



## CULTURAL ASSESSMENT OF TOURISM IN MAVAL TEHSIL OF PUNE DISTRICT IN MAHARASHTRA (INDIA)

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### Abstract:

*The Maval Tahsil of Pune district, located in the western part of Maharashtra, is endowed with a rich spiritual, historical, and cultural heritage. The region is home to several important pilgrimage centers such as the Pratishirdi Shirgaon, Ekvira Devi Temple near Karla Caves, Bhaje and Bedse Buddhist caves, and various local shrines and temples that attract thousands of devotees and tourists every year. These sites not only reflect the religious diversity of the region but also serve as vital contributors to its socio-economic development.*

*This study aims to assess the current status and potential of pilgrimage tourism in Maval Tahsil. It focuses on understanding how religious sites influence local livelihoods, infrastructure development, and cultural preservation. The research identifies key challenges such as inadequate facilities, waste management issues, and lack of sustainable tourism planning that limit the full potential of this sector.*

*With proper infrastructure development, eco-friendly management practices, and community participation, Maval Tahsil can be developed as a model destination for sustainable religious tourism. Enhancing accessibility, promoting local art and culture, and conserving heritage structures can significantly boost both tourism and the regional economy. The study highlights that pilgrimage tourism in Maval holds immense potential to strengthen socio-economic growth while preserving its spiritual and cultural identity.*

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### Introduction:

Maval Tahsil, located in the western part of Pune district, Maharashtra, is a region blessed with a blend of natural beauty, historical legacy, and deep-rooted spirituality. The area, surrounded by the scenic

Sahyadri ranges, is home to several important pilgrimage centers such as the Ekvira Devi Temple near Karla Caves, Bhaje and Bedse Buddhist caves, and numerous local temples and shrines. These sacred sites attract thousands of devotees and tourists



throughout the year, making pilgrimage tourism a vital aspect of Maval's cultural and economic landscape.

Pilgrimage tourism in this region not only fosters spiritual enrichment but also plays a crucial role in local socio-economic development. It generates employment opportunities through transport, accommodation, handicrafts, and food services, thereby improving the livelihoods of local communities. The influx of pilgrims has also encouraged infrastructural growth, including better roads, sanitation, and public amenities.

However, despite its potential, pilgrimage tourism in Maval remains underdeveloped due to inadequate facilities, poor waste management, and lack of proper promotional strategies. With sustainable tourism planning, environmental conservation, and community involvement, Maval can emerge as a model destination for religious and cultural tourism in Maharashtra. Therefore, this study aims to assess the existing condition and future potential of pilgrimage tourist places in Maval Tahsil and to explore strategies for their sustainable development.

### Objectives of Study:

1. To assessment of Religious and Pilgrimage tourism in study area.
2. To study the historical tourism in study area

### Location:

Maval Tahsil is located in the western part of Pune district in the state of Maharashtra, India. It lies in the foothills of the Sahyadri (Western Ghats) mountain range and forms an important part of the Pune metropolitan region. Geographically, Maval is situated between

latitudes 18°40'N to 18°55'N and longitudes 73°20'E to 73°45'E. It is bounded by Mulshi Tahsil to the south, Khed and Haveli Tahsils to the east, and Raigad district to the west.

The region is characterized by hilly terrain, lush greenery, rivers, and reservoirs, including the Indrayani and Pavana rivers, which add to its scenic beauty. Major towns in Maval include Lonavala, Kamshet, Talegaon Dabhade, and Wadgaon. Maval enjoys good connectivity through the Mumbai–Pune Expressway and railway routes, making it easily accessible to tourists and pilgrims from major cities like Pune and Mumbai.

Its natural charm, combined with religious and historical sites such as the Ekvira Devi Temple and ancient Buddhist caves, makes Maval a prominent destination for both spiritual and eco-tourism.

### Methodology (Secondary Data Based Study):

This study is primarily based on secondary data to assess the current status and potential of pilgrimage tourism in Maval Tahsil, Pune. The secondary data has been collected from various reliable government and non-government sources to ensure accuracy and comprehensiveness.

Data and information have been obtained from published reports, district census handbooks, tourism department publications, Maharashtra State Gazetteers, and official websites of the Government of Maharashtra and Pune District Administration. Additional references include research papers, journals, books on tourism geography, and articles related to religious and cultural tourism in the region. The collected data was analyzed to identify the distribution of pilgrimage centers, the number of



visitors, infrastructure development, and the socio-economic impact of religious tourism on the local community. Maps and statistical data were also referred to for understanding the geographical and demographic context of Maval Tahsil.

This secondary data-based methodology helps in understanding the existing tourism framework, recognizing development gaps, and suggesting measures for promoting sustainable pilgrimage tourism in the Maval region.

### Culture Tourist Center in Mawal Tehsil:

#### 1. Bhaje Caves:

The Bhaje Caves are located near the village of Bhaje Village in the Maval Taluka (Tehsil) of Pune district, Maharashtra, India. The approximate coordinates are **18°44'N 73°29'E**. They are about 3 km from Malavli Railway Station on the Mumbai-Pune railway line, and from the road, they are roughly 10–12 km from the hill-station Lonavala and easily reached via the Mumbai–Pune Expressway/Mumbai–Pune highway exit towards Bhaje.

#### 1. Information about the Bhaje Caves:

The Bhaje Caves are a complex of 22 rock cut Buddhist caves, dating from approximately the 2nd century BCE onwards. They are set on a hill about 120–130 metres (Sea level 400 ft) above Bhaje village and face west, overlooking the valley of the Indrayani River. Architecturally, the most prominent feature is Cave 12, the chaitya hall (prayer hall), with vaulted ceiling, horseshoe shaped window, and a stupa at the end. There is a group of 14 stupas (5 inside the rock cut area, 9 outside) at the site, which are relic monuments of Buddhist monks. The caves also show early

wooden architectural imitation in stone — for instance, carved beams, wooden style details, and mortise holes on façades.

#### 2. Karla Caves:

The Karla Caves are located at Karli village in the Mawal tehsil of Pune district, Maharashtra, India. The approximate coordinates are **18.7600° N, 73.4050° E**. They are about 3 km from Malavli Railway Station on the Mumbai-Pune railway line. And from the road, and easily **Access by Road:** From Mumbai–Pune Expressway, take the Karli exit; from Lonavala town, a short drive

#### 2. Information about the Karla Caves:

The Karla Caves are a complex of ancient rock cut Buddhist shrines, viharas (monastic cells) and a major chaitya hall (prayer hall) dating roughly from 2nd century BCE to 5th / 6th century CE. The crown jewel of this site is the so called “Grand Chaitya” (Cave 8) — one of the largest and best preserved chaitya halls in India, measuring about 45.72 m long, 25.91 m wide, and 17.74 m high. Architectural features include massive rock cut pillars, vaulted ceilings, a stupa at the end of the hall, horse shoe arched entrance, carved wooden style details in stone, and large windows to illuminate the interior. The caves were built along an ancient trade route between the Arabian Sea and the Deccan plateau, emphasizing their role as a religious, monastic and lodging site for monks and travelers. Later religious layering: At the front of the caves there is a temple dedicated to the goddess Ekvira Devi (Ekveera Aai), reflecting the continuing cultural



and religious importance of the site into more recent times.

### Pilgrimage Tourist Center in Mawal Tehsil:

#### 1. Prati Saibaba Temple Shirgaon:

Prati Shirdi (literally “Little Shirdi”) is a temple complex built as a **replica** of the original Shirdi Sai Baba temple. It was established in 2003 by the founder-trustee Prakash Deole. The design deliberately mimics key elements of the Shirdi temple: Gurusthan (the Neem tree spot), Samadhi Mandir, Chavadi, Dwarkamai, Dixit Wada etc. The trust also runs social initiatives: a school (Ashram Shala) for tribal/down-trodden children with hostel and nutritious food.

The temple complex is situated in the village of Shirgaon, in the Mawal Taluka (also spelled Mawal) of Pune District, Maharashtra. The temple opens around **5:00 AM** and remains open till **10:00 PM**

#### 2. Ekvira Devi Temple:

The deity Ekvira Devi (also spelled Ekveera) is a form of the Goddess (often associated with Renuka or Durga) and is especially worshipped by the Koli and Agri communities. According to travel sources: Devotees often climb a number of steps to reach the shrine, and the scenic hill-top location adds to its appeal.

The temple is located at Karla (Karla Caves area) near Lonavala, which falls under Mawal (Mawal) Tehsil. Coordinates approx. latitude 18.75249, longitude 73.48216. The temple is located on a hillock above the base near Karla Caves: you’ll need to climb ~500 steps. Nearest railway station:

Lonavala (approx 8-12 km away) and road access from the Mumbai–Pune region.

### Conclusion:

The study reveals that Mawal Tehsil, with its rich cultural and spiritual heritage, holds immense potential for the development of sustainable pilgrimage and cultural tourism. Sites such as Ekvira Devi Temple, Prati Shirdi Shirgaon, Bhaje Caves, and Karla Caves not only attract thousands of visitors but also reflect the region’s religious diversity and historical significance. Despite this, inadequate infrastructure, limited facilities, and insufficient waste management hinder the sector’s full growth. Strengthening accessibility, improving amenities, and promoting community-based tourism can significantly enhance visitor experience and economic benefits. Integrating eco-friendly practices and preserving cultural assets are essential for sustainable development. With coordinated efforts by local authorities, tourism departments, and residents, Mawal can emerge as a model destination blending spirituality, heritage, and natural beauty contributing meaningfully to regional socio-economic growth while preserving its cultural and environmental integrity.

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