



Situated on the neighbouring lane of its more renowned counterpart, the Mahalakshmi Temple, the Dhakleshwar Mandir is the third oldest temple in Mumbai, following Mumbadevi and Babulnath. This temple, believed to be named after its builder, has a rich history dating back 250 years. Despite its age, it has remained in relative obscurity.

In 18th-century Bombay, sometime before 1799, a wealthy man named Dady Nusserwanji dedicated a large piece of land near the Mahalaxmi Temple for charitable and religious purposes. When Dady Nusserwanji passed away, his son Ardeshir Dady became the sole executor of his will. After Ardeshir Dady died in 1810, his two sons, Cursetjee and Jehangir, and three other executors, inherited his property. In 1845, Cursetjee Ardeshir appointed Dhakji Dadaji as the sole manager of the charitable properties established by his grandfather, Dady Nusserwanji. Cursetjee confirmed the grant for charitable purposes and authorised Dhakji Dadaji to permit the construction of Hindu charitable buildings, inns, or temples on the land. Dhakji Dadaji, between 1830-1832, built a temple known as Dhakleshwar Temple (The Tulsidas Gopalji Charitable And Dhakleshwar Temple Trust 1999-2014).



The temple was constructed in 1832 and elevated on a lofty plinth facing the sea. It cost Rs. 80,000 to build and is known for its excellent craftsmanship. One can see this temple from twenty-five miles out at sea (State of Bombay 1910). In an interview, Historian Usha Vijaylakshmi elaborated on the temple architecture. She says the pair of deepmalas at the temple foreyard entrance resemble Konkani architecture, and the rectangular complex is in cave-temple style. While the arches are designed in Islamic architectural style, the pillars resemble Greek revival pillars (Vijaylakshmi 2023). The Shikhar, showcasing the Nagari Gujarat style, crowns the architectural masterpiece, while the overall style of the complex remains distinctly Konkani (Gandhi 2010, 153). The complex, viewed as a whole, possesses a fortress-like aura. The temple, with a length of sixty feet and a width of thirty feet, features a circumambulation or Pradakshina space measuring one hundred and sixty feet (Raghunathji 1895, 25). Unlike many temples in Mumbai, this expansive foreyard brings out the beauty of the entire complex.



Shri Dhakleshwar Mahadev temple is a cherished symbol established by Dhakji in memory of his family, including himself. The temple holds significant historical and cultural value. The temple complex has five chambers, each with a unique dedication. The central chamber is a tribute to Mahadev, housing a black marble Pindi that stands at two and a half feet. A Pindi in Hindu iconography refers to a garlanded and ornamented stone as an abstract exhibition of God. An image of Parvati, the spouse of Mahadev, on the rear wall adds a spiritual dimension to this chamber named 'Dhakleshwar.' Moving to the next chamber, an image of Lord Ganpati takes centre stage. It is named Mayureshwar after Dhakji's first son, Moreshwar. The marble image is seated on a stone mouse atop a pedestal. A mouse called Mushakraj is said to be the vaahan or vehicle of Lord Ganpati. Adjoining Ganpati are images of Jaya and Vijaya, the Dwarpalas or guards in Hindu Mythology. The third chamber pays homage to Rameshwari, also known as Ramabai, the wife of Dhakaji. A marble image of the goddess, standing at about a foot and three-quarters. The fourth chamber, next to the Pindi's abode, hosts an image of Harinarayana named after Dhakaji's other son, Narayan (Raghunathji 1895, 24). The fifth and final chamber is dedicated to Vinayakaditya. Double images of Narayan with his wife Aditi, flanked by small images of Jaya and Vijaya, sits on a four-wheeled carriage with stone horses (Raghunathji 1895, 25). Goddess Aditi is mother to Lord Indra (King of the Gods), Lord Varuna (God of Water), Lord Surya (Sun god) and many other gods. The chamber houses a statue of Lord Surya, considered the third of its kind in the country. According to popular belief, the first idol was crafted in Orissa, the second in Gujarat, and the third found its home here in the Dhakleshwar Temple (Sheth 2018).

The entire setting in the temple consists of marble idols elevated on a pedestal and under an exquisitely carved Sheesham wood Makhar. Fundamentally, a Makhar is a carved and ornamented wooden frame accommodating the deity. Each of these chambers measures ten feet by ten feet with a separate door leading to a corridor. Behind the image in each chamber, the wall shades, hanging glass globes, and a chandelier create an ambience of divinity (Raghunathji 1895, 26).

A stone Nandi sits in the corridor opposite the Pindi's chamber door (Raghunathji 1895, 25). There is a Nandi opposite the deity of Shiva in any Shiva temple. The Nandi Bull was the vahana and gatekeeper of Shiva. It is said to be extremely loyal and devoted to Lord Shiva, as the legend goes that the Nandi drank poison along with Lord Shiva in a fight between the Devas and Asuras (Gods and Demons). It is believed that if one whispers a wish in the ear of Nandi Bull and covers the second ear with the other hand, Lord Shiva fulfils it.



Each day, following the customary practice in temples, food known as bhog is first offered to the Gods before the Pooja (Sheth 2018). A Gujarat Brahman conducts daily worship, waving a lighted lamp in the morning. The nagara drum reverberates during worship and light-waving. The Brahman, or pujari, receives a monthly stipend and free quarters on the premises. Additionally, a Bhopi ensures the temple's cleanliness, washing the Pindi daily (Raghunathji 1895, 26).

The temple also actively participates in the celebration of various festivals. One of the most treasured festivals is Maha Shivratri, celebrated enthusiastically. During this festival, there is a Mahaabhishek of the Gods, which goes on for several hours (Sheth 2018). The annual celebration of Utchhar, on the 30th of Vaishakh (April-May), i.e. Vaishakh Poornima (Full Moon), witnesses the adornment of new dresses, mukuts, and the enchanting charghada music (Raghunathji 1895, 26). The temple comes alive with vibrant festivities during these special occasions, adding joy and vibrancy to its spiritual atmosphere.

The marble tablet fixed on the temple wall reads:

“The installation ceremony of the images occurred in May 1832, while the construction commenced in February 1830. The temple was consecrated to five Hindu deities: Shri Mayureshwar, Shri Rameshwari, Shri Dhakleshwar, Shri Harinarayan, and Shri Vinayakadetya. The Earl of Clare served as Governor, and Sir Herbert Compton K.T. as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court in the Island of Bombay during that period. Dhakji Dadaji Prabhu, the founder, ensured that the temple's erection was for charitable purposes under the management and protection of his heirs forever”.

The temple underwent renovation in 2008. The intricately crafted chambers, daily rituals, and vibrant celebrations retain its unique aura. The temple's commitment to preservation and modern standards is evident in its procurement of the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) certification. With its rich history dating back 250 years, Dhakleshwar Temple is a tribute to Mumbai's local community's spiritual heritage.



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