Chapter V

Haji Malang: Laying out the Context for Interactions
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As we move on from secondary literature related to the theme of study to understanding real people who have contributed to the entire exercise, it becomes imperative to begin with an introduction to the participants and their contexts. As described in the research setting, though there are several villages surrounding the mountain where the dargah of Haji Malang Baba is located, yet the entire setting could be called ‘Haji Malang’ since that is how it is popularly known. Herein might lay the significance of the shrine and the mountain where several other shrines of various nature and importance are located. However, it must be understood that a shrine or any physical structure is the manifestation or the symbolic edifice of what is more importantly the processes of people coming together in converging spaces. As for the research participants, we need to reckon that every individual or group involved in the study comes from a particular context with a particular understanding of the various processes of coexistence, interactions and adaptations.

In order to bring out these various strains of perception, this chapter attempts to cluster the participants around certain specific characteristics that bind them in certain respects and yet mark them out from each other. For instance, people from the surrounding villages could be called local inhabitants rooted in the geography who describe their personal and social backgrounds and also provide a general overview of the physical setting including the mountain village and its significance. On the other hand, there are people residing in the mountain village and though they also may be considered locals, they have a somewhat different way of living and it is quite a mish mash of languages, castes, religious backgrounds and economic relations that characterize this set of research participants.

Apart from this, another most significant cluster is that of devotees who throng to the mountain to seek blessings from Baba Haji Malang and the various other deities stationed here. This is again not a homogeneous cluster as it includes general people who have been coming here for many years including those who are from outside the locale but play a significant role in rituals associated with the dargah. Then there are liminal groups
of eunuchs and *sadlus* and *faqirs* who wander from place to place, this being one of the spots. In a way, it is these people who perpetuate the significance of the mountain village and help to consolidate the interests of various groups of people associated with the place in various different capacities.

**Constructing Haji Malang – The Mountain Village**

Nestled amidst the mountainous ranges of the Sahyadri is the *dargah* of Haji Malang Baba – a resplendent domed structure housing the twin *mazars* of Haji Malang Baba and his daughter also known as *Maa Saab*. The *dargah* is a green and white structure with a verandah running all around it. Beyond the verandah is a huge courtyard paved with marble stones with a green flag staff situated in the middle. The two *mazars* inside the *dargah* lie side by side with *Maa Saab's mazar* being the smaller in size. Both of them are covered with cloth as well as flower *chadars* in abundance and this considerably increases the original height of the graves. The *dargah* has two doors – one serving as the entrance for devotees while the other serves as an exit.

The bustling scene of people and their activities around the shrine vouch for the significance of Haji Malang Baba’s *dargah* which has become a pivot for the rest of the mountain with the numerous communities, trades, shrines and legends that it houses. In fact, the associations of the shrine go beyond the mountain and into the surrounding landscape that has continuously contributed to the socio-historical and political significance of a shrine that stands for non-discrimination. Hundreds of people climb up and down everyday as they come from various regions to seek blessings from the saint who “fulfils all wishes”. The mountain is specifically known for the annual *urs* celebrated in the month of February and it would be useful to treat this as a point of departure for understanding the construction of the mountain village around the principal shrine – the Haji Malang *dargah*.

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65 A mountain range along the western side of India. It runs north to south along the western edge of the Deccan Plateau, and separates the plateau from a narrow coastal plain along the Arabian Sea. The range starts near the border of Gujarat and Maharashtra, south of the River Tapti, and runs approximately 1600 km through the states of Maharashtra, Goa, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala ending at Kanyakumari, at the southern tip of India (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Western_Ghats)
Malang Baba ka Jatra – Sabse Bada Tyohaar (Malang Baba’s Yatra is the Biggest Festival)

A continuous stream of vehicles plied along the Haji Malang road even as an Agriswoman in Mangrul sat at her tea and watermelon shop and mentioned that everything remained closed in the area for three days owing to Haji Malang Baba’s jatra. It was a high activity time on the mountain for everyone and the best time for business for people from all the villages around. She mentioned that she also would be going up to the mountain to put up a stall of watermelons and observed that doctors from the Mangrul health centre went up to the mountain during the jatra to serve people as there was a huge crowd and there were chances of people falling ill. The involvement of local people and the proactive practices of the state in providing health facilities, civic amenities and personnel for maintaining law and order was evidence enough to comprehend how important Baba’s jatra was. Jodha Gangad described the phenomenon as “Baba ki yatra jisse door door se log aate hain” (Baba’s yatra which draws people from far off places).

This famous jatra is a part of Haji Malang Baba’s urs that is celebrated on the mountain where Baba’s dargah is located. The centre of activity during this period was the mountain that overlooks the numerous villages in Haji Malang. A bus from Kalyan station stopped at the Haji Malang Bus Depot at Haji Malang wadi as the climb up the mountain began and scores of people were seen going up as they paid obeisance to deities at temples, dargahs and chillahs along the way. The mountain is a part of the Haji Malang wadi Group Gram Panchayat that includes the mountain, Haji Malang wadi village and Bandhanwadi (adivasi village with the Brahmin custodian’s house) and is no less a settlement than any other village around. In fact it would be interesting to understand the formation of this settlement as it branches out to the surrounding villages comprising the general locale around.

\textsuperscript{66} Agris belong to Other Backward Castes in Maharashtra and are found abundantly in Thane and Raigad districts. Historically they have been the prime landowners in these areas and have been occupied with agriculture.

\textsuperscript{67} The concept of Group Gram Panchayat has been explained later in this chapter.
The Haji Malang mountain – drawing its name from Haji Malang Baba – is physically situated in between two districts. On one side of the mountain falls Thane district comprising Ambarnath Taluka with its numerous villages. According to local people, the other side of the mountain fell in Raigad district and this was equally significant since “the milkmen, or other people coming here to sell and trade come from Raigad since these items are not available in the Thane side of the mountain”. The climb up the mountain village begins at the Haji Malang bus stop leading into a shaded lane with steps and flanked with shops on both sides. The shops range from those selling flowers, chādars as offerings to Baba to others selling tea, snacks, fruits, cold drinks etc. and besides, there are hotels that serve meals and food for travellers.

Anybody who has visited Haji Malang would remember it for three distinct features – (1) the monkeys who are constantly yearning to receive roasted gram from the visitors; (2) the faqirs who hanker for money in return for blessings that they promise would be
bestowed by Haji Malang Baba (for the faqirs apparently share a special relationship with Baba and hence can seek blessings on behalf of their patrons); (3) a lepers’ colony that is a unique element of the mountain village.

Along the mountainous path, there were numerous milestones at different places depicting the names of the people who had donated them in the name of Baba Haji Malang. The names also included the addresses of the devotees and it was evident that people from different regions, religions, castes and languages had visited Haji Malang to seek blessings. There were many such with Hindu, Muslim and Christian names and quite a few of them with distinct Sindhi names. In fact the Bhojwani family had its name in a lot of places especially denoting construction of drinking water taps, pumps, toilets, dispensaries etc. They seemed to have donated all these in the name of their deceased son Late Prakash. Most of these facilities were non-functional and the buildings such as dispensaries remained vacant.

However, the present picture of the settlement is very different from how people remembered it from earlier years. People like Noori Pathan – wife of a deceased forest guard, an old Agri inhabitant and Vishnu Ketkar (custodian of the Haji Malang dargāh) recollected that this used to be a densely forested mountain with barely three or four houses along its entire length. Pathan – who came here fifty years back after her marriage now lives in a small house on the mountain – remembered just a narrow strip of road that ran through the forested mountain and people would climb through this to go up. Jodha Gangad from the adivasi pada mentioned that three dargāhs have always existed on the mountain since he could remember and also from stories he had heard from his father and grandfather.

Yahan 3 dargāh hai– bada dargah jisme Baba aur unki beti hai, ek Sultan Shah Baba ka aur ek Bakhtar Shah Baba ka (there are 3 dargāhs here. The big one in which you find Baba and his
daughter, one Sultan Baba’s and one Bakhtar Baba’s). Then there is panch pir which has 5 mazars. The shrine of Pouch pir is located on forest land and falls into the dargah trust. These are the oldest shrines here.

In terms of physical location in the ascending order, Bakhtar Shah Baba’s dargah came first, followed by Sultan Shah Baba’s dargah finally leading to Haji Malang Baba’s dargah. Describing this path as he remembered from his childhood, the fifty five years old custodian Vishnu Ketkar explained that the climb from the first dargah was a very steep one leading into a thick forest eventually clearing out on reaching the premises of the Haji Malang dargah. He also described the sparsely populated mountain which was known for the Darbar Hotel – the only one that existed earlier – and the seven baudis in the forest used as sources of drinking water. Ketkar counted the baudis as “Lambi baudi, Gol baudi, Chashma baudi, Fanas baudi, Khazana baudi, another Khazana baudi near Bala Ansar and Sher baudi located in the forest”.

Rahim, a sixty five years old Muslim waiter in a hotel on the mountain mentioned that very few people would visit the mountain earlier since it was densely forested and to go up would scare them for fear of wild animals. Rahim came here from Nashik as an eleven year old with his mother who was a great devotee of Haji Malang Baba. Once when she was unwell, she came to Haji Malang and asked Baba to cure her and in return she promised that “I will come to your darbar (court) for ever”. Rahim’s mother was cured and she stayed back and eventually passed away. Rahim continued staying here and worked as a hamal and then started working in Patil Hotel (owned by an Agri family) where he continues even today. According to Rahim, the mountain started attracting more and more people with the increased frequency of the bus service to Haji Malang. As a child he had seen that the bus would ply once every two hours and would stop plying after 5.30 p.m. However, as it increased its frequency, people started coming and the population increased. Those who came settled here to set up business and build houses to live in.

As the houses came up, people felt the need to clear the forests and Jodha Gangad felt that this was how the mountain began transforming into a settlement. With the forests gone, more and more people started coming here to seek blessings from Haji Malang
Baba and as their wishes were granted, they offered to build steps along the mountain. This in turn made the climb easier thus drawing more people. Mengal, a devotee of Haji Malang Baba had been coming here for the past sixty years and recollected that even some forty years back, there was no structure around here except for makeshift huts made with paper, plastic etc. The scenario had changed and the mountain had given way to a mountain village with people from various backgrounds settled there and engaged in day-to-day interactions based on social and economic frameworks. In fact the settlement had been formalised with a tax naka which charges two rupees to everyone who visits the mountain and this money goes towards the Group Gram Panchayat expenses for public utility services.

Evidently, one sees how it is people who have added to the significance of Haji Malang over many years to turn it into the place it is today. Starting from the mountain village and coming down to its hinterland, we see numerous communities that have gradually settled in the site while at the same time bringing their practices, customs and traditions to live and add to the society physically represented as Haji Malang.

Babas' darbār caters to the livelihood of three villages around the mountain: People, Interactions and Economy

Sitting at her shop selling fruits for weary travellers, a Muslim lady narrated how she came here thirty years back. As a child, every year she would come with her parents from Karnataka to visit the Haji Malang dargāh. Gradually she grew up and then while she came here as a teenager, she fell in love with a man who owned this particular shop on the mountain. They got married and she continued living here after her husband passed
away. Such were the stories of many people who came here, settled down and started a livelihood. According to Jodha Gangad, there were Agris, Kannadas, Bhaiyars, Bengalis, all living here together and this included both Hindus and Muslims. Custodian Vishnu Ketkar added that more people started inhabiting the mountain after the Haji Malang dargah trust was formed and it was around 1960s that many shops came up here. It was evident that the present settlement with basic services in place was not a very old one and Rahim observed that electricity had come to the mountain only some thirty years back.

For people from across the numerous villages around the mountain, this was the only hub that showed Hindus and Muslims living together. People in Kharad village mentioned that it is only in Haji Malang wadi and that too on the mountain that one would find Mohammedans for “Hindus and Muslims have been living there together for years and you would find different communities there”. People in Dhole and Mangrul villages were emphatic in mentioning that these were all Hindu villages except for Haji Malang wadi where the mountain was inhabited by a mixed population of Hindus and Muslims. As Arun Patil rightly pointed out, people came here, opened a shop or a hotel and then continued living on the mountain. What becomes apparent from here is that people were drawn to the place firstly out of their devotion to Haji Malang Baba and secondly due to the economic opportunities it provided. As a result, these opportunities were linked to Baba’s blessings and it became a stronger reason to continue living on the mountain where Baba would ensure economic prosperity for his devotees.

Sitaram Kumbhar, owner of a shop on the mountain was a case in point who validated this inter-relationship thus:

“We believe in Baba very strongly and it is only due to him that we can eat and live. I never asked Baba for anything but he has given me everything I needed. It is owing to him that my trade continues, I have one son and this shop is enough for him to live on.”

68 People from the state of Karnataka speaking Kannada language
69 Colloquial term used for people from the state of Uttar Pradesh who have come to Maharashtra in search of livelihood
Sitaram Kumbhar hailed from Kumbharli village – a village of Kumbhars or potters – and had been living on the mountain for more than thirty years. Ramabai Kumbhar, another original resident of Kumbharli village also owned a shop on the mountain for thirty years now. The old lady sat at her shop selling earthenware such as chillums and pots. Ramabai’s son mentioned that apart from his job in a company, he also ran a pathpedhi (small savings group) with people on the mountain. Around 25-30 families on the mountain were members of this group and he collected money – different amounts ranging from rupees 50-100 – from them and deposited the daily sum at the pathpedhi office located in Kumbharli village. Describing membership patterns, he explained that people from all religions took up membership and “after all, what’s a Hindu or a Muslim when it comes to a savings group”. As for family occupation, his brother too was involved with running pathpedhis for eighteen villages and apart from that, they had this shop on the mountain and little land in Kumbharli where they could cultivate only rice.

Apart from such shops, there were florists, especially close to the Haji Malang dargah and they had been here for many years. Most of these shops were managed by Muslims except for one shop owned by the Ketkar family and even here the employees were Muslims. According to a phoolwala (florist/flower seller), another major business on the mountain was renting out rooms to devotees who would come to seek blessings. Almost all the residents, especially closer to the Haji Malang dargah had constructed lodges, small rooms with attached baths or just rooms to be rented out to people. For rooms with no baths, separate hamams or public bathrooms had been constructed. These accommodations were such major business investments that during the urs of Haji Malang Baba, they would be rented out for as much as Rupees 5,000 – 10,000 per room for two days. The florists on both sides of the way leading to the main dargah called out to people constantly to hire rooms and hamams to take bath.

There were also houses that had been built to be rented out to people who wanted to live on the mountain and earn a living. Both Hindus and Muslims constructed pucca houses or even make shift ones and rented them out to people irrespective of their religious backgrounds. As mentioned by people from the local villages, the pahad was a major source of income for people around it and rightly so, there were hotels owned by Agris
from Haji Malang wadi village. Sarita and Manohar Patil (both Agris) from Haji Malang wadi also owned hotels while there were adivasis who worked as hamals and doli bearers. It was an advantage for people from Haji Malang wadi to be living so close to the mountain since it was youth from here who were employed by the trusts at the dargahs for daily maintenance and management. For people from other villages, there were other occupations such as setting up shops, selling various kinds of goods during the annual urs and so on.

It was interesting to note that procuring employment at the dargah trust was a much sought after option. A faqir called Nawaz Ali echoed this sentiment when he told custodian Vishnu Ketkar that “I have served you all my life and I am determined to get a job for my son in the dargah”. Laying out options, Ketkar mentioned that the dargah trust would be starting a ticket system for the people wanting to go to Bala Ansar and this required a person who would need to manage it. He tried to persuade Nawaz Ali to engage his son for this post.

The entire mountain with its various inhabitants struggled for daily livelihood and continued to seek blessings from Baba so that they could make ends meet. Interactions crossed boundaries as Hindus and Muslims sought employment in each others' shops, families shared life stories along with spices and other items of daily needs. When asked whether people had great faith in Haji Malang Baba or not, a school teacher from the Haji Malang wadi primary school observed “Pet to bharne hoga na, aur urs ke waqt sabse zyaada dhandha hota hai” (people need to fill their stomach and maximum profits come from the annual urs).

**I can feel the Invisible Power when I come here: Devotees to Haji Malang**

Babu was both a faqir and a sadhu and as he sat inside his small hut he emphasized that just like people from various backgrounds lived on this mountain, people from all religious background visited this place since “Malang Sarkar belonged to everyone”. According to Babu, the Gaus Pak mazar (on the mountain) that he looked after was built

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70 A particular peak in the Haji Malang range of mountains that provided adventurous climbing opportunities especially for trekkers
by a person from Bijapur. He had no real need to build it, but out of his devotion for Malang Sarkar and to follow his orders, he had built the place. The man from Bijapur came there occasionally, spent money to help people and went away. Indeed, a deeper interaction with people climbing up and down the mountain revealed that they were from many different castes, religions, regions and speaking various languages. A Maharashtrian Hindu family from Pune had come to the mountain in remembrance of their deceased father who was a sincere devotee of Haji Malang Baba and used to visit Baba’s dargah every year till he passed away. A family member mentioned that they did not come here to ask for boons, but just to pay their respects to Baba.

On the other hand, young boys belonging to the Pardhi community and hailing from Osmanabad had come for Haji Malang Baba’s urs as they were sure that Baba would grant their wishes. They explained how their people “come here every year. Almost 3/4 of the Pardhi community comes here for Baba’s palkhi. Ten trucks full of Pardhis have come this year. Each truck carries 100 people, so you see, there are 1,000 Pardhis who have come for the mela.” Similarly, a young Muslim girl from Diva had come with her friend to thank Baba since she had been cured of her illness due to his blessings. At her mother’s behest, the girl had come to sacrifice a hen as an offering to Baba in return for his blessings. Such votive offerings were a common practice and local people mentioned that Haji Malang drew the maximum devotees from Karnataka who brought goats to be sacrificed to Baba and then celebrated niyaz where they distributed the meat to family, friends and other people.

There were other people who had continued their family tradition of deep allegiance to Haji Malang Baba. An old Muslim man from Pune had been coming here since his childhood when he used to visit the dargah with his parents and grandmother. According to him, many people from Pune came here to take back Baba’s sandal. He observed with great pride that people from all religions came here as there was no restriction on anyone and even women could enter Baba’s dargah unlike many other dargahs in Pune and Mumbai. Another middle aged Muslim lady from Pune mentioned that she had been coming to Baba for the last thirty years and had never missed a single urs. A middle aged Hindu Maharashtrian man from Santa Cruz (Mumbai) echoed her sentiment and
explained that every year he came for Baba’s palkhi which carried the saint’s sandal on the day of his urs.

A group of Tamilians with Hindus and Muslims forming part of the same family had been coming for the urs every year for some twenty years since one of the women in the group had been blessed with a son after she had wished for one before Haji Malang Baba. Her sister’s daughter had married a Muslim man and she had also started coming to pray to Baba for her family’s well being. The families lived in Mumbai and looked upon the urs as a very auspicious occasion. Another thirty seven year old Tamil lady had come from Dharavi, Mumbai for the first time and wanted to continue coming every year. She mentioned that she was encouraged by her “good” Muslim neighbour who was a regular visitor to the shrine. An insight into the contexts of the various people who visited Haji Malang depicted layers of identities that go beyond the popular notions of singular identity structure. Such instances uphold coexistence and shared perspectives across people and as Gottschalk (2000: 34) explains, “Hindus and Muslims have interacted and continue to interrelate in private and public arenas – even those identified as “religious” by participants – sharing identities beyond the religious ones”.

A very interesting group of people comprising an old Maharashtrain Brahmin and two middle-aged Parsees came for the urs regularly. Chiplunkar, a Maharashtrain Brahmin from Ambarnath – very well versed in English, Arabic and other languages – had been coming for the last forty five years and he was accompanied by Bomi who lived in Tardeo and had been a devotee of Haji Malang Baba since his childhood. Bomi’s late father and mother had been regular visitors to Haji Malang and so had been Sarosh’s family. However, Sarosh had settled in the United States and hence he made it a point to come for the urs every alternate year. They recollected a time when a large number of Parsees would come to pay respects to the saint.
While the above mentioned devotees of Haji Malang Baba could be categorized neatly into their respective communities based on their religion and language we must not forget Babu who referred to himself both as a faqir as well as a sadhu. In fact an entire section of those who professed allegiance to Baba mentioned how they lived between categories and could relate with many religious identities. For example, Bharat was a wandering mendicant from Karnataka who called himself a faqir. Dressed in a tattered saffron robe, he explained that he had been wandering in various temples and dargâhs for the last thirty years. Similarly Tora Bora Baba from Jind, Haryana was known as Sant Abdul Majeed or neem ka peer. Sitting at the Rajai chowk – one of the Malang astanâs in Haji Malang – he called himself a Malang faqir. Born into a Hindu family, Tora Bora Baba had dedicated his life to spread communal harmony and had been awarded the Sant Longowal Award for his work. Dressed in a bora (sack cloth), he closed his eyes and shook his head from side to side at the beat of drums people played while they came up the hill to participate in the urs.

Eighty two years old Baba Sidhwani was born in Karachi in a Hindu Sindhi family and had a Muslim Guru in Pakistan. He came to know of Haji Malang Baba at the age of twenty four when he was a forest officer in Gujarat. He asked Baba to grant his wish of getting married and Baba did not let him down. Out of gratitude to Baba, Sidhwani decided to dedicate his entire life in the service of Haji Malang Baba and he thought the best way to do this would be to serve the poor and the pilgrims who visited the dargâh. Sidhwani built 1100 steps going up to the shrine and also built Sufi Darshan – a place at the foot of the mountain which contained deities from all religions and also prayers halls for people from various faiths. A London trained physician, Sidhwani called himself a
Faqir and also ran a dispensary every Thursday especially to cater to the health needs of poor tribals. His wish was to get buried in Haji Malang according to Islamic rituals.

Indeed, for faqirs, one’s religion or faith held no boundary against friendship, as they believed that these categories had been created by human beings and not by the divine master. Rahman Syed, a faqir from Gulbarga had been coming to Haji Malang Baba’s darbar for many years now. He never missed the urs and he traversed the entire distance from Gulbarga to Haji Malang on foot over twenty days. He had also brought along his friend and explained that “My friend is a Hindu called Ram and he has been troubled for many days. I told him that he must seek Baba’s blessings and his troubles will be gone”. Both Syed and Ram were very poor and did not even have money to pay for the tea they had at a shop in Mangrul. However they were extremely rich in their devotion for the saint on the mountain and this is what mattered most to them.

The common refrain across all devotees who came to Haji Malang was that this place was open to all and embraced everybody irrespective of their background, religion or other attributes. Shefali, a eunuch from Ulhasnagar attested this feeling when she mentioned that “Our people have been coming here for the last 36 years. I have been coming for the last 7-8 years.” The dargah of Haji Malang has been known distinctly for the crowd of eunuchs that it draws. According to local people, “the khala log71 come here and now they have been allotted space on the mountain to build a house.” They mentioned that the economy of the Haji Malang mountain was largely dependent on the eunuchs who arrived for the urs, stayed for eight days and spent a lot of money in renting accommodation, food and other facilities established for business purposes.

Very interestingly, the eunuchs had the right to hoist a flag on the mountain to announce the commencement of the annual urs and they also offered expensive chadar to Baba and Maa Saab72. Mehak, a eunuch who had been coming to Haji Malang with her Guru since her childhood, observed that

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71 A term used for the eunuchs visiting Haji Malang. Khala is a term used by Muslims to denote the relation of mother’s sister
72 Maa Saab was the adopted daughter of Haji Malang Baba and her grave lay beside Baba’s grave inside the Haji Malang dargah
We worship gods from all faiths and visit all kinds of religious sites. The society does not want to assign a position of honour to us since we fall in between the male and female. In such a situation, places like the Haji Malang dargah are breathing spaces since they do not discriminate against anyone and are open to all. We come here with full confidence that Baba will not send us back empty handed.

It seemed like a gathering of eunuchs from various places such as Mumbai, Pune, Karnataka and they stayed in rented rooms, decked themselves up in full show and danced with renewed vigour every time they had to entertain people visiting during the urs. They felt that it was a place where they could express themselves through song and dance without being conscious or without the fear of being judged by the larger society. Many of them were particularly drawn to Maa ki mazar (the grave of mother - Haji Malang Baba’s adopted daughter) and looked upon the grave as a symbol that emphasized a special inclusive element for women and eunuchs - as they identified closely with women.

For this set of people, it was their faith in Haji Malang Baba that drew them to the mountain for years together and it was insignificant which faith or religion they chose to profess in their daily lives. For them Baba was the sole force behind their well being and the love and affection with which they invoked Haji Malang Baba or Malang Sarkar was testimony to the fact that faith\(^{73}\) cuts across boundaries of region, religion, caste and other such constructions. Devotees coming to Haji Malang share a common spiritual quest even as they differ in their physical locations, occupations and social contexts. For the local people around Haji Malang, their religious identities and affiliations were as important as the significance of the saint on the mountain. Similarly, for the mountain village, trade relations seemed to be the fundamental basis of interactions and cohabitation. However, for people who came to seek Baba’s blessings, the sole drive was their faith in Baba.

The Haji Malang dargah does not exist in isolation; rather it almost subsumes the social geography of the landscape around it starting with Haji Malang wadi village and then

\(^{73}\) Refer to discussion around the concepts of ‘faith’ and ‘religion’ in Chapter II
getting distributed into many other villages dotting the entire route from Kalyan Station to Haji Malang.

**Describing Haji Malang wadi**

Haji Malang wadi is situated at the foot of the mountain and is the beginning point for the mountain as it draws its name from the dargâh of Haji Malang Baba. Like any other Group Gram Panchayat, Haji Malang wadi also came within one such Panchayat. However this was a distinct case with three characteristically different villages forming the Group Panchayat. While Wadi gaon was a predominantly Agri village with around sixty households and an adivasi settlement, the Group Panchayat also included Bandhanwadi – a village populated by tribals (mostly Thakurs and some Katkaris) – with just one Brahmin family, that of the custodian of the Haji Malang dargâh. The third element in the Panchayat was the Haji Malang mountain with its numerous and mixed settlements of Hindus and Muslims from various regions. All the three taken together formed the Haji Malang wadi Group Gram Panchayat that decided on budgetary allocations for roads, stairs on the mountain and other public utilities. Attesting this fact, Manas Ketkar observed that his village Bandhanwadi came under the Group Gram Panchayat that included Haji Malang wadi (reference to the mountain), the mountain road, the bus stop, wadi and Bandhanwadi. According to Kamlabai Patil, a 61 year old Aanganwadi worker and resident of Wadi gaon, her records showed that Haji Malang wadi had a total of 108 households.
Govind Patil, the sixty years old ex-sarpanch of the Group Gram Panchayat Haji Malang wadi observed that wadi gaon belonged to the Agri samaj with few scattered settlements of Thakur and Katkari tribals. Going into the history of the village, Narayan Patil’s wife, a sixty five years old Agri woman recollected that when she came here after her marriage fifty years back, there were “the adivasi padas and just seven good houses in this village besides that of the Brahman’s”. She further explained that the Agris came here from Uran and this was a predominantly Agri village with four adivasi padas viz. Bhendi pada, Koprekarwadi, Bandhanwadi and Shiv mandir. Seventy five years old Manohar Patil, one of the oldest residents of the village who had shifted base to Kalyan added to this history saying that “Haji Malang wadi village is very old – My grandfather came there first and then got people from outside to settle here and it is an only Agri village”. Comparing it to certain other villages, he mentioned that unlike other villages, Haji Malang wadi did not have Shimpi (Tailor), Hajaam (Barber) or any other community. Meena Pati pointed out that their families came to this village some 300-400 years back. Attempting to go by logic, she observed that one person must have come and settled here with his family thus multiplying into more and more. She said that a testimony to this fact was that each family in the village was related to the other as kutumb in the form of brothers, cousins and so on. Describing the communities in the village, she said that apart from the majority Agris, there was one Brahmin household – that of the pujari of the mountain. Besides, there were some lower Agri castes also known as Kolis or fisher folk.

Interestingly, according to a seventy six years old Agri man, the village was known as Bammanwadi and he included all the three villages in his definition:

This village is called Bammanwadi. It is populated by the Agri community and the residence of the Brahmin is at a distance of ten minutes from here. The tribals are settled around his house and there are some Muslim houses too like Yusuf’s who stays close to the Brahmin. Earlier, this was a forest area. There was a small mazar (grave) on top of the mountain and nobody would dare to go there alone. What is called Sultan nagri today was a forest of black peppercorn trees. Gradually, as people started coming to stay here, houses were built; dargah, mandir, everything was built. Here, people live together in peace. We all participate in each other’s marriage functions, festivals etc. It was only after the inception of Raajkaran that the panchayat was formed and things started changing.
Thirty years old Arun Patil echoed the above explanation that this village was indeed known as Bannmanwadi since the Brahman family resided here and later as the name of Haji Malang Baba gained popularity it came to be known as Haji Malang wadi. Meena Patil validated the information as she said that this used to be an only Brahmin village, but as the community got educated, they moved out in search of various professions with just the Pujari’s family left behind as the single Brahmin family. She added that the only other village where one would find Brahmins was Karawle which was also known as Bamman Karawle (Karawle inhabited by Brahmins).

Describing Bandhanwadi – the settlement where the Brahmin family was located – Manas Ketkar observed that apart from being known as Bannmanwadi owing to his family, “This village is called Bandhanwadi and it might have been named after Bandhandev, the gamdevta (village deity) and the shrine of the deity still exists at the end of the village”. Bandhanwadi was significant since it was an all adivasi settlement accommodating one Brahmin and one Muslim household. The adivasi population in the village was a mix of Thakur and Katkari adivasis. Some of the adivasis worked for the Brahmin family while others carried out various other tasks for a living. The other adivasi settlement in Haji Malang wadi was called Bhendipada after some Bhendi trees – bearing yellow flowers – surrounding the settlement.

According to local people, all the villages in the vicinity were structured in such a manner that the adivasi population from each village inhabited a settlement on the outskirts of the village and this came to be known as the adivasi pada for the village. Jodha Gangad, an adivasi from Bhendi pada adjoining Haji Malang wadi mentioned that their settlement had a mix of Thakur and Katkari adivasis and the Katkaris were more in number with just 15-20 Thakur houses. Jodha’s twenty eight years old son clarified that the Thakurs in Bhendi pada lived separately from the Katkaris and their settlement was called the Thakur pada. He further explained how they were strictly Hindu Thakurs and must not be confused with non-Hindu Thakurs who belonged to the Warli adivasi community. Jodha observed that the Thakurs were endogamous and would marry only within Thakurs and it was a Brahmin who must officiate in their marriage ceremonies.
Geographically speaking, water for irrigation was a scarce resource in these parts and if
one travelled through the terrain at any time of the year except for the monsoons, one
would find dry patches of land with thorny bushes and parched masses of leaves gathered
across the land. According to the *Agri* woman from Mangrul, rice was the only crop that
could be grown once a year in these parts and everything else like vegetables and other
food items had to be brought from the markets in Ulhasnagar or Kalyan. A number of
wells could be seen in each village and people said that they relied on the *baudi ka paani*
(well water) largely for drinking water purposes as there was no river that ran through the
terrain. Ramchandra Patil from Kharad lamented that since paddy was the only crop that
could be cultivated besides very few vegetables, one had to depend only on the rainy
season for agriculture since absolutely no cultivation was possible during the *dhooop kaal*
(dry/sunny months).

**Surrounding Villages and Communities**

As we take a bus from Kalyan railway station to Haji Malang\(^1\), we briefly pass through
the urban settlements and market areas of Kalyan before entering into a route marked by
villages and agricultural fields on both sides. The distance of sixteen kilometres is
punctuated with stops at almost every village as the bus passes through village viz.
Adavli, Pisavli, Bhal, Vasar, Kharad, Dhoke, Kakarwal, Nevali, Karawle, Mangrul and
Kushavl before finally reaching *Haji Malang wadi*. School teachers teaching in local
*Zilla parishad* (district council) schools added to this information saying that this is not
enough and that there were many other villages – *Ambegaon, Posre, Chinchavali, Chirad, Dwarli, Kumbharli, Shiravli, Dhangarwadi, Bonoli, Gorpe, Kakode, Budul, Bandhanwadi, Shelarpada, Pali, Naren* – in the vicinity. The entire area is included in
Ambarnath *Taluka* under the administrative jurisdiction of the Thane district with the
*Zilla parishad* looking after civic issues including health and education.

However, it is interesting to note that while according to people, all the above mentioned
villages are separate settlements, according to administrative records, they are not so.

\(^1\) The conductor of the bus keeps calling out ‘Haji Malang’ even as the board of the bus says ‘Malang gad’
Ramchandra Patil, the *Police Patil* (post of customary community head)\(^7\) of Kharad village explained that since all the villages in the area were small in size and had few households, three to four villages had been clustered together to form *Group Gram Panchayats*. Based on this arrangement, Kharad – with around 115 households and a population of 700-800 people – was also a part of a *Group Gram Panchayat* and came under the jurisdiction of Ambarnath Taluka and Ulhasnagar Police Station. Patil’s family had been living in Kharad for many generations now and he had been serving as the *Police Patil* since 1982. He has been living in a two storey house with his family comprising his wife, four sons and two daughters-in-law.

Kharad had an interesting history of resettlement since it shifted to its present location some fifty years back. According to the villagers, it was earlier situated close to the main road, but after some trouble, the entire village was forced to relocate to the present spot. It was widely believed that the *gaon devi* (village goddess) wanted the village to be relocated and hence the troubles leading to it were indications for this to happen. It was after this that the villagers took a decision not to allow any outsider to come and settle in their village. Kharad was an exclusively *Agri* village and no other *jammat* (community) resided here. In fact people in Kharad observed that most of the villages around had a majority *Agri* population.

Manas Ketkar, the son of the present custodian of the Haji Malang *dargah* and resident of Haji Malang *wadi* village also mentioned that the majority population across all these villages comprised of the *Agri samaj* followed by Marathas, *kunbis* (agricultural caste), *kumbhar* (potter caste) and very few Muslim *telis* in Karawle village. According to him, both Hindus and Muslims lived around this area and that there were tribals too, but they were counted among Hindus – “*Hindu pot jaat mein aate hain woh log*” (tribals belong to Hindu sub-castes). Residents of Kharad described how people from other castes would be found in Dhoke village adjoining Kharad where one would find different communities

\(^7\) A post equal to that of a village *mukhia* (headman) who solves disputes related to land, family etc. within the village without going out or to the police station. It is more like a customary community leadership respected by all in the village.
such as *Jai Bhim*, *Mahar*, *Kumbis* (agricultural Maratha sub-caste), *Rohidas* living together.

Describing further, they mentioned that there were three *adivasi padas* (tribal settlements) in the area viz. – *Bhendi (Thakur) pada*, *Bandhanwadi* and *Koprechiwadi*. Some people in the group mentioned emphatically that one would not find a single *Mohammedan* in any of the villages around. They observed that it was only in Haji Malang *wadi* and that too on the mountain that one would find *Mohammedans*. Sunil Gaikwad, Police Patil from Dhoke *gaon* belonged to the *Baudhd Samaj* (Buddhist Community) and according to him Dhoke had approximately sixty five houses with some 800 inhabitants. Out of this number, 20-22 houses belonged to people from the *Baudhd Samaj* and then there were *kumbis*, *Rohidas* and *Marathas* in the village. He mentioned that there were no *Mohammedans* or Christians in the surrounding ten villages around Kharad and Dhoke.

While Kharad and Dhoke were strategically significant as they came under the same *Group Gram Panchayat* and also housed one of the very few Higher Secondary schools in the area, Mangrul was equally important since it had the biggest health centre which catered to forty surrounding villages. A woman from Mangrul who belonged to the *Agri* community and whose family had been living there for many generations mentioned that Mangrul was an *Agri* village. She asserted that with the exception of Dhoke with a mixed population – “*wahan Harijan. Jai Bhim aur Maratha log rehte hain*” (*Harijans*, *Jai Bhims* and *Marathas* reside there) – and Haji Malang *wadi* with Hindus and Muslims living together, all the other villages in the vicinity were inhabited by *Agris* and this phenomenon stemmed from the fact that it was the *Agri* community that owned the maximum amount of land in the area. In fact Arun Patil from Haji Malang *wadi* claimed

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*Jai Bhim* is a colloquial term for Schedules castes or *dalits* and used to denote those who adhere to the Buddhist community and are followers of Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar. *Mahars* form the largest scheduled caste population of Maharashtra. Apart from being occupied as service castes they also exhibit expertise as warriors. Gradually, many of them converted to Buddhism following Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and came to be known as *NavBaudhd* (neo-Buddhists). *Rohidas* denotes scheduled castes who are otherwise also known as *Chamars* and are occupied as leatherworkers. A term coined by Mahatma Gandhi to denote people belonging to the lower strata of the Hindu caste structure. He defined ‘*Harijan*’ to mean ‘children of Hari or god’.
that 96% of the land in the vicinity belonged to the Agri community since the Agris – ‘our people’ as he said to refer to them – had been living here for almost six to seven generations.

About the Agri community, Meena Patil from Haji Malang wadi had to say that “Hamare sanaaj mein hi alag alag log hain - Ksheti wale, Macchhiwale, doosre kuan karne wale,” (one will find different kind of occupations within the Agri community – some would be farmers while others would be fisher folk or occupied in other professions). She also classified Agris into those who speak ashudh bhasha (impure tongue) and those who are sudhre hue and speak shud bhasha (reformed and speaking a pure language). She was proud about the fact that the Agri community in Haji Malang wadi was ‘reformed’ and ‘developed’ since they were educated people and hence also different from Agris in all the other surrounding villages. To add to this definition, Somnath Patil from Haji Malang wadi mentioned that Agris were also known as kunbis or Marathas engaged in agriculture.

Economy

It was indeed the dismal status of agriculture in these parts that had driven people to seek jobs outside their villages. Some were occupied as labourers, while others went to factories or worked as hamals (porters) in the mountain. In Kharad, while people were mostly occupied as farmers, there were many who worked in MIDC (Maharashtra Industrial development Corporation). The Police Patil mentioned that the village had a mix of landed and landless families and there were quite a few men who migrated to other places in search of work. Similarly, in Dhoke village, while some farmers worked in their own fields, there were others who worked in the companies nearby. Sunil Gaikwad from Dhoke also mentioned that the Haji Malang mountain was a great source of income for people from surrounding villages despite the fact that very few people from Dhoke were engaged in commerce in the mountain.

According to Arun Patil from Haji Malang wadi, most of the people from his village were engaged in service in companies, banks etc. since they were educated. Barring few people still occupied with agriculture, most of the others were engaged in companies, brickfields
etc. Somnath Patil from Haji Malang wadi worked in the Century Mills in Panvel and he mentioned that there were many like him who worked in industries located in Shahad, Panvel or Kalyan. Agriculture did not yield any profit and many people also ventured into real estate business as they had been selling off their agricultural lands. While lack of irrigation facilities and the nature of the land might be one of the reasons for decrease in agriculture, the adivasis had a different story to tell. Jodha Gangad from Bhendi pada observed that the Agris were largely dependent on agriculture and it was the landless adivasis who worked in their fields for meager wages and under harsh conditions. Gradually, as the economy of the entire area came to be dependent on the mountain, the adivasis refused to work in the fields and this led to a major shortage of field hands leading to decrease in agricultural practices.

As a landowning community, every Agri family in the villages owned at least some amount of land and Govind Patil from Haji Malang wadi reiterated, “adivasi log ko chhodke sabke paas zameen hai” (everyone except for the tribals own land in these parts). Manohar Patil reminisced that it was his grandfather who got the adivasis to work in the fields and the entire land would yield huge agricultural produce; however this meant hard toiling for the adivasis throughout the day against a paltry sum of hundred rupees per day. Since the last ten years, economic practices had changed and families like that of Meena Patil’s had given up farming despite having a huge amount of land. She found that agriculture had become an expensive affair as one had to pay daily wages to the adivasi majoors (labourers) besides providing them with food, tambaku (tobacco) and tea. Daily wages were at the rate of one hundred and fifty rupees per day and then one also had to invest ten thousand rupees for seeds and what one got in return was Rupees 1,000/- as profit after all the hard work. Earlier, they would have two big rooms filled with grain, but now the situation was different. The adivasis did not want to work for the Agris in the fields since they made money as hamals carrying load up to the mountain. Just four trips a day would earn them one hundred and fifty rupees or more and this meant better earnings than before.

The tensions between the landowning Agris and the landless adivasis were quite evident from the kind of responses the issue of agriculture elicited from people at large. Somnath
Patil vented his irritation when he expressed that “The adivasis have become pricey nowadays and ask for higher wages. And then, they keep going to the hill where they work as porters and thus earn more”. As if to respond to this, Jodha remembered that earlier, the Agris used to force the adivasis to work in their fields for unfair wages and if they refused, the Agris threatened them saying that the adivasi settlements would be burnt down if they did not work as labourers.

Presently the adivasis had several other means of livelihood. For example, Jodha’s son Shiv worked in a cement factory and also worked with a local band in his free time. At times, he worked on commission to get customers to hire rooms and lodges on the mountain. A lot of adivasis worked as hamals viz. an old Katkari lady who went up to the mountain everyday to supply kerosene and firewood to shops and people living there. Manohar Patil also observed that now the adivasis worked in the brick fields that were coming up regularly along the main bus route to Haji Malang.

As for other means of livelihood, several people from the villages owned shops and hotels on the mountain. Some young people in Haji Malang wadi had their own shops in wadi gaon, some worked as caterers or real estate agents in Kalyan and in the present situation, there were some who were into professional courses to be able to secure jobs outside their villages. Each village had its own shops and some of these were located at the entrance to the villages in order to attract people travelling to Haji Malang. Some of these shops sold tea and snacks for wary travellers and some even sold seasonal fruits like water melons. A general over view of the economy of the area suggested that there were hardly any sources of fixed local livelihood in the villages especially in the face of decrease in agriculture as a source of income. As Mnaohar Patil mentioned, the people had gradually come to depend on the pahad (mountain) for their livelihood.

**Gaon Devi, Deities and Festivals**

As we saw in the earlier paragraphs, the villages in Haji Malang were clustered into Group Gram Panchayats and yet each village with its few households retained their distinct characteristics in all other respects. One of the most significant features of each village was the presence of the Gaon devi at the border. According to Manohar Patil,
every village must have a **gaon devi** and the deity may not have a specific form or structure. It is usually a stone smeared with vermillion and lying beneath a tree. In *wadi gaon*, once every year, "urs/sandal (annual festival) ceremony of gaon devi was held". This happened in the month of June before cultivation began and it was only after **gaon devi's sandal** that seeds were sown into the soil.

At the border of *wadi gaon*, there was a clump of trees amidst some vacant land and a *Katkari* woman pointed out that it was within the shade of the trees that **gaon devi** was located. It was a rough stone structure within which there were some big stones of various sizes smeared with red vermillion. Some red and green pieces of cloth could be seen strewn here and there. Evidently the deity was placed within a sacred grove and had interlinkages with the Haji Malang *dargah*. Deeper probing revealed that people get amulets and charms from *Baba* and then also get these blessed by the **gaon devi** for double protection against evil and health ailments. According to an elderly *Agri* man, **gaon devi** was worshipped everyday and someone or the other from the village lighted a lamp or incense before the deity. Jodha Gangad observed that **gaon devi** was worshipped on Tuesdays and Sundays and these were the days when people would go to her to seek blessings. In most cases, women would go to her if their children cried excessively or if they fell ill. Also, during the festival of *Dusshera*, lots of people offered garlands to **gaon devi**.

As mentioned earlier, *Bandhanwadi* was named after *Bandhan dev* who was the *gamdev* of the village. This deity was also found at the border of the village amidst some bushes and it had no form or shape. *Advisis* who pointed out *gamdev* were extremely protective of the deity and would not let anybody from outside touch it for fear of desecration. There was a **gaon devi** in Mangrul where the deity shared a common space with the *mauli cha mandir* (temple of lord Vitthoba). It was only in Kharad that one found the physical structure of a **gaon devi** temple built in the year 1961. **Gaon devi** was considered to be extremely significant for the maintenance of well being in the villages and its location at the borders also suggested its protective element as in case of Kharad we saw earlier how the entire village was relocated to fulfill the wishes of the **gaon devi**.
Apart from this, Kharad was a village with ancient temples like the Bholenath mandir and a Vageshwari mandir situated outside the village. The Police Patil mentioned that the Vageshwari temple was being constructed with 7 lakhs rupees and would be inaugurated shortly. People mentioned that for all the temples, the priest was usually from the village itself. Another priest called the bhagat was exclusively designated for the worship of the kul devat (family deity) on a daily basis. The bhagat had been living in the village since his birth and had been a bhagat since the last forty years. An all Agri village, Kharad had people who celebrated various Hindu festivals such as Maruti Jayanti (birth anniversary of Hanuman – the monkey god), Ram Navmi and Ekadashi (beginning of the full moon cycle). One of the most prominent festivals was the annual pilgrimage to Alindi and Pandharpar to pay respects to Lord Vithoba.

A pilgrimage to Pandharpar was found to be a common feature across the Agri community from different villages. Emphasizing associations with Vitthal – another name for Lord Vithoba – an Agri woman from Mangrul asserted that 90% people in her village were dedicated devotees of Mauli or Vitthal and to further prove this she showed a tulsi (basil) bead necklace around her neck (ye dekho, mere gale mein bhi mala hai). This is an identification mark for every Vitthal devotee and one would see this around the necks of numerous people from the villages around Haji Malang. Also she observed that no Vitthal devotee ate any non-vegetarian food. All devotees ritually participated in a pilgrimage to Pandharpar and Alindi to pay their respects to Vitthal. Narayan Patil’s wife went to Pandharpar twice every year with her husband. They belong to the Varkari sampraday (community) – a community of Vitthal followers. The old lady informed that the Varkari Sampraday was 500 years old and people belonging to this community believed in worshipping God in whichever way they liked.

The Varkari Sampraday was started by Sant Jnyaneshwar. Most of the Agri villages in the vicinity were affiliated to this community and it was no different for people from wadi gaon. Arun Patil from wadi gaon explained that there were certain societies where idol worship was not allowed, but there were no such restrictions in the Varkari

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80 Pandharpar is the seat of Lord Vithoba and the palkhi yatra (palanquin procession) to the Pandharpar temple during Ashadhi Ekadashi is one of the most popular festivals of Maharashtra
Sampradaya. Patil emphasized that people followed Hindu traditions of worship, devotional songs (*Bhajan-Kirtan*) etc. Most of the people in his village were associated with the *Varkari Sampradaya* including Patil and his family and they were 'pure' vegetarians in their diet. Meena Patil, an avid non-vegetarian eater in her parental home before marriage, became a *Vitthal* devotee after she came to *wadi gaon* through marriage and thus turned to strict vegetarianism. With reference to the Varkari Sampradaya, it must be mentioned that it was started by Sant Jyaneshwar as a resistance movement against Brahminical rituals and sanctions for religious practices that often did not include the 'lower' sections of the society for fear of pollution.

While the Pandharpur pilgrimage was of great significance, the next most popular festival for people was *Datt Jayanti* celebrated in December in all the major villages around Haji Malang. The biggest *Datt Jayanti* festival happened in Haji Malang *wadi*. According to people, previously, this used to be the only *Datt Jayanti* in the vicinity and attracted people from almost 40 villages. However, with villages becoming clustered as *Group Panchayats*, the practice had given way to smaller *Datt Jayanti* festivals for several villages. In olden days the festival in Haji Malang *wadi* would go on for a week or more, but gradually just 3-4 villages were left to participate in it and hence it came to be celebrated for three days. This festival was considered to be so significant that Meena Patil described how it was a holiday for three whole days and daughters from Haji Malang *wadi* married in other villages would come home especially for *Datt Jayanti*.

Manohar Patil mentioned that the *Datt mandir* in Haji Malang *wadi* was built by his grandfather. There was no idol inside the *Datt mandir* except for a photograph of *Datt Maharaj*. The festival was celebrated annually in community spirit and “since it did not seem nice to ask for *chanda* (donation) like in Ganpati, one family had been appointed for organizing the entire festival”. This family had been given five acres of land and they used the revenue/income from this land to organize *Datt Jayanti* every year. The celebrations took place for three days with a lot of *bhajan-kirtan* (devotional songs). A *Baba* (holy man) came from outside and he narrated *Datt Maharaj*’s story at about 4-5 in the evening. People from many villages gathered here during the festival. About participation of various communities in the festival, there were different points of view.
While Manohar Patil observed that *adivasis* and Muslims did not come for *Datt Jayanti* since they would not be interested, other people from the village emphasized that Muslims from the *pahad* participated in it every year.

One could see posters announcing the *Datt Jayanti* festival on the mountain. Also, it was observed that Muslims from the mountain joined in the festivities towards the evening and brought small gifts of fruits and incense. As for the *adivasis*, Jodha Gangad mentioned that "*Datt Jayanti mein hum salami karke aate hain, Datt mandir mein daal bhaat khaate hain*" (We pay our obeisance in *Datt Jayanti* and participate in the meals of rice and lentil soup served in the *mandir*). He mentioned how it was a very significant festival and people from far off places would come to attend it.

While people celebrated other festivals like *Ram navmi* — the biggest one being celebrated in Kumbharli village — the villages in Haji Malang also abounded in temples and other shrines. A *Maruti mandir* and a *Ganpati mandir* were almost common features across villages. For instance, in Haji Malang wadi, the Ganesh *mandir* was at the entrance of the village and every newly married couple must pay their obeisance here before beginning a new life together. In Mangrul, people expressed that the concept of a village could not exist without a *mandir* in it ("*mandir nahi to gaon kaisa?*"). An *Agri* man mentioned that Haji Malang wadi also had a *Wagh devi mandir* — an open shrine beneath a tree since there was no *hukum* (orders) to build a structure enshrining the deity. Such sacred spaces in a village also included *samadhis* and *mazars*. Sunil Gaikwad from Dhoke pointed to a particular place beyond his house where one would find the abandoned *mazar* of a *peer* and he mentioned that nobody knew whether he had been a Muslim or a Hindu.

However, Vishnu Ketkar — the Brahmin custodian of the Haji Malang *dargah* referred to the same spot in Dhoke as the *mazar* of *Mamu saab*. He mentioned that *Mamu saab* was a well known person in this area and his grave was an open *mazar* where the Ketkar’s were bound to perform *sandal* ceremony after the *urs* of Haji Malang Baba. Vishnu Ketkar also referred to two other *mazars* around Dhoke, both known as *Gaimukh mazar* where they performed the *sandal*. At the entrance to *Bammanwadi*, one would find two
grave-stones covered with red and green *chadar*. It was revealed that these were both *samadhis* in memory of Vishnu Ketkar’s father and uncle who had served Haji Malang Baba as custodians in their life times.

Besides such spaces that were for common use by people, one would also find sacred corners in each house. Every family had a *kul devat* (family deity) – a deity that would be worshipped first thing in the morning after the family had bathed. *Kul devats* could be different for different families or they could also be shared. In Kharad, the *bhagat* mentioned that the various *kul devats* in the village were *Yogeshwar Dev, Khandoba, Agni Dev, Raasman, Chintaman, Bhairavi, Bhawani* and others. In Govind Patil’s family, *Khandoba* from Jejuri\(^81\) was the *kul devat* and every morning, Patil would invoke him along with other gods and goddesses such as Shankar, Ganpati, Lakshmi and Ram. Patil also invoked Haji Malang Baba everyday since he owed his well being to Baba.

The *adivasi Thakur* family of Jodha Gangad too revered *Khandoba* as their *kul devat*. He mentioned very fondly that *Khandoba* was a special god and demanded the sacrifice of a hen and a chick on *Dusshera* along with garlands of lotus flowers (“*Kamal ke phool ka haar banate hain; woh kahin se bhi laakar chadhana padta hai kyunki usko wohi mangta hai*”). This was significant to understand the different ritual practices community groups indulged in. While it was a complete taboo for the *Agris* to even mention non-vegetarian food for gods, the *adivasis* happily engaged in ritual sacrifice to appease the same god.

The *adivasis* also celebrated *Diwali* by offering prayers to goddess *Mahalakshmi*. In certain cases, many families in a village shared their *kul devat* who would reside in a particular house and would be worshipped by everyone. Narayan Patil’s family was one such instance and his wife mentioned that the *Agris* from Haji Malang *wadi* village had an array of *kul devats* who resided in a particular house in the village. In case there was a wedding in a particular house, the *kul devats* would be taken there and thereafter returned to their usual abode.

\(^{81}\) Jejuri is a place in Maharashtra famous as the abode of the pastoral god Khandoba. Khandoba, according to Sontheimer (in Feldhaus *et al* ed. 1997) combined various heterogeneous tribes and social groups under a common umbrella. On one hand, the Dhangar shepherds worship the god and carry on with his hunting traditions; Khandoba’s wife Banai is considered to belong to the fishermen or ferrymen caste and hence the Son Kolis [*fishermen of the seacoast*] are also devotees of Khandoba. (see Chapter III)
Conclusion

In laying out the various contexts of interactions in this chapter, an attempt has been made to uphold a panorama of people, places and processes that go into the construction of a society that has adapted, exchanged and continuously interacted across boundaries. It is a close knit but complex weave with people as elements - people who have lived across historical changes that have impacted their lives in various ways. All the categories described above have played important roles in constituting the setting as it is and these categories overlap in certain respects while differing in others. What emerges from the above descriptions is that Haji Malang has the characteristics of a shared space opening up its boundaries to various perspectives, people and traditions.

Descriptions of villages as territorial boundaries that contain communities and their social norms along with descriptions of how they engage and interact with people from other villages explain territorial nexus that form group identities. Gottschalk (2000) argues that groups build and reinforce their identities through the expression of shared interests. These interests could be of a varied range as we have seen above - village communities, villages that come under a Group Gram Panchayat with common elections, economic interactions between people from within and across villages and with those in the mountain village and so on. At another level, devotees from different regions and speaking different languages forge the group identity of being Haji Malang Baba’s devotees owing to their common quest for happiness at Baba’s darbar.

Known as Haji Malang to people visiting from outside, the setting warrants analytical discussions around the key stages in the formation of this shared space historically. This could be construed through an examination of the various symbols and identities that permeate into one another to construct grounds that are fuzzy and boundary less. It is a constant shifting that marks social identification with groups based on contexts that may be temporal, spatial, economic or political. According to Gottschalk (2000: 39),

...many Hindus and Muslims do not live within discrete and distinct religious worlds but practice faith lives that obscure clear identity boundaries. Furthermore, many Hindus and Muslims (and Jews and Christians) associate themselves with those labels because they perceive a community of
people who not only worship in the same way but also draw from similar, broad cultural traditions.

In keeping with the broad objectives of the study it becomes significant to seek out those instances and experiences that enable people to carve out obscure boundaries. In many cases, as we have seen above, the feeling of transcending water tight categories has been passed on as an ever burning torch from one generation to the other and this has very well created a spool of oral history that has been interpreted, added to and presented in different forms so that it has become a history that seems to have had no specific beginning. Such has been the historical underpinnings of Haji Malang and each participant and context described above and many more along with them have contributed to its making. This chapter has therefore added the much needed territorial and contextual dimension to the agency of people who are part of many shared traditions that are to be found in this setting.