” Here he beheld the ocean, its ceaselessly surging waves—rising from waters issuing from Śiva’s crest³² and from the moon’s rays³³—making the circle of the quarters resound.” (8.1–3)

In *Kīrtikaumudī*, the route of pilgrimage is slightly different. After visiting Śatruñjaya and Raivataka mountains, Vastupāla finally arrives at Prabhāsa in Saurāṣṭra and prostrates to Candraprabha. The poet tells us that at this *tīrtha*, Vastupāla, with devotion, worshipped Śiva famous by the name Somanātha. Thus, Somanātha marking the final destination of Vastupāla’s pilgrimage itself points to its significance. He worshipped Somanātha with camphor and incense:

abhyarcya bhaktyā bhavam atra tīrthe śrīsomanāthābhidhayā prasiddham |
prattaprasūnāñjalīnā pradatto jalāñjalistena punarbhavāya ||
tenopanītairghanasārādhūpaiḥ svam aṅgam aṅgāritamīnaketuḥ | śaṅke sa
laṅkeśvarakandharāścirāya viśraṃ surabhīcakāra ||

“By having devoutly worshipped Bhava at this *tīrtha* famed as Śrī Somanātha, offering handfuls of flowers, he presented a libation of water to Kāma, the reborn.³⁴ With the camphor and incense he brought, Śiva—who had reduced fish-bannered Kāma to ashes—seems to have made his own body fragrant, long tainted, I think, by the blood flowing from the heads of Rāvaṇa, lord of Laṅkā.” (9.71–72)

As per epigraphical evidence, a pilgrimage to Śatruñjaya, Ujjayanta (Raivataka), and other great *tīrthas* took place in Vikrama year 1277 (c. 1220–21 CE). In order to harmonise the contradiction between *Kīrtikaumudī* and *Sukṛtasaṅkīrtana* in the sequence of *tīrthas* visited by Vastupāla, Bühler argues that two different visits to Devapattana took place.³⁵

Even though the visit to Somanātha and the worship of Somanātha are described in these two *kāvyas*, the information remains brief. Compared to the relatively scanty references in *Sukṛtasaṅkīrtana* and *Kīrtikaumudī*, Bālacandra gives a much more detailed description of Somanātha. In the eleventh canto of *Vasantavilāsa*, Vastupāla's visit to Somanātha is described through a carefully structured ritual sequence at Prabhāsa. It includes bathing at subsidiary *tīrthas*, entry into the temple complex, and rituals such as *abhiṣeka* and *nīrājana*, culminating in acts of donation such as *tulādāna*. These are not documentary reports but literary representations that nonetheless reflect observable ritual and pilgrimage practices of their time.

After listening to Dharma in the dream, Vastupāla sets out on pilgrimage. First, the pilgrimage to Śatruñjaya is described in detail. The eleventh canto is then devoted to “the lord (*adhipa/adhipati*) of Prabhāsa *tīrtha*,” which refers to Somanātha, before whom Vastupāla proceeds to prostrate.³⁶ The group of pilgrims led by Vastupāla moves towards Somatīrtha.³⁷ The temple's flag (*vaijayantī*) is described with highly poetic fancy and compared with the Gaṅgā.³⁸ As Vastupāla reaches the city of Śrī Somanātha, he is gazed upon by the ladies of Surāṣṭra.³⁹

The foam moved by the wave-hands of Sarasvatī and the western ocean seems like moving fly-whisks (*cāmara*) before Somanātha. As water keeps splashing from the shore and the ocean is always resounding, the service of incense and drum-beating (*paṭaha*) thrice a day before Someśa seems almost unnecessary:

sarasvatīvāridhivīcihastasañcārityasya puraḥ purasya |
parasparāśleṣavibhedavadbhiścāmaryam ācaryata phenakūṭaiḥ ||
tīrasphuṭannīrakadambakena bahiḥ sadā garjati yatra vārddhau | vṛthaiva
someśapinākinō 'gre trirdhūpavelāpaṭahaprapañcaḥ ||

“Before that city of His (Somanātha), the masses of foam—set in motion by the wave-hands of the Sarasvatī and the ocean, and breaking apart as though after embracing one another—performed, as it were, the service of *cāmara*. There, with clusters of water bursting forth along the shore, and the ocean continually roaring outside, the elaborate performance of incense-offering and drum-beating, thrice enacted before Someśa, the bearer of Pināka, was indeed in vain.” (11.33–34)

This shows how the environment of the temple at the confluence of the Sarasvatī with the western ocean, along with the daily rituals performed there, was experienced and poetically represented.

Vastupāla entered the *pattana* of Maheśa, who, pleased at his arrival, seemed to perform *tāṇḍava* through the waving arms of the temple banners.⁴⁰ Observed by the ladies of the city, Vastupāla finally entered the *prāsāda* of Śrī Somanātha Pinākapāṇi.⁴¹ Then follows the description of the immense height of the temple and its golden *toraṇas*:

brahmāṇḍabhāṇḍopamamaṇḍapaśrīratyuccakaiḥ kiṃ bahu varṇyate yaḥ |
maḥītalavyomatalāntarālapramāṇadaṇḍaśrīyamādadhāti || yasmin sadā
dhūpaghaṭīsamutthadhūmormibhiḥ sāmбудhanāghanābhe |⁴² vidyudbhramaṇ
bibhrati śātakumbhakumbhadhvajokṣādhipatorāṇāni ||

“What more can be said of that shrine, whose splendid *maṇḍapa*, resembling the cosmic vessel (*brahmāṇḍabhāṇḍa*), seems to assume the form of a measuring rod (*pramāṇadaṇḍa*) spanning the very distance between earth and sky? There, with billowing waves of smoke rising from constant incense-offerings, the shrine appears like a rain-laden cloud; and the golden *toraṇas* of Śiva—lord of the bull Kumbhadhvaja—create the illusion of flashes of lightning.” (11.60–61)

This verse is rich in poetic imagination and suggests that the temple must have appeared majestic and richly adorned in the 13th century.

After this follows perhaps the most significant part of *Vasantavilāsa*: the highly structured worship of Somanātha by Vastupāla. He first prostrated before a *dharmasīlā*:

saddharmavid dharmasīlām upetya daṇḍapraṇāmaṇ vidadhe praṇāmaṇ | gattvā ca
garbhālayamadhyam adhyālilīṅga someśvaram aṣṭamūrttim ||

“He, well-versed in the true dharma, approached the *dharmasīlā* and performed a full prostration, stretching his body upon the ground. Then, having entered the very centre of the sanctum, he embraced Someśvara, the lord of eightfold form.”⁴³ (11.63)

The *dharmasīlā* appears to refer to a consecrated stone or slab situated within the temple complex, possibly near the entrance to the sanctum, functioning as a preliminary point of devotion. The sequence suggests a structured ritual progression, in which acts of reverence are spatially organised before the central act of worship of the *liṅga*.

Then follows the elaborate worship. First, Vastupāla bathes (*abhiṣeka*) the *liṅga*. Then he anoints it with camphor, black *agaru*, sandal paste, and other substances:

*atho tameva snapayan hṛdisthaṃ pramodajairlocanakumbhatoyaiḥ | pañcāmṛtaiḥ
pañcaśaraprapañcajitam jitāriḥ snapayāmbabhūva ||
karpūrakṛṣṇāgurucandanādivilepanairviśvagurum vilipya | viśram
daśagrīvaśirodharāsrairamātyaśambhuḥ surabhīcakāra ||*

“Then, bathing that very Lord—enshrined within his own heart—with the waters from the pitchers of his eyes, born of joy, he, the conqueror of enemies, bathed Śiva—who has subdued the manifold play of the five-arrowed Kāma—with the five nectars (*pañcāmṛta*).”⁴⁴ Having anointed the preceptor of the whole world with camphor, black *agaru*, sandal, and the like, he—the Śambhu-like minister—made Him fragrant, as though dispelling the foul odour caused by the blood from the severed heads of the ten-headed Rāvaṇa.” (11.34–35)

The last verse can be compared with *Kīrtikaumudī* 9.74 quoted earlier. These verses move from external ritual to an interiorised dimension of devotion. The imagery of bathing the Lord situated in the heart with tears of joy suggests that ritual action is complemented by emotional and inward devotion. At the same time, the sequence of *pañcāmṛta abhiṣeka* and anointing with fragrant substances reflects standard temple liturgy. The combination of inner (*bhāva*) and formal ritual underscores the fully developed and experiential nature of worship at Somanātha.

Then follow the offerings of flowers, propitiation with silken cloths, and the offering of camphor, black *agaru*, and incense causing dense clouds of smoke:

anyūnabhaktiḥ sa varaprasūnavṛndena vṛndārakavandanīyam | vṛṣāṅkam abhyarcya

vr̥ṣāyamāṇo 'nukūlayāmāsa tato dukūlaiḥ ||
karpūrakṣṇāgurudhūpadhūmavīcībhiruccai racayāñcakāra | tathā ghanān eṣa
ghanān aśeṣaśreyovanī samvavṛdhe yathāśya ||

“With undiminished devotion, he—himself a bull among men—having worshipped the bull-bannered Lord, who is revered by the hosts of gods, with clusters of excellent flowers, then further propitiated Him with silken garments. With billowing waves of smoke from camphor, black *agaru*, and incense, he raised aloft dense clouds, so that the grove of all his merits (*śreyas*) might flourish in full abundance.”⁴⁵ (11.66–67)

These verses extend the ritual sequence beyond *abhiṣeka* and anointing to include flowers, garments, and incense. The imagery of rising smoke forming cloud-like masses nourishing the grove of merit suggests a symbolic link between ritual action and the accumulation of religious merit. This again points to a well-developed and layered liturgical practice at Somanātha.

Then follow the performance of *nāndī*, dance, music, food offering (*naivedya*), and *nīrājana* before Somanātha:

nāndīmanādīnavacittavṛttiḥ sa tāṇḍavam tāṇḍavitapratāpaḥ | sugītam
uccairdalitāvagītaḥ puraḥ purāreḥ prathayāñcakāra || samvedyavedī
sacivo 'nivedyanaivedyamālāṃ vimalāntarātmā | aḍhaukayat
prauḍhaguṇaprārūḍhakīrttiḥ puraḥ kṛttibhṛtaḥ kṛtī saḥ ||⁴⁶
akārayaddīpratamapradīpairvirājiviśvārttitamahpradīpaiḥ | nīrājanam
rājasabhāvataṃsaḥ śrīsomanāthasya yathocitaṃ saḥ ||

“With a mind renewed for the occasion, he recited the *nāndī*-hymns; he—whose prowess itself seems to dance, and whose fame has shattered all reproach—caused dance and melodious song to be performed aloud before Purāri. That accomplished minister, knowing what was to be known, with a pure heart and a fame grown from mature virtues, presented *naivedya* in due form before Śiva, the bearer of the hide.”⁴⁷ That ornament of the royal assembly then performed the *nīrājana* of Śrī Somanātha as prescribed, with exceedingly radiant lamps—lamps whose brilliance dispels the darkness of the world’s afflictions.” (11.68–70)

These concluding verses complete the ritual progression. The poet seems to intend some kind of hymn-recitation by the word *nāndī*. The inclusion of dance, song, and formal offerings indicates that worship at Somanātha was not limited to individual acts of devotion but involved coordinated liturgical elements. The sequence—from prostration to ablution, anointing, offerings, and finally *nīrājana*—reflects a highly structured and elaborate ritual environment.

Finally, Vastupāla gave gold, silver, and other metals (*kupya*) equal to his weight (*tulāpuṃs*) several times for Śrī Somanātha, and also gave gifts to worthy recipients.⁴⁸ Then, after worshipping Candraprabha, he departed for Raivata.⁴⁹

Such elaborate space given to Somanātha within a Jaina pilgrimage narrative by a Jaina author tells us much about the significance of Somanātha and offers a perspective somewhat different from the rivalry narratives of texts like *Prabandhacintāmaṇi* that have often been stressed in modern scholarship. In these *kāvya*s, Somanātha is included within a larger Jaina pilgrimage network without any diminution of its significance and without any explicit sense of rivalry. Moreover, Bālacandra's account is not a stray mention of pilgrimage, but one equipped with a clearly structured code of worship. Dharma had complained of his deterioration in the Kali age, and Vastupāla sought to restore Dharma through pilgrimage both to Jaina shrines and to Somanātha.

Thus, the contemporary experience of Somanātha reflected in these *kāvya*s is varied. It includes evidence of pan-Indian pilgrimage routes, the movement of large and diverse groups of pilgrims, and a clearly structured pattern of ritual worship performed at the temple. Taken together, these descriptions suggest Somanātha as an active and well-organised sacred centre, deeply embedded in both regional and wider networks of religious travel and practice.

Conclusion

The foregoing analysis has shown that Sanskrit *kāvya*s of 12th–13th century western India offer a distinctive perspective on Somanātha that has remained largely underexplored in modern scholarship. While much of the existing discussion has been shaped by narratives of desecration, rivalry, and political legitimation, these *kāvya*s instead bring into focus continuity, both in memory and in lived religious practice. It must be noted that this

continuity has already been recognised in scholarship, particularly through epigraphic evidence and Jaina narrative traditions. The present study does not aim to propose an entirely new framework. Rather, it seeks to complement these established sources by bringing Sanskrit *kāvya* material into the discussion as an additional and understudied body of evidence.

On the one hand, these texts preserve a sustained and layered memory of Somanātha. References to royal patronage, the establishment of almshouses, regular royal pilgrimages, removal of pilgrimage taxes, and acts of temple renovation suggest that Somanātha was remembered not only as a sacred site, but also as a centre of enduring royal and religious responsibility. Many of these recollections refer to events from several decades, and sometimes more than a century earlier. This indicates the presence of a continuing cultural memory that shaped literary representation over time.

On the other hand, the same *kāvyas* also reflect the contemporary experience of Somanātha as an active and functioning sacred centre. Mentions of long-distance pilgrimage from regions such as Gauḍa to Prabhāsa show its integration within wider networks of religious travel. Descriptions of caravans, large gatherings of pilgrims, and structured ritual practices further suggest that pilgrimage was continuous, socially organised, and institutionally supported. In particular, the detailed account of worship in Bālacandra's *Vasantavilāsa* points to a well-defined ritual environment and an active temple setting.

A notable feature of these texts is the place of Somanātha within Jaina literary contexts. Even when included within narratives primarily centred on Jaina pilgrimage or patronage, the temple is neither marginalised nor reduced in significance. Instead, it appears as an important and at times culminating point within pilgrimage routes, suggesting a shared sacred geography in which major *tīrthas* were recognised across sectarian boundaries.

Taken together, these *kāvyas* present a twofold representation of Somanātha, as a site remembered from the past and as a living presence in the present. This dual perspective allows us to move beyond a historiography focused mainly on rupture and to recognise instead patterns of continuity in pilgrimage, patronage, and sacred memory. In this sense, Sanskrit *kāvyas* are not merely literary compositions, but also valuable historical witnesses to the cultural life of sacred centres. Thus, between the two well-known episodes of desecration,

Somanātha emerges in these texts not as a disrupted or forgotten site, but as a continuing and active centre of devotion, sustained through networks of memory, movement, and ritual practice.

Notes and references

¹ For a brief summary of Maḥmūd's career, see R. C. Majumdar, ed., *The History and Culture of the Indian People*, Vol. 5, *The Struggle for Empire* (Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 2001), 5–22; and M. Habib, "Career of Sultan Mahmud", in *Sultan Mahmud of Ghaznin: A Study* (Aligarh Muslim University Publications, 1927), 11–57.

² K. M. Munshi, *Somanatha: The Shrine Eternal* (Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1965), 25; and R. C. Majumdar, ed., *The History and Culture of the Indian People*, Vol. 5, *The Struggle for Empire* (Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 2001), 74–75.

³ R. C. Majumdar, ed., *The History and Culture of the Indian People*, Vol. 5, *The Struggle for Empire* (Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 2001), 19–21; and K. M. Munshi, *Somanatha: The Shrine Eternal* (Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1965), 35–39.

⁴ See v. 17: "... someśvarasya agrataḥ... ātmānam tulayām babhūva," published in A. S. Gadre, *Important Inscriptions from Baroda State*, Vol. 1 (Baroda State Press, 1943), 69. See also K. M. Munshi, *Somanatha: The Shrine Eternal* (Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1965), 40, who mistakenly identifies Śaṣṭha II as Siyaka II and gives the date as 1045 instead of 1042. For a survey of inscriptions attesting to the continued prominence of Somanātha as a sacred centre, see R. Thapar, "Sanskrit Inscriptions from Somanatha and Its Vicinity", in *Somanatha: The Many Voices of a History*, (Penguin Viking, 2004), 76–104.

⁵ K. M. Munshi, *Somanatha: The Shrine Eternal* (Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1965), chaps. 11–12, 40–49.

⁶ R. C. Majumdar, ed., *The History and Culture of the Indian People*, Vol. 6, *The Delhi Sultanate* (Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1967), 19.

⁷ R. H. Davis, *Lives of Indian Images* (Princeton University Press, 1997), chap. 3, 88–112; chap. 6, 186–221.

⁸ R. Thapar, "Biographies, Chronicles and Epics," in *Somanatha: The Many Voices of a History* (Penguin Viking, 2004), 105–45.

⁹ See Jayānaka, *Prthvīrājavijayamahākāvya* (Rajasthani Granthagar, 2022). I have also translated and annotated the *Lalitavigraharāja* in connection with my M.A. dissertation, which remains unpublished.

¹⁰ For a literary and historical analysis of the play, see A. Kumar, “A World Inscribed in Stone: Literary and Historical Study of the Medieval Sanskrit Play Lalitavigraharāja” (M.A. diss., University Name, 2026).

¹¹ For a comprehensive study of this topic see, B. J. Sandesara, *Literary Circle of Mahāmātya Vastupāla and Its Contribution to Sanskrit Literature* (Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1953).

¹² For a short biography of Harihara, see B. J. Sandesara, *Literary Circle of Mahāmātya Vastupāla and Its Contribution to Sanskrit Literature* (Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1953), 52–55.

¹³ For a comparison of the contents of these kāvyas, see the introduction to *Vasantavilāsamahākāvya*, ix–x.

¹⁴ See 83–84 in the edition of *Sukṛtasaṅkīrtana*.

¹⁵ For a short biography of Arisimha, see B. J. Sandesara, *Literary Circle of Mahāmātya Vastupāla and Its Contribution to Sanskrit Literature* (Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1953), 61–64.

¹⁶ See 46 in the edition of *Kīrtikaumudī*.

¹⁷ For a short biography of Someśvara, see B. J. Sandesara, *Literary Circle of Mahāmātya Vastupāla and Its Contribution to Sanskrit Literature* (Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1953), 44–52.

¹⁸ All translations are my own.

¹⁹ *somanāthatīrthamārge’navaratam annasatram ca kārayadi(nni)dam annasatrakaraṇam mokṣakāṅkṣiṇām ānuṣaṅgikaṃ phalam akathayat || avaśyaṃ mokṣaḥ prāptavyaḥ prasaṅgād annamapi prāptam ityarthah ||*

²⁰ I tentatively read it as *satrā maobhiḥ*, rather than *satrāmaobhiḥ*.

²¹ *Vasantavilāsa* 9.21: śrīmūlarājaḥ sa jagāma rājā yayau ca sa śrījayasiṃhadevaḥ | someśayātrābhīranaiṣi viśvamanīṣitām sphātim ahaṃ yakābhyām ||

²² The *anvaya* of the verse is not entirely clear; hence, the translation remains tentative. The disease is described as *kṣaya*, which is commonly identified in modern medical terminology with tuberculosis, especially pulmonary tuberculosis.

²³ B. J. Sandesara, *Literary Circle of Mahāmātya Vastupāla and Its Contribution to Sanskrit Literature* (Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1953), 99. A. S. Altekar identifies Bāhuloḍa with the village Bholada, situated about 20 miles south-west of Dholka; see A. S. Altekar, “A History of Important Ancient Towns and Cities in Gujarat and Kathiawad (From the Earliest Times Down to the Modern Conquest)”, *The Indian Antiquary* 53–54 (1924–25): 33.

²⁴ The connection between the words *somanāthapathaḥ* and *bāhuloḍa* is not entirely clear; hence, the translation remains tentative.

²⁵ Dakṣa's sacrifice refers to Śiva's destruction of Dakṣa's ritual, while the cutting of Brahmā's head alludes to the episode in which Śiva severed one of Brahmā's heads, thereby incurring the sin of *brahmahatyā*.

²⁶ F. Kielhorn, *Bruchstücke Indischer Schauspiele in Inschriften zu Ajmere* (Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1901), 4, line 17.

²⁷ G. S. Gai, "Tarkkārī," *The Indian Historical Quarterly* 35 (1959): 271–73.

²⁸ See Dasharatha Sharma, *Early Chauhān Dynasties: A Study of Chauhān Political History, Chauhān Political Institutions and Life in the Chauhān Dominions from c. 800 to 1316 A.D.* (Delhi: S. Chand & Co., 1959), 68; and Jay Vardhan Singh, "Evolution of the Representations of Muslims in the Non-Arabo-Persian Literary Sources of Northern India, c. Eighth Century AD to Fifteenth Century AD" (PhD diss., Jawaharlal Nehru University, 2025), 72.

²⁹ *Śaṅkhaaparābhava*, 3: *gauḍacūḍāmaṇerasya bhāradvājadvijanmanaḥ | pavitrāyati nāmaiva dūre cāritracāturī || 7*

|| tad alam ativistareṇa, prastutam anusarāmaḥ | yad ayam anena mahākavinā

śrīsomeśvarayātrāprasaṅgasaṅgatena

sūrisūraśiromaṇermahārājaśrīvīradhavalasacivaśekharasya

vasantapālasya

guṇānurāgavaśamvadahṛdayena nirmāya samarpito 'yaṁ prabandhaḥ sāmpratam

abhineṣyate |

³⁰ See *Prabandhakośa*, "Hariharaprabandha," 61.

³¹ It is not clear why the poet has used the neuter gender at the end of the second *pāda*. It is also unclear what the purport of the word *iṣṭam* is.

³² The reference is to the river Gaṅgā.

³³ The moon causes the ocean to surge.

³⁴ Kāma was reduced to ashes by Śiva. Later, he was revived, but without a body (Anaṅga).

³⁵ See 76–77 of his critical study in the edition of *Sukṛtasāṅkīrtana*.

³⁶ 11.1. The colophon to the eleventh canto reads *prabhāsatīrthādhipavarṇana*.

³⁷ 11.16.

³⁸ 11.26.

³⁹ 11.31–32.

⁴⁰ 11.44.

⁴¹ 11.59.

⁴² The meaning of the word *ghaṭī* in this context is not clear.

⁴³ The eightfold form of Śiva consists of water, fire, the sacrificer, the sun, the moon, the sky, the earth, and wind.

⁴⁴ Milk, curd, honey, ghee, and sugar—these five constitute *pañcāmṛta*.

⁴⁵ A grove flourishes when sprinkled by water-laden clouds.

⁴⁶ I adopt the readings *nāndīm anādīnnavacittavṛttiḥ* instead of *nāndīmanādīnnavacittavṛttiḥ*, and *sacivo nivedya naivedyamālam* instead of *sacivo 'nivedyanaivedyamālam*. However, the use of both *nivedya* and *aḍhaukayat* in the verse remains unclear to me.

⁴⁷ Śiva bears the hide of the elephant-demon Gajāśura.

⁴⁸ 11.71–72.

⁴⁹ 11.73.

Bibliography

Altekar, A. S. “A History of Important Ancient Towns and Cities in Gujarat and Kathiawad (From the Earliest Times Down to the Modern Conquest).” *The Indian Antiquary* 53-54, (1924-25): 1–54.

Balacandra Suri. *Vasantavilāsamahākāvya*. Edited by Chimanlal D. Dalal. Central Library, 1917.

Bühler, G. “Cintra Praśasti of the Reign of Sāraṅgadeva.” *Epigraphia Indica* 1, (1892): 271-87.

Choudhary, G. C. *Political History of Northern India from Jain Sources (c. 650 A.D. to 1300 A.D.)*. Sohanlal Jaindharma Pracharak Samiti, 1963.

Davis, R. H. *Lives of Indian Images*. Princeton University Press, 1997.

Gadre, A. S. *Important Inscriptions from Baroda State*. Vol. 1. Baroda, 1943.

Gai, G. S. “Tarkkāri.” *The Indian Historical Quarterly* 35, (1959): 271-73.

Habib, M. *Sultan Mahmud of Ghaznin: A Study*. Aligarh Muslim University Publications, 1927.

Harihara. *Śāṅkha-Parābhava-Vyāyoga: A Historical Sanskrit Play by Harihara*. Edited by Bhogilal J. Sandesara. Oriental Institute, 1965.

Jayanaka. *Prithvirājaviṣaya of Jayānaka: With the Commentary of Jonarāja*. Edited by

- Gaurishankar Hirachand Ojha and Chandradhar Sharma Guleri. *Vedic Yantralaya*, 1941.
- Jayānaka. *Pr̥thvīrājaviṣayamahākāvyaṃ*. Rajasthani Granthagar, 2022.
- Kielhorn, F. “Sanskrit Plays, Partly Preserved as Inscriptions at Ajmere.” *The Indian Antiquary* 20, (1891): 201-12.
- Kielhorn, F. *Bruchstücke Indischer Schauspiele in Inschriften zu Ajmere*. Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1901.
- Kumar, Alok. *A World Inscribed in Stone: Literary and Historical Study of the Medieval Sanskrit Play Lalitavigraharaja*. MA diss., Chinmaya Vishwa Vidyapeeth, 2026.
- Majumdar, A. K. *Chaulukyas of Gujarat: A Survey of the History and Culture of Gujarat from the Middle of the Tenth to the End of the Thirteenth Century*. Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1956.
- Majumdar, R. C., ed. *The History and Culture of the Indian People: The Struggle for Empire*. Vol. 5. Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 2001.
- Majumdar, R. C., ed. *The History and Culture of the Indian People: The Delhi Sultanate*. Vol. 6. Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1967.
- Moraes, G. M. *The Kadamba Kula: A History of Ancient and Medieval Karnataka*. B. X. Furtado & Sons, 1931.
- Munshi, K. M., *Somanatha: The Shrine Eternal*. Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1965.
- Peterson, P., ed. *A Collection of Prakrit and Sanskrit Inscriptions*. The Bhavnagar Archaeological Department, 1892.
- Rajasekhara Suri. *Prabandha Kośa*. Edited by Jina Vijaya. The Adhiṣṭhātā-Singhī Jaina Jñānapīṭha, 1935.
- Sandesara, B. J. *Literary Circle of Mahāmātya Vastupāla and Its Contribution to Sanskrit Literature*. Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1953.
- Sarda, H. B. S. “The Prithviraja Vijaya.” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, (1913): 259–281.
- Sharma, D. S. *Early Chauhan Dynasties: A Study of Chauhan Political History, Chauhan Political Institutions and Life in the Chauhan Dominions from c. 800 to 1316 A.D.* S. Chand & Co., 1959.
- Singh, J. V. *Evolution of the Representations of Muslims in the Non-Arabo-Persian Literary Sources of Northern India, c. Eighth Century AD to Fifteenth Century AD*. PhD diss., Jawaharlal Nehru University, 2025.
- Someśvara Deva, and Arisimha Ṭhakkura. *Kīrtikaumudī and Sukṛtakīrtana*. Edited by

Punyavijaya. Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1961.

Thapar, R. *Somanatha: The Many Voices of a History*. Penguin Viking, 2004.

Water as a Material: Role of Water in Sustaining the Collective Cultural Identity through the Somnath Built Landscape

Veeksha Mehndiratta

Independent Scholar

New Delhi

veeksha.mehndiratta@gmail.com

Abstract

The ancient Somnath site and the Temple did not merely exist, it was chosen. Chosen, among twelve sacred sites, to usher Bharat through the thresholds of deep energetic provenance across generations. The genus loci of the landscape embody the spirit of exploration of both inner and outer worlds. The Author studies Prabhas Kshetra through cartographic, architectural, site specific as well as ritualistic mapping, that negotiates through the usual historic tropes. The interrogation will anchor tangible and immaterial concepts of 'water' as a continuing thread as she bears witness to the ravages and irreverent desecrations across timelines. The paper reframes 'water' as a material of three intersecting dimensions of tangibility, interpretation and experience.

Keywords: Pancha Maha Bhuta, Regeneration, Sacred Geography, Sensorial Study, Soundscapes, Temple Architecture, Water as a Material

Introduction

Across millennia, Vedic knowledge fundamentally understood द्रव्य (Dravya/matter) through Pancha Mahabhuta, the five natural elements. Water, one of the five elements, holds a significant across Vedic Cosmology, Philosophy, and Ayurveda.¹ Water's physical and philosophical manifestations, in Sanskrit, are referred to as Jala and Apas respectively. This distinction aids in the articulation of the spiritual experience- especially in the built and formal environments such as temples.

जल (Jala) describes the physicality of water, while अपस् (Apas) interprets its divine characteristics through the ideas of purity, flow and clarity. In nature, water in the form of rivers, such as सिंधु (Sindhu) and सरस्वती (Saraswati), are revered for their life-giving and mighty presence. Seas, too, have seen similar veneration across Bharat. From the impactful episode of Samudra Manthan to the traditions of seafaring, cultural roots around the seas and particularly, the Indian Ocean, run deep.²

Many temples across the country, built with भक्ति (Bhakti/divine principle), can be found close to coastline, such as the Mahabalipuram Temple Complex, Surya Devalaya/Konark Sun Temple in Odisha, Dwarkadhish Temple and Somnath Temple in Gujarat and so on.³

Notably, all these temples' sites have rivers in proximity or in historical association. The Somnath Temple, one of the first Jyotirlingams (eternal shrine), is situated near the southern coast of Saurashtra in historic city of Prabhasa Patan. The Arabian Sea laps against its south and eastern side, and the sacred Triveni Maha Sangam occurs towards its south-western edge. The Somnath shrine is pre-historic and "according to ancient tradition, the low-lying lands between the mainland and Saurashtra was immersed in sea where River Saraswati emptied her waters". This threshold where the river met the sea was called असितीर्थ (Agnitirth) that alluded to Lord Shiva as the god of fire.⁴

Need for Study

The sensorial qualities of sacred spaces have been felt, documented, measured and recreated. However, the process and creation of visual lexicons is critical. A repository that is predominantly visual, symbolic and evocative. The interpretation of the Somnath site requires a strong cultural foundation to begin perching before the community stands.

Tools and Methodology

1. **Secondary Research:** An exploratory process produces layered evidence of literary, epigraphic, archaeological and cartographic nature. Here, the visual is experienced through impressions and personality- driven.
2. **Production of Images:** The Author utilises image production through tangible resources that is critical to the research process. Reifying the intangible sensorial elements is intertwined in the reflexivity of the process that lends to the material quality of the image. These aspects can be mapped to reveal similarities and contrasts to alluded ‘re/non-interpretation.’

Scope and Limitations

The paper brings a visual interpretation to the existing literature around the Somnath Temple. Myriad qualities of the experience are drawn into the visual through various tools and techniques embodying the multidimensionality of the subject. A phenomenological approach is required to further the study and bring out the philosophical and lived- experiences- which is beyond the scope of the paper.

Another interesting aspect of time can bridge the historic to historical, quantitatively. The temporal affects in a sacred space can be of great consequence to reify abstract concepts. The community awaits immersion and there is space for both. This study can lend into applied futures thinking and regenerative practices through tradition and spiritual revival.

Three Dimensions of Study

As multisensorial study invites different overlapping themes, three key aspects around water are identified by the Author. These themes offer constraints for detailed research. These include:

1. **Tangibility:** Viewing water in its physicality is the first step to appreciate the ‘materialness’ that attributes to clarity, temperature, speed and reflection. These characteristics propounds evidence to devotees and to ‘rational minds’.
2. **Interpretation:** Here, the familiarity with water is augmented through cultural layers. Narratives and oral traditions build a basis for tangible manifestations such as temples,

sculptures, smaller shrines as well as landscapes. The interaction is far more intimate- moving closer to the self- revealing the reflexive nature of inner and outer worlds.

3. **Experience:** The spatial experience in and around the Somnath complex is studied through fundamental elements- of the Pancha Maha Bhuta. Narratives scaffold the poetic experience while the tangibility platforms temporality through the permanence of its materials.

Water as a Material in Tangibility

Of Ports and Portals

As the first encounter to Somnath temple, the coastline extends immediate familiarity. Marine archaeological studies, especially at the Prabhas-Somnath coast in the Saurashtra region of Gujarat, highlight the strategic importance of the long coastline acting as a portal to flourishing trade and active ports.⁵ The banks of the Hiranya River revealed submerged anchors and wares from four cultural periods in the midst of corals- including the Lothal and Prabhas periods. The Indo-Roman trade connection corroborates the strong commercial foundation that Prabhasa Patan built. The trade route also connected other ancient ports in the larger Gujarat region, including Bharukaccha (later Broach) on the Narmada.⁶ Travelogues from 640 CE, describe the Capital of Valabhipur to be a powerful place of not only thriving trade but also of learning. Merchant princes, such as Grihagupta, were well-versed in sea navigation and owned a plethora of seafaring vessels.

Therefore, the Somnath temple was an important node of an international trade route connecting both land, sea and river systems. A few centuries later, this prosperous land-sea portal to Bharat witness far malicious intents of desecration and conversion.

The Triveni Maha Sangam

The strategic location of the Somnath site is not purely a sea to land connection but also of a sacred confluence. The three rivers- Hiranya, Kapila and Saraswati merge at the banks of Somnath. The Saurashtra landscape has been buried in the Deccan Traps formed by volcanic eruptions at the Western Ghats during the Cretaceous period, while Somnath lies in the post-Deccan Sediment zone.⁷

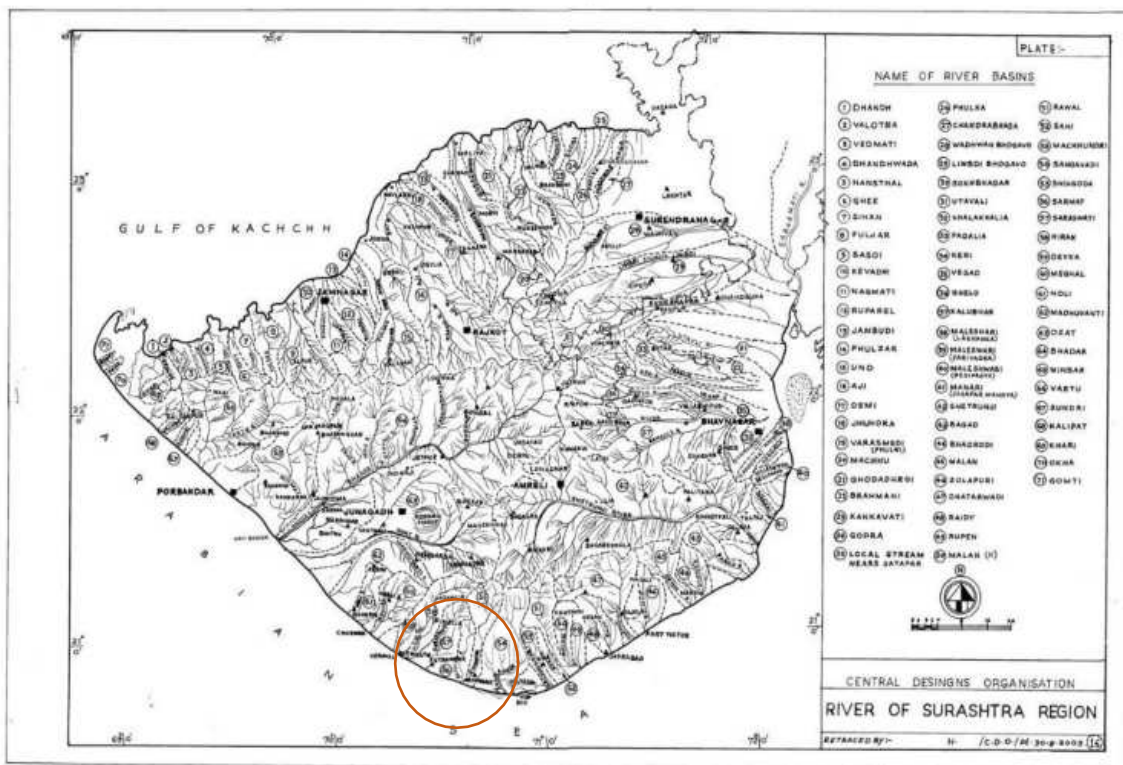


Figure 1: The map shows the river drainage system in the larger Saurashtra Basin. The orange circle marks the Triveni Maha Sangam⁸

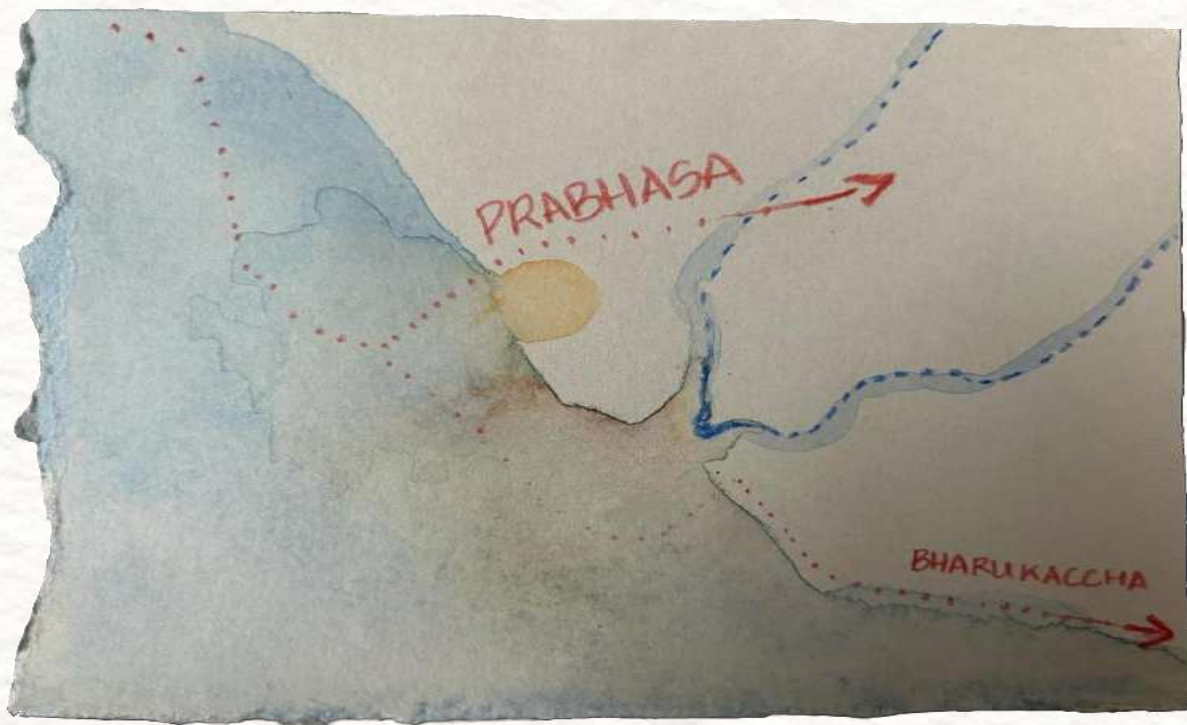


Figure 2: An artistic rendition of foreground continued cultural priorities through a watercolour medium and frayed paper technique

Water as a Material of Interpretation

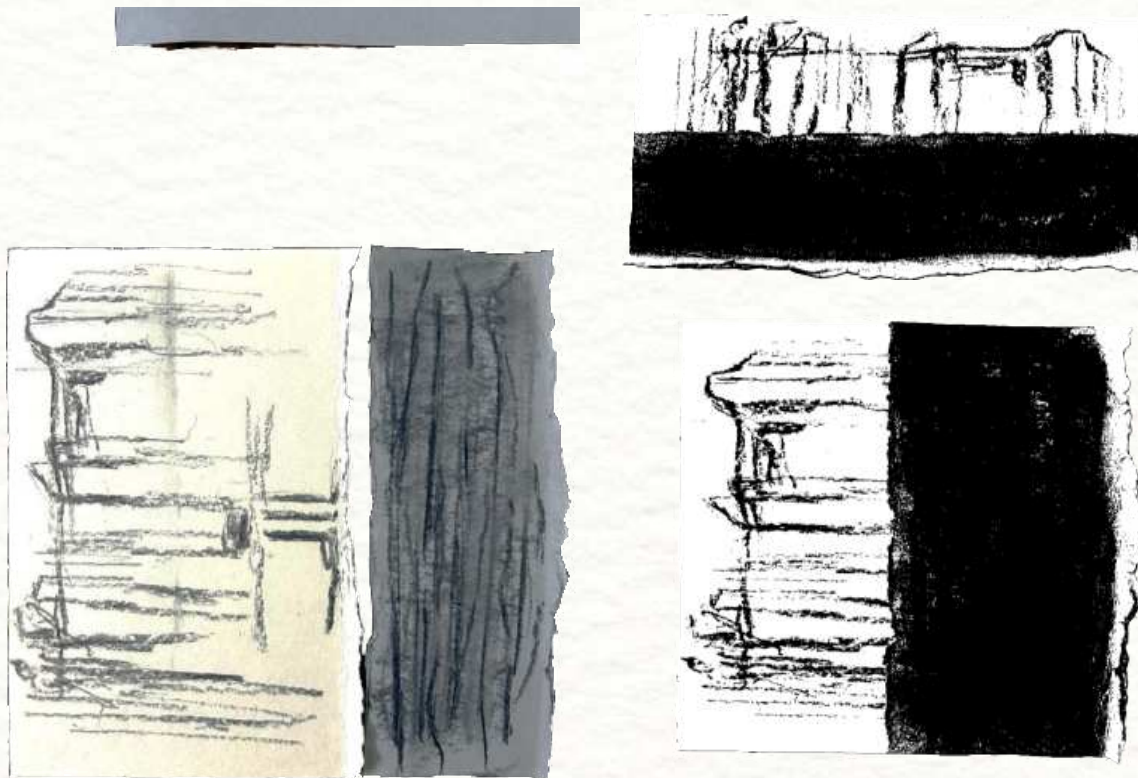


Figure 3: Material study of the temple and its text-based descriptions—‘Black Ruptures of Time’

While the First Temple was established around 1st century, the Second Temple was constructed in 649 CE by Shri Harsha Bhrugukachchha. The Brahmi inscriptions are also of this period. The garbagriha was constructed on the site of the First Temple with an open Sabhamandapa. Kanjur stone steps were utilised to connect the temple grounds to the sea from two sides.⁹

Material Study

The Kanjur stone steps are used as a focal point to interpret the Temple and its water-based environs. The Author dwells on the sedimentary grey stone which assimilates the lapping seawater- its memory, its clarity and its speed. The salty water highlights the porosity of the stone steps as a devotee reaches to the sea for a dip. The sandy- ashy surface creates stark shadows-temporal yet sustained. Black ruptures of time gains saturation as the wave wets the stone.

Since there is a dearth of visual studies of the Somnath Temple, the Author fills the gap through material study and text interpretations. 'Quasi-plein air' observational study' of the archival images of the Temple provides a guide to the visual lexicon. Charcoal is chosen as the tool for mark-making that offers a monochromatic tonal language. Colour is added through the paper as a background. The gold radiance of sunlit sandstone is in stark contrast to the ash steps.

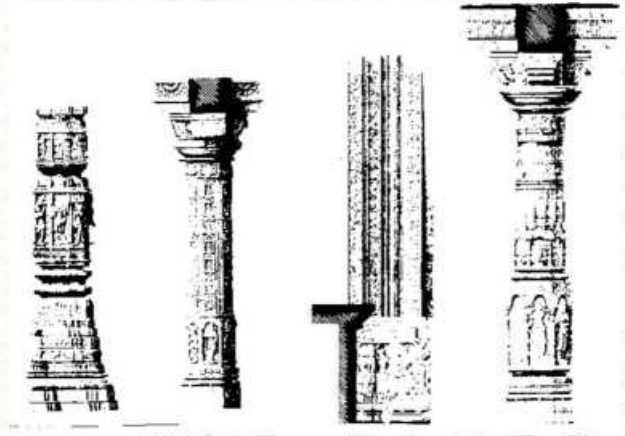


Figure 4: Archival Study of Moulding Ornamentation-Plate IX¹⁰

1. Directionality: The linear marks spotlight the proportions of the columns and their verticality. The roof terrace that is supported by pillars shades the temple entrances.
2. Temporality: The cosmological affects on the Temple and, through extension, the devotee, cannot be deemed instantaneous. Not by cycles, nor by waves and undoubtedly, not by Bhakti.
3. The permanence of temporality at Pattan can be sensed, shaping energy and emotion. The charcoal stick depicts this texture of experience by building depth juxtaposed with broad linear strokes.
4. Depth: The medium of charcoal reflects the ease and a paradoxical anticipation that represents the Devotee's passions, hopes and fears. The deep yet reflective black 'box' forms a dramatic depth- evoking contradictory feelings of control and letting go.
5. Ascension: As the Devotee descends to the land-sea threshold, the duality of an inner and outer world is apparent. The discipline and rituals promising Moksha rips through beliefs. Inside the Temple, ascension begins through stone, through form. While the Garbhagriha offers the most intimate interaction with the आत्मन् (Atman/Self), that is, through the Jyotirlinga of a boundless, infinite and formless quality.



Figure: Plate II¹¹

Destroying to Create

As one looks into the Somnath archives, the mutilated figures and vandalised roof structure warrants critical thought. Postans ventures into the intent of the Islamists to destroy, especially systematically and over long periods of history. He writes, “As laboriously was the work of mutilation carried on here, that of the larger figures scarcely a trunk has been left... and the domes, have evidently been added to the original building. The two side entrances, which are at some height from the ground, were gained by flights of steps: of these latter the remains only are to be traced. The whole space, for a considerable distance around the temple, is occupied by portions of pillars, stones, and fragments of the original building.”¹² Vallabhi city was destroyed by the Muslim invaders, in around 725 CE. Consequent attacks were rendered ineffective by the Pratihara dynasty. The capital shifted to Kanauj, under Nagabhata II, and the Third Temple was reconstructed around 800 CE.¹³ The intentional irreverence and desecration of Hindu Temples, by the Muslim rulers can be traced across India and unmistakably in Saurashtra. Cousens notes this incessant and intentional disrespect aptly as he expects the image of Surya Dev of Kumarpala’s Somnath Temple to be ‘found buried, upside down, in the pavement in front of some mosque.’ He further points out the religious insecurity that formalised into a “universal practice to build their first mosques out of the material of the demolished shrines, and often upon their very sites”.¹⁴ These formalised ‘rules of conduct’ ceased Hindu gatherings and

worship and instilled fear and misplaced guilt.

Alas, the Shastras do not craft temples to merely congregate but rather as the House of the Spirit Destruction takes but simply from the 'Outer World'.¹⁶ The Santan Dharma is more deeply layered than that. Energy cannot be destroyed. The divine energy strengthens the flame of Bhakti at the Agni Tirth. The Triveni Maha Sangam bears witness to all. She channels the flow of water and energy which reveals the Truth. The Sanskrit inscription “आसमुद्ररित दसिण ध्रुव,पर्यंत अबरसधत ज्योसतथमरर्थ” on the Baan Stambh accurately points to the sea route that reaches the South Pole without a landmass obstruction. This demonstrates the idea of balancing the mastery of both Inner and Outer Worlds. Here, the Outer World also represents the ऋत (Rta/Cosmic Order) where the Universe operates on an impersonal quality.

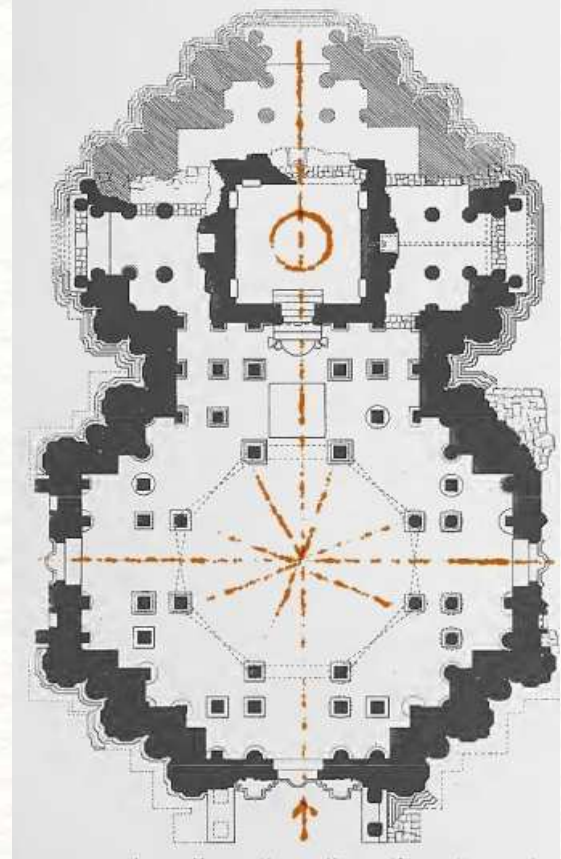


Figure 6: Marked-up plan of the Somnath Temple¹⁵

Therefore, the Temple manifests these qualities through architectural features. The first visual encounter to the initial phase of the Somnath Temple was through the exterior. The ornamentation and gradual ascension of mass. The density is balanced through punctures or voids acting as shaded extensions. This brought in light and ventilation into the form. The Temple faced East direction and had clear axes along the entryway and into the Garbhagriha through the Gudha Mandapa. The movement inside the Temple was anchored through ornamented pillars in multiples. This created intimate corners, allowing the devotee to linger and immerse themselves before they enter the Garbhagriha. The durable etched stone blocks offer a visual tactility that makes a unique canvas to translate oral traditions.

The Virawal port was often attacked by pirates, and the Temple's roof was used as a battery for some heavy pieces of ordnance.¹⁷ This marks the durability of the stone structure that

survived after such violent events.

Water as an Experience

The Pancha Maha Bhuta creates living and non-living beings on the Earth. It constitutes of the five elements:

- Prithvi (Earth)
- Jala/Apas (Water)
- Agni (Fire)
- Vayu (Air)
- Akasha (Space/ Ether)

Cosmic Experience

“र्यर सपण्डे तरं ब्रह्मण्डे”

As is the microcosm, so is the macrocosm

The association of the Outer World and the inner World extends beyond the individual Self. How can one explain the millennia of cultural continuity untethered to brute force, desecrations and displacement? A Collective Consciousness that builds shared awareness connects individuals through a unifying force. ब्रह्मण्ड (Brahmaan/Prakriti) anchors an unbiased experience through the Pancha Maha Bhuta that is exercised through Vedic rituals and traditions. Continued practices create a shared reality and the rise of the Somnath landscape is proof.

According to oral traditions, Lord Soma, the Moon god, was cursed and lost his lustre. As repentance, he reformed and worshipped Lord Shiva. He immersed himself at the Prabhasa Tirth. He was granted his shine back but only for one half of the month. Tantric Literature connects Lord Soma to Lord Shiva- in some instances, as Shiva himself. Somavidya, specifies, सोमवर (Somvaar/Monday) as the most sacred day to worship him especially on अमरवरस्यर (Amavasya/ moonless night). This could be considered counter-intuitive, where the Moon is effectively worshipped on the day it has completely waned. It is known that tidal influence is greater during a new moon night. Further, in relation to interpretation, the idea of utilising the invisible qualities to appreciate the visible elements can be anchored to the very non-existence of River Saraswati in Kaliyug.

According to the Skandapurana, the River Saraswati, the sea, an eclipsed moon is ideal for worshipping God Somnath.¹⁸ Interestingly, the blend of tangible and intangible elements immerses the devotee fully- in philosophy, belief, cosmology and sequential water purification.

As perceived before, the Temporality of the Patan Landscape generates various interconnected temporal feedbacks. Such as the Temple form itself. The ashlar masonry of the pillars and steps urges the Devotee to consider texture and shadows. The waves break onto the wall- adding another layer to the complex soundscape. The bells and chants whisper through the sea breeze. The air is weighed down by the tropical heat and the breeze offers respite. The same damp air breaks down stone and adds a layer of temporality. The Temple form embraced material degradation as a natural consequence. Rather than longevity of materiality, spiritual longevity was prioritised. The role of Pancha Bhuta, especially water, is recognised as a pillar of generational sustenance influencing identity, power and Dharma.

Somnath in the 21st Century

Somnath Temple has been built in different materials- gold by Lord Soma, silver by Shri Krishna, and in stone by Bhima Deva. The Author has described how Water has, across millennia, also shaped, carved and contained multitudes and duality of the Somnath landscape. This worldview of personifying and centering Water calls upon similar values as we see in the contemporary literature of regeneration. The idea that nature and human life should have an inextricable connection was practiced by the Vedic communities. The civilisational ‘destinies’ that takes and provides- submerging towns, through shipwrecks and volcanic eruptions, through desecrations and strength- Water holds moments of repose and of quiet resilience.

The Silence in Non-Interpretation

India in the 21st century has seen ‘re-interpretation’ of history. Using the term ‘secular’ to validate violence is the norm. But in the Author’s opinion, re-interpretation is not the problem. The real challenge is non-interpretation by the public that deliberately avoids assigning meaning to an object, event or collective memory. Non- interpretation, by the masses, wreaks havoc through indifference. Re-interpretation still brings up themes for a debate. Non-interpretation is inaction in-action. The conversation ceases and leaves critical

knowledge production unhindered.

Notes and references

- ¹ P. Palsra, S. Sharma, R. Kumar, and R. Thamman, “Panchamahabhuta—Five Basic Elements and Their Utility in Ayurveda: A Review,” *International Research Journal of Ayurveda & Yoga* 5, no. 2 (2022): 112–19.
- ² K. M. Panikkar, *India and the Indian Ocean* (George Allen & Unwin, 1951).
- ³ D. N. Shukla, *Vastu-Sastra*. Vol. 1, *Hindu Science of Architecture* (Vastu-Vangmaya-Prokashana-Salas, 1961).
- ⁴ K. M. Munshi, *Somanatha: The Eternal Shrine* (Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1965).
- ⁵ S. R. Rao, S. Tripathi, and A. S. Gaur, “A Preliminary Exploration of Prabhasa-Somnath,” *Journal of Marine Archaeology* 3 (1992): 13–16.
- ⁶ K. M. Munshi, *Somanatha: The Eternal Shrine* (Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1965).
- ⁷ H. Sheth and A. Kumar, “The Physical Volcanology of Large-Scale Effusive and Explosive Silicic Eruptions in Southeastern Saurashtra, Deccan Traps,” *Geological Magazine* 160, no. 10 (2023): 1845–62. Also refer to C. J. Divya, “Unravelling the Sands of Time: Exploring the Mesozoic Sands of Saurashtra Basin,” *IIT Bombay Research Spotlight*, August 9, 2024, https://rnd.iitb.ac.in/unravelling_the_sands_of_time
- ⁸ NWRWS (*Narmada, Water Resources, Water Supply and Kalpsar Department*), Gujarat (Government of Gujarat, 2003)
- ⁹ K. M. Munshi, *Somanatha: The Eternal Shrine* (Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1965).
- ¹⁰ H. Cousens, *Somnatha* (Archaeological Survey of India, 1931).
- ¹¹ Ibid.
- ¹² C. Postans, “A Few Observations on the Temple of Somnath,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 8 (1846): 172–75.
- ¹³ K. M. Munshi, *Somanatha: The Eternal Shrine* (Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1965).
- ¹⁴ H. Cousens, *The Architectural Antiquities of Western India* (Government of India Central Publication Branch, 1926).
- ¹⁵ H. Cousens, *Somnatha* (Archaeological Survey of India, 1931).
- ¹⁶ D. N. Shukla, *Vastu-Sastra*. Vol. 1, *Hindu Science of Architecture* (Vastu-Vangmaya-Prokashana-Salas, 1961).
- ¹⁷ C. Postans, “A Few Observations on the Temple of Somnath,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 8 (1846): 172–75.
- ¹⁸ K. M. Munshi, *Somanatha: The Eternal Shrine* (Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1965).

Bibliography

- C. J., Divya. “Unravelling the Sands of Time: Exploring the Mesozoic Sands of Saurashtra Basin.” *IIT Bombay Research Spotlight*, August 9, 2024. https://rnd.iitb.ac.in/unravelling_the_sands_of_time.
- Cousens, H. *The Architectural Antiquities of Western India*. Government of India Central Publication Branch, 1926.
- Cousens, H. *Somnatha*. Archaeological Survey of India, 1931.
- Coverage of Somnath Temple, Gujarat*. Vol. 2. Cinema Vision India, 1996.
- Munshi, K. M. *Somanatha: The Eternal Shrine*. Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1965.
- NWRWS (Narmada, Water Resources, Water Supply and Kalpsar Department). *Gujarat*. Government of Gujarat, 2003.
- Palsra, Priyanka, Saneel Sharma, Rajesh Kumar, and Rakesh Thamman. “Panchamahabhuta—Five Basic Elements and Their Utility in Ayurveda: A Review.” *International Research Journal of Ayurveda & Yoga* 5, no. 2 (2022): 112–19.
- Panikkar, K. M. *India and the Indian Ocean*. George Allen & Unwin, 1951.
- Postans, C. “A Few Observations on the Temple of Somnath.” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 8 (1846): 172–75.
- Rao, S. R., Sila Tripathi, and A. S. Gaur. “A Preliminary Exploration of Prabhasa-Somnath.” *Journal of Marine Archaeology* 3 (1992): 13–16.
- Sheth, Hetu, and Anmol Kumar. “The Physical Volcanology of Large-Scale Effusive and Explosive Silicic Eruptions in Southeastern Saurashtra, Deccan Traps.” *Geological Magazine* 160, no. 10 (2023): 1845–62.
- Shukla, D. N. *Vastu-Sastra*. Vol. 1, *Hindu Science of Architecture*. Vastu-Vangmaya-Prokashana-Salas, 1961.

SESSION 2:

THE EVENT: DESTRUCTION, RESISTANCE, RECONSTRUCTION

Session Chair: Dr. Anand Ranganathan

This session examines what happened to Somnath across time - focusing equally on attacks, resistance, and reconstruction. Speakers will engage with primary Persian and Indic sources, temple chronicles, inscriptions, and travel accounts, while also surveying the evolution of Somnath's historiography. Attention will be paid to how historical narratives are constructed, contested, and transmitted across generations.



Recovering Somanātha: ‘Alā al-Dīn Khaljī, Kānhaḍade, and the Afterlife of Desecration in Indic Tradition

Jay Vardhan Singh

Research Scholar, PhD Candidate

Centre for Historical Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi

jayvsingh96@gmail.com

Introduction

In the year 1296 AD, ‘Alā al-Dīn Khaljī seized the throne of Delhi by murdering his uncle and reigning Sultan, Jalāluddīn Khaljī. The violence of his accession was entirely consistent with the political ambition that would characterise his reign. Having consolidated his authority over the Sultanate in the years that followed, he decided to dispatch an expedition to Gujarat. The expedition was dispatched in 1299 CE under two of his most capable commanders, Ulugh Khān and Nuṣrat Khān. Nuṣrat Khān marched from Delhi on 24 February 1299 CE, while Ulugh Khān advanced from Sindh; the two columns were designed to converge upon Gujarat in a coordinated military operation. The direct road from Delhi to Gujarat passed through Jālor, and ‘Alā al-Dīn sought passage from the ruler of Jālor, but was denied passage.¹

The ruler of Jālor, who had not permitted the Sultanate army to pass through his territory, was not a minor chief. Jālor was ruled by a line of the Chauhāns during this time. This line of the Chauhāns traced its origins to Kīrtipāla, the youngest of the three sons of Ālhaṇa, the Chauhān ruler of Nāḍol, and Ānnalladevī. The heir-apparent Kelhaṇa and the ruler Ālhaṇa granted him, either in Vikrama Saṃvat 1218 (1161 CE) or earlier, twelve villages. This grant constituted the territorial nucleus from which the Jālor principality would develop. By 1296 CE, Sāmantaśiṃha, the ruler of Jālor, had formally associated his son Kānhaḍade with himself in the administration of Jālor.²

After being refused by Kānhaḍade, the Sultanate army consequently undertook a forced march through Chittor, crossing the river Banas. The Jain scholar, Jina Prabhā Sūri, records that Samarasimha of Chittor offered resistance as the Sultanate forces traversed Mewar. This

suggests that the march of the Imperial army was not entirely uncontested. Yet beyond Mewar, the Muslim chronicles record no significant military opposition until the army reached Gujarat itself.³

Gujarat at this time was under the rule of Karṇa of the Vāghelā dynasty, who had succeeded Sāraṅgadeva around 1296 CE. The historical record pertaining to his reign is sparse and derived almost entirely from Muslim sources. Upon the arrival of the Sultanate army, its forces divided their operations: one contingent pursued Karṇa while the other advanced directly toward the temple of Somanātha. Karṇa's forces engaged Ulugh Khān near Āśāpallī, the site of modern Ahmedabad, and suffered defeat. The fall of Aṇahilapāṭaka followed. One source states that Karṇa withdrew into a fort where he was besieged before eventually escaping to Devagiri. From this point onwards, the Vāghelā kingdom effectively ceased to function as a coherent political entity.⁴ The temple toward which the second contingent of the Sultanate army advanced was not an incidental target. It was one of the most celebrated sacred sites on the western coast of the subcontinent, and its selection as an objective of the campaign was deliberate. The temple had a long and historically layered existence, and its significance within the Islamic sources was itself shaped by an earlier act of desecration. It was Maḥmūd of Ghazni who had carried out its destructions in 1026 CE, when he raided Somanātha, broke the liṅga, and carried its fragments to Ghazni.⁵ That destruction did not extinguish the temple's religious life. An inscription records the Kadamba ruler Ṣaṣṭha II performing a Svarṇa Tulā ceremony at the location in 1042 CE.⁶ This suggests that religious activities had resumed around this time. However, when it comes to an elaborate reconstruction of the shrine, this was undertaken by the Chaulukya ruler Kumārapāla (r. 1143–72 CE).⁷ This reconstruction of the temple was completed before 1169 CE. We can say this because of the Bhadrakālī stone inscription of Kumārapāla, which records the reconstruction on the request of the Pāśupata priest Bhāva Br̥haspati.⁸ In the subsequent period, the Chaulukya king Bhīma II (r. 1178-1240 CE) added a maṇḍapa to the shrine.⁹

The Persian Sources and the Declared Purpose of the Campaign

The stated purpose of the expedition is recorded by Amīr Khusrau, court poet and contemporary witness, in his *Khazā'inul Fuṭūḥ*. Khusrau records that 'Alā al-Dīn Khaljī issued a farmān dispatching an army to the coast of Gujarat with the explicit purpose of destroying the temple of Somanātha. That even this partisan source, a court poet celebrating Alāuddīn's victories, records the destruction of the temple as the declared objective of the

expedition rather than an incidental consequence is a fact of considerable importance. Khusrau's account of the destruction is elaborate: "Round the temple of Somnāth, which is the centre of Hindū worship, he drew a circle with his troops... The banner of Islām was elevated to the equator... The idols, who had fixed their abode midway to the House of Abraham, and there waylaid stragglers, were broken to pieces in pursuance of Abraham's tradition. But one idol, the greatest of them all, was sent by the maliks to the Imperial Court, so that the breaking of their helpless god may be demonstrated to the idol-worshipping Hindūs."¹⁰

A second contemporary Persian account, Waṣṣāf's *Tārīkh-i Waṣṣāf*, records similar details: "the Muhammadan army brought the country to utter ruin, and destroyed the lives of the inhabitants, and plundered the cities, and captured their offspring, so that many temples were deserted and the idols were broken and trodden under foot, the largest of which was one called Somnāt... The Muhammadan soldiers plundered all those jewels and rapidly set themselves to demolish the idol... its limbs, which were anointed with ambergris and perfumed, were cut off. The fragments were conveyed to Delhi, and the entrance of the Jāmi' Masjid was paved with them, that people might remember and talk of this brilliant victory."¹¹

A later source, the *Mirāt-i-Aḥmadī*, written by Mohammed Ali Khan approximately five centuries after the events describes the conquest in similar terms.¹² He confirms the same details which other Persian sources also presents: the Khāns subjected Pattan and the whole of that dominion to plunder, Raja Karan Baghela fled, and they broke the idol of Somnath which had been reinstalled after Sultan Maḥmūd Ghaznawī, dispatching riches, treasure, and captives to the Sultan at Delhi.¹³ Even in this late account, the destruction of Somānatha appears as a prominent and deliberate act.

Kānhaḍade Prabandha: The Text and Its Tradition

Apart from the Persian sources, the destruction of the temple of Somanātha is also described in considerable detail in an Indic text called *Kānhaḍade Prabandha*. The text was authored by Padmanābha, a Nāgar Brāhmaṇa, and was composed in 1455 CE.¹⁴ The work is composed in old Gujarātī or old Rājasthānī. One scholar characterises the language of the text as embodying a stage when Gujarātī and Rājasthānī were just beginning to evolve their distinctive characteristics from their common source, the post-Apabhraṃśa.¹⁵ Padmanābha, the author of the text, explicitly states on multiple occasions within the text that he composed

it in Prākṛit.¹⁶ Within the broader literary landscape, *Kānhaḍade Prabandha* occupies a significant place in the Prabandha tradition, a prominent strand of the Jaina historical and literary corpus that emerged during the late first and early second millennium CE.¹⁷ Although associated with this tradition, the text diverges significantly from its conventional norms. Where the Jaina Prabandha tradition tends toward religious biography and the celebration of mendicant virtue, the dominant themes of *Kānhaḍade Prabandha* are bravery, valour, and martyrdom. This was because of the direct influence of the ethos of the Rajput courts, where martial values occupied the centre of cultural life.¹⁸

The text narrates the valorous exploits of the Chauhān ruler of Jālor, Rāval Kānhaḍade, with its focus falling principally on his sustained resistance against the Delhi Sultan ‘Alā al-Dīn Khaljī. It was composed at the behest of Akhairāja, the fifth-generation descendant of Kānhaḍade.¹⁹ While the account is grounded in historical events, the text does not conform to the conventions of a *Carita*, the biographical genre with which historical narrative was more conventionally associated in the Indic literary tradition. Instead, Padmanābha frames his composition in a markedly religious and devotional idiom. He consciously imbues the narrative with spiritual significance throughout, and at the conclusion of the text writes that those who listen to this account with attention will have all their sins washed off. In another verse, the text is explicitly likened to the Purāṇas, with the claim that those who listen to this narrative earn spiritual rewards equivalent to those obtained from the recitation of the Purāṇas.²⁰ This devotional framing is not incidental to the text’s historical value; on the contrary, it is central to understanding the paradigm within which the events are being narrated and the kind of meaning the text assigns to the acts of desecration and resistance it describes.

Kānhaḍade Prabandha’s account of the initial encounter between the Sultanate and Jālor establishes the religious character of the narrative from its opening. When ‘Alā al-Dīn resolved to march his army toward Sorath, he dispatched his ministers to Kānhaḍade bearing a dress of honour, (*pahirāvaṇī*), a conventional diplomatic instrument by which a ruler’s acceptance of the robe signified acknowledgement of imperial authority. The ministers conveyed the Sultan’s request: “Know it well, your Lordship [Kānhaḍade], that the army of the Turks is on way to Sorath. Other routes have difficult passes. The Pātasāh [‘Alā al-Dīn], therefore, requests you to let the army pass this way.” Kānhaḍade’s response, characterised by the text itself as words “pregnant with truth and wisdom,” was an unambiguous refusal

grounded in dharma: “This is contrary to our *dharma*! The Kings do not give passage when by doing so villages are devastated, people are enslaved, ears of women torn for ornaments, and cows and Brāhmaṇas are tortured.”²¹ His refusal was not political defiance but a declaration of religious and moral obligation.

When it comes to the account of the passage of Sultanate army through Gujarat and the destruction it caused, *Kānhaḍade Prabandha*’s account is unflinching in its depiction of religious transformation. After the flight of Karṇa, the text records: “What took place in Aṇhalapur [Pāṭaṇa] had never happened earlier, nor would ever happen again. Where formerly temples stood, now the call to prayer, *bāṅ*, by the Sillāri [Muslims], could be heard.” This explicitly marks the replacement of Hindu sacred space with Islamic religious practice as the defining transformation of the conquest. Towns across the region trembled; the Sultanate forces plundered grain, seized cattle, and made people prisoners. It is at this point that the drums were struck and the Khān set out for Somanātha Pāṭaṇa.²² The march toward Somanātha is presented not as the incidental conclusion of a military campaign but as its culminating religious objective.

When the Sultanate army arrived at Somanātha Pāṭaṇa, it did not encounter an undefended shrine. The text records an organised and determined resistance. The brave *pāyakas* [infantry] of the town “kept their charge and honour, their *māṇa*, intact,” engaging the enemy in hand-to-hand fighting. The clans of *Vālā*, *Vājā*, *Jeṭhavā*, and *Chūḍāsamā* “unitedly faced the enemy, but the Sultān’s army came like a raging tidal wave overwhelming all that came in its way.” Even after the fall of the town, the defence of the temple continued as a separate and spiritually charged act: “the Rāuts circumambulated round the temple. They took bath, each one put Tulasī leaves on his head, and took charge of protecting the God’s idol.” The text frames their deaths, in the defence of the temple, in explicitly theological terms: “Neither by performing yajñas, nor by pilgrimages to the tīrthas, nor even by giving unbounded charities in the three lokas does one attain the high position which these brave warriors attained, verily the heaven, the Sura Loka, by laying down their lives in the defence of Lord Somanātha.”²³ The defence of the temple is not narrated as a military engagement alone; it is an act of supreme devotion surpassing all conventional forms of religious practice. That these defenders were real and not a literary invention is confirmed by epigraphic evidence. An inscription dating to Vikrama Saṃvat 1355 (1298–1299 CE), discovered at Somanātha itself, records that two warriors of the *Vājā* clan fell at the very door of the temple while fighting.²⁴

The Vājā clan appears in precisely this context in *Kānhaḍade Prabandha*. The convergence of the epigraphic record with the narrative testimony of the text establishes that Padmanābha's account of the defence preserved historical memory rather than poetic embellishment.

The fall of the temple is narrated as an event of profound sorrow. "Profound calamity had fallen upon Lord Somanātha's temple. The locks of the doors were broken open and the enemy rushed through the doors tumultuously." The *mleccha* stone-breakers, characterised as *asuras*, "climbed up the śikhara of the temple to take off the golden kalaśa and began to rain blows on the stone idols on all the three sides by their hammers, the stone pieces falling all around." They "loosened every joint of the temple building" before applying force "from both the sides to uproot the massive idol by means of wooden beams and iron crowbars." The text offers a theological explanation for the deity's apparent helplessness: "Such strange and improper happenings were taking place: the kaliyuga was, no doubt, showing its true temper: Lord Śiva, leaving the earthly abode, went away to Kailāśa."²⁵ Padmanābha addresses the god in his own voice: "I, Padmanābha, ask you plainly, Lord Somanātha, Somaīyā, where is your trident now?"²⁶ Following the uprooting of the idol, Ulugh Khān issued his order in direct speech: "The temple will remain without its God's idol! Despatch the idol, *bhūta*, to Delhi where I will have it crushed and made into lime."²⁷ The liṅga was loaded onto a large cart yoked with three pairs of bullocks and sent toward Delhi. This detail finds direct corroboration in both contemporary Persian sources. Waṣṣāf records that the fragments were conveyed to Delhi and the entrance of the Jāmi' Masjid was paved with them. Khusrau records that the greatest idol was sent to the Imperial Court so that the breaking of the helpless god could be demonstrated to idol-worshipping Hindus. The convergence of *Kānhaḍade Prabandha* with these Persian sources, separated by language, religion, literary tradition, and cultural orientation, on this specific detail is of considerable historiographical importance.

The Rescue of the Liṅga

What makes *Kānhaḍade Prabandha* unique as a source for the aftermath of the desecration of Somanātha is that it alone preserves the account of what happened to the liṅga after it was dispatched toward Delhi. The Persian sources are entirely silent on this. It is *Kānhaḍade Prabandha* that fills this silence. The text narrates that as the Sultanate army transported the liṅga toward Delhi, its route passed through Jālor's territory. Ulugh Khān sent a challenge to Kānhaḍade: "Be a man! I have conquered in this single campaign both Sorāṭha as well as

Gujarāt, and I have made thine Śiva a captive! Get ready thine troops and come for fight. Nay, if thou art a man, then try to bar my path and free thine Somānatha, or else come with presents to meet me.”²⁸ The challenge is framed as a test of martial honour, but its religious content is unmistakable. Ulugh Khān does not say he has captured a symbol of Gujarāti royal legitimacy; he says he has made Kānhaḍade’s Śiva a captive.

On the same day, Kānhaḍade saw a dream at dawn. Gaṅgā and Gaurī appeared before him and asked: “Who gave you the kingdom?” Kānhaḍade replied: “Śiva.” Gaurī declared: “The Turks have made your Lord a captive.” Gaṅgā urged: “Wake up, O immortal one! The *Asapati* [Lord of Horses] is taking away Somanātha through your territory. Earlier also, Rāma had Rudra freed from the demons. Again, Bali, son of Virochana, displayed his intense devotion and got Śiva freed. Now, on this third occasion, you come forward, O Kānhaḍadeva. O brave one, delay not in this.” The Satīs lamented: “Why may we not break our bangles, unless you get our Lord freed? Restless like a fish in shallow water, we are burning in the fire of separation.” The divine injunction followed: “Whoever will get the Lord freed, he will be absolved from all sins. You regard these words as true as the Vedas.”²⁹ Thus, in this episode, the text grounds Kānhaḍade’s sovereignty over Jālor in divine sanction. A king who holds his territory as a gift from Śiva cannot permit Śiva’s idol to pass as a captive through that territory without acting. Kānhaḍade is placed in a lineage of sacred devotion alongside Rāma and Bali, his intervention presented not as a local political act but as the third moment in a cosmic pattern of divine rescue. When Kānhaḍade’s minister went to meet Ulugh Khān in his camp, his response reinforced this theological framing: “Our Lord’s *salām* is only for one, the Creator of the Universe, high above there. He bows his head to Nārāyaṇa only and before none else; as for you, do not hope for *salām* from Kānhaḍade.”³⁰

The text also narrates the condition of the prisoners who were held captive by the Sultanate forces: “Weeping and wailing, they were hoping that some miracle might save them even now. If, however, Kānhaḍade does not come to our deliverance, then we all will definitely be made *Turkāṇai* [Musalmāns].” This is an important detail as it establishes that forcible conversion was understood by the captives as the fate that awaited them. This also confirms that the religious stakes of the Sultanate’s campaign extended well beyond the capture of a single shrine.

In the subsequent episode the text narrates a night attack in which the Sultanate army was

defeated and the idol was rescued.³¹ After the rescue, the text characterises Kānhaḍade's achievement entirely in the language of *punya*: "Indeed, the Chauhāna clan has unmeasured *punya* to its credit. It is on account of *punya* that Rāval Kānhaḍade destroyed the *mlecchas*."³² What Kānhaḍade then did with the recovered liṅga makes the religious character of his motivation clear. He did not return the idol to Sorāṭha. Instead, five idols were carved from the Ekaliṅga: "One of these was ceremoniously installed at Sorāṭha and another at Lohasing in Vāgaḍa. One was sent to a pleasant spot on the Ābū hill for consecration, while one was installed at Jālor where the Rāi built a temple and one was sent to Saivāḍi in Jālor district."³³

Present Historiographical Framework and Its Limitations

One of the scholars who has analysed this episode of desecration and the subsequent rescue of the idol as preserved in *Kānhaḍade Prabandha* is Romila Thapar. When it comes to the desecration of Somanātha by the Khaljī forces, she argues that the Khaljī operation should be viewed not as an act of religious iconoclasm but as a calculated political gesture directed at the symbolic capital of Gujarāti sovereignty. She observes that Ulugh Khān "carries away the lingam, intending to take it back to Delhi as a trophy, although it is also said that he wanted to break it and grind it into lime, actions associated in Persian accounts with Maḥmud." She then notes that "the capturing of the image is possible because Shiva has deserted his icon and gone to Kailāsa and, in any case, it is now the Kaliyuga, the age of the losing throw as it has been called, when the images of deities can be wilfully broken." From this she draws her central argument: "The theme in this version seems less to be the desecration of the temple, and more the attempted conquest of Gujarat by the Khaljis. It could be argued that perhaps the temple had become a symbol of legitimation of the kings of Gujarat after Kumarapala's renovation, therefore the conquest of Gujarat required the capturing of the icon at Somanatha, but seems not to have required the destruction of the temple. Hence, the focus on the icon. The capturing of the icon amounts to the symbolic capturing of the legitimacy to rule, apart from an Islamic victory over Shaivism."³⁴

When it comes to the rescue of the idol by Kānhaḍade, Thapar employs a similar framework based on legitimacy. She argues that the rescuing of the icon constitutes Kānhaḍade's claim to legitimising his authority, writing that this would be important to a member of a lesser Chauhān lineage facing constant and intense competition from other Chauhāns, and that Kānhaḍade created five icons from the one and distributed them in Marwar by way of marking the kingdom he aspired to or sanctifying the kingdom he was ruling. In her view, the

narrative of the rescue should be read as a claim to the legitimacy of rule by capturing the icon. The case of the Turks and the Rājputs was analogous in structure, though Kānhaḍade's case was distinguished by the fact that he worshipped the idol, which further empowered his legitimacy claim through an act of devotion.³⁵

The legitimacy argument that Thapar advances in her reading of *Kānhaḍade Prabandha* has also been articulated by Richard H. Davis. Davis argues that the portrayal of what he calls the “virtues of resistance” in the text served a specific patronage purpose. Since the text was composed by Padmanābha at the behest of Akhairāja, the fifth-generation descendant of Kānhaḍade, Davis reads the heroic deeds attributed to Kānhaḍade as acts of “constituting authority,” a literary construction of legitimacy designed to serve Akhairāja's political interests within the competitive landscape of Rajput dynastic politics. Davis does, however, make a concession that is significant: he explicitly acknowledges that the acts attributed to Kānhaḍade should not be considered “nonreligious” actions. The acts of resistance and devotion recorded in the text carried genuine religious meaning, which Davis does not deny. What he argues is that this religious meaning was simultaneously deployed in the service of a legitimization project.³⁶

Both scholars operate within a broadly similar analytical framework that interprets both the Sultanate's acts of desecration and the actions of Kānhaḍade primarily through the lens of political legitimization. This interpretive model, advanced by Thapar and Davis, has come to dominate the historiography of temple desecration in medieval India, and its intellectual foundations may be traced to the work of Richard Eaton. Eaton's argument proceeds from a foundational claim: that iconoclasm was not the originating impulse behind temple desecration. He grounds this in a reading of early Indian history that identifies, from the 6th century onward, a pattern of Hindu kings ‘attacking’ temples patronised by rival rulers. From this pattern, Eaton concludes that early medieval temples should not be understood as exclusively religious institutions; they were, in his formulation, “pre-eminently political institutions,” and the deity housed within the temple shared sovereignty with the king who patronised it. Temple desecration, in this framework, is therefore seen as a political act continuous with pre-existing Indian political practice, and its Islamic framing in the Persian sources is understood as retrospective religious glorification rather than evidence of actual religious motivation. Eaton further argues that Indo-Muslim chroniclers writing in later periods attributed acts of desecration to early rulers to enhance their religious prestige, and

that the precise scale and motivation of temple destruction cannot be reliably determined in the absence of contemporary evidence.³⁷

It is precisely this prior argument that makes the legitimacy reading of the Somanātha episode possible. If temples are understood as extensions of royal power rather than as primarily sacred sites, then the capture of the Somanātha līṅga becomes intelligible as a seizure of political symbolism, and its rescue by Kānhaḍade becomes intelligible as a counter-claim to that

symbolism. Both Thapar and Davis are working within the logical space that Eaton's framework opens.

A foundational methodological problem that is present in Eaton's framework is that it is constructed almost exclusively on Persian and Islamic textual sources. Eaton does not engage seriously with the Indic literary tradition, which preserves extensive accounts of temple desecration by Muslim rulers. Texts such as *Kānhaḍade Prabandha*, which records in considerable detail the systematic replacement of temples with sites of Islamic worship across Gujarat, the slaughter of Brāhmaṇas, forced conversions to Islam, and the deliberate destruction of the Somanātha shrine, find no place in Eaton's analysis. The Indic narrative tradition records the experience of desecration from the perspective of those who suffered it. A historiographical framework constructed without reference to this tradition is, by definition, a partial account, and its conclusions about motivation cannot be treated as authoritative.

Thapar's analysis of the desecration of Somanātha is built on Eaton's framework but represents a methodological step forward in that she engages with Indic texts, particularly *Kānhaḍade Prabandha*. The limitations of Thapar's legitimacy model, however, become apparent when *Kānhaḍade Prabandha* is read in its entirety and on its own terms rather than through the prior imposition of the Eaton framework.

In Thapar's analysis of the text and the events recounted in it, we find that she notes the transportation of the idol to Delhi in *Kānhaḍade Prabandha* but does not acknowledge that this same detail is recorded independently in two contemporary Persian sources, Waṣṣāf and Khusrau. This convergence of contemporary accounts with the detail provided by *Kānhaḍade Prabandha* is precisely the kind of corroborative evidence that illuminates how the text

perceived the event of desecration, and Thapar's silence on this convergence points to a selective reading of sources.

Although she has not ignored Persian sources altogether, in her treatment of them the episodes of desecration are dismissed as fanciful or as products of a genre with a clear ideological agenda. The more consequential lacuna concerns her central conclusion: she argues that the theme of the episode is less the desecration of the temple and more the attempted conquest of Gujarat, and that the capturing of the icon amounts primarily to the symbolic capture of the legitimacy to rule, with the Islamic victory over Shaivism treated as a secondary consideration. This formulation is reductionist. It takes an act that the sources, both Persian and Indic, frame consistently in religious terms, and re-describes it as a political act drained of primary religious content. By acknowledging the religious dimension only to immediately subordinate it to the political one, Thapar treats what the sources present as the central motivation as though it were merely an incidental corollary. The sources do not support this hierarchy. Khusrau frames the entire campaign as a religious enterprise from its outset. Waṣṣāf records the paving of the Jāmi' Masjid with the idol's fragments as an act of demonstrated Islamic victory. *Kānhaḍade Prabandha's* account of the systematic replacement of temples with sites of Islamic worship across an entire region, its record of Brāhmaṇas and people of all eighteen varṇas taken captive, its depiction of prisoners weeping in fear of forcible conversion, find no place in Thapar's analysis because they do not fit the framework she brings to the text.

If we look at the episode of the defence of the shrine, the legitimacy argument encounters a problem it cannot resolve. The warriors who gave their lives protecting the Somanātha temple, the clans of *Vālā*, *Vājā*, *Jeṭhavā*, and *Chūḍāsamā*, have no discernible relationship with Kānhaḍade. They are not his vassals, not his kinsmen, not extensions of his political authority. If legitimation of Kānhaḍade's authority were the text's primary concern, there would be no narrative logic in devoting sustained attention to the deaths of warriors who stand entirely outside the political relationship between Kānhaḍade and 'Alā al-Dīn. Their presence in the narrative serves no legitimacy argument; it serves a religious one. The text elevates their sacrifice to the highest level of spiritual merit, stating that neither yajñas, nor pilgrimages to tīrthas, nor unbounded charity could confer the spiritual station attained by those who laid down their lives in the defence of Lord Somanātha. This is the language of devotion and martyrdom, not of

dynastic politics. That these defenders were real is further confirmed by an inscription dating to Vikrama Saṃvat 1355, discovered at Somanātha itself, which records that two warriors of the Vājā clan fell at the very door of the temple while fighting.

The second problem for the legitimacy argument concerns the scale of what the text describes. Thapar's reading, following Eaton, rests on the premise that what was at stake was the capture of a single symbolically important shrine. But *Kānhaḍade Prabandha* does not describe a targeted act against a single site of royal legitimation. It describes a systematic and widespread religious transformation across Gujarat as a whole. Where formerly temples stood, the text records, the call to prayer of the Muslims could now be heard. The Sultanate forces burnt villages, devastated the country, and made captive people of all eighteen varṇas, binding them with straps of raw hide. Prisoners wept in fear of forcible conversion to Islam. Considering these accounts the argument that the essential meaning of these acts was the symbolic capture of royal legitimacy becomes analytically untenable.

Thapar's analysis of the rescue of the liṅga is instructive not for what it illuminates but for what it reveals about the limits of her framework. She observes that one of the five locations where a portion of the liṅga was installed was Sorāṭha, that is, Saurāṣṭra, and proceeds to claim that this installation would have been at Somanātha itself, arguing that this would indicate the temple had not been converted into a mosque by Ulugh Khān as Persian sources maintain.³⁸ This assumption the text does not support. Sorāṭha is a regional designation for Saurāṣṭra as a whole, not a specific site within it. Had Kānhaḍade succeeded in reinstalling the idol at the original Somanātha shrine, that achievement would have been the single most dramatic act of religious restoration in the entire narrative. Its silence on this specific point is evidence that no such reinstallation took place. Also, it is worth pointing out that after the desecration of the shrine, Gujarat and Saurāṣṭra were now under Sultanate control. Kānhaḍade, who had defeated the Sultanate army and recovered the idol, knew that this act of defiance would invite a reaction from Delhi. His immediate priority was the consolidation and defence of Jālor against the inevitable counter-attack from Delhi. A military expedition into Sultanate-controlled Saurāṣṭra to reinstall an idol was not a realistic possibility.

The legitimacy argument encounters a further difficulty that neither Thapar nor Davis adequately addresses. When *Kānhaḍade Prabandha* is read in its entirety, what emerges is not merely the narrative of a Rājput chieftain's resistance against a rival political power but a

sustained and systematic articulation of two distinct socio-religious identities. The term *Hindu*, which had earlier been used by Persian and Arabic sources to designate the non-Muslim population of the subcontinent, was by the 15th century being adopted by non-Muslims themselves as a marker of collective self-identification. Alongside this emerged the figure of the Muslim as a distinct socio-religious identity within the Indic literary tradition. *Kānhaḍade Prabandha* is among the earliest Indic texts to reflect this dual emergence with sustained narrative consistency.³⁹ This development is of direct analytical significance for the legitimacy argument. Legitimation arguments operate within political communities; they address audiences that share a framework of political recognition defined by dynastic affiliation, territorial loyalty, or lineage. But the framework that *Kānhaḍade Prabandha* constructs is not political in this sense. It is civilisational and religious. The consolidation of the Delhi Sultanate is seen in the text not as a shift in the balance of political power between rival dynasties but as a series of assaults upon the foundations of Hindu religious life: the desecration of temples, the flight of deities, the slaughter of Brāhmaṇas and cows, forced conversions to Islam, and forced enslavement. It was this deepening of Sultanate rule and its repercussions that creates the context within which a collective Hindu self-representation was taking shape. If Padmanābha's primary concern had been the legitimation of Akhairāja's dynastic authority, the elaborate and consistent articulation of this Hindu-Muslim binary would be difficult to explain. A legitimation exercise addresses a political community; it does not construct a civilisational identity. The fact that *Kānhaḍade Prabandha* does the latter, and does so with sustained narrative investment across its full extent, is evidence that the author's concern extended well beyond the dynastic politics of Jālor.

The Khyāt Tradition and the Memory of Kānhaḍade

The limitations of the legitimacy argument become further apparent when we turn to another Indic text that preserves the memory of Kānhaḍade, one that belongs to an entirely different genre and was composed more than two centuries after *Kānhaḍade Prabandha*. This text is *Munhaṭā Naiṇsī rī Khyāt* and it was composed in the late 17th century. Khyāt as a genre belongs to the historical and literary tradition of the Rājput courts of Rajasthan. It is a form of chronicle or miscellaneous historical compilation, the word itself likely derived from the Sanskrit *khyāti*, meaning fame or renown. In the context of medieval Rajasthan, a Khyāt was a repository of historical information, encompassing chronicles, genealogies, descriptions of regions and towns, tales, poems, and other records pertaining to Rajasthan, Gujarat, and central India.⁴⁰ This tradition grew out of the composition of panegyric works in prose and

poetry cultivated in Rājput courts, primarily as oral accounts that were being committed to writing by the 17th century. These texts were recited in Rājput gatherings and served to convey the martial magnificence of both the Rājput patrons and the Charan composers who produced them.⁴¹ The author of this Khyāt was Munhaṭā Naiṇsī, who lived from 1610 to 1670 CE. An Osval Jain Mutsaddī by background. He participated in several military campaigns in the service of Mahārājā Jaswant Singh before being appointed Dīvān of Jodhpur, a position he held from 1657 to 1666, and it was in this capacity that he composed the *Munhaṭā Naiṇsī rī Khyāt*.⁴²

Munhaṭā Naiṇsī rī Khyāt's account of Kānhaḍade and the events surrounding the desecration of the Somanātha shrine is rendered in a way that is at once historical and devotional. The text introduces Kānhaḍade, identified as Rāvaḷ Kānarḍe, son of Sāmvatsi, as the master of Jālor and a great Mahārājā, describing him as an avatar of Gokulināth Śrīthākurjī.⁴³ This is similar to how in *Kānhaḍade Prabandha*, Kānhaḍade is described as an incarnation of God, *avatāra*.⁴⁴ Describing the invasion of Gujarat by 'Alā al-Dīn Khaljī and the subsequent desecration of the Somānatha shrine, the text tells us that Alāvdī Sultān ['Alā al-Dīn Khaljī], having come upon Gujarat and imprisoned many of its people, reached Devrō Pāṭaṇ in Sorath, where Somaiyō Mahādeva stood as a jyotirlinga. The Sultān had the liṅga raised, bound in moist hides, and placed upon a cart. What follows is a remarkable depiction of divine resistance: Mahādeva would not move from the place. The Sultān yoked five hundred pairs of bullocks onto a large canopied vehicle. Fire flared repeatedly from within the liṅga, and five hundred water-bearers were kept continuously rinsing it. The bullocks died from their exertions. The text acknowledges the paradox of divine power yielding to demonic force, observing that Mahādeva displayed exceptional magical power but that the *dānavas* were over the *devas* at that time. With great difficulty, the liṅga moved only one kos each day, and in this manner the Sultān's camp came to be established at Sakrāṇo, a village of Jālor lying nine kos from the fort. When Kānhaḍade received word of Mahādeva's setback and learned that the Sultān had encamped with the bound liṅga in his own territory, he dispatched his officers to the Sultān's camp with a message that was unambiguous in both its moral and religious framing: "You have killed and enslaved so many in *Hindusthān*, bound Somaiyō Mahādeva, and encamped in my village near my fort. You have not done well. You do not consider me a Rajpūt."⁴⁵ This was followed by an attack on the camp of the Sultanate forces. The account of what followed the defeat of the Sultanate forces is also described. We are told that after destroying the Sultān's army, Kānhaḍade approached Somaiyō Mahādeva. He placed

his hand on the upper part of the liṅga of Mahādevajī, and it rose up immediately, the resistance it had offered to five hundred pairs of bullocks dissolving at the touch of the devoted ruler of Jālor. Kānhaḍade then installed the liṅga at Sakrāṇo village and had a temple built above it. It was this action of Kānhaḍade, which in the eyes of the author, Munhaṭā Naiṇsī, that “upheld the upheld the dignity of *Hindusthān*.”⁴⁶

The fact that the *Munhaṭā Naiṇsī rī Khyāt*, composed in the 1660s, separated from *Kānhaḍade Prabandha* by more than two centuries, produced under different patronage, in a different genre, and addressing a different audience, preserves the memory of Kānhaḍade’s actions in precisely the same religious and civilisational terms as Padmanābha’s text helps us better understand the limitation of the legitimacy framework. The legitimacy argument, in either its Thapar or Davis formulation, rests implicitly on the assumption that the narrative of desecration and rescue was constructed to serve the specific political interests of a specific lineage at a specific moment. But if that were so, the narrative would have no reason to persist beyond the political context that generated it. Legitimation arguments are contextually bound; they address audiences that share a framework of political recognition, and their relevance diminishes as that context changes. Scholars who interpret Kānhaḍade’s action described in *Kānhaḍade Prabandha* through this lens argue that the recounting of these events served the dynastic interests of a Chauhān lineage in Jālor. *Munhaṭā Naiṇsī rī Khyāt* was composed in the 1660s within the Rajput chronicle tradition, by an Osval Jain Dīvān of Jodhpur, with no direct connection to the Chauhān lineage of Jālor or to the patronage network within which Padmanābha wrote. These two texts share no patronage, no genre, no literary tradition, and no immediate political context. What they share is the memory of an event and the meaning they assign to it, and that meaning is, in both texts, religious and civilisational rather than dynastic and political. Kānhaḍade is remembered not as a lesser Chauhān chief who boosted his legitimacy by capturing an icon, but as a ruler who upheld the ‘dignity of *Hindusthān*’ by fulfilling a divine obligation. It is this action of his that makes him an incarnation of God in the eyes of these two texts. That this memory persisted in this form, across genres and centuries and entirely distinct literary traditions, is the strongest available evidence that it reflects something real about how the episode was understood by those who lived through it and those who came after them.

Conclusion

The close reading of *Kānhaḍade Prabandha* and *Munhaṭā Naiṇsī rī Khyāt* demonstrates that

the episode of the desecration of Somanātha by the Khaljī forces in 1299 CE and its aftermath was understood, narrated, and remembered within the Indic tradition in an unambiguously religious framework. The fact that we see a consistency in the religious meaning ascribed to the action of Kānhaḍade in these two texts shows that this episode retained live religious significance within the Indic tradition. It was understood consistently as an act of devotion and resistance rather than a calculation of dynastic legitimacy. This shows that legitimacy framework, which scholars like Thapar and Davis formulate, is reductionist in nature. In this framework, every action of every historical personality is interpreted as an advance or a diminution of political legitimacy. Kānhaḍade refuses passage to Alāuddīn's army: this is read as a legitimisation claim. He rescues the liṅga: this is read as a seizure of political symbolism. He distributes the five idols across a sacred geography: this is read as territorial marking. The Khaljī forces desecrate Somanātha: this is read as the capture of Gujarāṭi royal legitimacy. In every instance, the political reading is imposed upon the evidence, and the religious meaning that the sources themselves foreground is set aside. The consequence is that the historical actors are effectively reduced. Their religious convictions, their sense of obligation to the divine, their understanding of what was at stake in the encounter between the Sultanate and the sacred sites of Gujarat, are rendered invisible.

This is not to argue that legitimacy played no role in these events. It did. The political dimensions of the Khaljī campaign and of Kānhaḍade's resistance were real, and any serious historiography must acknowledge them. Political consequence and religious motivation are not mutually exclusive, and the insistence that they are is itself a product of a modern analytical hierarchy that did not exist in the medieval contexts under examination. But to acknowledge that an act had political consequences is not the same as arguing that political calculation was its primary motivation. *Munhaṭā Naiṇsī rī Khyāt*'s summative judgement that Kānhaḍade upheld the dignity of *Hindusthān* is not the language of dynastic legitimisation. It is the language of civilisational and religious obligation fulfilled. Kānhaḍade Prabandha's framing of the defenders of Somanātha as having attained spiritual merit surpassing all conventional religious practice is not the language of political symbolism. It is the language of martyrdom and devotion. What the close reading of these two texts demonstrates is that in the episode of the desecration of Somanātha and its rescue, religiosity was not a secondary factor that accompanied political motivation; it was the primary framework within which the events were experienced, narrated, and remembered.

Notes and referen

- ¹ K. S. Lal, *History of the Khaljis: A. D. 1290-1320* (Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1979), 68–70.
- ² D. Sharma, *Early Chauhān Dynasties* (Motilal Banarsidass, 1975), 161, 180–81.
- ³ A. K. Srivastav, *Khalji Sultans in Rajasthan* (Purvanchal Prakashan, 1981), 110–11; and K. S. Lal, *History of the Khaljis: A. D. 1290-1320* (Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1979), 68–70.
- ⁴ A. K. Majumdar, *Chaulukyas of Gujarat* (Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1956), 186–87.
- ⁵ R. H. Davis, *Lives of Indian Images* (Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1999), 88–112.
- ⁶ A. S. Gadre, ed., *Important Inscriptions from the Baroda State*, Vol. 1 (Sri Pratapasimha Maharaja Rajyabhisheka Granthamala, 1943), 67.
- ⁷ K. M. Munshi, *Somanatha: The Shrine Eternal*, (Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1965), 40–47.
- ⁸ *A Collection of Prakrit and Sanskrit Inscriptions* (The Bhavnagar Archaeological Department, 1894), 184–93.
- ⁹ A. K. Majumdar, *Chaulukyas of Gujarat* (Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1956), 372.
- ¹⁰ Amīr Khusrau, *Khazā'inul Fuṭūḥ*, trans. Muhammad Habib (D. B. Taraporewala, Sons & Co., 1931), 35–36.
- ¹¹ H. M. Elliot and J. Dowson, *The History of India as Told by Its Own Historians*, Vol. 3 (Trübner and Co., Paternoster Row, 1871), 43–44.
- ¹² A. M. Khan, *The Political and Statistical History of Gujarat*, trans. James Bird (Richard Bentley, 1835, 2005), 2–3.
- ¹³ M. F. Lokhandwala, trans., *Mirat-i-Ahmadi* (Oriental Institute, 1965), 28.
- ¹⁴ Padmanābha, *Kānhaḍade Prabandha*, trans. V. S. Bhatnagar (Aditya Prakashan, 1991), vii.
- ¹⁵ Padmanābha, *Kānhaḍade Prabandha*, ed. Kāntilāla Baladevarāma Vyāsa (Rajasthan Oriental Research Institute, 1997), 1.
- ¹⁶ *Kānhaḍade Prabandha*, trans. Bhatnagar, 1, 104.
- ¹⁷ R. Thapar, *The Past Before Us* (Harvard University Press, 2013), 651.
- ¹⁸ R. Thapar, *Somanatha: The Many Voices of a History* (Penguin Books India, 2008), 125.

-
- ¹⁹ Padmanābha, *Kānhaḍade Prabandha*, trans. Bhatnagar, vii.
- ²⁰ Ibid., 104.
- ²¹ Ibid., 3–4.
- ²² Ibid., 7.
- ²³ Ibid., 8–10.
- ²⁴ D. B. Diskalkar, “Inscriptions of Kathiawad”, *New Indian Antiquary* 1, (1938-39): 695.
- ²⁵ Padmanābha, *Kānhaḍade Prabandha*, trans. Bhatnagar, 10.
- ²⁶ Ibid., 11.
- ²⁷ Ibid., 10.
- ²⁸ Ibid., 12.
- ²⁹ Ibid., 12–13.
- ³⁰ Ibid., 15.
- ³¹ Ibid., 23–25.
- ³² Ibid., 25.
- ³³ Ibid., 28–29.
- ³⁴ R. Thapar, *Somanatha: The Many Voices of a History* (Penguin Books India, 2008), 128.
- ³⁵ Ibid., 129.
- ³⁶ Davis, *Lives of Indian Images*, 191–94.
- ³⁷ R. M. Eaton, *Temple Desecration and Muslim States in Medieval India* (Hope India Publications, 2004), 32–37.
- ³⁸ Thapar, *Somanatha*, 128.
- ³⁹ Birendra Nath Prasad and Jay Vardhan Singh, “The Making of the ‘Self’ and the ‘Other’: The Representations of Hindus and Muslims in a Fifteenth Century Prākṛit Text,” in *The Social Realms of Religion: New Researches on Religion and Society in Indian History* (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers & Distributors, 2026).
- ⁴⁰ R. D. Saran and N. P. Ziegler, trans., *The Mēṛṭīyo Rāṭhoṛs of Mēṛto, Rājasthān: Select Translations Bearing on the History of a Rajpūt Family, 1462–1660*, Vol. 1, *Michigan Papers on South and Southeast Asian Studies* 51 (University of Michigan, 2001), 10–11.
- ⁴¹ T. Kothiyal, *Nomadic Narratives: A History of Mobility and Identity in the Great Indian Desert* (Cambridge University Press, 2016), 19–20.
- ⁴² Ibid., 52–53.

⁴³ Munhaṭā Naiṇsī, *Munhaṭā Naiṇsī Rī Khyāt*, Vol. 1, ed. Badarīprasāda Sākariyā (Rajasthan Prachyavidha Pratishthana, 1960), 213.

⁴⁴ Padmanābha, *Kānhaḍade Prabandha*, trans. Bhatnagar, 103.

⁴⁵ Munhaṭā Naiṇsī, *Munhaṭā Naiṇsī Rī Khyāt*, Vol. 1, ed. Badarīprasāda Sākariyā (Rajasthan Prachyavidha Pratishthana, 1960), 216–17.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 219.

Bibliography

A *Collection of Prakrit and Sanskrit Inscriptions*. The Bhavnagar Archaeological Department, 1894.

Amīr Khusrau. *Khazā'inul Fuṭūḥ*. Translated by Muhammad Habib. D. B. Taraporewala, Sons & Co., 1931.

Davis, R. H. *Lives of Indian Images*. Motilal Banarsidas Publishers and Private Limited, 1999.

Diskalkar, D. B., “Inscriptions of Kathiawad.” *New Indian Antiquary* 1, (1938): 695.

Eaton, R. M. *Temple Desecration and Muslim States in Medieval India*. Hope India Publications, 2004.

Elliot, H. M., and J. Dowson. *The History of India as Told by Its Own Historians*. Vol. 3. Trubner and Co., 1871.

Gadre, A. S., ed. *Important Inscriptions from the Baroda State*. Vol. 1. Śrī Pratāpasimha Mahārāja Rājyābhisheka Granthamālā, 1943.

Khan, A. M., *The Political and Statistical History of Gujarat*. Translated by James Bird. Richard Bentley New Burlington Street, 1835.

Kothiyal, T. *Nomadic Narratives: A History of Mobility and Identity in the Great Indian Desert*. Cambridge University Press, 2016.

Lal, K. S. *History of the Khaljis: A.D. 1290–1320*. Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1979.

Majumdar, A. K. *Chaulukyas of Gujarat*. Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1956.

Mirat-i-Ahmadi. Translated by M. F. Lokhandwala. Oriental Institute, 1965.

Munhaṭā Naiṇsī. *Munhaṭā Naiṇsī Rī Khyāt*. Vol. 1. Edited by Badarīprasāda Sākariyā. Rajasthan Prachyavidha Pratishthana, 1960.

Munshi, K. M. *Somanatha: The Shrine Eternal*. Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1965.

-
- Padmanābha. *Kānhaḍade Prabandha*. Edited by Kāntilāla Baladevarāma Vyāsa. Rajasthan Oriental Research Institute, 1997.
- Padmanābha. *Kānhaḍade Prabandha*. Translated by V. S. Bhatnagar. Aditya Prakashan, 1991.
- Prasad, B. N., and J. V. Singh, “The Making of the ‘Self’ and the ‘Other’: The Representations of Hindus and Muslims in a Fifteenth Century Prākṛit Text.” In *The Social Realms of Religion: New Researches on Religion and Society in Indian History*, edited by B. N. Prasad. Manohar Publishers & Distributors, 2026.
- Saran, R. and N. P. Ziegler, trans. *The Merṭīyo Rāṭhoṛs of Merṭo, Rājasthān: Select Translations Bearing on the History of a Rajpūt Family 1462–1660*. Vol. 1. University of Michigan Center for South Asian Studies, 2001.
- Sharma, D. *Early Chauhān Dynasties*. Motilal Banarsidass, 1975.
- Srivastav, A. K. *Khalji Sultans in Rajasthan*. Purvanchal Prakashan, 1981.
- Thapar, R. *Somanatha: The Many Voices of a History*. Penguin Books India, 2008.
- Thapar, R. *The Past Before Us*. Harvard University Press, 2013.

Reading Swayambodha and Shatrubodha in K. M. Munshi's 'Jaya Somanath': A Civilizational Inquiry

Dr. Arjun Anand

Independent Scholar

Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi

arjunanand3535@gmail.com

Introduction

Kanhaiyalal Maneklal Munshi's *Jaya Somanath* deals with the story of the epic heroism of Bheemdev and the transcendental love of the temple dancer Chaula, for the brave warrior. This historical romance was originally written in Gujarati. The historical fiction throws light on the political landscape of western India during the religio-military conquest of the Somanath Temple by Mahmud of Ghazni. I try to situate this work in the Swayambodha-Shatrubodha¹ scale developed by Pankaj Saxena.² While not a rigid quantitative measurement, the "Swayambodha-Shatrubodha Scale" is used in this paper as a heuristic tool to evaluate the theological imperative of 'Jaya Somanath' based on their clarity of purpose and their alignment with Dharmic interests.

Swayambodha involves an internal understanding of who one is—individually and as a collective society. It encompasses the principles of Sanatana Dharma, the significance of rituals, the role of *dharma* (duty) over rights-based paradigms, and the preservation of one's cultural and spiritual identity. It is, essentially, the act of knowing the 'self' within the context of Indian civilization. On the other hand, Shatrubodha is the capacity for "ethical othering" - the ability to recognize and distinguish between forces that sustain Dharma and those that are inimical to it. Saxena emphasizes that in this framework, a "Shatru" (enemy) is not any individual, but rather an institutional or ideological force that actively seeks to dismantle the civilizational foundations of Hindu society without any provocation.

The "Scale" is a conceptual device Saxena employs to assess various historical and contemporary figures (such as Gandhi, Savarkar, or Ambedkar). It functions by placing these

figures along the depth of Swayambodha (the essence of Sanatana Dharma, its traditions, and the necessity of its continuity) and the clarity of Shatrubodha (identification of the institutional, colonial, or foreign ideological threats facing the civilization). By plotting figures on this framework, the objective is to move beyond uncritical hagiography or condemnation, instead fostering a nuanced understanding of where specific historical choices - or the lack thereof - have impacted the preservation and continuity of the Dharmic tradition. It serves as a call for *viveka* (discernment), encouraging a shift from mere reaction to proactive, informed, and coordinated civilizational protection.

This paper is in no way a commentary on the genius and contributions of a civilization giant like K. M. Munshi. It just seeks to point out a systemic flaw in popular Hindu perspective on Islam which hinders the objective study of the same. Additionally, this paper is conceptualized on the conviction that Hindu civilization has a lot to offer as a knowledge society. However, the internal inertia as well as colonial aggression put obstacles to realize the full normative potential of Bharat. Hence, the recognition of Swayambodha and Shatrubodha becomes essential. The history of the continuous revitalization of Somnath is a story that is the Rāma-Bāṇa to ascertain important aspects of our Swayambodha and Shatrubodha.

Munshi's Swayambodha: The Recognition of Civilizational Identity

Somnath represents a Civilizational Constant where the ritual continuity of a Hindu traditional institution overrode the material discontinuity of the architecture. Munshi was one of the pioneers of the most recent reconstruction of the temple, which was destroyed by Jihadi-forces half a dozen times, in 1951. His Swayambodha was alive in his actions, and was inspiring the people to take up Dharmic causes. In addition to 'Jaya Somanath,' he wrote 'Somanath: The Shrine Eternal' which is considered as the "best known and most comprehensive work on Somanatha".³ This historical account was published by Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan in 1951 to commemorate the reconstruction of the temple.

'Jaya Somanath,' the focal text of this paper, is a historical fiction written in 1937. So, it is not meant to be factually correct. Imagination is essential to construct any piece of literature. Moreover, the historical validity of the novel is not the subject matter of this paper. It is a fictional story set in the background of a series of real-life incidents, i.e. the destruction of Somanath by the army of Mahmud of Ghazni in 1026 C.E. What the author wants to note is that those incidents had particular civilizational context. That is why, the destruction of

Somanath and countless other Hindu sacred spaces became a frequent affair since the advent of Islam in the greater Bharat region. “In the history of Islam,” notes Ram Swarup, “iconoclasm and razing other peoples’ temples are not aberrations - stray acts of zealous but misguided rulers - but are central to the faith.”⁴

Likewise, the resistance by Hindus and the rebirth of deities also became a frequent affair in the greater Bharat region after the arrival of Islam. Meenakshi Jain’s seminal work ‘Flight of Deities and Rebirth of Temples: Episodes from Indian History’, explores the cultural and physical resilience of Indian civilization through the lens of temple destruction and reconstruction.⁵ A Hindu temple is ritualistically designed to ensure the praxis of Dharma for the masses. Stella Kramrisch, in her monumental work on Hindu temples, elucidates:⁶

The purpose of the Hindu temple is shown by its form. It is the concrete symbol of Reintegration and coheres with the rhythm of the thought imaged in its carvings and laid out in its proportions. Their perfection is a celebration of all the rites enacted during the building of the temple from the ground to its pinnacle. Nothing that is seen on the temple is left unsaid in the verbal tradition nor is any of the detail arbitrary or superfluous. Each has a definite place and is part of the whole. The Hindu temple is the sum total of architectural rites performed on the basis of its myth. The myth covers the ground and is the plan on which the structure is raised.

In simpler words, it is meant to take the knowledge of the Vedas to the masses. The primary purpose of the Hindu temple’s establishment was to make the Vedic knowledge available to masses. In the form of a *yajña-vedi*, the Hindu temple was constructed.⁷ Not only this, temples were historically considered as the hubs of cultural, social and economic activities. A temple was, thus, such an essential feature of the Hindu public life which we can easily grasp from the reading of the historical fiction. Munshi starts the story with the narration of hordes of pilgrims flocking to the sacred shrine on Utthāna Ekādaśī, “the most sacred day in the year.”⁸ He provides a vivid description of the Prabhāsa town, where Somanath is situated, which is described as “the city of god, centuries of faith had made it the doorway to heaven.”⁹

Then comes the portrayal of the grand annual festival at the Somnath temple, coinciding with the Pūrṇimā (full moon) of the month of *Karttika*. The atmosphere is one of immense spiritual energy, marked by the chanting of hundreds of Brahmins, the performances of numerous dancers, and the gathering of hundreds of thousands of pilgrims from across the

Indian subcontinent. King Bhima, the Solanki ruler of Gujarat, is present alongside his royal court. The centerpiece of the celebration is the debut dance of Chaula (a temple dancer), whose ecstatic movements symbolize a profound, collective devotion to Lord Shiva. She wins Bhimadeva's heart and both of them marry later in the story.

This celebration is soon interrupted by reports of Mahmud of Ghazni's latest military expedition, which is clearly aimed at Gujarat and the Somnath shrine. K.M. Munshi weaves a tale of political intrigue, romance, and warfare, leading to a valiant but ultimately failed attempt by the Solanki forces to protect the temple. The assault ends with Mahmud shattering the sacred idol with his mace. King Bhima, rendered unconscious by his injuries, is secretly spirited away on a boat by the temple priest, narrowly escaping the final Ghaznavid onslaught.

Once the invading armies retreat toward Afghanistan with their spoils, Bhima returns to restore order to his kingdom. His immediate priority is the reconstruction of the temple. The novel concludes with a second massive festival at Somnath to mark the ceremonial installation of a new *Śiva linga*. As kings and devotees gather once more, Chaula (now the queen of Bhimadeva) performs her final dance—an act of such intense devotion that she collapses and passes away at its conclusion.

Munshi weaves the Hindu traditional background beautifully. The spirit behind the institution of devadāsī-s, the management of temples by the Pāśupata sect, the adoration of Bhagwān as the real ruler of the land by the Rājapūta-s, the inter-sectarian diversions among the Hindu traditions based on rituals, and the intra-sectarian politics are all narrated with much flair and ease. For K.M. Munshi, Somnath transcends its role as a mere religious sanctuary dedicated to Bhagwān Śiva; it serves as a potent emblem inextricably linked to the broader ethos of Hindu civilizational identity. This is why it unites a number of kingdoms and warrior clans to lay their lives for its protection. He includes tales of treachery, jealousy and cowardice in the narrative which add to the gravitas of the story. He beautifully narrates the Bhakti spirit behind the much-maligned Deva-Dāsī tradition in the following words:¹⁰

Her eyes were fixed on the image of the Lord whom had been worshipping for many years in the single-minded hope of winning His favour. She felt that her Lord was waiting for her, was impatient for her dance, was eager to congratulate her. The very thought brought life into her frozen feet. With swift movements of her feet, she sailed towards the entrance of the sanctum; that was the signal for

music begin.

She was no longer the temple dancer, Chaula, but the Spouse of the Lord. The temple was the high Himalayas. This was not the image of her Lord, but the Lord Himself. She felt she was not a temple dancer, but His Spouse Parvati herself wooing him. Particularly interesting is the story of Shivarashi, the disciple of the head of the Pāśupati sect. His theological divergences with his guru Gang Sarvagna, and his infatuation for Chaula who marries Bhimadeva, drives him into committing treason. He helps Mahmud's soldiers enter the Prabhas fortress on the condition that they will not desecrate the shrine, and make him the head of the Pāśupata sect after massacring the Hindu forces of resistance. When Mahmud enters the temple, he reminds him the promise. Mahmud replied laughingly, "You Kafir, Mohammed does not sell idols. He is an idol-breaker."¹¹

The Critique: A Deficit in Shatrubodha

Why couldn't Shivarashi understand that Mahmud will definitely desecrate the temple? Why the warnings that Mahmud had destroyed the temples in Multan, Sthaneshwar and Mathura did not alert Shivarashi about the theological imperative of Islamic iconoclasm? V. S. Bhatnagar notes that the "Hindus took the conduct of the Muslims philosophically, taking it to be the behaviour of ignorant and misguided people,"¹² which it was not. Whatever may be the reasons, but iconoclasm as the theological compulsion in Islam is a fact which has been difficult to digest for the Hindu intelligentsia. This is what I call as the deficit in Shatrubodha.

Munshi's historical fiction is a very balanced retelling of the conquest of Somnath. It does not unnecessarily demonize Mahmud, even shows him in a better light. He is portrayed as an able commander, astute warrior and a principled ruler. He becomes impressed with the courage of Samant Chauhan who attempted an unsuccessful assassination, and lets him go free. He is shown as a calm, brave and righteous conqueror. Of course, the historical fiction genre has "fiction" in its noun. One cannot expect strict factual accuracy from such a work. But things become problematic when the fiction partially hides the Islamic theological basis of barbaric deeds of a ghazi like Mahmud Ghazni. He writes that Mahmud "aspired to be the torch-bearer of Islam and to achieve immortality by destroying idols. He razed the temples of Mathura of age-old glory. The plundered crowns of deities he gave to the women of his zenana."¹³ But Munshi also writes that while his forces stood ready to attack the Somnath fortifications, Mahmud wonders, *With Allah and the Prophet on his side, why could not victory be won without bloodshed?*¹⁴

It is not that he does not discuss the iconoclasm of Mahmud, or the fact that he took pride in the destruction of Hindu life-worlds. He just stops short of analysing the purely theological logic of Islamic iconoclasm. Why would Allah and the Prophet not want bloodshed? Is Islam against violence against Kafirs? Do Islamic scriptures preach a “live and let live” approach to life? I will and cannot answer all these questions in this paper. What I will do is discuss some contemporary and later Muslim accounts of the Somanath desecration by Mahmud of Ghazni to ascertain whether what he did was against Islam or not.

Hindu temple destruction was a common and boasted phenomenon during Islamic rule in various parts of Bharat, since the aggression on Sindh by Md. Bin Qasim. “There are many mosques all over India,” writes historian Sitaram Goel, “which are known to local tradition and the Archaeological Survey of India as built on the site of and, quite frequently, from the materials of, demolished Hindu temples.”¹⁵ Most of them carry inscriptions invoking Allah and the Prophet, quoting the Quran and giving details of when, how and by whom they were constructed.” And this is not a political phenomenon, rather an ideological one.¹⁶

Bamiyan Buddhas, the once highest Buddha statues in Afghanistan sacred for the followers of Buddha, were annihilated by the Taliban in 2001. The Taliban faced intense international pressure to preserve the sculptures when they declared their intention to demolish them. However, the group used massive explosives to bring down the monuments, calling them un-Islamic.¹⁷ After the destruction, the Justice Ministry of Taliban issued a statement, “We have obeyed the orders of Allah by destroying the idols.”¹⁸ Interestingly, the Bamiyan Buddha statues were also desecrated by Aurangzeb and Nadir Shah earlier.

K. M. Munshi was very much aware of this fact and hence he states, in his later works, to Islamic “invaders nothing was sacred.”¹⁹ He quotes Al-Utbi to express the fact that in the days of Mahmud of Ghazni, “the blood of the infidels flowed copiously and apostasy was often the only way of survival.” He even quotes “so liberal a Muslim of this age as Amir Khusrav,” to elucidate that “the land had been saturated with the water of the sword and the vapours of infidelity (i.e. Hindus) had been dispersed.” Furthermore, he quotes Will Durant, who in his ‘Story of Civilization,’ aptly says: “The Mohammedan conquest of India is probably the bloodiest story in history. It is a discouraging tale, for its evident moral is that civilization is a precarious thing, whose delicate complex of order and liberty, culture and peace may at any time be overthrown by barbarians invading from without or multiplying within”. In his

Somanath: The Shrine Eternal, he asserts:²⁰

The Conquest of India is the Conquest of Culture by Those Who Lacked

This clearly means that either in his later days he may have become convinced about the theological origins of Islamic iconoclasm. Let us discuss some of the contemporary evidence. Though Al-Utbi's writes about the exploits of Mahmud only until 1020, but he makes the ghazi's religious motive abundantly clear.²¹ He states that Mahmud's army "upon arriving at the provinces of India ... began with open hand to devastate the lands, to punish the infidels, to overturn the idols." He explains the reason of his conquest as, "the country might be cleansed from the odiousness of that idolatrous people; and he spread the carpet of the Muhammadan religion and law, and drew the people of those provinces into the bond of Islam, and arranged the construction of mosques and pulpits, and appointed imams, for the purpose of instructing them in the precepts of religion and the laws of Islam."²²

Utbi's chronicles are replete with descriptions of the widespread slaughter of Hindus who, upon being captured after the fall of a city or fortress, refused to renounce their faith and were subsequently killed by Mahmud's forces.²³ Citing Qur'an, Al-Utbi eulogizes the vision and mission of Sultan Mahmud thus:²⁴

The Sultan, Yamin-Addoulah, in the year 400, having taken India and proceeded into the most distant limits of the land, into regions where Islam had never displayed her standards, and unto parts whereunto the wondrous verses of the Muhammadan profession had never extended, having purified that region from the darkness of denial, and having lighted the blazing torches of the Law in those tracts and towns, having founded mosques, and having exhibited the perusal of the noble book in the verses of the glorious Kuran, in the audible prayer- summons, and in the other signs of the belief; wished to take possession also of the remainder of the land of those vile ones, and to bring ruin upon those enemies of the faith and servants of idols, and to subdue, by the cutting proofs of the sword, the deniers of the unity and glory of God, to catch in the snare of Islam, that owl of their confidence, who was hooting in the duskiess of novel errors. Therefore he summoned his victorious armies and heroic bands, and covered them with great honour and eloquent commendation, erecting, as the guide of his plans and the Kiblah of his devoted ones, that verse of the glorious Kuran, "He hath incited the believers; God is able to make them sufficient (to cope with) the powers of those who believe not, for God is mighty in force and mighty to subdue." And, thus strengthened by the breastplate of purity and pardon, with the pearl of self-command, and the gem of confidence in the help of Heaven, he marched towards his business, with an army of the stars of this world and of the other, with a most lofty

assembly (emphasis added).

Davis states that while eulogizing the desecration of Somanath by Mahmud, later chroniclers emphasize Prophet Muhammad as “the exemplary destroyer of idols, and the paradigmatic moment was the Prophet’s destruction of the idols of the Ka‘ba in Mecca.”²⁵ Al-Utbi further emphasizes:²⁶

(T)he men of Islam made a charge, and scattered them all about the skirt of the rocks, and they took the path of flight and preservation from the heat of that battle and onset... The army spilt so much blood (of Hindus) that the water of that, river was so full, and that stream so abundantly stained with gore, that it could not be used for purification and was forbidden to drinkers, and if the darkness of the night had not prevented it, not one of these wretches would have escaped with life, all through the blessing which is upon Islam, and the wondrous religion of Muhammad, unto which by the kind promise of Heaven victory is pledged, and for the manifestation of whose sayings, the standard of the glorious Kuran speaks plainly, “He unto whom He sent his Apostle to guide him, and the faith of truth to lighten all to religion, even although the idolaters hate it” – Kuran (emphasis added).

The spilling of blood is done especially in the name of Allah and his Prophet, not in spite of them. “The promise of heaven is pledged” to people who do bloodshed in the name of Islam. I am not arguing that Islam, despite the popular claims, is a monolith. There are diverse sects within Islam that debate and dissent vociferously. There are Muslims who are good people. I am just stating that the dehumanization of (violence against) non-believers is a basic feature of Islamic theology, not an exception, which is exemplified throughout the history of Islamic expansion. The hatred for non-believers is so essential that for no fault of their own, people who were born before the arrival of Islam are condemned to damnation. The list of people who live in hell also includes all ancestors of the Prophet himself. According to the Quran itself, only Allah has the authority to decide who goes to heaven and who goes to hell, not the prophet. All of the prophet’s predecessors and everyone else must be in hell as no one who had rejected Islam could enter paradise.²⁷

In addition to Al-Utbi, countless later chroniclers and travellers have celebrated the destruction of Somanath by Mahmud of Ghazni in theological terms. “These accounts,” comments Davis, “built upon the famous event (of Somanath desecration), reinforced the status of Mahmud as an archetypal Islamic warrior bringing new lands into the Islamic fold.”²⁸ For instance, Badauni proudly explaining that the shattered fragments of the Somnath

idol were installed at the threshold of the Jami Masjid so that worshippers would continuously walk over them. Furthermore, it should be noted that the medieval Hindu epic literary genre of resistance “developed largely in ignorance of” the Muslim accounts.²⁹ Hence, Hindu intelligentsia failed to theologically understand the Islamic iconoclastic menace. The civilizational lack of shatrubodha emanates from this fact. But why did they fail?

The Theoretical Blindness: A Category Error

We could not counter Islamic iconoclasm and separatism in an institutional way. India got partitioned in 1947 on the basis of Islamic theology. The Gandhian experiment failed. We are on the verge of total demographic takeover in nearly half a dozen border states. Islamic terror seems to be directly linked to Islamic theology. The reason that many scholars, in addition to lay persons, fails to observe this basic fact may be in the theoretical assumption that all religions are (more or less) same. While quoting Islamic scholar after scholar celebrating the desecration of a Hindu sacred site without any provocation, Richard Davis false equivalences between the imperialist Islamic project and the native Hindu resistance.³⁰ It must be noted that no Hindu ruler was desecrating mosques as a theological imperative or a civilizational policy, while the vice-versa is not true. He goes to the extent of negating widespread Islamic iconoclasm with academic jargons:³¹

Doming of former temples turned into mosques was not an uncommon architectural alteration of the period. Iconoclasm, and the subsequent colonization of Hindu sacred spaces, is described as “not an uncommon architectural alteration.” Unfortunately, negationism of Islamic iconoclasm and terrorism has been a dominant theme in contemporary history-writing of Medieval India. ‘Negationism in India: Concealing the Record of Islam’ is an seminal work by Koenraad Elst on the same theme. Pushkar Raj, in his unpublished paper, critically analyses the works of historians like Richard Eaton and Romila Thapar who draw false equivalences to downplay Islamic iconoclasm with the foundation of primary Persian sources.³² The false equivalences are drawn because of a category mistake. The category being that of ‘religion.’ If Islam and Sanātana Dharma are both religions, then they cannot be much different from each other. This is why some scholars observe similarities where there are none.

I argue that if the Hindu traditions are collectively termed as ‘religion,’ then Islam cannot be one. Likewise, if Islam is a ‘religion,’ then Hindu Dharma is not. We can observe that the means of differentiation of a Muslim from a non-believer is the dogma. If you believe in it, you are an insider. If not, you are a Kafir, worthy of condemnation to eternal hell. On the

other hand, right conduct is prioritized over right belief in Hindu cultural setting. To prove my point, and for a fair comparison, I will be presenting the views of a medieval Hindu chronicler, Padmanābha. He was a scholar of Jalor court. He penned a heroic epic titled ‘Kānhaḍade Prabandha’ in 1455, at the request of the local ruler Akhairaja, a direct descendent of Kānhaḍade. Here too Somanath (attack by the forces of Ala-ud-Din Khalji) figures as the cultural background.

I am not delving into the storyline, but the outlines of swayambodha and shatrubodha as emanating out of his narrative. Delineating the way of Dharma, and extolling right conduct, Padmanābha notes:³³ Those who have earned puṇya enjoy the pleasures of the world. It is due to puṇyas that one can perform more puṇyas in a gracious manner, and it is on account of puṇya that everyday is as bright and prosperous as Divali. The stones which the brave Vānaras (monkeys) brought floated on water on account of puṇya and even what may seem impossible becomes possible due to puṇyas, such as the destruction of all the Rakshasas by Lord Rama.

Now, contrast this with a Muslim chronicler describing the way of Islam. In his ‘*Ashīka*, Amir Khusraw proclaims, “Happy Hindustan, the splendour of Religion, where the (Muslim holy) Law finds perfect honour and security. . . The strong men of Hind have been trodden under foot and are ready to pay tribute. Islam is triumphant and idolatry is subdued.”³⁴ Interestingly, idolatry is not a positive religious practice which can be defined in clear terms. It is a category of discourse, derived from the Greek word for ‘adoration of images,’ which denotes the “derogatory” religious practices of the religious other. “The discourse of idolatry,” writes Davis, “involves a profound denial of livelihood to the images of others.”³⁵ It must be noted that there is an image in Ka’ba too. Anthropologist A. M. Hocart contended that accusations of idol worship and the resulting destruction of religious imagery are frequently tied to broader efforts to consolidate religious and political power.³⁶

Religion, as monotheism, seems to be a political/dogmatic affair rather than a performative/contemplative one. The primary reason for religious othering being dogmatic difference, a religion is primarily concerned with the contestation of beliefs. On the other hand, Padmanābha criticizes Muslim invaders on their conduct, not beliefs.³⁷ They devastate villages, takes common people as slaves, and torture cows and Brahmins. There is no discussion of their theology as inherently violent. As discussed earlier, the conduct of the Muslims was taken to be the behaviour of ignorant and misguided people. He even tries to

make sense of rampant temple destruction by Muslim rulers within the belief of Kaliyuga.³⁸ The description of Muslims as ‘Asuras’ is also grounded on the fact that they desecrate temples.³⁹

Unfortunately, given the whitewashing of Islamic iconoclasm in modern times, it must be pointed out that temples were attacked without provocation of any sort. Destruction of mosques, not standing on temple ruins, by Hindus is almost unheard of medieval Indian history. Still, Davis equates Islamic epics of desecration with the Hindu epics of resistance as presenting “the views of elite courtiers who defend conservative ideologies within settings of religious plurality and debate, and seek to persuade royal audiences to adopt vigorous military programs of conquest and resistance, respectively.”⁴⁰

I think that the flaw with Hindu intelligentsia remains that they are primarily offering resistance, and not addressing the elephant in the room. The theoretical flaw lies in not studying and accepting the theological roots of iconoclasm and Jihadi bloodshed. The ‘Voice of India’ school led by Sita Ram Goel and Ram Swarup were the first group courageous enough to promote and publish honest scholarship on Islam and other civilizational adversaries. The two volumed ‘Hindu Temples: What Happened to Them’ edited by Sita Ram Goel, and ‘Understanding Islam Through Hadis’ by Ram Swarup (among many other works) prove beyond doubt that the Hindu Dharma and Islam cannot be defined by a single category. If contemporary scholars do not understand this basic fact, and policy makers do not take this into account, then another partition of Bharat is not far away. Failing to address these theological roots has created a civilizational wound that remains vulnerable to future threats. That is why Munshi comments:⁴¹ And neither the ferocity nor the persistence of the invader could lead the Indians to develop the military organisation or the ruthlessness needed to match the opposing savagery.

Conclusion: The Qualitative Measure of Civilizational Awareness

The *Swayambodha–Shatrubodha* scale, as employed in this paper, is not a quantitative instrument but a qualitative heuristic—a way of evaluating the depth and clarity of a thinker’s or community’s civilizational awareness. *Swayambodha* denotes self-recognition and continuity with the philosophical and ritual foundation of Sanātana Dharma, while *Shatrubodha* signifies the ethical discernment necessary to identify forces opposed to it. Both are complementary poles of a living civilization: one nurturing inner coherence, the other

ensuring outer vigilance. When balanced, they sustain Dharma not merely as an abstract virtue but as a way of being in the world.

In this light, K. M. Munshi's *Jaya Somanath* emerges as a profound expression of *Swayambodha*—a reaffirmation of Hindu cultural identity, spiritual resilience, and collective pride centred upon the eternal sanctity of Somnath. His lifelong dedication to the reconstruction of the temple, and his literary rendering of its ethos, testify to his deep alignment with *Deva*, *Desha*, and *Dharma*. While striving towards the reconstruction of Somanath, even the first Prime Minister of India was against him. In November 1951, the Prāṇa-Pratiṣṭhā at Somanath was presided over by the President of India, Dr. Rajendra Prasad. Although Jawaharlal Nehru had voiced his opposition to the President's involvement, Prasad maintained a stance in the language of 'secular impartiality,' noting he would similarly honor an invitation from a mosque or a church.

K.M. Munshi, the driving force behind the project, was absent from the rites due to his official duties in Burma, where he was negotiating rice imports as the Union Minister for Food and Agriculture. Despite his distance, Munshi remained spiritually connected to the moment, and wrote: "With the dawn of a new era, the new temple has risen like the phoenix, from its own ashes."⁴² He critiqued the ones who were opposed to the project, and said that they were "more fond of dead stones than live values." He further added, "I am fond of history, but fonder still of creative values."⁴³ Munshi asserted:⁴⁴

This temple once restored to a place of importance in our life, will give to our people purer conception of religion and a more vivid consciousness of our strength, so vital in these days of freedom and its trials.

Yet, within this luminous *Swayambodha* lies a subtle underrepresentation of *Shatrubodha*: the civilizational ability to apprehend, in unambiguous theological terms, the ideological motives behind iconoclasm. It is not that he was not aware about the theological motives of Mahmud while writing the novel in 1937. However, the only sentence where Allah and his Prophet are mentioned in the novel, they are taken with prayer against bloodshed.⁴⁵ All the primary sources point out that Islamic theology was responsible for the bloodshed against the non-believers. It never sensitized any practising Muslim against it.

This deficit is not unique to Munshi but symptomatic of a broader Hindu intellectual

disposition that often presumes moral equivalence among all traditions - extending the ethics of Dharma even toward those whose theological structures are non-reciprocal to it. Munshi was not alone in this partial theological blindness towards Islam. The objective here is not to diminish Munshi's stature or question his devotion to the Hindu cause. Rather, it is to recognize how even the most visionary among us may reflect an inherited civilizational tendency—to explain the “other” through the moral grammar of the “self.” For a civilization to endure, both knowledge of the self and recognition of the “other” must mature in tandem.

Somnath, thus, continues to stand not only as a symbol of faith rebuilt from ruins but also as a reminder that civilizations survive by cultivating both self-knowledge and strategic discernment. True civilizational awakening emerges when *Swayambodha* finds its necessary complement in *Shatrubodha* - when inner devotion is matched by outer clarity, and reverence becomes wedded to vigilance. This paper grounds the historical data to point out the civilizational lesson of the millennia which the historical fiction fails to discuss. To move beyond inertia and achieve the normative potential of Bharat, an integrated approach of both *Swayambodha* and *Shatrubodha* is indispensable. Calling a spade, a spade is essential.

Notes and references

¹ A sense of the civilizational ‘self’ and the ‘other’.

² P. Saxena. *Svayambodha and Shatrubodha: Hindu View of Self and the World*. (Blueone Ink, 2025).

³ R. H. Davis, *Lives of Indian Images* (Motilal Banarsidass, 1999), 187.

⁴ S. R. Goel, ed. *Hindu Temples: What Happened to Them*, Vols. 1-2. (Voice of India, 2020).

⁵ M. Jain, *Flight of Deities and Rebirth of Temples: Episodes from Indian History* (Aryan Books International, 2019).

⁶ S. Kramrisch, *The Hindu Temple* (University of Calcutta, 1946).

⁷ P. Saxena, *Svayambodha and Shatrubodha: Hindu View of Self and the World*. (Blueone Ink, 2025), 98.

⁸ K. M. Munshi, *Jaya Somanath* (Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1988), 2.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 290.

-
- ¹² Padmanābha, *Kāṇhadade Prabandha*, trans. V. S. Bhatnagar (Aditya Prakashan, 1991), 137–138.
- ¹³ K. M. Munshi, *Jaya Somanath* (Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1988), 77.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 234.
- ¹⁵ S. R. Goel, ed. *Hindu Temples: What Happened to Them*, Vols. 1-2. (Voice of India, 2020).
- ¹⁶ P. Saxena, *Svayambodha and Shatrubodha: Hindu View of Self and the World*. (Blueone Ink, 2025), 200-204.
- ¹⁷ K. Cobiella and R. McCullough, “The Taliban Destroyed Afghanistan’s Ancient Buddhas. Now They’re Welcoming Tourists.” *NBC News*, December 7, 2021. [nbcnews.com](https://www.nbcnews.com).
- ¹⁸ M. Jain, *Flight of Deities and Rebirth of Temples: Episodes from Indian History* (Aryan Books International, 2019), 29.
- ¹⁹ K. M. Munshi, *Foreword to The History and Culture of the Indian People*. Vol. 5, *The Struggle for Empire*, eds. R. C. Majumdar, A. D. Pusalker, and A. K. Majumdar, (Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 2001), xiv.
- ²⁰ K. M. Munshi, *Somanath: The Shrine Eternal* (Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1965), 32.
- ²¹ Al-Utbi. *The Kitab-i-Yamini: Historical Memoirs of the Amír Sabaktagín, and the Sultán Mahmúd of Ghazna*, trans. James Reynolds (Oriental Translation Fund of Great Britain and Ireland, 1858), 361.
- ²² *Ibid.*, 324-325.
- ²³ R. C. Majumdar, A. D. Pusalker, and A. K. Majumdar, eds., *The History and Culture of the Indian People*, Vol. 5, *The Struggle for Empire* (Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 2001), 499-501.
- ²⁴ Al-Utbi. *The Kitab-i-Yamini: Historical Memoirs of the Amír Sabaktagín, and the Sultán Mahmúd of Ghazna*, trans. James Reynolds (Oriental Translation Fund of Great Britain and Ireland, 1858), 388-389.
- ²⁵ R. H. Davis, *Lives of Indian Images* (Motilal Banarsidass, 1999), 95.
- ²⁶ Al-Utbi. *The Kitab-i-Yamini: Historical Memoirs of the Amír Sabaktagín, and the Sultán Mahmúd of Ghazna*, trans. James Reynolds (Oriental Translation Fund of Great Britain and Ireland, 1858), 395.
- ²⁷ P. Saxena, *Svayambodha and Shatrubodha: Hindu View of Self and the World*. (Blueone Ink, 2025), 266-267.
- ²⁸ R. H. Davis, *Lives of Indian Images* (Motilal Banarsidass, 1999), 88, 95-105.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, 90.

-
- ³⁰ Ibid., 194.
- ³¹ Ibid., 197.
- ³² Pushkar Raj, *Representation of the Ghaznavid raid at Somnath in Muslim sources: A critique of existing interpretations* (Unpublished manuscript).
- ³³ Padmanābha, *Kāṇhadade Prabandha*, trans. V. S. Bhatnagar (Aditya Prakashan, 1991), 26.
- ³⁴ R. H. Davis, *Lives of Indian Images* (Motilal Banarsidass, 1999), 89.
- ³⁵ Ibid., 205.
- ³⁶ A. M. Hocart, *Kings and Councilors: An Essay in the Comparative Anatomy of Human Society* (University of Chicago Press, 1970), 246-248.
- ³⁷ Padmanābha, *Kāṇhadade Prabandha*, trans. V. S. Bhatnagar (Aditya Prakashan, 1991), 4.
- ³⁸ Ibid., 10.
- ³⁹ Ibid., 23, 28.
- ⁴⁰ R. H. Davis, *Lives of Indian Images* (Motilal Banarsidass, 1999), 91.
- ⁴¹ Munshi, foreword to *The History and Culture of the Indian People*, vol. 5, xv.
- ⁴² R. H. Davis, *Lives of Indian Images* (Motilal Banarsidass, 1999), 219.
- ⁴³ Ibid., 214.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid., 219.
- ⁴⁵ K. M. Munshi, *Jaya Somanath* (Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1988), 234.

Bibliography

- Al-Utbi. *The Kitab-i-Yamini: Historical Memoirs of the Amīr Sabaktagīn, and the Sultān Mahmūd of Ghazna*. Translated by James Reynolds. Oriental Translation Fund of Great Britain and Ireland, 1858.
- Cobiella, K., and R. McCullough. "The Taliban Destroyed Afghanistan's Ancient Buddhas. Now They're Welcoming Tourists." *NBC News*, December 7, 2021. [nbcnews.com](https://www.nbcnews.com).
- Davis, R. H. *Lives of Indian Images*. Motilal Banarsidass, 1999.
- Goel, S. R. ed. *Hindu Temples: What Happened to Them*. Vols. 1-2. E-book. Voice of India, 2020.
- Hocart, A. M. *Kings and Councilors: An Essay in the Comparative Anatomy of Human Society*. University of Chicago Press, 1970.
- Jain, M. *Flight of Deities and Rebirth of Temples: Episodes from Indian History*. Aryan Books International, 2019.
- Kramrisch, S. *The Hindu Temple*. University of Calcutta, 1946.

- Majumdar, R. C., A. D. Pusalker, and A. K. Majumdar, eds. *The History and Culture of the Indian People*. Vol. 5. *The Struggle for Empire*. Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 2001.
- Munshi, K. M. *Jaya Somanath*. Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1988.
- Munshi, K. M. *Somanath: The Shrine Eternal*. Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1965.
- Munshi, K. M. Foreword to *The History and Culture of the Indian People*. Vol. 5, *The Struggle for Empire*, edited by R. C. Majumdar, A. D. Pusalker, and A. K. Majumdar, vii–xiv. Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 2001.
- Padmanābha. *Kānhaḍade Prabandha: India's Greatest Patriotic Saga of Medieval*. Translated by V. S. Bhatnagar. Aditya Prakashan, 1991.
- Raj, P. "Representation of the Ghaznavid raid at Somnath in Muslim sources: A critique of existing interpretations." Unpublished manuscript.
- Saxena, P. *Svayambodha and Shatrubodha: Hindu View of Self and the World*. Blueone Ink, 2025.

Somnath: The Unbroken Temple - Architecture, Memory, and the Idea of Resilience

Shweta Kalmeshwar Handigol

Independent Researcher

Belagavi, Karnataka

handigolshweta04@gmail.com

Abstract

The Somnath Temple holds a significant position within the sacred and historical landscape of India, functioning as both a major Jyotirlinga shrine and a site deeply embedded in collective memory. Over centuries, the temple has undergone multiple phases of destruction and reconstruction, frequently discussed in relation to political history and narratives associated with Mahmud of Ghazni. While existing scholarship has largely examined Somnath through the lenses of historiography, religious importance, and political symbolism, relatively limited attention has been given to the role of architecture in mediating and sustaining civilisational memory. Addressing this gap, the present paper re-examines Somnath by foregrounding its architectural history as a critical site of continuity. The paper argues that the idea of Somnath as an “unbroken temple” must be understood not in terms of uninterrupted material existence, but as the persistence of sacred identity through repeated acts of reconstruction. By analysing successive building phases, spatial continuity, and symbolic elements, the study demonstrates how architecture operates as an active medium through which memory is preserved, rearticulated, and transmitted across historical ruptures. Situating this discussion within broader debates on heritage, memory, and Indian temple traditions, the paper suggests that reconstruction at Somnath represents a deliberate cultural practice rather than a mere response to loss. It thus positions Somnath as a compelling example of how built form participates in the making of civilisational memory, where resilience is not only remembered but materially enacted.

Keywords: Civilisational Memory, Reconstruction, Resilience, Somnath Temple, Temple Architecture

Introduction

The Somnath Temple occupies a significant place within the sacred geography and historical imagination of India. Revered as one of the twelve Jyotirlinga shrines dedicated to Shiva, it has long been associated with both religious devotion and layered historical memory. The temple's history is frequently narrated through cycles of destruction and reconstruction, most notably in connection with the raid of Mahmud of Ghazni in the 11th century.¹ Such narratives have often framed Somnath within broader political and ideological debates, emphasising themes of conflict, loss, and revival.

While existing scholarship has largely approached Somnath through historiographical, religious, and political perspectives, comparatively limited attention has been given to the role of architecture in shaping and sustaining its continuity. The temple is often treated as a passive subject of historical events rather than as an active medium through which meaning is preserved and transmitted. As a result, the repeated reconstructions of Somnath are commonly understood as responses to rupture, rather than as part of a continuous cultural and architectural process. This study draws on the concept of cultural memory, as articulated by scholars such as J. Assmann,² to understand how built forms function as carriers of meaning across time, beyond the limits of written or event-based history.

This paper re-examines Somnath by foregrounding its architectural history as a critical site of continuity. It argues that the idea of the temple as “unbroken” lies not in uninterrupted material survival, but in the persistence of sacred identity across time. Through an analysis of successive building phases, spatial continuity, and symbolic elements, the study demonstrates how architecture operates as a medium of civilisational memory. In this context, reconstruction emerges not merely as recovery from loss, but as a deliberate cultural practice through which resilience is materially expressed.

Historiography and Review of Scholarship

The Somnath Temple has attracted sustained scholarly attention across historical, religious, and political domains. Much of the early and later writing has focused on its repeated destruction and reconstruction, particularly in relation to the raid of Mahmud of Ghazni in the 11th century. These accounts, found in both Persian chronicles and later historical interpretations, often frame Somnath within narratives of conflict, iconoclasm, and revival.³ As a result, the temple has frequently been positioned as a symbol within broader debates on identity and

historical memory.⁴ While these interpretations are significant, they often prioritise political narrative over spatial and architectural continuity, leaving the material dimension of the temple underexplored.

Colonial scholarship further shaped the understanding of Somnath by situating it within classificatory frameworks of Indian architecture and history. Scholars such as James Fergusson approached temple architecture primarily through stylistic and chronological analysis, often detaching built forms from their lived and ritual context.⁵ Such approaches, while foundational, tend to isolate architecture as a stylistic category, without sufficiently addressing its role within lived religious and cultural practices. While such studies contributed to documentation and formal analysis, they tended to privilege linear historical development over the cyclical and reconstructive nature of temple traditions in India.

More recent scholarship has expanded the discussion by engaging with themes of religious significance, heritage, and political symbolism, especially in the context of modern reconstruction. However, despite these contributions, relatively limited attention has been given to the role of architecture as an active medium in sustaining and transmitting cultural memory. The emphasis has remained on events and interpretations, rather than on how the material and spatial continuity of the temple itself participates in the construction of its enduring identity. It is within this gap that the present study situates its inquiry.

Historical Phases of Destruction and Reconstruction

The history of the Somnath Temple is marked by multiple phases of destruction and reconstruction, which have been central to its historical identity. Early references to the temple appear in literary and inscriptional traditions, indicating its significance as a prominent centre of Shaiva worship well before the 11th century. The temple's wealth and ritual importance made it a site of both reverence and attention, embedding it within wider networks of pilgrimage and regional power.

The raid of Mahmud of Ghazni in 1025 CE is often treated as a defining moment in the history of Somnath.⁶ While this event has been extensively documented and debated, it represents only one episode within a longer sequence of disruptions and renewals. Subsequent periods witnessed the rebuilding of the temple under regional dynasties, particularly during the Solanki period, when temple construction in western India saw significant development.⁷

These reconstructions did not simply restore the structure but reaffirmed the sanctity of the site, ensuring the continuation of ritual practices and pilgrimage.

In the modern period, the reconstruction of Somnath following Indian independence, supported by figures such as Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, marked another important phase in its history. This rebuilding was not only an architectural project but also a cultural and symbolic act, reflecting a conscious effort to reclaim and re-establish the temple's significance. Across these different phases, what remains consistent is not the material form of the structure, but the persistence of the site as a sacred centre. The continuity of location, ritual function, and cultural meaning suggests that each reconstruction participates in an ongoing process through which the identity of Somnath is sustained across time.

Architectural Continuity: Form, Space, and Sacred Identity

The continuity of the Somnath Temple is most effectively understood through its architectural and spatial persistence rather than its material survival. Despite multiple phases of destruction and reconstruction, the site itself has remained constant, preserving its sacred geography along the western coast. This continuity of location is not incidental; it reflects the enduring association of the place with divine presence, ensuring that each successive structure is anchored within an already established sacred landscape. The temple's placement at the confluence of land and sea further contributes to its enduring sanctity, embedding it within a cosmological and geographical framework that persists across rebuilding phases.

At the level of architectural form, certain key elements demonstrate continuity across rebuilding phases. The presence of the garbhagriha as the central sanctum, the axial alignment guiding ritual movement, and the orientation of the temple space all contribute to maintaining a recognisable sacred structure. While stylistic features may have shifted across periods in response to changing regional idioms and patronage, these core spatial principles have remained stable.⁸ The present structure, built in the Maru-Gurjara style, is characterised by a prominent shikhara, intricate stone articulation, and a clearly defined axial progression leading to the sanctum. These elements reinforce continuity not through exact replication of earlier forms, but through adherence to a shared architectural vocabulary associated with temple construction in western India. Such persistence suggests that the identity of the temple is not dependent on a fixed architectural style, but on the retention of essential spatial and symbolic frameworks.

Reconstruction, therefore, does not signify rupture in an architectural sense but operates as a process of renewal within continuity. Each phase of rebuilding re-establishes the relationship between space, ritual, and meaning, allowing the temple to retain its sacred identity despite changes in form. Architecture in this context functions not merely as a physical structure but as a medium through which memory is embodied and transmitted. The endurance of Somnath lies in this capacity of built form to sustain continuity through change, where repetition is not replication, but a rearticulation of an enduring sacred order.

Somnath and Civilisational Memory

The enduring significance of the Somnath Temple can be more fully understood when situated within the framework of civilisational memory. Unlike history, which often privileges linear narratives and discrete events, civilisational memory operates through continuity, repetition, and shared cultural practices. In this context, Somnath is not merely remembered through texts or historical accounts, but through its continued existence as a sacred site where ritual, space, and meaning intersect.

The repeated reconstruction of the temple plays a crucial role in this process. Each act of rebuilding does not simply restore a lost structure but reaffirms the presence of the sacred within a specific spatial and cultural context. The persistence of rituals, pilgrimage practices, and the symbolic centrality of the site ensures that memory is not static, but actively renewed. Daily worship practices, pilgrimage cycles, and ritual performances further reinforce this continuity, linking the present structure to earlier sacred traditions associated with the site. In this sense, the temple functions as a living repository of meaning, where architecture and practice together sustain a sense of continuity across historical disruptions.

This perspective allows for a reconsideration of what it means for Somnath to be “unbroken.” The continuity of the temple lies not in the uninterrupted survival of its physical fabric, but in the sustained recognition of its sacred identity. Through the interplay of reconstruction, ritual, and spatial continuity, Somnath embodies a form of resilience that is embedded within cultural practice itself. It thus illustrates how civilisational memory is not only preserved through narration, but materially enacted through the ongoing life of the built environment.

Reconstruction as Cultural Practice

The repeated rebuilding of the Somnath Temple is often interpreted as a response to episodes of destruction. However, such a view remains limited if it reduces reconstruction to a purely reactive process. Within the broader context of Indian temple traditions, reconstruction can be understood as an established cultural practice through which sacred space is continually renewed and reaffirmed.

Temple architecture in India has historically accommodated processes of repair, renewal, and rebuilding as part of its lived existence. Structures were not always conceived as permanent in a fixed material sense; rather, their continuity depended on the preservation of ritual function, spatial organisation, and sacred association. In this framework, the rebuilding of Somnath reflects an adherence to an enduring tradition in which the sanctity of the site takes precedence over the permanence of any single structure. Reconstruction, therefore, operates within a cultural logic that values continuity of meaning over material fixity.

Seen in this light, each phase of rebuilding at Somnath represents a conscious and deliberate act that reasserts the temple's identity within changing historical contexts. The modern reconstruction, supported by figures such as Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, further illustrates how this process extends into the contemporary period, where rebuilding becomes both a cultural and symbolic assertion. Rather than marking a break, reconstruction serves as a mechanism through which continuity is actively produced. It is through this repeated and intentional practice that Somnath embodies resilience, not as a passive endurance of the past, but as an ongoing cultural process grounded in renewal.

Conclusion

The Somnath Temple demonstrates that continuity in Indian temple traditions cannot be understood through material permanence alone. Its history, marked by repeated phases of destruction and reconstruction, reveals that what endures is not the physical structure in an unaltered form, but the persistence of sacred identity anchored in place, ritual, and cultural meaning. The idea of an “unbroken temple” therefore lies in continuity of significance rather than uninterrupted material existence. This shift from material permanence to conceptual continuity allows for a more nuanced understanding of temple traditions in the Indian context.

By foregrounding architectural analysis, this study has shown that elements such as spatial

organisation, site continuity, and symbolic form play a central role in sustaining this identity across time. The temple is not merely a witness to history but an active medium through which memory is preserved and rearticulated. In this sense, architecture functions as a repository of civilisational memory, enabling continuity even in the face of historical disruptions (Eck, 2012). Finally, the reconstruction of Somnath must be understood as a deliberate cultural practice rather than a simple response to loss. Each act of rebuilding reaffirms the sacred and re-establishes continuity, demonstrating that resilience is not only remembered but materially enacted. Somnath thus stands as a compelling example of how built form participates in the ongoing making of cultural memory, where renewal itself becomes the basis of continuity.

Notes and references

-
- ¹ R. Thapar, *Somanatha: The Many Voices of a History* (Penguin Books, 2004). Also refer to R. M. Eaton, *Temple Desecration and Indo-Muslim States* (Oxford University Press, 2000).
- ² J. Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization* (Cambridge University Press, 2011).
- ³ R. Thapar, *Somanatha: The Many Voices of a History* (Penguin Books, 2004).
- ⁴ R. M. Eaton, *Temple Desecration and Indo-Muslim States* (Oxford University Press, 2000).
- ⁵ J. Fergusson, *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture* (John Murray, 1876).
- ⁶ R. Thapar, *Somanatha: The Many Voices of a History* (Penguin Books, 2004). Also refer to R. M. Eaton, *Temple Desecration and Indo-Muslim States* (Oxford University Press, 2000).
- ⁷ G. Michell, *The Hindu Temple: An Introduction to Its Meaning and Forms* (University of Chicago Press, 1988). Also refer to A. Hardy, *The Temple Architecture of India* (Wiley, 2007).
- ⁸ Ibid.

Bibliography

- Archaeological Survey of India. *Annual Report of the Archaeological Survey of India*. Government of India, various years.
- Assmann, J. *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization*. Cambridge University Press, 2011.
- Eaton, R. M. *Temple Desecration and Indo-Muslim States*. Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Eck, D. L. *India: A Sacred Geography*. Harmony Books, 2012.
- Fergusson, J. *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture*. John Murray, 1876.
- Hardy, A. *The Temple Architecture of India*. Wiley, 2007.

Michell, G. *The Hindu Temple: An Introduction to Its Meaning and Forms*. University of Chicago Press, 1988.

Thapar, R. *Somanatha: The Many Voices of a History*. Penguin Books, 2004.

SESSION 3:

MODERN INDIA AND SOMNATH

Session Chair: Dr. Neerja A. Gupta

This session situates Somnath within the political and intellectual landscape of post-Independence India. Speakers analyse the reconstruction initiative led by Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, the pivotal role of K M Munshi, and the ambivalences reflected in the Nehruvian approach to temple reconstruction and state patronage. The discussion explores how Somnath illuminates enduring tensions between constitutional secularism and the idea of Bharat as a civilisation-state.



Reclaiming Civilizational Glory: K. M. Munshi and the Somnath Temple

Dr. Pinku Jha

Assistant Professor, Faculty of Law
The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda
jhapinku000@gmail.com

Dr. Nidhi Shendurnikar

Independent Media Educator & Researcher
Vadodara

Dr. Neha Raval

Adhyapak Sahayak
Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan's
Ahmedabad

Abstract

The reconstruction of the Somnath temple after multiple attacks and invasions by Islamic colonizers spanning centuries is a civilizational wound that India continued to carry until the temple was restored in 1951. Temple reclamation, which has become a significant socio-political movement in the last decade in India aims to acknowledge and rectify historical wrongs inflicted on the Hindu community which suffered as a result of their most sacred places of worship being looted and destroyed. These attacks intended to rob Hindus of their sense of self, culture, dignity, and honour. In this context, the reconstruction of Somnath temple in Prabhas Patan is a milestone in modern Hindu history and post-independent India. It serves as a reminder for Hindus to never relinquish their rightful claim over their collective heritage. At the forefront of this massive and monumental effort of rebuilding along with Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and N V Gadgil was Kanaiyalal Maneklal Munshi. He is often remembered for his educational and cultural vision for Bharat, his role in the Constituent Assembly, contributions to public life and as a doyen of Gujarati literature. As the founder of Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Munshi gave practical shape to institution building informed by

Bharatiya ethos. However, he was also the driving force behind rebuilding the Somnath temple at a crucial time in India's political history. The struggle encountered by him in the rebuilding process has been chronicled in his books and other writings. He played a key role as the Chairman of the Somnath Temple Advisory Committee along with Digvijaysinh Ranajitsinh Jadeja of Nawanagar (Jam Saheb). This paper presents a detailed understanding of Munshi's role as a modern nationalist for whom the reconstruction of the temple represented an essential continuity in civilizational thought and practice. The paper dwells on the following aspects: 1) Somnath in Munshi's writings, 2) Role and Challenges faced in the reconstruction, and 3) Lessons for Contemporary Temple Reclamation in India in the light of Munshi's civilizational endeavours.

Keywords: Civilization, Hindu History, K M Munshi, Rebuilding, Somnath Temple

Somnath in Munshi's Writings

Kanaiyalal Maneklal Munshi—popularly known as K. M. Munshi was a distinctive figure in Indian Politics and Gujarati literature with a richly layered personality. Gifted with intellectual breadth and depth, his energies were spread across a multitude of endeavours. Having inherited legal practice from his family—one that could have carried him to the pinnacle of his career, he instead chose to participate in the Indian freedom movement by joining the Indian National Congress. He was a visionary leader who mobilized support for cultural rootedness and believed that India's ancient civilizational values should be at the forefront of India's development as an independent nation.

Munshi played a key role in the reconstruction of Somnath temple with Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and Jam Saheb Digvijaysinhji from 1949 to 1951. Munshi's view of Somnath was informed not merely by antiquity or history. For him, Somnath was a civilizational, cultural symbol of Hindu heritage and through its revival he wanted to achieve more than just undoing of thousands of years of injustice meted out to Hindus. Munshi considered Somnath as the focal point of Gujarati Nationalism and believed that the temple's destruction and rebuilding was to be understood from the context of India's independence.¹

As a prolific author he contributed to Gujarati, Hindi and English literature by writing historical novels, stories, dramas, biographies etc. His celebrated work—*Somnatha: The Shrine Eternal* and *Jay Somnath*/જય સોમનાથ mirror his aspiration for a cultural renaissance in independent India.²

While *Somnatha: The Shrine Eternal* provides historical and archaeological details about the significance of Somnath temple in Gujarat, *Jay Somnath* is a historical novel which narrates Gujarat's resistance against Mahmud of Ghazni's attack on the Somnath temple during 1026 CE.

Munshi's *Jay Somnath* adopts the 'New Historicism' framework which highlights an interplay between literature and history. This framework does not approach history merely as an objective collection of facts but as subjective narratives created by people around a particular historical event. In *Jay Somnath*, Munshi has intrinsically curated a story around the spiritual, social and political realities of 11th century Gujarat. Absence of reference to

Mahmud of Ghazni's invasion in Hindi literature, erasure of histories of collective resistance by regional rulers in the leadership of King Bhimdeva of Anhilwad Patan and perceived inadequacies in accounts provided by Islamic sources were among the factors that inspired Munshi to write this novel. Through the incidences narrated in the novel and dialogues between various characters, Munshi seeks to capture the prevalent sentiment of people towards Somnath during Ghazni's invasion.³

Jay Somnath opens by describing how Somnath Temple occupied a significant place in collective consciousness as the guardian deity of Prabhas.⁴ People from various parts of India, across different social classes travelled along diverse routes to Somnath, with a single-minded objective, i.e., Darshan of Bhagwan Somnath. Munshi articulates this shared spirit of devotion in the following phrase:

“સોમનાથન શિવાલય નહોત, આલય, નહોત હેરને ન હોતો સ્વસ્થ પ્રદે. સદીઓની શ્રદ્ધાએ તેને દેવભૂશમસમ, સમૃદ્ધને ને મોક્ષદાયી બનાવી મૂક, હત.” (p. 3)

The Story of Jay Somanth revolves around the presiding authority of Pashupata cult Gang Sarvagna (ગુંગ સર્વવજ્ઞ), temple dancer Chaula (ચૌલા), King Bhimdev (ભીમદેવ) of Anhilwad Patan, Rajput King Sajjan Chauhan (સજ્જન ચૌહાણ) and his son Samant Chauhan (સામંત ચૌહાણ). Munshi vividly portrays how the life philosophy of each of these characters revolves around their faith in Lord Somnath.

Chaula (ચૌલા), a temple dancer is a reverent devotee of Somnath and regards her dance as an offering of prayer. Her mother Ganga (ગુંગા) trained her for eighteen years in various dance, music and performances so that she can offer her art to Bhagwan Somnath. Her unwavering devotion towards Bhagwan Somnath is narrated in following lines:

“તનને મનથી, શ્વાસને પ્રાણથી જીવનભર ભગવાનના ચરણોમા નૃત્ય કરવા શસવાય એને બીજો જરાય રસ નહોતો. જીવનભર નૃત્ય કરવ – “જય સોમનાથ” ની ઘોષણા સાથે નૃત્ય કરતા દેવના ગભવદ્વાર આગળ પ્રાણ છોડવો - એનાથી વધારે સુદર પરાકાષ્ઠા એની કલ્પનામા આવતી નહી.” (p. 4)

When Bhimdev's minister brought the news of Mahmud of Ghazni advancing towards the Somnath temple with the intention to plunder it, Gang Sarvagna's words reflect a spirit rooted in divine certainty.

“ભગવાન સોમનાથન, ધામ તોડવા આવે છે, એમ? ને એ યવન મારા દેવોશધદેવની પતાકા નમાવે? અશભમાની માનવી દેવથી પણ ડરતો નથી? આવવા દો, જેણે ત્રીજી અંખે કામદેવને બાળીને ભસ્મ કર્યો, તેની નયન જ્યોત્તલ હજી જુંખવાઈ નથી.” (p. 24)

Gang Sarvagna was portrayed not only as the presiding authority of the Somnath temple, but also as a spiritual leader whose devotion inspired common people and kings to place their faith in Bhagwan Somnath. He also possessed the ability to influence the actions of kings in favour of protecting the temple. Beyond that, he commanded the resources and royal alliance needed to support all those devoted to the defence of Somnath. He guided Bhimdev and Rajput kings with strategies to halt Ghazni on his march towards Somnath by forging alliances with the kingdoms along the desert frontier by entrusting them with the duty of protecting the temple.

“ગરજનનો મલેરચઢી આવે છે - ભગવાનનું મુંશદર તોડવા ઘોઘારાણાને કહે છે કે ભગવાનને ઐ વષવની ભશિને પશરણામે દેવોને દુલવભ એવો અશધકાર આપ્યો છે; સોમનાથના મુંશદરના રક્ષક શનમ્યા છે ... કહેજે કે ભગવાન સોમનાથની આજ્ઞા છે - જ્યા હોય ત્યા એ દેવના દ્વેષીનો જીવ લેજો.” (p. 40)

Munshi effectively captures the bravery with which Rajput kings resisted Ghazni's advance, while also showing how discord among kingdoms ultimately allowed invaders an easy path to Somnath. When Bhimdev resolved to defend Somnath by assembling his forces at Prabhas, kings across Gujarat joined him to protect the Supreme. This alliance of kings in defence of 'Dharma' is described in the following words by Munshi:

“ભગવાન સોમનાથન, સુરક્ષણ દ્વાશરકાથી વાસવાડાને દમણથી આબ, સુધી દરેકને પરમ મનોરથ બની ગયો. અને બાણાવળી ભીમદેવ મહારાજએ મનોરથ શસદ્ કરવાન, સાધન લાવ્યા. પાટણ સ્વધમવસુરક્ષણ અને સ્વાધીનતાની અભેદ મૂશતવ બનય. એક વીરની

આજ્ઞા, એક નગરનો પ્રેમ અને આક્રમણનો શવરોધ કરવાનો એકાગ્ર તલસાટ - એ ત્રણે મળી ગુજરાતની એકતા અને પાટણની મહત્તા રચી.” (p. 124)

In latter half of the novel when the king advised Gang Sarvagna to leave Prabhas and relocate the deity, Sarvagna rejected the idea and vowed to remain by Somnath until his last breath.

“પ્રભાસ ખાલી કરી જવ; મારે ભગવાનને બીજે લઈ જવા - બીજે સ્થળે? અને સકલ જાતના ત્રાતા એવા ભગવાન સોમનાથને મલેરછોને ભયે સુંતાડી દેવા? અને સૃશિના પ્રારંભમા પ્રગટ થયેલ, સેકુંડો જ્વાલાઓથી સશભત, પ્રલય સમૃદ્ધના અશનિ સમુદાય સમ તેજસ્વી, ક્ષય અને વૃશદ્ધથી રશહત, અશનવયવનીય, ને અવ્યય એવ, જગતના મૂળરૂપ આ જ્યોતશશલિંગ સ્થાનસ્થિ કરવ,? ... અને હું,

કરના અવતાર લક, લીના મતનો અશધષ્ટાતા કરની કૃપાથી સવવજ્ઞ એવો એમનો દાસાન, દાસ, ચુંદ્રે પોતાને હાથે રચેલ, આ મુંશદર છોડી ભાગી જાઉં?

એમા કા કે શવયારને સ્થાન નથી. દેવને મલેરછ વચ્ચે કોઈ માડીનો જોયો ઉભો નહી રહે તો હું, વૃદ્ધ બ્રાહ્મણ - હું, એકલો ઉભો રહી. જોઈએ, થાય છે? શપનાકપાશણના પ્રાબલ્યને કોણ રોકી કિં? આ વૃદ્ધને લલાટે પૂવે મ, શનઓને કયાવ પરાક્રમ લખાયા હોય તો તમે કરો?” (p. 106, 107)

Thus, through various characters of the novel, Munshi portrays how there was profound devotion, unwavering dedication and an intense resolve to protect the shrine until the last breath among Bharatiyas of that time. As the first among the 12 Jyotirlinga shrines of Lord Shiva, the significance of Somnath is not limited to it being a building or a physical structure. It represents the core of Hindu thought, history, culture and civilization. Munshi highlighted the premier place that Jyotirlinga holds in Dharmic literature. When someone suggested to Munshi that Somnath could be maintained as an ancient monument, he said that the temple lived in the sentiments of the entire nation and its reconstruction was a national pledge, national urge, a symbol of Hindu restoration. The temple's destruction, in Munshi's views, was considered a national disaster by Hindus and has stayed deep in their subconscious.

The cry of Gujarati pride—“Jai Somnath”—inspired Munshi's writing and energies guiding his literary works towards independence. Somnath nurtured his imagination as a writer and thinker. He very well understood that the desire to resurrect Somnath was multigenerational and that without this achieved, Bharat would never be able to restore Dharma, Civilization

and Culture in its truest sense. In his writings on Somnath temple, Munshi acknowledges the significant role of Devi Ahilyabai Holkar who helped establish and re-establish Dharmic heritage across Bharat. In 1783, she built a new shrine adjacent to the one destroyed by Aurangzeb. Munshi notes that because she found the ruins of Somnath to be beyond repair, she built a new temple at a little distance from the original one. His writings also call upon the devotees to be awakened, to rise to the occasion to protect the 'Deity' as part of their Dharma. Even as Munshi praises the heroic defence of the temple in Jay Somnath, he also talks about the downfall of Gujarat's glorious culture and critiques the weakness of the country's defence in protecting sacred Dharmic sites.

K. M. Munshi: Role and Challenges Faced in Reconstructing Somnath

The contributions of K. M. Munshi to the reconstruction of the Somnath Temple represent one of the most intellectually layered and civilizational significant interventions in post-independence India. His role must be understood not merely in administrative or political terms, but as a synthesis of historical reconstruction, archaeological engagement, cultural articulation, and philosophical commitment to Dharma. In many ways, Munshi transformed the rebuilding of Somnath from a localized act of temple restoration into a national civilizational project that sought to reconnect India with its historical memory and cultural Soul.

At the core of Munshi's contribution was his insistence on grounding the reconstruction in rigorous historical and archaeological inquiry. His collaboration with B. K. Thapar was crucial in this regard. Thapar's excavation work at the Somnath site enabled a systematic understanding of the temple's stratigraphy, architectural evolution, and material remains.⁵ Munshi did not treat archaeology as a peripheral activity but as central to the legitimacy and authenticity of the reconstruction effort. Through this engagement, he was able to reconstruct a layered history of Somnath, revealing not a single temple but a succession of temples built, destroyed, and rebuilt across centuries. This insight was critical in challenging simplistic narratives and instead presented Somnath as an example of civilizational endurance. By understanding the nature of destruction inflicted upon the temple during the invasions by Mahmud of Ghazni (1025-26 CE), Alauddin Khilji (1296 CE), Aurangzeb (1665 CE), Zafar Khan (1395-1403 CE)—Munshi was also able to reconstruct a broader history of Gujarat and its socio-political transformations across time.⁶

Munshi's engagement with the material culture of Somnath was marked by an extraordinary sensitivity to both detail and meaning. He examined relics, inscriptions, ceramic pottery, architectural fragments, and devotional carvings, treating them not merely as artefacts but as embodiments of lived history. The inscriptions etched into stone, the stylistic features of pillars, and even the fragments of pottery were read as texts each contributing to a deeper understanding of the temple's past. Through this method, Munshi brought to light both the visible signs of destruction and the invisible signs of resistance. While broken structures and scattered stones testified to episodes of violence, the continued presence of devotional markers, reconstructed shrines, and reused materials pointed to an unbroken continuity of faith. This dual emphasis allowed Munshi to move beyond a narrative of victimhood and instead highlight resilience as the defining feature of Somnath's history.

Munshi's attention to architectural detail further highlights the depth of his engagement. He documented the various components of the temple, including the plinth, pillars, carvings, and inscriptions, as well as the changes introduced during successive reconstructions. He examined the reuse of older stones, the techniques of repair, and the stylistic variations that distinguished different phases of the temple's history. Importantly, he also recognized that Somnath was not a single structure but a succession of temples, each representing a different moment in time. This layered understanding informed his approach to reconstruction, allowing him to balance historical fidelity with contemporary relevance.

A particularly significant dimension of Munshi's contribution was his effort to embed Somnath within the broader framework of Indic consciousness. Through his writings, especially *Somnatha: The Shrine Eternal*, he articulated a vision in which the temple symbolized not just a pilgrimage but the very idea of Bharat's civilizational freedom. He argued that every attack on Somnath represented an assault on this freedom, and that its reconstruction signified the revival and re-establishment of cultural dignity. This interpretive framework was crucial in elevating the temple from a regional shrine to a national symbol. Munshi's writings thus functioned as both historical documentation and civilizational philosophy, shaping how Somnath was perceived in public discourse.⁷

Munshi's historical research was comprehensive and methodologically robust. He undertook a detailed study of the temple's multiple phases, examining the political contexts in which it was constructed, destroyed, and rebuilt. He analyzed the materials used in different periods,

the architectural techniques employed, and the modifications introduced over time. His work also involved identifying the rulers under whose reigns the temple suffered destruction or experienced revival, thereby situating Somnath within a broader political and cultural vision. This meticulous approach ensured that the reconstruction was not based on conjecture but on a carefully assembled body of evidence.⁸

Equally important was Munshi's effort to document the extent of devastation that Somnath had endured. He recorded the wreckage, the neglect, and the long period during which the temple lay in ruins, as well as the history of loot and plunder associated with successive invasions. This documentation was, in his view, essential for preserving historical memory and ensuring that the experiences of the past were not erased or distorted. By bringing together archaeological findings, textual sources, and oral traditions, Munshi created a comprehensive narrative that could withstand critical scrutiny. His work thus served as a safeguard against the manipulation or dilution of historical realities, ensuring that Somnath remained a significant reference point in discussions of India's past.⁹

The role of B. K. Thapar as the excavator was central to this process, and Munshi's support ensured that archaeological work was carried out systematically and effectively. This collaboration underscores the importance Munshi placed on empirical evidence and scholarly rigor, distinguishing his approach from purely symbolic or emotive efforts at reconstruction. Beyond archaeology and history, Munshi's contribution was deeply shaped by his civilizational vision. He believed that the reconstruction of Somnath was an act of Dharma, an ethical obligation to restore what had been lost and to reaffirm the values of Sanatan civilization. For Munshi, the temple was not merely a place of worship but a symbol of continuity, resilience, and cultural identity. He saw the rebuilding process as an opportunity to rekindle the aspirations of future generations, encouraging them to remain rooted in their traditions while engaging with the modern world.¹⁰

This vision was reflected in his holistic plans for the temple. Munshi envisaged Somnath as a centre of knowledge and cultural activity, integrating religious practice with education, scholarship, and community life. His proposal for the establishment of a Sanskrit University at Prabhas, supported by Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, was a key component of this vision. He also emphasized the importance of promoting Sanskrit learning, supporting research in classical texts, and disseminating knowledge through publications and institutions.¹¹

Munshi's role in drafting the Trust Deed of the temple was instrumental in institutionalizing these ideas. He ensured that the Deed included provisions for the establishment of educational institutions, the promotion of Sanskrit, and the encouragement of research and publication. The Deed reflected his belief that the reconstruction of Somnath must go beyond the creation of a physical structure and contribute to the revival of India's intellectual and spiritual traditions.¹²

The inauguration of the reconstructed temple on May 11, 1951, marked the culmination of these efforts. On this occasion, Dr. Rajendra Prasad addressed the gathering, highlighting Somnath's historical significance and calling for its revival as a symbol of national pride. While performing the installation ceremony at the temple, Dr. Prasad remarked—"The Somnath temple signifies that the power of reconstruction is always greater than the power of destruction".¹³ The event also saw the participation of delegates from multiple universities and the inauguration of a Sanskrit Parishad, reflecting the intellectual and cultural dimensions of the project. Munshi's resolution at the conference, declaring Sanskrit as the language of India's cultural inspiration, further emphasized the link between the temple and the broader civilizational mission.¹⁴

Furthermore, Munshi's efforts can also be seen as part of a broader intellectual resistance to dominant historiographical trends of his time. By emphasizing empirical evidence and civilizational continuity, he challenged narratives that either downplayed or selectively interpreted episodes of temple destruction. However, it is important to note that his approach was not merely oppositional; it was constructive, aiming to build a more comprehensive and balanced understanding of history. This balance between critique and creation is one of the defining features of his work.

Munshi's authorship of *Somnatha: The Shrine Eternal* represents the culmination of his intellectual engagement with the temple. The work serves as both a historical account and a philosophical reflection, weaving together evidence, narrative, and interpretation. It ensures that the story of Somnath is preserved not only in stone but also in text, accessible to future generations.¹⁵ The other leaders and public figures of the time who contributed to the rebuilding were - Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, V. P. Menon, M. K. Gandhi, Dr. Sarvepalli

Radhakrishnan, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, Samaldas Gandhi and Jam Saheb of Nawanagar - Digvijaysinhji Ranjitsinhji.

Jadeja, thereby making it a collective effort at a huge scale.¹⁶ A noteworthy feature of the temple's reconstruction was that it an endeavour spearheaded by the Hindu community. No state support/funding was sought for the temple's rebuilding. Sardar Patel had specifically called upon the people of Saurashtra to support and participate in the efforts.

Munshi's participation in the rebuilding of Somnath was not without challenges. He was faced with the might of the 'secular' Indian State which had decided to go out of its way to protect minority (Muslim) rights at the cost of denying Hindu victimhood and self-expression. Nehru was clearly upset with Patel and Munshi's role in the reconstruction and termed the project as 'Hindu Revivalism'.¹⁷ He disapproved of Dr. Rajendra Prasad attending the temple consecration ceremony and even censored his speech. This is documented in the letter exchange between the two leaders which depicts the subtle ideological clash between the two over issues such as identity, culture, politics and nationhood.

New Delhi
April 22, 1951

My dear Munshi,

I am distressed at the impression abroad that the Somnath installation ceremony is more or less a Government affair. Questions are going to be asked in Parliament and I am going to make it clear that the Government of India has nothing to do with it. Unfortunately I cannot say the same about the Saurashtra Government which, I am surprised, is reported to have decided to spend Rs 5 lakhs over the installation ceremony. I think this is improper expenditure for a Government at any time and more especially in view of the circumstances in the country today.

I have written to the President on this subject also and to the Jam Saheb. Unfortunately, the Jam Saheb is not only the Chairman of the Trustees of Somnath temple, but also the Rajpramukh of Saurashtra. His letter to our foreign Embassies has given us a lot of trouble and created a good deal of misunderstanding.

Yours sincerely,
Jawaharlal Nehru

Source: <https://nehruarchive.in/documents/to-k-m-munshi-22-april-1951-5e9wok>

Munshi's role in the movement meant that he was directly challenging Nehru's political & ideological hegemony, Nehru's affinity and inclination towards minority appeasement and his left-leaning policies which always positioned Hindu culture and practices as threatening. By

being at the forefront of the temple reconstruction movement, Munshi established his credibility as a force to reckon with in turbulent political times where power was concentrated in one leader and a single party. Munshi stood tall as a public figure, intellectual, freedom fighter and a man of action to ensure that despite Nehru's vehement displeasure, rebuilding of the temple continued. Munshi thus possessed the ability to balance his role as a mainstream political figure along with standing up to political tyranny by keeping his ears to the ground. Thus, Munshi faced immense political arrogance, cowardice and resistance from some forces in the Indian government as he set on a civilizational mission to rebuild the temple.

New Delhi
July 20, 1950

My dear Munshi,

I have been feeling a little uncomfortable at your references to the rebuilding of the Somnath temple.^[2] As a Government, we cannot undertake the building of any religious edifices. If once we begin doing so, we might be asked to favour a variety of religions. Also in the present economic condition of the country and the great lack of residential accommodation, any project for a large scale building of a temple seems rather out of place.^[3]

Yours sincerely,
Jawaharlal Nehru

Source: <https://nehruarchive.in/documents/to-k-m-munshi-20-july-1950-8v1ydj>

In response to Nehru, Munshi wrote, "I cannot value freedom if it deprives us of the Bhagavad Gita or uproots our millions from the faith with which they look upon our temples and thereby destroys the texture of our lives. I have been given the privilege of seeing my incessant dream of Somanath reconstruction come true. That makes me feel—makes me almost sure—that this shrine once restored to a place of importance in our life will give to our people a purer conception of religion and a more vivid consciousness of our strength, so vital in these days of freedom and its trials," Munshi argued.¹⁸

Munshi also faced resistance from Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, the education minister at that time and a good friend of Nehru, who opposed the idea, and in one of the cabinet meetings, argued that the ruins of the temple should be handed over to the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), to be preserved as a historical monument.¹⁹

Munshi's role in rebuilding Somnath must also be examined in the light of his long political career, the organizations that he was affiliated to and the ones he pioneered (Jan Sangh, Akhand Hindustan Front, Swatantra Party, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan), involvement in social reform activities, leadership of organizations committed to public welfare (Sir Harkisandas Narotam Hospital, Bai Kabibai Trust, Seth Manganlal Goenka Charitable Trust) and grounding in Dharmic values and Sanatan civilization.²⁰ His role in the reconstruction can be understood from this statement where he expressed a firm belief in the indivisibility of Indian civilization—"From Amarnath to Rameswar, from Dwarka to Kalighat, the land is one and indivisible." After his initial stint with the Indian National Congress influenced by M. K. Gandhi, Munshi grew uncomfortable with Gandhi's stance on the Hindu-Muslim issue and his response to the Muslim League.²¹ This possibly reaffirmed to him that Hindus needed to reclaim Somnath as a symbol of civilizational heritage & pride, especially in the aftermath of the Partition and the creation of Pakistan. Thus, one can conclude that Munshi's early political career, his experience with the Indian National Congress and interactions with other political leaders of the time played an important part in the role that he eventually played in the Somnath movement.

Thus, Munshi's contributions to the rebuilding of the Somnath Temple were comprehensive, multidimensional, and transformative. Through his integration of archaeological research, historical documentation, cultural interpretation, and institutional vision, he elevated the reconstruction from a physical project to a civilizational effort. His work demonstrates that the restoration of heritage is not merely about rebuilding structures but about reconstructing memory, identity, and continuity. Somnath, under his stewardship, emerged not just as a temple reborn but as a powerful symbol of Bharat's enduring civilizational spirit—an embodiment of faith, resilience, and the unbroken flow of cultural consciousness.²²

Lessons for Contemporary Temple Reclamation Movements in India

The contemporary relevance of the Somnath reconstruction, particularly when viewed through the lens of K. M. Munshi's civilizational vision, offers a rich framework for reflecting on present-day temple reclamation movements in India. The rebuilding of Somnath in the mid 20th century was not merely an isolated historical episode; rather, it provides a template both inspirational and cautionary for understanding how questions of heritage, faith, politics, and identity intersect in modern India. One of the most striking features of the Somnath movement was the nature of its leadership. Figures such as K. M. Munshi, Sardar

Vallabhbhai Patel, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, and others were not only political leaders but also intellectuals, institution builders, and participants in the freedom struggle. Their engagement with the reconstruction project demonstrates that commitment to modern nation building and adherence to civilizational roots are not mutually exclusive. On the contrary, their involvement suggests a model in which public life could be informed by cultural consciousness without descending into sectarianism and pretentious secularism. Munshi's own writings, particularly in *Somnatha: The Shrine Eternal*, make it clear that he saw the reconstruction not as an act of religious assertion alone, but as a civilizational necessity—an effort to restore continuity with a past that had been violently disrupted and subsequently marginalized in historical narratives.²³

The historical and political context in which Somnath was rebuilt is crucial for drawing lessons for contemporary temple reclamation efforts. India in the late 1940s and early 1950s was a newly independent nation grappling with multifold challenges such as Partition, mass displacement, and the task of forging a cohesive national identity. The adoption of a secular Constitution created a framework within which the state was expected to maintain a principled distance from religious institutions, yet the lived reality of Indian society deeply embedded in religious and cultural traditions—complicated this ideal. The Somnath project emerged precisely at this intersection. While the state did not officially fund the reconstruction, the involvement of key political figures blurred the boundaries between public office and cultural commitment. This delicate balancing act offers an important lesson: that civilizational restoration projects in India often operate within a complex interplay of formal secularism and substantive cultural engagement. As scholars have noted, Indian secularism has historically differed from its Western counterparts, allowing for a degree of interaction between state and religion that reflects the country's pluralistic ethos.²⁴

At the same time, the Somnath experience underscores the importance of political will in the success of such movements. Although the reconstruction was formally a community driven initiative under the aegis of the Shree Somnath Trust, it benefited significantly from the moral and organizational support of leaders like Patel and Munshi. Their ability to navigate opposition—demonstrates the critical role of leadership in sustaining civilizational initiatives. Munshi's correspondence with Nehru reveals a clear articulation of this position: he argued that the restoration of Somnath was not a regression into the past but a necessary step in reclaiming cultural self-respect in a newly independent nation.²⁵ This insight remains highly

relevant today, as contemporary temple reclamation movements often face similar challenges of political resistance, ideological contestation, and public scrutiny.

Another significant lesson from the Somnath reconstruction lies in the role of public participation. The temple was rebuilt through contributions from ordinary citizens, making it a genuinely collective endeavor. This aspect is particularly important in the present context, where questions of ownership and legitimacy often dominate debates around temple reclamation. The Somnath model suggests that such movements derive their strength not merely from legal or political endorsement but from the active involvement and emotional investment of the community. It also highlights the importance of framing these efforts in a manner that emphasizes shared heritage and cultural continuity rather than exclusionary narratives. Munshi himself repeatedly emphasized the idea of 'Swabhiman' and saw the reconstruction as a means of restoring dignity to a civilization that had endured centuries of upheaval.²⁶

However, the differences between the historical context of Somnath and the present-day scenario must also be acknowledged. In the immediate post-independence period, the memory of historical invasions and religiously motivated destruction was relatively fresh, particularly in the wake of Partition. This created a certain degree of public awareness and sensitivity to issues of cultural loss and restoration. In contrast, contemporary India operates in a vastly different informational and ideological environment. Despite the availability of extensive historical research and documentation, public understanding of these issues is often mediated by competing narratives in academia, media, and politics. The characterization of temple reclamation movements as expressions of 'majoritarianism' or 'cultural nationalism' has, in some cases, contributed to their delegitimization in public discourse. This represents a significant challenge, as it complicates efforts to build broad based consensus and can lead to polarization.

The legal dimension also marks a key point of divergence. The reconstruction of Somnath did not involve prolonged litigation or judicial intervention; it was largely a matter of political decision-making and community initiative. In contrast, contemporary cases such as the Ram Janmabhoomi, Kashi Vishwanath, Bhojshala and Krishna Janmabhoomi have resulted in prolonged legal processes, requiring extensive evidence, argumentation, and judicial scrutiny before any resolution could be reached. This shift reflects the evolution of India's political,

civic, societal and institutional frameworks, where the rule of law plays a central role in adjudicating competing claims put forth by different religious groups. While this provides a structured mechanism for conflict resolution, it also introduces new challenges, including delays, procedural complexities, and the need to translate civilizational claims into legally admissible forms of evidence.

Present day temple reclamation efforts are compelled to address challenges such as—impact of secular politics over seven decades of independence, consolidation of communities into vote banks on the lines of caste, religion, ethnicity, language etc., highly distorted view of Hindu history deliberately propagated and institutionalized through academia, media and civil society and political actors which has resulted in unprecedented deracination of Hindu society, systematic vilification of civilizational reclamation in national and international media and popular culture which frames these efforts as ‘majoritarian’, ‘fascist’ and ‘exclusionary’ primarily informed and evaluated from a colonial lens borrowed from the West’s understanding of politics, history, secularism, religion, and race. At times, parochial—political and party interests drive these movements rather than an urgency to restore the dignity of Hindu civilization. Thus, future such movements will need to pass the litmus test of mass support, comprehension of the core civilizational message and support from the political ecosystem.

Conclusion

Munshi’s approach offers valuable guidance in navigating these complexities. His insistence on rigorous historical research, documentation, and engagement with material evidence demonstrates the importance of grounding civilizational claims in credible scholarship. At the same time, his broader vision linking temple reconstruction with education, cultural revival, and intellectual inquiry suggests that such movements must transcend the immediate goal of reclaiming a site and instead contribute to a larger process of cultural renewal. The provisions in the Somnath Trust Deed for the promotion of Sanskrit learning, the establishment of educational institutions, and the dissemination of knowledge reflect this holistic perspective.²⁷ In this sense, the temple was envisioned not merely as a place of worship but as a centre of knowledge and cultural life, echoing the traditional role of temples in Indian society.

Perhaps the most enduring lesson from the Somnath experience is the emphasis on resilience and continuity. The history of the temple marked by repeated destruction and

reconstruction—serves as a powerful symbol of the enduring nature of ‘Dharma’ and the capacity of communities to rebuild in the face of adversity. Munshi often referred to this as the “zeal” of the devotee, a quality that ensured that the essential spirit of the temple survived even when its physical structure was reduced to ruins. This idea has profound implications for contemporary movements, suggesting that the strength of a civilizational project lies not only in its institutional or political manifestation but also in the depth of its cultural and spiritual foundations.

At the same time, it is important to approach these lessons with a degree of critical reflection. While the Somnath reconstruction provides a compelling example of cultural revival, it also raises questions about the relationship between history and memory, the role of the state in cultural affairs, and the potential for such projects to be appropriated for narrower political ends. Munshi’s own writings indicate an awareness of these risks; his emphasis on ethical conduct, intellectual rigor, and an expansive vision of cultural renewal suggests that he sought to avoid the pitfalls of sectarianism and instrumentalization. For contemporary movements, this implies the need for a careful balance between asserting cultural identity and maintaining the pluralistic and inclusive ethos that underpins the very nature of Sanatan Dharma and the Indian Constitution.

In conclusion, the reconstruction of the Somnath Temple offers a rich repository of lessons for contemporary temple reclamation efforts in India. It demonstrates the importance of leadership that is both politically astute and culturally grounded, the necessity of public participation and collective ownership, and the value of rigorous historical scholarship in substantiating civilizational claims. It also highlights the challenges posed by changing political, legal, and intellectual contexts, underscoring the need for adaptability and strategic thinking. Above all, it reaffirms the idea that such movements are not merely about reclaiming physical spaces but about re-establishment of a deeper sense of cultural continuity, dignity, and civilizational consciousness an idea that lay at the heart of Munshi’s vision and continues to resonate in contemporary India.

During the entire process of the restoration, Munshi demonstrated great mental and emotional clarity. He was the backbone of the rebuilding process as he well understood the impact it could have on India’s cultural identity in the future. The temple stands as a pronouncement of freedom and a rejection of colonial ideas and institutions imposed on Bharat. Munshi’s standing by ‘Dharma’ and his astute sense of civilizational, cultural and ideological

conviction will be remembered by generations of Bharatiyas as a testament of the collective greatness of Hindu culture.

Notes and references

¹ S. Mehrishi, “The Defiant Rebuilder: Why K. M. Munshi’s Contribution to Somnath’s Eternity Matters to PM Modi’s Restoration of Dharma and Culture,” *The Pamphlet*, January 11, 2026, thepamphlet.in.

² K. M. Munshi, *Somnatha: The Shrine Eternal* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1951). Also refer to K. M. Munshi, *જય ઈલ્લાહી* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1940).

³ D. Jani, “Munshi’s Jaya Somnath: The New Historicism Approach,” *Lapis Lazuli: An International Literary Journal* 4, no. 1 (2014): 144–56.

⁴ K. M. Munshi, *જય ઈલ્લાહી* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1940).

⁵ S. Mehrishi, “The Defiant Rebuilder: Why K. M. Munshi’s Contribution to Somnath’s Eternity Matters to PM Modi’s Restoration of Dharma and Culture,” *The Pamphlet*, January 11, 2026, thepamphlet.in.

⁶ K. M. Munshi, *Somnatha: The Shrine Eternal* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1951).

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ R. Pusarla, “Somnath: The Shrine Eternal,” *MyIndMakers*, August 26, 2022, myind.net.

⁹ K. M. Munshi, *Somnatha: The Shrine Eternal* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1951).

¹⁰ J. K. Parmar, “Revisiting Sanctuary, Sovereignty, and Patronage: A Critical Study of K. M. Munshi’s Somanatha - The Shrine Eternal,” *VNSGU Journal of Research and Innovation* 4, no. 3 (2025): 212–25.

¹¹ V. B. Kulkarni, *Builders of Modern India: K. M. Munshi* (New Delhi: Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1959), 228.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ “Somnath Temple: A Mesmerising Story of India’s Power of Reconstruction over Power of Destruction,” *VSK Telangana*, November 13, 2019, archives.vsktelangana.org.

¹⁴ V. B. Kulkarni, *Builders of Modern India: K. M. Munshi* (Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1959), 229–30.

-
- ¹⁵ K. M. Munshi, *Somnatha: The Shrine Eternal* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1951).
- ¹⁶ M. Lal, "Re-building of Somnath Temple: A Tribute to Sardar Patel and K. M. Munshi," *Vivekananda International Foundation*, January 16, 2018, vifindia.org.
- ¹⁷ H. Roy, "Nehru and Somnath Temple," *Frontier* 57, no. 15–18 (2024), frontierweekly.com.
- ¹⁸ M. Vaidya, "Somnath Temple Debate is Crucial to Understand Significance of Ram Mandir and Opposition to It," *The Indian Express*, August 4, 2020, indianexpress.com.
- ¹⁹ M. Lal, "Re-building of Somnath Temple: A Tribute to Sardar Patel and K. M. Munshi," *Vivekananda International Foundation*, January 16, 2018, vifindia.org.
- ²⁰ "Ram Mandir's Precursor: How a Nehru Govt Minister Helped Rebuild Somnath Temple," *The Week*, August 4, 2020, theweek.in.
- ²¹ P. Chakraborty, "Kulapati K. M. Munshi: The Pilgrim Who Marched Towards Freedom," *IndiaFacts*, August 14, 2014, indiafacts.org.
- ²² V. B. Kulkarni, *Builders of Modern India: K. M. Munshi* (Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1959), 228–230.
- ²³ K. M. Munshi, *Somnatha: The Shrine Eternal* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1951).
- ²⁴ R. Bhargava, "The Distinctiveness of Indian Secularism," in *The Future of Secularism*, ed. T. N. Srinivasan (Oxford University Press, 2006), 20–53.
- ²⁵ S. Gopal, ed., *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*. Vol. 14 (Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund, 1993).
- ²⁶ K. M. Munshi, *Somnatha: The Shrine Eternal* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1951).
- ²⁷ V. B. Kulkarni, *Builders of Modern India: K. M. Munshi* (Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1959), 228–230.

Bibliography

- Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan. "Kulapati K. M. Munshi: Dates & Events of Munshi's Life." Bhavans.info.
- Bhargava, R. "The Distinctiveness of Indian Secularism." In *The Future of Secularism*, edited by T. N. Srinivasan. Oxford University Press, 2006.
- Chakraborty, P. "Kulapati K.M. Munshi: The Pilgrim Who Marched Towards Freedom." *India Facts*, August 14, 2014. indiafacts.org.
- Gopal, S., ed. *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*. Vol. 14. Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund, 1993.

- Jani, D. "Munshi's Jaya Somnath: The New Historicism Approach." *Lapis Lazuli: An International Literary Journal* 4, no. 1 (2014): 144–56.
- Kulkarni, V. B. *Builders of Modern India: K. M. Munshi*. Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1959.
- Lal, M. "On KM Munshi's Birth Anniversary, Remembering His Fight to Rebuild Somnath Temple." *The Print*, December 30, 2018. theprint.in.
- Lal, M. "Re-building of Somnath Temple: A Tribute to Sardar Patel and K.M. Munshi." *Vivekananda International Foundation*, January 16, 2018. vifindia.org.
- Mehrishi, S. "The Defiant Rebuilder: Why KM Munshi's Contribution to Somnath's Eternity Matters to PM Modi's Restoration of Dharma and Culture." *The Pamphlet*, January 11, 2026. thepamphlet.in.
- Munshi, K. M. *જય જીયારામ*. Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1940.
- Munshi, K. M. *Somnatha: The Shrine Eternal*. Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1951.
- Parmar, J. K. "Revisiting Sanctuary, Sovereignty, and Patronage: A Critical Study of K. M. Munshi's Somanatha - The Shrine Eternal." *VNSGU Journal of Research and Innovation* 4, no. 3 (2025): 212–25.
- Pusarla, R. "Somnath: The Shrine Eternal." *MyIndMakers*, August 26, 2022. myind.net.
- Roy, H. "Nehru and Somnath Temple." *Frontier* 57, no. 15-18 (2024), frontierweekly.com
- "Ram Mandir's Precursor: How a Nehru Govt Minister Helped Rebuild Somnath Temple." *The Week*, August 4, 2020. theweek.in.
- Vaidya, M. "Somnath Temple Debate is Crucial to Understand Significance of Ram Mandir and Opposition to it." *The Indian Express*, August 4, 2020. indianexpress.com.
- "Somnath Temple: A Mesmerising Story of India's Power of Reconstruction over Power of Destruction." *Vsktelangana*, November 13, 2019. archives.vsktelangana.org.

Somnath Revival and Sardar Patel

Parika Jashvantbhai Rathod

Research Scholar, Department of History

Sardar Patel University, Anand, Gujarat

parikajrathod@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper examines the reconstruction of the Somnath Temple in post-independence India by situating it within the broader framework of nation-building and state integration under Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel. A key objective of this study is to analyze Sardar's role in the integration of princely states, particularly Junagadh, and to show how this political achievement directly enabled the revival of Somnath. Drawing on writings by N. V. Gadgil, K. M. Munshi, and other contemporary accounts, the paper examines how the Somnath project emerged from a convergence of political authority, cultural memory, and public participation. Sardar's visit to the site and his support for its reconstruction are interpreted as symbolic acts reinforcing sovereignty and civilizational continuity.

Keywords: Cultural sovereignty, Junagadh, Sardar Patel, Somnath.

The Somnath temple, situated in the Prabhas region, has been renowned since ancient times in western India. The Suryavanshi Aryans referred to Prabhas as Bhaskartirtha, Agnitirtha, and Suryatirtha. The Chandravanshis called it Somtirtha and Chandratirtha. Prabhas is referenced in the Mahabharata in the context of holy pilgrimage site. The significance of Prabhas is highlighted in the Prabhas Khanda of the Skanda Purana. As per the Prabhas Khanda, Somraja conducted a *yagna* to establish a linga at this location. Some historians suggest that Mulraja Solanki either constructed the first temple here in 997 CE or restored an existing smaller temple.¹ Prabhas became a commerce port and place of pilgrimage during the Chavda and Solanki dynasties in Gujarat. There were sporadic invasions here as a result.

In 1026 CE, Mahmud of Ghazni invaded Prabhas, destroyed the temple, and looted fortune. Following Mahmud's return to Ghazni, Bhimdeva used stones to restore the temple. Minaldevi, mother of Siddharaja Jaisinha, made significant donations here. The temple was rebuilt by Kumarpala. Additionally, Vastupala and Tejapala made a pilgrimage here and constructed a palace. In 1300 CE, Alauddin Khalji launched the second invasion. He vandalized the temple, plundered it, and committed massacres. Exploiting the disorder following the collapse of the Khalji dynasty, Ra'Navaghan, alongside Vinjaldeva in Gujarat, reinstated the Somnath linga. Rah Mahipal oversaw renovations of the temple. During the third invasion led by Muhammad Tughlaq, the linga was once again destroyed. Descendants of Vinjaldeva, Meghraj and Jaisinha, undertook repairs of the Somnath temple, allowing worship to resume. In 1369 CE, Zafar Khan invaded Somnath and once more plundered the temple. Meghraj's younger sibling Bhama ascended to power and had the fort restored. In 1395 CE, Muzaffar, the Suba of Gujarat, attacked Somnath, destroying the temple and plundering it. However, upon learning that the locals were still worshipping amidst the ruins, he again invaded and slaughtered the populace. Brahmadasa Vijayarai from the Waja clan ascended to power and attempted, without success, to restore the temple. Upon learning this, Muzaffar dispatched another army to the site, resulting in further turmoil. In 1414 CE, Ahmad Shah seized the throne of Gujarat and sent forces to assault the remaining temple, ultimately destroying it. The following year, in 1415 CE, he returned to the ruins, taking pleasure in its devastation. In 1451 CE, Rah Mandlik III renovated the Somnath temple and re-consecrated the linga. In 1490 CE, Mahmud Begda launched another attack, plundered the site once more, and demolished the temple. In 1511 CE, following Begda's death, the Brahmins at Somnath resumed their worship there.

The Portuguese engaged in conflict with the Sultanate of Gujarat. The Portuguese general De'Castro arrived to the port of Prabhas in 1547 CE and launched a reign of slaughter, looting, and arson. They demolished the mosques and temples. Somnath was one of the temples that Aurangzeb ordered to destroy in 1665 CE. The troops destroyed the temple and shattered the dome of the temple. Gujarat was no longer under the dominion of Sultanate by the 17th century. About 1783 CE, queen Ahilyabai Holkar of Indore erected a new shrine of Somnath a little distance away from the original temple. The Peshwa government gave money to fix the original temple in 1805 CE. Conflicts between communities began to occasionally occur in Prabhas when the British government took office. Curzon visited Prabhas in 1900 CE and ordered to guard the run-down structure. The Somnath region was part of Junagadh when India was set to be divided in 1947 CE.



Figure 1: Sardar at Somnath with a Resounding Majority

Junagadh was a princely state in western India. Although the Nawab of Junagadh in 1947, Mohabbat Khan was a Muslim, the bulk of the population was Hindu. His minister Shah Nawaz Bhutto, supported Jinnah. He followed Jinnah's instruction and waited until 15 August 1947, to declare which nation he would join. Bhutto declared that Junagadh would become a part of Pakistan on August 15, the day the country was formally founded. Pakistan also approved the accession on September 13. Jinnah was willing to forgo the two-nation principle

and integrate even the Hindu-majority regions with Pakistan in order to expand the territory of Pakistan.

Sardar Patel sent V. P. Menon to Junagadh on September 19 to talk about the merger. The Nawab did not meet him, and Bhutto also did not provide any satisfying response either. The Indian army joined the Kathiawar princely state of western India in sending troops to the Junagadh frontier on September 24 at Sardar's urging. Leaders from Kathiawar and Junagadh who wished to join India, gathered in Mumbai on September 25. At this convention, the provisional government of free Junagadh named Arzi Hookumat with Rajkot as its capital and Shamaldas Gandhi as its president was created with the intention of uniting Junagadh with India.

The Nawab of Junagadh and the Pakistani government contended that the Khandia kings had no right to an independent union because the army would be the first to enter the Khandia regions of Babariyawad, Manavadar, Mangrol, and Junagadh. Sardar did not hesitate to take military action. The Arzi volunteer army arrived in Junagadh. The Nawab escaped to Karachi. The Arzi Hookumat seized power in Junagadh on November 2. Bhutto then issued a proposal to the Indian government to seize control of Junagadh after realizing there was no other option. A vote was held in Junagadh on 20 February, 1948, and it joined India.



Figure 2: Honorable President Shri Rajendra Prashad Performing Consecration

Following Bhutto's suggestion, Sardar traveled to Junagadh on 13 November 1947, accompanied by N.V. Gadgil. In Junagadh, Sardar addressed an audience at Bahauddin College and subsequently paid a visit to the Somnath temple. Menon recounts his (Sardar's) visit, stating that he was deeply affected to see the temple, once a symbol of India's grandeur, now in a state of disrepair, neglected and sorrowful.² Gadgil believed that the temple should be restored and proposed this idea to Sardar.³ He instantly agreed. The Jamsaheb of Nawanagar, who was present, pledged a donation of 1 lakh rupees for this noble cause. Shamaldas Gandhi, the leader of the Arzi Hukumat, announced to contribute 51,000 rupees. Gandhiji and Sardar had agreed that the government would not fund the temple's restoration; instead, the community should raise the necessary funds to undertake the project themselves. To facilitate this, a Somnath Trust was formed by the people, with Jamsaheb serving as its president. He laid the foundation stone of the temple on 8 May, 1950. Sardar provided his support and assistance for this monumental task and was expected to conduct the consecration ceremony of the temple; however, he passed away on 15 December, 1950, before he could do so. As a result, the ceremony was led by the then President of India, Rajendra Prasad. On 11 May, 1951, Rajendra Prasad performed the consecration of the Somnath Jyotirlinga.

When Rajendra Prasad received an invitation to the inauguration of the Somnath Jyotirlinga, Jawaharlal Nehru sent him a letter urging him not to participate in the event. Nehru believed, it was not the appropriate time to concentrate on such a significant construction project in Somnath, and the project could have been executed more effectively and gradually at a later time. Nevertheless, Rajendra Prasad was in attendance. According to him, it was inappropriate to decline the invitation considering the Somnath temple's historical significance. Since this invitation was extended by the Jamsaheb of Nawanagar, he believed it was his duty to attend.

Somnath was assimilated into nationalist consciousness during the 20th century. According to Kanaiyalal Munshi in addition to being a place of worship, the temple represented cultural continuity that had been disrupted by foreign rule. He also presented Somnath as an "eternal shrine" that represented India's ability to persevere through centuries of turmoil. The way Somnath was perceived after 1947 was significantly influenced by this viewpoint. Munshi assisted Sardar and participated in the restoration of Somnath. In his book, Munshi recounts an episode involving Sardar and Somnath from October 1947, when he was with Sardar at his residence in Delhi and received a phone call from Neelam Buch. The call informed him that Bhutto had suggested the Indian government take control of Junagadh. Upon hearing this, Sardar expressed his delight and remarked to Munshi, "It is Jay Somnath."⁴ This indicates that the notion of Somnath was already in Sardar's conscious before Junagadh was integrated into India. Sardar, Gadgil and Jamsaheb went to visit the premises of the temple in November, 1947. Munshi notes that, "Sardar took some water from the sea in his hands and said, 'my ambition is fulfilled'."



Figure 3: The Somnath Garbhagriha Inauguration on 11/05/1951

The reconstruction of the Somnath temple occupies a distinctive position in the history of independent India, reflecting themes of nationalism and perspectives on historical memory. The temple's repeated destruction over the centuries and its subsequent rebuilding turned it into a symbol of religious faith, historical awareness, local historiography, and nationalist ambitions. Recognized as the principal architect behind the unification of the princely states, Sardar also played a significant role in the restoration of Somnath. Different individuals interpret this endeavor through various lenses. Some view it as driven by religious devotion, while others perceive it as motivated by nationalist ideals. However, understanding Sardar's political philosophy and ideology is essential in this context. The central thesis of this research article is to show Sardar Patel's contribution for the reconstruction of Somnath temple.

The rebuilding of Somnath represented an endeavor to reinterpret and commemorate the past. Examining the Somnath temple through various lenses is particularly insightful in this context. The temple embodies multiple identities: a symbol of spiritual devotion, a historical site, and a significant political and national landmark. It signifies the nation's self-assurance as a national monument, thanks to Sardar's initiatives. By initiating the temple's reconstruction immediately after gaining independence, Sardar conveyed that true independence was unfulfilled without cultural dignity. To grasp Sardar's perspective on Somnath, it is essential to comprehend his wider political viewpoint. Unlike Nehru, Sardar

was not a theorist of secularism, and he was not a cultural revivalist like the later Hindu nationalists. His politics was practical and grounded in public sentiment, characterized by reality and historical continuity.

Despite Sardar's noble intentions, Somnath has continued to be a politically contentious issue. The later appropriation of the temple by more explicitly religious nationalist movements has, at times, overshadowed Sardar's initial vision. Sardar did not live to witness the temple's inauguration in 1951. If Sardar lived longer, he would have served as a mediator, and Somnath would not have been viewed solely through a communal lens. This distinction between Sardar's intentions and the later interpretations highlights the strain between the two communities during the process of nation-building. Gandhiji remarked in a post-prayer discussion on 25 October, 1947, that he read in an Urdu newspaper about, the widespread discussion on Somnath; "if the temple were to be restored, it would provoke a new Ghaznavi to emerge from Ghazni for revenge." These comments were featured in the Aligarh Urdu Magazine published by Aligarh University under the pseudonym "Mahmud Ghaznavi." Upon reading this, Gandhiji expressed his sorrow. Subsequently, Nawab Mohammad Ismail Khan, the then Vice-Chancellor of Aligarh University, wrote to Gandhiji to convey his apologies for the error.

The rebuilding of the Somnath temple was not solely a religious endeavor nor a breach of secular values. Guided by Sardar, it represented a manifestation of post-independence sovereignty, aiming to establish confidence in historical identity. Viewing Somnath through this lens enables us to move past the conflicts of "secular versus communal." Sardar recognized that nations could be upheld not just by their constitutions and institutions, but also by shared symbols of collective memory. In this regard, Somnath was not merely constructed from stone but reimagined as a concept; a concept that sheds light on the discussion surrounding history, identity, and freedom in contemporary India.

Notes and references

- ¹ Romila Thapar, *Somnath: The Many Voices of a History* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2004), 25.
- ² V. P. Menon, *The Story of the Integration of the Indian States* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1956), 147-48.
- ³ N. V. Gadgil, *Government from Inside* (Meerut: Meenakshi Prakashan, 1968), 59.
- ⁴ K. M. Munshi, *Pilgrimage to Freedom (1902–1950)*, Vol. 1 (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1967), 559.

Bibliography

- Gadgil, N. V. *Government from Inside*. Meenakshi Prakashan, 1968.
- Menon, P. *The Story of the Integration of the Indian States*. The Macmillan Company, 1956.
- Munshi, K. M. *Pilgrimage to Freedom (1902-1950)*. Vol. 1. Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1967.
- Munshi, K. M. *Somnath: The Shrine Eternal*. Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1951.
- Patel, M., and G. M. Nandurkar. *Sardar Patel—In Tune with the Millions—II*. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel Smarak Bhavan, 1976.
- Thapar, R. *Somnath: The Many Voices of a History*. Penguin Books, 2004.
- Sarvepalli, G., ed. *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*. Vol. 16, pt. 1. Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund, 1994.
- Bobbio, T. "Somnath Mandir in a Play of Mirrors: Heritage, History, and the Search for Identity of the New Nation (1842–1951)." *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (2023).
- ગાંધી, રાજમોહન. ૧૯૮૪. સરદાર પટેલ એક સમિપત ડવન. અમદાવાદ: નવડવન શાલય. ૬૨૫, શંસાદ હરસાદ. ૧૯૬૫. ભાસ અને સોમનાથ. રાજકોટ: વીણકાશન.

Somnath: The Eternal Soul of India – From Śaṅkarācārya's Philosophy to Modern Governance

Dr. Somya Nagar
Research Associate
Banasthali Vidyapith, Jaipur, Rajasthan
saumyanagar5555@gmail.com

Ankur Joshi
Fellow of MDI-Gurgaon
Faculty of Management Studies, Banasthali Vidyapith

Abstract

The history of Somnath Mandir lies in its physical struggle, of the mandir being broken and rebuilt again. Therefore to totally understand the reason behind Somnath being called as the unconquered soul of Bharat lies beyond its stones in the philosophy of the Mandir in the idea that kept it alive for a thousand years. This research argues that the strength of Somnath Mandir is in the spiritual and intellectual framework which was established decades back by Adi Shankaracharya Ji. While historians focus on the 1026 CE raid and 1951 reconstructions, this study focuses on the significant contribution of Adi Shankaracharya ji's vision of a culturally unified Bharat (Kshetra), without which the physical reclamation of the mandirs would not have been possible. Studying Shankaracharya Ji's efforts is essential while studying Somnath as he provided us with a civilisational compass allowing the nation to distinguish between what is temporary and what is eternal. In the Advaita philosophy he taught the concept of Mithya or changing form (a physical structure) can be damaged, while the satyam or the truth of the Jyotirlinga remains untouched. Identifying Somnath as the first of the twelve pillars of light it was Shankaracharya ji long before the first stone was laid by Sardar Patel who ensured mandir remains an eternal reality in the hearts of every Bharatiya.

This research will provide a deep insight into sequential analysis connecting the ancient past with the modern future. Beginning with the exploration of Advaitic Seed of Resilience employing texts like Vivekacudamani to depict the philosophical aspect of Non-Duality and how it helped the Hindu community in processing their historical trauma and staying focused on reconstruction. The sequence then moves towards the civilizational mapping phase which discusses the aspects of Shankaracharya ji's physical geography that inspired modern leaders like Sardar Patel and K.M. Munshi argues that Somnath is not merely a religious site but the very soul of the Indian Union. Lastly, the research transitions into its Governance Phase, in which analysis of the scientific symbolism 'The Baan Stambh' (The Arrow Pillar) is employed to propose a contemporary framework for the management of our sacred spaces. The research to be summarized provides a comprehensive understanding of the practical guidance provided by the ancient wisdom in modern statecraft. The study will also provide a detailed look at the philosophical justification for 1951 reconstruction, which demonstrates the act of Applied Advaita helping to decolonize the Indian mind. Additionally the research will introduce a Dharma-Sanchalan Model- a governance framework model that provides a balance between modern administrative transparency while preserving the sacred traditions. At the end the study will conclude Somnath being a living entity for bharatiya identity, rendering a stage for future primary research related to governance and management of major Indian Mandir based on secondary data analysis.

Keywords: Ādi Śaṅkarācārya, Advaita Vedānta, Civilisational Resilience, Mandir Governance, Modern India, Somnath

Introduction

The legacy of Somnath mandir is a story of faith standing in calm at the shores of the Arabian Sea in Prabhas Patan, this mandir is first among all the jyotirlinga dedicated to Bhagwan Shiva. One must go beyond its physical foundation and explore the philosophy that kept the mandir alive for years in spite of being broken and rebuilt multiple times, this is the reason why we call Somnath as the eternal soul of India.

The primary argument of this research is that the strength of the mandir lies in its spiritual and intellectual frameworks established by scholars like Adi Shankaracharya Ji. The history often focuses on the 1026 CE raid by Mahmud of Ghazni and the 1951 reconstruction; this research highlights the vision of unified Bharat emphasized by Shankaracharya Ji. He delivered us a civilizational compass that made us distinguish between what is temporary and what is eternal, without this foundation the physical reclamation of mandir in the 20th century was not possible. The concept of Mithya (Changing physical form) and Satyam (The truth of the jyotirlinga) are the advaita philosophies taught by him which still remain untouched.

Identifying Somnath mandir as the very initial pillar of the twelve jyotirlinga or pillars of light, Shankaracharya Ji made sure the mandir resides as a reality in the hearts of every citizen way before Sardar Patel laid the first stone of modern mandir structure. The research is a framework to provide a sequential analysis which connects ancient past with modern future, diving deep into the philosophy that assisted the community in processing historical trauma and staying focused on the reconstruction.

Key Concept	Philosophical Basis	Modern Governance Link	
Civilizational Resilience	Advaita Vedanta (Non-duality)	Decolonization of the Indian Mind	
Cultural Mapping	Śaṅkarācārya's-Dashanami Sampradaya	Unified National Identity	
Scientific Symbolism	The Baan Stambh (Arrow Pillar)	Strategic Maritime Framework	
Applied Advaita	Discrimination of Real vs. Unreal	Transparent Management	Temple

Review of Literature

There have been many researches undertaken in the past, spanning from ancient Puranic legends to modern debates. The “Somnatha: The Shrine Eternal,” by K.M. Munshi traces history from the prehistoric era mentioning mandir is a symbol of India’s destiny.¹ Munshi also defines mandir as a “living entity” in his study embodying collective sentiments of the nation.² This view contrasts sharply with the perspective of Jawaharlal Nehru, who characterized the 1951 reconstruction as "Hindu revivalism" associated with medievalism. Nehru's stance, as documented in various cabinet records and personal correspondence, suggests a preference for a secular modernity where "dams are the new temples".

The philosophical underpinnings of this resilience are explored in traditional Advaita Vedanta texts, most notably the *Vivekachudamani*. Although modern scholars such as Shah-Kazemi and Comans question the direct authorship of Ādi Śaṅkara, the text is so deeply interwoven into his spiritual heritage that it remains the primary manual for understanding his perspective on discrimination (*Viveka*). The *Vivekachudamani* (v. 20) defines *Viveka* as the firm conviction that Brahman is real and the universe is unreal. This philosophical stance is crucial to the study of Somnath, as it allowed the Hindu community to view the destruction of the physical temple as a temporary, *Mithya* event, while the spiritual essence of the Jyotirlinga remained permanent.³

Modern scholarship on decolonization, such as that by Rajiv Malhotra, provides a framework for understanding how Indian knowledge systems were marginalized or "digested" by Western colonial narratives. Malhotra argues that recovering ancient knowledge and re-writing history is essential for shedding colonial baggage and regaining national consciousness. Similarly, Namvar Singh (1992) analyzes how Indian identity was fractured by events like Partition and how a "militant decolonization" of the mind is required to restore cultural integrity.

The economic and administrative aspects of temple management are discussed in recent reports from IIM Bangalore (2020) and various research papers on "Sacramental Property". These studies highlight the shift from self-governing community hubs under the principles of *Dana* (charity) and *Palana* (protection) to modern state-controlled bureaucratic structures characterized by financial exploitation. The proposed "Dharma-Sanchalan Model" draws from these insights to suggest a governance framework that balances transparency with

tradition.

Author/Source	Key Theme	Perspective on Somnath/Advaita
K.M. Munshi (1951)	National Identity	Somnath as a "National Pledge" and Shrine Eternal
Ādi Śaṅkarācārya (Attrib.)	Advaita Vedanta	Discrimination between Satyam (Real) and Mithya (Unreal)
Rajiv Malhotra (Contemporary)	Decolonization	Resisting "Epistemic Cannibalization" of Indian traditions
IIM Bangalore (2020)	Management	Need for Public-Public Partnerships in temple governance
Nehru (1951)	Secularism	Concern over "Hindu Revivalism" and anti-modern sentiment

Research Objective

The primary objective of this research is to analyze the intersection of spiritual philosophy and modern statecraft through the lens of the Somnath Mandir. Specifically, the study seeks to:

- Evaluate how Ādi Śaṅkarācārya's Advaita philosophy provided a framework for civilizational resilience that withstood centuries of destruction.
- Investigate the role of the 1951 Somnath reconstruction in the process of "decolonizing the Indian mind" and establishing a post-independence cultural identity.
- Analyze the scientific and geographical symbolism of the *Baan Stambh* (Arrow Pillar) to derive principles for modern administrative clarity.
- Propose the "Dharma-Sanchalan Model," a governance framework for Indian temples that integrates modern transparency with ancient sacred traditions.

Methodology Used

This research employs a qualitative, sequential analysis method, integrating historical data with philosophical inquiry and governance modeling. The methodology is divided into three primary phases:

- **Philosophical Analysis (Advaitic Seed of Resilience Phase):** This phase uses traditional texts like *Vivekachudamani* to explore the concept of Non-Duality and its role in helping the community process historical trauma. It examines how the distinction between *Satyam* and *Mithya* allowed for sustained focus on reconstruction.
- **Historical and Civilizational Mapping Phase:** This involves the study of physical geography as mapped by Ādi Śaṅkarācārya and its subsequent influence on modern leaders like Sardar Patel and K.M. Munshi. It analyzes correspondence, speeches, and the "national pledge" discourse from 1947 to 1951.
- **Governance Phase:** This phase analyzes the *Baan Stambh* and its scientific symbolism to propose a contemporary framework for sacred space management. It synthesizes insights from modern management reports (e.g., IIM Bangalore) and legal doctrines on religious trusts to formulate the "Dharma-Sanchalan Model".
- The study relies on secondary data analysis, including ancient scriptures, historical chronicles, architectural inscriptions, and modern economic data related to temple tourism.

Findings

The Advaitic Seed of Resilience: Processing Historical Trauma

The research findings indicate that the primary driver behind the survival of Somnath is the collective psychological resilience provided by Advaita Vedanta. In Hindu mythology, the story of the Moon God (Soma) praying to Lord Shiva to escape the curse of Daksha Prajapati serves as the foundational narrative. The moon's cycle of waxing and waning represents the eternal nature of the divine, which persists even when its brightness seems to fade.

सौराष्ट्रदेशे त्विशदेऽतरम्ये ज्योतिमयं चन्द्रकलावंतसम् । भिरतप्रदानाय कृतावतारं तं सोमनाथं शरणं प्रपद्ये ॥

"In the pure and very beautiful Saurashtra region, I take refuge in Somnath, the Lord who is in the form of Light and wears the crescent moon."

This verse from the *Dwadasa Jyotirlinga Stotram* underscores that the Lord is *Jyotirmayam* (made of light). Philosophical inquiry suggests that light cannot be destroyed by iron or fire; only the vessel containing the light can be broken. By internalizing this, the Hindu community viewed the attacks by Mahmud of Ghazni (1026 CE), Alauddin Khilji (1299 CE), and Aurangzeb (1701 CE) as attacks on the *Mithya* (the physical vessel) but not the *Satyam* (the Light). This allowed for a rapid psychological recovery after each destruction, leading to a "phoenix-like" rise of the shrine.

Civilizational Mapping: The Vision of Sardar Patel and K.M. Munshi

The study finds that the 1951 reconstruction was not an act of religious fundamentalism, as argued by some secular critics, but a fulfillment of a civilizational mapping established by Śaṅkarācārya. K.M. Munshi argued that the temple lived in the hearts of the nation and its reconstruction was a national pledge.⁴

Ruler/Leader	Contribution to Somnath	Philosophical Stance
Kumarapala (1169)	Built the "Fifth Temple"	Restoring the glory after Ghazni's raid
Ahilyabai Holkar (1783)	Built a small temple adjacent to ruins	Preservation of worship during colonial/Mughal decline
Dr. Rajendra Prasad	Performed Pran-Pratishta in 1951	Reasserting the bond between culture and the nation

Patel and Munshi envisioned the temple as the first monument of a finally independent India after a millennium of foreign domination. Their justification was rooted in the idea of "Applied Advaita"—taking the abstract truth of oneness and manifesting it through the physical restoration of a sacred site. This act was essential for decolonizing the Indian mind, which had been conditioned to view its heritage as a collection of "dead ruins" under colonial archaeological frameworks.

Scientific and Geographical Governance: The Baan Stambh

A significant finding of this research is the scientific sophistication represented by the *Baan Stambh* (Arrow Pillar). The inscription "आसमुद्रांत दध्ण ध्रुव, पयत अबाधत ज्योतिम ाग" (No

landmass from this point to the South Pole) is not merely a geographic fact but a governance directive. It indicates that ancient Indian knowledge systems had mapped the globe with a level of precision that contemporary science has only recently verified via satellite mapping.

This "unobstructed path" symbolizes the ideal state of administrative clarity. In modern governance, this suggests that sacred institutions should be managed without the "obstructions" of political interference or bureaucratic delays. The *Baan Stambh* reminds the modern administrator that the management of a temple must be aligned with a "higher longitude"—a moral and spiritual purpose that transcends local politics.

The Dharma-Sanchalan Model: Proposals for Temple Management

The research introduces the "Dharma-Sanchalan Model," which seeks to rectify the failures of current state-led temple management. Data from IIM Bangalore and other studies show that many state-run temples suffer from a lack of financial autonomy and a blurring of spiritual and administrative domains.

Feature	Current Model	"State-Control"	Proposed "Dharma-Sanchalan" Model
Leadership	Government-appointed bureaucrats		Independent Boards of scholars, priests, and experts
Finances	Revenue often diverted to state exchequer		Reinvested in Veda Pathshalas, hospitals, and charity
Accountability	Accountable to political authorities		Accountable to the <i>Bhakta Sabha</i> (devotee community)
Spiritual Autonomy	Departmental control over rituals		<i>Agama</i> rules and rituals managed by specialists

The model classifies temples into three categories (Iconic, Regional, Local) to tailor governance. For instance, Iconic temples like Somnath (Category A) would focus on dharmic education and running Sanskrit universities, while Local temples (Category C) would be

managed by village committees with community voting.

Economic Impact of Spiritual Tourism

Findings indicate that the "Temple Economy" is a robust part of the national socio-economic fabric. Spiritual tourism accounts for over 60% of domestic travel in India. In 2024, the religious tourism market is estimated at US\$ 10.8 billion, with a projected growth to US\$ 28.9 billion by 2030.

- **Revenue Generation:** Major temples like Tirupati have annual budgets exceeding ₹5,000 crore, demonstrating the sheer scale of the temple economy.
- **Employment:** Temples catalyze industries like transportation, hospitality, and retail, creating millions of jobs in surrounding ecosystems.
- **Regional Development:** The construction of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya saw visitor numbers jump from 6 million to 164 million, transforming the city's infrastructure.

These findings suggest that a well-governed temple like Somnath is not just a place of prayer but a development hub that can sustain regional prosperity if managed under the Dharma-Sanchalan Model.

Conclusions

The research concludes that Somnath is a living entity that defines the Indian civilizational identity. The study demonstrates that the resilience of the shrine was not a historical accident but a result of the "Advaitic Seed" planted by Ādi Śaṅkarācārya. By distinguishing between the eternal light and the temporary stone structure, the Indian mind was able to process trauma without losing its spiritual orientation.

The 1951 reconstruction, led by Sardar Patel and K.M. Munshi, was a pivotal moment in the decolonization of India, reasserting the nation's right to its sacred geography. Furthermore, the scientific marvel of the *Baan Stambh* proves that ancient Indian wisdom was both spiritual and empirical, providing a strong foundation for modern statecraft.

The current challenges in temple management—ranging from bureaucratic overreach to lack

of transparency—can be resolved through the "Dharma-Sanchalan Model". This model shifts the focus from "state-control" to "community-trusteeship," ensuring that temples return to their historical role as centers of education, charity, and social cohesion.

Future Scope of Study

While this research provides a comprehensive sequential analysis, there are several areas for future primary research:

- **Longitudinal Impact of Temple Governance:** Future studies should compare the socio-economic outcomes of temples managed by independent trusts versus those under state endowment departments.
- **Digital Decolonization:** Researching how technology and blockchain can be used to ensure financial transparency in temple donations and the "pious benefit" spending mandated in the Dharma-Sanchalan model.
- **Archaeological and Scientific Verification:** Further studies on the *Baan Stambh* to explore if other similar landmarks exist along the Indian coastline, potentially revealing an ancient network of maritime navigation points.
- **Applied Advaita in Psychology:** Expanding the study of Śāṅkarācārya's philosophy into modern mental health, exploring how the *Satyam-Mithya* framework can help individuals cope with contemporary trauma and existential anxiety.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

- **Implement the Dharma-Sanchalan Model:** The Indian government should consider legislative frameworks that transition temples from "state-managed" to "state-independent" boards, focusing on fiduciary duty to the deity and accountability to devotees.
- **Educational Integration:** The scientific significance of monuments like the *Baan Stambh* and the history of civilizational resilience should be integrated into the national education curriculum (NEP 2020) to foster a sense of decolonized pride.
- **Infrastructure and Security:** As spiritual tourism continues to grow, investments in sustainable infrastructure and IT-based security (as suggested by the IIM Bangalore paper) are essential to manage large crowds while preserving the sanctity of the environment.

- **Preservation of Oral and Scriptural Heritage:** Temples must be mandated to allocate a fixed percentage of their revenue (as per the "pious benefit" principle) to the establishment of Veda Pathshalas and the digital archiving of rare Sanskrit manuscripts.
- **Community-Based Voting:** For local Category C temples, a democratic system of committee elections among households attached to the temple should be implemented to ensure the institution remains rooted in its local community.

A Note on the "Man-God" Experience: A Narrative Example

To truly understand the impact of Somnath, one must look at the personal transformation it triggers. A traveler's account describes entering the temple during the *lunch-time* of Lord Shiva, where priests were offering *Bhoga* to the sounds of drums and trumpets. Feeling sad because she had nothing "material" to offer, she sat by the seashore, her mind "full of emptiness".

A sudden disturbance caught her attention: a lift-man was shouting at an old, helpless lady who couldn't walk down the stairs. The traveler decided to help, lifting the woman in her lap and taking her to a special van provided by the temple committee for the disabled. In that moment of service, she realized that she had "touched her God"—not in the stone idol, but in the living human being. This story perfectly illustrates the practical application of Ādi Śaṅkara's "Jivo Brahmaiva Naparah" (The individual is none other than the Divine). It shows that the "unconquered soul" of Somnath is not just in the temple's rising stones, but in the rising compassion within the hearts of its devotees.

By integrating this human-centric view with scientific mapping and rigorous governance, Somnath remains the "Eternal Soul of India"—unbroken, unconquered, and ever-shining.

Notes and references

¹ K. M. Munshi, *Somanatha: The Shrine Eternal* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1951).

² Ibid.

³ Adi Shankaracharya, *Vivekachudamani*, trans. N. Avinashilingam (WisdomLib, 2016).

⁴ K. M. Munshi, *Somanatha: The Shrine Eternal* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1951).

Bibliography

- Batra, J. "Decolonising Indian Mind and Rajiv Malhotra's Predatory-Digested Cultures Paradigm." *Boletín de Literatura Oral-The Literary Journal* 11, no. 1 (2024): 183–92
- Bindhani, R. K., and J. R. Mohanty. "Temple Economy: Unveiling the Major Contribution to India's GDP." *International Research Journal of Economics and Management Studies* 3, no. 10 (2024): 37–44.
- Ghosh, B. "Sacramental Property: Evolving a New Model for Temple Management." Working paper, 2026.
- Kulkarni, G. V. "The Temple Economy: How India's Sacred Spaces Power Local Livelihoods." *The Week*, April 30, 2026.
- Malhotra, R. *Being Different: An Indian Challenge to Western Universalism*. HarperCollins, 2011.
- Mishra, S. V. "The Afterlife of Temples: Western India." In *The Routledge Handbook of Hindu Temples*. Routledge, 2022.
- Munshi, K. M., *Somanatha: The Shrine Eternal*. Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1951.
- Nair, S. N. *The Lord Shiva*. Pustak Mahal, 2009.
- Parmar, J. K. "Revisiting Sanctuary, Sovereignty, and Patronage: A Critical Study of K. M. Munshi's Somanatha - The Shrine Eternal." *VNSGU Journal of Research and Innovation* 4, no. 3 (2025): 212–25.
- Patel, V. *For a United India: Speeches of Sardar Patel, 1947–1950*. Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1967.
- Ramesh, G. "Governance and Management of Temples: A Framework." Working paper, Indian Institute of Management Bangalore, 2020.
- Saggi, P. D., ed. *Life and Work of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel*. Overseas Publishing House, 1950.
- Shankaracharya, Adi. *Vivekachudamani*. Translated by N. Avinashilingam. WisdomLib, 2016.
- Singh, N., and H. Trivedi. "Decolonising the Indian Mind." *Indian Literature* 35, no. 5 (1992): 145–56.
- Thapar, R. *Somnatha: The Many Voices of a History*. Viking, 2004.

SESSION 4:

THE FALSEHOOD OF LEFT HISTORIOGRAPHY

Session Chair: Dr. Vikram Sampath

This session offers a critical interrogation of dominant Left historiographical interpretations of Somnath. Speakers identify methodological fallacies, selective source usage, and ideological presuppositions that have shaped reductionist or dismissive accounts of the site. The objective is not polemic, but scholarly correction - equipping students, teachers, and the wider public with historically grounded counterarguments rooted in evidence, context, and comparative historiography.



Reconstructing the Left Authorship—On Somnath

Shreya Shinde

Student

St. Xavier's College, Mumbai, Maharashtra

shindeshreyaanand@gmail.com

Introduction

It's been one thousand years since the recorded destruction of the Somnath temple by Mahmud of Ghazni and 75 years of *pran-pratishtha* in Independent India by the efforts of K M Munshi and Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel. The 'collective trauma' faced by Hindus and the subsequent resistance have been recorded, documented but what came to be marketised, academically and historically have been the narrative of the left authorship. And their distinct way of historiography. Here, first, the meaning of historiography needs to be deconstructed because the scholars on the left, built an entire narrative of the invasions of Somnath on this deconstructed left historiography.

Historiography is the writing of history. Beginning from selection of well documented historical references and records, critically examining them and later, forming narrative, theoretical frameworks upon the same. It is more about the 'how' and 'why' it is written than 'when'. The left Historiography and authorship takes historiography of mediaeval Indian History and specifically Somnath temple seriously. The core arguments of left historiography gets heavily applied to the analysis of archaeological and literary references of invasions and plunder of Somnath temple. The event itself is important and there is no ambiguity of the event's happening but what is crucial is the varied experience of the social groups involved during Mahmud of Ghazni's invasions. The multiplicity of records of the destruction of the temple ranging from Turko-Persian court histories, Sanskrit inscriptions, Jain merchants chronicles is needed to critically analyse or validate the 'collective trauma' faced by Hindus.

While reading the modern historiography of invasions of Somnath temple, the crucial dearth of counter/alternative analysis of left historiography on Somnath temple was felt, both academical as well as civilizational. Despite having both Hindu nationalist and left perspectives on the invasions and plunder of Somnath, what needs attention is the research that attempts to fill that research gap by critically analysing through Indic lenses the left

authorship on the Somnath temple.

The paper seeks to examine the falsehood of left historiography through various inter related themes. First, the origins and fundamentals of left historiography. This includes analysing the works of D.D. Kosambi and Irfan Habib. This analysis becomes the base for examining the works of left historians on Somnath temple and invasions by Mahmud of Ghazni. Second, this leads to assessing the works of Romila Thapar, Harbans Mukhia, Eaton Richard on Somnath temple through the lens of left historiography. Third, examining the crucial bibliography of invasions of Somnath temple used by the left authorship. That includes Turko-Persian accounts and left scholars' interpretation of them. Fourth, although this isn't the main focus of this paper, it is an attempt to provide alternative history to the dominant left works on Somnath temple.

The Origins of Left Historiography

From what started with Mohammad Habib's work on Mahmud of Ghazni, the left historiography took concrete shape under the leadership of D.D. Kosambi, Indian polymath who mastered the art of applying Marxist framework to the study of Indian History. His arguments became the basis of methodological debates in the study of medieval history of India. And later, imbibed by left authorship into the study of invasions and raids on Somnath temple.

According to D.D. Kosambi, *history is the development in chronological sequence of essential stages in the means and relations of human social production*. Here, the emphasis was especially upon the sequence, archaeology of the events and most importantly the material, economic and technological dimension of the societal stages. The significant thing about this definition is that it completely and deliberately criticises the mysticism and scriptural reverence of Indic history. The question of whether Indus Valley Civilisation worshipped which gods is of lesser importance to the critical examination of the civilisation's tools, metals, trade surplus.

What is history? No historian can say everything that happened having often to select from sources that have already selected what seemed important enough for them to be recorded. Thus, the conception of what constitutes history changes with the times, with the class in power. A partial answer to the inquiry has been given in some of the questions propounded in

section 2: the implication is that any serious history should be able to answer questions of this type. To state the matter as a definition: history is the development in chronological order of basic changes in the means and relation of production. Any other type of history deals only with the superstructure, not with essentials. It doesn't matter if king Tweedledum succeeded Tweedledee, or the reverse: but whether the production and use of iron was first developed under Dum or Dee is a problem of a totally different order of importance, which might then make it essential to determine which of the two came first.

1

Only primary archaeological work can help us to evaluate the content, to fix the meaning of our written sources. It was not so long ago that European scholars, relying solely upon records, dismissed the Buddha as a sun-myth. We know that though particular episodes of the Iliad may be fictitious, Troy did exist, and there is evidence for its having been sacked by the Achaeans.

Was there actually a Mahābhārata war? What does Rāma's legendary invasion of Laṅkā represent?

No answer will be forthcoming unless someone digs at the right places. Indian archaeology is still at the bourgeois-colonial stage of digging for museum exhibits that look impressive to foreigners.²

Historiography for him was the method through which Indian culture from ages a. can be consequentially or sequentially constructed on the material foundation (base in Marx's language) b. And the examination of superstructure, the religion, the culture as the effect of the material base and not vice versa. c. Application of feudalistic approach towards the Indian civilisation rather than mythical framework.

The methodologies with which D.D. Kosambi and subsequently Irfan Habib were theoretically critical were the ones who solely relied upon the Indian philosophical and religious literature and scriptures.³ For Kosambi, Historiography means reading the solid documents of history of society which keeps a record of its material production.⁴ The study of society that recognises that history is not an act of god but the culmination of actual human effort.

According to Kosambi, the authorship until now was primarily based on broader Hindu (read priestly) scriptures that have successfully compiled some narrow local traditions and made it mystical and universal with overlapping chronology.⁵ Additionally, the ownership of the history had sectarian robe of the priesthood class, thus reductant, exclusive and privileged. The secrecy and gatekeeping nature of Brahmins have made the study of Sanskrit scriptures, an arduous task for the correct analysis of History. The very insistence of memory over writing, preference of epics, Veda and Puranas over ordered historical journals, theology over documents of events is the primary hindrance that prevents Indian History to be as lucid as European history. Or more precise, Indian history to even be called history in its truest sense.

The Indian scriptures lack archaeological substance, sheer absence of important additions and documentation of Indian means of production has made the Historiography based on superstructure rather than the base. Because according to Kosambi, the base of Indian civilisation, both in real sense and literary evidential sense was missing.

Until now, the themes of study in Indian History have been upon kings, dynasties, religions, pre feudalistic societies, the strong hold of priesthood upon the generation of literary systems and prevention of the knowledge to the wider society. The history of man, the efforts of man with others, means and relations of production makes history.

In essence, the teachings of Mahabharat doesn't constitute historiography but the excavations, archaeology does. Likewise, the evidence of Islamic invasions and encounters in Indian society has literary records constituting a new way to look at medieval history, the feudalistic perspective to Indian History. The communal perspective prior to the Islamic invasion and assimilation gets criticised for being hyper communal and mystic and the theological aspects of Islamic rule in India becomes feudalistic.⁶ The Marxist lens is used for portraying the Islamic rule in India as purely economic and material encounters concentrating upon trade routes, land revenues, agricultural tools and greenwashing of the aggressive destruction of the dharmic civilization.

The fundamental arguments of the left Historiography built by D.D. Kosambi and Irfan Habib were significantly applied by the left historians on Somnath temple, specifically Romila Thapar. Other left authors generally built their narratives on the broader medieval period

within which Somnath temple invasions and plunder get trivialised, while Romila Thapar specifically studies Ghazni's invasions on Somnath temple. The invasions, desecration of the idols and raid on the temple are intricately and theoretically placated with what left authorship considers history.

Left Historiography, Somnath temple and Mahmud of Ghazni

Stages of Indian Feudalism and Trivialising the collective trauma of Hindus

Empires broke up into smaller kingdoms at war as local production increased in the wilderness. The dominance of the relatively changeless self-sufficing village where only the rotation of the seasons had a meaning, not the succession of the years, destroyed Indian history, as it destroyed historiography through its intellectual product, the incurably rustic Brahmin. It is the stagnant village that gave to the caste system its theoretical rigidity in spite of many new castes recruited from tribes and guilds. Commodity production per head declined, as most of the produce was consumed locally; this meant the decline of cities as centres of production. The problem of increasing commodity production was solved in part by force, in the feudal period-Islam's chief contribution to India which promoted trade in the expropriated surplus and connected India more tightly with a much larger international market. This is the period also of annals and light histories, which go naturally with such trade; the period when Munshis and Majumdars were created, though not their mentality.⁷

As history has to be documented through the actual human efforts and relations of human production, D.D. Kosambi reflected upon Indian history as evolving stages of feudalism, the advanced beginning of which started during the Muslim period in India and the culmination of which happened during British rule. The trade routes, exports, market internationalisation advanced strongly with Muslim rule although the left authorship recognised the brutal force with which it occurred on the subcontinent. But the brutal force and invasions were normalised by the scholars because of the enormous and intricate trade in Muslim period.

The main advances may be taken as follows: (1) The urban but stagnant Indus valley culture (3000-1500 BC) which left its mark on later technique, iconography, and probably social institutions. (2) Aryanization, i.e. late bronze and early iron age pastoral-nomadic tribal organization over the two-caste system, developing into four caste-classes by 800 BC. (3) Clearing and settlement of the heavily forested Gangetic alluvial basin with Sadra labour, mostly under Magadhan state enterprise (from 500 BC) ending in the first empire over the

whole country by 250 BC. (4) A primitive feudalism whereby the peninsula was properly developed for trade and agriculture (say the Satavahana period), but with far less production in cities. The emergence of private property, even in land, began earlier than AD 400, before the prime of the Gupta empire. (5) Pure feudalism, beginning in the later Gupta period but enormously stimulated by Muslim trade and military penetration after AD 1200. (6) Modern capitalism, culminating in the rule of a new indigenous bourgeoisie that came into being less than 100 years ago through European trade, factory production, and share capital, under British colonial rule.⁸

Further, the temple loot, plundering was normalised as desire for economic, competitive and sovereign expansion in mediaeval Islamic periods. And the effect of the economic adventures of the Muslim dynasties in the subcontinent was glorified quantitatively as well as qualitatively. The changes in social and religious fabric was given little priority by the left authorship. On the other side, the advanced evolution from the stagnant and rustic vedic civilisation and polity until the country under Muslim rule was critically acclaimed in the form of later Feudalism that was a characteristic of the below to top model. The scale of which not even Arthashastra could have matched and Indic dynasties could have built, forget sustain.

Later Feudalism

The basis of fully developed feudalism was not the Muslim conquest but a considerable change in property relations which had begun long before and continued afterwards. The Muslims were a great stimulus as traders on the international market; they completed the decay of the older priest-ridden feudalism, turning a good deal of the accumulated loot into barter pseudo-capital. The first direct step in breaking up the old village economy was a heavy increase in taxes. Furthermore, some landowner-by no means always a Muslim-was made responsible for tax collection (generally in kind, but converted by the agent into money for the share to little effective change, comparatively few people availing themselves voluntarily of the chance of escape from the caste system because there was not much chance of escape from the economic class. The centralization attempted by Alauddin Khilji in direct exploitation of crown lands with imperial slaves (the bandagan-i-khas) failed dismally, as did Mohammed Tughlaq's currency control. Neither a slave economy nor reversion to the Arthashastra were possible. The feudal nobility and theologians (ulema) opposed these attempts bitterly and successfully. Thus, we have Asiatic feudalism, the central state being

rather weak (in spite of the supposedly absolute power of the emperors) except in regulating matters between or to the class benefit of feudal lords.⁹

This framework of feudalism is applied by Thapar while examining Somanath's invasions by Mahmud of Ghazni.¹⁰ She emphasises upon raids being normal during the mediaeval period, the political and sovereign emergency in Central Asia, the Caliphate and the urgency to build an empire by Mahmud of Ghazni validated the raids, plundering as the demand of the period. Additionally, she argues, the economic and trade aspects from the Turks and Persians were too strong for the local and regional dynasties of India to ignore. Further, the collective trauma of Hindus, according to her, is not widely documented as much as their trade interests with the Turks and Persians during and post the invasions made by Mahmud of Ghazni.

Evidently, these relationships were far more complex than we have assumed and range beyond the concerns of religions and conversions. To place the raid in a historical context would require considering the wider canvas of Mahmud's ambitions and the part played in these by his raids on India. Mahmud's activities in the Indian subcontinent on the one hand, and in Afghanistan and central Asia on the other, were seemingly dichotomous, but were to a large extent interconnected. To understand why he was conducting raids into India needs at least a minimal familiarity with what was happening on the other side of the border. The purpose of the raids was multiple, of which iconoclasm was undoubtedly a motivation. But other intentions were equally important and for reasons other than religious.¹¹

Hormuz was crucial to the trade in horses, therefore Nur-ud-din Firuz, an obviously wealthy and efficient trader, was welcomed. Did the profits of trade overrule other considerations? Were the administrators of the temples and of civic authority also trading and making handsome profits? This was not the sole example of mosques being built by and for Arab and Persian traders in Gujarat, for both Hindu kings and wealthy merchants were known to endow mosques. Among other places, mosques.¹²

Curiously, in 1264 another inscription records the building of a wall around the temple of Somanatha by the mahajanas/merchants of Devapattana during the reign of Arjunadeva Vaghela. Here again one wonders whether it was a wall or an embankment. Was it a wall built to protect the temple from Turkish attacks or was it an embankment built to protect it from the sea? The decision is likely to have been taken by the same dignitaries who

negotiated an agreement with Nur-ud-din Firuz. Did the transaction recorded in Nur-ud-din's inscription not interfere with the memory of Mahmud's raid on Somanatha, or the threats of the Turkish Sultans if they were as frequent as is claimed in Persian sources, in the minds of the rajas, the priests and the 'big men' who were all party to the decision to permit the building of the mosque on the estates of the temple and in its vicinity? If no mention is made in the inscriptions of Mahmud's devastating destruction of the temple, was it in fact so? Or did Mahmud break the idol, and loot the temple of its wealth, leaving it to the chroniclers to fantasize about this event? Did the local people make a distinction between the Arab traders and the Turks? The Arabs, who were initially invaders, had now come to be accepted as partners in trade and the trade brought large profits. Were the Turks unacceptable because most of them were still coming as invaders? Clearly, they were not all homogenized and identified simply as 'Muslims', as we would do today.¹³

According to the left authorship, the Persian accounts and Indic inscriptions as historical references on invasions and plunder of Somnath temple deserves a substantial benefit of doubt in its historiography. The religious argument behind the iconoclasm might be considered valid historically but the economic opportunities that arrived with Ghazni's invasion for Indians are worth examining. This literary 'benefit of doubt' while examining Somanath's invasions and plunder is a consistent theme across left historiography.

Caste as a Negation of History - Double edged Sword

Left Historiography views caste as eliminating some vital features of Indian history namely, the deliberate non development of economic, material historical documentation of India, engulfing history of class-sections into the garb of religion-philosophy of mystical Hinduism.

Conquest followed by constant warfare had its inevitable effect upon conquerors as well as conquered. But we must not forget, in our disgust at the backwardness and human degradation imposed upon India by the caste system, that the system at its beginning advanced production, being so eminently suited to local conditions that it had to develop. It opened up the wilderness to the east of the Punjab for the new type of settlement; it prevented the formation of large-scale chattel slavery, real slavery in the Greek or Roman sense; it permitted the enrolment of newer tribes, later also of guilds, in the artificial Manusmrti scheme of mixed castes. This was done on the basis of religion which minimized the need for internal violence, thereby leading all social manifestations of the class-struggle in India into

*religio-philosophical channels of expression. In this sense, caste is the negation of history, so that it is not in the least surprising to find that Indian literary tradition has virtually no historical sense or content.*¹⁴

Thapar in her book studied this negation into the linguistic and structural meaning of the term 'Hindu'.¹⁵ For her the collective trauma of the Hindus cannot be an assimilative force for temple resurrection because by nature of the religion, the castes are hierarchical in structure of the varna. And the multiplicity of castes and kingdoms during the raids might have experienced the event differently. Thus, the question of 'collective trauma' faced by Hindus doesn't hold the ground. And additionally, the present, political resurrection of Somnath temple might be an upper caste representation of the 'collective trauma'. This collective trauma is mystical and brahmanical in its wholeness based on a constructed memory rather than documented events.

Thus, both left historiography and specifically Thapar offer a range of questions to research upon the invasions of Mahmud of Ghazni on Somnath temple, so that the unilateral argument of Hindus having suffered destruction of their faith shouldn't be the central question. The collective resistance and suffering, if any faced by Hindus due to invasions of Somnath temple, should be in defence of history as a discipline open for discussion.

Each narrative has its own politics, and trying to unravel this becomes one explanation in its historiography. A memory becomes a component of the identity of a group. The authors of the Turko-Persian texts attempt to distance themselves from local communities by focusing on destruction and power; the Sanskrit texts distance themselves from these acts perhaps by being silent about the destruction-if in fact they were deliberately silent or other events are recorded such as the coming of the trader from Hormuz. The Jaina texts seek legitimacy for their faith. The pirs and the Tantric gurus draw in the memory, recreate it in a manner that allows it to be common across a large range of communities, and make it different from the previous ones. The last is not a deliberate act of historical construction as is the first, but the forms emerge from popular perceptions and traditions. These stories reflect the sharing of a culture and a perceived history as being common to Hindus and Muslims.

Recent analyses of these sources point towards a reading of the event and its aftermath different from that which has been current so far. It raises many new questions: did varying

*groups in Indian society react in varying ways to the event; was the destruction of temples just a matter of religious hostility? Were accounts of such destruction exaggerated for political reasons or were they accurate? Were there in fact monolithic communities labelled Hindu and Muslim or were there variant and changing relationships among a multiplicity of communities which did not see themselves as part of a monolith? Seeking answers to such questions does not simplify the process of analysing historical events. But even the asking of such questions is essential in order to move away from generalizations based on mono-causal explanations that tell us virtually nothing about the past. They merely allow us to impose on the past our requirements of the present and thus obfuscate the reading of the past.*¹⁶

Left Historiography on Somnath - Enmeshment, more of a Melting Pot

Romila Thapar, remains the foremost amongst the left historians who wrote about Somnath through her book Romila Thapar—*Somanatha: The Many Voices of a History, Early India: From the Origins to AD 1300, Interpreting Early India*. Her interpretation is based on the theoretical framework provided by D.D. Kosambi, Mohammad Habib and Irfan Habib—the Marxist trio.

Thapar talks about two interrelated things, demystifying the temple destruction event and analysing the historiography behind re-constructed memory. The author adds that contemporary nationalist politics places emphasis upon the reconstruction of the temple as a ‘sacred duty’ of the Hindus due to the collective trauma the community went through post destruction. This gradually builds the narrative that exists independently out of the evidence shown through Turko-Persian, Sanskrit, Jain scriptures and inscriptions. And through such hyperfixation on the ‘mystical’ force, a memory is created and transferred devoid of the substantial evidence. This is directly related to the Marxist approach of studying Indian History, where the religious superstructure and complete reliance on Indian scriptures is considered vague and incomplete. The Marxist approach sees the Indian scriptures as passed through oral traditions, memorised not documented.

Thapar et al., emphasise upon critical examination of ‘memory’ supposedly created initially by colonial historians, later crystalised and politicised by nationalist and Hindu intelligentsia.¹⁷ The manufacturing of the ‘memory’ according to left historiography requires ‘structural amnesia’ by the one who creates it and needs people to selectively forget the multiplicity of the event's experience. From ‘structural amnesia’ the author means the forceful

deletion of the memory that even Hindu rulers attacked and plundered the temples. The reasons would be varied, political legitimacy, religious or sector-based hegemony, dynasties conflict, conflicts between Jainism, Buddhism and Hinduism. According to Thapar, first, why is that Somnath temple invasions are remembered as an attack on Hindu faith and the inter dynasties invasions on temples (pre-Islamic ones) remain under discussion or deliberately ignored.¹⁸ Second, the historiography on Somnath should also seek to analyse the reasons it applied to pre-Islamic temple invasions and use similar lenses to the raids on the Somnath temple invasions by Mahmud of Ghazni.

This reconstruction of the memory albeit without any evidence of the 'Hindu trauma' in noted Sanskrit inscriptions and deliberate deletion and forced ignorance of diverse accounts of invasions on Somnath is hegemonic and Brahmanical. And this memory as narrated becomes national.

Moreover, left historiography on Somnath accuses the nationalist and Hindu intelligentsia of furthering the dichotomy of two communities. For the left authorship, the literary and archeological evidence on invasions on Somnath temple consistently suggest that these two supposedly monolith communities shared lived reality. Thus, the entire argument of Muslim invasion on temples as epics of conquest and Hindu's trauma as epics of resistance breeds enmity and suppresses the complexity of historiography on Somnath temple. The need for left historiography is acknowledgement of multiple sources of the event even if religious iconoclasm might be the prominent reason. As it will do justice to all the social groups involved in this event and experience.

The enmeshment comes from the left historiography approach to open the research gates for multiple research questions all at once, to create a melting pot. This will successfully decentralise the gravity of trauma and resistance of Hindus as a field of study in history. And eventually lead to anti rigid periodic categorisation that dared to put Somnath temple invasions amidst world history.

The left authorship on Somnath includes an issue with revisionist categorisation of periods of Indian History as reiterated by left authors, Romila Thapar, D.D. Kosambi, Irfan Habib. The authors suggest that this categorisation culminates into epics of conquest and epics of resistance, the former conveying Muslim rule and the later, the hindu subjects. This, they add,

applies to historiography on Somnath as well. The very nature of the beginning of Islamic encounters in India or Hindu civilisation began with invasions, temple destructions, conversions. And the specific response of the prior population was resistance.

This categorisation of Indian history periods, ignores the multiplicity of response and broad placating of events and invasions in Central Asia and well as in their own country. D.D. Kosambi's obsessiveness of attaching Indian history to European standards and timelines was applied to the left historiography of Somnath as well. Thus, the collective trauma that K.M. Munshi referred to was not to be analysed in its Bharatiya nature but placing it into the giantness of the event itself. To analyse, Somnath temple invasions purely and primarily through the lens of politics and crisis of sovereignty in Central Asia where Mahmud of Ghazni was an emerging hero and soon to be declared as the founder of Muslim period in India. Thus, the Somnath temple plunder remains sidelined, as an event within larger strategic world events.

This inter-boundary aspect is well studied by the Turko-Persian accounts as court historians of Mahmud of Ghazni. This will be critically studied in the next section that delves deeper into bibliography of Left authorship on Somnath.

The Interpretation and the Use of Turko-Persian Chronicles

The Left historiography primary bibliography as well as most critiqued reference over the raids and invasion of Somnath temple comes from Turko-Persian chronicles or court historians' records who write during the time of Mahmud Ghazni and post the invasions as well. There are certain specific themes that scholars focus upon while examining the Turko-Persian sources.

First, some court historians like Al-Beruni who were in cross heads with Mahmud of Ghazni wrote about the destruction of the temple and the animosity it has and will create between the Hindus and the Musalmans ahead. Thapar criticised his work as being obvious towards his critique on Ghazni because of his enmity.¹⁹ Thus, the subsequent impact of the destruction of the temple wasn't paid literary attention despite being mentioned in Persian accounts.

Second, court historians such as Farukki Sistani and Gardizi, who praised the Sultan for the wrath of destruction on Somnath and proclaimed him as the flagbearer of Islam were doubted

of hyper valorization. Additionally, the court historians were dismissed as fantasies of impressing the Sultan. Because the left authorship recognised that these court historians will deliberately need political sponsorship from Mahmud of Ghazni as he was busy establishing his empire of eastern Islam in modern day Afghanistan.

But what gets accepted as a possible alternative to Islamic invasion intentions of Mahmud of Ghazni is the story of Manat, the pre-Islamic goddess pressed by Farukki and Gardizi. The left narrative on double iconoclasm against single anti-Hindu iconoclasm gets manufactured as a benefit of doubt to the potential readers. Here, the left historiography interprets the idol desecration at Somnath in equivalence to the iconoclasm of Manat, the Arabic pre-Islamic goddess, prohibited from worshipping by the Prophet and Allah. The idol of goddess Manat is said to be placed in India, the region of Somnath, thus inviting reactions from the advanced elements of Islam. Thapar writes or interprets this double iconoclasm of Mahmud of Ghazni as a substantial reason to invade Somnath.²⁰ By doing this, she writes, Ghazni secures political sovereignty as well as religious leadership in the eyes of Caliphate and Islam. Both the idol worshippers, be it pre-Islamic goddesses and the *lingum* in the Somnath gets targeted. Hereby, the religious fanaticism and iconoclasm against Somnath temple gets decentralised, again.

The paper throughout its core themes analysed the fundamental arguments with which left authorship studies Ghazni's invasions on Somnath temple. The crucial requirement in this field of study, is to create dharmic and Indic Historiography on Somnath temple, it's history with invasions and plunders, and inscriptions. There needs to be a rather assimilative methodological framework backed by archaeological, epigraphic, inscriptional, scriptural and inter disciplinary themes to have an independent, nationalist view of Somnath temple. Individual works and studies (on Somnath) of Sita Ram Goyal, R.C. Majumdar, K.M. Munshi, A.K. Majumdar need to be studied in a manner that becomes a methodology or a template of Indic studies on temples themselves in order to counter the organised left historiography.

In conclusion, Left Historiography on Somnath temple primarily revolves around economic determinism and materialism in Marxist sense. It seeks to study Indian history in sequential order while having its base (means and relations of production) intact. This base remains the foundation for the study of civilisation, then religion. Indian history until now according to

left authorship relies heavily upon religious scriptural evidence mired with myth and fantasies. There's no order, documentation of events.

When specifically applied to the historiography of Somnath temple, this paper attempts to examine it through several arguments. First, analysing the event of invasions on Somnath temple as one of the acts within the stages of Indian Feudalism. The Muslim period albeit it's force and invasions brought economic integration within the subcontinent. Thus, the left authors generalise the economic opportunities enjoyed by Indians especially Hindus while simultaneously trivialising the destruction of Somnath temple and impact on the Hindu faith.

Second, left scholars think of caste as a negation of substantial history deliberately created by the priestly class. The class history or diversity in the voices of Indian history gets mystified under the influence of mythical Hinduism. On Somnath invasions, left authorship suggests the application of this framework to negate the experience of 'collective trauma' faced by upper caste Hindus. Additionally, it dismisses the overall framework of sacred duty of Hindus led by Hindu nationalists towards Somnath temple because there's lack of varied sources of experience for this recorded invasion. As the narrative is itself hegemonic.

Third, the literary research on Somnath temple invasions by the left authorship creates a melting pot. An enmeshment, whose goal is to decentralise the narrative of 'collective trauma' of Hindus by throwing economically deterministic research questions and gaps for further research.

Fourth, the critical analysis of bibliography used by left historians show distinct differences in their interpretation of Turko-Persian accounts. If the accounts were of the court historians in Mahmud of Ghazni's reign, then their accountability was dismantled by the left scholars. By calling them, privileged seeking sections. And if they were to be delving into pre-Islamic goddess narrative/iconoclasm then they were given scholarly benefit of doubt for further research. Despite the Turko-Persian accounts consistently pointing towards anti-Hindu iconoclasm.

This paper is an attempt to deliver an alternative interpretation to the left's authorship on Somnath, an Indic perspective on the left's dominant scholarly works. Although significant dharmic studies and research have already been done by K.M. Munshi, R.C. Majumdar, Sita

Ram Goyal, an Indic perspective on the dominant Marxist studies on Somnath was lacking. This research was a comprehensive and theoretical attempt to study the falsehood by the left authors in the Historiography on Somnath temple.

Notes and references

¹ D. D. Kosambi, *Combined Methods in Indology and Other Writings*, ed. Brajadulal Chattopadhyaya (Oxford University Press, 2002).

² Ibid.

³ I. Habib, *Essays in Indian History: Towards a Marxist Perception* (Tulika Books, 1995).

⁴ D. D. Kosambi, *Combined Methods in Indology and Other Writings*, ed. Brajadulal Chattopadhyaya (Oxford University Press, 2002).

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ R. Thapar, H. Mukhia, and B. Chandra, *Communalism and the Writing of Indian History* (People's Publishing House, 1969).

⁷ D. D. Kosambi, *Combined Methods in Indology and Other Writings*, ed. Brajadulal Chattopadhyaya (Oxford University Press, 2002).

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ R. Thapar, *Somanatha: The Many Voices of a History* (Verso, 2005).

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ D. D. Kosambi, *Combined Methods in Indology and Other Writings*, ed. Brajadulal Chattopadhyaya (Oxford University Press, 2002).

¹⁵ R. Thapar, *Somanatha: The Many Voices of a History* (Verso, 2005).

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ R. Thapar, H. Mukhia, and B. Chandra, *Communalism and the Writing of Indian History* (People's Publishing House, 1969).

¹⁸ R. Thapar, *Somanatha: The Many Voices of a History* (Verso, 2005).

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

Bibliography

- Eaton, R. M. *Temple Desecration and Muslim States in Medieval India*. Hope India Publications, 2004.
- Habib, I. *Essays in Indian History: Towards a Marxist Perception*. Tulika Books, 1995.
- Habib, Mohammad. *Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni*. 2nd ed. S. Chand & Co., 1960.
- Kosambi, D. D. *An Introduction to the Study of Indian History*. Popular Prakashan, 1956.
- Sharma, R. S. *Indian Feudalism: C. AD 300–1200*. Macmillan Publishers India, 2005.
- Kosambi, D. D. *Combined Methods in Indology and Other Writings*. Edited by Brajadulal Chattopadhyaya. Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Thapar, R. *Early India: From the Origins to AD 1300*. Penguin Books, 2002.
- Thapar, R. *Somanatha: The Many Voices of a History*. Verso, 2005.
- Thapar, R., H. Mukhia, and B. Chandra. *Communalism and the Writing of Indian History*. People's Publishing House, 1969.

Representation of the Ghaznavid Raid at Somnath in Muslim Sources: A Critique of Contemporary Scholarship

Pushkar Raj

Student, Jawaharlal Nehru University

New Delhi

Pushkar7703@gmail.com

The raid of Mahmud of Ghazna on the temple of Somnath in 1025 CE remains one of the most fiercely contested episodes in medieval Indian history. Existing historiography, most prominently represented by Romila Thapar, has systematically endeavoured to secularize and reframe this event by marginalizing its pronounced religious character. She seeks to reduce the raid to an economic and political enterprise, stripping it of its religious motivation. She further draws misleading parallels between the Ghaznavid raid and earlier incursions by the *Parthians* and *Śakas*, thereby obscuring the fundamentally distinct ideological character of Mahmud's expedition. This paper undertakes a systematic historiographical critique of such interpretations by tracing the representation of the Somnath raid across a chronological range of Muslim sources, from near-contemporary accounts such as those of *Farrukhī Sīstānī* and *Gardīzī*, to later Mughal-era commentaries by *ʿAbd al-Qādir Badāʾūnī* and Nizām al-Dīn Aḥmad. Through close textual analysis, the paper examines the religious sanction invoked for the raid, the portrayal of Mahmud as a champion of the faithful, and the specific vocabulary employed to describe Somnath and its religious practices. It further contends that Thapar's conflation of Mahmud's campaigns against heterodox Muslims with his raids against Hindu temples constitutes a fundamental analytical error that misrepresents the ideological framework operative in the primary sources. By returning to the original texts, this paper seeks to restore the religious dimension of the Somnath raid that existing historiography has endeavoured to obscure

Mahmud ascended the throne of the *Ghaznavid* dynasty in 998 CE and subsequently pledged to conduct annual raids into the Indian subcontinent, largely aimed at plunder, pillage, and the desecration of Hindu temples. Of all the raids Mahmud undertook across various cities of the Indian mainland, his assault on the celebrated temple of Somnath in 1026 CE was

immortalized in Muslim chronicles. Somnath was a prominent Hindu pilgrimage site situated on the coast of Gujarat. Mahmud successfully sacked the city, desecrated the temple, and mutilated the idol, thereby fulfilling his objective before returning to Ghazni. This raid remains one of the most fiercely contested episodes in Indian historiography, with scholars debating both the motive behind the campaign and its impact on the Hindu populace. Ever since this audacious assault on Somnath, a vast body of literature began to evolve around Mahmud, projecting him as an ideal Muslim ruler and a foundational figure in the establishment of Muslim power in India. The depiction of his raid, from the works of *Al-Bīrūnī* to the poetry of Iqbal, represents a remarkable journey through which the event was transformed and recast in varied interpretations and meanings. It requires a careful study of the muslim sources which have depicted the raid at Somnath to understand why it was immortalized over the centuries.

Although *Al-Utbi* wrote an authoritative and contemporary work on the life of Mahmud in ornate Arabic titled *Tārīkh-i-Yamīnī* but his account terminated in 1020 and that's why he doesn't mention the famous raid of Mahmud at Somnath.

¹ This leaves us with the account of *Al-Bīrūnī*, who may have accompanied Mahmud during the campaign. He furnishes a measured and relatively restrained version of the raid, one that is not yet embellished with the pronounced religious fervour that would characterize later accounts. It is important to understand how *Al-Bīrūnī* presented this episode and how he described Somnath, particularly because his account was completed in 1030 CE, merely four years after the raid, and also because *Al-Bīrūnī* was deeply versed in the nuances of Hindu philosophy and customs, as is abundantly evident from his monumental work *Kitāb al-Hind*.

Al-Bīrūnī narrates the mythological origin of the shrine, recounting how Soma was cursed by Prajāpati on account of his exclusive devotion to Rohiṇī, his favourite wife, to the neglect of his other wives, who were also daughters of Prajāpati. Their complaints moved Prajāpati to pronounce a curse upon Soma, rendering his face leprous. Soma thereafter repented, and Prajāpati directed him to erect a temple housing a Śiva liṅga; accordingly, Soma raised a temple at Somanātha.² Having thus established the theological origins of the shrine, *Al-Bīrūnī* proceeds to narrate Mahmud's raid, stating that the image was destroyed by Mahmud in 416 AH. He records that Mahmud ordered the upper portion of the idol to be broken and the remainder to be transported to his capital at Ghazni, along with all its coverings and ornaments of gold, jewels, and embroidered garments. A portion of the idol was cast into the

hippodrome of the city alongside an idol of *Viṣṇu* looted from *Thāneśvar*.³

This episode demonstrates that Mahmud sought to display the idol as a trophy of conquest, a public symbol of the supremacy of his faith over that of the infidels. The remaining fragment was deposited at the entrance of the mosque at Ghazni, where it served as a threshold upon which people wiped the dirt from their feet which was an act of deliberate humiliation. This account is further corroborated by excavations conducted by the Italian Archaeological Mission near Ghazni, which have uncovered several Hindu icons from the vicinity.⁴ *Bīrūnī* was evidently aware of the singular importance of Somnath within the Hindu religious world, as reflected in his description of the shrine. He mentioned that, “This idol(Shiva linga) is frequently met with in the house destined for worship of the Hindus but Somnath was the most famous of these places”.⁵ This recognition of Somnath's pre-eminence may well illuminate Mahmud's choice of target. Having already penetrated as far as *Mathurā*, *Kanauj*, and *Gwāliyar*, Mahmud could equally have directed his campaign towards cities of comparable religious stature such as *Ujjain* or *Vārāṇasī*, both of which would have yielded considerable spoils. His deliberate selection of Somnath in spite of the fact that it would take passing through the unknown deserts to reach a target which is faraway from his frontiers, therefore, strongly suggests that the motivation was not merely material but was driven by the site's exceptional religious significance, and that Mahmud sought to demonstrate the supremacy of Sunni Islam through the assault and desecration of *Somanātha*. This is further corroborated by the account of *Zakariyyā al-Qazwīnī*, who composed *Āthār al-Bilād* (*Monuments of Countries*) in Arabic, completed in 1275 CE, which contains significant information pertaining to Somnath.

Although *al-Qazwīnī* was not himself a traveller, he compiled his work from the writings of *Iṣṭakhrī*, *Ibn Hawqal*, and other authorities whom he regularly cites.⁶ In this work, he furnishes a general description of numerous Indian cities, including Somnath. Much like *Al-Bīrūnī*, he elaborates upon the profound religious significance the shrine of Somnath commanded among the Hindus. He records that, “It was held in highest honor among Hindus and whoever beheld it(linga) floating in the air was struck with amazement, whether he was a musulman or an infidel.”⁷ He further notes that devotees assembled at Somnath in numbers exceeding one hundred thousand on occasions of lunar eclipses, which powerfully attests to the shrine's stature as a major centre of pilgrimage. Having established its importance, *Al-Qazwīnī* proceeds to offer a vivid account of Mahmud's raid and explicitly states the intention

behind it. He tells that, “When Mahmud went to wage religious war against India, he made great efforts to capture and destroy Somnath in the hope that Hindus would then become Muhammadans.”⁸ This reveals that Mahmud's objective through this raid was to shatter the Hindu belief in the invincible power of their deities, and that he pursued this end by targeting the most venerated of all shrines. *Al-Qazwīnī* further narrates the desperate resistance offered by the defenders, who would retreat weeping into the temple invoking divine aid, before issuing forth to battle until they were slain to the last man. It is important to observe that by this juncture, the account of the sack of Somnath had already acquired wide circulation and had elevated Mahmud to the status of a hero across the Islamic world. This explains the pronounced religious tenor of *al-Qazwīnī*'s narrative, which casts Hinduism in an inferior light and presents the raid as a triumphant religious war, thereby consolidating the image of Mahmud as the ideal Muslim sovereign in the eyes of all subsequent Muslim dynasties in India.

Mahmūd Gardīzī, an 11th century Persian historian writing during the reign of *Mas'ūd*, Mahmud's successor, recounts the raid on Somnath in vivid detail and with unmistakable religious fervour. The commemorative impulse in *Gardīzī*'s writing is readily comprehensible, given that the raid had occurred only a few decades prior and its memory remained fresh. He records that Mahmud learnt of a great city situated on the shores of the All-Encompassing Sea, that is, the Indian Ocean called Somnath, which was venerated by the Indians in a manner comparable to the Muslim veneration of *Mecca*. The city reportedly housed numerous idols of gold and silver, and among them the idol *Manāt*, which, according to the account, had been transported from the *Ka'ba* by way of *Aden* during the time of the Lord of the world (Prophet Muhammad), was enshrined there. It had been adorned with gold, encrusted with jewels, and vast wealth had accumulated in the treasuries of the temple. When Amir *Maḥmūd* heard this account, he became gripped by the idea of marching against that city and destroying those idols and of embarking on a raiding expedition.⁹ *Gardīzī*'s equation of Somnath with *Mecca* attests to the shrine's extraordinary popularity and the singular reverence it commanded among the Hindu populace, which rendered it an obvious target for a monarch who styled himself the champion of orthodox Sunni Islam. The narrative of *Manāt* is similarly deployed by *Gardīzī* to invest the raid with added religious significance: according to this tradition, the Prophet had assigned 'Alī with the task of destroying the idol of *Manāt*, a pagan goddess of pre-Islamic Arabia, but the idol had somehow escaped and found its way to Somnath, where it continued to be venerated until Mahmud finally

accomplished what 'Alī had left unfinished. He further mentions that when Mahmud reached near to the city, and the Shamanān and Brahmans saw that army, they all busied themselves with worshipping and invoking the idols.¹⁰ The deliberate inclusion of this detail serves a clear rhetorical purpose: to demonstrate the impotence of the idol, which proved incapable of coming to the aid of its devotees a topos deeply embedded in classical Islamic narratives of conversion and conquest, wherein infidels are confronted with the inert, stonework nature of their objects of worship. It is significant that nothing of this kind appears in *Al-Bīrūnī's* account; by the time of *Gardīzī*, however, the deed at Somnath had achieved considerable fame and had become inextricably linked with the legend of *Manāt*. *Gardīzī* further narrates that Mahmud unleashed a devastating slaughter, killing a great number of infidels, smashing, burning, and destroying all the idols. He then commanded the *mu'adhdhin* to ascend to the summit of the shrine and proclaim the call to prayer. This act of ascending the temple and pronouncing the *adhān* from its heights was a deliberate and symbolically charged gesture, intended to enact the subordination of Hindu belief to the Sunni Islam that Mahmud so zealously championed.

Another contemporary of Mahmud, *Farrukhī Sīstānī*, one of the most celebrated court poets of the Ghaznavid period in the eleventh century, composed a *qaṣīda* on the victory at Somnath by Sultan Mahmud, replete with triumphal and religious imagery. This composition illuminates the immense significance of the Somnath campaign for Mahmud and presents it unambiguously as an act of religious domination over the pagan beliefs of the Hindus. *Farrukhī's* account constitutes the earliest literary glorification of the Somnath raid and served as a foundational text upon which later Muslim writers based their own praise of Mahmud. He states that the idol of *Manāt* had been concealed by its worshippers and transported to a land that had been, since time immemorial, a stronghold of idolatry namely, *Kāṭhiāwāḍ* where it was installed as an object of veneration. A temple was raised to house it, and it was named *So-manāt* so as to perpetuate the original name *Manāt* in a disguised form.¹¹ Among all the earlier writers, Farrukhi is the most explicit in narrating the religious nature of the expedition, according to him The hindus of Somnath boasted in pride that the only reason why the Sultan had been able to demolish other idols of India was that Somnath was displeased with them.¹² This claim, it is said, convinced the Sultan to march against Somnath and shatter the pride of its devotees. *Gardīzī*, similarly, sought to establish that Somnath was the most powerful among all the idols of the Hindus, thereby magnifying the significance of Mahmud's act of destruction and presenting him as one who had struck the

greatest possible blow for the expansion of the domain of Islam.

It is evident that Muslim writers struggled to comprehend the hierarchical structures of Hindu theology and were therefore unable to determine which deity occupied the supreme position within it. This may well explain why they persistently sought to equate Somnath with *Mecca*, fabricated the legend of *Manāt*, or portrayed Somnath as the paramount idol of the Hindus all in an effort to amplify the magnitude of Mahmud's raid in the eyes of the wider Islamic world. Mahmud himself, in his correspondence with the 'Abbāsid caliphs, extolled the grandeur of Somnath in order to convey the scale of his achievement and the magnitude of the service he had rendered to Islam. We know from Mahmud himself the primary motive behind his raid of Somnath because he himself extols its religious significance for Islam. It was, therefore, entirely to be expected that his court poets would depict the raid against idolatry in the most resplendent terms. In his *qaṣīda*, *Farrukhī* records that the Sultan slew the people and burnt their idol temples, just as he had done with the temples of *Warnī* and *Thāneśvar*.¹³ Unlike *Al-Bīrūnī*, neither *Farrukhī* nor *Gardīzī* hesitated to portray the raid as a decisive triumph of Islam over the idol-worshippers of *Hind*, notwithstanding the fact that both were nearly contemporaneous with the raid itself. In his account of Mahmud's destruction of Somnath, *Gardīzī* sought to draw an explicit parallel between the raid and the Prophet's campaign against idolatry in pre-Islamic Arabia. He wrote in his *qaṣīda*:¹⁴

“A person who will destroy the temple of Somnath will not waste his time with the wounded. The king hastened toward the destruction of Manat; his haste was perhaps for this reason. Manat and Lat and Uzza were three idols in Mecca from the handicraft of the idol-maker of that time, Azar.¹⁵ The entire world worshipped those three idols except that person upon whom God's eyes were fixed. The Prophet smashed two of them, and both that day, he had thrown them before the Kaaba on their backs. The infidels stole Manat from the midst; they took it from that country to another, To a place where, from the days of Adam, no one except an infidel stayed or went.”

Several scholars have argued that these writers indulged in exaggeration and imposed a religious injunction upon the raid, either to gratify the Sultan or to enhance his prestige within the Islamic world. However, much like *Al-Bīrūnī*, these writers also depicted Somnath as a shrine of considerable importance for the Hindus, and their accounts do not diverge significantly from *Al-Bīrūnī*'s in most essential details differing only in trivial particulars such

as the physical appearance of the idol or the precise manner of its destruction.

Al-Bīrūnī chose not to invest this campaign with a religious tone, perhaps because the primary focus of his work was not the military exploits of Mahmud, even though these naturally formed a significant component of his narrative. He was far more concerned with exploring the customs, theology, and beliefs of the inhabitants of *Hindūstān*, and was thus content to offer only a brief account of the raid.

The great 13th century Persian poet *Sa'dī Shīrāzī* also made mention of Somnath in his celebrated work *Būstān*. The anecdote titled "The Idol of Somnath" appears as the concluding story in the eighth chapter, "On Gratitude for Good Estate," of *Būstān*'s ten chapters.¹⁶ This episode is particularly noteworthy because, unlike *Gardīzī* and *Farrukhī*, *Sa'dī* makes no reference to Mahmud's raid on Somnath, nor does he offer any praise of the Sultan though it is difficult to believe he was unaware of such a celebrated event. *Sa'dī* claims to have personally visited Somnath; and while he was indeed a traveller of considerable repute, this particular claim is unlikely to be historically accurate, and was in all probability a product of poetic imagination or the kind of visionary experience commonly associated with *Ṣūfī* contemplation. *Sa'dī*'s narrative about Somnath may broadly be understood as a parable of a devout Muslim affronted by idolatry, though a closer examination of his account is necessary to interpret its full dimensions. He recounts that upon visiting Somnath, he beheld an ivory idol encrusted with jewels, reminiscent of *Manāt* during the *Jāhiliyya* (the pre-Islamic period of ignorance). Confronted with the spectacle of people prostrating themselves before a lifeless and powerless object, *Sa'dī* was overcome with indignation, and his account conveys the characteristic contempt that a devout Muslim reserves for idol-worship and its adherents. He writes:

I was astonished by the discovery of what went on, why did the living worship the inanimate?
I asked softly, "O Brahmin, I am amazed by the doings of this region, That they are stupefied
by this impotent figure, tightly bound in the pit of error. Its hand has no strength, its foot no
movement; if you throw it down it will not arise from the place. Don't you see that its eyes are
of amber? seeking fidelity from the sallow-eyed is a mistake."¹⁷

Here, *Sa'dī* seeks to expose the folly of idol worship and to vilify the priests whom he holds responsible for perpetuating popular ignorance through false claims regarding the miraculous

powers of idols. The episode identifies the *Brāhmaṇas* as the principal charlatans, a role they habitually occupied in accounts of counterfeit miracles which constitutes a fitting motif for a Muslim orthodoxy that held priesthood in contempt. Appalled by the spectacle of such heathen practices, *Sa'dī* condemns the idolatry he witnesses and demonstrates the impotence of the idol through Quranic arguments that bear close resemblance to those employed by *Farrukhī*. He then recounts that his *Brāhmaṇa* companion grew incensed at these blasphemous remarks, whereupon *Sa'dī*, in order to placate him, displayed fake curiosity and requested the *Brāhmaṇa* to instruct him in the nature and significance of the idol, professing his own ignorance on the matter. The *Brāhmaṇa* invited him to spend the night at the temple, assuring him that the power of the idol would be revealed to him by the following morning. *Sa'dī* consented and remained at the shrine, and he recounts:

I was afflicted by distress, drunk from sleep, when suddenly the image raised its hand. All at once a roar came from them; you would have said that the sea had arisen with a seething.¹⁸ *Sa'dī* had already deduced that the phenomenon was the product of some mechanical trickery, but the *Brāhmaṇa*, believing him to be genuinely convinced of the idol's power, urged him to pay his respects to the deity. Recognising that ignorance was deeply entrenched in the *Brāhmaṇa*'s mind, *Sa'dī* kissed the wretched idol upon its hand upon which he invokes a curse against both the idol and its worshippers. He recounts that for several days he continued to conduct himself outwardly as an infidel, all the while waiting for the opportunity to expose the mechanism behind the idol's apparent animation. One night, moving stealthily through the temple, he discovered behind a golden curtain a fire-worshipping priest who held the end of a cord in his hand; when the priest pulled the cord, the idol raised its head. The deception thus laid bare, *Sa'dī* dispatched the *Brāhmaṇa* by casting him into a pit and subsequently returned to his homeland.

Saadi without praising Mahmud makes a case for admonishing the idol practice by vilifying the priests, a theme that recurs prominently in the works of later historians treating the episode of Somnath. His narrative belongs to a well-established genre of classical Islamic literature in which a rational protagonist unmasks the fraudulent basis of an idol's supposed powers. A similar motif is associated with Somnath itself in several chronicles, most notably in the recurring account of the idol suspended in mid-air. *Zakariyyā al-Qazwīnī* narrates this episode in his work: after slaying the defenders of the temple, Mahmud himself entered the inner sanctum and enquired of his companions what they made of the marvel of the idol

remaining aloft without any visible prop or support. Several maintained that it was held in place by some concealed mechanism. The Sultan directed an attendant to probe all around, above, and below the idol with a spear, which was done, yet no obstruction was encountered. One of those present then proposed that the canopy had been constructed of lodestone and the idol of iron, and that the ingenious builder had so precisely calibrated the magnetic forces on all sides that the idol remained suspended at the centre. Some concurred; others dissented. Permission was sought from the Sultan to dislodge some stones from the summit of the canopy in order to resolve the question. When two stones were removed, the idol shifted to one side; as more were taken away, it inclined further still, until it finally came to rest upon the ground.¹⁹ Although *Sa'dī*'s narrative differs in its particulars from this account, the underlying principle is identical: the idol is believed by its devotees to possess divine power, yet this power is ultimately revealed whether by *Sa'dī* or by Mahmud to be the product of priestly deception. This recurring motif illustrates how Somnath was employed as a vehicle for portraying Hindu ignorance and the supposed inferiority of idol worship in contrast to a more rational and enlightened Islamic worldview.

While Mahmud was habitually cast as the crusading warrior who undertook the sacred mission of demolishing Somnath, *Ṣūfī* saints such as *Sa'dī* fashioned narratives of their own in which they too claimed a role in enlightening the people about the profound ignorance inherent in idol worship, with Somnath serving as the emblematic site of such spiritual intervention. A 16th century Persian poet *Jāmī*, who wrote a biographical dictionary of Sufi saints and masters titled *Nafahāt al-Uns min Ḥaḍarāt al-Quds* (Breezes of Intimacy from the Sacred Presences) mentioned *Sa'dī* himself as the idol breaker of Somnath. He wrote:²⁰

“[Sa'dī] made the pilgrimage numerous times on foot, and he entered the temple at Somnath and smashed their great idol”.

This demonstrates that by this period, Somnath had become virtually synonymous with idol worship in the Islamic literary imagination, which accounts for the proliferation of narratives eulogising Sultan Mahmud as the one who shattered that idol and brought glory to Islam. It is a matter of some interest whether *Jāmī*, in attributing the breaking of the idol of Somnath to *Sa'dī*, was deliberately seeking to elevate the latter's stature within the *Ṣūfī* hagiographical tradition, or whether this attribution was simply a product of historical ignorance.

With the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate in India, Persian chronicles came to regard Mahmud as the exemplar of the ideal Islamic sovereign, frequently invoking his deeds to counsel reigning monarchs and portraying him as the figure who had laid the foundations of Muslim rule in India. *Minhāj al-Sirāj Jūzjānī*, a 13th century Persian historian born in the region of *Ghūr*, composed *Ṭabaqāt-i-Nāṣirī*, named in honour of Sultan *Nāṣir al-Dīn*, which constitutes an elaborate history of the Islamic world in Persian, completed in 1260 CE. The work was dedicated to Sultan *Nāṣir-al-Dīn Maḥmūd*, under whose patronage *Minhāj* served. In his narration of Mahmud's life, it is instructive to observe how Mahmud is transformed into a near-mythical figure, presented as one who was destined from birth to serve the cause of Islam. *Minhāj* records, "The same night also upon which Mahmud was born, the idol-temple of Wahand or Bihand [it may also be read Wahind, or Bahind], which was situated on the confines of Barshabur', on the bank of the river Sind, split asunder. He was endowed with great virtues and vast abilities and the same predominant star was in the ascendant at his birth as appeared at the dawn of Islam itself."²¹ Further narrating about the famous raid at Somnath he says, "He led an army to Nahrwalah of Gujarat, and brought away Manat, the idol, from Somnath, and had it broken into four parts, one of which was cast before the entrance of the great masjid at Ghazni, the second before the gateway of the Sultan's palace, and the third and fourth were sent to Makkah and Madinah respectively."²² While the transportation of the idol to Ghazni is attested in earlier sources, the account of the broken fragments being sent to the two holiest cities of Islam represents a new embellishment, absent from earlier narratives. This addition reveals the religio-mythical stature that Mahmud had by now attained and illustrates the manner in which accounts were elaborated and embroidered to amplify the religious fervour associated with his raid on Somnath.

Another prominent historian of the Sultanate period, *Ziyā al-Dīn Baranī*, elevated Mahmud further still, casting him as the archetype of the perfect Muslim hero and a model for emulation by succeeding generations of Muslim rulers. In his treatise *Fatāwā-i-Jahāndārī*, *Baranī* made Mahmud the vehicle for his own orthodox political philosophy, presenting him as the foremost advocate of the view that the Islamic ruler in India must, above all else, strive to establish the supremacy of truth by vigorously combating infidelity and polytheism. Counselling in the voice of Mahmud, *Baranī* exhorts: "You should with all your royal determination apply yourself to uprooting and disgracing infidels, polytheists, and men of bad dogmas and bad religions. You should consider the enemies of God and His Faith to be your enemies and you should risk your power and authority in overthrowing them, so that you may

win the approval of God and the Prophet Mohammad and of all prophets and saints"²³ *Baranī* complained that the Indian muslim kings were very lenient in uprooting the practice of infidels and he tried to counsel them by giving the example of Mahmud who has shown how infidels should be dealt with. In *Baranī*'s conception, Mahmud had become the ideal Islamic sovereign whose example every Muslim monarch was duty-bound to emulate. Mahmud also became a figure through whom *Baranī* sought to propagate his own vision of religious orthodoxy.

'*Abd al-Malik Isamī*, a 14th century Indian historian at the court of 'Alā' al-Dīn Bahman Shāh, founder of the *Bahmanī* dynasty, composed his monumental work *Futūḥ al-Salāṭīn* (*Victories of the Sultans*), a general history of the Muslim kings of India. He regarded Mahmud as the exemplary hero of his epic and celebrated him as the first conqueror of India. He also forms a mythical story around the birth of Mahmud like Minhāj, he recounts that father of Mahmud, Subuktigin beheld a dream that in his compound of his place had sprung a lofty tree under whose shadow flourished a world. It shaded the world, transforming it into a garden and purged the universe of dust. On the same night one of his king's wives who was pregnant delivered a son. The king called many dream interpreters and told them about his unusual dream, one of them who was very experienced said: The interpretation is that the prince who was born last night will open to the world the gate of prosperity. He will march upon India and he will run a Euphrates out of infidels blood and raze to the ground the idol-house of Somnath.²⁴

In *Isamī*'s retelling of the events of Mahmud's life, Somnath occupies a central and defining role, as though Mahmud had been born expressly for its destruction. It is noteworthy that unlike *Baranī* or *Minhāj*, *Isamī* lived in close geographical proximity to Somnath and must therefore have possessed a more immediate appreciation of its significance for the Hindu populace. His preoccupation with Somnath is evident throughout his narrative, and he presents several vivid and remarkable stories concerning its sack by the pious king. One such account relates that Indian astrologers, having foretold that a king named Mahmud would one day attack India and demolish the temple at Somnath, conveyed this prophecy to their ruler, who, after deliberation with his ministers, dispatched emissaries to Ghazni. They went there and met Mahmud who was a child back then. They requested him that when in future he will attack India and destroy the temple of Somnath, he might take all the wealth and jewels but spare and return the idol of their deity. Mahmud agreed to this proposal. However, after

Mahmud had desecrated the temple, the Brāhmaṇas went up to him and reminded him of his promise. Mahmud was in a dilemma as he didn't wish to return the idol so he asked the Brāhmaṇas to take the idol from him at the sunrise tomorrow. By that time, he devised a plan to humiliate the infidels. He ordered that the idol should be burnt and turned quickly into lime and coated some betel leaf with the same lime.

When those infidels returned tomorrow, he offered them the same betel leaves which they readily chewed and then asked the king about the return of the idol. Mahmud laughed at those ignorant and told them that the idol they are demanding has been already consumed by you with that betel-leaf.²⁵ This story also depicts how Isami tried to paint the Hindus as credulous and ignorant, blindly devoted to the illusory power of their idols. His account of Somnath is suffused with religious fervour and presents Mahmud as the most exalted of kings, one who had triumphed over and humiliated the infidels. Isami also used the example of Mahmud to chastise later Indo-Muslim rulers for their failures to carry out his rigorous policies.²⁶ According to Isami, the destruction of temples was a significant part of Islamic conquest in India and Somnath was fit for it because it enjoyed a preeminent position among Hindus. He was lavish in his praise for Mahmud because he achieved this pious deed. He wrote that, "Even if any king before him [Mahmud] marched on Hindustan he retreated after raiding this beautiful land and made peace. No one set his heart on settling in this meadow; none captured even a fortress, nor won a siege. No one demolished the idol-house of Somnath and none made the blood of enemies flow like the Euphrates. No one uprooted the Hindu power and none demolished the old idol-houses. But his troops overran the country in such a manner that the Hindu power was destroyed completely."²⁷

The representation of Mahmud and his raid at Somnath underwent a considerable transformation during the Mughal period, where it no longer commanded the degree of attention it had received in the works of *Baranī* or *Isamī*. Although, the length occupied by Mahmud in the chronicles reduced, his story was narrated and for Nizām al-Dīn Aḥmad who composed *Ṭabaqāt-i-Akbarī* which is a history of India covering the period from the Ghaznavids till the 36th year of the reign of Akbar, Mahmud was the figure with whom he chose to begin his work giving a brief space to his father before him. He then narrated about Mahmud and his raid at Somnath. He wrote, "When he (Mahmud) reached Somnath, the inhabitants shut the gate on his face. After much fighting and great struggles the fort was taken, and the methods of plunder and destruction were carried into effect, and vast

multitudes were killed and taken prisoner. The temples were pulled down, and destroyed from their very foundations. The idol Somnath was broken to pieces, and one piece was sent to Ghazni, and was placed at the gate of the Jami Masjid; and for years it remained there.”²⁸ He also mentioned that the story of Manāt was not true as he had verified with the Brahmins that this idol was at Somnath since the time of *Kṛṣṇa* which was four thousand years ago, and that *Kṛṣṇa* himself had disappeared at the same site. Although the language of *Ṭabaqāt-i-Akbarī* is notably restrained in its religious register and Mahmud is not celebrated as the ideal Islamic hero in the manner characteristic of the Sultanate-period chronicles, it is nonetheless significant that the author chose to commence his history with Mahmud. We can understand that the ecclesiastical environment of Akbar’s era must have had some effect on the writing of authors of his time and this may well explain why this version concerning Mahmud is free of the usual religious and orthodox metaphor though his raid on Somnath continued to command attention more than five centuries after the event had actually taken place.

Abd al-Qādir Badā’ūnī, who belonged to the orthodox faction at Akbar’s court, completed his work *Muntakhab al-Tawārīkh (Selection of Chronicles)*, in which Mahmud is portrayed in comparatively laudatory terms, being designated with the honorific *Ghāzī*. *Badā’ūnī* similarly commenced his work with Mahmud and accorded him considerably more space than *Nizām al-Dīn Aḥmad* had done. He mentioned that: “He(Mahmud) arrived at Somnath where the garrison closed the gates of the fort against him, and reaped their reward in rapine and plunder. The fort was taken and Mahmud broke the idol in fragments and sent it to Ghazni, where it was placed at the door of the Jāmi‘ Masjid and trodden under foot”.²⁹ While *Badā’ūnī*’s account of the raid itself does not differ substantially from that of *Nizām al-Dīn Aḥmad*, his treatment of Mahmud’s life as a whole is markedly more extensive and admiring, reflecting his orthodox inclinations. He also cited a *qaṣīda* composed by *Ashadī* in praise of the desecration of Somnath: When the king of kings marched to Somnath, He made his own deeds the standard of miracles.³⁰

The liberal intellectual environment of Akbar’s reign gave rise to a distinctive depiction of Somnath among the poets of that era, who celebrated the site as a source of divine truth. Notably, *‘Urfī Shīrāzī*, who migrated to India during the latter half of the 16th century and was a preeminent Persian poet of his age, composed a verse in which he compared Somnath to the fire at Sinai.³¹ His verse, originally in Persian, translates as: “The lamp of Somnath is the same as the fire at Sinai, the light spread all around from both of them”.³² It is pertinent

to note that earlier in his career, 'Urfi had resided in the Deccan before being summoned to Akbar's court on account of his exceptional poetic talents. His years in the Deccan had in all likelihood acquainted him with the profound significance of Somnath for the Hindus. Moreover, 'Urfi did not conform to orthodox Islamic beliefs and frequently composed verses critical of the religion, a disposition made possible by the patronage and atmosphere of liberalism that Akbar's court provided.

The last of the great Mughal monarchs, Aurangzeb, who reverted to the orthodox Islamic policies largely abandoned by his predecessors, was equally cognizant of the legacy of Mahmud and lavished praise upon his treatment of heretics. It is reasonable to argue that the character and exploits of Mahmud exerted a considerable influence upon some of Aurangzeb's more conservative policies. In one of his letters, Aurangzeb makes reference to Mahmud and writes: "Sultan Mahmud, may God forgive his crimes did not allow half-hearted religious men and heretics to enter his court, nay not even his kingdom, so that other people might not be misled by seeing such persons in the form of the dervish, and they themselves might have no power to mislead others".³³ It is well established that in the mid-17th century, Aurangzeb himself issued orders for the destruction of the Somnath temple, an order that was apparently not carried out, prompting him to issue a subsequent directive for its demolition and conversion into a mosque in 1706, shortly before his death.³⁴ It is entirely plausible to assume that Aurangzeb, deeply conscious of Mahmud's celebrated expedition against Somnath, ordered the temple's demolition in conscious emulation of a sultan held in the highest esteem by a pious Muslim of his disposition to ensure that his name also get included in the list of great kings like Mahmud who desecrated Somnath the symbol of idolatry and rendered significant service to Islam.

An 18th-century chronicle, the *Mir'āt-i-Aḥmadī*, composed by 'Alī Muḥammad Khān, narrates the political history of Gujarat under Muslim rule. The author, who resided in the Gujarat province, was intimately acquainted with the significance of Somnath, which lends his account considerable historical value. Writing at a time when Muslim political power had largely waned and the Marathas were ascending to prominence, he nonetheless recounts the conquest of Somnath by Mahmud with evident pride, stating that, "Mahmud has come here (Somnath) with an intention of religious war."³⁵ That even after nearly eight centuries the memory of Somnath remained central to any history of the region is eloquently reflected in the fact that the author places the conquest of Somnath at the very opening of his text.

The raid on Somnath continued to resonate even into the 20th century, when, amid Muslim demands for a separate nation, poets such as *Allāma Iqbāl* invoked Mahmud in their verses and portrayed his raid in decidedly positive terms. In a poem titled "*Zauq-o-Shauq*" (Ecstasy and Longing) from his collection *Bāl-i-Jibrīl*, Iqbal composed a verse in Urdu that translates as:

Is there not another Ghaznavi in the world? The Believers have been awaiting a blow for long like it was delivered at Somnath.³⁶ Iqbal composed these lines in the 1930s, a period of acute crisis for the Muslim world, during which a British Mandate in Palestine was actively facilitating Jewish migration into an Arab-Muslim land regarded as sacred by Muslims across the globe. As a revivalist poet profoundly troubled by these developments, Iqbal invoked Mahmud, the celebrated religious champion of Islam who had vanquished Somnath, and longed for a leader of comparable resolve who might redress the afflictions then besetting Muslims in Palestine. He mourned the absence of any such decisive figure in the Muslim world of his time, one possessing the courage and conviction of Mahmud while Muslim holy places and sacred interests lay under siege. This same lament had been voiced centuries earlier by *Ẓiyā' al-Dīn Baranī* in his *Fatāwā-i-Jahāndārī*, in which he lamented that the Muslim kings of his own time bore no resemblance to Mahmud. The memory of Mahmud and his raid on Somnath thus traversed the centuries to reach Iqbal, who presented Somnath as an entrenched power, an idol, and an oppressive force that humiliated and subjugated Muslims.

It must be acknowledged that the Muslim sources upon which this paper principally relies were, in large measure, products of the *Ghaznavid* court or of later dynasties that had a vested ideological interest in celebrating Mahmud as the exemplary Muslim sovereign. *Farrukhī* was a court poet whose livelihood depended upon royal patronage, and *Gardīzī* wrote under the reign of Mahmud's own successor. Several scholars have argued precisely on these grounds that the religious fervour permeating these accounts was a literary and political construction imposed upon the raid rather than a reflection of Mahmud's actual intentions, which they contend were primarily acquisitive.

This objection, while not without merit, does not withstand sustained scrutiny for several reasons. The convergence of religious framing across sources of vastly different periods,

genres, and geographical origins, from the court poetry of *Farrukhī* in 11th century *Ghazna* to the chronicle of *‘Alī Muḥammad Khān* in 18th century Gujarat cannot be explained away as mere courtly flattery. If the religious interpretation were simply an artifice of patronage, one would expect it to dissolve once the *Ghaznavid* dynasty itself had collapsed and later writers had no political reason to perpetuate it. Yet the religious framing not only persisted but intensified across subsequent centuries and dynasties, suggesting that it corresponded to something that Muslim writers across the Islamic world genuinely understood the raid to represent. Even *Al-Bīrūnī* who was not usually associated with religious triumphalism, and whose account is the most measured in nature corroborates the essential details that render the raid intelligible as a religiously motivated act. He explicitly identifies Somnath as the pre-eminent shrine of the Hindus, notes the deliberate placement of the broken idol at the entrance of the mosque at *Ghazna* as a threshold upon which worshippers wiped their feet, and records the transportation of the idol alongside that of *Viṣṇu* from *Thāneśvar* as trophies of conquest. *Al-Bīrūnī* who was writing without any rhetorical investment in glorifying the raid, nonetheless records details that point unmistakably towards religious intent. It lends the accounts of the more explicitly celebratory sources a degree of corroboration they would not otherwise possess.

The religious framing was not merely imposed upon Mahmud from by admiring chroniclers; it was a register he himself actively cultivated and deployed. The sources, therefore, are not transparent windows onto Mahmud's inner motivations which no historical source can promise but they constitute a consistent and mutually corroborating body of evidence that the raid was understood, conceived, and publicly represented as an act of religious warfare, and that this understanding originated with Mahmud himself.

To sum up the argument, It is evident that even since the times of *Gardīzī*, *Farrukhī*, and *Isamī* up to the time of Iqbal, the raid at Somnath was invoked as a call to the muslim community to arouse them from their slumber. It was always a feat applauded in the Islamic annals which showed the superiority of Islamic belief over the Hindus and therefore this event became the foundation of Islamic rule in India for generations to come and Mahmud became a hero for his act of great religious and political merit.

The Somnath episode assumed a place of considerable magnitude in Indian historiography, particularly after the temple's reconstruction in 1951, when several scholars challenged what

they labelled as colonial historiography surrounding Somnath and argued that it had given rise to growing communalism in the country. There has since been a sustained effort to strip the Somnath raid of its religious character and relocate it primarily within the economic realm, recasting it as an assault motivated solely by the desire for loot and plunder. Scholars have further attempted to equate the Somnath raid with several other expeditions of the *Ghaznavid* ruler, or have not hesitated to draw parallels with entirely unrelated episodes in Indian history. Their arguments warrant careful dissection to assess whether the Somnath raid can be adequately understood within the framework they propose.

Richard M. Eaton, in his book *India in the Persianate Age*, attempts to draw an equivalence between the raid of the Chola king *Rājendra I* into northern India and Mahmud's raid on Somnath. He contends that, much like his Chola contemporary, Mahmud had targeted a specific north Indian site, the wealthy temple of Somnath.³⁷ However, this parallel does not withstand close scrutiny. Unlike Mahmud's campaign, *Rājendra's* raid was not directed at a site of pilgrimage; it was rather a demonstration of military prowess intended to overawe the kingdoms of the north. Mahmud, by contrast, had planned his attack on Somnath after receiving accounts of its immense wealth and its profound religious significance for the Hindus. Scholars have even argued that the expedition of Rajendra I was nothing more than a pilgrimage to Ganges. Rajendra also erected a liquid pillar of victory after its expedition named *Ganga Jalmayam Jalstambham* in his capital with the waters of Ganges in the form of the tank Colaganga. This shows that the fetching of the water of the Ganga was perhaps present from the beginning as the motive of the expedition.³⁸

Furthermore, no primary source indicates that any seizure of a statue took place during the campaign, a fact Eaton has repeatedly mentioned in his books while trying to equate *Rājendra's* seizing of a Shiva sculpture from the *Pāla* during his bengal raid with the seizing of Shivalingam by Mahmud, both done in order to delegitimize the king according to him. There is no evidence to establish that any specific sculpture was associated with the deity venerated by the royal *Pāla* family, which would be necessary to argue that its removal constituted an act of delegitimation. The available evidence is primarily architectural in nature, and even if one were to accept the existence of so-called "war trophies," these were ritually reconsecrated before being installed in *Chola* temples. To compare this with Mahmud's deliberate act of placing Somnath's *Śivaliṅga* beneath the steps of the mosque at Ghazna is to consciously diminish the gravity of his act of desecration and the religious zeal

that animated his campaign, a zeal that is unambiguously attested in the Muslim sources.

Unlike Mahmud's campaign, *Rājendra's* expedition was not commemorated with comparable intensity and fell largely into oblivion, whereas Mahmud's campaign was immortalised in literary memory even after the *Ghaznavid* dynasty collapsed within a few decades of his death, a contrast that is itself a testament to the entirely different significance the two campaigns held for their respective traditions.

Thapar has also attempted to draw a parallel between Mahmud's raid on Somnath and other military campaigns he undertook. She argues that Mahmud also raided the Iranian city of *Rayy* in 1029, which demonstrates that he targeted both Hindu and Muslim centres alike.³⁹ It is important to highlight, however, that the attack on *Rayy* was conducted for purely political reasons. *Rayy* was an Iranian city on the western frontier of the *Ghaznavid* dynasty, ruled by *Majd al-Dawla* of the *Būyid* dynasty. He was an indolent ruler whose affairs were largely managed by his mother, *Sayyida*.⁴⁰ Upon her death, the incapable ruler found himself unable to govern a kingdom increasingly threatened by the *Daylamites* from northern Iran, and he implored Sultan Mahmud to come to his assistance. Mahmud, who had long awaited such an opportunity, seized upon this invitation as a pretext to extend his western boundaries, and he duly brought *Rayy* under his control. Unlike Somnath, which lay thousands of kilometres beyond the borders of his kingdom, *Rayy* was situated in close proximity to *Ghaznavid* territory, and the presence of a weak ruler who had himself solicited external intervention rendered it a purely political opportunity, with practically no religious dimension. While *Thapar* draws attention to the fact that *Rayy* was also a *Shī'a* centre, this does not alter the essentially political character of the attack, which stands in sharp contrast to Somnath, a site that offered Mahmud no comparable political pretext, but whose religious prestige as an illustrious centre of idolatry provided the Sultan with every incentive to destroy it.

Sultan Mahmud also raided the city of Multan, which was governed by *Abū al-Faṭḥ Dā'ūd* of the *Ismā'īlī* sect, regarded as heretical by the *Sunnī* Mahmud. *Thapar* has attempted to equate the raid on Multan with that on Somnath, suggesting that both carried comparable religious significance for the Sultan. Following his raid on Multan, Mahmud discontinued the use of the *Ismā'īlī* mosque but did not destroy it, and the *Sunnī* mosque was reinstated for worship.⁴¹ Crucially, however, *Thapar* does not adequately address the immediate cause of the Multan campaign. When Sultan was returning from his expedition to *Bhaṭinda* in 1005, the ruler of

Multan probably resented passage for Mahmud's army through the province of Multan.⁴² The attack on Multan was thus undertaken to punish him for this act of defiance. Moreover, as Mahmud was already engaged in conflict with the *Hindu Shāhīs* on his eastern frontier who constituted a significant obstacle to his campaigns into *Hindūstān*. He could not afford to tolerate a further threat on the same front. The immediate and primary motive for the attack on Multan was therefore strategic and political in nature. Furthermore, although Mahmud discontinued the use of the *Shī'a* mosque in Multan, nothing of the order of what he unleashed at Somnath, burning and razing the temple to the ground was visited upon Multan. The ferocity of Mahmud's persecution of heretics was well attested and was even celebrated by *Farrukhī*, who, in his elegy upon Mahmud's death, observed that heretics could now rest at ease: "Alas and alack, the *Qarāmiṭa* [the *Ismā'īlīs*] can now rejoice! They will be secure against death by stoning or the gallows."⁴³

Thapar, in her work, argues that the Turko-Persian sources have enjoyed historiographical hegemony in accounts of Mahmud's raid on Somnath and contends that these sources are riddled with inconsistencies.⁴⁴ However, she fails to recognise that without the Muslim sources it would not have been possible to reconstruct any coherent account of the raid at all, for the Sanskrit and *Jaina* sources, which she argues were systematically marginalised, were by no means contemporary with the event and lacked the specific detail necessary to reconstruct it. Indeed, had it not been for these very Muslim sources, the raid on Somnath might well have passed into oblivion, with the desecration attributed to some form of sectarian strife among Hindus themselves. Furthermore, there are no major inconsistencies within the Muslim accounts of the Somnath episode; the core narrative remains largely consistent across sources, with later versions differing only in the architectural description of the idol or in the degree of religious embellishment. *Thapar* also advances a remarkable claim without adequate evidentiary support, suggesting that Somnath may originally have been a Buddhist site, citing the account of a Buddhist traveller who visited the region in the 19th century.⁴⁵ These were attempts to open a completely new debate with respect to Somnath and trying to portray Mahmud's raid as a gradual re-appropriation of the site as has been relevant in the Indian context since ancient times according to her. She also says that the Buddhist caves in nearby Junagadh were later occupied by other religious sects and it is not quite clear whether the taking over by other sects was a process of incorporation or the result of a confrontation.⁴⁶ In her eagerness to locate evidence of such confrontation where none exists with respect to Buddhism, she conspicuously overlooks the abundant evidence of

confrontation that is embedded in virtually every Persian source describing Mahmud's raid on Somnath.

Thapar also contends that texts and inscriptions record a series of regular incursions led by the *Achaemenids*, *Seleucids*, *Indo-Greeks*, *Śakas*, *Parthians*, *Kuṣāṇas*, and *Hūṇas* prior to the Turks.⁴⁷ While such earlier incursions were indeed a recurrent feature of the subcontinent's history, their primary motivation was entirely distinct from that of the *Ghaznavid* campaigns, which were explicitly oriented towards temple desecration and plunder. Recent scholarship has demonstrated that it was precisely these *Ghaznavid* raids that crystallised the representation of the Turks in Indic texts, and that rather than being understood in monolithic or ethnic terms, designations such as *Turuṣka* and *Mleccha* now acquired a distinctly religious connotation. Two acts came to be specifically attributed to the Turks in this emerging discourse: temple desecration and the consumption of beef. For instance, works like *Kīrtilatā*, the later *Rājatarāṅgiṇī*s, or *Vividhatīrthakalpa*, despite being composed under Muslim patronage or in close alliance with Muslim power, continue to link Muslims to temple desecration.⁴⁸

To conclude, the foregoing analysis has traced the representation of Mahmud's raid on Somnath across more than nine centuries of Muslim literary production, from the measured scholarship of *Al-Bīrūnī* and the triumphal verse of *Farrukhī* in the 11th century to the political poetry of Iqbal in the twentieth. This survey shows that the destruction of Somnath came to embody, for the Muslim literary and political imagination, the very idea of Islamic supremacy over the idol-worshipping world of *Hindus*. The consistency of this representation across dynasties, genres, languages, and centuries is itself the most compelling argument against reducing the raid to an act of economic opportunism.

In their effort to dismantle what they regard as communally charged historiography, scholars like Eaton and Thapar have at times overcorrected, drawing equivalence between Mahmud and *Rājendra I*, between Somnath and *Raṅg*, between the sack of a pilgrimage centre and a politically motivated frontier campaign that the evidence simply does not sustain. The asymmetry between these events is not a colonial invention; it is attested by the sources themselves, including those produced within traditions that had no investment in glorifying Mahmud.

The religious motive behind the raid need not be understood as the exclusive motive to the total exclusion of all others. Mahmud was simultaneously a pious Muslim, an ambitious sovereign, and a pragmatic military commander, and these identities were not mutually contradictory. The wealth of Somnath was undoubtedly known to him, and its plunder was a welcome consequence of the campaign. But the deliberate desecration of the idol, its transportation to *Ghazna* and Mahmud's own letters to the '*Abbāsīd* caliphs framing the raid as a service to Islam does not account for economic motivation alone. They belong to recognisable deeds of religiously charged symbolic action, and they were understood as such by every Muslim writer who engaged with the episode in the centuries that followed.

Notes and references

- 20 N. Jami, *Nafahāt al-uns min ḥaḍarāt al-quḍs*, ed. M. Tauhīdī-Pūr (Kitāb Furūsh-i Sa'di, 1957), 600–601.
- 21 M. S. Juzjani, *Tabakat-i-Nasiri*, trans. H. G. Raverty, vol. 1 (Gilbert & Rivington, 1873), 76–80.
- 22 Ibid., 82.
- 23 R. H. Davis, *Lives of Indian Images* (Princeton University Press, 1997), 98.
- 24 A. M. Husain, trans. and ed., *Futūḥu's-Salāḥīn, or Shāh Nāmah-i Hind of 'Isāmī*, Vol. 1 (Aligarh Muslim University, 1967), 79–80.
- 25 Ibid., 83–88.
- 26 R. H. Davis, *Lives of Indian Images* (Princeton University Press, 1997), 98.
- 27 A. M. Husain, trans. and ed., *Futūḥu's-Salāḥīn, or Shāh Nāmah-i Hind of 'Isāmī*, Vol. 1 (Aligarh Muslim University, 1967), 66.
- 28 B. De, trans., *The Tabaqāt-i-Akbarī of Khwājah Nizāmuddīn Aḥmad*, Vol. 1 (Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1927), 15.
- 29 A. Q. Badauni, *Muntakhab-ut-Tawarikh*, trans. G. S. A. Ranking, Vol. I (Asiatic Society of Bengal 1884), 28.
- 30 Ibid., 17.
- 31 God descended at Sinai mountain and gave 10 commandants to Moses, who is considered prophet both by Christians and Muslims thus making the place of religious significance for them.
- 32 M. Alam, “The pursuit of Persian: Language in Mughal politics”, *Modern Asian Studies* 32, no. 2, (1998): 318.
- The original verse in Persian is,
 نور را جهت هر زان طور بود شتا است سومنات راغچ
 نور در .
- 33 J. H. Bilimoria, *Ruka'at-i-Alamgiri, or letters of Aurungzebe: With Historical and Explanatory Notes* (Luzac & Co., 1908), 106–107.
- 34 R. Thapar, *Somanatha: The Many Voices of a History*. (Penguin Books, 2004), 68.
- 35 M. F. Lokhandwala, trans. *Mirat-i-Ahmadi* (Oriental Institute, 1965), 25.
- 36 The translation is my own, the original verse is کیا نہیں اور غزنوی کارگہ حیات میں
 بیٹھے ہیں کب سے منتظر اہل حرم کے سومنات!
 37 R. M. Eaton, *India in the Persianate Age: 1000–1765* (Allen Lane–Penguin Books, 2019), 26–29.
- 38 K. A. N. Sastri, *The Cholas*, 2nd ed. (University of Madras, 1955), 209–210.
- 39 R. Thapar, *Somanatha: The Many Voices of a History*. (Penguin Books, 2004), 45.
- 40 M. Nazim, *The Life and Times of Sultan Mahmud of Ghazna* (Cambridge University Press, 1931), 80–81.
- 41 R. Thapar, *Somanatha: The Many Voices of a History*. (Penguin Books, 2004), 53.
- 42 M. Nazim, *The Life and Times of Sultan Mahmud of Ghazna* (Cambridge University Press, 1931), 96.
- 43 R. N. Frye, ed., *The Cambridge History of Iran*, Vol. 6 (Cambridge University Press, 1975), 183.
- 44 R. Thapar, *Somanatha: The Many Voices of a History*. (Penguin Books, 2004), 5, 17.
- 45 Ibid., 21–22.
- 46 Ibid., 23.
- 47 Ibid., 40.
- 48 J. V. Singh, “Evolution of the Representations of Muslims in the Non-Arabo-Persian Literary Sources of Northern India, c. Eighth Century AD to Fifteenth Century AD” (Unpublished PhD diss., Jawaharlal Nehru University, 2026), 232–245.

Bibliography

- Al-Biruni. *Alberuni's India: An Account of the Religion, Philosophy, Literature, Geography, Chronology, Astronomy, Customs, Laws and Astrology of India about A.D. 1030*. Vol. 2. Translated and edited by E. C. Sachau. Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1910.
- Alam, M. “The Pursuit of Persian: Language in Mughal Politics.” *Modern Asian Studies* 32, no. 2 (1998): 317–49.
- Badauni, Abd al-Qadir ibn Muluk Shah. *Muntakhab-ut-Tawarikh*. Vol. 1. Translated by G. S. A. Ranking. Asiatic Society of Bengal (Bibliotheca Indica Series), 1884.
- Bilimoria, J. H., trans. *Ruka'at-i-Alamgiri, or Letters of Aurungzebe: With Historical and*

- Explanatory Notes*. Luzac & Co., 1908.
- Bosworth, E. C., trans. and ed. *The Ornament of Histories: A History of the Eastern Islamic Lands AD 650–1041—The Persian Text of Abū Saʿīd ʿAbd al-Ḥayy Gardīzī*. I. B. Tauris (BIPS Persian Studies Series), 2011.
- Davis, R. H. *Lives of Indian Images*. Princeton University Press, 1997.
- Eaton, R. M. *India in the Persianate Age: 1000–1765*. Allen Lane–Penguin Books, 2019.
- Elliot, H. M., and J. Dowson, eds. *The History of India, as Told by Its Own Historians: The Muhammadan Period*. 8 vols. Trübner & Co., 1867–1877.
- Farrukhi Sistani. *Dīvān*. Edited by M. J. Siyaqi. Tehran, 1956.
- Frye, R. N., ed. *The Cambridge History of Iran*. Vol. 4, *The Period from the Arab Invasion to the Saljuqs*. Cambridge University Press, 1975.
- Habib, M. *Sultan Mahmud of Ghaznin: A Study*. Muslim University Press, 1951.
- Homerin, E. Th. “Sa’di’s Somnatiyah.” *Iranian Studies* 16, no. 1–2 (1983): 31–50.
- Husain, A. M., trans. and ed. *Futuḥu’s-Salāṭīn, or Shāh Nāmah-i Hind of ʿIṣāmī: Translation and Commentary*. Vol. 1. Published for the Department of History, Aligarh Muslim University. Asia Publishing House, 1967.
- Jami, Nur al-Din. *Nafahāt al-Uns min Ḥaḍarāt al-Quds*. Edited by M. Tauhidi-Pur. Tehran, 1957.
- Juzjani, Minhaj al-Siraj. *Ṭabaqāt-i-Nāṣirī: A General History of the Muhammadan Dynasties of Asia*. Vol. 1. Translated by H. G. Raverty. Gilbert & Rivington, 1873.
- Lokhandwala, M. F., trans. *Mirat-i-Ahmadi*. Oriental Institute, 1965.
- Munshi, K. M. *Somanātha: The Shrine Eternal*. Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1951.
- Munshi, K. M. *The Glory That Was Gurjara-Deśa (A.D. 550–1300)*. Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1944.
- Nazim, M. *The Life and Times of Sultan Maḥmūd of Ghazna*. Cambridge University Press, 1931.
- Nizamuddin Ahmad, Khwaja. *The Ṭabaqāt-i-Akbarī of Khwājah Niẓāmuddīn Aḥmad: A History of India from the Early Musalman Invasions to the Thirty-Sixth Year of the Reign of Akbar*. Vol. 1. Translated by B. De. Asiatic Society of Bengal (Bibliotheca Indica Series), 1927.
- Raverty, H. G., trans. *Ṭabaqāt-i-Nāṣirī: A General History of the Muhammadan Dynasties of Asia*. 2 vols. Gilbert & Rivington, 1873–1881.
- Sastri, K. A. Nilakanta. *The Colas*. 2nd ed. University of Madras, 1955.
- Singh, J. V. “Evolution of the Representations of Muslims in the Non-Arabo-Persian Literary

Sources of Northern India, c. Eighth Century AD to Fifteenth Century AD.”
Manuscript/Working Paper.

Thapar, R. *Somnātha: The Many Voices of a History*. Penguin Books India, 2004.

Vaidya, C. V. *History of Medieval Hindu India: Being a History of India from 600 to 1200 A.D.* Vol. 3. The Oriental Book Supplying Agency, 1926.

THE ORGANISERS



Shree Somnath Trust

Shree Somnath Trust is the governing body of the revered Somnath Temple, entrusted with the preservation and management of one of India's most sacred Jyotirlingas. Guided by a distinguished board of trustees - including **Shri Narendrabhai Modi** (Chairman, Hon'ble Prime Minister of India), **Shri L. K. Advani** (Trustee, former Deputy Prime Minister of India), and **Shri Amitbhai Shah** (Trustee, Hon'ble Home Minister of India) - along with other esteemed members, the trust plays a pivotal role in safeguarding the temple's spiritual, cultural, and historical legacy.



Foundation for Indian Historical and Cultural Research

The Foundation for Indian Historical and Cultural Research (FIHCR) is a private, non-profit, apolitical & non-governmental organisation. It is aimed at reviving, preserving, and promoting India's rich historical and cultural heritage by re-establishing India's historical and cultural narrative, nurturing pride and ownership of Indian identity among her people. By doing so, it would contribute significantly to the intellectual, cultural, and social fabric of India at large.



Brhat

Brhat (बृहत्) is a Hyderabad-based culture engine dedicated to nurturing a self-sustaining civilisational resurgence. Operating at the vibrant intersection of education, creative practice, and policy, Brhat builds frameworks deeply rooted in Bharatiya consciousness. Its work is driven by three core pillars: Culture Creatives, Policy Research and Leadership Development. Through these initiatives, Brhat seeks to restore meaning to modern learning and ensure that the timeless wisdom of India remains a living, breathing force in the global landscape.

WITH GRATITUDE



Bhavish Aggarwal
Founder & Chairman - OLA



Rajalakshmi Aggarwal
Chairperson - OLA Foundation



Devesh Varma
Head, OLA Foundation

We extend our gratitude to all whose support and guidance continue to strengthen our efforts to revive, preserve, and promote India's rich historical and cultural heritage

Follow us:



[FIHCR](#)



[@fihcrinfo](#)



[@fihcr_info](#)



[FIHCR](#)



[FIHCR](#)

Visit our website:

www.fihcr.com

***Emerging from the shadows of 1026 CE to the resurgence of 1951,
Revisiting a millennium of resilience, continuity, and civilisational memory***

