

# Evolution of Bhumija Shikhara and Distribution of Bhumija Shrines in India

Maulik Hajarnis & Bhagyajit Raval

Faculty of Architecture, Parul University, Waghodia, Vadodara, Gujarat, India

Email: hajarnismaulik@gmail.com

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## Abstract

The present paper begins with a brief on the meaning and essence of a Hindu temple. It talks about the types of classification of the Hindu temples in India, on the basis of its physical attributes. The authors then try to trace the evolution of the *Bhumija shikhara* chronologically. The paper examines the *Bhumija* mode with respect to its meaning and references in literature. Finally the paper mentions various *Bhumija* shrines in various states of the country chronologically. The description ends with maps showing spatial distribution of *Bhumija* shrines across India and a graph showing state wise *Bhumija* shrines with respect to their time-line.

**Keywords:** Temple, Bhumija, Shikhara, Shrine, India

## Introduction

As the title of the paper suggests, this paper talks about the evolution of the *Bhumija* spire and the spatial locations of various *Bhumija* shrines in India. But before we arrive at the description of *Bhumija* spire and its peculiar features, it is essential to have a brief understanding of the meaning of the Hindu Temple. The Hindu temple is based on a simple and direct concept of worship with a ritual of prayer involving a dialogue between the devotee and the deity of the temple (Hardy, 1995). The sole purpose of every Hindu temple is to be a house for a god whose image or idol is installed at the heart or core of the monument. This concept applies to any scale or form of a Hindu Temple ranging from a road-side shrine to any of the grandest work of royal patronage.

## Classification of Hindu temples

Hindu temples can be classified on the basis of several aspects. For instance, they could be classified on the basis of any of the following criteria:

1. **The Deity of the Temple:** If the temple is devoted to *Shiva* it is a *Shivalaya* or a *Shaiva* temple. If it is devoted to *Parshvanatha*, it becomes a Jain *derasara* and so on.
2. **The Number of Shrines in the Temple:** If the temple has one shrine it is a single shrine temple. If it has two shrines besides a common *Mandapa* (prayer hall) it is a double shrine temple. If it has three shrines attached to a common *mandapa*, it is a Triple shrine temple.

3. **The Plan – form of the Sanctum:** If the sanctum has been planned on an orthogonal grid it is an orthogonal plan. If the plan of the sanctum of a temple is generated on the principle of a rotated square, it is a stellate plan.
4. **The Circumambulation Path:** If the temple possesses an ambulatory path it is a ‘*Sandhara*’ temple. If it is devoid of a circumambulatory path it is a ‘*Niradhara*’ temple.
5. **The Number of Projections or Buttresses in the exterior face of the sanctum:** If there are 3 nos. of projections or buttresses (one central and two on each side/corner offsets) then it is a ‘*triratha*’ temple. If there are 5 buttresses or offsets it is a ‘*pancharatha*’ temple. Similarly ‘*saptaratha*’, ‘*navaratha*’ and so on. However it has to be noted that the number of projections is always an odd number since the plan of any temple is symmetrical about the central axis.
6. **The Regional modes of Temple Architecture in India:** If the temple is situated in the northern part of India, it is a ‘*Nagara*’ temple. A temple in South India is termed as a ‘*Dravida*’ or ‘*Karnata*’ temple. And likewise all temples located in the central part of India are termed as ‘*Vesara*’ temples. (Albanese, 2004)

Similarly there are several other ways of classifying temples on the basis of *anga*, number of storeys or *bhumi* in elevation of the *Bhumija Shikhara* and so on. But since the current paper has to focus on the evolution of the *Bhumija Shikhara* we have to understand further bifurcation of the regional classification of temples mentioned in the previous paragraph.

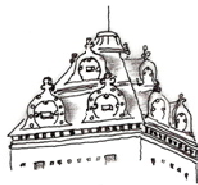
Language	Modes
1. Nagara	Latina
	Shekhari
	Bhumija: orthogonal
	Bhumija: stellate
2. Dravida	Orthogonal
	Stellate
3. Vesara	Fusion of Nagara & Dravida

The above table shows the classification of Temple Architecture in India with respect to the regional modes of temple architecture. It also gives their respective styles developed gradually with the evolution of each regional mode of Indian temple architecture. Here, however it is necessary to mention the styles of ‘*Nagara*’ mode: *Latina*, *Shekhari*, *Bhumija* and *Valabhi*. Out of these the *Latina* and *Valabhi* are contemporaneous; whereas the *Shekhari* and *Bhumija* are an outcome of the *Latina* style of the ‘*Nagara*’ mode. A *Bhumija Shikhara* sits either on an ‘orthogonal’ plan or a ‘stellate’ plan of the sanctum of a ‘*Nagara*’ temple.

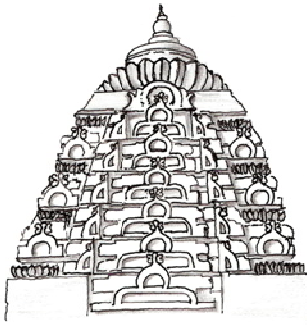
### Evolution of the *Bhumija Shikhara*

Here we are elaborating on the *Nagara* temples of India and various sub-styles of this language. But before that it has to be remembered that the development and evolution of different sub-styles was not a sudden phenomenon but a gradual process.

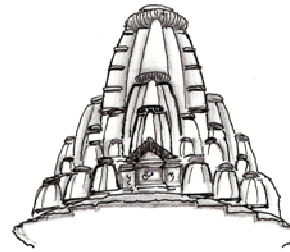
The evolution of the *Nagara Shikhara* from pyramidal, then the curvilinear *Ekandaka* (single spired)- *Latina* and finally the fully fledged *Anekandaka* (multi spired)- *Shekhari* and *Bhumija*, can be traced as follows:



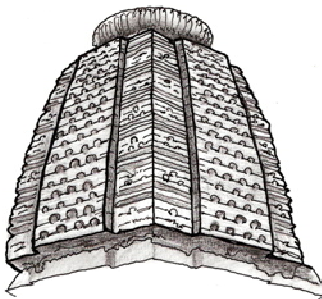
Temple at Gōp,  
5 th Cent. A.D.



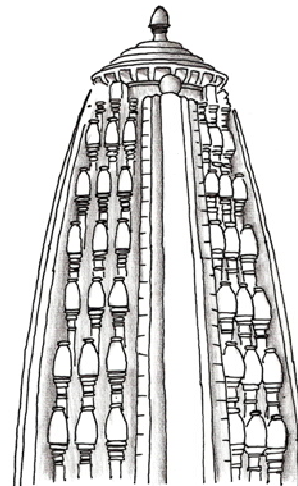
Temple at Sūtrāpādā,  
7 th Cent. A.D.



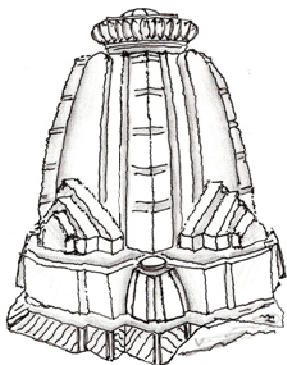
Kirāḍu. Smaller Śiva Temple No. 1,  
c. 2 nd quarter of 11 th Cent. A.D.



Rōḍā. Temple No. 1,  
c. A.D. 775.



Maṅkeśvara Temple at Jhodga,  
Mid - 12 th Cent. A.D.



A Pañcāṅḍaka Shrine, Modhera,  
Early 11 th Cent. A.D.

**Fig. 1. Evolution of Bhumija Shikhara**

## Features of *Bhumija Shikhara*

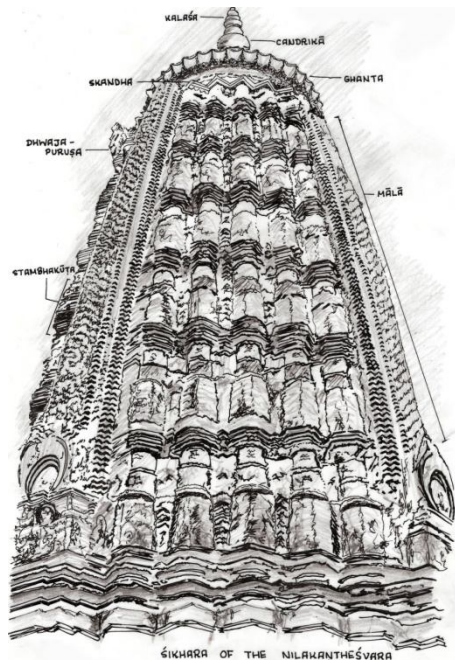


Fig. 2. Features of *Bhumija Shikhara*

“The *Bhumija*, one of the two composite styles of *Nagara* type can be seen as a development of the *Latina Shikhara*. A *Bhumija Shikhara* consists of storied arrangement of *kutas* placed over miniature *stambhas* arranged in rows, creating an illusion of vertically thrown necklaces of gigantic beads. The *Madhyalata* receives a strong emphasis in the shape of a *mala*. The *Shurasenaka* is made of a single *chaitya*-dormer. The crowning member is the *amalaraka* of a peculiar non *Nagara* kind where its serration follows the plan of the *Shikhara*.” (Dhaky, 1977)

### Meaning of *Bhumija*

Etymologically, *Bhumija* means ‘earth born’ or ‘country born’ (Kramrisch, 1976). But the meaning “country-born” loses its validity since, apart from the *Samaranganasutradhara*, it is also used in the *Aparajitaprucccha* and the *Lakshmanasamucchaya* compiled outside *Malava*. The *Aparajita* gives a lengthy discussion on the origin of the fourteen medieval temple-types and while it attributes the origin of all other temple-types to the deities and demons, *Bhumija* is the only class attributed to

the human kings. Thus *Bhumija* might mean “of a secular origin” unlike the other forms which were believed to be of a divine or a super-natural origin. Again, since ‘*bhumi*’ is an architectural term meaning “storey”, this gives a third interpretation of the word *Bhumija* meaning “born of the storey”. This may indicate that, *Bhumija* was the only *Nagara*-mode arisen with the living memory of the compilers and that the favour accorded to it by some royal dynast was known.

The *Bhumija* style has certain marked peculiarities, with *Shikhara* being the chief one. The *Shikhara* shows four *lata*s with the usual *chaitya* arches on the central *rathas* and a distinctive grouping of miniature *Shikharas* of diminishing heights on the four quadrants between the *lata*s, the number of these miniature *Shikharas* varying from three to five rows vertically and five to nine rows horizontally. Decorative in style, they are called *kutastambha* or *stambhakuta* in the texts, meaning *kuta* (miniature *Shikharas*) resting on pilasters. The sculptured medallion within a large *chaitya* window (*Shurasenaka*) at the base of the *lata* on the three sides and corresponding to the same feature appearing a little higher up as a *Shukanasa* on the front face of the *Shikhara*; the *Shurasenaka* applied on the face of the *Shukanasa* is as a rule larger and more elaborate. The temples of this mode are essentially ‘*nirandhara*’, for a *sandhara* plan is incompatible with the *Bhumija Shikhara*. There are other directives also given in the texts – as in the proportions of the doorway, the *pitha* (socle) and in elevational features – which the extant monuments generally follow. These texts devote a chapter exclusively to a detailed description of the ground plan, elevation and ornamentation of the *Bhumija* temples of three varieties of plan, namely, *caturashra* (orthogonal), *vritta* (circular) and *ashtashala* (comprising of eight *bhadras* or principal offsets).

### Indian states possessing *Bhumija* shrines

In India there are four main northern states possessing fully fledged *Bhumija* shrines: Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Gujarat. However it should be noted that *Malava* (current

Madhya Pradesh region) is believed to be the homeland of *Bhumija* style of North Indian Hindu temples.

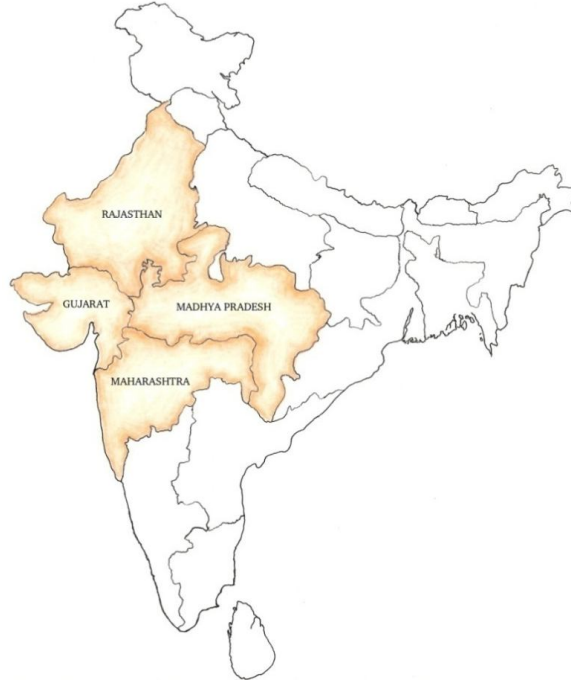


Fig. 3. Indian States possessing fully fledged Bhumija Shrines

On the basis of the research carried out by Prof. Krishna Deva, published in *Studies in Indian Temple Architecture*, (Deva, 1975) a state-wise list of *Bhumija* Shrines in India could be furnished. The same are given as follows:

*Bhumija* temples in M.P:

Sl.	Name of temple	Period	Site	Type of Plan	Elevation
1	<i>Udayeshvara</i> temple	1080 AD	Udaypur	Stellate cum-circular and <i>saptaratha</i>	<i>sapta bhuma</i>
2	<i>Jamaleshvara</i> temple	1080-90 AD	Jamli, Dhar	Orthogonal type and <i>pancharatha</i>	<i>panchabhuma</i>
3	Eight temples at Un	-	Un, West Nimar	Stellate. Some are <i>pancharatha</i> and others are <i>saptaratha</i> on plan	<i>panchabhuma</i>
4	Around half dozen temples at <i>Omkara Mandhata</i>	Late 11 <sup>th</sup> cent. AD	River Narmada, East Nimar	Stellate, with <i>pancharatha</i> or <i>saptaratha</i> plan	-
5	Two shrines - <i>Siddheshvara</i> Roofless Shaiva temple	Early 12 <sup>th</sup> Cent. AD	Nemawar, Dewas	Both are stellate and <i>saptaratha</i> on plan	<i>Siddheshvara</i> is nine storeyed i.e. <i>navabhuma</i>
6	<i>Malavai</i> temple	14 <sup>th</sup> cent. AD	Alirajpur, Jambua	Stellate plan	<i>saptabhuma</i>
7	<i>Barro Khera</i>	15 <sup>th</sup> cent. AD	Neemach, Mandasaur	Stellate plan	-

**Bhumija temples in Maharashtra:**

Sl.	Name of temple	Period	Site	Type of Plan	Elevation
1	<i>Ambaranatha</i> temple	1060 AD	Ambarnath, near Kalyan	Orthogonal type	Similar to those of <i>Udayeshvara</i>
2	Group of temples at Balsane with one of them as the triple shrine temple	12 <sup>th</sup> cent. AD	Balsane, Dhulia	<i>Pancharatha</i> and <i>panchanga</i>	<i>panchabhuma</i>
3	<i>Mankeshvara</i> temple	Mid 12 <sup>th</sup> cent. AD	Jhodga, Nasik	Triple shrine temple like the one mentioned above at Balsane	<i>saptabhuma</i>
4	<i>Gondeshvara</i> temple	13th cent. AD	Sinnar, Nasik	<i>It is a panchayatana Shaiva</i> temple. Main shrine is <i>saptaratha</i> on plan. The other four subsidiary shrines are <i>pancharatha</i> on plan	-
5	<i>Jagadamba</i> temple	Late 13 <sup>th</sup> cent. AD	Kokamthan, Ahmednagar	Stellate plan	-
6	<i>Amriteshvara</i> temple	15 <sup>th</sup> cent. AD	Ratanwadi, Ahmednagar	Late in style	-

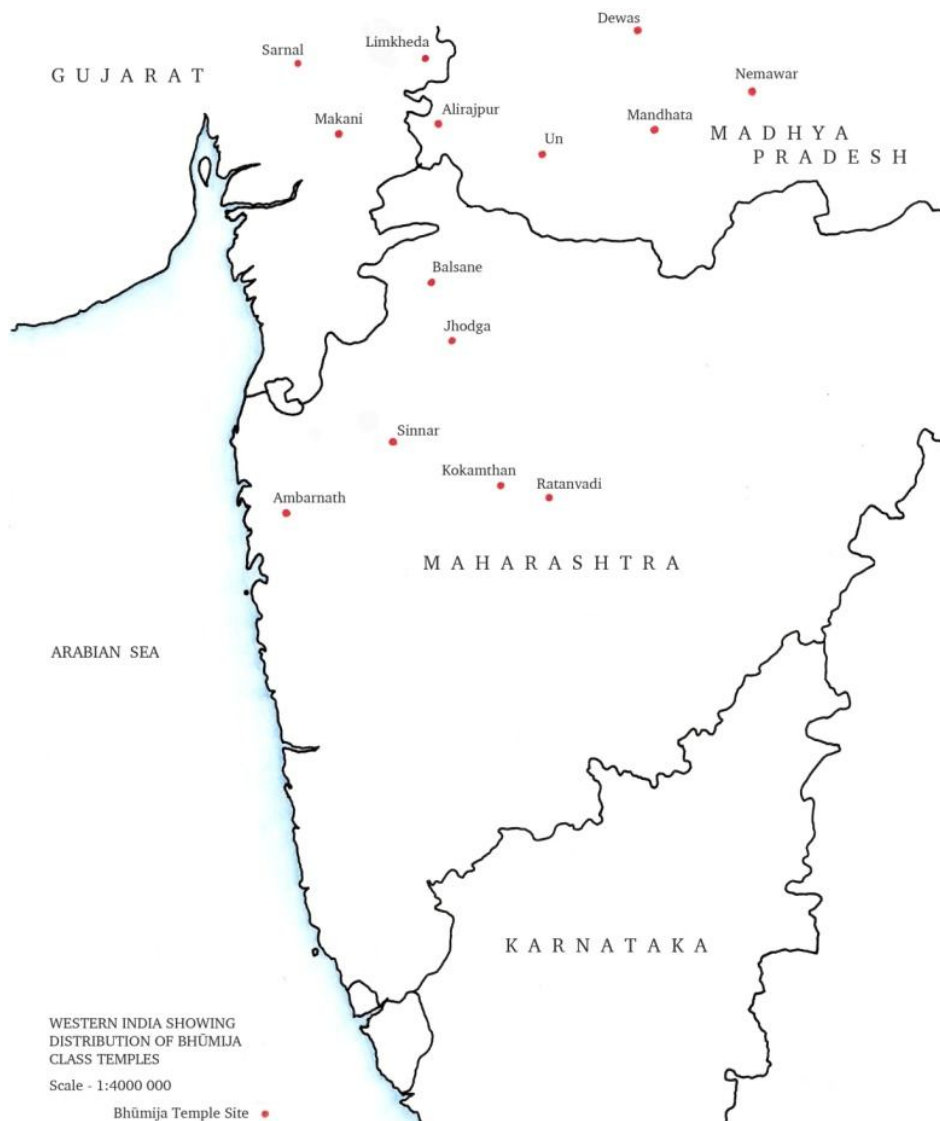
**Bhumija temples in Rajasthan:**

Sl.	Name of temple	Period	Site	Type of Plan	Elevation
1	<i>Mahavira</i> temple	1010-20 AD	Sewari, Pali	Orthogonal and <i>Pancharatha</i>	<i>shadabhuma</i> , a feature reserved only for the stellate type in texts
2	<i>Mahanaleshvara</i> temple	Late 11 <sup>th</sup> cent. AD	Menal, Chittor	Orthogonal and <i>Pancharatha</i>	<i>panchabhuma</i>
3	Small temple situated in a tank	Late 11 <sup>th</sup> cent. AD	Near Menal	Orthogonal and <i>Pancharatha</i>	<i>panchabhuma</i>
4	<i>Bhand Deora</i>	Early 12 <sup>th</sup> cent. AD	Ramgarh, Kota	<i>Stellate saptaratha</i>	<i>saptabhuma</i>
5	<i>Devi</i> temple, subsidiary shrine at <i>Shiva</i> temple at Ramgarh	Early 12 <sup>th</sup> cent. AD	Ramgarh, Kota	Orthogonal <i>saptaratha</i>	<i>saptabhuma</i>
6	<i>Undeshvara</i> temple	-	Bijolia, Bhilwara	Stellate and <i>saptaratha</i> on plan	<i>navabhuma</i>
7	<i>Surya</i> temple	Late 11 <sup>th</sup> cent. AD	Jhalrapatan, Jhalawar	Orthogonal <i>saptaratha</i>	<i>saptabhuma</i>
8	<i>Surya</i> temple	15 <sup>th</sup> cent. AD	Ranakpur	<i>ashtashala</i> sanctum and <i>ashtabhadra mandapa</i>	<i>navabhuma</i>
9	<i>Adbhutnatha</i> temple	A generation later than the above	Chittor	<i>Pancharatha</i> on plan	-

*Bhumija* temples in Gujarat:

Sl.	Name of temple	Period	Site	Type of Plan	Elevation
1	<i>Ranamukteshvara</i> temple	10 <sup>th</sup> cent. AD	Makani, Vadodara	Orthogonal and <i>Pancharatha</i>	<i>Shadabhuma</i> , a feature reserved only for the stellate type in texts
2	<i>Triple shrine Shiva</i> temple	11 <sup>th</sup> cent. AD	Limkheda, Panchmahal	Stellate on plan	-
3	<i>Galateshvara</i> temple	Late 11 <sup>th</sup> cent. AD	Sarnal, Kheda	<i>ashtabhadra</i> stellate plan	<i>saptabhuma</i>

**Spatial distribution of *Bhumija* shrines in India**





### Findings

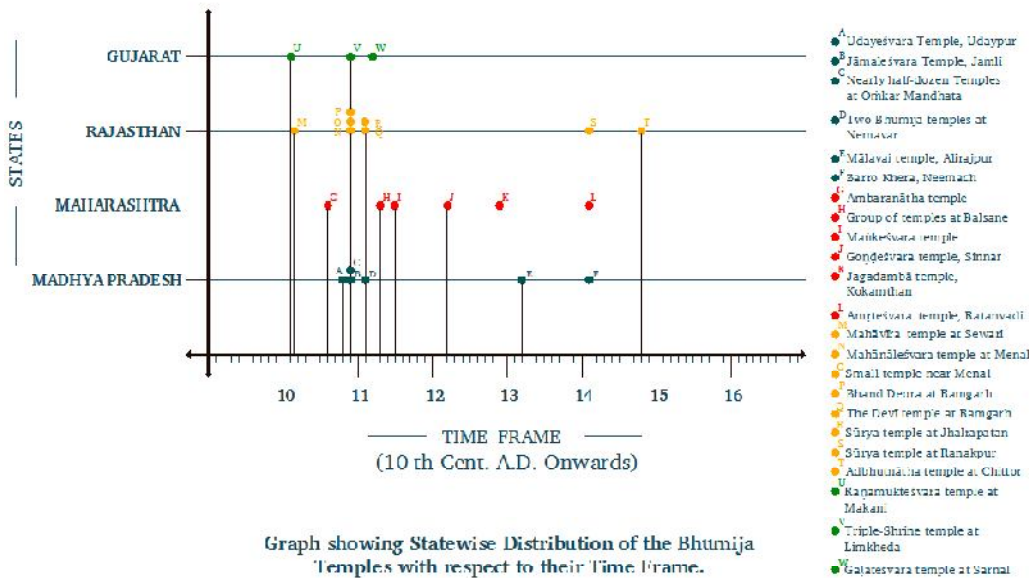
As mentioned earlier in the paper *Malava* (M.P) is believed to be the land of origin of *Bhumija* style. But still as evident from the above tables, the earliest *Bhumija* temple known so far is not in M.P. It is in Gujarat – the *Ranamukteshvara* temple. This implies two possibilities:

1. That the style might have originated near to this region of Gujarat, or
2. That this region of Gujarat might have been a part of the then *Malava*.

In any case, nothing can be said firmly at this point of time. This assertion can be achieved only after further research in the direction.

The graph showing the time-line of various *Bhumija* shrines across states of India is shown as follows:





Graph showing Statewise Distribution of the Bhumija Temples with respect to their Time Frame.

**Endnote:**

- i. All sketches and drawings are reproduced from the unpublished B. Arch. Thesis of the author submitted to S.V.I.T, Vasad in the year 2006.

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The Authors are Architects, Urban Planners and Educators. They are working as core faculty members with Faculty of Architecture, Parul University, Waghodia, Vadodara, Gujarat, India  
 E Mail IDs: hajarnismaulik@gmail.com, bhagyajit.raval@gmail.com