Design Resource

Baramotichi Vihir - Satara

The Historical well in Maharashtra

by
Sunil Mahajan and Prof. Ravi Poovaiah
IDC, IIT Bombay

Source:
http://www.dsource.in/resource/baramotichi-vihir-satara

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Introduction

Satara is one of the districts of Maharashtra. It is enclosed by beautiful hill stations, temples and historical places. The number of magnificent palaces and forts were built during king Shivaji's reign. In the era of king Shivaji the creative architectural construction was at its peak. King Shivaji did not only build the new forts but he also overhauled and restored the other old forts in his kingdom of Marathas. The high quality of constructions and architecture was not only limited to building the forts but was also implemented in the construction of other multipurpose buildings and structures. The impingement of creative and aesthetic constructions remained even after the death of Chhatrapati Shivaji. Baramotichi vihir is in a place called Limb at Satara district, it is one of the best examples of those constructions. This historical monument has become the fascinating subject for the archaeologists, students of history and historical architecture including tourist from all over world.

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History

The Great Maratha king Chhatrapati Shivaji conquered Satara fort in 1663 after the first Muslim invasion and hence the Nizam Shahi dynasty came to an end. Udayanraje Bhonsale the 13th descendent of king Shivaji is now the current king of Satara. Near Satara at a place called Limb where Baramotichi vihir, an archaic step-well is situated. The construction of this well was started in 1641 and completed in 1946 under supervision of Mrs. Virubhai Bhonsale in the government of first Shahu maharajah the son of King Shahaji. This well was intended to be a water source to almost 300 mango tree farms around.

At the main entrance arch while looking through the inner gallery, two 'Sharabhas' (The legendary animal from the Hindu mythology) are carved in the stone.

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Some particular vehicle or a carrier was used to bring the stones for building the well, but now only the wheels of the carrier can be found lying around the well.

Some particular vehicle or a carrier was used to bring the stones for building the well, but now only the wheels of the carrier can be found lying around the well.

This rectangular well has ten moats, five on two opposite sides. These ten moats were the arrangement of relieving the overflow of the water from the well.

The five moats are located at of the sides of rectangular well.

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Place

Baramotichi vihir is situated at a village called Limb. Limb is on national highway number 4, almost 16 kilometers away from Satara and 99 kilometers away from Pune. The local business is farming of sugarcane, rice, vegetables and mangoes. Tamarind, Pipal and Mango trees are found in the land around the well. It's very hard to notice the well because there is not much construction done over the ground level. The farmers from the local area still use the well water for the farming which they pump out through the electric pumps.

The front view of the well, this is how the well looks from the ground level. The well is dug 110 feet deep in the ground to source the water supply for the mango plantation in the surrounding farm.

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The motif of the flower is carved at the entrance of the well. This well is made in the available black stones in the surrounding area.

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Architecture

Baramotichi vihir is octagonal and has been built identically in the shape of dug-out shivling (In Hindu mythology it signifies Lord Shiva). Imprecisely this well is 130 feet long in length, 50 feet in width. The main area of the actual well is 110 feet deep and 50 feet in diameter. This well has been built unlike those traditional step-wells in Rajasthan. Once climb down from the stairs there is an arched grand opening below the ground level which leads to the well. At both the sides of this arched opening there are two more staircases which lead towards the lower level of the well. This one has steps from one side leading to the middle of the well from where there were look-out galleries. This whole well is divided into two parts, one rectangle and other one is octagonal well at the gallery on top of the second arched opening. This gallery opens out to both the sides, one inside the octagonal well and second at rectangle well which is towards main entrance. Above these galleries there is a platform to accommodate the throne of the king. From the side ground level to reach out the galleries, one secret narrow door 'chor-darwaja' is built at the second arch. The entire well has been built in black stone. This structure resembles some kind of underground palace.

On the inner side of the main octagonal well, there are four sculptures of tigers. Form of tiger was used as a metaphor of the victory. At the front feet of both the south most sculptures of tiger has two small elephants carved and other both the north most sculptures of tiger are in jumping gestures. That signifies the king's victory at the south and his next aspirant move to the north.

Including grand staircase this well has two more ways to be entered into. The main octagonal well has an arrangement of fifteen moats to channel the water from the well but only twelve moats were functioning rest of the three moats were used whenever it was required. The arrangement of ten more moats was made in between the first and second arch in case if the water level increases during the monsoon.

The structure which divides this well is nothing but one of a kind of palace. At both the sides there are steps from the second arch to reach at the main hall of the palace. There are two creatively carved pillars at the centre of the hall. Each pillar is carved differently. The horse riding kind, Lord Hanuman and the elephant are carved on one pillar while other one is carved with elephant riding king, Lord Ganesh and decorative motifs of flower. The motifs of flowers and birds are carved logically near the windows and on the pillars.

On the roof of this palace the setting for the king's throne and arrangement of council meeting is made. The first Shahu maharajah by himself used to run his council meeting with his administrative body.

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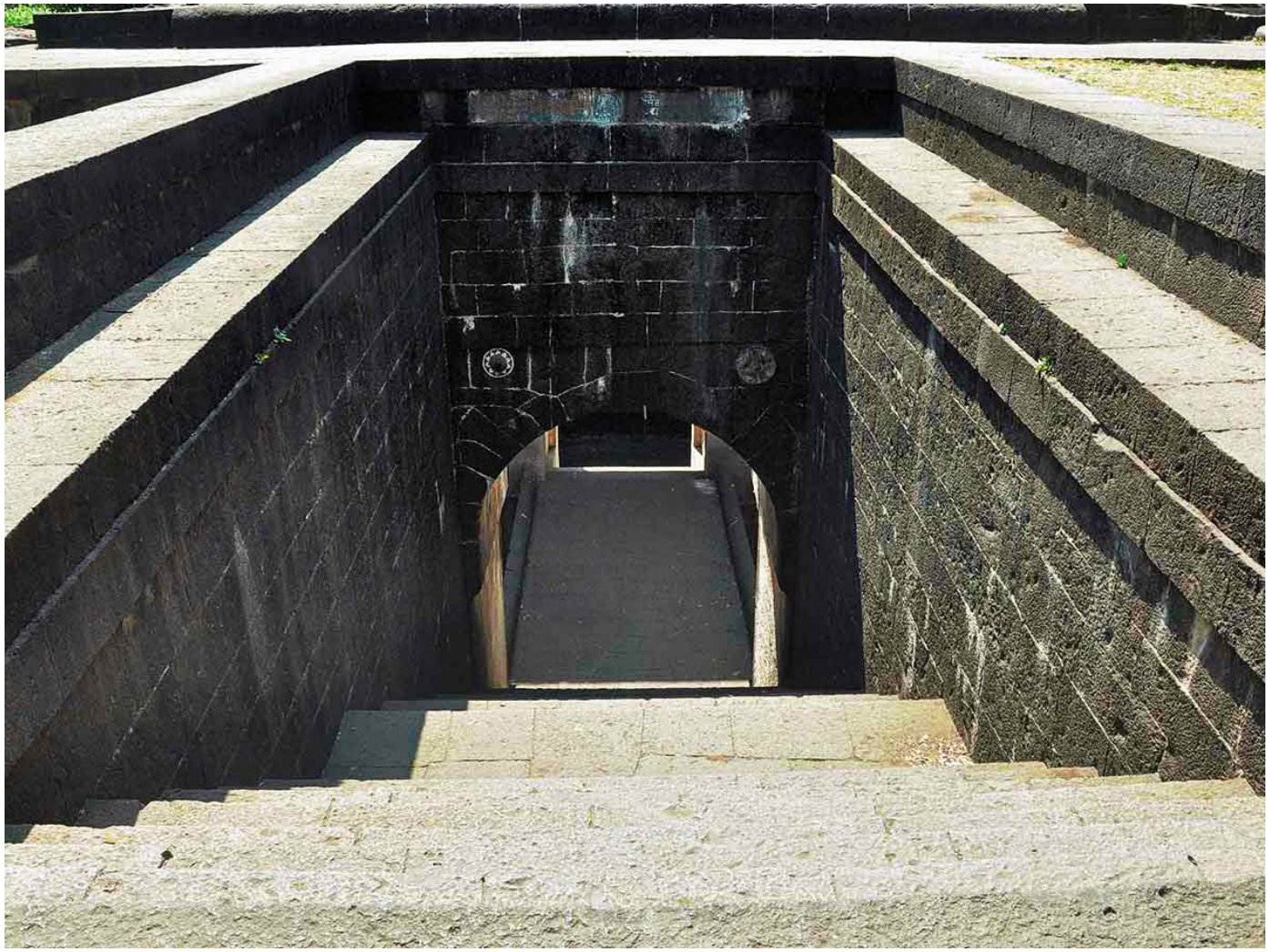

The grand staircase leads towards the well and the palace.

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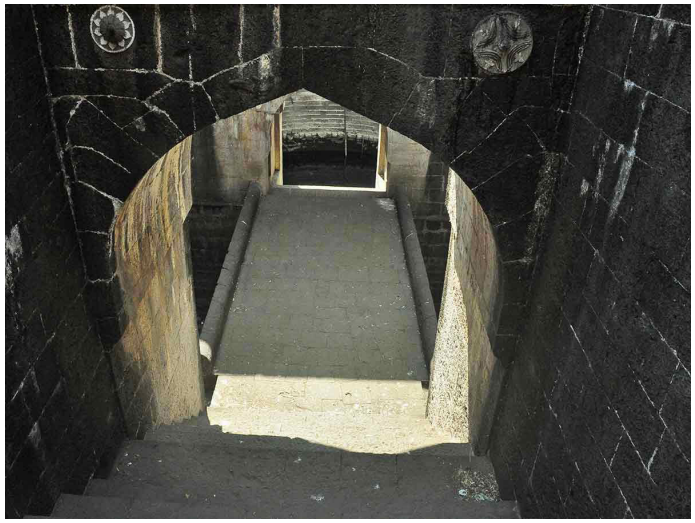
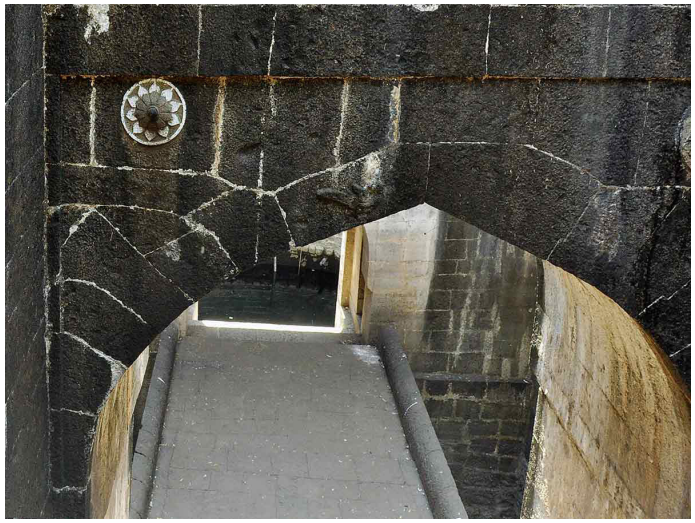
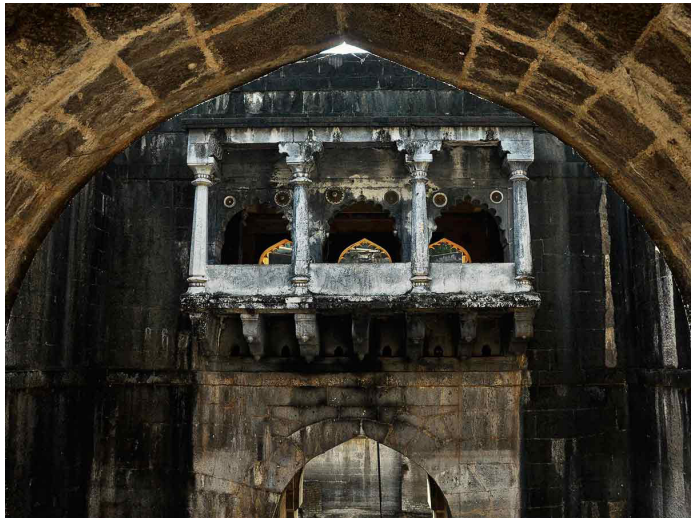


The passage connects the two arches. This area is open to sky. This space was used as adjunct well in case if the water level increases in main well during the monsoon.



The motifs of the flowers are carved near the first arch. Most of the carvings are painted occasionally later on to enhance the beauty of it.



The front side view of the palace gallery from the entrance arch. The huge structure of the well carved in the black stone. Inside of the gallery has decorated by carving the motifs of flower.

The front view of the second arch of the well, the entire palace is based upon it. The two small staircases are placed at both the sides of pathway to reach out at the lower level of the well.

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The view of the balcony from below.

The inside view of the first arch from under the second arch. The height of the walls is almost 35 feet.

The space under the second arch opens to the well. The two entrances at the both the sides have steps which lead to main hall upstairs in the palace. The marks on the wall of well indicate the previous water level, sometime it raises high and this arch also gets drowned under the water.

The narrow staircase leads to the main hall on top from the second arch. The floral motifs are carved in the stone above the entrance.

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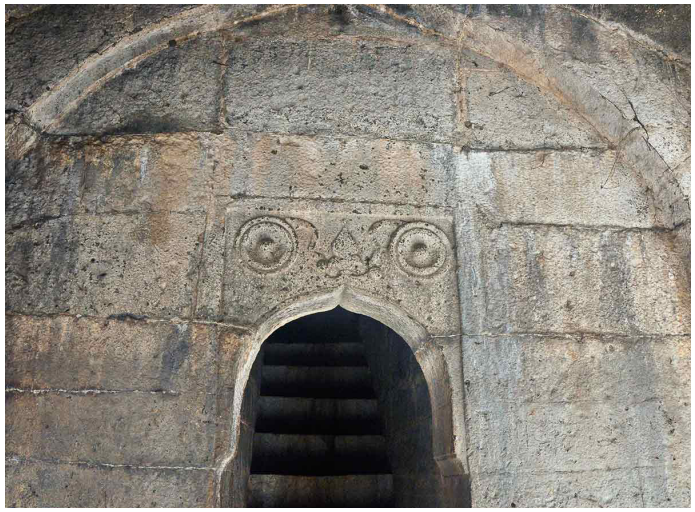
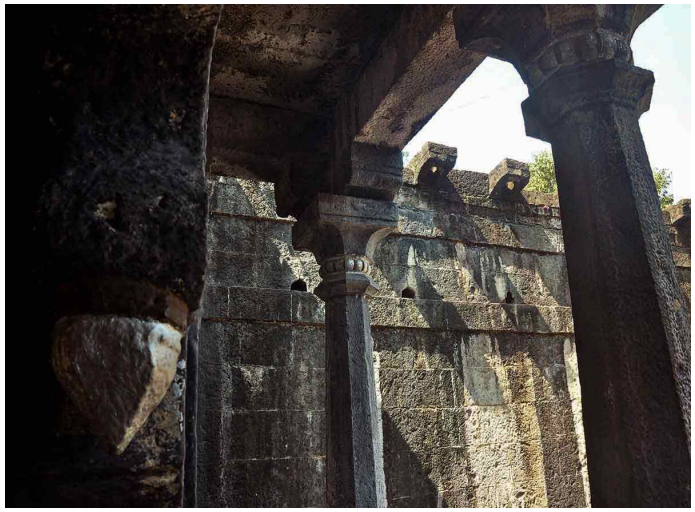


The narrow staircase leads to the main hall on top from the second arch. The floral motifs are carved in the stone above the entrance.



The moats can be watched through the balcony, to keep track of the water supply.

Creatively carved pillar at the centre of the hall. This pillar has a Lord Ganesh carved and is occasionally repainted and restored to its original colour.

Each pillar is carved differently. These pillars are at the centre of the hall in the palace. This pillar has a Lord Hanuman (Monkey God in Hindu mythology) carved and is occasionally repainted and restored to its original colour.

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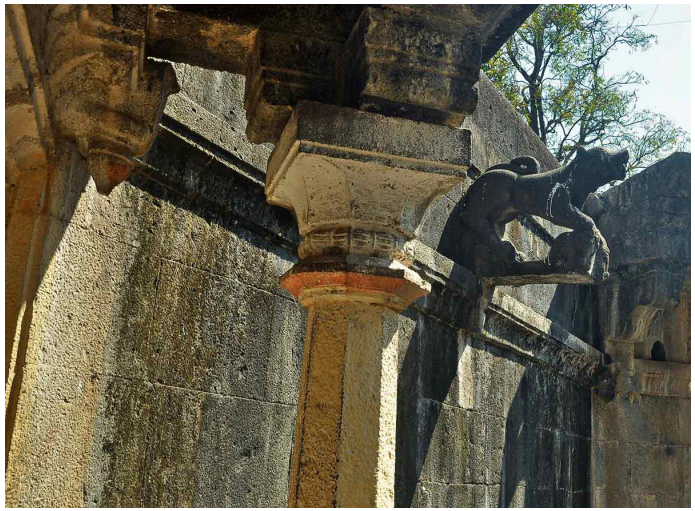
Creatively carved pillar at the centre of the hall. The lower part of the pillar is carved differently with a king riding horse, elephant and motif of flowers. The walls and the pillars were painted occasionally in the shades of grey, Brown, Orange, yellow and metallic colours.

Creatively carved pillar at the centre of the hall. The lower part of the pillar is carved differently with a king riding elephant and motif of flowers. The walls and the pillars were painted from time to time in the shades of grey, Brown, Orange, yellow and metallic colours.

The metal rings can be seen at the corner near the ceiling, which was the armament to hold the curtains at the widows.



This is the view of a sculpture of south facing tiger from the gallery in the palace.

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This is the view of a sculpture of south facing tiger from the gallery in the palace.

Two sculptures of a tiger out of four on the inner side of the octagonal well are south facing. Two elephants are carved under each of the tiger, which depicts the victory by the king at south.

Two sculptures of a tiger out of four on the inner side of the octagonal well are north facing. These two tigers are in the pose of jumping high, which depicts the king is about to move towards the north to conquer it.

This is one of the sculptures of the north facing jumping tiger. The artist during that time has done a good work in terms of the finishing of the sculptures.

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This is the view from the top of the octagonal main well.

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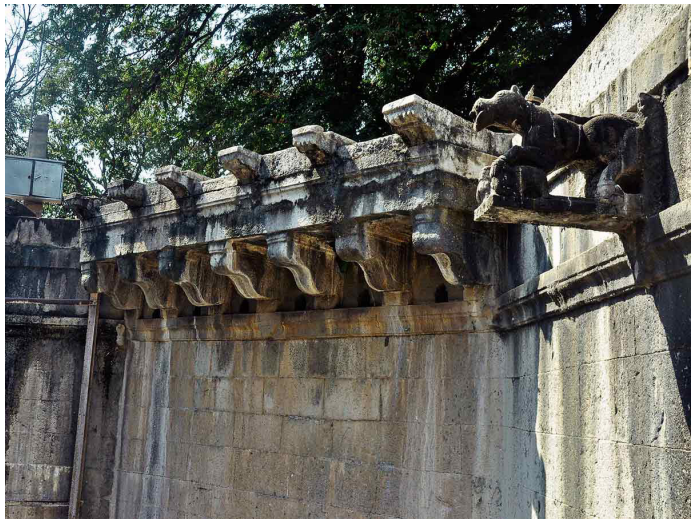
The main octagonal well has the provision of total fifteen moats out of only twelve moats were in use. Rest of the moats were operated rarely. It is fascinating to observe and study the arrangement of this many moats at one place.



The arrangement of five moats out of fifteen in octagonal well, at right hand side of the palace.

The arrangement of five moats out of fifteen in octagonal well, at left hand side of the palace.

This is the view of the main hall in the palace, which opens out to a well on either side.

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The motifs of flowers are used creatively while making the design of the ceiling. This entire area is occasionally repainted and restored to its original colour.

The pillars in the palace hall are also decorated by carved creative forms of birds with slight embossed effect.

The pillars in the palace hall are also decorated by carved creative forms of birds with slight embossed effect. Some forms are smaller and some motifs are carved in a bigger size.

There is a secret narrow door 'chor-darwaja' situated at one side of the palace hall which reaches out on the ground level of outer side of well.

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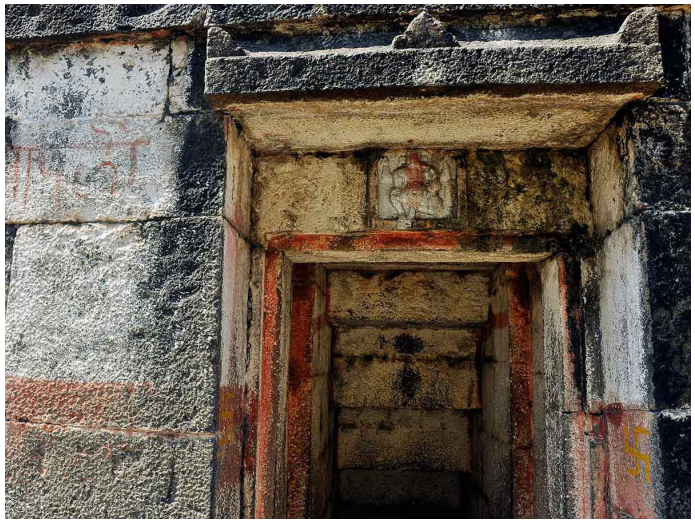

The secret narrow doors 'chor-darwaja' opens at the ground level. The Lord Ganesh is carved on the top of the door frame which is considered to be a blessing to the person exiting and entering this door.

The secret narrow doors 'chor-darwaja' opens at the ground level. The motif of flower is carved at the bottom of the door frame which is a symbol of hospitality.

The extra pumped water would flow out through this sculpture of a cow's face, which is also called 'Gomukha' in Hindu mythology.

The extra pumped water would flow out through this sculpture of cow's face. Such arrangement was designed on either of the well.

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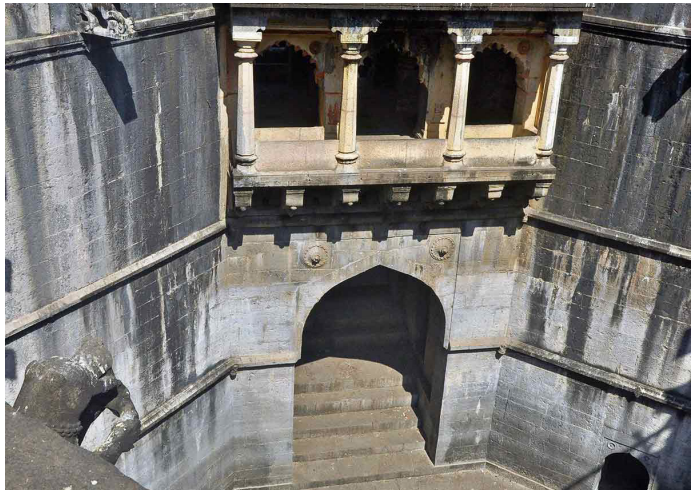
The water used to pump out from these moats and flow out into the fields. Suitable stones were used and the way they were carved enhanced the look and this process.

The side view of the palace and the council area. The king's council area was situated right above the palace.

The side view of the gallery which opens into the octagonal main well. This gallery has been also used as a view point to check and keep an eye on the activity related to water level such as the correct functioning of the moats.



On reaching to this arch there is an octagonal well and the palace is situated above this arch. Also, there is a small door on the right hand side which was used to reach out the lower level of the well.

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All the fifteen moats are situated on three sides of the well. The area which these five moats cover is same in size and appearance.

This is the view of the throne from the corner which is located above the palace.

This council area was used to have a meeting regarding the future preparation of conquering new land.

At the main entrance arch while looking through the inner gallery, two 'Sharabhas' (The legendary animal from the Hindu mythology) are carved in the stone.

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Some particular vehicle or a carrier was used to bring the stones for building the well, but now only the wheels of the carrier can be found lying around the well.

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This rectangular well has ten moats, five on two opposite sides. These ten moats were the arrangement of relieving the overflow of the water from the well.

The five moats are located at of the sides of rectangular well.

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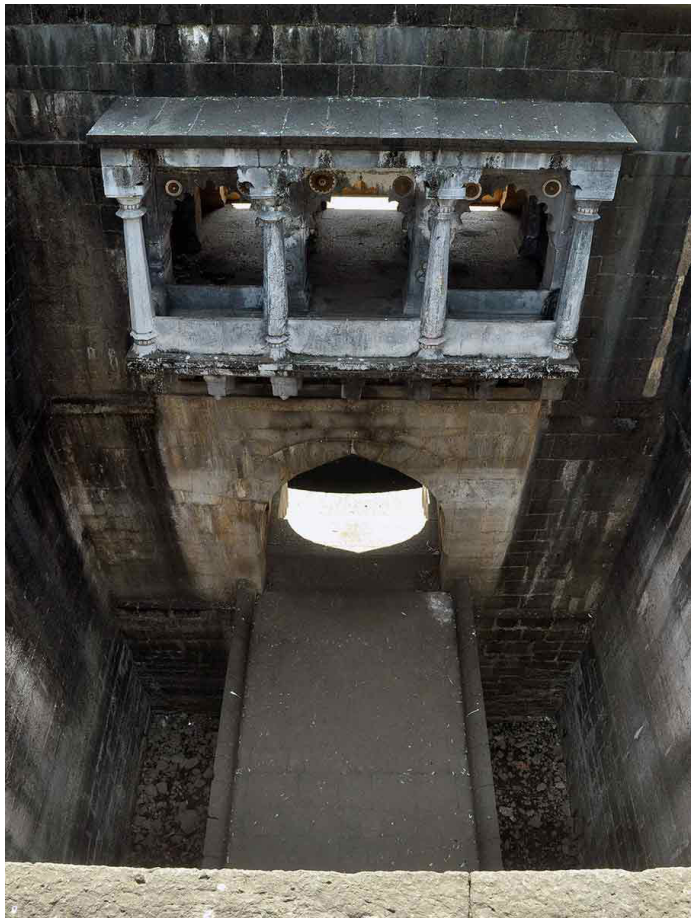
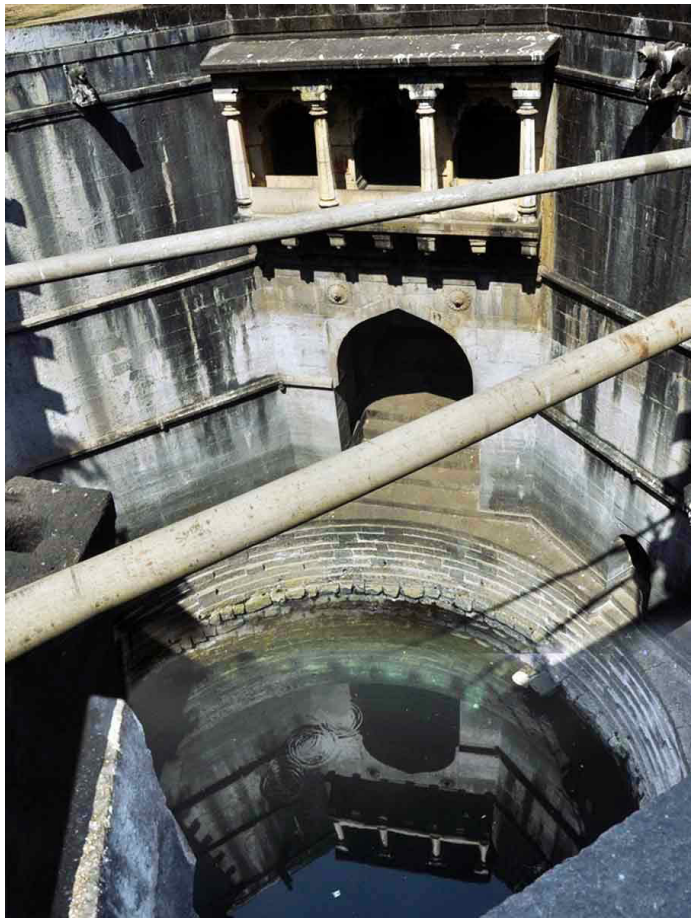


This is the top view of the rectangular well. The one side of the palace gallery opens into this well. There used to be steps which lead towards the lower level of the well, which are not visible clearly anymore due to wear and tear.



The reflection of the gallery and the huge arch looks beautiful in the well water. Baramotichi vihir is one of those beautiful monuments which were constructed in the realm of Marathas.

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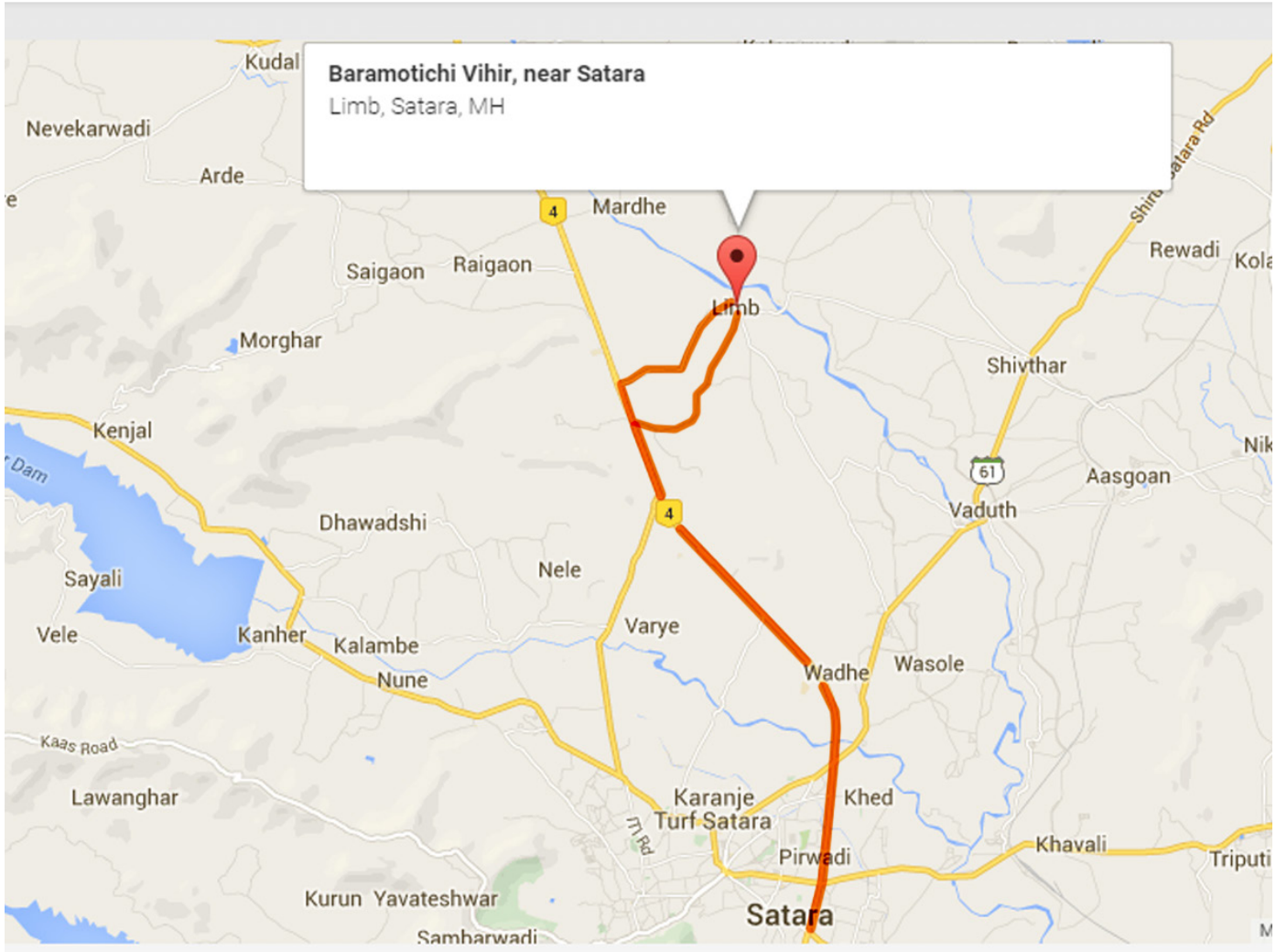

The Limb village is renowned for Baramotichi vihir. Limb is placed beside the National Highway number 4 and approximately 16 kilometers away from Satara city.

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