

# domus

India

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**Cover Design:**

The design on the cover by Mumbai-based architect Sen Kapadia showcases the campus for the National Institute of Design's Post-Graduate studies at Gandhinagar – designed and built by Kapadia himself. He conceptualises through colour – colour is as good as text for him – and calibrating colour values into planes and volumes is a unique methodology he thinks with and designs. He draws references from the sculpting of volumes and tectonic planes at NID Gandhinagar, and rewrites them with colour. For more details turn to page 12.

From our launch in November 2011 we are now in November 2018, and this is our seventh anniversary issue. It has been a most exciting journey, as we have been living in interesting times, especially in India, no doubt. *Domus India* began its work in India roughly when a new generation – a third-wave generation, roughly speaking, since India's independence in 1947 – was reaching its maturity and beginning to articulate a voice. In this generation of architects, roughly those who set up their offices since the early 1990s, one found a struggle to shape an idiom, a voice, a self, and a history that had least to do with a normative past or any obvious rhetoric on history, identity, or context. In publishing some of these architects and their work – at times sporadically, at times insistently – the magazine was a kind of 'coffee-house' or much like the quintessential Bombay/Mumbai Irani cafe, where like-minded projects met and chatted with each other, argued, not always sure of debates or directions, but continued on discussions and directions, making notes, and more. But the magazine also slowly aspired to be like a campus, the shared arena of a university where ideas and histories would be recalled and experimented with, where intellectual traditions would be archived, as well as challenged and debated. The magazine, over its 78 issues, has built this – a coffee house, a *nukkad* (street corner), a campus, a playground...

The magazine has been for the last few years, associated with the Urban Design and Architecture section of the annual Kala Ghoda Arts Festival in Mumbai – where the week-long deliberations are often a physical realisation of the discussions and journeys explored within the pages of this magazine. The explorations and journeys of younger

practices are discussed as much as senior practices are invited to share and ruminate over their work and time in architecture. Architecture's existence and exchanges with history and politics, or the wider battles in the field of design as well art, and planning are brought in proximity – to listen and hear from each other, to whisper their own experiences to friends, and think with shared readers and audiences. The magazine was also closely associated and involved in two national exhibitions – both of which marked historical moments for the profession – *State of Architecture: Practices and Processes in India*, and *State of Housing: Aspirations, Imaginaries, and Realities in India*. The former marked a historical shift and beginning not only in the way India's architecture and its architectural history is viewed, but called out for the 'role of the architect' which had slipped into forgetfulness and at worst, slumber. And in all these processes, the archives and pages of the magazine played a vital role and contributed as an ongoing vehicle of testing the ground of practice on an everyday basis. The magazine is an archive, a jury room, a scanner, and a kaleidoscope – all in one, all in one time; and in that sense its perception, its logic, its flexibility, its vulnerability, are all properties of importance and value.

Continuing this existence and process we look at two senior and critical practices in India, with their works featured in this issue – architects Sen Kapadia and Brinda Somaya; we look at two works of each - a house and a campus from Sen Kapadia, and an exhibition design and a campus from SNK Architects. Both these individuals have shaped some interesting trajectories for contemporary India – and their journeys have yet not been fully realised, reviewed,

and critically evaluated. They are part of a generation that probably grew and navigated one of the most undefined periods of India's design history since 1947. It was a period neither defined by the idealism and spirit of nationalism and modernity as were the first few decades immediately after independence, nor was it a period defined by the turmoil of the regional politics and economic liberalisation from the 1990s onwards. But this is a generation that helped design values transition from the logic of modernism to the needs of a post-colonial nation coming to terms with its own realities, maintaining and redefining either a need for intellectual engagement with everyday life as a civilisational process and aesthetics as a way of human civilisation and development as in the case of Sen Kapadia; or as in the case of Brinda Somaya, architecture took as its role the deep sense to engage with changing states of urbanity while never losing sight of people and culture as an aspect of everyday living. We hope this very brief discussion on these two rich and intense careers is only the beginning, and the magazine will continue to explore and read further many critical histories.

# The Demon's Tears: Water and Worship at Lonar

Formed due to the impact of a meteorite, the Lonar Lake – located in the Buldhana district of Maharashtra – is surrounded by numerous temples, a majority of them in ruins. These temples are probably a reminder of the eternal cycle of life and death, and of the essential sacredness of the site, over the lake itself

Text and photographs by Anuradha Shankar and Sudha Ganapathi



This page, top: The Lonar Lake with the Kamalaja Devi Temple seen on the lower left corner; right: a view of the Kamalaja Devi Temple. Opposite page, left: a black-winged stilt at Lonar Lake; far right, top: ruins of the Yadneshwar Temple in the Lonar Crater; bottom: the Ramgaya Temple



Since ancient times, water and water bodies have been considered to be sacred in Indic traditions, as they are believed to be of divine origin. It is, therefore, not surprising to see temples or temple ruins near ponds, lakes and rivers across the country. Known as *tirthas*, *kunds* and *kalyanis*, among other names, these water bodies serve as the main source of water for temple rituals.

Some towns and villages are so rich in the number of water bodies that one can often see a corresponding number of temples (if not more) located near them, as in the case of Lonar in the Buldhana district of Maharashtra. In addition to springs, wells and stepped tanks, Lonar also boasts of a lake, which is the largest water body there. Interestingly, though Lonar Lake is surrounded by temples – most of them in ruins – the lake itself is not considered to be sacred.

Lonar Lake was 'discovered' in 1823 by C.G Alexander, a British military officer. Though there was no doubt that the lake had formed due to the impact of a meteorite, it took another 140 years to declare that this was a one-of-a-kind impact crater in basalt and that it was more than five million years old. But the locals, who had always been aware of the Lonar crater and the lake within, have a very different story to share as far as its origin is concerned.

According to local legend, the lake was created when Lord Vishnu pushed the demon Lavanasura (also known as Lonasura) deep inside the earth as punishment for his wicked deeds. The penitent demon wept copious tears of remorse which then filled up the lake. The lake water is saline as befits tears and the name of the demon, the lake and the town it is located in, originate in the local Marathi word for salt – *lavan*.

#### Temples and Water Bodies at Lonar

The Lonar Lake, which has a mean diameter of 1.8 km, is almost circular in

shape, tranquil, ringed with a thick green cover and dotted with temples around its periphery. One has to descend into the crater to reach the lake and explore the temples that surround it. There are well-trodden paths, goat trails, rough-cut and constructed steps that descend into the crater from all sides.

The lake is an unbelievable shade of green – not moss, not acid, not olive but a mix of all three – due to the presence of a blue-green algae. Standing at the edge of the lake and watching gentle ripples fan out and then come to a still, the imagination runs wild about the lake and what could lie beneath.

A rough path runs along the lake shore, sometimes passing through thick bushes and sometimes dense woods. The ground is littered with carved stones, which probably graced the pillars and lintels of the temples that once stood here. Occasionally, one also comes across temples that are still standing, but in a dilapidated state. Little remains of their grandeur, but it is not too difficult to imagine how they must have been in their original state. From the names painted on the stones, we know the names of two of the temples in the crater – Yagneshwar and Kumareswar.

The Kamalaja Devi temple is one of the few temples inside the crater which has been maintained, and is still in worship here. The temple and its fluttering flags are visible from the top/rim of the crater as well as from across the lake. Kamalaja Devi is considered to be Lonar's *gramdevi* or local goddess and is much revered not only by the people of Lonar but also the surrounding towns. The annual *yatra* or festival of the goddess during Navaratri sees lakhs of pilgrims congregating at the temple. Kamalaja Devi is also called Padmavati, the consort of Lord Vishnu, the creator of the crater, but whose shrine stands outside the crater, and in Lonar town. The well at this temple is said to have fresh water despite being located close to the saline lake!



Across the lake from the Kamalaja Devi Temple and near the southern rim of the crater, the rough path turns into a concrete path. This, in turn, leads to steps going up to the crater rim and to the Viraj Tirtha and Gaumukh, from where a mountain spring emerges and flows into the crater. The Viraj Tirtha is a group of temples, built around the Gaumukh or mouth of the spring. It is a popular pilgrim place, filled with people bathing in the sacred waters



This page, left: Viraj Tirtha; centre: Gaumukh; bottom: Paphareshwar Dhar  
Opposite page, clockwise from top: Limbi Barav; Daitya Sudan Temple; detail from a section of the outer wall of the Daitya Sudan Temple. Dikpala Vayu is on the extreme right; Daitya Sudan or Vishnu standing on the vanquished Lavanasura

and offering prayers, in sharp contrast to the Lonar Lake and its temples, which are empty and ignored.

Only one temple stands outside the Lonar crater – the Daitya Sudan Temple. Here, Lord Vishnu is Daitya Sudan, the destroyer of the demon Lavanasura (or Lonasura) and is depicted standing atop the demon as a sign of vanquishing him. Located in the heart of Lonar town, the unique architectural style of the Daitya Sudan Temple makes it different from the other temples in the town. Built from the local black basalt, like the other temples in Lonar, the temple has no spire. There is some doubt whether the temple, which is supposed to have been built around the 10th-11th century CE, was ever completed, or if it was broken at some point. The temple has the *garbagriha* (the central shrine), a *mandapa* (pillared hall) and an *antarala* (passage) and the pillars, lintels, ceilings and the outer walls of the temple are profusely and intricately carved. The sculptures represent the various forms of Vishnu, other gods such as Ganesha, Shiva and Mahishasuramardini, Dikpalas, or guardians of the eight directions, flanked by sculptures of saints (holy men) and *apsaras* or *surasundaris* (celestial women).

There are two water bodies in Lonar town, which are no longer part of any ritual worship. The first is the Paphareshwar Dhar, a stepped tank, located close to the Viraj Tirtha. The shrines around the Dhar are no longer under worship and the tank is used for washing clothes by the locals. The

second water body, also a stepped tank, is known as Limbi Barav. The niches along the walls of the tank are empty as is the small shrine attached to the tank. Unlike the Paphareshwar Dhar, there is no activity around this stepped tank. Instead, rumours of hidden treasures and water spirits abound.

#### Conclusion

Lonar has been ruled by the Satavahanas, the Chalukyas, the Rashtrakutas and the Devagiri Yadavas. Going by the profusion of temples – of Vishnu, Shiva and Devi – Lonar must once have been a hub of pilgrimage, at least during the Chalukyan period, when most of these temples were built.

One of the questions that recurs, and one that cannot be easily answered due to lack of records, is why were so many temples built around Lonar Lake? Why were so many temples – about 32 of them – built around a water body that is not considered sacred? One can speculate but it's possible that they were built at different times by different rulers and patrons to propitiate the God of their choice. Even though the lake was not sacred, the legend of the crater and lake must have been taken as a divine sign.

Over time, the presence of so many temples would have acted as a source of divine energy and a draw for the faithful. The simple act of visiting all the temples along the lake shore would have soon transformed into a circumambulatory ritual, that still continues today. Though the



numbers may have come down from what it must have been in the past, full moon days still bring pilgrims, who circumambulate the lake, and end it with a dip in the sacred Gaumukh.

This fresh water, flowing from the sides of the crater, into the lake, is considered sacred. Perhaps each temple in the crater had its own stream or freshwater source near which they were built. Today, these streams multiply during the monsoons, nourishing the land and merging with the salty lake, much like rivers merging with the ocean. These streams nurture the lush greenery within the crater, where rare plants, herbs and trees flourish. Locals, however, believe that it is the penitence of the demon, who lies beneath the lake, that causes the lush and unique ecosystem in the Lonar crater to flourish.

The tears of the demon, while shunned by humans as unfit for consumption, still sustain many other forms of life. The lake attracts scores of migratory birds in winter, which thrive on the organisms around here, and find a safe haven within the confines of the crater.

It is this life-sustaining force of nature which is revered at Lonar. The lake signifies the end of evil in the form



of the demon, and the sustenance of life in the form of the ecosystem. The temples around the lake are probably a reminder of the eternal cycle of life and death, and of the essential sacredness of the site, over the lake itself.

#### Note:

There is very little reliable information on the temples and water bodies of Lonar. Most of the information is from a self-published book by S.T Ugdane, a resident of Lonar and a history and culture enthusiast – *Lonar: The Unique Indian Meteorite Crater in Basaltic Rock* (Third Edition), 2014. Please note the title of the book comes with spelling errors and it has been reproduced here just the way it has been spelt.