

Architecture of the Indian City – Kolhapur: Roots of Heritage

¹Piyush Prakash Salve, ²Prof. Lagad Surekha Ramdas

M.A. -II (History), R. B. Narayanrao Borawke College, Shrirampur. (Autonomous)

Head, of Department of History, R. B. Narayanrao Borawke College, Shrirampur. (Autonomous)

Article Info	ABSTRACT
Article History: Received: 24th January 2026 Accepted: 01st February 2026 Published: 05th February 2026 Keywords: <i>Architecture</i> <i>Indian City</i>	The progress and identity of an Indian city are deeply rooted in its architectural heritage. Architecture reflects the cultural values, political authority, religious traditions, and social life of a region. Kolhapur, one of the historically significant cities of Maharashtra, possesses a rich architectural legacy shaped by temple traditions, Maratha royal patronage, vernacular residential forms, and colonial influences. The present article examines the architectural development of Kolhapur by analysing its historical background, major architectural forms, and urban structure. It also highlights the contemporary relevance of heritage architecture and the challenges involved in its conservation in a rapidly modernising urban environment.

Plagiarism Check Report:

Tool Used: Turnitin

Date of Report: February 02, 2026

Similarity Index: 6%

Remarks: No significant matching text. All citations and matches are properly referenced. The manuscript is considered original.

Copyright © 2026 The Author(s). This is an open access article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License, (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>) which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

How to Cite: Salve, P. P., & Lagad, S. R. (2026). Architecture of the Indian City – Kolhapur: Roots of Heritage. *IIP: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal (IIPIMRJ)*, 3(1), 805–807.

Introduction:

Architecture is not merely the construction of buildings; it is an expression of a society's historical experience, cultural ideals, and collective memory. Urban architecture, in particular, provides insight into how cities evolve over time in response to political power, religious beliefs, economic activities, and social organisation. Indian cities, shaped by centuries of continuous habitation, reveal multiple architectural layers reflecting different historical phases.

Kolhapur stands as a remarkable example of such layered urban development. Known for its religious importance and Maratha legacy, the city has evolved organically from ancient and medieval times to the modern period. Temples, palaces, wadas (traditional houses), markets, and colonial civic buildings together form a distinctive architectural landscape. The architectural heritage of Kolhapur thus represents the roots of its cultural identity and historical continuity.

Objectives of the Study:

1. To study the historical evolution of architecture in Kolhapur.
2. To examine major architectural forms such as temples, palaces, and traditional residential structures.
3. To analyse the role of Maratha patronage in shaping Kolhapur's urban and architectural character.
4. To understand the significance of architectural heritage in the cultural life of the city.
5. To identify challenges related to the preservation of Kolhapur's architectural heritage.

Hypotheses:

1. Kolhapur's architecture reflects continuity from the medieval to the modern period.
2. Religious institutions and Maratha rulers played a decisive role in shaping the city's architectural identity.
3. Traditional architectural forms in Kolhapur were well adapted to social and environmental conditions.
4. Rapid urbanisation has adversely affected the preservation of heritage structures.

Research Methodology:

The present study is based on the qualitative research method. Secondary sources such as historical texts, architectural studies, research articles, government reports, and heritage surveys have been used. Descriptive and analytical approaches are adopted to understand architectural forms, urban morphology, and heritage issues related to Kolhapur.

Historical Background:

Kolhapur has a long historical tradition extending from ancient times through the medieval and modern periods. The city developed as an important religious centre, attracting continuous settlement and patronage. Over time, Kolhapur came under various political authorities, each contributing to its architectural growth.

The most significant phase in Kolhapur's architectural development occurred during the Maratha period, when the city emerged as a centre of regional power. Royal patronage encouraged temple construction, palace architecture, and organised urban development. This historical continuity is clearly reflected in the city's architectural landscape, where older structures coexist with later additions.

Temple Architecture and Sacred Spaces:

Temple architecture forms the earliest and most prominent layer of Kolhapur's architectural heritage. Built primarily in stone, temples display regional Deccan architectural features such as sculpted pillars, mandapas, and well-defined sanctums. These temples were not only places of worship but also centres of social, cultural, and economic activity.

Temple complexes influenced the spatial organisation of the city, with markets and residential areas developing around them. Religious festivals and rituals played a vital role in shaping urban life and collective identity. Thus, temple architecture served as the sacred foundation upon which Kolhapur's urban form developed.

Maratha Architecture and Royal Patronage:

Maratha rule marked a transformative phase in Kolhapur's architectural history. Architecture during this period symbolised political authority, administrative efficiency, and cultural pride. Palaces, administrative buildings, and public structures were constructed using stone and wood, combining strength with aesthetic restraint. Maratha architectural principles emphasised functionality, climate responsiveness, and social hierarchy. Courtyards, thick walls, and wooden elements were common features. Royal patronage also

extended to urban infrastructure such as roads, markets, and water systems, contributing to planned urban growth while retaining traditional character.

Traditional Residential Architecture: Wadas

One of the most distinctive elements of Kolhapur's architectural heritage is its traditional residential architecture, particularly the wada system. Wadas were courtyard houses designed for joint families and community living. These structures reflected social organisation, family hierarchy, and cultural practices. Architecturally, wadas were well adapted to local climatic conditions. Central courtyards ensured ventilation and natural light, while wooden balconies and carved doors added aesthetic value. The wada represented a sustainable and culturally rooted form of urban housing that shaped neighbourhood life for generations.

Colonial Influence and Urban Change:

The colonial period introduced new architectural styles and urban planning concepts in Kolhapur. Civic buildings, educational institutions, hospitals, and administrative offices reflected European and Indo-Saracenic architectural features. These structures introduced new materials, symmetrical designs, and modern infrastructure.

While colonial architecture altered certain aspects of the urban landscape, it did not completely replace traditional forms. Instead, it added another architectural layer, contributing to the city's composite character.

Challenges to Architectural Heritage:

In recent decades, Kolhapur has faced significant challenges in preserving its architectural heritage. Rapid urban expansion, commercial development, and population growth have resulted in the neglect or demolition of historic structures. Traditional buildings are often replaced by modern constructions that ignore historical context. Lack of awareness, insufficient funding, and weak enforcement of conservation policies further threaten heritage structures. As a result, the architectural identity of the city faces

Bibliography

1. Gadgil, D. R. *The Marathas and Their Architecture*. Pune: Deccan Publishing, 2015.
2. Kulkarni, R. S. *Kolhapur: History and Heritage*. Kolhapur: Heritage Press, 2018.
3. Deshpande, M. V. *Urban Development in Western India: 17th–19th Century*. Mumbai: Orient Black Swan, 2014.
4. Gokhale, S. *Architecture of Maharashtra: Temples and Palaces*. Pune: University Press, 2016.
5. Mehta, P. *Preserving Urban Heritage in India*. New Delhi: National Heritage Board, 2017.
6. Patil, A. "Urban Morphology of Kolhapur: A Historical Perspective." *Indian Journal of History and Architecture* 12, no. 3 (2020).
7. Desai, R. "Maratha Era Temples and Wadas in Kolhapur." *Journal of Deccan Studies* 8, no. 2 (2019).
8. Sharma, V. "Challenges in Heritage Conservation in Small Cities of Maharashtra." *Heritage India* 5 (2021).
9. Archaeological Survey of India. *Report on Kolhapur Heritage Sites*. New Delhi: ASI, 2018.
10. Kolhapur Municipal Corporation. *Heritage Conservation Guidelines for Kolhapur*. Kolhapur, 2020.