
Archaeology of Early Medieval Settlements: A Study Based on the Navsari Copper Plate

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Abstract: This paper deals with the Gurjaras of Nandipuri, whose history is based solely on the land grants found at various places over time. These land grants were issued by the Gurjara rulers and referred to specific rural settlements, the location of which remained unidentified. Pandit Indrajī, and Mirashi (1955) have attempted to identify some villages from the grant based on phonetic resemblances in ancient and modern place names. However, there is no general agreement to his propositions as only limited studies have been carried out in this region to understand the early medieval history of this area. Therefore, this paper examines the spatial ramifications of an early medieval settlement in the light of settlement data presented in a 7th century CE Copper Plate of the Gurjara ruler Jayabhatta III (690–710 CE) with the help of a fresh field survey.

Keywords: Navsari Copper Plates, Pottery, Land Grants, Kalachuri Year, Early Medieval, Architectural Fragments, Aditeshwar Temple

Introduction

Navsari Copper Plates were found during an excavation of a foundation at Navsari in the modern Navsari District of Gujarat. This was studied by Mr. Shariarji Dadabhai and then by Pandit Bhagwanlal Indrajī, who published it with a translation in Indian Antiquary Vol. XIII (Mirashi, 1955). The plates are dated to the Kalachuri Year 456 (706 CE) and were issued by Jayabhatta III from his camp at Kayavarta (present Karvan village) (Mirashi, 1955). The grant speaks of the donation of a field in:

Korillāpathāantakaragatha Samipadraka Grāmai Pūrvantar Simni Chatusthasaṭhi Bhu Nirvartanā Pramānā —

Yasyāghatanāni Pūrvanto Golikā Grāmā Simā Sandhī Dakṣiṇato Yamalākhalarābhīda — Samipadraka Grāmādevā Dāhadva Grāmayayī (Mirashi 1955).

It can be translated as “on the north-east boundary of the village Samipadraka situated in the Korillāpathā. The village is surrounded by Golikā and Dāhadva” (Mirashi 1955).

The editor of the plate identified the present village of Sondarna, Koral and Dhavat with *Samipadraka*, *Korillāpathā*, and *Dāhadva* respectively (Mirashi, 1955) (Figure 1) based on the phonetic resemblances. However, there is no general agreement with Mirashi's propositions, as limited studies have been conducted in this region to determine the places mentioned in the land grants of the Gurjara rulers (Sankalia, 1941, 42). Therefore, the present study attempts to corroborate the material evidence with the epigraphic record through a fresh survey to verify the propositions by Indrajī and Mirashi (1955). This would also help to consolidate the chronology of the region.

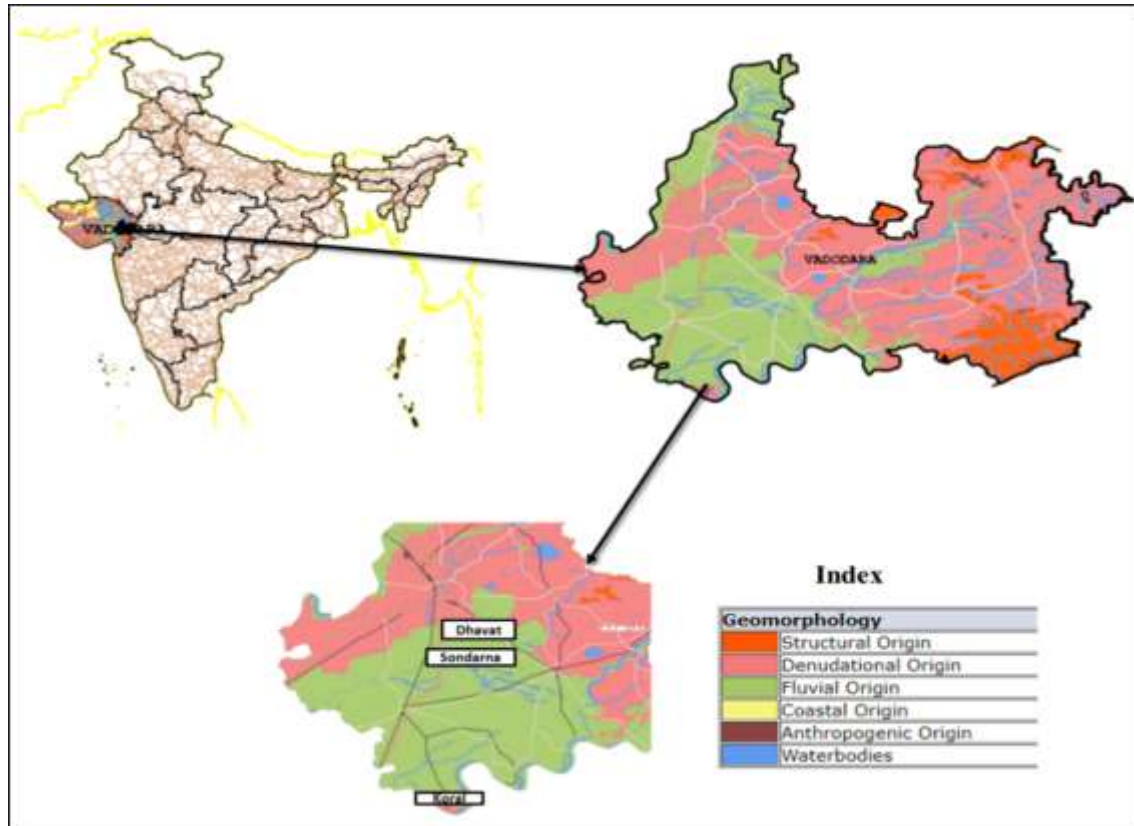


Figure 1: Map marking the present villages of Koral, Sondarna, and Dhavat

Study Area

The plate locates a village called *Samipadrika* in terms of its spatial connection with three other contiguous localities that exist in the four major directions beyond it. However, of the three villages only the present village of Koral, which is identified with *Korilla Pathaka* located at 21°49'58.44"N and 73°13'05.83"E (Figure 2) revealed evidence of early medieval occupation in the form of bricks, structure, etc., indicating that this area was occupied during the early medieval period.

Koral

Koral is located on the north bank of the river Narmada and is subdivided into Moti Koral and Nani Koral. The village falls under the Mahi-Narmada Doab and has been denuded, resulting in the Pediment-Pedi Plain complex (Figure 2). The village is

identified with *Korilla*, mentioned in the grant of Gurjara ruler Jayabhatta III (Majmudar, 1960, 257). However, Sastri (1935), identified the village as *Kuntalpur* or *Kulalapura* (the potters' town), probably based on the oral tradition which mentions the area being ruled by a King named *Chandrasahsa*. Sastri (1935), likely identified *Chandrasahsa* with the one mentioned in the Mahabharata (Mahabharat Shantiparva: Adhyay 50-60), who had his capital at *Kuntalapura* (Sastri, 1935, 4). This site was reported by R.N Mehta in 1957 and was dated to the Early Historic period (Mehta, 1957, 13), based on the bricks found during the exploration.

The present inhabited area is highly undulating, and the whole village is seen perched on high mounds that are spreading beyond the limit of the inhabited village. These mounds rise from the eastern extremity of the rectangular village. These undulating mounds spread towards the west. The northern and southern tip is occupied by agricultural fields. However, large areas of the old mounds are ploughed or their earth is used for a variety of purposes, such as the cement for brick houses, building walls of mud structures or for flooring, etc., the uninhabited parts are under cultivation where also the destruction is extensive due to the manifold needs of agriculture. Mounds like Bava nu Khetr (Figure 4), and the mound of the Aditeshwar temple, revealed traces of habitation dating back to the early medieval period (Figure 4).

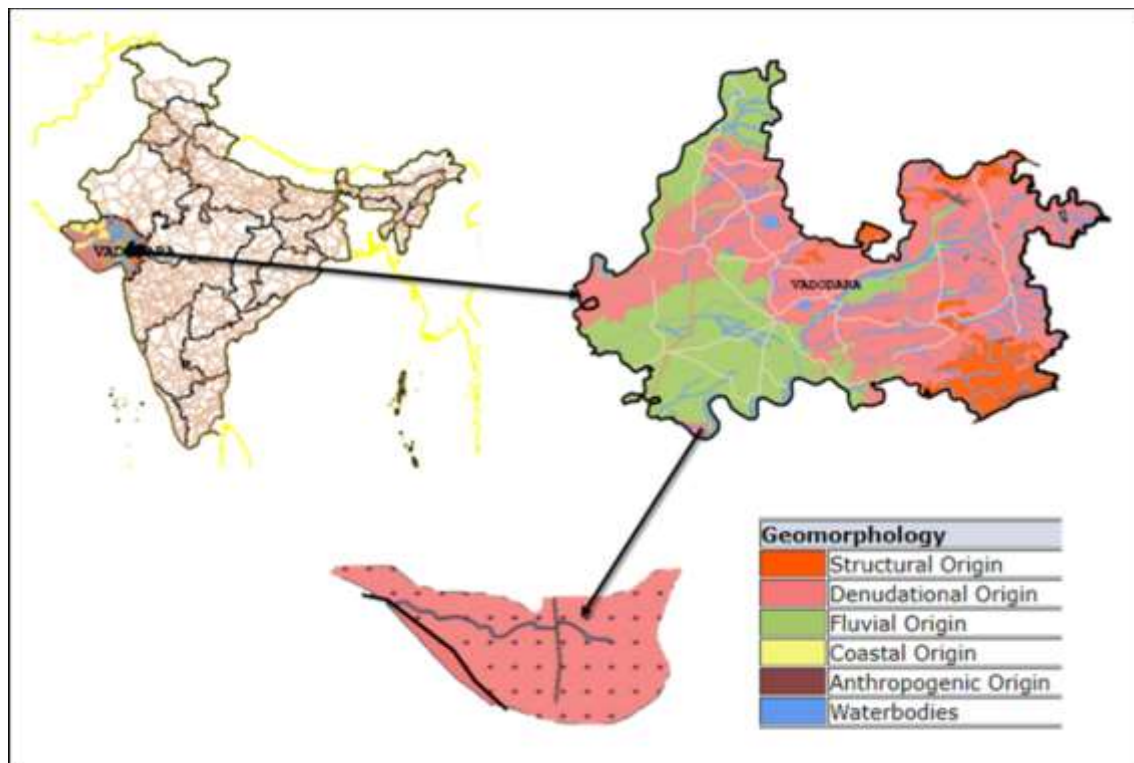


Figure 2: Geomorphological map showing the location of Koral

Dhavat

The exploration carried out in the village of Dhavat, located at 22°03'N and 73°17'E in the Karjan Taluka of District Vadodara, revealed traces of occupation in the form of

brick structures, memorial stones, architectural fragments, and pottery which could be dated to the Medieval period, i.e., between 10th-16th centuries CE. The village was identified as Dhahadva mentioned in the grants of Gurjara ruler Jayabhatta III (708 CE), and Rashtrakuta ruler Karka I (816-17 CE) (Mehta, 1957, 107). The village was first reported by Mehta (1957), however, he did not report any antiquity other than a Mahishmardini and some Jain sculptures. Modern Dhavat lies on a mound that is disturbed by anthropogenic activities revealing medieval brick structures (of brick sizes 22:15:5cm), medieval black wares, and half-round roof tiles (also known as *naliya*). However, till now this village did not show any remains based on which it could be ascribed to a period of 7th-9th century CE. In addition, to these, architectural fragments were also found. These include blocks of stones decorated with mesh pattern, one of the fragments also have a depiction of a Simha-Vyala, and the panel is decorated with Kirtimukha, and mesh patterns (Figure 3). These architectural fragments might have undoubtedly formed part of medieval religious architecture. The presence of these sculptures also suggests the possibility of the existence of other sculptures, lying in this area. Apart from these, memorial as well as curse stones outside a house were also noticed during the survey. These stones have a clear indication of being worshipped even now. These include *Thesa* stones, which are roughly hewn blocks of stone, and a Gadhegal, with the depiction of a crouched human figure being forced into sexual congress with a donkey.



Figure 3: Medieval architectural fragments from Dhavat

Sondarna

Similar to Dhavat, the present inhabited area in this village lies on a mound that is disturbed by urbanisation and anthropogenic activities. As of yet, this village did not show any material remains based on which it could be ascribed to a period of 7th-9th century CE.

Material Remains: The Early Medieval Context

Of the three above-mentioned villages only the present village of Koral, located at 21°49'58.44''N and 73°13'05.83''E (Figure 2) revealed evidence of early medieval

occupation in the form of bricks, structure, etc., indicating that this area was occupied during the Early Medieval period (Figure 4).



Figure 4: Map marking mounds which revealed evidence of occupation

The Mound of the Aditeshwar Temple: This mound is locally known as *Chandrahastu-tekro* after King Chandrahas (the ruler of this area), who had his palace built here (Figure 4). Locals report finding coins and gold objects in this mound. The temple of Aditeshwar Mahadev (21°49'56.43"N 73°13'01.50" E) (Figure 4) stands on this small semi-rectangular mound. Its southern and western edges are open fields, but the eastern edge is occupied by some farmers. The mound rises to a height of about 2m from the surrounding plan (Figure 5). On this mound, brickbats and an unfinished pillar bracket was found (Figure 5). As the broken bricks found here are 8 cm to 10 cm thick, the mound is probably an extension of Bava-nu-Khetr (21°49'59.00" N 73°12'57.87" E), where brick slabs measuring 32:26:10 cm and 38:26:8 cm were found (Figure 6).

Mound opposite of the Aditeshwar Temple (Bava nu Khetr): The field located opposite to the Aditeshwara temple is locally known as *Bava-nu-Khetr* and is marked by the Kashi Vishwanath Mahadev temple (Figure 4). The field revealed an exposed section deposit containing a brick wall, pottery, and other vestiges of ancient habitations (like annular beads, ashy deposit, pestle, etc.) (Figure 6).

Structure: The brick wall has 35 courses with bricks of varying sizes following the ratio of 1:3:5 (length: breadth: height) (Figure 6). The size of the bricks varies from 36:24:7, 32:26:10, and 38:26:8 (length: breadth: height) (Figure 6). Similar brick sizes (36:24:6; 36:26:8cm; and 39:26:7) were also reported from the excavations at Devnimori 1974-75 and Phulwa Tekri, Vatvagar in Karvan, 1977-78. These brick structures at Devnimori

and Kayavarohan are dated to the 5th-6th century CE. Based on the analogy of the similar brick sizes found at Kayavarohan and Devnimori (Mehta, et.al., 1966; IAR 1974-75; IAR 1978-79), the partially exposed brick structure at this mound could also be dated to a similar period.



Figure 5: Mound of Aditeshwar Mahadev temple revealing traces of occupation

Pottery: The pottery at the mound is represented by ill-fired red ware, grey ware, dull-grey ware with thick sections, black burnished wares, black ware, and a few cooking vessels with horizontal incised decorations. The sherds found from the mound are well fired, wheel made, and consists of forms such as pots, handis, bowls, etc (Figure 7). The

raw material used range from thin finely lavigated ware to medium and thick jars of comparatively coarse materials. The fabrics such as the plain red wares, and black wares are abundant in comparison with the remaining fabrics such as the grey ware which are represented by a few specimens only. Due to the paucity of the specimen in these fabrics, they are often represented by sherds which do not help in determining the shapes of the pots to which they belong. Most of the pots, ledge of bowls, and parts of *handi* (cooking pots) obtained from the mound are in Black and Black Burnished Ware. Sherds with excurved, beaded, and beaked rims are noted, some of these are even decorated by conspicuous and non-conspicuous grooves. The decorated sherds from this mound include incised ware (Figure 7). The decoration is seen on the upper middle or lower middle part of the body of the pot. Decorations like oblique incisions forming one band can be noted. Similar ceramic types were also reported from Kayavarohan, Shamlaji, and Nagara (Mehta, et.al., 1966; IAR 1974-75; Thapar, 1978-79) (Figure 8). Depending on their descriptions and fabric comparability, it may be said that they are datable prior to the 10th century CE.



Figure 6: Mound of Bava nu Khetr revealing a 35 coarse brick wall, and pot sherds

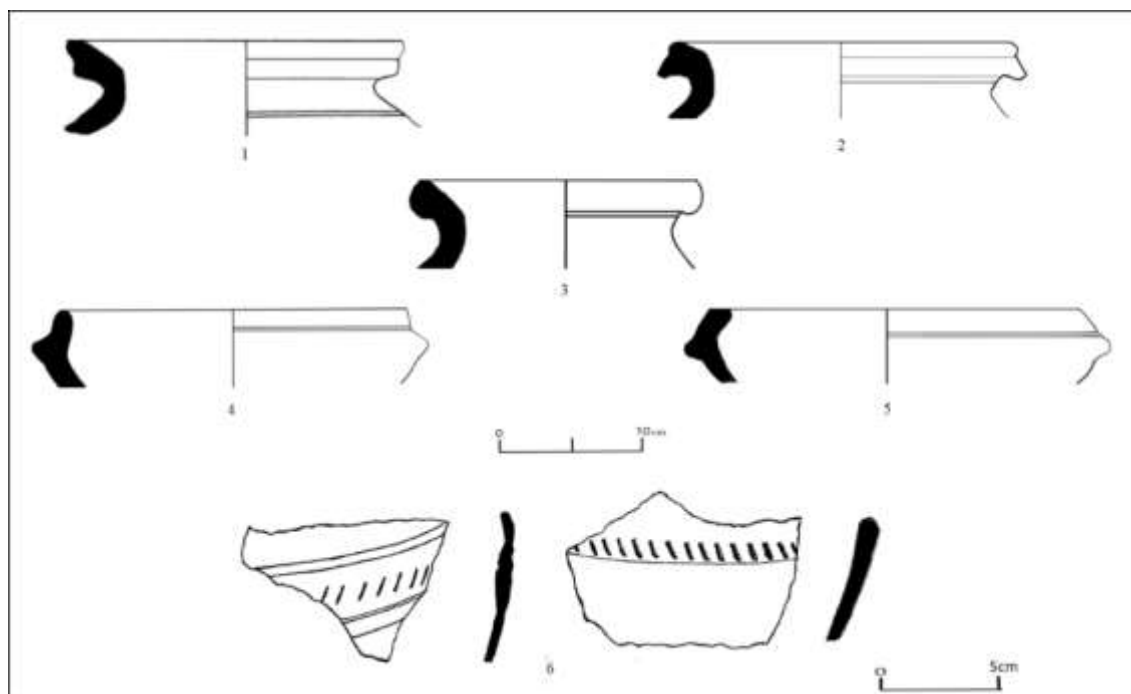


Figure 7: Pottery from Koral

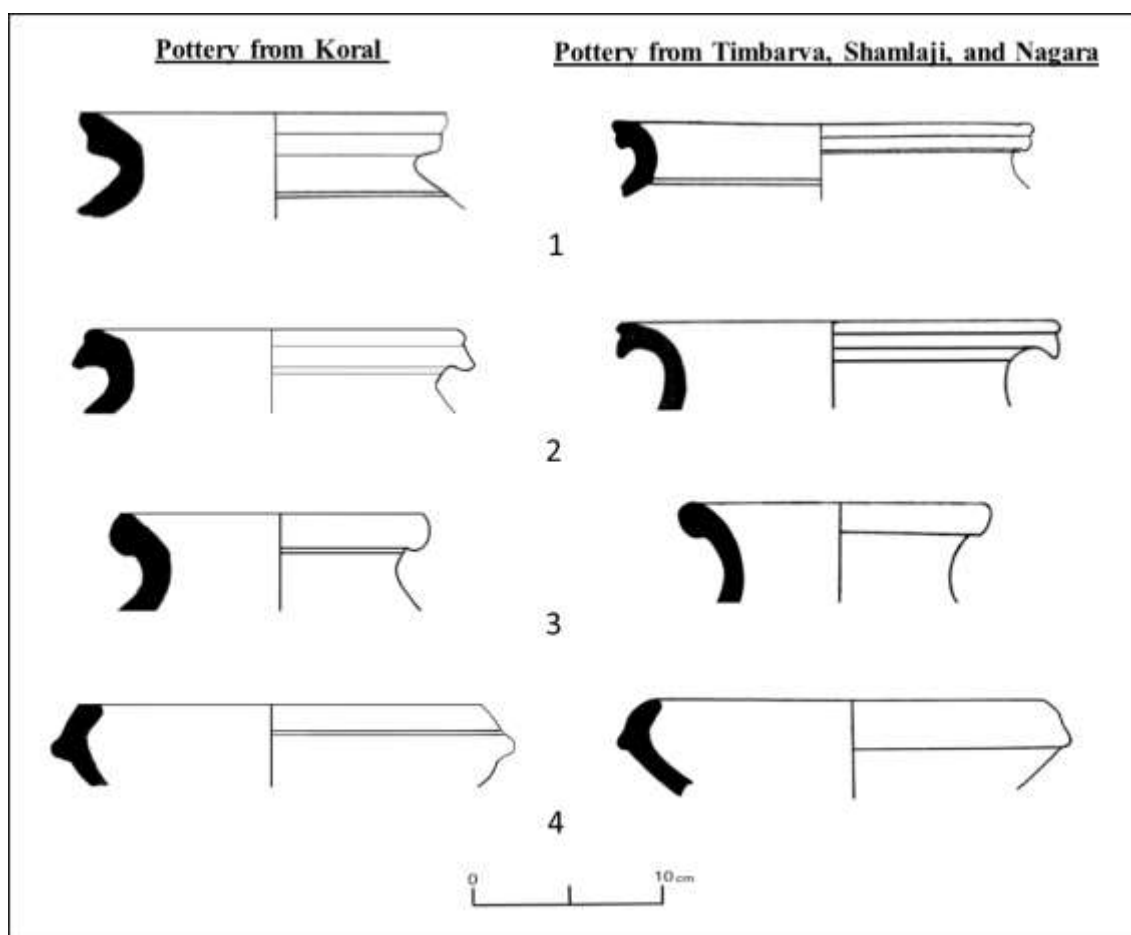


Figure 8: Comparison between Potteries from Koral and Timbarva, Shamlaji, Nagara

Miscellaneous Objects: Two terracotta annular beads dated to the 9th-10th century CE (pers. comm. S. Pratapchandran) and a pestle were also found in the same section (Figure 9).

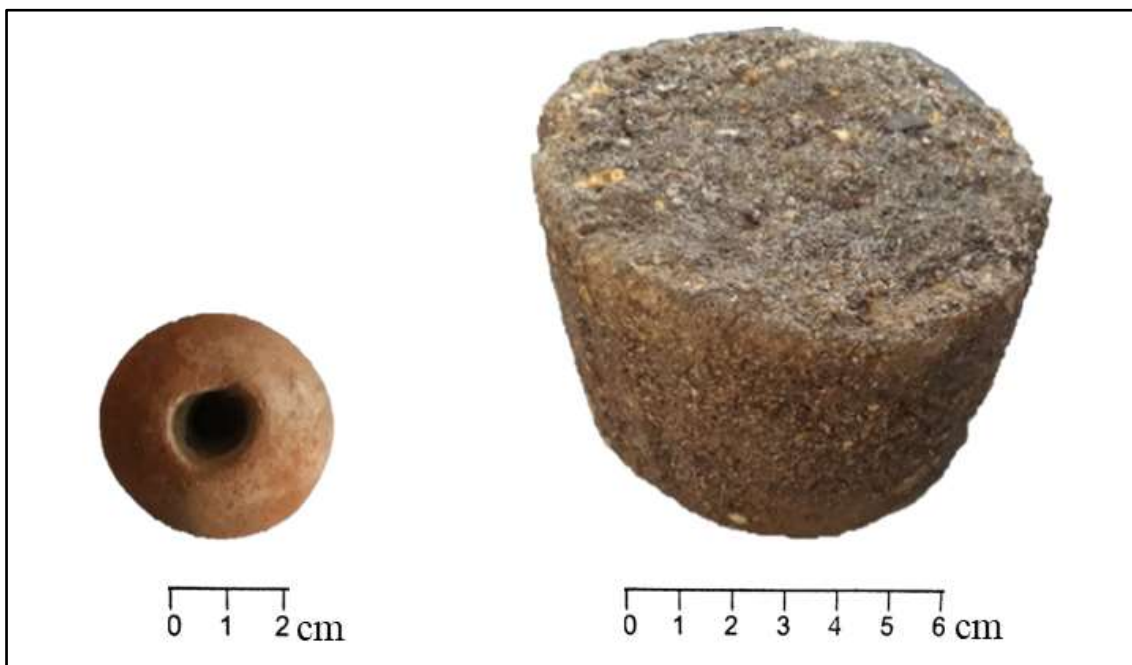


Figure 9: Annular terracotta bead and stone pestle from Koral

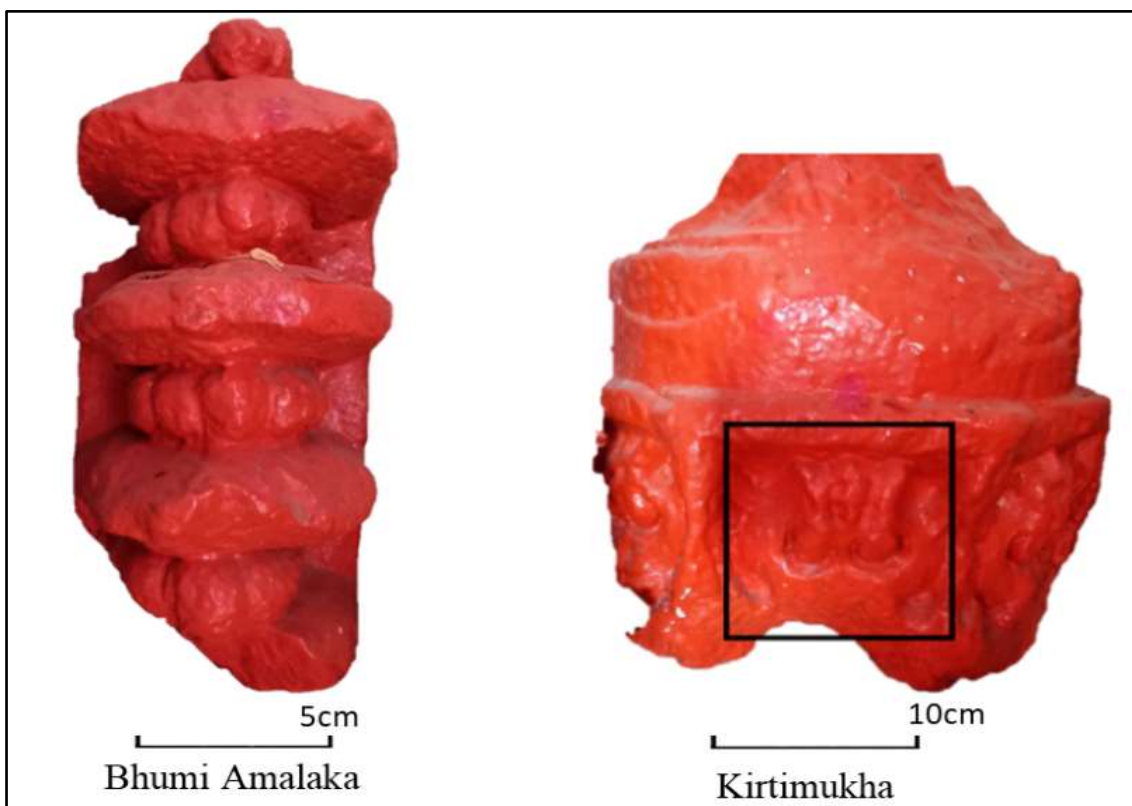


Figure 10: Architectural fragments found in a modern temple of Moti Koral

Architectural Remains from the Village: In a modern temple dedicated to *Bhathuji Maharaj* kept two architectural fragments (one is probably a *Bhumi Amalaka* and the other one is a *Kirtimukha*). The *Bhumi Amlaka* (Figure 10). found from this village might be dated to the early medieval period (pers. comm. Urmi Biswas), as the *Bhumi Amalakas* in the developed stages follow a curvilinear pattern (i.e., having equal height and breadth as that of the horizontal courses). However, the *Kirtimukha* found here might be part of a pillar and can be dated to the medieval period (Figure 10).

Discussion

The present survey at Koral revealed additional evidence of occupation in the form of bricks, brick structures, other architectural members, and a variety of artefacts indicating that this area was occupied from the early historic period and the occupation continued with occasional breaks until the present. The brick size of 16" x 10" x 3" (41x26x7cm) reported by Mehta (1957) from a mound behind the temple of Aditeshwara could be dated to the 3rd-5th century CE, based on the analogy of the similar brick sizes (i.e. 41x26x7cm) reported from the excavations of the Mahadeopura mound at Goraj (Pandey and Vyas, 1989-90) and Devnimori, which are dated between the 3rd to 5th century CE. Whether this was the first habitation stage at the site or it was preceded by another stage requires further work on other mounds of Koral which at present are under cultivation, making it difficult to explore. The present survey revealed an exposed section deposit containing a brick wall, pottery, and other vestiges of ancient habitations (like annular beads, ashy deposit, pestle, etc.) from a 3.5m mound at Bava nu Khetr. The brick wall has 35 courses with the size of the bricks varying between 36:24:7, 32:26:10, and 38:26:8 (length: breadth: height) (Figure 6) which may be dated to the 5th-6th century CE. The presence of the bricks and brickbats at a distance of 85.7m from west to east, and to the north-south at a distance of 50m, more or less aligned in a line suggest the possibility of a fortification. However, the presence of an ashy deposit and over-burnt potsherds suggests that burnt kiln material was dumped there. The pottery at the mound is typo-technologically similar to the one reported from Kayavarohan, Shamlaji, and Nagara (Figure 8). Depending on their descriptions and fabric comparability, it may be said that they are datable prior to the 10th century CE. Two terracotta annular beads dated to the 9th-10th century CE and a pestle was also found in the same section (Figure 9). Summing up these finds the site could be assigned a date standing from the 6th-10th century CE. This corroborates with the period of the Navsari Copper Plates.

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